

Statement Of Significance

Summary

The Point Bonita Historic District, located at the entrance to the San Francisco Bay from the Pacific Ocean, includes both the Point Bonita Light Station and the Point Bonita Life-Saving Station. On September 3, 1991, the Point Bonita Light Station was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The light station meets the “registration requirements for its property type. It contains an intact lighthouse tower (in this case with intact lens as well) and an associated fog-signal building. The architectural integrity of the station's historic buildings is high and their condition is good. The tower and fog-signal building, clustered together at the end of the rocky point, give cohesiveness to the station site. This is heightened by the building's separation from the main access path by a pedestrian suspension bridge. This bridge, existing in the shadow of the Golden Gate Bridge, provides an element of grace and whimsy to the light station. Point Bonita is the only lighthouse in the United States (perhaps the world) approached by a suspension bridge.” (National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1991.) Established in 1855 to mark the entrance to San Francisco Bay and to warn of local navigational hazards, the Point Bonita Light Station meets the requirements for registration as defined in the multiple property submission "Light Stations in California." The period of significance was listed on the National Register nomination form as 1855 to 1940.

For the purposes of including the broader site development and landscape features associated with the aids to navigation and humanitarian operations, the Point Bonita Life-Saving Station has been included as part of the Historic District. A draft nomination for the Point Bonita Life-saving Station was completed in 1978 but never finalized. The life-saving station was initially developed in 1899 under the authority of the U.S. Life-Saving Service which complemented the work of the U.S. Lighthouse Board. By the end of the period of significance, the function of the life-saving station had evolved from supplying humanitarian assistance to providing housing for lighthouse staff.

This CLI proposes expanding the end of the period of significance to 1966, which reflects the work of an operating light station complex, encompassing the initial construction of the light station and the last major investment in the station, reflecting the modernization of equipment and the duties of Coast Guard staff. This period also incorporates the period of significance proposed in the draft 1978 National Register nomination form for the Point Bonita Life-Saving Station, 1899 to 1930, which encompasses the development of the life-saving station.

The 1991 nomination established the significance of the site under Criteria A and C. Under Criterion A (historic events or broad patterns of history), the district is linked to the historic growth of commercial shipping along the West Coast and “California’s critical reliance on maritime transportation and the aids that made navigation possible,” under National Register Criterion A. Under Criterion C (embodies distinctive characteristic of type, period, method of construction, or the work of a master), the light station retains the general form of a formal late nineteenth/early twentieth century light complex reflected in the architecturally distinctive late nineteenth century lighthouse tower and early twentieth century fog-signal building. In addition, the draft 1978 nomination for the Point Bonita Life-Saving Station found the station to be significant under Criterion D (has yielded, or may likely yield information important in prehistory or history). The district was identified as being significant on a state level under historic Theme V: Developing the American Economy, under sub-theme “Shipping and Transportation by Water; Ships, Boats, Lighthouses and Other Structures” and Theme II: Creating Social Institutions, under sub-theme; “Social and Humanitarian Movements; Emergency Aid and Health Care.”

Context

Shipping and Transportation by Water

In spite of very few natural harbors suitable for shipping, California's strategic location on the Pacific Ocean opened the West to maritime trade and exploration and established California as a dominant commercial influence. Following the initial exploration of the California coast by Spanish and English explorers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the 1849 Gold Rush provided a major impetus for maritime transportation to California, as the transcontinental railroad would not be completed for another twenty years.

Following the discovery of gold near Sutter's Mill in 1848, people in the East wanted to reach California before the gold ran out. However, the established route around Cape Horn took five to eight months, making a short cut through Panama enticing. The route from New York City to Panama then from Panama to San Francisco reduced the travel time to three to five months. A lack of natural protected harbors between San Francisco and San Diego prevented an immediate increase in southern maritime activity. The resulting maritime economy was primarily a northern California phenomenon and San Francisco, with its superior natural harbor, served as the port city for all maritime activity north and south of the Golden Gate.

With increased travel to San Francisco Bay, a light was essential for the safety of the arriving ships. As stated in the Multiple Property Documentation Form ... "the Gold Rush of 1849 had produced a virtual maritime stampede to San Francisco Bay. Unfortunately, the Bay was completely unmarked when the first shiploads began to arrive. San Francisco Bay, despite its calm appearance, is in many ways a nautical nightmare.

Since 1775 when the first European vessel, Ayala's *pacquebot* San Carlos, entered San Francisco Bay, hundreds of vessels have come to grief on its rocky shores, wide sandy beaches or in its fast currents and swirling fog. The north shore of the Golden Gate was, and is, a heavily used area for vessel traffic. Swift currents and other hazards combined with the large volume of shipping to litter its shores with shipwrecks. High on the list of dangers are the fierce currents that sweep in and out of the narrow entrance to wide San Francisco Bay. As the tide changes, or as the flowing water is deflected by the several points of land that jut into the channel, confusing and dangerous back eddies are formed. The high cliffs that line the Marin County shore are unforgiving to grounded vessels. Point Bonita especially, and also Point Diablo and Lime Point protrude into the water, Deep water close to shore makes casting the lead an insufficient warning method. Thick fogs blanked the area both summer and winter. Sailing craft close to the cliffs are somewhat in the wind shadow from the prevailing north-westerlies, but vessels are given no lee at all from the more dangerous southerly winds than accompany winter storms. From the beginning, it appeared that the establishment of navigational aids would be necessary to assure safe passage in and out of the Bay." (Light Stations of California: Multiple Property Documentation Form, 1990)

The historic record indicates that at least ten vessels have wrecked along the shores of the Point Bonita Historic District, and that documentation is complete enough to ascertain the location of six of these shipwrecks with sufficient accuracy to list them as contributing features to the District under the theme of "Shipping and Transportation by Water: Ships, Boats, Lighthouses and other Structures."

