

FINAL DRAFT

Merrie Way & The Lands End Street Railways Abbreviated Cultural Landscape Report

Golden Gate National Recreation Area
San Francisco, California

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January 2006



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**Abbreviated Cultural Landscape Report
Lands End, Golden Gate NRA**

“Merrie Way & The Lands End Trails”

Introduction

To many San Franciscans and visitors, Lands End at the western tip of the city appears to be pure wilderness. Rough cliffs, pocket beaches, endless breakers rolling in from the Pacific, barking sea lions, and wind blown forests give the impression that this an area where humans are outsiders and that natural forces are in control.

However inhospitable and wild it might appear, though, most of Lands End is a human-made environment. Since the first Ohlone people set up hunting camps along its cliffs, this part of San Francisco has undergone innumerable landscape changes. Railroad tracks and streetcar lines were built and then slid into the sea; military fortifications sprang up and were disarmed; a grand auto boulevard across the dunes was soon undermined and washed away by winter deluges; and an amusement park, complete with rides and sideshows, was built here and abandoned and then lost to memory. Man-made forests planted in the 1930s eventually engulfed nearly all these sites, leaving little or no trace of their existence.

In the 1942 book *From Lands End to the Ferry*, essayist Earle V. Weller evoked the spirit of Lands End in the purple prose of that era:

Land’s End is a place of many moods. When the north wind blows it looks out on one of the most remarkable panoramas in the world but, when the gray mists roll in, it dons a robe of mystery while the eerie voice of the siren on Mile Rock Light echoes from headlands to headland.

In the days of sunshine it is the resort of tourists and picnic parties and children race with the tide on the beach below. In the teeth of the gale the angry waves pound unceasingly on the rocky cliffs and the waves break with might surges of foam on the shadowy height....

There was mystery and magic, the moaning of the waves in the underground caves, the pounding of the surf, the shriek of the gulls, all sights and sounds which blended into a never-to-be-forgotten motion picture of fascinating beauty and ever-varying delight. ¹

Early in the 20th century, the area was also notorious for attracting despondent visitors. Suicides from its beaches and cliffs were such a common occurrence that the city Morgue maintained a journal titled “The Death Lure of Land’s End” recounting their stories. A 1920s newspaper reporter wrote of the macabre document, “In this record was kept the history of the many suicides who, for some reason or other, had sought death amid the breakers at the base of that rock-bound bluff overlooking the Golden Gate.”²

Although almost totally forgotten today, the area apparently had the same lure for the emotionally unstable and suicidal as the Golden Gate Bridge holds today.

Lands End still remains an attraction to San Franciscans, but suicides there are now almost unknown. The area still has its dark side, though. Overgrown forests obscure tempting views, and unplanned trails lure the novice walker towards sheer sea cliffs. Even the formal trails and roads that were once straight and level have settled and eroded, making hiking an arduous ankle-twisting experience. The steam trains, streetcars, paved roads and manicured trails that once traversed Lands End have all disappeared to the forces of erosion, weather and neglect. Over-enthusiastic visitors become stranded on a regular basis and have to be rescued by park personnel, fire fighters, and the occasional Coast Guard helicopter. Deaths by falls and drowning are all too common.

Lands End ACLR -- Final Draft

Ironically, this part of San Francisco was safer and more accessible to visitors in the late 19th century than it is in the early 21st.

In an effort to once again make Lands End accessible and hospitable to all visitors, the National Park Service and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy are studying various ways to make the area safe once again by restoring long neglected trails, and ensuring that the famous vistas are available and safe at the same time. This Abbreviated Cultural Landscape Report (ACLR) contains documentation of some of the many historic resources at Lands End in the hope it will provide solid documentation and guidelines for future improvements to the area.

It also should be emphasized that this report does not address all the cultural themes in the Land End area; that would require a much, much thicker volume. Instead, this ACLR only addresses those themes and resources that might be impacted by upcoming park development projects. Themes that remain to be researched in depth include the Ohlone people and their occupation of the area; the ranching history and grazing activities of the Seal Rock Rancho; shipwrecks and life saving activities; Mile Rock Lighthouse; the Marine Exchange and other maritime lookout stations; Golden Gate Cemetery and its successor, the Lincoln Park Golf Course; the Palace of the Legion of Honor; the USS San Francisco Memorial; Fort Miley; and the Veterans Administration Hospital.

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November 2005

Administrative Background to the Abbreviated Cultural Landscape Report

This Abbreviated Cultural Landscape Report was prepared at the direction of the Chief of the Division of Cultural Resources for Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GOGA). It is designed to provide historical background and context for cultural resources located in the Lands End area of GOGA, identify surviving elements of those resources, and give an initial assessment of the integrity and significance of those elements. It will hopefully provide resource information during the planning and implementation of visitor facilities and trail restoration currently under consideration by the park, as well as for any compliance actions resulting from those planning efforts.

This Abbreviated Cultural Landscape Report is also intended to be a companion document to the two outstanding Cultural Landscape Reports (CLRs) prepared for the National Park Service in 1993: *Sutro Historic District Cultural Landscape Report* prepared by for the National Park Service by Land & Community Associates in association with EDAW, Inc., of San Francisco, and the *Sutro Historic District Comprehensive Design and Environmental Assessment* prepared by for the National Park Service by EDAW in association with Land & Community Associates *et al*, both prepared in September 1993.

The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (GGNPC) and the GGNRA are currently in the process of undertaking various projects to enhance the Lands End segment of the Coastal Trail and its surrounding landscape and habitat. The Lands End segment of the Coastal Trail is located within the GGNRA along the high, rugged bluffs south of the mouth of San Francisco Bay on the city's northwest corner. The Lands End portion of the Coastal Trail is roughly two miles long. It begins in the vicinity of the Merrie Way parking lot and continues to the northeast along the coastline to Eagle Point Overlook, near the Sea Cliff neighborhood.

The Lands End Coastal Trail project is part of the Trails Forever initiative to "restore and

steward park trails, enhance park resources, improve the visitor experience, provide recreation, stewardship and education opportunities, and ensure the preservation of the Golden Gate National Parks."

The cultural landscape features within the Lands End area have been the focus of previous studies and evaluations including:

- In 1979, a preliminary National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) nomination was prepared for features within the Lands End area including the Cliff House, Sutro Baths, Sutro Heights Park, and Lands End. However, this nomination was prepared before cultural landscape concepts had been developed and implemented into the NRHP guidelines and the nomination was not finalized.
- In 1993, a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) was prepared by Land and Community Associates for the group of historic sites and features previously addressed in the 1979 NRHP preliminary nomination. This CLR provided a history of the development of the area and identified cultural landscape features. It became the base documentation for the cultural landscape of the Sutro Historic District and its information was used in subsequent analysis.
- In 2000, another NRHP nomination was prepared for the Sutro Historic District. This nomination was reviewed by the California State Historic Preservation Office and found to be ineligible. GGNRA manages this district as a historic resource (NPS 2005: 1-4).
- In 2005, a Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) was prepared for the Sutro Historic District based on information in the 1993 CLR and 2000 NRHP nomination.
- Also located within the Lands End area are cultural landscape features associated with San Francisco's seacoast fortifications. In 1996, a draft National Historic Landmark (NHL) nomination was prepared for the Seacoast Fortifications of San Francisco Bay. Battery Lobos, Battery Land, and the remains of the road at Battery Land were included

as contributing features in this nomination (Haller 1996). The remaining features of Searchlight 24, located at just north of the Sutro Baths site, were not included as contributing features in this nomination (Haller 2005). However, all of these features are located outside of the Phase 1 project area.

The Lands End Coast Trail project is located within the boundaries of the Sutro Historic District. Information on the cultural landscape features located within Lands End in previous reports, including the 1993 CLR and 2000 NRHP nomination, was less detailed than for other areas within district.

However, these earlier studies focused almost exclusively on the Cliff House/Sutro Heights/Sutro Baths areas and their immediate environs. As a result, the undeveloped two-mile connecting corridor between the Sutro developments and the Sea Cliff area has not been extensively researched.

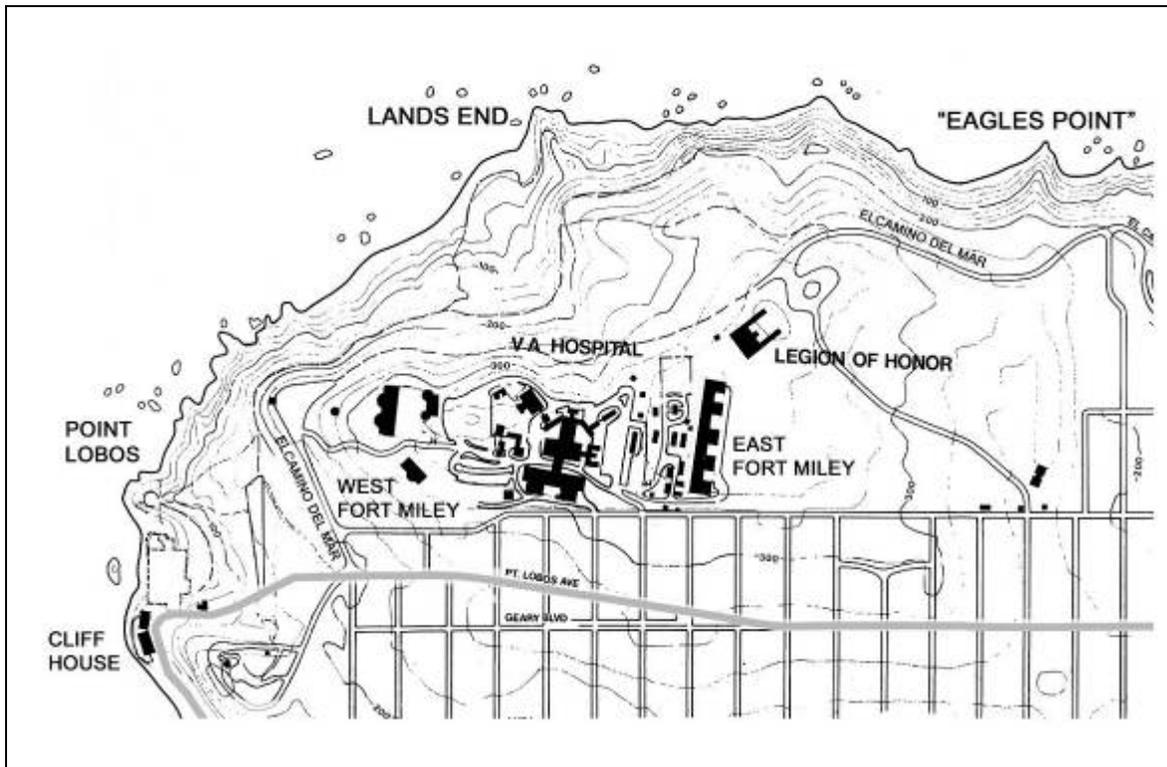


Figure 1. Base Map of the Land's End area showing key geographic features, 2005. (John Martini)

Part I. Overview of Prehistoric and Historic Backgrounds of the Lands End Area

(The following section is adapted from the *Sutro Historic District Cultural Landscape Report* and the *Sutro Historic District Comprehensive Design and Environmental Assessment*, September 1993.)

The earliest known evidence of human occupation in the Lands End area are the remains of two Native American shell mounds (“middens”) located adjacent to the site of Sutro Baths. Dated to sometime after 500 A.D. and prior to the arrival of Spanish explorers in 1769 A.D., these mounds are the cultural remains of the Ohlone people, the area’s aboriginal inhabitants who resided along the San Francisco peninsula, the East Bay, the San Mateo coast and South Bay areas as far south as Monterey Bay.

The tribal people who inhabited present day San Francisco called themselves the Yelamu, a subgroup of the Ohlone, and they regularly came to the Lands End area for hunting. Although generally residing inland, the Yelamu made periodic trips to the ocean’s edge to fish, gather eggs, make salt, hunt seabirds and marine mammals, and collect shellfish from the rocky shore. Consequently, the Lands End mounds contain vast bits of the remains of shells, bones, and seeds but no artifacts or other cultural materials. Spanish settlement in the area beginning in 1776 sharply curtailed Ohlone activity throughout the region, especially the Spaniards’ policy of forced relocation of tribes to the missions. At the missions, diseases such as measles and influenza took a high toll of the Ohlone, and within a few decades native Yelamu population of San Francisco virtually ceased to exist.

Evidence of the Yelamu’s prehistoric use of the Lands End area is not extensively documented, but we can surmise much from the contents of the shell mounds. One midden was located in the slope under the historic entrance to the Sutro Baths containing molluscan remains including mussel, clam, oyster, limpet, and chiton. In addition, fire-cracked rock, charcoal and ash were found. Archaeologists designated this site SFr-21.

A second site was located immediately north of the Baths on a promontory overlooking Point Lobos. This large midden, designated SFr-5, contained remains of mussel shells and bones of sea lion, deer and sea otter. Located on a bluff's edge, the site is badly eroded and was probably once much larger than presently identified. Both SF5-5 and SFr-21 were listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1976 as "the Point Lobos Archaeological Sites."

The attraction for native people to the area is clear. In its natural state, the small cove located between the two middens was a sheltered sandy beach measuring approximately 500 feet across. A small perennial creek drained its eastern flank, and the water formed a brackish pond behind a sand berm that probably broke through to the sea during winter storms. Willow trees likely grew along the creek's watercourse. Off shore, the sea lions who hauled out on Seal Rocks presented inviting targets for hunters. Further offshore, sea otters and even whales came close enough to shore to be hunted. Tule reed canoes could be launched from the sandy beach, and the rocky shoreline stretching north and south from the cove offered prime – if hazardous – areas for gathering mussels and other shellfish. Above the cove, rock outcroppings to the south and rolling dunes to the east and north provided cover from the westerly winds.

In the 19th century this beach was named "Naiad Cove" by American settlers. It later became the site of Sutro Baths. (See Figures 2 & 3)



Figure 2. “Golden Gate” by Gilbert Unger, circa 1860. This view looks north from Naiad Cove towards the Marin shore and Mt. Tamalpais. SFr-5 would be located atop the bluff at upper right.



Figure 3. Detail from an 1867 U.S. Army topographical survey of Lands End showing the Cliff House and Naiad Cove to the north. (RG77, NARA)

With its fresh water, willow trees, sheltered surroundings, and easy access to game, the cove must have been a regular hunting destination for the extended families living in San Francisco that made up the Yelamu tribe. Archaeologists and contemporary Ohlone

representatives speculate that the two sites at Lands End today are mere remnants of a much larger complex of encampments that probably ringed the small cove, but that have been destroyed by erosion and subsequent construction in the area.

For many years, SFr-5 was partially (and inadvertently) protected by the construction of a World War II-era army road that ran directly over the site. Following the war, however, erosion and uncontrolled visitor activity resulted in serious erosion to the edges of the midden. Drawn by the spectacular views from the site, many visitors used the exposed cross-section of the midden as a convenient stopping place to enjoy the views and, in some cases, carve their initials into its compacted surface. (Figure 4)



Figure 4. NPS research team at SFr-5 in 2001. The midden and its shell fragments are clearly visible beneath the crushed rock roadbed. Note graffiti carved into the midden face. (John Martini)

In 2003, the National Park Service and local Ohlone undertook a major preservation effort at SFr-5 that involved capping the midden with clean beach sand and planting native grasses on the new fill. Fencing was erected to direct visitors away from the site.

Hopefully, interpretive signs will eventually be installed to inform the public of the Ohlone's use of the area, the significance of the resource, and the reason for the closure. (Figure 5)



Figure 5. Site SFr-5 after restoration efforts, 2005. (John Martini)

Sometime after 1822, the area now occupied by the Sutro District and Lands End was part of Rancho Punta de Lobos (Wolf Point Ranch), a Mexican land grant that included part of the northwest corner of the future city. Following the conquest of California by the United States in 1846 and its formal cessation by Mexico in January 1848, these lands became part of the City and County of San Francisco. Although comprising the westernmost tip of San Francisco, the area around Point Lobos was considered remote and inaccessible for most of the 19th century.

By 1854, Point Lobos bluffs had been homesteaded by a potato farmer named Chambers, but the landscape remained largely unchanged. Narrative descriptions from this era indicate that adventurous travelers visited Point Lobos to pick wild strawberries native to

the area. Hikers and horseback riders reached this portion of the city by means of several informal trails that crossed the six miles of sand dunes that lay between downtown and the sea. By the middle 1850s, though, travelers could rest and take refreshment at Seal Rock House located near the corner of present-day Balboa Street and the Great Highway, or at Ocean House four miles south near today's San Francisco Zoo. A popular day trip was a coastal loop journey from downtown to Fort Point in the Presidio, along the bluffs to Seal Rocks, a ride down the hard sandy beach to Ocean House, and back downtown via a trail that passed Mission Dolores.



Figure 6. "Lands End" by Gilbert Unger, circa 1860. Goats are grazing on the hillside in the foreground. The large rock at left center is today's Helmet Rock.

In the late 1850s, Charles C. Butler, a well-known San Francisco real estate magnate, purchased a quarter-section of land (160 acres) around Point Lobos. In 1862 he and his partners decided to develop a fashionable resort at the very tip of the rugged coastal bluffs. To get people to their new "Cliff House", they designed a toll road connecting Lands End with the downtown districts and incorporated themselves as the Point Lobos Road Company. Work began on the new toll road in 1863, and when finished it extended from the corner of Bush St. and Presidio Ave. to the new restaurant/saloon overlooking

Seal Rocks and Ocean Beach. Before the year was over, a horse-drawn stage made the trip from Portsmouth Square to the Point Lobos area each Sunday.

The opening of the first Cliff House in 1863 marks the beginning of the major recreational developments within what has been designated the “Sutro District” by the National Park Service, despite the fact Adolph Sutro himself would not start to acquire properties in the area until 1881. Sutro’s accomplishments in the area were so far-reaching, though, and his legacy so strong, that it is wholly appropriate to use his name when referring to the general cultural history of the area.

For a detailed history of the Sutro District, and especially the physical alterations to the landscape carried out by Adolph Sutro, please see *Sutro Historic District Cultural Landscape Report* prepared by for the National Park Service by Land & Community Associates in association with EDAW, Inc., of San Francisco, September 1993, and the *Sutro Historic District Comprehensive Design and Environmental Assessment* prepared by for the National Park Service by EDAW in association with Land & Community Associates *et al*, September 1993.

Part II. Lands End Steam Train Operations, 1888 – 1905



Figure 7. Ferries & Cliff House train with the Marin Headlands in the distance. (Golden Gate NRA)

1. Background & Context.

The origins of the legendary Lands End steam train line -- as both a commercial enterprise and as an engineering achievement -- can be found in the fertile mind of Adolph Sutro. When Sutro purchased the Cliff House in 1881 he decided to build his residence on the high hill across the road, which was the highest promontory in the vicinity and that commanded a sweeping view of the Golden Gate, the Marin Headlands, and Ocean Beach. Sutro's modest home was eventually surrounded by acres of lush gardens coaxed from the sand dunes and ornamented with statuary, hedge mazes, and other Victorian attractions.

Sutro grandiosely named his estate "Sutro Heights" and opened its paths and sheltered overlooks to visitors. A major problem, though, was that the Heights lay at the extreme

western edge of the city and reaching it was a challenge for people without personal carriages or the means to rent one. The closest public transit was many blocks away from the Heights at the terminus of the Park & Ocean Railroad, constructed in 1883 at the corner of Balboa Street and La Playa Avenue. Passengers departing the little train still faced a several block uphill walk to Sutro Heights. And its cost was prohibitive for many people, since reaching the beach involved paying two fares totaling 10¢. These factors led Sutro to begin work on his own railroad to carry people to his seaside attractions safely and cheaply.

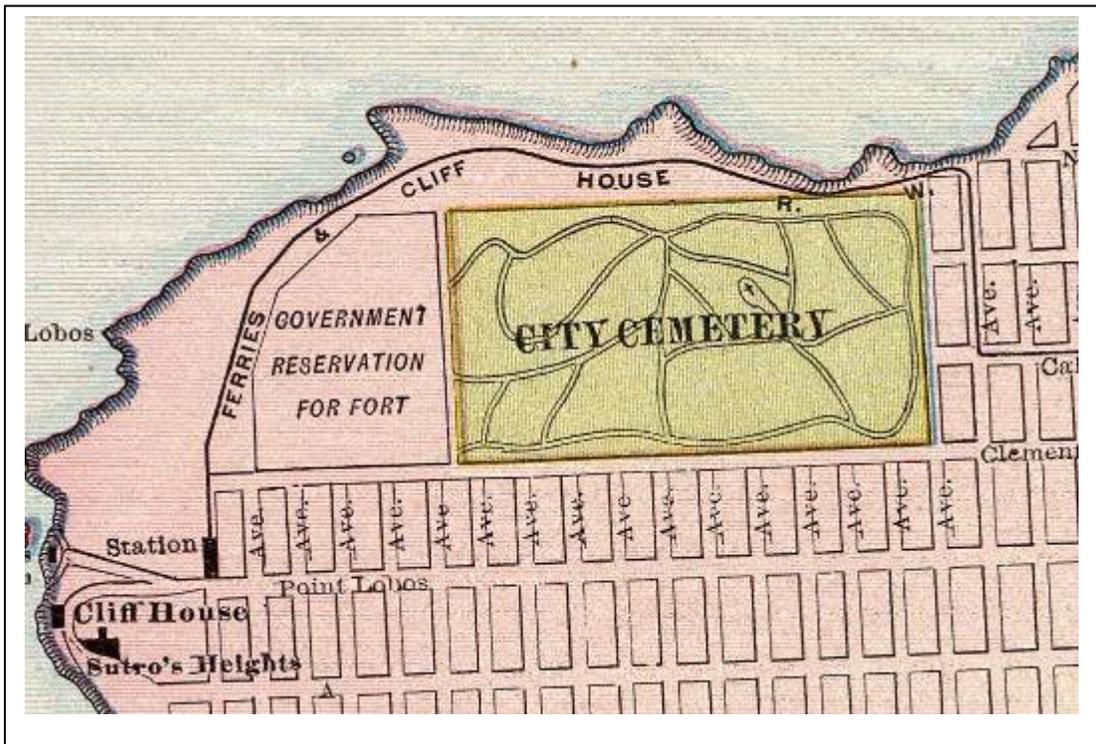


Figure 8. Detail from an 1897 Rand-McNally map of San Francisco showing the route of the Ferries & Cliff House train around Lands End. (David Rumsey Map Collection)

In their landmark study *Adolph Sutro: A Biography* historians Robert E Stewart, Jr., and Mary Frances Stewart explain the origins and construction of the Lands End railroad:

With many people wanting to visit [Sutro Heights], transportation was a problem. For those who could afford it, there were carriages. The problem of public transportation was partly solved when the Park and Ocean Railroad Company built a street railroad operated by steam west from the

terminal of the Page Street branch.... This was a welcome improvement, but a trip from downtown San Francisco to the Heights cost at least two fares, or ten cents. This was a period when an ordinary clerk earned twelve dollars a week, and Sutro felt that a round-trip fare of twenty cents [more than \$4.00 in 2005 currency] was exorbitant.

At the same time, Sutro was active in promoting a much longer street railway [around Lands End]. Although the franchise was issued in 1884 to Adolph's cousin, Gustav Sutro, a usually reliable witness asserts that Adolph was behind it and invested \$40,000 on grading and other preliminary work at the western end of his own land. This railroad was designed to insure a single fare from the ferries to the Cliff House by means of transfer to one or more lines it met at the Presidio Avenue (then called "Central Avenue"). It also embraced a branch line in Seventh Avenue to provide economical access to Golden Gate Park.

In addition to saving money for the public it would be pre-eminently the scenic railroad of the city. The first few miles going west in California Street would not be unusual but at Thirty-third Avenue the route planned to curve north around the old cemeteries and run on Adolph Sutro's land along the rugged shore. Except when in an occasional tunnel [n.b., there were two] the visitor would have excellent views of the Golden Gate, Fort Point, the headlands of Marin County, and many other points of interest.

Sutro did the already mentioned grading in 1886 but in the following year he sold his franchise and the work already done to the Powell Street Railroad Company. An important stipulation provided that the company must provide service from the downtown area to Cliff House or the park for a single five-cent fare. Construction was pushed vigorously and service began in 1888. The five-cent fare was a reality.³

Officially titled the “Ferries & Cliff House Railroad”, but familiarly known as the “Cliff Line”, the steam trains never technically reached either destination. However, in 19th century San Francisco transit operations, it was considered proper advertising to list any and every destination a passenger might eventually reach, no matter how tortuous a series of transfers and walking might be required in arriving at those destinations.

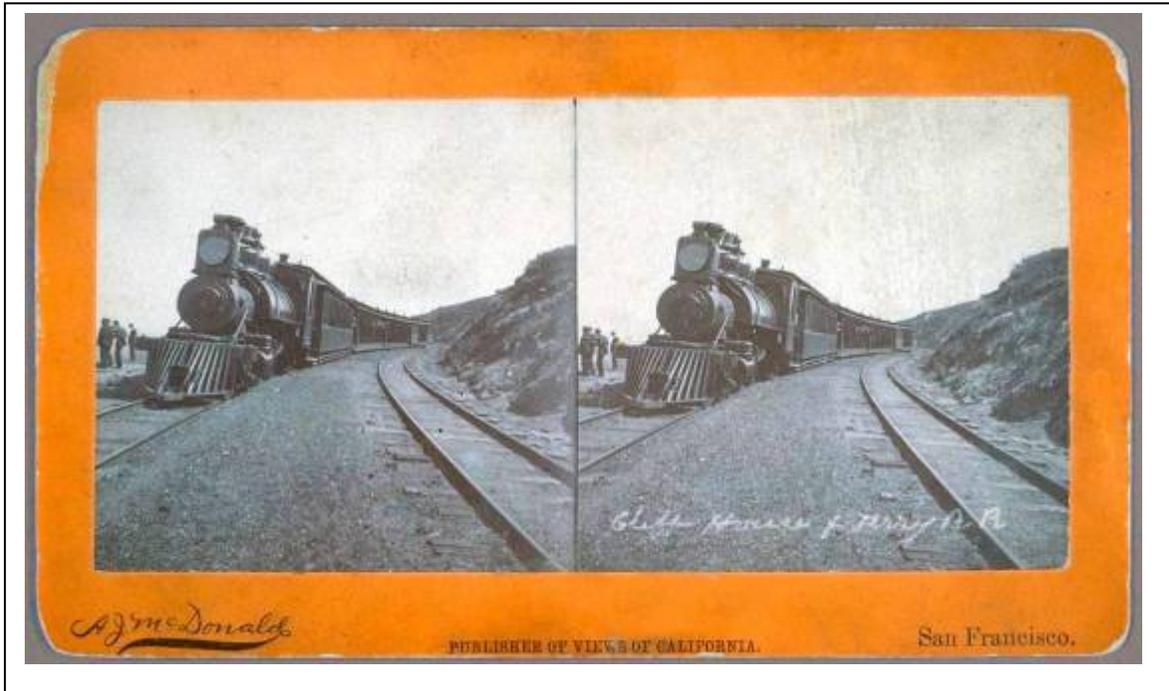


Figure 9. Stereograph view of Ferries & Cliff House train at Lands End, circa 1889. (Bancroft Library)

The inner terminus of the new railroad was near the corner of California Street and Presidio Ave., where a roundhouse and rail yards were located on the site presently occupied by the Jewish Community Center. There, transfers were available to cable cars headed to the downtown area and Ferry Building. The outer terminus for the railroad was a gable-roofed wood depot near the corner of 48th and Pt. Lobos Avenues, directly across from the main entrance to Sutro Heights and about three blocks away from the Cliff House itself. With its large freight doors and overhanging roof, the little structure looked more like a rural railroad station than an urban street railway terminal. (Figures 10 & 11 show the depot at different times during its existence.)



Figure 10. Ferries & Cliff House train at 48th Avenue / Sutro Heights depot circa 1900. (Bay Area Electric Railroad Association)



Figure 11. The 48th Avenue train depot just prior to demolition in 1905 (Municipal Railway, URR Coll.)

The steam line was an instant hit. Its official owners for the first years of operation were W.H. Martin, John Ballard, W.J. Adams, Thomas Magee and H.H. Lynch as part of the Powell Street Railroad Company. However, the new railroad was not without its

problems, which former owner and lessee of the right-of-way Adolph Sutro followed closely. National Park Service Historian Anna Coxe Toogood summarized these early conditions in her 1980 *Historic Resource Study: A Civil History* for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area:

In March 1889 Sutro received word from his son-in-law [George Merritt] that the railroad had been shut down for a week due to a big landslide “east of the old blacksmith shop.” Two months later Merritt again wrote Sutro to report, “This new R.R. has such a bad reputation at present that people are afraid to ride on it. The trains are irregular and the road looks so dangerous.” The following fall Merritt explained that the railroad would be stopped that winter of 1889 as often or oftener than the preceding winter. A new tunnel had been built on the road but a slide had filled it with a “mountain of dirt.” After being moved to the west end of the old tunnel, the pile of dirt had gradually slipped down the cliff into the ocean, and Merritt predicted that the tracks would go next, as they had once been known to slide two inches down hill in a day. The track at one point curved pass several springs and a large rock, and here it had been sliding throughout the summer of 1889, and as much as the railroad hands worked to shore up the banks of the right-of-way, there always appeared to be more problems. Because the whole side of the hill at that point was sliding, the track had to be changed every day or so. “Mr. Leary the [supervisor?] is disgusted with the road,” Merritt reported, and chances were that Sutro would have to expect a reduction in his rent from the railroad if the company shut down for a few months during the winter.

Somehow the Cliff House and Ferries Railway [sic] Company improved and continued service in the years to come, providing the cheapest and most beautiful ride to the beach.⁴



Figure 12. Train entering the east tunnel circa 1888. This tunnel was removed shortly after. Note the freshly-graded slope below the train. (California Historical Society)

At this time, San Francisco was served by a number of privately owned cable car, horse car, and steam railroad companies that provided public transit throughout the city. Beginning in 1893 many of these companies were absorbed by Market Street Railway Company, a subsidiary of the powerful Southern Pacific Railroad.⁵ In 1894 the Market Street Railway bought the Ferries & Cliff House line, and its steam train became yet another possession of “The Octopus”, as first the Market Street Railway and later the entire the Southern Pacific came to be widely and acidly known.⁶ A legendary showdown was soon in the making.

While the Sutro Baths were under construction Sutro again became concerned about the people who came out from the city by public transportation. In 1893 [sic] the Powell Street company was absorbed by the Market Street company, which was controlled by the Southern Pacific Railroad, and the policy of a single fare promptly ended. Polite requests to the street railways failed and Sutro decided to fight again on the issue. He

knew that he was taking on no minor opponent, for nearly all of the street railways were controlled by the Southern Pacific Railroad, the biggest single monopoly in the state. The man who dominated the Southern Pacific was Collis P Huntington, and Huntington would require a good fight.

