

# Moments in Time

SAUSALITO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2007

## Marinship Land Battles of the 1970s

### SCHOONMAKER — The Project That Never Got Built

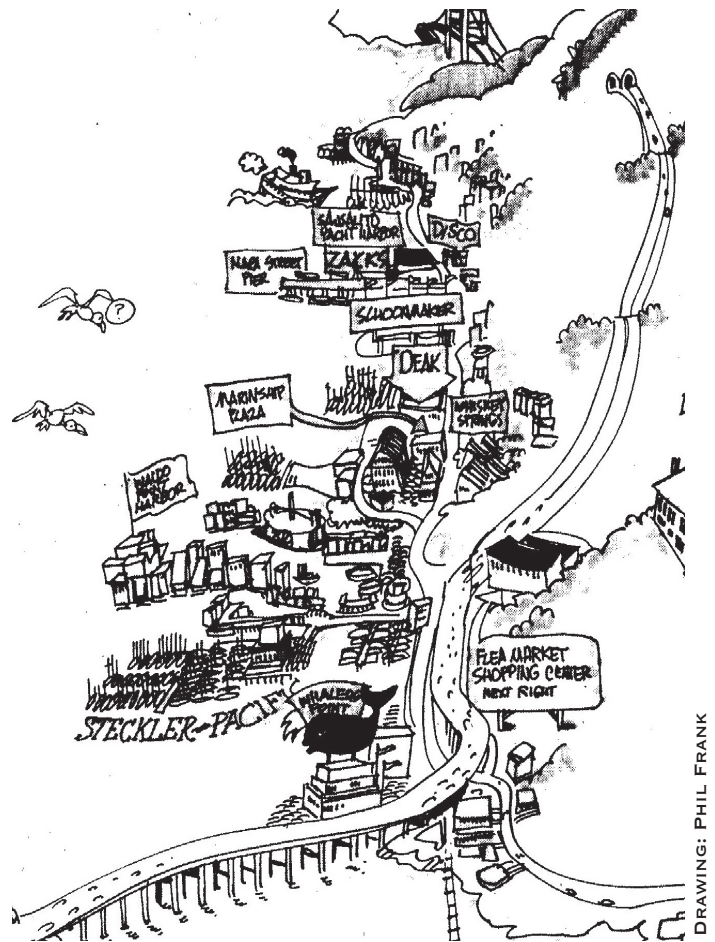
Early in the 1970s, Sausalito's northern waterfront, much of it still in limbo since the end of the Marinship era, was long overdue for reuse. The question was what kind. The former shipyard lands had been surplused in the late '40s to private interests, and most had utilized it in partial, unplanned, and underproductive ways. Some parcels, strewn with broken cement, weeds, and debris, lay largely fallow. The Sausalito General Plan of 1963 was, from today's environmentally sensitive perspective, remarkably permissive. Given these circumstances, the perfect storm was clearly brewing.

To enterprising entrepreneurs, approximately 100 acres of developable land on one of the most beautiful waterfronts in the world was ripe for something to happen. In the eyes of some Sausalitans, 25 years of stagnation and blight were happily coming to an end. To others, a long, blissful era of laissez-faire and benign neglect was about to vanish.

Of all the proposals flooding the planning offices of city hall, offering to stud the shoreline with offices, restaurants, marinas, hotels and condominiums, the \$38 million Schoonmaker Project—proposed for 37 acres of prime land and water bounded by Bridgeway, Napa Street, Spring Street and Richardson Bay—was the most dazzling.

It came into town with a bang in September of 1972, and ended with a whimper in late 1975. During those years, readers of Sausalito's weekly newspaper were regaled with its ups-and-downs: a succession of four development schemes, rejected one after another; an alleged Brown Act violation that landed the City Council in temporary hot water; a dramatic shift of architects from a respected partner in San Francisco's most prestigious firm to a brash, young newcomer; entanglement in the waterfront's general plan/zoning wars, just beginning to heat up at that moment; fierce resistance to the plan's residential, traffic-generating features, both from anti-development forces in the hills and from insurgents on the waterfront, ultimately leading to the demise of Bob's Boatyard and the Napa Street Pier.

