

Watsonville began as rancho

A small village named Pajaro, meaning bird, was laid out in 1852 along a narrow and dusty stage-coach road which wound through the Pajaro Valley and over the Pajaro River into Monterey County. A great rolling meadow covered with wild oats, clover, alfalfa and other grasses. Mustard grew so tall that, as one old-timer recalled, his grandmother would ride her horse through it and never see over the tops for miles on end.

The land abounded with vegetables, sparkling water and sloping hills. This was the El Rancho Bolsa del Pajaro, granted to Sebastian Rodriguez in 1823 and 1828 while he was a sergeant in the Monterey presidial company. Governor Alvarado re-granted it in November of 1837 to Sebastian and his brother, Alejandro. The rancho consisted of 5,496 acres, bounded on the south by the Pajaro River and on the west by the Monterey Bay. Watsonville was laid out on the eastern portion of the grant.

Merchants came to the Pajaro valley bringing their wagons full of goods and supplies — many had arrived here from the mining fields. Tents and small roughly framed buildings sprang up on the main street first called Pajaro Street. Spanish cattle were still in the valley, often being herded through the village, stopping to graze in an open field which was to become the city plaza.

Some of the streets that were laid out had different names than now — Third became Beach; Fourth became Lake; Callahan was changed to Palm; Merchant to Marchant; West Third to Wall and then West Beach; Rodriguez, between Third and Front, became Van Ness and then back to Rodriguez. Very con-



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Local columnist

fusing for a researcher!

The first town election was held in December of 1852 — a man by the name of Miles was elected Justice of the Peace. In 1866 the County Board of Supervisors named the following persons as Clerks and Judges of Elections in accordance with the Registry act, Pajaro Election District — John R. Porter, Clerk; J.S. Chapman and Thomas Beck, Judges; James Cathers, Thos. S. Cooper, Wm. Vanderhurst and Richard Leland, alternate Judges. Watsonville' City Government was formed in 1868 with B.A. Barney, Joseph McCullum, G.M. Bockius and Hy Jackson as town trustees.

Men were hanged for horse stealing and for murder as was a Mr. Dean who swung from a livery stable sign at the entrance to what is now Maple Avenue. Sometimes the victims could be seen hanging from the wooden bridge that crossed the Pajaro River, but most hangings were carried out at the county seat in Santa Cruz. Life was rough and tough in those early years but Watsonville was to become "civilized" quite rapidly compared to some of the other western towns.

According to the 1873 directory of Watsonville the population stood at 2,000 — of 714 registered voters — Californians, 58; Americans, 503; Irish, 59; English, 16; Scotch, 5; Ger-

That was Watsonville

man, 16; Prussians, 10. The remainder was made up of the French, Portuguese, Swedes, Swiss, Italians and Canadians. This list does not show the Chinese who could not vote but had come to the valley in 1866.

The following is from The Pajaronian in 1871: "While the rich valley lands produce enormous quantities of wheat, barley, flax, potatoes and vegetables of all kinds, the foothills are no less valuable for dairying purposes, and added to the fine dairies already under way in this section, we may expect many more, on more extensive plans.... Plans for great improvements in the future, in building and establishing manufactories, are now being talked of and the Pajaro Valley is proud and confident in its wealth of soil (which is the true wealth of any country) and its many advantages. It is destined to become a spot to be pointed at with pride by the State at large, and Watsonville will rise to the dignity of one of the most flourishing inland cities in the State."



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