

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Churches in Bodega Bay

by Ruth Burke & others - 2010

Ruth McCaughey Burke, from *An Intimate History of Bodega Country and the McCaughey Family*. With permission from the Tomales Regional History Center, which holds the copyright.

Other Protestant churches had the label Bodega attached to their names for a while. For instance, the Bodega Cumberland Presbyterian Church. It was in the Bodega Country, established at Spring Hill, about two miles west of Sebastopol on October 2, 1851. In 1871, it was changed to Sebastopol after they had moved to that town.



The first Baptist church of Petaluma originated at Bodega Corners, where it was organized on July 17, 1853, with Rev. A. A. Guernsey, the first pastor, and Worham Easley, first clerk. The last meeting was held here in October, 1853. It was not here for long – only three months. Although it moved to Petaluma in 1853, the name was not changed until November of 1854.

Other Protestant dominations sent circuit preaches to Bodega Corners until a church was built here. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, had a Bodega circuit in 1853, later changed to the Santa Rosa circuit. Southern Methodists also had a Bodega circuit in February, 1854. This circuit later changed to Santa Rosa, also. In later years, the Methodist Episcopal congregation of Bodega Corners met in the Presbyterian Church here.

In the spring of 1860, Rev. Thomas Fraser of the Presbyterian Church in Santa Rosa occasionally visited Valley Ford and Bodega. He and Rev. Frederick Buel organized a Presbyterian Church at the Beck Schoolhouse near Tomales, October 21, 1860. They called it the Bodega Presbyterian Church. The Bodega name was dropped after the congregation moved to a new church in the vicinity of the two rocks and called it Two Rock Valley Church. It was dedicated May 3, 1863.

It was a sorry day for Bodega when the old Presbyterian Church, which once stood proudly on the opposite side of the school house from the Catholic Church, was torn down for lack of parishioners in 1940. It had stood empty and lonely for many years. The lumber was taken to Petaluma, August 9, 1940, where it was used to enlarge the Presbyterian Church on Fourth Street. It always seemed strange to me that a Protestant church was built at Bodega Bay, just six miles away. Why couldn't they have used the one in Bodega? I suppose it was because there were two different denominations involved. The Church had its start on August 6, 1865, at the "Gulch" school house, between Bodega Bay and Bodega, where Rev. A. Fairbairn conducted first services.

Fisherman's Chapel by The Bay by John Riley (2010) started active life in June, 1984. The conception, organization and format are all attributable to its founding pastor, Rev. Arthur Wright. Much of the chapel

CHURCHES IN BODEGA BAY



program reflects Pastor Wright's training and important life experiences.

After his graduation from Santa Rosa High School, Pastor Wright completed his university and theological studies which led to his ordination as a Lutheran minister. His career included his service as a chaplain for the U. S. Army in Vietnam and elsewhere and after his discharge he worked as a teacher and counselor. He maintained his rank as a major (chaplain) in the U. S. Army and served as chaplain for the Redwood Empire Chapter of the U. S. Retired Officers' Association.

Pastor Wright and his wife, Elizabeth (Liz) became residents of Bodega Harbour. He felt the call to establish a church that would serve the Bodega Bay area and coastal communities in Sonoma County. He contacted Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Sebastopol and they commissioned him to establish a preaching station in Bodega Bay. This became the legal and ecclesiastical basis for the chapel.

From the beginning, Pastor Wright used his wide experiences in the Army as well as his other background to create a chapel in a broadly non-denominational manner except for the church sacraments and church publications, including the bulletin. These remained Lutheran for several years.

As a "preaching station" the chapel did not have formal membership. Regular attendees were considered "adherents" and many retained membership in their home churches in other communities. The first "adherent" was Natalie Church, a Lutheran and a resident of Bodega Harbour.

For several years the chapel services were held in the Bodega Bay Community Center. The opening service was held on Natalie Church's birthday. This brought out her family and friends to accompany her to "church." The opening attendance of the chapel was, thus, 20 people.

For the first few years the job of pastor also included all roles including secretary, treasurer and chairman. Pastor Wright did it all, including his work as counselor, from an office in the Branscombe Gallery. Later the office was moved to Sebastopol and finally to his own home in Bodega Harbour.

