



UTILITAS • FIRMITAS • VENUSTAS

Northern California Chapter
Society of Architectural Historians

The Newsletter

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Historic Seacoast Fortifications at the Golden Gate Will Be Focus of Chapter's Fall Tour

Saturday, September 27, NCCSAH will be doing an all-day tour of the fortifications in the Presidio and the Marin Headlands that once protected San Francisco Bay. Golden Gate National Parks historian Steve Haller will lead the tour. We will gather for pastries and coffee at 8:30 a.m., in the parking lot at Ft. Point, under the south anchorage of the Golden Gate Bridge. After a tour of the fort, the group will transfer to a small (28-passenger) bus that will transport us to all the remaining sites on the itinerary.

We will view an astonishing array of fortifications, beginning with pre-Civil War Ft. Point, to emplacements dating from the 1870s, the Spanish American War, the First World War, and the Second World War. A century of fairly intact military construction reveals a fascinating history of the nation's coastal defense system. We will see the design evolution of fortifications in response to changes in weaponry.

The National Park Service has been restoring some of these sites, whose extent and scale are amazing. A 16-inch gun (the largest ever put into service in this country) has been recently returned to a battery in the Marin Headlands. We will have access to areas not normally open to the public or easily accessible. All of this against the backdrop of breathtaking views.

Price \$50/person, \$70 for those not members of NCCSAH, includes a box lunch, which we will have outdoors at the Marin Headlands Visitor Center. The non-member cost includes a one-year NCCSAH membership.

Not just for military history buffs, this program will have a wide appeal, and space is limited. So reserve your place now. Registration form and itinerary appear on page 6. See related feature article beginning on page 2.



Pre-Civil War Ft. Point, its ordnance removed long ago, stands at the Golden Gate. Photo: National Park Service

Seacoast Fortifications of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area Reflect Changes in Warfare and Nation's Evolving Defense Posture



Battery Cavallo, Ft. Baker, constructed in the 1870s. Photo: National Park Service

The seacoast fortifications of San Francisco Bay are nationally significant, well-preserved examples of nearly every important development in military fortification engineering and architecture from before the Civil War to the guided missile era. They remain tangible reflections of changing trends in “homeland security” over the course of our national history.

The former military reservations at the Presidio and the Marin Headlands provide a relatively unchanged physical context for these fortifications, while also creating a spectacular backdrop of open space at the very verge of our great urban metropolis. Not only a defining factor in the San Francisco Bay Region's scenic beauty, this open space is the core of the first of the nation's urban national parks—the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA).

The GGNRA has the challenge of protecting, preserving and interpreting more than fifty coast defense fortifications, ranging in age from before the Civil War and the massive masonry bulk of Fort Point at the narrow harbor entrance, to the experimental and sophisticated reinforced concrete structures of the turn of the twentieth-century, through

the years of World War II. Augmenting the oversized scale of the primary gun emplacements are scores of associated features in the coast defense cultural landscape. These include casemates that served as the control centers for mines placed outside the Golden Gate, fire control stations for modernizing the aiming systems required with the expanded range and accuracy of modern guns, and searchlights at multiple points of land along the coastline both north and south of the harbor entrance. Mine casemates and fire control stations, the latter also known as base-end stations, first appeared during the 1890s, while systematic searchlights followed after the turn of the century. Extending coast defense beyond World War II and into the Cold War decades of the 1950s and 1960s are radar stations and Nike anti-aircraft batteries.

Today walkers, hikers and joggers encounter many images as they explore trails within the park. A single view can yield a close look at a castle-like site of the 1850s formed from an intricately crafted mosaic of brick and mortar, against the backdrop of the elegant Moderne towers of the Golden Gate Bridge of the late 1930s. The man-made beauty inherent in the sculptural forms of many gun pits, such as Battery Mendell at Point Bonita, draw the eye of visitors when, after climbing up steep battery steps to the blast apron, they



Three-inch guns, Battery O'Rorke, Ft. Barry, 1908 Photo: Durland Collection

turn back and view the unexpected sweeping precision of a crisp circular form.

Explorations in the immediate proximity of a battery can yield not just a better understanding of the primary structure, but also of its support systems and how the entire system functioned, as well as its role in a broader national defense strategy. For instance, a battery commander's station at World War II Battery Construction #129 within Fort Baker gives a clear sense of the role of the observation post, half-buried, with its seaward view shed framed by a bunker-like horizontal panoramic opening.

