

# Balboa Island Yarns



HAPPY NEW YEAR  
1950

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## THE SAGA OF CAPTAIN JOHN WATTS-FERRYMAN

Dear to the memory of early settlers on Balboa Island is the recollection of the genial colored man who ran the Balboa Island Ferry boat for many years. Readers who were children when the first houses were being built on Balboa Island will find the memory of John Watts associated with their first contact with salt water and their initiation into the science of handling a row boat. Though possessed of a raucous voice and garrulous disposition, John's kindly intent was never questioned by those who knew him. Whether in scolding the children for their carelessness in handling their row boats or the chances they took in swimming out into deep water, there was always a savor of paternal interest in his admonitions which typified his kindly interest and made them love him.

At a beauty show, even John's most ardent admirers must admit that he would have fallen short of the first prize, but when anything amused him or when he greeted an old friend, the smile that radiated from his homely face rivaled the sunrise.

Fortunately for John the mechanism of the ferry boat Teal was not as complex as that of modern boats. The single cylinder engine was of the open crankcase type with a connecting rod plying back and forth in unblushing nakedness. The ignition was of the antiquated wipe-spark type while the modesty of the



clutch knew not the shielding ministrations of a gear case.

John believed in the application of lots of oil, but seemed to pin more faith on gasoline as a cure-all for any ills his boat might develop. After cranking the engine, he used to seize a priming can and apply a little of its contents to everything in sight. The igniter came in for a dose, the reverse band on the clutch, the hub of the steering wheel and any other place that happened to arrest his attention. Fortunately the Teal was an open boat and there is no report of a fire or explosion.

John's ministrations to the engine required only an abstract attention on his part and never interfered perceptibly with the flow of conversation. If John were silent there was something wrong-but John was seldom silent.

During the long lonely winter months with no permanent residents on Balboa Island, John used to hang around Charley Way's grocery store which then stood on the east side of Palm Street, and around the shop of the Collins Commercial Company, keeping his eye open for anyone who might happen to want to cross the bay. The bridge connecting the island to the mainland was not constructed until 1912, prior to which time if anyone appeared on Balboa Island who had not crossed in John's ferry, the old skipper promptly chugged over there to demand an explanation.

The chance islander who might come down for a winter week-end was sure of a cordial welcome from the

ferryman. "Well, here you is and I sho' am glad to see you," was a frequent greeting. "Why, lemme see. You ain't been down for fou' weeks. Yes sir, it done been fou' weeks since you was here. Misto' Leslie, he was down two weeks ago, but dere ain't been nobody down since and there ain't been nobody on de island at all 'ceptin' the Dickinsons. Dey been here but dat's all." Thus, as the little round bottomed boat chugged its way across the placid waters of the bay, he passed along the doings of his little world. "Where you all goin' and when you comin' back?" was his customary question when any winter visitor left the island. In the summer time when passengers were more plentiful, he used to complain of the fact that "Dey's so many strangers here now I jes' can't keep track ob dem all."

During these busy days when John was in a jovial humor, he had a song that announced the pending departure of the ferry. Old timers will enjoy the memory of his voice calling out

"I can hold dis boat but I cain't hold de sun,  
De fast train am standin' on track number one,  
If you'se gwine to ride with me you got to be on  
de run,

Cause it's goodbye, my honey, I'm gone."

Clang, clang, clang, would go the bell on the Teal, and with John shooting gasoline from the priming can with one hand and steering with the other, the boat would go chug, chugging away.

John's repertoire numbered some fine old revival hymns and a number of negro ballads and "coon songs"

the words of which come not at the call of memory. A few lines from one of these ran

"Get away from dat window, my love an' my dove,  
Get away from dat window, don' you hear.  
Come around some udder night for dere's gwine  
to be a fight,  
Wid' de razors a flyin' in de air."

Eyeing strangers suspiciously at first, John welcomed them cordially when they were introduced by one of his elect, or upon their first demonstration of personal goodwill and friendliness. Young men of the age to be noticing the girls led a hard life when within range of his voice. Imagine the feelings of a young skipper, proudly exhibiting his boat and seamanship to a young lady enjoying the thrill of a first sail, when he hears a voice come booming over the water conveying some such warning as, "Don' you listen to him. Don' you believe a word of it. Dere ain't no truth in nothing he says. You am not de only girl he ever loved. He tells that to every girl he gets out in dat boat. You're too purty to be taken in by such nonsense. If he won't put you asho' I'll come and get you, and then you be careful about goin' out around with such people."

John regarded the waters from Bay Island to the Pavilion and from Balboa Island to the mainland as his private domain reserved for the use of the Balboa Island Ferry, and to anchor a boat anywhere within that area was sure to rouse his ire. Boats inshore were treated with tolerant resignation, but anchored anywhere out in

the bay, the owner came in for vigorous denunciation. Fortunately there were so few boats in the bay at that time that John's peace of mind was not often disturbed.

Strangers on the ferry were often startled to have the pilot suddenly desert the wheel, stand up in the middle of the boat, prance up and 'down and shake his fist most belligerently at a passing vessel on which another boat operator was going through the same pantomime. The initiated realized that all this pugilistic display was simply the form of friendly greeting exchanged between John Watts and John Scarpa, an Italian gondolier whom our ferryman used to accuse of infringing upon his prerogatives in navigating across the course of the Balboa Island Ferry. After the departure of John Scarpa, Floyd Gage, popular operator of the excursion boat Balboa, was the object of like attention.

In those old days when Newport Harbor boasted a fleet of two yachts, four or five makeshift sail boats and about as many primitive motor boats, the electric lights on Balboa Island were supplied by a light plant situated in the building on the rear of the southwest corner of Park and Agate Avenues. In the back of this old building was a sort of built-in loft or mezzanine floor which projected into the upper part of the building for about ten feet, with an outside stairway and entry. This cubby hole was, John's room. One night, for some reason never satisfactorily explained, he lugged a galvanized wash tub up into this loft and proceeded to wash his feet. Either there was too much water in the tub or John's feet were too big, because the water overflowed and, running down onto the electric generator, damaged it to such an extent that the plant was laid up



for two weeks. During the gloomy evenings while the islanders groped about with the aid of candles and kerosene lamps, the question frequently heard was, "If John washes his feet and we go without light for two weeks, what would happen to us if he took a bath?"

It is rumored that at one time our genial ferryman aspired to the ministry. A scriptural flavor which was sometimes noticed in his conversation lent color to this story. John was not faultless. He had some well-known failings, frailties which we will draw not from their dread abode. Be it said, however, that they were weaknesses of the flesh and not of the spirit. His heart was in the right place and the fact that he ran a gas engine without the aid of profanity indicates that he was possessed of a deep religious nature.

Familiar and loquacious as John was, there was one person whose presence evoked in him an admiration bordering on reverence. Gertrude Machin, youthful daughter in a Pasadena family who spent their summers on the Island, was possessed of a gracious dignity which silenced his garrulous voice and converted him into a serious and respectful public servant.

John's admiration was shared by all who were so fortunate as to enjoy the acquaintance of the object of his affection, for she was a person of unusually fine character and great personal charm. Patrons of the ferry often commented that whenever she was aboard John was the essence of deference and attention to business.

The last time he saw her John helped her out of the boat on her way to the car at the close of the

summer. "Give me your hand but give your heart to God," he said as she stepped lightly up onto the dock. "Good bye, John," she said. "Be as nice to everyone as you've been to me and they will all love you."

As she disappeared up the street John stood absent-mindedly fumbling his gasoline can. "She's too good for dis world," he muttered to himself, "She's sho' going to dwell wid de angels." It was but a few years until both John and the fine young woman he had the perception to idolize were called to their long home.

In the rainy winter which linked the year 1917 to 1918, certain of the young people of the community roduced a home talent entertainment which was given m the ramshackle old Balboa Theater, which once stood on Main Street. A talented young woman, Brownie Brown, wrote and directed a play and played the leading part therein. While the wind blew rain through cracks and knot holes of the dilapidated structure other features illuminated the program, 'but to one member of the audience the crowning event was an address by Captain John Watts.

Captain John appeared on the platform attired in a pullman porter's uniform and cap on which was emblazoned in gold letters the word CAPTAIN, a high white collar, red necktie, a pair of black patent leather shoes and white socks. This event, it will be remembered, took place before the coming of prohibition, so if John had taken a drink, it was perhaps ill-advised but not illicit. After being introduced, he paused a moment as though to produce an effect, then rising to the occasion, he lifted his right hand high in the air and proclaimed in a

voice heard above the howling wind and pelting rain, "Ladies and Gentlemen. When de sun rises in de east and starts on his glorious way across de canopy ob de heavens, he stops when he gets over de town ob Balboa and he says, 'De ladies ob Balboa are de <sup>most</sup> gorgeous and beautiful constellation which dere <sup>is</sup> in de "hole heavens.' Ladies and Gentlemen, hoping for a contmuation ob your most distinguished consideration, I begs to remain your obedient servant, Captain John Watts." Amidst a storm of applause the Captain made an exultant exit.



## MISREPRESENTATION

The summer of 1912 was one of building activity on Balboa Island. A number of houses were going up on the southwest portion of the island and two were built on the South Bay Front as far east as Apolena Avenue. The superintendent of construction was a man named Bostwick, who lived in a house which, in 1949, is 112 Pearl Street.

A student working his way through college wanted to spend the summer at Balboa, but he needed a job. Observing the building activities, he knocked at Mr. Bostwick's door early one morning and made application for work. Mr. Bostwick sized him up and said, "I don't know whether we can use you or not. We have all the common labor we need. We need carpenters. We pay two dollars a day for common labor, two-fifty for carpenters and three for expert carpenters, but they've got to have their tools."

Obviously, the way to get a job was to be a carpenter, and to have some tools. Repairing to the house of kindly relatives who were lending him their cottage, the student ransacked the place. He found a hammer, rip saw, but for some strange reason no cross-cut, a hand ax and sundry other tools. He needed a cross-cut saw, a plane, a brace and some bits, so he crossed the bay and visited Way and Driggers general store, which at that time was situated on Palm Street at the spot where a Ferris Wheel entertains visitors at the Fun Zone. Pouring out his problem into the kindly ears of Churley Way, he proceeded to select from the stock on display the items he felt he needed to qualify him for



the job as carpenter. With the items listed on a sales slip, it appeared that it was going to cost \$12.50 to become a carpenter. As he gathered up the purchases the storekeeper said with a twinkle in his eye, "Now, you've got the tools, you may get the job, but how do I know I'm going to get the money?"

"Why, didn't I just tell you that I'd settle with you when I got my first pay?" said the student.

"Oh, so you did," said Charley, as if that settled the matter.

As Mr. Bostwick approached his home that evening on his way to supper, he was accosted by a young fellow in overalls and a carpenter's apron with a rope over his shoulder, the two ends of which were attached to a long narrow box full of tools. "Needing any carpenters?" was the query with which he was greeted.

"Yes, we are," was the reply, "Got your tools?"

"Yes, look at 'em."

"Can you build a bridge?"

"Sure."

"All right. In the morning go over to the far corner of the island. You'll see a bunch of piles. Old man Gage will be there to help you: The stakes are already set and Lee will be along with the airplane full of lumber pretty soon.

"Old man" Gage was faithful, but Lee and the "Airplane" were several days in making their appearance. The airplane was a black barge with an engine in it. It had a ramp on the forward end which could be

lowered to the beach. This landing barge was used to transport lumber, cement, sewer tile and other material to the shores of Balboa Island from whence it was distributed by team and wagon, there being no surfaced roads on Balboa Island in those good old days.