In 1950, when New York-based A.G. Schoonmaker Company opened a west coast plant on a large surplused



This mid-'70s Phil Frank cartoon depicts what the Sausalito north-central waterfront, and the shoreline north to the Richardson Bay Bridge, would look like if all the development proposals filed with the City and County were built. Among those with the most potential impact, from south to north, were: Zack's—fishing village, flotel, schooner wharf and a facimile of a 19<sup>th</sup> c. railroad station; Schoonmaker—residential, recreation, restaurants, hotel, boatyard/harbor; Deak—six office buildings; Monterey-Marin—offices, club restaurant, handball court, two-screen theater; Waldo Point Harbor—upgraded and expanded houseboat harbor; Steckler-Pacific—shops, restaurants, offices, expanded Kappas Marina and Gates 6 and 6 1/2; Whaler's Point—12-story hotel and convention center.

parcel on the north-central waterfront, it was a thriving engineering firm, supplying diesel engine generators for major Bay Area projects. But by the early '70s, it had fallen on hard times. In 1971, it filed for bankruptcy and entered a deal with a Texas-based firm, O'Meara Chandler, which gave the

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Texans first option to buy the Schoonmaker property if its development application before the City won approval.

The first Schoonmaker application enjoyed an auspicious beginning. Designed by the internationally prize-winning firm of Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons, its lead architect was Donn Emmons, whose professional and environmental credentials were impeccable—and who was a longtime Sausalito resident to boot. Proposed in August of 1972, it was a fairly conventional waterfront enclave designed for the upscale market: almost 200 townhouses and condos, a 130-room hotel, the usual medley of shops, restaurants, and offices; yachting facilities and boatyard. Bowing to Sausalito sensibilities, 80% of the land and water was designated as open space.

But not everything went smoothly. At the Emmons home on Sausalito Boulevard in December 1972, things turned abruptly rocky when all five city council members attended an unofficial viewing of a project scale model. The Sausalito Citizens Council cried foul, calling the affair a Brown Act violation. An *Independent Journal* editorial weighed in, prompting an investigation by the Marin County District Attorney, who ultimately cleared everyone.

Signaling the community's increasing slow-growth sentiments, City Councilwoman Violeta Autumn, in a *MarinScope* interview, argued for a waterfront favorable to artisans, artists, and small maritime businesses. "Most of the developments proposed so far have attempted to force a foreign aesthetic on Sausalito," she said of Schoonmaker and other proposals crowding the City's docket, "rather than drawing their inspiration from the place itself." The first Schoonmaker Project

had been shot down by the Planning Commission, mainly on the grounds of its heavy dependence on residential development—a then-permitted waterfront use, but one toward which the Commission was showing mounting resistance.

But Schoonmaker was by no means dead. What followed was three years of endless hearings and angry controversy, beginning with an unsuccessful request for a rezoning, followed by a return to the drawing board for revisions which came to be known as Plan II. That proposal was just reeling from ten grueling weeks of inconclusive EIR review when, in March of 1974, Plan III arrived.

The lead architect was now Steve Siskind, of Environmental Systems International, which had become a partner in the Schoonmaker joint venture. Bold and visionary (many felt recklessly so), Siskind proposed a channel of water curving inland from the Clipper Boatyard and paralleling Bridgeway to the Napa Street lagoon, in effect creating an island. Siskind painted an opulent picture, designed to transform the northern waterfront: 13 indoor and outdoor tennis courts, two restaurants and a garden hotel with lanai units, a health club, three swimming pools, a 210-boat harbor, two yacht clubs, a 600-car garage, and a people-mover railway running to and from downtown, among other things. Residential units were cut to 100, and ultimately to 72. He promised net revenues to the city of \$500,000 per year (plus savings to an average \$47,000 Sausalito home of \$160 a year in property taxes), and new and improved versions of two beloved waterfront icons, Bob's Boatyard and the Napa Street Pier.

Through it all, the two architects' overarching

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Fritz Crackers, *MarinScope* cartoon by Phil Frank, March 29, 1977.

