

# RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## St. Teresa of Avila Church in Bodega

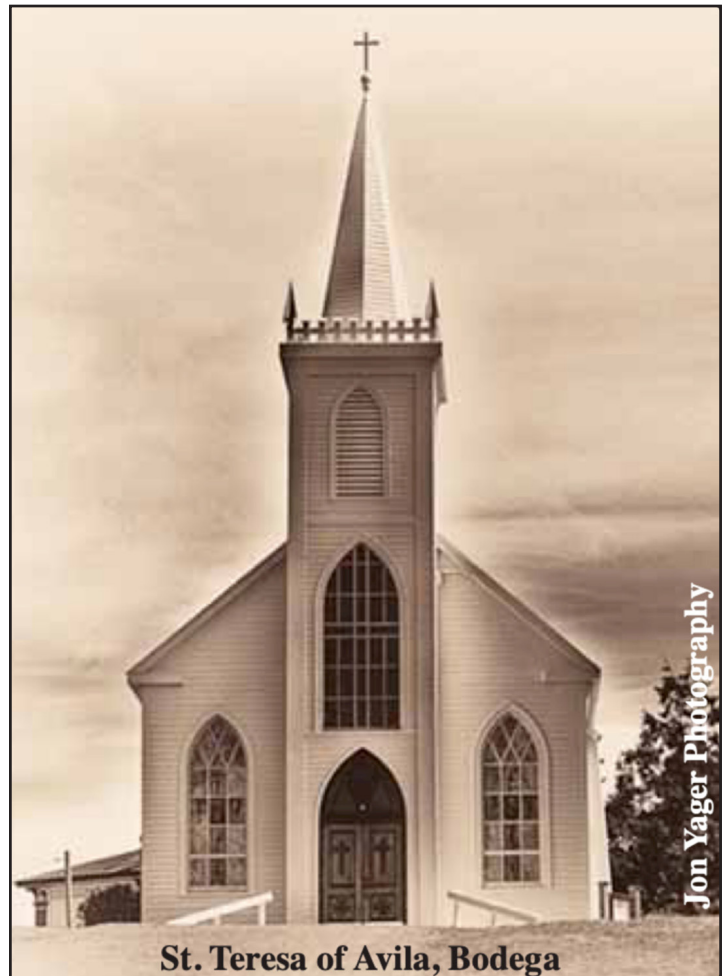
*by Ruth McCaughey Burke - 2010*

The most imposing structure in the town of Bodega is, and was from the very beginning, the Roman Catholic Church of St. Teresa. Before the church was built, Catholic services were held on the Bodega Rancho. Mrs. Torres, Captain Smith's mother-in-law, was a very religious woman. She had an unexcelled opportunity to carry the gospel to the heathen Indians on the Rancho. This she proceeded to do with true missionary zeal and with considerable success. Intermittently, clergymen came from the missions at San Francisco and Sonoma to celebrate mass, to baptize, and to bury both natives and whites as the occasion arose.

Captain Smith died in 1855. Some time later, Tyler Curtis either drove the Indians off the rancho, as some say, or they left voluntarily. Naturally, the congregation dwindled. Whether it was due to this or to the fact that their rancho chapel had been destroyed by fire, religious services were held thereafter in the large front room of the adobe dwelling. In one of the deep window embrasures, an altar was set up along with a large crucifix, the family heirloom later given to St. Teresa's, and other accouterments that Señora Torres had used in the rancho chapel. Here, for a time, services were continued until other events changed the picture.

The town of Bodega Corners was growing rapidly. Archbishop Joseph Sadoc Alemany, Spanish-born and first Archbishop of the diocese of the Roman Catholic Church of San Francisco, who had administered confirmation around Bodega, on August 4, 1853, sent a young French-Italian priest into the coast district to look over the prospects for founding a parish. His name was Father Louis Rossi. He laid the groundwork for a parish with headquarters at Tomales. His parish included Tomales, Bodega, Healdsburg, Santa Rosa and vicinity, when he was appointed pastor on March 8, 1860. He would stay on occasion at the Jasper O'Farrell home in Freestone and travel throughout his parish by horse and buggy.

Under Father Rossi's direction, construction of St. Teresa's church in Bodega was begun in 1859, according to some, although the deed to the lot from John O'Farrell (Jasper's brother) to the Archbishop was dated November 20, 1860. Archbishop Alemany says in his diary, December 16, 1860: "I visited the town of Bodega, but the church there erected is not blessed," so we know from this statement that the church was standing in 1860.



