

Fort Baker Parade Ground Walk

Innovations in Army Post Life



Fort Baker Sausalito, CA

Cavallo Point
the Lodge at Golden Gate

Institute at
the Golden Gate

Bay Area Discovery Museum

U.S. Coast
Guard Station



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Innovations in Army Post Life

The Route

Length: ½ mile

Number of stops: ..9

Time required:..... About 45 minutes

Accessibility: Most of the route is paved and accessible. There is a moderately steep uphill walk between Stop #5 and Stop #6 that is not accessible.

Restrooms: Portable toilets are located at the fishing pier at the waterfront.

Historic Fort Baker is now home to *Cavallo Point, the Lodge at Golden Gate*. This tour takes you through the conference center and lodging facilities; please be respectful during your visit. If you have any questions, visit the Marin Headlands Visitor Center, located approximately 3 miles from Fort Baker in the historic Fort Barry Chapel. The visitor center number is (415) 331-1540.

www.nps.gov/goga/planyourvisit/fort-baker.htm

Fort Baker was named for Col. Edward Dickinson Baker, the commander of the 71st Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment who was killed during the Civil War.

Cover photo: Fort Baker in 1923.

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

The U.S. Army established Fort Baker in 1897 to support the many seacoast defense batteries located around the north side of the Golden Gate strait. The design and architecture of this army post was a departure from earlier western military forts. Fort Baker represented a new model for army life, in which both the enlisted soldiers and officers enjoyed a much higher standard of living.

Start the tour at Building 615, Fort Baker's historic guardhouse, at the foot of the parade ground, facing the flag pole (see the map).



Credit: Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Park Archives & Records Center, PAM Negs Coll.

Most of the buildings around the parade ground were built between 1902 and 1910. (Photo circa 1905.)

1 Main Parade Ground

The Establishment of Fort Baker

By the turn of the 19th century, a major construction campaign began at Fort Baker to provide permanent housing for the newly reorganized Coast Artillery Corps. The Corps operated seven seacoast defense batteries [Ridge Battery (1871), Battery Cavallo (1872), Battery Spencer (1897), Battery Duncan (1900) Battery Kirby (1900), Battery Orlando-Wagner (1901), and Battery Yates (1905)].

To appreciate the significance of Fort Baker, it helps to understand the challenges of earlier routine army life during the late 19th century. The soldiers' work was often physically demanding and tedious, and their military pay rarely covered even their own necessities. Most small frontier posts were a collection of drafty, run-down barracks that were poorly ventilated, with no running water, separate bathrooms, or electricity. The food was often of poor quantity and in short supply and the soldiers' uniforms were made of shoddy, ill-fitting material. It is easy to understand why it was hard to encourage responsible men to join the Army. Most of the men who enlisted in the Army felt they had no other choice; they were often either in trouble with the law, or flat-out broke.

The peace-time years between the Civil War (1865) and the Spanish-American War (1898) were a time of great improvement for the U.S. Army. The army turned its energy toward improving the living conditions of enlisted soldiers, in order to stem desertion, boost morale and attract a better class of recruits. Fort Baker is a reflection of the new Army policies to improve a soldier's life. These new policies dramatically influenced how the army built their buildings. By the turn of the century, the army was creating a new military architecture and these changes can be easily identified at Fort Baker.

Begin to walk up the hill, alongside the historic parade ground. The National Park Service has recently restored the parade ground to its former historic configuration; planting new, hardy grass and trees that reflect the parade ground's original look and alignment by removing incompatible parking lots; and installing new sidewalks and curbs that match the historic ones. Stop at the first large white building on your right-hand side.

2 Building 636, Soldiers' Barracks

The Construction of a New & Better Army Post

This Fort Baker barracks' interior shows the new, more spacious dormitory design. (Photo circa 1915.)

