

Gerald F. MacMullen: Historian, Raconteur, Lover of the Sea

By Gregg Chandler

Through the years, many writers have painted in glowing words and descriptive phrases the beautiful coastline of California, while others have recounted the maritime history of its many ships and harbors. None, however, has better described this coastline's beauty, or brought to life through salty tales what actually occurred there, than San Diego historian, Jerry MacMullen.

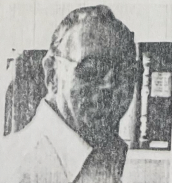
Although he was born in San Francisco in 1898, Jerry spent most of his life along the shores of his beloved San Diego Bay. He attended the University of California at Berkeley, where he studied under Herbert Bolton, one of the University's foremost professors of history, specializing in California and the Southwest. After graduating, Jerry returned to San Diego in 1921 and joined *The Evening Tribune* editorial staff. He transferred to *The San Diego Union* in 1928 and wrote for this newspaper until the outbreak of World War II. It was during this period that his knowledge of San Diego's waterfront and the ships plying the waters of San Diego Bay steadily increased. No sailing vessel, passenger liner, freighter, or warship ever passed Point Loma and entered the channel without this waterfront reporter being aware of her, duly recording her passage, and—if it was a special event—often photographing the same. His collection of photos of these vessels, dating from prior to World War I to after World War II, now resides in the archives of the San Diego Maritime Museum.

Jerry was attracted to the Navy at an early age and joined the San Diego Division of the Naval Militia, which later became the United States Naval Reserve. It was here

that he first became acquainted with Don Stewart, one of San Diego's finest historians and author of *Frontier Port*. When World War II broke out, Jerry went on active duty with Naval Intelligence and served with the Western Sea Frontier in San Francisco and San Pedro. His knowledge of ships was of great use to the Navy both in the collection of intelligence and in counter-intelligence. After the war, he continued in the Naval Reserve and retired with the rank of Commander. His familiarity with the history of the Navy in San Diego is especially evident in his chapter on the *Cyane* in his book, *They Came by Sea*. At the beginning of the chapter he writes:

At midnight of July 28, 1846, the U.S.S. *Cyane*, Capt. Samuel F. Dupont U.S.N., commanding, hove-to in the blackness somewhere to the southwesterly of Point Loma, and nothing was further from the minds of her people than the thought that within a little over half a century "...the roaring flues and the humming screws..." of an outlandish craft called a "torpedoboot-destroyer" would be putting San Diego on the map as a Navy town.

As a longtime staff writer for *The San Diego Union*, MacMullen's Sunday articles in the travel section of the newspaper became an important part of the maritime history of San Diego. All of these articles are on file in the MacMullen Collection, housed in the library of the San Diego Maritime Museum. They frequently appear in the quarterly issues of the museum's journal, *Mains'! Haul*.



Gregg Chandler is a native Californian, having been born and raised in Glendale. His family moved to the San Francisco bay area in 1917, and he obtained his A.B. degree in political science at the University of California at Berkeley in 1932. The next year he completed an M.A. degree in public administration at Columbia University. After graduation, he worked with the California Schoolbook Depository, where he became manager in 1936. Chandler joined the Navy in World War II and served as an Armed Guard Commander. In 1950, he transferred to the Naval Intelligence Branch and continued in the active reserve until his retirement as Captain in 1970. He joined the San Diego Maritime Museum in 1971 and is currently a member of the Board of Trustees. Chandler has been a member of the San Diego Corral since 1972 and served as Deputy Sheriff in 1982.