**St. Teresa of Avila, Bodega**

Jon Yager Photography

## ST. TERESA OF AVILA IN BODEGA

On June 2, 1861 or 1862, he visited Bodega again, and under the name of St. Teresa de Avila, patron saint of Jasper O'Farrell's sister, dedicated the church. It was canonically established as a mission of Tomales in 1867. The O'Farrells not only donated the land, they subscribed \$200 in cash and some say a large part of the building material.

It is said he also gave the land for the cemetery in Bodega where he is buried. The oldest date that I find of a burial is 1860. O'Farrell evidently told the church they could use the area for a cemetery. I do not know of any deed from O'Farrell, but there is one from J. C. Stump to Archbishop Alemany, dated June 4, 1869 – two acres of land (\$100). Details can be found in Book 28 of Deeds, page 483, in the county's Recorder's office. Stump bought from Benjamin Belloc, who had bought it from O'Farrell.



As Jasper was an engineer by profession, it is more than likely he also prepared the plans for the church. It has strong resemblances to the old churches of New England. Mrs. Tyler Curtis, the former Mrs. Stephen Smith, gave \$200 and the carved 16th century crucifix above mentioned. Thomas Roche, brother-in-law of O'Farrell, gave \$100. Many others gave money, also some supplied labor and teams for hauling and grading. Fund raising festivals were held, and in one instance, a cow was donated on which 300 tickets at \$1 each were sold. Final cost of the structure was around \$3,000. Besides the crucifix, there are other historical church furnishings of interest in St. Teresa's: the sacred vessels, the baptismal set used in administering the sacraments, the statues, the old iron bell, the old vestments, a pair of pewter candelabra and an old engraving or print of St. Teresa.

Before the church was finished, services were held in various places in the neighborhood. They met three times in "the school house," but, which schoolhouse, I don't know. The Presbyterians used the Gulch School House, and also Watson School. Maybe the Catholics did also. The first school in town was built in 1866, as far as we know. They also met twice in a hotel and once in the blacksmith shop, of all places!

In 1872, a plan to increase the capacity of the church to accommodate a growing membership was carried out. The building was sawed in half, the rear portion moved back and a new section placed in the center. A steeple, surmounted by a cross was added.

February 18, 1876: "On Friday evening, March 17th, an entertainment will be given by the Bodega Dramatic Club at the school house for the benefit of the Catholic Church at Bodega Corners, on which occasion will be performed the comedies 'A Gentleman from Ireland' and 'Perfection' or 'The Maid of Munster.' As an interlude there will be performed a favorite olio (medley) of national airs and an oration. At the close of the performance, free music will be furnished for social dancing."

In 1886 a new cast iron bell was acquired for the enlarged church July 24, 1886: "The 'Blessing' of the new bell for the Catholic Church at Bodega last Sunday was a beautiful and highly interesting ceremony performed by the Rev. John Baptist McNally of W. Oakland, who was delegated by his Grace Archbishop Riordan, to officiate in his Grace's absence, consecration taking place after high mass which was celebrated

by the Rev. Father Baden, of Buffalo, New York, who is a most excellent singer. He sang the mass in a very impressive manner which was listened to by the largest congregation ever assembled in Bodega, there being no less than six or seven hundred people present (They surely could not have all congregated in the church!)

“Father McNally preached a grand and forcible sermon, which drew tears from many of his congregation. The Pastor, Rev. Edward Slavin, under whose direction the shapely bell was decorated, deserved great credit for the artistic manner in which it was done.



“The bell, which weighed 850 pounds, and together with the frame 1,150 pounds, was placed on the left side of the altar during the ceremony, and on the shoulders of the frame were placed two, as tastefully arranged bouquets as is not often seen, and upon them were two cards, one with the inscription ‘Tomales Literary and Dramatic Society’ and the other ‘Saint Brendan’s Society, Tomales’. The two bouquets were the tasteful work of the Misses Nolan of Tomales and Bagley of San Francisco. Several other beautiful bouquets were also around the bell, presented by a bevy of young ladies too numerous to mention. “After the ceremony, the two bouquets were presented to the sponsors of the bell by Mr. M. L. Murphy of Tomales, in two brief speeches from the steps of the church on behalf of both Societies, he being a member of both.

