

HISTORY

Discovery

San Francisco owes its discovery and much of its history to the daring and adventure-loving early Portuguese, English and Spanish explorers. The romance of those early days clings to the city and lends charm to its atmosphere even today.

Though San Francisco's heritage is rightly credited to the Spanish, more than two centuries before Portola's arrival, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo in 1542 discovered the Farallon Islands (now a part of San Francisco); next, Sir Francis Drake, famed English explorer, passed by the Golden Gate and in 1579 discovered Drake's Bay, a few miles north of San Francisco, where the first church service in the English language on the Pacific Coast was held.

In 1769, Don Gaspar de Portola and his little band of adventurers were the first to glimpse the bay from the nearby hills on the south. Six years later the ship "San Carlos," in command of Don Juan Manuel Ayala, sailed through the Golden Gate to cast the first anchor in the bay. More than a century before, in 1603, Vizcaino visited what is now the Gulf of the Farallons and mapped it as Bahia de Puerto de San Francisco. This is the first time the name San Francisco appeared on record in connection with the vicinity of San Francisco.

Early Beginnings

The settlement of what is now San Francisco was just being founded by the Spaniards when the Liberty Bell pealed the birth of this nation. First Spaniards, then Russians, then Americans came and lived to enjoy life and to rule.

The site for the Presidio of San Francisco was selected on March 28, 1776, by Colonel Juan Bautista de Anza, and on March 29, the site for the mission, Mission San Francisco de Asia (Dolores)—a combination of Mission, Moorish and Corinthian architecture. While from the beginning the mission was called San Francisco, the settlement at the cove under Telegraph Hill was known as Yerba Buena.

For many centuries, history records, traders sought to reach the Orient through a western route. San Francisco was the westerly outpost in the days of sailing vessels. Growing in stature, the city has become one of the world's great distribution centers.

First Elections

Democratic self-government of the bureaucratic sort decreed by the Mexican Republic came to Yerba Buena (later named San Francisco) before the town itself arrived. Citizens of the Partido (civil district) of San Francisco, on Governor Jose Figueroa's orders, assembled at the Presidio on Dec. 7, 1834 to choose electors for the Ayuntamiento (district council). On the following Sunday, Don Francisco de Haro was elected to the district council as Alcalde for the projected pueblo of Yerba Buena.

Naming of the City

The village of Yerba Buena, which in 1847 was to be rechristened with the name of San Francisco, in 1835 was still an insignificant outpost frequented by roving seafarers and was little more than a waste of sand and chaparral, sloping down to a beach and small lagoon which has long since been filled in and

is now covered by massive commercial structures, El Paraje de Yerba Buena (the Little Valley of the Good Herb) derived its name in the beginning because of the aromatic vine found in the underbrush there.

The Bay

In 1835, the Bay was declared a port of entry by Governor Pablo Vicente de Sola. He appointed as captain of the Port of San Francisco, William Antonio Richardson, a young master mariner who had deserted the British whaler "Orion" in 1822 and set up the first "house" in Yerba Buena Cove, made up of some red-wood poles over which was stretched a ship's sail.

During 1836, the Port of San Francisco became an important trading post. On July 1, 1836, Jacob Primer Leese, Ohio-born, partner in a Monterey mercantile firm, arrived by the barque "Don Quixote" from Monterey and by July 4 had thrown up a frame house 25 by 60 feet, the first "real" house to be built—part dwelling and part warehouse. He then summoned all the leading Mexican families and other prominent persons to an Independence Day celebration which lasted two days and a night. During the celebration the Stars and Stripes were raised beside the Mexican flag for the first time in San Francisco.

First Survey

In the autumn of 1839, Jacques Vioget, a versatile Swiss of the Peruvian brig "Delmira," was commissioned by Alcalde de Haro to make the first land survey of Yerba Buena. By 1841 thirty families comprised the village population. During the next five years some of the prominent early settlers shifted to other localities in the Bay Area. At the same time, Yerba Buena, out-rivalled by the port of Honolulu, drifted back into obscurity.

"The Portsmouth"

Then, on July 9, 1846, the "U. S. S. Portsmouth" quietly dropped anchor in Yerba Buena Cove, and Capt. John B. Montgomery and 70 sailors and marines came ashore and ran up the Stars and Stripes on Mexico's flagpole atop the adobe Custom House near the Plaza, as the "Portsmouth" gave a 21-gun salute. Thus passed the rule of the village of Yerba Buena from Spanish to American. On Aug. 6, 1846, Captain Montgomery appointed Lieut. Washington Allen Bartlett as the first Alcalde of Yerba Buena under the American flag. Bartlett was confirmed by public vote on Sept. 15. His first important decree ordered the revision of Vioget's survey, which had served to locate building lots since 1839. His civil engineer, Jasper O'Farrell, in making the survey, discovered in 1847 that streets as laid out in the early survey intersected at $2\frac{1}{2}$ degrees from a right angle. Correction of this error, known as "O'Farrell's Swing," was made promptly.

A Reception Center Since Gold Days

When gold was discovered on Jan. 24, 1848, in Sutter's millrace on the American River, and the evidence reached San Francisco's nearly 900 inhabitants, the first gold rush, led by Sam Brannan, publisher of the town's newspaper, "The Star," left only seven inhabitants behind. As the news spread around the world and ships came streaming into the harbor, a year later found over 6,000 miners at the "diggins," and San Francisco again was a cantonment of tents with a population reported at 2,000 excited transients.

