



*Friends of the SFMML*

# Relative Bearings

#3 April, 2006

## A Kortum Recollection

*This is the address delivered by Library Friends' Board member John Kortum, son of San Francisco Maritime founder Karl Kortum, at the 2005 Festival of the Sea, in celebration of Balclutha's 50 years as a museum ship.*

It's a little odd for me to look around and notice that I'm the guy here who's known the *Balclutha* longer than anyone else here. It's odd because I've always been the youngster, Karl's son, "Johnny."

But when I think about it, I was no doubt aboard the *Balclutha* while still in my Mother's womb and no doubt when an infant and a toddler. And, in my Father's best fashion, I was put to work scraping and painting her before age 10.

To my horror today—I now practice environmental law—one of my jobs was to wash paint brushes with my bare hands in drums of diesel half-filled with red-lead paint.

But whatever the health hazards then unknown, I had great fun. My colleague in child labor and crime, Freddie Bartz, and I would climb to the masthead and shimmy down the backstays. We even bombed the tourists from the foretop with grapes.

One time Freddie's brother Billy, locked me in the pig cage with the wooden pig from a merry-go-round and left me there for the tourists to eye. I don't think I've ever received so much sympathy on any occasion since.

So for being around so long, I guess I have some *bonafides* aboard the *Balclutha* today.

As some of you know, my Father, Karl Kortum, was a hard driver. He had a peculiar knack for getting things done, for lining up all the forces that needed to converge for something to happen. I don't know where he learned it, but he had it.

Given that, he was a natural to push the preservation and restoration of the *Balclutha* back in 1955 when he was the Director of the newly-formed and quite fledgling San Francisco Maritime Museum.

My Father was not afraid of what we might call derelicts. Before WWII, he had visited the remains of sailing ships all over San Francisco Bay. Right before the war, he shipped out on a sailing vessel like the *Balclutha* around Cape Horn to Australia. That voyage turned out to be the last commercial cargo voyage of an American-built square-rigger. Pearl Harbor was bombed when they were off Cape Horn.

So when the *Balclutha*, then named *Pacific Queen*, was left for dead in 1953 on the mudflats of Sausalito, yards askew, unpainted for decades, pitted so badly through her plating that a trip to her dark hold was like a trip to a planetarium, my Father was not afraid. She was a fixer-upper, true, but a beauty.

The *Balclutha* fit the vision my Father had for a great museum on San Francisco's waterfront. One issue, of course, was money. The *Balclutha* could provide an income stream for the Maritime Museum for its operations. To do this, the *Balclutha* was filled with historic artifacts—parts and pieces of ships. She became a museum in a museum ship showcase.

And sure enough, that income stream supported the Maritime Museum for over twenty years, helping it

to become the multi-faceted institution it is today, with world class library, archives, photograph collection, artifact collection and skilled talent pool. Saving the rusty old hulk was a very practical move.

Most importantly, the *Balclutha* was to become the flagship of a vision of a major cultural institution that my Father and Scott Newhall, then editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, had for San Francisco. They called it Project X. Project X included the Victorian Park, a lumber schooner (the *Thayer*) a steam schooner (the *Wapama*) and other vessels. It also included a major museum in the Haslett Warehouse across the street. Project X was to create a destination for visitors to San Francisco, like the Smithsonian Museums are in Washington D.C.

Project X is not done. The plan still is for the Haslett Warehouse, now strengthened for earthquake, to become that museum when it reverts back to Park Service in about 50 years. That sounds like a long time, but it's the same period of time since the *Balclutha* was rechristened as a museum ship.

In 1955, the Project X vision was hard to communicate. When the Board of the Maritime Museum convened to consider whether to purchase the *Balclutha* in her sorry state for \$27,000, there was, frankly, considerable doubt and debate. Was the price too far above scrap value?

But the mood changed when Harry Lundeberg, the head of the Sailors Union of the Pacific, spoke: "The scrap value is no way to set a price for the last great sailing ship left on the Coast." He orated that the *Balclutha* is a reminder of the city's maritime history, of what the port had once been, of the spirit that would make it that way again.

