

# The Livable City

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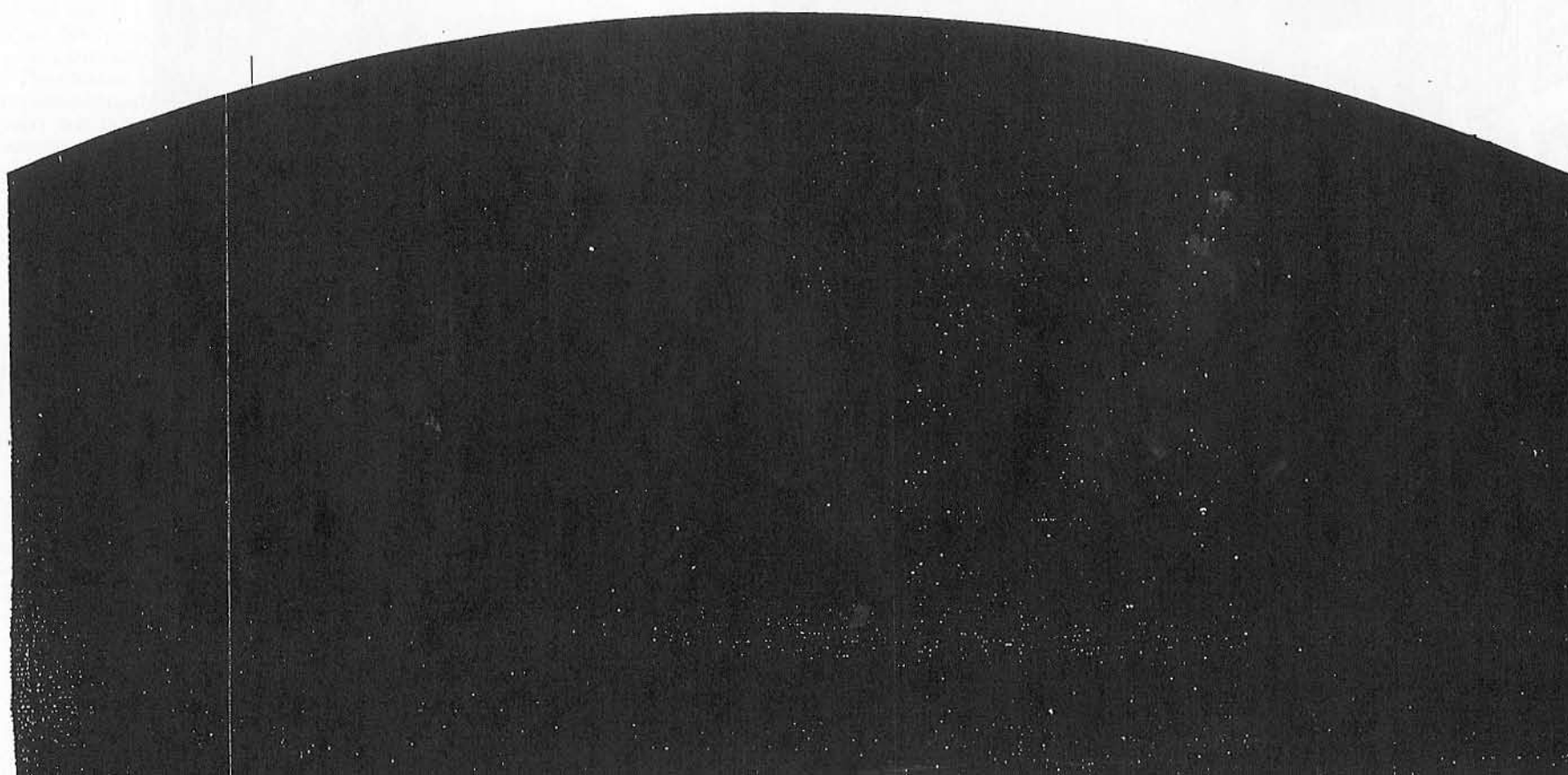
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2 The South Street Seaport Museum

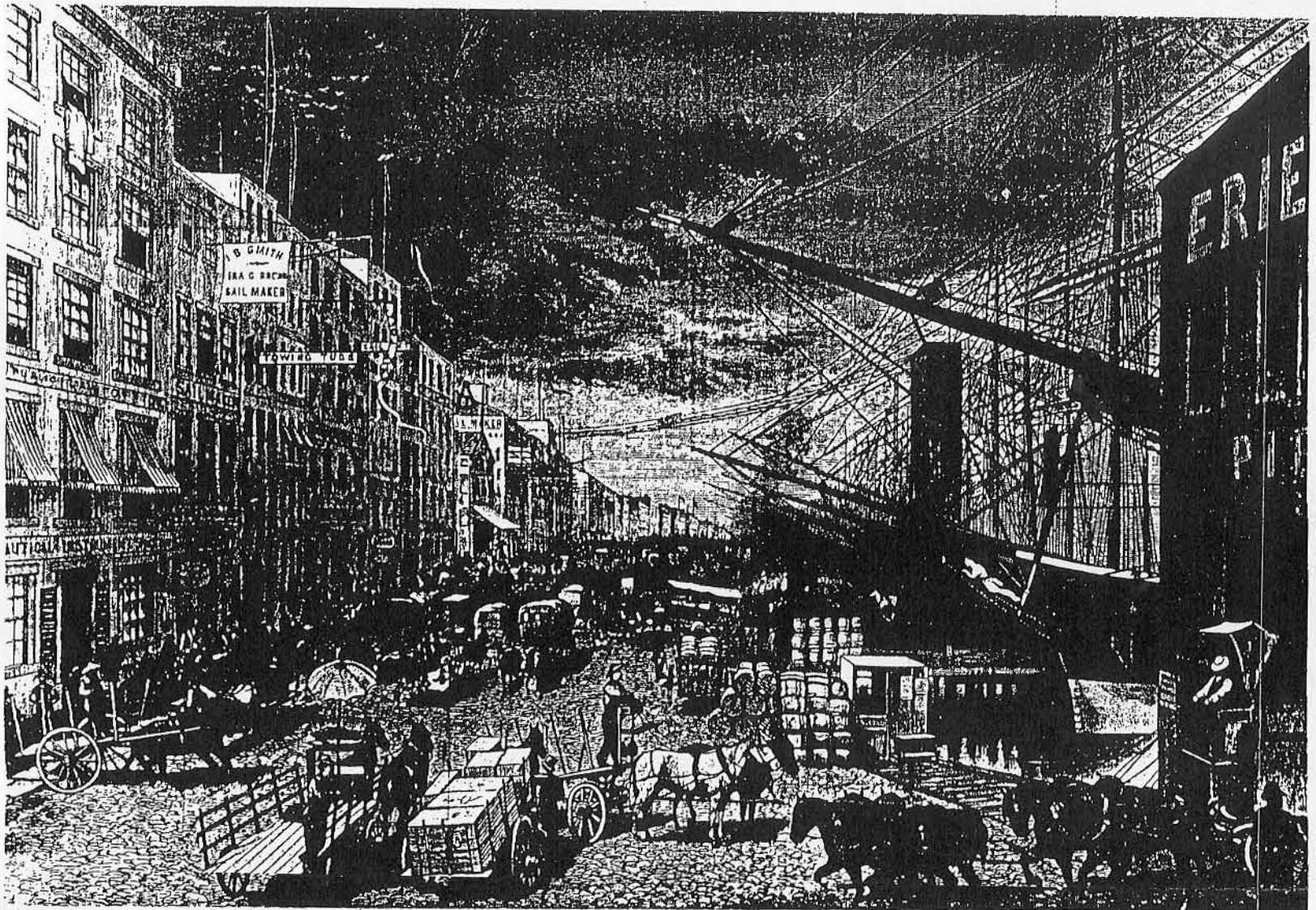
14 Books

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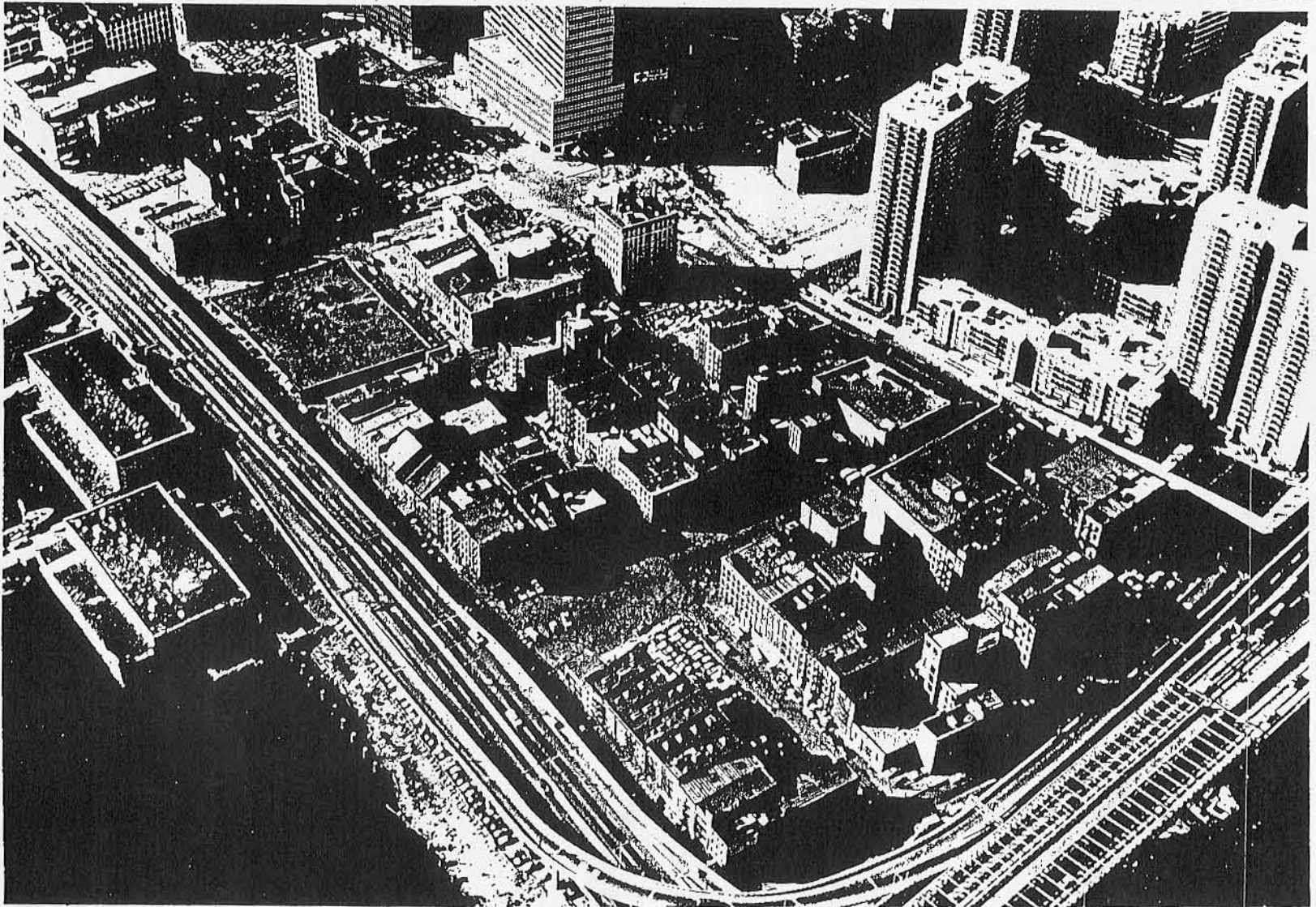
*Water has lured the heart of man all of his days — whether it was the silvery line of a river, the gilded sparkle of a lake, or the phosphorescing green glint in an ocean. Angry or calm, fresh or salt, helpful — in giving man his food — or cruel — in bringing him an enemy — the sea makes its presence always known to humans. — from The Lore of Ships*



# THE SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MUSEUM



Above, looking uptown on South Street toward Brooklyn Bridge under construction, c. 1877. Below, looking down from Brooklyn Bridge on South Street Seaport Historic District, mid-1970s.



