

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
 INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

 SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
 TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS
1 NAME

HISTORIC Aquatic Park Historic District

AND/OR COMMON
Aquatic Park**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER Foot of Hyde Street, Polk Street, and Van Ness Avenue

CITY, TOWN

San Francisco

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Fifth

STATE

California

CDDE

06

COUNTY

San Francisco

CODE

075

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	N/A AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
N/A BUILDING(S)	N/A PRIVATE	N/A UNOCCUPIED	N/A COMMERCIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
N/A STRUCTURE	N/A BDTH	N/A WORK IN PROGRESS	N/A EDUCATIONAL N/A PRIVATE RESIDENCE
N/A SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	N/A ENTERTAINMENT N/A RELIGIOUS
N/A OBJECT	N/A IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT N/A SCIENTIFIC
	N/A BEING CONSIDERED	N/A YES: UNRESTRICTED	N/A INDUSTRIAL N/A TRANSPORTATION
		N/A NO	N/A MILITARY N/A OTHER

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable) National Park Service, Western Regional Office

STREET & NUMBER
450 Golden Gate Avenue, Box 36063

CITY, TOWN

San Francisco

VICINITY OF

STATE

California 94102

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Property Division, National Park Service, Western RegionSTREET & NUMBER
450 Golden Gate Avenue, Box 36063

CITY, TOWN

San Francisco

STATE

California 94102

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE List of Classified Structures

DATE

1976 Updated to 1982

 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

United States National Park Service, Western Region

CITY, TOWN

450 Golden Gate Avenue, Box 36063
San Francisco

STATE

California 94102

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
N/A EXCELLENT	N/ADETERIORATED	N/A UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
X GOOD	N/ARUINS	X ALTERED	N/AMOVED DATE N/A
N/A FAIR	N/A UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

San Francisco's Aquatic Park, a recreational complex on the waterfront of San Francisco Bay, is on the site of Black Point Cove, a natural landmark that has since been partially filled. Landfill and dumping of debris associated with industrial activity at the site in the 19th and early 20th centuries were responsible for the partial filling of the cove.

Concerned citizens began to advocate the development of the Black Point Cove area as a recreational facility early in the 20th century. Development, however did not occur until the 1930s, when workers with the 1933-34 Works Progress Administration constructed a new beach, a bathhouse, restroom, concession stand, stadia, and two speaker towers. All of these structures exist with few modifications. The historic scene of Aquatic Park is basically unchanged from its appearance in 1939 when it was completed. The only two exceptions are the addition of a wooden pier and building built in the 1940s and a Bocce Ball Court, built in the 1950s.

The enclosed site map delineates the various structures and their relationship to one another.

Bathhouse (Maritime Museum Building)

The bathhouse is an oval-shaped, four-story reinforced concrete building designed in the "Streamlined Moderne" Style of architecture. It incorporates nautical lines and represents a ship in abstract form. The stories of the building step inward to form decks. According to the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which designed and constructed the building, it is "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."¹

The building is flanked by large concrete stadia with seating for spectators. Intended to seat "many thousands who desire to watch athletic events, races and the large crowd at play..."² in the lagoon, the stadia today are the setting for outdoor music concerts and resting tourists. The stadia have rooms and spaces under them; the easternmost stadium houses the original hospital and first aid station for Aquatic Park. These rooms are now the Aquatic Park Lifeguard Station.

The building is entered through the doors on the south facade of the second floor which faces the foot of Polk Street. Access is also possible through doors on the north facade of the first floor, which faces San Francisco Bay. The building is built into a natural slope of the land; the south facade of the first floor is below the level of Polk Street.

The building was historically painted white; this historic color scheme is still used. The flat roofs were red tile; this is now covered with a grey membrane. The building is trimmed with various spotlights and vents which are in the shape of ships' funnels. These features are original. The roof of the fourth floor (the bridge of the "ship") is topped with the original flagstaff. The flagstaff lacks a metal crosspiece. Access to the various roof levels is through the interior of the building.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

< '3 '7

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	__ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
__1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
__1900	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

San Francisco's Aquatic Park, developed between 1936 and 1939, was built as one of California's largest Works Progress Administration construction projects. Aquatic Park exhibits a high level of integrity and is of National Significance in the areas of Architecture and Community Planning. Constructed in the architectural style known as the "streamlined moderne," Aquatic Park is significant because it is one of the major examples of the use of a nautical metaphor in the streamlined style in the United States.¹ In addition to the central building in the complex, the bathhouse, which was designed to resemble a luxury liner with porthole windows, rounded ends, set-back upper stories, and ship rails (in the style of streamlined ocean liners such as Normandie and Nieuw Amsterdam) Aquatic Park exhibits a harmonious use of the style in all of its aspects, which include auxiliary structures, a curving pier and seawall, landscaped grounds, bleachers, and numerous artworks. Of popular significance are the artworks in the bathhouse, which were designed and executed by regionally important artists. The artworks are significant because of their continuation of the nautical, maritime, and marine motifs of the building and surrounding structures and grounds.² Aquatic Park is also significant since there are other examples of exemplary streamlined moderne architecture, but in most cases these structures are single buildings rather than the extensive complex of Aquatic Park's structures, all of which blend into a major monument to the style in all of its aspects of curvilinear and streamlined form while retaining a unique and pervasive nautical motif.

Aquatic Park is also of National Significance in the area of Community Planning due to its ties with Nationally acclaimed urban planners and landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Daniel Hudson Burnham. Both men prepared plans for the City and County of San Francisco which included detailed recommendations for the preservation of the aquatic park site for public use and recreation and it was largely the recommendations of Olmsted and Burnham (respectively given in 1866 and 1905) which spurred a public drive to set aside the land for recreational use. The efforts, which culminated in the 1920s when the land was acquired for public use, made possible the construction of the significant WPA complex in the next decade. The park lands, therefore, are significant inasmuch as they are among the principal monuments to the San Francisco planning efforts of Olmsted and Burnham.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Donald J. Bush, The Streamlined Decade (New York: George Braziller, 1975).

² Discussion with Paul J. Karlstrom, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, January 16, 1984

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"Aquatic Park" Election materials. Manuscript material in the Collection of the Society of California Pioneers, San Francisco.

