

Oakland Ferry

In 1852 Oakland granted the first Bay ferry franchise to a "reliable" maritime operator. By the late 1800s, 22 passenger cross-bay ferry companies were in operation, and another five companies carried only automobiles. The ferries served approximately 30 destinations, approximately half of them on the San Francisco—Oakland corridor.

Most vessels were large and stately. Some had seating for 2,300 and standing room for a further 1,000. All of Southern Pacific's major vessels had seating capacity of greater than 1,000. By comparison, most of the ferries you see on the Bay have a seating capacity of only 450.

By today's standards, the ferries were slow. In the 1920s, diesel engines began to appear, but ferries will still quite slow.

"The trip on all ferry lines was of sufficient duration between Oakland, Alameda, Sausalito and San Francisco to permit consumption of a substantial meal. Service, by and large, was fast and courteous and the quality of the food exceptionally high, considering the handicap of space in which it was prepared."

"In 1930, forty-three ferryboats, the largest number to have ever operated on the bay. Each day, fifty to sixty thousand people crossed the bay between San Francisco and the East Bay; 25 percent of them rode in automobiles."

On the waterside, ferries made 340 arrivals and departures daily. Street car lines extended to the Ferry Building and the trolleys made departures to various city destinations every 20 seconds.

Then came the great bridges. First the Golden Gate, followed by the Bay Bridge, both in 1937. The decline of ferry service was rapid, and by 1958 there were no more ferries. Moreover, any entrepreneurs who wanted to start a ferry system could not. To prevent competition, the Legislature had adopted several laws and resolutions prohibiting alternative forms of transportation within 10 miles of the Bay Bridge. There was to be one way and only one way over the Bay, and that way was over the bridges.

Building of both bridges were started in 1933 and completed in 1937. Visualize what the Bay looked like when Grandma, Grandpa and Marian lived here from 1927 to 1931. There was no Golden Gate Bridge and no Bay Bridge. There was no Treasure Island. Hundreds of ferries arrived at the Ferry Terminal all day long, and trolleys stopped to pick up passengers every 20 seconds.

When the family returned during the summer of 1934, both bridges were under construction, but would not be completed until three years after they moved to Boulder.

Ferries started making a comeback in the 1960s, but it was a slow start. Today, the ferries are very popular and carry many thousands of people to and from the city each day.

Today, an average of 6300 passengers cross by ferry in a day to the East Bay. That is about a tenth of the number of passengers who traveled by ferry in Grandpa's day.