

Moments in Time

SAUSALITO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER SPRING 2009

THREE SAUSALITO FERRIES

Saucelito/Sausalito Two Ferry Tales

THE SAUCELITO, 1878-1884

The *Saucelito* was not the first ferry to come to the town of Sausalito, but she was the first brought to serve a real commute system between Marin County and San Francisco. She and her sister ship *San Rafael* were ordered in 1877-78 by President Latham of the North Pacific Coast Railroad (NPCRR) to connect Marin train service with ferry service to San Francisco. His idea was to create a “horseshoe,” or water/land loop, from San Francisco to southern Marin via either Sausalito (to San Anselmo Junction) or Pt. San Quentin (to San Rafael).

Our ferry tale begins with the building of the twin, 205 foot “luxury liners,” or single-ended ferries *Saucelito* and *San Rafael*, in Green Point, New York. After construction, both ships were completely disassembled, sent west in sections and then reassembled on the west coast. Curiously, historic records contradict each other as to whether these two ferries were loaded onto sea-going ships and carried around Cape Horn or came by rail. According to one source, the *Marin County Journal (MCJ)*, 3/29/1877, “120 train cars were chartered to convey the ships here on several different trains because the cost, time, insurance and liability estimate favored the land route.” George H. Harlan and Clement Fisher, Jr. reached the opposite conclusion in their book *Of Walking Beams and Paddle Wheels*.

Inside, the sister ships were beautifully crafted with finely worked white oak and pine, grand staircases and plush, upholstered seats. Powered by coal-fired steam and a walking beam that connected to an enormous paddlewheel, the *Saucelito* could reportedly carry up to 2,500 passengers from San Francisco to Sausalito in

Saucelito/Sausalito (Continued on Page 3)

Ferryboat Memories: The *Eureka* Run

She was called “the largest double-end passenger ferry in the world” when she made her grand entry into the San Francisco Bay in 1922. A full 299.5 feet long, the steamer *Eureka* could carry 2300 passengers. And when her main deck seats were removed, she could handle 120 “machines,” the term used in a 1922 press release to describe the new mode of transit of the early ‘20s, the automobile. In short, she was an impressive example of early mass transit. With her seats back in place, she could accommodate 3500 people.

She and the *Sacramento* were the last “beam-engined” paddle-wheel ferries to be built on San Francisco Bay. For 19 years, from 1922 to 1941, the *Eureka* was the chief workhorse of the Northwestern Pacific Railroad (NWP) ferries—a small fleet consisting primarily of four “regulars” (plus various back-ups from the Southern Pacific fleet) which plied daily between Sausalito and San Francisco, with a few scheduled stops at Tiburon. Every 45 minutes or so you could make a bay crossing on the *Tamalpais*, the *Cazadero*, the *Eureka*, or the *Sausalito* (until that boat’s retirement in

Eureka (Continued on Page 2)



The *Eureka* churns across the bay during her last years of service between the time the Bay Bridge was completed in 1936 and when she retired in 1941.

PHOTO: SHS COLLECTION

Eureka (continued from page 1)

1933—see article on the *Sausalito* this issue). The boats ran all day out of Sausalito from 7 a.m to 10:35 p.m. The *Eureka* was primarily responsible for handling the heaviest traffic of the day, the commuter runs—the 7:30 a.m. from Sausalito and the 5:15 p.m. from San Francisco.

Today, she's this country's only surviving wooden-hull ferryboat, still afloat at the Maritime Museum National Historical Park at San Francisco's Hyde Street Pier. Oakland resident Bill Knorp, 79, occasionally visits her there, on nostalgia trips which take him back to 1932 when he was three years old. A ferryboat buff for over three-quarters of a century, Knorp recently co-authored an Arcadia book on the subject, "The Ferries of San Francisco Bay."

Living with his family in San Francisco's Sea Cliff, he'd been taken on ferry rides since he was a toddler, often crossing to the Alameda Mole on the *Sausalito*, then traveling by the Southern Pacific's Red Train to Neptune Beach. His first trip to Sausalito was on the *Eureka*. "There was this pedestrian bridge where you crossed over the Embarcadero to the second floor of the Ferry Building. You could buy a 35 cent ticket and your favorite ferryboat postcard there. I have a vivid memory of coming into Sausalito that first morning, and one of the first things you saw was the Sea Spray Inn at the south end of town on Water Street (now Bridgeway). They served the best split pea soup you've ever tasted.