Burnham, Daniel Hudson, Report on a Plan for San Francisco...Presented to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors.... (San Francisco: Sunset Press, 1905), p. 146.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A | 10 | 55,122,5 | 4,18,47,9,0

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B | 10 | 55,138,0 | 4,18,47,8,0

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C | 0 | 55,146,0 | 4,18,46,6,0

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

D | 10 | 55,145,5 | 4,18,44,3,0

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Commencing at the northwest corner of Hyde and Beach Streets and running north along the western edge of Hyde Street to the northwest corner of Hyde and Jefferson Streets, thence running west along the northern edge of Jefferson Street to the foot of Jefferson Street some three hundred yards distant, then running across Black Point Cove due north to the end of Municipal Pier, thence

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE James P. Delgado, Historian

ORGANIZATION

National Park Service

DATE

February 1, 1984

STREET & NUMBER

Golden Gate National Recreation Area
Bldg. 201, Fort Mason

TELEPHONE

(415) 556-9504

CITY OR TOWN

San Francisco

STATE

California 94123

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES ___ NO ___ NONE ___

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is ___ National ___ State ___ Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Windows are round and are shaped like the portholes of a ship. They are set into the concrete with metal frames. Typically a rectangular sash which pivots is centered in the circle. There are six long narrow rectangular windows on the south facade of the second floor. Most of the glass is reinforced with "chicken wire." Picture windows dominate the wall space in the two circular rooms on the second floor.

The main entrance is sheltered by a small marquee. In historic times, a canvas awning extended from the marquee to the sidewalk, but this was removed after 1941. The doors are entered from a large platform and are framed with intricately carved green slate rendered by WPA artist Sargent Johnson. To the left and right of the entrance are two fountains, which no longer function and were built with green slate with multi-colored tile bottoms. In front of the platform is a multi-colored terrazzo sidewalk which has cracked and settled.

The doors of the building are metal frames with glass panels. The handles are brass (brass plated) and are shaped like a partial ship's wheels. All of these doors are original and are in situ with the exception of the door on the southeast corner of the building, which leads into the San Francisco Senior Center. This door was removed several years ago and a new wider door was installed to permit handicapped access. The original door is in storage.

The building exterior has not been altered except for two minor signs from the Maritime Museum. The first is a wood, three-dimensional sign designed to appear as the stern of a small wooden sailing craft. This is bolted to the exterior and can be easily removed. On the east facade of the second floor, above the windows, is the painted legend "San Francisco Maritime Museum."

The third floor sports four small round windows on the south facade, with picture windows and two doors on the north facade. The doors permit access to the roof of the second floor. A small glass block addition to the east facade, which is original, has small square panes of thick glass.

The fourth floor has no windows on the south facade but does have picture windows on the north, east, and west facades. Four doors, two on the west facade, side by side, and two on the east facade, side by side, open on to the third floor roof. There is no access to the fourth floor roof except by ladder.

The interior of the bathhouse features many original art works done by various artists under the auspices of the WPA. The interior design for the building was supervised by artist Hilaire Hiler, and was rendered by Hiler and artists Sargent Johnson, John Glut, Richard Ayer, and Beniamino Bufano.

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Main Lounge (Second Floor)

The decoration of the main lounge begins with the terrazzo floor, which consists of "varied colors executed in a variety of marbles which are all of American origin. Certain portions of it have been embellished by the addition of crushed abalone shells to the aggregate, particularly to the baseboard which leads to the wainscot...."³ The wainscot is Tennessee pink marble and Royal Jersey green marble. The wainscot is undamaged but the terrazzo floor is cracked. It is not known if the cracks impair the structural integrity of the floor.

Above the wainscot are a series of murals painted by Hilaire Hiler. According to Hiler,

"the general color scheme of the room, which is an off-complimentary harmony of shades of red and green, is relieved in these panels (the murals) by a more intricate and extended relation of another harmony based on blue-green and orange. The form-design of these paintings is a flowing arabesque based on the ocean wave form and variations of it. This is tied in with the architecture by a use of the right angle through the possibility of introducing architectural motifs into the paintings themselves by employing the legend of the lost Pacific continent.³ With this motif a very considerable and interesting, if somewhat involved symbolism is natural and possible. It is however, kept in a secondary role as the murals are neither primarily representational or symbolic, but decorative."⁴

Various representations of sea life, notably fish, squid and shells, abound in the murals. On the west wall there is a representation of the ribs, keel and anchor of a sunken vessel intertwined with rope. On the north wall, opposite the rear doors and near the stairs providing access to the third floor, and two figures which represent Polynesian sea gods. According to Hiler, the "material technique of these murals is a wax-emulsion variation of the Gambier-Parry spirit fresco process...."⁵ The murals are in good shape, if somewhat faded. Inside recesses for six rectangular windows on the south wall, the murals have been damaged by either sunlight or water and are peeling away from the walls.

The chrome and glass light fixtures, designed by artist John Glut, are original and have not been modified.

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Portico (Rear Porch-Second Floor)

The portico is on the second floor and is reached from the main lounge by doors on the north wall or through the former Restaurant (now the Senior Center) at this level on the east side of the building. The portico is closed on three sides by the walls of the building but opens to the north. Tubular steel railings are set into the opening. Stairways on the east and west ends of the portico lead to the grand concession on the first floor.

The portico walls, as originally designed, were to have been finished with tile mosaics designed by Sargent Johnson. These tile mosaics were to feature maritime motifs. They were never finished and only portions of the mosaics cover the walls. The unfinished portions sport only the concrete setting bed for the tile which has been painted green. There are two statues here, one a red seal and the other a black frog both of which were carved by Beniamino Bufano.

The north wall of the second floor is pierced by two doors, one to the east of the stairway to the first floor, the other to the west. The door to the west leads into the men's room, which has no art decoration. It has a tiled antechamber after which is the main restroom. The restroom fixtures appear to be original. The door to the east leads into the kitchen of the restaurant which will be discussed later.

The only alteration to the portico is the addition of an elevator to the first floor, which was added around 1960. The elevator is to the east of the door into the kitchen and was designed to be harmonious with the architectural scheme of the building. It was designed by George Applegarth. The new wall built for the elevator shaft has a wainscot that matches the original and the elevator appears to be an original feature.

Restaurant (San Francisco Senior Center)

In a circular room to the east of the portico, the former restaurant today serves as the cafeteria-meeting room for the San Francisco Senior Center. The addition of the new exterior access door has already been discussed. The original color scheme of the room was a monasterial blue "delicately shaded from a light tint near the ceiling to a deeper hue as it nears the floor and dado." The walls have been repainted and are now white. The walls also featured a frieze of removable wooden plaques representing "the Yacht Club flags of the Pacific Coast." which have been removed and are in storage. The walls were also decorated with nautical designs in the plaster that were created by imbedding real rope. This feature is still intact.

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The floor in the restaurant is a multi-colored terrazzo floor of an abstract design. This floor is intact and unchanged. The kitchen portion of the restaurant has been remodeled for use by the San Francisco Senior Center and little resembles the former kitchen.

Ladies Lounge (Steamship Room)

Opposite the restaurant, to the west of the portico is the ladies lounge, another circular room. The decorative features are intact and were designed by Hilaire Hiler who described the room as being

"...a color circle covering the entire ceiling. A moving lighting fixture containing lights in the color of the Physical Primaries makes it possible to give striking demonstrations on the relationship of color and light. Charts showing the psycholo-ical Pigment Primaries, and the Solar Spectrum, etc., adorn the walls and make the room a veritable full size color scheme of the field of color in outline, which its designer, Hilaire Hiler, calls a 'Prismatorium' functioning in relation to the field of color much as a Planetarium does for the heavens. These considerations in no way interfere with the function of the room as mentioned above, as the fondness of the Fair Sex for colors is too well known to merit discussion."⁷

The light fixture, which evidently revolved, no longer operates, but it can be assumed that if the light were repaired the "prismatorium" effect could be restored.

