

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 the Merchant Exchange (a civic organization that acted as a clearinghouse for shipping and commercial news) had established an organized system of messaging using semaphores placed strategically across San Francisco, operated by resident signalers.

The 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 1927 and was in operation until 1966.

The last family to operate the Marine Exchange Lookout continued living in the building until 2002. The octagon building can still be seen above the Lands End parking lot. It is now under management of the National Park Service.



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Top: The old Marine Exchange building when it was located 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.