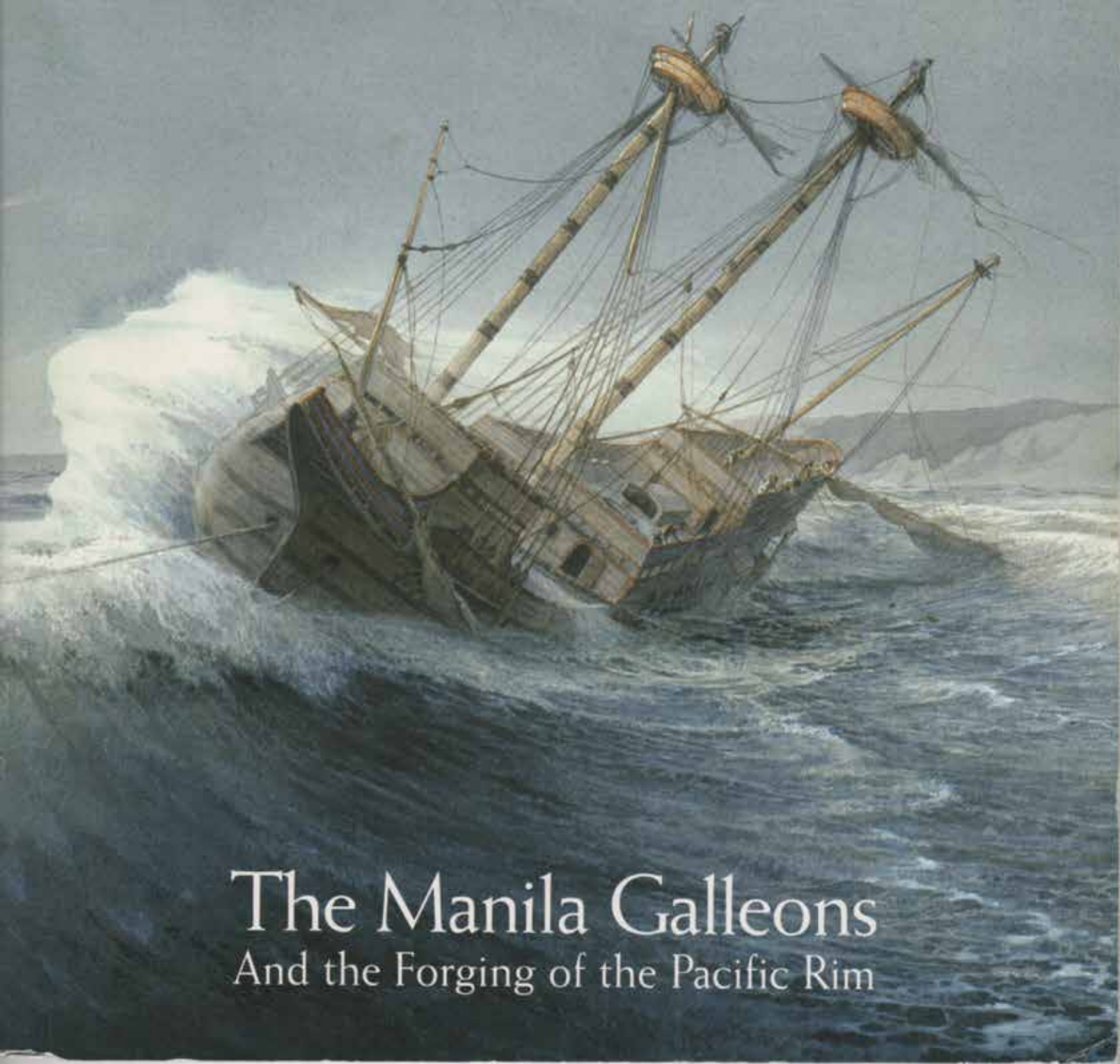


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MAINS'L HAUL

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A Journal Of Pacific Maritime History



The Manila Galleons
And the Forging of the Pacific Rim

M A R

THE LOG

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*A Spanish galleon in a Pacific storm,
from a 1622 map by Hessel Gerritsz,
courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris;
quote from Genivelli Careri, 1697*

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DID YOU KNOW?

- ▶ that trade across the Pacific began with the Manila galleons?
- ▶ that when the first Manila ship sailed, England hadn't yet colonized America—and the last one sailed after the U. S. was a quarter-century old? (page 4)
- ▶ that most eastbound voyages across the Pacific took 6 months or more? (page 7)
- ▶ where the nickname "two bits" for a quarter comes from? (page 8)
- ▶ that one galleon sailed on as a "ghost ship" after all aboard died? (page 21)
- ▶ that a shipwrecked galleon is still being uncovered in Baja California? (page 57)
- ▶ that Filipino sailors helped found San Diego in 1769? (page 67)

*"Mains'l Haul" —An order to "haul"
ship bidding "Swing the main yard"
To loot, steal, or acquire."
—John M. Murphy*

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And the Forging of the Pacific Rim

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After her long voyage across the Pacific, the San Agustín wrecks at Point Reyes, California.

Watercolor by Gordon Miller, 2000, courtesy of the artist



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Few people today have heard of the galleons that created the first regular trans-Pacific trade, carrying Asian luxuries, and the silver to pay for them, between Spain's Philippine and Mexican colonies. During the nearly 250 years of their crossings, however, these vessels were freighted with legend; the words "Manila ship" conjured an image of riches almost beyond imagination. Cannonballs were said to bounce harmlessly off their hulls, due to their construction of exotic woods, but generations of English and Dutch mariners dreamed of trying their metal against a galleon's hull in the hopes of capturing one for themselves. In the early modern world, capturing a Manila galleon was the only way to achieve fabulous wealth and eternal fame in an afternoon's work.

Galleons and other ships cluster by the arsenal and shipyard of Cavite. Behind them is Manila's walled center, Intramuros, where the Spaniards lived. To the left, Chinese suburbs sprawl across the Pasig River, while to the right lie the main Filipino neighborhoods.

Detail from a 1647 Dutch drawing, courtesy Österreich Nationalbibliothek

FROM THE HELM

by Ray Ashley
Director, San Diego Maritime Museum

The fact that something was once legendary is, of course, hardly a guarantee that it has any relevance to us today, and the rich commerce between the ports of Manila and Acapulco has been a dusty memory for almost two centuries now.

The reason that we at the San Diego Maritime Museum have chosen to devote this special publication and an important exhibit to the subject is that the Manila galleon trade left us a legacy: the phenomenon of cross-Pacific connections between markets, economic centers and peoples that we know as the Pacific Rim. It is a truism worth repeating that, when one stands inside an edifice, it is difficult

to see its foundations. In the case of San Diego and other West Coast cities, the foundation of our Pacific Rim economy was laid when the galleons established, and for centuries sustained, a pattern of regular trade across the Pacific.

Each of the following articles advances our understanding of this foundational Pacific trade in a different way. Two dis-



tinguished members of *Mains'l Haul's* editorial board remind us that the galleons first and foremost represented business propositions. Carla Rahn Phillips addresses longstanding suspicions that the Spanish must have encountered Hawaii during two-and-a-half centuries of circling it on their round trip voyages. This avoidance may seem unlikely, but the galleons existed only for commerce; once their pilots found a viable commercial sailing route, they preferred to leave exploration for others. Michael Mathes presents us with a sixteenth century contract between a Mexican merchant and a very unlucky galleon pilot.

William McCarthy, who introduces the galleon trade in the following essay, uses historical documents to explore the amusements and climactic celebration aboard ship, while archaeologist Jinky Gardner employs documents of a different sort—artifacts from shipwrecks—to reveal evidence of the trade's effects.

I explore one such utterly unanticipated effect in my article: Lord Anson's transformation of the Royal Navy into a force able to sustain its men's health, and thus its fighting

ability, after long periods at sea—was one result, I argue, of the horrors Anson witnessed during his hunt for the Manila galleon.

Edward Von der Porten shows us that the array of porcelains found in a shipwrecked galleon in Mexico reflects early efforts by Chinese merchants to discern the kinds of products that would appeal to their new trading partners in Latin America and Europe. Later Chinese export porcelain designs, unlike those from the wreck displayed in the "Treasures of the Manila Galleons" exhibit, were selected explicitly to meet European tastes. The world economy, of which the Pacific Rim is a key part, arose precisely because of such interactions between market demands on one side of the globe, and the willingness of those on the other side to meet those demands.

While it now seems clear that the trade between Manila and Acapulco laid the foundation upon which the Pacific Rim was ultimately built, Kale Fajardo's article reminds us that history, including the story of the galleons, can be manipulated to justify many viewpoints—including economic concepts like free trade that are integral to today's Pacific Rim economy.



The Manila Galleon

An Introduction by William J. McCarthy

William J. McCarthy served as Editorial Consultant for this publication. He is Associate Professor of History, Director of Graduate Studies and Director of the Science, Humanities and Society Program at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Philippine history is his specialty, and he has conducted research there and in Spain, Portugal, France, India and Macau.

When Miguel López de Legazpi dispatched a galleon across the Pacific from Manila to Acapulco in 1571, he began one of the world's most ambitious commercial ventures, and heralded a centuries'-long trade in Asian commodities. Spanish galleons sailed across the Pacific annually, with few exceptions, until 1814, transporting Spanish American silver and Asian luxuries. The voyages created, for the first time, the sense of the Pacific as a unity, as the vast ocean—the world's largest geographical feature—was regularly and methodically traversed. The story of the galleon has intrigued sailors, Filipinos, cultural aficionados and historians, but has rarely formed the nucleus of an important study, such as this publication. With the popularizing of the

Model of a Manila ship
of about 1575.

*Model by Bill Brown based
on plans by Raymond Aker,
from the exhibit "Treasures of
the Manila Galleons;" photo by
John Wright*

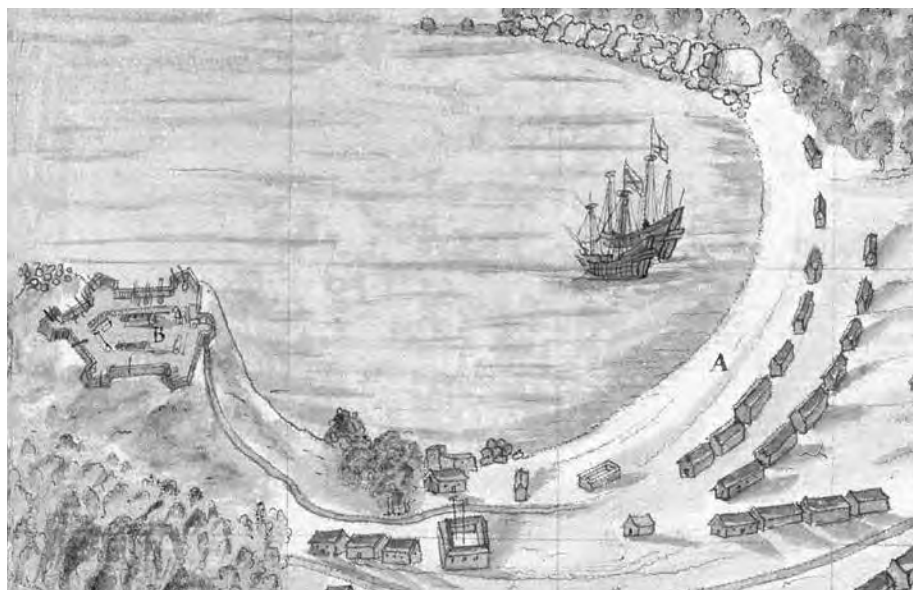


The luxurious commodities that loaded down the galleons caused much of the wonder associated with the enterprise. These treasures included fine silks and linens, precious stones and spices, and manufactured items such as jewelry, porcelain and lacquerware. Spanish Philippine *oidor* Antonio Morga breathlessly described a cache of such items in 1609:

Raw silk in bundles...quantities of velvets...woven stuffs and brocades...quantities of gold and silver thread...damasks, satins, taffetas...musk, benzoin and ivory; also pearls and rubies, sapphires and crystal...precious stones of all colors; pepper and other spices; and rarities, which, did I refer to them all, I would never finish...²

Many of these items came from further afield than China. Cottons from Bengal and other distant regions eventually became available to the Spanish merchants; precious stones came from Indochina, pepper from Sumatra, lacquerware from Japan, and rare spices from the Moluccas. Typically the Spaniards acquired them at Manila from regional merchants eager to tap into the supply of Spanish silver. The lure of this silver, and centrality of location, made Manila the leading entrepôt of the East in its day.

Ever ambitious and monopolistic, Spanish officials soon adopted a system of purchasing Chinese trade goods en masse, the *pancada*, whereby they attempted to procure the entire annual shipments of goods, and prevented the worst excesses of price gouging. In an ingenious and progressive bid to support merchants and other resident Spaniards, a system of entitlement emerged whereby each citizen (*vecino*) of the colony was allotted lading space on the galleon, represented by a certain number of vouchers, or *boletas*. As the decades passed, speculators, or the voracious charitable institution the *Casa da Misericordia*, came to control the greater part of the *boletas*. Widows, youthful heirs and unwary common sailors and soldiers parted with their *boletas* for ready cash, but were consequently cut out of the trade's huge profits. Within a few decades, the bulk of the trade came under the control of a small coterie, but collectively or individually, the galleons' cargoes became the sustenance for



the colony.

Great wealth was obtained by many of the Manila merchants; beautiful homes were built and lavish lifestyles enjoyed. Fiestas upon the arrival of the galleon from Mexico were mirthful and decadent, and foreign travelers tell of the sloth of the wealthy *Manileños*. Some Spaniards stayed on in the colony, and many became large land-owners, or *encomenderos*. Others returned to Mexico or Spain with their earnings. Other merchants invested in the trade from New Spain (Mexico), though Manila regulations forbade it.³ Many, however, became victims of the vicissitudes of the far-flung enterprise, losing fortune or life to shipwreck or other hardships of the crossing. The proliferation of beggars, widows and orphans attested to the risks of the trade.

The long voyage across the Pacific inspired awe, and dread. Westbound, the journey was a bearable, even pleasant, three months along the prevailing trades. Galleons departed Acapulco in late winter, arriving at Manila in the spring, usually without incident. “They always run in a straight line in a smooth sea, before the wind,” exaggerated one passenger, “as if they were in a canal.”⁴ The east-bound return was a different matter altogether. The voyage took approximately six months, sometimes longer—an extraordinarily long time to be at sea—and was often beset by storms in the Philippine Sea and as far north as Japan. Galleon departures were often delayed due to bureaucratic or other reasons, increasing the risks of encountering monsoon rains or typhoons (*baguíos*).

The length of the voyage caused much discomfort, illness and loss of life. Storms sent many ships and men to their graves, or forced returns (*arribadas*) to Manila. In the case either of shipwreck or *arribada*, the year’s profits were lost to the colony, for there was typically only one galleon annually. For *Manileños*, there was no other income until agriculture and ranching took hold in the eighteenth century. Tribute and largesse from the Mexican treasury (the *socorro*) supported the colony, but for most Spanish merchants and settlers, the fabled wealth and glamour often remained elusive.

Over the course of Imperial history, the Manila galleon was marginalized. As early as 1591, the trade was restricted to two galleons per year, cargo not to exceed 250,000 *pesos*’ value at Manila. This was designed to facilitate or obvi-



The sweltering port of Acapulco, under the guns of the Fort of San Diego, sprang to life when the galleon arrived.

Facing page: detail from a 1618 Dutch map of Acapulco, courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France; this page, Arnoldus Montanus, 1671



The Spanish met Asia's insatiable demand for silver with these coins, creating the first world-wide monetary system. Minted in the Americas from silver mined under grueling conditions, they were accepted everywhere. When small change was scarce, *ocho real* coins ("pieces of eight") could be cut into eight "bits." Because these coins were legal tender in the U.S. into the 1800s, Americans still occasionally refer to a quarter as "two bits."

From "Treasures of the Manila Galleons," courtesy Edward and Saryl Von der Porten

ate inspection, and to keep the alarming amount of silver escaping from the empire somewhat in hand. Merchants in Seville, in particular, lobbied for the curtailment of the trade. This was the great irony of the Manila trade—that Europeans spent centuries struggling to establish direct trade with China, and when it was finally achieved, the threat of its success caused its sponsors to attempt to limit or squelch it. Thus we find Philippine governors begging repeatedly for a higher trade allowance, begging for more soldiers and settlers, begging for additional financial assistance, begging for permission to trade overtly with Portuguese Macau, even occasionally suggesting abandoning the colony. Manila became a victim of its own potential.

The restrictions helped to foster smuggling of legendary proportions aboard the already richly-laden ships. The legend was enhanced by four British captures of Manila galleons (1587, 1709, 1743 and 1762), from which word spread widely of the unimaginably vast sums of wealth being transported. A rare inspection at Acapulco in 1637 revealed that ten times the permitted amount of cargo was being shipped.⁵

Further, the priorities of Spanish policymaking rarely included the Philippines. From the moment of the colony's founding, the Crown was preoccupied with challenges that precluded rapt attention to Manila. From the Inquisition to the peninsular expulsions to the administration of America to the constant European wars to Habsburg and Bourbon dynastic concerns, attention was constantly directed elsewhere. Even the British occupation of Manila during the 1760s failed to make the colony a priority. This is not to say that its existence and administration were ignored; on the contrary, they received attentive review. Instead, hampered by this multiplicity of concerns, the most far-flung empire yet to appear in the world was unable to expend the initiative or provide sufficient resources to realize its colony's potential.

The viability of the trade, and the splendor of Manila, peaked between approximately 1610 and 1640. During this time, silver was plentiful, suppliers of luxuries active, construction in Manila and in the Cavite shipyards booming, and competitors few. A number of factors diminished the success of the trade and the colony thereafter. Dutch incursions proved damaging, the fall of the Ming in 1644 chaotic, and the opening of Canton to Western merchants in 1685 debilitating. The hostility of Japan to Catholics, too, proved disadvantageous, as did an earthquake that devastated Manila in 1645, and flooding of Mexico City between 1628 and 1633. The incursion of Northern Europeans into the Caribbean created new challenges and expenses during the 1630s, and decreasing silver production after 1620 was detrimental to the Imperial economy as a whole.⁶ In Europe, the Thirty Years' War and rebellions in Cataluña and Portugal devoured resources, and the success of *Sevillano* merchants in restricting the trade all had their effects.

The galleon trade carried on, however, until 1814, continuing to link Madrid and its most distant colony. It still brought silks, porcelain, devotional items, and the tortoise-shell combs and embroidered silk shawls (*mantones de Manila*) that had become characteristic dress for women in Spain and her American colonies. The trade still supplied the enormously successful Philippine missions with wine, wafers and prelates. It survived the challenge of the short-lived Philippine Company of the 1780s, the Bourbon monarchy's attempts at enlightened economic and Imperial reorganization, and arguments that the resource-draining colony be abandoned altogether, but ultimately the trade foundered on the rocks of Mexico's War of Independence.

For almost 250 years, the galleons carried their treasures across the vast Pacific. They pioneered trans-Pacific trade, in the longest-enduring and furthest-flung regular maritime trading voyage during the Age of Sail. At its peak, the Manila-Acapulco trade was one of the great commercial and logistical achievements in world history. It was also the theater for a great deal of heroism as well as hardship and oppression, and saw the creation of an extraordinarily ambitious and successful economic system. The rich subject of the galleon trade, as the articles on the following pages attest, is no longer being tarnished by neglect, nor by the subsequent torpor of the economy of the great port on Manila Bay.



NOTES

- 1 While his successful passage followed that of mutinous captain Alonso de Arellano by several weeks, Urdaneta is generally accorded the honor of having discovered the key to traversing the Pacific from the West.
- 2 Benzoin is a balsamlike tree resin used in medicines and perfumes. Quoted in William Lytle Schurz, *The Manila Galleon* (New York: Dutton, 1939), 74. Schurz's book remains important; drawing upon decades of his research, it was the first to describe the galleon trade in significant depth and detail. With an eye for effective anecdotes and admirable thoroughness, his work has yet to be surpassed. In previous histories of Spain and its empire, the Manila galleon received scant attention as a curiosity, or a quaint but marginally significant adventure.
- 3 Mexican scholar Carmen Yuste-López and American Louisa Schell Hoberman have emphasized the integral participation of Mexican merchants in the trade. Yuste-López, *El comercio de la Nueva España con Filipinas* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1984); Hoberman, *Mexico's Merchant Elite, 1590-1660: Silver, State and Society* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).
- 4 Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Carreri, *A Voyage to the Philippines* [1697] (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1963), 138. Such contemporary travelers' accounts offer generally grim impressions of the voyages, and may not have been widely read. Antonio Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, quoted earlier, was written in 1609 but not published until the twentieth century. Dominican Father Francisco Domingo de Navarrete told of being shipwrecked off southern Luzon in 1653. J. S. Cummins, ed., *The Travels and Controversies of Friar Domingo Navarrete, 1618-1686* (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1962).
- 5 William J. McCarthy, "Between Policy and Prerogative: Malfesance in the Inspection of the Manila Galleons at Acapulco, 1637," *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 2, no. 2 (spring 1993). The author, and scholars including Katherine Bjork, Antonio Garcia-Abásolo, John Headley and Ostwald Sales-Colín, is among those currently scouring documentary sources for new insights into various aspects of the topic. McCarthy, "A Spectacle of Misfortune: Wreck, Salvage and Loss in the Spanish Pacific," *The Great Circle* 17, no. 2 (1995); "The Yards at Cavite: Shipbuilding in the Early Colonial Philippines," *International Journal of Maritime History* 7, no. 2 (December 1995); Bjork, "The Link that Kept the Philippines Spanish: Mexican Merchant Interests and the Manila Trade, 1571-1815," *Journal of World History* 9, no. 1 (1998); Garcia-Abásolo, "Spanish Settlers in the Philippines (1571-1599)" in Florentino Rodas, ed., *Estudios sobre Filipinas durante el Período Español* (Manila: Instituto Cervantes, 1998); "The Private Environment of the Spaniards in the Philippines," *Philippine Studies* 44, no. 3 (1996); Headley, "Spain's Asian Presence, 1565-1590: Structures and Aspirations," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 75, no. 4, (1995); Sales-Colín, "El movimiento portuario de Acapulco: un intento de aproximación (1626-1654)," *Revista Complutense de Historia de América* 22 (1996).
- 6 In recent decades scholars have increasingly recognized the global importance of the flow of silver. See, for example John TePaske's ground-breaking "New World Silver, Castile, and the Philippines, 1590-1800" in John F. Richards, ed., *Precious Metals in the Medieval and Early Modern Worlds* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1984); Peter Bakewell, *Silver Mining and Society in Colonial Mexico: Zacatecas, 1546-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971). Dennis O. Flynn and his collaborators have underscored this significance of the trade to Spanish Imperial history and the global economy. Flynn and Arturo Giraldez, "Silk for Silver: Manila-Macao Trade in the Seventeenth Century," *Philippine Studies* 44, no. 1 (1996); "Born with a 'Silver Spoon': The Origin of World Trade in 1571," *Journal of World History* 6, no. 2 (1995); Flynn, Lionel Frost, A. J. H. Latham, eds., *Pacific Centuries: Pacific and Pacific Rim History since the Sixteenth Century*, (London: Routledge, 1999); Flynn and Arturo Giraldez, eds., *Metals and Mines in an Emerging Global Economy* (Brookfield, Vermont: Variorum, 1997).

Spaniards in Hawai'i Before Cook?

Myths, Legends, and History

Carla Rahn Phillips

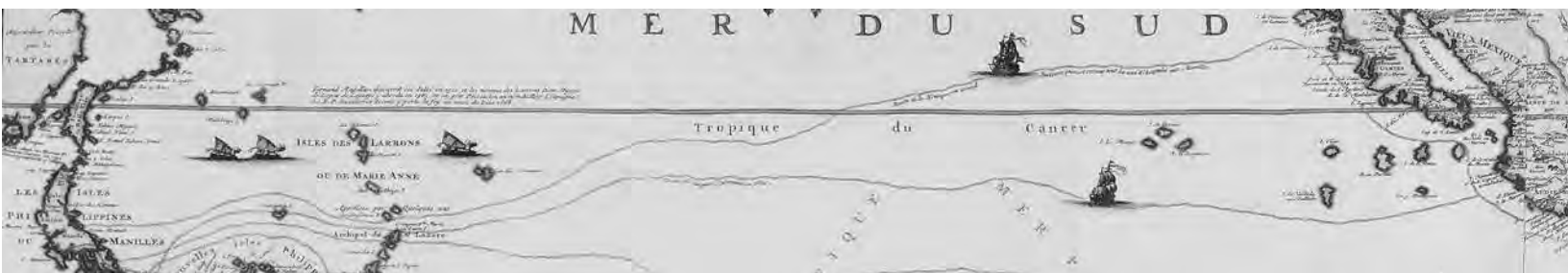
For two centuries prior to Cook's visit, galleons seem to have circled Hawaii without encountering it.

Detail of 1719 French "Carte Tres Curieuse de la Mer du Sud..."; courtesy Michael Stone

For generations, professional and amateur historians have studied the accounts and maps of sixteenth-century Spanish explorers in the Pacific, trying to trace their understanding of longitude, currents, and weather patterns in that vast expanse of ocean. Logic suggests that at least one of those explorers must have discovered the Hawaiian Islands, hundreds of years before the Englishman James Cook.

That point of view first emerged with some of Cook's men, and many scholars agreed with them. Over time, various Spanish explorers were touted as Cook's precursors, based on interpretations of official reports and maps and oral traditions among the Hawaiians. The pendulum began to swing the other way in 1916, when the Swedish scholar E. W. Dahlgren published an exhaustive analysis of the evidence. Dahlgren concluded that, "No historical fact proves, nor is there any sort of probability, that the Hawaiian Islands were ever visited, or even seen, by the Spaniards before their discovery by Captain Cook in 1778."¹

Dahlgren's thesis was reinforced by John F. G. Stokes in the 1930s and became the basis for a new scholarly consensus.² Yet the idea that Spanish explorers preceded Cook can still be found in serious work among an older generation of scholars, mostly in Spain, and in



some atlases and encyclopedias published there for a broad audience.³ Younger Spanish scholars have generally abandoned the idea,⁴ but it lives on elsewhere, including Hawaii.⁵ Is there any truth to the persistent idea that Spaniards discovered Hawaii before Cook? At the very least, the complicated history of early Pacific exploration should make us question the rigid certainty of Dahlgren and Stokes, as recent scholars have begun to do.⁶ The brief survey that follows will look at a range of evidence regarding the early Spanish presence in the Pacific, trying to sort the legends from the history of Hawaiian discovery.⁷

The earliest possible Spanish contact with Hawaii was the disaster-prone expedition commended to García Jofre de Loaísa in 1524, just a few years after the epic circumnavigation that began under Ferdinand Magellan. Loaísa lost three of his seven ships to mishaps and desertion before they even attempted to cross the Pacific. And shortly after emerging from the Strait of Magellan in June of 1526, the caravel *San Lesmes* vanished in a storm. Robert Langdon argued in 1975 that the *San Lesmes* not only survived but that its crewmen settled on islands throughout Polynesia. There is no trace of them in Spanish written records, but Langdon makes a strong case based on oral traditions in the South Seas and on presumed Spanish elements in local artifacts, customs, language, and genetic inheritance.⁸ Loaísa died before his flagship reached the Spice Islands (Moluccas), but his crew carried on, challenging the well-entrenched Portuguese for the rich spice trade.

Fortunately for them, a ship that abandoned Loaísa's expedition at the Strait of Magellan reached New Spain (Mexico) and told Hernán Cortés about the expedition's plight. As a result, Cortés financed a rescue mission from Mexico in 1527, under the command of his cousin Álvaro de Saavedra.⁹ Saavedra was supposed to carry letters to Loaísa and others, find the rest of Magellan's men, and spy on the Portuguese to learn whether they had built any forts within the Spanish sphere defined by the Treaty of Tordesillas. Saavedra left the Mexican coast in early November of 1527, with three ships and one hundred men. Sailing more or less straight across the Pacific, they stayed together for about 1,170 leagues, but during a storm in late December, the flagship lost sight of the other two. There is no written evidence about what happened to the missing ships, but their probable location when the storm hit suggests that one or both of them might have been blown to Hawaii.

In the Moluccas, Saavedra located Loaísa's remaining men and joined forces with them against the Portuguese. After buying a load of spices, he attempted to return to New Spain, battling the Pacific from June to November of 1528 in the vicinity of New Guinea, but eventually he had to turn back. After repairing the ship, he again sailed for New Spain in May of 1529, this time by a northerly route. Saavedra died after the ship had reached 26° North. Modern scholars have variously sketched the track of his final voyage, and a few argue that he died near Hawaii,¹⁰ but there is no explicit support for that notion in the documentary record. Following Saavedra's dying wish, the crew continued to 31° North before bad weather and diminishing supplies forced them to turn back. At that point, they thought they were about twelve hundred leagues from the Moluccas and one thousand leagues from New Spain.¹¹ Back in the Moluccas they again joined forces with survivors from the voyages of Magellan and Loaísa and held out against the Portuguese

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Manila ships like the *Victoria*, depicted on a 1744 map of the Philippines, sailed past Hawaii unawares.

Courtesy U. C. Berkeley Libraries

until 1632. When they learned that Charles V had sold Spanish claims on the Moluccas to Portugal in 1529, they arranged to travel to Spain under Portuguese auspices. Thus the survivors from three unplanned circumnavigations arrived in Lisbon together in 1536.

Saavedra's expedition was the first of several organized from New Spain that tried to discover the return route from Asia. The next such effort with a possible connection to Hawaii occurred in 1542-45 under the command of Ruy López de Villalobos, a cousin of Antonio de Mendoza, the viceroy of New Spain.¹² After numerous delays, Villalobos left Navidad on the Mexican coast on All Saints' Day (November 1) of 1542, with six ships and more than four hundred men. According to the best reconstructions of the voyage, the little fleet headed west past the islands now known as the Revillagigedo group near Mexico and thereafter more or less straight across the Pacific through what are now called the Marshall Islands and the Caroline Islands. They anchored in Mindanao in early February of 1543.

Over the years, some scholars have argued that the expedition's track across the Pacific ran farther north, past the Hawaiian Islands, which they credit the Castilian pilot Juan Gaetán with discovering. This story is a cautionary tale about the misuse of historical evidence. Gaetán was a sailor on Villalobos's expedition but says he was made a pilot on the trip home from the Moluccas around India and Africa. His account of Villalobos's expedition was published in Venice in 1550 as part of a famous collection of travel stories.¹³ Though quite brief and often confusing, it was the only eyewitness account of the expedition published before the nineteenth century, and was well known. After Cook's well-publicized discovery of the Hawaiian Islands in 1778, and his death at the hands of native Hawaiians in 1779, other navigators followed his track.¹⁴ The Frenchman Jean-François de Galaup de la Pérouse sent detailed journals and observations of his voyage in 1785-88 back to France from various ports of call; they were published after he vanished in the South Pacific. Of Hawaii, La Pérouse noted, "It seems certain to me that these islands were first discovered by Gaetán in 1542," basing his certainty on Gaetán's published account, and on the islanders' familiarity with trade and "knowledge of iron which, from their own evidence, they did not get from the English..."¹⁵ Gaetán's track lay ten degrees south of Hawaii, and his descriptions of the islands on the way to Mindanao bore little or no resemblance to the Hawaiian Islands. No matter. La Pérouse added 10° to Gaetán's notations of northern latitude, attributing it to a 'slip of the pen,' and ignored the descriptions. Thus began the persistent legend of Juan Gaetán as the discoverer of Hawaii.

An alternative Gaetán legend stems from events after Villalobos arrived in Mindanao. Short on food, hemmed in by the Portuguese, and unable to found a colony, the Spanish situation grew desperate. Villalobos therefore sent one of his ships toward the northeast, trying to reach New Spain to ask the viceroy for aid. Bernardo de la Torre led the probe on the sixty-tonelada *San Juan Letrán*, which set out on August 26, 1543, with a small crew that included Juan Gaetán.¹⁶ Judging from Gaetán's account, they seem to have discovered the Volcano and Bonin Islands south and east of Japan (now known as Kazan Retto and Ogasawara, respectively), reaching a latitude of some 25° North. On October 18, short of water and struggling with damaged masts and contrary winds, they turned back toward the Philippines, sailing west by

southwest and passing the Ladrones (now Marianas) along the way.¹⁷ Some authors argue that de la Torre reached Hawaii before turning back and credit him or Gaetán with its discovery, but the available records offer no support for that argument. In another curious twist, sometime before the end of the eighteenth century the date for Gaetán's supposed discovery of Hawaii shifted from 1542 to 1555, but there were no known voyages to the Pacific in 1555, and no record of Gaetán after 1550.

Villalobos sent two more probes to look for a way back across the Pacific; he died in Amboina on the second attempt. The survivors of his expedition, like all the others before them, had to arrange with the local Portuguese governor to get back to Spain. Part of the deal was to surrender all their papers and maps, which may explain why the several archival accounts of the voyage, as well as Gaetán's published version, lack essential details.

The discovery of a viable return track across the Pacific had to wait until 1565, when the Augustinian monk Andrés de Urdaneta put all the clues together, studying and reasoning from his own experiences on Loaísa's voyage and from other explorers' reports. Urdaneta accompanied the expedition of Miguel López de Legazpi in 1564 that succeeded both in conquering the Philippines and in solving the mystery of the return route. To carry news of the successful conquest, Urdaneta sailed far to the northeast from the Philippines with what is now called the Kuroshio or Japan Current, crossed the ocean with the North Pacific Current, and then followed the coast of North America southeastward with the California Current to Mexico.¹⁸ The voyage took four months, and although the route looks obvious on a modern map of the Pacific, navigators spent over forty years trying to discover it.

Shortly after knowledge of the return route spread, Álvaro Mendaña y Neira led the only other expedition that might have sighted the Hawaiian Islands before the establishment of the Manila galleon trade. Mendaña's two ships left in November 1567 from Perú, where Mendaña's uncle was governor, captain-general, and president of the Audiencia of Lima. The captains of the ships, Hernando Gallego and the noted cosmographer Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa were the navigational experts on the voyage, advising the twenty-five-year-old Mendaña. The expedition would be marked by dissension among the three of them.¹⁹

Sailing more or less straight out from Lima's port of Callao, a few months later they discovered the Solomon Islands, which had been named (even before their discovery) for the Biblical king who had fetched great riches from faraway isles.²⁰ Continual battles with the local inhabitants and pestilential fevers took a heavy toll on the expedition, and in early September the men petitioned Mendaña to return home. They sailed north by northeast in accordance with Urdaneta's formula. Along the way Mendaña discovered a low inhospitable island at just over 19° North that most scholars identify as Wake Island, but some have unconvincingly claimed was part of Hawaii. Whatever he found, it was not one of the verdant Hawaiian Islands. Mendaña was obsessed with the idea of colonizing new lands, and he would not have neglected any promising opportunities. After a series of misadventures at sea, the expedition reached the coast of Lower California in December of 1568, and Perú in September of 1569. Mendaña spent the next twenty-five years trying to organize a colonizing expedition for the Solomon Islands. He finally succeeded in 1595, only to die shortly after arriving.

Given the lack of convincing documentary evidence that Spain discovered Hawaii before Cook, how can we explain its persistent appeal?

Abraham Ortelius's 1570 world map includes the imaginary islands of Los Bolcanes and La Sarsana. On the 1761 symbolic map at right, the equator is Spain's staff. The galleon route between Manila and Acapulco literally underpins her.

1761 map courtesy of the Centro Geografico del Ejercito, Madrid



One reason seems to be that historical maps from the sixteenth century onward contained island groups with Spanish names that can be taken as the Hawaiian archipelago. To my mind, those maps prove little, however. No one could calculate longitude accurately until the late eighteenth century, and the vast dimensions of the Pacific defied the understanding of sixteenth-century sailors and cartographers. The Pacific is over twice as large as the Atlantic and fifty-six times the size of the Mediterranean. Navigators sailing the unknown waters of the Pacific, with few or no landmarks to guide them, simply did not know how far they had traveled, and the winds and currents added to their misperceptions. Pilots might think they were far out into the ocean when they were close to the Mexican coast, or vice-versa.

Early mapmakers relying on explorers' reports underestimated the size of the Pacific; later mapmakers increased its size by an arbitrary number of degrees and shifted islands and names from older maps back and forth as they saw fit. Sometimes the same group of islands appears twice on a map, with different names. And sometimes the islands depicted did not even exist. They were figments of the mariners' or mapmakers' imagination, chimerical shoals that appeared from time to time in the middle of the Pacific, or even outright fabrications. Similar distortions had characterized medieval depictions of the Atlantic Ocean, but the voyages of early explorers soon provided more accurate knowledge. That process took hundreds of years in the Pacific. In short, although the history of Pacific mapping is fascinating, and although I have the greatest respect for historians of cartography and the beautiful maps and charts they study, arguments about Hawaiian discovery based on maps from the period seem doomed to futility.

Anyone interested in the topic, despite my disclaimer, can find learned and lengthy arguments from several authors.²¹ None of them, however, mentions one stunning map that provides evidence against any official Spanish discovery of Hawaii. In 1761, Vicente de Memije, a Jesuit in Manila, depicted the Hispanic world from Spain to the Philippines superimposed on a female figure representing the Spanish monarchy. The Equator forms the flagstaff in her left hand, and the folds of her gown form the preferred routes back and forth across the Pacific, all neatly labeled. The symbolic depiction celebrates the global extent of the Spanish empire in the late eighteenth century, which Memije claims to have arrayed according to strict geographical principles. He even dedicated the map to King Charles III.





The remains of this iron blade, lashed to its wooden handle with coconut-fiber cord, came from a tomb predating the first known European contact.

Courtesy of the Bishop Museum, Honolulu

But the Pacific Ocean is blank where the Hawaiian Islands should be. When Spaniards discovered new lands, their government did not forget the fact.

Denying any official Spanish discovery of Hawaii does not eliminate the possibility of unreported contact, however. I have already mentioned that stray ships from the Loaísa and Saavedra expeditions might have carried individual Spaniards to Hawaii. Later, six ships are known to have disappeared on the Manila galleon run from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth century, and any one of them might also have carried survivors to the Hawaiian Islands.²²

Hawaiian oral traditions support the possibility of a Spanish presence in their midst long before Cook, and nineteenth-century missionaries, ethnographers, and historians accepted those traditions as valid evidence.²³ Dahlgren in 1916 and Stokes in the 1930s did not, but scholars such as Langdon and Spate in the 1970s discuss the oral traditions with the respect they deserve. One story describes how a foreign ship wrecked on the south Kona coast of Hawai'i during the reign of Keliokaloa, who is estimated to have been born about 1500. If we accept the oral tradition as genuine, the wreck could have been one of the two vessels from the Saavedra expedition that went missing during a storm in December of 1527. The "Kona wind" brings violent weather at that time of year, and it is plausible that a storm-tossed ship could have ended up on the Kona coast. According to various versions of the oral tradition, two or three people survived the wreck, including one woman, all of whom remained in Hawaii and had children with native Hawaiians.²⁴ At least two other oral traditions mentioned the arrival of white foreigners who settled in the islands, and many observers noted that some Hawaiian families had skin much lighter than the norm and traditions that claimed the white foreigners as ancestors.²⁵ Dahlgren and Stokes dismissed all such evidence, but it is not so easily explained away.

Artifacts also provide tantalizing suggestions of a European presence in Hawaii long before Cook, a presence that was more likely to have been Spanish than anything else. Early nineteenth-century visitors thought that Hawaiian feathered helmets and capes resembled sixteenth-century Spanish styles, but those ideas are subjective and impossible to prove. More intriguingly, Cook and his men noted that Hawaiians had several small pieces of iron used as tool blades, though there is no iron ore in Hawaii, and knew how to work iron. Several of Cook's associates assumed that iron and ironworking knowledge had come from Spanish vessels, but Cook resisted the notion, preferring to think that it had arrived with driftwood.²⁶ Less easy to explain away was the presence of a large iron anchor on Maui that seemed to be quite old. An American visitor in 1798 took it as further evidence that other Europeans had preceded Cook.²⁷ Both Dahlgren and Stokes dismissed that possibility out of hand, and Stokes argued that there was "little doubt" that the anchor had come from a European vessel sometime after Cook's arrival.²⁸ Despite Stokes's certainty, the available evidence cannot prove the point one way or another.

Perhaps the most interesting physical evidence found to date is a large piece of woven cloth (1' x 8') and a piece of iron in a wooden handle like a chisel, both found in a Hawaiian burial casket with the body of a deified chief. The burial undoubtedly occurred several generations before Cook, probably in the late seventeenth century. The Hawaiians did not weave, so the cloth, as well as the iron, must have come from outside the islands. When the cloth came to light at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu in the late 1950s, inquiries and tests determined that it was neither Japanese nor South American, but was likely to have been a piece of European sailcloth.²⁹ If so, it may have drifted in

on pieces of wreckage; it may have been part of the sails on a manned ship; it may or may not have been Spanish; but there is no question of its antiquity or its non-Hawaiian origin. Given the probable date of the burial, the cloth could arguably have come from one of the missing Manila galleons.

In the history of exploration and discovery, pride and national identity intrude more often than we like to admit in matters such as who first discovered a new land and how the encounter with its inhabitants played out. Regarding the Hawaiian Islands, there is no question that the third Pacific expedition of Captain James Cook made the first official, recorded European discovery of the islands. The encounter began peacefully but soon turned violent, echoing the sad refrain that has sounded so often in global exploration. If any Spaniard saw the islands earlier, or if a Spanish ship or individual Spaniards reached Hawaii any time before Cook, there is no convincing written, artistic, or cartographic proof of such an event. On the other hand, the evidence from Hawaiian oral tradition, the knowledge of iron in Hawaii before Cook's arrival, and the presence of what is likely to be European sailcloth in an earlier Hawaiian burial cannot be denied. Despite the rigid certainty of Dahlgren, Stokes, and scholars who have followed their lead, there is ample support in material remains and oral traditions for the notion that unrecorded Spanish contacts with Hawaii occurred during the 250 years between Magellan and Cook.

NOTES

- 1 E. W. Dahlgren, *Were the Hawaiian Islands Visited by the Spaniards Before their Discovery by Captain Cook in 1778?* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1916), 213.
- 2 John F. G. Stokes, "Hawaii's Discovery by Spaniards. Theories Traced and Refuted," *Papers of the Hawaiian Historical Society*, No. 20 – Papers Read Before the Society, November 18, 1938 (Honolulu: The Printshop Co., 1939): 38-113, summarizes the evidence from several earlier papers.
- 3 The *Atlas Marín de Historia* (Barcelona: Editorial Marín, 1985) shows the outbound track of López de Villalobos's expedition in 1542 touching the island of Hawaii. And the most recent edition of the *Diccionario enciclopédico* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1997) includes the statement that "...the islands [of Hawaii] were discovered by the Spaniards in 1527, and visited thereafter by Juan Gaitano in 1555 and by Mendaña in 1567. Captain Cook knew of their existence through these voyages of the Spaniards," 6: 6169.
- 4 None of the authors in Carlos Martínez Shaw, ed., *Spanish Pacific from Magellan to Malaspina* (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 1988), even mentions the theory of a Spanish discovery of Hawaii.
- 5 For example, Edgar Knowlton, Jr., "Hispanic Contact before Cook," in *The Land of Aloha* (Honolulu: Paradise Books, 1983).
- 6 For example, O. H. K. Spate, *The Pacific Since Magellan*. Vol. I: *The Spanish Lake* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 106-109.
- 7 Documents and reports about all of the voyages discussed exist in the Archivo General de Indias (AGI) in Seville; several accounts have been published. For summaries of some early voyages, along with maps of their likely trajectories, see Martínez Shaw, *Spanish Pacific*; and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, ed., *The Times Atlas of World Exploration* (London: Times Books, 1991).
- 8 Robert Langdon, *The Lost Caravel* (Sydney: Pacific Publications, 1975).
- 9 Documents pertaining to the Saavedra expedition are in AGI, Patronato, legs. 37, 43.
- 10 Salvador Bernabéu Albert, *La aventura de lo imposible. Expediciones marítimas españolas*. (Madrid: Lunwerk, 2000), 78-80. A map on p. 80 shows the track of Saavedra's final voyage very near the Hawaiian Islands.

- 11 Helen Margaret Wallis, "The Exploration of the South Sea, 1519 to 1644. A Study of the Influence of Physical Factors, with a Reconstruction of the Routes of the Explorers," 3 vols. (Ph.D. thesis, St. Hugh's College, Oxford, 1953), 1: 174-75.
- 12 Modern scholars have found several full or partial reports of this expedition in European archives. For recent treatments, see Harry Kelsey, "Ruy López de Villalobos and the Route to the Philippines," *Terrae Incognitae* 17 (1985): 29-45; and extended sections in Amancio Landín Carrasco, et al., eds., *Descubrimientos españoles en el Mar del Sur*, 3 vols., (Madrid: Banesto, 1991), 2: 317-375; 403-434.
- 13 Juan Gaetán, "Relatione di Iuan Gaetan piloto castigliano del discoprimiento dess'Isole Molucche per la via dell'Indie occidentali," in [Giovanni Ramusio, ed.], *Delle navigationi et viaggi nel qual si contiene la descrizione dell'Africa et del paese del Prete Ianni, con varii viaggi, dal mar Rosso à Calicut, & infin all'isole Molucche, dove nascono le Spetierie, et la Navigatione attorno el mondo* (Venice: Heredi di Lucantonio Giunti, 1550), 403-406.
- 14 Marshall Sahlins provides the most thorough and persuasive analysis of Cook's demise in *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, for Example* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). It contains an extended critical commentary on Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), which had attacked Sahlins's earlier work.
- 15 Jean-François de Galaup de La Pérouse, *Journals*, trans. and ed. John Dunmore, 2 vols. (London: The Hakluyt Society. 2nd. Ser. Vols. 179, 180), 179: 83. La Pérouse also presumed that the Spaniards had introduced venereal diseases to the island, though the islanders blamed the English, but that controversy is beyond the scope of this inquiry. *Ibid.*, 179: 86-87.
- 16 Barreiro-Meiro analyzes the voyage in "Bernardo de la Torre y su intento de tornaviaje," Landín, et al., 2: 359-375. A Spanish *tonelada* was a measure of volume roughly equivalent to 1.42 cubic meters. Michel Morineau, *Jauges et méthodes de jauge anciennes et modernes* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966), 31-34, 64, 115-116.
- 17 Gaetán, "Relatione," in Ramusio, fols. 404-404v. A cluster of islands near Mindanao was named the "Felipinas" by Villalobos, in honor of Charles V's son prince Philip. The name Philippines later came to designate a larger group of islands.
- 18 Landín, et al., 2: 502-512.
- 19 The disputes between Mendaña and Sarmiento continued at law for decades. See Landín, et al., 2: 542-549.
- 20 *The Discovery of the Solomon Islands by Álvaro de Mendaña in 1568*, trans. and ed. by Lord Amherst of Hackney and Basil Thomson, 2 vols. (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1901), 2nd. ser., vols. 7-8.
- 21 For example, Dahlgren, chaps. 10-12; Stokes; and Barreiro-Meiro and Landín, "El descubrimiento de las Hawaii," in Landín, et al., 2: 415-421.
- 22 Langdon, 271-272.
- 23 Hawaiian traditions were recorded by William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (London, 1831); Otto von Kotzebue, *A New Voyage Round the World in the Years 1823, 24, 25 and 26*, 2 vols. (London, 1830); and Abraham Fornander, *An Account of the Polynesian Race, its Origins and Migrations*, 3 vols. in one (London, 1878-1885; repr. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1969). Fornander's extensive ethnographic research notes were published as the *Fornander Collection of Hawaiian Antiquities and Folk-Lore, with Translations Revised and Illustrated with Notes by Thomas G. Thrum*, vols. 4-6 of the *Memoirs of the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1916-1920). See Langdon, 272-280, for a full discussion of the cultural evidence for a Spanish presence in Hawaii before Cook.
- 24 Fornander, *Collection*, in *Memoirs*, 6: 240-242; Fornander, *Polynesian Race*, 2: 106-110.
- 25 Ellis, 4: 438-39.
- 26 J. C. Beaglehole, ed., *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery: The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery, 1776-1780*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Hakluyt, 2nd ser., 35, 1967), 285-286, 475, 1151.
- 27 Cited in Langdon, 274. Kotzebue, 2: 166-68, mentioned old anchors on both Hawaii and Maui in 1823-24.
- 28 Stokes, 92.
- 29 Langdon, 278-80, 346-347, describes inquiries made by the Bishop Museum in Honolulu and the Peabody Museum in Salem, Massachusetts.



A detail of John Speed's 1626 map of the Western Hemisphere shows a nonexistent island group composed of La Vezina, Los Monges, and La Desgraciada.

Richard W. Rogers (article at right), author of *Shipwrecks of Hawai'i*, is also an airline pilot. He worked with the Smithsonian Institution on the only permitted underwater archaeological project in the Hawaiian Islands (*Ha'aheo o Hawai'i*, a royal vessel sunk in 1824, recovered between 1995 & 2001). He and his company, Piilalo Consultants, have participated in a magnetic survey of Kealakekua Bay in search of the galleon reportedly sunk there. He is hopeful that a documentary on this exciting project will be produced soon.

European Influences in Ancient Hawaii

Another View of Spanish Contact Before Cook

Richard W. Rogers

The following are, in my estimation, four of the best arguments for the existence of encounters between Native Hawaiians and Spaniards during the galleon era.

1 Numerous maps printed in Europe after 1570 show several mid-Pacific islands, often depicted at or near 20° north and variously named La Mesa, Los Monges, and La Desgraciada. Los Bolcanes appears on some earlier charts. At the very least, these imaginary places may represent a sighting of the actual Hawaiian Islands.

2 When the men of Captain Cook's *Resolution* and *Discovery* first encountered the Hawaiian people, they immediately wondered whether they were the Islands' first European visitors, due to the iron artifacts they found. On Kaua'i, Cook was presented with "a piece of hoop iron, about two inches long, fitted into a wooden handle; and another edged tool, which our people guessed to be made of the point of a broad sword."¹ Likewise, off Maui, one of the attendants to Chief Kahakili boarded *Resolution* carrying "two large, long iron daggers."²

The *Discovery*'s Captain Charles Clerke saw an iron cutting implement lashed to a handle, which "appeared to be a piece of the blade of a cutlass, and had by no means the appearance of a modern acquisition; looking to have been a good deal used and long in its present state." Clerke also saw "two large, long iron skewers. I was not master enough of the language to learn the proper history of them...I should have been glad to know, but it was pretty well clear from them having them at all...that Europeans have sometime or other been in the neighborhood."³

In 1798, nine years after Cook's death, trader Ebenezer Townsend wrote that "It is very much in doubt whether Capt. Cook was the first discoverer of these islands, it appears pretty evident that he was not....There is at Mowee [Maui] the ring and part of the shank of an anchor of about seven hundred weight...where there is no recollection of their ever having been a vessel, and for its appearance it must have been there many years..."⁴

3 The presence of European diseases was noted by early explorers. When La Pérouse's expedition landed on Maui in 1786, surgeon M. Rollin examined a number of Hawaiians and diagnosed advanced cases of syphilis, which, he estimated, would have taken twelve to fifteen years to develop in Europe. Because Cook had visited but eight years previously and never landed on Maui, La Pérouse concluded that this venereal disease had been introduced before Cook's time.⁵ Cook's men, too, wondered how syphilis could have traveled so quickly and spread so widely among Maui's people.⁶

According to early Euroamerican visitors, Hawaiian oral tradition recorded early visits by foreigners. Thomas

4 Manby, accompanying George Vancouver in 1793, befriended an old Hawaiian priest at Kealahakua: "This traditional historian informed me that a few generations back white men visited the Sandwich Islands, many of whom remained behind & were raised to the highest honors. From these visitors it is recorded that the present batch of Royalty are descended."⁷

Trader Ebenezer Townsend spoke with the governor of Hawai'i on the subject in 1798, and was told that "they have a tradition that a couple of white men came on shore and remained there about a hundred and fifty years ago. They landed in a small vessel covered over with skins..." The governor, he wrote, "has seen their descendants which satisfies him of the truth of the story that they were white."⁸

The hunt for conclusive evidence of early interactions between Spanish mariners and Hawaiians continues. Two intriguing Native Hawaiian legends tell of specific shipwrecks from which white women survived, and the author is actively involved in the search for one of these.⁹ Its discovery may, in time, prove beyond doubt the tantalizing possibility suggested by early maps, iron artifacts, disease, and Hawaiian oral tradition: the presence of foreigners in the islands long before Captain Cook.

NOTES

- 1 John Barrow, *Captain Cook's Voyages of Discovery* (London: Dent, 1906), 329. On metal artifacts in Hawaiian tombs of the 15th and 16th centuries, see Roger G. Rose, *Reconciling the Past: Two Basketry Ka'ai and the Legendary Liloa and Lonoikamakahiki* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum, 1992).
- 2 Terence Barrow, *Captain Cook in Hawaii* (Norfolk Island, Australia: Island Heritage Collection, 1978), 83.
- 3 Charles Clerke, *Journal*, 23 January 1778.
- 4 Ebenezer Townsend, *Voyage Around The World* (New Haven: New Haven Historical Society, 1888), 66.
- 5 Jean-François de Galaup de La Pérouse, *Journals*, trans. and ed. John Dunmore (London: The Hakluyt Society. 2nd Ser. Vol. 179), 86-87.
- 6 Barrow, 82.
- 7 Thomas Manby, *Journal of the Voyages of the H.M.S. Discovery and Chatham [1793]* (Fairfield, Washington: Ye Galleon Press, 1992).
- 8 Townsend, 66.
- 9 Abraham Dahlgren, *An Account of the Polynesian Race, its origins and Migrations*, Vol. II (Tokyo: Charles Tuttle Company, 1969), 106-110.

The *Fiesta de las Señas* and Life Aboard Spain's Pacific Galleons

William J. McCarthy



A sixteenth-century Manila ship battles a storm.

Painting by Richard DeRoset, 2001, from "Treasures of the Manila Galleons"

The eastbound voyage of the Manila galleons was described by seventeenth century traveler Francesco Gemelli Careri as “tedious and dreadful, ...enough to destroy a man, or make him unfit for anything as long as he lives.”¹ The voyage from the Philippines to Acapulco typically took six months, sometimes as many as nine. If the galleon successfully rode the *Kiro Suwa* current across the Pacific to safely reach the coast of Upper California, a joyous celebration marked the occasion. It was called the *fiesta de las señas*, or festival of signs, after the appearance of shorebirds and various types of marine animals and flotsam that indicated the proximity of land. Given the notoriously harsh conditions of the voyage, the *fiesta* was typically a raucous affair, the climax of attempts by passengers and crew to find amusements on their long crossing. It also provided a ritualized moment in

which order and authority were temporarily subverted, aspects that it shares with shipboard “crossing the line” ceremonies before and since. Ceremonies like the *fiesta de las señas* carried the Medieval European peasant tradition of “festivals of misrule” to sea, where they have survived into our own day in mock-ceremonies marking crossings of the Equator or the International Date Line.

Hardships of the Voyage

Aboard the Pacific galleons, months at sea brought extreme physical and mental debilitation. Provisions were often forsaken at Manila in favor of salable items, or were ruined or exhausted before the galleons reached America. Any voyage that exceeded six months’ duration ran the risk of losing many lives to starvation, beri-beri and scurvy. Belts, boots and rats became food. Vermin overran the ship and mariners’ bodies. Crews were often weakened to incapacity.

The most menial crew members (*grumetes*), usually indigenous Filipinos referred to by the Spaniards as *Indios*, were the first to be denied provisions—many had sold their own storage areas for cash and so had no stock of their own—and ships foundered due to a dearth of able hands. Violence, madness and even cannibalism resulted, and it was not uncommon for galleons to lose over one hundred men. The *Santisima Trinidad*, for instance, arrived at Acapulco in 1755 with only twenty-seven persons aboard able to stand. The chilling story of a galleon found drifting off the coast south of Acapulco exemplifies the ultimate horror—there was not a living soul on board.²

These calamities occurred despite the fact that as much care as possible was taken to provide a reasonably healthy diet. Directives from the navy mandated the disbursal of supplies of *garbanzos*, garlic, onions and olive oil, among other comestibles. But, of course, during the course of these unusually long ocean voyages, provisions did not hold out. Further, infestations by vermin, bacteria and salt rendered both food and water unpalatable if not unhealthy. Hot food was not always available due to the hazard of fire during rough weather. The wealthier passengers kept the better food for themselves, and in times of scarcity could commandeer any food at the expense of others. The eastbound Pacific voyage was notorious in these regards due to its extraordinary length, during which it became virtually certain that there would be a severe scarcity of food.

The diet aboard the Manila ships consisted primarily of biscuit, dried meat and fish, and *garbanzos* and other beans; provisions including fruit, cheeses, bacon, chocolate, onions, garlic, oil, vinegar, rice, sugar, live animals, wine, honey and tobacco were also loaded.³ Once at sea, food supplies were supplemented with sharks or smaller fish the Spaniards called *cachorretas*. In the later years of the trade, some galleons called in at locations in Alta California, including San Diego, to take on water and fresh fruit, although trading was forbidden and even stopping was heartily discouraged.

After the first month of the voyage—by which time the vessels would barely have cleared the Philippine archipelago—the bulk of the perishable stores were already exhausted. Then commenced the long dependence on dried meat and hard biscuit. Wealthy passengers could still rely on their own livestock—galleons carried pigs, chickens, goats, and even some cattle. Preserved fruits and other delicacies also survived for months. When English corsair Thomas

*The poor people stowed in
the cabins of the galleon
bound toward the
Land of Promise of New
Spain endure no fewer
hardships than the children
of Israel did when they
went from Egypt toward
Palestine. There is hun-
ger, thirst, sickness, cold,
constant watchfulness, and
other sufferings besides the
terrible shocks from side
to side, caused by the furi-
ous beating of the waves.*

*Giovanni Francesco
Gemelli Careri, 1697*

William J. McCarthy, Associate Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, served as Editorial Consultant for this publication.

After such long voyag-
es, I am in very poor
health, with little hope
of recovery. . .
I have fewer children
than when I left, several
of them having perished
during the crossing.

Antonio de Morga,
1596



This *martaban* jar is a true Pacific Rim artifact. Food or water for a galleon's voyage was stored in this 24" tall Southeast Asian stoneware jar. The scratched mark near the rim is the owner's identifying symbol. After its arrival in Acapulco, a Mexican blacksmith added the iron lid.

From "Treasures of the Manila Galleons,"
courtesy of the Museum of International
Folk Art, Santa Fe; photo by John Wright

Cavendish captured the *Santa Ana* after her four and-one-half-month crossing in 1587, his men were pleased to find "great store of all manner of victuals with the choyse of many conserves of all sortes for to eate, and of sundry sorts of very good wines."⁴ For those who could afford it, a typical eastbound voyage need not be one of absolute deprivation. Common seamen, though, had to rely essentially on the king's provisions and their own wits.

Stories of mariners eating rats, leather belts and boots, and enduring provisions infested with maggots are common to long voyages of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries. Francesco Gemelli Careri, a traveler of fairly modest means who made the eastbound voyage in 1696-97, observed that

The ship swarms with little Vermine the Spaniards call *Gorgojos*, bred in the Biskit... Abundance of Flies fall into the Dishes of Broth, in which there also swim Worms of several sorts,... in every Mouthful whereof there went down abundance of Maggots, and Gorgojos chew'd and bruise'd.⁵

Fresh water was also a concern. At Cavite, water was brought on board in four thousand or more stoneware jars. Private passengers also transported containers, provided they could be fitted into cabins. The public supply was suspended in the rigging, and stored at various locations above and below decks. The water was used for drinking, cooking and such sanitary measures as could be permitted. When it ran low or became foul, rainwater was collected by suspending a series of mats to convey it into jars, or from mats suspended high in the rigging. Gemelli Careri tells of naked sailors dashing about in a rainstorm, catching sufficient water to fill the empty vessels.⁶ Shortages were typically not severe, inasmuch as the galleons sailed at the onset of monsoon season, and made the crossing at 30° to 40° north latitude during the autumn and winter.

Exposure was also debilitating. While it may not be entirely credible when Gemelli Careri complained of temperatures which froze olive oil, he recounts that "the Indians born at Manila, where they are always in a sweat, could not endure the cold of this climate." Due to the weather, "the blacks aboard creep into the very hen coops; and those that got under the deck could not be got out at night;" they reportedly defecated there, to the complaints of other seamen.⁷

Hardships were compounded by firm and quick shipboard discipline. The 1636 sailing orders advise:

You will not allow quarrels or resentments. Nor [for officers or crew] to indulge in rivalries, nor to threaten each other with any kind of weapons... You will not on any account allow anyone to show you any disrespect in word, or deed, or in writing, but you will punish with severity and justice anyone who ventures to do so.⁸

There were not punishments as harsh as those of eighteenth century navies, such as being flogged through the fleet, but the perils of misbehavior were notable nonetheless. Quarreling and blasphemy merited fifteen days gagged and fettered, with a diet of bread and water. For the second offense, the sailor's tongue was pierced with a burning iron. Drunkenness earned four days in fetters.⁹ Such punishments emphasized expected behaviors, deference to officers and the maintenance of the normal chain of command—circumstances that varied on only one day during the voyage, the *fiesta de las señas*.

Amusements

Given the grim aspects of the passage, the men's spirits and vitality were maintained late in the voyage with occasional rations of wine and chocolate. The captain bore the responsibility of quelling disturbances, and so kept some extra supplies to hand. His sailing orders included unpopular clauses such as the requirement that a third of a person's ration must be retained untouched until their safe arrival at Acapulco.¹⁰ Once in port at last, often after needed recuperation, crew members attempted to make up for the deprivations—often to the extent that Mexican officials complained to the Philippine governors about the poor quality of the men sent on the voyage.¹¹

Comfort and diversion was also found in smoking. Tobacco was an indispensable part of the provisions, its use having become common among Europeans, at home or at sea, at least by the 1620s. In 1638, *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción* carried five hundred bales in its cargo.¹² Its use aboard ship was a grave concern, however, and subject to constant vigilance. Philippine Governor Arandía (1754-1759) made his orders very precise:

The crew may smoke above the waist or the forecastle on the lee side of the ship, either during the day or at night, but it must be in the form of a well-covered pipe or a cigar with a holder. When there is a strong wind smoking will only be permitted under the forecastle, where there are jars of water for any emergency. Smoking cigarettes is absolutely prohibited.¹³

Those caught smoking out of bounds could find themselves spending fifteen days in fetters.

On Spanish voyages during the Early Modern period, gambling and reading were popular diversions, and so, more selectively, was sex.¹⁴ While gambling was officially forbidden, it was typical to encounter games of cards and dice as well as cock-fights. Music, dancing and humorous sketches were also enjoyed, with dancing and mummery permitted less frequently than singing. Almost anything could provide welcome relief from boredom: Gemelli Careri witnessed mariners tie a board to the tail of a shark so it could not dive; two others were tied together at the tail, one being blinded so it could not discern why it was being pulled. The setting also inspired musings of a naturalistic sort; Gemelli Careri participated in discussions over whether sharks were born live, or hatched from eggs or spawn.¹⁵

Occasionally pleasure was sought by transporting concubines, typically slaves, on the galleons. This practice was apparently common, if frowned upon. On one occasion, an official was accompanied by fifteen such women, several of whom bore his children; others left the ship at Acapulco pregnant. Such excess was uncommon, but though Philip III banned the practice in 1608, it proliferated.¹⁶ Widows or other female passengers, or young boys, were occasionally available for dalliance. But whether fornication or sodomy, perpetrators committed a crime as well as a sin, and punishments varied from harsh to fatal.¹⁷ Captains were also advised to beware of free women who sought passage (most commonly at Acapulco traveling to Manila) by claiming to have a husband at the terminus of the route, then striking the best bargain she could with one of numerous prospects while at sea.¹⁸



For the men in the forecastle on long Pacific voyages, amusements were precious.

Model from "Treasures of the Manila Galleons;" photo by John Wright

The *Fiesta*

The *fiesta de las señas* aboard the Manila galleons was marked by general revelry, but had a particular theme that was common to maritime traditions of celebrating the crossing of lines like the Equator, and to many festivals of misrule held in early modern European societies. The social order was inverted for the day, or for duration of the festival, and inferiors had the officially sanctioned opportunity to abuse their betters. The *fiesta*, then, was something more than merely “letting off steam;” it was an episode that embodied accepted social ritual. The harsh and relentless lot of the common seaman was more bearable when it offered the chance to escape, even if only briefly and under the most artificial of circumstances.

The *fiesta* began after mariners approaching the American coast sighted the first of the *señas*, or signs of land. When tuna appeared, typically about two hundred miles offshore, the coast was perceived to be somewhat near. Then, occasional weeds floated by. Before long seals (*perrillos*) and sea lions (*lobillos*) appeared, then kelp, ducks or other birds, and matted bunches of weeds. Profound relief and joy washed over the ship. On Gemelli Careri's voyage, “the sailor who first saw the weed had a chain of gold given him by the captain, and at least fifty pieces of eight by the passengers and others.”¹⁹

These signs were particularly welcome inasmuch as navigators could not readily gauge the distance across the Pacific. The determination of longitude remained difficult even after the chronometer came into wide use at the close of the eighteenth century. Pilots' predictions of when land would be reached typically erred by a number of days; in the case of the 1696-1697 voyage, signs of land were encountered when they were not expected for two more days.

On December 3, 1696 the galleon carrying Gemelli Careri approached the

As the pioneering U. S. Fish Commission steamer *Albatross* crosses the Equator in 1899, Durward Johnson is “shaved” with a wooden razor:

“After the shave I was pushed forward down the chute into a pool of water made by pumping sea water into a sail...in the pool sharks (four men dressed for the purpose and standing in the pool) grabbed me and scrubbed me clean and told me I was an adopted son of God Neptune...”

From scrapbook, “The U.S.S. *Albatross* in the South Seas, Japan and Alaska,” SDMM Coll.



California coast, and the sight of floating seaweed brought rejoicing to his ship:

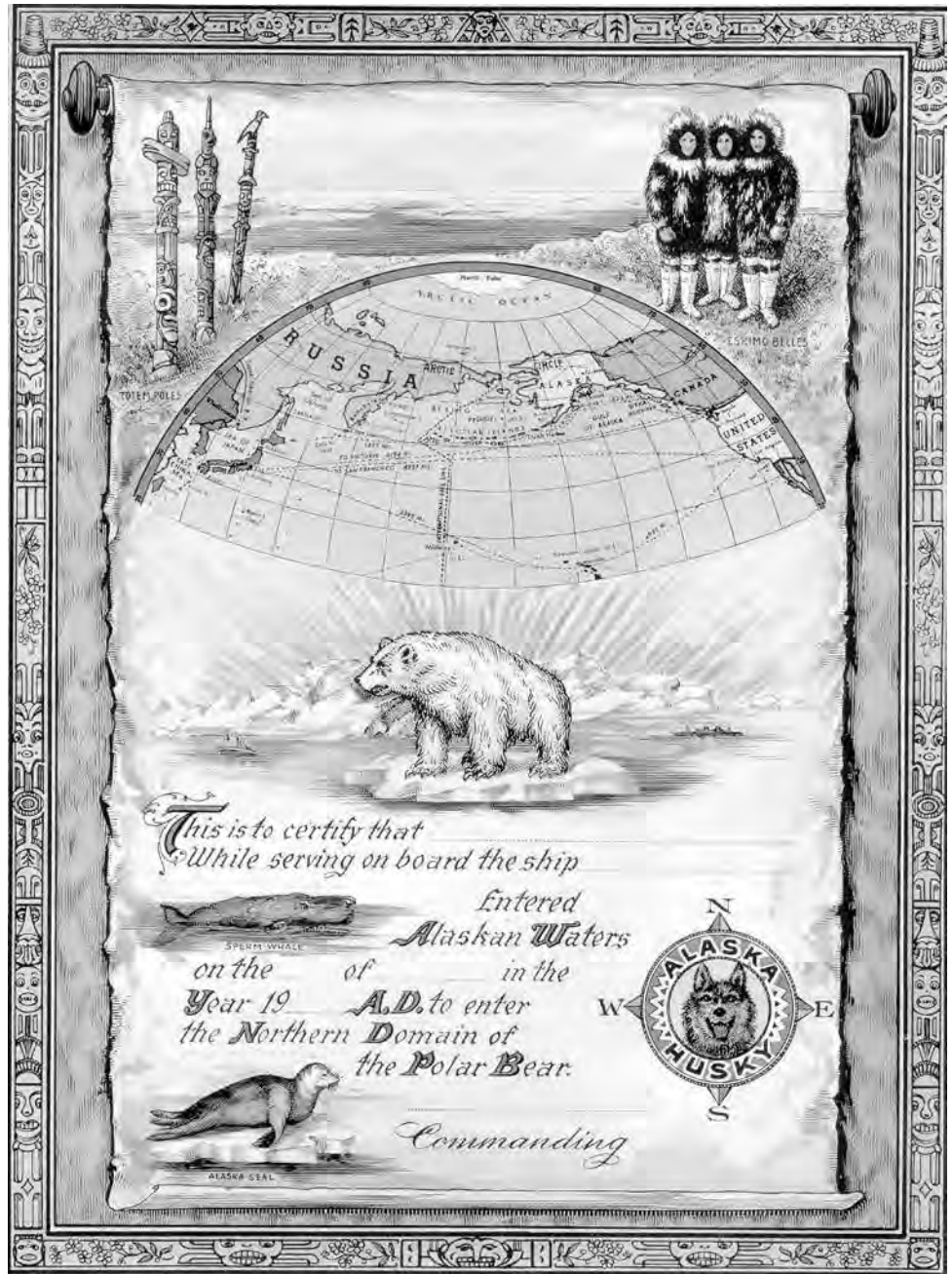
Hereupon the sailors (according to custom), having power so to do, took the bell and carried it to the prow; and the judges they chose of their court (called in jest the court of *señas*, or of signs) made proclamation to try the officers of the ship. *Te Deum* was sung, and all persons congratulated one another with the sound of drums and trumpets, as if we had been in our port, although we were then seven hundred leagues from it...²⁰

The day following the first *señas* a Mass of thanksgiving was sung, and after a delay of two days caused by foul weather, the *fiesta* began. A canopy accommodated the mock court, or *tribunal de las señas*. The common sailors put officers and passengers on trial. Each individual, from the ship's captain to civilian passenger, was found guilty of some offense. Gemelli Careri was himself convicted of the charge, whether nonsensical or serious, of eating too many of the fish called *cachorretas*.

