

THE BELVEDERE-TIBURON DRAWBRIDGE

By Dave Gotz

The 200 foot section of Main St. from the edge of Corinthian Island to Beach Rd. once had an elevated roadway and drawbridge spanning the opening where Bay water flowed from Belvedere Cove into the Tiburon Lagoon - a vast body of water which reached from San Rafael Ave. to the back of Main St. The concrete wall that faces Belvedere today is a remnant of the elevated roadway drawbridge.

The bridge was probably built in the late 1880's after the railroad came to Tiburon. Before it was built there was no overland way to get from Belvedere to Tiburon except by going around the other side of the lagoon, where the rails were laid. The railroad and ferries brought people and commerce to the peninsula and the County Road (now San Rafael Ave.) needed to connect to Tiburon to the rest of the County. (Tiburon Blvd. was not extended from San Rafael Ave. into Tiburon until 1930).

The reason this crossing had to have a drawbridge was because many watercraft owners moored their boats in the calm and protected waters of the lagoon during the winter. Every fall the bridge would open allowing a small armada of boats, arks

and dinghies to pass into the lagoon. In spring the bridge was lifted and the craft would pass back into the Bay through the opening, we believe that this is the origin of "Opening Day on the Bay".

The bridge was often the subject of complaints to the County Supervisors because it was not well constructed. It was rebuilt in 1905 and 1910 with local money raised by the Belvedere Land Company and local citizens but little assistance from the County. Finally in 1920 an appropriation was made and the proper concrete structure, which still stands, was created.

During the first two decades of the 20th century dredged slurry from the Tiburon cove was pumped into the lagoon and it slowly filled in. By the late 1920's it was decided that the tidal flow should be stopped and the opening was closed off with large rocks. The State Highway Dept. built a raised causeway across the nearly filled lagoon allowing Tiburon Blvd. finally be extended into town. The wooden drawbridge section remained locked in place until it was paved in the late 1930's.

1. Drawbridge circa 1900: the earliest known photo of the bridge. The people are standing on the draw section. Notice Old St. Hilary's mission church on the hill behind (built in 1888).

2. Opening Day 1905: the draw has been raised, either by men or horses, and the boats move into Belvedere Cove for the start of the season.

3. Drawbridge late 1920's: not long before the opening was filled in and draw section made solid. The draw was moved to the Corinthian side in this final version built around 1920, and a large counterweight was added to ease opening. The concrete section on the left remains visible today.

