

Charting the Menasco family's long and illustrious history

By BETTY LEWIS

"J.S. Menasco, president of the Charles Ford Company, one of the largest mercantile firms in south central California, and president of the Watsonville Oil Company, as well as owner of one of the largest and most prosperous apple orchards in Pajaro Valley, passed out of reckoning yesterday evening." — Evening Pajaronian, July 7, 1909.

Though Charles Ford was the founder of Ford's store, the name

That was Watsonville

of Menasco was synonymous with that mercantile institution. James Sidney Menasco, better known as Sid, came to the Pajaro Valley as a young lad with his parents. He went to work in the store of J.S. Payne, which was located on the Monterey side of the Pajaro river.

A short time later he moved over to the town of Watsonville and went to work for Edward Martin and learned telegraphy. This new accomplishment landed him a job as the railroad agent at Sargent's Station — then located on the bank of the Pajaro River when the Southern Pacific line was put through Chittenden Pass area in 1869.

When the line was built further into the Pajaro Valley in 1871 and ended over the river at Pajaro, the Southern Pacific was pushing for a town to be established near the depot. A free excursion train accompanied by a brass band was run from San Francisco with plenty of literature describing the proposed new town — a fact not mentioned was the existence of the already flourishing town by the name of Watsonville!

It was through the efforts of Sid Menasco that a public social meeting was held, and the men attending were unanimous in their decision to discourage the establishment of a rival town. On the arrival of the excursion train, the travelers were met by conveyances from Watsonville, and whisked over the bridge to be handsomely entertained for the day.

In 1875, at the age of 23, Sid went to work at Ford & Sanborn's as a clerk. Mr. Menasco married Mary Tuttle in 1874 and on their 10th anniversary, in 1884, they moved to their new home on the corner of Main and West Fifth. The house was



Jennie Mesasco

later moved around the corner and remodeled into apartments and is still standing today.

The Menascos had two children: Sidney and Edna. Following the senior Menasco's death in 1909 at the age of 57, his son, also to be called Sid, became the president of Ford's. He was 30 years old at the time. When his mother died in 1926, he became the largest single stockholder.

Back in 1906, when Sid was a young clerk at Ford's, a lovely young girl from San Francisco came to work at Ford's — Jennie Hannaford. Jennie had come to live with her sister, Mrs. Hihn, after the big earthquake. She was to be chosen as the Goddess of Liberty in the 1909 fourth of July Parade, and, in 1911, became the bride of Sidney Tuttle Menasco.

They had two sons, Sidney and

George. Sidney died of a strep infection while in college and his father died in 1932 of a heart attack at the age of 53. Upon Sidney's death, Victor Tuttle became the president and general manager of the Charles Ford Company and held this position until 1946, when he retired as general manager but retained the presidency of the board of directors until 1957 when George Menasco became the third in his family to hold this position.

Jennie Menasco threw herself more and more into community work. When the United States entered World War II she was one of three women named to Watsonville's 24-member Defense Council. She was also chairman of the "Soldier" Welfare Shop, which opened in the old bowling alley building at 27 E. Beach Street on January 19,

1942.

For three years, literally tons of material passed through their hands. With the money raised, the group provided equipment for the many service camps in the area. Jennie was the first woman in Watsonville to receive the Chamber of Commerce Woman of the Year award presented to her on January 19, 1945. She died at age 101 April 14, 1986, at a local rest home.

For a number of years I would have breakfast with Jennie at the Resetar Hotel where she was living and would listen to her early-day stories of Watsonville and the Pajaro Valley. That was back when there was a coffee shop and several old-timers would gather there besides Jennie — Tim Arano, Ruth Turner, Leonore Kelly and others.

George Menasco is now retired

and, of course, the Charles Ford Company is a thing of the past. George and his wife, Earline, still stay active in community affairs, enjoying their family, taking trips and staying at their cabin in the San-

ta Cruz mountains.

The Menasco family certainly has had a long and illustrious past in the town of Watsonville and their family history will long live in the history books of the area.