From the beginning the "adherents" were from a broad sample. They included residents of Bodega Bay and coastal communities like Carmet, Sereno del Mar and fishermen who had boats in one of the local marinas, but who lived elsewhere.

The congregation always liked to sing and music was important from the start. For several years Sybil Brown, an active volunteer from Bodega Harbour, was our musician. When she moved away, Joan Poulos assumed the musical directorship. For a brief period the chapel had a regular choir, directed by Liz Wright, and then for a time, an "instant choir." When it became obvious that the chapel had attained permanent status and was recognized as such in the community, Pastor Wright established the church council as the administrative Bodega and delegated the non-pastor duties to it. The office of moderator was established.

In the 1990s a visiting minister from Mount Olive Lutheran was the guest preacher. He mentioned that he

might come out when he retired. That gave Pastor Wright the idea of reducing his workload by leaving the chapel and doing interim work for the Lutheran Church. He appointed Tim Beck, a Lutheran layperson, to be his successor. Tim and his wife and children had attended the chapel for a while. Tim was not ordained and he later led to pursue his education to become a minister.

The chapel, under the direction then of George Harper as moderator, began an extensive search. When two excellent candidates were found, Rev. Richard Wilcox of the UCC and Rev. Wally Drotts, a Presbyterian, the decision was made to have a joint ministry with alternating months of responsibility. This popular decision led to a major ecclesiastical problem with the Lutheran Council. They decreed that only an ordained Lutheran minister could administer the sacraments.

The chapel concluded that an amicable separation was the answer. The chapel had always operated on a primarily non-denominational basis, so the chapel became an independent non-profit church. With the assistance of David Lewis, an attorney, the Fisherman's Chapel by the Bay was created as an independent church with non-profit status assured under both federal and state laws.

The transition was without controversy. The chapel maintains its mission of serving the wider Bodega Bay area, maintaining its Christian mission including charitable work, with pastors from varying denominations. Rev. Larry Ballenger, a Presbyterian served when Rev. Drotts moved away and now Rev. John Brooke, UCC, has joined Rev. Richard Wilcox as a co-pastor.

In the 1990s, when the Rev. Wright was still pastor, the chapel shifted the locale from the Community Center to the Yacht Club of Bodega Harbour Homeowners' Association. Later because of a change in that association, the chapel changed its permanent location to the Bodega Bay Grange, where it remains. It continues to carry out its Christian mission and stewardship and provides church services and charitable support for the Bodega Bay area. (The Chapel celebrated its 25th anniversary in August, 2009)

Bodega Bay Union Church by Gerald Lites (2010)

Gerald "Jerry" Lites is the Pastor of the Bodega Bay Union Church. Prior to the first church being built in Bodega Bay, there was a Bible study in some of the local homes along the coast, possibly starting in the late 1920s. Guy Mann, son of Guy and Ruby Mann, local ranchers, remembered some of those meetings being held at their home at the ranch about 5 miles north of Bodega Bay (known as "Bay" in those days). Ruth Burke (McCaughey) also remembers attending those studies. The lessons were taught by Miss Buelah Balderie (later, her married name was Beeson). Mary May's family moved to Bay in the late 1920s and also remembered attending the studies. She remembered the lessons being taught by Mrs. Harmon, "grandmother to the VanVicol children." Mrs. May believes that the church was possibly built in the area as a direct result of the coastal Bible study women's group.



On April 19, 1932, Despard William Taylor, single, a local property owner, deeded a small piece of land to I.B. Raymond, D.G. Niel, and et. al. as Trustees of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Petaluma (the other Trustees not named on the deed were as follows: C.F.D. Burmiester, M.H. Gordon, G.W. Van Bebber, H.A. George, and N.B. Rundall). The property, 50 feet wide by 100 feet long, was located in the community of Bay. Within the next year, a church was erected on the property. Materials to build the church were donated by individuals and by the Methodist churches of Santa Rosa, Petaluma and Sebastopol. It was built

by Jean Robertson, a local builder. Jean's daughter, Jeannie, was the first one married in the little church in 1933. The church stood at that location until it was demolished in February 2006, to make room for the parking lot for the new church building.

