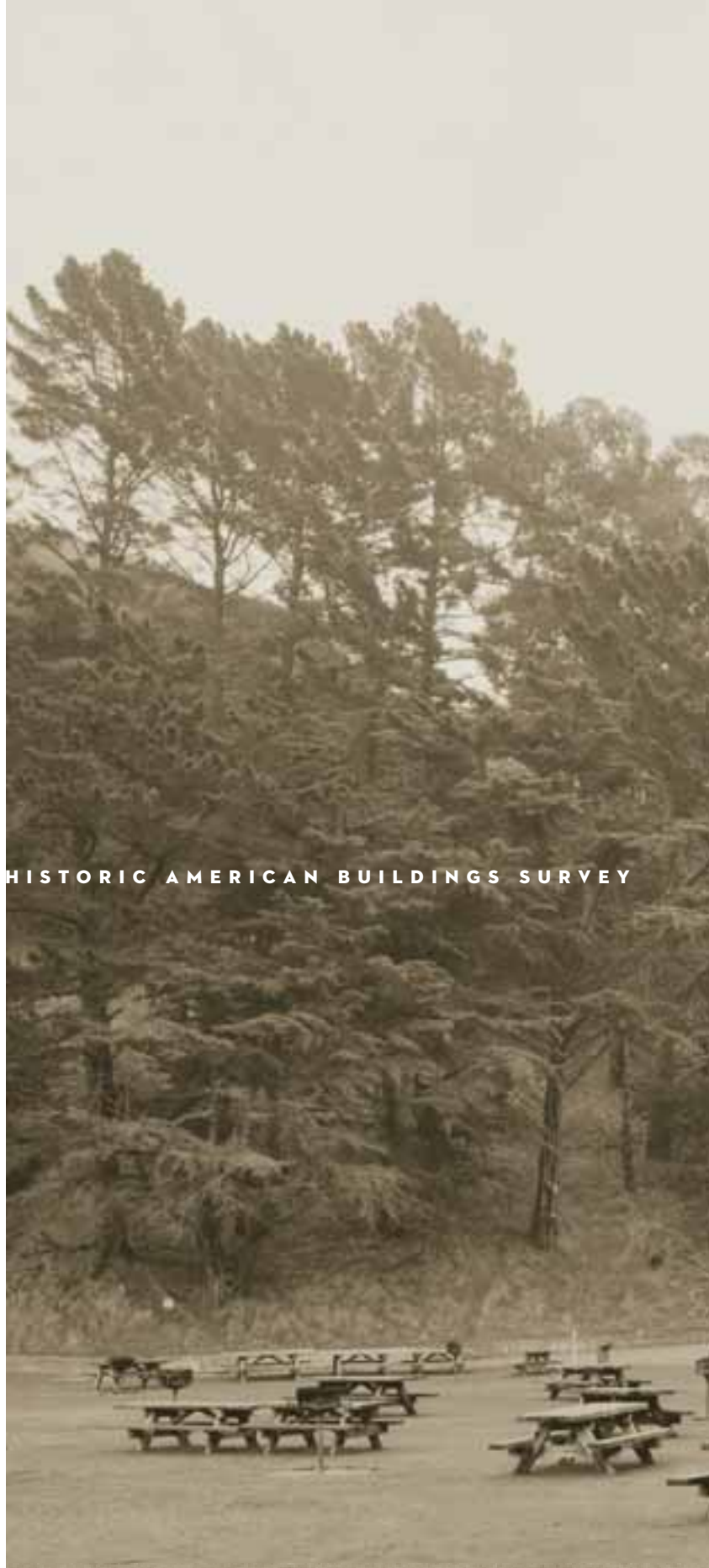


PHOTOGRAPHED BY JAMES ROSENTHAL HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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S I L E N T S E N T R Y



ANGEL ISLAND, GHOST OF AMERICA'S PACIFIC PRESENCE BY JOE FLANAGAN



WHILE THE CONFEDERATES NEVER ARRIVED IN SAN FRANCISCO BAY, THE



IN THE EAST, THE WAR RAGED IN PLACES LIKE SHILOH, ANTIETAM, AND BULL RUN. ON the West Coast, it was mostly in the newspapers. The summer of 1863 brought the astounding news of Confederates in Pennsylvania and the cataclysmic three-day battle at Gettysburg. Military authorities in California started thinking about the daring southern navy, growing nervous about their vulnerability. If the Confederates should suddenly turn up in San Francisco Bay, the consequences would be grave. Gold and silver from the Sierra Nevada, critical to the war effort, came through the city, and there were other potential spoils—an arsenal at Benicia and a navy yard at Mare Island. Gun emplacements had been deployed at Fort Point (at the bay's entrance), on Alcatraz, and on Yerba Buena Island. Angel Island, a hilly outcropping roughly a mile square, seemed like the logical place for some added insurance.