Shipping along the West Coast continued to increase throughout the rest of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a result of U.S. expansion, the development of western crops and products for domestic sale and increased international trade, boosted by the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914. Major forces behind the expanding shipping business included: trade agreements in Asia, treaties with the Hawaiian Islands, coastal transportation of prospectors to the Alaskan gold rush and other passengers

along the coast and around the world and export of products from California including, redwood lumber, grain and beef.

Architecturally, the initial light stations built along the West Coast were adaptations of the lighthouse layouts and styles found in New England and the Mid-Atlantic States. The first West Coast lighthouses, built of imported brick, were constructed in the Cape Cod style. Over time, these plans were modified to fit the unique climatic, topographical and geographical conditions of the Pacific Coast. Plans were developed for five geographic conditions: high capes and headlands, low coastal plains and beaches, harbor entrances, islands and coastal mesas and tables. The light towers built closer to shore have a more typical New England and Mid-Atlantic shape; tall, slender and cylindrical. The “California” light towers, generally on higher elevations, are squat with powerful lenses. The 1855 lighthouse tower was designed in the Cape Cod-style

“In lieu of the standard plan of a tower within a Cape Code-style house used for the other early West Coast lighthouses, at Point Bonita, the Lighthouse Board chose a separate site for each of the structures. The tower stood at an elevation of 260 feet near the edge of a cliff which had a steep drop down to the ocean below, while the house stood about 440 yards inland to the southeast, at a lower elevation. The two structures were most likely separated because of the practice of maximizing visibility by placing towers at the highest point of the land, in this case a spot of land not large enough for a house and a tower. This decision would later prove to be the lighthouse tower's undoing, as its light proved to be too high to be seen through the frequent low clouds that rolled in through the Golden Gate.” (National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1991)

It became evident that the fog experienced on the Pacific Coast occurred at a higher elevation than the ocean fogs of the East. Even when lower elevations remained clear, the light would be obscured by fog at the 300-foot level. A new type of lighthouse tower was needed with a lower focal plane and authorities decided that a new tower and fog-signal would be constructed on the tip of the Point at a much lower elevation. The lens and tower were moved from the original 1855 lighthouse tower to the lower location in 1877. The resulting combination of lighthouse tower and lantern room from two different periods produced a unique style among California lighthouses.

Social and Humanitarian Movements

As maritime trade increased, so did the demand for assistance. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries large sections of the United States’ coasts were sparsely populated. The crews of ships running aground could expect little, if any help. If the sailors managed to reach the shore following a shipwreck in the winter, often died from exposure on the largely uninhabited shores.

Although the need for a life-saving service was recognized, no established organization or equipment was made available for decades. Storms repeatedly battered the East Coast, leading to the loss of life and an increase in public outcry. Congress continually funded stations, but did not provide for a full-time crew.

Finally in 1871, Sumner Kimball was appointed the chief of the Treasury Department’s Revenue Cutter Service. Kimball succeeded in gaining an appropriation of \$200,000 and Congressional authorization for the Secretary of the Treasury to employ crews at the stations. In 1874, the stations were expanded from the New Jersey and Massachusetts coasts to include the coast of Maine and ten locations south of Cape Henry, Virginia. The following year, stations were built on the Delaware-Maryland-Virginia peninsula, the Great Lakes, and Florida. Eventually, stations were constructed on the Gulf Coast and the West Coast, as well as one station in Nome, Alaska. The life-saving station at Point Bonita was constructed in

1899.

In 1878, the life-saving stations were organized as the U.S. Life-Saving Service, a separate agency in the Treasury Department. Sumner I. Kimball was chosen to serve as the General Superintendent of the Service. The stations were manned by full-time crews, comprised of a keeper and a crew of six or eight "surfmen," during the active season when wrecks were most likely to occur. By the twentieth century, the active season was year-round and some stations were staffed with more than ten men.

The first stations consisted of a single building measuring 42 x 18 feet. These early stations were strictly utilitarian, but by the 1880s, the stations usually included two or three structures. The main building contained the offices, boat house, and berthing area for the crew and usually had a lookout tower on the roof. Outlying buildings consisted of housing to support the crew who were required to live at the stations during shipping season.

The U.S. Life-Saving Service had two means of rescuing people from stranded ships; by boat and by a strong line. The Service used two types of boats: 1) a 700-1,000 pound surfboat pulled by six surfmen with 12-18 foot oars, or 2) a two to four ton lifeboat. The surfboat could be pulled on a cart by crewmen to a site near a wreck and then launched directly into the surf from the beach. The lifeboat could be fitted with sails for work further offshore and during heavy weather.

When a ship wrecked closer to shore and the seas were too rough for boats, a strong line was launched up to 600 yards from the beach to the wrecked vessel using a small cannon. The projectile carried a small messenger line from which the shipwrecked sailors were able to retrieve the strong line. Once the line was secure, a life car could be pulled back and forth between the wreck and the shore.

The crews performed amazing rescues, but the majority of their time was spent conducting practice drills with the rescue equipment, general station maintenance, and patrol and lookout duty. During the day, surfmen was assigned to scan the nearby water areas from the lookout tower. At night, duty was divided into three watches to patrol the beach until morning.

