

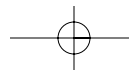
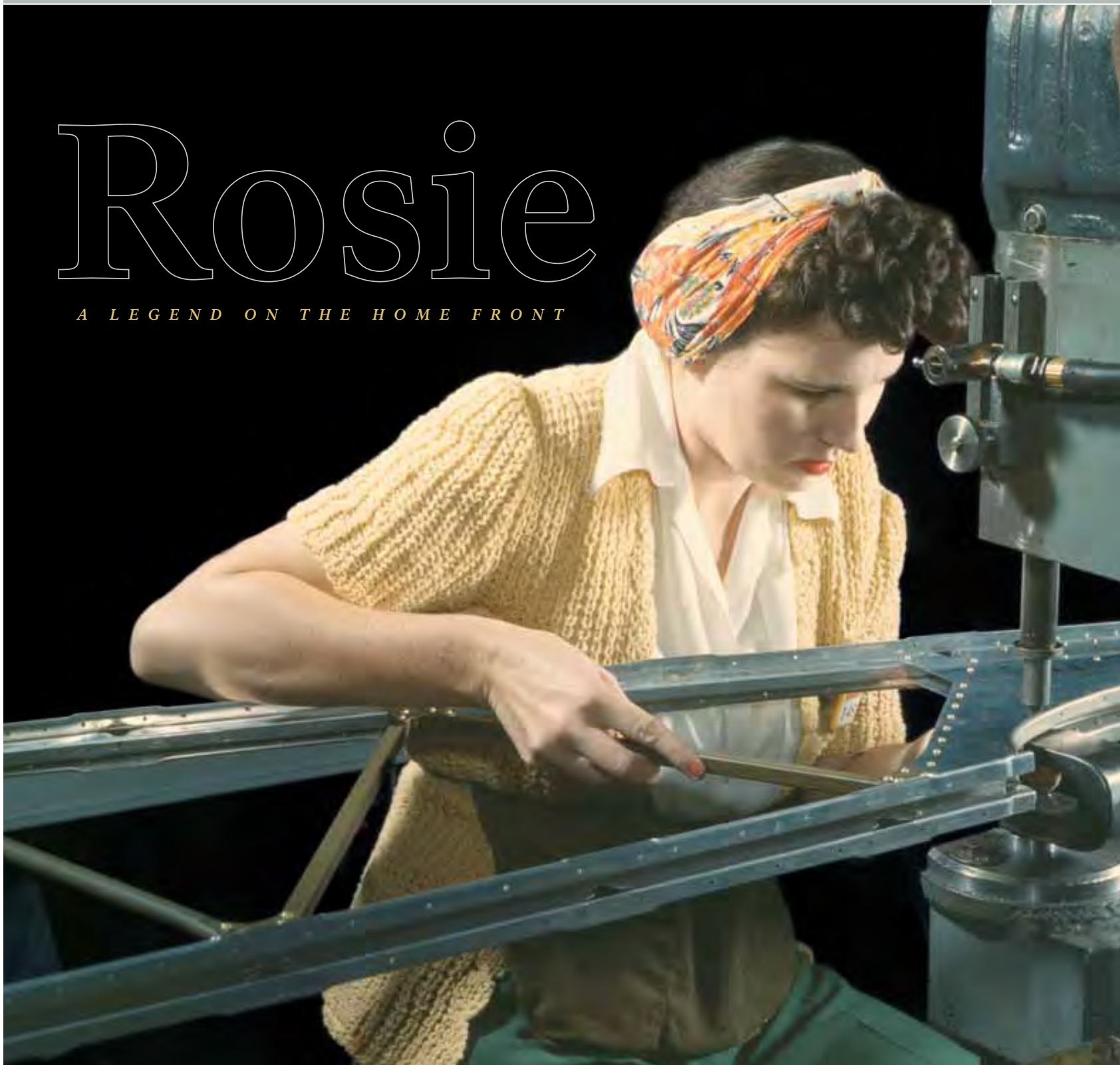
# COMMON Ground



P R E S E R V I N G   O U R   N A T I O N ' S   H E R I T A G E   F A L L   2 0 0 7

# Rosie

*A LEGEND ON THE HOME FRONT*





# FIRST WORD

## Out of the Kitchen

| BY LUCY LAWLISS |

**WOMEN'S HISTORY MOVED TO THE FOREFRONT** of academia in the second half of the 20th century because of one seminal event: World War II. To examine the impact of millions of women called to work to replace men—fathers, brothers, husbands, uncles, friends, and strangers—only to give up those jobs at war's end is to gain some insight into why the daughters of these pioneers grew up to challenge their traditional roles in American society. The baby boom generation birthed the modern feminist movement and it is no surprise that Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi and Senator Hillary Clinton link their images to the Rosie the Riveter icon of the wartime “We Can Do It” poster. It is a statement about where the roots of “power” lie. **MORE SURPRISING IS THAT** the real women of Roosevelt’s “arsenal of democracy,” who were often in their teens and early 20s, were more than willing to do their part in work previously unavailable to them—to assure victory in a truly perilous era. These jobs ran the gamut from blacksmiths to shipfitters, from clerks to “chaufferettes.” Every story from this remarkable group gathered at Rosie the Riveter National Historical Park is as unique as Betty Reid Soskin’s—whose voice you will hear in the interview on page 28. These stories contain conflicting truths that only now, with time and perspective, can be sorted out and understood. **IN THE SPRING OF 1941**—months before the attack on Pearl Harbor—President Franklin Delano Roosevelt campaigned Congress to support the Allied nations through a lend-lease program. Its incorporation into the Neutrality Acts released billions of government dollars to aid Great Britain, Russia, and China in an effort to stem the spread of Nazism across Europe, in a war the United States had yet to join. This infusion of money into the U. S. economy, still reeling after a decade of economic depression, invigorated industrial geniuses like Henry J. Kaiser of Richmond, California, shipyard fame who—along with the military—mobilized to take advantage of government contracts for ships, planes, and munitions. **THE TREMENDOUS NEED FOR LABOR** in parts of the nation that were not the industrial centers caused an unprecedented wave of migration. Men and women of every age, race, creed, and color responded to America’s call to work—in their own communities or in jobs on the other side of the country.

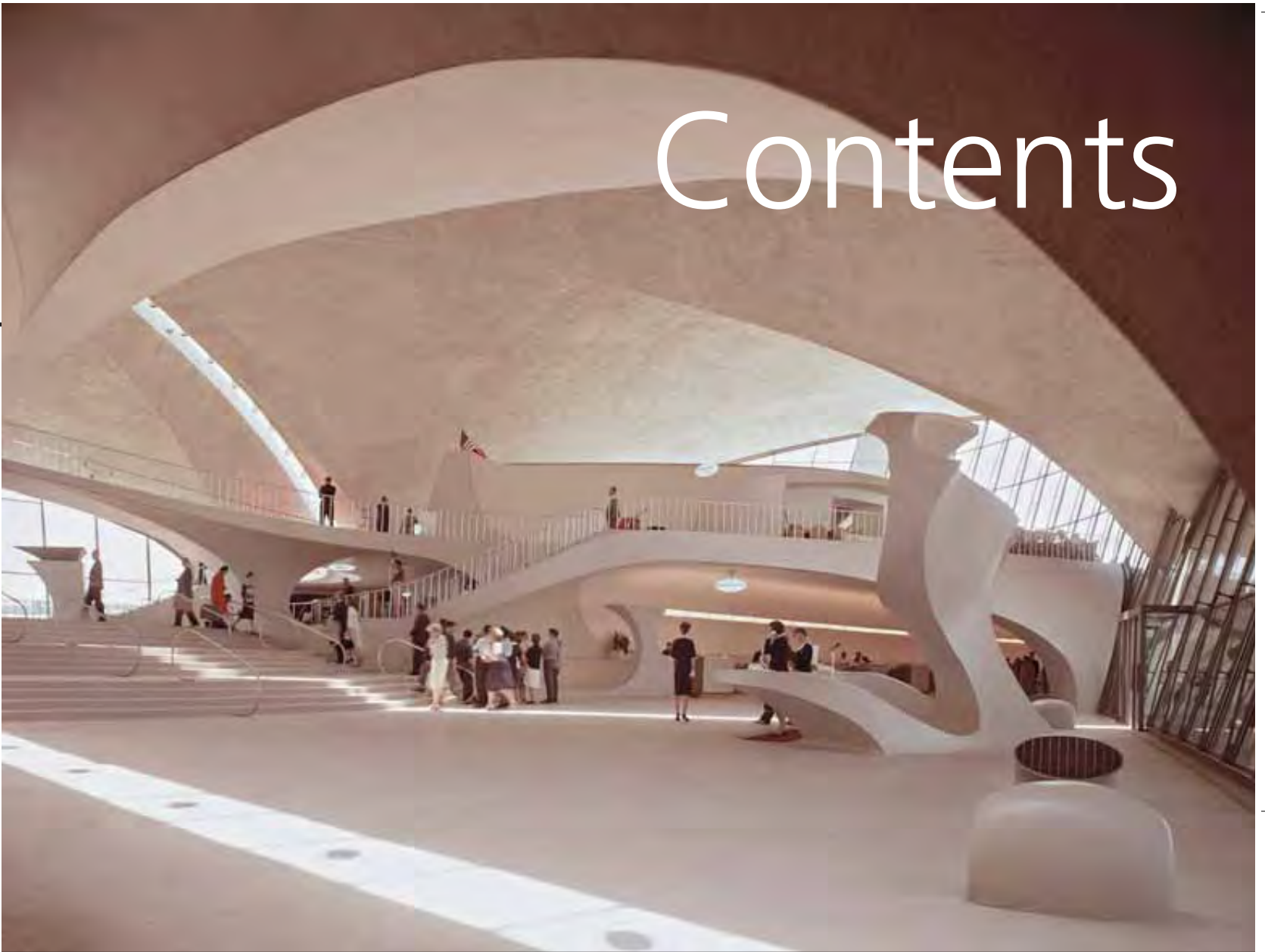
**IN THE CASE OF ROSALIE PINTO**—the other home front voice in the article—as a first generation, Italian American teenager with eight siblings, her South Philly neighborhood was not far from the naval shipyards. Rosalie’s close-knit home stands in stark contrast to the Richmond experience of Betty Soskin, a young married African American whose family had sought a better life in the San Francisco Bay area after New Orleans’s catastrophic 1927 floods. She watched as Richmond’s population exploded as a wartime boomtown. Streets teemed with thousands of newcomers mostly from the southern states of Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. Overnight, Richmond became a “city of strangers” and locals like Betty experienced firsthand the arrival of the segregated Jim Crow South to the Bay Area. Whether at home, next door, or thousands of miles

**Streets teemed with thousands of newcomers mostly from the southern states . . . Overnight, Richmond became a ‘city of strangers’ and locals like Betty experienced firsthand the arrival of the segregated Jim Crow South to the Bay Area.**

from familiar faces and surroundings, women’s worlds were turned upside down by a world at war. **EMILY YELLIN, AUTHOR OF *Our Mothers’ War*** and the historian for our interview, grew to understand a truth as she researched her book, a truth many of these women still struggle with: their jobs on the home front were every bit as noble as the jobs on the battlefield. **IN THE END IT WAS THE UNITED POWER** of citizens, government, and military that pushed democratic freedoms forward in this country and abroad. And whether at home or far away, those who participated were part of an amazing generation of Americans. An anonymous quote at the Rosie the Riveter Memorial gives credit where it is due: “You must tell your children, putting modesty aside, that without us, without women, there would have been no spring in 1945.”

Lucy Lawliss is Resources Program Manager at Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front National Historical Park, Richmond, California.

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TWA TERMINAL. EZRA STOLLER © ESTO

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### Last Stop: An Apparition of Steam Finds New Life in the Nevada Desert

When Kennecott Copper pulled out, it left a relic of the steam era high and dry in the Nevada desert. Which is why it is a national historic landmark like no other. **BY JOE FLANAGAN WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY GORDON OSMUNDSON**

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### Rosie: A Legend on the Home Front

“When the men came home from the war, Rosie would unfurl her fist, unflex her muscle, change back into her dress, and trade in her rivet gun for a mop and a spatula,” writes Emily Yellin in her book *Our Mothers’ War*. Meantime, there was work to do. **A TALK WITH AUTHOR EMILY YELLIN AND HOME FRONT VETS BETTY REID SOSKIN AND ROSALIE PINTO**

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**Cover: War worker joins the sections of a B-17 wing at Long Beach, California’s Douglas Aircraft Company.**

ALFRED T. PALMER/LOC



NEWS  
CLOSEUP

## IMMORTAL MOMENT

## Documenting an Icon of Sacrifice in the City of Monuments

“Uncommon valor was a common virtue.” These words, inscribed on the base of the U.S. Marine Corps Memorial, capture something essential about the war years. The statue depicting the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima conveys the mettle of those who found themselves in the midst of the greatest conflict the world had ever known. Dedicated by President Eisenhower in 1954, the statue was inspired by the Pulitzer Prize-winning photo taken by Joe Rosenthal. Though the flag raising was a quickly staged event, the image electrified the nation, coming to symbolize the struggle in its entirety.

As a memorial to Marines who have given their lives in the nation’s wars, the 78-foot-high bronze is the centerpiece of a landscaped park on the Virginia side of the Potomac, near Arlington National Cemetery. Described at the time as an “earnest and uncomplicated piece of popular art,” it has become nothing less than a national icon. Set aside in a quiet green sanctuary apart from the monumental city but within view of its symbols, the memorial is a contemplative shrine, well-suited for a place dedicated to the staggering sacrifices made by ordinary citizens at a time when the world was coming apart.

Since the memorial was designed long before the Americans with Disabilities Act, the project included making the site accessible, a particular concern for elderly and wounded veterans. Workers relaid the

**DESCRIBED AT THE TIME AS AN “EARNEST AND UNCOMPLICATED PIECE**

**NOTHING LESS THAN A NATIONAL ICON. SET ASIDE IN A QUIET GREEN SANCTUARY APART FROM THE MONUMENTAL CITY BUT WITHIN VIEW OF ITS SYMBOLS, THE MEMORIAL IS A CONTEMPLATIVE SHRINE, WELL-SUITED FOR A PLACE DEDICATED TO THE STAGGERING SACRIFICES MADE BY ORDINARY CITIZENS AT A TIME WHEN THE WORLD WAS COMING APART.**

Sculptor Felix de Weldon was commissioned to create the statue. A Viennese immigrant working as an artist for the U.S. Navy at the time, de Weldon was profoundly effected by Rosenthal’s photograph. After seeing it, he is said to have worked nonstop for 48 hours to produce the original model in plaster. Larger versions were displayed around the country. A 36-foot-tall replica was displayed in Times Square for a 1945 war bond drive. It also made appearances during the war at Chicago’s Soldier Field and other stops around the country, accompanied by the three surviving members of the group that raised the flag.

When de Weldon made the actual statue, it was cast in bronze over a three-year process. It arrived at the Arlington site in about a dozen pieces, which were then welded and bolted together.

