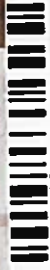


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SAN FRANCISCO MARITIME

SEA LETTER

SUMMER 2016 | NUMBER 73



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Research Center
SF Maritime NHP

SPECIAL
AQUATIC
PARK
ISSUE

Historic Aquatic Park Building

A MESSAGE

from the
Chief Executive Officer

This issue of Sea Letter represents a bit of a celebration. First it is a celebration of the beautiful Maritime Museum building, which started life as a project of the New Deal Works Progress Administration. It was a remarkable achievement: a building that resembled a streamlined ocean liner, docked on San Francisco's northern waterfront. And inside, the building was graced with the most amazing collection of murals, fanciful, colorful, almost musical pieces of art that made the building a masterpiece, inside and out.

You'll find a complete description of art and how it was rediscovered and is being restored by the National Park Service.

The second celebration is about the 100th birthday of the National Park Service, our partners in the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. The San Francisco Maritime

National Park Association, which founded the city's maritime museum in 1950 and rescued the old sailing ship *Balclutha* from the mudflats of Sausalito, had a major role in creating the Maritime Park. And now, we are delighted to join the Park Service in celebrating a beautiful building and a milestone birthday.

John R. Tregenza
Chief Executive Officer, San Francisco Maritime National Park Association

from the

Superintendent

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service, an institution often cited as our nation's best idea. Both locally and nationally, we are focusing on our Centennial goal: connecting with and creating the next generation of park visitors, supporters and advocates. I'm delighted that the San Francisco Maritime National Park Association is a key partner in all of our Centennial efforts.

2016 FIND YOUR PARK
The nationwide Find Your Park campaign and



Every Kid In a Park program (to name just two initiatives) are raising awareness of parks and getting a new generation interested in their parks.

Locally, we're planning special events to celebrate the Centennial, and spreading the word with social media campaigns. We're also tremendously proud that the park is one of 16 parks selected for the US Postal Service's special Centennial Forever stamps (see page 33).



As members and supporters of San Francisco Maritime National Park Association, you're already familiar with our wonderful park, but in 2016 I encourage you to explore and enjoy the 410 other NPS sites which protect our amazing natural areas and historical sites, and preserve our country's special stories. Visit www.nps.gov for a wealth of information on the Centennial, parks, and special events. And I encourage you to not only find your park, but to support your park and park partner as well.

Kevin Hendricks
Superintendent, San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park

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Visit the website to become a member or to order copies of this issue. The San Francisco Maritime National Park Association is a nonprofit organization dedicated to maritime preservation and education. The Association operates the historic World War II submarine USS Pampanito and supports the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. Many illustrations in Sea Letter are taken from the collections of San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. Reference use of these collections is encouraged, and is available through the Park's Maritime Research Center and other sources. The opinions expressed in Sea Letter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the San Francisco Maritime National Park Association.

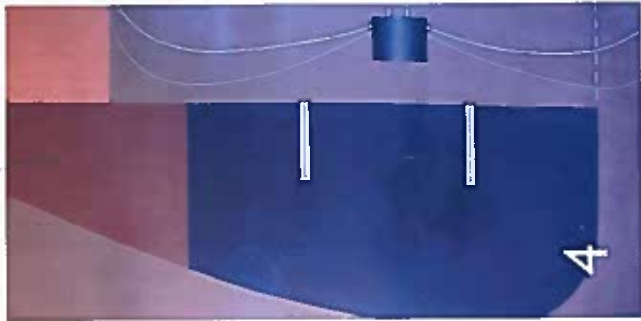
On the cover:



Two artists from the "relief rolls" working on the Aquatic Park Building's murals. "If San Francisco should presently become as distinguished for its arts as for its setting, San Franciscans would owe many thanks to WPA," Sea Murals; Time Magazine Feb. 06, 1939.

SEA LETTER

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HOW AQUATIC PARK

CAME TO BE

BY STEPHEN CANRIGHT

The Aquatic Park complex, finished by the Federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1939, was the product of years of agitation by local citizens, spearheaded by the rowing and swimming clubs, located within

Black Point Cove since the 1890s. Beginning in 1912, the clubs and their supporters campaigned for the establishment of a city park devoted to aquatic recreation and protecting this bit of the waterfront from commercial development. By 1927, the city had acquired the land area around the lagoon, and had made a start on the development of a seawall



WPA seal on the front steps of the bathhouse.

and on design work for the complex.

Municipal Pier was begun under a city contract in 1931 and was largely finished by 1933, but there was no funding for parapet walls and the pier was not opened to the public.

With the pressures of the Great Depression, work came to a halt until 1936, when the WPA agreed to take on the project. Over the next three years, they were able to complete the central Aquatic Park Building and the adjacent bleachers, to largely finish the interior decoration of the building, and to complete Municipal Pier. Other structures that were planned to house the rowing clubs and the Sea Scouts, were dropped from the project for lack of funding. The complex was turned over to the City in January of 1939.

The City initially leased the building to private restaurant developers, but a public outcry and a Federal inquiry led to a cancellation of the lease by the end of 1940. During 1941, an exhibit of ship models and maritime artifacts was shown for a time in the building. In December of 1941, some days before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the complex was turned over to the U.S. Army for use as the head-

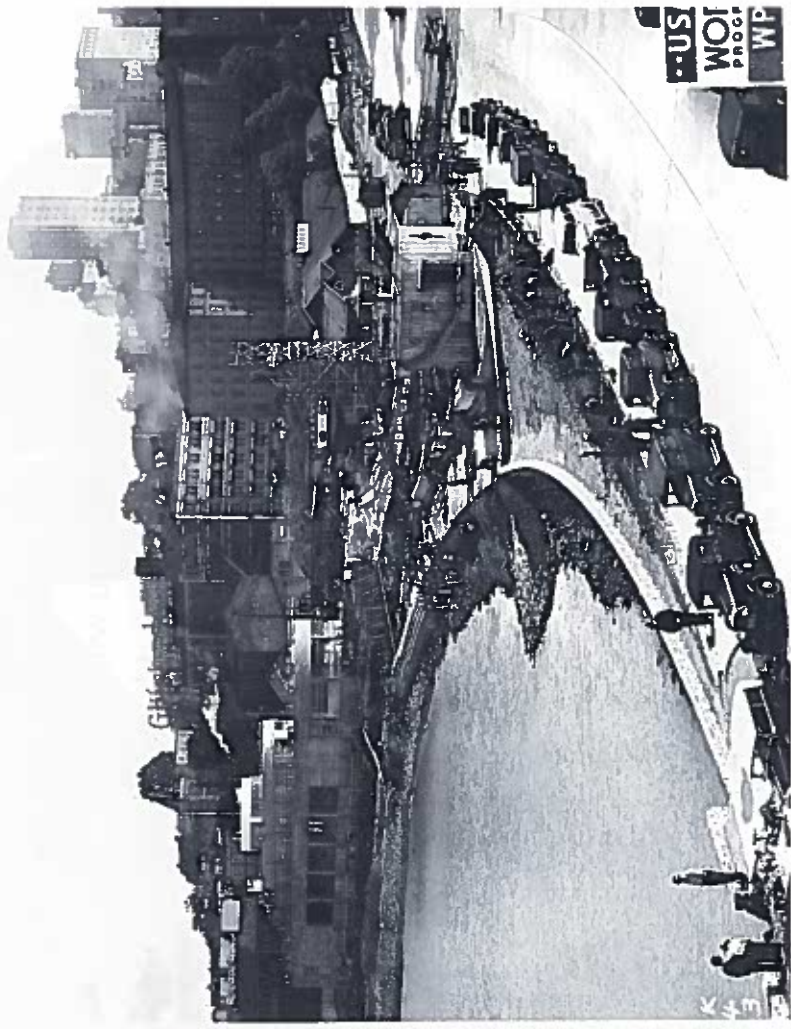
quarters of an anti-aircraft gun unit. The Army would maintain control of the Park until 1948.

Upon its return to city control, the Park was reopened for limited public use. The San Francisco Senior Center began leasing a portion of the main building in 1949. The newly established San Francisco Maritime Museum Association opened its museum in the remainder of the building in early 1951. Agitation by the Museum Association led to the establishment of the San Francisco Maritime State Historic Park, which opened at Hyde Street Pier in 1963 with four historic wooden vessels. The state park was transferred to the National Park Service in 1977, followed by the Maritime Museum and the whole of the Aquatic Park complex in 1978. Initially operated as part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the Maritime Park became an independent unit of the National Park Service in 1988. ■

Stephen Canright is the Curator of History at San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park.



Two views of Aquatic Park, nearly complete in 1938. The familiar structures are in place, with the rail line, now routed along the shore (SAFR P88-035.139.p) and (SAFR P88-035.121n).



A REMARKABLE SET OF SURPRISES

BEHIND THE WALLS

BY TODD BLOCH, RA

T

here are always surprises when you start to look at the inside of a historic building. It is like an x-ray. You are never quite sure what you will find.

There was a remarkable set of abstract murals hidden behind the walls of what was the banquet hall of the Bathhouse Building at Aquatic Park, now repurposed as the Maritime Museum. In some cases they were painted over; in others, the art was hidden behind newer walls. Now they are being revived revealing a unique synthesis of art and architecture that hasn't been seen in over 40 years. It took a lot of artistic detective work, but the results were dramatic.

