

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Rancho Bodega Settlers

by John Maestri

As a historian, I have always been fascinated with place names and the people who gave their names to these places. We are familiar with such names as Cheney Gulch, Doran Beach and the Coleman, Wright & Gleason Beaches.

In February 1875, James Smith, son of Captain Stephen Smith sued some 40 ranchers in Rancho Bodega to reclaim property sold by Tyler Curtis. In October 1875, the lawsuit was dismissed in the Sonoma County court, indicating that Tyler Curtis' sales to these ranchers was legal under the terms of the guardianship signed by Tyler and Manuela Torres Smith.

In June 1877, the case was appealed and went to the California Supreme Court, where the court upheld the earlier judgment made by the lower court. Judges of the California Supreme Court heard testimony from many parties, including James Smith, who attested that the sales were illegal and that the guardianship had been obtained without his permission.

The Supreme Court reviewed the original Mexican Land Grant of 1843 and the subsequent California affirmation of Captain Smith's land grant of 37,000 acres in Sonoma County, called Rancho Bodega. They reviewed the will of Captain Smith which gave his estate (and the land) to Manuela Torres and her children.

After Captain Smith died in 1855, Curtis obtained a guardianship of the three children of Captain Smith and Manuela Torres Smith (Stephen Smith, Manuelita Smith & James Smith). Tyler petitioned the Probate Court of California to allow him to sell their shares in the estate including the land of Rancho Bodega and it was granted based on his 1861 guardianship obtained after his marriage to Manuela Torres Smith.

The land owners and ranchers were the subject of the lawsuit. They had purchased their properties of between 150 and 500 acres beginning in 1861, and by the 1870s Tyler had sold all the lands of Rancho Bodega. Tyler Curtis and Manuela Torres Curtis moved to a mansion on Van Ness in San Francisco, where Manuela died in 1871. Needless to say, the Ranchers of Bodega Bay rejoiced in the Supreme Court ruling that allowed them to retain their ownership of the land. ■

The map on page 5 and the biographies of the ranchers listed here can be found on our web site: <<http://ranchobodega.org/rancho.html>>

Ocean Township

- Joseph Knowles
- David Knowles
- Samuel McCready
- Russian River Land and Lumber Company
- George Washington Smith
- John Kinder Smith Sr.
- Winfield Wright

Bodega Township

- Reuben Wood Acker
- James Henry Brown
- Isaac Vail Button
- James 'John' Campbell
- Edmund Cheney
- John Nathan Clark
- James Coleman
- James Delehanty
- William Marion Doran
- Hickman Estes
- Enos Fay
- John Finley
- Andrew Fitzpatrick
- Miles Gaffney
- Lorenzo Dow Gale
- Otis Seldon Gale
- John Henry Gibson
- William Gleason
- Hollis Hitchcock
- Andrew Johnson
- Benjamin Joy
- James Kee
- Nathaniel Keefe
- Hugh Ancrum Marshall
- John McCrea
- John McQuade
- George Moore
- Joel Orender
- Almar Phelps
- Patrick Quinlan
- Henry Stump
- Despard Taylor
- Thomas Van Winkle
- William Waggle
- Christian Warneke

