

The Spanish Anchorage in San Francisco Bay

By J. N. BOWMAN

NATURE provided San Francisco Bay with a number of safe, convenient and desirable anchorage grounds, nevertheless the location of the first one actually used was not determined from the water by vessels but from the land by land establishments. It was the location of the Presidio that determined the site of the earlier anchorage and continued its use, until nature and the water interests—the ships' masters—revolted against the land interest and transferred the anchorage to a point meeting their requirements, thereby forcing the Presidio to come to terms on this question. The winds, rains, floods and tides during the winter of 1824 had proved the hazardous nature of the old site; and four years after the masters repaired to Yerba Buena cove for safety, and for convenience remained there, the Presidio capitulated. Later, when a presidial pueblo was founded, it was located at the anchorage and not at the Presidio.¹

The site of the anchorage at the cove is well known, but the old anchorage has become a tradition and its site indefinite. Bancroft, some sixty years ago, wrote that Yerba Buena battery was built in 1797 at "Point Médanos, later called Point San José and Black Point, renamed Mason, and long occupied by a battery. It was known as the Battery at Yerba Buena, designed to command the shore stretching westward to Fort Point, and that stretching eastward to what was called later North Point, together with the body of water between that shore and Alcatraz Island, already so called, known as the anchorage of Yerba Buena, though it does not appear that any vessel except that of Vancouver ever had anchored there." The name of Yerba Buena, he says, was, in these early times, applied particularly to the North Beach region "and not, as is commonly supposed and as was the case after 1830, to the cove south of Telegraph Hill."² Several items in this statement must be questioned. Vancouver anchored in Yerba Buena cove, already so called in 1792, and only an impossible interpretation of his map would make possible his anchorage off North Point.³ The question remains as to the site of the anchorage off the Presidio.

The sources of materials bearing on this question are Spanish governmental papers, the statements and maps of the early explorers, and the testimony in the private land grant cases.

The Spanish records in California which were possibly concerned with the subject were burned in the 1906 San Francisco fire, but Bancroft fortunately had salvaged much material in his collection of abstracts and copies of the *Archivo de California*. In this collection only two references to Yerba Buena cove have been found, namely, the two Sal reports⁴ to Monterey relative to the arrival and departure of Vancouver and his first anchorage

at a place called Yerba Buena, about a league from the Presidio—approximately the distance given by the visitor himself. The Vancouver text and map, to be discussed in a later paper, place the anchorage in this cove; Sal's letters must therefore refer to the same place.

The early explorers are not very specific in their texts, but their maps, where they exist, often give definite sites of anchorage. For the recent litigation over the validity of the confirmation of the Mare Island grant, the government with great care collected all available maps of San Francisco Bay which could possibly bear on the case.⁵ This is one of the most complete collections of such material in existence and contains the explorers' maps from 1775 onward.

The map of the Ayala expedition of 1775, in the above collection, is a facsimile of the Library of Congress' copy of the reproduction made in Mexico on November 30, 1775, of the original transmitted to the viceroy. This map, then, was made during or within a few weeks of the expedition itself. After orienting the map with reference to known conditions, the anchor—the symbol of anchorage—is found located about midway between Fort and Black Points. The next map is without a date but was executed after the founding of the Presidio and Mission Dolores. Judging by its great similarity to the next map, dated 1781, it is probably of the late 1770's, as the anchor symbol is placed at the same place as on the Ayala map.⁶ The "place of the Port," surveyed by José Cañizares, who did much of the exploring for Ayala, and engraved by Manuel Villavicencio in 1781, is almost the same as the undated map mentioned above, but shows no anchorage symbol. The Dalrymple map of 1789 is also without the anchor symbol. The map of 1798 shows the anchorage just east of and close to Fort Point with three water depths indicated near the symbol—2, 3, and 3 Spanish fathoms of 2 varas. The map of the Bay made in Mexico in 1825, which is very similar to that of 1798, shows the anchorage at the same place as this map, with the depths 2, 3, 3, nearby. The Beechey map of 1827-28 contains no symbol of an anchorage, but has the word "landing" at about the present site of the U. S. Coast Guard Station. The Beechey map is the last one made of the old anchorage before the final transfer to Yerba Buena cove.

In the text of the early explorers are only general references to anchoring grounds. Langsdorff stated that in 1806 he anchored in the neighborhood of the Fort, and Kotzebue wrote that in 1816 he anchored "opposite the Presidio." The following year, Roquefeuil on entering the harbor "proceeded to Yerba Buena, where Vancouver first anchored." Beechey related that "we entered the port, and dropped our anchor in the spot where Vancouver had moored his ship thirty-three years before." He later moved to "a small bay named Yerba Buena, from the luxuriance of its vegetation, about a league distant from both the presidio and the mission of San Francisco." In 1822 Capt. John Hall visited the California coast in the *Lady Blackwood*,

and extracts from his log were published by Forbes in the appendix of his *California*. Regarding the old Spanish anchorage in San Francisco, Hall wrote that in "passing the fort, the anchorage is situated in a small bay, immediately abreast of the *Presidio*, where a vessel will find good holding ground in five fathoms, about a cable's length from the beach."⁷

All these maps of 1775 to 1828, which show places of anchorage, locate the respective sites just east of Fort Point, and none near Black Point nor between it and North Point nor between Black Point and Alcatraz Island.

