

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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The FRANK H. BUCK, ashore, 1923

Courtesy ship Collection of Allen Knight

A Tragic Christmas In Monterey Bay

(Continued from the December Issue.)

As one drives down the Monterey coast road today, thrilling to the beauty of the mountains as they tumble headlong into the foaming surf of the Pacific, picture the scene as it was before the highway was completed in 1937. The lonely dirt road, scarcely wide enough for the thrice-weekly stagecoach and team, hugged the skirts of the steep slopes like a frightened child. Travel was at the whim of the landslide, the wash-out, the mild little creeks that turned into torrents when the winter and spring rains lashed the hills.

The only practical means of transporting heavy material was by ship. The names on the old charts and in the old stories are all that now remain of the days

when the sea was the best and sometimes the only road to the remote south coast. Bixby Landing, Notley's Landing, Partington Landing: they were not harbors. On that grim coast there were few refuges for ships. A "landing" was a platform high up on a bluff where a crane, a cable and a windlass might be anchored and freight sent up or down the cliff to the tiny ship bobbing off-shore in the swell.

The little ships curtsied slowly in the swell, taking aboard lime burned in the narrow canyons, redwood logs and lumber, sheep, calves, hides and wool from the ranches hidden in the folds of the mountains. The little ships were the slender thread that connected the isolated people of the Santa Lucias with the world outside.

The little ships are gone now; the highway and the depression of the "Thirties" finished them, but they were gallant ships, doing a hard job and often suffering disaster.

In 1906, soon after the wreck of the *Gipsy*, the *Celia*, a coastwise freighter of 173 tons, built at Benicia in 1884, went on the rocks at Point Joe on the 17 Mile Drive. The hull of the *St. Paul*, which had gone ashore in the same spot ten years before had long ago disintegrated, but the schooner *Hesper*, a more recent victim, lay close at hand. In 1909 two ships were lost. The *Majestic* was wrecked near Point Sur. Back in the mountains of the Big Sur the little country school, *Majestic*, received its title from this vessel and economically used the ship's name-board over the door. At last report it was still there.

The other loss of 1909 was the *Roderick Dhu*, an iron bark of 1534 tons built at Sunderland, England, in 1873. Her figurehead, a plaided Highlander, is now in the Maritime Museum in San Francisco. Her proud days in sail past, she was reduced to a barge under tow by the Associated Oil Company.

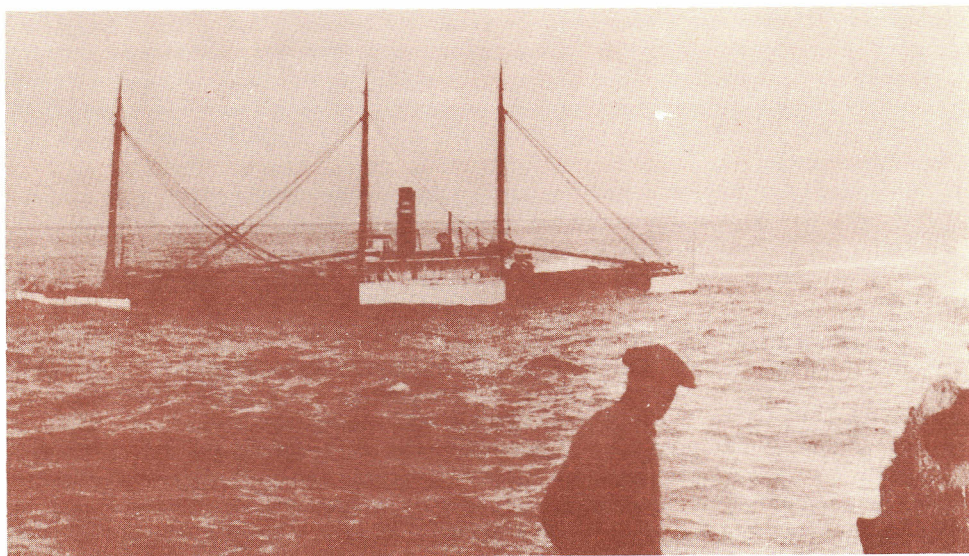
In a thick fog on April 26, at 3:30 A.M., her tug, the *Relief*, under the impression that they were entering Monterey Bay, turned in at Moss Beach, two miles south of Point Pinos Light. The tug quickly realized the danger and saved herself, but the *Roderick Dhu* could not be swung around in time and went ashore. At first inspection she appeared unharmed and without a leak. The *Relief*, aided by the tug *Defiance*, tried to pull the big ship off at the 6 A.M. high tide, but the bark was too solidly embedded in the sand; the tugs decided to wait until the higher tide at 7 P.M. Captain Haskins and nine of the crew of the stricken vessel stayed aboard to prevent salvage claims, for the ship was valued at \$175,000.

