

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Battle of Bodega Head

by Dianne Hales - 2024



Remote and rugged, Bodega Head seemed an unlikely setting for an epic battle that pitted a mighty public utility against a motley coalition of ranchers, fishermen, scientists and concerned residents. Yet this determined band of citizens-turned-activists defied all odds to derail Pacific Gas & Electric's plan to build a nuclear plant within a quarter-mile of the San Andreas Fault. Their unlikely victory gave birth to the modern environmental movement and inspired generations of ordinary people to unite for an extraordinary cause.

Bodega Head's deep history began with the Coast Miwok, who settled the area more than 5,000 years ago. Spain, Russia, Mexico and the United States laid claim to

the land, which was divided into ranches in the 1860s. The Gaffney family, immigrants from Ireland, bought and grazed dairy cattle on the largest parcel.

An immigrant from Poland, **Rose Gaffney** came to the ranch as a teenager to serve as housekeeper and cook. In 1917 Rose married one of the Gaffney brothers. Working at his side for decades, she cherished the wild natural beauty of their windswept land. After her husband's death in 1941, Rose would brandish a baseball bat—or occasionally a shotgun—to shoo away trespassers from her beloved Horseshoe Cove.



Rose

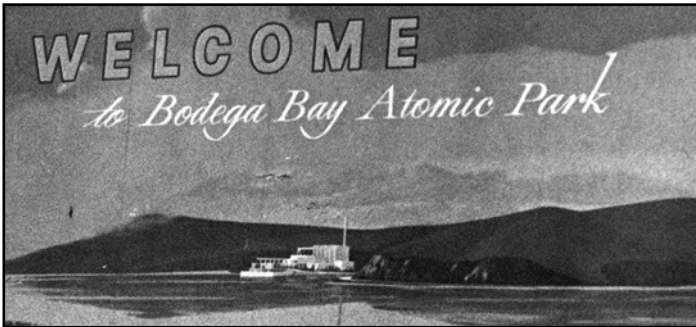
As California's population and energy needs

On November 11, 2024 at 7pm the Rancho Bodega Historical Society, in cooperation with Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods, and the Museum of Sonoma County present a webinar to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of PG&E's official withdrawal of its proposed nuclear power plant.

to register: <https://stewardscr.org/events/2024-the-battle-of-bodega-head-webinar/>

ATOMIC PARK ARCHIVES

soared in the 1950s, PG&E decided to build a nuclear-powered “Atomic Park” on Bodega Head. In 1958 PG&E representatives tried to purchase the Gaffney ranch. The feisty widow, who wanted to preserve this beautiful location for future generations, adamantly refused, triggering a years-long cascade of lawsuits and countersuits.



PG&E kept its nuclear plans secret, but a waitress at The Tides restaurant overheard PG&E men in suits discussing nuclear energy and spread the word. Despite opposition from locals, fishermen and marine scientists, PG&E plowed ahead with an access road that destroyed valued tidelands and clam beds in Bodega Bay. The utility also began excavating a massive crater that critics labeled the “Hole in the Head.” Its opponents became known as the “Hole in the Head Gang.”

In 1962, the San Francisco Chronicle published a poignant eulogy for the “doomed” headlands by its environmental reporter and a call to action from Karl Kortum, director of the SF Maritime Museum, urging readers to demand hearings by the Public Utilities Commission. In the heated proceedings, Rose Gaffney attacked PG&E’s promises as “Hooey!” Joel Hedgpeth, director of a marine lab at nearby Dillon Beach, warned

of dangers from heated water released from the plant. David Pesonen, a young Sierra Club staffer, testified about possible collusion between the utility and county officials. Nonetheless, PG&E’s plans won approval from the Public Utilities Commission.

Pesonen, who broke with the Sierra club to lead the Hole-in-the-Head Gang, transformed the ragtag squad into a savvy legal, political and communications lobby. At an informational meeting in Sonoma County, the head of the California office of the Atomic Energy Development & Radiation Protection infuriated the audience by urging them to leave complex issues like nuclear energy “to the experts.”



An outraged Doris Sloan, a mother of four, headed up a grass-roots campaign of leafletting, canvassing and letter-writing. Sign-carrying protesters marched outside PG&E headquarters. Popular musicians, including legendary trumpeter Lu Watters (an amateur geologist), performed protest songs, such as “*Blues over Bodega*,” that played on local radio stations. On Memorial Day, 1963, the Gang hosted a festival-like demonstration with live music and speeches

BLUES OVER BODEGA

WALLY
ROSE

* LU WATTERS JAZZ BAND *

BARBARA
DANE



at Bodega Head. Its highlight was the release of 1,500 helium balloons, each tagged to represent a radioactive isotope that might leak from the proposed plant. The balloons flew hundreds of miles, landing in San Rafael and Oakland, sparking widespread concern and garnering national attention.

