

SPACE AVAILABLE

It was everyone's good fortune that in 1970 the lands around the Golden Gate were hardly developed. They were next to a rapidly expanding urban area, and they were highly scenic and desirable. Although steepness and isolation had in places discouraged the bulldozers and graders, the lay of the land by itself hadn't kept the developers away.

Some of these lands had already been set aside as parks; the remainder were available for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area because historic land uses had precluded or discouraged development. The two sides of the Golden Gate itself, along with parts of the Pacific Ocean edge of San Francisco, had long been claimed by the military because of their strategic location beside the entrance to the bay. Other parts of the San Francisco shoreline had been saved in coastal parks beginning in the 1870s. The island of Alcatraz had been a fort and then a prison, first military and then civilian; by 1970 it had been abandoned. In Marin County, the rolling hills and the steep slopes of Mount Tamalpais had long been the domain of ranchers and loggers. Separated by steep ridges

from the bayside towns, and without a bridge to cross the Golden Gate until the late 1930s, suburban developers came upon these Marin lands only after some estate owners, hikers, summer residents, ranchers, and vacationers had come to value them and had saved some of the best places in Muir Woods National Monument and in state and local parks. Also, most of Marin's western reaches had remained as open space because the Marin Municipal Water District had set aside 21,000 acres there, and because the pastoral landscape was home to a handful of ranchers.

ARMING THE GOLDEN GATE

From the very beginning, European settlers in the Bay Area knew the Golden Gate was the key to the defense of the great harbor. Hostile ships would have to sail through the opening to enter San Francisco Bay, and it could be guarded by well-placed artillery. Fortification of the Golden Gate began in 1776, when Spain established an armed garrison—a presidio—and built a battery at the entrance to the bay to guard the harbor from occupation by other powers. The Presidio of San Francisco became the northernmost of the Spanish empire's four military garrisons in Alta California.¹ It remained a military post through the Spanish Mission period and the period of Mexican control from 1822 to 1846. The United States Army occupied the Presidio of San Francisco in 1846 during the Mexican War.

James Marshall discovered gold at Coloma on the American River on January 24, 1848.² As gold fever spread across the country and then the world, the tiny settlement of San Francisco grew rapidly. By 1860 it was the twelfth-largest city in the United States, and the Golden Gate's strategic military role grew even more important. In part to protect the gold passing through the city, the Army built new fortifications at the entry into what had become the principal American harbor on the West Coast. Between 1853 and 1861 the Army Corps of Engineers built Fort Point on the southern side of the Golden Gate, the only brick fort on the West Coast.³ After the Civil War, the Army acquired 1,300-acre Lime Point Military Reservation on the northern side of the Golden Gate, which later became Forts Baker, Barry, and Cronkhite.

The Army modernized the harbor entry's defenses as gun range increased, from about 2 miles between the Civil War and 1890, to 10 miles between 1890 and World War I, and up to 25 miles after that war (figure 1). The harbor's batteries spread south and north. By the end of World War II, several generations of gun emplacements, bunkers, and other shoreline defenses extended for more than 50 miles, from south of Half Moon Bay to Point Reyes, in a system of forty separate mili-