Every effort to float the *Roderick Dhu* failed. She was too firmly aground. By April 29th, it was apparent that a hole had been stove in her bottom by the waves pounding her against the rocks under the sand, and there was ten feet of water in her hold. There was little prospect that she would break up soon, for her sturdy iron construction appeared sound. Captain Haskins still had hopes of floating her and the First Mate and a sailor set up a tent on the beach to keep guard over her. The Star Theater in Monterey advertized that it had made dramatic photographs of the wreck and feature them in a magic lantern special at the Friday night show.

On May 6th, divers were brought from San Francisco in a last attempt to get the ship off. Their opinion after inspection was that she was not seriously damaged. The six oil tanks were intact and would keep her afloat. The sea was moderate.

But all was in vain. Two days later the *Roderick Dhu* was abandoned to her fate. Heavy seas had torn her hull so badly that she could not be moved, and all that could be done was to dismantle her and save the engines, pumps, masts, spars, rigging and sails. *4

*4- Monterey Daily Cypress, April 27 - May 9, 1909



Courtesy ship Collection of Allen Knight

The FLAVEL, wrecked, 1923

Between 1909 and 1923 eight coaster and lumber schooners were cast ashore, most of them near Point Sur, despite the lighthouse that had been erected there in 1889. Four of the casualties, however, were re-floated: in 1913, the *Casco* at Point Piedras Blancas and the *Raymond*, aground at Point Sur; in 1916, the *Schnayak* got off Point Sur to sail again under the name of *Annie Christensen*, and in 1923 the oil tanker *Frank H. Buck* went high and dry on the 17 Mile Drive.

(The *Frank H. Buck* was a hoodoo ship. She suffered no serious damage in her misadventure on the Monterey Peninsula, but she had scarcely been reconditioned when she was rammed one foggy night in the Golden Gate by another ship. She drifted, a total wreck, under the cliffs at Land's End below the Lincoln Park Golf Course in San Francisco and found her last birth close to the rusting hulk of another tanker, the *Lyman Stewart*. By a fateful coincidence, the two wrecked tankers were sister ships.)

Three of the ships that were not rescued went under near Point Sur: in 1915, the *Catania*; 1921, the *C. G. Lindauer*, and in 1922, the *Thomas K. Wand*. In 1923, the *Flavel* smashed on the rocks of the 17 Mile Drive.

The *Flavel* was a big three-masted steam lumber schooner valued at \$50,000, bound from Aberdeen, Washington, to San Pedro with more than a million feet of lumber worth some \$65,000. Shortly after midnight on December 14, 1923, in a rising sea and heavy fog, she hit the rocks at the Loop. Captain Johnson and his 22 men took to the boats and were picked up by Captain Takigawa of the Paladini Fish Company vessel, the *Normandie*.

The schooner, at first light, was seen to be almost a total loss. Lumber was scattered for hundreds of yards along the 17 Mile Drive, and the Del Monte Properties announced that it would seize the ship and its cargo under the law of the sea that gives all rights to the first person who boards a vessel abandoned by its master and crew.

