



San Francisco Bay Trail Historical Markers

Eight sculptural markers tracing World War II history along the path of the Richmond Bay Trail — once the site of Kaiser shipyards. The project was designed by a collaborative team of design firm Mayer/Reed, visual artists James Harrison and Lewis Watts, writer Chiori Santiago and project manager/historian Donna Graves. Commissioned by the Richmond Redevelopment Agency for the City of Richmond and the National Park Service, with funding from the California Coastal Conservancy, and the Association of Bay Area Governments.



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The historical markers are important embellishments to Richmond’s waterfront and a significant component of the new Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front National Historical Park. Punctuating over two miles of spectacular shoreline, they link several of Richmond’s parks and the Rosie the Riveter Memorial, as well as the Ford Assembly Building, future home for the National Park’s Visitors Center. The markers also enhance the San Francisco Bay Trail by introducing information about the area’s social and natural history in signs that engage visitors through rich content and powerfully developed forms.

The markers consist of a graceful 18-foot-high sweep of metal – suggesting the prow of a massive wartime ship – and richly colored graphic panels filled with images of wartime Richmond and the memories of women and men who made the city a critical part of President Roosevelt’s “Arsenal of Democracy.”

A sleepy town of 23,000 at the start of WWII, Richmond’s population mushroomed to over 100,000 in just two years. The Kaiser Shipyards employed over 90,000 people at their peak, and were among the first to recruit women and people of color into their workforce. Men and women from across the country and from diverse backgrounds came to Richmond to find new, better-paying jobs throughout the war.

The markers describe a broad range of home front experiences and the dramatic changes that Richmond experienced during World War II – from the incarceration of Richmond’s Japanese-American community to the city’s lively wartime nightlife, advances in civil rights and other legacies.



ROSIE THE RIVETER / WORLD WAR II HOME FRONT
NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

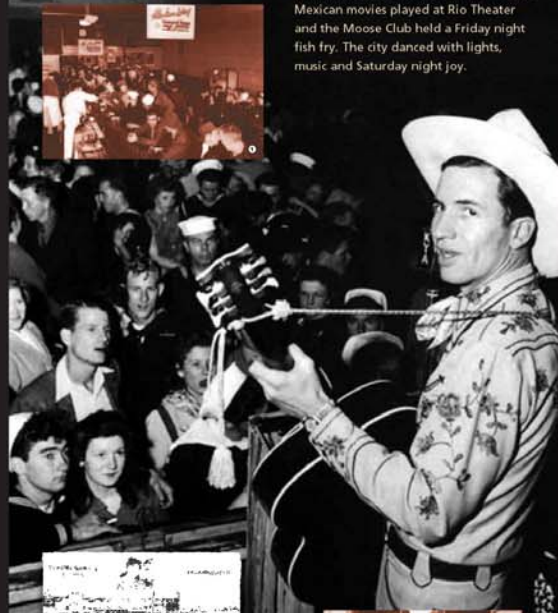
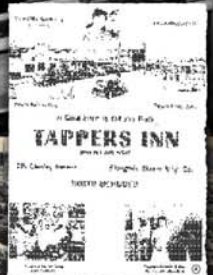

SHIFT CHANGE

“Back in 1944 you only needed 25 cents to go to Schwartz’s Ballroom, where we danced to live music all evening. I got my money’s worth because I never did sit out even one dance!”
Joseph Wilson-Neil

The daily adventure began at 5 a.m. for shipfitter Thelma Jensen and her daughter Norma, when they’d wake to catch a cable car to San Francisco’s ferry terminal. In overalls, they looked like men, so they rode hanging outside the car, which women weren’t allowed to do. “The next leg of their commute was even more exciting, riding the ferry boat over to Richmond,” recalled Norma’s daughter Donna Jones—until the day the ferry was caught in a frightening electrical storm.

Three shifts a day, crowds from Richmond and surrounding cities made the journey to the shipyards, walking miles on foot, organizing carpools, hopping the shipyard train and hanging onto bus straps. “Downtown was suddenly just a mass of moving people of all kinds,” recalled Phyllis Gould.

At shift’s end, the human tide changed direction. Shoppers jostled in the streets. Fingers snapped to blues bands at Tapper’s Inn; zoot-suiters jitterbugged to “Jersey Bounce.” Folks went to church, had dinner and a game of whist. Mexican movies played at Rio Theater and the Moose Club held a Friday night fish fry. The city danced with lights, music and Saturday night joy.






