



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.

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

For more information, visit the Pacific West Information Center located at:

the Argonaut Hotel
495 Jefferson Street
San Francisco, CA 94123
(415) 561-4700

www.nps.gov/goga

A Reflection of San Francisco Through Time



A 19th Century Army Post on a San Francisco bluff

Welcome to Fort Mason. Step back in time to visit Civil War-era buildings and streetscapes. This self-guided walking tour of Fort Mason suggests a specific walking order. However, there are also interpretative waysides that provide you with additional information, so feel free to wander and explore what interests you.

Please be advised that most of the Fort Mason buildings and residences are currently occupied; 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.

Start the tour in front of the William J. Whalen building.

1 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 Spanish settlers arrived to this area and established Spain's northernmost outpost, a presidio and a Catholic mission. The Spanish recognized that this hilltop promontory was an obvious choice for the defensive fortifications and built the Bateria San Jose here in 1797.

When the United States took control of California in 1846, one of the military's first priorities was to protect the rich bay from both the British and Russians who maintained extensive fur trapping interests up and down the Pacific coast. Recognizing the geographic and economic importance of the San Francisco Bay and the need to transport gold cargo safely, the army identified locations that were well suited to national defense. In 1850, President Millard Fillmore established this land as a military reservation, designating it Point San Jose.

On the cover: Fort Mason, aerial view, circa 1920s.

All images from Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Park Archives and Record Center, unless otherwise noted.



Point San Jose with Civil War-era army buildings. Notice that the adjacent neighborhood is mostly sand dunes and industrial buildings. (image circa 1865)

From the headquarters building, turn left on MacArthur Street; 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 without the trees, buildings and skyscrapers.

2 Gold Rush Transforms San Francisco

When California became a state in 1846, the first government seat was 150 miles away in Monterey and San Francisco was a sleepy port town. There were less than one thousand inhabitants in the city; sailors, fishermen, whalers, and fur trappers lived in temporary wood-frame shacks around the waterfront. Except for the presidio and Mission Delores, young San Francisco had few permanent buildings. In January 1848, gold was discovered in the Sierra Nevada foothills and San Francisco was changed forever. People flocked to California from all over the world to seek their fortune. Almost overnight, the gold rush transformed San Francisco into a booming city filled with makeshift tent-houses, hotels, stores, saloons, gambling halls, and shanties. By 1849, as the gold rush fever swept through the country, the city's population exploded to a staggering 25,000. Because of the rapid population rate, city managers could not build shelter fast enough to accommodate everyone.

Turn left and walk up on the right-hand of Franklin Street. Stop at the first driveway on your right. (across from the Fort Mason Chapel) In the 1850s, private citizens constructed homes on the east side of the street, facing the water; after 1865, the army constructed the west side buildings.

3 "Black Point": A Civilian Neighborhood on Military Land

Although the military reserved Point San Jose for its purposes, the army had not assigned any soldiers or constructed any buildings. This scenic and underutilized piece of property, known to locals as "Black Point" because of the bluff's dark laurel trees, offered refuge from the rapidly growing city. Black Point was exceptionally desirable to opportunistic real estate developers and because the U.S. government had trouble enforcing its property claims, a few entrepreneurial civilians moved in and claimed the land for their own.

Proceed up the street to the third driveway. On your right is Quarters 2 and on your left is Quarters 3. Please do not proceed past the top of the driveway entrance as people are living in these homes.



During the Gold Rush, the San Francisco waterfront was a congested mess of wharves, storefronts and boarding houses. Sailors with gold-rush fever

literally abandoned their ships in the harbor. (photo courtesy of John A. Martini; photo circa 1853)

By 1855, San Francisco real estate developers had constructed five large, private residences at Black Point. Some of San Francisco's most influential citizens moved into these elegant homes and over the next nine years, Black Point became a prestigious community of well-educated bankers, merchants, and literary figures. Fortunately, three of these civilian, pre-Civil War homes still stand: Quarters 2 (Brooks House), Quarters 3 (Haskell House), and Quarters 4 (Palmer House, located a little further up north) are the oldest Fort Mason buildings and reflect the popular mid-19th century Italianate Style.

Please remain where you are, with a view of the Haskell House (Building 3) to your left. The Leonard Haskell residence was the place of U.S. Senator Broderick's untimely death.



The Palmer House, built by a private citizen, was a two-and-a-half wood frame Italianate structure with hipped roof and bay windows. Note Alcatraz's Civil War citadel in the background. (Photo courtesy of the San Francisco Public Library; photo circa 1885)

4 The Anti-Slavery Movement at Black Point

The Gold Rush attracted Southerners who supported slavery, Northerners who were against slavery, 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 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 anti-slavery constitution was open for extensive interpretation.

The Broderick-Terry Duel, an important chapter of the anti-slavery movement, is associated with the Black Point community. During the 1850s, the people living here were openly hostile to secession and slavery. They politically supported David Broderick, a self-made man opposed to slavery, in his effort to become California's U.S. Senator. In 1859, after Broderick responded to verbal abuse from his political opponent, California State Supreme Court Justice David S. Terry, Terry challenged him to a duel. On September 13, 1859, the Broderick - Terry duel commenced at Lake Merced, south of the city. After Broderick's gun misfired, Terry shot Broderick and wounded him severely. After his friends rushed him to Haskell's Black Point



California U.S. Senator David Broderick

home (Quarters 3, on your left), Broderick died three days later, after reportedly saying “They killed me because I am opposed to the extension of slavery and a corrupt administration.”

From this driveway, continue up Franklin and stop near the upper end of the tree-filled circle. Look in the direction of the path leading north. Imagine a modest Victorian cottage perched at the edge of the bluff, surrounded by rose bushes and garden paths.

