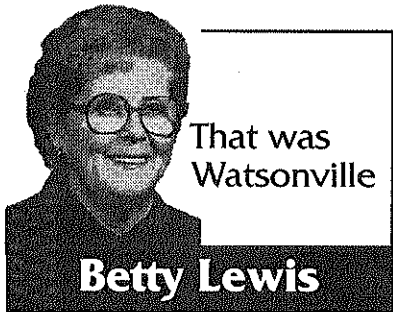


The history of the Watsonville Plaza — Part



That was
Watsonville

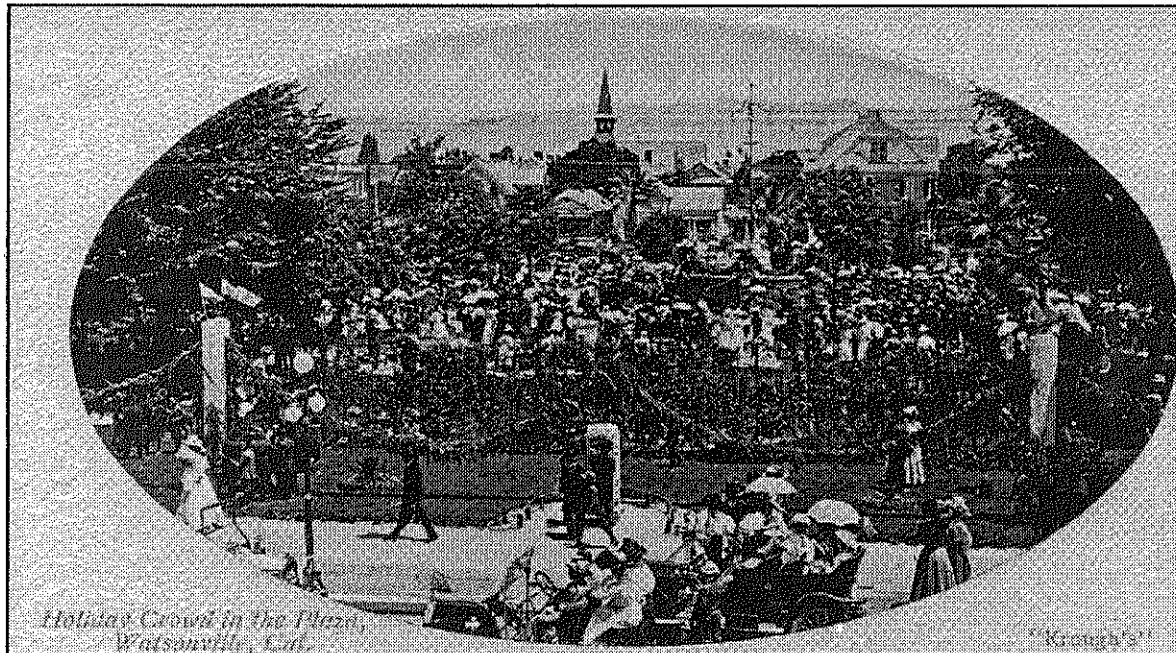
Betty Lewis

"The Public Square — this piece of land still remains as barren as a bachelor's love, isolated from the thought of beauty, and as useless as a discarded suitor. It is neither beneficial nor ornamental; yet mutely invites the attention of our public-spirited citizens. We would suggest to persons holding interests in this locality to create a committee of ways and means, and convert this naked field into an object of interest. It would not only prove an ornament to the town of Watsonville, but would certainly increase the value of property in the immediate vicinity. We hope we are not talking in vain. This is the season for such improvements, and now is the accepted hour. Fence it in, and plant shrubbery, shade trees, etc." — *Pajaro Valley Times*, May 2, 1863

Throughout Watsonville's history the city plaza has been a favorite topic of conversation and, in its earlier years, was run through the gamut in regard to scathing remarks about its condition and lack of care. Of course, all that has changed and today the plaza is kept in a beautiful state, used by many and is indeed an ornament to the city.