- 1 Rosie the Riveter, considered “the symbol of the shipyard and the war effort,” is the subject of the “Shipyard” exhibit.
- 2 The “Shipyard” exhibit is the subject of the “Shipyard” exhibit.
- 3 The “Shipyard” exhibit is the subject of the “Shipyard” exhibit.

- 4 Rosie the Riveter is the subject of the “Shipyard” exhibit.
- 5 The “Shipyard” exhibit is the subject of the “Shipyard” exhibit.
- 6 The “Shipyard” exhibit is the subject of the “Shipyard” exhibit.

Developed by the Richmond
Historical Association

City
of
Richmond





NO HOME ON THE HOME FRONT

Located in Shimada Park, named for Richmond's Japanese sister city, this marker is the first public retelling of the wartime incarceration of Richmond's Japanese American community, and the relocation of local Italian residents who were also deemed "enemy aliens." A separate project funded by the California State Library allowed Graves to gather oral histories and family photographs from these communities, which were incorporated into the graphic panels.



ROSIE THE RIVETER/WORLD WAR II HOME FRONT NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

No Home ON THE HOME FRONT

"When my family returned to the nursery, all the glass panes in the greenhouses were broken. I didn't see it because I was overseas with the 442nd in Italy."
 Jun Honda

"I still don't understand how they could have allowed my brother to stay here and work in the shipyards, and send my father and mother away from their home. They lost the house, the property...and that's all they had."
 Margherita Siri Burgy

Bombs exploding over Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 destroyed American ships, shattered lives and divided American people. In Richmond, war stirred thousands to roll up their sleeves and build new ships. They shared a single goal: to win against the enemy.

War kindled fear and long-held prejudices, and America's own citizens became suspect. Immigrants from Japan and Italy who'd lived in Richmond for decades were labeled "enemy aliens." Japanese Americans

were forced to shutter their businesses and piled onto trains, each passenger clutching the two suitcases they were allowed to carry. They were incarcerated, behind barbed wire, in Topaz Relocation Center, Utah. Italian-American families were split in two: non-citizens were forced away from the waterfront, while others could stay in Richmond. Yet citizens of both communities enlisted to defend US ideals.

Despite the wounds of war, many who were sent away returned to Richmond. They rebuilt. The greenhouses filled with roses and carnations. In 1961, some of the original flower-growing families helped launch a Sister City relationship with Shimada, Japan. As allies, they continue "aiding in the development of mutual understanding between citizens of free countries."

NOTICE TO ALIENS OF ENEMY NATIONALITIES

Developed by the Richmond Redevelopment Agency for the City of Richmond




DIVIDED WE LIVE

Richmond's shipyards were erased by post-war redevelopment that transformed the area. Now filled with housing developments, open space and a recreational marina, the historical markers allow residents and visitors to understand the site's complex, and at times contentious, past. This marker uses its proximity to the founding place of Richmond's NAACP to discuss racial discrimination on the home front and struggles for civil rights during and after the war.



ROSIE THE RIVETER/WORLD WAR II HOME FRONT
NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

DIVIDED WE LIVE



"There were so many of us who were tired of being put last. Real change was happening, and it took us working folks to make it happen."



Cleophas Brown

In 1944, you could stand here and wave to the folks living in Harbor Gate Homes. In one of those buildings, constructed for the influx of shipyard workers, the new Richmond chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the NAACP, took up its first task.

As Americans united in the war effort, they lived in segregation. Although life in Richmond was a great improvement, Jim Crow practices


followed migrants from the South. At church, at the movies, in Scout meetings and in the union halls, black residents were separated from their white neighbors. When Cleophas Brown and Margaret Starks of the NAACP protested housing discrimination, officials tried to evict Harbor Gate's African-American tenants. Black demonstrators rallied in front of City Hall, signed petitions and began a rent strike. "They thought they could scare the people, but... we were learning fast about how to get some of the things we needed," Brown said.

By 1945, Richmond's NAACP was one of the most influential civil rights organizations in the region. Their call for equality and interracial solidarity inspired the next generation of activists.

"A lot of young Mexican Americans became civil rights activists in the 1950s. My family left Richmond when the shipyards closed and moved back to the Central Valley to register voters and become community activists."

Antonio Medrano



1. Historic Americans, based from the main signpost, were based in the shipyard and moved to Harbor Gate Homes before construction was complete.

2. Antonio Medrano is based at the home in Central Valley. He is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley.