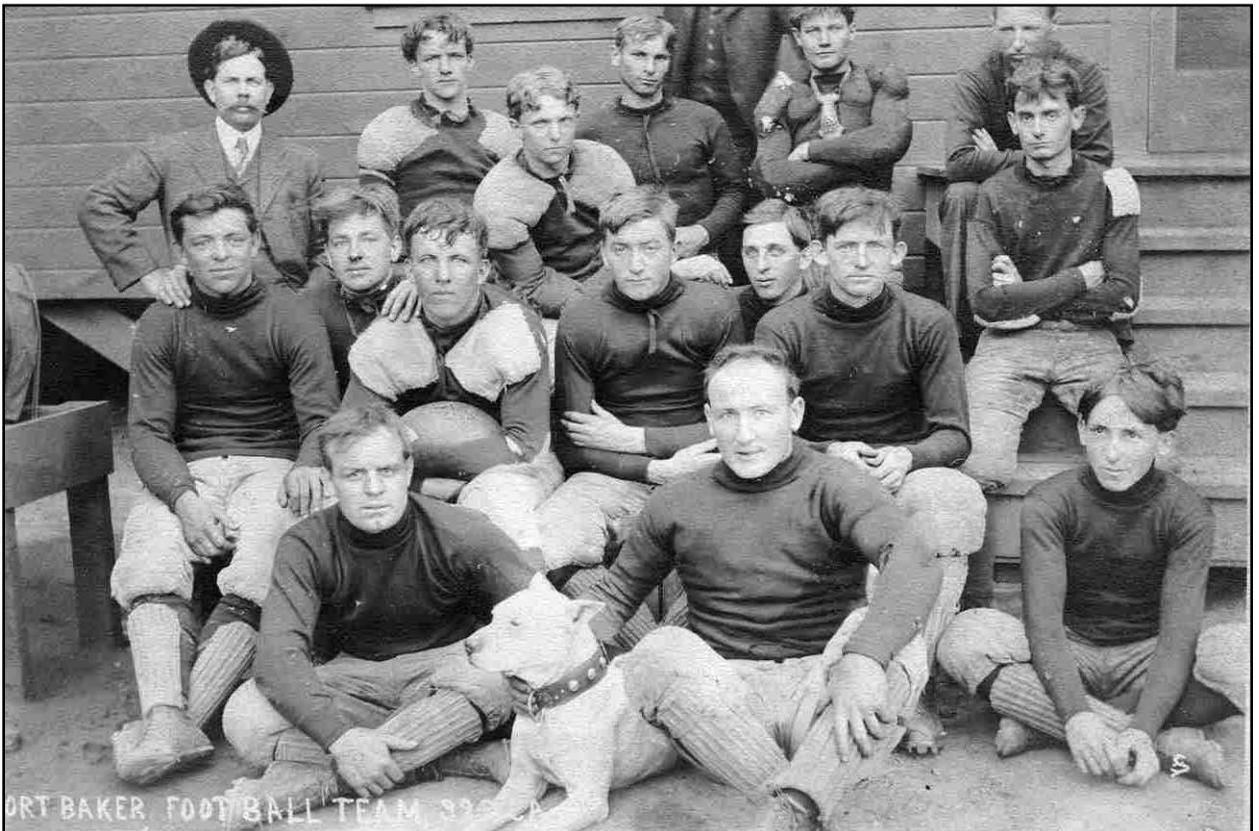
You are standing in front of a historic barracks where 109 enlisted soldiers lived, slept, ate and bathed. All of Fort Baker's historic barracks represented 'state-of-the-art' military housing when completed in 1903. Earlier military housing had been much



different. During the late 1800s, army medical officers were appalled by the soldiers' living conditions at the frontier posts. Two to three men would often share one bug-ridden, makeshift bed, in an already damp and cramped barrack. Many posts only owned one bath tub for fifty men; it was not uncommon for the men to bath only once a month.

