



Society for Industrial Archeology ROEBLING CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

October 2004

Vol. 13 No. 3

TOURS

Library & Locks

General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen

20 West 44th Street (between 5th and 6th Avenues), Manhattan

October 29, 2004, 3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Tour the John M. Mossman Lock Collection with John Erroll, Curator, and hear about the resources of the Library of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen on this afternoon tour, hosted by Janet Wells Greene, Historian and Director of the Library.

The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New York was founded in 1785 to provide cultural, educational and social services to families of skilled craftsmen. In 1820, The General Society opened one of the city's first free schools as well as the Apprentices' Library. The school, which became the Mechanics Institute in 1858, continues to provide tuition-free evening instruction in trades-related education. Also founded in 1820, the General Society Library is the second oldest continuously operating library in New York City. The wealth of older books makes the library an excellent research facility, especially in the building trades and applied arts.

The John M. Mossman Lock Collection represents one of the most complete anthologies of bank and vault locks in the world, with more than 370 locks, keys and tools dating from 4000 BC to the modern 20th-century. Many of the examples are unique, made-to-order locks that were not produced in commercial quantities and nearly every lock has protected millions in money and securities. To augment the lock collection, Mr. Mossman donated his notes and scrapbooks, known as the Mossman papers, which have proven to be a valuable resource for the study of locks.

This tour will highlight the Library's holdings in 19th- and early 20th- century technical books and periodicals. Called the "Useful Arts" collection, these books include a small but significant group of works on building,

carpentry, engineering, fuels, manufacturing, and trades. Also of interest is a small collection on military and naval science, navigation, and ship and yacht building. Attendees will have the opportunity to become subscribers to the Library, a membership that includes access to circulating and non-circulating books and periodicals as well as free and reduced-price admission to events sponsored by the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen.

Refreshments will be served at the conclusion of the tour. The tour is free to chapter members and \$10 for non-members. Reservations are required. Please call or e-mail Mary Habstritt at 212-769-4946 or RCSIAprez@aol.com.

OTHER EVENTS

To the best of our ability, this information was accurate at press time. Please check with the listed sponsor for up-to-date information.

Subway's 100!

Many events are planned this year to celebrate the 100th anniversary of IRT in October. Here is a current selection.

NYPL Exhibition

THE SUBWAY AT 100: GENERAL WILLIAM BARCLAY PARSONS AND THE BIRTH OF THE NYC SUBWAY

March 23 through December 31, 2004

A salute to the first chief engineer of the subway at the New York Public Library's Science, Industry and Business Library, 34th Street and Madison Avenue, lower level. More info at www.nypl.org.

N-YHS Exhibition

Subway Photos, 1904-1908

August 3 through November 7, 2004

A selection from the extensive Subway Construction Photograph Collection, donated by the New York City Board of Transportation, at the New-York Historical Society, 77th Street at Central Park West, lower level. Info: www.nyhistory.org.

Tug Pegasus Reception

Henry Buhl's loft
102 Prince Street, 5th Floor
between Greene and Mercer
Thursday, November 4th, 2004, 6:00- 8:30 p.m.

Join the Tug Pegasus Preservation Project in a celebration of the 1907 tugboat and learn what its preservation means for New Yorkers. The Tug Pegasus Preservation Project is dedicated to nurturing our urban youth through interaction with New York Harbor on board historic vessels and through our maritime community. Partnering with the Police Athletic League of New York, Friends of Hudson River Park, North River Historic Ship Society and Save Our Ships New York, the Project creates programs that bring New York City kids on historic ships and piers to learn about our maritime heritage. Tug Pegasus Preservation Project is a not-for-profit, 501(c)(3), New York State chartered organization. For further information, see <http://www.tugpegasus.org>

The General Society Lecture Series: Labor, Literature, and Landmarks

All lectures are held in the General Society building at 20 West 44th Street (between 5th and 6th Avenues) in New York City on Tuesday evenings beginning at 6:00 p.m. Admission is \$15. A selection of upcoming lectures of interest to chapter members is given here. For a full program, watch your mail for a brochure from the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, or go to <http://www.generalsociety.org/events>.

NOVEMBER 9, 2004

Henry Petroski, Professor of Civil Engineering,
Professor of History, Duke University [SIA]
"The Bridges of New York City"

The late 19th and early 20th century was a great period of world-class bridge building in New York City. Learn how these bridges influenced the design of other bridges in America.

NOVEMBER 16, 2004

John Kriskieiewicz, Architectural historian, Co-curator
NYC Transit Museum Centennial Exhibition
"Subway Style: A Centennial Celebration"

Construction of the subway system was not just a stunning engineering achievement; it was also an enormous opportunity for artists and craftsmen. Colorful tiles, commemorative panels, and decorative fixtures enriched the subterranean platforms, bringing fine arts to subway passengers.

Roosevelt Island Tours

The Roosevelt Island Historical Society is offering a series of behind-the-scene tours called "How Roosevelt Island Works," some of these (listed below) will be of special interest to RCSIA members. All tours are free.

Reservations are requested as space is limited. Persons without reservations will only be taken if space is available. Please e-mail your reservation to rooseveltislandhistory@usa.com or call 212-688-4836.

Date: Sunday, November 7

Site: Tram

Time: 11 a.m.

Meeting Place: R.I. Tram Station

Visit Includes: History of island transportation, how we got a tram, tram construction, technical aspects of its operation.

