

## **Watsonville Remembered – a Selection of KOMY-Radio Broadcasts\***

by Betty Lewis

\*Each selection is the txt of one of a series of broadcasts on KOMY Radio, Watsonville, during 1975-1985. All 400 programs are available in typescript at the Watsonville Public Library. They are being prepared for publication.

### **AGRICULTURE**

The following was written in 1916 by S.J. Duckworth, who was then the secretary of the Watsonville Chamber of Commerce.

Agriculture began in the Pajaro Valley in 1823, when the first Spanish settlers applied for their land grants from Mexico. Farming on the scale known to Americans began in 1851 and since then the valley has undergone several transformations. Aside from fruit, the important crops are alfalfa, beans, corn, hay grains, hops, potatoes, sugar beets and garden truck. Poultry and hog raising are also very profitable in this equable climate.

The first apple orchard was planted in 1853 as a family orchard on the C.O. Silliman farm. The yellow Bellflower and Newtown Pippin soon proved far superior to all others and the planting of these two varieties has increased until at the present time they consist of about four fifths of all the apples planted. Other popular varieties are the White Winter Pearmain, Red Pearmain, Smith Ciders, Gravensteins, Lanfords, Spitzembergs, Rome beauties, Winter Bananas and Missouri Pippins. The average annual output of commercial apples ranges from 3,500 to 5,000 carloads excluding apples that go to canneries and dryers.

The apple industry in the Pajaro Valley has had a long and varied career and as a result of the escalating production, the fruit packing houses sprang up in Watsonville like mushrooms around the turn of the century – Walker Street became the apple men's Mecca. As to the actual operation of the business, thirty to forty men were employed to pick up and haul the apples in large boxes to the packing house. The apples were then given to the sorters, about a dozen young women who carefully went over the apples and took out the culls. Next in line were the packers who sat on low stools with the apple on one side and the squares of wrapping paper on the other – about sixty boxes were packed a day. The Earl Fruit packing shed near the depot had convenient turntables along the miniature car track which greatly facilitate fruit handling.

Chong Wo, a Brooklyn merchant, is going to be in the apple handling business this year. He has been buying by the box and has about ten carloads contracted for. This is the first appearance of Chinaman in the business of buying apples in the Pajaro Valley. He expects to ship to Asiatic ports. –

*Register Pajaronian 1899*

Mr. Wo built a packing and shipping shed over across the river in Pajaro. His fruit growing operation, by 1901 was confined to the cultivation of a twenty acre orchard of deciduous fruits and seven acres of strawberries. He employed a large number of workers in his plant and gave his personal attention to the grading of apples thus insuring an excellent pack. During the 1900 season he shipped sixty carloads of apples and never

received any complaints – the fruit was true to its label and the pack was one of the finest on the market.

P.N. and Mateo Lettunich built the first apple packing shed in Watsonville in 195 near the Watsonville depot on Walker Street. In 1900 the Lettunich Company employed several girls to grade apples and the newspaper noted: "It is a branch of work at which girls excel, and if apples are perfectly graded to start with the pack is apt to be all right."

Disaster struck in May of 1903 when three large packing houses were burned to the ground including Lettunich's. These fires were of incendiary origin and the small four inch water mains were insufficient to put out the flames. P.N. Lettunich was able to save four newly painted fruit wagons out of the tragedy. Work was soon underway to rebuild the packing sheds and the Dewey Brand wrapper was soon being placed on the top grade apples – on extra fancy stock for export, the top layer of fruit was sprinkled with gold and silver gilt making for a very attractive box. In 1900 the Lettunichs handled about 100,000 boxes of apples and shipped 110 cans of fruit to local and eastern points.

Every year he [Lettunich] places about ten carloads of choice stock in cold storage at New York and in the spring, when there is an advance in prices on export trade, he reaps the benefit. Today P.N. Lettunich & Co. send a carload of Newtons to London, and another car consisting of an assortment of Alexanders, Fall Pippins, and other varieties to the San Francisco market, while a third car of early Bellefleurs under the famous Dewey brand goes south for cold storage.