In the autumn of 1863, an artillery unit put ashore and started work. Soon, what the army called seacoast howitzers and big, 10-inch Columbiad guns were pointing out from high points on the island. The

TODAY, ANGEL ISLAND IS PART OF THE CALIFORNIA STATE PARK SYSTEM, SPONSOR OF the HABS work. An immigration station on the north coast, once called “the Ellis Island of the West,” is a national historic landmark, where thousands of Asian immigrants got their first glimpse of America. While the station is probably the island's best known feature and most compelling draw, the abandoned barracks, officers' houses, and other buildings are remarkable artifacts of military life in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. World War II, which brought the last burst of construction, left a telling record of its time, too.

“It was a huge operation,” says HABS photographer James Rosenthal, who roamed the now largely deserted site, capturing the impressive scale of the buildings and how they interacted. “The sense of activity is palpable.” The industrial-size concrete structures and their smaller wood counterparts are either boarded up or present the viewer with rows of darkened windows. There is a faded vitality about them, a once powerful sense of purpose that disappeared long ago. Says Lisa Davidson, the proj-



ARMY STAYED, ITS PRESENCE WAXING AND WANING ACCORDING TO THE NATION'S FORTUNES.

West Coast went into a panic in 1865 when the CSS *Shenandoah*, unaware of Lee's surrender at Appomattox, blasted a Union whaling fleet in the north Pacific. Nervous Californians speculated that the next target was going to be the mother lode of gold in San Francisco banks. The Union guns remained ready, leveled out over the water, waiting while the war's final chapter was written thousands of miles away.

Nearly a century and a half later, members of the National Park Service Historic American Buildings Survey arrived on the island, photographing and producing drawings of the military legacy. While the Confederates never arrived and the Civil War was followed by the Reconstruction, the Army stayed, its presence waxing and waning according to the nation's fortunes. The island would become an appendage to future wars, distant conflicts for which it was ideally suited because of its location. A close neighbor of Alcatraz, it shared the same combination of nearness and alienation, part of San Francisco's military complex but very much a place on its own.

ect historian, “These buildings were mothballed. The state had no budget for restoration, so this was a good chance to document them.”

PREVIOUS PAGES: Quarters for public health officers at Angel Island's circa 1891 quarantine station, which today greets visitors coming ashore from the mainland. **LEFT:** Interior of Fort McDowell's mess and drill hall on the east side of the island. **ABOVE:** A postcard image of morning drill at Fort McDowell.

ABOVE U.S. ARMY OFFICE OF MEDICAL HISTORY, OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL

BEFORE SPANISH EXPLORERS ARRIVED, THE LOCAL MIWOK INDIANS HUNTED AND FISHED around the island. When Lt. John Tiernon came with 56 men to install the gun batteries, California had only been part of the Union for 15 years. Angel Island was a military reserve, but there was little activity there aside from a quarry whose granite and sandstone helped build the prison at Alcatraz and many San Francisco buildings. The island was home to a small cattle ranch and some squatters, but otherwise it was a wild place typical of the northern California coast, with rocky shores, oak and Madrone trees, sloping hillsides covered with sagebrush and chamise, various coves and promontories, and an 800-foot high hill at its very center.

Tiernon got approval to start putting up buildings. By the end of 1863, there were officers' quarters, a quartermaster storehouse, a trading post, a stable, and a bakehouse. The settlement was on a stretch of flat terrain on the west side of the island, overlooked by high points to the north and the south, where big guns were dug in. They named it in honor of Major General John Reynolds, who was killed at Gettysburg. By the time the war was over, the army had added an enlisted men's barracks, a blacksmith shop, and laundresses' quarters. There was a wharf nearby—Camp Reynolds' connection to the mainland—but the installation was basically self-sufficient.

As the army focused on other concerns in the immediate postwar years, the garrison seemed unnecessary. But as the Indian resistance in the West approached its zenith, Camp Reynolds found a purpose as a processing point for recruits headed to forts throughout the Plains and the Southwest. It became a main staging area for the Indian Wars, part of what the HABS history calls a "frontier constabulary." By 1870, over 60 percent of the U.S. Army was stationed in the West.