With time, age and the elements took their toll. While the effects were not evident in the memorial’s dramatic visual focus—the statue itself—its associated components were dated and wearing out. The pavers around the memorial were cracking, water was seeping into parts of the sculpture, lighting was inadequate, and there were problems with settlement. In addition, the Marine Corps Memorial has never been documented as a piece of history itself.

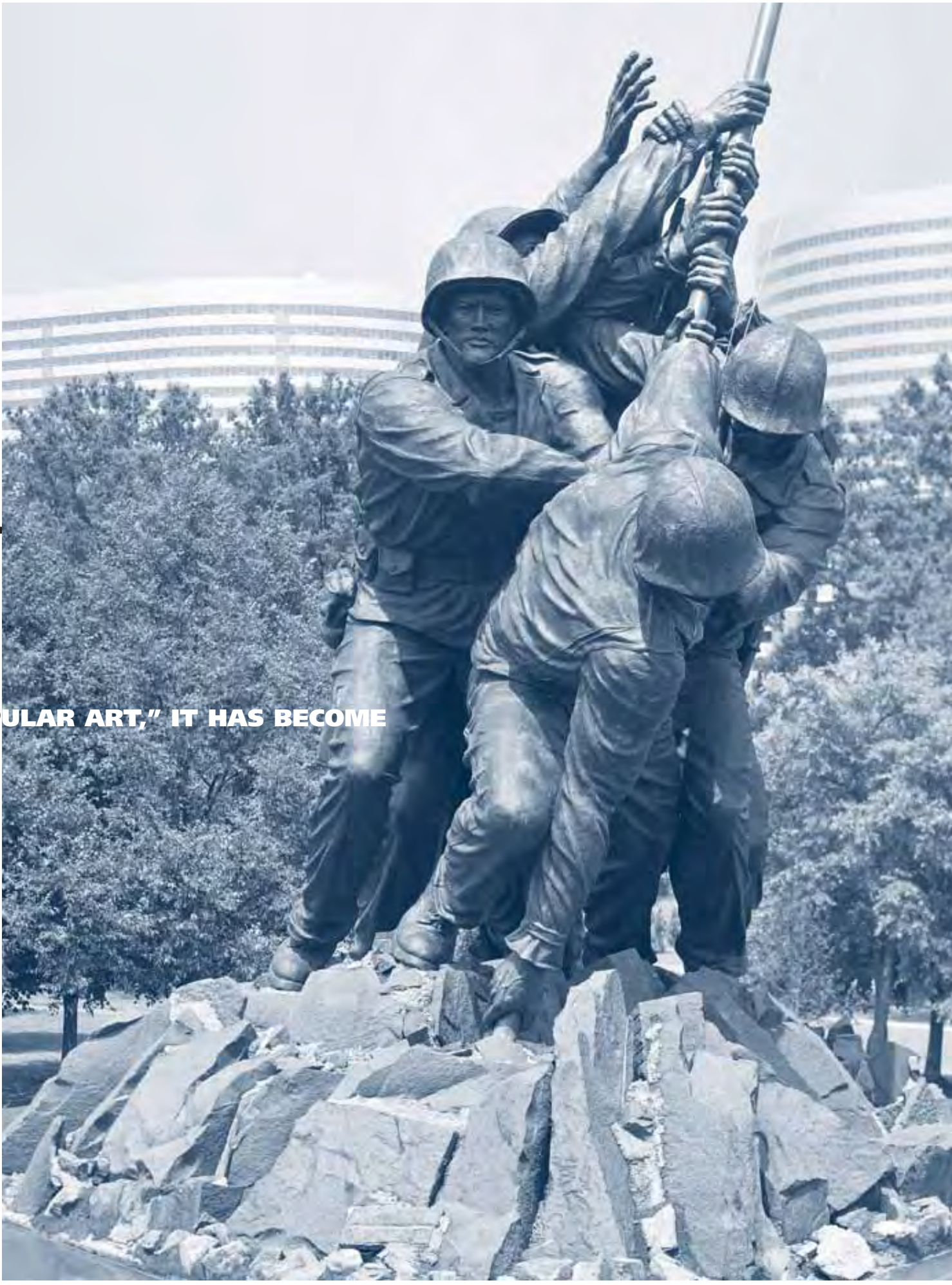
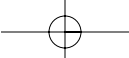
An extensive rehabilitation was planned. “This was an ideal opportunity to address a number of issues, mainly safety and deterioration,” says Paul Dolinsky, chief of the National Park Service Historic American Landscapes Survey. It was also an opportune time for his group to record the site for posterity, the photographs shown here a part of that effort.

**Above: View of the Marine Corps Memorial at night with the lights of Arlington, Virginia, in the background. Right: Sculptor Felix de Weldon’s rendering in bronze of the raising of the flag on Iwo Jima.**

pavers around the plaza, improved drainage, and updated the lighting.

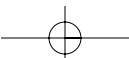
HALS is working on a number of projects for national parks and other historic places as they grapple with how to manage the sites in their care. One of these is the White House, where specialists are producing a record of the executive mansion grounds believed to be the first of its kind, critical to preserving what Dolinsky describes as “probably the most managed 20 acres in the world.”

For information on the Historic American Landscapes Survey, visit <http://www.nps.gov/hdp/hals/index.htm>.



OF POPULAR ART," IT HAS BECOME

LEFT AND RIGHT JET LOWENSPHALS





# SHAPE OF THE FUTURE

SAVING A SAARINEN MASTERWORK MAY PORTEND A BUMPY RIDE FOR HISTORIC AIRPORTS. It's hard to believe its alleged inspiration is a hollowed-out grapefruit rind, but wherever Eero Saarinen got the idea, it worked. Terminal 5 at JFK Airport, once home to TWA, is probably the architect's most famous building, but since 1999 when the airline went out of business, it's also been his most threatened. So when the city landmark finally reopens next year, preservationists will heave a collective sigh of relief. It will be the day they've long awaited, ever since TWA's bankruptcy spawned fears that the building would be demolished and replaced.



**Left and right: While the terminal is now seen as one of Eero Saarinen's greatest works, when it first opened the critics, who disliked most of his designs, did not embrace it. "Cruelly inhuman and trivial," is how Vincent Scully described Saarinen's creations, likening his Gateway Arch in St. Louis to a pipe cleaner.**

INSTEAD, THE STRUCTURE—LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC Places two years ago—will be incorporated into a new terminal for New York City-based JetBlue Airways, as part of the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey's \$9.4 billion redevelopment program to update the airport. JetBlue, which currently operates a terminal next door, says the move will be a good one. "We are going from a 28-acre terminal to a 72-acre terminal," says Richard Smyth, vice president of redevelopment. The discount airline is spending \$80 million on the reconstruction project, with the Port Authority contributing the rest towards an \$875 million price tag. "We saw this as both an opportunity to grow and to also build a state of the art terminal," Smyth says.

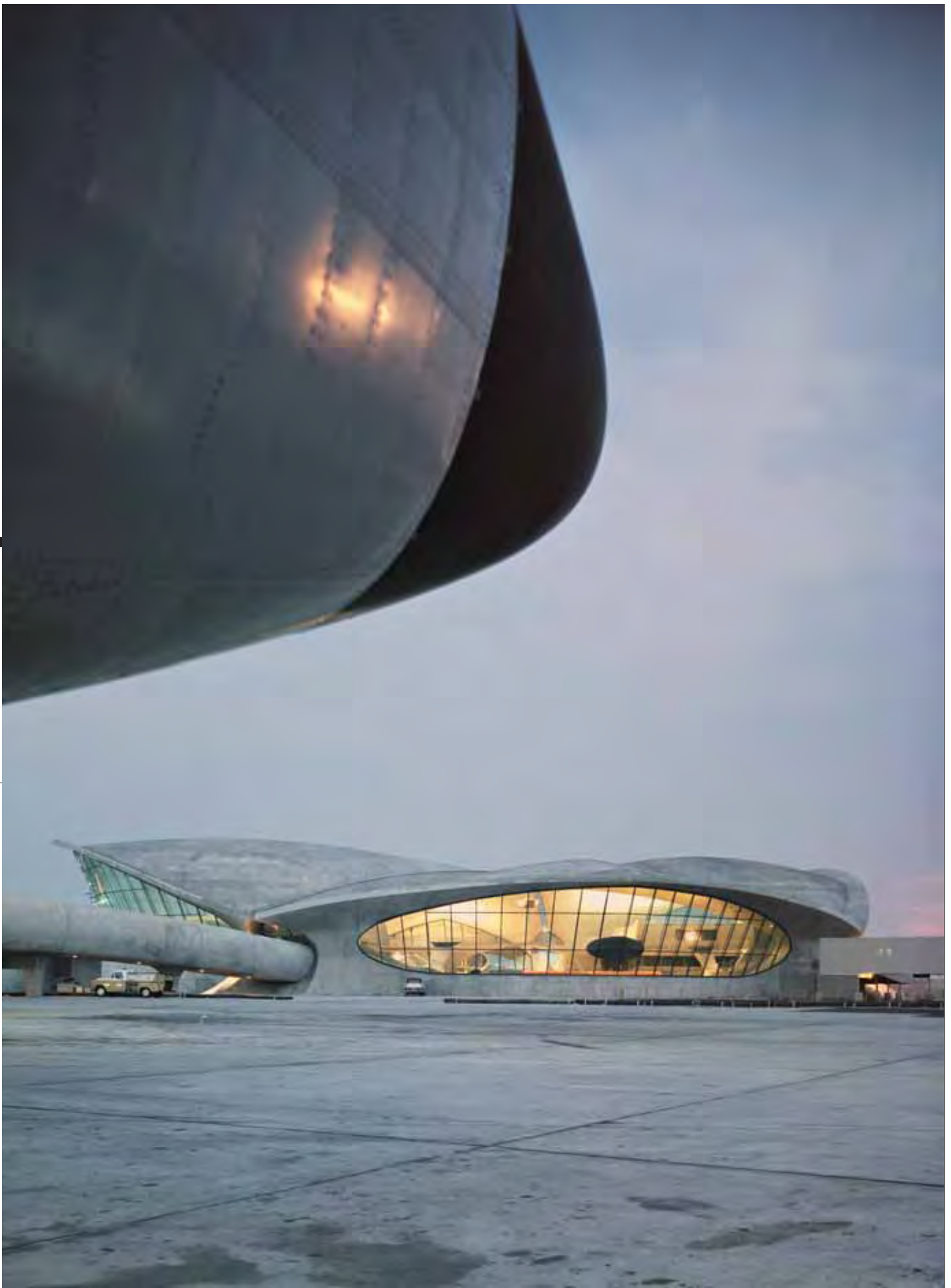
Despite the outcome, the bumpy ride to get there may portend much the same for the nation's historic airports. That the Port Authority decided not to bulldoze was good news, but the initial plan was not. And today, the fate of what was saved—as part of a compromise—is still unresolved.

In 2000, when the Port Authority announced its intent to demolish part of the complex and erect a new terminal behind the old one, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Preservation League of New York State put the place on their lists of threatened sites. Several other groups joined negotiations to craft an alternate plan.

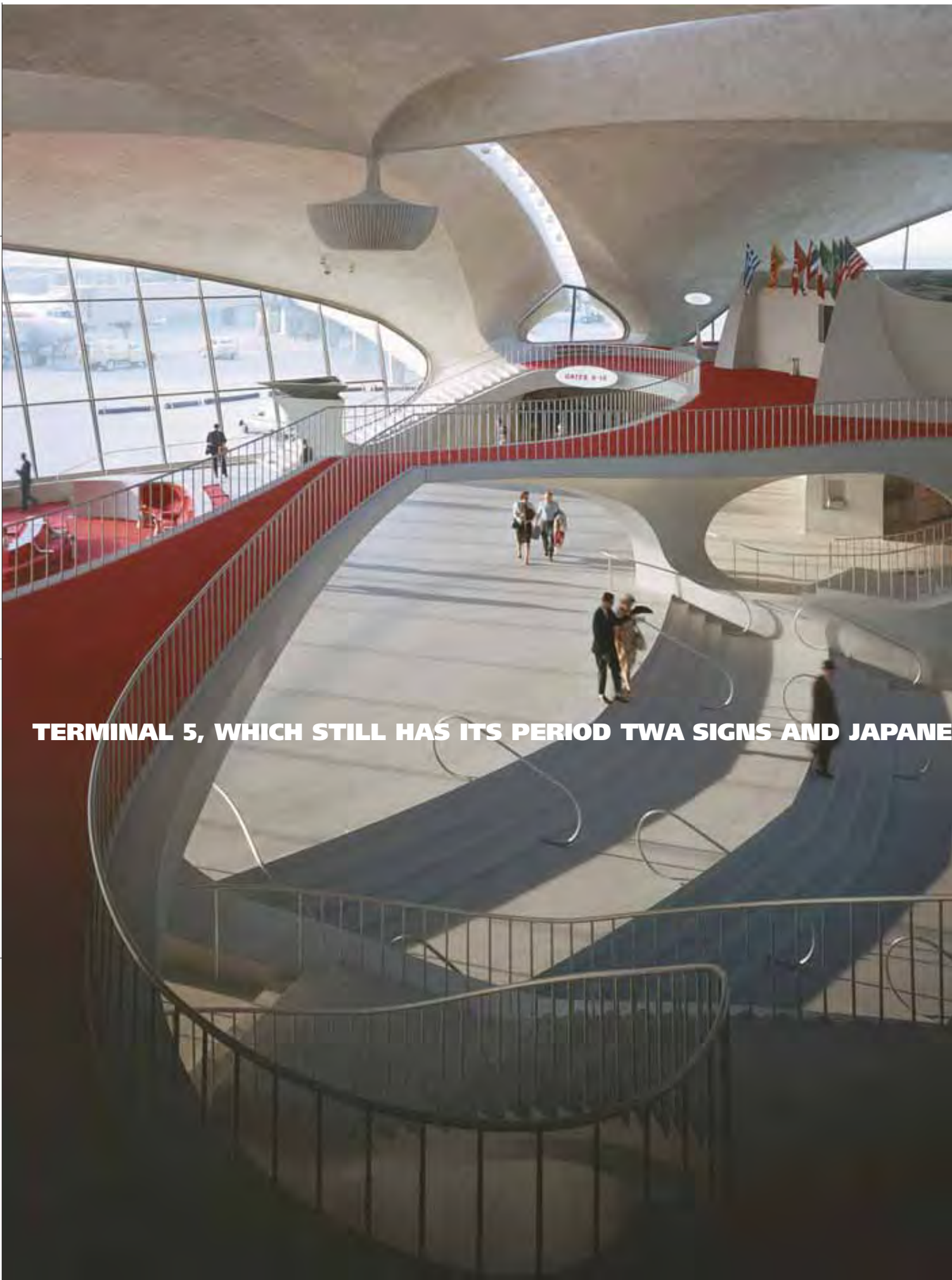
When two wings were torn down in 2006, a year after construction started, a small section of one, called the trumpet, was saved (the other wing was not part of the original design). The new terminal—first envisioned as a glass donut encircling the old one—was redesigned with a lower profile. "It's being built in a very sensitive way, almost as a background element to the original," says Alex Herrera, director of technical services for the New York Landmarks Conservancy.