After the anchorage was changed in 1824 and after it was recognized by the government in 1828, only occasional reference to the old anchorage is found. In January 1827, Duhaut-Cilly arrived at San Francisco and after passing the *Presidio*, which appeared at first sight to be a group of farm houses, he anchored in a "gentle curve taken by the southern shore, just beyond the fort," in 17 fathoms of water with a mud bottom and 200 fathoms from the beach. This would place the anchorage at the site of the eastern end of the old Spanish anchorage, but he does not refer to it as the general anchoring grounds; later he moved to Yerba Buena cove.⁸

In 1841 Wilkes indicated "landing" on his map at the present U. S. Coast Guard Station. After this date, and especially after the end of the Mexican regime, the anchorage became somewhat legendary and known as the "ancient landing place." In the San Francisco pueblo land case an undated map of the early 1850's places "landing" at the same spot as did Beechey and Wilkes. In the Limantour land case an undated and colored map of the middle '50's places the anchor symbol just off the present Coast Guard Station, and on the land is written "estacada." This "estacada" is the place referred to by Richardson, in his testimony in the same case, as the place he pointed out to the engineer Whitcher, and is also that referred to by Jimeno in his letter to Richardson on January 14, 1843, relative to the Limantour petition for 1.5 leagues in the *Presidio* area beginning at the "estacada or Fondeadero Antigu." The map showing the limits of the claim has "Estacada" written at or near the site of the present Coast Guard Station, and the anchorage symbol directly offshore.¹⁰ In this same case is also the Hoadley map made in 1849 to 1855 which has "ancient anchorage grounds," extending along the shore from Fort Point to the present Coast Guard Station.

The Bay bottom as shown on the early maps and on the U. S. hydrographic charts of the '50's shows the *Presidio* Shoal extending along the shore of the Coast Guard Station. Vancouver's inner anchor was in 5 fathoms of water and the outer one in 13 fathoms; this indicates the edge of the shoal. He gave the distance from the shore as about a quarter of a mile. At present a buoy about due north of the outer end of the pier of the Coast Guard Station marks the 12 fathom depth at the edge of the shoal; it is anchored about 2000 feet offshore, so Vancouver understated the distance but covered the difference by the word "about."

There still remains the question of the east and west ends of the anchorage. W. A. Richardson, who was port captain from 1835 to 1841, testified in the Limantour and pueblo cases that the old anchorage was "at the eastern end of the old fort opposite the Presidio and at the entrance of the Bay," and that "for merchant vessels it was to the eastward of the fort, about 3 cable lengths from the fort, in a small bay opposite the Presidio. They anchored at that place up to December 1824. Whaling ships used to go to Sausalito to anchor for the benefit of fresh water. From December 1824 the merchant vessels came to anchor at the Yerba Buena cove." The eastern end would be limited by the location of the Anita Rocks almost due north of the Presidio; it was limited, however, by another factor—the condition of the shore and the accessibility to the Presidio itself. From about the site of the Coast Guard Station eastward the shore was low and swampy, with a slough running eastward and connecting with the Bay just west of Black Point. Vancouver's map shows this slough as somewhat larger than in the earlier maps of 1775 onward. Between Fort Mason and the Coast Guard Station a landing to the Presidio was extremely inconvenient if not impossible, and Vancouver relates the difficulties attending the landing at this anchorage.

The shore from Fort Point to the Coast Guard Station is free of slough and swamp, but it is high and precipitous and in only one place is there easy access to the Presidio and the Fort. This place is the ravine directly back or south of the Coast Guard Station, in which are now located the Presidio stables. The shore conditions indicate an anchorage off the mouth of the ravine. It was undoubtedly up this ravine that the sailors of the San Carlos in 1776 reached the mesa (on which they helped to build the first palizada buildings of the first Presidio), and up which Vancouver and his officers went to the Presidio to pay their respects to Comandante Sal.* By way of this ravine the Presidio officers could supervise the visiting vessels. No direct evidence has been found of a wharf or pier ever having been built there, though at this "landing" place was the "estacada" of the early 1850's map, which Richardson in his testimony referred to as the "Timber point." These stakes (estacas) may have been the relics of an early wharf, but of it nothing has been learned. The remains of an old wooden bridge back of the present Coast Guard Station are, however, recalled by the captain. It crossed the ravine at a point just behind the present schoolhouse (near the concrete footbridge), and the bridge or a predecessor is mentioned in the claim of General Vallejo in the 1880's for part of the Presidio ground.¹¹

