

# Watsonville's first fair was back in 1887

By BETTY LEWIS

The forerunner of the Santa Cruz County Fair, at least as far as Watsonville is concerned, was the Pajaro Valley Fair first held in 1887 —

"The Board of Directors of the Pajaro Valley Fair met at the Grange Hall (Hildreth Building) last Saturday afternoon, and a majority of the members were present. The Board organized by electing A.N. Judd, President; Mrs. A.P. Roache, Vice President; H.S. Stipp, Secretary; N.A. Uren, Treasurer; A.P. Roache, Superintendent; A.N. Judd, Assistant Superintendent . . ."

—Watsonville-Pajaronian,  
Sept. 5, 1887

The idea was for local farmers to exhibit their products in the Rink (Opera House) to show how nature had blessed the fertile land of the Pajaro valley. But money had to be raised, and members of the committee struck out one day to solicit funds from local businessmen. "If our people are in earnest, if they desire progress and is they wish to do everything possible to build up the town and valley, they will liberally respond in aid of the project." And respond they did, as they dug into their pockets and cash registers to hand over the coin for Watsonville's first fair.

Besides renting the Rink for the exhibits and shows, ground was secured in the Mansion House stable yard for the showing of livestock. Preparations stepped into high gear as the opening date of October 21st drew near. It was a combination of hard labor and a labor of love that brought the fair to the people of Watsonville and surrounding communities. The women worked as hard as the men, decorating booths and making jams and jellies to be on display.

Opening day broke clear and warm, and the small community was packed with people who were soon waiting for the doors to open at the Rink. Once inside the hall, visitors were soon listening to the Watsonville Band strike up a lively tune to start off the festivities. After a



**DIRECTORS OF THE 1887 FAIR—Front row:**

**Mrs. B.A. Osborn, Mrs. Libby, A.P. Roach; Roach, N.A. Uren, J.W. Sill; top row: A.N. Judd, H.S. Stipp, Mrs. Stipp, Lucy E. Card.**

Photo courtesy Pajaro Valley Historical Assn.

few selections, the Reverend C.S. Haswell led the throng in prayer followed by a "timely" address by President Judd and, then, the "monster" crowd dispersed to the various exhibits. Heading the list in popularity was the agricultural department with its

mammoth cabbages and baskets of potatoes. Daniel Tuttle displayed 26 lbs. of potatoes from one hill. Other products on view were beets, tomatoes, onions, sweet potatoes and watermelon — "We have seen far poorer displays take first premium at the State fair."

Tiered semi-circular shelves were heavily laden with every fruit known to cultivation shown in dried or green form — apples and berries the ranking fruits of the Pajaro valley. A box of bellefleurs, 45 in a box weighting 50 pounds, was a top exhibit by Capelli and Dondere. The

apples were shipped to Boston after the fair.

Hailed as the drawing card of the fair was the baby show. "Everyone likes babies, everyone can freely express his admiration of baby beauties . . ." A.B. Chalmers had designed an elegant cottage front which was placed in front of the stage to separate the small fry from the crowd. Eighty babies were entered in the contest and it was so crowded and the air so close, the show was adjourned across the street to the plaza. There were three divisions and the winners of each received a silver cup; every baby entered was presented with a doll or rattle besides being photographed by Mr. Fell.

In the evening, entertainment was in full swing and included such productions as "Mother Goose" and a pantomime of "Jack and Jill" plus specialties, music, readings finished off by homemade refreshments. The list of exhibits and prizes was almost endless and included a school exhibit including taxidermy display; a group of fifteen young ladies wearing white caps with the letters J.C.C. emblazoned on the front — Jolly Cooking Club; the Charles Ford Company gave away samples of tea and lithographs of celebrated yachts; an art exhibit with many local painters displaying; plus the refreshment booths where one could sit, chat and enjoy the results of local products such as Martinelli's Orange Champagne.

The fair was considered a resounding success. — "They (the Directors) can look back upon their labors with pardonable pride, for they wrought better than they anticipated. There was no friction, every department worked harmoniously, and out of the chaos of preparation the harmonious and well trained discipline necessary to a successful exhibition was speedily evolved . . ."

Now celebrating its 38th year, the Santa Cruz County Fair hosted 61,000 visitors last year — a far cry from that first fair in 1887 when the total population of Watsonville was around 2,000!