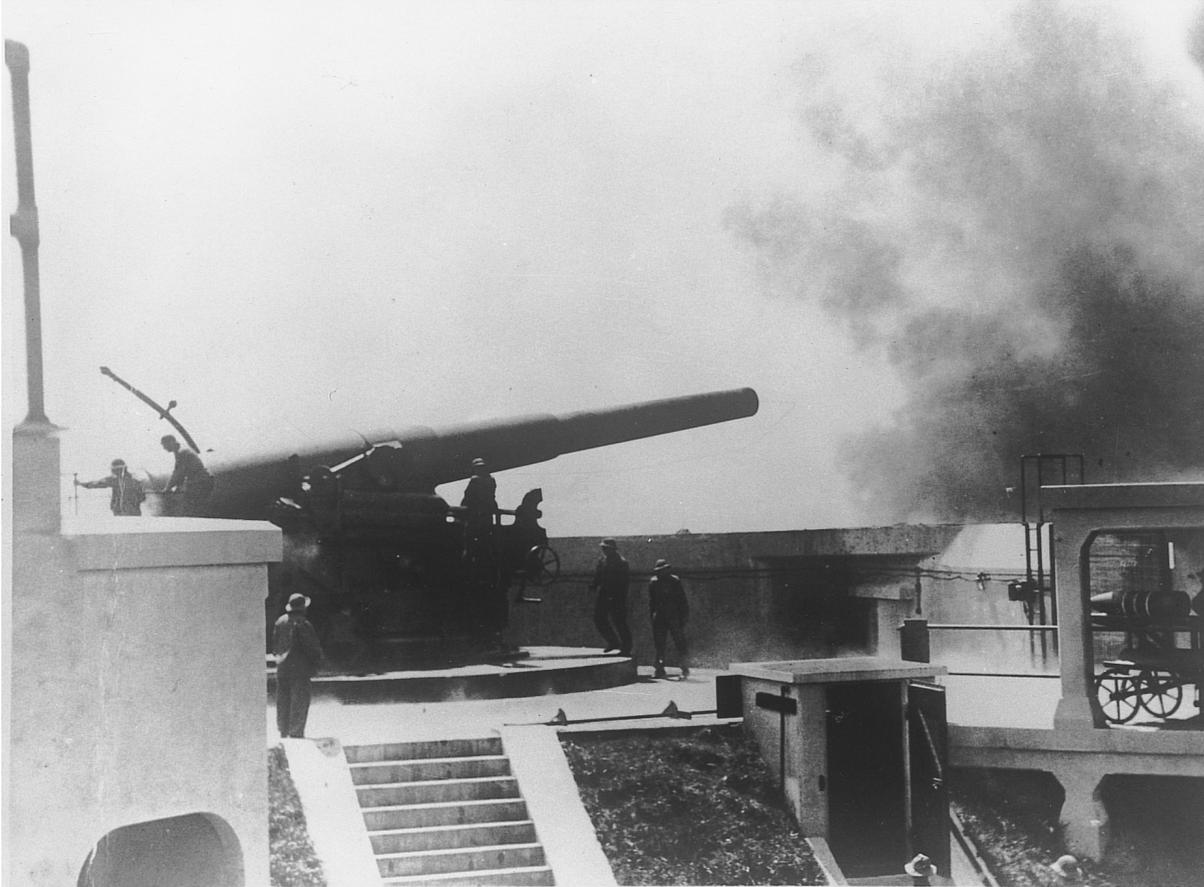


Figure 1. *Modern Coastal Defense:* From the 1840s to the 1940s, the Presidio was the nerve center for the defense of San Francisco harbor. As the range, power, and accuracy of modern artillery increased, a succession of batteries was built. Battery Spencer was built at Fort Baker across the Golden Gate in the late 1890s. Its breech-loading guns fired shells 12 inches in diameter and could reach enemy ships 20 miles out at sea. No shots were ever fired against an enemy from any of the forts at the Golden Gate. (Courtesy Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Park Archives, GOGA 35301, TASC Negative Collection.)

tary reservations spread over 6,000 acres. One of these reservations was Fort Miley; the eastern part near my home would help trigger the fight for the GGNRA.

Despite their concrete structures and roads, these fortified properties included some of the most scenic land in the United States. The terrain remained relatively untouched, often preserving significant areas of natural vegetation. Because they were already federally owned and so close to urbanized areas, they would become the initial parcels within the GGNRA.

SAN FRANCISCO SAVES ITS SHORE

When the GGNRA was assembled in the 1970s, a string of city and state parks along San Francisco's shoreline already existed. Each of these was available for integration into the federal park or could remain as locally administered public land in the expanded greenbelt. These parks included Ocean Beach, Sutro Heights Park, Lincoln Park, China Beach, the Marina Green, and Aquatic Park.

For a century after 1850, most people who came to the western side of San Francisco Bay settled on the bayside flatlands and rolling hills, where the weather and topography are more gentle than beside the ocean. In 1872, when few people lived there, Mayor Frank McCoppin managed to reserve 10 percent of San Francisco's coastal "outside lands" for parks, the rest being given over to private claimants in return for a one-time assessment. This reserved land eventually became the city's famed Golden Gate Park, some smaller parks, and parcels for public uses such as schools. McCoppin's act also saved for public use the long strand of Ocean Beach framing the city's western edge (figure 2).⁴

In the 1880s the engineer and philanthropist Adolph Sutro, mayor of San Francisco from 1894 to 1896, assembled large landholdings on the high bluffs in the northwestern corner of the city on the southern edge of Lands End north of Ocean Beach. At his estate, called Sutro Heights, he created gardens that he generously opened to the public. He led the movement to preserve Seal Rocks just offshore with its seals and rookery. In 1887 Congress granted the half-dozen rocky islets to the City of San Francisco "in trust for the people of the United States." After Sutro died without a will in 1898, wrangles over his estate thwarted his expressed intention to give Sutro Heights to the city. In 1912 the voters defeated a proposed bond issue to buy 80 acres of Sutro land, including Sutro Baths, with the gift of Sutro Heights. Finally, in 1920 the city purchased three parcels of Sutro property (but not the baths) and Sutro's heirs donated 19.56 acres at Sutro Heights with the condition that it be "forever held and maintained as a free Public Resort or Park under the name 'Sutro Heights.'"

