



# Society for Industrial Archeology ROEBLING CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

July 2005

Vol. 14 No. 1

## TOURS

*Remember that tour space is often limited, please cancel your reservation if you find you cannot attend so that another may go.*

### **Fireboat Harvey Cruise**

*Sunday, August 28, 2005, 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.  
Depart Pier 63 (at 23rd St.), Manhattan*

**W**e will be joining the Suffield Historical Society and Suffield Fire Department for an afternoon aboard the fireboat John J. Harvey. The cruise will circle south around Manhattan and travel as far north on the East River as time permits, saluting the bridges on the East River with water displays. Historical narration will be provided.

Lunch will be served on board and will feature food cooked on the charcoal grill on deck. Cost to Roebling chapter members for food and drink is \$20.

Since space is limited, this cruise is only open to chapter members and their families. To reserve space, contact Mary at 212-769-4946 or [RCSIAprez@aol.com](mailto:RCSIAprez@aol.com). Payment may be made by check to RCSIA and mailed to Mary Habstritt at 40 W. 77th St., #17B, New York NY 10024, or by check or in cash on the day of the tour.

## OTHER EVENTS

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

### **Up Newtown Creek**

*Walking tour led by Jack Eichenbaum  
Meet at Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn  
Sunday, July 10, 2005, 9:30 a.m. to noon*

**N**ewtown Creek developed from marshland to a flourishing industrial center and then declined into urban brownfields. At peak industrial build-up, the busiest waterway in the world, it carried more traffic than the Mississippi. This tidal arm of the East River also forms the boundary between Brooklyn and Queens. The bridges, neighborhoods and the industry at its edges,



Photo by Huntley Gill

*The John J. Harvey at Direktor's Shipyard about to undergo major repairs completed June 22, 2005.*

from Greenpoint to Maspeth, will be discussed. Meet at Fulton Ferry Landing, foot of Old Fulton Street, opposite the River Café (exit west end of High Street station on A, C subway line). Sponsored by the Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment (BCUE), 718-788-8500. Fees \$45 non-member/\$35 BCUE member, senior, student. Pre-payment required. Book early!

### **Foundry Days**

*Cold Spring, Putnam County, New York  
July 16 and 17, 2005, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.*

**J**oin Scenic Hudson and Michigan Tech University at Scenic Hudson's West Point Foundry Preserve for an insider's tour of the current excavation conducted by Michigan Tech's industrial archeologists at this National Historic Site. Learn about its history and how it shaped America during the Industrial Revolution. See the remains of the boring mill, blast furnace, machine shop and other features. Wear sturdy close-toed shoes or hiking boots; long pants helps avoid ticks. The site is an easy walk south from the southbound platform of Metro North's Cold Spring station. For more information call Rita Shaheen (845) 473-4440, ext. 230 or [rshaheen@scenichudson.org](mailto:rshaheen@scenichudson.org).

## Steamboat Excursion

Lambertville, New Jersey

Sunday – July 24, 2005, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Cruise aboard the steamboat *SPLASH*, a replica 1850 sternwheeler passenger and supply boat. The first steamboat to ply the Delaware River in 100 years!

The cost for this 1.5 hour trip on the Delaware River in the Lambertville-New Hope area will be \$25 per person. Only 48 spaces are available, so please send your check by **July 17th**, payable to the Canal Society of New Jersey, to Linda Barth, 214 North Bridge Street, Somerville, New Jersey 08876.

Parking and boarding will be on the New Jersey side of the river, south of the Lambertville Station Inn. For more information: e-mail (barths@att.net) or call (908-722-7428)

## ROEBLING CHAPTER BUSINESS East River Project

The Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance is embarking on an East River Industrial Heritage Trail Guide with grant funding from the New York State Department of State, Division of Coastal Resources. The Roebling Chapter has been asked to assist with this project. The first step is to compile a list of sites to be included in the guide. We are looking at still-standing industrial buildings and infrastructure along the East River (from Buttermilk Channel to Flushing Bay) which have historical significance. We will be collecting histories and looking at opportunities for adaptive reuse of these structures which will then be developed into a guidebook. Please send us your suggestions for additions to the draft list below: Loren Talbot, East River Advocate, at MWA, 888.364.9943 or [loren@waterwire.net](mailto:loren@waterwire.net) or Mary Habstritt, 212-769-4946, [RCSIAprez@aol.com](mailto:RCSIAprez@aol.com). Please also tell us if you have existing research or can suggest known resources for the histories.