James Beckman

*New York was a seaport before it was a town. Ten years before Nieuw Amsterdam was founded there was a harbor where ocean-going vessels sailed.*

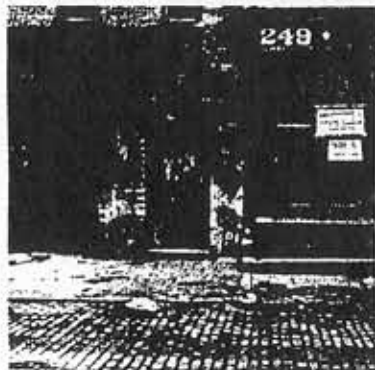
by Barry Lewis and Virginia Dajani

The South Street Seaport Museum was founded in 1967 as a dream of a generation that made dreams a way of life. Many of those visions of the sixties foundered in the stormy economic conditions of the decade that followed. That the Museum has actually survived is a miracle; how it survived is another story, a long, complicated, and controversial one. It's the kind of story in which few people are willing to be quoted, but many have an earful to tell.

The situation has been complex and the cast constantly changing. In the two years that this article was being researched, over 35 people were interviewed, most of whom insisted on anonymity before telling their stories. A number of leads were dead ends. *The Livable City* is attempting here to take an objective look at the history of the South Street Seaport Museum.

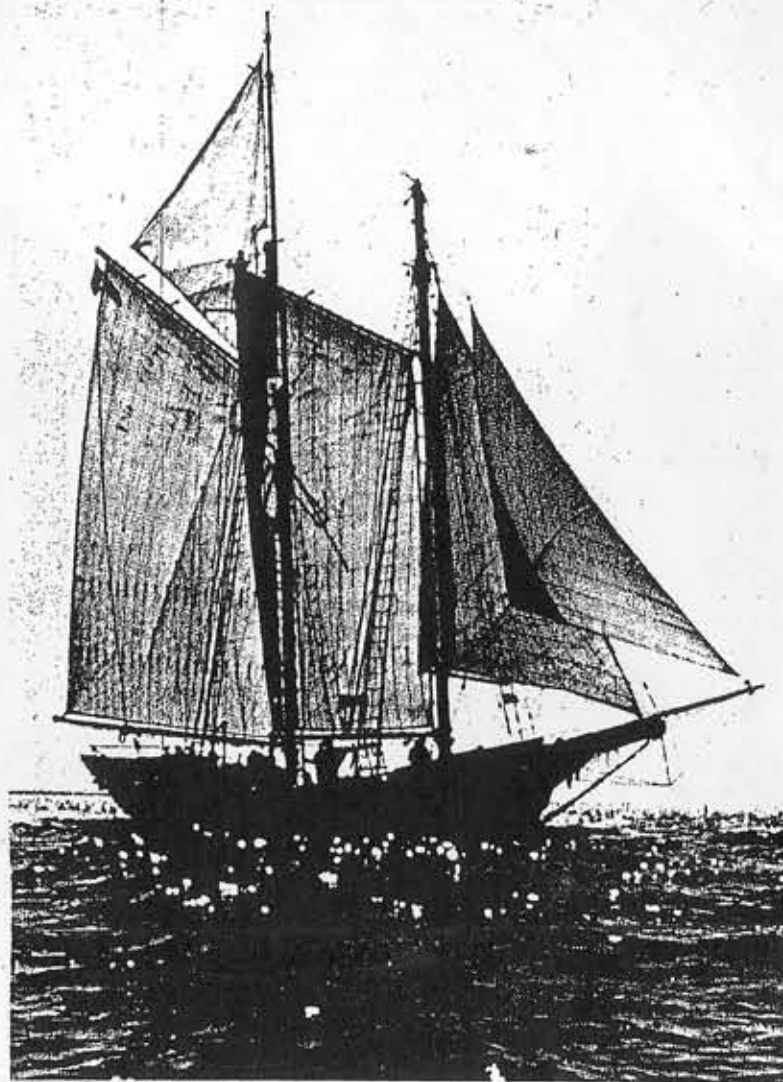
**The Museum's origins**

During the boom years of the 1960s this City was rebuilding itself on an unprecedented scale: entire 19th-century districts were being demolished for new construction. It was at this time that the City — and the developers — cast a covetous eye on the lowrise 19th-century quarter that lies along South and Water Streets in lower Manhattan, at the edge of the financial district. That entire East River waterfront, from the Battery to the Brooklyn Bridge, was designated the Brooklyn Bridge Southeast Urban Renewal District, and block after block of New York's history was systematically removed. Water Street, which had been a two-lane, Belgian-block-paved thoroughfare lined with five-story, vintage buildings, was turned into a six-lane expressway framed by characterless highrises of brick



and glass. In 1966, as the demolition forces moved up Water Street towards Fulton Street, a small group of concerned citizens, led by Peter Stanford, mounted a heroic effort to save the last remaining blocks of the waterfront from approximately Fulton Street northward to the Brooklyn Bridge — an area containing this island's last fragile link with its maritime origins. Those first informal efforts jelled by 1967 into a not-for-profit museum chartered by the New York State Board of Regents; it was born as the South Street Seaport Museum, with Peter Stanford as its first president.

This new museum owned nothing except pluck at its birth, but in May, 1968, the City of New York designated an 11-block area, from John Street to Dover Street, and from Pearl Street east to the river (for those less familiar with these small streets, this meant approximately Fulton Street to the Brooklyn Bridge) as a special urban renewal district within the larger, previously mentioned, Brooklyn Bridge Southeast area.



*The Pioneer under sail*

The Museum was named the *unassisted* sponsor for the new area. This meant — as in all urban renewal districts — that the City would use its power of eminent domain to acquire the properties (at fair market value) and turn them over to the area's sponsor, the Museum. However, since that sponsorship was *unassisted*, the Museum would have to raise the money to acquire whatever the City would "liberate" on its behalf. The City would not use public money for that purpose.

By naming the Museum as a sponsor, the City was announcing that, possibly for the first time since urban renewal was invented, it would be used as a device for preserving an area rather than accelerating its wholesale removal. To many people, it seemed that Museum was forging new ground in halting the City's long-standing policy of self-evisceration.

**Early strategy**

After a brief crisis in 1968 in which Schermerhorn Row was almost lost, the Museum set about to develop a plan for fulfilling its charter and to put together a financial package that would make that plan a reality. In fact, the Museum never adopted a rigidly formal plan, but instead opted for a series of informal goals. The outline of those goals reflected the aspirations of the army of ardent volunteers that Peter Stanford was able to attract. Those volunteers admired his vision and his sensibility; they appreciated his opening up the Museum to them (as few museums ever do), and the sense of community and individual participation that the Museum fostered. This informality was characteristic of the Museum's early days.

The Museum itself was a maverick. Its collection would not be made up of paintings or coins or things in cases with labels. Its treasure was to be a piece of the City: the buildings that stood within its boundaries, the ships moored at its piers. The Museum's "building" would be the neighborhood, and within that neighborhood Stanford envisioned a gathering of dedicated people who would live and work there — restorers, artists, craftsmen, traditionalists, lovers of old and musty things — whose individual efforts would contribute to the building of a stable, seaport-oriented community.

In articles and memos written in 1971 and 1972, Stanford sketched an outline for the future of the Museum. His original program envisioned a neighborhood geared toward the water, a revolutionary idea on this island that, since the decline of its maritime industry, has totally ignored its shores. The East River, serving as the community's focal point, would be lined with a collection of sailing and steam ships that would bring New Yorkers back into contact with the kind of ocean-going vessels that had first made this City a world-renowned port. On land, the Seaport's buildings — when the Museum could raise the funds to buy them — would be restored on an individual basis by various artisans, artists, and shopkeepers; the ground floor shops of these buildings would house arts and crafts carefully selected to reflect the maritime and historical nature of the district. The prices of the merchandise for sale in the shops would vary widely, so that all visitors to the Seaport would be able to afford something, and the manufacture of the goods, when done on the

premises, would be open to the public. Stanford did not want another Williamsburg. He wanted a living community, although this Museum-cum-community would have to pay its own way.

It was obvious that certain new infill structures would have to be built, and it was understood that the new buildings would *fit in*, respecting the scale of the existing neighborhood; they would not overwhelm it.

To finance this ambitious program, Stanford turned to the concept of air rights transfer. He reasoned that, if the Museum was not going to build to the maximum what the zoning regulations allow, it should be able to bank the unused air rights and sell them to developers of nearby properties. Those properties could then have larger buildings than would otherwise be permissible. Transferring of air rights was not a new idea in 1971, but it was the first time in New York that an entire district was to be considered a single property. It was a thorny issue, and Richard Buford, then in the City's Office of Lower Manhattan Development, helped the Museum work out the details and shepherd the concept into legislation.

The trail-blazing by the Museum in the use of urban renewal and zoning, its open-door policy, and the vision of Stanford and his community presented to the City an image of the Seaport as an inspiring alternative to the over-glossed, over-built, over-new society of the sixties. The Museum sparkled with the high hopes of those who founded it and who expected it to fulfill its promise. But for all its dreams, the Museum, after several years of operation, still did not own any of the buildings within its territory.

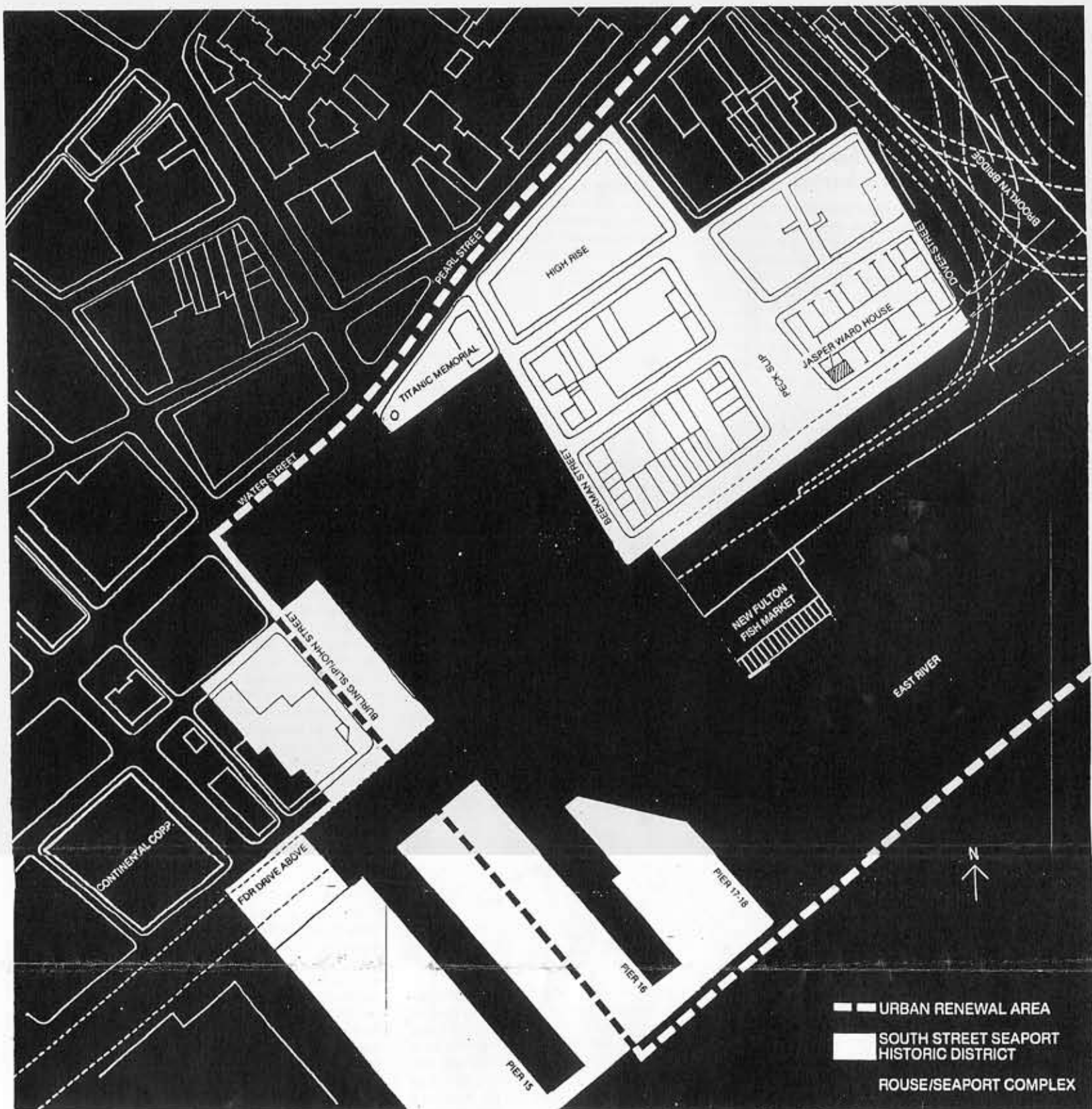
To solve this serious problem, the Museum administration, during the early seventies, sought to gain ownership of several blocks by having investors on its Board hold the buildings in escrow until the Seaport, through the sale of air rights, could afford to buy them. Once they belonged to the Museum, the buildings could be restored, one at a time.