## DEAK: “WE HOPE TO IMPROVE YOUR WATERFRONT.”

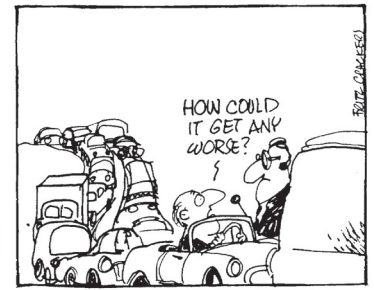
Nathan Jones, Vice President of the Deak Investment Corporation, had a clear idea of how to upgrade Sausalito’s waterfront in the early 1970s: build a six-building office park that would “make an aesthetic, cultural and economic contribution to the community.” In his view, the northern Sausalito waterfront badly needed commercial redevelopment. It was, he believed, “potentially some of the most beautiful land in the world and should be utilized for something other than an automobile graveyard.”

The parent conglomerate, Deak and Company, had purchased the Marinship waterfront acreage, located just north of present day Marinship Park, in 1947 at about the same time Donlon Arques bought his parcel at Gate 3. (According to waterfront lore, the City of Sausalito “turned down the federal government’s offer to sell all of Marinship for \$275,000.”) Deak President Nicholas Deak, head of the international banking and currency exchange giant that bore his name, summarized his motive for investing in Sausalito: “In my opinion, San Francisco does not exist without Sausalito. I especially enjoy your hilly sections and your waterfront, which we hope to improve.”

In the early 1970s, deciding finally to move on developing Deak’s Sausalito holdings, Nathan Jones, somewhat to the surprise of the city officials, asked them what they would like to have on their waterfront. In those days, the answer seemed simple: office space and a first-class inn. Deak and Jones, working with the December 17, 1963 General Plan which contained few restrictions, responded with an ambitious proposal that included a 200,000-square-foot office complex “arranged in a campus



DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FINDINGS THAT THIS OFFICE COMPLEX WILL HAVE NO GREAT EFFECT ON BRIDGEWAY TRAFFIC?



CARTOON: PHIL FRANK

plan around a courtyard.” It was comprised of six three-story office buildings “timber framed and redwood sheathed.” In addition, there were to be a 45-boat marina, a yacht club with pool, a small restaurant, tree-lined walks, a pedestrian walkway along the shoreline and a small waterfront park.

But Deak’s timing turned out to be problematical. The early part of the decade saw an onslaught of waterfront development proposals. The community began to pay attention, reflecting changes in people’s attitudes and values. General Plan and down-zoning amendments ensued. Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) restrictions came into play. Traffic and parking plans revealed problems with projects like Deak. Finally, Environmental Impact Reports (EIR) were added to the mix. Sausalito’s Community Appearances Advisory Board (CAAB) stepped forward and, although limited by its by-laws from imposing conditions on any project, wielded considerable power in its role of protecting the town from development not in conformity with its village identity.

Both Deak and Jones were sophisticated professionals with pragmatic reasons for trying to meet these requirements. Their intent was to produce “prime office space with rents equal to the highest levels in San Francisco.” And, in fact, they seemed to conform to—even came in under—all waterfront size/height restrictions and included more landscaping than required. “According to the density code,” Jones declared in a MarinScope interview, “we could have covered 50%

of the land when in actuality we have covered only 18%.”

But despite their dogged persistence and unanimous city council approval for a “conditional go-ahead” won in March 1972, the Deak Office Park over time was drastically reduced. Later, Councilwoman Violeta Autumn personally paced off the building site and proved that Deak claimed allowable dry-land square footage that was actually on off-limits tidelands. Consequently, one of the six buildings would require BCDC approval. Autumn also successfully challenged the information in the EIR. The fatal blow to the six-building concept, however, related to the increased cars it was projected to bring to the waterfront. Where were they going to park? How were they going to move on an inadequate road system?

Deak finally won approval for the two buildings (built in 1983-84) that occupy this site today, and a third building was granted “conditional approval” pending major improvements to traffic flow through the area. But an ambitious Marinship Way realignment, over which city planners labored for years and which was added to the General Plan, never materialized. One of the buildings that got built housed a major software firm, Autodesk, during the dot.com expansion, but lost it to San Rafael because the company outgrew the available space.

To that degree perhaps Nicolas Deak’s goal of “rents equal to the highest levels in San Francisco” was temporarily realized. But the two structures currently occupying Deak’s site are clearly a far cry from the half-dozen once envisioned.