While waiting for the lumber for the bridge, the future bridge builders were put to work setting out the trees in the "Park," the block bounded by Apolena, Coral, Park and Balboa Avenues, Balboa Avenue at that time being known as Central Avenue and consisting only of some lines on a map and a row of stakes in the sand.

The trees planted by those two have for many years been a grace and beauty to the Island. The bridge they built would not warrant such a description. If there are any defects of bridges which this bridge did not have, they have yet to be enumerated. It was only twelve feet wide, so of course there was no passing. This was of small consequence, because there was only one team and wagon that crossed it in its early years, and it knew not the tires of an automobile for some two years after it was built. Crooked, uneven and unbeautiful it still served its purpose for some twelve years when it was replaced by a better structure, which in turn was supplanted by the concrete bridge built in 1928.





## THE SALESMAN AND THE SOURPUSS

On a bright summer day in 1914 the special car which was bringing a crowd of Pasadena prospects for Balboa Island lots, wended its way cheerfully along the Pacific Electric tracks toward the ocean. Although at this time World War I was beginning to engulf the world, nothing was further from the minds of the excursionists than the disturbance in Europe. They were going to have a good day at the beach. They had been promised clam chowder, barbecued fish, sandwiches, coffee and a boat ride, all at the expense of someone else, so why shouldn't they have a good time?

The three budding real estate men (college students doing a vacation job) were also in a happy frame of mind. They had spent the day before at Balboa, gathering mussels off the rocks, spearing fish in the marine gardens, and making general preparations for the much advertised real estate excursion to Balboa Island. Little did they realize that with all their efforts they were destined to consummate but one sale that day.

We have said it was a cheerful party. But there was one cloud in the sky, one fly in the ointment, one death's head at the feast, and that was a portly individual somewhat past middle age, who scorned to participate in the pleasantries that were being passed back and forth or to otherwise join in any of the festivities of the occasion. He occupied a seat by himself and repulsed all advances from his fellow passengers by a grunt; followed by a muttered exclamation - "Hell of a business." Other passengers were jolly, talkative, communicative, and agreeable. Out of some forty in

the party the young salesmen felt sure of at least ten or twelve sales. The one impediment to their enthusiasm was the sourpuss, whose presence, they felt, was dampening the ardor of the rest of the party.

Venturing to approach this individual, one of the salesmen called his attention to the line of breakers as the car reached the coast near Sunset Beach. "Th lok beautiful to me," was the response. he gii, ever. I get bred of looking at them. They just keep breakmg and breakmg and never do anybody any good."

rawing the attention of this unpleasant person to the bird life at Bolsa Chica elicited the comment "They're noting but coots. They're no good. They rui te wheat fields. The meat on their breasts isn't as big as a hen's egg. You can have 'em. Hell of a busmess."

The group having arrived at Balboa, John Watts' ferry transported them in two loads to the Island, where they repaired to "Collins' Venetian Cafe," a frame structure which stood on the corner of Agate Avenue and the South Bay. This building later became the Island Boa House, which was moved to make way for a small office building.

While one of the real estate men supervised the serving of the lunch by some local talent, the others extolled the virtues of Balboa Island and explained its advantages to the members of the party, whose desire to roam along the beach was overcome by the prospect of a free lunch rather than by the information being imparted. When one of the salesmen finally said "Are there any questions you would like to ask?" obody

asked any except the sourpuss, and his queries were anything but helpful. They concerned themselves with such embarrassing questions as to who was going to put up the money for the \$100,000 hotel; what assurance was there that the ferry would always be in operation; where did the sewer pipes go? The glib responses from the gullible young salesmen, who had accepted in good faith the statements of the promoters of the Island, did not appear to convince the sourpuss, though everyone else seemed perfectly satisfied.

Before lunch was over the three budding business men put their heads together and decided they would draw lots, the loser being assigned the chore of taking charge of the sourpuss and "walking him where the sand's the deepest and the sun's the hottest," to the farthest corner of the island, to keep him from further infecting the rest of the party with his gloom. The loser, hanging up his coat, but intentionally refraining from suggesting that his companion do likewise, proceeded to take this gloomy man for a long walk across the most desolate of the sandy wastes which then comprised Balboa Island. Arrived at a point near the northerly end of the Grand Canal, the dredging of which had been but recently completed, the sourpuss stopped, mopped the sweat from his brow and inquired,

"How much do you have the nerve to charge for these lots?"

"A thousand dollars," replied the salesman.

"It's a hell of a business, but I'll take this one."

"WHAT?" the salesman stammered, accepting the proffered ten dollar bill and reaching for his wilted receipt book.

"I said I'll take this one. They all look alike. I'd rather go to hell than live on one of them, but the family wants a bit of the beach. Now they've got one. You get a commission for selling it don't you? Well, you're a nice young fellow and that will help you get your education. Now let's go back. I want to get away from this place as fast as I can."





## CHOCOLATE AND ORANGES

During the rainy winter of 1918 a young boat builder on Balboa Island crossed the bay late one February night in search of help for an invalid. There was no doctor on the island; there was no one, in fact, except Pa and Ma Collins, the invalid and the boat builder. As he dumped the rain water out of his row boat he noticed, in the gloom, numerous low, black objects parading down the channel. In rowing across the bay he encountered one of them. It was composed of branches, sticks, twigs, tin cans and rotten oranges. As he looked in the direction from which the Santa Ana River came pouring through the center of what is now Lido Isle, he noticed that these peculiar floating masses practically covered the water.

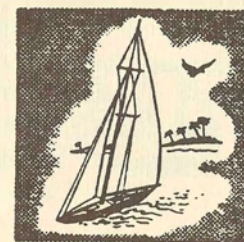
Later, he found a long floating barrier of rubbish running the length of the bay, moving slowly toward the ocean. In order to push through it to regain the island, it was necessary to stand up in the row boat and use the oars like a pair of crutches to pole his way through. This debris had been washed down by the flood waters from the dumps along the river.

The next day the incoming tide could not overcome the flood, with the result that for a time the water flowed neither way, but eddied and swirled about, a southeast wind breaking up the mass of debris and driving it on shore. The water of the bay was the color of chocolate, and the beaches were littered with thousands of oranges and everything else, from decrepit baby buggies to dead calves. A black ooze was deposited wherever the tide reached, piling up in areas of quiet

water to a depth of two feet. One of the heaviest deposits was north of Balboa Island on the sheltered marsh which later became Beacon Bay. Many days elapsed before the bay water clarified. Shellfish, in which the bay then abounded, were smothered by the m1lhon, a lot of dredged channels were partially refilled and the sand bars were converted to mud flats.

Doubtless it was the material carried by the Santa Ana River which built up the peninsula and the marshes upon which the islands of this community were built. Also, the silt and vegetable matter thus deposited are what have made our sand so fertile. In the matter of harbor development, however, the river was a menace.

The construction of the dam at Bitter Point (now noticed as a slight rise in the Coast Highway beyond Newport) and the diversion of the Santa Ana River into the ocean west of that point, have saved the harbor from similar catastrophes in more recent floods.



**Minutes of Meeting of  
Balboa Island Improvement Association  
July 5th, 1919**

President Charles E. Stanton in the chair.

Present: Secretary Baverstock, Treasurer Bostwick,  
and the following Trustees:

Lightipe, Thompson, Young and Baker.

Others present:

Mrs. Collins, Mrs. McNally, Mr. Cubbon, Mr. White,  
Mr. Beek, Dr. Suckow, Mr. Webster, Mr. Garrison, Mrs.  
Garrison, Mr. Bradshaw, Mr. Lyon, Mr. Spencer, Mrs.  
Stanton and Mrs. Baverstock.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and  
approved.

The report of the Secretary was read and accepted.

The report of the Treasurer was read and accepted.



**Committee Reports**

**Bulkhead Committee**

The President reported for the bulkhead committee that the city attorney had advised that it would be necessary to form an assessment district to raise the money to rebuild the bulkhead. He said that the committee had interviewed the city trustees and had found Mr. J. P. Greeley and George Wilson very cooperative but that one member of the trustees had said that if the island sank into the bay it would be a good thing because it was "sold by a bunch of - - - crooks and bought by a bunch of - - - fools."

Mr. Spencer said he did not think the whole island should be assessed for the bulkhead. Mr. Lyon said the assessment should be so graduated that remote lots would bear only a nominal assessment. A general discussion followed. The Committee was directed to continue its work.

**Sewer Committee**

Mr. Bostwick reported that it appeared that a bond issue would be necessary to provide funds for sewers and water lines. A general discussion followed. A letter was read from Mr. Claude G. Putnam saying that unless something was done about the sewers he would sell his place for whatever he could get and move off the island. Committee continued.

**Street Committee**

Mr. White reported that with the aid of Mr. Cubbon enough money had been raised to fill the hole between



the bridge and the county road. He reported further that petitions were being signed to surface Coral and Sapphire Avenues and two alleys.

#### Ferry Committee

Mr. Young reported that his committee had interviewed all the boat concerns but that nobody but Wilson Bros. would have anything to do with it. He said the petition to an island resident to undertake it had been presented and that another petition was being prepared to present to the city. Mr. Webster said he was going to the meeting of the City Trustees next Monday with his boat and would be glad to take anyone who would like to go to get the ferry problem settled.

#### Mosquito Abatement

Mr. Beek reported they had investigated the place where the mosquitos originated and had plenty of bites and a jar of water with larvae in it to prove the committee's contention as to the source of the pests. Sacks of sawdust soaked in oil had been distributed over the area.

Committee thanked and continued.

#### Motion

Moved by Mr. Garrison, 2nd by Mr. Thompson, that a vote of thanks be given Mr. Lightipe and the Edison Company for the beautiful flag pole.

Motion carried.

#### Discussion

Mr. Cubbon called attention to the favorable action

of the county in carrying the harbor bonds.

Mr. Webster said the harbor development would give the town new life.

Mrs. Collins said the low prices at which some real estate men were selling lots was hurting the island.

Mr. Bostwick said prices are a matter of supply and demand and will adjust themselves.

Mr. Beek said that if the Association program for improvements is carried out values will surely increase. He predicted that the time will come when there won't be a lot on the island worth less than five hundred dollars and that front lots will some day be worth five thousand!

Mr. Bradshaw said he believed Mr. Beek was right but not unless we all pull together and get the bulkhead and water and sewer problems settled.

#### Motion

Mr. Baker moved, 2nd by Dr. Suckow, that the Committee *in* charge of the 4th of July celebration be *given* a vote of thanks for all their hard work. Motion carried.

#### ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business the meeting adjourned.

## SERVICE A LA CARTE-1920

The ferryman, who had run the evening shift and tied the ferry up at midnight, was awakened five hours later by a heavy pounding on his door.

"What is it?" he mumbled sleepily.

"Ah wants to get across de bay," came a voice through the window.

"The ferry starts running at six-thirty," said the ferryman, turning over.

"But Ah's got to catch de five-fifty car to get to mah job."

"What job?" asked the ferryman, yawning.

"Portah," came the response.

"There's a row boat alongside the ferry. Row it across the bay, tie it up to the landing and lay the oars on the seats. The ferry will pick it up later."

"But mistah, Ah cain't oar."

Returning fifteen minutes later, with the five cent fare in his pocket, the ferryman found himself meditating upon the responsibilities and vicissitudes of public utilities.