Artist Richard Ayer and his assistants completed the murals and the bas-relief decoration on the third floor—the bathhouse's largest room—in 1939. The work was executed with oil paint and bas-relief elements of wood, rope and textured plaster. Ayer describes the design of the murals in an

“IT TOOK A LOT OF ARTISTIC DETECTIVE WORK,
BUT THE RESULTS WERE DRAMATIC.”



Eloise Warren, NPS Museum Technician, removes a plywood panel that had been covering the second tugboat mural. (Photo by Dave Casabolt, NPS)



3rd Floor — 2003: View of the Third Floor (Banquet Hall/Room) in 2003 before restoration of the building and removal of contemporary walls. (Photo NPS)



3rd Floor — Reconstructed: Same view modelled with reconstructed murals. (3D computer model by Architectural Resource Group and Todd Bloch, NPS)

oral history interview with Mary McChesney in 1964: “There are great windows overlooking the bay...I decorated the sides with marine motifs and anchor chains, sails and all kinds of various symbols, radio signals, signal flags, all that; anything that would pertain to that. It was all very modern, I mean there were no cute little sailboats running around in there. There was enough of that on the Bay that you could see.” In his oral history Ayer regrets he never took photos of the finalized work. Very little documentation has been found—a situation that has hindered efforts to restore some of the murals.

As a result, the specific design of the murals, if they still existed, was to remain unknown until the walls’ plaster and paint were removed. The murals were covered up over a 20 year period, starting in the 1950s. We don’t know why. Perhaps it was a simple desire to create blank wall space for the exhibit of artifacts from the maritime museum collection. Or perhaps the murals were covered because they were in bad condition. Historical photographs and the current state of the murals suggest the murals may have suffered damage in the first decades after their completion in 1939. Photographs from the 1950s show that some of the bas-relief elements had already fallen from the walls. Water damage is also visible in some photos. Regardless of the reasons, the art work was truly hidden. Of the 115 linear feet of wall murals, only 15 feet was left visible. Of the four columns in the one-time banquet hall, only one was left uncovered. The murals began to come to light with restoration of the Streamline Moderne bathhouse. Some of the contemporary walls were removed—and behind them was art. It was a mixed blessing. Though the contemporary walls had protected



Mary McChesney,
Artist and Writer

some murals, and saved them from being painted over, others had been extensively damaged where the walls intersected with the artwork.

There were some exciting moments of discovery when the walls came down. Eloise Warren and Dave Casebolt, two members of the park’s conservation staff, were looking into a rumor they’d heard that some kind of mural—involving tug boats—had once existed over a prominent doorway. They found what looked to be a false panel, and when it was removed there was a long-lost tugboat mural hiding underneath. This mural pairs with another tugboat mural over a second door—and together they complete a composition that anchors the east end of the room. This was the first clue that the murals were more than just art on the walls—they are an integral part of the interior design and spatial concept for the room. So there was much more to do.

The first step for consulting conservator Anne Rosenthal and her team was to analyze the composition of the wall. The underlying surface is plaster. A sizing was applied to reduce the plaster’s ability to absorb later coats of paint. The plaster was then painted with an oil-based primer. The murals themselves came next, using a commercial grade oil paint.

When the walls were painted over, crews used an oil primer and various layers of latex paint. Underneath all this was a remarkable set of murals—but the process of restoring them without damage has been long and tedious, working in small sections inches at a time. When the new paint came off, it was clear that a significant amount of the artwork was damaged or missing. It seemed clear to the team that the murals, and the room itself, would appear incomplete if left in this state. The team was faced with a

“VERY LITTLE DOCUMENTATION HAS BEEN FOUND—A SITUATION THAT HAS HINDERED EFFORTS TO RESTORE SOME OF THE MURALS.”



The over-paint removal process shown here has taken over three weeks; repair and restoration of the mural will take several additional weeks. (Photos by Todd Bloch, NPS)

philosophical question—whether to leave the murals incomplete and only conserve the remaining art or to in-fill and recreate the missing parts. There was a strong desire to reconstruct the missing elements and return the room to its original appearance, but only if it could be done in observance of conservation’s “unwritten law of reversibility,” meaning that the new materials can easily be removed without damaging the original. The team opted for an approach that would minimize the impact on the remaining historic fabric, leaving as much as possible even if it shows wear and tear, and only making additions when absolutely necessary. This will not return the murals to a good as new appearance but rather to what Anne Rosenthal describes as “looks old, but well cared for.” The team felt this approach was the most appropriate and honest—while the overall appearance of the murals and room will be unified and cohesive, close inspection will reveal the modifications that have been made.

There were a few historical photographs that showed some of the murals. These, together with some physical evidence, provided enough information to allow reconstruction of most of the missing artwork. The expectation is that we will be able to reconstruct all of the murals except for one face of one column.

Here’s how the work was done: The murals were first coated with a protective, non-yellowing varnish. Then the subsurface plaster and chips in the paint were repaired with appropriate filler material. Areas of lost paint were filled in with a variety of media to suit the location, including synthetic resin paints, acrylics and wax pigments. Bas-relief elements were replaced with in-kind materials. The resulting transformation from what was recently a whitewashed room has been dramatic. Anne Rosenthal’s skillful conservation work is revealing the extent to which Ayers’s design unites the architectural elements of the room and even blends

THE MISSING MURAL

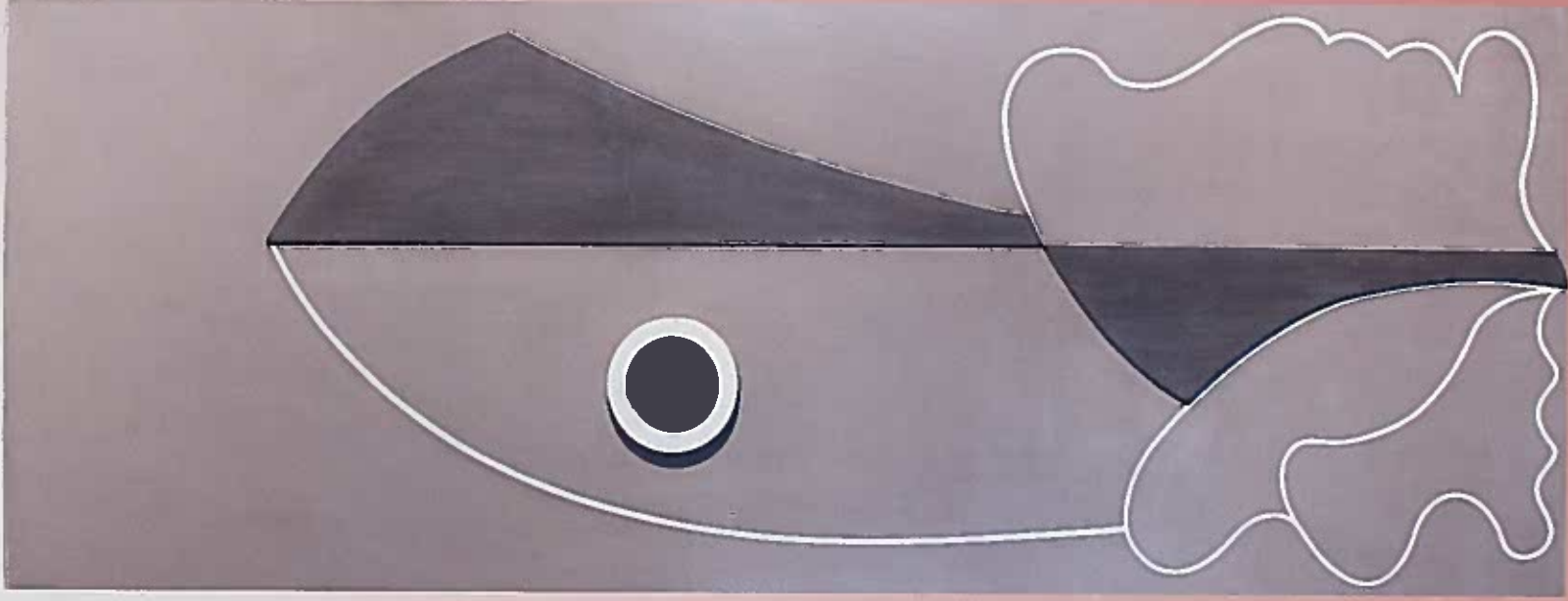


We could use your help in reconstructing the missing mural on the left side of this column. This face was completely destroyed during a previous remodeling of the room. If you have a photo taken prior to 1976 of the third floor that includes this column, it could be the missing link that would allow us to reconstruct the mural design.