### CURRENTLY IDENTIFIED SITES:

Atlantic Basin	Gantry State Park transfer bridges
Fulton Ferry Fireboat House	Long Island City Power
Tobacco Warehouse	House/Schwartz Chemical
Empire Stores	E 132nd St Ferry Terminal
Brooklyn Bridge	South Bronx Marine Transfer Station
Gair complex, Dumbo	Smallpox Hospital, Roosevelt Island
Captain's Boathouse/Navy Yard	Mark DiSuvero's Studio
Transfer Bridge, Wallabout Creek	Old Astoria Ferry Pier (90th St.)
BMT Power House	Grand Street Firehouse
Domino Sugar refinery	Fulton Fish Market
Williamsburg Bridge/ DOT Shop	Old Ferry Pier

Grand Ferry Park	Battery Maritime Building
Bushwick Inlet/ Monitor Museum	Con Ed Waterside Steam Station
Greenpoint Terminal Market	Bridgemarket
Eberhart Faber pencil factory	Hudson-Manhattan Power Station
Sludge Tank	Stuyvesant Cove Beach
Terra Cotta Building	Tin Building
Reliant Astoria Generating Station	

## Annual Meeting Report

January 29, 2005 – Drew University

President Mary Habstritt was unable to attend due to illness. The meeting was run and **President's Report** was read by Vice President Lynn Rakos. [Text follows.]

**Events:** *There were five tours this year. All but the latest have been reported upon in the newsletter, so I won't go into detail here but for an occasional comment.*

- We visited Whitlock Cordage in Jersey City in Feb.
- College of St. Elizabeth right up the road hosted us in April. This was an architectural tour rather than IA, but Kevin Olsen took it upon himself to set it up and it was enjoyed by all who attended.
- Three Tugs in July
- Manhattanville Works tour also in July
- Library & Locks on October 29: 22 members attended and were introduced to the library collection of the General Society of Mechanics & Tradesmen, saw a video on the society's educational programs which serve to pass on skilled trades to new generations, and had a very detailed and enlightening tour of the John M. Mossman Lock Collection. Refreshments afterward included some of the most delicious cookies ever served at our events.

*In addition to these tours, the Corn Roast was held in September and we held our annual Drew Symposium in October. For the first time, the symposium was on a Sunday and had slightly higher attendance. This may have been partly due to an announcement being published in the online Waterwire, newsletter of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, an organization on our mailing list. Comments both pro and con about the date were received, which may mean we'll switch back and forth between Saturdays and Sundays in future so everyone gets their first choice once in two years.*

*The newsletter often includes notices of lectures, tours, and exhibits hosted by other organizations. Due to some misinformation on last summer's Hidden Harbor tours, I've added a disclaimer to these notices reminding members to check with the sponsoring organization for up-to-date information.*

**Newsletter and Mailings:** *I did manage to produce the required four issues this year, but just barely. (More on this*

when we vote on the proposed bylaws change.) It takes many hours to write, edit, lay out, stamp and label the newsletter. We also occasionally have other mailings, such as the postcards we sent this year for the annual Corn Roast. Thanks to Joe Macasek, as always, for handling the graphics. Stanley Dusek, Tom Flagg, Susan Katz, and especially Gerry Weinstein, have helped with stamping and mailing this year.

**Advocacy and Advice:** This year I have followed up on a part of our mission that I felt has not gotten as much attention as I would like. That is, fostering the preservation and documentation of our industrial heritage.