The ultimate death blow for the project came, not from a publicity stunt, but from science. Pierre Saint-Amand, a geologist with expertise in plate tectonics, became alarmed about the proposed plant's proximity to an active earthquake fault. On a covert inspection of the Hole in the Head, he discovered a "spectacular" fault slicing through the reactor site.

In March 1964 a powerful earthquake in Alaska intensified public fears. After more surveys confirmed the seismic risks, the Atomic Energy Commission declared the Bodega Head site unsafe. Under political and public pressure, PG&E officially withdrew its plans on October 30, 1964.

Six decades later the Hole in the Head, filled with spring and rainwater, serves as a testament to the power of people united to defend and preserve the natural world for future generations. On the sixtieth anniversary of PG&E's official withdrawal of its proposed plant, we celebrate the local heroes who saved a now-iconic part of the Sonoma Coast. ■

BODEGA

Evelyn Piazza Casini: The Heart of Bodega

1926-2024



Evelyn “Evie” Casini, the beloved owner of The Casino Bar and Grill in Bodega, California, has passed away, according to close friends and social media posts. (1 Oct 1926 ~ Sep 3, 2024)

In 1949, Evelyn and her husband, Art Casini, took over The Casino Bar and Grill, transforming it from a simple bar into the heartbeat of Bodega. For 75 years, she welcomed every customer, whether a local or a visitor, with genuine warmth and a friendly smile. She wasn’t just running a bar; she was creating a gathering place for all kinds of moments — celebrations, casual get-togethers, and even memorials. Her ability to connect with people, sharing stories that captured decades of local history, made The Casino a beloved spot for everyone.

Under Evelyn’s care, The Casino became a place of community and inclusivity. It was where everyone could find a good meal, play a game of pool, or just enjoy the company of others. She believed in feeding people, caring for the community, and keeping the doors open to all. This philosophy showed in the Casino’s long-

standing traditions, like community potlucks and providing meals during the holidays, ensuring everyone felt a sense of belonging.

“This place is comfortable, like an old coat,” Evelyn said. “After I’m gone, I don’t know what the hell they’ll do. I have a boy and a girl, but neither one of them want it. They’ll probably sell it, but I hope it’s to someone who doesn’t change a thing.” - *Sonoma County Gazette*



BODEGA

Bodega Matriarchs Pass On

by Andrea Granahan

Bodega is already in mourning for 99 year old Josephine Franceschi (31 Dec 1925-17 Aug 2024) and Evelyn Casini in September who would have been 98 in October. Evelyn Casini, just a couple weeks before her death, had danced and celebrated with the community in celebration of her 75th anniversary of owning the Casino Bar and Grill. The Casino is a lot more to Bodega than a saloon; it is the town hall and town living room for everyone.

Both matriarchs were from old Italian families in Sonoma County. Josephine was a Mantua before she married Humberto Franceschi and Evelyn was a Piazza until she married Art Casini right after he came home from serving in WWII. Both families had originally emigrated to Sonoma County in the late 1800's.

The two women attended Potter School in Bodega when they were girls, and became best friends when, Josephine was 14, on a school bus to Tomales High School. They were both hard-working with Evelyn still tending bar and flipping burgers until bedridden, and Josephine working at Willie Bird's Restaurant until she was 85. They grew up milking cows and collecting eggs on the family farm and Josephine making Christmas wreaths to add to the family income.

Both women had three children: Josephine had three sons, Evelyn a daughter and two sons, but lost one to cancer at the age of three.

They have large extended families who adored them.

In Bodega both were beloved. Josephine had a more private life but was always at anything that was happening in Bodega. Evelyn had more public life. She did a lot for her community.

Every Thanksgiving Evelyn held a pot-luck at the Casino so no one had to be alone. She provided turkeys and ham. Locals brought pot-luck side dishes even if they were eating at home just to share in her generosity.

They both lived not just long lives, but rich ones, filled with love and affection. They have left a large hole in Bodega. ■



**Josephine
Franceschi**

BODEGA BAY COMMUNITY

Bodega Red Potatoes

On the trail of the Bodega Red potato from South America to Bodega Bay

This is a story of buried treasure. The tale of a wayward sailor, Chilean immigrants, Mexican land grants, an arranged marriage, Luther Burbank, blight, neglect, a play, a song, a band, and distrust. This is the story of a potato. The Bodega Red potato, to be exact.

Frequently mentioned by Luther Burbank the Bodega Red was once the favored potato of Sonoma County. It grew so hardily and was so well liked for its thin skin, nutty flavor, and great cooking qualities that it was briefly the premiere potato in California, back in 1850 when the population was a bit smaller.

