

# Ford, Charles and the Charles Ford Company

"On a November afternoon in 1890 an incident, amazing enough to shock anyone, occurred in a little town of Watsonville. The city band was marching back from the Pioneer Watsonville Cemetery, gaily playing the jolly tune, Ta-ra-ra-boom-deo-ay. Residents were shocked beyond words. They couldn't believe their ears. The band was returning from playing for the funeral of Dr. Charles Ford. On the way out they had played with proper dignity a funeral march. Had they gone mad? No, they were just carrying out the wish of Charles Ford, who had wanted the band to play this tune on the way back to town from his funeral (he died on Nov. 15, 1890.) Thus ended the career of one of Watsonville's greatest pioneers." - Register-Pajaronian, no date.

Charles Ford was born on January 13, 1824 in New Jersey. His parents died when he was quite young and, at age 14 he entered the business world as a clerk in a dry goods store. He left the dry goods business to operate his own drug store and, as was the custom in those days,



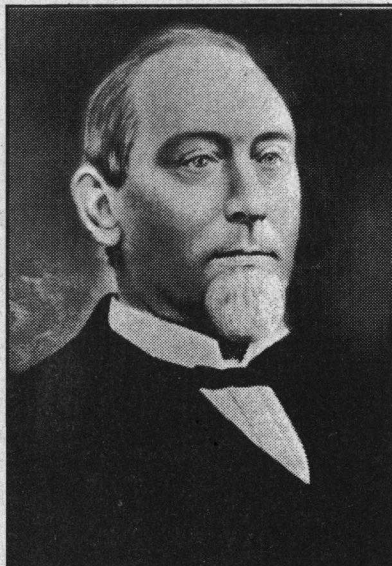
**Betty Lewis**

That was Watsonville

came to be referred to as Doctor Ford. He moved to New York, owning and operating two drug stores until he was bitten by the gold fever bug in 1848.

Now 24 years old, he came to California by ship around Cape Horn and arrived in San Francisco on July 31, 1849. After landing he went immediately to the mines near the Yuba River. Although he had some success as a miner, ill health forced him to return to the East Coast. He came back to San Francisco in 1850, and went into the mercantile business for two years. He then sold out and headed south having heard tales of the beautiful Pajaro Valley.

His first act was to rent land in



**Charles Ford (1824-1890)**

the Amesti Rancho area and plant 200 acres of potatoes, a crop that had been bringing top prices. By harvest time, over-production had caused the bottom to fall out of the potato market and he had the foresight to leave his potatoes rotting in the fields, rather than incurring the

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additional expense of harvesting, sacking and hauling the potatoes to a non-existent market.

Deciding that farming was not for him, Charles Ford went back to what he knew best, the dry goods business. Joining with Barbelden "Little Barney" Barney in partnership with Lucius Sanborn, he established the Ford and Sanborn mercantile store on Main Street near West Third Street in 1852. "Messrs. Ford & Barney have nearly completed a two-story building — the lower floor of which is to be appropriated to mercantile purposes; the upper floor is designed for a lodge room for the Masonic fraternity, a branch of which order has been established here." - Pacific Sentinel, April 11, 1857.

Charles Ford never married and was the first guest to register at the Mansion House hotel when it opened its doors to the public in 1871 and lived there for some time. It was said that at one time, he owned one fourth of the town of



**Ford's store circa 1870.**

Watsonville.

Ford served one term in the California Legislature as a staunch Republican but never was to seek another public office. He was said to be bold and aggressive in his undertakings but had a natural tact. He also suffered from liver trouble in his later years but managed to trav-

el to foreign countries.

Ford and Sanborn continued the business until 1880, when Lucius Sanborn retired. At that time, A. A. Morey and James Sidney Menasco were taken into partnership and they soon became responsible for the day-to-day operations of the expanding store.