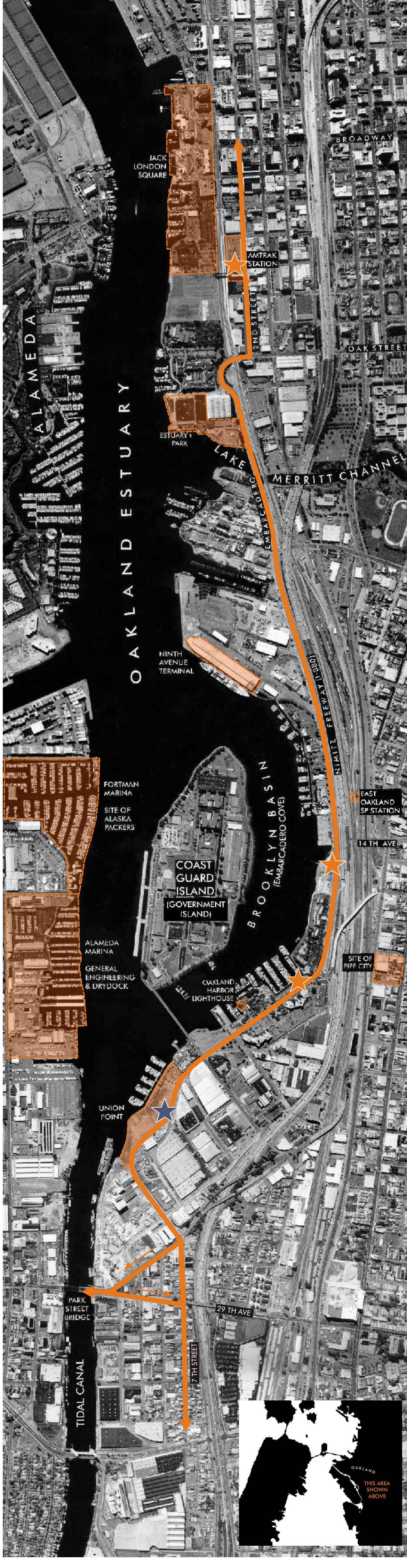


UNION POINT



Creating a Harbor

Spreading before you is the Oakland Estuary. This sheltered inlet of San Francisco Bay was once fringed by broad marshes and shallow tidelands which became mud flats at low tide. A rich wildlife habitat, the estuary was a plentiful source of food for Native Americans. The Ohlone Indians established a village near this spot. A long-vanished shellmound was located near the village, marking the location of discarded shells from oysters, clams, and mussels.

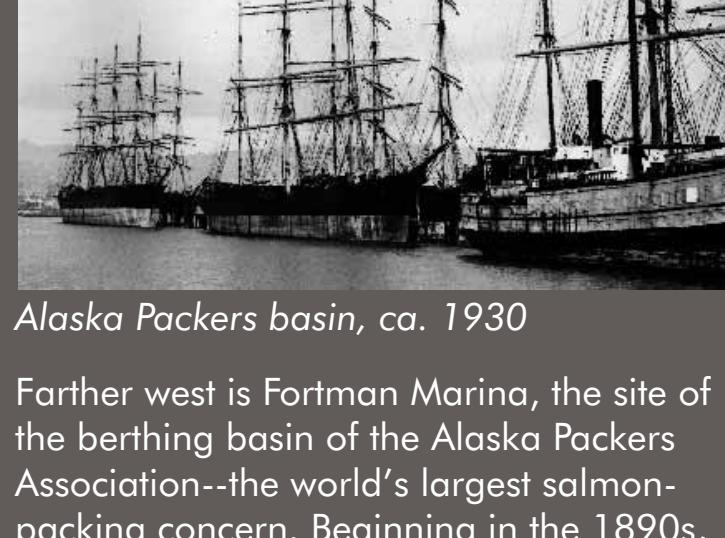
Beginning in the 1870s, harbor improvements by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers transformed the shallow estuary into a working harbor. Channels and basins were deepened, and the dredged mud and sand were used to fill marshes and tidelands. Coast Guard Island, north of here, was created by dumping dredged material behind levees. The excavated mile-long tidal canal, south of here, transformed Alameda from a peninsula to an island and funneled tidal water from San Leandro Bay through the estuary in order to scour the shipping channels. These harbor improvements made the estuary accessible to ocean-going vessels, ushering in a new era of maritime commerce.

General Engineering and Alaska Packers



General Engineering & Drydock shipyard during World War II

Across the estuary is the Alameda Marina, occupying the site of the General Engineering & Drydock shipyard. Established in 1922, the yard built diesel-powered ferry-boats. During World War II, it was expanded and equipped with a floating drydock (shown above), making it one of the largest ship-repair facilities on the coast. It closed in 1948. Alameda Marina, which opened in 1967, has retained a number of the old shipyard buildings for new uses.



Alaska Packers basin, ca. 1930

Farther west is Fortman Marina, the site of the berthing basin of the Alaska Packers Association—the world's largest salmon-packing concern. Beginning in the 1890s, the company's ships sailed north each spring, returning in late summer with salmon from the Alaskan canneries. After 1900, the fleet was moored and repaired in Alameda. By the 1930s, the square-riggers had been replaced by steamships, and the company moved to Seattle during World War II. The basin was renamed Fortman Marina in honor of the first president of the Alaska Packers.

KEY

- BIKE ROUTE
- ★ YOU ARE HERE
- ★ LOCATIONS OF SIGNS



For more information on the history of Oakland's waterfront, visit the Oakland Library's History Room and the Oakland Museum of California.

DATE OF AERIAL PHOTO: 6/1998