



History Walk At Lake Chabot

By Jacqueline Beggs
1997



Based on a larger work
"An Historical Tour of Lake Chabot"
by Jacqueline Beggs
scheduled for publication by the Alameda County
Historical Society

Eagle Scout Alexander McDougall of
the Berkeley Boy Scouts of America,
Troop 19, led a work crew in clearing
the debris
from each historical site
and installing the numbered posts.
Lake Chabot Park Ranger
Joe Maestre
co-ordinated the project.



STOP NO. 1--CLIMB THE STEPS to the history markers for a spectacular view of Lake Chabot Reservoir once called "one of the wonders of California." Eight hundred Chinese laborers hired by the private Contra Costa Water Company began work on this unique pioneering achievement in February of 1874. Water hoses invented by Anthony Chabot in the gold fields of the Sierra Nevada and 200 horses were used to construct it.

Compare The 1875 Lake View Sketch With The 1991 Photograph: Two tunnels were blasted and dug through the hill by the dam for outlets for drinking water pipes. The third tunnel was built as an overflow spillway.

A. Tunnel No. 1 The inlet is to the right of the temple tower beneath the lake's water. Seven feet high, five feet wide, 862 feet long.

B. Tunnel No. 2 The inlet is under the temple. It is eight feet high, seven feet wide, and 420 feet long. It was dug in 1875 but "Diana's" temple was added around 1917.

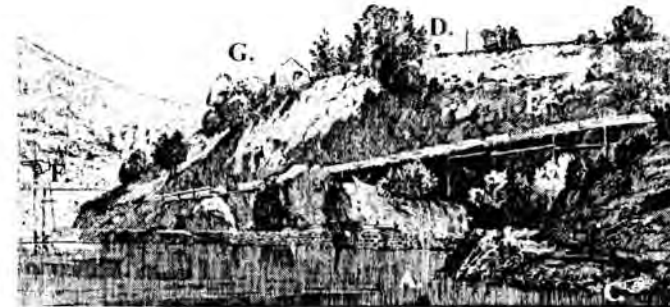
C. Tunnel No. 3 The inlet is in the cove across from the history marker. Ten feet high, ten feet wide, 1,438 feet long.

D. Shaft A 157 foot vertical control to Tunnel No. 1.

E. Sluiceway Used in 1875 for hydraulic fill. Removed.

F. Spillway A bridge was over it in 1875. Improved 1980.

G. Superintendent's cottage (removed).



Upper photo taken in 1991 by Vern Beggs. Lower sketch from John Muir travel Book "Picturesque California," 1888.

STOP NO. 2 TOP OF DAM Take time to stop while crossing the dam and look east towards the lake. Grass Valley Creek flows from the north-east and San Leandro Creek flows from the south-east (direction of the marina). The dam was constructed at the narrowest point between two rocky outcroppings at the convergence of these two creeks. Turn to the west to view the City of San Leandro, formerly Rancho Leandro. The bare hill to the south west was once an active quarry which opened in 1897, appropriately owned by Mr. Egbert Stone. **THE SPILLWAY at STOP NO. 2** was last improved in 1980. The first spillway was made of masonry with a bridge over it from which stop-logs could be raised or lowered to control the flow. Today when the water reaches the top of the spillway a cascading waterfall flows down it back to San Leandro Creek far below.

STOP NO. 3 TUNNEL SHAFT This stone covered object that looks like a round well is a 157 foot vertical control shaft that connects to Tunnel No. 1 to regulate its flow of water. Dug only 30 feet above the creek to divert the stream and allow work on the dam, the inlet to Tunnel No. 1 was quickly covered by the rising water when the lake first filled. Water flowing through pipes in this tunnel was delivered to homes in Oakland in 1876.



