

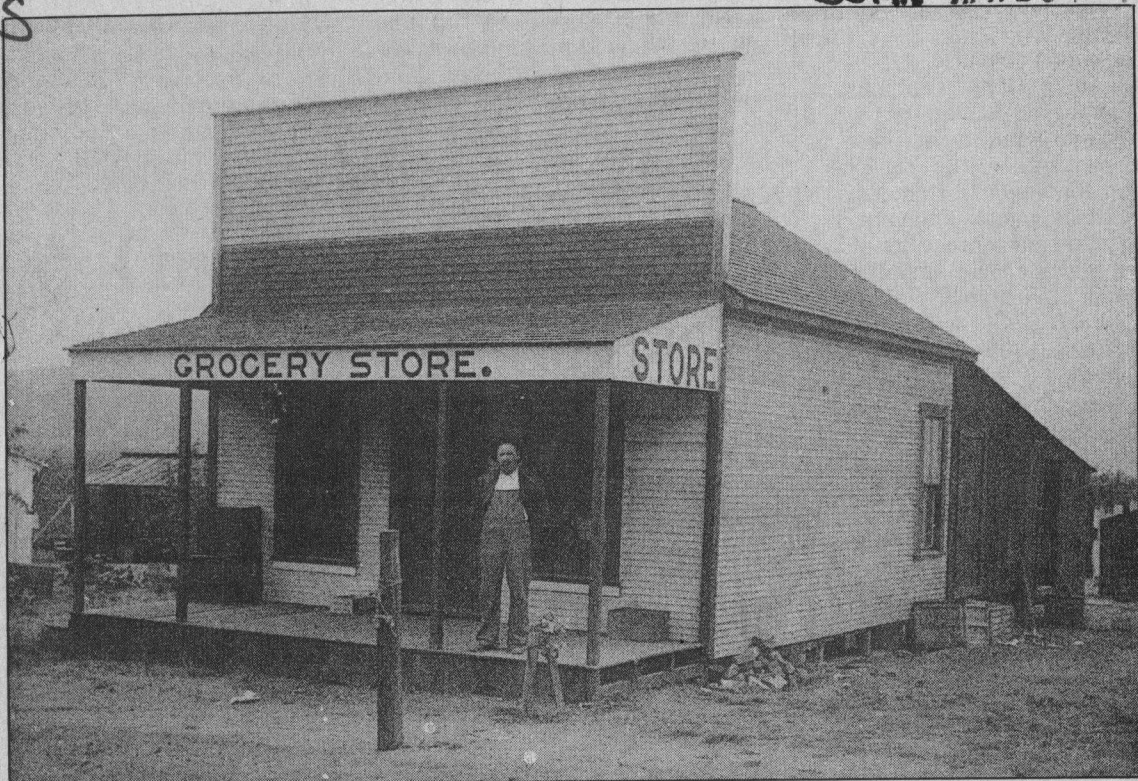


SANTA CRUZ
Historic Perspective

A town spanning 3 counties

AROMAS CIVIC CENTER COLLECTION

The Aromas post office was in a store in San Benito County, right, before it moved across Carpenteria Road, below.



Aromas post office celebrates its centennial

BY ROSS ERIC GIBSON
Special to the Mercury News

Today the Aromas post office, which serves a town located in three counties, is celebrating its centennial with a special cancellation. The post office holds a special place in the town, having played an important role in its name.

Aromas' main street, Carpenteria Road, is a county line, dividing Monterey from San Benito. When the road crosses the Pajaro River, it enters Santa Cruz County. If town-folks want anything done, they have to go to three county governments.

George Dunlap first established the post office in Monterey County, and though only three homes were in view, it served 20

families. Then Rosa Kortright became postmistress in 1897, and moved the post office into her general store, across the street in San Benito County. Here William Von Canse became postmaster in 1915.

