

Marine Exchange Lookout Station

After gold was discovered in California in 1848 the number and frequency of ships entering the San Francisco Bay increased dramatically. Each vessel was eagerly anticipated and great effort was put into spreading the news of the arrival.

By the early 1850s, an organized system of messaging using semaphores placed strategically around the Bay and operated by resident signalers, had been established by the Merchant Exchange. This civic organization acted as a clearinghouse for shipping and commercial news.

A Marine Exchange lookout station on Point Lobos was erected in 1850. The lookout station was a telegraph semaphore that communicated with a semaphore atop Robb Hill in the Presidio. The Robb Hill semaphore would relay the message to the semaphore atop Loma Alta, which quickly became known as Telegraph Hill. Though the installation of telegraph lines eventually replaced the semaphore system, the need for communication between the lookouts remained necessary for decades.

The lookout station on Point Lobos was demolished in 1889 for Adolph Sutro's railroad line. It was replaced by a wood shingled octagonal station built above the railroad grade, at the site of the current USS San Francisco Memorial. The station was moved again in 1925 to make way for the installation of a scenic overlook along El Camino del Mar. The final Marine Exchange Lookout Station building was built at its current location in 1926 and was in operation until 1966.

The last family to operate the Marine Exchange Lookout continued living in the octagon building until 2002. The octagon house can still be seen above the Lands End



Top: Abandoned Marine Exchange building at the current site of the USS San Francisco Memorial, ca. 1927; *Bottom:* Marine Exchange Lookout in its current location above Lands End, ca. 1927.

parking lot. It is now under management of the National Park Service.