

Pilot House

Probably this is the first issue of STEAMBOAT BILL to be edited on the Pacific Coast. Despite the speed and convenience of air mail, there still are handicaps to working so far from most of the people active in the field. Add to this the inexperience of a Freshman editor, and the result will require some indulgence from readers.

The West Coast steamship picture has both light and dark areas. The hope of many that YARMOUTH would return for another summer of voyages between San Francisco, Victoria, and Seattle have not been realized. ACAPULCO (a MONGOLIA, b EUROPA, c NASSAU) is having her troubles in establishing a Los Angeles-Acapulco service. The three new State of Alaska ferries plus the addition to the

Southeastern Alaska service of the white-painted PRINCESS PATRICIA in place of the PRINCESS LOUISE, and NORTHLAND PRINCE OF Northland Nav. Co. considerably extend the possibilities of getting to Alaska by water. At San Francisco the restored steam schooner WAPAMA (a WAPAMA, b TONGASS, c WAPAMA) should soon be ready to open for visitors at the San Francisco Maritime Museum. Recently your editor crossed from Wilmington to Avalon in CATALINA. She is excellently maintained, and seems to enjoy good patronage. Her reciprocating engines of 1924 vintage are a joy to observe. At Avalon there awaits the traveller a side-wheeler, m.v. PHOENIX, which operates plates in her bottom. Another former glass-bottomed boat, m.v. PRINCESS, cruises back and forth between San Pedro and Long Beach Harbor. She also is a side-wheeler. For her present service, her single squat stack has been replaced by two tall fake stacks athwartships.

STEAMSHIPS TO SAN DIEGO

by Jerry MacMullen

From the time of its discovery in 1542 until the completion of the breakwaters for Los Angeles Harbor early in the present century, San Diego Bay was the only natural, landlocked harbor south of San Francisco which was capable of accommodating deepwater vessels.

Joao Rodrigues Cabrilho -- popularly Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo --, a Portuguese navigator sailing for the Spanish government, discovered the port on 28 September, 1542. He sailed on, to his death a few months later, and nothing was done about it until 1602 when the Spanish navigator Sebastian Vizcaino sailed up from New Spain to see if the place was still there. It was, but again nothing was done about it, this time for a mere matter of 167 years. Then in 1769, Spain decided to do something about her new territory to the north, and a colonizing expedition, led by Don Gaspar de Portola, moved up by land and by sea and San Diego was established. From then on until the end of Spanish rule in 1822, and of Mexican rule in 1846, it became the port of call for sporadic visitors in the form of government supply ships, small-time warcraft and, in increasing numbers, the ubiquitous Yankee traders and whalers. Everything, of course, continued to be sail.

What was the first steamer to enter San Diego Bay? For a pity, no one knows, probably it was some sidewheeler bound from Panama for San Francisco, and poking her nose into San Diego Bay in the fond hope that there she might find something to burn other than her own furniture and bunk-boards.

The Act of March 3, 1847, specified that steamers of the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. were to call at San Diego, Monterey and San Francisco to pick up and discharge mail. However, when their first steamer, CALIFORNIA, was off San Diego on the night 20-21 February 1849, she was so low on fuel that they decided

not to risk it. Not far north of San Diego the last scoop of coal went into her furnaces -- so they thought. They set sail and began chopping up woodwork; then someone found some more coal stashed away somewhere, and they got on into Monterey where, after laying in a supply of wood, they found still more coal somewhere down below, and they made San Francisco 28 February. Pacific Mail's OREGON, which had picked up some dubious coal at San Blas, made a brief stop at San Diego 30 March, 1849. Her call was strictly for mails; she remained in port only for half an hour. She may well have been, and in fact probably was, the first steamer to enter the Port of San Diego.

By the following year, there was enough of interest in California to call for "opposition" steamers, and in 1851 San Diego enjoyed, a bit vicariously, the story of its first shipwreck. The opposition steamer UNION, a 593-ton screw steamer, piled up at San Quintin, Baja California, on what some say was the overly-celebrated night of 4 July, 1851. The San Diego Herald scooped the world when survivors arrived, on foot, in San Diego a few days later, and the machinery was set in motion for Pacific Mail's NORTHERNER to go to the rescue of the stranded passengers.



OREGON of the Pacific Mail S.S. Co., 1848. Probably the first steamer to call at San Diego. (Eldredge Collection, Mariners Museum.)