

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Fort Mason
Golden Gate National Recreation Area

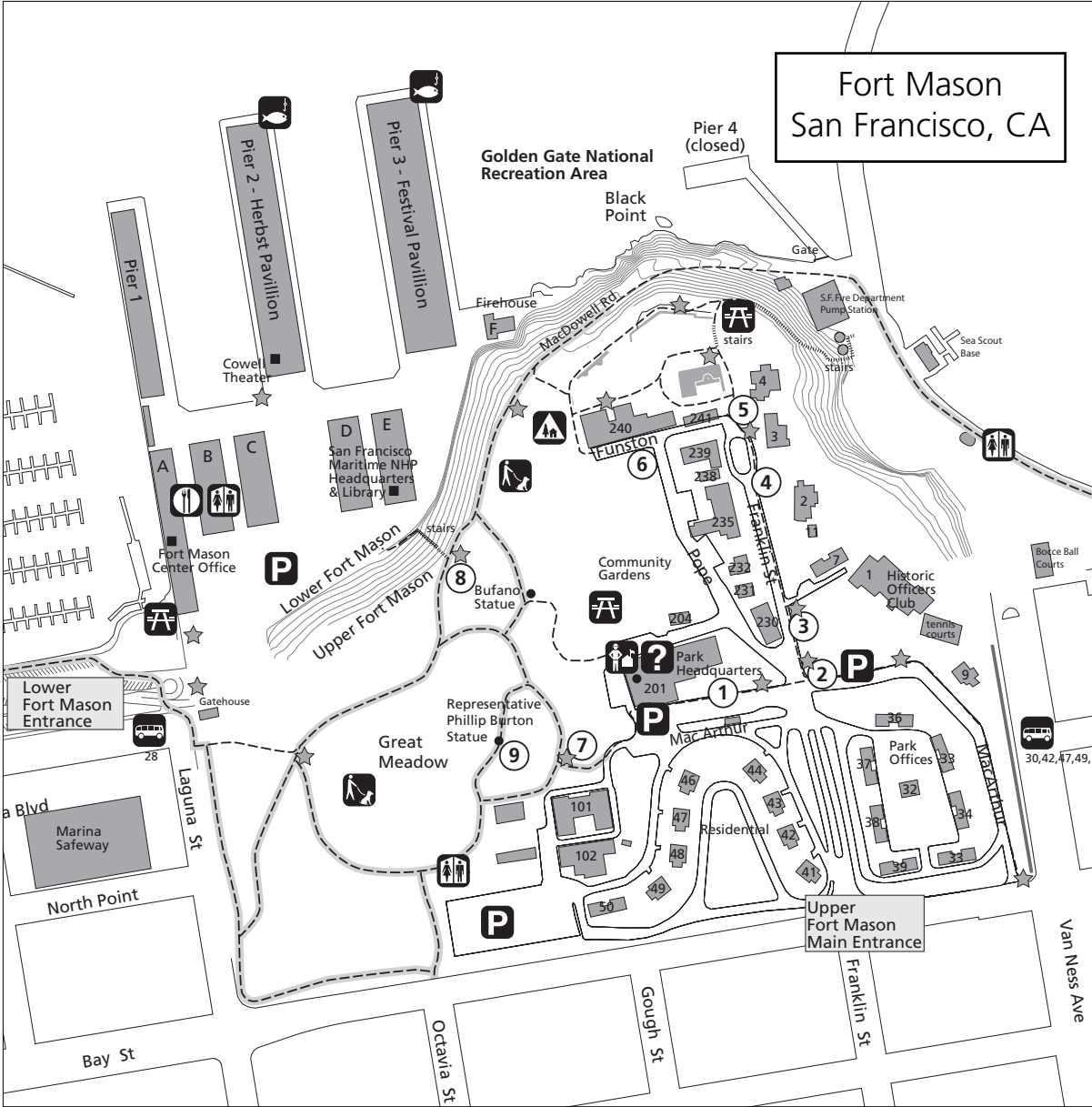


Fort Mason History Walk

An Army Post at the Edge of San Francisco



Fort Mason San Francisco, CA



★ Fort Mason Waysides

Self-Guided Stops

Welcome to Fort Mason, one of the oldest military bases in San Francisco! Step back in time to visit buildings and a streetscape that have survived since before the 1906 earthquake and fires. This self-guiding brochure takes you on a walking tour of Fort Mason, as well as explaining where examples of historic building styles can be found on this former army post. While a specific walking order is suggested, way-sides exhibits provide you with additional information, so feel free to wander, exploring what interests you.

