

# ROEBLING CHAPTER

## Society for Industrial Archeology

November 2010

Vol. 19 No.3

### CHAPTER EVENTS

#### **2011 Annual Meeting**

**Paterson Museum**

**2 Market Street**

**Paterson, New Jersey**

*Saturday, January 29, 2011*

*Business Meeting: 12:30 – 3:30*

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

The business portion of the meeting will include annual reports from the President, Secretary and Treasurer, and election of officers. Plans for the upcoming year will be available and proposals invited. Feel free to bring your lunch. Beverages and light snacks will be available.

As per the RCSIA by-laws, four of the five members of the board are elected by the membership. The fifth member is appointed by the elected members. All current board members are eligible to run again: Jim Mackin – President, Mary Lee Baranger – Vice-President, Kevin Pegram – Treasurer, Aron Eisenpress – Secretary. However, Mary Lee Baranger has declined to run again due to many other activities with which she is involved. One of those activities relates to archiving the papers of her renowned mother (be sure to ask Mary Lee about her). Fortunately, Joe Macasek has volunteered to run for Vice President.

The Nominations Committee consisting of Tom Flagg as Chair, Bierce Riley and Beryl Goldberg worked diligently towards assuring a full slate of nominees. Candidates may also be nominated from the floor prior to the election and must be members in good standing and of the National SIA and RCSIA. To vote for RCSIA officers, the voter must be a member in good standing of both the National SIA and the RCSIA as per the by-laws of both organizations.

As our tradition, we will provide time for “show and tell.” If you plan to make a presentation, please let Jim Mackin know in advance. You are encouraged

to share your current IA research with your fellow members at the meeting.

Directions can be found at the Paterson Museum website: <http://www.thepatersonmuseum.com>. The museum is a walk of less than a mile from the Paterson train station and taxis are available at the station. There are also buses from NYC's Port Authority bus station.

#### **Annual Meeting Tour**

A factory or archeological site tour is being arranged on the morning of the annual meeting, but the plans are not yet finalized. Members will be notified via our chapter e-mail list. If you are not already on the list, please contact [RCSIAPrez@aol.com](mailto:RCSIAPrez@aol.com) or call (212) 663-5149.

#### **Vice President Candidate Biography**

JOE MACASEK

Joe is a long-term member of the Roebbling Chapter, Society for Industrial Archeology, Vice President of the Canal Society of New Jersey and a member of the board of directors of the Friends of Historic Speedwell, the Birth Place of the Telegraph. He holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in design from the Pratt Institute and is self employed graphic designer.

Some of Joe's history related professional projects include the design and fabrication of historic exhibits for the new Copper Mill Visitor Center in Chester, interpretive panel for New London Connecticut, and numerous interpretive panel and brochures for the Morris Canal Greenway in both Morris and Warren County.

Personal projects include authoring the Guide to the Morris Canal in Morris County. Joe and long time associate Bierce Riley have developed a program of Industrial Heritage Walks for the Morris County Park Commission. This popular program, now in the 12th season, offers 11 industrial archaeology tours each year to sites throughout the New York, New Jersey area.

**FOR THE LATEST ON UPCOMING EVENTS**

*WATCH THE ROEBLING CHAPTER WEB SITE FOR DETAILS*

**roebblingsia.org**



*Paterson's International High School, the site this year's Great Falls Symposium*

## RECENT EVENTS RECAP

### **2010 Corn Roast**

*By Jim Mackin*

This year's corn roast on Sunday, September 26th was most festive and memorable. We are so fortunate to have Mary Habstritt and Gerry Weinstein host our large group at their special place in Croton-on-the-Hudson. Roebling members and friends came from New Jersey, Long Island, Upstate and New York City.

The very dapper Gerry Weinstein treated early arrivers to an operational display in the Engineerium of the topping lift hoisting engine from the crane barge *Monarch*, one of the Merritt, Chapman & Scott vessels that raised the General Slocum from the mud of the East River. Late arrivers, however, were not disappointed as Gerry ran the engines again. In addition to making sure that everything was just right, Mary led a tour of the grounds, the houses, and the views to the Hudson River and some interesting topography.

At least one Roebling Chapter member, Jeff Fry, was occupied with not one, but three grills going at the same time. In addition to corn, burgers and hot dogs, Master Chef Jeff (note the rhyme) roasted chickens. But the efficiency of the grill process rested on Janet Mackin moving the roastings aggressively to the crowd. For the record, Lynn Rakos' guacamole dip was in much demand, matched only by a huge cake at the end of the day.

Despite the warm weather, only one person

hopped in the pool. It was good to have many young people, Tom Flagg, Joe Macasek and I not withstanding. But the youngest and undoubtedly future Roebling Chapter member was the beautiful and talented eighth-grader, Pooja, daughter of Dorothy and Aron Eisenpress. Can't wait 'til next year; but not ready yet to forget this Corn Roast.

### **Brooklyn Navy Yard Tour**

On Sunday, September 12th, some of us took the Urban Oyster tour of the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Urban Oyster, which conducts other tours such as Brooklyn Brewery, takes its group by bus from the Brooklyn Historical Society to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The tour commentary was enthusiastic and comprehensive and made a number of stops at the oldest graving dock, select buildings and the hospital ruins. The prospect of a museum on site raises hopes of a new appreciation for this great industrial relic.

The map (provided) of the entire Navy Yard was helpful in understanding its scope and various functionalities. Our tour guide conveyed the significance of the Yard and the famous ships that were built or maintained there. With that in mind, it is still difficult to appreciate that it was the city's largest employer and all that implies. One good way to gain some of the appreciation is to get your hands on Roebling member John Bartelstone's book "*The Brooklyn Navy Yard*." Another way was to have been at the 2003 SIA Conference based in Brooklyn. Yet another way, and of low cost for members, is to buy Tom Flagg a cappuccino and start a conversation about the shipyard's railroad.

