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SAN FRANCISCO SHORELINE
PRIOR to 1849

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SAN FRANCISCO SHORELINE PRIOR TO 1849

During the first ten years of San Francisco's existence, from 1836 to 1846, there were no changes made to its shoreline, since there were no demands then made by commerce in that direction. With the discovery of gold and the arrival of hundreds of vessels in the bay every year thereafter, it became necessary, in order to load and unload those vessels, to build long wharves extending hundreds of feet into the bay. It was imperative to fill in the shallow waters of Yerba Buena Cove and extend the shoreline eastward four or five blocks, so that the ships might dock close to the land instead of half a mile out to sea. This new-made land could be sold by the city at a handsome profit to enterprising merchants who wished to build storehouses and shops, or other structures, upon it. This concession to progress completely changed the outline of the shore from the point at Fort Mason in the north around Telegraph Hill, Rincon Hill, and China Basin. It straightened out North Beach, leveled off half of Telegraph Hill, completely obliterated Yerba Buena Cove, practically demolished all of Rincon Hill and half filled China Basin and Mission Bay.

In 1848, the water-line ran from Black Point at Fort Mason, almost due east and west, much as it does now,

to the foot of Hyde Street and Bay Street. From there it continued in the same direction almost parallel to Bay Street and several hundred feet north of it across Leavenworth, Jones, and Taylor streets. At the east side of Taylor Street, about seventy-five feet north of the intersection with Bay Street, the shore turned in a southeasterly direction, crossing Bay Street diagonally, about 100 feet east of Taylor Street, and striking the south side of Bay Street about 150 feet east of Taylor Street. From there it proceeded in the same general direction across the northeast corner of that block and crossed Mason Street diagonally on the west side about 200 feet north of Francisco Street and on the east side about fifty feet from the northeast corner of Mason and Francisco streets. It cut the north side of Francisco Street at about fifty feet from that corner and continued diagonally in the same direction to the south side of Francisco Street about 125 feet east of Mason Street. It continued from there in the same general direction to a point about 100 feet south of Francisco Street and half way between Mason and Powell streets, then in a northeasterly direction to the southwest corner of Powell and Francisco streets, cutting diagonally across that intersection to the northeast corner of the same streets. From there it went northeast diagonally across that block until it reached the south side of Bay Street at a point about 200 feet west of

Stockton Street, continuing along the south side of Bay to the southwestern corner of Bay and Stockton streets. It ran diagonally across that intersection to the northeastern corner and across that block to a place about 200 feet north of Bay, and 150 feet east of Stockton Street. It swung east, striking the west side of Dupont (now Grant Avenue) Street about 100 feet north of Bay Street. It crossed Dupont Street at right angles and continued to North Point, which was situated in what is now the block between Dupont and Kearny streets, about 300 feet east of Dupont, and 150 feet north of Bay Street.¹

From North Point it turned to the southeast until it struck the northwest corner of Bay and Kearny streets. It cut across the intersection to the middle of Kearny Street and ran south along that street to a point on the east side about 100 feet north of Francisco Street. From there it turned to the northeast corner of Francisco and Kearny streets; then across Francisco to strike a point on the south side of that street about fifty feet east of Kearny Street. Continuing in its southeasterly direction, it went diagonally across that block to the north side of Chestnut Street, about 125 feet west of Montgomery Street. Then it cut diagonally across the

1. H. H. Bancroft, History of California, VI, 169, gives a map showing the shoreline of the main waterfront in San Francisco in 1849.

intersection to the southeast corner of Chestnut and Montgomery streets. It followed the south side of Chestnut for about 100 feet to the east and then struck southeast across that block to a point on the north side of Lombard Street, half way between Montgomery and Sansome streets. It crossed Lombard to a point on the south side about 150 feet from Sansome Street, then southeast across the northeast corner of that block to strike the west side of Sansome about seventy-five feet north of Greenwich Street. It went south along that side of Sansome for some fifty feet, then southeast diagonally across the intersection to strike the south side of Greenwich on the south side about fifty feet east of Sansome Street. South again it went across the block, almost parallel with Sansome, to cut Filbert about 100 feet east of Sansome. It crossed Filbert at right angles and ran southwest for nearly 100 feet, then southeast again across the block to hit the north side of Union Street about half way between Sansome and Battery streets. Then, continuing in the same direction, it cut the south side of Union about 150 feet west of Battery Street. From there it ran across the block to the northwest corner of Green and Battery streets; then across Green to the southwest corner of the same intersection cutting southeast across Battery, striking the east side of that street about fifty feet south of Green Street.