Actually, when you crossed the bay on the *Eureka*, you didn't have to wait for lunch at the Sea Spray. You could get it on board. Knorp remembers a "big horseshoe counter and tables capable of seating as many as 64 diners where you could get breakfast, lunch or dinner, and the service was fabulous—all the staff were in immaculate white uniforms!" In the 32 minutes it took to cross the bay, the ferry could serve a three-course meal. The menu on Tuesday, January 18, 1938, for example, offered soups (15 cents) and fruit juices (10 cents), including prune juice by the glass; a lettuce or potato salad (10 and 15 cents respectively); an entrée ranging from pot roast of beef (45 cents) to kidney sauté on toast (40 cents); and for dessert, assorted pies (10 cents per slice) and, you guessed it—stewed prunes! (10 cents). Beer and ale were available at 20 cents a glass.

Knorp recalls the contrast between social life on the ferries of the '20s and '30s—reflected in people's more formal wear and decorous behavior—and today's more laid-back code of conduct. "All men wore hats, and most women did, too. Suits, ties, dresses, gloves, high heels. Things were very different then." Contributing to many people's sense of a ferryboat ride being a special event was the dignity and stateliness of the ferries themselves. The *Eureka* was officially designated as a

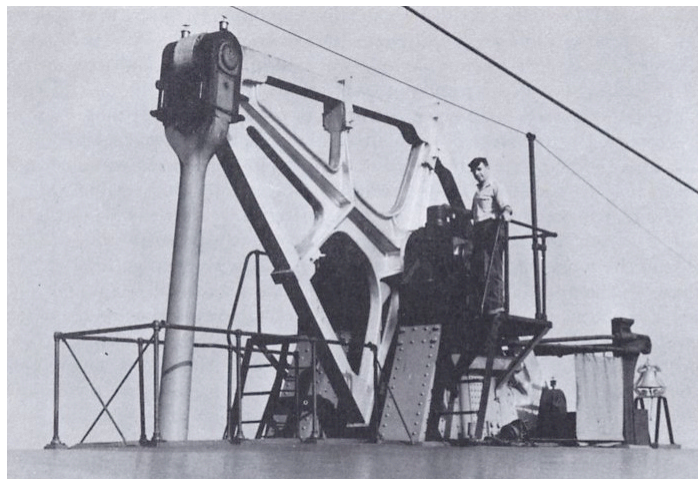


PHOTO: SHS COLLECTION

A walking beam was a massive web of steel atop the paddle wheel ferries of this era. Driven by a giant cylinder, the powerful rod pushed the paddle wheel through the water. The only remaining walking beam mechanism displayed on a floating vessel in this country can be seen today on the Eureka at the Hyde Street Pier in San Francisco.

rebuild of the *Ukiah*, built in 1890, and it retained the *Ukiah*'s walking-beam-driven engine. But in many ways she was a different boat, with her brand new superstructure (consisting of an upper passenger deck and a hurricane deck) rising imposingly above her main deck and her sleek, round-bottomed hull. In fact, these upper portions, extending beyond her hull by 18 feet on either side, almost gave her the look of a modern aircraft carrier. Her hull's framework of heavy timbers and planking was sheathed in copper, allowing her to slip smoothly through the water.

In fact today, a video presentation provided on her main deck for public viewing, shows her in her heyday, a striking profile moving swiftly across the bay. Her walking beam, outlined against the sky, worked by simple principles of mechanics: steam pressure forced the piston up and down, thereby rocking the beam. A connecting rod at the other end of the beam rotated the crankshaft, and that, in turn, drove the paddle wheels. The steel A-frame encasing this elaborate machinery rose 42 feet through the heart of the vessel. On some of NWP's beam-engined ferries—though not on the *Eureka*—a window was provided allowing passengers to view the pulleys and cables at work as they passed down to the engine room. Bill Knorp recalls joining the crowds of children who spent their bay crossings with noses pressed to the glass, entranced with the power of moving machinery.

