MAINS'L HAUL

Vol. X SEPTEMBER 1973 No. 1



'TIS A LONG, LONG WAY FROM GLASGOW!

A mere four centuries behind Joao Rodrigues Cabrilho, the gorgeous little steam yacht *Medea* sweeps silently past Point Loma, to join our growing fleet of historic ships; off her port quarter is Joe Jessop's *Cathleen,* leading the welcoming yachts.

—PHOTO BY AUTHOR

THE S. Y. *MEDEA* JOINS THE FLEET

by Bob Sharp

In San Diego since July 14, 1973, the *Medea* made the big move to join her fleet-mates at the Embarcadero on August 25. Thus ends another chapter in a saga starting with a stag hunt in Scotland in 1904. Who would want a yacht for stag hunting? Capt. MacAllister Hall of Torrisdale Castle, Scotland, had a plausible reason. In 1904 the fine hunting grounds of northern Scotland were virtually inaccessible except by sea. Yachts could cruise the coast, anchor in a bay, send a party ashore, and provide the utmost luxury afloat after the hunt. Opening day of the August shooting season was only three months off when Alexander Stephen & Sons, Ltd., of Glasgow, took the challenge of building a steam yacht of 112 tons displacement on a rush order.

The best of materials, yard know-how, and a fine two-cylinder steam engine went into her. She was completed in 49 working days and delivered with hot steam, cold champagne and caviar — complete in every detail. Each guest did bag a stag and the maiden voyage was a triumph.

The record building time and subsequent durability of the *Medea,* although remarkable, represent standard performance for Stephen & Sons. Thirty years before, they built a steam auxiliary, bark-rigged wooden whaler which was destined to become the most famous ship in U. S. Coast Guard history. The Coast Guard cutter *Bear* went with Rear Adm. Richard E. Byrd U.S.N. to Antarctica and with another Stephen ship, the *Thetis,* had already performed spectacular rescue service in the Arctic. Like them, the *Medea* would live to see grim service in cold, unfriendly waters — such as patrol duty for the Royal Navy, off Norway, in World War II.

Paul and Olive Whittier found her in Oskarshamn, Sweden, in the winter of 1971. Their plan was to cruise her to Goudge Island, B. C., restore her, and give her to the Maritime Museum. On her own steam, through the Baltic and North Sea to Rotterdam she went, then to Falmouth to provision for the Atlantic leg. Delays — a Caribbean ETA during hurricane season — no good. So back to Rotterdam she went to hitch a ride on the German freighter *Riederstein,* which made Long Beach in August of 1971: "Steady, old girl, can't put your forefoot in the Pacific yet — dock strike, you know!" November — at last she was off for Canada. Even at this late

season, cruising should be better than the icy North Sea recently left behind.

She took the "Pacific" in her stride, outwitted a broken steering cable in Monterey, wriggled into a girdle-tight slip at St. Francis Yacht Club, and ran with a 90-knot gale out of Coos Bay right into a Canadian winter.

For 18 months a crew of experts gave her loving care, removing post-1904 obscenities, cleaning, restoring, beautifying, always with an eye to quality and authenticity. With a new lease on life and feeling 50 years younger, she headed south on June 29, 1973. Although a member of the Maritime Museum fleet since 1971, this would be her first entry through the Silver Gate. The boating fraternity welcomed her as the focal point of the Museum's yachting exhibit. Also noteworthy is the fact that she is the first vessel to join the Museum fleet in virtually restored condition.

The Maritime Museum, and San Diego, salute the *Medea*'s friends, Capt. Hall (and his stag), Stephen & Sons; her owners, masters and crews, and particularly Paul and Olive Whittier for saving this queen of yachts for future generations to admire.

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

— John Masefield

WELCOME ABOARD!

Since the last issue of *Mains'l Haul,* we have shanghaiied the following new members:

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MAINS'L HAUL

Vol. X DECEMBER 1973 No. 2





Although San Miguel Island (above) has been accepted as the burial-place of Cabrillo, it now appears that the explorer's grave may be on nearby Santa Rosa; to the right is the mysterious sandstone slab which started it all. Illustrations courtesy of Cabrillo National Monument.

WERE THEY LOOKING ON THE WRONG ISLAND?

