

Maritime Museum
Beach Street, W of Polk St.
San Francisco
San Francisco County
California

HABS No. CA-2225

HABS
CAL,
38-SANFRA,
157-

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

ADDENDUM TO:
AQUATIC PARK BATHHOUSE
(Maritime Museum)
San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park
Beach Street, West of Polk Street
San Francisco
San Francisco County
California

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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
PACIFIC WEST REGIONAL OFFICE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
333 Bush Street
San Francisco, CA 94104

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

AQUATIC PARK BATHHOUSE (Maritime Museum)

HABS No. CA-2225

Location: 900 Beach Street (north terminus of Polk Street), San Francisco City and County, California. The Aquatic Park Bathhouse, a.k.a. Sala Burton Building, is located at latitude: 37.806359, longitude: -122.423959. The coordinate represents the main entrance of the building. The coordinate was obtained on April 14, 2014 by locating it on an online topographic map supplied by Worldwide Topographic Maps With a UTM Coordinate Grid:
<http://www.mappingsupport.com/p/gmap4.php?coord+utm>

Significance: The Aquatic Park Bathhouse is significant as the main structure within the Aquatic Park National Historic Landmark District. Aquatic Park is of national significance because of its outstandingly thorough and masterful design. The buildings and landscape were designed in the Streamlined Moderne style, a type of Art Deco, which worked well with the graceful curve of Municipal Pier as it reaches north and east to partially enclose the Cove. The buildings and the site design, and the Bathhouse in particular, are outstanding examples of Streamlined Moderne. Rounded walls, strong horizontal elements, repetition of nautical elements like porthole windows, ship type railings, and steamship style roof ventilators, as well as art works within the Bathhouse with aquatic motifs all combined into a common sense of design and purpose.

The Bathhouse is largely unaltered and has a high degree of architectural integrity. It is an outstanding example of a federally-funded Federal Art Project, and was constructed through the Works Progress Administration in the late 1930s. The murals in the main Lobby and Prismarium on the main, Beach Street level were designed and executed by internationally known artist Hilaire Hiler. The Lobby mural depicts the mythical kingdoms of Atlantis and Mu; the Prismarium is a physical manifestation of Hiler's color theory. Hiler oversaw the execution of all of the art work in the building and worked closely with building architect William Mooser III so that the artwork fits perfectly with the building elements. The murals are Hiler's best known works and are pioneering examples of his work in color theory. A *Time* article from February 6, 1939 states that:

“For the last two years, large, free-speaking Hilaire Hiler has been in San Francisco, working mostly on the Aquatic Park Murals. . . . Unquestionably Hiler's masterpiece, this mural embodies a refinement of intelligent detail and one of the most thoroughly studied color systems now at the command of an artist. He has evolved his own color chart, with 24 hues based not on the spectrum, obtained by the mechanical refraction of white light, but on pigments found in nature and the observed human reactions to them. He is far prouder of the Aquatic Park's 'color chart room' – in which these hues and their

tints, shades and tones are painted on a 60-foot [sic] ceiling – than of the undersea murals.”

Other exceptional artwork found throughout the building includes the slate bas-relief marquee surrounding the main entrance on Beach Street, the unfinished mosaic on the second floor veranda, and a carved slate door header on the fourth floor by African American artist Sargent Johnson (Johnson may have also created the mosaic designs in the fountains at the main entrance); the multi-media wall murals on the third floor by Richard Ayer; a mural in the Ladies’ Lounge by Charles Nunemaker, light fixtures by John Glut and the remaining two of eleven planned sculptures by Beniamino Bufano.

The area of the building used by the San Francisco Senior Center is of national significance as the first official senior citizen’s center in the United States.

Aquatic Park also holds regional significance in the area of military history as the headquarters of the Fourth Anti-Aircraft Command which oversaw the defense of the Pacific coast states during World War II. It holds regional significance in the area of social/humanitarian movements as one of California’s most extensive and noteworthy results of the work relief programs of the 1930s that gained national recognition for its ambitious plan.