Still going in the southeasterly direction, it cut into that block to a point about 150 feet south of Green and 100 feet east of Battery Street. There it changed direction, going south almost parallel to Battery, crossing Vallejo Street at right angles and through that block to the north side of Broadway about 150 feet east of Battery Street to what was known as Clark's Point.²

At Clark's Point the shore turned southwest, cutting across Broadway to a point just east of Battery Street and striking the east side of Battery about fifty feet south of Broadway. Here it turned directly west, crossing Battery Street at right angles. Then it went southwest, diagonally across the block to a point about 100 feet east of Sansome Street and fifty feet north of Pacific Street. From that point it turned directly south, crossing Pacific Street at right angles and continuing into the block about 150 feet south of Pacific. It then turned southwest again to strike the east side of Sansome Street about seventy-five feet north of Jackson Street and crossing diagonally to the northwest corner of Sansome and Jackson streets. Swinging directly west from that corner, it went into the block about fifty feet, running almost parallel to Jackson Street, and struck Montgomery Street at the northeast corner of Jackson and

2. Bancroft, History of California, VI, 169.

Montgomery streets. Here was the mouth of what was at that time known as the Jackson Street slough. The shoreline cut across Montgomery Street at right angles to the northwest corner of this intersection, and swung into the block north of Jackson Street for about 100 feet, then turned back to the west to hit the north side of Jackson Street about 125 feet east of Kearny Street. It cut directly south across Jackson Street and turned east into the block south of that street for about 125 feet, meeting the west side of Montgomery Street about seventy-five feet south of Jackson Street. Then it went northeast diagonally across to the southeast corner of Montgomery and Jackson streets.³

Leaving the entrance of Jackson Street slough, the shore turned just a little east of south, across the block, cutting across Washington Street at a point some seventy-five feet east of Montgomery Street. It continued in the same general direction across the next block to strike Clay Street about 125 feet east of Montgomery Street. Without changing direction, it crossed Commercial Street at about the same distance east of Montgomery and reached the north side of Sacramento at a point about 150 feet east of Montgomery Street. From a place about fifty feet south of Sacramento Street, which

3. Bancroft, History of California, VI, 169.

it crossed at right angles, the shoreline turned directly southeast across the block and struck the north side of California Street about 200 feet west of Sansome Street. On the south side of California Street the line was about 100 feet west of Sansome Street, then it cut across the corner of the block to strike the west side of Sansome a hundred feet or so south of California Street. From that point it went diagonally across the street to hit the east side half way between California and Pine streets and cut the corner of that block to the north side of Pine Street about seventy-five feet east of Sansome. It continued in the same direction across Pine where it reached the south side about 125 feet east of Sansome Street and then on through the block to the northwest corner of Bush and Battery streets.⁴

From that corner it cut diagonally across Bush and almost at right angles across Market Street to the southeast corner of Market and First streets. In the triangle formed by the intersection of Bush, Battery and Market streets, has been erected a bronze monument to the mechanics of San Francisco, known as the Donahue Monument. At the base of the monument the Native Sons of the Golden West placed a tablet to mark the place where the water-line was in 1848. The tablet is a reproduction of a map of the old shoreline as it

4. Bancroft, History of California, VI, 169.

was at that time. At the corner of Market and First streets the ~~Landmarks~~ Committee of the Native Sons of the Golden West also placed another plaque marking the shoreline. The tablets were dedicated on April 16, 1921.

Without changing direction, the line continued along the east side of First Street to the northeast corner of First and Stevenson streets, and then directly across to the southeast corner of the same intersection. From there it swung into the block, striking the north side of Mission Street about 100 feet east of First Street. Across Mission it went to a point about 125 feet east of First Street and into the block about 200 feet, to a point about the same distance from First Street. There it turned directly south to a point about half way between Mission and Howard streets and about 100 feet east of First Street, where it turned southeast again, cutting the north side of Howard Street about seventy-five feet west of Fremont Street. It then crossed to the southwest corner of Howard and Fremont streets, and ran diagonally to the east side of the latter street about 100 feet south of Howard Street. From there it cut diagonally across that block, still in a southeasterly direction, curving to the northwest corner of Folsom and Beale streets, which it crossed at right angles to the northeast corner of the same intersection. It then swung east across Folsom Street to strike the south side of that street about 125 feet east of Beale Street, from where it cut

across the block to the west side of Front Street. About twenty-five feet south of Folsom Street it crossed Front Street to the east side some fifty feet south of Folsom, then across the north end of the block to Spear Street. It hit the west side of the latter street about 150 feet south of Folsom and crossed to the east side of Spear Street, some 200 feet south of Folsom Street. Some 200 feet east of Spear Street and half way between Folsom and Harrison, the shoreline came to Rincon Point.⁵