A small historical bombshell (only perhaps "small" isn't the right word) was exploded in the presence, a few weeks back, of those who were lucky enough to attend "The Gravestone Seminar" at the Cabrillo National Monument, out on Point Loma.

The bombshell was the fact that, instead of being buried on San Miguel Island, perhaps the bones of João Rodrigues Cabrilho — to give him his correct, Portuguese name — lie somewhere in the vicinity of Becher's Bay on adjoining Santa Rosa Island. Exploder of the bombshell was Dr. Robert F. Heizer, of the Robert H. Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley.

What brings this about is the fact that, in June of 1972, Dr. Heizer was going over a report on the Philip Mills Jones expedition to Santa Rosa in 1899 - 1901, when a photograph of a piece of sandstone caught his eye; this bit of sandstone had been in storage for 71 years. It's only 13 inches high, but those could be a highly significant 13 inches. In the upper left corner is a crudely incised cross. Then comes a stylized monogram "JR" and, below it, a "stick figure" of presently unknown significance. References to the discoverer of coastal California as "Juan Rodriguez, called Cabrillo" and to his occasional use of the signature "Juan Rodz" immediately lend potential significance to that JR monogram, just as the cross hints at its being a grave marker.

Traditionally, the place of Cabrillo's burial has been accepted as somewhere around Cuyler's Harbor, on San Miguel Island; he broke his leg (some say his arm) while landing through the surf, and died of subsequent complications, early in January of 1543. This was based upon a not-too-good description left by his shipmates, and the description more or less fits Cuyler's Harbor. The original report of the expedition disappeared some 400 years ago, so all that is left is a sort of transcript of the log.

Efforts to find his grave have been going on, from time to time, ever since about 1850. Cuyler's Harbor is on the northerly side of San Miguel and faces to the northeast. Becher's Bay is on the notherly side of Santa Rosa — and faces to the northeast. The crude written description of the burial spot, left by those 16th Century mariners, would fit either one.

The sandstone itself is no help; the same kind of sandstone is found on both islands. The possibility that the stone, if the marker for the grave of Cabrillo, may have been carried by Indians from one island to the other, has been considered by Dr. Heizer. He also has explored the possibility that it could have been a hoax of pre-1901 vintage; it is all in his thorough-going monograph, *California's Oldest Historical Relic?*

Dr. Heizer makes no claim that it is positively the marker from the grave of the man who discovered San Diego Bay in the autumn of 1542 — but he has piled up a lot of circumstantial evidence leading to such a conclusion.

J.M

THE NIGHT THE THROTTLE STUCK

by Laurence E. Bulmore

After its two "days off" following a week on the morning watch, Crew No. 4 of the *Berkeley* returned to work on the night of June 7, 1956. The first trip from Oakland Pier to San Francisco was made in routine crossing time and nothing unusual happened; the return trip, however, was something else again.

Approaching Oakland Pier, the "Stand By" signal from the Pilot-house was given and the Assistant Engineer stepped to the working-platform while the oiler acknowledged the signal. Next the telegraph signalled "Slow;" the Assistant closed the throttle, worked the reversing-ram once or twice to test it and re-opened the throttle to "Slow." Then came "Full Astern" and the engine was reversed and the throttle fully opened; this was followed, after a minute or so, by the "Slow" signal – and trouble. The throttle would not close.

The Chief ran over and shut down the main stop-valve from the boilers, and the Captain, thinking that the telegraph had broken, rang the emergency gong. By then the engine had been stopped, and the Chief phoned the pilothouse to inform the Captain of the trouble – and to ask for plenty of time in answering signals. The landing was made with no damage to boat or slip.

The Captain came down to the engineroom, and after talking it over with the Chief it was decided that one more trip could be made, so long as more time was given to respond to signals. The Captain then went ashore and telephoned the Superintendent, who agreed, and arranged to have the machinists meet the boat on its return from San Francisco. At the same time, he ordered the crew of the *Berkeley* to transfer to the *San Leandro,* which had tied up earlier at Oakland.

The machinists came aboard and dismantled the throttle. There, under the valve, was the trouble – a half-inch rivet. Where that rivet came from, and how long it had been in the main steam line before falling under the throttle valve, will always remain a mystery.

(Laurence E. Bulmore of San Jose is a veteran riverboat and San Francisco ferry engineer — and an outstanding authority on the history of the New Almaden quicksilver mines and of those too-little recognized people, the Cornish miners of California.)