Aquatic Park is of local significance as the site of the San Francisco Maritime Museum, founded in 1951 and now part of San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. It holds local significance in the area of recreation as a favorite recreation spot for San Franciscans since the time of the Civil War. It is also of local significance in the area of community planning. In 1866 Frederick Law Olmsted proposed a marine plaza, landing quay and public park at the site. In 1905 Daniel Burnham prepared a city plan that suggested the site be developed as a “bay shore park” with rowing and swimming clubhouse and yacht harbor. Although neither plan was adopted, citizens successfully fought for the site to become a public park in the early 1900s with development beginning in the 1920s.

When San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park was created in 1988, the legislation specified that the Bathhouse Building be renamed the Sala Burton Building to honor the U.S. House of Representatives legislator who had recently died.

Description: The Aquatic Park Bathhouse houses the Maritime Museum and the San Francisco Senior Center. It is a four-story reinforced concrete structure. The main block of the building is shaped as a rectangle with semicircular ends with floors three and four each stepping back. The shape along with the nautical themes gives the impression of a ship. A Works Progress Administration (WPA) report stated: “Like a huge ship at its dock . . . with rounded ends, set back upper stories, porthole windows and ship rails, its resemblance to a luxurious ocean liner is indeed startling.”

The ground floor of the building has a much larger footprint and originally included men’s and women’s shower and changing facilities under concrete stadia (bleachers) with seating for spectators. The cove to the north of the building was meant to be the site of swimming, rowing and other water sport competitions. The bleachers are situated to the east and west of the main block. The first floor

of the main block originally housed a large concession stand, a caretaker's apartment and other support spaces. These rooms are now used for the Senior Center's fitness center, classrooms and offices. The spaces under the east and west bleachers are used by the Park for offices, workshops and meeting spaces. The building is constructed into the slope of the land as it gradually descends toward San Francisco Bay. The main entrance to the building is on the second floor at the south elevation facing the foot of Polk Street. There is also access to the first floor through doors on the north side facing the beach, and access into the spaces under the bleachers also from the north side.

The building is painted white and the roof terraces accessed from the third and fourth floors are red tiled. A slate bas relief sculpture created by WPA artist Sargent Johnson surrounds the main entrance. Fountains flanking the main entrance (no longer functional but due to be rehabilitated) are built of green slate with multi-colored mosaic tile basins. The doors throughout the building are steel with brass-plated handles that are shaped like halves of ships' wheels. Most of the large banks of metal windows were replaced in 2007 due to extreme deterioration, although original windows remain on the north side of the second floor at the veranda. All of the original doors were repaired and a pair of non-historic doors entering the Senior Center on Beach Street were replaced with new doors to match the others.

The main entrance of the building opens into the Lobby where Hilaire Hiler's exquisite undersea mural adorns all of the walls. The terrazzo floor is of varied colors and abstract design. Tennessee pink marble and Royal Jersey green marble were used for the wainscot. North of the Lobby is the veranda, which is a recessed porch overlooking the Cove. Ship-like tubular steel railings edge the north side. Stairways on the east and west sides lead down to what was once the grand concession stand, and is now the fitness center and main class room of the San Francisco Senior Center. An unfinished tile mosaic by Sargent Johnson adorns most of the south wall and the stairwells. The two remaining sculptures by Beniamino Bufano, a black frog and a red seal, sit on the veranda. An elevator was added to the east end of the veranda in the mid-1960s and connected the first and second floors. It was replaced in 2007 by a new elevator, turned 90 degrees and moved slightly to the south so that it could also reach the third floor.

