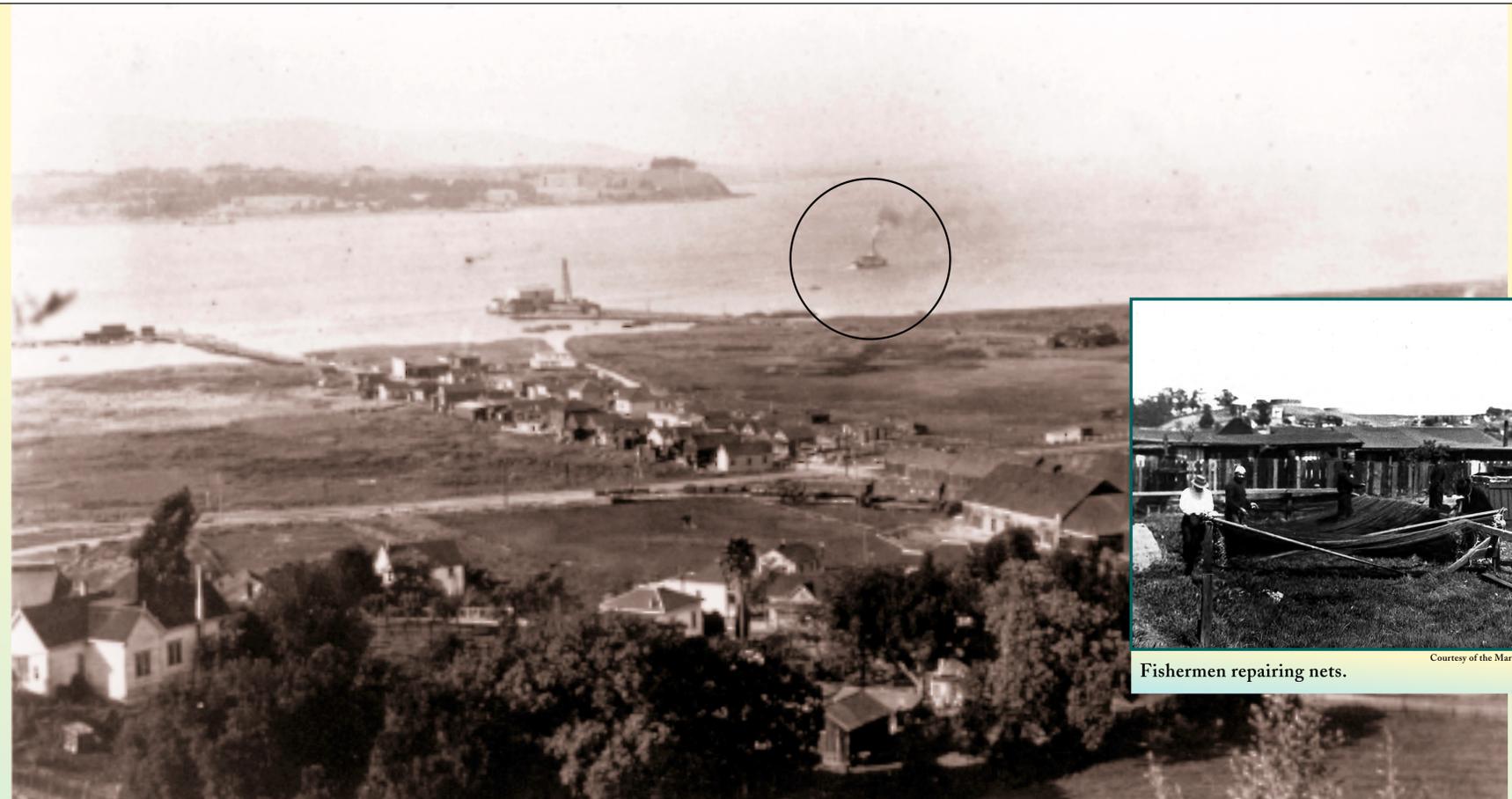


The Fishing Industry and Martinez-Benicia Ferry

Some of the first Italian immigrants to arrive in Martinez settled in the Grangers' Wharf area and established a fishing village complete with grocery stores, bakeries, barber shop, boarding house, and restaurants.

The City of Martinez leased the land to the fishermen for \$1.00 a year. Although Alhambra Creek, the creek used by the fishermen, was dredged for accessibility, the boats often needed a high tide to get in and out.

The fishing nets, made of linen, required much upkeep. During the fishing season, the linen nets were dipped weekly in a tanning solution, put on racks to dry, and repaired. The Italian fishermen called these tanning vats "karates." The karates, built by the fishermen's union, are still visible and can be seen near Alhambra Creek.



The Grangers' Wharf area. A ferry can be seen in the distance.



Fishermen repairing nets.

Courtesy of the Martinez Historical Society

The Martinez-Benicia Ferry was the first established and longest operating ferry service in the San Francisco Bay area.

In 1847, ferry service was established between Benicia and Martinez by Dr. Robert Semple, the founder of Benicia. The first boats were small sail and oar-powered scows, and operated on an occasional basis across Carquinez Strait. The boats landed at Cemetery Point, located below the Alhambra Cemetery. During the Gold Rush, gold seekers in pursuit of fortune in the Sierra foothills considered the ferry "the gateway to the gold fields." It was reported that up to 200 wagons a day waited to cross Carquinez Strait.



Ferryboat "City of Seattle" built in 1888.

Courtesy of the Martinez Historical Society

In 1850, Contra Costa County was established and required ferry operations to be licensed. During the same year, application was made and a license granted to Oliver Coffin to operate a ferry between Martinez and Benicia.

In November of 1854, the Contra Costa County Court of Sessions directed that the ferry operating between Martinez and Benicia make half-hourly trips in the morning between 8:00 and 11:30 a.m. and in the afternoon between 1:00 and 5:30 p.m.

From the mid 1850s until the early 1960s, various ferries operated intermittently between the two cities until the Martinez-Benicia Bridge was completed. In September 1962, the ferry "Carquinez" made the last voyage between Martinez and Benicia.