“After Mr. Murphy, Father McNally also delivered an address from the porch to the sponsors of the bell, Mr. Nathaniel Keefe and Mrs. James Furlong (Anne O’Brien), and in his speech he expressed the hope that the young members of St. Brendan’s Society would grow up to be as grand an ornament to the Society as every flower in the bouquets had been upon the beautiful bell.

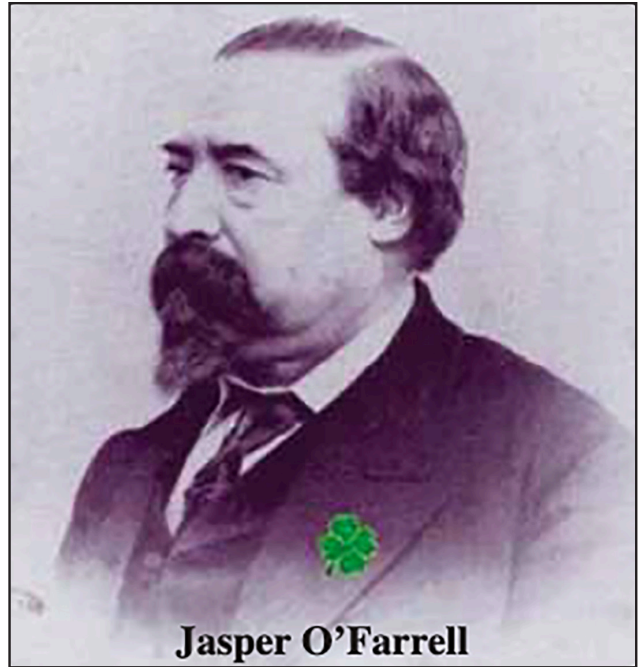
“Then, twelve of the most muscular men were chosen to carry the bell from the altar to the door of the church, and the large gothic window in the tower of the church was taken out. The hoisting apparatus had already been placed in the tower by Peter Morrisy whose good judgment was sufficient guarantee that everything was safe and secure. The ropes and pulleys were straightened out by M. L. Murphy and the hauling line stretched out along the walk where all could lend a hand in raising the bell. Mr. Morrisy announced from the tower that everything was ready and Mr. Murphy gave the word ‘hoist away.’ Gently then, the bell moved slowly and gracefully to the top of the tower and soon the largest and most magnificent bell in Sonoma County was safely hanging pendant in its frame. Then the bell was rung and tolled, after which the assemblage dispersed; both young and old feeling that they had witnessed a very impressive ceremony, and such an one as many of them would never have the opportunity of seeing again. ‘L’ Tomales, July 19th.”

However, sorry to say, it was soon discovered that the bell was too heavy for the tower in the church, so it was taken down, without ceremony, I might add, and installed in a newly constructed bell tower at the rear corner of the property. Many, many years later when the tower became weakened with age and threatened to collapse whenever the bell was rung, it was dismantled. The bell traveled from churchyard to town then to several different ranches in the area where at times it was used to summon workers from the fields to their meals. In the 1950s, it was returned to the churchyard and hung on a stout scaffold in back of the church. It now hangs in front of the church by the roadside for all to see, put there in 1968.

Over the years, various repairs have been made to the church building, paid for by the parishioners. From the Press Democrat, January 31, 1911: “Bodega, January 30. The re-decoration of St. Teresa’s Church

here was progressing favorably until the recent rains made postponement imperative. When completed, the edifice will possess an exceptionally attractive appearance as possible inside and out. Hughes Bros. of San Francisco have the work in hand and Frank Hughes, a member of the firm, assisted by a force of decorators and painters is making the transformation. Wm. Manning of San Francisco is doing the fresco work and George Kee (local), at the same place, is re-gilding and graining. A new fence, gravel walks and other repairs is being superintended by James Furlong who takes great pride in doing the job in good shape.”

During the pastorate of one of the early priests, Father John Rogers, a new altar was acquired and some inside statuary added. In later years, further repairs included replacing the original windows with wine colored stained glass; ornamental tie rods put through the side across the inside to protect against possible earthquake damage, roof coverings renewed; the foundations looked after, the whole structure occasionally painted inside and out, and heating arrangements installed – three floor furnaces in place of a pot bellied wood stove.



