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NAVSTA LONG BEACH  
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# Belated sense of history

**Long Beach:** Many surprised to hear 11 buildings on former naval station qualify for national register.

By **Bill Hillburg**  
Staff writer

LONG BEACH - The former Long Beach Naval Station, all but signed, sealed and delivered to the Port of Long Beach for a container terminal, has developed a belated sense of history that could alter plans for its reuse.

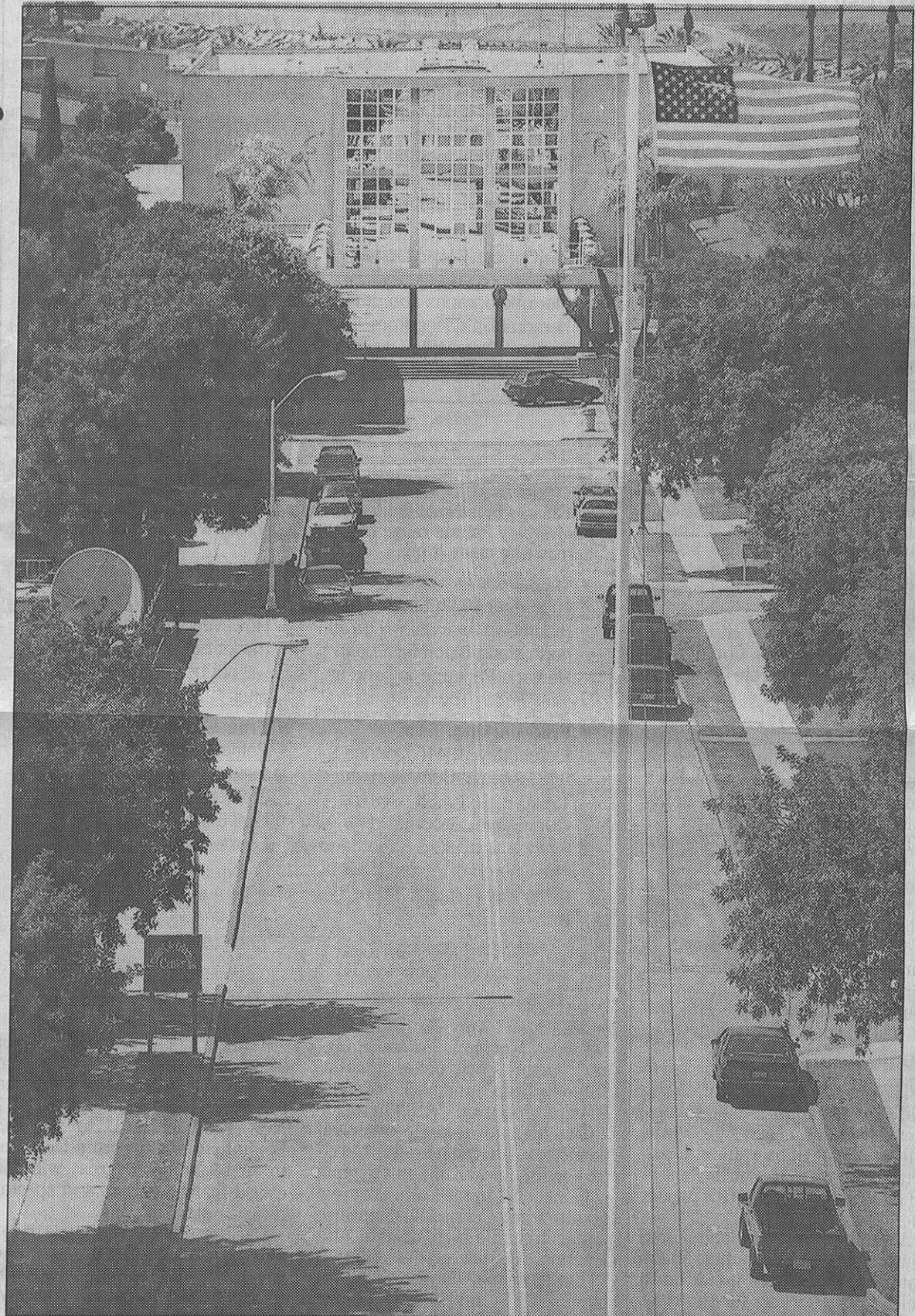
Several Long Beach officials and members of preservation groups say they were surprised in January when the Navy notified them that 11 buildings and other facilities on the 104-acre base qualify for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

The finding, based on federally mandated studies completed by the Navy in 1992 and 1994, cited the structures' association with historic events dating from World War II.