Banquet Room (Third Floor)

The two stairways to the east and west end of the Main Lounge lead up into the former Banquet Room, which is now used for exhibit display. The men's restroom, which is at the east end of the building, is used as the office for the Maritime Museum Librarian; the women's restroom, on the west end of the building, is not in use as a restroom, it is a storage facility for photographic negatives.

The Banquet Room was originally an open area with two square concrete columns in the center of the room. Next to the two restrooms, and immediately between them, is the stairway that leads up to the fourth floor. In March 1976, two partitions were installed opposite of the men's restroom, creating an exhibit bay for the San Francisco Maritime Museum. The work was done in conjunction with a major redesign of the third floor displays.

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This remodeling involved the covering over of some of the original art work by Richard Ayer, mainly abstract bas-reliefs. "The relief work is carried out in different materials, sugar pine, gumwood, plywood veneer panels, Masonite Prestwood, metals, photo murals and plaster...the motifs of the designs are marine-nautical in character,"⁸ Richard Ayer's artwork was partially painted and partially covered by a new drywall, which is separated from the original by 3-inch steel beams. The drywalls were mounted to the original wall of the men's room in 1976. During this process the artwork in that corner of the wall, consisting of a porthole design, imitation rivet heads and the artist Richard Ayer's signature with the date 1939, was painted over with white paint. The bas-relief on other walls of this room have been partially damaged and painted over with the exception of the west wall, the wall facing the west stairway, and the one remaining visible column.

The floor is terrazzo designed to follow the lines of a shoal chart of the surrounding San Francisco Bay region. This floor was partially obscured and approximately 40% was covered in 1976 when a carpet was glued to the floor. The original light fixtures, which are chrome and glass are evident.

Pantry (Library)

The pantry is a small glass block room across from the men's room on the third floor, and is part of the west facade of the third floor. The room was panelled with black walnut by the San Francisco Maritime Museum in the 1950s. The original walls, as well as the original dumbwaiter, which runs to the kitchen below, are intact behind the panelling. This room is now in use as the Museum Library.

Radio Room (Fourth Floor-Museum Offices)

From the third floor Banquet Room, a double stairway surrounds a storage closet and ascends to the fourth floor, where the former Radio Room, which was apparently never operated as such, is located. This room is the smallest in the building, and is used as the Museum Office. There are two doors on either side of the room opening onto the roof of the third floor. This room is decorated in semi-abstract design on the ceiling, which has been painted over, perhaps recently. Above the door into the room is a green ceramic lintel made by Sargent Johnson. The piece is signed in the right hand corner. The light fixtures are original. This room, apart from new paint, has not been altered.

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Dressing Rooms, Showers, and the Grand Concession (First Floor)

The ground floor, sometimes identified as the basement due to the subterranean south facade, was built to extend beyond the limits of the building and is partially underground. The main portion of the first floor, forming the true "first floor," is the former Grand Concession, where a concession stand operated and opened onto the beach from the north facade of the building. According to artist Hilaire Hiler, the Grand Concession was "more utilitarian in function than the rest of the rooms...decorated by a studied coloring of each wall, embellished simply by international code flags and the emblems of the different steamships which pass the building. These enable spectators to identify ships while adding color and interest to the walls."⁹ Today, the Grand Concession has been repainted and the color schemes and code flags and emblems are no longer visible.

To the west of the Grand Concession were the Women's dressing room and showers, which still function as such today. To the east ran the larger underground complex, the Men and Boy's dressing rooms and showers, which were separate. Upon leaving the Grand Concession two corridors branch to the left and the right. Separating them is a caged booth that functioned as the ticket booth and the repository for clothing and valuables. This booth and the Boy's locker room and showers have been converted into storage and office space by the Maritime Museum. Structurally, however, the facilities are intact, with only the shower heads having been removed. The Men's dressing room and shower is in use and does not appear to have been modified. Part of the locker room is closed off, with a wooden drywall, though, and is in use as classroom space by the San Francisco Senior Center.

The only damage to the structure is where concrete walls have been damaged by leaking water. Here the concrete has spalled and exfoliated from the steel mesh reinforcing wire. Leaking has also forced sealing (with plywood) of the large overhead skylights of the Men's and Boy's section. This seal is temporary.

Concession Stand and Restroom

Standing at the approach to the Municipal Pier is the structure known as the concession stand and restroom. Constructed at the same time as the Aquatic Park bathhouse, this was a WPA structure designed as part of the Aquatic Park complex. A one-story reinforced concrete building painted white, the concession stand and restroom conforms with the general design of the bathhouse in that it is an oval structure with a nautical flavor. The only decoration evident is the pattern of two bands of rope in a swirl design on the concrete wall.:

The structure is built over a small partial basement which was intended for use as a storage area for the concession stand, a use to which it is still put. A doorway pierces the building on the north facade and immediately encounters another door to

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the right which leads into the concession stand. A corridor to the left leads into the restroom which is for male use only.

The concession stand consists of two small rooms to the north and south which serve as storage and office space for the concessioner. These rooms flank a larger room with a large rectangular window opening at waist level which serves as the concession stand. The floor is concrete and is not original; it was added after 1945. The original floor may have also been concrete. The interior of the stand and the two small side rooms are not original and have been altered by the concessioner who has occupied the building since 1944. Modern concession equipment, cooking facilities and a "fry-vat" now occupy the interior. A new stainless steel counter has also been installed.

The restroom has not been modified. Tiled floors and walls are evident and appear to be original as do the windows which are fixed metal sashes in the shape of portholes, with hinged openings in the middle of the window.

The north facade of the building also evidences the beginning of a stairway that follows the curve of the building to the flat red tile roof. Though now closed to public access, this area was intended for use as an observation deck and is furnished with built-in benches and a shelter in the middle of the roof. There is also an original metal "pipe" rail.

A canvas awning installed by the concessioner shields the counter and serving windows from inclement weather. This is attached to the building by means of metal pipe which is bolted to the structure.

Restroom

At the far eastern end of Aquatic Park and directly adjacent to the Rowing Club buildings is a small restroom which was built as part of the WPA involvement in the Aquatic Park complex. An oval-shaped, one-story reinforced concrete structure painted white, the restroom has a stucco exterior.

The exterior decoration is simple and consists of two bands of rope imbedded into the stucco. This decoration and the oval design of the building are contiguous with the design and style of the Aquatic Park bathhouse and concession stand-restroom. These three structures appear to have been built at or around the same time.

