Map Section

Mare Island

Flagship Ave.
Club Dr.
Scenic View
11
12
13
Azuar Dr.
Walnut Ave.
Railroad Ave.
Nimitz Ave.
To Temescee St.
Mare Island Causeway/G St.

I-80
29
37
Vallejo
Tennessee St.
Mare Island
I-780
680
Benicia

To San Pablo Bay Trail
North
Azuar Dr.
Flagship Ave.
Oklahoma St.
10th St.
Rickover St.
Poplar St.
Oak St.
Walnut Ave.
A St.
Pintado St.
23
22
21
Club Dr.
9
8
11
7
To Cemetery & Shoreline Preserve
12
10
6
Nereus St.
Bagley St.
5
24
Railroad Ave.
To Hwy 37
20
Mare Island Causeway/G St.
16
16
4
4
3
3
1
1
4th St.
18
Nimitz Ave.
E St.
15
15
2
2
1
19
18
Waterfront Ave.
18
To Temescee St.
Promenade
17

Legend

Mare Island Architectural Heritage Tour

1. Ferry Building, Power Plant
2. Drydocks, Ship Ways
3. Oldest Shipyard Building, distillery
4. Commandant's Office, Park, Bomb Shelters
5. Officers' Mansions
6. St. Peter's Chapel
7. Marine Commander's Home
8. "Old 84" Prison
9. Marine Barracks, Parade Grounds
10. Old Navy Stables
11. Officers' Club
12. Navy Hospital, Touro University
13. Shoreline Preserve, Ammo Depot
14. Navy Cemetery
15. Massive "Industrial Cathedral"
16. Industrial Buildings
17. Historic Ships, Mighty Midget
18. Coal Sheds, art studios, B-77 Ghost!
19. Early Industrial Complex
20. Morton Field Ball Park
21. Rodman Center
22. Former Sailors' Quarters
23. Former Sports Complex
24. Little Dublin Housing

Mare Island Architectural Heritage Tour

Mare Island, site of the U.S. Navy's first permanent West Coast base, has hundreds of structures and sites of historic interest. This tour highlights 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 1, 1996.

The USS Saginaw, first Navy warship built on the Pacific shore, was launched here in 1859. Other shipyard "firsts" included the USS California, only West Coast-built dreadnought (1916-1919); the Navy's first aircraft landing deck, a 157-foot wood platform on the USS Pennsylvania; oldest (1857) Pacific ammunition Depot; the Navy's first interdenominational Chapel; and the first permanent West Coast drydock.

Much of Mare Island now is a mixed-use, master-planned community being developed through a public/private partnership between Vallejo and Mare Island Co. There are over 100 commercial, civic and educational entities with more than 3,000 employees.

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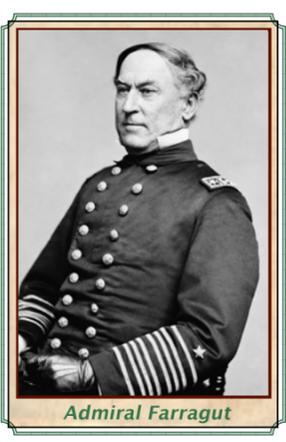
Farragut, who was the Mare Island Naval Shipyard commandant from 1854 to 1858, transformed a desolate site into a bustling Navy base capable of handling many types of ship repair work done by long-established East Coast Navy yards.

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
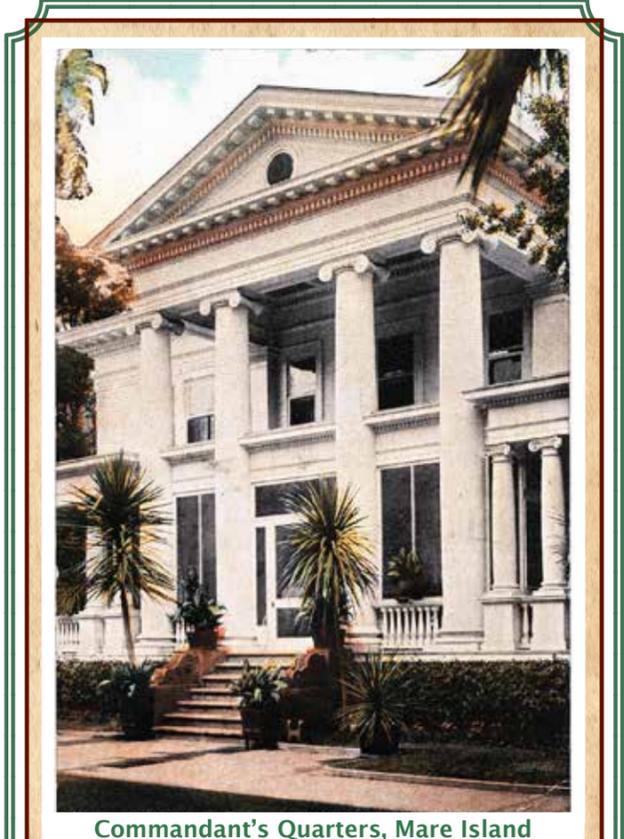
Explore Mare Island

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

Sponsored by the Vallejo Architectural Heritage and Landmarks Commission

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. 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.


