

PRESIDIO OF SAN FRANCISCO, RAIL LINE  
Golden Gate National Recreation Area  
North Cantonment, Between Mason Street and Halleck Street  
San Francisco  
San Francisco County  
California

HAER CA-2296  
*HAER CA-2296*

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
PACIFIC WEST REGIONAL OFFICE  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1111 Jackson Street, Suite 700  
Oakland, CA 94607

## HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

### Presidio of San Francisco, Rail Line

HAER No. CA-2296

**Location:** Mason Street, between the Marina Gate of the San Francisco Presidio and Halleck Street, San Francisco, San Francisco County, California

The San Francisco Presidio Rail Line (Rail Line) is located within the formal boundary of the Presidio of San Francisco National Historic Landmark District (PNHLD). The Presidio of San Francisco occupies 1,480 acres of land at the northwest corner of the City of San Francisco. The former military reservation is bordered on the north and west by the San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean, respectively. It is bordered on the east and south by San Francisco's Marina District, Pacific Heights, and Richmond District. Originally, there were four rail lines paralleling Mason Street starting at Halleck Street to the west (where it diverged from the airfield at Crissy Field) and continuing to the Marina Gate of the Presidio. The rail lines continue from the Marina Gate of the Presidio along the north side of Marina Boulevard to Fort Mason. Only a single rail line, the San Francisco Presidio Rail Line (Rail Line), remains today and it is located at latitude: 2121474.2, longitude: 5998816.1. The coordinate represents the main entrance point, the north sidewalk of Marina Boulevard at the Marina Gate (at Marina Green Drive). This coordinate was obtained on December 22, 2009, using a GPS mapping grade unit accurate to +/- 1 meter after differential correction. The coordinate's datum is North American Datum 1983. At the west terminus of the Rail Line (at the north sidewalk of Mason Street at the intersection of Halleck Street), a second coordinate was taken at latitude: 2121222.0, longitude: 5997214.8.

**Construction Dates:** ca. 1913-1919 for the Panama Pacific Exposition of 1915

**Architect/Engineer/**

**Builder:** United States Army Corps of Engineers

**Present Owner/**

**Occupation and Use:** National Park Service, Golden Gate National Recreational Area and Presidio Trust

No current use. Three rail lines were removed in 1978/1979 and aerial photographs indicate the remaining San Francisco Presidio Rail Line was paved over in 1980 and then dismantled and removed west of Halleck Street and within the Crissy Field area (currently the Crissy Field Marsh Restoration Area). The vacant Rail Line, east of Halleck Street, is presently paved over.

**Significance:**

The design of the Rail Line is not unique and portions of the Rail Line are not visible or have been wholly removed; however, the remaining rail line maintains its integrity through its overall dimensions (e.g., width, alignment, and length) and association within, and as part of, the larger Presidio National Historic Landmark District (PNHLD). The significance of the Rail Line is its ability to convey the function and activity of railroad operation at the Presidio from the early 1900s through the mid-1970s and its association with the warehouses on Mason Street and Gorgas Avenue that also contribute to the PNHLD. Although the rail line has been partially removed or covered, it still retains its integrity through location and association.

The San Francisco Presidio Rail Line is not specifically called out in the 1993 National Historic Landmark form as a contributing feature for the district. The rail line(s) are mentioned in the 1993 PNHLD as “present” along Mason Street and part of a discussion of the warehouses of the North Cantonment:

The demolished exposition buildings located in the area of the North Cantonment were followed in 1917 by new Army warehouses (Nos. 1183-1189), constructed in response to the United States’ involvement in the World War. These warehouses stand as a largely intact group along Mason Street, just inside the Marina Avenue entrance; the old railroad tracks, located along the course of Mason Street, remain as well. Through both World Wars this area of the North Cantonment served as the Post’s major supply depot.<sup>1</sup>

Although not specifically listed as contributing to the Presidio National Historic Landmark District, the line is considered a well-documented feature from the period of significance and integral to the placement road and building placement in the landscape. The portion of the line along Mason Street is assumed to have significance under Criterion A of the National Register, for its association with the operation of the Presidio, transport of injured soldiers between Fort Mason and Letterman General Hospital, and movement of goods into and out of the Presidio. It should also be noted that the 2008 draft update to the PNHLD did not address the rail line(s) as a contributing feature to the PNHLD because the update focused only on post-1945 resources, rather than reassessing or identifying undocumented resources from the established period of significance, 1776 to 1945.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Alley et al., *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Presidio of San Francisco National Historic Landmark District* (San Francisco: National Park Service, 1993).

**Description:**

One track of the Rail Line is present and associated with the larger rail system that previously existed along Mason Street. The single track, constituting one rail line, is present on Mason Street from the intersection of Halleck Street east to the Marina Gate of the Presidio. The line is apparent immediately under the road and existing bike lane a few inches below their asphalt surfaces. The two tracks of the line are approximately 56-inches apart. The rail line and ties are intact at a width of approximately 8.5-feet. The rail line runs parallel with Mason Street, mostly under the existing bike lane (National Park Service property/Area A) for the length of Mason except for near the intersection of Marshall Street, where the line trends south into the vehicle travel lanes of Mason Street, before it moves north again and veers off into the Crissy Field Marsh at approximately 200 feet east of the intersection with Halleck Street. The rail line can also be observed above the existing road asphalt at the intersection of Lyon Street and Mason Street, outside the Presidio Trust/National Park Service (NPS) boundary and inches below the asphalt surface of the north sidewalk of Marina Boulevard between the Marina Gate of the Presidio and the eastern terminus of Marina Green Drive.