**Jasper O'Farrell**

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June 12, 1955, marked the end of a year-long program of restoration of St. Teresa's church and on this "Father's Day" a celebration took place. First, a thanksgiving mass was held, then a fun festival and chicken barbeque on the P.G. Albin ranch down Salmon Creek Road about two miles west of town. The whole community of Bodega and surrounding towns, Catholic and Protestant alike, had rallied to save the church from being demolished for a new building (Heaven forbid!). Father Lawrence E. Pio was priest of the parish at this time. He was largely instrumental in starting the restoration. My father, Howard C. McCaughey, and Father Pio were on radio station KSRO, Santa Rosa, publicizing it. Card parties and other fund raising events took place during the year. The annual Harvest Festival, sponsored by the whole parish, donated its proceeds to the Bodega church that year. One of our local girls, Elaine Bordessa, daughter of Peter and Joanna Bordessa, was chosen Queen of the festival. Altogether \$5,800 was subscribed.

While Father served the church here he tried to institute as an annual observance on Good Friday, a religious procession around the outside of the building as is traditional in Italy. I believe it was observed once only, in 1955. At the head of the procession was carried the 16th century Spanish crucifix given to St. Teresa's by Mrs. Tyler Curtis in 1860. Girls carrying framed pictures of the Stations of the Cross, altar boys bearing lighted candles, and a guard of honor composed of members of the Santa Rosa Knights of Columbus were part of the procession.

Repairs made at this time to the church building included new concrete foundations, heavily reinforced concrete abutments to hold the sagging walls plumb, new steel sash and new stained glass for the windows. Seven stained glass memorial windows were presented in memory of Guiliana and Antonio Bordessa, Lodovico and Sabina Del Curto, Guglielmo and Madalena Valena, Michael and Mary McKay, Pietro and Adele Albin, and Mose Battistessa. The cross on top of the steeple was given a new coat of gold paint, the first since Lawrence Neles climbed up on a tall ladder one windy day many years ago to cause his neighbors to gasp at his daring.

Another restoration on a grand scale took place from 1967 to 1974, its goal being the maintaining of the beauty and simplicity of the original church. At this time, replicas of the old carved front doors were put in place, brass candelabra replaced the lighting fixtures inside. They were selected by parishioner Mae Furlong who remembered the originals. A new ball and cross was made for the steeple. It was gold leafed.

Floor furnaces were replaced with hot water pipes. The entire church was painted. Most of this work was done by Gary Santer, Bodega carpenter. St. Teresa's church has been detached from the Archdiocese of San Francisco to become part of the new Diocese of Santa Rosa, in accordance with a division made in 1963 by counties. A beautiful book, entitled "Of Towers and Trees and Towering Men," a pictorial history of the Christian communities of the Sonoma Coast, text by Don Nivens and photos by Steve Crouch, was sold to help cover the expenses of this final restoration.

The commanding position that the church occupies, as well as the excellently proportioned form it presents, instantly attracts the eye and admiration of the traveler coming from the east as he tops the hill a mile from town. This beautiful church building was designated as a California State Historic Landmark in October of 1967, and dedicated as such on June 2, 1968, 107 years to the date of its first dedication. Present day members of the church are still keeping careful watch over the building as of 1993. Services are held every Sunday morning. A chicken barbeque was held every 'Fathers' Day' for many years at Fern Grove picnic grounds near Bodega to raise money for its maintenance. The last picnic was held in 1983, I believe. - Adapted from the two-volume *An Intimate History of Bodega Country and McCaughey Family* by Ruth McCaughey Burke with permission from the Tomales Regional History Center which holds the copyright.

Editor's Note: When the 1870 census was taken, the largest group of foreign born citizens listed in Sonoma County were Irish, and second in number were Germans. The Irish were both Catholic and Protestant and there were active protestant churches in these regions. In Bodega, the Presbyterian Church stood just south of the old Potter School. Both populations got along well together. As a large percentage of these Irish were Catholics, some of the churches discovered they were too small to handle the increase in population. St. Theresa's Church was one of these that weren't big enough to handle the population increase. During the 1880s Swiss Italians from the Canton of Ticino, Switzerland, and Italians, principally from Lombardy, Italy began to add to the Catholic population of Bodega and this flow of people continued into the early 1900s.