Reflecting upon the larger cultural landscape of coast defenses within the GGNRA, these many and diverse resources remain what they were designed and engineered to be: an intimate part of the land forms on which they are both imbedded and perched. The Army built the coast defense fortifications bracketing the San Francisco Bay, from batteries to support structures, with deliberate care in their texturing and coloration, achieved through planted foliage, coated blast aprons, and structural paint schemes.

Manmade cuts and fills to provide for roadways, paths and parade areas, both at and between installations, were set within the contours of the hills in such a way to give the appearance of an undisturbed natural site when viewed from approaching hostile ships. Native and introduced plantings, including rye grass, ice plant and eucalyptus helped to conceal

the installations, while not impairing the line-of-sight view sheds from the batteries themselves.

Coastal fortifications were once a keystone of America's defense, and the nation invested both treasure and talent in their construction. This strategy was based in part on geography and in part on fundamental political convictions about America's place in the world and the nature of our government.

Throughout American history, coast defense weapon systems have offered a practical solution to the challenge of national defense that did not require a large standing army and could not be diverted for use as an instrument of internal suppression. Remark- ing on coastal defenses, a noted military officer before the Civil War wrote: "When once constructed they require but little for their support. In time of peace they with- draw no valuable citizen from the useful oc- cupations of life. Of themselves they can never exert an influence dangerous to pub- lic liberty, but as the means of preserving peace, and as obstacles to an invader, their influence and power are immense." (Emanuel Raymond Lewis, *Seacoast Fortifications of the United States: An Introductory History* (Missoula, Montana: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1990), 4.)



16-inch gun outside Battery Townsley, Ft. Cronkhite, Marin Headlands, 2014. National Park Service Photo by John Martini

The role of geography in moving the nation into this defense posture is simple:

“Throughout most of its history, the United States, separated from the other powerful nations of the world by large bodies of water, relied on coast defense to deter enemy invasion. This defensive measure depended on fortifications but also included submarine mines, nets, and booms; ships; and airplanes.” (Dale E. Floyd, *Defending America's Coasts, 1775-1950: A Bibliography* (Alexandria, Virginia: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1997), xi.)

The United States was free to choose an isolationist policy as long as coast defense, coordinated with command of the seas, allowed the nation to defend its shores effectively. Since World War II, air power has rendered classic coastal fortifications obsolete (although, arguably, the Nike anti-aircraft missile system, dismantled by 1974, can be considered its last iteration). Yet the successive generations of coast defense fortifications that evolved in the course of a century and that survive within the GGNRA are a tangible manifestation of our historic conceptions of military preparedness.

Exploring the coastal fortifications reveals a rich pattern of military architecture whose evolution reflects technological change, often spurred by wartime developments. When rifled cannon replaced smoothbores during the Civil War, masonry forts, such as Fort Point, became obsolete and were replaced by massive earthworks and concrete that absorbed the shock of high velocity projectiles rather than trying to repel it.

The character of the defenses between the 1870s and the Cold War finds expression in the selection of sites and the placement of batteries, the choice of materials used in their construction, and the manner of their design. The advent of steam-powered battleships triggered a corresponding modernization of gun batteries, with long-range rifles firing from behind multi-level concrete emplacements. The location of the defenses moves from close to the water and harbor entrances, to distant from them as the range and accuracy of artillery improves.

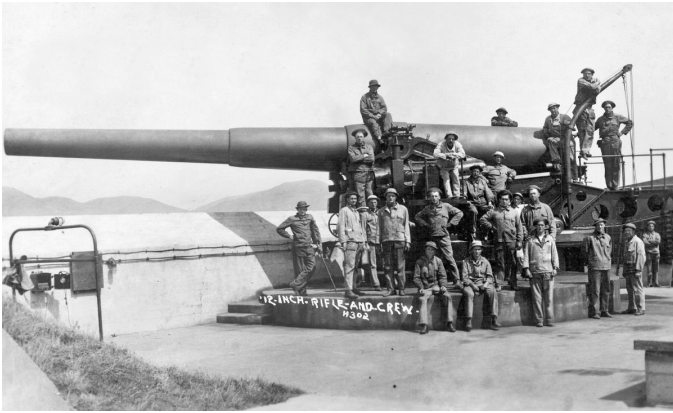


Finally, the ascendancy of air power in World War II saw the last generation of seacoast defense sheltered within the hill-sides to protect against aerial attack. The plan of the batteries shifted from two guns side by side in a single emplacement, to

two guns, each in its own emplacement and separated from the other by hundreds of feet as bombardment by aircraft became a threat.