...after dinner the two *oyedores*, or judges, and the president took their seats, being clad in a ridiculous manner. They began with the captain of the galleon, chief pilot, under-pilot, master, mate, and other officers of the ship; and after them proceeded to the trial of the passengers. The clerk read every man's indictment, and then the judges passed sentence of death, which was immediately bought off with money, chocolate, sugar, biscuit, meat, sweetmeats, wine, and the like. The best of it was, that he who did not pay immediately, or give good security was laid on with a rope's end, at the least sign given by President Tarpaulin [Common Sailor].²¹

Feasting and reveling continued through the evening, and the accumulated spoils were divided among sailors and *grumetes* before the ship continued on its remaining one- to two- month coastal sail to Acapulco.

Though joy ruled on the day of the *fiesta*, the dangers of the voyage were



20th century sailors who "crossed the line" into Alaskan waters for the first time received this elegant 1944 certificate drawn and printed by W. G. Crosby, a naval retiree in San Pedro.

SDMM Coll.

never far off; on the morning of this particular trial the body of a sailor, dead from disease, was thrown overboard. Not even chaplains were exempted from the trials, a typical accusation being that of murder—death coming, as it came to so many on the galleons, after the careful ministrations of the cleric.²² Other punishable offenses included officers' leaving the hatches closed and physicians' bleeding patients to death or merely offering repeated and irritating admonishments.²³ The awarding of luxury food items attests to the prevalence of hoarding among the wealthier passengers, and the fish-eating charge leveled against Gemelli Careri may reflect crew members' feelings toward those privileged to commandeer the best of the King's food. As in land-bound societies, inferiors resented their superiors but could do little to assuage the resentment. One recorded instance of the keel-hauling of a passenger attests to social antagonisms beneath the surface of this seemingly frivolous entertainment.²⁴

Ceremonies like the *fiesta* presumably descend from superstitious traditions associated with attempts to assuage rough currents encountered at the entrances to semi-enclosed bodies of water such as the Baltic, Mediterranean or Black Seas. Ulysses tossed crewmen into the sea to appease monsters, and many less radical means of assuring good voyage continue to be employed. For centuries in the West, the remnants of such ceremonies bore a religious cast, and involved prayer, the casting overboard of coins, and the like.²⁵ Staged ceremonies of thanksgiving or propitiation were quite common by the Early Modern period.²⁶

These ceremonies came to serve as a celebration for reaching or passing a particularly significant point in the voyage, such as rounding Cape Horn or the Cape of Good Hope, or as initiation rites. Ceremonies associated with “crossing the line,” whether the Equator, Tropic of Cancer, International Date Line, or other imaginary lines, are the most common. Attributes of the typical crossing-the-line ceremony were in place by the late sixteenth century. In English parlance, it involves turning the “polliwogs” aboard into “shellbacks” (those who had made the crossing), usually by roughly shaving them and dousing them with water, either in the sea (thrice) or from a barrel of sea water, or by merely sprinkling with sea water—if sufficient payment is made.

These rites are typically introduced by an imaginatively got-up King Neptune, who invites the sailors to join his minions, and makes them swear to subject future polliwogs to the same treatment. The initiation is followed by libation and revelry. In elaborate versions, particularly during the early nineteenth century, Neptune might be heralded by Davy Jones and accompanied by Queen Amphitrite and pages, such as Mercury, or several tritons. Crossings might even be delayed for days to provide for elaborate preparations and to permit the dunking, or “baptism,” to occur in good weather.

Most significantly, the tradition also came to include, or imply, the liberty of ordinary sailors to upbraid or rough up the ship's officers, something we also see in the *fiesta de las señas*, a practice that presumably had its origins in situations in which officers had not before crossed the line, while experienced sailors had. In most cases the officers were subjected to the same dunking and shaving as the common sailors. Sometimes, though, the ceremony degenerated into an opportunity for sailors to abuse officers, and find some restitution for real or imagined slights. Increasingly seamen came to see



this part of the festivities as their due, and could become unruly if it were not afforded them. Officers, in the main, were more likely to buy off their detractors, but occasionally they were subjected to dunking and humiliation against their express will. Such ceremonies were witnessed by sailors and passengers throughout the Age of Sail.

The *fiesta* was strikingly similar to festivals of misrule in Europe, in which the same type of inversion of the social order obtained. Sixteenth century Europe was witness to many such festivals in the Catholic nations, but the tradition lingered in Reformed areas as well. Typical celebrations were held in conjunction with regal or magisterial parades of entry, Carnival, Holy Week, Pentecost, John the Baptist day and Corpus Christi in June, the Assumption, All-Saints, the twelve days of Christmas, Epiphany, and marriages. Entertainments depended upon the affluence of the community, but could involve parades, masques, farces, dancing and, typically, excessive drinking.²⁷ Christmastime was the most usual season to conduct a Feast of Fools. In those revelries sponsored by the Church, ceremonies burlesqued the mass and confession, and ridiculed the clergy. It was common practice to lead a donkey around the church, and to elect a young boy as bishop to preside over the day.

A late-19th century Neptune and his court.

From "The U.S.S. *Albatross* in the South Seas, Japan and Alaska," *SDMM Coll.*

A *charivari* might also be held in conjunction with a festival. This ceremony mocked people in the community, in this instance non-conformists. Typical victims were cuckolds, those marrying across accepted barriers of age, or those who married too soon after having been widowed.

Most of the celebrations were conducted by lay groups, originally male youth groups whose grievance was often that young women were being removed from the marriage pool by wedding older men. Over the decades and centuries, ad hoc groups were created for the purpose. A frequent construct employed was that of the Abbey of Misrule. Such groups and their festivities were presided over by individuals such as the Abbot of Misrule, the Abbot of Gaiety, the Prince of Pleasure, the Prince of Youth, the Prince of Improvidence, the Cardinal of Bad Measure, Duke Kick-Ass, or the Grand Patriarch of syphilitics.²⁸ Various means were found to lampoon misrule and to celebrate the inversion of order for a day.

In their audacity and ubiquity, these temporary inversions of the social order had the potential to become associated overtly with revolutionary movements, such as the carnival held at Romans, France, in 1580.²⁹ Some, such as Corpus Christi and Carnival, were revitalized in defiance of Protestant innovation. While many members of the ruling elite found these festivities onerous, others believed that they served an essential purpose. As the sixteenth century French lawyer Claude de Rubys observed, “it is sometimes expedient to allow the people to play the fool and make merry, lest by holding them in with too great a rigor, we put them in despair...” Following despair, he believed, would come insubordination and sedition.³⁰

Shipboard life necessitated far more severe discipline than did a European town. Harsh corporal punishment was one way captains maintained their authority, but amusements also helped keep crews compliant and orderly. Shipboard ceremonies such as the *fiesta* served as both an outlet for frustration and a reminder of where authority lay. The maritime world thus reflected the European peasant world of its origins—a sense of the familiar amid the distinctly unfamiliar surroundings halfway around the world. And the justification from superiors at sea has precisely the same ring as that on land cited above:

These sports, while they serve to keep up the spirits of the men, and make them forget the difficulties they have to go through, procure also the most beneficial influence upon their health: a cheerful man being much more capable of resisting a fit of sickness than a melancholy one. It is the duty of commanders to use every innocent means of maintaining this temper in their crews; for, in long voyages, when they are several months together wandering on an element not destined by nature for the residence of man, without enjoying even occasionally the recreations of the land, the mind naturally tends to melancholy, which of itself lays the foundation of many diseases, and sometimes even of insanity. Diversion is often the best medicine, and used as a preservative, seldom fails of its effect.³¹

Life aboard the eastbound Manila galleons, then, was harsh and dangerous, but relieved by occasional diversions, notably the *fiesta*. In the traditions both of maritime rituals and societal festivals back home, Spanish sailors in the Pacific celebrated reaching California by inverting the social order for one raucous day.

N O T E S

- 1 Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Carreri, *A Voyage to the Philippines* [1697] (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1963), 157.
- 2 Schurz tentatively identified the vessel as the *San José*, 1657; William Lytle Schurz, *The Manila Galleon* (New York: Dutton, 1939), 265-266.
- 3 Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla (hereafter AGI), Contaduría 1218, <<Cuentas de Real Hacienda...>>, ff. 1105v., 1106, 1107, 3-28 July, 1638; Schurz, 268.
- 4 Master Francis Pretty, "The Admirable and Prosperous Voyage of the Worshipfull Master Thomas Candish..." [c. 1598], in W. Michael Mathes, ed., *The Capture of the Santa Ana* (Los Angeles: Dawson's Book Shop, 1969), 28.
- 5 Gemelli Carreri, 155.
- 6 Ibid., 148.
- 7 Ibid., 158-159.
- 8 Charles R. Boxer, "The Sailing-Orders for the Manila Galleons of 1635-1636," *Terrae Incognitae* 4 (1972): 13.
- 9 Schurz, 272.
- 10 Boxer, 13.
- 11 Captain Sebastian Pineda to Philip III, Mexico, May, 1619, complains of the men (Spaniards and indigenous Filipinos) having left wives in the Philippines, and once in Mexico, engaging in the distillation of Philippine-style palm wine. Gregorio Zaide and Sonia Zaide, eds., *Documentary Sources of Philippine History* Vol. 4, doc. 152, 118.
- 12 AGI Contaduría 1218.
- 13 Orders of Governor Arandía (1754-1759); quoted Schurz, 271.
- 14 Pablo E. Pérez-Mallaína, *Spain's Men of the Sea*, tr. Carla Rahn Phillips (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 153-176. Pérez-Mallaína concentrates on gambling and reading; the former was an endemic problem among ships of all nations, the latter does not receive as frequent mention. It is noted that reading matter was subject to some scrutiny on Spanish vessels. Sex was reserved for the privileged, the lucky, the daring. No mention is made of athletic or other diversions, nor is any organized revelry described.
- 15 Gemelli Carreri, 148.
- 16 Schurz, 272.
- 17 Pérez-Mallaína, 164, 171.
- 18 Boxer, 11.
- 19 Gemelli Carreri, 160.
- 20 Loc. cit.
- 21 Ibid., 161.
- 22 The latter was commonly understood by non-Europeans to be a possible outcome of Christian ministry. A young catechist in the Marianas was set upon by Chamorros and killed in the early years of the Jesuit mission there when a baby he had baptized died. AGI Ultramar 562.
- 23 Schurz, 273.
- 24 Gemelli Carreri, 161.
- 25 Horace Beck, *Folklore and the Sea*, (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 117.
- 26 Harry Miller Lydenberg, ed., *Crossing the Line: Tales of the Ceremony during Four Centuries* (New York: New York Public Library, 1957), 4-8.
- 27 Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 17-19.
- 28 Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1965), 98-99.
- 29 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans* (New York: George Braziller, Inc.), 1979.
- 30 Quoted Davis, 96.
- 31 Otto von Kotzebue [1830] quoted Lydenberg, 118-119.



French Peasants frolic in a 1506 woodcut.

The Unfulfilled Contract of an Unlucky Galleon Pilot

W. Michael Mathes

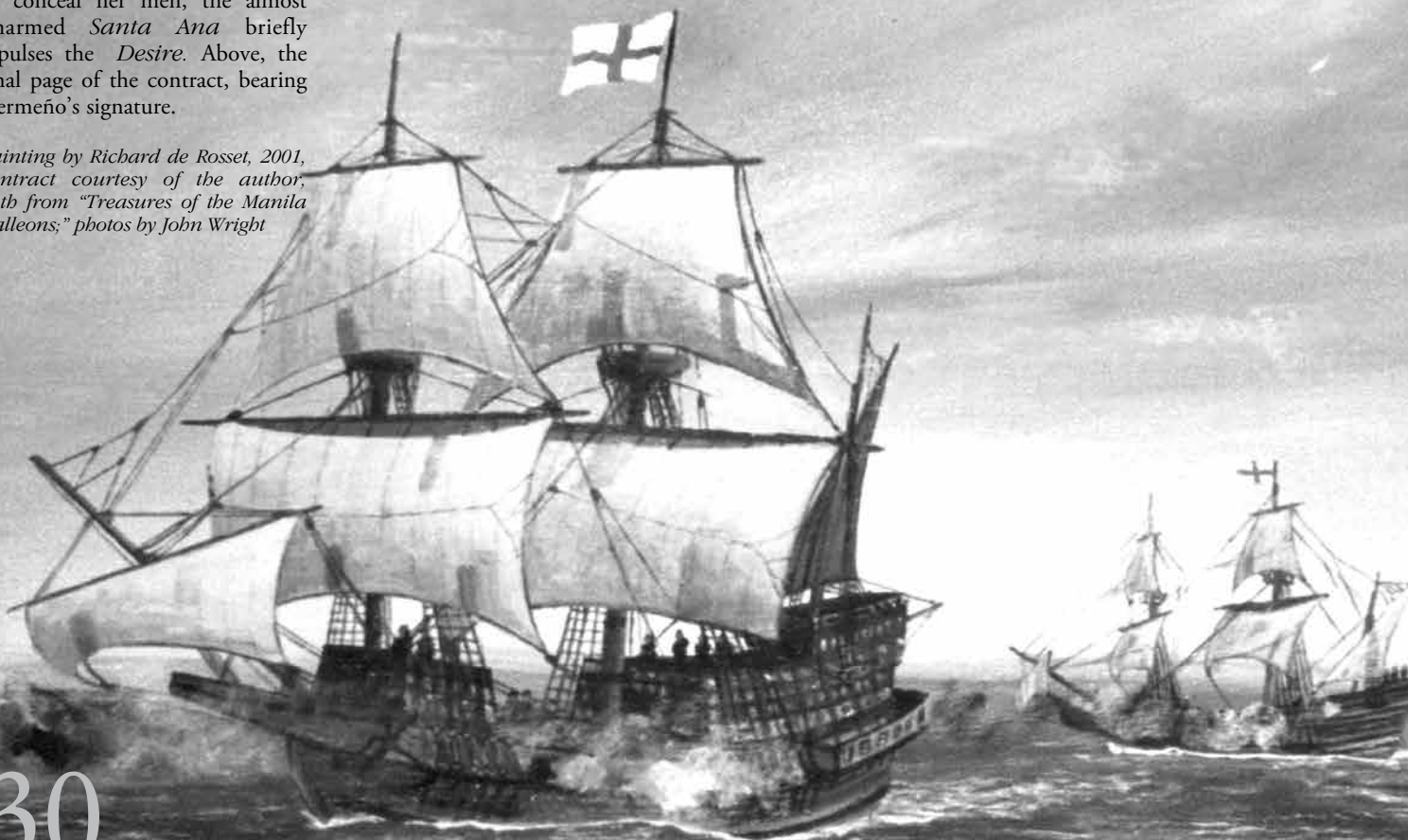
W. Michael Mathes is a member of *Mains'! Haul's* editorial board. He is the author of numerous works in English and Spanish, including books on the capture of the *Santa Ana* and explorer Sebastián Vizcaíno. His scholarship earned him the "Orden Mexicana del Aguila Azteca," the highest honor Mexico bestows on non-citizens. His articles have previously appeared in *Mains'! Haul* 35:4 and 36:4.

In 1587, after a decade of peaceful Pacific crossings by Manila ships, an incident occurred off Cabo San Lucas, Baja California, which sent shock waves through the Spanish Empire for decades. On her return voyage from Manila, the treasure-laden *Santa Ana* was captured by the English corsair Thomas Cavendish. Among those lamenting their ill fortune aboard the *Santa Ana* that November day was Sebastián Rodríguez Cermeño, charged with piloting the ship safely to Acapulco. He had signed a contract with a merchant in the City of México for goods he was permitted to carry, which would have made him a substantial profit. Contracts between galleon officers and merchants were usual, but his is unique in having survived the intervening centuries, and it is published here in English for the first time.¹

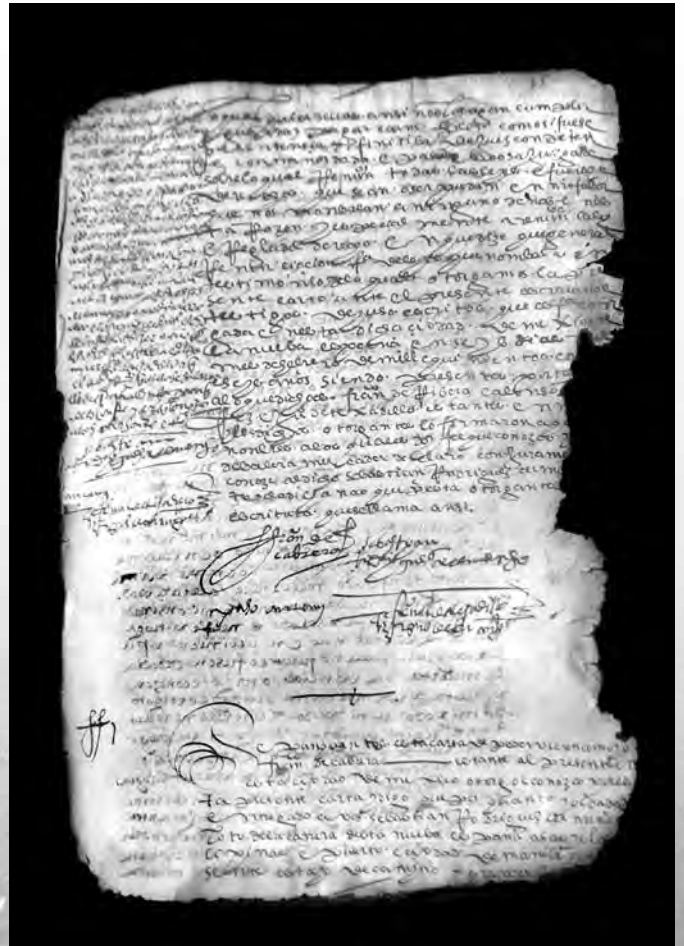
Galleons like the *Santa Ana* were generally constructed of Philippine timber at the yard in Cavite, and frequently displaced seven hundred tons. Sixty to

Her decks covered with canvas to conceal her men, the almost unarmed *Santa Ana* briefly repulses the *Desire*. Above, the final page of the contract, bearing Cermeño's signature.

Painting by Richard de Rosset, 2001, contract courtesy of the author, both from "Treasures of the Manila Galleons;" photos by John Wright

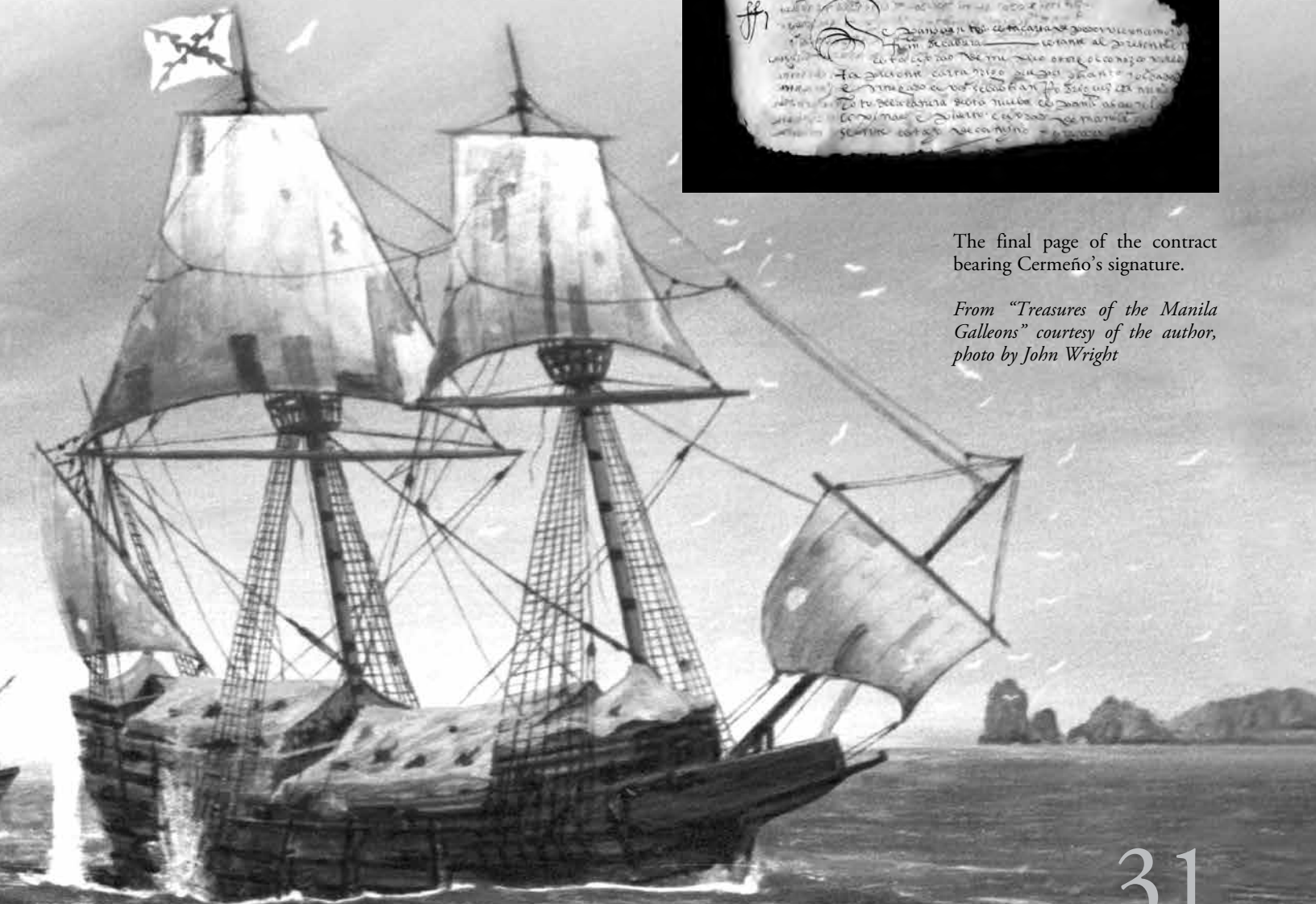


one hundred men composed the crew, with officers typically consisting of a general, sea and war captains, two mates, one pilot-major, two or three pilots, two boatswains, guardians, constables, surgeons, a notary, a chaplain, an accountant, and an overseer. Galleon officers were appointed by the viceroy in Mexico City, the governor of the Philippines, or, after 1583, by officers of the Royal Treasury in Manila. The majority of these officers were friends or favorites of those in government, and thus, generally the only professional and experienced navigators were the pilots. Due to the hardships of the Pacific crossing, pilots held their posts for a relatively short time before transferring to less rigorous voyages. The salaries of officers for each round-trip voyage were 4,325 *pesos* for general, two thousand *pesos* each for accountant and overseer, seven hundred *pesos* for pilot, four hundred *pesos* for mate, and 325 *pesos* for other officers.²



The final page of the contract bearing Cermeño's signature.

From "Treasures of the Manila Galleons" courtesy of the author, photo by John Wright





Thomas Cavendish was 27 when he captured the *Santa Ana*. When he returned to London, his ship wore silken sails, and every sailor sported a golden necklace.

Although salaries of the officers were reasonably high, they were almost insignificant when compared with the profits to be made. With no restrictions other than those of available space aboard the ship—allotted according to rank—officers, with exception of the accountant and overseer, were permitted to contract personally for the purchase of merchandise in Manila in the name of merchants in New Spain. These direct investments in cargoes, plus commissions and gratifications from merchants of both provinces increased their income by between 20,000 and 100,000 *pesos* per voyage.³ Such participation by the officers generally comprised a third of the cargo, which was subject only to a three percent tax in Manila after 1582, forty percent per ton in Acapulco after 1585, and a duty of six percent in Mexico City. They were well compensated for the risks of the voyage.

During the first thirteen years of the crossing, these dangers were limited to storms, a shortage of provisions, and illness, but after English corsair Francis Drake entered the Pacific in 1578, these risks were augmented by danger of attack due to enemy knowledge of the route of the unarmed galleons. Drake's incursion and its consequences initiated a search by Manila galleons for an intermediary port north of Acapulco where exhausted crews could rest and re-provision, in order to permit more effective defense against any attack. This search was initiated by pilots Francisco Gali in 1584 and Pedro de Unamuno in 1587 without success, and the galleons continued their voyages with increasingly valuable cargoes, and crews which, when they neared Acapulco, were in no condition for combat.⁴

This was the situation when Sebastián Rodríguez Cermeño, Portuguese by nationality and a highly respected navigator in the service of Spain in the Philippine voyages, arrived at Acapulco in 1585 to take his post as pilot of the six-hundred-ton galleon *Santa Ana*. He then traveled to the City of México where he initiated personal contracts for purchase of merchandise to carry on his return from Manila. One of the merchants with whom he contracted was Francisco de Cabrera, who gave him a thousand *pesos* to purchase merchandise on February 6, 1586, agreeing to pay a handsome commission of twenty-five percent on profits.

The voyage of the *Santa Ana* to Manila was marred by conflict between two factions of passengers that escalated to the point that gunshots were exchanged on deck, but fifteen Dominican friars who were aboard resolved the dispute, and the galleon reached Manila with crew and ship intact.⁵ After repairs, a princely cargo was loaded, including gold valued at 600,000 *pesos*, and 1,500,000 *pesos* worth of silks, musk, and pearls. On July 2, 1587, the *Santa Ana* sailed from Cavite under the command of Tomás de Alzola with Cermeño as pilot, accompanied by the canon Juan de Almendáriz, merchant Antonio de Sierra, and sixty crewmen, with Moslems and Negro Filipinos among them.

On November 14, when the *Santa Ana* reached the coast of Baja California near Cabo San Lucas, the crew sighted the sails of two ships on the horizon. Unfortunately for the *Santa Ana*, carrying only a few small falconettes and arquebuses as armament, these proved to be the English ships *Desire* and *Content*, under the command of the young Thomas Cavendish. He had left Plymouth in July, 1586 to emulate Drake and raid the Pacific coast from Chile to New Spain. After sacking and burning Guatulco, Navidad, Acatlán, Chacala, and Mazatlán in August and September, 1587, Cavendish reached Cabo San Lucas on October 19, and awaited arrival of the Manila ship.⁶

On the morning of November 15, the English opened with a salvo of artillery and, in spite of a long and valiant defense by the Spanish, on the following day *Santa Ana* capitulated. After ordering Alzola and Cermeño to deliver the ship's cargo register, Cavendish began transferring the spoils to *Desire* and

Content. On November 19, the Spanish were put ashore at Bahía San Lucas, and Father Almedrales was hanged, demonstrating the deep hatred Elizabethan Protestants held for Catholic Spaniards.

The booty taken by Cavendish from the *Santa Ana* was the largest haul from a single ship during the Age of Sail. After sacking the galleon for ten more days, Cavendish set *Santa Ana* afire and set sail for the Philippines, taking two of her crew to serve as pilots. Ashore at Cabo San Lucas, the survivors were able to quell the flames when they reached the waterline. After cleaning out the keel and stretching a canvas aloft, they boarded the remains of their ship and left the desolate cape behind them on December 21. They reached Santiago on January 2, 1588 and Acapulco six days later. Hearings were held to determine the losses and culpability of the officers and crew. The latter were vindicated, but trans-Pacific commerce was seriously harmed. The matter of the *Santa Ana*'s capture was local, but international repercussions of the event echoed for a century and a half.

Danger from the presence of English corsairs in the Pacific brought new precautions, including arming the galleons with artillery cast in Cavite. Commerce regulations of 1593 brought the ships under royal ownership, limited them to three hundred tons, and restricted cargos by volume and value. At the same time, the search for a port of refuge on the coast north of Acapulco was renewed. Sebastián Rodríguez Cermeño was appointed to command the *San Agustín* and charged with conducting detailed exploration when it reached the California coast on its voyage from the Philippines in 1595.⁷

When the *San Agustín* wrecked in Drakes Bay, exploration of the Californias from Manila was abruptly terminated. Though Cermeño survived and, astonishingly, reached the coast of Nayarit in an open boat, it ended his career as well.

In 1604, contracting for merchandise by officers of the galleons was forbidden by Royal Order. During the seventeenth century no galleons were captured, but in 1709, English privateer Woodes Rogers followed Cavendish's sailing instructions to Cabo San Lucas and ambushed the *Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación y Desengaño*.

A translation of the unfulfilled contract between the unlucky Cermeño and equally unlucky merchant Francisco de Cabrera appears on the following pages. It typifies legal language of the period, and survives as a rare example of such documents and a reminder of an event that shook an empire.

Those of us on our ship,
the *Santa Ana*, as soon
as we saw the...English
on board with swords and
iron bucklers, went at
them and we killed five
English and wounded six.
When they saw that the
battle was against them,
the wounded and others
threw themselves into the
water, leaving three of our
men dead.
The English. . . began to
ram us cruelly.

Antonio de Sierra, 1588

Coast Miwok people watch Cermeño's
San Agustín break up at Drake's Bay,
California, in 1595.

Painting by Gordon Miller, 2001, from
"Treasures of the Manila Galleons,"
courtesy of the artist



Agreement

Be it known to all who see this letter that I, Sebastián Rodríguez Cermeño, pilot, as I am, of the navigation from the Philippine Islands, presently in this city en route to make the voyage from New Spain to the said islands toward the west and to the port of Manila, God willing, as pilot of the ship named *Santa Ana*, presently at anchor in the port of Acapulco. To continue with the said voyage, I grant and acknowledge by this present letter that I have received, and do receive, from Francisco de Cabrera who is here present, the sum of one thousand silver *pesos* in *reales* in the presence of the present notary and witnesses undersigned to this delivery. For this, I, the notary here present, give my oath that in my presence and that of the said witnesses undersigned, the said Francisco de Cabrera gave and delivered to the said Sebastián Rodríguez Cermeño the said one thousand silver *pesos* in *reales*, counted out, and that he received them, and he holds in his control the said one thousand silver *pesos*.

I oblige myself to take the funds on this voyage which I am making, God willing, aboard the said ship as pilot, entered in the general registry of the said ship for your behalf and at your risk and venture. And, having arrived at the said city of Manila, I oblige myself to employ them, and shall employ them, on your, the said Francisco de Cabrera, account for merchandise, following the order of a memorandum which you gave and delivered to me, signed with your name and mine, the said Sebastián Rodríguez Cermeño, and with that of the notary present, there remaining in your, the said Francisco de Cabrera, control the same text. And, if at the time that I arrive or am in the said city of Manila the merchandise listed in the same memorandum, or some of it, is not available, for employment of the said one thousand *pesos*, I may employ them, and shall employ them in all or whatever merchandise I may find in the said city of Manila at the prices in silver *pesos* to the extent that I am able. And having employed the said one thousand silver *pesos*, I will bring the merchandise aboard the ship on which I shall return to New Spain, and, if perhaps the governor or president of the Royal Audiencia of Manila orders me to return on the said ship on which I sail as pilot, or on any other ship ready to make the return voyage to New Spain, causing me to be unable to complete the employment of the funds for which I have been contracted, I will bring that merchandise obtained with me, registered on the said ship in your name and at your risk, consigned to you.

And the funds I have not employed and what remains, I shall leave and do leave, under your orders and consent, to Cristóbal Sánchez de Rojas, a person who travels with me on this voyage from New Spain to the said islands and city of

Manila, so that he completes the said employment, giving you a notarized statement of how I delivered the funds to the said Cristóbal Sánchez de Rojas, and in which I state what I have received from you, so that with it you may approach whomever you designate, and will bring it on the first ship or ships that leave from the said port of Manila for New Spain, noted in the general registry of the said ship. And giving you the said note, I shall take for myself from what may be considered as being delivered, because of the labor and attention I shall give to the said employment, the amount of a fourth part of all that is gained from the employment of the said one thousand silver *pesos*, deducting the costs of shipping, carriage, duties, and payments from the said *reales*, as well as from the cloth that may be sold in this city.

And, I should be believed by my simple oath when I give an account, which I shall give, of the prices that the said merchandise cost, and further costs which accrue according to my book. All of this I oblige myself to give to you, and I shall give you a certain, loyal, and truthful accounting of payments through my said book and simple oath as stated.

And, as is done and is customary in similar cases of giving *pesos*, I, the said Francisco de Cabrera, for I am present to what is stated and granted, and I know it to be in this present letter which I recognize and acknowledge is such a contract, and what is contained in it, *de verbo ad verbum*, is its contents, I give you my power of attorney and commission so that, in the event that by order of the said president and governor you are ordered to return later to New Spain on the said ship on which you are going, or on any other which is ready to leave the said port of Manila to come to New Spain, so that you cannot personally carry out the said employment, you may give and deliver the said one thousand silver *pesos* in *reales*, or that part which has not been employed, to the said Cristóbal Sánchez de Rojas so that he, with my funds and by my account and risk he may employ them in the said city of Manila for the merchandise listed in my said memorandum if it is available, and if not, in the order, form, and manner which he deems proper, doing in this what he may as a good agent so that he takes advantage of the price in said employment, and that he employs and carries out his charge as is the custom in paying for similar agencies in the said city of Manila. And, that he will receive the note in its proper form and employ it, and send the merchandise to me on the first ship that shall sail from the said city of Manila, registered and consigned to me at my risk, before a notary who attests to it, and giving me the said merchandise, I give to you as full payment the quantity of silver *pesos* that will be delivered and appear in the said contract, and I oblige myself to give to you, and I shall give to you for the said employment and service that you may carry out for me from the said one thousand *pesos* or from that part of them that you do employ, one fourth of the profits which God may provide from them, subtracting costs of shipping, duties, taxes, and carriage which may be incurred.



And, because you have stated and declared below, for this, all that is stated is as such, and to be complied with and committed to promissory payment by us, and both of us, the said parties, each of us for himself and for what relates to him, and for what, through this contract he is obliged to comply, keep, pay, and hold certain, and for the execution and compliance of it, we give total and complete power to all and any magistrates, judges, and justices of his Majesty in any place, district, or jurisdiction of any kind, and especially those of this court and Royal Chancellery of México and to the Royal Audiencia which, for his Majesty, resides in the said city of Manila, so that the said justices, or any one of them may thereby cause us to comply, keep, and pay entirely, as if it were by definitive sentence of a competent judge given against us and passed in court. Relative to this we renounce all the laws, privileges, and rights which exist or may exist in our favor, thus they are of no value to any of us in this matter, and especially renounce the law and rule of law wherein it is stated that general renunciation outside of law is invalid in testimony.

Under these terms we grant the present letter before the present notary and witnesses undersigned. Given in this said city of México of New Spain, on the sixth day of the month of February of 1586, being present as witnesses to that which is stated, Francisco de Ribera, Alonso Gutiérrez, and Juan de Tejadillo, present in the city, and the said grantors signed this with their names which, under oath, I know, and Fulano de Valera, merchant, declared under oath that he knows the said Sebastián Rodríguez Cermeño, pilot of the said ship, who, for this grantor and contract is thus named.

Francisco de Cabrera (rubric)

Sebastián Rodríguez Cermenbo

Given before me, (rubric) *Cristóbal de Tejadillo* (rubric)

Notary of His Majesty

NOTES

- 1 The original contract is in the collection of the author. This article was originally published in Spanish as: "El Galeón de Manila. Un contrato no cumplido de 1586," *Calafia* 3 (septiembre 1989): 15-18.
- 2 William Lytle Schurz, *The Manila Galleon* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1939), 203-04.
- 3 Ibid., 204.
- 4 W. Michael Mathes, *Sebastián Vizcaíno and Spanish Expansion in the Pacific Ocean 1580-1630* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1968), 10-18, and works cited therein.
- 5 Schurz, 76.
- 6 For a full documentary account of the hunt for and capture of the galleon, see Mathes, *The Capture of the 'Santa Ana' at Cabo San Lucas, November, 1587* (Los Angeles: Dawson's Book Shop, 1969), *passim*.
- 7 Mathes, *Sebastián Vizcaíno*, 44-53.



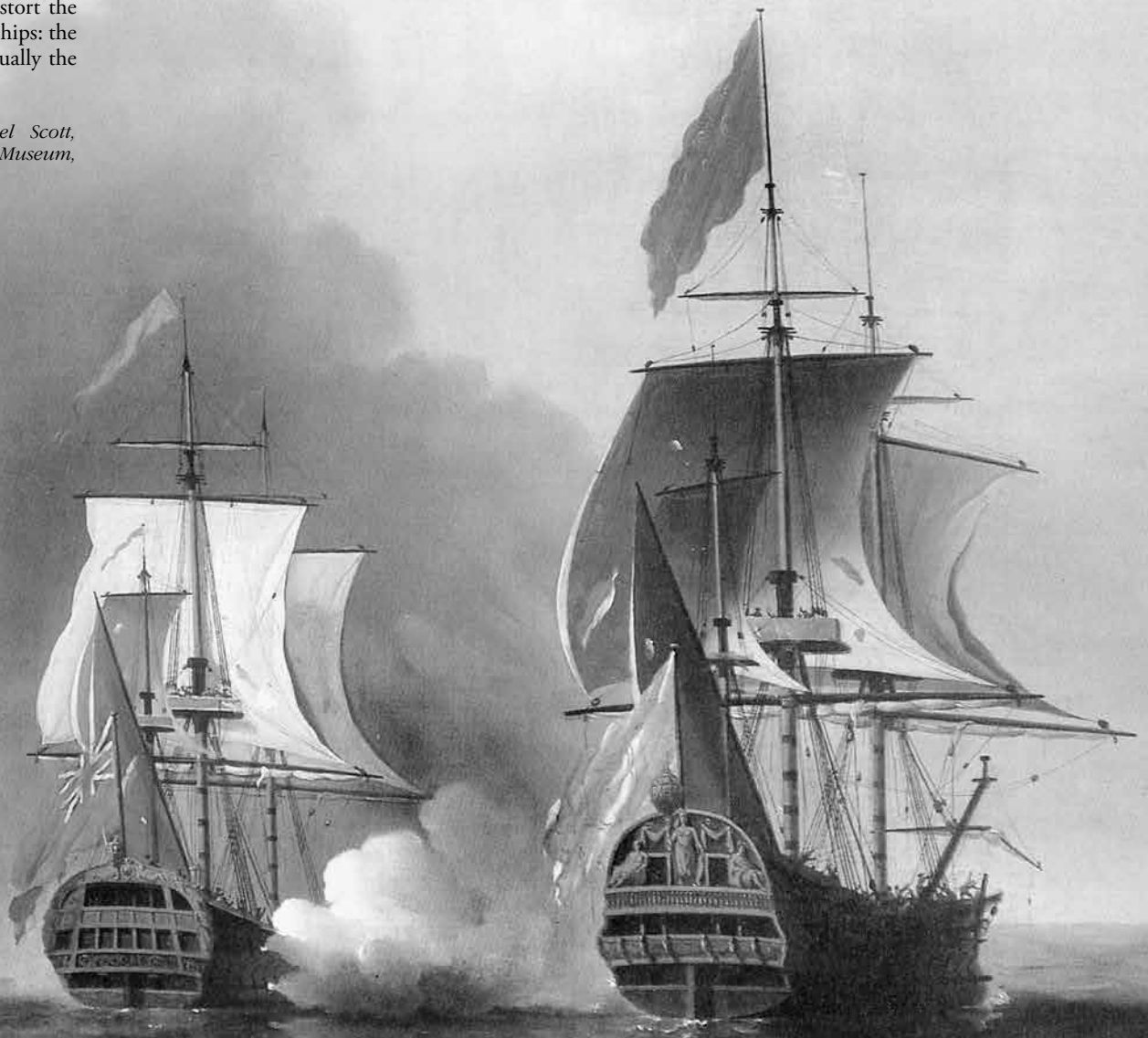
Two sides of a 16th century piece of eight from "Treasures of the Manila Galleons," courtesy of Edward and Saryl Von der Porten; photos by John Wright

"such a dreadful and fatal passage" Anson's Arrival in the Pacific

Ray Ashley

In a ninety-minute battle, the *Centurion* pounded the galleon *Covadonga* into surrender. This and other British paintings distort the relative sizes of the ships: the *Centurion* was actually the bigger of the two.

*Painting by Samuel Scott,
National Maritime Museum,
Greenwich*



In one sense, modern globe-spanning naval power may well have had its origins in an ill-advised and catastrophically executed attempt to hunt down a Manila galleon. It was this fabulous prize that in 1740 lured two powerful squadrons of European warships far beyond their natural limits with horrific consequences. Ultimately it was there, at the extremities of distance, disease, and despair, that the capture of a galleon helped set in motion a new understanding of what naval power could accomplish and what transformations would be necessary for it to realize its potential.

Until the latter half of the eighteenth century, the maritime nations of Europe very rarely conducted naval operations that took fleets of major warships beyond a six to eight week radius of a base, and for good reason. If ships tarried at sea much longer than this, the sailor's diet of those times virtually insured that scurvy, caused by a number of dietary deficiencies (including vitamin C), would begin to exact a debilitating and accumulating toll on the effectiveness of any crew. In consequence, despite the vast extent of maritime empires, European battlefleets were relatively short ranged. It was the maritime geography of disease, as much as any other reason, that allowed the Spanish free rein to exploit their monopoly on Pacific trade unmolested by hostile naval force. Though Spanish assets in the Pacific were occasionally attacked by Japanese, Dutch, and English adversaries, these ventures tended to be high-risk entrepreneurial forays rather than naval expeditions, usually funded by investors and carried out by private individuals, bold or desperate, sailing under letters of marque when they sailed under any authority at all.

In the winter of 1739, declaration of the "War of Jenkins' Ear" against Spain provided England an irresistible pretext to commit formal naval forces in a hunt for the fabulous Pacific galleons that voyaged between Manila and Acapulco. English strategists Sir Charles Wager (First Lord of the Admiralty) and Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Norris proposed using two Royal Navy squadrons to deliver unprecedented and simultaneous attacks on the Pacific ports of Spain's American colonies while also displacing the Spanish from Manila itself, and snaring at least one of the galleons in the process. It was a breathtakingly ambitious scheme but also hopelessly unrealistic. To take the Spanish eastern stronghold of Manila, the two visionaries believed that a mere three hundred soldiers would suffice.

Wager and Norris nonetheless recognized two technical requirements for their project. First, the Navy would have to provide sufficient force to accomplish its aims, not the least difficult of which was the capture of a Manila galleon. Though not warships proper, by the mid-eighteenth century the galleons were large, well armed, well manned, and massively constructed with thick frames and hardwood planking said to be impervious to round shot. In 1704, when William Dampier and William Funnell attacked a Manila ship off Colima, the galleon drove them off without sustaining any damage, as shot was unable to penetrate her sides. In 1708, a few days after Woodes Rogers took the *Desengaño* off the coast of Mexico, his two small sloops of war attacked the far larger and richer galleon *Begoña*. The ships fought at close quarters for more than six hours, during which time the English put "not less than 500 shot into her hull," but "we could perceive that few of our Shot entered her Sides to any purpose." There was a material reason for this: "these large Ships are built at Manila with excellent Timber, that will not splinter, they have very thick sides, much stronger than we build in Europe." In 1721, John Clipperton fled from the prospect of engaging the *Santo Cristo*

Ray Ashley has been executive director of the San Diego Maritime Museum since 1995, and is also an adjunct professor of history at USD. He is currently preparing a book on the relationship between science and seafaring in the Enlightenment, and has begun another work, in conjunction with four other historians, on the history of the American Merchant Marine.



Covadonga carried an astonishing 1,313,843 pieces of eight like this one, plus 35,682 ounces of other silver.

From "Treasures of the Manila Galleons," courtesy of Ed and Saryl Von der Porten; photo by John Wright



George Anson.

Painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds, National Maritime Museum Coll.

off Cabo San Lucas, according to George Shelvocke, “dreading the engagement with a ship that was always known to defend itself with some obstinacy,” after sailing halfway around the world and enduring unspeakable tribulations in order to place his ship in just such a position. Clearly, it would take powerful warships to capture a big galleon. The second problem was both logistical and navigational—the safe delivery of this force, intact and effective, to the right place at the right time for the heavy metal to make itself felt.

As preparations to implement the scheme advanced, it grew more unrealistic still as plans also went forward to send a major force to the Caribbean and the entire Pacific project was reduced to a single squadron. The force assembled for the task would have seemed modest for European operations or the West Indies, but it was far more powerful than anything the British had ever sent to the Pacific, or would send for more than a century.

Command of the expedition was given to Captain George Anson, a protégé of Norris with a solid reputation for good seamanship and independent capability, qualities which would be sorely tested.

The objectives of the expedition, though nominally a secret, were widely known throughout England with the result that

Anson had trouble filling his crews, despite the obvious opportunities for sudden wealth in prize money. The reason was clear: extremely long voyages in naval vessels were regarded as a death sentence. In the end, about half the men who sailed with Anson were “pressed” involuntarily into service from waterfront establishments and passing merchantmen. Filling the requirement for troops proved even more of a problem, once an appreciation of the odds caused those in high places to reconsider committing a valuable front line regiment to the project. Instead, Anson was provided a scratch marine regiment filled by impressed pensioners from Chelsea Hospital. These new marines were all over sixty years of age, and many were over seventy; some had lost one or more limbs, and many had to be transported to the waiting ships by stretcher and hoisted on board by tackles. Only about half the men of the new regiment were active and ambulatory, and these deserted immediately. To make up for the loss of the invalids, Anson was sent 210 orphaned boys as “marine recruits.” These had no training or experience with firearms, and as it turned out, few of them would live long enough to acquire much.

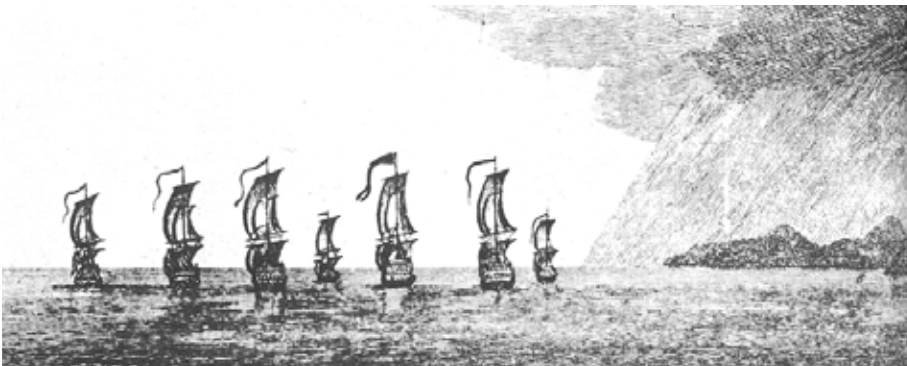
Unfortunately, Anson’s mission was just as well known in Spain, so that a squadron under the command of Admiral Don José Pizarro (a descendent of the conquistador of Peru) was prepared to put to sea on first news of Anson’s departure. Of the two, Pizarro’s squadron was the larger and more powerful.

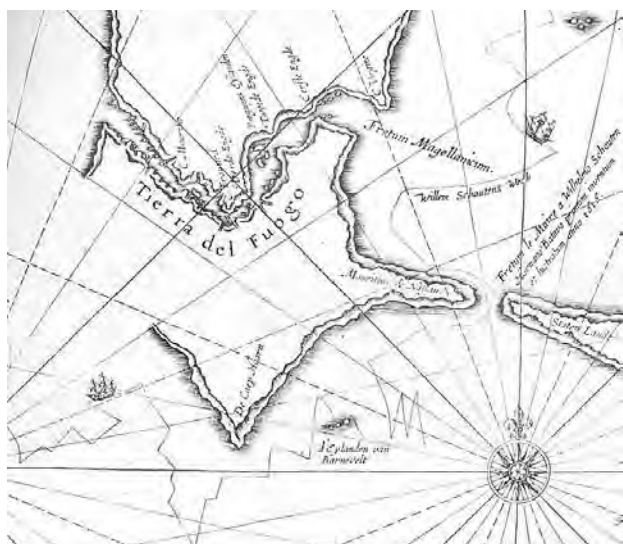
Pizarro's orders encouraged him to beat the English into the Pacific, repair his ships, replenish his stores, restore the health of his crew at a Spanish port, and then ambush Anson as he struggled up the Chilean coast with his ships ruined and his men dying. The Spanish preparations for the expedition were just as transparent as those of the English, so that both adversaries knew what they faced. Well matched for an Atlantic line-of-battle duel, both squadrons were poorly prepared to face the far more formidable Pacific enemies of distance, disease, and weather.

Thus it was that in September of 1740, the two doomed squadrons began their race southwards, heading toward a narrow and tempestuous patch of water at the bottom of the world. Until the moment that disaster overtook them, it appears that they were never far apart. In fact, were it not for the thick and murky weather that prevailed as they groped their way slowly down the coast of Patagonia, they may have been in sight on several occasions and the affair might have ended differently. The *Pearle*, for instance, became separated from the rest of her squadron for several days. When she sighted a group of warships and made sail to join them, they turned out to be Pizarro's squadron flying false colors. *Pearle* barely managed to escape.

By the time the two squadrons reached the South Atlantic, large numbers of men began to sicken and die, chiefly from scurvy. In December, Anson and Pizarro (who was in the lead) pulled into separate ports on the South American coast for reprovisioning, recovery, and repairs. When Pizarro received word of Anson's arrival by secret dispatch, however, he rushed to sea before completing his own reprovisioning, a move that would have fatal consequences. Anson stopped once again at Bahia St. Julian, but upon receiving word that Pizarro was nearby, cancelled the striking of cannon down below in preparation for Cape Horn and ordered them back in their carriages on the gun decks. Then he too put to sea with minimum delay, expecting a battle. Thus it was that both squadrons approached the Horn with cannon up and ready, a condition which affected stability and safety in strong winds and heavy seas.

Racing to battle in the Pacific, both Anson and Pizarro decided to attempt the passage of Cape Horn by way of the Strait of Le Maire, despite contemporary belief that the strait was dangerous. Pizarro was about 150 miles ahead of Anson when he reached the strait, but his provisions and water were very low, his men were dying from scurvy with increasing frequency, and starvation was rampant; rats were reportedly selling for four dollars apiece. He was struggling westward past Cape Horn itself, when during nighttime hours the Admiral lost





At the tip of South America, the adversaries threaded the Strait of Le Maire, at right, between Tierra del Fuego and Staten Land. This map shows the 1616 track of the strait's discoverers, Willem Schouten and Jacob Le Maire.

contact with three of his ships. The Spanish squadron was thus fragmented with its manpower waning, when on March 8 Cape Horn lived up to its reputation. "There came on a most furious storm from the N.W. which, in spite of all their efforts, drove the whole squadron to the eastward."¹³ From that moment, Pizarro's squadron ceased to exist as a military force; of his five ships, one foundered with all hands, another was dismasted and run ashore after a mutiny, and two others limped into Buenos Aires in ruin. Only the fifty-gun *Esparanza* made it to the Pacific, though hardly serviceable as a man-of-war. From her original complement of four hundred and fifty men, only fifty-eight¹⁴ remained alive by the time the ship raised the coast of Chile. Of the nearly three thousand men who set out with Pizarro, slightly over one hundred returned to Spain.

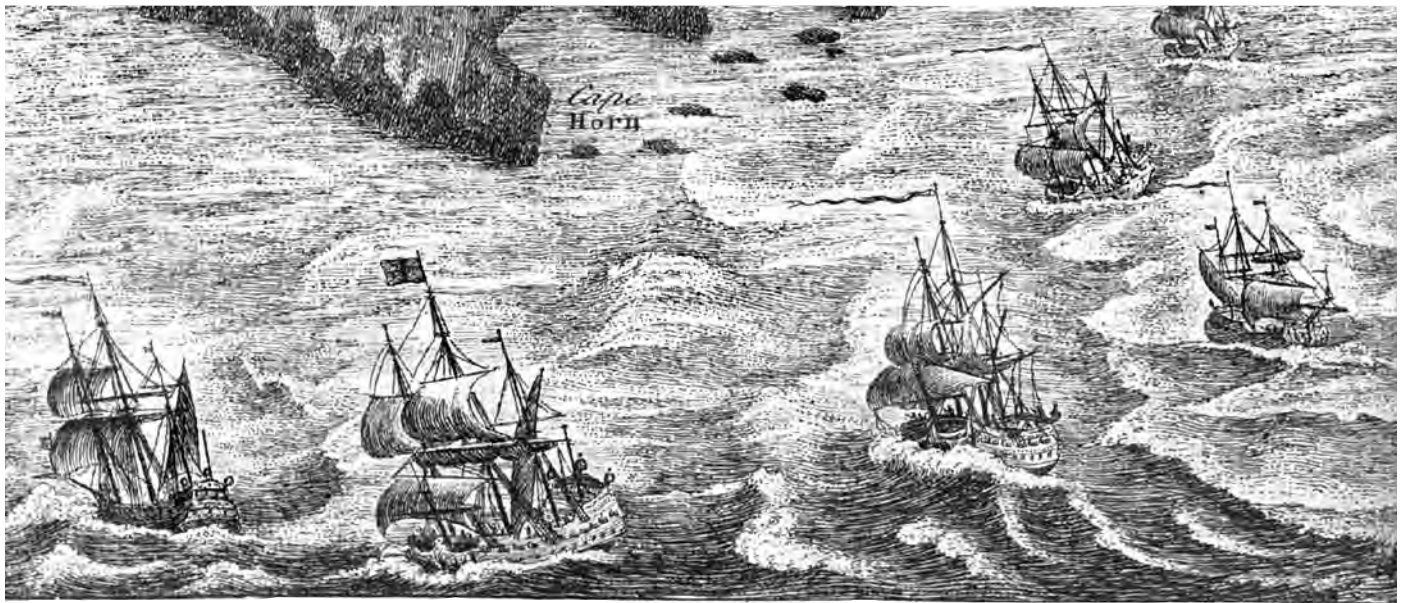
As they made their own passage of the Strait of Le Maire, the English were blissfully unaware of what awaited them. The strait itself posed no problem navigationally, but the appearance of the place seems to have provoked a chilling sense of foreboding: "consisting of high craggy hills, towering above each other, mostly covered with snow, with deep horrid valleys, some few scattering trees, no plains, nor one cheerful green thro' all the dismal scene."¹⁶ *Centurion* was the first ship through. After completing the passage, Anson waited for the other ships to catch up. One by one they gathered, and for a short while enjoyed the comfort of one another's close company on the threshold of an enemy ocean. Some allowed themselves to think that "the Storms here were not so boisterous nor so long [in] Continuance as had been commonly reported."¹⁷ The ships then hauled their wind and stood away in the direction of Pizarro's scattered squadron, at that moment driving toward them before the fury of a shrieking gale.

In all the accounts from the English survivors, what followed next seemed an endless nightmare. According to schoolmaster Pascoe Thomas,

from this time until May 25, we had nothing but the most terrible and dreadful storms, that I believe that it is possible for the Mind of man to conceive... The Sea went Mountains high continually, our Ship was nothing to them... [she] rolled almost Gunnel-to, the Sails were almost always splitting and blowing from the Yards; the Yards themselves frequently breaking; the Shrouds and other Rigging cracking and flying in Pieces continually; and what added to our Misery amidst those amazing and terrifying Scenes, we made very little Way to the Westward and Northward, wither we were now bound.¹⁸

Anson's ships were driven to the east and then for two weeks fought their way back against the wind and greybeard seas larger than any of them had ever seen.

Just after the middle of March, the English squadron weathered Cape Horn.¹⁹ It proved a sorely needed boost to the spirit when the ships were finally able to wear and head north, for the deterioration of the ships was but a pale reflection of the horror beginning to take place inside. Up to this point, scurvy had not been epidemic. Now, according to Thomas in the *Centurion*, "the People began to be universally afflicted with that most terrible, obstinate,



and at Sea incurable Disease, the Scurvy, which quickly made a most dreadful Havock among us.”²⁰ As bad as things seemed in Thomas’ ship, they were worse elsewhere. The *Severn* was losing men at a prodigious rate.²¹ In the *Gloucester*, the storms and the sickness were creating panic and undermining authority, “the captain of the *Gloucester* was taken violently ill, and read the articles of war to the Ship’s Company: The Sickness increasing vastly among them.”²²

It was about this time that Pascoe Thomas began to note scurvy’s effects on his own body. His first inkling of the disease came with a pain in the joint of a toe. Since he had injured the toe only a short time before, he at first attributed the pain to the injury: “but in a little time a large black spot appearing on the part affected, with very intense pains at the bone, gave me to understand my case.”²³ Over the course of several days,

Several hard nodes now began to rise in my legs, thighs, and arms, and not only many more black spots appeared in the skin, but those spread till almost my legs and thighs were as black as a Negro; and this accompanied with such excessive pains in the joints of the knees, ankles, and toes, as I thought, before I experienced them, than human nature could never have supported. It next advanced to the mouth; all my teeth were presently loose, and my gums, overcharged with extravagated blood, fell down almost quite over my teeth...²⁴

From April 3 until April 10, another storm raged with rain, snow, sleet, hail, lightning, and “a hollow sea.” Bit by bit, Anson’s ships were breaking up. All the while the *Gloucester* reported “the sickness still increasing among her men.”²⁵ By April 10, the *Severn* and *Pearle* were lagging further and further behind the other ships and could not be induced to keep up. The next morning they were gone. *Centurion*, *Gloucester*, *Wager*, *Tryall* and *Anne* pressed on northward, hopeful that every day would bring them nearer to warm latitudes, calm seas, the salvation of the land, and the treasure of the Acapulco galleon.

Anson’s ships struggle around Cape Horn.

From An Authentic and Genuine Journal of Commodore Anson’s Expedition, 1744

On April 15, the remains of the squadron narrowly averted running²⁷ aground on Isla Noire, which they had reckoned as being far to the east. With a rocky shore stretching ahead and under their lee, they were forced to turn south again. By April 21, they were back down to S 60°28', their furthest penetration into Antarctic seas, and believed themselves to be far enough west to wear about and try once²⁸ again. Finally, they turned north, minus the *Wager*, which had disappeared. After keeping more or less together for seven months, on April 23 Anson's ships lost sight of one another in a day of rain, squalls, hail and snow.

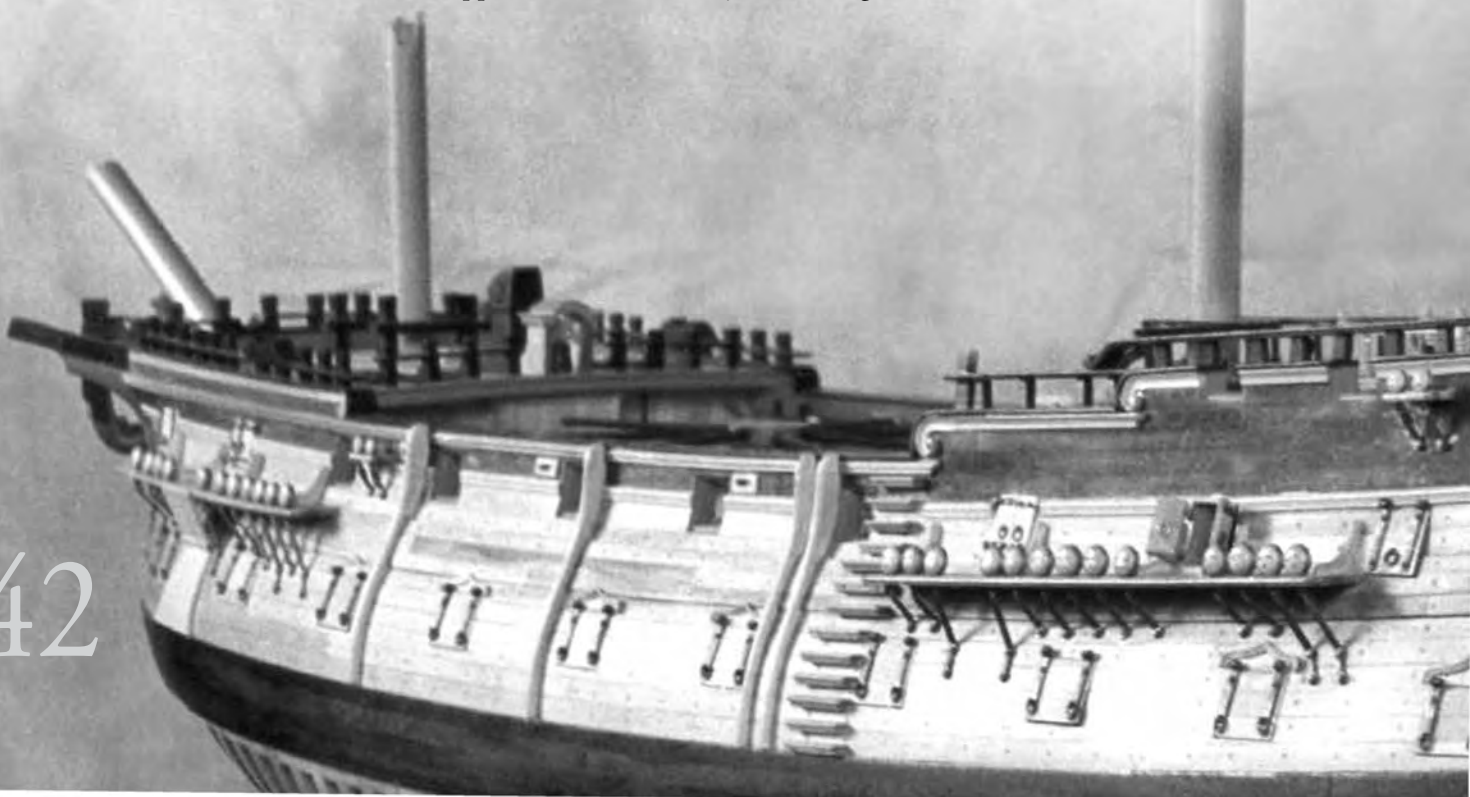
Prior to leaving St. Julian, Anson had set two rendezvous points for the squadron should the ships become separated. The first was the island of Socorro (now Isla Guamblin) located close off the coast of Chile, where each was to cruise for ten days awaiting other ships and then proceed to Juan Fernandez Island, the famous onetime refuge of Alexander Selkirk, Defoe's model for Robinson Crusoe.

On May 8, *Centurion* raised the latitude of Socorro and ran down the line to that island. From the sea, however, the place looked like just another dangerous lee shore without any evidence of safe harbor or useful vegetation. With the westerly seas and winds now besetting them and a crew virtually incapacitated, they dared not surrender any sea room to get a closer look. Anson tarried in the vicinity for three days and when none of the other ships appeared, made for the latitude of Juan Fernandez.

Centurion continued to deteriorate. The leaks were gaining and the water in the hold rose above the casks of fresh water. On deck and aloft, working the heavy gear was becoming almost impossible, "being able to muster about 27 men,²⁹ our people being dispirited and fatigued beyond what can be imagined." Early the first evening of yet another storm, a crescendo of boiling sound suddenly rose out of the darkness to windward, "with so much Noise and Fury as if it would have carried all before it."³⁰ In Chaplain Richard Walter's words: "A mountainous overgrown sea took us upon our starboard quarter, and gave us so prodigious a shock that several of our shrouds broke with a jerk, by which our masts were greatly endangered. Indeed it was a most tremendous blow, and we were thrown³¹ into the utmost consternation from the apprehension of instantly foundering" This was the second time *Centurion*

A model of the *Centurion*, based on a model owned by Anson himself.

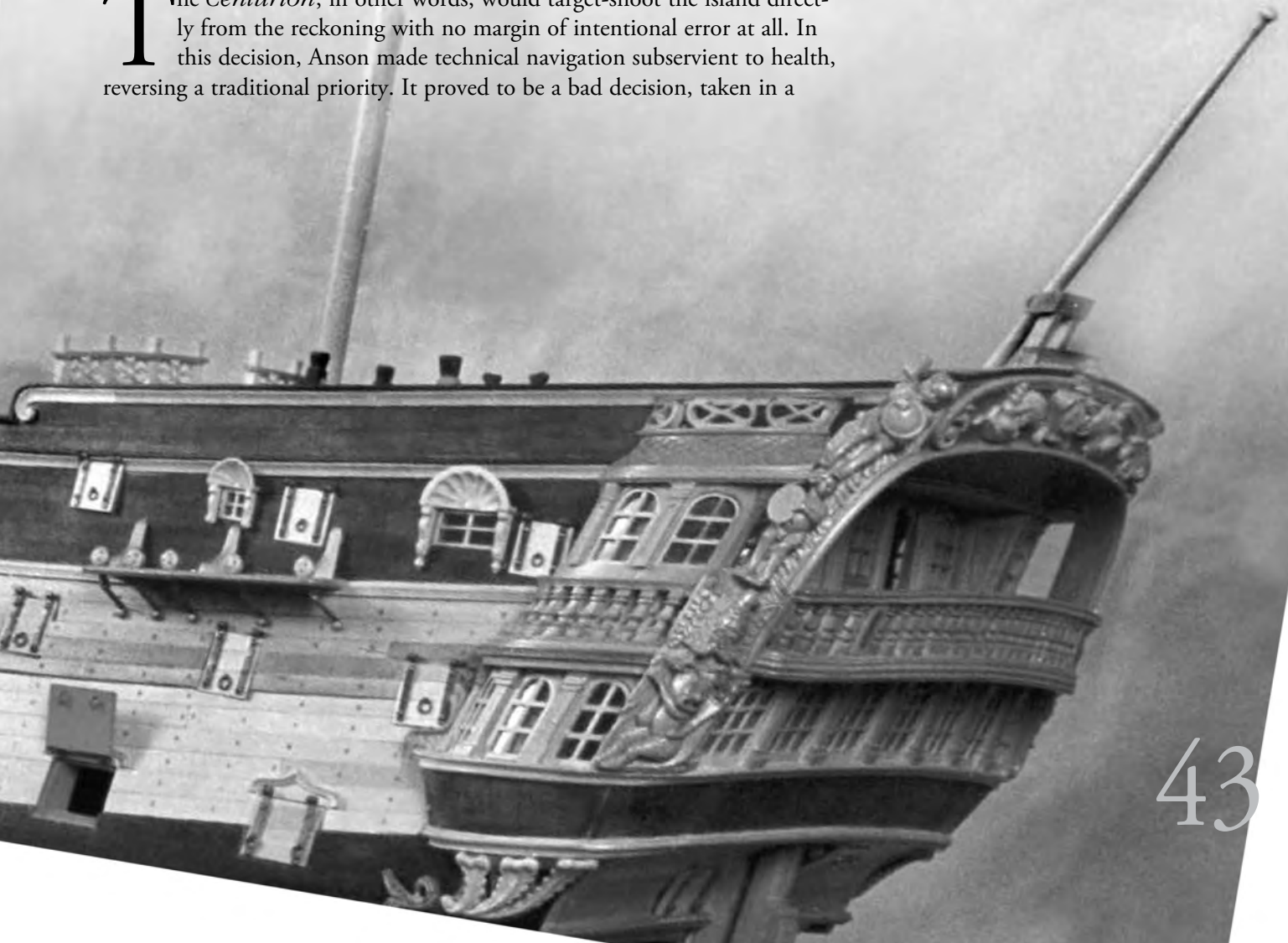
From "Treasures of the Manila Galleons," courtesy of the Kelton Foundation; photo by John Wright

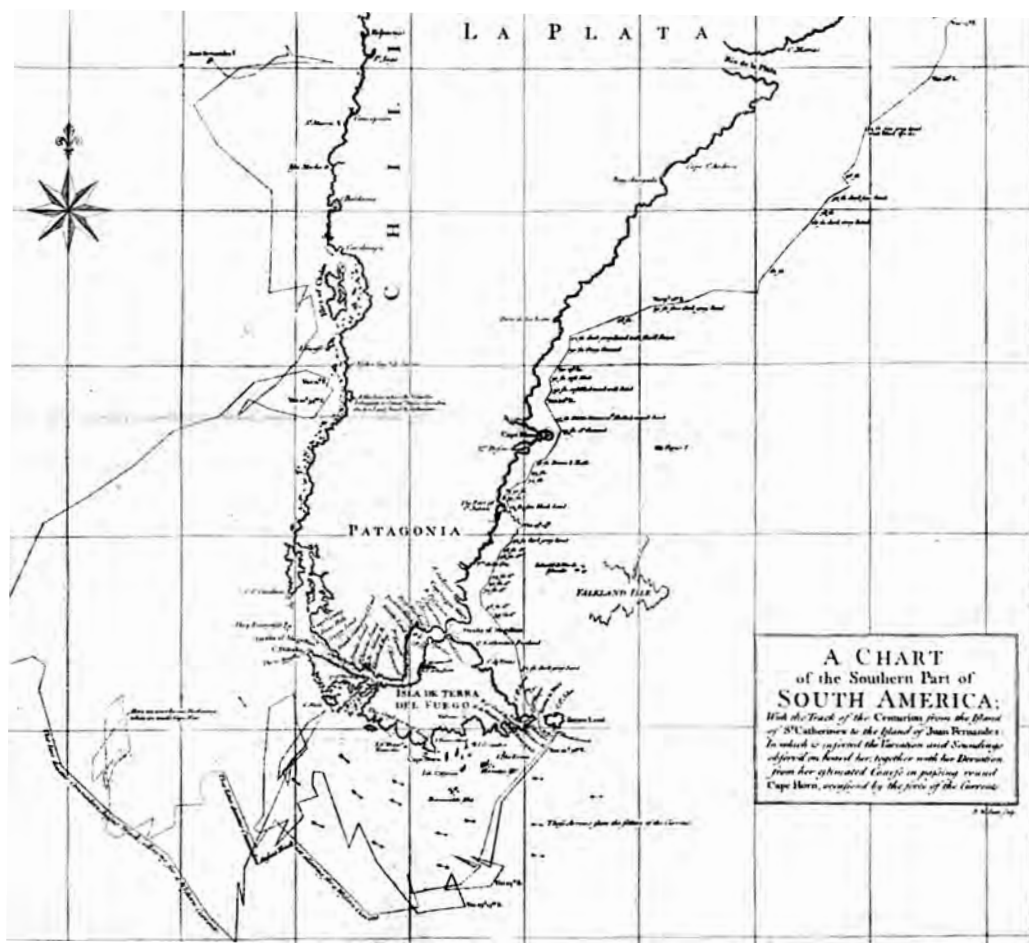


had been knocked on her beam ends, but this greater wave caused far more damage; when she righted, she retained a mysterious list to port. The wind then began to lessen, leaving the ship rolling “gunwale to” in a sea that threatened to send her weakly supported masts over the side.