5 Jessie Benton Fremont

Jessie Benton Fremont, wife of explorer John Fremont and daughter of Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, lived here at the end of this street. Mrs. Fremont carved out her own special recognition as a bright, courageous, and ambitious woman at a time when these attributes were discouraged in women. Throughout her life, Jessie Fremont was politically active; both she and her husband were free-soilers and lobbied hard to eliminate slavery. The Fremonts moved to Black Point in 1860 and situated their house and grounds on the bluff. Their home, nicknamed Porter’s Lodge, became the center of San Francisco’s intellectual life, where Mrs. Benton invited like-minded writers, spiritual leaders, and artists to engage in lively conversation. When the Civil War broke out, the Union Army summoned John Fremont for active military service and the family moved to the east coast.

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, near the Fort Mason Youth Hostel. This area was originally the center of the Civil War-era army post; the western half of the post is gone, but the eastern side remains intact.



Jessie Benton Fremont on the porch of “Porter’s Lodge”, overlooking Alcatraz and Angel Island. (photo circa 1860s)

6 Military Life at Point San Jose

Once the Civil War started, the army reclaimed Point San Jose. The post’s prominent bluff, in tandem with the forts at Alcatraz and Fort Point, served as an ideal location to protect the city from Confederate attacks. The army evicted the civilian residents and tore down the Fremont’s home to make way for new gun batteries.

Like all Army posts that sprang up throughout the west, the military designed Point San Jose to function as a small, self-sufficient town. The post included a post headquarters, a hospital, barracks, and mess halls clustered around the main parade ground. The army usually constructed the more utilitarian and displeasing buildings, like the latrines and the stables, at the outskirts of the post. The fortunate Point San Jose officers enjoyed living in the elegant bay-front homes that the army had appropriated. In 1882, the army changed



By the late 19th century, the army's improvements to Fort Mason made the post look more formal. This photo shows the elegant streetscape along Franklin and the well-maintained lawns, hedges and fences. (photo circa 1893)

the post's name to Fort Mason to honor Colonel Richard Barnes Mason, the second military governor and commander of California (1847 to 1849).

Walk down Pope Street, heading south towards the flag pole. At the flagpole, turn to your right and walk in front of the headquarters building. Follow the sidewalk to the Great Meadow, which is the large grassy field to the west side of William J. Whalen Building.



The Fort Mason officers were permitted to bring their families to live on post with them, by the turn of the 19th century. (photo circa 1900)



Fort Mason's sprawling earthquake relief encampment, one of several established throughout the city. Note the Park Headquarters building in the background. (Photo courtesy of the San Francisco Public Library; photo circa 1909)



The Zone introduced visitors to the new concepts of national parks, by providing replicas of the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone National Park. (photo circa 1915)

7 Fort Mason's Role within the Community

Earthquake Relief

Early April 18, 1906, a devastating earthquake hit San Francisco and the ensuing destructive fires magnified the earthquake's damage. Brigadier General Frederick Funston, acting commander of the U.S. Army Department of the Pacific, immediately established a command post in the Fort Mason Commanding Officer's residence (Quarters 1). Because much of the city's downtown was on fire, the city and the army designated the Commanding Officers' residence as San Francisco's temporary City Hall. From Fort Mason, the army managed an emergency command center, coordinated law efforts to maintain civilian peace and set up hundreds of essential earthquake relief camps.

The World's Fair

In 1915, San Francisco hosted the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. This World's Fair celebrated the opening of the Panama Canal, which dramatically improved travel to and from the East Coast and worldwide. The city filled in over 600 acres of tidal marsh to create three miles of exhibition space for different nations and U.S. states. "The Zone", the fair's amusement and concession area, was constructed on Fort Mason and extended south out to Bay Street. Locally, San Francisco used the Exposition to prove to the world that the city had fully recovered from the devastating earthquake and was once-again open for business.



Fort Mason at its most developed, with World War II buildings constructed right up against Civil War-era buildings. Notice the San Francisco Port of Embarkation, with its piers and storehouses, in the upper right-hand side. (photo circa 1951)

If you are standing at the top of the Great Meadow, turn right and walk towards the overlook of large red-roofed buildings near the water. The Fort Mason Center, while not part of this tour, was originally the historic San Francisco Port of Embarkation.

8 Supporting the Pacific

The Port of San Francisco was already a shipping hub for the West Coast but by the early 20th century, Fort Mason was transformed from a coastal artillery post into a logistical and transport hub for the U.S. Army. The army constructed massive piers and storehouses at the waterfront to support the needs of new U.S. military outposts on the Philippines, Hawaii, and various Pacific Islands. 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.

The U.S. Army's San Francisco Port of Embarkation headquarters, managing the port's Bay Area shipping facilities, was located at Fort Mason. The army constructed an impressive number of barracks, office buildings, warehouses and machinery shops to support the port's logistical work. To provide services for the thousands of military and civilian employees required to run this large organization, the army also constructed cafeterias, recreation halls, a movie theatre, a post library, a post office, dry cleaners and hospitality centers.

Continue back the way you came, walking towards the commemorative statue of Congressman Phillip Burton.

9 The Establishment of a People's Park

By the 1950s, the port's role had diminished, as troop movement increasingly relied on air transports instead of ships. Eventually, the Department of Defense identified Fort Mason as redundant to military purposes. The future of Fort Mason became the focus of lively debate at both the local and national level for over a decade. Congressman Phillip Burton (D-CA) championed the idea, pushed forward by the local community, of creating a new urban national park that would provide outdoor recreational opportunities and preserve historic and natural sites for all. In 1972, Congress created Golden Gate National Recreation Area, a unit of the National Park Service, encompassing much of this historic army land. Over time, the government removed many of the dilapidated army buildings and created the Great Meadow 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 this former army post or walk down to the Fort Mason Center.