

# City Hall's former incarnations

Town meetings were once held on the second floor of the engine house then located at 268 Main St. in a two-story building topped by a bell tower. This structure was built in 1875 replacing the old one located on Union Street across from the plaza. James Waters and Thomas Beck were the architects and builders of the new building. Here the Board of Aldermen would meet while down below the Pajaro Engine Company would have their engine cart readied for a fire.

In 1902, the Forester's Hall at 264 Main St. was completed, replacing the Freiermuth store, having a common wall with the firehouse next door. This imposing, two-story building was designed by William Weeks and was of Romanesque style of architecture. On the ground floor the front portion was used as a business and the back portion for a banquet hall for the Foresters. On the upper floor were a parlor, three modern offices and an anteroom. The corner stone of the building, Tennessee marble, was provided by Dr. Spencer Clay Rodgers who had it sent out to Watsonville from his native Knox County.

"The stairway is finished in oak and the other work is grain finish. The lodge room is commodious and beautiful and is tinted in harmonious colors of rich hue. The classical columns and entablature add dignity to the room. The plans for the building were drawn by architect Weeks, whose talent has added so materially to the ar-



**Betty Lewis**

Local columnist

## That was Watsonville

chitectural beauty of this section and under his critical eye the work of construction progressed until the hall was completed." — The Pajaronian, April 17, 1902

The hall was sold to the city of Watsonville in 1923 for \$20,000 and work began on remodeling the two buildings into one large structure. A new marble front was placed across the entire front and in charge of the improvements was Jack Renfrow, local contractor, whose winning bid was \$15,448.50. This combined building served as the city hall for many years - the upper floor was used as a municipal court; lodge rooms and police department.

Meanwhile, in 1925, a new fire station designed by Ralph Wyckoff was built at the corner of Rodriguez and Second Streets. An addition was made in 1927. This building was re-



The former fire house and City Hall at 268 Main Street.

placed in 1981 by the present facilities located next to the old firehouse.

But the combined building on Main Street, after serving well for many years, was condemned in 1959 but kept in use until a new City Hall could be built. In 1963, the voters approved a \$660,000 bond issue for a new facility and ground was broken in 1964. At the dedication ceremonies on April 24, 1965, some 2,000 people gathered together for the long-awaited day. The overflow crowd heard an address by local attorney, Philip

Boyle, who noted: "This is a day of comfort in our valley. We have built a new house of government. We must now turn to the task, of making this house a home."

The old city hall was torn down in 1964 and Emma and Henrique Nessler still have a piece of the Tennessee marble from that building. Emma and I were talking at church one Sunday and she told me of their historical marble piece and mentioned that she would like to know more about that old city hall so here it is!