



MAINS'L HAUL



VOL. XIV

DECEMBER 1977

NO. 2



They didn't know it—but these lads were making maritime history on a world-wide level. The scene is the old East Santa Fe Wharf, which angled off to the southeasterly from what now is the foot of Pacific Highway; the year is 1910—but the handsome little chemical engine dates back to the 1890s, and the fireman hamming it up with the axe is the late Capt. "First-water George" Knowles, a carry-over from the days of the volunteers. In the background is, of course, the American-Hawaiian steamer *Alaskan*, with her embarrassing cargo.

—HISTORICAL COLLECTION, TITLE INSURANCE & TRUST CO.

A HARD WAY TO MAKE HISTORY

The night of June 17, 1910, was dull and overcast. Throughout San Diego, people were just finishing

supper when they noticed, from somewhere down on the waterfront, the monotonously repeated blasts

of a steamer's whistle. Then, in the lower part of the town, came the sound of horses' hoofs and the clattering bells of fire-engines. At the old East Santa Fe Wharf, American-Hawaiian's freighter *Alaskan* was on fire.

The big freighter had come in that day from Salina Cruz to discharge her Southern California cargo before heading for San Francisco. That was in the hey-day of the Tehuantepec Route, when American-Hawaiian's ships in the Atlantic brought cargo down to the east side of the Isthmus of Tehauntepec, where it was shipped by rail across to Salina Cruz, where the line's Pacific Coast freighters picked it up. The Panama Canal was still in the future—as was Los Angeles Harbor.

The freighter's master, Capt. F.J. Bennett, and most of the officers and crew had gone ashore and the senior officer left aboard, Chief Engineer Louis Biedrot, was about to settle down with a magazine when he was aroused by a hammering on his door; it was Quartermaster Hans Schmidt, with bad news—she was afire in No. 4 and No. 5 holds.

Biedrot rushed to the bridge, shouting the alarm to the watchman on the wharf, and began yanking on the whistle-cord. In a few minutes the first fire-engine arrived, as did Fire Chief Louis Almgren—and Captain Bennett, who had heard the booming note of the whistle, and knew that there was trouble. He got there just in time to keep them from pouring water into the smouldering cargo. Chief Almgren agreed with him when Bennett explained that the cargo in No. 4 included 500 tons of calcium carbide. Just one leaking cannister of the stuff, had water struck it, would have generated enough acetylene gas to take the *Alaskan* sky-high. Almgren made a quick decision: "Send for the 'Medicine-wagon'!"

Although all of the hose-wagons carried 35-gallon soda-and-acid chemical tanks, "The Medicine Wagon" was the only true chemical-engine in the department; it carried two 80-gallon Holloway tanks and 150 feet of rubber hose. Soon it was speeding toward the waterfront, its horses at a full gallop, from the old board-and-batten fire-house which then stood at Park Boulevard and Monroe.

Meanwhile firemen were over the side of the *Alaskan*, in one of her lifeboats, starting to drill holes through her plates. Through these holes they would direct nozzles from the chemical-lines—a bubbling froth of "soda-water" and bubbles of

carbon dioxide. Another crew, with drills, had gone down through the engineroom to the shaft-alley, which ran under the bottoms of No. 4 and No. 5 holds. Almgren's strategy was to fill the holds with CO₂, which would slowly rise until it reached, and put out, the smouldering fire. Should there be a leak in one of the cannisters of carbide, it would not be affected.

The unique battle against the fire went on through the night and the next day—and several more nights and days. Cotton quilts were broken out from the cargo, soaked in water and lashed over the ventilators into the hold, to shut off the air to the flames. But still, frequent readings with thermometers, the blistering heat from the holds did not decrease.

And now came a new problem: local chemical supply houses were running out of bicarbonate of soda, and of sulphuric acid, from which the chemical extinguishers produced that all-important gas. The *Alaskan*'s owners bought a carload of the stuff in Los Angeles and shipped it down by train. It was just a question of time, however, until even Los Angeles' supply ran out, and they started making inquiries in San Francisco.

About this time Chief Almgren had another idea—the soda-fountains! In those days, they had begun to charge carbonated drinks from metal cylinders of compressed carbon dioxide, and a few long-distance calls later, he located a good supply of them in Los Angeles.