**The real estate market goes sour**

Who could have foreseen the recession of 1973? Nobody was building anything in New York. The financial underpinnings of the Seaport's development plan collapsed: the air rights bank was worthless; the properties held in escrow were in danger of default; the Museum faced the very real possibility of losing everything and going out of business.

At this point, the City, which was never expected to support the Seaport financially, was persuaded to step in and save the properties. In 1973, in a complicated package involving the City, the Seaport, and the banks holding the mortgages, the City acquired four blocks on Fulton Street between Water and South Streets and the East River piers 15 through 18, and leased most of the holdings to the Museum.

The three blocks leased to the Seaport were the following: 1. what became known as the Museum block where the Museum had its headquarters (it was bounded by Fulton, Beekman, Water, and Front Streets); 2. the Fulton Market block; and 3. Schermerhorn Row. The fourth block which the City had acquired, an empty lot at the Water Street entrance to the Seaport's territory, was leased to the telephone company to build a switching tower atop a retail complex. This mixed-use development project was supposed to use some of the Seaport's banked air



rights, and the proceeds from this sale would help to pay back the City. Although the telephone company never built its tower, the block became thereafter known as the Telco block, and its role in the Museum's finances has remained to this day.

Soon after the 1973 transaction, the Seaport, with the City's blessing, bought Schermerhorn Row, and then immediately sold it to the State of New York to house the publicly financed New York State Maritime Museum. The Seaport was thus once again brought back from the brink. By the mid-seventies, the Seaport was operating the Museum block, the Fulton Market block, Piers 15 through 18; and it had in Schermerhorn Row a friendly neighbor run by the State. While this was only the southern portion of the 1968 urban renewal area, it was nevertheless a near miracle that even this much had been accomplished.

In 1977, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the entire original urban renewal district (John Street to the Brooklyn Bridge) as the South Street Seaport Historic District. The effect of this was to reinforce the public's commitment to the preservation of this neighborhood.

#### More troubles

The recession of 1973 had hit just as the Museum was trying to get on its feet. The Museum had hardly a cent to maintain any of its properties, let alone

restore them. The situation was bleak.

The Museum entered a period of extreme financial hardship, and under that kind of pressure, the original vision began to crumble. The air rights bank appeared worthless; development plans went begging; there was dissension on the Board; and the disillusioned and disheartened staff and volunteers began to leave. It was not a happy time. In this unfortunate climate, attitudes hardened and policies were adopted that are still affecting the Museum's current negotiations.

Under terrible pressure to produce income, both the Museum's Board of Trustees and its staff could not agree among themselves how the Seaport was going to make it financially. It is not easy for an outsider to understand exactly what happened to the Seaport during this period because the stories of those who were there contradict each other.

There were those in the Museum — Stanford was their staunchest ally — who understood that the South Street Seaport Museum's first obligation was to restore the buildings and ships entrusted to them, and to present them as a living exhibit to New Yorkers as evidence of their roots, and they further understood that any development that would take place in that territory would have to fit into that framework. However, the majority of the Board's members were not preservation-oriented people. They were successful business-

men whose interest in yachting and the maritime trades had brought them into the Museum's sphere. They were willing to try to save the buildings, but they felt the only way to do it was to consider the properties a business investment. Perhaps one could say that their instincts for development were more finely tuned than their instincts for preservation, and they began to look at the buildings in their territory as a business asset rather than as a treasure entrusted to them for protection. They decided that the incremental, building-by-building approach to development favored by Peter Stanford was too complicated and would take forever to implement. What they wanted was fewer developers — or possibly only one — who through the economics and efficiencies of scale could get the job done quickly, and could start money flowing into the Seaport's coffers.

One hears that many of these Board members were chagrined at how the Museum was being run. Although they admired Stanford's vision and his ability to conjure up an army of volunteers, they felt that, like many men of vision, he was more skilled as a philosopher than as a business manager. There was friction.

Joan Davidson (now president of the J.M. Kaplan Fund which awarded the Museum its earliest grant monies), who was at that time a member of the Seaport's Board of Directors, commented to us on the situation of those days:

"Peter Stanford's love of the sea, imagination, eloquence, energy, and leadership quality created this institution out of nothing but shadows. The tragic flaw was that sometimes his judgment about people failed him. The Board Peter assembled was heavy with yachtsmen and suburbanites. Although in many ways responsible and helpful to the Seaport and often charming, they tended, with distinguished exceptions, to lack poetry and a sense of history and an understanding of the many-layered gritty character of New York — and in the end they rose up and devoured him."

The managerial staff the Board brought in (in 1974) was supposed to put the running of the Museum on a more businesslike basis. But the new administration lost sight of the one quality that had gained the Seaport its loyal following: an ardent sense of mission. That mission the technocrats couldn't grasp, and in trying to run the Seaport much as one would a corporation, the new administrators gradually estranged the very public whose loyal support had pulled the Museum through its roughest hours. As one former high-ranking staff person now says: "Nothing went as smoothly as the dream. There was no meeting of minds between the dreamers and the managers."

What further clouded the issue was the fact that the new managers simply could not manage. *continued on page 6*

# Schermerhorn Row

Around 1810, the prosperous merchant Peter Schermerhorn built a block of commercial buildings in the Federalist style on new landfill near the East River. In the early days of the Seaport Museum, Schermerhorn Row was nearly demolished to make room for a commercial skyscraper, but the developer, through a property switch, was persuaded to give up his option, and in December 1968, Schermerhorn Row was designated a New York City landmark. In the next few years, over a dozen artists moved into the Row joining sculptor Mark di Suvero and several pre-1968 tenants. Without the restoration work the artists did on these buildings, the Row might not have survived intact. The new tenants were sympathetic with the Seaport's dreams and expected to help the Museum fulfill its plans.

In 1973, the Row was part of that City package which saved the Museum; later that year, the City sold not only the Row but the entire block to the Seaport which, with the City's approval, resold the block to the State of New York for \$300,000 profit with the understanding that the money was to be used as a relocation fund for the Schermerhorn Row residents. The Museum spent the money on general operating expenses, for which it was formally criticized in the 1977 NYC Comptroller's Report on the Seaport's financial management.

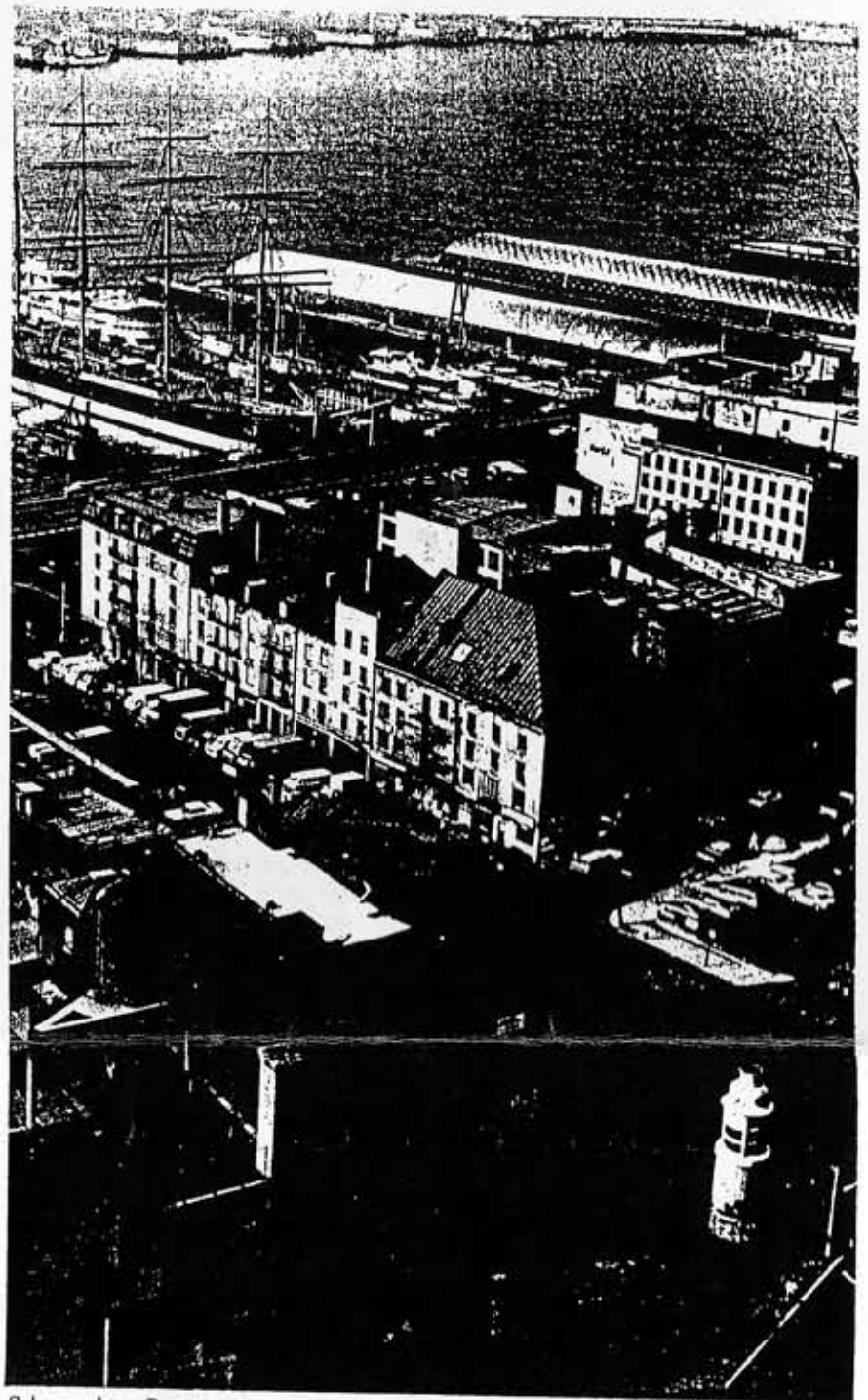
The State of New York had bought the Row to establish a home for the seven-year-old financially strapped New York State Maritime Museum. The Seaport Museum administration felt that a state-run Maritime Museum could complement the activities of the privately financed Seaport Museum, and that the two museums, located on either side of Fulton Street, could benefit each other.

During the next seven years (1973 to 1980), the Maritime Museum set up shop in one end of the Row. The first task was to get the Schermerhorn Row tenants out of the Front Street end. The tenants didn't want to go. The money intended as a lure to get them out had been spent. Bad blood ensued between the Maritime and the tenants. That adversary relationship was inherited by the Seaport Museum when, after the departure of Peter Stanford who had supported the artists, the Seaport administration supported the Maritime's eviction policy. Now the Seaport, as did the Maritime, looked upon the tenants as squatters, and claimed that they had moved in after the Seaport Museum was founded knowing that eventually they would have to relocate.

The tenants looked upon the Seaport and Maritime administrators as the illegitimate representatives of the original Seaport vision. Attitudes hardened and both sides dug in their heels.

The Maritime could not budge the tenants, and the issue of their relocation became a minor *cause célèbre*. Somewhere along the line, the State decided it would not be politically expedient to throw the Schermerhorn Row artists out, although, with the tenants intact, the Maritime did not have enough room to operate. To give it all a nice Byzantine touch, the Seaport decided it wanted the Row back.

As the prospect of doing business with the Rouse Company grew stronger, the Seaport realized it should never have sold off the Row. The Seaport wanted it back in order to be able to offer Rouse as much square footage as possible. Also, by this time, in a reversal of an earlier opinion, the Seaport had come to realize that two strikingly similar museums across the street from one another, competing for funds from the same sources, would only hurt one another

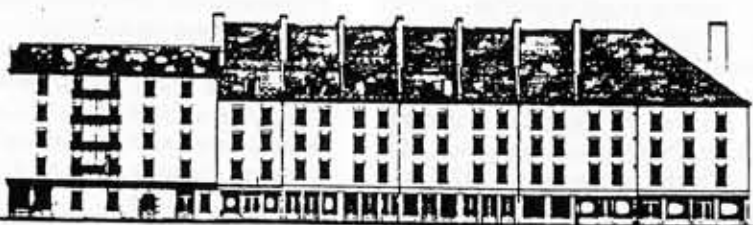


Schermerhorn Row at center; lighthouse at lower right is Titanic Memorial

financially. In a showdown in Albany in 1979, the Maritime Museum lost. In a complicated real estate negotiation, it was decided that the Maritime Museum would fold; Schermerhorn Row would be transferred to the Urban Development Corporation in 1981; and UDC would sublease the Row to the Seaport Museum which could then sublease the lower floors to the Rouse Company.

