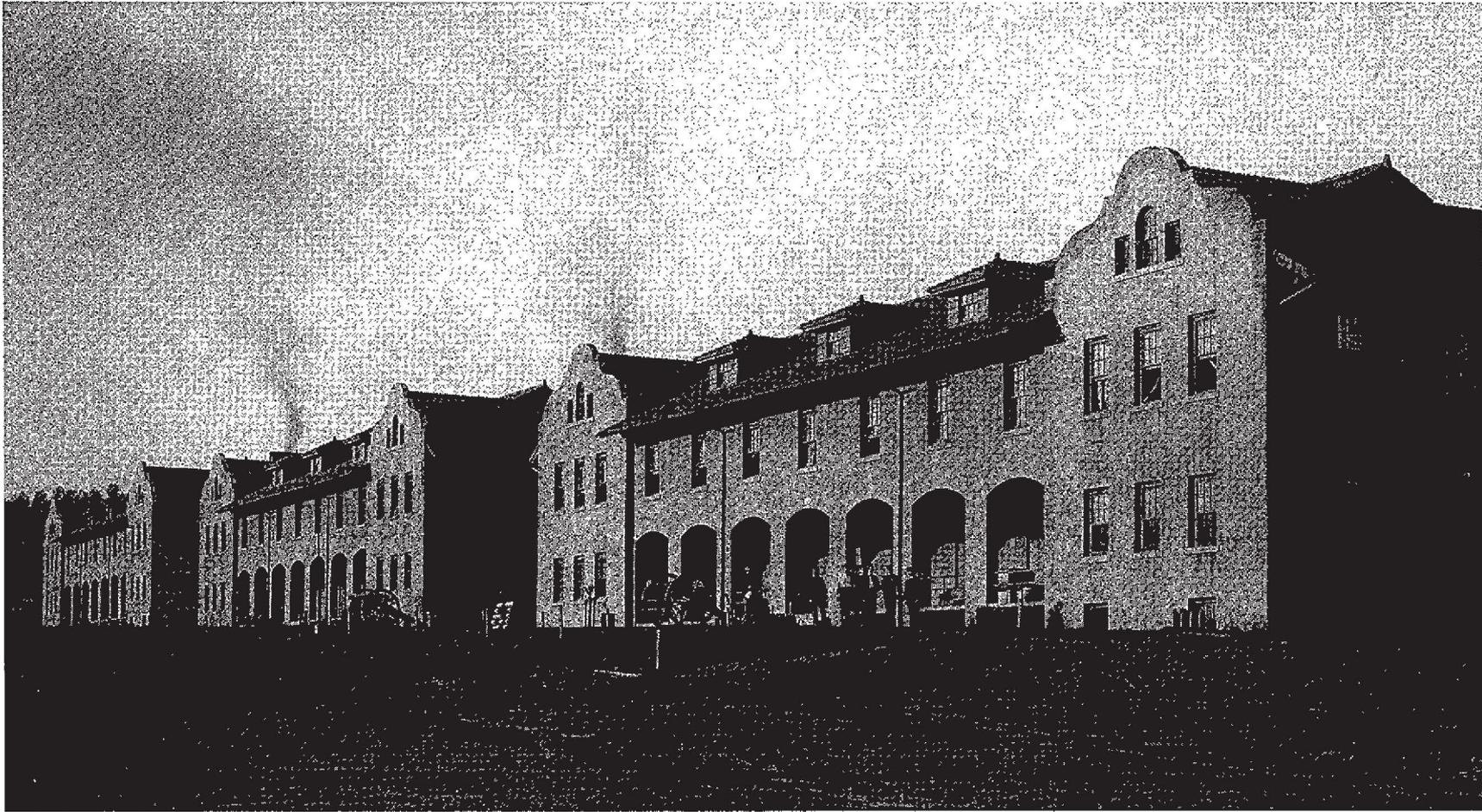


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The Presidio of San Francisco:
An Architectural History

November 1

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The front cover is a photograph of Fort Winfield Scott, constructed in 1912 as a Presidio sub-post. The fort was the headquarters for the coastal battery defenses. *GGNRA Park Archives and Records Center, NPS; 1915.*

