

## II. HISTORICAL RESOURCES

### Introduction

It is a goal of the Coastal Plan to protect Sonoma County's historic resources as a reminder of past eras. The coastal area has a rich and varied history. Many of the activities of the 1700's and 1800's remain important today: fishing, farming and timber harvesting. Lessons of the past are echoed in several sections of the Coastal Plan. Biological resources are fragile and must be protected or they may be destroyed, as the Russians destroyed the sea otter population in the 1800's. Timber must be managed on a sustained yield basis or the timber industry will be eliminated, just as many lumber boom towns vanished in the past. Transportation planning can have a profound effect on land use patterns, as the location of the railroad did in the 1870's.

This chapter contains a brief history of Sonoma County's coastal area, a description of the County's existing zoning ordinance provisions designed to protect historic resources, an inventory of coastal historic resources, and recommendations to accomplish historic resource protection.

### History

The history of Sonoma County's coastal area is one of Native Americans, Spanish explorers, Russian settlers, Mexican land grants, and Americans, who established Statehood after the Bear Flag Revolt.

The natural communities along the coast are divided by the Russian River into two main regions. North, the land is forested and mountainous, the coastline wild and rock-bound without good harbors. South of the Russian River, wilder beaches begin to appear and Bodega Bay, a major harbor, reaches toward Tomales Bay. The coastal prairies give easy access to Bodega Bay.

The Native Americans followed the two environmental divisions. The Pomo Indians lived on the Russian River and northern coast. The Coast Miwok lived south of the River at Bodega Bay; their region included Southern Sonoma County and Marin County. The Miwok controlled a valuable trade route which reached to the Sacramento Valley. The coastal Indians utilized the salmon filled creeks, abundant sea food, and over 100 varieties of birds. Sea products like clam shell beads were the monetary systems for many tribes.

On October 3, 1775, Lieutenant Don Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra sailed his ship, the Sonora, to sheltered Anchorage. The log of this voyage, which named the bay for the young Lieutenant "Bodega Bay," was to reach not only the world courts of Madrid, London and Paris, but also the cold palaces of St. Petersburg.

The Russians, in 1809, came south from Alaska, seeking furs and a food source. The colonizing group of Russians and Aleutian fur hunters built warehouses on Bodega Head and a village at the upper reaches of Salmon Creek. They located the village near what is now the town of Bodega. They also built a defensible, strong fort twenty miles to the north and called it Fort Ross. The Russian American Fur Company prospered for thirty years by harvesting the sea for seal and otter furs. After the destruction of the sea otter, the Russians began to fail financially and sold to Captain John Sutter in 1841..

The intrusions of the Russians forced the Spanish and Mexican governments to occupy the North Bay. General Vallejo, in particular, blocked Russian expansion toward warmer valleys by granting land grants to those who would settle near the Russians. When the Russians left in 1841, the Mexican government quickly monopolized the coastal access by giving land grants from Estero de San Antonio to the Gualala River.

In 1841, a Yankee ship captain named Stephen Smith was in Monterey. The Mexicans, eyeing the encroaching westward seeking American trapper Sutter, were anxious to resettle the area vacated by the Russians, and suggested that Smith become a Mexican citizen and carve out such land as he chose.

By 1844, Captain Smith was granted Bodega Bay and a huge rancho. The New England sea captain became a Mexican citizen, and moved to Bodega, where he began a saw mill.

### **The Early American Communities**

The Gold Rush brought population and statehood to California. New settlers sought free land that did not require irrigation. Squatters broke up the great ranchos, as in the Bodega Squatters War of 1859. The route of the North Pacific Coast Railroad, completed in 1877, and the location of lumber activity and mills, shaped the course of development in western Sonoma County. The first center of population was the southern coast near present day Marin County. By 1851, Valley Ford, on the coastal trail, became a community. In the 1870's it was to have a railroad, two lodges and two churches.

The Captain Smith Ranch was renamed Bodega Corners by 1853. There the coastal roads met and the town became the center of several coastal valleys. In the 1870's it was the largest town. The New England appearing town had three stores, one hotel and three lodges. St. Theresa's church, built by Yankee shipbuilders, served many local Irish. The Potter School, once the "finest in the county" had dances, social gatherings and a Dramatic Society formed in 1874. The township flourished with agriculture, lumber, and particularly with potatoes. The narrow gauge railroad came about in 1876. It bypassed the town and Bodega began to decline. The mills left following the lumber. The soil was already exhausted.

