

San Francisco Maritime

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
National Historical Park
California



Redesigning The Waterfront *A Self-Guided Walking Tour*



Then

&

Now

Black Point Cove, ca. 1910.



Aquatic Park, 2003.

Redesigning The Waterfront - Then & Now

In the 1700's, on this windswept shoreline, waves tumbled along the edges of great white sand dunes. But, by the 1860's, your experience here would have been quite different. Plumes of smoke filled the air with the smell of burning coal. Signs posted along this shoreline warned of unsanitary water conditions – no swimming! Today you see what the visionaries of the 1930's left us, the recreation area, Aquatic Park.

Take a stroll through Aquatic Park to discover the history of this changing waterfront. Over the years, military, industrial and recreational uses have dramatically altered this environment. Have the changes improved or impaired this beautiful landscape? You decide.



Route Overview

The tour begins at Hyde Street Pier and continues west to Lower Fort Mason. Rest spots along the route offer stunning views of the Golden Gate Bridge, the Marin Headlands, Angel and Alcatraz Islands, and the East Bay hills.

Length: Three-quarters of a mile (1.2 kilometers).

Difficulty: The route is flat and paved for stops 1-5. Stops 6-7 ascend a steep paved hill. You may continue the tour down to Lower Fort Mason by descending the staircase (73 steps) or go further down the trail and enter at the corner of Laguna Street and Marina Boulevard.

Time: Approximately 45 minutes.

Hyde Street Pier in 1931.



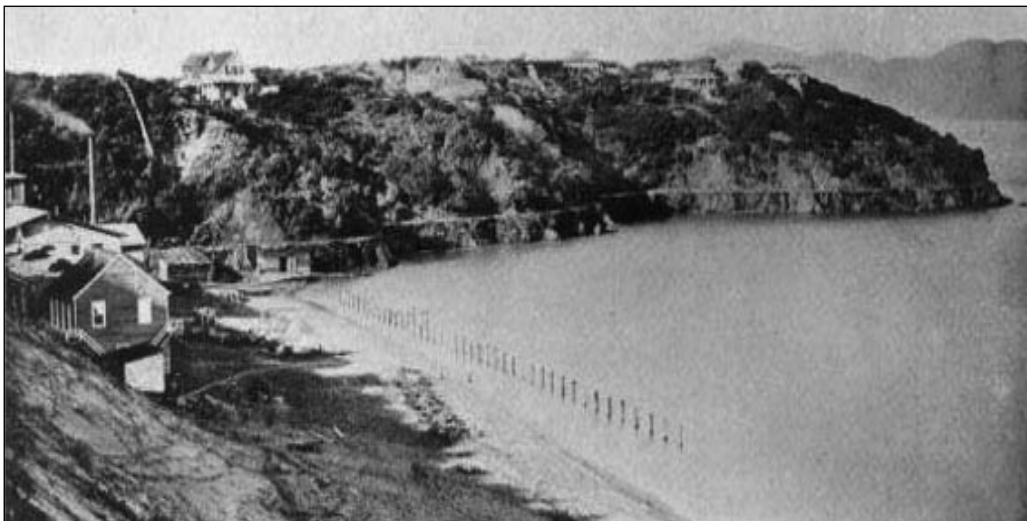
Hyde Street Pier # 1

Hyde Street Pier was once a busy ferry terminal. Steam-powered ferryboats like *Eureka* transported travelers north to continue their journey along U.S. Highway 101 or onto other ports around the Bay. With the completion of the Oakland-Bay Bridge in 1936, and the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937, most of these beautiful steam-powered ferries soon retired.

Today Hyde Street Pier, with its collection of historic ships and buildings, is part of San Francisco

Maritime National Historical Park. Each year this “floating National Park” welcomes millions of visitors to experience Pacific Coast maritime history. Please visit the fee booth for a boarding pass!

Walk back to Jefferson Street and turn right. Continue past the end of the street and pause a moment, at stop #2, where the beach begins.



Black Point Cove around 1863.

Filling of Black Point Cove # 2

Aquatic Park, where you are now, was once known as Black Point Cove. Changes began between 1858 and 1860 when the Spring Valley Water Company and Pioneer Woolen Mill began to build on the southwest shore and to fill the cove (see "Polluted Waters # 4"). By 1867 structures and wharves pushed twenty feet or more beyond the original shoreline.

The pilings in this illustration now mark the present location of Beach Street, located south of you. How does the view of Black Point Cove today compare with this photo from 1863? Notice how much of the cove has been filled.

Continue along the path following the old railroad tracks embedded in the pavement. Stop before the bleachers.

Constructing Black Point Tunnel # 3

As the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition drew near, better transportation was needed to connect downtown to the new exposition site west of Fort Mason. Excavation of a railroad tunnel through Black Point began in 1914. This route also served Fort Mason's new military wharves (see "Building Lower Fort Mason # 7"). The railroad trestle was built across a portion of the cove, which forced members of the Dolphin Swim Club, then located on Van Ness Avenue, to cross under the trestle to swim. The tracks were relocated to their present location sometime after 1925.

1918 photo of the Dolphin Club and train route.



By 1970, use of the railroad line had dwindled due to modernization of transportation and cargo technology. Military activity shifted from San Francisco to Oakland on the east side of the Bay, leading to the eventual closure of the tunnel.