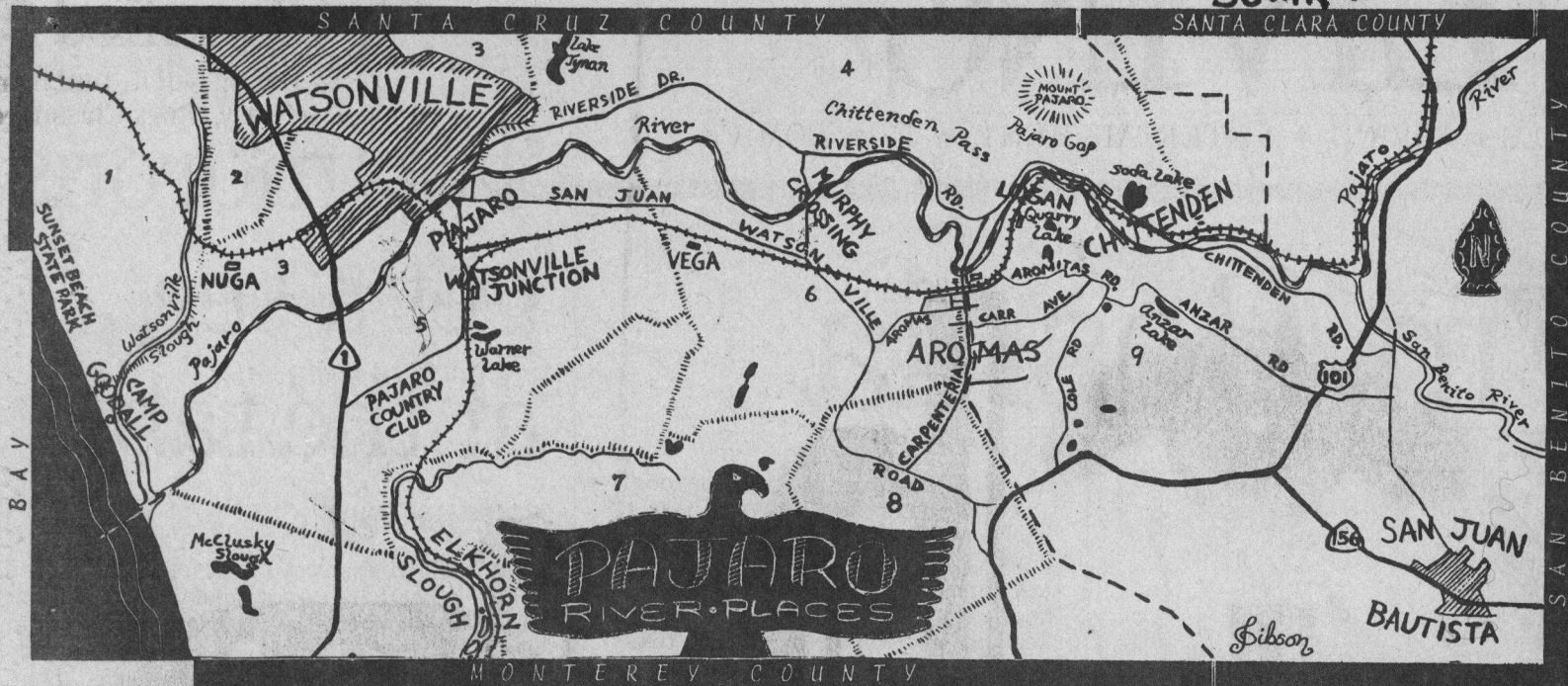
Kortright's store burned in 1924, and was replaced by Dolan Marshall's store. In the meantime, Canse died, and his wife, Lesbia, took over. The post office bought a lot from John Snyder, next to the Church of Christ he had built, and so returned to Monterey County where it remains today. The church became the Elmer Snyder home in 1945.

The post office was also responsible for naming the town. In 1894, Postmaster Dunlap didn't like the name "Sand Cut" station, given to the place during 1870 train tunnel

construction. Dunlap requested the post office use its more historic name, Aromitas, which became Aromas for brevity's sake. It's Spanish for "perfume" or "odor," which came to mean fragrant hills of apricot blossoms, but originally referred to the aroma of brimstone.

The odor came from the many springs in the area, which once formed large lakes but now mostly have been drained for farming. The water is unusually sulfurous, thanks to an earthquake fault that bisects the area. The fracture exposes underground springs to heat venting from molten magma, producing hot springs close to this source,

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MAP BY ROSS ERIC GIBSON

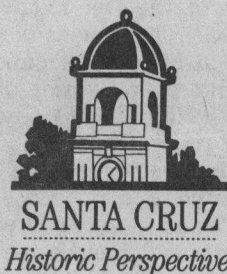
Few maps show all of the Aromas area, since each county prints its own jurisdiction. The numbers indicate the Spanish land grants.

Post office unites town spanning 3 counties

HISTORY from Page 1B

while elsewhere the migrating water only retains its brimstone fragrance.

Local Spanish place names originated in four land grants that comprise Aromas, and whose boundary lines have since become county lines.



The main street is Carpenteria, deriving from an 1831 grant (No. 8 on the map): "Cañada de la Carpenteria," or "Valley of the Woodshop." The west side of Carpenteria Road (No. 6) was the 1820 grant of Branciforte resident Antonio Miguel Castro, called "Vega del Rio de Pajaro," or "Pajaro River Flats." A railroad station named Vega later sat midway between Aromas and Watsonville.

East of Carpenteria Road (No. 9) was Juan Maria Anzar's 1835 grant, "Las Aromitas y Aguas Calientes," or "Smelly Hot Springs," partly in Santa Cruz County. An-

zar built his adobe home on Anzar Lake, and his son gained Vega del Rio in marriage, adding the adjoining (No. 7) "Los Carneros," or "Sheep Ranch," in 1842. Watsonville architect William Weeks later built his summer home on the foundation of Anzar's adobe.

Across the Pajaro River in Santa Cruz County, was "Salsipuedes" grant (No. 4), named for a treacherous creek the Spanish dubbed "Get Out While You Can!" After the Civil War, new owner Nathaniel Chittenden gave his name to the pass and the white and black sulfur springs. An 1893 post office served 80 people, and a hot springs resort that opened in 1906, when A.F. Martel added a hotel and summer cottages. St. Francis Brothers ran it as a Catholic retreat from 1918 to 1923.

A granite quarry began in 1870 for railroad construction, which became permanent in 1880. Its station name was Logan, after Judge John Logan of Santa Cruz, who developed the loganberry and the town of Brookdale.

In 1900, the quarry was purchased by A.R. Wilson, and today is operated by

grandsons Bruce and Steve Woolpert for Granite Construction. A coal mine and oil wells once also operated in the area.

Orchards of apricots soon made Aromas an apricot capital. San Joaquin laborers escaping the valley heat helped harvest and dry the fruit. When the California Prune and Apricot Association was formed in San Jose, apricots were required to be bone dry before shipment by rail, then partly rehydrated in San Jose before resale. Aromas growers complained they were being short-changed.

The distinction of being the oldest living Aromas natives is shared by Alvin Cole, 83, and railroad historian Albert Snyder, 82, whose grandfather settled along the Pajaro River in 1854. Albert's wife, Alzora, founded the Aromas History Center, as an archive connected with the Pajaro Valley Historical Society in Watsonville, where she works.

Local historian, architectural consultant and author Ross Eric Gibson writes a weekly history column for the Santa Cruz/Monterey edition.