West of the veranda is the Prismatarium. It is a large, round, open room, approximately 54 feet in diameter with a continuous mural painted on the walls and ceiling, which was cleaned and conserved in 2012-2013. The room is a color wheel mural with 190 distinct colors and was created by Hilaire Hiler. Three paintings attributed to Hiler and related to his color theory were hung in the room including "Pigment Primaries", "Hiler Psychological Color Chart" and "Solar Spectrum". The paintings are now stored in the park's museum collection and replicas of the paintings hang in the room. The concept was for the "Prismatarium" to function in relation to the field of color the way a Planetarium does for the night sky.

Women's and men's restrooms are located just east of the Prismatarium. The anti-room to the women's restroom includes a South Seas themed mural by Charles Nunemaker on the plaster walls above tile wainscoting. Two additional paintings hung in the lobby outside the women's restroom and Prismatarium, "Cross Section of a Color Solid" and "Painting of a Color Solid". These paintings were done by Charles Nunemaker and are currently stored in the park's museum collection.

East of the veranda is the Blue Room, which mirrors the Prismarium in dimensions and was restored to its original blue color scheme by the NPS in 2014. It had been known as the Bay View Room since 1958 when it was repainted and a new exterior door and ramp was added to the south side of the room to provide wheelchair access from Beach Street. The 2014 paint restoration was based on historic paint analysis and involved restoring the original design of blue paint that is gradated from dark at the floor to light at the ceiling. The ceiling is a light, blue-green color, and the effect of the walls and ceiling gives the impression of being under the water. Rope of various sizes was partially embedded within the plaster of the walls to form a chair rail and nautical designs. It was originally not painted, but the paint could not be removed without significant damage to the rope, so it was painted grey which was the color of first coat of paint. A frieze of removable wooden plaques representing Pacific Coast yacht clubs was removed at some point and is now stored in the park's museum collections. Plans are underway to create replica plaques and remount them as seen in historic photographs. A kitchen is located to the southwest of the Blue Room, and provides support for the Senior Center lunch program.

The third floor of the building has a terrazzo floor that includes maritime motifs of a ship's wheel and a compass rose as well as areas depicting portions of the shoal chart of the San Francisco Bay Region. An abstract multi-media mural that includes wood and string elements designed by Richard Ayers adorns the walls and columns. The south wall and some of the column faces were painted over in the 1970s by the then private Maritime Museum. The National Park Service has a contract in place in 2016 to remove the over paint, repair damaged areas and clean and conserve the historic mural that should be complete in 2017. Large windows on the northwest and north side of the room provide spectacular Bay views. A glass block pantry that was built to support an original banquet operation on the third floor has been converted into an elevator lobby, providing elevator access from the first floor to the third. Doors lead out to a large tiled roof terrace from the west and north sides of the room. It is possible to circumnavigate the entire third floor via the terrace.

The fourth floor of the building was called the radio room, but there is no evidence that it operated as such. A central stair leads to the center of the room with large window banks providing views of the Bay to north, and views of the park to the west and east. Doors on the southeast and southwest lead to a terrace roof deck. Apart from the carved door header by Sargent Johnson, there is no remaining visible artwork.

History: Designed by architects William Mooser, II and III, the building was begun in 1936 and completed in January 1939. It was a WPA project dubbed "A Palace for the Public" that was meant to benefit the citizens of San Francisco who would come to the waterfront to relax, recreate, swim, and socialize.

The city leased the building to concessioners Leo and Kenneth Gordon in 1938. The Gordons began requiring design changes related to their plans for a banquet hall on the third floor. The WPA turned the unfinished project over to the City in 1939. The Gordons, who had won their lease without competition and who excluded the public from part of the main building, also did not pay their rent because the building was not complete. Due to the issues with City management and the Gordons, many of the artists had walked off the site, including Sargent Johnson, whose incomplete mosaic adorns the veranda on the second floor. The WPA investigated the project after sculptor Beniamino Bufano and Adolph S. Oko, Jr. complained about the state of affairs to the WPA Deputy Commissioner in Washington, D.C. The City finally cancelled the Gordon's lease in August 1940

after the WPA investigation and outspoken criticism of the City's mismanagement of Aquatic Park by the press. The city had not put together a permanent plan for the building's use when it was taken over by the troops of Battery B, 216th Coast Artillery in the fall of 1941.