An exciting race then took place to get aboard the sinking *Flavel* which, pounded by heavy seas, had been washed from the rocks and was slowly drifting toward Fanshell Beach. Captain Johnson tried to get back aboard but could

not. Paul Flanders of Carmel, an ex-Lieut-Commander, U.S. Navy, and Jim Meehan, chief of the freight-handling crews at the Monterey Municipal Wharf, prepared an abalone launch for salvage operations, while the Hammond Lumber Company as owners, and the insurance adjusters as interested parties, struck a fast bargain with the Del Monte Properties and sold them ship and cargo on December 15th.

Del Monte's business acumen interested the salvage hunters not at all. The *Flavel* was floating at the mercy of the waves and fair game for any intrepid seamen. Feeling ran high among the aggressive competitors and it appeared that open battle might break out at any time as they strove to get first foot on the wallowing vessel.

Thumbing his nose at the threats of the lumber company's representative to prefer charges of piracy against him, Flanders succeeded in throwing a grapnel aboard and scrambling up on the deck. He and his crew brought off chronometers, compasses, side-lights, cordage and other easily removeable gear.

Up and down the beach for three miles between Point Pinos and the Loop, there lay an indescribable litter of planks and beams. Dozens of fishing boats gave up fishing for the more profitable task of grabbing floating lumber, while 10,000 people made the trip out on Sunday to stare at the shipwreck. By Monday, December 17th, the *Flavel* was nowhere to be seen. She had broken up and gone down in the night. *5

By the mid-"Thirties", the long list of wrecks was drawing to a close. The *Rhine Maru*, a Japanese ship, was lost at Point Sur in 1930; 1931, the *Tamalpais* went on the beach at Moss Landing but was hauled off; on September 3, 1934, the *John B. Stetson* rode up on the rocky ledges of Cypress Point, not a hundred yards from where the *Flavel* had splintered in 1923.

There was a dense fog but a calm sea when she struck at 1 A.M. Captain Carl Hubner and the 21 men aboard tried valiently to bail her, but as the ship ground on the rocks, the water came in so fast that the pumps could not expel it. To get ashore through the surf seemed impossible, but alert citizens had already phoned the Monterey police department and the Coast Guard cutter *Daphne* was racing to pick up the life-boats that had been launched. Captain Hubner and two men stayed aboard until daylight. When it was obvious that the vessel was beyond help, they too left and the *Stetson* was abandoned.

The wreck of the *Stetson* was long remembered by the local people. She was loaded with shortening, valued at \$5,000, and as the waves wafted the casks, tins and cartons up and down the beach, eager hands rescued them and took them home.

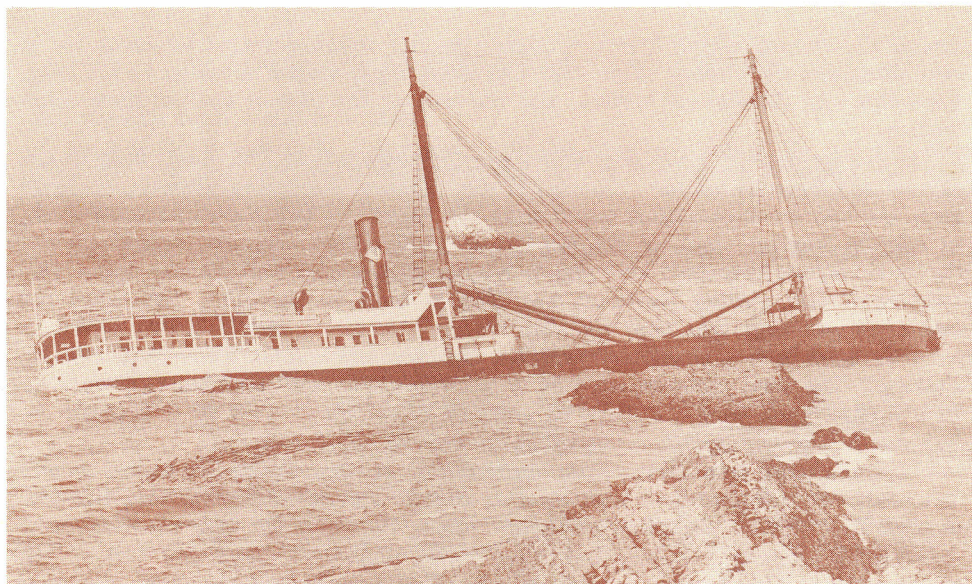
Like the *Frank H. Buck*, the *Stetson* cost her owners dearly. On November 11, 1932, she had collided with the *Chehalis* and had undergone \$5,000 worth of repairs in a San Francisco drydock. Before that, she went aground at Eureka. Built in 1905 for the coast passenger and general freight service, she was a wooden vessel of 837 gross tons, 181 feet in length and valued at \$25,000. *6