Be Advised

- Most of the Fort Mason buildings, including the residences, are currently occupied, and visits to their interiors are not allowed.
- Please keep in mind that Golden Gate National Recreation Area is an urban park, and exercise common sense while using its trails, especially after dark.

The Route

Length: Approximately 0.5-mile

Number of Stops: 9

Time required: Approximately 45 minutes

Access: The route is paved, but watch for steps and cracked pavement.

Restrooms are located at the southwest corner of the Great Meadow (see the map).

Questions? Please stop by the Fort Mason Visitor Information Center, located in the GGNRA Headquarters Building 201, open Monday through Friday, 8:30 to 5:00 or phone (415) 561-4700.

On the cover: Fort Mason, aerial view, circa 1927.

On the back: Quarters 3 and 4, facing the bay, showing Fort Mason's former military landscape. Photo circa 1915.



This 1865 illustration of Point San Jose (looking north towards the bay), was taken after the army had established the post and shows the original landscape of sand dunes and dune scrub.

Start the tour outside Building 201, GGNRA Headquarters.

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Defending the Bay

The San Francisco Bay Area, long recognized as a land rich with economic opportunity, has historically attracted the attention of expanding nations, including Spain, Mexico, Great Britain, Russia, and the United States. In 1776, the first Europeans—Spanish settlers—arrived and established Spain’s northernmost outpost, a presidio and a Catholic mission.

Early on, the land now occupied by Fort Mason was recognized as valuable. This hilltop promontory, overlooking a narrow stretch of the bay, was an obvious choice for the location of defensive fortifications. The Spanish built the *Bateria San Jose* here in 1797. When the United States took control of California in 1846, its military planners placed a high priority on protecting the rich bay from foreign invasion, notably by the British and Russians who maintained extensive fur trapping interests along the Pacific coast.

The army therefore began to identify properties in San Francisco that were well suited to national defense. In 1850, recognizing the geographic and economic importance of the San Francisco Bay and the cargo that was funneled through its strait, President Millard Fillmore established this land as a military reservation, designating it *Point San Jose*.

Now leave the GGNRA Headquarters and turn left on MacArthur Street just to the east. Continue up the street and stop at the corner of Pope and MacArthur. Look south past Fort Mason, toward the city, and try to imagine this area minus trees, buildings and skyscrapers.



Gold Rush Transforms San Francisco

In 1846, San Francisco, originally named Yerba Buena, was a sleepy port town with a few temporary wood-frame shacks clustered around the docks and wharves. The ocean wind blew constantly, spreading sand and dirt across the treeless landscape. At the time, only about 500 people lived in San Francisco, most of them sailors, fishermen, whalers, fur trappers, merchants and descendents of original settlers. California's first government seat was 150 miles to the south, at Monterey. Except for the presidio and Mission Delores, young San Francisco had few permanent buildings.

Then in January 1848, gold was discovered in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, and San Francisco would never be the same again. From all over the world, people came to California by ship, wagon, and on foot to seek their fortune in the gold fields. Almost overnight, San Francisco was transformed from a small, dusty port town into a booming city filled with makeshift tent-houses, hotels, stores, saloons, gambling halls, and shanties. By late 1848, the number of people living in the city had risen to approximately 850 and by 1849, as the gold rush fever swept through the country, the city's population had increased to a staggering 25,000. In 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, there were almost 57,000 people living in the city by the bay.

San Francisco's population was growing at an alarming rate and buildings could not be constructed fast enough to accommodate everyone. Housing was so scarce that people paid \$1 a night (a substantial sum in the 1850s and an average day's pay for some people) to sleep in packing crates.