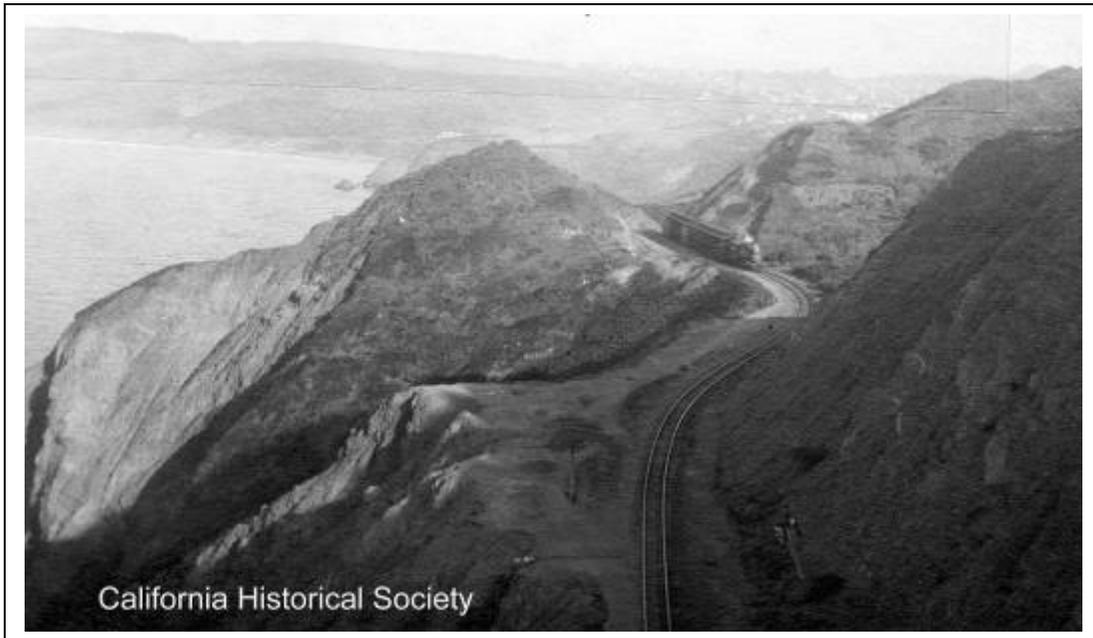


Figure 13. "Outbound" train passing through hillside cut at former site of east tunnel, n.d. (California Historical Society)

Sutro dramatized his declaration of war by erecting a high fence and charging twenty-five cents admission to the Heights and to Cliff House if the visitor came "on the cars." Those who came by foot, however, or by means other than the cars were admitted free.

Huntington stood firm and Sutro threatened again to start a street railroad of his own. He obtained a franchise to build a line to Presidio Avenue mainly on Clement Street, which lay one block south of and parallel to the rival line in California Street.... He arranged for free transfers at Presidio Avenue to the Sutter Street line, which was independent of the railroad

monopoly. Electric traction had recently proved itself, so Sutro's railroad would be an electric line from the start.⁷

Sutro kept his threat, and work continued on construction of a parallel electric line through 1894. Called the "Sutro Rail Road Company," the line would approach Sutro Heights along Geary Street to 48th Avenue, where it turned north for a block and then entered a private right-of-way sloping down towards the Sutro Baths and terminating in a wood depot on Point Lobos Avenue near the Baths' main entrance.

The strategy worked; an accommodation was made with the Market Street Railway and in late 1894 a five-cent transfer system was once again instituted on the steam train line. In 1902 ownership changed once again, though, when the newly formed "United Railroads of San Francisco" (URR) took over the Market Street Railway's lines. Aside from the name change, however, there was little effect to the train line and its operations around Lands End until the end of steam operations on April 17, 1905.

2. Physical Description & Characteristics

The Ferries & Cliff House Railroad was a narrow-gauge railway with a total length of three and a quarter miles, and a branch line of one mile leading to Golden Gate Park. The main line ran west on California Street from the roundhouse/depot at Presidio Avenue and California to the City Cemetery boundary at 33rd Avenue and California. (A branch line cut off the main track at Seventh Avenue and ran south to Golden Gate Park where a gable-ended depot — forming a park entrance — is still standing.) At 33rd Avenue the main line turned north for two blocks and then followed a private right-of-way around the cliffs of Lands End, finally terminating at a wood depot across from the main entrance to Sutro Heights at 48th Avenue and Point Lobos. Two tunnels lined with timber bracing were originally located on this final section, the longer western bore measuring 200 feet in length. The eastern tunnel was wide enough for two parallel tracks, but the western bore ran through a rocky hill and was excavated only wide enough for a single track. Beyond the smaller tunnel, the double tracks resumed for the rest of route around Lands

End to the terminal across from the Heights.⁸ (Figure 8 is a period map showing the right-of-way around Lands End.)

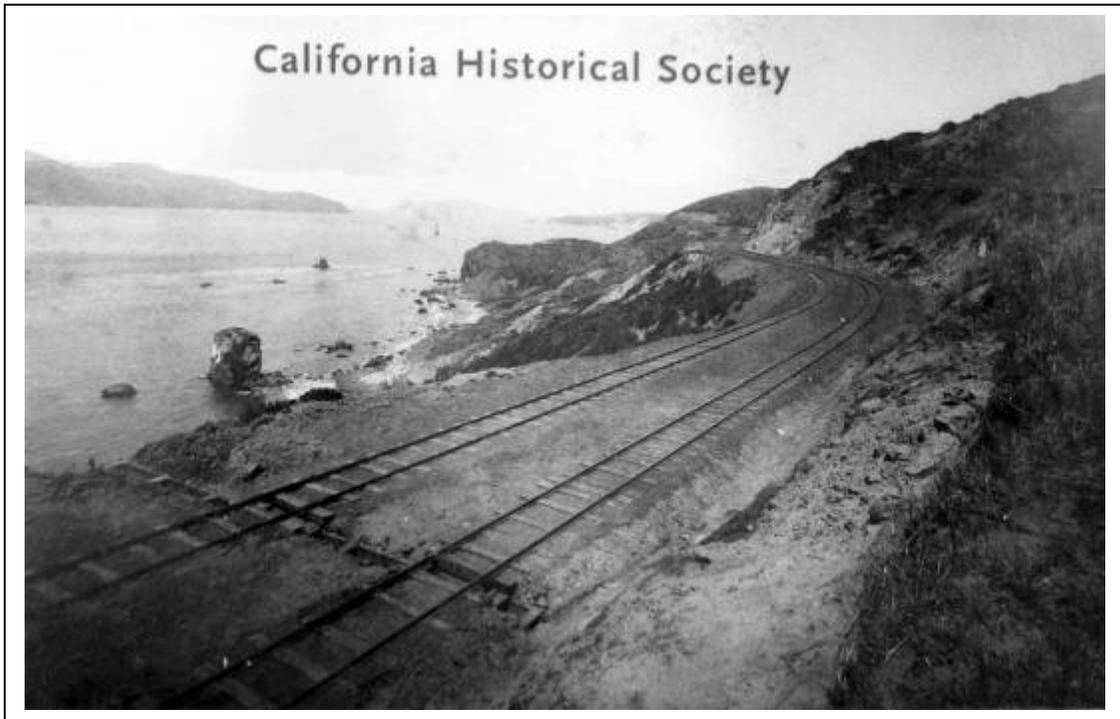


Figure 14. View of the original double-track roadbed, circa 1889. (California Historical Society)

The rails were English steel and turnouts on the branch line were provided with spring switches. The company initially operated six Baldwin locomotives on the route: four light ones for daily work and two heavy ones to haul long trains on Sundays. The twelve light and airy passenger coaches, each capable of seating sixty people, had been built in San Francisco.

A trial run over the branch line and the main road as far as the tunnel was made June 14, 1888; the trip from the terminal on California Street at Presidio Avenue to the Golden Gate Park entrance taking only nine minutes. The opening of the road to Sutro Heights was delayed due to the fact that it was necessary to construct retaining walls on the stretch of road along the cliffs. On July 1, 1888, all work was completed and the steam line extension was thrown open for business.⁹

Little documentation exists on the engineering and construction of the Lands End portion of the line, but historic photographs indicate the route was originally a lightly built road consisting of medium-weight steel tracks set on wood ties (“sleepers”) of irregular length. The roadbed between the sleepers appears to have been simple gravel ballast, much of which was laid over the natural sand dunes with little subsurface preparation aside from grading. This construction technique likely led to the recurring slides and track repairs referred to in early operating reports. Photographs taken subsequent to the line’s opening reveal that wooden cribbing was eventually constructed beneath the right-of-way at various points, probably as a result of repeated roadbed settling.¹⁰



Figure 15. Outbound train passing Helmet Rock circa 1895. Erosion has undermined the rails and ties on the outer set of tracks. Compare the tracks to those in Figure 14. (California Historical Society)

As mentioned previously, the line was originally a double track right-of-way for most of the Land’s End portion of the route, and averaged about 15-20 feet in width without any type of edge treatments or barriers on either side. Instead, the roadbed simply merged with the surrounding terrain on both sides of the track, in some places dropping almost vertically into the ocean just feet from the edges of the cars. Photographs taken over the following years document how erosion continued to take its toll on the on the line, and in one view taken c1890, the outer tracks had become so undermined that daylight was

visible between the ties. (Figure 15) The endangered tracks were eventually removed, and by the time of its electrification in 1905 much of the Lands End route had been reduced to a single track line.¹¹

An excellent, albeit brief, documentary movie of the line was made in 1902 by Thomas Edison's studios. Titled "Panoramic View of the Golden Gate", the 2 minute 42 second film was shot from the pilot of a moving steam engine headed "inbound" (east) from the Sutro depot and records a treeless landscape, broken only by the occasional brushy outcropping.¹² The movie also confirms that by the time it was shot, much of the right of way along the cliff portion of the route had eroded away and been replaced with single-track, and that double-track portion of the line only commenced near the location of today's Eagles' Point at 33rd Avenue. Also, in the movie the train passes through only one tunnel on its journey — the western tunnel with its single-track bore. (The wider eastern tunnel had been "daylighted" at an undisclosed earlier date but its former location appears in the movie as a wide cut through a hill.)

Only one trackside structure marked the Lands End section of the route — a small, ramshackle waiting room located about two-thirds of the way to the Sutro Heights depot, at the point where a theoretical extension of 44th Avenue would have intersected the rail line. The only known photograph of this building is in the collection of the Municipal Railway, in which it appears to be a rectangular wooden structure with a gable roof, its walls papered with period advertising. It was open on its south side facing the track. Although the signboard is not legible in the photo, the station was referred to simply as "Lands End Station." (Figure 16)

In 1905 this humble wooden shed would be replaced by a much more grandiose concession stand and waiting station when the United Railroads converted the entire line to electric streetcar operation.¹³

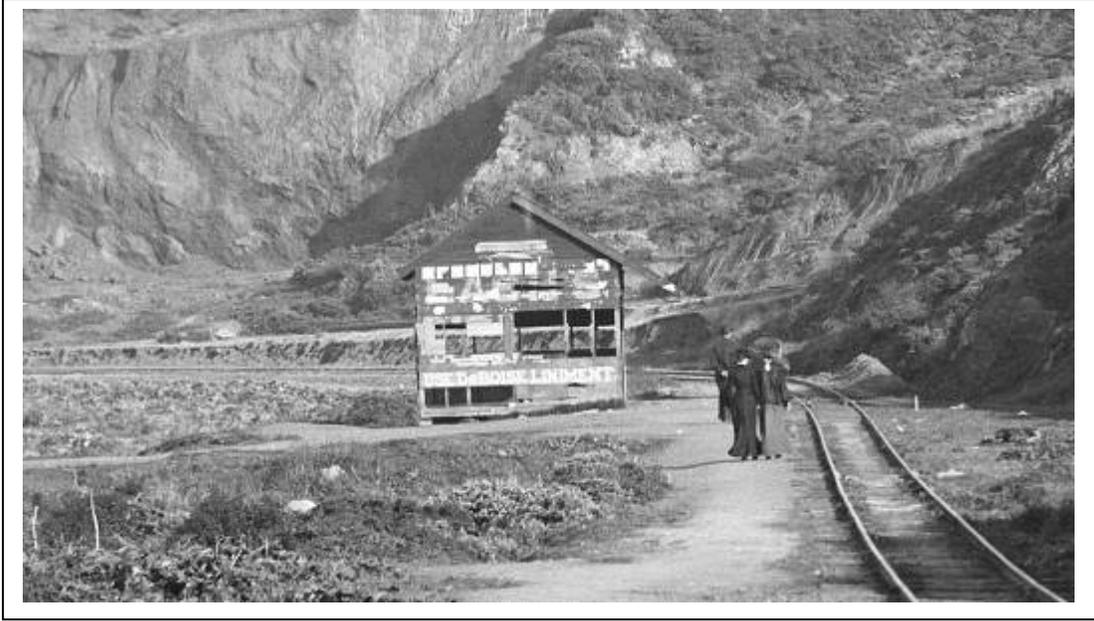


Figure 16. Pedestrians approaching the original Lands End station building on January 12, 1905. View looking east. The hillsides in the background are showing signs of severe erosion. (Municipal Railway, URR Ferries & Cliff Line Collection)

3. Surviving Elements & Features

Aside from the alignment of the original roadbed, virtually nothing remains from the 1888 Ferries & Cliff House steam train line. Even this alignment has been greatly impacted, first by the 1905 widening of the right-of-way to accommodate double tracks during the conversion to an electric streetcar line, then by the 1925 landslides that caused the Market Street Railway to cease operations altogether. Subsequent landslides have continued to erase the old right-of-way until today only about half of the original steam train alignment remains in place. (Figure 17)

Beginning at the western terminus of the line, the only intact portions of the right-of-way are as follows:

1. The section beginning at the intersection of El Camino Del Mar and Point Lobos Boulevard, and proceeding north and then east for a distance of 2,230 feet. The alignment roughly parallels El Camino Del Mar to a point 330 feet east of the

concrete retaining walls below the USS San Francisco Memorial Parking Lot.
(The two walls are surviving features of the streetcar era.)

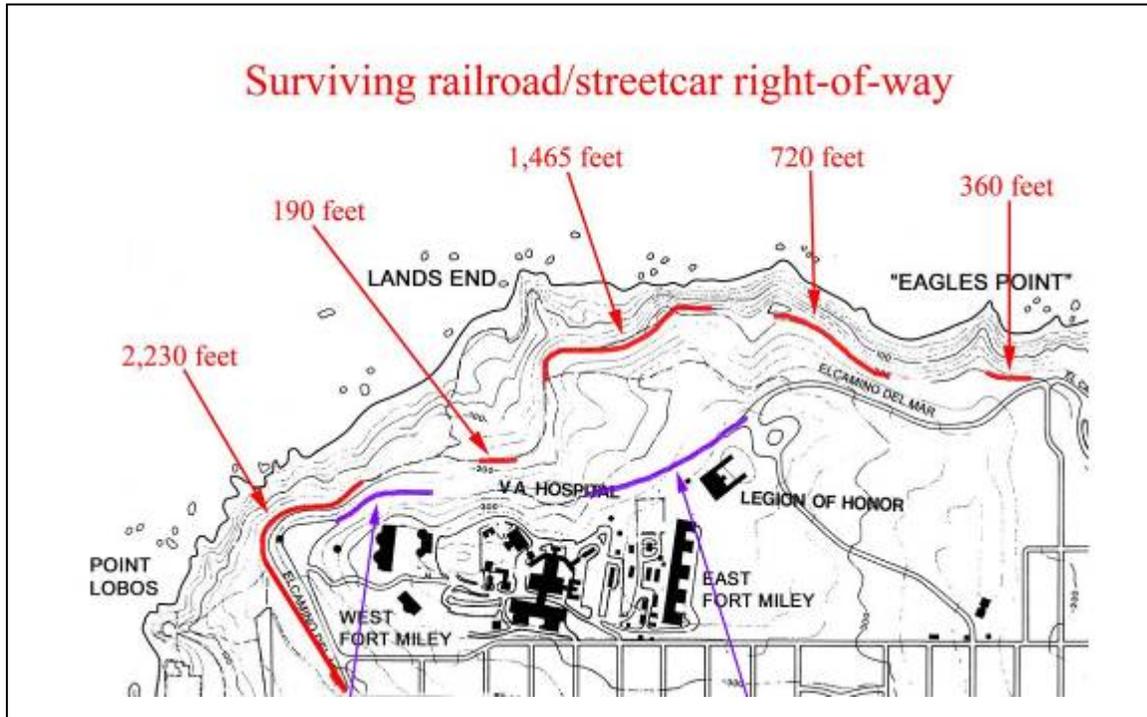


Figure 17. Map showing the surviving portions of the original Ferries & Cliff House railroad right-of-way, 2005. (John Martini)

2. The section beginning at the Lincoln Park service road, then proceeding north and then east past Lands End and the Painted Rock for a distance of approximately 1,465 feet to a point east of the former West Tunnel location.

3. The section below Fort Miley at the site of the former Lands End station. This short portion measures only 190 feet, starting at the point of the former station building and heading east to a point near the large sandstone outcropping where the roadbed drops away.

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4. The section below Lincoln Park Golf Course, beginning at the site of the western portal of the former East Tunnel, then heading east for a distance of approximately 720 feet.
5. The section near the intersection of 33rd Ave. and El Camino Del Mar, beginning at the Eagles Point overlook then heading westerly for a distance of approximately 360 feet.



Figure 18. A bad day on the Cliff Line, February 2, 1901. (Bancroft Library)

Part III. Lands End Electric Streetcar Operations, 1905-1925

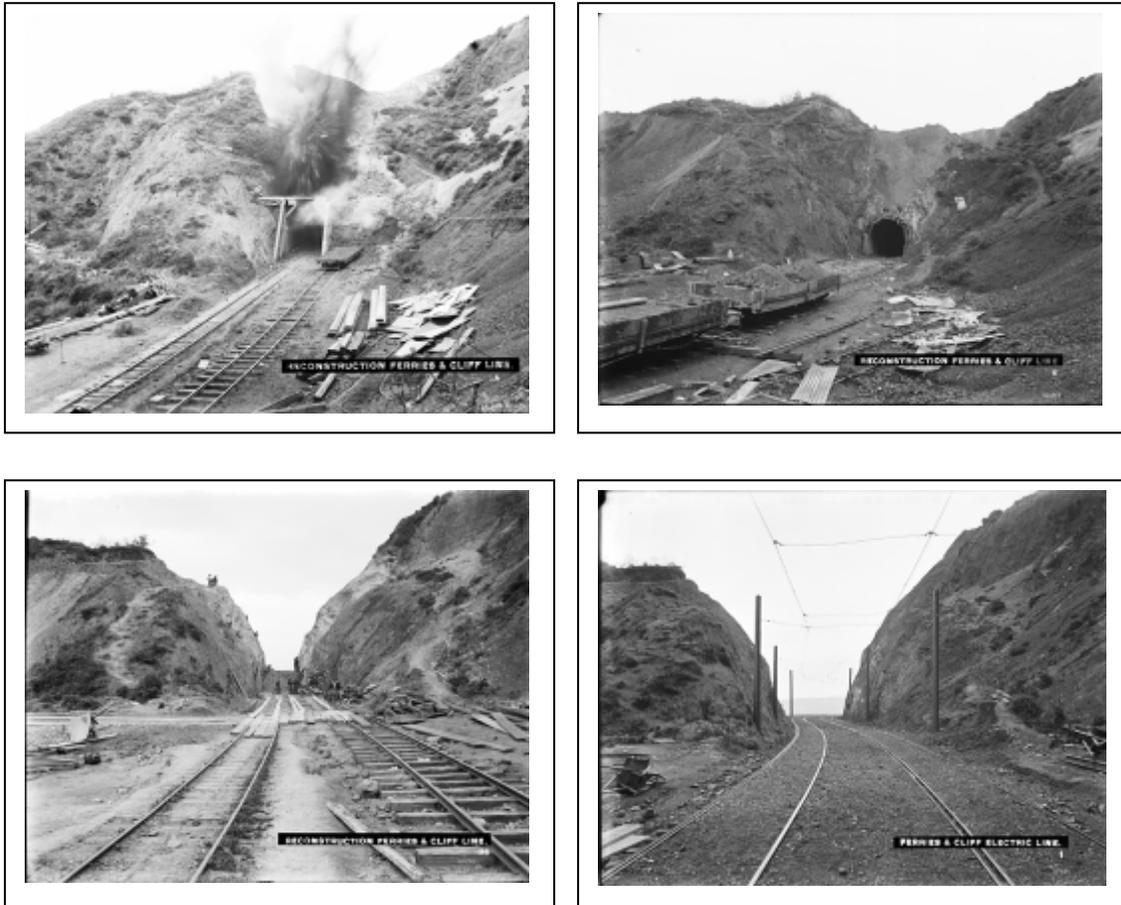
1. Background & Context.

The growing trend to replace cable cars and “steam dummy” trains with electric traction eventually caught up to the scenic Lands End steam train line, and it was electrified by the United Railroads (URR) in 1905. In the process of modernizing the line, a major rebuild of the right-of-way took place that included such features as widening the right-of-way to allow for double track operations its full length, replacing narrow-gauge with standard-gauge tracks, installation of poles and overhead electric lines, and replacing the aging F&CH depot and stations with newer waiting rooms. (Figure 19 shows a typical section of new roadbed, trackage and overhead lines.)



Figure 19. A section of newly-built streetcar track and overhead lines, May 1905. This stretch of line was located west of today's Eagles Point. View looking west. (Municipal Railway, URR Ferries & Cliff Line series)

A major element of the rebuild was the demolition of the old timber lined tunnel. The tunnel, which seems to have been a highlight for many passengers on the steam train trip, was simply too narrow to accommodate the double streetcar tracks so it was “daylighted” by removing the overhead earthen cover and transforming the former tunnel into a wide, V-shaped open cut in the hillside east of Lands End beach.



Figures 20 thru 23. Sequence showing the “daylighting” and widening of the Cliff Line’s former west tunnel in 1905. (Municipal Railway, URR Ferries & Cliff Line series)

Conversion of the line was surprisingly rapid, taking place between January and May 1905. At the same time the old train depot at the corner of 48th Avenue and Point Lobos was completely remodeled, and a new “Lands End” station constructed to replace the humble passenger shed located midway along the route.¹⁴ (Figure 24)

Many years after the streetcars ceased operations, an essayist described the amenities at the Land's End station and the family that ran it:

Here for many years following the fire [of 1906] lived the Harris family in a little round house which had been erected for sightseers by the Market Street Railway Company. It was a shrine of hospitality with its familiar glass lemonade bowl, wire backed chairs, and carved piano. There were strange flowers that grew on the rocky heights and wild strawberries to be sought in hidden shelters, while below was the wide stretch of Baker's Beach.¹⁵



Figure 24. *The new Lands End station in 1908. The hexagonal building contained a waiting room, snack shop, souvenir stand and restrooms. (SF Railway Archive, Richard Schlaich Collection)*

Conversion to electric operation was completed quickly and the route began operating as an electric line on May 26, 1905, at which time the Sutro Baths depot officially became the terminus for the California Street line.

The new electric line precisely followed the former steam train right-of-way around Lands End, starting at the 33rd Avenue 'entry' to the scenic route and continuing around

past the Lands End station to the Sutro Heights depot at the corner of 48th and Point Lobos Avenues. There, however, a major change in the route took place. Instead of terminating at the former steam train depot, a loop of track was constructed in the intersection to allow the Cliff Line car to make a tortuous, hairpin turn to the right and merge with the former Sutro Railway tracks and follow the right-of-way leading to the depot above the Baths.

Over time the electric line was renamed, first in 1906 as the “California Line” in recognition of the street that formed most its route. Then in 1908 a new city ordinance dictated that all streetcar lines be given numbered designations, and the California Line became the #1 California. (Its former competitor line on Clement Street was designated the #2 Clement.)¹⁶

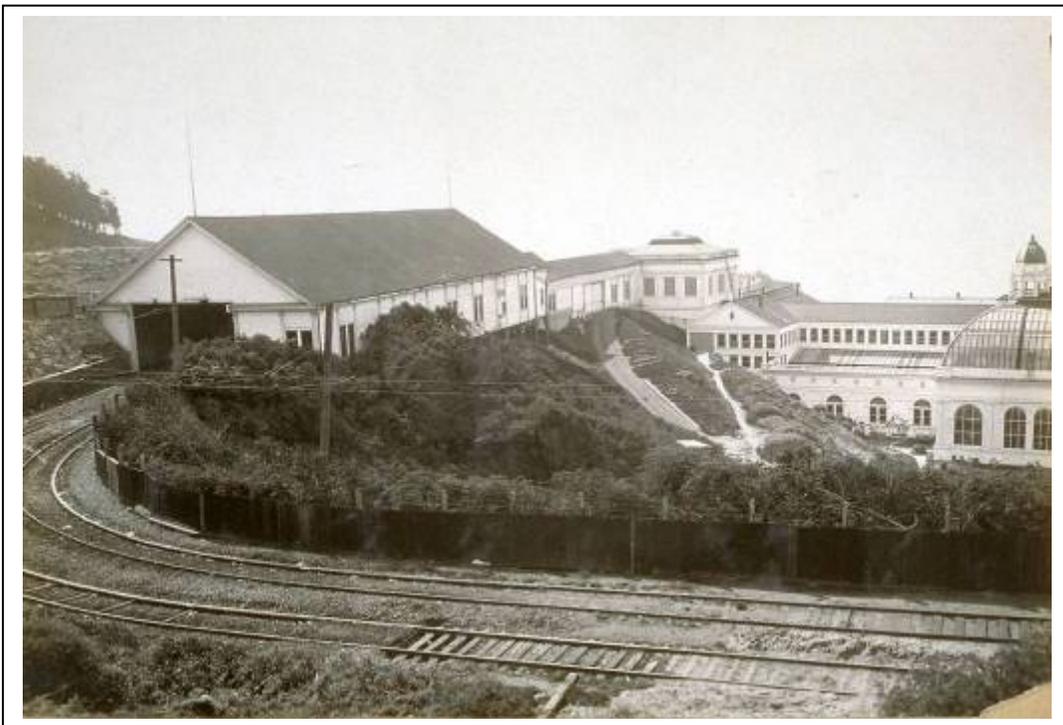


Figure 25. This wooden depot above Sutro Baths served as terminus for the #1 and #2 lines until it burned in 1949. (Bancroft Library, Jesse Cook Collection)

In early 1921 the United Railroads of San Francisco reorganized as the Market Street Railway, which continued operations of the #1 line around Lands End until February 7,

1925 when a series of landslides along the cliff portion of the route closed the line permanently. (Figure 26) After that date, the outer terminus of the #1 streetcar line briefly changed to the Market Street Railway's car barn at 33rd Avenue and Clement Street. Eventually the #1 line track work was reconfigured to connect with the #2 line on Geary Street so that its cars could still reach the depot above Sutro Baths. The scenic line around Lands End, though, was never rebuilt.

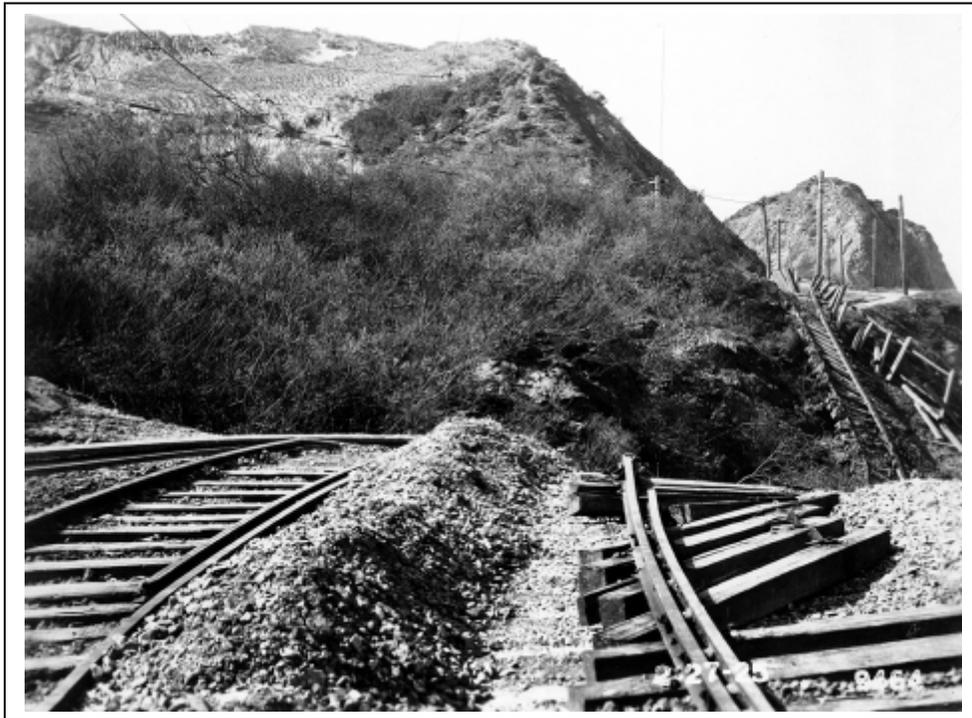


Figure 26. A view taken in February 1925 showing one of the slides that closed the cliff line. The hillside cut in the background marks the former site of the west railroad tunnel. (John Gerrard Graham Collection)

Although streetcar operations ceased in early 1925, the City of San Francisco stabilized the former right-of-way and continued to use it as a service road, hiking and equestrian trail for many years following the disastrous slides.¹⁷

2. Physical Description & Characteristics

The 1905 reconstruction of the original Ferries & Cliff House line resulted in a wider and much more permanent roadbed. As mentioned previously, the right-of-way was now a

double-track operation for its full length and measured approximately 30 feet wide in most places.

The streetcars operating along the new line took their power from overhead electric lines. Simultaneous with the widening of the roadbed, wooden trackside poles were installed along the entire length of the line to support the overhead electric system. (Figure 27)

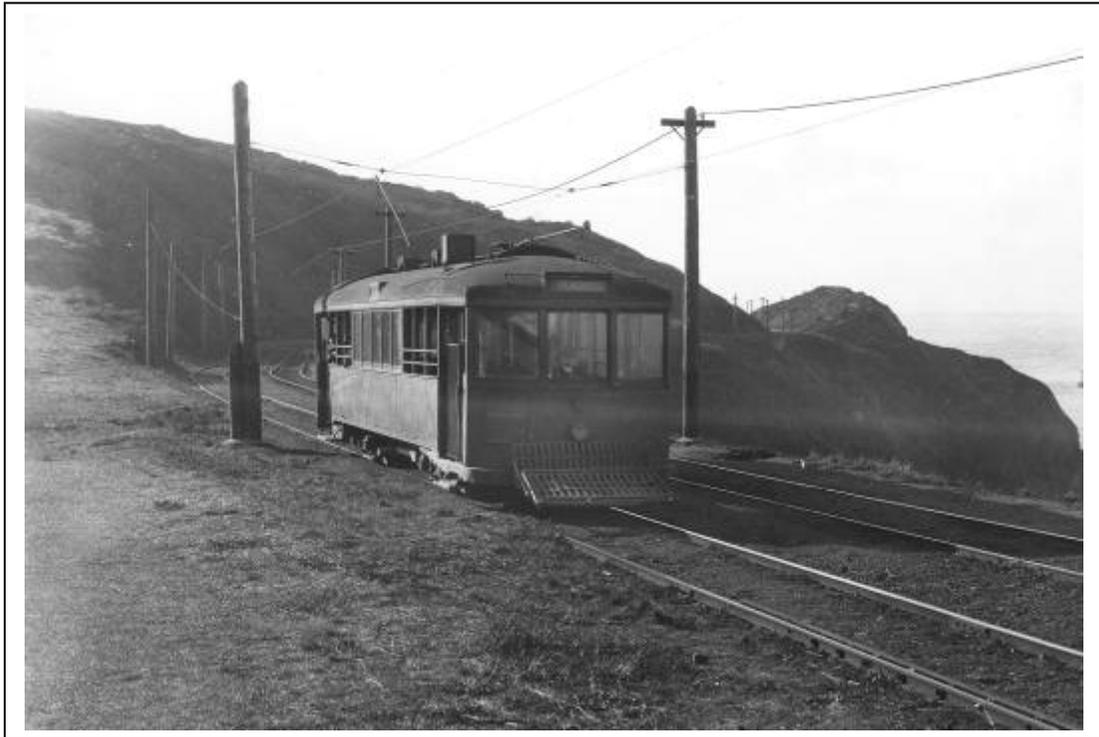


Figure 27. This 1920s view of a #1 streetcar below Lincoln Park provides a good example of the original Lands End geography. (Municipal Railway U08534A)

In the course of remodeling the line, United Railroads demolished the original Lands End passenger shelter and replaced it with a hexagonal station that served as both a waiting room and a food concession. A wooden viewing platform with benches surrounded the building itself, and picket fences and planter beds lined the track adjoining the station. A track spur was built at the station so that excursion streetcars could park there for extended periods without blocking the main line. This charming little building became a feature in many photographs of the era. At some point (likely in 1905) the concession

operator, Charles Harris, acquired either a derelict cable car or passenger coach and set it up as his family residence on the hillside below the waiting room.