North of the Sutro Baths, the aptly named Lands End, a windswept promontory rimmed by



Figure 2. *The City and the Shore:* Ocean Beach at the western edge of San Francisco was the first part of the city's shoreline to be reserved for public enjoyment. First carriages, then early transit lines brought San Franciscans and visitors out to the Cliff House and the beach to dine and to delight in ocean views. (Courtesy the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.)

rugged, landslide-prone cliffs, forms the dramatic southwestern corner of the opening of the Golden Gate. In 1970 it was under the ownership of a variety of entities. The state had 17 coastal acres named Seal Rocks State Park, which never had a sign and did not include the city's Seal Rocks. The Marine Exchange owned an octagon house, a vestige of an earlier communication system for shipping that still stands on an ocean-facing hillside. Fifty-four acres of federal land, purchased from the city in 1891, contained East and West Fort Miley, with a Veterans Administration hospital sandwiched between. Most of the hilltop of Lands End, which slopes down to Clement Street on its southern side, was (and still is) the city's Lincoln Park. In 1870 the city had designated this land as the Golden Gate Cemetery for the indigent and the Chinese, but in 1901 it forbade further burials within the city limits and closed the cemetery in 1909 so that it could become a park. The present-day golf course in Lincoln Park can trace its origins back to 1909, and the California Palace of the Legion of Honor art museum was completed there in 1924.

China Beach, just east of Lands End, was threatened with development in 1929, when the builders of Sea Cliff filed a subdivision map for the beach just below their development. The cove had been proposed as part of a chain of shoreline parks in the city's unexecuted Burnham Plan of 1905. Local improvement associations called for the preservation of the cove, but a proposal to buy it for the city failed at the polls. However, when James Duval Phelan—the mayor of San Francisco from 1897 to 1901 and an avid proponent of parks and city beautification—died in 1930, he left a bequest of \$50,000 to buy the scenic cove facing the Golden Gate. In 1933 the city and the state combined to purchase the property for \$160,000 and officially named it James D. Phelan Beach State Park. It is known today as China Beach after the fishermen who once frequented it.

The great lawn of the Marina Green owes its existence to the vast Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915. To hold the fair, a huge area of tidal lands, industrial plants, and marshy Presidio bayfront was cleared, filled, and landscaped. After the exposition ended, the Marina Green became the first part of San Francisco's bayfront to be made a park. This was under Mayor James Rolph, who also oversaw the beginning of San Francisco's citywide park system.

The origins of Aquatic Park reach back to the late 1800s, when the shoreline east of Fort Mason was one of California's pioneer industrial zones and also a favored location for Victorian rowing and swimming clubs. When industrialists proposed expanding the factory zone out into the bay, rowers and swimmers spearheaded a decades-long campaign to persuade the city to pass bond issues for a park. Even when those proposals failed, the recreationists persisted. Finally in

1922, during the administration of Mayor Rolph, the land for Aquatic Park was acquired, and construction of facilities was completed in 1938.

MARIN KEEPS ITS COUNTRYSIDE

Point Reyes National Seashore, authorized in 1962, and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area both included tracts of private and public land. Broad areas of private land in West Marin had remained open space in part because of ranching. Here, the coastal climate of rainy, mild winters and cool, dry summers creates a long growing season for pasture grasses. The open, rolling hills can support livestock without irrigation or large amounts of supplementary feed. Raising dairy cattle began here in the 1850s on the Point Reyes peninsula, and for a while Marin was called “the butter capital of California.” Relatively isolated from the rest of the Bay Area before the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937, Marin developed slowly, with much of the county divided into beef and dairy ranches, a scattering of small towns, and a few estates and vacation communities (figure 3).

After the Golden Gate Bridge linked Marin to San Francisco and initiated faster growth in the eastern part of the county, the ranchers of West Marin held on tenaciously to their way of life. A number of them were careful stewards of the land and passed their lands whole to succeeding generations of family, along with the tradition of stewardship.

I learned about West Marin ranching from Boyd Stewart. Randolph Delehanty and I interviewed him in the summer of 1999. Boyd was born in 1903 and lived in one of the oldest homes in Marin County, a white 1864 Victorian on the ranch near Olema that his father bought in 1923. Sitting at his dining table, Boyd talked with pleasure about his ranch, now part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and managed by the fourth generation of his family. “It’s a beautiful place—we make a good living, we’re attached to it.”

