

Allen's Hall once hosted skating and good old-fashioned reverie

"The kindergarten opened in Allen's Hall yesterday with an attendance of 21 pupils. Miss McKenzie is in charge and is assisted by Miss Hanchett. The little folks are delighted with their school and it has opened under most auspicious circumstances." - The Pajaronian, March 22, 1888

Allen's Hall, according to the late Niram Mansfield, was built by Ira Allen on Main Street and moved to West 4th (Lake) in 1865. It was also called Independence Hall and the Rink. Susan B. Anthony spoke at Independence Hall on her first visit to Watsonville in 1871. Her stirring speech was on "The Power of the Ballot."

This same year Messieurs Shepard and Buckwell opened a skating rink at Allen's Hall and the editor of the Pajaronian paid a visit to the rink and wrote: "He found a merry crowd of all ages and both sexes. A number of the boys had made very rapid proficiency in learning and could move around the hall very rapidly and gracefully."

Ira Allen, who had made his home in the back portion of the building, sold the property in 1876



Betty Lewis

That was Watsonville

and moved to San Francisco. Another skating company operated by Smith and Brown opened in 1890 at the hall — admission was 10 cents; skates 25 cents and ladies were instructed free on the fine art of skating every week-day morning at 10 o'clock.

The Hall was used for many local events including the Poultry Show held during the Apple Annual Show in 1911. "When the show is opened tonight the public will see a collection of the finest and choicest barnyard birds ever witnessed in this region." — Evening Pajaronian, Oct. 9, 1911. Also held in the hall over the years were meetings, rallies, school classes, vaudeville shows, church meetings, etc.

Many years ago Jennie Menasco

told me of meeting her future husband, Sid Menasco, at the skating rink in Allen's Hall. "I met him (Menasco) at the skating rink where they skated on the outside and danced in the middle; it was down there on West Lake. He had seen me often and I had looked at him once in a while but we never got acquainted because you had to be formally introduced in those days; you didn't talk to anybody you didn't know...So I met him there and right away he decided we would go on a picnic the next day which we did." Jennie and Sid were married in 1911; she had come to Watsonville from San Francisco in 1906 after the big earthquake.

In 1929, to make room for the construction of a Greyhound bus depot, the old building was demolished. The bus depot was moved some time ago and La Manzana was created and there are now offices at the location of the former Allen's Hall where people skated, danced and had a good old time.

Betty Lewis, a local historian, is a contributing columnist to the Register-Pajaronian