Dry Dock #1

3 - Historic Building 45, fronting on launch ways, now houses Redwood Empire Whiskey distillery. Nearby Building 46 was built around oldest structure on Mare Island. Cornerstone of first building laid Feb. 23, 1855, only five months after David Farragut took charge of the first West Coast Navy base. The Building, once the pipe shop/smithery, is an example of Industrial Romanesque Revival architecture.

4 - Building 47, commandant's admin-istration 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. Nearby mansions house the Quarters Coffee House and Vino Godfather Winery.

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. Contact the Mare Island Historic Park Foundation at 707-557-4646 or www.MIHPF.org to tour 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.
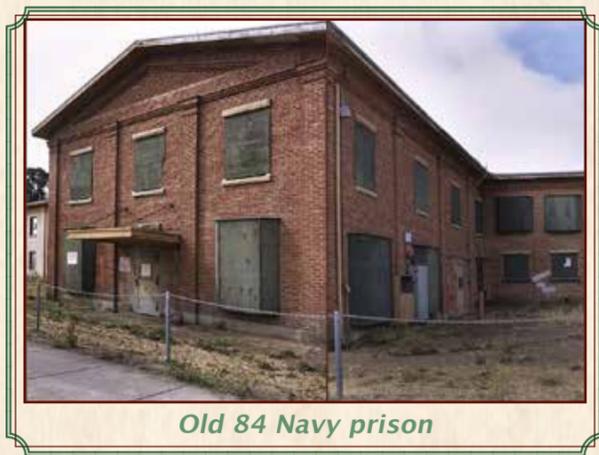
Old 84 Navy prison

8 - Building 84, prison. Staffed by Marines, "Old 84" was built starting in 1868 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 - 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.

11 - Farragut Inn officers club and B-926 bachelor officers quarters. B-926, built in 1939, 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.

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 707-638-5200 in advance for tour information.

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.
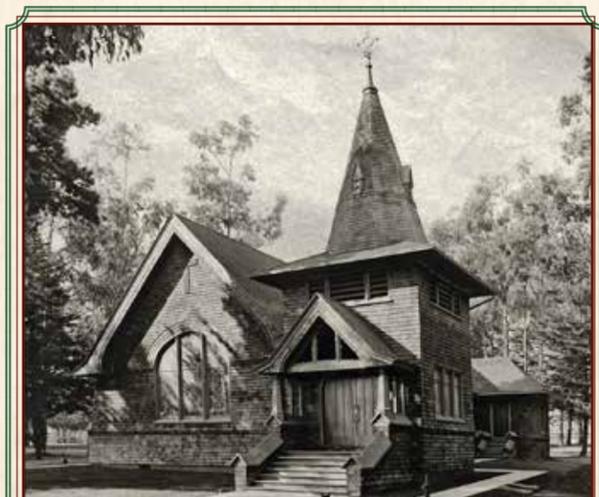
St. Peter's Chapel

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

16 - 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.

17 - Historic ships from the National Park Service's Hyde Street Pier in San Francisco temporarily at Mare Island until pier is rebuilt. Fleet includes 1886 sailing ship Balclutha, 1895 lumber schooner C.A. Thayer, 1914 paddle-wheel tug Eppleton Hall, 1890 steam ferryboat Eureka and 1907 steam tug Hercules. Nearby on seawall is "Mighty Midget," last of WWII landing craft support gunships.

18 - Buildings 141-163 - Coal sheds dating to 1901 and used for storing coal for ships. Now home of Coal Shed Brewery and Taproom, Mare Island Art Glass, other enterprises. Huge industrial cranes, art sculptures, Mare Island Art Studios along seawall. 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 years. Building workers later reported strange noises and ghostly figures.

Industrial Cathedral -- See #15

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.

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, 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 Quarters P, 17, 19, 29, 21. Quarters P dates to 1873, followed by B-17 dating to the late 1890s. This develop-ment 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.