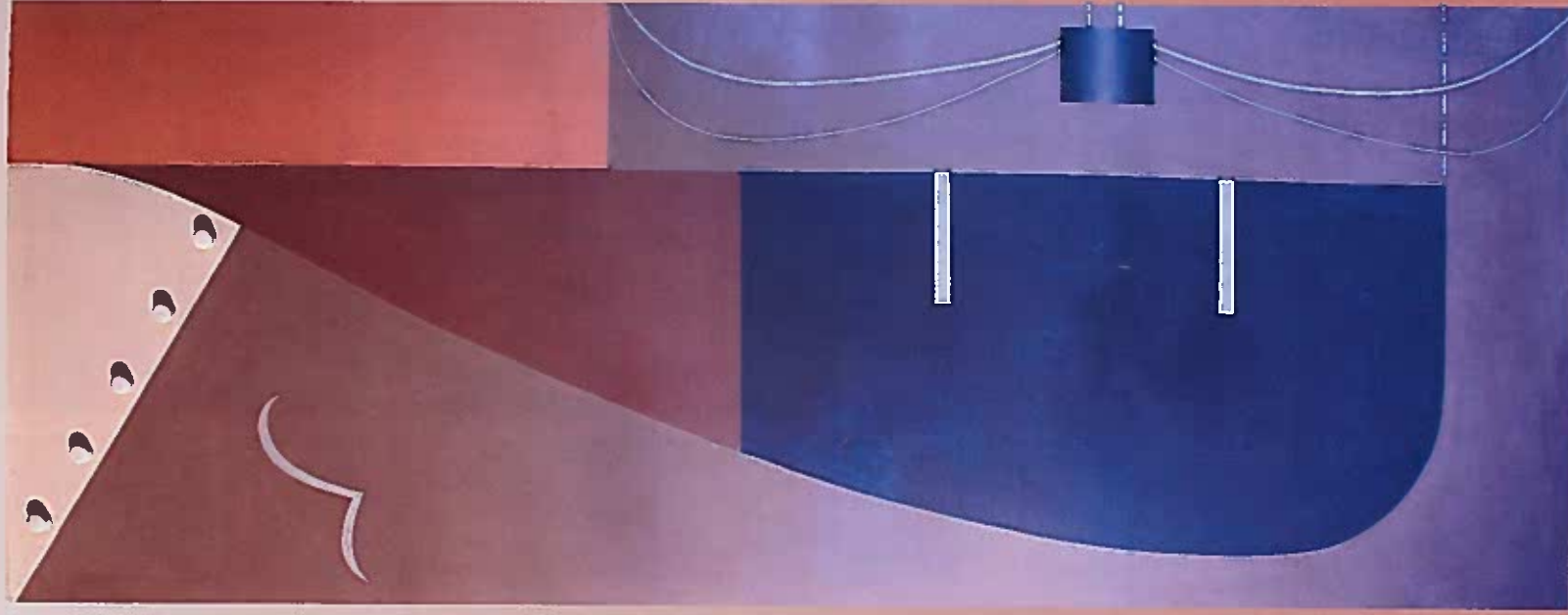
— Todd Bloch

“THE TEAM OPTED FOR AN APPROACH THAT WOULD MINIMIZE THE IMPACT ON THE REMAINING HISTORIC FABRIC.”

“ALTHOUGH THE **THEME OF THE MURALS IS MARITIME,**
SOME OF THE **SPECIFIC SUBJECTS ARE NOT CLEAR DUE**
TO THE **ABSTRACT NATURE OF THE ART.**”



SHIP BOW AND BOW WAVE
Looking straight at the bow, a fairly realistic interpretation.



RUDDER AND PROPELLER
Part of a hull, and a bird, are visible.



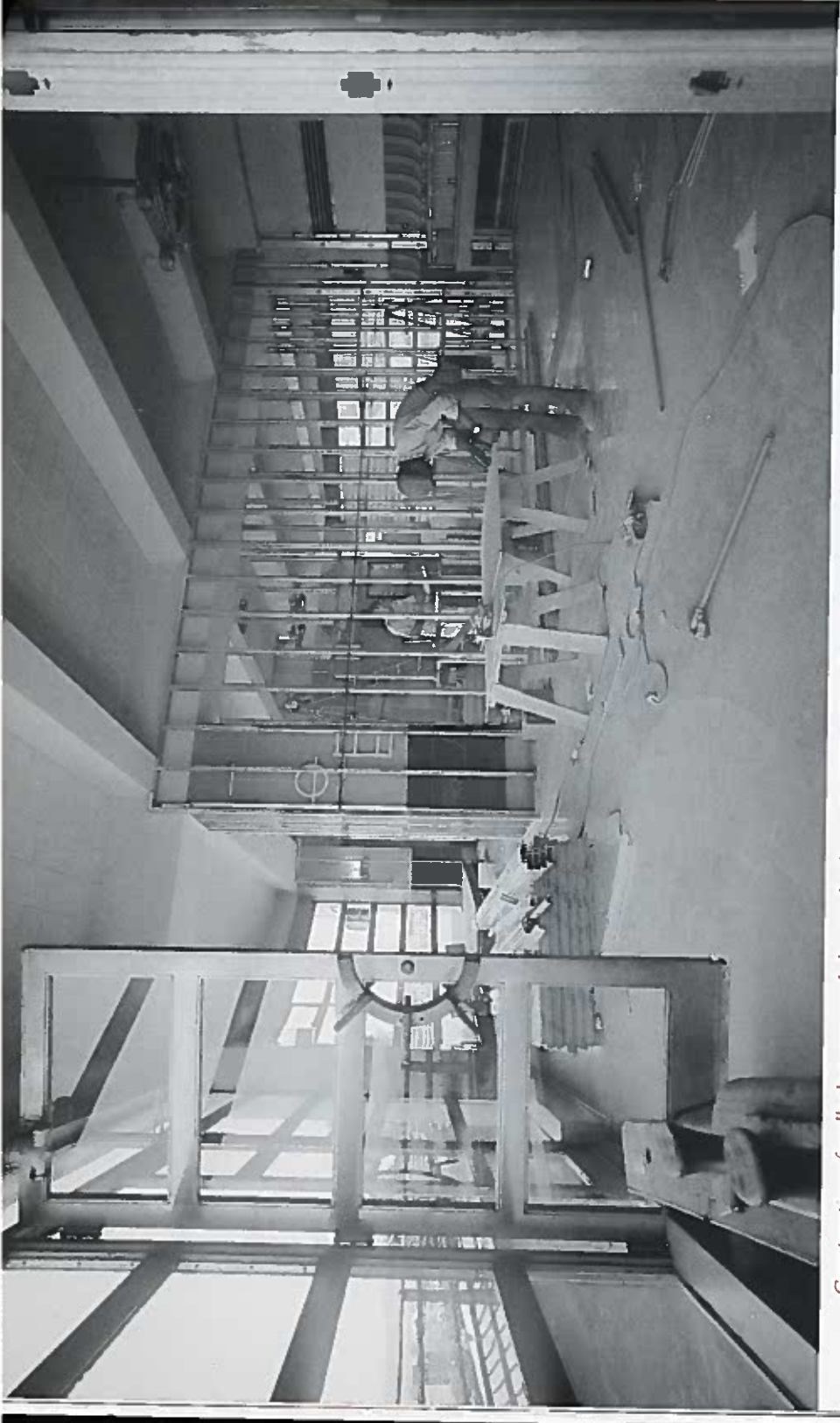
SHIP WAKE
Thought to be a ship (a double ended ferry boat?) and its wake, as seen from above.



UNKNOWN
If you have any guesses on what this might represent, let us know.

Some mural panels are more abstract than others; below are four restored column faces and the current thinking as to their subject matter.

Photos by Chris Wilhite

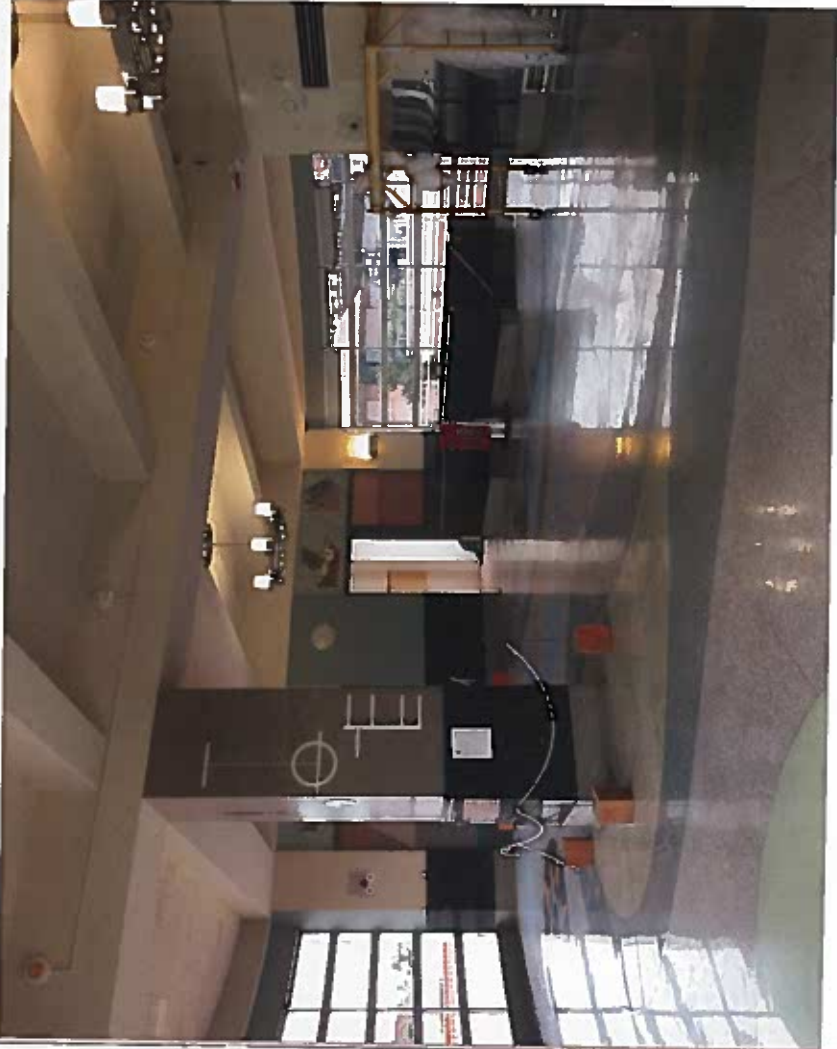


Construction of walls that surrounded several columns in 1976. Photo by Karl Kortum. San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, A10.29.758.3u (SAFR 21374).

subject of the murals themselves, the marine motif, abstract ship parts and symbols, furthers the inside/outside relationship, echoing the outside view. Overall, this use of color and subject matter creates an intriguing interplay between the interior and the exterior. In a certain way, you are seeing the same thing whether you are looking out the window or at the murals. In a space that would otherwise serve as a pleasant but simple viewing platform for the bay, the murals and decoration bring the visitors' attention into the room, and playfully compete with the real life maritime scene.