STILL, EXPERIENCING SAARINEN'S BIRD-LIKE EDIFICE, CURRENTLY HALFWAY through renovation, won't be the same as in its heyday. Flyers used to check in amidst sweeping stairways and walls of windows looking out at the planes on the tarmac. Now they will simply pass through the space, and the windows won't offer the same view. "Saarinen wanted travelers to walk up stairs toward a vast window that symbolized an open future," says Mark Stevens, art critic for *New York* magazine. "Now they'll just see another building instead of the sky." Plus, since the new terminal will have its own entrance, flyers can skip the old one altogether.

"Making everyone happy was quite the challenge," says spokesman Pasquale DiFulco of the Port Authority, which tried to find a balance between preserving the structure and meeting the needs of JetBlue. "We recognize what an iconic status the terminal holds," he says, point-



ALL PHOTOS EZRA STOLLER © ESTO



**TERMINAL 5, WHICH STILL HAS ITS PERIOD TWA SIGNS AND JAPANESE**



ing out that it “won’t be beyond security, so if any architecture buffs want to take a drive out to the airport to look at it, they can do so.”

**THE FINNISH-BORN SAARINEN, LONG CONSIDERED A GENIUS, DESIGNED THE terminal in 1956, although it was not finished until 1962, the same year as his only other airport, Virginia’s Dulles International. The architect died of a brain tumor in 1961 and never saw either finished.**

The gull-shaped edifice is one of his best-known works in part because it gives a sense of “the magic of travel” in the ’50s and ’60s, says Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, assistant professor of architecture at Yale and the co-editor of *Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future*. But he built the structure for the wrong era—it was not big enough to handle the passenger loads of the jets fast supplanting prop planes. “Jets got too big, quickly,” says Frank Sanchis, senior vice president of New York’s Municipal Arts Society. Recalls Herrera: “It was always very crowded. People would have to wait outside, and extra ramps were needed to accommodate luggage. The TWA employees couldn’t stand it.” And that was before September 11th security

line, but that’s not in the cards. “Since this building was so particularly and brilliantly designed for air travel, we feel adaptive reuse is not appropriate,” says Sanchis, whose group’s consultants offered ideas on how the space could be at least partially reused.

The Port Authority is reviewing proposals. The possibilities include turning the terminal into a conference center, exhibit space, or area for restaurants and shops.

**MEANTIME, THE RENOVATION AIMS TO RETURN THE STEEL-FRAMED STRUCTURE to its jet age roots, just as it looked in Steven Spielberg’s 2002 film “Catch Me If You Can.” Terminal 5, which still has its period TWA signs and Japanese mosaic tiles, will be freed of additions like extra ticket counters, baggage handling systems, and taxi stands. “We really want to return the building to its original design,” DiFulco says.**

Some hope to see it recognized at an even higher level. “Saarinen revolutionized air terminal design,” says Ruth Pierpont, deputy historic preservation officer for New York State, calling the edifice “a distinctive and highly acclaimed work of expressionistic architecture.”

**■ MOSAIC TILES, WILL BE FREED OF ADDITIONS LIKE EXTRA TICKET COUNTERS, BAGGAGE HANDLING SYSTEMS, AND TAXI STANDS. “WE REALLY WANT TO RETURN THE BUILDING TO ITS ORIGINAL DESIGN,” DIFULCO SAYS.**

**Left: Critics slighted Saarinen for lacking a signature style. He said a work’s look arose from collaboration with clients, whom he called “co-creators.” Saarinen was on the cover of *Time*—“one of the first media architects,” says Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, co-editor of *Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future*.**

measures, when the terminal, in temporary use by United Airlines, was shut down completely.

“The building is a remarkable architectural accomplishment, but there was a whole series of issues when it came to using it,” DiFulco says, one that it was not ADA-compliant. He says the new 635,000-square-foot terminal with its 26 gates will be better equipped to handle JetBlue’s 12 million annual passengers.

Still, that leaves uncertainty. The Municipal Arts Society prefers to see the structure as Saarinen intended, a “front door” for the air-



**Above: Pictures don’t do the place justice, says Pelkonen. “It has a really wonderful interior spatial landscape. You feel like you are in a cloud.” Renewed fascination with the architect’s work is evidenced by the traveling exhibit “Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future,” based on the book of the same name.**

Sanchis says that the struggle to save the structure should serve as a lesson for preservationists, as more like places become obsolete due to changing technology. “Airport terminals aren’t quite like old train stations which are usually located in the city center,” he says. “And they aren’t easy to use for purposes other than the original one.”

For details about the renovation, contact the Port Authority at (212) 435-7000 or go to [www.panynj.gov](http://www.panynj.gov). For more information about Eero Saarinen, contact the Finnish Cultural Institute in New York at (212) 674-5570 or visit [www.eerosaarinen.net](http://www.eerosaarinen.net).

GRANT  
SPOTLIGHT

## WRIGHT RESTORATION

## Preserving a Frank Lloyd Wright Foray into Low-Income Design

When most people think of Frank Lloyd Wright, low-income housing is not what comes to mind. But the same architect who built for the wealthy also created a whole series of affordable structures called American System-Built Houses. Only a handful of the 900 designs, around 25, were built. And while not many are left, a six-house stretch still stands in a Milwaukee neighborhood. One, 2714 West Burnham Street, is about to get a long overdue restoration, thanks in part to a \$150,000 grant from Save America's Treasures, administered by the National Park Service. "It's a 91-year-old house and there's a lot of work to do," says Mike Lilek, treasurer of the Frank Lloyd Wright Wisconsin Heritage Tourism Program, the nonprofit restoring the edifice.



THE GROUP SET ITS SIGHTS ON FIXING UP THE STRUCTURES YEARS AGO BUT was unable to make any headway until three years ago when 2714 went on the market and again the next year when an adjacent duplex went up for sale. "It took a lot of patience," Lilek says.

Waiting may have been the easy part, however, because all six have been remodeled. "Every one of them has changed," says Wright historian Jack Holzhueter, also a member of the tourism program. One was sheathed in aluminum siding at some point.

As part of 2714's \$389,000 restoration, preservationists were challenged on how to re clad the two-bedroom house, originally plastered in asbestos-laden stucco, removed years ago. The group went with a granite and quartz mixture that will give off a faint shimmer. "The trim will stand out the way it's supposed to," Lilek says. Roof reconditioning and new wiring are also needed, and a stairwell rebuilt.

The houses, erected between 1916 and 1917, were not Wright's first foray into low-income design, nor his last. He designed Chicago's Waller Apartments in the 1890s, and later his well-known Usonian. But the System-Built Houses, a collection of styles from bungalows to duplexes, brought new flair to the concept. Wright was adamant that design not suffer because of price. He especially did not want his work confused with systems such as the Sears mail-order kit houses that could be "stuck together in any fashion." "He knew that people would feel

**Above: 2714 West Burnham, initial target for preservation. Left: Neighboring houses by Wright. Right: Ad for the series.**

better about themselves living in something beautiful," says Holzhueter.

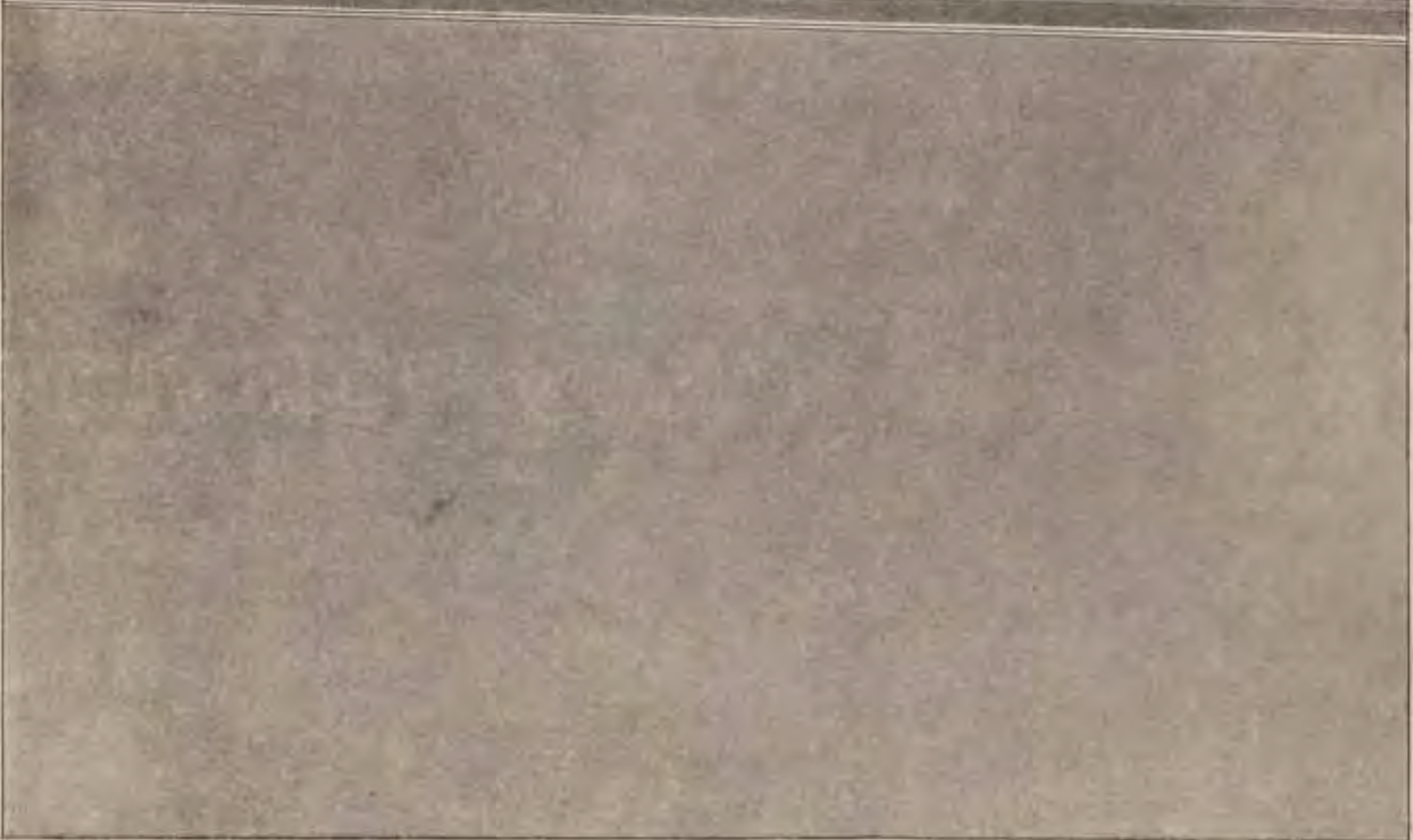
While the West Burnham Street structures sold for \$3,500 to \$4,500, buyers could choose from plans costing up to \$10,000. "The parts were interchangeable," Holzhueter says. The houses are "absolutely charming," he adds, with atriums and lots of floor space despite the size.

**UNFORTUNATELY THE STRUCTURES NEVER CAUGHT ON LARGELY BECAUSE WORLD** War I ground construction to a halt and tastes changed afterward. "It was really kind of the end of Prairie School architecture," says Christopher Meyer, director of planning for the city of Gary, Indiana, who has extensively researched the houses. Only 14 of them, scattered about the Midwest, are known to still exist.

Lilek says plans are to reopen 2714 next year to regular tours, something his group does already on a limited basis. He hopes that the restorations, as they are in an economically depressed neighborhood, will inspire other residents to take better care of their houses. "We want to give the block a shot in the arm," he says.

To find out more about the restoration or how to take a tour, contact the Frank Lloyd Wright Wisconsin Heritage Tourism Program at (608) 287-0339 or go to [www.wrightinwisconsin.org](http://www.wrightinwisconsin.org).



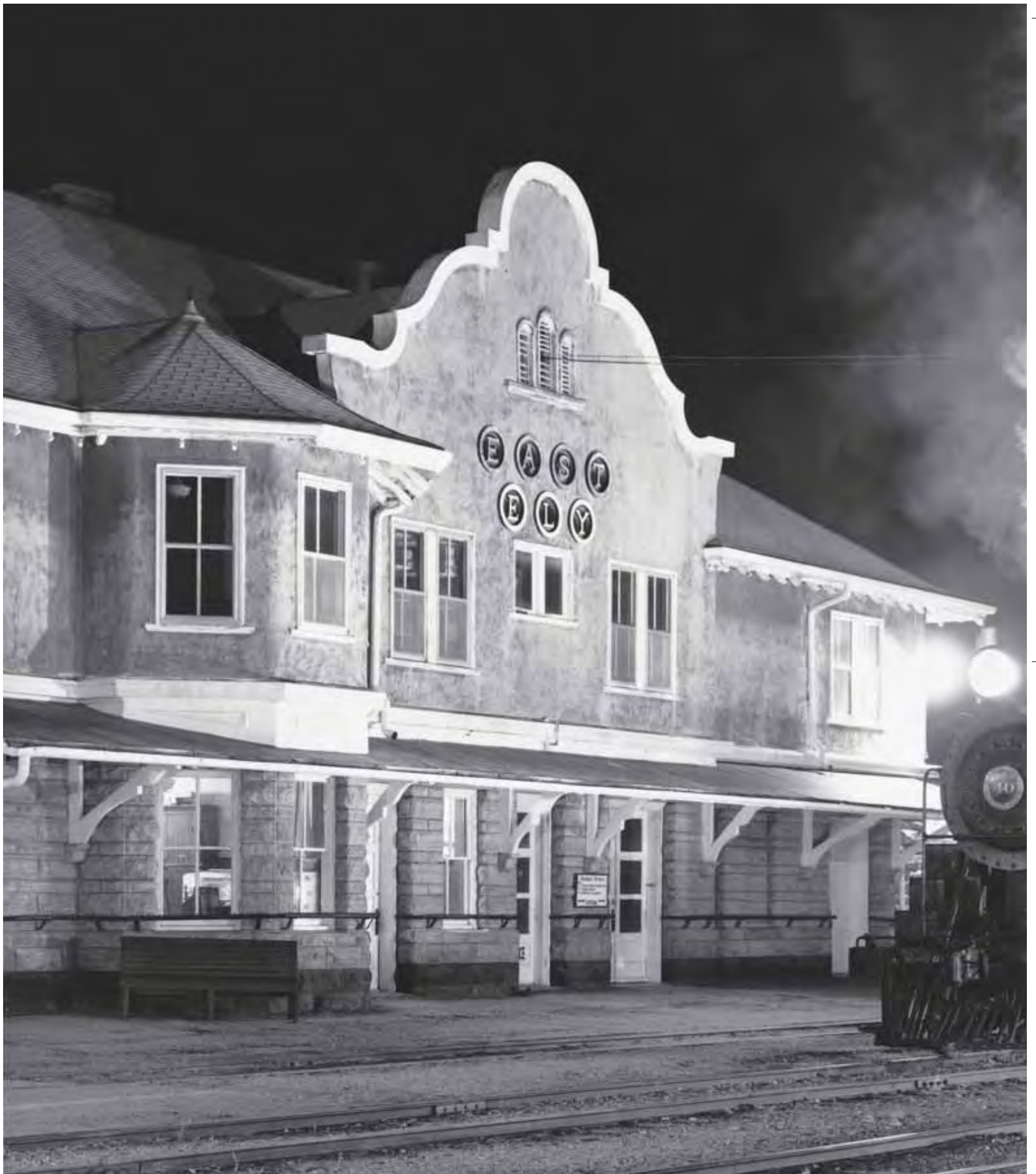


AMERICAN MODEL D101 PATENTS APPLIED FOR  
 AMERICAN SYSTEM-BUILT  
 HOUSES DESIGNED BY  
 FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT  
 THE RICHARDS COMPANY  
 PROPRIETORS MILWAUKEE



FROM LEFT WILLIAM ALLIN STORRER, MORRY GASH/AP, © 2007 FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT FOUNDATION, SCOTTSDALE, AZ/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY, NY









ALL PHOTOS GORDON OSMUNDSON

# LAST STOP

an apparition of steam finds  
new life in the nevada desert

by joe flanagan photographs by gordon osmundson

**ABOVE:** A RESTORED VINTAGE STEAM LOCOMOTIVE ROLLS PAST THE 1907 DEPOT AT THE EAST ELY YARD NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK.

