

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Chanslor Ranch

by Robin Rudderow - 2016

A 437 acre dairy ranch, known as the “Sutherland Ranch”, was purchased by James Coleman (born in Dublin, Ireland in 1825), probably in the 1860's following the subdivision of Rancho Bodega. The 1877 atlas shows a house on the ranch, in the same location where the current ranch house is located, called the “Ocean View House.”

Sutherland was Coleman’s second ranch. His first, purchased in 1857, was the 1000 acre “Coleman Hill Ranch,” located between Occidental and the coast, near where Fitzgerald Lane meets Joy Road. In 1871, Coleman leased a portion of the Sutherland Ranch to John Genazzi, and the rest of the ranch to N. Keefe. In approximately 1877, Hollis Hitchcock, the then owner of many large tracts of land in Rancho Bodega, acquired Sutherland Ranch.

Salmon Creek was a lot bigger then, and boats could go up and down the creek to the ranches behind Chanslor Ranch. Catherine Poncia lived on the ranch as a girl. She told Abby Killey, Bodega RBHS member, stories about a ship that wrecked at the mouth of Salmon Creek, providing her family with firewood and about how she worked the fields planted with potatoes and THEN walked into Bodega Bay to go to school.

Fast forward to 1948 and enter John A. Chanslor. The ranch was now 705 acres, and under Chanslor’s stewardship was operated as a guest ranch, offering horseback riding on the beach and on the trails above the ranch. Chanslor died in 1969 at the age of 58, leaving no wife or children, just a \$1.1 million estate that included Chanslor Ranch. Chanslor Ranch was purchased by the Bodega-Salmon Creek Corporation, Tom Taylor, President, Verne Paule, Secretary, plus George Rich and Dave Heiman. Carrying on in the spirit of John Chanslor, the new owners operated the ranch as a dude ranch, an early version of a bed and breakfast. Bob and Bonnie Hardenbrook were the ranch managers. They moved to the ranch in 1973, their own three horses in tow, and set up the day-to-day operations. Bonnie tended the 10 or so horses and maintained the guest quarters, while Bob, an award winning chef, cooked for the guests and maintained the ranch lands. Guests paid \$16 a day. A special guest who frequented the ranch during those days was Liberace--apparently the stories of his stays are quite salacious. The Hardenbrooks left the ranch in 1984 after 10 years of making friends from around the world.



CHANSLOR RANCH

My records are sparse for the next 10 years, other than noting that the owners made a couple of efforts to break apart the acreage, or expand the operations, of Chanslor Ranch. In December 1976 they applied for a 4 way lot split, and in 1985 they applied for a 30 room expansion. Both were apparently defeated. Finally in 1994 George Gross leased Chanslor Ranch. Gross, who had spent his summers at a family dairy farm in Wisconsin, brought his enthusiasm for ranching to Bodega Bay via Los Angeles in 1991.

Bodega Bay is along the Pacific Flyway, a migratory route consisting of a string of coastal stopovers stretching from Alaska to South America. Chanslor Ranch, bounded on the north and west by Salmon Creek, has a large wetland that serves as a stop-over for ducks and other birds. The Chanslor Ranch wetlands are an important habitat for this area due to the natural diversity of the estuary, which includes a tidal lagoon, a freshwater marsh and pond, riparian habitat, a wet meadow, and seasonal pools, all favored by waterfowl and seabirds for good eating and resting.



George Gross promoted the protection of the wetlands as a wildlife habitat and an environmental educational preserve. For some period of time, 250 acres of rare estuary habitat at Chanslor Ranch was dedicated as a Wetlands Wildlife Preserve. In 1996, 5 high rise osprey nesting platforms were installed. PG&E donated the drilling for Eucalyptus poles to hold up the platforms. Also, a turtle island was built in the pond to improve the habitat for the western pond turtle.

Gross offered guided horseback rides and hiking trails around the wetlands, and he embarked on numerous fundraising projects to promote the wetlands. In 1995 the Bodega Bay Seafood Art and Wine Festival was started to benefit the wetlands project. The festival drew 8,000 people in 1995, and by 1997 the attendance was up to 9,000. Traffic on Highway One was tied up all afternoon. (Let's keep that in mind the next time someone proposes an event center on the Coast!). The last festival in Bodega Bay was in 2003, after that the festival was held in Bodega.

Guests at Chanslor Ranch have long enjoyed exploring Indian culture. Indian trails and artifact sites indicate human habitation at Chanslor Ranch as long as 8,000 years ago. Chanslor Ranch was the site of a chert quarry, where Coast Miwok gathered the flint-like material for making arrowheads.

The ranch had been listed for sale as early as 1997, but in late 1999 or early 2000, the Bodega-Salmon Creek Company applied for the County to purchase a conservation easement at Chanslor Ranch. This would have limited development at the ranch and preserved it as open space. The County approved the acquisition, but had not agreed on a price. At the same time, the State Parks Department was considering purchasing the ranch as an addition to the state parks system. Unfortunately, neither of those options came to fruition, and in May 2000 the ranch was split into two large parcels and sold to private owners.

The purchaser of Chanslor Ranch in 2000 was Chanslor Ranch, LLC, which was managed by Charlene Schnall, a Healdsburg real estate agent. George Gross continued to operate the ranch. Abby Killey managed the two guest houses at Chanslor Ranch from 2001 to 2004. During that time the property hosted only three campsites. Classes from Bodega Bay to San Francisco came to the ranch to study the wetlands.

In 2014, Chanslor Ranch was purchased by Y&N Chanslor Ranch, LLD for \$2,950,000. The website www.chanslorranch.com promotes at least 17 camp sites on the property—many of them accommodating multiple campers, as well as RV camp sites, rental of rooms in the ranch house, horseback riding and kayaking.