When the banquet room murals are completed in late 2016, it will be one of the last interior restoration efforts at the Aquatic Park bathhouse. We look forward to showcasing the room as Richard Ayer left it 77 years ago—a harmonious collaboration between architecture, waterfront views and art. ■

Todd Bloch is the Historical Architect at San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park.



The same view today, as mural conservation continues. (Photo by Todd Bloch, NPS)

THE ARTISTS OF AQUATIC PARK

BY RICHARD EVERETT

JOSEPH DANYSH AND WILLIAM GASKIN

"[Bill Gaskin] was the man; he was the artists' alter egos. We tried to keep him free of administrative things. He had a touch that very, very few people had in any of the other regions that I know of. Bill Gaskin had the best judgment, the keenest insight, and the most creative relationships with the artists of anybody in my region." —Joseph Danysh



Joseph Danysh (left) and William Gaskin.

Gaskin was an artist and San Francisco native who had attended the California School of Fine Arts.

He had a painting and sculpture studio in SF and solid relationships with prominent California artists. The FAP required that workers be hired from the relief roll, but supervisors were exempt. To ensure quality and a measure of control, Gaskin chose to appoint the most accomplished artists as supervisors. Thus it was that Hilaire Hiler, Sargent Johnson, Richard Ayer and Beniamino Bufano found themselves in charge of a small army of other artists, painters, plasterers and craftsmen.

HILAIRE HILER

Hilaire began painting at the age of four. Rejected by art colleges for not being able to draw, he travelled to Paris in 1919, and opened the wildly successful Jockey Club when he was 25. It was the first after hours club in the famous Montparnasse, and his entertaining presence and personality attracted many legendary artists and writers of the time. He decorated it and several other nightclubs with his own painted murals.

Hilaire's friend, novelist Anaïs Nin, introduced him to Otto Rank, a close colleague of Sigmund Freud. Hiler attended classes at the Otto

The outstanding art at the Aquatic Park Building owes much to Joseph Danysh and Bill Gaskin. Danysh, an artist with a special capability for administration, came to San Francisco from New York in 1932 absorbed with contemporary art. Almost immediately, he found himself the leader of 50 artists whose exhibition the Legion of Honor had just refused. Instead, he found them a gallery space inside the City of Paris department store, and then joined Ansel Adams to open the new Danysh-Adams Gallery representing the famous "F/64 Group" of photographers. These included Edward Weston, Dorothea Lange, and Imogen Cunningham. His other job as a contemporary art and music reviewer for the weekly *San Francisco Argonaut* led to his appointment as Director of the Western Region for the Federal Art Project (FAP). Danysh quickly invited his former teacher and artist Bill Gaskin to help him choose artists for public works, including the newly-built building at Aquatic Park.



The Jockey Club, Paris 1923
Front row: Man Ray, Mina Loy, Tristan Tzara, Jean Cocteau—Middle row: Kiki, Margaret Anderson, Jane Heap, unidentified, Ezra Pound—Top row: Bill Bird on the left, Hilaire Hiler and Curtis Moffat on the right.

Hiler's nightclub became a popular Bohemian hang-out frequented by famous 1920s writers and artists. Hiler was manager, host, musician, and barman to them all. He painted Native American motifs outside, and played piano and saxophone while wearing a green velvet jacket with a live monkey on his back.

“HILER FIRST DIRECTED THE PAINTING OF A **47' DIAMETER** “**PSYCHOLOGICAL COLOR CHART**” — A WHEEL ON THE CEILING IN THE LADIES LOUNGE.”



Hiler's "Psychological Color Chart" on the ceiling in the room he renamed *The Prismatarium*.



Hiler's Psychological Color Chart



Ostwald's Color Wheel

Hiler often credited Dr. Ostwald as a source. The similarities in the men's color wheels are apparent.

Rank Institute of Psychoanalysis—an adjunct of the Sorbonne. Rank's psychological theories, together with the color theories of Nobel scientist William Ostwald, greatly influenced the submarine world Hiler later painted in San Francisco—one that certainly fulfilled Otto Rank's vision of "worlds of life never seen before."

Hiler's one-man shows in New York and Paris gained him much notoriety. When he travelled to San Francisco in 1934 he was hired by Gaskin and given full responsibility to direct the art at the Aquatic Park Building.

Hiler first directed the painting of a 47' diameter "Psychological Color Chart" a wheel on the ceiling in the ladies lounge. He renamed the room *The Prismatarium*. The chart was based on Ostwald's with 30 divisions, including hues and grays. Hiler considered each color to have a psychological relationship, and his murals in the main lounge would be partially governed by this. Artists Richard Ayer, Charles Nunnemaker and others executed the work, including six color charts that hung inside and outside the room.

Hiler brought all he'd learned about color and psychology to the main lobby murals. His treatise "The

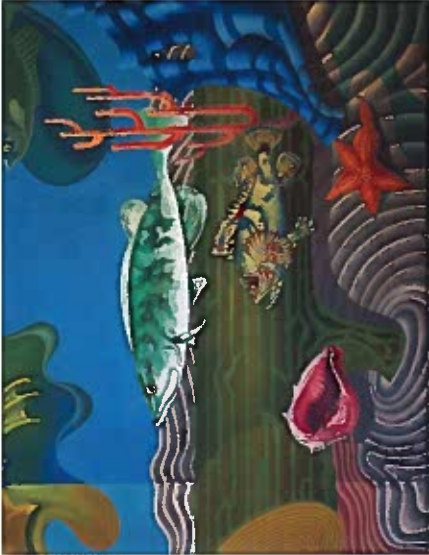


This color study hung outside the *Prismatarium*. Hiler used it to coordinate his murals in the main lounge with the existing "Jersey Green and Tennessee Pink Marble" tainscot.



The Jockey Club 1929, by Hilaire Hiler.

“HILER CONSIDERED **EACH COLOR** TO HAVE A **PSYCHOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIP**, AND HIS MURALS IN THE MAIN LOUNGE WOULD BE PARTIALLY GOVERNED BY THIS.”



SAFR Collections

Scenes from Hiler's underwater world.

Aquatic Park Murals”—written by him just two months before the building opened—tells us more.

“The decorations were conceived as a flowing arabesque carrying around the room. There was no beginning and no end. European methods of design and composition were not followed. Undersea life is...rather exclusively organic...there are no straight lines. A mural with no geometrical quality can hardly relate itself to a room which is...based upon the right angle. A solution was finally found by introducing submarine architectural motifs in the forms of ruins of some lost civilization such as those existing in legend in Atlantis and Mu. With two elements of design, the organic ones for plants and fish...and the geometrical architecture of the ruins...needs were satisfactorily filled. The handling of color in a room must be furnished by a premise...the wain-

scot of the room had to be marble... Tennessee Pink and Royal Jersey Green... The color scheme of the paintings went from this off complementary harmony...”

After viewing the murals, novelist Henry Miller wrote, “Hilaire lives and breathes color. He is color itself. Sometimes he’s a veritable aurora borealis.” He describes Hiler’s fish as smiling and “jocose.” Certainly proud of his use of color, Hiler wrote, “[My] colleagues are playing a short harpsichord or a broken-down spinet. They are not aware that our instrument has been extended by some octaves, and that new color notes have made it possible to tune it more truly than ever before.” Researching Hiler’s artistic relationship with music, David Pelfrey, Interpretive Ranger at SF Maritime NHP, notes Hiler’s murals are “the best example of American jazz on a wall.”

ANNA MEDALIE



Anna Medalle helped paint murals in the main lounge and assisted muralists Diego Rivera and Miguel Covarrubias painting murals and maps for the exposition on Treasure Island.

Photo 1 shows Hiler and white empty places for fish and plants. Hiler painted shapes on stretched canvases in the basement that would later be attached to the walls.

Photo 2 shows empty places on walls for fish. Anna Medalle painted in the plants and extraordinary fish. Anna’s name and great importance were revealed years later by Earnest Lenshaw who also worked on the project, “There was a Russian girl named Anna Medalle...I think she did all of the fish with the gold leaf on them...they were, you know, painted in and glazed over!” This is believed to be Anna Medalle painting a sea plant. The assistant above her might be Earnest Lenshaw or Charles Nunemaker.

Photo 3 Possibly Anna Medalle with Hilaire Hiler—admiring an area she would have worked on.



Terrazzo work on third floor.

“AYER BEGAN BY ASSISTING WITH HILER’S COLOR WHEEL AND MAIN LOBBY MURALS BEFORE HILER ASSIGNED HIM FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE TERRAZZO FLOORS AND, NOTABLY, THE DESIGN AND PAINTING OF THE THIRD FLOOR MURALS.”

RICHARD AYER

“I designed the floor. I designed the whole room....in the floor of my room was one of the first abstract terrazzo floors put in around here. It was a [not a] mariner’s...sounding chart of the Bay...but it was the subject of it.”