## THE STORY OF THE FAIR LADY AND THE RUNAWAY FERRY BOAT

Since the fair lady was the only one of her sex participating in the event we are about to relate she must perforce be assigned the part of heroine. To fail to do so would not be quite courteous and since the writer is a sea-faring man, he is constrained to reward the claim of Gilbert and Sullivan, in whose Pinafore it is claimed that "Sailors welcome ladies most politely." With all due respect to the heroine's charms, it must be recorded that she was neither blond, redhead nor brunette. Her coloring was neutral and her life, until the event we are reviewing, definitely drab. According to her own report she had never been selected queen of any beauty contest, nor had she been arrested as a shop lifter, robbed of priceless jewels, sued anyone for breach of promise, nor engaged in any other of the conventional activities of those females the press call glamorous. She had lived a good life but, until the opening of this chapter, one free from adventure. It must have been an urge for adventure which prompted her to board the ferry boat Joker in the early evening of the rainiest, roughest, stormiest night of a very wet and stormy winter.

This was before the removal of the sand bars, in the days when the lower bay bar extended into the Balboa turning basin tapering off at Agate Avenue, while the Bay Island bar over-lapped it and ended just south of it near Palm Street, Balboa. At low tide the



ferry boat had to follow an "S" shaped course to cross the bay.

Southeasterly of this junction of the bars, Ed Burge's palatial yacht Louise was anchored and not far away her sister the Maud F. Near these vessels was anchored a barge on which their crews kept tools, cans of paint, spare coils of rope and other impedimenta.

The wind and waves of the southeaster which was raging up the bay dislodged a coil of rope from this barge and put it squarely on the course of the Joker, which, with the heroine aboard, and ferryman Ira Rainbolt at the wheel, was making its difficult way across the bay. When the propeller encountered the coil of rope, there was a sudden throbbing of the engine, a jerking sensation throughout the boat and then an ominous silence as the engine stopped and the storm drove the ferry onto the Bay Island bar.

Failing to get the engine started again, the skipper devoted his attention to ringing the bell and blowing the whistle in the hope that there might be some hardy boatman who would hear his distress signals and come to his rescue.

Enter the hero. Since we have a heroine we must ipso facto have a hero. Casting about among the four mere men who participated in this production, we will select the one who, according to such members of the other sex as have noticed him at all, is the very merest of men;° it being stipulated that all men are mere, some more than others.

At this point it would be nice to say, "Hearing the

distress signals, the hero sprang to action." Well, he didn't spring to action; he stumbled into action, barked his shins and nearly fell overboard getting into the little passenger ferry Islander, cutting her loose and splashing away in a lather of foam to get a line on the Joker to pull her off the bar.

The Joker's distress signals had been heard by others. Reginald White and Ed Offerle of the Rodger Bros. staff got quickly under way in the motor boat Tom Cat. Maneuvering the Tom Cat's stern to the Joker, they got a line aboard and added their power to that of the Islander in the effort to set the Joker free.

Whether the Islander got too far to starboard or the Tom Cat too far to port is a question which is still open to dispute. The fact was that the Tom Cat's tow rope - longer than the Islander's - got fouled on a bitt on the latter's after deck. The next thing that happened was that with their sterns tied down neither boat could steer and they were driven by the seas willy-nilly broadside against the bluff end of the Joker.

In an effort to extricate the Islander from between the two heavier craft, our hero clambered out onto the deck of the Joker and cast loose his tow line, getting it aboard the Islander and ready to pass to the Joker again when he got free.

Heroes are men of determination and great presence of mind. They do everything right. Well, fortunately for our story, this one did everything wrong. Stowing his line aboard, and pushing his clutch in, he found that the Tom Cat's line was holding him prisoner.

Through the howling of the storm and the crunching of the sides of the boats as the waves bashed them together, someone yelled, "Cut her loose." The hero did so. As the line parted, the Islander lurched ahead, depositing him partly on its after deck, partly on the deck of the Joker, but mostly in the bay. Clambering aboard the Joker with the aid of Ira Rainbolt and the heroine, he rose to see the Islander speeding away through the night, running lights gleaming, engine running full speed, clutch in, and nobody on board!

It was just at this point that the fair lady clinched her claim to the role of heroine. Thus far she had been little more than part of the scenery, one of the props, may we say. Now, having helped drag a bedunked boatman from the bay, she seemed to have gained a feeling of importance, and a realization that she was a leading member of the cast.

"We've got to catch it," she screamed, jumping pell mell into the cockpit of the Tom Cat, which was now occupying the berth just vacated by the Islander.

The ferryman stayed with his vessel, but the other four, Reg White at the wheel, Ed Offerle conning him, the hero astride the forward deck, and the heroine shouting advice and encouragement from the cockpit, went charging away in a cloud of foam, in pursuit of the runaway ferry boat.

It could reasonably be assumed that a motor boat under such circumstances would follow a crescent shaped course until it wound up on the beach or hit something. Not so the Islander. It had never before been on a cruise entirely on its own, so it took full

advantage of the chance to display its individuality. Each wave that struck its bow or hit its rudder was reflected in a change of course. The pursuing Tom Cat was never able to get within a boatlength.

It is not of record that the individual shivering on the bow of the Tom Cat is a person of piety, but others on board testify that on that wild night he engaged in prayer. He is alleged to have muttered over and over again, "Oh Lord, if it must hit something, let it be something cheap." As if in defiance to his supplication, the Islander suddenly dived between the two largest crmsng yachts anchored in the bay. Coming around one of them, it came charging toward the Tom Cat as though to run its pursuer down.

The quartet on the Tom Cat seemed to realize that it was now or never. The helmsman set a course to pass portside to portside. Our hero, on the forward deck, got ready to make the greatest leap on record. Ed Offerle got a boat hook ready to drag a wet sailor out of the bay. The heroine screamed, "Oh! Oh! Oh!" as a numb figure flew through the air and landed awkwardly on the forward deck of the Islander.

There was something speculative, something uncertain, about the takeoff from the Tom Cat. There was nothing indefinite about the landing on the Islander. It was very conclusive. The Islander had a glass cabin and a visor which projected some eight inches forward. This visor printed a wide black and blue mark on our hero's equator which lasted a very long time.

Clambering over the cabin top and splashing down into the wallowing cockpit, it took him but a few minutes



to get the boat to its berth and to ba? out the water which had come aboard during the wild excursion.

The ferryman had not been idle. He had succeeded in getting his engine started and with the aid o! a boat-hook and his knife, he had fished the offending rope up and cut it short. With the work of the Tom Cat and his one free propeller, he got off the bar and returned to the Balboa Island slip, there being no further calls for ferry service that night.

Whatever favored spot was to have been the destination of the heroine when she boarded the ferry that wild and blustery evening, was destined to disappointment. Where she thought she was going is still a mystery. She seemed to have forgotten that detail entirely, as with a zeal born of her new found sense of importance, she built a roaring fire in the boathouse stove and cooked up a pot of hot coffee for three shivering mariners. Yes, three. The hero had slunk off to a bath tub of hot water and the solace of dry blankets.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Islander had another cruise all by itself. It was turned loose at daylight on a calm morning by a young fellow who wanted to see what would happen. The culprit was destined to atone for his indiscretion. Years-later, with the complete concurrence of the owner of the ferry, he was sentenced to a long term at hard labor as a judge of the Superior Court of Orange County!

## OCEAN PIE

Youngsters growing up on Balboa Island are likely to become sailors of one class or another. Whether they become sailors or not they are in such close proximity to the salt water that there are few of them who cannot swim, row, sail and understand the language of the sea.

In the late nineteen twenties the Sea Scout movement entered Newport Harbor and enrolled both senior and junior support from residents of Balboa Island. It was while Bob Boyd, who was destined to become Commodore of the Balboa Yacht Club, was serving as skipper of the local Sea Scout fleet that a cruise was undertaken on the sloop *Westerly*. Fifteen Sea Scouts were aboard on that bright morning as the little vessel under Captain Boyd's command made its way out of the harbor entrance and off to Catalina Island.

The *Westerly* was a sloop of 32 feet with a small auxiliary engine and a twelve gallon gasoline tank. Realizing the limit on the cruising radius of twelve gallons of gasoline the skipper had wisely provided a reserve supply by having two five gallon cans of fuel stowed below. The day of the cruise dawned fair, one of those quiet days when the wind gods seem to be asleep. The sails hung loose, or slatted about with each roll of the vessel, so the engine was run most of the time. Nearing the coast on the way back the tank ran dry, and one of the crew going below for the cans of gasoline, found both of them empty, nail holes in the caps and bottoms of each showing how the thief had got the fuel out. Sea Scouts still speculate as to



why this pirate took the trouble to carefully replace the empty cans.

Hailing a fishing boat, a request was made for enough gas to get home on. The fisherman had no gas to spare but offered to tow the Westerly into port. A protest came from the crew and upon the question being put, the entire ship's company voted against being towed. Thus did this group of valiant young mariners pit their skill and their resources, plus those of a good skipper, against whatever old Neptune had to offer.

Hardly had their declaration of independence been delivered until those sailors found out what Neptune had in mind. Descending at first from an overcast sky came wisps and veil-like puffs of fog which gradually settled around the Westerly, blotting out all view of ships and shore and placing their safety on that fine old formula of "log, lead and lookout."

Watches were stood just as though under way, drift and set were carefully estimated, an anchor with ample cable was lowered so that in the event the ship got near shore she would be kept out of the breakers and then the little ship's company settled down for a night of calm ocean and pea soup fog. That the predicament of the Sea Scouts was simply annoying and not dangerous was realized by all the horny-handed sons of the sea who frequent the yacht clubs and boat landings around Newport Harbor, but since few of the mothers of the Sea Scouts fell into that classification they were uneasy. They only knew that their boys were at sea, that night had come on, that there was a heavy fog, and that there seemed to be an ominous note in

the bells and fog horns which penetrated the gloom. Their mental distress vocalized itself over the telephone. The Harbor Master, all adult affiliates of the Sea Scout movement and the yachting brass of the harbor were besieged with appeals for help. "Where's my wandering boy tonight" was revived, sans the religious significance, and various suggestions bordering on calling out the fire department and ordering the militia mobilized, were made.

