

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Salmon Creek House with a History

by *Adrianus Boudewyn* - 2007

One of the best spreads in Salmon Creek is the old "Ocean View House", built in 1868 by Hugh Marshall, as a hotel, post office and saloon. It was a designated stop for the coast stagecoach of the time. Originally, the property - known as the Ocean View Hotel Property encompassed 25 acres-stretched as far as the beach, but after subsequent owners subdivided some of the land, it now sits on close to an acre with sweeping views. The 25-acre tract was deeded from Manuela T. Curtis (widow of Capt. Stephen Smith) to Hugh Marshall on March 15, 1862. Marshall planted the cypress trees at the house and it is said that Monarch butterflies used to winter in these trees. Its current address is 255 McChristian Avenue.



One wouldn't suspect, but three of the neighboring dwellings still standing today, originally served the purposes of the hotel. One bedded the stagecoach horses (for two horses, the same number used by a stage coach for part of the route), another was a chicken house to provide fresh eggs and poultry for hotel guests, and the third housed the cows that gave the milk (under the house floor there are still cement feed troughs and run-off troughs).

The coast stage coach route that included this stop ran between Ocean View and Petaluma, covered Bodega (Bay) Port, Bodega Corners, Freestone, Analy Ranch, Miller and Walker's near the present Sebastopol, Stony point (Washoe House) and Petaluma. Fare for a ride from Ocean View to Petaluma was \$3.50 in gold.

Hugh Marshall, trained as a Presbyterian minister, was one of seven brothers (also Samuel, James, David, Alex) who came to California from County Armagh in Northern Ireland (two other brothers, Joseph and Robert, remained in England). They originally settled in Philadelphia, then made their way to California around 1852. Hugh came around Cape Horn to get to California, which took him a year. He located land near Tomales and, reportedly, it was he who urged his brothers to bring cattle to replace the Spanish dairy cattle. James, Sam, and David did just that, forming a partnership and herding two immense droves of cattle over the plains to California in a seven-month trek. Once they settled in the Tomales area they became prominent in many endeavors and the town of Marshall is named after them.



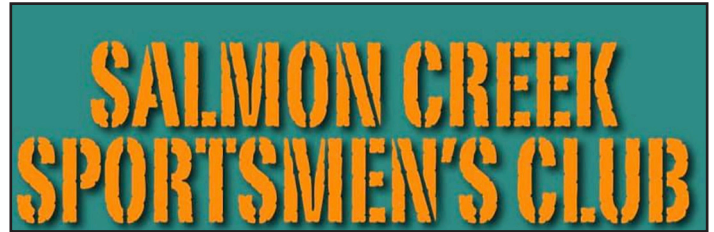
Meanwhile, Hugh had moved up to the Bodega Bay area, buying acreage from the Manuela T. Curtis estate, and building and making his plans for the Ocean View House property in Salmon Creek. When counted

OCEAN VIEW HOUSE IN SALMON CREEK

in the 1870 census, he was 45 and single. His neighbors were Henry Stump and Chloral Dougherty. He again appears in the 1880 census as being a stock raiser in Salt Point, and still single. In addition to owning the hotel and saloon, he was also appointed as postmaster in 1870 and held that post until 1872 when the appointment went to Patrick Feeney. Marshall's name appears as owner of property on older maps. We know that he was educated in England and that he and his brothers left for America in 1847. According to family correspondence, Hugh at one time served on the Sonoma County Grand Jury as foreman. In later years, around 1880, he lived in Gualala and still later in Cloverdale, perhaps with his brother Alex, who had moved there with his second wife. Beyond that, very little is known about Hugh Marshall.

The Ocean View Property as it was called passed through a series of owners beginning in the 1870s (from Hugh Marshall the property was deeded to a Patrick Feeney in 1871), as security for private financing at that time. It was also subject to claims in lawsuits and at one time appears to have been into receivership.

History has it that Ocean View House was used by a group of San Francisco businessmen as a Sportsmen's Club in the 1910s, according to Ruth Burke. They used it as a hunting lodge for hunting ducks, apparently so plentiful that they could be shot from the back porch of the house. Indeed, John Bressie has among his possessions an old poster of the Salmon Creek Sportsmen's Club showing all manner of birds pictured for identification. The writing (in pen and pink) says: 1917 Salmon Creek Sportsmen's Club (at the top,) and E.L. Bosqui resident (in the middle), and S.C.S.C. (a little lower), and Keeper - W.J. Taylor - 1913-1917 (at the very bottom center). They also hunted abundant deer and fish. Ruth's research has her father, H. C. McCaughey, stocking Salmon Creek with 24,000 trout at the request of club president, E. L. Bosqui.



Both chimneys went down in the 1906 earthquake and only the one on the right was ever rebuilt. A distillery was built (in the area where the greenhouse now sits) and George McChristian was hired as the bootlegger. Later, to hide liquor, a special room was built around the brick fireplace chimney at the north end of the second level of the house with peepholes drilled into doors for watching inquisitive "revenuers." (After prohibition, stills were set up in this room and the chimney was used to provide venting for the fumes).

