

The Bolinas Garage History

The Longley building, known as the Bolinas Garage, has a long history of service to the community. 2009 marks its 100th birthday! In 1908 Oliver Longley moved back to Bolinas with his wife and baby, George. Already a skilled blacksmith and wagon maker for Studebaker in San Francisco, Oliver bought the original Bolinas blacksmith shop. The next year, 1909, he built the Bolinas Garage as we know it today. The family residence was the upstairs and below was Oliver's blacksmith shop.

Oliver Longley and his nine siblings were born on the Bolinas Ridge, on the homestead established by his grandfather George Washington Longley, in the mid 1800s. Oliver's love for country life and his passion for hunting were his motivation to return to Bolinas. Among his siblings, his brother Joseph Longley and wife Helene, whose family went back to the Briones, who settled the Mexican Land Grant of Rancho Baulines, also played a large role in early Bolinas businesses.

Oliver Longley's blacksmith shop was a hub of activity. In those days everyone in the community depended on his skills. He shod the horses and oxen, made and repaired farm, ship, logging, ranch and household equipment. He made and repaired cooking utensils, ornamental fireplace tools and repaired and built buggies and wagons. George Longley's gift of his father's blacksmith tools including his huge bellows, can be seen in the history room of the Bolinas Museum.

In the early 1900s society was being transformed by the invention of the automobile. By the time an automobile made the arduous trip over rugged dirt roads to Bolinas from anywhere, the auto inevitably needed repair. Oliver adapted his skills and built an annex garage on the left side of his building. By the 1920s he had a full service garage with gravity gas pumps and tow trucks. Louise Pepper, well known Bolinas resident and retired realtor, arrived in Bolinas as a child when her father came to be Longley's chief mechanic. Louise married Frank Pepper whose grandparents on both sides helped build Bolinas as it looks today.

Oliver's son George and his cousin Floyd Longley grew up together when everyone knew everyone in the town. As old men they laughed about what rascals they had been. One Halloween, the local Chinese laundry man found that the Longley boys had reassembled his cart on the roof top of the Presbyterian church. It took several men to get it down. George drove the stage and the school bus for a time, then married and he lived in San Rafael. But he always kept his little house overlooking Duxbury Reef. Until he died in 2006, George and his nephew David Rhodes, came to Bolinas almost every Sunday to attend 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. Owner Jimmy Dougan tore down the 1800s house next door to the garage in order to bury gas reservoirs and move the pumps to where they are now. In 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 pumps continue to be one of the few sources of gas in Coastal Marin, a service that is expensive but essential to maintain. So, 2009 is the year to celebrate 100 years of continuity! And the best way to do that is buy gas there, at least once a week, to support the Bolinas Station's invaluable service!