

#### 4. Garden and Vegetation Features

San Franciscans had long been displeased with having a military prison in such a highly visible place. During the nineteenth century, Alcatraz's rocky shores, barren slopes, and collection of wood-frame buildings perched on the sides of the slopes were not pleasing to the eyes of San Franciscans. The lack of visible green vegetation (trees, green lawns, and plants that did not go dormant during half of the year) on the island contributed to Alcatraz's poor public image.

Up until this time, given the general lack of soil of any depth on the island and the limited water, ornamental plants were not widely planted on the island. The Army's earlier attempts to plant the slopes with sod or grass or clover were not very successful –mainly because these plants were not suited to the conditions on Alcatraz. There were garden spaces around the homes of residents on the island and in front of the Citadel (the most formal and public space for the post and the community on the island). However, these features were not very visible at a distance, and the public perceived the island to be rather ugly. After the construction of the new prison facilities and the modernization efforts on the island, this issue was finally addressed by the Army

The Army undertook a concerted effort to plant the slopes of the island in an attempt to both control erosion and to “beautify” the island. The plant materials used (such as agave, ivy, ice plant, eucalyptus) were better adapted to the growing conditions on Alcatraz, than the types of plants previously used (such as bluegrass), and so survived and altered the appearance of the island..

The Army was eager to promote its efforts to beauty the island and invited reporters out to see what was happening. (Hart 1996: 14) In an article in the island's newspaper, “The Rock,” the author, Edward Mayer, wrote about the Army's efforts to “improve the Rock” so that “its own beauty shall be in harmony with that of its surroundings.” He noted the roses, sweet peas, lilies, and “a large variety of other flowers” that were on the island and the efforts made to establish these plantings:

“ . . . deep holes are cut into the hard rock and filled with rich, black soil. In these the seeds are planted. In this way barren wastes are converted into garden spots, and ugliness is transformed into beauty” (Mayer 1918).

He also noted that the progress of “boardwalk” that was nearing completion around the lower perimeter of the island. Whatever the intended utility of this path, it also appears to have viewed as adding to the beauty and recreational aspects of the island. He noted that:

“Flowers and shrubbery have been planted on both sides of the walk wherever possible, and in course of time it will be as fine a ‘lovers lane’ as there is in the country” (Mayer 1918).

In 1915, Alcatraz was renamed the “Pacific Branch, United States Disciplinary Barracks” and programs was implemented that focused on providing education, training, and rehabilitation for the soldiers incarcerated in the prison. One of the 25 training programs offered was gardening. The number of men working and studying as gardeners varied, but there seems to have been about 12-15 gardeners during the early years of this program. (The Rock 1917-1918)

Another major planting effort took place in the spring of 1924, using plants donated by the California Spring Blossom and Wild Flower Association. The prisoners on the island planted 300 trees and shrubs, “100 pounds of nasturtium seeds, many pounds of Shirley poppy, three mallow and cobaea scanderis” provided by the association (San Francisco Chronicle 1924). (A picnic with entertainment by the

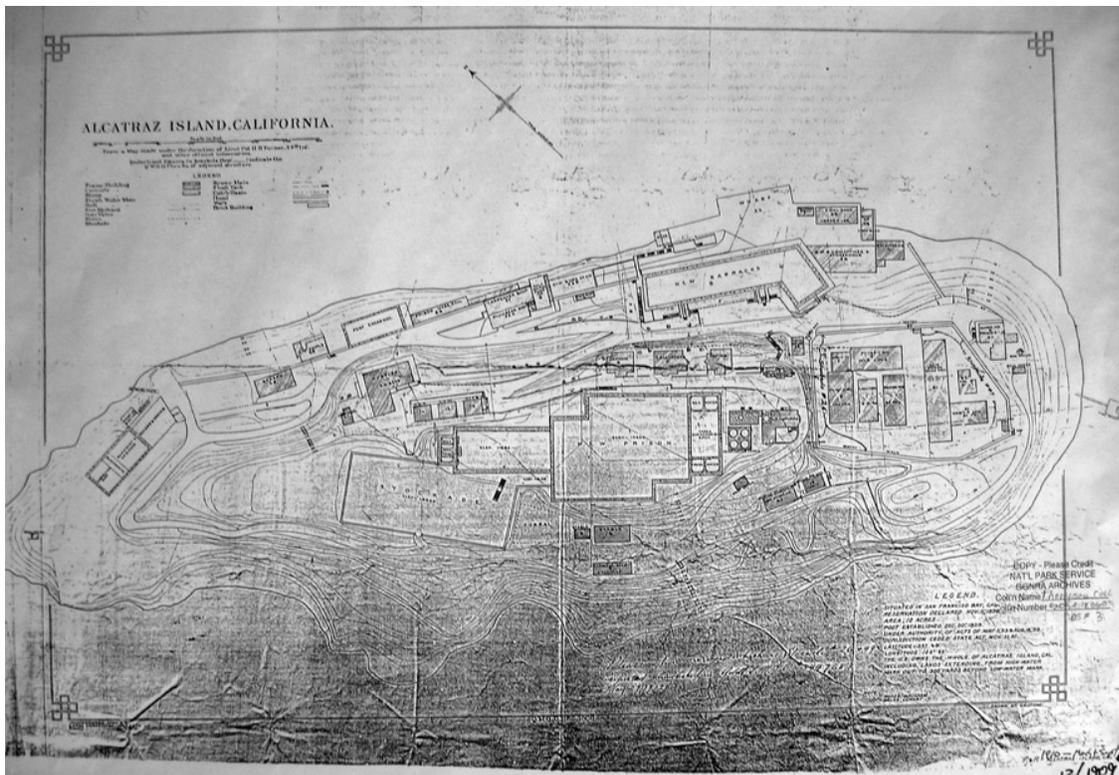
Alcatraz band was planned for later in the spring.)

