Mare Island

Flagship Ave.

Club Dr.

10

Scenic View

11

12

13

14

Azuar Dr.
Walnut Ave.
Railroad Ave.
Nimitz Ave.

Mare Island Causeway/G. St.

To Tennessee St.

80
29
37
Vallejo
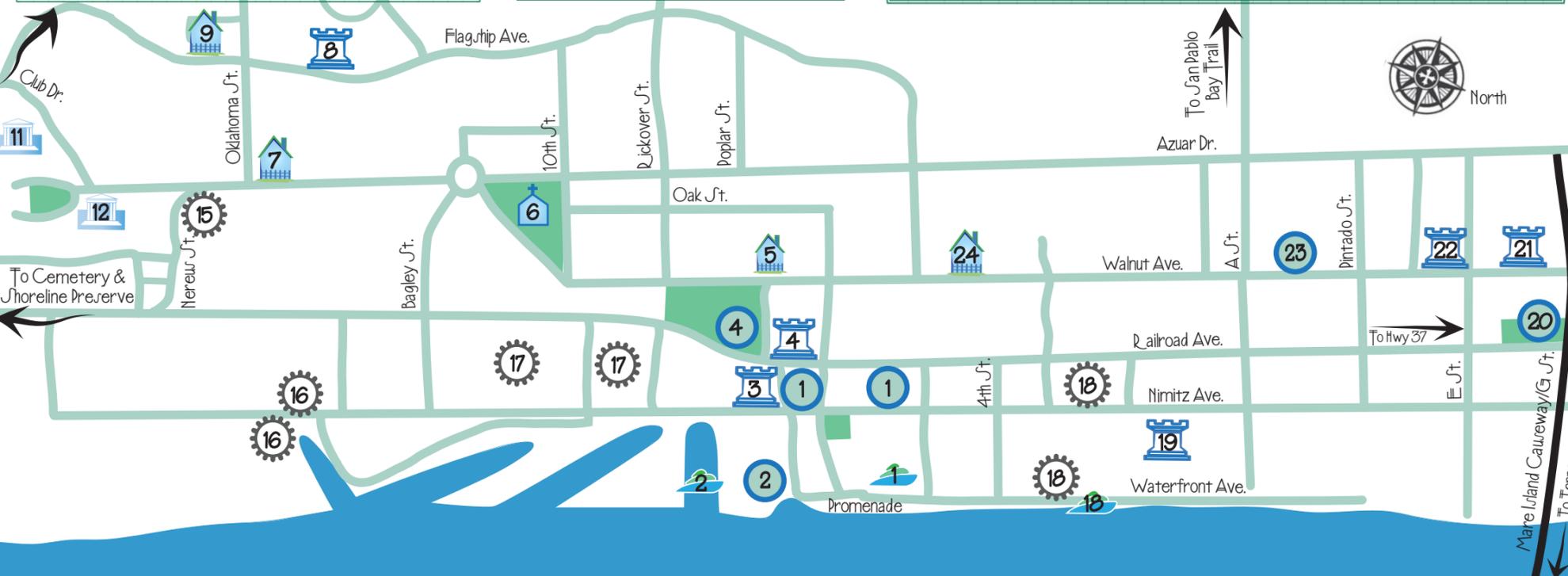Mare Island
Benicia
780
680

About Mare Island

MARE ISLAND NAVAL SHIPYARD

Mare Island was first named Isla Plana, or Flat Island, by Lt. Juan Manuel De Ayala, the first Spanish mariner to enter San Francisco Bay in 1775. It got its current name, according to one generally accepted story, as a result of a mishap in Carquinez Strait involving a white mare belonging to Gen. Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo.

Vallejo made use of a crude raft to move supplies and livestock to his extensive land holdings. During a stormy trip from Martinez to Benicia, the frightened animals on board, including the white mare, kicked down a crude fence penning them in and fell into the water. Another version has the mare drifting away from horses that Vallejo's workers were swimming across the Carquinez Strait. A few weeks later, the white mare was discovered later on Isla Plana, and Vallejo renamed the island Isla de la Yegua -- Mare Island.