The last major project of the Maritime Museum was a most valuable one — the documentation in drawings of the entire Row for the purpose of restoring the facades. A team of restorationists, headed by architect Jan Pokorny, did the documentation, which, in the opinion of the preservation community, is excellent. The restoration work will begin in the summer of 1981.

The Seaport is still haggling with the tenants, who, it seems, are there to stay. The interior restoration, which will be done by the Seaport Museum's architects, Beyer Blinder Belle, was to include the rehabilitation of residential loft space, but the Seaport administration has not yet presented a written proposal with the financial details. The tenants want to know how much this will cost before they sign anything. As of this writing, they are still negotiating.



FULTON STREET



FRONT STREET



JOHN STREET

In 1974, Robert Bonum was brought in as Managing Director; Peter Stanford continued as President. Bonum was to be the administrator and Stanford the philosopher. It didn't work out. Eight months later Bonum was replaced by Richard H. Buford, who had helped the Seaport with the original zoning legislation. That apparently didn't work out either since 14 months later Peter Stanford left. (Peter Stanford now heads the National Maritime Historical Society in Brooklyn's Fulton Ferry District.) Buford then took over both roles — administrator and philosopher — replacing Stanford as president, and that also didn't work out.

Fifteen months later (we are now up to July 1977), John Hightower replaced Buford as president. Thus in a four-year period, 1974 through 1977, the Museum had four chiefs, and the rest of the staff came and went like customers at an Automat. John Hightower is still president today. Those constant changes in leadership wrecked any sense of continuity in programming, and turned the Museum's financial planning into shambles.

#### The City takes a closer look

In 1977, the New York City Comptroller's office issued a report that was highly critical of the Museum's financial management. The report noted that the Museum had over the previous two years not paid the modest rents it owed the City under the 1973 agreement. It had negotiated restaurant concession leases that were in some circles called sweetheart contracts, rendering little money to the Museum and even less to the City. It had taken \$300,000 which had been put into a special fund for the purpose of relocating the Schermerhorn Row residents and had used up the money for its own administrative operating expenses. The report chastized the Museum for sloppy bookkeeping in recording sales from its shops, a portion of whose income was subject to City rents. This report contributed to the general disillusion with the Museum's already slipping reputation.

#### The neighbors complain

At this point, the troubled Museum also began to alienate the neighborhood. As the direction of the various administrators leaned more heavily toward the idea of a single large-scale developer, they grew less cordial to their neighbors. Their own commercial tenants felt threatened. Now the Museum supported the idea of ousting the Schermerhorn Row residents, and cast its eyes on the private properties north of Beekman Street (which the Seaport technically had some claim to, as the area's official urban renewal sponsor). The Museum grew less enthusiastic about the desires of the Fulton Fish Market merchants at Fulton and South Streets (who give the Seaport much of

South Street fish merchant



its character and flavor) to stay where they were (and which is where the fish market had been for over 150 years). The Museum wanted the fish merchants to move up to Hunts Point in the Bronx, where the City's wholesale vegetable market had already relocated. Obviously, the Museum wanted as much uncommitted space as possible to offer to a potential developer, and it began to regard its neighbors, many of whom antedated the Seaport by generations, as illegitimate intruders into the Seaport's private landscape. Said one retailer whose concern had been on Fulton Street for decades: "This Museum is... a tax-exempt outfit but they run this place like it's the City itself."

Another local resident, Christopher White, a property owner in north-of-Beekman (he is also chairman of the Civic Center Committee of Manhattan Community Planning Board #1), said he felt that the Seaport saw itself as the "kingpin" and everyone in the neighborhood had to accommodate it. "Aside from the fact that it's unjust, it's arrogant. The Museum is not a museum anymore; it's a real estate entity."

One property owner, who insisted on not being identified, said he was told several years ago by someone "highly placed" in the Museum administration that if he did not stop criticizing the Museum in public, the Museum would use its urban renewal powers to take his property away from him.

Ironically, and sadly, it was the Seaport's now-threatened neighbors — workers and residents alike — who had most wholeheartedly supported the Museum at its inception. They now unanimously have turned against it.

#### And the Museum's treasures?

Professional preservationists began to be unhappy about events down at South Street. The Museum's seeming inability to raise sufficient funds, and its fitful planning practices which dissipated the small funds it did have, did not bode well



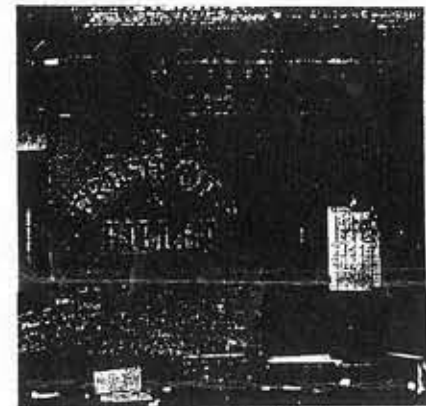
The Peking

for the ships and buildings entrusted to its care. One board member has said: "After ten years of existence, there was nothing to show except the Bowne Shop on land and the Peking on the sea." Both the Peking and the Bowne Shop were helped financially — and spiritually — by individual Museum board members who acted as project godfathers. The Peking was given to the Seaport by board member Jack Aron, who paid for its restoration. The much-acclaimed Bowne Shop, a restored, 19th-century print shop, was created and is still maintained by board member Ted Stanley, who is the head of the very-much-alive Bowne & Company publishing house on Hudson Street. Stanley has been mentioned by several Museum-watchers as one of the few board members left who understand the Seaport's original vision. But what about the rest of the Seaport's wards?

In 1977, the Museum received a Public Works Grant of \$4 million from the Federal Department of Commerce (EDA) for the restoration of Pier 16 and for the restoration of the entire Museum block. This grant should have paid for an impressive restoration beginning, and could have provided the Museum an opportunity to show the public what it could do if given enough money. Both projects eventually became the subject of much criticism, and both projects would be considered dead history if they were not responsible for the further souring of the Museum's relationship with the preservation community.

In both cases, the issues are complex, and by no means does the Museum appear to be the only party at fault. On both jobs, because of legal restraints, the City had to act as the contractor.

The Pier 16 restoration has had to be redone: the new wooden decking has already had to be replaced, a very expensive job. Then the Front Street restora-



Fulton Street fish merchant

tions, that is, the first three buildings to be done in the Museum block, ran into difficulty partly because the Museum failed to document the buildings properly, and partly because the supervisors and CETA workers first hired by the City were incompetent, a problem over which the Seaport had little control. One professional preservationist said of the beginning of the project: "The restoration process has not been a thoughtful one, one that deserves to be called restoration."

About this time, 1978-79, the Museum began to negotiate seriously with the Rouse Company with the intention of having them repeat down on South Street the kind of restoration/shopping center project that they had just completed, to wide acclaim, at the Quincy Market in Boston. Concerned members of the community, looking askance at the Seaport's lackluster track record, its financial mismanagement, its worsening relations with its neighbors, and its spotty preservation achievements, wondered aloud at the Museum's ability to negotiate this package to the advantage of the South Street Seaport's buildings and ships.

#### Things are looking up

Since mid-1979, there has been happier news coming out of South Street, at least concerning the restoration end of the Museum's Development Plan. The Museum's architects, Beyer Blinder Belle, have engaged the services of two preservation experts to work on the Seaport's building restorations: Dr. James Marston Fitch, founder and former head of the Columbia University Historic Preservation Program; and John Stubbs, a graduate of that program. Both men are respected by preservation professionals. Dr. Fitch is the overall coordinator for the restoration work, and Mr. Stubbs deals with the



South Street

day-to-day supervising. Both men have sought to correct, where possible, the original mistakes in the restoration program, and both are now working on the completion of the Museum block.

Across Fulton Street in Schermerhorn Row, another well-respected restoration architect, Jan Pokorny, working under the direction of the New York State Maritime Museum, has documented the entire Row, and is now completing plans for the exterior's restoration. The Maritime Museum will soon be handing over the Row to the Seaport, and the Seaport, it is assumed, will use their own architects, Beyer Blinder Belle, for the restoration of the Row's interiors.

Recently established in the territory of the Museum is the Center for Building Conservation, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to research on the techniques used in the physical conservation of historic buildings. The Center will be restoring and occupying the Jasper Ward House on Peck Slip (next to the Richard Haas trompe l'oeil mural of the Brooklyn Bridge), where it will have its headquarters and a small museum on the history of American building technology. The Center for Building Conservation is a totally separate entity from the Seaport Museum, but the presence of this tiny organization of dedicated young preservationists in close proximity to the Seaport can give comfort to anyone nervous about the future of the Seaport's buildings.\*

Some of the Museum's programs have been admirable: the Bowne Shop, the excellent Viking ship program presented in Autumn 1980, the Seaport's traditional summer programs for children, the exhibit on the Hudson river ships (one of the Museum's best), and the revival, at long last, of the ship restoration program.

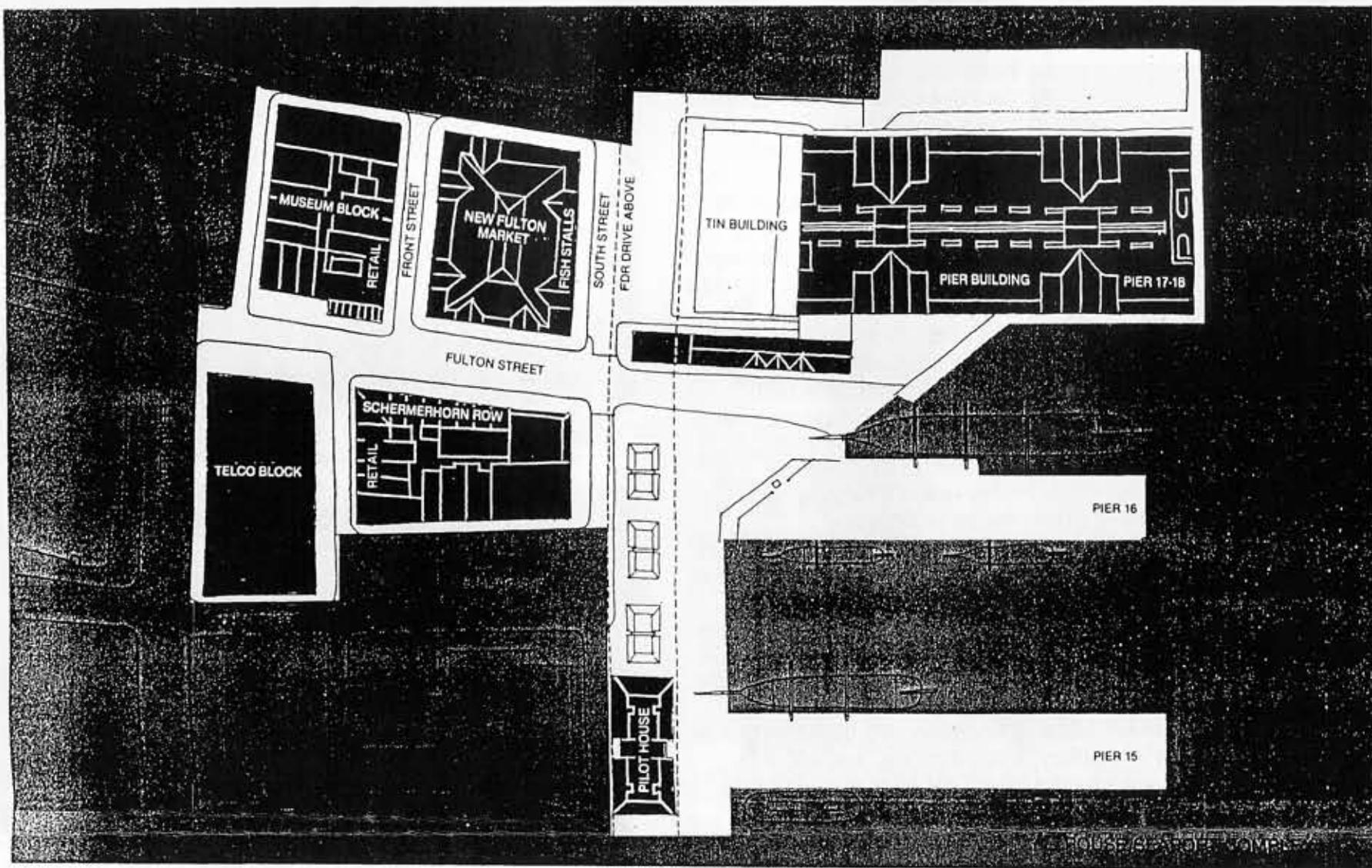
For many concerned individuals — even the most vociferous critics — disillusion with the Museum is saddening even if it is understandable. Even critics point out that it would be tragic to put the Museum against the wall now that it's finally moving after all these years of fumbling. It doesn't take much vision to see that the Museum is all that stands between the ships and buildings of its district and the real estate development that could eventually overwhelm the area whether one big developer comes in or not.

