

Channel Crossings

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Newsletter of the Los Angeles Maritime Museum, San Pedro California



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WORKING OUR BUTTS OFF: PILE DRIVING AND THE BUILDING OF LOS ANGELES HARBOR

The Maritime Museum's newest exhibit celebrates the work of pile drivers, informally known as "Pilebutts." In "Working Our Butts Off: Pile Driving and the Building of Los Angeles Harbor," visitors can learn about the ancient origins of pile driving, see works of art created by real-life pile drivers, hear authentic labor songs, and take a "pilebutt" quiz. The history of local pile driving brings us to the present day, as the final segment of the show features

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**Los Angeles
Maritime Museum
Channel Crossings**

Berth 84
Foot of Sixth Street
San Pedro, CA 90731
(310) 548-7618
www.lamaritimemuseum.org

Museum Hours:
Tuesday–Saturday
10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.
(last entry 4:30 p.m.)
Sunday
12:00 noon–5:00 p.m.
Closed Mondays

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The Los Angeles Maritime Museum is a special facility of the City of Los Angeles, Department of Recreation and Parks, operating with the financial assistance of the Los Angeles Maritime Museum Foundation, a 501(c)(3) corporation.

The Los Angeles Maritime Museum creates an awareness and appreciation of the maritime history of coastal California, with an emphasis on the contributions of the people and institutions of the port city of Los Angeles.

Director's Message

By Marifrances Trivelli

Last month, the Maritime Museum celebrated the opening of a new exhibit. Humorously entitled "*Working our Butts Off: Pile Drivers and the Building of Los Angeles Harbor*," the exhibit explores the ancient skill of pile driving, and role of the pilebutts in building the infrastructure of today's harbor. The Museum staff and volunteers worked closely with members of the Pile Drivers, Bridge, and Dock and Wharf Builders Local Union 2375, of Wilmington California to create a new interactive experience for our visitors. (See related story on next page). The pile drivers took an active part in the exhibit's design, construction, and installation, even working outdoors to transform our roll-up exterior door to feature a classic pile driving illustration.

This exhibit is a perfect example of the critical role the museum plays in the life of the community. It is our mission and responsibility to create an awareness of our local maritime history, emphasizing the contributions of the working people of the harbor area. Pile driving, though such an integral part of any waterfront construction, (as well as for bridges, freeways, and skyscrapers), is often overlooked by the general public. The Maritime Museum is the ideal place for visitors to discover the history of pile driving and how it relates to their own lives. (Especially appropriate in this case because the east side of our building is constructed on piles). Visitors who enter with little knowledge of pile driving leave with a new appreciation of how pile driving helps to build places to work, live, or travel. The Pile Drivers are especially proud of their union, celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. The inclusion of the original union banner in the exhibit is a dramatic visual reminder that the working conditions and benefits enjoyed today were hard won, and should not be taken for granted. We consider the pile driving exhibit as the merger of a story needing to be told, in the perfect location to share and educate. And the result is on view through January, 2005.

While our pile drivers provide a strong physical foundation for our museum, it is our members who play an equally important role: providing the financial supports on which we build new exhibits, care for our collections, and produce new programs. And like our concrete piles holding strong now for over 60 years, your dedication and ongoing support will ensure us a solid future as well. Please renew your membership annually, and consider giving at a higher level if possible. Introduce your friends and family to the museum, and urge them to become involved during this exciting time of change. With your help, our children and grandchildren will have a place to experience maritime history in their own community, built on firm foundations.

Thank you for helping to build a stronger Museum!

