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Richmond's Rosie the Riveter/ World War II Home Front National Historical Park

by

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Did you know that there's a new National Park in the country? Did you know it's located right here in the Bay Area? I've lived in California for 58 years, and I'm right here in Northern California, and I hadn't heard of this park until this last summer. Here's what the park literature says about it...

"The Rosie the Riveter/WWII Home Front National Historical Park is now taking shape in the port city of Richmond, California. This sleepy seaside town was galvanized by the war effort, swelling in three years from an agricultural byway with a population of 20,000 into a pulsing, productive metropolis of 120,000, most of whom worked on this site. Set amid the old Kaiser Shipyards and former Ford Assembly Building where legions of "Rosies" helped build ships and tanks that won the war, the Park will celebrate the workers on their home front, bringing their stories to life in the setting where they took place.

This vast waterfront Park—150 acres on San Francisco Bay—will include several fascinating components. Already open is the Rosie the Riveter Memorial...Also open to the public is the S.S. Red Oak Victory, one of the 747 "Victory" and "Liberty" ships built at the Kaiser Shipyards, where 90,000 workers labored in the most productive shipbuilding facilities of the war. Near the shipyard, visitors will be able to tour two historic child care centers., the first of their kind in America. The centers are still in use today." The Ford Assembly Building and Kaiser Shipyard #3 are also open to the public.

Still, the Park is so new (established by Congress on October 24, 2000), that developmental work of all



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kinds is still going on, and several areas are not yet open to the public. Did you know that more American workers died in Home Front accidents than US soldiers killed on WW II battlefields? That was true up to June, 1944. That's why Henry Kaiser (Kaiser Shipyards) set up the Kaiser Hospital and instituted a revolutionary idea—pre-paid medical care for workers. Along with the original hospital, the Maritime and Ruth Powers Child Development Centers, and Atchison Village are not yet open to the public.

“The huge explosion of workers coming to live in cities like Richmond, caused intense strain on city infrastructure. One of these strains was the severe lack of housing. Workers arriving in these rapidly expanding urban centers were forced to find what they could. They slept in all night movie theatres, shared “hot beds” (where three people used one bed, each getting an 8 hour stretch), or just camped out. In response to this need, government and industry combined to construct communities all over the nation that included housing, schools, fire/police stations, child care facilities and other amenities. Atchison Village was one of them. These were highly sought after and company managers were the most likely to be able to procure housing in Atchison Village.”

“Due to discrimination, minorities fared very poorly in gaining housing. They often lived in shacks, in the crates that brought the raw materials to the city, in trailers, or in automobiles. They and other lower income earning workers were lucky when they were able to move to barrack-like dormitories constructed for the mass of WWII workers.

Today, Atchison Village is a collection of privately owned houses managed by a cooperative of the homeowners. While most of the dormitories and other low income housing of WWII are gone, Atchison Village, built as permanent housing, remains.”

Unfortunately, the chances of the collector getting a cover from this new park are probably nil, but there may be a chance in the future of finding some Richmond matchcover that *refers* to the park. That's probably the most one could hope for these days, but the Park, itself, is a good tie-in to the whole category of World War II covers—Military, Navy Ships, World War II Patriotics, and so forth. If anyone gets the chance to visit the Park, please send in your feedback. I'd be interested in seeing your impressions. I would imagine a person over 50 would get more out of it than a younger person, although the whole concept is to educate the younger people who didn't live through World War II. The Park has a web site if you'd like further information:

http://www.nationalparks.org/proudpartners/partner_ford_rtrs_disclaimer.shtml

The SS Red Oak Victory, shown below, is located at the SS Red Oak Victory Terminal, 1500 Dornan Dr., Richmond, CA. Tours of the ship are available Tuesday through Sunday, weather permitting. You can call 510-237-2933 for further details.

