



## **The State Highway Comes to Marin County**

By Scott Fletcher

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The wide, paved roadway in the photograph above is the recently completed State Highway in Marin as it passes through Novato on its way to Sonoma and points north. The California State Highway system had its beginning in the year 1895-6 when the State took over maintenance of the Lake Tahoe Wagon Road that ran from Placerville to the Nevada State line. At that time, California also formed the Bureau of Highways to coordinate construction of better roads between the counties. After California voters approved the \$18 million dollar “State Highways Act” in November of 1910, engineering and construction began statewide to connect all county seats with a “continuous and connected state highway system.” Within a year of the passage of the Act, the County of Marin and cities and towns from Sausalito to Novato began issuing bonds to assist in funding the construction of the highway. By the end of the 1920s, motorists could traverse the county on a fully-paved roadway that passed through many of Marin’s downtown districts.

Businesses in the photograph are DeBorba’s Stage Station and Ice Cream Parlor in the left foreground, the Midway Garage just beyond it and Nave’s Garage across the street on the corner. The rather dusty intersection is present day Grant Avenue and Redwood Blvd. The Midway Garage changed hands many times in its first few years and was out of business by the 1930s. On the other hand, Nave’s Garage prospered and expanded their business to include a Dodge and Plymouth showroom. Over the years, Nave’s Garage changed locations a couple of times and was a cornerstone business in the Novato area until Louis Nave sold the business to new owners in 1953. De Borba’s Stage Station had been a saloon opened by the DeBorba family in 1906, but changed its spots during Prohibition to an ice cream parlor when this photograph was taken. Upon repeal of Prohibition, it reverted back to its saloon incarnation and added the first Chinese

restaurant in Novato operated by Sid and Jimmy Lack. DeBorba's remained a favorite watering hole and eatery in downtown Novato until closing in May of 2018.

In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the California State Highway made long-distance traveling both easier and safer. It also brought many more visitors and tourists to North Coast cities and towns from Marin County all the way to the Oregon border. Business and civic leaders from Crescent City to San Francisco lobbied successfully to change the name to "The Redwood Highway" to encourage the growing motorist population and trade. Eventually, much of the old State Highway would become part of US Route 101 of the federal Interstate Highway System, a far cry from the Lake Tahoe Wagon Road of 1895.

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