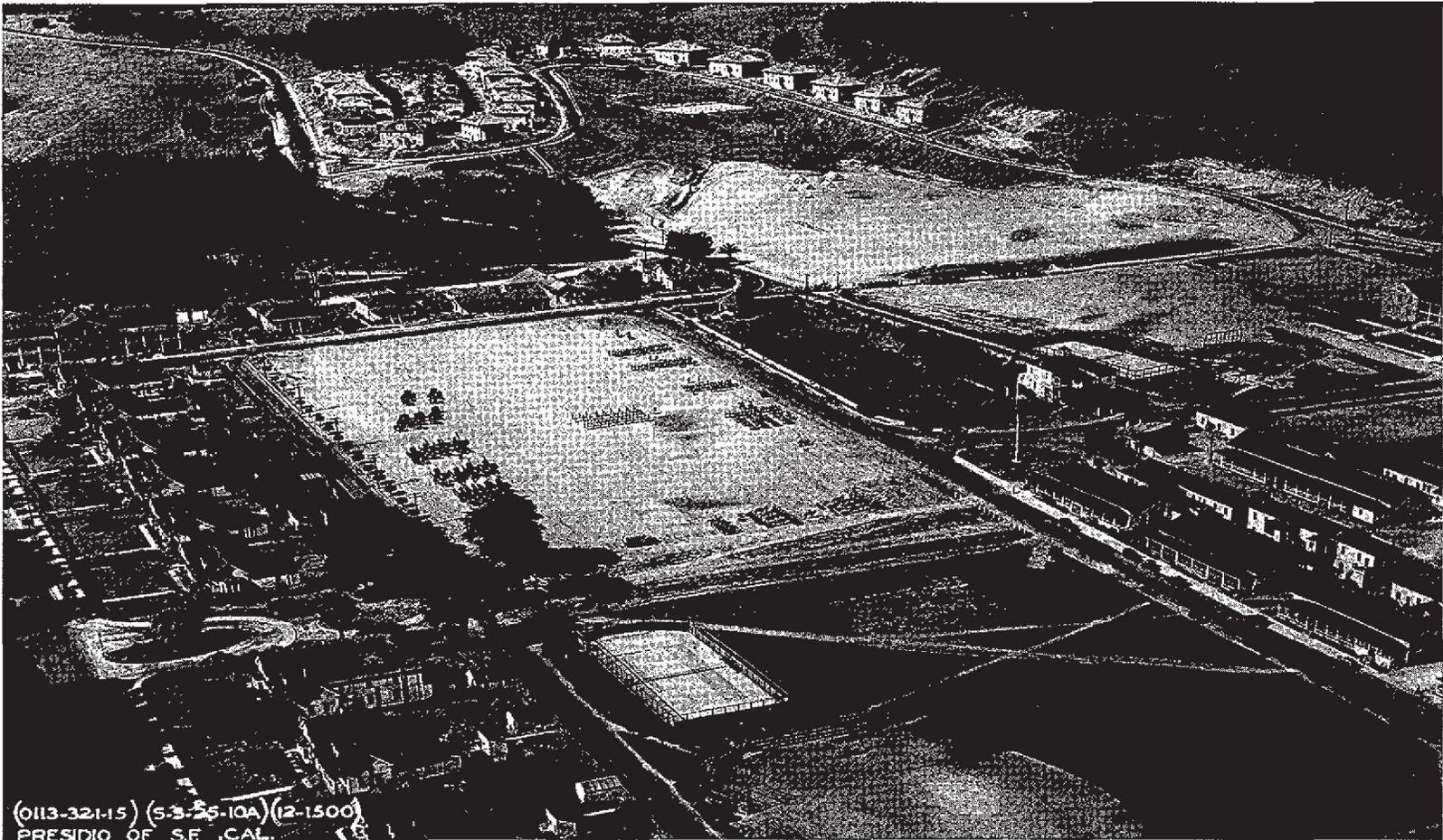


Figure 1: The above 1925 aerial view of Main Post shows many of the buildings that exist today as well as the undeveloped areas that were used for both troop exercises and recreation. Note the collection of wood frame buildings located along the west edge of the main parade ground that are no longer extant. *GGNRA Park Archives and Records Center, NPS; 1925.*



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Golden Gate National Recreation Area
Fort Mason, San Francisco, California 94123

IN REPLY REFER TO:

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Dear Friends of the Presidio:

I am very pleased to provide to you The Presidio of San Francisco: An Architectural History, written by Kristin L. Baron, Architectural Historian of the National Park Service, Presidio of San Francisco. This publication defines the architectural styles found at the Presidio and provides good background information on the park's rich architectural heritage.

We are dedicating this booklet to Erwin N. Thompson, a highly respected National Park Service historian who sadly passed away this year. "T", as he was commonly known, wrote several documents for both Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the Presidio. Through his tremendous knowledge, research and writing, he helped us all to better understand the value of history, and he is greatly missed.

Sincerely,

B.J. Griffin
General Manager, Presidio of San Francisco

Introduction

The Presidio of San Francisco represents one of the finest collections of military architecture in the United States, and reflects over 200 years of development under three different nations. Today, the Presidio boasts more than 790 buildings, of which 473 are historic and contribute to the Presidio's status as a National Historic Landmark District. The building types range from elegant officers' quarters and barracks to large industrial warehouses, administrative headquarters, air hangars, major medical facilities, and stables. This rich diversity of architectural styles signals many different building campaigns that narrate the story of the Presidio's growth into a significant western United States Army post. Entire streetscapes of historic buildings are intact, as well as unique, individual buildings that are important in their own right. Taken together, the diverse collection of buildings at the Presidio function collectively as a small city.

The Presidio was designated a National Historic Landmark District in 1962 for its national historical significance. The district's period of significance spans from 1776 to 1945 and includes sites, buildings, structures, objects, archeological resources, road corridors, and landscape features. In 1993, the *National Historic Landmark Update* was completed and includes a comprehensive listing of all Presidio features, and a determination of their importance as contributing or non-contributing resources to the Presidio's landmark status. The Presidio's landmark status is not based upon individual buildings, but rather a collection of diverse buildings and structures representing the many layers of military history present at this one site.

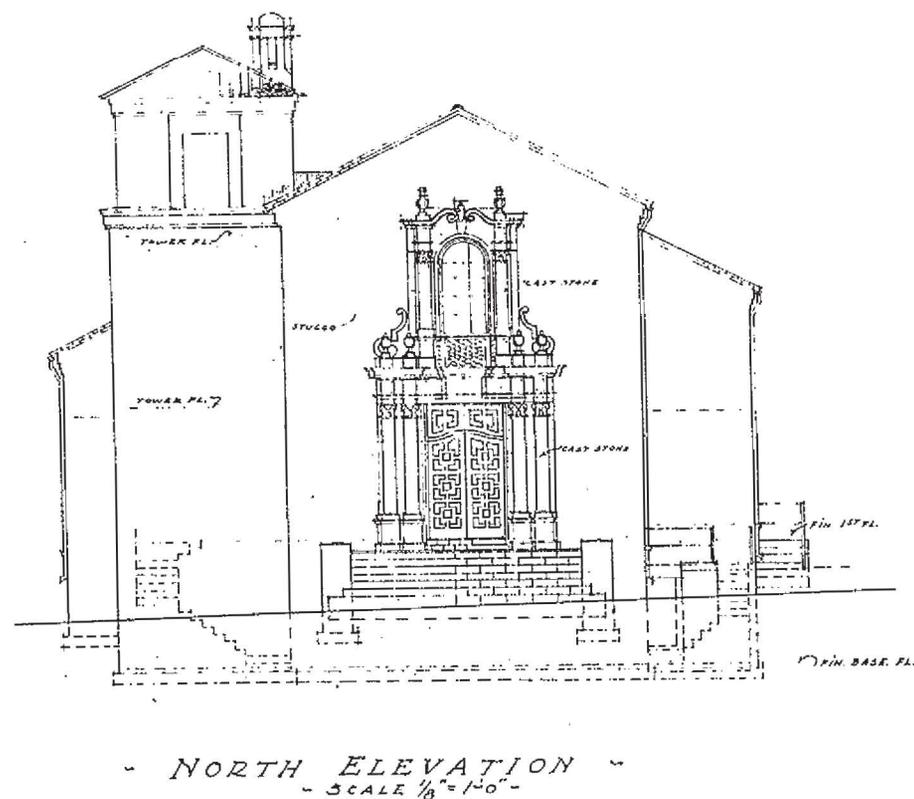


Figure 2: Drawing of Building 130, Post Chapel. GGNRA Park Archives and Records Center, NPS; 1930.

