



West Marin's Stagecoach Days

Gate and sail northward along the coast. Bolinas was the largest port in Marin County, and schooners from San Francisco would transport timber, copper, lime, beef and numerous dairy products from the coastal ranches and mines to the growing population of the city.

The Bolinas lagoon was still navigable for ships and the bustling town had two hotels, restaurants, taverns, a shipbuilding yard and, remarkably, almost two-thirds of the population of the county. However, within 25 years the lagoon would silt up, partially because of all the logging in the area, and Bolinas would see its position as an important port and shipping town replaced by Sausalito, Tiburon and San Rafael.

When the railway reached Point Reyes in the 1870s, Bolinas and Stinson Beach (then named Willow Camp) had traded their mercantile past for a future economy based on camping and recreation. The problem for these campers and vacationers was how to get there. Besides an expensive and often harrowing boat ride from San Francisco, there was only the old Miwok trail accessible by horse or foot that connected San Rafael to Bolinas over Mount Tamalpais.

After the San Rafael to Olema road was completed in 1865 another road was constructed 14 miles south to Bolinas, used by travelers on foot, horseback and wagon. However this route was nearly 35 miles long and required an overnight stay. In 1877 prominent West Marin ranchers and citizens convinced the County Board of Supervisors to help fund the construction of a road that would connect Bolinas to San Rafael.

Henry Gibson operated the first Bolinas Stage Line starting in 1879 from a stable across the street from the County Courthouse in San Rafael. The trip took three hours and cost \$1.50. Robert Cottingham bought the line from Gibson in 1882 as well as running a stage from

Sausalito to Willow Camp that had begun in the early 1870s. Leonard Nott, a driver for Cottingham, purchased the stage line in 1886 and operated it for four years when Albert Sayers and his brother Wallace took over both the Sausalito- and San Rafael-based stagecoaches that ran to the coast. By 1913, better roads, the automobile and a rail line to Willow Camp had replaced the horse-drawn conveyances, and the stagecoach era passed into history.

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