An army surgeon, Edwin Bentley, left a written account of the island, describing ancient Indian shell mounds and a vegetable garden whose produce went to Alcatraz, which was a military prison. A carriage road wound through the draws, ridges, and knolls. A hospital was built at the top of a hill, the site chosen for ventilation. The recruits, who lived in tents, got only one or two weeks of training before being sent off to their posts.

Camp Reynolds was critical to supplying manpower to the western forts, and while the number of recruits overwhelmed the small facility, there was little interest in upgrading it. The necessity of a large standing army—the biggest peacetime force since the U.S. Constitution was adopted—was being debated at the time. Funding for military installations grew scarce, and the facilities began to take on a rundown look. Military historian Joseph Dawson, quoted in the HABS report, said that "modernization and professional improvement in the Army of the late 19th century was slow and haphazard and always on a limited budget."

But persistent requests for repairs and better facilities led to a boom in the mid-1870s and again in the mid-1880s. In addition to single-family officers' housing and an expanded enlisted men's barracks, the army dou-



THE ISLAND WOULD BECOME AN APPENDAGE TO FUTURE WARS, DISTANT CO

bled the size of the hospital and built a chapel. Compared to other postings, Angel Island was attractive. The HABS history quotes Martha Summerhayes, whose memoir *Vanished Arizona* recounts her experiences as the wife of an army officer. Transferred to the island after spending time in the Southwest, she writes, "we began to live; for we felt the years spent at those desert posts under the scorching suns of Arizona had cheated us out of all but a bare existence upon the earth." When the In-



NFLICTS FOR WHICH IT WAS IDEALLY SUITED BECAUSE OF ITS LOCATION.

ABOVE: *New in the early 20th century, an indirect outgrowth of U.S. designs in the Pacific, was Fort McDowell's 600-man barracks, made of reinforced concrete.*



IT WAS A WILD PLACE TYPICAL OF THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA COAST, WITH ROCKY SHORES,



OAK AND MADRONE TREES, SLOPING HILLSIDES COVERED WITH SAGEBRUSH AND CHAMISE . . .



IN A DEPARTURE FROM THE TRADITIONAL . . . THE NEW STRUCTURES WERE BUILT

dian Wars ended, and army officials considered abandoning the camp, the federal government built a quarantine hospital at Ayala Cove, on the north side, where foreign ships suspected of carrying disease were fumigated with steam from the boilers of the U.S.S. *Omaha*. Immigrants were housed in a 400-bed detention barracks, the complex including medical labs and staff housing. Most of these structures were torn down in the 1950s, though some remain as a park museum and offices.

THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY SAW THE END OF THE FRONTIER. WITH A NEW NAVY AND imperial designs, the United States set its sights abroad. Congress authorized the first seagoing battleships in 1890. “The first fruits of U.S. imperialism were possessions in Hawaii, Samoa, Cuba, and the Philippines,” says National Park Service historian Harry Butowsky.

With the start of the Spanish-American War—and the ensuing Philippine Insurrection—massive numbers of troops circulated between San Francisco and the Pacific. Many returning vets had contagious diseases like smallpox. A large detention facility was built for them on the island’s east side. But the army faced an unforeseen problem. Veterans returned to what was in some ways still a frontier city, many with a lot of back pay in their pockets. They were released from the Presidio right into the streets of San Francisco, where quite a few were robbed, beat up, or squandered their money. Some committed suicide—shamed by their debauchery and lost wages, said the army—which saw a solution at Angel Island. As Captain John Finley wrote in a 1902 *Sunset Magazine* article, there soldiers could “be protected

from every abuse by unscrupulous tradesmen, by gamblers and by rogues.” The camp had a barbershop, a restaurant, a fruit stand, and a commissary. “All men are advised to remain in camp until discharged,” the regulations read, “and then start at once for home, avoiding any chance for trouble in the city.”

Finley penned a description of the five-mile road that followed the island’s contours, connecting the installations: “There are many beautiful vistas from this road which winds in and out through the ravines and over the projecting ridges, with rapidly alternating scenery of luxuriant vegetation, densely wooded slopes, stretches of water, quiet coves, rugged cliffs and sheltered nooks. There is no more attractive drive in the west, outside the great national parks, than that to be found on . . . Angel Island.”