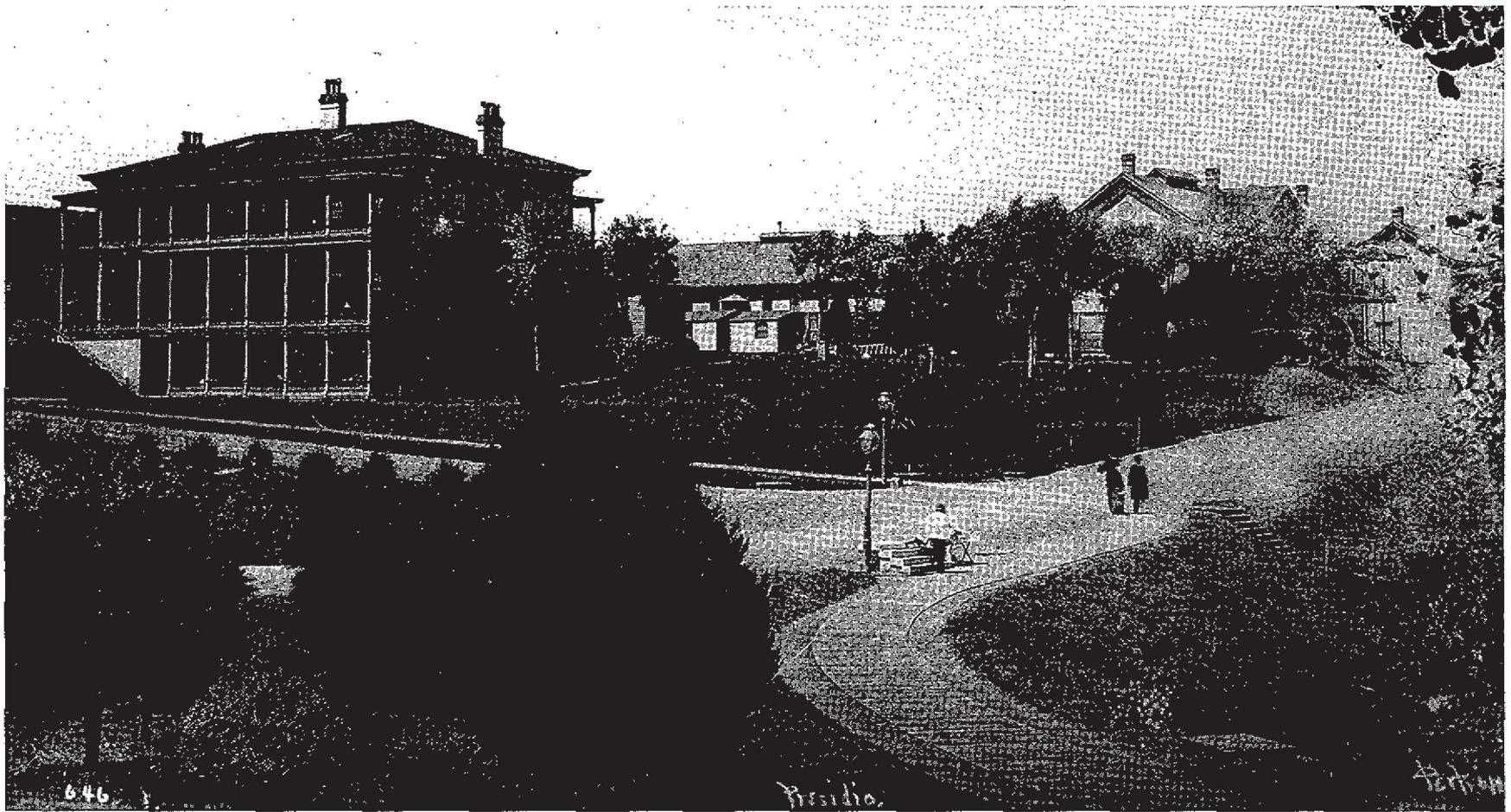


Figure 3: The Wright Army Hospital, shown here in 1895, was constructed during the Civil War as the Presidio's first hospital. This view from Lincoln and Funston Avenues shows the building before the porch enclosures and the octagonal surgery wing addition. *GGNRA Park Archives and Records Center, NPS; 1895.*

Architectural History

During the course of its 220 year history, the Presidio has evolved from under-utilized, temporary western outpost to a grand, permanent, and noteworthy garrison. The Spanish founded the Presidio in 1776. In 1822, the Mexican government established its presence at the post and occupied it for twenty years. By the time the United States Army arrived in 1847, the barren and wind-swept Presidio landscape contained only a few deteriorated adobe and wood-frame buildings.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, the Army quickly bolstered its presence at the Presidio in order to protect the San Francisco Bay and its gold-laden ships from the City's community of Confederate sympathizers. To enable the rapid construction at the Presidio, the Army Quartermasters Office, located in Washington, D.C., dispatched standard building patterns that were used at most of the expanding military bases across the nation. These building patterns usually consisted of simplified versions of popular East Coast architectural styles and included standard floor plans, elevations, and construction instructions.