On the advice of Kenneth Rexroth (poet and friend of Coit Tower painter Shirley Staschen), Hiler sent Richard Ayer a telegram inviting him to join the project. Ayer began by assisting with Hiler’s color wheel and main lobby murals before Hiler assigned him full responsibility for the terrazzo floors and, notably, the design and painting of the third floor murals. Here, Ayer’s main assistant was Shirley Staschen, who had already spent months working with Hiler downstairs on the main lobby murals. Shirley recalled that “We intermingled fairly freely between these two floors and several rooms and the jobs were occasionally mixed. The palettes were the same. They were all related to Hiler’s famous palette.”

“...THERE WERE **NO OTHER BLACK ARTISTS** ON THE PROJECT IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA.”

SARGENT JOHNSON

Born in Boston, Sargent was one of six children. Orphaned, he was sent to live with his uncle and wife May Jackson, a Washington D.C. sculptor specializing in portrait busts reflecting black themes. Influenced by her, Johnson gained recognition for his own portrait sculptures. He arrived in San Francisco in 1915 where he took art classes from Beniamino Bufano. His sculptures received awards from the Harmon Foundation during the period called the Harlem Renaissance.

In 1935, Johnson was working for Beniamino Bufano, carving stone animal sculptures. Hiler wanted him on the project. Sargent went down to the FAP office but was turned down. The fact that Sargent was not on relief may have been a reason, but it may also have been discrimination as



© Benjamin J. Larson

there were no other black artists on the project in Northern California. The next day, Hiler went down with him to the office and Gaskin hired him as a supervisor.

Richard Ayer remembers Hiler and Johnson’s conversation at the main entrance:

“Hiler asked Johnson: ‘What should we put on the front here, Sargent, what are we going to do, do you want to put a mosaic up here?’ Sargent said, ‘My God, no more mosaics. I want something carved. Hand carved.’”

Johnson designed the main entrance, carving it from Vermont slate. The work was executed at 14th and Howard Streets in a studio and later attached to the building using plaster-of-paris and wire.

Johnson then created a beautiful tile expanse on the veranda. Gaskin noted he had seen during his travels the “successful use of inexpensive 4 inch bathroom tile” at other public art projects in Southern California. He subsequently urged its use at the Aquatic Park Building. Using this tile, Johnson designed the north facade, and worked closely with Mohammed Zyani (a Moroccan who’d cut tile for a mosque in Paris) to create the monumental 140’ mural *Sea Forms*.



Tile mural on the second floor veranda.

“There were about four of us altogether. Each piece of tile had to be marked and put in place in trays and put away until the whole of a certain section was finished.

Then you’d start from the bottom with each tray with this number and put it in place until the top. But, the man that was cutting, this Moroccan, he was first class. He could cut anything out of tile.” Mohammed Zyani is thought to be the man in a white shirt at left.



The main entrance was carved of Vermont green slate and may make the only political reference in all of the Aquatic Park murals. This is rare since most WPA art in San Francisco included political reference. On either side of the front entrance stands a figure wearing a badge and a diagonal belt similar to what policemen wore in the 1930s. His hand is on the shoulder of a longshoreman wearing the typical “Lundberg Stetson” hat. SF’s 1934 longshoremen’s strike had been only a few years before.



“THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE, BUFANO MAINTAINED THAT PUBLIC ART IS CREATED FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE MASSES AND THIS CONVICTION FUELED A DEEP CONTROVERSY WHICH SURROUNDED THE OPENING” OF AQUATIC PARK.”

BENIAMINO BUFANO
“Art must become democratic by being big enough to belong to everybody, too big for anyone to put in his pocket and call his own.” – Beniamino Bufano

Born in Italy, Bufano was three when his family moved to New York. He arrived in San Francisco in 1915 to work on the Exposition, and produced medallions which decorated the Court of the Universe. He created ten sculptures intended for installation at Aquatic Park: one at the Van Ness entrance, three in the main lounge, and one each at the bottom of the two ramps. The rest would line the esplanade overlooking the beach near today’s rowing clubs.

Throughout his life, Bufano maintained that public art is created for the benefit of the masses and this conviction fueled a deep controversy which surrounded the opening of Aquatic Park. When Bufano learned that the publicly owned building would be leased as a restaurant, he refused to allow his art to be installed. Not one of the sculptures

was in place on opening day January 22, 1939. His outrage was largely responsible for



day but *Penguin* suffered damage and was removed quietly one night by Bufano who installed it in Jackson Square. Shirley Staschen Trieste noted in a 1997 interview that she saw the sculptures at the beach installed. These were later removed by the city and given to the housing authorities.



Bufano in his studio with Sargent Johnson directly behind him.



Bufano's Penguin was installed at the bottom of the west ramp of the building. It suffered from general wear and being hit by a truck, and

on September 23, 1949 the statue was removed at night by Bufano and his longshoremen friends to be repaired. In 1967 it was installed here at the intersection of Jackson and Davis Streets by Bufano, where a plaque identifies it as acquired by Golden Gateway Center.



Seal, one of the three sculptures originally installed at the building as seen today.

JANUARY 1939, HILAIRE HIL FR'S RESIGNATION

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!
 All members of the San Francisco Maritime National Park Association enjoy the following Shipmate benefits; other membership levels receive additional benefits.

- Unlimited free entry for you and an accompanied guest to the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park and the USS Pampanito World War II Submarine and Memorial at Historic Pier 45
- Sea Letter magazine & Scuttlebutt e-newsletter
- Invitation for two to the Members' Annual Party
- Free admission for two to a USS Pampanito Wine Reception with reservation
- Advance notice of exhibit openings and discounted registration for public programs and special events

Sea Letter 73



The City leased the building to the Gordon Brothers, who named it the Aquatic Park Casino.

(Above) The restored Blue Room. Note the clock that Hiler called "large and horrendous" which was installed against his objections.

(Left) Invitation to the Grand Opening Dinner, February 11, 1939.



Hiler's damaged signature was concealed beneath paint for 70 years but has since been restored.

Richard Everett is the Curator of Exhibits at San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park.

MY FIRST VISIT TO THE AQUATIC PARK CASINO

Transcription and notes prepared by
LISBIT BAILEY, ARCHIVIST
SAN FRANCISCO MARITIME NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

I worked with Karl Kortum in his penthouse office of the Museum Building and at his home at the end of his career and near the end of his life. While preparing the records of Karl's museum career, I came across the document titled My First Visit to the Aquatic Park Casino.

I was excited to find this item for a number of reasons. It described the use of the Museum Building in a manner keeping within its as-built intent. Karl's experience there surely aided his visioning of a maritime museum. A fine photographer, Karl's mention of his first flashlight shot is of particular note. In addition, he was clearly a cognoscente of Jazz.



Photograph of Karl Kortum, courtesy of David Nelson.

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I've enjoyed sharing these few paragraphs of Karl's at a couple of All Hands meetings over the years, most recently following Richard Everett's terrific presentation (April 2016) on the Museum Building's original artists of the WPA. I present it here along with some notes I prepared. I offer it wholeheartedly to Karl, to the Maritime Museum and to the artistic, musical and poetic heart of San Francisco.

KARL KORTUM COLLECTION. DIARY EXCERPTS, 1935–1961

Pieper, Meacham, Bundy and I drove down in the uncovered V-8 to San Francisco and went to the Aquatic Park Casino. We were surprised and thrilled to hear good, old time jazz coming from the upper deck and we paid our 40 cents and entered a smoke filled tunnel, full of people and drinks at tables, and a good jazz band indistinctly seen at the further end. We made our way there and found Harry Zohn and His Boys battling it out and enjoyably.¹ It was a thrill to hear the old Chicago balance brass coming in all at once, each playing a different key, strong counterpoint and quite loud.²

We found a banister to sit on and listened to Jazz Me Blues, One O'clock Jump and Found a New Baby.³ For a local orchestra it was prime stuff and set the foot stomping. Their style was nostalgic; this is the first time I have heard a small combo like that in person; you get it only on records. It looks like sport for the musicians; no wonder jam sessions went that way. The pianist, drummer, and trombone player—two of the Zohn's—were adept players and the others adequate to ensemble playing and short solos. There was a boogie-woogie piece and

a couple more jazz standards and then the next orchestra came on.⁴ It retained the Teagarden (almost) trombone Zohn and added a conchise clarinet and very good trumpet.⁵ The brass and reed resultant were much better, but rhythm was worse than Harry and His Boys. Followed a Negro orchestra playing very much Basie, but the long Kansas City phrases didn't carry the interest Count's skilled musicians put into them and this outfit lagged.⁶ The bass player and leader was exceptionally good, however, played tunes on it. (Vernon Alley, an Arts Commissioner through 1991.⁷ Mayor Art Agnos administration.)

We had done nothing but listen and change our seat. Meacham took a flashlight shot. Harry Zohn came back, but some of the Negroes sat in with him and the result did not jell to well, furious though it was. The first Zohn session was the peak of the evening and made the trip worthwhile. I took my first flashlight shot, quite an experience; this was of the boys leaving.⁸ Home in the rumble seat and bed sat well. ■

—Karl Kortum, April 29, 1940
Copyright, Estate of Karl Kortum



Matchbook cover from the Aquatic Park Casino.

“WE WERE
**SURPRISED AND
THRILLED TO HEAR
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JAZZ COMING
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DECK AND WE
PAID OUR 40 CENTS
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INDISTINCTLY
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Matchbook cover from the Aquatic Park Casino.