The United States held a lease on Aquatic Park through February 1948 and the military made significant use of the Bathhouse Building between June 1942 and January 1946 when it served as the headquarters first for the 216th Coast Artillery Regiment and then for the entire Fourth Anti-Aircraft Command. The west end of the first floor served as an officer's mess, the main lobby on the first floor was allocated to the General's driver and other functions, and the rooms on the east end were an enlisted mess. The second floor was partitioned into offices and General L. Homer had his office on the fourth floor as commander of the headquarters.

In 1949 the Senior Center opened in the Blue Room on the east end of the second floor. In 1951 the Maritime Museum officially opened in the Lobby, Prismaticarium, and upper floors of the building. In the late 1940s a sewage treatment facility was built at Hyde and Jefferson Streets, making it safe to swim in the Bay waters. In 1953 the lockers and showers on the first floor were finally made available to the public and lifeguards were stationed in the park. At some point, the Senior Center was granted the right to use portions of the ground floor. The grand concession stand in the main first floor room was removed and the room remodeled. Wooden ship and maritime industry flags were removed from the walls and are now located in the Park's museum collection. In 1964 - 1965 an elevator was added just outside the Blue Room to provide access for the Seniors between the first and second floors.

In the mid-1970s, the San Francisco Maritime Museum made some substantial changes to the third floor of the Bathhouse Building. Two large exhibit bays were created at the east side of the room by building walls from columns and perpendicular to the south wall and a false wall was erected at the east end of the room. Some of the artwork was destroyed by the installation of the walls and additional electrical wiring. A drop ceiling was installed above the two new exhibit bays. The artwork on the south wall was painted over white, as was artwork on some of the columns. Shelves were installed in the glass block pantry to serve as a Library.

In 1977 the Aquatic Park Bathhouse and the Maritime Museum came under the control of the National Park Service as part of the new Maritime Unit of Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Plans for extensive restoration of the artwork and the building began in the 1980s but were not realized until the 2000s. In 2006 the Park removed all of the maritime exhibits in preparation of a major project to repair the leaking roofs and replace the severely damaged windows in the main block of the building. As part of this project, the walls installed on the third floor in the 1970s by the Maritime Museum were removed, exposing what remains of the original artwork. A second project followed in 2008 to rehabilitate the bleachers portion of the building. The second floor lobby murals were cleaned, repaired and conserved between 2009 and 2011. The Prismaticarium mural was cleaned, repaired and conserved between 2012 and 2013. The Blue Room was restored in 2014. Conservation and restoration of the third floor artwork is underway in 2016.

Sources:

Toogood, Anna Coxe. *Historical Resource Study: The Bay Area Community, A Civilian History of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Point Reyes National Seashore*. Denver: National Park Service, Denver Service Center, 1980.

Delgado, James P., revised by Laura Soulliere Harrison. National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form, Aquatic Park, 1986.

Historian(s): Robbyn Jackson, (Historical Architect) Chief of Cultural Resources & Museum Management, San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, 2014.

Project Information:

Drawings of Aquatic Park Bathhouse (Maritime Museum) were delineated by Todd Croteau (Project Manager), Dana Lockett and Jairo Umana. Photographs of the Bathhouse were taken by Jet Lowe in September 1981. Photographs of the artwork on the third floor were taken by Todd Croteau in 2012. Photographs of the Prismatarium were taken by David G. DeVries in 2013. The short historical report was prepared by Robbyn Jackson.

The Prismatarium documentation was undertaken due to an adverse effect determination related to the conservation of the Prismatarium Mural. The grey shade walls had an extremely high lead content and the paint was no longer adhering well to the substrate. Attempts to clean the walls removed significant amounts of the paint. Upon discussion with the Conservator, it was decided that the best course would be to encapsulate the original lead paint via a clear, breathable coating and then replicate the original design of the gray walls.