Even though the Army relied on the use of standard building plans, local conditions at the individual posts dramatically affected the final designs and produced deviations from standard prescribed buildings. Once the plans were received at the post, if the funds or building materials were not readily available, the structures were often erected quickly with limited supervision or guidance, and with whatever materials were on hand. These circumstances often yielded buildings that contained an unusual mixture of architectural styles and materials, like the log cabin at Fort Winfield Scott. Typically, the Army put more effort into the architectural design and construction of high-profile buildings, such as generals' quarters, headquarters offices, chapels, and officers' housing rather than smaller, utilitarian buildings such as power houses, munitions storage, garages, warehouses, and bunkers.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Presidio looked dramatically different than it did upon the Army's arrival. Because of its strategic, defensive location and its important role in the Civil War, the Indian Wars, and the Spanish-American War, the Presidio became a significant West Coast military base. To accommodate the post's expanding role, the Army initiated several major building campaigns. Eager to establish a more permanent presence, each successive Army building campaign produced larger, grander and more expensive buildings. During the Civil War, the architecture at the Presidio typically consisted of simple, wood-framed, Italianate and Greek Revival-style buildings. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, the standard building pattern trends shifted to reflect the nation's preference for the large, classical Colonial Revival-style buildings. As a result of several Presidio fires at the turn of the century, newer buildings like the Montgomery Street barracks were constructed of brick, a more expensive but fireproof material. The use of more permanent building materials provided safer buildings than previously constructed on the base.

To complement Presidio building development, the Army also began a large-scale landscaping effort. By the 1890s, tens of thousands of trees had been planted along the ridges and borders of the Presidio in an effort to reduce soil erosion, provide windbreaks, and create the illusion of a



Figure 4: The Army planted thousands of trees in rows throughout the post in an effort to make the Presidio appear larger and more formidable. This view of the Main Post from around 1890 shows some of the initial tree plantings, as well as many early buildings which are no longer extant. *Photograph courtesy of California Section of California State Library; 1885-1890.*

larger, more impressive post. The Army installed formal landscape designs around the post to make it more hospitable and to present a dignified facade to the growing City of San Francisco.

By 1912, the Army received Congressional approval to construct a coastal artillery headquarters at the Presidio, designed specifically to protect the San Francisco Bay. The commanding officers at the Presidio wanted to use a new architectural style to highlight the headquarters, rather than utilizing traditional styles. The newly popular Mission Revival style, which evolved from the southwest's Spanish Colonial mission heritage, was adopted for the Presidio's new buildings. Fort Winfield Scott, named after a previous Chief of the Army, was constructed in 1912 as the first Presidio building project in the Mission Revival style. These large barracks and administrative buildings were built with flat, unadorned white stucco walls, decorative parapets, and red tile roofs.

Fort Winfield Scott's design was considered a great success. Constructed in its entirety with a defining architectural style, the new sub-post appeared more orderly and uniform than other parts of the Presidio. Responding to the success and acceptance of the Mission Revival style, the garrison began to use the style for all new construction on the post. Soon, the characteristic white stucco walls and red tile roofs were applied to many of the existing Presidio buildings, creating a more uniform image throughout the post. The Mission Revival style later became a visual tool used to identify the Army's military presence as a recognizable symbol of West Coast military architecture. By the 1930s, the Mission Revival style was adopted for all of the Bay Area bases. New construction at Fort Mason, and at Forts Baker and Barry in the Marin Headlands, incorporated the Mission Revival style. Existing buildings at these sites were repainted in white and re-roofed with red tiles to create an uniform appearance.

The Presidio experienced tremendous construction and growth during World War I in an effort to accommodate the Army's training programs for soldiers. Temporary wood-frame cantonments containing barracks, mess halls, and storehouses were quickly constructed at Crissy Field and at the east and west ends of the Presidio to house nearly 6,000 soldiers. An officers' training school was established at the Presidio and large

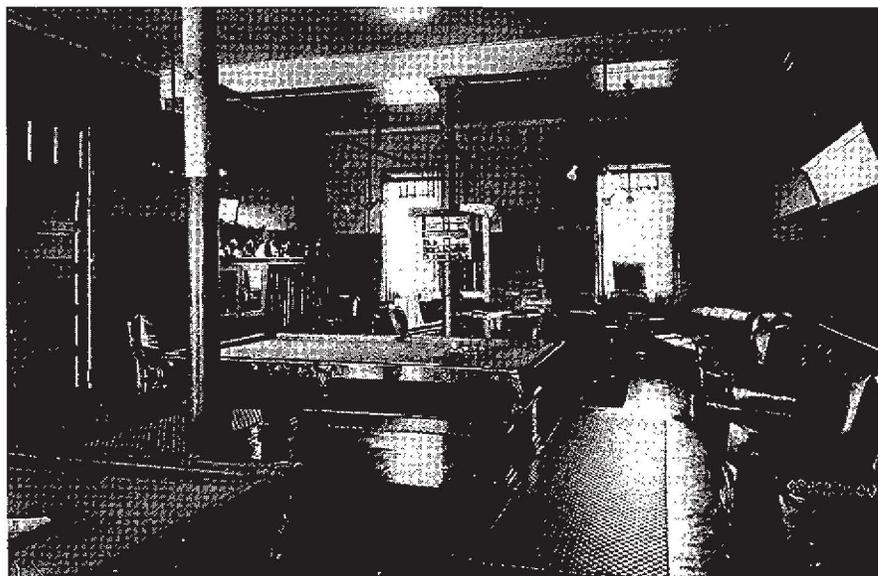


Figure 5: Day rooms, where soldiers could relax after training, were an important part of army barrack life. This interior image shows some typical military furnishings. *GGNRA Park Archives and Records Center, NPS; 1920-1930.*



Figure 6: In 1886, the Army built two of these large, Italianate-type barracks, based on standard building plans, on the Main Post. One of the barracks was removed in 1912 to make space for the new barracks Building 35; only Building 36 remains today and it has been significantly altered over time. *Photograph courtesy of National Archives; Quartermaster General Photo, RG 92-F-50-12; 1893.*

Mission Revival officers' housing was constructed along Lincoln Avenue. The wood-frame warehouses along Mason and Gorgas Avenues are the only remaining non-residential buildings from the extensive World War I construction era.

During the period of postwar reorganization, even as Congress was reducing Army personnel, the Presidio experienced slow but steady growth. During these two decades of peace, the Army continued its practice of removing old buildings, including the World War I cantonments, to make space for the new service and utilitarian buildings, such as a cooks' school, movie theater, chapel, and airplane hangers. A new Army headquarters was created and its station was moved to the Presidio from a San Francisco site. The Works Progress Administration (WPA), created during the Great Depression, provided funding for new buildings on Army bases across the country, to help replace deteriorated temporary structures. Several Presidio buildings, such as the pre-World War II concrete Mediterranean Revival barracks on the Main Post, were designed by civilian WPA architects with their form reflecting a new interpretation of the Mission Revival style.