Cross MacArthur and turn left onto Franklin Street. Continue up on the right-hand side of Franklin Street and stop at the first driveway on your right (across from the Fort Mason Chapel and near the lawn in front of Quarters 1). As you walk up Franklin Street, note that the civilian-built residences are on the right-hand side of the street, while the army-built structures are on the left side.



Black Point: A Civilian Neighborhood on Military Land

San Francisco's population explosion affected Fort Mason, which was known to locals as *Black Point* because of the large clusters of dark and wind-blown laurel trees that grew at the bluff's edge. Although the U.S. Army had reserved this land, by the mid-1850s, there was still no military presence here. The army had not constructed any buildings and no soldiers were stationed at Point San Jose. A scenic and underutilized piece of property that offered excellent views of the bay and refuge from the city, Black Point was exceptionally desirable to civilians in need of homes. And frankly, in the midst of the chaotic and somewhat lawless days of early San Francisco, the U.S. government had trouble enforcing its property claims. As a result, a few entrepreneurial civilians moved into this undeveloped area, claimed it for their own, and began construction.

Proceed up the street to the second driveway on the right side (across from Building 232). Look to your right for a glimpse of Aquatic Park. Then continue to the third driveway; Quarters 2 is on your right and Quarters 3 is on your left. Please keep in mind that these homes are occupied, and go no farther than the driveway entrance.

By 1855, Leonard Haskell and George Eggleton, both San Francisco real estate developers, had constructed at Black



This 1885 photo shows the Palmer House (*Quarters 4*) which was originally constructed by private developers in 1855. Note Alcatraz, with its Civil War citadel, in the background. Photo courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Point five large, private homes, all facing the bay. These decorative and expensive homes attracted the city's newly-emerging upper middle class, and over the next nine years, Black Point became the preferred location for San Francisco's elite and well-educated bankers, merchants, and literary figures. Luckily, three homes from this early private real estate project still stand: Quarters 2 (Brooks House), Quarters 3 (Haskell House), and Quarters 4 (Palmer House) are the oldest buildings here at Fort Mason. Unlike nearby army buildings, which were constructed from standardized plans, each of these homes was built to the owner's specifications and reflects the architectural styles and individual tastes of their time.

Please remain where you are, with a view of the Haskell House.



Quarters 2, also constructed in 1855 by private developers, was originally located further north near the Officer's Club. In 1877 the Army moved the building to its current location. Photo circa 1900.

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The Anti-Slavery Movement at Black Point

By the late 1850s, the State of California had become a focus of the heated issue of slavery. Its population stimulated by the Gold Rush, California was now home to people from the North—often referred to as *free-soilers*—who were against slavery, and transplanted Southerners who supported the institution of slavery. Many Southerners also passionately felt that, if need be, Southern states should be able to secede from the union, to preserve slavery and the larger concept of *states' rights*. The Gold Rush also brought both free African-American settlers, seeking their fortunes, as well as enslaved African-Americans, who were forced to dig for their owners' benefit.

As new states were added to the union, Congress tried to achieve a balance by carefully admitting an equal number of as *slave* states and *free* states. After much bitter national debate, California entered as a *free-state*, part of the so-called Compromise of 1850. However, its vague antislavery constitution was open for extensive interpretation. And

because people of color could not testify for or against a white person in a court of law, both African-Americans and local Indians were vulnerable to a white-only court system.

A chapter of the national anti-slavery movement was written here at Black Point. By the mid-1850s, the civilian neighborhood had become home to a small but influential group of white residents who were openly hostile to secession and slavery. Leonard Haskell, Black Point's developer and a resident, was a *free-soiler* and politically well-connected. He and a large group of influential friends actively supported the anti-slavery movement by promoting David Broderick in his effort to become California's U.S. Senator. Broderick was a self-made man who was outspokenly opposed to the expansion of slavery. In 1859, California State Supreme Court Justice David S. Terry, Broderick's political opponent, gave a searing speech, attacking Broderick and his anti-slavery stance. Broderick responded to Terry with unflattering comments, and Terry challenged him to a duel, which was then illegal in San Francisco.