— Margaret Badger

## Arques' Choice: Craftsmanship, Artistry and Lifestyle

The Arques family boatyard business were a presence in Sausalito beginning in 1913 when Camillo Arques leased the property at the foot of Napa Street from the Oceanic Boatyard Co. to build barges for the Sacramento River. The Crichton-Arques yard operated there until 1918. In 1915, following in his father's footsteps, Donlon Arques purchased blocks 200 and 201 at the foot of Johnson Street, establishing the Johnson Street Boatyard where he worked until selling/trading it in 1952.

It was not until 1947, when the federal government was selling off lands formerly occupied by the Marinship Yard, that Arques bought the 22.8 acres of waterfront that his name is associated with today. It consisted of three skidways and one slipway and was considered essentially worthless. "A big mess of discarded shipbuilding debris—you couldn't give it

away," was the way many considered it at the time. For Arques, however, who had worked at Marinship during the war and who loved boats, tools and machinery—and had an incredible eye for promising real estate—it was a dream property.

It was this parcel of Arques land that ended up in the middle of Sausalito's development battles of the 1970s. Waldo Point Harbor, the Arques holding to the north which figured so prominently in the so-called "houseboat wars" of that era, was beyond the city limits and therefore the County of Marin's problem, not Sausalito's.

Arques had a unique philosophy of land stewardship, as elaborated on in the adjacent interview with Scott Diamond. Essentially, because he'd shrewdly chosen land of great potential, rather than developing it, he let it sit and increase in value over time. He enjoyed keep-

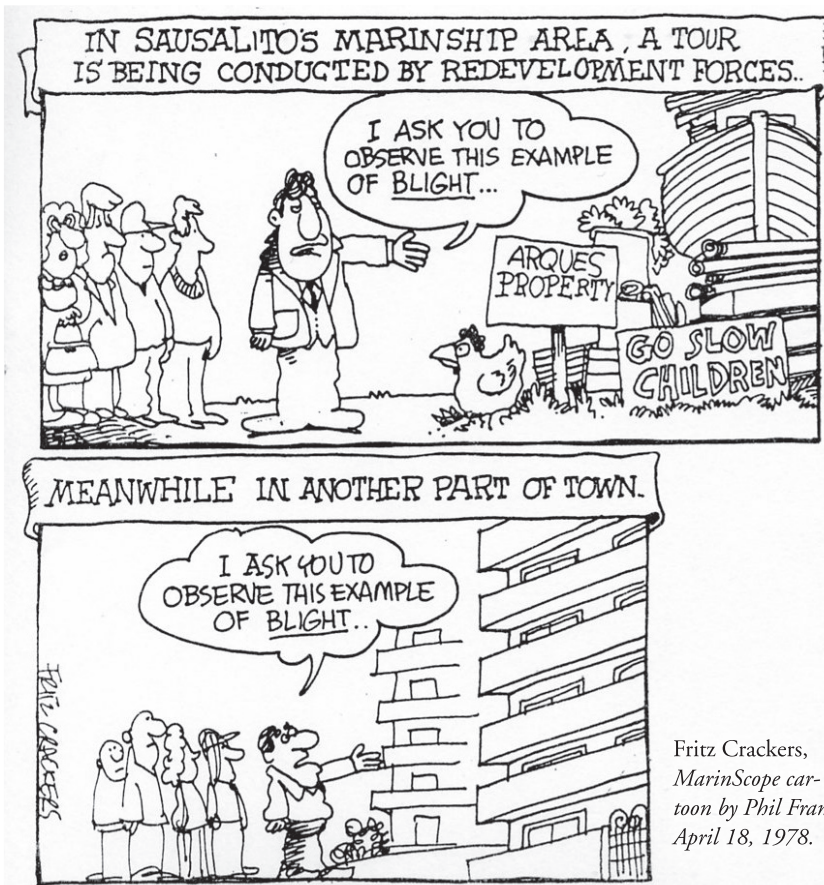
ing maintenance costs low and allowing the land to support the lifestyles of boat lovers, artists and craftsmen. Of course, this stance was in direct conflict with the aspirations of those promoting nearby Schoonmacker and Deak, who sought to enhance their property value through maximum development.

The *MarinScope* of April 18, 1978, described Gate 3 as "an unrepentant vestige of the funky post-World War II Marinship, for years a haven for junk collectors, artisans, craftsmen, counterculturists, small marine industries and low key entrepreneurs of all kinds.... The community includes people who do marine and general engine rebuilding, boatbuilding, houseboat construction, cabinet work, prefabricated structures, plumbing and fabricated metal equipment sales, repair and manufacturing."

