

# RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## DID YOU KNOW?

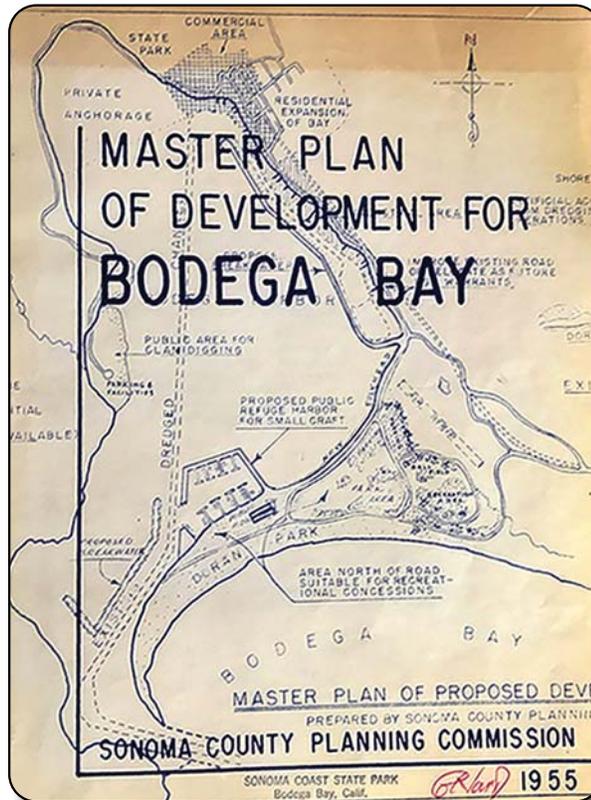
### The Bodega Ghost

The Potter School House in Bodega is one the most recognizable and historically significant buildings in the Rancho Estero Americano. The School sat empty and abandoned for years after it was sold at auction. Alfred Hitchcock arrived in Bodega Bay in 1961 in search for a location for his new film, "The Birds", which became a true classic in the film world.

After filming, the building remained empty for five years until it was purchased by Tom and Mary Taylor who moved their family there in 1966 with plans to open it to the public as a bed & breakfast inn.

The Taylor's daughter Leah, who now owns the building and used to open it for public tours, tells of unusual occurrences inside their new home almost immediately after they moved in. Young Leah would hear footsteps in the night. The footsteps seemed to climb the stairs and then abruptly come to a stop. As an adult, Leah would watch the apparition of a little girl with shoulder-length hair appear to her. She described the girl as being surrounded by a "white aura" and speaking to her in a small girl's voice, saying simply, "Hi!" ■

## Controversary Swirls Around Bodega Harbor (Part 4) Who Owns the Bodega Harbor's Tidelands?



For at least 10,000 years the Coast Miwok, known as the Olamentko culture, thrived in Bodega Bay along with Southern Pomo to the East in Sebastopol and Kashaya Pomo north of the Russian River (called Shabaikai or "long snake" as early as 5,000 BCE). Inland tribes traveled to the coastal plains in Rancho Bodega for cooler weather, summer games and seasonal gatherings.

