

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Early Settlers of Bodega Township

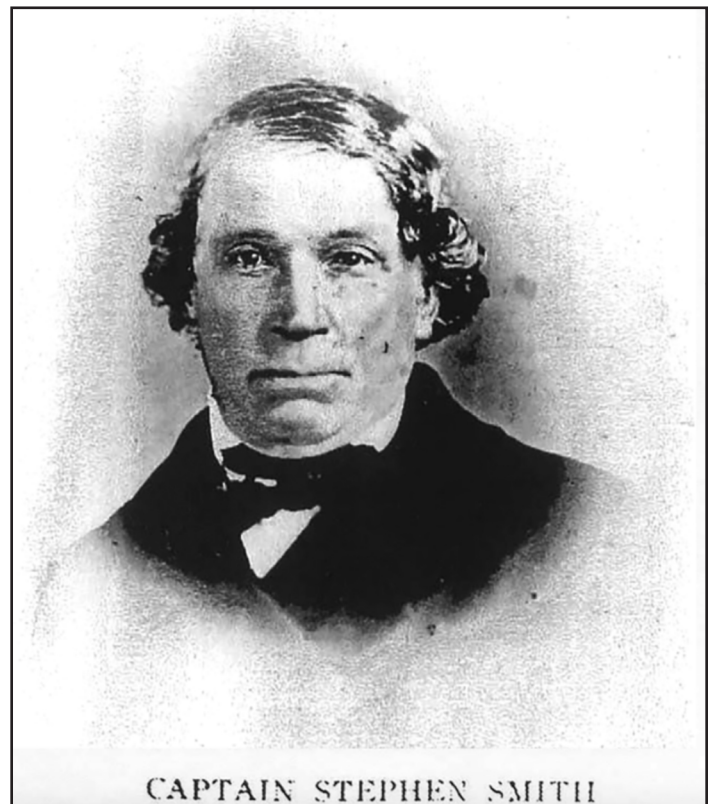
by Lois W. Weeth - 2009

Having grown up in Los Angeles County, in 1939 I went to UC Davis. While there, my Dad took me to nearby Woodland to show me the graves of two great grandparents, part of the Gold rush group. They were farmers who helped feed the miners. Talking to other Aggie students I learned about various other areas in California where their families lived. As a native Californian, I was curious about my home state. When I moved to Bodega Bay in 1981, the local history drew my interest because the influences are so unique:

Until the fall of 1775, the Miwok and Pomo Indians with a rich culture and heritage lived peacefully in the coastal mountains and valleys of what we now call Sonoma County. Their lifestyle revolved around the seasons, hunting and gathering from the land and harvesting the sea and rivers. Little changed over hundreds of generations (literally thousands of years) until the first white sails were spotted off the coast and exploration of the Pacific Coast attracted the Spanish, the Russians, English, and later the Americans. The Bodega Bay area offered very attractive options to the white settlers. There was land for grazing, dairying, and crops; timber for lumber, fishing for food. The Mexican land grants were influences in ownership and mapping of territory. The Russians held land at Fort Ross and inland to Sebastopol, to raise crops to feed their settlement in Sitka. With the help of local and Aleutian Indians, they were heavily involved in the fur trade and in sea otter skins.

Even before moving here, I had an interest in research gathering information about my ancestors, building my family tree. When starting to use a computer for this research, most of the records were in books, on microfiche, on film, and housed in various libraries. As these records were transcribed to computer format, I became acquainted with databases as a resource for research. Since there were many areas of information not yet available to searching, I embarked on a project to help other researchers by building such a database of early settlers of Bodega Township. If a person is researching specific family groups, indexed lists and references are helpful. For genealogical documentation, public records such as census and vital records are accepted as mostly accurate. These are federal, state, or county records and are open to the public. Using Excel for the database, a chart was built in my computer, indexed by surnames, showing where those individuals appear in census records, listing the page numbers of the census in the column for each census year.

In 1843 Captain Stephen Smith was awarded a Mexican land grant named Rancho Bodega, comprised of eight leagues, approximately 35,200 acres of land. He established a home and headquarters buildings near the present day town of Bodega.



CAPTAIN STEPHEN SMITH

EARLY SETTLERS IN THE BODEGA TOWNSHIP

California became part of the United States through a treaty with Mexico in 1848. The gold rush hastened its adoption as the 31st State in 1850. Even though governmental procedures were still being developed, counties defined, county seats determined and roads improved, it was decided to include the new state in the 1850 census data taking. The boundary of Bodega township was composed of Rancho Bodega and part of Estero Americana land grants. This was one of the four named Sonoma County townships at the time. Sparsely populated Bodega Township was re-apportioned in later years until there were finally 14 townships in 1867. In the 1850 census records there were no landmarks or named locations for determining a framework for census records. So census information would start with a group of existing families, such as the Smith family because there was a post office on the Smith Ranch, then expanded to the neighbors, until some families were recognized as being in other areas of Sonoma County.

Subsequent census information was collected in 1860, 1870, 1880, and 1890. Most of the national records for the 1890 census were destroyed in a fire in Washington D.C.; in Sonoma County, these names were reconstructed from the Great Register of Voters and from other resources. In the early census years, the legal status of women was not specified. The federal census was not considered legal documentation of a woman's marital status and the term "housekeeper" was used for adult women in the occupation column. When the term 'housekeeper' was applied and the surname matched that of the head of the household, she could be a wife, mother, daughter, niece, granddaughter, or a paid housekeeper. To determine whether the woman was married or not required access to public records or church records for marriage documentation. In the 1860 U. S. Census, a total of 884 persons were listed for Bodega Township, Smith's Ranch Post Office; by 1870 that figure rose to 1,415.

Today, my entire project of referencing these settler names is a work in progress with the eventual goal of making all the names available on a CD. The CD would include an introduction and explanation of the project, a timeline of California's history, census records for 1850, 1860, 1870, 1890 for Bodega Township, as well as an index of settlers (by surname), and other reference material. However, parts of this information are already complete in paper form and as of this writing available in Rancho Bodega Historical Society (RBHS) files.

Lois W. Weeth currently resides in Pacific Grove. She is a native Californian, a botanist, and was a Bodega Bay resident from 1981 to 2005. An avid historian, she has served as secretary of RBHS.

SCHEDULE 1.—Free Inhabitants in Bodega Township, in the County of Sonoma, State of California enumerated by me, on the 24th day of July, 1860. Job Cook

Post Office Smith's Ranch, 1860 US Census: Bodega Township: Smith Family

Dwelling-house numbered in the order of visitation.	Family numbered in the order of visitation.	The name of every person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1860, was in this family.	Decedents.			Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each person, male and female, over 15 years of age.	Value or Return Comp.		Place of Birth, Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	Age	Sex	Color	Whether deaf and dumb, blind, idiot, insane, idiot, idiot, or insane.
			Age	Sex	Color		Value of Real Estate.	Value of Personal Estate.					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
926	576	Richard Curtis	34	m		Gentleman	26000	10000	Virginia				
		Margaret " "	29	F					Texas				
		Mary " "	2	F					California				
		Anna J.	3	F					" "				
		Stephen M. Smith	16	m		at College			" "				
		Margaret J.	14	F		" " "			" "				