David Colbreth Broderick (1820-1859), was member of the California State Senate from 1850 to 1851 and then elected as a Democrat to the United States Senate in 1857. Photo date unknown, courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

On September 13, 1859, the Broderick - Terry duel commenced at Lake Merced, south of the city. Broderick's gun misfired and Terry, a man known for his hot temper and tendency toward violence, aimed directly at Broderick's chest and fired, wounding him severely. Broderick was rushed to Haskell's home here at Black Point (the house to your right), where he died three days later, reportedly saying "They killed me because I am opposed to the extension of slavery and a corrupt administration." This San Francisco duel drew national attention. Terry and his southern sympathizers were accused of assassination, while David Broderick's death made him a martyr for the anti-slavery movement. The Broderick-Terry duel reflected the nation's larger and more violent division and pushed it further toward a civil war.

Continue up Franklin and stop near the upper end of the tree-filled circle. Look in the direction of the path leading north. Instead of this landscape, marked by mature vegetation and simple army buildings, imagine a modest Victorian cottage perched at the edge of the bluff, surrounded by rose bushes and garden paths. If time permits, you may want to follow this path to the grassy area where the Fremont house once stood.



Jessie Benton Fremont (1824-1902), shown here on the porch of her Black Point house, loved the fact that her home was so close to the water. In 1860, she wrote that “the flapping of the sails as the schooners round this point and the noise of their paddles as the streamers pass are household sounds.... It is like being on the bow of a ship.” Photo circa 1861, courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

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Jessie Benton Fremont

Jessie Benton Fremont lived here at Black Point, at the end of this street. The wife of the explorer John Fremont and the daughter of Thomas Hart Benton, a powerful U.S. senator from Missouri, Jessie carved out special recognition on her own. She was bright, courageous, and ambitious at a time when these attributes were discouraged in women. Both she and her husband were *free-soilers*, and lobbied hard to eliminate slavery. After having lived in New York; Washington, D.C.; Paris; and the Sierra foothills, she and John moved to Black Point in 1860. Sited on the bluff, their house and its grounds occupied 13 acres of land; once she moved in, she oversaw the construction of walkways and drives and the plantings of roses, geraniums, and fuchsias. She loved her home at Black Point, which was nicknamed “Porter’s Lodge”, because it provided her and their three children with what she defined as a healthy mixture of city and country living.

Throughout her life, Jessie Fremont was politically and socially active, and her home here became the center of San Francisco’s intellectual life. Jessie invited like-minded writers (both burgeoning and established), spiritual leaders, and artists to her house, and they were encouraged to walk the landscaped grounds, to develop their thoughts, and to engage in lively conversations with one another. Among her friends were Reverend Thomas Starr King, the impassioned Unitarian minister who supported preserving the Union and would later charter national charities; Bret Harte, the young writer who would become a leader of the San Francisco literary movement and expose the American West to the world through poems and articles; and Carleton Watkins, the commercial photographer who would become famous for capturing California’s landscapes on glass plate.

In the summer of 1861, as the long-feared Civil War broke out, John Fremont was summoned east to active military service, and Jessie and her family left their peaceful home on the bluff and faced the challenges of living in a country divided by war.

From Franklin, turn left (west) onto Funston Street. Walk down Funston and notice the 19th-century army buildings on both sides of the street. Stop at the corner of Funston and Pope. You are now standing in what was the middle of the late 19th-century army post. The western half of the post is gone, but the eastern side remains intact. Feel free to cut back through to Franklin to get a second look at the early army buildings.

6 Military Life at Point San Jose

The outbreak of the Civil War forced the army to take permanent possession of Black Point and the army re-established the original name, *Point San Jose*. Because the Union government feared possible Confederate attacks against commercial sailing ships and their valuable cargoes, as well as against the city itself, the army quickly identified the bay's strategic vulnerabilities and ordered better defenses to be constructed immediately. Point San Jose's prominent bluff, in tandem with the forts at Alcatraz and Fort Point, served as an ideal location for another pair of gun batteries. The civilian residents, whom the army referred to as *genteel squatters*, were evicted to free up their houses for incoming army officers. Jessie Benton Fremont's home, once the center of San Francisco's literary society, was torn down to make way for one of the new harbor defense batteries on the point. Civilian life here was officially over.

