



Morrow Cove

By Ernest D. Wichels

Morrow Cove, now the site of the West's only Maritime Academy, has a long and varied history.

The California Academy was established by the Legislature in 1929, but it didn't begin in Vallejo. More about that later.

For years prior to May, 1927, Morrow Cove was the terminus of the Lincoln Highway from New York — coming through Vallejo via Napa Road (now Broadway), thence Alameda and finally Fifth Street to the ferry slips.

Here automobiles traveled by boat to Valona or Vallejo Junction — both now part of Crockett. The completion of the Carquinez Bridge on May 21, 1927 (with a program usurped by Lindbergh's landing at Le Bourget Field, Paris) spelled the end of the car ferries.

Here, some 40 years ago, a clipper ship had been beached, and Chronicle and Times-Herald newsboys used it as a diving platform — into clear waters.

Also, around the Solano shore line of Carquinez Strait, numerous fishing and recreation lodges stood on the rocks or on piling. Like the Gadwall's Club House — a group which included Rome Mini, Dave Price, Lloyd Willock, Jack Foley, Frank Lovegod, Ed Blanco, Morris Christensen, Ed Houseman and others.

THE ACADEMY

But our story should be titled Codfishery to Nautical School, with acknowledgments to Louise Teather of the Marin Landmarks Society.

Back in 1877 there was a boom in Pacific Coast codfishing. Several pioneers in that industry were Lynde, Hough, McCollam, Union Fish Company and the Richard Company. The Lynde and Hough plant was in Tiburon.

Benicia shipyards built some of the fishing fleet — which went all the way to Siberia for the codfish. This accounts for Lynde's early product called "Okhotsk Sea Cod Liver Oil," or "Fisherman's Lotion for Man and Beast."

Declining catches and other economic reasons marked the end of cod fishing, and in 1904 the Tiburon property was sold to the U.S. Navy for use as a coaling station, to replace the Mare Island coal sheds.

The Navy paid \$80,000 for 60 acres, erected a wharf, hoisting towers, a power plant and bunkers. The dramatic start of the Tiburon Fuel Depot (also known as California City) was in May, 1908, when the Great White Fleet visited the Bay. It was an important base until the conversion from coal to oil, in the middle 1920's.

Mail, groceries, for the base, were transported by horseback or wagon from Tiburon; high school students were transported all the way to San Rafael.

When Governor C. C. Young signed the act providing for a nautical school, things began to happen. The steamship HENRY, a Great Lakes freighter, was converted at Mare Island in 1930 for a schoolship, and the Navy loaned some of the coal station facilities for offices and classrooms.

Lt. Cdr. Emile Topp USN (ret.) was the first superintendent; in August, 1933 the first class, 44 men, graduated and were immediately placed with Bay area steamship companies.

The HENRY was renamed California State and its first training cruise, beginning in December, 1931, covered 21,000 miles: — to New York via Magellan Straits, and return via Panama.

MAJOR CHANGES

In 1938 the name of the school became California Maritime Academy, and the Legislature authorized the granting of Bachelor of Science degrees.

By 1940 war clouds began brewing, and the Navy wanted the premises.

So everyone at the Academy moved aboard the schoolship, now renamed the Golden State, and tied up at Pier 54 in San Francisco.

After an investigation of some 40 sites, Morrow Cove in Vallejo was selected and funds were slowly made available for the progressive building of the present Academy. The midshipmen now had a third cruising training ship, the Golden Bear.

FORMER SUPERINTENDENTS

Richard C. Dwyer, former Chief Engineer of the Leviathan, became acting superintendent in 1934; Capt. Neil Nichols USN (Ret.) in 1937; Captain Claude B. Mayo USN (Ret.) in 1940.

Capt. Mayo was followed by Commo. Russell M. Ihrig USN (Ret.) in 1947; Capt. Henry E. Richter USN (Ret.), and then RAdm. Francis T. Williamson USN (Ret.).

The present Superintendent is RAdm. J. P. Rizza USN (Ret.), and the school begins to operate on a four-year college course this Fall. The "plankowner" of our local Maritime Academy is Cdr. Richard Herron USN, who is Commandant of Midshipmen; he has served the local school for 27 years!

The original site at Tiburon has seen many changes, too. It was the Roebling's Sons work area in the 1930's for reeling the wire used in the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge cables.

During WW-II it was headquarters for the Navy's anti-submarine net across the Golden Gate. Subsequently, it became the Tiburon Oceanographic Center — the study of mining the ocean bottom for minerals, a distant cry from the production of cod liver oil.

Portions of the site are now the Tiburon Uplands Park and the Paradise Beach County Park.

The latter park must bring back memories to old-timers — readers who went picnicking away back in 1905 to 1910, or so, when the Monticello steamers were chartered for Sunday and holiday parties from Vallejo to Paradise Park.