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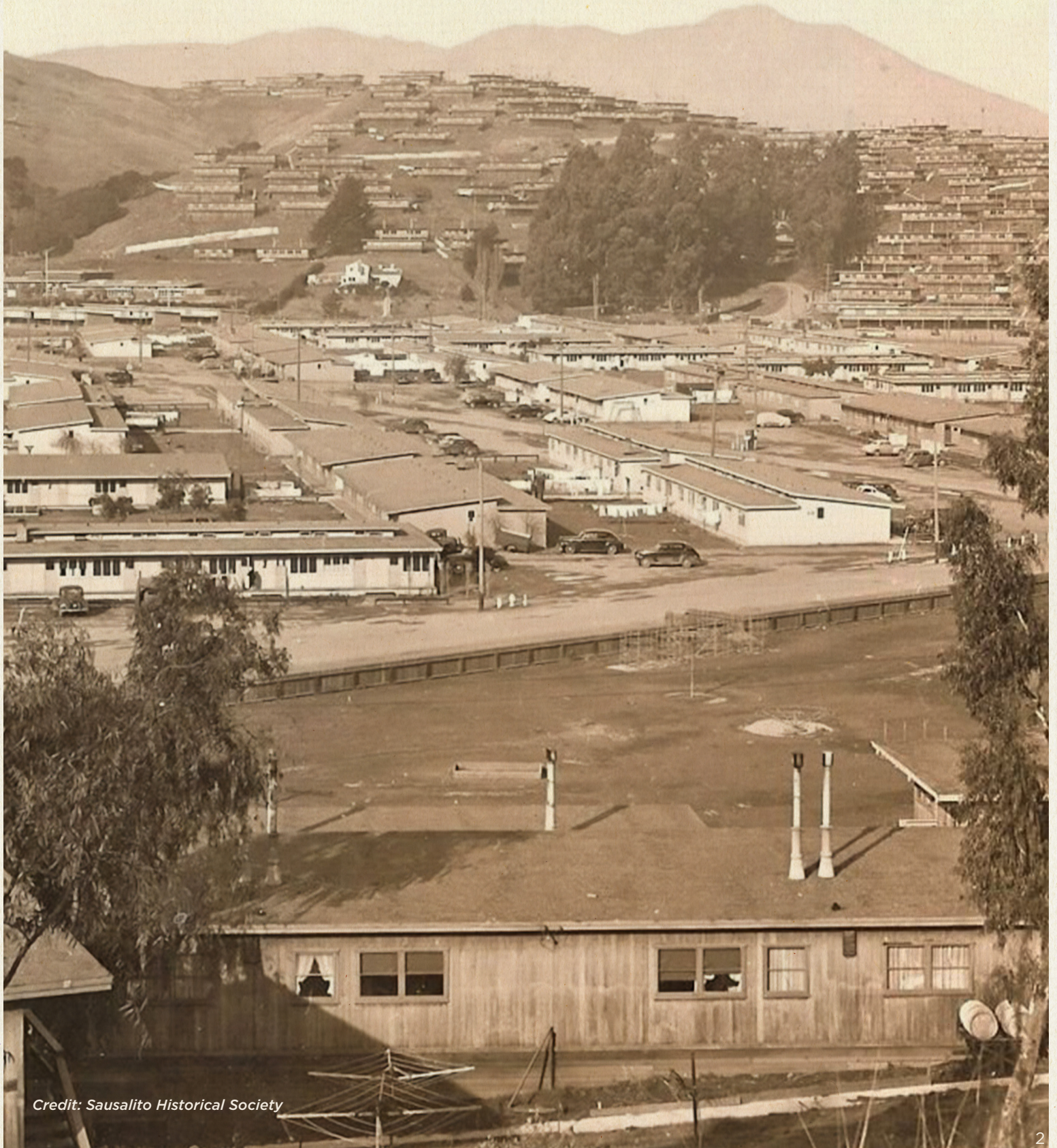
The Legacy of Marin City
A California Black History Story
(1942-1960)



Illustrations by:
James Shields

Marin City

(1943)



Credit: Sausalito Historical Society

Marin City's legacy is here to stay

You are invited to join us on an exploration of the legacy of Marin City!