There are not many details available on the continuing planting and garden work that was carried out on the island under the Army during this period, but Fred Reichel, the first secretary to the Warden, provided a description of the island in 1933 when the facilities were transferred from the Army to the Bureau of Prisons:

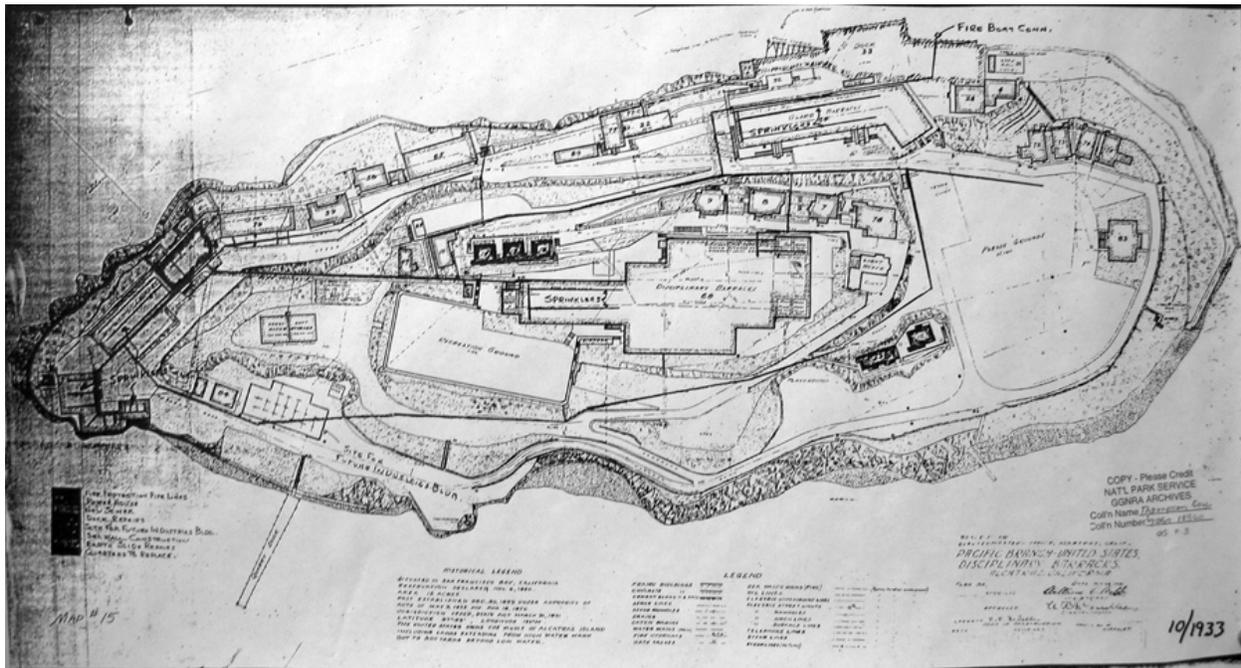
“I was very much impressed by the thousands of hours of hard labor which had gone into its beautification. True, from the mainland it appears mostly rock. However, though much trial and error many plants had become naturalized there and were quite happy. One of the banks was bristling with those inaccurate time keepers –the century plants –and there were blankets of the lavender flowered mesembryanthemum . . . There were many sturdy trees, particularly on the leeward [east] side of the island . . . But perhaps the most unexpected were the terraces which had been formed from the ever present rock and filled in with soil from the sacks carried back by the returning day laborers from Angel Island. Then these terraces had been supplied with various bedding plants which on that February day made me feel that life there would not be as bleak as I might have feared” (Reichel ca. 1974: 1)

The Army also built a simple system that used the recycled or gray water from the prison showers to irrigate the lawn areas and terraced beds on the west side of the island. The water from the showers drained down into tanks (or a pool) where it was stored until it was used. (Reichel, the source of this information, did not say how the water was applied to these areas.) (Reichel Unedited Draft Transcript: 24; Reichel ca. 1974: 2 in Lutsko 1992; Reichel ca. 1978: 1 in Lutsko 1992)

