

Before it was Freedom, it was Whiskey Hill



That was
Watsonville

Betty Lewis

"Two Men Shot — Every locality has its Five Points, and Watsonville's may be recognized in Whiskey Hill — where a shooting scrape occurs at least once a week; but where it is very difficult to obtain facts in relation to these little occurrences.

"Last week two men were shot — one fatally, perhaps. It seems a couple of natives, whose names we have been unable to learn, had a quarrel and passed shots, one of them receiving a light wound. Guadalupe Alvarado, who was looking on, received a shot through one lung, the ball coming out at his back. The wound, it is thought, will give him an unlimited leave of absence from that locality.

"Whiskey Hill is becoming noted in the annals of crime. It is infested with a lot of drunken, worthless fellows who live by robbery and murder. Indeed, we advise all night travelers in this region to go well armed — for the grave seems but a short distance from this classic hill." — **Pajaro Times, Oct. 31, 1863.**

Whiskey Hill — a small village

where violence, hangings, drinking, carousing, brawling and bear and bull fights were part of its daily life. Around 1860 it had its beginnings on a portion of the San Andreas and Corralitos Ranchos. Flimsy shacks dotted both sides of the old Santa Cruz Road — now Freedom Boulevard — which ran between Watsonville and the county seat.

There were a number of saloons where the cowboys would congregate on a Sunday to unwind by drinking, dancing, betting and just plain socializing. There were race tracks — one on the Roach property, (now Roach(e) Road), and another located south of town near the present waterworks.

Horse stealing was a hanging offense and the unlucky culprits could be seen swaying from a tree or hastily constructed gallows after being brought to a speedy "justice." The first white family to settle in the area was that of J.M. Nistetter, a blacksmith from Gilroy. There was no rain that year, making for short supplies and high prices. Flour sold for \$50 a barrel; coal was scarce and when available, you would probably be charged \$50 a hogshead.

The year of 1866 saw Whiskey Hill's first hotel under construction and things were "looking up." The little village continued to grow, the name was changed to Freedom (more civilized!), ranches were improved and enlarged and, in 1882, Peter Schmidt erected a large ware-

Palmer's Bull Fight Company.

GRAND BULL FIGHT, AT WHISKY HILL,

Sunday.....October 23, 1864,

Courtesy of Betty Lewis

Advertisement for a grand bull fight from 1864.

house while starting a business which carried a full line of agricultural implements.

James and Nels Enemark were to purchase property from Schmidt and the Enemark Brothers' store was a vital part of Freedom, carrying such necessary items as groceries, liquors, hardware, cigars and tobacco. In 1901, the local newspaper was announcing: "Freedom now has a restaurant where you can get a meal with a drink, or a drink with a meal. It is one method of getting around the anti-saloon ordinance of this county."

The Roache school, which had its beginnings in Mrs. William Roach's kitchen, was to have a new building in 1903 designed by William Weeks and other stores and businesses sprang up along the main thoroughfare.

Fond memories linger of old Whiskey Hill — the stagecoach that rocked and swayed over rutted dirt roads and past wooden plank sidewalks. Memories of cowboys vying for prizes of a horse, gold piece or a bottle of whiskey as they raced down the banks of the Salsipuedes (get out if you can) river. "Booze flowed like water and joy was unconfined."

Charles Houwer was to note in the Register-Pajaronian (no date on the article): "Gone are the days when the Castros, handsomely decked out in velvet and lace, would ride by on their silver palominos to be greeted as tin gods by the poverty stricken populace. A new era, one of intensive cultivation of the soil,

was ushered in. It brought a romance of its own, less poetic perhaps, but built on a more substantial foundation than the preceding one."

In 1939 the Freedom Chamber of Commerce was headed by Lynn Marsh. Serving along with Marsh was Pat Smith, Bill Cissna, Vince Linneman, Nels Enemark, Charles Huck and William Hambley. Gutierrez sold his barber shop to John Hamilton which adjoined the Fairway Market. Hamilton was across the street in a barbershop with Miss Hope Wolf, beauty specialist. But Miss Wolf's business got too busy so Hamilton had to move.

Mrs. Mary Maksimow and her daughter, Helen, opened the Freedom Inn in the Schmidt Building — the space formerly used by Eddie's Tavern. Paul Ziesing produced a handsome sign in red and white for the front of the building.

Yes, Whiskey Hill may have been rougher and tougher than now, but just the name brings back a lingering nostalgia to many in the Pajaro Valley. A small part of California's colorful past that made the "old west" an intriguing part of our state's history. "About two miles north of Watsonville is the far-famed Whiskey Hill, celebrated for — well, anything you please, but the preaching of the Gospel." — **Pajaro Times, Sept. 23, 1965.**

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John Hamilton

If the kids need their hair cut
this is the place to bring them.
Open till noon Sundays.

FREEDOM

An advertisement for John Hamilton from 1939.