Building 240, built in the 1860s as company barracks for the artillery troops, was one of the first buildings that the Army constructed at Point San Jose. Photo date unknown.





This photograph shows a Fort Mason family sometime around 1900.

In many ways, Point San Jose was laid out and constructed like most late 19th century army posts, which were designed to function as small, self-sufficient towns. The main parade ground, an open, grassy square dedicated to drills, marches, parades, and public ceremonies, was the physical and organizational center of post life. The most significant military buildings, like the post headquarters, the hospital, the barracks, and the mess halls were constructed on a rectangular grid around the main parade ground. However, because the army seized the existing civilian's buildings for officers' housing, Point San Jose evolved differently than standard army posts. Here the officers' homes faced out toward the city, rather than in towards the main parade ground. Also, the historical flagpole was not located in its traditional place in the middle of the parade ground but off to the east side, near the east-facing headquarters building (the flagpole was then later moved closer to Building 201).

By 1870, Point San Jose comprised several different types of buildings. There was a six-bed hospital to provide the men with adequate health care, and a kitchen, a bakery and a post garden for fresh food. Laundresses' quarters housed the few women on post, who were hired to keep the uniforms and linens clean. Army life was often monotonous and alcohol frequently provoked problems, so Point San Jose had a guard house, that doubled as both a security post and jail with prison cells for drunk and unruly soldiers. Like all army post, the more utilitarian or unsightly buildings, like latrines, stables, and corrals, were located at the outskirts of the post.

When Point San Jose was first established, the post was predominantly a bachelor society. Like soldiers at posts spread across the western United States, men stationed at Point San Jose participated in the resolution of the "Indian Wars" and stabilizing the western frontier. The army strongly discouraged married junior officers, and enlisted men were specifically forbidden to marry. The general feeling was that women and children had no place within army life. But by the turn of the century, as part of an effort to improve morale, the army softened its policy and officers were allowed to bring their families with them.

Renamed Fort Mason in 1882 to honor Colonel Richard Barnes Mason, the second military governor and commander of California (1847 to 1849), the army post played an important role in the life of the city it bordered. In an effort to make the place more hospitable and pleasing, Congress continued to fund additional construction and general landscaping improvements.

As an 1884 article in *The Daily Alta California* describing Fort Mason noted:

The houses are neat and comfortable, but not extravagant in architecture or appointment. The grounds, once as dreary as a waste of sand as the outlying desert, have been wonderfully beautified with lawns, shade trees and flowers and no more pleasing a place could be designed for a military headquarters or anything else. A high lattice fence separates the officers' quarters from those of the garrison, and in many places the fence is covered with flowering vines to its full height of twenty-five feet.

This general view of Fort Mason shows the post after almost 30 years of army occupation. Photo circa 1893, courtesy of the National Archives, RG-92.



Continue down Pope, which was the original east side of the main parade round. At the flagpole, at the corner of Pope and MacArthur, turn to your right and continue along the sidewalk to the Great Meadow, which is the large grass field on the west side of Building 201. Follow the red sidewalk to the benches at the first little hill.



Top photo: This long-distance view (looking northwest) shows Fort Mason's sprawling earthquake-relief encampments. Note, Building 201 (now park headquarters, circled) in the background. Photo circa 1906, courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Bottom photo: As part of the earthquake relief effort, the Army quickly set-up a food distribution center at the end of Franklin Street. This photo, looking north towards the bay, shows Building 239, built as the post's first hospital, on the left hand side of the street. Photo circa 1906.



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Fort Mason's Role within the Community *Earthquake Relief*

In the early morning hours of April 18, 1906, a devastating earthquake hit San Francisco, followed by even more destructive fires. As news of the wide-spread damage reached Fort Mason, Brigadier General Frederick Funston quickly established a command post in the Commanding Officer's residence (Quarters 1). With much of the downtown area on fire, Fort Mason was designated as San Francisco's temporary City Hall; from Quarters 1, the army managed an emergency command center and coordinated the law enforcement efforts required to maintain civilian peace.