Meanwhile they were charging and re-charging that chemical-engine, and the temperature in the burning holds was, ever so slightly, going down. Day and night they kept it up. Weary firemen became a bit careless, and spilled chemicals were taking their toll on uniforms and on the finish—both varnish and gleaming copper—of the chemical tanks. But there was a feeling that they were gaining the upper hand, and at last came the day when the temperature in the holds went down to 80°—and Almgren ordered the hatches opened. There still was smoke, but it was dead smoke; the fire was out.

Now came the task of ventilating the holds and hauling out the burned cargo, which was loaded onto the lighters to be hauled out to sea (in those pre-ecology days!) and dumped. At long last the *Alaskan* departed, to continue her voyage to San Francisco. The fire—still the longest one in San Diego's history—had lasted three weeks, and would

go down in sea history as the first shipboard fire to be extinguished with CO₂.

Before she left, however, there had been time for the American-Hawaiian Steamship Co. to put on a bang-up Victory Party on the big freighter's awninged decks, for every fireman who had taken part. Not only that, but they gave each man a new uniform, and paid for re-painting the chemical-spattered fire engines.

The Medicine Wagon, however was not through with making history. On a somber afternoon in 1919 Lt. (later Chief) George Courser, then in charge of the station, ordered the driver to hitch up and drive the gleaming old rig down to the city shops, to make way for a new, motor-driven one. Charlie Duncan climbed into the driver's seat and picked up the reins, to drive off with San Diego's last horse-drawn equipment. The other firemen turned away silently, for there were tears in the driver's eyes.

—J.M.

BIRTHDAY PARTY

The *Star of India* had her 114th Birthday party which was combined with the annual membership meeting and held aboard the *Berkeley* on the night of November 13th. The old Gal must have been real happy when she found that three hundred and eighty members showed up to wish her a "Happy Birthday"!

It all started with the members climbing up the gangplank of the *Star* to be greeted with a ration of grog—what else when you are celebrating the birthday of a grand old lady who started her life in 'Merry old England' and ended up in this lovely seaport of San Diego. After paying their respects, the members moved over to the *Berkeley* where they were treated to a hearty buffet dinner, and shown for the first time the new movie on the life of the *Star*. It was a tremendous hit and has since been shown three times on the local television station KPBS.

During the evening an informal membership meeting was conducted. Among the members present was Bert Alton who had actually sailed on the *Star* earlier in her career. Also six of the Board of Directors whose terms had expired were re-elected

to a new term. They were: Joseph E. Jessop, Sr., Norman B. Neely, Robert M. Foster, Kenneth N. Baker, Robert G. Baker, and John Hamrick.

The evening concluded with everyone present agreeing that it was the *Star's* best birthday ever, and that all the citizens of San Diego should be grateful that this lovely 'Lady of the Sea' should have her permanent home here among us.

DR. JOHN LYMAN

The recent death of Dr. John Lyman, of Chapel Hill, N.C., came as a shock to maritime historians around the world.

One of the oldest friends of the *Star of India*, John Lyman received his Ph.D. at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at La Jolla in 1940, and was immediately called to active duty as an officer in the U.S. Naval Reserve. Although an oceanographer, he found time to keep up extensive activities in maritime history, especially that of sailing vessels. A frequent contributor to *The American Neptune* and to other journals of history throughout the world, he gave generously of the results of his research. Perhaps the most valuable of his works was his compilation of what came to be known unofficially as "The Lyman List" of all West Coast-built sailing vessels of 50 or more tons, built between 1850 and 1905. It was published many years ago by the Maritime Research Society of San Diego, which still meets quarterly aboard the *Star*. For many years he served as an oceanographic expert, with the Hydrographic Office and other governmental agencies, and after retirement taught classes in oceanography at the University of North Carolina.

RESTORATION REPORT

Restoration aboard the *BERKELEY* is proceeding on schedule. Her engine room has been chipped and will soon see a new coat of paint, prior to the giant crankshafts and pistons being electrically operated for public viewing. Special notice will be sent in the months ahead about our opening celebration of this marvelous exhibit.

WELCOME ABOARD!