**Early 1800's** - Mexico and Russia rivaled

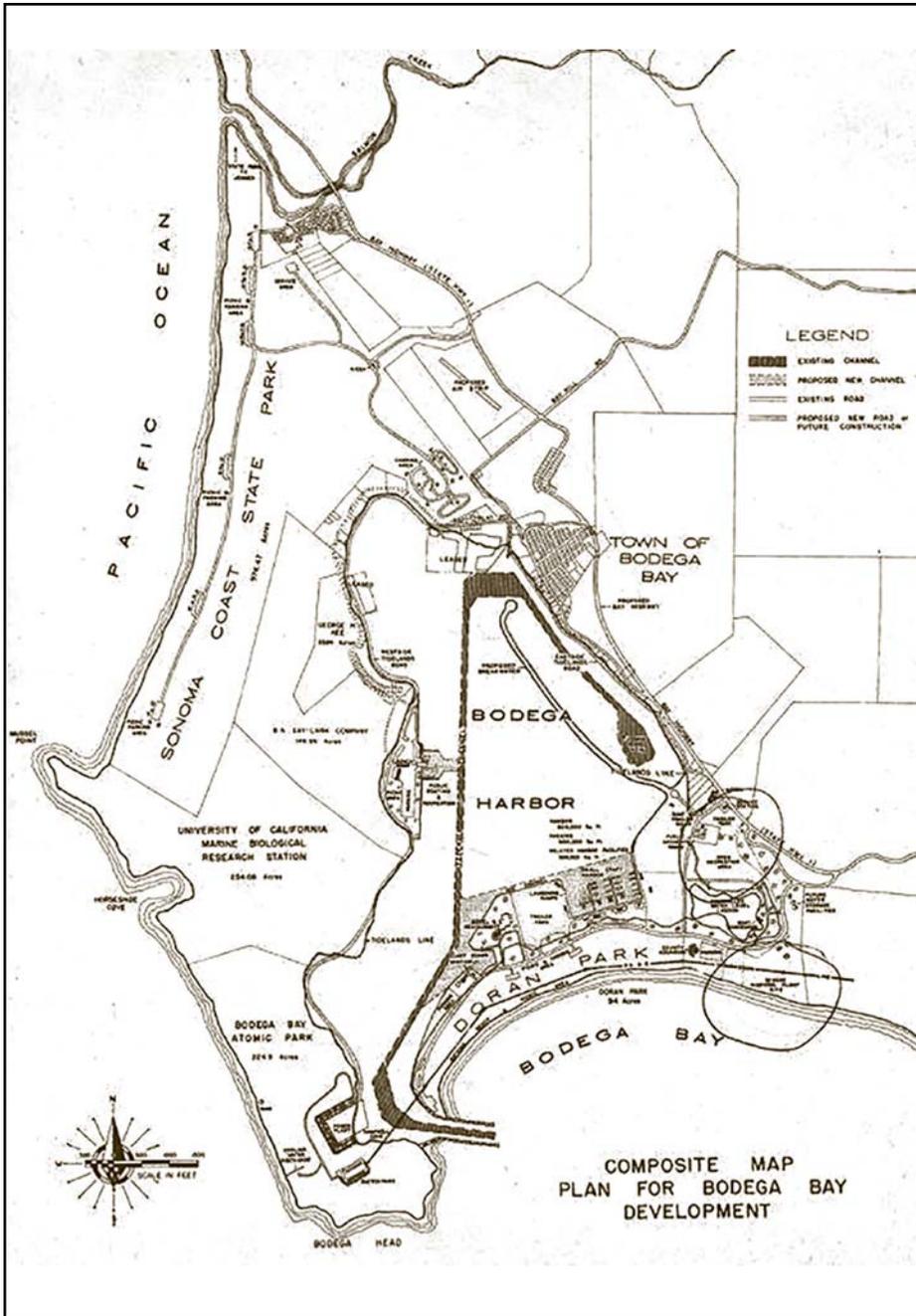
over resource rich Alta California. The Russians landed a settlement where Campbell Cove is today. The northern border was known as the Slavyanka River by the Russians.

**1843** – Captain Stephen Smith was awarded Rancho Bodega as a land Grant by Mexico. Indian people were in servitude by Mexican land grant owners, such as Captain Stephen Smith until he died in 1855. Coast Miwok people's human, ancestral and property rights were shamelessly absconded by all levels of Government as well as local residents.

**1861 - 1870** – Rancho Bodega, including the area around Bodega Harbor, was carved into ranches. Private landowners vied for property, leaving the earliest settlers and indigenous people without their long-time homes.

*continued nerxt page*

## CONTROVERSY SWIRLS AROUND BODEGA HARBOR (PART 4)



**1870** -- Stephen Smith's widow's new husband, Tyler Curtis, sold all the lands in Rancho Bodega. Landowners and ranchers surrounding the bay with familiar names such as Smith, Doran, Campbell, Gaffney, and Kee used the tidelands as their own.

**1943** - The Army Core of Engineers opened the channel and built jetties making Bodega Harbor accessible to larger boats. World War II created more demand for food. Wartime measures prohibited international fishing boats. Crab pots were legalized locally. On stormy days, Bodega Bay's fishermen made and repaired their own crab pots making for a more sustainable catch. The old ring nets used before, pulled in, destroyed and killed all kinds of sealife, including female reproductive crabs, juvenile fish too small to sell, and sealife not considered useful. In good fishing weather, the inner bay was almost deserted with most boats out to sea.

