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# Society for Industrial Archeology ROEBLING CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

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December 2005

Vol. 14 No. 4

## CHAPTER BUSINESS

### *Annual Meeting*

*Drew University Hall of Sciences*

*Sunday, January 29, 2005 – 2:00 to 5:00 P.M.*

In accordance with our bylaws, which require us to hold a business meeting in January of each year, members are hereby notified that the meeting will take place at the time and location given above.

The business portion of the meeting will include annual reports from the President, Secretary, and Treasurer, and election of officers. Plans for the upcoming year will be discussed and proposals are invited. Fruit, cookies, coffee and sodas will be available to all members who attend.

Four of the five members of the chapter's board are to be elected by the membership. The fifth member is appointed by the elected members. This year we have two candidates for treasurer. Nominees for 2005 are:

**Mary Habstritt**, President (Incumbent)

**Lynn Rakos**, Vice President (Incumbent)

**Aron Eisenpress**, Secretary (Incumbent)

**Charles Scott**, Treasurer (Incumbent)

**Kevin Pegram**, Treasurer

Tradition dictates that we also provide time for show and tell. If you have IA slides, video, artifacts, or the like which you wish to share with other chapter members, please notify Mary Habstritt at 212-769-4946 or [RCSIAPrez@aol.com](mailto:RCSIAPrez@aol.com) to be placed on the schedule.

Individuals with disabilities who require special assistance should contact Mary no later than January 22, 2005 to ensure appropriate arrangements can be made.

#### **Directions:**

**Via Automobile #1** – From Northwest New Jersey and Northeast Pennsylvania via I-80: Take I-80 East to Exit 43, I-287 South. Proceed to Morristown Exit 35, "Madison Avenue/Route 124". At top of exit ramp, turn left. Proceed three miles on Route 124

East to Madison. Drew University is on Route 124 (Madison Avenue) on your right.

**Via Automobile #2** – From West New Jersey and Pennsylvania, via I-78: Take I-78 East to I-287 North. Proceed to first Morristown exit (Exit 35 South Street/Route 124". At end of exit ramp, turn left. Proceed 100 yards ahead and take first right, following signs to Route 124. At the stop sign, turn right (Route 124 East) and proceed three miles on Route 124 East to Madison. Drew University is on Route 124 (Madison Avenue) on your right.

**Via Automobile #3** – From Southern New Jersey via NJ Turnpike: Take NJTP North to Exit 10 and follow I-287 North to first Morristown exit, Exit 35 (South Street, Route 124). At end of exit ramp, turn left. Proceed as above under #2.

**Via Automobile #4** – From New York City (Lincoln and Holland Tunnels): Lincoln Tunnel - Follow the signs to the N.J. Turnpike South. Take exit 14 (Newark Airport). After the toll plaza take I-78 West (either express or local lanes okay) to Exit 48 - Route 24 West. Take exit 7A - Chatham/ Route 124 West. Exit 7A/B splits so watch carefully. Follow Route 124 West through Chatham (Main Street) into Madison (Madison Avenue). Drew is located on Route 124 (Madison Avenue), on your left, just past the center of Madison. Continue as above.

**Via Automobile #5** – From New York City (upper Manhattan/George Washington Bridge): Take I-80 West from bridge to I-287 South (Morristown). Proceed as under #1, above.

**Via Public Transportation** – NJ Transit's Morristown Line train service stops at the station in Madison, approximately one-half mile from the Drew Campus. From the station, proceed to Madison Avenue. Turn left and walk along Madison Avenue until you come to the Drew campus on your left. For train schedules and other information contact NJ Transit: (800) 722-2222 in NJ and (973) 762-5100 in NY.

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## Story of the Drew Symposium

by Tom Flagg

One of the constants of the Roebing Chapter has been its annual symposium held every Fall in Drew University's Hall of Sciences. This symposium consists of approximately half-hour illustrated presentations featuring the industrial archeology of the New York - Northern New Jersey region.