WORKING OUR BUTTS OFF: PILE DRIVING AND THE BUILDING OF LOS ANGELES HARBOR

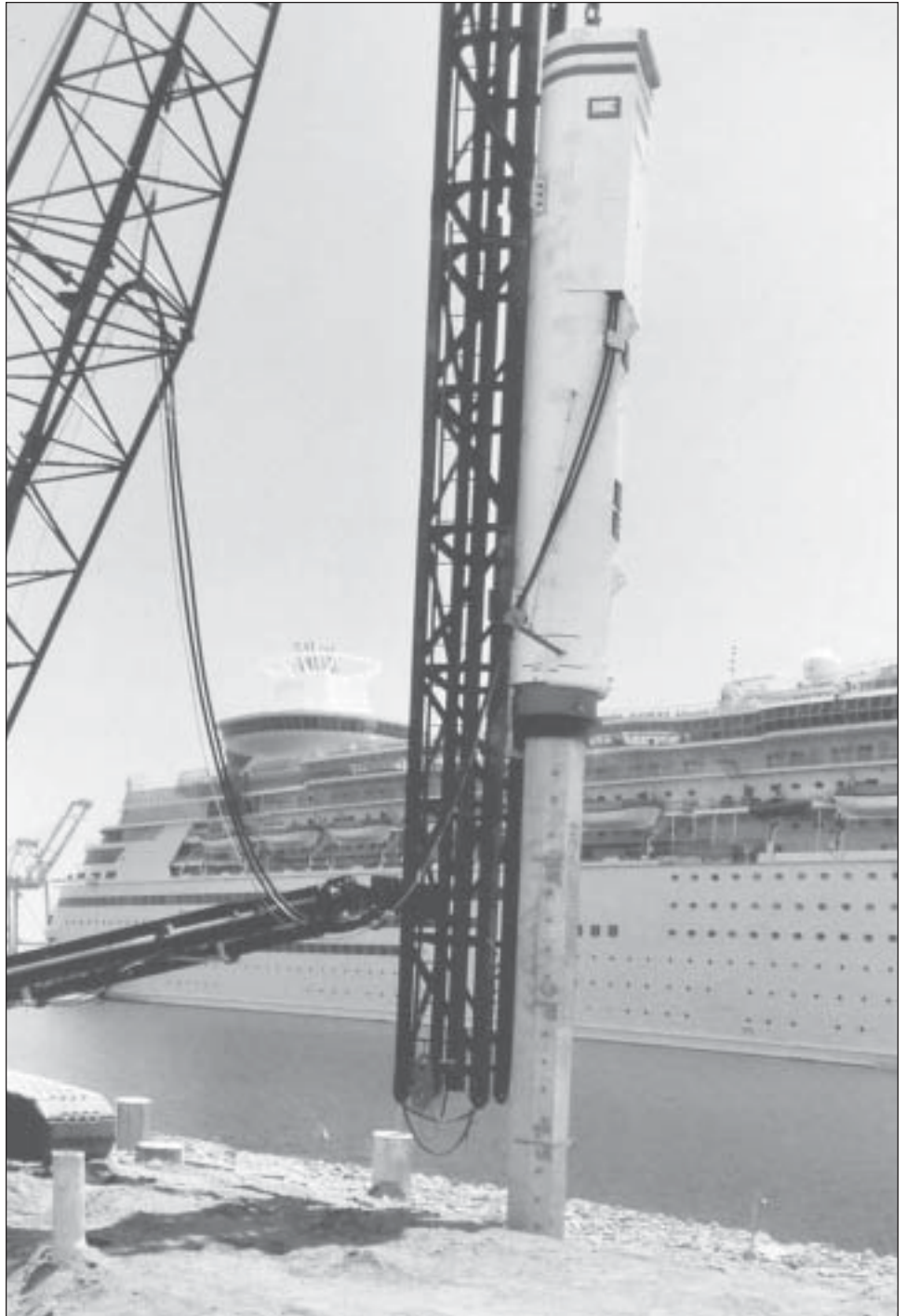
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large-scale color photos of pile driving work in progress on the San Pedro waterfront. Labor historian Archie Green has studied pile driving traditions and history in depth, and he provides the following detailed job description:

“Work as a pilebutt can best be described as heavy construction involving specific skills in the area of piling, rough carpentry, cutting, and welding.

Pilebutts generally perform foundation work on large scale construction projects such as piers, wharves, drydocks, breakwaters, underwater pipelines, bridges, highways, skyscrapers, and parking lots. They also called upon to reconstruct, repair, maintain, and even demolish existing structures. Whether constructing, maintaining or demolishing structures, their work is generally very strenuous.

Pilebutts perform all heavy labor—skilled and unskilled—incidental to their work. They load and unload their broad gauge lumber, construction forms and pilings up to 80 or more feet in length. They manhandle, rig, erect, and drive wooden, steel, and cement pile. They construct, move, set, and scale all forms and shapes used in the laying of cast-in-place structures. They construct, climb, and demolish wooden
continued on next page



21st-century pile driving at Berth 93, across from the cruise ship center in Los Angeles harbor. This is the first section of what will become the new waterfront promenade. Pile drivers are responsible for placement of the 45-foot high, two-foot diameter concrete piles. The piles will support a concrete deck, covered with wood.

— Photograph courtesy Moffatt & Nichol, Engineers

WORKING OUR BUTTS OFF

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and metal falsework. They shore and brace any excavations undertaken in connection with their work.

During demolition work, they perform all actual deconstruction with cutting torches, jackhammers, and power saws. They also do any rigging and loading work associated with the removal of debris. They perform this work on a variety of maritime and shoreside locations including barges, work floats, tugboats, wharves, piers, pontoons, and foundation excavations. Because their work usually occurs during the early stages of construction, the sites are often unprepared, uneven, and ungraded.

For the individual workers, these duties translate into physical evolution involving repeated bending, stooping, lifting, carrying, and climbing. Pilebutts routinely work with heavy hand-held equipment and outsizing material. They are often



Pile Drivers Building Allen Field—Allen Field was a civilian airfield built in 1927 on Terminal Island, later re-named Reeves Field and used by the Navy during World War II.

