

Save the Copra Crane

A SAN FRANCISCO LABOR LANDMARK

PART OF NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY

PART OF SAN FRANCISCO HISTORY




Copra Crane Labor Landmark Association
c/o ILWU— Bill Ward & Don Watson
1188 Franklin St., Fourth Floor
San Francisco, CA 94109

Copra Pete




Save the Copra Crane as a tribute to the copra handlers and a symbol for all workers.




"When I started at the copra dock in 1948, the method of removing copra, which was a bulk cargo, was by means of a vacuum situation. The copra had been in the ship for a while, and it got solid in there. So it was a pick and shovel job. It was hard work. You worked 20 minutes with a pick, 20 minutes with a shovel, and you had 20 minutes off. Copra at the bottom, where moisture collected and it rotted, smelled like hell. The copra was full of copra bugs. They'd get in your nose, in your mouth, in your eyes and down your neck."

— JOE AMYES




"The water [of Islais Creek] was black and bubbling. I believe the sewer was draining in there. Besides the copra, the creek itself smelled. Yes, there was a copra smell, like smoked coconut. You work fifteen minutes into it and you don't smell it anymore until you went home and your wife or mother or whoever you went to said, 'What the hell's wrong with you? You stink!'"

— BUDD RIGGS



"I remember why the copra dock closed. Ferdinand Marcos, who was in charge of the Philippines, decided he wanted to put his people to work, because all they was doin' is gathering the copra and shipping it over here. So, they built factories over there to squeeze out the copra and get the oil out. So that's what happened to the copra dock. If you don't have a product to squeeze, you don't have a job."

— WILL WHITAKER

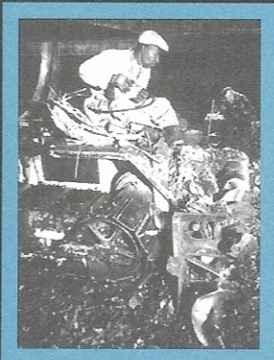


"When I talk to civic groups about this project, I like to show slides comparing the Copra Crane with the new red steel sculpture at South Beach park. They are roughly the same size and shape, but the old crane, still capable of doing the job, is a true symbol of the union labor which was the life of this port for generations."

— JULIA VIERA

THE COPRA CRANE-A LABOR LANDMARK*

The words *labor* and *landmark* when combined suggest craft and cause, sacrifice and vision. Originally *landmark* meant a boundry stone at river's bank or forest's edge. Today, it designates sites from Mount Vernon to Yosemite. To such national parks and monuments, we add the structures that memorialize work itself or workers' history.



The Copra Crane on San Francisco's Islais Creek is a highly visible reminder of toil on the waterfront. It symbolizes a world-wide process — harvesting coconuts from palm trees on Pacific plantations; shipping and unloading dried copra; processing the copra for oil for food, soap, perfume, and medicine; and recycling the residue for animal feed.

Islais Creek, once the home of tanneries, canneries, and slaughterhouses, meant both welcome jobs and careless damage to a bay inlet. As factories faced obsolescence, they were abandoned. In the last decade, community conservationists and preservationists have banded together to restore the natural creek, and return wildlife to its shores.

San Francisco labor, spearheaded by the ILWU, has joined hands with citizens from Hunters Point-Bayview and throughout the Bay Area to safeguard the Copra Crane and put it to community use. An educational classroom, mini-museum, and creekside exploratorium will be housed in the crane's shadow.

Islais Creek marks a story not yet ended. Where enterprise meets environment, the earth's fate is in the balance. The Copra Crane, a labor landmark, represents demanding work. It is also a dramatic industrial structure, as well as a signpost along humanity's road.

*Copra is dried coconut.

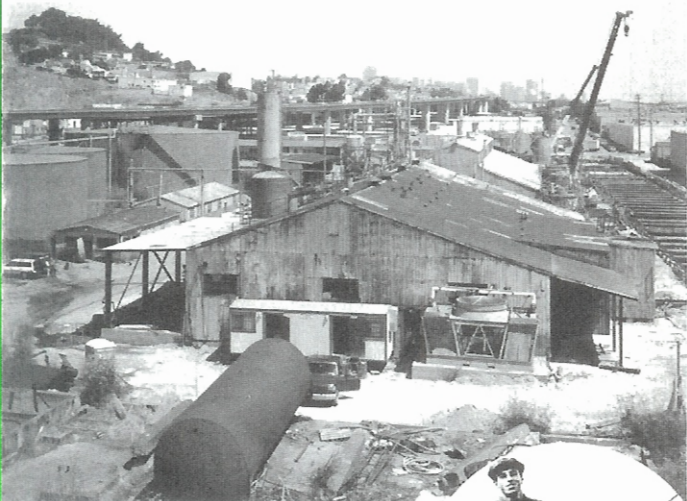


— ARCHIE GREEN
Labor Folklorist, Shipwright,
Board member, Labor
Heritage Foundation.

