

The Novato Historian

The Quarterly Publication of the Novato Historical Guild, the Novato History Museum, and the Hamilton Field History Museum



Preserving Novato's History Feature Section

Contents ©2017 Novato Historical Guild, Inc.

January - March 2017

The Novato Historian

Volume 41, Number 1

Sonoma and Marin Railway

by Michael Read

*As Reported in the Marin Journal
November 5, 1874*

Enthusiastic Meetings at Novato and Petaluma.

The call for a meeting to be held at Novato, on Thursday, 29th ultimo, to consider the matter of building a railroad from Petaluma to San Rafael, met with a prompt and enthusiastic response from the people all along the line. By 1 o'clock there were from thirty to forty buggies and carriages drawn up around Mr. Johnson's store, and from 75 to 100 of the most substantial and enterprising citizens of Sonoma and Marin counties, representing wealth enough to gridiron the district with railroads were there.

From Petaluma, we noticed Messrs. Wm. Hill, L. G. Wickersham, H. Mecham, E. Denman, B. F. Tuttle, Wm. B. Spears, Daniel Brown, Col. C. P. Hatch, A. Warner, T. T. Unckless, J. Fritz, B. Haskell, D. W. C. Putnam, F. W. Lovgee, C. Poehlman, A. P. Whitney, B. Seavey, J. C. Wickersham, E. S. Lippitt, Kelly Tighe, Wm. Zartman, H. N. Scudder, Lee Ellsworth, Theodore Skillman, Wm. M. Brown. John Gwynn.

Of Novato — Messrs. Sweetser & DeLong, Dr. Burdell, J. W. Atherton, Geo. Haven, A. Van Holland,

Gilbert, Davis, Atchley, Johnson, Tann, Pacheco.

Of San Rafael — Wm. T. Coleman, James Ross, Judge Wm. H. McGrew, G. W. Gift, J. B. Rice, D. Nye, N. H. Olds, G. P. Harte, T. J. Bowers, the editor of the JOURNAL, and others. J. McM. Brown and Judge Southard were there, and Mr. Joseph S. Kohn, of the prismoidal, with a model.

ORGANIZATION

Mr. Sweetser moved that the crowd go up to the Sweetser & DeLong homestead, and refresh before proceeding to business, but it was

thought prudent to dispatch the matter in hand, and accept the famous hospitalities of that princely garden afterwards.

I.G. Wickersham, of Petaluma was chosen Chairman, and Messrs. Scudder, Gift and Barstow, Secretaries.

MR. WICKERSHAM - Alluded to the object of the meeting, and asked gentlemen to express their views upon it.

Mr. Lougee called on

MR. WM. T. COLEMAN - To state the object of the meeting. Mr.



Novato's first railroad depot on Reichert Avenue between De Long Ave. and Grant Ave.

Sonoma and Marin Railway

Coleman said he supposed it was well understood. It was to see if we could form an organization, and chrystalize into shape to build a railroad down this shore line from Petaluma to San Rafael. That is the thing we need; we have long wanted.

It was expected at one time that the Central Pacific Railroad would build it, but the North Pacific changed hands, and Mr. Donahue became the proprietor. He set to work and surveyed. and we supposed we would get the road from him, but it has all resulted in barren discussion and preliminary surveys. The wants of the people are quick transit and low fares, and these have come to be so keenly felt that the people are asking, "Why shan't we have a railroad of our own, and build and run it ourselves, and develop and augment our property interests. If it pays, we will have the profit, if not we will reap the indirect benefits." It was surprising we had not acted before. But now was the time.

He argued that the people had not lost by our present railroad system. The people on the line of this road are not poor. Every man could measure the benefits to flow from it. But it is generally true that people the best able do the least. Moneyed (sic) men, getting fair returns from their capital, grow torpid, concentrate, and look too much to slow but sure returns. The enterprising people have not much money. That is our condition at San Rafael. We have here, from Petaluma to San Rafael, and we should say from Sonoma and Napa, a belt of beautiful, rich country, teeming with wealth, and all that is needed to bind us together is a cheap line of railroad.