Before the turn of the century, there were very few recreational boaters and most assistance cases were for commercial ships. With the advent of steam powered ships and improved navigational technology, ships were in less danger and small gasoline powered boats were increasingly rescued. In an effort to modernize the stations to meet these new demands, recruit new members and streamline the bureaucracy, the U.S. Coast Guard was created on January 28, 1915 by combining the U.S. Life-Saving Service and the U.S. Revenue Cutter System. During its forty-four years of existence, the U.S. Life-Saving Service rescued 28,121 vessels and 178,741 individuals.

Physical History

1849-1854: Early Lighthouse Backing

In January 1848, gold was discovered along the American River at Coloma, California near Sacramento. The resulting Gold Rush of 1849 made San Francisco a West Coast boomtown. Maritime traffic soon inundated the San Francisco Bay, bringing ships from around the world. That same year, President Zachary Taylor authorized the U.S. Coast Survey to inspect and recommend sites for lighthouses along the California coast. The following year, the U.S. Coast Survey recommended that a light station be constructed at several critical locations. Altogether, sixteen light station sites were recommended for California, four of them in the Bay Area: Alcatraz, Fort Point, Farallon Islands and Point Bonita.

Prior to 1852, the Fifth Auditor of the Department of the Treasury operated the lighthouses through local collectors of customs. On October 9, 1852, the Lighthouse Board was created within the Treasury Department; California was part of the twelfth district. The nine-member board was composed of several civilian, naval, army engineers to inspect each light station, and other aids to navigation, every three months and report on the condition. (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-cp/history/faqs/when.html>, first accessed February 11, 2005)

In a letter to the Secretary of the Treasury, the Superintendent of the 1853 Coast Survey, stressed the urgency for funding the Point Bonita Light Station and explained why the other three funded light stations could not serve as a suitable entrance marker to San Francisco Bay. He concluded that Fort Point could not be adequately viewed from a southern approach. This was an especially important consideration in the Gold Rush years when the majority of coastal traffic was arriving via Cape Horn or Panama. It was deemed that Alcatraz was located too far inside the Bay to serve as an entrance marker through the Golden Gate. Finally, the Farallon Island Lighthouse was more useful "showing its own position and the surrounding dangers, than as a guide to the heads" and served as general navigation aid for the West Coast. Additionally, Point Bonita provided a natural landmark at the northern entrance to San Francisco Bay that was as "well known or remarkable . . . as could be readily and promptly distinguished during a clear night." (National Register Nomination, 1989)

Few captains dared sail their vessels through the Golden Gate after sundown; even those approaching in the daytime encountered fogs, swift currents and other navigational hazards. Before the station was constructed, a number of shipwrecks occurred while ships tried to find a safe passage into the Bay. The largest wreck in the vicinity of Point Bonita was that of the side-wheeler steamship Tennessee which occurred on March 6, 1853. Fortunately all 1,000 passengers and crew made it safely to shore at Indian Cove (later renamed Tennessee Cove in memory of the shipwreck).

Congress finally authorized and appropriated \$25,000 for the Point Bonita Light Station on March 3, 1853, just three days before the wreck of the Tennessee. However, construction continued to be delayed. In August 1853, Richard P. Hammond, Superintendent of Lights and Collector of Customs at San Francisco requested permission to contract local companies to expedite construction and complete the new light station before the rainy season. In response to a letter from the Secretary of the Lighthouse Board on December 5, 1853, Hammond continued to advocate for local contractors, stating that within forty days of authorization the tower could be constructed of brick by a local contractor for \$16,500 or of stone for \$17,000. In the letter he also explained the "it is believed that the claimant under the [Sausalito Rancho] grant will donate 100 acres or such quantity as may be necessary for the Light House purposes," and stressed the importance of the light at Point Bonita.

On May 27, 1854, the lighthouse inspector of the Twelfth Lighthouse District, Campbell Graham, was instructed to concentrate on the construction of the lighthouse at Point Bonita. Because Inspector Graham was supervising the construction of eight other funded lighthouses along the West Coast, it would be two more months before he could send specifications and plans for the light. He had found the ridge of Point Bonita was too narrow and would have to be cut down twenty feet and also advised that local contractors should be used.

On September 29, 1854, another petition was submitted to the Secretary of the Treasury, this time from the Branch Pilots Association and Merchant Ship Masters urging the construction of the light station.

Finally, on November 15, 1854, more than a year and a half after Congress appropriated funding, Inspector Graham receive plans for, and authorization to solicit local contractors to construct the Point Bonita Light Station.

1855-1899: Point Bonita Light Station Construction

After finally receiving notice to move forward, Inspector Graham immediately arranged a contract for the construction of the Point Bonita Lighthouse. A letter was sent to the Lighthouse Board that a contract with Ephraim McLean was established to provide for materials and construction of the lighthouse tower and Keeper's dwelling. The contract stated building was to be completed by March 1, 1855, and the beacon was to be installed on May 1, 1855. A second letter was sent from Inspector Graham to the Lighthouse Board informing them that McLean had sold the contract to Hofras and Cowing, and that they also had a good reputation.

Rather than use the standard plan of a tower within a Cape Code-style house imported from the East Coast and used for the other early West Coast lighthouses, the Lighthouse Board had the Point Bonita Light Station and Keeper's dwelling constructed at separate locations. The light beacon was located at the highest point of the land near the edge of a cliff, which had a steep drop down to the ocean 260 feet below. Because the site was not large enough for a house and a tower, the house was constructed 440 feet to the southeast at a lower elevation.

On February 14, 1855, Inspector Graham reported the construction was well underway and in agreement with his directives, the contractor was ready to install the lens in two weeks. However, rains and heavy seas prevented the delivery of the lens until March 6. Finally, on April 24, the work on the first lighthouse tower completed. The lighthouse tower was 295 feet above sea level and the height of the tower created a focal plane for the light beacon of 306 feet above sea level, marking the northern entrance to San Francisco Bay. The Point Bonita Lighthouse beamed its first rays from the fixed natural color second-order Fresnel light out to sea on May 2, 1855.

