

70 years ago tomorrow, all hell broke

By BETTY LEWIS

"A dense volume of smoke arose from the upper story of this magnificent structure and from the windows burst forth long tongues of flame." — The Pajaronian, April 26, 1906.

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A slight tremble was felt by residents of San Francisco on the morning of April 18, 1906, at 5:14 a.m. on a cold and foggy morning. Not everyone was awake at this early hour but before long, a violent earthquake was in full swing, awakening them from their slumber, and tumbling some out of bed. People rushed from their homes in fright. Soon the city burst into flames and burned for three nights and four days — 453 city blocks burned, nearly 60,000 buildings were destroyed and 250,000 inhabitants were left homeless. An estimated 1,000 persons lost their lives.

The Pajaro Valley did not escape this disastrous quake. Chimneys fell, windows were broken, and fires broke out. News item quoted above is about the Moreland Notre Dame Academy where a vial had tipped over in the chemistry room; the convent bell started ringing and the fire bell was heard as flames arose from the academy. At the fire house a brick wall had fallen on the

engine; firemen rushed to clear the debris, quickly went to the school and saved the building from being consumed by flames. One of the heavy iron columns on the Cooper building was moved about half an inch and in the Sheehy building, Attorney Tom Gaffey awoke to find plaster falling on him and part of the rear wall of his room crashed into the backyard. "Tom made a hurried exit that is described as thrilling." The Pajaronian, April 26, 1906.

George DuCommon's jewelry store sustained damage but at the DuCommon home, even more disastrous, was the broken shattered china set that had dated back to the Ming Dynasty — every piece broken into fragments. On Hecker Pass Road at the Valley Catholic cemetery, almost every monument was tipped over and near Pinto Lake the Old Amesti Adobe was in shambles. At the Charles Ford Company every plate glass window was shattered and the sidewalks were strewn with dry goods, clothing and crockery. The bridge across the Pajaro River was wrenched out of shape, closing the road and in Chinatown (Pajaro), the earth split to a depth of over six feet on Brooklyn St.

Josey Daly, who ran a men's boarding house on Beach St., said: "Our ceilings, bedrooms and parlor shook terrifically. The plaster crashed down and one wall fell directly across the piano. I thought it was the end of the world. When I heard the cracking and popping of plaster, I thought the house was on fire." It was said that one out of every three chimneys toppled during the quake. The front chimney on the Judd home came down, smashed through the hall and parlor and broke the stone front steps. Scores of ceilings collapsed but no one was seriously hurt. Sections of the Santa Cruz mountains were broken off and gaping wounds in the hillsides were visible from Watsonville. Three miles of hillside slid down over the county road near Corralitos and the creek was dammed up.

E. C. Meritt, an employee of the

Pajaronian, was rudely awakened while in his bed at the Hoffman House, a wooden building with iron rods extending into it from the brick block adjoining. The walls from the two buildings pulled apart and the ceiling fell on Meritt's bed, just a moment after he had vacated it! Two large brick chimneys fell through the roof at the high school, one landing in the senior room and one in the sophomore room. The postmaster's safe, weighing over half a ton, was thrown off its feet. In the San Miguel Canyon area, water tanks and windmills were moved or knocked down by the quake. Near the Pajaro River, by the bridge, the Pajaro Brewery suffered damage to the foundation of the building and the brick furnace was destroyed.

In many places the ground split and deep

fissures extended for many feet. At Moss Landing a large part of the wharf was destroyed and four warehouses were thrown down. At the Hotel Del Monte in Monterey, so many chimneys fell through the roof that the structure resembled a "huge sieve" and damages was estimated at \$75,000.

There have been numerous earthquakes in the Pajaro Valley since. But none have had the terrifying and devastating effect as in 1906. As Mrs. L. H. Lopez recalled: "I was still in bed and thought the world was coming to an end. I got up and went outside. The ground was rolling and mother's pancake batter went upside down on the kitchen floor. My father had been outside doing some chores and the ground was rolling so, he could hardly walk up the path to the house."



—Photo courtesy of
Pajaro Valley Historical Assoc.

Quake was direct cause of fire at Notre Dame Academy

Watsonville (Calif.) Register-Pajaronian, Saturday, April 17, 1976—9



Quake of 1906 opened a sizeable fissure in Pajaro just across bridge from Watsonville

—Photo courtesy of
Pajaro Valley Historical Assoc.