

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

DID YOU KNOW?

Early in Rancho Bodega history, a lawsuit over land rights had a huge effect on Bodega Bay as we know it today.

James Smith, the young son of Captain Stephen Smith and Manuela Torres, was born in 1852 in Rancho Bodega. His father, Captain Smith died in 1855, when he was only three years old. His mother, Manuela Torres Smith remarried in 1856 to Tyler Curtis, a lawyer from Virginia.

Tyler Curtis succeeded in getting the California State Legislature to pass an act in 1861, giving him the right as guardian to sell the children's interest in the rancho. Curtis sold the grant in parcels of mostly 150 to 500 acres each and by the 1870s, Tyler and Manuela has sold the entire 36,000 acres of Rancho Bodega and moved to San Francisco.

In 1875, James Smith sued the new owners of Rancho Bodega, arguing that Tyler did not have his permission to sell off land that was granted to James through his father's will.

In 1877, the case reached the California Supreme Court, which ruled that the sales by Curtis were legal.

The likes of Coleman, Doran and Gaffney were pleased that they could stay on their land.

Controversy Swirls Around Bodega Harbor (Part 1)

For more than two centuries, controversy has eddied around Bodega Head and its safe harbor. Much to the consternation of the Mexican government in the early 1800s, Russian seal hunters occupied Bodega Harbor as their Port Rumiantzev, where goods were shipped to and from Russia.

To American and European settlers in the mid-1800s, Bodega Harbor was the on-ramp to a swift, watery trip to gold rush booming San Francisco. To commercial fisherman in the early 1900s, it was a refuge and important safe harbor from the stormy Pacific Ocean. Except at high

water, Bodega Harbor was little more than a mud flat. Commercial viability was limited. In 1938, local interests finally persuaded the Army Corp of Engineers to build jetties and dredge a boat channel with turning basins for small craft. Project costs of over half a million dollars were partially paid with emergency wartime appropriations. The jetties and channels were completed in 1943, ready for defense as a strategic ocean harbor in time for World War II.

After World War II, before PG&E carved and paved its way to Atomic Park on Bodega Head, our fishing village was viewed as an asset waiting for Commercial Development. After construction of the jetties, Bodega Harbor became known as an important and welcome place to shelter in a storm, much safer than nearby San Francisco Bay. But Bodega Harbor still was without berths for boats once they got inside.

In 1959, a Santa Rosa consulting engineer proposed reconstruction of Bodega Harbor. The map above shows the plan. There were two channels and three boat basins. Roads were to be added between short canals and between the two basins. The natural environment would be drastically different. Dreams of Bodega Harbor story continues in the Fall Issue. ■