In January we visited the Domino Sugar refinery in Brooklyn for a reconnaissance with Christopher Marston from HAER. The plant was later sold and Domino gave the new owner a good word for us and we are continuing to talk to them about access this spring for a full documentation.

From a contact there, we were asked to help save the Austin-Nichols & Co. warehouse nearby. The current owner has applied for a zoning exception to add several floors to this Cass Gilbert building that once housed the largest wholesale grocer in the world. Freight came in by car float on tracks that ran through the building and, after packaging, went out again by rail and truck.

A member e-mailed me shortly thereafter asking us to get involved in a project to build a tower in Dumbo next to the Brooklyn Bridge, blocking views to and from the promenade and razing a 19<sup>th</sup>-c. foundry. This one we won for the moment. The developer withdrew the plans when it was clear public opposition would sway the City Council to vote against the project. We expect he will re-group and submit another plan.

Tom Flagg and I have been enlisted as history advisors to the Friends of the High Line as their plans for a park and fundraising progress. We both appeared on a local news magazine show to comment on the history of the viaduct.

In the late part of the year we became part of a coalition that includes the Municipal Art Society and the Preservation League of New York to prevent the 1929 Graving Dock No. 1 of the former Todd Shipyard in Erie Basin from being converted to a parking lot for an IKEA superstore in Red Hook, Brooklyn. This is still at a critical stage, with demolition of related shipyard buildings from the Civil War period being demolished against orders of the Army Corps and without proper asbestos abatement. A joint press conference is planned for January 31 with Congresswomen Nydia Velazquez in attendance.

All of these have involved coming up to speed on local, state, and federal preservation and zoning regulations, writing letters, attending public hearings and strategy meetings, and making phone calls.

I would like to propose that we implement a suggestion that I understand was made by Ed Rutsch several years ago and that is to form a Preservation Committee. That means sharing

the workload. (Whew!) There is a lot to do. If you can help, please let me know. I'll be asking for volunteers through the newsletter also.

I would also like to have a budget to respond to preservation crises if needed. So far expenses have only been for faxes, copying, postage, and meeting rooms and not much more may be needed, but it would be good to know more was available just in case. The committee could review proposed expenditures from the budgeted amount. Money might be used to fund the expenses, such as film and processing, for a documentation. It might pay for an assessment by an engineer whether a structure was really in need of demolition. It might help pay to move equipment to a museum.

**Business Affairs:** The formation of a budget committee was initiated at our last annual meeting, but got off to a slow start. It had its first meeting today. Members are Bob Bodenstein, Kevin Pegram, Charles Scott, and Bill Wilkie. This budget will be discussed and approved by the board (after it is re-elected) at its meeting this afternoon [postponed due to president's illness].

We are pursuing 501(c)(3) status for the chapter. I hope to report next year that we have achieved this. Although we are incorporated as a non-profit in New Jersey, this IRS status will allow donations to the chapter to be tax-deductible and will allow us to apply for exemptions from sales taxes.

The board and a couple of technical advisors from our membership looked at the work of a couple of different website designers. The one we all agreed upon was too heavily scheduled to take on design of our website. In the meantime, we have started posting information, including our bylaws, membership form, and past newsletters, on the SIA national website with the help of Don Durfee, the SIA's office manager. Joel Moskowitz has continued to pay for registration of our URL.

**Award Committee:** I have asked George Bulow to join the Roebling Award Committee and he has accepted. I will be leaving the committee and Mike Raber will become chair. Conrad Milster is the third member.

We have presented two of these annual awards so far and the nominations have come from committee members. Please do think about nominating a person or organization which you think has contributed to the documentation or preservation of our industrial heritage. Recognizing this work is a way to ensure that it continues.

**Bylaws Change:** The change I've suggested to the bylaws is simply to recognize reality. The newsletter has not been produced four times a year for many years and, in fact, at some point started appearing with the phrase, "published at irregular intervals." My thought in proposing the change is not to discourage quarterly publication, but not to require it. The text will still say that, "The President shall be responsible for the creation and mailing of the chapter newsletter ...to inform the membership of coming activities, actions taken by the

Trustees and officers and other news.”