The first annual Symposium was organized by Thorwald Torgerson, who was president of the Roebing Chapter and then the national SIA, and a tireless advocate for industrial archeology. It was co-sponsored by the Anthropology Department of Drew University (as it has been ever since). The date was Sept. 12, 1981 and it featured the first of many presentations by Edward Rutsch and also one by Abba Lichtenstein on historic bridges, plus presentations of slides showing past field trips of the chapter. The presentations were heavily illustrated with slides, setting a precedent that is still followed. Lunch was at the student center, and was included in the charge of \$10.

The success of this symposium, and the hard work of Thorwald, set the pattern for years to come. The second annual symposium was held October 16, 1982, and included a movie on the Mauch Chunk Switchback Railroad shown by Lance Metz, a presentation by Ed Rutsch on a site at which he was then working, and seven other talks. This left no time for showing slides of past chapter trips, and it was decided to have these instead at the annual meeting in January, another tradition that we have kept.

For the third annual symposium (Oct. 19, 1983), lunch was served in the seminar room outside the auditorium, which has been the practice ever since. The food for this lunch was prepared under the direction of Nanci Batchelor, who (with her family) cooked much of it herself, a huge job for a large group like this; the typical audience is 100 to 150 people. Jim Lee gave a presentation on the Plane 9W Turbine of the Morris Canal, Lance showed another great film, Ed Rutsch was on again also, and Ed Lenik gave his first talk on an IA site in the region. We heard a presentation on the Baltimore Museum of Industry from Dennis Zembala: but this was very relevant because it was presented to give us some guidance in creating a museum of industry in our region. This of course has not yet come about.

In the fourth symposium I gave my first full talk, on Bush Terminal, which I was then documenting for the Army Corps of Engineers. Brian Morrell and Bill McKelvey gave their first Drew presentations also, and Ed Rutsch and Lance Metz were back again.

It is interesting to note that Lance and Bill went on to create their own annual symposiums, inspired in part by Thorwald's creation. Lance's Canal Symposium takes place at Lafayette University in Easton, PA, under the auspices of the Canal Museum. Its presentations are somewhat longer, and always accompanied by a published version of every talk. McKelvey's symposium takes place at Drew also, in the spring, under the auspices of the Friends of the New Jersey Transportation Museum. The presentations here are generally more brisk at about 15 minutes long, and there are more of them. So Thorwald's efforts have resulted in three annual symposiums, each with its own distinctive character and tradition.

Thorwald decided to bow out after the fifth annual symposium, and the sixth was organized by Terry Karschner, of the state Office of New Jersey Heritage, which has co-sponsored the symposium ever since.

Terry's many duties with the New Jersey office made it difficult for him to find the time to devote to the Symposium, so the eighth one (Nov. 5, 1988) was handed off to me, Tom Flagg, who had just ended four years as president of the chapter, and who has been the symposium coordinator ever since. I have had generous assistance from other chapter members. Nanci Batchelor continues to supervise the food part of the symposium. For about the past ten years we have been required by Drew to use a designated caterer to provide the lunch, which raises costs some but means that Nanci and her family do not have to cook it! Of course she and her crew still arrange it, set it out, and clean up afterward, and we are very grateful for her work there. We are also grateful to Charles Scott, who has handled the financial and registration work.

Even with the caterer, we have held the cost to \$18 pre-registered (\$20 at the door), which may be the least expensive all-day lunch-included symposium around. The fee is set to break even, not to bring in money to the chapter's treasury. And anyone may attend, not just SIA or chapter members; we have found this helps to recruit new members.

Our 25th annual symposium was held this past October 29, 2005. We did not arrange any special celebration of the 25th; after all, this audience comes for the meat of technical talks, not self-congratulation. That said, all those involved with this series of symposia can rightly feel some pride in an unbroken record of 25 years of full symposia that brings people together to share their interest in this broad range of topics.

As coordinator I can say it is very rewarding to be in touch with so many dedicated workers in this field, willing to present talks. That said, would anyone like to

become a co-coordinator, with future takeover in mind?

