

CHEDA RANCH
Golden Gate National Recreation Area
5051 Sir Francis Drake Boulevard
Olema vicinity
Marin County
California

HABS CA-2831
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CHEDA RANCH

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- Location:** 5051 Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, 3.1 Miles east of Olema, California
- Significance:** Cheda Ranch, established in 1866, was one of the first dairy ranches along the north bank of Lagunitas Creek in West Marin County. West Marin County became the most important dairy region in California by the mid-1860s, and Cheda Ranch was one of a number of ranches that supplied butter and cheese to a growing San Francisco. The ranch has been determined eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Olema Valley-Lagunitas Loop Ranches historic district, pending final submittal to the Keeper.
- Description:** The 920-acre Cheda Ranch is set on Bolinas Ridge. The property incorporates several secondary ridges on the hill slopes east side of Lagunitas Creek, which is part of the larger Bolinas Ridge. Outlying ranch lands consist principally of grass pasture, with bands of riparian vegetation (live oak and California bay) lining the drainages and north-facing slopes within the ranch. The ranch pastures continue to be used to graze beef cattle and horses. The ranch core is located at the end of a half-mile-long two-track access road that exits from the north side of Sir Francis Drake Highway. The unpaved access road, constructed on the hill slope above Cheda Creek, leads to the building cluster of the ranch core, which occupies the relatively level area at the confluence of several drainages. Buildings include a main house, a bunkhouse, a Grade A dairy, a tack shed, two milking barns, a calf shed, a blacksmith shop, garage, a large hay barn and a greenhouse.
- History:** Swiss immigrants Gaudenzio Cheda and Carlo Solari founded the 932-acre Cheda Ranch in 1866, in the booming dairy ranching area of West Marin County, California. Cheda had worked in the gold fields in Trinity County and was, along with Solari, one the first Swiss immigrants to arrive in Marin County. Solari apparently sold out his share to Cheda within a few years.
- Dairying in West Marin County began in 1857 when the Steele brothers established a dairy farm on the Point Reyes Peninsula. They demonstrated that dairying could be a profitable business in the area, and other settlers soon established farms on the grassy hillsides of West Marin County. The area's proximity to San Francisco via Tomales Bay and the ocean gave it an advantage over other dairy producing regions. Many gold miners in California gave up prospecting and turned to the

more lucrative fields of farming and ranching, occupations in which they were occupied before trying their luck in the gold fields. In 1850, only 2,000 Californians engaged in agriculture, while 60,000 identified as miners. Ten years later, almost 36,000 state residents worked in farming or ranching, and by 1870, almost 48,000 worked in these fields. By that year, the value of the state's agricultural products surpassed the value of the state's mined products. San Francisco's population had grown from almost 57,000 to over 150,000 in 1870, and demand for dairy products such as butter and cheese ran high. By 1866, the year that Cheda and Solari bought Cheda Ranch, Marin County ranches (most of which were near Point Reyes) produced more butter than any other county in California.

By 1870, Cheda owned 85 cows and produced 8,500 pounds of butter. He returned to Switzerland with his family, but came back to Marin County by 1878, settling in San Rafael where he bought a hay, grain, wool, and coal business. Cheda retained the ranch, but leased it to a variety of tenant dairymen, and the Cheda family never returned to the ranch. Cheda died in 1889, leaving the ranch to his wife Antonia. In 1901, Antonia deeded the property to the Cheda Estate Company, a corporation established to handle the family real estate assets. Soon after the turn of the century the large original Cheda home burned and was replaced with a more modest bungalow. The family leased the ranch to various dairymen. Armin Truttman and Don McIsaac bought the milk contract in 1965 but moved operations off the ranch. The ranch was slated for development in the 1970s, but in 1982, but the federal government purchased the ranch for inclusion in Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The recreation area, in 2010, leases the land to rancher Ted McIssac, who grazes beef cattle on the property.

Sources:

Avery, Christy. *Tomales Bay Environmental History and Historic Resource Study*. National Park Service, 2006.
National Park Service. *Olema Valley-Lagunitas Loop Ranches Historic District National Register Nomination*, July 2008.

Historian:

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