

Medical practice: Watsonville's hospitals through the years



That Was
Watsonville

Betty Lewis

"J.A. Linscott has moved the sanitarium building from Third to Alexander Street and will build a carriage warehouse on the vacant lot. He will have the agency for a well-known make of vehicles." — The Pajaronian, April 22, 1897.

According to historical records, Dr. P.K. Watters had rented the building in November 1894 and set up his own sanitarium with Dora Linscott as the matron. Watters moved the old building to East Third Street and had it rebuilt in 1897. The hospital was incorporated in 1902, the same year that the nurse's training school was started on Carr Street, just around the corner. The training school lecture staff included: Guy Miller, M.D.; S.C. Rodgers, M.D.; F.H. Koepke, M.D.; E.E. Porter, M.D.; E.E. Briggs, M.D.; S.T. Pope, M.D.; H.B. Rodgers, D.D.S.; P.K. Watters, M.D.

The nurse's training school was discontinued in 1915. In 1902, an-

other hospital had been opened on Blackburn Street with Dr. Charles E. Beebe in charge, but it was destroyed by fire just one year later and was never rebuilt. In 1907, another hospital called the El Pajaro opened in Watsonville, but it closed after four months, the owners saying it was too expensive to run. A brochure was published in 1909 showing the interior and exterior of Watsonville Hospital on East Third Street.

Henry Watters, son of P.K., graduated from Watsonville High School in 1903, then graduated from medical school. The following is from the Evening Pajaronian in 1911: "Hereafter the Watsonville Hospital will be conducted as a private institution by Dr. P.K. Watters and his son, Dr. Henry Watters, owing to the failure of the other physicians of this city to purchase the place as they intended several weeks ago..."

In 1913, the hospital was leased by Miss Bessie Silliman who operated it until 1919. Henry Watters served in World War I during part of Miss Silliman's management of the hospital. Fees during that period were listed at \$35 per week and up. Another remodeling took place in 1923 and, by 1936, there was an average of 15 patients in the hospital at rates at \$6 per day.

Dr. Clyde Wayland had opened

a hospital on West Lake Avenue in 1914, but moved to San Jose shortly afterward. That facility was of such short duration that very little is known about it.

During the flu epidemic in 1918, a temporary hospital was opened in the Apple Annual building, then located on Second Street, with Mrs. Grover Cottrell in charge.

Property was purchased in 1937 from Frank Brewington on Prospect Street and A.W. Story drew up plans for a modern new hospital that was completed in 1938 at a cost of \$10,000 including furnishings. Melissa Merrill was the superintendent of nurses and capacity in the structure was 50 patients. Many rooms in the new hospital were dedicated to family members, such as the one furnished by the sons of Matteo Lettunich in his memory. The children of Dr. Watters furnished the southeast corner room in his memory and Charlotte Bockius furnished a room in memory of her father, Godfrey M. Bockius.

The children's ward was contributed by the children of the late Dr. S.C. Rodgers — the good doctor had attended more than 1,000 obstetric cases during his lifetime in Watsonville.

Ground was broken in July 1940 for the medical offices of doctors E.H. Eiskamp, L.M. Liles,



Courtesy of Betty Lewis

This photo of Watsonville Community Hospital was taken in the late 1970s.

Frank Blaisdell and P.K. Gilman Jr. The new building was located at 850 Main St.

A bigger and better hospital was needed in Watsonville as the town grew and the population increased. The hospital on Green Valley and Holohan was built in

1969 and served the community well, despite the devastating earthquake of 1989. The old hospital on East Beach is now apartments and the old one on Montecito Street is now a residential care facility. Now we have a new hospital that opened seven years

ago with just about every modern convenience and up-to-date equipment.

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Betty Lewis, a local historian and Watsonville resident, is a regular columnist for the Register-Pajaronian.