### **Madame Alexander Doll Company Factory Tour**

Some 15 Roebling Chapter members toured the Madame Alexander Doll Company under the guidance of Latasha Sidibay, Assistant Manager of Client Relations. The company is in the Manhattanville section of Manhattan and manufactures approximately 500 different types of dolls for sale primarily in the United States.

The factory process is neither a "soup to nuts," nor just an assembly operation. The rubber doll heads are made in the Far east. They are customized for the larger number of dolls produced from a limited number of generic heads. Designers created the heads with different

“looks” over the years and by trial and error in the marketplace. One memorable image that received much of our attention was a board of some few hundred heads. The fabric is cut and affixed primarily by hand.

We were guided through design and assembly areas, with some rather specialized machines. Madame Alexander is very “hands on” company where experience counts. We saw the doll hospital area where dolls are repaired, and our members demonstrated their special talent of asking a gamut of questions. The museum display is stunning in its breadth and reveals how specialized the dolls can be. Some dolls sell for thousands of dollars. Many doll owners have long connections with Madame Alexander and many are members of various doll clubs.

The real Madame Alexander was Beatrice Alexander Behrman, an entrepreneur, who ran the company with her husband. She died at age 95 in 1990. The business started in 1923 and attained distinction with a Scarlet O’Hara doll from “*Gone With The Wind*”. Soon Disney and many other well-known character dolls followed. Madame Alexander also introduced the first dolls with “sleep eyes” that open and close.

Madame Alexander Doll Company resides within the an old Studebaker facility, which, in turn, lies within the 17-acre footprint of land acquired by Columbia University. Some of us walked the immediate neighbourhood to appreciate the industrial-related wonders nearby. These included the last vestige of the 3rd Avenue Electric Cable Car line with the 3<sup>rd</sup> rail in the middle, the Sheffield Farms Milk Company and the 130-foot girders of the Riverside Drive viaduct.

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

### ***The Most Powerful Idea in the World***

By William Rosen (*Random House, 2010*)

Reviewed by Jim Mackin

This book uses “The Rocket” locomotive built by father and son engineers, George and Robert Stephenson to back into the thesis of what was the most powerful idea in the world. The most powerful idea was the most important invention of the Industrial Revolution, and that was the “invention” itself. To begin his argument, Rosen questions what made the

## IN MEMORIAM

### ***Robert Amson Olmsted. P.E., FASCE***

*November 7, 1924 - August 16, 2010*

Our Esteemed Roebling Chapter member, Bob Olmsted, passed away this past summer. Many members had such high regard for him, which was evident at a memorial service hosted by his gracious wife, Elizabeth, and his family at their apartment on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. Countless anecdotes attested to how central and significant he was to the metropolitan area’s transportation. One story told had this poignant point: if you asked Bob for input on something, he was likely to respond “I’ll get back to you.” When he did get back to you, he offered much more help, detail and insight than ever expected. So many accomplishments; so much making of transportation history. He is most affectionately missed.

eighteenth-century Britain such fertile soil for inventors? The simple answer is the concept of intellectual property.

With this comes an excellent recounting of the roles of the great English jurist Edward Coke, who advanced the legal process for inventions, and John Locke, who introduced a new understanding of property to be embraced by inventors and makers of government alike. Francis Bacon and his role in the development of the scientific method are also given his due.

The continued story covers the Newcomen and Watt steam engines, and makes much of Kay’s flying shuttle and the spinning jenny. The flying shuttle enabled a wider cloth product that came to be known as “broadloom.” The jenny, though usually cited for dramatically reducing the price of yard, is more profoundly understood to be the first major integration of machine processes. This was such a threat to the old artisan method of production that Luddites and similar groups destroyed jennies. They understood their skills to be property; to them, ideas and inventions were not property. A quote in the book was further to this point: “an artisan can make a family prosperous, a great inventor can enrich an entire nation.”

Some tidbits, in case you didn’t know: Abraham Lincoln is the only President who was granted a pat-

ent. The American patent system was much simpler than the British one. Washington and Jefferson signed the early patents issued. Three patents (50¢ fee) were issued in the first year with the first going to a native of Vermont. The third went to the namesake of our Philadelphia Chapter, Oliver Evans. Oliver Evans is another wonderful story and, believe it or not, he is buried in Trinity Cemetery in northern Manhattan.

One fault of "The Most Powerful Idea" lies with an economic analysis provided. It contrasted different countries and different theories of economists in attempting

to explain why and where inventions prospered. The analysis was ambitious and perhaps it is another book. This book is powerful enough without it.

### Roebling Chapter SIA Officers

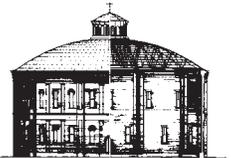
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Membership is \$20.00 per year, payable to RCSIA, c/o Aron Eisenpress, 235 West End Avenue, Apt. 14-C, New York, NY 10023. A downloadable chapter membership form and general information about the SIA are available at [www.siahq.org](http://www.siahq.org).

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AN OFFICIAL CHAPTER OF THE  
SOCIETY FOR INDUSTRIAL  
ARCHEOLOGY



## UPCOMING EVENTS – 2011

- January 29** Roebling Chapter Annual Meeting  
Paterson, New Jersey
- June, 2 – 5** National SIA Annual Meeting  
Seattle, Washington
- October 13 – 26** National SIA Annual Meeting  
Seattle, Washington

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