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— John Masefield

GROWING PAINS

We are getting so many new members that the "Welcome Aboard" list in *Mains'l Haul* has gotten completely out of hand. So from now on , our "recruits" will be listed in our new, monthly newsletter.



WHEN OUR BOILERS WERE HOT

The engineroom telegraph stands at "Ahead – Full" in this 1954 view on the working-platform of our steamer *Berkeley*. Left to right: Laurence E. Bulmore, chief engineer; Herb Kenyon, oiler, and Lloyd Price, assistant engineer.

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MAINS'L HAUL

Vol. X | MARCH 1974 | No. 3



Ferry service from San Diego to Point Loma began with the dainty little steamer *Roseville*, which the immortal Joe Supple built for the Pt. Loma Land & Town Co., back in 1888. She ended her days towing logs, in Latin American waters.

— HISTORICAL COLLECTION, TITLE INSURANCE & TRUST CO.

A STEAMBOAT WITH A PIANO

It might be stretching things to say that, since we acquired that lovely old San Francisco ferryboat, the *Berkeley*, we have become a bit ferryboat happy — but facts are facts, sir, and although San Diegans think of ferries only in terms of the San Diego-Coronado run, there is a job to be done on the ferry service between San Diego and a strange and far-off place called Point Loma.

Fortunately, two of the members of our Board of Directors are in possession of documentary material on the Point Loma Ferry — Kenneth Baker, whose father, the late Capt. Robert H. Baker, owned and operated a Point Loma ferryboat (of sorts) and O.J. Hall Jr., both of whom were on our board when our *Star of India* was a disgraceful bucket-of-rusty-bolts — and the recruitment of board members was difficult. So let's go back to the days of the *Nautilus* and the *Tia Juana* and the *Roseville*, which was probably California's only ferryboat to have not only plush cushions, but a piano.

Back in the late 1880s, San Diego went through a fantastic real estate boom which suddenly collapsed and left our fair city as flat as a sting-ray. Point Loma — which briefly held hopes of being the Pittsburgh of California — got in on the deal, and so, of course, passenger service to San Diego was indicated. This brings us up to Joseph Supple, later a famous shipbuilder on the Columbia River, who had a boat-shop down around the foot of D Street (Broadway) and who built the little steamer *Roseville*.

He built her in 1888 and she grossed a modest 34.57 tons, on dimensions of 67 x 19 x 4.5; her 60-horsepower simple compound steam engine came from the old Risdon Iron Works in San Francisco, who also supplied the boiler and the surface-condenser. She had a hexagonal pilot-house with an ogee roof, and the main deck was complete with a cozy little cabin, with plush seats — and the piano.

She carried commuters (and real-estate prospects) from San Diego to Roseville and Ballast Point, and doubled as an excursion-boat for a couple of years; then, the boom having collapsed, she was laid up. Cabins, sponsons and the piano were removed and she was converted into a prosaic tug. On Nov. 24, 1891, it was reported that she was "about ready for sea" and shortly thereafter, she left for Mexican and Central American waters, to engage in log-towing. The last heard of her was a report dated Jan. 24, 1893, which recorded that the American Consul at Mazatlan had ordered her to proceed from Mazatlan to Las Tres Marias Islands, to assist survivors of one of those square-rigger "pleasure cruises" in a little bark called the *Sea Breeze*. She was followed briefly as a Roseville ferry by the little San Francisco tug *Tia Juana*, which based here for a couple of years.

It was around 1898 that Bob Baker, who had acquired a diminutive gasoline launch named *Nautilus*, found himself in

need of transportation to the old Russ High School in San Diego. So — why not take passengers as well? So until 1902, when he graduated from high school and left for Stanford University, "Capt. Bob" became the Point Loma Transportation Co.

One of the able historians among our membership, Eric Sanders, recounts that in 1893 Capt. R.M. Creswell started running an iron steam-launch named *Hercules* in the Point Loma Service; he also ran the old Star Boat House at the foot of H (Market) Street. It is reported that the Point Loma Ferry Co. was incorporated in 1895, with Capt. Oakley J. Hall (later head of the extensive Star & Crescent enterprises) as the first skipper. Although the street-cars to Roseville started around 1916, the ferry service went on for a couple of years longer — and what old-timers can forget its big "gas boats" *Fortuna* and *Golden West*, among others?