Following the closing of the line, the Harris family continued to run their tiny restaurant for many more years, relying for their business on the Lands End trail hikers and the vehicles passing by on the new El Camino Del Mar street above the station site. Mr. Harris, a long-time fixture of the area, became known as the unofficial “Mayor of Lands End.” His wife, Goldie, developed a reputation as an untrained but effective life saver, and on at least two occasions pulled would-be suicides from the Lands End surf.¹⁸



Figures 28 & 29. Two photos of the former Lands End station in 1936. By this time the entire building had slid downhill below the former railroad grade. The Harris’ home in a converted streetcar body is visible in the view at right. (California Historical Society)

Photographs taken following the demise of the streetcar line reveal that the hillside beneath the station also began to move, and by the 1930s the station building and adjacent residence had slid about ten feet downhill from their original locations.¹⁹ (Figures 28 & 29) In 1937, the original Lands End station building finally succumbed to the combined effects of termites, dry rot and land slides, and was demolished by the Harrises. The family wouldn’t give up (“We still have the view,” Harris was quoted as saying) and they immediately set up a much simpler refreshment stand in a converted parking garage located on the old right-of-way.²⁰

Charles Harris died in November 1940 but Goldie struggled to maintain the concession stand for another ten months. She continued to live in the family cottage in the converted cable car, but it too was succumbing to landslides and had become a hazard. By 1941 the cottage had reportedly slid 30 feet below its original site. Mrs. Harris finally vacated the home and refreshment stand in September 1941, and after 35 years of residence at Lands End was forced to move to Oakland.²¹ The City presumably demolished the structures shortly after her departure. No traces remain of either the station buildings or any of Harris' structures.

During 1923-1925, the City of San Francisco constructed a new vehicle boulevard around Lands End connecting the Legion of Honor museum at Lincoln Park with the Cliff House area. This new street, alternately referred to as Harding Boulevard and Lincoln Park Boulevard during construction, was eventually named "El Camino Del Mar." This new street paralleled the car line for its entire length, but only near the western terminus did the city street and tracks come perilously close to each other. Large amounts of fill were brought in to shore up the new boulevard's 75-foot width, and in order to protect the private streetcar tracks the city's Department of Public Works (DPW) engineers constructed two reinforced concrete retaining walls alongside the right-of-way at a point near where El Camino Del Mar passed the Marine Exchange Lookout building.²² Completed in 1923, these two walls followed the standard DPW style of the era and are still extant just east of the present Memorial Parking Lot.²³ (Figure 30)

3. Surviving Elements & Features

As mentioned in the preceding section on the Ferries & Cliff House Railroad, much of the right-of-way for the steam line and the successor electric streetcar line has been lost to landslides and erosion since 1925. Only in the three locations noted previously are substantial sections of the roadbed still intact.

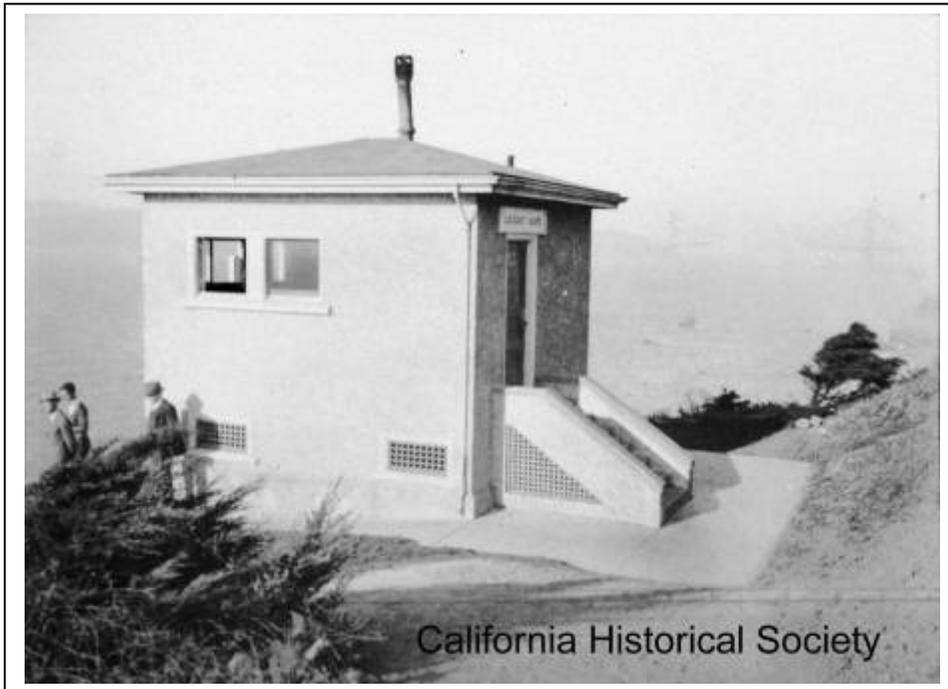
The only other remaining physical features associated with the streetcar line (aside from the roadbed) are the two DPW retaining walls constructed in 1923. These two walls, one

measuring 190 feet in length and the other 70 feet, appear to be in excellent condition. Aside from graffiti and the encroaching trees that have sprouted over the years, the walls appear unchanged from their original construction.



Figure 30. Construction work on El Camino Del Mar in June 1923. One of the two retaining walls constructed by the city's DPW to protect the streetcar tracks is visible at lower right. The large building is the Marine Lookout on the future site of the USS San Francisco Memorial. (SF Public Library, DPW)

Adjacent to the railway right-of-way – but not associated with either the steam train or streetcar operations – is the foundation for a lifesaving lookout station located directly north of the Memorial Parking Lot. Although specifics as to its construction and history are still lacking, the structure was constructed in the mid-1920s as a lookout post for Coast Guard rescue personnel assigned to the nearby lifesaving stations at Fort Point and Golden Gate Park. The flat-roofed building was apparently a one-room structure built of wood and stucco on a concrete foundation and provided with windows on its north, west, and east sides. From its windows overlooking the Golden Gate, personnel on duty would monitor traffic entering and leaving the bay and keep a watchful eye for vessels in distress. The station was demolished sometime in the early 1950s, its role supplanted by the more modern technologies of radar and radio telephones for monitoring ship traffic. The lookout station's broken foundations still survive today, albeit in ruinous condition.²⁴ (Figures 31 & 32)



Figures 31 & 32. *The Coast Guard lookout station at Lands End in 1936 and today. (California Historical Society and John Martini)*

Part IV. The Sutro Electric Railway & Successor Car Operations, 1896-1948

1. Background & Context.

As described earlier, the Sutro Electric Railway had its origins in Adolph Sutro's desire to counter the Southern Pacific's 'no-transfer' policy on the Ferries & Cliff House Railroad. Although the SP eventually caved in to the pressure from Sutro's planned electric line and resumed offering transfers, Sutro continued with the completion of his streetcar line. The Stewarts recorded the story in their biography of Sutro:

The railroad monopoly granted a five-cent fare five days before the election in which Sutro became Mayor. Sutro did not trust the railroad management, however, and continued work on his own street railway. Its completion in March of 1896 made the single fare doubly sure. The cars of the first train were painted red, white and gold; the flags and bunting draped not only the cars but houses along the route. The magnificent Sutro Baths had opened one week previous, so two of Sutro's major promises had become realities.²⁵

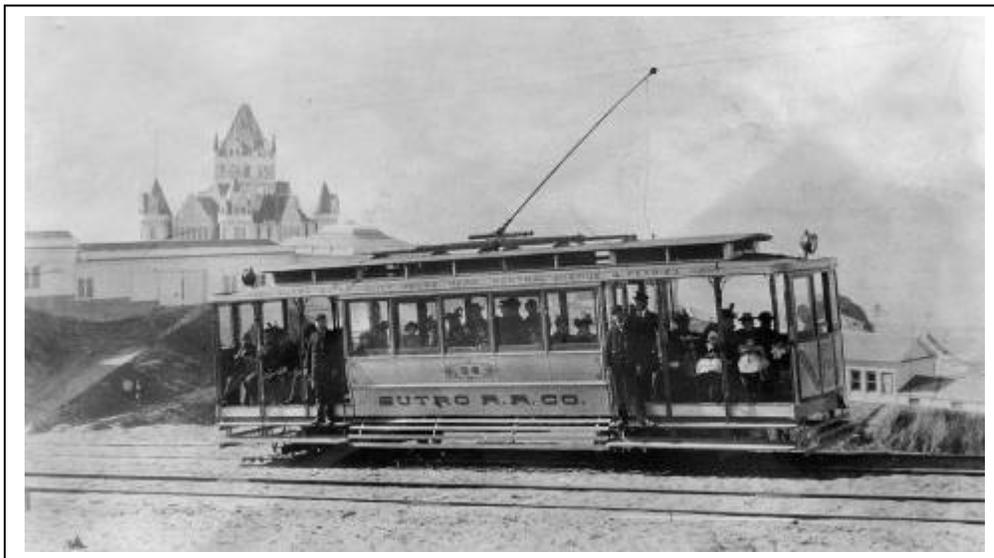


Figure 33. A Sutro Rail Road Company streetcar approaching the Baths depot in 1896. The second Cliff House is visible above the covered pedestrian walkway. (SF Public Library AAC-8408)

The Sutro Railway line began operations on February 1, 1896 running from Presidio Avenue to a private depot on Pt. Lobos Avenue directly above the Baths.²⁶ From the depot, an enclosed wooden corridor connecting directly to the Bath's main entrance allowed visitors to exit the streetcars and walk into the Baths during inclement weather. (Figures 33 & 34 show the line in its early days of operation. The new depot and connecting corridor are clearly visible in the background of Figure 34.)

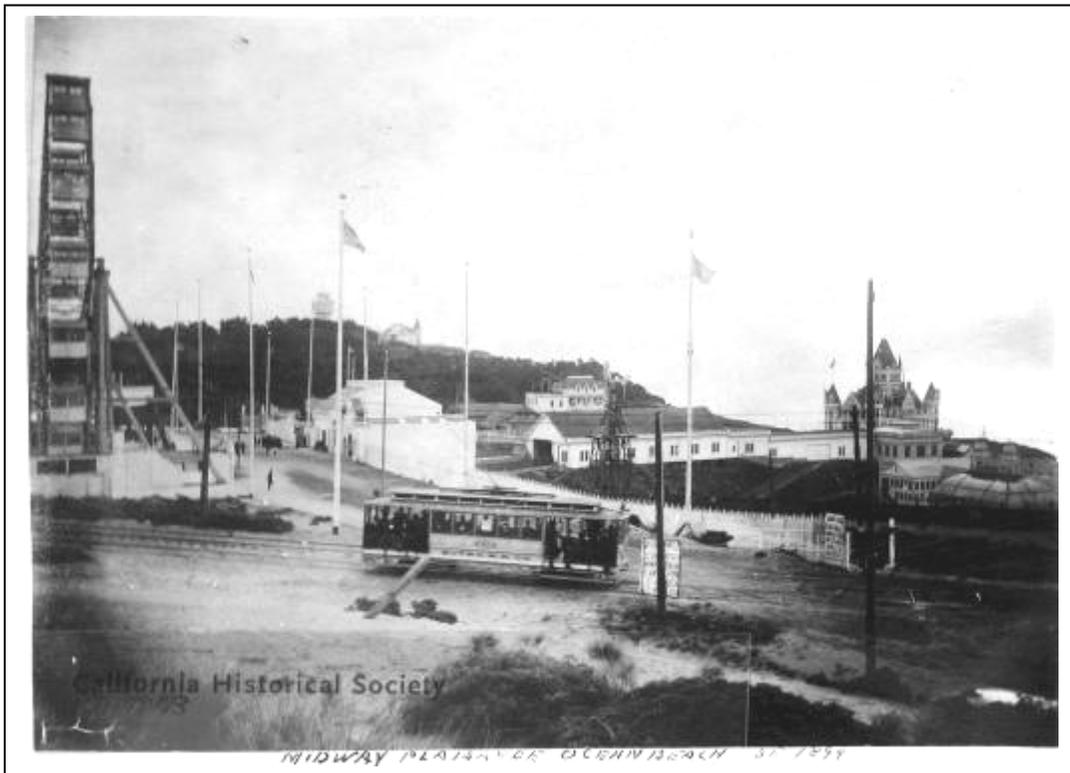


Figure 34. A Sutro RR car passing the Firth Wheel and Merrie Way attractions, 1899. The entrance to the Sutro Baths depot is directly above the street car. (California Historical Society)

The alignment of the new streetcar line was significant for other reasons, both political and tactical: Sutro's electric car tracks cut directly in front of the existing train terminal at 48th Avenue and created a visual and physical demarcation line between Sutro Heights and the passengers arriving on the SP-owned steam train. Sutro was giving a clear message to Southern Pacific and its riders: his streetcars were cheaper, they were more modern, and they brought passengers directly to the Baths and the Cliff House.

Adolph Sutro died on August 8, 1898, and four years later the United Railroads of San Francisco bought out the Sutro Railway. The URR assumed its full operations on March 18, 1902. On July 4, 1906, the line was formally designated the Sutter-Clement streetcar line. In 1908 it would be numbered in accordance with city ordinances as the #2 Clement.

When the Lands End steam train line was electrified in 1905, the URR extended its tracks beyond the 48th Avenue depot and across Point Lobos in order to connect with the old Sutro Railway's tracks leading to the Baths depot. In 1921, the United Railroads reorganized and emerged as the Market Street Railway (MSRY), which assumed operation of the two lines. For the next several years, the MSRY's #1 California and the #2 Clement cars shared the private right-of-way that curved down from 48th Avenue to the wooden depot building above the Baths. (Figure 35)

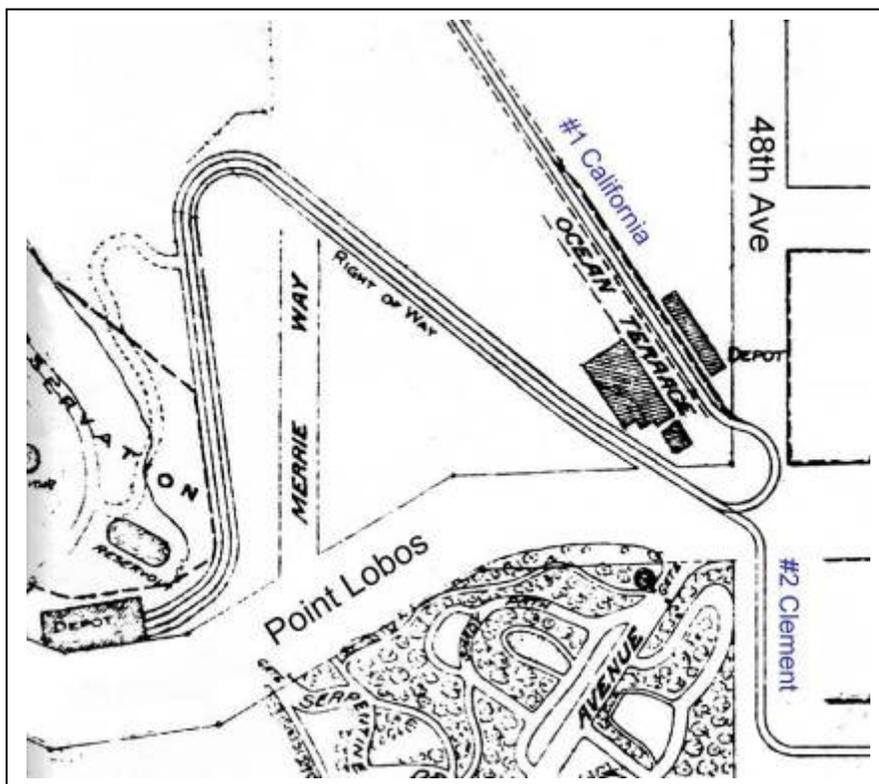


Figure 35. Map showing the rights-of-way of the #1 and #2 streetcar lines. The track loop at right allowed both lines to reach the Sutro depot at lower left. The original steam train depot on 48th Avenue is at right. (Adapted from the 1910 Adolph Sutro Estate map.)

The covered pedestrian arcade connecting the depot with the Baths entry seems to have been little used, and in 1937 the portion immediately adjacent to the depot was leased by the Sutro Estate to Louis Hontalas, who converted it into a food concession named “Louis’ Restaurant.”²⁷ The present Louis’ building, although extensively rebuilt in the 1960s and 1970s, is believed to incorporate remnant foundations of the 1896 pedestrian walkway. (Figures 36 & 38 show the Sutro depot as it appeared during URR and MSRY operations.)



Figure 36. *The Sutro depot in the paint scheme of the Market Street Railway, December 1937. The original Louie’s Restaurant occupies the former pedestrian walkway at left. (SF Public Library AAC-0064)*

In 1921 the United Railroads reorganized and emerged as the ‘new’ Market Street Railway. Then, in 1944, the city’s Municipal Railway (MUNI) bought out the privately-owned Market Street Railway and assumed all its streetcar operations, including the cars terminating above the Baths. Aside from the logos on the streetcars and a few new paint jobs, nothing else much changed along the two routes.

In a 1944 article for *Harper's Magazine*, author John Dos Passos described a streetcar ride to the Cliff House and the aging depot:

Somebody said I ought to take a car to the Cliff House. Somewhere in the back of my memory there was connected with that name a park on a cliff, full of funny beer-garden statuary under pines—and the disappointment as a child of not being able to spot a sea lion among the spuming rocks off the headland. The streetcar, a full-sized normal streetcar, rattled along through a suburban section of low stucco houses and across wide boulevards planted with palms, described an S through pines down a steep slope, and finally came to rest in a decrepit barn beside a lunch counter. I stepped out onto a road that curved down the steep slope to the old square white restaurant, and farther round the headland to the broad gray beach, where slow rollers very far apart broke and growled and slithered inland in a swirl of gray water and were sucked back in spume.²⁸



Figure 37. A Market Street Railway #2 streetcar car approaching the Sutro Baths depot, about 1943. An outbound streetcar is making the hairpin turn in the distance. View looking north.

This section of private right-of-way was located between Merrie Way (out of view to the right) and Sutro Baths. (Bay Area Electric Railway Association)

On February 12, 1949 the Sutro Baths depot burned in a spectacular early morning fire. The cause of the blaze is unclear, but lore has it that two chilly streetcar motormen kindling a fire in a trash barrel started the fire.²⁹ The San Francisco Fire Department responded to the three-alarm fire but was unable to save the 1896-vintage structure. Newspaper accounts put the damage at \$50,000, but the building was a total loss and never rebuilt.³⁰

Following the blaze, MUNI abandoned service to the Baths and relocated the terminus of both the #1 and #2 lines to 45th Avenue and Geary Street.³¹ The tracks leading down to the depot site apparently survived for a short period after the fire but were removed sometime around 1950. The former depot site today is a flat area directly east of Louis' Restaurant, almost entirely overgrown with vegetation.

2. Physical Description & Characteristics

The Sutro Railway was typical of most electric streetcar lines of the era for most of its length. At the point where it crossed 48th and Pt. Lobos Avenues, though, it entered a “private right of way” that descended diagonally in a “Z” shaped course through the undeveloped land east of Sutro Baths. Cars approaching the Sutro depot doubled back below Merrie Way before reaching the terminus in the station above the baths. Based on historic photographs, the right-of-way along this private section consisted of a double-track arrangement of standard gauge tracks set onto bed of crushed rock, or “ballast.” A tall board fence separated the right-of-way from the adjacent pedestrian traffic along Merrie Way and Point Lobos Avenue.



Figure 38. The Sutro streetcar depot in 1938. The shield over the car doorway is the emblem of the Market Street Railway. Note the rock retaining wall on the left and the board fence separating the cars from the Sutro property. (SF Railway Archive, Richard Schlaich Collection)

The tracks terminated inside the covered, barn-like depot just uphill from the main entrance to Sutro Baths. This depot consisted of a large, gable-end wooden building arranged on a roughly east-west alignment bordering Point Lobos Avenue. The depot's open eastern was large enough to permit the passage of two cars simultaneously. Furnishings inside were sparse, consisting only of a few benches, some advertising panels, and a small food concession stand. Two parallel tracks and a crossover allowed the double-ended streetcars to reverse direction before leaving the depot.³² (Figure 39)

Immediately outside of the depot's car portal an embankment of earth separated the tracks from Point Lobos Avenue and Merrie Way, both of which sat about 20 feet higher than the tracks. When the City of San Francisco widened Point Lobos Avenue and its sidewalk in 1921-1922, this embankment needed reinforcement and an elaborate rockwork wall was constructed adjacent to the tracks.³³ (Figure 40)



Figure 39. Two streetcars waiting inside the Sutro Baths depot, 1927. The hot dog stand at right was a concession operated by the Hountalis family. (SF Railway Archive, Richard Schlaich Collection)

3. Surviving Elements & Features

Although all tracks were removed from the private right-of-way following the 1949 fire that destroyed the depot, the diagonal section of the track alignment east of Merrie Way showed clearly on aerial photographs taken well into 1950s. Cypress trees growing adjacent to the former right-of-way have blurred this visual orientation, though, and today the tracks' alignment can be barely discerned as the toe of an earthen slope below the encroaching cypress.³⁴

The lower section of right-of-way, located west of Merrie Way, was almost completely covered in 1955 when the city widened Merrie Way. As part of this project, workers pushed fill over the crest of the original street edge and used the 30-foot width of the streetcar right-of-way as the footing of the new slope they were creating. In the process they all but obliterated the former track alignment paralleling Merrie Way, leaving uncovered only the area east of the former depot site where the city had earlier constructed the rock retaining wall.³⁵

Although the Sutro Depot building burned in 1949, the former site of the depot and its adjacent rock wall are believed to remain beneath the dense vegetation that has claimed the area over the past 50 years. Conditions of both features are unknown, but it is likely the rock wall would retain more integrity than any surviving foundations of the streetcar depot.



Figure 40. The rockwork wall constructed by the Department of Public Works to protect the streetcar tracks after Point Lobos Blvd was widened. (SF Public Library, DPW Collection)

Part V. Ocean Terrace / Train Terminal Area, 1888 – c1915

1. Background & Context.

When the Ferries & Cliff House Railroad began operations in 1888 its terminus was located directly across from the main entrance to Sutro Heights. Its terminal building was a simple wood depot structure, similar in design to many small-town railroad stations. At some undetermined date, Adolph Sutro began developing the area directly across the tracks from the depot structure as a commercial area known as “Ocean Terrace.” The complex is not well documented, but first appears on a map in a souvenir album of the Sutro area printed sometime between 1889 and 1894. Based on this simplified map it appears the name “Ocean Terrace” originally referred to the street fronting the commercial buildings that separated them from the train depot opposite.³⁶

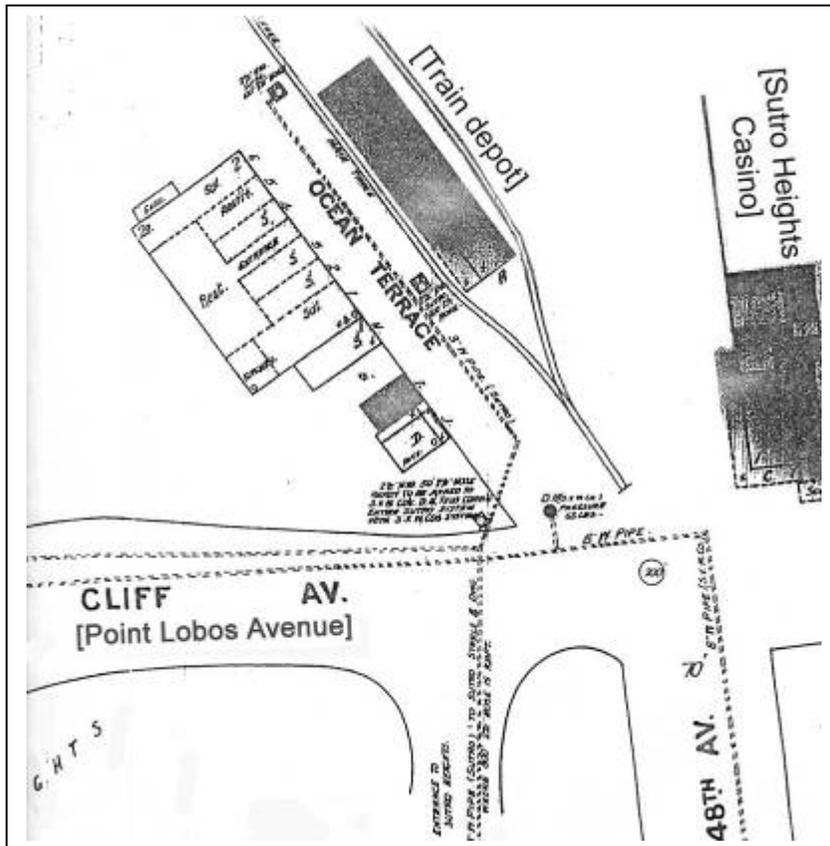


Figure 41. Sanborn Fire Map showing layout of Ocean Terrace, 1899 (SF Public Library)

The first detailed depiction of Ocean Terrace appears in the 1899-1900 Sanborn Fire Map of San Francisco, which shows a complex of three wooden buildings arrayed in a northwest-southeast alignment facing the steam train depot. Two of these buildings were small wood-frame structures of undetermined use while the largest was a commercial block containing two saloons, two restaurants, and three storefronts.³⁷ (Figure 41)



Figure 42. Ocean Terrace in 1910, viewed from the location of today's Seal Rock Inn. The #1 line streetcar tracks and the 48th Ave. depot are at center. The gable-ended building at right is a city fire station. (Sutro Library)

Across the street from Ocean Terrace at the northeast corner of 48th Avenue and Pt. Lobos Avenue stood several additional commercial and residential buildings that were not part of Sutro's holdings. These structures fronting on Pt. Lobos included a self-proclaimed Sutro Heights Casino, several sheds, a dwelling, and a San Francisco Fire Department "Chemical Station 8."³⁸

In 1910 a large illustrated inventory of Adolph Sutro's estate was prepared that included several views of Ocean Terrace. The most informative is a view titled "Richmond Blocks No. 20" looking approximately northwest from the intersection of Pt. Lobos and 48th

Ave., showing from right to left the private developments along Pt. Lobos, the former steam train depot, the streetcar right-of-way, and the buildings comprising Ocean Terrace.³⁹ This view reveals that the ‘commercial block’ building at the north end of the row had three gable-end facades facing the streetcar depot, each with its own brick chimney, probably representing the subdivisions within the structure. (Figure 42)

Another view from the 1910 Sutro Estate Inventory shows Ocean Terrace from the west and reveals that the commercial block was actually a two-story wooden building with lengthy rows of double-hung windows facing the Pacific.⁴⁰ A comparison of this photo with the floorplan shown on the Sanborn map reveals these windows were mostly in the restaurant area, and must have provided diners with spectacular views overlooking the Sutro Baths and Cliff House. (Figure 43)

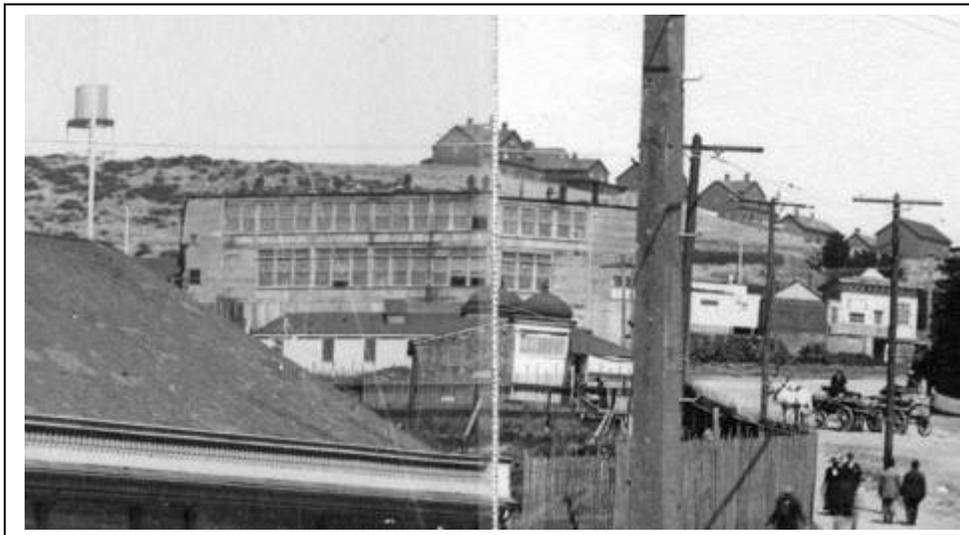


Figure 43. The west facade of Ocean Terrace as viewed from Point Lobos Road. Note the windows in the restaurant area. The roof at left is part of the Sutro depot. The buildings and water tank in the distance mark the parade area of Fort Miley. (Sutro Library)

No written documentation has been found concerning the development, use, or fate of Ocean Terrace, but the 1913-1915 updates to the Sanborn Fire Map show the complex still intact.⁴¹ It must have been torn down shortly afterwards, though, since historic photographs reveal that all traces of the Ocean Terrace buildings had disappeared by

April 1922.⁴² Today the site is a tangled thicket of cypress and other vegetation at the northwest corner of Pt. Lobos Blvd. and El Camino Del Mar.

2. Physical Description & Characteristics

No detailed construction drawings have been located of this area, but based on historic photographs and Sanborn Fire Maps, we know that in 1910 the Ocean Terrace complex consisted four wood-frame structures, all arranged along the west side of the street facing the United Railroads streetcar depot. The largest of these buildings was a “commercial block” measuring approximately 50’ x 90’ and containing several businesses. The smaller buildings varied in size from 20’ x 15’ to 30’ x 15’ and apparently contained only a single business each.⁴³

Photographs taken during the widening of Point Lobos Avenue in the early 1920s show no evidence of Ocean Terrace’s existence, leading to the theory that the buildings were built on the simplest of foundations. On-site investigations confirm this theory, and NPS cultural resources staff members believe that the buildings relied on either brick or wooden pilings for support. Based on historic photographs, the commercial block seems to have been of especially flimsy construction – but it did have a commanding view.⁴⁴

3. Surviving Elements & Features

There are no physical remains of the buildings that comprised Ocean Terrace. However, in the early 1980s the historian for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area discovered a large rubbish dump on the site, containing broken bottles, plates and other debris. Speculating that the dump was associated with nearby Sutro Heights, the site was quickly evaluated and reburied by the park’s archeologist to prevent damage to the resource by “bottle hunters.”⁴⁵ A site visit in 2004 by the current park archeologist reconfirmed the existence of the trash deposit, and several bottle and ceramic fragments and coal hunks were recovered from the site consistent with commercial restaurant and saloon activities known to have taken place at Ocean Terrace.⁴⁶



Figure 44. Former site of Ocean Terrace, August 10, 1942. Compare to Figure 42. The abandoned right-of-way of the #1 streetcar line is visible at extreme right. Close examination of the original print reveals barbed wire entanglements across the old right-of-way, probably erected by the army as a wartime security measure. (Municipal Railway)

PART VI. Merrie Way “Pleasure Ground”, 1896 - c1915

1. Background & Context.

Adolph Sutro developed an extensive series of attractions at the western edge of the City’s “outside lands” during the 1880s and 1890s, the core of which were his home and gardens at Sutro Heights. Sutro’s developments eventually grew to include the Cliff House, an outdoor aquarium, the Sutro Baths, numerous shops and cafes lining Pt. Lobos Road above the Cliff House, and a street railroad bringing visitors to the area.

