

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bodega Bay's Legacy of Fishing, Resilience and Community

Needing to raise money, in 1958 for their newly built volunteer fire house, the people of Bodega Bay began the annual festival first called "Discovery Day". Held in October, the festival honored the



memory of Lieutenant Juan de Bodega y Quadra who, sailing down the coast from Sitka, Alaska in his tiny sloop the Sonora, thought he had found San Francisco Bay, which had not yet been entered by water. He learned, on October 3, 1775 that instead, he had discovered a smaller, but also beautiful harbor on what is now the Bodega Bay Coast. Discovery Day featured carnival rides, including a Ferris Wheel and a Merry-Go-Round, at Doran Park; the Old Adobe Antique Car Club came out to the airfield; the Tomales High School band performed; and Saturday night there was a Dime-A-Dip Potluck supper at the Grange, followed by fireworks and a dance, featuring music from the likes of Gene Carter's five-piece orchestra, a San Francisco combo. The highlight of Discovery Day was the boat parade around the inner harbor.

At the first "Discovery Days" celebration, some 17 festively decorated boats participated in the parade. The parade was appropriately led by Eddie, William, and Steve Smith, members from the local Smith Brothers family, who began the commercial fishing industry in Bodega Bay in the 1920s. As the beautifully decorated boats made their way

around the harbor, they passed a stand where they were blessed in a short religious ceremony. Local fisherwoman Mary Darling spearheaded Discovery Day's committee until she became pregnant with her first child, and thus the event was discontinued after the 1964 festival.

The festival resumed in 1974 under the auspices of the Bodega Bay Chamber of Commerce. The date was moved to the beginning of the salmon season in recognition of Bodega Bay's hard working fishing industry, and the name was changed to the "Fisherman's Festival".

The Volunteer Fire Department continued to be a festival beneficiary, and in 1975 the community formed its own ambulance service, the "Bodega Bay Area Rescue", so it too received money from Fish Fest (as the festival is called by locals).



FISHERMAN'S FESTIVAL

The theme for each coming year was chosen by the Fisherman's Auxiliary* at its Golden Hook award ceremony in November. Themes have included "Mariner's Mardi Gras" (1981), "Adios El Nino" (1984), "Salmon-Chanted Evening" (1992), and the somewhat controversial "Golden Hooker's on Parade" (1996).

For over twenty years, the festivals were spread throughout the town, with the newly renovated Yacht Club the center of much activity, and fish and chips served at the Grange. There were foot races, kite flying contests, a Saturday night dance at the Grange, a juried art show, a "White Whale sale," and a crafts fair. Clown Lagoon was for children, where they played games, got their faces painted, and looked at cuddly animals.

During the early years of Fish Fest, there was the "bathtub regatta" with "bathtubs" of all varieties, from contraptions made of milk cartons to real bathtubs. Later, that event became the "Wooden Boat Challenge", where groups have a limited amount of time to build a boat with hand tools and materials provided by organizers, which they then have to float and race. Throughout, the Coast Guard has stood by, as not all vessels were sea-worthy.

As with Discovery Day, the highlight of Fish Fest was, and still is, the Boat Parade and Blessing of the Fleet. Decorated fishing boats sail around the bay and out of the harbor to the outer bay off Doran Park. There, a bugler plays Taps as a wreath is cast into the sea to honor those who died wrestling a



FISHERMAN'S FESTIVAL



living from the sea. Then the boat carrying the clergy stations itself at the entrance to the harbor so each boat can be individually blessed as it sails back in.

For decades, vessels decorated in the theme of the year paraded past a reviewing stand of judges, and prizes were awarded to the best decorated boats.

Music has always been a part of Fish Fest, starting with high school bands and the Sonoma County Sheriff's Bagpipe Band. By 2002, there was a full line up of music both days across a variety of genres, such as Celtic music, folk-rock, jazz, county rock, swing, and blues.

1997 was the first year that Fish Fest charged an admission fee, \$3. Discouraged that in 1996 they had grossed \$60,000 but only had \$17,000 left to distribute, festival organizers saw an admission fee as a money maker. Park rangers were pleased with the plan to charge admission, as the park would receive a percentage of ticket sales, and alcohol sales and consumption were easier to monitor when the area is fenced. Thereafter, all festival activities were consolidated to West Side Park, except the art show continued at the Yacht Club for several more years. The admission fees dramatically increased net proceeds, and the community was happy.