During the military prison era, there is specific documentation or reference (historical maps, historical photographs, and interviews/letters from Fred Reichel) to the following plant materials and planted areas: roses, sweet peas, lilies, nasturtium, poppies, “mallow” (a common name that could have indicated a plant from the Malva, Lavatera, or Alcea genera), “cobaea scanderis” (a misspelling of Cobaea scandens), trees on the east side of the island, and on east side of road on the road from the wharf up to the Guardhouse, between the ca.1881 officers’ quarters (the terraces, walls, and steps that exist today in this area were in place by 1933 when the Army transferred the property to the Bureau of Prisons [U.S. Army 1933]). In addition to these, Fred Reichel found the following Army-era garden spaces, when he arrived on the island in February 1934: agave and “Mesembryanteumum” (a misspelling of Mesembryanthemum that could have referred to plants in different genera including Carpobrotus, Drosanthemum, Aptenia, and Malephora –all of which were listed in a 1992 plant inventory [Lutsko 1992]) on the slopes, a “small flat garden near the Post Exchange,” a rose garden and small green house in the level area of the ca. 1859 NCO’s quarters or on the next lower level (site of the hospital), lawn in the flat areas on either side of the road on the terrace below and west of the cellhouse; and terraces on the west side of the island. (Reichel Unedited Draft Transcript, ca. 1974, and ca. 1978)



Alcatraz Island, California From a map made under the direction of Lieut. Col. R. B. Turner, 29th Inf. Drawn by C.H. Stone December 1909. (This map shows the layout of the island at the beginning of the military prison era.) See Supp. Info. For larger copy



Quartermasters Officer, Alcatraz, Calif., Pacific Branch - United States Disciplinary Barracks, Alcatraz, California, 1933 (This map shows the layout of the island at the end of the military prison era.) See Supplemental Information for a larger copy.

## FEDERAL PRISON ERA (1933-1963)

### Summary of History

Although, the Bureau of Prisons intended to utilize the existing Army-era facilities at Alcatraz, certain repairs and changes were needed to retrofit the island to meet the federal prison system's needs. In November 1933, a report was prepared by Robert Bunge, a consulting engineer who made recommendations on alterations that were needed at Alcatraz. Many of the initial alterations to the facilities at Alcatraz were made inside the prison building. However, exterior features—fences, guardhouses, guard towers, and metal detectors—were added to the landscape to accommodate the Bureau of Prisons' security requirements. (Thompson 1979: 353, 361, 368) The costs associated with this initial period of construction were provided by funds from the Public Works Administration, under the direction of the Department of the Interior. Contracts were awarded to civilian companies for the major projects, and the retrofit work began in late 1933.

The majority of the military prisoners were transferred off of Alcatraz in early 1934 (Martini 1990: 122), and the Bureau of Prisons officially took charge of the 32 military prisoners who the Army had chosen to transfer to the federal system on 1 July 1934. On 11 August 1934, the first group of federal prisoners arrived. (Thompson 1979: 380, 381)

During its 30 years at Alcatraz, the Bureau of Prisons faced the same problems and costs related to maintaining and operating Alcatraz as had the Army. The facility also faced the same hostility from the civilian community who, although fascinated by the lore of "The Rock," did not necessarily appreciate having J. Edgar Hoover's "super prison" in their midst. "In his annual report for fiscal year 1952, Dir.

James V. Bennett said that Alcatraz should be replaced with an institution that was more centrally located and less difficult to operate administratively” (Thompson 1979: 413). Then in 1961, an engineering survey of the island’s facilities found that the buildings “were dangerously deteriorated and that \$ 5,000,000 would be required to repair and rebuild them” (Thomson 1979: 413). The federal prison operations at Alcatraz were closed on 21 March 1963. (Thompson 1979: 414)

After the closure of the federal prison in March 1963, the General Services Administration (GSA) screened other federal agencies to determine if any had an interest in the island, and none did. Alcatraz became surplus federal government, and GSA assumed custody of Alcatraz in July 1964. (Thompson 1979: 466)

## Changes to the Cultural Landscape During the Federal Prison Era (1933-1963)

### 1. Summary

The changes to the cultural landscape features between 1933 and 1963 were related to meeting the needs of operating a high security federal prison on the island, and the Bureau of Prisons added new fences, guardhouses, guard towers, and metal detectors.

The infrastructure of the road system basically remained largely unchanged during this era. However, the circulation patterns on the island were altered and movement was restricted by the fences erected on the island.

The Bureau of Prisons concentrated the housing for the corrections officers and their families on the south end of the island. Three reinforced concrete apartment complexes (Nos. A, B, C) were built on the Parade Ground. The Bureau then demolished a number of 19th century quarters: the ca. 1859 quarters (Nos. 12-14) that were located in the Water Tank area; two of the three ca. 1881 quarters (Nos. 8 and 9) in Officers’ Row; and two wood-frame buildings (Nos. 15 and 43) located on the southwest side of the island. On the north end of the island, the New Industries Building (No. 84) was built, and older shop buildings, located between the Model Industries Building and the Powerhouse complex, were removed.