3. Photo credit: The Historic Site, San Francisco, California.

4. Photo credit: The Historic Site, San Francisco, California.

5. Photo credit: The Historic Site, San Francisco, California.

6. Photo credit: The Historic Site, San Francisco, California.

7. Photo credit: The Historic Site, San Francisco, California.

8. Photo credit: The Historic Site, San Francisco, California.

9. Photo credit: The Historic Site, San Francisco, California.

10. Photo credit: The Historic Site, San Francisco, California.

Developed by the Richmond
Redevelopment Agency for
City
of
Richmond

AMERICANS

ALL

DREAMING OF UNITY

"I remember, when I was a little girl, I could lie in my room on Bissell Avenue on a foggy night and listen to music from the shipyards drifting in through the windows."

Betty Reid Soskin



Gather 'round! As the war effort rolled on President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued a rallying cry: "We are fighting that the spirit of brotherhood which we prize in this country may be practiced here and by free men everywhere."



Real brotherhood was more difficult to find. Men looked askance at women in pants. City folk looked down on "Okies and Arkies," while "People who came from Oklahoma, they were never used to being around Mexicans or blacks," remembered Tony Avalos. Southern black families felt isolated and Mexican Americans had a hard time finding a decent enchilada outside their own kitchens.



This "forced melting pot" labored together in shipyard crews. Workers transformed discord into harmony, braving discomfort and danger to toil together, three shifts a day. To boost morale, Kaiser management organized lundtime entertainment. Hollywood stars brought glamour to bare wooden stages, costumed dancers whirled and shipyard musicians in overalls and hardhats played swing and bluegrass.



When the work was done, ship launchings celebrated shared accomplishment. As patriotic anthems swelled and champagne sprayed over the new ship's bow, each worker took pride in what they'd built, and could believe in the slogan "United we win."



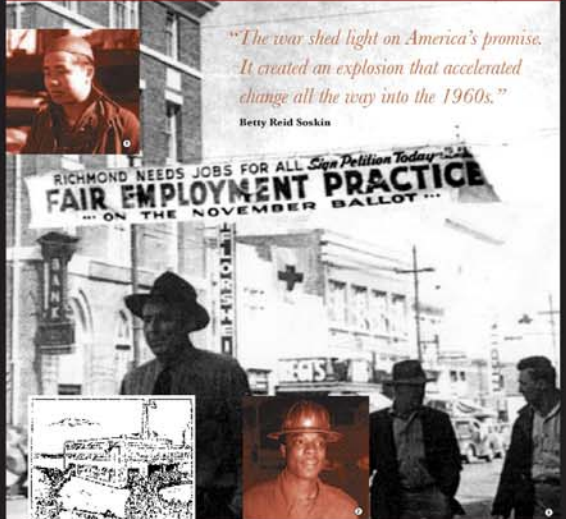
- 1. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.
- 2. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.
- 3. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.
- 4. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.

- 5. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.
- 6. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.
- 7. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.
- 8. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.

Developed by the Richmond Redevelopment Agency for the City of Richmond



THE HOME FRONT LEGACY



"The war shed light on America's promise. It created an explosion that accelerated change all the way into the 1960s."

Betty Reid Soskin



With World War II officially ended, Richmond filled with celebration in September 1945. Years would pass before residents fully understood how much the war had changed their lives.

A wave of new civilians bought homes and enrolled in college thanks to the "GI Bill." Although "old-timers" expected them to go home, most wartime migrants remained in the Bay Area. Having fought for democracy, veterans of home front and battlefield would not accept second-class status; the path to integrated schools, fair housing and workplace equity was worn by their marching feet.

Women had succeeded at men's work, and they wanted more. George Johnson remembered: "They couldn't understand why men made so much fuss over their job when it was so easy to weld." Though many lost jobs when the men came home, their daughters enrolled their children in daycare (almost nonexistent before the war) then entered the trades, corporate offices and boardrooms.

Wartime demands had inspired new approaches to social needs. Affordable housing and childcare centers sprang up around Richmond's shipyards. Kaiser offered pre-paid healthcare to a newly integrated workforce. Those innovations were models for social progress, a glimpse of what could be achieved in time of crisis, and a motivation to accomplish more in time of peace.



- 9. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.
- 10. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.
- 11. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.
- 12. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.

- 13. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.
- 14. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.
- 15. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.
- 16. Photo courtesy of the University of California, San Diego. Photo by Robert B. Lewis.

Developed by the Richmond Redevelopment Agency for the City of Richmond

