

Watsonville Oil Company blossomed with a gusher

The Watsonville Oil Company was incorporated in December of 1896 with a capital stock of \$100,000. Directors and stockholders were James Menasco, Fred Kilburn, William DeHart, Edward White and A. C. Massey. The Sargent and Chittenden ranches were bonded by the company and the first derrick was erected in the Sargent tar spring district on a portion of the 20,000 acres in Santa Clara and Santa Cruz Counties which came under the umbrella of the oil company.

"It is boiling — the Watsonville Oil Company has a genuine mammoth gusher. After a long fight, the Watsonville Oil Company has cleaned out the geyser gusher hole near Sargents and the drill is at work going deeper into the oil sand. The dropping of a string of casing 7 5/8 inches in diameter and vigorous sand pumping while the hole was full of water, overcame the difficulty of heaving sand, and the company now feels that the geyser gusher will soon develop into one of the best, if not the best, wells ever drilled in California.

"The oil was coming over the casing this morning in a steady flow of over 100 barrels per day. The column of oil as it comes over the top of the pipe spreads out with a head of over five feet in diameter. Yesterday morning the column was forced up by the powerful gas pressure to the height of



**Betty
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**That was
Watsonville**

over twenty feet above the pipe top, and the oil flooded the derrick and drill house. The roaring of the gas and the force with which it occasionally sends the oil out of the well indicates the presence of a force which will send the oil to the surface in a steady column that will make its present flow of 100 barrels per day look like six bits!" — Salinas Daily Index, April 1903

Articles like this brought in other oil companies such as the one headed by Wm. Clark of the Realto Refining and Oil Company who leased land from the Watsonville Oil Company between Chittenden and Sargents, near Highway 101, on the banks of the Pescadero Creek - this outfit's existence was of very short duration as were many others. But work went on with the Watsonville Oil Company and the following is from the Pacific Oil Reporter dated December 31, 1904:

"Before producing oil sand was discovered, the company had drilled twelve wells and had

passed through a varied experience with numerous drillers and experts. These wells were from a few hundred to near two thousand feet in depth. In all of them, oil bearing shale was found, and from some of the wells a production of several barrels per day was obtained. Thirteen is a lucky number for the Watsonville Oil Company, for in its thirteenth well, rich oil sand was discovered and since then each well drilled has proven to be a producer. The oil is conveyed by a pipe line two miles long of five inch pipe to tanks at a railroad siding at Chittenden, a station on the Coast line of the Southern Pacific Company. The oil flows nicely and pumps easily."

Some of the oil mentioned in this article was used at the Spreckels sugar factory in Watsonville, the fruit dryers as well as in other businesses plus being used to coat the county roads for the first time. The Watsonville Oil Company went out of business many years ago due to the thick, low quality oil not being commercially salable, but out in the Chittenden pass area oil can still be seen oozing from the ground — a remnant of oil speculation in the Pajaro Valley.

"Last week the Watsonville Oil Co. tapped a light flow of oil in its well on the Sargent ranch, but a cave-in has prevented boring since then. It is expected that the well



A 1934 stock certificate from the Watsonville oil Company.

will be cleaned out this week and the boring will continue. The formation is very satisfactory and the

prospect is the most encouraging the company has had." - Pajaronian, July 5, 1899

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REFERENCE

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