*Evening Pajaronian September 24, 1903*

In 1909 the Apple Annual Association was formed and Otto D. Stoesser was elected President. Architect William Weeks was hired to prepare plans for a building to be located on Second Street between Rodriguez and Walker (this later became the Civic Auditorium). Publicity for the first apple show went into high gear – soon on the sale racks were: colorful souvenir programs, pennants, buttons, post cards –

Every portion of California will be awakened to the fact that the local carnival will eclipse any of the kind ever attempted in the State and members of the committee will be sent to points all over the state to boost the fair. –

*Evening Pajaronian 1910*

As the October 10<sup>th</sup> opening date drew closer a special Accommodations Committee was formed to canvass the city homes to see how many spare rooms would be available for the expected crowds – the limited number of hotels at that time made for a lack of space and more lodging was needed to satisfy the "inner man." The new Apple Annual building boasted a stage measuring 100 by 30 feet plus three dressing rooms. The exhibits featuring facsimiles of buildings and structures made of dried and fresh apples spilled over into two large tents set up next to the main building. Fifteen counties were represented with exhibits and twenty-six carloads of apples were on display – 640 boxes to the car. The show ran from October 10<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> in 1910 and 40,000 people streamed into Watsonville that first year to enjoy the displays, parades, stage shows, horse racing and street car rides to the beach.

The Apple Annual ran for three more years, growing bigger and better with each succeeding year. In August of 1912, the Hotel Appleton opened its doors and was to house many of the visitors to the week long festival. On the final October night of that third year the following appeared in the local paper:

One thousand Japanese marched with illuminated lanterns while decorated vehicles followed in line. The Watsonville Band at the head of the pageant and the Japanese were applauded all along the line for their pretty showing.

The show moved up to San Francisco in 1914 to become part of the celebration for the upcoming Panama Pacific Exposition held in 1915.

On a balmy Saturday afternoon in June of 1915 over 1,000 men and women gathered together in the Second Street Auditorium (formerly the Apple Annual Building) to organize the Watsonville Apple Distributors. This newly found organization was to help perfect the packing, shipping and marketing of apples from Watsonville. Attorney John Gardner was the presiding officer and Carroll Rodgers secretary at this mass meeting. Other on the thirteen man committee were W.R. Radcliff, C.H. Baker, George Copriviza, W.J. McGrath, H.M. Tenny, J.W. Baxter, C.F. Langley, F.S. Jerome, J.B. Cutter, J.W. Tullock, Edward White and M.N. Lettunich. A membership list of the newly formed organization was printed in the newspaper in July of that year and there were five brokers, fifteen commercial packers, 150 growers and 180 merchants, business and professional men listed. Indeed the apple industry was at its peak and for the first time in its history, the bankers and business men realized how vital was the success of the apple industry to the Pajaro Valley.

### **FRED W. ATKINSON**

A man of many talents and dedicated to the betterment of the community in which he lived was Fred W. Atkinson, newspaper editor, mayor, author and founder of the radio station KHUB (later changed to KOMY). Mr. Atkinson was born June 7, 1876 in New Brunswick, Canada. He financed his higher education at Dartmouth and Tufts College and graduated with high honors. His first contact with the newspaper world was contributing to the Springfield, Massachusetts *Republican Union*, and the Alameda, California, *Alameda Times-Star*, and it was during this period in 1906 that he married Ann Metzler of Santa Cruz. They were to have one daughter, Alice Mae. Mr. Atkinson purchased the *Burlingame Advance*; the *Benicia Herald* and the *Benicia New Era*. The two Benicia newspapers were consolidated and eventually sold in 1911 at which time the Atkinson family moved to Watsonville.

In 1919 he purchased the *Watsonville Register*, a six-column publication, containing eight pages and employing eight people. The newspaper office was located at 452 Main Street. By 1927, eight years later, Mr. Atkinson had built the paper up to eight standard columns; running from eight to fourteen pages, with a mechanical office and a staff of 21 persons. Ten carriers were delivering the *Register* to homes in the Pajaro Valley, and new facilities were being used as a Spanish Mission style building had been erected at 18 East Lake Avenue in 1926.

In 1930 Mr. Atkinson purchased the *Evening Pajaronian*, and became the owner of both the daily and weekly papers in Watsonville. He was also active in community affairs and was elected Mayor of Watsonville in 1921; he served three consecutive two-year terms. This was when the city was governed by a Mayor and a Board of aldermen. Two Aldermen were elected from each of the four wards. During these six years of Atkinson's administration, the following was accomplished: a successful bond election for the purchase of the city water works from a private concern; the office of police chief was changed to an appointed office (formerly, it was a combination of marshal and tax collector); the tax and license collecting department was transferred to the jurisdiction of

the city clerk; a new fire house was built on Second Street; another successful bond election carried in 1925, providing for the construction of an out-fall sewer system, and a long-term street paving program when completed ended the city's dirt streets.

