

Golden Gate

National Recreation Area
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

The Presidio of San Francisco

MAIN POST WALK

200 years of history and architecture



Walk around the Presidio's main post and experience firsthand more than 200 years of history, architecture and natural beauty . . . 17th-century cannon . . . homes occupied by soldiers during the Civil War . . . a forest where wind once whipped barren dunes.

The Route

Length: one mile

Number of stops: 12

Time required: about one hour

Access: The entire route is paved, with curb cuts at essential points, but watch for steps and cracked pavement. One steep downhill section will be encoun-

tered about halfway, near the bottom of Funston Avenue (between Stops 7 and 8).

Restrooms are located at the Presidio Museum (Stop 8) and at the Presidio Visitor Center in Building 102 on Montgomery Street (Stop 12).

If you have any questions, please stop by the visitor center.

Begin at the flagpole near Moraga Avenue and Arguello Boulevard (see map).

PERSHING SQUARE

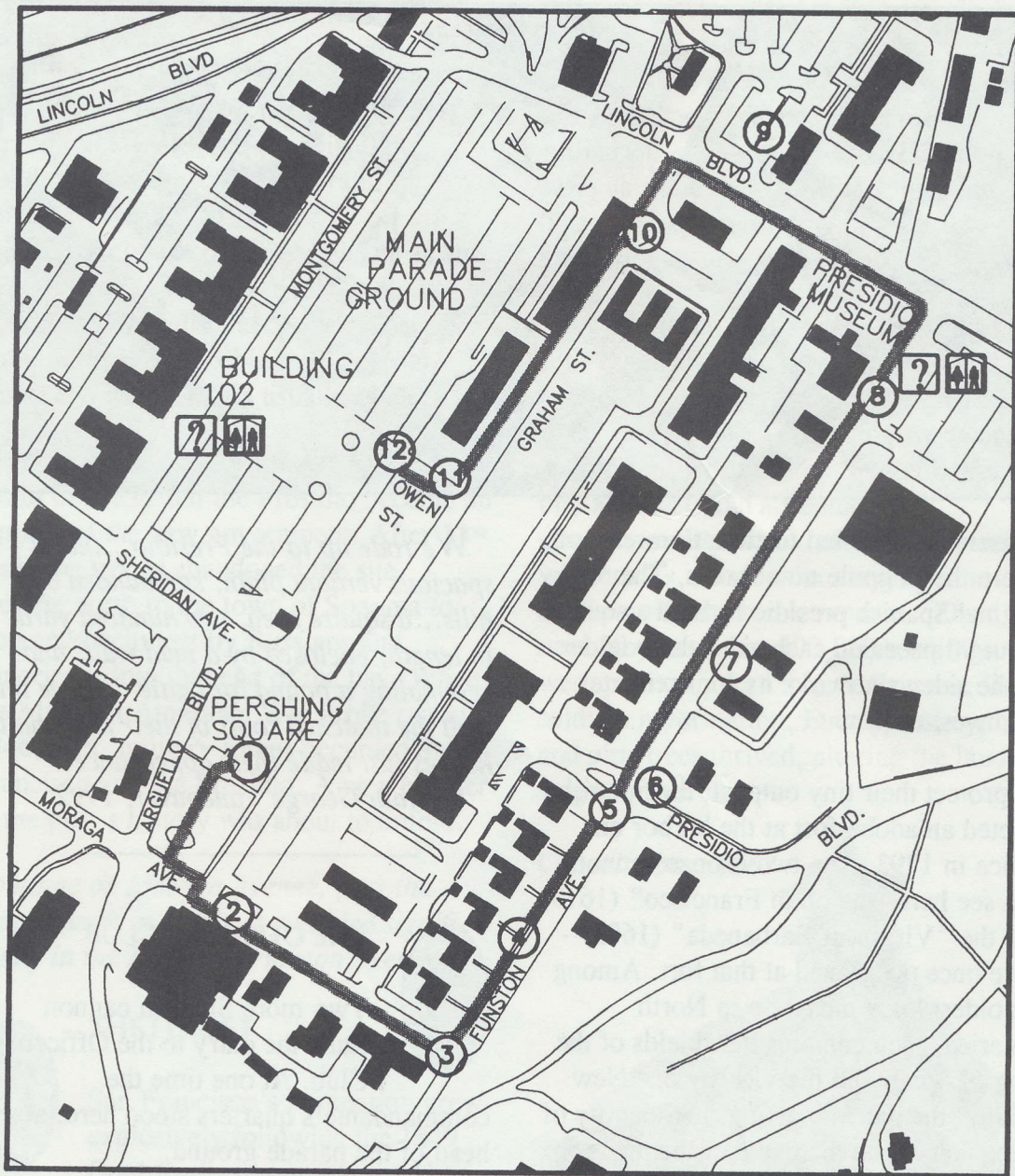
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To understand how the Presidio developed, imagine it as it looked more than 200 years ago: windswept and almost barren, with low-