We have certain water communication, but it is slow and tedious, and not in consonance with the spirit of the age. We have a level country to build a road over, and a narrow gauge or a prismoidal could be built within the means of one wealthy farmer; the merchants and bankers

of the large and thrifty town of Petaluma could build and equip it without feeling it. If this is so, how easy it could be done if the people all along the line would take hold according to their means, and put the work through. It is more than feasible. It is easy. To begin with, we want an organization that will command respect. It should be undertaken free from all jobs and stealings, and in a spirit that will enlist all interests. It might be all one thing, a railroad and a ferry to the city, or in separate divisions, and either way we could have it finished and running almost before we knew it.

Mr. Coleman instanced a railroad from Boston to New York, which was beset with many difficulties in construction, and was finally built in five separate roads; it was run a long time by separate organizations, but with the same rolling stock, and pro rating. It was surprising how successful it was. If the people on this line met on no better basis than that, this route is admirably fitted for such a project. If it can't be all done by one company, let it be done in sections, but one is better.

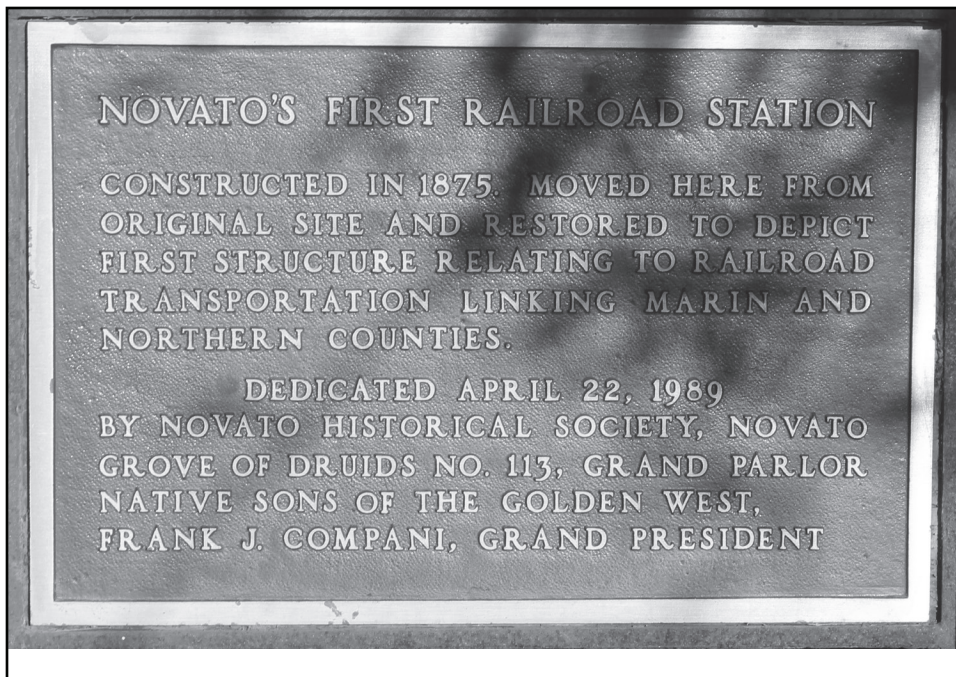
He touched upon the railroad transactions of the past decade by which railroad securities have been depopularized in the East and in Europe — bonds, watered stocks, and subsidies. We want no more of this. We should subscribe and pay up for stock to the extent of our ability, after which it might be desirable to borrow some money, at 6, 7 or 8 per cent., on the property, which would be worth much more. Therefore, it would be better to have the whole line on one basis.

Who shall build this road? We all need it and want it, and it is incumbent on every one to do his best. Petaluma had said that San Rafael was ready to put up \$200,000, and Petaluma \$100,000. He said San

Novato's first railroad depot , moved to its present location on Reichert Avenue behind Druid's Hall.



