

# RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

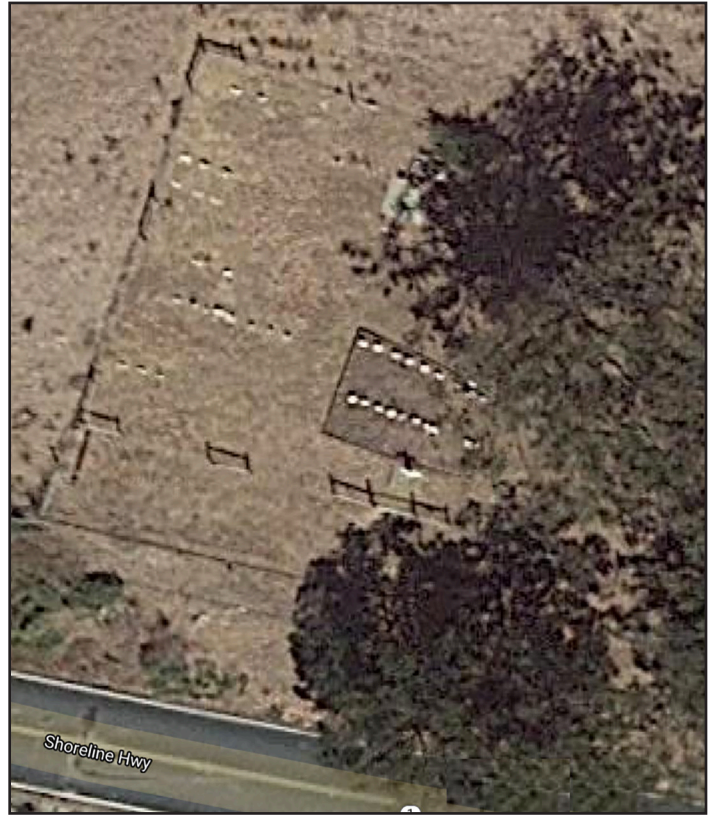
## The Marshall Coast Miwok Cemetery

*by Sylvia B. Thalman - 2006*

A striking example of the continuity of culture of the Coast Miwok people and the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria is the little cemetery at Marshall on Tomales Bay in Marin County.

The cemetery has an exceptionally beautiful outlook, westward across and to the Coast. In pre-Christian tradition, the dead followed a line of foam from Pt. Reyes, out to the Creator. It seems likely that the Christian Indians buried were not unaware of this tradition. The area does not appear on maps, nor is it marked in any way. It is on the bluff above Highway 1 on the east side of and is only visible, briefly, if you are southbound on Highway 1.

It technically belongs to the rancher whose property surrounds it. Early ranch owners permitted the use of the area for a cemetery, while their cattle grazed around it. The present rancher respects the Indians' use of the cemetery on this land. The cemetery was maintained very informally by conventional standards. Funeral homes were usually not involved, particularly in the early days. Family members dug graves. As the tiny cemetery filled up, burials were put one on top of another.



Readers should be aware of the history of Indians. The Catholic Church established the mission San Francisco de Asis, St. Francis in 1775 and the Santa Clara Mission, San Jose Guadalupe, San Rafael Arcangel and finally in Solano that was established later. Before the missions came, Pt. Reyes area Indians can be clearly traced back to 1579, when the English sea captain Francis Drake brought his ship, the Golden Hinde into the Bay to repair leaks. English descriptions of the Indians there mention "bony chaines" around the neck of the "chief." These were necklaces of clam shell beads, used as money and indications of wealth and importance up into recent times.

Many, but probably not all, Indians in the area were baptized at the missions. Children were baptized in the church, and their parents could not then take them away. As a result of the great overcrowding at the missions, thousands of Indians died of malnutrition and European diseases. By 1840, only 10 percent of the number of Indians alive in 1775 still existed. This accounts for the intermarriage with several outside groups, including other Indian tribes.

Present day Coast Miwok and southern Pomo people comprise the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, a federally recognized tribe. Bodega Miwok are included in the tribe. In the cemetery, graves were marked

## MARSHALL COAST MIWOK CEMETERY

by redwood headstones. Although these were quite long lasting, many had fallen down by 1980 when tribal member Lydia Sciallo Bachman Summers began reading them. Many were stacked again the fence by that time. Marin Genealogical Society members read gravestones in the 1970s, but they were less familiar with the family names. At this time, December 2005, some 105 individuals who are buried or whose ashes are scattered in the cemetery have been identified. Some names came from headstones and other sources include and death certificates. Lydia Sciallo referred me to Father Robert White, Pastor of the Church of the Assumption of Mary in Tomales. Father White is quite familiar with the cemetery and continues to hold services there, at the time of death, and since several tribal members have Mexican as well as Indian ancestry. Father White has in his safe at the Victorian-style rectory in Tomales, the original church records of baptisms, marriages and deaths. He was generous enough to go through these with me in 1992, identifying many as Indians. He read me the Latin records and I entered them into my laptop.



