

A Brief San Francisco Maritime History

While native peoples navigated the Bay in reed canoes, European explorers charted the foggy coastline. In 1776, the Spanish settled at the site of present-day San Francisco. Soon ships came searching for seal and sea otter furs. In the early 1820s whalers arrived and Boston merchant ships began trading for California cowhides.

Then in 1849, after the discovery of gold in the Sierra Nevada foothills, over 750 vessels arrived. Sleek, American-built clippers carried some passengers, but most fortune seekers chartered anything that could float—and then abandoned their vessels in a headlong rush to the gold fields. The timbers of many Gold Rush vessels still lie beneath San Francisco's bustling financial district.

The Gold Rush brought laborers, craftspeople and merchants from across the country and around the world. By the 1870s California's grain lured big European sailing ships, like the Park's *Balclutha*. Fleets of sailing schooners, like the Park's *C.A. Thayer*, arrived with Douglas fir from Puget Sound.

Flat-bottomed scow schooners, like the Park's *Alma*, sailed up the Delta into California's Central Valley. They delivered plows and seed, sewing machines and cloth, coal and oil; and returned stacked with jute bags of hard, white wheat, well suited for long-distance shipping. From San Francisco's docks, the bags were hand-loaded into the holds of great sailing ships.

After the grain trade declined, and railroads reached the lumber mills and valleys, many sailing vessels were abandoned or scrapped. The lucky ones were refitted for other careers. Some, like *Balclutha* and *Thayer*, supported Alaskan fisheries. American intercoastal steamer traffic exploded after the Panama Canal was completed in 1914. Later, West Coast shipyards geared up to meet the demands of World Wars I and II.

For a time, a dazzling array of vessels crowded the San Francisco waterfront: world-traveling cargo ships, coastal passenger steamers, military craft and local working boats. One by one, though, these vessels became obsolete. Those that remain are treasured for their beauty, and for the stories they tell.

Planning Your Visit

San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park is located west of Fisherman's Wharf. The area is served by public transit; paid parking is available nearby. The Park is open daily, year-round. The museum building and pier are closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas day and New Years day.



Maritime Museum

Maritime Museum The white ship-like building is filled with exhibits documenting the history of West Coast seafaring, the California Gold Rush, Cape Horn sailing vessels, the Pacific whaling industry and steam technology. The interactive "Sparks, Waves, and Wizards" exhibit tells the history of maritime communications. Located at 900 Beach Street (the foot of Polk Street in the Sala Burton Building). Open daily, 10am-5pm. No admission fee.

Hyde Street Pier Just east of the museum building, Hyde Street Pier displays historic steam and sailing vessels, and offers exhibits and interpretive programs. Open daily, 9:30am-5pm. The pier is free, but admission is charged to board the historic ships.

Aquatic Park Stroll through the gardens, along the waterfront or out on Municipal Pier. Catch a cable car, watch a bocce ball game and enjoy an urban beach. Keep a lookout for boats, birds, swimmers and sea lions in the lagoon.

USS Pampanito Pier 45. Restored, maintained, and operated by the San Francisco Maritime National Park Association, this World War II fleet submarine made long-range cruises in the Pacific. Open daily. For hours call 415-775-1943, or visit www.maritime.org. Admission is charged.

Research and Collections The library is located at Fort Mason Center, Building E. Open for research five days a week, the library provides access to the Park's books, photographs and documents. For hours of operation, call 415-561-7030.

Information San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, Building E, Fort Mason Center, San Francisco, CA 94123 tel 415-561-7100 www.nps.gov/safr

San Francisco Maritime

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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National Historical Park



The Historic Vessels at Hyde Street Pier

Hyde Street Pier

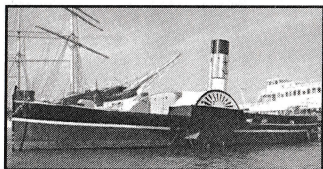
Hyde Street Pier was built in 1922 for automobile ferries between San Francisco and Sausalito. The ferry route was part of U.S. Highway 101 until the Golden Gate Bridge opened in 1937. Today the pier and a number of the historic vessels moored here are open to visitors.