The Legacy of Marin City: A California Black History Story (1942 - 1960) showcases the story of Black History in California and the nation, revealing the true-life stories of Black Americans with tremendous faith, courage, heart and soul. The Marin City story is shared through exhibits at ten distinct branches of the Marin County Free Library, providing a view into places, people, perspectives, and history you might not otherwise know.

These exhibits chronicle the trials and tribulations of Marin City's Black residents, most arriving from different parts of the United States to seek a better life while still preserving the traditions they held dear. These rich exhibits include archives from newspaper articles, oral histories, artifacts, and photographs that document Marin City's founding as a ship-building community during World War II and evolution into Marin County's only primarily Black enclave.

This is an American story of patriotism, persistence, and Black migration during the 1940s. Workers traveled primarily from the western rim of the South: Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, and Arkansas. They bought one-way tickets, vowing not to go back to barbaric Jim Crow laws of racial segregation, discrimination, lynchings, and unequal rights and pay.

Black Americans came to start a new life for themselves and their families. They were looking for a better future. Their actions and contributions changed the course of American history and the Black experience to this day. Marin City's legacy is here to stay.

Enjoy this journey through history at all ten branches of the Marin County Free Library! For more information on the exhibit please visit marinlibrary.org/marinship. To delve deeper into the history of Marin City, please visit Marin City Historical & Preservation Society: preservemarincitylegacy.org and the resources available in the Anne T. Kent California Room: marinlibrary.org/california-room.

Felecia Gaston, Curator, Marin City Historical & Preservation Society

Lana Adlawan, Director of County Library Services



About Marin City

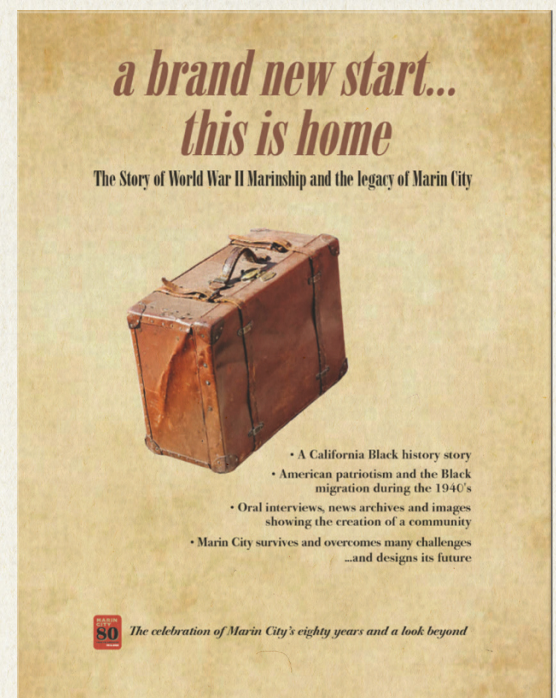
Marin City is an unincorporated community and census-designated place in Marin County, California, United States. It was developed for housing starting in 1942, to accommodate wartime shipyard workers and other migrants to California. Many of these workers were Black Americans from the South, part of the Great Migration, which continued until 1970.

The area that is now Marin City was once occupied by a dairy farm and a handful of families. However, after the declaration of World War II (WWII) on December 8, 1941, Marin City was rapidly built in 1942 to house 6,000 of the 20,000 workers who migrated from all over the United States.

These workers were attracted by the Department of Defense jobs at Marinship, the Sausalito waterfront shipyard. A total of 93 Liberty ships and tankers were built and launched from Marinship in fewer than three years.

Felecia Gaston, founder of the Marin City Historical and Preservation Society, has published a book about Marin City titled "A Brand New Start . . . This Is Home". The book documents the city's origins as a shipbuilding community during WWII to the present day. It focuses primarily on the workers who migrated from the American South and Midwest to create Marin's only Black enclave, and the housing and social challenges they have faced.¹ This book is available in all Marin County Free Library branches.

This is a California Black History Story.