But by the early 1900s, the army began to design larger, healthier barracks with a new emphasis on proper ventilation, clean running water and modern toilet facilities. This former Fort Baker barracks was designed with open, spacious wards, numerous windows and real beds and mattresses. All the Fort Baker buildings had electricity, hot and cold running water, and a sufficient number of proper toilets and shower facilities. The first floor contained a large kitchen, mess hall (a communal dining room) and a day room (a communal living room). The dormitories were located on the first and second floor, where the enlisted soldiers slept in one large room. The noncommissioned officers—usually

Fort Baker football team, photo circa 1910. (Photo courtesy of John Martini).





Soldiers playing baseball on the main parade ground. Note the wood-frame barracks and the brick gymnasium, then unpainted, in the background. (Photo circa 1905.)

unmarried lieutenants and captains—slept in separate private rooms. The bathroom facilities were in the basement and each barracks even had its own tailor and barber shop.

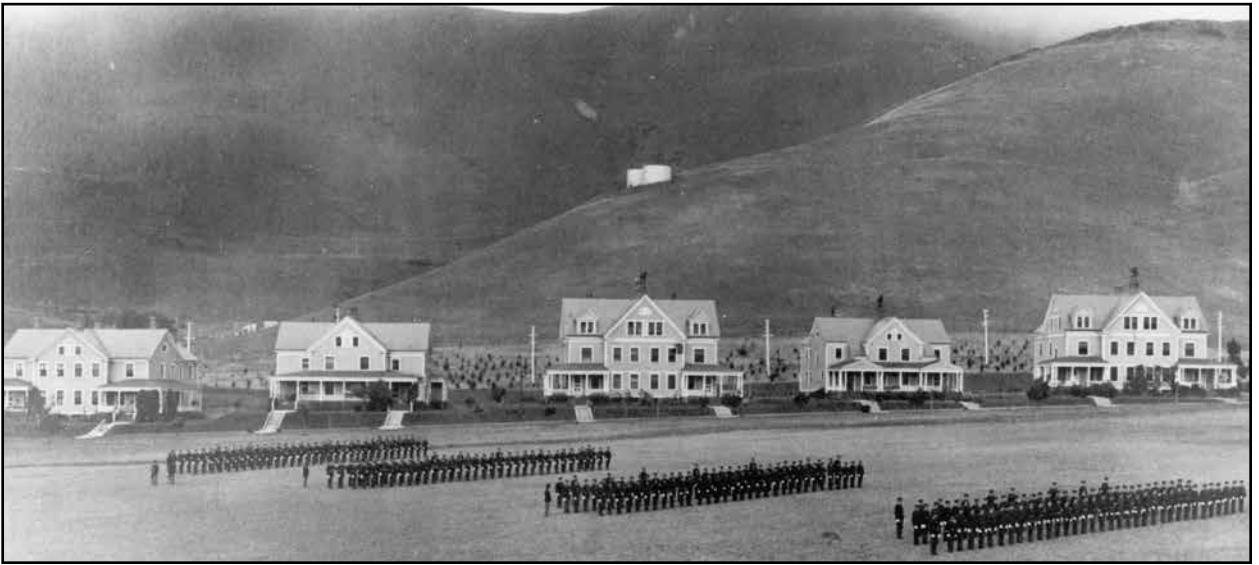
Continue up the hill and stop at the first building on your right, which was the post gymnasium.

3 Building 623, Post Gymnasium *A Soldier's Life Improves*

Life at Fort Baker illustrates other improvements made for the soldiers. In addition to raising the soldiers' pay, providing new uniforms, and improving housing, the army also began to build facilities and sponsor activities to help alleviate the monotony of army life. The post exchange system was established, which offered soldiers beer and general dry goods at a fair price. The army placed a new emphasis on physical activity, and in addition to the formation of baseball and football teams and marching bands. Most new posts included some kind of gymnasium space. The army also provided schooling, teachers, text books and libraries to help educate the men.

The Fort Baker gymnasium, in front of you, was originally constructed as a fully-equipped exercise facility, with a basketball court, climbing ropes, jump horses, flying rings, tumbling mats and striking bags. The gymnasium also included a school room and reading room, a post exchange, a lunch counter and kitchen, and a bowling alley.