So, because of those words fifty years ago, the *Balclutha* was restored. The trades—the riggers, the shipwrights and the shipfitters—were still commercially viable. They did the job as if the *Balclutha* were to set sail with a cargo 'round the Horn. That right way of doing things—right way because it was tested by rigors of the sea—has lasted this half century.

That authenticity has enriched the lives of millions of visitors who have strolled these decks. Visiting the *Balclutha* gives you the uncanny feeling that

you are visiting something real, something original, something truly historic. I feel it every time I set foot on board.

For 50 years now, the *Balclutha* has been that reminder of the city's maritime history, of what this port had been, of where we came from, that Harry Lundeberg foretold.

She is a catalyst of enthusiasm for both sail and history. It's not a coincidence that a parade of sailing ships like her has been visiting San Francisco every three years for nearly the past decade. It's not a coincidence that this week the newspaper reports with great interest the discovery of the remains of a Gold Rush sailing ship under the streets of San Francisco. It's not a coincidence that thousands of volunteers have nursed the *Balclutha* from her first visit to the shipyard in 1955 to this day.

The *Balclutha* and all that she stands for—our historic past and our continuing interest in it—is rooted in this city's consciousness. She is doing her job with grace and excellence.

## How to Care for Your Own Books

*The best information is out there!*

Heather Hernandez  
Technical Services Librarian

There are many, many websites telling you how to care for, even repair, your own books. In fact you may have seen the book repair kits offered for sale in many catalogs and even at Cody's Books in Berkeley. Should you use them? The answer, of course, is, "It depends."

There is very reliable information out there to help you decide how to care for your books, or whether or not to repair them. Below are some great

websites--if you lack internet access at home, just stop by the Library to see them!

“Care, Handling and Storage of Books” from the Library of Congress Preservation Directorate:  
<http://www.loc.gov/preserv/care/books.html>

If you like your information presented briefly and directly, without a lot of pictures so the site loads quickly, this is the site for you! All the basics are here: shelving and handling techniques to extend the life of your books, how to avoid damaging them inadvertently, and how to locate a conservator for that damaged book or flaking leather binding.

“How to care for books” from the Canadian Conservation Institute:  
[http://www.preservation.gc.ca/howto/articles/books\\_e.asp](http://www.preservation.gc.ca/howto/articles/books_e.asp)

This site also offers all the basics, but contains more extensive information on caring for your books, including proper cleaning and vacuuming techniques, and what to do in case of disasters like a soaked or moldy book. This site’s information is divided into sections, and is also not graphics-intensive.

“Caring for your books” from The American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works,  
<http://aic.stanford.edu/library/online/brochures/books.html>

Another textual site, this one is as thorough as the Canadian site, with the addition of a bibliography for further reading, and more information on what to do in case of disaster and how to locate and select a conservator, including leading to information on their brochure, “Guidelines for Selecting a Conservator.”

Want to learn more? Have questions about your other collections--scrapbooks? Photographs? Furniture? All of the websites above are part of larger sites on caring for other types of collections. In addition, a favorite site of conservation and preservation professionals, Stanford University’s “CoOL” (Conservation OnLine) website has a

wonderful compilation, “Conservation/Preservation Information for the General Public,” at:  
<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/bytopic/genpub/>

And remember: it’s your book. If you enclose it in a mylar envelope and never let it be touched by human hands, decide to have it fully restored, professionally conserved, read and re-read every year, or you cut it up and use it in your collage art, it’s up to you, because your books are yours to enjoy.

## **Confederate Raider in the North Pacific: The Saga of the C.S.S.**

*Shenandoah*

**by Murray Morgan**

Washington State University Press, 1995

Reviewed by Melani Van Petten

It’s very easy to write an entertaining book about the voyage of the C.S.S. *Shenandoah*, since her captain and many of her officers kept journals during the cruise and later published memoirs, and most of them were lively and engaging writers. One of the most enjoyable books about the *Shenandoah* is also one of the first. Originally published by Tacoma native Murray Morgan in 1948 as *Dixie Raider: The Saga of the C.S.S. Shenandoah*, it begins with a scene of espionage worthy of James Bond, and goes on to read like a swashbuckling adventure novel.