Boyd’s father came to Marin from Scotland at age seventeen and worked on other ranches before buying his own spread. Concerned about overgrazing, his father was “a good rancher” who “always left one of the pastures to grow, go to seed, not grazed.” Boyd learned about ranching from his father and told us that he was also influenced by the federal Agricultural Extension Service, which began in the 1920s to teach farmers and ranchers about good management practices. “It was a government agency out to improve agriculture,” said Boyd. “New crops, new ways of doing things. ‘Use, don’t abuse the land,’ was the word,” he declared. Summing up the role West Marin ranch-



Figure 3. *A Day's Outing:* Visitors look west toward Bolinas Lagoon in about 1900.

(Courtesy Sausalito Historical Society.)

ers played in protecting the landscape, he told us, “They’ve not had changes in ownership here. [People] don’t want to go someplace else. That’s why the land was here for the parks.”⁵

EARLY LAND CONSERVATION IN MARIN

By the early twentieth century, San Francisco and nearby cities such as Berkeley and Oakland had become urban centers. For some of their residents, a trip to Marin County was an important antidote to the stresses of urban life. Many Bay Area nature lovers hiked on the trails of Mount Tamalpais and vacationed at Stinson Beach and Inverness. When it became clear that many of these beautiful places were threatened with logging, housing construction, and dam building, people began advocating for their protection. Over the years, portions of these lands were indeed

Figure 4. *First Step*: The reservation of Marin County's Muir Woods, with its ancient coast redwoods, as a national monument by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 established the first federal park in the Bay Area. (James M. Morley.)



protected as state and county parks, and there was even one federal park, Muir Woods National Monument (figure 4). When the GGNRA was first authorized in 1972, some of these early parks were included in the new federal recreation area's boundaries and became part of a much larger contiguous area of wildlife habitat and public land.⁶

Boyd Stewart and his wife, Joseffa, were involved in the creation of the early parks, so he could tell us about some of the park advocates who had helped protect several thousand acres of Marin County's beaches, meadows, and forests as parkland. These early visionaries included Caroline Livermore (mother of Norman B. "Ike" Livermore, Jr., who would become the California state secretary of resources from 1967 to 1974), and Sepha Evers (mother of Bill Evers, who would be-

come a founder of the Planning and Conservation League). Boyd got to know them through his wife, “a girl from San Francisco who liked the out-of-doors—a musician, a professional accompanist” who gave piano lessons around the county. Boyd told us about dinners at the Livermore home in Ross at which Caroline Livermore would tell her assembled guests—“a grain broker from San Francisco, a hiker, a Pacific Gas and Electric Company vice president and his wife, and others”—about her desire to preserve Marin’s undeveloped hills and tidelands. The Marin Conservation League, founded in 1934, grew out of these dinners. Some of this organization’s earliest work was for acquisition of these lands.

Caroline Livermore helped raise funds for Mount Tamalpais State Park and was the driving force behind the state’s acquisition of a small part of Angel Island in 1954, and the creation of a state park on the island when more acreage was acquired in 1958. (The summit of Angel Island State Park is now named Mount Caroline Livermore in her honor.) The Marin Conservation League also successfully campaigned for acquisition of the state parks on Tomales Bay and at Stinson Beach.

Muir Woods National Monument

The first park in Marin County, Muir Woods National Monument, predated the conservation campaigns of the Marin Conservation League. Muir Woods was protected early on as public land—and was available to be part of the GGNRA in 1972—primarily because of the efforts of one couple, William Kent and Elizabeth Thacher Kent.

In 1903 William Kent chaired a meeting attended by the chiefs of the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Biological Survey. The group discussed a proposal for a 12,000-acre park from the mountain to the sea, on land owned by ranchers and the Tamalpais Land and Water Company. In 1905, using money borrowed from a banker friend, the Kents bought 611 acres of Redwood Canyon within this area on the southwestern side of Mount Tamalpais to thwart logging, protect the redwood forests, and provide visitors’ accommodations. Two years later, their plan to save the primeval redwood groves of Redwood Creek was threatened when the North Coast Water Company began condemnation proceedings on 47 acres of the Kents’ private acreage in order to dam the creek and create a reservoir to provide a water supply for Sausalito. But William Kent learned about America’s first preservation law, the Antiquities Act of 1906: it allowed the government to accept gifts from private citizens and gave the president the ability to create national monuments by proclamation.⁷ Kent wrote to President Theodore Roosevelt and offered to donate 298 acres

to the nation. Roosevelt accepted, and in 1908 Muir Woods became a national monument. Kent insisted that the park be named for John Muir, whose western explorations, political efforts, and writing had so increased our country's awareness of its natural treasures. With later land acquisitions, nearly all of them Kent family gifts, the monument grew and now protects 560 acres, most of it virgin redwood forest. William Kent was elected to Congress in 1910 and served for three terms. During his time in Washington, he helped create the National Park Service.