9   8   Flagship Ave.

Club Dr.

11

7

12   15

To Cemetery & Shoreline Preserve

Oklahoma St.   10th St.   Rickover St.   Poplar St.

Oak St.

6

5   24

4   4

17   17

16

3   1   1

16

2   2   1

Promenade

Nereus St.   Bagley St.

4th St.

18

18

19

18

To San Pablo Bay Trail

Azuar Dr.

Walnut Ave.

A St.   23   Pintado St.   22   21

Railroad Ave.

To Hwy 37   20

Nimitz Ave.

E St.

Waterfront Ave.

North

Mare Island Causeway/G. St.

To Tennessee St.

Mare Island Architectural Heritage Tour

#		#	
1	Ferry Building, Power Plant	13	Shoreline Preserve, Ammo Depot
2	Drydocks, Ship Ways	14	Navy Cemetery
3	Oldest Building, Museum	15	Old Navy Stables
4	Commandant's Office, Park, Bomb Shelters	16	Massive "Industrial Cathedral"
5	Officers' Mansions	17	Industrial Buildings
6	St. Peter's Chapel	18	Coal Sheds, Might Midget, Ghost!
7	Marine Commander's Home	19	Main Power Plant
8	"Old 84" Prison	20	Morton Field Ball Park
9	Marine Barracks, Parade Grounds	21	Rodman Center
10	Mare Island Golf Course	22	Former Sailors' Quarters
11	Officers' Club	23	Mare Island Sports Center
12	Navy Hospital, Touro University	24	Little Dublin Housing

Mare Island Architectural Heritage Tour

Mare Island Architectural Heritage Tour

Mare Island, site of the U.S. Navy's first permanent base on the West Coast, has several hundred structures and sites of historic and architectural interest. This tour attempts to highlight some of the best.

The Navy bought the island for $83,491, opened the shipyard in September 1854 and in its 142-year history turned out 513 ships -- including nearly 400 during World War II. Its World War I ships included the destroyer USS Ward, built in a record 17 ½ days. Seventeen nuclear submarines were constructed between the mid-1950s and 1970. Thousands of other vessels underwent overhauls and other repairs over the years.

During WWII, the shipyard employed more than 44,000 civilian personnel, a fifth of them women. Naval operations ceased and the shipyard was decommissioned on April Fool's Day, 1996.

Mare Island had the first permanent drydock on the West Coast. The USS Saginaw, first Navy warship built on the Pacific shore, was launched here on March 3, 1859.

Other shipyard "firsts" included the only U.S. dreadnought, the USS California, to be built on the West Coast (1916-1919); the Navy's first aircraft landing deck, a 157-foot-long wooden platform on the USS Pennsylvania; oldest (1857) ammunition depot on the West Coast; and the Navy's first interdenominational chapel.

Much of Mare Island now is a mixed-use, master-planned community being developed through a public/private partnership between Vallejo and Lennar Mare Island LLC. There are over 100 commercial, civic and educational entities with more than 2,200 employees. Also underway are open-space improvements and a new ferry facility.

The choice of David Glasgow Farragut to create the U.S. Navy's first permanent base on the Pacific Coast turned out to be a wise move.

Farragut, who was the Mare Island Naval Shipyard commandant from 1854 to 1858, transformed a desolate site into a bustling Navy base capable of handling many types of ship repair work done by long-established East Coast Navy yards.

Admiral Farragut

Farragut was just 9 ½ years old when he became a midshipman in 1810. By the time he got to Mare Island, he had more than 40 years of service at sea and at the Navy's Norfolk shipyard. He was stationed on the USS Essex during the War of 1812, was master of a captured British ship at age 12, and was captured and held prisoner by the British for several months in 1814.

Following Mare Island, Farragut returned to sea duty and became a Civil War hero. He had a key role in capturing the port of New Orleans in April 1862, and then achieved a critical Union victory at the Battle of Mobile Bay in 1864 -- where he's remembered for saying, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!"

That's close to what he actually said, which was, "Damn the torpedoes! Four bells! Capt. Drayton, go ahead! Jouett, full speed!"