Given the Presidio's strategic location along the Pacific Ocean, the post took on a commanding role during World War II. To accommodate the frenetic military activity and expanding number of troops, the Army again constructed numerous cantonments of temporary wood-frame structures. These barracks, mess halls, offices, day rooms, and recreation halls were constructed quickly and cheaply from standard issue plans. Large groups of buildings were clustered on Crissy Field and around the historic Letterman complex.

The development of RADAR and the subsequent shifting of military defense from the ground to the skies lessened the Presidio's strategic importance after World War II. From 1945 to the late 1960s, military activity at the Presidio slowed and fewer defense-related buildings were constructed. The Presidio buildings designed and built in the post-war era reflect the acceptance of Modern architecture in the United States, as exemplified by an emerging architectural interest in simple, functional structures, free of applied decorative ornament. During the 1950s, the Army constructed large multiple-unit quarters located at the south and west areas of the post in an effort to provide adequate housing for the remaining enlisted soldiers. As the Vietnam War intensified, the Department of Defense realized the need for a state-of-the-art hospital complex on the West Coast. Letterman Army Medical Center and the associated Letterman Army Institute of Research were constructed using the latest in hospital and research design to provide care for wounded soldiers returning from Southeast Asia.

In the 1970s, a renewed interest in preserving America's heritage resulted in new historic preservation laws that mandated all Federal agencies to inventory existing historic structures. These laws also established that any new construction within a historic district had to be compatible with the surrounding historic setting. The effects of the preservation movement can be seen in some of the Presidio's more recent structures, such as the Letterman nurses quarters and the Post Commissary, where the new architecture intentionally incorporated the now standard white stucco walls and red tile roof components of the Mission Revival style.

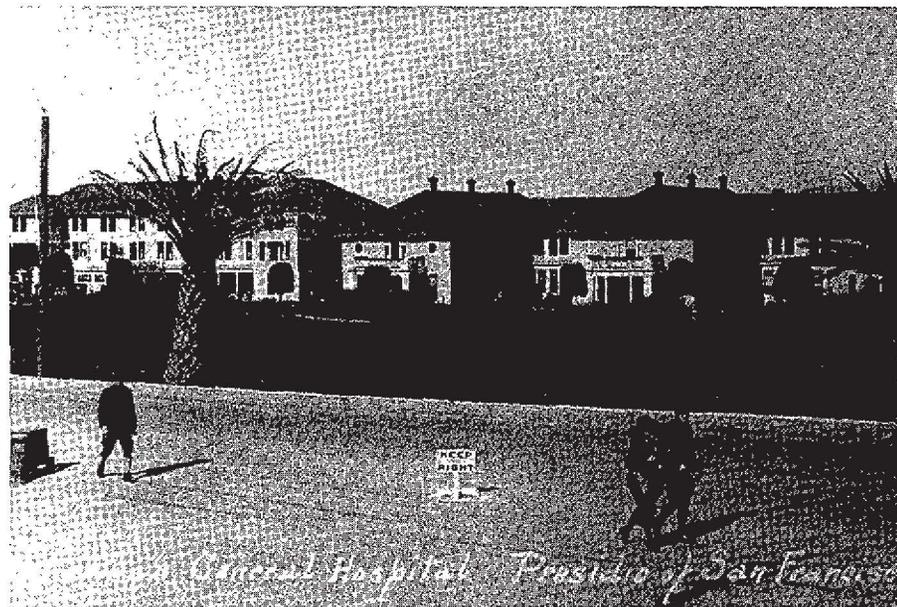


Figure 7: Letterman Army Hospital was built in 1900 as the first permanent army hospital on the West Coast. The hospital complex, designed in the Colonial Revival style, was originally constructed and organized into separate pavilions of wood-frame structures connected together by glazed gallery corridors. GGNRA Park Archives and Records Center, NPS; circa 1917.

Architectural Styles At The Presidio

There are nine prevalent architectural styles found at the Presidio. Presidio buildings often defy strict stylistic categorization with their design often less elaborate than civilian examples. Elements of different styles are frequently intermingled, resulting in eclectic designs or anomalies.

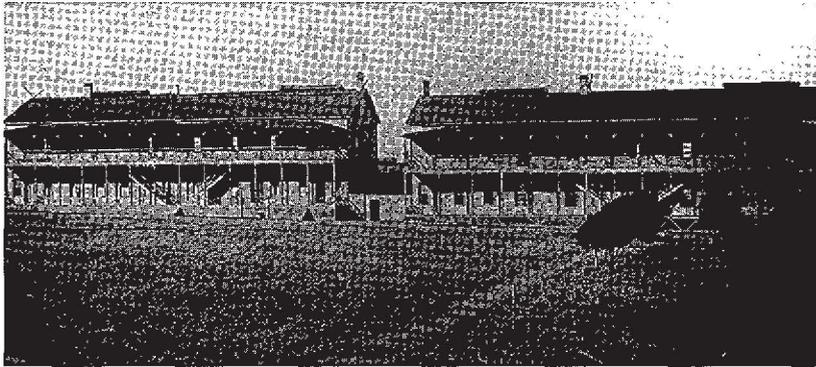


Figure 8: Buildings 86 and 87, constructed in 1862, have elements of both the Italianate and Greek Revival styles; Main Post. GGNRA Park Archives and Records Center, NPS; 1924-1938.

ITALIANATE (1860 - 1880) and GREEK REVIVAL (1840 - 1860)
Buildings 86 and 87, constructed in 1862, are examples of the earliest wood-frame buildings still extant at the Presidio and represent a simplified version of the Italianate and Greek Revival styles, which were both popular at the time of the Civil War. The Italianate style was used predominantly in residential architecture, where the design and shapes were based on the classical villas of Northern Italy. Features of this style include low roofs, long overhanging eaves, decorative brackets, cupolas and arcade porches. The Greek Revival style was based on the forms of the Greek temple. Pediments, columns, bold moldings, and heavy cornices were applied to all types of buildings, sometimes indiscriminately. The simplest elements of these two styles were combined in the Quartermasters' building patterns for wood-frame structures.