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The building is entered through a doorway that pierces the north wall. Adjacent to the doorway is a stairway that follows the curve of the building to the red tile roof which was designed for use as a lifeguard station. A "pipe" metal rail fences the roof and leads down the stairway. A small structure in the center of the roof may have been intended for the lifeguard. It is an open shelter with a small roof supported by a pillar which resembles a type of "mushroom."

The windows of the building are oval, metal sashes fixed into the wall with small, rectangular hinged openings in the center. The entire building, both the interior and exterior, seems to be original and has not been modified, though interior plumbing fixtures and partitions have been vandalized.

Speaker Towers

There are two reinforced concrete speaker towers in Aquatic Park. They are to the east and west of the stadia of the bathhouse. Both towers stand approximately 35 feet high. The base of the tower slopes inward to meet the speaker housing, which is a circular enclosure with horizontal metal bands shielding the opening. A metal ladder, which is bolted to the concrete base, allows for access to the speaker housings. The towers were built at the same time as the bathhouse and restrooms and WPA-built projects for Aquatic Park. The towers reflect the international design of the other structures.

Sea Scout Building

Built around 1943, the Sea Scout building is a wood frame, one-story structure built on pilings over the waters of the lagoon. A walkway connects it with land, near the entrance to the Municipal Pier. The building has a boat docking facility. The interior contains many small rooms that are used for storage, offices, classrooms, small boat, and spar repair facilities for the Sea Scout organization.

Lagoon

The Aquatic Park lagoon occupies the site of the former Black Point Cove, which was partially filled in during the early 20th Century. As the former beach had been buried under tons of rubble and fill, the lagoon was supplied with a new sand beach, with most of the sand coming from excavations in downtown San Francisco for the Union Square underground parking garage which was built in 1941.

The grading and re-shaping of the lagoon and the addition of the new sand beach contributed to create a new, man-made lagoon which is in good condition and does not seem to have been altered or modified.

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Seawall

Constructed between 1934 and 1934, the seawall at Aquatic Park is built of rubble faced with granite paving blocks from San Francisco streets. The blocks were removed during street modernization in the 20th Century and were reused by the City of San Francisco in the Aquatic Park seawall.

The blocks are mortared into place with cement and are stepped. The wall is seven tiers high (about 1-1/2 feet tall) at the beach and, as it stretches toward the Municipal Pier, the tiers reach over ten levels and then become flush. The seawall seems in good condition and has not been modified.

Between the bathhouse and the concession stand-restroom is a later addition, which is a breakwater made of large stones. This work was done at a later date to help combat erosion of the sand beach. In accordance with this work temporary wooden-wall breakwaters were constructed to the east of this stone breakwater. They have fallen into disrepair. Only a few rotted wooden pilings and planks remain.

Municipal Pier

The reinforced concrete Municipal Pier is built on pilings over the seawall that shelters the Aquatic Park lagoon. Built in 1929, with subsequent repairs in 1947 and 1955, the Municipal Pier is a curved concrete structure with a round, bulb-like end. The pilings of the Municipal Pier are concrete and support a deck of wood, concrete, and asphalt. Benches line the pier and streetlights are placed near the benches. At the end of the Pier, there is a circular reinforced concrete structure that was built as a convenience station. It was never used and the doors are sealed with the exception of a trapdoor on the roof. The interior is hollow and was never developed.

Bocce Ball Courts

Erected in the 1950s, the Bocce Ball courts are the most recent structural addition to Aquatic Park. Concrete lanes are shaded by a concrete protective shelter which is roofed with panels or corrugated fiberglass. The area is fenced with a metal chain-link fence.

Bordering Historic Properties

Aquatic Park is bordered by many historic sites, many of which are on the National Register. To the east is Hyde Street Pier Historic Ships, with the vessels C.A. Thayer

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and Wapama (National Historic Landmarks), Hercules, Alma, and Eureka. Also to the east is the Haslett Warehouse, on the National Register at a Local level of significance. In the southeast corner of the park is a cable car turnaround, which is the terminus for the Hyde Street Cable Railroad, which is part of the San Francisco Cable Car system, a registered National Historic Landmark. To the south is Ghiradelli Square, a complex of 19th century red brick industrial buildings converted into a shopping mall. Ghiradelli Square is listed on the National Register. To the west is Fort Mason, also on the National Register. To the northwest is the San Francisco Fire Department Pumping Station which is on the National Register.

Footnotes

¹ Fact Sheet, "A Palace for the Public," (1939) Works Progress Administration Press Release. Copy on file at the National Maritime Museum, San Francisco.

² Ibid.

³ Hilaire Hiler, "Aquatic Park Murals." (nd) Manuscript in the Collections of the National Maritime Museum, San Francisco.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "A Palace for the Public."

⁸ Hiler, "Aquatic Park Murals"

⁹ Ibid.

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The area ultimately developed as Aquatic Park was first known as Black Point Cove. In the aftermath of the Gold Rush, as the burgeoning population of the infant city of San Francisco expanded over the sand hills bordering Yerba Buena Cove and settled along the shores of North Beach, Black Point Cove was named and developed. Adjacent to Black Point, the northern most extension of the San Francisco peninsula, the cove was a small, sandy indentation on the shoreline. Both the cove and the point, popularly named for its stands of dark laurel which contrasted with surrounding dunes of white, wind-blown sand, were public property. On November 27, 1850, President Millard Fillmore designated the land a military reservation for the defense of San Francisco harbor.¹ As the land was not immediately occupied by the military, others quickly moved in to "squat" on the property. Black Point became the site of several prominent citizens' homes while the cove became the first industrial center of young San Francisco. The first to use the cove was entrepreneur George Bensley. In 1857 Bensley built a redwood flume which carried fresh water from Lobos Creek near the Golden Gate to a pumping station erected on the beach of Black Point Cove which conveyed the water to reservoirs on the slopes of nearby Russian Hill and thence into the city, providing San Francisco with its first permanent system of water supply.² Bensley was followed by the firm of Heynemann, Pick, & Company, who built wood and later brick structures next to the pumping station to open California's first woolen mills.

In 1867 the cove was further industrialized when Thomas Henry Selby erected a large smelter on its eastern shore. The pumping station, woolen mills, and the Selby smelter gave the cove's shoreline a decidedly industrial character with bulkheads, wharves, and substantial brick and wood buildings lining the beach and marching up the steep slopes which surrounded the water. The industrial use of the site at first seemed the best use of the land. The military dispossessed the residential squatters on Black Point in 1863, fortifying that place and erecting a post which would ultimately be known as Fort Mason. The low-lying cove, however, was not required for defensive purposes and the industries had been allowed to stay. When in 1869 the military did decide to evict the "squattling" businesses, substantial opposition culminated on July 1, 1870 when an Act of Congress reduced the size of the military reservation, excluding the cove and placing the land in the hands of the private speculators who occupied it. The victory of the businessmen was Pyrrhic, for as the century drew to a close nearly all of the original businesses had folded. In 1885 the smelters closed, citing a need for adequate rail service, the lack of deep-water frontage, and inadequate space for expansion. In 1889 the woolen mills closed, victim of intense competition from eastern mills and racist anti-Chinese agitators who had successfully campaigned against the mill's almost exclusively Chinese labor force. The pumping station, rebuilt and incorporated into a larger system of water supply by the Spring Valley Water Company, and the abandoned woolen mill buildings, adapted for use as the factory of the D. Ghirardelli Company in 1894, remained to illustrate the industrial past of Black Point Cove by the turn of the century.