Shortly after the light began operation, the Lighthouse Board turned its attention to providing a fog-signal for the fog-bound location. A twenty-four pounder army cannon on a field carriage was requisitioned from the Benicia Arsenal and installed at Point Bonita on August 6, 1855, becoming the first operating fog-signal on the West Coast (see photo: History #1). Due to the rough terrain at lower elevations, the cannon was situated 1,800 feet to the north of the lighthouse tower and fired every half-hour, day and night, during foggy weather. On March 18, 1858, the cannon was replaced with a mechanical fog bell that only required winding every six hours. A notice to mariners informed them that the new fog-signal would be struck six times at intervals of sixteen seconds followed by forty-four seconds of the silence. The cannon was finally removed in 1915 for the Panama Pacific Exposition. The fog cannon was eventually moved to the U.S. Coast Guard Island, Alameda, California, where it is still

located.

While the construction of the light station went smoothly, ownership of the property and establishment of the lighthouse reservation was apparently not immediately determined. William Richardson owned Rancho Sausalito in addition to running a very successful transportation service. However, at the time of the construction of the light station, Richardson was experiencing a series of financial setbacks after he transferred to the riskier shipping trade and mortgaged the ranch. He then turned to Samuel R. Throckmorton, a San Francisco real estate broker. Throckmorton advised Richardson to deed four and one-half leagues of the Rancho; Throckmorton would serve as trustee for William Richardson. Eventually, the property would be returned to Richardson free of debt. However, Richardson died on April 21, 1856, after he had received confirmation of his title for the Rancho Sausalito. Subsequently, Throckmorton replaced the beef cattle with dairy cattle and leased the property to tenant ranchers.

It was also at this time that Throckmorton offered to sell 2,300 acres of Rancho Sausalito to the U.S. government for a military reservation. However, the exorbitant asking price led to an investigation of the land values and the actual size of the property, postponing the sale of the property. Finally, on July 24, 1866, a grant deed transferred nearly 2,000 acres of the Marin Headlands, later the Lime Point (later renamed Fort Baker) Military Reservation, from Throckmorton to the United States government, eleven years after the completion of the lighthouse tower. A September 24, 1902 letter to the Lighthouse Board from Lieutenant Colonel Thomas H. Handbury, Engineer of the Twelfth Lighthouse District, and Commander J.B. Milton, Inspector of the Twelfth Lighthouse District, confirms this, stating that there were no records of any arrangements with Throckmorton for the construction and use of Point Bonita for a light station.

After several years of operation it became apparent that the fog on the Pacific Coast occurred at a higher elevation than the ocean fogs along the East Coast. As a result, the Point Bonita light would often be obscured by fog at the 300-foot level, while lower elevations remained clear. Lighthouse authorities decided that a new tower and fog-signal would need to be constructed on the tip of the Point, at a much lower elevation. Construction proved difficult due to the precarious terrain.

Beginning in 1871, improvements to the site of the Point Bonita Light Station commenced. In the early 1870s, a landing was constructed near the new lighthouse tower site along with a winch and lift to haul material up the side of the cliff. A new fog-signal—a steam siren—was completed in 1872; however, a portion of the fog-signal building fell to the sea in a winter storm two years later. In 1874, the tip of the Point was leveled and the fog-signal building pulled away from the edge of the cliff.

A gallery, or cliff-hanging wooden platform, skirted the sheer cliff providing the only pedestrian access to the lighthouse tower and fog-signal building. Numerous landslides, from 1872 to 1876, had plagued the light station, making the gallery one of the most dangerous stretches of the path to the lighthouse (see photo: History #2). Finally, in 1876, Chinese workmen hand dug a tunnel through solid rock to replace the gallery.

The new lighthouse began operation in 1877. It was composed of a one-story brick base on which was mounted the relocated lantern room and lens from the original lighthouse tower (see photo: History #3). The 1855 lighthouse tower was converted for use as a day mark when a dome was added to the top of the structure.

The present fog-signal building was constructed in 1903, replacing the previous fog-signal buildings built in 1872 and 1874. Following the 1906 earthquake which severely damaged the old residence, the 1874 fog-signal building was adapted for temporary use as the Keeper's residence (see photo: History

#4). Eventually, a new Keeper's residence and Assistant Keeper's duplex were completed in 1908 (see photo: History #5). The 1874 fog-signal building became the quarters for a third Assistant Keeper.

The Keeper's life was full of monotony, given that the Keepers kept long watches and performed routine maintenance, such as cleaning the lens, whitewashing the buildings, repairing structures, water lines and cisterns, and keeping journals of the light station. However, despite the light and the fog-signals that were installed, shipwrecks still occurred during thick fog and stormy conditions, and on rare occasions the monotony at Point Bonita was interrupted as lighthouse staff performed heroic rescues. On October 3, 1874, the steam tug "Rescue" went aground and was broken against the shore. The lighthouse Keepers were able to rescue nine of the ten crew members. Again in April 1876, two men were rescued by the lighthouse staff after their boat capsized. On December 26, 1896, Lighthouse Keeper George Cobb, without assistance, rescued three men from drowning after their sailboat capsized in the San Francisco Bay during a storm of rainsqualls and gale force winds blowing fifty miles an hour.