growing dune plants, grass and shrubs. Extensive marshes along the shore abounded with seagulls and pelicans, a few deer and occasionally a mountain lion or grizzly bear. The native people, the Ohlone, lived nearby in small villages, in temporary shelters constructed of reeds. The animals and plants provided the people with food, tools and clothing. For about 5,000 years Ohlone life ebbed and flowed with the seasons: with the sunshine, fog and rain.

In 1776, Spanish colonists established a military and civilian "presidio"--the Span-

On the cover: against backdrop of the main parade, a medical detachment poses before Montgomery Street barracks. Note medical steward at upper left holding a kitten.

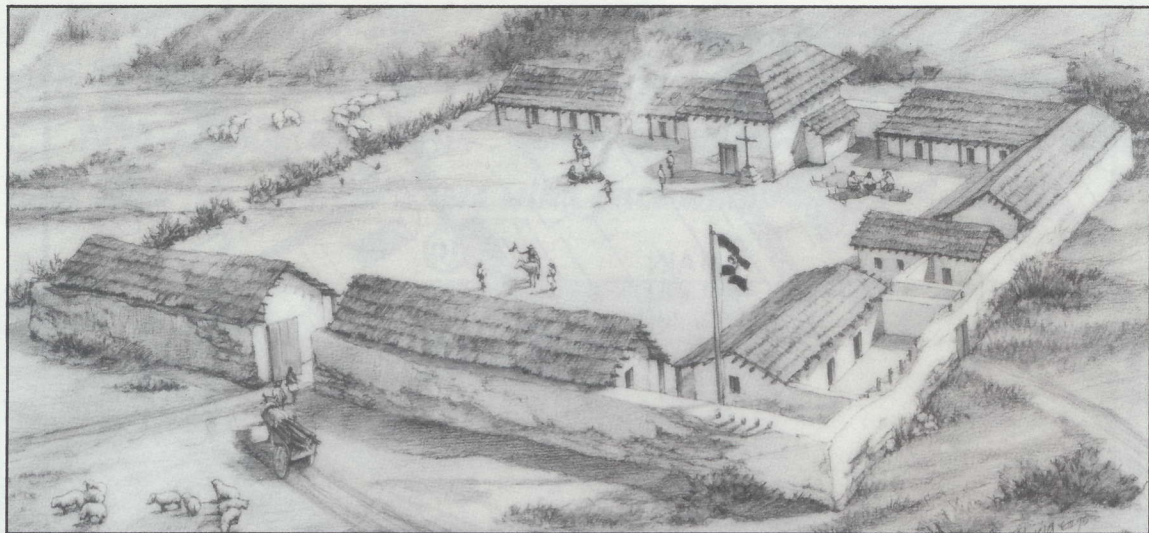


INFORMATION CENTER



RESTROOMS





ish term for a walled fortification--east of where the flagpole now stands. The original Spanish presidio formed a square about 90 paces on each side; the boulder by the sidewalk marks its approximate northwest corner.