Fort Mason was also the site of one of the essential earthquake relief camps that sprang up in the hours and days following the disaster. In these camps, soldiers provided food, water, medical supplies and temporary shelter to hundreds of homeless citizens. The relief camp was located here on the open land in front of you and extended down and to the left, near today's Marina Safeway.

"The Zone", the fair's amusement and concessions area, was set up in Fort Mason, to the left of the Great Meadow in front of you. The Zone also introduced visitors to the new idea of national parks. Replicas of Grand Canyon National Monument, complete with realistic pueblos, and Yellowstone National Park were created at either end of the Zone to promote the value of conserving natural resources. Photo circa 1915.



World's Fair

In 1915, San Francisco hosted the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE), the world's fair designed to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal, which improved travel to and from the East Coast and indeed, worldwide. Locally, the PPIE was San Francisco's opportunity to prove that the city, now fully recovered from the earthquake, was open for business.



This aerial view shows the post during its most heavily developed period. What is today the Great Meadow was once covered with large industrial-type buildings, and MacArthur Street was twice as wide as it is now. Photo circa 1954.

Turn your attention to your right, to the large red-roofed buildings near the water. If time permits, follow the red sidewalks to the brown sign with the word “PIERS” and downward-facing arrow in white. Look down over Lower Fort Mason.



San Francisco Port of Embarkation

You are looking at the massive buildings of lower Fort Mason, built in 1912 to warehouse army supplies and provide docking space for army transport ships. By 1898, with the onset of the Spanish-American War, the United States’ interests and responsibilities had shifted from managing internal issues to exerting the country’s new power across the Pacific Ocean. The War Department began to build new bases in Hawaii, the Philippines, and various Pacific islands and most of the material for those bases was shipped through San Francisco. The three piers, their sheds, warehouses, and a railroad tunnel running under Fort Mason were completed by 1915. With these new facilities, Fort Mason was transformed from a harbor defense post into a logistical and transport hub for American military operations in the Pacific.

From the 1920s through World War II, the San Francisco Port of Embarkation played a critical role in the movement of supplies and troops to the Pacific. Fort Mason served as the headquarters for the San Francisco Port of Embarkation, the nerve center of a vast network of shipping facilities that spread throughout the Bay Area. However, by the 1950s,

the port's role was much diminished, as increasingly, troop movement relied on air transport instead of ships. In the 1960s, the Department of Defense began examining cost-cutting possibilities and eventually closed both the post and the docks altogether.

Continue back the way you came, following the red sidewalk along the Great Meadow. Stop near the statue of Congressman Phillip Burton.



Creation of Golden Gate National Recreation Area

In the 1960s, the Department of Defense identified Fort Mason as no longer required for military purposes. For the next decade, the future of this incredible property was the focus of lively debate at both the local and national level. Congressman Phillip Burton (D-CA), represented in the statue in front of you, championed the idea of creating new urban national park that would provide outdoor recreational opportunities and preserve historic and natural sites for all. So it was that this land, used by the military for more than a century, became part of the newly created Golden Gate National Recreation Area, a unit of the National Park Service. The new park's headquarters was established in Building 201, originally the post hospital and over time, many of the underutilized and dilapidated army buildings were removed. Finally, in the 1980s, the Great Meadow was created as open space for the enjoyment of the city's residents and visitors alike.

This marks the end of the walking tour.

Feel free to continue to explore the former army post and the piers and buildings at lower Fort Mason (now known as the Fort Mason Center) or return to the visitor information center. Thank you for visiting, and please return to discover more stories of this hilltop overlooking the bay.



Architectural Guide to Fort Mason's Historic Buildings

As you walk the streets and trails of Fort Mason, you will see buildings that span the post's entire construction period, from 1855 through the 1940s. When the army established a new post, the Quartermaster Office in Washington D.C., would dispatch plans, complete with layouts, elevations, and construction instructions; the particular architectural style mirrored whatever was popular in the country at the time. There was a standard plan for every type of building, be it the commanding officer's quarters, company barracks, mess hall or stables.