Five vessels — *Alma*, *Balclutha*, *Eureka*, *Hercules* and *C.A. Thayer* — are designated National Historic Landmarks.



Eureka

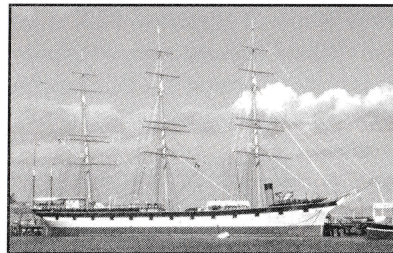
The side-wheel steam ferry *Eureka*, designed to carry trains across the Bay, was rebuilt in 1922 to carry passengers and automobiles. Slide into one of the original seats to get a feel for an early 20th century Sausalito-to-San Francisco commute. Or examine the selection of classic autos and trucks displayed on the lower deck.



Eppleton Hall

Eppleton Hall, a sturdy little tugboat from Newcastle, England, crossed the Atlantic under her own power

in 1969. “Eppie’s” side paddle-wheels recall the earliest days of steam navigation on the Bay.



Balclutha

A short walk up *Balclutha’s* gangway takes visitors back to the 19th century. This square-rigged ship was built in Scotland to haul California

wheat to Europe. Men lived aboard for months at a time during the voyage around treacherous Cape Horn. Learn about the maritime culture of the day by comparing the rough sailors’ bunks in the forecabin to the plush Captain’s quarters aft. Like all of the Park’s fleet, *Balclutha* survived because she kept working. In 1902 the ship started a twenty-eight year career in the Alaskan salmon trade.



C.A. Thayer

Board *C.A. Thayer*, representative of hundreds of vessels that sailed the Pacific Coast. Hardworking, eight-man crews piled her deck high with the fresh-cut Douglas fir that built California’s growing cities. Later, this schooner carried small boats

and fishermen north for Alaskan salmon and cod.



Hercules

Step aboard the steam-powered ocean-going tugboat *Hercules*, and imagine a slow trip down the coast, towing a huge log raft while

angling for dinner off the stern. This workhorse towed big ships out to sea, pushed railroad car barges across the Bay, and towed huge lock structures to build the Panama Canal.



Alma

Alma, the last San Francisco Bay scow schooner still afloat, is the Park’s sailing ambassador — welcomed by port cities around the Bay each summer. Flat-bottomed scows like *Alma* transported bulk cargoes (like hay, bags of grain and bricks) between delta farming communities and San Francisco’s international port.



Small Craft

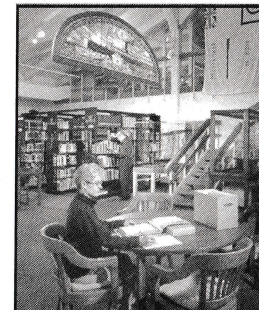
Take a moment to look over the east pier rail and examine the collection of historically significant **Small Craft**. The Park’s boat shop restores these

often-unheralded, everyday craft used for work and pleasure on the Bay: feluccas, Montereys and yachts. The boat shop also offers public classes.

Collections and Research

Artifacts, scrapbooks, sailors’ crafts and shipboard machinery: all tell personal stories about the men and women who created and used them.

In the **Maritime Museum**, measure a sheet of hull plating between thumb and forefinger, turn a ship’s wheel and review surprisingly domestic scenes of family life at sea. For visitors who want to learn more, thousands of books, photographs and documents make the **Maritime Library** the first stop for West Coast maritime history research.



Maritime Library

Experience Your America

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park is part of the National Park system, one of more than 380 areas that are important examples of the nation’s natural and cultural heritage.