

The Bolinas Garage History

The Bolinas Garage, formerly the Longley building, has a long history of service to the community of Bolinas. Built by Oliver Longley for his family's residence and to house his blacksmith shop, the structure has been in constant use for almost a hundred years.

Oliver Longley and his siblings were born on the Bolinas Ridge where his grandfather George Washington Longley and his wife and ten children homesteaded in the late 1800s. Among his siblings, his brother Joseph Longley had the grocery store and meat market in Bolinas, and one of his sisters married Captain Peter Bourne whose homestead is now Audubon Canyon Ranch. Oliver learned the blacksmith trade while building wagons in San Francisco for the Studebaker Company. His love for the countryside where he grew up hunting and fishing brought him back to Bolinas. Oliver built a small blacksmith shop, and then in 1909 he built the Bolinas Garage building as his blacksmith shop and the upstairs dwelling for his wife and baby. In those days everyone in the community depended on his skills. He shod the horses and oxen, made and repaired farm, shipping, logging and household equipment, cooking utensils, ornamental fireplace tools and whole wagons. The Bolinas Museum's history room displays many objects from Oliver's blacksmith shop.

In the early 1900s society was being transformed by the invention of the automobile. Oliver adapted by adding an annex to work on the early autos that made the arduous trip over dirt roads from eastern Marin. By the 1920s he had a full service garage with gravity gas pumps and tow trucks. Oliver's son George grew up working with his father and later drove the local school bus as well.

George Longley, Oliver's son, was born in Bolinas in 1908. As a married man he moved to San Rafael but maintained a house overlooking Duxbury Reef. Up until he died in 2006, he came with his nephew David Rhodes every Sunday to Bolinas and attended services at the Presbyterian Church right around the corner from the Bolinas Garage where he grew up.

Over the years Oliver's building served the community as a vehicle repair garage under many owners (best remembered is Jimmy Dougan). On May 7, 2004, the Bolinas Garage was purchased by the Bolinas Community Land Trust. The new "Bolinas Station" no longer operates as a repair garage but benefits the community as affordable live/work housing and shops for local businesses. The gas station continues to operate and serve West Marin as the only gas available between Mill Valley and Pt. Reyes Station.