Mrs. May remembered the following people being present for the building dedication in 1933: Mary May, her daughter, Dolores, Mae Wilson, Rose Linebaugh, Mrs. Harmon, Ivy Thomas, and possibly Ruby Mann. There were others, but she didn't recall them. Very few people used the church, so within a few years, the doors were closed and the church was not used.

In early 1937, a young missionary with the American Sunday School Union by the name of Carl Jungkeit (pronounced "young kite") and his family was approached by Mrs. Rose Linebaugh about starting a Sunday school in Bay. Carl drove out to Bay and found the church. He wrote these words: "I found a little brown church sitting up above the town, but quiet and empty. Upon inquiring, I found that it was closed, even tho' it had been built in 1932... just five years before. I also inquired around about the ownership and got permission to open the doors and start a Sunday school."

Bay Union Sunday School was then organized on February 26, 1937, on a Friday afternoon. The "Union" in the name came from the American Sunday School Union. On that first day, there were 23 people present. The weather was cold and windy. Those present were: Mr. Snow, Mr. & Mrs. G. Allen, Mrs. May and her daughter, Dolores, Mrs. Blanche Pillow, Mrs. W.J. Robertson, Mr. & Mrs. Howard Risto, the VanVichel children, the McCaughey's granddaughter, Alice, of Bodega, Mr. & Mrs. August Jungkeit (parents of Carl Jungkeit), Mr. & Mrs. Carl Jungkeit, and their children, Dorothy and Dwight, and five other unidentified people. Mrs. W.J. Robertson was elected the secretary and treasurer. The Jungkeits volunteered to drive out and hold the service on Friday of each week. They did this for several years. In these early years, there were a number of people who came and served in the church. From 1941 to 1944, Dr. Josephine Williams, a medical doctor from Eldridge, drove over each Sunday to conduct the Sunday school.

In 1943, the town of Bay changed its name to Bodega Bay, thus the name of the Sunday school became the Bodega Bay Union Sunday School. In 1944, Ethel Teff started attending and became an active part of the church service for many years. On November 26, 1944, a young peoples society was organized with Miss Shirley Rhodes (later married Harold Ames) as president, Miss Ardel DeHaven as vice president, and Miss Glenice Ames (later married Earl Carpenter) as the secretary and treasurer.

The very first preaching service was established in September 1946 when Rev. George Allen agreed to come up each Sunday from Oakland to preach. His wife helped with the Sunday school teaching. It was also through Rev. Allen that pews were donated from the Baptist Church of Oakland. These pews were in the church for many years. It was also about this time that Mrs. Rose Gaffney started to attend the services, and helped whenever there was a need.

A number of pastors and other workers carried on the work in the church over the next few years. From 1947 to 1950, Rev. Elmer Burroughs and his wife were faithful workers, driving each Sunday from Petaluma. In 1950, Mrs. Norma Faught (married to Roy) began working in the church where she was a faithful worker for many years. In the early 1950s, several pastors filled the pulpit: Mr. Ernest Quaintance, Mr. Lyle Jeffers, Rev. Elmer Burroughs, Rev. Reuben Granlund and Dr. John Bain.

In January 1953, Missionary Carl Jungkeit was speaking at a Sebastopol church when he announced that the church in Bodega Bay needed help. Darrel and Margie Hurst were attending the service that day, and felt the call to go help in Bodega Bay. They arrived in the next few weeks and began work that lasted for the next nine years. On their first Sunday, only seven people were present. They worked in the Sunday school

and occasionally Darrel had to preach from the pulpit when the pastor didn't show up.

Shortly after the Hursts started attending, the congregation decided to incorporate as a church. The process was started and Bodega Bay Union Church was officially incorporated on June 25, 1953. The name "Union" in the name was taken from the missionary organization that started the Sunday School, the American Sunday School Union, an organization that has been in existence since the founding of our country (it is now called American Missionary Fellowship). When the church was incorporated, the original three Trustees of the church were Darrel Hurst, Norma Faught and Eithel Teft.

In 1954, Darrel and Margie Hurst purchased a home across Bay View Street from the church and started using it for classrooms to accommodate the pupils of the Sunday school and the Children's Church. The congregation grew during this time, and on some occasions would reach around 75 people. In June of 1956, Mr. David Hundrichs, a single man, became the first resident pastor of the church. The house purchased by the Hursts became the parsonage as well as classrooms. From July 1959 until 1962, the pastors were Rev. A.N. Willems of San Jose and Rev. John F. I. Lemke from Anaheim.

