

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Some Random Sketches of Ruth Burke

by Nancy T. Conzett - 2010

“Ask Ruth Burke!” people told me when I moved up here in the early 80s and began asking questions about local history. When I called her, she immediately asked me to her house and once there that afternoon, as I told her about my own early childhood experiences at Salmon Creek and subsequent long friendship with Rose Gaffney, we chatted much longer than either of us had planned and continued doing so for a good many years.

I admired the accuracy of Ruth’s knowledge of historical facts (she’d wince and glare at my theory that “history is only what you’ve heard and what you pass on”). Her references may have been ancient, but they were also written by authors (very often her own father) much closer to events than the newspaper articles often popularly cited as “fact.” Until late in her long life, she could nail down her answers with names, dates and facts surrounding not only the subject in question, but its perimeter.



From the very beginning days of the Rancho Bodega Historical Society, Ruth was a fixture each week, sitting at the table at our meeting room, cutting, pasting, and filing away pages of items pertaining to this area and all the while she’d weave whole chapters of local lore for our benefit.

Ruth could be charming, gracious, kind; she was not without a sense of humor – but she had very definite standards relating to behavior and values which did not always coincide with the century in which she lived. And she was not one to mince words – nowhere was this made more apparent than during the Tomales Regional History Center event when she was honored for the publication of her memoirs. She was seated as the guest of honor in front of the area from which the usual speeches droned. She was, by then, of an advanced age, so when someone asked her a question; she started a bit and explained patiently, “Speak Up! I’m deaf in one ear and can’t hear a damned thing out of the other.”

I’ll recall a few more things about Ruth, as well as her husband Ralph: They ALWAYS arrived early for events -- usually by a half hour. He kept the best wood and kindling piles I have ever seen; absolute works of art! She would often call me with the description of a bird she’d seen that had been unfamiliar to her, asking my opinion as to its type.

Her descriptions were certainly creative but I’d eventually reach a decision and then she could never find the bird in her field guide because it was so old that names had been changed and I’d have to tell her once again why “They” did that. She was in her late 80s when she tired of walking past the carcass of a deer that had been victim to a car’s superior heft on Tannery Road. She hauled it across and over a barbed wire fence into the meadow. “Don’t tell Ralph,” she said. He showed me the untidy trip in his leather glove where his chainsaw had skidded: “Don’t tell Ruthie,” he said.

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RUTH BURKE

Ruth McCaughey Burke - Local Historian Dies at Age 93 by Alice Bell-Eastus, niece (2010) H. C. McCaughey and his wife, Elsie Tibbetts McCaughey, represented two of Bodega's earliest and most prominent families. They had already been blessed with the birth of two daughters, but on April 16, 1916, a third daughter, Ruth Elizabeth, entered their growing family. Through the following years, the family was to be further increased by the births of a son and another daughter – five McCaughey children in all and among the, Ruth came to carve her own unique position in the family.

In 1921, Ruth began her formal education at potter School, the same two-room school most recently seen in Alfred Hitchcock's locally filmed movie, "The Birds." During her eight years in potter, Ruth proved to be a very bright, energetic and athletic child, and one could see a bit of independence coming through a developing personality. She graduated from potter in 1929.

The next step in her education was Tomales High School, where she performed with honors. Graduating in 1933, Ruth went on to attend Santa Rosa Jr. College and Luther Burbank Business College in Santa Rosa. By 1937, she was ready to make the leap out into the world of independence. She had studied well and had developed into a very attractive skilled young lady. With her newly earned independence and 'wealth', she headed almost immediately for the nicer stores in town for clothes she loved and wore well.

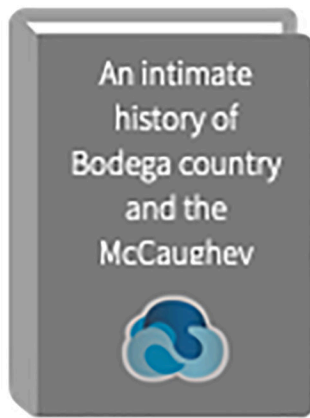
Ruth's first job was with the Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Company in Santa Rosa. She was eventually transferred to the San Rafael facility, where she met Anthony Joseph D'Arcy (Joe), a construction foreman with the San Rafael office. Ruth and Joe were married on June 4, 1941 in Reno, Nevada. Ruth was soon to retire from the telephone company, but Joe continued working for them. In the 1950s, Joe retired and they moved to Bodega to build their retirement home out on Tannery Creek Road in Joy Woods, a home surrounded by 20 beautiful wooded acres and which they lovingly names La Escondido.

Much of Ruth's and Joe's time together in later years was spent developing their home, but they also enjoyed traveling, having made several extended trips including at least two accompanied by Ruth's parents, and Joe was an avid sports fan. On October 7, 1962, Joe died, being the third loved Ruth had lost in two years, the others being her father, JH. C. McCaughey in 1960 and her sister, Miriam, in 1961. Though saddened, her strong nature helped her meet the challenges she faced.

Ruth's father, Howard, had been an avid historian, focusing primarily on local history, the history of the family and how the two intermingled. He had written several articles including some for the Santa Rosa Press Democrat and the Knave section of the Oakland tribune. He left boxes and binders full of notes and information he had gathered or written. It was from these notes and articles that Ruth's interest in the area's and family historical connections grew, and she went to working 'putting it all together', a task she tackled lovingly and with a dedication that crowned her accomplishment with success shortly before her death.

A couple of years after Joe's death, Ruth met Ralph Burke, who worked for Wonder Bread and delivered their products to McCaughey Bros. General Merchandise in Bodega. Ralph and Ruth were married on October 14,





An intimate history of Bodega country and the McCaughey family

Author: [Burke, Ruth McCaughey.](#)

by [Ruth McCaughey Burke](#) ; incorporating the writings of [Howard McCaughey.](#)

Personal Author: [Burke, Ruth McCaughey.](#)

Publication Information: Tomales, CA : Tomales

1964. Ralph loved 'the woods' as much as Ruth did, and happily worked with her at continuing the progress that had been made in developing La Escondida. They also enjoyed traveling and did much of it. Through this they met many new friends and saw many new and interesting places. Their traveling experience was enhanced considerably by the lovely motor home they'd purchased. Mexico was often one of their destinations as they would meet with other 'travel buddies.'

La Escondida had become a lovely a friendly place to visit and the Burkes often entertained visitors. Ruth had always enjoyed cooking and was an excellent cook, much to the pleasure of her guests. On August 2, 2002, however, Ruth again faced the challenge of having to go on with her life alone, as Ralph died of lung cancer. Though 86 years old herself at that time, she again rose to the challenge of picking up and moving on. The force that gave her the strength, will and determination was her dedication to finish her 'book' before her time on earth was declared over and her efforts were well rewarded.

In 2007, her work was completed, turned over to the Tomales Regional History Center for editing and publication and in June, the center held a reception to honor Ruth and introduce the her two-volume history, An Intimate History of Bodega Country and the McCaughey Family by Ruth McCaughey Burke.

With her book safely published and preserved, Ruth settled into old age and with the help of family and the loving support of two devoted care-givers, she realized her wish to live out her life in her beloved la Escondida home. Ruth died quietly on April 5, 2010, just 11 days short of her 94th birthday. She is survived by her sister, Roberta McCaughey, a niece, Alice Bell-Eastus, four grand children and two grand nephews.

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