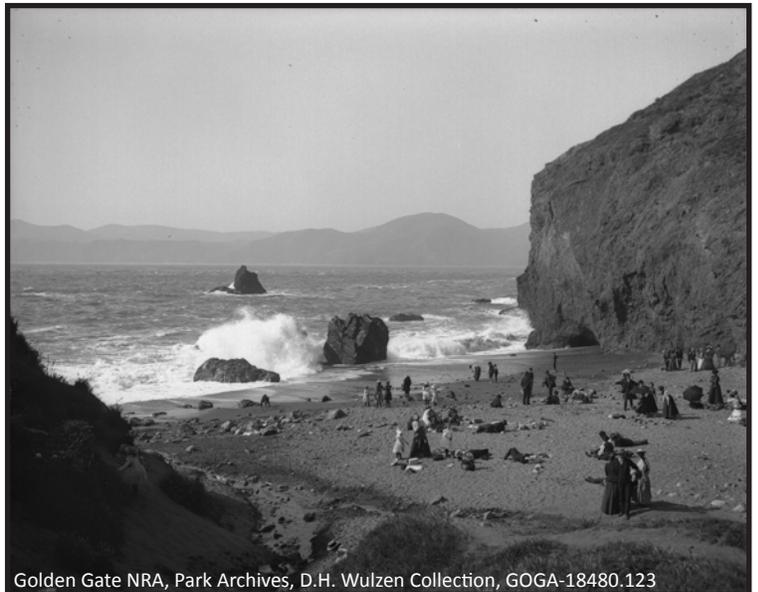


Swimming

By the mid-1800s, salt air and ocean water were thought to have therapeutic qualities. This belief drew people out to the beaches for a healing dip in the water and a breath of fresh ocean air. Later, the fitness benefits of swimming were promoted, and it became a popular recreation.

At Lands End, deadly rip tides and cold temperatures kept all but the bravest and strongest swimmers out of the ocean. Famous swimmers would draw crowds to the Cliff House to witness their circuits around Seal Rocks. The Olympic Club began its annual New Year's Day ocean dip in the early 1900s. Less hardy swimmers could dive and paddle in the more protected aquatic environment of the indoor Sutro Baths.

Although the water was cold, the beach was often advertised as temperate all year round. Winter publicity swims were organized to entice envious East Coast tourists. But most visitors lounged on the sand or waded in the shallow surf. This remains true of Ocean Beach visitors, but many avid surfers happily risk the cold water and currents for their sport. The rip tides and strong currents make Ocean Beach and Lands End Beach extremely dangerous. The lives of casual as well as experienced swimmers have been lost there over the years.



Top: Postcard showing bathers at Sutro Baths, date unknown; *Middle:* the Olympic Club New Year's Dip, 1905; *Bottom* Lands End Beach (Naiad Cove), 1900.