Marinship Women Workers - Credit: Sausalito Historical Society

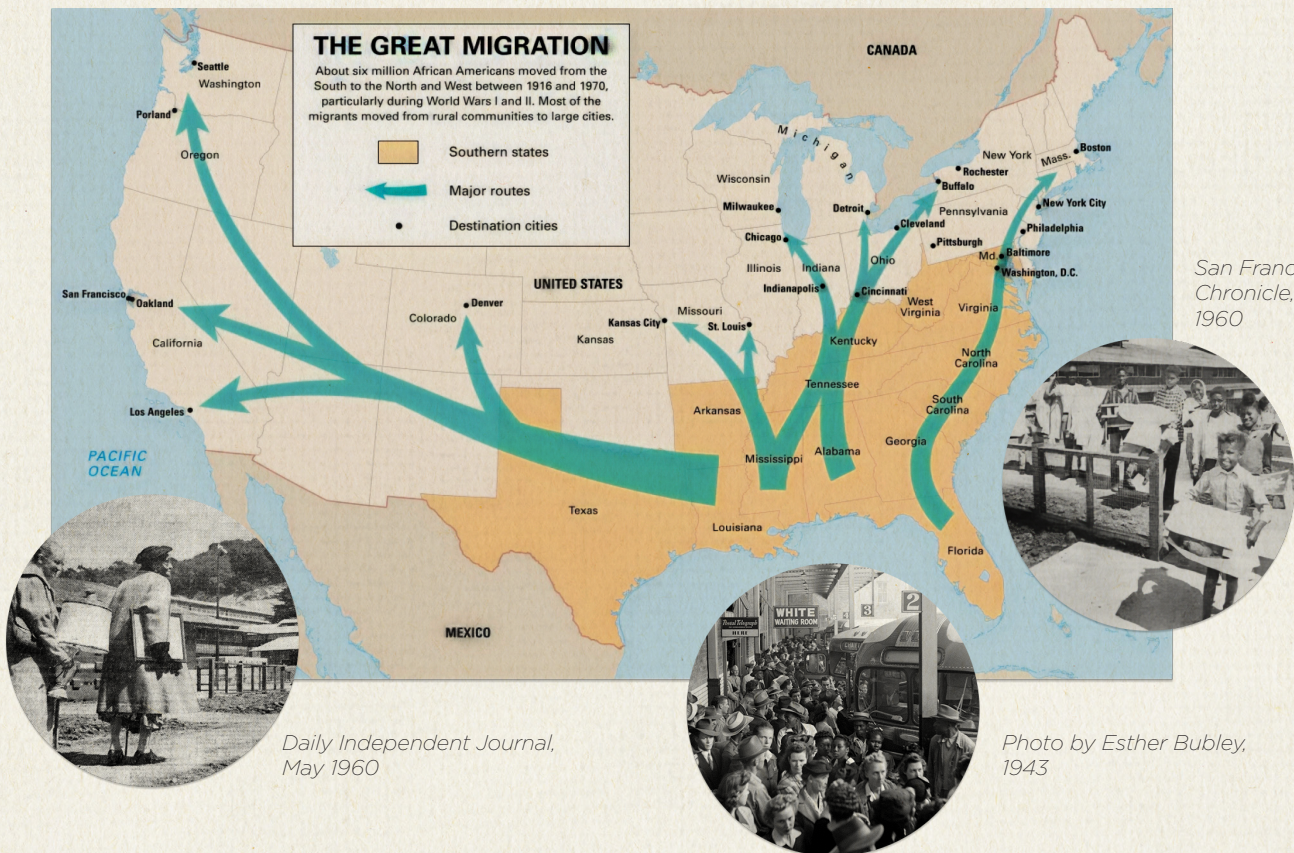


Liberty Ship John Muir sliding down the ways at Marinship. Sausalito, California, United States, 22, Nov. 1942, Public domain image courtesy of ww2dbase

What was Marinship?

MARINship Facts

- The U.S. Maritime Commission established Marinship in March 1942, one of six “Emergency Shipyards” in the San Francisco Bay Area.
- During Marinship’s three-plus years of existence, it employed 75,000 workers and contributed over 100 million human hours of labor towards the war effort.
- Marinship’s workforce was recruited from all over California and eventually the entire United States, including large contingents from Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Iowa, Minnesota, and Missouri. Many were Dust Bowl refugees from the Southwest as well as thousands of Black Americans from the deep South.
- To build ships as quickly as possible, workers pieced them together in assembly-line fashion from pre-made sections built at the shipyard. About 120 large units, made up of some 250,000 items, went into building each ship.
- 2,000 workers worked in shifts around the clock.
- In July 1945, 20,000 Black American Marinship workers were employed; by September 1945, that number was reduced to 12,000.
- In the 3 1/2 years that Marinship was active, it launched 15 Liberty Ships, 16 fleet oilers, and 62 tankers: a total of 93 ships.