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Besides the early industries had used the cove. Despite the development of the area, the sheltered sand beach of the cove had made it a favorite spot of public recreation. While the most frequent users were no doubt employees of the nearby factories and plants, an influx of other "bathers" anxious to swim in the cove had started a small but substantial trade for "bath-houses." The first bath-house at Black Point Cove dated to the 1860s. Later court testimony concerning the character of development in the area noted

I remember in 1863 when I first knew this block, of seeing a small shanty on the beach at the foot of Larkin Street; it was a sort of bathhouse. At the corner of Larkin and Beach Streets there were steps leading down to the beach and to this shanty.³

Salt-water bathing was quite popular with San Franciscans, and from all accounts Black Point Cove was where they congregated:

Swimming was a delight to the old-timers of the city. Early in the morning, from 6 to 9, the bay at the cove below Black Point was dotted with bobbing heads, swimming far out in the icy waters of the strait.⁴

By 1871 the first formally listed bath-house appeared in the San Francisco City Directory. Operated by Joseph Dunkeley, the "Sea Baths," later known as the "Neptune Bath-house" was a series of mismatched structures perched at shores' edge at the base of the steep sand slope, accessible only by means of stairs leading down from Beach Street. A rickety wharf stretched out into the cove; from this a line was usually strung with drying towels and bathing suits.

Business was good, as the bath-houses attracted a larger and more diverse clientele. By 1883 two other bath-houses were in operation at Black Point Cove, the "Sheltered Cove Baths" operated by Joseph J. Bamber, a former teamster, and the "Golden Gate Sea Baths" operated by Henry Frahm, a one-time "fish-curer." While the majority of bathhouse users were working class people, other more affluent members of San Francisco society frequented Black Point Cove, the most famous being prominent financier, merchant prince and philanthropist William Chapman Ralston. After Ralston's unfortunate business setbacks which ended his tenure as President of the Bank of California, he ended his day with a customary trip to the Neptune Bath-house. While swimming in the cove, he faltered and was pulled from the water dead. Though a coroner's jury ruled that he had over-exerted himself and died of a "pulmonary embolism," many felt that Ralston chose his favorite form of recreation to commit suicide.⁵

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The demise of the popular Ralston notwithstanding the bath-houses prospered through the 1880s, expanding to meet their ever-increasing use. At the Neptune Bath-house

It was a bad Sunday for proprietor Charlie Hanson when every one of his 300 bathhouses was not rented all day long to holiday patrons who had walked or driven from the city in carriages with their bathing suits and lunches for a day of salt-water and air.⁶

Unfortunately the boom was brief. By the 1890s all of the bath-houses were closed. In 1895, the empty structures stood weather-worn and half-demolished:

They seemed, one reporter noted, to possess "an air" of despondent regret over their desertion." "The future," he continued, "does not seem to hold out much promise for the little beach at Black Point as a swimming resort. Its glories are of the past and are fading as the bath-houses are crumbling....The beach is still a good swimming place, but the air of desolation grows thick and with grim ironical assertion."⁷

The reasons for the failure of the bath-houses were two; the beach was slowly being destroyed by landfill and minor industrial development while other indoor bath-houses attracted the bathing public. The latter was perhaps the more prominent reason as the public seemingly embraced the concept of large, indoor salt-water pools, which offered many of the same invigorating qualities of a dip in the bay without the nuisances of fog, wind, and sand. By the turn of the century the Lurline Baths, Crystal Baths, and Sutro Baths hosted thousands of swimmers who favored the comfort of heated indoor bathing.

There were swimmers who disdainfully declined to use the indoor baths. The hardy and rugged members of the Dolphin, South End, and Ariel Clubs were swimming in Black Point Cove within six years of the closure of the last bath-house. Members of the clubs undoubtedly swam in the cove prior to then and would continue to for decades. The clubs are still located at Black Point Cove, now Aquatic Park, and were largely responsible for the preservation of the cove and the creation of the park. Beginning as social organizations for workers in the 1870s, the clubs quickly developed strong

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ties to aquatic recreation, notably swimming and rowing. All were located on the city's waterfront, some as far south as China Basin. As the 19th Century drew to a close, though, the clubs were forced to relocate time and again as the changing character of the waterfront and San Francisco's penchant for landfill finally left Black Point Cove as the last open and accessible section of city bay-front. By 1900 club-houses were barged into place at the foot of Van Ness Avenue and the three clubs were firmly ensconced.⁸

The clubs arrived at a cove that had already been altered and which would continue to be developed despite the fact that it was the last place they could go. As early as 1858 the industrial use of the cove had necessitated its being partially filled; this was followed by additional fill along the eastern and western edges, cutting the area of the cove in half. The despoliation of the sand beach occurred with the first decade of the clubs' tenure. In 1906, after the disastrous earthquake and fire, City officials anxious to clear the devastated urban core began hauling debris to selected dumping sites. At Black Point Cove, 15,000 truck loads of broken brick, stone, and burnt rubble covered the beach.⁹ Ironically, much of the debris came from the ruined Palace Hotel, which had largely been the product of William Chapman Ralston. Ralston's hotel was buried at the same spot its creator had died.

In 1913 the backers of the proposed Panama Pacific International Exposition, anxious to connect the waterfront Belt Line Railroad to the exposition site to the west of Black Point, applied for and received permission to do so across the cove. An elevated trestle was erected and a tunnel driven through Black Point. Not only did the trestle pass over the clubs' piers, but excavated spoil from the tunnel was dumped along the trestle, further ruining the cove.¹⁰ This desecration angered the members of the clubs; what alarmed them was the position of the State Board of Harbor Commissioners, who held the fate of the cove in their hands. According to the Harbor Commissioners, "by this means a large new waterfront area of desirable flat land has been made more available for factory and other commercial uses."¹¹ Realizing that unless they took some action the cove was doomed, members from all three clubs began to actively lobby for the creation of an "aquatic park" at Black Point Cove.

The preservation of the cove and its use as a park was not a new idea. While much of the emphasis for the planning and construction of an aquatic park dated to the period after 1906, when the future of Black Point Cove was threatened by heightened indiscriminate dumping and filling, the first thoughts of preserving the area for

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recreational and other pursuits predated the ultimately successful effort by some forty years. As early as 1866 landscape architect and urban planner Frederick Law Olmsted proposed a waterfront park at Black Point Cove. In a report to the Board of Supervisors Olmsted outlined a plan for "Public Pleasure Grounds" throughout the city. Olmsted felt that Black Point Cove was the best spot for a "municipal landing place and marine parade" for dignitaries and foreign representatives.

