

Watsonville man writes the book on old-fashioned steam trains



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WATSONVILLE — Sherrell Watson wants to make sure young people today realize the importance of steam trains on the development of the United States.

So he's written a book about them.

Watson, 80, said in the introduction of the book that he wrote it with the hope that his three young great-grandchildren "may in a few years enjoy learning of the family members who lived through these long ago times."

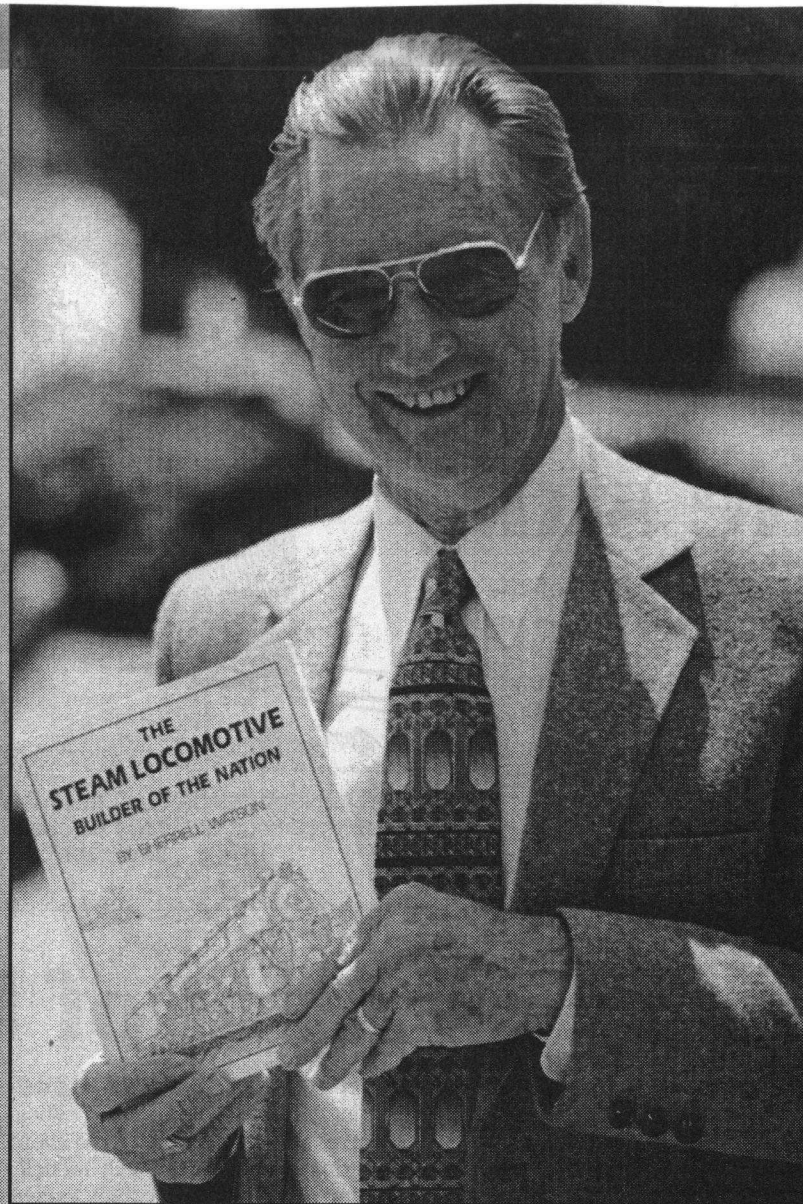
The book, "The Steam Locomotive — Builder Of a Nation," recounts historical facts as well as Watson's first-hand experiences as a machinist for the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad from 1940-'52.

Watson left the railroad just as steam trains were on the way out, but that wasn't why he left. In 1952, Watson began a career in chamber of commerce work that lasted 30 years.

Watson retired in 1982 after four years as executive director of the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce, but he's not fully retired — he is a real estate agent for Kane Hall Palmtag in Watsonville.

Watson didn't have the opportunity during his chamber years to spend as much time as he would have liked on railroad history, but he's made up for it since.

Watson, who grew up in rural Kansas, writes in his introduction that he would sit beside the tracks as a child and "marvel at the steam engines as they virtually blasted their way through town or the countryside on the double tracks



Michael McCollum

Train buff and author, Sherrell Watson, of Watsonville, proudly displays his new book 'The Steam Locomotive — Builder of the Nation.'

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that carried the Santa Fe's heaviest freight and fastest passenger trains."

At first, Watson intended his writing for his family, but the project grew to the point he decided to publish it. He's not aiming for the best-seller list, though — the first printing was 300 copies.

Watson and his wife, Lorene, occasionally take train trips. Amtrak is all diesel, but there are excursion steam trains around the country.

Steam trains went out of production because they were more costly than diesel, Watson said, and the large amounts of water required to steam weld were tough to come by in arid regions.

Still, Watson prefers steam. The diesels "don't have the appeal," he said. "They're just like a big truck."

The 110-page book, which includes 29 photographs, sells for \$12.95. It is available at Crossroads Books, in the Crossroads shopping center at Main Street and Green Valley Road, and the Doodle Bug hobby shop in San Juan Bautista.