On March 9, 1897, the State of California ceded "all right and title of the State of California in and to the parcels of land extending from the high-water mark out to three hundred yards beyond the low-water mark ... to the United States ... occupied or reserved for any military or naval purpose" as long as the government of the United States held title to the adjunct land. The ceded property was added to the Lime Point Military Reservation. However, a boundary for the lighthouse reservation had still not been established.



History #1: The first operating fog-signal on the West Coast, circa 1870; the original 1855 lighthouse can be seen in the background on the far left side. (U.S. Coast Guard, 12th District)



History #2: A photo of the gallery around the cliff at Point Bonita, date unknown. (Lone Mountain College Collection of Stereographs by Eadweard Muybridge, Unit ID: 1652, University of California, Berkeley; The Bancroft Library)



History #3: Circa 1910 view of the 1877 brick lighthouse, with the 1855 metal lantern and lamp rooms. The 1903 fog-signal building roof is in the background. The brick chimney for the fog-signal boilers is on the right. (U.S. Coast Guard, 12th District)



History #4: Circa 1940, the aerial photo shows the lighthouse tower, 1874 fog-signal building, 1903 fog-signal building, oil tanks, inclined tramway, and the trail to the light. (Golden Gate National Recreation Area Park Archives and Record Center)



History #5: Point Bonita Cove, from left to right, with the fog-signal building, turn-around station above the derrick, Keeper's residences, life-saving station and the boathouse on the waterfront. (1908-40, PWR-Oakland, National Register Records)

1899- 1966: Construction of the Point Bonita Life-Saving Station

Beginning in 1848, the U.S. government began funding life-saving equipment and stations along the East Coast, due to the increasing maritime traffic. However, these stations relied solely on volunteer crews who were typically ill-equipped and untrained. As storms continued to pound the East and the loss of life and goods rose, so did the public outcry for Congress to do more. Unfortunately, it was not until after a series of disastrous winter storms in 1870 and 1871 that appropriations were made for stations and crews nation-wide. Sumner Increase Kimball was appointed the chief of the Treasury Department's Revenue Marine Division and under his command, more stations of the organization began to be established along the eastern seaboard, the Great Lakes, Gulf Coast and, finally, on the West Coast.

On June 20, 1874, life-saving stations were authorized in California at the entrance to the Golden Gate, near the Great Beach in Golden Gate Park, at Bolinas Bay and at Humboldt Bay. On June 18, 1878, the U.S. Life-Saving Service was officially established as a separate agency to aid in the rescue of shipwrecked passengers and crew on the East and West Coast, as well as the Great Lakes (20 Stat. L., 163).

These stations were not able to meet all the demands of increased maritime traffic and the hazardous water through the Golden Gate. While Congressman John A. Barham introduced H.R. 1980 on December 17, 1895 and Senator George C. Perkins put forth S. 2980 in April 1896 for the creation of a new life-saving station, Kimball began looking for the best site, based on local opinion, for the station. Kimball, in concurrence with the Inspector of the U.S. Life-Saving Service, Twelfth District, Major Thomas J. Blakeney, recommended a site at Potato Cove. At this location, the life-saving station would be protected from any storms from the south by a rocky shelf to the west and from the Pacific Ocean's westerly swells by the Four Fathom Bank, locally known as the "Potato Patch."

Eventually, the life-saving station would be built at Bonita Cove, near the lighthouse tower and military buildings, but Boathouse B, which included a launchway, was constructed at Potato Cove, closer to Rodeo Beach, approximately three-quarters of a mile north of the Point Bonita Historic District. The Inspector also recommended that the lighthouse wharf should be fitted with a derrick, to support a surfboat in the event that a larger boat could not be safely launched. The station would also require a telephone connection, linked with the life-saving stations to the south of the Golden Gate.

On March 18, 1899, the contract for the construction of the station was let to the Thomson Bridge Company, the lowest bidder of the thirteen submitted estimates. The contract, to be completed in ninety days, included the construction of Boathouse A (within the Point Bonita Historic District) and B (north of the Point Bonita Historic District), a residence, cisterns, fire shed, storage shed, garage and sidewalks. Construction started in the summer of 1899; however, high rough swells and refractory rock at the location of Boathouse A delayed the project. Even with a thirty day extension, the project was not completed, though Captain Fred M. Munger, the superintendent of construction, advised that the Thomson Bridge Company was not to blame, citing that the contractor received the orders to begin work one month after the contract had been signed, faced severe weather and poor roads and had an accident in which the contractor's foot was crushed. Finally, on September 8, 1899, Charles M. Colonell, the project supervisor, reported that the station was completed in accordance with the Life-Saving Service's plans and specifications.

During the construction of the station, a second contract was issued to P.G. MacIntyre, the sub-contractor for the construction of the residence, to build a redwood picket fence around the dwelling site to guard against dairy cattle grazed in Marin by tenant farmers and the U.S. Army and protect the crew and their

families from falling over the edge of the cliff into the ocean.

The rough seas, rocky slopes and the hazardous weather conditions at Point Bonita proved to make launching a boat extremely difficult at Boathouse A. It was not until November 1901 that Kimball authorized the construction of a platform, railing and boathouse siding that had been requested by Captain Munger two years earlier to improve the safety of Boathouse A (see photo: History #5).

The standard boats used at a life-saving station included the lifeboat and surfboat. The lifeboats were slow heavy boats that were strong and stable and could be launched directly into the water, usually along a set of rails. This would be a station's largest boat at 26 x 7 feet. The Dobbins lifeboat weighed less than half of the standard lifeboat. The surfboat was almost the same dimensions as the lifeboat but was much lighter and drew only six to seven inches. It was designed to be launched by the crew directly into the surf. Usually it was hauled on a cart down the shore to where it was needed and then launched. Both types of boats had buoyancy tanks. The lifeboats were self-righting and self-bailing; the surfboats were only self-bailing.