Since the last number of *Mains'l Haul*, the following have signed on:

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Mains'l Haul is published quarterly (wind and weather permitting) at headquarters of the Maritime Museum Association aboard the bark *Star of India*, 1306 North Harbor Drive, San Diego, California 92101.

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— John Masefield

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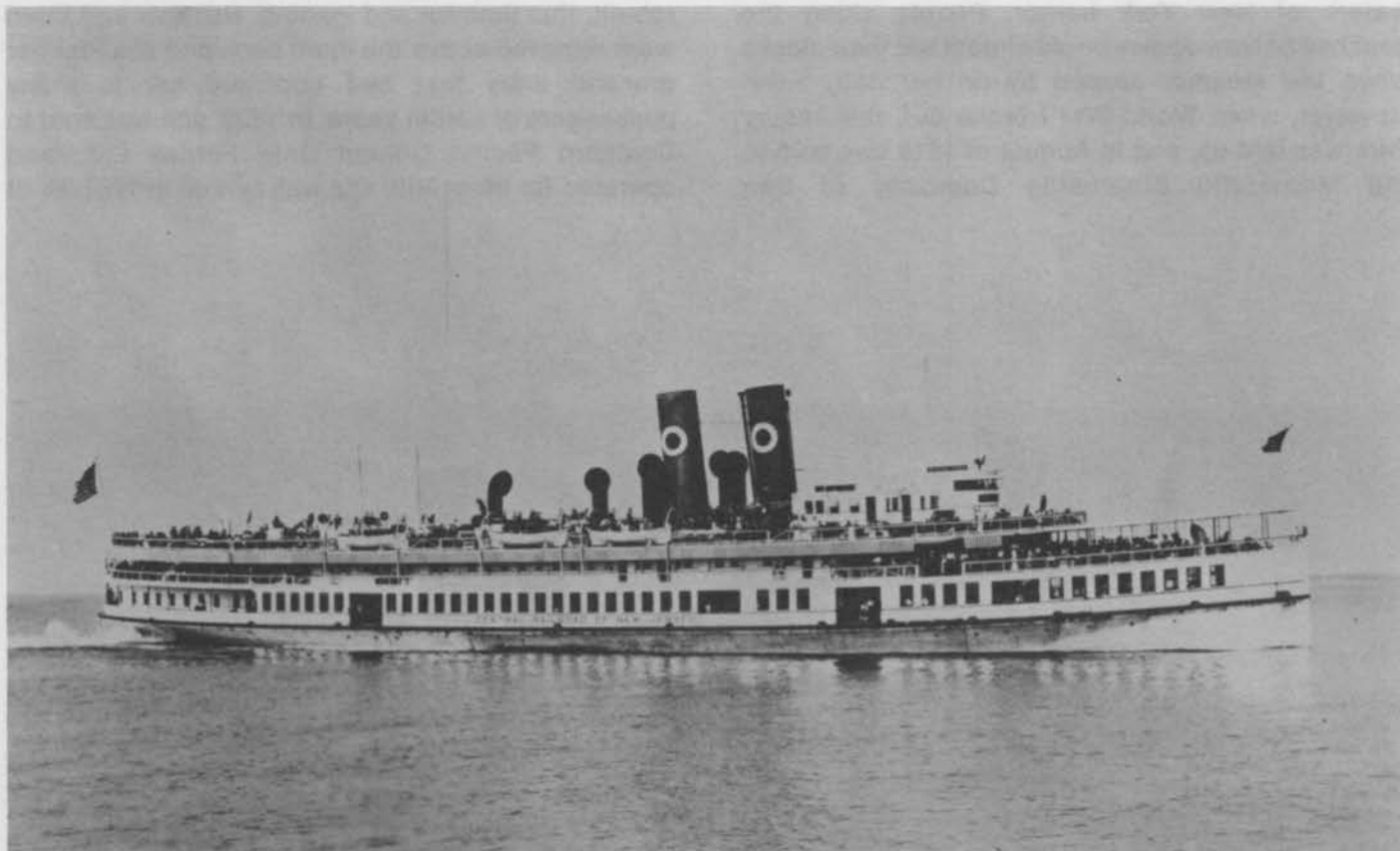
MAINS'L HAUL



VOL. XIV

MARCH 1978

NO. 3



Asbury Park

—STEAMSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

AN OLD FRIEND IS ON THE BLOCK!