Mr. Atkinson was also the author of two books which are now collector's items: *100 years in the Pajaro Valley* and *Argonauts of 1769*. Less than a month before his death, a project he had worked on for 10 years came into being as radio station KHUB went on the air. Fred Atkinson contributed much to the city of Watsonville and to the Pajaro Valley. A brilliant man, he was loved and respected by those who knew him and those who knew of him. In a relatively brief span of 61 years he accomplished much and accomplished it well.

### **JIM BROADIS\***

What is known as the Heights up on Freedom Boulevard in the High Street area, was once owned by a former Negro slave by the name of Jim Broadis. In 1939, a series of articles entitled "Back to the Roots," by Sam Hawkins appeared in the *Watsonville Morning Sun* and the following information is partly drawn from those articles:

Jim Broadis, after being brought to California from the south, had been sold by his third owner during a card game in Marysville. The buyer threw \$1,600 across the gambling table in sacks of gold nuggets. Broadis was to escape from his new master and, after hiding and running, came to the Pajaro Valley in 1850 going to work as a delivery man. He acquired enough money to buy an acre of land on what is now High Street where he built a small house and his property was soon dubbed "Nigger Hill" or "Broadis Hill." He married, accumulated more money and became the owner of over 50 acres on the Heights. Jim Broadis was a teamster, farmer and rugged pioneer; he was an excellent hunter and hunted with most of the prominent men in the valley who respected his ability and his friendship. Jim's wife left him and tried for years to get a divorce and have the property divided; she finally won and the property was sold off. Jim Broadis moved to a small shack at 1<sup>st</sup> and Main Streets. He died in 1906 leaving an estate of \$18,000 to his children. He is buried out in pioneer cemetery in an unmarked grave.

[\*Editor's Note: The Broadis name is found spelled in various forms.]

### **DRISCOLL FAMILY**

Jeremiah Driscoll was born in County Cork, Ireland, and at the age of twenty-five, he came to California going to the mining fields at Forbestown. He later sold his holdings and journeyed to the Pajaro Valley where he purchased the Grimes Ranch in the Carlton district and, later, became the owner of what was to become known as the Driscoll Ranch in the Railroad District. He was married to Johanna Hickey who was also a native of Ireland.

After Mr. Driscoll's death in 1884, his wife carried on the management of the ranch with the help of her two sons. She died in 1920 having moved into town several years earlier. The Driscoll Ranch was first devoted to the raising of grain and then later planted to berries and apples.

Another Driscoll who came to Watsonville was Dennis Driscoll who purchased property in the green Valley area and was considered one of the valley's foremost farmers and orchardists. In the 1880's he married Julia Hickey – they had eleven children.

## **PIONEER CEMETERY**

*We have been shown a plot of plan for a cemetery, to which we beg leave to call the attention of anyone interested. The disgraceful condition of the present corral – we cannot give it any other name – has long been a reproach to this community.*

The foregoing appeared in the *Pajaro Times* in 1864. It refers to Pajaro Cemetery, later named the Pioneer Cemetery, which was founded on Freedom Boulevard in 1852.

By 1865, the newspaper was noting: *This spot (cemetery) bids fair to surpass in Beauty in a few years, anything of the kind this side of San Francisco.*

The Odd Fellows took over the cemetery in 1882 until 1937 when it was purchased by Clarence Clausen, Carrie Clausen and R.R. Petersen. This is when the name was changed to Pioneer Cemetery. There was another change in ownership in 1945 when the owners of the Pajaro Valley Memorial Park, Marion Hughson and Catherine Patrick, became the new owners.

A special election was held in 1955 to form a Pajaro Valley Cemetery District which was to encompass the three Watsonville Cemeteries. The Pioneer Cemetery was called a public disgrace but it was soon spruced up due to the love and care of commissioners Nelse Struve, Phil Boyle, Mabel Curtis, Louis Lopes and Mrs. H.A. Hyde plus a big assist from sexton Tim Arano and Gardner's Unlimited.

## **LETTUCE – 'GREEN GOLD'**

In the autumn of 1916 the first commercial crop of lettuce, or green gold as it was to be called, was grown on three acres of land belonging to Moses Hutchings. There were two acres of the Los Angeles variety and one of the Hansen type. In the fall of 1917 he harvested three acres, packed and iced in the fields and sent to San Francisco at \$2.50 per crate. Orrin O. Eaton, in 1917 planted lettuce between the berry plants on his Oak Grove ranch near Natividad thus bringing commercial lettuce to Monterey County.