## 2005 Symposium Report

The 25th Annual Drew Symposium began swimmingly with a presentation by George Matteson, based on his recent book, *Tugboats of New York*. Matteson conducted a brisk business in autographed copies during breaks from the program.

A highlight of the day was a firsthand account by sandhog Dale Estus on the construction of the Third Avenue Tunnel. He brought amazing images of the underground work and told anecdotes from a working life underground. This was reinforced by a semi-official video on the project, presented by John McCluskey, who helped put it together.

Other presentations included an examination of a possible Edison concrete neighborhood in Phillipsburg by Michael McGowan and a review of contaminated former industrial sites in Newark by Mark Zdepski. Tom Flagg told the story of the Brooklyn Navy Yard's freight infrastructure to fill the hole left by Lance Metz' presentation on transistors which had to be postponed until next year.

Tom was surprised out of his duties as moderator when, as he addressed technical problems with the projection equipment, he heard his name announced as this year's recipient of the Roebling Award. The citation read at the event appears below.

Thank you to all the presenters and to Tom Flagg, Nanci Batchelor, and Charles Scott for handling arrangements.

## 2005 Roebling Award

By Mike Raber

The John Augustus Roebling award for contributions to industrial archeology recognizes an individual, group, or organization that has made an outstanding contribution to documenting or preserving the industrial heritage of the greater New York/New Jersey area. This annual award, the third of which we are presenting today, consists of a certificate – designed for us by Joe Macasek – and a \$250 check. I think everyone in this room knows that industrial archaeology is often a collaborative enterprise, since hardly anyone knows



Photo by Ron Rice

2005 Roebling Award presentation with Mary Habstritt, President, Tom Flagg, awardee, and Mike Raber, Award Committee Chair.

enough by themselves to cover all bases. Usually, one relies on what I call “the network of loons,” or more politely, the obsessively inspired. Today's recipient is more than just one of the loons. Today's recipient actually constitutes a one-person network. Today's recipient – who I decided to surprise since I knew he would be here – is Thomas Flagg.

Tom came to our region almost 40 years ago from Minnesota, with an interest in railroads which included bicycle-based railyard inspections as well as modelmaking, a fascination with material handling at ports, and a background in perceptual psychology which helped make him an excellent photographer. Once here, he was immediately enthralled by the scale and, at the time, the vitality of rail and harbor activity in the Port of New York, and he saw three things which have driven him ever since. He noted the railroads' heavy reliance on fleets of tugboats, barges and ferries to deliver freight and passengers to parts of the harbor not reachable with land-based rails, on a scale found nowhere else in the world. He found little integrated documentation of the port's history of infrastructure and freight-handling operations. Finally, he realized that what he was seeing was beginning to disappear.

While not the only one to notice these things, Tom was probably the first to begin assembling comprehensive information on most aspects of rail-marine and other port facilities in the region. For many years, he did this on his own time and his own nickel, when he was not at his day job with the State University of New York's College of Optometry. Beginning just before industrial

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archeology truly became a recognized field, he used methods which exceeded what most academic researchers would do now. In addition to scouring libraries, he assembled his own collection of rare books, company or agency annual reports, maps, and discarded plans sometimes rescued from dumpsters. This collection alone, with many items found virtually nowhere else, warrants a preservation award. He visited and photographed working or abandoned railyards and waterfronts throughout the region, approaching them using everything from bicycles to airplanes. As many of you know, Tom's aerial photo surveys of the port span over thirty years, and may be unique among long-term, low-altitude looks at a large industrial region. He sought out people who operated or photographed rail and marine facilities, gathering his own network of informants. He paid particular attention to mechanical handling equipment at the water's edge, and become the foremost authority on the history and design of the port's carfloat bridges.