The Great Migration

The Great Migration was the movement of millions of Black Americans from rural communities in the South to large cities in the North and West. They wanted well-paying jobs and opportunities for their children. They needed to get away from the discriminatory Jim Crow laws of racial segregation, which were a collection of state and local statutes that legalized racial segregation in the United States. These laws existed for almost a century, spanning from the post-Civil War era until 1968.

When Black people traveled during the Jim Crow era, they were refused service in restaurants and public places, so families would pack sustainable, nutritious meals that would last 4 to 5 days in shoeboxes.

Questions to Consider as You View the Exhibit:

If you had to move to another state to begin a new life, and only had one suitcase, what items would you bring?

What foods would you pack in your shoebox?

What foods feel like home to you?



Artwork: Peter Ambush



University of Santa Cruz

Ruth Marion-Baruch and Pirkle Jones Photographs

Quiett Family Archive

A Community Begins

What does community mean to you? What does being a good neighbor look like now? Read the reflections of two prominent Marin City residents, Mrs. Annie Small and Mrs. Rodessa Battle, who discuss moving to Marin City and what was important to their community.

“As I was saying, my cousin heard about it. . . He decided to come out and see. And he came out, he liked it, and went to work in the shipyard. He sent for my husband and [my husband] told me well, I’m going and if I don’t like it I will be right back. I will send for you if I like it. And he sent for me the same week he got here. . . I caught a train Wednesday night and arrived to San Francisco. . . Got here on a Sunday and went to work on a Monday.” - Mrs. Annie Small

“The ship was real high. They said ‘well you got to go up this ladder if you want to work in here in the shipyard and on the ship’ So I kept trying. I’d look down and I back off and next time I got a little further and I said I’m going up that ladder. . . and I went up there and I had been going up there ever since.” - Mrs. Annie Small

Conversation between Mrs. Rodessa Battle and Mrs. Annie Small:

“Everybody got along well because they seem to act like a family unit. Everybody helped everybody else.”

“We would never lock that door. We would leave the money in the milk jar with a note in there and set it on the porch. . . And you would find your change.”

“The iceman came in and put your ice in for you. If your door was open, your neighbor would close it for you. And that’s what we meant when we said neighbors took care of each other.”

Courageous Leaders Spotlight



Mrs. Rodessa Battle, Welder
1921-2018



Joseph James, Welder
1910-2002



Rev. Leon Samuel, Welder
1913-1997



Mrs. Annie Small, Welder
1919-2018

Thriving Businesses

During WWII, many businesses sprang up to serve the needs of the men and women who worked at Marinship and their families, such as candy shops, pharmacies and grocery stores. In the 1950s, Black residents owned thriving businesses from gas stations, department stores and beauty shops. In the 1960's, these businesses were removed due to redevelopment of the area. One business remained until the 1990s, Hayden's Market.