To protect their tiny outpost, the Spanish erected an adobe fort at the harbor entrance in 1793. The two bronze cannon you see here--the "San Francisco" (1679) and the "Virgin of Barbaneda" (1693)--were once positioned at that fort. Among the oldest known cannon in North America, each contains the shields of the king of Spain and the viceroy of "New Spain," the date of casting, the identity of the maker--even the name of the piece.

The two "new" cannon in the square date to the 1860s. Walk up the sidewalk between them and cross Moraga Avenue.

"We rode up to the Presidio...into a spacious verdant plain, surrounded by hills...a square area, two hundred yards in length, enclosed by a mud wall, and resembling a pound for cattle. Above this wall the thatched roofs of their low small houses just made their appearance."
Captain George Vancouver, 1792

2

THE OFFICERS' CLUB

Two more Spanish cannon flank the entry to the Officers' Club. At one time the commandante's quarters stood here, at the head of the parade ground.

In the beginning the Spanish lived in thatched shelters similar to those of the Ohlone. Soon, however, they began to

erect the adobe and timber structures more familiar to them, only to have harsh winter storms wash apart the earthen bricks and blow off the tule roofs. Eventually they turned to clay tile roofs to shield the buildings from the wind and rain.

Initially about 40 soldiers, their wives and children, and 140 civilians lived on the Presidio. Gradually the civilians moved three miles inland to Mission Dolores, where the weather was usually better.

Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821, and the Presidio became an outpost of the new government. After 13 years the troops abandoned the site, moving north to the town of Sonoma to stop encroachment by Russians and Americans into that end of the bay. When the Mexican-American War broke out in 1846, U.S. military forces occupied San Francisco and the Presidio. A new chapter in the post's history was about to unfold.

Continue on Moraga Avenue, past the chapel (built in 1864 but modified significantly in the 1950s) to Funston Avenue.

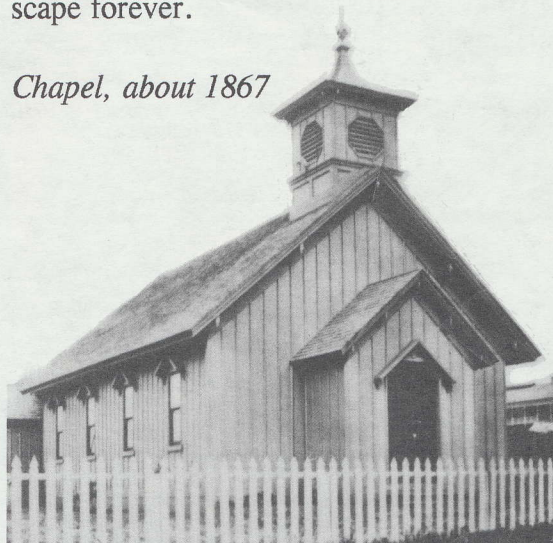
THE FOREST

3 San Francisco's population grew explosively following the 1849 Gold Rush, prompting the U.S. government to formally establish a military reservation here in 1850. The Presidio's proximity to gold and other resources gave

it new importance a decade later, during the Civil War. Rumors of Confederate plots flew. With Fort Point just completed at the harbor entrance, an increased military presence at the Presidio would safeguard the West Coast for the Union. The post experienced its first major expansion--and beautification.

In 1883 Major William A. Jones proposed a forest to "crown the ridges . . . and cover the areas of sand and marsh" San Francisco was advancing westward. A forest would provide contrast between city and post, and accentuate the government's power. It would also create windbreaks, subdue the blowing sands and beautify the bleak expanses. Over the next 20 years some 400,000 seedlings were planted, often in orderly rows, like soldiers in formation. Eucalyptus, cypress and pine trees thrived, altering the landscape forever.

Chapel, about 1867



Cross Moraga Avenue and walk downhill to Presidio Boulevard, noting especially the houses on your left.

FUNSTON AVENUE

4

Built between 1862 and 1863 according to standard Army plans, these houses faced west toward a new, larger parade ground. In 1878 the porch was removed from the front side of each house and reattached to the back side, which you are now viewing. This "about face" re-oriented the houses, presenting a more pleasing appearance to visitors from the city. Over the years bay windows, gables and dormers added their unique charm. By the mid-1880s white picket fences, street lamps, flower gardens and the developing forest gave the street a garden-like quality.

