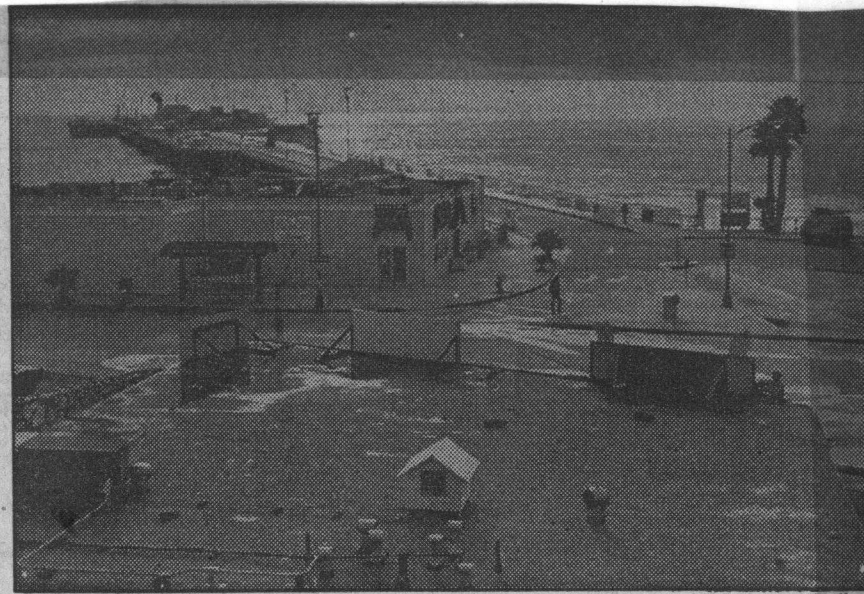




Warren "Skip" Littlefield Historical File



Pete Amos/Sentinel

The Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf, at left, was under construction in 1914, with the old Railroad Wharf at right. At right, the same view today.

Big bash Saturday at the wharf

By JOAN RAYMOND

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — A nine-day celebration of the Municipal Wharf's \$3-million facelift begins Saturday with Italian heritage ceremonies, entertainment and lighting of a wharf Christmas tree.

While wharf businesses, city officials and their staff scrambled today to finish last-minute preparations, dedications are scheduled for 11 a.m. Saturday to publicly herald the coming of new buildings and

walkways on the pier, a project that has been in the making for five years.

Organizers are hoping for fair weather, although forecasters predict a good chance of rain by Saturday.

If there is rain, it will be a repeat of what happened in 1914, when hardy souls with umbrellas attended the original ceremonies to open the pier.

Saturday's celebration — to be followed each day with activities until the end of the celebration Dec. 16 — coincides with

the 70th anniversary of the wharf opening.

Highlighting Saturday's events will be the evening lighting of the wharf and Boardwalk area in what is billed as a sparkling extravaganza, punctuated by the glow of beachside searchlights.

The evening events begin at 5. The Santa Cruz High School Jazz Band — a replacement for the originally scheduled United States Army Band — will provide the musical background for the lighting ceremonies.

If there were ever rain on any city project, this is it.

Even as the ceremonies get under way, the county grand jury continues its investigation of how the project was handled at City Hall.

Grand jury foreman, Paul Bihler, said Thursday jurors have requested copies of many project documents from City Hall.

He said jurors will soon be interviewing more persons involved with the project,

but declined to state who those persons are.

Some merchants who are tenants in three new buildings at the wharf have already been interviewed by the jury.

The three new buildings, plus new walkways, lamps, benches, information kiosks and trash dumpster enclosures, make up the bulk of the taxpayer-supported renovation, made possible through a federal grant, state loan and city money.

Despite problems with construction delays and slip-ups, city officials and business representatives see the recommercialization of the wharf as a boost for the local economy, a magnet for tourist dollars, a revitalization of the beach area

and an architectural asset. The new buildings are sleek, with natural-wood sidings, and bright yellow and blue accents.

They also hope expansion of wharf businesses will drop more tourists dollars into the local economy during the winter off-season — the time when business leaders say a financial shot in the arm is needed the most.

The celebration was set for December, instead of the warmer summer months, partly as a way to attract off-season business, and partly to coincide with the 70th anniversary.

Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt said Friday: "I think it's extremely exciting and gratifying to see what a beautiful wharf we've created. It has only been accomplished with enormous efforts by a variety of



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Fishermen, from left, Abbie and John Perez, Sam Scott, Jim and Fred Perez Sr. on the old Railroad Wharf

people."

But the mayor admitted, "Every possible struggle that could exist on this project has existed."

At 10:30 a.m. Saturday, the Coast Guard will give a helicopter and boat operation demonstration.

Other Saturday events include "Italian Day" ceremonies and entertainment by John Orlando, Gene Manners and Carmella Parodi from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.; Cabrillo College fire safety exhibit and UCSC fish "touch tank" exhibit from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Aptos High School Jazz Band, 2 p.m.; jazz by Joe Indence and Wendy Bowers, 3 p.m.; evening lighting ceremonies, 5 p.m.

Sunday will feature "The Toy Shop" children's ballet at noon; Cabrillo Com-

munity Chorus Christmas sing-along, 2 p.m.; Santa Cruz Brass Quintet, 3 p.m.

More festivities, exhibits and entertainment will continue at 10 a.m. Monday.

There is another ceremony planned for 2 p.m. Dec. 14 to honor government officials and others who helped make the project possible.

That ceremony is planned to honor the completion of the renovation project, even though it is not quite complete. City Council members have yet to sign off the Public Works Department project, and have no plans to do so between now and Friday's ceremony.

The new buildings — which add restaurants, cafes and gift shops to the old businesses on the wharf — were financed partly through a \$1-million grant from the federal Economic Development Administration. This money was originally targeted for the construction of a convention center at Lighthouse Point, but was funneled into the wharf project after public opposition killed convention center plans.

Originally, city officials hoped the new wharf businesses would be open in time for the start of the 1983 tourist season, but delays pushed back the project by almost two years.

New businesses just started to open at the end of last summer.

Delays came to be the name of the game with the project. The contractor for the three buildings — Armand Construction Co. of San Jose — walked off the job last year. The project stood idle for more than several months, said Public Works Director Larry Erwin.

Also, there were walkoffs by subcontractors and problems with getting materials.

At one point in the early planning stages, it looked like the federal grant had been lost, but the grant came through. The project was also funded with a \$1.4-million loan from the state Coastal Conservancy and \$600,000 in city money.

Celebration sponsors also have included Sons of Italy, Marconi Club, Italian Catholic Conference, Seaside Co., wharf businesses, Dominican Hospital Foundation, city Public Works and Parks and Recreation departments, the Downtown Association, county Convention and Visitors Bureau, UCSC and Beach Street merchants.

The council recently agreed to spend up to \$8,000 for promotion of the celebration. Some of that is to be offset by private donations.