In the early 1960s, Darrel and Margie Hurst left the church to work in another ministry. By this time, they had made an impact in the lives of hundreds of young people in this area. According to the words of Carl Jungkeit, "The Hursts became a blessing, an inspiration, and a help to those lives they contacted in Bodega Bay. God alone knows the number who has come to know Him because of the faithfulness of Darrel and Margie Hurst." At this time, the church offices were held by the following: Dwight Jungkeit (son of Carl Norma Faught, Secretary and Treasurer; Melvin and Emma Clark, teachers; Zannette Santos, teacher; LaRue Ross, teacher.

In mid 1962, Mr. Earl Lackey began serving as pastor. He and his wife, Jean, served for eleven years in the church. They would drive out from Forestville each Sunday for the services. Mr. Lackey was a great Bible teacher, and he continued to be a guest speaker even after his retirement.

In 1965, Earl and Helen Nevins were on their fishing boat outside Bodega Bay, but were lost in the fog with no instruments to guide them. A local fisherman helped them find their way into the bay. According to Helen, they were flat broke when they arrived here. Earl has many times jokingly commented on the situation when he said, "We didn't have any money when we got here, and we've been too broke to leave ever since." They gave up fishing and Earl began operating a backhoe in the local area, an occupation he continued until well into his 80s. Upon retirement of Earl Lackey in March 1973, Earl and Helen Nevins were voted in as the pastors of the church. Under the leadership of Earl and Helen Nevins, the church continued to grow spiritually, and in numbers. Many people were affected by their kindnesses, and their genuine love for everyone--no matter what their standing in life might have been. Since that March day in 1973, they served as pastors of the Bodega Bay Union Church for almost two decades--and without accepting any pay for their work.

In the 1960s, church members realized that some unknown person had stolen the bell from the bell tower. Later, a used bell was donated to the church from the First Baptist church of Los Altos. In 1965, John and Gaye LeBaron donated a 50-foot square lot adjoining the original church property. Later, the church purchased another lot adjoining the existing lot on the north side, giving the church a total of three lots.

In 1972, church members started building an 800 square foot building to be used for Sunday school rooms, dining room and restrooms. It was completed in 1973, and was named "The Jungkeit Hall" in honor of the missionary, Carl Jungkeit, who started the ministry in Bodega Bay. Upon completion, the building was completely paid for by donations and volunteer labor.

In 1979, Jerry and Arden Lites started attending the church, and are still active in the ministry. At the time of their arrival, there were only four kids attending church. Jerry started a children's ministry, and within a few months, there were over 25 kids attending each Sunday. In 1987, Pat Parks started attending the church. He became a Sunday school teacher, and elder, and also served in many other capacities within the church. He is still active in the church today.

In the late 1980s, Earl Nevins was doing some backhoe work for a husband and wife in the area. They were impressed with Earl and the work that he was doing in the ministry, so they donated a piece of property to Earl on the outskirts of Bodega Bay. Earl signed over the deed to the church, and it was sold so that the money could be used to start the building of the new church. There were some obstacles to overcome. First, the church owned three small lots. We then had them combined into one lot through the County. Second, the Building Department said that we needed 60 parking spaces for the size of our proposed building, but here was only enough room for just over 20 spaces. After some meetings with the County, they finally gave permission to proceed with the smaller number of parking spaces. Third, we needed more land so that we could move the building to the edge of the hillside to make room for parking. In 1988, we approached Mr. John LeBaron who owned the adjoining land to see about purchasing the land on the hillside. The said that he and his wife had already agreed to donate the land to us, a very wonderful and generous gift. We went to the County with a lot line adjustment and after that last obstacle was removed, we were able to proceed with the building plans. The plans for the new church were drawn up by John Cook, a local architect, and the process was begun. A building permit was issued through the County Building Department in 1991. The work project went on for many years with the help of dedicated people who also had a vision to see the new church in place.

Lew Smith, a church member for many years, volunteered many hours over several years to work on the church. Chuck Gentry, a local contractor, also volunteered his Saturdays working on the church for several years. It was because of the vision of Earl and Helen Nevins and the dedication of many people like Lew and Chuck that the church was finally completed and signed off by the County in January 2009. At the time of completion, the church was debt free. It was an amazing story of how funds were supplied each and every time a need was there, even many times when we had no money.