Without the Museum there would be no formal organization to defend the properties, and there would be little incentive to keep the buildings from being dipped in plastic and presented to the public as a stage set of New York's "quaint maritime past." And there would be no institution dedicated to recounting the area's pivotal role in the history of the City.

There are some very good people,

\*On June 5, 1981, the Seaport served the Center with an immediate eviction notice — see page 8.

*The Museum's Development Plan includes linking up with the Rouse Company to create a shopping center that will mix the totally new with the recycled old within the Museum's precinct: income from the retail complex, through a complicated lease arrangement, would guarantee the Museum a steady — though not complete — source of funding. This marriage has been the subject of controversy and criticism as well as praise. And the Museum's answers to questions reflecting concern have not always clarified the issues:*



both staff and professionals, down on South Street, and perhaps this time around the Seaport administration will back them up. The work and skills of this team should not be submerged by the even sharper debate now brewing around town over the Rouse end of the Development Plan.

#### Enter Rouse

In October 1979, when the Museum, the Rouse Company, the City of New York, and the State Urban Development Corporation signed an agreement of intent, the Museum's long quest for a developer came to an end. That agreement was published by the Museum as the Seaport Development Plan 1980.

Under the plan, the Rouse Company would develop the Seaport's properties with a retail complex whose revenues would not only deliver profits for the developer but would also channel income to the Museum and the City. The Board of Estimate approved the plan in September 1980. Because the Museum exists within an Historic District, approval is also required of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. This approval is still pending. As of this writing, the Landmarks Preservation Commission is waiting for "an architectural proposal with fuller detail than previously submitted."

The Rouse Company, which once built a whole town from scratch — the much-acclaimed Columbia New Town in Maryland — developed a number of suburban shopping centers during the fifties and sixties. In the mid-seventies, reflecting which way the national tide was turning, Rouse began to focus on the neglected urban core — downtown — for their shopping center sites. Their first downtown project was the resurrection of Boston's 1820-era Quincy Market for which Rouse won kudos from all corners for a good restoration

job and an imaginative mixture of shops and restaurants. So widely discussed has this project been that one already hears in urban design circles the verb, "to quincy-market"; and, at Harvard University, the phrase, "the Rousing of America."

Rouse's next two downtown projects were Philadelphia's Galleria on Market Street and Harborplace in Baltimore; these consisted primarily of new buildings fitted into an older downtown core. Boston's Quincy Market was a restoration and recycling job with a limited amount of new construction, as will be the case with South Street.

The Rouse Company is praised from most corners — by preservationists and developers alike — for being the best there is at what they do. But we must ask: is what Rouse does appropriate for what a Museum needs? With all this valuable real estate on hand, it could be easy to lose sight of the original goal: the conservation of the South Street Seaport.

It is the Seaport's position that, without a steady source of income from a large developer like Rouse, it would take years for the Seaport to become solvent.

Most people have accepted the Rouse solution as inevitable and desirable, and feel that, with coming of Rouse, the Museum may finally have the income to carry out the many wonderful programs for which it was created. Others are not so sure.

The partnering of a cultural institution with an entrepreneur is a groundbreaking and complex issue, and on this point the Seaport might be praised for being a pioneer. Due to inflation and other evils, we may be seeing more of this public/private partnership in the future. But how does a museum join forces with a developer and still maintain its own independent vision? What

is clearly required here is a strong Museum administration with a dedicated sense of purpose to lock friendly horns with Rouse to work out the details of this complex arrangement to the best possible advantage of the Museum. After years of growing estrangement from and increased distrust towards the Seaport, many concerned citizens question whether the Museum is capable of this, their reasons being that the present administrators, like those who have run the Seaport since 1975, are more at ease with development than they are with preservation. While the Seaport may have a blue ribbon restoration committee to give advice on preservation matters, the committee's voice is in no way binding. And, although the restoration portion of the plan now has preservationists working on it who are part of the decision-making process, this is not the case with the development portion. The proposed construction will affect the nature and character of the older buildings and ships more than actual restorations.

The Museum does not help matters by evading questions at its public hearings. At a recent meeting called by the American Institute of Architects (New York Chapter) for the purpose of having the Rouse proposal outlined to an audience of architects, the representatives of the Seaport showed up one hour late and then spent the next hour using many words to say very little. The question-and-answer period was opened during the last five minutes of the meeting by which time at least one-third of the audience had left. In a subsequent telephone interview with the Museum's vice-president in charge of new development, Christopher Lowery, reservations concerning the Museum's Development Plan were dismissed by him as "gratuitous."

Perhaps the Museum administration

has lost sight of the fact that it is not a private corporation making decisions behind closed doors. It is a public trust, and its Development Plan involves the survival of the artifacts in its trust, i.e., the buildings and ships that are literally owned by the public. The Development Plan also involves issues that the public has every legal right to comment on, such as access to the waterfront and the disposition of open space. The Development Plan is complicated enough as it is; discouraging legitimate public inquiries and concern only further clouds the Museum's reputation.

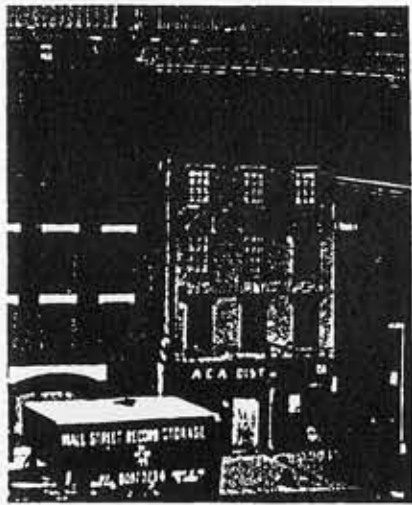
#### The Development Plan in outline

The Seaport Development Plan 1980 is roughly a five-year plan for the restoration and development of the Museum district (the four blocks fronting Fulton Street purchased by the City in 1973, plus the four piers, 15 through 18, facing those blocks on the East River). This means the complete restoration (already underway) of the Museum block and the construction of six new in-fill buildings (three major structures and three minor ones.) If all is built as projected, Rouse would acquire approximately 240,000 sq. ft. of retail space, and the Museum would acquire gallery space, offices, a new orientation center, and an auditorium. The plan also calls for the building of residential units in Schermerhorn Row for the loft dwellers who have been living in the Row for the last 12 years, and for a blueprint for the restoration and rebuilding of the Fulton Fish Market.

Community Planning Board #1 hired the architect/planner Barry Benepe (the man who brought Greenmarkets to New York City) to review the Development Plan. The Benepe Report, published in 1980, contained several reservations and recommendations. Benepe,

continued on page 11

## The Jasper Ward House



Some time ago, Con Edison demolished almost the entire north side of Peck Slip between Front and South Streets to make way for a substation. Perhaps to atone for having torn down a row of fine 19th-century buildings, Con Ed purchased the adjacent dilapidated structure at the end of the block built in 1807 by the merchant Jasper Ward, and gave it (and \$50,000) to the Seaport Museum with the understanding that

the house would be restored and used, in conjunction with Columbia University's Preservation Program, as a laboratory for building preservation techniques.

In 1978, in keeping with the terms of Con Edison's gift of the Ward House, a board of directors made up of prominent New Yorkers, most of them preservationists, was formed, and the not-for-profit Center for Building Conservation was founded to do research on the techniques of conservation of historic structures. Its home base would be the Ward House. CBC would restore the house and use its four floors for a museum of American building technology, a conservation research library, a laboratory, lecture rooms, and offices. Among CBC's plans was the intent *not* to restore the exterior of the South Street wall of the building, so that CBC could use that wall as a test site for different preservation methods; these experiments frequently use chemicals and the results must be observed over 10- and 20-year periods.

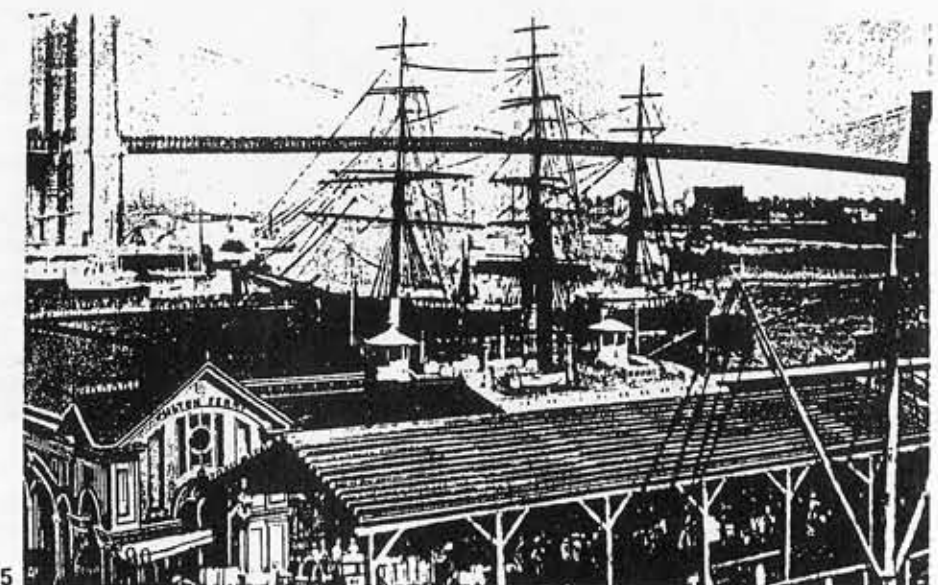
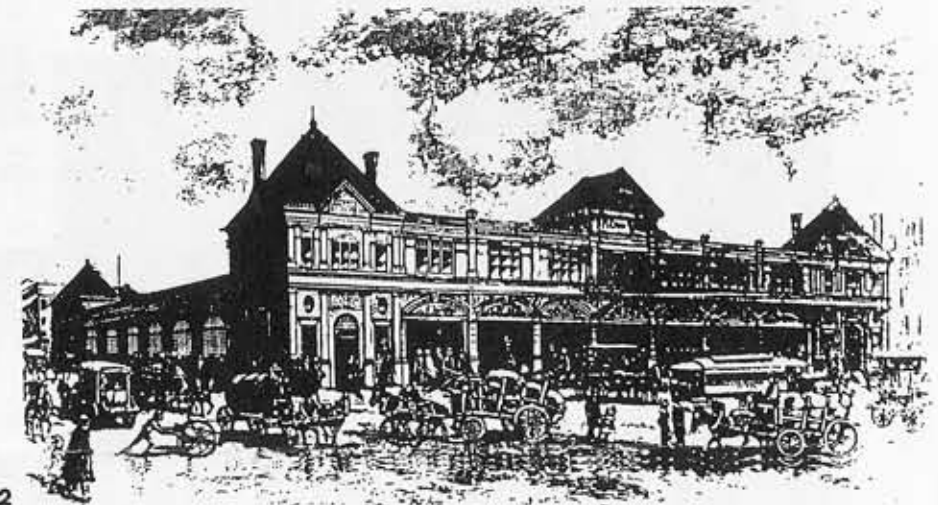
To accomplish its goals, CBC required, and was given to expect by the Seaport administration, a 25-year lease, with two 25-year extensions. CBC began restoration work on the building in July 1979, and at the same time, signed a short-term lease with the Seaport, with the expectation "reflected in specific language in that short-term lease that a long-term lease was in the offing." While the Museum dragged its feet for almost two years over lease negotiations, CBC spent almost \$80,000 in cash and another \$60,000 in donated services to finish approximately 30% of the restoration work. Finally, in April 1981, the Seaport offered CBC a five-year lease with a five-year extension, and stipulated that the extension was to be granted to CBC only if at the end of the five years the Seaport approved of the organization's programs and activities. In short, CBC was to pass a test to be devised by the Seaport's counsel. CBC was never informed of the test requirements. Looking at the manner in which the Seaport has taken care of its own preservation and conservation affairs over the years, one may question whether the Seaport is qualified to make such judgments. One may further question what its motives are.