The people who lived on Alcatraz during the federal prison era –prisoners, employees of the prison, and the families of the employees –continued the tradition of gardening and utilized the garden spaces that had been developed by the Army. Although many individuals gardened on the island, several people, in particular, contributed to the garden areas during this period. One was Fred Reichel, secretary to the Warden between 1934-1941, who took a personal interest in the gardens and plantings at Alcatraz. He maintained gardens; obtained, cultivated and planted new species of plants; convinced the Warden to allow inmates to work as gardeners; provided plants and horticultural advice to inmate gardeners; and helped to expand the extent of the island that was maintained as gardens. The gardens on the west side of the island were expanded through the efforts of a number of inmate gardeners, in particular that of Elliott Michener, who work there from 1941-1948.

The following sections provide a more detailed description of the key cultural landscape features on the island during the federal prison era (1933-1963).

### 2. Changes Related to Security Requirements of the Prison

Under the Army, there had been few restrictions on the movement of the inmates. Under the Bureau of Prisons, parts of the island were designated as restricted to the prison operations and other parts to the administrative and residential functions. These changes were made based on the recommendations from

the Bunge report:

“In contrast to the army regime, prisoners are now to be restricted to only the area containing the prison, the utility building at the northwest of the island, and the laundry shops adjacent to the power plant. The entire eastern side of the island from the powerhouse to and including the southeastern end of the island would be off-limits to the convicts” (Thompson 1979: 354).

The north end of the island was enclosed with new fencing (metal “cyclone type with barbed wire protectors at the top” [Thompson 1979: 361]). The fencing began on the west side at the incinerator, went along the west edge of the island, to the Model Industries Building (No. 82), along the north edge enclosing the fog siren station, along the edge of the shops area (that was between the Model Industries Building and the Powerhouse), and then back of the Powerhouse. (Thompson 1979: 361-362 and Towill 1961). “Where it passes the shops building, which was built on the high scarp wall of the original fortifications, a steel walk was provided to get around the building, so that dogs patrolling the area might pass between the fence and the building” (Thompson 1979: 362).

A guardhouse was installed on the dock and the dock was fenced off “to allow for a receiving station at which all persons going or coming were identified” (Thompson 1979: 371).

The tunnel that ran from the powerhouse complex west to the old quarry area (location of Building 84), powder magazines, and underground storage rooms, left over the 19th century fortifications, were sealed to prevent them from being used as hiding places in the event of escape by prisoners. (Thompson 1979: 354)

Guard towers were built at key locations including: at the wharf; on the north end of the top level of the island, on the Recreation Yard walls; on top of the old North Caponier (fuel storage area); and on the Model Industries Building. (Thompson 1979: 405 and Towill 1961)

There were two metal detectors located outside: one on the wharf where the prisoners arrived to the island via boat and one at the rear entrance to the prison (at the base of the stairs leading up to the Recreation Yard) where the prisoners passed through on their way to jobs at the shops area. (Thompson 1979: 367)

Large signs were posted at the perimeter of the island –on the northwest side of the Model Industries, west side of the island on the wall between the upper and lower roads, southeast end of the island, and at the registration office on the dock –proclaiming a series of warnings, announcing the limits of access to the waters off the island, and emphasizing the Bureau of Prison’s control and authority over the island. (The “ALCATRAZ” that was painted on the slopes of the roof on the Quartermaster Storehouse may have been painted earlier by the Army as a landmark for early planes flying into Crissy Field.) (Thompson 1979: 378-379)

### 3. Circulation

The infrastructure of the road system basically remained largely unchanged during this era. However, the circulation patterns on the island were altered and restricted by the fences erected on the island.

### 4. Changes to the Major Areas

On the east side of the island, the Bureau of Prisons demolished: the hospital, the row of three ca. 1859 NCO’s quarters (Nos. 12-14) (located at the Water Tank area); two of the three ca. 1881 officers’ houses

(Nos. 8 and 9) in Officers' Row. The hospital functions were now located inside the Cellhouse building, and after the construction of the new apartment buildings, there was no longer any need for the quarters and their removal opened up the views in these areas (which was desirable due to security concerns).

