



*The ferry **Garden City** in the mud at Eckley, late 1970s*

The Ferry *Garden City*: The Rest of the Story

Editor's Comment: In last Winter's edition of the *Bulletin*, I inserted an article about the San Francisco Bay ferry, **Garden City**. A short time later, as I was putting together our Spring edition of the *Bulletin*, I happened to mention to Keith Olsen, a board member of the Crockett Historical Society, that I was looking for additional information on the **Garden City**. Keith promptly produced an article that he had written some years before on the old boat. The following is an abridged version of that account.

The *Garden City* is Burning Keith Olsen

It seemed as if everyone in town was watching the smoke billowing across the Straits that August Sunday in 1983. The fire first burned the grassy hills around Eckley. When the large eucalyptus trees near the ferry began to burn, sparks flew on the dry hulk. The end was near for the *Garden City*, one of the classic boats plying the Bay in days past.

The fire that destroyed eight homes, some piers and the 104 year-old ferry was arson-caused. Corckett-Carquinez fire dispatcher Don Tacconi said that there were at least “10 points of ignition.” Three devices, not yet ignited, were found along the crooked road between Crockett and Port Costa. The West County Times quoted fire department officials as saying the fire started about 3 pm on Sunday, and was not pronounced under control until 9 am Monday morning. Unburned areas in the hills were streaked with and ochre-colored fire retardant dumped by air tankers on Sunday. Present day Assistant Fire Chief Larry Bohlig recalls that he heard the alarm on his scanner and was the first unit out. Larry says that the boat burned to the water line.

The *Garden City*, named for the city of San Jose, went down the ways on June 20, 1879. She was intended by her South Pacific Coast Railroad owners primarily as a railcar float between Alameda and the San Francisco docks. The main deck was laid with rail to provide portage services for freight cars of perishable or express cargoes. Built of wood, she was an oil-burning side wheeler, 243 feet long, 66 feet wide over the guards and 15 feet deep at the center. She carried passengers by day and freight by night. When unloaded her draught was 6’9” which increased to 7’10” when loaded. There was seating for 721 passengers and she could carry 45 automobiles.

During its time on the Bay the *Garden City* would carry its share of important and famous people. On September 30, 1879, the shiny new ferry carried former President Ulysses S. Grant across the Bay on his return from a 2 year world tour. On October 14, 1919, King Albert and Queen Elizabeth of Belgium and their entire royal party crowded the rails as they crossed from Oakland to San Francisco. Frenchman Marshall Joffre was a passenger in 1921. In 1926, near the end of her time of carrying passengers between San Francisco and Oakland, the *Garden City* carried the Swedish Crown Prince and Princess on a crossing.

As she neared fifty years of continuous cross-bay shuttling, the *Garden City* was transferred to the Carquinez Strait, moving people from Vallejo to Crockett. The Carquinez Bridge was being built as the *Garden City* began making the cross-strait run which she continued until after the span was completed in 1927. When the bridge began carrying traffic, the ferry was retired. In 1931, C&H management purchased the old boat to use as a “fishing club” and an “employee hall.” Anchored at the west end of the C&H sugar docks, these plans never came to fruition.

The *Garden City* was purchased by Michael Hallissy in 1934. The boat was towed to Eckley by one of the C&H tugs. The sea valves were opened and the ferry “sank” in the Eckley mud flats to be used as a resort. Mike remodeled the boat to accommodate a residence, the largest dance floor in Contra Costa, the headquarters for a sport fishing business including a lunch counter, a bar, a tackle shop, as well as rooms for fishermen.

On Saturday, July 28, 1934, with appropriate ceremonies including music from a 10 piece orchestra, the historic old side-wheeler began her career as a pleasure boat serving holiday pleasure-seekers without the throb of engines. The old boat soon became a landmark and a gathering place for community recreation.

Mike Hallissy’s idea turned out to be a big success over the next 20 years. Old timers recall the sounds of music and happy voices floating from Eckley. In addition to fishermen and picnickers, the ferry attracted the business of the stevedores who worked in the shipping of grain along the shores of the Strait. Mike Hallissy also ran the Hotel Granger which he purchased in 1921. Mike also built a home in Eckley and a public swimming pool.