Continue up the road and stop at either of the last two buildings on the right hand side.



The Fort Baker parade ground was an essential military open space dedicated to drills, marches, parades and public ceremonies. Note how bare the landscape was originally. In 1905, when this photo was taken, trees were planted in a semicircle behind the buildings to help create much needed wind breaks and to add a more finished appearance to the post (Photo circa 1905.)

4 Buildings 601 & 602, Artillery Barracks

Colonial Revival Architecture at Fort Baker

These historic barracks, like most of the Fort Baker buildings constructed between 1902 and 1910, were designed in the Colonial Revival architectural style. The goal of this architectural style, which favored clean, simple lines and a minimal use of applied decoration, was to inspire a sentimental remembrance of the early history of the United States, a time when American democracy was in its infancy.

The Colonial Revival style is often characterized by large, stocky symmetrical buildings with classical elements, such as columns, porches and wide windows. The Fort Baker buildings were originally painted dark greens and browns and had gray slate roofs. By the 1930s, in an effort to match the Presidio and other Bay Area army posts, the army repainted the Fort Baker buildings an off-white color and replaced the slate roofs with red asphalt shingles. All three barracks were originally constructed with two-story front porches; the porches were removed in the 1950s.

You are now at the top of the parade ground. Please turn left and walk up to Kober Street.

5 Kober Street

Modest Military Housing

As you walk up Kober Street, notice the modest, noncommissioned officers' duplex housing on either side of the street. The scale and location of these homes reflect the lower rank of the occupants. The officers lived in the large homes directly on Murray Circle, while the noncommissioned officers lived in these smaller residences, away from the heart of the post. Originally, the building plans for Fort Baker specified brick, but the first round of construction bids came in too high. As a result, most of the Fort Baker buildings were constructed in wood-frame. The two brick buildings on Kober Street are the only masonry residences. The single-family residence up the hill (Building 522) was constructed specifically for the Fort Baker hospital steward.

The noncommissioned officers' housing along Kober Street was constructed between 1903 and 1909. Notice the rustic fence and the sparse landscaping. (Photo courtesy of the Sausalito Historical Society circa 1905.)

Continue up the hill to Building 533, which was the post hospital. This portion of the tour is not accessible. If you don't want to walk up this hill, proceed to Stop 7, which starts in front of Building 603.





The Fort Baker Hospital was designed and constructed in 1905 during the same era as the Presidio's Letterman Army Hospital complex. While the Fort Baker Hospital was much smaller in scale, both hospitals were designed with more space and better ventilation than earlier Army hospitals. This photo of a ward at the Letterman Army Hospital illustrates the improved medical conditions at an early 20th century military hospital. (Photo circa 1910.)

6 Building 533 Post Hospital

A Healthier Army

You are standing in front of Building 533, which was the Fort Baker Hospital, constructed as a 12-bed hospital in 1902. Changes in the Army medical health care system are also apparent at Fort Baker. Before the turn-of-the-century, sick soldiers were treated in drafty, temporary buildings. If their post did not have an assigned surgeon soldiers often had to wait long intervals for a traveling doctor to visit. Due to inadequate sleeping and sanitation conditions, diseases such as small pox, yellow fever and cholera remained rampant on army posts.

As the medical community began to better understand germs and their relationship to diseases, the army began to place a new emphasis on cleanliness, water purification, proper ventilation, and the liberal use of disinfectants and quarantines. By the 1880's, all posts were required to submit monthly sanitation reports, and the newly created Army Medical School provided more medical training. The army began to construct large, permanent hospital buildings. These medical advances resulted in a much healthier army, with a dramatic drop in illnesses.

The Fort Baker Hospital had a medical store room and vegetable cellar in the basement, and an open, well-ventilated ward room, medicine dispensary, kitchen and mess hall on the first floor. The second floor contained an operating room, a laboratory, and an isolation ward for communicable diseases.