On the Parade Ground area, three concrete apartment buildings (Apartments A, B, and C) were built in 1940. The Army-era handball court, that had been located at the south end of the wharf, was relocated to the Parade Ground. A recreation building was located on the northern edge of the Parade Ground, and the handball court was on one side of the building and a children's play area on the other. The paved area, that under the Army had had a tennis court, was used for baseball. (Thompson 1979: 403, 406)

On the southwest side of the island, the two wood-frame buildings (Nos. 15 and 43), on the terrace that was located slightly above the Parade Ground, were removed after the construction of the three apartment buildings on the Parade Ground. (Thompson 1979: 402-403, 411 and Delgado et al. 1991: 17)

On the north industrial end of the island, the New Industries was built around 1940. The quarry dock was in place, but not in use in 1937 (Thompson 1979: 407). By the end of the federal prison era, it had been torn down or had simply disappeared, although the steps down to the dock still appeared on a map from 1961. (Towill 1961) Riprap was added to the seawall on west side around 1935. (Thompson 1979: 407) During this period a seawall around the north end of the island (from pump house to quarry dock and then 300 feet south of quarry dock) was proposed in 1937. (Thompson 1979: 408)

Work was done throughout the island to shore up the sides of hills to prevent earth slides. By 1937, the following work had been completed: concrete buttresses on the cliff on east side of wharf and in the industrial area using concrete blocks manufactured by the inmates; 200 feet of retaining wall south of the Cellhouse; retaining wall north of Quarters No. 9 and small pilasters between Quarters Nos. 7 and 8; and two large pilasters southeast of the lighthouse. (Thompson 1979: 408)

## 5. Garden and Vegetation Features

The people who lived on Alcatraz during the federal prison era –prisoners, employees of the prison, and the families of the employees –continued the tradition of gardening that had existed on Alcatraz since the military fortifications era in the 1860s. (Oral histories and photographs from this era provide more details about the garden and vegetation features than is available from earlier eras.)

### Freddie Reichel

Freddie Reichel lived on Alcatraz and worked as the secretary to the Warden from January 1934 to August 1941. During his seven and a half years on the island, he took a personal interest in the garden areas and plants on Alcatraz and served as their unofficial overseer. He maintained gardens; obtained, cultivated and planted new species of plants; convinced the Warden to allow inmates to work as gardeners; provided plants and horticultural advice to inmate gardeners; and helped to expand the extent of the island that was maintained as gardens. Through his horticultural activities, Reichel helped to foster the garden community that existed on Alcatraz during the federal prison years. As the secretary to the Warden, he was one of the few people on the island who had access to the entire island. He was able to see all of the garden spaces on Alcatraz and to have an impact on the landscape in a way that guards' families, whose access was limited to the public part of the island, and the various inmate gardeners, whose access was limited to particular parts of the prison, could not. (Reichel undated oral history; ca. 1974; and ca. 1978)

When Reichel arrived on the island in January 1934, he was "very much impressed by the thousands of

hours of hard labor which had gone into its beatification” (Reichel ca. 1974: 1). Soon after his arrival on the island, he began maintaining several of the existing garden spaces: the rose garden and greenhouse (located in the Water Tank area), the “terraced garden behind my quarters and extending down to the bay” (Reichel ca. 1978: 1) (he is referring to the Lower Terraces and/or Tool Shed Terraces), and a garden near the Post Exchange. (Reichel ca. 1974: 2)

He first activities on the island were growing and then planting annuals and perennials for planting beds, but he was very aware that these types of plants were not necessarily the best suited to the conditions on the island. There was a limit to the amount of labor that was available to water, weed, and care for plants; there were limits on the areas that inmate gardeners were allowed into due to security concerns; and there was a limit to where plants that relied on irrigation could be planted due to the limited availability of water. He wanted to use plant that could “tough it out with the poor soil and the weeds on the slopes” and ones that did not require a lot of water. Succulents were one of the first types of plants that he grew; he started these in boxes of sand and then transplanted them.

He experimented through his years on the island to see which plants survived and thrived:

“I kept no records of my failures, for I had many –the main thing was to assure some success by trying many things and holding on to those plants which had learned that life is worth holding on to even at its bitterest” (Reichel ca. 1974: 3).

Among the plants that he noted as surviving were white-flowered poppy (*Carpenteria californica*), flannel bush (*Fremontodendron californicum*), Pride of Madeira (*Echium fastuosum*), New Zealand Christmas tree, aeonium, aloe, sedum, ice plant, agave, and bulbs including gladiolus, narcissus, and watsonia. (Beatty 1996: 34-35 and Reichel undated oral history; ca. 1974; and ca. 1978) (The white-flowered poppy and flannel bush were not found during the 1992 plant inventory [Lutsko 1992] and so it is not clear how long these plants survived on the island.)

He corresponded with various people he knew through his involvement with the California Horticultural Society, seeking advice and receiving cuttings from them to try out on Alcatraz. In his reminiscences of his time on the island, Reichel mentioned receiving cuttings of succulents, “a wide range of mesembryanthemums” (ice plant), and possibly other plants from Kate Sessions, a well-known and influential horticulturist in San Diego; one plant of *Echium fastuosum* (Pride of Madera) from Hugh Evans, a nurseryman in Los Angeles, in the late 1940s from which all of the echium that have naturalized the island have descended; and seeds of “*Carpobrotus circinaciformis*” from Bloem Erf Gardens of Stellenbosch, located outside of Cape Town, South Africa. (Reichel undated oral history; ca. 1974; and ca. 1978)

Reichel left Alcatraz in August 1941 to go to work in Montevideo, Uruguay.