— *Photograph Courtesy Port of Los Angeles*

required to make unassisted individual lifts in excess of 100 pounds. Depending on the job, day-to-day individual lifting and carrying requirements will run from 50 to 100 pounds.

Bending and stooping, often for prolonged periods, are also a routine part of the work. Pilebutts are also required to climb. They must scale pile-driving leads, the track upon which the driving hammer runs, up to 120 feet tall. Access is provided by means of a vertical ladder. Safety belts are not always practical and are seldom worn. There is additional climbing on and around the job site which is as varied as it is strenuous. Pilebutts are ordinary five-day-a-week workers.

The usual work week is 36 hours long. However, as with all construction work, 60-, 70-, and even 80-hour weeks are not unheard of.

There is no light duty as a pilebutt. While the men are always happy to carry an injured man for a few days, there are no sheltered positions where he can safely spend the rest of his professional life. In order to obtain work out of the hall, a member must be able to perform all the duties of his trade.

We think it is safe to describe work as a pilebutt as very strenuous. It requires a high degree of agility, strength, and stamina.”

The exhibit will run through January, 2005.



The oversized graphics were adapted from Giacomo Patri's "How to Organize the Job: A Handbook for Stewards."

— *Albert Alcalá Photo*

PILE DRIVERS LOCAL 2375 CELEBRATES 100 YEARS



This year marks the 100th anniversary of Local Pile Drivers Union 2375, of Wilmington California. Prominently displayed in the exhibit is the original union banner. The Museum thanks the members of Local 2375 for lending us this significant labor history item. Labor Historian Archie Green has compiled a timeline highlighting the early years of the history of Local 2375:

- 1904 March 8 – *Los Angeles Examiner* reports “San Pedro starts a new local union: Pile Drivers and Structural Iron Workers Fall into Line.” Sunday afternoon organizational meeting was held March 6. Speeches by Frank Buchanan, International President IABSIW, and several San Francisco unionists. Eighteen men apply for a charter.
- 1905 Local Union merges into local 51 by year’s end.
- 1912 Local Union members travel to San Diego to assist in Industrial Workers of the World’s free speech fight. Some San Pedro pile drivers also assist in the Mexican Revolution.
- 1913 Local 51 Pile Drivers make unsuccessful attempt to organize Santa Monica Pier jobs.
- 1920 During jurisdictional conflict between Iron Workers and Carpenters, San Pedro pile drivers switch to Local 2375. Eventually grows into strong union, with innovative experience on harbor and waterfront work as well as on freeway construction and earthquake repairs.

Celebrate the San Pedro Fishing Industry...

**COMING SOON TO THE
LOS ANGELES
MARITIME MUSEUM!**

Welcome, New Members!

The following recently signed on as members of the Los Angeles Maritime Museum.

Michael O’Gara
 Tony and Winnie Barcott
 Kruno and Marie Ursich
 Matt and Dorothy Matich*
 Clarence and Mary Alice Harrison
 Gordon Ghareeb
 David L. Staley
 Robert E. Schenbeck
 Dr. John Goode
 Diane H. Stricker
 Steve Blount
 Michael Ruggera*

** Life Members*

United Radio Amateur Club Broadcasts Maritime Museum News Worldwide!

By Jim Pitman, United Radio Amateur Club



Since March of 1987 the United Radio Amateur Club (URAC), with its amateur (“ham”) call sign WQZ 357 has maintained and operated a radio station on the second floor of the Los Angeles Maritime Museum. Station operators are club volunteers who donate their time to explaining amateur radio to museum guests. URAC has been an active club in the Harbor/South Bay area since 1927. K6AA has the capability of reaching anywhere in the world and has communicated with 330 countries. Islands and island groups are issued distinctive call signs to distinguish them from their mother country.

The goal of the ham radio station is to contact all 335 countries. Postcards, called QSL cards (meaning “confirmation”) are exchanged between stations as a means of proving the completion of a two-way contact. K6AA has thousands of these cards as a result of contacts made since 1987. Some of these cards are shared with visitors to the station.

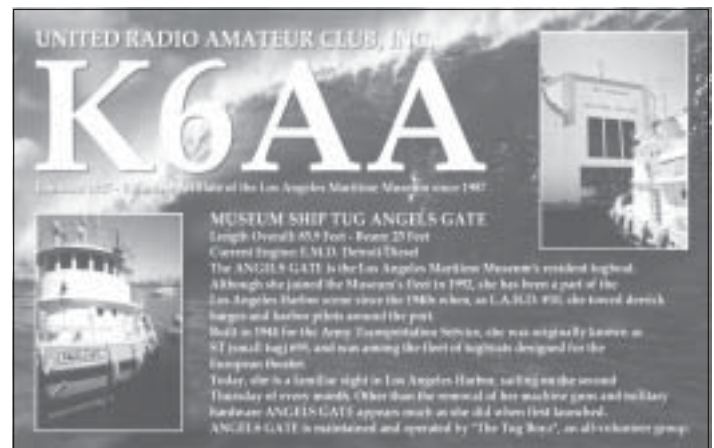
Museum visitors observe several methods of communication used in our operation. They include voice, Morse code, and a number of digital modes utilizing a combination of computers and radio. One of the digital modes, Slow Scan Television, allows us to send and receive still color pictures.