Here there should be a suitable landing quay and a plaza, with a close and thick plantation of evergreens on the west side, with banks of shrubs and flowers. The plaza or parade should be open and large enough to be used as a drill ground by a battery of artillery or a regiment of infantry, with some standing room and seats for spectators. It should also contain an elegant pavilion for the accomodation of committees of reception and their guests and a band of music, and should be decorated with flagstuffs, marine trophies, and eventually with monuments to naval heroes, discoverers and explorers. It should not, however, be very large or fitted for extended ceremonies, being considered rather as the sea-gate of the city rather than the place of entertainment for its guests.¹²

Olmsted's plan for Black Point was never realized, probably because of the firmly entrenched industries at the cove and the then unsettled question of military ownership.

The failure of the Olmsted plan did not discourage later schemes. In 1905, noted planner Daniel Hudson Burnham, at the invitation of a group of prominent citizens headed by former Mayor James Duval Phelan known as the Association for the Improvement and Adornment of San Francisco prepared a plan for the redesign of the city. While the AIASF was in part motivated by a desire for a more beautiful, better designed city, they were also hoping to use urban planning for political change in a city ruled by fighting factions of labor and capital and presided over by ruthless and powerful "bosses."¹³ This character of the Burnham Plan is ironical in its application to Black Point Cove, which Burnham included in his proposed redevelopment. Labor, as represented by the working class club members, was struggling with capital, which was represented by the commercial interests who wished to fill the cove for industrial use at the expense of public recreation.

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Burnham's plan for Black Point Cove was more restrained than Olmsted's. Rather than statues, monuments, and a ceremonial "sea-gate" Burnham saw the cove as the perfect locale

for a bay shore park adjacent to the Outer Boulevard, the land bounded by Lewis and Laguna streets and Fort Mason; also that strip of land encircling the government reservation to the east and enclosing the proposed yacht harbor (the Marina). By doing so it would be enabled to preserve the beauty of the point and to restrain the encroachment of any buildings other than club-houses and those of a semi-public character.¹⁴

Burnham's plan was not adopted. Even when the earthquake and fire struck in April of 1906 Burnham's plan was not used as the city was rebuilt along old lines as established commercial patterns and property lines dictated the character of new construction. At Black Point Cove, as previously noted, tons of debris was dumped, seemingly ending all future prospects for recreational use.

It was at this point that the rowing and swimming club members, prodded by Charles Farrell of the Dolphin Club began to actively lobby for the creation of an aquatic park. The "Aquatic Park Improvement Association" was organized and presented a cost estimate to the Board of Supervisors in April of 1909 along with a request that the proposition be submitted to the voters as a bond issue.¹⁵ The public rejected the idea of a \$796,000 allocation to acquire the cove in November of 1909.¹⁶ The initial defeat did not lessen the enthusiasm of park proponents. In 1912 a new proposal was presented to the voters of San Francisco. This bond issue received the support of the Board of Supervisors; the public was also more receptive as a majority voted in favor of the proposal.¹⁷ Unfortunately, the majority fell short of the two-thirds required and the bond issue did not pass. Cheered by the near success, though, the Aquatic Park Improvement Association planned to continue to push for the park, for now they clearly had a majority of public support.

A new tactic was tried in 1912 when members of the South End Club attempted to negotiate an exchange of desirable public property on the northern waterfront for Black Point Cove lands owned by the Southern Pacific Railroad, which had proposed additional construction and landfill.¹⁸ The negotiations faltered, though, and by 1913 the park plans were seriously jeopardized by the construction of the Belt Line trestle across the cove and the subsequent filling. The new setback brought another group into the struggle, though, for the filling aroused the ire of the San Francisco Recreation League. The Recreation League spearheaded the fight for the aquatic park

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from then on. One of the most successful moves made by the Recreation League was obtaining the support of United States Congressman Julius Kahn and other prominent individuals, including members of the Board of Supervisors. On March 3, 1914, San Francisco Supervisor McLeran introduced a resolution calling for the preservation of the "site of the proposed aquatic park."¹⁹ This was a needed step inasmuch as an application for a permit to fill most of the cove had been filed by the Harbor Commissioners with the Board of Supervisors.

The resolution stated that there was nowhere else "on the shore line of San Francisco suitable for an aquatic park or for swimming, boating or fishing" and called for the cessation of development at the site:

Be it resolved by the Board of Supervisors that we invite the cooperation of the citizens of San Francisco who are interested in the moral and physical welfare of the citizens of the State of California in the creation of a sentiment that will arrest this march of commercialism and attempted theft of public rights....²⁰

As more public support was manifested success moved closer. In 1916 the Black Point Cove lands were assessed and the possibility of the city exchanging property to acquire the cove was revived.

There was some opposition, though, as public hearings held by the Board of Supervisors soon showed. There were proponents who wanted to see the former Panama Pacific International Exposition's marina as an "aquatic park." Arguing that "we already have an aquatic park fronting on the Marina and that this would be a duplication," they were countered by the Black Point Cove partisans, who pointed out the sheltered locale and long tradition of aquatic sport at the latter site. Advocates of commercial development spoke against the use of Black Point Cove, noting that an extension of Van Ness Avenue to the water and its subsequent development as "another Market Street, another commercial artery of San Francisco" could not happen if the cove was set aside. Rather, "that location will be required for ferries in the future when the people of San Francisco may be taken for recreation and pleasure to the attractive places in Marin County." Edward Scully, a member of the South End Rowing Club and one of the active aquatic park proponents, noted in response that the recreational use of the cove would actually encourage commercial growth in the surrounding area as the "large number of people who leave this city every Sunday and patronize the baths in Alameda County" would stay as the aquatic park would "keep San Franciscans in this city."²¹

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Support for the park far outweighed the opposition as a diverse number of groups, and not just sporting associations, joined to urge the Board of Supervisors to acquire Black Point Cove. Indication of this were letters of support received by the Board of Supervisors on January 4, 1917 from:

Major General J. Franklin Bell, Commanding General, Department of the Pacific, League of Improvement Clubs, Congress of Mothers, Indoor Yacht Club, North Beach Promotion Association, San Francisco Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis, Polk and Larkin Street District Association, Juvenile Protection Association, Laguna Honda Mothers and Teachers Club, Columbus School Mothers Club, Olympic Club.²²

In mid-1917 the land transfer was approved by the Board of Supervisors. The Southern Pacific Railroad acquiesced, and in November of the same year the long-awaited transfer finally took place, with the city receiving \$392,073.30 as compensation for the lesser-valued Black Point Cove land.²³

Proposals to spend the money on the development of the park were tabled; the Board of Supervisors did commit to acquiring additional lands in the cove in December of 1917 however. The long-dreamed for and much debated setting aside of Black Point Cove for public recreation had been achieved. The city was committed and popular support clearly stood behind any efforts to reclaim and develop the cove was sport and public use. Yet an additional ten years passed before work actually began on the park. The decade was marked by additional struggles, much like those to acquire the cove in that they were uphill battles. False starts, surprising rejections by the voters, and a lack of funds hindered the beginning of park development. Acquisition of land did continue from 1917 to 1928, though, and plans were drafted.

