

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Casini Ranch

by Susan Teel - 2015

From as early as 4000 BCE, Western Sonoma County was the home of the nomadic Pomo. The Pomo were hunter gatherers that lived in small groups of bands. Some of the Pomo people remain in the area today, including the Kashia Band at Stewarts Point Ranch and the Dry Creek Band in Alexander Valley. Just to the South of Casini Ranch is Pomo Canyon Campground, named after the native people who once populated the area. Taking the 12 mile hike from Casini Ranch to Shell Beach will take you right through Pomo Canyon. Fort Ross was a former Russian establishment along the Sonoma County coast from 1812 to 1842. The land around Casini Ranch was used to harvest lumber and grow food for the Fort until the Russians departed the Fort in 1841. Not much of this period remains in the area around Casini Ranch; however, the Fort itself is only 30 minutes away.

Duncans Mills Ranchero was part of the Rancho Muniz Mexican Land Grant given in 1845 by Governor Pio Pico to Manuel Torres. Manuel Torres

was the brother of Manuela Torres Smith, the wife of Captain Stephen Smith. Casini ranch, however being on the south side of the Russian River, was part of the Rancho Bodega Mexican Land Grant since the River was the dividing line between the grants. The Bodega Ranchero was granted to Captain Stephen Smith in April of 1846. While the Mexican culture did have influence in Sonoma County, it was held in check to some degree along the coast due to the presence of the Russian Fort.

Casini Ranch was once the Moscow Mill owned by the Russian River Land and Lumber Company. In 1889 the Russian River Land and Lumber Company was the largest owner of timber land in the area with 10,000 acres. Moscow Mill was located south of the mill relocated by the Duncan Brothers from the Russian River mouth to the location of the North Pacific Coast Narrow Gauge Railroad Bridge in 1877. Two rail lines once ran through Duncans Mills. The first was the North Coast Narrow Gauge rail which came from the south starting at Sausalito



CASINI RANCH

then running through the towns of Point Reyes Station, along Tomales Bay, Tomales, Valley Ford, Freestone, Occidental and Monte Rio. The Narrow Gauge rail actually went beyond Duncans Mills and terminated in Cazadero from 1886 to 1933. Evidence of these rail lines can still be found today, from sections of track that can be seen along Austin Creek (or even on the west beach at Casini Ranch) to the four narrow gauge cars on display in Duncans Mills. In 1911, The Northwest Pacific Standard Gauge rail line reached Duncans Mills from the East running down the Russian River from Fulton and through Guerneville. Most of the narrow gauge tracks were converted at that time to standard gauge. The standard gauge track was last used in 1935

The Casini Family has lived on what is now Casini Ranch for four generations and has owned the land for three generations.

In 1881 Bartolomeo and Anastacia Casini settled in the area around Duncans Mills, first living in the Freezeout Creek* area and then later living at the European Hotel in Duncans Mills after the bridge was washed out. Their son Paul Anthony Casini worked as the dairy manager on the land that is now Casini Ranch for the La Franchi Family who at the time owned the dairy ranch. Over the period of 1928 to 1932 Paul Anthony Casini would buy out

the La Franchi shares in the dairy and become the sole owner of what is now Casini ranch. Over the next 33 years people visiting the area would express and interest in going to the river to fish. During this time, Paul Anthony or his son George would grant people access and allow them to go down to the river. In 1965 George Casini began the process of turning the 110 acre parcel bounded by the Russian River and Moscow Road into what is the Casini Ranch Family Campground (22855 Moscow Road, Duncans Mills, CA (800) 451-8400).

The Campground is still owned by the Casini Family. George's son Paul Casini is the chairman of the organization that oversees the day to day operations of the park.

* The spectacular 3,373 acre community-powered Willow Creek Park is located near Duncans Mills and covers much of the Willow Creek and Freezeout Creek watersheds. Its rolling grasslands, forested ravines, and fish-bearing streams are home to an abundance of plants and wildlife. Hikers, bikers and equestrians enjoy the 15 mile network of old logging and ranch roads, accessible through a free permit-for-use program. For more information, go to the Landpaths-Willow Creek website. An orientation is required. Enjoy beautiful Sonoma County!

