

Mr. John Cushing
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a profound effect upon these expatriates, just as it did upon a ship named "Balclutha". It caused her creation.

All this may seem academic, but in starting a museum of maritime history we have aligned ourselves with academicians. Museums, libraries, and universities must seek the truth or they are unworthy of their character. Barney Gould has the privilege of re-writing history so that the "Fort Sutter" becomes a Mississippi showboat, but we have the very opposite function -- to get at the source, to unblinkingly face the fact that "Balclutha" may not be the most resonant name in the world but we're stuck with it. I don't think we should try to duck; I think we should act like a museum. An art museum doesn't dub in the name Rembrandt because it is dissatisfied with the origin of a painting; it recognizes that it doesn't have that privilege.

Moreover, that's the way we're going to make the most money -- by the word getting around that the museum has the real thing available for 50¢ at Fisherman's Wharf. I think it will be agreed that without much question the '80s and '90s -- her deep water days -- were the most fascinating in the old ship's life, both to the public and the historian. That opens up to us an exploration of shanghaiing, hell-ship practices and the like -- subjects for some good displays and good come-on material to get the public on board. And we will be at the same time completely within the confines of good museum practices, because the "Balclutha" lived in the midst of those roughhouse days. The "Star of Alaska" and "Pacific Queen" had almost effeminate careers by comparison.

It is a funny thing, but keeping an eye on the public and how they react to our displays here has convinced me that authenticity in reasonable doses and attractively packaged is the most valuable thing we have to market. The public has been fed so much honey and popularization by the movies, by so-called "showmen", etc., that they seize upon the real thing with a gasp of relief. They have become cynical, but are warm-hearted when they find they haven't been duped for the umpteenth time. The class of people that we have at the museum, and that will form the bulk of our paying visitors to the ship, are interested and inquiring -- I know because I deal with them every day. They are going to sense the phony note once again when they wander around a ship picturesquely named "Pacific Queen" or "Star of Alaska" and see the name "Balclutha" engraved on her bell and deck capstan. So we can remove these fittings or launch into an elaborate explanation on a placard alongside. It seems to me that we are beating a clumsy and makeshift retreat -- scared by that little non-euphonious word "Balclutha". Certainly an undignified performance for, of all things, a museum.

Sincerely,

Karl Kortum, Director



PS: Since this will eventually be an Executive Committee matter, I have taken the liberty of sending a copy of this letter to the members of the Committee.

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