A recent article in a Vancouver B.C. newspaper informed us that the *Lady Grace* has been repossessed for debts and will be sold at auction.

The name *Lady Grace* may not mean much to ship buffs, but the names *Asbury Park*, *City of Sacramento*, *Kahloke* and *Langdale Queen* bring

back memories to thousands of Americans who loved to ride the bays and rivers from New York and New Jersey to California, Washington and British Columbia in the years 1903 to 1976.

It all started back in 1903 at the shipyards of W. Cramp and Sons in Philadelphia. The *Asbury Park* was built for the commuter passenger service between New Jersey and New York on the popular "Sandy Hook Route." For many years this fast, trim vessel was one of the more popular sights in the waters of New York harbor. People along the beaches of New Jersey could almost set their clocks when the steamer passed by on her daily runs. However, when World War I broke out, the *Asbury Park* was laid up, and in August of 1918 was sold to the Monticello Steamship Company of San

Francisco. She passed through the Golden Gate on October 9, after a coaling stop in Havana, and a trip through the Panama Canal.

After arriving in San Francisco she was converted to an oil burner. At the same time one funnel was removed and she was refitted to carry automobiles. On November 1, 1919, the *Asbury Park* began a regular service between San Francisco and Vallejo that was to last until 1931. In 1925 her name was changed to *City of Sacramento* and she was again rebuilt, this time for end loading. Her bow and stern were removed above the main deck and she lost her graceful lines that had endeared her to many passengers of earlier years. In 1929, she was sold to Southern Pacific Golden Gate Ferries Ltd., and operated for them until she was laid up in 1931. Until



—STEAMSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

1936 she was used mainly on excursion trips around the bay and up the Sacramento River. During World War II the government operated her in transportation service around the bay. Later the *City of Sacramento* was sold to the Puget Sound Navigation Company, and set out for Seattle under tow on May 25, 1944. However, due to fierce gales along the route she did not reach her destination and delivery to her new owners until June 15, 1944.

The next life for this historic vessel began on the ferry run between Seattle and Bremerton and she continued on this route until September 30, 1947, when she was laid up for the next four years. In 1952, the *City of Sacramento* was transferred to Canadian registry to be operated by Black Ball Ferries Ltd. She was rebuilt at the Yarrows Yard in Esquimalt and renamed *Kahloke*, an Indian name for aquatic bird.

She was entered on the run between Nanaimo and West Vancouver, and for the next eight years made five round trips daily. In 1963, she was transferred to the Langdale—Horseshoe Bay route and renamed *Langdale Queen*. For the next thirteen years she plied back and forth faithfully on this route until her final lay up in 1976. In April of 1977, the *Langdale Queen* was purchased by Coal Harbor Marine Leasing Ltd., for use as office space, restaurant, and repair facility for small boats, and was renamed *Lady Grace*. However, the company went into bankruptcy before these plans could be put into effect and the future of this seventy-five year old vessel is at best—uncertain.

REFERENCE: "STEAMBOAT BILL" SSHA.

ARTICLE ON "LANGDALE QUEEN" BY FRANK A. CLAPP.

THANKS

Norval Diamond, a long time friend of the Museum, dropped by recently with a gift of over 100 books from his fine collection on Maritime Lore. They will be greatly appreciated by future readers of our Library.

Our own Jerry MacMullen also donated valuable collections of negatives of old sailing vessels and streamers for our photo library.

WHAT'S NEW

The *Star of India* Auxiliary is sponsoring its fourth annual rummage sale aboard the Museum ship *Berkeley* on the Embarcadero Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, April 7, 8, and 9, from 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM. Come and bring a friend!

A meeting of the Library committee was called by Captain Chandler on February 24. In attendance were Jerry MacMullen, Robert Weinstein members of the committee, and Captain Eddie Fredericks USN (Ret.) from the Navy League, and Captain Bowman and Captain Reynard. The purpose of the

meeting was to have Bob Weinstein, expert Marine Photo-Historian, give us valuable pointers on how to set up our new Photo Library. Following this meeting Captain Reynard has already started to assemble our fine photographs which have been stowed away for many years.