Walk back down the hill until you reach Murray Circle again. Turn right and stop in front of Building 603, which was the Post Headquarters Building, where the Commanding Officer had his formal offices.

7 Building 603, Post Headquarters

“WANTED: 100 men for service....”

Army recruitment offices around the country posted “wanted” signs in the hopes of enticing men into joining the army. Why did these men enlist during peace-time? Civilian life did not always offer job security; unemployment often influenced men to enlist because they saw life in the army as a secure job when other possibilities did not exist. Many men wanted adventure to ride horses and to see the West. Some men, including African-American soldiers and recent immigrants, joined the U.S. Army because it offered a better quality of life and an opportunity to gain an education with the hope of advancement.

Who were the men stationed at Fort Baker? The 1910 census of Fort Baker provides valuable information about the enlisted soldiers and officers. Most of the enlisted men were in their 20s, unmarried and from the Northern, Western and Midwestern states. The single enlisted men listed professions such as cooks, tailors, musicians and mechanics. The married officers were identified by rank—as majors, sergeants, and captains while most of the Fort Baker men were second generation Americans, while some of soldiers’ parents were foreign-born. About one out of every fifteen soldiers stationed here was an immigrant from another country such as Germany, Poland, Sweden, Ireland, England, Portugal, Austria and Hungary.

Continue walking to your left and stop at the next large residential building.



Enlisted Fort Baker musicians. (Photo circa 1905.)

8 Building 604, Commanding Officer's Residence

A Prominent Home

You are now standing in front of the former Commanding Officer's residence, built in 1903. To help accentuate the commanding officers' status on post, the army constructed their homes at prominent sites like this one. This residence originally had seven bedrooms and four bathrooms, and was designed as the largest, single family house on the post. Building 604 was also embellished with metal-pressed ceilings, fireplaces with decorative mantels, and a built-in buffet in the dining room. This building, with its formal dining room, living room and library, was also designed for social functions. The commanding officer and his wife were expected to host a variety of parties and dinners to important visiting military and civilian dignitaries. These large social events could not have been possible without the help of servants; the servant quarters were located on the third floor, and the building had a separate servant staircase in the rear.

Continue walking down the other side of Murray Circle and stop in front of the group of duplex housing with the large front porches.

The Commanding Officer's Residence and Headquarters. (Photo circa 1910.)



A Fort Baker's officer's wife with her children on the front porch of a Murray Circle residence. (Photo circa 1905.)



9 Buildings 605, 606 & 607, Officers' Housing

Army Family Life

Before Fort Baker was established, the frontier outposts were predominantly a bachelor society. The army strongly discouraged married junior officers, and soldiers were specifically forbidden to marry (even though many of them did marry). If an officer had a wife and children, they were to be left behind at home. If the families were determined to follow the army made no provisions for them. Several groups of families and servants were often forced to live together in deteriorated, abandoned buildings off-post as makeshift housing.

But by the turn of the century, as part of the effort to improve morale, officers were now allowed to bring their families with them. You are standing in front of duplex housing that was built in 1902–1904 to house the families of captains and lieutenants. Each family would occupy one-half of the building. These large homes, with ornate dining rooms, elegant living rooms and numerous bedrooms, became the new model for family life on post. Each residence was built to accommodate a large family, as well as the live-in servants who were necessary to support the family's needs. The quality of this new housing design reflects the U.S. Army's acceptance of families within the military community.



This porch detail shows the historic window shutters (which were probably removed in the 1950s) and the decorative cane porch furniture. (Photo circa 1905.)

This marks the end of the Fort Baker tour. As a result of many army-mandated changes to military policies, a soldier's everyday life was greatly improved by the late 19th century. These important changes are well expressed in both the design and function of Fort Baker's historic buildings. If you are interested take the *Fort Baker History Walk—Horseshoe Cove: A Water Haven on San Francisco Bay*.