

C O P Y

July 23, 1954

Mr. John Cushing, President
The Oceanic Steamship Company
215 Market Street
San Francisco 5, California

Dear Mr. Cushing:

The renaming of our full rigged ship poses a program before the museum and one that I have mentally wrestled with off and on during the several years that we have been working to acquire her. Incidentally, I want to say that I am overjoyed that we have taken title to the ship and think it is the best thing that ever happened to the museum. I think it will revitalize the organization internally, and externally give us prestige that we never had before - witness photos during the past week in the New York Times, Baltimore Sun, Roanoke, Virginia paper, Seattle Times, Portland Oregonian, to mention a few that we have got wind of.

With this spotlight of national attention directed on our efforts, I think it behooves us the more to act like a museum. This I would essentially define as striving to raise the level of the public's interest and education, rather than the reverse process of lowering museum standards, until they reach a "popular" level. The latter is what Frank Kissinger did by hanging a pirate dummy in the rigging, painting the hull aluminum, the masts red, and giving the ship a "pretty" name, i. e. "Pacific Queen". This is the Hollywood quickie level of nautical research, and a subject of derision in the museum world. The "A" pictures make the money these days, not the "B" pictures.

For several years I was of a mind like yourself that the vessel should be renamed "Star of Alaska" because that was the name she carried for twenty-six years in the Alaska Packer's trade out of this Bay. Intrinsically, it is an attractive name, certainly a hundred times more than "Balclutha" with its Scottish burr.

However, for the past couple of years it has been my conviction that we would be riddled with contradictions if we put "Star of Alaska" on her bows. From a money-making standpoint, a major feature in getting the public to stroll that block from the Fisherman's Wharf restaurants to Pier 43½ is going to be that the ship will be painted to look like an old-time man of war, with a row of big black gun ports painted along her sides. These run along the third strake of plating (at the level of the hawse pipes) and will show well above the wharf. This war-like appearance would draw people if the name on the bows were the "Merchant's Gargling Oil" (which a little wooden schooner actually carried at that time).