Work is progressing on the enlargement of the office on the *Star of India*, and the new quarters should be ready in the near future.

The *Star of India* Auxiliary sponsored a Champagne Opening of the Brentwood Galleries, 5181 Morena Place, San Diego, on Friday evening March 17, with the proceeds going to the San Diego Maritime Museum. It was a delightful evening, with a very good attendance.

NOTICE

Over three hundred books are now available for loaning to members for reading. In most cases the Library will be open to members on Fridays between 10 AM and 3 PM. For an appointment at other times call the *Star of India* office 234-9153.

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— John Masfield

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MAINS'L HAUL



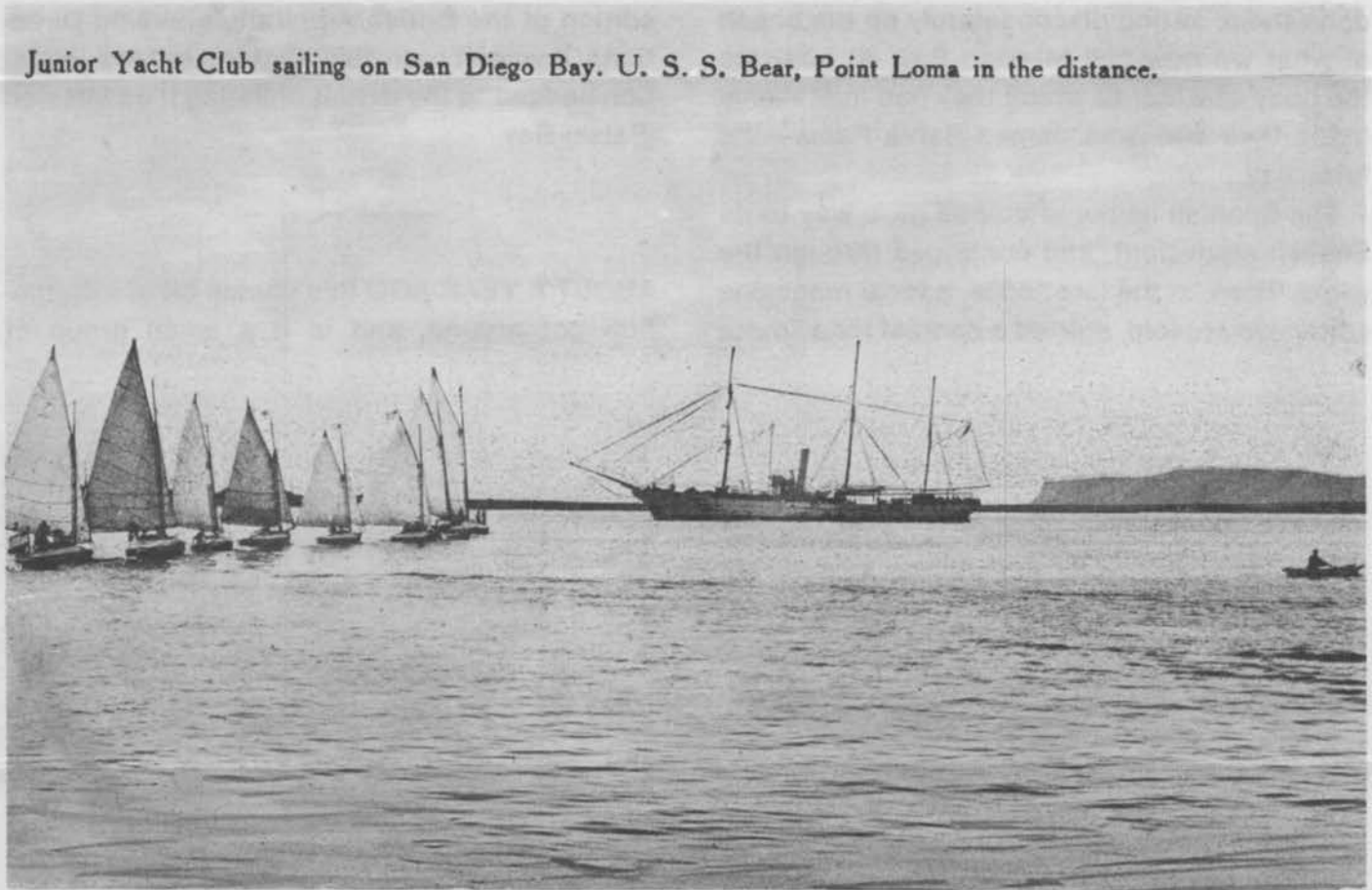
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JUNE 1978