At the end of the Point Loma terminal was a large building which housed a dancing-pavilion — and later was acquired by the San Diego Yacht Club. It was an important item in water transportation on San Diego Bay and, as Sanders points out, its full story remains to be told.

A GHOST OF OUR OWN?

Now that the ghost at the historic Whaley House is back in the news — why not go into the supernatural ourselves?

From San Jose comes a note from Laurence E. Bulmore, one-time (or rather, many-time) Chief Engineer in the *Berkeley*. He suggests that if, in the silent watches of the night, faint tappings are heard in the engineroom of the *Berkeley*, they may have an eerie origin.

Another chief in the *Berkeley*, it seems, had a hobby of working in copper, and turning out rather nice table-lamps. So, when she was tied up in either the San Francisco or the Oakland Pier slip, he used his spare time at her engineroom work-bench; the patient tapping of this now long-gone chief became a familiar sound, faintly audible above the low rumbling of the boilers.

So if you (or the Night Watchman in the *Berkeley*) hear the faint "tap, tap, tap!" of a hammer on sheet copper, it just *could* be the ghost of that old chief engineer, hard at work on a table-lamp. But don't let it worry you; he's a very friendly ghost, and wouldn't harm a soul.

On second thought, perhaps it would be just as well not to tell the Night Watchman about this.

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— John Masefield

CAPT. JAMES E. ROBERTS

No one who knew the Panama Pacific liners will ever forget their most popular master, Capt. James E. Roberts. Now from New York's South Street Museum comes word of his death, at the age of 90. For the past several years he lived at Sailors' Snug Harbor and was a frequent visitor to the museum, where they are restoring the ship *Wavertree*, in which he served as a boy.

Every second Friday one of those Panpac liners would arrive at our own Broadway Pier, from New York via Havana and Panama; the service began with the *Finland, Kroonland, Manchuria* and *Mongolia*, back in 1915 and ended with the *California, Virginia* and *Pennsylvania*. Much of the genial captain's popularity came from his singing of chanteys — he had a fine baritone voice — at ship's concerts.

Commenting on the restoration of sailing ships not long before he passed on, he made these comments for the *South Street Reporter*: "I think it is good. There is something about a sailing ship that makes you feel she is a thing of life... It was a hard life and a rough one, but it was clean and free and held satisfaction."

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MAINS'L HAUL

VOL. X JUNE 1974 NO. 4



In 1898, when this photo was taken, it was easy to lay your hands on a whitehall boat — or in this case two of them — to go out and gawk at wartime activity in the Navy. The vessel involved is the U.S.S. *Monterey*, anchored off Spreckels' Wharf to top off her bunkers with sacked coal on deck which, hopefully, would last her until she made Honolulu, on her way out to Manilla. The tug in the background is the famous old *Santa Fe*.

THE UBIQUITOUS WHITEHALL BOAT

In the *San Diego Union* for April 26, 1885, it was duly noted that the schooner *Bertha Dolbeer* was in port, and that in addition to her customary cargo of redwood lumber from Humboldt Bay, she had aboard ". . . a Whitehall boat for C.S. Hardy . . ."

The very brevity of the item reflects the fact that, as of 1885, no one had to have "Whitehall boat" explained to them by the media; Whitehalls were as well known as coffee-pots or hitching-posts. Hardy's need for such a boat is explainable: he had just opened a meat-market in San Diego — and how else but in a Whitehall are you going to drum up trade from the ships and barks and schooners lying at anchor in San Diego Bay? Hardy was not adverse to a bit of bumboating, and soon his business would expand to the point where — on April 5, 1886 — he would launch his first sloop *Butcher Boy*, whose descendant, the *Butcher Boy* of 1902, now is being restored by the Maritime Museum Association of San Diego.

Very briefly, the Whitehall was a round-bottomed rowboat of easy lines and with a wineglass-shaped transom, generally fitted for two pairs of oars, and was the water-taxi of her day, as well as serving the pilot, the bumboat-man, the ship's broker and the crimp. The name sounds English but is not; the boats originated around Whitehall Street, in New York, well over a century ago.