Sonoma and Marin Railway



Rafael would do it if she had the means, but she is poor. The people there who have means are San Franciscans, not much interested in San Rafael, and some of them want it to remain a quiet retreat, a place for suburban homes, without growth or change. The landholders are poor in means, and some of them in enterprise. Our people of moderate means will do their utmost. But that proposition will not do. Petaluma ought to reverse the figures. She has five times the business and wealth, and twenty times the rich country tributary to her; she is a big town, with big resources and capacities, and big necessities for this road.

Further, while a road from San Rafael to Petaluma would give us a little trade and travel, the great aim of all these places is to reach San Francisco as quickly as possible. Petaluma can do that by San Pedro or San Quentin, but the advantage of coming to San Rafael is that we would join her, and by the union would make a sure success, while either alone would be harassed by doubts. A good ferry will cost \$150,000, and unless the present

little road is used, it will take another \$150,000. That is \$300,000. From Petaluma to San Rafael will cost \$500,000. We figure these things too low. True business men will look at it squarely, and prepare to meet the whole sum. This road will pay a big dividend on \$500,000. Donahue's railroad pays a \$1,000 a day, yet it is all inland; it stops up a creek, runs up into the country, and has no deep water landing. The little San Rafael road pays \$30,000 a year, yet it has worked under great disadvantages. It pays interest on a \$40,000 mortgage, and while it is but three miles long, it has nearly all the expenses of a 40-mile road. If that little road, with its limited travel, can build and repair and run and make \$30,000 a year, and Donahue's road can make \$1,000 a day, I ask you how much a road from San Francisco to Petaluma, through this magnificent country would pay?

We of San Rafael can talk you solid columns, if you want it. But for putting up money we haven't got it. We don't feel the advantages of a road up into the country enough to impoverish ourselves to build it. If

Petaluma feels able to run a road to San Francisco, we won't interfere, but it would be more agreeable for us to join you. You come to us and we will take you up and put you in the city. Let Sonoma come to you, and you take her up. We can get a big ferry, and will do it. Petaluma can better afford to come to us than we can to put on a ferry. Sonoma and above can well afford to come down. You can be in San Francisco in 90 minutes from Petaluma, for 50 to 75 cents fare; be in the city by banking hours, do a day's business and return. The country that you would drain is a world of wealth.

But we all know there is a torpid state to be overcome. Petaluma is in danger of retrograding. Towns must be stimulated at times.

We ask you to join the people of Novato and San Rafael, and make a subscription to build this road. Not as beggars, or borrowers, but as property owners, who will get great benefits from the road, and have the profits besides.

Now, if the people of Petaluma will raise \$300,000, and Messrs. Sweetser and De Long and Dr. Burdell and the people of Novato will put up the other \$100,000, that will bring you into San Rafael; we will take \$200,000. and that gives us the capital of \$500,000. With it you can make the city in an hour and a half, for 75 cents fare, and the road will pay handsomely. Mr. Coleman was heartily applauded.

MR. I. G. WICKERSHAM - Being loudly called for, said he agreed with Mr. Coleman that the time had come for building this road. Population and the products of the country are increasing, and the more they increase, the more imperative the demand for the road. What practical steps can we take to build it? He was willing to

Sonoma and Marin Railway

accept the flattering things Mr. C. had said about Petaluma as compliments, but truth would reverse his propositions. San Rafael is owned and occupied by men of wealth. If they could by uniting with us, get a road to drain all this country above them, they would derive even more benefits than Petaluma, both from augmented values and increased trade. But they were willing to do their part.

He thought all should be done by one company, incorporated to build a road and ferry and put in our money and complete the work, and make it pay. Better organize a company, go right over the line and get the right of way, and then see what we can get subscribed. We must make a united effort. We can go on and make a railroad for a great deal less than railroads cost. We want to see that every dollar is properly expended. Railroads are not built this way. but we will try to build this one so.