QUEEN ANNE (1880 - 1890)

The Queen Anne style, imported from England during the mid-nineteenth century, was an eclectic style based on decorative medieval forms. Similar to buildings commonly known as "Victorians," these buildings were often asymmetrical with wrap-around porches, turrets, angled roof brackets, and different combinations of exterior building materials. The cluster of large officers' quarters located at Funston and Presidio Boulevards represent the Presidio's version of the Queen Anne style with a cleaner, less ornate building than the colorful, civilian counterpart found throughout the City of San Francisco.



Figure 9: Building 59 was constructed in 1885 in the Queen Anne style; Main Post. GGNRA Park Archives and Records Center, NPS; 1924-1938.

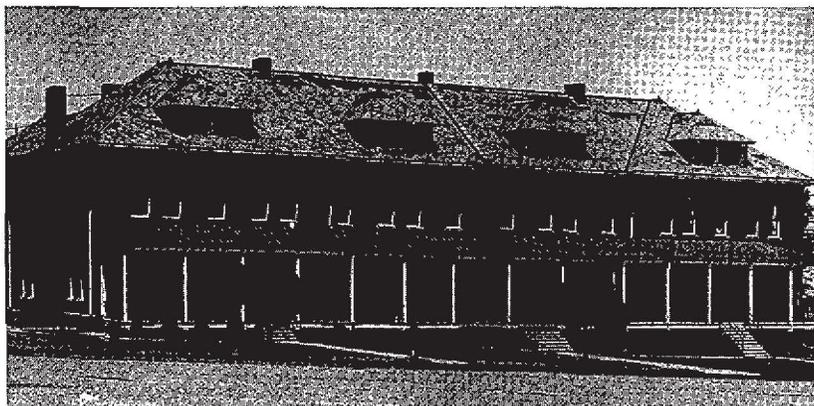


Figure 10: Building 105 was constructed in 1897 in the Colonial Revival style; Main Post. *GGNRA Park Archives and Records Center, NPS; 1924-1938.*

COLONIAL REVIVAL (1880 - 1940)

In the 1890s, the US Army began to favor the nationally-popular Colonial Revival style. Colonial Revival is an umbrella term for the revival of the eighteenth-century East Coast colonial architecture, including the Georgian and Federal styles. The goal of this style, which favored clean, simple lines and a minimal use of applied decoration, was to inspire a sentimental remembrance of the early history of the United States, a time when American democracy was in its infancy. This calculated revival of patriotic feeling made the Colonial Revival style particularly appropriate to an evolving Army base; the style was often used to imbue a sense of civic pride. The Montgomery Street barracks are good examples of the Presidio's Colonial Revival and are characterized by large, stocky symmetrical buildings executed in prominently displayed classical elements, such as pediments and columns in brick and white-painted wood trim.

MISSION REVIVAL (1910 - 1940)

By the 1900s, the Mission Revival style was gaining in popularity throughout the country's West and Southwest. This style developed from the desire to create an architecture based on the Southwest's regional historic influences, namely the Spanish Colonial mission history, rather than adopting imported design influences from the East Coast. At the Presidio, the Army adopted the Mission Revival style in constructing the Fort Winfield Scott barracks. The style, as shown here with Building 1204, was characterized by silhouetted shapes that mimicked the old missions, with large flat stucco surfaces, often punctuated by deep windows and door openings. The exterior surface was usually devoid of any ornament; the shadows cast on walls by overhanging roofs were usually the building's only decorative features. The gable and hip roofs were typically sheathed in red tiles.



Figure 11: Building 1204, constructed in 1912, is an example of a Presidio building in the Mission Revival style; Fort Winfield Scott. *GGNRA Park Archives and Records Center, NPS; 1924-1938.*



Figure 12: Building 35, constructed in 1912, exemplifies the Mediterranean Revival style at the Presidio; Main Post. *GGNRA Park Archives and Records Center, NPS; 1919.*

MEDITERRANEAN and ITALIAN RENAISSANCE REVIVAL (1920 - 1940)

While the Mission Revival style was based on the shapes of the Spanish Colonial missions, the Mediterranean Revival evolved from a rekindled interest in Italian Renaissance palaces. By the turn of the century, prominent architects were designing buildings incorporating details of sixteenth-century Italian palaces and utilizing newly developed construction technologies. Building 35 is an excellent example of the Army Quartermasters' interpretation of the Mediterranean Revival, with its large, boxy shape that could accommodate many different building uses, simple stuccoed exterior, flat roof and decorative horizontal frieze.

WORLD WAR II -ERA (1940-1945)

World War II buildings at the Presidio, as at other Army bases, were constructed from standard plans designed for quick, cheap construction that could be sited anywhere. The basic building pattern, as exemplified in the Main Post's Building 40, called for very simple rectangular wood-frame buildings, with exterior stairs at each end, horizontal wood siding, and asphalt-shingled roofs. This design was applied to all building types indiscriminately, so that barracks, mess halls, administrative buildings, post exchanges, chapels, and various other service buildings had similar appearances.

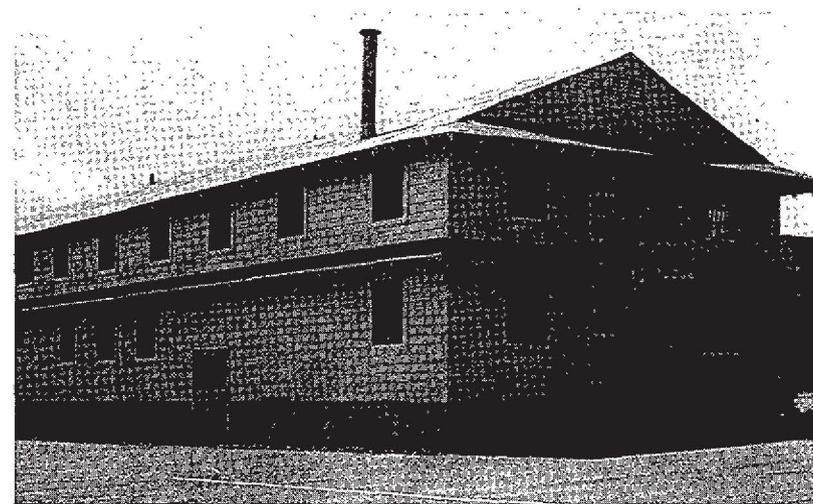


Figure 13: Building 40 was constructed in 1941 during World War II; Main Post. *GGNRA Park Archives and Records Center, NPS; 1941.*