Decay over time and limited funding for preservation work obscures one of the nation's most complete and compact representations of coastal fortifications, so that it can be difficult to appreciate what they once were. They are disarmed. Slopes that were crisp and groomed a century ago are now muted by erosion, unplanned and untended vegetation, and a web of trails. The massive concrete emplacements are separated from their view of the sea by walls of trees, and their once-trim parapets and traverses are marked with crumbling concrete and graffiti.

Above: Battery Mendell, aerial view taken with a camera attached to a kite. Photo courtesy of Chris Benton



*Twelve-inch gun, Battery Godfrey, Ft. Winfield Scott.
Photo: Smith Collection*



*Concrete repair at Battery Godfrey, Presidio of San Francisco,
2012. Photo: National Park Service*

Yet much work has occurred in the past decade to improve the condition of these remarkable resources. Repair of concrete pillars and soffits, removal of overgrown vegetation to open up historic view sheds, and rehabilitation of trails and selected batteries have become the focus of preservation and interpretation work, often spearheaded by a cadre of dedicated volunteers.

Interpretation and preservation of these resources are part of the mission of the National Park Service as defined almost a century ago. This task demands repeated looks at the many sites within the coast defense system of fortifications, coupled with renewed archival siftings through Army reports; letters between military engineers and between commanders; and through drawings, plans, and historic photographs. In turn, historically informed preservation of coast defenses augments and gives form to the story the archival materials tell and allows future generations to see and touch the past.

*Stephen A. Haller
Historian
Golden Gate National Recreation Area*

*Adapted from Seacoast Fortifications Preservation Manual,
Golden Gate National Recreation Area
(Joe C. Freeman AIA, Stephen A. Haller, David M. Hansen,
John A. Martini, and Karen J Weitze)*

Other Events Of Interest

Preservation Action Council of San Jose

House Tour: Wolfe & McKenzie Homes Tour
Saturday, August 23, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
<http://www.preservation.org>

SF Heritage

Lecture Series, Thursdays, 6:00 p.m.
August 21, Reel San Francisco: On-Location Movies and Preservation. *September 18*, The Magic City: Treasure Island's GGIE. *October 16*, Recovering from Depression: The New Deal's Contributions to San Francisco. *November 6*, The Alice Ross Carey Memorial Lecture.
www.sfheritage.org/upcoming_events/lecture-series/

AIA San Francisco

2014 Architecture and the City Festival
September 1-30 Theme Home: My San Francisco.
Tours, films exhibitions, lectures.
<http://aiasf.org/programs/architecture-and-the-city/>

National Trust for Historic Preservation

2014 Conference: Past Forward
Savannah, GA, November 11 - 14, 2014.
www.pastforward2014.com

Society of Architectural Historians

68th Annual Conference, April 15 - 19, 2015
Chicago, Ill. <http://www.sah.org>

Seacoast Fortifications Tour

Registration

The cost of the tour for NCCSAH members is \$50, non-members \$70. Prices include coffee and pastries in the morning and a box lunch. A one-year introductory NCCSAH membership is included in the non-member fee. Please send your check made out to NCCSAH to: Seacoast Fortifications Tour, c/o Ward Hill, 3124 Octavia St., #102, San Francisco, CA 94123. Include your name, e-mail address and a mailing address. We have limited space, so please send your check as soon as possible. For your convenience there is a registration form below.

Registration for Tour of Seacoast Fortifications

[please print]

Name _____

Affiliation _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Email address _____