To return to Bancroft's statement, quoted in the second paragraph of this paper: Immediately west of Black Point a landing could have been made from ships anchored between Anita Rocks and Fort Mason, and the Presidio reached by the old Yerba Buena battery trail when and while it existed, but

* At the mouth of this ravine Vancouver dug a well in 1792; and from a stream coming down it or one of its tributaries he secured his water in 1793.

it was not so convenient as the ravine and trail between the Presidio and the Fort. A landing between Black and North Points, at North Beach, would have been possible but Russian Hill reached down close to the water and made access to the Presidio quite difficult between the hill and Fort Mason. The battery at Fort Mason in 1797 would supplement the fort on Fort Point in commanding the half mile of anchorage between these points, and especially would give added protection to the eastern access to the Presidio, but nothing has been found as to its commanding an anchorage between it and North Point. By the time of Vancouver the place where he anchored off the Presidio was known as "the general anchorage place" and "the general place of anchorage." A Presidio pilot guided him to the anchorage, so that the general anchoring grounds in 1792, well known to the local pilot, would be definitely known to the visitor.

In summary: the old Spanish anchorage at the edge of the Presidio Shoal, extending from about 600 to 720 feet east of Fort Point eastward to about due north of the Coast Guard Station and west of Anita Rocks, served for half a century. Its site was determined by convenience of access to the military post; during the same period, whaling vessels determined their anchorage off Old Sausalito from the abundance of wood and water.¹² Only a few naval and merchant vessels visited the Bay during the Spanish regime, but after 1822 and the end of the revolution against Spain, the province was opened to shipping, which continued the use of the old anchoring ground until the great storm at the end of 1824 forced the masters to determine the anchorage from the point of view of their vessels rather than from the location of the land establishments. Yerba Buena cove was used as a refuge, and after four years of governmental attempt to force the masters to return to the old ground the authorities acceded to the inevitable change. When it was founded by Figueroa, the presidial pueblo had its headquarters and elections at the Presidio but the populace was at the cove. A second time the government acceded to the inevitable and Figueroa founded the pueblo at the cove, but it still was several years before the headquarters were changed from the Presidio, first to Dolores and then to Yerba Buena. Within a quarter of a century after the shipmasters' selection of the cove as the new anchorage ground, the pueblo on its shores had absorbed both the Presidio and the Mission.

NOTES

1. J. N. Bowman, "The Selection of the Site of Yerba Buena," MS.
2. H. H. Bancroft, *History of California* (San Francisco, 1884-90), I, 701-702.
3. J. N. Bowman, "Vancouver's Anchorages in San Francisco Bay," MS in files of California Historical Society.
4. State Papers, Sacramento (transcripts from the *Archivo de California*, in Bancroft Library), I, p. 116, MS.
5. U. S. v. O'Donnell and Stewart, and Stewart v. U. S., United States District Court, San Francisco.

6. The map is reproduced in this QUARTERLY, XIV (June 1935), op. p. 111, and is labeled "Made by José Cañizares in 1776." As it shows both the Presidio and the Mission, the date must be questioned.

7. George H. von Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels* (London, 1813), II, 150; Otto von Kotzebue, *Voyage of Discovery* (London, 1821), p. 276; Camille de Roquefeuil, *Voyage Round the World* (London, 1823), p. 24; F. W. Beechey, *Narrative of a Voyage to the Pacific* (Philadelphia, 1932), pp. 293, 294; Alexander Forbes, *California* (London, 1839), appendix. In the map attached to this volume is an insert of part of the Beechey map of San Francisco of 1826-28. The reference in the text of Hall's extracts has sometimes led to the confusion of dating this map four years before it was made.

8. A. Duhout-Cilly, *Voyage autour du Monde* (Paris, 1834-35), I, Chapter 8; see translation of California portion in this QUARTERLY, VIII (June 1929), 140. Alfred Robinson in his "Statement," MS in Bancroft Library, p. 14, recalled from his visit to Yerba Buena in 1830 that "formerly the place of anchorage for vessels was in front of the Presidio, but after a while the trading vessels found there was better protection farther up. . . ."

9. Land cases 424 ND, 427 ND, U. S. District Court, San Francisco. The Limantour petition of January 10, 1843, and the concedo of February 27, of the same year, place the beginning point of the grant description "en la Playa del Estacada en el Fondadero Antiguo del Puerto de San Francisco." Although the documents were proven forgeries, the descriptive data reflect the recollections of the early 1840's as to the site of the old anchorage.

10. Land case 427 ND.

11. U. S. Circuit Court (San Francisco), case 4152, Vallejo v. Howard.

12. *Ibid.* In those days the aesthetic factor would not be raised as a reason for placing the whalers at Sausalito, judged by the usual method of slaughtering cattle near the dwellings.