

Murnane Wharf, Marvin Ricks remembered with honors

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BY MICHAEL MUNK
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

There is sad news and good news for Portland and its waterfront. Sad is that Marvin Ricks, the last surviving Portland veteran of the great 1934 west coast dock strike died at age 97. Without the struggles of labor heroes like the young Brother Ricks, there would be no International Longshore & Warehouse Union (ILWU) and no official memorial to one of its local leaders now threatened by the relocation of the Saturday Market.

But good is the chance that the Memorial

plaque honoring Francis J. Murnane above the floating wharf named for him will be replaced by the Portland Development Commission with the cooperation of Portland Parks. Richard Engeman, a member of the Portland Historic Landmarks Commission reports his efforts to restore the memorial seem to be succeeding, although a public announcement has not been made. Officially sited by vote of the City Council at the foot of SW Ankeney Street just south of the Burnside Bridge, the Murnane Wharf

was either forgotten or ignored in the recent relocation of the Saturday Market. The bronze plaque had disappeared.

Replacement of the Murnane memorial plaque would honor not only Murnane himself, but all the militant longshoremen like Marvin Ricks who built their union into a model for America's workers.

Street Roots first called attention to the Murnane Wharf scandal in its March 20 edition. After The Oregonian picked up the story a month later, Saturday Market's Sue Kenny said she hoped to organize an event supporting its restoration.

ILWU Local 8 President Jeff Smith sent out an appeal on behalf of several Portland ILWU locals:

Members of ILWU Locals 8 (Longshore), 40 (Supercargoes & Clerks) and 92 (Walking Bosses and Foremen) are concerned that the Francis J. Murnane memorial wharf, which was dedicated in Portland by Harry Bridges in 1979, is slated



The Murnane Wharf perched off the west bank of the Willamette River.

for destruction. The wharf is named after former ILWU Local 8 President Murnane and is Oregon's only public monument to a union worker.

Brother Murnane worked tirelessly to advance the cause of working families, and poverty, and restore many of Portland's treasured historical monuments for future generations. These monuments include Pittock mansion, the Benson fountains, Skidmore Fountain, the Campbell firefighter's memorial, and many more.

We have petitions in our union halls for members and friends to sign. It says:

"We ask that the Murnane wharf be restored with a plaque to replace the one that is missing. If the wharf cannot be restored, we ask that an equivalent monument in Portland be named in honor of Francis J. Murnane. We ask that any monument to Brother Murnane be as large as his personality, as beautiful and visible as the monuments he saved for Portland, and that it carries a plaque that contains the exact language as the original plaque that was dedicated by the City in 1979."

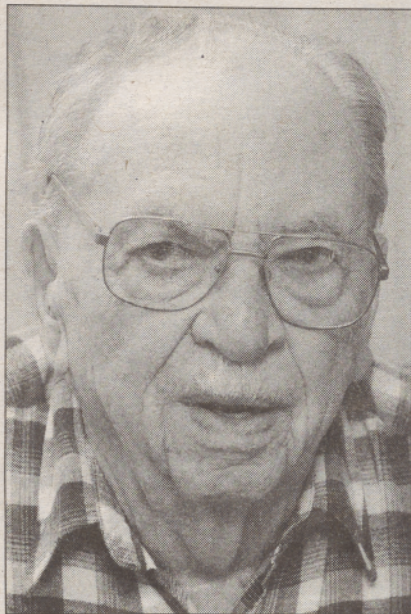
Commissioner Engeman learned from city planner Dave Skilton that Portland Parks believes the plaque was stolen prior to the market construction. In 1989, the Portland Development Commission spent \$500 to replace the original plaque and the

PDC appears ready to restore it again.

Mayor Potter had begun such efforts before he left office, but it would seem clear that the city is obligated to maintain its own memorials such as the Murnane Wharf.

In the midst of these developments the last Portland veteran of the 1934 "Big Strike" died June 10 at age 97. Ricks was a young longshoreman who joined the strikers' "riot squads" which discouraged scabs from crossing union picket lines and fought the shippers' vigilantes. He was the last survivor of over 1,000 Portland dockworkers who won their demands in the historic strike 75 years ago.

His death came shortly before members and their families of the ILWU's Columbia River District, which also includes Local 5 at Powell's books, will gather at Oaks Park July 5 to commemorate "Bloody Thursday," the day in 1934 when police killed two strikers in San Francisco. Ricks had been an annual speaker at that event, reminding today's union members of the struggle that won them one of the nation's most progressive unions. He would also tell them that Portland had its own "Bloody Wednesday" on July 12, 1934 when police wounded four strikers while trying to force a train through picket lines at Terminal 4.



Marvin Ricks

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