Sutro was also an investor who could never quite pass up a bargain, and he included many recycled buildings and attractions in his growing empire. As construction of the Sutro Baths was in progress, Adolph Sutro found an opportunity to pick up several attractions at bargain-basement rates when the 1894 Midwinter Fair closed down and sold off many of its holdings. Sutro purchased several rides and attractions from the Fair and had them moved from the fair site in Golden Gate Park to a recently cleared area just east of the Baths -- today’s Merrie Way.⁴⁷ There, Sutro had several of the Fair’s most popular attractions reconstructed as the “Sutro Pleasure Grounds.”⁴⁸ (Figure 45)



Figure 45. The “Sutro Pleasure Grounds” in 1896. From left to right: Cliff House, Sutro RR depot, Haunted Swing, Mystic Maze, Sutro Baths and Firth Wheel. (Golden Gate NRA)

Sutro began transporting these pieces shortly after the Fair closed, but he apparently delayed opening the rides until the simultaneous completion in 1896 of the Sutro Baths, the Sutro electric streetcar line, and the new Cliff House. An idea of Sutro's grand design for his Pleasure Ground can be found in a March 8, 1896 article that appeared in the *New York Times*:

A San Francisco Coney Island.

From The San Francisco Examiner. Adolph Sutro has announced that he intends to spend \$200,000 immediately for the purchase of attractions that will make the Cliff House region a formidable rival of Coney Island, and he has selected Col T. P. Robinson to run the business. The Colonel has already made arrangements for a host of popular shows, compared with which the brilliancy of the Chicago Midway would be as a candle in the sunlight. The extensive amusement plan has been only partly outlined, but the features so far enumerated are amply sufficient to warrant the anticipation that San Francisco will have an incomparable pleasure resort on the ocean beach before the Summer months.

The pleasure season at the ocean beach will very probably begin about the middle of March. It is intended that the new baths shall be opened with appropriate festivities on the 15th. Col. Robinson proposes to have a grand concert in the bath house, and possibly a production of "Pinafore" on pontoons in the water. He is also to erect an immense amphitheatre on the bluffs, in which the people of the city will have the privilege of holding celebrations on National holidays. Then there is to be the Midway. This will be the star attraction, from the description of it. The haunted swing will be there, and so will the mirror maze. The great electric tower now being taken apart in the park will be set up in the Sutro Midway. Near it will be the Firth wheel, the camera obscura, and other marvels. A Venetian canal, in which boats will run, is also to be constructed. This will

be 800 feet long and twelve feet wide. Lifeboats strung on a wire cable will carry venturesome sightseers from the Cliff House over the beating surf and land them out on Fish Rock.⁴⁹

The centerpiece attraction of the Pleasure Ground was the 100-foot diameter “Firth Wheel” with its 16 carriages that took passengers on 20-minute rides high over the Sutro Baths to view the Pacific Ocean. Across the street were two indoor attractions: the “Mystic Maze,” which was an indoor house of mirrors similar to those still found in amusement parks; and the “Haunted Swing,” a full scale optical illusion where visitors would enter a large furnished room, sit down on a glider-type swing in the center of the room and began gently swinging. Unknown to the visitors, the entire room was set on gimbals and had started swinging simultaneously in the opposite direction, giving the illusion the room was rotating around them. The experience was reported to be very, very unsettling.

Sutro’s other fantastic attractions, though, were not to be. He never constructed the Venetian canals or amphitheater described in the *Times* article, nor was the Tower of Electricity relocated from Golden Gate Park after the fair’s close. Interestingly, the “lifeboats strung on a wire cable” would appear in a slightly different form as the Sky Tram, constructed in 1955, that carried passengers between the Cliff House and Point Lobos.

Not much is written about the operations of the Sutro Midway, but its evolution can be tracked through historic photographs and maps of the area. By 1898 the Pleasure Ground had grown to include an embryonic roller coaster also salvaged from the 1894 Fair called the “Scenic Railway,” a curiously named ride called the “Springs on Platform,” and a cluster of chowder stands lining Pt. Lobos Road built from kiosks also recycled from the Midwinter Fair.⁵⁰ (Figures 46, 47 & 48)



Figures 46 & 47. Two views of the Firth Wheel. A portion of the Scenic Railway is visible in the view at left. (California Historical Society)



Figure 48. Merrie Way and the abandoned attractions, 1910. The #1 line streetcar tracks are visible in the foreground. Compare this view to Figure 34. (Sutro Library)

The Pleasure Grounds must not have been long-lived, though, since by 1900 the official Sanborn insurance maps of the Sutro Baths showed all the attractions labeled either “not

in operation” or “closed.”⁵¹ The possible reason for closing the midway was the death of Adolph Sutro on August 8, 1898. Upon his death, Dr. Emma Sutro Merritt, Adolph’s favorite child and executor of the estate, took over financial control of the far-flung Sutro investments. Dr. Merritt found the estate overextended and sold off many of her father’s holdings, including the Sutro Rail Road, beginning in 1899. Given the timing of Merrie Way’s demise, it seems likely Dr. Merritt closed it down as part of these cost-cutting efforts. (The Baths however, remained in full operation.)⁵²

The last photo of the amusement complex, taken in 1910, shows the weather-beaten Firth Wheel, Haunted Swing, and Mystic Maze buildings facing onto a deserted midway.⁵³ (Figure 48)

By 1913 all traces of Sutro’s attractions had vanished from the Sanborn fire maps, and the former midway (which never had a formal name during its Pleasure Ground years) was now simply a dead end street briefly designated 49th Avenue.⁵⁴ By the 1920s, though, the former midway had been renamed Merrie Way, either in reference to the old adage to “eat, drink and be merrie” or the phrase “to go on one’s merrie way.” Whether or not the name reflected the street’s previous incarnation as amusement park use is not known.⁵⁵

In early 1927 a group of investors titled the Pacific Coast Holding Company purchased six acres of land at the north end of Merrie Way from the Sutro Estate for construction of a lavish ocean front resort to be known as the Pacific Edgewater Club.⁵⁶ This parcel, located on the bluffs directly above Point Lobos, was billed as the “most exclusive ocean front property in San Francisco.”

The plans for the new Club were announced with fanfare on March 12, 1927, and were overwhelming even by today’s standards. “An Architectural Monument!”, blared a half-page advertisement in that day’s *Chronicle*, which also featured an artist’s rendering of how the completed resort would appear. (Figure 49) The reinforced concrete building, of vaguely *art deco* design, would sit on the promontory directly above Point Lobos and rise twelve stories above the surrounding landscape. Wings extending on each side would

encompass a broad terrace overlooking the Pacific. Every whim would be catered to.

“The Pacific Edgewater Club will embody features of home and club life, unique in their completeness. Dining, dancing, swimming tennis handball, equestrianism – all these and many other amusements may be enjoyed with your own friends or acquaintances of your own circle.”⁵⁷ The estimated cost of the Club would be over \$1,000,000.

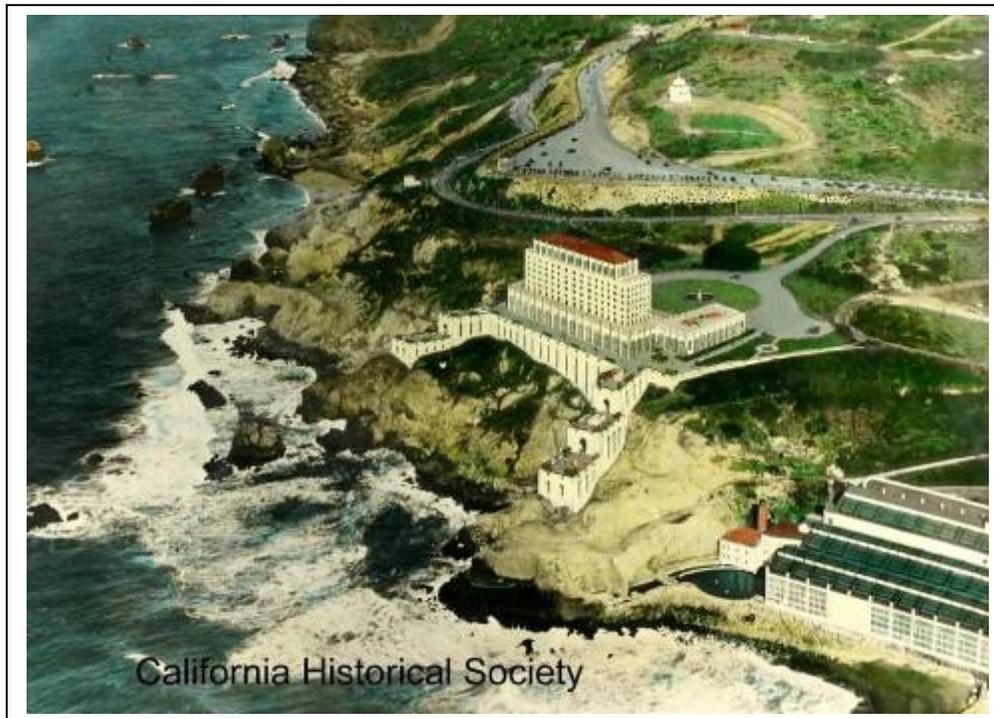


Figure 49. An artist's concept of the Pacific Edgewater Club, 1927. (California Historical Society)

A conveniently-placed news story was located on the same page as the advertisement, and recounted how preliminary work had already begun and a new fence had gone up at the Point Lobos construction site. The article also stated that “pathways have been hewn through the dense tangle of dwarf timber and shrubs covering the ground...”, and that an office structure for the project was being erected at the end of Merrie Way. The article concluded by stating that memberships were now being accepted and considered by the Club’s membership committee.⁵⁸

Title to the property was formally transferred from Emma L. Merritt, daughter of Adolph Sutro, to the Pacific Coast Holding Company on April 23, 1927, “for a consideration of

\$250,000. Plans for the Edgewater Club will be finished soon, according to the architect, T.L. Pflueger, to be followed immediately by construction work.”⁵⁹

And there the story ends, for local newspapers and historical archives are simply mute on the fate of the Edgewater Club. No further work took place on the gargantuan resort, and no traces of any preliminary site work described in the *Chronicle* story can be discerned at Point Lobos today. Perhaps the onset of the Great Depression in October 1929 put the ambitious plans to an early rest, or alternately, potential club members were simply put off by the blustery winds and chilling fog of the spectacular – but inhospitable – promontory.



Figure 50. *Merrie Way looking north from Point Lobos Avenue, 1931. (Bancroft Library, Cook Coll.)*

Photographs of Merrie Way in the early 1930’s reveal the street to have been simple dirt track across the dunes above Sutro Baths, without any paving, gutters, sidewalks, drains or other improvements.⁶⁰ In short, Merrie Way existed as a city street in name only. (Figure 50)

In 1936, the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) carried out paving and other repair improvements to the area to increase its usability as a vista point. In the Project

Application statement, the purpose was summarized as simply to “afford a parking area on a high cliff giving an unobstructed view of the Pacific Ocean and the entrance to San Francisco Bay.”⁶¹

The official completion report states that work commenced on November 30, 1935 and was completed by October 25, 1936, and that a daily average of 200 workers had been employed on the project. The report documents that ½ acre was cleared in the course of the project, probably indicating work done along the shoulders of the street. In addition, 3,500 cubic yards (cy) were graded; 350 cy of surfacing material were laid down, and 3,522 cy of “oiling” spread over the street’s surface. Total cost was \$9,038.00.⁶²

The project does not appear to have involved any significant infrastructure improvements such as curbing or drainage systems, though, since aerial photos taken only a few years after the project show Merrie Way as still an unpaved city street with indistinct shoulders and no curbs, sidewalks, or other permanent features.

The WPA’s Annual Report for 1937 briefly sketched out the work completed:

Merrie Way Esplanade. Clearing and grubbing of a half-acre tract – 1,500 cubic yards of grading to level same, and 350 cubic yards rock surfacing topped with a bituminous wearing surface.⁶³

In early 1955 Merrie Way was re-graded and enlarged by the City of San Francisco as part of a never-completed renovation of the area overlooking Sutro Baths. In the course of ‘improving’ Merrie Way, the city widened the street from a standard width of 70 feet to an irregular *cul de sac* varying in width from 100 feet to nearly 130 feet. The widening was accomplished by pushing spoil over the slope west of the original Merrie Way, a technique that also resulted in the burial of the former streetcar right-of-way. (Figures 51 & 52)

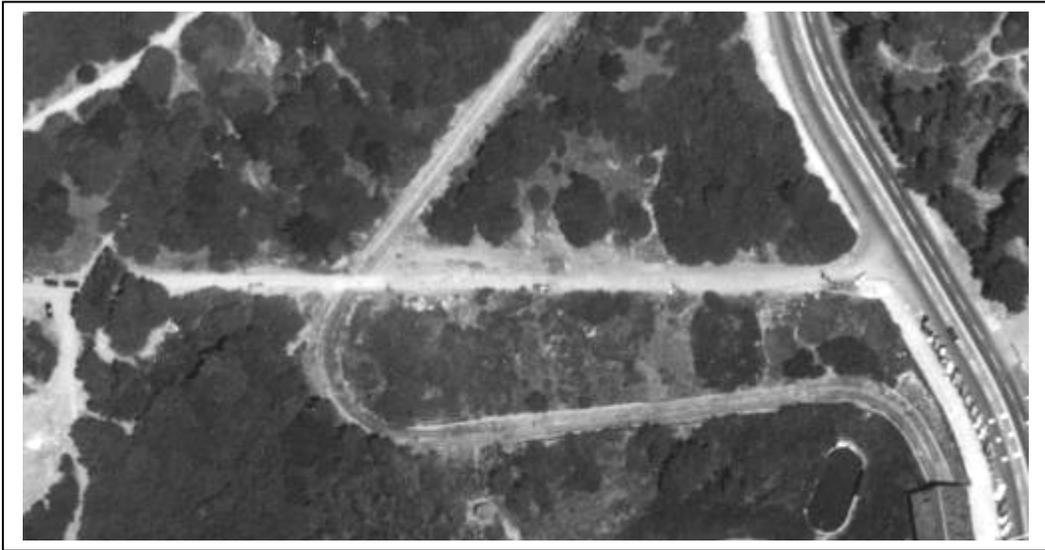


Figure 51. Aerial view of Merrie Way on July 28, 1948. (Pacific Aerial Surveys)



Figure 52. Aerial view of Merrie Way after widening on April 23, 1958. (Pacific Aerial Surveys)

Simultaneously to the widening, the triangular parcel east of Merrie Way was cleared of trees and also regraded, which probably provided the fill used for widening Merrie Way proper.⁶⁴ The purpose of these grading and widening projects is still not known, but Merrie Way itself emerged from the work efforts as an unpaved parking lot measuring

roughly 500' x 120'. The cul de sac would remain in this same relative condition for the following fifty years.

2. Physical Description & Characteristics

The Haunted Swing and Mystic Maze were both wood frame buildings, transported from the Midwinter Fair site in Golden Gate Park and re-erected on (presumably) new foundations that took in account the sloping terrain above Sutro Baths.

The Firth Wheel across the midway was a wood and steel structure with timber outriggers, and had substantial anchoring foundations to steady the 216,000 pound, 100-foot diameter wheel. An 1893 article that ran just prior to the Fair's opening described the Wheel when it was installed in Golden Gate Park: "It is so constructed that if merely set on the ground it would be perfectly safe, but as a precautionary measure it is anchored in a stone and concrete foundation, weighing over seven times as much as the superstructure, which spreads out underground like the roots of a great tree, and is as firm and solid as the everlasting hills." Elsewhere in the same article, it also states, "The wheel has a diameter of 100 feet, and the foundation adds to this another 20 feet..." Whether or not Sutro had this same foundation constructed when he moved the Firth Wheel to Merrie Way is unknown.⁶⁵

The Scenic Railway appears to have been constructed entirely of wood timbers and was surrounded by a tall board fence. It likely had no extensive foundations. No construction details are available for the Springs On Platform.

The midway portion of Merrie Way appears in historic photos as a simple graded area, undistinguished from the surrounding landscape except for a flattening of the terrain. Photographs indicate the ground may have been either oiled or watered down to provide a more solid surface. The borders of the midway were at one time marked by tall flagstaffs, each measuring approximately 75' tall.



Figure 53. The northern end of Merrie Way can be seen paralleling the Sutro Baths' fence in this circa 1900 view of the Cliff House and Baths. (Gary Stark Collection)

Originally, Merrie Way also extended much farther than it does today, and at its northern end almost intersected the streetcar right-of-way where it made a turn below the present USS San Francisco Memorial. However, the further it extended north of the attractions, the more undulating its surface became. (Figure 53 shows Merrie Way as it changes elevation north of the midway.) Also, Merrie Way started out with a standard city street width of 70 feet but tapered noticeably the further north it extended, eventually devolving into a network of social trails leading up to the streetcar right-of-way and down towards the Lands End cliffs.⁶⁶

3. Surviving Elements & Features

There are no surviving remains of any of the attractions that once lined Merrie Way, and historic aerial photographs of the area (taken beginning in 1928) fail to show any traces of the former building sites. Much like the buildings along Ocean Terrace, the Merrie Way sideshows must have been built on the most rudimentary of foundations – ones which left no trace following the buildings' demolition. It is possible, though, that the buried remains of the Firth Wheel's extensive anchoring foundations might still be in place on the east side of the present Merrie Way parking lot.

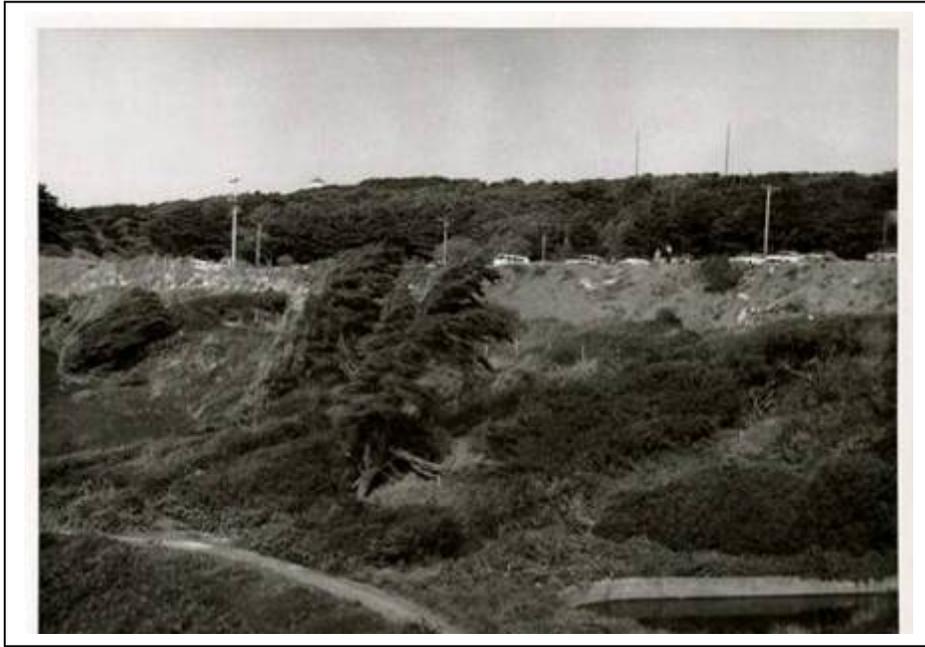


Figure 54. Fill dumped along the west side of Merrie Way, circa 1960. (SF Public Library AAC-0346)

The historic alignment of Merrie Way was severely impacted in 1955 when the city embarked on a major project to widen the street and clear the “triangle” property just to the east. During this process, the original alignment of the street was entirely destroyed along its west side when fill was pushed outwards and down onto the streetcar alignment below. The east side of the street was also widened slightly during this process, effectively removing any traces of the original width and alignment of historic Merrie Way.

Part VII. “Triangle” Parcel East of Merrie Way

1. Background & Context.

The area known as the “Merrie Way triangle” (hereafter referred to as the Triangle) is a roughly triangular-shaped parcel bordered on the west by Merrie Way, on the south by Pt. Lobos Blvd., and on the north by the former streetcar right-of-way built for the Sutro Electric Railway. Although this area was never extensively developed, it was the site of several temporary food concessions and three midway rides from the original Sutro Pleasure Grounds.



Figures 55. Aerial view of Triangle adjacent to Merrie Way in 1928. (U.S. Army photo, GGNRA)

The triangle first took shape following the fall of 1894 when Adolph Sutro purchased several rides and other amusements from the recently closed 1894 Midwinter Exposition. He had the attractions moved to the area west of the still-incomplete Sutro Baths and erected along a midway originally known as the Sutro Pleasure Grounds. The rides were apparently installed over the course of several years, but were all in place by 1898. The midway, eventually named Merrie Way, formed the eastern boundary of the Triangle parcel.⁶⁷

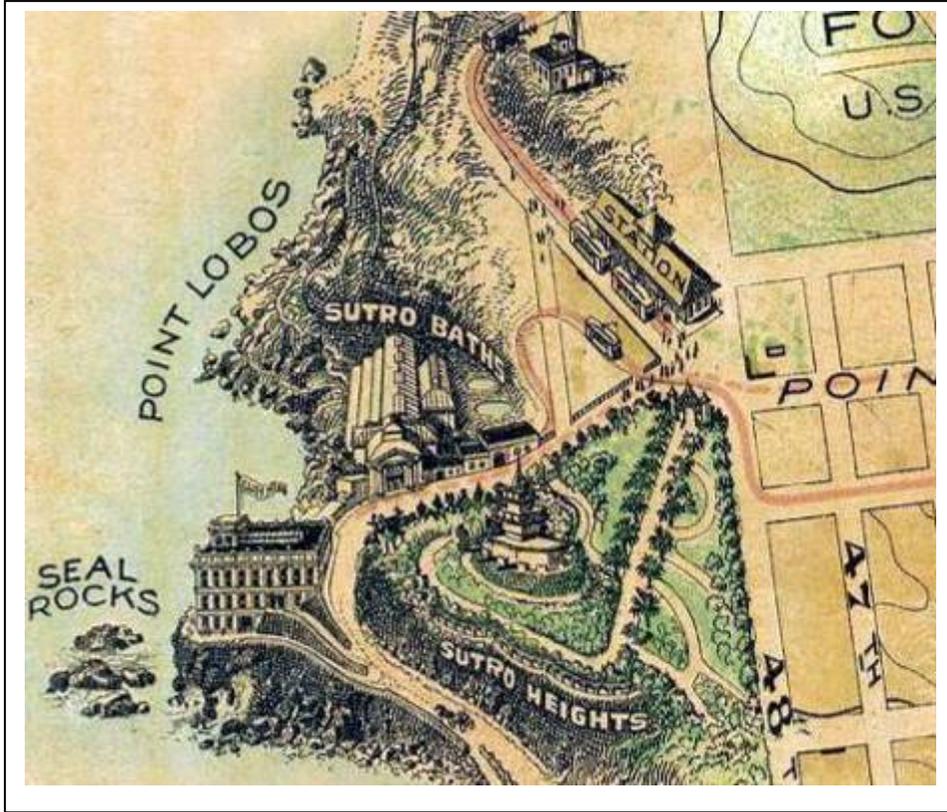


Figure 56. A trolley passes the undeveloped Triangle parcel above Sutro Baths in this fanciful 1911 map illustration. Note that no buildings are shown along either Merrie Way or the former Ocean Terrace site across from the station. (David Rumsey Map Collection.)

At the same time, Sutro was completing his electric streetcar line to compete with the Southern Pacific-owned steam train that stopped near Sutro Heights. Sutro's electric line terminated much closer to the Baths, and reached its depot via a private right-of-way beginning at the corner of Point Lobos and 48th Avenues. This right-of-way ran northwesterly to a point where it crossed the Pleasure Grounds midway, then made a hairpin turn and continued south to the depot near the Baths. The northwest leg of this right-of-way formed the northern boundary of the present Triangle. Figure 56, a 1911 cartoon of the Cliff House and Sutro areas, shows the Triangle at center with a trolley headed down the private right-of-way towards Sutro Baths. Figure 57 shows streetcar operations along the same section of private right-of-way during the MUNI era.



Figure 57. MUNI #1 car on private right-of-way at intersection with Merrie Way, August 1948. View southeast. The still-forested Triangle is at the right. (Bay Area Electric Railway Association)

The third side of the Triangle was formed by the alignment of the historic Point Lobos Avenue, a street that has also been known as Point Lobos Road, Cliff Road, and Cliff Avenue. This street took on its present configuration during a major paving and alignment project carried out by the City of San Francisco in 1922 to widen and improve the previously unpaved Point Lobos Avenue. As part of this project, brick and asphalt pavement was laid and concrete curbs built along the length of the street, extending from 48th Avenue to Ocean Beach.⁶⁸ Figure 58 shows the paving work in progress along Point Lobos.

The first structures built in the Triangle were a pair of rides transplanted from the 1894 Midwinter Fair in Golden Gate Park: the Firth Wheel and the Scenic Railway, both located immediately east of the unpaved Pleasure Ground midway. By 1899, a third attraction called “Springs on Platform” had been added, but its actual operation is unknown.⁶⁹



Figure 58. *Repaving Point Lobos Avenue near Merrie Way on April 6, 1922. View north. The 48th Ave. streetcar depot is visible at center. (SF Public Library, DPW Collection)*

Among the other items that Adolph Sutro purchased from the Midwinter Fair were a dozen or so small kiosks that had served as information and concession stands on the fair's grounds. Several of these kiosks with their distinctive onion-shaped roofs were converted into display cases inside Sutro Baths, while others were located along Point Lobos Avenue to serve as vendor's stands where peanuts and other 'fast foods' were sold. (The 1899-1900 Sanborn fire map recorded eight concession stands of various sizes along Point Lobos just north of today's Merrie Way.)⁷⁰ Photographs taken for the 1910 inventory of Adolph Sutro's estate record details of several of these converted kiosks, one of which was prominently labeled "Oyster Chowder."⁷¹ (Figures 59 & 60)

As previously noted in this report, the rides and attractions along Merrie Way were all apparently demolished by 1913, at which time only two concession stands were still standing along Point Lobos Avenue.⁷² Even those two stands had vanished by the 1922 road widening, possibly demolished in order to make way for the new sidewalk and curbs installed that year.⁷³ These were the last structures to exist on the parcel.



Figure 59. Concession stands lining Point Lobos across from Sutro Heights (left) in 1910. View looking west from 48th Avenue. (Sutro Library)

Sometime following 1932, the triangle was intentionally planted with Monterey cypress trees, probably as part of a large-scale landscaping project of the Lands End area apparently undertaken by the city and the federal Civil Works Agency (CWA) in the 1930s. Aerial photographs taken between September 1928 and the early 1950s show a continual expansion of the cypress forest on the Triangle and adjacent city-owned lands. By 1948 the entire parcel was heavily forested, but its boundaries were clearly defined by the sidewalks along Pt. Lobos, the Merrie Way *cul de sac*, and the streetcar right-of-way leading to the Sutro Depot.⁷⁴ (Figure 51)

By early 1955 the city decided to clear and regrade the Triangle area, and simultaneously to widen Merrie Way to its present 120-foot width. The purpose of the project is unclear, but the city was apparently opening the area for unspecified future developments. A photograph taken in May that year shows the Triangle in the process of being cleared, with freshly graded sand on all areas of the parcel. The only exception was a border of trees lining Pt. Lobos Ave., which might have been left as a visual buffer to the never-completed development. (Alternately, these trees might simply have been the last stand

waiting to be removed.) Three years later, though, the remaining trees had also been cut down and the Triangle and adjacent Merrie Way had assumed the contours and appearance they would retain until the present time.⁷⁵ (Figures 51 & 52)

2. Physical Description & Characteristics

In its original state, the Triangle was a sparsely vegetated area that apparently matched in topography and flora the rest of the nearby Lands End–Point Lobos area. Sometime in the early 1930s, though, the Triangle and the entire surrounding area east and north of Sutro Baths became the site of an intensive tree-planting program, probably the result of a CWA-sponsored 1933 improvement project. From then until 1955, the trees in Triangle appear to have grown at the same rate and density as the surrounding forest. Beginning in 1955, though, the cypress trees were removed from the Triangle during the widening of the adjacent Merrie Way parking lot discussed previously.

The structures erected in the Triangle included the 1890s attractions “Firth Wheel”, “Scenic Railway” and “Springs on Platform” (discussed in the previous section) and the concession stands fronting Point Lobos Avenue along its southern boundary. At the height of development in 1899, this lineup of stands consisted of eight distinct structures, at least three of which were recycled kiosks transported to the site from the 1894 Midwinter Fair in Golden Gate Park.

As was the case with all the other structures of the area, these concession stands must have been built without permanent foundations because photographs taken in 1922 during the repaving of Point Lobos fail to show any traces of their existence. (Figure 58)

3. Surviving Elements & Features

There are no surviving traces of any of the recreational or food concession structures in the area. The only historic structural remains are the pedestrian sidewalks constructed by the City of San Francisco during the 1921-1922 realignment of Point Lobos Boulevard.



Figure 60. Overlay showing 1899 structures in the Triangle and 2001 existing conditions. The original Ferris & Cliff House depot and Ocean Terrace development are at right, and the Scenic Railway and Firth Wheel are at center. Also note the cluster of small concession stands lining “Cliff Avenue” east of Merrie Way. (Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy)

Interestingly, although no structures remain, a site visit in the summer of 2004 turned up quantities of broken oyster shells along the southern boundary of the parcel, almost exactly where one of the food concession stands was once located. A 1910 photograph of this stand (Figure 59) shows it emblazoned with a large sign reading “OYSTER CHOWDER”, supporting the speculation that these shell fragments mark the site of a commercial rubbish dump associated with the concessions.

Part VIII. Military Uses of Lands End, 1891 - 1945

1. Background & Context.

The United States Army first surveyed the Point Lobos-Lands End area shortly after the Civil War as a possible location for fortifications to deal with the post-war threat of attack by foreign navies. In 1867, Lt. George Wheeler of the U.S. Army's Corps of Engineers carried out extensive surveys of the area that would eventually become Fort Miley, together with the surrounding topography of coastal bluffs and undeveloped dunes that make up today's Lincoln Park and Sutro District.

However, it would be more than twenty-five years before the army actually occupied any part of Lands End. It wasn't until 1893 that the government procured through condemnation a large section of the city-owned Cemetery Reservation for development as a coastal defense site originally known as the Pt. Lobos Military Reservation.⁷⁶

Western Regional Historian Gordon Chappel summarized Fort Miley's early history in a monograph prepared for a 1980 conference held by the Council on America's Military Past (CAMP):

By September 1890, Colonel George Mendel, the army engineer officer in charge of defense construction in the San Francisco region, had selected for fortification a 73-acre tract of land near Point Lobos which belonged to the City of San Francisco and since 1868 had been the Golden Gate Cemetery. After much intrigue and various maneuverings, the Federal government secured an 1891 condemnation of 54 acres for \$75,000.

It was still some years before the army did anything with its new Point Lobos Military Reservation. The Spanish-American War of 1898 provided the needed stimulus and that year the first two buildings were built there to house a small Signal Corps detachment whose mission is now long

forgotten, though it may have been to provide a warning of the approach of enemy ships during that war.

On September 23, 1899, an engineer lieutenant cleared and graded a road into the new reservation, began clearing the ground, and soon had laid out a battery for two 12-inch guns on Buffington-Crozier 'disappearing' carriages. He also supervised erection of construction buildings and shops.

Work began on November 27, 1899 on a battery for 16 12-inch mortars. Both batteries were nearing completion and the reservation was renamed Fort Miley in 1900 after Lieutenant Colonel John D. Miley, U.S. Volunteers, who had died in Manila, Philippine Islands, in 1899.⁷⁷

Fort Miley served as a subpost of Fort Winfield Scott for most of its history, and by all accounts was a sleepy post generally garrisoned only by a small caretaker contingent. Shortly before the outbreak of World War II, though, the army increased the size of the Harbor Defenses of San Francisco (HDSF) and brought Fort Miley's garrison up full wartime strength. Immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor, soldiers were put on alert and required to be ready to bring their heavy coast artillery guns into action on a ten-minute notice.⁷⁸

Although Japanese forces never attacked San Francisco, the HDSF maintained a high state of readiness throughout most of World War II. To augment the aging guns at Fort Miley, soldiers hurriedly constructed additional defenses along the Lands' End bluffs north of the post, on lands belonging to the San Francisco Department of Parks & Recreation and to the estate of Mayor Adolph Sutro.

