

[18a, 18b, 18c]

## ***Star of Alaska, formerly Balclutha, later Pacific Queen, later Balclutha***

Rig: Steel 3-mast ship

Launched: 1886

End: Still afloat as a museum ship in San Francisco, Hyde Street pier

Built: Glasgow by Charles Connell

Dimensions: 253.3' x 34.2' x 22.7'

Tonnage: 1862 tons

Probably more has been written about this ship in the last sixty years than almost any existing vessel. *Balclutha*, ex *Pacific Queen*, ex *Star of Alaska*, ex *Balclutha* while not a pioneer as a museum ship, was nevertheless instrumental in awakening the reality among economic development types that such a ship could anchor a tourist destination and pay for itself in public relations value alone, if not in actual receipts.

The Scottish builder Charles Connell built numerous ships and many of them are to be found elsewhere in this file. *Balclutha*, built during a boom time in sailing ship construction, was heavily-built with 9/16<sup>th</sup>-inch steel plates. As originally constructed, the ship had a raised forecastle and raised poop with a charthouse aft, and a deckhouse immediately abaft the foremast. The crew bunked in the forecastle and in all things, *Balclutha* was pretty standard and ordinary for its time.

*Balclutha* traded to India, to South America, to San Francisco, to Puget Sound—in short, to all of the familiar haunts of nineteenth-century sail. In 1899, arriving from England at San Francisco, the Colonial Shipping Company, under the directorship of J. J. Moore of San Francisco, purchased the *Balclutha* and traded lumber out to Australia while bringing coal back to the west coast. Pope & Talbot owned the ship in 1901. Registered in Hawaii, it was admitted to U.S. Registry under a special Act of Congress. Pope & Talbot used the ship to haul lumber for a couple of years, and then in 1903, they chartered *Balclutha* to the Alaska Packers Association for the season of the salmon pack at Karluk, Alaska. The Alaska Packers Association repeated the charter the next year, but the *Balclutha* wrecked on Sitkinak Island. The Alaska Packers Association purchased the vessel where it lay for \$500, and during the next year effected temporary repairs whereupon the ship sailed to San Francisco for extensive refitting and repair. Renamed *Star of Alaska*, as the Alaska Packers Association's practice when acquiring an iron or steel sailing ship, *Star of Alaska* first went north under its new ownership in 1906. The Packers each year employed a crew to sail the ship, a crew of fishers (usually Scandinavians and/or Italians), and a crew of Chinese cannery hands—some years totaling 300+ persons aboard, in addition to a thousand tons of cannery supplies for the canneries of Alaska. In 1911, the Alaska Packers Association modified the *Star of Alaska* by extending its poop nearly to the mainmast. The creation of this tween decks space was to house more workers. Between 1906 and 1930, the *Star of Alaska* made an annual trip north from San Francisco and return. While in 1917 and

1918 several ships of the Alaska Packers Association fleet were chartered by the United State Shipping Board, *Star of Alaska* continued its annual run. Artist Gordon Grant made the trip in 1925, and his book *Sail Ho* recounts that experience.

After the last voyage for the Alaska Packers Association in 1930, *Star of Alaska* lay idle for two years. In 1932, the ship was purchased by Frank Kissinger. Kissinger was a showman who had worked carnivals and other venues. He renamed *Star of Alaska*, *Pacific Queen*, and thus began a somewhat gaudy career of showboating up and down the California coast. *Pacific Queen* was chartered to a movie company in 1934-35 to make several sea films, including *Mutiny on the Bounty* with Charles Laughton and Clark Gable. *Pacific Queen*, superficially made up to look like an 18<sup>th</sup>-century ship of the line, posed in a Catalina Island back water (along with several other old west coast sailers) pretending to be Portsmouth Harbor. *Pacific Queen* also served a stint at San Diego as a “pirate ship” and repeated the performance at Fisherman’s Wharf in San Francisco in 1939. In between these stints was a failed voyage to the Galapagos with a bunch of sea scouts. Kissinger was nothing if not creative and energetic. By 7 December 1941, the government required that the ship vacate its berth in San Francisco and after a couple of years in South San Francisco, *Pacific Queen* ended up in Sausalito Bay. It was here, after Frank Kissinger’s death, that *Pacific Queen* was purchased on behalf of the San Francisco Maritime Museum for \$25,000 in 1954, and a lengthy “restoration” begun culminating in the now renamed again *Balclutha* being on permanent display on the San Francisco waterfront. While the ship is port-painted as it was when under the English ensign, the lengthened quarterdeck has not been removed from *Balclutha*.

The first photograph, taken in 1918 or 1919, shows *Star of Alaska* in the act of retrieving the leader on a hawser. Crew members gather forward on the forecastle to haul the hawser and make it fast prior to the tow. The Alaska Packers Association painted *Star of Alaska*, and indeed all of their metal-hulled vessels, with red boot top, black hull and buff masts and spars. A photographer from the *San Francisco Examiner* took this photograph.

The second photograph reveals a white-painted *Pacific Queen* in the mid 1930s, on one the ship’s coastwise voyages. The elongated poop is easily discerned.

The third and last of this series shows a bedraggled *Pacific Queen* in Sausalito Bay in the early 1950s before being purchased by the San Francisco Maritime Museum. This image, a copy from the collections of the Cushing Library, Texas A&M University, owes its existence to the late William A. Baker who shuttered the image on a trip to San Francisco around 1950.