



## Fort Point National Historic Site Background

### Geography:

Fort Point National Historic Site (NHS) is located at the southern base of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Opened to the public in the fall of 1970, Fort Point is a popular destination, offering unique and stunning views of the Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco's city skyline, and a close up look at where the Pacific meets the San Francisco Bay.

### Historical Timeline:

**Before 1776:** The first known communities to use this area were the Ohlone and Miwok American Indian Tribes, who inhabited the area for over 10,000 years.

**1776:** The Spanish Expedition, led by Juan Bautista de Anza, claims the area in the name of Spain by staking a white cross on the cliff where Fort Point sits today. The Spanish colonizers called the site "Punta del Cantil Blanco" - White Cliff Point.

**1793-1794:** Realizing the importance of the bay, and the strategic value of Cantil Blanco's location, Spain constructs an adobe gun battery. Called "Castillo de San Joaquín," this fort was built to monitor and protect the bay's entrance from potential British and Russian aggression.

**1821:** Mexico declares its independence from Spain and a new flag flies over California. Castillo de San Joaquin was left to the elements, and the Spanish adobe structure crumbled.

**1846:** A group of self-described "Bear Flaggers," led by John Charles Fremont and Kit Carson, invaded the ancient Spanish fort, hoping to liberate California from Mexican control for the United States. Named after their flag of the revolution, which featured a California bear, they victoriously took control of the site.

**1848:** The discovery of gold on the west fork of the American River changes everything in the Bay Area. Protection for the wealth coming through San Francisco is key, and the plans for the Fort at "Fort Blanco," later nicknamed "Fort Point," start, along with several other strategic forts on Alcatraz and Angel Island. San Francisco's population began to grow exponentially from 200 to 36,000 by 1852. People came from across the country and abroad seeking fortune.

**1850:** California becomes the 31st state of the United States of America.

**1853-1861:** Construction of Fort Point starts in 1853. In 1861, after eight years, Fort Point is completed. In the same year, a battle takes place at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, officially starting the Civil War.

**1861-1865:** During the Civil War, Fort Point housed Union soldiers. As a post, Fort Point was damp, cold, and isolated. Though it offered a strategic view of the Pacific and the mouth of the bay, it was often enveloped in fog and swept by strong winds. Those enlisted waited in vain as at the Fort never saw battle.

**1868-1913:** The years following 1868 were lonely ones at Fort Point. No soldiers were posted there for nearly 10 years, and the Fort was relegated to caretaker status. Infantry soldiers inhabited the Fort for

short periods with tight budget constraints and little room for further reinforcements or developments. Shortly after the turn of the century, any remaining guns were turned over to a scrap dealer.

**1914:** Two bills were introduced in Congress directing Alcatraz Island be transferred to the Bureau of Immigration, and that the military prisoners on Alcatraz be moved into old Fort Point. Before either bill left the committee, the Army began remodeling the Fort for us as “detention barracks”. Much of the construction work was done by Alcatraz inmate crews. Despite the remodeling and reconstruction efforts, the bills never passed and Fort Point never became a detention barrack.

**1915-1937:** In the 1910s and 20s, the Fort served a variety of uses: unmarried officers moved into the gorge during WWI and later schools used the casemates for classrooms. By 1926, the Fort was abandoned once again and plans for the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge began. These plans called for the Fort’s removal, but Chief Engineer Joseph Strauss redesigned the foundation of the bridge to save the Fort, urging that the site be preserved as a national monument. In 1937 Bridge construction was complete.

**1942-47:** The outbreak of World War II brought a massive increase in military activity around the Bay. In response to the fear that Japanese submarines might try to enter the harbor, a steel net was strung across the Golden Gate in early 1942 and guns and artillery were sent to Fort Point. The interior of the Fort was refurbished one more time, but by late 1944 the threat of Japanese attack disappeared and the Fort Point troops were removed.

**1970-Today:** Following WWII, a movement began to preserve the Fort as a National Historic Site. On October 16, 1970, after decades of fundraisers, repairs, and growing support, President Richard Nixon signed a bill making Fort Point a National Historic Site. Now managed as a part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Fort Point NHS and its history is preserved for future generations.

### **The Modern Visitor Experience:**

Fort Point National Historic Site is free and open to the public Fridays-Sundays, 10am-5pm. The Fort offers regular programs such as Living History Days, Junior Ranger activities, and Ranger-led or self-guided tours. Seasonal programs include the Fort Point Candlelight Ranger-led Tour and Pier Crabbing Demonstrations. The Fort also features videos and exhibits about the Fort, an exhibit on the Bufallo Soldiers and the Golden Gate Bridge as well as a bookstore.

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