Boundaries between the life-saving station and the military station were further blurred when the army engineers at Fort Baker (formerly the Lime Point Military Reservation) began construction of large gun emplacements north of the Golden Gate at new locations to the west, toward the ocean. Here, the Corps of Engineers constructed five batteries: Battery Mendell (1901), Battery Alexander (1901), Battery Edwin Guthrie (1904), Battery Samuel Rathbone (1904) and Battery Patrick O'Rorke (1904). In support of the construction effort, the engineer's wharf and tramway were built in Bonita Cove to the ridge top near the old lighthouse tower—at the original terminus of Field Road. The engineers' housing was constructed immediately north of the life-saving station residential area and eventually completely removed.

This construction program required the subsequent construction of a garrison to house the units stationed at the batteries. The first detachment from Fort Baker arrived at the Point Bonita batteries in July 1903 and had to live in the magazines of Batteries Mendell and Alexander. The artillery detachment eventually occupied a series of temporary camps. Finally on July 16, 1904, the Secretary of War authorized construction of a permanent post for two companies of the Coast Artillery Corps on December 27, 1904; the War Department designated the new post "Fort Barry."

Confusion about the boundary of the lighthouse reservations persisted. A September 24, 1902 letter from Lieutenant Colonel Thomas H. Handbury, Corp of Engineers, Twelfth Lighthouse District, and J.B. Milton Commander, U.S. Navy, Twelfth Lighthouse District, to the Lighthouse Board in Washington D.C. reminded them that, in 1872, the Engineer Officers of the Twelfth District and Lime Point Military reservation were directed to recommend a reservation at Point Bonita. The 1872 recommendation was to set aside forty-four acres; however, it appears neither the Secretary of the Treasury nor the Secretary of War acted on this recommendation. Handbury's and Milton's recommendation for a boundary included "All the extreme southern part of Point Bonita lying south of a line joining the south west corner of the present Engineer wharf and point which shall be 120 feet from the north end of the tunnel through which the trail now runs leading to the fog-signal and light on the end of the Point, measured by said trail." The 1902 letter goes on to discuss the land on which "the light-house tower and the cisterns belonging to the Light-House Establishment are constructed" and right to access the property through Fort Baker Military Reservation by Lighthouse Board employees for transportation of Keepers, supplies and water and for maintenance.

According to the "6th Endorsement," on December 4, 1902, Major General Hughes assents to the U.S. Lighthouse Board request for the lighthouse reservation outlined in Handbury's and Milton's 1902 letter,

stating that the reservation could be “granted without prejudice to the military interest and is necessary for the light house service.” A letter was sent from Wm. Cary Sanger, Assistant Secretary of War to the Secretary of the Treasury on March 5, 1903 to “state that this Department concurs in the views therein expressed by General Hughes.” This agreement between the Department of the Treasury and the War Department established the first endorsed boundary of the lighthouse reservation after forty-eight years of use as a light station.

On February 14, 1903, the U.S. Lighthouse Service; along with the Coast and Geodetic Survey, the U.S. Shipping Commission, the Bureau of Navigation, the Bureau of Statistics, the National Bureau of Standards and the Steamboat Inspection Service, was transferred from the Department of the Treasury to the Department of Commerce and Labor (32 Stat. L., 825).

The U.S. Army also developed their own presence within the area with the construction of a number of fire control stations around the Point. The nearby Battery Alexander and Battery Mendell had a double concrete station on Point Bonita constructed in 1909, located on a rock shelf below the fog-signal building, accessed by a narrow flight of stairs. The station served as an emergency fire control and observation station, monitoring for enemy assault.

As part of the Coast Defense measures put into place by the U.S. Army, the original 1855 lighthouse tower was removed. The Army was concerned that the lighthouse tower, which had been used as a day marker since the construction of the 1877 lighthouse tower, could be used by an enemy to establish their location on the California coast.

While the Life-Saving Service had improved the safety at the Point Bonita Life-Saving Station, the conditions for launching remained problematic. In 1911, the decision was made to build a boathouse and launchway to the northeast of the Army’s Quarter Master’s Wharf (Engineer’s Wharf)—labeled as 1911 Marine Railway and Boathouse Remains on Site Map. The hillside behind the new site and two pinnacle rocks were cut to grade. The new boathouse was to be constructed in what was expected to be solid rock; however, the hillside turned out to be composed of decayed lime rock and clay. This type of rock is very hard when dry, and when wet or exposed to moisture, soft and crumbly, creating a potential rockslide hazard. However, the construction of the wood frame boathouse proceeded. On December 31, 1911, a large rock slide damaged the new boathouse, requiring \$600 just for the removal of rock debris and to stabilize and protect the boathouse. In early 1912, the boathouse was finally put into service, and Boathouse A and B were decommissioned; Boathouse A was used for storage, while Boathouse B was moved to Fort Barry for use as a school house.

On June 17, 1910, Congress replaced the U.S. Lighthouse Service with the Bureau of Lighthouses, which was staffed by civilians. The Bureau was under the Department Commerce and Labor and was given authorization to reorganize the lighthouse districts, but not to exceed nineteen, which were headed by a civilian inspector. The bureau would remain with the Commerce Department after the Department was again reorganized in 1913.

By June 1912, through modernization introduced as a result of the reorganization of the Lighthouse Bureau in the Department of Commerce and Labor, the power of Point Bonita light beacon was increased by seven fold, with a new light signature of a flash every twenty-five seconds and an eclipse for five seconds as opposed to the fixed light used since 1855. At this time, the coast defense searchlight was mounted between the fog-signal building and the fire control station as part of the coastal military defense (see photo: History #6).