Guide: Judith Berdy

Date: Saturday, November 13

Site: Water Tunnel

Time: 11 a.m.

Meeting Place: Tennis Courts by Octagon Park

Visit Includes: History of Croton Water system, Construction of 3rd NYC Water Tunnel.

Guide: Nancy Cruickshank, former project archeologist on water tunnel project.

TOUR REPORTS

Three Tugs Tour

On July 25, more than 50 Roebling Chapter members joined other friends of the *John J. Harvey* for a cruise to Staten Island to visit three historic tugboats, *Pegasus*, *Bertha*, and *New York Central 13*. Narration during the cruise by Norman Brouwer and Tom Flagg



"Swingin' in the sling. Photo by Elliot Hunt"

filled us in on history of the harbor sights. A fine spread of burgers, chicken, salmon, and salads was consumed upon reaching Garner's Yard. Pamela Hepburn, executive director of the Tug Pegasus Preservation Project was on hand to talk about the work on the *Peg*. Darren Vigilant, owner of the 1925 former timber tug *Bertha*, led a demonstration of riveting after performing yeoman's service at the grill. Folks clambered over *New York Central #13*, built in 1887, to see the work owner Eric Fisher has done on this vessel. Complicated logistics that allowed for folks only going one way on the *Harvey* to maximize the number who could join the tour did not dampen spirits. A great time was had by all, especially those who turned the shipyard's slings into swings. The chapter made donations to the Tug Pegasus Preservation Project and to Save our Ships New York for restoration of *Pegasus* and *Harvey*. (For more on those restoration efforts, see previous newsletter, Vol. 13, No. 2, July 2004.)

Manhattanville Works

Eleven chapter members attended a walking tour of the west Harlem neighborhood of Manhattanville on July 29. Led by Eric K. Washington, the group saw remnants of the industrial and transportation heritage of the neighborhood. These included a former Yuengling brewery, now re-used for various small distribution and art businesses; a former stable for a dairy concern that is used by a moving and storage company, and the yokes from the former 3rd Avenue Railway. The tour went on past the scheduled end time with many interested questions from attendees.

Corn Roast

About 25 people joined Gerry Weinstein and Mary Habstritt in Croton-on-Hudson for a gorgeous afternoon of eating and swimming in the shadow of steam engines on September 26. Corn was boiled on a hot plate and sausages and bluefish were cooked on the grill, as the Engineerium is without a kitchen, but camping out only seemed to increase the fun.

ADVOCACY

South Street Seaport

Chapter members were disturbed to learn of the termination of Norman Brouwer, Ships Curator, Jim Clements, Waterfront Director, and Diane Dallal, Curator of Archaeology from South Street Seaport Museum in June. The Museum is blaming financial difficulties for the staff cutbacks.

Many who have used the library at South Street were particularly concerned about future access and preservation of the library collection as it was packed up to be moved to the newly renovated buildings on Schermerhorn Row so that its space on Water Street might be leased out.

On behalf of the chapter, Mary Habstritt sent a letter to Lawrence Huntington, Chairman of the Board at South Street, expressing concern for stewardship of the library, ship collection, and archaeological artifacts, and the impact that this loss of expert knowledge would have on those who wish to do research on New York Harbor and its shipping history. This letter was reproduced in the *Battery Park City Broadsheet*, a neighborhood paper. This generated a form letter from Executive Director, Paul Mayo, and Mary followed up with a letter directly to Ms. Mayo offering the expert assistance of our chapter members in any way that would help to make the library collection accessible and ensure the conservation of the ships and archaeological collections.

Mary has also been pursuing conversations with other interested groups and individuals, including the New York Ship Lore & Model Society and Professional Archaeologists of New York City (PANYC), about what might be done to safeguard these important resources. An update on these efforts will be provided at the Drew Symposium on October 24.

ROEBLING CHAPTER BUSINESS

General Information

Registration: If a newsletter listing contains no information regarding reservations or registration for a particular activity, the event is open to all individuals who show up at the designated time and place. You don't need to call ahead unless stated in the announcement. Unless otherwise stated, all tours will be conducted rain or shine, short of a Biblical Deluge. If in doubt, inquire at the Chapter's official telephone number (see below).

Dues/Address Changes

Please review the mailing label on your copy of this newsletter. If you have not paid your dues for 2003, kindly make out a check for \$10, payable to RCSIA, and send it to Aron Eisenpress, RCSIA Secretary, 235 West End Avenue, Apt. 14-C, New York, NY 10023. If you have moved or plan to move, kindly notify Aron of this fact, either by mail at the above address or by e-mail at AFECU@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Oct. 24** **Annual Drew Symposium**
Madison, NJ
- Oct. 29** **Library & Lock Tour**
Manhattan

Roebling Chapter SIA Officers

President	Mary Habstritt
Vice President	Lynn Rakos
Treasurer	Charles Scott
Secretary	Aron Eisenpress

The Roebling Chapter official telephone number is the residence number of the President: (212) 769-4946. Please leave a brief message on the answering machine.

Membership is \$10.00 per year, payable to RCSIA, c/o Aron Eisenpress, 235 West End Avenue, Apt. 14-C, New York, NY 10023

For those who want to keep abreast of IA matters at the national level, the national SIA may be reached at either of the following web addresses: www.siahq.org or www.sia-web.org.

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