A waterfront observer of that time who valued Arques' unique mix of passivity and creativity concluded, "If it hadn't been for Arques' control of three key properties between Waldo Point and Johnson Street and his refusal to clean up his act or go for big profits via land deals with developers attempting to assemble parcels for large projects, the Sausalito waterfront would long ago have become Miami Beach."

Before he died in 1993, Donlon Arques had laid the groundwork for the Arques School of Traditional Boat Building, which opened in 1996 in order to further the Arques Trust Foundation's mission of preserving hands-on craftsmanship and artistry on the waterfront. It is operating today at the Spaulding Boat Center under the direction of Bob Darr, carrying on the skills and values of wooden boat building into the 21st century. The course of development on the Arques Marinship property, now under new ownership, is still to be decided.

—Margaret Badger



Fritz Crackers,  
*MarinScope* cartoon by Phil Frank,  
April 18, 1978.

# SAUSALITO VOICES

## Scott Diamond Remembers Donlon Arques, Interview with Margaret Badger, June 2007

He was already a myth when I met him.

A lot of people think he inherited his money. He did inherit some, but that was later. He actually was a self-made man and took the money he had and invested it. He was a very good businessman. He had a goal that when he made a certain amount he was going to retire, but he made it so early in life—before 30—he said, “Hey, I was too young to retire.” He was addicted to the game [of making money from property] and so good at it—like a chess master—the money just came to him.

Don saw the American work ethic from a very early point. His father built things on the Embarcadero [in San Francisco] so his childhood environment included successful businessmen who made and lost fortunes.

Don understood psychology pretty well. When I was 20 he hired me to paint a rusty building called the Cyanide Shed that he brought down from a mine site in the Sierras. This was not an OSHA-approved thing. We just had a manila rope and a hook. I caught myself on one side and kept myself from falling. He spurred me on: ‘Oh, a good painter uses a gallon of paint an hour.’ I was struggling to meet his expectations of getting a gallon an hour on the roof while hanging from a rope!

Don had a mind like a steel trap. He was brilliant and he didn’t forget much.

[One incident Don Arques didn’t forget] was with the City of Sausalito in



PHOTO: MARGARET BADGER

*Scott Diamond*

1948-49. He had this old Plymouth that was an extra car that he just left parked at the shipyard gate and it was in front of a fire hydrant. He ignored the first ticket, but the motorcycle cop kept plastering it with more. [Eventually the city] hauled the Plymouth and impounded it. Don turned around and sued the city for illegally taking his property.

After a couple of years, the Plymouth case was finally won by Arques because the fire hydrant was his. He had installed it in the 1930s with a permit from the railroad, but the police department did not know that. Arques was a Basque, and as so many Basques, he didn’t like the government telling him what to do. That was a focal turning point for Don’s relationship to the city. After that, Don pretty much was delighted to annoy the city or the county.

Annie Hallett coined the term ‘benign neglect’ to describe Arques’ Sausalito property management style. He knew his property was skyrocketing in value... so why pour money into it if it’s making money anyway? He was not going to develop it and pay more taxes. He was going to sell it.

I viewed [benign neglect] as anarchy.

We lived on the property with no government control by the county or by Don himself. He did not monitor what was going on. You came and you created your own world, whether it was utopia or skid row. You could build a very artistic, beautiful houseboat and no one came by and said ‘Where’s the rent? Why you doing this? Where’s the permits?’ Or you could build yourself a tarpaper shack. . . . Don’s Pelican Harbor housed artists and sculptors who came to this basically free living situation and this is why he was probably in so much trouble with the city. Free-thinking people. Arques’ property was in the city’s face on the edge of downtown Sausalito.

Don and I had a similar view of politics. How government was and wasn’t working for the people and what we would like to see. We also both loved boats—were boat addicts—and we both had a love of machinery. Don was a far better mechanic [than I] and had the mind of an engineer. He really knew hands-on about a variety of machinery, having had to run all kinds of shipyards. He had a ranch as well as boat yards and both had wrench trucks and old machines in the front yard that he was never going to get rid of. We loved the old machinery.