In 1926, the light was strengthened once more to 40,000 candlepower when electricity was introduced to

the light station. The conversion from oil to electricity for the light beacon and the fog-signal decreased the need for maintenance and, subsequently, the necessity of four Keepers. In 1938, additional improvements were made to modernize the light station; a radio beacon tower was installed adjacent to the lighthouse tower's east façade.

Following the construction of the new boathouse at the life-saving station in 1912, the army built a road directly past the residence and along the hill to the Quartermaster's Wharf. This road provided an easier way to transport supplies to the boathouse. Then in 1914, the station received permission to connect to the military electricity system. In 1915, the Monomy surfboat, two power lifeboats and the surfboat were tied up at the Army's Quarter Master's Wharf.

At this time, a major shift occurred in the operation of the U.S. Life-Saving Service. On January 20, 1915, the operations of the U.S. Life-Saving Service and the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service were combined to form the U.S. Coast Guard (38 Stat. L., 800). The joining of the two separate agencies was meant to streamline and improve government operations, and attract new servicemen.

Further improvements were made to the station in 1916 when a lean-to was added to the boathouse for the storage of the Dobbins lifeboat, which made launching the boat more efficient as needed. But by June 1916, it was reported that the launchway rails were spreading, which could allow one of the power lifeboats to drop into the cove, injuring the boat and crew. In December 1916, rains again threatened to cause a landslide behind the boathouse. On December 6, District Superintendent Wellander wrote that hydraulicing, a method to remove material by spraying water under high pressure at a rock face to remove the excess material behind the boathouse, could be completed when the hillside was already soaked, requiring less water. It is not clear whether this method was used; although few repairs or alterations were made to the boathouse over the next thirteen years.

However, overriding problems with boathouse and launch facilities were still not fixed. In 1923, ship owners, ship masters, and sea-faring men formally requested that the Coast Guard improve the condition of the life-saving station, protesting "the present lamentable and crippled condition" of the station, including a "lack of proper boats, lack of launching facilities and lack of other equipment" which created a station that was "utterly incapable of rendering any assistance to vessels in distress." (Historic Resource Study, 305; 1980) The letter took specific issue with the station the removal of two powerboats and the disrepair of the launchway. Suggestions were made for improvement including, construction of a jetty in the cove. Plans for construction of a new wharf were not funded until the following year.

On April 2, 1929, five years after the completion of the new wharf, the boathouse was destroyed as a result of a landslide. By December, J.J. Grodemen and Company had been selected to build a new boathouse. The unstable slope behind the boathouse continued to halt construction as new landslides occurred. In the summer and fall of 1930, following a landslide, 14,582 cubic yards of dirt were removed. In February 1931, additional material had to be removed following a second landslide. At this time, the launchway rails ended above the water line at low tide, compounding the already dangerous conditions during a boat launch.

The launchway was repaired in 1934, but by 1939 two studies had been completed regarding the relocation of the boathouse and launchway and the construction of a breakwater. The Acting Chief Engineer of the U.S. Coast Guard concluded that launching conditions at the site could not be improved. Additionally, it appears that the cost of relocating the boathouse and launchway was not a necessary expenditure since the Fort Point Station could respond to any calls of distress as quickly or within a few minutes of a Point Bonita lifeboat reaching an accident. Another landslide occurred in November, 1943. However, the discussion about whether to remove the life-saving station continued until 1946, when the

station was abandoned. The boathouse was finally destroyed by fire in 1948.

On July 7, 1939, the Bureau of Lighthouses was merged with the U.S. Coast Guard by Congress in order to streamline the federal government (53 Stat. L., 1432). The U.S. Coast Guard was transferred from the Department of the Treasury to the U.S. Navy as the nation entered World War II (Executive Order 8929). The agency was transferred back to the Treasury Department on January 1, 1946 (Executive Order 9666).

In 1950, a small watch room was added to the west end of the lighthouse tower. The watch room was removed by the U.S. Coast Guard in 1980 to restore the structure to the original 1877 appearance.

In 1939 and 1940, landslides destroyed the simple wood plank bridge that connected the lighthouse tower and fog-signal building to the rest of the station. The landslides combined with years of erosion produced an un-repairable chasm. In 1954, a suspension bridge was constructed to connect the lighthouse tower and fog-signal with the path along the Point.

In the early 1960s, the Light Keeper's residence and the 1899 life-saving Station Building were demolished, and the awnings, storm doors, and gallery deck around the lantern room were removed. The luminosity of the light was strengthened to 60,000 candlepower. Three wood frame residential buildings were constructed by the U.S. Coast Guard to house the Point Bonita Lighthouse Keepers.