The 25 year alliance between the Bodega Bay Chamber of Commerce and Fish Fest organizers ended in 2000 due to liability insurance and tax concerns. Fish Fest then formed its own non-profit organization. The net proceeds of Fish Fest have always stayed in the community. As the amount of money to distribute has grown, so have the number of local non-profits seeking money.

“Over time, it’s kind of turned into community fun,” said Josh Perucchi, a Petaluma Firefighter. “We still celebrate commercial fishermen, but it’s really become a major community event to support local non-profits. Last year (2024), we made about \$90,000, which we distributed to about 20 different organizations overall.”

Volunteers are the heart and sole of Fish Fest. Each year dozens of committee chair persons oversee the set up and supplying of Fish Fest, and hundreds of volunteers show up on the days of the event to sell tickets, fry fish, paint faces, pick up trash ... whatever it takes to put on a great party and help the Bodega Bay community prosper.

Be sure to come celebrate this year’s Annual Fisherman’s Festival, on May 3rd & 4th, 2025 in Bodega Bay! (www.bbfishfest.org)

*Editor’s note: Fisherman’s auxiliaries were in most ports on the coast, from Mexican border to Alaska. An auxiliary group known as the *Fishermen’s Wives Coalition* later became the *Fishing Women’s Coalition* to include women that weren’t wives. The Coalition held annual meetings in rotating port locations. *Andrea Granahan published the Bodega Bay Navigator, a publication that still exists today as the Coast Navigator* She reported on the meetings because it almost always led to legislation. They were big on safety and stayed on top of any laws that could affect safety.

With good reason, at one meeting a new president had to be elected because unfortunately the current one drowned on her Alaskan fishing boat. Fishing is dangerous work. - *Robin Rudderow* ■

BODEGA BAY GRANGE

Protecting Bodega Bay's Fisherman A Legacy of Fishermen, Resilience and Community

In the US Congress, a fearless sense of righteousness took over Congress. There were blacklists. Good people lost their jobs. Criminal trials and fear gripped repressed the voice of people accused of crimes against freedom. It was the McCarthy Era (1950-1954).

Overall, times in the U.S. were good and optimistic. In 1945, the United States had "won" the war with the greatest weapon ever created. Our young men were thought of as heroes of the free world. For the most part the fast-growing population of young families were happy and looking to the future, thrilled with the joy of children, opportunities for higher education for GI's, new homes and plenty of good jobs advancing a lifetime of opportunities. Cities and metropolitan areas thrived.

Rural America with its small population, had a small voice made mightier by The Grange, a national organization formed in 1867 by farmers to advance agricultural methods, promote the social and economic needs of farmers, and advocate for their interests against harmful practices by big business.

With the rife of McCarthyism threatening, fishermen of Bodega Bay found their voice, and were able to unite to protect fishermen's as "farmers of the sea" as told by the Carpenters, the Wedels, and the Ames to Andrea Granahan, Bodega Bay's original journalist. McCarthy's Congressional Committee outlawed fishermen's co-ops as Communist because they bargained collectively, giving a strong voice against big business monopolistic interests. Groups that came together were outlawed.

They came together in 1952 to form Bodega Bay's Grange, adopting a charter that formed our active community culture that still stands today for healthy oceans, healthy food, and healthy livelihoods. Here is their story.

Bodega Bay's Grange boasted 115 charter members (probably the largest in the State) had its beginning in February 7, 1952.

Only a handful of people attended this first meeting at Louie's Hall, and listened to George E. Turkington, District Deputy, explain the Grange and how this community would benefit in belonging to this great organization. Mr. Turkington said that because the Grange is usually associated with agriculture, local fishermen were skeptical of the advantages of throwing in their lot with the farmers.