### Inmate Gardeners

There was no official civilian gardener at Alcatraz, and the use of prisoners to maintain the gardens grew out of the practical need to “keep prisoners occupied” (Reichel ca. 1978: 2). (Although Reichel admitted that he “thought it would be prudent to try to turn a pleasant face toward San Francisco and as we had a really capable and dedicated gardener [Elliott Michener] available for the west lawn, a great deal of attention was given to that area” [Reichel ca. 1978: 2].) The security practices at the prison limited the location of gardens that could be maintained and the horticultural practices of the inmate gardeners.

At the beginning of the federal prison era, no inmates were assigned the job of gardener, and “. . . the

authorities were fearful of allowing any ‘resident’ loose on the island, even though under the custody of a gun tower officer” (Reichel ca. 1974: 1 in Lutsko 1992). So a limited amount of work was done by the inmate crew assigned to garbage collection and cleanup. Fred Reichel, the Warden’s secretary who had a personal interest in horticulture, provided them with “young plants” that he grew in the greenhouse on the east side of the island (Lower Water Tank area). After the prison was up and running, Reichel succeeded in getting an inmate “assigned to the west lawn.” This person was assigned “not on the basis of his horticultural ability but rather because the other residents would have nothing to do with him” (Reichel ca. 1974: 4).

Inmate gardeners are known to have worked in the gardens or planting beds at the dock area (Reichel oral history: 21); greenhouse and rose garden on the terrace(s) known today as the “Water Tank” garden area (Reichel oral history: 24 and Michener 1995b: 1); the garden and greenhouse at the Warden’s house (Michener 1995a: 2, Beatty 1995: 2-3); the West Lawn area; the Tool Shed terraces; the Recreation Yard slope and Greenhouse area; and the Lower Terraces. During this period, the garden areas on the west side of the prison were expanded through the efforts of individual inmate gardeners, in particular that of Elliott Michener (1941-1950).

While the names of all of the inmates who worked as gardeners are not known, information is available on these three: Dick Franseen (prisoner no. 387; at Alcatraz from 1937-1948), Elliott Michener (prisoner no. 578; at Alcatraz from 1941-1950), and Jack Giles (prisoner no.250; at Alcatraz from 1935-?). These three gardeners knew each other and were friends before they were “reunited” at Alcatraz. It seems that Franseen was the first to work as a gardener, and it may have been that he was able to suggest one or both of his friends as gardeners, when a position came open. They shared information, seed catalogs, and plants while working as gardeners on the island. Michener described himself and his two friends as “accomplices in all we did” (Michener 1995c: 2).

Franseen seems to have started out working on the west side of the island and was later “promoted” to the small garden area and greenhouse in the Water Tank area on the east side of the island. (He may have also worked in the gardens in Officers’ Row). He also helped Reichel with the practice of cutting flowers that were placed out on the dock area for the island’s families to pick up on Sundays (Michener 1995c: 1). Franseen was the inmate who had direct contact with Fred Reichel and received plants, seed catalogs, and valuable horticultural advice from him. Franseen, in turn, provided Elliott Michener, a lifelong friend who he first met as an adolescent at “reform school,” with seed catalogs and plants.