He was in favor of the broad gauge, because that is the railroad system of the State, and if we run to Napa we can then connect directly with the whole railroad system of the Coast. But if we cannot do that he would favor a narrow or one-rail road. Petaluma feels interested as our delegation here to-day evinces. He pledged Petaluma to do her part.

PROF. LIPPITT - Spoke in favor of having one company and one line, including a ferry. The object is direct and swift communication with San Francisco. We don't want to be tributary to any company that will have power to charge us high rates. All towns grow just in proportion as they have quick and easy access to the metropolitan city. He believed San Rafael would become the commercial center, the en-try-port of the whole line. And there are no such lands in the whole State for beautiful residences as are opened

by this projected line. With a railroad from Petaluma to San Rafael, all these lands will not only double and treble in value, but increase ten fold. Petaluma would do all that could be reasonably expected. He was not in favor of seeing what could be raised, but forming a company, and going right to work to build it. It should be finished in four months. We can do it, and will do it. [Great applause.]

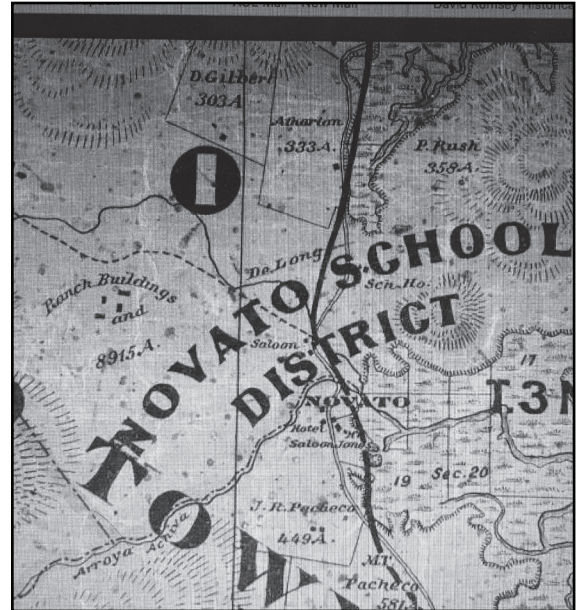
MR. J. B. SWEETSER - Said he would like to see it go through, and he would do all he could to assist.

DR. BURDELL - Spoke to the same purport.

JUDGE SOUTHARD - As a citizen of San Francisco, said he was interested in the project, and pleased with the enthusiasm evinced. Thought Mr. Coleman's estimates of the cost a great deal too high. A broad guage (gauge) would not cost half a million. He was in favor of union — one road, one interest, and one rail.

MR. J. S. KOHN - Exhibited a model of the prismoidal road, and said there would be a mile or two in operation in San Francisco by the first of January, so that people could judge for themselves. In answer to a question, Mr. Kohn said the road could be built for \$5,000 a mile, and the cost of the patent would not exceed \$500, making \$5,500 a mile, and the rolling stock would not cost more than half as much as for a narrow gauge.

MR. T. J. BOWERS - Argued that if the road on our western line will pay one per cent, this would pay 10. Now was the time to build it. He moved that a meeting be called



Map from 1873 showing where the train tracks would have been. They would have gone down 1st street in Novato.

at Petaluma, on Thursday, 5th instant, to effect an organization. Mr. Coleman moved to amend by calling it for Tuesday November 3d, which was carried.

A COMMITTEE

Petaluma, was on motion appointed, to draw up a basis of organization, and report to the meeting on Tuesday. Messrs. Lippitt, Hill and Whitney were named as such Committee.

JUDGE MCGREW - Moved that a committee be appointed to report the comparative cost of a broad, a narrow, and a prismoidal road. McGrew, Coleman and Harte were appointed.

It was suggested that the Company should be named. Mr. Coleman moved to call it, 'The Sonoma and Marin Railway Company,' which was adopted.

And the meeting adjourned.