



# The Maritime News

The Official Newspaper  
of San Francisco Maritime  
National Historical Park  
April, May, June 2006



## Museum Headed to Drydock

The Aquatic Park Bathhouse building, home to the park's Maritime Museum since 1951, will be "drydocked" this year for much needed restoration. Before it closes, please come down and experience this one-of-a-kind building, the 1930s artworks created under the Federal Art Project, and the maritime exhibits.

The Bathhouse building was built in 1939 as a joint project of the City of San Francisco and the New Deal Works Progress Administration, and is the focal point of the Aquatic Park National Historic Landmark District. This unique structure was designed in the Streamline Moderne style, a late offshoot of the Art Deco period that mimics the clean lines of an ocean liner.

After occupation by troops in WWII from 1941 through 1948, the building became home to the San Francisco Maritime Museum and the country's first Senior Center. The museum was operated by the San Francisco Maritime Association until it was transferred to the National Park Service in 1978.

Construction will take approximately three years, during which time her "upper hull and decks" (windows and roof) will be replaced, and her "hold" (the poured concrete bleachers and underground spaces) will be renewed and reinforced. The existing elevator will also be extended upward one more "deck" to improve public access to, and enjoyment of, this architectural work-of-art.

Although the Museum will close, the activities of the San Francisco Senior Center will continue throughout the construction.

The work is needed because 67 years of driving winter rains and salt-laden summer fogs have taken their toll. Stainless Steel clad windows and doors are rusting from within, causing metal



Opening day of the Maritime Museum on May 28, 1951. Photo: Frank Ricci. Photos top right: Relief over the main door by artist Sargent Johnson and detail of the interior mural by artist Hilarie Hiler. Photos: NPS.

deformation, broken glass and water leaks. The waterproof membrane on the roofs has deteriorated over time, causing significant roof leaks. The reinforcing steel within the concrete amphitheater structures is corroding due to moisture saturation. Poorly designed original skylights have resulted in significant water damage to underground work spaces.

During the restoration project, the NPS will replace 90% of the windows and doors, and all of the roofs in the bathhouse building with new materials that match the historic originals. The concrete amphitheater structures will be repaired and the skylights replaced with modern copies that replicate the look of the historic ones.

### Greetings!

We look forward this spring to an opening and a closing.

April 18, the 100th anniversary of the great San Francisco earthquake and fire, is the opening day of the exhibit, "W. A. Coulter: A Master's Brush With the Sea." The oil paintings and illustrations, done by Coulter between 1869 and 1936, depict some of the most significant moments in the city's maritime history. The exhibit is located in the Visitor Center and runs through the end of October.

Later this year, the Aquatic Park Bathhouse will undergo a major restoration. Although we are disappointed that our Maritime Museum must close during the work, we are elated to preserve this nationally significant historic and architectural resource. For project updates, please call our Visitor Center information desk (415-447-5000).

We are also offering our annual Docent Training class this spring. If learning more about maritime history, and volunteering to work with the public appeals to you, please check it out. There is more information about the class on page three.



Kate Richardson  
Superintendent



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## Restored 1939 Bathhouse Building Sparkles Again



Begun in 1936, and dedicated in 1939, the Park's Bathhouse is a product of the post-Great Depression era Works Progress Administration (WPA). It was constructed to stimulate the U.S. economy by creating jobs and income. The Bathhouse's interior design was executed by a team of renowned artists employed by the Federal Art Project, the visual arts arm of the WPA.

Phase one of the Aquatic Park Bathhouse/Amphitheater rehabilitation began in May 2006, when the Museum was closed to relocate the collections and exhibits. The construction work began in October, and first addressed the building's roof, waterproofing and drainage, and window systems. With that phase now complete, it is a good time to review what has been accomplished.

Although the building itself is rather sturdy, the original roof system was actually quite fragile. Consisting of nearly 18,000 red slate tiles, it was designed to drain down through the building itself, using open pipes that ran precariously between ceilings and walls, and clogged frequently over the years – spilling rainwater into some interior spaces.

Over time, the roof tiles cracked and separated, and the red slate was buried under layers of sealant and tar applied to stem the leaks. Although somewhat effective, this treatment obscured an integral element of the building's character. Contractors had to jackhammer the fused tiles/sealant out chunk by chunk -- it may have been the City's only rooftop excavation! (Photos above far right.)

Of the building's many distinctive features, its extensive, curved windows and thick-paneled glass doors may be the most eye-catching. And for months, Park neighbors have watched yards of steel-sheathed glass replaced with plywood sheets.

The windows and glass doors gleam like the facets of a lighthouse lens, and their frames bear the imprint of hand-

held tools. They are all unique constructions, handmade on-site to fit into their own particular openings. Unfortunately, in today's templated and pre-cut world, this made them extremely difficult to duplicate and install. But it is a part of the building that was designed to be seen and appreciated, and we could do no less than retain the architect's original vision. (Photo above left.)

The third major accomplishment of this phase, on the other hand, was designed to be hidden.

As built, the Bathhouse did not have an elevator. In 1955, the City installed a car between the first and second floors, but the third floor remained inaccessible. The Park faced a dilemma: how to increase access without changing the building's historic character?

The answer: use an hydraulic elevator (which locates much of the machinery underground), and thread the shaft carefully through the building's superstructure. Unobtrusively, the Park both upgraded the existing elevator, and made the third floor accessible for the first time in seventy years.

Restoration of the lobby murals continues, and in future projects conservators will treat the green slate entranceway and the building's many terrazzo floors. (Photo above middle.)

In mid-September, repair of Aquatic Park's failing bleachers and associated underground structures (a surprisingly extensive complex including charmingly "modern" men's and women's shower facilities) will begin. We hope to completely re-open the building in late 2009, and start bringing exhibitions back in 2010.

In the meantime, Park rangers have already begun offering free, guided tours through selected portions of the Bathhouse. Please stop by and watch us work!

### Welcome

Welcome to an exciting fall here at San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. We just completed repair of the Aquatic Park Bathhouse roof and windows, and installation of an elevator to the third floor. And we are just now starting to rehabilitate the District's poured concrete bleachers and the adjacent underground complex.

At the same time, new exhibits are being built in our Visitor Center, work on the schooner C.A. Thayer's deckhouses continues, and we're preparing to send the 1886 square-rigger *Balclutha* to drydock this winter!

Amidst all the capital construction, staff and volunteers continue to build community stewardship and pride by offering participatory programs like Coastal Clean-up Day, on September 20, and a slate of special volunteer events to mark National Public Lands Day (September 27). More details about both events are inside.

And congratulations to the San Francisco Maritime National Park Association for producing the 2008 Festival of Sail, an event that spotlighted important maritime resources all along the San Francisco waterfront.

Please join us in preserving and appreciating America's cultural legacy here at San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park.



Kate Richardson  
Superintendent