The Center for Building Conservation found itself in a precarious position: assuming the Rouse shopping center complex is going to be a whopping financial success, the real estate in north-of-Beekman will become vulnerable to the shopping center expansion plans. The painstakingly renovated Jasper Ward House is sitting in the middle of this territory.

CBC was faced with the choice of accepting the five-year lease with the very real danger of being evicted just as the restoration work was being completed, or of simply abandoning its considerable investment. CBC feels that they have more substantial rights to the Ward House than the Seaport was offering. In May 1981, CBC's board of directors voted to sue the Seaport for having led them down the primrose path — encouraging them to spend so much money to restore the Ward House on the promise of a long lease. On June 5, John Hightower, director of the Seaport, responded to the suit by serving CBC with an immediate eviction notice. He then resigned from CBC's board of directors.

8 Does the Seaport want the Ward House back in order to lease it to the Rouse Company? What is really going on down at South Street?

*The South Street Seaport Museum is not four walls with paintings of ships on the high seas. It is an entire 19th-century maritime neighborhood full of the ghosts of sailors and sea merchants. Its treasures are the buildings in that neighborhood and the sailing ships moored at its piers. It is the largest museum in the world.*





1. The market at Fulton Street, 1828

2. The New Fulton Market, c. 1880

3. South Street, 1900

4. Oyster stalls and lunch rooms, Fulton Street, 1867

5. Fulton Ferry, 1885

6. Fulton Fish Market, 1870; photo, John S. Moulton

7. Schermerhorn Row seen from Front Street, c. 1940

8. South Street, 1930s

9. Guard's Hut, South Street Pier

10. A Waterfront Slop Chest on South Street

11. Shipsmith, John Street

12. The James Slip Mission, South Street

13. A South Street Sailors' Diner

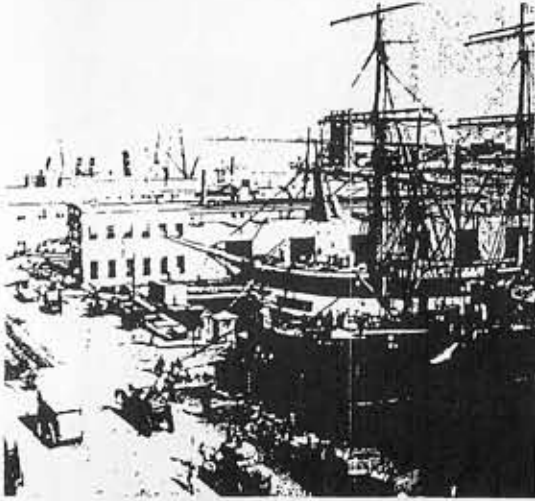
14. Vagrants' Refuge near Seamen's Institute:

9 - 14, paintings by Witold Gordon, c. 1940

15. Neighborhood food merchant, c. 1952; photo, Charlotte Winter

16. Fish merchants, South Street, c. 1960; photo, Charlotte Winter

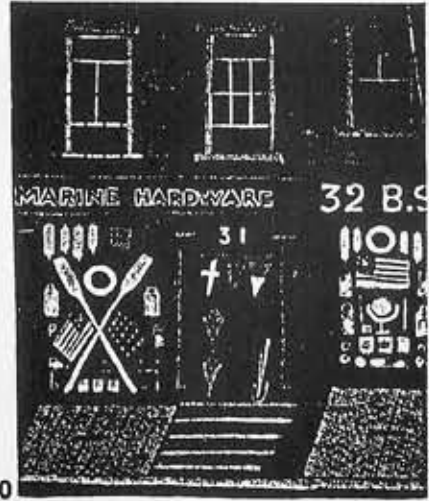
17. Richard Haas' trompe l'oeil mural on Peck Slip



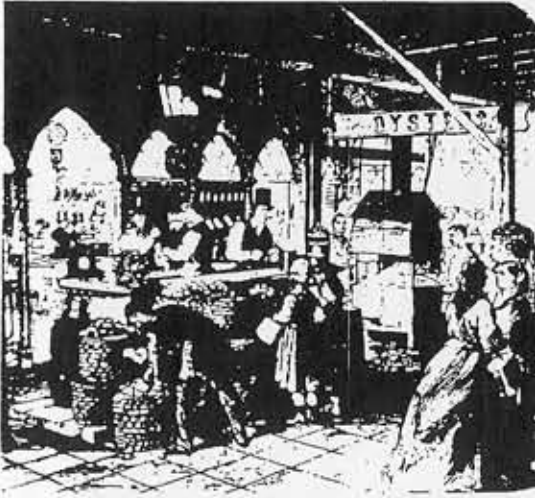
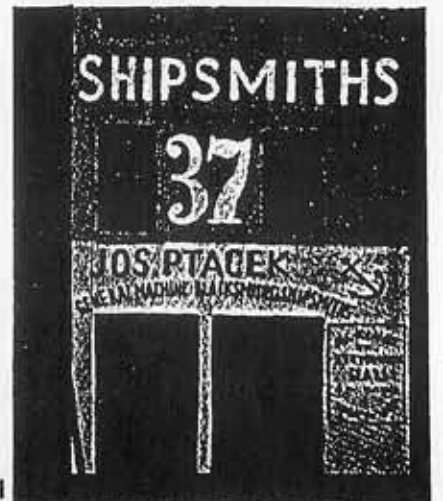
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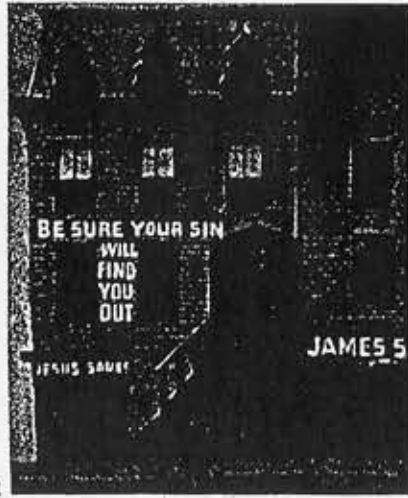
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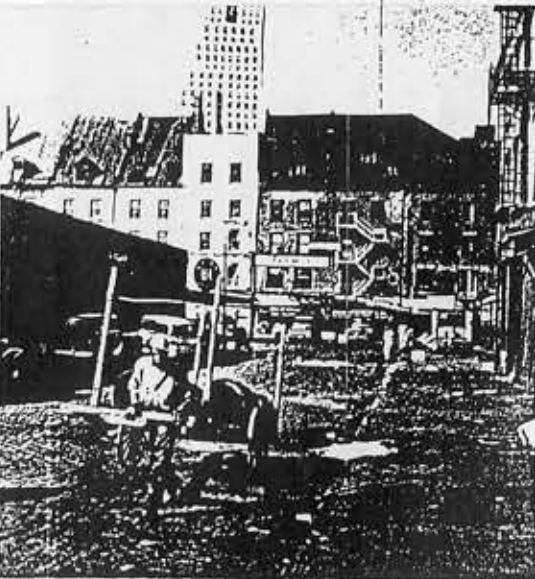
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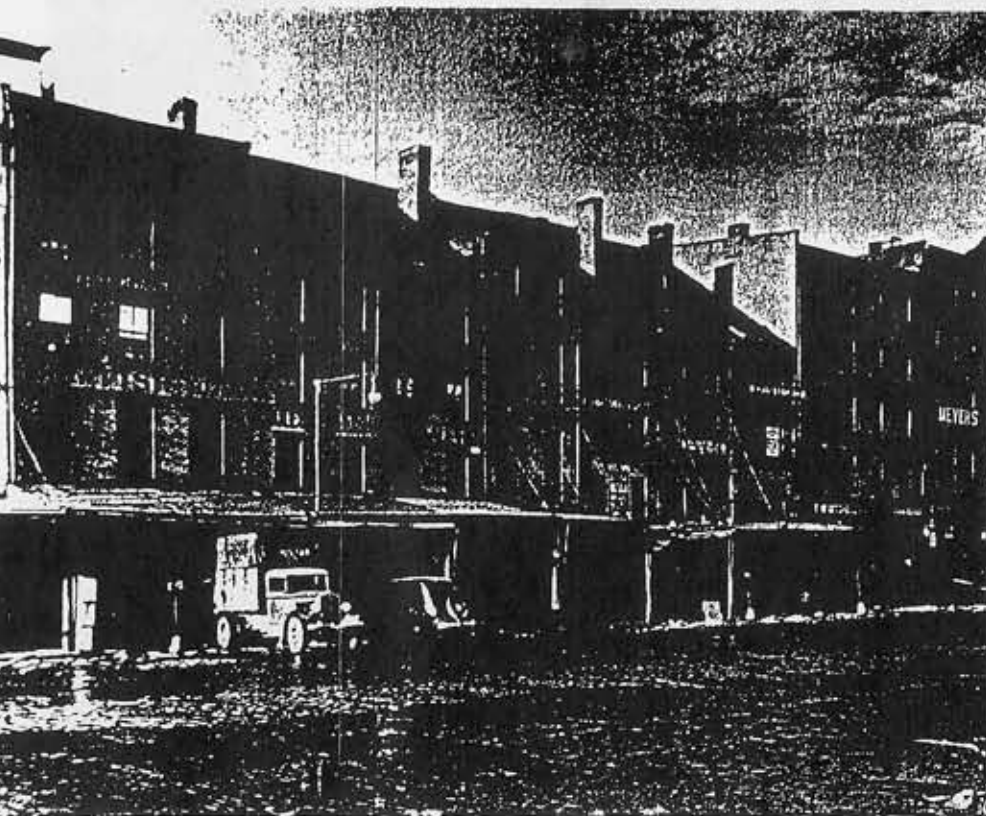
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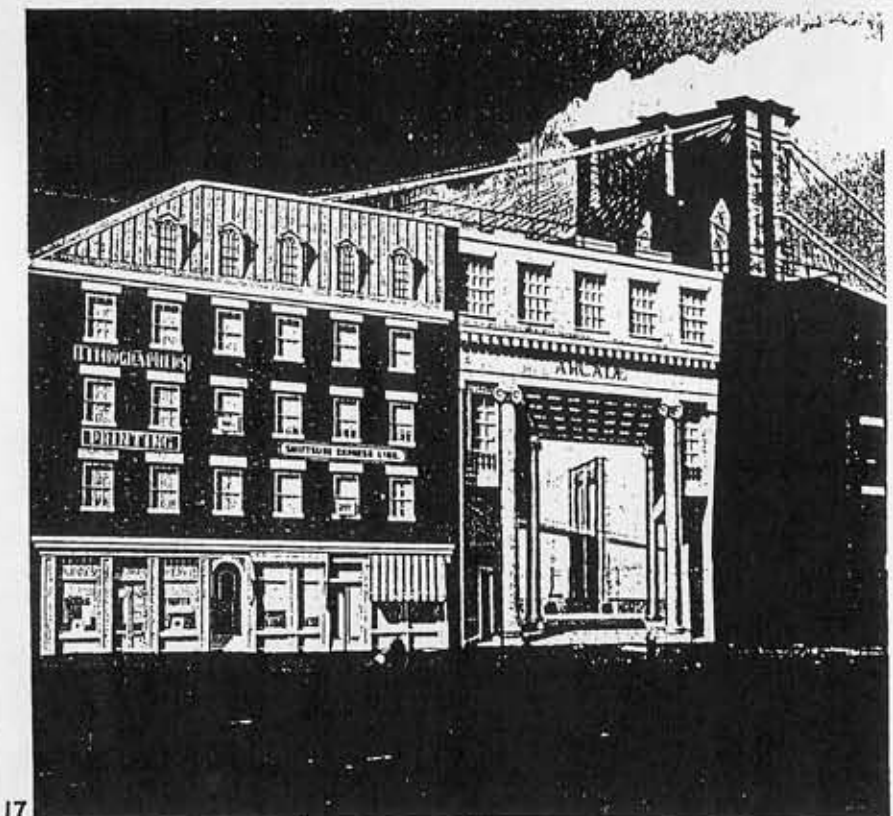
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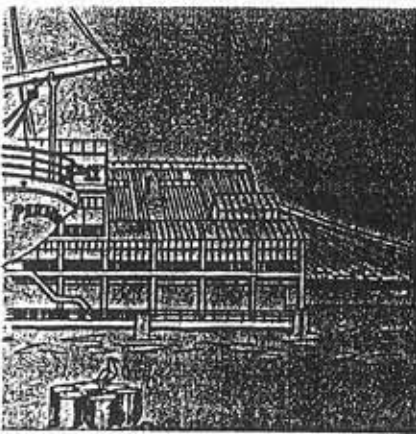
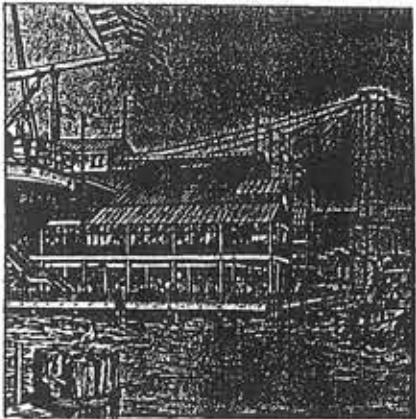
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*A major concern with the Rouse plan is: too little pedestrian space amid too many large buildings — and the scale of the latter might just overpower the original Seaport neighborhood that the Rouse project was meant to save.*



*Rouse Company logo above shows Pier Building with Brooklyn Bridge in background; below, Barry Benepe's version of the same view clearly showing that, from Seaport's pier 16, Rouse's Pier Building will block that vista of the Brooklyn Bridge. Conclusion: Rouse's artist must have been sitting in a rowboat in the middle of the East River.*

and other critics, raise several issues.