As you stroll down this street, imagine life as it was during the late 19th century:

1880s view of Funston Avenue from the Alameda

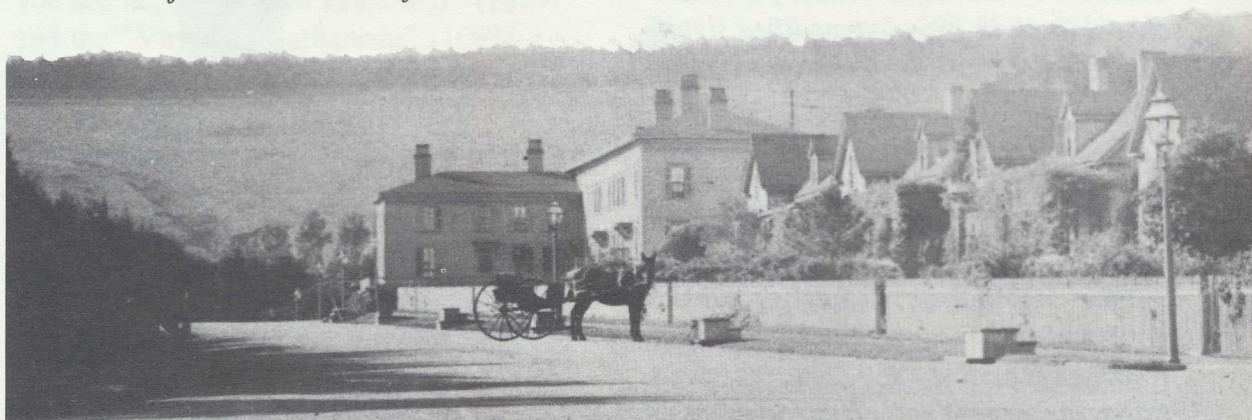
soldiers awakening to bugle calls before sunrise, wives preparing meals on wood-burning stoves, boys chopping wood, girls learning to make lace doilies to decorate elaborately furnished rooms, troops and horses parading down the street daily.

THE ALAMEDA

5

Halfway down Funston Avenue the "Alameda" (Spanish for avenue) served as the post's official entrance from the 1860s until 1895. Old photographs show a soldier standing guard duty here, by a formal wooden arch, with hundreds of cannonballs lining the street as decorative curbing. A bandstand here further contributed to the picturesque setting. The Presidio of San Francisco had been transformed into an Army post unlike any other in the nation.

After the Civil War, the Army turned its attention once more to fighting Indians.



Situated at the entrance to the West Coast's most important city and harbor, the Presidio assumed a new role as center of operations for West Coast campaigns.

Look at the four large homes across the street on either side of Presidio Boulevard.