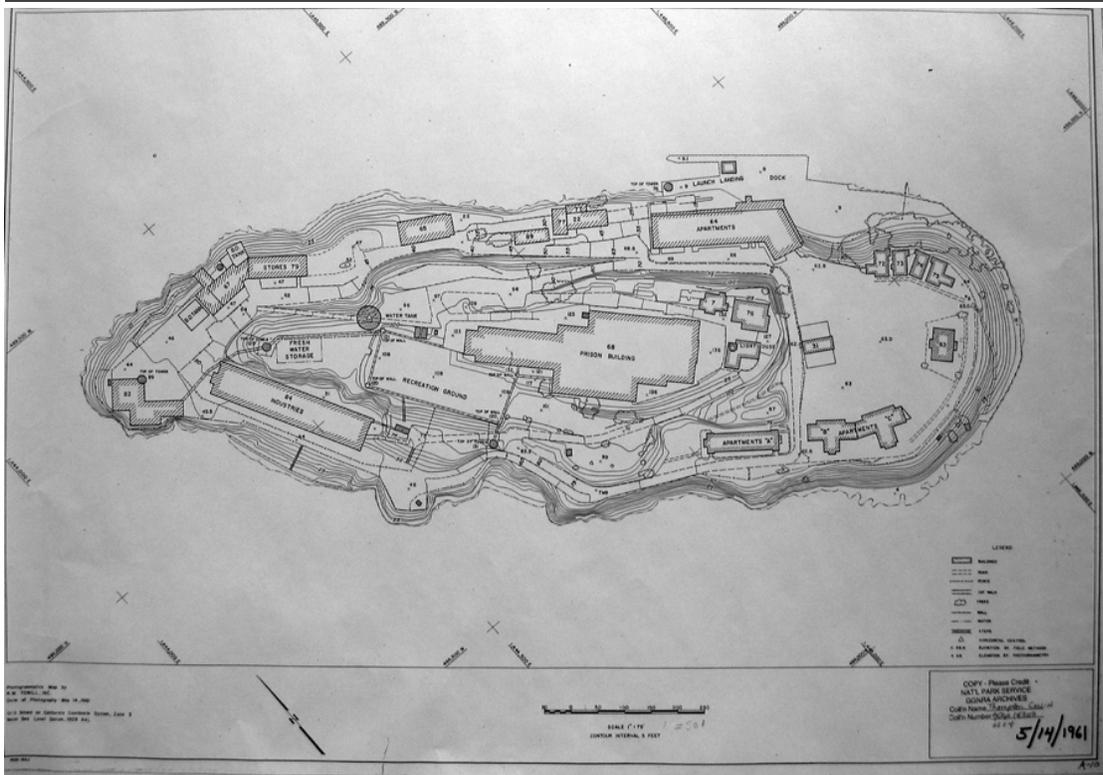
Elliott Michener worked as a gardener on the west side of the island for seven years (from 1941-ca. 1949) and then cared for the gardens and greenhouse at the Wardens house for his last two years (from ca. 1949-1951) at Alcatraz. He arrived at Alcatraz in the summer of 1941 and was assigned to work on the weekends “to retrieve softballs hit over the exercise yard wall to the slope below” (Beatty 1995: 1). A few months later, he “was assigned to be gardener on the east side of the fence on a full time basis, seven days a week” (Beatty 1995: 1). At some point, the areas under his care expanded, and he was responsible for the West Lawn, Tool Shed terraces, Recreation Slope and Greenhouse area, and Lower Terraces.

After receiving the permission of one of the corrections officers, Captain Weinhold, Michener undertook a two-year-long project of improving the beds on the Recreation Slope and Greenhouse area. When he began caring for these spaces on the west side, the soil was only four to five inches deep. He broke up the underlying “solid yellow hardpan” to a depth of two and a half feet, shifted it through a home-made screen, and then added “thousands upon thousands of five-gallon pails of garbage” that he “lugged up from the incinerator and disposal area” to create a suitable medium for planting. He planted the area with “Iceland poppies, stock, and snapdragon” that he got from Dick Franseen. He also planted “picture-beds

of delphinium, chrysanthemum, dahlias, and iris” after he received permission from the Warden to “send out for seeds and plants.” (Michener 1995a: 1-2)

Michener described working on the hillside as providing “a refuge from the disturbances of the prison.” The work was a “release;” it became an “obsession” with him; and provided him with a “lasting interest in creativity” (Michener 1995a: 1). The gardening position provided Michener with a relative amount of autonomy: he seems to have chosen the plants and laid out the planting beds; he planned and implemented the expansion of the beds in the areas under his care. However, given the restrictions of the prison regulations, he had to get permission just to begin his arduous expansion project on the Recreation Yard slope, and he also had to receive special permission from the Warden to order seeds and bulbs from catalogs. (Michener 1995a: 2) (There was no mention on who paid for these plant materials.) Working in the garden probably also helped to ease some of the isolation inherent in the Alcatraz prisoners’ lives. He was a part of an informal community of people on Alcatraz whose interactions aided his gardening efforts: other prisoners, guards, the Warden, the Warden’s wife, and indirectly Fred Reichel. He relied on his friendship with the prisoner assigned to the incinerator detail to get the pails of organic garbage he used for compost in his planting beds. He received plants, seed catalogs, and valuable information from his friend Dick Franseen. He was able to build a small potting shed, located on the south edge of the upper west side terrace area from old windows that were salvaged by Captain Weinhold. (Beatty 1995: 1) Weinhold also bought him a pair of gloves after noticing that his hands were blistered from digging. (Beatty 1995: 1) Other guards (and possibly Weinhold) would buy him seeds and plants on their trips into the city. Mrs. Swope, the Warden’s wife, provided him with plants and seeds. (Michener 1995a: 2)

After Michener was transferred to the Warden’s house, Jack Giles took over the responsibilities of caring for the west side garden areas. (Although, Michener was allowed to visit the west side gardens and Giles on Saturdays [Beatty 1995: 2], he never saw Franseen’s garden area since it was on the east side of the prison and Michener did not have access to this area. [Michener 1995a: 1]) Jack Giles was probably recommended for the west side gardening position by Michener. Giles met Franseen and Michener in 1926, when they were all in the Oregon State Penitentiary. Giles, who was the boss of the print shop there, got the two jobs in the print shop after their failed escape attempt. After Franseen and Michener had served their sentences, they “came back and helped Jack escape” (Michener 1995b: 2) in 1934. (Giles was famous for his 1945 escape attempt. He worked as a stevedore at the dock and stole an Army Staff Sergeant’s uniform as he unloaded laundry that came to the island to be cleaned. On 31 July 1945, he put on the uniform and boarded the Army boat leaving the island; he was captured 20 minutes later.)