Secretly built in England in violation of that country’s official neutrality, the fine new ship was launched as the merchant vessel *Sea King*, bound for India with a load of coal. Once at sea, however, she was officially “sold” to the Confederacy, renamed *Shenandoah*, and fitted out as a warship, ready to take over the destruction of U.S. commerce where her famous predecessor, the C.S.S. *Alabama*, had left off. Her skipper, Commander James Iredell Waddell, had resigned his commission in the U.S. Navy at the start of the war, on the grounds that he could not fight against his own people. Her officers were mostly young and idealistic, the youngest being only twenty, and included a nephew of General Robert E. Lee. The crew came from diverse sources—some were veterans of the sunken *Alabama*, some had run the Yankee blockade, and a

very few were English seamen who elected to remain on board after discovering they were not bound for India after all. Initially, the officers outnumbered the crew, and Waddell had only 43 of the 150 men he needed to fight the ship.

Trusting to luck and audacity, the *Shenandoah* set out on a voyage of destruction that became legendary. From October of 1864 to June of 1865, she captured or sank 38 ships and took over a thousand prisoners, filling out her crew in the process by offering the prisoners the opportunity to volunteer. She led the U.S. Navy's finest warships on a twenty-seven thousand mile chase, becoming the only Confederate ship to circumnavigate the globe. On June 22, 1865, she fired the final shot of the Civil War—for the simple reason that she had been occupied in the Bering Sea with the destruction of the New England whaling fleet, and didn't realize that the war had been over for almost three months.

During her more than a year-and-a-half at sea, many of the *Shenandoah's* officers passed the time by keeping journals, and their observations on the personalities and events aboard are some of the most interesting and entertaining parts of the story. For those who wish to delve further into the original sources, the Library's collection also includes *C.S.S. Shenandoah: the Memoirs of Lieutenant Commanding James I. Waddell*, and *The Shenandoah; or the Last Confederate Cruiser*, by Master's Mate Cornelius E. Hunt, published in 1866.

## **The Long Voyage and From Clipper Ships To Ocean Greyhounds**

**by Hans C. de Mierre**

London: Harold Starke Limited 1963 and 1971

Reviewed by Ted Miles, Park Historian

These two books tell the history of a young man's career in British Merchant Ships in the years before and after the First World War. The author wanted to go to sea and his family was able to pay a premium for him to go as an indentured apprentice. He was luckier than most because he started out in the ships of James Nourse of London.

They were in the business of transporting East Indian laborers from their homes to the British possessions in South America where they usually worked in the sugar cane plantations.

His first voyage was in the ship the *Main* and took over three years to complete. These books are especially good in their descriptions of the places that the author visited. His port visits were far from ordinary because of the nature of the work.

His time in Calcutta has a special flavor to it. His second ship was the *Arno* in which he is dismayed, but they manage to sail into New York in the middle of winter.

The Coolie Trade is often mentioned way back in the 1860s when it was quite inhumane and mostly illegal. By the early 1900s the ships carried doctors for the laborers and large crews to sail the ships. Basil Lubbock's volume about the *Coolie Ships* has additional information on the James Nourse fleet.

The second book is what removes these accounts from the run of the mill apprentice accounts on the library shelf. De Mierre finishes his apprenticeship and becomes Second Mate and advances rapidly to Master. The Nourse Company called back their former apprentice and employed him in their steam ships until he left to serve in the Cunard Line. He joined the Royal Navy Reserve just before World War I, and spent the War at the British Naval Base at Gibraltar inspecting the shipping of many countries

Following the War, he continued with the Cunard Line of North Atlantic liners. Hans de Mierre then spent the last few years of his sea-going career working in both cargo and passenger ships crossing the Atlantic in the ships of this famous firm.