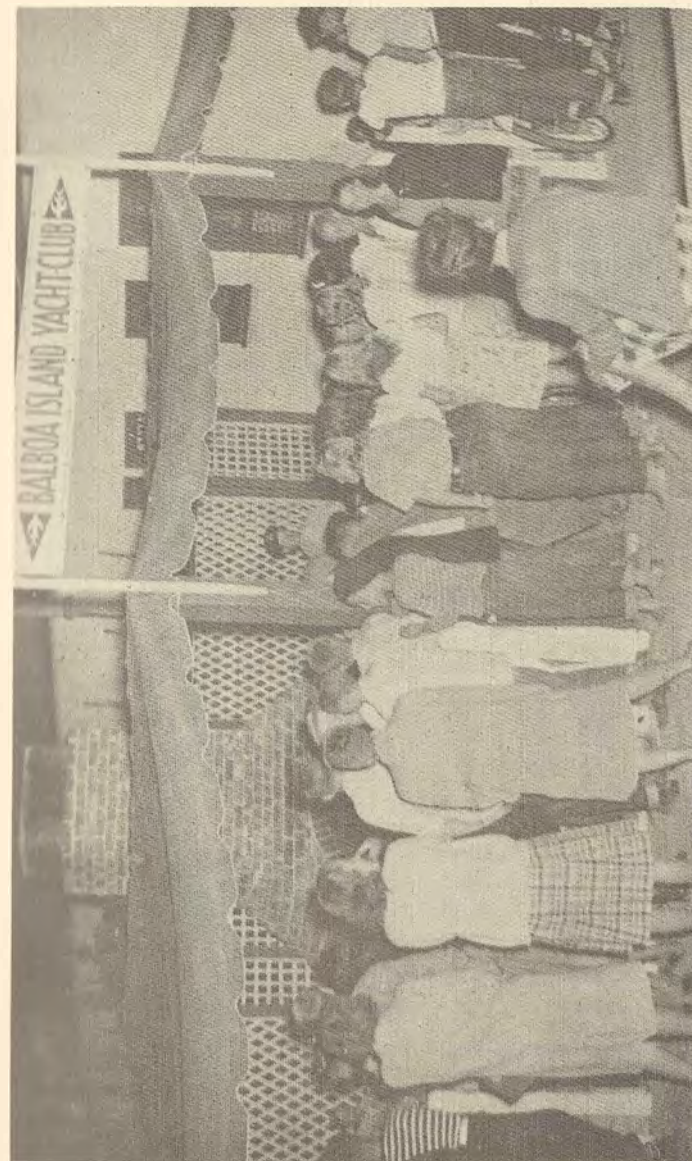
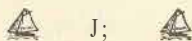
Responding to this appeal, Byron Marshall of Balboa Island, one of the founders of the Sea Scout movement, hunted up another boatman of kindred interest who had a twin-screw cruiser. These two, motivated in a small measure by a desire to rescue fellow seamen in distress, and in a much larger measure by a desire to escape the telephone, stocked the small cruiser with ample supplies of everything from gasoline to coffee cream and put to sea. From their point of departure to the bell buoy, crawling along at a snail's pace in the fog, they had plenty of time to plan their strategy. They decided that starting at the bell buoy they would cut the ocean up into a lot of sections suggestive of cutting up a pumpkin pie. They ran out from the bell in a southwesterly direction five miles, then turned to port and ran off towards the southeast a mile, then back to the bell buoy; then they laid out another slice of ocean to port of the first one and kept at it all night. Running slowly, the procedure called for sounding the fog horn at frequent intervals and shutting down every five minutes to listen for a response. One belated fishing boat was encountered but as the long night hours wore away and the ocean was



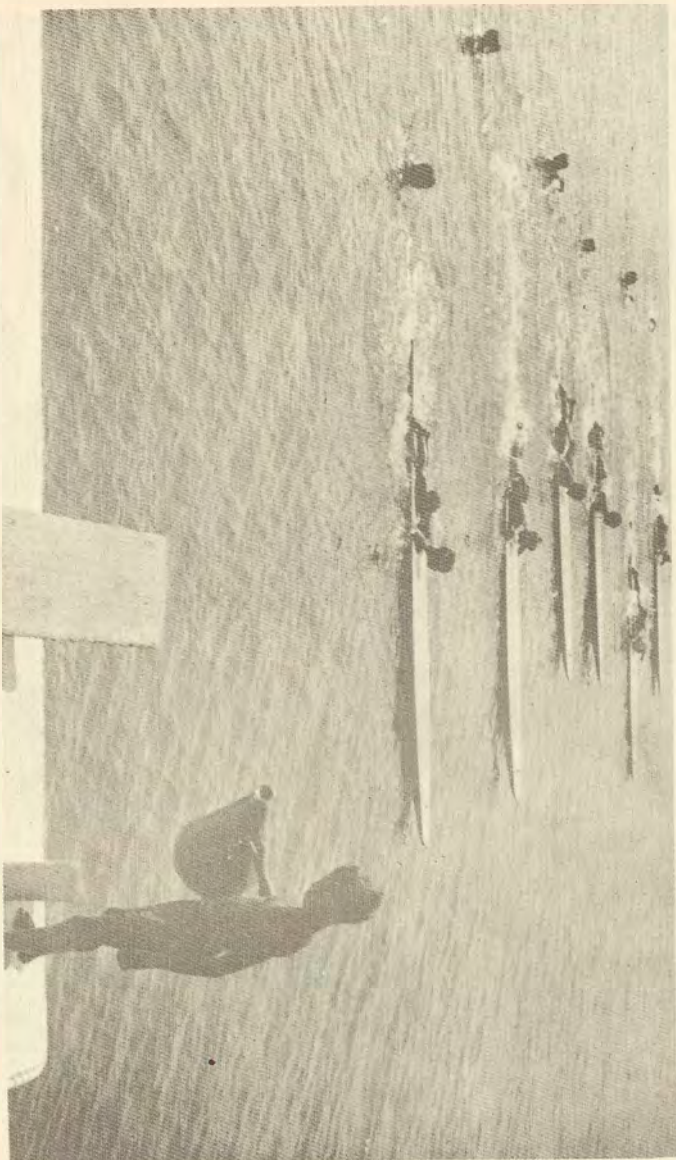
reduced to well-proportioned pieces of aquatic pie, no trace of the wandering heroes was found.

As daylight came filtering dimly through the fog, hopes of the relief party rose because by that time they were on a course well toward Point San Juan, and believed that the drift would have put their quarry somewhere within the area that they were then combing, so it was no surprise to hear a far away answer to their whistle signal when, with the engine shut down, they drifted and listened about a mile and a half south of the Laguna shore. Cutting the fog in the direction from which the hails seemed to come, they ran slowly along and finally made out the Westerly looming up on their starboard, anchor down, sails flapping about, no bottom within reach, the crew shivering on deck and responding with enthusiasm to the invitation to have some hot coffee.

By such experience did these young mariners learn the lesson of patience which was to serve them well in their service at sea in the coming world war.



Standing room only, for late comers



## ANNALS OF THE OLDEST YOUNGEST YACHT CLUB

On a pleasant morning in the summer of 1923 the Port Captain of the Newport Harbor Yacht Club was working on the cruising sloop "Carrollie" getting her ready for a trip to San Clemente Island, when he noticed that the group of three or four youngsters who were usually around had swelled to a dozen; the reason being that he had let drop the remark that he would probably make a short run to sea that day to try out a new propeller.

The dock to which the "Carrollie" was moored was situated at a spot on Balboa Island where children were wont to forgather. Probably the proximity of a boat house, with work benches and tools not too carefully guarded, as well as the numerous boats, accounted for the number of youngsters who frequented the place.

By the time the trial trip was to begin there were thirty-five young sailors ready to go to sea. Two trial trips had to be run to accomodate the volunteers. With all this interest in yachting on the part of the young idea it seemed that it should be coordinated, so there was formed the Balboa Island Yacht Club. It was for yachtsmen from six to sixteen years of age, was to elect flag officers, conduct its own affairs, have no dues or assessments but always have money in the treasury; this last matter to be attended to by the one adult member, who became the honorary staff commodore.

The juniors soon took matters into their own hands, levied dues of twenty-five cents a year and adopted a



money raising device which makes the finance committees of senior yacht clubs look like pikers. They hold a club picnic every other Tuesday, charge everybody fifty cents for the feed, put the proceeds in the trophy fund and let the mothers supply the food! Fathers are allowed to contribute cash if they wish, so it is no wonder that their trophy display frequently outshines that of the senior yacht clubs.

The classifications employed for many years for rowing, swimming and diving contests were "little," "middle sized" and "big." Thus, we had races for "little girls," "middle sized boys," etc. These designations have since been supplanted by a plan which uses age classifications. Four to seven year olds race in one group. There are three other age classes for both boys and girls, making seven groups altogether in each event. During the past season there were so many four to seven year old swimmers that this class had to be divided into two groups.

In spite of the fact that the club is now twenty-seven years old, it is still the youngest yacht club as far as the average age of its members is concerned, for it was soon found that there were many children under six who enjoyed all the club activities. Starting with thirty-five members, the list gradually rose to a peak of 225 in 1946, but there were more active participants in all the races in 1949 than in any previous year.

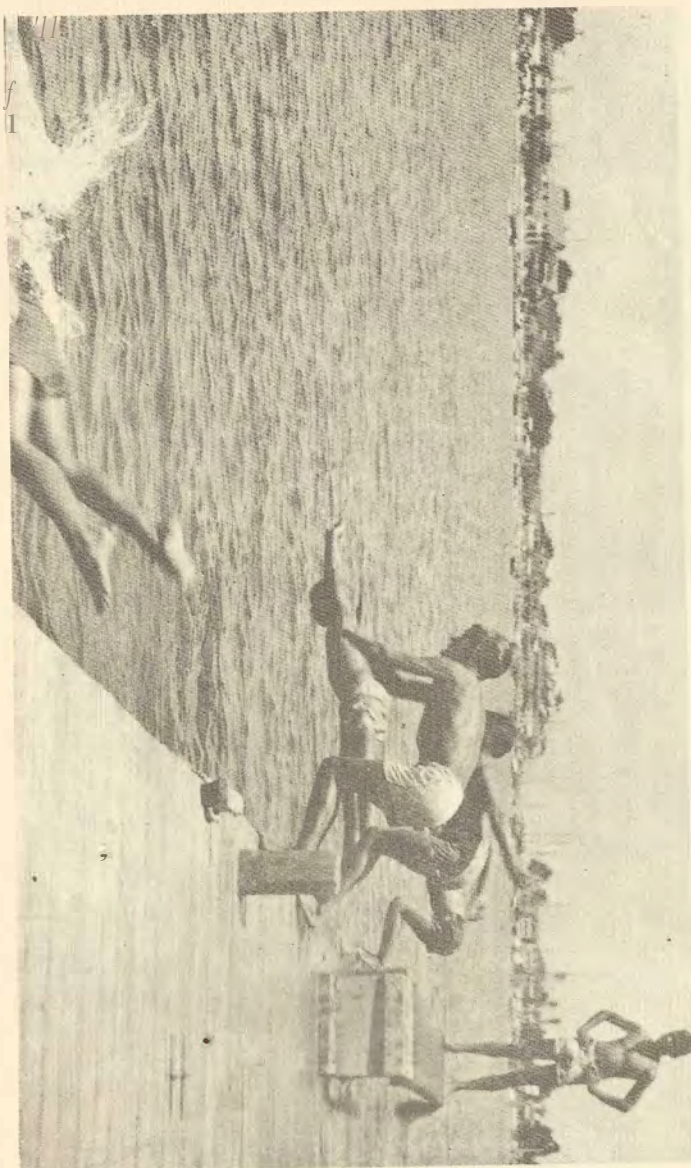
Sailing, swimming, diving, rowing, paddleboarding, cruising, eating and crabbing are the major sports of this junior organization. The cruising, of course, is done on the yachts of older yachtsmen; eating takes place at



To see the trophies and the children who won them, see page 41.



Boys Diving Contest



the picnics, and as for crabbing, well, these youngsters have not yet enjoyed sufficient contact with their elders to be really expert at this time-honored adjunct of the yachting game. There are times, however, when their race committees get the same brand of razzberries usually served to senior race committees.

Membership in the club and participation in its events has always been open to any youngster interested in aquatic sports, even those hailing from such foreign ports as Newport or Balboa.