Advertisement - Daily Independent Journal circa 1940's-50s



Waldo Market circa 1940's-50s - Family Archives of Mike Schladweiler



Hayden's Market circa 1960s - Hayden Family Archives



Standard Oil Products Gas Station
Page Family Service Center



Marin City Archives: Shopping Center circa 1940's-50s



Credit: Sausalito Historical Society

Wartime Housing

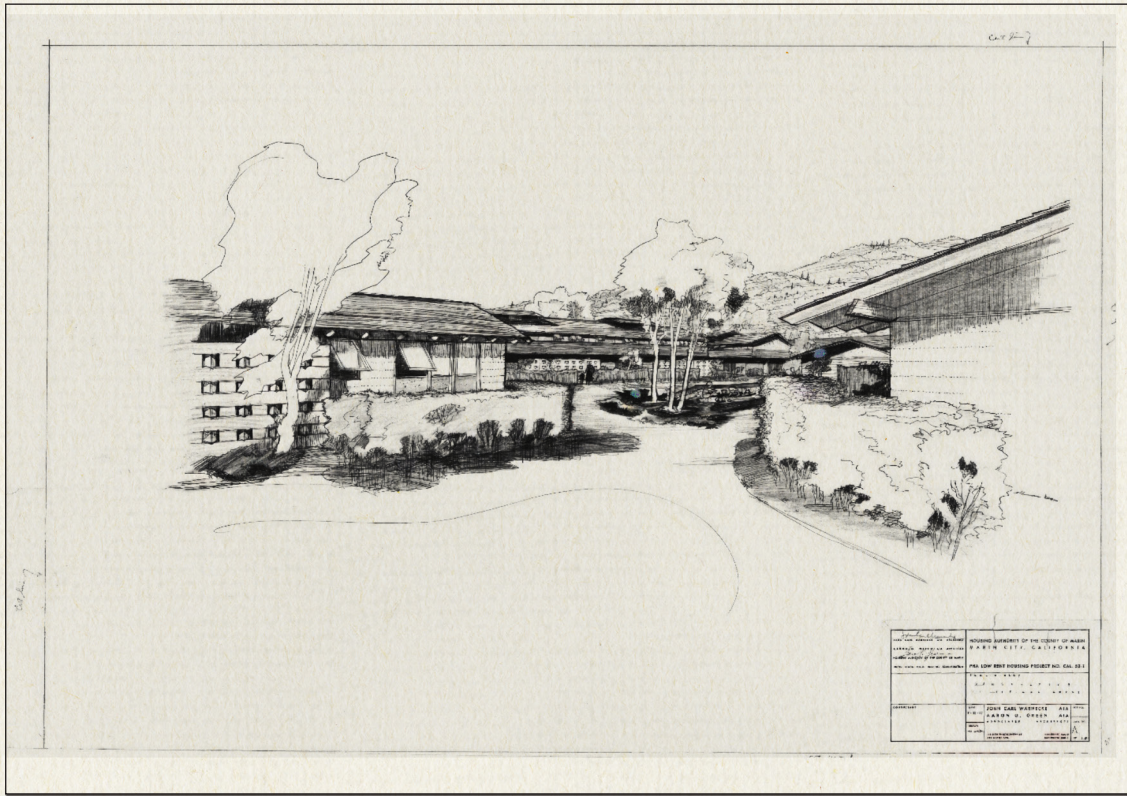
The thousands who came to Marin City to work at the shipyard needed housing – and though Marin City’s wartime housing was seen as having some of the best housing and an active community life, the housing was always meant to be temporary and to last for 4 years.

By 1943, the Federal Government began to relax its restrictions on home building in the area and made materials available to contractors, as well as offered 4% home loans to Marinship employees. With this support, many of the white residents in Marin City began to move out of the city. Due to racist restrictive covenants, Black residents were not able to purchase homes in Marin County and to remain in Marin City.

The wooden temporary wartime housing remained in place for 18 years, 14 years beyond its expected life span.

In May of 1945, Marinship launched its last ship and closed its doors. There were no further employment opportunities for Black Americans in Marin at this time. The County of Marin pulled down the shipyards, remodeled some of the buildings for other purposes and abandoned the rest. But Marin City as a community did not disappear. Unwilling to return to life in the Midwest and the South, these wartime emigrants, white and Black, stayed on. Post-war housing shortages kept many who were there gainfully employed now in peacetime construction enterprises and domestic services. Others stayed because they had no place to go.