Army construction was always economical and simple, with minimal attention to detail and color, so the architectural styles that you see here are stripped-down versions of their civilian counterparts; you won't find any of San Francisco's famous "painted ladies" here. Please use the map in the front of the booklet to identify building numbers.

Italianate Style

Fort Mason's oldest buildings, Quarters 1 (Fort Mason Officers Club), Quarters 2 (the Brooks House), Quarters 3 (the Haskell House) and Quarters 4 (the Palmer House), were all built by civilians between 1855 and 1877 and reflect the Italianate style. The shapes and design features of the Italianate Style were derived from rambling Italian farmhouses and Italian-style villas; identifying features of this style included asymmetrical plans, low-pitched roofs, overhanging eaves with decorative brackets, tall, narrow windows, frequently with elaborate crowns and cupolas or towers.



Top: The decorative brackets and the gabled dormers on Quarters 2 are illustrative of the Italianate Style at Fort Mason.

Bottom: Quarters 4 has an asymmetrical building design, a tapered mansard roof and a row of dentil moldings at the 1st floor roof line.

Photos circa 2005, K. Baron

Queen Anne Style

Popular in the U.S. during the 1880s and 1890s, the eclectic Queen Anne style, imported from England during the 19th century, was based on decorative Medieval forms. Similar to those buildings commonly known as “Victorian,” these buildings were often asymmetrical, with intersecting roofs, wrap-around porches, angled roof brackets, and different combinations of exterior building materials. Buildings 231 and 238, built in 1891, represent the army’s restrained version of the Queen Anne Style.

Photos from left to right: Building 231 show the playful use of different shingle styles and a bull’s eye window.

The supporting brackets at the front entrance are another decorative feature of the Queen Anne Style.

While Building 232 lacks decorative or structural columns, it still represents a simple Greek Revival building with a front-gabled shape, gable end returns and a short boxy shape.

Photos circa 2005, K. Baron



Greek Revival

The Greek Revival style, popular from 1825 to 1860, was based on the Greek temple form; pediments, columns, bold moldings, and heavy cornices were applied to all types of buildings, sometimes indiscriminately. Building 232 and 235 (built in 1864) and Building 234 (built in 1878) are some the first buildings the army constructed after they took over Black Point.



Colonial Revival

The Colonial Revival style was characterized by large, stocky symmetrical buildings with classical elements, such as columns, porches, and wide windows. This style was fashionable from 1880 to 1955 and favored clean, simple lines and a minimal use of applied decoration. The Colonial Revival Style, which harkens back to the 18th-century Federal buildings, was used to invoke a sentimental remembrance of the early history of the United States, a time when America and her democracy were in their infancy. Both Building 201, the park's headquarters (constructed in 1902) and the adjacent Building 204 (constructed in 1904) are examples of the Colonial Revival Style.



Top: Pairs of double-hung windows with multi-window panes, as seen here in Building 201, are characteristic of the Colonial Revival Style.

Bottom: Building 204 was originally constructed as a residence for the hospital steward. The segmental arch window openings and projecting front porch is typical for this style.

Photos circa 2005, K. Baron

Mission Revival

By the 1900s, the Mission Revival style was gaining popularity throughout American West and Southwest; examples of this style were built up through the 1920. Developed with a desire to create an architectural form based on the Southwest's historical influences, specifically the Spanish Colonial Mission period, this style was characterized by silhouetted shapes that mimicked the old missions' red tile roofs and large flat stucco surfaces, which were often punctuated by deep windows and door openings.



Top: The Fort Mason post chapel (Building 230), constructed in 1942, is a good example of the Mission Revival style with flat stucco surfaces, minimal applied decoration, and in the case of this building, a bell tower.

Bottom: Red clay roof tiles, seen here at Building 101, are commonly found in the Mission Revival style.

Photos circa 2005, K. Baron



Golden Gate National Recreation Area
Fort Mason, Bldg. 201
San Francisco, CA 94123

(415) 561-4700
(415) 556-2766 (TDD, for the hearing impaired)
www.nps.gov