Anson now was faced with a significant decision. The refuge of Juan Fernandez still lay more than two hundred leagues to the northwest—considerably more if one counted the normal cushion of sea room allowed for “intentional error” and its consumption in running down a latitude. The proper extent of that “intentional error” cushion, and therefore the time to devote to creating it, was now a crucial issue because the charted longitude of the small island was so undependable, not to mention that *Centurion* had no means to establish her own longitude. Currents had stymied the reckoning before and could do so again. The ingrained tradition of generations of seafaring dictated a conservative strategy with a large margin for error that rendered other variables, like disease, subservient to navigation. The reasons for this were understood by all: scurvy usually struck individuals among a crew to different degrees with gradual effect, but navigational errors could destroy the entire ship in an instant. But now a terrifying epidemic of scurvy worse than anyone had imagined truly threatened the entire ship, rendering traditional considerations questionable. According to Chaplain Walter, “our deplorable situation then allowing no room for deliberation, we stood for the island of Juan Fernandez; and to save time, which was now extremely precious (our men dying four, five, and six a day), and likewise to avoid being engaged again³³ with a lee shore, we resolved, if possible, to hit the island upon a meridian.”

The *Centurion*, in other words, would target-shoot the island directly from the reckoning with no margin of intentional error at all. In this decision, Anson made technical navigation subservient to health, reversing a traditional priority. It proved to be a bad decision, taken in a





This chart of Anson's miserable voyage around the Horn ends at Juan Fernández Island, at top left. On the facing page is John Harrison's chronometer, H1.

an island fifteen miles by six miles in extent. The island had a reputation as an idyllic, protected, and unoccupied spot, and well situated as a base for English ships cruising against the Spanish coast for prizes, a purpose it had served for most of Anson's predecessors. It was high, craggy, and home to innumerable birds, which made it a good navigational target. Though more Englishmen knew the name of Juan Fernandez than any other island in the Pacific, no one seems to have known where it really was.³⁴ Most navigators followed the continent's coast until they reached the right latitude, tacked, and then stood close to the prevailing northwesterly wind as they ran down the parallel for 330 miles. The alternative would have been to stand far out to the west and then come at it the other way with a fair wind. His sources differed on its longitude, but Anson's strongest information placed the island at 84°08' W (though it is actually in 78°55' W) and his own reckoning placed the *Centurion* 1°18' farther west still, though in fact both he and the island were to the east of their assumed meridians.³⁵ Compounding the charted error, when *Centurion* reached the latitude at which Juan Fernandez was supposed to appear, she steered to a position at least sixty-five miles to the east of the island.

Five years earlier, *Centurion* had voyaged from Portsmouth to Lisbon with the horologist John Harrison to test his marvelous chronometer H1 (the "sea clock"). It is tempting to speculate that things might have turned out differently had *Centurion* somehow managed to take one of Harrison's chronometers

moment of desperation by a fading crew in their last extremity. But the establishment of health as a primary factor, possibly the primary factor, in the direction of naval operations would one day characterize sweeping change in policy and radical alteration in the nature of sea power, beginning with a number of reforms that Anson himself implemented in later years.

Placing all their hopes in the master's reckoning and their best information about the position of Juan Fernandez, the *Centurion's* people shifted stores and ballast to correct her list to port and made good as much of the damage as possible. When the wind shifted to the south, *Centurion* bore up directly for the charted position of Juan Fernandez,

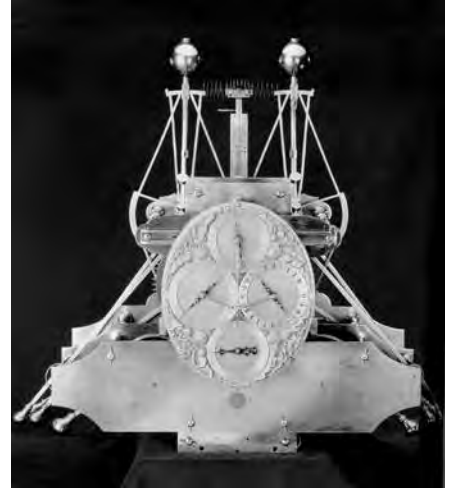
with her on this voyage, but had this happened, it almost certainly would not have made much difference. At that stage of its development, the chronometer was simply one component within a larger system yet to be assembled. A chronometer on its own could not “find” the longitude, only keep it, as Isaac Newton observed, and there were no means yet to rate the quality of its keeping through astronomy at sea.³⁶ Of even greater importance, the presumed position of the island itself was in error. Ironically, it is possible that a functioning, accurate chronometer might have delivered *Centurion* to the same empty patch of water.

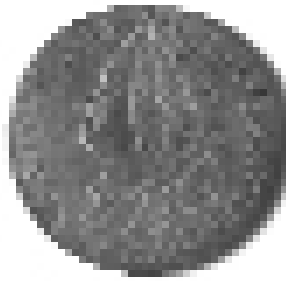
On May 29, Philip Saumarez logged: “had all our faculties awake to look out for the island, our people being grown to the last degree infirm and sick and few of them being able to do their duty and falling down hourly.”³⁷ Richard Walter concurred: “we began to fear we had gone too far to the westward.” Anson was not convinced, for he thought he had seen something hard and sharp on the far horizon to the west in the first light of morning on May 28. His officers disagreed, believing that Anson’s sighting was only a cloud. There was a council and the consensus was to “stand to the eastward, in the parallel of the island, as it was certain by this course we should either fall in with the island, if we were already to the westward of it, or should at least make the Mainland of Chili, from which we might make a new departure.”³⁸ On May 30, they saw the white capped peaks of the Andes in the far distance, and between the continent and themselves only open sea.

To reach her destination *Centurion* now had to beat to windward, requiring “nine days to regain the westing which, when we stood to the eastward, we ran down in two.”³⁹ According to Walter, debilitating dejection now took hold of the entire ship’s company, the mortality rate increased dramatically once again, and to prove that matters could always get worse, the water ran out. On June 10, they finally came to anchor at Juan Fernandez, “with a crazy ship, a great scarcity of fresh water, and a crew so universally diseased that there was not above ten fore-mast men in a watch capable of doing duty, and even some of these lame, and unable to go aloft.”⁴⁰ By Thomas’ account, they had come “from St. Katherine’s in the Brazils, to this place, 148 days, on such a dreadful and fatal passage, as I believe very few persons ever experienced.” They had survived, though barely.

The subsequent events of Anson’s voyage are well known. The *Tryall* arrived a few days later “in a most miserable and shattered Condition; having buried half her Crew since she left England.”⁴¹ Suffering in the *Gloucester* was even more extravagant. She drifted into the anchorage weeks later a virtual ghost ship, with 314 out of her original complement of 396 dead.⁴² Her final days were also marked by a horrifying battle between her dying crew and thousands of starving rats that swarmed onto her decks when the water in the hold rose above the provisions.⁴³

Yet, once the survivors restored themselves to health and made repairs to the ships, Anson retained sufficient force to harass the Spanish ports of the Americas for months and bring coastwise trade to a standstill. *Centurion* and *Gloucester* then attempted to cross the Pacific, which cost Anson the *Gloucester* and one hundred more men. Finally, with a crew composed almost entirely of officers and children (the categories in the ship least affected by scurvy), *Centurion* ambushed the Acapulco galleon *Nuestra Señora*





This 1746 British half crown was minted from the *Covadonga*'s treasure. Beneath George II is the word *LLMA*, signifying that the coin was struck from Peruvian silver.

From "Treasures of the Manila Galleons," courtesy Charles R. Luce; photo by John Wright

de Covadonga north of Cape Espirito Santo in the Philippines on June 20, 1742. This proved to be the only instance in the history of the Pacific galleons that one of them faced an Atlantic World ship-of-the-line. As Wager and Norris had hoped would happen, *Centurion*'s twenty-four-pound shot burst through the *Covadonga*'s topsides, "and killed great numbers: the Spaniards having near 600 Men, standing very thick on the Deck, scarce a Shot missed them."⁴⁴ Such work made for a short battle, and it produced the richest haul of treasure ever returned home by an English man-of-war. It required thirty-two wagons to carry the hoard from Portsmouth to London in a triumphant procession escorted by the 145 "*Centurion* Men" who survived out of the more than two thousand who sailed from England.

The prize money made Anson one of the richest men in England, a national hero, and a powerful figure in naval society, in which he ultimately rose to First Lord of the Admiralty. In the process, Anson went on to command sizable fleets and win large engagements that provided yet more prize money. More importantly, he implemented a host of reforms that professionalized the navy and established well-defined conventions of authority and accountability, which for the first time included responsibility of a commander for the health of his men. Anson also elevated the physician James Lind, who had conducted the first clinical experiment in medical history in an effort to test cures for scurvy, to physician of Haslar naval hospital. At Haslar, then the largest hospital in the world, Lind implemented a systematic program of clinical research into various branches of military and public health, dedicating his most important treatise to Anson.⁴⁵

During the intensive naval phase of the Seven Years War, Anson also implemented the first systematic program for underway replenishment of warships at sea in an effort to provide a continuous supply of the fresh produce necessary to control scurvy. It was a fleet that Anson trained and provisioned which

Centurion was actually slightly larger than the galleon, but British images always depict her as the underdog. Her adversary's lower deck guns, which this painting shows in action, were not in fact mounted.

1756 painting by John Clevely, National Trust coll.



In the end, the conquest of scurvy begun by Anson and completed by the explorer James Cook and naval physician Gilbert Blane contributed to a seminal transformation of naval power and even set the stage for the advent of public health administration itself. The contemporary naval surgeon Robert Finlayson observed at the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars that “it is the opinion of some of the most experienced officers that the blockading system of warfare which annihilated the naval powers of France could never have been carried on unless sea-scurvy had been subdued.”⁴⁸ Moreover, the victory was administrative. In the words of Admiral Horatio Nelson, “when the thinking mind reflects on the ravages committed in our fleets by disease in times past and contrasts it with the present, we must be strongly impressed with sentiments of admiration and astonishment, and almost induced to say that mournful waste of the human species was more chargeable to mismanagement than anything unavoidable in nature or a sea life.”⁴⁹

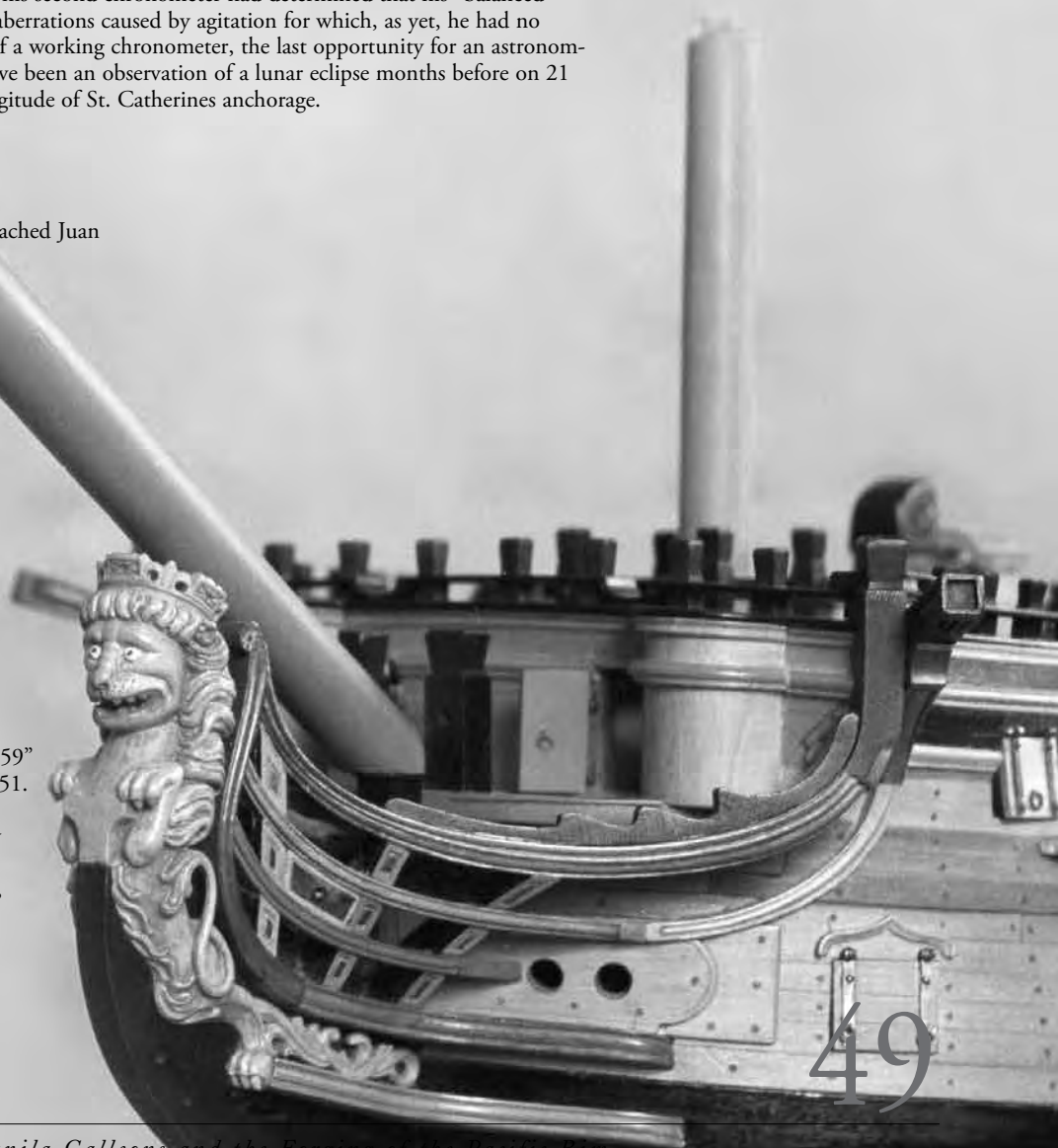
Courtesy U.C. Berkeley Libraries

NOTES

- 1 While today we think of scurvy as a deficiency of vitamin C (ascorbic acid), in Anson's day it also consisted of other deficiencies, such as thiamin, niacin, and riboflavin.
- 2 Leo Heaps, *Log of the Centurion, Based on the Original Papers of Captain Phillip Saumarez on Board H.M.S. Centurion, Lord Anson's Flagship during his Circumnavigation 1740-1744* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1973), 23.
- 3 William Funnell, *A Voyage Round the World* (London: W. Botham, 1707), 84.
- 4 Woodes Rogers, *A Cruising Voyage Round the World* (London: A. Bell and B. Linton, 1712), 147.
- 5 Ibid. See also Edward Cooke, *A Voyage to the South Sea and Round the World* (London: B. Lintot and R. Gosling, 1712), 336.
- 6 George Shelvocke, *A Voyage round the World* (London: J. Senex, 1726), 327.
- 7 The Caribbean force consisted of nine ships under Admiral Edward Vernon, which sailed from Portsmouth July 24, 1739, to join forces already on station. Operations in the West Indies continued to absorb resources thereafter.
- 8 The squadron also sailed with two supply ships under hire, the "pinks" *Anne* and *Industry*. This force was arguably more powerful than the "Nassau Fleet" sent by Prince Maurits of Nassau under the command of Admiral Jacques l'Hermite around Cape Horn to raid Spanish possessions in 1623. The Dutch fleet consisted of eleven ships fitted with a total of 294 guns and 1630 men. Kris Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas 1500-1750* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 84.
- 9 Peter Shankland, *Byron of the Wager* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1975), 19. Also Walter and Robins, and letter Anson to Andrew Stone (Adm. 1/4109, Doc. 42) in Glyndwr Williams, ed. *Documents Relating to Anson's Voyage Round the World 1740-1744* (Greenwich: Navy Records Society, 1967), 50.
- 10 Anson's ships called at Saint Catherine's anchorage (today Florianópolis), while Pizarro did the same thing six hundred miles further south at the entrance to the Rio de la Plata.
- 11 Heaps, 57; Richard Walter, *Lord Anson's Voyage Round the World 1740, 1, 2, 3, 4* (London: John and Paul Knapton, 1748), 26. Anson left no published narrative of his remarkable voyage. Richard Walter's account is the "authorized version" that carried Anson's endorsement, and probably is closest to Anson's interpretation. There remains some question of how much Anson contributed and how much of the account is Walter's own, or indeed, if the entire story was ghostwritten by the scholar Benjamin Robbins. Robbins, an experimental scientist who contributed greatly to the progress of gunnery, did not go on the voyage, but acted as a paid consultant to finish the published account.
- 12 Walter, 27.
- 13 Ibid., 26-27.
- 14 Peter Shankland, *Byron of the Wager* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1975), 221, 223, 265-266.
- 15 Christopher Lloyd, *Pacific Horizons* (New York: AMS Press, 1946), 113.
- 16 Pascoe Thomas, *A True and Impartial Journal of a Voyage to the South-Seas and Round the Globe In His Majesty's Ship the Centurion, Under the Command of Commodore George Anson* (London: S. Birt, 1745), 19.
- 17 Ibid., 20-21.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 They turned north at S 58° 59', where their reckoning placed their longitude at about 77° W, and thus well to west of Cape Horn. Their actual longitude at that point was probably due south of Cape Horn in about 69° W, though charts of the day placed Cape Horn at about 74° W.
- 20 Thomas, 22.
- 21 The *Severn* was the first ship of the squadron to lose men to scurvy at a rate of more than one per day, thus acquiring an early reputation among the fleet as the most diseased of the lot. Popular belief held that this was due to her being relatively new, as old ships were thought generally healthier than new ones. Arthur C. Murray, *An Episode in the Spanish War 1739-1744* (London: Seeley, Service & Co., 1952), 64.
- 22 John Phillips, *An authentic journal of the late expedition under the command of Commodore Anson. Containing a regular and exact account of the whole proceedings and several transactions thereof: particularly at Madeira, St. Catharine's ... their cruising on the coast of Acapulco, Chequatan Bay, Tenian, one of the Ladrone Islands, and Macao; the taking of the rich Spanish Galleon ... their going to Canton in China, etc. To which is added, a narrative of the extraordinary hardships suffered by the adventurers in this voyage* (London: J. Robinson, 1744), 41. "John Phillips" is probably a pseudonym – no such person is listed in the ship's rolls. This and the "Anonymous account," both of 1744, were probably published as such because they spoke of events in the *Wager*, then under consideration during the courts marshal of John Bulkeley and others, and because the officially authorized version had yet to appear.
- 23 Williams, *Documents*, 86.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid., 42.

- 26 *Severn* and *Pearle*, having sustained heavy damage and loss to disease, gave up the expedition and returned to England by way of Rio de Janeiro and Bermuda. They encountered the shattered remnants of Pizarro's squadron along the way home, but none of the crews had sufficient energy to give battle.
- 27 Charts of that day located Isla Noire (then known as Cape Noire) in 78°46' W (it is actually about 73°30' W), while the reckoning of various navigators in the squadron put their position 9°30' further west, or more.
- 28 *Wager* ended up wrecking in the bay of Penas, whereupon followed one of history's most celebrated accounts of mutiny, murder, and an epic small boat voyage, each of which equaled the drama and ordeal of similar events years later aboard *Bounty*.
- 29 Heaps, 94.
- 30 Thomas, 28.
- 31 Walter, 72.
- 32 The list was initially believed to result from the shifting of objects in her hold, but inspection revealed nothing moved. Thomas, 28.
- 33 Ibid., 73.
- 34 All the primary sources agree closely on latitude (and are within 15' of the actual position), which is to be expected, but estimates for longitude vary widely. Curiously, Glyn Williams has the latitude more than a full degree in error in his modern authoritative narrative of the voyage, *The Prize of all the Oceans* (New York: Viking, 2000). During the voyage *Centurion* captured a Spanish gazetteer compiled by a Manuel Monz. Prieto, Professor of Arts in Peru. Prieto gives the longitude of Juan Fernandez as 70°01' W from the meridian of London. Thomas, Appendix, 29. Juan Fernandez is known today as Isla Robinson Crusoe.
- 35 This is by Saumarez's estimate. Thomas actually placed the island at 87°37' W, which is more than 2° further west *still* from the location they assumed for the island.
- 36 By that time Harrison's experiments with his second chronometer had determined that his "balanced beam" principal was vulnerable to subtle aberrations caused by agitation for which, as yet, he had no solution. Had Anson been in possession of a working chronometer, the last opportunity for an astronomical cross-check to rate its going would have been an observation of a lunar eclipse months before on 21 December, when Thomas derived the longitude of St. Catherine's anchorage.
- 37 Heaps, 98.
- 38 Walter, 73.
- 39 Ibid., 74.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 *Tryal* lost 34 of her 67 men before she reached Juan Fernandez. Williams, *The Prize of all the Oceans*, 56.
- 42 Walter, 151.
- 43 Ibid., 49-50.
- 44 Phillips, 176.
- 45 See James Lind, *A Treatise on the Scurvy in Three Parts: Containing An Inquiry into the Nature, Causes, and Cure of the Disease* (London: Crowder, Wilson, Nicholls, Cadell, Becket, Pearch, and Woodfall, 1772).
- 46 Brian Tunstall, *Naval Warfare in the Age of Sail: The Evolution of Fighting Tactics 1650-1815* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 116.
- 47 Christopher Lloyd, "Hearts of Oak: The Battle of Quiberon Bay, 20 November 1759" *History Today* (November 1959): 744-751.
- 48 Louis H. Roddis, *James Lind, Founder of Modern Medicine* (New York: Henry Shuman Inc. 1950), 51.
- 49 Christopher Lloyd and Jacl. L. S. Coulter, *Medicine and the Navy 1200-1900*, Vol. III, 1714-1815 (Edinburgh: E. & S. Livingston, Ltd., 1961), 150.

From "Treasures of the Manila Galleons," model courtesy of the Kelton Foundation; photo by John Wright



Archaeology and the Galleons: “Snapshots” of a Treasure Trade

Jinky Gardner

A diver recovers the galleon *San Diego*'s
astrolabe.

*From Treasures of the San Diego; used by
permission*



Jinky Gardner left her job in computer programming to dive into maritime archaeology. She is completing her M.A. at East Carolina University, focusing on the development of shipbuilding technology during the 16th and 17th centuries. She had the opportunity to work as a field archaeologist on the *Margarita* and *Pilar*.

Manila galleons had a reputation as treasure ships, and rightly so. Their fabulous reputation echoed for decades after the last galleon sailed; when Thomas Carlyle wrote of the heavy, ornate coach in which Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette attempted to escape France, he called it an “Acapulco Ship.”¹

Their reputation as treasure ships has led modern scuba-diving treasure hunters to search for and locate several Manila galleons. Happily, in the past decade some of these people have been as interested in the treasure of knowledge that the wrecks provide as in the valuables, and have worked with archaeologists to recover both. Though shipwreck sites exist because disaster and death befell vessels and their crews, their excavation reveals aspects of the life that surrounded the Manila trade. This article offers a series of “snapshots” showing what a few artifacts selected from four shipwrecks can reveal.

Archaeology is critical in order to enable us to learn about the lives of the thousands of people whose work sustained the galleon trade. Who were these colonists, administrators, merchants, shipbuilders, sailors, dock workers, artisans, and others, and what was life like for them? Some answers to these questions lie in written records from the period, but archaeology makes a

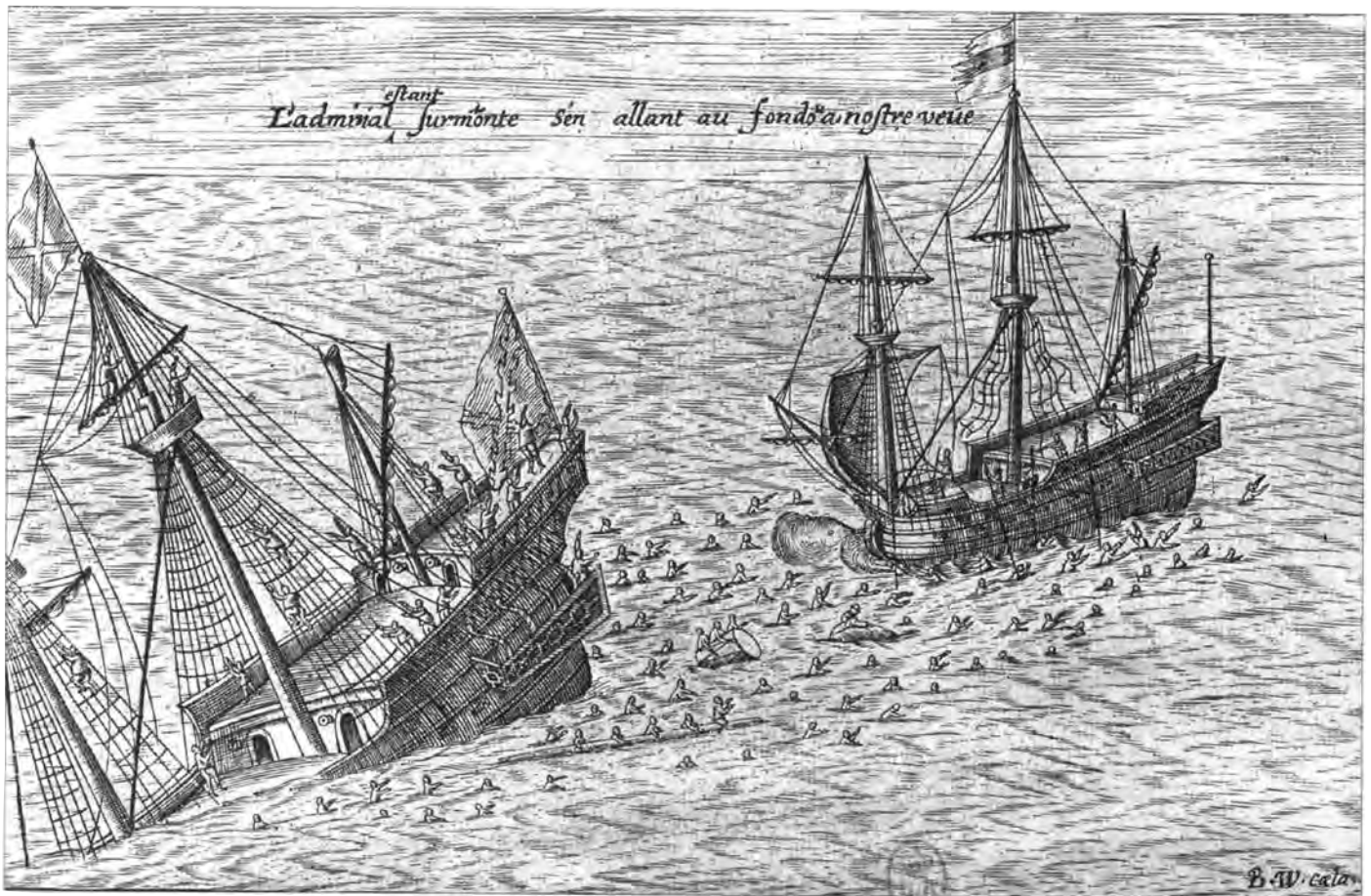
unique contribution because its “documents” are artifacts: anything made or modified by humans, from treasure to trash. They provide a different kind of information than written documents, and offer a tangible sense of past conditions. They also inform us about people who are ignored or barely mentioned in the written record. Only a small number of people in this era could read and write, so historical records tend to emphasize the viewpoints or subjects of interest to their writers, the literate elite. Everyone, however, leaves artifacts.

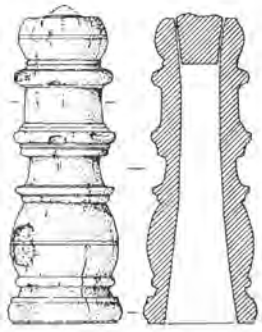
Excavations at four shipwreck sites have uncovered a wide variety of artifacts that provide insights into the galleon trade and the lives of those involved in it. One of these ships, the *San Diego*, sank in battle with the Dutch in 1600.² Two were wrecked while carrying trade goods to Acapulco: the *Santa Margarita* in 1601³, and the *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción* in 1638.⁴ Another, the *Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Zaragoza y Santiago*, sank in 1690 en route to Manila carrying silver and supplies.⁵

Spanish Officers' Luxuries and Asian Sailors' Traditions on the *San Diego*

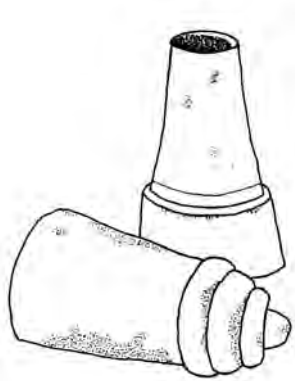
Because the Spanish had no warships in the Philippines when the Dutch attacked in 1600, the *San Diego* was requisitioned for military use, while being loaded for her trans-Pacific voyage at the royal shipyard

The overloaded *San Diego* sinks in action with the smaller Dutch ship *Mauritius* in 1600, after taking in water through her gunports.





A chess piece and betel nut container from the *San Diego*, and a bobbin and jewelry from the *Concepción*.



in Cavite. Some of that cargo was still on her when she sank. One group of artifacts from the wreck affords a glimpse of the luxuries enjoyed by officers, who provided themselves with as much comfort and luxury as possible. Archaeologists recovered a variety of silver serving items, including plates, ewers, knives, forks and spoons, glassware, silver candlesticks and a pair of snuffers.⁶ Servants would have used these pieces to serve their masters, for officers did not eat the common rations, and had servants to prepare their meals. Two ivory chess pieces were also found.⁷ Because chess was played primarily by the upper classes in both Europe and Asia, these are not likely to have belonged to a common sailor or soldier.⁸

Sailors, too, brought what they could for their comfort and enjoyment. Galleon crews included Spaniards and other Europeans, a majority were Southeast Asians.⁹ These people, identified as *Indios* in the records, included many distinct groups. There were always Filipinos, whether experienced sailors or labor conscripts, from any of the many tribes throughout the islands. Lascars, seafarers from the Southeast Asian mainland, were often employed as well. A betel nut container recovered from the *San Diego* indicates their presence and one of their pleasures.¹⁰

The betel nut (*Areca catechu*) is native to Malaysia, but its cultivation spread to India, southeastern China, Southeast Asia, the East Indies, the Philippines, and Oceania. Slices of the nut are placed in the mouth, and betel leaves (*Piper betel*, a separate genus) smeared with lime are added. On festive occasions various spices are included. The concoction is chewed, then spat, a custom popular for centuries among both men and women. A galleon passenger in 1768 observed the native people on Guam chewing betel when his ship made its reprovisioning stop there en route from Acapulco.¹¹ The nut produces mild euphoria, gives energy, sweetens the breath, strengthens gums, aids digestion, and is effective against parasitic worms. It leaves the mouth and teeth red, which is considered a sign of beauty. The custom was not adopted by Europeans, so the container and contents belonged to an *Indio*.

Lace Making and Jewelry on the *Concepción*

Another glimpse into activities aboard ship comes from the *Concepción*, which sank bound for Acapulco. Archaeologists recovered eight bobbins for making lace, a female occupation in that era.¹² While it is known that women sailed on the galleons, the information supplied by written records is scanty. Only upper class women are referred to individually, and even then usually not by name. The passenger roster from the *Concepción*, for example, lists Captain Joseph de Vides “and his wife.”¹³ There is no mention of whether this couple or other passengers had servants with them, but it is likely that they did. Servants could be of either sex. Even sailors sometimes brought wives, concubines, or servants onto the crowded ships.¹⁴ The few journals that chronicle these voyages were written by men, and rarely mention what women were doing.¹⁵ The bobbins give a clue to one activity that provided a woman with a productive way to fill the many days aboard ship.

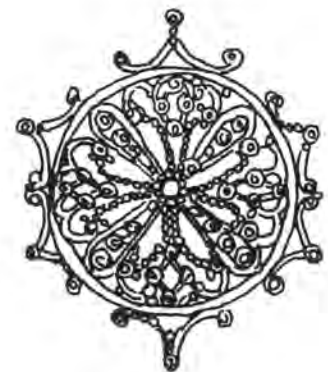
Although it is clear that the lace maker was a woman, it is less clear what sort of woman she was. The volume of lace making rose dramatically after about 1580 with the extravagant use of lace on clothing among the European

upper classes. What had been a domestic industry carried on by, or under the direction of, mistresses of noble houses, spread to cottage workshops, convents, hospitals, and homes for the poor. By the 1620s thousands of women in Europe had taken up this work to supplement family income.¹⁶ The bobbin user could have been an upper class lady raised to be proficient in this noble skill, or she could have been directing a servant, possibly a Filipina. If the effects of this social change in the way lace was made had spread through the Spanish colonies by the time the *Concepción* sailed in 1638, the lace maker could even have been the wife or concubine of a common sailor.

Jewelry, along with silks and porcelain, was shipped to Acapulco throughout the period of the trade, and an exceptional collection of gold jewelry was excavated from the *Concepción*.¹⁷ Over a thousand buttons, sixty-six chains, 102 beads, and 230 other pieces were recovered. The majority of pieces recovered were gold filigree, and many incorporate gems. Some few may have been personal items, but most were part of the cargo, for each type of jewelry is represented by many pieces in the same style. They are the work of highly skilled goldsmiths, but the ethnic group these artisans belonged to is uncertain, because their work shows evidence of extensive style borrowing. Craftspeople around the world regularly produce products suited to the taste of their customers, so it is not surprising to find the same practice in jewelry production. The goldsmiths were probably introduced to European styles through pattern books provided by the merchants who placed the orders. But there are many pieces that include elements of Chinese, Javanese, Islamic, and Indian styles as well.¹⁸ The jewelry could have come from outside the Philippines, but according to the *Concepción* project's researcher, it gives strong evidence of being produced at a single shop, probably in the Philippines. Spain inherited a complex multi-ethnic world in the Philippines, and the *Concepción*'s jewelry, displaying features from many different ethnic groups, demonstrates the connections among cultures that the galleon trade nourished.

Several Philippine tribes had produced gold jewelry since about 700 B.C., and by the fourteenth century native goldsmiths were highly skilled, and their techniques included filigree.¹⁹ Even in this early period, the jewelry incorporates elements from other Asian styles. The Philippines were an active part of Asian trade networks, and trading centers in the islands held a cosmopolitan mix of people. A colony of sixty Chinese merchant families already lived in Manila when the Spaniards first arrived.²⁰ The population of Manila remained cosmopolitan during the colonial period, with the Spanish being a small minority. In 1620 there were about 2,400 Spaniards, 8,000 Chinese, 3,000 Japanese, and 20,000 Filipinos, numbers which fluctuated over time but are representative.²¹ The Chinese did most of the manufacturing work, and may have been involved in jewelry production.

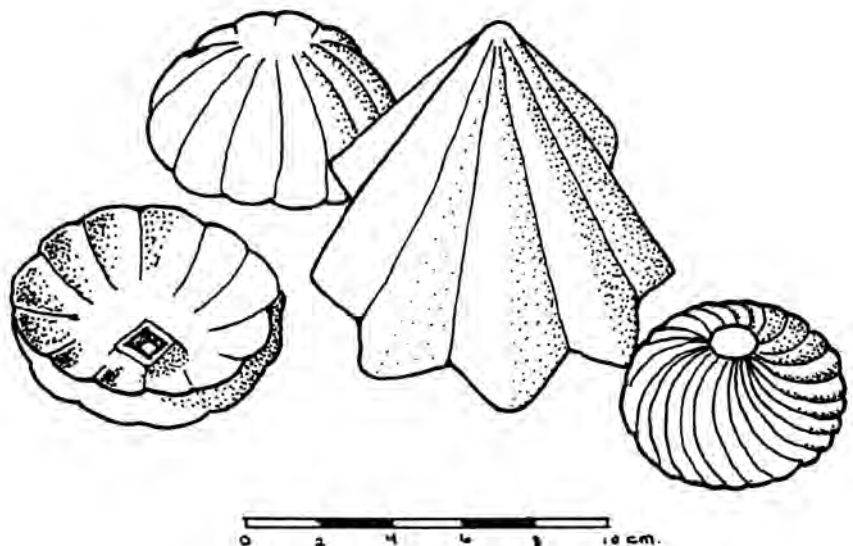
In addition to this mix of Asian styles and adaptation of European patterns, Philippine-produced jewelry may have affected the work of goldsmiths thousands of miles away. Some of the jewelry carried by the galleons remained in Mexico and influenced goldsmiths there.²² The great volume of jewelry that came into Europe from this trade probably affected European goldsmiths as well, especially during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when Spain was a leading taste setter for the continent. Because of the discovery of the *Concepción*'s cargo, many pieces in European museums, assumed to be European in origin, must potentially be reconsidered as Asian products.²³



Unexpected Uses for Cargo from the *Santa Margarita*

On her interrupted journey to Acapulco in 1601, the *Santa Margarita* carried a large number of elaborate, decorative nail heads, or *chapitones*.²⁴ *Chapitones* were used extensively in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries throughout the Spanish Empire to decorate the doors of public buildings, churches, and gates with geometric patterns.²⁵ Usually they were made of wrought iron, but those on the *Margarita* site are copper. Each has a seat on the inside center where the nail shaft attached; residue shows that the shafts were originally iron. The *chapitones* come in several sizes and patterns. When the first few were found on the site, it was hypothesized that they had been used to decorate the ship, perhaps the captain's quarters, but so many have been found that it is now believed that they were part of the cargo. A few were also found on the 1638 *Concepción* site, and so they were part of the cargo for a notable period of time.²⁶

Chapitones have been found in native sites throughout the Marianas, where they were converted for use as oil lamps.²⁷ The Marianas lie along the route the galleons sailed, and from the early days of the trade the ships stopped there for water and fresh food. The people of the Marianas, the Chamorros, had a complex social structure, built houses and boats, grew rice and other foodstuffs, and used tools made of stone or shell because the islands contain no ore deposits. When the Chamorros first encountered Spanish ships, they immediately recognized the usefulness of metal objects, and enthusiastically traded their food and water for all the metal they could get, especially knives, nails, and scissors. The Spanish reported that they also helped themselves to anything available while the sailors weren't watching, which led to the Spaniards calling them *ladrones*, or thieves, and their islands the *Islas de los Ladrones*. (The Chamorros, whose descendants still populate the Marianas, doubtlessly perceived this interaction rather differently.) With the wreck of the *Margarita* on their shore, they had an opportunity to collect a wide range of objects. Some objects, like jewelry, which they hung in trees, had no practical use for them,²⁸ but with the *chapitones* they may have first removed the iron nail shafts for one purpose, then found a practical use for the decorative heads.



A Mystery: Bear Claws on the *Pilar*

A very surprising group of artifacts was recovered from the *Pilar*, which sank in 1690 while bound for Manila.²⁹ Three claws of the American Black Bear (*Ursus Americanus*), native to the Acapulco area at that time, were found mixed with other galleon artifacts on the reef. They generate more questions than they answer. Were they from a complete skin? Could they have been an unlisted cargo item? Would the Chinese have bought them for medicinal uses, or as an aphrodisiac? Were they part of an officer's or sailor's belongings? The possibilities are tantalizing, and one hopes that more information will be forthcoming, for the claws hint at archaeology's potential to reveal to us what historical documents alone cannot.

While the picture of the Manila galleon trade painted by archaeology is far from complete, these examples provide "snapshots" of the people involved, their activities and interests, and the effects that craftsmen had on each other's work. More research needs to be done, but archaeology has begun to give us insights into often-overlooked aspects of the trade. The galleons did more than simply make merchants wealthy or allow people to dress in silks. Thousands of people carried their knowledge, foods, and customs across the Pacific with them. Technological knowledge expanded and styles of art spread as the galleons laid the foundation for the trans-Pacific interconnectedness of people and markets that we now call the Pacific Rim. The artifacts left behind by people who are otherwise unknown help us understand those whose lives and work established this legacy. There is an old Chinese saying that adjures us to consider the importance of anonymous men and women: "When you drink water from the well, remember the well-diggers."

N O T E S

- 1 Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History* Vol. II (London: 1837), 169.
- 2 World Wide First in coordination with the National Museum of the Philippines performed the excavation in the early 1990s; the artifacts were divided between them. See Jean-Paul Desroches, Fr. Gabriel Casal, and Franck Goddio, eds., *Treasures of the San Diego* (Manila: National Museum of the Philippines, 1996). A more technical archaeological report is promised.
- 3 The *Margarita* wrecked off Rota, in the Marianas. IOTA Partners, in cooperation with the Historic Preservation Office (hereafter HPO), Department of Community and Cultural Affairs, Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, is conducting the excavation and has custody of the artifacts until work is complete. Interim reports are available from the HPO. A detailed account of the voyage can be found in Rodrique Levesque, ed., *History of Micronesia: A Collection of Source Documents*, Vol. 3, *First Real Contact 1596-1637* (Quebec: Levesque Publications, n.d.).
- 4 The *Concepción* wrecked off Saipan. Pacific Sea Resources excavated in cooperation with the Saipan HPO. Upon completion of the project the HPO received half the artifacts. Pacific Sea Resources published a report that includes history of the trade and ship, site maps, the complete artifact database, and research on the jewelry. William M. Mathers, Henry S. Parker, and Kathleen A. Copus, eds., *Archaeological Report: Recovery of the Manila Galleon, Nuestra Señora de la Concepción* (Pacific Sea Resources, 1990).



Mexican silver ewer from the *San Diego*.

- 5 The *Pilar* wrecked off Guam. The *Pilar* Project, in cooperation with the Parks Department in Guam, is conducting this excavation and has custody of artifacts until the work is complete. Project reports are filed with the State HPO, Department of Parks and Recreation, Territory of Guam.
- 6 Desroches, et al., 258-297.
- 7 Ibid., 181.
- 8 Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680*, vol. 1, *The Lands Below the Winds*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 197-199.
- 9 William Lytle Schurz, *The Manila Galleon* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1939), 210.
- 10 Desroches, et al., 167.
- 11 Vicomte de Pagés, in Tomé Pires, et al., *Travel Accounts of the Islands 1513-1787* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1971), 135-136.
- 12 Mathers, et al., 488.
- 13 Ibid., 53.
- 14 The Vicomte de Pagés, who made the crossing in 1768, noted that common sailors were allowed two domestics. Pires, et al., 134.
- 15 One exception is the childbirth mentioned in the account of the *Santa Margarita*. Levesque, 167.
- 16 Santina M. Levey, *Lace, a History* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1983).
- 17 A. Beatriz Chadour, "The Gold Jewelry from the *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción*," in Mathers et al, 132-395. Color pictures of many items can be found in "*Nuestra Señora de la Concepción*," *National Geographic* 178, no. 3 (September 1990): 39-53.
- 18 Examples of European style include "peapod" ornament on ring, catalogue no. 4, Chadour 152-154; Renaissance scrollwork on cross pendant, catalogue no. 58, Ibid., 259-261; and "Schweifwerk" on gold basin, catalogue no. 115, Ibid., 363-370. Examples of Asian style include Chinese scrollwork on belt end, catalogue no. 66, Ibid., 290; Javanese shape of ring bezel and collet holding stone, catalogue no. 1, Ibid., 143; Islamic geometric rosette pattern of necklace links, catalogue no. 22, Ibid., 197-198; and Indian quatrefoil decoration on ring, catalogue no. 14, Ibid., 178-179.
- 19 Ibid., 263.
- 20 "Relation of the Conquest of Luzon," 20 April 1572, in Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, eds., *The Philippine Islands 1493-1803*, Vol. 3 (Cleveland: The A. H. Clark Company, 1903), 168. Blair and Robertson compiled and translated documents from the Philippine archives shortly after 1898.
- 21 Robert R. Reed, *Colonial Manila: The Context of Hispanic Urbanism and the Process of Morphogenesis* (Berkeley: University of California Publications in Geography, 1979), 33.
- 22 Chadour, 135.
- 23 Ibid., 134-140.
- 24 IOTA Partners, "1996 Annual Report," 20-22. Initially these were listed as *clavos* (nails) in the project inventory; the proper Spanish term was provided by Jorge Loyzaga, Senior Architect, Mexico City. Personal communication, 28 June 1998.
- 25 Antonio Cortes, *Hierros Forjados* (Mexico: Talleras Graphicos del Museo de Arqueologia, Historia y Ethnografia, 1935).
- 26 Mathers, et al., 474, 494.
- 27 Brian Butler, ed., *Archaeological Investigations of the North Coast of Rota, Mariana Islands*, Mirconesian Archaeological Survey, No. 23, (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Center for Archaeological Investigations, Occasional Paper No. 8, 1988). Nine *chapiñones* are exhibited at the Cave Museum, Rota.
- 28 Morga's "Sucesos de la Islas Filipinas," in Blair and Robertson, Vol. 15, 238.
- 29 *Pilar* Project, "Project Monthly Report," (August 1996), 5.

Archaeology and the Galleons: Uncovering a Lost Galleon

Edward P. Von der Porten



Scattered on a desert beach in Baja California were traces of the earliest shipwreck of a Manila galleon yet known. There, we have found no stacks of doubloons or pieces of eight heaped in treasure chests. Nor have we uncovered a single splinter of wood from the hull, or a piece of metal of any kind. Yet we have found treasure: new insights into the earliest phase of the first regular trans-Pacific trade. We do not yet know the galleon's name or the names of any aboard her, but we are beginning to piece their stories together from the archaeological evidence.¹

After spending months crossing the Pacific in or around the year 1575, the ship and her crew of adventurers were only weeks away from making port in Acapulco when a westerly winter storm drove them to destruction. Desert sun and thirst probably killed any who survived the crush of falling masts and smashing timbers and the power of breakers crashing over their ship. Galleon and crew, and hopes and dreams, disappeared without trace.

During the following centuries, indigenous people salvaged objects from the wreck. A lone scraper chipped from a sherd of blue-on-white Ming porcelain testifies to their adaptation of an exotic material to their own needs. Two centuries after the wreck, these people showed a Spanish explorer bits of porcelains, and he commented on the tragedy of a shipwreck he recognized as

Detail from The Wreck of the San Agustín, by Gordon Miller, 2001; courtesy of the artist

Edward Von der Porten, of San Francisco, is a nautical historian and the retired director of the Treasure Island Museum. His most recent book is *Discovering Francis Drake's California Harbor*. Ed's collection of porcelains forms an important part of "Treasures of the Manila Galleons."

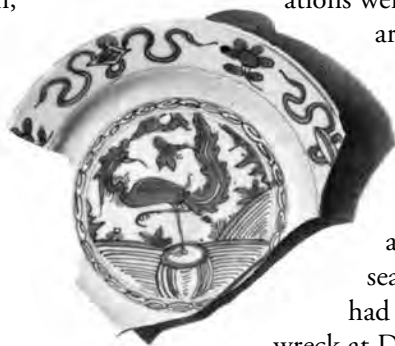
coming from long before his time, though he did not visit the site himself.

Merle Emory, a longtime Baja California explorer and beachcomber, had read the explorer's account. In the 1960s, he discovered sherds of porcelain on the site and brought some back to his home in Nevada as curios. Around 1978 he showed them to Jeff Lough, a friend of his grandson, who enjoyed venturing into the desert with friends. The following year these explorers relocated the site and in subsequent trips returned home with sherd collections of their own. They began to ask questions about their finds, record the locations where the pieces were found, and very quietly show them to specialists. Growing realization of the sherds' age and significance led them to permit the publication of a few photographs, but with only vague attributions, for they also began to realize that their collections were illegal in both Mexico and the United States.² As the years passed, they came to recognize that history is the property of all, and broken porcelains in boxes under beds and in closets were meaningless unless shared. They began to plot ways of turning their finds in to some responsible institution without risking time in jail.

Unknown to those beachcombers, in 1976 two American women living in Mexico had gone exploring in the same region. The husband of one, a commercial pilot, had spotted a modern ship's hatch covers on a beach, and the pair set out in a rubber boat, intending to salvage them. They discovered a dense scatter of broken porcelains in a wash lined with weathered timbers.

My contact with the ship began in mid-1997 when

my wife, Saryl, saw photographs of some sherds in a newly-published book by George Kuwayama about Chinese porcelain finds in Mexico.³ They bore the enigmatic attribution "from an unpublished site off the California Coast." That clue led to long, roundabout negotiations with the sherds' possessors, with George, the book's author, serving as a go-between. Most of these negotiations were undertaken by my colleague, nautical archaeologist Jack Hunter.



These slow dealings were still under way when another archaeologist contacted me. Dr. Eric Ritter had found porcelain fragments in the campsites of semi-nomadic Native Baja Californians, and, not recognizing the types, began to search for someone who could date them. I had worked on early porcelains from a shipwreck at Drakes Bay, north of San Francisco.⁴ When he sent me his sherds in late 1998, I recognized them as the same types as the ones in George Kuwayama's book. That gave us a general location for the wreck, but not a specific one, as the sherds could have been moved a considerable distance by the indigenous people. He also sent me a photograph of another sherd which he had received from an American living in Mexico. That put me into contact with the women beachcombers, who promptly drew and mailed me a shipwreck map, complete with route to the site and a star to mark the site.

Armed with this map, early in 1999 Jack and I persuaded everyone involved to work together to investigate what was clearly one of the most important shipwrecks on the West Coast. We arranged for the beachcombers to turn their finds in to the Mexican government's archaeological agency, the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH). But organizing a search is a complex operation. We needed contacts and permits, involving officials from California and Mexico. Two universities, the National Geographic Society, and the San Diego Maritime Museum became sponsors. Mexican institutions and archaeologists joined wholeheartedly in the work. We needed vehicles and boats, remote-sensing equipment, communications gear, global-positioning receivers, cameras, tools and markers—and skilled operators for all. Fortunately, most equipment was donated, and each participant agreed to pay personal expenses and serve as an unpaid volunteer.

INAH archaeologist Cesar Berkovitch relocates a bowl fragment which had been discovered and flagged, but was reburied by shifting sand in three days.



Months of planning led to expeditions to the site in 1999 and 2000, each about a week in length. A week in the field, however, requires months of follow up. Annual field reports were prepared in English and Spanish, all artifacts were photographed, and dozens of drawings were made to illustrate the porcelains' shapes and designs. Aerial photography aided mapping and site formation analysis. Specialized studies were written to deal with such subjects as dating the wreck based on the dates of the porcelains, attempting to identify the ship, cataloging and analyzing the finds, and estimating the weights of porcelain cargoes.⁵

What have we achieved so far?

We have recovered more than seven hundred fragments of cargo, most of it blue-on-white porcelains made during the Wan-li reign of the Ming Dynasty. These not only have enabled us to date the cargo to circa 1574-1576, but the unusual range of porcelain designs offers insight into early Chinese-Spanish commercial relations. The sherds demonstrate that, in the earliest years of the galleon trade, Chinese merchants did not know what shapes and designs their new customers valued: they experimented by including a wide range of porcelains, from expensive wares suitable for export to Japan or to wealthy and cultured overseas Chinese, down to simpler wares normally destined for tribal peoples in Southeast Asia. Would the Spaniards pay high prices for polychrome overglaze plates and bowls? Did they appreciate exquisitely painted country landscapes? Could they understand illustrations drawn from folk tales and allegories? What would they make of bowls decorated with calligraphy? Or would simple bowls with floral decoration appeal most—and fit Spanish budgets?

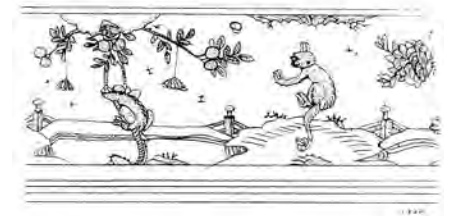
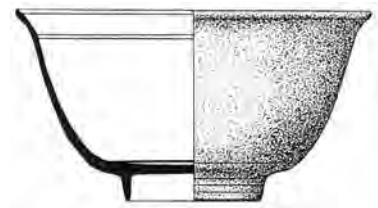
Our scholars are describing the finds, teasing out their stories, comparing this cargo with somewhat later ones (which contain mostly mid- to low-value porcelains with motifs appealing to European tastes),⁶ all in the effort to learn about these objects' makers and owners, trade systems and social values,

Thus far, the artifacts recovered have been scattered pieces of cargo. In searching for remains of the vessel herself, magnetometers, ground penetrating radar (right), and other sophisticated technologies have been employed.



The monkey on this bowl fragment is reaching for the peach of immortality. Chinese stories like this one were doubtlessly lost on Spanish consumers.

Porcelains from "Treasures of the Manila Galleons," courtesy of INAH, photos by John Wright





Porcelains reveal their secrets to scholars Li He, Clarence Shangraw, and Sheila Keppel. Fifty-seven types have been identified from the wreck.

economics and aesthetics. As we organize future expeditions, unfortunately we also must spend time fundraising.

Already the work has made it possible to create a small display in an INAH museum in Ensenada, Mexico, and the “Treasures of the Manila Galleons” temporary exhibit at the San Diego Maritime Museum, where the finds are put into context.⁷ We hope to see this exhibit travel to other museums in the United States and Mexico in years to come, bringing the galleons’ story to hundreds of thousands of people.

Our project serves other purposes. The expeditions and analyses demonstrate the value of cooperation among persons from many backgrounds—amateur and professional alike—all of them participating fully, contributing their wide range of skills, and making their efforts available for the enjoyment and education of the public. Among them, the beachcombers who made the original discovery

and brought it to the attention of scholars continue to play active and useful roles, a level of cooperation that we hope may serve as a model for others. To each of the individuals involved in this project so far we say, “Thank you! and, Well done!”⁸ Now, our team looks forward to our next expedition, an opportunity to uncover more of the story of the lost galleon.

NOTES

- 1 Because the archaeological exploration of this isolated site is ongoing, many details have been omitted to ensure that the site remains undisturbed.
- 2 George Kuwayama, *Chinese Ceramics in Colonial Mexico* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1997).
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Clarence Shangraw and Edward P. Von der Porten, *The Drake and Cermeño Expeditions’ Chinese Porcelains at Drakes Bay, California, 1579 and 1595* (Santa Rosa and Palo Alto, California: Santa Rosa Junior College and The Drake Navigators Guild, 1981).
- 5 These progress reports are not yet available for publication.
- 6 Shangraw and Von der Porten, *Kraak Plate Design Sequence, 1550-1655* (San Francisco: Drake Navigators Guild, 1997).
- 7 Porcelains from the wreck are also housed in the Museo de Historia y Cultura, Bahía de Los Angeles, Mexico.
- 8 In addition to those noted in this article, people significantly involved in this project include: Julia Bendímez Patterson and Pilar Luna Erreguerena of INAH, intergovernmental liaisons Kirstin Aliotti, Al Ducheny and John Foster, explorers Jeff Ferguson, Stephen Lowe, Leysl Muñoz, Lucinda Navarre, Michael Raven and Donald Schaeffer, archaeologist Dr. Russell Skowronek, INAH archaeologists Roberto Enrique Galindo Dominguez and Carmen Rojas Sandoval, remote sensing specialists Sheldon Breiner, Amy Day-Lewis and Meg Watters, field scouts and recorders Walter and Ken Anderson, Ray Ashley, Michael Foster, Carolina Shepard Espinosa and Eric Von der Porten, historical researchers Jinky Gardner, Marco Meniketti and Richard Rogers, oceanographers Guy Gelfenbaum and Christopher Sherwood, photographers Robert Allen, Sisi Brimberg, Michael Gardner and Jesus López, writers Margaret Foster and Michael McRae, and translator Francisco Hulse.

A Post-Modern Perspective: Of Galleons and Globalization

Kale Fajardo

It was on the Manila Galleon that we [became] the Philippines.

Nick Joaquin, *Manila, My Manila*, 1999

You have to ride the boat. You can't miss the boat. There's only one boat.

Johnas M. Lamorena, referring to corporate globalization while representing
Philippine President Estrada, San Francisco, 2000



Manila, March 1998

A band in red uniforms plays a fanfare, as a small crowd waits eagerly for the boats to arrive, and a television helicopter hovers overhead. Much excitement is generated, but no boats arrive. The band sits down along a concrete ledge to rest. They appear to be tired of waiting and playing during these “false alarms.” I sit near them and listen in on their conversation.

“Maybe they’ve hit an iceberg,” a trombone player jokes.

I laugh along with them. It is the year of the Hollywood sensation, *Titanic*, but we are far from the North Atlantic, seated at the edge of one of the world’s great natural harbors, Manila Bay.

The advertisement for this event reads “The Race of the Century,” or the Acapulco-Manila Commemorative Regatta. A yacht, *The Karakoa-Manila Harbour Centre (MHC)* is expected to arrive at any moment—the first boat

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to “officially” retrace the Acapulco-to-Manila leg of the galleon trade route, whose last voyage had ended 185 years previously.¹

During my anthropological fieldwork in Manila in 1998 there was noticeable interest, attention, and nostalgia regarding the galleon trade and its history.² Filipino *marinos* (seafarers) on international ships, for example, frequently evoked the Manila galleons and their maritime ancestors during conversations or interviews. “We’re a seafaring people,” one *marino* said. “We’ve been sailing and working on the seas even before the Spaniards arrived, but during the galleon times, *that* is when we proved ourselves as seamen.”³

In Manila, others involved in shipping also discussed the galleons or celebrated the Manila-Acapulco trade route, among them maritime school officials, seaman’s union organizers, Philippine Overseas Employment Agency representatives, and various government officials and businesspeople.

History is a malleable substance: stories about the past are constantly being

reshaped in the present, often to serve very modern economic or political ends. I observed the spectacle of Philippine State officials and multinational corporate leaders, along with other economic elites, deploying the history of the galleon trade in 1998 Manila.

In this instance, the legacy of the galleon trade was resurrected by government representatives and corporate leaders to promote the Manila Harbour Centre. This “ultramodern port city” in a free trade zone features shipping facilities, a financial center, and assembly plants where cheap laborers now manufacture electronics and garments.⁴ The project was part of President Fidel Ramos’s “Philippines 2000” economic plan, which sought to open up the economy to international free trade and privatization and to expand the presence of multinational corporations in the Philippines. Free trade zones like the Manila Harbour Centre have proliferated in poor countries around the world, and are integral to the phenomenon of corporate globalization.

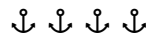
While these pages are insufficient to address the impact of corporate globalization on the world’s poorer countries, its impact on the Philippines has been acute. In this essay, *globalization* refers to the creation of an economic and social system in which capital and commodities circulate freely in unrestricted international trade, and where multinational corporations often wield more power than national governments.⁵

Another characteristic of globalization in



developing countries is the reliance on foreign loans to prop up the economy. The resulting debt problem has plagued the Philippines since the Marcos era, affecting communities across the islands.⁶ During the 1998 festivities on Manila Bay, the Philippines carried a foreign-debt burden of \$46.4 billion, and 40% of the national budget was spent servicing this debt. 32% of the population lived below the poverty line, and unemployment stood at 9.6%.⁷ The real unemployment rate is significantly higher if one takes into account the seven million Filipinos forced to leave to seek jobs, who currently work in more than 180 countries worldwide.⁸

The poverty, debt, and dependency cycle for the Philippines (and other poor nations around the world) is dire. In this local and global context, how governments and corporate leaders use history to legitimize and ultimately institutionalize a particular economic agenda is significant. How then did economic elites resurrect the Manila galleon at the end of the twentieth century to promote their goals?



Eventually, the band and I are rewarded for our wait by the arrival of *The Karakoa-Manila Harbour Centre* and other yachts. The audience around me appears to include upper-class families dressed in a style which can be described as Sunday-Best-meets-Cruise-Wear. Also present is the Mexican ambassador, Enrique Michel, his small contingent of embassy staff, members of the press, and curious onlookers from nearby neighborhoods.

After the fanfare, photo opportunity, cocktails, and refreshments, the event sponsors and honored guests address the small crowd. Ambassador Michel stresses the importance of the port expansion and the cultural and economic connections between Mexico and the Philippines. He talks about the commodities and culture that were exchanged aboard the galleons—the fashion, food, and language that crossed between Acapulco and Manila, and how the ships forever linked the two former colonies.

R-II Builders Incorporated, a Philippine construction giant, is the regatta's corporate sponsor and builder of the Manila Harbour Centre. Company Chairman Reghis M. Romero also addresses the crowd:

It is easy to see that in the same way the galleon trade made Manila the hub for trade and commerce in the fifteenth century [sic], in this area along the Manila Bay, shall also rise this generation's prestigious business address...

Ambassador Michel, CEO Romero, and the Philippine government (through the commemorative regatta it sponsored to benefit the Manila Harbour Centre) each used a version of the Manila galleon story as a historical and cultural rationale to attract investment and spur commerce.

The Ambassador and CEO portrayed Manila's future as a revival of the Galleon Era's glories, characterized by grandeur, cosmopolitanism, and a role as a critical trading port. This offers a convenient historical justification for port expansion, as well as for the necessity and legitimacy of free trade zones and corporate globalization—concepts that, needless to say, were quite



foreign to the originators of the galleon trade. The actual history of the Manila galleons is complex and heterogeneous, and does not by itself lend support for *any* particular modern economic policy. By highlighting the galleons' contributions to Manila, and ignoring the social inequalities associated with that luxury trade—for example, the concentration of wealth it generated in the Spanish and Chinese economic elite, or the fact that the ships were often built with virtual or actual Filipino slave labor—the speakers recycled history for their particular agenda.

This version of history attempts to project Manila's onetime importance to the global economy onto the beginning of a new millennium. The city's past connection to the Americas, it says, signi-

fies present possibilities of trading with the entire world. Through the galleon narrative, Manila's position as a strategic port where "East meets West"—in centuries past *and* in 1998—is reinforced. And the galleon story offers Filipinos and the world a uniquely *Filipino* pedigree of global trade, justifying present policies.

This free borrowing from history was important in 1998 because of two related factors. First, in a Southeast Asian regional context, evoking the galleons to demonstrate a long history of cosmopolitanism translates into a global sensibility. That is, if historic Manila was a cosmopolitan place, it also means Manila is destined to be a global player today.

In light of the globalization frenzy of the mid-to-late 1990s (characterized by heightened interest in communications technologies and the promotion of global trade), becoming a "global city" was important because Manila was competing with other Southeast Asian cities and their respective national governments for investments and capital. Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta and especially Singapore also strove to create the infrastructure deemed necessary to attract capital by improving their air, surface and sea transport, telecommunications linkages and financial services.⁹

Second, at the time of the regatta, Southeast Asia was experiencing an extreme financial crisis. Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, and to a lesser extent, Malaysia, experienced severe currency devaluation, as well as "capital flight" as investors pulled out of Southeast Asia.

In the historical moment and social context of 1998 Manila, Philippine governmental officials and the private sector sought desperately to protect and defend policies that favored corporate globalization. Although the financial crisis revealed weaknesses of globalization, showing, for example, that the crisis disproportionately affected the poor, supporters continued to claim that the phenomenon brought prosperity to people worldwide—especially in poor countries.

In this regional and international context, the Philippine State and corporate leaders celebrated the galleons to craft an illusion of historical continuity by linking their 1998 economic desires with the Philippines' distant maritime

and cosmopolitan past. It offered, and offers, these elites a compelling discourse to substantiate their claims that Manila was global in the past *and* global in 1998. This strategy, along with the Manila Harbour Centre's infrastructure and services, helped to make a case in the international finance arena that Manila was ready, and worthy of investment.

Finally, in the context of the 1998 Asian Financial Crisis, the Manila Galleon's historical and economic legacy also afforded economic elites an avenue in which to continue celebrating or legitimizing what they perceived to be contributions of corporate globalization.

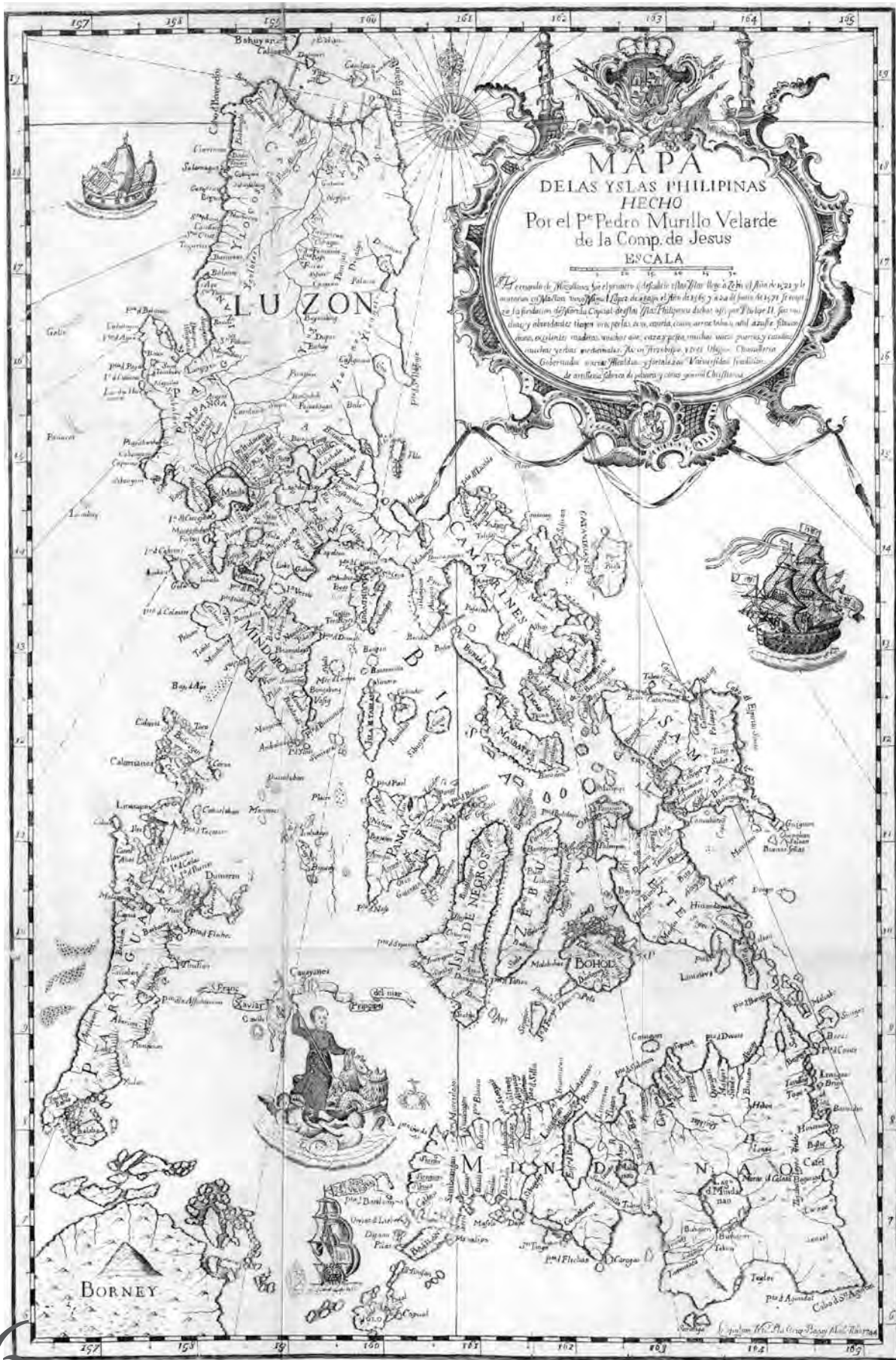
Economic elites at the regatta used the Manila galleon to attempt to convince those in attendance that the new Centre would bring jobs and prosperity to their community and to the Philippine economy. The real winners in the "Race of the Century"—really, a race for capital investments and profits—are the multinational corporations, along with the economic elites who negotiate on their behalf. "You can't miss the boat," admonished a representative of the Philippine president, referring to corporate globalization.¹⁰ This boat, however, is bringing none of the fabled riches of the galleon trade to ordinary Filipinos.



Mexico commemorated the galleon trade on this 1998 stamp.

NOTES

- 1 The boat is named after *karakoa*, indigenous craft that sailed between Mindanao and the Moluccas in the sixteenth century. MHC is the boat's corporate sponsor. Press Release, March 29, 1998, Manila Harbour Centre.
- 2 The substance of this article is based on field notes by the author taken in Manila. Kale Fajardo, "Destination Pinoy: Filipino Seafaring, Migration, and Travel in an Age of Globalization" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz, forthcoming).
- 3 Ibid. Esteban Cruz, interview by the author, February 1998.
- 4 "Harbour Centre Industrial Park Now Open," *Philippine Star*, 23 March 1998, p. 39.
- 5 In poor countries that participate in the global economy, there are generally higher taxes, increased social spending cuts (in health and education, for example), and privatization of industries. Sarah Anderson, ed., *Views from the South: The Effects of Globalization and the WTO on Third World Countries* (San Francisco: International Forum on Globalization, 2000).
- 6 In 1972, President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law and used the military to create a species of economic stability which soon attracted multinational corporations, investors, and World Bank loans. During the years of his U.S.-supported dictatorship, the Philippines became increasingly beholden to international financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), which are linked to the U.S. economy and thereby create and reinforce a neo-colonial relationship. Philippine dependency, of course, has roots in the Spanish empire and more so in the U.S. colonial period.
- 7 http://www.photius.com/wfb/philippines/philippines/philippines_economy.html
- 8 Sari Korkalainen, "Illegal Recruitment of Overseas Filipino Workers," in *Kakampi Report*, Series No. 4, April 2000.
- 9 Dean Forbes, "Globalisation, Postcolonialism and New Representations of the Pacific Asian Metropolis," in K. Olds, P. Dicken, P. Kelly, L. Kong and H. W. Yeung, eds., *Globalisation and the Asia-Pacific: Contested Territories* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
- 10 Speech by Johnas M. Lamorena, representing Philippine President Estrada at Global Exchange, San Francisco, 7 September 2000. Author's notes.



Four Centuries of Filipinos in California

Christian Trajano

On the torturous journey across the Pacific, the loss of life could be staggering. Most of the bodies of the dead men were brown; for every one European, on average there were five Filipinos on these ships.¹ Because of their role as the labor force of the Manila Trade, and the galleons' historic connection to California, Filipinos should be remembered as important California pioneers.

Most of Spain's early interest in California was as a potential way station where exhausted, malnourished galleon crewmen could recover on the last stages of their voyage to Acapulco. British attacks on galleons also led Spain to fear that, if a foreign outpost was established in California, the rich trade could be cut off entirely.