The reports noted that the station's major buildings were designed in 1940 by Los Angeles architect Paul Revere Williams. One of America's most acclaimed designers, Williams was also a pioneering leader of the Southland's African-American community.

Those findings mean that a 40-acre portion of the station, designated as the Roosevelt Base Historic District, could be preserved and placed under the control of the National Park Service. A request for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places would have to be made by the city of Long Beach, which now controls the property.

City officials say they don't plan such a request. But preservationists are concerned that the Navy waited until this year, long after reuse plans for the site had been decided, to share their



The Long Beach Naval Station's recreation center is one of 11 buildings that qualifies for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Kenny Kwok / Press-Telegram

historical findings.

## Residents panel

After the Navy declared in 1992 that it planned to close the base in 1994, an appointed panel of Long Beach residents began

studying reuse options and soliciting input from the public. Based on that panel's recommendations, the City Council voted in 1993 to turn the base property over to the Port of Long Beach for a container terminal.

"We flagged the property for historical assessment in 1992 and then did a further study in 1994," says Lowell Martin, an official with the Naval Facilities Engineering Command in San

# INSIGHT: Naval station reuse could be altered

CONTINUED FROM C1

Diego. "I have no idea why Long Beach officials were unaware of that information. I suspect that part of the problem is the fact that many of the Navy people who were involved in the reuse process have since scattered."

Port officials plan to raze the entire base site starting late this year and build a container terminal. The terminal, expected to open in 1998, has already been leased for 10 years to China Ocean Shipping Co., a cargo carrier owned by the government of the People's Republic of China.

"We found out about all this when everyone else in town did," says Geraldine Knatz, director of planning for the Port of Long Beach. "The Navy requested that we do a Historical American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the base."

That survey will catalog architectural and historic aspects of base buildings, preserving data about them after they've been demolished.

## Council concern

The historic designation has caused two City Council members to consider revising plans for the site.

"I would hope we could revisit our reuse plans," says Vice Mayor Doug Drummond. "When we voted on this plan, we didn't know a thing about historic buildings. Maybe we can come up with a plan where both the city and the port can have their cake."

Drummond sees the Navy's lack of communication as another example of its piecemeal retreat from Long Beach.

"I still get so irritated that the Navy is walking away from one of the best facilities on the West Coast," he says. "And, all through the process, the Navy kept changing the rules on us. First, they were going to give up only a portion of their property. Then they announced they were pulling out completely. It was hard to keep track of their plans."

Drummond suggests historic base buildings might be used to house the Long Beach Police Academy, which will be displaced by commercial development of the former Navy hospital site in north-east Long Beach.

He also sees a possible home for the Police Athletic League, a youth program, in the base's massive recreation center. The complex, which includes a gymnasium, swimming pool, bowling center and playing fields, is included in the Navy's inventory of historic base buildings.

"This project is pretty far down the road," says Councilman Alan Lowenthal. "Perhaps we could find some alternate uses for parts of the base. But I'd also like to know why we were never told about all of this before we voted on the current plan."

## Ruled incompatible

Knatz, the port's planner, rules out any multiple uses of the base property.

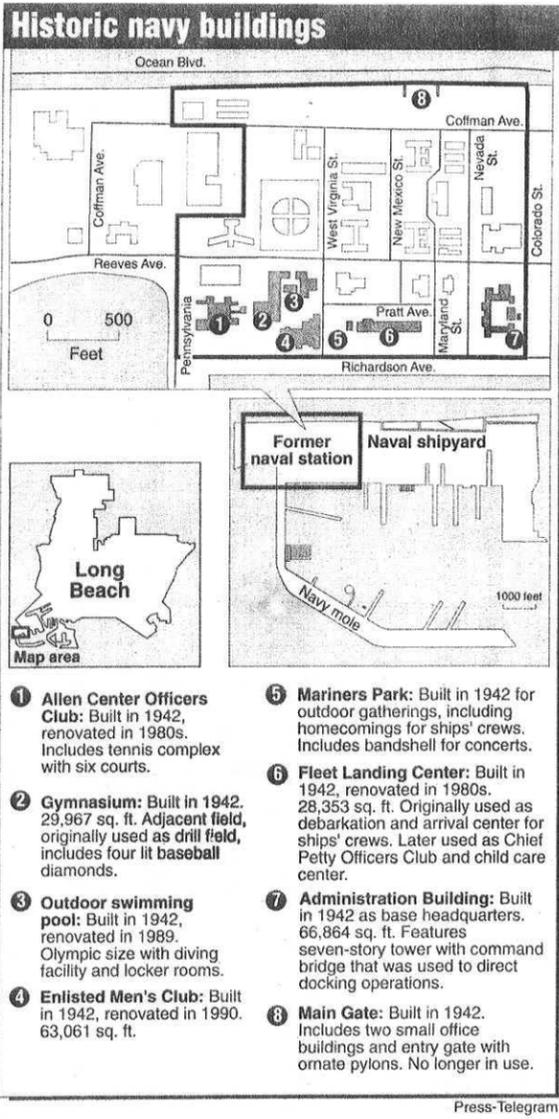
"A container yard is basically a big parking lot with storage and a lot of transportation activity," she says. "And port terminals are secure locations that would limit access. Noncompatible land uses would be in conflict."