At Rincon Point the water-line made a right angle bend and ran south to the north side of Harrison Street, which it struck about 100 feet east of Spear Street. It then crossed Harrison just a few feet east of the southeast corner of Spear and Harrison and the east side of Spear about fifty feet south of the same corner. There it turned southwest, cutting across Front Street some 200 feet south of Harrison Street. It went straight south from there, crossing Beale Street diagonally half way between Harrison and Bryant streets. Fremont Street was crossed about a hundred feet north of Bryant, the shoreline passing through the southeast corner of First and Bryant streets. It continued in the same southerly direction to the southwest corner of Brannan and Second streets. There it changed directly southeast, parallel with Second Street and

5. Bancroft, History of California, VI, 169.

about seventy-five feet east of it, until it crossed Townsend Street at Steamboat Point. At that point it made a right angle turn to the southwest parallel to Townsend Street, cutting across Third Street about 200 feet south of Townsend, and continued half a block beyond, where it reached the entrance to Mission Creek.⁶

This was the water-line of San Francisco in 1848, before any work was started on cutting Telegraph Hill or filling in Yerba Buena Cove. . Since that time, all the waterfront from North Point to Rincon Point has been filled in, so that the shoreline forms one straight line between them.

Along this waterfront, wharves were built at the foot of most of the principal streets, as extensions to those streets. At North Beach, from the foot of Mason Street, Meggs' Wharf extended into the bay. On the east side of Telegraph Hill, half way between Union and Green streets, was Law's Wharf, several hundred feet long. Green Street was extended into the bay as Buckelew's Wharf and between it and Vallejo Street was Cunningham Wharf.

At Clark's Point, jutting out from the foot of Broadway for seven or eight hundred feet, was Broadway Wharf, where many of the ocean steamers docked. At the end of Pacific Street was a short wharf known as Pacific Street Wharf.

6. Bancroft, History of California, VI, 756.

From Jackson and Montgomery streets there extended another long wharf of about 800 feet. A short pier at the foot of Washington served for small boats of all kinds. From Clay, Commercial and Sacramento streets there extended three very long wharves where many of the sailing vessels docked. California Street also had a wharf where lumber and other goods were unloaded. At the foot of Market Street was built another pier, which was made longer from year to year. As commerce developed, these wharves were extended into the bay, to accommodate larger vessels. The shallow water was filled in, along the piers, with sand and rocks removed from the hills which were being leveled. Thus the water-line was changed after 1850.⁷

South of Market Street there were still other docks. At the foot of Mission Street was the Mission Street Wharf, with a wood-yard located at the shoreline. There, too, was "Uncle Sam's Saloon," where most of the sea captains quenched their thirst. Between Mission and Howard streets were several lumber yards where lumber vessels unloaded. These yards belonged to the firms of Herrick and Moore; Pope and Talbot; A.M. Simpson, and Adams and Blinn. Mission Wharf was devoted mostly to passenger vessels. The Howard Street Wharf

7. Bancroft, History of California, VI, 169-188.

was very long and at the head of it was the "Young American Saloon" frequented by most of the sailors.

At the Oregon Dock nearby, steamers from Portland, Eureka, Victoria and Mexico docked; also vessels from Tahiti carrying oranges and bananas. At the end of this wharf was a big bell which tolled the hours throughout the night.

Nearby stood John Griffin's boat shop. He was a builder of fast boats. Longside was "Brady's Hash House," where sailors got meals, and across the street stood the "Independence Saloon," frequented by steamboat men.⁸

That was the way the shoreline between Clark's Point and Rincon Point looked in the early days, up to the fifties. After that it changed very rapidly; many new docks were built and the old ones either filled in or destroyed.

Now the original waterfront is far inland and practically none of the old land marks which delineated it, exist to tell the passerby where the shoreline used to be. It is intended to put markers at all the prominent places such as Clark's Point, Rincon Point, and the principal streets that were crossed by the shoreline.

8. Anonymous, South of Market Journal, VIII, No.4, April, 1933.

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