



SOCIETY FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHEOLOGY

NEWSLETTER

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THE STEEL

This article by Joseph E.B. Elliott (SIA) introduces his new book *The Steel: Photographs of the Bethlehem Steel Plant, 1989-1996* (Columbia College Chicago Pr., 2013, 90 pp., 60 duotones, \$60). Aware of the decline and imminent demise of many integrated steel mills in the U.S. and fascinated by their monumental architecture, machinery, and the culture of work, Joe photographed the mills in Bethlehem, Pa., from 1989 until final shutdown. Working with historian Lance Metz (SIA), he amassed more than 1,000 large-format photographs and hundreds of archival images and documents, in an effort to preserve a record of the development, workings, and human dimensions of an integrated steel plant typical of machine age America. The book features an introductory essay by Betsy Fahlman (SIA), who also writes and edits the IA in Art column for SIAN. The project took many years to come to fruition and was helped along the way by a SIA Industrial Heritage Preservation Grant of \$1,000.

By the time I moved to the Lehigh Valley to teach art and photography at Muhlenberg College in 1983, I had a well-established interest in industrial infrastructure, particularly

railroads and waterways. I had explored and photographed the decaying waterfront facilities of New York harbor while I was simultaneously studying artists and documentarians such as Walker Evans and Charles Sheeler. I was ready for a big project that would document the heavy industry that seemed to be slipping away before my eyes.

Seeing it for the first time in the early 1980s, the Bethlehem steel plant embodied for me the history of the modern age, and possessed the sublime beauty of the remains of an earlier civilization. In 1987, after several years of probing the Bethlehem plant from the outside (this work was discussed by Betsy Fahlman in IA, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1986)), I wrote to the company management, introducing myself as an artist who was interested in making photographs about monumentality, structure, and the patina of rusting metal. My letter of inquiry drew no response. At the time, company officials were too preoccupied with financial losses, layoffs, and environmental violations to consider the forays of an aesthete. It must have been difficult for them to imagine the faltering nexus of their empire as a cultural landmark.

In 1988, I learned that Lance Metz, a historian with the

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Joseph E.B. Elliott

Last Night at C Furnace, 1995.

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CALENDAR

2013

Jan. 9-12: Society for Historical Archaeology Annual Conference, Leicester, England. Info: www.sha.org.

Feb. 23: 26TH ANNUAL NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE ON INDUSTRIAL ARCHEOLOGY, CLARK UNIVERSITY, WORCESTER, MASS. Paper proposals requested. See article in this issue. Info: www.sia-web.org/chapters/nnecc/index.htm.

Mar. 4-5: Iron and Steel Preservation Conference, Lansing Community College, Lansing, Mich. See article in this issue. Info: www.historicbridgerestoration.com.

Mar. 7-9: Nineteenth Century Studies Assn. Annual Conference, Fresno, Calif. Theme: "Loco/Motion" on the history of transportation and travel. Info: www.nineteenthcenturystudiesassociation.org.

Mar. 21-23: Business History Conference Annual Meeting, Columbus, Ohio. Info: www.thebhc.org.

Apr. 10-14: Society of Architectural Historians Annual Conference, Buffalo, N.Y. Info: www.sah.org.

Apr. 17-20: National Council on Public History, Ottawa, Ont. Info: www.ncph.org.

May 30-June 2: SIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE, THE TWIN CITIES: ST. PAUL & MINNEAPOLIS, MINN. Paper and DVD proposals requested. See article in this issue. Info: www.sia-web.org.

June 5-8: Second National Covered Bridge Conference, Dayton, Ohio. Info: www.woodcenter.org.

June 5-8: Railroad Station Historical Society Annual Convention, Providence/Pawtucket, R.I. Info: Theodore Xakellis, xakellis@juno.com.

June 6-9: Mining History Assn. Annual Conference, Galena, Ill. Tours of the historic zinc and lead mining district. Info: www.mininghistoryassociation.org.

June 6-9: Railway & Locomotive Historical Society Annual Meeting, Madison, Wis. Info: www.rlhs.org.

Aug. 9-15: Assn. for Industrial Archaeology Annual Meeting, Dundee, Scotland. Info: www.industrial-archaeology.org.

Aug. 21-24: Chemistry in Material Culture, 9th Int'l Conference for the History of Chemistry, Uppsala, Sweden. Paper proposals requested. Deadline: Mar. 31, 2013. Info: www.9ichc.se.

Sept. 14-22: National Railway Historical Society, Annual Convention, Fairbanks and Anchorage, Alaska. Charter trains and tours. Info: www.nrhs.com/events.

Sept. 25-27: Big Stuff, Triennial Conference, Ottawa, Ont. Sponsored by the Canada Science & Technology Museum. Theme: "Saving Big Stuff in Tight Economic Times." Info: www.sciencetech.technomuses.ca (search Big Stuff).

Sept. 26-29: SIA FALL TOUR, ROCKFORD, ILL. Info: www.sia-web.org.

Oct. 9-12: Pioneer America Society: Assn. for the Preservation of Artifacts & Landscapes, Annual Conference, Mohawk Valley, N.Y. Info: www.pioneeramerica.org.