Through a series of permits and leases negotiated between the City of San Francisco and the Sutro heirs, the Army eventually controlled 64.83 acres of Lands End property by the time the war ended. This acreage was broken down into two major parcels, one

immediately north of the Sutro Baths area comprising 9.13 acres and referred to as the “Point Lobos” reservation, and the other stretching along the cliffs due north of Fort Miley comprising 55.35 acres and referred to as the “Lands End” reservation. (The remaining .35 acres was a separate cable right-of-way crossing the municipal properties of El Camino Del Mar and Lincoln Park.)⁷⁹ Both of the large reservations would eventually become the location of temporary gun batteries that bolstered the Harbor Defenses during the later part of the war. (Figure 61)

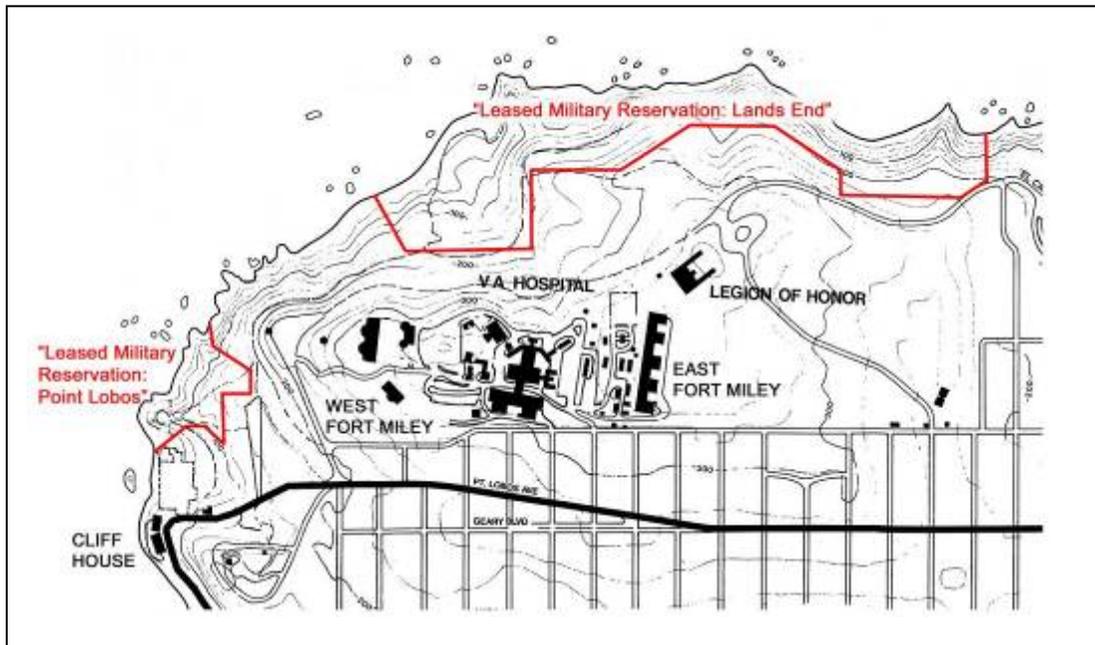


Figure 61. Military reservations leased by the U.S. Army at Lands End during World War II.

Of these two reservations, the Point Lobos parcel (also referred to as “HDSF Location No. 20”) must have been the more difficult lease to negotiate since historic real estate maps show it was comprised of lands leased from the City of San Francisco, from Emma L. Merritt (the daughter of Mayor Adolph Sutro), from Adolph G. Sutro (the grandson of Mayor Sutro), and from a Mr. Lewis M. Norton. By contrast, the Lands End reservation (“HDSF Location No. 15”) and the cable right-of-way were both located on lands leased exclusively from the City and County of San Francisco.⁸⁰

The soldiers entrenching themselves along Lands End created a bewildering array of fences, foxholes, wooden huts and other temporary structures. A detailed map of the Point Lobos reservation prepared in December 1943 shows such interesting features as a searchlight shelter and soldier barracks on the plateau immediately north of the Baths (on the site of the future Sky Tram overlook); extensive barbed wire entanglements on the bluff above the searchlight; communication cables; a spider's web of perimeter fencing; machine gun pits; and gates along Merrie Way, the former streetcar right-of-way, and the road leading down towards the Lands End cove.⁸¹

Growth was rapid, and less than a year later the searchlight plateau had sprouted five range finding stations for the heavy caliber gun batteries of the HDSF. Also, a new road had been constructed linking the searchlight area with the existing road leading down to the beaches. Access to the plateau originally seems to have been via the service road that ran around the east side of Sutro Baths and out to the point. Although not a problem in pre-World War II years, the military probably demanded more direct access to the site, and army maps indicate that a new road was constructed between late December 1942 and September 1943. This road followed a curving alignment westward from Merrie Way along the top of the bluffs above the plateau, then in a straight line due west to the end of the plateau where it linked up with the existing access road around Sutro's.⁸²

More importantly, the 1943 map documented a new gun battery that had gone into service at the Point Lobos reservation.⁸³ This new battery consisted of two 6-inch Navy rifles mounted on open concrete pads and emplaced a few hundred feet east of the searchlight position. Referred to as either "Point Lobos Battery" or simply "Battery Lobos," the guns reflected the military's hurried efforts to bolster the anti-motor torpedo boat (AMTB) defenses along the Golden Gate straits. Figure 62 shows one of the 6-inch guns of Battery Lobos during a practice drill.

Rather than mounting army-issued weapons, the two guns of Battery Lobos were actually obsolete U.S. Navy deck guns pressed into Coast Artillery service. The battery was simple in the extreme, consisting of two 20-foot diameter concrete plugs located

approximately 430 feet apart with the guns bolted to their centers. One gun sat an elevation of 94.14 feet while its companion was positioned slightly lower at 93.81 feet. No protection of any kind was given to the guns – or gunners. Nearby, a timber ammunition magazine was dug into the bluffs. Smaller structures serving as ready magazines and crew shelters were constructed closer to the guns. (Figure 66)



Figure 62. Coast Artillery soldiers aiming a 6-inch naval gun at Battery Lobos, circa 1943. (Golden Gate NRA, Interpretation Collection)

Work began on the battery on 2 July 1942 and was finished six weeks later at a cost of \$14,416.30. However, for reasons unclear, the battery was not officially “transferred” to HDSF control until 1 July 1943. (The guns were likely in service the whole time and the July 1943 date merely a record keeping convenience.)⁸⁴

Shortly after Battery Lobos was completed work began on a second AMTB battery, this one located on the northernmost tip of Lands End and commanding a sweeping field of fire of the entire Golden Gate. This battery consisted of two 90mm guns mounted on concrete gun plugs spaced 120 feet apart, and separated by the rocky spine of Lands End proper. The guns were technically described as 90mm M-1 guns on M-3 carriages,

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converted to T-3 “fixed” carriage models. Elevation above sea level for both guns was 186 feet.

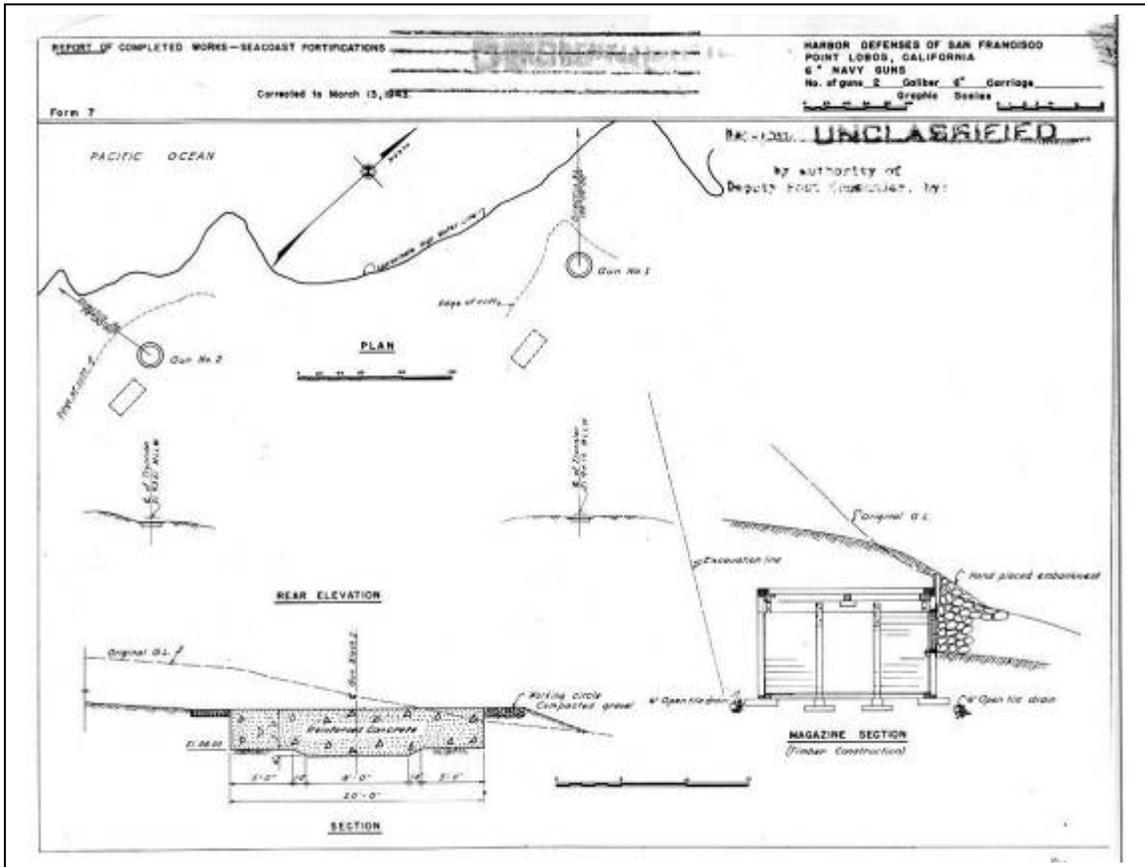


Figure 63. “Form 7” for Battery Lobos showing locations and details of gun blocks and wooden magazines, March 1943. (US Army, Golden Gate NRA)

Referred to alternately as the “90mm Battery,” “Battery Lands End” or simply “Battery Land,” work commenced on 29 June 1943 and was completed on 6 September 1943. Final transfer took place on 18 January 1944. (Again, the reason for the transfer delay isn’t clear but may be merely clerical.) Total cost for the two guns and electrical service was \$13,049.78.⁸⁵

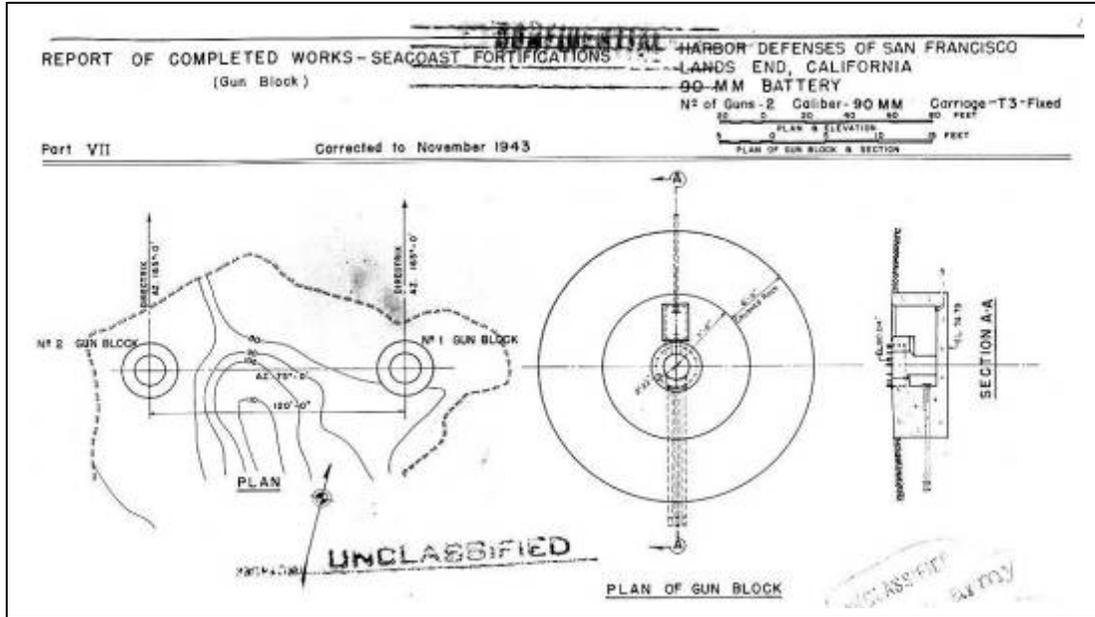


Figure 64. Portion of "Form 7" for Battery Land, November 1943. (U.S. Army, Golden Gate NRA)

No photographs have been found showing Battery Lands End while armed, so little is known of its operational history or about any of the support buildings constructed by the gun crews. Contemporary maps of the area show only two gun plugs and the location of a .50 caliber machine gun emplaced for close-in antiaircraft defense located atop the stubby ridge between the guns. There are the apparent remains of a collapsed corrugated metal structure dug into the ridge between the two guns, though, that may have served as a ready room for the crews or an ammunition shelter for the 90mm or .50 caliber guns.⁸⁶ Another photograph taken in November 1947 indicates that an underground structure of some type may have been dug into the point behind and below the level of the two guns.⁸⁷ (Figures 64 & 65)

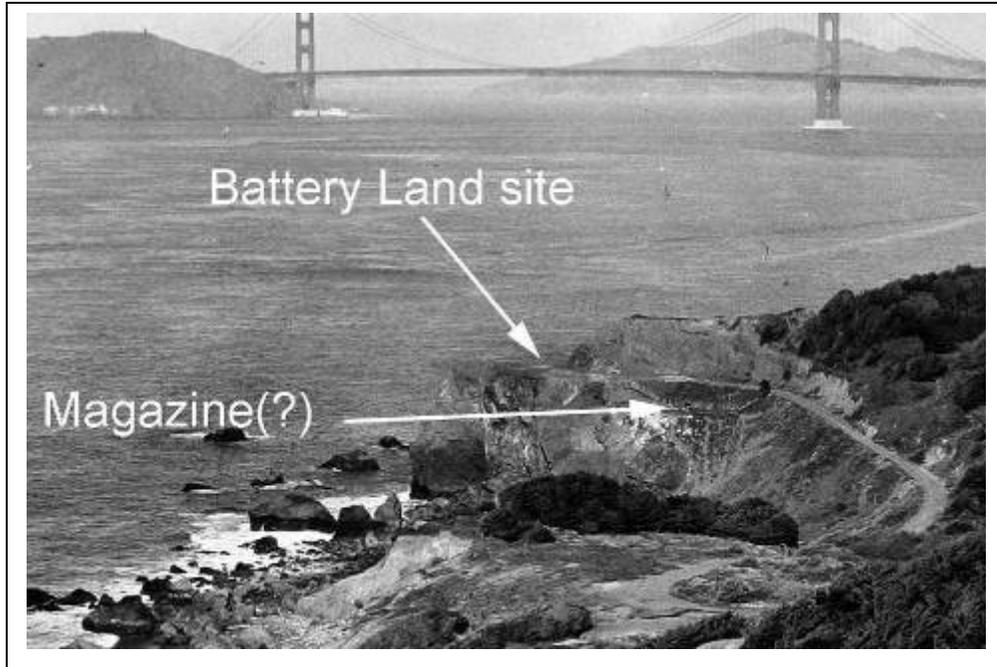


Figure 65. Battery Lobos site and possible magazine location, November 12, 1947. (SFPL AAB-9141)

The last installations known to have been constructed by the army during the 1941-1945 period were two temporary installations located along Lands' End beach about 200 yards west of Battery Land: an antiaircraft (AA) gun battery and another searchlight position. The AA battery consisted of a pair of towed 40mm antiaircraft weapons emplaced temporarily on the bluff overlooking the beach. It was informally named “Battery Buck” in honor of the wreck of the commercial steamship *SS Frank Buck* that had gone aground some years earlier close to where the guns were emplaced. Being towed weapons, site improvements were probably minimal and likely consisted of a prepared flat area and some earthen or sandbag revetments. The searchlight position, designated simply “Searchlight No. 22”, was also a piece of towed equipment and sat on the bluff about fifty feet west of the two antiaircraft guns.⁸⁸

Little documentation has been found about the installation, operation and subsequent removal of Battery Buck and searchlight No. 22, but it is not believed that any physical improvements were made to accommodate their installations aside from grading. A site

visit made by this researcher in 2004 turned up no obvious traces of the guns, the searchlight, or any associated support structures.⁸⁹

2. Physical Description & Characteristics

The most permanent features of the gun batteries erected by the army at Lands End were the reinforced concrete gun blocks (sometimes called gun plugs) for mounting the 6-inch navy guns of Battery Lobos and the 90mm AMTB guns of Battery Lands End.

At Battery Lobos, the gun blocks were two circles of reinforced concrete, each approximately 3'8" thick and measuring 20 feet in diameter. A smaller circle of bolts set into the concrete served for mounting the guns. Surrounding each concrete gun plug was a 3-foot wide "working circle" made of compacted gravel that gave the crews additional maneuvering room while aiming and loading the gun. In addition, partly underground ammunition magazines made of heavy timbers were constructed near the guns. Although contemporary plans show the locations for two magazines, official completion reports state only one magazine was constructed. It measured 32'8" x 14'10" x 8'11". (It is quite likely that more than one magazine existed, though, especially considering the HDSF soldiers' propensity for field construction.)⁹⁰

A single photograph has been located showing both weapons of Battery Lobos. The view, taken by a navy plane on 30 April 1945, reveals that the #1 gun (the easternmost weapon) was situated on a narrow rock outcropping and was provided with a partial retaining wall on its south side. By contrast, gun #2 (the westernmost weapon) sat on a relatively flat area of open dune. In addition to the officially authorized guns and gun plugs listed in the 1943 "Report of Completed Works" (RCW) forms, the soldiers appear to have constructed a series of wooden shelters near the gun positions. These non-authorized – but totally usable – structures probably served as workshops, additional magazine space, and ready rooms for the crewmen on duty. Based on photographic evidence, they were generally single-story timbered huts, provided with flat roofs and set as much as possible into the rocky hillsides. One structure that may have served as the Battery Commander's

station was located at the edge of the parking lot on the site of today's USS San Francisco Memorial.⁹¹ (Figure 66)



Figure 66 . Aerial view of Battery Lobos and temporary buildings in 1948. (U.S. Navy, Golden Gate NRA)

Battery Point Lobos was dismantled shortly after the photo was taken, though, because a November 1945 update map to the Harbor Defenses of San Francisco notes that both of the guns were “Being Salvaged.”⁹²

Battery Land’s two gun blocks each measured 14 feet in diameter with a thickness of five feet. An outer working circle 6-foot wide of crushed rock surrounded the plugs. Unlike the 6-inch guns, the 90mm guns were to be provided with permanent electrical service and telephone connections, and a hollowed out space within each block provided room for electrical and communication cabling and equipment. Again, a ring of spaced bolts was set into the concrete for mounting the 90mm AMTB guns. There are no photographs or contemporary maps to indicate the locations of the magazines or other support buildings at Battery Lands End.⁹³

3. *Surviving Elements & Features*

The only significant surviving elements of the two semi-permanent gun batteries at Lands End are the four reinforced gun blocks for the 6-inch and 90mm weapons. All traces of the temporary wooden magazine and crew shelters located nearby have vanished.

At Battery Land, both gun blocks are clearly visible at the very tip of the Lands End promontory, along with the access road around the site that was likely widened and improved by the army. Between the two gun blocks and dug into the hill separating the weapons are the collapsed remains of a possible corrugated steel magazine or crew shelter.⁹⁴



Figure 67. Battery Land site, September 21, 2004. Lands End Beach is to the right. The locations of Battery Buck and Searchlight #22 are at right. (California Coast Recording Project)

At Battery Point Lobos, the most prominent features are the gun block for gun #1 and the short retaining wall on the south side of the position. Given its dramatic location, this gun

plug is frequently visited by hikers and vandals who have left a maze of spray paint graffiti on the retaining wall. To the west, the gun plug for gun #2 is believed to still be intact but covered by a layer of drifting sand and ice plant. (This gun block was definitely in place in the mid-1970s when this researcher patrolled the Lands End area as a park ranger.) No traces can be found of any of the support structures shown on the 1943 Form 7 or visible in the 1945 aerial photograph taken of the site by the U.S. Navy. Any traces of the probable Battery Commander's station adjacent to the parking lot were destroyed during construction of the USS San Francisco Memorial in 1950.



Figure 68. Battery Lobos site, September 21, 2004. Trace remains of the old Lands End Beach access trail are visible connecting the two gun positions and to the left of gun #1. (California Coast Recording Project)

At the plateau for Searchlight No. 24 overlooking Sutro Baths, only the general areas of the former searchlight shelter, barracks and fire control stations remain. This area was extensively rebuilt in 1955 when the Sky Tram aerial attraction was constructed and the plateau turned into a tram station and viewing deck. Any traces of military structures were demolished at this time. The only feature believed to be associated with the Coast

Artillery's presence is a square concrete utility vault adjacent to the wooden staircase on the east edge of the plateau. This feature, measuring approximately 2 feet square and 3 feet tall, sits directly in line with the communication cabling shown on the December 1942 plans of Point Lobos, and likely served as a pull box for the telephone lines linking the searchlight and fire control stations with other HDSF installations.



Figure 69. Searchlight #24 location and traces of 1942 army road, September 21, 2004. Midden site SFr-5 is located beneath the road bed at upper left. (California Coast Recording Project)

The last remaining feature at the plateau is the trace remains of a road leading to the tip of the peninsula to the access road to Battery Lobos. Badly eroded and missing entirely in some areas, this road can still be identified in aerial photos and by watching for segments of the crushed rock roadbed used in its construction.⁹⁵ (Figure 69)

The concrete gun blocks and retaining wall associated with Batteries Land and Lobos may be contributing elements to a proposed “San Francisco Harbor Defense Landmark District,” a non-contiguous historic property currently under consideration that is composed of surviving coastal defense fortification features dating from the 1850s to 1970s.

Part IX. El Camino Del Mar

1. Background & Context.

El Camino Del Mar (“The Road of the Sea”) began in the 1910s as part of a grand drive that would connect the Harbor View District with Ocean Beach. Envisioned as one link in a winding ocean-side route extending from Telegraph Hill to Ocean Beach, El Camino Del Mar and its shifting roadbed became a source of never-ending frustration for the city’s engineers.

Historian Anna Toogood recounts this early history and construction in her 1980 Historic Resource Study A Civil History: Golden Gate NRA:

Superintendent of [San Francisco] City Parks has been credited as the source of the original 1909 or 1910 plan to construct a boulevard system in Lincoln Park which would connect with a drive overlooking Bakers Beach – as well as other Presidio boulevards – affording magnificent views of the Golden Gate and Marin Headlands. In 1912, moreover, plans for the Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915 already had set Lincoln Park aside as part of the exposition territory and had identified a boulevard system from Telegraph Hill along the coast [through the Presidio] to Lincoln Park and then south through the Richmond District to the Western End of Golden Gate Park.

Having taken some two years to arrange for the funding, the purchase of the right-of-way, and the letting of the contract, construction got underway in 1915, and by the close of the year [and the end of the Exposition] the first stretch of El Camino Del Mar...had been completed between the Presidio and Lincoln Park by Contractor John Brickell Co. of San Francisco under the direction of the City Engineer. As the boulevard was also to serve the military, \$30,000 from the U.S. Army went towards

construction of the 1,665 asphalt roadway, while the Panama Pacific Exposition Company contributed \$56,000, and the City, \$30,000. In September 1915, some seven months after the opening of the exposition, two ceremonies were held in Lincoln Park to celebrate first, the completion of the transcontinental Lincoln Highway in the park, and second, the opening of the boulevard El Camino del Mar on September 26.

In 1920 Lincoln Park was enlarged by the City's purchase of 27 acres of the Sutro estate lands lying north of the park from 33rd Avenue west to Sutro Baths. Since the new acreage contained mostly hills, gullies, and rock formations unsuitable for a golf course, Superintendent McLaren recommended that El Camino del Mar be extended, and by 1924 the Park Commissioners had planted thousands of pine and cypress trees on the hillsides [bordering the road] to beautify the winding boulevard which was nearly completed that year with some \$75,000 appropriated by the Board of Supervisors out of the County Road Fund.⁹⁶



Figure 70. The future alignment of El Camino Del Mar below Fort Miley as viewed from the Legion of Honor, June 15, 1923. (SF Public Library, DPW Collection)

In October 1924 the *San Francisco Chronicle* did a photo spread on the soon-to-be opened road and touted it under the headline “City Boasts of Wonder Road.” In an obvious advertising tie-in, the photos featured several views of shiny new Oldsmobile parked along “a boulevard that for scenic beauty cannot be equaled anywhere in the world.” The accompanying story explained the confusing array of names already affixed to the new road, and also provided some statistics on its construction:

Variously it has been referred to as the Warren G. Harding Memorial highway, Camino Del Mar, and the Golden Gate Highway. Officially it has not been christened, but whatever name is given to this one-mile stretch of highway it will remain for all time one of the most picturesque and beautiful bits of roadway in all the West.

... the completed road, which will be thrown open to the public within two weeks, will be seventy-five feet wide over all. This width includes a twelve-foot pedestrian pathway and a space for flowers and shrubs to be planned under the direction of Superintendent of Parks John McLaren. McLaren, in addition to bordering the highway with flowers and shrubs, plans to transform the neighboring hills into gardens of seasonable blooms.

... Near the ship observation tower a parking area 125 feet in width for a distance of 400 feet has been provided. The road, which has an average grade of 2½ per cent is to be oiled for the present to permit the fills to settle. Cement walls and drains have been constructed to protect the fills, several of which are from forty-five to fifty feet.⁹⁷

El Camino Del Mar opened later in 1924, and the public was soon enjoying its spectacular views of the Marin Headlands, ships passing through the Golden Gate, the military buildings of Fort Miley and, just below the roadway, the broken remains of the

steamship *Lyman Stewart* that had gone ashore near Helmet Rock in 1922. A lot of scenery was packed into the highway's one mile length.



Figure 71. Newly-completed El Camino Del Mar, October 20, 1925. Note seedling trees and concrete drainage swale at left. This is nearly the same view as Figure 70. (SF Public Library, DPW Collection)

Historian Toogood summarized the road's eventual demise:

The scenic El Camino del Mar carried the growing automobile traffic through the park to Sutro Heights for less than four years before the first landslide damaged the roadway. Slides in 1925 had finally closed the scenic overhead trolley along the original Cliff House and Ferries [sic] Railway route which ran below El Camino Del Mar, and now, in 1928, the unstable hillsides were making their mark on the City's boulevard system. With \$15,000 appropriated to prevent further slides, Superintendent McLaren, in cooperation with the army officers at Fort Miley, set his employees to work on repairing the damage.⁹⁸

Whatever work McLaren's workers accomplished at Lands End was short-lived; El Camino del Mar would continue to erode, slither and slide over the coming three decades. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "A slippery tendency in the section between the California Palace of the Legion of Honor and Point Lobos showed up when the road was a mere five years old, and the route was roped off for several months."⁹⁹ Newspaper photos document major slides that occurred in 1937 and again 1941.¹⁰⁰



Figure 72. Roadway settling occurring below Fort Miley, December 12, 1927. (SFPL, DPW Coll.)

During the Great Depression, El Camino Del Mar received an infusion of federal assistance when the WPA carried out extensive repairs to the boulevard. Justification for the project was simple: "Boulevard and scenic drive used by large portion of population of S.F. and most visitors who make auto trip."¹⁰¹ According to the 1937 annual report, work consisted of the following:

Removing of existing oil surface, and replacing with a 2" asphalt wearing surface for .8 mile on a main boulevard to the beach; raise 800 lineal feet of

settled fill gutter and sidewalks, reslope [sic] the cuts and landscape hillsides.¹⁰²

The official WPA completion report for the El Camino Del Mar project (surprisingly titled “Harding Boulevard”) states that work commenced on March 2, 1936 and was completed on October 25, 1936. By the end of the project, materials included 350,105 sq. ft. of asphalt surface; 2,850 cy of rock fill; 6,000 linear feet of concrete gutter; 4,470 linear feet of red rock walkways, and 2.8 acres of landscaping. Total WPA cost was \$40,472.47.¹⁰³

Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. Army declared the entire Lands End area a military district and closed El Camino del Mar to all vehicle traffic in order “to keep headlights, signal lights, and spies from an area of military security.”¹⁰⁴ The closure would be a lengthy one, and would last almost ten years.



Figure 73. Reconstruction work on El Camino Del Mar below Fort Miley, May 17, 1951. New drainage swales are visible along both sides of the graded roadbed. (SF Public Library AAB-3499)

Shortly after the war's end, a hopeful story in the *Chronicle* touted the road's imminent reopening to the public – at least as soon as repair work could be completed. Two ten-foot deep depressions had formed in the road during its wartime closure, one measuring 400 feet long the other 600 feet, so extensive filling would be required.¹⁰⁵ The newspaper story was several years premature, though, since the scenic roadway would remain closed until 1951 when the army finally relinquished control of the area. (It should be noted that only vehicles had been excluded from El Camino Del Mar following the war's end; the military apparently allowed pedestrian access to Lands End shortly after peace was declared.)

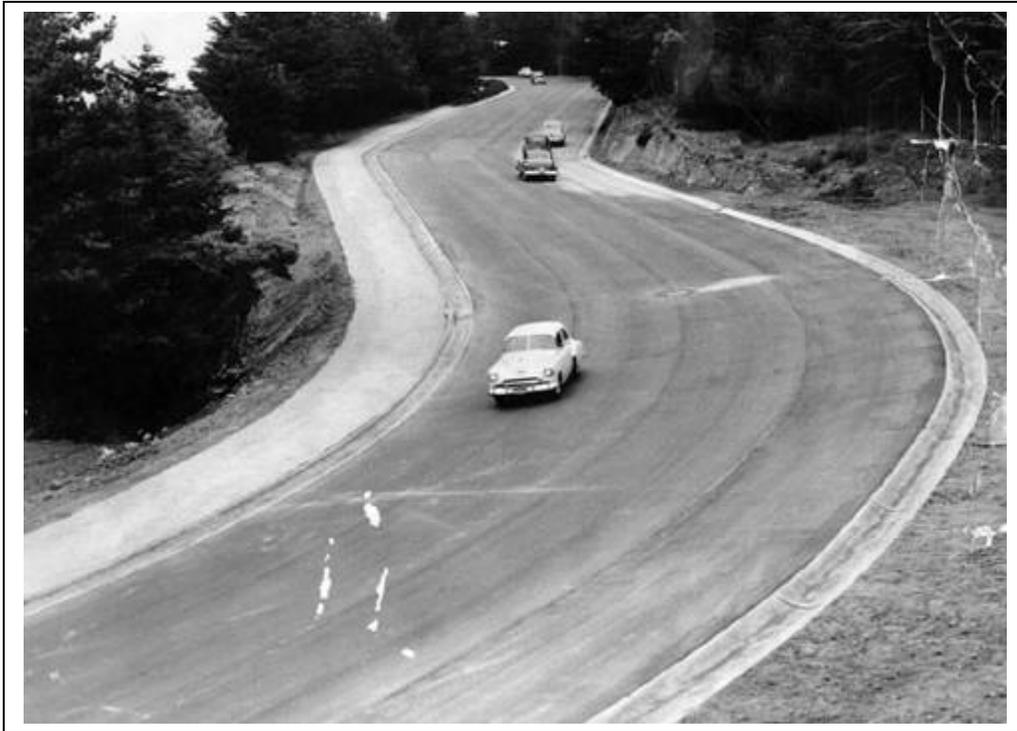


Figure 74. Newly-reopened El Camino Del Mar below Fort Miley, July 2, 1951. View looking east. The jog in the road marks the area of repaired slide. (SF Public Library AAB-3499)

The City had been awaiting this eventuality and had been developing geological studies and engineering plans for reopening the road since 1948. As soon as the army transferred control of the area, the City began repair work to reopen El Camino del Mar to vehicle traffic.¹⁰⁶ Work proceeded rapidly, and in July 1951 the road was finally reopened.¹⁰⁷

Drivers had only three and half years to enjoy the Lands End views, though, because in late January 1955 the roadway began to slip once again and had to be closed until September when additional repairs were finished. Then, in January 1956, El Camino del Mar let go once again and this time the City elected to explore a more permanent solution.