After World War II, the sport fishing business declined as pollution started killing fish in the Carquinez Strait. In 1958, the property, boat and all, was sold to Signal Oil and Gas Company and Mike leased back the resort until the mid ‘70s. In 1976 the

Garden City was offered to the San Francisco Maritime Museum but was so firmly lodged in the mud that it couldn't be moved. Although the hull was rotted, the interior had fine wood paneling, with woodwork, according to Museum Director Kortum, "not to be found in more modern boats." The property was leased by James Angell. The *Garden City* was deteriorating and collapsed at both ends so that none of the 40 or 50 people who came on weekends were allowed on board.



View of the walkway, boarded up, to the Garden City, 1970s.

And so, on this August Sunday, the end came for this classic lady of the Bay's ferry system. As the fire engulfed the aged hulk, watchers could remember all the happy days in the existence of the venerable *Garden City*. She carried narrow gauge trains and their passengers as they reached end of their trip. She carried passengers on outings to and from The City. She shuttled folks across the Straits to and from their jobs on Mare Island or Vallejo or C&H. She was the home of the Hallissy family and provided unlimited childhood memories for the Hallissy boys as they grew to manhood. She was the backdrop for thousands of picnickers who came to Eckley to recreate on a weekend. And she was a thing of wonderment for my own young children. The memories still linger, but the landscape of the Carquinez was changed forever on August 7, 1983.

CCCHS at the Vintage Market

On Saturday, May 16, CCCHS set up a booth at the bi-annual Martinez Vintage Market (formerly Peddlers Faire). The idea was to show the flag, disseminate information about the History Center, recruit members, and sell books, photos, maps, and some donated artifacts. Board members Scott Saftler, Steve James, Tara Weber, John Burgh, and Donald Bastin showed up to man the booth. All in all, it was judged to be a worthwhile endeavor, as we generated a few hundred dollars to help support the activities of the History Center, but more important, we gained valuable insight into the dynamics of this event. We will be better prepared when we set up shop at the next Faire on August 1. See you then!?



From left: Steve James, Tara Weber, John Burgh

THE SHELL ALUMNI MUSEUM

Anne Fincke, Alumni Board President

It all began when a group of retirees from the Shell Martinez Refinery decided to organize an activities group in 1986, naming it the Shell Martinez Complex Alumni. They enjoyed two years of fun trips and luncheons before they decided to put together a Museum.

First, they approached Shell's Martinez Refinery Management team. They told them what they wanted to do and asked for their help. The next step was to find a building to hold everything. The Shell Martinez Refinery made a building available outside

the refinery fence line and financed the initial stages of remodeling the building. Alumni members and their spouses donated their time and expertise from carpentry to plumbing to gardening, and computer programming.



From left: Bill Richardson, Bob Gottelli, John Sprecher, Robert Bartolomei

Meanwhile, they formed a committee, turning their attention to collecting photos and artifacts for the Museum. They put the word out that they were looking for Shell memorabilia and the donations started to pour in. The committee members spent hours identifying and cataloguing the donated items. All of the exhibits are the result of joint efforts by management, staff, operators, retirees, and members of the community.

The Museum was dedicated and opened for visitors on September 22, 1990 as a non-profit organization (independent of Shell Oil Company) and is staffed by a group of dedicated volunteers that enthusiastically share their knowledge of Shell's Martinez Refinery, and also volunteer their time in the Martinez Community, by conducting school tours of the Refinery for Martinez students, and open the Museum for the Home Tour in the fall.

In 1993 Shell Oil Company donated a building across the courtyard from the Museum. The Museum Annex contains small working versions of the large refinery equipment so that visitors can have a "hands on" experience operating refinery machinery that is actually in use in the refinery.

Anne Fincke, Board President

John Rippee, Vice President



The Museum is open on

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. We are also happy to escort visitors around the Museum or let them just browse. As the Alumni Board President I am very fortunate to have a dedicated Board of Directors to work with. **Address: Pacheco Blvd & Arriba St. Phone: 925-313-3598.**

CCCHS Joins with Shell to Celebrate 100 Years in Martinez

The Royal Dutch Shell Oil Company began refining oil at its Martinez site in 1915. This year, the facility marked the 100th anniversary of this event by opening the refinery to tours for past and present employees,



and the general public. Our Historical Society was invited to set up an

informational table for events held on May 2 and May 16. It was a very instructive experience for everyone involved. While we spread the word about our History Center and the unique collection that we house, we learned a great deal about the Shell refinery and its history in our area. Many of us were quite unaware of the fact that the refinery had its own museum, created and curated by retired employees.