"I'm dismayed that we're getting into the picture so late," says Peter Devereaux, an architect and member of Long Beach Heritage, a nonprofit preservation group that was alerted to the base's historic status in January and asked to provide input.

"Our group wants to be sensitive to the economic needs of the community that will be met by the port," says Devereaux. "But we're also concerned about an important part of our history."

That history began in 1940, when the Navy condemned 104 acres of Terminal Island and began construction of Roosevelt Base. Political and diplomatic considerations by the base's namesake, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, helped shape its design.

In 1940, America was still bound by the Neutrality Act of 1935, which barred a military buildup and involvement in foreign conflicts. Roosevelt Base was designed to be an administrative and recre-



**1 Allen Center Officers Club:** Built in 1942, renovated in 1980s. Includes tennis complex with six courts.

**2 Gymnasium:** Built in 1942. 29,967 sq. ft. Adjacent field, originally used as drill field, includes four lit baseball diamonds.

**3 Outdoor swimming pool:** Built in 1942, renovated in 1989. Olympic size with diving facility and locker rooms.

**4 Enlisted Men's Club:** Built in 1942, renovated in 1990. 63,061 sq. ft.

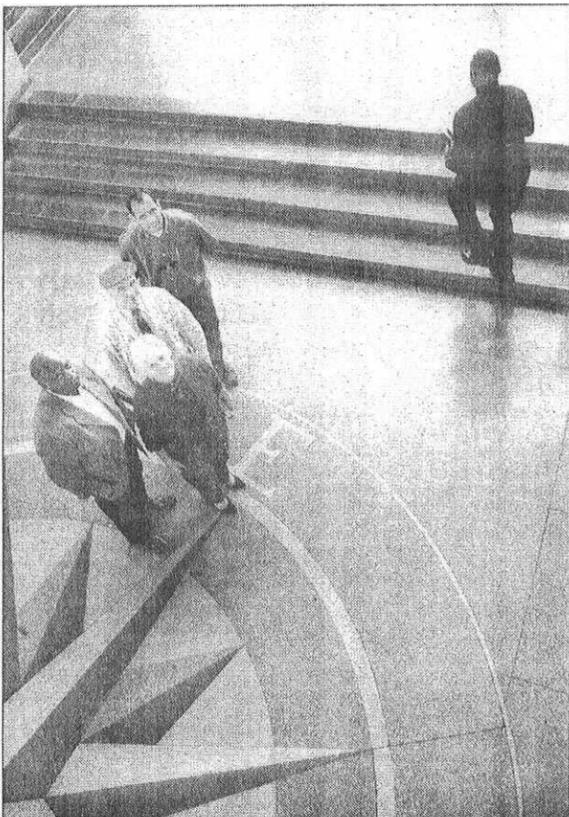
**5 Mariners Park:** Built in 1942 for outdoor gatherings, including homecomings for ships' crews. Includes bandshell for concerts.

**6 Fleet Landing Center:** Built in 1942, renovated in 1980s. 28,353 sq. ft. Originally used as debarkation and arrival center for ships' crews. Later used as Chief Petty Officers Club and child care center.

**7 Administration Building:** Built in 1942 as base headquarters. 66,864 sq. ft. Features seven-story tower with command bridge that was used to direct docking operations.