Figure 14: Building 924, constructed in 1959, represents buildings constructed in the Post-War Era; Crissy Field. *NPS, 1998.*

POST-WAR ERA/MODERN (1945 to the present)

The modern buildings constructed at the Presidio, including the Main Post Gym, Letterman Army Medical Center, and the Crissy Field warehouses, were designed as simple, functional buildings. These buildings often incorporated new advances in building technology. Letterman Army Medical Center was constructed of pre-cast concrete components, and Building 924, a Crissy Field warehouse shown here, exhibited innovative engineering design with its open floor plan and glass curtain walls.

UTILITARIAN (1860 to the present)

Simple utilitarian buildings were usually constructed with inexpensive materials and limited applied detail. The function of the building usually dictated its design. Wood-frame warehouses were long and rectangular with open plans to accommodate storage. Crissy Field hangars were tall and wide to accommodate airplane maintenance. Despite their simple functions, some Presidio utilitarian structures, like Building 225, contained special architectural details, such as arched window frames or brick water tables. These details demonstrated the builder's interest in incorporating decorative elements, often reflective of the period style.



Figure 15: Building 225 was constructed in 1910 in the utilitarian style; Main Post. *GGNRA Park Archives and Records Center, NPS; 1924-1938.*

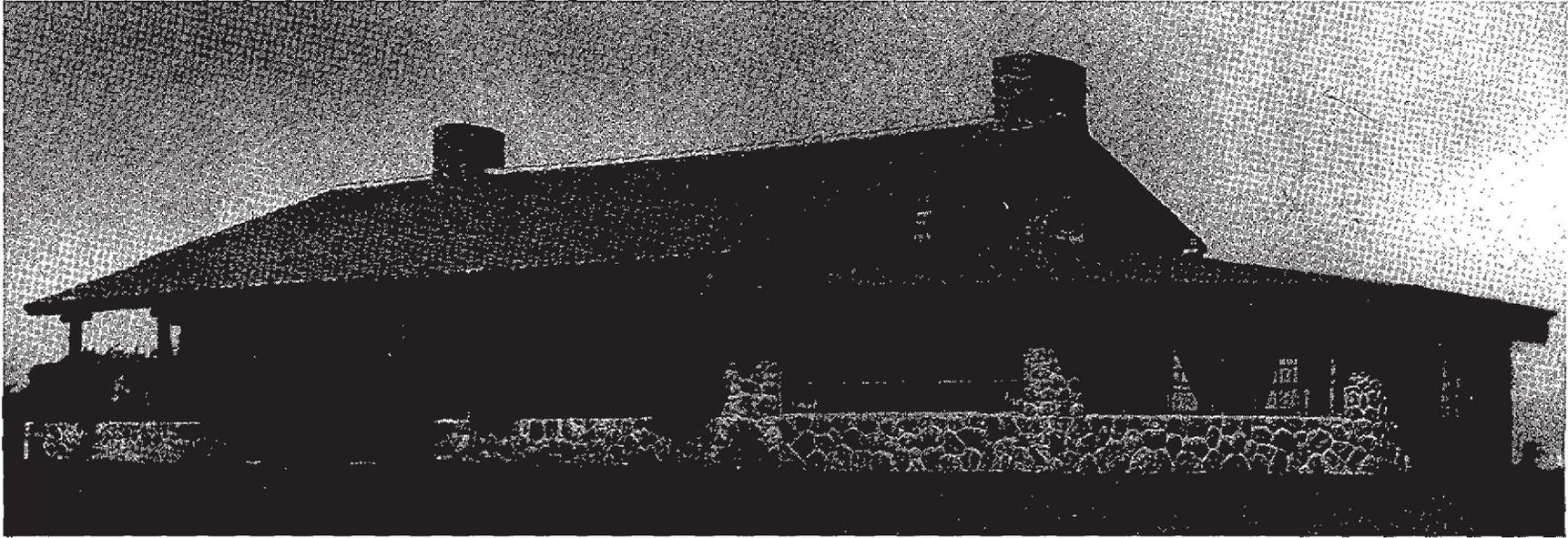


Figure 16: Building 1299, constructed in 1937, exemplifies an eclectic style at the Presidio; Fort Winfield Scott. *GGNRA Park Archives and Records Center, NPS; 1942.*

ECLECTIC ANOMALIES

Some unique buildings stand alone as the only representatives of their type at the Presidio. The United States Coast Guard Life Saving Station, built and managed by the Coast Guard, was designed in the Coast Guard's traditional Dutch Colonial style and is the only example of its kind at the Presidio. The Protestant Main Post Chapel is the only building designed in the thickly decorated Spanish-Colonial Revival style. There are also buildings that defy definition, like Fort Winfield Scott's log cabin, with its playful use of building materials, or the small Funston Avenue cottage topped with a large mansard roof. These buildings were probably a result of the whimsical mixing and matching of standard building plans with local styles.