NO. 4

MARITIME MEMORIES OF SAN DIEGO

Junior Yacht Club sailing on San Diego Bay. U. S. S. Bear, Point Loma in the distance.



LOST WATERING PARTY NAMES BAY

by Jerry MacMullen

OLD-TIMERS still call it False Bay, and in a way you can't blame them, for something which has been correct for more than three centuries is difficult to stamp out.

The water situation was a matter of some concern in 1542 to Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo who had just arrived with two tiny vessels, the *San*

Salvador and the *Victoria* to discover our harbor and add it to the Spanish kingdom. They needed fresh water, and so he sent off a party in a pulling-boat, with casks, to find some.

One can imagine their feelings when, as dusk approached, they got back to the shore and looked for the two ships. The ships were not

there.

Aboard ship, they began to wonder what had happened to the water party. A search party was sent off to find them.

— — — — —

SOME SAY that the lost party actually had started to walk to La Paz, some 800 miles away, while others insist that the search party came upon them, sitting disconsolately on the beach of what we now call Mission Bay. At any rate the body of water to which they had mistakenly made their way was named Bahia Falsa—the false bay.

The Spanish name, of course gave way to its English equivalent, and continued through the years. Then, in the late 1880s, a local magazine editor, we are told, started a contest for a “more

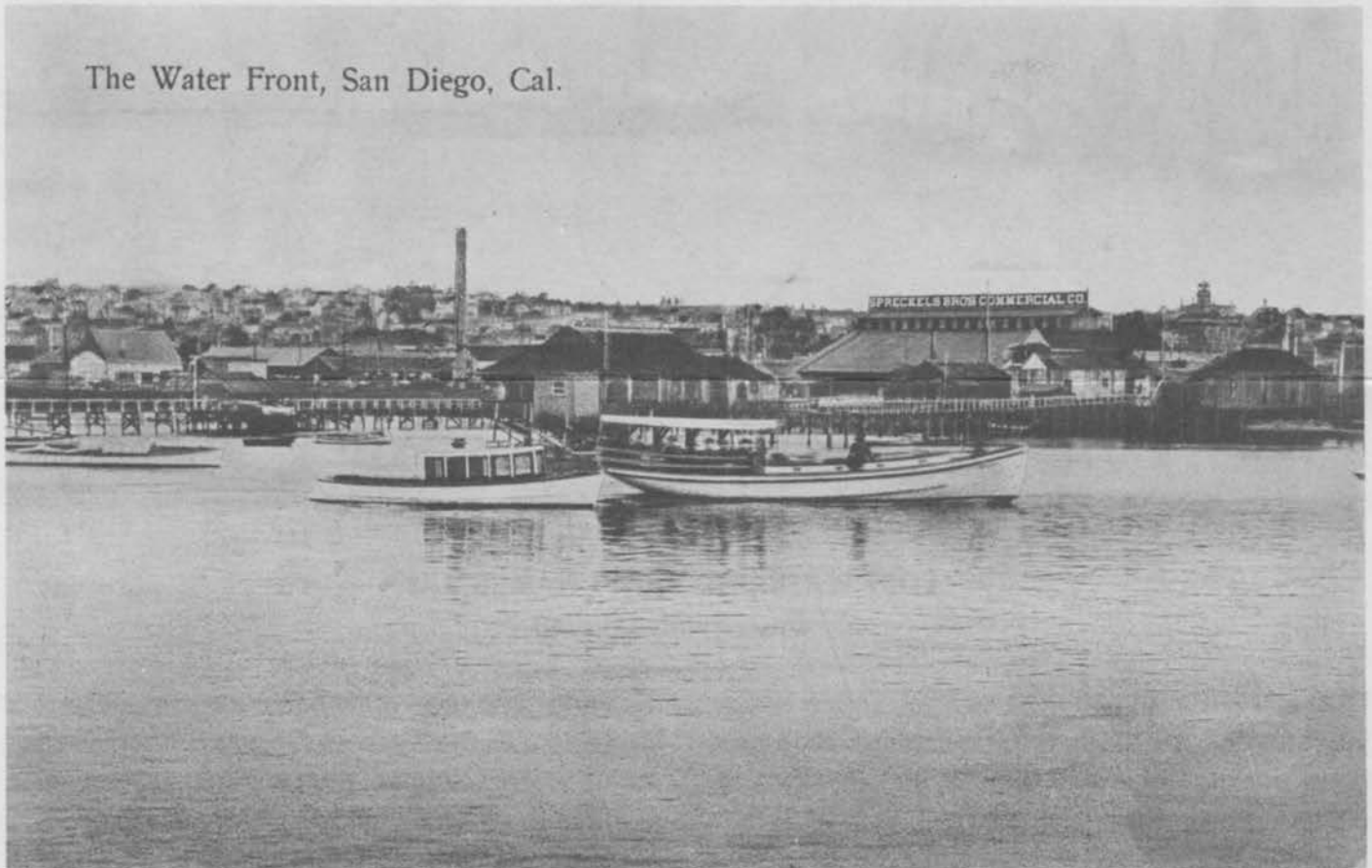
suitable” name for False Bay, and some housewife came up with Mission Bay.