IN THE WAKE OF THE WAR, THE ARMY HAD PLANS FOR THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE ISLAND. An ambitious building campaign began in 1909. The outpost was renamed after Major General Irwin McDowell, who had led the Union Army at the first battle of Manassas. Mission Revival buildings of reinforced concrete, spacious and modern, went up on a promontory on the island’s east side. They included officers’ quarters, a 600-man barracks, a post exchange, administration building, guardhouse, hospital, and mess hall. Prisoners provided much of the labor. In a departure from the traditional ranks of buildings sited around a central parade ground, the new structures were built along curved roads that wound along the island’s hilly contours. Pacific Gas and Electric ran an underwater cable from the mainland so the installation had electricity for the first time.

World War I saw a spike in troops passing through—some 4,000 a month—and even with all the new buildings, the army had to resort to tent encampments. “Enemy aliens”—German citizens on ships in harbors up and down the West Coast—were arrested and imprisoned here until transferred to North Carolina. By 1926, the island had become the largest troop staging facility on the West Coast.

WHILE AMERICA WAS ASCENDING AS A global power, the equally ambitious Japanese Empire was exerting its influence. “The United States and Japan were now rivals in the Far East,” Butowsky says. “The U.S. had a colony to protect in the Philippines, and



ALONG CURVED ROADS THAT WOUND ALONG THE ISLAND’S HILLY CONTOURS.

PREVIOUS PAGES: Time and nature join forces against non-commissioned officers’ quarters at Fort McDowell. **LEFT:** Chapel at Camp Reynolds, from Angel Island’s early days as an outpost. **ABOVE:** Fort McDowell circa World War I.

ABOVE COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

Japan resented the intrusion, considering the region in its legitimate sphere.” Tension between Japan and the West had been escalating for decades. The island nation launched its own ambitious ship-building program, matching the Americans and British ton for ton. As the United States flexed its muscles in Cuba and the Philippines, Japan did likewise against Russia and China, establish-

ing itself as a force to be reckoned with. By the 1930s, the military was in firm control of the Japanese government.

When war broke out, San Francisco became the staging area for the Pacific conflict. “World War II was a logistics war, a fact that is largely ignored,” says Butowsky. “Every item—fuel, food, tenting, uniforms, everything—had to be shipped out to the Pacific. Angel Island was a critical facility.” The immigration station was converted to a holding area for hundreds of German, Japanese, and Italian prisoners. More than 300,000 troops passed through on their way to war. When the conflict was over, the flood of homebound troops was staggering—over 3,000 in December 1945 alone. Though the island had a large barracks, the army had to resort to “World War II temporaries,” inexpensive, quick-built structures, says historian Gordon Chappell of the National Park Service Pacific West regional office. These were eventually removed by the state park system.

At the end of 1946, the War Department declared the island official surplus. Various proposals were discussed on its future use. In 1954, the area around the quarantine station became a state park. It was the early days of the Cold War, and to counter potential forays by Russian bombers, the military returned to install a Nike missile battery, one of twelve around the city. The top of Mount Livermore, the center of the island, was leveled for a helicopter pad and radar control booth. This site was closed in 1962. Today, the concrete radar pads provide hikers with excellent views of San Francisco Bay.

The rest of the island became a state park the following year. According to photographer Rosenthal, much of the decorative hardware from the officers’ quarters was scavenged, winding up in San Francisco curio and antique shops. Security improved in later years and now a staff of state park employees is housed on the island.

TODAY, ANGEL ISLAND DRAWS HIKERS, CAMPERS, BOATERS, AND KAYAKERS WITH ITS beauty and panoramic views of the San Francisco skyline, Sausalito, and Tiburon. The history remains a big attraction, too. The immigration station—recently reopened after a 3-year, \$15 million rehab—receives support through its own foundation. One of the Civil War era buildings on the west side has been restored, too.

While it once teemed with soldiers, prisoners, and immigrants, today the isolation and empty buildings create an almost surreal environment. Although some parts of the place abound with weekend visitors, other parts are “very quiet, almost eerie,” says Davidson. Much of the island’s life is long gone, but there is still a story here, very much alive. What remains captures a country in transition, from the homey shelters of a nation defined by the rural 19th century to the utilitarian concrete buildings of a growing global power. “What is really amazing about Angel Island,” says Davidson, “is the layers of history.”

contact points **web** HABS Collection http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/habs_haer/ Angel Island State Park www.angelisland.org/



WHAT REMAINS CAPTURES A COUNTRY IN TRANSITION, FROM THE HOMEY SHELTERS OF A NATION DEFINED BY

RIGHT: *Layers of history. Wood-frame non-commissioned officers' housing with the concrete 600-man barracks in the background.*



THE RURAL 19TH CENTURY TO THE UTILITARIAN CONCRETE BUILDINGS OF A GROWING GLOBAL POWER.