Bodega Bay had several periods of interest and decline. Long popular with explorers like Vancouver, American whalers, smugglers and fishermen, it was developed as a port by Captain Smith. Silting of the harbor destroyed commercial expansion. As the railway bypassed the bay, tourism rescued the harbor from oblivion.

Salmon Creek by 1900 was the model for communities that lived only for vacationing tourists. The State Park system began to expand north to the Russian River as more people visited the beaches.

The scenic Russian River had several settlements near the ocean. First was a Russian farm near Bridgehaven. The lumber rush brought mills; the Duncan brothers moved mills frequently. In 1877 the railroad had reached the Russian River and a decision needed to be made about the location of the terminus. The site of the town of Duncans Mills was the result of a conference between the officers of the North Pacific Coast Railroad and Mr. A. Duncan. In the spring of 1877, Mr. Duncan moved his mill to its present location, and the railroad constructed a bridge across the Russian River, just below the mill, and erected the necessary station buildings.

North of the Russian River once stood a first growth redwood forest. The moving lumber boom supported several coastal mills that required hazardous loading roadsteads called "dog-holes." When the mills moved on, the towns died. The turbulent, hard-drinking lumberjacks were forced out.

In 1873, Fort Ross was purchased by George W. Call, whose family maintained the property for generations. Call's ranch exported lumber, dairy products, hides, beef, and abalone on his schooner. A hotel was opened in the old Russian fort in 1878. By 1906 the fort was sold for a State Park.

Timber Cove was named in the 1850's as a lumber shipping point. Salt Point as early as 1853 had a saw mill. Stewart's Point was founded in 1857 and remains a village that has maintained original buildings and families. Stewart's Point had seven schooners shipwrecked nearby. In the early 1920's the Richardson

family still obtained most of its groceries, hardware and equipment by boat. The last boat to load at Stewart's point was the steamer Vanguard in 1929.

In the 1870's the Kashia Indians survived in three villages. By 1914 a reservation was granted for a permanent residence. North on a coastal plain before the Gualala River, livestock ranchers held large properties which were later purchased for The Sea Ranch.

### **Economic Development**

The Americans successfully developed, in the 1800's, various economic activities that still form the basis for communities today.

Lumber and lumber products started commercially when Captain Smith brought the first stream saw mill in the 1840's. The mills followed a rapidly dwindling virgin forest. In order to get the timber products from the mills to market, both railroads and sail and steam schooners were used. There were landings at Del Mar and Black Point in The Sea Ranch, Stewart's Point, Fisk Mill, Salt Point, Walsh's Landing (now Ocean Cove), Stillwater south of the existing Stillwater Cove, Timber Cove, Fort Ross, Russian Gulch, Rules Landing, and Duncans Landing. The great redwoods were almost logged by the 1880's. At Stewart's Point there were three or four chutes at different times, but by 1885 there was only one chute in operation. All remaining landings ceased operation in the 1920's. Forest products and second growth mills continued until 1930. In the 1930's the railroads, created for timber, abandoned the coastal regions.

Agriculture in various forms was the major economic interest replacing lumber. In the southern county the first boom was the potato boom which peaked in 1854. Wheat and stock were also thriving. Overgrazing and soil erosion forced the farmers to dairy products.

Dairying, thanks to the Swiss in the 1870's and later Italians, transformed the area. The railroads, and later better roads, could bring butter, cheese and fish to San Francisco. The boom caused by the railroad brought dairy herds all over the coast.

Sportsmen first, and later tourists, took advantage of the area opened by the railroads. A triangular route from San Francisco meant a trip could be made in one day to the Russian River from San Francisco. By 1894, Inverness, the model ocean community in Marin County, brought attention to the coast. By 1900, wealthy Santa Rosans bought summer homes at Bodega Bay. With roads like Highway 1 built in the 1920's, the tourist industry flourished. In the 1930's, the Russian River area was popular, offering name bands and summer camps. More people began to build vacation cabins on the coast. The people from the Sacramento Valley discovered the bay and cool coast and they began to plan annual visits. Fishing was a year round business, and the local tourists would visit for a day. Bodega Bay was dredged in 1943, opening the bay at last for pleasure boats and commercial fishing. The fishing industry grew rapidly, and Bodega Bay became a fishing village. The tourist industry boomed after World War II and is today a major activity the full length of Sonoma County's coastline.