**8 Main Gate:** Built in 1942. Includes two small office buildings and entry gate with ornate pylons. No longer in use.

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Ronald Lewis, left, of the California Preservation Foundation, Patti Moore and Peter Devereaux of Long Beach Heritage, and Jeff Samudio of the Society of Architectural Historians, tour the Administration Building.

Kenny Kwok / Press-Telegram

ation center for the Navy's Pacific Fleet, not a fortress.

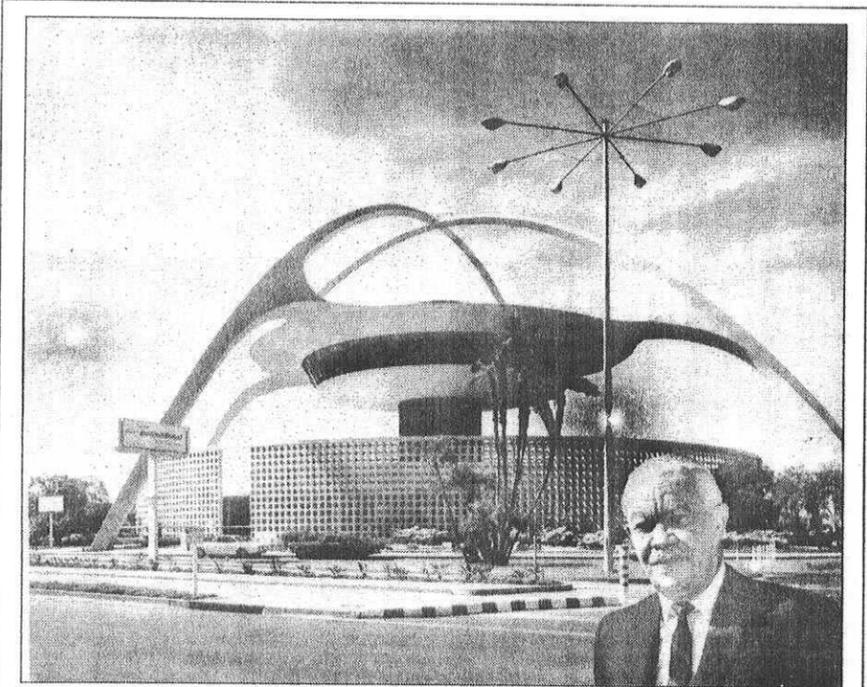
However, with war on the horizon, architect Williams was ordered by the Navy to bolster his buildings with thick, bomb-proof walls.

## International style

Williams designed Roosevelt Base in the International Style, popular in Europe and America in the 1930s. His buildings feature sleek styling, ribboned windows and built-in landscaping planters. He clustered them around a long, rectangular mall filled with trees and lawns.

His major works at the base include the Administration Building, with a seven-story tower topped with a bridge-like command center that once directed ships in port. At the far end of his mall, Williams designed the recreation center, including a gymnasium, swimming pool and the Allen Center Officers Club.

Roosevelt Base was rushed to completion in 1942 following America's entry into World War II on Dec. 7, 1941. Temporary structures were built to meet wartime needs, and alterations were made to other buildings. But all 11 of Williams'



Architect Paul Revere Williams in 1960 with one of his most familiar creations, the Theme Building at LAX.

"Paul R. Williams, Architect," Rizzoli International Publications, 1993

## Williams key in L.A. design

**Era: African American fought prejudice to become world famous architect.**

By Bill Hillburg  
Staff writer

Status symbols abound in upscale Southland communities such as Beverly Hills, Bel Air, Brentwood, Pacific Palisades and La Cañada Flintridge. And one of the most prized symbols is ownership of a home designed by Los Angeles architect Paul Revere Williams.

That's quite a tribute for an African American who was born into poverty in Los Angeles in 1894 and who pursued his profession in an era marked by widespread racial prejudice.

But Williams was a man whose dreams and talents would not be denied.

From the 1920s until his death in 1980, Williams designed hundreds of landmark Southland homes, commercial structures and government complexes, including the major buildings at the former Long Beach Naval Station.

His most familiar works include the Saks Fifth Avenue store in Beverly Hills (built in

1939), an extensive remodeling of the Beverly Hills Hotel and Polo Lounge (1947), the Los Angeles County Courthouse (1955) and the Theme Building at Los Angeles International Airport (1960).

Williams also became known as the "architect to the stars," designing dozens of homes for such Hollywood luminaries as Frank Sinatra and Lucille Ball.