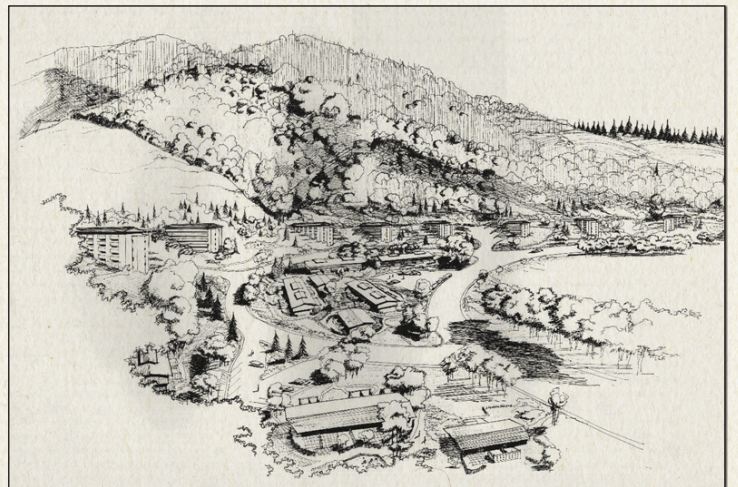
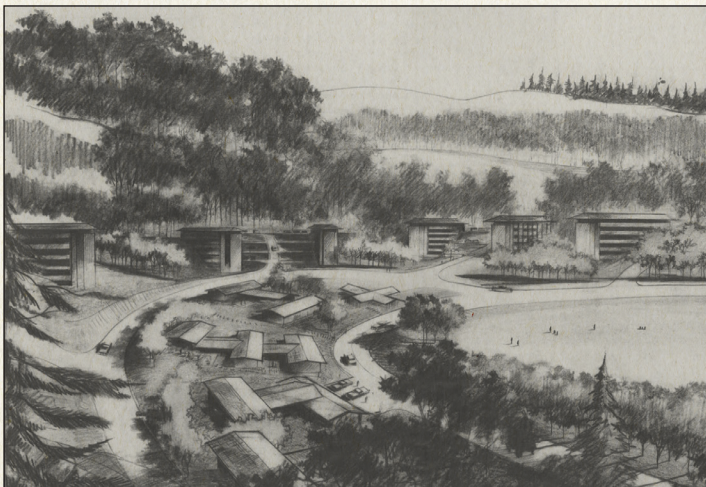
As the war drew to a close and Marinship crafted its last vessel, Marin City’s population was cut in half. Although a few workers returned home to Texas or Louisiana or Minnesota, the great majority remained in the Bay Area. Most white residents found new jobs and homes and moved out of the community, but it was a different story for the Black Americans who made up 10 percent of the project’s population. The few jobs available were menial and paid half of what Marinship had paid them.



Courtesy of Aaron Green Archives/Daniel Rouark Collections

A Brand New Start (This is Home)

Efforts to redevelop deteriorating temporary wartime housing into a new community, a racially and economically integrated community where none existed elsewhere in the County of Marin, resulted in Marin City Public Housing. In January 1957 Aaron Green and John Carl Warnecke were elected to serve as Associated Architects. Landscape Architect Lawrence Halprin and Planning Consultant Lawrence Livingston Jr. were also members of the design team. Architect Aaron Green and his creative team designed buildings suited to the hillside site and scenic natural resources. An associate of Frank Lloyd Wright, an American architect who designed the Marin County Civic Center, Green's vision was to create a democratically oriented housing development for the workers at Marinship, connected to the natural landscape.ⁱⁱ



Experience the Legacy of Marin City

Description of Library Exhibits

Marin City Library - The Great Migration

Showcases the journey of Black Americans in leaving the South. Between 1940 and 1960 over 3,348,000 Black folks left the South for northern and western cities. These migrations occurred for job opportunities, and to escape the oppressive conditions of the South.

Fairfax Library - Temporary Wartime Housing

During World War II, Marin City in California was a hub for shipbuilding. The Marinship shipyard in Sausalito was established in 1942 and operated 24 hours a day. To accommodate the influx of workers, temporary housing was constructed in Marin City.

Southern Marin would have to open its doors to the deluge. Summer homes, cottages, fishing shacks, old garages, servants' quarters, abandoned filling stations, every standing building with a roof on it on the county was occupied and it was not enough. Marinship turned to the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) for help. Temporary housing was purchased by the FHA and brought in. Additional "temporaries" were built. Space for approximately 1,500 families and dormitory space for 1,200 single men was located in a cul-de-sac north of Sausalito and west of Highway 101. The floor of the cul-de-sac was a lovely meadow at the foot of the mountains, that formed the north escarpment of the Golden Gate. The creation of Marin City had begun.

Corte Madera Library - Businesses/Education

Many services and facilities were offered to Marinship workers: an auditorium and social hall, club rooms and craft rooms, a lounge, a cafeteria, a nursery school for working parents, and a grade school which was to be administered by the Sausalito School District, as well as a branch of the Marin County Free Library.