Typical of the races are these results from old files. For July, 1927, we find the following winners:

Sailing Races — no age classification

Free for All	1st Bernard McNally
	2nd Bill Merrill
	3rd Helen Murphy

Snowbirds	1st Bill Murphy
	2nd Andy Merriman
	3rd Jack Crook

Swimming:

Big Girls	1st Helen Murphy
	2nd Gertrude Murphy

Medium size Girls	1st Didi Vibert
	2nd Barbara Murphy

Little Girls	1st Jane Ellen Magee
	2nd Pat Rollins

Kicker Boats:	1st Sandy MacKay
	2nd Herbert Gillman



And here are some of the race results from a day in 1936:

Thursday A. M., Rowing:

Little Girls	1st Jean Hahn 2nd Carroll Ridgway
Little Boys	1st Donald Kinney 2nd Allan Beek
Medium size Girls	1st Joan Penberthy 2nd Connie Ridgway
Medium size Boys	1st Dick Munroe 2nd Dick Hahn
Big Boys	1st Fay Penberthy 2nd Donald Hayes

The authority of the history made taken over in recent years is a on which Mr. Felix Murphy have served, having been succeeded upon his retirement by Mr. Ronald Barlow. However, the activities of adult club affairs have been more in the nature of rendering service than in acting as governing agencies. In its infancy, Mrs. McSpadden, mother of the first secretary, was one of the club's ardent supporters. Since then Mrs. Murphy, Mrs. Westwood (Gertude Murphy, whose daughter Barbara was the first child of an ex-member to join the club), Ronald Barlow and Mrs. Wymann Williams, all of her staff members, have been actively helpful.

Two ex-club members, Bill Bangs and Eugene Baum, have served as race committee for the sailing

races, for the reason that the older club members cannot serve as record keepers because they are always skippers. For similar reasons, Mrs. Barlow (who happens to be a former long distance swimmer) and Mrs. Williams (who happens to be a former diving champion) assist in judging swimming and diving. Their helpful advice has developed some fine swimmers and divers among club members.

Due to the interest and generosity of the Bangs family, the club now has three large perpetual trophies; the Miriam Kirk Memorial Trophy for a special series of Snowbird races; the Burl Johnson Memorial Trophy for a series of Balboa Dinghy races, and the Dick Munroe Memorial Trophy, awarded at the end of each season to the all-round champion of the club. Dick Munroe and Burl Johnson, who were both club commodores, lost their lives in World War II.

A rapid turnover in membership has been due to the inability of members to restrain their tendency to violate the constitution. It is set forth that members shall not be over sixteen years of age, but, sad to say, each season finds a considerable group of them withdrawing because of their violation of this provision. This unfortunate circumstance is in a measure compensated for by the replacements they often bring in after the passage of a few years. For example, Gene Baum, a charter member of 1923, supplies replacements in the form of little Mike and Stephen.

While the personnel has changed, certain characteristics of the members have remained the same. The freshness, the enthusiasm, the enterprise of the mem-

bers of 1923 seem to be equally typical of the members of 1949, so it is sometimes difficult for an aging ex-Port Captain to remember which group he is addressing.

Following is the list of commodores of the B. I. Y. C.

1923-24 Robert Griffen	1937 Ferrier Penberthy
1925 Jack Crook	1938 Ted Munroe
1926 Thoburn White	1939 Dick Munroe*
1927 Bill Merrill	1940 Barton Beek
1928 Dan Murphy	1941 Bob Klemmer
1929 Bernard McNally	1942 Allan Beek
1930 Robert Rollins	1943 Arthur Penberthy
1931 Bill Murphy	1944 Morris Kirk
1932 Robert McKenzie	1945 Robert Yardley
1933 Burl Johnson*	1946 Seymour Beek
1934 Robert Fritsch	1947 Richard Deaver
1935 Paul Penberthy	1948 Gilbert Kraemer
1936 Warwick Hayes	1949 Morgan Morgan

Officers elected to serve during the season of 1950 are: Commodore, Robert Halderman; Vice Commodore, Benny Benjamin; Rear Commodore, Noel Barlow; Secretary, Ann Rawlins.

• Deceased.

## SHINE ON, LITTLE LIGHTS

*"Ere my heart beats too coldly and faintly  
To remember sad things, yet be gay,  
I would sing a brief song of the world's little children  
Magic hath stolen away."*

In the year 1921 when there were but a few scattered houses on Balboa Island, when great flocks of terns and gulls, cormorants and plovers waded about in the shallow water or fed undisturbed on the sand bars, there was born on the shore of the island an event which was destined to evoke the enthusiastic interest of many a child and not a few adults in the years to come.

This event, sponsored by a group of boat owners of Balboa, was to consist of a parade of illuminated water craft, to be conducted annually and called a tournament of lights.

While this tournament dates its birth as 1921, it was not the first time that decorative lights were reflected from the waters of Newport Bay. In August, 1907, kindly Fred Beckwith, postmaster and leader in the founding of Balboa, decorated the motor boat Flora with a string of Japanese lanterns in honor of a group of Pasadena people who were spending the day at Balboa. One of the Pasadena group was a young student who had lately arrived from Denver, Colorado who told glowing tales of marvelous illuminated 'street

\*From "The Truants" by Walter de la Mare: Peacock Pie, Henry Holt and Company, New York.



parades which used to be conducted in Denver by an organization known as the Knights of the Silver Serpent, a feature of the Denver Carnival, "The Festival of Mountain and Plain."

On the Fourth of July, 1908, the remembered glories of these silver serpent knights were again reincarnated when a group of Balboa Islanders including the young sons of the Rev. Harry White (still a resident of the Island in 1949) staged a reproduction of the battle of Manila, then just ten years past. Battleships built of abandoned row boats with turrets made of cheese boxes and cannons of water pipe spouted roman candles while row boats and canoes circled about all aglow with Japanese lanterns. Participating in this festive affair were the genial Fred Beckwith and an Italian gondolier named Scarpa, who from that time on carried Japanese lanterns on his gondola as permanent decorations both night and day.

In 1913 an enterprising young business man of Balboa, Walter Gustlin, promoted an event featuring lighted boats which was called the "Illuminated Water Parade." Prizes were awarded, the first place being won by H. R. Johnson who thirty-three years later captured a first prize in the tournament of 1946. Similar events were staged again in 1919 and 1920, leading to the establishment of the Balboa Tournament of Lights in 1921.

While support for this event came from both the Island and the Peninsula, it was the children of the

Island who were then, and continued to be, its most enthusiastic participants.

Enthusiasm is infectious. The spirit got into the old from the young and the fleets of row boats, canoes and small sail boats were augmented by motor boats, power cruisers and large auxiliaries. The year 1929 saw no less than eighteen power cruisers and numerous motor boats and auxiliaries decorated and illuminated, each towing its quota of small craft.

Those who loved and labored in the cause of these gala enterprises enjoyed the participants as much as the beautiful things they produced. There is no music so lovely as the voices of happy children, and there is something very appealing about these same voices when floating across the water come such plaintive messages as, "My tow line broke. Will you take me up to my tow boat?" or, "Some of my candles have gone out. Please help me light them." Some of these same children did their part faithfully for many years, . . . so many years that they ceased to be children and were lost in the drab environment of the adult world. Why does the enterprise of thirteen have to give place to the apathy of thirty? We understand the lament of the poet when he tells us that-

*"The waves tossing surf in the moonbeam,  
The albatross lone on the spray,  
Alone know the tears wept in vain for the children  
Magic hath stolen away."*

And one tournament followed another, schemes of illumination were as varied as the imagination of youth. Not matter what the plan nor how unsuccessfully it was



carried out, the result was always pleasing. Boats are beautiful, so are lights reflected by the water, and so are children. Float these lovely things on the placid surface of our tranquil bay, with a moon overhead, or fire works flashing in the sky. Add to this romantic music and the cadence of youthful voices and you have something so charming that it is no wonder the world came by the thousands and finally by the hundreds of thousands to witness it.

Favorite songs and poems were illustrated, sea legends portrayed, famous characters represented. Noah's Ark, The Caravels of Columbus and other famous ships, were all there at one time or another. Jonah and the whale appeared as did Washington crossing the Delaware. Barnacle Bill was not forgotten nor was Little Red Riding Hood.

Bob and Betty had their water lilies, Dorrance his Viking ship, Virginia her Ariel, Allan his Dream Castle with gleaming towers, Frances and Celestine were mermaids, Marie was the Statue of Liberty. Tiny Breta, all in white, was the "gem of purest ray serene" in a mysterious sea cavern in which horrendous marine monsters and gorgeous fish-all silver and gold-swam in and out amid waving fronds of sea weed, while in another cave of glittering blue-green ice sat the spirit of the North Wind.

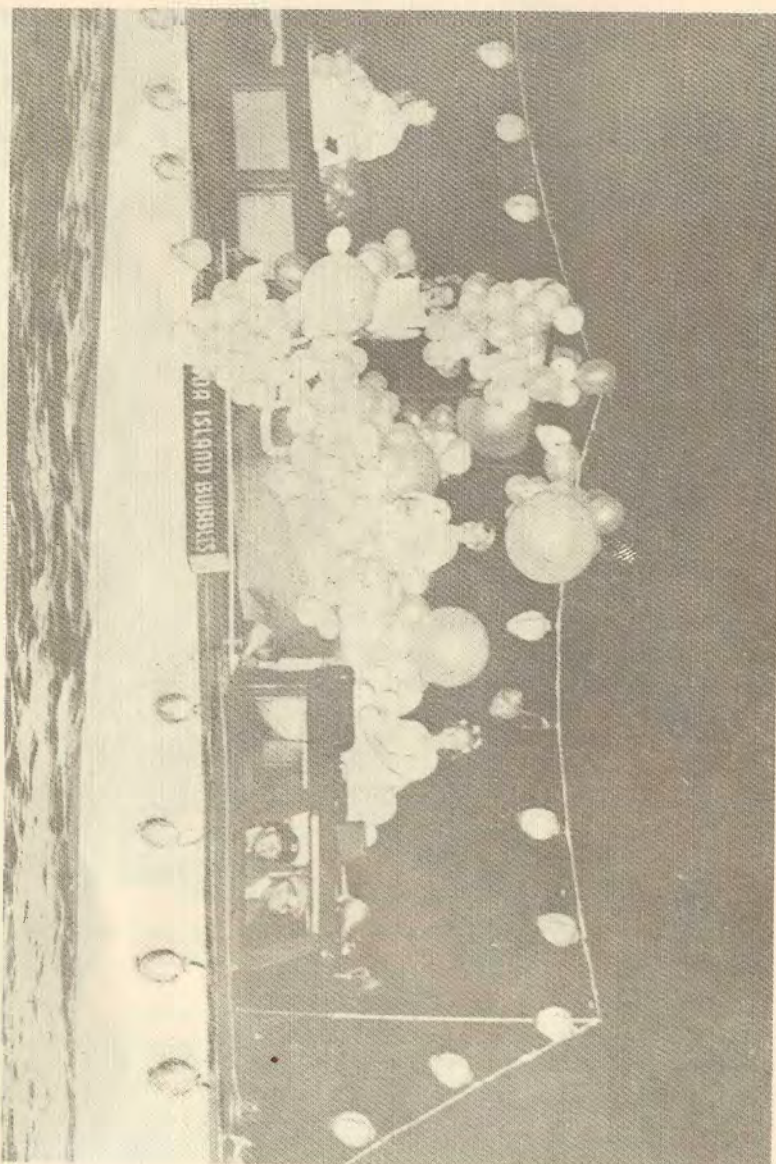
An ancient washerwoman (aged 12) scrubbed clothes in sud, made of little white balloons which dripped overboard and floated away in the gleam of following spot lights.

Lupine and poppies there were. Brown-eyed Evelyn



Sea Nymph - Nancy and Peggy Baird





was a <sup>great</sup> orange poppy, while tall Patricia was a blue and white lupine.

A slender maiden of thirteen summers adopting the <sup>pose</sup> of the little kneeling figure in front of the San Francisco Palace of Fine Arts was the worshipper at the shrine of light, the light being an enormous Japanese lantern six feet high.

The Owl and the Pussy Cat, with their pea green boat, wended their melodious way along the course, as did Mother Goose, Alice and the Mad Hatter and the March Hare, the toad and the frog, Captain Kidd and other celebrities of song and story.