One point involves the nature of the shopping center itself. As good as Rouse may be, they still are shopping center people and their standard formula of high-priced boutiques and ethnic, fast-food eateries is a far cry in spirit and substance from the maritime-oriented arts, crafts, and workshops envisioned in the Seaport's charter. And will Rouse's thus-far-successful formula work in a city where candle shops and chocolate chip cookie carts are already on every fourth corner?

Another issue is scale. It is feared by concerned people that the proposed shopping center, especially the three major new buildings, will visually and physically overwhelm the seaport neighborhood, not to mention become a barrier to the river. And, they ask, will the kind of intensive retail complex Rouse is planning drive up real estate values in the area, thus changing drastically the scale and use of the surrounding district?

In addition, there does not appear to be any comprehensive planning for the surrounding area. This, of course, is not Rouse's responsibility, or the Museum's, but we would all feel more comfortable if the City had an overall plan for the Seaport neighborhood, covering provisions for open space, parking, mass transit access, and the relation of future highrise construction to the Seaport blocks.

#### **The Museum block**

The Museum block is being restored with federal public works money; design work is by Beyer Blinder Belle, the firm which now has the preservationists Dr. James Marston Fitch and John Stubbs on its staff. This block will be used partly by Rouse, and partly by the Museum for its headquarters, Board room and gallery space. On the empty lot, at the corner of Fulton and Front Streets, will be an infill building also designed by Beyer Blinder Belle which is now under construction. Although this building was designed before the Rouse agreement was signed, it was assumed all along that the building would accommodate retail and office space. Since this was the first infill building to go up in the Seaport district, there was much agonizing over whether it should be a latter-day version of the 19-century brick and granite commercial structures adjacent to it or contemporary; the latter viewpoint won out.

#### **Schermerhorn Row**

For seven years, 1973-80, Schermerhorn Row was the home of the now phased-out New York State Maritime Museum. During that time, a team of restoration experts directed by architect Jan Pokorny painstakingly documented the block and began the restoration of the facades of the Row. The gas station at the corner of South and John Streets, just in back of the Row, will be replaced by a modern building housing the Seaport's orientation center and auditorium; this structure will also be designed by Jan Pokorny. The interior restoration of Schermerhorn Row will probably be done by Beyer Blinder Belle, and paid for with state funds. Sometime in 1981, the Urban Development Corporation is expected to take over the block with the express purpose of leasing it back to the Seaport Museum. The lower two floors will be subleased to Rouse; the upper floors will be used for Museum services, galleries, rental offices, and apartments.

#### **Market block and Fulton Street**

The existing structure on the site is a 1950s nondescript garage scheduled to be replaced by the New Fulton Market building which will be designed by Ben Thompson (Quincy Market architect) for Rouse. Unfortunately, an earlier, extravagantly Victorian market was demolished 30 years ago to make way for the garage. Will the New Fulton Market overwhelm the smaller 19th-century buildings on either side? Just how much will this building block the view to the river? Since the birth of the Seaport Museum, it was intended that the Seaport would face the water and the ships — the ships were going to become the focus of the neighborhood. How is this going to be possible with all the new buildings lining the shore? From the drawings, it appears that Rouse intends to extend the New Fulton Market, with lowrise glass additions, into the streetbed of Fulton Street, making Fulton Street — from Water to South Streets — a pedestrian mall. According to the plans, as this mall slopes down toward the East River, instead of growing wider, it will grow narrower until it is only about 25 feet wide, which, anyone would have to agree, does not leave much of a waterfront vista.

#### **The Pier Building**

Piers 17 and 18 are to be reconstructed, with financing from a \$20-million UDAG grant (Urban Development Action Grant) from the Federal Government. (The exact amount of the grant was \$20,450,000; the announcement, a preliminary grant award, was made in December 1980. The grant application filed last summer requested \$28 million.) The two rebuilt piers will then be subleased to the Rouse Company, and they will build the Pier Building, to be designed by Ben Thompson. This structure will house shops and restaurants, with 110,000 sq. ft. of rentable retail space (not including circulation and service core); this is no modest lean-to. Its sheer bulk, along with the New Fulton Market, will make the existing older buildings and the ships look like dollhouse accessories. The major problem with the Pier Building is its size. It's too big. It will block the upriver view so that, for example, the Manhattan end of the Brooklyn Bridge will no longer be visible from Piers 15 and 16 (where the Museum ships will be docked) — the only two piers left to the South Street Seaport Museum, piers 17 and 18 being turned over to Rouse. In a lovely touch of irony, the Rouse Company has designed as its South Street Seaport logo a drawing of the Pier Building — with the majestic sweep of the Manhattan end of the Brooklyn Bridge in the background. In conducting his research for Community Planning Board #1, Barry Benepe discovered that the artist who made this wondrous drawing for Rouse must have been sketching from a rowboat in the middle of the East River.

#### **Pedestrian space — not much of it**

The Pier Building will have a public promenade ranging from 25 to 45 feet wide on its three waterfront sides. (On the north, or uptown, side, the promenade will be wider. The extra width will be reserved for use as a loading dock by the Fulton Fish Market; when the Fish Market isn't using it, the additional space is to be open to the public.)

Critics (including the Parks Council, Community Planning Board #1, and Barry Benepe) have said that these pro-

menades should be much wider, especially the eastern one, which faces the river. (In Boston, the City built several large waterfront parks near Quincy Market; and in Baltimore, Harborplace has large areas of open promenade along the harbor.) The Rouse Company predicts that, once the complexes are open, there will be as many people milling about South Street in one month as there are now in a year. (In Baltimore, Rouse visitor-per-year projections for Harborplace were met within three months.)

New York has as yet no comprehensive open space plan for the Seaport's surrounding neighborhood, although in 1975, the City sponsored a Lower Manhattan Plan which included a landscaped riverfront promenade extending from the Battery all the way up to the Brooklyn Bridge. New York, however, is not ready for such a manifestation of magnificently far-reaching civic vision, and the plan has quietly died.

Incidentally, we were unable to learn the fate of existing open spaces now in the Seaport district, such as Burling Slip, which lies just south of Schermerhorn Row, or of Peck Slip, north of Beekman Street. It is probably too much to hope that they won't become parking lots.

Why is it that in New York City where there are so many more people than there are in Boston or Baltimore, we are to have so much less space to move around in? It seems we are to be packed into our Seaport like the IRT at rush hour.

#### **The Pilot House**

The Pilot House, an 8500-sq. ft. restaurant/cafe complex (built by Rouse, designed by Ben Thompson), will be located on the river side of South Street between piers 15 and 16. The Pilot House will sit in the middle of what might have been the (above-mentioned) East River promenade.

#### **The Telco site**

The Telco site (owned by the City, leased to the New York Telephone Company, and still empty after all these years) is about to be purchased by a private developer for immediate construction. This developer, who is also purchasing some of the Museum's air rights, is expected to build a 35- to 45-story hotel/office complex on top of a two- to three-story retail complex. The retail complex will be subleased to Rouse. Architect Der Scutt has been selected as the designer.

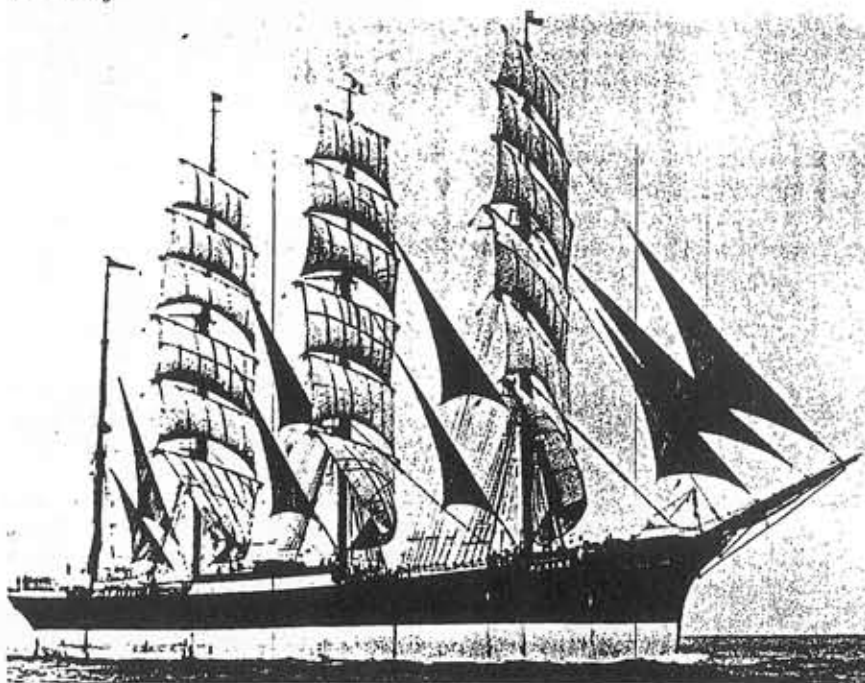
There is growing uneasiness over the size of this building and other buildings using Seaport air rights. With a skyscraper at its Water Street entrance, the New Fulton Market, the Pier Building at the South Street end, and a wall of monoliths soon to rise around it, the Seaport may disappear under all the glass and steel.

There is, however, nothing to be done about this: the Telco site development and the air rights transfer arrangement were locked into place in 1973 as part of the financial plan that kept the Seaport alive. Were it not for that plan, the Seaport today might be one mammoth parking lot. That the Telco site was not developed before this was due only to the dormant real estate market of the early seventies. Now that the real estate market is foraging, Telco and all the other sites are ripe fruit. The Continental Corporation is already building just south of the Museum district.