The Bodega Red is a heritage breed that may have come with a land-sick sailor when he jumped ship or may have had its seeds sewn into the hem of a dress worn by a young bride, Maunela Torres arriving here over 150 years ago to marry a stranger (Capt. Stephen Smith) who needed a foreign wife to secure a local land grant.

The Bodega Red was so popular and grew so well that it was shipped to the gold fields to feed the Forty-Niners. And that Spud Point in Bodega Bay was named for the tuber after a boatload of the vegetables memorably sank there. At its height, some 60,000 pounds of Bodega Reds left our fields each year. And then it all stopped.

By the 1970s, the Bodega Red potato was thought to be extinct, kaput, gone—a victim of its own success, and a local taste that found 19th century farmers eating the best ones and returning the poor growers back to the earth, eventually led to a weaker genetic strain. Presumably, the Bodega Red was forgotten.

No good mystery is complete without a detective. Enter Elissa Rubin-Mahon. A chef with a business purveying preserved foods, Rubin-Mahon is also active in the Slow Food Sonoma County North in which seeds from such heritage products as the Gravenstein apple are saved to forestall extinction. In 2005, her friend Judy Christensen was reading Gaye




LeBaron's book, *Santa Rosa, a 19th Century Town*, and came across mention of a potato with which she was unfamiliar. Christensen thought Rubin-Mahon might be interested in tracking it down. "I started looking around and found the names of some people who were growing the potato," Rubin-Mahon says. "I tried contacting them but they didn't contact me back and no one would talk to her about the potato.

Rubin-Mahon turned to friends at the Bodega Land Trust and she was "able to procure some potatoes from an anonymous source." The next step in her mission was to verify the potato. She reached out to Dr. Chuck Brown, a USDA researcher in Washington state who was working on the six unique varieties from South America potatoes that had all migrated up our West Coast. In 2009, Dr. Brown confirmed that her samples were "indeed distinct and had originated in Chile."

The Bodega Land Trust planted some Bodega Reds in its demonstration garden. The Bodega Red was back. Rubin-Mahon praises the potato's flavor as "a combination of floury and creamy. It also makes the most amazing potato chips you can imagine. What's more, the tuber has its own fan base, the Bodega Red Potato Club, and its own tribute act, the Bodega Red Potato Band. A short musical play, "Manuela, Beauty of Bodega" (she of the potato-lined dress), written by Rancho Bodega Historical Society's chief archivist Robin Rudderow featured a song intended to be sung to the tune of "O, Susanna!".
- Gretchen Giles 2014, *madelocalmagazine.com*

**O, Manuela!
Our beauty from Peru
We'll keep planting red potatoes
In fond memory of you.
Red potatoes!
From Chile not Peru,
They are called Bodega Reds and
They are mighty tasty, too**

Our sincere thanks to our Advertisers, Supporters, Donors & New Members



BUSINESS SERVICES UNLIMITED
ph. (707) 875-2183
fax (707) 875-2952

OPEN M-F 10-4
UPS: 2 PM • FEDEX: 2 PM
Packing & Shipping
Full Service Copies - Color / B&W
Bookkeeper • Secretarial Services

NOTARY PUBLIC
PO Box 115 • 1400 N Hwy 1
Bodega Bay, CA 94923
www.bodegabaycopy.com
email: shonaweir@mac.com



D. REN BROWN
1781 N. Highway One
Bodega Bay CA 94923-0156
707-875-2922
rbc4art@renbrown.com
www.renbrown.com

The REN BROWN COLLECTION

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

Diana & Michael Bundy; Carolyn & Pete Connors; Patricia Engman; Linda Holden; David & Marsha Lightfoot; Lorraine Thomas

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Angela Aloise; Carol Anello; Harold Appleton; Jo Ann Bray; Ren Brown; Beth Bruzzone; Dennis & Patty Dong; Ray Hill; Jim & Janet Moore; Tim & Sally Moratto; Don & Sharol Oliver; Robin Rudderow; Ralph Schoolcraft & Joan Hosking; Richard Shipps & Rhonda Berney; Carol Sklenicka; Susan & Steve Teel; Sue & Greg Tichava; Michael & Barb Trapani; Val Williamson & George Bruening

Coastal Treasures Bodega Bay
Seaside Gifts and More...
(707) 321-5696
1580 Eastshore Rd.
Blue Whale Shopping Center



John Hershey Photography
Bodega Bay Photographer
hersheyj@mac.com
www.jhersheyphoto.com


PO Box 477
Bodega Bay CA 94923
415 • 279 • 9649



Ginocchio's KITCHEN
BBQ Bakery Pasta

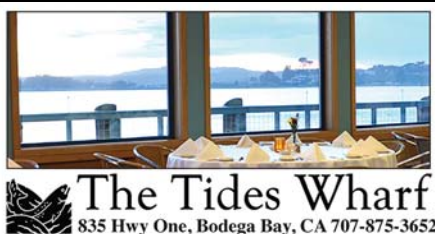
If you love us ...
f i yelp

707.377.4359
1410 BAY FLAT RD • BODEGA BAY CA 94923
www.GinochiosKitchen.com
GinochiosKitchen@gmail.com



