

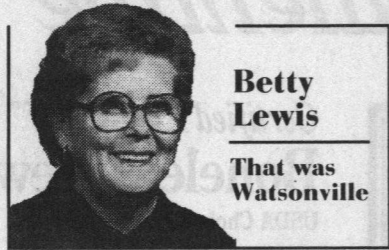
Woman's Club turns 100

There have been many clubs, churches and organizations that have contributed so much to the Pajaro Valley but the Watsonville Woman's Club has to stand at the forefront and these women can be justly proud of their many achievements in the local community.

Back on Feb. 18, 1899, the club had their first meeting at the Watsonville High School — a building that was to burn to the ground two years later. Miss Florilla Wickersham was elected the first president and dues were set at \$2 per year with meetings to be held on the first and third Saturday afternoons of the month.

In December of 1899, the Woman's Club Building Fund for the benefit of the Watsonville Free Public Library was established and the president was instructed to write to Andrew Carnegie regarding monies for a new public library building. The city fathers began negotiations for a lot in town and it was finally decided to use the Bixby lot at the corner of Union and Trafton. The Woman's Club headed the list of subscribers with a \$200 donation towards the total price of \$1,800 for the lot. Carnegie donated \$12,000 for the building whose cornerstone was laid in February 1905.

In 1907, the Woman's Club adopted an amendment to their constitution and by-laws which read: "The object of this club shall be to unite the influence and enterprise of its



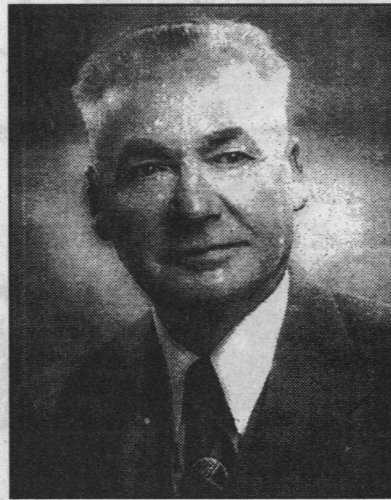
Betty Lewis

That was Watsonville

members to promote measures which all can endorse whether these be educational, moral, social or civic."

As early as 1904, discussion began on building a clubhouse and a number of money-raising activities were held. In 1914, the club voted to purchase a lot on Brennan Street for \$1,800. From 1914 to 1917, such events as flower shows, garden parties, carnivals, fairs, fashion shows, food sales and bazaars were sponsored to obtain the necessary building funds. Ground was finally broken on May 17, 1917. Ralph Wyckoff, born and raised in Watsonville, was the architect and the first meeting of the Woman's Club was held in the new building on Sept. 1, 1917. The final cost of the structure was \$6,858.97.

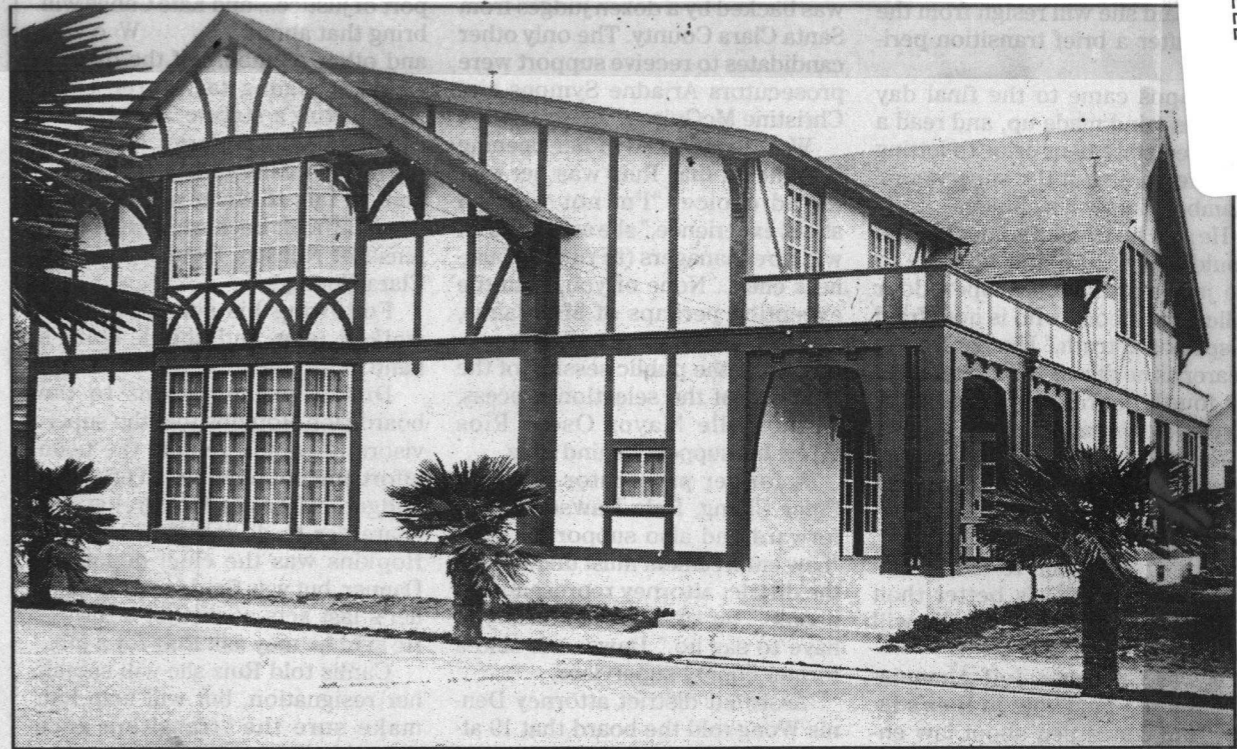
One of the many projects the Woman's Club spearheaded was the Callaghan Playground between Sudden and Brennan. They also raised the funds to provide the grounds with a wading pool, tennis courts, swings and a fence. Another project



Ralph Wyckoff

was to confer with the school trustees on installing a manual training department in the public school. This was accomplished with the women raising the money for the equipment. Mrs. Mary Piratsky donated the proceeds from a matinee performance at her theater, the La Petite, which swelled the fund considerably.

During World War I, the club held a one-day street fair around the plaza and raised \$2,235 for the Belgian Relief Fund; they also instigated the annual Christmas celebration held in the city plaza; supported the Watsonville Band; sponsored Red Cross work; Girl Scout troops; flower shows; concerts and on and on. When the Spanish Flu epidemic was



The Watsonville Woman's Club.

running rampant in 1918, the Woman's Club set up an emergency hospital at the auditorium then located on Second Street.

The mortgage on the building was burned in January of 1922 thanks to the generosity of so many of the club's members. The women were instrumental in having the new school on Palm Avenue named after Arminta Allison White, local school teacher, thus the Mintie White School built in 1928 and designed by W.H. Weeks.

In 1936, the club campaigned for

a community playground on Second Street and, a year later, the Garden Club section was formed. This group is currently establishing the Memorial Rose Garden at the fair grounds.

The American Red Cross started using the clubhouse of the Woman's Club for the mobile blood bank — from 1951 to 1997. The clubhouse was damaged during the 1989 earthquake and much work was done to restore the building and make the necessary repairs — like a new roof!

Through the years, this dedicated and hardworking group of wom-

en have worked so very hard for the betterment of their community and it would take page after page to recount all of their many accomplishments. Suffice to say that their 100th birthday certainly signals what a marvelous and vital part of the Watsonville scene they have contributed to over all these years and these women — past and present — are to be sincerely commended. Job well done!

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