City officials calculated they had spent \$168,000 rebuilding the roadway over the past fifteen years, as well as allocating an additional \$26,480 for maintenance just since 1948. Given these totals – and the fact that the land appeared to still be on the move – it is not surprising the city opted not to spend additional funds on El Camino del Mar until a permanent engineering solution was reached.¹⁰⁸



Figure 75. El Camino Del Mar drainage ditch construction, November 15, 1957 (SF Public Library AAB-9169)

City engineers decided that water seeping from springs in the hillsides below Fort Miley and runoff were the cause of the problem, so in November 1957 the City installed a mile-long drainage system paralleling El Camino del Mar and announced that the road would

be restored to use in early 1958.¹⁰⁹ Their reports were overly optimistic; the road washed out again later that year and never reopened.

Hopes for rebuilding El Camino del Mar were kept alive, though, by a series of engineering studies and reports that indicated that a multi-span bridge sitting on concrete anchors set into bedrock would shortly be built that would span the slide area – once the land stopped moving. In 1962, *Chronicle* columnist Margo Patterson Doss chirpily reported, “City Engineer Clifford J. Guertz says that the slide is almost stabilized now. Since geologists have indicated a firm foothold for it, he is hopeful that a three-span bridge across this gap [below the Veterans Administration hospital] will one day be a reality. Plans for it have been prepared. It will cost \$1.5 million.”¹¹⁰

In late 1963 the *San Francisco News-Call-Bulletin*'s “Angry Man” column let loose a broadside at the City for its ineptitude on dealing with the slide problem and recounted a litany of engineering reports, geologic studies, and overoptimistic reopening dates that had been announced for the road:

Promises from various city engineers flutter like the leaves in autumn – and are just about as effective.

Myron Tatarian, now chief of the Department of Public Works, when he was city engineer gave a definite date for reopening. His successor as city engineer, Clifford Guertz, has given several more – 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963.

The plans were for a bridge to permanently end the slide problem. But this week Guertz says: “We may never build the bridge at all. Instead, we may have to put up permanent retaining walls”....

More studies are under way. A decision is not in the foreseeable future. The \$1.5 million DPW got for the bridge is languishing in the city's vaults, gradually falling prey to rising costs.

And El Camino del Mar still is closed.¹¹¹

The situation at Lands End has changed little in the last 40 years since the vitriolic newspaper article was written. The easterly portion of El Camino del Mar today survives as a stub-ended service road below the Legion of Honor, used primarily for overflow museum parking. At its west end, the road is blocked off near the USS San Francisco Memorial and provides a beckoning – but deceiving – entry for hikers and bikers since the asphalt paving devolves into a series of undulating dirt mounds only a few hundred yards past the barricades. At the time of this writing there are no plans to reopen the road.

2. Physical Description & Characteristics

A series of historic photographs were taken by the city's Department of Public Works between March 1923 and October 1925 documenting the construction of El Camino del Mar. These photos, now in the collection of the San Francisco Public Library, reveal that much of the road was constructed over the natural sand dunes that comprised the land west of the Legion of Honor with very little subsurface preparation. Mule-drawn scrapers, workers with shovels, and water wagons are the only technologies visible in any of these photos. Only near the western end where a rocky cliff face below Fort Miley intruded on the roadway was any major excavation required. The resulting spoil from the excavation appears to have been used to widen and harden the roadbed east of the cliff face.

As late as April 1924 the roadbed was still composed only of graded sand, but by early 1925 a topping of crushed rock had been applied, likely quarried from the Fort Miley cliff. Drainage for the roadway was provided by unlined, V-shaped swales approximately

10-inches deep filled with rock bordering both sides of the road. These were probably interim construction elements, though, because photos dated October 1925 show the temporary ditches replaced by permanent concrete drainage swales. (Figure 71)

In its original finished configuration, El Camino Del Mar was approximately 75 feet wide with flanking drainage swales on both sides. The original road surface appears to have been graded rock with some type of oil coating. Cypress and pine trees, planted under the direction of the city's head gardener John McLaren, lined both sides of the road.¹¹²

The road appears to have remained unpaved until the late 1930s when most of it was paved through the efforts of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Based on photographs and official reports of the project, the paving involved removing the original oil and gravel surface between the drainage swales and replacing it with asphalt paving, and replacing much of the drainage system that had been damaged by roadway settling.¹¹³ (However, the lower trail along the former railroad grade remained unpaved through the eve of World War II, when a press photograph was taken documenting a slide along the roadbed partway between the old Land's End station building and the Coast Guard lookout station.)¹¹⁴

When the city undertook repairs to El Camino Del Mar in 1951 it apparently removed much of the WPA road base, especially in the slide area below the Veterans Administration Hospital. The damaged roadway was replaced with new asphalt paving. At the same time, the engineers added a 10-foot wide paved pedestrian walkway along the northern edge of the road. Photographs taken during the repair work indicate that the U-shaped concrete drainage swales along both shoulders were replaced in some areas during the reconstruction.¹¹⁵ (Figures 73 & 74)

This is the final configuration the road would maintain until its final closure in 1957.



Figure 76. Arrow indicating a slide on El Camino Del Mar below Fort Miley, 1941. View west. (SF Public Library AAB-9153)

3. Surviving Elements & Features

As described previously, the only two intact sections of El Camino Del Mar are the stub end of the road now used as a parking lot on the north side of the Palace of the Legion of Honor, and a portion adjacent to the parking lot of the USS San Francisco Memorial.

The section at the eastern end near the Palace of the Legion of Honor museum extends approximately 1,270 feet in length, as measured from the intersection of El Camino del Mar and Lincoln Park Blvd. near the museum's entrance. Along this section of road the asphalt paving and U-shaped concrete swales remain intact on both sides of the roadbed, together with portions of the pedestrian walk along the northern edge. In places, the asphalt has been extended over the northern shoulder of the original road to provide additional vehicle parking but burying the swales, which are still visible through the

paving. The road and paving falls away just past the vehicle barricade at the western terminus below the Veterans Administration Hospital.

The section at the western end near the USS San Francisco Memorial Parking lot extends approximately 680 feet in length, as measured from the parking barricade to the point where the convoluted asphalt paving becomes unusable as a driving surface. The U-shaped concrete swale is clearly visible along both edges of this roadway, along with the pedestrian path along the north side. The swale along the southern shoulder, however, is buried for much of its length due to rockslides from the Fort Miley hillsides above.

Part X. General Notes on Roads and Trails

Over the last century, the Lands End area has sprouted a spaghetti-like network of roads, train tracks, and trails, leading to confusion among both visitors and park planners. (See Figure 77 for the location of the major features.) Following are some general notes and observations on the evolution of these routes:



Figure 77. Aerial view of Lands End circa 1926 showing historic road and trail features (Staples Photos)

Ferries & Cliff House Railway right-of-way (1888-1905) As described at length earlier in this report, the F&CH route formed the original roadway around the Lands End area. From the earliest days it was plagued by washouts and continually rebuilt by the original operators and its subsequent owner, the United Railroads of San Francisco. This steam train route was later rebuilt as a double-tracked electric streetcar right-of-way. In 1905 this right-of-way was rebuilt as a streetcar route. See following.

United Railroads/Market Street Railway streetcar right-of-way (1905-1925) In 1905, the United Railroads of SF reconstructed the entire length of the F&CH steam train line and converted it to double-track electric streetcar operation. The URR and its successor, the

Market Street Railway, operated the #1 California Street line along this right-of-way until the disastrous washouts of February 1925. Following the washouts, the city maintained a hiking and equestrian route along the general alignment of the former right-of-way.

Today this former right-of-way, originally built for steam trains and adapted for streetcars, is informally referred to as the “Lower Trail” around Lands End.

El Camino Del Mar This roadway had its origins in the 1910s as part of a scenic automobile route that would link the 1915 Worlds Fair site at the Marina District with Ocean Beach via a coastal route through the Presidio, Sea Cliff, Lands End, and the Cliff House area. The first link opened in 1915, connecting the Presidio with today’s Lincoln Park. Construction continued over the next decade and was substantially completed around Lands End by 1925. El Camino Del Mar’s route (originally called Lincoln Boulevard or Harding Boulevard) roughly paralleled the existing streetcar right-of-way but at a higher elevation, running along the bluffs just below the Palace of the Legion of Honor and Fort Miley. Only at its western end did El Camino Del Mar finally merge with the rail bed near the intersection of Clement Street and 48th Avenue.

However, the same sliding geology that troubled and finally destroyed the steam train and streetcar lines also took its toll on El Camino Del Mar. Serious slides followed by lengthy closures of the road and expensive reconstruction work continued until 1957 when it was closed for good. Today, El Camino Del Mar’s asphalt roadbed is only partially intact between the USS San Francisco Memorial parking lot and the service road behind the Palace of the Legion of Honor. In the most damaged areas below the present Veterans Administration Hospital, the road is virtually unrecognizable.¹¹⁶

Today, this former scenic highway is informally referred to as the “Upper Trail” around Lands End.

Lands End Beach Access Road / Trail A third trail once made its way around Lands End, connecting Merrie Way with the cliffs and beaches at the tip of Lands End.

Although no written documentation has yet been found about this trail, it appears on maps and photographs of the area as early as 1916. Beginning at the northern end of Merrie Way, this trail followed a treacherous route along the sheer bluffs of Point Lobos and Lands End as it worked its way downhill towards the Lands End beach, which was sometimes also called the Mile Rock Beach.¹¹⁷

The original purpose of the trail/road is presently unknown, but it may have been constructed in conjunction with the Mile Rock Tunnel, a storm sewer constructed by San Francisco's Department of Public Works in the 1915 that tunneled under the Richmond District and Fort Miley. The Tunnel's outfall is only a few hundred yards west of the Lands End beach, and this researcher theorizes that the DPW built the trail as an access road to the remote area during tunnel construction. Once completed, the road probably continued to be used by DPW and Parks & Recreation crews headed to the beach. Aerial photographs indicate the road may have originally been wide enough for motor vehicles, but it would have been a perilous ride.

In 1942 the army occupied the Point Lobos area and constructed the two-gun installation named Battery Lobos adjacent to this former beach trail. The military likely used the trail for transporting building supplies, construction crews, the artillery pieces, ammunition, etc.¹¹⁸ Aerial photographs of Lands End following the war document the slow demise of the anonymous trail as parts of it disappeared to erosion, while other segments were buried under rubble poured down by the City from trails located higher up the cliffs.¹¹⁹

Today, only small segments of the trail can be identified, mostly in the area of the former Battery Lobos and close to its terminus at Lands End Beach.¹²⁰

The Civil Works Agency at Lands End

In late 1933, the federal government's Civil Works Agency (the predecessor to the WPA) hired unemployed workers to construct trails and carry out general repair work in the Lands End area. The project lasted barely four months and was designated San

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Francisco's "C.W.A Project #11." An excellent summary of the work they completed can be found in a four-page "Final Construction Report" filed on March 29, 1934 that includes the following information:

The work at Lands End consisted of "Developing a park, which consists of clearing, brushing, improving existing trails, grading new trails and roads, etc." The work was supervised by "Mr. Graybow, Engineer Park Commission" based on plans provided by the Park Commission.

- Work started on November 30, 1933 and closed on March 29, 1934. On average 250 men were employed at any time during of the project.
- Approximately 10,000 trees were planted over the whole area, and ice plant was planted on the slopes of all trails.
- All trails were practically doubled in width and graded. They were also covered with gravel obtained from the rock quarry on the project.
- Underbrush was cleared and refuse burned. Considerable garbage and rubbish was removed from the sea-side slopes of the road known as trail #2. [N.B., the former railroad right-of-way]
- Drains were laid out along the entire length of the road known as trail #2.
- Ten men spent "considerable time" cultivating the ground at the base of trees and shrubs previously planted.
- Thirteen men were employed for six weeks at the Palace of the Legion of Honor cleaning the columns of the building and re-graveling the paths surrounding the building.

- Two concrete catch basins 6' x 6' 8' deep were constructed. Also 8 concrete and brick manholes, as indicated.

Interestingly, the monthly reports include repeated references to requests for plans or maps for the project from the Park Commission to guide the work crews, leading to the theory that the work was done on an 'ad hoc' basis without much previous planning.

Completion reports also make tantalizing references to hedges, barbecue areas, and flower gardens planted by the workers. Unfortunately, no maps were included in the microfilmed records to show the exact locations of these improvements.¹²¹

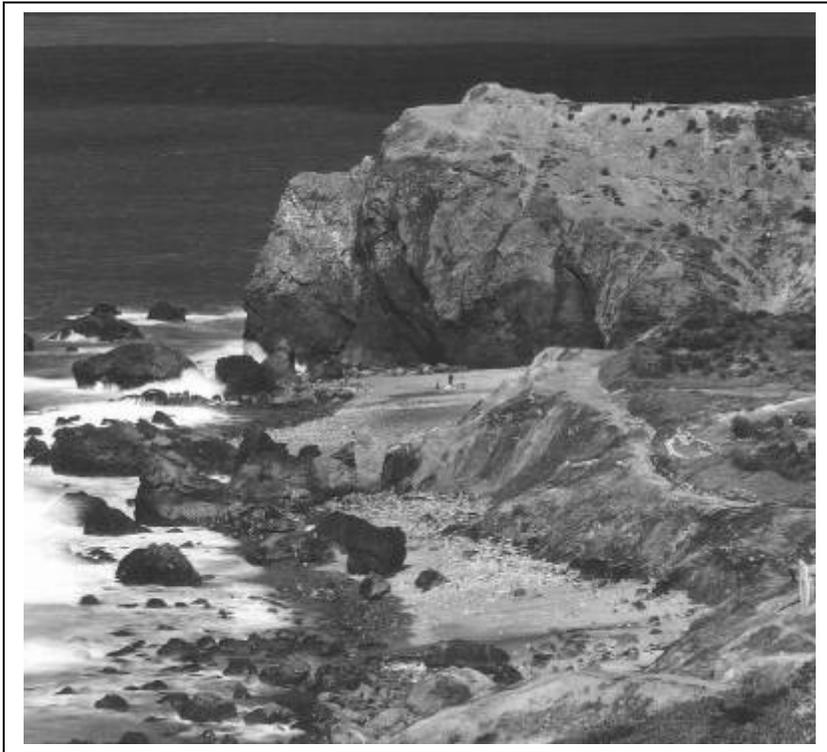


Figure 78. *Lands End Beach in 1937. Evidence of the CWA's trail work and landscaping efforts can be seen along Lands End ridge and the newly-widened trails at right (GG Bridge Coll.)*

Another photograph showing workers building a trail above Lands End beach appeared in the *San Francisco News* on December 12, 1933, with the accompanying caption: "Scenic Path Around Lands End Built by CWA Men." A U.S. Army aerial photograph taken in

November 1937 shows several newly-built trails crisscrossing the hillsides below Lincoln Park, presumably the results of these CWA crews' efforts.¹²² (Figure 79)

For an excellent and complete history of the CWA, its landscaping and park projects at Lands End, and the significance of the cultural forest at Lands End, see *Identification of Cultural Landscape Features at Lands End and Discussion of the Potential for Effects Related to Phase 1 of the Lands End Coastal Trail Project* prepared by landscape architect Denise Bradley as GGNPC Project No. 3102-501-12, October 4, 2005.



Figure 79. Aerial view of Lands End in November 1937 showing new trails leading down to the Lands End and beach at center. The earlier Lands End Beach Access Trail is also clearly visible at right. (U.S. Army, Golden Gate NRA, PAM Prints Collection)

Part XI. General Notes on Tree Cover

Lands End today presents an image of wild, wind blown cypress forests clinging to sheer coastal cliffs. This is a recent development of the landscape, though, since up until the early 1930s most of Lands End was notable for its barren, desolate character. One of the best ways to document these changes is to consult historic photographs taken of the area over the decades.

Beginning with the first operations of the Ferries & Cliff House Railway, photographers flocked to the Lands End area to document the railroad, but what they also recorded was an undeveloped landscape mostly notable for its coastal brush and rocky cliffs, topography similar in many ways to the Marin Headlands on the opposite side of the Golden Gate. The earliest aerial photographs taken in the 1920s reinforce this image, and reveal that major stands of trees were located at Lincoln Park golf course, Sutro Heights, and on the bluffs immediately northeast of Sutro Baths. The rest of the coastal bluffs stretching from Point Lobos eastward to Sea Cliff were still mostly scrub, especially along the streetcar right-of-way and below El Camino Del Mar.¹²³ (Figures 13, 24 and 77 are excellent representations of the original landscape.)

Outside of the formally landscaped areas of Sutro Heights and Lincoln Park Golf Course, the earliest known landscaping efforts in the area were associated with the development of El Camino Del Mar in the 1920s. This project is described in Anne Coxe Toogood's 1980 civil history for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area where she records:

In 1920 Lincoln Park was enlarged by the City's purchase of seventy-five acres of the Sutro estate lands lying north of the park from 33rd Avenue west to Sutro Baths [i.e., today's Lands End area]. Since the new acreage contained mostly hills, gullies and rock formations unsuitable for a golf course, [City Parks] Superintendent McLaren recommended that El Camino Del Mar be extended, and by 1924 the Park Commissioners had planted thousands of pine and cypress trees on the hillsides to beautify the

winding boulevard which was nearly completed that year with some \$75,000 appropriated by the Board of Supervisors out of the County Road fund.¹²⁴

Most of McLaren's planting areas were close by El Camino Del Mar, though, because up through the early 1930s the northern cliffs are still barren. A photograph of the newly finished road taken in 1925 shows landscaping and seedling trees planted on the uphill slopes below the Fort Miley garrison buildings.¹²⁵ (Figure 71)

In June 1932 in the depths of the Great Depression, Mayor Angelo Rossi convened a board led by the city's Welfare Council to plan the "restoration" of Land's End. The group, headed by some of San Francisco's leading activist women, urged the mayor to carry out a variety of improvements that, they stated, would both add to the city's beauty and also provide aid to the unemployed. An article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* relayed the ambitious plans:

Women of the city have a plan on foot for the restoration of Land's End, former scenic attraction of San Francisco. . . . Argument was made to the Mayor by the women that restoration of the famous spot will provide employment for jobless men and also will provide a recreation place for those who through lack of automobiles may be unable to reach scenic spots in and near the city.

OTHER IMPROVMENTS URGED

A safe and accessible trail or roadway for pedestrian use is embodied in the women's plans and the suggestion is made that later recreation park features such as outdoor grills for making hot coffee and roasting weenies be provided as well as nooks sheltered from the winds and suitable for picnic uses.¹²⁶

It's likely the "nooks sheltered from the winds" were the origin of the extensive tree planting programs that would follow in the next few years. Sometime shortly after the Council made their report, money for many of these improvements came in the form of the federally-funded Civil Works Administration (CWA) , one the Roosevelt administration's early Depression-era relief programs.

In late 1933 the government announced San Francisco was to receive funding for several CWA projects, including "park work" that included "grading and landscaping at Aquatic, McCoppin, Balboa, Golden Gate and Buena Vista parks, and Lands End, employing 1200 men for two months."¹²⁷ Later newspaper stories give a wider view of the CWA projects. In a December 1, 1933 article in the *San Francisco News* ("Federal Jobs Put 7900 On Payroll Here") there is a list of the number of men employed on different San Francisco area projects and lists "Land's End Park, 202." A map on p. 18 in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on December 15, 1933 shows the locations of projects in the city and number of men and women employed; Land's End is listed as employing 250 men.

As noted previously, the Lands End work was carried out between November 27, 1933 and March 29, 1934 when all CWA projects across the country were terminated. Microfilm reports at the National Archives document that about 10,000 trees were planted at Lands End during this four month period, although there is no mention of species, size, locations, etc. These reports only make passing reference to the CWA's tree planting efforts, but instead focus on the paths that were re-graded, paved, etc.¹²⁸

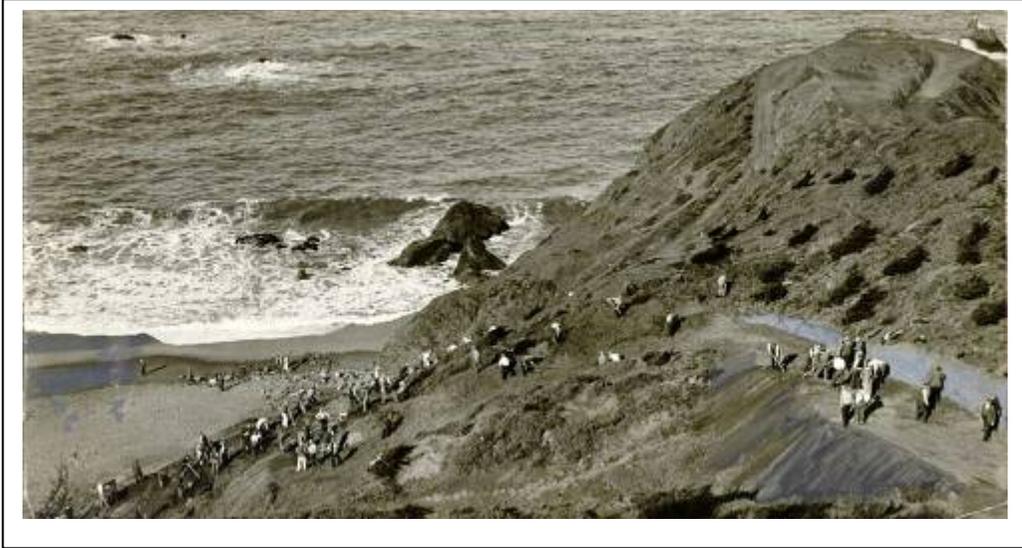
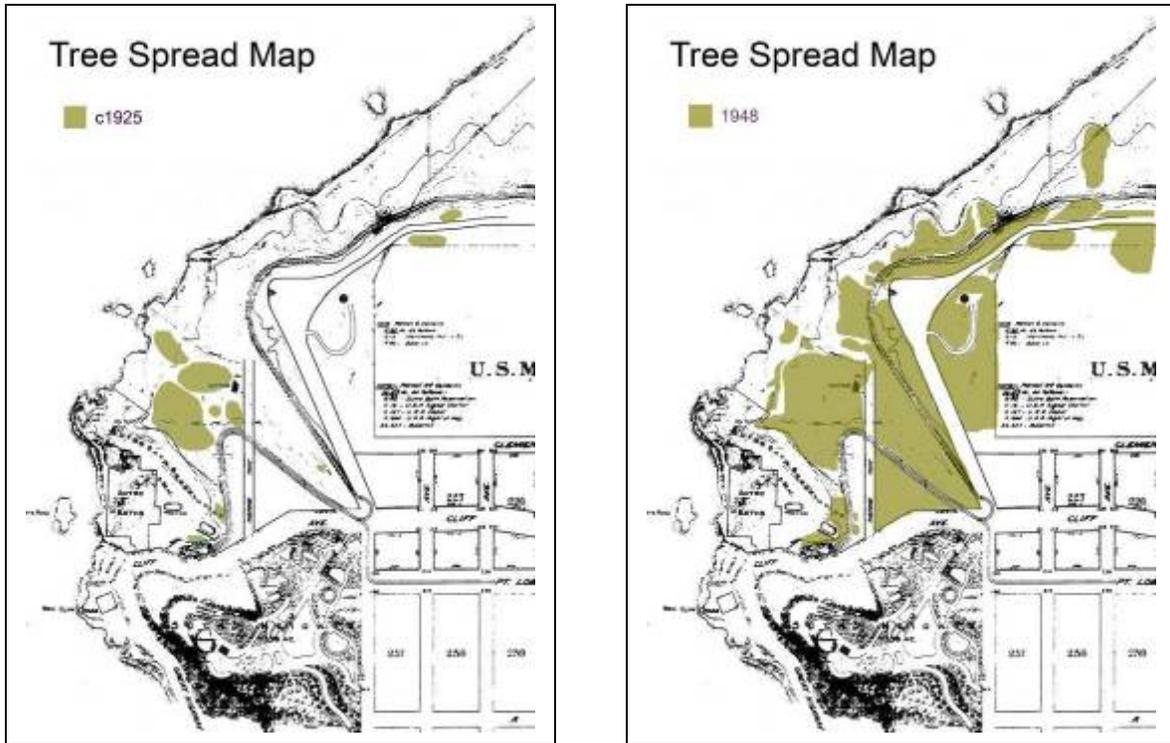


Figure 80. CWA workers above Lands End Beach, December 6, 1933. Newly-planted cypress trees are visible on the hill at right. (SF Public Library AAB-9256)

Based on historic photographs of Lands End taken before and after the CWA project, the locations of the planting efforts can be summarized as follows:

- The “Triangle” parcel directly east of Merrie Way and the adjacent lands extending northwest to the edge of the present Memorial Parking Lot.
- The strip of land west of El Camino Del Mar, between the curb line and the former streetcar right-of-way.
- The slopes below the Memorial Parking Lot
- The hillsides west of Fort Miley and surrounding the Marine Exchange lookout building (aka the “Octagon House”).
- The slopes of the Lands End promontory.
- The sheltered valley south of Lands End Beach lying between the beach proper and the Lands End Station site.

Within a few years, what had been an open landscape turned into a thick forest of fast-growing cypress trees. (Figures 81 & 82)



Figures 81 & 82. Comparison maps showing tree spread at Lands End before and after the 1933-1934 CWA landscaping projects. Maps based on historic aerial photographs in collection of Golden Gate NRA. (John Martini)

In 1999, Lands End researcher Wolfgang Schubert interviewed Mr. Richard Morrissey, a former occupant of the Marine Exchange Lookout in the Octagon building at Lands End. During the interview, Morrissey recalled that in the 1930s ‘WPA work crews’ showed up and began planting seedling trees around the Exchange building and on nearby slopes. In some cases, claimed Morrissey, the crews worked so rapidly they didn’t even bother to remove the wooden planter boxes protecting the trees’ roots.¹²⁹

(Although he gives the WPA credit for the trees, it’s likely that Mr. Morrissey was actually remembering the CWA workers who landscaped the grounds surrounding his family residence. As described earlier in this report, the WPA’s 1937 road building and landscaping efforts along El Camino Del Mar took place several hundred yards to the east of the Octagon Building.)

Other recommendations of the Council were apparently also enacted, including a network of trails constructed by the Civil Works Agency in 1933 and a convenience station and septic system built by the Board of Parks and Recreation at Lands End Beach in 1934.¹³⁰

As noted in the previous section, for a complete history of the CWA at Lands End and the significance of the cultural forest see *Identification of Cultural Landscape Features at Lands End and Discussion of the Potential for Effects Related to Phase I of the Lands End Coastal Trail Project* prepared by landscape architect Denise Bradley as GGNPC Project No. 3102-501-12, October 4, 2005.

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- ⁹⁸ Toogood, p 111-113

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- ⁹⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, “Scenic Road ‘Beyond Repair’”, 8 September 1956, p 3
- ¹⁰⁰ *San Francisco News*, “Site of Historic S.F. Landmark Sliding Away.” 7 April 1937, p 7, showing John McLaren inspecting slide located fifty feet west of old Lands End station; and photograph AAB-9153 in the collection of the San Francisco Public Library’s History Center showing another slide area in 1941.
- ¹⁰¹ Works Progress Administration, “Report of Completed or Discontinued Project: Harding Boulevard S.F.”, Revised 16 March 1937, NARA
- ¹⁰² Work Project #3679, “Harding Boulevard.” *Report on Progress of the Works Program – W.P.A., San Francisco, California*”, January 1938, p 87. Report in the collection of the California Historical Society, item #11024
- ¹⁰³ Works Progress Administration, “Report of Completed or Discontinued Project: Harding Boulevard S.F.”, Revised 16 March 1937, NARA
- ¹⁰⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle*, “Scenic Road ‘Beyond Repair’”, 8 September 1956, p 3
- ¹⁰⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle*, “Land’s End Drive Will Be Reopened Soon”, 4 April 1946, p 22
- ¹⁰⁶ Toogood, p 113
- ¹⁰⁷ Photograph captions on historic photos AAB-3499 and AAB-3503, SF PUBLIC LIBRARY collection.
- ¹⁰⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle*, “Scenic Road ‘Beyond Repair’”, 8 September 1956, p3
- ¹⁰⁹ *San Francisco News Call Bulletin*, photo caption “Huge ditch shown here ...,” 15 November 1957
- ¹¹⁰ Doss, Margo Patterson, “A Ramble to Land’s End” in *Bonanza Magazine*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 17 January 1962, p 20
- ¹¹¹ Allison, Joe, “Our Most Beautiful Road – Sealed for 7 Years.” *San Francisco News Call Bulletin*, 13 November 1963, p 3
- ¹¹² Various photographs in the Department of Public Works Collection, San Francisco Public Library. This collection, referred to simply as “the DPW albums” was still uncatalogued at the time this report was written. Photographs documenting the construction of El Camino del Mar through current GGNRA lands are numbered as follows: 8809; 8861; 9031; 9237; 9239; 9562; 9631; and 10018.
- ¹¹³ Works Progress Administration, “Report of Completed or Discontinued Project: Harding Boulevard S.F.”, Revised 16 March 1937, NARA
- ¹¹⁴ Historic photo AAB-9153, SF PUBLIC LIBRARY collection
- ¹¹⁵ Historic photographs AAB-3499 and AAB-3503, SF PUBLIC LIBRARY collection
- ¹¹⁶ Toogood, p 111-114.
- ¹¹⁷ Rand-McNally map of San Francisco, 1916, and aerial photograph of Lands End c1926 on page 52 of *San Francisco’s Ocean Beach*, Arcadia Publishing/Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, 2003.
- ¹¹⁸ U.S. Navy Photograph, “View of Pt Lobos Reserve.”
- ¹¹⁹ Photographs of the Lands End area dated 1948, 1955 and 1958 in the collection of Pacific Aerial Surveys; and in the California Coastal Photographic Project, 2004.
- ¹²⁰ Site visit
- ¹²¹ Microfilm roll WPA B-86, NARA
- ¹²² US Army photo dated 3 November 1937, Presidio Army Museum Collection, PARC, GOGA
- ¹²³ US Army aerial photo, 19 September 1928, GOGA 3113, PARC, GOGA
- ¹²⁴ Toogood, volume 2, p. 112-113
- ¹²⁵ Photograph of El Camino Delmar dated 20 October 1925, in DPW Albums, SF Public Library
- ¹²⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle*, “S.F. Welfare Group Launches Drive for Restoration of Lands End”, 1 June 1932, p 1
- ¹²⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 November 1933, p 3, col 1.
- ¹²⁸ Email correspondence, Denise Bradley to author, 29 September 2005
- ¹²⁹ Schubert, Wolfgang. Conversation on 20 January 2005, San Francisco.
- ¹³⁰ Toogood, p 114

Ocean Terrace, 1890 – 1920

A Physical and Sociological History

Introduction

Ocean Terrace was a short-lived -- but vibrant -- commercial and residential street located near San Francisco's famous Cliff House. Situated on the northwest corner of what is today Pt. Lobos Avenue and El Camino Del Mar, the one-block street was barely two hundred yards long and consisted of a large commercial block with six storefronts, and four smaller wood-frame buildings adjacent to the large structure. Designed as a sort of 19th century "strip mall", the ground floors of Ocean Terrace held restaurants, saloons, curio shops, photo galleries, and other amusements geared towards visitors arriving at the Sutro Baths and Cliff House area. Residences occupied the upper floors.

