

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bodega Creamery

This was a working Creamery before 1900, receiving and shipping dairy products to San Francisco. It was incorporated on July 12, 1912 and continued as such until 1916, when it merged with the Bodega Creamery and then together they were called The Bodega Cooperative Creamery.

During Prohibition, there were tales of profitable bootlegging business from 1919 to 1933 when Canadian Whiskey was brought up under the building and repackaged in milk cans for shipment down to San Francisco. Gun battles in the Bay were to have occurred, but the operation succeeded until the repeal of Prohibition in 1933. The Press Democrat remembered in a 1999 issue that in 1926, rum runners and prohibition agents, with machine guns on one side and automatic pistols on the other, fought it out on the beach near Bodega Bay. The smugglers, apparently believing they were being attacked by hijackers, escaped to sea under cover of machine gun fire. The three agents retreated safely to their car, although one agent's hat had been pierced by bullets.

As dairy and bootlegging profits diminished, the business resorted to shipping fish and crabmeat to San Francisco. The row of three houses to the south of the main building was known as Chinaman's row. There was also a public dock on the south side of the building.

In 1936, Howard McCaughey, Bodega merchant and caretaker of the political needs of the Sonoma Coast, wrote to Congressman Clarence F. Lea as follows: "The southeastern storms of this winter have changed the whole aspect at the mouth of the bay, where there was formerly deep water, there is now none, these storms have cut off the end of the sand spit and thrown sand right across the channel. You will readily see from this what a great handicap this condition is to the fishing boats whose operators make their living out of Bodega Bay." McCaughey explained how Bodega Bay went from a commercial shipping port where potatoes, calves, butter and passengers embarked from San Francisco daily to little more than a mud puddle.

As McCaughey continued his plight in 1940, "It is now possible to walk across from the sand spit (Doran Park) to the Gaffney Ranch (Horseshoe Cove) and the Smith Bros. were unable to get out with their trawlers yesterday at high tide. Even the tides will not run out as usual. The first thing we know, we will have a lake there." All the pleas to Congress might have been in vain had not the prospect of war loomed hurrying the project along. Finally, in May 1941, Congressman Lea wrote to McCaughey that "in the interest of national Defense" the appropriation for the Army Engineers to move the project along had been approved and

work was to begin in Bodega Bay. The Engineers let out a contract to Piombo Corporation and work began. As dredging and jetty construction progressed, the Ways was built on the north side of the original barn and the business now turned to ship repair. Out beyond the dock, there are remnants of railroad tracks that were instrumental in pulling the ships in for repair. There was also a crude shack built over the Ways that was used for fisherman's quarters.

In the 1960s when Hitchcock was here to film "The Birds", the property was purchased by Karl Rhode-Hamel, a prominent architect and art dealer in San Francisco. His wife, Irene was a noted member of the Association of San Francisco Potters. They finished the second floor of the building for their living quarters and added the garage for her kiln and studio space. The main floor was then used as a gallery. Karl was also the leader who sparked the effort to start the Fisherman's Festival modeled after the Discovery Days that were once held in October. When the Rhode-Hamels passed away in the 1980's, the property was left to George and Nancy Foot, local realtors. It was then converted to its present day use of three apartments. This information was gleaned from reports on file from the Press Democrat, Ruth Burke, John Cook and George and Nancy Foot. --Mary Jane Hutchinson