Registration: \$50 members / \$70 nonmembers

Total Enclosed _____

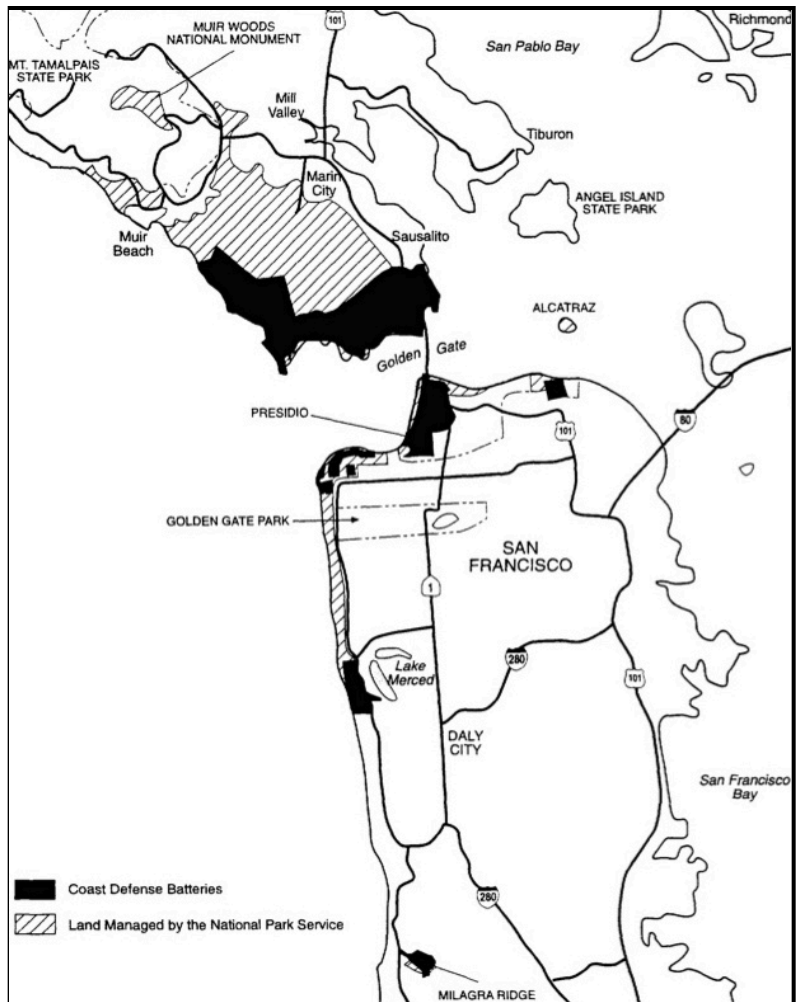
Please make checks payable to NCCSAH and
mail to:

Ward Hill
NCCSAH Seacoast Fortifications Tour
3124 Octavia Street, #102
San Francisco, CA 94123

For more information please contact Ward Hill
at whill@pacbell.net.

Nonmember cost also includes one year's
membership in NCCSAH.

**Please use the form above to sign up for
the Seacoast Fortifications Tour and the
form on the last page for membership
dues.**



Source: Golden Gate National Recreation Area, 1994

Itinerary

8:30 - 9:00	Coffee and pastries
9:00 - 10:00	Ft Point tour (restrooms)
10:00 - 11:00	Battery West (includes travel time from Ft Point)
11:00 - 12:00	Chamberlin (restrooms at Baker Beach)
12:00 - 12:30	travel Chamberlin to Battery Cavallo
12:30 - 1:00	Battery Cavallo (travel to Headlands Visitor Center)
1:00 - 2:00	lunch at Visitor Center, visit bookstore and exhibits
2:00 - 3:30	Battery Wallace and Mendell
3:30 - 4:30	Battery Townsley (includes travel time)
4:30 - 5:00	travel time back to Ft Point

Sea Ranch Tour Provided a Close-up Look at a Remarkable Community on its 50th Birthday



NCCSAH tour of Sea Ranch pauses for group photo with Donlyn Lyndon, Condo 1 in background.

We've all driven by it on Highway 1, and some of us have even vacationed there, gaining legal access thereby to 10 miles of coastal bluff and hillside forest that is otherwise mostly off-limits to the general public.

But how many of us have visited one after another of The Sea Ranch's earliest and most architecturally and historically significant homes – in the company of some of the men who designed them?

The NCCSAH's Sea Ranch tour in early May, organized by Sea Ranch architect Peter Jenny, proved to be all that was promised – more, in fact, as important homes were added to the schedule after it was first posted. These included the Reverdy Johnson house, a Moore-Turnbull design for the lawyer whose CCRs have succeeded in keeping The Sea Ranch as architecturally intact as it is today, and the home of Donlyn Lyndon, the "L" in MLTW, one of the original designers of the community. Lyndon and his wife, the artist Alice Wingwall, hosted us for lunch at his home. Lyndon emphasized how his house, which has a view of the Pacific Ocean only from a rooftop deck, offers instead experiences of meadow, hedgerows and a stream bed – along with view of an immense rock outcrop. "You get the whole story" of Sea Ranch, he said.

Following lunch, Lyndon led participants on one of the true highlights of the event, a chatty and informed two-hour walking tour of the original section of Sea Ranch, past Joseph Esherick's Hedgerow Houses, that helped set the pattern for development.

The tour culminated at a reception at Condo One, one of the first buildings in Sea Ranch, thanks to the unit's owner and our host, Wayne Donaldson, the former state historic preservation officer, and his wife Laurie.

Ward Hill, who had the smarts to book one of Sea Ranch's most iconic residences well in advance, the Condo One unit that architect Charles Moore designed for himself, also opened it for the tour. It remains in the family of the late architect and still contains Moore's furnishings and eclectic art collection.