On the day the *John B. Stetson* went on the beach, the Monterey Peninsula Herald noted that the steam-shovels working toward each other from opposite ends of the new coast highway were only a mile apart. The bill authorizing the construction of the road passed the legislature in 1919, and when, on June 28, 1937, the new highway was officially opened, the day of the little coastal steamer, the errand-boy of the majestic south coast, was over.

The hundred year period between the casting ashore of the *Natalia* in Christmas week, 1834, and the destruction of the four masted ex-lumber schooner

*5- Peninsula Daily Herald, December 14 - 17, 1923

*6- The Monterey Peninsula Herald, September 3, 1934.



Courtesy ship Collection of Allen Knight

The JOHN B. STETSON, wrecked, 1932

Aurora at the same Monterey anchorage on January 18, 1935, forms an almost perfect circle of coincidence. They were both sailing ships, both victims of a sudden northwest gale and they went aground at almost the precise spot along the dunes to the east of the harbor.

The loss of the *Aurora* is of more than passing interest to Allen Knight, an ex-president of the Monterey History and Art Association, for he was her owner. The schooner had been built in 1901 in Everett, Washington, and her principal voyages were between northern California and Australia with cargoes of red-wood lumber. During the First World War she was a munitions carrier. By 1932, when she and another schooner, the *William H. Smith* were purchased by Horace Cochran and brought to Monterey, the picturesque deep-water voyager had become an echo of the past.

The *William H. Smith* did not last long. Struck by a fatal northwest wind in 1934, she dragged her anchor and was ship-wrecked on the Del Monte beach where the *Aurora* was to find her grave a year later.

Knight bought the *Aurora* in 1934, intending to use it as a training ship for Sea Scouts, but leaks developed and early in January, 1935, he asked the city council for permission to beach it and preserve it as a tourist attraction. The Chamber of Commerce enthusiastically backed him up at the council meeting. The council decided to "think it over" until the February meeting, but on the evening of January 18th, the sea settled the question. A gale arose, waves swept over the bow of the half-sunken schooner, the anchor dragged, and at 9:30 P.M. she struck. An hour later, the *Aurora* broke up under the pounding of the surf, a total loss. *7

A month later, on February 12, 1935, there occurred the most spectacular, unusual and expensive wreck ever to take place in local waters. It is perhaps stretching the yarn somewhat to number the U.S.S. *Macon*, a dirigible airship,

*7- The Monterey Peninsula Herald, January 16 - 19, 1935

among the victims of the Monterey coast, but her wreck deserves comment for it also chronicles the closing of an era. The huge, cigar-shaped airships had a long, honorable and disastrous history, and the loss of the *Macon* spelled their elimination.

As the impressive battle fleet of 34 warships steamed up the coast, high in the sky before them sailed the silvery, 787 foot *Macon*. From her altitude of 3,000 feet, she had an unparalleled position as the "eyes" of the Navy. At 5:18 P.M., in squally weather, just as she was approaching Point Sur, she staggered and the stern section crumpled like paper. Apparently, a gust had hit the upper fin, twisting it and pulling its struts and girders loose so that they punctured the two after gas bags that kept the ship aloft.