Inside the cabins, touches of elegance contributed to the excursionist's sense of occasion. The intricate Victorian stained glass of the 19th century ferries was, by the '20s, considered passé. In its place, on the *Eureka*, there was etched glass. The joinerwork of her wooden interiors was a fine example of a

Eureka (Continued on Page 3)

soon-to-be lost art. Everything conspired to lend a feeling of holiday. On the earlier *Ukiah*, weekend parties often rode her to Marin County to picnic at Paradise Cove and El Campo. Knorp and his family frequently took the *Eureka* to Sausalito, then boarded the electric train to Mill Valley's Old Mill Park.

For the "regulars"—i.e., the commuters—the five-day-a-week crossing, both to the North Bay and across to the East Bay on the Southern Pacific ferry fleet, offered a different sort of experience. People who took the ferries daily tended to stake out claims to certain cherished seats—and for years nobody challenged their seniority. Groups formed—the bridge playing crowd, the poker players, the knitters, the readers. The ladies tended to retire to the upper deck, the gentlemen to the dining saloon.

Those crossing in their autos missed this, isolated as they were on the main deck. They drove on, paid their money (40 cents for a car with driver and four passengers), and drove off. But the pedestrians enjoyed unusual bonding experiences. Debating societies debated. Barbershop quartets performed. On special occasions—the Big Game between Cal and Stanford, Christmas, birthdays, weddings, retirements—the boats were festooned with appropriate colors and gifts were exchanged. The commuity spirit became so mutually supportive, even beyond the passengers themselves, that when foul weather delayed the ferries, commuters were given excuse notes to present to their employers. The Palace Hotel in San Francisco offered special rates for those stranded in the City, along with a kit containing pajamas and toothbrush.

And then came the bridges—the Oakland-Bay Bridge in 1936 and the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937. An eight-year-old Bill Knorp walked across the Golden Gate to Marin on Pedestrian Day on May 27, 1937, and remembers the span thronged with children. He and his family's Swiss maid, Rose, returned home on the *Eureka*—for him, a curiously sad voyage despite the air of celebration. The grown-ups had assured him there was no way the bridges would doom the ferries, but he knew better. As he watched the Golden Gate Bridge go up from his Sea Cliff home, he "knew they'd be gone before long. I kept hoping the bridge would fall down."

But it didn't, and on February 28, 1941, a 12-year-old Knorp was on the last NWP ferry run into Sausalito, aboard the *Eureka*. Accounts of that day describe the atmosphere on the big steamer as "raucous" and "emotional." Lawrence Wosser, grandson of Thomas Wosser, who was engineer of Sausalito's first ferryboat, the *Princess* (introduced to the downtown waterfront in 1868), "stepped up to the bar to handle the engine," according to George H. Harlan in his book *Of Walking Beams and Paddle Wheels*. It was a wild and stormy day, but that didn't seem to dampen spirits. A band

played all afternoon, mainly the "Ferryboat Serenade," over and over.

Not everyone partied. Crying towels were distributed for those who required them. And valiant attempts were made to stop the clock by a group calling itself the "Save the Trains and Ferries League of Marin County." But with its final newsletter, in which appeared an angry article titled "Try Riding a Bus Just Once!" the League ran out of funds. Their parting words, however, must have long resonated in the minds of ferry lovers: "Where is the deck where you can take a short, brisk stroll in the fresh air? . . . Ask where the restrooms are. . . . If the bus has someplace where you can get a cup of coffee and something to eat, now is the time to find out."

Obviously, that advice came too late.

— Doris Berdahl

Saucelito/Sausalito (continued from page 1)

17 minutes! "The people dwelling in the suburban towns of San Rafael and Saucelito have reason to be delighted over the prospect of rapid transit to and from San Francisco (*MCJ*, 3/29/1877)."

The life span of the *Saucelito*, however, was short. One day she was required to switch routes with the *San Rafael*, her twin ferry, and travel to Pt. San Quentin rather than her usual destination, Sausalito. Tied up at the Pt. San Quentin wharf for the night in February 1884, she caught fire. "The flame-wrapt steamer was disengaged from the wharf and, being cut loose and shoved out in the stream a short distance, the tide then swung the burning mass back and the wharf took fire. But just then a breeze came up from the land and the doomed beauty, in her shroud of fire, floated off into the bay to meet her fate." (*MCJ* 2/28/1884) This devastating loss, which destroyed both the ferry and the wharf, resulted in termination of NPCRR's service to Pt. San Quentin, and henceforth the *San Rafael* and the *Tamalpais* served only the Sausalito terminal.