Farragut was the Navy's first admiral and was permitted to remain in the Navy for life. He visited Mare Island in 1869, getting a hero's welcome in Vallejo which in 15 years had grown from a tiny village to a town of more than 6,000 residents. A year later he died at age 69 in Portsmouth, N.H..

Farragut has been remembered with a statue in Washington, D.C., five Navy ships named for him over the years, and other honors. But, as stated in the book "A Long Line of Ships," it's on Mare Island and in Vallejo where he is best remembered.
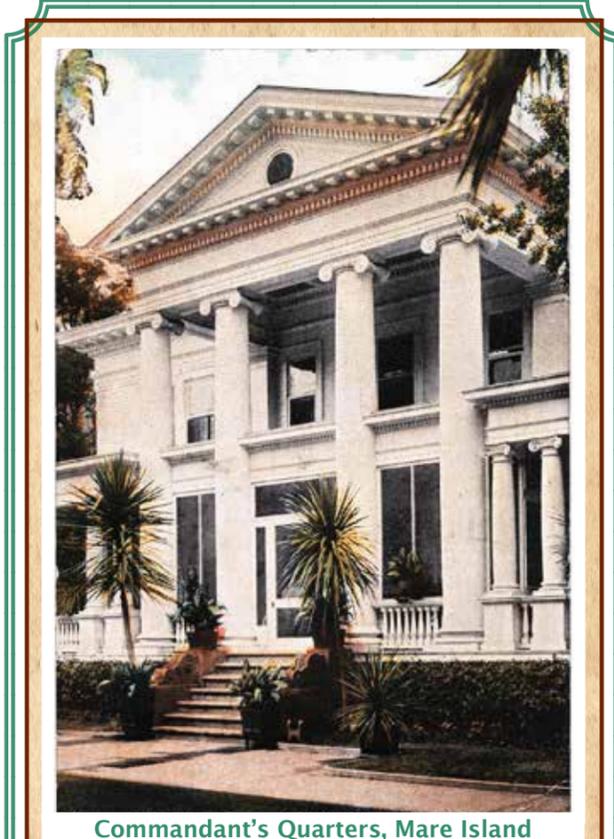
Commandant's Quarters, Mare Island

History Speaks

A tour of some of the many architectural gems on Mare Island

Sponsored by the Vallejo Architectural Heritage and Landmarks Commission

For More Information

Vallejo's Architectural Heritage and Landmarks Commission
555 Santa Clara St., Vallejo CA 94590
www.ci.vallejo.ca.us

The Tour

1 – Building B-165, now the ferry maintenance and passenger terminal, this once was a lead-casting shop dating to 1905. It also provided steam power for heating and hydraulics. Also B-99 and B-99A –– fire house and garage. The fire house is the first steel-framed building on the island, built in 1900; and B-121, the shipyard's central power plant building with a 210-foot-high stack. The 1918 plant is an example of what was then a new industrial concept of a central generating point for electrical power to various shop buildings.

2 – Drydocks and ship launch ways, on the Mare Island waterfront. Construction of Drydock #1 began in 1872 and it went into service in 1891 as the first U.S. drydock on the Pacific coast. Dug by hand, Drydock #1 is 508 feet long and is considered one of the most remarkable granite-and-concrete structures in California. Drydock #2, completed in 1910, is 740 feet long and could hold six destroyers at a time, Drydock #3, 680 feet long, was completed in 1940. Drydock #4, completed in 1942, is the smallest drydock at 435 feet long. It was designed to accommodate destroyers, submarines, and smaller merchant vessels.

Dry Dock #1

3 – Building 46 was built around the oldest structure on Mare Island. The cornerstone for the original building was laid on Feb. 23, 1855. Once the pipe shop/smithery, B-46 is now the Mare Island Museum. It's an example of industrial Romanesque Revival architecture. The museum is a treasure trove of shipyard history. Call 707-557-4646 or 707-280-5742 for museum information.

