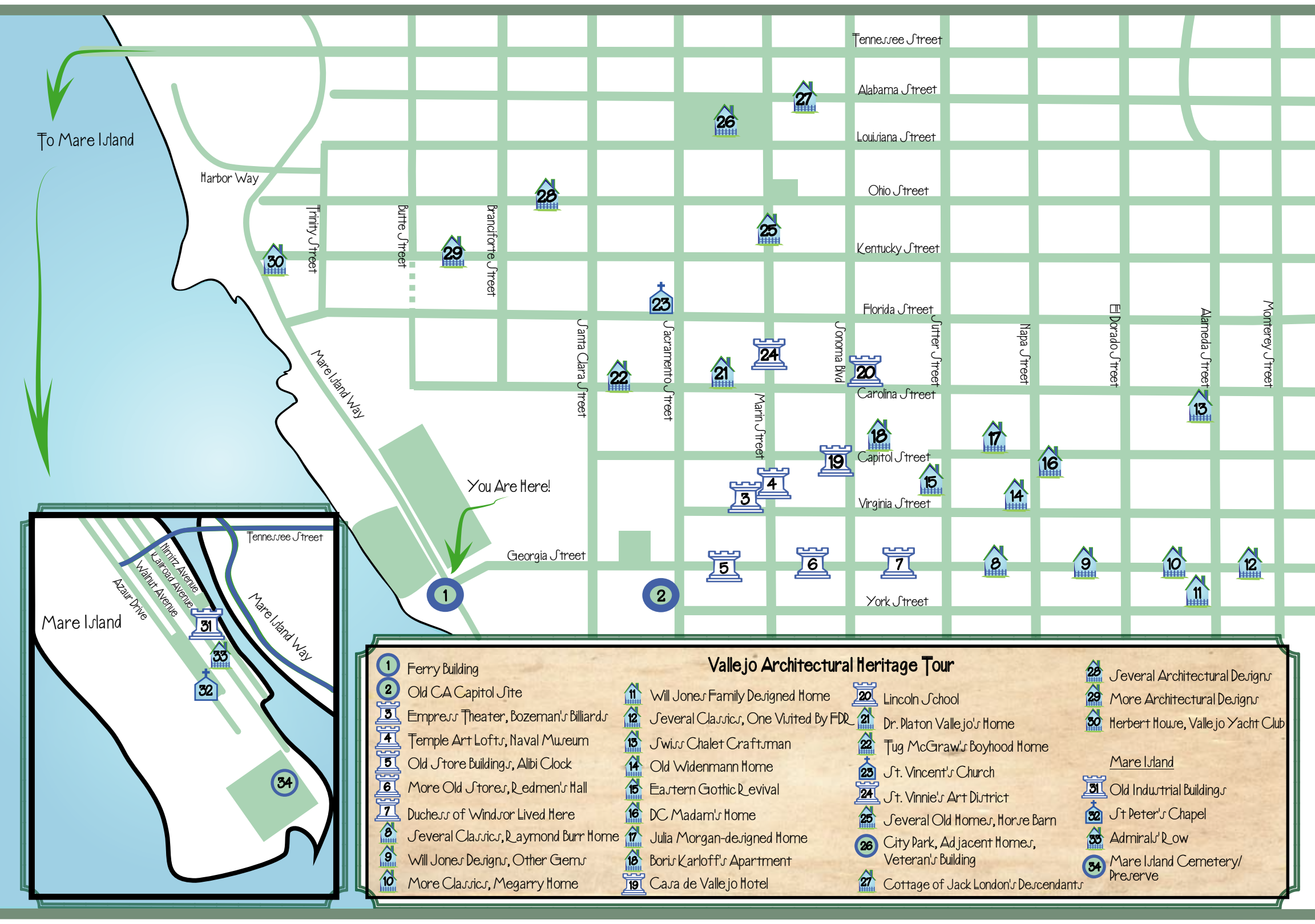
Vallejo Architectural Heritage Tour



Vallejo has one of the best collections of historic homes and old commercial and industrial buildings to be found anywhere in the San Francisco Bay area. There are examples of many architectural styles, such as **Shingle, Queen Anne, Spanish Colonial Revival, Beaux Arts, Italianate, Greek Revival, Craftsman, Zig-Zag Moderne** and more. For each style, there are examples ranging from the grand to modest workingman structures in a city envisioned by Gen. Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, Mexico's commandant general of Alta California. As a result of the general's influence, the city of Vallejo served briefly as California's capitol in 1852 and 1853.

There are three designated historic districts in Vallejo:

The Heritage District

Centers on and radiates out from Georgia Street in the oldest part of town

The St. Vincent's Hill Historic District

The Mare Island Historic District

The old Mare Island Naval Shipyard, which became the first permanent Navy base on the West Coast in 1854. The base closed in 1996.

