

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bodega Head

The windswept Bodega Head: a park, a campground, two marinas, a world class marine research facility, all made accessible by the road PG&E built in the early 1960s. Life on the Head for the early Russian otter hunters and the subsequent European and American ranchers and farmers revolved around hunting, fishing, tending livestock, and growing food. Modern conveniences were few. The full force of the weather was always at hand. And for thousands of years before that, Native Americans lived in small villages on the Head, where shell fish, birds, rabbit, deer and fresh water springs were plentiful.

During the Russian presence in Bodega Bay from 1811 to 1841, the Russians grew crops on the Head, most likely in the open field across the street from West Shore Park. Thus, the field was ready to use when Captain Stephen Smith arrived in Bodega Bay in 1843 to claim Rancho Bodega. In 1850, John Keyes and his partner, last name of Noble, grew potatoes, possibly as squatters, and then later that year Captain Smith leased the 200 acre field to Edward Cheney (1826-1889). Cheney grew wheat and oats.

Gold fever hit Bodega Bay in 1856 with the report of a gold mine on the Head. Nothing came of the mine because it didn't produce in paying quantities. The 1855 death of Captain Stephen Smith and the 1856 marriage of his widow, Manuela, to Tyler Curtis, brought change to Rancho Bodega. Curtis subdivided Rancho Bodega, creating on the Bodega Head three large parcels that became the Kee Ranch, the Gaffney Ranch, and the Campbell Ranch. The 3 ranches stayed intact until 1959 when PG&E moved in.

Kee Ranch: The 379.41 acre northern-most parcel on the Head was sold in 1862 by Tyler Curtis to Despard Taylor for \$1,200. After a couple more transfers, it was sold in 1869 to James Kee (1836-1913) and Catherine Kee (1835 - 1874) for \$4,000 (talk about inflation! Over 300% in 7 years!).

The Kee Ranch on the Head was the second property for the Kee Family. They first purchased a 412 acre ranch on Coleman Valley Road, then the ranch on the Head, then another 275 acres next door to their Coleman Valley Road property. On these 1000 acres the Kee Family raised dairy cows and grew Bodega Red potatoes. William Smith (father of the Smith Brothers) and his family lived at and worked on the Kee Bodega Head Ranch for a while in the late 1800s, before buying land from the Doran Family on what is now Smith Brothers Road.

Robert Kee (1872 - 1959), one of James and Catherine's sons, inherited the ranch on the Head in 1914. He rented the ranch to many different families, including the Ricci family from

1921 to 1926 and to Doris and Guy Mann from 1942 to 1944. Robert Kee never married. He operated his own dairy farm on the Coleman Valley Road properties and he was one of the organizers of the Bay Creamery in 1912. The Bay Creamery was short lived though, closing in 1916 and consolidating with the Bodega Creamery.

The 1877 Atlas shows a house on the Kee property close to the bay. The house was moved to its present location at the top of Bay Flat Road sometime before the 1940s, and in the 1990s it was lovingly restored. When Robert Kee died in 1959, the Kee Ranch was inherited by his nephew George Kee. George built a new house close to the old farm house in 1963. When George died in 1968 the Kee Ranch was divided among his 3 children, including Florence Roppolo (1917 - 2006). Florence sold a portion of the ranch to the Bodega Bay PUD in 1976 for the wells for our water system. A good portion of the Kee Ranch is now a part of the State Park. A small parcel holds the restored 1800's ranch house and the newer 1963 house.

Located on the southeastern corner of the Kee Ranch was a Native American burial/shell mound three hundred feet long, one hundred forty feet wide, and fifteen feet high, called the "Kee Mound." A Coast Miwok village by the Kee Mound was called "Kili". The Kee Mound was first excavated in 1947 by Hardin Chenoweth (1885 - 1957), a local rancher, sawmill owner, and amateur archeologist. Hardin and Robert Kee were neighbors on Irish Hill (so called because of all the Irish folk who lived on the hill encompassed by Coleman Valley Road). In 1949, UC Berkeley archeologist Frank Fenenga and a team of 10 students excavated the Kee Mound. Working for 3 months, they retrieved 4,000 artifacts which are now housed at the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology. From the photo of the excavation, it is clear that Fenenga and his team uncovered only a small portion of the artifacts in the Kee Mound. The excavations were objected to by local Native Americans. Tragically, the Kee Mound was destroyed in 1951. Robert Kee sold the contents of the mound to a landscaping company, ostensibly because he wanted the land cleared.