## IN THE ENGINE HOUSE ARE TWO FULLY

**IT IS PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST ENDURING IMAGES OF THE AMERICAN WEST:**



**ABOVE: LOCOMOTIVE WHEEL AND BRAKE SHOE. RIGHT: WORKERS AT THE EAST ELY SITE TAKE ON THE HEAVY WORK OF THE STEAM ERA.**

the steam locomotive churning across the plains, the symbol of ingenuity and conquest hurtling through the arid landscape. The clatter, the hiss, the expulsion of steam call to mind long ago afternoons in the movie house, the lore holding the same mythical power no matter who you were or whether you were in Brooklyn or Chicago or San Francisco. The picture was irresistible. Here was the modern juggernaut to which distance was no obstacle, announcing a new order, declaring the emphatic end of the Old West.

A century later, it was the steam era's turn for a requiem, although with less picturesque associations. It was the 1950s and the old locomotives and the shops that serviced them were being scrapped or abandoned in favor of the new diesel-electric technology.

Except that in a remote corner of Nevada, in the lonely wastes of the Great Basin, there is a sizeable piece of history so well preserved that it is essentially a vast outdoor museum. The Nevada Northern Railway complex at East Ely was designated a national historic landmark last year, an honor bestowed both for its importance and remarkable integrity. Announcing the designation, which is the highest honor the federal government bestows upon a historic property, Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne described the East Ely Yards as the "best preserved, least altered, and most complete main yard complex remaining from the steam railroad era." Today, it is known as the Nevada Northern Railway Museum, established to preserve and interpret its history to the public.

The railroad was established in 1905 as an outgrowth of the Western copper boom. Its cars mostly hauled ore, though there was passenger service too. When new diesel locomotives arrived in 1952, the cars, facilities, and associated trappings of the steam era were left behind, untouched. The effect was as if everyone had simply walked away and shut the door. Remarking on the yards' level of integrity, the national historic landmark nomination describes "furnishings,



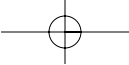


## RESTORED LOCOMOTIVES DATING TO 1909

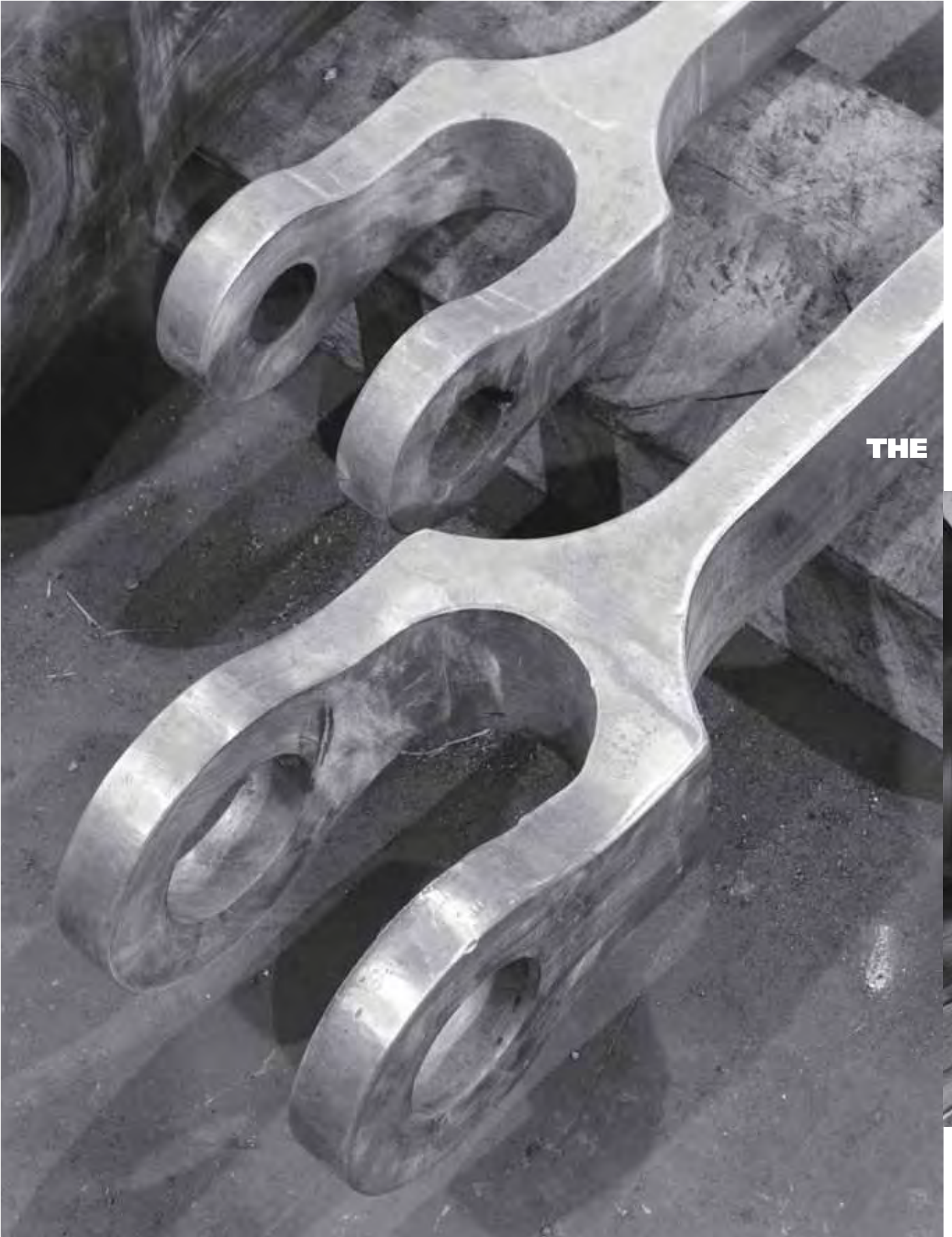
AND 1910, SO NEW-LOOKING THEY COULD BE MISTAKEN FOR REPLICAS. ONE IS STILL RADIATING HEAT FROM A TOURIST EXCURSION 16 HOURS EARLIER. A VOLUNTEER IS DEEP INTO THE WORKS OF THE OTHER, TRYING TO UNCLOG A GREASE FITTING.



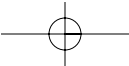




**BELOW:** CLOSE UP OF A PAIR OF ROD ENDS, COMPONENTS OF A STEAM LOCOMOTIVE'S DRIVING MECHANISM.



THE





equipment, tools . . . down to the stationery and forms stacked on shelves . . . as they were a half century ago.”

The complex sprawls over 56 acres. The desert environment no doubt has had a hand in its survival but equally important has been the isolation. Located on Highway 50, “the loneliest road in America,” the yards are halfway between Salt Lake City and Las Vegas. The drive takes you through what is possibly some of the most barren and empty country in the United States.

Though passenger service stopped in 1941 and new diesels arrived in 1952, the Nevada Northern continued running—with much of its old equipment—until 1983, when Kennecott Copper shut down the mine. Today the site is operated by the White Pine Historical Railroad Foundation, which has performed major restoration on cars, locomotives, buildings, and track. The group also runs tourist excursions into the mountains around Ely. It works in partnership with the state, which preserves the original depot and freight barn. The foundation’s executive director, Mark Bassett, a stocky, bearded man who looks like

an old-time train engineer, says “the number one question we get is ‘Where’s the museum?’” He gestures across the tracks toward the old rusting water tower and the mountains beyond. “This is our museum.”

Looking out at the isolated wooden structures alongside the tracks, with parched slopes all around, it is difficult not to think of “High Plains Drifter” or “The Magnificent Seven,” so strong is the atmosphere of the mythical West.

### Living on Copper

**WHEN THE GOLD RUSH OF 1849 PETERED OUT, HOPEFUL PROSPECTORS BEGAN** wandering further afield in search of another strike. They found it in Nevada in the 1860s. The rich Comstock Lode, which yielded unexpected riches in silver, lasted a decade. Those who were too late or

## WEATHERED STRUCTURES HOUSE SAWS, LATHES, AIR BRAKE TESTING EQUIPMENT, ELECTRICAL HARDWARE, FORGES, AND

**A COLLECTION OF SPARE PARTS YOU WILL SEE IN NO HARDWARE STORE ON EARTH. MANY OF THESE BUILDINGS STILL HAVE CALENDARS ON THE WALLS FROM WHEN KENNECOTT PULLED OUT. IN ONE, SMOCKS STILL HANG ON A HOOK. IN ANOTHER, A RADIO IS STILL TUNED TO THE STATION FAVORED BY THE FOREMAN. A FLICK OF A SWITCH FILLS THE SHOP WITH LIFE.**

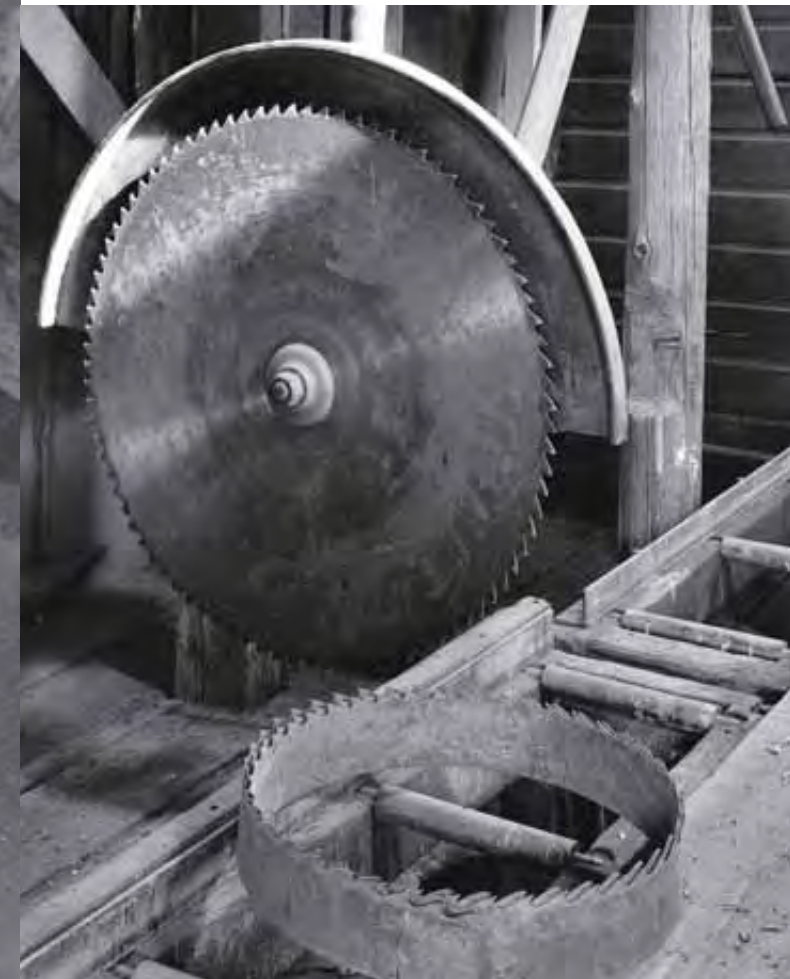
unlucky ranged into the Great Basin to see what they could find. Isaac Requa, a mining magnate who had struck it rich with the Comstock Lode, established mines around Eureka, Nevada, 75 miles west of Ely. In 1869, the transcontinental Central Pacific Railroad was completed farther to the north. Requa’s idea was to build a small railroad running from his mines in Eureka to a junction with the Central Pacific. Independent “short line” railroads were multiplying in the area to take advantage of the new volume of east-west traffic on the big line to the north.

For about a quarter century, Isaac Requa’s Eureka & Palisade Railroad did well, but then the Eureka mines played out. In 1897, he sent his son Mark east to the area around Ely with a mining engineer to look for gold and silver. What they found was copper.

It would have been a disappointment but for a convergence of circumstances, notably the technical revolution happening at the turn of the century. The advent of electricity brought an unprecedented demand for the metal. New inventions like the steam shovel made strip mining possible. This meant that low-grade ore, once not worth the trouble to excavate using traditional shafts and tunnels, was now valuable.

Mark Requa, who bought a number of claims in the area, started a railroad. Like the Eureka & Palisade, it was a short line running north to the Central Pacific. Ely was the southern terminus. From Ely, the

**LEFT: RADIAL ARM SAW IN THE CARPENTER’S SHOP.**



tracks ran another 10 miles west to the mines. He also built a smelter in the nearby town of McGill. The first years were profitable, so much so that investment bankers from New York, the Guggenheim brothers, put money into the smelter and mines. Soon they were interested in the railroad as well, and in 1906 they bought out Mark Requa.

As copper mining boomed, Ely and the surrounding towns grew. Immigrants from the East flocked to the area to work in the mines or on the rails. The Nevada Northern, as the new line was called, soon had a healthy business running passengers between local towns and to and from the junction with the Central Pacific. "Shift trains" carried workers between Ely and the mining camps and ran students back and forth between their hometowns and the high school in Ely.

The Nevada Northern did a brisk business hauling freight, too. Livestock, produce, and manufactured goods filled the wooden box-cars as they creaked and swayed through the high desert. At its peak, the railroad was running some 32 trains a day carrying passengers and freight. Another 64 ore trains rolled through the yard daily. "In the 1930s, we were bigger than Vegas," says Bassett. The railroad,



## **LOCOMOTIVES, PASSENGER CARS, A YELLOW CABOOSE, ASSORTMENT OF OTHER MACHINES SIT IN STAGES OF RESTORATION. A LADIES' PASSENGER CAR HAS HAD ITS ORIGINAL RED VELVET SEATS RESTORED. THE WINDOWS ON THE MEN'S CAR HAVE STAINED GLASS WITH ORNATE BRASS KEROSENE LAMPS AFFIXED TO THE CEILINGS.**

according to the national historic landmark nomination, "was a major economic influence on the development of eastern Nevada."

As the automobile gained prominence and more roads were paved, passenger service dropped off, then ceased altogether in 1941. The railroad and mining operation were acquired by Kennecott Copper in 1933, which continued a routine relatively unchanged through the decades.