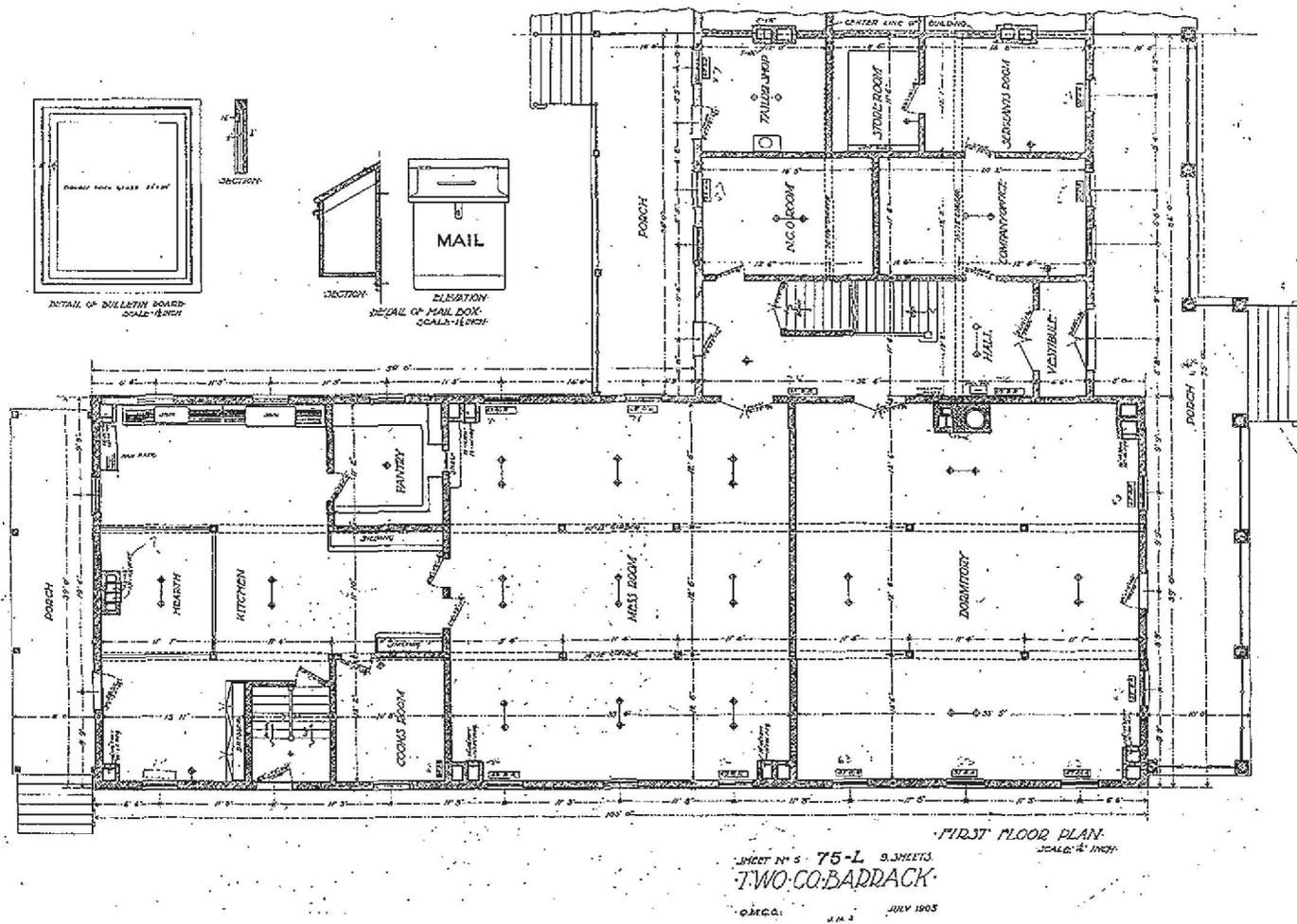


Figure 17: Partial floor plan of Building 100 for two company barracks. GGNRA Park Archives and Records Center, NPS; 1905.

The Presidio Today

Due to the tremendous range of building types and styles at the Presidio, a visitor can easily trace the post's many layers of the area's history, with Colonial Revival barracks adjacent to Mission Revival administration offices, beside modern utilitarian structures. Many of the buildings have experienced physical changes over time as buildings designed for specific military activities are converted into peacetime new uses. For example, several of the Main Post and Fort Winfield Scott barracks, designed to house soldiers, have been rehabilitated into offices, and the Main Post guard house was converted into a post office.

The goal of building rehabilitation projects at the Presidio is to preserve this rich collection of buildings types and broad range of styles. According to the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), all buildings contributing to a National Historic Landmark must be preserved and rehabilitated in accordance with National Park Service policy and The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties. These standards ensure that any modification proposed to either the interior or the exterior of the building must present the least possible loss of historic building material and must preserve the historic character of the building.

Exciting new rehabilitation projects are presently underway. The historic Letterman Hospital, built in 1900, has been rehabilitated into offices for the Thoreau Center for Sustainability, a consortium of organizations which foster science, research, and education. The original features of the historic clinic buildings were preserved and the floor plans only slightly modified to accommodate new office use. Recreational facilities such as a swimming pool and post gyms have been rehabilitated, upgraded and made accessible for new use by the YMCA. Other successful rehabilitation projects carried out at the Presidio illustrate how historic and non-historic buildings, in an urban National Park setting, can be re-used for new and innovative purposes.



Figure 18: The Thoreau Center for Sustainability is located at the historic Letterman Hospital complex. NPS; 1998.

Additional Information

For more in-depth information on the Presidio buildings, please consult:

Defender of the Gate: The Presidio of San Francisco, A History from 1846 to 1995; (NPS, July 1997);

Guidelines for Rehabilitating Buildings at the Presidio of San Francisco (NPS, March 1995);

The National Historic Landmark Update/Presidio National Register of Historic Places Registration Forms (NPS, October 1993).

These documents are available for research at the William Penn Mott, Jr. Visitor Center library, located at Building 102, Montgomery Street (415-561-4323) and are available for copying at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area Park Archives and Records Center, located at Building 667, Cowles Street (415-561-4807).



Figure 19: The Funston Avenue cottages, built as officers' quarters in 1862, originally faced the west parade ground. In 1880, the buildings were re-oriented toward the east and remodeled with bay windows as they became part of the Presidio's formal front entrance. *Photograph courtesy of National Archives; c. 1885.*

Prepared for the National Park Service
Department of the Interior
by Kristin L. Baron
Architectural Historian
Golden Gate National Recreation Area



As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering sound use of our land and water resources; protecting our fish, wildlife, and biological diversity; preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to ensure that their development is in the best interest of all our people, by encouraging stewardship and citizen participation in their care. The department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

Publication services provided by Architectural Resources Group, Architects, Planners & Conservators, Inc., Pier 9, The Embarcadero, San Francisco, CA 94111. NPS D-370, November 1998. Printed by Government Printing Office with recycled paper stock and soy-based inks.