Now was the religious theme overlooked. On one occasion a cardboard structure called The Village Church, with art windows of red and blue and a boat bell in its steeple regaled the audience with sacred music plucked from the melodious if reluctant needs of a primitive organ. Years later the three Christian graces Faith, Hope and Charity, were represented by an entry in which three boats participated, the spirit in each being a "fair young maid" with Faith typified by a cross, Hope by an anchor and Charity by a heart.

The thorough spontaneity of these amateur events stimulated general interest and participation, as well as recognition by people of discrimination and taste. After seeing the tournament of 1929, Governor C. C. Young, man of letters, co-author of "English Poetry: Its Principles and Progress," statesman, . . . one of the most distinguished gentlemen ever to hold public office, . . . exclaimed, "It is soon of the most beautiful things I have ever seen! I think it is the most



charming feature is its freedom from commercialism, and the realization that these beautifully decorated boats are the result of the spontaneous effort of these fine young people."

Notwithstanding this tribute commercial interests insisted that advertising entries be admitted. So there were elaborate, expensive, spectacular, glorified floating billboards in the parade. Transient visitors were probably impressed but several hundred yachtsmen and children dropped out, never to return. Thus our festival of loveliness was lost on 'the unknown road that beauty takes at last.'

After the black-hulled barges with all their evidence of the advertiser's art pass by; after the strident squawking of the loud speakers dies away, some of us, looking out upon the somber waters of the bay, still see in memory that far caravan of little boats, little lights, and little sailors wending its luminous way down the long channel of the years. As the last weary fishing boat seeks its berth and the last belated yachtsman his sleepy anchorage, the night mist rolling in from the ocean bedims our view, but we hear across the placid water the youthful voices of those brave young mariners mingling in the melodies of other years.

*"In the gathering dusk of the twilight,  
When the stars twinkle into the grey,  
Seems to echo the far-away cddling of children  
Magic hath stolen away."*

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EARLY HISTORY OF BALBOA ISLAND

*The following chapter has been appended in the thought that newcomers to Balboa Island might like to know something of its early history and that old timers might enjoy reviewing the struggle against the adversities which engulfed the island some thirty years ago.*

Balboa Island first attained public notice in 1906 when the small steam dredge with which the Collins' interests dredged the channel along the East Newport water front was towed across the bay and began dredging a channel and filling a sand bar which it was announced was to be called Balboa Island. W. S. Collins was the prime mover in this enterprise.

The first two houses to be built on the new development are, in 1949, still standing. The first, known successively as the Dickinson, Englehart, Bettin place, is situated at 404 South Bay Front, next door to the Island Boat House. The second, the Collins' residence, was named the White Swan. It is situated on the South Bay front, just west of Pearl. It has been well preserved by its owner, Mrs. Jessie Collins, but looks less like a swan since a cupola, which adorned it for some fifteen years, was removed.

In 1907 lots were sold on contracts of sale for three hundred dollars for inside lots and six hundred for those on the water front. Collins' Isle was filled and work



started on Collins' Castle in the same year.

Prior to the dredging there was a long meandering sand spit from what later became Harbor Island, Collins' Island and the area between Park Avenue and the South Bay, to a point perhaps a hundred feet south of the corner of Coral and Balboa Avenues. This spit had a few breaks in it and was, at its widest, a little over a hundred feet, while in many places its width was not more than five or ten feet. It was covered with a dense growth of wire grass and some of it was above all but the highest tides. However, in 1907 it was possible to row a boat over most of Balboa Island.

The subdividers actually owned a much greater acreage than they subdivided. Their plan to establish the south shore of the island along a line running from Topaz Avenue out through the present bay toward the Corona del Mar cliffs, was interrupted by the establishment of government bulkhead lines, upon the insistence of a group of harbor-minded citizens led by City Attorney Clyde Bishop. Thus was this beautiful expanse of still water preserved for posterity.

The little steam dredge worked its way along the south, north and east shores of the island during the next six years, finishing its work by digging the Grand Canal in 1913. Upon completion of this work it was towed to Sunset Beach, after a hazardous crossing of the harbor bar on a quiet morning. Its arrival at Sunset Beach was the occasion for a celebration. A great sign was erected in full view of the Pacific Electric car line which read, "Sunset Beach, Where the Fleets of the World Will Lie Proudly at Anchor." When the tide is

low, Balboa Islanders driving through Sunset Beach can still see the bones of this dredge, rotting in the mud flat opposite 18th Street in that community, north across the channel from a business concern which in 1949 advertises "Mexican Foods..",

While filling raised the island only to the high tide line, a makeshift bulkhead standing ten inches above the sidewalk kept out high water except the extreme high tides of 1914 and 1936. In 1920 the Orange County Harbor Commission offered to raise the island three feet with dredged material at a cost of fifteen dollars per lot. A local enthusiast undertook to get property owners committed to this project, but met objection from owners of the existing houses, and only escaped the indignation of the citizenry by taking refuge in a distant part of the state until his indiscretion was less keenly resented.

In spite of the low altitude, small lots, stingy alleys and shoddy improvements, the natural charm of the place, the low prices, lavish promises and high pressure salesmanship resulted in the sale of some four hundred lots between the years 1907 and 1914. Values reached their peak just before the outbreak of World War I. Lots on the Grand Canal and facing the "Park" (Park Avenue and Coral) brought a thousand dollars each, while some on the South Bay brought as much as \$2500.

Shortly before the war it was noticed that the improvement program had come to a stop. No sidewalks were being laid, construction of the little bulkhead along the waterfront had ceased and over half the island was left without water pipes or sewers. Paving and street lights which had been promised never materialized.

Motorboats, which were offered "free with every lot" were not forthcoming. It was difficult to find anyone to sign deeds to lots which had been purchased on installments, though there always seemed to be someone to accept payments due. The platoon of salesmen who used to greet every arriving Pacific Electric car disbanded and went their several ways. Particularly missed was a big jovial fellow who wore a yacht cap with "Real Estate" emblazoned in gold letters across the front.

Among other signs of decay, the ferry, which had been operated by the promoters, ceased to function. The ferry boat, along with other properties, was attached in satisfaction of debts. The island was given service for a time by a boat owned by Joseph Ferguson, maintained by the Jackson-Norton Company, and operated by John Watts, the colored ferryman referred to elsewhere in this booklet. After some four years of desultory operation, this arrangement was discontinued. One factor making for dissatisfaction on the part of those who owned and maintained the boat may have been John's idea about fares. He was likely to forget the detail of collecting fares from patrons who had the generosity to present him with a token of esteem now and then, in the form of currency, or maybe a chicken, or a bottle. It was rumored that such proceeds of the ferry business were not shared with John's partners. Be this as it may, the partnership was dissolved and the ferry ceased operation in the fall of 1918.

The outbreak of war in 1914, together with the abandonment of the island by its exploiters, led to a depreciation in values seldom equaled in the history of real estate. Entire blocks of property had been mort-

gaged to raise funds with which to install the promised utilities. The funds were reported to have been used for speculation in oil stocks, and the improvements were not made. In 1914 the general sales agent went into bankruptcy, leaving unpaid the sub-agents' commissions on sales consummated. Most serious of the misfortunes which befell the residents was the impending shutting off of water because the chief promoter had departed and there was no one to pay his water bills. Nor was there anyone to repair the two-inch water main, running across the bay from Adams Street to Agate Avenue, when some boat's keel damaged it and caused a leak. The gas supply was subject to the same trouble.

The gas works, like the water system, being the property of the city, a partial solution to these problems was found in becoming annexed to the city. This took place in 1916 and promised dependable sources of water and gas, but did not prevent fishing boats from cutting both gas and water lines.

It is refreshing to remember that with all the deceit, the evasion, and the misrepresentation to which the islanders were subjected at this period, there were two men who dealt fairly with all concerned. They were Mr. E. G. Derby and Mr. H. E. Lyon of the Oils and Metals Bank, and the Bankers Bond and Mortgage Company of Los Angeles. These gentlemen had come into possession of nearly five hundred lots on the island through foreclosure of unpaid obligations. To many of these lots the unscrupulous promoters had given contracts of sale. The treatment of these unfortunate



purchasers by Mr. Lyon and Mr. Derby was not only fair, but in many cases very generous.

The boom was over. There were no more free excursions for prospective buyers of lots. There were no buyers. There were only prospective sellers; sellers at any price. Lots which the Collins' interests (known variously as the Newport Land Company, Collins' Commercial Co., Balboa Island Realty Co., etc.) had sold for five hundred dollars went begging at fifty. Numerous lots went for taxes. One parcel of twelve sold for three hundred dollars. So deplorable was the condition of the island that those who had any hope for its future were few indeed.

Bulkheads along the water front, built of shells, sea weed and sand with a slight flavor of cement, failed and collapsed. This situation became particularly acute along the south-west exposure of the island where the water took both bulkhead and sidewalk and almost undermined the house known as the Quarterdeck, 136 South Bay Front.

A line of four-by-four poles along the South Bay leaned crazily one way and another, supporting the few scattered lights which illuminated a short part of the water front. These lights were controlled by a clock and switch mounted on a pole. The lights often failed to come on unless the pole was vibrated. A telephone call to Cordie Rogers, City Electrician, would elicit the advice, "Kick the post." One resident nearly wore out a pair of shoes kicking that post.

Probably the most alarming and disheartening thing which confronted the islanders at that time was the

condition of the sewers. No proper plan of sewage disposal had been attempted. The sewers emptied on the beach at the street ends. At high tide this condition was not apparent but at low water it was all too evident. While large areas had no sewers at all, the populated portions were constantly aware of their sewers.

The map of the island issued by its developers showed the block bounded by Coral, Park, Apolena and Balboa Avenues to be a public park. Lots facing this block were sold at exorbitant prices because of the advantage of facing the "park." Officers of the Improvement Association later discovered that the property had never been dedicated as a park but was included with other lots in a mortgage which was in process of foreclosure. Thus the island was deprived of the promised playground and purchasers of adjacent lots robbed of the excessive price they had paid.

From 1917 to 1923 the island boasted but one place of business. The Island Boat House built and repaired boats, conducted a real estate business, relayed messages received on its telephone, and served as a meeting place. Around its old rusty stove was held many a debate about the merits of various types of yachts and many a discussion of how to improve the harbor, to say nothing of the continual discussion of island problems.

Deplorable conditions finally led property owners to meet in the winter of 1918-19 to form the Balboa Island Improvement Association. It began its career with Charles E. Stanton as president and R. S. Baverstock as secretary. Its first meetings were held in Los

Angeles where owners of large blocks of lots could most easily attend. After June, 1919, its meetings were held on Balboa Island. Its membership rolls were open to all property owners or residents of the island. Its program, called for bulkhead repair; ferry service; sanitary sewer system; dependable water and gas supply; paving of certain streets; surfacing of alleys; street lights, at least in the summer months; rebuilding of the two public piers at Opal and Coral Avenues, and, most important of all, an effort to convince property owners that, while they had better write off most of their investment as loss, the place still had possibilities and merited the assessments necessary to develop it.

The endeavor to revive morale was a difficult one. Many owners were angry and discouraged. Some refused even to pay taxes, or dues to the Association (\$1.00 a year). A whole block on Section 5, the "little island" sold for sixty dollars a lot. The fictitious announcement, in November, 1918, that a ship yard was to be opened at the east end of the Balboa peninsula was of no help. However, the passage of a County bond election, in June, 1919, for \$550,000 for harbor development had a beneficial effect. On July Fourth of that year the Association conducted a celebration and erected the highest flag pole in town (80 feet) at the south end of Agate Avenue. This symbol of patriotism was procured and placed in position by Mr. J. A. Lightipe of the Southern California Edison Company, one of the first trustees of the Association.