The museum is housed in two buildings, along with a garage which houses two old vehicles, used in the refinery in the past.



The museum is a testament to the investment that Shell employees have in their company, unusual in today's world, where people

rarely stay long with one business.

The Shell Oil Company Alumni Museum is one of the many historical societies in our county. If you haven't had a chance to drop by on one of their open days, make it a point to do so at your earliest opportunity. You will be pleasantly surprised.

Meet the New Board Members



Tara Weber

Tara was born and raised in Sacramento where she spent warm summer days on the city's rivers and on Lake Tahoe and where she began her love for the outdoors, the Sierra Mountains and the history of Northern

California. Driving on Highway 50 up to Lake Tahoe is still one of her favorite pastimes.

While attending Sacramento City College, her evening job at the hotel front desk quickly propelled her to Hotel Management and the beginning of a 31 year career in the Hospitality/Tourism business. As a member of the Planning Committee for Meeting Professionals International/Sacramento Chapter, Tara was introduced to her future employer, Embassy Suites Hotels. She moved to Walnut Creek in 1992 to begin her career in Sales & Marketing with Embassy Suites – first with Walnut Creek, then Seaside/Monterey Bay, Milpitas/Silicon Valley and

finally Napa Valley.

In 2014, Tara decided to retire from her Director of Sales & Marketing position to spend more time traveling and hiking with her husband. She now considers herself semi-retired with a strong desire to give back to her community through volunteer work at the Contra Costa County Historical Society and to her profession through part-time work at the Hyatt House in Pleasant Hill.

Tara lives in Martinez, CA with her husband Jim Telle and her two "kids" (cats) Leo & Isabelle.

John Greitzer

John Greitzer is the newest member of the CCCHS Board, having been appointed in April. He worked for Contra Costa County in transportation planning and water policy planning until his retirement in 2013. In his work for the County, he worked on community transportation projects in El Sobrante, Bay Point, Clyde and Montalvin Manor, among others, and coordinated local road and bikeway improvements across eastern Contra Costa County. His work on water issues mainly focused on the never-ending struggles over how best to manage and distribute Delta water, and on improvement of the shipping channel from the Bay through the Carquinez Straits. Prior to his career in transportation and water policy, he was a newspaper reporter. In addition to history, his interests include music and the arts, and travel. He has been a resident of Contra Costa County since 1987.



Contra Costans exhibited at the wondrous Panama Pacific Exposition of 1915

(This is an excerpt from an article written by Bobbie Davis in *A History of Contra Costa County*, published by The Tri-Valley News in 1976.

Sheriff R. R. Veale, Contra Costa Commissioner to the Panama-Pacific Exposition, reported that the money voted by the Board of Supervisors to provide

the county exhibit was an excellent investment. It was an opportunity to “let the world in general know of the wonders, agricultural and industrial, that our county holds within its borders. Capital is attracted to establish new industries, homeseekers come to invest in small farms and in locations for suburban residences in our tree and vine embowered regions, for it is a delight just to live in Contra Costa and people who wish neither to farm or manufacture nor follow other pursuits, but have money to enjoy life at ease will spend thousands on their mansions here as fast as they learn all about what we have.”

Samples of the county’s products were sent out or given away: Almonds, walnuts, celery, fruits, cider, grape juice and onions.

Towns of Contra Costa had special days at the exposition and residents who ferried across the bay spoke for years after of the wonders of the great Panama-Pacific Exposition. Contra Costa Day was April 3, 1915.

The History Center’s exhibit on the PPIE (which opens July 18) will provide images of Contra Costans at the Fair, pictures of Veale at the opening of the Contra Costa exhibit and a number of programs, pins and other artifacts. Jerry Warren from the Museum of the San Ramon Valley has helped gather items for this exhibit.



From the President

“Spring has sprung, the grass has riz. I wonder where, da birdies iz?”

A little ditty I learned as a kid back in New England. To me, it was always a harbinger of better weather ahead.

I’ll reiterate my plea from the last newsletter to consider spending some time assisting us in cataloging, scanning or organizing our ever-growing collection of county records.

