

The Star of India

By JERRY MacMULLEN

At the intersection of Kettner Blvd. and Market Street, the Automobile Club of Southern California recently has erected directional signs on which one of the arrows points to "Maritime Museum." And when you get onto an Auto Club direction sign—well, it might be said that you have arrived.

Follow that arrow and you will pull up alongside the only physical assets of the Aquarium Committee of the Zoological Society of San Diego—the bark *Star of India*, oldest iron sailing vessel afloat today. She not only houses the museum; she is the museum itself. And an increasing number of residents and visitors are finding that the staunch old packet offers something which is not found in every type of museum.

It is to the generosity of James Wood Coffroth that San Diego owes the maritime museum. When the day of the sailing ship was over and they were being sold for scrap metal, he bought the *Star of India* from her owners, the Alaska Packers Association, and presented her to the Zoological Society as the first unit of a proposed floating museum and aquarium. She was towed down from San Francisco, arriving here July 8, 1927. At that time, she wasn't much to look at and she was even less to live aboard. This opinion, which may be taken as official, was formed by your correspondent as, going ashore from her in San Diego, he stood in the bath-tub, undressing with one hand and holding a can of Flit in the other.

A Youthful Crew

About the time she was secured alongside the Embarcadero, near where the Civic Center now stands, the old bark was discovered by the Sea Scouts. Obviously, she was just the thing for their headquarters, and as the long uphill fight to make her into a suitable museum started, they moved aboard for seanship, boat-drill and what have you.

The question of a caretaker has produced situations on which a small but interesting volume might be written. The majority of old seafaring men, from whose ranks the "ship's husbands" generally have been drawn, were raised under the system in which the toe of the boot transcends the gentle word, and they cannot comprehend the ways of modern youth. From time to time, minor uprisings have had



The "Last Crew of the *Star of India*." Volunteer Naval Reserve Officers brought her down to her last port.

to be taken in hand, but no heads have been broken, at least not so far, and the boys still are very much on board. Incidentally, more than one lad of the age in which the pool-hall, the \$15 jalopy and other pitfalls may be encountered has, through his Sea Scouting in the *Star of India*, found his niche in life. We've sent two to Annapolis, many to be California Maritime Academy and into the Navy as enlisted men, and others to useful employment aboard vessels or in shipyards. One *Star of India* graduate at present is with the Byrd Antarctic expedition in the U. S. S. *Bear*, having been chosen principally because of his training in a sailing vessel.

But that is getting away from the Maritime Museum. . . .

No Easy Task

The ship got here, of course, just about in time to run full tilt into the depression. People don't go around building museums in such times.

For a number of years the poor old *Star*, increasingly down-at-the-heels, lay at the Embarcadero. And yet, those people who saw in her the last example of that grand old fleet which wrote so much of world history, kept plugging away. Bit by bit, discarded oddments of ship's gear were gathered up and stowed in what—with what now seems inexcusable gall—as termed the "Museum Room." It was a dingy, poorly-lighted room at the forward end of the poop, from which bunks for 45 fishermen of varying degrees of cleanliness had been removed.

Then harbor improvements forced the moving of the ship from the Civic Center location

to her present berth — at that time, a muddy back-road of low social status. Someone suggested a State Relief project of reconditioning her, and the idea was seized upon with alacrity. A gang of eager but untrained workers descended upon her. They took chipping-hammers to remove the paint from soft-wood panels, and in so doing broke most of the skylights. They scaled the paint off of the hull, which did not need scaling — and went away and left her, an ugly exhibition of rust, for some two years. It was the darkness which preceded the dawn. In this case, the dawn as largely a one-man affair—a chap who appeared upon the scene quite by accident, just as a new caretaker was being sought.

Paint, Paint — And Paint

The newcomer to the ship was Bert Shankland, who had just retired from the fire department, his last job being captain of the fireboat and of one shift at the fire station which also houses the shops. An old seafaring man in his own right — he enlisted in the U. S. S. *Independence*—he is an expert rigger, carpenter, and what have you. Immediately, he began to yell for paint—more paint!

Then began a campaign about which perhaps nothing should be said. The black paint on the hull is legitimate; it was donated by Roger Lapham, president of the Co. But there is more than black paint; there is white, there is spar-color, there is boot-topping. Who donated it? Ah—don't you wish you knew! Praise be to Neptune, there still are kind-hearted first mates and second mates in freighters who will turn their

backs when someone has inadvertently left a bucket of paint sitting out, homeless and alone, on the open deck Anyhow, the *Star of India* got painted. Other friendly souls came along with "surveyed" lifeboat-falls, which were used to renew the braces and other running-gear. The ship woke up and looked at herself with something resembling pride. The San Diego and Coronado Ferry Company donated a stack of glass panes, and from them were made picture-frames for photographs and prints. The Museum Room got new coats of white paint; showcases appeared, and at last there was something besides the bare ship for the tourists to see.

Antipodean Visitor

Now, the *Star of India* has not always been an American vessel; originally she was the British full-rigged ship *Euterpe*, built at Ramsey, in the Isle of Man, in 1863. And into San Diego harbor not so long ago came the big British motorship *Limerick*, of the Union Steamship Company of New Zealand, Ltd. Her master was Captain Norton, who looks as if he may have been the original model from which the cartoons of John Bull were drawn. He spotted the masts and yards of the *Star of India* from the *Limerick's* bridge, and made inquiries.

"What! The old *Euterpe*? Knew her well! In fact, the master of the first ship I sailed in came from her. Big fellow. Chap named Bowling. Son still living in New Zealand. Must tell him about this!"

Not long after, Captain Norton was aboard the *Star*.

You may recall that when the vessel first came here, her cabin was divided by a bulkhead, forming two dinky rooms. The bulkhead had been regarded with some suspicion—although one school of thought held that it always had been there. Captain Norton looked at it sourly. That was enough. A few days later the bulkhead was torn away, to reveal, between its two layers of wood, definite proof that it was not original—a San Francisco newspaper, dated 1918.

Words From The Past

Up on the poop, Captain Norton looked at the binnacle of the standard compass, and frowned slightly.

"Odd-looking," he said. "Well, I must be going."

After he left, Shankland walked about the binnacle — a square, box-like affair with the compass on top and its brass hood. Some of the old