This brochure provides a partial list of the historic structures in Vallejo and on Mare Island. The goal is to highlight some of the best architectural gems and encourage people to eventually tour adjacent streets to fully appreciate what Vallejo has to offer.

For More Information

Vallejo's Architectural Heritage and Landmarks Commission

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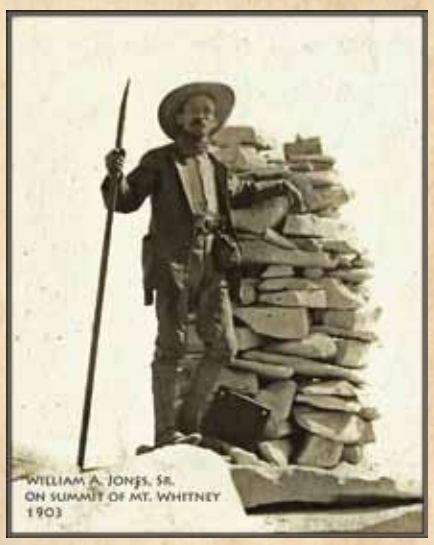

William A. Jones, Sr., 1903

William A. Jones, Vallejo's best-known architect, designed many of the town's signature brown-shingle homes as well as many other homes in styles ranging from Craftsman to Colonial Revival. Among his larger structures is the Beaux Arts-style Empress Theatre. He also collaborated with prominent architect Julia Morgan on one of Vallejo's grandest homes, at 728 Capitol Street.

Jones' work shows a sophistication and playfulness that mirrored that of San Francisco architects Ernest Coxhead and Willis Polk, who in the late 19th century blended historial elements with great success.

Jones moved from Vermont to Vallejo as a boy in 1872. His father became foreman in the molding shop at Mare Island Naval Shipyard, across the Napa River from Vallejo. Will also started working on Mare Island, but architecture appealed to him and he took classes in San Francisco, studying under well-known architect Bernard Maybeck.

By 1898, Jones was working as chief architectural draftsman on Mare Island. and also designing homes on his own. His clients included many of Vallejo's leading citizens.

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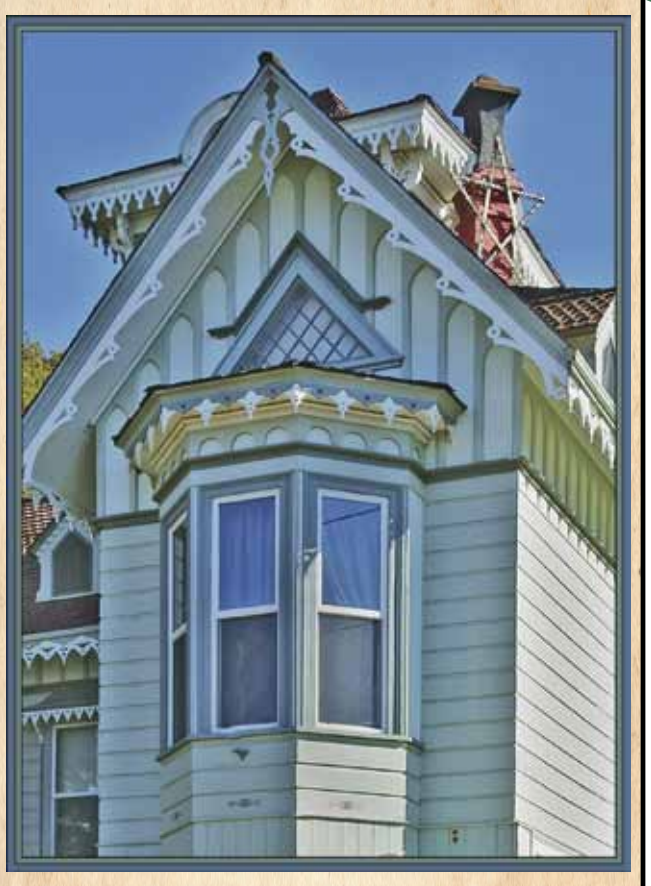

History Speaks

A walking tour of some of the many architectural gems in Vallejo and on Mare Island

Sponsored by the Vallejo Architectural Heritage and Landmarks Commission

The Tour

1 – This tour of Vallejo's historic highlights starts at the city's ferry terminal. For most of its history, Vallejo has had ferry service to San Francisco and other points.

2 – California's Capitol: Vallejo briefly served as California's capital city in 1852 and 1853. A monument at the city's new bus transportation center marks the location of the old capitol, destroyed by fire in 1859.