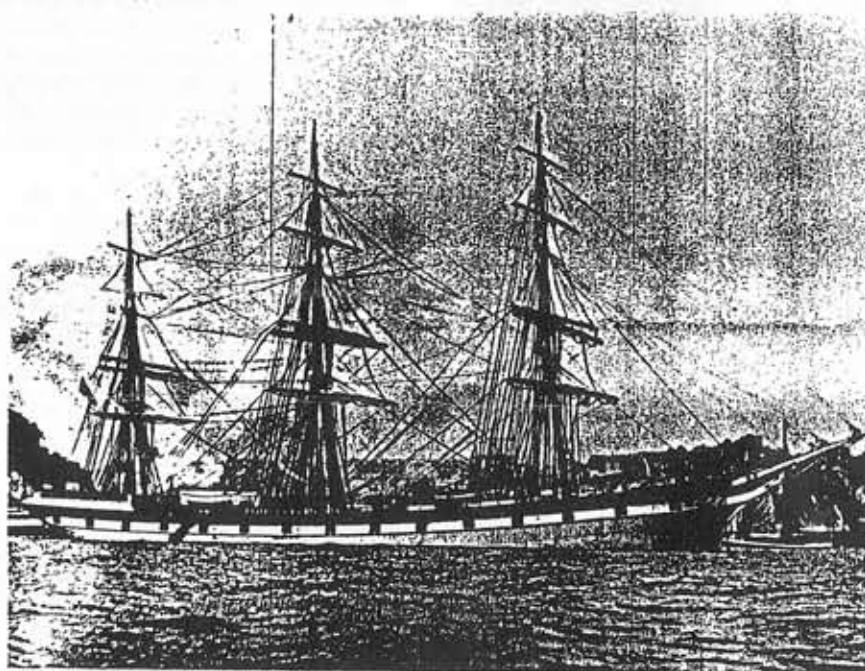
These other sites being developed

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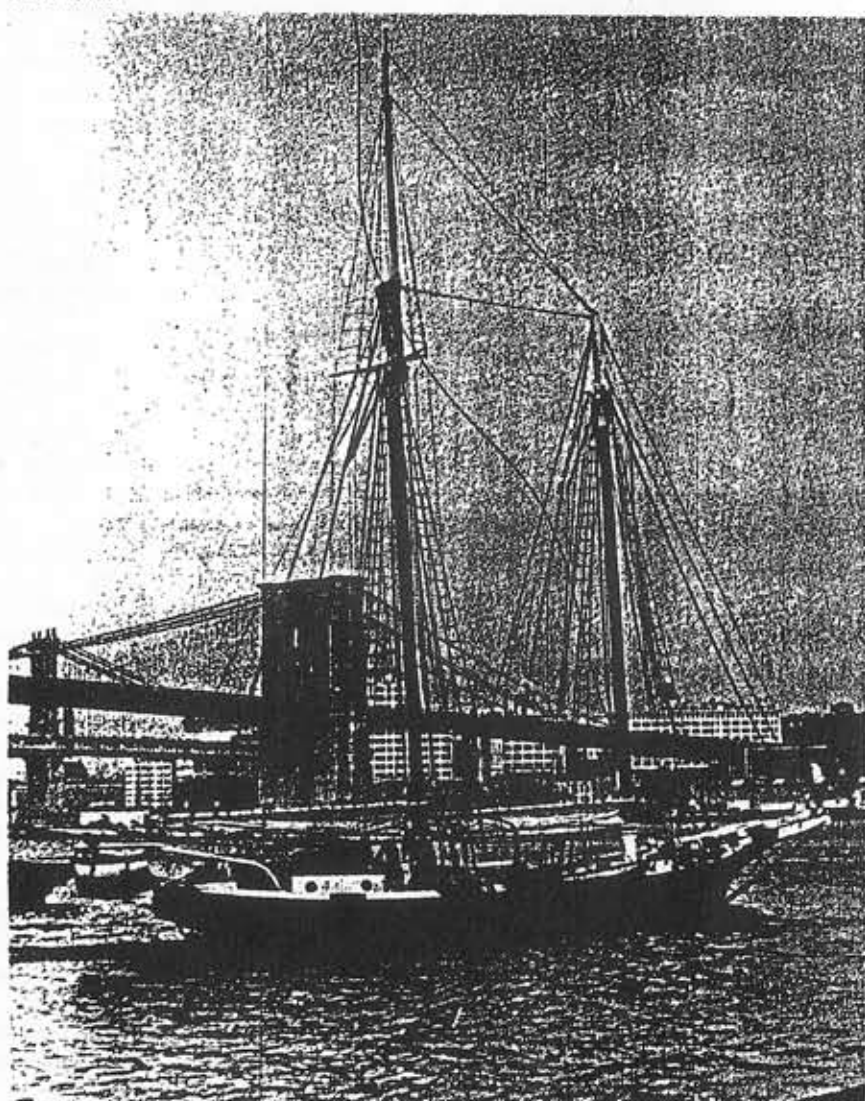
The Peking



The Wavertree



The Pioneer



## The Ships

The South Street Seaport has many wonderful old ships, most of them 19th-century. Several are in deplorable condition. Seaport administrators contend that this is due to severe financial constraints.

Restoring ships is more complicated than restoring buildings. Maritime restorationists are scarce; little money is available; and those who can judge a good job are few.

Maritime preservation requires great skill and lots of money. The work is tediously slow, and most of it is below the deck and below the waterline where no one can see it. Furthermore, the field of maritime preservation is so new that much time is spent in philosophical arguments: does one restore the actual old materials, or is it more important to teach the old ship-building skills using modern materials? And should a maritime museum concentrate on teaching its staff these skills, or should it spend its meager funds to educate the public to appreciate the ships and to understand their role in our history? Public programs are time consuming and pull the staff away from actual restoration work. This dilemma is common to all maritime museums.

Since Peter Stanford left in 1975, there has been no one in authority at the Museum who understands maritime preservation. Stanford, on the other hand, may have inadvertently caused a problem by zealously acquiring too many ships, overextending the Museum's scant resources. The Seaport had no money for repair or even simple maintenance.

An 1899 steam tug, the *Mathilda*, sank. That a ship could sink while moored at a seaport museum would be humorous if it were not so sad. It was hauled up from the bottom and is now in storage on Manhattan's west side. It will return to the Seaport when they can raise enough money to repair it.

Another ship, the *Acqua*, almost sank. A spokesman for the Seaport insists that it did not "almost sink." It may be a question of semantics. Actually, the ship filled up with water and before it slipped below the waterline, it was bailed out and towed to Brooklyn where it, too, sits in storage waiting for restoration funding.

The *Peking*, a 321-ft., four-masted barque acquired in 1974, is in very good condition; it was completely restored and given to the Seaport by the J. Aron Charitable Foundation.

The magnificent *Wavertree*, the "last remaining 19th-century full-rigged sailing ship berthed on the U.S. east coast," was acquired in 1968 and is the pride of the Seaport. Its restoration had been a fitful affair during the seventies, and stopped altogether in mid-1979 because of a lack of funds.

The *Lettie G. Howard*, an 1893 Gloucester fishing schooner, will be sent to Maine this summer for a year of restoration work. The *Howard* is expected to be back in New York in working condition by the summer of 1982.

The *Ambrose*, a 1908 lightship, is having a new waterproof deck laid so that the Museum will be able to use its below-deck spaces for exhibits.

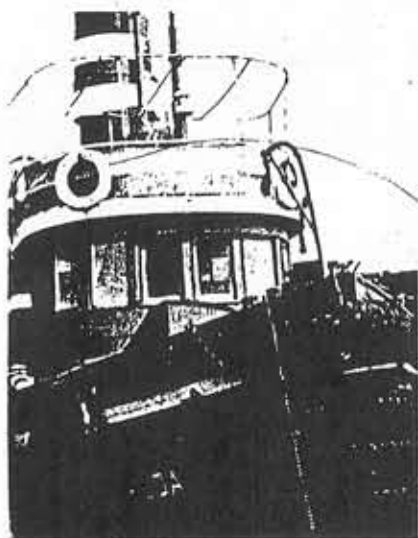
However, as is the case with the Seaport's building restorations, the ship restoration program has recently taken a turn for the better. A spokesman for the Seaport says they have received a \$400,000 challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities for programming, and an outright grant of \$150,000 from the Seamen's Bank for Savings for pier amenities, to include a public information booth. David Beggs, head of the Museum's Department of Ships & Piers, told us that the *Wavertree* has received a matching grant of \$180,000 from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and as the Museum has already raised the necessary matching funding, restoration of the *Wavertree* could resume any minute. If enough more money can be raised, the work could be completed by 1984.

The Museum's ship restoration program seems to be moving ahead. The maritime preservation community and the public are hoping that, at last, it will come to fruition.

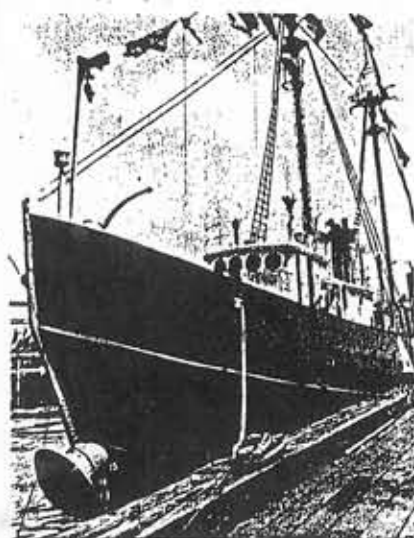
The Lettie G. Howard



The Mathilda



The Ambrose



South Street Seaport today



with purchased air rights will all have huge buildings. Now, in 1981, the public consciousness has been raised in favor of the preservation of lowrise historic districts, perhaps a little too late. Unfortunately, the Seaport's eight-year-old package is legally binding. In the early seventies, the tower-and-plaza era, it was progressive planning to regard the lowrise Seaport district as the collective plaza for the towers that were to surround it. That this kind of planning would produce tall, bulky buildings which would wall in the Seaport district was not frowned upon. Today's New Yorkers are more sensitive to the relation of new construction to older buildings and districts.

**The Fulton Fish Market**

In the seventies, the Fulton Fish Market, a private-merchant wholesale industry in the neighborhood for over 150 years, was programmed by the City to move to the new wholesale food market at Hunts Point, the Bronx. To make a very long story short, the fish merchants refused to go. In the end, these merchants, in an agreement drawn up between themselves, the City, Rouse, and the Museum, drove a hard bargain to insure that the day-to-day workings of their market will not be hampered by this noisy, glittery new neighbor, Rouse. That agreement includes spending federal public works money for the renovation of the City-owned fish market buildings (the Tin Building, the New Fulton Fish Market Building, and the fish stalls in the old Fulton Market Building). Still, observers of the South Street scene wonder if the fish market days are numbered. The fish market does smell like a fish market; and paper guarantees trying to buck the inevitability of real estate pressures are like King Canut holding back the tides.

What may prove fatal eventually to the fish market is the relentless rise in real estate values that will follow the successful shopping center opening next door. Will the private owners of the buildings north-of-Beekman — where many fishmongers rent their stalls — be able to resist the high-rent boutique handwagon? Even the City is going to have to raise rents in its own fish market buildings to reflect the surrounding, steadily rising, real estate values. And even if the fish merchants convert to retail operations to profit from the crowds of pedestrians, can the acrid smells of the market be tolerated for long by the clientele Rouse is expecting? Do fish oil and Perrier mix?

**North-of-Beekman**

This area which centers on Peck Slip lies within the Historic/Urban Renewal district, but outside the Museum/Rouse development area. The Museum, as the unassisted Urban Renewal sponsor, controls 40% of the properties in this area. Private property owners say they are apprehensive over the Museum's plans: the Museum could request the City to condemn private property as provided for in the urban renewal legislation. (Condemnation in this case refers to ownership. The Museum, as sponsor, has the legal right to appropriate private property, although, since this is an officially designated Historic District, the structures can't be demolished.) Some buildings will be restored, but the earthy, workaday aging-sailor atmosphere that has been the neighborhood character for generations is bound to go the way of the Third Avenue el.

**The neighborhood in context**

In 1967 when the Museum was founded, downtown New York was a mecca for avant-garde art. In cheap, scrungy lofts in SoHo and TriBeCa, artists were forging new directions and a new community. The downtown of the sixties that was the haven of the low-income artist is now receding into history. Downtown 1981 may become New York's newest silk stocking residential district.

Obsolete and ornate office buildings on Wall Street and industrial buildings in TriBeCa are being converted into six-figure loft apartments, and they're having no trouble being sold. The Lefrak Organization is constructing the first 1600 apartments in Battery Park City — on the 100-acre site across the street from the World Trade Center, a site created with landfill from the WTC excavation. On the real estate page, downtown is hot news.

Wall Street as a residential area has two drawbacks: it doesn't have the neighborhood services New Yorkers expect on every corner, and it doesn't have much space to provide them.

The Seaport/Rouse development would give the financial district the "Main Street" it lacks. Boutiques and spinach-salad cafes fitted respectfully into a restored 19th-century cityscape is just the kind of neighborhood these new loft dwellers might feel comfortable with. It's the kind of environment — picturesque but controlled — that the tourist might like. While it may not be what the Seaport's founders had in mind in 1967, it certainly reflects the realities of 1981. Space in New York goes to the highest bidder.

If demand warrants, developers may even resurrect the Manhattan Landing plan, circa 1970, that called for landfill to be dumped along the East River downtown, forming a bulge on the island, creating another Battery Park City. Considering the pressure on the current real estate market, this may not be so farfetched. The East River, if the original Manhattan Landing plan were to be followed, would be filled in right up to the Seaport's south door.

**Conclusion**

We should not fault the Museum for being born in one age and having to live with the realities of another. If, as seems inevitable, future buildings in the Seaport district are to be luxury loft apartments and mammoth office towers, perhaps this is all the more reason to throw united support to the Seaport Museum. There's got to be someone to look after what little is left of the past.

And yet the critics' concerns deserve consideration. The many small hodgepodge buildings in the South Street Seaport Museum are a living exhibit of an 18th- and 19th-century New York, a demonstration of urban life on a scale we could never duplicate in an age of skyscrapers. It is the scale that is sacred. Those buildings and ships, and the neighborhood they're in, are all that is left of our maritime history, and they have been left to us in trust. Our grandchildren will judge whether or not we were worthy of that trust.

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All photographs not otherwise identified are courtesy South Street Seaport Museum