

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ZIP Codes 94922 and 94923 (story about Post Offices)

by *Glenice Carpenter - 2006*

In the early 1860s weekly mail stages ran down from the Russian River valley towns, from Sonoma and the Coast, taking in Gualala, Fort Ross, Duncan's, Ocean View (Salmon Creek), Bodega Port, Bodega Corners, Freestone, Anly Ranch, Millers' & Walkers near the present Sebastopol, Stony Point (Washoe House), and Petaluma. These mail stages were "double



decked" vehicles with six horses. According to early Bodega's talented historian, the late Honoria Tuomey "to ride with the driver was considered a great treat, and applications were always numerous for that reservation. The pace was hard gallop and as the roads were dirt, only, one can imagine the excitement of a stage ride up and down hills, across lowlands and through the shallower streams not yet spanned by bridges." These stages lasted until mail transportation was gradually taken over by the railroads in about 1876.

A historic figure in the development of local post offices is Capt. Stephen Smith, whose 35,000+ acre Rancho Bodega stretched from Estero Americano to the Russian River. He established the first post office on Smith's Ranch. The name was changed to 'Bodega Post Office'. In Smith's footsteps followed a long line of postmasters:

Stephen Smith 1854, Nathan M. Hodges 1856-1859, Epen M. Winslow 1859-1860, George R. Rosseter 1860-1861, Edward M. Deory 1861-1862, David N. Brown 1861-1862, George Briar 1862-1864, Harris Kowalski 1865-1867, Matthew Aiken 1868-1873, James L. Springer 1873-1879, Jas. McCaughey 1879-1885, Leopold S. Goodman 1885-1897, James McCaughey 1897-1901, Howard McCaughey 1901-1948, Milton J. Cunningham 1948-1975, Glenice M. Carpenter 1975-1989, Edward Riley 1989-1002, Ken Peterson 2002-2004, Robert Romos 2005-

It wasn't until W. J. "Gene" Robertson purchased the general store and hotel in 1920. Until the office was established, Robertson would travel inland to Bodega Road Depot to meet the narrow gauge railroad that came from and bring the mail back to his store. The town at that time was known only as Bay. W. J. Robertson was the first postmaster 1920-1929. Others followed in his shoes: Bay proper had a post Office.

Pansy Icterzt 1929-1939, Helen Hellwig 1939-1964, Shirley Ames 1965-1988, Glenice Carpenter 1988-1992, Jamie Archer 1993-

Jamie is a 28-year veteran with the Post Office and previously a manager of training for the five northern counties. She says the nicest part of the job is the daily contact with the public and customers, "all very interesting people." She says the worst part is "lack of face-to-face time when handling internal

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communications. Everything is through computers and E-mail and not always very productive." Jamie lives in Guerneville.

Rob Romos has been with the Post Office for 22 years and is coming up on two years in Bodega. He started out in Bolinas and has worked in some 10 post offices in Marin and Sonoma Counties. "It doesn't get much better than being out here. It's about the best job I can think of and there are so many positives, I'm just proud to be the postmaster here. This is a wonderful community." Bodega Post Office has 320 mailboxes.

It was Postmaster Helen Hellwig who in 1943 had the name 'Bay' changed to Bodega Bay, as mail was being misdirected to another community with the name 'Bay' elsewhere in (remember, this was well before zip codes).

The office has over 1200 mail boxes and serves a large route, delivering to mail boxes in Salmon Creek, Carmet, Sereno del Mar and Lawson's Landing. An interesting note about that route is that it has been served by one family since the time that the Post Office was in the general store. Vern DeMars was the carrier from 1960 until his retirement in 1976 and has since been serviced by his daughter Dawn Loukes.



In January of 1982 a disastrous flood hit the area.

A main bridge on Highway One was washed out at Salmon Creek. As Highway One is the only roadway along the coast, all of the coastal villages served by the post office would have had no mail if it hadn't been for Mary Cook (still there) who lived on the other side of the wash-out and with the aid of community members would haul the mail across the washout in mail sacks on ropes. The State Park Ranger Station was used as the mail dispatch center until the road was repaired.

Postmaster Shirley Ames participated in a "Smokey the Bear" program sponsored by the Post Office with the issuing of the Smokey the Bear stamp. The State Forestry honored her for her participation in the program.

In 1991 postmaster Glenice Carpenter was awarded second place in a national Postmaster of the Year award sponsored by the National Newspaper Association. She was nominated by "The Navigator" and was chosen by a committee from the National Association of Postmasters. She was chosen for her work as a Postmaster and her contributions to the community.

Probably the Post Office in will always be remembered as the one Alfred Hitchcock used in the film "The Birds". It was housed in the general store in 1963 and was mentioned in the movie.

Post offices in started soon after was admitted to statehood by the in 1851. Not that the news got here any faster - it was six weeks after the fact, that found out it had been admitted as the 31st state!

The first post office was located in Petaluma on February 9, 1852, then primarily a shipping place for game and agricultural products such as grain and potatoes to San Francisco. Eleven days later, on the bank of Laguna de Santa Rosa, at a place called Pine Grove (south of the present city of Sebastopol) 'Bodega' post

office became second on February 20 in 1852 - this was shortly before the town of Bodega Corners came into existence was third and the Smith Ranch (in what later became Bodega Corners) was the fourth post office with Captain Stephen Smith as the postmaster.

According to early history, no post office bore the name 'Bodega' between 1867 and 1901, the year when Howard. C. McCaughey (Ruth Burke's father) obtained permission to give the name to the post office at Bodega Corners.

The first post office serving Bay was actually called Ocean View after the then popular Ocean View House hotel in Salmon Creek with Hugh Marshall, hotel proprietor, as postmaster in 1870 until 1872, when Patrick Feeney took over. The post office was discontinued in 1874. A second post office located at was established in 1882 and lasted for five years until 1887, with John Cauzza and James Watson, respectively, serving as postmasters during its short duration.



Meanwhile ever- expanding routes and service were a tremendous cost to the government, which at one time employed more postal workers than it did soldiers. In 1845, more than two-thirds of the Post Office Department's budget was for transportation, and steps were taken to help reduce mail transportation - horseback, stage, steamboat, and railroad - costs. Throughout the 1850s, the Department continued to favor stagecoaches over horses on certain routes. In 1855, the rate for mail was three cents for a letter weighing a half-ounce and traveling up to 3,000 miles.

Contractors had to be at least 16 years old until 1902, when the age limit was raised to 21. Subcontractors or carriers could be 16. Contractors were bonded and took an oath of office. From 1802 to 1859, postal laws required carriers to be free white persons.

Regular schedules made stage carriers easy targets for thieves, including occasional stage robbing by armed and masked bandits. Their usual objective was the express box, but it is possible that while they were at it passengers also became targets of convenience (passenger travel on a stage coach from and to Salmon Creek was 10 cents a mile or a \$3 gold piece).

Benjamin Franklin was the first Postmaster General and the present Postal Service continues in an unbroken line from the system planned and place in operation.