3 – The Empress: The beautifully restored Empress Theater, at 338 Virginia St., was built in 1911. It's now the centerpiece of downtown Vallejo's arts and entertainment district, with live music shows and other events. Next door, at 326 Virginia, is the building that once housed Jay Bozeman's billiard hall. He played against Minnesota Fats, Willie Hoppe, Johnny Layton and other greats at world-championship events.

4 – Temple Arts, City Hall: The newly restored Neoclassical-style Temple Art Lofts building, at 707 Marin, is a former Masonic temple built in 1917. Next door, at 715 Marin, is Vallejo's first city hall, jail and police and fire stations, constructed in 1872. Across the street at 734 Marin is Vallejo's second city hall, built in 1927 in a Spanish Renaissance Revival style. Replaced by a new city hall built in 1975, it's now the Vallejo Naval and Historial Museum — a must-see for history buffs.

5 – Downtown: Historic buildings in the 300 block of Georgia Street include the Classical-style bank at 330 Georgia St. Also note 314 and 337-39 Georgia. Several downtown structures underwent ground-floor remodeling but remain historically intact above that level.

6 – More downtown: Note the Redmen's Hall at 431 Georgia, built in the mid-1920s with decorative American Indian motifs; and also 418 and 444-448 Georgia.

Wallis Simpson

7 – Duchess of Windsor's apartment, 524 Georgia: Renters in this Mission Revival structure, built in 1907, included the wife of a Navy officer who later became the Mrs. Simpson for whom the Duke of Windsor gave up the throne of England. Also note the twin Zig-Zag Moderne tiled storefronts at 541-543 Georgia, built in the mid-1920s.

8 – Actor Raymond Burr's home, 610 Georgia: Burr lived with his mother, a piano teacher, in this Queen Anne-style home. Also note the Queen Anne at 622 Georgia and the elegant Classical Revival home at 635 Georgia.

9 – Will Jones Territory, 700 block: There are several of prominent Vallejo architect Will Jones' signature brown-shingle houses, including 720, 711, 721, 723 and 729 Georgia St., dating to the late 1800s and early 1900s. The 705 Georgia house is a fine example of Queen Anne/Eastlake design. This house is on the corner of Georgia and Napa streets, and a short walk down Napa St. to York St. will take you to many architectural gems on both those streets.

10 – Megarry home, 809 Georgia St.: Sisters Mary and Letitia Megarry lived in this Georgian-style home, one of only a few in Vallejo, for decades. The stern, no-nonsense sisters, who wore old-fashioned black dresses when out walking, once sued a man for $5,000 in the 1950s for calling one of them a witch. They won the case. Also in the 800 block are two Italianate Victorians, at 836 and 842 Georgia.

11 – Will Jones' Home, 403 Alameda St.: Architect Will Jones in 1912 designed this L-shaped, two-story brown shingle with a courtyard and a broad porch held up by four oversize columns. Across the street, at 901 York St., is the cottage he designed for his son in 1930.

12 – FDR dined here, 901 Georgia St.: The Colonial Revival home was designed by Will Jones for Judge Frank Devlin, who in 1914 hosted then-Assistant Navy Secretary Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor at a banquet at the house. Also note 933, 915, 912 and 919 Georgia.

13 – Swiss Chalet, 721 Alameda St.: Swiss Chalet decorative elements were adapted to this Craftsman-design home, constructed in about 1907.

14 – Shingled Italianate-style farmhouse, 639 Virginia. Built in 1868, this home was owned by prominent early-day Vallejo brewer Charles Widenmann. Note several other architectural gems on the block and on adjacent streets.

15 – Rare, Eastern-style Gothic Revival, 918 Sutter St.: This was the home of professor William Henry Tripp, who in 1867 opened a penmanship school in downtown Vallejo and ran it for decades.

16 – Washington Madam's House, 803 Capitol St.: Among this block's interesting homes is the Italianate home of "Washington Madam" Deborah Jeane Palfrey. Facing prison on charges related to an alleged Washington, D.C., prostitution ring, she committed suicide in Florida in 2008. Her many clients allegedly included a U.S. senator, a U.S. ambassador and a military strategist.

Julia Morgan house

17 – Julia Morgan house, 728 Capitol St.: The Wilson House, built in 1908-9, is a fine example of the Academic Eclectic movement styling as it developed in the San Francisco Bay area, reflecting work done by Bernard Maybeck influenced by Swiss architecture in the Chalet style after his travels abroad. Noted architect Julia Morgan worked with Vallejo architect Will Jones on the house. Next door, at 740 Capitol St., is a Carpenter-Gothic Revival home, possibly prefabricated and shipped to Vallejo.