After graduating from Los Angeles Polytechnic High School in 1912, Williams trained at the Los Angeles School of Art and the Beaux Arts Institute of Design in Los Angeles. He became California's first licensed African-American architect in 1915.

Williams recalled his early drive to succeed in a 1963 Ebony magazine article:

"Why do you want to be an architect? Why don't you study to be a doctor or a lawyer? This was the first question the student advisor asked me when I entered high school," Williams wrote. "I told him I had heard of only one Negro architect in America, and I was sure this country could use at least one or two more. It was this challenge that decided my future."

In a 1936 article titled "I am a Negro," Williams told of his struggle to overcome racial prej-

udice.

"Naturally, I encountered many discouragements and rebuffs, most of which were predicated upon my color," he wrote. "But I do not regret those difficulties, for I think that I am a far better craftsman today than I would be had my course been free."

Williams won international acclaim for his works, a fact that has led architects and preservationists to focus on saving his Navy buildings in Long Beach.

He was also deeply involved in civic work, where he recorded a number of African-American firsts. They included his appointment to the Los Angeles Planning Commission (1920-28) and the Los Angeles Housing Commission (1933-41). During World War II, he served as a Navy architect, designing new installations.

Williams summed up his approach to his craft in a 1939 speech:

"Good planning, good design and good construction are the three essentials necessary to fight obsolescence," he said. "And it is the quality of our designing today that will definitely stamp this decade as being one of good taste."



The Administration Building at the Long Beach Naval Station has a seven-story tower topped with a bridge-like command center that once directed ships in port.

Kenny Kwok / Press-Telegram

works maintain their architectural integrity.

"We feel that because it was never accessible, most people are unaware of what is on the base," says Patti Moore, president of Long Beach Heritage. "It's a beautiful place with really elegant buildings. People need to see it."

Long Beach Heritage plans to remedy that lack of access on Saturday, when it will host guided public tours of the base.

The base's historic and architec-

tural attributes have also drawn the attention of state and regional preservation groups.

"This site is really significant," says Jeff Samudio, a Hollywood architect and president of the Society of Architectural Historians. He says the group is alerting preservation officials in Sacramento and Washington.

Both Samudio and Ron Lewis, a board member of the Oakland-based California Preservation Foundation, raised other concerns

## Naval Station tours

Long Beach Heritage will host free guided tours of the Long Beach Naval Station's historic buildings and facilities on Saturday, beginning at 10 a.m.

Tours will start at Building One, the former base headquarters building. Visitors should enter the base through Gate 2 of the Long Beach Naval Shipyard, at Ocean Boulevard and the Terminal Island (47) Freeway. All visitors must show a driver's license or other photo identification card to enter.

For more information, call Long Beach Heritage at (310) 493-7019.

during a recent tour of the base.

"It's hard to understand why all of this needs to be razed," says Lewis, a Pasadena resident and a student of Williams' architecture. "There must be other uses compatible with preservation."

"It's seems like such a waste," says Samudio. "As a taxpayer, I'm really mad about this, much less as a preservationist."

# Naval shipyard, civilian workers prepare for looming shutdown

**Operations:** Many employees have secured jobs at other military facilities while final ship work nears completion.

LONG BEACH - Signs of the looming 1997 shutdown already abound at the former Long Beach Naval Station and the adjacent naval shipyard.

Spokesman Ernest McBride says the shipyard's civilian work force, which topped 5,000 in the mid-1980s, now

stands at 2,000. It will be 600 by September.

More than 400 of the yard's workers have recently secured jobs at other military installations, McBride says. And 320 of the yard's remaining employees have accepted a separation pay incentive

and will leave July 1.

Work is under way on the shipyard's three final projects. The carrier USS Boxer is scheduled to leave May 10, and work on the destroyer USS Kincaid will end in mid-June. Work on the yard's last Navy customer, the destroyer USS David Ray, will be completed in July.

The 600 employees who remain after September will be removing machinery

and materials that will be shipped to other Navy installations. McBride says many of the shutdown crew are veteran employees who plan to retire when the yard officially closes in September 1997.

McBride says the Navy Commissary and Navy Exchange, which offer discount shopping to the 80,000 active and retired military personnel and dependents in the Long Beach area, will close in November

and move to the Los Alamitos Armed Forces Reserve Center.

Since the naval station was decommissioned on Sept. 30, 1994, it has operated as an annex of the shipyard. Recreation, housing and other facilities have mainly been used by crews of ships under repair. Most base facilities will be shut down in September.

- Bill Hillburg