6

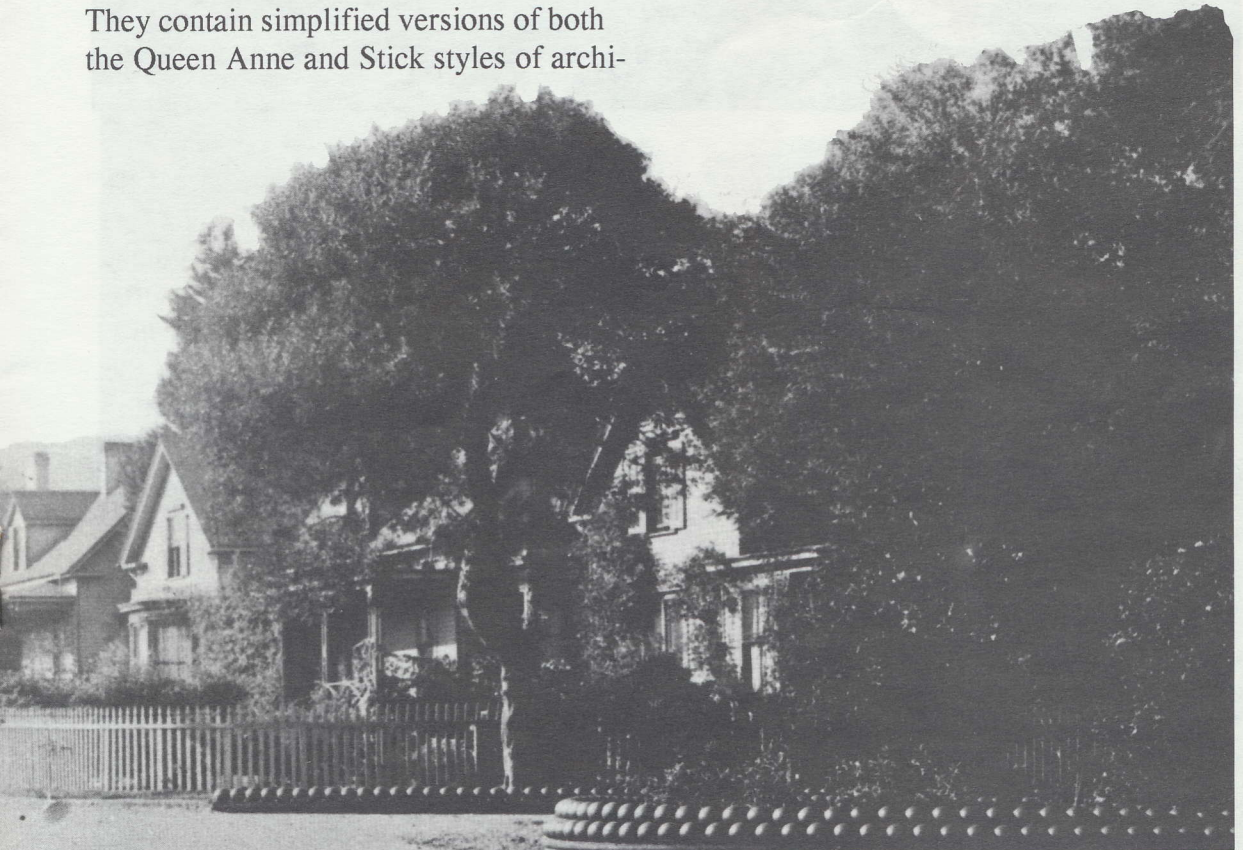
QUEEN ANNE/STICK STYLE

These more elaborate Victorian-era houses, built in the late 1880s for higher-grade officers, reflected the Presidio's increased status. They contain simplified versions of both the Queen Anne and Stick styles of archi-

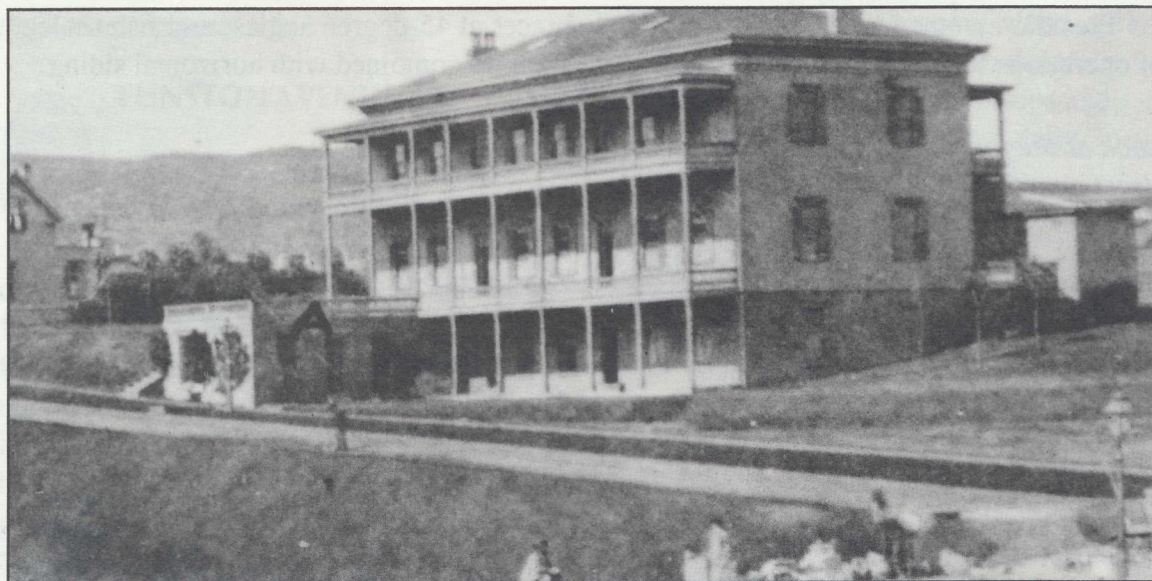
itecture: wrap-around porches with lattice underneath, roof brackets and column braces at 45-degree angles, and fish-scale shingles combined with horizontal siding.

