



**San Rafael's Early Canal Landing**  
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The San Rafael Canal Landing, once called ‘the embarcadero’, was an early transportation hub for the town of San Rafael. When the sub-mission, or ‘asistencia’, was founded in 1817 the quickest way to travel there from San Francisco was by boat across the bay and up the San Rafael creek from Pt. San Pedro. Smaller boats could actually sail all the way up San Rafael Creek to deliver and pick up cargo near B St. between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. Within a few decades that end of the creek had silted up and boats began using the embarcadero near the city limits which would place it just east of the present-day Montecito shopping center.

An 1852 article in the San Francisco newspaper, *The Daily California*, mentions the embarcadero as the bayside landing for boats traveling from the city. In a humorous, and ornately lyrical style, the author recounts a “2 or 3 hour” sail across the bay in the sloop *Boston*, that landed at the embarcadero. From there he and his friend, “Mr. B\_\_\_” walked about a mile to the mission, describing the “fertile valley”, the “fat cattle” and “the lovely women” in the town that consisted at that time of “about a dozen houses”, the mission, a “good hotel kept by an Italian named Angelotti” and a bar where one can get an “iced drink served by the polite Judge B\_\_\_”. “The author goes on to describe a delightful evening of dining, drinking and dancing that lasted until, “the sun rose in the morning.” They sailed back to San Francisco that evening in the company of other San Franciscans along with “the worthy Bishop” (Joseph Sadoc Alemany), all of whom had to spend much of the night aboard a becalmed ship until slipping into port, “at half past two in the morning.”

At that time, there was just one wharf on the canal, but in later decades additional wharves were built near present day 3<sup>rd</sup> and Mary streets and closer to downtown near Irwin St. The problem of siltation in the canal called for constant maintenance and the City of San Rafael began a series of dredging projects every few years to keep the canal open to shipping. In 1908, an even larger initiative began to not only dredge the canal, but construct bulkheads on both sides of the canal near the wharves. Work was also begun to dig a “cut-off” channel across a “goose-neck” bend further east near the mouth of the canal. The photograph above of a large load of hay being unloaded at the landing appeared in a 1908 *Marin Journal* article along with a map showing the work to be completed in the next year. As railway and motor vehicle transport expanded in the twentieth century, the canal became less important as a transit hub and private marinas and pleasure-craft began popping up all along the length of the canal. One issue that hasn't changed over the years, however, is the constant need for dredging to keep the waterway navigable.

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