The next meeting was also poorly attended. That was February 14. Mr. Turkington and Mrs. Lena Zankich, proprietress of Louie's Café, decided to make a third attempt at organization the following Thursday, February 21. Mrs. Zankich enlisted the aid of several women to bring refreshments, and George R. Hagens, State Park Ranger, volunteered to post a sign in the Bay store and to send personal invitations to everyone that held a post office box. Mr. Turkington was busy in the meantime also. He lined up Masters and past Masters and members active in other Granges to come to Bodega Bay to convince the predominantly fisherman population that they would be passing up a good thing by not joining the County family of Granges. At this meeting, February 21,

the Bodega Bay Grange, chapter 777, was born. Forty-two charter members signed. Mrs. Vivian Turkington, County Home Economics Chairman, explained the Home Economics Club to the assembly, and told of the active part women play in the Grange. Also present were Charles Knight, past Master of Ojai, Rolly Jones, past Pomona Master, Lou Hepworth, Sebastopol Master, and Tom Moyle, Cotati Master.



BODEGA BAY GRANGE

The following Thursday, February 28, there was another organizational meeting, but it was at the next meeting, March 6, that it was clear to everyone that Bodega Bay had decided to welcome the Grange wholeheartedly. A record crowd of local people and visitors filled the hall and a total of 71 members were signed. Eight of the 16 officers were elected at this meeting. They were: Roy Fraught, Master; Dusty Roades, Overseer, Mrs. Clarence Steen, Lecturer, Paul Wedel, Steward, Emil Valena, Assistant Steward, Mrs. Vernon Ginrich, Chaplain, Glenice Carpenter, Treasurer, Shirley Ames, Secretary. The other eight officers were elected the following Thursday, March 13. They are: Ronald Hunter, Gatekeeper, Mrs. Paul Wedel, Pomona, Mrs. Leonard Carpenter, Ceres, Mrs. Emil Valena, Flora, Mrs. Clara Owens, Lady Assistant Steward. The following men were elected to the Executive Board: Normal Paulsen, for three years; Robert Manni, for two years; Bert Merwin, for one year. Mrs. George Hellwig, postmistress, was elected musician. Since the Charter had not yet been received, more people were allowed to sign on as Charter Members. This brought the total to 91.

Thursday March 20 the new members were obligated and the officers were installed in an impressive ceremony by L. A. Johnson, County Installing Officer, and his drill team. Most of the Sonoma County Granges were represented at this meeting, as well as members from Napa and Ojai Granges. The Charter Members added up to 115, and George Turkington conceded that it "was the largest Charter membership in the County and probably the largest in the State".

The officers were a little uncertain and bewildered with the Grange ritual, but as one member pointed out, "we are all in this together, and if we laugh, we are laughing with you, not at you".

Today, join us as we continue...

Support Bodega Bay's Community

Today's fishermen in Bodega Bay, have evolved to become "Stewards of the Sea" prominently led by President Dick Ogg, of the Fisherman's Marketing Association. http://ranchobodega.org/dick_ogg.pdf

The Grange still meets once a month at 6 pm on the first Thursday of each month as a community organization. Staunch supporters of Bodega Bay, they serve in diverse ways, holding events such as town halls, and as a critical resource for disaster relief, community events (remember Cabaret!) and now, RBHS proudly introduces Bodega Bay's first Variety Show! You can support the ever-evolving Grange by becoming a supporting member of the Grange or simply having a great time! You are invited! ■

**BODEGA BAY
VARIETY SHOW
&
GRANGE FUNDRAISER**

Saturday, April 12, 2025
Bodega Bay Grange Hall
1370 Bodega Ave., Bodega Bay CA

1:00 p.m.
matinee show

7:00 p.m.
evening show

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TICKETS: <https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/bodega-bay-variety-show-4125403>

BODEGA BAY COMMUNITY

Sonoma County Fire District Launches New Fire Boat “Integrity” to Serve Sonoma Coast

Bodega Bay-The Sonoma County Fire District is excited to announce the official launch of its new state-of-the-art fire boat, *Integrity*, which will proudly serve the Sonoma Coast. This vital addition to the District’s emergency response capabilities was ceremonially introduced and launched into service on Monday, December 16, 2024, at 11:30 AM in Bodega Bay.


Designed to enhance marine safety, firefighting, and rescue operations, *Integrity* is equipped with advanced navigation and water pumping systems, ensuring rapid and effective response to fires, medical emergencies, and hazardous situations along Sonoma County’s picturesque coastline.

