

Watsonville Transportation Company had troubled history



Betty Lewis

That was
Watsonville

In 1905 the Chas. Ford Company was advertising their furniture, clothing, hardware and grocery departments. In the latter such items were selling as blood meal, rye seed, lice killer and roup (croup?) cure. Also, if you bought a pair of Buster Brown stockings for 25 cents per pair, you would receive a free Buster Brown Drawing Book — an item that is very much of a collectible today!

But in this May 1905 issue of the Watsonville Daily Register newspaper, much space is devoted to the straightening out of the Watsonville Transportation affairs. "In response to the general call for a hearing of stockholders, Odd Fellows' hall was thronged with interested residents

of this section, there was close attention given to every detail of the report and in the questioning that followed it was made plain that some serious thought had been given to every feature of the activities of the corporation."

Two years before, in 1903, two promoters from San Jose were trying to make Watsonville one of the important seaports on the coast. These two men were W.J. Rogers and H.H. Main. Three influential men of Watsonville joined them in this venture — Robert W. Eaton, F.A. Kilburn and Stephen Scurich. They formed the Watsonville Transportation Company, and land was purchased north of Palm Beach. A narrow gauge electric line was constructed designed by Thomas Beck and the street car ran from Port Rogers to Main street Watsonville. Visionary people had hoped the line would be built even further, even to Hollister.

A wharf was built, the steamer Kilburn was launched, buildings sprang up and hopes were high for a popular resort area plus the shipping of produce from the Pajaro

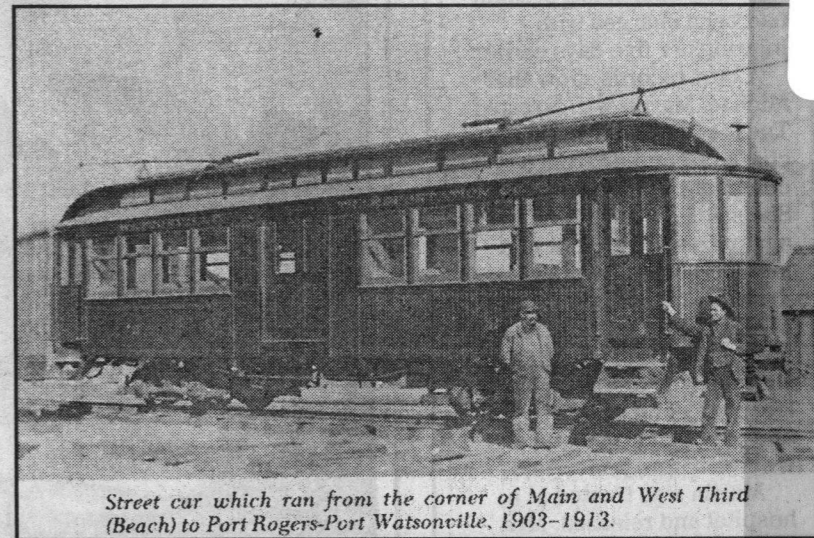
Valley. But heavy seas and high winds kept washing away the wharf, the area was renamed Port Watsonville and a shadow fell over the company's affairs.

Also in May of 1905, the Evening Pajaronian reported: "The Company's books from the beginning, March 2nd, 1903, to January 1st, 1904, were kept in a most careless and slovenly manner, on scratch books whose cost was not to exceed 15 cents each, and the entries were made with lead pencil, but since the appointment of Mr. Clements as bookkeeper, January 1st, 1904, the accounts have been kept in a neat and satisfactory manner, and he is entitled to great credit for placing in proper shape the chaotic entries of his predecessor." — H.S. Fletcher, Banker.

By September of 1905, the company was declared bankrupt. A very lengthy legal hassle followed that kept the electric railway and port idle for over five years. Eventually creditors were paid, the company sold and the stockholders received less than ten cents on the dollar. In

1911, the new owner, F.E. Snowden, took over and the name was changed to Watsonville Railroad and Navigation Company; the wharf was rebuilt and the streetcar was back in business. The Pajaro Valley Development Company bought beach property, subdivided it, and offered lots to the public for \$150 to \$500 each and named the area Calpaco deriving the name from the first syllables of the corporate name the California Pacific Company.

But, in December of 1912, a heavy storm hit and the pier was strewn along the beach and Calpaco was flooded — the company was never to recover. "The two club houses on the baseball grounds at Port Watsonville have been sold by the Bridge Company to Wm. J. Russell of this city and have been moved away. The old dance pavilion, (designed by Weeks) at the beach is to be dismantled in a few days and soon there will be nothing left of the historic building that has been the scene of many jolly affairs in the past. It is reported that the Bridge Company is also negotiating for



Street car which ran from the corner of Main and West Third (Beach) to Port Rogers-Port Watsonville, 1903-1913.

the sale of the lumber in the grandstand, bleachers and fence at the beach baseball park. Visitors to the beach in a few months will be surprised to see how deserted the place will look and many memories of the good old days of the past when the beach was a popular resort will spring to the mind." — Evening Pajaronian, January

19, 1917. Since the recent storms even more pilings from the old piers are visible between Pajaro Dunes and Sunset Beach; a haunting reminder of those "glory" days of Watsonville's pleasure resort.

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