Tour participants also got to visit the home of the "W" from the firm, Richard Whitaker, who lives in a lovely forest home designed by Dmitri Vedensky.

Whitaker spoke during an introductory session about the history and ethos of Sea Ranch, about the community's successes, failures and challenges, as it begins to celebrate its 50th year. Several members of the Sea Ranch community took part in the introductory session and accompanied NCCSAH on the tour, Peter Jenny, Doug Paul, and Diane Preece, one of the community's archivists.

Both Donlyn Lyndon and Richard Whitaker also dined with the NCCSAH group at Stewarts Point Store a few miles down the coast, a hundred thirty-plus-year-old structure of the sort that inspired Sea Ranch's architects. Thirty-six people attended the dinner including two (unre-



Richard Whitaker speaking to our members in the Vedensky House. Photo:

lated) people who traveled all the way from Massachusetts for the tour.

The Sea Ranch is worth visiting to see its residential architecture, which gave birth to the much copied (especially by beach and ski houses and condo complexes) “Sea Ranch Style,” sometimes called the “Third Bay Tradition.”

It’s of interest as well to study its land use planning, devised by Lawrence Halprin to create harmony between man and nature. The idea was to cluster ocean-side houses alongside cypress hedgerows originally planted as windbreaks for a sheep ranch, preserving meadows as open common space. In the forests, the houses hide among the redwoods. The tour also illustrated how that planning has worked over the decades, and how well, or sometimes poorly, subsequent planners and builders have adhered to the original principles.

It is heartening to see how and to what extent architects designing homes in Sea Ranch today are extending and revising the idealistic

architectural and environmentally friendly principles of the mid-20th into the 21st century.

Organizers of NCCSAH’s two-day event saved themselves a bit of work by sensibly piggybacking on a separately organized event, the Soroptimist Architectural Tour, Wine tasting and Auction, that is held annually.

This event took tourists to eight houses, all but one of them in Sea Ranch. (That one, a traditional major remodel by Fiona O’Neil, proved to be among many people’s favorites).

Homes on the Soroptimist tour included some brand new homes that fit well the Sea Ranch ethos, including one that many favored, the beautifully constructed *Pelican House*, a 2,700-square foot home squeezed into a tight, bluff-side lot by architect Malcolm Davis, with multiple private courtyards, a roof deck, and barn-door like shutters for privacy.

Another new home, the *Ocean Pines Lodge* by architect David Alpert, deliberately harked back to a series of homes designed by William Turnbull (The “T” in MLTW) known as Binker Barns for their resemblance to barns.

The Dragon House by Obie Bowman, who has designed many homes at Sea Ranch, showed just how playful the style can be with a profile that suggests to the homeowner a dragon and with an open, split-level interior space that suggests a funhouse with its mixture of pastel hues and metallic textures.

Sorry you missed the tour? There will be occasions to visit and learn more about Sea Ranch throughout its 50th anniversary, including at “an Architectural Forum,” “The Once and Future Sea Ranch” on October 18. (<http://www.tsra.org/news.php?viewStory=1953>.)

Dave Weinstein

Our sincere appreciation to Dave Weinstein and to Stephen Haller for generously providing articles for this issue of the NCCSAH Newsletter.



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The mission of the NCCSAH is to further the objectives of the Society of Architectural Historians of which the Northern California Chapter is an affiliate; promote the study and discussion of our region's architectural history and its related fields; visit significant works of architecture; and increase public awareness and appreciation of our architectural heritage. Membership is open to anyone interested in architectural history and its related fields who agrees to pay the annual dues and subscribe to the bylaws of the organization.

NCCCSAH Officers

President, Rich Brandi
Vice President, Paul Turner
Treasurer, Ward Hill
Secretary, Don Andreini
Membership, Ian Berke

**Remember you do not have to be
a member of the National SAH to
become a member of NCCSAH**

Join or Renew Now!!

Individual \$20.00

Student \$10.00

Make checks payable to NCCSAH

Please send your ideas or comments
concerning The Newsletter to:

Don Andreini

NCCSAH Newsletter Editor

dandreini@sbcglobal.net

To become a member of the Northern California Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians

or to renew your dues return this form
and your dues check for \$20 made out to NCCSAH
to

Ian Berke, NCCSAH
Ian Berke Real Estate
2824 Clay Street
San Francisco, CA 94115

Name _____

Affiliation _____

Occupation _____

Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Home Phone _____

Work Phone _____

Fax Number _____

E-mail address _____

For your convenience: Renewing members who sign up for The Seacoast Fortifications Tour may include their \$20 membership dues in a single check with their payment for the tour. In that case, use the address on the tour registration form shown on page 6.