The Stained Glass Windows: The stained glass windows at St. Teresa's Church have had their own history with replacements, additions, and dedications. When the church was split in half to be expanded, additional windows were needed for the new middle section and were made to match what was already there and not donated by anyone. There was a time when the church was in severe disrepair – in fact during the 1940s and part of the 1950's there was a movement afoot to dismantle the old church based on the argument that the building was no longer safe for the public to use – age and neglect had taken its toll. The outcome of this debate was good, for many turned out to rescue St. Teresa's Church – describing her as an historic landmark in the region. Two of the leaders for saving the church were Emil Valena and John Bianchi. They worked diligently convincing people. Actual work to save the church started in 1954 and included in the items that needed attention were the windows – they leaked during the rainy season. This brought about the idea of memorial windows and individual families or persons could donate a window as a memorial. At first, seven windows were replaced; then over a period of a few years more were installed. By the beginning of the 1960 decade, 12 windows had been replaced. It wasn't until January of 1991 that the last two windows in the main body of the church were completed. This brings the total number of windows dedicated to local people to 14.

The new dedicated windows did well for a few years until some "unknowns" decided it was fun to use their BB guns to shoot holes in the glass. Father Thomas Devereaux was pastor at the time, and he decided the windows should be protected first; then see what could be done about the holes. The outcome was that the windows were covered with a heavy transparent plastic so the light could pass through but not the BB shots. The holes were repaired by a Santa Rosa company known as Venerable Classics (still in business: see [www.venerableclassics.com](http://www.venerableclassics.com)) and in 1988 the two artisans who did the amazing work were Lynn Waddington and Janet Connolly.

They devised a way to pour the liquid glass, tinted one of 24 shades of brown, purple or green to match the windows – into the bullet holes and seal it so it could harden for a week. After the glass was hardened, they climbed ladders to reach the repaired areas and with brushes they added the swirls needed to blend the old and the new. - Adrianus G. Boudewyn

Rev. Louis (Luigi) Angelo Rossi: Some background information about Father Rossi seems appropriate at this point, for he was the first RC pastor in this region. He was born June 14, 1817, and his name was Abramo De Rossi. He was born in Ferrara, Italy, which is slightly southwest of the Po River where it enters the Adriatic Sea. His parents were Graziado Nissim Rossi, and Anna (Finzi) Rossie. In local histories he is often recorded as French-Italian. However, his parents were Italian Jews and young Abramo Rossi was reared in the Jewish faith. At the age of 19, he converted to the Roman Catholic faith and was baptized on November 19, 1836, and took the name of Luigi Angelo Rossi. Father Rossi wrote his memoirs during his final years: *Six Years on the West Coast of America 1856-1862* Louis Rossi, translated and annotated by W. Victor Wortley, 1983 (p. 10 in the introduction has family details). Father Rossi, due to illness, returned to Europe in 1862 and it was while serving at a church in Paris that he died on September 9, 1871. - Courtesy of the late Tom Chapman

Ansel Adams: Acclaimed photographer Ansel Adams in 1953 made St. Teresa's Church famously prominent in a photograph entitled "Church and Road, Bodega, California. Two of his books, *Examples: The Making of 40 Photographs* and *The Camera*, describe his thinking at the time:

"The Bodega Church expresses aesthetic qualities that I believe have been captured in this photograph. The image reflects my original visualization...an object as simple and chaste as this church, demands the utmost simplicity of composition and isolation...the white church should dominate, yet it must not be harsh or lacking in texture."

For the Record: Mounted on the brick work under the bell of St. Teresa's Church is a metal plaque about the church's origin. It was placed there by the State Department of Parks and Recreation in cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church and the Sonoma County Parks and Recreation Department, June 7, 1968. However, according to historian Tom Chapman the only correct information on the plaque is that Father Louis Rossi was appointed pastor for this region on March 8, 1860. Other than that, the plaque contains several errors. First the church was not constructed in 1859. The building activities began in May of 1860 and the first building was completed in October of 1860. Second, who did the construction work was never been recorded in any of the early histories of Sonoma County. The New England story became popular in the later 1960s, but no documentation has ever been provided. Third, Jasper O'Farrell never had a Spanish Land Grant, but a Mexican land grant. The only deed in Sonoma County Records concerning the donation of the church lot and the church that was already built on that lot is the one which John O'Farrell (Jasper's brother) provided – and that should be accepted as official. Jasper O'Farrell is also said to have given the land for the cemetery in Bodega – again, not true. Those two acres were sold to Archbishop Alemany on June 4, 1869 by John and Bridget Stump and this can be found in the Sonoma County Record (land price \$100). Fourth, the dedication date is off by one year; it should be June 2, 1862. Backup for the 1862 date was provided to Helen Fulton in 1986 by Jeffrey M. Burns, then in charge of the Chancery Archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco.