Therefore, in 1602 Sebastián Vizcaíno sailed north from Mexico to explore potential ports of refuge with a crew garnered from a Manila galleon—almost certainly including Filipinos.² Over a century later, in 1769, Spain moved to counter the threat of foreign encroachment on the California coast by sending an expedition north from Mexico to build missions and military outposts. Two packet boats, the *San Carlos* and the *San Antonio*, reached San Diego Bay well before the arrival of the celebrated mission founder Father Junípero Serra. Both ships carried Filipino sailors. As usual, Filipinos did more than their share of the hard work—and the dying. Their brown bodies lay in several fresh graves on the shores of San Diego Bay by the time California's first Spanish settlement was officially founded in 1769.³

NOTES

- 1 William Lytle Schurz, *The Manila Galleon* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1936), 210.
- 2 Consequently, 2002 marks the 400th anniversary of Filipinos in California.
- 3 Deaths of Filipino crewmen are noted in the log of the *San Carlos*. Robert Selden Rose, Ed., "The Portolá Expedition of 1769-1770: Diary of Vicente Vila," *Publications of the Academy of Pacific Coast History* 2, no. 1 (Berkeley: University of California, 1911).



Spanish maps of the galleon era: at left, 1744, courtesy U. C. Berkeley Libraries; above, detail from "La America Septentrional," 1803

Christian Trajano is a graduate student in History at U. C. Riverside.

We are most grateful to the following friends and supporters, who donated services and auction items for the March 9, 2002 Gay Nineties Gala fundraising event, sponsored by the Star of India Auxiliary of the San Diego Maritime Museum.

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Bahia Resort Hotel
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Bayfair San Diego
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Continental Catering
Bill Corwin
Captain Fitch's
Children's Discovery Museum
Christian Community Theatre
Jim Davis
Dazzling Diane
Del Coronado Jewels
Del Mar Thoroughbred Club
Disneyland Resort
Downwind Marine
William Dysart
Thomas N. Fat
The Fish Market
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Marilyn Fulton
Globe Theatres
Great News Cooking School
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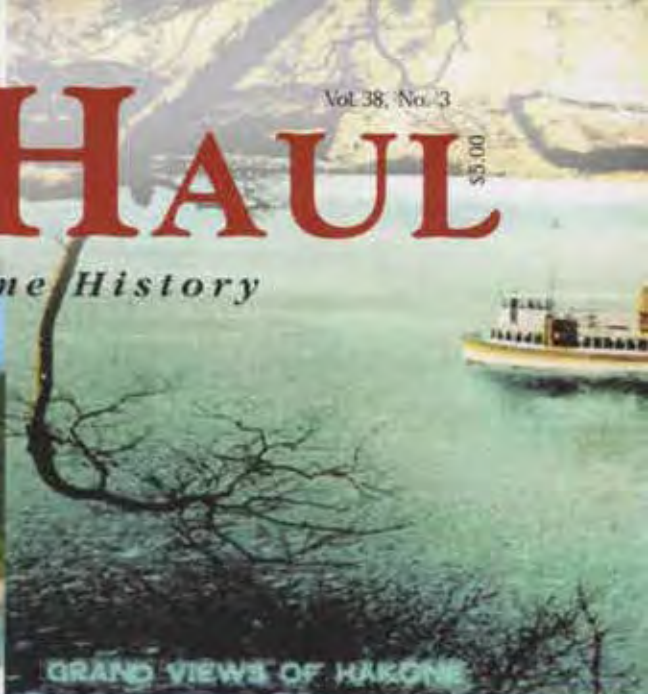
MAINS'L HAUL

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A Journal Of Pacific Maritime History



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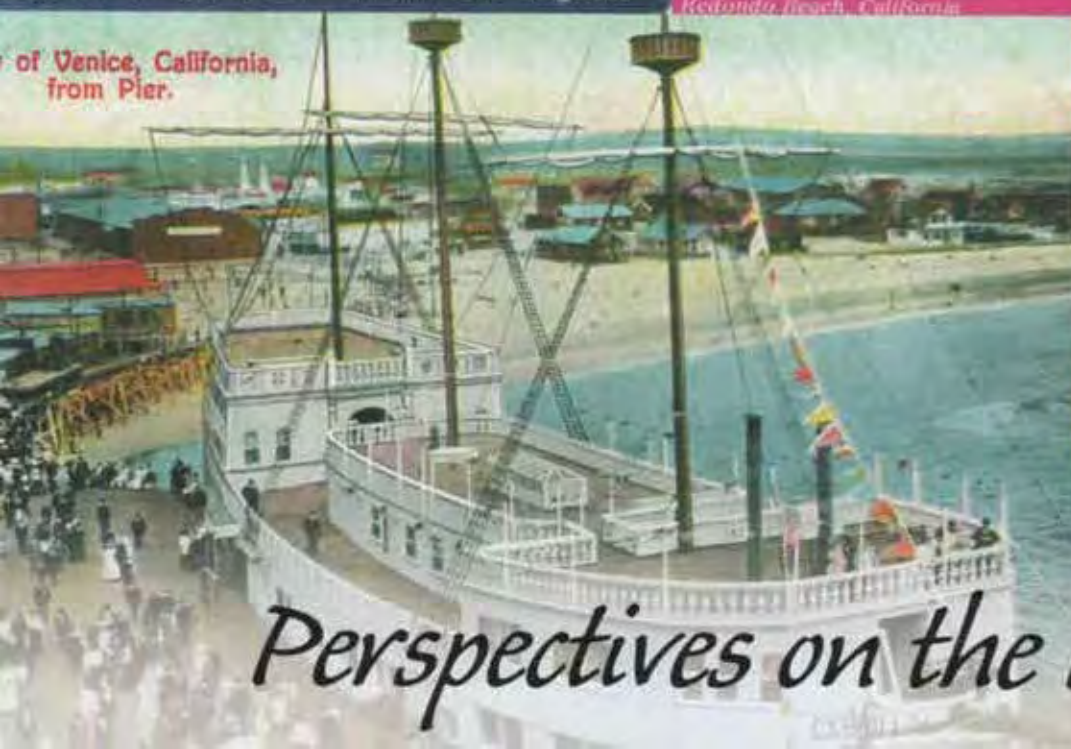
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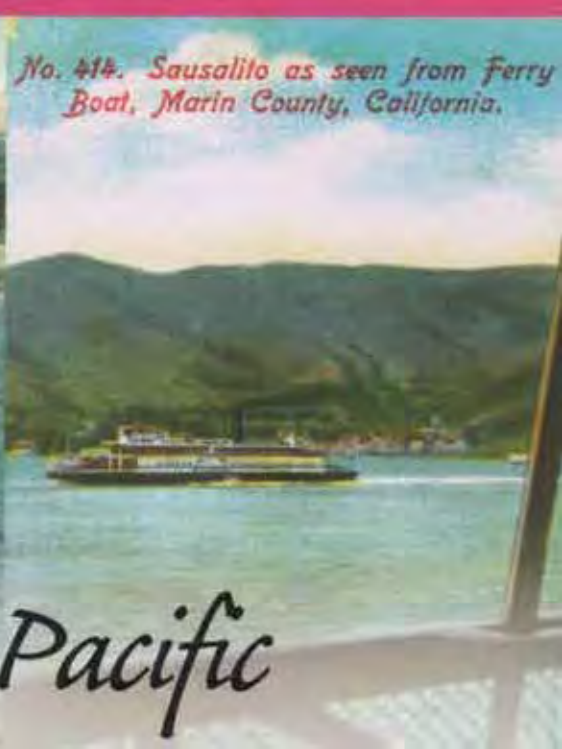
Moonlight on San Pedro Harbor, Los Angeles.



Redondo Beach, California



*of Venice, California,
from Pier.*



*No. 414. Sausalito as seen from Ferry
Boat, Marin County, California.*

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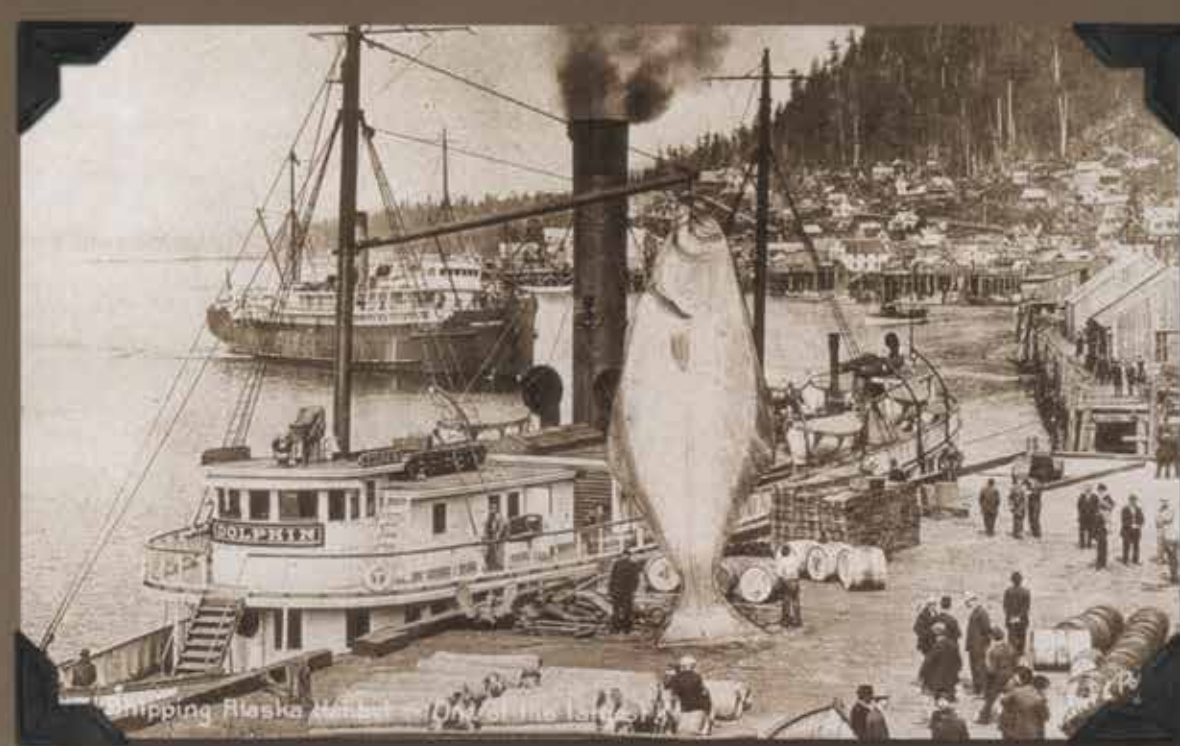
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is published quarterly,
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aboard the ferryboat *Barkley*.

*"Mains'l Haul—An order in tacking
ship bidding 'Swing the main yards'
To loot, steal, or acquire."*

—John Mayfield



This issue of Mains'l Haul has been generously sponsored by the Star of India Auxiliary



Above and cover:

Pacific perspectives from the Maritime Museum's historic postcard collection. Compare the pre-WWII image directly above, with USS *Houston* moored at San Diego's Municipal piers, to the bottom of the inside back cover.

DID YOU KNOW?

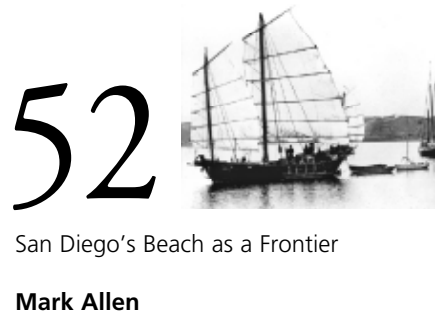
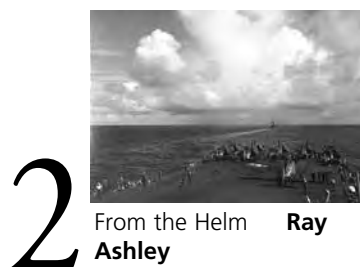
- ▶ that a painting of Captain Cook once was a sacred object in Tahiti? (page 9)
- ▶ that the author of *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville, deserted from a whaler? (pages 13-15)
- ▶ that some of San Diego's Kumeyaay Indians sailed on whalers? (page 55)
- ▶ that a fleet of Chinese junks once sailed on San Diego Bay? (page 57)
- ▶ that a group of Hawaiians once lived in an oven on a San Diego beach? (page 59)

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MAINS'L HAUL

A Journal Of Pacific Maritime History

Perspectives on the Pacific



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Our mission is to engage members and the public in the study of maritime history, while promoting scholarly research. We welcome submissions on all aspects of the Pacific's past, and encourage a wide variety of perspectives on this rich heritage. Articles are indexed for researchers worldwide in *America: History & Life* and *Historical Abstracts*.
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Mark Allen Editor

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"Exploring the Pacific" has been a frequent and recurring theme in past issues of *Mains'l Haul*, and it has often enough led us into strange places. Usually, however, such explorations have confined themselves to a conventional understanding of what the history of Pacific exploration is about, namely, the activities of people in ships confronting an imperfectly known Pacific and forced to contend with its vast expanse, uncharted dangers, and inexhaustible quirkiness. It's worth considering, though, whether there is more to it than tales of dead guys in wooden ships; this issue is something of a response to that speculation. In the pages following, you will certainly read strange tales of exploration by historians of the Pacific, but they offer very different vantage points than the ones *Mains'l Haul* customarily provides. Thus, we travel with a cultural historian, a literary scholar, a musicologist, a pho-

to-historian, a landscape historian, and a historian of the American West.

Greg Denning, internationally admired for his lyrical and syntactical analysis of what went wrong aboard HMS *Bounty*, takes us on a new voyage with some famous Pacific beachcombers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the cultural "beach" which divides the sacred from the profane in the clash of two Pacific cultures. American literature scholar John Williams picks up the story of one of Denning's favorite beachcombers, Herman Melville, to probe the spiritual connection between the Pacific vistas of Melville's prose and the novelist's assessment of the precarious human condition. Stuart Frank, one of the world's leading authorities on whaling, moves us from Melville's literary seascapes to fragments of that past world captured in the music and poetry of native

FROM THE HELM

by Ray Ashley
Director,
Maritime Museum of San Diego

F6F Hellcats line a carrier's deck in November, 1943, as it heads into the Pacific, the largest battleground in human history.

Photo by Victor Jorgensen, Maritime Museum Coll. P740, U. S. Navy Photo.



Hawaiian seamen ranging the Pacific in American whaling ships. If such literary and musical snapshots served to represent a Pacific world that seemed otherwise too large, diverse, and foreign to comprehend in the nineteenth century, Carol McCusker's essay on the wartime photographs of Edward Steichen explains how the advent of photography brought a new understanding of the Pacific in the context of a war fought with unprecedented violence and intensity over the largest battleground in all of history. Author John Stilgoe, continuing this meditation on how photography has shaped our perceptions of the Pacific, moves us back to the beach to consider how technical factors in the history of photography, and Hollywood glamor, contributed to the creation of "the beach" as a hallowed space in the collective fantasy life of postwar America. Finally, *Mains'l Haul* editor Mark Allen's essay offers the equivalent of a "photographic negative" to the conventional gloss on the history of the American West.

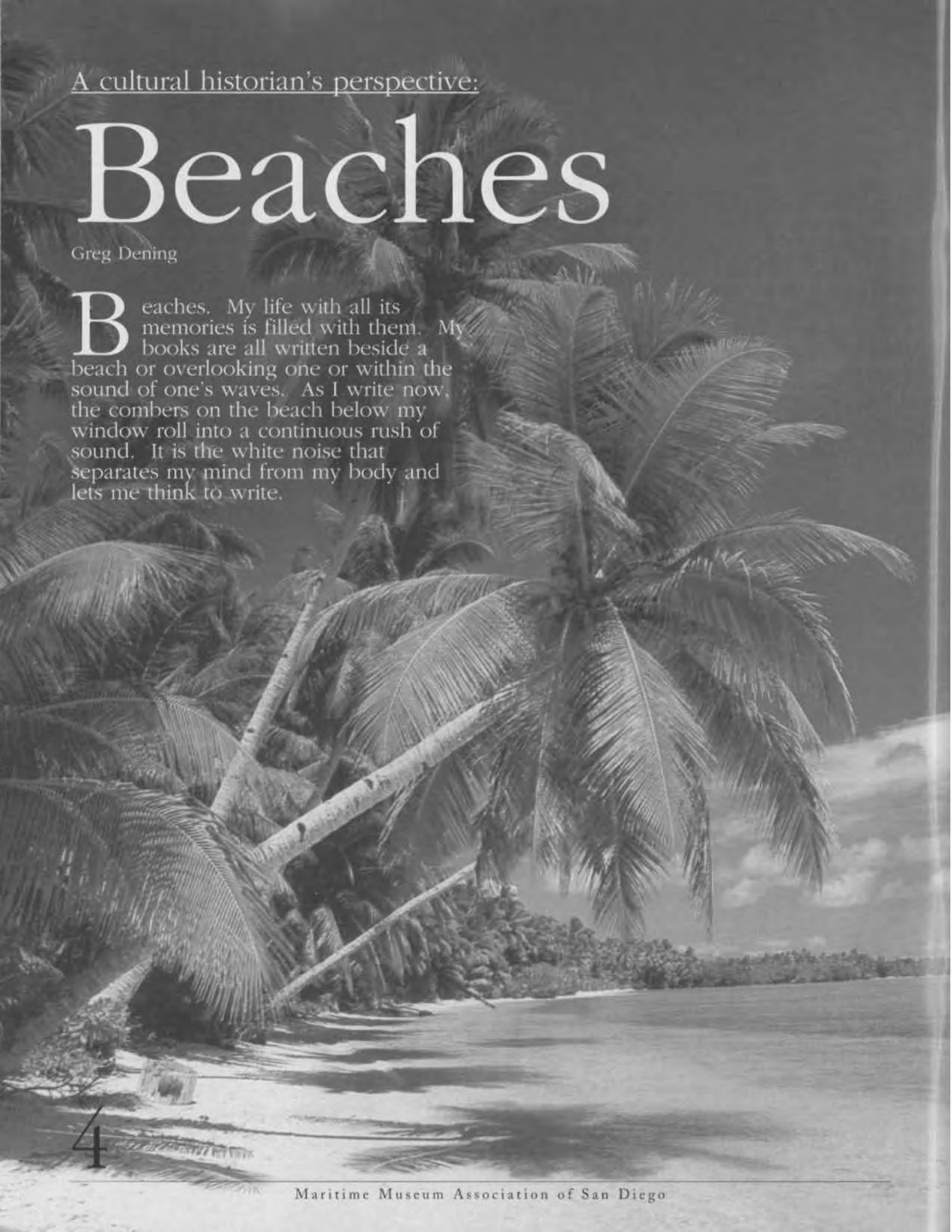
In the stock narratives of literature and Hollywood, the Old West is presented as a wild, expansive, and dangerous void into which civilization and people poured from the East. Instead, the author asks us to consider if it might be the case that the American West is simply one of the borderlands of a far more wild, expansive and dangerous Pacific world which has absorbed the people, culture, and attention of Americans for more than two centuries and continues to still.

A century ago, historian Frederick Jackson Turner portrayed the West as the defining component of an American national character. From other perspectives, including some of those presented here, it's worth considering if our west is indeed but a beach, lapped by waves and currents that originate worlds and ages away. So put on some sunscreen, take your shoes off, and join us for a strange, roundabout walk along that shore.

As for me, I am tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas and land on barbarous coasts.

—Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*.





A cultural historian's perspective:

Beaches

Greg Denning

Beaches. My life with all its memories is filled with them. My books are all written beside a beach or overlooking one or within the sound of one's waves. As I write now, the combers on the beach below my window roll into a continuous rush of sound. It is the white noise that separates my mind from my body and lets me think to write.

There is hardly a week that I don't walk a beach. These days I can't walk their soft white sand. There is too much pain and too many reminders of mortality in that. A dune to cross to reach a beach drains energy and resolve. No! The beach I walk is the hard wet sand at the sea's edge. It is an edge that moves with the tide and each wave in the tide, of course. So, unless it is taken barefoot, the walk meanders just beyond the reach of the largest wave in a set—always the seventh, don't the fishermen say?

This glistening strand between high and low tide is my freedom trail. I lose myself as I walk. I write in my mind; the waves are my worry beads. The last reach of the sea soaks into the sand. On one side of me, colonies of gulls and terns dry themselves on the white sand. On the other, the sea side, gannets dive into the troughs between breakers. Occasionally dolphins are to be seen surfing in the green transparencies of the waves. In the soak of the sea life stirs almost immediately, as the crab holes bubble. Worms and burrowing mollusks probe just below the surface, sucking life from the brine seeping into their world. Sandpipers ballet after the retreating waves.

This wet stretch between land and sea is the true beach, the true in-between space. Among the peoples of Oceania about whom I write—the *maohi* of Tahiti, the *enata* of the Marquesas, the *kamaiana* of Hawai'i—it is a sacred, a *tapu* space, an unresolved space where things can happen, where things can be made to happen. It is a space of transformation. It is a space of crossings.

Let me take you to a beach to show you how. The time is 1789. The place is Matavai, a bay on the northwest coast of the island of Tahiti. It is the place of the first, violent and awful encounter between the *maohi*—the native islanders of Tahiti—and the European intruders in 1769. In the twenty years prior to 1789, James Cook has anchored there four times. The French under Louis de Bougainville and the Spanish in various expeditions from Peru have done the same. The latest visitor had been William Bligh, collecting breadfruit in the *Bounty*. Now the *Bounty* is back after the mutiny. Fletcher Christian and eight mutineers bargain with the rest that if he could take the *Bounty* to some place of settlement—he didn't know where—he would leave the rest either to fulfill their dreams of paradise or to take their chances with the British navy, which would inevitably come looking for them.

The beach at Matavai is a black sand beach. This was a somewhat upsetting discovery for Marlon Brando when he filmed "Mutiny on the Bounty" there in 1965. It wasn't his idea of a "real" Tahitian beach at all. So he imported thousands of tons of good white New Jersey-type sand to make it right. Didn't I say that this in-between space of a beach was a space where things are made to happen?



Greg Dening is Adjunct Professor at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, Australian National University. He 'adjuncts' by offering workshops on the creative imagination in the presentation of scholarly knowledge. His own creative imagination on beaches can be seen at work in *The Marquesan Journal of Edward Robarts* (1974), *Islands and Beaches* (1980), *Mr Bligh's Bad Language* (1992), *The Death of William Gooch* (1995), *Performances* (1996), and *Readings / Writings* (1998).

The view toward Matavai, as seen by Captain James Cook in 1769.



AN VIEW of part of the West side of GEORGE'S ISLAND taken from the Ship of Anson in ROYAL BAY



Taputapuātea, drawn from the seaward side in 1792.

The black sand beach at Matavai curves around the bay and ends at a point of land just opposite the passage through the reef through which first the *Dolphin*, then the *Endeavour*, then the *Resolution* and then the *Bounty* had sailed. The English had noted the point in 1769 and called it “Morai Point.” “Morai” is how they heard the Tahitian word *marae*, a sacred space. It was indeed a sacred space. Tahitians called it *Taputapuātea*: “Sacrifices from Abroad.”

There were several *marae* called Taputapuātea through the “Society Islands,” as Cook had called them after the Royal Society, which had sent him to Tahiti. The most important, the original and the most sacred was at Raiatea, a hundred miles to the northwest of Tahiti.

These *marae*—to call them “temples” is to say too much and too little—had all the same characteristics. They were all on a point of land. They all stood opposite a passage through the reef which itself was deemed sacred. They had two parts: a seaward side on which canoes beached bearing human, animal and vegetable sacrifices, and a landward side which was a treasure house for the most sacred icons and ritual paraphernalia of the people whose *marae* it was. The landward side was also a place of feasting, dance and mythical and historical song. This partition of landward and seaward sides had its own symbolic beach, a transition zone between gods and humans. It was a stone, *tepa*, on which the god-chief of the place stood and had the sacrifices offered to him. There he pantomimed eating the eyes of the human sacrifices. On that stone he was clothed in the feathered wraps that were the symbols and title of his power and authority.

Deep in Tahitian mythic understanding of themselves was a polarity that they negotiated by ritual and theatre. The *marae* Taputapuātea with its landward and seaward sides and its stone “beach” was the mythic and ritual space where the polarity was negotiated. Land and Sea were the basic oppositions, but the associations with these two poles ran wide and deep. Land was Native: Sea was Stranger. Land was Life, Legitimacy, Fertility: Sea was Death, Power, Sacrifice. The “beach,” *tepa*, was the place where the power of Violent Strangers—the ancient Polynesian chiefs who had come across the sea—was assuaged with sacrifices brought through the sacred passages in the reef. *Tepa* was the place where naked power was given authority and legitimacy by being wrapped in the feathered symbols that were their title to the land.

In September 1789, Fletcher Christian came and went at Matavai in the *Bounty* in a day and a night. He left the sixteen mutineers who had chosen to take their chances at Tahiti and kidnapped about the same number of Tahitian women, throwing those he deemed too ugly or unsuitable for his purposes into the sea as he left. The sixteen mutineers came to Tahiti with not much other than the clothes they wore, some muskets and other weaponry, three gallons of Madeira wine each, and a few useful tools. The five months they had spent in Tahiti collecting breadfruit for Bligh had taught them a smattering of the language, and some understanding of Tahitian cultural practices. They knew



The *Dolphin* at Matavai, from Hawkesworth's *Voyages*.

Below, another *marae*, drawn in 1792.





Cook's *Endeavour* lies at anchor at Matavai in his 1769 drawing. Taputapuātea stood just south of "One Tree Hill."

that Tahitian greed was not so much for European goods as for the native goods—red feathers, clubs, drums, statuary—that the mutineers had stolen or exchanged at the islands the *Bounty* had visited after the mutiny. The *Bounty* men knew that their own safety depended on their making *taio* with Tahitians—friendships in which the individual's name, person and all social relationships were exchanged. They knew too that with their muskets they were an intrusive power in the politics of the islands.

It is not to my purpose to tell the dismaying and intriguing story of the eighteen-month stay of the mutineers at Tahiti, which ended when Captain Edward Edwards of HMS *Pandora* captured them and took them back to England for trial. Here I am talking of beaches. The mutineers discovered that theirs was a different sort of beach now that there was no *Bounty* in Matavai to dominate the scene with its cannons. They now had to bow to much that before they easily overrode. In fact, their first bowing took place at the *marae* Taputapuātea we have been talking about. They presented themselves, armed, to the boy-chief—Pomare was his name—who had title to the land where they wanted to stay. They came to the *marae*. Pomare was seated on the shoulders of one of his servants. (Should Pomare's feet touch ground, that ground became *tapu*, sacred, and inaccessible to others.) Tahitian protocol demanded that all who approached Pomare should bare their shoulders and their head and bow to the ground. This the mutineers refused to do. They were Englishmen, they said, and did not bare shoulders to anybody and besides, their own king demanded that they wear hats when they were armed. "Maitai!"—"fine!"—the Tahitians said. Put some Tahitian bark cloth on your shoulders and take that off. Then give our king an English salute.

Two beaches had been crossed in this one incident, don't you think? Two parties had bent to one another. Two parties had been relativised a little in their cultural perceptions. Two parties had to be inventive, create something new. That is what happens when beaches are crossed. In the in-between space of a beach, something new is made. Both sides give a little but lose nothing.

Around Pomare at Taputapuātea were all the sacred treasures of his people. There was an icon of the god 'Oro and all his feathered accoutrements. 'Oro was the god of sacrifice. Prominent among the treasures was a painting of Captain Cook by John Webber. (The latest portrait of Cook by Webber to come on the market was acquired by the National Gallery of Australia for over a million dollars!) All ship's captains who came to Matavai were asked to sign their name on the back of it. It was wrapped in a red cloth and kept reverently in a chest among the skulls of famous warriors who had been killed or sacrificed. (In a little while, skulls of mutineers Charles Churchill and Matthew Thompson would join the collection, as would the red hair of the *Bounty's* barber. He was deemed a most powerful man, since he touched other's hair and kept in his cabin a collection of his own "skulls"—models of the latest hairstyles in London.) Along with the portrait of Cook, the mutineers were surprised to find a print of Zoffany's painting of Cook's death in Hawai'i. Bligh had tried to keep Cook's death a secret from the Tahitians. So did Fletcher Christian, who explained Bligh's absence on his return to Tahiti by saying that Bligh had stopped off somewhere with Captain Cook. In a strange coincidence, a Swedish ship, the *Mercury*, had called at Tahiti between Christian's first return to Tahiti and his last. The *Mercury* people told the Tahitians of Cook's death and left the Zoffany print to prove it. Then the *Mercury* sailed on, passing the island of Tubuai where Christian had temporarily holed up and was building his Fort George. The ship did not stop at Tubuai but passed it in the night and saw the fires that the mutineers had lit, nearly discovering Fletcher Christian and the *Bounty*.

I haven't made my full point yet. We need to go forward a year into the mutineers' beachcombing story. Two of the most uncontrolled and violent of them are dead. Thompson in a fit of jealousy has murdered Churchill and the Tahitian *taio* of Churchill has murdered Thompson. Churchill and Thompson had raped and murdered Tahitians, flogged and mutilated them. The rest of the mutineers must have been relieved to see them gone. The most remarkable of the mutineers, James Morrison, the bosun's mate with the star of the Garter tattooed on his breast and the order's motto, *Honi soit qui mal y pense*, tattooed around his thigh, had built with huge ingenuity the small schooner *Resolution*, using strange woods, makeshift tools and unskilled labor. The *Resolution* was to be Morrison's means of escape, and that of whoever would go with him. The making of the *Resolution*, however, changed the mutineers' relationship with the Tahitians. They were much more deeply in Tahitian debt because of it. And the Tahitians realized that they had the last say in whether the mutineers could escape. They alone could supply the matting that would form the *Resolution's* sails. The mutineers wouldn't get the matting—unless they joined the wars that were endemic on the island.



A portrait of Cook by John Webber, like this one, was a sacred object in the *marae*.



Captain Cook considers the “man-long plantains” at a Tahitian *marae*.

The mutineers went to war for Pomare, and won victory for him. Tahitian politics were changed forever. These latest strangers from the Sea brought an uncontrolled and uncontrollable new violence to the Land. Their muskets and their scorn for the old rituals of Tahitian battle had brought death from the Sea in new ways, and had given the Pomare clan a sovereignty over the whole island that had never happened before. The Pomare clan immediately sought recognition for this new form of power in their boy-chief from all the powers of the island. They organized a “right-handed” procession around the island—right hand (signifying Life) towards the Land, left hand (Death) towards the Sea; we would say ‘clockwise’ in token of how other mythic forms shape our own imaging. The procession began at Taputapuatea in Matavai. It was preceded by a British flag on a pole. The boy-chief Pomare led it, “flying” on the shoulders of his servant. Behind him, his people danced under the canopy of a Union Jack extended by yards of white *tapa* bark cloth. The procession proceeded very precisely along the in-between space of the soak of the sea.

The purpose of the procession was to receive acknowledgment of Pomare’s sovereignty in the form of human sacrifices. Thirty of these canoe-borne Sacrifices from Abroad then came through the sacred passage at Matavai and were beached on the seaward side of Taputapuatea. All through the weeks of these events, the mutineers were not allowed to move from their houses unless they moved from Sea to Land first over the “beach” of Taputapuatea.

When the day came for Pomare’s inauguration, the mutineers assembled at Taputapuatea. They found the boy standing naked on his stone “beach,” *tepa*. Before him were laid out his people’s treasures—the painting and print of Captain Cook, the feathered image of the god ‘Oro, the skulls of Churchill and Thompson. Prominent was the red and yellow feather wrap, *maro ura*. This wrap was a historical register of Tahitian politics. At critical moments in the cultural life of the congregation of the *marae* patches of feathers representing human sacrifices were sewn on to the wrap. There was one remarkable patch: the red bunting with which Captain Samuel Wallis of the *Dolphin* claimed possession of Tahiti for King George III in 1767.

Sacrificial foods, dozens of slaughtered hogs, mountains of breadfruit, coconuts and taro—for the god ‘Oro, for Pomare, for the priests and for the communion feast of the congregation—lay at Pomare’s feet as well. The thirty “man-long plantains,” as the Tahitians called the corpses of human sacrifices wrapped tightly in coconut leaves and tied to poles, waited. The stench of them, now several weeks dead, was barely tolerable.

The priests offered their “man-long plantains” to Pomare by peeling back the coconut leaves covering their heads like a banana skin and scooping the eyes out. These Pomare “ate.” (He probably mouthed eating the eyes, rather than actually eating them.) When the violence in him was assuaged by these sacrifices from the Sea, his authority was acclaimed by wrapping him in the *maro ura*, the symbol of his title to the land. Then with the peculiar mixture of acclamation and defamation that was characteristic of Tahitian worship—and no doubt with the same archness of gesture with which he “ate” the sacrificial eyes—Pomare was covered with semen and feces by his worshipers. Or, they may have pantomimed the pouring as he had pantomimed the eating of the eyes. Their chief was a god. He was also the excrement of the gods. (This uplifting and then downputting is usually also part of the coronation ceremony in Westminster Abbey—but not quite as dramatically as in Tahiti.)

Pomare’s “beach” was a *very* in-between space.

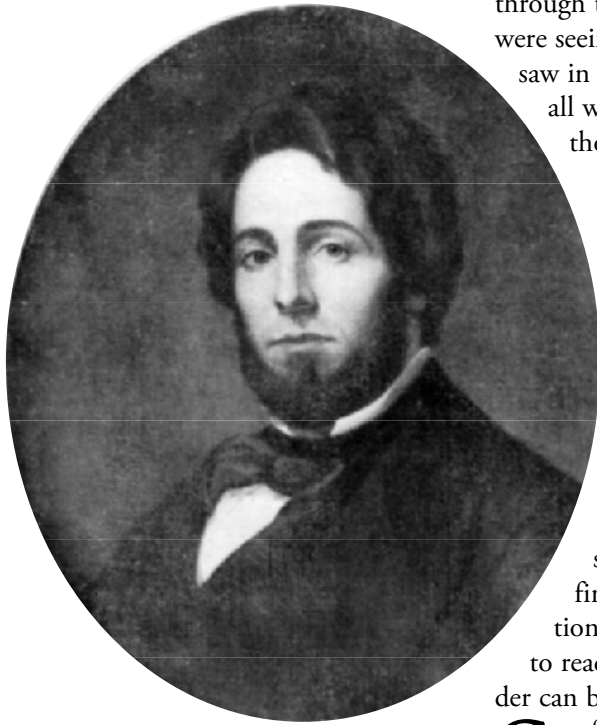


Yesterday, when I completed that last sentence, I thought I needed some in-between space of my own. I went for a walk on my favorite beach. It was the first day of the Southern Hemisphere’s summer. The tide was low. The soak of the sea was a glistening twenty yards wide. The beach curves for five miles in the shelter of hills just a road-width back. There is a fishing harbor at one end behind a rock groin. Squid boats shelter there. I see their lights at night like UFOs on the horizon of the sea. At the other end of the curve, the beach ends, as so many Australian beaches end, with a small stream riding against a rocky headland. That stream is always my walking goal.

This first day of summer was brilliant. Pale blue sky, deep blue sea. Miles of white, white foam. What is it that the oceanographers say? At any one time two percent of the earth’s surface is under sea foam? The breeze beats against the green, green hills. The spring rains still hold their effect. It is a steady breeze, just right for the hang-gliders who float above my head. *That* is an in-between space that I haven’t dared try.

I’m thinking beaches, of course, as I walk. A very rewarding thing happened to me recently. *Fenuaenata*—The People of the Land, the Marquesans—through their Association Eo’ Enata, published a French translation of my book *Islands and Beaches* in a splendid edition. It was a great honor. I was humbled to be giving these sad and silent islands a history that they could never before read.

Islands and Beaches was an important book for me. It was the book I always had wanted to write when forty years ago I discovered that the history I wanted to write had two sides, a history both of the native islanders who came into the Central Pacific two thousand years ago and the strangers who “discovered” them four hundred years ago. I needed to see these island cultures



Herman Melville, five years after he jumped ship in the Marquesas.

through the eyes of strangers who for the most part couldn't "see" what they were seeing. Explorers, missionaries, whalers, traders made texts of what they saw in their journals, letters, diaries, books. But what attracted me most of all were the beachcombers, those who left their ships and "went native"—those who crossed beaches.

Beachcombers. There were hundreds of them in the years I was interested in, the mutineers of the *Bounty* among them. They were a peculiar breed. They were as varied as humanity itself, and as good and as evil. They were always a scandal to the societies they left, deemed traitors. They took freedoms that other men (there were no women among them in these years) didn't dare or want to take. They soon found that their beaches were dangerous places. If they were wise, they did not bring any material goods with them. These would be taken from them, with their lives if they resisted. What they couldn't bring with them was all the cultural and social support, including language, that made them who they were. To survive, they had to enter into native society in some way, its language first of all. They had to bow to the realities of politics and social relationships. They had to be good mimics and actors. They had to be able to read gestures and understand the ways in which power and class and gender can be in a color or a shape or a look.

So for me, who wanted to see across the beach, the beachcombers' eyes saw more than most. I began to "see" the Land—*Fenua*—The Marquesas—through the eyes of two beachcombers, Edward Robarts and a lone nineteen-year-old missionary beachcomber, William Pascoe Crook. They both wrote long manuscripts of their experiences in the Land. *Islands and Beaches* grew out of that seeing.

Islands and Beaches freed me in many ways. It gave me courage to take risks in the theatre of cross-cultural writing. The beach metaphor allowed me to escape the tunnel vision of an island topic and to discover the many ways in which there are *liminal*—"threshold"—spaces in life. I experimented structurally in the book, balancing the two requirements of the historical endeavor, narrative and reflection, in a quite explicit way. I gained a freedom especially by giving back to *Enata*—The People—of *Fenua* something of their own identity in how they named themselves and their islands. But more importantly, how they structured their identity in the opposition of native (*enata*) and stranger (*aoe*). It was a first and small step in inverting the priorities of our cross-cultural gaze.

I tell you this because my present work, maybe half done, is called *Beach Crossings*. I'm going back to the beaches where I began. It is a little humbling to think that for forty years I've crossed the same beaches over and over again. But the miracle is that it is not actually the same beach that I'm crossing, and I'm not the same person crossing it.

Maybe it is self indulgent, but that gives me the concept for the book *Beach Crossings*. I'm using the beach crossings of Fenuaenata as a sort of mirror to my own beach crossings in life. I'm trying not to make it the Mirror of Dorian Gray! But it is pretty scary. It is not so much that the answers to the questions are frozen still, young and handsome. They aren't. It's the questions that are frozen. The problematic for which one has changing answers is rather scarily constant.

For me, I think, the constant issue has been how to describe process—how to describe the continuities and discontinuities of cultural existence in the present tense—not life, but living; not belief, but believing; not science but “sciencing;” not empire, but “empiring.” How to catch life, belief, science, empire not as if they were still frames in a moving film, but as if the illusion of the film’s movement was their actual reality. The beach above all is a stage in the theatre of the processes of living.

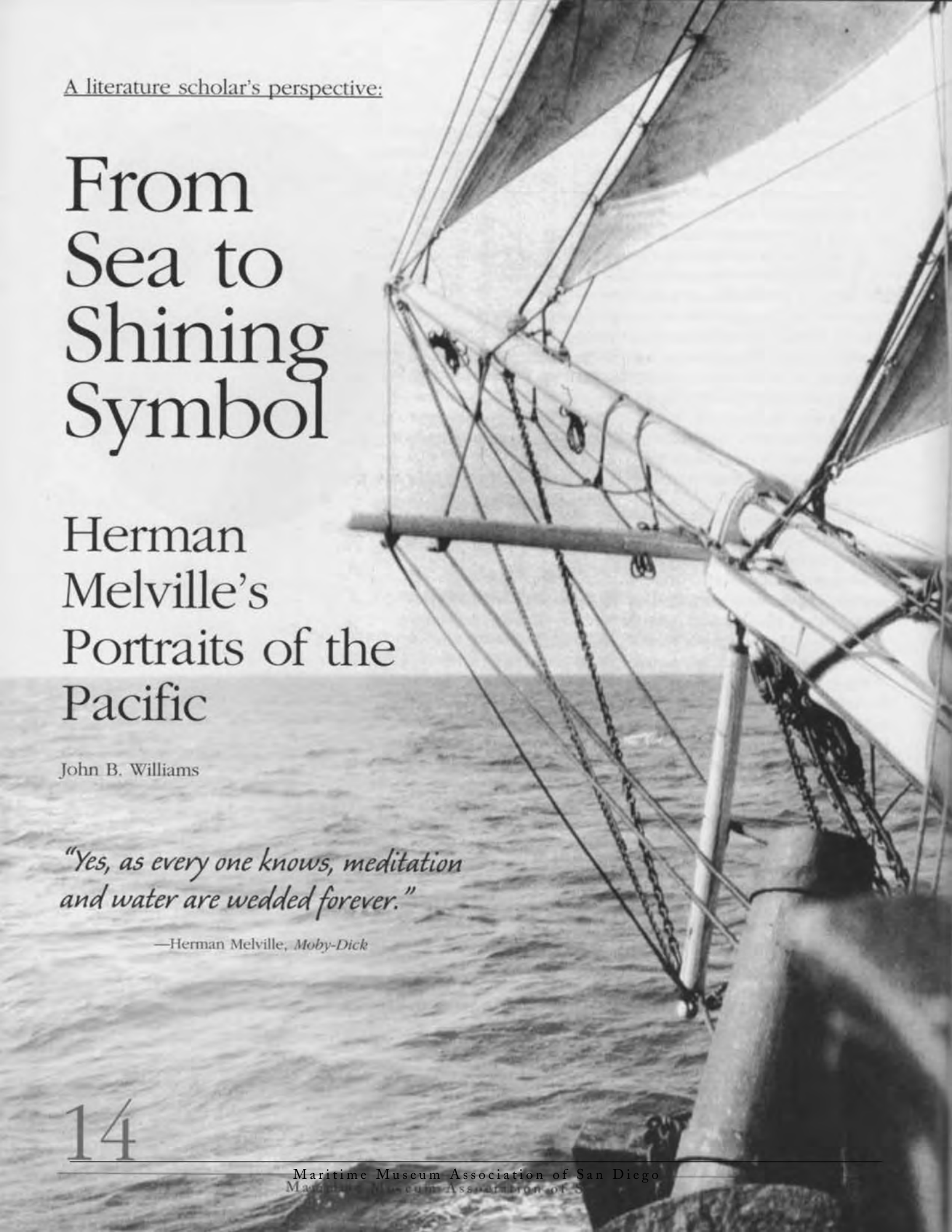
As part of *Beach Crossings* I’ve completed what I would call an ethnography of Herman Melville’s beach crossing in Fenuaenata. His beach crossing for me is the three and a half weeks he spent on Nukuhiva after deserting from the whaler *Acushnet*, enlarged by his four years’ experience in Hawai’i and Tahiti and on a variety of whalers as well as the frigate *United States*, enlarged again by his eighteen months reading and writing back at home in the Berkshires, Massachusetts. These readings and writings gave shape and language to his memories, gave sight to his unseeing eyes on the beach. His beach crossing for me begins July 9, 1842 when the twenty-three year old Melville and Toby Greene stuffhardtack down the fronts of their sailor’s frocks, slip away from the shelter of a canoe shed in the rain and scramble up the ridge behind to find a path and escape from the bay—where not only their whaler, but a French fleet is anchored. (The fleet’s 2,500 soldiers and sailors have their own business to attend to: they are about to take possession of *Les Iles Marquises*.) Melville’s beach crossing for me is from that day until November 14, 1851, nearly ten years later—the day *Moby-Dick* is published—when Melville gets into his horse and dray and drives from his home in Pittsfield over to Lenox to have dinner with Nathaniel Hawthorne in the Curtis Hotel. Hawthorne has just finished *The House of the Seven Gables*. Melville had dedicated *Moby-Dick* to Hawthorne “In token of my admiration of his genius.”

These hours with Hawthorne were among the happiest of Melville’s life. He wrote to Hawthorne afterwards: “From my twenty-fifth year [when he began *Typee*] I date my life. Three weeks have scarcely passed at anytime between then and now that I have not unfolded within myself.” It is this “unfolding” in reading and writing that I take to be his beach crossing.

Over the previous five years Melville had written *Typee* and its near-sequel *Omoo*. He had felt the genius within himself and wrote *Mardi* to prove it—not for the money that the public was prepared to pay, but for all his ambitions for American literature. *Mardi* was a commercial and literary disaster. In disgust he set himself to write something that the public would buy. He wrote *Redburn* in three weeks; *White-Jacket* in twenty sittings.

Then, having done his duty and now quite determined to be the self that had unfolded within him, he wrote *Moby-Dick*.

For me, the mirror in Melville’s beach crossing reflects the unfolding that reading and writing stirs. Reading weaves experience into something else, enlarges it, deranges it. Reading is a dance on the beaches of the mind.



A literature scholar's perspective:

From Sea to Shining Symbol

Herman Melville's Portraits of the Pacific

John B. Williams

*"Yes, as every one knows, meditation
and water are wedded forever."*

—Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

On any sunny day, if you gaze out on the Pacific Ocean from a California beach, an open novel in your lap, what you see at first will be three dimensional. Your eyes, squinting in the sunlight, will take in the gentle curve of the horizon, the stretch of seascape, and the volume of the sky. And you may daydream; the details of the scene before you may mix with imagination and lead you inward, into an artist's fourth dimension, where reality changes into symbol.

Herman Melville first viewed this ocean between 1841 and 1844 when he sailed the South and Central Pacific as a deckhand on three whalers and a frigate. His adventures included jumping ship in the Marquesas, beachcombing in Tahiti, riding out gales and typhoons, and harpooning whales in the Sea of Japan.¹ He later recalled his impressions of the Pacific in several novels, and his depictions of the sea's calms and storms are a significant part of Melville's legacy as America's greatest novelist of the sea. Though always evocative, these images often appear as digressions in his narratives. Critics tend to ignore them in focusing on larger issues, but Melville's descriptions of the sea deserve scrutiny for their unique insights into his art. Melville is an artist who paints brilliantly with water.

Melville's depictions of the ocean capture more than any eye can see as they mature from his first novel, which features a near-literal view of water from the deck of a ship, to a far more imaginative portrait of the ocean in his masterpiece, *Moby-Dick*. For many artists, the literal three-dimensional sea has beauty enough to merit capturing in paint or in print without investing it with deeper meaning. Melville's friend Richard Henry Dana did so in *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), which offers occasional glimpses of the watery world, though Dana focuses primarily on the harsh conditions of a sailor's life and the places he visited along the California coast.² Generally, this sea is only an implied background. It sometimes affects his mood, but like James Fenimore Cooper in his sea tales *The Pilot* and *Red Rover*, Dana views the ocean objectively, as a sailor would. On his first morning at sea aboard the brig *Pilgrim* he pauses from his duties to meditate for a few moments on the ocean at dawn:

There is something in the first grey streaks stretching along the eastern horizon and throwing an indistinct light upon the face of the deep, which combines with the boundlessness and unknown depth of the sea around



Above, Melville in 1870. At left, the sea from the whaler *Sunbeam*, 1904.

Photo by Clifford W. Ashley, courtesy New Bedford Whaling Museum.

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you, and gives one a feeling of loneliness, of dread, and of melancholy foreboding, which nothing else in nature can give. This gradually passes away as the light grows brighter, and when the sun comes up, the ordinary monotonous sea day begins.³

This is the verbal equivalent of a snapshot. Like Dana's other brief references to nature, it reports only what he saw, not dreamed. By contrast, no camera could record Melville's depictions of the sea. Even in his first novel, *Typee* (1840), he sees beyond literal fact in combining memories of several views into a single panorama. No sailor pausing from his duties could take in this composite view of a calm sea in the vicinity of the Marquesas:

Although I could not avoid yielding in a great measure to the general languor, still at times I contrived to shake off the spell and to appreciate the beauty of the scene around me. The sky presented a clear expanse of the most delicate blue, except along the skirts of the horizon, where you might see a thin drapery of pale clouds which never varied their form or color. The long, measured, dirge-like swell of the Pacific came rolling along, with its surface broken by little tiny waves, sparkling in the sunshine. Every now and then a shoal of flying fish, scared from the water under the bows, would leap into the air, and fall the next moment like a shower of silver into the sea. Then you would see the superb albacore, with its glittering sides, sailing aloft, and often describing an arc in his descent, disappear on the surface of the water. Far off, the lofty jet of the whale might be seen, and nearer at hand the prowling shark, that villainous footpad of the seas, would come skulking along, and, at a wary distance, regard us with his evil eye. At times, some shapeless monster of the deep, floating on the surface, would, as we approach, sink slowly into the blue waters, and fade away from sight. But the most impressive feature of the scene was the almost unbroken silence that reigned over sky and water. Scarcely a sound could be heard but the occasional breathing of the grampus, and the rippling at the cut-water.⁴

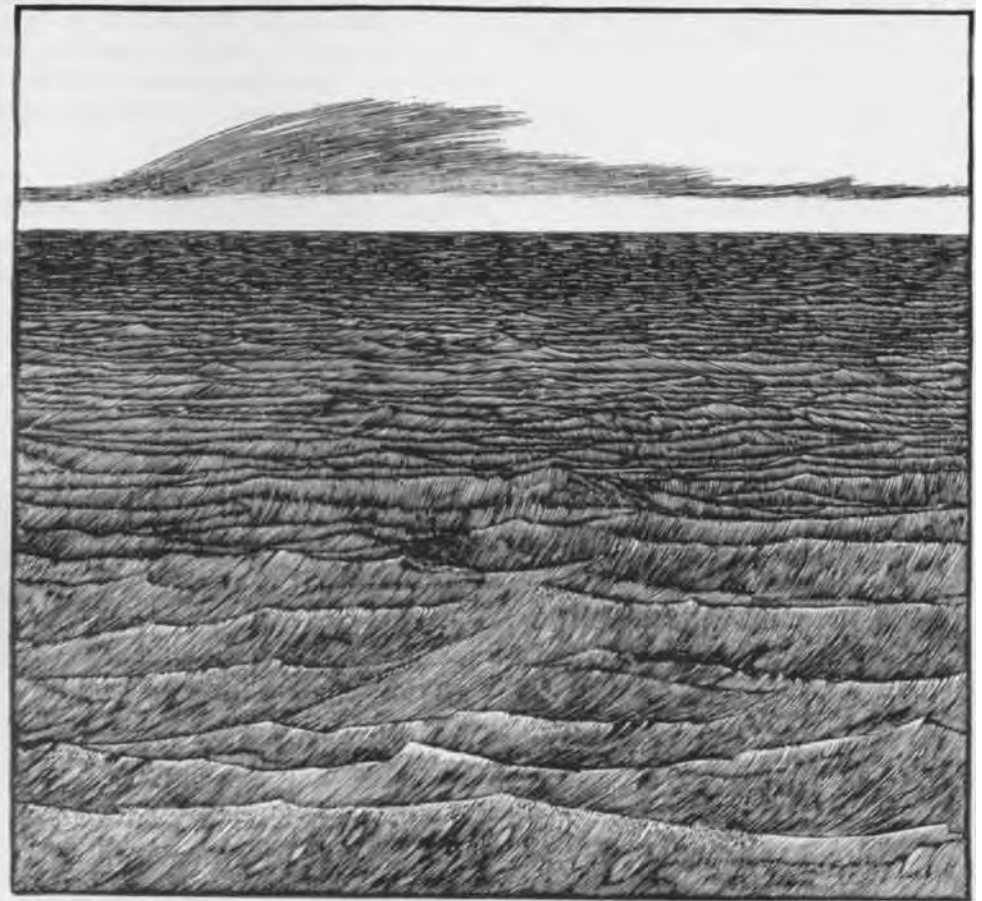
Typee and his second novel, *Omoo* (1847), offer representations of the sea which are realistic, but heightened by imagination.

Melville's marriage in 1847 into a highly respectable family, and his extensive reading of European romantic literature at that time, impelled him to attempt to establish himself as a serious novelist. Rather than dwell on facts, he began to offer his individual sense of fact in ways that eventually led to his use of nature as a comprehensive symbol of the mind. In his third novel, *Mardi* (1849), which he subtitled "And A Voyage Thither," the Pacific seems to possess creative power that lures the seafaring narrator into jumping ship from his whaler in mid-ocean. This dreamy narrator, who eventually calls himself Taji (the name denotes an Arabian headdress of distinction), begins his "voyage thither" into the world of the mind with a sailor companion named Jarl. Abandoning common sense along with their ship, the two cast off in a stolen boat at night a thousand miles from shore. They sail westward by instinct in the tropical ocean, which becomes a sea of symbols. As their tiny craft bobs in the rolling swells, the South Pacific (whose islands were popularly compared with earthly Edens in Melville's day) becomes the locale where Taji awaits his spiritual rebirth:

Now as the face of a mirror is a blank, only borrowing character from what it reflects, so in a calm in the Tropics, a colorless sky overhead, the ocean upon its surface hardly presents a sign of existence. The deep blue is gone, and the glassy element lies tranced, almost viewless as the air.

But that morning the two gray firmaments of sky and water seemed collapsed into a vague ellipsis. And alike the [boat] *Chamois* seemed drifting in the atmosphere as in the sea. Everything was fused into the calm, sky, air, water, and all. Not a fish was to be seen. The silence was that of a vacuum. No vitality lurked in the air. And this inert blending and brooding of all things seemed gray chaos in conception.⁵

white surf beat against its steep sides; then all collapsed, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago.



This illustration by Barry Moser, and those on the following pages, are from the 1979 Arion Press edition of *Moby-Dick*.

From the chaos before creation in this nautical Genesis, what is conceived is not the tangible world, nor Adam, but Taji, transformed from a common sailor into an Ideal Man. The story of his implausible quest for perfect beauty around a cluster of islands representing the world was decried in the London *Examiner* on March 31, 1849 as the tale of “a transcendental Gulliver, or Robinson Crusoe run mad.” Modern readers have been more charitable, recognizing in Taji’s determined pursuit of perfection a precursor of Ahab’s fanatic search for the white whale.

Melville’s most spectacular image in *Mardi* is not of anything that happens on ship or shore, but of a startling view of the Pacific’s beauty and power which Taji witnesses at night:

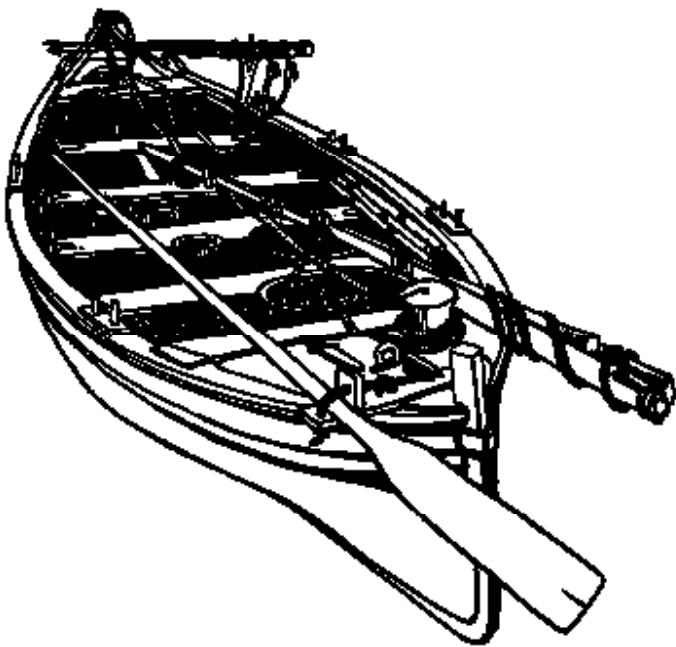
Slumbering in the bottom of the boat, Jarl and I were suddenly awakened by [their traveling companion] Samoa. Starting, we beheld the ocean of a pallid white color, coruscating all over with tiny golden sparkles. But the pervading hue of the water cast a cadaverous gleam upon the boat, so that we looked to each other like ghosts. For many rods astern our wake was revealed in a line of rushing illuminated foam; while here and there beneath the surface the tracks of sharks were denoted by vivid greenish trails crossing and redressing each other in every direction. Farther away and distributed in clusters, floated on the sea, like constellations in the heavens, innumerable Medusae, a species of small, round, refulgent fish only to be met with in the South Seas and the Indian Ocean.

Suddenly as we gazed, there shot high into the air a bushy jet of flashes, accompanied by the unmistakable deep breathing sound of a sperm whale. Soon the sea all round us spouted in fountains of fire, and vast forms, emitting a glare from their flanks and ever and anon raising their heads above water and shaking off the sparkles, showed where an immense shoal of Cachalots had risen from below to sport in these phosphorescent billows.⁶

These watery fireworks and the ghostly appearances of the sailors suggest a spiritual dimension to a common oceanic phenomenon. Samuel Taylor Coleridge similarly used biological luminescence in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:

About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue and white.

After the commercial failure of *Mardi*, Melville wrote two more novels of the sea in 1849: *Redburn*, the story of a voyage across the Atlantic, and *White-Jacket*, published in 1850 and subtitled “The World in a-Ship.” This latter, generally acknowledged to be Melville’s finest work before *Moby-Dick*, relates the adventures of a young sailor home-bound from Hawaii to Boston aboard a frigate. Melville’s fictional *Neversink* encounters the Pacific’s fury off Cape Horn, and Melville’s *Pilgrim*. The two writers offer contrasting views of foul weather. *Neversink* describes the battle between his fragile brig and the heavy seas realistically.



The boys of the other watch were in the tops, taking in the top-gallant studding sails, and the lower and top-mast studding sails were coming down on the run... rain, sleet, snow, and wind, enough to take our breath from us, and make the roughest turn his back windward! The ship lay nearly over on her beam-ends; the masts and rigging snapped and cracked; and her top-gallant masts bent like whip-picks. “Clew up the fore and main top-gallant sails!” shouted the captain, and all hands sprang to the clewlines. The decks were standing nearly at an angle of forty-five degrees, and the ship going like a mad steed through the water, and the whole forward part of her in a smother of foam.⁷

Aside in *White-Jacket*, Melville writes glowingly of Dana’s stirring “His chapters describing Cape Horn must have been written with an icicle.”⁸ But in contrast to Dana’s description of a physical event in which men react to powerful natural forces, Melville presents the struggle between ship and weather as a mortal storm that everyone must face in life:

But, sailor or landsman, there is some sort of a Cape Horn for all. Boys! beware of it; prepare for it in time. Gray-beards! thank God it is passed. And ye lucky livers, to whom, by some rare fatality, your Cape Horns are placid as Lake Lemans, flatter not yourselves that good luck is judgment and discretion; for all the yolk in your eggs, you might have foundered and gone down, had the Spirit of the Cape said the word.⁹

Just as a life-threatening crisis may occur to an individual without warning, Melville's "Spirit of the Cape" arises from a calm:

Here we lay forty-eight hours, during which the cold was intense. I wondered at the liquid sea, which refused to freeze in such a temperature. The clear, cold sky overhead looked like a steel-blue cymbal, that might ring could you smite it.¹⁰

A warning from a passing ship, "Look out for Cape Horn!" alerts the crew to the oncoming Pacific storm. The onslaught is sudden: at midnight, the boatswain's whistle shrieks, followed by the cry, "All hands take in sail! Jump, men, and save the ship!"

The vessel seemed to be sailing on her side. The main-deck guns had several days previous been run in and housed, and the port-holes closed, but the lee carronades on the quarter-deck and forecastle were plunging through the sea, which undulated over them in milk-white billows of foam. With every lurch to leeward the yard-arm-ends seemed to dip into the sea, while forward the spray dashed over the bows in cataracts, and drenched the men who were on the fore-yard. By this time the deck was alive with the whole strength of the ship's company, five hundred men, officers and all, mostly clinging to the weather bulwarks. The occasional phosphorescence of the yeasting sea cast a glare upon their uplifted faces, as a night fire in a populous city lights up the panic-stricken crowd.¹¹

This close encounter between men and the sea transcends the factual reality of the storm that Dana depicts. Melville portrays the Spirit of the Cape as providing a moral test of character, for at issue is whether the ship should turn tail from the blast or sail directly into it. As White-Jacket tells the story, the ship's conformist commander, Captain Claret, would flee, but his subordinate Mad Jack, a nonconformist officer who in a crisis obeys instinct rather than naval laws and customs, orders his captain below, takes command, and sails into the teeth of the storm. Melville comments: "It is needless to say that, in almost all cases of similar hard squalls and gales, the latter step, though attended with more appalling appearances, is, in reality, the safer of the two, and the most generally adopted." He applies the lesson of Cape Horn to the individual: "As with ships, so with men; he who turns his back to his foe gives him an advantage. Whereas, our ribbed chests, like the ribbed bows of a frigate, are as bulkheads to dam off an onset."¹² In this instance of insubordination, Mad Jack prevails, with the crew behind him. The captain resumes his command in safer waters.

The year 1850 marks a turning point in Melville's artistic career. Until then, he had focused on the Pacific Ocean milieu in four of his first five novels.¹³ Also, Melville's narratives to this date are episodic, often with little suspense or plot connections between events. But in *Moby-Dick*, which he began in 1850 and published the following year after many revisions, his epic story of Captain Ahab's pursuit of a white whale around the watery world is far more integrated as a work of art than his previous novels.

So much has been written in the last eighty years about Melville's masterpiece that contemporary readers might conclude there is nothing new

to be said about it. Even though numerous passages describe the sea, many readers assume these are merely atmospheric episodes, and not significant to characterization or plot. But Melville paints brilliantly with water.

In *Moby-Dick*, the sea is frequently a spiritual foe to humankind; “however baby man may brag of his science and skill,” he writes, “for ever and for ever, to the crack of doom, the sea will insult and murder him.”¹⁴ “The strong, troubled, murderous thinkings of the masculine sea” in *Moby-Dick* are far removed from the impersonal ocean observed by Dana.¹⁵

In the chapter “First Lowering,” Melville describes a vicious Atlantic squall. His storm, with its narrative of tragedy averted, can stand alone as one of the great maritime scenes in American literature. In two paragraphs, Melville sums up the human condition and the hope of salvation. After the *Pequod* lowers its whaleboats in pursuit of whales, a storm suddenly comes up:

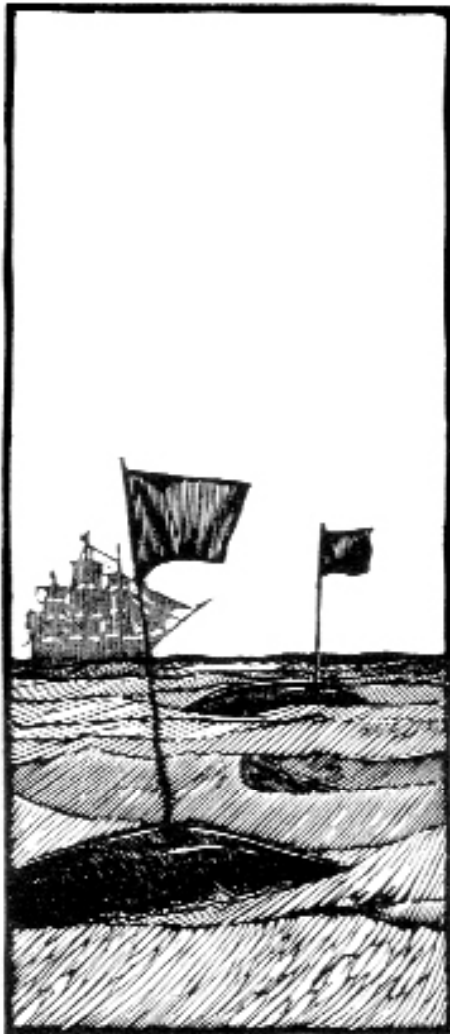
The wind increased to a howl; the waves dashed their bucklers together; the whole squall roared, forked, and crackled around us like a white fire on the prairie, in which, unconsumed, we were burning; immortal in these jaws of death! In vain we hailed the other boats; as well roar to the live coals down the chimney of a flaming furnace as hail those boats in that storm. Meanwhile the driving scud, rack, and mist, grew darker with the shadows of night; no sign of the ship could be seen. The rising sea forbade all attempts to bail out the boat. The oars were useless as propellers, performing now the office of life-preservers. So cutting the lashing of the waterproof match keg, after many failures [First Mate] Starbuck contrived to ignite the lamp in the lantern; then stretching it on a waif pole, handed it to Queequeg as the standard bearer of this forlorn hope. There, then, he sat, holding up that imbecile candle in the heart of that almighty forlornness. There, then, he sat, the sign and symbol of a man without faith, hopelessly holding up hope in the midst of despair.

This is a *spiritual* confrontation of men and water. Queequeg, a good-hearted cannibal who lacks an orthodox faith and is a spiritual innocent, holds up a lamp hung upon the appropriately-named waif pole.¹⁶ The lamp of forlorn hope is all that sustains these waifs, lost at sea in their tossing boat.

Wet, drenched through, and shivering cold, despairing of ship or boat, we lifted up our eyes as the dawn came on. The mist still spread over the sea, the empty lantern lay crushed in the bottom of the boat. Suddenly Queequeg started to his feet, hollowing his hand to his ear. We all heard a faint creaking, as of ropes and yards hitherto muffled by the storm. The sound came nearer and nearer; the thick mists were dimly parted by a huge, vague form. Affrighted, we all sprang into the sea as the ship at last loomed into view, bearing right down upon us within a distance of not much more than its length.

Their whaleboat is smashed by the *Pequod*.

At the novel’s famous conclusion, the man in the whaleboat is civilized Ahab, who has rejected faith; instead of a waif-pole topped by the lamp of hope, he holds a harpoon, embodying his hostility to nature. The harpoon, hurled at the white whale, pulls him to annihilation, and he is strangled in his own line. Ahab’s ship, rammed by the angry whale, sinks into the uncaring, ancient Pacific: “a sullen white surf beat against its sides; then all



Waif-poles in dead whales

At right, whalemens look out to sea from the *Sunbeam*’s fo’c’sle, 1904.

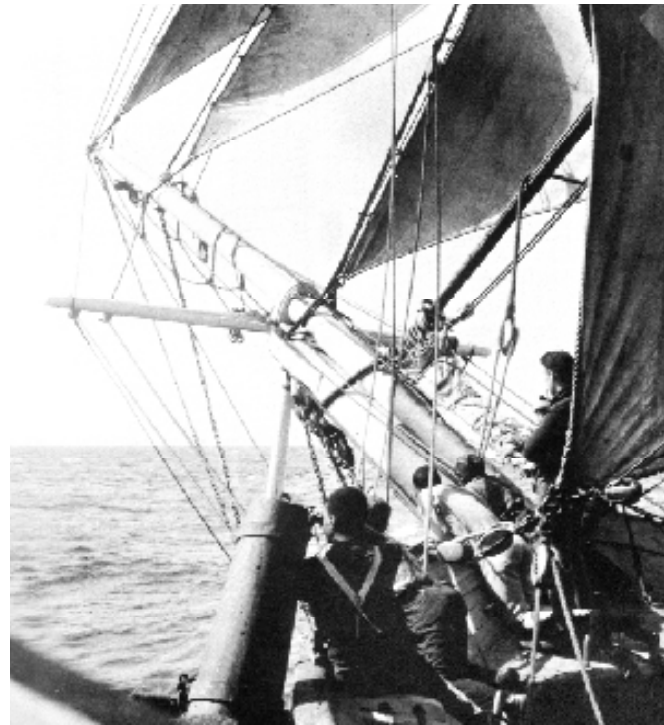
Courtesy New Bedford Whaling Museum.

collapsed, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago.” Ishmael, the lone survivor, is left floating atop a coffin “on a soft and dirge-like main” that recalls the “dirge-like swell” that Melville had described in his first portrait of the sea off the Marquesas in *Typee*.

Through these and other descriptions of the ocean, Melville turns his wide-angled lens outward to nature and inward to memory and the shaping power of imagination. Like no other writer before or since in American literature, he portrays the Pacific as a reflector of man’s estate in nature, his moral and spiritual environment, and soul.

N O T E S

- 1 On Melville’s life see James Leyda, ed., *The Melville Log*, 2 Vols. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951) and Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman, eds., *The Letters of Herman Melville* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960). The most complete biographical treatment of Melville’s life through the writing of *Moby-Dick* is Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: A Biography*, Vol. 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). An earlier, still useful biography is Leon Howard, *Herman Melville: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).
- 2 Dana’s book may have inspired Melville’s own voyage. Arthur Stedman, a friend of Melville’s old age, stated “It is more than probable that the publication of Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast* in 1840 influenced him [Melville] to follow the sea as a vocation, and to ship for Liverpool as a cabin boy.” Charles R. Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas* (New York: Dover, 1966), 11. Anderson observes, however, that Melville actually sailed before Dana’s book was published. Though Stedman later corrected his chronological error by saying Dana’s book stimulated Melville to travel in the South Seas, Anderson notes the skepticism of some biographers concerning Stedman’s view.
- 3 Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years Before the Mast*, Vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie Press, 1965 [1840]), 11.
- 4 Herman Melville, *Typee*, Harrison Hayford, Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle, eds. (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 10.
- 5 Melville, *Mardi*, Hayford, et al., eds. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 48.
- 6 Ibid., 121-122.
- 7 Dana, Vol. 2, 286.
- 8 Melville, *White-Jacket*, Hayford, et al., eds. (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 99. Charles R. Anderson asserts that a copy of Dana’s book was in the library of the frigate *United States*, suggesting a possible influence on Melville’s description of a Cape Horn storm. Anderson, 375.
- 9 Melville, *White-Jacket*, 109.
- 10 Ibid., 101.
- 11 Ibid., 105-106.
- 12 Ibid., 110.
- 13 The exceptions are the Atlantic voyage in *Redburn* and the journey home to Boston along the Atlantic coast of the Americas after the Cape Horn storm in *White-Jacket*.
- 14 Melville, *Moby-Dick*, Luther S. Mansfield and Howard P. Vincent, eds. (New York: Hendricks House, 1952), 273.
- 15 Ibid., 224.
- 16 A waif pole is a pole bearing a flag, which is jabbed into a floating dead whale to help the mother ship find the drifting carcass. In the quoted passage, however, Melville uses the pole with a lamp to identify sailors in a whaleboat hoping for rescue in stormy seas. The scene can be interpreted literally or imaginatively as a metaphor for the plight of a lost soul.



A musicologist's perspective:

No Ke Ano Abiabi A “Lost” Hawaiian Narrative Ballad

Stuart M. Frank

*In this night's watch Jack of Hawaii,
our Kanaka bard, chanted to us the
song of the Haleakala... The more I see of
the Kanakas of the Sandwich Islands,
the more I am drawn to them...*

—William M. Davis, *Nimrod of the Sea*, 1874

Sperm whale tooth scrimshaw of a Polynesian *wahine* (maiden) engraved by whaler George O. Hiliott in the 1830s.