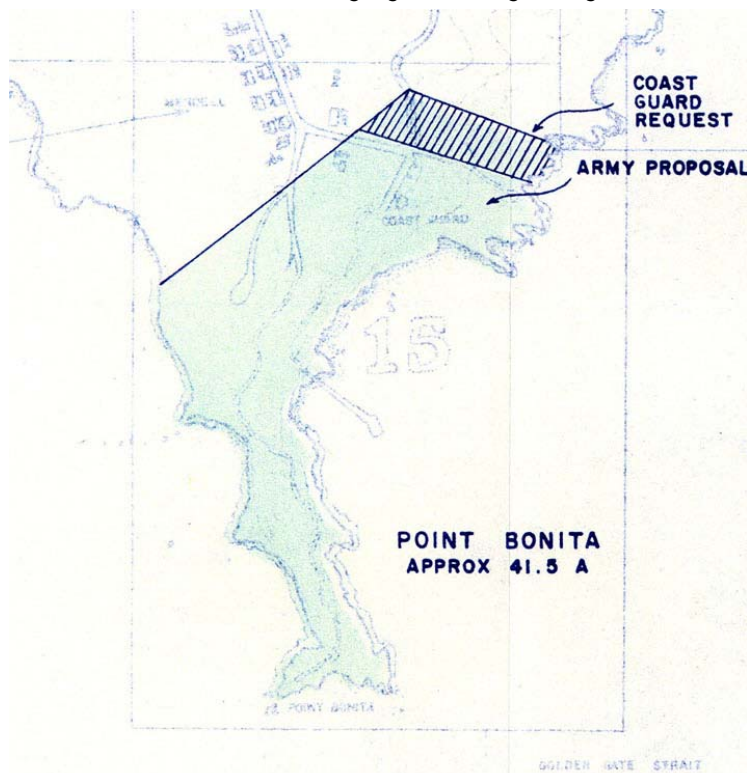
According to a letter from Donald Morrison, Acting Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard to the Chief of Engineers, Department of the Army on October 10, 1962, the U.S. Coast Guard petitioned the Army for the transfer of ownership of the land beneath four aids to navigation; Lime Point Light Station, Point Bonita Light Station, Point Diablo Light and Yellow Bluff Light and "rights of ingress and egress" to all four sites, located on Army property of Forts Baker, Barry and Cronkhite. The letter also requested an addition to the boundary for Point Bonita to include "approximately 350 feet of Conzelman Road for access purposes (see photo: History #7)."

New residences were completed at the life-saving station residential area to house the light Keepers. The combination of electricity to the light beacon and fog-signal building in 1926 and more efficient equipment made the unique way of life for Coast Guard light Keeper increasingly obsolete. Completion of the housing represents the last phase of Coast Guard development at the site before it became an un-staffed light station in 1980.

A letter from Stanley Resor, Secretary of the Army to Henry H. Fowler, Secretary of the Treasury, dated November 10, 1965, confirmed the transfer of a "a portion of the Fort Barry Military Reservation, California, identified as Point Bonita, consisting of approximately 39.0 acres of fee-owned land, together with certain Army-owned improvements and rights of ingress and egress through adjoining Army property" to the U.S. Coast Guard. On January 31, 1966, the U.S. Army transferred the property to the U.S. Coast Guard under Title 10 U.S. Code, Section 2571.



History #6: 1967 oblique aerial view (looking east) of the abandoned U.S. Army fire control station and searchlight enclosure in front of the 1903 fog-signal building and lighthouse tower. (U.S. Coast Guard, 12th District)



History #7: A detail of the 1962 "Tentative Coast Guard Reservation Limits" map, depicting the requested light reservation from the Army. (U.S. Coast Guard, 12th District)

1967-1997: National Park Service Management

On April 1, 1967, the U.S. Coast Guard was transferred to the newly created Department of Transportation (80 Stat. 931). The Department was created to consolidate highway, rail, air, and marine transportation.

An agreement was established between the U.S. Coast Guard and the National Park Service regarding the management and the eventual transfer of the property. On September 13, 1962, public law 87-657, 72 Stat. 538 established that “any land found excess to the needs of the Coast Guard will be incorporated into the Point Reyes National Seashore Tract.” (Proceedings of a Board of Survey, Number 12-133-73) This was revised with the creation of Golden Gate National Recreation Area on October 27, 1972; Public Law 92-589 stated that the property would be transferred to the new park unit if the property were declared excess.

In 1980, the Point Bonita Lighthouse became the last lighthouse in California to become automated, effectively ending the remote lifestyle of the Light Keeper and their families in California (see photo: History #8).

On July 21, 1982, an agreement was reached between the U.S. Coast Guard and the National Park Service. The U.S. Coast Guard retained ownership and rights of access at Point Bonita. The U.S. Coast Guard was also responsible for the maintenance of the aids to navigation. The National Park Service would “provide a continuous presence and protection” and was responsible for law enforcement and maintenance of the property. In 1984, the light station was opened for tours by the National Park Service. The Officer in Charge of the San Francisco Aids to Navigation Team (ANT) from the U.S. Coast Guard noted the poor condition of the lighthouse lantern room. In 1993, further assessment of the structure was conducted to determine how to renovate the structure. “The original plan was to stop the water from entering the lighthouse and let Civil Engineering Unit (CEU) Oakland do the overall renovation in a couple years. But further investigation indicated the need for more immediate repairs, using self help-funding and the ANT personnel.” (Historic Lighthouse Preservation Handbook, Case Study: Rehabilitation of Point Bonita Light Station, 1997: 8 The project eventually grew into a comprehensive exterior maintenance project that took six months and \$75,000 to complete) Following extensive research of the building including site visits to the contemporaneous Cape Disappointment Lighthouse, the gallery deck was restored, the awnings and exterior doors were replaced and the structure was repainted. See the Historic Lighthouse Preservation Handbook, Case Study: Rehabilitation of Point Bonita Light Station for additional information regarding the specifics of the restoration.

On November 25, 2002, President George W. Bush signed H.R. 5005 into law (P.L. 107-296), establishing the Department of Homeland Security. The Act brought together twenty-two agencies or parts of agencies from other departments, including Transportation, Justice, Commerce, Health and Human Services, under the control of the Department of Homeland Security. According to the act the U.S. Coast Guard was to be transferred from the Department of Transportation. On March 1, 2003, the U.S. Coast Guard was formally transferred to the Department of Homeland Security.