Reaching back to the town's beginnings, the area bounded by Main, Union, and East Third (Beach) streets was a grazing land for cattle and smaller animals and a romping place for human small fry. What is now Peck Street was once Park alley and the name wasn't to be changed until 1894. In 1871 a big stride was taken to beautify the city plaza. Broad-planked walks were built through the park and some fifty trees, including Australian gum, were planted. The wooden walks brought forth the following comment: "Eccentric planks along the plaza sidewalk sometimes disturb the grace of female motion, and serenity of female tempers."

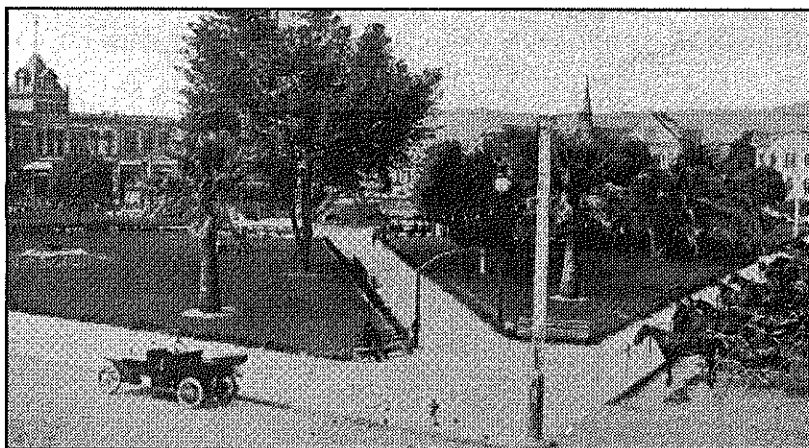
"On Saturday last a crowd could have been seen on the plaza watching the operation of cutting down the liberty pole which had bravely stood through all the various storms and political and



Holiday Crowd in the Plaza, Watsonville, Calif.

Kramer's

Photos courtesy of Betty Lewis



ABOVE: A postcard of the Plaza during a holiday celebration in 1913.

LEFT: Postcard showing the Watsonville Plaza with horses and buggies to the right.

religious changes of Watsonville for seventeen years. It was thought to be greatly decayed, but was found to be comparatively sound. At length the pole fell with a large crash, and immediately a rush was made for the ball at the end, for the legendary bottle of whiskey, which was supposed to be confined within the ball. After a good deal of sport the search was given up and quiet reigned once more." — *The Pajaronian*, January 19, 1871

A hitching rail was constructed in 1873 on the Main Street side of the plaza so local citizens could tie up their horses when they came to town. Old pictures show horses and buggies in great numbers being parked there. The Butterfly Social Club, a dancing club composed of young women of the town, offered to donate a fountain for the plaza and their generous offer was accepted by the town trustees in 1879. Costing \$150, it was made of bronze on a granite base and stood 9 feet high. It was dedicated in ceremonies on the

Fourth of July, 1880, with Miss Dora Hernandez delivering the address on behalf of the Club. A tin box was placed in the corner of the basin, which contained local newspapers, town documents and coins. In 1893 the fountain was moved to the center of the plaza, and, in 1899, it was moved to its present location.

In 1880 preparations were under way for the construction of a wooden bandstand near the Main Street side of the plaza. "The plaza stand, or chalet as the aesthetes call it, is a beautiful structure and reflects credit on architect Chalmers, builder Holbrook and the enterprising Trustees. We hail these plaza improvements as the dawn of a new era." — *The Pajaronian* 9/16/1880

In March of 1882 the flagpole crashed to the ground during a bad storm and the remains were purchased by Conrad Jessen for \$3.75. A new one was soon erected and was also known as the "liberty pole." The first American flag to be

hoisted up the flagpole arrived in town for the 4th of July celebration in 1882. It measured 36 by 70 feet with streamer measuring seventy feet length.

The year was 1883 when following appeared in the *Pajaronian*: "Under the management of the Plaza Committee, gas has been introduced in the plaza pavilion, and it can now be used for public gatherings of the local bands. We are informed the Gas Company does its handsome by donating the gas, and local bands are willing to donate music; hence on moonlight nights you may expect the plaza to become a popular resort for our town people."

The Pajaro Brass Band under leadership of Stephen Martin rendered its melodious and stirring renditions on Saturday evening at the plaza, or whenever a special occasion happened along.

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