Hopes of Balboa Islanders that annexation to the City of Newport Beach would result in amelioration of their civic problems were doomed to disappointment, and

their relationship to their neighbors across the bay was far from cordial during the years 1916 to 1919. The island, with its many problems, was considered, except for purposes of taxation, more as a liability than an asset. The island people retaliated by doing all possible trading out of town and rubbing it in by stalking through Balboa with bundles of provisions brought by street car or automobile from stores as far away as Los Angeles or Pasadena.

The futility of this feud was realized by officers of the improvement association and an effort made to bring about a more amicable relationship. There was an incipient war between the Balboa and Newport ends of town, Newport being concerned with commercial interests and Balboa with recreational and residential development. Thus the islanders found themselves in league with the Balboa group and their support was rewarded by a complete change of attitude on the part of the city government, indifference giving place to cooperation and sarcasm to sympathy.

On July 7, 1919, a boat carrying most of the residents of the island tied up at the 19th Street landing while islanders attended the meeting of the city fathers and persuaded them to award a contract for ferry service to a resident of the island, who the next morning started operations with a large and commodious boat, large and commodious enough to carry six passengers all at the same time. Fares were reduced from ten cents to five cents and continuous service was provided during the summer with thirty minute service in the winter. Whenever the water pipe was severed, the ferry



would carry a couple of galvanized tubs, which were filled at the Pavilion, due to the kindness of Mr. J. P. Greeley. Housewives and children would meet the ferry with buckets, sauce pans, coffee pots and bottles with which to carry home the precious fluid. Prudent householders kept an oil stove or an empty five gallon can with one end cut out, on which to cook out of doors when the gas failed. Conditions were greatly improved in 1920 when a cut was dredged across the bay in which the gas and water pipes were laid.

Some features of the improvement program were bitterly contested but others proceeded unopposed. A pier committee, consisting of T. P. Upton, Harry Rider and the Harbor Master, devised assessment districts adjacent to the public piers and advised each property owner as to the amount he was expected to contribute. Some owners did not contribute, but a sufficient sum was raised to rebuild the piers.

Balboa Island attempted a rash innovation in deciding to install its sewers first and pave its streets afterward, rather than to follow the traditional plan of paving and then ripping the pavement up to lay pipes. Objection to this unorthodox plan was not the only obstacle. A group of lot owners headed by Mr. E. B. Spencer protested the entire program on the ground that the assessments would amount to more than the property was worth. In spite of this opposition and delay, bulkheads were rebuilt and water lines laid in 1923, new sewers installed in 1924, and streets paved in 1925-1926.

The most necessary of these improvements was the

sewer system. It was entirely new and modern and was connected to an inverted siphon under the east bay which led to a treatment plant (popularly known as "little heliotrope") which served until 1939, when the island system was connected to a new line leading to a plant near the Santa Ana river between Newport and Huntington Beach.

As these changes were brought about there was a revival of interest in island property. Many lots changed hands, at first at low prices, some inside lots bringing as little as one hundred dollars. By 1922 there was a revival of building and the community morale was bolstered by the regatta of the Southern California Yachting Association. The Tournament of Lights was causing favorable comment as was the establishment of the Southland Sailing Club, later to become the Balboa Yacht Club.

The years 1919 to 1926 saw a steady improvement in the island. The regatta of 1926, generously aided and supported by island people, is still remembered as one of the most successful affairs of its kind ever conducted. It gave a stimulus to the community which cannot be overestimated.

With the gradual improvement of conditions, new businesses came to the island. A store was built at Agate Avenue and the South Bay Front. Wallie Kaufman started a store and service station at Park and Marine Avenue in 1924, and opened a post office called "Balisle" in 1926. The designation of this post office

was later changed to Balboa Island. Mr. A. S. Richardson opened his business at 210 Marine Avenue in 1927.

Real Estate men came and went. One odd character named Henry Ferguson, who always carried a pocketful of graham crackers, built a house on Onyx, north of Balboa Avenue, before the water pipes were laid. He dug a well in the sand, getting water at about four feet. This water had no salt in it and served his purposes for several years.

Although building revived in the early twenties, there were no restrictions, and many of the structures were anything but desirable. Islanders were greatly dismayed when an ingenious fisherman bought two lots on the east bay, where he planned to engage in the praiseworthy business of converting string-ray wings into smoked fillet of sole. Officers of the improvement association and a committee consisting of Herbert M. Worcester, R. H. Rollins and Commodore Frank Smith hastily prepared an ordinance making the conduct of such business unlawful on Balboa Island. Adopted by the city trustees in 1924, this became the island's first zoning ordinance, which, while incomplete, kept the commercial fishing industry off Balboa Island.

Prior to 1928, no representative of the island had served on the governing body of the city. In that year Dr. Herman Hilmer, a resident of the East Bay Front, was elected to the office of councilman. A gentleman of education and public spirit, he gave the island capable and conscientious representation for eight years, serving as Mayor during his second term.

Depressed business conditions of the early 1930's,

which injured many communities very seriously, were less disastrous on Balboa Island than elsewhere, for the reason that growth since 1918 had been steady and consistent. There had been no boom and no inflated values. Intrinsic values were steadily increasing and continued to do so right up to the inflation of World War II.

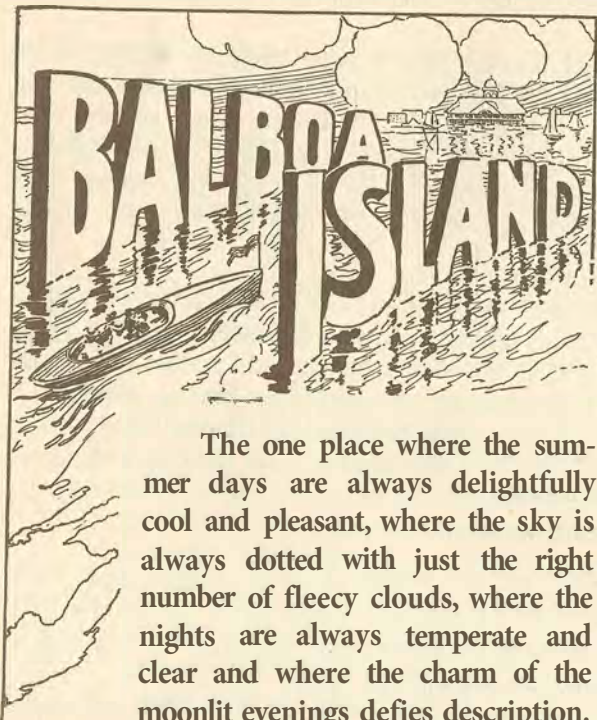
The harbor dredging in 1935-36 and the construction of the new promenade and bulkhead in 1937 have materially added to the security and value of island property. The leveling off of prices during 1948-49 is probably a healthy phenomenon. It is better that values become stabilized at a reasonable level than to skyrocket to unjustifiable heights from which there would have to be a disastrous collapse.

Those of us to whom Balboa Island has been "home" for most of our lives, are more concerned with keeping it a place of peace and contentment than with seeing values rise to a point where only people of great wealth can afford to live here. It has been inhabited largely by those of modest means, those who

"Hold fast the golden mean  
And live contentedly between  
The little and the great -"

the kind of people who make the most desirable neighbors and the best friends.





The one place where the summer days are always delightfully cool and pleasant, where the sky is always dotted with just the right number of fleecy clouds, where the nights are always temperate and clear and where the charm of the moonlit evenings defies description.

Balboa Island is the place where hot days are never known, where fleets of pretty pleasure craft dot the blue surface of a sheltered bay and where little children play all day in safety in the friendly waters of a gently sloping shore.

## BALBOA ISLAND

Enjoys many other advantages, among which are

Freedom from Mosquitos  
Improved Property, against which No Assess-

ments Can be Levied  
Hourly Car Service to Los Angeles  
Easy access to Marine Gardens  
and Mountain Canyons  
Absence of Disorderly City Crowds  
Unexcelled Boating, Surf and Still Water  
Bathing, Lively Fishing, Clam Digging,  
Canoeing, Sailing, Duck Hunting