"I went to the Presidio . . . where the soldiers live in barracks and in tents. There are beautiful residences where the officers live and a wide cement drive where automobiles and carriages go, with dirt roads for the cavalry."

Laura Ingalls Wilder, author, 1915



The hospital before its morgue (small building marked "A") was removed, ca. 1881-84



As you continue down Funston, note the two houses across the street.

7

TWO MORE STYLES

The first, built in 1889, was modeled after Army buildings in the still-untamed Arizona Territory. The one next door, constructed four years later, is French. Its big mansard roof was very fashionable in France in the mid-1800s because it created an extra floor technically considered an attic, and as such not subject to taxation. Houses of this style rarely appeared on U.S. Army posts.

Continue down the hill to the museum.

8

POST HOSPITAL

The homes on Funston Avenue weren't the only structures to get an "about face." Built in 1864, the hospital also opened toward the parade ground before it was remodeled in 1878. In 1899 it was converted to a dispensary and dental clinic following construction of Letterman Army Hospital, and continued in this capacity until 1973. It now houses the Presidio Museum.

You may want to stop and explore the museum a bit; admission is free.

Turn left at Lincoln Boulevard and look for the fire station across the street.

9

FIRE STATION

Among the famous names connected with the Presidio is that of Brigadier General John J. "Black Jack" Pershing, whose family lived in a house in the area known today as Pershing Square. In 1915, while General Pershing was on duty in Mexico, the house burned, and his wife and three daughters perished. Out of the tragedy came the construction in 1917 of this fire station with its hose-drying tower outside and brass pole inside. It also resulted in

establishment of the first professional firefighters on an Army post.

Continue west on Lincoln to Graham Street. The barracks on your left were built in 1886. Cross Graham Street, turn left and begin walking uphill.