Spud Point Crab Co
Bodega Bay, CA

1910 Westshore Road (707) 875-9472



The Tides Wharf
835 Hwy One, Bodega Bay, CA 707-875-3652

THANK YOU TO THOSE SUPPORTING OUR BUILDING REPAIR FUNDRAISER

Business Services Unlimited, Ren Brown Collection
Ginocchio's Kitchen, John Hershey Photography
Dennis & Patty Dong, Don & Sharol Oliver, Susan & Steven Teel

STORIES & ARTIFACTS

If you have artifacts or stories of Bodega Bay History to contribute to the Rancho Bodega Historical Society, please contact Robin Rudderow, our Archivist at RBHS@bodegamoon.net

BECOME A MEMBER

Enjoy the history of Rancho Bodega. Please join us. Subscribe for a year and receive the RBHS newsletters, \$15 individual (\$20 family). Support the stories of Bodega Bay.
http://www.ranchobodega.org/membership_form.pdf

BOARD MEMBERS

President & Newsletter

Melinda Pahl

Melinda.Pahl@comcast.net

Treasurer

Linda Mark

LJMark2@comcast.net

Archivist

Robin Rudderow

rbhs@bodegamoon.net

Webmaster

John Maestri

JohnMaestri@comcast.net

Member at Large

Ren Brown

rbc4art@renbrown.com

Member at Large

Andrea Granahan

granahan10@gmail.com

Member at Large

Tom Petek

trpetek@gmail.com

Member at Large

Jeanette Petek

jwpetek@gmail.com

Rancho Bodega Historical Society, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation
PO Box 1027, Bodega Bay CA 94923



Rancho Bodega Historical Society
 Post Office Box 1027
 Bodega Bay CA 94923
www.RanchoBodega.org

IN THIS ISSUE

Bodega Matriarchs Pass On

Bodega already in mourning for 99 year old Josephine Franceschi, lost Evelyn Casini in September. For 75 years, Evelyn welcomed every customer to the Casino, with genuine warmth and a friendly smile.



The Battle of Bodega Head



In 1954, PG&E decided to build a nuclear-powered “Atomic Park” on Bodega Head. They were challenged by the Hole in the Head Gang.

FALL EVENTS

SCIENCE UNCORKED. Gourmet au Bay, Wed, 6-7 pm., October 23rd. BMLers and Jackie Sone discuss the history of Alfred Hitchcock’s famous thriller film *The Birds*. Explore how these local landscapes/filming locations across Bodega Bay and Bodega have changed 61 years later. There will be fun movie trivia at the end.

HITCHCOCK FILM FEST Friday, Oct. 25th & Saturday, Oct 26th, Bodega Bay Grange, Dan Sneed, Special Guest and Hitchcock Enthusiast, will open each film. *The Birds*, Dinner & Live Music by Erin Brazill and The Brazillionaires on Friday night. *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, Sat 3:30 pm, *The Birds*, Sat. 7 pm. Cocktails, wine, beer and soft drinks, popcorn and other concessions available for purchase. Tickets online: (<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/hitchcock-film-festival-2024-tickets-1002625338377?aff=ebdssbdestsearch>)

BODEGA BAY FARMERS MARKET. Bodega Bay Community Center, 2255 CA-1, Sun, 10 AM – 2 PM. Until the end of October. Offering the freshest, locally grown produce specializing in organic, heirloom and gourmet varieties of fruits and vegetables, beef, goat, duck, pork, poultry and fish.

FINDING HISTORY DAYS. Nov 2nd 10-2 pm. Veterans Memorial Building, 1351 Maple Avenue, Santa Rosa. Join over 30 local historical and cultural organizations and explore the rich historical heritage of the region! Presented by the Sonoma County Historical Society. Co-sponsored by Sonoma County Library. Free Parking & Admission

BATTLE OF BODEGA HEAD - SAVING THE SONOMA COAST. Online Webnair, Nov 11th 7-8:30 pm, In 1954 Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), the state’s largest public utility begun excavating a massive crater, dubbed the “Hole in the Head,” for a \$61 million Atomic Park. The Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods, the Rancho Bodega Historical Society and the Museum of Sonoma County will present “The Battle of Bodega Head” to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of PG&E’s official withdrawal of its proposed plant. Free, to register: (<https://stewardscr.org/events/2024-the-battle-of-bodega-head-webinar/>)

For more local events, visit our website. <<http://www.ranchobodega.org/events.html>>