

Physical History

Summary

Please refer to the Fort Baker Cultural Landscape Report for a full history of Fort Baker. The following is a brief historical summary:

In the 1850s, President Millard Fillmore designated 1,899 acres on the north side of San Francisco Bay as the Lime Point Military Reservation. After 16 years of ownership disputes, the federal government acquired the land and began constructing several batteries along the shoreline and low bluffs including Ridge Battery, Gravelly Beach Battery, and Battery Cavallo. Beginning in the 1890s, the Army began a major program to reconstruct all major coastal fortifications, including those in San Francisco Bay. Massive reinforced concrete batteries were constructed along both sides of the Golden Gate. In 1897, the Army completed Battery Spencer on the ridge above Lime Point, and by 1905, Batteries Kirby, Duncan, Orlando Wagner, and Yates had been completed. During the Spanish-American War of 1898, soldiers manning the guns at Fort Baker lived in tents on the parade ground. Shortly after the turn of the century, and over the next ten years, a major construction effort was undertaken at the site. Circulation systems and utilities were established or supplemented, permanent structures were built to house and support the troops, and the grounds were modified to meet the needs of an active military post.

Most of the guns were removed during World War I and the post reverted to caretaker status in the interwar years. During World War II, the facilities at Fort Baker served as a mine depot, storage buildings, and ammo bunkers for coastal defense. Also during World War II, new structures and facilities were developed along the waterfront of Horseshoe Cove and the site was also used as a temporary hospital.

Coastal defense activities at Fort Baker ended in 1949. In 1959, 21 additional military family housing units (known as Capehart housing) were constructed for use by the 91st (Reserve) Infantry Division and by various anti-aircraft missile units under the 6th Regional Army Air Defense Command stationed at the post.

In 1972, Congress established the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Included within the authorized boundaries of this newly designated park were all of Fort Baker, and all of the former Lime Point Military Reservation. The following year, Fort Baker was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as part of the "Forts Baker, Barry and Cronkhite Historic District" (1973). The National Park Service took over management of the open space throughout the Marin Headlands while the Army maintained and administered the developed area of Fort Baker. Beginning in 1985, and in phases over the next fifteen years, the Army transferred jurisdiction of portions of the Fort Baker Military Reservation to the National Park Service. In 1986, the Army transferred 258 acres of open space at the east end of the Baker-Barry Tunnel to the National Park Service. In 1988, the U.S. Coast Guard constructed new facilities for its Station Golden Gate at Horseshoe Cove. Also during this period, the Bay Area Discovery Museum opened, occupying several historic structures in the former warehouse area of the post. In August 2002, the Army relinquished its remaining holdings at Fort Baker to the National Park Service. Today, in addition to the Coast Guard and the Bay Area Discovery Museum, the site encompasses 335 acres and contains over 100 historic structures including 47 significant military residential and administrative buildings, historic roads, landscape resources, numerous utilitarian structures, and seven batteries from the turn of the century development of the site.



Fort Baker, 1925.