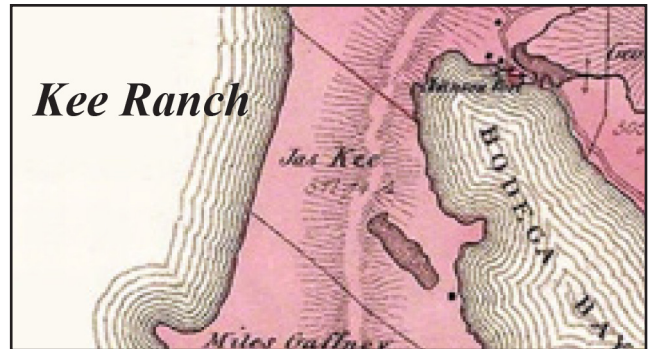


RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Kee Ranch

by Robin Rudderow - 2013

The Bodega Head was part of the 1843 Rancho Bodega and earlier was the temporary home and burial site of several different cultures of ancient dwellers, spread out over widely separate time periods. In 1869 James and Catherine Kee purchased 379 acres on the Bodega Head, to become the Kee Ranch. In 1996 restoration of the original Kee Ranch farm house was undertaken by then owner Cecily Gregory, who also created a notebook for RBHS of the history of the ranch.



James Kee (1836-1913) and his wife, Catherine (1835-1874) were from Belfast, Ireland. Catherine died following the birth of twins, who themselves died at 6 and 8 weeks of age. The Kees first purchased a 412 acre ranch on Irish Hill, which is across Salmon Creek from Coleman Hill, near the town of Bodega. In 1869 they purchased the 379 acre Bay ranch for \$4,000, which we now know as the “Kee Ranch”. On the Kee Ranch, potatoes were grown and dairy cows were raised. The Kee Ranch could support 30 cows because of the fresh water pond and marshes to the west of the farm buildings. This fresh water now partially supplies the town of Bodega Bay through the wells of the Bodega Bay Public Utilities District.

The Kee family resided at the Irish Hill ranch, and either operated the Bay ranch themselves, or leased it out. As the 4 Kee sons matured, sons Samuel and Hamilton operated the Bay ranch before buying their own ranches. The farm house at Kee Ranch was first built close to the Bay side of the ranch, and was moved up the hill by 1880, when William Smith and his family moved in and operated the Kee Ranch dairy farm. James Kee finally moved to the Bay ranch in 1888.

Robert Kee (1872-1959), one of James and Catherine’s sons, inherited the farm from his father in 1914. He rented the farm to many different families, including the Ricci family from 1921 to 1926 and to Doris and Guy Mann from 1942 to 1944. Robert Kee operated his own dairy farm in the Bodega area and he was one of the organizers of the Bodega Co-op Dairy Creamery in 1912.

Robert named his bay front property “Keesport” and had cottages for vacation rental. In 1930 he gave an option to Frank Johnson to further develop Keesport with a golf course, club house, tennis courts, Italian Gardens, and a lake, to be called “Rose of Del Mar”.

In 1959 Robert Kee died and the Kee Ranch was inherited by his nephew George Kee. George built a new house close to the old farm house in 1963. When George died in 1968, the Kee Ranch was divided among his 3 children. A good portion of the Kee Ranch is now a part of the State Park. A small parcel holds the restored 1800’s ranch house and the newer 1963 house.

In 1996 RBHS had a picnic at the Kee Ranch, hosted by then owner, Cecily Gregory. Two of the Ricci children who had lived on the Kee Ranch from 1921 to 1926 were special guests. Among their recollections was that twice while they lived at the Kee Ranch, they saw processions of mounted Indians in full regalia on the way to the Indian burial ground, which was located about where Westside Park is now.