4 – Building 47, commandant's administration building, dating to 1870, and Farragut Plaza. The building, expanded over the years, once included a courtroom which doubled as the first shipyard chapel. The building, with a Renaissance Revival architectural style, was the nerve center for Mare Island. Across the street is Alden Park, named for Commodore James Alden who in 1868 began the practice of landscaping Mare Island with trees and other vegetation brought by Navy ships from around the world. The north end of the park, with an 1895 bandstand and numerous Navy artifacts, was the site of formal military ceremonies. Many WWII bomb shelters are on south end of park. Work on the bomb shelters, which were scattered throughout the island, began on Dec. 8, 1941, the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

5 – Quarters A, Commandant's mansion and other mansions along Officers' Row. Built following 1898 earthquake that badly damaged the original brick officers' quarters. The main style of the existing mansions is Classic Colonial Revival. Prominent visitors to Quarters A included many leading U.S. public figures and naval officers of most maritime nations.

6 – Building 104, St. Peter's Chapel. Oldest Navy chapel in the nation and the Navy's first interdenominational church, dating to 1901. Designed by architect Albert Sutton and built of California redwood, the chapel features 25 Tiffany stained-glass windows, best viewed from inside the building. Numerous plaques and tablets inside the church honor Navy men going back to John Paul Jones and the Revolutionary War. Located in Chapel Park. Call the Mare Island Museum at 707-557-4646 or 707-280-5742 to arrange to see the chapel.

7 – Building M-1, Marine commander's residence, built in 1871 in an Italianate style. The home has features including marble fireplaces, stained glass and high ceilings. Marines had a long history on Mare Island, starting with the Jan. 1, 1863, arrival of 140 troops to help protect the shipyard and the San Francisco Bay area –– especially from any southern sympathizers during the Civil War.

Old 84 Navy prison

8 – Building 84, prison. Staffed by Marines, "Old 84" was built in 1890 as a prison for Pacific Fleet sailors serving time for serious crimes. Inmate work crews raised cattle and grew vegetables for Navy officers' families, and even helped to build a golf course. Other Marine buildings are near the prison, closed in the 1940s after WWII. It later served as a print shop and storehouse.

9 – Marine Corps barracks and parade grounds, built in 1917, to replace 1871 barracks and parade ground located north of Building M-1, the Marine commanders residence. Nearby are three Victorian homes, jacked up for movement to different locations. These houses, built in the late 1880s for Marine officers, are the only Queen Anne/Eastlake style buildings on the island.

10 – Mare Island golf course. The island's first golf course was first located on the site of the Marine parade grounds. Dating to 1892, it was the oldest golf course west of the Mississippi River. The fairways were dry and the "greens" were sand. The course was moved to its current location in 1914.

11 – Farragut Inn officers club and B-926 bachelor officers quarters. B-926, built in 1909, is a good example of Mission Revival architecture adopted on Mare Island after earlier use of neoclassical and Colonial Revival styles. Farragut Inn is now part of the Touro University medical school and on private property. Call Touro's facilities department at 707-638-5800 in advance for tour information.

12 – Building H-1, the Navy hospital dating to 1901, replaced an earlier hospital that opened in 1870 and was damaged in the 1898 earthquake. H-1 is now part of Touro University. During WWII, it was a treatment center for thousands of military amputees. Other hospital buildings, including a Mission-style H-78 nurses building dating to 1939 and a small park, are located here. Call Touro at 707-638-5800 in advance for tour information; or the Mare Island Museum at 707-557-4646 or 707-280-5742.

13 – Mare Island Heritage Shoreline Preserve, located within part of the old Naval Ammunition Depot. The depot, dating to 1857, was located on the south end of the island to isolate it from the rest of the shipyard. To avoid fire danger, the Navy contracted with sheep ranchers to graze flocks until grass on the depot was eaten. The oldest shipyard home, dating to 1860, is located here.
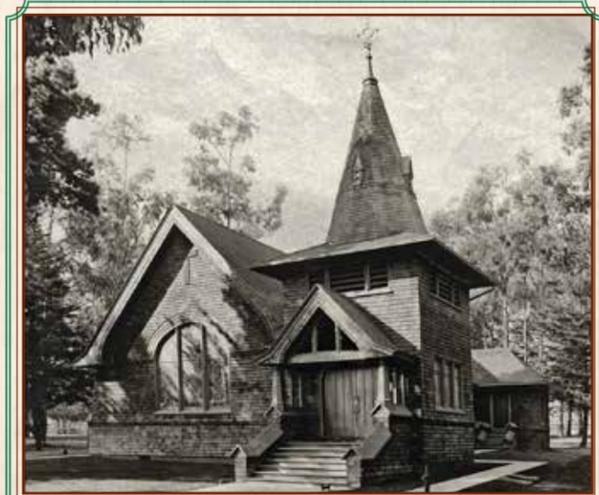
St. Peter's Chapel