After getting married the sameness of the ships began to take away the call of the sea, and naturally, missing his almost new wife made him decide to pursue another career ashore in banking and finance. That however is another story, which sadly this gifted writer apparently did not choose to tell for future readers.

# *The President's Letter*

Dear Library Friends,

Welcome to the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of "Relative Bearings", the newsletter of the Friends of the San Francisco Maritime Museum Library. It looks like we're succeeding (so far, at least) in turning the publication of "Relative Bearings" into a quarterly event, and we hope you are enjoying it. Please let us know by phone, e-mail or letter what you would like to see in future editions, and feel free to submit material for publication. Have you read a good maritime book recently that you would like to share with our readers? Is there an upcoming event of possible interest to Friends that you would like people to know about? Are you researching a maritime topic and either looking for or wanting to share information? We may not be large audience, but we're an interested one.

2006 is starting out as a busy year for the Friends. In addition to our normal monthly events, discussed elsewhere, on Saturday, February 18 we co-sponsored the premiere aboard *Balclutha* of Maria Brooks' new documentary "Shipping Out" about women in the maritime industries. There was a great turnout, and we all got to see an entertaining and thought-provoking film. The Friends provided refreshments and netted over \$200 on book sales.

On April 18, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1906 quake, a William A. Coulter Retrospective Exhibition entitled *A Master's Brush with the Sea* opens in the Park's Visitor Center at Jefferson and Hyde. Highlighted by the stunning "San Francisco Fire, 1906", painted on a 10 foot long window shade pulled from the rubble, this is the first ever retrospective of Coulter, one of the preeminent American marine artists of the last 150 years. I urge you to make a point of attending this ambitious exhibition. You won't be disappointed. Materials relating to Coulter, such as cards, pamphlets, books, prints and posters will be available on our web site—which, as a loyal Friend, I'm sure you visit religiously, but just in case you've forgotten, is

[www.maritimelibraryfriends.org](http://www.maritimelibraryfriends.org)--and their purchase is yet another way of supporting the Friends.

Speaking of which, (you knew you weren't getting away without a pitch, right?) we are in continuing need of all forms of your support. Yes, we always need your monetary donations, and if you haven't renewed for 2006 please do so right away.

We also are in desperate need of volunteers both for library work and our donated book sales operation. The Friends utilize, and pay for, several work-study students from UC Berkeley during the school year for both of these functions. When they go home in the summer, as students will, we get strapped for manpower, so we can use you all the more in the coming months. Further, the library and book sales operation are always in need of new material. If you are downsizing your library, or clearing out an estate, please think of us. The Library is always happy to get first choice of maritime publications, but it doesn't have to be maritime material. We can sell, or at least try to sell, anything.

So please consider donating your time, expertise, money or books to the Friends of the San Francisco Maritime Museum Library. I can assure you that they are all needed.

*Doug Burrill*

## *What's Happening*

### *Upcoming Events*

*The Klebingat Lecture Series takes place on Saturday evenings at 6 pm at the Maritime Library, Building E, Fort Mason Center.*

*Fee: \$5, \$4 for Library Friends*

*Reservations: 415-561-7040*

**April 8, 2006**

#### **Maritime Heroics in 1906**

When San Francisco burned following the 1906 earthquake, many more would have died if not for the efforts of the sailors who helped evacuate the city. Join Ranger Tom Jares for the tale of these brave mariners and the refugees they conducted across the Bay to safety.

**May 13, 2006**

#### **How to Eat Canned Salmon**

When the Alaska Packers Association wanted to expand their market at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they decided the way to do it was to introduce their product as a versatile delicacy in parts of the country where it was unfamiliar. Maritime historian Diane Cooper will show the highlights of their remarkable advertising campaign, and will serve samples of several recipes from the cookbook that accompanied it.

# *A Master's Brush with the Sea*

## **William A. Coulter Restrospective Exhibition**

**Opening Tuesday, April 18, 2006**

**Visitor Center**

**San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park**

**499 Jefferson Street (at Hyde)**

**San Francisco**