

Moments in Time

SAUSALITO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2014

THE DRYDOCKS OFF SAUSALITO

These recollections from the early 70s are part of a memoir in progress by waterfront icon Joe Tate. As leader of the legendary band the Redlegs, Joe was a regular denizen of the drydocks in the waters off Sausalito, and also a participant in the infamous houseboat wars:

The Redlegs came about sort of by accident. I was a refugee from the music business living among the boat dwellers in Sausalito. Many of us were very poor and had taken to living on some huge abandoned wooden drydocks that were sunk in the middle of Richardson Bay. It was a really crummy, filthy place to live. They really smelled bad too. It was so wet and moldy that the seams in our jeans kept rotting out. Someone figured out that painting the seams kept them from rotting. We had red paint.

The drydocks were gigantic and had been used to lift military ships for repair during WWII. The Sausalito waterfront was largely a big junkyard of marine wreckage from the war. Many houseboats were built on a variety of surplus landing craft, balloon barges as well as submarine chasers and minesweepers. The drydocks were part of this surplus and they were the ugliest of all this stuff. Not only that, but they were right in the middle of the bay where every complainer in town could clearly see them. And complaints there were.

It was bad enough before we started partying there but the bonfires at night along with the electric guitars really got the complaining department going.



The Hwang Ho near the drydocks.

Photo by Saul Ronda

The sporadic gunfire didn't help either.

I had a small Chinese junk named the Hwang Ho, which I more or less lived on while commuting between shore and the drydocks.

I just wanted a good rockin' group that could bring parties alive. I had no faith in the recording business or any of the regular club business, which I regarded as being dominated by people whom I viewed as *ignoratii*.

For some months we had been having parties at the drydocks by picking up paying attendees from the Sausalito shoreline. We had a friend named Jesse Bolton, who could quickly prepare a feast. He also did a lot of scrounging at the Big G dumpster. Jesse was one party animal and, for his style, he was nicknamed "Jesse Crocodile."

We also made friends with Frank Werber, owner of the Trident, a trendy restaurant built on a pier in downtown Sausalito. He allowed us to land at the restaurant and schmooze. We would hustle patrons to go with us aboard the Loafer, a small tug owned by my old sailing buddy, Bill Becker.

It was about this time that Becker sold the Loafer to one Captain Dredge, who was a regular dweller at the drydocks. "Dredge" made the party runs so often, we had to scramble to keep up our appearance as the local outlaw rock scene.

Our passengers were out to have fun though and they loved the Sausalito waterfront ambience. At least they were willing to give us money. We would just load up as many people as we could cram on board. Once the

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several trips a day. Who knows how many violations we were committing.

This scene went on for many months with growing dissatisfaction among the hill people. The rock 'n roll music, as well

as the gunfire, could be heard along the shoreline. Frank Werber was getting fed up too. It may have been Werber who exclaimed

“Those people at the drydocks are just a bunch of rednecks”. John Stephens, a local wit, who was present and knew we had a habit of painting our pant seams red, corrected the gentleman and said, “Those people aren’t rednecks, they’re REDLEGS”. The name stuck and our band was forever branded The Redlegs.

While returning from the drydocks one day, Joe found himself in the midst of the houseboat wars, with sheriff’s deputies attempting to destroy waterfront structures. Most peoples’ homes were saved, but as Joe notes:

The drydocks, which we continued to plunder, were next. Apparently, the City was anxious to get rid of them any way they could and, since they were no longer occupied they hired someone to torch them before someone else moved in. That someone was Andy Schlepp, as he was known among the locals. “For fifty bucks,” he said later, “I poured gasoline on each of the towers and lit it off.”

SAUSALITO NEWS

ACCESS EXPANDED

You can now read, copy and print back issues of Sausalito News from 1895 through 1957 via the Historical Society’s website: www.sausalitohistoricalsociety.org.

Just click on the Sausalito News link on the home page. Then, print out the instructions for searching the newspaper, click on the green Sausalito News link, and follow your printed instructions.



The drydocks fully aflame. Photo by Saul Rouda

SHS CO-PRESENTS SAUSALITO FILMS

The Sausalito Library and the Sausalito Historical Society launched a series of free showings of documentary films shot in and about Sausalito on Friday evenings from January 16 to February 6.

The first showing, *Last Free Ride*, recreates Joe Tate’s adventures in Sausalito and on the high seas. This “hip pirate movie” was introduced by its co-producer Saul Rouda and drew a packed house at the library. DVDs of the film are available at the library, or may be purchased via www.lastfreeride.com.

Another capacity crowd filled the library the following Friday evening to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of philosopher and one-time Sausalito waterfront resident Alan Watts with a screening of *Why Not Now?* Watts’ son and filmmaker Mark Watts introduced the retrospective, which presents the life and works of Alan Watts in his own words using archival film, audio recordings, and photographs. Afterward, everyone enjoyed a birthday carrot cake, one of Alan Watts’ favorite treats.

On January 30, Galilee Harbor’s Marianne Dolan showed *Houseboat Wars*, about her community’s struggle to survive during and after the contentious 1970s.



Mark Watts shared fond memories of his father.

The final installment in the series was a premiere of Eric Torney’s *Sausalito After the Bridge*, that tells the story of how Sausalito changed after the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937. The film’s narrative is interspersed with interviews, old movies, and current and archival photos.

