

'Our Home Town': Exhibit depicts life at turn of century

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PEOPLE in Watsonville used to be smaller. Wedding dresses weren't always white and bathing suits weren't always skimpy. But when it came to having a civilized picnic, tea was a must.

Such historical trivia will be revealed in "Our Home Town," an exhibit featuring

turn-of-the-century clothing, photographs, artifacts and memorabilia that opens Saturday at the Pajaro Valley Gallery in Watsonville's Porter Building at Main and Maple streets.

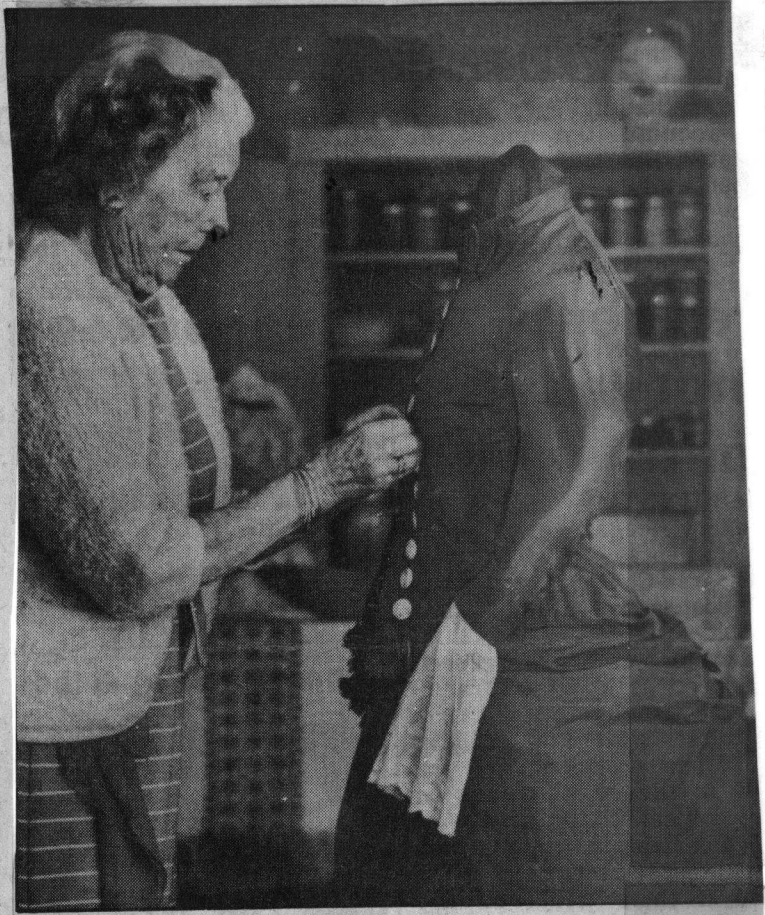
With the help of exhibit designer Nikki Silva, the intimate gallery will be turned into a showcase for 15 pieces from the Pajaro Valley Historical Association's extensive costume collection. The entire collection numbers almost 2,000 pieces and is the largest in the county.

In addition to clothing (all mannequins will be dressed in authentic period clothing from the underwear out), the show will feature more than 100 historical photos, furniture, household and work-related items.

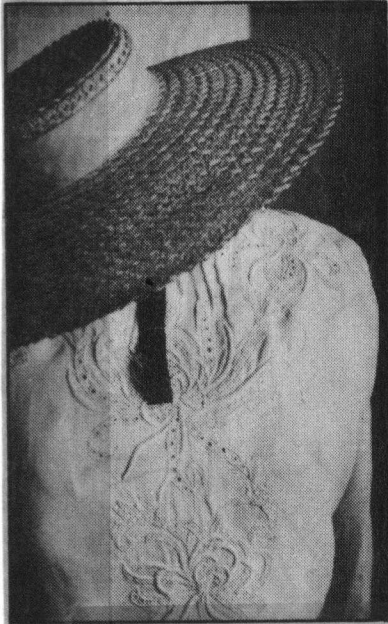
"The hardest thing, really, was deciding which pieces to use," said Silva, who designed the recent show "The Udder Side of Santa Cruz County" and worked with her husband, Charles Prentiss, director of the Santa Cruz City Museum, in creating "The History of the Chinese in the Monterey Bay Region." Both were displayed at the Pajaro Valley Gallery.

For "Our Home Town," she used rose and moss-green panels to create various

The way we were



Bernice Porter fastens the hand-painted buttons on a fuchsia wedding dress from 1860.



An embroidered blouse to wear to town.



Around the turn of the century, even everyday work dresses were trimmed in lace.

REFERENCE

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areas in the museum.

For the holiday scene, a Christmas tree will be decorated with candles in antique holders and strung with cranberries and popcorn.

On Tuesday, Bernice Porter, a strong supporter of the historical association and the costume collection, was arranging the Christmas scene. She knelt in front of a pint-size china cabinet and carefully placed the pieces of a child's tea set on its shelves.

The tea set was hers when she was young. She has donated many other items for use in the show and is happy to see the costumes made

available for public viewing.

"I like clothes," she said. "And I think they sort of show the times. You look at the clothes they wore and you sort of know what kind of people they were."

A look at the kitchen and sewing area reveals what people had time to do when there was no television to occupy the evening hours. A woman's apron is displayed. Sewn onto the front are panels of handmade cotton lace.

"It's made of cotton and it's a sturdy lace so it can be laundered," explained Dale Agron, textile conservator for the association.

Many of the dresses are decorated with lace that, Agron said, women either made for their garments themselves or had custom made.

A look around the room also reveals that people were smaller then.

Agron said in addition to inferior diet and exercise, people around the turn of the century were corseted at birth. Babies wore what was called a "belly band" and "children were dressed like small adults."

The result was — small adults.

Mary Silliman's dark brown velvet wedding dress (the dresses were not always white and were usually worn as party dresses after the wedding) shows she was about 4 feet 10 inches tall, had a 31-inch bust and 24-inch waist. Her hip measurement is difficult to determine since her dress had such a large bustle.

White dresses may not have been popular for weddings, but they certainly were in vogue for high school graduation. The school corner features the graduation dress of



Dale Agron, left, and Nikki Silva crown a working woman with a starched bonnet.

Myrtle Rowe Chapman. Behind the dress is a display of pictures. One of them is Myrtle, wearing the dress, in her 1903 graduation portrait. Her classmates are also wearing white.

All of the costumes in the historical association's collection are from the Pajaro Valley and all in the exhibit will be labeled.

The show, which will be on display through Feb. 20, is one of several planned for the new gallery. The historical association, Pajaro Valley Arts Council, Art Museum of

Santa Cruz County and Santa Cruz County Historical Trust have signed a three-year contract that stipulates each group will hold one show a year, with the exception of the art museum, which will do more.

A reception for the show's opening will be held from 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday. The gallery is located in the Porter Building at 280 Main St. but its entrance is on Maple Street.

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, noon to 4 p.m.