**In the 1950's**, On good fishing days, Bodega Bay's fishermen thrived. Crabbing was "brand new." Where once, only the Smith Brothers operated commercially, five fish plants received and canned or "fast-froze" (also new) and shipped thousands of tons of fish each year.

Meredith Wharf, based in Sacramento and operating from the wharf in Bodega Bay, was the largest, packing 900,000 pounds of crab in 1950. There women filleted about a million pounds of bottom fish – sole, flounder, and around 400,000 pounds of albacore tuna. There was Consolidated Fish Co., A. Paladini Fish Company, and Dusty Rhodes Plant. At Consolidated and Meredith, women workers could be found any weekday, sometimes "around the clock," deftly picking crab meat from the shells in clean, careful process preparation for hotels, restaurants, and lucky households.

A major issue around Bodega Harbor was the **Tidelands ownership**. What about the local people that work and own the adjacent upland property?

## CONTROVERSY SWIRLS AROUND BODEGA HARBOR (PART 4)



One of Bodega Bay's prominent residents, Rose Gaffney, owned a ranch on Bodega Head. She disputed both County and State ownership of the Bodega Harbor's tidelands, saying her ownership went back to the original 1843 Mexican Land Grant to Captain Stephen Smith. Gaffney's theory was that her husband's family purchased their land from Smith's estate and thus she owned the tidelands adjoining the Gaffney Ranch. She had a second theory that she owned the riparian rights the same way people own the shore of an inland stream.

Unfortunately for Rose, that border dispute was decided in 1886 by the California Supreme Court. Winfield Wright, who purchased his ranch when Rancho Bodega was sold off

by Tyler Curtis, claimed ownership of Penny Island in the Russian River. Wright lost the case when the Court determined that Rancho Bodega extended to the edge of the Russian River but not into the river. The Court decided "California State is the owner of all land below ordinary high-water mark."

"Before West Shore Road was built, the pavement took you only as far as the Kee Ranch House (above present Spud Point Marina), an area known as Keesport. From there the pilgrim who wanted to find his way to the headlands followed a half-road that snaked through the sand to a gate on the Gaffney Ranch which was usually closed. Or you might find your way blocked by Rose Gaffney, who did not like State officials, politicians, or trespassers. And she owned a shot gun." <sup>1</sup>

**1951** - CA State offered a land grant to Sonoma County. CA State's original grant was for the "furtherance of navigation, commerce and fisheries." There was thought given to restore and enlarge an air strip located where today's Bird Walk is on CA Highway One in Doran Regional Park. The landing field was occasionally used, although some pilots preferred safer landing on a nearby pasture.

With these varied and rich sources of income, local property owners expected a formula for tidelands rents to help spread expenses across business owners, rents formulated to ensure a steady stream of profitable commerce among many, many people. Rents kept to a level that would allow businesses to grow and prosper as well as invest in their own properties and the basic infrastructure. Growth was an imperative to the plan.

**1955** - Sonoma County's Master Plan for Bodega Bay assured abundant revenue sources in the form of fees for entering and parking at Doran Beach, recreational docks, rents from business owners and taxes on the goods and services purchased by tourists and locals. Rents could be collected from the plethora of fish processors, docks and shops surrounding the Harbor. Rents could be collected not only from the businesses but from slip holders and moorings. The fishing was good then, really good, and commercial boat owners would pay for safe refuge during a storm and when fish were running.

**1958** - Eight years had already passed since 1951, when CA State granted "certain tide and submerged lands to the County of Sonoma." That left only two short years for Sonoma County to act and show real improvements to the State. Meanwhile investors large and small were ready, waiting and losing faith in the County's ability to come up with a fair, simple formula to rent the tidelands presumably to the owners holding property adjacent to the tidelands, in time for the State deadline but controversies & conflicts abounded, as we reported in Part III of the Winter 2021 RBHS newsletter available at [RanchoBodega.org](http://RanchoBodega.org). ■

<sup>1</sup> GAYE LeBARON's NOTEBOOK, Sunday April 14, 1991