

FROM THE ARCHIVES by Robin Rudderow

Another Historical Society in Bodega Bay?

If you are interested in the history of shipwrecks and remains of the old “dog hole ports” I know you will be excited and interested to hear that a new historical society is forming in Bodega Bay. The Redwood Coast landscape is dotted with evidence of how the lumber trade adapted to the rugged marine environment allowing the business to flourish from the mid-19th century into the 20th century.

The rugged coast had few roads and no long distance railroads so the most cost effective way to move lumber was by sea. Lumbering operations established sawmills, including Rancho Bodega’s original land grant holder, Captain Steven Smith, along the shoreline at the few places where it was possible to temporarily anchor a vessel. These “doghole ports,” so named because they were so small and exposed that mariners joked they were barely large enough for a dog to turn around, became centers of economic activity.

Enterprising lumbermen rigged a network of chutes and cables extending from the bluffs down into small coves allowing lumber to be transferred from shore to waiting ship. A fleet of small, maneuverable schooners and eventually steamers carried the timber to markets as close as San Francisco and as distant as the Eastern Seaboard, Australia and Asia. The trade left not only place names, but the archaeological remains of the infrastructure and in some cases those vessels unlucky enough to be lost on these shores.