This Special History Report is designed to give background and context to the Ocean Terrace neighborhood, and to document its physical development. It will also provide information on the sociological makeup of the street, its residents, and the activities that took place along its sidewalks and within its walls.

The tiny street was located directly across from the lion-flanked main entry gate to Sutro Heights, and faced squarely the train depot on 48th Avenue where passengers debarked from the Ferries & Cliff House Railroad headed for the Cliff House, Sutro Heights and Sutro Baths. Ocean Terrace's businesses were clearly situated to separate arriving and departing train passengers from their change. Also, the presence of five liquor establishments on a street only 600 feet long attests to the hearty drinking abilities of early-day San Franciscans.

Several of the storekeepers and their families lived upstairs above their shops, along with numerous single males who stayed with them as boarders. A working class

neighborhood, the proprietors and residents of Ocean Terrace were almost exclusively white male Europeans. Approximately 80% were recent immigrants to the United States.

In 1909 Ocean Terrace was renamed “Sunset Terrace” by a City Street Commission tasked with making sense out of the similar-sounding street names in San Francisco. Ocean Terrace was apparently being confused with nearby Ocean Boulevard (today’s Great Highway) and the much-larger Ocean Avenue located several miles to the southeast. In its waning days, the stubby street was often referred to simply as “48th Avenue” on many maps and directories. The entire street and all its buildings were part of the Estate of Adolph Sutro, and were referred to in the 1910 appraisal of the Estate as simply “Improvements on the west side of railroad right-of-way.”¹

City directories for San Francisco as well as U.S. Censuses record the various businesses and tenants of Ocean Terrace up through its demise around 1920. At some point in 1918, for reasons likely related to wartime restrictions on liquor sales, all the residents except two families vacated the street and moved to other San Francisco addresses and took up new careers. The street itself (under whatever name one searches) disappears from subsequent city maps and directories after 1918. The last residents left around 1920

Today, the site of Ocean Terrace is simply an overgrown street corner across from the concrete lions flanking the entrance gate to Sutro Heights. Administered by the National Park Service’s Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), the Ocean Terrace site is proposed for new landscaping and trail improvements as part of an overall development plan for the Sutro District – Lands End District of the park.

In 2005 this author prepared an “Abbreviated Cultural Landscape Report” for the National Park Service and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy documenting the physical evolution of the Lands’ End and Merrie Way areas of GGNRA. Due to potential impacts on the Ocean Terrace site during the proposed rehabilitation and trail work, I was requested to expand on my original research to learn more about the physical and cultural histories of this vanished streetscape.

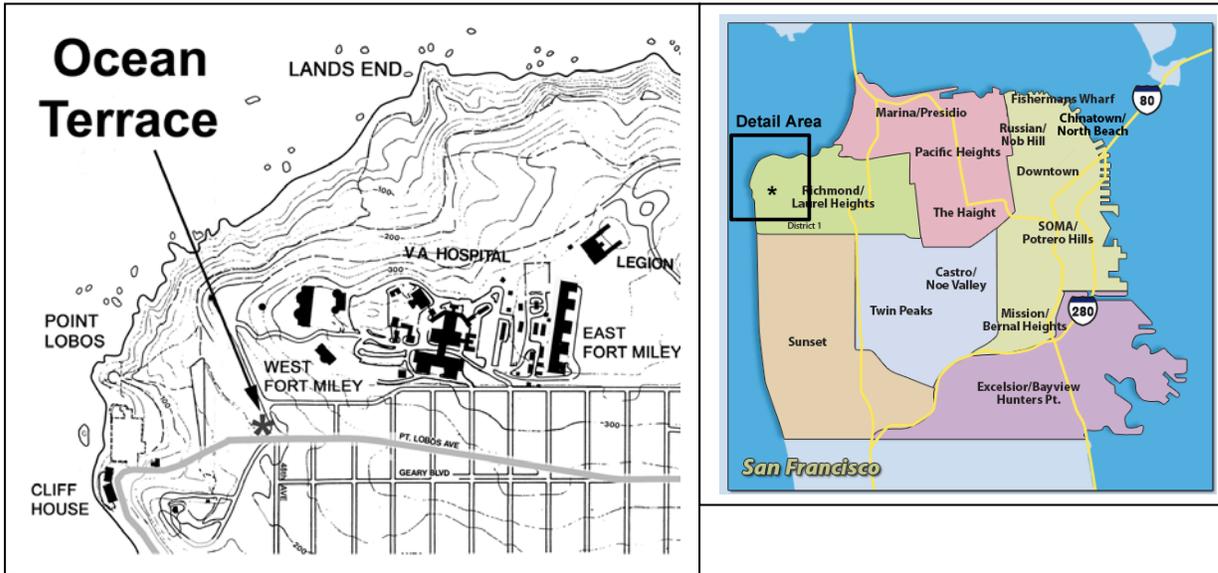


Figure 1. Locator map showing Ocean Terrace in the extreme northwest corner of San Francisco

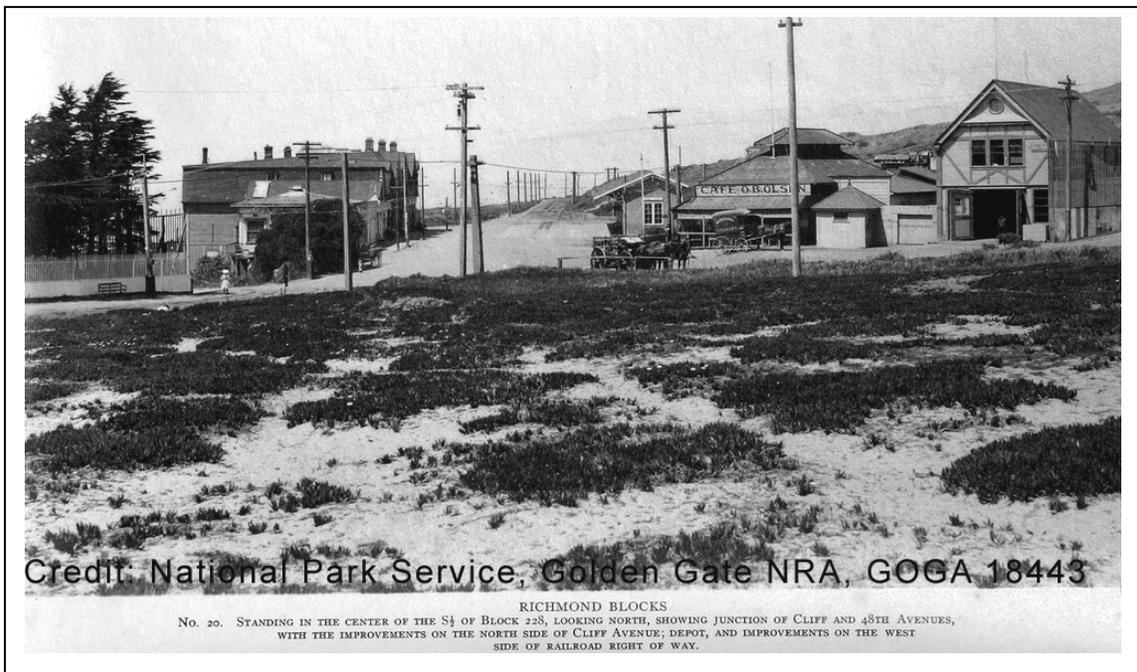


Figure 2. Ocean Terrace in 1910, viewed from the location of today’s Seal Rock Inn. The steam train had been replaced by an electric car line by this time, and the “Cliff Line” streetcar tracks and its 48th Avenue depot are at center. The trees and white fence at far left are part of Sutro Heights. (GOGA 18443)

Part I. Background & Context

The origins of Ocean Terrace are inexorably tied in with the legendary Ferries & Cliff House steam train line that wound its way around the Lands End cliffs beginning in 1888. Both Ocean Terrace and the Ferries & Cliff House had their inception in the fertile mind of Adolph Sutro, the engineer/entrepreneur who owned much of western San Francisco during the late 19th century.

Adolph Sutro made his original fortune by developing a ventilation and ore-removal shaft for the Comstock silver mines in Nevada. Called the “Sutro Tunnel”, it was a marvel of engineering that earned Adolph Sutro millions of dollars at the time of its sale. Sutro moved to San Francisco in the early 1880s and began purchasing real estate in the largely undeveloped “outside lands” of the City located west of Divisadero Street. Among other pieces of desirable realty, Sutro purchased the Cliff House in 1881. Shortly afterwards, he decided to build his residence on the rocky hill across the road, which was the highest promontory in the vicinity and that commanded a sweeping view of the Golden Gate, the Marin Headlands, and Ocean Beach.

Sutro’s modest home was eventually surrounded by acres of lush gardens coaxed from the sand dunes and ornamented with statuary, hedge mazes, and other Victorian attractions. He grandiosely named his estate “Sutro Heights” and opened its paths and sheltered overlooks to visitors. A major problem, though, was that the Heights lay at the extreme western edge of the city and reaching it was a challenge for people without personal carriages or the means to rent one.

The closest public transit terminated many blocks away at the terminus of the Park & Ocean Railroad at the corner of Balboa Street and La Playa Avenue. Constructed in 1883, this little railroad ran from the Haight-Ashbury along today’s Lincoln Way and

terminated near the Seal Rock House on Ocean Beach. Passengers getting off the train still faced a several block uphill walk to Sutro Heights, though. And its cost was prohibitive for many people, since reaching the beach from downtown involved paying two fares totaling 10¢. These factors led Sutro to begin work on his own railroad to carry people to his seaside attractions safely and cheaply.

Sutro's solution was to finance his own competing street railway line that would offer transportation at a lower fare. In 1884 a franchise for building a railroad out California Street and around Land's End was issued to Adolph's cousin, Gustav Sutro, but it was widely reported that Adolph was actually behind the railroad. He had also invested \$40,000 of his own funds on preliminary grading and other work at his end of the proposed line.

Sutro and his cousin sold the franchise in 1886 to the Powell Street Railroad Company with the important stipulation that the company must provide service from the downtown area to Cliff House for a single five-cent fare. Construction was pushed vigorously and service began in 1888, with the promised five-cent fare a reality.²

The inner terminus of the Ferries & Cliff House was near the corner of California Street and Presidio Ave., where a roundhouse and rail yards were located on the site presently occupied by the Jewish Community Center. The outer terminus for the railroad was a gable-roofed wood depot near the corner of 48th and Pt. Lobos Avenues, directly across from the main entrance to Sutro Heights and about three blocks away from the Cliff House itself. With its large freight doors and overhanging roof, the little structure looked more like a rural railroad station than an urban street railway terminal. (See Figure 3 & Figure 10.)



Figure 3. *Ferries & Cliff House train at 48th Avenue / Sutro Heights depot circa 1900. (Bay Area Electric Railroad Association)*



Credit: National Park Service, Golden Gate NRA, Interp Coll

Figure 3A. *Ferries & Cliff House locomotive parked on a spur track south of the depot. The “Sutro Heights Casino” in the background was located on the northeast corner of today’s El Camino Del Mar and Pt. Lobos Avenue. (Golden Gate NRA, Interpretation Collection)*

Part II. Physical Development of Ocean Terrace

Although no actual construction date has been found, Adolph Sutro built his first retail structures along Ocean Terrace across from the depot sometime before 1891. This date can be extrapolated based on the photographs taken by San Francisco photographer A.J. McDonald, who was active in San Francisco during 1890 and 1891. One of McDonald's early photographs shows the ornate entrance gate to Sutro Heights, with the rooftop of the main Ocean Terrace building just visible in the distance. (See Figure 4.)

Given Adolph Sutro's propensity for commercial development, and considering his expenditure of \$40,000 on improvements to his end of the steam train line, it's very likely Ocean Terrace was built contemporaneously with the Ferries & Cliff House line's opening in 1888 to take advantage of the arriving passengers.



Figure 4. Main gate, Sutro Heights, by A.J. McDonald, 1891. The rooftop of Ocean Terrace is just visible to the left of the gatekeeper's house. (Bancroft Library, Roy Graves Collection)

The Ocean Terrace complex first appears on a map of the Cliff House area in an undated souvenir album of Sutro Heights printed around 1890. This cartoon-type map shows a

single, rectangular building oriented parallel to the steam train tracks and directly opposite the 48th Avenue depot building. (See figure 5.)³

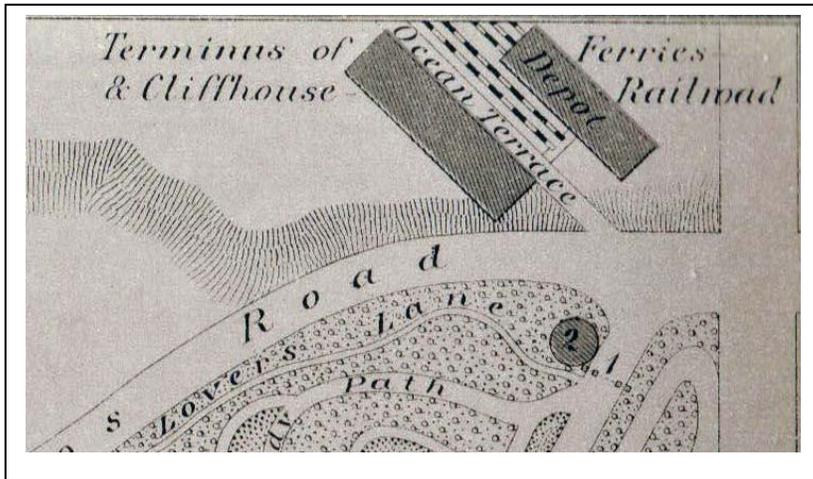


Figure 5. Detail from stylized map in “Album of Sutro Heights” showing the train depot and Ocean Terrace, c1890. (Christine Miller Collection)

The first detailed depiction of Ocean Terrace appears in the 1899-1900 Sanborn Fire Map of San Francisco, which shows a complex of four wooden buildings arrayed in a northwest-southeast alignment with their entrances oriented east towards the train depot. The largest of these was a two-story ‘commercial block’ structure located at the northwest end of the street that contained six store fronts facing the tracks, and large restaurant in the rear. (This building, measuring approximately 100’ x 65’, was apparently the same structure shown in the 1890 guide book map.) The storefronts were given street numbers 1 through 6 running from south to north.

In addition to the commercial block, three smaller wooden buildings had been appeared at the southwest end of the street, presumably built after the publication of the 1890 album. From north to south these structures were, respectively, a storefront, an undetermined building, and a residence. The buildings were given letter designations H, I and J rather than normal street numbers, possibly because they were late additions to the street.⁴ (See Figure 6)

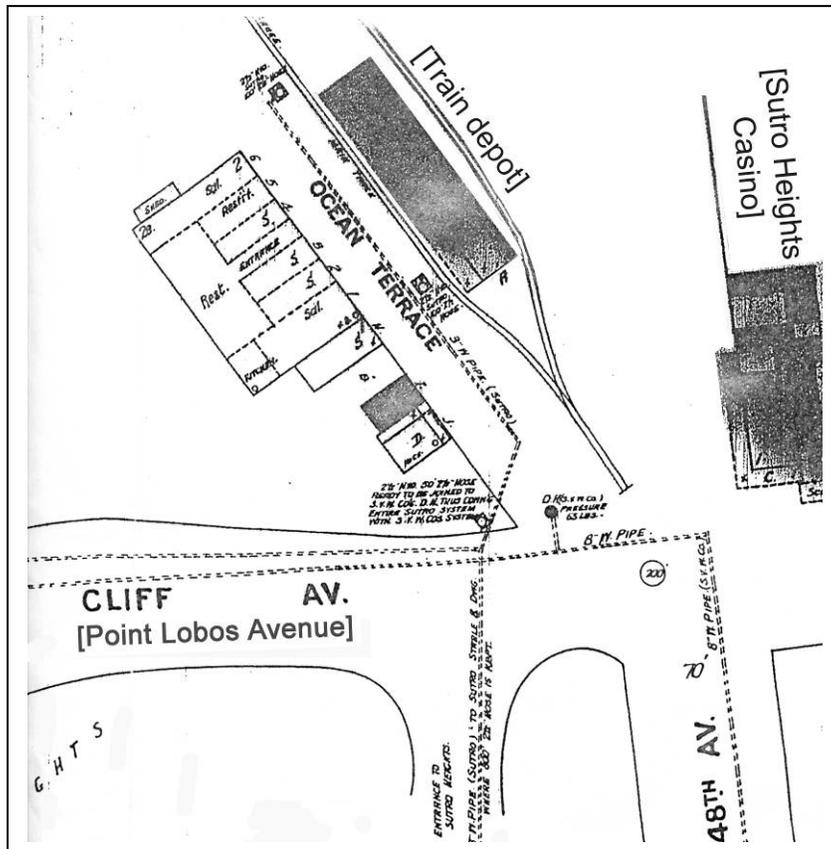


Figure 6. Sanborn Fire Map showing layout of Ocean Terrace, 1899-1900. Author's notations are shown in brackets. (San Francisco Public Library)

(Curiously, although both the 1890 cartoon map clearly shows the street labeled “Ocean Terrace”, the City Directories would not include that street name until the 1892 edition.⁵) Across the street from Ocean Terrace, at the northeast corner of 48th Avenue and Pt. Lobos Avenue, stood several additional commercial and residential buildings that were part of Sutro’s holdings. These structures fronting on Pt. Lobos Boulevard included a self-proclaimed “Sutro Heights Casino,” several sheds, a dwelling, and the San Francisco Fire Department’s “Chemical Station 8.”⁶

A photograph taken in 1903 of three early automobiles parked outside the Casino shows a portion of Ocean Terrace in the background and corresponds precisely to the Sanborn Map. (See Figure 7) In this view, the first building at the southwest end of the street was a two-story wood structure with the prominent name “MECCA” painted on its sides. Next in line were a one-story building with a painted sign reading “CLIFF HOUSE

GROC[ERY]”, an empty lot, and a 1½ -story gable-ended building with Queen Anne style detailing. At the right end was the commercial block, which is sizably taller than the other structures, with a slight Mansard roof, dormer windows, and several brick chimneys. (See Figure 8)



Figure 7. Early automobiles parked in front of the Sutro Heights Casino, 1903. The buildings along Ocean Terrace are directly behind the center auto. The Firth Wheel located on Merrie Way rises in the background behind the Mecca building. (John O’Neill Collection)



Figure 8. Detail of 1903 photograph showing Ocean Terrace. The man at extreme right is believed to be Herman Schmidt, proprietor of the Sutro Heights Casino. (John O’Neill Collection)

It's interesting to note that the three smaller buildings displayed widely different architectural styles (especially MECCA), indicating they may have been brought to the site from other locations. Moving wood-frame buildings was a common practice in late 19th century San Francisco, and such an undertaking would have been a simple matter for Adolph Sutro's workers. Relocating buildings was also an economical way to increase the value of one's real estate holdings.

The Mecca building, with its tall columns and vaguely Middle Eastern architecture, is especially intriguing. Although listed as a residence on all the Sanborn maps, the structure definitely looked as if it served another purpose. Perhaps it did. Sutro had continued to expand his amusements near the Sutro Heights in the years following the opening of the steam train line, and constructed such attractions as Sutro Baths (1894) and a "chateau-style" Cliff House (1896). As part of this development program, Sutro had purchased numerous rides and sideshow attractions from the 1894 Midwinter Fair in Golden Gate Park and relocated them to a "Pleasure Ground" above the Baths on the site of today's Merrie Way, only a block west of Ocean Terrace.⁷ It's possible that the Mecca building was one of these relocated structures put to a new use.

Alternately, Mecca could have been a meeting hall for one of the popular 19th century "secret societies": the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, a branch of the Freemasons, founded in New York City in the 1870s. At the turn of the last century, meeting halls utilized by Shriners frequently bore names such as "Mecca Temple", and close examination of historic photos reveals that the Mecca name boards on three sides of the building included stars and crescent moon motifs, which are international symbols of Shriners. However, if the building did indeed serve as a Shrine temple, why it was consistently identified on the Sanborn maps as a 'residence' is unknown.⁸

The next edition of Sanborn maps was prepared in 1905 and shows Ocean Terrace little-changed from the 1899-1900 version. The primary differences are minor changes in

building uses (such as the subdivision of one storefront into two); the replacement of the grocery store by a photo gallery; and the closing of the large restaurant that had occupied the rear portion of the commercial block.⁹ As will be discussed later, numerous male boarders were living on Ocean Terrace at this time, and it's speculated that the former restaurant area (now unlabeled on the map) had been converted into bachelor apartments by 1905. (See Figure 9.)

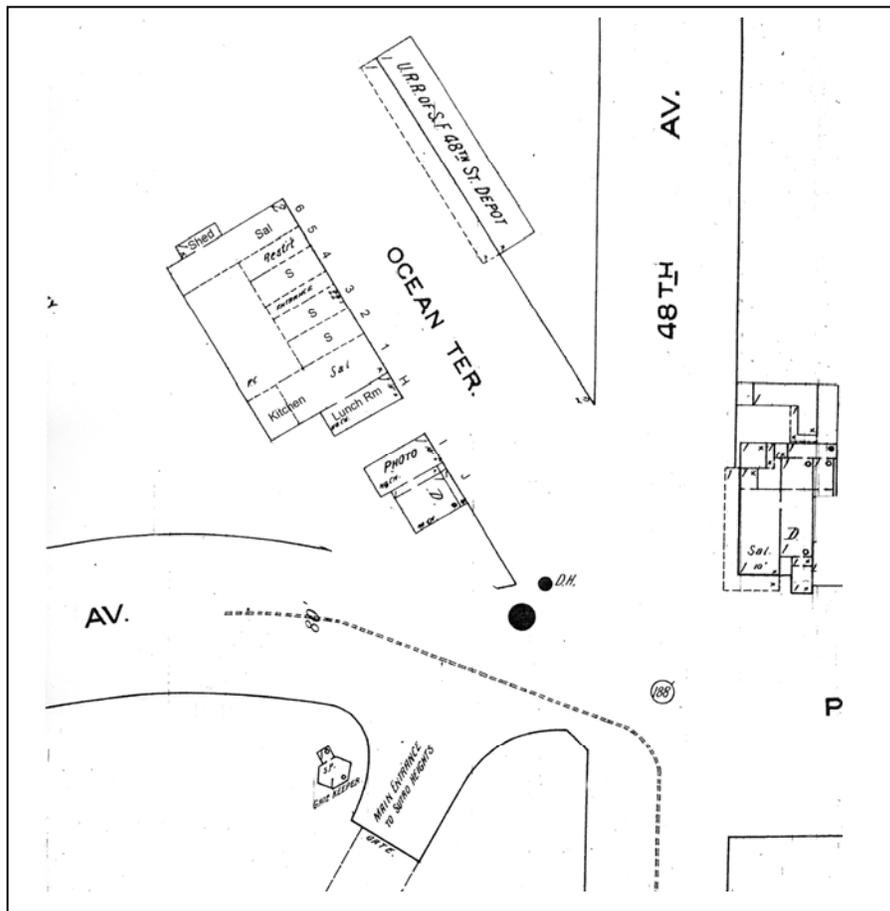


Figure 9. Sanborn Fire Map showing layout of Ocean Terrace, 1905. (SF Public Library)

A major technological change occurred on Ocean Terrace in 1905 when the Ferries & Cliff House steam train line was replaced by a new electric streetcar line designated “Cliff Line” operated by the United Railroads of San Francisco (URR). As part of this upgrade, the old narrow-gauge train tracks were removed and replaced by standard-gauge streetcar tracks, overhead power lines installed, and the long-neglected depot across from

Ocean Terrace totally remodeled by the URR to include both a waiting room and a residence for streetcar company employees. (Figures 10 and 11 show the depot before and after remodeling.)



Figure 10. 48th Avenue Depot prior to remodeling, 1905. Note the shadows cast on the depot and street by Ocean Terrace buildings out of view to the left. (SF Municipal Railway)



Figure 11. 48th Avenue Depot after remodeling. Photo taken 1921. (SF Public Library)

Photographs showing Ocean Terrace are rare, but a photo taken about this time from the depot shows a horse-drawn fire wagon passing a corner of the commercial block. (See Figure 12.) In this undated view, the wagon is passing the new streetcar tracks and the north end of the commercial block (street address #6), with the Firth Wheel visible in the background. Although the fire wagon was clearly the photographer's intended subject, the view also captures such building details as the Mansard roofline, the glass front of the Rohrs Brothers' saloon at #6, the awning over its windows, a nearby flagpole, and

(beneath the wagon) a board fence and shed adjacent to the main building. The original photo also gives clues to the shabby nature of Ocean Terrace: the flag is tattered, the saloon windows dirty, and the board fence and shed in disrepair.



Figure 12. Fire Department wagon passing Ocean Terrace, c1906 (John Martini Collection)

Ocean Terrace lost its name – at least formally – in 1909 when the San Francisco Street Naming Commission changed its designation to “Sunset Terrace.” Responding to complaints from the Post Office that mail was frequently misdirected due to repetitive or similar-sounding street names, the Commission decided that “Ocean Terrace” should be changed since it was so similar to “Ocean Avenue” and “Ocean Boulevard” -- much larger streets located elsewhere in the city. (Many of the street’s residents apparently ignored the new name and listed Ocean Terrace as their address in the 1910 census.) Seven years later the street’s name was changed once more, this time from Sunset Terrace to simply “48th Avenue.”¹⁰

In 1910 a large illustrated inventory of Adolph Sutro's estate was prepared that included several views of Ocean Terrace/Sunset Terrace. The most informative is a view looking northwest from the intersection of Pt. Lobos and 48th Ave. titled "Richmond Blocks No. 20" and showing, from left to right, Ocean Terrace, the URR streetcar right-of-way, and the remodeled train depot.¹¹ (See Figure 2.) This photograph also documents more of the commercial block at the north end of the row than any previous photograph and reveals that the structure had three gable-end facades facing the streetcar depot, each with its own brick chimney that probably signified a subdivision within the structure. (See detail below in Figure 13.)

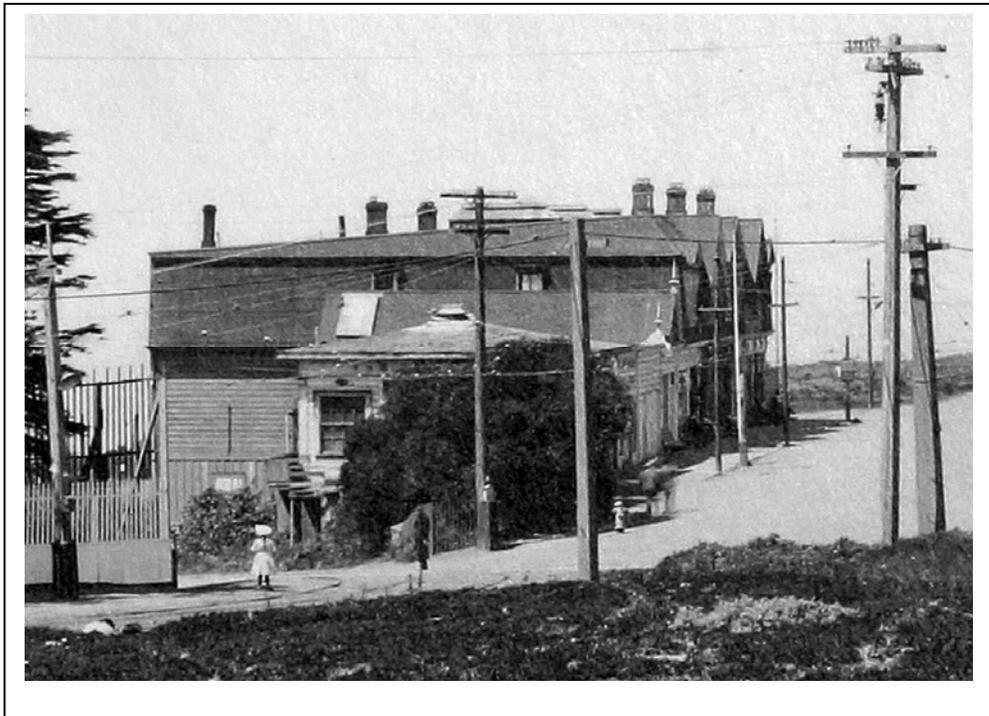


Figure 13. Ocean Terrace in 1910. Detail of photo titled "Richmond Blocks No. 20" from the Estate of Adolph Sutro. (See Figure 1 for a view of the entire photo.)

Another view from the 1910 Sutro Estate Inventory shows Ocean Terrace from the west and documents two lengthy rows of double-hung windows facing towards the Pacific Ocean.¹² A comparison of this photo with the floorplan on the Sanborn map reveals these windows were mostly in the original restaurant area, and must have provided diners with spectacular views overlooking the Sutro Baths and Cliff House. (See Figure 14.)

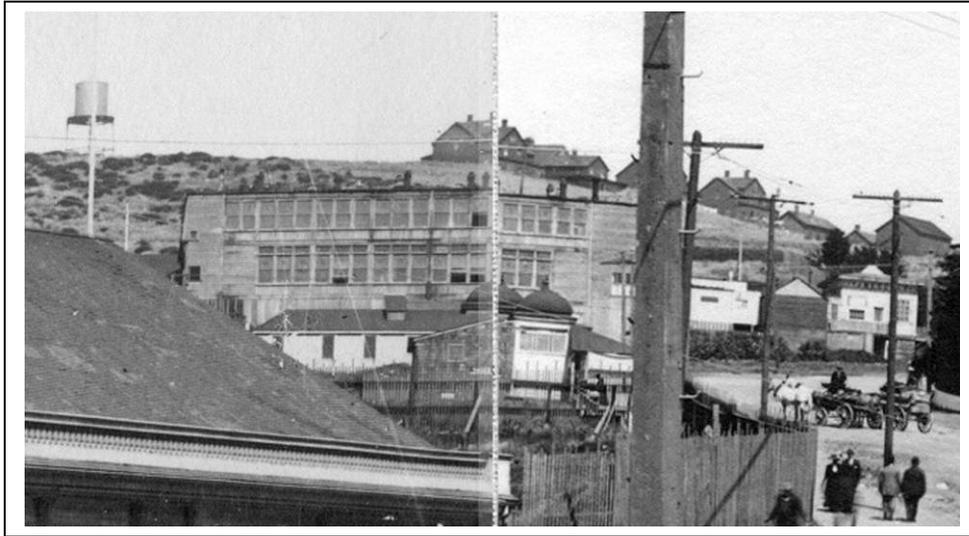


Figure 14. The west facade of Ocean Terrace as viewed from Point Lobos Road, 1910. Note the windows in the restaurant area of the large building. The smaller structures to the right were a lunch room (obscured by the telephone pole), a carpenter shop, a photo gallery, and the MECCA residence building. Army residences at Fort Miley are visible at top. (Sutro Library)

The appraiser of the Sutro Estate, a Mr. A.S. Baldwin, did not think much of Ocean Terrace or its potential, and described the street in a derogatory manner:

The only improvements of any value on the tract [the sand lots adjacent to Sutro Heights] are the buildings at the terminus of the car line on Ocean Terrace.... As a matter of fact I consider them undesirable whether this plan [building a subdivision] is carried out or not, and consequently I have placed no value on them, notwithstanding the fact that they are producing a rental of several hundred dollars per month.¹³

The 1913-1915 updates to the Sanborn Fire Map show Ocean Terrace/Sunset Terrace at its height of development.¹⁴ At this time, the street had expanded to include another wood frame building labeled “Carpenter” that occupied the formerly vacant lot between buildings H and I. (See Figure 15.) Given the street address “K”, this last building likely

a photography studio. The other five businesses – three restaurants and two saloons – had all closed down.