But all this work would be little more than the efforts of a giant squirrel, collecting and storing information, if Tom had not applied what he learned to preservation, publication, tour leadership, and more photographic and written documentation projects than I can begin to list here today. He has applied other critical skills to these efforts. Alarmingly well organized, he was one of the first people in our field to use a personal computer to transition smoothly from a world of index cards to a digital encyclopedia of topical and site-based information of unequalled completeness, which he continues to update all the time. He insists on communicating in language designed for the broadest audience, and his ability to summarize many complex topics has also made him an excellent tour guide. His tours over the last several decades have probably raised public consciousness about the port's historic resources as much as any other form of public education. Today, despite his lack of a professional academic or public agency position in industrial history, he is a widely-known authority among state and local officials and journalists who often turn to him. Not all officials or developers care for his knowledge or advocacy, but he has had an important hand in preserving resources such as the remains on Manhattan's west side of the High Line and of the New York Central's float bridges at 69th Street.

Over the last dozen years, Tom has published a stream of important articles and books on the port's harbor craft and its labyrinth of marine terminals. He was a founding member of the Rail-Marine Information Group, and through its amazing journal *Transfer* he has published the first systematic typologies and analyses of the region's float bridges and virtually all types of harbor

craft once used in intra-port freight transfers. Within the last five years, he has published two heavily-illustrated volumes on the operations of the port's railroads and their navies, based on his own knowledge, files, and years of contact with people who have been taking color pictures of this subject for almost a half century and were willing to let him use their photos. Despite the publisher's general lack of interest in text, Tom packed excellent summaries and captions into what are at present the best illustrated compendia on the subject. True to form, he hates making mistakes and has put a long list of corrections and addenda on the rail marine information group's website.

Tom is also well known here for his long service as a director of the Roebing Chapter and of the national SIA, as president of this chapter, and as organizer of what I think are seventeen of the symposia here at Drew.

Today, we are honoring him for embodying the IA approach to research, preservation, and documentation, which combines academic rigor, dirty-hands as well as library research, and unstoppable energy. His wife Susan sends her love, and her acknowledgement that Tom will likely spend his prize money on more books or maps.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### ***New LIC Book***

**P**lace in History and Furnace Press are pleased to announce the publication of *LIC in Context: An Unorthodox Guide to Long Island City*. The culmination of a 3-year, multi-faceted public history and public art project, the book explores 54 sites in NYC's most dynamic and misconstrued neighborhood. 72 full color pages, including original photographic work by Anthony Hamboussi and illustrations by Monte Antrim.

Books available at:

<http://www.placeinhistory.org/AboutUs.htm>

\$10 + shipping

Urban Center Books, 457 Madison Avenue (@51st St).

### ***Call for Papers***

**CONFERENCE ON NEW YORK HISTORY**

***Columbia University, Manhattan***

***June 1-3, 2006***

**T**he Conference on New York State History is an annual meeting of academic and public historians, librarians and archivists, educators, and publishers who come together to discuss topics and issues related to the people of New York State in historical perspective and to share information and ideas regarding historical



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research, programming, and the networking of resources and services. Ten to fifteen presentation sessions, workshops, and a keynote address permit more than fifty individuals to take part in the formal program.

Individual paper abstracts, panel proposals, workshop plans, and other program suggestions are invited. Presentations may consider any aspect of the history of New York State over the past 400 years. Diverse theoretical perspectives and innovative methodological approaches are welcomed. Papers on New York City-based topics are strongly encouraged. Special consideration is accorded first-time presenters, graduate students, and local government historians. Interested parties are encouraged to discuss proposals and any conference-related ideas with Field Horne, conference chair (e-mail preferred).

All proposals must be received by January 6, 2006 at 12:00 noon. A proposal should be a one-page description of each presentation – not the full manuscript – and must include the following information: paper and/or session titles, names, postal addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of all participants, and all equipment needs and scheduling requests. It should also briefly discuss sources, methodology, and argument. The Program Committee will meet to consider proposals in mid-January. Applicants will be notified immediately thereafter. All program participants must register for the conference.