Howard I. Chapelle, in *American Small Sailing Craft* — for the Whitehall frequently carried a sail and was fitted with a folding centerboard — says that they are believed to have appeared in the period 1820-1828 and originally were lap-straked, although by the 1850s carvel-built Whitehalls were becoming common. They ran from 14 to 22 feet long and carried from one to five pairs of oars, single-banked. Intended for general harbor work-boat use, they were extremely popular, and spread to everywhere in the United States. Chapelle states that the Pacific Coast models were the most powerful ones — and that the class itself was the "most noted of American rowing boats."

So the Whitehall which Capt. Fred Fardelius off-loaded from the *Bertha Dolbeer* for Charlie Hardy was nothing new. They probably even built them right here in San Diego, although there is nothing to verify this; however, early local builders like Supple and Witham and Telson were quite capable of turning them out — and they would have been good ones.

The late Shepherd B. De Silva, who a generation ago was a flag officer in the San Diego Yacht Club, recalled that when he first saw San Diego in the early 1880s, his first job was to engage in bumboating, in a Whitehall. De Silva, by the way, had the distinction of serving, at the tender age of 18, as mate in the famous Down East medium-clipper *A.G. Ropes*.

The Whitehalls were everywhere, and now they are gone — but there is a faint ray of hope. Two members of the Maritime Museum Association of San Diego have picked up a report that there is, carefully stowed in an upstate private garage, an authentic Whitehall. And they are working on it!

—J.M.

OUR FIRST STEAM YACHT

Proud of her as we are, our own dainty little *Medea* is not the first steam yacht on San Diego Bay. The late John D. Spreckels' *Venetia* was a familiar sight here for many years; the *Casiana* home-ported here for a while, and there also were the much smaller *Vergana* and *Lucero*.

The very first one, however, appears to have been the *Cuyamaca*, about which practically nothing is known. And it was so long ago that, by now, the trail is pretty cold.

In the *San Diego Union* for Jan. 3, 1882, there is a brief item about a Captain Chester, ". . . who brought Capt. Wilcox' steam yacht *Cuyamaca* here some years since."

Capt. A.H. Wilcox, who came to California in 1850 as mate in the *Invincible*, became one of San Diego's more important citizens — as evidenced by the fact that the "Wilcox mansion" boasted two Chinese cooks instead of merely one. He was in partnership with Capt. G.A. Johnson in operating stern-wheel steamers on the Colorado River.

It is likely that the *Cuyamaca* — probably rather small — came here from San Francisco, so if any of our northern readers have any information on San Diego's first recorded steam yacht, it would be appreciated. And a photograph, of course — but that's like asking for the moon!

* * *

THE FOLDING CENTERBOARD

In case anyone reading the account of the Whitehall boats should question such an outlandish thing as a folding centerboard, please rest assured that they existed — and if you need proof, look it up in the old Durkee Catalogue.

The thing was housed in a watertight metal case, open through the bottom of the boat, and consisted of several leaves which spread apart like the leaves of a fan, it was operated by a lever at the forward end. Of course, it was expensive — a 24-inch galvanized board would set you back $8.00.

The "Durkee Catalogue", incidentally, is a gold-mine. Published some 60 years ago by Charles D. Durkee, a New York shipchandler, it also was available (with a different cover) to other dealers. Here in San Diego it was issued by the old South Coast Marine Supply Co., which later became McCaffrey's and now is Nuttall-Styris.

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NUGGETS OF MARITIME HISTORY

Among recent contributions to maritime history is an excellent article in a publication by the Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners. The article, by Anna Marie and Everett Gordon Hager, is a brief but informative history of Los Angeles Harbor's Terminal Island. The Hagers, who live in San Pedro, are well-known Western historians and trace the island's history back to the days when the Spaniards discovered it and named it *La Isla de la Culebra de Cascabel* — or, if you'd rather, Island of the Snake of the Rattle.

In Santa Barbara recently, F.H. Warde came onto a small cache of paperback histories of that city's famous Stearns Wharf — where, some of our older members may recall, you could step ashore from the *Santa Rosa* or the *State of California*, on your way to San Francisco.

With commendable judgment, Mr. Warde sent them off to the San Francisco Maritime Museum, through whose courtesy we obtained one. Of course, it isn't everyone who has his nautical background: Mr. Warde sailed in the *Roderick Dhu*, the *Falls of Clyde* and the *Star of England*.

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