I did get feedback from a couple of members that they felt it would be important to put a minimum number of issues in the bylaws to make sure that a newsletter is published. But, as indicated in the revised text I just read, the newsletter will still be part of the president’s duties.

If we want to include a minimum, I believe the revised text will have to be sent to all members before voting, so we’d need to hold until next year or do a mail ballot

Discussion of **Preservation Committee** idea: Motion by Tom Flagg to allow the chapter to spend up to \$500 per case for emergency response to preservation crises. For the interim until the Budget Committee has a full proposal. The hope is to have an engineer to contribute expertise (pro bono), we would pay expenses. Motion passed (I saw no abstain or opposed).

George Bulow’s appointment to **Award Committee** was approved unanimously.

**Proposed change to the Bylaws** [proposal called for eliminating frequency of publication from Article VI, see Dec. 2004 issue of newsletter for details]: Bierce Riley spoke against the change, saying that communication with the members is very important. Gerry Weinstein agrees on the importance of the newsletter but comments on the difficulty of the physical production. Discussion on spending a little more to get the production done for us with less work for the President. Ann Dichter volunteered to run the newsletters through a postage meter, chapter writes a check, we don’t have to put stamps on. Kevin Pegram suggests we offer email distribution of the pdf-format newsletter (and hopefully reduce the number mailed). Canal Society has a mailing party with like a dozen folks doing all the work. Ideas: Editor position? Circulation Committee? Publications Committee? Motion by Bill Wilkie, sense of the organization is we’re willing spend a little more money to have the mechanics of the publication done by an outside organization. Bill McKelvey notes that 6-page printed for 27 cents/copy, mailed for 20 cents. Joe Macasek could have the printing/production done by a printer with whom he has a relationship, have the finished copies shipped to whoever will take care of the actual mailing. Motion passed, no opposition.

Discussion on content, Bierce pointed out that the newsletters don’t all have to be 8 pages... obligation to members for communication... Bob Bodenstein says the number of 4 issues/year is an admirable goal but he is

opposed to a specific number. Ann Dichter proposal ... shall communicate with the entire membership no less than four times per year ... Bylaws proposal, majority voted to table with 3 abstentions, none opposed.

**Treasurer’s report:** Treasurer Charles Scott presented a preliminary report. [Final report follows.]

**January 1, 2004** \$17,995.10  
(Balance from bank statement)

**INCOME**

Membership Dues and Donations	3,122.00
Symposium Registration	2,414.00
Tour Income	956.61
Interest	192.96
Other	10,436.25
(Reimbursement of 2002 SIA National Conference advance)	

**Income Total** **\$17,121.82 +**

**JANUARY 1, 2004** **\$35,116.92**  
(Balance plus income total)

**EXPENDITURES**

Annual Meeting	\$684.00
Donation / Prize (Awarded, cashed 2005)	.00
General Operations (Aron’s postage)	105.03
Insurance	260.00
Newsletter (Print / Postage)	971.99
Symposium	1,993.50
Tour Expenses	792.44
Tour Donations	200.00
Donations	200.00

**Expenditures Total** **\$5,206.96 –**

**JANUARY 1, 2004** **\$29,909.96**  
(Balance plus income minus expenditures)

**DECEMBER 31, 2004** **\$29,909.96**  
(Balance from bank statement)

**Budget Committee report:** Bob Bodenstein represented committee. Other members are Bill Wilkie, Kevin Pegram, Charles Scott. First looked at a chart of accounts, adjusted Charles’, plugged in some tentative numbers. One modification of note is that the Chapter should have options to invest in things that come up as appropriate - preservation, advocacy, etc. Money that

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can be spent if opportunities present themselves, but does not have to be spent.