## IMPROVED LOTS

Close to Water \$ 6QQ Very Easy Terms

JOIN ONE OF OUR

## Excursions and Free Clam Bakes

and Enjoy a Motorboat Ride Around the Bay  
Call Up . . . . . Fair Oaks 301

Leon T. Eliel Kenneth W. Rich

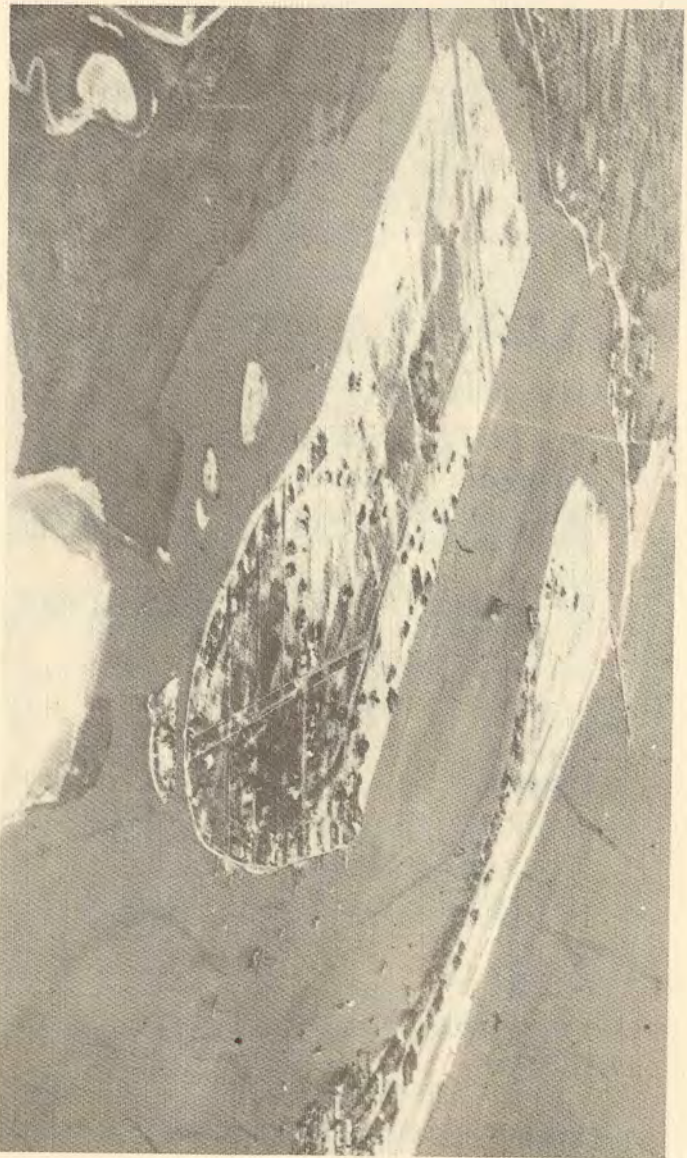
JOSEPH A. BEEK  
PASADENA AGENT

325 Chamber of Commerce F.O. 301

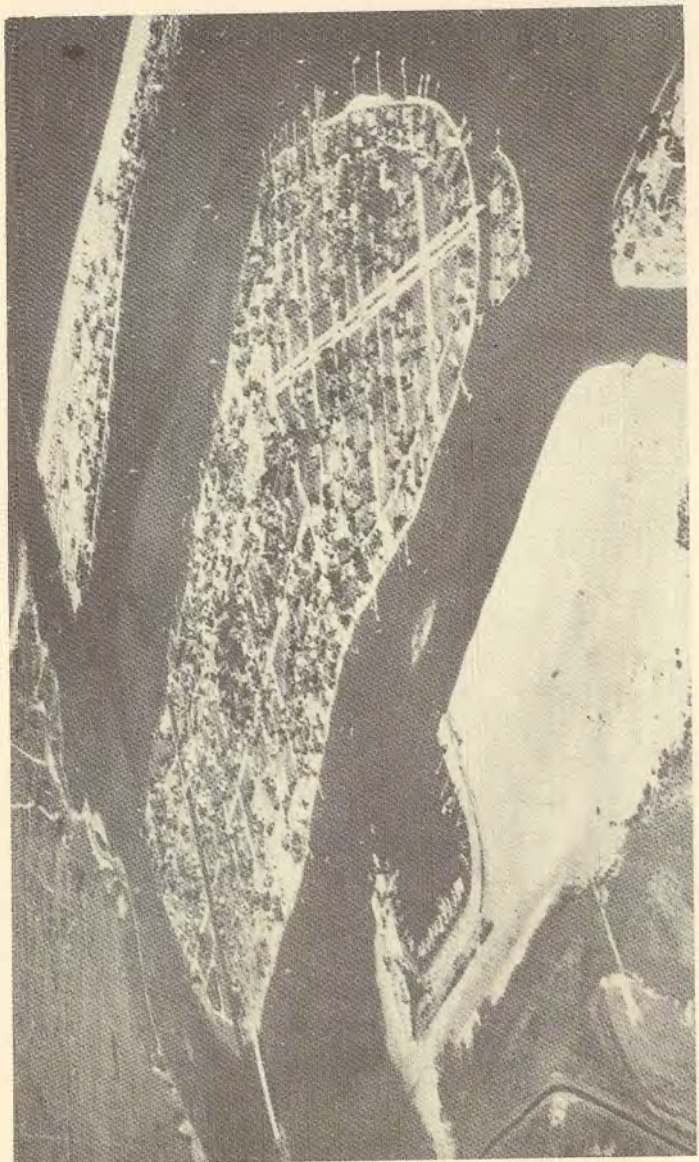
Clean,  
Comfortable  
Cottages  
for  
RENT







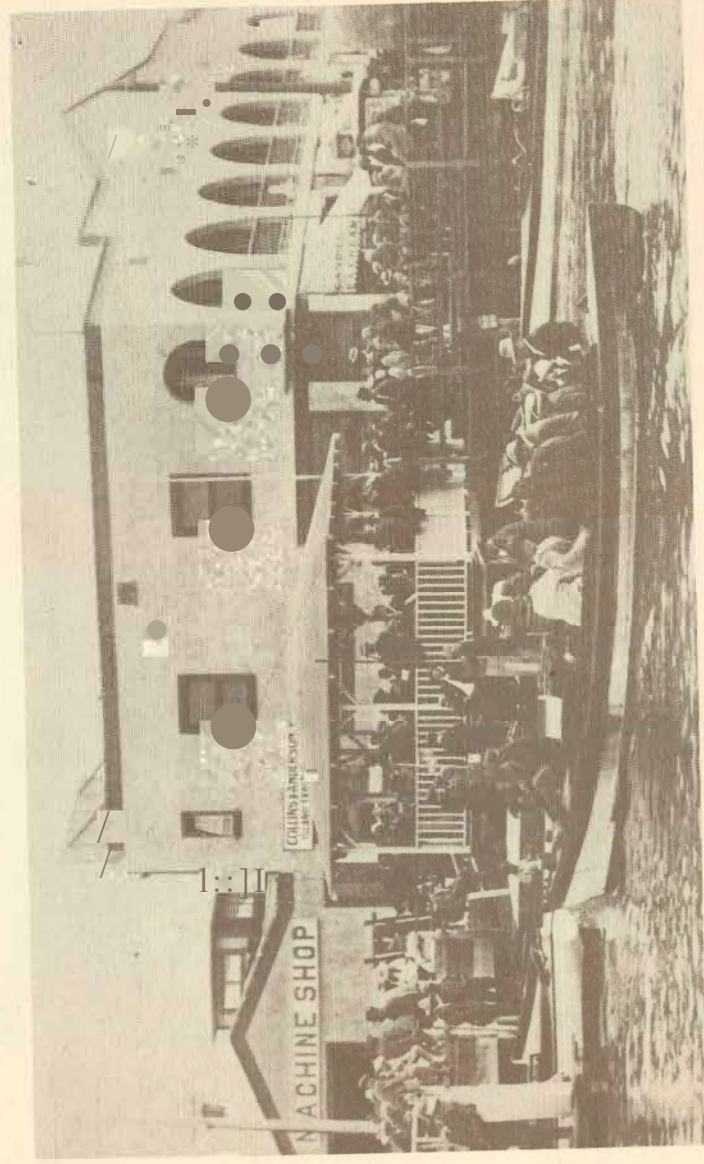
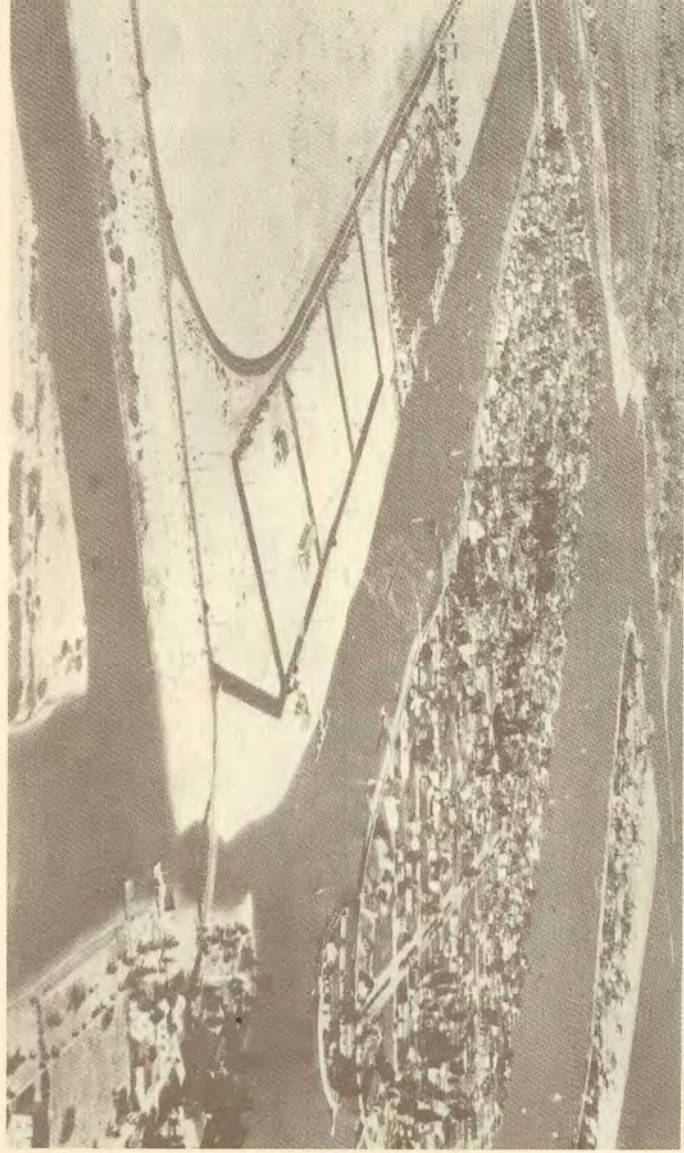
Balboa Island 1922



1932



1939



First Balboa Island Ferry about 1912





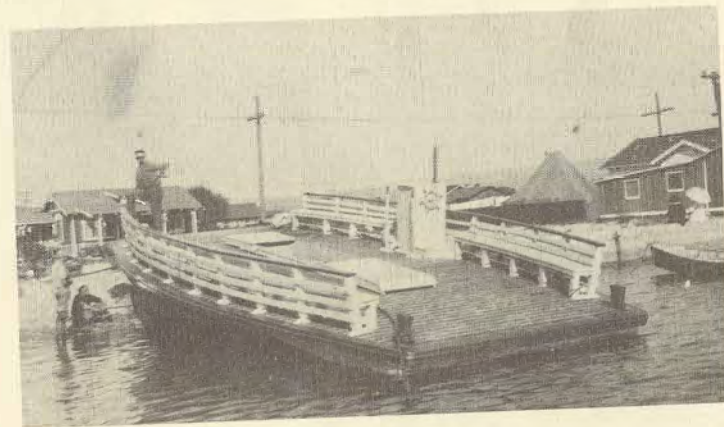
First and Second Beck Ferrics 1919

First and Second Beck Ferries 1919



First Auto Transportation 1921

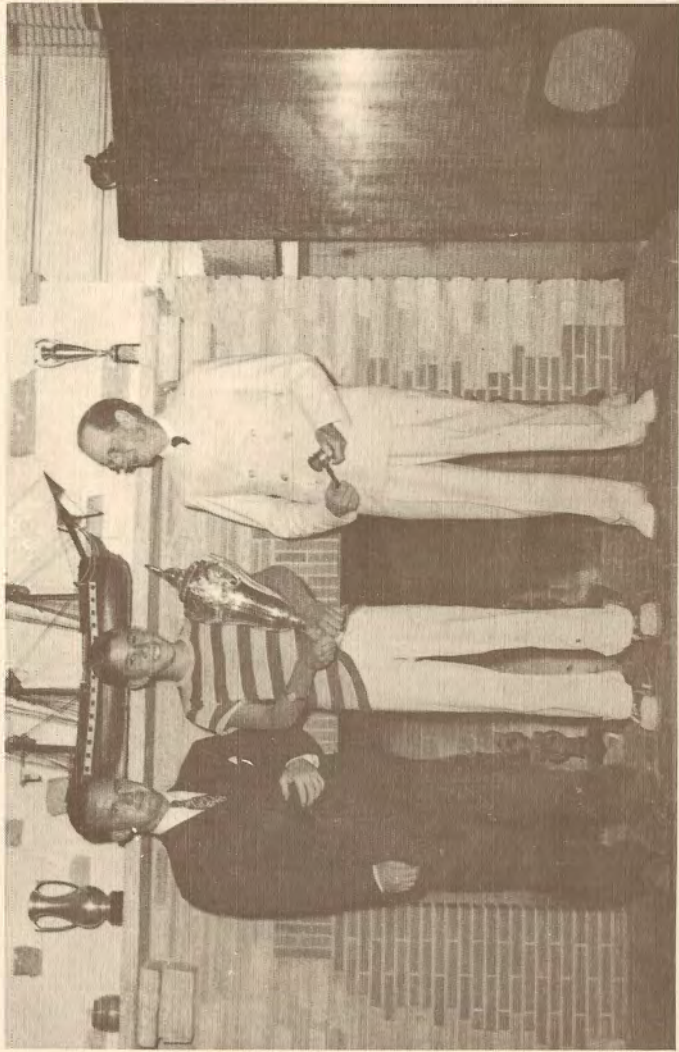
First Auto Transport twn 1921



Launching of first auto ferry "Joker" 1922

Launching off"lrst auto ferry "Joker" 1922





BIYC All-Around Championship Trophy Morgan Morgan



1924 BIYC Model Yachts

1937 BIYC Snowbird Race

1937 BIYC Sea Wall

1949 BIYC Snowbirds on the beach