STOP NO. 4 THE SUPERINTENDENT'S COTTAGE for the first superintendent was at this site. During the 1874-75 initial dam building period there were many structures on this hill including a large barn where all the horses were kept, a wheelwright shop, a blacksmith shop, offices, and lodgings for the supervisors overseeing the Chinese laborers. When Anthony Chabot died in 1888, changes in the water company were evidenced by changes in the buildings on this hill. The practical barn and small cottage were eventually torn down and replaced by a beautiful new home for use of the new superintendent George Logan. ENJOY THE VIEW.

STOP NO. 5 THE SLATE HOUSE was built for the new superintendent in 1904. It was called the "slate house" because it was covered in slate, not only on the roof, but on the sides as well. William Dingee, a multi-millionaire who was head of the Contra Costa Water Company at this time was in the slate business and slate from his Eureka quarry was used on the house. Famous Oakland architect Walter J. Mathews, who designed Dingee's San Francisco mansion, and the Unitarian Church of Oakland, also designed the "slate house." One of the two dining rooms was especially built for the superintendent to use when conducting business with the workmen over the mid-day meal. In 1907 the Contra Costa Water Company became the People's Water Company and the flamboyant William Dingee got out of the water business.



Only Slate House in Cal. Situated at Lake Chabot San Leandro, Cal.

Above, Superintendent George Logan sits on Slate House steps. The residence was built in 1904. Stop 5. Photo courtesy of Lois Over.



At left, 1933 photo shows the fish pond and the gazebo that topped the shaft mentioned in stop 3. Photo courtesy of Beverly Wiseman. At right, "Diana's Temple" over inlet to tunnel No. 2 is reflected in lake.



STOP NO. 6 THE FISH POND was originally the site for one of the work shops during the 1874-75 dam building period. In 1916 the People's Water Company became the East Bay Water Company. The new company's president George Wilhelm and his wife Rosina gave frequent festive parties for the water company staff. Guests could be found lounging at "Diana's Temple" while listening to an orchestra playing on the dam. There was a small zoo, a gazebo and this exotic fish pond for their enjoyment. The water company changed from private to public in 1928 and the third family to live in the house was a family of horse loving "range riders" who patrolled the watershed lands for East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD). During World War II the house was left unoccupied and it fell into disrepair. It was torn down in 1950. See photos of "Diana's Temple" in upper lefthand photo and detail.

STOP NO. 7 THE CHINESE LABOR CAMP

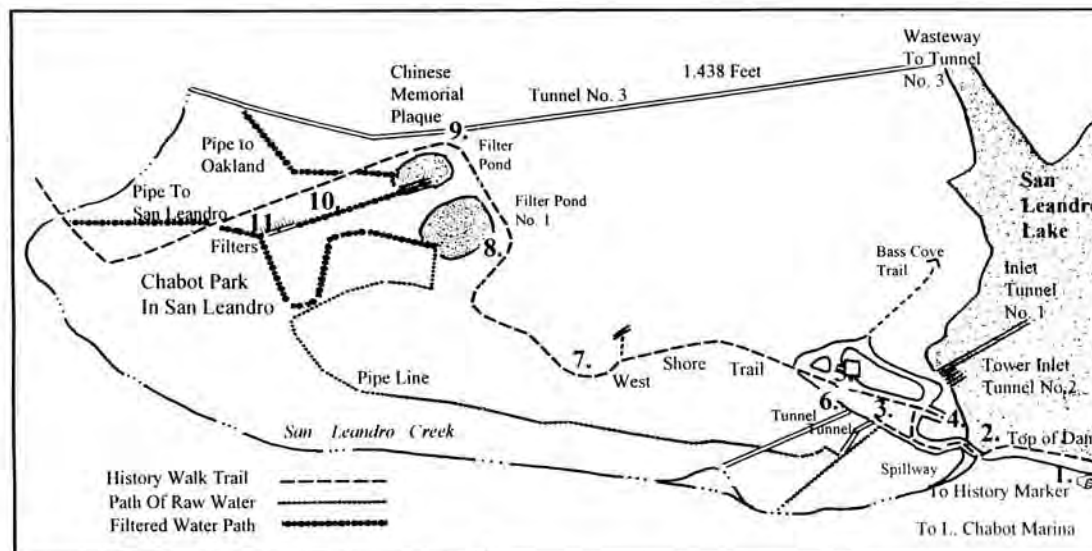
Step cautiously to the edge, keeping behind the fencing, to peer down the steep ravine. Chinese laborers working on the dam lived on the banks of the creek below and had to climb up hill daily to perform their work tasks. Many of the jobs were dangerous, especially digging and dynamiting the tunnels. An unstable section of Tunnel No. 1 caved in upon two Chinese workers in 1874. This tunnel was also the site of a second accident in 1887 when water was forced down the shaft (on the hill at Stop No. 3). The Chinese foreman and three assistants, not knowing that water was being applied, came into the tunnel and were washed out by the forceful flow. They were injured but fortunately survived.