Little by little the name which went back, through more than 350 years, to a sound historical foundation, began to be superseded—although False Bay remained the legal title. The 1909 Coast Pilot, published by the Department of Commerce & Labor, made no mention of Mission Bay, but did list False Bay. It was the same in the 1917 edition—and in the 1935 edition of the British Admiralty's Sailing Directions; it wasn't until 1950 that the latter publication hedged to the extent of listing it as Mission (False) Bay.

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ABOUT A YEAR AGO this choice bit of information got around, and in it a small group of

The Water Front, San Diego, Cal.



historically-minded citizens saw a chance for a lot of fun. Had the name ever been changed legally? By any chance was it still False Bay? What would the legal repercussions be? How would it affect titles and leases?

A letter to the United States Board of Geographic Names brought a reply which punctured the balloon. The board, it seems, had officially changed the name to Mission Bay on Oct. 6, 1915.

London is a long ways away, and Sailing Directions just hadn't got the word.

Courtesy of the San Diego Union
May 13, 1956.

GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

Jerry MacMullen has decided to retire as editor of MAINS'L HAUL. Since he started our publication fourteen years ago, he has given us interesting maritime lore as well as keeping us up to date on the activities of our Museum. As an author, raconteur, historian, and all-around great guy, nobody can ever take Jerry's place. However, we will all do our best to keep MAINS'L HAUL on a steady course toward the goals which he has set for us. We will miss you Jerry, thanks, and smooth sailing.

Now for the good news! We have secured Jerry's and the San Diego Union's permission to run the articles which Jerry wrote and which appeared in the travel section of the Sunday edition of the Union for many years. They should bring enjoyment to those reading them

for the first time, and fond memories to those who have read them before. The first of the articles appears in this issue.

WHAT'S NEW

A salute to the Ladies, they have done it again! The *Star of India* Auxiliary recently presented Captain Bowman with a check for the Maritime Museum in the amount of \$ 10,000, the result of their fine efforts in the spring Rummage Sale. This brings their gifts to the Museum this year to a total of \$ 12,800.

The Propeller Club of San Diego will hold their Board meeting in our library aboard the *Berkeley* on July 12, 1978.

Wayne Smith of KPBS recently received two Emmy awards for his work on the film about the *Star of India* entitled "The Iron Lady of the Seas." This film will be shown on nationwide Public Television, July 3, July 6 and on July 9. Consult your local T.V. guides for times.

THANKS

A vote of thanks to Norval Diamond, Wayne Kenaston Jr., Wendell H. Calkins, and Joe Jessop for their donations of books to our Library. Also a special thanks to Captain Eddie Fredericks for his gift of Naval Institute Proceedings and his generous donation of time and effort in helping our Library grow.

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