The first preliminary study of the proposed park was presented to the public in 1920. Prepared by Civil Engineer John Punnett of San Francisco, the study was intended as a conceptual basis for more detailed plans to be prepared by architects and engineers in open competition.²⁴ Perhaps not surprisingly, it was Punnett's plan which "showed the lines of later development, while the architectural schemes which won first prize in the contest had little resemblance to the later plans selected for the cove."²⁵ Minor site work was accomplished in August of 1920 as the area between Van Ness Avenue and Larkin Street was graded. In 1922 the railroad trestle was removed from the middle of the cove and moved closer inland, freeing much of the cove's last open water from development.²⁶

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In 1922 the Board of Supervisors also placed the site under the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Park Commission, which promptly appointed the firm of Bakewell, Brown, and Bauer architects for the project and directed them to prepare a prospectus and plan.²⁷ The plan was approved by both the Park Commission and the Board of Supervisors in 1923, paving the way for further development. Suggestive of the Punnett plan of 1920, the Bakewell, Brown, and Bauer scheme called for enclosing piers outside the cove, "various buildings, bath-houses, boat-landings, beaches, driveways, approaches, and planting and landscaping the entire park area...."²⁸ The first approach into the park was ironically Van Ness Avenue, the would-be "commercial artery." In 1927 funds were approved to extend the avenue to the tip of Black Point along the eastern shore of the cove. For \$10,000 the three clubhouses were moved to the foot of Polk Street (they would later be moved in 1938 to the foot of Hyde Street) and fill was dumped and hemmed by a crude seawall for grading and paving. Work then halted; \$378,799.96 had been expended for planning and improvements. An additional \$1,500,000.00 was estimate-d to see the project completed.²⁹

As a great deal of money was needed to implement the Bakewell, Brown and Bauer plan for the aquatic park, voters were once again offered a bond issue in November of 1928 in hope of raising \$950,000. Advertisements in favor of the issue stated "People Demand and Deserve A Safe Place to SWIM, ROW, FISH in the Heart of San Francisco" and urged passage to "Make the Bay A Safe Place to Play."³⁰ Perhaps recalling the elections of 1912 which had seen the last aquatic park bond issue receive a majority of votes and fail, placards exhorted voters to "REMEMBER A TWO THIRDS MAJORITY IS REQUIRED FOR THE APPROVAL OF THIS PROJECT." Optimistic, the Board of Supervisors appropriated \$100,000 to build a curving "recreation pier" to partially enclose the cove from the west.³¹ The Supervisors were understandably disheartened when the bond issue failed at the polls. Nevertheless the appropriation for the pier had been made and construction proceeded.

Work began on August 17, 1931 as 22 men cleaned the area, which had been prominently marked "Site of San Francisco's AQUATIC PARK To Be Erected By The Park Commissioners For The People Of San Francisco" for years. Cribbing built from salvaged lumber was placed at the foot of Van Ness Avenue, and a crude rubble and concrete seawall placed against the edge of Van Ness Avenue proceeded the actual start of work on the pier. The Healy-Tibbetts Construction Company, under contract to the city, had the pier half complete by December of 1931. The next half was not finished until 1933. Work was slow due to a number of factors, the first being a lack of funds. The total cost of the pier was approximately \$250,000, more than twice the original appropriation.³² Limited site work such as grading and the stockpiling of several tons of granite cobblestones from San Francisco streets being resurfaced which had been trucked to the "park"

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dragged along with a limited budget and the economic hardship of the Depression. Work proceeded with small appropriations such as \$8,000 from the city's "Urgent Necessity" fund in November of 1931 and \$10,000 from the Public Parks and Squares Fund in January of 1933, with borrowed tools, and with salvaged material such as the granite cobblestones.³³ Under such circumstances, the millions needed to build the second enclosing pier, construct a series of public buildings, and create a green park with a sand beach were beyond the resources of the city. Unless support from outside San Francisco was obtained, the aquatic park project was doomed.

The passage of the National Recovery Act of 1933 heartened park backers, who felt that money would now be available. The Board of Supervisors applied for NRA funds for a number of projects, which included the completion of the city's sewer system, ending the need to discharge raw sewage into Black Point Cove, and the completion of the aquatic park, "one of the most important recreational developments in the City and County."³⁴ The Supervisors pledged \$1,600,000 from any forthcoming NRA funds to complete the park, and placed another proposal on the ballot to raise the additional monies to build

boat houses for rowing clubs, the creation of a bathing beach, park and playground areas, a concrete wharf to facilitate auto parking, bathhouses, convenience stations, service buildings, gymnasiums, hand ball courts, shower and locker rooms, solariums, and club quarters.³⁵

As the park construction and the other hopefully NRA sponsored projects would create an additional 6,000 jobs in San Francisco, it was hoped that this would assure passage by creating support among the city's many unemployed workers. Many other bond issues passed, though, while that for aquatic park once again failed. Construction at the site limped along through 1934 and 1935, aided in part by the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA) and private donations of equipment. The demise of the NRA, declared unconstitutional, was yet another setback which dampened hopes. Finally, a proposal submitted to the newly created Works Progress Administration (WPA) in late 1935 hit the mark; on December 19, 1935, the WPA approved the plans for aquatic park. The dream was to finally be carried into reality, or so it seemed.

The Board of Supervisors appointed architect John Punnett, who had drafted the first plans for the park in 1920, to prepare a final site design. City Architect William A. Mooser III was selected to draft plans for the structures. While this was being done WPA crews began work in mid-1936. Through 1937 and 1938 the thousands of granite cobblestones were used to create a stepped, curving seawall along the beach front, the site was graded, and six reinforced concrete buildings were erected. Five were

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small incidental structures; the principal building was a bathhouse. Many structures had been planned, but since money was limited it was decided to expend most of the funding on the bathhouse, which would accomodate 5,000 people.³⁶ Left for future funding were a large new building to house all of the clubs, a bandstand, and expansive landscaped grounds.

