



## HISTORY ASILOMAR CONFERENCE GROUNDS

The meaning of Asilomar, a refuge by the sea, is formed by combining the Spanish words Asilar - meaning to seek refuge or shelter and Mar - meaning sea. True to its name, Asilomar has provided refuge for such diverse groups as the original YWCA campers of 1913 to today's travel guests and conference attendees.

Opening day festivities were held July 26, 1913. The original buildings, eleven of which are now a National Registry of Historic Places, were designed by noted San Francisco architect Julia Morgan, famed for designing Hearst Castle. Hired by the YWCA, Morgan helped the organization erect similar meeting and dormitory facilities in other cities.

In 1917, Ellen Browning Scripps visited Asilomar and graciously purchased an additional seven acres for the facility; the Scripps Lodge still bears her name. As years passed, Asilomar became more than a facility for the YWCA. In 1920, housing on the grounds grew to accommodate 500 guests and the complex opened year-round to welcome religious groups, college conferences and women's training courses.

As times grew tight with the Great Depression in 1933, the YWCA wanted to discontinue their funding to conference facilities and hotels throughout the United States and recommended closing Asilomar. The property was put up for sale but went unsold, and YWCA leaders in California formed a committee to upkeep the empty facility.

From 1936 to 1940, Asilomar was leased to David and Paulsen Visel as a motel. The YWCA reopened the facility in 1943 to World War II military families. As the war ended, Asilomar was placed back on the market. Without a new owner, the YWCA operated the grounds as a full-service conference facility until Asilomar became part of California State Parks, along with an additional 35 acres of beach lands, in July 1, 1956.

Two years later, George Heldt was named Asilomar's first park ranger and kept a watchful eye on the delicate balance between preservation and public access. Today, park staff continue to take the lead in guiding and educating visitors and protecting Asilomar's fragile habitats and wildlife. From 1959 through 1982, architects John Carl Warnecke, Clark Davis and the architectural firm Smith Barker and Hanssen designed the contemporary buildings throughout the grounds, inspired by Julia Morgan's original work. In 1987, 11 of Morgan's buildings became recognized as National Historic Landmarks.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, caring for the environment while providing for visitors became increasingly important. An on-going project to restore the dunes began in 1985, while in 1991, a coast trail was established along the beach. From 1993 through 1995, nearly three acres were added to the state beach property at Rocky Shores.

Currently, Asilomar Conference Grounds has 313 unique guest rooms, the Crocker Dining Complex and welcomes groups of up to 1,000 throughout their 38 conference and intimate meeting spaces. Recreation abounds with swimming, volleyball, water activities, nearby sight-seeing and world-class golf. Today, Asilomar preserves the very traits that made it such a remarkable retreat so many decades ago: Charming historic architecture, natural scenic beauty, and the inspiration of the sea.

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