Contrary to popular belief, the workforce of Marinship was never more than 43% Black. Black Americans from Oklahoma, Mississippi, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas and Louisiana lived side-by-side with white residents from the same states. It was, at first, a frightening experience for both. But the transition was easier than expected and the harmony in Marin City was remarkable. Black and white children went peacefully to school together and had almost identical juvenile crime rates. Sociologists were sent by the Federal Government to study the effects of patriotism on this mixed-race community.

Novato Library - The Marin City Projects in the 1960s

Architect Aaron Green, in association with John Carl Warneke, designed the new public housing project, which quickly filled. The physical changes of Marin City and its community before and after redevelopment are documented by Emme Fisk Gilman, a local photographer, conservationist, and public health educator.

Aaron Green, a protégé of Frank Lloyd Wright, was involved in the design of the Marin City Public Housing project in Marin County, California.¹ This project was recognized for its highly original design that met the challenge of the site's topography and dramatic situation

This project was seen as a "break-through" to better Federal Housing design.¹ It's a testament to Aaron Green's architectural prowess and his commitment to creating designs that are both functional and harmonious with their natural surroundings.

South Novato Library - Wartime Housing & Marin City Projects

In 1955, the Marin County Housing Authority purchased the 365-acre Marin City site from the federal government. In 1959, Marin's recently formed Redevelopment Agency purchased 121 acres of the site from the Housing Authority. The intent of the Marin City redevelopment project was to rebuild the entire site and transform it into a modern community including a shopping center, schools, community center, churches and recreational spots.

Until the 1960s, residents of Marin City resided in housing which had been built for workers at Marinship, a World War II Liberty shipyard on Sausalito's waterfront. The approximately 700 apartments and 800 houses were envisioned as temporary housing, yet post-war residents, most of whom were low- and middle-income Black Americans, continued to reside in structures which soon became dilapidated.

Civic Center Library - Joseph James v Marinship

Joseph James was a gifted singer and actor from the East Coast, a World War II shipyard worker, and civil rights activist.

During World War II, Joseph James led Black Marinship workers in a fight for equal rights and benefits with their labor union. His efforts culminated in the 1944 California Supreme Court case that outlawed racial discrimination by labor unions. This case would not have made it to the Supreme Court without James's charismatic leadership and courage. How did one Black man, a gifted singer and actor from the East Coast, become an exceptional shipyard worker and civil rights activist? Talk about an American hero! James enlisted the assistance of future U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, who was on the NAACP Council at the time. This case represents a significant historical moment as Marin County's first Affirmative Action case where James and other Black workers pushed back against being forced into an auxiliary union because of their race. This momentous legal case and Joseph James' leadership should be acknowledged and celebrated as part of the continual fight for racial justice and equality for Black people in America.

Stinson Beach Library - Demolition of Wartime Housing

The removal of the wartime housing would cost between \$35,000 to \$50,000. The less expensive way was to burn down the housing to make way for Marin City's redevelopment. 106 wartime housing duplexes and the homes that many Black residents had known for many years, went up in flames on December 6, 1960. The Marin County Fire Department completed the burning of all wartime housing units by April 20, 1962, with approval from the Marin County Board of Supervisors.

Point Reyes Library - The Liberty Ships

In 1942, W. A. Bechtel and Company, a Seattle based ship building company, was awarded a contract to build Liberty ships in the San Francisco Bay. K.K. Bechtel, to whom the project was assigned, decided to locate the yards in Sausalito in Marin County. Liberty ships were a class of cargo ship built in the United States during World War II under the Emergency Shipbuilding Program.

Inverness Library - Marinship Illustrations by James Shield

Original illustrations created by James Shield for the Marinship 80th Celebration. Read more about James and his work at creativeshields.com

Bolinas Library - Quilt Club

Quilts created by Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass are little-known national treasures. Created in the early 1950s by an interracial group in California, these quilts were on the cutting edge of the enormous political and cultural changes that would soon rock the United States. They are important landmarks in the history of American quilting.



Marinship

(1943)



Credit: Sausalito Historical Society

Acknowledgements

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ⁱ Marin City, California. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marin_City,_California

ⁱⁱ GGV National Registry

For more information on the exhibit please visit:

marinlibrary.org/marinship