Problems began to plague the project almost immediately. Delays in acquiring approved plans and specifications, a lack of supervision and direction, and costly mistakes hindered the work:

The project was under the supervision of at least six different WPA superintendents...yet few of those interviewed were able to give a concise description of the intended use of the building.... One person remarked "It was like Topsy, it just grew"...Instances were cited showing that completed work had to be torn out because of changes made....It would be difficult to determine the exact locations of all of the final installations.³⁷

The foundations for the bathhouse were poured only to be inundated at high tide; new foundations two feet higher were necessary. Additional problems occurred when city officials leased the half-finished building to Leo and Kenneth Gordon, operators of a concession in the Ferry Building, who were to develop a restaurant and other public facilities in the bathhouse for the city. Instead, the Gordons created the "Aquatic Park Casino," a restaurant, bar, and nightclub. Maleficence was apparently the order of the day, for the city ordered changes made in the building to better accomodate the Gordons' intended uses--at WPA expense. Perhaps the most glaring example was when a party of city officials, led by the Mayor, toured the building in 1938. During the tour an open lounge for public viewing of aquatic sport in the bay was demanded for use as a banquet hall for the concessioners. To the chagrin of the architects, the completed east wall was torn out and a small glass-block walled pantry installed. A dumbwaiter to serve the pantry was run up from the kitchen on the ground floor. Adding to the already ridiculous proposition was the fact that a pre-existing flue on the roof had to be surrounded by the last-minute pantry, making the pantry half of its needed size.

A decidedly slow pace of work, estimated at 3% progress each month, and beautiful but expensive artworks and decorations executed by artists from the Federal Arts Project added to serious cost over-runs. This and the obvious less-than-good faith maneuvers the city was pursuing with the Gordons angered WPA officials. Many of the artists, some of whom harbored definite socialist feelings, were outraged at the Gordon take-over and the attitude of the concessioners, who felt that the building was

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theirs, and angrily protested. Bitter action followed; artist chief Hilaire Hiler had a ladder pulled out from under him as he painted, and finally the artists quit in disgust, leaving many artworks unfinished. Sculptor Benny Bufano went so far as to steal back some of his pieces. Even the WPA grew tired, and at the end of 1938 announced to city officials that the project would be handed over, as is, for the city to complete, in January of 1939.

The officials decided to open the park on the day it was formally relinquished by the WPA. On January 22, 1939, thousands flocked to the long-awaited park. The bathhouse stood nearly complete, flanked by concrete bleachers capable of seating several thousand and by two massive concrete speaker towers which would broadcast races and other water sports being held on the cove to the crowd. Three comfort stations stood half-done. Over \$1,500,000 had been spent by the WPA: completion of the park, estimated to be at least twice that amount, was the responsibility of the city.³⁸

Despite the difficulties and the annoyance of the "Aquatic Park Casino" WPA officials expressed satisfaction with the park:

The finished park, protected by the great curve of the municipal pier...fills completely the need for a central water playground. Here one may bathe, swim, canoe, or sail....Here thousands of happy youngsters find protected playground in the water and on the shore. Here thousands of weaied adults may sink into warm, embracing sand, content to just lie and relax, and revel in the beauties spread before them.³⁹

The bathhouse was the crowning achievement, with a fully equipped hospital, complete with operating room, showers activated by photoelectric "eyes," rooms which dried swimmers with blasts of warm air and heat lamps, dressing rooms for 5,000 and beautifully done murals, sculpture, and mosaics, all done with nautical, maritime, and marine motifs. The structure was a "Palace for the Public" said WPA press releases, and portrayed its tie with the water admirably, being 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....⁴⁰

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The public was apparently pleased, though some mutterings were heard. Any euphoria and the euphemisms of Dedication Day would soon vanish in the light of harsh scrutiny.

Dismay quickly arose over the almost complete take-over of the bathhouse by the Gordon "Aquatic Park Casino." High prices discouraged most patrons, and public use was openly frowned on. A WPA investigator observed a group of school boys bring their lunches to the open veranda overlooking the cove; "they were ordered to leave by the concessioner." Throughout the public building the Gordons had erected prominent signs stating "Private--Keep Out."⁴¹ The disappointment over the bathhouse was matched by that over the cove. The sewer system had never been completed, and as a result the water grew increasingly polluted, and signs forbidding swimming in the unhealthy cove proliferated, remaining until the early 1970s. The "sand" beach was in reality still strewn with the broken brick, concrete and stone dumped there in 1906. It was not until 1940 that sand excavated during the construction of the Union Square Parking Garage was dumped on the beach. All of this discouraged everyone who had fought for so many years for the park; they rightly felt cheated, particularly when the city decided to not complete the grandiose park promised.

Additional controversy erupted in 1940 when it was discovered that the Gordons had not paid their \$1,000 per month rent for the bathhouse for over a year.⁴² Litigation followed as the Gordons were ousted and the "Casino" was closed and padlocked. This and disclosure of the many problems associated with the construction caused public anger to soar; "Such cavalier handling of an investment of over a million dollars out of the public treasury, city and Federal, is inexcusable, bordering on if not actually plain maladministration."⁴³ Nothing came of the flurry of outrage, however, as the advent of war turned the public attention to other, more pressing matters. Early in 1942 the bathhouse was unlocked, becoming the headquarters for anti-aircraft defense on the Pacific Coast as the city turned the entire park over to the military. Patrolled by sentries and fenced with barbed wire, the site had come full-circle in its history, once again becoming military property. Thus the long-awaited, just born aquatic park died.

In 1948 the military returned the park to the city. New uses for the bathhouse were found; the same year it became the home of the first permanent senior center in the United States. In 1951 much of the bathhouse's space was filled when the San Francisco Maritime Museum was opened. Limited public use of the often-polluted cove persisted through the years, though the most frequent users were and still are members of the clubs. In 1978 Aquatic Park became part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

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- ⁴San Francisco Bulletin, November 13, 1924.
- ⁵Julian Dana, The Man Who Built San Francisco: A Study of Ralston's Journey With Banners. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937); David Lavender, Nothing Seemed Impossible: William C. Ralston and San Francisco. (Palo Alto, California: The American West Publishing Company, 1974); San Francisco Daily Alta California (eds.) Memorial of William C. Ralston (San Francisco: Alta Press, 1875) and Harper's Weekly, September 25, 1875, XIX (978), p. 776.
- ⁶San Francisco Chronicle, May 1, 1950.
- ⁷Ibid.
- ⁸San Francisco City Directories, 1887-1905, pass.
- ⁹Gerald R. Dow, "Bay Fill in San Francisco: A History of Change." M.A. Thesis, San Francisco State University, 1973. p. 66.
- ¹⁰Anna Coxe Toogood, A Civil History of Golden Gate National Recreation Area.... (Denver, Colorado: National Park Service, 1980) Volume II, pp. 123-124.

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running along the north edge of the Pier, curving west, southwest, and south to the end of Van Ness Avenue, thence running south along the western edge of Van Ness Avenue to a point approximately one hundred feet south of the Railroad Tunnel at Fort Mason and due west of the intersection of Polk and Beach Streets, thence due east to the northwest corner of Beach and Polk Streets, then due east running along the northern edge of Beach Street to the point of beginning at the northwest corner of Hyde and Beach Streets.