This and all images in this article courtesy of the Kendall Coll., New Bedford Whaling Museum.



Perusing the shipboard journals and copybooks of nineteenth-century whalers can be like prospecting for gold: only occasionally does one strike a productive vein. For anyone interested in ballads, songs and poetry, or Pacific Ocean lore, however, a copybook kept by George Wilbur Piper during 1868-70 aboard the whaler *Europa* of Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, is truly a mother lode. In the annals of Yankee seafaring, it is by far the most extensive shipboard compendium of songs and ditties yet encountered among seamen's manuscripts—a barometer of nautical taste and a treasure trove of vintage materials, some still familiar today and others long forgotten.¹

One of the most obscure songs he transcribed is a work of great cultural significance, a survivor of an ancient Hawaiian tradition—a relic that, had it

not been for the survival of the Yankee whaler's manuscript, might have been lost forever. Transcribed in Piper's own hand, in the Hawaiian language, this song is an extraordinarily rare traditional hula narrative, undoubtedly obtained from one of the many Native Hawaiians (Kanakas), who shipped in the *Europa* for seasonal whaling cruises out of the Hawaiian Islands.

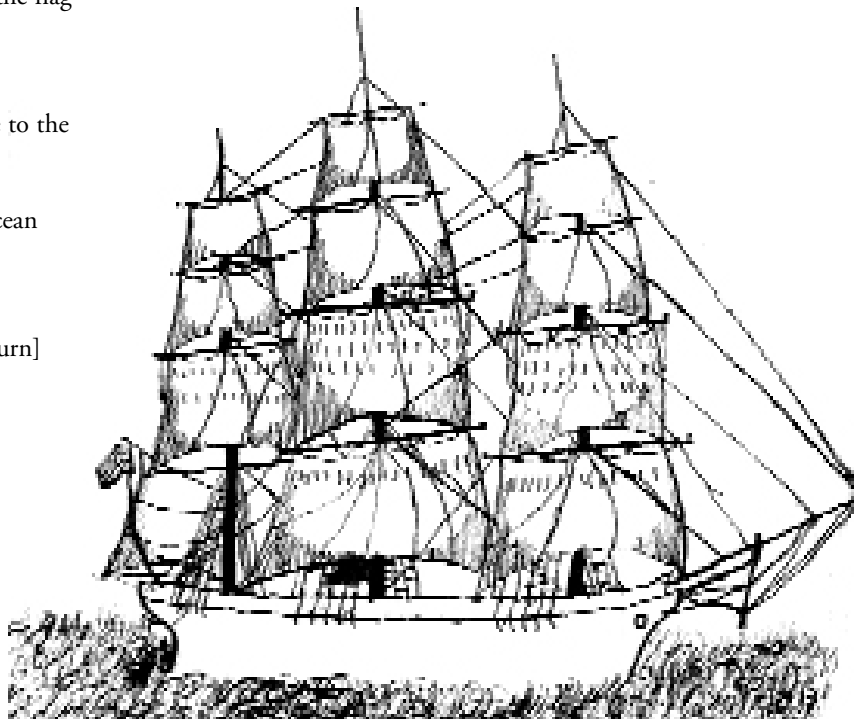
This classic Native Hawaiian ballad is virtually the only datable specimen of the *hula ku'i* tradition to survive the assimilation and hybridization of Hawaiian culture in the 1870s—the presence of which in a contemporaneous whaling journal is little less than miraculous. The ballad is a first-person narrative of a Kanaka who makes a whaling cruise to Alaska in an American whaleship. Its existence is remarkable on several counts, not the least of which being that Yankee whaler George Wilbur Piper was able to record an intelligible text in the Hawaiian language. The song itself is a transitional artifact, a rare textual remnant of a narrative singing-and-dancing tradition that became extinct within a decade of the whaler's fortuitous transcription.

Rendered into English,³ the song offers us a glimpse of a Kanaka's firsthand experience in the American bowhead whale fishery:

- 1 For the evening there is love
- 2 For fondly recollecting
- 3 [unintelligible]
- 4 This is the day I am sailing away,
the sails are unfurled
- 5 The anchor is lifted [weighed] the flag
flutters at the stern
- 6 I will not push the boat
- 7 Running before the wind
- 8 When the line [is pulled?] close to the
edge of the ice
- 9 Turn around and let us go
- 10 There/Here to the deep blue ocean
- 11 You outside...return
- 12 sea-spray rises well
- 13 Here the wind behind
- 14 Big wheel...wind [i.e. twist or turn]
- 15 We two go back and return
- 16 I saw the island of America
- 17 The cold of Alaska
- 18 The bow hums in the sea
- 19 I did not go around thee
- 20 [unintelligible]
- 21 Turn to me soft nose⁴
- 22 Let us kiss and embrace
- 23 This is the name heard
- 24 Of *Pilikoabu* in the cold

Stuart M. Frank is Senior Curator and Director of the Kendall Institute, New Bedford Whaling Museum. He serves on the Editorial Board of *American Neptune* and is author of *Herman Melville's Picture Gallery*, *Dictionary of Scrimshaw Artists*, *More Scrimshaw Artists*, *The Book of Pirate Songs*, and numerous articles on nautical art, history, and music. This article, researched as component of his Ph.D. thesis at Brown University, is adapted from his forthcoming book, *Ballads and Songs of the American Sailor*.

The whaler *Europa*, from George Wilbur Piper's copybook.



A rendering of the song
into standard Hawaiian:

- 1 *No ke ano ahiahi ke aloha ka*
- 2 *No ka hali'ali'a 'ana mai*
- 3 *E wiki 'oe [h]e pua loke*
'oia i ke hoa 'iu kane
- 4 *'O ko'u la holo keia [la]*
ke lu mai ne[i] na pe'a
- 5 *Kia'i u'i nei i ka heleu 'iu a*
ka 'eu a ka hae moki
- 6 *'A'ole wau e pa huana i ka pohi*
- 7 *Holo i ka ni'a [nia?] kani*
- 8 *Ahia [Ahea?] ho'opau*
laina ke pi'i nei i ka lu lihau
- 9 *Hau e alo e nele ka'eu*
- 10 *'Oia ai ka moana lipolipo*
- 11 *E waiho 'oe a huali ho'i mai*
- 12 *E ka uepa pono na i'a*
- 13 *Eia kana kani ma hope*
- 14 *A niu ka huwila ke peu 'iwi nei*
- 15 *Kau 'ilik[a]i ka ihu e ho'i ai*
- 16 *'Ike 'ia 'o Male[ka] 'Ailana*
- 17 *Me he hau le no 'Alike*
- 18 *E ka wewe ihu o ka moku*
- 19 *'A'ole au e puni a kiu*
- 21 *'Ike ka ua mai a ke hoa*
- 22 *Ho mai ke ihu waliwali*
- 23 *E honi kiu ili a kui ai*
- 24 *Ha'ina ka inoa a lohe*
- 25 *A'o Pilikoahu ai ke anu*

—Amy K. Stillman

The singer specifically mentions the “island of America” and the “cold of Alaska,” unequivocally indicating a bowhead-whaling cruise to the Western Arctic of the sort for which native Hawaiians were regularly recruited at Honolulu, Lahaina, and Hilo. Lines six and seven indicate that the narrator will not be rowing or paddling the “boat” (as he would a canoe) because it will be “running” (sailing) by the wind. The reference to “sea spray” is likely an allusion to the whale’s spout, rather than to spray as such, while “big wheel... wind” apparently refers to winding, as one would wind a watch, perhaps referring to the ship’s wheel spinning around in a storm. *Pilikoahu*, like *Maleka* (“America”) and *Alike* (“Alaska”), is evidently the Hawaiian form of some place-name, almost certainly in or adjacent to Alaska—perhaps the Pribilof Islands, an important whale- and seal-hunting ground in the Bering Sea.

Seaman George Wilbur Piper may have heard this song from a Kanaka whaleman, perhaps one of those aboard the *Europa* for seasonal cruises during her sojourn of almost six years in the Pacific, or perhaps from someone he met ashore in the Islands. Among the crew were no fewer than twenty-seven Kanakas, shipped at Honolulu for seasonal cruises to the northern and southern whaling grounds. Piper himself, like the Hawaiians, came aboard in the Pacific when the voyage was already in progress, then signed off before the *Europa* returned to Edgartown.

George Piper was twenty-eight when he commenced his copybook, but little else is known about him. The *Europa*’s logbook, kept by successive first mates William Earle and James Green during the first four years of her voyage, is sketchy about the crew, which turned over several times during the ship’s long sojourn in the Pacific. Nowhere is Piper mentioned by name.

The voyage that commenced on August 29, 1866 was not completed until just short of six years later, on August 17, 1872. While this was by no means a record, it was much longer and somewhat more lucrative than average, and certainly more eventful. Captain Thomas Mellen was likely the only member of the original company who stayed on for the duration; it appears that Piper joined as part of a large rotation of officers and crew at Honolulu in 1868, and may have left the ship in 1870 or 1871. The final months of the cruise, from October 1871 onward, were consumed by the frustrating and debilitating chore of rescue operations in the icy Beaufort Sea, well above the Arctic Circle and far beyond the Bering Strait on the north coast of Alaska. The *Europa* was recruited, grudgingly, to help offload men, cargoes, and equipment—and more than a few women and children, the wives and families of bowhead-whaling captains—from thirty-three American whaling vessels trapped in the ice in an unusually early autumnal freeze. Beyond being a harrowing ordeal for the victims, and one that resulted in financial reversals among owners, officers, crewmen, and insurers (miraculously, not a single life was lost among the 1,200 persons stranded), it was also an unwelcome intrusion upon the regular, money-making activities of the reluctant rescue ships. Their whaling season was unexpectedly curtailed, provisions and stores were consumed at a stupendously accelerated pace by hundreds of uninvited guests, and agents and owners were to be embroiled in litigation for twenty years; the suit for damages was not settled until 1891. Even in cases where the principals eventually

recovered a portion of their losses, the delay tied up their capital for twenty years and inhibited or disabled some from mounting subsequent voyages. Few of the common whalemens would ever recover a particle of their lost revenue. Nor was the lesson of Arctic cold well enough learned by whaling masters: the 1871 disaster proved to be only the first of a series of periodic mishaps in the decades following, in most of which the serious fiscal consequences were tragically overshadowed by human suffering, even death.

On board *Europa*, seaman Piper was a sponge for all he read, heard, and found. His collection is not only large—156 song texts, in addition to dozens of poems and literary excerpts—but also eccentric in its sources and catholic in its tastes. Folksongs, parlor songs, music-hall comic pieces, minstrel tunes, broadside ballads, sea songs, and traditional whaling come-all-ye's, are all represented in surprisingly rich variety, transcribed in a literate, legible hand. It was also Piper's custom occasionally to have shipmates inscribe a song or two. But, alas, he wrote nothing in the volume to explain the context and circumstances in which the songs were sung, or the role of music aboard the *Europa* in those years. And after 1870 he evaporates from view.

The introduction of the ukulele to Hawaii by Portuguese laborers in 1874 precipitated a revolution in Hawaiian music, creating a new island genre and virtually obliterating, or at least thoroughly hybridizing, earlier musical conventions. The *bula ku'i* tradition predates the advent of the ukulele, but no verifiably earlier specimen of a text than Piper's exists. Various non-whaling texts of "No ke ano ahiahi" are still in circulation in the Hawaiian Islands, where the *bula ku'i* dance is performed and the song has been collected and recorded. The whaleman's manuscript, however, transcribed in corrupt, occasionally enigmatic, but recognizably authentic Hawaiian, demonstrates an earlier provenance of the song and illustrates the influence of the Yankee whalers on native Hawaiian music. Allusions to the



Whaleships frozen in Arctic ice, 1871.

“HAWAIIAN OR SANDWICH ISLANDERS SONG”

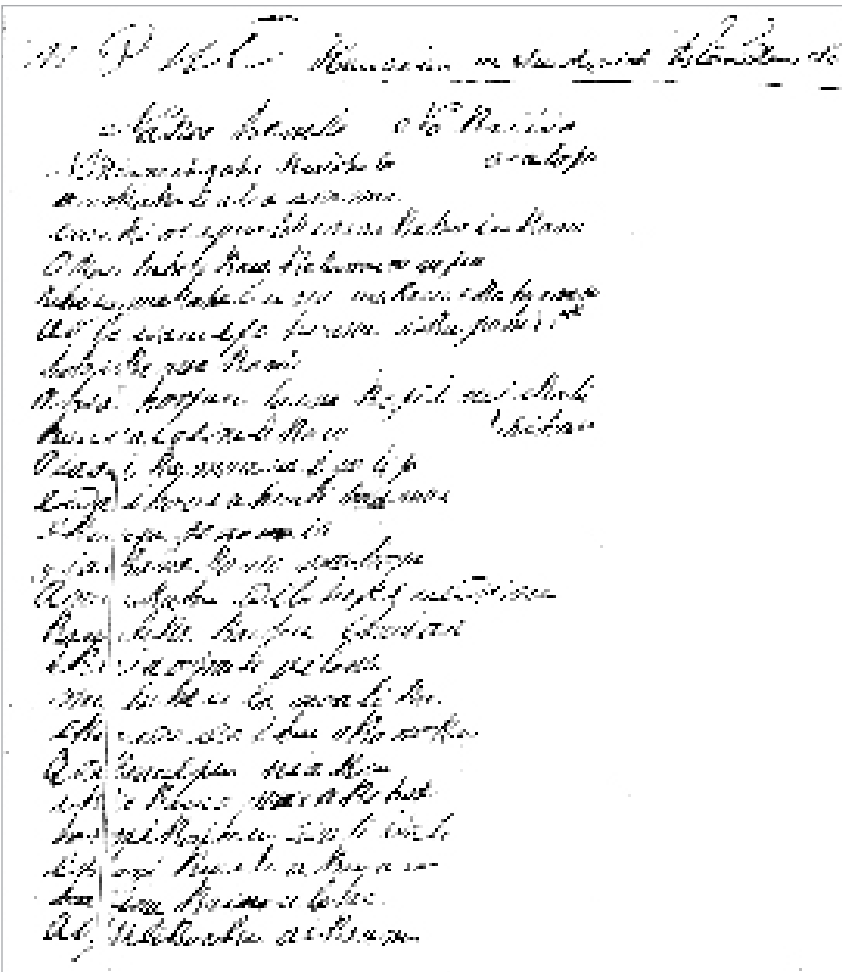
George W. Piper’s transcription

- 1 *No keano ahihi kealoha la*
- 2 *nokohali alia anamai*
- 3 *ewikioi epualokeoiai*
ka hoa in kane
- 4 *O kou laholo keia*
ke lu mai ne napea
- 5 *kiai ui neiikahe leu na*
uiakaeu e ka hae moko
- 6 *Ao le wau epa huana ika pohi*
- 7 *holo ika nia kani*
- 8 *Ahia hoopau laina*
kepeii nei ikalu hihau
- 9 *hau ealo e nele kaeu*
- 10 *Oiai ka moana lipo li po*
- 11 *ewaiho o e a huali ho i mai*
- 12 *ekauepa po no na ia*
- 13 *eia kana kani mahope*
- 14 *Anui kahu wilahepeuiwini*
- 15 *kauiliki kaihu ehoi ai*
- 16 *ikeia o male ailana*
- 17 *Ma he hau la noali ka*
- 18 *eka we we iku o ka moku*
- 19 *A o leauepu nia kin*
- 20 *ike kaeua maiakehoa*
- 21 *ho mai kaihu wali wali*
- 22 *ehoni kin ili a kui ai*
- 23 *ha ina kaino o lohe*
- 24 *A o pilikoahu aikeanu*

10

Alaska coast and Arctic ice vividly and unequivocally indicate its Yankee bow-head-whaling context, for the presence of which there can be no other reasonable explanation. Nor has any other version come to light in which these elements are fully present. Later examples of the lyrics are bland and unspecific, as though passed down until several generations removed from the actual event. Such later manifestations, the descendants of the original song, emerged after the metamorphosis of Hawaiian music; they were “preserved” in a time when the American whaling presence was no longer influential and Yankee square-riggers like George Piper’s had become only a distant memory.

- 1 Piper’s copybook now resides in the Kendall Collection, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
- 2 According to Amy K. Stillman (private communication, 23 August 1984) the song “retains elements of the original Hawaiian oral narrative conventions... [and] stands near the beginning of an acculturated genre of music accompanying the *bula ku’i* which we know was established by the mid 1880s. Although early *bula ku’i* songs were chanted to sparse melodies and little accompaniment, further acculturative processes included addition of [ukulele and] guitar, and melodies conforming more closely to Western temperament and harmonization. Thus, much later nineteenth-century repertory is extant today in both ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ versions. This particular song is unique in being one of the very few datable pieces.” Ms. Stillman is a native Hawaiian who in 1984 was a consultant to the Peabody Museum (now the Peabody Essex Museum) while pursuing doctoral studies in Hawaiian language and literature at Harvard.
- 3 In 1984, Elizabeth Tatar and Patience W. Bacon of the Bishop Museum, Honolulu, translated the song. “It certainly was difficult to decipher... Some of these lines just don’t make sense in Hawaiian; lines 3 and 20 stumped us totally.” It is unclear whether the apparent corruptions and problems of Hawaiian syntax in the text are entirely due to Piper’s errors in transcription; the version he heard may well have been corrupt. Also, given the inability of translators to account for some of the words and phrases, it may employ conventions or terminology pertaining to ships and whaling that are now obsolete in Hawaiian and hence lost to philologists.
- 4 Translator Elizabeth Tatar perceives in these lines an echo of David Kalakaua’s song, “Aloha no wau ikou maka, Kou iku waliwali ka’u i honi” (“I love your eyes, your soft nose I kiss”).
- 5 Interpretation offered by Amy K. Stillman.
- 6 The *Europa*’s articles and crew list additions for this voyage, along with Captain Mellen’s partial logbook for the voyage, are in the collections of the New Bedford Whaling Museum.
- 7 Piper was born in 1840, either at Hopkinton, New Hampshire, or Topsham, Vermont, and raised at Concord, New Hampshire. His early career is a mystery, and it is uncertain when he joined the *Europa* crew. His Protection Paper (passport), issued at New Bedford scarcely a month before the whaler weighed anchor in August 1866, indicates that he set off a-whaling at around that time, but his name does not appear on the *Europa*’s outward manifest.
- 8 Ms. Tatar, an ethnomusicologist, indicated that lines 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, 15, 16, 23, and 24 are still sung today. “We came to the conclusion that the American [Piper] was given several songs, not just the one we all recognized [as ‘No ke ano ahihi’] which is now a name song for Lunalilo, one of the [Hawaiian] kings... I recognized some phrases from another sailor’s song, ‘Kuu aloha la, kuu aloha.’” Elizabeth Tatar, private communication, December 1984.
- 9 A slightly different Hawaiian version was prepared in 1984 by Elizabeth Tatar and Patience W. Bacon.
- 10 Transcribed by Stillman directly from the manuscript, which consists of twenty-four lines undifferentiated into stanzas, though divided between lines eight and nine.



The song, transcribed in Piper’s handwriting.

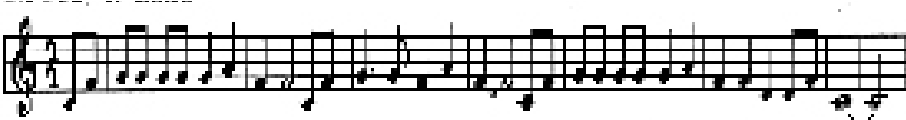
Two tunes for “No ke ano ahiahi”

From Amy K. Stillman, 1984, learned from tradition as a child in Hawaii and transcribed after additional research on recordings:

No ke a-no a-hi a-hi ke a—lo—ha la i ka ha-li-’a—li-a -’a-na mai



From *Ritual Song: A Hymnal and Service Book for Roman Catholics* (Chicago, [1996] 1998); it is used as the tune for “Canción del Cuerpo de Cristo” / “Song of the Body of Christ:”



A photo-historian's perspective:

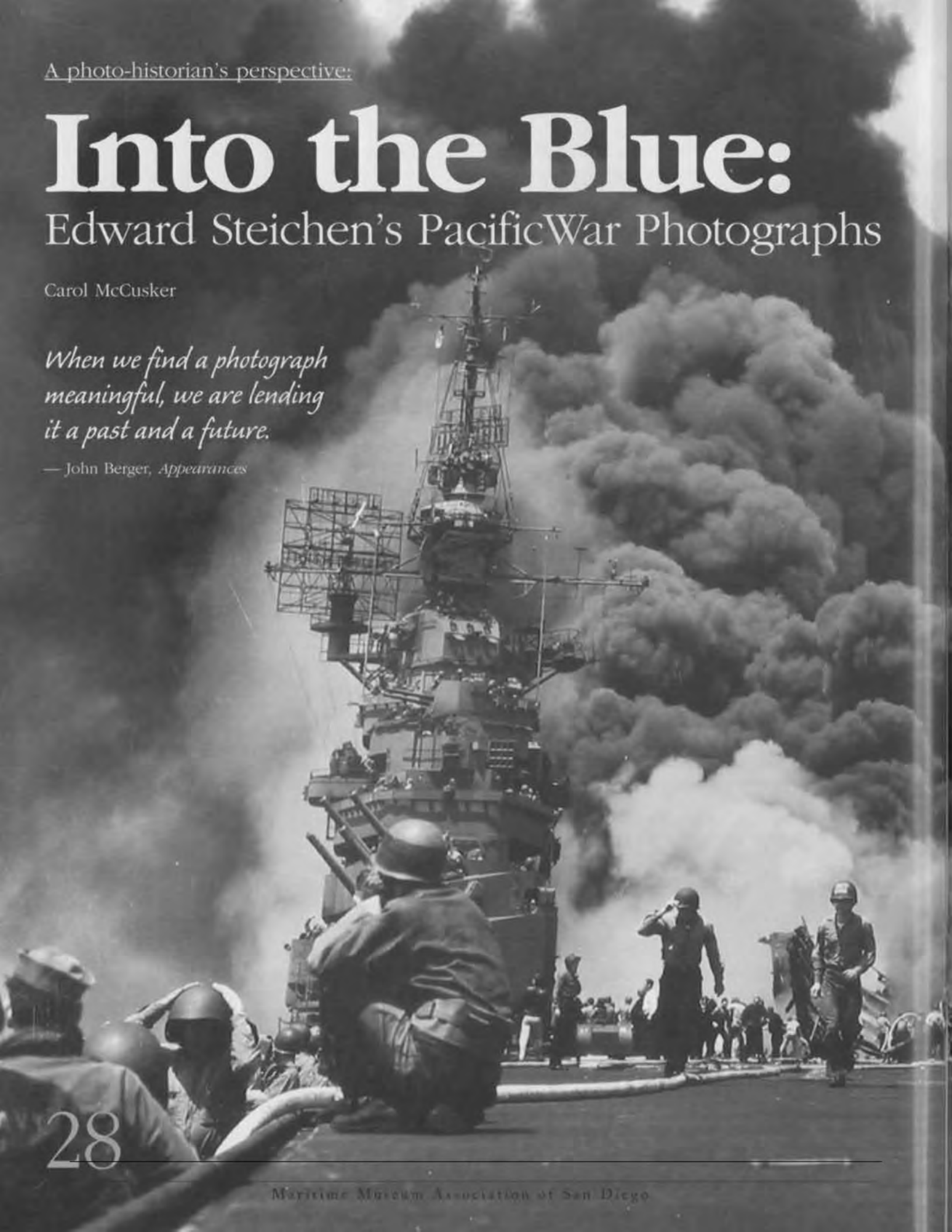
Into the Blue:

Edward Steichen's Pacific War Photographs

Carol McCusker

*When we find a photograph
meaningful, we are lending
it a past and a future.*

— John Berger, *Appearances*





If you mention "The Pacific" to people of a certain age, the phrase automatically conjures up the Pacific Theater of War, a place worlds apart from WWII's European Theater. In 1942, Rear Admiral Arthur W. Radford commissioned renowned photographer Edward Steichen to direct a team of eight photographers: the Naval Aviation Photographic Unit.¹ Their mission was to record life on the aircraft carriers that were proving centrally important in the war against Japan. Over the next four years, Steichen & Co. recorded life aboard these new, massive weapons of warfare, creating 15,000 photographs that brought viewers an up-close and personal vision of the war. In 1980, in honor of the one hundredth anniversary of Steichen's birth, these photographs were allocated to several museums nationwide; the San Diego Maritime Museum received over seventy prints, including those reproduced here.

Although the most disturbing of these photographs never made the popular press—the OWI (Office of War Information) controlled their release, and banned images of American losses, with few exceptions—many were published in a hugely popular 108-page paperback, *U.S. Navy War Photographs*, that was made available to Navy personnel exiting the services in 1945.² After the war, these images virtually disappeared, languishing in a Washington archive among the half-million other Navy photographs. Not until Christopher Phillips's 1981 book *Steichen at War* did a comprehensive collection of this WWII material again come to light.³

Service in the Pacific Theater, as these photographs show, placed Americans in the most vulnerable physical circumstances one can imagine—a world surrounded by water, the most alien and unstable of battlegrounds. When, and if, an actual *battleground* was established, it was a far cry from the hedgerows of Normandy, instead often being a speck of coral-ringed rock in the vast ocean, or an island-bound patch of impenetrable jungle. While sailors and troops on the Atlantic were equally vulnerable, the Atlantic's story was a more familiar one to Americans, who knew the dangers of its cold waters from generations of crossings and memories of disaster. The Pacific, however, offered a new kind of war, replete with the horrors of suicide attack by an enemy whose beliefs seemed utterly alien, and new disasters, like the fate of the

"The USS *Bunker Hill* Takes Two Kamikazes in 30 Seconds—11 May 1945."

An unknown Navy photographer caught the aftermath minutes after 392 men died and 264 were wounded. Steichen included this image in his book a few months later; its title, like those of photos on the following pages, is from the book.

Maritime Museum Coll. P742; U. S. Navy photo.

Carol McCusker is Associate Curator of Photography at the Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego. She received her Ph.D. in the history of photography at the University of New Mexico in 2001. Her dissertation examines the war and postwar photographs of Robert Capa, David Seymour, and Phil Stern.

crew of the USS *Indianapolis*, who—if they survived the sinking of their ship by a Japanese submarine—faced attack by sharks in the warm Pacific. American unfamiliarity with its weather patterns, island cultures, enemy tactics, and the effects of long tours at sea, kept the Pacific war beyond full comprehension for people on the homefront and those in the armed forces as well.



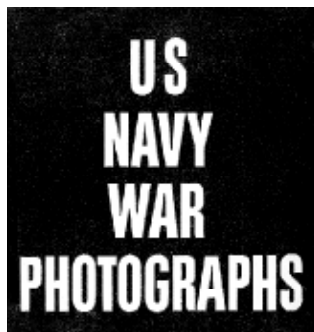
Recent critiques of the ways war photography functions in the mass media rightly point out that most images serve moral and political agendas.⁴ These analyses demand that we see *through* their content to their “constructedness”—how they are scripted by government officials, editors, and photographers alike—and to note how they are designed, re-framed, or censored outright. Most of the time, we are handed “authorized” versions of history or the day’s news, each affirming only selected facts about any given situation, thereby shaping our perceptions. There is not enough room in this essay to adequately address the complexity of these issues. Suffice it to say that, in the majority of Steichen & Co.’s photographs, the *war itself* takes over with an energy and magnitude of its own. Steichen & Co. tried to “frame” the Pacific war to suit the OWI’s agenda, but there was no way the OWI or any other government agency could contain or re-frame it. Peril, suffering, and death were inescapable, and photographers captured such sights as an enemy bomber crossing a ship’s deck in flames, massive nighttime volleys of rockets, survivors rescued at sea, kamikazes making direct hits, deck fires, charred corpses, wounded sailors awaiting treatment or evacuation, burials at sea, exhausted marines dug in on Peleliu, and—perhaps most riveting and tragic of all—the moment of impact as a bomb hit the USS *Enterprise*, killing the photographer. Alongside these are images of strange artfulness

that transform the wakes of ships, tides and storms, and smoke plumes into stunning modernist abstractions. The former images break the taboo against showing death and destruction; the latter show an almost “romantic-natural” view of the world alongside a “destructive-cultural” one. When Steichen selected and assembled these images in book form at the war’s end, in essence he “curated” the war for the men who fought it. *U. S. Navy War Photographs* is essentially an exhibition on paper, in which Steichen presents an unflinching look at the war’s horrors and surprising beauties. The book was followed by an actual exhibit, “Power in the Pacific,” which he curated at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in early 1945.

Peppered throughout Steichen’s collection are staged scenes of sailors seemingly happy at their work, reading or writing during “R & R,” mugging, or boasting about the day’s “kills.” Made to boost morale and reassure the homefront, photos of such antics no doubt also helped the men themselves momentarily transcend their circumstances. Such attempts at bravado and normalcy, however, are subverted by the raw and relentless evidence of the war in the other photos. The French writer Annie Leclerc points out that “sometimes it is necessary for men, in the face of real danger, to appear arrogant, hard-boiled, afraid of nothing. The moral error is when one starts taking one’s mask for oneself... A little grandstanding or pretending is not the evil; the evil is that one is fooled by pretense.”⁵ Such swagger was as needed then as it is transparent now.

WWII has become something of a national pastime in modern America, particularly with the war’s fiftieth anniversary and the gradual passing of the generation that lived through it—for many of us, including myself, our parents. Our fascination is evident in a seemingly endless procession of tributes, books, TV specials, and films. Why do we want to look at such images? War photographer Don McCullin calls it “appalled fascination.” William James noted that “showing war’s irrationality and horror is of no effect upon men. Rather, the horror makes for fascination.” Whatever the imperatives behind this impulse, in the end it is the sense of attraction and spectacle that

remains uppermost in our response. As Graham Clarke observed, “the image images the unimaginable and allows us to consume the horror from a safe distance.”⁶



Below left, Steichen's 1945 *Power in the Pacific* exhibit, and the cover of the popular paperback which featured most of the photos on these pages.

Posed heroic images like the one at right are rare in Steichen's WWII collection.

Maritime Museum Coll. P743, U. S. Navy photo.

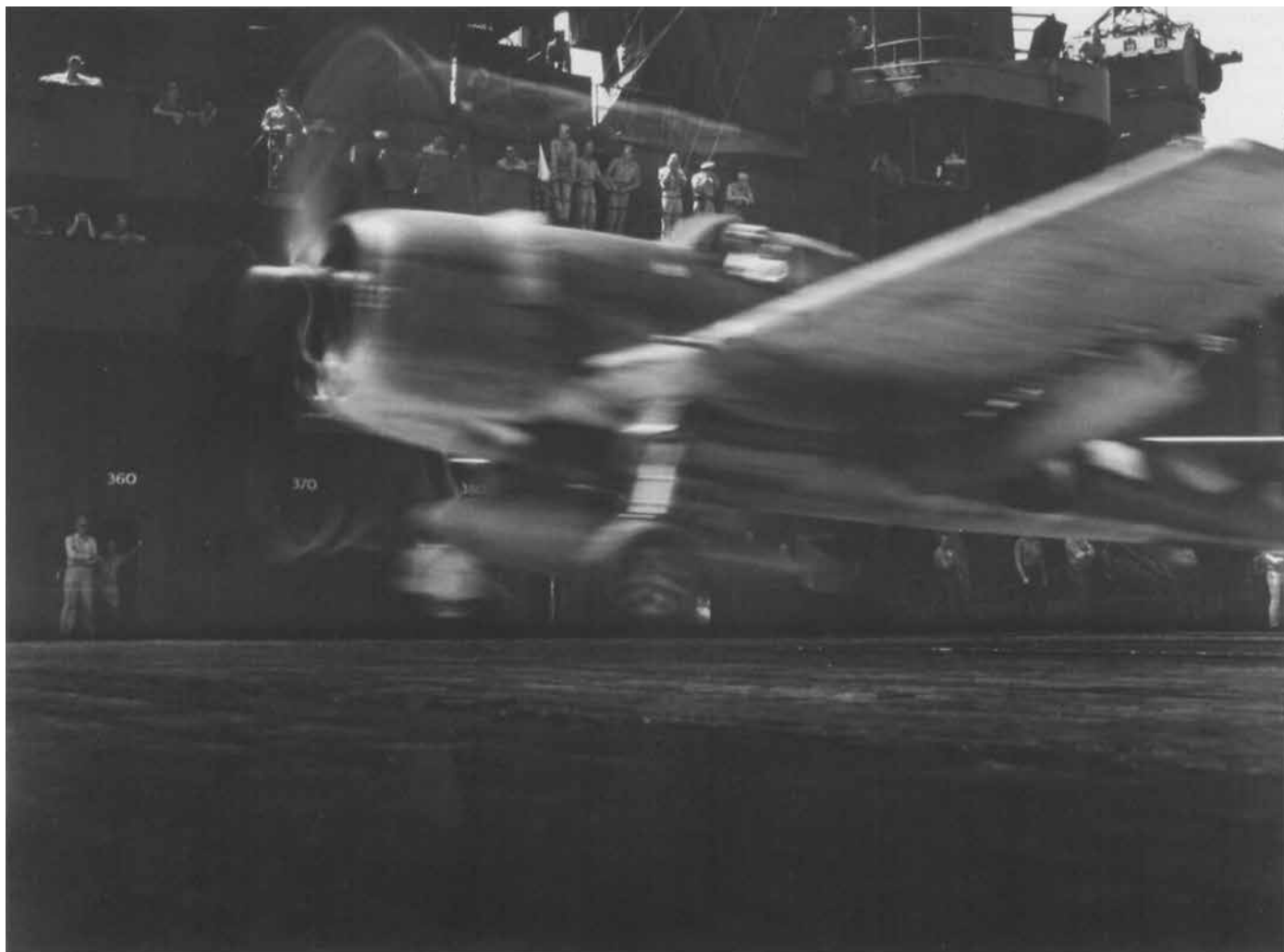


Yet I believe we should also encourage war photography to communicate a cautionary message. We *should* look, so as not to forget or romanticize the power of war. The photos on these pages are true to WWII's lived experience, and leave an indelible record for posterity. It is important to acknowledge the political motives behind them, not merely the surface information they contain, lest the period under examination become blanketed in exaggerations, half-truths, and myths that ultimately mock those who actually lived it. This is true of every image of armed conflict, since governments are always deeply invested in denying civilians a full view of it. To take any representation of war at "face value" only—including Steichen's fascinating and grim Pacific images—is to view war through an indiscriminating, glamorizing lens.

WWII was a war of unprecedented carnage. While much of this was judiciously edited out in New York and Washington, Steichen insisted on keeping a measure of its gritty reality in focus, through the directive he gave to his unit to photograph the war's "struggle and heartache."⁷ His intention was to make the war as human as possible. "If a real image of war could be photographed and presented to the world," he wrote, "it might make a contribution toward ending the specter of war."⁸ In the epigraph at the beginning of this essay, John Berger states that what we find meaningful in a photograph lends it both a past and a future. Steichen & Co. lent the war a past that was both real and varied in the men, situations, and events they depicted. Their images are kaleidoscopic, rendering the war through a prism that insists on more than one story, granting future generations a more complex understanding of this war and of war itself, as Steichen wanted them to.

NOTES

- 1 Steichen was a legendary figure in photography. An art photographer who, with Alfred Stieglitz, helped introduce America to abstract art, he led the Museum of Modern Art's photography department through the 1940s and '50s, and curated the best-attended photo exhibition in history, *The Family of Man*. His WWII unit consisted of Wayne Miller, Charles Kerlee, Fenno Jacobs, Horace Bristol, Victor Jorgensen, Barrett Gallagher, John Swope, and Paul Dorsey; all held naval commissions except Dorsey, assigned to the unit from the Marine Corps. In civilian life, these men worked in journalism, documentary photography, illustration, advertising, and marine photography.
- 2 In an astonishingly brief six months, Steichen pushed six million copies of the book through to publication, using all his connections in the photography and publishing industries. Initially intended as a gift from the Navy, it was sold for exactly its production cost—35 cents. A publisher's dream, for a time it sold at a rate of a million copies per month.
- 3 Christopher Phillips, *Steichen at War* (New York: Abrams, 1981).
- 4 See, for example, John Taylor, *War Photography: Realism in the British Press* (London: Routledge, 1991); Caroline Brothers' excellent *War and Photography* (London: Routledge, 1997); Jorge Lewinski, *The Camera at War: A History of War Photography 1848 to the Present* (London: W. & J. Mackay Ltd., 1978); Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London: Verso, 1989); and John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).
- 5 Quoted in Richard Klein's *Cigarettes are Sublime* (Duke University Press, 1993), 177.
- 6 Graham Clarke, in his review of Don McCullin's *Unreasonable Behaviour: An Autobiography in History of Photography Journal* (Spring 1992), 82-83.
- 7 Quoted in Phillips, 34.
- 8 This and quotes used in captions are from Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1984 [1963]), 11.



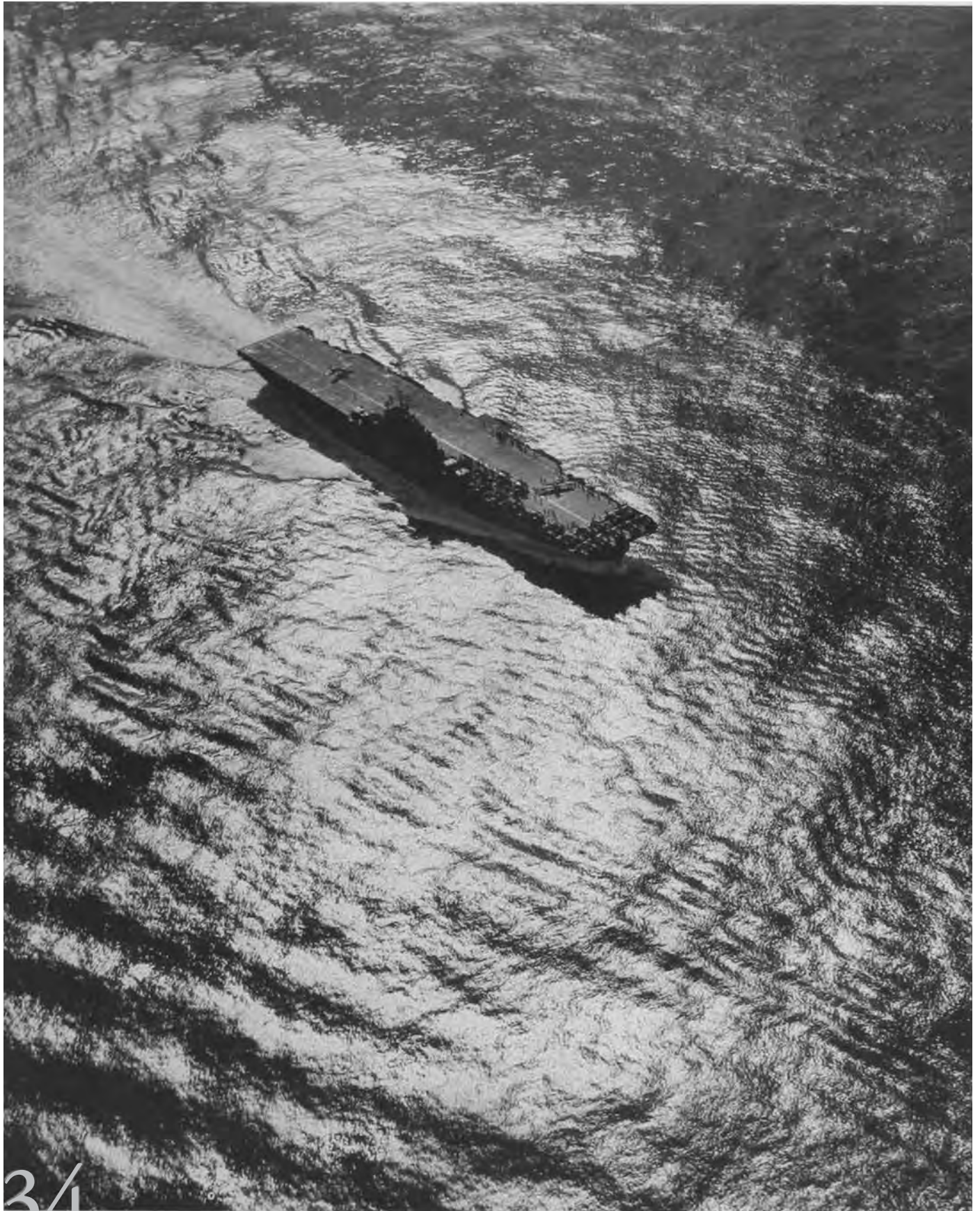
Above, “Hellcat Roars Off Flight Deck of ‘The Blue Ghost’—The USS Lexington.” At right, “Jap suicide plunge that missed and crashed alongside the USS Sangamon.”

Steichen sought to do more than merely record events. For example, in the November 1943 photo above, Steichen created an intentionally blurry effect. He wrote, “all the take-off pictures I had seen...gave no impression of the terrific on-rush as the planes started their run for the take-off. Nor did they suggest the noise, which is tremendous. Each thundering plane as it takes off emphasizes the contrast between the dynamic intensity of the moment at hand and the dreamlike memories of other places, other times, another life.”

Almost all the photographs Steichen assembled for the book and exhibits were taken by others; he edited the images, oversaw their printing, and released them to the media. The kamikaze at right was witnessed by an unknown Navy photographer on May 4, 1945.

Maritime Museum Coll. P 737 and P741, U. S. Navy photos.



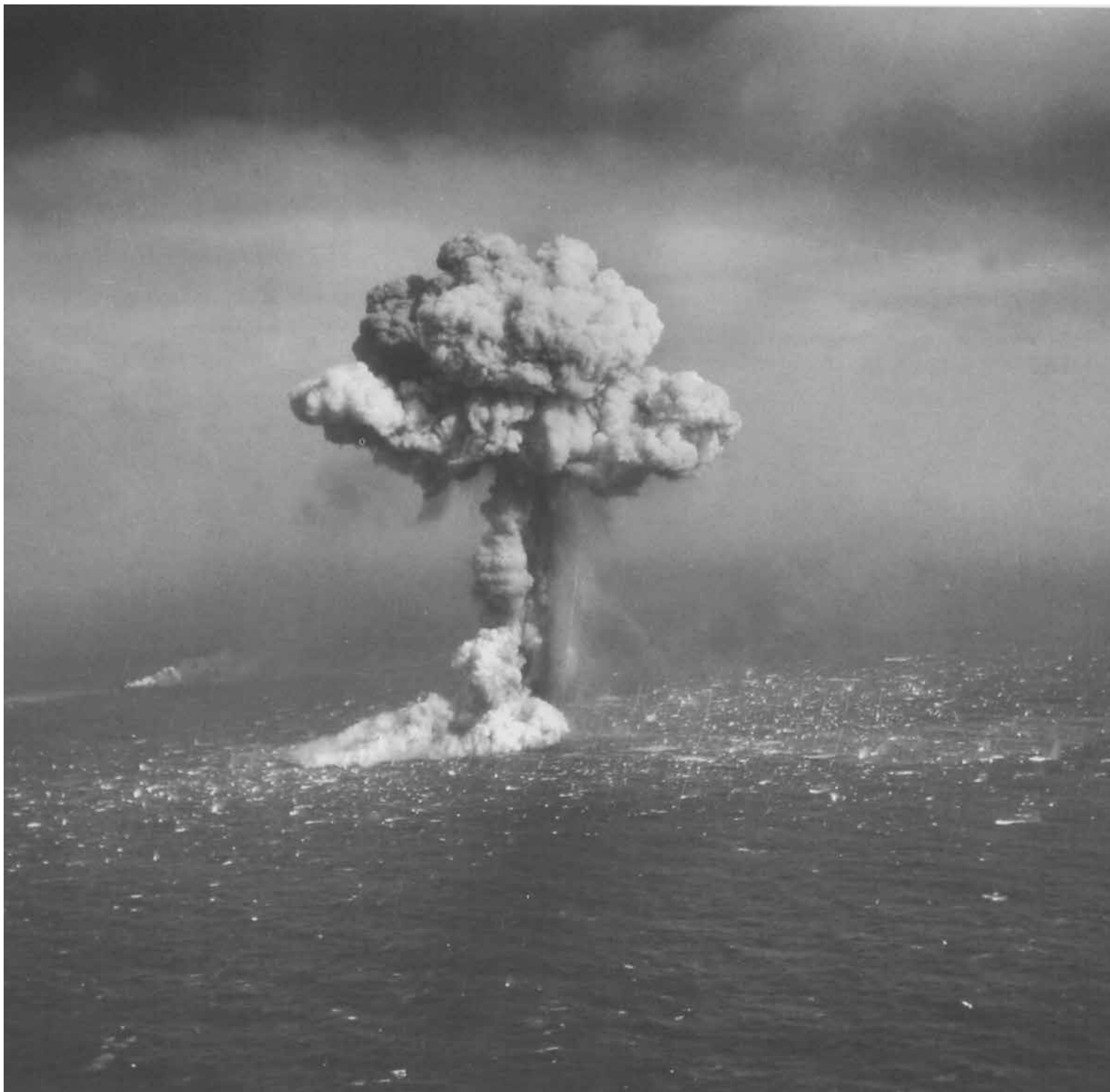




At left, "**The Fighting Lady.**" Above, an aerial view of the Marine amphibious invasion of Engebi Island.

Steichen's men found beauty in the midst of war. Charles Kerlee photographed the USS *Yorktown*, while Wayne Miller caught landing craft racing toward the beach through a smokescreen on February 18, 1944.

Maritime Museum Coll. P 737 and P741, U. S. Navy photos.



At left, Glenn Reed's photo, "**Five-Inch Guns Fire During a Night Attack—Solomons, 21 October, 1943.**" Above, a bomb explosion at sea, caught by an unknown photographer. In many of the sights the Pacific War created, Steichen thought, "reality is piling up images as fantastic and incongruous as those dished out by the surrealists."

Maritime Museum Coll. P 750 and P854, U. S. Navy photos.

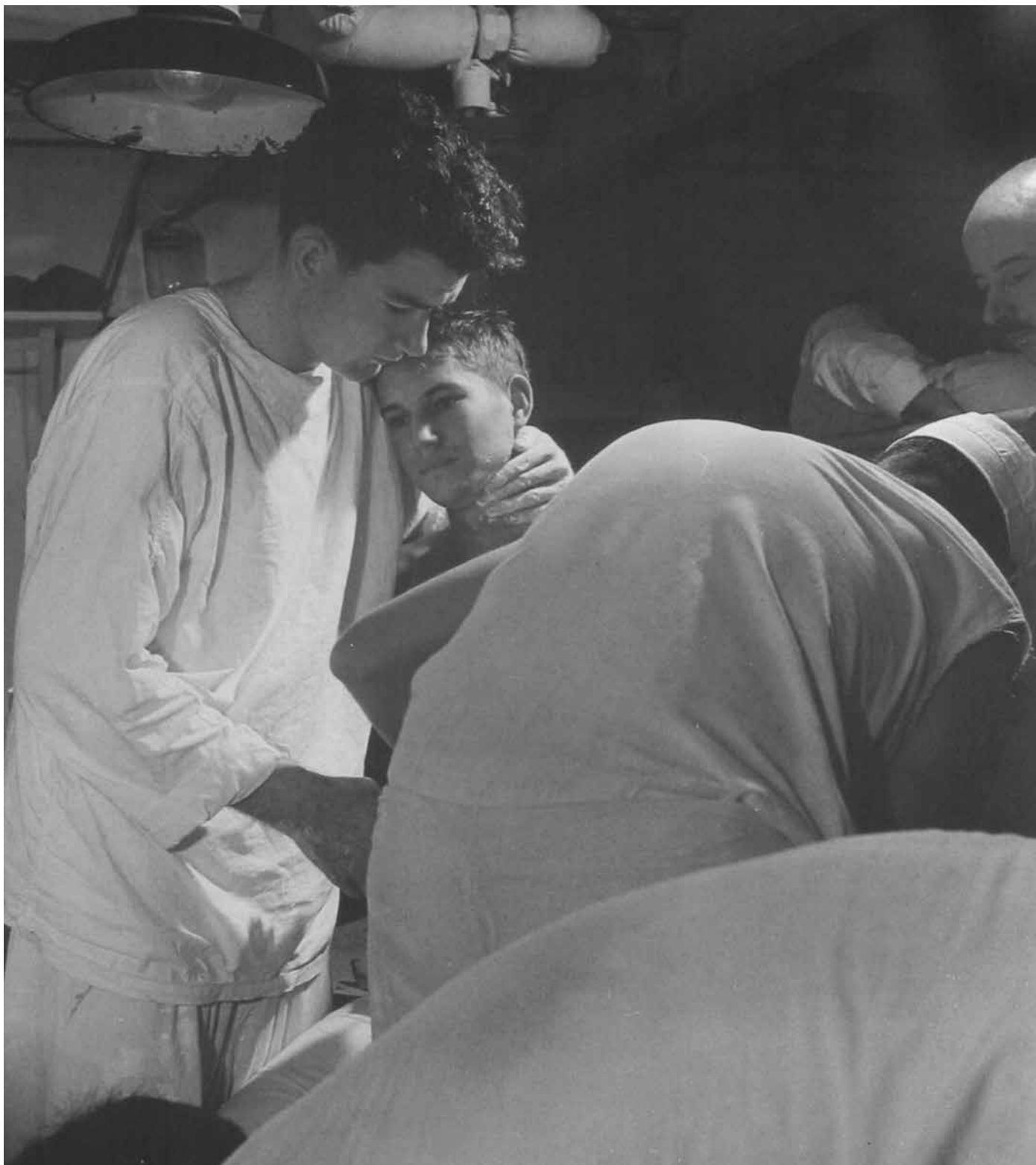




War's grim reality. At left, **"The Marines Inch Forward Against Suicidal Resistance on Peliliu Island,"** photographed by Marine Corps reservist John C. Smith on September 15, 1944. Above, a scene witnessed by an unknown USS *Lexington* photographer; **"To the Dead are Accorded the Honors that Go Only to Heroic Men of the Sea Who Die in Battle—Burial at Sea with Full Rite and Ritual While Their Shipmates, with all the Dignity of the Living, Pay Silent Tribute."**

Maritime Museum Coll. P 816 and P744, U. S. Marine Corps and Navy photos.





An unknown Coast Guard photographer snapped the survivors at left. Above, **“Doctors and Corpsmen Treat Okinawa Casualties on Hospital Ship Solace—May 1945.”** Victor Jorgensen captured the war’s human costs in Private J. B. Slagle’s shockingly young face, distant stare, and the medic’s tender embrace. Steichen instructed his men to “photograph everything that happens...above all, concentrate on the men. The ships and planes will become obsolete, but the men will always be there.”

Maritime Museum Coll. P 835 and P837, U. S. Coast Guard and Navy photos.

A landscape historian's
perspective:

Sunset Beach,

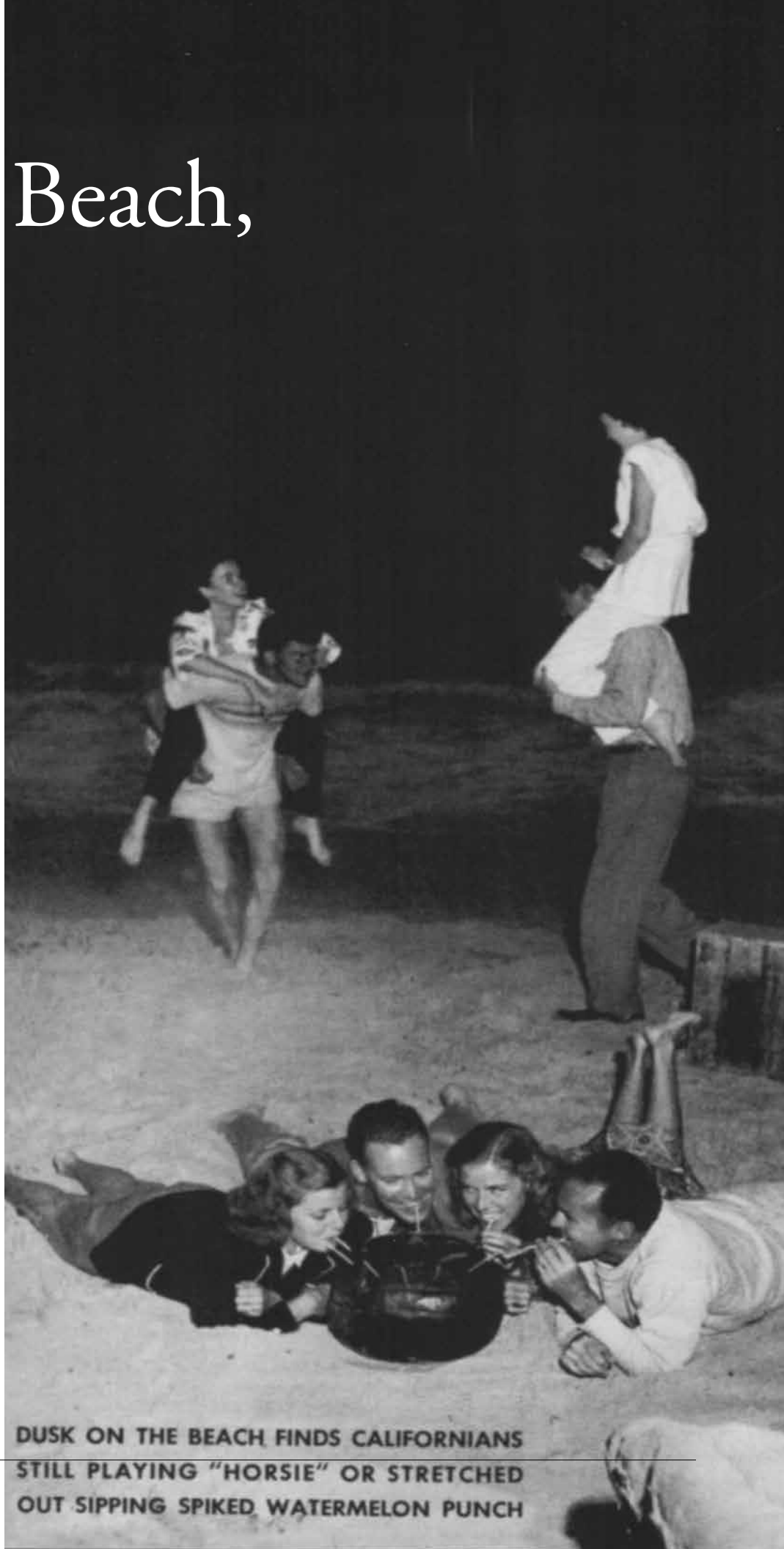
Studio Beach

John R. Stilgoe

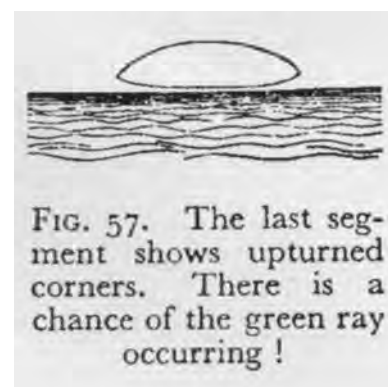
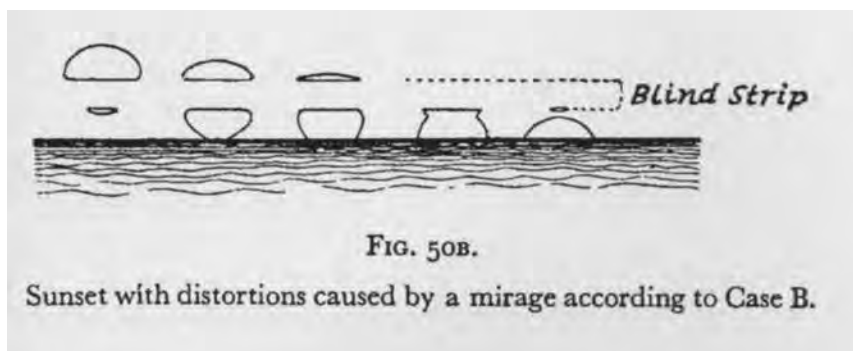
Sunset over the ocean. In American culture the phrase almost invariably connotes sunset over the Pacific. Some Easterners travel to Key West to see the sun go down over the Gulf of Mexico, but the main event lies a continent away. The West Coast sunset, frequently spectacular, quickly came to symbolize not just the Gold Rush, but fertile soils and gentle climates that rewarded hard work, a sort of gold-in-the-sky recompense for the travails of covered-wagon pioneering. What the first farmers, ranchers, and loggers valued soon became a stock tourist icon. Railroad companies pushed the sunset notion, publishing brochures and even a magazine named *Sunset*, and in time an entire seashore resort industry evolved in the golden glow of the sun dropping slowly into the sea. But not until Hollywood grasped its subtler, sexier overtones did the Pacific Coast sunset reshape the way all Americans viewed beaches.

Postwar beachgoers.
Life magazine, July 19, 1948.

42



DUSK ON THE BEACH FINDS CALIFORNIANS
STILL PLAYING "HORSIE" OR STRETCHED
OUT SIPPING SPIKED WATERMELON PUNCH



Illustrations from Minnaert's *Light and Color in the Outdoors*.

Who truly grasps the West Coast sunset? Millions see it every evening, and while most viewers accept it as a pleasant accent to the evening commute or something that enlivens west-facing windows, thousands throng parks not just to exercise or relax, but to enjoy the show. But the extraordinary East Coast bias of the national school system shackles most viewers who appreciate the beauty but know appallingly little about simple physics, optics, and meteorology that not only explain how the sunsets happen but make a handful of viewers aware of nuances most others miss. Our nation's East Coast bias originates in Britain, where most eighteenth-century educated observers lived in the environs of London and studied the sun rising from the sea. Unlike world-voyaging mariners, most British and American intellectuals fixated on the beauty and optics of the ocean sunrise, something that explains so many paintings, professional and amateur, and a lingering absence in schoolbooks and college curricula—the systematic method of analyzing the play of light over the sea.

Not surprisingly, a Dutchman wrote the premiere book on the subject. Long a favorite of deep-water mariners, M. G. J. Minnaert's *Light and Color in the Outdoors* appeared in Dutch in 1937, in English three years later, and in subsequent improved editions until 1968. Still in print in a handsomely illustrated paperback, the book deals with subjects often seen but rarely analyzed, say the color of diesel smoke against skies of different color, the nuances of mirage, and rainbows. The book is surprisingly useful for Pacific Coast observers of atmospheric effects over the ocean. "The following observations were carried out during a holiday on the flat, sandy coast of Holland, which runs virtually due north and south, and from where magnificent sunsets can be seen over the sea," Minnaert explains in the preface to a section called "Light and Color at the North Sea." "The phenomena are, of course, differently distributed over the day for differently oriented coasts: the essential point is the position of the sun relative to the surface of the sea." But the section based on his acute observations during a seashore vacation is only part of a larger whole in which the Dutch view of the sea—a sea that lies *to the west*—governs many observations.

In dealing with the green flash, the distortion of the sun setting over the sea, and above all with sunset over the sea, Minnaert makes clear his insistence that a bit of practiced observation yields tremendous dividends. In orienting sections of chapters around questions like "When is the color of the distant sky orange and when is it green?" he dissects the generic sunset into types that reward scrutiny. But his fascination with waves, reflection, and light-scattering

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produce a technique of analyzing the color of the sea too. “The color of the sea in the distance is therefore about the same as that of the sky at a height of 20-30 degrees, and therefore darker than the sky immediately above the horizon, and the more so because only part of the light is reflected.” And always Minnaert is not merely a landsman, not merely an accomplished alongshoreman. He is something of a mariner too, and makes clear that the absence of surf means that sunsets seen from a ship at sea are fundamentally different from sunsets seen from a beach. He even explains, in the most casual way imaginable, why someone taking passage from the United States’ West Coast to Australia will notice that above 40 degrees North longitude the sea seems olive green, that between about 30 and 40 degrees North the sea seems indigo, and that south of 30 degrees North it becomes ultramarine.¹ Anyone who follows his simple viewing procedures soon discovers that Pacific Coast sunsets vary by longitude as well as by local conditions.

What Minnaert explains once formed the armature of much public-school science teaching. Meteorology involved far more than predicting the weather: it included the whole range of mirage, and especially that phenomenon almost peculiar to the sea, looming. Physics meant Newtonian physics, and especially the Newtonian optics that once paralleled high-school geometry. Until about 1910 or so, liberal-arts college graduates knew at least something of the aesthetic superstructure built on such basics: the study of color in nature formed the skeleton of *gentleman’s chromatics*—what a gentleman knew of looking around that made looking at paintings so valuable. Nowadays few observers of nineteenth-century marine art make much sense of the weather the artists depict, let alone the impact of the weather—or approaching weather—on either the colors on the canvas or the set of the sails the vessels carry. What happened to the old curriculum that taught American schoolchildren how to grasp a sunset, how to talk about it from both scientific and artistic angles combined?

Beach photography was a cumbersome process until transformed by roll film cameras like the Kodak Brownie, top right, and its more sophisticated successors.

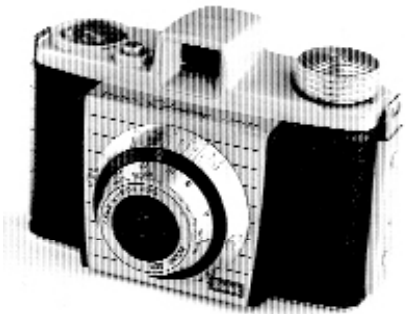


Almost certainly, popular photography is the culprit, for it skewed entire angles of vision. After George Eastman put roll-film cameras in the hands of professionals and amateurs alike, and certainly by 1910, photography divided into thirds. A handful of professionals continued using tripod-mounted, large-format, glass-negative-based cameras while most Americans embraced the box-camera-and-roll-film approach still called *snapshot photography*. But thousands of professionals and serious hobbyists alike soon shared the sophisticated, medium-format Kodak cameras that quickly altered concepts of photography and concepts of looking too. In an odd way, Americans are still recovering from the shock of acquiring sophisticated cameras and are still ignorant of the limitations camera manufacturers secretly impose. Exactly a century ago, popular photographers struggled with beach photography. Despite ever more complex cameras, many photographers experienced only frustration.

“The lack of success, which has disappointed many, may usually be traced to a lack of familiarity with or understanding of the local conditions interfering with ordinary manipulations,” wrote George D. Firmin in a July, 1901 *Photo-Miniature* essay entitled “Seashore Photography” that filled almost the entire magazine. “Atmospheric conditions, for instance, demand precautions unknown further inland. The intense illumination or light glare peculiar to the seashore and the strangeness of the subjects found there are real difficulties until known and mastered.” Step by step, Firmin detailed what he knew of seashore photography using sophisticated cameras, both tripod-mounted and hand-held, in different atmospheric conditions. He warned readers about the corrosive effects of salt air on cameras and exposed film, suggested making cardboard screens to block stray light from viewfinders, and outlined at great length the best combinations of lenses and shutter speeds when working with the long-distance views educated Americans appreciated.

For all its detail and seeming expertise, “Seashore Photography” in the end seems subtly biased, and indeed it is. Firmin worked from his experience along the New Jersey coast, and many of his suggestions derive from his locale. “The south Jersey beaches are usually flat and the breakers consequently small and distant, so that the camera will often be set up in the water,” he wrote in a chapter devoted to surf photography. Placing the camera very low to the water sometimes produced images with what he called *sparkle*, something difficult to achieve if mist fogged a lens set only a few inches above the sea. But finding sunsets over the ocean meant heading south to Cape May and aiming his camera over Chesapeake Bay.

Firmin waited and watched for six weeks at Cape May before he saw a suitable sunset. “Evening after evening I would watch the sunset often, on the ground-glass, and decide it was not just what I wished. Beautiful beyond compare, maybe, in itself, but I knew that when translated into monochrome it would be robbed of most of its glory. And there was possibly nothing else to convey the impressions to the person viewing the print.” In the end, Firmin concluded that “one must learn to forget color, or rather to see the colors as they will appear when photographed, in black and white,” and that the photographer seeking a spectacular sunset should wait until after a stormy day. Anyone reading Minnaert’s book carefully quickly discovers what so baffled Firmin: the lack of surf altered the whole appearance of the short-distance sunsets Firmin tried so hard to capture in black and white. Instead of watch-





ing sunsets over a bay, Firmin should have been watching sunrises over the ocean, and hoping for sunrises over the surf that magnifies the magnificence of sunrise and sunset. But however much he appreciated the beauty of his accidental efforts, in the end he admitted that “the whole effect is that of a warm summer moonlight night.”² And in his perplexity, and in the puzzlement of thousands of other popular photographers, something changed along East Coast beaches.

Firmin and other savants suggested that popular photographers eschew making images of atmospheric conditions and instead concentrate on short-distance beach subjects. An extraordinary shift occurred by 1915 or so, as well-equipped, otherwise skillful photogra-

phers shifted their attention away from long- and even middle-distance views. Part of the shift occurred for a quite simple reason: few photographers enjoyed getting up before dawn, preparing their cameras in the dark, and then struggling to capture the sunrise. Daybreak is, after all, often uncomfortable along-shore. The air is cool and damp, and breezes prove unpredictable. But more importantly, the state of the sea itself is often difficult to discern before sunrise, simply because the photographer cannot see the sea. Since most photographers worked along East Coast beaches, and since so-called national photographic magazines catered to East Coast readers, West Coast sunsets received markedly little attention from any but West Coast photographers. Those photographers quickly learned the good fortune of location. Sunset photography not only allows the photographer to set up by daylight and scrutinize the state of the sea, but American West Coast sunset photography frequently involves spectacular sunsets most evenings highlighted by waves and surf. But another part of the shift occurred almost by coincidence. As Firmin and other experts counseled aiming at short-distance subjects, the fledgling film industry moved from New Jersey to California. The coincidence proved momentous.

“Seashore Photography” advises popular photographers to focus on short-distance subjects like pleasure boats close inshore, flotsam and jetsam strewn along the beach, anchored yachts, and above all, people. So also do many other period magazine articles, and an outpouring of advice from the Eastman Kodak Company and other manufacturers of cameras and film.³ On both East and West Coasts, photographers began shifting their view sideways, ignoring atmospheric effects like sunsets, and ignoring ships offshore too. Instead they turned their attention and cameras to objects very close inshore—like the large rock off Rialto Beach or the tour boat off Catalina’s Moonstone



Beach at left—and in the middle distance alongshore—like the Point Fermin lighthouse, above. On-board photography of coastlines defeated many, even those equipped with sophisticated hand-held cameras. While West Coast photographers enjoyed the privilege of long afternoons and evenings when the setting sun illuminated the coast inshore from boats (East Coast photographers had to rise before dawn for such effects), they faced the enduring difficulties posed by over-exposure and an empty foreground—as in the Santa Barbara image below. Not surprisingly, then, photographers shortened their attention-distance more and more, driven not only by limitations of equipment (perhaps especially by the lack of color film) but by the examples created in Hollywood. They focused on people.

Hollywood used West Coast beaches as film sets, but perhaps more importantly, as the locale for publicity photographs that in time reshaped much American beach photography. The publicity images nowadays so carelessly accepted as icons of the silent-film era do more than emphasize actresses in





filmy costume and period pose: they make the beach and ocean only background, and the famed West Coast sunset mere sparkle in the lower left of the image, as in the image at bottom below. By the 1930s, Firmin's discovery that children make the best alongshore subjects had been subtly expanded and codified. Alongshore scenery had become the background of posed and candid portraits—like the 1940 image at left of Fisherman's Wharf, that is really a photograph of the woman watching the fishing boats. Cropping period photographs, even slicing them up with scissors, very frequently converts them from carefully contrived portraits to images of close-inshore or nearby-alongshore subjects, as a hand held over the right of the Fisherman's Wharf image demonstrates. By the beginning of World War II, popular beach photography, even snapshot beach photography, emphasized people, de-emphasized long- and even middle-distance views, and reoriented the design of cameras. More and more frequently, Americans purchased fixed-focus, snapshot cameras incapable of long-distance views. Camera manufacturers knew that snapshot portraits comprised most of the film being developed and printed, and they produced thousands of cameras

that focused best on subjects between six and ten feet away.

World War II and Cold War morale-boosting efforts converted the Hollywood-publicity-office beach photograph into an odd cross between the sexy pin-up image and the spirit-lifting wholesomeness of photos of GI girlfriends. Men photographed women, and perhaps more importantly, women photographed each other, on beaches, since beach-going offered a proper reason for wearing the revealing attire that so pleased far-off servicemen. Many sub-genres of beach photography combined in the early 1940s to create the morale-boosting snapshots so many elderly men keep in wallets and bureau drawers. 1930s West Coast beach athletics, especially races, for example, solidified the notion that men and women in at least some beach photographs ought to be doing something other than lying on blankets or staring out to sea. But not until the late 1940s did the power



of West Coast beach culture become clear to the entire American public. “The one place where people of all ages and temperaments feel free to kick over the traces is a public beach,” opined *Life Magazine* in its July 19, 1948 issue. “When hot weather comes Americans get beach fever and shed most of their inhibitions along with their clothes.” *Life* wondered at the postwar willingness of Americans, especially men, to “show off” in almost nothing, and found all sorts of “extra-aquatic diversions” worth photographing.⁴ Nothing of seascape, landscape, or atmospheric effects shapes the long *Life* article, only a focus on postwar exuberance during the Berlin airlift and an emerging openness toward frivolity, skin, sexuality, and image-making. Postwar Americans had become as unselfconscious as the children Firmin recommended as subjects a half-century earlier.

The willingness of West Coast beach-going women to be photographed, even by men unknown to them, jars the contemporary undergraduates whom I teach, ignorant of the postwar confidence of women and the freedom enjoyed by professional and popular photographers alike. For decades, American women and men often sought refuge in numbers when a friend asked to photograph them—like the people above, patiently sitting in the shallows. Uneasy in bathing costumes, perhaps uneasy on the beach itself, they confronted cameras cautiously. But anyone scanning thousands of period images detects a greater easiness among West Coast subjects, an easiness born of greater familiarity with beaches perhaps, and one certainly assisted by familiarity with beaches, thanks to their use by Hollywood as outdoor photography studios. In a September 1950 *Popular Photography* article entitled “Your Summer Studio . . . The Beach,” Herman Quick used the photographs of Peter Gowland to explain the revolution wrought by Hollywood and World War II, while offering straightforward techniques for photographing West Coast beachgoers.