Bill Wilkie, recommendation to create a “special projects” committee (memorials, scholarships, preservation, etc) for worthy projects, budget a certain amount for awards of this sort, this can cover the preservation issues discussed earlier. Bill presented a tentative resolution, will refine and distribute. Discussion of conflict of interest followed; this should be covered by existing language in the Bylaws and the certificate of incorporation. Vote to form Special Projects Committee as Bill presented, approved no opposed/abstained.

**Membership Report:** Aron Eisenpress, Secretary

After taking care of the flood of renewals that came in this month, our membership stands at 445, of whom 156 are paid for this year, 16 are paid for future years, 212 are paid for 2004, and 28 are only paid through 2003 and will be getting final notices from me shortly. There were 38 people paid through 2002 (or before) who did not respond to my final notices, and they’ve been dropped from membership.

For comparison, the membership as of the 2004 Annual Meeting was 450, but I had not done a drop before that meeting and there were 76 “old” members.

In 2003 the membership was 418 and I had done the drop that year. So we’ve gained around 40 members over the last year.

There are 33 “comp” members on the list which we will be reviewing after this meeting. They are primarily National and other Chapter SIA officers, as well as organizations that can help us and benefit RCSIA endeavors (such as the NYC Department of City Planning), and a few special people like Janet Torgersen and Robert Vogel, who were significant to the founding of the chapter or national organization.

**Election of officers:** Tom Flagg, Nominations Committee, submitted the four current officers for re-election: done.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Entertainment:** Tom presented slides of the East River, mostly historical. Two videos that George Bulow brought were shown, one on candy (especially Domino Sugar cube production) and one on Martin Guitar history and production process.

**Attendance** at the annual meeting was low, approximately 20 to 25 people came.

## Member News

*If you have news about your achievements or that of other chapter members, send them in.*

**O**n April 20, the New York City Council honored a long-time preservation advocate, the indomitable **Margot Gayle**, with a Proclamation on behalf of activists working to preserve their communities throughout the city. The public ceremony took place in the Council chambers on the second floor of City Hall. This was the day New York’s Landmarks Law turned 40 on April 19. What a great way to celebrate the thousands of neighborhood preservationists doing their utmost to put the Law into effective action!

**Rodney Swain**, an active and long-time member of the SIA and both the Roebling and Southern New England Chapters, died April 13 in Stamford, Connecticut at the age of 83. He was the husband of Florence Brown Swain, also an SIA member, who survives him.

Swain graduated as a chemical engineer from the University of Rochester in 1943 and immediately began work at American Cyanamid in Stamford. In 1950 he obtained a Masters degree in Chemical Engineering at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn. At American Cyanamid he was initially involved in developing materials for the Manhattan Project, although the purpose of the work was not revealed even after the war ended. In the 1950s Swain helped to develop the process to make Creslan acrylic fiber, the first synthetic fiber that could be mixed with wool and dyed to a uniform color. He helped to start up a Santa Rosa, Florida, plant to make Creslan.

In 1959 Swain became a Process Engineer for Crawford and Russell, Inc., of Stamford. His work included participation in the design, construction, and startup of many plastics plants. In the 1970s Rodney and Florence moved to Europe for a number of years, where he designed plastics plants in Holland and England. In 1987 he officially retired from Crawford and Russell and began to work as an engineering consultant around the country, in such places as Hannibal, Missouri; Parkersburg, West Virginia; and Kingsport, Tennessee. He particularly enjoyed determining the cause of fires and accidents for insurance companies.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Unitarian Universalist Society, 20 Forest St., Stamford CT 06901, or to the Brookfield Craft Center, PO Box 122, Brookfield, CT 06804.

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## Advocacy

### A PARTIAL WIN

Thanks to all of you who signed postcards urging preservation of Cass Gilbert's Austin Nichols & Co. Warehouse (ANCW) at 184 Kent Avenue in Brooklyn. The Historic Districts Council forwarded over 250 of these postcards to Councilmember David Yassky asking him to support the designation of as an individual New York City landmark.