The railroad made good use of what was already on site. Little was thrown away. When Kennecott brought in brand new diesel-electric locomotives in the early '50s, it kept a pair of the original pre-WWI steam locomotives for backups. Ore cars from the early days continued to roll into the 1980s, as did the freight cars. Wide leather belts powered the saws in the carpenter's shop until the very end. The sense of antiquity pervades every aspect of the railyard, from the heavy mechanics to the paperwork, and along with the primitive landscape, produces an eerie sensation of time having stopped.

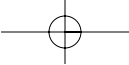
**ABOVE: DOORWAY TO A RESTORED CAR FROM 1872.**

By the late 1970s, inexpensive Asian copper was flooding the international market, and Kennecott shut down the mines and the smelter. The impact was severe. Bassett says "the major employer had left the community and you had no money here. It was like, 'Will the last person leaving town please turn off the lights.'"

It wasn't long before the idea of an historic attraction surfaced. Three classic locomotives sat in the yard's giant barns. Original passenger cars were there, too, some going back to the 1870s. Advocates approached the state to see if it would take on the complex as a historic site. "We couldn't take on such a big, expensive responsibility," says Nevada historic preservation officer Ron James. With an expected renovation cost of some \$8 million, his office demurred (though it eventually took control of the depot and freight barn). The city council approached Kennecott and simply asked if it could have the complex. Surprisingly, the answer was yes.

In 1984 the town took over the facility and formed the foundation. The freight barn and depot were taken over by the state and are now operated separately from the main yard as the East Ely Railroad Depot Museum. "Nevada has shown a substantial financial commitment to the restoration," says Director Sean Pitts, spending more than \$2 million rehabilitating the buildings with plans to spend another \$3 million over the next two years.

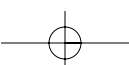




**BELOW:** CARS IN THE YARD'S MASSIVE BARN.



**AND AN**









**ABOVE:** A WORLD WAR I-ERA NORTHERN NEVADA FREIGHT CAR SITS IN THE YARD WITH THE COALING TOWER IN THE BACKGROUND.

### Inheriting a Legacy

**MARK BASSETT SWINGS OPEN THE HEAVY STEEL DOORS TO A BRICK BLOCK-**house, which, though it is stacked floor to ceiling with ledgers and documents, carries not a whiff of mildew. “Welcome to the high desert,” he says. All manner of administrative and technical documents can be found here, spanning the decades, all of it in nearly pristine condition. A pay ledger from 1909 details disbursements to employees, the names and amounts filled out with a Victorian flourish.

Bassett describes the difficult early years of the museum. The amount of work was staggering and the money scarce. There were three employees and whatever goodwill could be generated in the form of volunteers and donations. By 2001, it looked like the museum wasn’t going to make it. Bassett arrived the following year with experience in helping to revitalize the historic downtown of

**LIVESTOCK, PRODUCE, AND MANUFACTURED GOODS FILLED THE WOODEN BOXCARS AS THEY CREAKED AND SWAYED THROUGH THE HIGH DESERT. AT ITS PEAK, THE RAILROAD WAS RUNNING SOME 32 TRAINS A DAY CARRYING PASSENGERS AND FREIGHT. ANOTHER 64 ORE TRAINS ROLLED THROUGH THE YARD DAILY.**

Laramie, Wyoming. He brought the Main Street approach espoused by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, using imaginative yet practical ways to lure people and businesses back to dying towns.

The museum began a vigorous marketing campaign, casting a wide net for assistance. Bill Withuhn, curator of transportation for the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History, acted as a conduit to the larger preservation community (he also regularly visits the complex to give presentations). Gordon Chappell, a historian with the National Park Service, was brought in to write the national historic landmark nomination. The museum also pursued grant money and intensified its outreach to potential donors.

Today, the museum has over 1,900 dues-paying members. A 2 percent tax on hotel rooms—which are legion in this last-chance town—generates \$150,000 annually for the railroad. The state is a main source of revenue, having awarded over \$1 million to the museum to date. Recently, the foundation broke the \$1 million mark in annual revenue—not including grants—a feat for an organization that had eked along on a steady \$250,000 annual budget.

This close to the Utah border, there is what James calls a “cultural aftertaste” of Mormonism, and this is a blessing for local heritage. “Even today,” he says, “you still feel the Mormon bedrock in the community; they’re really good at preserving history.”

The Nevada Northern now runs three trains a day for tourists. Full time employees have grown to fifteen. Volunteers number over a hundred. A walk through the yard conveys the enormity of managing

such a place. Lonely wooden buildings sit in isolation along the rails, once used for storage, shops, and various offices. Most are painted red, with a coal stove pipe protruding from the roof. Here in the desert, there is little wood rot, though the paint has become so dry it has taken on the quality of an alligator's hide.

While modern locomotives are built with standardized parts, their steam counterparts were custom-made. Railroads were self-sufficient. At Ely, if they couldn't fix a broken part, they made a new one. The weathered structures house saws, lathes, air brake testing equipment, electrical hardware, forges, and a collection of spare parts you will see in no hardware store on earth. Many of these buildings still have calendars on the walls from when Kennecott pulled out. In one, smocks still hang on a hook. In another, a radio is still tuned to the station favored by the foreman. A flick of a switch fills the shop with life.

Bassett laments the passing of the technical know-how. He cites the decline in high schools offering shop classes. "We're trying to recapture these skills," he says. The National Railway Historical Society

**BELOW: EQUIPMENT FOR TESTING AIR BRAKES; THE DISPATCHERS DESK AS IT WAS CIRCA 1907; LOOKING DOWN THE RAILS AT THE YARD'S MAIN STRUCTURES. RIGHT: COACH SHED AND CARPENTER'S SHOP.**

In the engine house are two fully restored locomotives dating to 1909 and 1910, so new-looking they could be mistaken for replicas. One is still radiating heat from a tourist excursion 16 hours earlier. A volunteer is deep into the works of the other, trying to unclog a grease fitting. A third sits off to the side awaiting restoration. The employees are cross-trained in all the skills needed to operate the machines. The dawn of the diesel era is preserved in a pair of brightly colored 12-cylinder

## **THE SENSE OF ANTIQUITY PERVADES EVERY ASPECT RAILYARD, FROM THE HEAVY MECHANICS TO THE PAPERWORK, AND ALONG WITH THE PRIMITIVE LANDSCAPE, PRODUCES AN EERIE SENSATION OF TIME HAVING STOPPED.**



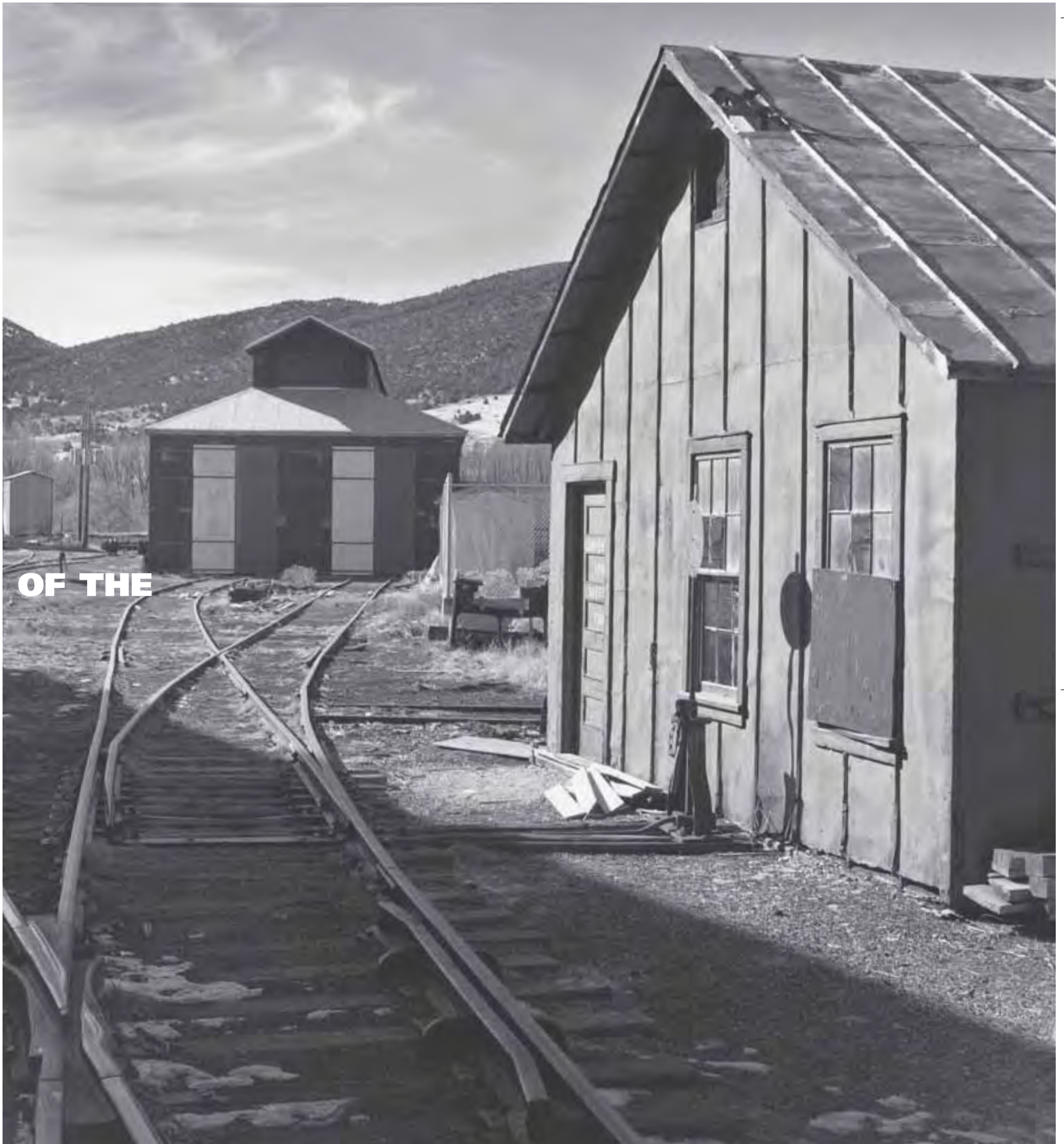
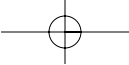
has a rail camp program for teenagers, and the museum has seized the opportunity. "They learn basic metal working and problem solving," says Bassett. They've also been treated to the experience of laying railroad ties and driving spikes with a sledgehammer.

### **American Classics**

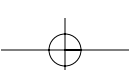
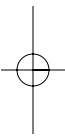
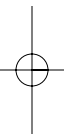
**THE SHOWPIECES OF THE MUSEUM ARE IN A PAIR OF MASSIVE BUILDINGS** with enormous windows, skylights, and roofs 60 feet high. The effect is ecclesiastical. Locomotives, passenger cars, a yellow caboose, and an assortment of other machines sit in stages of restoration. A ladies' passenger car has had its original red velvet seats restored. The windows on the men's car have stained glass with ornate brass kerosene lamps affixed to the ceilings. The oldest of the cars goes back to 1872. Some of the work is done by staff and volunteers. Some requires specialists, and this is where isolation exacts its price. Salt Lake City and Las Vegas are both about 240 miles distant. Says Bassett, "You have to make it worth the trip to get them here." Though the challenges are daunting, the smell of new paint and the gleam of polished brass are encouraging signs.



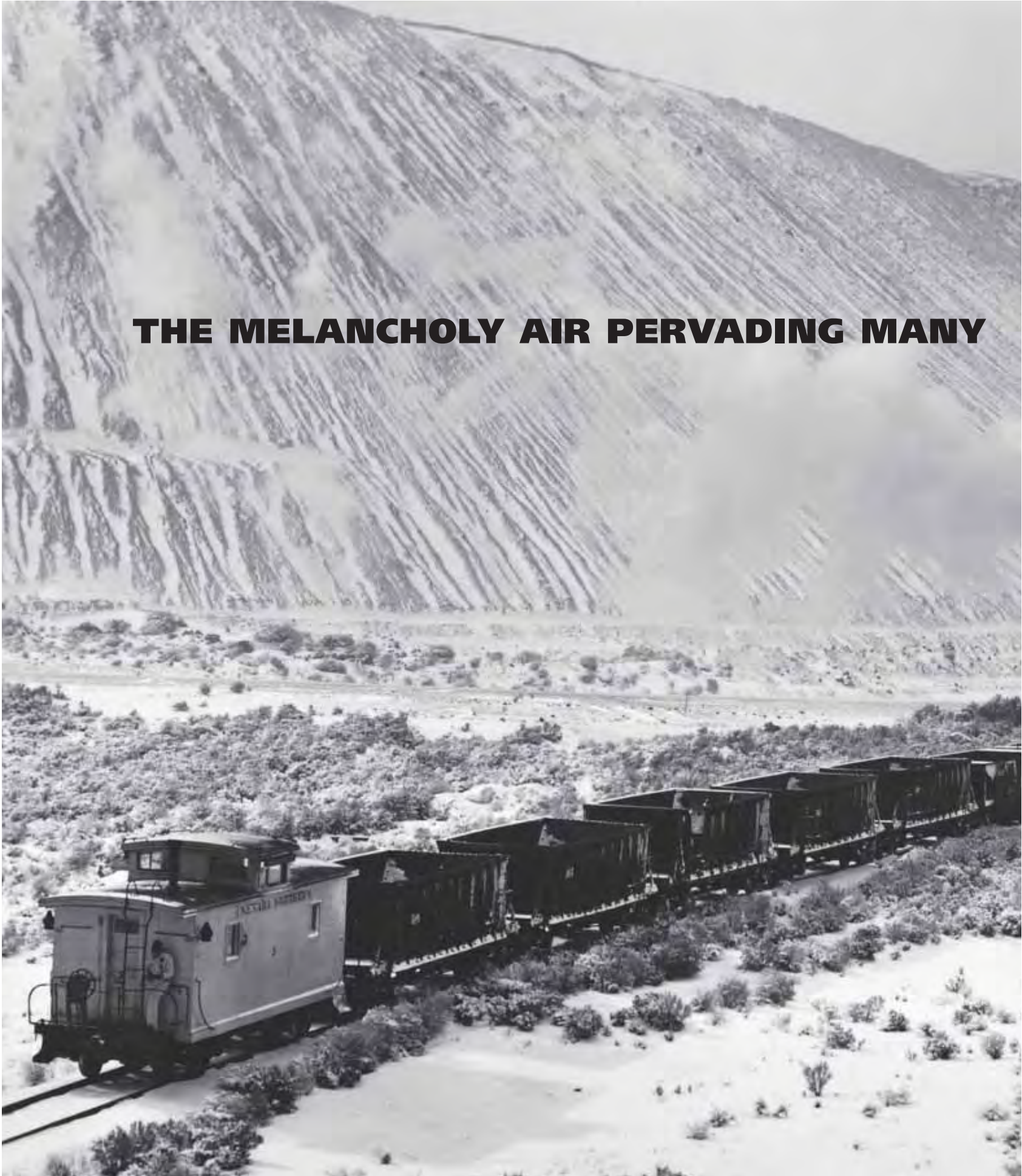
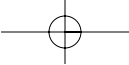