Here he was, this multi-millionaire who obviously owned some of the most prime real estate in the world. He was totally unassuming. He just about always dressed like a longshoreman. He had black frisco jeans on, a gray-striped Ben Davis work shirt; he had a corncob pipe and some cheap tobacco in his pocket. He would most likely be tuning the carburetor on his 1950 Dodge flat bed or just rummaging around in his collection of stuff.

(Continued from page 2)

concept remained the same. In a *MarinScope* interview, Donn Emmons rejected Councilwoman Autumn's goal of a "working waterfront," arguing instead for a graceful convergence of land and water reminiscent of traditional European waterfront cities. "Places like Copenhagen, Amsterdam, and Paris long predated the Industrial Revolution. So when it came, it didn't change them much," he pointed out. "They kept their cafes, shops, homes and promenades. But American waterfronts didn't have time to retain their cultural heritage. The revolution came too soon, and it preempted the water's edge for factories." A latter-day variation of that occurred on the Sausalito waterfront, he implied, and now should be corrected.

In mid-1973, there were three still-active Schoonmaker Projects before the City—yet none had yet come before the City Council. Approval of the Plan II EIR was stalled, and Plan III looked to be in trouble. Traffic generation on Bridgeway had become a major issue, and a traffic study, sure to be damning, was underway. By now, Ted Schoonmaker, in charge of the company's west coast operation, was running ads in the *MarinScope* accusing critics of foul play and waging a rear-guard action against anchor-outs camping on Schoonmaker Beach (which, he pointed out, was not a product of nature, as they claimed, but an artificial stretch of landfill his company had hauled over from Angel Island). They, in turn, were writing letters to the editor and flooding City Hall with reams of esoteric impact data—everything from the plight of the Marinship fishing industry to the number of times snowy egrets, mud hens, grebes, loons and harbor seals had been sighted along the Schoonmaker shoreline in recent years.

In November, 1974, the Planning Commission dealt Plan III its long-expected death blow, citing massive scale, excessive traffic generation, nonconformance to the General Plan, and a potential 10,000 Schoonmaker-related visitors a day coming to Sausalito in high season. The following spring, the City Council confirmed, on appeal, the Commission's action.

But before killing Plan III, the Commissioners had agreed to look at a much diminished Plan IV, called the Schoonmaker Marina, which promised to gut the proposal of tourist-attracting elements, retain the resident-serving features, and save versions of Bob's Boatyard and the Napa Street Pier, both located within the Schoonmaker property.

The improvement and expansion of these aging facilities, once a bustling center of boat-building and fishing activity, but since allowed to fall into disrepair and disuse, had been purchased by O'Meara Chandler in early 1974. And for a period, Siskind offered the possibility of their restoration as an



PHOTO: SHS COLLECTION

*Destruction of Bob's Boatyard*

enticement to win approval of his larger plans. But the Marina proposal, like its predecessors, died in late 1975, and the Schoonmaker saga appeared to be over.

With one exception. In the process, Bob's Boatyard had become a *cause celebre*. By mid-1974, a discouraged and bitter Siskind, claiming the City had delayed him too long, had reneged on his restoration plans and applied to demolish the derelict boatyard and pier, citing liability issues. An outraged community claimed these structures were vital to Sausalito's hopes for a revived fishing industry. A years-long struggle by O'Meara Chandler and its successors to demolish was accompanied by several City moves, first to approve and then to resist demolition, a Siskind lawsuit, and a court order forbidding city officials to interfere. The boatyard was torn down in a pre-dawn action on August 4, 1980, precipitating months of waterfront wakes and countywide recriminations.

The Napa Street Pier—padlocked, for a time patrolled by armed guards, often beset by open warfare—was, in April, 1976, discovered to be, to the City's surprise, municipal property. The pier's inshore portion outlasted the boatyard by almost a decade. In 1987, the maritime community, long tied up there, was able to relocate to nearby Gallilee Harbor.

The Schoonmaker property was sold in May, 1978 to a Mill Valley investment group called Schoonmaker Point. At the end of the decade, the property's fate was still in transition.

One thing, however, is certain. Today the quiet uses at the former Schoonmaker property, now housing offices and artists studios, in addition to the waterfront marina and beach, certainly belie its colorful past.