The HDC subsequently reported in its May E-Bulletin: *Unfortunately, Council Member Yassky still refuses to support the designation of this important Williamsburg waterfront building and without his support, the Landmarks Preservation Commission is reluctant to act. With Williamsburg currently under extreme development pressure, this building has become a symbol of Williamsburg's future. This is the line in the sand - we cannot afford to let this very visible and significant work by one of America's most prominent 20th century architects be destroyed by short-sighted avarice.*

*We must demonstrate to the administration that the protection of Williamsburg's historic character is more important than gratifying developers' greed. To suggest that preservation is at odds with the administration's goals of creating housing in the neighborhood is specious; the building has already been re-used for market-rate housing. The proposal to alter the windows and build a rooftop addition is being driven entirely by the developer's desire to create more expensive apartments.*

However, on May 10<sup>th</sup> we were informed by Mary Beth Betts of the LPC that the building had been calendared. This is significant step as once it has been officially calendared for public hearings, even if no date has been set for these hearings, no building permits can be issued by the Department of Buildings without the approval of the LPC. This is very important progress. A letter of thanks has gone out to Chairman Robert Tierney from the chapter.

ANCW is not yet an official New York City landmark though. We need to make sure hearings are actually held and that we continue to speak up about this building's importance so that it proceeds to landmark designation.

The owners withdrew their application for a zoning variance, which was pending before the New York City Board of Standards and Appeals. They also changed architects and are now working with Jordan Gruzen to develop a plan that is more sympathetic to the history of Gilbert's original design.

### A LOSS

In the same mailing in which you received postcards in support of landmarking ANCW, you received postcards asking for landmark designation for the Long Island City Power House. Thank you for sending these to Chairman Tierney of Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Unfortunately, in this case, we were not in time. A demolition permit was issued by the Department of Buildings on March 28<sup>th</sup> and the iconic smokestacks on this historic power plant started to come down. The developer, CGS Builders, and architect, Karl Fischer had developed a plan that kept the stacks (see renderings at <http://www.kfarchitect.com/>), but said once they found out from the city that they would need a variance to carry it out they decided it would take too much time and trouble. They would be familiar with the difficulty of this process after their involvement with the Austin Nichols & Co. Warehouse – same owner, same architect.

Latest news releases indicate that they will keep the building without the stacks and add several floors for luxury residential units. The architect has claimed they will keep the arched window openings. But how much structural fabric will remain when they demolish the coal pockets that still remain in the upper portion of the boiler house?

The history below by Mary Habstritt appeared in the April 14<sup>th</sup> issue of *Waterwire*, the online newsletter of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance.

*The Long Island City Power House opened in 1905 as part of "the most extensive system of electrification yet put in operation on any steam railway in the world" but is now threatened with demolition of its iconic smokestacks. The planned conversion to luxury condominiums intends to add six floors that will alter it almost beyond recognition. Demolition fabric is already draped over one of the stacks, and the owner has applied for demolition permits. It appears to be doomed on the eve of its 100th birthday.*

*The Power House was built as part of a massive endeavor to improve the city's commuter transportation network. Concerns about safety, noise, and dirt from steam-driven trains resulted in an 1897 agreement with the city of Brooklyn requiring the Long Island Rail Road to separate its tracks from the surface of Atlantic Avenue and to operate these passenger trains using a motive power that did not require combustion. Since it would make no sense to only partly electrify busy lines and require people to change trains to complete their trips, the LIRR proceeded to electrify all its steam lines out of Flatbush Avenue Terminal, the hub for heavy suburban and excursion traffic. Service was inaugurated in July, 1905 with trains*



Photos by Mary Habstritt

### *Two stacks down and two to go, May 14, 2005*

*running from the Flatbush Avenue Terminal over the Rockaway Beach Division.*

*The Pennsylvania Railroad owned the LIRR at this time and plans for the Power House were only part of an enormous electrification and expansion project which began in 1902 and ended in 1910 with the completion of Penn Station in Manhattan. Tunnels for both railroads under the Hudson and East Rivers were also part of the plan. McKim, Mead, and White were the overall project architects, which has caused a number of sources including a 1906 Scientific American article, to attribute the design of the Power House to this renowned firm. (Henry Herman) Westinghouse, Church, Kerr & Co., the engineering firm that designed the mechanical and electrical systems for the project and handled the structural engineering for the buildings, seems to some scholars to be a likelier candidate for the building's design.*

