

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

History of Bodega Bay School

by Glenice Carpenter - 2007

In the 1850's a one-room school was built across the roadway where now it stands. The school was only there for a short while as it was apparent that a more level piece of land was necessary. So the rancher who owned the property around the school deeded a parcel of land a few hundred yards north.

That parcel is where the school was moved to until another one-room school could be built on that same parcel. That school is where my Grandmother Frances taught school starting in 1913.

The students she taught were from the original Smith fishing family, who were Coast Miwok Indians and whose ancestry could be traced to the first people in Bodega Bay. Other students were from the ranch families. The Van Vicel Family had grandparents that lived here. Evelyn Casini from Bodega has her mother is one class photo.



In 1931, the Lombella Family that lived on a ranch north of town near Goat Rock started sending students here and Alvin Lombella was kind enough to supply class photos and the names of many of those students. My brother, Harold Ames, started school here in 1933-34 and from that period on I have more pictures. I started school here in 1936-37.

Miss Helen Lonergan was my teacher and was the one and only teacher I had all of my grade school experience. It was a small classroom with about twelve students when I started, but in 1939 the U. S. Government started the harbor-dredging project, which really changed the face of Bodega Bay. Our school enrollment went from twelve to fifty students. We were all in one room with few desks and many of us sat two to a desk. Picnic tables were brought in and put in the front of the room for reading and any subject matter that would let students sit together at a table.

When I first started school there was no indoor plumbing. The washhouse with two bathrooms was about 25 feet away from the main building (not very convenient when it rained). I can remember one summer when the carpenters moved the washroom and attached it to the main building. We also had a small library and an anteroom where we could put our lunches and coats.

When World War II began in December of 1941, we had another drastic change in Bodega Bay. The Army sent men in to live at the old ranch house location on Bodega Head. After just a few months the Army was replaced by the U.S. Coast Guard for the remainder of the war. The Army had a camp on the other side of Freestone, and they had military tanks that they would drive on the roadway to do practice maneuvers in the sand dunes between the Bay and Salmon Creek. Miss Lonergan would let all the students stand in the windows of the school or along the fence in front to watch the tanks roll by. I also remember that surplus food in cans would be distributed to the school and she would warm canned foods such as beans on the old oil stove. One time she forgot them and one exploded. (Kids always remember things like that!)

BODEGA BAY SCHOOL

The Air Force stationed in Bodega Bay would practice camouflaging our town and completely cover us with a smoke-like substance. At night there was a blackout restriction and all of our windows had to be covered with dark fabric to conceal any light from the outside. The Coast Guard had a dog patrol so above Diekmann's Store was a kennel with many dogs that were noisy at times when you walked by.

Miss Lonergan didn't have workbooks, so we spent many hours at the blackboards doing lessons in math. She would divide the class and have races to see which team could complete the math problem put on the board. She taught reading by the phonetic method and we all had work cards that she made up at night with a list of words we had to know how to read and spell. I'm sure she spent most of her night hours preparing for the next day. On Friday we always had afternoon art, that is if we had all our work completed.

We had art paper, colored paper, paints and color crayons. All ideas were original on assigned subjects.

There was only a large teeter-totter at the school. No swings or bars. We had baseball games, dodge ball games, played hopscotch, or when the weather was bad the girls played a lot of jacks and pick-up sticks. There was always a Christmas Program. Sometimes my brother Harold would play his accordion. There were always oranges and hard candy for all the students during these holidays.

One Christmas there were three Canadian Seaplanes that landed in the bay as one of them had engine trouble. They happened to be here when we had our Christmas play and they attended our program. The Christmas tree was decorated with all homemade ornaments. Links of colored paper, chained together, popcorn strung on long strings, and sometimes cranberries. We always sang as a group, probably as none of us were good enough to sing solo.

Miss Lonergan was a good friend of Rose Gaffney. Rose and her husband owned the ranch where the Marine Lab Dormitories are now. That area, in times past, were many of the Miwok Indians had their camps. Rose began collecting Indian artifacts, and over the years accumulated a fantastic display of arrowheads, bowls, mallets, beads, and many other interesting pieces. She was a master storyteller and she had a story that went along with all the pieces. She had them displayed in folding drawers, and once each year she would come to our school and give us a lesson about her collection.

The remaining photos I have are from when my children went to school here or from my friends that attended school here. Many of these students stayed on in Bodega Bay to live as they were from fishing or farming families whose lifestyle followed in the traditional footprints of their fathers or grandfathers.

Mrs. Lloyd, who taught school here when my children went to school, would put on a Pet Parade for the school. There were dogs, cats, birds, mice, snails, sheep (the Valena girls always had a sheep dyed pink). Ribbons were awarded to best dog, best cat, etc. I could never figure out how all the children came home with a blue ribbon. Mothers supplied lunch and it was one of the most memorable events of the year. We had many field trips that were planned by the Mothers Club, and it was one of my favorite times of life. Mr. Charles LeVeque was principal and taught the upper grades. His wife was Alvina and they owned the house across from Bodega Bay Lodge, under the west side of the road. They were here for many years and participated in all the local activities.

In Summer 2006, Glenice Carpenter represented RBHS at the Bodega Bay Elementary School -- to share with students her childhood memories. She made it a project to come up with a special album of old class photos, captioned with the names of students.