Continue along the railroad tracks to Van Ness Avenue and look for the old railroad tunnel. Turn right to the next stop at the entry of Municipal Pier.



Polluted Waters

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In this photo, the Selby Smelter and Lead Company, Pioneer Woolen Mill and Spring Valley Water Company line the shore of Black Point Cove. Swimming in the cove has been banned periodically, often years at a time, due to pollutants and raw sewage found in the water.

Industrialization of Black Point Cove, ca. 1869.

The San Francisco Recreation League, with public support, addressed the pollution problems and transformed the cove once again into a suitable recreation area. The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission tests the water weekly and posts the results at <http://sfwater.org/home.cfm>.

Maritime Museum

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"The Bathhouse," completed in 1939, was originally intended as a public bathing and recreation center. In 1941 the U.S. Army took control of the building, quartered troops inside, and used the beach to practice military landing maneuvers until 1948. The building opened to the public as a maritime museum in 1951.



In 1984 Aquatic Park, including the "Bathhouse" building, was designated a National Historic Landmark District. The "Bathhouse" now serves as part of San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park and features a collection of artifacts and exhibits focusing on Pacific Coast maritime history. The museum is open daily 10:00-5:00, no fee. Stop in for a visit!

Aquatic Park, 1940.

Make your way up the hill into upper Fort Mason. You are now entering Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Changing of Black Point # 6

As you travel up the hill, look over the wall to the rocky area down below. This is the last surviving natural shoreline of San Francisco inside the Golden Gate. This outcropping, between Aquatic Park beach and the Fort Mason piers, is called Black Point. The point was named in the late 1800s, most likely from a stand of dark laurel trees which stood in contrast to the white sand dunes behind.

Today the Laurel trees are gone, replaced by the non-native Eucalyptus and Cyprus trees, brought in for landscaping, which you can see today. Can you find remnants of a remaining sand dune?

Building Lower Fort Mason wharves, 1910.



had become the largest and most important Army Transport Service facility on the west coast.

In 1972, Fort Mason became part of Golden Gate National Recreation Area. “Landmark Building E,” you see below to the left, houses the J. Porter Shaw Research Library of San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, which is the largest maritime based research library on the West Coast.

*Walk down the flight of “Pier” stairs and come in to visit the library located on the third floor.
Open Tues. 1:00 - 8:00 p.m., Wed. - Fri. 1:00 - 5:00 p.m., and Sat. 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.*



Eastern tip of shore at Black Point, 1891.

Continue to the top of the hill and stop near the second interpretive panel “Fort Mason Piers.” Notice a small part of the original sand dune covered in vegetation between upper and lower Fort Mason

Building Lower Fort Mason # 7

When construction began in 1910 on the Lower Fort Mason military piers, which you see below, the shoreline was filled with tons of debris. The piers were built so they could easily connect with a new railway extension to be built through Black Point tunnel (see “Constructing Black Point Tunnel # 3”). By 1919, Fort Mason

The Aquatic Park area has continued to evolve throughout history to meet the needs of this changing city. Where commuters once boarded ferryboats to travel across the Bay, you can now board the historic ferryboat *Eureka* to be reminded of days past. Where the military once developed and occupied this land, we see a museum and wharves where we can learn about our maritime history. Where Black Point Cove was once polluted and filled for development, we now have a lagoon open for swimming and boating.

Many of these changes, such as water pollution, filling of the cove and the intrusion of non-native species have affected the natural environment. Today you can see the latest change of Aquatic Park returned to a recreational area for all to share. How can you help in preserving this resource for future generations?

Thank you for walking with us today and learning about the National Park.

Chronology

- 1850 - President Fillmore expands military control over Black Point Cove.
- 1852 - Homesteaders and industry begin moving into the area.
- 1858 - The Pioneer Woolen Mill builds a factory on the shore.
- 1871 - Public bathhouses are established along the cove.
- 1900 - Dolphin and South End Clubs located at the north end of Van Ness Avenue.
- 1905 - Daniel Hudson proposes an "Aquatic Park" at Black Point Cove, but plan stalls.
- 1906 - Following the Earthquake, rubble dumped into cove, beach destroyed.
- 1913-14 - Railway trestle built across cove and tunnel built through Black Point.
- 1920s - Plans are developed for a park around the cove.
- 1925-39 - Tracks are re-laid to their current location.
- 1931-34 - Municipal Pier is built over the seawall that shelters Aquatic Park Lagoon.
- 1935-39 - Aquatic Park Bathhouse constructed under the Works Progress Administration.
- 1941 - The US Army extends its jurisdiction over Aquatic Park.
- 1948 - The Army returns Aquatic Park to the city after rehabilitating the bathhouse building.
- 1951 - San Francisco Maritime Museum Association opens a museum in the bathhouse.
- 1970 - Regular use of the Beltline Railway had declined.
- 1972 - Fort Mason becomes part of the National Park Service.
- 1978 - Aquatic Park and Museum become part of Golden Gate National Recreation Area.
- 1987 - Aquatic Park is designated a National Historic Landmark District.
- 1988 - Congress passes Public Law 100-348, establishing San Francisco Maritime NHP.

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