"We have had a casualty," crackled the *Macon's* radio. Then came, "SOS. Falling." The final message, at 5:31 P.M., was, "We will abandon ship as soon as it lands on the water. We are 20 miles off Point Sur." At 5:40 P.M., with no way on, the *Macon* gently collapsed stern first in the Pacific.

The thin fog was immediately lighted by calcium flares from the rubber life-boats. The descent had been gradual enough for all aboard to don life-preservers and perfect discipline prevailed. When the rescuing fleet came up with searchlights glaring over the darkening ocean, it picked up all but two of the 88 man crew. The chief radioman had leaped from the craft 125 feet above the water. He hit the waves on his back and sank at once. A cook was carried down with the wreckage.

Lieut.-Commander Wylie, the captain of the *Macon*, was a dedicated dirigible officer. He had previously survived the loss of the U.S.S. *Shenandoah* over Ohio in 1925 when a storm wrecked the airship and 14 lost their lives, and the worst disaster of all, the collapse of the U.S.S. *Akron* off New Jersey in a storm in 1933 when 73 died.

The *Macon*, built at a cost of \$2,450,000, sank in 250 fathoms. There was no salvage. She was almost the last, and certainly the biggest of the ships lost off the slopes of the Santa Lucias. Thanks to radar, sonic depth measuring devices, radio signals and the fact that nowadays there is no particular reason for ships to hug the coast, only one sinking is reported in recent years. That crash took place in the early morning hours when the *Marine Leopard*, a freighter ploughing confidently through the heavy fog off Point Sur on May 14, 1956, rammed into the steel lumber schooner *Howard Olsen*, cut her in two and killed two crewmen.

The gallant little coasters that played such a part in the development of the rock-bound California shore have been supplanted, but the story of their struggle against the sea and the dangerous coast is a part of the heritage of Monterey and its setting.

— Donald M. Craig

The editors of the NOTICIAS are greatly indebted to Allen Knight for the source material and photographs that have been the foundations of this article. Throughout the years, Mr. Knight, a deep-water sailor who stood his trick at the wheel in the day of the wind-jammers, has gathered at his "Ship Museum" in his Carmel home not only source books and mementoes of the sea, but a collection of some 14,000 photographs of old ships that is, perhaps, unrivalled on the Pacific coast. Like so many others who have sought his help in writing on maritime history, we express our thanks and deep appreciation for his generous help and enthusiastic interest.

— The Editors

COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

NEW MEMBERS SINCE JANUARY 1, 1962

Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon Crane, Miss Allene Knight, Mrs. Theodore I. Bogert, Mr. and Mrs. James Scales, Mrs. Jean Day, Miss Judith van Loben Sels, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Rodriguez, Mrs. C. S. Magenheimer, Mr. and Mrs. Geil J. Norris, Mrs. Walter Norris, Mrs. E. T. Haskell, and Mr. and Mrs. Ed Hilby, Jr.

New Junior Members: Richard Wilkerson, Michael Bentley and Gaither and Eric Campbell.



COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

Colonel Allen Griffin, association president, appointed the following members to committees at the March meeting of the Board of Directors:

EXECUTIVE: President, Col. Griffin; vice-president, Henry Jones; Allen Knight, Adm. Lucius Chapel and Robert McKeever, Jr. **HOSPITALITY,** Mrs. Tod Singleton, who is to choose five others to serve with her; **HOUSE,** Mrs. W. M. O'Donnell, Mrs. Horace Dormody, Myron Oliver, Mrs. L. J. Hudson, Mrs. F. L. Knudsen; **GARDEN,** Mrs. W. E. Oberholtzer, chairman, Theodore Durein and Mrs. Allen Griffin; **ACQUISITION,** Myron Oliver, chairman.