In accompanying Gowland to the beach, Quick accompanied a master willing to teach advanced amateurs, the well-equipped and thoughtful photographers nowadays designated *popular photographers*. “The beach has everything, character studies, outdoor portraits, pinup boys flexing their big muscles; leap-frogging enthusiasts, gamesters of every variety, surrealists burying each other’s bodies in the wet sand; teenagers, birds, fish, sea shells, clouds, boats,





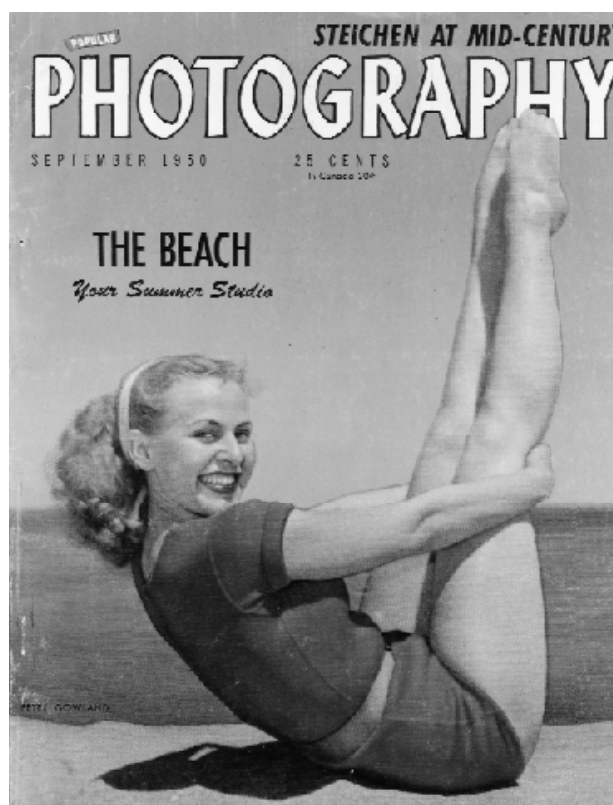
planes, rafts, colorful beach umbrellas and swimming gear . . . splashing waves and the mighty churning surf,” Gowland announced, but he put the great surf last on his list. For Gowland, for Quick, and for the readers of *Popular Photography* by 1950, *beach photography* meant the photography of people. And for many young women, especially in California, beach photography meant the possibility of being discovered by acting agents or studios—just as eighteen-year-old Marilyn Hampton won a role in the Paramount film *Tripoli* after her photograph won the 1950 “Miss Photo Flash” contest.⁵ Nowadays the 1945 to 1955 period of West Coast beach photography proves hard for university undergraduates to analyze. Many find themselves taken aback by the brief bikinis Gowland recorded for the 1950 *Popular Photography* article—they think that such brief suits materialized only in the late 1960s, after the wildly popular *Bikini Beach* films—and they cannot imagine young men and women being “discovered” on beaches and thrust into modeling and acting careers. To them, the beach culture of 1950 seems very long ago, almost beyond the horizon, yet subtly contemporary.

Each snapshot turn up in dining-room closets, old suitcases, filing cabinets, and especially in antique shops. Sometimes dated, often not, they provide both professional scholar and enterprising adventurer with portals into rewarding subjects. Analyze the snapshot at right, entitled “Looks Like Bob made out.” Square format—120 or 620 film—and not well exposed, certainly, and perhaps the fixed-focus camera had begun to leak light. But where on the West Coast? Maybe more importantly, when? Consider the swimsuits, scrutinize the hairstyles, note that only one of the four subjects looks at the camera. What implications lie here, in this ordinary, poorly composed image? It is three thousand miles away from Firmin’s *Photo-Miniature* advice and light years away from Minnaert’s precise observations of atmospheric light and color, but is it 1938 or 1945 or 1960? In the end, Bob and his companions show us something about how West Coast beaches changed American popular culture, as photography shifted our gaze from sunsets and surf to people.



NOTES

- 1 M. G. J. Minnaert, *Light and Color in the Outdoors*, trans. Len Seymour (1937: rev. ed.: New York: Springer-Verlag, 1993), 337-345.
- 2 George D. Firmin, “Seashore Photography,” *Photo-Miniature* III (July 1901), 151-177.
- 3 John R. Stilgoe, “Popular Photography, Scenery Values, and Visual Assessment,” *Landscape Journal* 3 (Autumn 1984), 111-122.
- 4 “Fun on the Beach,” *Life* 25 (July 19, 1948), 65-70. For an analysis of this period of beach-going, see Stilgoe, *Alongshore* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), esp. 335-367.
- 5 Herman Quick and Peter Gowland, “Your Summer Studio—The Beach,” *Popular Photography* 27 (September, 1950), 34-39, 93-95.



A westerner's perspective:

West of “The West”

San Diego's Beach as a Frontier

Mark Allen



Though there are no cowboys visible, beaches are part of the American West. These beachgoers, lounging in La Jolla around 1906, show that local shores were once undervalued places, where people could find a refuge or an economic foothold.

San Diego Historical Society Photograph Coll.

Beaches, as Greg Denning pointed out on the first pages of this issue, are “in-between” zones, places of transition between land and sea. As he has written elsewhere regarding beachcombers, beaches are consequently often places of possibility for “in-between” sorts of people. There, neither the elaborately constructed social worlds of the land nor the rules of shipboard life completely hold sway. Consider one well-known La Jolla beach, for example. There, anyone may stroll naked down the sand without attracting attention, despite the fact that it is quite as illegal to do so as it is to parade naked through downtown San Diego, and has been for most of Black's Beach's four decades as a nudist haven. To one degree or another, every beach is an intermediate zone between the more firmly ordered social worlds of sea and land. Instead of being No Man's Land, however, the beaches of San Diego—and the shores of the American West¹ in general—have more often been Every Man's Land. Today, though to a lesser extent than in the past, local beaches remain places where “in between” people can congregate. The line of men and women seated along the seawall on any sunny day at Ocean Beach—homeless, addicted, or just unwilling to bend to society's expectations—marks a frontier at the farthest reach of the long arm of the law. Throughout history, many such “frontiersmen” have sought refuge on beaches. Others have used them as stopovers on seaward journeys, while others still have made beachheads there

on landward journeys to firmer footing in Southern California society. To see the latter phenomenon, one may climb the steps from the Ocean Beach seawall onto the pier; piers, like beaches, are places where the line between land and sea blurs. On the pier, part-time fishermen discuss their catch in Vietnamese or Spanish, as they pull resources from the ocean to supplement the incomes of families working to “make it” ashore.

A frontier, in this sense of the word, is a border region where two worlds intermingle. The more usual use of *frontier*, of course, is to refer to the myth and reality of the phenomenon of American expansion from the Eastern seaboard to the Pacific’s shores. But beaches, despite being as far Out West as it is possible to go, play no part in our national myth of the West. As any watcher of westerns knows, cowboys gallop through the sage, not the surf, and the only dunes behind which Indians lay in ambush are in deserts.

The same historical currents that shaped the inland heart of the American West, however, have also gnawed at its perimeter, although Western historians seldom consider their arid region’s wet edge.²

Likewise, most maritime historians ignore the breakers that fringe their chosen area of study, except when tracing vessels to unfortunate ends. Pacific Coast beaches are worth reconsidering in the context of the American West, given the degree to which they share the West’s distinctive regional traits, and because they played a special role in western history. Consider these features which beaches share with the inland West: both were the last places where Native Americans enjoyed near-complete freedom to pursue their old ways independent of white society; both have been a dumping ground for unwanted people and wastes; both were dominated by extractive industries subject to erratic boom-and-bust economic cycles and rapid resource depletion, both remain places where—compared to the rest of the country—federal and state governments have played outsize roles, and both are places of extraordinary convergence where cultures intersect and merge.³ Also, San Diego and other western beaches offered a foothold for ethnic groups otherwise denied entry to mainstream society. Some examples drawn from San Diego’s past hint at the richness which further examination of the relationship between the American West’s shores and its interior may reveal.

What has transpired on San Diego’s sand in certain respects recalls the touchstone work on the history of the American West, Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1893 paper “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” One of Turner’s theses is that the frontier functioned as a “safety valve,” a constantly westward-moving zone where people ill-suited to a settled life in the East could find escape, and a true land of opportunity where poor but entrepreneurial people could gain a foothold.⁴ In this sense, beaches have functioned essentially as a kind of static frontier, a margin between worlds where the survival of “marginal” people is possible, where newcomers can make an economic beachhead (from which they move *eastward* into the West), and new cultural blendings form.

One distinctive attribute of the West as a region is the fact that its native people were the last in the United States to maintain their traditional livelihoods largely apart from whites. For San Diego’s Kumeyaay people from the mid-nineteenth through the early-twentieth century, the beach was one of very

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few places where they could harvest food resources in the old ways, unmolested by burgeoning private property restrictions. This was due to benign neglect of the beach by the white population, which perceived the shore as a nice place to visit but a harsh place to live, a view which predominated in San Diego until the early twentieth century, and much later along lonelier stretches of coast. Until then, its resources were largely up for grabs. Delfina Cuero, a Kumeyaay woman born about 1900, recalled camping on the beach during shellfish gathering forays: “I remember when I was very young, we used to go and look for abalone. [Elders] used to show me how to find them and get them off the rocks. We used to hunt for fish, shellfish and other stuff in the ocean and along the edge of the ocean around Ocean Beach. There are so many houses here now I can’t find my way any more,” she added plaintively, identifying the problem that would close the long chapter on the beach as a place for seasonal resource harvesting by her people.⁵ She likewise recalled that “Before there were a lot of houses there, we could get manzanita in Pacific Beach between Mission Bay and the ocean.”⁶ Later, “our family went down to the beach below Ensenada when we couldn’t get to the San Diego beaches any more.”⁷ But for a substantial stretch of time, her beach was a place of refuge at the seaward margin of white society.

Other Native Americans used the beach as their transition zone between a past on land and a future at sea. Though the practice was apparently not widespread locally, some Kumeyaay men, whose native culture was essentially a landbound one, chose to seek a new living far from the rapidly narrowing options they faced on land.⁸ The San Diego *Herald* reported in 1856 that “the brig Sarah McFarland, Captain Osborne, arrived...from San Francisco. She is bound on a whaling cruise, and put in for hands—Indians.”⁹ Though these enterprising native San Diegans vanish from view after they cross the beach, Native Americans from other non-seafaring cultures who likewise disappear into the Pacific whaling grounds reappear in surprising places. When the aged whaling bark *Tamerlane* wrecked on Hawaii’s Big Island in a nighttime squall in 1892, a seaman who swam to shore at dawn after a miserable night clinging to the mizzen shrouds was identified in the newspaper as a Paiute—an individual whose people hailed from east of the Sierras.¹⁰ While the conquest of their lands was undoubtedly a factor behind these men choosing to go to sea, interpreting their choice solely as an act of desperation by victims of conquest does them a disservice. They actively took advantage of the chronic labor shortage on whalers, and chose to climb outside the box into which their people were being forced. Pushed to the margin, they made the beach their place of transition seaward.

Another characteristic that distinguishes the West is its Hispanic heritage. Spanish expansion north from Mexico on the Pacific Coast created the first of many beachheads where beleaguered people clung before moving inland toward greater security and stability. After brief visits by seaborne explorers from 1542 on, Spain’s expansion along the West’s edge was led not by powerful conquistadors on horseback but by soldiers and sailors—mostly not themselves Spanish and often very sick—stumbling out of boats to claim land in the name of their king. Presidio- and mission-building came later. In the spring and early summer of 1769 the Spanish empire’s representatives were scurvy-ridden men huddled beneath sail canvas on a San Diego beach, sickly strangers who depended for months on the unpredictable hospitality and trading preferences of their Kumeyaay hosts.¹¹ “The whole expedi-

tion,” wrote survivor Miguel Costansó,

which had been composed of more than ninety men, was reduced to only eight soldiers and as many sailors who were in any condition to help guard the ships, handle the boats, protect the camp, and assist the sick.¹²

The in-between space of their beach camp, where the slowly recovering expeditionaries struggled to impress the people on whose food they depended for survival, gave the beach a new role as a site for negotiations and deal-making between the worlds of ship and shore.

The shore played a crucial role in offering beachheads for several ethnic groups. Along the beach resource rights were free, divorced from land ownership, a situation analogous to the mining laws that shaped the West. Since coastal fisheries required only inexpensive small boats, and the beach was free, they offered niches for impoverished newcomers with fishing skills. Ethnic groups living on or near the water’s edge found—for a time at least—the economic opportunity that the American frontier promised. The pioneering California fisheries scientist David Starr Jordan wrote of immigrant

This “exotic” scene was an everyday sight in 1880s San Diego. This is probably *Sun Yun Lee*, the largest fishing junk built on local beaches.

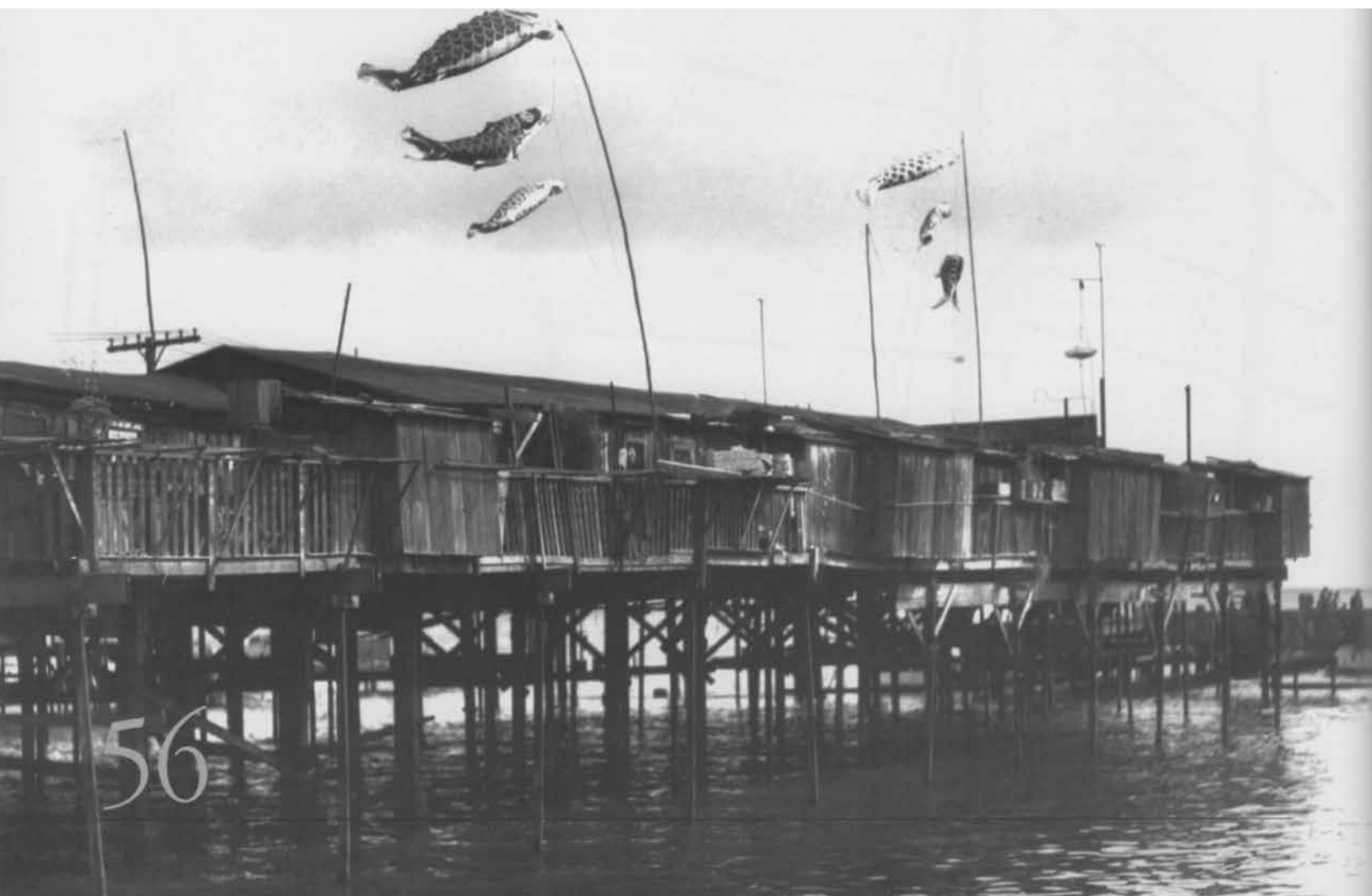
Courtesy Nash Coll., Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.



fishers in 1879 that they “refused nothing for which they were sure of finding a market, from the whale to the abalone.” Their success, in the nineteenth century, depended on their ability to market products to members of their own ethnic groups.¹³ Those who made beachheads for themselves included Chinese fishermen, whose shacks teetered on and over the bay’s edge by the 1860s. Although they sold some of their catch to white merchants, their economic and cultural attention remained riveted on China, to which they exported their dried catch, while on San Diego’s beaches in the 1880s they constructed junks that were exact replicas of craft back home—but built of locally-available redwood. In the 1890s, as the Chinese were being legislated out of abalone gathering, Japanese immigrants took over that niche. They set up tents and abalone drying racks on the beaches, worked in canneries, and developed the tuna fishery. They, too, used the beach as a foothold on their climb toward a acceptance in the landward community—a climb interrupted by WWII and internment, which ended their involvement in fishing. Likewise, whaling stations inside the mouth of San Diego Bay—among a string of California outposts which sprang up after 1854 to intercept migrating gray whales—offered Portuguese Azoreans a local beachhead. They, and the mainland Portuguese who began arriving in the mid-1880s, would later move on to tuna fishing and prosperity.¹⁴ Italian immigrant fisher, too, settled by the Bay and began selling fish to local markets, especially after many were burned out of their San Francisco homes by the 1906 earthquake and fire. The members of these ethnic groups were prospectors who, instead of wandering the deserts with burros in tow, searched for their own Mother Lodes in small boats.

Japanese families, their homes suspended between land and water, fly carp flags in honor of Boys’ Day. The San Diego end of the Coronado Bridge towers over the site today.

Courtesy Don and Carol Estes.





Japanese abalone drying racks and tents on a San Clemente Island beach, around 1913.

Courtesy San Diego Public Library.

The West's ghost towns are famous examples of the effects that boom-and-bust cycles have had on communities of people who depended on extractive industries. Fishermen rode alongside miners and loggers on the same rising-then-plunging economic rollercoaster, for they shared the problems that followed the overzealous pursuit of the rich resources of a suddenly "opened" region. The shore whalers were a case in point: like bison hunters inland, they helped drive their prey to the brink of extinction, and drove themselves out of business in the process.¹⁵ The rapidity with which whalers and fishermen exploited, and then expended, newly-discovered fisheries parallels the California Gold Rush and resource rushes like it, that ultimately left only the ghosts of mining camps behind on the West's landscape.

The West, too, features far more land under government control than other American regions, giving government a comparatively outsize role; likewise, resource management and allocation decisions made in distant government centers have had a disproportionate effect on beaches, fisheries, and the people dependent on them. Near-shore fisheries played an early role in the larger Western story of the deployment of state and federal power in a conquered land. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, fisheries management was among the first arenas in which the government reined in private enterprise. The reason, however, had little to do with managing natural resources—instead, it was about forcing the "the Heathens out of the bay," as the San Diego *Union* gracefully put it, and ending environmentally-destructive Chinese net-fishing practices popularly believed to be destroying new fisheries dominated by white immigrants. The "Foreign Fisher's tax" of 1860, aimed at the Chinese, had a fine Western pedigree; it was modeled on the foreign miner's tax that had helped push the Chinese from the goldfields (and into fishing) in the previous decade. Legislative weapons aimed as much at scoring political points as at managing natural resources have proliferated ever since. By the early 1890s California's Chinese fishermen were virtually legislated out of existence.¹⁶ Today, government continues to play a substantial role alongshore in, for example, the considerable powers over beachfront propertyowners wielded by the California Coastal Commission—not to mention environmental restrictions on fisheries.

The final noteworthy characteristic shared by the West and its beaches is the role both have played as places of extraordinary convergence among cul-



Portuguese kids on their beach at Roseville.

Courtesy Portuguese Historical Center.

tures. New cultural possibilities continue to emerge there. One sees this first on San Diego shores in *Two Years Before the Mast*, when Richard Henry Dana describes his time spent ashore, deposited on the beach to cure cow hides prior to carrying them back to Boston. For Dana and his mates in 1835, the beach was a temporary job site, one that he found utterly different from shipboard life, and which also bore little resemblance to the settled society he knew ashore. “In the twinkling of an eye I was transformed from a sailor into a ‘beach comber,’” he remarked, noting with considerable understatement that “the novelty and the comparative independence of the life were not unpleasant.”¹⁷ The experience tugged his

New England spirit in unaccustomed directions, less from the fact of his being thrust into a new environment than from his thought-provoking interactions with other beach dwellers—the Kanakas—unlike himself except in sharing the same in-between space. Dana was the first of many California visitors to find an alternative lifestyle on the beach appealing, in the communal sharing and carefree lives of the Hawaiians sojourning there. “The Sandwich Islanders, a dozen or twenty in number, who had worked for the other vessels and been paid off when they sailed, were living on the beach, keeping up a grand carnival,” occupying a remodeled oven.¹⁸ Though he expressed admiration for his Kanaka companions, Dana never succumbed to the stirrings of a new kind of man he may have felt awakening in himself. The birth of that fully-formed new man on Southern California beaches would have to wait for over a century and the emergence of surfer culture.

This place where cultures converge has also been a place of negotiations between worlds. In the space of the beach, the powers that customarily dominate land or sea rarely hold sway for long, before ebbing back to their natural spheres on the ship’s decks or the city’s streets. But the beachcombing life is temporary too. Dana observed his Hawaiian friends drive the *Pilgrim*’s captain nearly to distraction as they forced him to negotiate at length for their labor. (He noted with amusement that they required Captain Thompson to take care to refer to their leader as *Mister Manini*.) On that in-between space the Kanakas momentarily held significant power, but all parties in these negotiations were equally aware that eventually they would leave the beach behind. Throughout its history, the beach has been a temporary lodgement, a transition zone.

On the wave-washed sands of San Diego, and all along the strip of coast to the west of the West, the same patterns appear which distinguish the American West as a region. Beaches have played their own distinctive role in that history. Though seaweed and tumbleweeds seem to have little in common, it is time that the fringe of the West and its heartland discover that they share a distinctive past.

NOTES

- 1 Definitions of the region referred to here as the American West are problematic. For example, in *The Atlas of the New West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997) “The West” lies to the east of the Sierra and deserts—despite the fact that the aridity which the authors identify as a defining regional characteristic is also a feature of coastal Southern California life.
- 2 While Patricia Nelson Limerick has observed that in American history, “Attention to the Pacific Ocean is as necessary as attention to the Atlantic Ocean,” that expansive view of the West’s history is the exception, and the attention devoted thus far has not extended to beaches. Limerick, *Something in the Soil* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 24.
- 3 The author is indebted to Limerick for this list of attributes, a longer version of which appears in *Something in the Soil*, 18-24. Considerable inspiration for this essay also comes from an unpublished 2001 article by A. C. W. Bethel, “Between Ship and Shore: California’s Beaches as Frontiers.”
- 4 Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: H. Holt & Company, 1920). Much simplified, a central tenet of Turner’s argument is that the westward-advancing frontier is the most significant characteristic of the West as a region. Once that frontier could be said to be “closed,” however, in 1890 census data, the West consequently lost its significant role in American history. The weaknesses of this thesis, particularly its tendency to arbitrarily divide the modern West from all that went before, have been probed at length by “New Western Historians,” notably Limerick in *Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987).
- 5 Delfina Cuero (as told to Florence Shippek), *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero* (Morongo Indian Reservation: Malki Museum Press, 1970), 27.
- 6 Ibid., 31.
- 7 Ibid., 56.
- 8 Although they employed reed boats in bays and estuaries, the Kumeyaay do not appear to have been seafarers, unlike some others to the north and south. Evidence suggesting otherwise has been gathered by ethnographer Florence Shippek, but has not yet been published. Florence Shippek, personal communications, 2002.
- 9 San Diego *Herald*, February 9, 1856.
- 10 *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* (Honolulu), February 11, 1892. The author is indebted to Captain Richard Rogers for this reference. The fact that the reporter makes no special remark about the Paiute suggests a wider maritime presence for Native Americans from non-maritime cultures than has generally been acknowledged. Other Indigenous maritime peoples of the Eastern Pacific, notably Aleuts and Native Hawaiians, were longstanding participants in otter hunting and whaling.
- 11 Mark Allen, “So Extended and Painful a Voyage: A Narrative of the 1769 Journey of the *San Carlos* to San Diego,” *Mains’l Haul* (hereinafter *MH*) 36 (Winter 2000), 10-11.
- 12 Miguel Costansó, *Diario Histórico De Los Viajes De Mar, Y Tierra...* (Mexico City: Imprenta del Superior Gobierno, 1770), n.p.; author’s translation.



“Hide Park,” Dana’s beach. When he returned 24 years later, he mused on the transitory nature of beach life: “They were gone, all, and left no mark behind...poor Kanakas and sailors, the refuse of civilization, the outlaws and beachcombers of the Pacific!” The San Diego Yacht Club stands near the site today.

1854 drawing by William Meyers,
Bancroft Library Coll.

- 13 David Starr Jordan, "The Fisheries of the Pacific Coast," in George Brown Goode, ed., *The Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Congress, Senate, Forty-Seventh Congress, First Session [1879]), 593.
- 14 On San Diego's Chinese fishermen, see Murray K. Lee, "The Chinese Fishing Industry of San Diego," *MH* 35 (Spring/Summer, 1999), 6-21; Arthur F. McEvoy, "In Places Men Reject: Chinese Fishermen at San Diego, 1870-1893," *Journal of San Diego History* (hereinafter *JSDH*) 23 (Fall 1977), 12-24. On San Diego's Japanese fishermen, see Donald H. Estes, "Silver Petals Falling: Japanese Pioneers in San Diego's Fishery," *MH* 35 (Spring/Summer 1999), 28-46; Estes, "Kondo Masaharu and the Best of All Fishermen," *JSDH* 32 (Summer 1977), 1-19; Estes, "'Offensive Stupidity' and the Struggle of Abe Tokunosuke," *JSDH* 28 (Fall 1982), 248-268. On San Diego and West Coast shore whaling, see *MH* 37 (Winter, 2001). See also William Richardson, "The Fishermen of San Diego," (Master's thesis, San Diego State University, 1981). On immigrant fisheries and their economic and ecological ramifications, see McEvoy, *The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and Law in the California Fisheries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
- 15 The gray whale population crash was hastened by overhunting at calving lagoons in Baja California, while the rise of the petroleum industry simultaneously undercut demand for whale products. Georgia Fox, "Nineteenth Century Whaling on California Shores," *MH* 37, 17.
- 16 Federal restrictions on Chinese immigration included the 1882 Scott Act and 1892 Geary Act, which contained wording specifically aimed at those "taking, drying, or otherwise preserving shell or other fish." McEvoy, *The Fisherman's Problem*, 112.
- 17 Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840: rev. ed.: Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie Press, 1965), 147.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 143, 150.

The new man cometh: "Hot Curl," sculpted on Windansea Beach in 1963. Surfer culture produced a new American male identity, as the cowboy had—just as you will meet "cowboys" in Iowa, you can find "surfers" in Illinois.

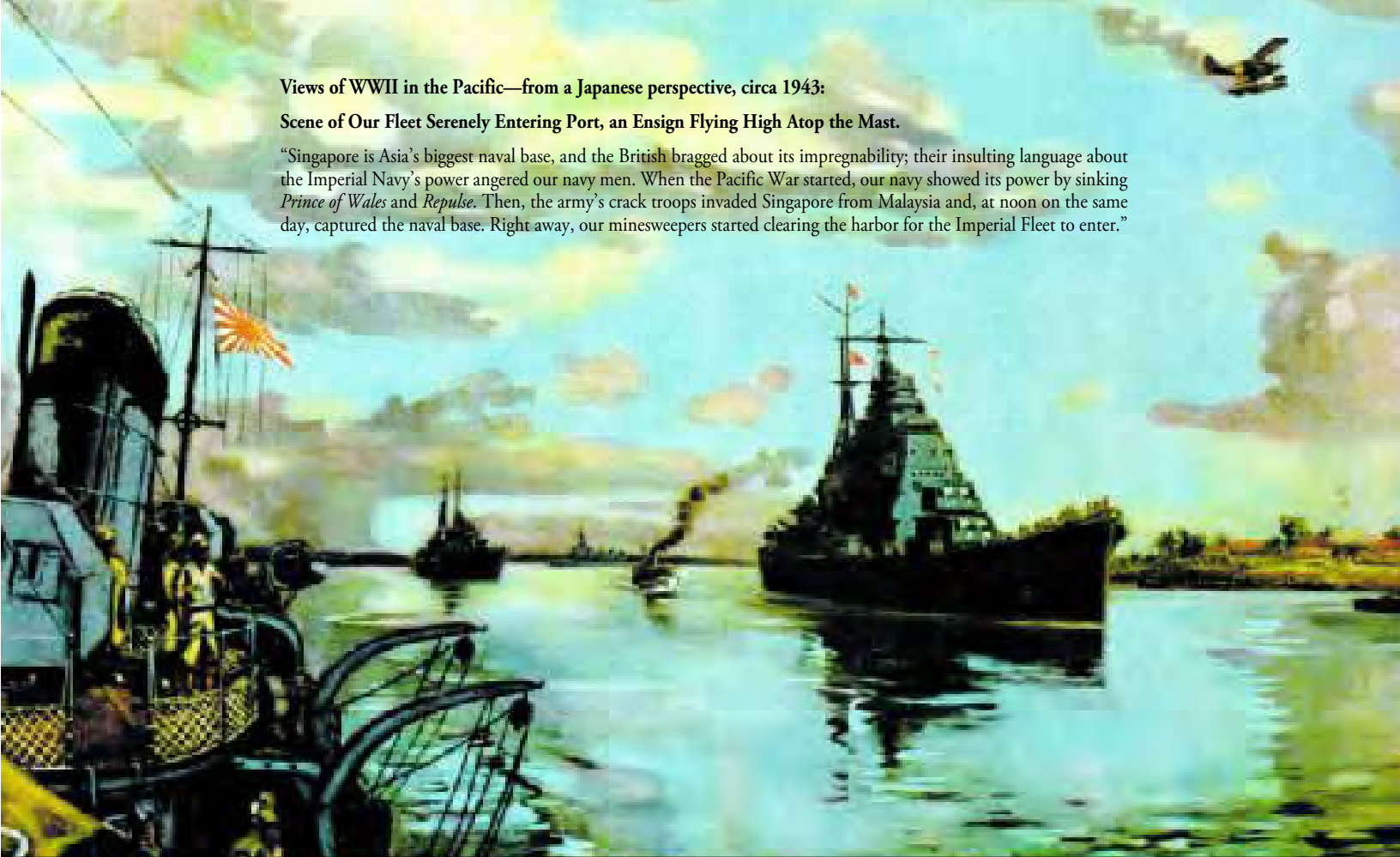
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Views of WWII in the Pacific—from a Japanese perspective, circa 1943:

Scene of Our Fleet Serenely Entering Port, an Ensign Flying High Atop the Mast.

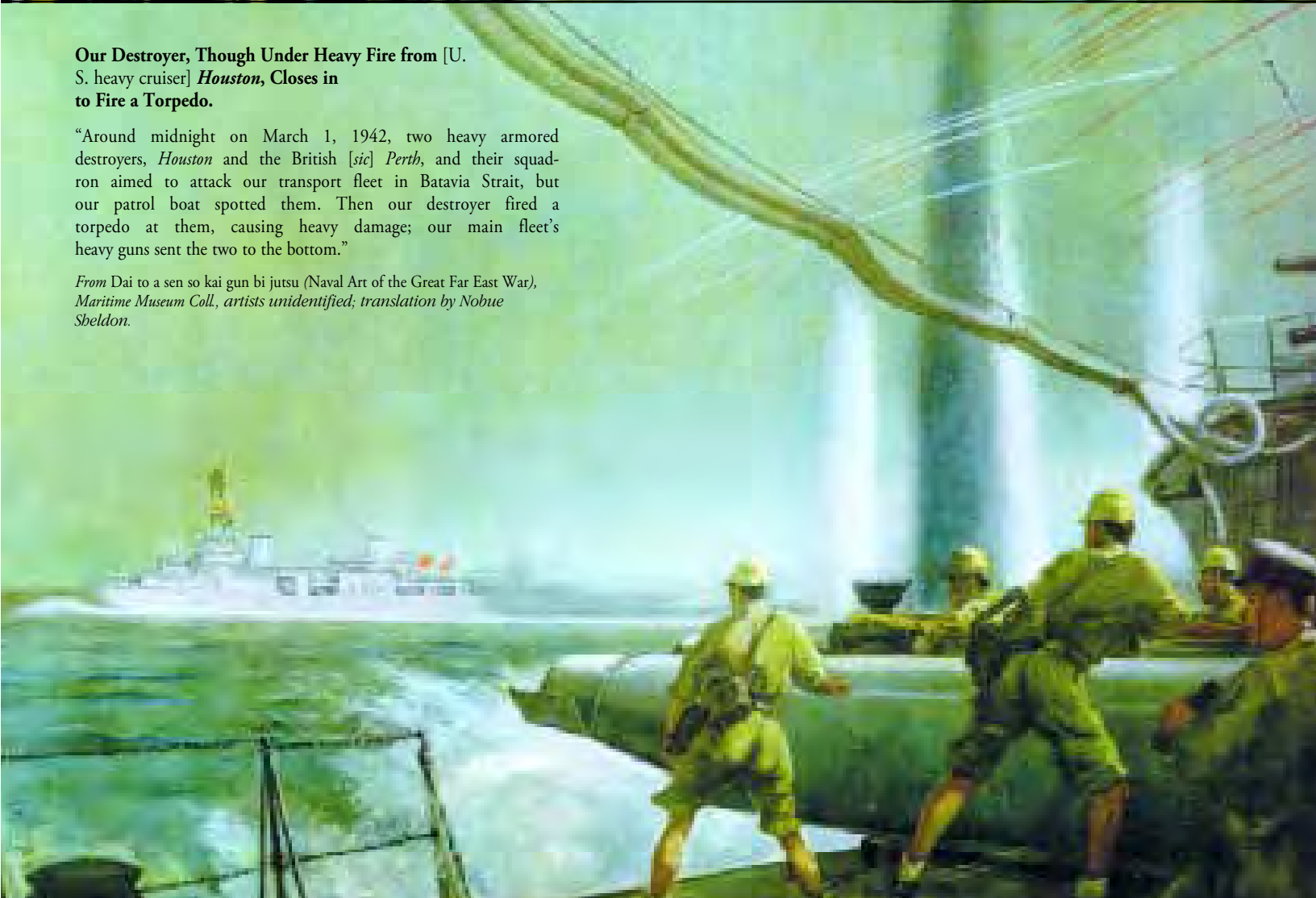
“Singapore is Asia’s biggest naval base, and the British bragged about its impregnability; their insulting language about the Imperial Navy’s power angered our navy men. When the Pacific War started, our navy showed its power by sinking *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*. Then, the army’s crack troops invaded Singapore from Malaysia and, at noon on the same day, captured the naval base. Right away, our minesweepers started clearing the harbor for the Imperial Fleet to enter.”



Our Destroyer, Though Under Heavy Fire from [U. S. heavy cruiser] *Houston*, Closes in to Fire a Torpedo.

“Around midnight on March 1, 1942, two heavy armored destroyers, *Houston* and the British [sic] *Perth*, and their squadron aimed to attack our transport fleet in Batavia Strait, but our patrol boat spotted them. Then our destroyer fired a torpedo at them, causing heavy damage; our main fleet’s heavy guns sent the two to the bottom.”

From Dai to a sen so kai gun bi jutsu (Naval Art of the Great Far East War), Maritime Museum Coll., artists unidentified; translation by Nobue Sbeldon.



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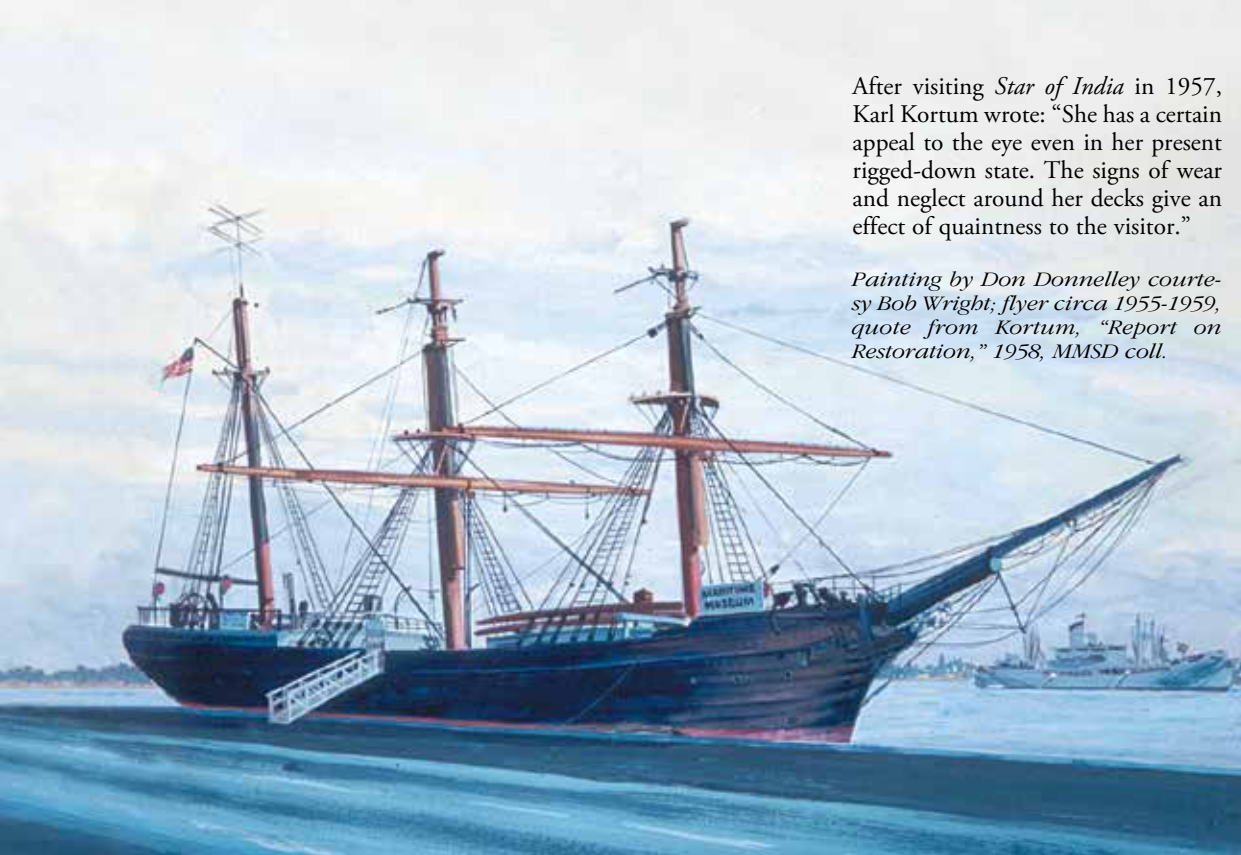
A Journal of Pacific Maritime History

4520 U. S. NAVY PLANE CARRIER AT ANCHOR—LOOKING UP BROADWAY, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA



3A-H1374

*Developing San Diego Bay
In the 20th Century*



After visiting *Star of India* in 1957, Karl Kortum wrote: "She has a certain appeal to the eye even in her present rigged-down state. The signs of wear and neglect around her decks give an effect of quaintness to the visitor."

Painting by Don Donnelley courtesy Bob Wright; flyer circa 1955-1959, quote from Kortum, "Report on Restoration," 1958, MMSD coll.



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is published quarterly,
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the ferryboat *Berkeley*.

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ship bidding 'Swing the main yards.'
To loot, steal, or 'acquire.'"

—John Masefield

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DID YOU KNOW?

- that concrete-hulled ships were built on San Diego Bay? (page 10)
- that over 750 San Diego-based boats fished for tuna in 1950? (page 18)
- that during the 1950s, the "home port" of many San Diego tuna boats was Wilmington, Delaware? (page 23)
- that Shelter Island was a barren sandbar until the 1950s? (page 32)
- that the *Star of India* was brought to town by the San Diego Zoo to be converted into an aquarium? (page 41)
- that the *Star* was nearly installed in Mission Bay—high and dry? (page 42)
- that the *Star* was once so rusty that a workman's hammer went through the hull? (page 53)

Fall 2002 / Winter 2003
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A Journal Of Pacific Maritime History

Developing San Diego Bay in the 20th Century

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Mark Allen Editor

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In December of 2002, without much fanfare, our newly restored *Pilot* got underway from her home next to the *Berkeley* for her very first “Day on the Bay” educational program. Her job in this program is to help convey to young people some sense of the unfolding spectacle of San Diego Bay and how it came to be the jewel it is today. In the course of *Pilot*’s wanderings, the students encountered all the tideland activities and sights we have come to take for granted, from marinas to marine cargo terminals, and the naval vessels and installations that makes San Diego Bay one of the most potent concentrations of military power in history.

Essentially, San Diego Bay is an exhibit of the entire maritime world in microcosm: its past, present and future.

It’s a tiny body of water for so many things to be going on at one time: if you paved it over, you couldn’t begin to park all of San Diego’s cars on it. Small as it is, above all

other things we possess, our bay is the wellspring of the entire region’s prosperity, quality of life, and identity. Yet the bay as we know it was not inevitable, or even very likely.

The notion of human agency is perhaps the most important message *Pilot* has to convey. Contrary to what its complexity would suggest, the world we live in is not purely the consequence of time and enormous geopolitical forces acting

beyond individual influence. It is rather the direct result of human decision-making. As in *Pilot*’s wheelhouse, courses are not ordained, they have to be *charted*. By the

FROM THE HELM

by Ray Ashley
Director
Maritime Museum of San Diego



end of the voyage, hopefully, our students step ashore with some glimmering of how this was once done and how things might have gone very differently.

This issue of *Mains'l Haul* might be thought of as pages from the log of a *Pilot* voyage, for all of these stories about how twentieth-century people reshaped the bay were witnessed by our workboat as she went about her daily business. She began her career in 1914, as Bill Kettner and others worked to turn San Diego into a Navy town, and *Pilot* welcomed the big carrier *Saratoga*. She saw the prosperity of local tuna men, and passed with them through the economic "Valley of Death." *Pilot* was already half a century old when the San Diego Unified Port District was created by Port Director John Bate, and she motored innumerable times past Shelter Island long before Bate and Joe Brennan imagined a recreational future for the nameless sandbar. *Pilot* was operating when *Star*

of *India* entered San Diego Bay for the first time in 1927, and witnessed her slow decline and the heroic recovery made possible by Jack Donnelley and others. The *Star of India*'s restoration reminds us that historic ships are never "saved" once and for all, but have to be saved each and every day through the commitment of dedicated people. And *Pilot* was present but passed unnoticed as San Diegans and Navy men worked to reshape the shallow bay as a great aircraft carrier base.

If everything that students see from *Pilot*'s deck is understood to be the product of past human effort, then what they will see on the bay of our future is equally so. In providing a wheelhouse where they can begin to chart their own courses, creating chapters of *Mains'l Haul* yet to be imagined, the future of *Pilot* and the rest of the maritime museum's ships may well be even more significant than their past.



At left, *Pilot* greets *Desaix* outside San Diego Bay in 1914. Above, a 21st-century group of voyagers is introduced to the bay from her deck.

San Diego Historical Society Photograph Coll.

1917-1922 The Decisive Years in San Diego's Relationship with its Navy

Bruce Linder



The grounds of the 1915-16 exposition in Balboa Park became the site of San Diego's original Navy Training Center.

San Diego Historical Society Photograph Coll.

At this moment, Navy destroyers and frigates crowd San Diego's waterfront, swathed in cocoons of white painting tarps, emitting choruses of metal-on-metal clangs. Forty-thousand-ton gray behemoths rise high inside gargantuan floating drydocks, while cranes that would clear twenty-story buildings swing through the air in choreographed ceremony. These bustling days in the life of a working waterfront highlight an industry that annually puts millions in San Diego's coffers and employs upwards of ten thousand San Diegans. Navy dominance within this sector of San Diego's industrial base—a fact of life for over eighty years—makes it hard to visualize San Diego with-

out the Navy. The Navy's presence in San Diego, however, was never preordained, and in fact never even an odds-on chance. It is due in large part to five crucial years early in the twentieth century—five years that shaped San Diego's waterfront forever.

The years between 1917 and 1922 were the most consequential in San Diego's relationship with the Navy. Across a span of just five years beginning in 1917, San Diego rose from an infrequently visited naval logistics stop to a permanent homeport for over a hundred warships, a naval presence that soared from a disconnected jumble of facilities to a well-oiled juggernaut that propelled city industrial growth for decades. This chain reaction of spectacular growth was fueled by a rapid concentration of Navy ships, aircraft, recruits, influence and dollars. By 1922 the Navy's presence had reached "critical mass"—the point in a nuclear chain reaction when the reaction becomes self-sustaining—and ongoing naval investment in San Diego was virtually assured, giving the city a reliable new power source to propel its prosperity.

For San Diego to reach "critical mass," a core of essential elements was needed. Beginning in 1917, a fortuitous alignment of forces created this core, including America's entry into World War I, a spirited mayoral campaign, a downturn in the local economy, the fledgling development of naval aviation, and the combined actions of a high-powered San Diego congressman in Washington and an able admiral in San Diego.

Bruce Linder, a naval historian and retired naval officer, is author of the richly illustrated history *San Diego's Navy*, published in 2002 by the Naval Institute Press.

Before facilities expanded, the Navy moored ships wherever it could, like these destroyers alongside the Santa Fe wharf about 1919. Note the recently-completed railroad depot and, to its left, new landfill where the maritime museum is today.

Courtesy National Archives



The Navy's sudden concentration in San Diego was especially surprising because in the years immediately preceding 1917 nothing seemed to jell in the San Diego–Navy relationship. San Diego's tireless congressman William Kettner had won federal commitments to deepen the notoriously shallow harbor for Navy ships (never assigned here), the first pilots in naval aviation had trained on North Island (soon abandoned to the Army), while a modest coal-ing station had suffered such lackluster support that it took over ten years to complete. Naval shipping at anchor had no repair shops, supply depots or even piers they could call their own.

Even more remarkable was how little progress had been made over the years to establish any formal naval operating base or repair yard in San Diego. The Navy's interest in the city had sputtered hot-and-cold, much to the dismay of expansion-minded businessmen and civic leaders.

As early as 1898 the Navy's Bureau of Yards and Docks had reported to the Secretary of the Navy that San Diego was the preferred site in Southern California for a naval repair base and dockyard.¹ This endorsement was reinforced two years later when the commanding officer of the gunboat *Ranger* surveyed the bay and identified it as "the only good harbor south of San Francisco," and later noted that "the strategic importance of San Diego is so great that sooner or later a dry dock and repair shops will be constructed at this port."² But neither report sparked much interest within a Navy Department that lacked a West Coast vision.

San Diego's perseverance convinced the Navy to order the Great White Fleet to visit in 1908. But, when the deep-draft battleships had to anchor outside the harbor, the Navy raised a critical eyebrow.

The businessmen of the San Diego Chamber of Commerce peppered the Secretary of the Navy with glowing reports highlighting the weather, a shoreline free of development, and protected natural anchorages. Assistant Navy Secretary Franklin Roosevelt endorsed San Diego's "magnificent harbor with more magnificent possibilities" (an innocent quote quickly escalated in the San Diego press to the headline: "San Diego to be Great Naval Base, Says Roosevelt"). But a massive Navy study of potential West Coast bases in 1916 largely overlooked San Diego in favor of San Francisco, Bremerton, and Pearl Harbor.³

Not that San Diego was completely a backwater—indeed, at the turn of the twentieth century it was Southern California's primary port. Nevertheless, the harbor had never truly prospered, was widely known to be shallow and difficult to navigate, and had been unable to capitalize on the trade flowing in new deeper-draft freighters through the Panama Canal, opened in 1914. The creation of a harbor in Los Angeles, where nature had failed to provide one, and San Diego's lack of a major rail connection to the East made its port unattractive to exporters.

The bay's shoreline largely consisted of undeveloped mud flats, where real estate opportunities were routinely described not in lots of land but in acres of "submerged tidelands" uncovered at low tide. The one ship repair yard of note, San Diego Marine Railway & Drydock on North Island, could handle only small craft and coastal steamers.

The first hint of a new twist in San Diego's relationship with the Navy surfaced within local politics. In 1917, San Diego entered one of the most energetic mayoral contests in its history. Two influential men, George Marston and Louis Wilde, sparred in a contest largely remembered for its turbulent "Smokestacks versus Geraniums" debate. Wilde focused on the need for new industries, manufacturing and development, following the model of Los Angeles. Marston favored guiding the city towards tourism, agriculture, and commerce to protect it from the perceived ills of heavy industry. An intense debate over urban versus suburban ideals ensued and, although Wilde won the election, an enduring theme emerged: the Navy could become San Diego's perfect compromise "industry." It would bolster real estate development, foster a relatively clean service industry, attract "paycheck-every-payday" employees, and (in later years) lure high-tech engineering talent into aviation and ship repair. The Navy represented progress without the smokestacks.

Within days of the election, America entered the First World War, adding a second push to the San Diego-Navy relationship. Although most of the Pacific Fleet sailed to European or South Atlantic waters, those remaining (including the flagship *Oregon*) used San Diego as a central support base for West Coast and Baja California patrols. A pro-Navy patriotic spirit touched every facet of San Diego life, and industries and services aligned with the Navy prospered and gained political strength.

Destroyers *Ward*, *Boggs*, and *Crosby* at the Santa Fe wharf.

MMSD postcard coll.



No. 28. U.S. Destroyers at Dock - Pacific Fleet. Weidner Photo

7



Rear Admiral Welles reads aloud the orders installing him as the first commandant of Naval Base, San Diego, in 1920.

Courtesy U. S. Navy

War also triggered a need for thousands of new Navy recruits. When existing West Coast training facilities couldn't handle the increase, city officials (spurred by Congressman Kettner and Colonel D. C. Collier) shrewdly offered the Navy vacant buildings in Balboa Park left over from the 1915-16 exposition for a dollar a year as a temporary training station. It was a stroke of genius. Not only did many thousands of bluejackets descend on the city almost overnight, but city officials reaped the advantage of Navy gratitude for the city's generosity and rapid response to the Navy's wartime needs.

Developments on distant fronts also played to San Diego's advantage. With naval aviation expanding rapidly with the war, the Navy pressed for a new West Coast aviation training site and operating base. Submarine designs, too, rapidly matured, with both San Diego and San Pedro "floated" as premier submarine operating areas. Equally importantly, naval yards around the country began mass-producing warships. Destroyers, the ships most compatible with San Diego's shallow harbor, led the mobilization.

To satisfy its need for a western aviation base, the Navy pressed the War Department to share North Island for air operations—the Army on the island's southern and western half, fronting the ocean, with the Navy moving onto the north and east sides along the bay. By 1918 the Navy had rolled out big plans for the island, which the Secretary of the Navy projected as "undoubtedly the largest and most important naval aviation station on the West Coast." By the end of World War I, the Navy had trained 892 aviation mechanics and 206 officers at its North Island flight school.⁴

The success of the temporary recruit training facilities in Balboa Park generated momentum for a permanent facility. During October 1918, the training station's commanding officer, under Navy Department instructions, inspected sites for a permanent station. City officials and Congressman Kettner rushed to assist, steering the Navy to an undeveloped site now known as Loma Portal. Kettner and the city then raised sufficient funds to donate 277 acres to the Navy to clinch the deal, with Kettner finding funds in Congress to begin construction.⁵

Bill Kettner had vigorously courted naval investment in San Diego since his first days as a congressman in 1912. Influenced by city businessmen, Kettner had consistently wooed the Navy both as a means to attract harbor improvements for commerce and in order to bring development dollars to San Diego County. His skilled lobbying on San Diego's behalf was crucial in completing agreements for the Marine base at Dutch Flats and the communications station at Chollas Heights, and set the stage for San Diego's successes with the Navy.

Across town from the Naval Training Station, the Navy and city similarly reached agreement to replace the Navy's wartime dispensary (servicing the temporary training station) with a new permanent hospital in Balboa Park. Again, generous land donations held the Navy's interest while Kettner, city officials and businessmen worked out construction details, which in the end added another important component to bring the Navy's involvement in San Diego to critical mass.

As World War I wound down, American naval planners looked to the postwar world, with particular attention to counter the ambitious Japanese naval program. Many called for a two-ocean Navy, a Pacific Fleet battleship force, and new Pacific bases.

The stakes were huge for every West Coast port. Everyone recognized that large numbers of ships would be diverted westward after the war and that the Navy would spend generously to service them. The prize in this competition would be the selection of a principal operating base, repair yard and submarine base for the regenerated Pacific Fleet. The Navy's preference was for a single site in order to save money on facilities, with Puget Sound, Pearl Harbor and (especially) San Francisco considered the favorites. However, it quickly became evident that any single West Coast port would be sorely overtaxed to support the entire fleet, and Navy planning shifted to how best to "temporarily" disperse the fleet to several ports while facilities were being developed at the primary operating base.

In the immediate postwar years, though, Navy budgets were leaner than anticipated, delaying construction plans. Here opportunity came knocking for San Diego—for, in the arcane logic of the accountant, San Diego's already planned facilities for aviation, training and a naval hospital could actually "save" the Navy money if a sufficient number of ships could be based in San Diego. Small destroyers and patrol craft, the largest number of ships needing bases, would not be affected by the bay's shallowness.

It was a recipe perfectly balanced for San Diego's success. While existing and planned shore facilities attracted the Navy's attention, its undeveloped shoreline promised berthing for hundreds of ships. In addition, the local citizenry appeared supportive of the Navy, the city was ready to donate public lands for naval facilities, and San Diego's activist congressman could generate fresh appropriations for base construction.

The Navy was convinced. In what amounted to a complete reversal of official sentiment from that of only three years before, the key Navy planning report of 1919 concluded that "operations of the fleet on the west coast will require additional facilities in San Diego Harbor, consisting of a supply base, repair base for all but capital ships and a large addition to the Fuel Supply Base as planned."⁶

Despite these gains, by late 1919 the "nuclear reaction" of naval investment in San Diego had not quite reached critical mass. Navy interest was high but, in the minds of many San Diegans, the Navy could vanish just as quickly as it had come. What was needed was the right kind of personal chemistry between the Navy and San Diego that would secure the gains of the partnership.

At this critical juncture, the Navy decided to order a flag officer to San Diego to coordinate its widespread and suddenly very diverse activities. On January 26, 1920, Rear Admiral Roger Welles assumed duties as the first commandant of the group of scattered facilities newly christened as Naval Base, San Diego.

Barely three months previously, this stocky, patrician sailor had been walking a battleship's decks. Although his knowledge of San Diego was limited to



With Mayor Wilde behind him, Congressman Kettner listens to the Navy Secretary aboard the battleship *New Mexico* in 1919.

Courtesy National Archives

a brief visit thirty years before, and his stated preference for duty was with the battle fleet, San Diego's first "naval mayor"—as future commandants would be known—quickly warmed to his task and set plans in motion to consolidate the Navy's gains in San Diego. Although the naval presence had expanded rapidly, little attention had been paid to coordinating plans and integrating cross-base operations. An admiral overseeing all public works planners and base commanding officers would change this. With a single voice representing San Diego's naval interests in Washington, construction dollars could be better coordinated and broad strategy for future investment articulated. And, with a single voice representing the Navy's interests in San Diego, civic interests (and generosity) could be encouraged and better coordinated.

The creation of San Diego's destroyer base epitomized the new closeness and coordination between Navy and City. Admiral Welles knew that the Scofield Engineering Company was building ships at a site they had incorporated as the Pacific Marine & Construction Company at the foot of Thirty-Second Street. The U. S. Shipping Board had contracted for two concrete-hulled ships during the war, and Congressman Kettner had been instrumental in arranging a lease of seventy-seven acres of land and twenty-one acres of water and marsh to support this venture. The company had improved the site but had been unable to win further ship-building contracts.

In a scene far removed from the view of downtown San Diego on page 5, destroyers cluster at their own new base at 32nd Street in 1925.

MMSD P6899



Welles also knew that Kettner had helped appropriate \$175,000 for a proposed naval repair yard at La Playa, to build a marine railway large enough to haul out vessels of 2,500 tons and three hundred feet in length, replacing the old marine ways on North Island that had been dismantled to make room for seaplane ramps and hangers.

Kettner, however, had bigger plans. “The Marine Railway is practically a Naval Base,” he told the Chamber of Commerce.⁷ Knowing that the La Playa site was too cramped for a full-fledged naval yard, Kettner maneuvered to have the new marine railway dismantled and moved to the Thirty-Second Street site and have the land deeded to the Navy. The plan seemed to satisfy everyone. The government would protect its investment in equipment provided to the Scofield Company and would receive important harbor property for no cost, Admiral Welles could berth and repair his destroyers at a single site in the harbor, the city would increase Navy investment and be assured of a continuing shipyard industry, and Kettner would have the Navy established on a ninety-eight acre site ideal for further growth into a “real” base.

On February 15, 1921 Admiral Welles took formal custody of the yard, buildings, and machinery, and the Navy moved quickly to consolidate the destroyer force that was moored helter-skelter around the harbor.⁸ After dredging and the installation of mooring dolphins, the first sixty-nine destroyers were ordered to the new base by September.⁹ For years, the city had lagged behind others along the West Coast in fostering a sustainable shipbuilding and repair industry, but after 1920, Navy industrial work at the destroyer base stimulated consistent demand that helped transform San Diego into a hub of maritime industry.

The beauty of San Diego’s new naval-centered economic strategy was now clear. One facility had led to a second, and two facilities had expanded to three and so on until a substantial infrastructure stood in place. Kettner had foreseen it, as he candidly told the Chamber of Commerce in 1918: “As soon as we open an account with the government, it is easy to do business, but first we must open an account.”¹⁰

By city charter, land donations such as those proposed for the training station, naval hospital, and destroyer base had to be ratified by the voters. With a cyclic economic downturn in full swing, most San Diegans in 1920 recognized that the Navy represented “industry” without the offending smokestacks, and a means to propel the city back into economic prosperity. Editorial comment in the *San Diego Union* cemented this theme: prosperity was linked to commerce, commerce to improvements (primarily dredging) in the bay, and improvements in the bay to Navy investment. “All the government asks of San Diego is the concession of a few acres of tidelands and a site for a hospital in Balboa Park,” the *Union* editorialized; “in return, it gives San Diego one of the finest naval establishments in the world.”¹¹

The vote was strongly in favor of the Navy. Even the Secretary of the Navy was overwhelmed: “Dear Mr. Kettner: My heartiest congratulations to you and to the citizens of San Diego on the gratifying result of the election to ratify the grant by the City of San Diego. . . . the Navy will begin active operations immediately.”¹²

Kettner's mastery of "pork barrel politics" primed the pump to bring federal resources flowing to San Diego and built broad city-wide support for the Navy. No city in America focused as single-mindedly on the Navy as did San Diego, and by 1922 a self-sustaining reaction was underway that would propel Navy investment in San Diego. Congressman Kettner retired from politics in 1920 and Admiral Welles was transferred from San Diego in 1923. They had seen the advantages of a City-Service partnership long before most. While they, and the businessmen of the Chamber of Commerce, did not start the chain reaction that brought San Diego Bay the naval presence that it has today, their efforts gave the combination of Navy and City an irresistible momentum. Ever since, San Diego has been inescapably a Navy town.

N O T E S

As battleships ride at anchor in the harbor, the destroyer USS *Crosby* lies alongside the Santa Fe wharf, probably in 1919.

MMSD P806

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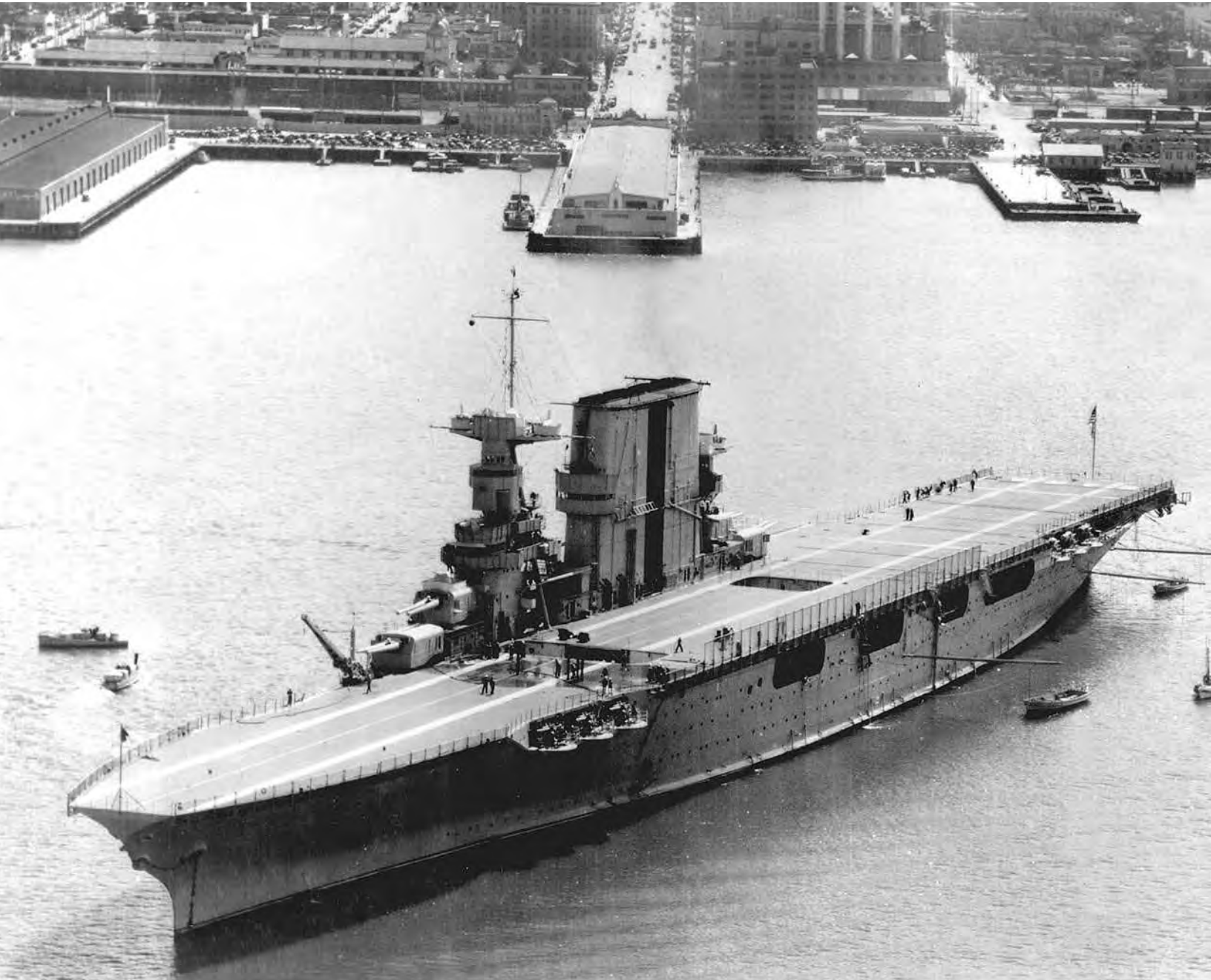


Big News in 1931:

“Sister Sara” Enters San Diego Bay

John Fry

During the first week of November 1931, San Diego newspapers were abuzz with the word that the largest ship to enter San Diego Bay in its history was coming: the aircraft carrier USS *Saratoga*. “GREAT WELCOME AWAITS SARATOGA IN PORT FRIDAY,” trumpeted the San Diego Union.¹



Aircraft carriers were not new to San Diegans—the Navy’s first carrier, USS *Langley*, had been based in San Diego since 1924—but the city’s boosters had dreamed for years of attracting the Navy’s biggest ships. At 888 feet in length, carrying double *Langley*’s complement of planes, *Saratoga* and her identical twin *Lexington* were the largest vessels in the Navy throughout their years in service. The two carriers had been homeported with the Pacific battle fleet in Los Angeles Harbor in the spring of 1928—to San Diego’s great envy.²

During the first years of the development of carrier aviation tactics off the Southern California coast, aircraft squadrons operated out of North Island, while the carriers sailed south to Coronado Roads, outside the mouth of the bay, and their planes landed aboard. The ship’s company had to travel by boat to the anchorage, where simply boarding the giant carrier, which rolled badly in heavy seas, was an adventure even for the ablest of seamen. The advantages of mooring the ship to a pier, or at least anchoring in a harbor, were obvious.

A visit to San Diego Bay was possible because in November, 1927, voters had approved a bond issue to create a municipal airport—dedicated as Lindbergh Field the following year—with fill dredged from the harbor bottom. The other purpose of the dredging was to dig a turning basin to permit the fleet’s leviathans to maneuver and anchor.

Captain Frank McCrary brought *Saratoga* south during the last week in October and announced plans to anchor in the turning basin at 7:00 A. M. on November 6, 1931. A noon luncheon aboard ship was planned for city, county, and Chamber of Commerce officials. The newspaper, however, warned that “if the bay is blanketed by fog no attempt will be made to bring the carrier into port until high tide Saturday.”³

At 6:00 A.M., taking advantage of the highest tide, *Saratoga* weighed anchor and made her way slowly toward the harbor entrance, where she was stopped short by a massive fog bank. With visibility estimated at five hundred feet, “Sara’s” officers elected to return to Coronado Roads and try again the following day. Visibility was more than a mile inside the harbor, where thousands had gathered to witness the spectacle, but the excited throngs would return the next day, when high tide would occur at 7:00 A.M..

The following morning *Saratoga* met with success. Sunlight broke through the overcast as she glided past Ballast Point. “Dwarfing everything afloat, in its path and all sides,” as the *San Diego Union*’s front page reported, “the U.S.S. *Saratoga*, giant aircraft carrier of the Pacific fleet, poked its blunt nose around Point Loma . . . and majestically steamed up the channel to a safe anchorage in the new turning basin.”⁴ Said the *Sun*, “Her broad deck lined with sailors, arms raised smartly in salute, the U.S.S. *Saratoga*, mother of Uncle Sam’s ‘sea eagles’ slid gracefully through the gray mists and dropped anchor in the harbor early today.”⁵

Her navigator, Commander James Gromer, was earning his pay. “Poring over charts, observing instruments which registered the position of the ship to the smallest fraction of a degree,” Gromer flawlessly threaded the narrow channel into the harbor. “Seasoned San Diego mariners said it was one of the best demonstrations of navigation they had ever seen,” according to the *Union*.⁶

Crowds through the foot of Broadway to see the mighty *Saratoga*.

Courtesy National Archives

John Fry has lived in San Diego since 1949. Three Fry brothers—Bud, “Mutt,” and Jeff (the author’s father)—reported aboard *Saratoga* in 1938. John graduated from Crawford High School and San Diego State University, then taught history in San Diego schools from 1968 to 1979. He is author of *USS Saratoga CV-3*, and is founder and president of the Pacific Beach Historical Society.

At 7:57, “Sara” dropped anchor in the turning basin. Immediately a crescendo of noise surrounded her, from the horns of small boats to the steam whistles of nearby factories, announcing the beginning of a three-day nautical love fest.⁷ The ship responded with a thirteen-gun salute to the commandant of the Eleventh Naval District, which brought an answering salute from North Island. Mayor Walter Austin and city officials, along with members of the Chamber of Commerce, were welcomed aboard by Captain McCrary.

That evening, members of the *Saratoga* boxing squad were guests at the Coliseum Athletic Club, a ball honored members of her aircraft squadrons, and enlisted personnel were fêted at a gala dance at the Mission Beach Ballroom. While San Diego was showing the crew a good time, San Diegans were invited aboard. The Star & Crescent Boat Company and the United Water Taxi Company announced a fifty percent reduction in fares for San Diegans to visit “Sara,” and free rides for her sailors. Motor launches ferried 20,000 excited visitors from the Embarcadero.⁸



At high tide on Monday, November 9, “Sara” bade San Diego farewell. “The greatest ‘open house’ in the history of the waterfront came to an end today when the aircraft carrier *Saratoga* left the harbor and went back to the ocean and to work,” reported the *Sun*.⁹ The carrier, which had barely squeezed into the bay, seldom visited again, but newer flattops like *Ranger*, *Yorktown* and *Enterprise* followed in her wake in the 1930s.¹⁰

Saratoga’s last visit to San Diego was, for her crewmen, as memorable as the first. At 11:32 A.M. on December 7, 1941, she tied up to North Island’s Pier Fox after steaming south from Bremerton. At 11:44 the public address system blared the news that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. Crewmen worked throughout the night to load aircraft aboard, and she sailed for Hawaii the following morning. At war in the Pacific, “Sister Sara” survived being hit by two torpedoes and a nightmarish attack by six kamikazes, only to become a target in the postwar atomic bomb tests at Bikini Atoll. She never returned to San Diego Bay, but *Saratoga*’s first visit gave San Diego, and the Navy, a vision of the city’s future as a great carrier port.



San Diego was a city of 148,000 when “Sara” visited in 1931, at left. She returned to the bay in 1932, below.

At left, *San Diego Historical Society Photograph Coll.*; below, *courtesy National Archives*

NOTES

- 1 *San Diego Union*, 4 November 1931.
- 2 The two ships had been laid down as battle cruisers ordered in the Naval Act of 1916. After the devastation of World War I, however, world powers met in 1921 to limit future expenditures on capital ships. The U. S. agreed to scrap 28 ships, if it could convert two of the *Lexington*-class cruisers then under construction into aircraft carriers.
- 3 “‘Toots’ Must Await Signal,” *San Diego Sun*, 5 November 1931, p. 1.
- 4 *Union*, 8 November 1931, p. 1.
- 5 *Sun*, 6 November 1931, p. 1.
- 6 *Union*, 8 November 1931, pp. 1, 10.
- 7 Boaters were warned not to make noise until the fireboat *Bill Kettner* signaled with its horn, to prevent distraction to the navigator. “‘Toots’ Must Await Signal,” p. 1.
- 8 *Union*, 10 November 1931, p. 3.
- 9 *Sun*, 9 November 1931, p. 1.
- 10 *Saratoga* returned to the bay in April 1932. She and *Lexington* generally continued to remain outside the harbor, until dredging alongside North Island permitted construction of piers capable of docking them.