*Photogrammetric Map of Alcatraz Island, R.M. Towill Inc., 1961 (This map shows the built features of the island at the end of the federal prison era.) See Supplemental Information for a larger copy.*

## **PUBLIC LANDS ERA (1963 to Present)**

### **Summary of History**

For the five years following the closure of the federal prison on Alcatraz in March 1963, the island was vacant except for the presence of GSA security personnel.

There was ongoing public debate about what to do with the island. Included in this debate were ideas to develop housing, a resort, or a casino on the island. There was also a growing constituency to use the island for outdoor recreation or to create some type of commemoration related to the island's history. San Francisco's city council voted to accept Lamar Hunt's proposal to totally redevelopment Alcatraz in July 1969, and by doing this, inadvertently energized the efforts for preserve the island. A campaign to "Save Alcatraz" was started by a local citizen, Alvin Duskin, when he took out one-page advertisements in two local newspapers, and the Department of Interior became involved in the issue and began to formally explore the options of using the island for recreation. (Thompson 1979: 467)

Also during this period, a group of Native Americans were pursuing claims to the island that would evolve into the 19-month Indian Occupation. A group of five Sioux Indians briefly occupied the island on 8 March 1964 for four hours. "This short occupation is significant because the demands for the use of the island for a cultural center and an Indian university would resurface almost word for word in the larger, much longer occupation of 1969" (Johnson). In September 1965, a claim was filed in the U.S. District Court of Northern California that tried to establish the Indian's right to the island and sought to prevent the federal government from selling the land or to award the Indians \$2,500,000 in settlement for loss of the land. The suit was dismissed in July 1968.

Then, during the night and early morning of 9-10 November 1969, a group of four Native Americans arrived on Alcatraz via a rented boat to “symbolically claim the island for the Indian people” (Johnson). That morning, the GSA regional administrator came to the island and asked them to leave. They did but returned on 20 November as the “Indians of All Tribes” and issued a press release stating their intention to stay and occupy the island. While the Indians’ claims during the previous five years had attracted little public attention, this action became national news. The Indians continued to occupy the island until 11 June 1971, when the last of the group, now only 10 adults and 5 children, were removed from the island by federal marshals. “The underlying goals of the Indians on Alcatraz were to awaken the American public to the reality of the plight of the first Americans and to assert the need for Indian self-determination. As a result of the occupation, either directly or indirectly, the official government policy of termination of Indian tribes was ended and a policy of Indian self-determination became the official US government policy” (Johnson).

In May 1971, GSA announced that it planned to transfer Alcatraz to the Department of the Interior. (Thompson 1979: 471) In 1972, Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) was created, and Alcatraz was added to the properties included in the park. The island was opened by the National Park Service (NPS) for public tours beginning in October 1973.

#### Changes to the Cultural Landscape During the Public Lands-Era (1963-present)

Alcatraz was basically uninhabited and vacant from the end of March 1963, when the last prisoners were removed from the island, through November 1969, at the beginning of the 19-month-long Indian Occupation. The government’s main investment on the island during this period was to provide security, and the main impacts to the cultural landscape were ones related to inaction rather than action. The lack of maintenance combined with harsh environmental conditions adversely impacted the condition of the island’s buildings. The lack of maintenance on the island also meant that plants and gardens on the island received no care or water; garden areas on Alcatraz naturalized; plants that could survive the conditions on Alcatraz remained and those that could not disappeared.

Birds began to return to Alcatraz to nest during these years, and this pattern has continued to the present. Western gulls re-colonized the island around 1973. Black-crowned night herons were there in 1975. Pigeon guillemots have been on the island since 1982; pelagic cormorants since 1986; Brandt’s cormorants since 1991; snowy egrets since 1997; and one pair of black oystercatchers since 1997. (Hellwig 2005)

During the Indian Occupation, the quarters for the Lighthouse, the Warden’s house, and the Post Exchange burned. After the Indians left the island in June 1971, GSA demolished all of the quarters on the Parade Ground. A brick arch in the Sallyport was damaged by a bulldozer during this demolition. (Thompson 1979: 474) GSA also installed metal fences along the east and west shores.

Under NPS management, two new restroom buildings have been constructed (one at the wharf and one on Officers’ Row). The deterioration of historic buildings and structures continued, and in 2001, a multi-year Historic Preservation and Safety Construction Program was begun. Work that has been completed, to date, under this program has included the dock repair, cell house seismic strengthening, and Building 64 balcony repair projects. (Lehman 2005) The naturalization of the garden areas and the reclamation of portions of these areas by nesting birds have continued.

In late 2003, Golden Gate National Park Conservancy staff and volunteers began clearing out plant debris from a number of garden areas (Sallyport bed, Electric Shop bed, Officers’ Row, Tool Shed Terraces, portion of the West Lawn along the east side of the road, and portions of the Greenhouse area).