



# ADOLPH SUTRO'S CLIFF HOUSE

## 1896-1907

Scale 1:750  
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San Francisco's Cliff House overlooking the Pacific at Land's End has been a beloved institution since 1863. The original Cliff House was a simple clapboard structure with a restaurant built by Charles Butler on the rocky promontory.

At first, only the most adventurous travelers braved the miles of sand dunes to reach this far west of the city, but soon a toll road was constructed to attract wealthy customers, who enjoyed racing their horse teams on the flat straight avenue, with the loser buying the drinks at the Cliff House.

Investor Adolph Sutro purchased the property in 1883 and built a mansion and park on the heights above. Sutro opened his estate to families and working-class visitors and arranged for construction of a railroad line to the Cliff House and the next-door Sutro Baths charging only a nickel fare.

The first Cliff House burned on Christmas Day 1894, but in its place Adolph Sutro commissioned a spectacular seven-story gingerbread chateau, completed in 1896. The bottom floor housed a workshop for making souvenirs from shells. Inside the large windows of the second and third floors was a restaurant charging no more than a downtown establishment, ballrooms and meeting rooms.

On the open veranda, guests could sit at a table and sip a cocktail for 10¢ and watch the antics of the sea lions at nearby Seal Rock through rented binoculars. The upper floors housed a shell museum and art gallery, and a camera obscura in the northwest corner tower.

Sutro's Cliff House hosted President Roosevelt, Buffalo Bill and many other celebrities. On the weekends, daredevil stuntmen and carnival games drew crowds to the nearby beach, the amusement park, and the famous swimming baths and tropical greenhouse.

In 1907 a fire in the basement overtook the wooden structure and it burned to the ground. Two years later a new Cliff House built of concrete was completed, which remains open to the present day.