**History:**

The Secretary of the Army gave permission on December 12, 1913 to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition Company to construct and operate railroad access across Fort Mason. Available historical records of further development of the railroad are rare; however, it is documented that the railroad was extended to include the Presidio of San Francisco during the time of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, held in San Francisco in 1915<sup>2</sup>. Records indicate that in 1927 the City of San Francisco granted the Federal government an easement 12'6" wide running between Fort Mason and the Presidio for the purpose of operating, constructing, and maintaining a railroad. This was conditioned on a land exchange to the city from the Army. The city acquired title to 9.93 acres of the Presidio where the Palace of Fine Arts now stands. The railroad then became part of the State Belt Line under the Board of State Harbor Commissioners for San Francisco Harbor in 1950<sup>3</sup>. Though the Army was permitted to move freight over this line it was charged a tariff per each car until the cost of the rail tunnel at Fort Mason was compensated. Ownership of the railroad on Fort Mason and the Presidio passed to the Federal government in 1969.

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<sup>2</sup> E.N. Thompson, *Defender of the Gate: The Presidio of San Francisco: The Presidio of San Francisco, A History from 1846 to 1995*, vol.1,2 (San Francisco: National Park Service, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Presidio of San Francisco Historical Real Estate Records, 1948-1968, Golden Gate Recreation Area (GOGA) Archives, GOGA 35159, Series IV: Boundaries and Boundary Claims, 3:10, GOGA Archives, San Francisco.

Spur trackage was added both at Fort Mason and the Presidio to accommodate movement of military supplies and troops to and from dock side at Fort Mason, including transporting the wounded to military hospitals in the Presidio during World Wars I and II. Additional information in Thompson<sup>4</sup> indicates that in the early 1940s, doctors and administrators at the Letterman General Hospital became concerned about these procedures for evacuating war-related patients to inland hospitals. The principal means of evacuation, however, remained the hospital trains from the Crissy yard in the vicinity of Area A, lower Presidio, which used the rail lines. In April 1944, Letterman General Hospital's publication, the *Fog Horn*, described a hospital train at the Presidio.

The Army had decided on a ten to twelve car train in accordance with the Medical Department's requirements. Manufactured by the Pullman-Standard Car Manufacturing Company in Massachusetts, a typical train consisted of the ward cars, utility car, officer personnel car, orderly car, and a kitchen-dining-pharmacy car, each forty-four feet long and mounted on two 4-wheel trucks. A ward car had eight two-tier bunks. The officer car had facilities for four officers at one end, and six nurses at the other (*Fog Horn*, 1944; Thompson 1997, p.296).<sup>5</sup>

In 1963, the Department of the Army announced plans to relocate the function of Fort Mason, which was primarily the transporting of wounded soldiers and medical goods, to other installations in the region and to deactivate the facility by 1966. Correspondence between the Army Post Engineer and the Commanding Officer for Letterman General Hospital, dated 1967, discuss the "matter" of continued railroad service to the Presidio of San Francisco. The installation master plan for Fort Mason recommended discontinuance of the railroad because of "low utilization by the army and lack of medical mobilization requirements"<sup>6</sup>. The correspondence did indicate that there was an obligation to provide railroad service to the Presidio through September 1968 incident to the completion of the new Letterman General Hospital.

The tracks remained and were in operation until the 1970s as other modes of transportation were introduced; shipments of goods began to tally not more than three or four rail cars per month. The use of the railroad on the

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<sup>4</sup> Thompson, *Defender of the Gate*.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Transfer of Passing Track RR Easement to DOI – National Park Service, 15 March 1978 (3.76 Acre), 1948-1968, Golden Gate Recreation Area (GOGA) Archives, GOGA 35338, BF4, F10 PSF 1503-03. GOGA Archives, San Francisco.

Presidio was discontinued in favor of motor freight during this time. Removal of the rail lines at the Presidio was prompted in 1978 during the City of San Francisco's planned removal of the railroad tracks along Marina Boulevard (outside the San Francisco Presidio) that connected to the Presidio. The track right-of-way was used by the Wastewater Program to construct a consolidation sewer to reduce the sewage overflows, which polluted the northern waterfront of San Francisco during rainy weather<sup>7</sup>. A plan was implemented that upon completion of the sewer line, the tracks on Marina Boulevard would be re-laid; however, they would not remain exposed. An agreement between the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department and the NPS called for restoring the railroad track area with colored asphalt paving so it could be used by pedestrians, bicyclists, and potentially a train or transit<sup>8</sup> line.

