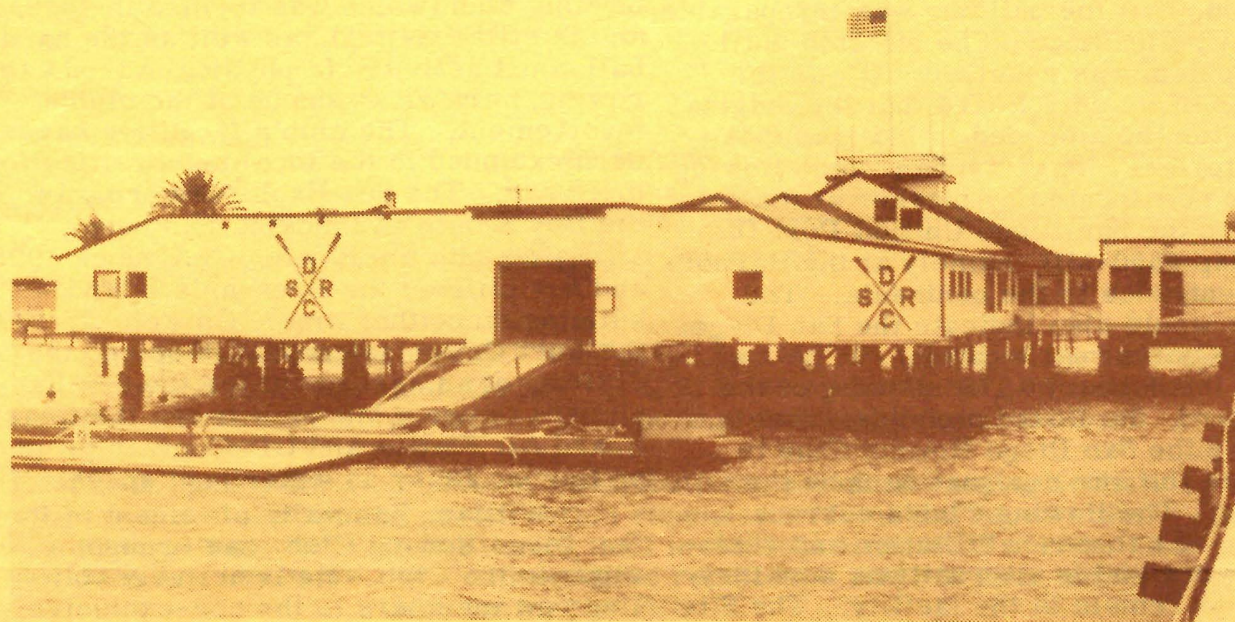


Reflections

March 1978



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THE SAN DIEGO ROWING CLUB - AN HISTORIC SITE

by Pat Schaelchlin

The San Diego Rowing Club will celebrate its 90th year of existence this year; its building will be 78 years old. How many more birthdays it can celebrate will depend on the negotiations in progress with the Board of Port Commissioners. The Club house is located in the new Marina at the foot of Fifth Avenue and is jeopardized by the attitude that it is no longer welcome on its historic site.

SOHO first became involved with the Rowing Club in April 1975, when the Board under President Bill Cartwright, voted to support the efforts to preserve the old boat house. San Diego city historic site designation #105 was obtained in July 1975. Later it was decided that the building could not be moved, as has been intended, a few feet away. At this time, architectural drawings were made

(continued)

for a new facility. The drawings called for the construction of a new building on the then Brennan's Island.

Brennan's Island had been created in 1935 with the dredging of the harbor and had been connected by foot bridge to the club house. In 1937, a handball court building was constructed. In the development of the new Marina, the island has been land filled and has become part of the south arm of the Marina.

At this point, the historic site designation complicated the club's interest and its intentions became suspect. There were allegations that it was using the designation to effect its continuing tenancy on the site. The Port Director pointed out that such a designation surely created problems in the construction of a new facility. The dialogue became clouded. In January 1977, the Club representatives again appeared before the Site Board, asking that the designation be removed, that the building was irreparable, and that no lease could be effected until this problem was resolved. It was the decision of the Site Board that the original designation be amended to indicate that the historical site of the San Diego Rowing Club be now located by marker at the point shown on the San Diego Unified Port District Map #550-MB, namely at the Harbor Street entrance to the peninsula. The marker would also indicate the San Diego Rowing Club's real location.

At the January 1978 meeting of the Site Board, the Board members were asked by the San Diego Rowing Club to reinstate the site designation upon the building. The Rowing Club's current thinking was that rehabilitation and restoration were viable alternatives, and they wished to remain in the facility. The Site Board voted against the request.

It becomes apparent that the entire situation has been a mis-management of words and intent. It has revolved around the San Diego Rowing Club's fight to remain in existence, (for removal from their present location will mean the termination of the club,) and the Port District's reluctance to negotiate an acceptable lease. In this maze of what has been said, what has been done, and the questioning of participant intent, the building itself is the victim.

The San Diego Rowing Club was formed in 1888 and was known as the Excelsior Rowing and Swimming Club. George Marston was one of its Charter members. The club promoted the values

of strong physical exercise which took the forms of rowing, swimming and gymnastics. Competition on a national level necessitated the rowing club's geographical identification; the new and present name was adopted in 1891.

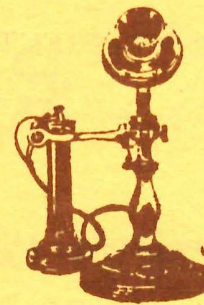
From the beginning, the club was located in the tidelands--first at the Chandler Boat House, then in the club's adjacent annex, and later 250 feet westward to the present building, which was built in 1900. The San Diego Rowing Club and its club house are tied to this location.

The San Diego Rowing Club has been part of urban San Diego from its beginning, as literally hundreds of its citizens were active members. No mention of early San Diego can be made without recognition of its influence. The rowing teams were strong contenders in all of the races and the club's regattas. Swimming and fishing contests, the January 1st ocean dips, the bowling club (which was formed in 1922 and is still existing), as well as the handball court activity, (a physical adjunct to rowing,) are all evidence of the club's involvement. The club's facilities have been extended to the local universities for their use. The Sea Explorers program of the Boy Scouts of America has been affiliated with the Rowing Club since 1925 and has utilized the Brennan's Island building since that time. On Feb. 7, 1978, the Port Commissioners authorized the drafting of an agreement for the Sea Explorers to use a lagoon between the Coast Guard Air Station and GD-Convair property on Harbor Drive as waterfront space.

William Zumwalt, president of the San Diego Rowing Club, has brought a new vigor to the Club. He is actively soliciting new members to the non-exclusive club. Membership is by request. He intends to raise the necessary \$100,000 to \$150,000 to stabilize the building and to restore it to its original, prime condition. The members are determined to remain at their harbor-side location and intend to carry their fight into the courts if necessary.

Jim Ellis, Assemblyman 77th District, California Legislature, has initiated a resolution that the Club House be placed on the State Historical Landmark Roster. An application is in process for the Club House's nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. It cannot be doubted that this building is one of San Diego's landmarks; as such, it must be protected.

In all of the problems of communication, cross-intent, and personalities, let's not forget that the club and its building have this historical merit. Let's set aside the destructive "should the building be saved" and turn to "how it can be adapted to its new environment". The Marina can be enhanced by its presence. Compromise can be met. Let's stop fighting and do it!



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New _____ Renewal _____ Date _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ZIP CODE _____

TELEPHONE (home) _____ (business) _____

REFERRED BY _____

_____ SEND ME A VOLUNTEER QUESTIONNAIRE.

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