Just south of the Kee Mound, on the Gaffney Ranch, is another shell mound. That mound is associated with a village called "Tokau." Artifacts found at Tokau indicate an occupation from between 100 and 500 years ago. The artifacts from the Kee Mound were much older, 900 to 2500 or more years old, indicating that the mound had not been used for a long time. A third shell mound on the Head, at Mussel Point, is perhaps the oldest, at more than 2,000 years. (See "A Radiocarbon Chronology of Hunter-Gatherer Occupation from Bodega Bay, California, USA" (Univ. of Arizona, 2005), by Michael A Kennedy, et al.) One of the Ricci sons who lived on the Kee Ranch in the 1920's recalled seeing two Native American processions going out to the Head while he lived there, so perhaps the Head continued to be the final resting place for Native Americans up to 90 years ago.

Gaffney Ranch: The 407.85 acre middle parcel was sold in 1864 to Miles Gaffney (1828 - 1902) and Catherine Gaffney (1836 - 1911). Rose Gaffney came to Bodega Bay around 1911, a 16 year old immigrant from Poland. She worked as a maid at the Gaffney Ranch and

soon married Bill Gaffney, son of Miles and Catherine. The home that Rose and Bill raised their daughter in was converted from a Russian barn at the former Port Rumiantsev. This house was the location of the Brenner Ranch in "The Birds," where the housing facilities for the Bodega Marine Lab are now. Horseshoe Cove on the Gaffney Ranch is a beautiful beach, sheltered from the winds and waves of the ocean. It was a favorite spot for Gaffney family picnics and for abalone poachers willing to risk the threat of Rose Gaffney's baseball bat.

After Bill died in 1941, Rose moved to a house she and Bill owned in Salmon Creek. In the late 1940s she rented out the ranch at the Head to the Mann family, who were sheep ranchers. Rose Gaffney's collection of Indian artifacts is renowned in Bodega Bay and beyond. Starting with twenty display cases, 2' x 3' each, lined with arrowheads, obsidian knives, charm stones, net sinkers, shell beads, Russian flint, and more, the collection also included baskets and other items. A map put together by the Northwestern California Archeological Society shows Rose's collection sites were on all sides of the bay, an interesting fact that reflects active occupation of the bay for millennia.

Rose died in 1974 at age 79. Her collection was sold in 1980 to her friend and fellow collector, vintner August Sebastiani. Subsequently the collection was broken apart, and the stone artifacts are now owned by collector Richard N. Corrow of Apache Junction, AZ. I don't know where the rest of the collection is. Richard Corrow's online publication, "The Bodega Bay Anthology of the Hardy Chenoweth and Rose Gaffney Collections", provides photos and details of the artifacts collected by Rose and Hardy and the UC Berkeley archeologists. Rose's true legacy lies in the fight she put up to resist PG&E's efforts in the late 1950s and early 60s to build a nuclear power plant at Campbell Cove on the Head. While Rose lost the eminent domain case that forced her to sell the ranch to PG&E, State Parks and UC, she remained an active and vocal force for the opposition to the nuclear power plant until PG&E gave up in 1964.

Campbell Ranch: The 160 acre lower parcel on the Head is a bit of a mystery as to its origins and operations. The 1877 Atlas shows it owned by "Mrs. John Campbell." The 1898 Atlas shows it owned by "Mary Campbell." We know that the Campbell's daughter, Theresa, married Christian Warneke (1832 - 1907), who had a 600 acre ranch on Bay Hill Road, and that the Campbell Ranch was leased to Mary Ann and William Gaughey from 1872 to 1906.

The Campbell Ranch was passed down to Theresa and Christian's daughter, Adelaide, who married Gerry Stroh. The Strohs sold the ranch to PG&E in 1959 after tragedy struck the family and they could not afford the fight to protect the land that had been in her family for so long.

There is so much more to tell about Bodega Head: its geology, its ecology, "The Birds", "The Battle" with PG&E, what it has become today. But I wanted this article to focus on the people who lived and worked on the Head, and I hope you felt, for a moment, what life was like for them, not so long ago.-- Robin Rudderow 2016