Among the leaders in the lettuce industry were Grant Cornell, Carroll Rodgers, P.M. Resetar and M.L. Kalich. Lettuce was at first thought to be exceedingly perishable and picking was done by lantern light at two o'clock in the morning and continued until daylight. In 1919 four carloads of lettuce were shipped from the Watsonville-Salinas district. By 1928, 17,947 carloads were leaving Pajaro junction. In 1955, the organization of West Coast farms took over the lettuce growing and shipping operations of the Watsonville Exchange, Inc.

## **JUDGE JOHN HOWARD WATSON**

A cloud of mystery still surrounds the nebulous figure of Judge John Howard Watson, for whom the City of Watsonville is named. This is due to the fact that very little is known about his life before his arrival in California in 1849. According to records at the United States Military Academy, he was born in Bedford, Pennsylvania. His father, William Watson, a well-known physician, was most anxious for his son to attend the Academy. On July 1, 1829, at the age of sixteen, John Watson was admitted to West Point; but his stay at the institution was short-lived, as he left for parts unknown five months after his admission.

The years between 1829 and 1849 are unaccounted for. Early biographers have him living in Georgia and Texas before coming to the Golden state. According to the *Alta California*, Watson was elected to the State legislature in 1849. He resigned in

February of 1850 – a pattern that was to follow him the rest of his life. In March of 1850 he was appointed the first District Judge of the Third Judicial district, which then included the counties of Contra Costa, Santa Clara, Branciforte (Santa Cruz) and Monterey.

According to census records, the Judge stood five feet, ten inches, had dark hair, dark eyes and a dusky complexion. His rather foreboding appearance belied his sense of humor, an example of which was recorded in *History of the Bench and Bar of California* published in 1901:

One day Watson was traveling by coach from San Jose to Santa Cruz in company with several other members of the Bar. He asked R.F. Peckham: *Don't you think I do as well as anyone else who don't know any more law than I do?*

Before answering, lawyer Peckham said that he would have to know first how much law Watson knew. *Well, to tell you the truth, Peckham, said the Judge, I don't know any, for I never read a law book in my life.*

*Well, laughed Peckham, I must say for a judge who never read a law book you do remarkably well, but how do you manage to get along with your cases?*

*I'll tell you the secret, Peckham, said Judge Watson, I make use of two presumptions in the trial of my cases. When I have heard the evidence I just presume what the law ought to be to do justice between the parties; and after I have settled that presumption, I next presume that the law is what it ought to be and give judgment accordingly.*

Though said to be very gallant with the ladies, Watson had a reputation for smutty language and bad temper and was said to be a little devious in his business dealings. In 1852 he once again resigned his office and purchased a portion of the Bolsa del Pajaro land grant in south Santa Cruz county for \$4,000. The land was divided up and sold, becoming the village of Pajaro (not Watsonville). In 1855 Watson was appointed Collector of the Port of Monterey; and in 1856 he declined nomination to the state Assembly.

The Judge was always looking for greener pastures and made several trips to mining camps in Nevada looking for the "big" strike. At one time it was reported that he had been killed by Indians in a skirmish in Nevada. The *Pacific Sentinel* reported in June of 1860: *He was first killed then brought to life – killed again and again resurrected.*

Watson was elected to the California Senate in 1859 and introduced a number of bills, including one on March 30, 1860, *to provide a line of telegraph from Santa Cruz to Santa Clara.* (it did not pass.) On May 3, 1861, after Watson again resigned from office, the *Pacific Sentinel* noted:

*Senator Watson, who left his Eagle bird soaring in mid-heaven, has took his flight to the argentiferous soil of Washoe (Nevada) there to make his 'pile' after which he will return to Santa Cruz and make us all happy.*

But the Judge never did return to California; he stayed in Nevada where he engaged in mining and was admitted to law practice. According to the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, July 23, 1864: *Judge Watson's silver mine, the Gem of the Sierra, is paying \$2,000 per week.* He moved to the Idaho Territory in 1865 but returned to Nevada in the 1870's and served as the Justice of Peace in Mountain City. In 1881, upon becoming ill he was taken to Elko, Nevada, and remained an invalid there until his death on August 2, 1882. Upon his death the *Watsonville Pajaronian* wrote:

*We noticed in an exchange a few days ago that the Honorable John H. Watson, better known in this State as Judge Watson, had died in Elko, Nevada.*

*The Judge was one of the pioneers of the Pajaro Valley, and out of compliment, this town was named for him. He belonged to the old recklessness and improvidence, was possessed of considerable bravery, often times running counter to his own immediate friends, and he evinced much pluck in early days by opposing the mob spirit that occasionally prevailed.*

And that was John Howard Watson who, eluding researchers in all parts of the United States, still remains a rather mysterious figure, but most certainly, a colorful and fascinating character.