"SIXTH SESSION"
"Hot" Music Society of S.F.
VERNON ALLEY and His Boys
Aquatic Park Casino
FOOT OF POLK STREET

MONDAY
MAY 20, 9 P. M.
Tickets 40c
Members with Paid Up
Cards Free.
Members of Local 8
25c with Book
1940
No. 781



Photo: David Johnson, San Francisco Chronicle

(Above) Scanned ticket image from William E. Burgess, Jr., in Bristol Fashion, page 119.

(Left) Vernon Alley on bass.

NOTES:

- 1.... Harry Zohn ...
While the rhyming of "trombone Zohn" in paragraph 3 is a good sound, I did not get any hits online for a trombone-playing Harry Zohn; however, I did find Harry Zohn, the Brandeis German literature professor who played viola with the Brandeis University Symphony Orchestra.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/06/12/us/harry-zohn-brandeis-professor-77.html>
- 2... old Chicago balance ...
may refer to the mid to late 20s and apparently white musicians preference for 2 meters instead of 4 and the transition from New Orleans jazz and Dixieland styles.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_of_Chicago
3. Jazz Me Blues
by Tom DeLaney, 1920.
<http://www.jwpepper.com/10452988.item#.V08gEPKrLTs>
- One O'clock Jump
by Count Basie, 1937.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_O%27Clock_Jump
- Found a New Baby
by Jack Palmer and Spencer Williams; first recorded by Clarence Williams' Blue Five in 1926.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1%27ve_Found_a_New_Baby
- 4.... boogie-woogie ...
became popular in the late 20s as a genre of piano dance music.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boogie-woogie>
- 5.... Teagarden ...
Weldon Leo "Jack" Teagarden (August 20, 1905 – January 15, 1964) was an American jazz trombonist, bandleader, composer, and vocalist, regarded as the "Father of Jazz Trombone."
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Teagarden
- 6.... long Kansas City phrases ... may refer to the 30s when the big band sound gave way to Bebop.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kansas_City_Jazz
7. Vernon Alley ... local man-of-note, Alley (1915-2004) played with the big jazz names of the era. In the early 1940s, he returned to San Francisco and played at the "Aquatic Park Casino" with his band certainly on May 20, 1940 and perhaps on April 29, 1940, too.
<http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/VERNON-ALLEY-1915-2004-jazz-bassist-played-2719977.php>
8. I took my first flashlight shot ...
Also known as light painting:
<http://improvephotography.com/380/light-painting-night-photography-tips/>

WORKING ON A BUILDING

BY STEPHEN CANRIGHT

In July of 2006, the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park shut down its Maritime Museum in the Aquatic Park Building. Everything was removed and taken into storage. We had to clear the space to make way for a series of badly needed repairs. The Maritime Museum had been in this building since 1951, the exhibits evolving and changing over the years. I had worked for the Museum since 1965, and had spent almost thirty years building exhibits in that building. Closing the Museum was difficult.

I had come to know the problems of this beautiful building first hand. I worked out of a shop in the central bleachers, under skylights that always leaked. There were leaks through the roofs of the main building, dripping the onto our exhibits. The steel window frames had rusted, cracking the glass panes and displacing the stainless steel cladding. The undersea murals around the lobby were damaged by water.



A new stainless steel window frame is fitted at the west end of the building.



A temporary barrier protects the building after the old window frames were removed.

“I HAD COME TO KNOW THE PROBLEMS OF THIS BEAUTIFUL BUILDING FIRST HAND.”



On the roofs, the old tile and grout had to be jack-hammered off.

It was clear that something had to be done, and by 2006 we could at last begin. Planning for the project had started in 1992; things take time to filter through the National Park Service process.

By 2006, I was Staff Curator for the SF Maritime NHP. My role in the project was Cultural Resource Officer, helping to ensure we did right by the historic features of the building.

The first job our contractor tackled was the roofs, largely flat, but sloped just enough to shed water. The roofs were red mission tiles, laid in mortar, on a waterproof membrane over the concrete of the building. First problem: the waterproof coating had entirely failed.

As the old tile and mortar was jack-hammered off, it was clear that our construction drawings were somewhat mistaken. There was a flurry of new design work, done on the fly, but in the end we had a good membrane, properly sloped, and a new system for holding the tiles in place.

Replacement of the window system was a major job, with the big

in a slightly different location. This required relocating a maze of utility lines. The contractors had to drill below ground to place a hydraulic ram for the elevator, and ran into unexpected problems with rubble from the 1906 Earthquake. A length of steel rail almost stopped them, but they were just able to drill alongside it.

Now we had the windows and the elevator in place, so finish work could begin inside the building, involving painting, and tile and terrazzo work. Conservation of the worn and damaged interior artwork got under way.

Outside, the major construction shifted to the bleachers. The topping slab, four inches of concrete and reinforcing rod, had to be jack-hammered off the underlying concrete structure. Epoxy filler was then injected into the cracks and some areas of failed structure were cut out and replaced with new rebar and concrete.

The east bleachers, on the Hyde Street side of the building, were the last to be finished in 1939. They had failed entirely, as the reinforcing rod rusted and spalled off chunks of concrete. Perhaps the rod had been rusty when it was first installed.

This meant that this whole structure would have to be replaced, and all but the top and the bottom tiers were finally jack-hammered out.

The structure was built anew, with rebar and concrete poured into wooden



In the old window system, a thin layer of stainless steel failed to protect the plain steel frame.

We had to learn the industry standards for the finish of stainless steel. The inside surface was a brushed finish, while the outside was a mirror finish. Again, there was a lot of back and forth before we got it right.

The installation of a new elevator in the building was added to the job just as the project was getting started. The new elevator would give access to the third floor, but had to be



Behind the west bleachers, soil has been reinstalled over the concrete slab. New skylights have yet to be installed.

forms. Even that was complex, as we had to get permission from the State Historic Preservation Officer to use plywood for the forms, instead the original wooden planks. A small change, but it indicates how careful we had to be with historic authenticity.

To the south of the west and the central bleachers were underground rooms, covered by soil and lawn, and pierced by those leaking skylights.

Our contractor dug away the soil and lawn to expose the underlying concrete. Any cracks were injected with epoxy. The original skylights were replaced with near duplicate units, now using light-weight carbon fiber rod to reinforce the concrete frames.

Much of the soil behind the east bleacher was dug out to expose the southern retaining wall. Leaking cracks in this wall were epoxy injected. All of the soil, both here and over the west and central bleachers, was replaced and the lawns re-sodded.

The last step on the bleachers was re-pouring the four-inch topping slabs. This was tricky, as the texture and color had to be just right. I acted as the inspector on this work, and ended up rejecting five of the pours. They were jack-hammered off, at a cost of \$150,000 each. Another difficult bit was the finish of the ramps on either end of the building. Here, we insisted on duplicating the original

ribbed finish. Our concrete sub-contractor got this part just right.

So, between 2006 and 2010, the long-standing faults of the Aquatic Park Building were made good. Much more work remains to be done; finishing the conservation of the interior art, and finally re-establishing the Maritime Museum. We plug away, and look forward to the day when this is all accomplished. ■



A deep pit reveals the back wall of the east bleacher.

“THE CONTRACTORS HAD TO DRILL BELOW GROUND TO PLACE A HYDRAULIC RAM FOR THE ELEVATOR, AND RAN INTO UNEXPECTED PROBLEMS WITH RUBBLE FROM THE 1906 EARTHQUAKE.”

THE AQUATIC PARK BATHHOUSE—

AN APPRECIATION

BY JOHN KING

Few buildings in San Francisco offer the pleasures and insight of the Aquatic Park's enormous bathhouse—as a work of architecture, yes, but also as a solid mooring amid all of this city's squalls and storms.

I'm not saying that this Streamline Modern edifice at the foot of Polk Street in Aquatic Park is our “best” structure, whatever that subjective verdict might mean. Nor would I tout the current home of the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park's Maritime Museum as some magnificent triumph of architecture in and of itself.

No, the pleasure for me is the serene power that radiates the aura of a time when San Francisco's center of gravity was located somewhere near Washington Square, and when the notion of a gathering place on the waterfront was the kind of thing that government did, even when times were tough.

“BUT TO ME IT BRINGS TO MIND AN OCEAN LINER,
ONE WHERE YOU MIGHT FIND GINGER ROGERS
AND FRED ASTAIRE LITHE AGAINST THE UPPER RAILING,
LOOKING OFF INTO THE BAY.”



© David Walsh

“A streamlined battleship riding at anchor,” is how the Work Projects Administration’s “San Francisco: The Bay and Its Cities” in 1940 described the four-story concrete structure designed by William Mooser Sr. and William Mooser Jr. as part of the WPA’s larger efforts to create a city-wide recreation center with a brand-new sandy beach. The *Chronicle*’s description of choice on opening day in 1939 was a “four-decked ferry boat.” But to me it brings to mind an ocean liner, one where you might find Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire lithe against the upper railing, looking off into the bay.

The thick concrete hull curves broadly, more smoothly than concrete has any right to perform; the metal frames that hold the elongated horizontal windows look apt whether gleaming in the sun or softened by the fog. As for the rounded summit, it tops everything off with elegant control.