Around the time the sewer project was being planned in 1977, the Army Command at the Presidio indicated the existing Presidio rails should be abandoned. In March of 1978, an Environmental Assessment (EA) of the proposed removal of the tracks was approved by the Army as having no adverse effect on the environment; however, on June 8, 1978 the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) advised the Army that he considered the removal of the PSF railroad to be an adverse effect. On September 19, 1978, on the advice of the SHPO, the Army held a meeting with the Western Region Historian for the NPS, the General Superintendent of the GGNRA, the Presidio Post Curator, and representatives of the Army to arrive at a compromise on the removal of the rail lines along Mason Street. It was agreed a single track, representative of the original railroad, would remain in place. A professional historian would be contracted to document the historical significance of the railroad with narrative and graphic exhibits.

The ACHP approved the removal of the railroad through the execution of an MOA on July 23, 1979. On June 28, 1979, the National Science Foundation contracted with Hefner Brothers Trucking Company of Socorro, New Mexico, to remove the railroad tracks and associated equipment from the Presidio (except for one representative line) for transport and use at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Socorro, New Mexico. In total, some 21,000 linear feet of rail line were

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<sup>7</sup> San Francisco Wastewater Management, "Tracks Up... Sewer Going In," *San Francisco Wastewater Management Newsletter*, Number VII, June-July 1978.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

removed, weighing about 265 tons<sup>9</sup>. Angle bars, tie plates, bolts, nuts, and cross ties were also removed.

Since 1979, portions were removed of the remaining rail line that was intended for preservation in the MOA. Information on the removal of the line west of Halleck Street is deductive rather than supported by documentary evidence. During the Crissy Field Expansion (1996-1998) attempts were made to locate existing information on the rail line(s). The researchers concluded that the remaining line, west of Halleck Street along Mason Street, was removed when the Army began construction of the Post Office and Commissary in 1989<sup>10</sup>. In 2005, sewer relocation efforts for the Crissy Field Center encountered one railroad line under Mason Street between Halleck Street and Marshall Street. The rail line was left in place at this location.

## SOURCES

### Published Books

Alley, P., L. Barker, G. Chappell, C. Feierabend, J. P. Langellier, D. Quitevis, and S. A. Dean, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Presidio of San Francisco National Historic Landmark District (San Francisco: National Park Service, 1993).

Thompson, E. N., *Defender of the Gate: The Presidio of San Francisco: The Presidio of San Francisco, A History from 1846 to 1995*. 2 Vols. U.S. Department of the Interior, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, (San Francisco: National Park Service, 1997).

### Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) Archives.

Real Property Transfers, Install and Demos, 1978-1979, Golden Gate Recreation Area (GOGA) Archives, GOGA 35338, PSF Historical 1505-03, Disposal: Railroad Trackage 63, from EMR, Box 54.

Presidio of San Francisco Historical Real Estate Records, GOGA 35159, Series IV: Boundaries and Boundary Claims, 1849-1968, Box 3, Folder No. 10.

Post Engineer Drawing, Road Resurfacing and Repair Section I, Mason Street, Complete, dated 20 May 1963.

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<sup>9</sup> Real Property Transfers, Install and Demos, 1978-1979, Golden Gate Recreation Area (GOGA) Archives, GOGA 35338, PSF Historical 1505-03, Disposal: Railroad Trackage 63, from EMR, Box 54.

<sup>10</sup> Ric Borges, email to Dana McGowan, 9 June 2009.

Real Property Transfers, Install and Demos, GOGA 35338, PSF Historical 1505-03, Disposal: Railroad Trackage 63, 1978-1979, from EMR, Box 54.

Transfer of RR R/1 West of Webster St. to E. Boundary of PSF to DOI – National Park Service – 15 March 1978 (1.06 acres), GOGA 35338, B54, F7 PSF 1505-03.

Transfer of Passing Track RR Easement to DOI – National Park Service – 15 March 1978 (23 Acre), GOGA 35338, B54, F9 PSF 1505-03.

Transfer of RR R/W E. of Webster thru Ft. Mason, Including Tunnel to DOI – National Park Service – 15 March 1978 (3.76 Acre), GOGA 35338, BF4, F10 PSF 1505-03.

### San Francisco Wastewater Management

*Tracks Up... Sewer Going In.* In San Francisco Wastewater Management Newsletter, Number VII, June-July 1978.

### Personal Communications

Borges, Ric, e-mail to Dana McGowan of ICF Jones & Stokes, 9 June 2009.

**Historian(s):** Michelle C. St.Clair-Jerman, historical archaeologist and Edward Yarbrough, architectural historian.  
Affiliation: ICF International)  
Date: December 5, 2011.

### **Project Information:**

This Historic American Engineering Record occasioned by the Doyle Drive Replacement Project follows the dictates of the Programmatic Agreement among the Federal Highway Administration, the California Department of Transportation, the San Francisco County Transportation Authority, the Presidio Trust, the National Park Service, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the California State Historic Preservation Officer, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department.

The Cultural Resources Studies team was jointly led by Meg Scantlebury, Senior Environmental Planner (Caltrans District 4) and Dana McGowan, Vice President, Cultural Resources (ICF International).

The contract work for the project was performed by ICF International, 620 Folsom, Suite 200, San Francisco, CA 94107.