14 – Mare Island cemetery includes nearly 1,000 graves of sailors and Marines and family members. The first burial was in 1856. Francis Scott Key's daughter and numerous Navy and Marine Corps heroes, including three Medal of Honor recipients, are buried here. Also buried here are Russian, French, British and Dutch sailors whose ships called at Mare Island in the 1800s; and a ship's mascot known as "Mike the bear" –– which may have been an anteater rather than a bear.

15 – Building 88, dating to 1862, was once the Navy's livestock stables. The last horses were sold in 1929, and the blacksmith area, shed and stable keeper's residence are gone. Later used as a warehouse, In WWII, B-88 was known as "Dineen's Storehouse" for longtime shipyard employee Tim Dineen.

16 – Building 680, former shipyard machine shop with 250,000 square feet of floor space, massive steel beams and hundreds of window. Described as an "industrial cathedral," it's now the site of Blu Homes. Also, B-742, the old Ocean Engineering Building, where top-secret Navy work was conducted.

17 – Building B-106, built in 1904 for construction of small boats; and Building B-114, built in 1901 and used as a sawmill. Architecturally, B-106 blends 20th century steel-framed industrial technology with a much older neoclassical brick masonry design.

18 – Buildings 141-163 –– Coal sheds dating to 1901 and used for storing coal. Current uses include artists' studios. "Mighty Midget" WWII landing craft support ship, tied up on seawall. Huge cranes, other equipment located here. Also B-77, where the body of a Navy lieutenant named Wilson, who died in the Far East in 1892, was stored by mistake for nine years after being shipped here for burial. Over the years, shipyard workers reported strange noises and ghostly figures, and an admiral once ordered that lights be left on in B-77 night and day. The 1870 structure is a good example.

19 – Buildings 85, 87, 89, 91 –– This group of large brick industrial buildings included a machine shop, boiler shop, smithery and foundry. All feature Classical Revival details, epitomizing the early period of Mare Island history. The structures were built between 1858 and 1871.

Industrial Cathedral –– See #16

20 – Morton Field, ball field developed during WWII. Named for Navy Capt. Dudley "Mush" Morton, commander of the Mare Island-built submarine Wahoo, lost in the Pacific on its seventh war patrol.

21 – Building 545, constructed in 1942 as the Rodman Naval Center Recreation Building and named after Hugh Rodman, the Navy admiral who fought successfully to keep the shipyard open after WWI. The Spanish-style center contained a movie theater, cafeteria, bowling alley, swimming pool and gym.

22 – Building 543, now the Vallejo City Unified School District Administration Building, was built in 1941 to house enlisted sailors. In 1944, the north wing was modified to accommodate enlisted women, and a section of the south wing was converted into a single-cell brig. B-459, across Walnut Avenue, once was quarters for submarine crews, including officers and enlisted men.

23 – Building 523, now Mare Island Sports Center, also known as the round or oval house, was originally designed by prominent architect Timothy Pflueger for the 1939 World's Fair on Treasure Island. In 1941, B-523 was moved to Mare Island for use as a Navy Exchange warehouse for over 40 years. It was converted in 1983 to a sports complex.

24 – Little Dublin, including Buildings P, 17, 19, 29, 21. Building P dates to 1873, followed by B-17 dating to the late 1890s. This development at first was for civilian employees, many of them Irish, whose duties required 24-7 accessibility. In the shipyard's early years there was limited ferry service from Vallejo. The first bridge to the island was built in 1918.