### **Historic Preservation Ordinance**

A special Historic District (HD) Combining Zone was established on August 21, 1975. The purpose of the Historic District Zone is to protect those structures, sites and areas that are reminders of past eras, events and persons important in local, state, or national history, or which provide significant examples of architectural styles of the past, or which are unique and irreplaceable assets to the County and its communities.

The Sonoma County Landmarks Commission, consisting of one representative from each of the five supervisorial districts, was created to implement the ordinance. The Commission has been given the

responsibility of reviewing all projects involving exterior remodeling of buildings designated as landmarks, buildings listed in the Historic Preservation Program of the Sonoma County General Plan, all structures within a Historic District, and other structures as requested by the Board of Supervisors, the Planning Commission or the Planning Department staff.

Two types of Historic Districts have been created. One designation is for an individual structure or an integrated group of structures on a single lot or lots having a special historical, architectural or aesthetic interest or value. Individual Historic Districts designated are called county landmarks. Sonoma County has more than 60 designated landmarks. An area wide historic district can be designated for an area having special historical, architectural or aesthetic interest or value. Sonoma County has two overall Historic Districts. Individual sites and districts are rezoned to add Historic District combining zoning only after recommended by the Landmarks Commission and approved by the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors.

The ordinance states that no zoning permit authorizing alterations (including demolition) in the exterior of a structure within the boundaries of a Historic District and no zoning permits authorizing construction of a new building within the boundaries of a Historic District shall be granted unless approval has been granted by the County Landmarks Commission. In all cases where the request for a zoning permit involves demolition alone, however, the Landmarks Commission shall take action on such request within six months of the date of application for the permit. It is not intended by this ordinance to grant the Landmarks Commission jurisdiction over zoning or use permit matters other than in the area of architectural and site plan review.

### **Historic Resource Inventory**

A comprehensive inventory of historic resources has been conducted. The purpose of the inventory is to identify resources so that they can be protected. Historic sites worthy of landmark status will be rezoned to add the HD combining zone. Other individual sites will be referred to the County Landmarks Commission for their recommendations on zoning permits requested. Historic areas will be established officially as historic districts. In this manner, all coastal historic resources will be afforded adequate protection.

The inventory revealed that a large number of historic sites remain on the coast (See Appendix A). Of the 89 individual sites identified, 38 are likely to be worthy of landmark status.

Four potential historic districts were identified as follows:

**Stewarts Point.** This community contains a collection of very good, simple, early Greek Revival styles. The buildings include the store, hotel, one-room school, and a series of barns and outbuildings which together illustrate a very strong sense of a nineteenth century coastal town.

**Plantation.** This community was once a vacation spot built around a sag pond, a topographic feature related to fault zones. The remaining features are the Druid's Hall, the barn, and some small cottages.

**Fort Ross.** The Fort has been well documented by other sources and is already protected and owned by the State of California as a State Historic Park.

**Duncans Mills.** This community is primarily a lumbering community which was connected with shipping points in the San Francisco Bay by means of a narrow-gauge railroad system which serviced communities such as Occidental, Freestone, Valley Ford, Tomales, and Point Reyes Station. All of the buildings in the Duncans Mills area represent the early origins of the town, and

the new buildings which have been built have picked up that character to maintain a strong sense of place.

### **Recommendations**

1. Establish boundaries and rezone as Historic Districts the areas of Stewarts Point, Plantation, Fort Ross and Duncans Mills during the Implementation Stage.
2. In addition to those individual sites incorporated into the four historic districts named in Recommendation 1, determine which of the historic resource sites identified in Appendix A are eligible for county landmark status and rezone to HD the worthy sites during the Implementation Stage.
3. Refer all coastal permits within the Stewarts Point, Plantation, Fort Ross, and Duncans Mills areas to the Sonoma County Landmarks Commission for their comments and recommendations.
4. Refer all coastal permits on historic resource sites listed in the historic resources inventory to the Sonoma County Landmarks Commission for their comments and recommendations.