Deputy Fire Chief Ron Busch emphasized the significance of this milestone: "*Integrity* embodies our commitment to safeguarding our community and coastline. With this vessel, we can provide a higher level of service, especially to those who live, work, and recreate along our beautiful but rugged coast."

The name *Integrity* reflects the values upheld by the District—Honesty, Respect, Integrity and dedication to the communities it serves. For more information, contact: Karen Hancock Community Outreach Specialist/Public Information Officer, Sonoma County Fire District, 707-230-1339, Email: khancock@sonomacountyfd.org



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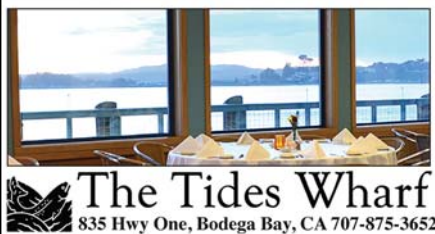
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STORIES & ARTIFACTS

If you have artifacts or stories of Bodega Bay History to contribute to the Rancho Bodega Historical Society, please contact Robin Rudderow, our Archivist at RBHS@bodegamoon.net

BECOME A MEMBER

Enjoy the history of Rancho Bodega. Please join us. Subscribe for a year and receive the RBHS newsletters, \$15 individual (\$20 family). Support the stories of Bodega Bay.
http://www.ranchobodega.org/membership_form.pdf

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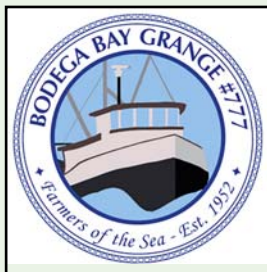
Bodega Bay Fisherman’s Festival



The highlight of Fish Fest still is, the Boat Parade and Blessing of the Fleet. Decorated fishing boats sail around the bay.

Bodega Bay Variety Show

The Bodega Bay Grange was founded by local fishermen in 1952. The fishermen found their voice, their story, and were able to unite to protect fishermen as “farmers of the sea”.



SPRING EVENTS

BODEGA BAY GRANGE VARIETY SHOW Bodega Bay Grange Hall, Saturday, April 12, 1pm & 7pm, 1370 Bodega Avenue Bodega Bay. The Bodega Bay Grange was founded by local fishermen in 1952. Come see amazing music, magic, circus and other variety acts. This show is a fundraiser for the BB Grange. Tickets: <https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/bodega-bay-variety-show-4125403>

THE COAST MIWOK TRIBE A Living Tribe, History and Land Stewardship, Sunday Aug 27th, 2-3 pm, Tomales Regional History Center, 26701 Highway One, Tomales CA. FREE The Coast Miwok people, now known as the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, which also represents the Southern Pomo Indians have a rich and vibrant history. Explore the tribe’s enduring presence as a living community, their cultural history and their efforts in land stewardship in Marin and South Sonoma Counties.

BODEGA BAY FISHERMAN’S FESTIVAL Saturday & Sunday, May 3rd & May 4th 10 am-5 pm, Westside Park, West Shore Road. Featuring Live Music, Entertainment, Wine Tasting, Beer Booth, Local Cuisine Food Booths, Art Show, Crafts Fair Exhibits and Children’s Events. Tickets available at (www.bbfishfest.org)

BODEGA BAY FARMERS MARKET Bodega Bay Community Center, 2255 CA-1, Sun May 25th, 10 AM–2 PM. Until the end of October. Offering the freshest, locally grown produce specializing in organic, heirloom and gourmet varieties of fruits and vegetables, beef, goat, duck, pork, poultry and fish.

SCIENCE UNCORKED Gourmet au Bay, 1412 Bay Flat Rd, Bodega Bay, Thursday’s 6-7 pm., April 24th “Preserving the local flora of Bodega Head: The Peter G. Connors Herbarium at Bodega Marine Reserve”, May 8th “One with the Wild - Sonoma County Wildlife Rescue and its Support Programs”, May 22nd “Mama didn’t raise no guppy! Transgenerational effects of seagrasses under ocean warming”. FREE

For more local events, visit our website. <<http://www.ranchobodega.org/events.html>>