Several individuals who had attended services were added to the list. Tim Campbell, a tribal council member at the time, interviewed members of the Sanchez family at a spring cleanup of the cemetery and more names and abbreviations were identified. Not all people interred or whose ashes are scattered are Indians. The tiny remaining population of Indians in the early 1850s married Mexicans, Filipinos, Italians, Italian and French Swiss, and other nationalities, including Americans from the East Coast.

The Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria are in the process of replacing the fence around the cemetery and installing a memorial stone. A drain along the sides and top of the cemetery is in. I estimate that about 80 of the known burials are Coast Miwok Indians. Some seamen drowned on the coast and unidentified seem to have been buried there. The earliest dated burial is that of Jose Calistro in 1889. He was born in 1830 and died February 13, 1889. A photograph of him in the Marin County Historical Society calls him the "Chief of the Marin Indians." Elsewhere is said to be a "half breed" but I have no knowledge of his parents. He married Maria Rafaela, a daughter of Juana Elserio; they had four children. Maria Rafael later married Francisco (Frank). Their descendants in the tribe spell the name "Maysee." I know of no descendants.

Among the known names of people buried in the cemetery are: Alcantra, Cacace, Calistro, Carillo-Carrio, Felix, Frias-Frease, Frescia, Jack, James, Jewell, Martin, McCloud, Pussich, Sanchez, Sandoval, Sciallo, Sosa, Truvido, Westgate (Vescott) and Zoppi. These may not sound like "Indian names," but when Indians were baptized they gave up their Indian names for Spanish saints' names. Thus Juan and Juana, Miguel, Ana Maria, and many lesser-known saints appear on the lists.

In 1880, the census required surnames of all individuals. People sometimes took the names of the owners of ranches where they lived - hence Smith and Martin, or often, their fathers' names. Today people have, as last names, Billy Mike, Antone, Willie.



Editor's note: Sylvia is a co-editor of "Interviews with Tom Smith and Maria Copa" - Isabel Kelly's Ethnographic Notes on the Coast Miwok Indians of Marin and Southern Sonoma Counties, published by the Miwok Archaeological Preserve of Marin 1992 (2002). She is the tribal genealogist for the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria and although not Native American in 2003 she was accepted as an Honorary Elder of the tribe.



Note: In the 1970s, 's legislature passed a law instructing third grade teachers to teach about Native American life. In the Dixie School District of Lucas Valley in Marin County, school principal Don Thieler heard about an archaeological dig taking place on the shell mound behind Miller Creek School in Marinwood by Charles Slaymaker, Ph.D, then a graduate student at San Francisco State University, and made it a point of visiting the site with his third grade teachers and Sylvia Thalman. That exposure became an enthusiastic passion and led them to become personally and intellectually interested in Coast Miwok life and the formation of Miwok Archaeological Preserve of Marin (MAPOM). Now more than 35 years old, MAPOM's objectives are to preserve and protect old village sites and to acquire and disseminate accurate information about Native Americans present in Marin. In December 2000, conferring of tribal status to The Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, signed into law by President Bill Clinton.

Tomales Bay is a long narrow inlet of the Pacific Ocean in west Marin County. This modest cemetery is located on the east side of Tomales Bay, just north of Reynolds and south of Marshall. Across the water to the west is bucolic Point Reyes National Seashore.

The Coast Miwok Indians were inhabitants of Marin for thousands of years. There was an abundance of fish and shellfish with game and seasonal foods being plentiful. The hunter-gatherer tribe thrived off the bounty of the land until the Europeans arrived. By the early 1930s, only three individuals predominantly Coast Miwok in blood were known to exist. The Native American practice was to bury their dead where they lived, within their territory. Formal cemeteries and tombstones do not exist for the tribes, therefore, an unknown number of unidentified Miwok burials are in the Marin area.

However, this cemetery is said to have been a burial ground for the tribe that lived around the Marshall area, their settlement being called Echa-kolum. The cemetery was not named, nor did it appear on maps; for many years, people were directed to “the burial on the Indian Grounds... somewhere up on a hill... just down from the Old School house.”

There are less than 50 known formalized burials here with tombstones marking their graves. There are 23 unnamed burials marked by sparse and weathered crosses which are scattered in various repose inside the fence. There may be an untold number of Miwok Indian burials underneath the formal inscriptions; the stark prodigious white cross at the entrance stands to the sky in their honor. .