Mount Tamalpais State Park

Soon after we moved to the Bay Area, George and I went for a walk in Mount Tamalpais State Park, enjoying the spring flowers and the glorious views along the highest trails of the 2,604-foot mountain. To the west and south, nearly all the land we could see was wild, from the forts near the coast to the state parklands at our feet.

Mount Tamalpais had long been a mecca for recreation. After many of its forests were logged, residents laid out hiking trails to the top, and in 1896 these were complemented by a railway—the Mill Valley and Mount Tamalpais Scenic Railway—that snaked up to the top of the mountain through 281 switchbacks, earning it the name “the crookedest railroad in the world.” By 1897 train passengers and hikers could eat in a restaurant and stay in a hotel at the summit.

By the 1920s Mount Tamalpais had large numbers of weekend and seasonal visitors. Marin County had become an important retreat for affluent and middle-class people all around the Bay Area and had a modest population of permanent residents. There were spacious estates in Ross and Kentfield, and summer cottages in Stinson Beach and Inverness. Sausalito, San Rafael, and Mill Valley were small towns; the other settlements were hamlets. People took a ferry across the bay from San Francisco, Oakland, or Berkeley to Sausalito or Tiburon and then walked or took other transportation to their homes. Many of these people valued Marin's beautiful open space and loved to hike the spectacular slopes of the mountain.

Fearing roads and subdivisions, Marin hikers and conservationists began to campaign for park protection for Mount Tamalpais. To buy crucial land and avert development, a coalition of hiking clubs and conservationists raised money, the state allocated some more, and Mount Tamalpais State Park was designated between 1927 and 1929. The original 531-acre park has now grown to 6,300 acres. Nearly all the rest of the stately mountain is within the protected lands of the Marin Municipal Water District.⁸

Samuel P. Taylor State Park

After the gold rush, Samuel Penfield Taylor ran a highly successful paper-mill operation in the redwoods northwest of Mount Tam, supplying newsprint and paper bags to the San Francisco market. Then Taylor established Camp Taylor along scenic Papermill Creek, one of the first resorts based on camping as a recreational pursuit. In the 1870s and 1880s the area was one of the best-known vacation destinations in California.

By the 1920s Camp Taylor had been abandoned. The property—then owned by a wealthy San Francisco woman, Elizabeth Rogers—abutted the Stewart ranch. “No survey had been done, and there was no fence,” Boyd Stewart recalled. People squatted on the Camp Taylor land. Boyd’s father thought there should be a fence, so in 1924 he sent Boyd to meet with Mrs. Rogers, who lived in a penthouse in the Mark Hopkins Hotel at the top of Nob Hill in San Francisco. Boyd, then a student at Stanford University, remembered going into the grand hotel “in my best suit—my only suit,” and going up in the elevator to her penthouse, where he was admitted to her suite by a maid. After a long, sociable chat he explained his mission. Mrs. Rogers pulled out Marin County plat books and they located the property. “Do you know any of the county supervisors?” she asked. Boyd said he knew a couple of them. She asked him to go to the Marin County Board of Supervisors and tell them she wanted to give the Camp Taylor property—more than 2,500 acres—to the county. “I’m not going to pay taxes on that land anymore,” she said.

When Randolph and I looked astonished, Boyd explained, “The land wasn’t worth anything.” The old-growth redwoods had been logged fifty to seventy-five years earlier, and the second-growth redwoods were young and small. Boyd went to the county seat in San Rafael and told the board of supervisors about Elizabeth Rogers’s offer. “The supervisors didn’t want the land and wouldn’t accept the donation,” he recalled. But Mrs. Rogers stopped paying taxes on the property anyway. In 1940 the Marin Conservation League began a campaign for the county to purchase the land for a park, which the state could then acquire. In 1945 Elizabeth Rogers sold the land to Marin County, which forgave her property taxes as its contribution to the purchase, and in 1946 Camp Taylor became Samuel P. Taylor State Park.

By 1960 Marin County’s residents and friends had saved several thousand acres of beaches and parks. Most people in most places would have expected towns and cities to grow up around these protected areas. But that is not what happened in Marin.