*The LIRR chose to use the third-rail system, which was more reliable than the newer single-phase system that used overhead wires. The subways had already been built to use electricity and made use of the same AC/DC, third-rail technology. Alternating current can be transmitted over longer distances, but direct current operates at lower voltage so was safer to have on the tracks near passengers. Also, AC-powered motors had not yet been perfected and DC motors were more powerful. The Long Island City Power House generated AC electricity that was transmitted to trackside substations, the romantic ruins of which still dot Brooklyn, where it was converted to DC to drive the motors on the trains.*

*The railroad considered building two power stations – one near Jamaica and one on the New York side of the Hudson – to connect with the Newark Rapid Transit system through the Hudson and Manhattan tubes into Church Street. However, the*

*land proved difficult to acquire and in order to create steam for the turbines, both plants needed to be located near a water source so the East River made more sense than Jamaica and one power house easiest of all. Long Island City was centrally located for the lines in Brooklyn and into Manhattan.*

*The Long Island City Power House is only the second power house in the country to be built to use steam turbines. This technology uses steam vapor to turn turbine generators. Steam turbines were invented by Sir Charles Parsons, an Englishman, who licensed the technology to the (George) Westinghouse Electric Co., which built and supplied the turbines. When the Power House opened, it had three 5,500 kW generators. By 1910 two 8,000 kW generators had been added to provide power to the tunnels into Penn Station. The plan was to continue to expand the plant to power trains all the way to New Jersey.*

*The Power House burned coal to boil water for steam to drive the turbines. There once was a steel tower that ran from the top of the boiler house over to the water for unloading coal from barges. It rose 170 feet above the dock with a big clamshell bucket that lifted the coal into cars that ran on a circular cable over a bridge into the boiler house where the coal was dumped into hoppers and crushed to a uniform size for efficient burning. It fell by gravity from the top of the building down into the boilers. The coal “pockets” or storage bins are still there. Ash from the burning of the coal fell down to another small railway in the basement, which carried this waste away.*

*The power house sits on a concrete foundation that is over six feet thick. The stacks alone took three and a half months to build. They are of steel plate lined with fire brick. They were built as independent structures from the boiler house so the building would not be stressed by the stacks deflecting in the*

wind. The 64-foot-long overhead crane is still in place in the turbine hall. It took three railroad cars to transport it from Morgan Engineering in Ohio, which built it. It was used to move generating equipment for installation and repair and could lift 55 tons.

The Long Island City waterfront was once a major transit hub, with freight being loaded and unloaded to carfloats (barges that carried railcars) using the transfer bridges in Gantry Plaza State Park. To the other side of the Power House was a large ferry landing where passengers could transfer from the ferries to the passenger trains that still stop at a yard just a few blocks away along Newtown Creek, itself a major

industrial thoroughfare where tugs and barges still ply their trade. This striking monument to the earlier days when our waterfront worked for us should be preserved.

### Roebling Chapter SIA Officers

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

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

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

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

Design: Joe Macasek, MacGraphics

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

July 10	Up Newtown Creek tour Brooklyn
July 16-17	Foundry Days Cold Spring, NY
July 24	Steamboat Excursion Lambertville, NJ
Aug. 28	Harvey Cruise – Manhattan

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**ROEBLING CHAPTER NEWSLETTER** is published at irregular intervals by the Roebling Chapter, Society for Industrial Archeology, c/o Mary Habstritt, 40 W 77th Street, 17-B, New York, NY 10024. e-mail: [RCSIAprez@aol.com](mailto:RCSIAprez@aol.com).

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ROEBLING CHAPTER  
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