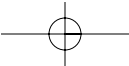
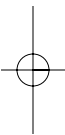
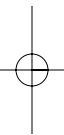
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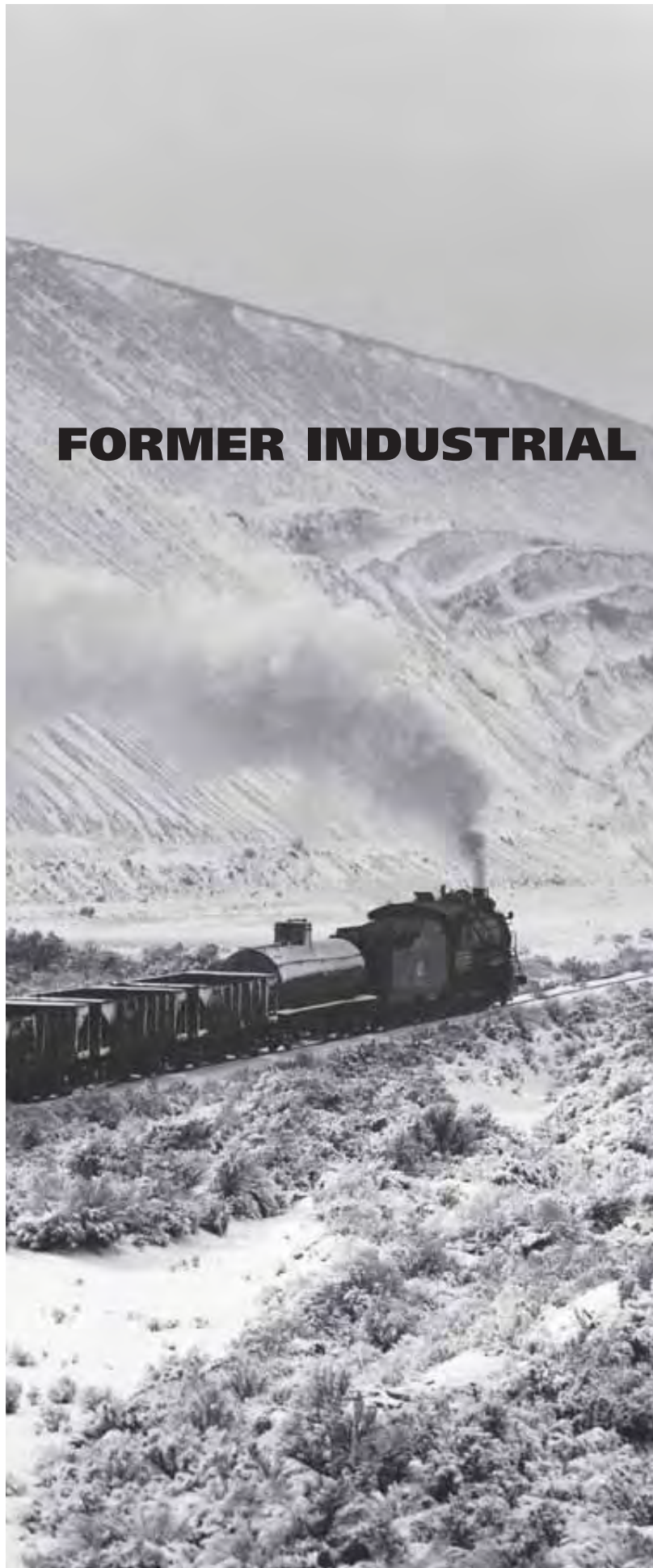




**THE MELANCHOLY AIR PERVADING MANY**







## FORMER INDUSTRIAL SITES IS TEMPERED BY WHAT'S OUT OF SIGHT OF THE COAL TOWERS, THE DRY BROWN MOUNTAINS, THE LONELY VISTAS. BECAUSE OF THE PARTNERSHIPS, BECAUSE OF THE VOLUNTEERS, BECAUSE OF THE DEDICATION, THE PLACE HAS NEW LIFE. IT'S CONFIRMED BY THE PERCUSSIVE SOUND OF AN AIR WRENCH COMING OUT OF THE ENGINE HOUSE, REACHING THE EARS ACROSS A LONG EXPANSE OF TRACKS.

acetylene torch ignites. With all the activity it would be easy to forget that this is a national historic landmark, except that posted on a board by the door is the Railway Labor Act of 1951, and beside that, Kennecott Copper circular number 63 from January 1922, warning employees of the consequences of “disloyalty, dishonesty, desertion [and] intemperance.” Both are original artifacts of their time.

Out in the yard, Bassett reflects on what the place means in the larger picture of history. “The railroad was completely intertwined with

American life,” he says. The depot—especially in a place like Ely—was the portal to the outside world. This was where mail arrived, where you met visitors, where things from faraway cities came to your doorstep. The depot’s symbolism came to transcend its function.

The immigrant story is pervasive too. A flood of newcomers came to try their luck in the wide-open West around here. They too left their imprint on the story of the railroads and the mines.

“You get an incredible look into the lives of people,” says Pitts. A tour through company records reveals the horrific accident rate. “We fail to understand that labor was a commodity. If you lost labor you just went out and got more . . . railroading was the second-most dangerous profession in the United States at the time. Mining was the first.”

The melancholy air pervading many former industrial sites is tempered by what’s out of sight of the coal towers, the dry brown mountains, the lonely vistas. Because of the partnerships, because of the volunteers, because of the dedication, the place has new life. It’s confirmed by the percussive sound of an air wrench coming out of the engine house, reaching the ears across a long expanse of tracks. And it is no doubt what prompted the Smithsonian’s Withuhn, weighing in on the landmark nomination, to say, “It’s a living American treasure . . . I’ve been in this business for over two decades, and there’s nothing like it.”

For more information, contact Mark Bassett, Nevada Northern Railway Museum, 1100 Avenue A, P.O. Box 150040, Ely, NV 89315, [nnry1@mwpower.net](mailto:nnry1@mwpower.net). Also visit [www.nevadanorthernrailway.net](http://www.nevadanorthernrailway.net).

**LEFT: AN ORE TRAIN ROLLS THROUGH THE HIGH DESERT OUTSIDE ELY, NEVADA.**



# ROSIE

## A LEGEND ON THE HOME FRONT

*A talk with Emily Yellin, author of *Our Mothers' War*, with home front vets Betty Reid Soskin and Rosalie Pinto  
Moderated by Lucy Lawliss, Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front National Historical Park*

“Sometimes the din will seem to swell and engulf you like a treacherous wave,” says welder Augusta Clawson—quoted in Emily Yellin’s *Our Mothers’ War*—about working down in the hold of a ship. “It makes you want to scream wildly. And then it struck me funny to realize that a scream even couldn’t be heard. So I screamed, loud and lustily, and couldn’t even hear myself.” Clawson captures just one of the experiences thrust upon women on the “home front,” a place in time not seen since. Here, Yellin joins a roundtable moderated by Lucy Lawliss of Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front National Historical Park in talking with two who were there. Rosalie Pinto, a tack welder on PT boats at the Philadelphia Navy Yard—the nation’s first, founded in 1799—had to move to another job when her eye caught a spark from a welding rod. Still, she “loved it” and would go back today, she told Robert Stewart, author of a yard history for the Historic American Engineering Record. Betty Reid Soskin, an African American and now ranger at the Rosie site, had a different experience in the San Francisco Bay area—as a clerk for the segregated boilermakers’ union, which served the Kaiser shipyards, the nation’s newest and largest. “The Bay Area boilermakers restricted blacks to powerless auxiliaries and stripped women of voting and other rights,” writes Fredric Quivik, author of the HAER history of the yards, rights that included training in a craft in exchange for initiation fees and dues, a typical track for new workers. Despite its reputation as a progressive employer, he says, “the Kaiser organization did little to overturn the boilermakers’ policies and pressured blacks not to be too bold in their advocacy.” Adds Yellin, “It was a difficult prospect for all women because they were pioneering in areas that weren’t created for or by them. But for African Americans, it was a double whammy.”

*Above: Joining sections of a B-17 wing at Long Beach, California’s Douglas Aircraft Company, the photograph part of a U.S. government public relations campaign to show a woman could do a man’s job and look attractive, too. Right: The Philadelphia Navy Yard, where Rosalie Pinto toiled as a tack welder, pictured five decades later. The photograph, like the other site shots in this article, is part of HAER’s documentation of these history-making places.*

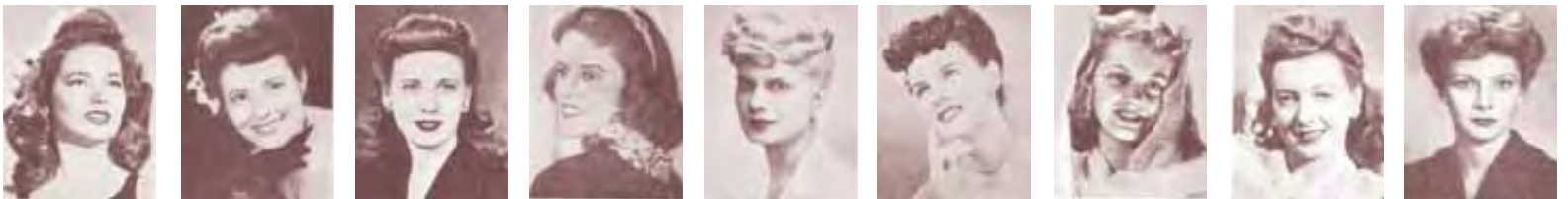




RIGHT JET LOWENPSHAER, LEFT ALFRED T. PALMER/LOC



THE



**Lucy:** *Betty, what did the home front mean to you? Or did that term have meaning?*

**BETTY:** I don't think it did. I had very little sense of the issues of the war. I thought of it as an opportunity to be something other than a young woman who took care of people's children or cleaned their houses. It was a new definition of what I might be—a clerical worker. It was a time of growth, but also pain. It's hard to recall.

**Lucy:** *How did you get your job?*

**BETTY:** Through friends. A young man from Chicago was brought in to run the segregated auxiliary of the boilermakers' unions. He was really a sportsman who owned a basketball team. His wife was a friend of mine who went to work in the union hall. At least it had the look of being part of the war, though we didn't see a single ship. We were about two miles away in a small office. We car-pooled from Berkeley, so we didn't see the waves of humanity going to the shipyards. There was no sense of being part of that.

*Top: During World War II, the Philadelphia Navy Yard—shown here in 1995—was a small city with its maze of railroad cars, piers, cranes, and drydocks. Above: Contestants for the yard's "War Bond Girl"; bond buyers got to select the winner (Kay McGinty, second from right). Near right top: Douglas Aircraft technician in a photo taken as part of the public relations campaign to glamorize war work. Women quickly acquired a spectrum of skills—welding, shipfitting, riveting, blacksmithing—with male supervisors eventually concluding they were just as good as the men. Near right bottom: Riveting an A-20 bomber at Douglas Aircraft in another photograph from the campaign.*

**Lucy:** *That's very different from your experience, Rosalie.*

**ROSALIE:** I was so proud to receive my award for selling war bonds. I still remember the date—December 7, 1944. My four brothers were in the service, so I went down to the Navy Yard gate and got hired. I was about 18 years old. My mother loved that I was a welder. My father was really proud too, especially years later when I was in a documentary and on the front page of the *South Philly Review*. After I got a flash in my eye, they put me in a woodwork shop where I did clerical



**FIRST DAY I WENT TO THE YARD, THEY PUT ME IN A PT BOAT,**  
*right in the magazine, a little room where the ammunition went. Women were put  
 in the small spaces because of their size.*

work. I got the same salary as a third-class welder. The clerical workers complained that I shouldn't get that. I worked almost three years, then left when I got married. They gave me a small retirement check.

**Lucy:** *Emily, can you put these very different experiences, on either side of the country, into perspective?*

**EMILY:** There were three main areas where women worked—shipbuilding, aircraft manufacture, and munitions. Shipbuilding was an established domain. Being a welder was hard work and there were injuries like what you experienced, Rosalie. The aircraft industry was relatively new, so it wasn't always about women coming into a workforce that had been men forever. It was still oriented toward men, but there was a little more sense of—I won't say "equality" because there wasn't any. Munitions was probably the most dangerous area. That was where a lot of African American women were employed, a sad commentary on our country. African American women didn't move into the workforce until late in 1944. They were not part of the

early home effort. The way it went was they got all the men they could, then white single women, then white married women, then black men, then black women.

**BETTY:** My relationship to the war was that my husband, who was a senior at the University of San Francisco, enlisted to fight for the Navy, and found that he could only be a mess man.

**EMILY:** It was a difficult prospect for all women because they were pioneering in areas that weren't created for or by them. But for African Americans, it was a double whammy.

**BETTY:** At 20, not knowing the issues of the war, I wasn't always sure who the enemy was.

**EMILY:** Rosalie, you were a welder. A lot of people don't understand how hard that work is. Can you talk to us a bit about that?

*Below: Rosalie Pinto, with clipboard, shown here at the Philadelphia Naval Yard in its World War II heyday.*

CLOCKWISE FROM LOWER LEFT OPPOSITE PAGE NPS/HAER, JET LOWE/NPS/HAER, NPS/HAER, ALFRED T. PALMER/LOC (2)





## AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN DIDN'T

**ROSALIE:** I had to go to school for five weeks to learn how to tack-weld. I would tack spots maybe 12 inches long, a shorter line than in regular welding. I had to wear a helmet and special gloves. The first day I went to the yard, they put me in a PT boat, right in the magazine, a little room where the ammunition went. Women were put in the small spaces because of their size. When I needed a break I'd have to go up this ladder and off to the ladies' room in the gun turret shop.

**Lucy:** *You were wearing gloves and a helmet, so it must have been quite warm in the summer with no air conditioning. Was the work hot?*

**ROSALIE:** Oh sure. But it wasn't that hot.

**Lucy:** *How did you get used to working with men?*

**ROSALIE:** I got to know them. I went out with a carpenter for a while.

**Lucy:** *Betty, you were working in a city where many thousands were employed by shipbuilders. Were you ever interested in that work?*

**BETTY:** No. I wasn't even aware of the shipyards. You have to realize what it was like in the Bay Area. Change dominated everything. You could be driving down the street and a convoy would come by and all the cars would pull over. There were trains and trucks everywhere, and air raid warnings at night. There was so much so fast that with our small role in it we had no way to understand what was going on. I had no expectation to do that kind of work. There were no such role models in my life. I came from the service-worker generation. Our parents were the barbers and the red caps and the porters and the hospital workers. They were not professionals. Even my husband, who was hired by Kaiser Shipyards as a helper, could not become a journeyman because he could not join the union as a full-fledged member.

**EMILY:** This was the first time women were allowed in the military, and the first time that married women outnumbered single women.