A LOT OF HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

The Historical Society has benefitted greatly from the support of businesses, organizations and individuals throughout the Sausalito community, and we'd like to acknowledge their many contributions:

Ed Couderec of Sausalito Moving and Storage has provided space for some of the treasures that no longer fit in our City Hall headquarters. Michael and Isaac Lappert have generously provided ice cream to the participants in our schools program.

Longtime SHS Board member Bob Woodrum supplies framing and other artwork through his business, Sausalito Picture Framing.

Food donations for our volunteer recognition event came from Saylor's, Venice Gourmet, Cibo and Angelino's.

Walt Van Voorhees has always helped with photo enlargements and enhancements. Barbara Geisler has provided graphic design for this newsletter and SHS exhibits. Michael Moyle has become the Society's "house photographer."



Third grade students and parents from Willow Creek Academy enjoy ice cream cones from Lappert's (Isaac Lappert in front) after completing a SHS Schools Program tour of Sausalito's downtown Historic District. The program is part of a year long study of the history of Sausalito sponsored by the Sausalito Historical Society.

The program, now in its fifth year, gives third grade students an opportunity to explore and learn about the historic buildings and people of Sausalito and the history of the Marinship era and its impact on the community.

The Sausalito Art Festival Foundation recently awarded the Society \$1,500 to create a space at the Ice House Visitor Center for the sale of arts and crafts from Sausalito artists. The Rotary Club helped upgrade our artwork storage.

Jonathan Westerling of Radio Sausalito airs our Secret History spots, and Soren Hemilla of MarinScope showcases our weekly history column.

The City of Sausalito has generously provided space for our research and exhibit rooms and the Ice House, and helps pay our Ice House staff.

Of course, we also want to acknowledge the support of our members, who contributed over \$3800 in response to our year end fundraising appeal. Those funds will be used to update and preserve our collections at the Ice House and the Marinship archives at the Bay Model. We're especially grateful to members who have upgraded to premium levels of membership. Most recently, Patricia and Thomas Theodoros renewed as Benefactors, and Mary Foust renewed as a Patron. To learn more about membership upgrades, please go to www.sausalitohistoricalsociety.com/membership.

COMING EVENTS

SHEL SILVERSTEIN EXHIBIT PLANNED

On May, the Historical Society will launch a new exhibit of the music, poetry, drawings, cartoons and writings of longtime waterfront resident Shel Silverstein. The exhibit will be open to the public at no charge on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10 AM to 1 PM.

NEW BOOK, EXHIBIT ON VARDA

On June 14 author Betsy Stroman and the Historical Society will launch an exhibit of work by iconic Sausalito artist Jean Varda at the Bay Model. Approximately 25 pieces of Varda's work will be on display. The exhibit, which will be open until July 13, coincides with the publication of Betsy's new book, *The Art and Life of Jean Varda*.

PORTUGUESE IN SAUSALITO PRESENTATION

Last year the Sausalito Historical Society and the Sausalito Portuguese Hall collaborated to create a self-guided walking tour through Sausalito and the surrounding area.

On March 4, one of the tour's creators, Mike Moyle, will present an overview of the tour, which features 33 locations highlighting Sausalito's long Portuguese-American history. This free event will begin with a 6:00pm no-host reception at the IDESST Sausalito Portuguese Hall, 511 Caledonia Street. Mike's talk begins at 7:00pm.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

In California, 3rd grade students study the history of California and local history. You readers know we've got HISTORY, in bold letters; but children may not yet know of the rich history they are growing up in.

For several years, under the leadership of SHS Board member Susan Frank, your Society has strived to bring local history to life for the 3rd graders at Bayside Martin Luther King, Jr. Academy, and at Willow Creek Academy. The Society sends costumed docents to the classrooms. Susan and Roland Ojeda created a workbook with Then and Now photos of key downtown Sausalito buildings. Later on in the year, the children will tour the SHS's Marinsip Exhibit at the Bay Model.

In December and January, the students, their teachers and parent volunteers, meet Society members outside the Ice House. Half of the group goes inside to see the exhibits; Robin Sweeny quizzes the students; they search for "hidden" clues. Robin's delightful and instructive, as well as being a legend in her own time.

The other half of the group is led on a tour of our Downtown Historic Area, focusing on the buildings they've seen in their workbooks. Later on the groups swap places so all get the inside and outside events. In recent months, I have had the privilege of accompanying three of these groups on their tours. I've learned from Margaret Badger and Vickie Nichols, and I'm trying not to burden the kids with my personal recollections.

So, I will burden you. Wait, don't leave. I'll just mention three stops: **Mason's Garage** will always be the Village Fair to me...fond recollections of the silversmith, the Carmelcorn shop, the record store. **Wells Fargo Bank** is gracious enough to let us bring the kids into the bank, and get up close to the vault which still proclaims the Bank of Sausalito, the builders of that structure. And look outside for some other clues to its heritage. The **Marin Fruit Company** is no more, but the facade is still there. To me, the little stools at the side counter are still there, as I chat with Willie and Uncle Jack and the rest of the family. Willie's grandson, Don Jen, is still one of my closest friends. Remember to renew you memberships. Let us know what you like best about us, or what we could be doing better.

Until next time, Jerry

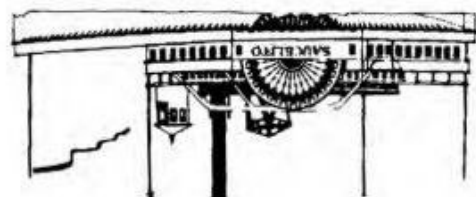
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