10

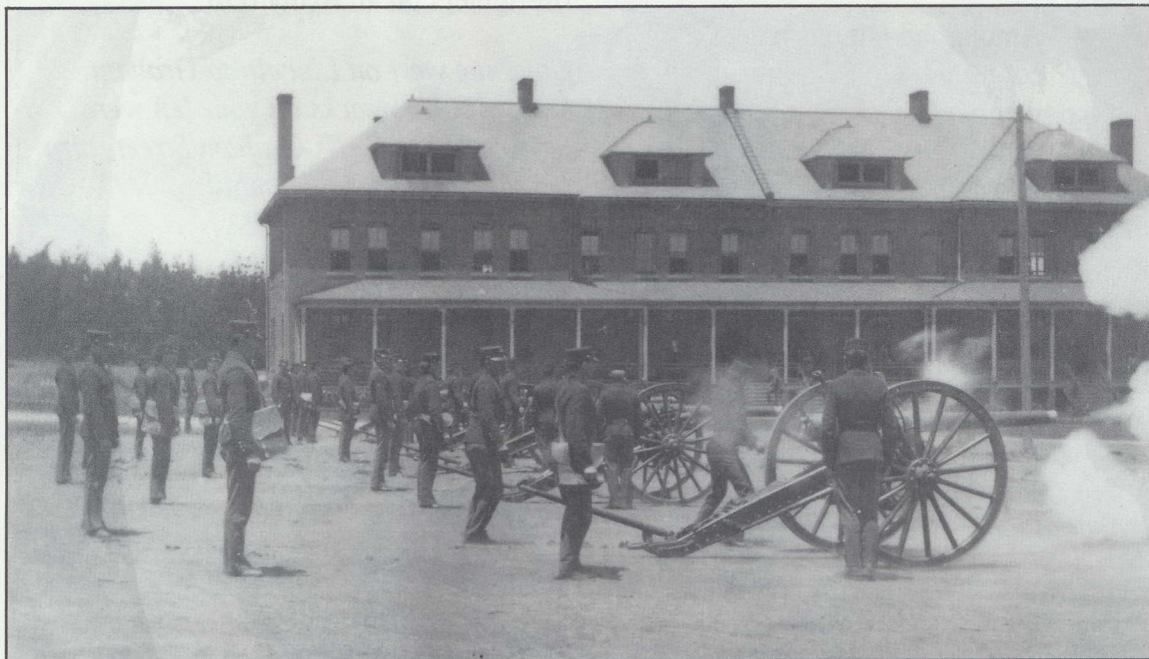
ENLISTED BARRACKS

The Presidio's post-Civil War expansion was accompanied by an increase in the number of men in each company from 75 to 100.

Artillery limbers with barracks in background ca. 1898



Field cannon firing with Montgomery Street barracks in background, about 1898



The barracks on your right, built in 1862, were once one story in height, part of a chain of barracks which stretched in a row uphill. They received their second stories in 1885.

With the end of the Indian Wars in 1891, the U.S. stretched from coast to coast. The frontier had been settled. Many small Army outposts were closed and the troops moved to larger urban posts with better communications, transportation and supplies. On the West Coast, the Presidio of San Francisco continued to expand.

Continue uphill to Owen Street, then look to your left.

11

ROMANTICIZED PAST

The two buildings with massive arched entryways reflect a romanticized vision of California's past popular in the state earlier this century. In the late 1930s the Army began "restoring" the main post's Spanish/Mexican appearance through the use of such architectural elements as arches, stucco and red tile roofs. Both barracks were constructed in 1940. They were used as headquarters for the Sixth U.S. Army from 1946 to 1995.

Now walk to the other end of Owen Street.

12

MONTGOMERY STREET

The five identical barracks forming a line up Montgomery Street mark the first major use of brick in Presidio architecture. Built between 1895 and 1897, these brick barracks symbolized permanence--a visible statement that the Army was here to stay. The main post expanded again with the construction of these barracks and a new, larger parade ground.

In 1898 the U.S. went to war with Spain. The Presidio became the Army's major West Coast post for mobilizing and training troops bound for the Philippines. Fighting there was heavy. Many of the sick and wounded returned to the Presidio hospital, now much too small to care for the number of men needing treatment. Two of these barracks were converted into temporary hospitals, and a new general hospital (later named Letterman General Hospital) built near the waterfront. The 30th Infantry Regiment, "San Francisco's Own," lived here from 1901 to 1941.

A National Historic Landmark, the Presidio became a National Park System site in 1994. Across from you, Building 102 houses the Presidio Visitor Center. Please drop by if you would like to learn more about the Presidio.

The Presidio of San Francisco served as an active military garrison almost continuously for more than 200 years under the flags of three nations. Its long, proud history is evident everywhere: in its architecture and its landscape, its cannon and its parade grounds.

Now that you've explored the main post, the heart of the Presidio, discover its byways. Visit the cemetery. Climb Lovers' Lane. Marvel at Fort Point. Stroll along Crissy Field's promenade. Inspect Battery Chamberlin. Seek out the wonders of the Presidio, in its broad vistas and hidden nooks. And come back--again and again.



Golden Gate National Recreation Area is administered by the National Park Service. If you need further information, please contact:

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