The Sharkey family recently gifted the center with two pieces of memorabilia from the old Sharkey building:

The glass entrance sign that sat over the front door, and an old clock that hung on the wall in Mr. Sharkey’s office. Thanks to John Burgh for hanging them up for us. John will be attempting to get the clock working. If anyone out there is good at fixing clocks, let us know. Waters Moving of Martinez again made the move possible.



Thanks Waters Moving!

We will also be “retiring” our old copy machine that has been quite finicky, even when we were still at 610 Main Street, in favor of a new model that seems to do everything but tell you how pretty it is. This donation has been made possible by one of our long time members, Ray O’Brien. Thanks, Ray!

Sometime in the next month or so, we will be releasing a video about the History Center, showing the world what it is we have in our archives and how researchers can benefit from our holdings and expertise. A huge thank you to Board Member Steve James who kept the project moving. Also, to Santiago Chen, who produced the video at no expense to the History Center. Thanks also to board members and volunteers who worked with Santiago.

Our program committee is working on a great program for our September meeting. I don’t want to give too many details, but I’ve been told that it is the site of the only DVC class not taught on the grounds of the college, either in Pleasant Hill or San Ramon. Stay tuned for more information.

Currently available for your use on the History Center’s Public Access Computer Terminal (PACT):

Universal search (by keyword or name) of the History Center’s Database, LookBack;
Contra Costa Gazette from 1860-1893 in searchable form; Nilda Rego’s columns – 1982-1998;
Thousands of photographs (by location);
Hundreds of maps that have been scanned;
3 volumes of County History: Purcell’s *History of Contra Costa County* (1940), Hulaniski’s *History of Contra*

Costa County (1917 – searchable), and *Under the Vitascope*, a wonderful picture book about history of the County;

The Dorothy Mutnick clippings index in searchable form – (Dorothy Mutnick, resident of Lafayette, among other things collected 5 volumes of clippings from early *Contra Costa Gazettes* and indexed them all.)
Contra Costa County Registry of Deeds Index – Currently only the first 2 volumes of many – more being added weekly;

The Eaglet. A yearbook of the U.S. Navy Preflight School at St. Mary's College, dated 1944;
Superior Court Record of Wills Index

Thanks to volunteer Bill Mero and to the Dean & Margaret Lesher Foundation and the Martinez Community Foundation.

Query the History Center

Lisa Gorrell

Our History Center receives on average 15-20 queries a month. These requests are made in person, by email or letter, and by telephone. These are people seeking to learn more about some aspect of Contra Costa History, whether as scholars writing a book, persons pursuing their own family history, or business people looking for photos to hang in their offices.

Examples of requests include obituaries, naturalizations, probate or court records, maps, and photos. Our website has databases that can be searched and many of our queries come from the result of these searches. These requests often can be completed in a short time and the turnaround can be quick.

The volunteer staff at the Center then endeavors to respond to their request. If made by phone or in person, we can help the requester zone in on their research question. By having a very specific question, we can then determine which of our vast resources can be used to answer the question and which volunteer has the expertise to help.

Other requests are more involved. There may be many photos to sort through and scan. Early pioneer families or early town histories can be much more complex and our experienced researchers take on

these projects.

Recent requests we have filled included archival materials and photos for the 100th Anniversary of the Shell refinery, property search at Little Dutch Slough in East County, Abraham Bargaehr genealogical research, Pinole Photo requests, and many obituary requests. In addition to members and members of the public, such firms as Condor Country Consulting and JRP Historical Consulting have also used our services in the past six months.

So, do you have a query to make of our History Center?

CCCHS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

New Renew Gift

Date: _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Phone _____

E-Mail _____

Please check here if you would prefer to receive your newsletter by e-mail—saves money and trees

DUES:

Individual \$40 Couple \$70 Sponsor \$100

Patron \$200 Corporate \$500

Benefactor \$1000 Student \$20

Your membership renewal date can be determined by checking the address label on this newsletter. If you receive your newsletter via e-mail please call the History Center at: 925-229-1042, or e-mail info@cocohistory.com.

Please consider CCCHS in your estate planning. It is simple, and any gift is tax deductible. We have a Schwab account that makes it easier for members and others to donate shares of stock to the Society, a good way to make a year-end or other contribution.