— Doris Berdhal

# SAUSALITO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

## SAVE THESE DATES!

### *Terrific Up-Coming Events*

#### **Local Marin Historian: Barry Spitz**

July 26, 2007, 7:00 PM

Author of five local history books, Barry Spitz, will share ten of the most significant of the 160 landmark days chronicled in his book *Marin: A History*. This is a don't-miss event for all knowledgeable and less-than-knowledgeable history buffs! Be sure to join us for an exciting program of local history spanning 428 years! (City Council Chambers, City Hall)

#### **SHS Annual Fund Raiser Spinnaker Restaurant**

September 20, 2007

This unique program will feature two of the finest Hispanicists active in early California studies, Rose Marie Beebee and Robert M. Semnkewicz who teach Spanish and History, respectively, at Santa Clara University. They will share the stories of thirteen women's first hand accounts from the time of the Spanish/Mexican period of California history as recorded in their recent book *Testimonios: Early California through the Eyes of Women, 1815-1848*. Watch for further details later in the summer!

### *Terrific Past Events*

#### **Exhibit Opening Celebration**

April 12, 2007

An enthusiastic crowd attended the opening of the Holman Collection exhibit of Marinship World War II photographs. The exhibit has received on-going interest and will remain on display through the summer during our normal open hours Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10-2.

#### **Archival Seminar**

April 21, 2007

The SHS Board participated in a two-hour seminar on archiving and conservation methods with California Historical Society archivist Allison Moore. She updated us both on CHS

procedures with researchers and on the dos and don'ts of storing and organizing archival material.

#### **Family Archives Public Forum**

May 24, 2007

Allison Moore and Paula Freedman, specializing in printed documents and photographs respectively, presented a program to a near-full house at the Sausalito City Council Chambers on the topic of Family Archives and Preservation. At both occasions, the point was emphatically made that digitizing photographs is a useful way of sharing images, but should not be mistaken as an archival storage method. Don't throw out those family albums!

### *Donation*

Soon after the opening of the Holman Marinship exhibit, **Claudia Yow** of Mill Valley walked into SHS with two donations related to Marinship. One was a leather welding jacket and the other her father **Bruce Shem's** logbook with notes about his work there from 1942-45. This unique donation was immediately incorporated into the exhibit display. Thank you Claudia Yow.

#### **Membership and Volunteers KEEP US GOING!**

If you would like to join and/or volunteer, please: call (289-4117) and leave your name and address with your message; email to [info@sausalitohistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@sausalitohistoricalsociety.org), or, write us at P.O. Box 352, Sausalito 94966.



Curator of the Holman exhibit, Margaret Badger, was assisted by Phil Frank and John Pullin in designing and annotating the show.

PHOTO: ALICE MERRILL

# SAUSALITO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

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## DEDICATION of the PHIL FRANK HISTORY RESEARCH ROOM

### *Discovering Sharing and Recording Our Rich Cultural Heritage*

On the balmy, solstice evening of June 21, friends and admirers of Phil Frank—beloved cartoonist and local historian—gathered outside to celebrate the dedication of the Phil Frank History Research Room at the Sausalito Civic Center. These photographs attempt to capture the spirited presentations and the fully engaged crowd.



*Two presidents of SHS chatting before the dedication, DJ Puffert and Evert Heyneman.*



*"Hymn to Him." A musical rendering of fun and affection for Phil Frank by Ann and Peter Arnott.*



*"I Bought the Ice House for A Dollar" and other amazing Phil feats as recalled by Michael Rex.*



*"How I Broke my Foot" and additional houseboat-related tales by Robin Sweeny.*



*"The Curse of the Broken Slide Projector" or behind the scenes before a Phil presentation, recounted by Chris Gallagher.*



*"Phil Frank—Sausalito's Favorite Historian." DJ Puffert presents the plaque for the dedication of the History Research Room.*



## *Guests Enjoyed the Festivities*



*Jeanne Fidler brings flair to the event with her historic attire.*



*Phil's friends and admirers listen with rapt attention to the program on the patio at City Hall.*



*SHS Board member Kenn Roberts and wife Anna in the history research room after the dedication.*



*Julie Warren, Alan and Carol Hayes and Wood Lockbart, SHS Board member and Accessions Chair, watch one of the TV monitors showing Phil's video histories.*



*Alice Merrill signs the guest book to be presented to Phil.*