The only swagger in the mix is applied, the round clock over the bay side entrance with its circle of numbers in an absurdly florid script; even the obligatory porthole windows have a predestined air. And what could be more fitting, a solid starting point, than the bulky bil-



“ ESPECIALLY IN THE MORNING MIST, OR IN THE ORANGE DUSK, THE MOOSERS’ CREATION HOVERS BETWEEN THE WATER AND THE CITY AND GREEN SLOPES OF FORT MASON LIKE SOME SILVER-PLATED VISION FROM THE PAST.”

lows of stonework that frame the main entrance—gray-green slate with its heaviness lighted by the abstract nautical embellishments, dreamy yet crisp, that Sargent Johnson etched into the surface. Especially in the morning mist, or in the orange dusk, the Moosers’ creation hovers between the water and the city and green slopes of Fort Mason like some silver-plated vision from the past.

That vision’s self-assurance is all the more striking when you con-



© Benjamin J. Larson

sider the surroundings. The Ghirardelli chocolate factory south of Beach Street remains, its red-brick buildings predecessors on the scene. But the decades are long gone when Ghirardelli Place was redefining urban life—remember festival marketplaces?—and the courtyards have a dated feel even with all the tourists stopping by for the

obligatory sundae. Rearing up across from the portholes are the twin warped shafts of Fontana Towers—more than 50 years old, but hardly what any true San Franciscan would consider a landmark.

Nor is this corner of the city one where 21st century families congregate en masse, or young scene-seekers might lurk. Today’s version of the working class households that called North Beach home live in distant suburbs; young adults who haven’t yet settled down now would gravitate to Dolores Park or Baker Beach, or join the crowds along the Embarcadero promenade.

When Aquatic Park was dedicated in 1939, the *Chronicle* estimated the crowd at 10,000, drawn not only to “the great semi-circle of lapping tides

inside the sheltering arms of breakwaters,” but also the otherworldly structure with bathing facilities on the bottom and a casino on



“THIS IS A BUILDING THAT STANDS OUTSIDE TIME, CONTENT TO BE IN A SETTING LIKE NONE OTHER IN THE WORLD.”

top that resembled some vessel “conceived and executed by a wedding cake chef.” These days the draw is the Maritime Museum with its restored murals. The amphitheater seating that faces the water is great for catching some sun, or marveling at those hardy souls who swim in the bay with wet suits, but you won’t be battling for space. San Francisco’s center of gravity has been shifting south of Market Street since the 1980s, and that trend’s not about to reverse.

Which is fine.

Call the home of the Maritime Museum the bathhouse, the casino or any of its other past incarnations, the enduring strength of the Moosers’ creation—and the artwork so integral to its charm—is the placid confidence that it radiates. This is a building that stands outside time, content to be in a setting like none other in the world, a self-contained form that complements the surroundings no matter how discordant they might be. I wish the old bathhouse would get a good scrubbing, to be sure, that the scuffed white exterior and the stained though solid slate blocks would receive the Ferry Building treatment. But a little bit of grime won’t stop the “streamlined battleship” from shrugging off all the shortcomings and setbacks of the past 77 years. Every curve, every flourish, every bit of chiseled depth and rounded delight... the Aquatic Park Bathhouse is an irreplaceable part of San Francisco’s urban terrain that still looks shipshape in more ways than one, and it makes you want to imagine what times were like back then. ■

John King is the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s urban design critic and author of *Citiescapes 2: Reading the Architecture of San Francisco* (Heyday, 2015). It doesn’t include a chapter on the bathhouse but you will find the Aquatic Park speaker towers, long silent, that stand on either side.

© Benjamin J. Larson

© Benjamin J. Larson

FUTURE

BY RICHARD EVERETT

For the next two years, the exhibit *Maritime Arts—At Sea and Ashore* will be featured in the Maritime Museum. Showcased in the main lobby and Prismatarium are remarkable examples of art fashioned by sailors using rope, wood, brush and camera. Seen here are scrimshaw, artwork, marlinspike craft work, and superbly made ship models. In the Prismatarium, a concertina which once belonged to a *Balclutha* captain is displayed, while an English concertina is heard in the background. Beautifully enlarged photographs crowd the walls. They include museum staff favorites, sailors' animal friends, and a fateful portrait of the crew of British ship *Andelena*, taken just three days before she capsized in Tacoma with the loss of all hands.

Next year, interpretive panels with photographs and colorful stories of the WPA workers and Federal Art Project artists will be prepared and placed on permanent display throughout the building. A film by John Rogers about the building and its art is underway, and we are searching for a way to show it long-term in both the museum and the visitor center. The film will include the restoration of the hidden murals on the third floor. The mural restoration project is expected to be complete near the end of this year and the floor reopened to the public.

Over the next few years, the park will undertake long term planning for the best use of the museum building, with an emphasis on sharing our collections with the public. Notably, the famous Allen Knight Collection

was recently donated and received. This is the core collection of the former Monterey Maritime Museum, founded by Knight. Knight began his collecting in San Francisco in the late 1920s, well before the founding of our museum in May of 1951. The inclusion of this collection in future exhibits is a truly exciting thing to look forward to. The Knight Collection includes more than 5,000 photographs, a spectacular range of artifacts with some twenty ship models, and a large amount of archival material illustrating the interpretive themes of our Park.

Here are some of the smaller projects to make the building shipshape:

- * A permanent accessible entry including two new ramps to the main entrance doors on Beach Street. As part of that project the park will restore the building's fountains, and install new recirculating water pumps.

- * Reimagining the landscaping on the Beach Street side with sustainable and compatible greenery.

- * Reactivating the overhead bank of aqua blue lights in the entry canopy. This project, would be an unmistakable visual cue that the visitor was "walking under the sea" would require work with the WPA-era electric wiring.

- * Recreating the building's "ship mast" flagpole. Prominent in old photos, the old-style pole would allow flying more than one flag at a time. A modern pulley system would also make it easier to raise and lower Old Glory.

“OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS, THE PARK WILL UNDERTAKE LONG TERM PLANNING FOR THE BEST USE OF THE MUSEUM BUILDING, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON SHARING OUR COLLECTIONS WITH THE PUBLIC.”



A canner label from the Allen Knight Collection.

“REIMAGINING THE MARITIME MUSEUM IN THE HISTORIC AQUATIC PARK BUILDING WILL OFFER BOTH OPPORTUNITY AND CHALLENGE.”



Todd Bloch

This architect's conception of the Museum Building shows some of the new features proposed for the future such as; new ramps to the main entrance doors, landscaping, and recreation of the building's "ship mast" flagpole.

Reimagining the Maritime Museum in the historic Aquatic Park Building will offer both opportunity and challenge. We will find ways to better balance presentations of maritime heritage with the aesthetics of the building. We will invite the participation of education and museum professionals and use proven techniques to create exhibits that speak to citizens of all ages and backgrounds. The new presentations need to connect with a 21st century population who are far removed from the past realities of maritime commerce. Maritime culture and trade had a broad and liberalizing influence on our region and the nation. We shall find ways, in company with the larger community, to share these understandings. ■

FILM

John Rogers, a celebrated Bay Area filmmaker, has begun work on a difficult and unusual project—a video of the Aquatic Park bathhouse building and its treasure trove of WPA murals.

Photographing Bay Area architecture is something Rogers has thought about a lot. He has been director of photography for three documentaries made by Emmy award winning producer Paul Buckhorts—one on the architecture of Bernard Maybeck, another on his masterpiece, the Berkeley Christian Science Church, and the third on arts and crafts architecture in Northern California.

Now, working closely with the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, Rogers is in the fundraising and research phase of his new documentary which will eventually be part of the Maritime Museum and the basis of a new site-specific mobile app. It will be called "The Artistry of the Aquatic Park Bathhouse" and will include extensive new footage of the restored artworks and architecture, interviews with historians, oral histories, archival photography and more.

When Rogers got a chance for an early start to the project, he jumped at it. It was an opportunity to film in Hilaire Hiller's "Prismatarium", the round room adjoining the building terrace. It once was a ladies lounge and was later converted to exhibit space for the Maritime Museum. The exhibits were temporarily removed and the room was as empty as the artists found it when the building was new. It would be the only chance for years to see the room empty of everything.

Rogers thinks that the "Prismatarium" as Hiller called it, is long overdue for more public attention.

The artist's surrealist underseas mural in the lobby has earned a lot of acclaim, but his true love was color theory. He wrote several books on the subject and even started a college in Southern California to teach his theories. And here, in Aquatic Park, he brought it to life—and the idea was that the "Prismatarium" would function like a planetarium for color.

The ceiling is painted with a striking color wheel divided into 30 shades, tones and tints of ten primary colors in precise relationships that theoretically evoke various

emotions. It is based on the ideas of Wilhelm Ostwald, a color theorist and a Nobel Prize winning chemist who influenced Paul Klee and Piet Mondrian.

The painting is big—it's 47 feet across—and it is 14 feet above the floor, so it is not easy to film.

Rogers brought in an ace gaffer named Alan Steinheimer to light the room and then set up a camera jib with a 30 foot arm and a 360 degree rotating head together with a high resolution digital camera. "We needed to get the camera up close to the ceiling and to be able to move it gracefully around the space," Rogers said.

Hiller's original plan for his "Prismatarium" was to have a moving light fixture with lights in his primary colors so he could give demonstrations of the relationship of color and light. However, this was never built, so Rogers did the next best thing—simulating the effect with their lighting.

"It was exciting to finally create the effect Hiller wanted—or at least our version of it," Rogers said. "Even if it was 70 years late. Now people seeing the video can get at least some sense of what he intended."

SF Heritage is a supporter of this project.

THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

CELEBRATES ONE HUNDRED YEARS

BY CARL NOLTE

The National Park Service is celebrating a great anniversary this summer—August 26, exactly one hundred years since President Woodrow Wilson signed legislation that created the service. The law was signed in the White House and the Park Service has always been headquartered in Washington—but its roots go back to the San Francisco Bay Area.

The first director of what became the National Park Service, Stephen T. Mather, was born in San Francisco, and many of the top figures in the early days had San Francisco or Berkeley connections.

The Park Service, of course, is an arm of the Department of the Interior, and the Secretary of the Interior and a major player in the creation of the Park Service was Franklin K. Lane, a powerful California political figure who had served



two terms as San Francisco's City Assessor. **National Park Service. CENTENIAL** One of the two co-sponsors of the Park Service bill was Congressman William Kent, of Marin, who had donated a tract of land that he named Muir Woods, after John Muir, president of the Sierra Club.

The club, of course, was founded in 1892, in San Francisco. Muir was president, and his vice president and right hand man was William Colby, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley.

Mather and Secretary Lane were both UC alumni. Lane himself had worked his way through college as a reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Mather's number two man, the Assistant Director of the Park Service was Horace Albright, who took over the direction of the park service when Mather became ill. Albright later served as the service's second Director.

Other UC Berkeley figures who were present at the creation of the Park Service were professor Adolph Miller, an assistant to Lane for national parks.

There were many other Berkeley people involved, among them Joseph N. Le Conte, a noted geologist and mountaineer and UC Professor. His father, also named Joseph Le Conte, was one of the first professors at Berkeley and his uncle, John Le Conte was twice president of the university.

There were other backers of a new National Park Service, particularly the country's railroads, who thought a coherent and well run series of national parks would draw tourists—and passengers. So for the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, the railroads spent thousands of dollars on displays of scenic wonders. The Great Northern had a model of Yellowstone, the Santa Fe a huge display on the Grand Canyon.

The Southern Pacific—which had a big role in the creation of Sequoia National Park in 1890 promoted Yosemite.

The 1915 San Francisco fair, visited by close to 19 million people, provided a big boost for national parks and a competent agency to run them. Alfred Runte, a historian, thinks that the 1915 fair was the spark that helped create the National Park Service.

A new park policy was sorely needed. The first national park—Yellowstone—was established in 1871, and by 1915, there were 35 national parks and national monuments, among them the famous Yosemite and Sequoia Parks

in California. However, there was no coherent policy to run the parks or patrol them. The Army patrolled some of them, including Yellowstone, Yosemite and Sequoia. The rest were run by various outfits, including political hacks. Some parks were barely staffed at all. The situation was so chaotic that Mather, then a millionaire wrote to Secretary Lane to complain.

The parks were run by a national park section in the Department of the Interior, and this was run by Adolph Miller, a former UC professor, and later by Mark Daniels, another UC graduate who was a San Francisco architect, and general superintendent of the parks.

“THE LAW WAS SIGNED IN THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE PARK SERVICE HAS ALWAYS BEEN HEADQUARTERED IN WASHINGTON—BUT ITS ROOTS GO BACK TO THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA.”

His field offices were in the Monadnock Building in San Francisco.

In the early days, park rangers wore what Albright called “a wild assortment of boots, shoes, scarves and hats.” This would never do, so the government accepted a new uniform, “pretty much a combination of the Forest Service style and color with bits of the army here and there,” as Albright described it. The design was Daniels' the UC graduate and San Francisco architect.

Many people had a hand in the first days of the National Park Service, but the San Francisco Bay Area was there at the creation. ■

NEW BALCLUTHA POSTAGE STAMP LAUNCHED



San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park

The United States Postal Service and San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park launched a new Forever Stamp featuring the square-rigger *Balclutha* at a first-day-of-issue event on Hyde Street Pier on Thursday, June 2, 2016. The ceremony included Deborah Woodrum, USPS San Francisco District Manager, Kevin Hendricks, Superintendent, San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, and Tim Campbell, the photographer who captured the stamp's image.

The San Francisco

event was part of a nationwide first-day-of-issue ceremony

for the National Parks Forever Stamps pane anchored at New York City's Javits Center as part of World Stamp Show-NY 2016. Dedication ceremonies are scheduled at or near each of the National Parks depicted on the stamps.

“The Centennial Forever stamps are a fantastic way to recognize and promote the National Park Service Centennial, and we feel extremely honored to be one of the 16 parks chosen,” said Superintendent Hendricks.

— Lynn Cullivan

A KID'S VIEW OF AQUATIC PARK

BY CARL NOLTE

When I was a kid growing up in San Francisco, Aquatic Park seemed to be a distant, exotic place. It was on the north side of the city, and we were from South of Market, from the Mission District, then such a distinct neighborhood that we felt no part of the mysterious and famous city of San Francisco. Our families were all what we used to call working class.

“...IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT OUR **JUNIOR PROM** WOULD BE HELD IN SOME PLACE CALLED **AQUATIC PARK**. THERE WAS A BEACH THERE, WE’D HEARD, BUT **ALSO THEY HAD SOME KIND OF BIG BUILDING, RIGHT ON THE BAY.**”



Our parents had the kind of jobs that made the city run: they worked on the docks, they were plumbers and carpenters, truck drivers. Some of us, myself included, went to parochial school. And we were parochial indeed: we seldom crossed Market Street. We knew little of Chinatown and had only heard rumors about North Beach. They didn’t even speak English, there, we heard, only Italian.

So it was a great surprise when it was announced that our Junior Prom would

be held in some place called Aquatic Park. There was a beach there, we’d heard, but also they had some kind of big building, right on the bay. That’s where the prom would be. Then as now, the prom was a rite of spring for teen-age



boys and girls. Everybody had heard of the grand Senior Prom, sometimes held at a big hotel. But this was the Junior Prom, a cut below. But it was at Aquatic Park, so it was exotic.

March and April were a time of intrigue in our small world. We were juniors at St. Peter’s Boys High School, and a Catholic girls school was just over the fence. It was assumed our dates would be one of the girls next door.

I asked a girl named Analeen, a slender blonde. We were both 16, I think. I had no car but she had an uncle, and he had a nearly new forest green Pontiac. He was an Older Man—maybe 20 or so—and it was

assumed he would keep an eye on us on behalf of her traditional Italian family. We made all the usual

arrangements: I rented a white dinner jacket and ordered a bouquet for her and a carnation for my lapel. She bought a formal gown and had her hair done. Fancy stuff. I think her uncle and his girl picked me up in that beautiful green Pontiac and drove me to call for



Postcard image, circa 1951.



San Francisco Examiner photo of the beach level concession stand.

my date at her house. I remember being interviewed by her father. It was very awkward: it was clear that he thought me unworthy. “I hope you have a good time,” he said dubiously. He had dark eyes, as sharp as lasers. He looked at me; he looked right through me. The message was clear: touch my darling daughter and I’ll kill you.

Her uncle was OK. Though he was young, too, he was family. He drove us in the Pontiac, down Mission Street out Van Ness Avenue, then a street of neon lit car dealers, to Aquatic Park. This was before the maritime museum. The city owned the place and it was empty most of the time.

I remember how it looked: how the dance floor glittered how the windows looked out on the bay and how the view changed as dusk fell. We had a live orchestra at the Junior Prom. It probably was Maurice Wolohan

“IT LOOKED LIKE A SHIP, WE THOUGHT. IT WAS AMAZING AND VERY DIFFERENT FROM OUR WORLD, THE KIND OF PLACE YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU ARE 16 YEARS OLD AND IT IS SPRING.”

and his Orchestra; they played all the high school dances. Nothing fancy. Fox trots mostly, maybe a waltz, standards we heard on the radio. We danced something called a two-step. I was a terrible dancer and still am.

I remember the last dance: “I’ll See You in My Dreams.”

In my mind’s eye I see that beautiful building, too, big, white. It looked like a ship, we thought. It was amazing and very different from our world, the kind of place you remember when you are 16 years old and it is spring.

I remember the uncle and how pleasant he was to us high school kids. He laughed and told stories. He went to the prom too, and danced with all the pretty girls.

My girl and I went to movies and met after school sometimes, but we never went to another dance. Summer came and we went our separate ways. I never saw her uncle again, though I heard he had gone in the Army. That winter he was killed in Korea.

I have forgotten his name, but I think of him and that spring prom night every time I go into the beautiful Aquatic Park building. ■

Carl Nolte is a reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and served as a trustee of the San Francisco Maritime National Park Association and as chairman of the board of the National Liberty Ship Memorial, which owns and operates the *SS Jeremiah O’Brien*. He also holds a merchant mariners credential from the U.S. Coast Guard.

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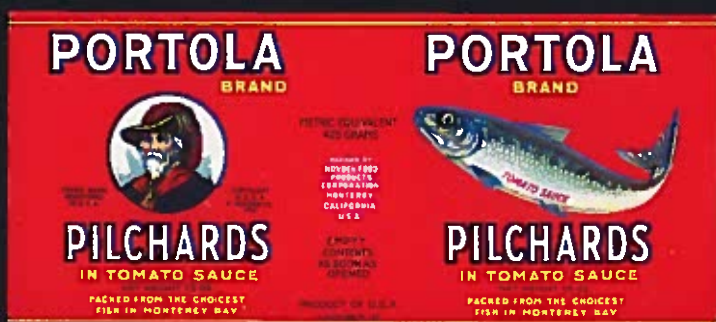
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