



Courtesy of Freda Rowan

Flood of 1931 — car in front of Seaside Oil Company. The 1932 city directory lists this at 631 Main St. *Floods R-P 5-26-04*

# Watsonville has seen its share of damaging floods

That Was Watsonville



Betty Lewis

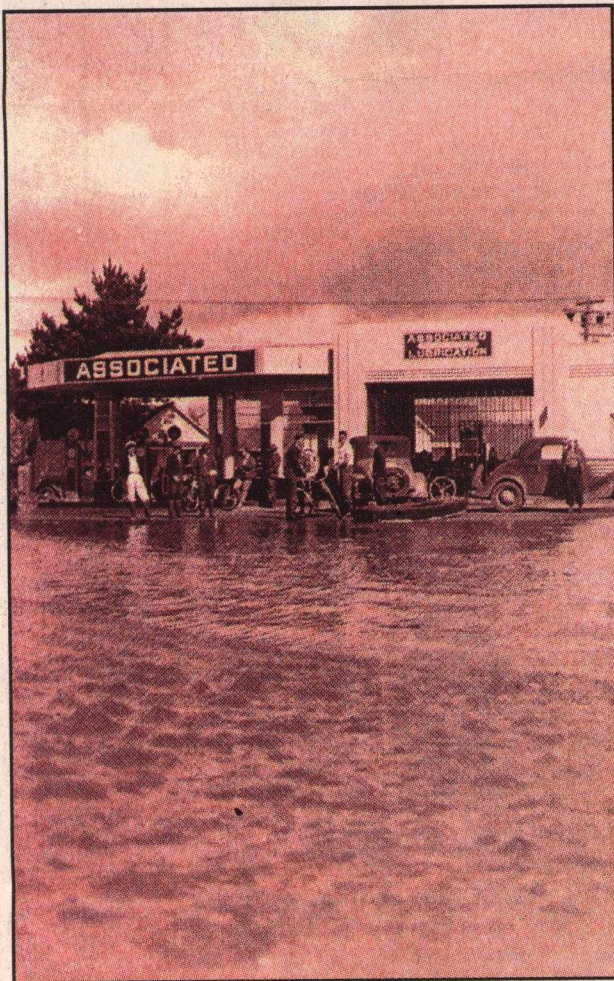
There have been many floods in Watsonville down through the years. A few of the most notable were in 1911, 1922, 1931, 1937, 1939 and 1955. But let's go back to January of 1890 when an article in the Pajaronian was titled "The Great Flood."

The article went on to say: "There may have been wetter winters than the one we are trying to outlast. There may have been floods in the Pajaro within forty years that surpassed that of Saturday night, but the Pajaronian is satisfied with the most recent experience in the storm and flood line, and is not desirous of seeking anything severer."

The Salsipuedes (get out if you can) Creek swept over its banks and the water came down First Street to Main and the overflow flooded portions of the eastern part of town. Meanwhile, the Pajaro River was rising and the water was racing to Rodriguez Street, sweeping away fences. Over the river in Chinatown, the water flooded the houses and poured through Porter's Grove near the John T. Porter house.

Out at Camp Goodall (now Pajaro Dunes), the hotel and cottages were flooded, ruining furniture and bedding. Inside the hotel, the water rose to the top of the sitting room fireplace and covered the piano. "The present mouth of the river is fully half a mile nearer to Camp Goodall than the old one. The water poured through it out to the ocean with fearful velocity."

Railroad tracks and bridges



Flood of 1937 showing gas stations at Main Street and Riverside.

Courtesy of Freda Rowan

took a fearful beating and much of the valley's good farming land was swept away by the onrushing flood. The local butchers also took a beating. They had moved all of their animals to Goodwin's slaughterhouse near Brooklyn. When the storm hit, they had to move all the stock to the uplands. It was estimated that the loss to the Pajaro Valley by flooding would amount to some \$15,000, including damage to personal property, businesses, farmers, railroad tracks, roads and bridges.

In January of 1939, the following appeared in the Watsonville Morning Sun newspaper: "High Water Again Marks Main Street...The water spread across sidewalks, particularly on the east-

side of the street. Lakes were created at the Third Street and East Lake Avenue intersections... At the Bank of America (then located in the Lettunich building) a car was driven up on the sidewalk to take out employees."

The flood of December 1955 was one of the worst ever when Watsonville received over five inches of rain. The Veteran's Hall was used as an evacuation headquarters, as well as temporary living quarters for 34 soldiers from Fort Ord. The Pajaro River reached a height of 33.2 feet. Little hard to imagine such a thing today!

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