This photo of the Lake Chabot filter basin appeared in the July, 1917 issue of "BUBBLES," published by East Bay Water Company.



STOP NO. 8 FILTER PONDS NO. 1 & 2 An old vegetable garden had been left at the bottom of the reservoir and this caused the water to have an "unpleasant" taste. Unfortunate recipients of the water had to put strainers over their faucets and these soon resembled used tea bags! Dr. George Pardee, who later became Governor of California, was on the Board of Health and at his insistence a filtration system was constructed. This filter pond and the one down the trail from it were constructed in 1888 and 1889 to clean up the water.

STOP NO. 9 CHINESE HISTORICAL MARKER--TUNNEL No. 3 EXIT The workers began construction in 1888 on this secondary spillway. When the lake is full, water flows through the tunnel and back to San Leandro Creek. The tunnel was dug and blasted 1,438 feet through the hard rock hill. On September 16, 1889, four Chinese were working the night shift digging the canal outside the tunnel when a dynamite explosion killed all four. The Alameda County Historical Society dedicated their 1997 plaque to the four Chinese workers, whose names were recently discovered, who died in the explosion near this tunnel exit. See photo, front cover.



Lake Chabot was at first called San Leandro Reservoir but was later renamed to honor its principal designer, Anthony Chabot. This map shows the path of water from the lake to the filter ponds around 1917. Improvements have been made throughout the years and today the dam is 135 feet high above the former creek bed and 500 feet from bank to bank along the walkway at the crest. It spreads out like a pyramid to 1700 feet wide at the base.

STOP NO. 10 THE CORK OAK (*Quercus suber*) It is not known when this tree was planted or by whom. The "Hayward Journal" of March 23, 1878 wrote that a large number of trees were planted around the reservoir. Anthony Chabot, who at one time had an arboretum in Oakland, may have planted it at that time. This type of tree is used commercially to make corks for bottles in Spain and Portugal. It is not a good tree for a park because the bark carves so easily. Tree is protected please leave it be.

STOP NO. 11 THE HYATT FILTERS These rusted round metal drums were put here in 1888 as part of the filtration process. The system varied throughout the years. In 1917 the process was as follows: Lake water flowed through pipes in the tunnels to Filter Pond No. 1 (at stop No. 8). Next the water traveled to the Hyatt's and was forced through pipes to create sufficient pressure to filter it through a bed of sand inside the drums. Finally, the water was piped from the Hyatt's to Filter Pond No. 2 to await delivery to homes.



Photo by Vern Beggs

END OF HIKE Lake Chabot was used as a primary source of water for the cities of Oakland and San Leandro from 1876 until the late 1930s. In the 1960s Lake Chabot was put on "stand-by" status to be used in emergencies. The last time the lake water was used for drinking was in 1977 during the drought. Lake Chabot opened for public recreation in 1966. The park is operated by East Bay Regional Park District under a lease agreement with the East Bay Municipal Utility District. The lake is also used to water the grounds of Chabot Golf Course in Oakland and Willow Park Golf Course in Castro Valley making it one of the oldest "working" reservoirs in the United States.

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