

THEY'LL SHINE ON STAR

Two Old Ferry Bells Get Glamorous Home Afloat

Last June state Sen. James R. Mills got an urgent letter from an old friend which said, "Something has to be done to save the bells."

The letter was from Jerry MacMullen, whose weekly column in the Southwest Section of The San Diego Union gives to readers light-hearted lessons in the history of San Diego as a seaport.

MacMullen, who is historian for the Star of India, was director of Serra Museum in Presidio Park when Mills, before being elected to the state Legislature, was curator.

The bells of which MacMullen wrote were the ones on the ferries San Diego and North Island. As a waterfront historian with knowledge of most incidents which have ruffled the waters of San Diego Bay, he knew the bells had a history which made them worth preserving.

Their last knell would be sounded Aug. 2, 1969, when the San Diego-Coronado bay Bridge was opened and the ferries were taken out of service and taken away by purchasers who had other uses for them.

Plea Made To Keep Historical Pair

Mills immediately called the state Public Works Department. He told them the story of the bells. He said the bells belonged in San Diego and he knew the place they should be enshrined, forever.

After reaching agreement with the purchasers of the ferries, the department declared the bells scrap and sold them to Mills for \$36.

The result is that an old lady, dear to the heart of San Diego, will have a wonderful birthday present.

On Friday, Nov. 14, 106 years after she was launched from a shipyard on the Isle of Man, the oldest iron sailing ship afloat will get the bells. She is the Star of India, now a museum on the Embarcadero.

Plans are for Mills to present the bells to Joseph E. Jessop, president of the Maritime Museum Association, which owns the Star of India.

One of the most interesting things about the

bells MacMullen has learned is they were cast by a foundry which was founded by a man who once was, like Mills, a California state senator.

William T. Garratt came to the state a gold-hunting '49er. He failed at that. He had been a brass-founder before he was a '49er, so he started a foundry in San Francisco. It was a big success.

He served in the state Senate from 1871 to 1874. He was a Republican. Mills is a Democrat.

The bell MacMullen and Mills rescued from the North Island probably is, both say, San Diego's most historic bell. MacMullen reports:

The North Island bell first came to San Diego aboard the sidewheel ferry steamer Coronado. Only the steam launch Della and a barge towed by the tug Gen. McPherson, served on the bay as ferries before her.

On Dec. 31, 1910, at midnight, the captain of the Coronado rang the bell so enthusiastically it cracked and had to be recast. The date on it now is 1911.

MacMullen said he was never able to learn what made the captain so enthusiastic, and so strong, on that New Years Eve nearly 60 years ago. The recasting was done by Senator Garratt's firm.

Rescued From A Watery Grave

The Coronado went out of service in 1920. The bell was rescued from her when she was sold to a motion picture company which sank her off Oceanside to thrill moviegoers who saw the picture "Captain Blood."

The bell from the ferry San Diego was originally with the sidewheel ferry steamer Ramona, first San Diego harbor vessel to have electric lights. She operated from 1903 until 1928.

The bells have not had much ringing. Aboard ferries they did not signal the time of day. They rang for fire and boat drills.

One ring signaled that the ferry would depart in one minute. That's all.

Both have a good, salt water sound. The grand old lady will be pleased to hear it.

maritime