**BETTY:** The successful girl was the one who married and had chil-

*Above: Operating a hand drill on a dive bomber at Vultee Aircraft in Nashville, Tennessee. Women took special care knowing the results of their labor might wind up in the hands of a loved one. Right: The Philadelphia Naval Shipyard. "I don't remember any African Americans at the yard," says former tack welder Rosalie Pinto. Adds Yellin, "The Navy didn't allow them until near the war's end."*

ABOVE ALFRED T. PALMER/LOC, RIGHT JET LOWE/NPS/HAER, RIGHT TOP FDR LIBRARY







*Right: Welders. Despite the opportunity for better pay, racism was rampant at wartime plants, with African Americans hired last and often denied training.*

## **MOVE INTO THE WORKFORCE UNTIL LATE IN**

*1944. They were not part of the early home effort. The way it went was they got all the men they could, then white single women, then white married women, then black men, then black women.*



*Below left: Poster published by the U.S. Office of War Information, which posited that war jobs had "to be glorified as a patriotic war service if American women are to be persuaded to take them and stick to them." Below right: Most of the public relations images in this article—like this one at Douglas Aircraft—were taken by chief OWI photographer Alfred T. Palmer, who sought out the most attractive women in the plant as the first step in preparing for a shoot. His goal, he later recalled, was to capture "the beauty of people, their work, their creations." Marilyn Monroe was discovered on a similar assignment by the Army Air Force First Motion Picture Unit under Captain Ronald Reagan.*

dren. There is a famous quote by an African American woman at the time—"Hitler got us out of the white woman's kitchen."

*Lucy: Even when I grew up, long after the war, my mother still didn't want us to work. Her ideal was that her three daughters get married and have children. I still hear it. It's amazing for that to carry into the '70s and '80s and even up*

## AT FIRST THE COSMETICS COMPANIES DIDN'T KNOW

*to today. Yet Rosalie's mother wasn't concerned that her daughter was going off to a job, even a non-traditional one. Betty, did your mother have concerns?*

**BETTY:** I was no longer living at home—I was newly married. My mother had three girls. Getting us married before we got pregnant was probably her ambition. To have gotten us through high school was the height of her expectations. There was never any thought of college. The fact that I was engaged to a young man in his senior year there was the greatest thing my mother could have wished. Going to work was my contribution to the war effort. All of my friends were doing it—that's what was important. I lived an untypical life because my family came here as refugees from the New Orleans flood of 1927, when I was six. My husband's family came here during the Civil War. We were part of a small African American community spread throughout the Bay Area. Although the war changed our lives drastically, we remained in that insular group. Our friends were the ones who became the Tuskegee Airmen, the guys who fought with Patton and the 761st Tank Battalion. These were young, educated African Americans who in some cases moved into officer training school, where they met others in segregated units. So my social life did not change, except in that way.

*Lucy: Rosalie, you dated a man you worked with. Did it change your social life to be working with men?*

**ROSALIE:** I dated him for a short while, and there was a man who drove me to work. Then I met my husband, and he said, "Get rid of your driver. I'll drive you to work." "Well, why?" "Because I'll drive you to work, and I'll pick you up." He used to pick me up at a statue outside the gate. I went to look for it a few months ago. It's not there. I heard it was moved to what's now called Franklin Roosevelt Park.

*Lucy: It sounds like a very traditional protective role. Your boyfriend, then fiancé, was concerned about your working there.*

**ROSALIE:** Yeah, he was. When I got the flash in my eye, I had to wear glasses for six months. I'd come out of the yard without them on and he'd say, "Why don't you have your glasses on?" "Because I don't like them." "Do you think the men want to look at you?" "No, that's not the reason." But everybody knew each other. I had six brothers, and the men would say, "Are you Charlie's sister?" When a truck came with box lunches—that was the best part because the sailors would want to treat us. Everybody was friendly. I had wonderful—they call them "bosses" but we didn't—I had wonderful leading men.



ABOVE LEFT WORLD WAR POSTER COLLECTION/UNIV OF MINNESOTA LIBRARIES, ABOVE RIGHT ALFRED T. PALMER/LOC, RIGHT JET LOWE/NPS/HAER

**BETTY:** I'm listening to Rosalie—how different our lives have been. My life was not changed by the war. I went in during the day to file cards and collect union dues, and went home at night to my small





## WHAT TO DO. MAKEUP SEEMED FRIVOLOUS.

*So hand lotion ads would say, “You work in the factory all day, keep your hands pretty for your man.” It was patriotic not to have rough hands when your man came home. At the time it seemed completely natural.*

apartment with my husband. So I didn't have a connection to the war.

**Lucy:** *Did any of your sisters work, Rosalie?*

**ROSALIE:** One in a bank, the other in a tailor shop. I said, “You're so gorgeous. You should get a job with Heinz. So that's where she went—her and her girlfriend—and she married her boss. They moved to Phoenix, and he became president of U-Haul Company.

**EMILY:** Did you ever work again?

**ROSALIE:** I sold jewelry and worked at Ritz Crackers and Keebler's. I didn't work while I raised my son, but from '62 to about '89 I worked at an exclusive dress shop on Broad Street, where I became the manager.

**Lucy:** *Betty, tell us about your life in the Bay Area.*

**BETTY:** My experience was pretty bitter. My husband tried to volunteer, and lasted only three days. He didn't talk about it to anyone except me. He was told he would make a wonderful sailor but they couldn't put him on a ship because it might spell mutiny. He was a leader of men—a college quarterback, a well-known football player. They sent him back on a train with mustering-out pay and an honorable discharge. He felt like a failure. He then went to the shipyards and got a job

*Above: Auxiliary plate shop at Richmond, California's Kaiser shipyards, today part of Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front National Historical Park, in 2001. Some articles in Kaiser's employee paper seemed designed to dispel stereotypes: “Women shipfitters? Unheard of till Dolly Thrash, gray-haired and not long off an Oklahoma farm, became California's first at Yard Four in August '42. But in three months, so well did she do the work, Dolly was a fitter leaderwoman, America's first.”*

as a second-class workman. Meanwhile, I briefly worked for the Air Force. I left after they found out I was African American. I didn't know that they didn't know. I was light-skinned.

I'd been transferred from a wartime job at San Francisco's Federal Building, where I was filing cards in the basement, and they had not asked my race. Then, a week or two after I was with the Air Force, the lieutenant was notified that I was nonwhite. I went up to his desk. He told me it was okay, that he had talked with my supervisor and I could stay and “the other women were willing to work with me.” I walked out, and this was around the time my husband came back. As a young western couple—without the background to prepare us for this kind of second-class citizenship—we were unable to cope. Here

we were, my husband working as a trainee and me filing cards in a segregated union hall. I decided, at the end of it, that we would never work for anyone again. We opened a little music store on Sacramento Street in Berkeley, and loved it. But during the war no one gave any credit to people like us, who had migrated here earlier. We were buried in a city that grew overnight with people from the southern states, people who brought with them the complete system of racial segregation, people who would not share drinking fountains, schools, public accommodations, even cemeteries for another 20 years. We were right in the middle of that.

**EMILY:** It wasn't just the South. Restaurants were segregated in Washington and New York, too. The military itself was segregated.

*Below: Second floor of Richmond, California's Ford Tank Depot, future site of the park visitor center, in 2002. The war transformed the sleepy town into a teeming city of 100,000, defined by whirly cranes, monumental manufacturing plants, and barracks housing laced with a network of ferries, buses, and trolleys in the form of recycled New York City railcars. "Finding a place to stay was a problem," says Matilda Maes, who worked in the Bay Area's Moore Drydock, in an interview with UC Berkeley's regional oral history office. People were "just swarming," she says, "staying in garages and lean-tos, anyplace they could."*

**BETTY:** Our young men were going to war on the back of the bus. Even now, it's difficult to think of myself as a "Rosie."

**EMILY:** Lena Horne, a popular African American singer, was asked to give a show at a military base. She performed in the evening for the white soldiers—her show was a nighttime thing—and was told she had to repeat in the morning for the African Americans. The next day she looks out into the audience—in this awful place, not the nice place of the night before—and sees three rows of white men in front. She says, "Who are they?" And they say, "The German POWs." She walked out.

**BETTY:** I can remember traveling in the South. In El Paso, my parents warned me to move into the Jim Crow car, behind the baggage car. I found myself sitting with white prisoners in handcuffs and shackles

CHANGE DOMINATED EVERYTHING. YOU COULD





LEFT JET LOWE/NPS/HAER, BELOW ALFRED T. PALMER/LOC, BELOW RIGHT HOWARD R. HOLLEM/LOC



## BE DRIVING DOWN THE STREET AND A CONVOY

*would come by and all the cars would pull over. There were trains and trucks everywhere, and air raid warnings at night. There was so much so fast that with our small role in it we had no way to understand what was going on.*

only half a car away. They were apparently en route to some prison—separated from the white passengers. I was absolutely terrified.

**Lucy:** *Having worked for the war effort, how did you feel about just the men getting the chance to go to school afterward? Rosalie, you worked hard for many years and were injured.*

**ROSALIE:** It didn't bother me because I got married, and my husband didn't want me to work. I just thought of all the good times.

**BETTY:** We didn't expect it.

**EMILY:** A lot of women told me they felt lucky to be where they were, and they never even considered comparing themselves to men.

**BETTY:** I was always an onlooker. I did feel the Nazi scourge was something that had to be stopped, but I don't remember being particularly proud except on VJ Day when it was over. I do remember being afraid. It was visceral feeling, how I felt when the air raid sirens sounded and my husband went out to be a warden and my father before then. I remember being frightened but not sure what of—always as a witness, not a participant.

**EMILY:** Betty, did you ever hear the term “double victory”?

**BETTY:** That was a public relations campaign by the *Pittsburgh Courier*—an African American paper—demanding rights. It said we were fighting for victory on two fronts, at home and overseas. I don't think I was as aware of it as later that we deserved more than we got. The campaign continued into Korea and was pronounced during

*Above left: OWI photographer Alfred T. Palmer's shot of a woman and an airplane motor at Inglewood, California's North American Aviation. Women often had a second job of housework and child-care waiting for them at home; companies such as North American tried to make the work enjoyable with news and music broadcast at lunch. Above right: Mrs. Virginia Davis, a riveter in the assembly and repair department of the Naval Air Base in Corpus Christi, Texas, supervises Charles Potter, a trainee from Michigan.*

Vietnam when we felt more of us were going into service than from the general population.

**Lucy:** *Let's talk about the p.r. image of Rosie.*

**EMILY:** During the Depression, if a man and a woman were competing for the same job, the man got it because they needed jobs to support families. Married women who worked were considered almost unpatriotic. Suddenly there was a manpower shortage, and the government had a delicate public relations problem. In a 1943 Gallup poll, only 30 percent of husbands gave unqualified support to their wives working in war jobs. Around that time the *Saturday Evening Post* published a masculine-looking rendition of a Rosie by Norman Rockwell, which set off a reaction. So the image we have today is the woman with the mascara, the lipstick, the nail polish.

At first the cosmetics companies didn't know what to do. Makeup seemed frivolous. So hand lotion ads would say, "You work in the factory all day, keep your hands pretty for your man." It was patriotic not to have rough hands when your man came home. At the time it seemed completely natural. But it was a concerted, very high-level effort to change attitudes. And then, when the war was winding down, there was a concerted, very high-level effort to change them back.

**BETTY:** I was so firmly imprinted with expectations that, at 23 with both sisters pregnant and me not yet with a child, I adopted one.

**Lucy:** *You can't understand World War II without thinking about the Depression, when many families could not find jobs. Was that true for your family, Rosalie?*

**ROSALIE:** That's why I went to work. My brother and I—my mother didn't call it "board," but we gave her \$20 a week. My father had a job working maybe three or four days a week as a blacksmith. I had a

brother who worked in a store—they gave him chicken and eggs. In 1939, my parents lost their house. They had two mortgages. We moved into a rented home. Eventually my sister bought that one.

**Lucy:** *Rosalie, what was your day like? Did you have a sense that the work was dangerous?*

**ROSALIE:** No, I loved it. First you showed your badge at the gate. When I resigned I had to turn that in, which I regret, but I remember the number—30307. Then you took a shuttle to your shop. I had to go on a gangplank to get to the PT boat, then down a ladder into the magazine inside the hull. There were no windows. We had lamps, but the main hole, the big hole to climb up and down, was the only outside light.

**EMILY:** Did the Navy provide health care when you were injured?

**ROSALIE:** No. I happened to go down to the restaurant, and a man said to me, "What's wrong with your eye?" "I got a flash." "Hey, go in and get the potato skins." So they sent me to the lab. They told me the only way to get cured was to stay off the job and put potato skins and tea bags—compresses—on my eye, because it was burning. It did help.

**EMILY:** What's a flash?

**ROSALIE:** A spark from a welding rod. It didn't affect my vision, but I had to wear glasses for six months. I still have them. My eye did clear up.

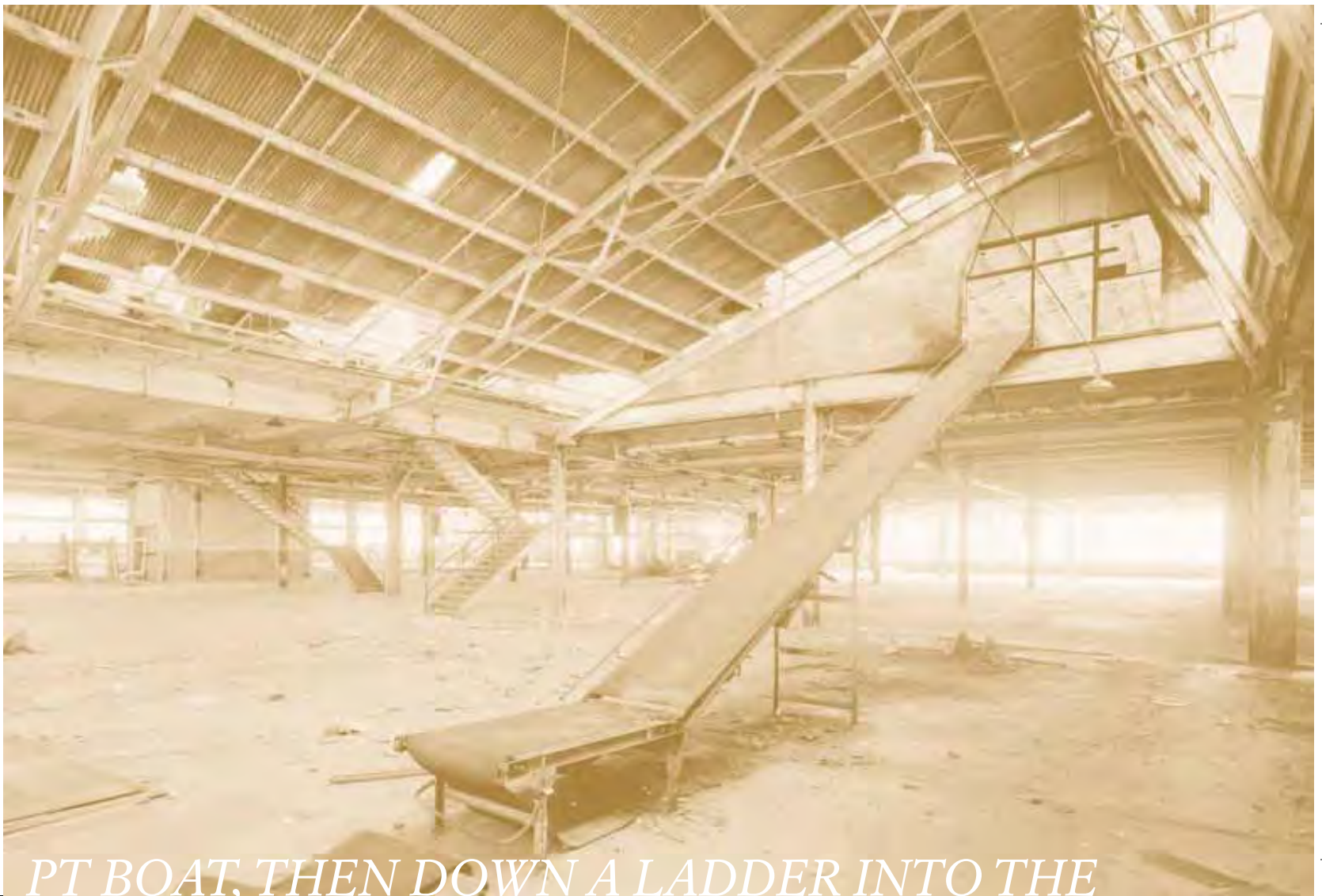
**EMILY:** In Richmond, the Kaiser company provided prepaid health

## I HAD TO GO ON A GANGPLANK TO GET TO THE



*Above: A riveter works on a bomber at Consolidated Aircraft in Fort Worth, Texas. One plant newsletter advised women to "be feminine and ladylike even though you are filling a man's shoes"; Boeing sent them to charm school.*





*PT BOAT, THEN DOWN A LADDER INTO THE magazine inside the hull. There were no windows. We had lamps, but the main hole, the big hole to climb up and down, was the only outside light.*

*Above: Conveyor at Richmond, California's Ford Tank Depot. "We were cautioned to not talk about our work," says Marion Sousa, a shipyard draftsman interviewed by UC Berkeley's regional oral history office. "In fact, my sister worked at the Pre-fab [facility] just maybe a block from the Ford plant, and didn't know that they were making tanks in there."*

care with first aid stations at the shipyard and a field hospital to take care of the more serious injuries. But Kaiser was unique. They also provided day care, a new concept at that time. Kaiser was really out front.