Into the Valley of Death:

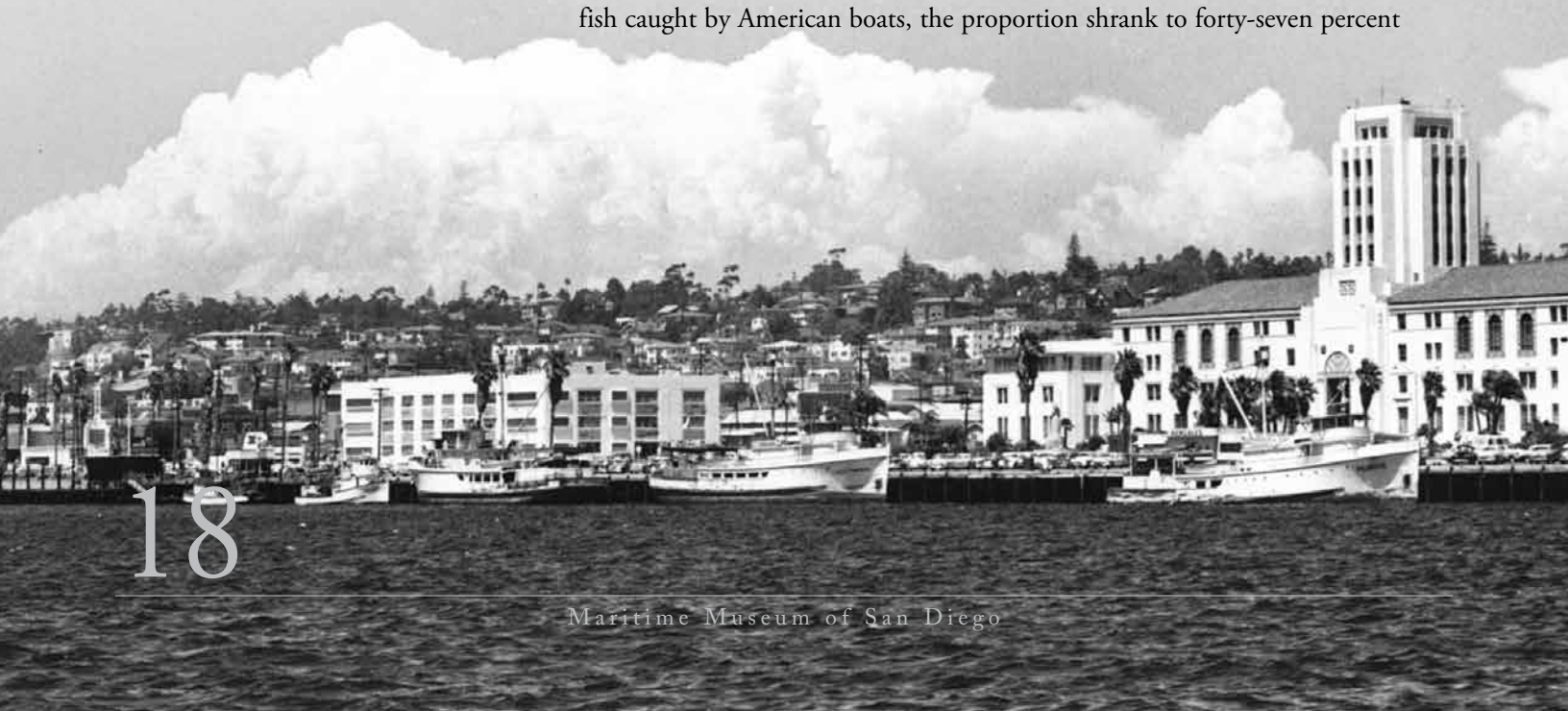
The 1950s and the Decline of California's Tuna Clippers

August J. Felando

During the 1950s, the American tuna industry entered the "Valley of Death."¹ San Diego, home to America's largest tuna fishing fleet in 1950, saw its tunamen endure a decade of trials and turmoil as they failed to evade looming threats to their livelihood. Their decline occurred despite the fact that consumers were buying more tuna than ever. Americans' consumption of canned tuna more than doubled from 0.9 pounds per person in 1948 to 1.9 pounds in 1959.² In 1950, as many as 755 San Diego-based boats fished commercially for tuna.³ The events which led this huge fleet into the Valley of Death included renewed competition from Japan and from a San Pedro-based fleet of inventive new tuna purse seiners, plus San Diego's reliance on timeworn tuna clippers and the implementation of federal policy to eliminate or reduce trade barriers.⁴ In response to these challenges, the few San Diego survivors of the Valley fashioned new tools for catching tuna that revolutionized the global tuna industry.

The Japanese Challenge

In 1949, Japan began exporting large quantities of tuna to the U. S., encouraged by American policy intended to help rebuild the war-shattered Japanese economy through exports. Japan shipped about 3.5 million cans to the U. S. in 1949, about one percent of the amount that the U. S. packed that year.⁵ By 1959, Japan's canned exports represented about twenty-four percent of the domestic pack. Domestic production of canned tuna grew during the 1950s, but while in 1950, eighty-eight percent of this pack was canned from fish caught by American boats, the proportion shrank to forty-seven percent



by 1959. In 1950 most frozen tuna shipments still came from American tuna clippers and seiners, many of which fished off the coasts of Peru, Ecuador and in the Galapagos, and from freezers in Peru, Chile, and Ecuador financed by California canners. That year, Japan's exports of frozen yellowfin and skipjack—light-meat tuna—to the U. S. was the equivalent of about 8.5 per cent of the amount landed by American clippers, while by 1959, the percentage soared to about seventy-five percent. Consequently, during the 1950s American tuna fishermen were staggered by a fifty-three percent drop in revenue due to falling prices.⁶

California canners remembered the flood of Japanese tuna that had swamped them during the Depression.⁷ By 1934 twenty-seven percent of all the canned tuna on American tables had been Japanese, but thanks primarily to protective tariffs raised by the Roosevelt administration, the challenge from Japan failed. As late as 1939, ninety-five percent of U. S. canned tuna came from fish landed by American boats.⁸

American tunamen were well aware, however, of how difficult it would be to counter Japanese penetration of the U. S. market. They remembered the 1934 failure to reach agreement on import quotas with representatives of Japan's Government and its tuna industry, recalled Congress's inaction on the industry's wish to place duties on imported frozen tuna, and knew of a 1936 report by the U. S. Tariff Commission which concluded that imports of fresh and frozen tuna were not harmful to the American industry. With U. S. aid, Japan's tuna fleet was quickly regaining the dominant position it held before the war, when, in the early 1930s, seventy percent of the world's catch of tuna had been Japanese.

Postwar tariffs created a climate that favored Japanese imports because frozen tuna was duty free, and because wartime trade agreements on canned tuna remained binding. U. S. tunamen faced the obstacle that Congress would have to be persuaded to change the free trade status of fresh and frozen tuna. On this issue, canners were divided: while some opposed any change, others left vessel owners' representatives with the impression that their position was ambiguous.¹⁰ Oregon and Washington canners chose to supplement domestic landings with Japanese frozen albacore. They found it more cost-effective to purchase yellowfin and skipjack from the Japanese than to continue their involvement in the

August Felando headed the American Tunaboat Association from 1960 to 1991. He has contributed three previous *Mains'l Haul* articles about the earlier history of the tuna fleet.

Southern Pacific leads the way. In this July 1, 1959 news photo, Lou Brito's clipper has been converted into a purse seiner, unlike the vessels behind her which still depend on live bait and hooks.

San Diego Historical Society Photograph Coll.



“reefer” trade with U. S. vessels fishing for tropical tunas off Latin America, which shipped their catch north in refrigerated transport ships.¹¹ California canners recognized the potential harm to them if they were bypassed and Japanese tuna was shipped frozen to the East Coast and canned near those profitable markets instead.¹² They also recognized cost benefits; according to a former Van Camp president, “during those years, the Japanese made it so convenient and inexpensive to purchase their frozen tuna that it would have been a poor business decision to reject their offers.”¹³

Canned tuna tariffs were still bound by wartime trade agreements, which had been intended to increase the domestic food supply. During 1943, for example, Mexico signed an agreement that reduced U. S. tariffs on several hundred items, and cut the tariff on canned tuna in oil from forty-five percent ad valorem (i.e. its value as determined by the federal government) to 22.5 percent.¹⁴ These trade agreements caused canners to seek relief from the U. S. Tariff Commission in 1948. At such reduced tariffs, canners sought relief from the U. S. Tariff Commission, claiming in 1948 that they feared that the Japanese canned tuna industry would “take over the entire United States tuna market,” and sought to restore the forty-five percent pre-war duty on canned tuna.¹⁵

On July 1, 1950, the agreement with Mexico was allowed to expire, a decision seen as a “windfall” by American tunamen because the duty on canned tuna in oil rose from 22.5 percent to forty-five percent.¹⁶ However, by the fall of 1951, it was clear that the Japanese were reacting effectively. First, they flooded the U. S. with canned tuna during the last six months of 1950, when it was still subject to the lower rate; second, they increased exports of tuna canned in brine or water, a product subject to only a 12.5 percent tariff.

In this June 1959 news photo, baitboats cluster at the foot of Grape St.. 1951 marked the numerical peak for America’s largest tuna fleet. Soon, virtually all these boats would perish or be converted to seiners.

San Diego Historical Society Photograph Coll.



Tuna Tariffs and the Truman Administration

Fishermen's representatives pushed for an effort by all segments of the industry to obtain legislative relief from imports. W. M. Chapman, research director of the American Tunaboat Association, pleaded, "What is needed is to bring the tariff on canned tuna in oil, canned tuna in brine, and frozen tuna all into line with each other so that there is no particular advantage to an importer in sending his tuna here in any one of these forms."¹⁷

Political "blood," of a type guaranteed to get Congress's attention, started to pour from the injured segments of the industry during 1950 and 1951. San Diegans staged a protest parade of over 260 vessels in San Diego Bay on September 9, 1951, and similar parades occurred in San Pedro and San Francisco. Organizations of fishermen's wives gathered tens of thousands of letters and petitions protesting imports and sent them to President Truman and Congress. Tunamen also began organizing in a novel way to gain political clout, forming chapters of the California State Grange, previously a fraternal farm organization. San Diego's new chapter quickly signed up 352 members. Several California chambers of commerce adopted resolutions supporting the fishermen, while the legislatures of eleven Western states sent resolutions of support to Congress.¹⁸

In the fall of 1951, a bill was introduced imposing a fifteen-percent duty on frozen tuna coauthored by San Diego Congressman Clinton D. McKinnon. Support came from fishery-related organizations throughout the country as well as from individuals, businesses, and industries allied with fisheries. Harold Cary, then general manager of the American Tunaboat Association, later recalled the tariff fight as "the greatest cooperation in history among fishery groups."¹⁹

Thanks particularly to McKinnon's efforts, in October, 1951 the House enacted a compromise bill, passed by the Senate Finance Committee in May, 1952. In response, Secretary of State Dean Acheson held a press conference stating that the State Department was "unalterably opposed" to its passage, on the grounds that it would harm foreign policy by being seen abroad as economic aggression.²⁰

Harold Cary, deeply involved in the legislative battle, recalled that the State Department succeeded in creating the fiction that Senate passage of the bill involved the "fate of the Nation, and perhaps of civilization." Senate debate turned on a letter from an assistant secretary of state received by a senator on the floor, which Cary perceived as containing the incendiary allegation that "this bill was viewed in Japan with greater bitterness than anything since the Exclusion Act, and that its passage would have a profound effect on United States-Japanese-Russian relations."²¹ The measure lost. Washington Senator Warren Magnuson advised in the spring of 1953 that "I think the tuna tariff is dead for now. The leadership of both parties actually are against it; and right now it looks like a dead issue."²²



Joe Madruga's elaborately-painted Paramount, on the cover of a 1949 publication, led San Diego's 1951 protest parade.

Author's coll.



WHY

should the **TUNA** industry
continue to provide a finer product at a
COMPETITIVE PRICE?

BECAUSE

the tuna you catch is in
daily competition with
meat, poultry, fresh fish
and other "main course"
foods on the tables of
America. To keep the house-
wives sold, we have to keep
giving them good values!

TOGETHER...we can do it!

The best of tuna becomes BREAST-O'-CHICKEN • WESTGATE - SUN HARBOR COMPANY
1995 Bay Front San Diego 13, California

August, 1950

PAN-AMERICAN Fisherman

Page 5



Tuna fishing the old way:
three big men versus one big fish.

MMSD P658

With Congress against them, the Tariff Commission was the only forum remaining for tunamen. In February 1952, inconclusive hearings were held on raising the 12.5 percent rate on canned tuna in brine and the fifteen percent rate on bonito in oil.²³

Meanwhile, the economic harm caused by Japanese imports to San Diego's tuna industry continued. Thirty-seven tuna clippers were removed from U. S. documentation between 1950 and 1953. Of the six canneries on San Diego's waterfront in 1949, half were gone by 1954.

Tuna Tariffs and the Eisenhower Administration

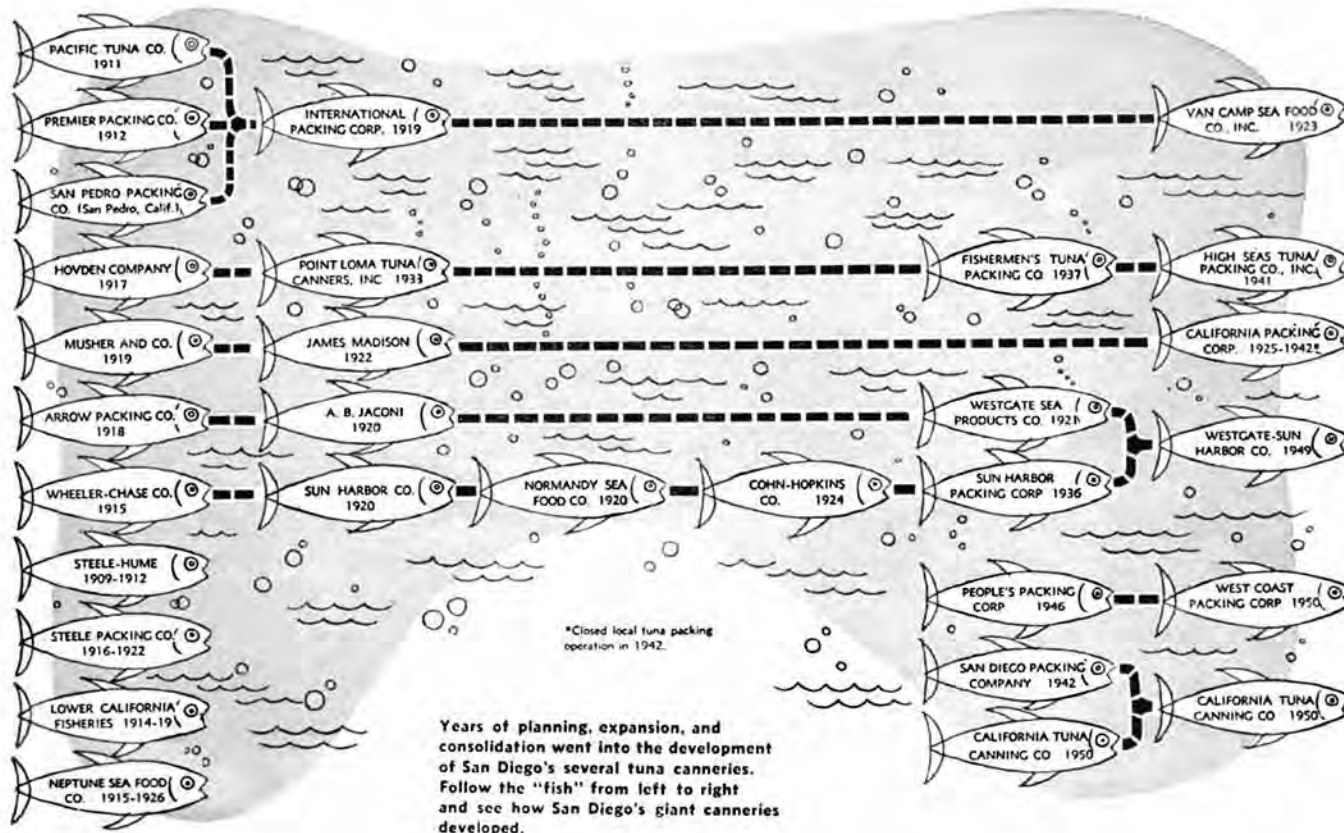
Early in 1955 the Eisenhower Administration began negotiating with Japan, and two concessions in Japan's favor were inserted into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The first bound the 12.5 percent duty on tuna in brine or water against increase, while the second dropped the duty on canned tuna in oil from forty-five to thirty-five percent.²⁴

During June 1959, a proposal that meetings be held between the Japanese and American governments on the tuna trade problem won support from all elements of the U. S. industry. Fishermen's unions hoped an agreement could be reached to "save the tuna industry in this country."²⁵ Responding to fishermen's political activity, newly-elected California Senator Clair Engle and Southern California Congressmen Cecil King, James Utt and Bob Wilson met in June with the State and Interior departments. Engle suggested that the State Department adopt a program for tuna like that worked out by the textile industry, which permitted Japan to secure a profitable share of the U. S. market without putting an American industry out of business. Thereafter, State, Commerce, Navy and Interior officials met with tuna industry representatives in Washington to plan a conference between the two governments, which began in Tokyo on September 30, 1959.²⁶

At the close of the Tokyo Tuna Conference, the chief Japanese delegate stated that Japan would "take in the future, as we have done in the past, the position of supplying what the United States domestic production fails to, in meeting the demands of the domestic market for tuna in the United States."²⁷ The conference ended without any agreement.

Reports on the conference emphasized that the American delegation, composed of tuna industry and government officials, "went into it as a fully united team, each segment upholding the others right down the line." A Pacific Fisherman reporter noted that "It seemed to come rather as a surprise to some of the Japanese delegates to find the U. S. Government . . . closing ranks with the U. S. tuna industry."²⁸ The survival of the industry itself was at stake: during the 1950s, eighty-five tuna clippers had fallen by the economic wayside, and been removed from American registration. In 1950, a dozen major tuna canners operated twenty-one Southern California plants; by 1960, only seven major canners survived to operate ten plants. The six San Diego canneries of 1949 were reduced to one.

The decline forced San Diego Port Director John Bate to massively revise his vision of the harbor's economic future. For over three decades the city had nurtured and promoted the fishery. During the Depression, San Diego's representatives in Washington touted tuna as the city's largest industry, and, after World War II, they proclaimed their city



"Tuna Capital of the World." During the 1950s, however, it became clear that the industry would cease to be the waterfront powerhouse that it once was.

San Diego Responds to the Japanese Challenge

Efforts to improve the efficiency and modernity of American clippers by applying new ownership and management concepts to cannery and fleet operation failed to offset the downward spiral. The largest San Diego-owned canner, Westgate-California, was the center of innovation. Owner C. Arnholt Smith's approach stressed vertical integration, consolidating shipbuilding, fishing and processing. A dozen modern steel-hulled clippers were built for his cannery by Smith's adjacent shipyard, National Steel and Shipbuilding. The vessels became known as the National Marine Terminal (NMT) fleet.³¹

Smith's methods of clipper ownership and management were instructive to the rest of the industry.³² Each San Diego-based vessel was ostensibly homeported in Wilmington, Delaware—evading the high personal property tax burden borne by California-registered clippers. NMT's management of fishing operations, too, was unique in the U. S. fleet: the boards of directors of the separate corporations which owned each tuna clipper authorized a contract with NMT. Then, NMT would enter into a contract with his cannery. Whenever possible, NMT would have its vessels repaired by his shipyard.

The NMT fleet, though not ultimately a successful challenge to the Japanese, firmly established the trend of tuna clipper ownership by a corporate entity or by joint ventures involving corporate entities. Although corporate

Soon, there would be only one.

From Union Title-Trust Topics, September-October 1951, author's coll.



Take advantage of National Steel's
shipyard "know-how"
and MODERN FACILITIES to
**MAKE MONEY
ON THE BEACH, TOO**

NATIONAL STEEL AND
CORPORATION
HARBOR DRIVE AT 28TH ST.
PHONE FRANKLIN 9-8065, SAN DIEGO 12



"Mr. San Diego" C. Arnholt Smith was involved in every aspect of local life: Padres owner, contributor to Star of India's restoration, GOP kingmaker—and white-collar criminal. The collapse of his U. S. National Bank in 1973 was the nation's largest, and sent him to prison.

Advertisement from Pan American Fisherman, August 1950, author's coll.

ownership was not new to American tuna boats, most had been financed under traditional co-ownership or partnership arrangements. Another unsuccessful attempt to counter the Japanese challenge occurred in January, 1959, when a group of San Diego clipper owners, calling themselves American Tuna Canning, purchased a cannery at Terminal Island, Los Angeles.

The most successful adjustment by San Diego's tunaboat fleet to the Japanese challenge, however, was by owners who chose to gamble on making a huge investment, converting their baitboats to deploy purse seine nets. By the end of 1959, the era of fishing with the traditional pole-and-line method was clearly over throughout the tuna grounds of the Eastern Pacific. The \$150,000-\$200,000 expense of adding the huge net, boom, winch and other equipment to a clipper was daunting, but technological changes had cut operating costs for seiners and substantially increased the average annual catch per vessel. The 1954 introduction of lightweight, synthetic fiber nets and hydraulic-powered machinery—especially the Puretic power block—made setting purse seines exceptionally productive and efficient. Seining also eliminated the time-consuming chore of traveling to bait grounds and capturing and sustaining live bait before fishing could begin. If a baitboat is pic-

tured as a weapon, it was one whose user had to search far and wide for ammunition; a purse seiner, by contrast, was a gun which was always loaded. The purse seine revolution had begun in San Pedro, where by 1950 most of these vessels, smaller than San Diego's clippers, spent half the year fishing for sardines and mackerel; San Diegans who converted their clippers turned purse seining for tuna into a year-round career.

In purse seining, each seiner and its skiff encircles a school with its net, forming a deep cylinder whose top floats on the surface and whose bottom is weighted; the net bottom is then pulled together in the manner of a drawstring purse—hence the name. The technology came with an unwanted side effect: large numbers of porpoises, which often school above tuna, were inadvertently caught. The first effort to address this problem was invented by Captain Anton Misetich in 1959; by "backing down," skippers learned to pull one end of the floating net below the surface, allowing many porpoise to escape. The environmental cost of purse seining, however, and the legislation and public reaction that resulted, would lead the tuna industry into a second Valley of Death three decades later.

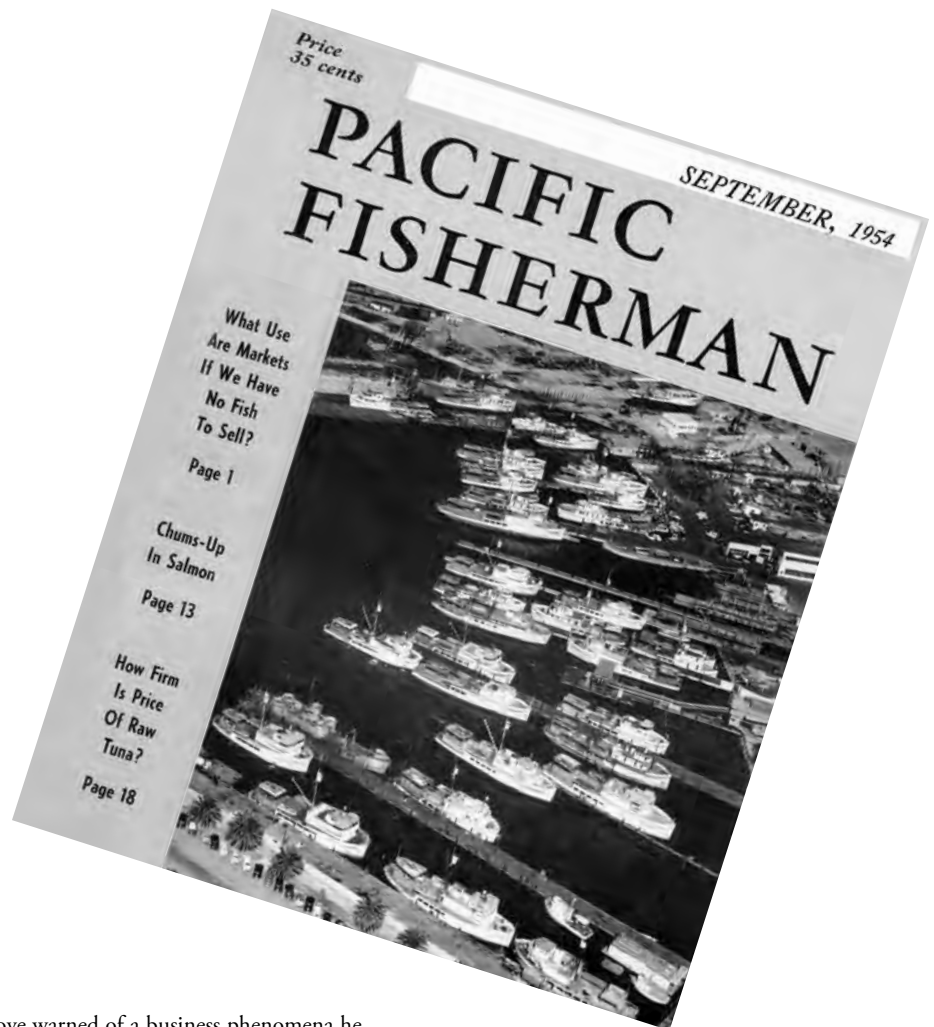
But those problems lay far in the future. In October 1958, Lou Brito, captain and part-owner of Southern Pacific, sailed from San Diego in his newly converted purse seiner. San Diego's tunamen watched carefully, and soon ninety-seven baitboats had been converted.³³ These survivors of the Valley experienced astounding success in developing a renewed San Diego tuna fleet that successfully met the Japanese challenge and brought a revolutionary change to the global market for canned tuna. The world followed Captain Brito's lead: today, purse seiners land most of the world's tuna catch.

The original Acme Newspictures caption for the cover photo at right reads:

“SAN DIEGO, CALIF: Scores of ocean-going tuna boats, idled by the heavy imports of frozen fish from Japan, are tied up along the waterfront here. Many of them have been waiting for weeks to unload their cargo. They are on a rotation schedule and must wait up to 90 days before returning to sea.”

The old Atlantic, below, sank during this period. One result of economically-enforced idleness coupled with deferred maintenance on aging vessels was that a shocking number were lost at sea.

author's coll.



NOTES

- 1 In a 1999 speech in Detroit, Intel CEO Anthony Grove warned of a business phenomena he called “The Valley of Death,” which resulted from hubris as firms believed past success guaranteed future success, preventing them from identifying and evading threats to their future.
- 2 Per capita consumption figures reflect edible weight. “Pacific Harvest ... the Story of Tuna,” Union Title-Trust Topics 5 (September-October 1951): 2-9. Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, “Fisheries of the United States,” Current Fisheries Statistics 4100 (Washington, D. C.: 1965), 47; P. J. Donley, W. G. Jacobson, C. S. Fanning, “Fifty Years of Tuna Statistics: Past, Present and Future 1948-1998 (Washington: D. C.: 1998); U. S. Department of Commerce, “Tuna 1947-1972,” Current Fisheries Statistics 6130 (Washington, D. C.: 1973).
- 3 The author’s estimate of 755 boats reflects peak albacore season, and includes the seasonal albacore fleet. About 164 were “tuna clippers,” vessels of greater than 100 tons, large enough to fish from California to Chile, while about 191 were smaller baitboats; both fished using poles and live bait. About 400 trolled with lines and unbaited hooks. “Tuna 1947-1972,” 32.
- 4 On the impact of trade policy, see “Acheson Lands Another Low Blow on Tuna Industry, Pacific Fisherman (cited hereafter as PF) (November 1952): 7.
- 5 In 1948 Japan began postwar tuna exports, shipping about 645,000 pounds of canned tuna to the U. S.. Harold Cary, “A Tariff History of Tuna Canned In Oil,” United States Tuna Foundation Review 83-2 (July 20, 1983).
- 6 During the early 1950s, yellowfin was sold to cannerys at prices ranging from \$310 per short ton to \$344; by 1959, the price fell to \$260. Skipjack during the early 1950s ranged from \$290 per short ton to \$304; by 1959, it sold for \$212. Productivity dropped, too, as the fleet sustained a 68% decline in yellowfin and skipjack landings. In 1950, the U. S. fleet caught about 90,686 short tons of yellowfin, but by 1959, landings dropped to 54,185 tons. In 1950, the fleet caught about 62,259 short tons of skipjack, which dropped to 49,240 by 1959.



Casualties of the “Valley of Death”

Compiled by August Felando

During the 1950s, eighty-five tuna clippers left the fleet, sixty-nine of which were lost at sea. Only thirty-seven had left the fleet during the entire preceding quarter-century, excepting the twenty that did not return from WWII-era military service.

The year each vessel was launched is in parenthesis.

1950

Lost at Sea

Glory of the Seas (1928); American Belle (1940/1948); Southern Cross (1929); Olympia (1927); Dependable (1936/1938).

Transferred to Other Uses or Fisheries

Oregon (1948); Alaska (1947); Alert (1930).

1951

Lost at Sea

Vindicator, ex-Rainbow (1930); American Girl (1944).

Removed from Documentation

Theodore Foss (1900/1928)

1952

Lost at Sea

Linda-Jo (1944); Morning Star (1940); Lady Ann, ex-Americano (1944); Sao Joao (1929); Sea Wolf (1945); Emma R. S. (1928); Olympic (1931); Steven L., ex-Cal-sea (1936/1948); Countess (1950); Mary Ann (1947); Miss California (1951); Princess Pat (1945); Coronado (1948); Atlantic (1926).

1953

Lost at Sea

City of San Diego (1931); Manabi, ex-Sunset (1942); Sonja (1945/1948); North Star (1942/1946); Mona Lisa (1951); South Pacific (1947); Sea Lady (1937); Dorothy Lee (1941); Explorer (1945/1948); Columbus (1930).

Removed from documentation

Senator (1930).

Sold to a Foreign Buyer

Marine Greyhound, ex-St. Therese (1928).

- 7 This postwar import challenge was not exclusively Japanese. Frozen **light-meat tunas and canned bonito in oil were also arriving from Latin American ports. In 1948, the largest exporter of canned tuna in oil to the U. S. was Peru** with a 56% share of 8.3 million pounds. An investigation by the FDA, the State Department, and the Peruvian Government, however, found that these products were mislabeled as tuna in oil, but were in fact bonito, a non-tuna species. Cary, “A Tariff History,” 2.
- 8 The first recorded purchase of Japanese tuna by California canners was in 1925. The president of the American Fishermen’s Protective Association opposed imports, and for a time, problems with federal labeling requirements suspended them. In 1927, California canners imported about 2,000 tons of Japanese albacore. Thereafter, imports of duty-free frozen Japanese tuna were no longer unusual. Yellowfin was first imported in 1932, and skipjack in 1933. San Pedro canner Charles P. Halfhill, whose father Albert canned the first tuna in 1903, went to Japan in 1933 to supervise the packing of tuna for the U. S., importing over 14 million cans that year. Soon, other California canners followed. In May, 1933, Pacific Fisherman reported that the U. S. market for canned tuna was about 60 million cans, but that during 1933 an anticipated total of over 24 million cans, plus thousands of tons of frozen tuna, would be imported. By October 1933, Japanese canned tuna imports represented about 65% of the total California pack of about 43 million cans. The U. S. raised the tariff on canned tuna in oil from 30% to 45 % ad valorem (that is, based on its market value as determined by the government) in January, 1934. In response, the Japanese introduced tuna packed in water to the U. S. market; the duty for this product was 25% and not the punishing 45%. In this period, however, tuna packed in water failed to be widely accepted in the U. S.. See PF articles, June 1925: 50-51; March 1927: 42; May 1927: 35; July 1927: 37; September 1927: 40; July 1928: 34; May 1930: 38; January 1931: 40; July 1932: 30; September 1932: 35; October 1932: 29; November 1932, 25; January 1933: 38; May 1933: 16; July 1933: 14; November 1933: 17, 23; December 1933: 18-19; January 1934: 18-19; February 1934: 28; September 1934: 17.
- 9 In January 1935, a Congressman representing San Pedro introduced a bill to remove fresh and frozen tuna from the free list and impose a duty of \$40 per short ton, and 50% ad valorem on canned tuna. PF (February 1935): 20. After issuance of the 1936 U. S. Tariff Commission report, no tuna tariff bills were introduced in Congress until after WWII.
- 10 Harold Cary, personal communication to author, 1998. Cary was American Tunaboat Association general manager 1949-1959.
- 11 Article by Tom F. Sandoz, President, Columbia River Packers Association, Inc., PF, (December 1952): 57.
- 12 PF (October 1952): 67-68.
- 13 Glenn Copeland, personal communication to author, circa 1995.
- 14 Also in 1943, a trade agreement with Iceland reduced the duty on canned fish not packed in oil to 15.5%. Iceland, which canned non-tuna fish, wanted concessions in exchange for allowing U. S. forces on its soil. In 1948, a GATT concession was negotiated with the Republic of China (Taiwan), and the rate was reduced to 12.5%. This concession was withdrawn in 1952, after Taiwan withdrew from GATT. U. S. International Trade Commission, “Certain Canned Tuna Fish,” Report to the President on Investigation No. TA-201-53 (Washington, D. C.: August 1984), A-6.
- 15 W. M. Chapman, “Tuna—In Brine,” Pan-American Fisherman (December 1951): 18.
- 16 Stuart Alton, “Windfall,” Pan-American Fisherman (August 1950): 11, 28. Importers objected to the increased duty rate and U. S. canners pleaded for immediate restoration of the 45% rate. The canners correctly anticipated that if restoration required a six-month delay, Japan would flood the U.S. market. In 1950, Japan exported 32 million pounds of the 36.5 million pounds imported into the US market, 75% of which entered during the last six months of 1950. 1950 was the last year that tuna in oil constituted a major tuna trade item. 1963-1983 tuna imports, for example, averaged 304,000 pounds annually, less than 1% than the “deluge of 1959. Cary, “A Tariff History,” 3.
- 17 Chapman, “Tuna—In Brine,” 29.
- 18 PF, October 1951: 8-11, 38. Many vessels in San Diego’s parade were part of the seasonal albacore trolling fleet, not based in San Diego.

- 19 Harold Cary, "The Tuna Wars, 1949-1952," *Fishermen's News* (February 1955): 18. On a meeting about countering tuna imports, held in Seattle in December 1951 by the newly-formed Pacific Coast Fish Producers Institute, see "Equalized Tuna Tariffs: Objectives of Industry Campaign," *PF* (January 1952): 13-14, 19, 25,
- 20 *PF* (June 1952): 1; *ibid.*, "Finance Committee Favors Tuna Tariff," 21; *PF* (July 1952): 13.
- 21 Cary, "Tuna Wars," 18. Following the vote, Senator Knowland secured passage of a resolution directing the Tariff Commission and the Interior Department to conduct an investigation on the impact of tuna imports and report findings by 1 January 1953.
- 22 "Tuna Tariff Outlook Dim," *PF* (June 1953): 15.
- 23 Montgomery Phister, "Tuna Cannery Advocate Balanced Tariff," *PF* (February 1952): 25; "Certain Canned Tuna Fish," A-5. The industry argued that it was "rational and customary" for parties to negotiate duty rates only on items involved in commerce between the parties—and that at the time the trade agreements were negotiated with Iceland and Taiwan, neither was involved in the tuna trade; therefore, rates on canned tuna were not bound by these agreements. The State Department countered that the meaning of "trade" should not be so restricted. Cary, personal communication, 1998. The Commission held another hearing in November, 1952 on a California Tuna Cannery Association petition seeking relief from imports of canned tuna in brine and bonito in oil, but a majority found that these were not being imported in such increased quantities "so as to cause or threaten serious injury to the domestic industry." *PF* (January 1953): 11.
- 24 GATT provided that the reduced rate would apply only to those in any calendar year not in excess of 20% of the U. S. pack of canned tuna during the preceding calendar year. Effective April 14, 1956, the 12.5% duty on tuna in brine or water was withdrawn from the agreement with Iceland.
- 25 "Meeting Between Tuna Nations Sought to Break Economic Trap," *PF* (July 1959): 7-9. In May, 1959, about 95 representatives of all segments of the industry met with Bureau of Commercial Fisheries officials at Scripps Institute of Oceanography and discussed ways in which the Bureau could help them effectively respond to imports. "U. S. B. C. F. and Tuna Industry Swap Programs for Progress," *PF* (June 1959): 14. Momentum to hold a conference with Japan built after meetings held by Los Angeles mayor Norris Poulson and by the California Commission on Interstate Cooperation, headed by Lieutenant Governor Glenn M. Anderson.
- 26 The State Department extended an invitation to the Japanese Government following a Tokyo meeting between Japanese Agriculture Minister Fukuda and Interior Secretary Fred Seaton "for the purpose of smoothing the tuna trade between the two nations." "American Tuna Industry Builds Hope on Meeting," *PF* (September 1959): 3-4.
- 27 "At Opening Plenary Session in Tokyo—U. S. Tuna Industry United, Hopeful, After Frank Talks with Japanese," *PF* (November 1959): 7.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 29 Sea-preme was built for California Canning and later acquired by Westgate-Sun Harbor.
- 30 The fleet consisted of Sea-preme (1951); Independence, Concho, and Missouri (all 1955); Westport and Elsinore (1956); San Juan and Mary Barbara (1957); Carol Virginia and Lois Seaver (1958); and Elsie A. and Larry Roe (1959).
- 31 Smith used syndication, usually arranged through a Kansas City firm, to finance vessel construction: a Delaware corporation was organized to own a clipper, whose construction was financed through sale of stock. The arrangement's federal income tax advantages proved persuasive to investors. This method of minimizing the tax burden had been established through lawsuits won by owners of California-based boats registered in Washington and Oregon.
- 32 Sun King of San Pedro actually made the first successful voyage, after her conversion in San Diego, but had far less impact than Southern Pacific. Converted seiners prior to 1960, listed by date of first voyage after conversion, are Sun King (October 1957); Southern Pacific (November 1958); Determined (ex-Challenger) (January 1959); Santa Helena (February 1959); Sun Jason and Southern Queen (April 1959); Ruthie B. (May 1959); Jo Linda (ex-Sun Hilarita), Equator, Saratoga, and Paramount (July 1959); Conte Bianco (September 1959); Dominator and Constitution (October 1959); Jeanne Lynn and American Boy (November 1959). On conversion to purse seiners, see Craig J. Orange and Gordon Broadhead, "1958-1959—A Turning Point For Tuna Purse Seine Fishing?" *PF* (June 1959): 20-26.

1954

Lost at Sea

Sun Voyager (1946); St. George (1941), Donna M. (1943/1948); Santa Barbara (1946), Anna M. (1941); Calistar (1945).

1955

Lost at Sea

American Clipper (1928); Sea Lark (1944/1951); Northern Light (1937); Western Pacific (1940); Marilyn Rose (1955); Ocean Pride (1944/1948); Sun Traveler (1947).

Sold to a Foreign Buyer Astorian (1945).

Transferred to Another Fishery

St. Francis (1940/1946).

1956

Lost at Sea

Sunset (1947); Sun Dial (1945); Defiance (1947/1952); Explorer, ex-Scarlet Queen (1944/1948); Victory (1943); Hornet (1945/1948); American Boy, ex-Bremen (1930).

Removed from Documentation

Marico (1930); Louise H., ex-Stella di Genoa (1928).

Sold to a Foreign Buyer Gulf Star (1951).

1957

Lost at Sea

Leona C. (1945/1948); Helen S. (1951); Sun Streak, ex-Pan American (1943/1945); Palomar, ex-Sharon Gale (1945); Sun Dawn (1945/1947); Sun Pacific (1945/1948); Sun Dora (1945/1948).

1958

Lost at Sea

Jenita (1946); Helen Ann (1945/1947); Mermaid (1949); Westgate (1937); Royal Pacific (1951).

Sold to a Foreign Buyer

American Lady (1945); Sun Harbor (1937).

1959

Lost at Sea

Sun Ray, ex-Star-kist (1945); North American (1944/1945); Martin B. (1945/1948); United Victory (1945); Excalibur (1949); Sea Boy (1933). **Sold to a Foreign Buyer** Merica, ex-Sea Hound (1948); Elena (1942/1948); St. Mary (1938).

Remembering John Bate and the Creation of the San Diego Unified Port District

Senator James R. Mills

Before the Second World War, San Diego's Harbor Department had just two wharves to accommodate merchant vessels. The cargo ships that called here, for the most part tramp steamers flying the British, Japanese and other flags, tied up and discharged or loaded their cargoes at the woefully inadequate "B" Street Pier. Coastal passenger ships tied up at the Broadway Pier.

The waterfront did not change much until after John Bate became head of the city's harbor department in 1948. He quickly formulated an ambitious program to expand its facilities for handling cargo by developing a plan for a new terminal at the foot of





Tenth Avenue. To finance its construction, he prevailed upon the city council to present a bond issue to the voters in 1955. The \$9,460,000 bond issue was approved, and the new terminal became an enormous improvement upon the “B” Street pier.

Bate also saw the bay’s almost untapped recreational and tourist potential—he was instrumental, for example, in the creation of Shelter and Harbor Islands, and in the restoration of the *Star of India*—but he was particularly dedicated to the expansion of San Diego as a commercial port. There was no more land available on the city’s waterfront, so he had to look elsewhere for a location on which to build another cargo handling facility. The obvious choice was the mostly vacant waterfront of National City.

I did not know what he had in mind when he asked to have lunch with me at Lubach’s after the legislature had adjourned the general session of 1961, but I knew he must have some purpose other than an exchange of pleasantries in mind. John, a Scottish preacher’s son, was a rather dour man for whom small talk had little if any appeal. While we were still looking over our menus, he started to tell me about the economic advantages that would result from having a marine cargo terminal at National City. Bate pointed out that the city of San Diego could not build it because it would be outside the city limits, but National City had neither the tax base nor other financial capacity to do it. He outlined the advantages to setting up a new region-wide agency, the chief of which was that it would allow for the unified planning and development for the tidelands of the entire bay. He finally said he wanted me (a state assemblyman at that time) or State Senator Hugo Fisher to introduce legislation that

At left, Bate speaks at 10th Avenue Terminal’s 1958 dedication. Note the cotton; port facility construction was spurred by a cotton boom that began in 1952. Neither 10th Ave. (above) nor the National City Terminal was built with container ships in mind; Bate failed to anticipate that they were more than a passing fad.

At left, San Diego Historical Society Photograph Coll., above, MMSD P2650

James R. Mills is a native San Diegan. He has served as president *pro tempore* of the California State Senate and the state’s acting governor, as well as chairman of the board of Amtrak.



Three generations of port directors: Bate, his predecessor Joe Brennan (San Diego's first port director) and his successor Don Nay.

MMSD P2804

would create a harbor district made up of all the cities with tidelands on the bay: San Diego, Coronado, National City, Chula Vista, and Imperial Beach. He reminded me that control of all the bayfront tidelands had been ceded by the State of California to the bay's cities in times past, but they could still be conveyed by the state to any governmental agency the state chose to create. He told me that he had already presented his proposal to Hugo, who had agreed to it as readily as I did at lunch that day.

During the even-numbered years before 1966 the legislature did not meet in general sessions; we met in brief budget sessions to compose and pass a budget for the coming year. The governor, however, could call a special session on any subject, and such a special session could meet simultaneously with the budget ses-

sion. Hugo Fisher and I asked Governor Pat Brown to call a special session to consider the creation of a port district for the harbor of San Diego, and Pat agreed to do it.

The last discussions of what should be in the bill took place in Hugo's office in the state capitol. John Bate and Hugo and I agreed that, even though the state *could* unilaterally impose the new agency we proposed, the creation of this new port district should be subject to a vote of the people in the areas affected. We decided the vote should be an inside-outside vote, that is, the proposition had to be approved by the voters within the city of San Diego and by those in the other four bayfront cities, taken together.

We knew there was fierce opposition to the proposition by the mayors and councils of every single city that stood to lose control of its bayside to the new agency. But how would the people themselves respond? John said he thought it was important to give San Diego only three members of the seven-member governing board, in order to make the proposition more palatable to voters in the smaller cities. Hugo and I reluctantly agreed. We also went along with his wish to give the agency the power to levy a property tax of ten cents on the dollar to build new facilities. Although Proposition 13 ended that tax in 1978, land rents on the Port District's properties have made the power to tax unnecessary to accomplish its goals and responsibilities.

In a final meeting in Hugo Fisher's office in the capitol, he and I discussed whether he should introduce the bill in the senate or I should introduce it in the assembly. We settled the matter in a reasonable way by the toss of a coin.

Hugo called “Heads!” while my quarter was in the air, and that was how it landed on the carpet in front of his desk.

The measure had one primary author in the senate and another one in the assembly, the only bill I ever heard of that did. It passed in the legislature despite the outspoken opposition of the governments of the cities affected.

In the November election of 1962, the measure was approved by the voters of San Diego and those of the other harborside cities taken together, despite their city governments’ opposition. The following month, on December 18, a flatbed truck trailer was hauled onto a vacant part of the tidelands of National City, an awning was raised over it, and Pat Brown signed the bill into law.

John Bate became the first director of the San Diego Unified Port District, and undertook the planning and construction of his cargo handling terminal in National City. The Port District dramatically expanded Lindbergh Field into an international airport, which has now become its own agency. It has also financed marinas, parks, roads, and other projects and programs that have improved the bayside cities for their inhabitants and visitors.

John Bate was farsighted enough to understand what a unified port district could do for our area, he was dedicated enough to spend the effort necessary to make it happen, and courageous enough to jeopardize his job by doing it in spite of the opposition of his employers in San Diego’s city government.



As the author is distracted by something off-camera, Pat Brown signs the legislation to create the port district. Hugo Fisher looks over his shoulder.

MMSD P11954

Creating an “Island” Playground:

San Diegans Recall the Development of Shelter Island

Karen Wagner Scanlon

Well into the twentieth century, mariners entering San Diego Bay gingerly skirted a shoal that arched its back at low tide at Roseville in the bay’s northwestern corner. This “mudbank,” as it was termed on an 1853 map, was created by sand deposited by the ebb and flow of the tide. Stirred into the mix was silt dumped by the San Diego River, whose mouth historically alternated between San Diego Bay and Mission Bay.

The man who imagined the scheme to build up this unlovely spot into Shelter Island was Joe Brennan—a tugboat operator who became San Diego’s harbor master in 1918 and was its first port director until he retired in 1948. It was his successor John Bate, however, who was most responsible for creating a commercial and recreational island.

Lexie Johnson, whose father kept the light at Point Loma Lighthouse, remembers picnicking there before the Second World War:





I never thought of it as a shoal, but I guess it was. Hardly a mudflat—it was all sand. It took no time to row out to it. We’d just pull the skiff up on the sand. No one ever went out there, no reason to. It was just a fun place to watch the ships come and go, but it was hot with no shade. Nothing [was] on the island except what floated up on the beach, some low weeds, maybe sagebrush. If I could swim back, you know it wasn’t far.¹

At top left in the 1935 view on the facing page, the nameless sandbar shelters the San Diego Yacht Club and the High Seas Tuna cannery’s pier. Above, by 1954 the still-barren “island” had gained its final shape.

San Diego Historical Society Photograph Coll.

Yachtsman Joe Jessop likewise recalled that “all of us kids thought it was great stuff to go out on Shelter Island and tramp around. It was [like] going to the South Sea Islands.”² As a boy, John Bate also fished and swam there.

Dredges had become commonplace in the harbor by 1934, when a federally-funded project began carving a two-hundred-foot wide ship channel, twenty feet deep. This dredging was good news to yachtsmen—particularly members of the San Diego Yacht Club, who that year moved their clubhouse from Coronado to Roseville—because the spoil from the project was used to raise the nameless mudflat and also fill in tidelands surrounding the yacht basin. Low though the sand spit still was, recreational boaters hoped that the heavy

Karen Wagner Scanlon is an early childhood educator and freelance writer. Her article, “‘New’ Point Loma Lighthouse” appeared in the Spring 2001 *Mains’l Haul*.



The "island" complete in 1961.

San Diego Historical Society Photograph Coll.

chop of the southerlies would no longer devastate yachts moored behind it. The yacht basin shelters in the lee of the island, and thus came the its new name, chosen by members of the San Diego Yacht Club through a contest around 1934. As the club's longtime publicist Faith Israel recalled, "We then wrote a letter to San Diego Port Director Joe Brennan, and told him we had decided on the name 'Shelter Island.' He said, 'I guess that's as good as any.'"³

The buildup to war brought urgency to deepening the shipping channel further, and the sandbar was once again a convenient place to dump dredged materials. "There was enough island there during World War II that the Navy used it to store ammunition" in several huts, recalls Paul Kettenburg, whose family's boat building and repair business was located nearby.⁴

After the war, the Harbor Department continued dredging, this time to provide a larger, four-hundred-foot entrance to the yacht basin. In late 1947 the *San Diego Union* reported of the growing island that "planners have envisioned this as an area of palm trees, landscaping, picnic grounds and camp kitchens available to the general public," a vision which demanded a link to the mainland to facilitate public access. There was strong opposition, however, from the Chamber of Commerce and Point Loma

residents, who "feared another Coney Island or worse," as John Bate recalled. Proposals were floated to link the island to Point Loma from the foot of Kellogg Street, or Cañon Street, or via a curving causeway, but it was Bate who gave the island its final shape.⁵

Carl Reupsh, Bate's deputy, recalled that "in about 1949-1950 John had the idea of building a recreational island, of moving the old High Seas Tuna Cannery, of moving the [tuna] fleet and the piers from that harbor at the foot of Talbot Street where they were located . . . and making that specifically a yacht harbor."⁶ Bate, a yachtsman himself, settled on a plan that created a substantially larger yacht basin than the other proposals by extending Byron Street on a causeway out to the island, dividing the yacht harbor from the commercial basin. As Reupsch recalled:

John was so sold on this idea in his own mind that he and I . . . called, I think, on every person in Point Loma. We assured them that there would be no loud noise, no bright lights, that the roofs would be the same as their own roofs—shake shingle so it wouldn't reflect the sun, wouldn't glare on their eyes—that we would eliminate and move the fishing operations from the yacht harbor into the commercial basin. And finally we got the [verbal] consent of the people on Point Loma to connect Shelter Island.⁷

The Byron Street causeway, Shelter Island Drive, was completed in 1950.

The young “island,” now a peninsula, was certainly not much to look at. Bate was derided as “Commodore of the Mud Flats” and the project dismissed as “Bate’s Folly.”⁸ In 1950, only a pathetic-looking line of palms—planted to attract East Coast snowbirds who “came here to see waving palm trees and flowers” in Bate’s words—straggled out the causeway onto the bare sandbar.⁹

Shelter Island—a mile long, seven feet above high tide, and on average three hundred feet wide—remained vacant until 1953 when the landfill had settled sufficiently to allow road construction to begin.¹⁰ Next came a new fishing pier, parking, a boat launching ramp, and grassy park areas. The first restaurant, which became the Bali Hai, opened in 1953, and Red Sails Inn opened in 1957. Short sandy beaches spilled to the water’s edge around the perimeter.¹¹

The Harbor Department funded the island’s creation through the leases it held on tideland properties, which State law requires to be reinvested in waterfront facilities.¹² Today, Shelter Island boasts boatyards, marine fueling facilities, three yacht clubs, marinas, hotels, restaurants, ship chandlers, and other small businesses. There are 2,300 boat slips in the yacht basin west of the causeway, and eight hundred more tucked into the commercial basin to the east.

Shelter Island’s resounding success triggered an echo: thanks to Bate’s efforts, a larger project, Harbor Island, began to emerge in 1961 thanks to fill provided free by the Navy from a project to dredge the bay for deep-draft *Forrestal*-class aircraft carriers. Joe Brennan died in 1974 at the age of ninety-one, having lived to see the successful completion of the island scheme that he had imagined and Bate had brought to fruition. Shelter and Harbor Islands—centerpieces along San Diego’s twenty-six miles of waterfront—testify to the growing awareness of twentieth century port planners of their bay’s recreational potential.

N O T E S

- 1 Lexie Johnson, online interview by the author, 19 June 2002.
- 2 Joe Jessop, interview by Jim Mills, 28 May 1993, Maritime Museum of San Diego Library.
- 3 Faith Israel, 1953 interview by George Michaud, San Diego Yacht Club, quoted in Ed Barr, “The Making of Shelter Island,” San Diego Yacht Club *Mainsheet*, January 1999.
- 4 Paul Kettenburg, telephone interview by author, 5 August 2002.
- 5 San Diego *Union*, 5 December 1947. Brennan favored the Kellogg St. causeway. Carl F. Reupsch, interview by Robert G. Wright, 28 December 1978, Maritime Museum of San Diego Library.
- 6 Reupsch, interview.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Quoted in Barr, 17.
- 9 Ibid. Like Brennan, Bate scavenged whatever he could for the Harbor Department; while many palms, for example, came from the State highway department, Jessop recalled that, “if a palm tree could be dug up, they’d come and get it and put it on Shelter Island.” Mills recalls, “Joe Brennan made everybody in San Diego . . . know that if you had a palm tree and didn’t want it he’d have his men come and get it. . . . We called up Joe Brennan’s office and two or three of his men came there with a truck and they dug [our palm] up . . . brought it down [to Shelter Island] and replanted it.”
- 10 Port of San Diego land use documents prepared by Carl F. Reupsch, 27 April 1970, San Diego Unified Port District.
- 11 The beaches were replaced by rock revetment to prevent erosion due to tidal action and ship wakes. This initially consisted of broken asphalt and concrete pavement placed over filter cloth, and was reinforced in 1977. Cesar Romero, Design Engineering Department, Port of San Diego, telephone conversation with author, 9 August 2002.
- 12 The state had put tidelands within San Diego city limits in trust to the city in 1911, the arrangement which persisted until 1962, when they were transferred to the new San Diego Unified Port District.

Remembering Alan Villiers's Visit to the *Star of India*

Senator James R. Mills

We who loved the *Star of India* were saddened to see her continuous deterioration throughout her first thirty years in San Diego. In the 1950s, some people began to talk about the decaying ship as an eyesore that should be removed from the waterfront. The *Star's* rebirth as a restored, active vessel and a tourist destination on the bay is now taken for granted, but it then seemed unlikely. The restoration effort actually got underway thanks to a burst of negative publicity that surrounded a 1957 visit to the ship by the Australian author and adventurer Alan Villiers.

At the end of September, 1957, San Diego newspapers told of a scheduled appearance by Villiers here on October 1 at 8:30 in the evening

at Russ Auditorium. He had recently sailed the replica ship *Mayflower II* across the Atlantic to reenact the 1620 voyage of the original *Mayflower*. His program that October night was to consist of a color film shot on the voyage, along with his commentary.

Jerry MacMullen, who later became the first president of the Maritime Museum Association of San Diego, was then director of the San Diego Historical Society, and I was its curator. We brought our lunches in brown paper bags and ate them together in the library of the Junípero Serra Museum,



in Presidio Park. On October 1, the day Villiers was due to appear, Jerry mentioned that he was going to hear him, and I replied, with regret, that I wasn't. I was then working toward my master's degree in history at San Diego State University, and the seminar sessions for me and other candidates on our theses were conducted by Dr. Abraham Nasatir, a serious scholar who did not lightly forgive absences. Those sessions were held on Tuesday nights, and October 1 would be a Tuesday.

As we were washing our sandwiches down with instant coffee, I suggested to Jerry that we should call Villiers, whom we had both met, and ask him to come down to the *Star of India*. I suggested that he might be able to say things for the press that could stimulate efforts to restore the ship. Though neither of us knew how to reach Villiers, he would certainly be staying at a hotel that night, so I told Jerry I that if need be I would call every hotel in San Diego to find him. I went downstairs to the front office, sat down at my desk, and called John Bunker, waterfront reporter for the *San Diego Evening Tribune*. Bunker was a friend of the *Star*; over the previous year or so he had written several constructive articles about the ship. I told him what I had in mind and asked if he could get down to the *Star of India* with a photographer if I could persuade Villiers to come aboard and comment on the ship's forlorn condition. John said he certainly could.

With John Bunker's assurance that he would appear if Villiers did, I telephoned the U. S. Grant Hotel and asked if a guest named Alan Villiers had a reservation for that night, to no avail. Then I tried the El Cortez and was told, "Yes. He just checked in. Do you want to be put through to his room?"

When an Australian voice answered the phone, I identified myself and asked Villiers if he would come down to the ship, comment on her sad condition, and advocate her restoration. I told him that a reporter from a daily paper would come with a photographer. He said he'd be glad to, at nine o'clock the following morning.

I called John Bunker back and then told Jerry, who volunteered to call Grace Hoff, the "ship keeper" who lived aboard the *Star*, and advise her when Villiers would appear. Grace had come aboard with her uncle, Captain Ed Fox, when he had been taken on as ship keeper fifteen years before. After Ed Fox died in 1955, Grace stayed on. She, however, had no incentive to promote the *Star*'s restoration, since she would lose her livelihood and home if the ship was closed to the public to be restored; admissions paid by the few visitors provided her income, and the ship was her home.¹

I suggested to Jerry that he should go down to the ship the next morning, but he said, "It was your idea; you should be the one to meet him." Jerry went to hear Villiers that night, and after the program he thanked Villiers for being willing to speak up for our poor old ship.

The next morning dawned as a typical October San Diego day; the newspaper's weather column referenced a "big fat marine layer" overhead. I arrived at about a quarter to nine, and John Bunker was already aboard with his photographer. The three of us walked around the seedy ship looking for good places for Villiers to be photographed, and were up on the forecastle head discussing the ship's bell as a centerpiece for the picture when we spotted Villiers getting out of a cab on Harbor Drive. I hustled aft to meet him, but a very grim-looking Grace Hoff emerged from the hatch in the poop and beat me to the head of the gangway.

"It'll be fifty cents to come aboard," she glowered at Villiers. I muttered,

James R. Mills was fascinated by sailing ships from his early childhood. In addition to his legislative career, he is a past member of the San Diego Maritime Research Society and past president of the Maritime Museum Association of San Diego.

Editor's Note:

Shortly before his death in 2002, John Bunker substantiated the version of events printed here. It differs, however, from Jerry MacMullen's recollection that he arranged Villiers's visit himself in a late-night telephone call to Bunker. (MacMullen, transcript of interview by Robert G. Wright, 5 September 1971, 28, and transcript of interview by Wright and Sylvia Arden, 21 September 1980, 16, Maritime Museum of San Diego Library.)

"Oh, my God!" and reached into my pocket, but the amused Australian found his fifty cents first. After parting with his change, he walked around the ship, followed by John Bunker and me. Villiers shook his head sadly at what he saw, especially at the tarpaper that had been laid on the poop deck by Ed Fox to keep the rain from seeping through its old seams. He also looked particularly unhappy as he gazed aloft at the large television antenna at the mizzen masthead. After our tour of the ship, we went back up to the forecastle head, where John interviewed him. The photographer climbed down to the main deck, asked Villiers to lean over the rail and look at the ship's bell from above, and snapped his photo.

On October 3, San Diegans opened the *Tribune* to find Captain Villiers gazing critically down from the front page, calling their neglected square-rigger "a bloody mess." John Bunker quoted him saying that "San Diego is overlooking a great potential tourist attraction by not restoring the *Star of India* as other cities have done with old windjammers." He continued, "San Diego has an old ship here that couldn't be replaced for millions of dollars today. . . . She's a great historical curio. She's the oldest one of her kind still afloat." "She'd take a lot of work," Villiers accurately foretold, "and a lot of money. But London restored the famous clipper ship *Cutty Sark* and San Francisco restored the old sailing ship *Balclutha*." If San Diego didn't want the *Star*, the captain warned, San Diegans should offer her to a city "which will give the old girl a decent break and fix her up the way she deserves."²

John Bunker's front-page story about his interview with Villiers helped motivate Port Director John Bate to become involved with the ship's restoration, and thus inspired the rebirth of our beautiful old ship—which is exactly what Jerry MacMullen and I had hoped, over cups of instant coffee in the Serra Museum library that day in 1957.

N O T E S

- 1 On Grace Hoff, see Opal Crandall, "Oldest Iron Sailing Vessel Afloat Called Home by Active Miss Hoff," *San Diego Union*, 4 May 1958.
- 2 John Bunker, "Star of India 'Mess,' Says Capt. Villiers," *San Diego Evening Tribune*, 3 October 1957, p. 1.

"I returned to the main deck and entered the poop extension fitted by the Alaska Packers" wrote Karl Kortum of San Francisco's National Maritime Museum in 1958, about a part of the ship removed early in the restoration. "There was a display here of various maritime artifacts . . . ranged around the room on shelves, badly displayed." The *Star*'s saloon is visible through the door.

MMSD P8582A; Kortum, "Report on Restoration: Star of India"



Though the topmasts are still missing at Christmas, 1959, the ship's rebirth had begun.

San Diego Historical Society Photograph Coll.



A *Star* is Reborn: 1959-1963 Critical Years in the *Star of India*'s Restoration

Robert G. Wright
with Mark Allen

In 1959, Port Director John Bate's efforts to find a chairman to lead the drive to restore the decaying windjammer *Star of India* were initially frustrated.¹ Bate "threw up his hands," according to his assistant Carl Reusch, and left the task to Reusch and the Port's director of public relations, Henry Roloff. "One Friday about 5:30 when the office closed down and Hank and I were mulling over who would be a good man to head this campaign, Hank struck on the idea of Jack Donnelley, the attorney," Reusch recalled. "So we called Jack's office and he was in New York. Hank said, 'Let's send him a telegram—let's appoint him chairman.'"² On

Independent 2/22/59
**Owners of 'Star'
Said Negligent**

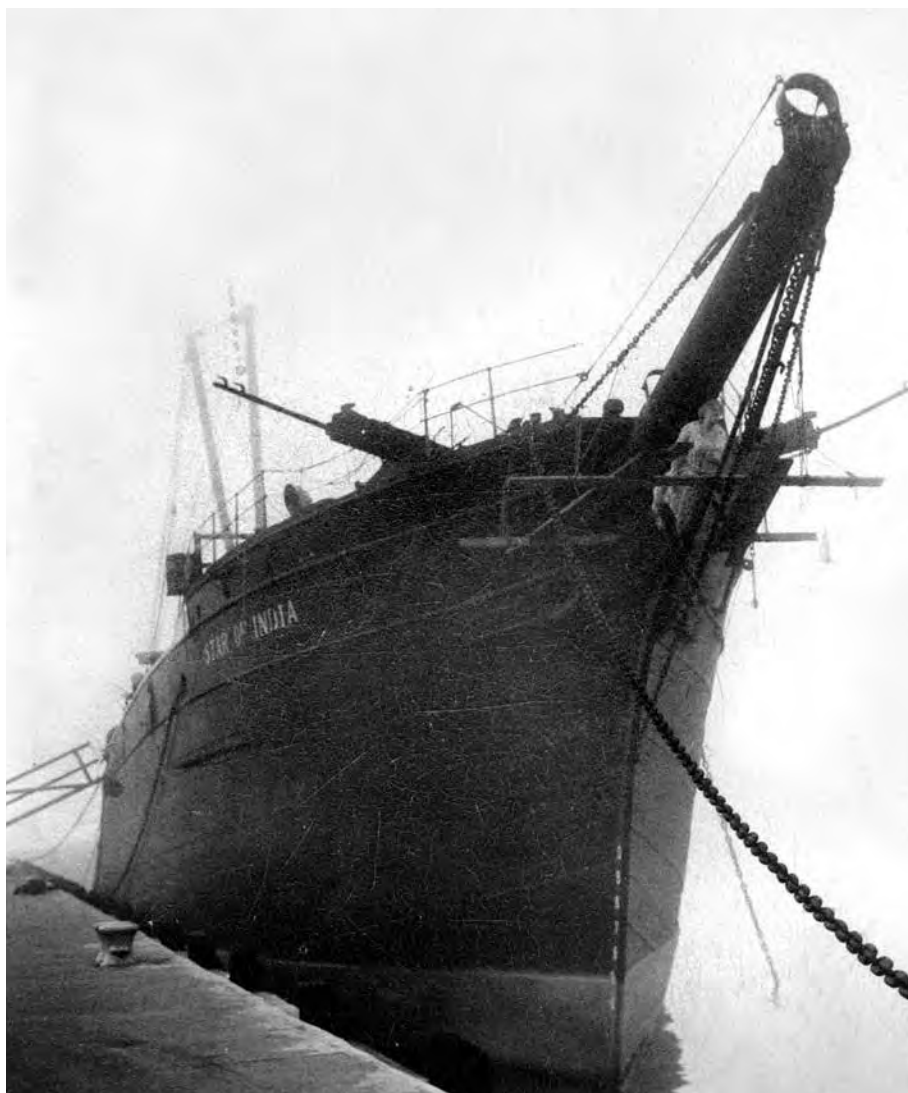


June 9, 1959, Donnelley was surprised to learn that he was “unanimously elected General Chairman of the Committee to Save the *Star of India*.” Roloff’s telegram concluded, “We desperately need someone to head the group who loves sailing ships, has worked on them, and who furthermore knows something about the waterfront.”³ Donnelley accepted the following day.

Jack A. Donnelley was a big, likeable Irishman who was an admiralty attorney and had sailed before the mast on the *Oriental* as a teenager. He knew San Diego’s movers and shakers, and had contacts in Washington. Like very few others, he could imagine a glowing future for the old ship—and more importantly, he could communicate this vision effectively: “I know it will be a great tourist attraction,” Donnelley prophesied to one potential donor, “and I am satisfied from the interest already shown by our school children that it will be a thrilling experience for them to go on board the ship and see for themselves just what things were like in the days of ‘Full Rigged Ships and Iron Men.’”⁴ As Reupsch later recalled, “the restoration of the *Star* really got underway with Jack Donnelley’s assistance.”⁵

Despite a chronic lack of funds, between 1959 and 1963 Donnelley and other dedicated volunteers set the *Star of India* on a course that would lead to the *Star*’s astonishing rebirth as an actively sailed ship. The old British bark had deteriorated to “little more than a pathetic, rusted hulk,” according to a 1947 magazine article, with rotting decks and peeling paint, masts rigged down to unsightly stubs, worn rigging, and a hull in doubtful condition.⁶ Thanks initially to the Depression, little maintenance had been done since 1927, when the San Diego Zoological Society had arranged to tow the retired square-rigger to San Diego with the plan to convert her into a landlocked aquarium with a maritime theme. But by her hundredth birthday in 1963, a renewed ship was beginning to emerge from the cocoon of rust and neglect.

This rebirth gained vital momentum from a 1957 visit by Australian sailor and author Captain Alan Villiers, who pricked San Diego’s conscience in a front-page newspaper article about San Diegans’ neglect of their ship. In



At left, the derelict ship is towed to drydock in 1959. Note the TV antenna atop the mizzen. Though she looks even worse above, restoration had begun.

MMSD Reynard scrapbook and P8918



The restoration's starting lineup. From left, Karl Kortum, Jerry MacMullen, Jack Donnelley, and John Bate. Behind them is the Harbor Department building, site of the restoration office.

MMSD P3153

Villiers's wake, interested citizens began to debate how to save the worn windjammer, which was difficult to visit in her berth alongside Harbor Drive, near where Seaport Village stands today. Port Director John Bate was among them. Carl Reupsch recalled that his boss "attempted to sell . . . the idea to the city manager of taking the ship to Mission Bay," which was then being developed for recreation. "Then they talked about putting it up on land, high and dry . . ." In early 1954, her owners considered a \$15,000 offer from a group of Northern California maritime history enthusiasts who proposed to restore the ship in San Francisco.⁷

Finally, as Jerry MacMullen recalled, "Bate gathered us together and said, 'Let's see what can be done about the *Star of India* before it is too late.'"⁸ On June 18, 1958 a group met in Bate's office to "successfully effect the refurbishing and rerigging of the *Star of India*, as well as moving the ship to the north side of Broadway Pier," and formed several committees.⁹ The following month, MacMullen, president of the San Diego Aquarium Society, which owned the ship, sent a \$200.00 check to Karl Kortum, Director of the San Francisco Maritime Museum, to bring Kortum south to evaluate the possibility of restoration based on his experience restoring *Balclutha*. Kortum submitted his report outlining basic steps needed to restore the ship in November, the most crucial of which was to drydock her as soon as possible to determine the hull's condition. To reflect this new mission of restoration, in April, 1959 the Aquarium Society renamed itself the Maritime Museum Association of San Diego, and Kortum wrote Bate to emphasize the need for a "working ship's manager who was very much needed to give direction to the project."¹⁰ To that end, Carl Reupsch persuaded retired Coast Guard Captain Donald B. MacDiarmid to take charge of the work as a volunteer, and the Harbor Commission donated an office at the foot of Broadway.¹¹

With Jack Donnelley's appointment to chair the restoration drive, momentum began to build. Within his first month, he held a meeting to formulate a plan of action for fundraising and restoration, attended by a group including Admiral George Henderson of the Copley Press, Carl Reupsch, and MacMullen.¹² A key asset to the group was the participation of James

Copley, publisher of the *Union and Tribune*, whose frequent publicity kept San Diegans aware of progress.¹³ Despite the demands of his law practice, Donnelley fired off a constant stream of letters, and San Diego's business community soon came to appreciate his fundraising firepower. "Boy what a salesman you would make" scrawled C. Arnholt Smith, Chairman of the Board of United States National Bank, in the margin of a letter acceding to Donnelley's request to refund the interest on a loan to the restoration.¹⁴

Since the ship's bottom had not been cleaned or inspected for over thirty-five years, drydocking was of first importance. The unknown condition of the hull forestalled any full-scale fundraising drive; as Donnelley wrote a donor, "I felt it would not be fair to the public if we made a public appeal and secured contributions and then it was determined that the bottom was not sound and we could not proceed with the restoration."¹⁵ He persuaded C. Arnholt Smith, whose bank held a controlling interest in National Steel and Shipbuilding, to donate the drydock time and lay days. The suspect condition of the bottom forced Donnelley to prepare an agreement with National Steel "relieving them from any liability if the *Star* should break in two when hauled out."¹⁶

The *Star of India* was towed into drydock on November 23, 1959, after twenty-six tons of concrete blocks were put aboard for ballast.¹⁷ In drydock, her waterline—the weakest part of the hull—was girdled with a steel belt, which

Arriving in drydock.