Submit proposals to Field Horne, Conference on New York State History, Box 215, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866-0215, or e-mail [conference@nyhistory.net](mailto:conference@nyhistory.net). Horne may be reached by phone at 518-587-4962. It is strongly recommended that a hard copy be mailed. Those submitting proposals by e-mail close to the deadline should phone to verify receipt.

## CORRECTION

In the last issue of the newsletter in the report of the Harvey Cruise, our fellow guests from Connecticut were incorrectly referred to as members of the Suffolk County Historical Society. This should have read the Suffield Historical Society. We regret the error.

## MEMBER NEWS

Roebling member JOHN GOMEZ was awarded Honoree of the Year at Congregation Mount Sinai's annual dinner on Sunday, December 4, 2005 in Jersey City.

John, "a true pioneer in Jersey City landmark preservation," is the founder and past president of the Jersey City Landmarks Conservancy, a non-profit historic preservation organization. In 2004, Mr. Gomez initiated "Legends & Landmarks," a weekly history

column in the Jersey Journal. Born and raised in Jersey City, he teaches writing and literature to gifted middle school students in the Jersey City public school system.

## EAST RIVER PANEL REPORT

Mary Habstritt was among the presenters at *Protecting and Reusing our East River Industrial Heritage*, a panel discussion sponsored by the Municipal Art Society (MAS) on December 8th at the Urban Center in Manhattan. The program accompanied a small exhibit on historic industrial sites and their re-use potential on view through January 25, 2006.

Steven Evans, Assistant Director of Dia:Beacon described the desirability of the former Nabisco printing plant for a museum of large-scale works of art. The north light through the sawtooth skylights and big open interiors were particularly suited to the enormous sculptures in their collection. He also described the tax benefits of adding the building to the National Register of Historic Places (NR).

Frank Sanchis, Executive Vice President of MAS, showed images of ConEd's Waterside plant now threatened by development. He pointed out the beauty of the architectural details inside and out and criticized the State Historic Preservation Office for determining that it was not NR-eligible because some small architectural details had been removed over the years. He used the example of the Tate Modern in London to promote re-use of this East River landmark.

Mary followed with examples of other power plants that have been or could have been re-used: The Long Island City Power House, now partly demolished; the Centrale Montemartini in Rome, which displays sculpture in front of the old electrical generating equipment; and the PECO plant in Chester, PA, converted to office space. Other examples of re-using industrial structures included the Crowne Plaza hotel in the former Quaker Oats silos in Akron, OH and, closer to home, the Gair buildings and Watchtower building (built for Squibb in 1925) in Dumbo. She also noted the National Cold Storage plant as an example of early re-use. This 1912-15 refrigeration plant incorporated an 1876-79 warehouse and is slated to be demolished as part of Brooklyn Bridge Park. In contrast, the Merchants Refrigerating Co. and Manhattan Refrigerating Co. in Manhattan have both been re-used, as mini-storage and apartments respectively. The Ko-Rec-Type building in Greenpoint makes printer and typewriter ribbons in a former John Morrell Meatpacking plant dating from 1932. Last was Domino Sugar, part of the exhibit, and a

potential re-use site. She ended with an exhortation to save enough of our historic industrial structures to tell the story of New York as a manufacturing metropolis.

Ward Dennis, a preservationist with Higgins & Quasebarth and active in the Waterfront Preservation Alliance, a grassroots Greenpoint/Williamsburg group, concluded with a discussion of the Austin, Nichols & Co. Warehouse. First, he delivered the bad news that that very day, the New York City Council had voted to override Mayor Bloomberg's veto of its earlier vote to disapprove landmark designation for the building. The Landmarks Preservation Commission had designated the building on September 20th. [A more detailed

report will appear in the next RCSIA Newsletter.] He went on to describe the building's history in the context of the East River waterfront and why it is important.

### 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.

A downloadable chapter membership form and general information about the SIA are available at [www.siahq.org](http://www.siahq.org).

Design: Joe Macasek, MacGraphics

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### 2006

Jan. 29	Chapter Annual Meeting Madison NJ
Jun. 1-4	SIA National Conference St. Louis, MO

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