**Lucy: Rosalie, did other women do similar work?**

**ROSALIE:** I knew only one other tacker. There were shipfitters.

**Lucy: What did they do?**

**ROSALIE:** Stand around and look pretty. A friend of mine would come in like she was going to the ball. I said, "Do you intend to work?" We did not have it hard, believe me.

**EMILY:** I have to say this is a classic statement. Most women say they didn't do much and that the men had it hard.

**ROSALIE:** Yeah.

**EMILY:** Being on the battlefield is difficult. But without the contributions women made—and where this country might have ended up

without them—that's an understatement. I never had to weld, I never had to put up with hatred. Women in factories, women in the military, women at home waiting for sons who could be dead at any moment—they weren't allowed to express anything negative. So while I believe you didn't have it hard compared to somebody in a trench with gangrene, it's difficult to be a welder in a hot hole every day getting your eye singed and not knowing if next year Hitler will be running the country.

**ROSALIE:** I got a couple burns through my flannel shirt, but I took care of them right away. I worked hard, but I was 18. I didn't come home tired. My thing in life was helping my mother.

**BETTY:** Had I been having the experience alone, it would have been different. Being even a small part of something large made it possible to survive the hatred. I looked around and saw others sharing the load.

**Lucy: Rosalie, what would you want as a legacy of this experience?**

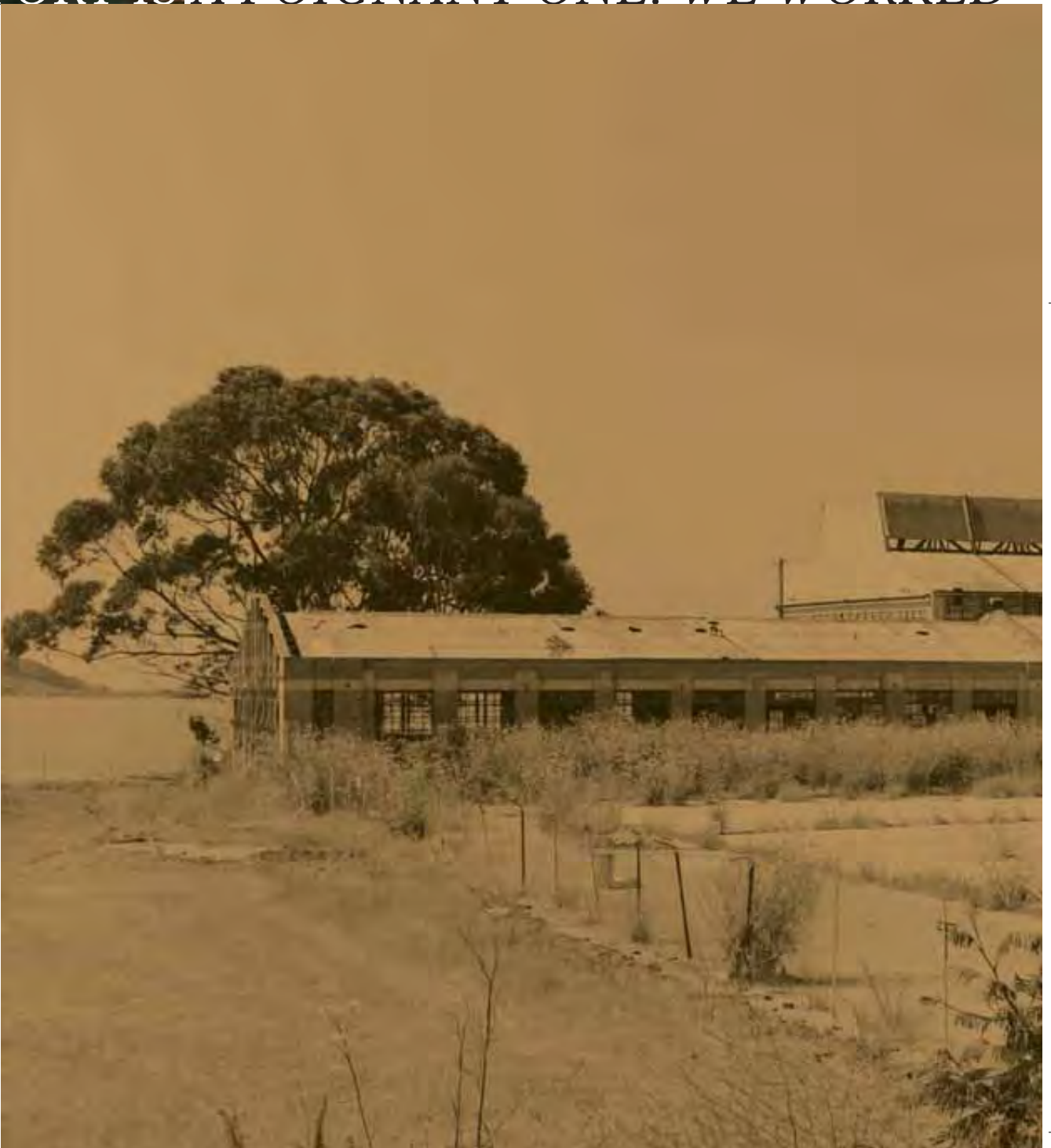


**ROSALIE:** Any woman who works a man's job should get equal pay and health coverage. I also want to preserve the memory of working there and all the people I met. I never missed a day. And the memory of my mother. Every morning she made our lunches.

**Lucy:** *Betty, what's the legacy that you want?*

**BETTY:** My husband and all the men I knew were experiencing the same humiliation as I was, so it's hard to think of any issues as a woman that supercede that. My great grandmother—who raised my mother and was born a slave in 1846—was still alive, surely a factor in my feelings. My sense of still being part of Jim Crow was strong. So what I want most is to preserve the full complexity of realities lived by so many of us. That if somehow it all can be remem-

# THE STORY IS A POIGNANT ONE. WE WORKED



RIGHT JET LOWENPSHAER, ABOVE DAVID BRANSBYLOC



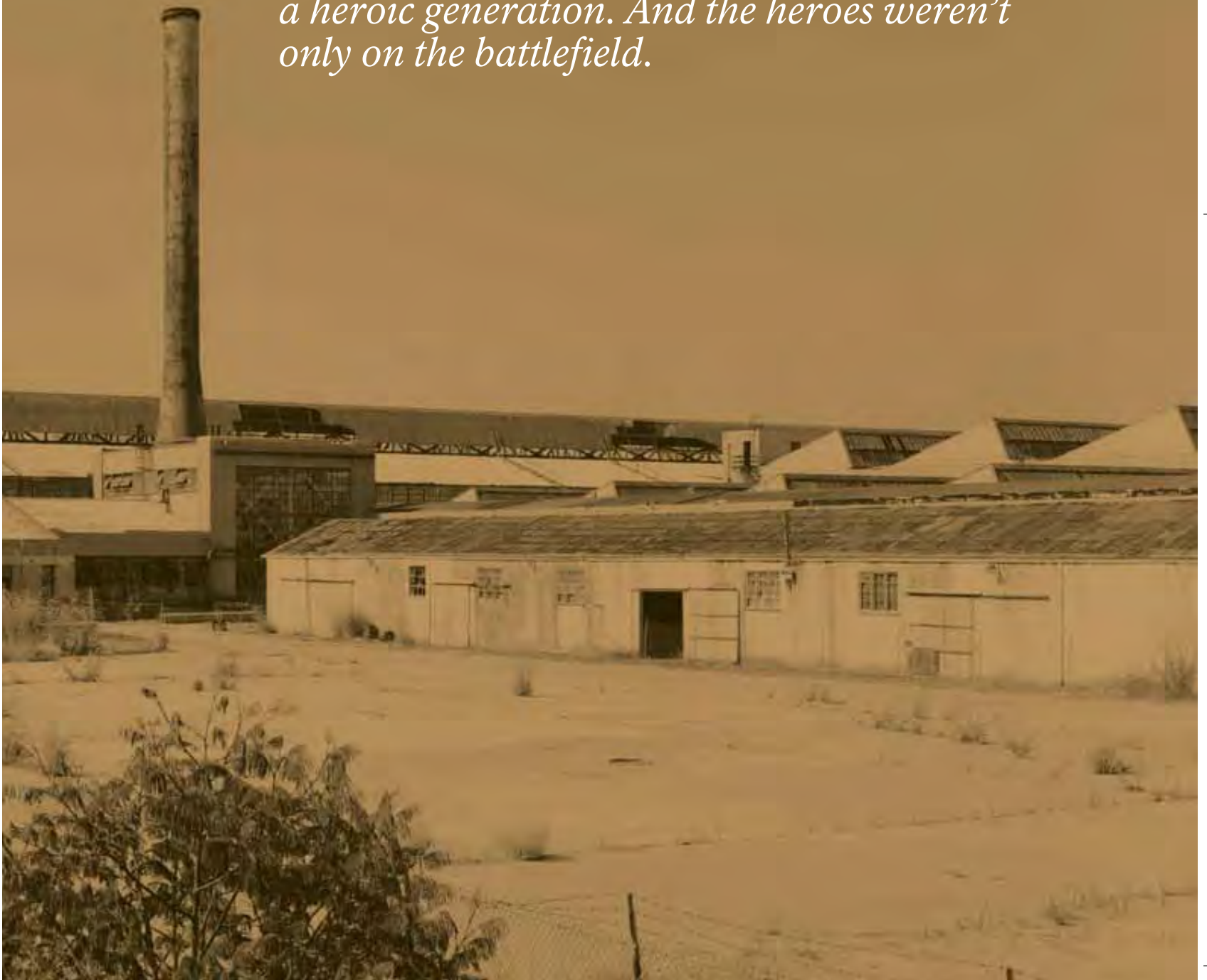
bered—even when the truths are conflicting—that is important. The story is a poignant one. We worked for, and died for, rights that some of us could not enjoy for another 20 years. It was a heroic generation. And the heroes weren't only on the battlefield.

For more information, contact Lucy Lawliss at [lucy\\_lawliss@nps.gov](mailto:lucy_lawliss@nps.gov) or go to the park online at [www.nps.gov/rori](http://www.nps.gov/rori). For more information about the interviews done by the Regional Oral History Office of UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library—a collaborative project with the city of Richmond and the National Park Service—go to <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/projects/rosie>.

*Left: Checking assemblies at Burbank, California's Vega Aircraft Corporation. Below: The Ford Tank Depot. "I don't want a doll—I want a welding set," a young girl says crossly to her mother outside a toy store window in a cartoon for the Kaiser yards paper. "In my mother's time, when she was a young girl, they were prohibited from so many things because they were girls, they were women," says Matilda Maes. "You do something out of line and you get on your knees and you pray three Hail Marys right now." What made it different for her? "I don't know how to answer that really. Ambition. [Desire for a] better life. Youth. Energy, more energy than we had to stay home . . . we probably could have flown if the occasion had arisen. That's how much energy we had to put into the effort of winning the war."*

## FOR, AND DIED FOR, RIGHTS THAT SOME OF

*us could not enjoy for another 20 years. It was a heroic generation. And the heroes weren't only on the battlefield.*



ARTI  
FACT

# STREAMING TO VICTORY



**LIKE MANY YOUNG PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES WERE SWEEPED UP BY WORLD WAR II**, Lee Minker was catapulted into extreme circumstances in a short space of time. One moment he was a freshman at idyllic Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, the next he was piloting a B-17 like this in subzero temperatures over Nazi Germany, explosives bursting all around him. **THE UNSPOKEN—AND THE UNSPEAKABLE—HOVER OVER** Lee's judiciously worded letters home. In the heat of 1944's Battle of the Bulge, he writes, "Dear Dad, I have been working rather hard this month and as a result I have sadly neglected my correspondence." **THROUGHOUT LEE'S BOMB RUNS AND EARLIER FLIGHT TRAINING**, his family replied with the familiar and comforting details of life back in Wilmington, Delaware. "Dearest Lee," his mother writes, "Now dinner is over and the house is quiet . . . Shirley has run up to May's, Bernice and Walter are over at his house, daddy resting, grandmother looking at cards." **THE MINKERS POIGNANTLY DETAIL THE BOND DRIVES**, the rationing, the tension of impending tragedy. Between 1943 and 1945, when Lee arrived home, he and his family exchanged some 800 letters, now housed at the Historical Society of Delaware and collected in the award-winning *An American Family in World War II*, edited by Minker with Sandra O'Connell and National Park Service historian Harry Butowsky. **IT IS A TELLING STORY OF THE PRIVATIONS OF WAR**, on the home front and the battle front.



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GORDON OSMUNDSON

*The clatter, the hiss, the expulsion of steam call to mind long ago afternoons in the movie house, the lore holding the same mythical power no matter who you were or whether you were in Brooklyn or Chicago or San Francisco. The picture was irresistible. Here was the modern juggernaut to which distance was no obstacle, announcing a new order, declaring the emphatic end of the Old West. —from “Last Stop,” page 14*

