

history of mare island

History of Mare Island dates back to the early 19th century, when it began its transformation from a natural landscape into a significant naval facility. Located in the San Francisco Bay, Mare Island has played a pivotal role in the United States Navy's maritime operations. This article will delve into the rich history of Mare Island, exploring its origins, development, and eventual decline, while also highlighting its current status and significance today.

Early Beginnings

Mare Island was originally inhabited by the Coast Miwok people, who utilized the area's rich resources for fishing and gathering. The island's name is derived from the Spanish term "Isla de los Mare," meaning "Island of the Sea." The island was largely untouched until the arrival of European settlers in the mid-19th century.

Establishment of the Naval Shipyard

In 1850, the United States Navy recognized the strategic importance of Mare Island due to its deep-water harbor and proximity to San Francisco. In 1854, Mare Island became the first naval shipyard on the West Coast. The establishment of the Mare Island Naval Shipyard marked the beginning of a new era for the island.

- Key milestones in the establishment of Mare Island:

1. 1850: The U.S. Navy acquires the island.
2. 1854: The Mare Island Naval Shipyard is officially opened.
3. 1856: The first dry dock is completed, allowing for the repair and construction of naval vessels.

The Growth of Mare Island Naval Shipyard

As the years went by, Mare Island Naval Shipyard expanded significantly. The shipyard became a critical site for naval operations during the Civil War and in the subsequent conflicts.

Construction and Innovation

Mare Island was not only a shipyard but also a hub of innovation. The facility was responsible for the construction of numerous vessels, including:

- Combat ships and submarines: From wooden sailing ships to ironclad vessels, Mare Island was at the forefront of naval technology.
- Support vessels: The shipyard produced many auxiliary and supply ships that supported U.S. Navy operations.

During World War II, Mare Island played a crucial role in the war effort,

with its workforce surging to nearly 40,000 employees at its peak. The shipyard was a vital asset for repairing and refitting naval ships, which were essential for the Pacific Theater.

Significant Shipbuilding Projects

Throughout its operational years, Mare Island was involved in constructing several notable ships, including:

1. USS Marlin (SS-205): A submarine that served in the Pacific during World War II.
2. USS Pigeon (ASR-21): A submarine rescue ship launched in 1943.
3. USS Sculpin (SS-191): Another submarine that played a significant role during the war.

Decline of Mare Island

The post-war era brought significant changes to Mare Island. The demand for naval ships decreased, leading to a reduction in shipyard activity.

Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC)

In the early 1990s, the U.S. Navy began to reassess its facilities, leading to the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. Mare Island was officially closed in 1996 after over 140 years of service.

- Factors contributing to the decline:

1. Changing military needs: The end of the Cold War reduced the need for a large naval presence.
2. Advancements in technology: The shift towards smaller, more advanced vessels required fewer facilities.

Mare Island Today

After its closure, Mare Island underwent a significant transformation. The area has since been redeveloped, blending historical preservation with modern uses.

Current Development Projects

Today, Mare Island is home to a variety of businesses, residential areas, and recreational facilities. The Mare Island Historic Park Foundation works to preserve the island's rich history while promoting its future.

- Key features of Mare Island today:

- Historic Sites: Many original buildings and structures have been preserved, allowing visitors to explore the island's naval heritage.
- Real Estate Development: The island has seen an influx of new housing

developments, attracting residents looking for a unique community.

- **Recreational Opportunities:** Parks and waterfront areas provide recreational spaces for residents and visitors alike.

Preservation Efforts

Efforts to preserve the history of Mare Island continue through various organizations. The Mare Island Historic Park Foundation offers educational programs, guided tours, and events that celebrate the island's naval legacy.

Conclusion

The **history of Mare Island** reflects the broader narrative of the United States Navy's evolution and its impact on maritime operations. From its establishment as a naval shipyard in the mid-19th century to its current status as a redeveloped island, Mare Island remains a testament to the nation's naval heritage. As preservation efforts continue, Mare Island stands not only as a reminder of its storied past but also as a vibrant community poised for future growth. Whether through its historical sites or modern developments, Mare Island is a unique blend of history and progress, making it a significant location in California's landscape.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Mare Island known for in American naval history?

Mare Island is known for being the site of the first naval base on the West Coast of the United States, established in 1854, and for its significant role in shipbuilding during both World Wars.

When was Mare Island Naval Shipyard officially closed?

Mare Island Naval Shipyard was officially closed on April 1, 1996, after over 140 years of operation.

What types of ships were built at Mare Island?

Mare Island was responsible for the construction of various types of vessels, including submarines, destroyers, and aircraft carriers, notably the USS California and USS St. Louis.

What historical events influenced the development of Mare Island?

The California Gold Rush and the subsequent need for a naval presence in the Pacific influenced the establishment and growth of Mare Island as a strategic military base.

How did Mare Island contribute to World War II efforts?

During World War II, Mare Island was crucial for the repair, maintenance, and construction of ships, supporting the U.S. Navy's operations in the Pacific Theater.

What is the current status of Mare Island?

Today, Mare Island is a mixed-use development site that includes residential, commercial, and industrial projects, while also preserving historical landmarks.

What architectural styles can be found on Mare Island?

Mare Island features a variety of architectural styles, including Beaux-Arts, Renaissance Revival, and military vernacular, reflecting its historical significance.

Are there any notable historic structures on Mare Island?

Yes, notable historic structures include the Mare Island Naval Shipyard Chapel and the historic shipyard officer's quarters, both of which are artifacts of the naval base's rich history.

What role did Mare Island play in the Cold War era?

During the Cold War, Mare Island continued to serve as a repair facility for submarines and surface ships, playing a vital role in maintaining U.S. naval readiness.

How has Mare Island been preserved or commemorated since its closure?

Since its closure, Mare Island has been subject to preservation efforts, and various groups have worked to commemorate its history through tours, museums, and historical societies.

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