Several times during the year URAC participates in Ham Radio Special Events. These events commemorate a historic event, celebrate an occasion, or serve as an exercise for emergency preparedness. We also provide communications support for public events.

One recent special event was “Museum Ships Weekend,” held this year from 5:00 p.m. on Friday, June 15, to 5:00 p.m. on Sunday, June 18. There were close to 100 ships and Naval shore stations participating. Our goal was to contact as many of these stations as possible in order to receive their special QSL card or certificate. This year the



The Club’s own distinctive QSL cards featuring the tug ANGELS GATE.



event was sponsored by the Cruiser USS Salem (CA 139) in Quincy, Massachusetts. We represented the Maritime Museum's tug ANGELS GATE and our special QSL relayed the history of the tug. Our station was manned throughout the entire time period and although atmospheric conditions were not all that great, we made contact with 695 stations, including the USS Salem, USS Missouri, USS Texas, USS Razorback, USS Orleck, USS Lexington, USS Kidd, USS Georgetown, SS Lane Victory, SS American Victory, and the RMS Queen Mary. We have since received several hundred requests for our Angels Gate card. It was a fun time for us and a way to help put out the word worldwide about our great Museum.

Please come visit our corner of the Museum and watch for improvements in the near future as we are planning a new public exhibit on the wall outside the station.

Jim Pitman, WA6MZY, is the president of the United Radio Amateur Club.



Armchair navigators will love our line of compasses and globes. Store all of your souvenirs in an attractive treasure box inspired by the designs of ancient maps.

Notecard of popular landmark Angels Gate lighthouse.



Notecard: Matson Line Steamship MATSONIA sails again.

Lots of New Things at The Sea Chest Museum Gift Shop

Autumn is here, and that means the familiar holiday displays are already in place at your favorite stores. Why not do some early shopping and support the museum at the same time at The Sea Chest?

You can find many of your favorite things together with our new arrivals of books, sterling silver jewelry, linen towels, photo albums, soap, candles, and journals. Many of our new items are exclusively found in the Sea Chest.

Just look for the “Los Angeles Maritime Museum Collection” stamp and you will know that your gift item is truly one of a kind. Pile Driving tee shirts are available for a limited time. Tall ship models in miniature will please that budding young sailor on your list. A new selection of nautical Christmas cards has arrived, and they’re going fast! A Sea Chest gift certificate is sure to please that seafaring someone who has everything.

Shop early—and remember to bring your membership card to receive a 10 percent discount on every purchase. Our friendly volunteer sales staff will be pleased to assist you.

Remember—all profits from the Sea Chest directly benefit the Museum, so a gift from the Sea Chest actually gives twice!

Sea San Pedro: Tall Ships Parade Into Harbor October 16-17

This month, the Port of Los Angeles will host “Sea San Pedro” a weekend festival of tall ships and working harbor boats. Sea San Pedro is a local event which will build excitement for the 2005 Festival of Sail. This year’s event will be smaller in scale, and will feature local sailing ships, as well as a variety of workboats, tugs, fireboats, historic boats, and vessels which call the Port of Los Angeles home. SSP will open with a parade featuring the EXY and IRVING JOHNSON, SWIFT OF IPSWICH, SPIRIT OF DANA POINT, LYNX, and TOLE MOUR. For information, call (310) 833-6055.

Los Angeles Maritime Museum
Berth 84, Foot of Sixth Street
San Pedro, California 90731

Support the Maritime Museum Today!

Help us preserve our maritime past for the education and enjoyment of future generations. Museum members receive: free subscription to *Channel Crossings*, invitations to special events, a ride on the historic *Angels Gate* tug, and a 10% discount in the Sea Chest Gift Shop and Book Store.

\$25 INDIVIDUAL \$40 FAMILY \$100 SPONSOR
 \$500 BENEFACTOR \$1,000 PATRON/CORPORATE*

*Recognition on Donor Board

I am interested in becoming a Volunteer, please contact me.

I would like to purchase a gift membership. I have enclosed the name and address of my friend/family member. Please send a letter to my friend/family member announcing my gift and send me an acknowledgment letter.

New Membership Membership Renewal

My company will match my gift. A completed form is enclosed.

Gift Membership

Mr. Mrs. Mr. & Mrs. Ms. Miss _____ (other)

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