



William Hammond Hall (1846-1934)

Biographical Sketch by Hany Abdoun, Archives Intern

William Hammond Hall was born in Hagerstown, Maryland in 1846. After service with the U.S. army engineers in the Civil War, Hall made topographical maps of the Western regions during the late 1860's.

In the mid-1860's, San Francisco citizens and officials advocated the building of a spacious park. The city offered a tract of 1,013 acres stretching from Stanyan Street to the ocean that was known as the "outside land." In 1870 the Park Commission solicited bids for a topographical survey and in August of that year, Hall was awarded a contract for \$4,860, to prepare a topographical map of the "outside land." In 1871, he was appointed Golden Gate Park's first superintendent.

Hall devised a three-stage plan to improve the Park: first, to design a Panhandle along with two main drives, known today as JFK Drive and MLK Drive, second, the removal of sand dunes and the planting of forest trees. The final stage was the improvement of Ocean Beach. By 1875, about 60,000 trees, mostly blue gum eucalyptus, Monterey Pines and Monterey Cypress were planted. By 1879, that figure more than doubled to 155,000 trees over 1,000 acres.

On March 6, 1876, Hall was elected a resident member of the California Academy of Sciences. That same year, Hall was appointed California's first State Engineer. He also remained a consulting engineer to Golden Gate Park until his resignation in 1890, when he was replaced by his assistant John McLaren. While state engineer, Hall realized that San Francisco needed more water supplies from the western watershed of the Tuolumne River. In 1900, Hall bought up the rights to Cherry Creek for \$165,000 to bring water to the San Francisco area. The city of San Francisco bought the Cherry Creek from Hall for \$800,000.

William Hammond Hall died in 1934. Despite all his achievements, little is mentioned about Hall in San Francisco's history and unfortunately very little is dedicated to him in the city.

Sources Consulted:

The California Academy of Sciences, Theodore Henry Hittell.

San Francisco Examiner, August 28, 1960.

San Francisco Progress, March 2, 1979.

The World, August 27, 1989.