This church was a dream of Earl Nevins, but he did not live to see its completion, although he had the vision in his mind. He never doubted that "God would supply for our every need," and he was right.

After the Nevins' retired as pastors, there was a series of pastors who came for short periods of time to fill the vacancy. In the mid 1990s, David Cook, a previous pastor and Bible teacher served as pastor. After that, Jason Miles, a Bible student, agreed to come for a period of time. He served for a year and a half before leaving in April 2000, to take a position with World Vision in Washington State.

Jerry Lites and Pat Parks then filled the pulpit as lay pastors until a pastor could be found. After seven months of filling the pulpit, the congregation unanimously signed a paper asking Jerry and Pat to consider being the pastors. After a few months of praying about the decision, both men decided to take the positions. They were voted in as co-pastors at the Annual Meeting on March 11, 2001.

There were a couple of obstacles: Jerry and Pat were both still working as police officers. Jerry was the Lieutenant on the Sebastopol Police Department, and Pat was Chief of Police on the Petaluma Police Department. However, both men retired from police work in 2002. Another slight conflict was that Jerry and Pat were both volunteering as security and crisis management consultants for missionaries in various countries around the world. Even with the busy schedules, both felt called to the ministry in Bodega Bay. They are still the pastors as of this writing.

Bodega Bay Church has always been an independent, non-denominational church, continuing its affiliation with the American Missionary Fellowship. Our teachings have always been Christ-centered, based on the Word of God and our personal faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior who died for our sins, and that it is only through him that we have the promise of eternal life.

Even though the “little brown church sitting up above the town” is no longer there, the ministry is still the same, reaching out to the people along the coastal area and surrounding communities, as well as for those who are traveling through who enjoy worshiping while away from home. Many of our visitors feel at home from their first visit, and they continue to return year-after-year as they pass through our area. One family is now on their fifth generation as “visitors.” On the other hand, we also have those in our church who have been attending and serving for decades. We welcome people from all walks of life to “come as you are” as they come simply to worship with a group of believers who love God. For all who are involved in the ministry in Bodega Bay Church, it is a blessing to be part of this church family.

Catholic Church Apologizes to Native People by Adrianus Boudewyn (2008) Beth Ashley, reporter for the San Rafael Independent called it a moving moment. Those in attendance were stunned. She was describing a December 15 ceremony at the Church of Saint Raphael in San Rafael, to celebrate the 190th anniversary of the founding of Mission San Rafael in December 1817.

The festive occasion had included a display of Indian skills and reciting the Coast Miwok names of 25 children that were baptized with Spanish names in 1817. It concluded with a mass presided over by retired Bishop Emeritus Francis A. Quinn, who used the homily to speak about injustice to the Indians, stating, “I think all of us are maturing as a culture. We are beginning to acknowledge our past mistakes and serious misdeeds” Then, as the congregation listened intently, many hearing these injustices for the first time, Bishop Quinn announced: “The Church this evening apologizes for trying to take Indian out of the Indian.”



Betty Goerke, professor of anthropology, who was at the service and ceremony, wrote that there was an audible intake of breath and then silence in the packed church. “He (Bishop Quinn) was referring to the attempts by the missionaries to eradicate Indian religion and Indian culture through punishments that included beatings and incarcerations. Quinn’s simple words had never been pronounced by a leading church authority. All of us were stunned, knowing that although conciliatory comments had been proffered at other historical missions, that this was an unmistakable apology.”

Bishop Quinn didn’t mince words. Regarding the attempt at eradication of Indian spiritual beliefs he said “the padres tried to impose European Catholicism upon the Natives, which should have been offered rather than forced on a people who already had their own spiritual beliefs and civilization.”

Retired as bishop of Sacramento since January 1994, Bishop Quinn has ministered with Native Americans in Southern Arizona as an associate pastor for the past 13 years. There was more for the attendees who left the mass overwhelmed and elated, then heard a very eloquent response by Greg Sarris, Chairman of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, who acknowledged Bishop Quinn’s words and accepted the Church’s apology in a memorable speech that traced the history of native people.