MMSD coll., Reynard scrapbook



Robert G. Wright began volunteering on weekends aboard the *Star* in 1962 and, beginning in 1973, lived on board for over seven years. He was married aboard, and currently works at the *Star*'s admissions desk. For over 30 years Bob has contributed oral history interviews to the maritime museum and San Diego Historical Society libraries, which form the basis of most of his twelve *Mains'l Haul* articles. He wishes to thank Joan Semmler for her help in typing his notes for this article.

Mark Allen has been editor of *Mains'l Haul* since 1999.

Karl Kortum had suggested.¹⁸ The ship was painted thanks to National Steel's Tony Codina, who obtained donations of paint and the services of painters.¹⁹ MacMullen reported "a little internal rhubarb among the restoration committee" over whether to paint the ship in her early "gunport" paint scheme or in the black she wore later. "I am very pleased that we did decide on the black color," Donnelley wrote Kortum. "The 'Star', to me, looks very imposing and almost majestic [sic] in black, although the effect is, of course, somewhat damaged by the broken spars and lack of rigging."²⁰

Drydocking, completed by late December, proved that the hull was sound enough to restore. But where should the ship be moored during the long restoration process? Bate gave Carl Reupsch the job of studying potential sites, and Reupsch concluded that "the best location was right at the foot of Ash Street," where the *Star* is moored today, "because at that point it would have been seen from the El Cortez Hotel and by everybody walking down the street. It was just a natural."²¹ Instead, however, that site's lack of electricity and water, needed for the restoration, dictated that the ship be moved adjacent to the "B" Street Pier where these services existed.²²

The new Policy and Planning Committee met in January, 1960 and identified priorities for the restoration: clean the bilges, construct a rack for ballast, ballast the ship with four hundred tons of concrete blocks, remove the early-twentieth-century extension of her poop deck to restore its original appearance, re-deck the poop, remove the old water tanks, rewire the ship, repair the forecastle head, re-rig, clean the brightwork, and paint the masts and spars.²³

Donnelley informed the public that it would take \$200,000 to restore the ship as a self-supporting tourist attraction and maritime museum.²⁴ Privately, however, he informed Karl Kortum in early 1960 that they were still unprepared to start a public drive for funds because "we decided that we could be very much embarrassed by stating our financial goals without actual estimates."²⁵ By July, 1960, Donnelley estimated that \$50,000 to \$60,000 had been spent, including \$16,000 for the steel girdle and other projects completed in drydock.²⁶ In October, Donnelley was forced to take out a personal note for \$20,000 from United States National Bank to defray these expenses.²⁷

Karl Kortum had anticipated, based on his experience restoring *Balclutha*, that "as a rule of thumb, money is about four or five times as hard to secure as are supplies and services."²⁸ "We had no budget," Carl Reupsch recalled, "It was purely scrounging for materials and labor to get anything done."²⁹ "The San Diego shipyards have opened their bone yards to us and we find there are many items of equipment that we can use," a grateful Donnelley noted in late 1961. "Many items have to be re-tooled for our use. Various machine shops, particularly those at the shipyards, will do this work free."³⁰

The *Star*, despite her cleaned and painted hull, remained unstable, with ungainly low masts and rigging that barely hinted at their original impressive appearance. Jerry MacMullen warned in July 1961 of the "dangerously wasted condition" of the lower main- and foremasts which "are in bad shape at the foot and the mainmast is completely gone where it penetrates the 'tweendeck; there are spots which have gone through here and there . . ."³¹ He thanked "whoever was responsible for the decision to remove the masts," a statement which, given MacMullen's role as the maritime museum's president, may

reflect the somewhat haphazard nature of the Restoration Committee's decision-making process.

Captain Donald MacDiarmid resigned from his voluntary post directing the restoration work in late 1961, a casualty of his mounting frustrations with the unsystematic project. After resigning, he complained that "the work seems to be going ahead piecemeal and without coordination," and warned that it was being confidently undertaken by men who had no real expertise with square-riggers. MacDiarmid cautioned against the constant temptation to take money-saving, potentially unsafe, shortcuts with materials. Further,

The problems of the *Star* obviously require many compromises, much resourcefulness, many improvisations. To present her public image in the best light has already required certain concealment and misleading statements (condition of hull as found in drydock, for instance). I have agreed that this is necessary to the success of the project, and, as she is not expected to go to sea again, not necessarily critical.³²

A classic example of the problems MacDiarmid perceived was the question of ballast. The restorers wrestled throughout this period with the issue of how to ballast the ship. Prior to drydocking, the *Star* had been alarmingly unstable; close inspection by flashlight at that time revealed that the only ballast in her bottom was an estimated hundred tons of dirt and fist-sized rock.³³ In November of 1959, San Francisco's Karl Kortum suggested that a platform be constructed to hold concrete blocks, as had been done aboard *Balclutha*, which would permit maintenance and inspection of the inside bottom of the hull.³⁴ Given the lack of funds, Bate and others argued instead for the cheaper solution of pouring approximately two hundred cubic yards of cement the length of the ship.³⁵ Donnelley agreed that "we should pour concrete on the theory that this would add strength to the hull and bottom," particularly if railroad rails were embedded to stiffen it.³⁶ "As you all know," he wrote his fellow Restoration Committee members in May, 1960, "the subject of ballast has been quite a headache and we have spent a great deal of time on this matter. So much so, in fact, that our progress in the restoration has almost come to a complete stop."³⁷ The problem was crucial because the ballast in place was temporary, and no replacement of the upper masts and rigging could begin until it was solved.

Karl Kortum and others strongly objected to pouring concrete, envisioning long-term problems if in future they had to chip it out to gain access to the hull bottom from the inside. "It is, in my opinion, a dangerous experiment. It could well be that the concrete pouring experiment would make her further repair economically unfeasible a quarter century from now. The ship would then have to be abandoned."³⁸

A San Francisco marine surveyors' firm, hired to survey the *Star*, was informed by Donnelley in September, 1960 that "the committee, based on advice from Naval engineers, marine surveyors, and shipyard superintendents, had come to the conclusion that we would pour concrete the length of the ship. We realize that the pouring of concrete is somewhat of an irreversible thing and we want to be sure as possible that we are doing the right thing."³⁹ Based on the San Francisco surveyor's strong recommendations, however, the idea was abandoned.⁴⁰



The cover of the Maritime Museum Association's first brochure, circa 1959.

MMSD coll.

An interim solution was improvised. As Carl Reupsch recalled, “we got donations of fifty-gallon drums, got donations of concrete, and when [construction firms] had a pour and they couldn’t use all the concrete, they’d route the trucks down to the *Star of India* and dump the concrete into these fifty-gallon drums,” which were lowered into the hold.⁴¹

By the spring of 1961, the restorers had a new idea. Donnelley informed the restoration committee that

We are currently working on a plan which we believe will whip our old enemy, “ballast,” by the use of tanks which will be secured in the hold and which will be filled with water. If the ship should ever sink it would be a comparatively easy task to refloat her if we have tanks below.⁴²

Jerry MacMullen explained further:

In the matter of ballast, a suggestion by Mr. [William] Remington, of the Harbor Department, appears to have unusual merit. He suggests lowering several large steel tanks into the hold, welding them to steel saddles welded to the frames, and filling them with water. . . . [Master rigger Jack] Dickerhoff was greatly impressed by this idea; he also stated that if finances were cramped, a mere extension of our present system of ballasting with cement-filled barrels would be quite satisfactory, as the barrels can be moved to give access for inspection and painting.⁴³

Several large gas station storage tanks were welded into place in the hold.⁴⁴ This long-awaited solution, however, lasted only months. One of the first projects undertaken by Captain Ken Reynard, hired to manage the restoration in December 1961, was to install a system of movable concrete block ballast he

designed atop a platform like that originally suggested by Kortum. The tanks were discarded. “They had just finished putting them in when I started cutting them out,” recalled Reynard.⁴⁵

Donnelley and the restoration committee were more successful in achieving their goal of restoring the upper masts and rigging, glaringly absent since the Second World War, when the Navy had removed them as a potential hazard to seaplanes landing on the bay. In 1944, Zoological Society Secretary Belle Benchley had authorized the Navy to lower the masts, “which we understand is necessary as a safety measure during the present emergency. The Society is very desirous of having the vessel restored at the end of the emergency and hopes Naval authorities replace masts.”⁴⁶ The Navy insisted that it could not legally commit money, and that legislative action would be necessary.⁴⁷ In late 1959, Donnelley contacted U. S. Representative Bob Wilson to attempt to make good the damage.

On April 4, 1960, Representative Wilson introduced a bill “for the relief of the Maritime Museum Association of San Diego,” directing that \$23,000 be reimbursed for “the cost of rerigging the vessel *Star of India* in full settlement of all claims against the United States arising out of damage done by the U.S. Navy to the masts and rigging during World War II.”⁴⁸ The bill passed the House, but died in the Senate. Wilson reintroduced it in January 1961, and



Treasure from the Treasury. MacMullen and Donnelley flank the long-awaited government check, presented by V. Earl Roberts, center. “Brother—did that \$23,000 get here just in time!” said MacMullen.

MMSD P1716; quote from MacMullen speech, n.d., MacMullen Coll. F-72, MMSD

in May the Senate passed the bill, which President Kennedy signed into law.

While pursuing federal funds, Donnelley also sought local government funding. In early 1961, he unsuccessfully approached the County Board of Supervisors with a request for \$25,000, and was also rebuffed in his request to the City Council.⁴⁹ 1961 finally saw the beginning of fundraising from the general public, commencing with a kickoff luncheon on August 14 at the El Cortez Hotel, at which the \$23,000 federal check was presented. In his speech there, Donnelley estimated that the restoration would cost a further \$150,000 to \$165,000.⁵⁰ The distribution of pledge cards began; a donor of \$2.00 was christened a Plank Owner, entitled to one free admission when the *Star* was ultimately opened to the public (a date which was pushed back several times), while a \$100.00 donation earned the donor the rank of Admiral and three free future admissions.⁵¹

With the promise of federal funds, the lower masts were removed for repair in late spring 1961, and all salvageable standing rigging was shipped north to Jack Dickerhoff, who would use the ferryboat *Eureka*, then moored in Oakland, as a loft in which to refurbish it.⁵² Mindful of the financial straits of the restoration, Jerry MacMullen reported of Dickerhoff that his pay would be \$3.42 per hour:

Although Mr. Dickerhoff's charges may appear to be high, it is unlikely that there is any rigger available—and still young enough to work at the trade—who has anything approaching his knowledge of sailing vessels. . . . He is a hard worker and insists that those working with him also be hard workers.⁵³

In December 1961, Donnelley had a vital new development to report to the Restoration Committee:

We all have known that the time would come when in connection with the work project we would have to employ a competent man to supervise on the basis of full-time. We can no longer handle the work on this project as we have in the past by stealing time from our own businesses to take charge of particular work projects. For example, I refer to Jerry MacMullen taking charge of the work of rerigging which has been done the last five months in Oakland, Jerry and Carl Reupsch collaborating on making new masts and spars, or the many separate projects handled by Bud Hall or Dave Carsten. If we are going to restore this ship we now have to have a full-time supervisor.



"Smiling Jack" Dickerhoff and Karl Kortum grimly survey the rigging situation from forward of the Alaska Packers' poop extension.

MMSD P8966



Saw in hand, Ken Reynard points through the empty mainmast hole in 1962.

MMSD P205

His choice for the job, Captain Ken Reynard, “although not by any means old, is an old-time sea captain, having a world of experience in connection with all kinds of ships.”⁵⁴

Carl Reupsch recalled that on November 6 “I was sitting in my office at Ash and Harbor Drive and Ken Reynard walked in.” Reynard was captain of the locally-owned refrigerated ship *Westgate*, which had recently been sold from under him, and Reupsch had known him for some time:

I knew he had been involved in the sailing of ships, so when he walked into my office looking for a job ashore I asked him if he would be interested in taking over the restoration of the *Star of India*. And he said, “Yes, but I can’t afford to do it on my own—I’ll have to be paid for it.” So I

said, “Well, let me see what Jack Donnelley says.” So I called Jack and Jack said, “Sure. If he is qualified and if he will spend full time on it, I’ll take care of his salary. Send him out to see me.”⁵⁵

“Just a word to say how much all of us up here are impressed with the gentleman you have selected to manage the *Star of India*,” Karl Kortum wrote Donnelley from San Francisco. “This man has background, sense, and interest. He is willing to work with his own hands. He is an artist as well as being a shipmaster. You won’t find another like him, is my guess.”⁵⁶

“They didn’t even know if they were going to be able to pay my salary after about eight or nine months,” Reynard later recalled, “but I wanted to fix that ship up. This was one thing I wanted to do from the time I first came to San Diego.”⁵⁷ Reynard’s hiring was a significant step forward for the restoration, as Donnelley told a potential donor in 1962:

Capt. Reynard is a meticulous and careful man and he will not permit any material to go into the ship or any work to be done that is not first class. The *Balclutha* in San Francisco was thrown together in a hurry and, consequently, maintenance expenses have been terrific. We do not believe that we will ever have this problem because of the careful, sound way we have proceeded with the work of restoration.⁵⁸

Ken Reynard would guide the museum’s restoration efforts until 1978.

At the beginning of 1963, Donnelly outlined the situation to the Restoration Committee:

I know that we are all exceptionally pleased with the way the work has progressed and the very fine, thorough, workmanlike manner in which it has been done. This, of course, is entirely due to Ken’s ability and the fact he will not stand for poor workmanship or materials. We still believe that we will be able to place the ship on display in April or May at the latest.

The financial situation, however, looked bleak:

Unless we secure additional money or know for certain that we are going to have additional money, I think the time has come where we must drastically cut our payroll. This will, of course, slow progress; however, we cannot carry the payroll that we have been carrying without additional funds.⁵⁹

Since January 1960, when the museum had hired its first paid employee, a retired mariner named George Cameron who became night watchman, the payroll had grown to between five and six men.⁶⁰ “The work of restoration will go on for a long, long time after the ship is open to the public,” Donnelley continued,

but once we can open the ship to the public, she will start earning money and, consequently, we are only trying to do the work that has to be done before we dare exhibit the ship. I feel that if there is any work in progress which is not required to be done in order to open the ship to the public that it should be stopped right now. I also feel that we should immediately lay off some of the workmen.⁶¹

With the reopening of the ship in sight, concerns surfaced about what kind of museum visitors would encounter on board. Karl Kortum had written Donnelley at the end of 1961 that “I can’t stress too much that displays have to be *designed* if they are to compete in this day and age. Just plunking some artifacts down with a descriptive line or two on a label is not going to do it.”⁶² Reupsch directed MacMullen to make a complete inventory of all museum exhibit material so that “there will be something for the people to see when they come aboard,”⁶³ and in early 1963 Donnelley sought to begin a collection virtually from scratch in time for a May opening:

I for one would not want to start exhibiting the ship without a reasonable number of display items or artifacts. A number of maritime objects, reportedly rare, have been offered us from time to time and I intend to go through my files and gather up this information so the Display Committee can take such action as may be needed. It is my own feeling that once we make an appeal for maritime objects, our chief problem will be in turning down items that we cannot use. On the other hand, I am satisfied there are many rare, worthy of exhibit maritime treasures in San Diego and we should be able to secure quite a few of them.⁶⁴

But when would the ship finally open? There was conflict in the committee between John Bate, pushing for an opening in June 1962, and Jerry MacMullen, James Copley and others who argued against opening a half-finished ship. MacMullen worried about the consequences “if we sidetrack restoration to make way for a distinctly premature opening. Some of our people seem to have the idea that the minute the three naked lower masts are in place, the restoration is 100% complete.”⁶⁵ In April, 1962, he warned Donnelley that,

As you know, I have been in favor of opening the ship to the public as soon as possible, to get at least a trickle of money coming in. However, I am beginning to see a lot of head-aches in this, which could easily delay the real opening far too long. To begin with, the time for opening would be week-ends—and this also is the time when you get your volunteer workers. The two just would not mix. People would get in the way of the work-parties, there is a good chance for someone to get hurt, and ship’s personnel would be interrupted continually to answer questions.⁶⁶

At last, on Memorial Day, 1963, visitors returned to the *Star of India*, paying sixty cents per adult and thirty cents per child to satisfy their curiosity about the partially-restored local landmark. Reynard reported that by December, 42,374 adults and 16,840 children had stepped aboard.

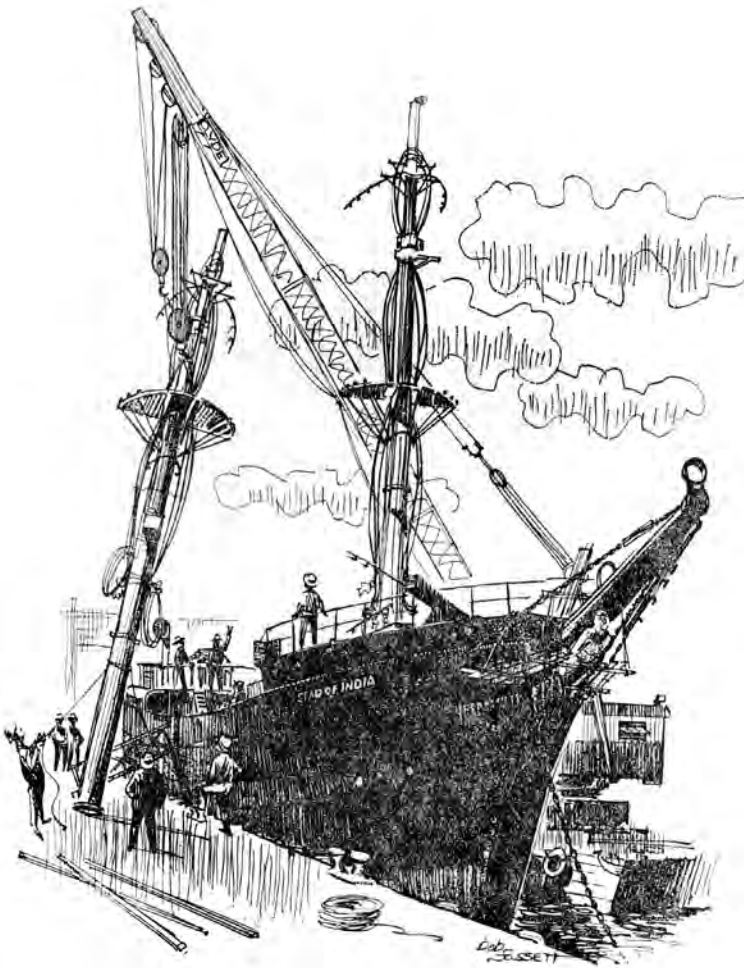
1963 also saw the founding of the *Star of India* Ladies Auxiliary by Margaret “Marnie” Woodworth, and the beginning of the museum’s corps of volunteer interpreters. Marnie’s husband Jim was a friend of Reynard’s and a dedicated volunteer. She recalled that in February of 1963 she wanted to hold a party for about two hundred people on board the *Star* “to introduce the community to the *Star of India*.”⁶⁷ She offered Reynard a donation to the restoration fund.

The event, held without the Restoration Committee’s prior approval, was a success, despite—or perhaps because of—the incomplete state of the ‘tween deck. “We used . . . the coils of hemp to sit on and the barrels for them to put their buffet tables on.” Afterwards, a number of women expressed interest in becoming involved with the restoration. Marnie’s husband Jim had been “bemoaning” the fact that “there was no money, and I had been with some women’s groups and knew how well they raised funds.”⁶⁸ When she approached Jerry MacMullen in the *Star*’s saloon about starting a ladies’ fundraising group, the delighted MacMullen made her president. She typed up by-laws for the organization on September 27, 1963, stating its mission as “to help foster interest in the *Star of India* and its Maritime Museum in the community” and “to raise funds to assist in the maintenance of the *Star of India* and the development of its museum.”⁶⁹

The Auxiliary gave rise to the museum’s original “docents,” the Hostess Guides. Ken Reynard spoke to the group in October, 1963, stressing the importance of volunteer historical interpreters to the public in terms equally appropriate today:

We opened to the public long, long before we were ready, so to fill the gap, several of the ladies came down to the ship and attempted to do the best they could in telling the public about the ship. Much of the time they referred the people to someone else because they didn’t know the answers, but still there was that

personal touch. And, we have had many good comments from many people to the effect that there was someone around who was willing to talk to them and bother with them. The idea of the Hostess Guides grew from this experience. . . . signs, no matter how well done, can tell only part of the story. Many people who come aboard are deeply interested in the ship, and a sign does not tell them enough of the story and more than likely will lead to further questions. I think you ladies will perform a very, very useful and valiant service to the ship if you can come down just once in a while on some of our biggest days. In dealing with the public, I think we all recognize the fact that there will be a large percentage of people who pay their 60 cents and shuffle through the ship. But by using your own imagination I know you can spot



The lower masts return, May, 1962.

MMSD coll., Donnelley scrapbook

the individual who is genuinely interested. . . . The purpose of these remarks is to assure you that this service is not a dilettante thing. I wish to assure you that it can make a great deal of difference. I think the ship will be far, far the better for it.⁷⁰

November 14, 1963 marked a milestone in the *Star*'s history, for exactly a century had passed since her launching. The Auxiliary planned a centennial celebration to rechristen the restored ship, since the *Star of India* had never been formally christened as such; her 1906 name-change from *Euterpe* had been arranged by the Alaska Packers Association through act of Congress.

Fittingly, Captain Alan Villiers was invited back for the celebration, which began with a gala dinner arranged by the Auxiliary at the El Cortez Hotel on November 13. Afterwards, according to Marnie Woodworth, Jerry MacMullen "just did a double flip in his swivel chair" when he learned the Auxiliary's maiden event had made \$761 for the restoration.⁷¹

A *San Diego Union* reporter perceived the larger significance of Villiers's return to the ship:

One of the century's saltiest windjammer captains strode the decks of the *Star of India* yesterday, eyed her new rigging critically and pronounced her fit for a 100th birthday celebration today. Capt. Alan Villiers of Oxford, England, ruled the iron-hulled bark a "bloody mess" when he last saw her rotting away in 1957 and his caustic remarks spurred the campaign to restore the ship. . . . Yesterday the captain, who sailed the *Mayflower II* across the Atlantic, had only praise for San Diego's square-rigger. "Just look at her," he said. "Isn't this a wonderful atmosphere? She's a lovely ship, and her restoration is a very nice achievement on the part of San Diego."⁷²

"She's a real queen, she is," said Villiers, "and she belongs to San Diego. If I lived here I'd be mighty proud of that."⁷³ A single fore lower topsail was set aloft, sewn by Reynard in time for the occasion.⁷⁴ On the afternoon of November 14, 1963 Marnie Woodworth joyfully smashed a bottle of champagne over the capstan on the forecastle and christened the *Star of India*. Among those who stood applauding her were Alan Villiers, Ken Reynard, Jerry MacMullen, John Bate, and of course Jack Donnelley.

N O T E S

- 1 Unless noted otherwise, all references refer to materials in the Maritime Museum of San Diego Library, primarily from files kept by Jack A. Donnelley. A longer version of this article is also on file in the library. For an overview of this period see Gerald F. MacMullen, *Star of India: The Log of an Iron Ship* (Berkeley: Howell-North, 1961), 98-124, and Jerry Conrad, "Jerry MacMullen and the *Star of India*" (master's thesis, San Diego State University, 1991), 109-135.
- 2 Bate's first choice for chairman, retired San Diego naval commandant Admiral George Henderson (then employed by Copley Press) was unavailable, though he served as an important committee member. Bate himself rarely attended restoration committee meetings; Reusch went as his substitute. Carl F. Reusch, transcript of interview by Robert G. Wright, 28 December 1978, 29, 31.
- 3 Hank Roloff to Donnelley, 9 June 1959.
- 4 Donnelley to Charles E. Salik, 22 May 1962. Donnelley was a graduate of Sweetwater High School and Berkeley, was active in Democratic politics, had been associated with

- Martinolich Shipyard and with Wilbur Clark's Desert Inn in Las Vegas, and was senior partner in the firm of Donnelley, MacNulty & Butler. "Attorney to Lead Star of India Drive," *San Diego Evening Tribune*, 11 June 1959.
- 5 Reupsch, interview, 30.
 - 6 Bernard L. McInturff, "Star of India: San Diego's Maritime Museum," *Sea* (November 1947), n.p..
 - 7 San Francisco acquired *Balclutha* instead. MacMullen and the Aquarium Society believed the *Star* should go to Mission Bay as part of a planned aquarium, a move which was stalled pending dredging. MacMullen to Karl Kortum, marked "Confidential," 16 April 1954, MacMullen Coll. FF68-1A. Reupsch, interview, 27. Mission Bay has "long been considered an ideal spot for relocating the refurbished Star of India as a tourist attraction." *San Diego Evening Tribune*, 9 October 1957. See also Ward W. Waddell, Jr. to Harry Burnaugh, 24 July 1957, MacMullen Coll. F67-1.
 - 8 MacMullen, transcript of interview by Wright, 5 September 1971, 29.
 - 9 Civic, promotion, and fund raising committees and a finance and operations committee were formed. Memorandum of meeting, 18 June 1958. Donnelley later identified the key people involved in the restoration prior to 1959 as MacMullen, David H. Carsten of Harbor Boat & Yacht Co.; Oakley "Bud" Hall, Jr., of Star & Crescent, Chief Engineer Jack Leatherberry and General Manager Milton Filius of National Steel & Shipbuilding, Bate and Reupsch of the Harbor Department, and James Copley and Henderson of Copley Press. Donnelley to John Alessio, 11 December 1959.
 - 10 Kortum to Bate, 30 April 1959. On 29 April 1949 the Zoological Society of San Diego transferred ownership of the ship to the Aquarium Society of San Diego, which had been incorporated as a non-profit organization on 21 April 1948. "'STAR OF INDIA' Information requested by Leon Parma by telephone from Washington, D. C., June 7, 1960." The Maritime Museum Association was founded as part of the Aquarium Society on 24 July 1958. MacMullen to Bate, 26 July 1958, MacMullen Coll. F27-2.
 - 11 Reupsch, interview, 28. Donnelley to Committee, 24 September 1959.
 - 12 Donnelley opined that an initial \$20,000 needed to be raised, and that donations of supplies, labor and services should be available, including the cost of towing, haul-out, sandblasting, painting, labor and supplies, and that the Navy should be persuaded to pay for replacement of the topmasts. Minutes of meeting at Donnelley office, 9 July 1959.
 - 13 Important publicity also came from a series of newspaper articles by Al Pearce, beginning in 1958. While perhaps exaggerating, Donnelley told Pearce's paper, the *Independent*, "It was a reporter for the *Independent* who built the fire under the *Star of India* restoration program. He and the paper can rightfully claim credit for getting it started." Jeanette Branin, "'Star of India' Rebirth Sparked by Newspaper," n.d. [c. 1962]. Clinton D. McKinnon of the *San Diego Sentinel* was also named to the committee.
 - 14 C. Arnholt Smith to Donnelley, 25 January 1961.
 - 15 Donnelley to Louis Bard, 15 December 1959.
 - 16 Since no surviving docking plans for the *Star* were known, divers were forced to make measurements. Memorandum, *Star of India* meeting, 26 October 1959.
 - 17 Towing was donated by Star & Crescent.
 - 18 Kortum, "Report on Restoration: *Star of India*," November, 1958, 11. To prevent electrolysis from corroding iron where it contacts steel, the belt is held out from the hull by angle iron; the space created was filled with Navy No. 1 preservative, 500 gallons of which were donated by Bray Oil Co. of Los Angeles. Donald MacDiarmid to Donnelley, 8 December 1959.
 - 19 The restoration committee estimated that Codina saved them about \$6,000. Donnelley to Louis Bard, 29 December 1959.
 - 20 MacMullen to Kortum, 5 December 1959, MacMullen Coll. F68-11; Donnelley to Kortum, 30 December 1959. MacMullen favored a "gunport" color scheme.

- 21 Reupsch, interview, 27.
- 22 In March 1959 Bate announced plans to turn part of the Broadway Pier into a maritime museum and library, which did not materialize. John Bunker, "Port Offers Berth for Old Ship," *Tribune*, 6 March 1959. A mayor's maritime museum committee, chaired by Joe Jessop, was also active at this time. "Sea Museum Urged As Mate for 'India,'" *Independent*, 23 August 1959, p. 1.
- 23 Minutes of meeting, 29 January 1960, MacMullen Coll. F66-5. MacMullen had reported contacting several authorities regarding removal of the poop extension. Bate moved, which carried unanimously, that it be removed and original appearance restored. Minutes of Meeting, *Star of India* Restoration Committee, 16 January 1960, MacMullen Coll. F66-4. Kortum had suggested removing the extension, which "spoils the whole after end of the vessel," in his November, 1958, report. Kortum, "Report on Restoration," 7.
- 24 The \$200,000 figure was based on Kortum's report. "Group Maps Drive to Restore Sailing Ship Star of India," *Tribune*, 16 April 1959. Elsewhere, Donnelley quoted other figures: in letters to potential donors in February, 1960 he estimated the cost of restoration as variously \$100,000 and \$250,000, or, the following month, \$165,000.
- 25 Donnelley to Kortum, 3 March 1960.
- 26 Donnelley to Graydon Hoffman, 7 July 1960.
- 27 Donnelley to Melvin N. Wilson, 7 October 1960; Reupsch, interview, 30. The note was also guaranteed by Lou Kornik, Carlos Tavares, and housing developer Irvin Kahn. In November, 1962, Donnelley was able to raise the note from \$20,000 to \$30,000. The note was due to be paid off in May, 1963, at which time he felt the ship would be open to the public.
- 28 Kortum to Donnelley, 11 March 1960.
- 29 Reupsch, interview, 28.
- 30 Donnelley report to Restoration Committee, December 1961.
- 31 MacMullen to Donnelley, 14 July 1961, MacMullen Coll. F70-12B.
- 32 MacDiarmid to Donnelley, 12 October 1961. The hull was indeed not in as good condition as claimed: as internal rust was being chipped away, a hammer broke through the ship's side. MacMullen to Kortum, 28 November 1959, MacMullen Coll. FF68-8A.
- 33 Memorandum, *Star of India* meeting, 26 October 1959. About 400 tons of dirt and rock ballast were removed prior to drydocking. Donnelley, "'Star of India' Ex Full-Rigged Ship 'Euterpe,'" to General Membership Committee, n.d. [c. 1961], MacMullen Coll. F67-15.
- 34 Kortum to Donnelley, 24 November 1959. The first recorded reference to constructing an orlop deck above the ballast was made by Bate in January 1960; it was later built by Reynard.
- 35 Donnelley to Charles Forward, n.d.; MacMullen to Kortum, 28 November 1959, MacMullen Coll. F68-8A.
- 36 Donnelley to Committee, 31 May 1960.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Kortum to Copley, 2 July 1960. Kortum's objections first appear in Planning Committee meeting minutes, 16 January 1960. As built, the ship originally had a small amount of cement in her bottom, according to an 1863 newspaper: "The floor of the ship is cemented in the same manner as the sides and bottom; this cementation which is for the purpose of preventing the effect of corrosion of iron being felt on cargo, is five inches thick in the center of the floor, and gradually tapers off to the run of the bilge." *Mona's Herald*, 18 November 1863.
- 39 Donnelley to L. L. White, 7 September 1960. Pillsbury & Martignoni, the firm that undertook the survey, had previously surveyed *Balclutha*.
- 40 Pillsbury & Martignoni (L. L. White) to Donnelley, 27 September 1960.
- 41 Reupsch, interview, 28. Reynard continued the practice of using 50-gallon drums for ballast, filling them with chipped rust and topping them off with concrete. Reynard, "Restoration of an Iron Star," *Mains'l Haul* 33 (Fall 1997), 11-12.

- 42 Donnelley to Al Fern, Hall, Wilson, Henderson, George A. Scott, MacDiarmid, MacMullen, Reupsch, Bate, Carsten, Dr. Frederick Hollander, Kornik, Charles A. Pratt, Howard Matson, Murray Goodrich, William C. Miller, and Frank K. Wyatt, 21 June 1961, MacMullen Coll. F67-13B. Pillsbury & Martignoni had earlier suggested the use of the *Star*'s 6 existing water tanks to help ballast the ship. Pillsbury & Martignoni to Donnelley, 27 September 1960.
- 43 MacMullen to Donnelley, 14 July 1961, MacMullen Coll. F70-12B.
- 44 The R. E. Hazard Company donated 4 tanks. Donnelley to Bruce Hazard, 21 August 1961.
- 45 Reynard, interview, 10. Reynard thought that the idea of the tanks was "brilliant," but that they prevented maintenance under and behind them and spoiled the appearance of the hold. Reynard, "Restoration of an Iron Star," 12.
- 46 Belle Benchley to Commandant, Eleventh Naval District, 29 January 1944. Another letter was sent on March 4, 1944; the masts were removed after that date. A Zoological Society letter to the *Star*'s caretaker, Ed Fox, stated that Benchley was "very sorry" but mast removal was "another one of those things that has to be sacrificed for the war effort." R. W. Sanderson to Captain Fox, 4 March 1944. MacMullen Coll., box 6, F72-2.
- 47 Bob Wilson to Donnelley, 23 March 1960.
- 48 House Resolution 11562. The version which ultimately passed was H. R. 1869.
- 49 Donnelley to City Council, 16 June 1961, MacMullen Coll. box F 70-10; City Manager George Bean to Donnelley, 7 July 1961.
- 50 Notes for speech by Donnelley, 14 August 1961.
- 51 A \$5.00 donation made one a Third Mate, \$10.00 a Second Mate, \$25.00 a First Mate, and \$50.00 a Captain.
- 52 Donnelley to Fern, Hall, Wilson, Henderson, Scott, MacDiarmid, MacMullen, Reupsch, Bate, Carsten, Hollander, Kornik, Pratt, Matson, Goodrich, Miller, and Wyatt, 21 June 1961. The lower masts were re-stepped in May, 1962.
- 53 MacMullen to Donnelley, 14 July 1961, MacMullen Coll. F70-12B.
- 54 Donnelley report to Restoration Committee, 11 December 1961.
- 55 Reupsch, interview, 31. On Reynard, see Wright, "Capt. Ken Reynard: Lest We Forget," *Mains'l Haul* 29 (Summer 1993), Reynard, "Restoration of an Iron Star," and Reynard, "The Star is Reborn!," *Sea History* 5 (Fall 1976), 19.
- 56 Kortum to Donnelley, 18 December 1961, MacMullen Coll. F70-24
- 57 Reynard, interview, 6.
- 58 Donnelley to Scott, 25 June 1962.
- 59 Donnelley to Bate, Reupsch, Reynard, C. C. Woodworth, Hall, Carsten, Henderson, MacMullen, Fred W. Morrison, Hollander, Scott, and Muriel Tolle, 15 January 1963.
- 60 Donnelley to Scott, 25 June 1962. Cameron was paid \$75 per month.
- 61 Donnelley to Bate, et al, 15 January 1963.
- 62 Kortum to Donnelley, 18 December 1961, MacMullen Coll. F70-24B.
- 63 MacMullen to Donnelley, n.d.
- 64 Muriel Tolle was given the chairmanship of the Display Committee by Henderson. Donnelley to Bate, et al, 15 January 1963.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 MacMullen to Donnelley, 3 April 1962, MacMullen Coll., F70-27.
- 67 Margaret Woodworth, transcript of interview by Wright, 15 November 1990, 5.
- 68 Woodworth, interview, 7.
- 69 *Star of India* Auxiliary By-Laws, 27 September 1963.
- 70 Notes for Reynard talk to Hostess Guide Group, 25 October 1963.
- 71 Woodworth, interview, 13.
- 72 Cliff Smith, "Peppery Salt Hails New Star of India," *San Diego Union*, 14 November 1963, A13.
- 73 John Bunker, "Ceremony Here Marks 100 Years for Star of India," *Tribune*, 14 November 1963, p. A28.
- 74 Reynard, "The Star is Reborn!," 19.

Perfecting Nature's Handiwork:

Aircraft Carriers and the Development of San Diego Harbor Since 1930

Abraham J. Shragge

Not a carrier is in sight as the fleet threads the channel in 1937, passing the sandbar that will become Shelter Island.

San Diego Historical Society Photograph Coll.

The first visit to San Diego of the aircraft carrier *Saratoga* on November 7, 1931 was an epochal event for the city's boosters. The *San Diego Union* emphasized that

bringing the *Saratoga* into port demonstrated the value of San Diego bay and the recently deepened turning basin from a commercial and strategical marine standpoint. The demonstration...also proved that almost any ship afloat now can enter San Diego bay if it so desires.¹



ERICKSON, SD.
37-271-2



Dredging underway in April, 1939.

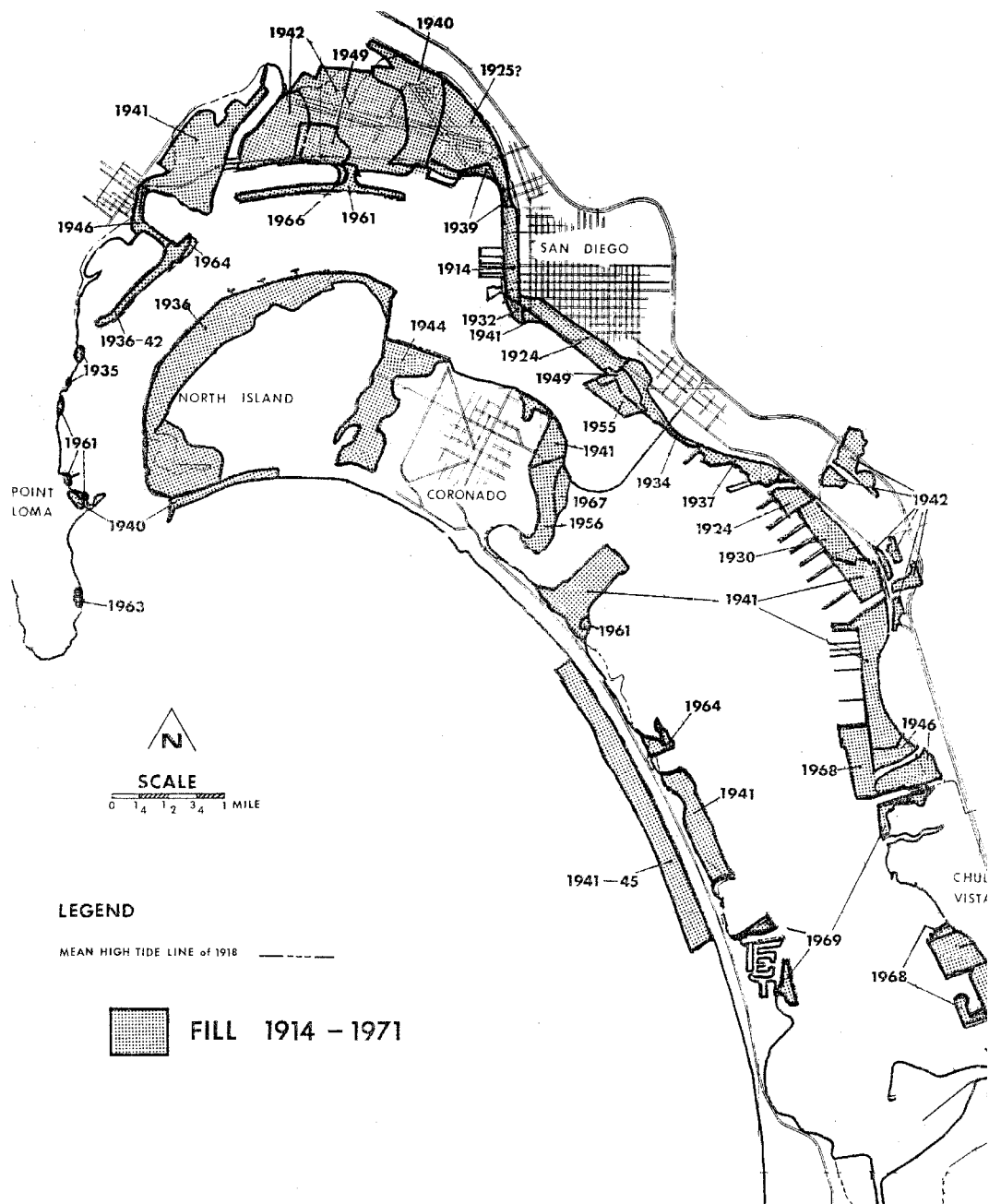
San Diego Historical Society Photograph Coll.

San Diegans had been more than displeased to learn back in 1928 that the Navy planned to home-port *Saratoga* and her sister ship *Lexington* at San Pedro. To lose these ships to the enemy—Los Angeles—would be unbearable, so the Chamber of Commerce moved “perfecting the harbor” to the top of the list of problems demanding immediate attention. The lobbying campaign that followed offered a clear indication of the Navy’s importance to the economic life and health of the city. Successes and setbacks occurred along the way, but in the end the local businessmen and the Navy men who wanted San Diego to become a great carrier base achieved their goals. In so doing, boosters and bluejackets all but completely merged their interests, demonstrating San Diego’s transformation into a complete Navy Town. The big carriers themselves still dominate the bay, an inseparable part of the city’s waterfront. Their presence over the years has provided more than tangible economic benefit; they continue to influence San Diego’s sense of its own world importance, despite the failure of its commercial port to live up to planners’ hopes and expectations.

Saratoga’s grand visit, however, failed to cool an ongoing debate between high-ranking Navy officers with regard to the utility of San Diego as a carrier base. The question had arisen because much of the bay remained relatively undeveloped. Solutions to this problem were complex technically, expensive, and as yet unfunded, and neither Congress nor the Navy Department were in any mood to spend money on projects of unproven necessity. One admiral

argued strongly in favor of shifting *Saratoga* permanently from San Pedro to San Diego because it would improve the efficiency of naval air operations. Another admiral opposed the idea on the basis that the narrow channel was “difficult if not impossible to use by a vessel of this type” in anything less than perfect conditions. (The report of *Saratoga*’s captain, Frank McCrary, indicated that his visit was a significant feat of ship handling and pilotage.) Worse, the harbor was “much congested and the approach to the two municipal piers is greatly restricted.” Thus, the “embarrassment to municipal shipping is certain to cause unfavorable reactions....” In the end, Commander in Chief of the Fleet Admiral Frank Schofield recommended in favor, and the deal was done: San Diego would become a major carrier port.²

The city of San Diego itself played a critical part in this discussion. In keeping with the mercantilistic pro-Navy tradition that had evolved there since 1900, the *Union* reduced the question of accommodating the Navy to a matter of dollars and cents: thirteen percent of San Diego’s population of just under 148,000 depended on Navy paychecks. More than eighteen thousand San Diego-based sailors, plus 710 civilian employees, pumped their pay into the local economy. The Navy had contributed at least \$21,000,000 overall “to San Diego commercial activity” during 1932. There were also 980 naval retirees living in San Diego, whose retirement pay added up to \$1,700,000 more. \$1,300,000 in further contracts were then in progress, and the government had recently authorized another \$300,000 worth of work on the naval bases.³ Not to accommodate the big ships of the Navy, then, represented economic suicide for the city.



Adapted from a Port of San Diego map in the San Diego Historical Society Research Archives.

Commercial considerations played a peculiar role in these matters. San Diegans had long advocated developing the harbor to facilitate merchant shipping, yet by the 1930s trade took a back seat to warships. Thanks to the additional charges that commercial shipping lines tacked onto freight originating or terminating there, the commercial port languished. According to the Chamber of Commerce, “Steamship officials appear to consider it a favor to San Diego to come in here with their ships. . . .”⁴ San Diego was neither a manufacturing center nor an entrepôt; in terms of volume of goods shipped, the port hardly held a candle to San Francisco or Los Angeles.

Even so, San Diegans never failed to emphasize “commercial neces-

Tonnage of waterborne commerce, based on San Diego Harbor Commission statistics, Clarence Matson’s 1945 *Building A World Gateway*, and Statistical Abstracts of the U. S..

Year	San Diego	Los Angeles	San Francisco
1928	793,000	25,696,430	13,661,947
1930	888,000	28,212,998	12,686,116
1932	625,000	18,288,705	7,956,226
1934	527,701	17,875,289	7,033,044
1936	682,000	17,728,494	6,320,511
1938	620,000	18,465,219	6,164,801
1940	907,077	18,786,539	6,314,160

sity” in their many attempts to justify federally funded harbor dredging projects. In language it began to develop at least as early as 1900, the Chamber of Commerce—the city’s principal advocate in the nation’s capital—roughly equated the needs of merchant shipping with the needs of the Navy in its petitions to the Congress and the Navy Department for harbor improvement appropriations. Prior to World War I, however, key decision-makers like Admiral George Dewey, of Manila Bay fame, viewed San Diego as too remote, isolated, and undeveloped; Dewey had resisted any investment in San Diego on the grounds that “San Diego’s strategic importance is more apparent than real . . .” Others recognized a certain hint of dishonesty in San Diegans’ stated vision of a mixed-use harbor. Once Dewey allowed himself to be persuaded to play San Diego’s game in 1913, the Navy began inexorably to become the major factor in both the city and the harbor’s future. But city boosters nevertheless maintained the rhetorical charade of emphasizing the port’s commercial prospects ever after.⁵

Despite naval expenditures in San Diego, symptoms of the Great Depression bore down upon the region. The Hoover administration looked to federal public works projects in an attempt to stem the accelerating national economic slide, and in the summer of 1930, Congress authorized an official examination of San Diego harbor in order to determine how much dredging might be part of the program. Surveys and public hearings determined that the harbor required a staggering \$9.7 million worth of work, almost all for the Navy’s benefit.⁶ In the meantime, the Hoover administration had enacted a \$2.5 million public works program, of which no less than eighty-four percent was earmarked for San Diego’s naval bases. Local businessmen credited the appropriations with stimulating business and relaxing economic tension in the district, perhaps even to the extent of making “a real start back toward

prosperity.”⁷

Then came Roosevelt and the New Deal. Within a few months, the federal government pledged \$8.75 million to the city for yet more public works. The *Union* gushed that consummation of the federal projects would “make San Diego in all probability the mightiest naval operating base in the west as well as placing it in the forefront of the nation’s leading commercial seaports . . .”⁸

The first New Deal dredging money arrived in San Diego shortly thereafter. It passed from the federal Public Works Administration (PWA) to the War Department, which applied it to deepening and widening the harbor entrance. Soon, the National Recovery Administration undertook relief projects that included major improvements to North Island and the training station and a new floating drydock at the destroyer base. But all was not well in Navy-town, as Admiral Joseph Reeves told the Chamber directors at a luncheon in his honor. Reeves feared that very soon “the present harbor facilities will be taxed to capacity. . . .” Long known as a great friend of the city, Reeves warned the organization that if it wished the Navy to station some of the new warships then under construction there, it would “have to do something about it.” An editorial in the *Union* told it like it was—the “business of developing a first rate harbor never ends;” the harbor was the city’s greatest single source of income; and “the navy more than pays its way by bringing new—and solvent—citizens into the community.”⁹

In past years, if money was available through Rivers and Harbors appropriations, then the Chamber of Commerce based its request on “commercial necessity” and found sympathetic members of the Corps of Engineers to support the claim. What was new about the New Deal, however, was the fact that money for these and many other public works projects across the nation now came in the name of Depression relief, whether they were related to commerce or defense—blurring the old dichotomy between commercial and naval necessity.¹⁰

Still concerned about the aircraft-carrier situation, the interested parties sought to widen the main harbor channel and complete the carrier-berthing facilities at North Island, while reclaiming 450 acres of submerged land at Spanish Bight for the air station. Under the Chamber’s guidance, the city first obtained the approval of the District Engineer, then the Division Engineer, and then the Chief of Army Engineers. Next, they applied to Secretary of the Navy Swanson and then brought Chief of Naval Operations William Standley on board. Thus armed, they went after the House Rivers and Harbors committee, but found themselves stalled by PWA director Harold Ickes. By the end of March, the committee approved the \$1.8 million project and included it in a \$100 million national rivers and harbors bill. This, according to Port Director Joe Brennan, “would be the largest undertaking ever attempted in development of the local harbor...,” that would be “the making of the port if it is completed.”¹¹

The Chamber’s strategy of picking the North Island/carrier-berthing project for the full lobbying treatment worked well to start bringing major New Deal dollars into the city, but this was only the tip of the iceberg. The Roosevelt administration had recently announced a new \$4.8 billion nationwide public works program, and the boosters want-

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ed to make sure that San Diego received its fair share of this staggering sum.¹²

The Army's district engineer held a public hearing in the Chamber's auditorium in April 1935. Testifying for the Navy, district commandant William Tarrant noted that the bay was badly congested by the 117 naval vessels then based there, but the situation would be much worse two years hence when that total would grow to 207 warships. "Commercial interests" from the south bay area wished that portion to be dredged for the sake of merchant shipping, which could then tie up next to the industrial lands there that they planned to develop. Yachtsmen wanted a basin for their use at Roseville on Point Loma; the Pacific American Steamship Association wished for the complete removal of the shoal at Ballast Point; and a brand-new player in town, Consolidated Aircraft, needed a seaplane landing area next to Lindbergh Field. This time around, the Engineers recommended a total of \$4,184,000 worth of work, giving the boosters a more realistic goal upon which to set their sights.¹³

The Chamber called upon some of its highest-ranking friends in the Navy to agitate in favor of a large appropriation, and in "appreciation for the cooperation extended them by the chamber of commerce," five admirals responded by writing strong letters to the organization that the directors forwarded to Washington.¹⁴ As part of its full-court-press on the government, the Chamber of Commerce commissioned an attractive brochure titled "National Defense and the San Diego Dredging Program," which it dispatched to all members of appropriate congressional committees, to "every flag officer on active duty in the Navy," and of course, the President himself.¹⁵ Most of the text of this document was written by admirals on active duty, who had clearly learned to speak the Chamber's own language very well indeed.

The outgoing Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral William Standley, claimed in his introduction to the brochure that the harbor was of "vital strategical importance to the nation, both in peace and in war." Standley also gave the usual nod to "merchant shipping requirements" as a large part of the need for all the new dredging.¹⁶ As far as the Chamber of Commerce was concerned, however, accommodation of merchant shipping no longer even entered the picture. Thus the organization explained specifically to the city's new congressman, Ed Izac, that their combined sales effort had only "one end in view. . . : selling the importance of this dredging from the National Defense viewpoint . . . and particularly to the utilization of San Diego Harbor by the Navy." Moreover, the directors confided to Izac that

Commercial arguments will be left entirely out of [the "National Defense" brochure], due to the fact that we realize that further commercial development of the harbor cannot be justified at this time from the cold, hard facts as presented by the figures. . . .¹⁷

Congress voted in favor of the appropriation in late 1938, and dredging operations soon commenced. Even before the passage of the Rivers and Harbors bill, however, the city and the Navy both began to ask for more money for more dredging. The editors of the *Union* had been



An Essex-class carrier on the bay in January 1945.

Courtesy National Archives

correct in their 1933 assertion: the business of developing the harbor might indeed last forever.

Even with all the dredging performed to date, San Diego Bay's naval inadequacies persisted. Although the entrance channel had been dug out to a depth of forty feet, much of the rest of harbor had a "controlling depth" of between thirty-two and thirty-five feet—considerably less than the forty-five feet which safe navigation of capital ships now required. And, as the commandant of the Eleventh Naval District pointed out in February 1940, "The curves in [the inner harbor] and the narrowness of [its] entrance channel . . . also make it extremely hazardous to handle them in such close quarters." On the very same day that the commandant transmitted this information, Congressman Izac cabled the Chamber of Commerce to tell the directors that Congress had just voted \$6.5 million dollars more for San Diego harbor dredging.¹⁸

Early in World War II, the Chamber of Commerce began to consider an economic development program for San Diego once the war had ended. Chair of the newly formed Harbor Committee was Vice Admiral Charles Blakely, who as recently as December 1941 had been Commandant of the Eleventh Naval District—the city's "naval mayor." At the committee's first meeting, Blakely stated the postwar priorities as he envisioned them: "first, to insure adequate facilities for a port for basing the fleet; [and second,] development of commercial possibilities of the port...." The admiral also pointed out "that in future, as was done in the past, the committee should be guided in further plans for the harbor by the recommendation of the local naval authorities."¹⁹

Aircraft carriers once again figured prominently with regard to how the city and the Navy chose to shape the bay after World War II. Because of the global commitments the United States had taken on for the defense of the "free world," the carrier only grew in stature, a fact San Diegans surely appreciated. Carriers were now so important and so potent that they had become a major symbol of U. S. national power. As such, their movements and locations took on considerable political

significance.²⁰

News of a new generation of supercarriers rekindled old anxieties nevertheless, and with good reason—once again, the bay was just a little too small to cope with the modernizing Navy.²¹ And once again, the Chamber of Commerce leapt into the fray, first by commissioning a lengthy report on the situation by a recently retired admiral friendly to the cause. The most prominent conclusion of the 1952 report was the familiar appeal to the federal government for a new dredging program. In the new postwar order, the old battlewagons were strictly passé:

San Diego does not need the battleships which are held out by their deep draft, but it does need the new super-carrier *Forrestal* and her sister ship. . . . For these San Diego is the ideal harbor.²²

In this instance, the Chamber's hired wordsmith had reversed the city's historic civic language—San Diego needed the Navy and its carriers, while the carriers needed San Diego, in that order.

During the same year, the city had sent a new man to Congress, Bob Wilson, who proved himself as effective a go-between for San Diego as his predecessors had been. Wilson became the ranking Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, making it a hallmark of his career in Congress to cultivate friendly relations with the Navy's top uniformed officers. This simple strategy paid off right away, for soon the *Union* reported the Navy Department's interest in an expanded San Diego harbor. The high command also commented upon the long-term compatibility between naval and commercial interests.²³ Thus it seemed that the new congressman had learned a great deal from the city's history.

The San Diego Harbor Department found the supercarrier idea so intriguing that in 1955 it proposed a dredging plan to the Navy calling for the creation of a turning basin and berthing area at the westernmost extremity of North Island, projected to cost in excess of \$12 million.²⁴ Since the Eisenhower administration had initiated a military economy drive and was loath to spend so much money, however, the Chief of Naval Operations reacted to the \$12 million figure with derision and sent the engineers back to the drawing board.²⁵ In the absence of the necessary funding, San Diegans feared they might lose their place as the major West Coast carrier port. The Navy launched further engineering studies of the bay in 1956 to determine more economical means to base the supercarriers at North Island.

In 1958 the Chamber commissioned retired Admiral Ray Tarbuck to report on the condition of the Navy in San Diego. This time the analysis focused almost exclusively on the carrier situation. Tarbuck was horrified that *Midway*, a World War II-era carrier, had to anchor in the Coronado Roads rather than enter the harbor. According to the gnarled warrior,

The swells were so heavy that the crew could not be given shore leave or liberty in San Diego. The *Midway* was, therefore, sent to Long Beach where the crew spent 1/2 million dollars. The *Forrestal* Class is here. Next will come the nuclear powered giant carriers looking for a berth. *Will we be ready or do we have to go through all this again?* . . . We can get the channel the same way [other cities] do, by sending our Washington friends to plague the authorities, and vex them into putting it in the budget.²⁶

In August 1959, the House Appropriations Committee failed again to fund the North Island project, so three months later the Chamber sent a representative of its own to Washington to lobby for the carrier base.²⁷ By this time, the dredging plan had shrunk to a little more than four million dollars, a tremendous reduction. The new configuration required more dredging than the old, but it saved millions of dollars by using the old World War II *Essex*-class quay opposite downtown San Diego, where carriers still tie up today. According to the Navy's Project Design Engineer, more important than the cost reduction was the fact that the extended dredging would add to the value of the city's recently completed Tenth Avenue cargo terminal by improving its accessibility to merchant ships: "The navy's proposed deep water channel to the [Tenth Avenue] quay wall would naturally be of major benefit to long range City plans for their facility."²⁸

Finally, the appropriation passed, and dredging began in the spring of 1961. Soon San Diego became the home port for three *Forrestal* carriers, each with a crew of approximately five thousand officers and men, many of whom were expected to move their families to San Diego for at least several years. And if this were not enough, the Navy threw in a special gift to the city—it proposed to donate all 3.3 million cubic yards of mud and sand it had picked up from the floor of the bay and deposit it free of charge off Harbor Drive, south of the airport. San Diegans know this mudpile today as Harbor Island, a city-owned eight-thousand-foot-long strip of prime commercial real estate occupied (at great profit to the city) by hotels, restaurants, and marinas.²⁹

When the first *Midway*-class carrier steamed into the bay in August 1961, there was again a public celebration reminiscent of the day thirty years before when *Saratoga* came to town. *Kitty Hawk*, *Ranger*, and *Constellation*—all of the larger *Forrestal* class—soon followed. And yet San Diego's harbor was still incomplete. As the *Forrestal* carriers approached obsolescence all the old parties put their heads together one more time, sure that they could find a way to obtain another major dredging project that would enable the new generation of nuclear-powered aircraft carriers with still deeper drafts to replace the old ones.

But with regard to the arrival of the "nukes," events suggested that the old coalitions and consensus were not what they used to be. At the end of the twentieth century, voices from the community spoke out in language that must have taken boosters by surprise. Two issues seemed particularly to bother 1990s San Diegans, who had learned valuable lessons over the years about protecting the environment and their own well being at the same time. First, concern over the possibility of the release of nuclear contaminants generated acrimonious debate within the city. Navy officials (and the editors of the *Union-Tribune*) pointed to the service's near-spotless record of nuclear safety, but that was not enough to quell anti-nuclear activists, who cited a number of accidental releases of radioactive material into the bay.

Second, it had never been a secret that in earlier years the Navy had dumped prodigious amounts of hazardous and toxic wastes into the harbor. The sediments of the bay still contain many substances and objects extremely

harmful to life and health. Since the previous dredging of the carrier basin (1960-61), a glutinous layer of silt and mud had covered over many of the sins of the past, but stirring up or removing this “protective coating” promised to expose the pollutants. Now the Navy again offered its long history of friendly and munificent reciprocity to skeptical San Diegans if they would permit the service to adapt the bay further to its future needs. This was serious business in the post-Cold War era, because congressional orders to close down “redundant” bases affected San Diego as well as many other martial metropolises.

The usual agencies, the Chamber, the municipal governments, and the newspaper supported the nuclear carriers wholeheartedly, for the old reasons: each carrier represented \$100 million per year for the local economy. In the end, the local constituencies that had any say in the matter rather reluctantly accepted the Navy’s analysis of the impacts they might suffer by virtue of the new class of carriers coming to town. Despite protests, the first nuclear carrier to homeport in San Diego, *John Stennis*, arrived in August 1998; *Carl Vinson* came shortly thereafter, and *Ronald Reagan* will soon appear.³⁰ To sweeten the deal, the Navy offered to deposit the sand it dredged up on local beaches that had been hard hit by a recent series of severe storms. This worked

As Ricky Neudek happily awaits his father, the USS *Philippine Sea* returns from Korean waters in 1952.

Courtesy National Archives



well enough until live ammunition began appearing in the spoil, and the Navy halted the transfer of sand pending a solution to the unsurprising problem.³¹ Thus environmental safety issues appear to have challenged the old booster consensus, as no one and nothing had ever done in the past. These problems continue to defy solution, but the “nukes” are now here to stay.

San Diegans and their partners in the government—the Congress, the Navy, and the Army Corps of Engineers—have labored mightily to reconfigure San Diego Bay in such a way as to harness its maritime potential. Dredging and filling, and yet more dredging, have always been the preferred means. As magnificent a “natural harbor” as it has always been, it has never ranked among the nation’s important commercial ports, and today is not even among the fifty busiest U. S. harbors—except in the size of its naval activities.³² And there, it is still Number One, just where the city’s boosters *always* hoped it would be.

N O T E S

- 1 “Saratoga Welcomed in Harbor,” *San Diego Union*, 8 November 1931, pp. 1, 10.
- 2 Yarnell to Leigh, January 4, 1932; Senn to Leigh, January 6, 1932; Leigh to **Chief of Naval Operations (hereafter CNO)**, January 27, 1932; and Schofield to CNO, February 15, 1932. All in United States National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter USNA-DC), Record Group 72—General Correspondence Files of the Bureau of Aeronautics (hereafter RG72), file CV3/A4-3 (5) (320215), box 1635.
- 3 U.S. Navy Pays out \$21,000,000 In San Diego,” *Union*, 23 October 1932. The 18,235 sailors then stationed in San Diego, plus the 980 retirees, represented thirteen percent of the city’s population (of 147,995) at the time.
- 4 San Diego Chamber of Commerce, Minutes of the Regular Weekly Meetings of the Board of Directors (hereafter SDCOCBOD), May 28, 1931, p. 2; October 9, 1931, p. 2; and March 10, 1932, pp. 2-3.
- 5 Dewey to SecNav. Second Endorsement, General Board No. 414-1, March 15, 1913. USNA-DC DC Record Group 80, Correspondence Files of the Secretary of the Navy (hereafter RG80), file 10924-75. Also, William Kettner, *Why It Was Done and How* (San Diego: Frye and Smith, 1923), 12-14; and Sparkman to Kettner, March 5, 1913, reproduced in *Why It Was Done and How*, 15-16.
- 6 House document 223, August 30, 1933, 73rd Congress, 2nd sess.
- 7 “Stimulation in Business Felt Here; Public Works Program Aids Conditions.” *Union*, 19 February 1933, p. 1; and “\$8,750,000 Allotted to San Diego,” 2 July 1933, pp. 1-2.

- 8 Burnham to SDCOC, Minutes of the Meetings of the Executive Committee (hereafter cited as Ecm), June 29, 1933, “\$8,750,000 Allotted to San Diego.” *Union*, 2 July 1933, pp. 1-2. The Corps of Engineers had already approved plans for the reclamation of Spanish Bight, digging out a battleship mooring basin, and widening the main harbor channel to a 1,000 feet. Further dredging in the area of the municipal mole pier and expansion of the airport onto reclaimed tidelands also figured in the appropriation.
- 9 “San Diego Gets \$125,000 Harbor Dredging Fund,” *Union*, 1 September 1933; “From A Friend,” editorial, 20 November, 1933, p. 4; and “Admiral Parsons Here To Inspect Naval Projects,” 24 November 1933.
- 10 SDCOCBOD August 17, 1933, pp. 4-5; see also, Gavin Wright, “The Political Economy of New Deal Spending: An Econometric View,” in *Review of Economics and Statistics* LVI (February 1974), 30-30; and Arthur Ekirch, Jr., *The Civilian and the Military* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 237-8. According to Ekirch, FDR’s use of relief and recovery funds to build up the Army and the Navy during the period of the “first New Deal” was nothing less than “subterfuge,” because the administration had in fact trimmed back military appropriations in order to fulfill its promise to balance the federal budget. To fund warship construction and other military necessities, the government reclassified such as relief, since these projects put some of the unemployed population back to work.
- 11 SDCOC Ecm, January 18, 1934, p. 1; and “\$1,800,000 S.D. Dredging Approved by House Body,” *Union*, 30 March 1934, pp. 1, 3.
- 12 SDCOCBOD January 31, 1935, p. 3; February 7, 1935, p. 3; February 14, 1935, p. 1; and April 4, 1935, p. 2.
- 13 Tarrant to SecNav, May 2, 1935, in USNA-DC RG80, file NB1/H1-1/N22 (PW), box 3901; and “Room Needed for Craft to Base at S.D.,” *Union*, 26 April 1935, p. 1. See also, “Report of the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors on Review of Reports Heretofore Submitted on San Diego Harbor, Calif.,” U.S. Cong., House Doc. No. 89, 74th Cong., 2nd Sess., March 2, 1936, p. 3.
- 14 “Five Navy Chiefs Pledge Help for Port Dredging.” *Union*, 24 January 1936.
- 15 T.C. Macaulay, Executive Manager, SDCOC, to CNO, April 6, 1937. USNA-DC Record Group 71, Correspondence Files of the Bureau of Yards and Docks (hereafter cited as RG71), file QH(16)-San Diego/N22(341005-3), box 1353.
- 16 CNO William Standley, in “Foreword,” “National Defense and the San Diego Dredging Program,” (SDCOC, 1937), p. 7; and U.S. Cong., House Doc. No. 89, 74th Cong., 2nd Sess., March 2, 1936, pp. 22-3.
- 17 SDCOC to Izak, February 5, 1935, in SDCOC Ecm February 11, 1937, pp. 3-4.
- 18 J. R. Defrees to Chairman, General Board, Feb. 26, 1940. USNA-DC, General Board Confidential Correspondence, file ND-11/CF-64 (A6-Sd) (Serial No. A63). Also SDCOC Ecm, Feb. 29, 1940, p. 5.
- 19 SDCOCBOD August 26, 1943, p. 2; and September 30, 1943, p. 2. Also, SDCOC, “San Diego Business,” November 19, 1945, p. 5.

- 20 Norman Friedman, *The Postwar Naval Revolution* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1986), 20.
- 21 D.R. Forrest and John B. Stetson, "Navy's New Carrier Berthing Facilities at San Diego," in *Journal of the Waterways and Harbors Division: Proceedings of the American Society of American Engineers*, Vol. 87, No. WW4, November 1961, p. 72. As these specialists noted at the time, "...harbor entrance channel depths and turning basin depths in San Diego Bay were totally inadequate for the Forrestal-class carriers...."
- 22 Rear Admiral Ray Tarbuck, USN, ret., "Analysis of the Transfer of Naval Vessels from San Diego," July 1952, p. 7.
- 23 *Union*, 18 July 1954. In the words of the CNO, "The Navy has great interest in any development of port facilities. The necessity for expansion of the commercial facilities of San Diego Harbor is well recognized by the Navy....In the San Diego area, the limited water frontage will require coordinate planning to develop the deep water channels, turning basins, and pier facilities for the mutual benefit of naval and commercial shipping."
- 24 Bob Wilson to W.A. Vestal, Mayor of Coronado, 7 March 1955, Bob Wilson Papers, San Diego State University Library, San Diego, CA.
- 25 *Union*, 9 October 1957.
- 26 Tarbuck, "The 1958 Report on the San Diego Navy," (SDCOC, 1958). Emphasis added.
- 27 *Union*, 8 August 1959, and 12 November 1959.
- 28 Forrest and Stetson, 73.
- 29 *Union*, 7 April 1961.
- 30 *Union*, 7 and 17 January 1990, pp. 1 and B-7, respectively; 1 September 1990, p. B-1; 4 January 1996, p. B-2; 30 May 1996, p. B-3; 26 February 1997, p. B-9 (a letter to the editor from two physicians at UCSD School of Medicine, claiming that contrary to information from the Navy and the *Union*, nuclear radiation is *not* good for the human organism); and 24 September 1997, p. B-9.
- 31 See, for example, *Union Tribune*, "Making a Place for Castles in the Sand," 16 March 1995, p. B-11; "Dredging on Deck for Larger Carriers," 15 December 1995, p. 1; "Coronado Wants New Look at Navy Plan for Carriers," 4 January 1996, p. B-2; "Napa Firm to Dredge Bay—Sand Goes to Beaches," 5 April 1996, p. B-3; "Navy Granted Right to Resume Sand-Dumping, but Coastal Panel Could Intervene Soon," 13 December 1997, p. B-1; and "Judge Rejects Plan to Halt Navy Dredging," 26 March, 1998, p. B-4.
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From San Diego Gas & Electric Co.'s
1946 Annual Report.

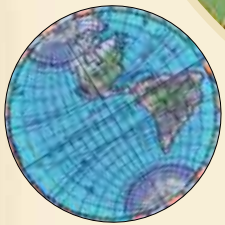
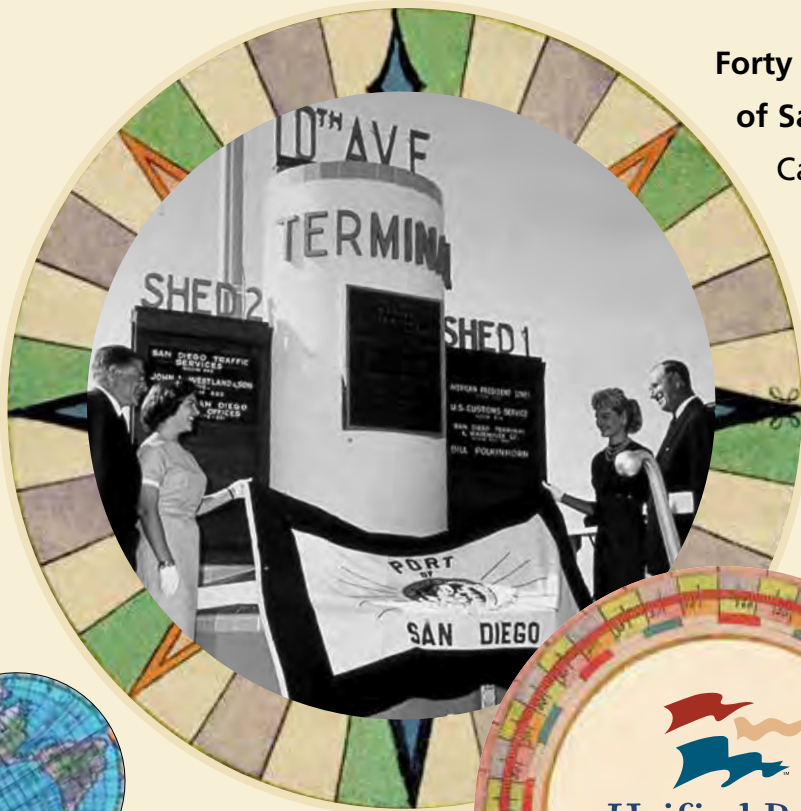
Courtesy August Felando.



Although our illustration shows a portion of the Navy's "Mothball Fleet" of 340 ships laid up in San Diego Bay, the Navy also bases the active First Fleet Task Force, Destroyers Pacific and a submarine squadron here, as well as numerous air groups. 70,000 men on active duty and 40,000 civilian Navy employees are stationed here. San Diego is and will remain a major Navy base.

Forty Years of Service

Forty years ago, the Unified Port of San Diego was formed by the California legislature to take a regional approach to managing San Diego Bay and its waterfront. Today, the Port carries out its mission by serving as an environmental steward for the region and a provider of public services, like parks, bike paths and community events that open the waterfront to everyone.



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