Why Save an Abandoned Crane at an Unused Dock?

The copra crane at Pier 84 in San Francisco is the last remaining piece of machinery on the Port of San Francisco hand operated by longshoremen working bulk cargo.

It was shut down in 1974 when the copra (dried coconut) processing plant closed next door. The seven acre property was sold to the City to build a bus repair and driver training yard.



The historic Cargill, Inc., copra processing facility that was once located next to the crane (top). Youthful sailor and future ILWU leader Harry Bridges arriving at the Port of San Francisco aboard the copra-laden vessel Ysabel in 1920 (right).



Islais Channel is a three-quarter mile man-made channel in the industrial section known as “Butchertown”. East of the Third Street silver drawbridge are the Port’s container docks. To the west is a waterway where the Friends of Islais Creek, led by community activist Julia Viera, have been working since 1980 to transform a trashed and toxic site into a green space people will want to visit.

The Copra Crane, rising five stories above a platform in the water, is the centerpiece for an emerging

park. The Port, owner of the platform, and the Municipal Railway (Muni), owner of the crane, at first thought the structure should be demolished.

Copra Crane Labor Landmark Association Formed

However, Archie Green, a renowned labor folklorist, saw the importance of saving the crane as an industrial artifact. Retired longshoremen, members of the ILWU Bay Area Pensioners, many of whom worked the copra in years past, agreed with Green and organized the Copra Crane Labor Landmark Association. They won the support of ILWU locals and the San Francisco labor movement. As a result, the Port and Muni agreed not to destroy the crane, and to help preserve it.

The Copra Crane Labor Landmark Association is now planning and raising money to create a lasting tribute to the generations of waterfront workers who so far are not suitably honored elsewhere on the Port of San Francisco.

The plans include re-creation of the original Pier 84 Walking Boss shack as a mini-museum where retired dockworkers will teach visiting school children and others about the sounds, scenes, and stories of this old site. An outdoor display showing the history



The Pier 84 Walking Boss shack (right). Longshoremen used it for years as a lunch room and social gathering place (left).

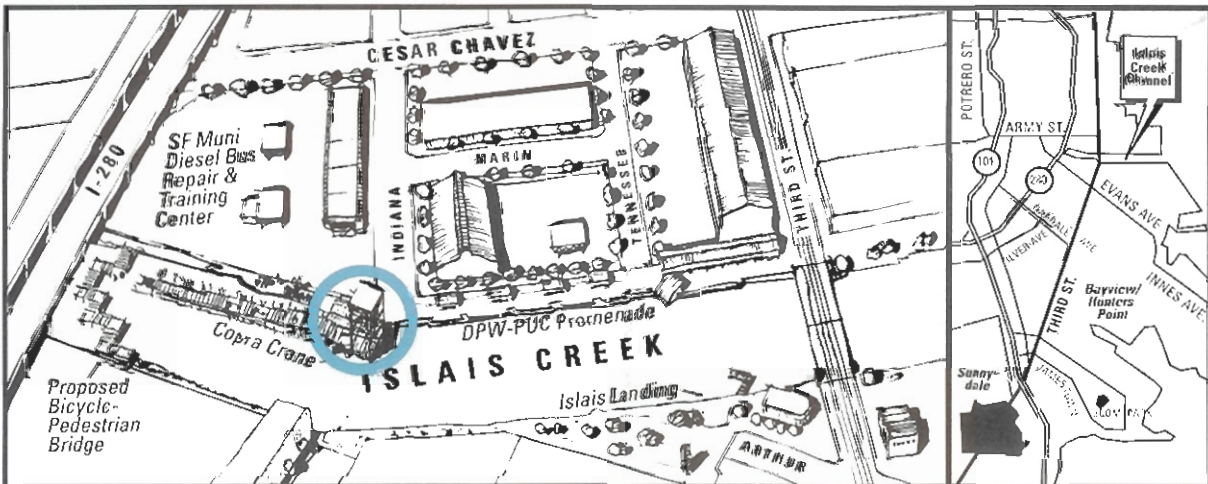
and operation of the copra plant will be an important feature of the emerging Islais Creek Waterfront Parkway.

What's Needed: Funds, museum artifacts, oral histories from union members who worked the copra dock, and additions to the roster of people who are interested in this project.

For information call (415) 775-0533.

To donate please make checks out to "CCLLA".

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The copra crane will be an important landmark feature within the Islais Creek park and recreational complex.

Hazy Bridges, lunchroom; (ILWU library, cover scene; Cargill plant and Walking Boss shack; Dave Dawson; Copra Pete, cover; inset: Otto Hagel

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