In 1920, Bertha E. Hays was listed as the owner and she sold it to George McChristian, then single, in 1922. McChristian liked to fish on a rowboat on Salmon Creek and was known to post "rattlesnake danger" signs along upper Salmon Creek so that he could protect his favorite areas for huckleberry and blackberry picking. McChristian had a theory about the dune grass, calling it "dead horse grass." The theory went that a horse had eaten the grass in Australia, died, floated onto Salmon Creek beach, ruptured and scattered the seeds. After he sold the house to Vernon L. Bressie, McChristian married in Salmon Creek and moved into a small house on Bean Avenue and lived there until he died.

After buying the house in 1934, Bressie found false bottoms in cupboards, used to hide liquor in earlier days. He also found bottles and jugs of wine and whiskey buried in sand on the hill where the garage now stands. In fact, while bulldozing for the garage foundations, strong whiskey fumes emanated from the ground and it turns out workmen had accidentally broken some of the surviving bottles while excavating. Some of the workmen poured out some of the whiskey and declared it to be "good." The original still from upstairs was also found at this time, buried in the sand on the hill west of the house below the water tank. According to Bressie, when he bought the house the oceanfront was closer to the house than it was in 1985.

He said that before grasses and trees were planted, there were no sand dunes along the ocean beach.

The wishing well was built by Bressie. He had found stepping stones above the old spring, suggesting that Coast Miwok Indians had used it. According to Bressie, water sometimes rose to the ground level and ran off down the hill. A pump house was built to pump the water to the hill tank, where it was stored for use with gravity flow. It had enough pressure to service some hill homes.

Bressie built the large greenhouse attached to the original house in 1972. He said there had been a bonded distillery on that spot, also a grotto and fish pond that had to be removed to make room for the new structure.

Bressie called it Friendship House, because it was used to entertain guests. The huge old stove, a ship's galley stove, was there when Bressie bought the house. It had been manufactured in San Francisco and McChristian is thought to have put it there. It had gone around Cape Horn several times. It had an oil burner originally, but Bressie electrified it after a houseguest caused a fire and smoked up the inside of the house.

The closet that was under the stairway before Bressie's remodeling was empty except for boxes and junk. Bressie found a valuable gold chain with a solid gold bear attached bearing the date 1891, and the initial J.A.L.

The house comes with its own stories. Black Bart was supposed to have slept there. A man was killed in the saloon. He was shot from the outside, and the Bressie children had looked for bullet holes. And during Marshall's time someone went crazy and supposedly took an axe to all the doors upstairs. They were replaced with beautiful hand hewn doors of native redwood. And, one woman said she saw a ghost. Bressie owned the house and water system until 1980, when he sold it to Richard Murphy. It was sold again in 2005, when Arlene Hogan bought it. Throughout its 140+ year history the sweeping view has remained.

Capt. Stephen Smith had received title to a tract of land known as "Bodega" containing 35,488 acres in September of 1844 from the then Mexican Government. After California became part of the United States, Smith in 1852 petitioned the General Land Office of the U.S. for confirmation of the Mexican grant. By the time the petition was granted in 1859 by President James Buchanan, Smith had died and decree of confirmation was granted to the heirs, his widow Manuella, and minor children Stephen Smith, Manuella Smith and James Smith. Smith's widow, Manuella, had in the meantime married Tyler Curtis and together they had guardianship over the Smith children.

Guardianship meant that when they set out to sell portions of the land, approval had to be sought from the Probate court-which they did in the case of the sale of about 25 acres to Hugh Marshall in 1862. That sale to Hugh Marshall as well as others made by Manuella and Tyler, were later challenged in court by James Smith in 1877, who sought to recover all of the Rancho Bodega lands that had been sold. He was not successful. Hugh Marshall had in the meanwhile proceeded to build his hotel and here is a list of the people who have owned the dwelling:

Hugh Marshall, original owner in 1868; Patrick Feeney 1872; John P. Johnson 1881; Nancy Eldred 1884; W. E. Dean 1888; John P. Overton 1903; Mercantile Trust 1911; D. and Jane H. Hearfield, V. W. and Grace T. Hoxie, W. H. and Anne Lemmer, and J. W. Gibb 1918; Bertha E. Hays 1920; George McChristian 1922; Vernon L. Bressie 1934; Richard Murphy 1980; Arlene Hogan 2005.

(Compiled from notes and interviews with Vernon L. Bressie by Frieda Forselles and Opal Shinabarger in 1985 and Adrianus Boudewyn at Willows in 1990, and contributions from Ruth Burke, Lois Weeth, Tony Hoskins, Bob Curtis, John Bressie as well as other historical accounts provided by Lois Parks and the Tomales Regional History Center.)