18 – Boris Karloff's apartment, 614 Capitol Street: In 1918, the small apartment house at the top of the Capitol Street steps was home for Karloff, the actor best known as Frankenstein. He was 31 and a dozen years away from fame in Hollywood's horror film genre.

19 – Casa de Vallejo hotel, Capitol St. and Sonoma Blvd.: Built in 1919 as a YMCA, the Spanish-themed Casa de Vallejo later became a luxury hotel and hosted many of the top entertainers of the Big Band era. A thriving center for community events into the 1960s, it now provides subsidized apartments for low-income seniors.

20 – Lincoln School, NE corner of Sonoma Blvd. and Carolina St.: Vallejo's first public school was built here in the 1850s, on land donated by city founder John Frisbie. Destroyed by an arson fire in 1894, it was replaced by another structure that in turn was replaced in 1938 by the current Monterey Revival-style school.

21 – Dr. Platon Vallejo's home, 420 Carolina St.: Dr. Platon Vallejo was the son of General Mariano Vallejo, this city's namesake. A volunteer battlefield surgeon during the Civil War, he later had a private practice in Vallejo for decades and established a reputation as one of the region's most gifted doctors.

22 – "Tug" McGraw's boyhood home, 312 Carolina St.: Frank "Tug" McGraw was a left-handed Major League pitcher and father of country music singer Tim McGraw. He coined the phrase "You gotta believe!" during the New York Mets' improbable run to the 1973 National League pennant. With the Philadelphia Phillies, he recorded the final out in the 1980 World Series, bringing the Phillies their first World Championship.

23 – St. Vincent Ferrer Catholic Church, NW corner, Florida and Sacramento streets: The St. Vincent Ferrer Parish was started in 1855. Construction of the existing Gothic Revival church was started in 1867. The imposing brick church, with its 150-foot tower, is both a physical and spiritual landmark for Vallejoans.

24 – Saint Vinnie's Art District, centered in the 900 block of Marin Street, includes several artists' studios. At Marin and Carolina streets, note the Vallejo Bible Church, a Spanish Colonial Revival structure built in 1925.

25 – Homes in the 1100 block of Marin St. and adjacent Ohio and Kentucky side streets include examples of Gothic, Queen Anne and Craftsman styles, along with shingled homes, vernacular cottages and a Gothic-style alley barn built in the 1800s.

26 – The Vallejo City Park encompasses a square block, bounded by Marin, Sacramento, Alabama and Louisiana streets. Structures ringing the park include the Beaux Arts-style Veterans Memorial Building, built in 1929. A Vallejo showcase for decades, it featured musicians such as jazz greats Fats Waller and Ella Fitzgerald. Note also the flat-front Italianate fourplex at 1214 Sacramento St., across from the park.

27 – In the 500 block of Alabama Street there are four side-by-side bungalows, all in a similar Craftsman style, including one once occupied by famed author Jack London's grandson Bart Abbott and his wife Helen. Groupings of bungalows and cottages with similar styles can be seen in several locations in neighborhoods that were home to shipyard workers.

28 and 29 – Many more architectural designs can be seen in the 400 and 300 blocks of Ohio Street and the 200 and 100 blocks of Kentucky Street, as well as on Florida St. and other adjacent streets. Look for Craftsman, Gothic, Prairie, Dutch Colonial, Mediterranean and Greek Revival styles, among others.

30 – Note the Queen Anne-Shingle at 1 Kentucky St., built in 1902 for the Herbert family and moved to its current site in 1961. Across Mare Island Way is the Vallejo Yacht Club, established in 1900. Jack London joined the club in 1910 and was a frequent late-night card player there.

Admiral Farragut
"Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!"

31 – Mare Island Naval Shipyard industrial buildings: Mare Island was the first permanent U.S. Navy installation on the West Coast, and David Farragut, who later became the Navy's first admiral, was its first commandant. During World War II, there were more than 40,000 workers repairing and building naval vessels. One of the cavernous sheds used to store coal for ships now is a haven for artists. Another building, the old pipe shop, houses a museum.

32 – St. Peter's Chapel, built in 1901, is the oldest naval chapel on the West Coast. A classic example of Shingled Gothic architecture, it has a priceless collection of 25 Tiffany stained-glass windows.

33 – Navy Officer's Mansions: The Colonial Revival-style "Admirals' Row" mansions on Walnut Avenue were built in the 1891-1901 period after a major earthquake damaged brick homes that dated to 1855.

34 – The 215-acre Mare Island Shoreline Heritage Preserve includes the Navy's first ammunition depot in the Pacific, founded in 1857; and the West Coast's oldest naval cemetery, dating to 1856. Besides some 900 sailors and soldiers, Anna Arnold Key Turner, daughter of Francis Scott Key, composer of "The Star-Spangled Banner," is buried there.