Mrs. Henry Jones, chairman of the Adobe House Tour and Table Setting Fiesta committee has chosen her committee for that event — September 29th in Memory Garden — as follows: **TICKETS,** Mrs. Rudolph verMehr; **PUBLICITY,** Mrs. Lawson Little Jr.; **HOSTESSES,** Mrs. John Shepherd; **TABLE SETTINGS,** Mrs. Robert McKeever Jr. and Mrs. George Leutzinger; **PRINTING AND POSTERS,** Mrs. W. E. Oberholtzer; Mrs. Robert Stanton, party editor of **HOUSE BEAUTIFUL**, consultant for decorations and table settings.



Mrs. Gladys Johnston should receive a big "Thank You" for arranging for and paying for an ad in the magazine section of the San Francisco Chronicle announcing the date of the Adobe House Tour.



Five hundred members have already paid their 1962 annual dues to the Association and there should be over 300 still to send in their checks for the privilege of belonging and being able to assist with the dedicated program and attend the historical and educational program it presents. Last year there were 836 paid up members.



The Monterey Realty Board has moved into the Fremont Adobe on Hartnell street and seems delighted to be our tenant. The flag pole was placed, the flag raised, the garden is being planted around the building and all is well. The income pays for the upkeep of the property.



OPEN HOUSE

All members of the Monterey History and Art Association Ltd. are invited to visit the Casa Serrano on Sunday afternoon, March 25th, from 3 until 5 o'clock, to view the interior restoration and furnishings, and enjoy refreshments in the historic old adobe, now the headquarters of the Association. The hospitality committee will act as hostesses for the occasion.



COMING EVENTS

The annual Merienda celebrating Monterey's 192nd birthday, will be held in Memory Garden on Saturday, June 2, 1962. Sunday, June 3rd, is the actual date of the landing of Father Junipero Serra and Don Gaspar de Portola 192 years ago, but because the day is Sunday, Saturday has been chosen for the celebration. Henry Jones is the general chairman and Robert McKeever, Jr. will oversee the barbecue.



(Continued on Page Eight.)

THE EDITORS
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COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

(Continued from Page Seven.)

July 7 will be the anniversary of the landing of Commodore John Drake Sloat on the shores of Monterey and the raising of the Stars and Stripes at the Custom House, 116 years ago. The History and Art Association and the Navy League will be co-sponsors of the re-enactment of this historic and important event. Allen Knight is chairman of this event.

—o—

The late Tal Josselyn's idea for a memorial to the historic significance of Monterey Bay has advanced a further step. His script, too long for a plaque, has been edited by Ted Durein and Donald Craig and the shorter version accepted by the directors. The next steps are scale drawings, city approval, and financial arrangements.

—o—

A suggestion that more general membership meetings be held, perhaps on a quarterly basis, was adopted by the directors. Admiral Chappell was appointed chairman to work out details for a spring and fall gathering.

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GIFTS

A black and white drawing of Casa Serrano by the late Percy Gray, an artist who formerly resided in Monterey, given by Mrs. A. C. Houghton of Balboa, California.

A very beautiful framed fan presented by Mrs. Winifred Wolf of Gonzales, in memory of her mother, Louise Stokes Gonzalez, wife of Dr. Alfred Gonzalez. Dr. Gonzalez presented the fan to his wife 65 years ago. It was purchased in France.

A pair of whaling boat oars, a cooking pot of cast iron once owned and used by Robert Louis Stevenson when he lived in a cabin of Jonathan Wright in the Carmel Valley, given by Mr. and Mrs. Charles McFadden.

A charming old music box which plays six tunes, the gift of Mrs. Walter Norris and her son Geil. Given to Mrs. Maria Antonia Bach Thompson by Aurelia Berg, the music box has been donated in memory of Mrs. Thompson, for many years a valued member and director of the Association, by her cousin Mrs. Norris.