There are several possible explanations for this sudden exodus from the street and the buildings' subsequent demolition three years later. First, during the World War I the military was authorized by the Secretary of War to shut down liquor establishments located within a half-mile of any recruit training camp or military post. In July 1918 the Cliff House restaurant was forced to close down temporarily under this ruling due to its proximity to Fort Miley, and it's safe to assume that the liquor retailers along Ocean Terrace (which was even closer to the fort) were also shut down by the military authorities. The saloon keepers along the street likely moved elsewhere and found other occupations.¹⁶

Second, by 1918 the wooden buildings along Ocean Terrace were nearly forty years old, some perhaps even older. The Estate of Adolph Sutro, which still owned the complex, was probably reluctant to keep maintaining the aging building, especially if most of its retail tenants had been forced to close due to wartime liquor restrictions. Rather than hold onto the empty complex and continue to pay property taxes, the Estate may simply have decided it was more economical to evict the last tenants and tear down the structures. Finally, the looming specter of Prohibition (enacted on October 28, 1919) made it unlikely that Ocean Terrace's restaurants and bars would ever be fully occupied again.

This theory is further supported by the minimal value given to Ocean Terrace by the Estate's 1910 appraiser. In fact, Mr. Baldwin went so far as to consider the triangular-shaped parcel's value actually to be diminished by the buildings' presence. They were also impediment to his proposed residential development of the tract:

The terminus of the Cliff Line at 48th and Cliff Avenues was also considered by me objectionable. While it is true it makes business lots of a small portion of the property, it also makes so public [i.e., publicly

accessible] a large portion of it which is unfit for business, that it would render it unattractive for residence purposes.¹⁷

Given the Estate's prejudice against its existence, it's little wonder Ocean Terrace was eventually torn down. No exact date for the demolition of Ocean Terrace has been found, but photographs taken during a 1922 reconstruction of Pt. Lobos Avenue reveal that all the buildings on the site had been demolished and the land left bare. Only the streetcar depot for the Cliff Line still remained across the street. (See Figure 16.)

Based on census information from 1920 and historic photographs taken in 1922, it is believed Sutro Estate evicted the remaining tenants and demolished the Ocean Terrace complex sometime in late 1920 or 1921.

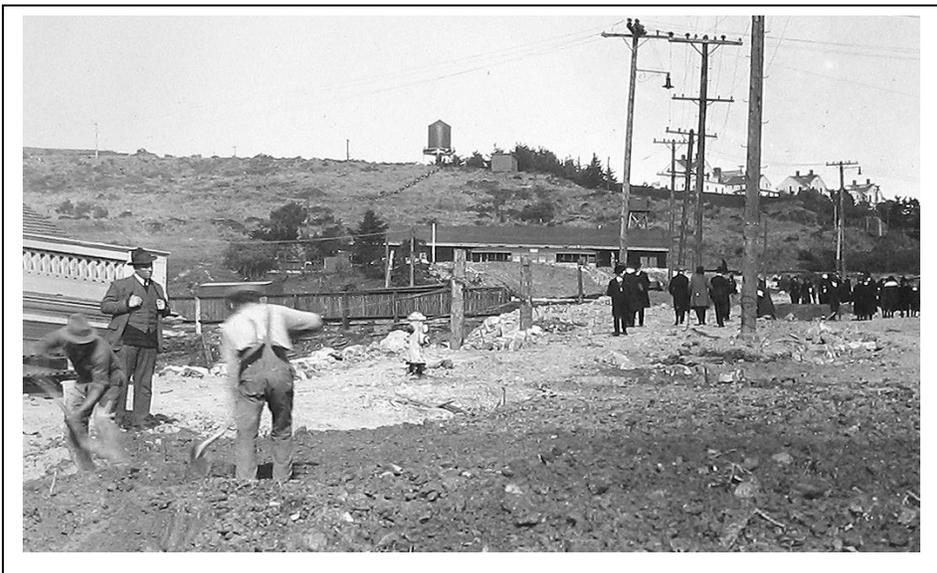


Figure 16. *Workers repaving Pt. Lobos Avenue, 1922. The 48th Ave. depot and the former site of Ocean Terrace are at center. Compare this view to Figure 14, especially the location of the water tank at Fort Miley. (SF Public Library, DPW Collection)*



Figure 17. Former site of Ocean Terrace, August 10, 1942. Compare to Figure 1. The abandoned right-of-way of the #1 streetcar line is visible at extreme right. The tracks at center lead to the Sutro streetcar depot above Sutro Baths. (Municipal Railway Coll.)



Figure 18. Former location of Ocean Terrace, 2006. This is the same general perspective as Figures 2 and 17. (John Martini)

Physical Description & Characteristics

No detailed construction drawings have been located of this area, but based on historic photographs and Sanborn Fire Maps, we know that at its height in 1913-1915 the Ocean Terrace complex consisted of five wood-frame structures, all arranged along the west side of the street facing the United Railroads streetcar depot. The largest of these buildings was a commercial block measuring approximately 100'x65' that in its original configuration contained six storefronts with upstairs living spaces.

The smaller buildings on the street varied in size from 20' x 15' to 30' x 15', and apparently contained only a single business or residence each. Although all the buildings probably had cellars beneath their floors, only the northwest corner of the commercial block had an actual basement area, as designated on the Sanborn maps.¹⁸

Photographs taken during the widening of Point Lobos Avenue in the early 1920s show no evidence of Ocean Terrace's prior existence, leading to the theory that the buildings were built on the simplest of foundations. On-going site investigations have confirmed this theory, and archaeologists have located the brick piers that supported the commercial block. As of this writing, however, no foundations or piers have been located for the smaller buildings located south of the commercial block.¹⁹

Surviving Elements & Features

There are no physical remains of the buildings that comprised Ocean Terrace. However, in the early 1980s the historian for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area discovered a large rubbish dump on the site, containing broken bottles, plates and other debris. Speculating that the dump was associated with nearby Sutro Heights, the site was quickly evaluated and reburied by the park's archeologist to prevent damage to the resource by "bottle hunters."²⁰ A site visit in 2004 by the current park archeologist reconfirmed the existence of the trash deposit, and several bottle and ceramic fragments and coal hunks

were recovered from the site consistent with commercial restaurant and saloon activities known to have taken place at Ocean Terrace.²¹

An archaeological survey of Ocean Terrace was carried out by a team of archaeologists and students from Sonoma State University in July 2006. Following are some observations on the buildings that formerly stood on the site provided by lead archaeologist Michael Meyer:

The 1899-1900 Sanborn map indicates the main building is two stories in front with a basement in rear. Photographs indicate that the first-story was at street level. Due to the slope toward the ocean there was sufficient space for even the Mecca building to have a large basement area, probably at least 6 ft. high.

The photograph from the rear [Figure 14] indicates an opening or doorway under the Mecca building. Shrubs obscure the opening under the Carpenters building from the 1915 Sanborn. A pole blocks the edge of the store and adjacent main building. Just behind a kiosk dome there appears to be a doorway or window in the bottom of the main building. There appears to be a matching doorway at the other end of the building. The fenestration of the lateral sections of the main building is asymmetrical. The double windows on the first floor (right) may be for the Kitchen as shown on the early Sanborn map. At the opposite end there are single openings on each floor. The saloons at each end do not have the panoramic windows. The first floor windows of the main restaurant do not extend across the entire width of the floor. The shed from the early Sanborn is shown at the left. The shed is covered in the 1915 Sanborn. The Carpenter's building is in the photo.

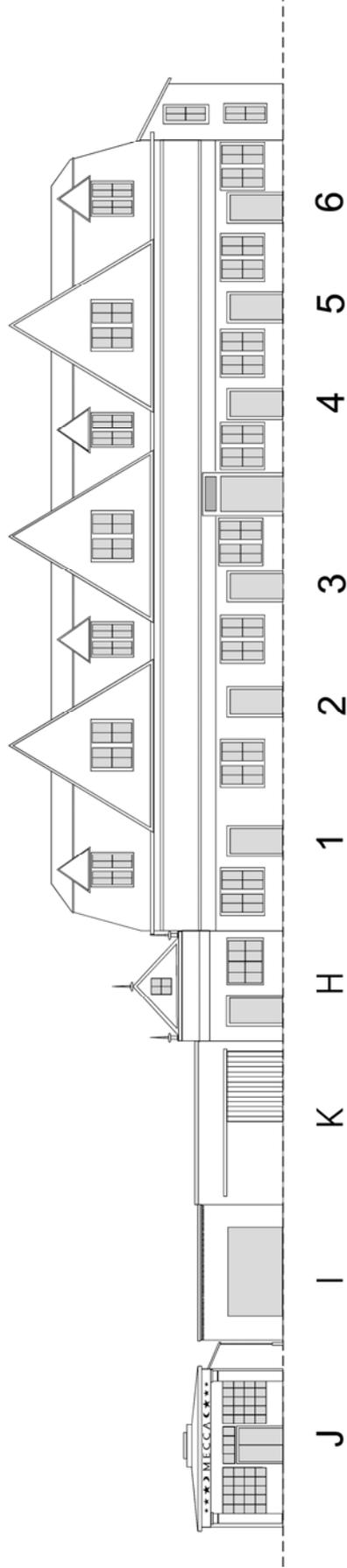
The photograph with a girl standing on the tracks [Figure 13] indicates there is a door or window behind a shrub in the side basement of the

main building. There are two windows in the side of the second story as well. This view also provides a view of the Mecca building further indicating almost a full story below the rear of the building.

The 1915 Sanborn indicates an addition over the shed on the side of the main building. At that end the rear of the saloon is listed as a Dining Room. Perhaps the side addition is an enclosed deck above the shed, associated with the new dining room or for housing boarders. The large restaurant is now listed as a Hall. Presumably the hall includes both stories and was more profitable for occasional rentals, rather than as a restaurant. The former kitchen is shown as a dwelling.

The photographs of both the Ocean Terrace buildings and the rest of Sutro's enterprises show a contrast between the facades of buildings for public amusement and starkness of practical design for profit. The gabled and mansard roofs at the front of the main building slope to a shed roof at the rear above a monolithic wall of windows. A hedge minimally hides the rear of the smaller buildings. Further down Cliff Avenue a wooden fence shields the space between the kiosks and entrance to the baths. Upon arrival by train to Ocean Terrace, visitors would see the attractions such as the Firth Wheel and disembark in front of buildings with interesting architectural detail. They could walk down the street past the onion dome kiosks or cross through the fanciful gate into the gardens. A photograph taken from the intersection with the electric train tracks presents an inviting view of kiosks, the ocean, and amusements beyond. In contrast, those walking back up Cliff Avenue got a view of the less appealing side of the Ocean Terrace buildings. Presumably, the plan was to have extracted the visitors' money by this time.²²

Ocean Terrace, circa 1915



Part III. Commercial enterprises on Ocean Terrace, 1892-1920

Tracing the evolution of the commercial enterprises lining Ocean Terrace is a challenging task, requiring constant cross-referencing between City of San Francisco Directories, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, early phone books, and U.S. census records for 1900, 1910 and 1920. Complicating this process are additional challenges: The street's name changed three times between 1908 and 1916; at least two different street numbering systems were used; census takers frequently misspelled occupants' names and wrote down incorrect street numbers; and some residents gave their address as "Ocean Terrace" while others gave theirs "48th Avenue" or even "NW corner Cliff & 48th Ave" – all in the same annual directory. Finally, City Directories did not even include Ocean Terrace as a street until 1892 making it virtually impossible to identify tenants before that date.

As a result of the constraints, the following section only contains information on tenants confirmed to have operated businesses at specific addresses along Ocean Terrace. While other businesses also operated there, they have not yet been identified.

Alfred Kidd's Photo Studio

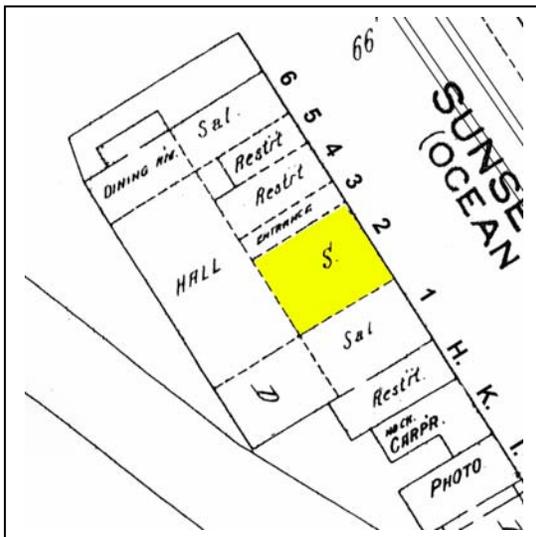


Figure 19. Location of Alfred Kidd's photo gallery at #2 Ocean Terrace.

The earliest (and longest-lived) establishment known to have operated on the street was a photography studio located at #2 Ocean Terrace that first appears in the City Directory for 1892. Originally operated by Rodney Jones, the studio was a tintype gallery that turned out quick “while-you-wait” photos for patrons. Jones later took on a partner, Luther Kennett, and the pair continued to operate the Ocean Terrace studio until 1904 when they moved operations to another studio on 49th Avenue. When they moved they turned over operations of the Ocean Terrace gallery to Alfred Kidd, an employee.

Kidd continued to operate the tintype gallery for sixteen years, first for Jones & Kennett and later as an independent proprietor. Like other proprietors on the street, he resided at the studio with his wife Priscilla and five boarders in 1910. His business survived to become one of the last two commercial operations on Ocean Terrace when it was finally demolished c1920.

It should be noted that Sanborn maps for 1905 and 1913-1915 show a second photo studio located further down the street in building “I”, the false-front building that previously housed a grocery store. This studio’s presence is also confirmed by the 1910 photograph of Ocean Terrace in the Sutro Estate. (See Figures 2 and 13.) A close examination of the original print shows a display rack of tintype photos set on the sidewalk outside the building at “I”. However, this second studio’s name and its proprietor have not yet been determined.

(The presence of two photography studios this close together was not unusual in the Cliff House area; two more studios were located down the street just west of the entrance to Sutro Baths, while still another operated on the parapet of Sutro Heights. Tintype photos were very popular keepsakes at the turn of the last century.)

Rohrs Brothers' Restaurant and Saloon

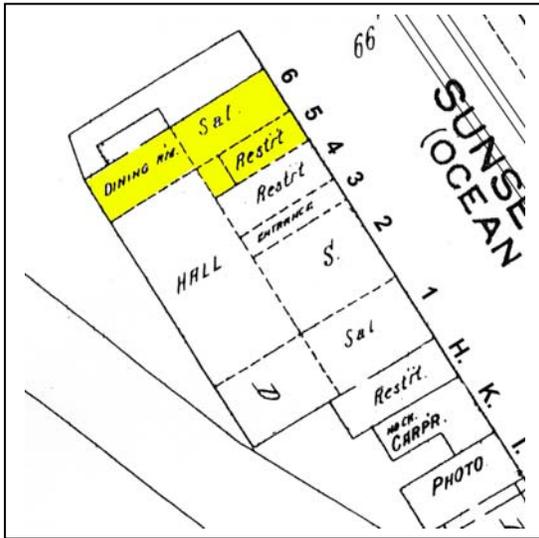


Figure 20. Location of Rohrs Brothers' restaurant and saloon at 5-6 Ocean Terrace

The next longest-lived operation was a restaurant-saloon first operated by John Henry Rohrs and Henry Reincke at #5 and 6 Ocean Terrace. Beginning operation in 1895, Rohrs & Reincke originally listed their restaurant address at “Sutro Baths”, but by 1901 John Henry Rohrs had gone independent and changed his business address to 5 Ocean Terrace. According to the 1900 census, John Rohrs (that year he dropped the middle name “Henry”) and his wife Annie lived at the saloon along with their daughter, a servant, and a single boarder. Phone directories for the era show that from 1903 to at least 1905 the Rohrs' restaurant operated under the elegant name “Sutro Heights Louvre.”

In 1905, Henry and his brother Diedrick (who also used the Americanized “Richard”) formed a partnership and expanded the liquor and restaurant business, and simultaneously expanded into the adjacent storefront at 6 Ocean Terrace. The Rohrs Brothers remained in operation until John's death in 1914 when his widow Annie took over his part of the business. In 1918 a family rift must have occurred between the brother and sister-in-law, because the directory for that year shows Diedrick operating a liquor store at #6 48th Avenue while Annie was independently running a restaurant at #5. (One can imagine a loud family argument followed by boarding up the doorway connecting the restaurant and bar.) 1918 was also the last year that anyone named Rohrs was listed on Ocean Terrace..

Joseph Imhof's saloon

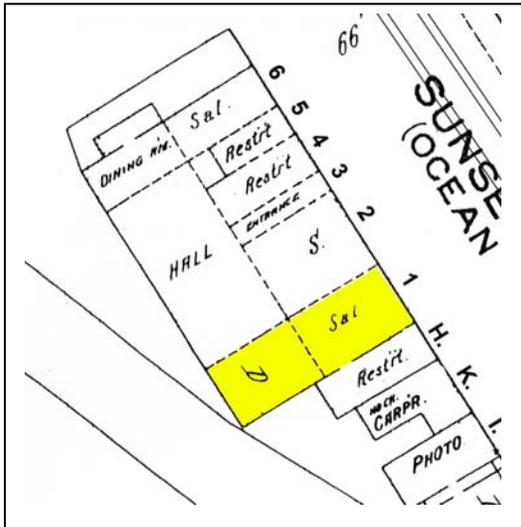


Figure 21. Location of Joseph Imhof's saloon at 1 Ocean Terrace.

Another saloon/restaurant occupied the storefront at the other end of the commercial building at 1 Ocean Terrace, which operated under the name “Ocean Terrace Exchange” from 1902 to 1905. In 1907 Joseph Imhof is listed as operator of the establishment but whether or not he retained the bar’s name is not known. While residing at their bar the Imhof family had plenty of company; the 1910 census states that 1 Ocean Terrace was home to Joseph Imhof, his wife Josephine, two sons, a servant and *ten* boarders, all of whom were single men. Imhof, it seems, was augmenting the saloon’s income by running a boarding house for bachelors.

(He wasn’t the only boardinghouse manager on the street. The same census reveals that the Rohrs family at #5-6 Ocean Terrace had seven boarders.)

Joseph Imhof and his wife continued to operate their saloon until the mass exodus of residents from Ocean Terrace in 1918.

Oscar Olsen's Saloon

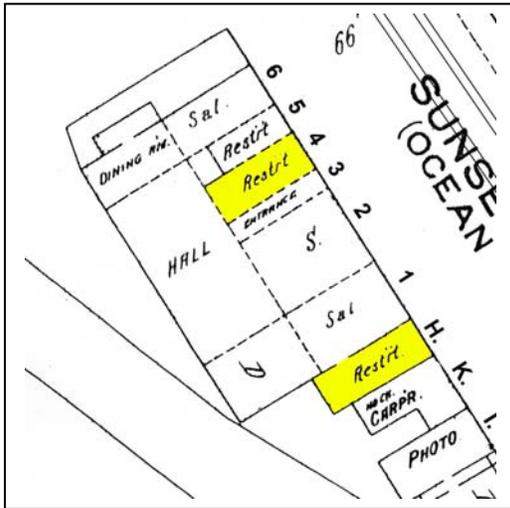


Figure 22. Possible location of Oscar Olsen's saloon on Ocean Terrace.

Another saloon proprietor, Oscar Olsen, gave his address on the 1910 census as 48th Avenue/Ocean Terrace, but his specific street number is illegible. It's likely that Olsen's saloon was located at either #4 Ocean Terrace or "H" Ocean Terrace, since both those locations are shown as restaurants on the Sanborn maps of the street.

In 1910, Oscar Olsen lived with his wife Violet and a single boarder.

Vilissartaos curio stand & Lampre's candy shop

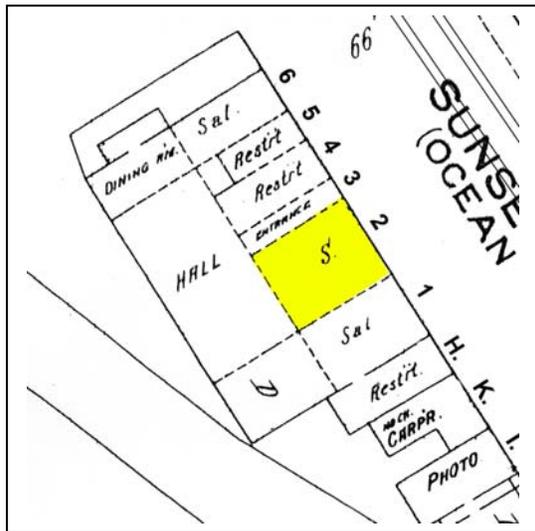


Figure 23. Location of Vilissartaos' curio shop & Lampre's candy shop at 2 Ocean Terrace.

Two additional commercial enterprises have also been documented as operating on Ocean Terrace, both of which were located at in the storefront at #2 at various times: a curio store operated by Dimiterus Vilissartaos (1900 census), and a candy shop operated by Nick Lampre (1920 census). It's difficult to determine how long the curio store and candy shop occupied their portion of the #2 storefront.

Interestingly, both of these businesses shared the same address as Fred Kidd's photography studio, albeit at different times, so the supposition is that Kidd shared (or sublet) his large storefront with a series of vendors over the years.

Finally, it's important to note that Nick Lampre and Fred Kidd were the last tenants of Ocean Terrace when final eviction came shortly after the 1920 census. Neither of their operations served liquor, which probably explains their continued existence after the onset of Prohibition.

Part IV. The Residents of Ocean Terrace

The residents living on Ocean Terrace formed a cross-section of working class San Francisco at the turn of the last century. The population recorded during the 1900 and 1910 censuses was overwhelmingly male, single, foreign born, and with ‘blue collar’ occupations. Nearly 50% were boarders and lodgers, whose occupations were frequently listed simply “laborer.” It was also a white European community composed mostly of men from Germany, the British Isles, and Scandinavian countries. In 1900, all the adults living along Ocean Terrace were foreign-born.

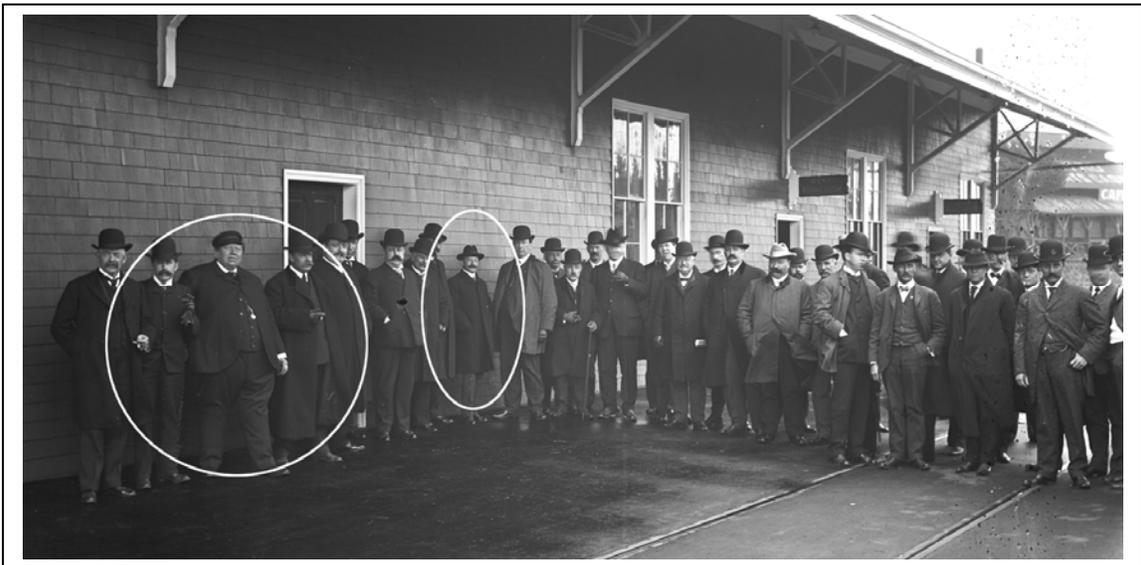


Figure 24. Opening day of the new electric “Cliff Line” streetcar line, May 27, 1905. This group portrait was taken outside the newly-refurbished 48th Ave. depot. At center is “Boss” Abe Ruef. The large gentleman at left is likely Herman Schmidt, who also appears in Figure 8. Given Schmidt’s presence, it’s highly likely that other Ocean Terrace proprietors also posed for this photograph. (Municipal Railway)

Virtually every proprietor along Ocean Terrace listed the same address for both his work place and his residence, indicating that the owners and their families lived upstairs above the storefronts on the second story of the commercial block. Every proprietor was also listed on the censuses as foreign-born, but each had already become a naturalized citizen. In short, the business owners of Ocean Terrace reflected the 19th century dream of many

Europeans: move to the United States, open a business, become an American, get married and raise a family, and (if possible) make a fortune.

Almost every family had at least one boarder, although the largest number of lodgers roomed with Joseph Imhof at #1, who had 10 single men living with his family in 1910. The other extreme was Dimiterus Vilissanantaos at #2, who lived with his wife Vangela and three sons, but no boarders.

Following are some observations about the population of Ocean Terrace:

1900 Census

Total residents:	19
Female	5
Male	14
Children	5
Foreign-born residents	15
U.S. born residents	5 (the children)
Naturalized citizens	7
Lodgers/Boarders	8 (all male)

Places of birth that year included the United States, Ireland, Denmark, Germany, and Greece. Occupations for boarders included “Day Laborer” (7) and “Gold Plater” (1).

If the American-born children of the store proprietors are deducted from the total number of residents, the entire adult population of Ocean Terrace was foreign-born. 46% of these adults were naturalized citizens.

1910 Census

Total residents:	42
Female	11
Male	31
Children	8
Foreign-born residents	24
US born residents	17
Naturalized citizens	19
Lodgers/Boarders	18 (all male)

Places of birth that year included the United States, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Sweden, England, Ireland, and Norway. Occupations for boarders included Laborer (8), Cook (3), Salesman, Carpenter (2), Fireman, Bartender, Graftor, and Motorman.

If the American-born children of the proprietors are deducted from the total number of residents, 75% of the adult population was foreign-born. 79% of these foreign-born adults were naturalized citizens.

It must be noted that the residents of Ocean Terrace didn't exist in a vacuum. Their street was only one of a number of now-vanished residential areas along Pt. Lobos Avenue and the Great Highway that were populated by similar populations of working class people. The closest example lay directly across from Ocean Terrace where a large saloon called the "Sutro Heights Casino" dominated the NE corner 48th and Pt. Lobos Avenues. Operated for many years by Herman Schmidt, it provided additional refreshment space for patrons who presumably couldn't find satisfaction at Ocean Terrace's five drinking establishments. Schmidt, a native of Germany, lived at the Casino with his wife Edna and an assistant/bartender. Schmidt, too, was a naturalized citizen.

Additional working class enclaves existed up and down the length of Pt. Lobos Avenue, including residential areas within Sutro Heights, along Merry Street (Merrie Way), inside

Sutro Baths, on the lower floors of the Cliff House, and in small buildings adjacent to the Seal Rock House at Balboa Street and the Great Highway. These were the people who operated the attractions built by Adolph Sutro and other 19th century entrepreneurs that lined the cliffs overlooking Seal Rocks and the sand dunes of Ocean Beach. Their occupations often mirrored those of the residents' of Ocean Terrace (e.g., bartender, saloon proprietor, laborer, and carpenter), but sometimes their trades reflected the specialized nature of employment in the Adolph Sutro empire: gardener, waiter, stableman, porter, boiler engineer, Baths' watchman.

A large number of these workers lived on "Cliff Avenue" (today's Pt. Lobos), probably on the slope of Sutro Heights across from today's Louis' Restaurant, where Adolph Sutro maintained a boarding house and other residences for his employees. In the 1900 census, 31 people listed this Cliff Avenue address as their place of residence. 30 these residents were male, all were single or widowed, and their average age was in their mid-30s. Based on their occupations (mostly food service or hotel operations), all were probably employed at the nearby Cliff House.

Surprisingly, six of the men living in this boarding house were from Japan. They were the only non-Caucasian residents found in the entire census for the Ocean Terrace-Cliff House area.

Part V. Conclusion

Ocean Terrace disappeared and its residents departed for two primary reasons:

1. Restrictions on the sale of alcohol during World War I and Prohibition that spelled the end for the saloons and restaurants lining the street.
2. The Sutro Estate's perception that the street and its activities were detrimental to a never-implemented residential subdivision.

Many of the smaller pieces of the Ocean Terrace story are still lacking, but this Special History Study has resulted in a clearer understanding of the evolution and social order of the street. If time allowed, this author would research several additional questions, such as: Exactly when were the various structures built? Who operated the second photo gallery located at "I"? Exactly when did the buildings come down? Do any of the residents' descendants still live in San Francisco, and what family stories do they remember? And what went on in the mysterious Mecca building?

The residents of Ocean Terrace lived much of their lives overlooking Seal Rocks before moving on, but they left few physical remnants to document their existence. For now, it's been rewarding to this researcher simply to give names again to some of the long-departed Ocean Terrace residents, families such as the Imhoffs, Vilissartaoses, Schmidts and Kidds. These were people who never would have dreamed they'd someday be the focus of archaeological digs and archival research projects.

These Ocean Terrace families were also the unknowing pioneers in a tradition of recreation in the Lands End area that continues today.

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- ¹ Illustration, “Richmond Blocks No. 20” in *Estate of Adolph Sutro, Deceased, Appraised by A.S. Baldwin*, March-April-May 1910, Golden Gate NRA, Park Archives, GOGA 18443 (Hereafter *Sutro Estate*)
- ² Stewart, Robert E., Jr., and Stewart, Mary Frances *Adolph Sutro: A Biography*. San Francisco: Howell-North Books, 1962, pp. 181-182.
- ³ “Album of Sutro Heights, San Francisco”, collection of Christine Miller.
- ⁴ Sanborn Fire Map of San Francisco, Section 480, 1899-1900 edition.
- ⁵ “Crocker Langley’s San Francisco City Directory, 1892”
- ⁶ Illustration, “Richmond Blocks No. 20”, *Sutro Estate*
- ⁷ Martini, John A. *Abbreviated Cultural Landscape Report—Land’s End & Merrie Way*. Special Report for the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, 1995.
- ⁸ Website for Mecca Temple AAONMS at <http://www.mohermecca.org/>
- ⁹ The original Sanborn map for 1905 featured color coding for buildings, which made second-generation printing impossible from the microfilm available to researchers. The map included in this report is a re-creation of the 1905 map drawn by the author based upon inspection of the original Sanborn maps at the SF Public Library.
- ¹⁰ Langley-Crocker City Directory, 1916
- ¹¹ Illustration, “Richmond Blocks No. 20”, *Sutro Estate*
- ¹² Illustration, “Cliff Road”, *Sutro Estate*
- ¹³ *Sutro Estate*, pg 16
- ¹⁴ Sanborn Fire Map of San Francisco, Section 530, 1913-1915 edition
- ¹⁵ Langley-Crocker City directories for years 1913-1918
- ¹⁶ Toogood, Anna C. *A Civil History of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area*. Vol. II. Denver, National Park Service, 1980, pg 93.
- ¹⁷ *Sutro Estate*, pg 24
- ¹⁸ Sanborn Fire Map, various editions; and photographs in Adolph Sutro Estate Inventory
- ¹⁹ Site visit with archeologist Leo Barker, August 2004; conversation with NPS Historical Consultant Ric Borjes, April 7, 2005.
- ²⁰ Interview with former park historian James P. Delgado, November 9, 2004. Park staff at the time were unaware of the existence of Ocean Terrace’s commercial establishments.
- ²¹ Site visit with archeologist Leo Barker, August 2004
- ²² Email, Michael Meyer to author, 6 October 2006