The fine ferry *Saucelito* has found extended life as the logo of the Sausalito Historical Society as seen on the line drawing on the back page of this newsletter.

THE SAUSALITO, 1894-1933

Ten years passed before the replacement for the *Saucelito* was in service. In that period, major changes were incorporated into the new *Sausalito* (the spelling of the name now restored to the town's original spelling), which was designed and built locally at the Alameda shipyard of John W. Dickie. To accommodate more and more riders, she

(*Saucelito/Sausalito* Continued on Page 4)

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was enlarged by 51 feet in length (totaling 256'1") and 32 feet in width (totaling 68'3")! She was fueled with oil rather than coal and, most significantly, she was built a double-ender. At the San Francisco ferry slips both single-enders *San Rafael* and *Saucelito* had to back out of the slips, turn around, and then steer north. This took time and created hazard at the busy terminal. The new double-ended *Sausalito* was like Dr. Doolittle's two-headed friend the Pushmi-Pullyu; each end could pull equally hard and since there was a pilothouse, a rudder and a vehicle entrance deck at each end, the ship never had to turn around.

The capacity to carry freight train cars on narrow-gauge tracks was another new feature of the *Sausalito*. The NPCRR could load multiple train cars on to the main deck in Sausalito and off again in San Francisco without disturbing the cargo. These freight transports were usually made at night after the daytime passenger runs. However, after a few years of hauling freight cars, it was determined that the weight was detrimental to the ship's architecture and the practice was discontinued. More amenities were made for passengers and, years later, the giant main deck of the *Sausalito* carried automobiles.

As with much of history, it is not until something goes wrong that notoriety is achieved. In the case of the *Sausalito*, that occurred on the night of November 30, 1901. She was heading across to San Francisco in a "soupy mist" when just off Alcatraz, she rammed and fatally wounded the *San Rafael*, the twin of her namesake *Saucelito*. It was the worst collision ever on San Francisco Bay. Amazingly, all passengers but three

were safely transferred on to the *Sausalito* before the *San Rafael* sank twenty minutes later. The press later told the heart-rending story of "Old Dick," the horse kept on board for pulling carts, who refused to walk the plank between ferries to safety and went down with the ship. The ferry accident was further immortalized in the opening chapter of Jack London's famous story *Sea Wolf*.

The calamity was followed by the demise of the NPCRR "who had to sell the line to someone who could invest fresh capital in the tottering venture" (Harlan, *San Francisco Bay Ferryboats*). But the *Sausalito*, under different ownership, went on to serve bay area commuters for another 32 years. Only one other traumatic incident, in 1922 while steaming toward Sausalito, marred her long career on the water. The walking beam broke and fragments fell into the main passenger cabin; then the main connecting rod tore loose taking with it a good portion of the center of the hurricane (top) deck. There was no loss of life, but henceforth in the interest of passenger safety, the glass for viewing the engine was covered with plywood. The high pleasure of "engine gazing" came to an abrupt end.

THE SAUSALITO IN RETIREMENT: 1934-PRESENT

Sausalito made her last run to Sausalito in the summer of 1931. She was older than many other ferries on the bay and when she was diagnosed with a cracked shaft, she was retired from service, dismantled of her powerful moving parts and in 1933 hauled up to Antioch on the San Joaquin River. In 1934, the recently formed Sportsmen Yacht Club of Antioch made the bold move to buy *Sausalito* for \$750 to be used as their clubhouse! In 1939, they configured a 100 x 300 foot land-locked harbor for the hull and maneuvered her into a final resting place. By 1994, however, fifty-five years of rot had destroyed the hull and it became necessary to raise what remained of the substructure above water level. It was placed on 13 steel eye beams, which sit on compacted sand enclosed by cofferdams that keep the sand from moving with the tides. This formidable project to stabilize the underside of *Sausalito* was paid for by club members who loaned money for the project at 5%.

The main clubhouse activities take place on the former upper cabin deck where most ferry passengers sat. The vast space, where once the A-frame enclosing the walking beam thrust right through the center, is today open for dancing, dining or reminiscing as the light comes through the original Victorian stained glass windows of the clerestory. Beautifully hand-crafted mahogany details highlight the interior woodwork.

The double-ender design is still apparent outside with pilot house and ramp at each end; inside, the giant steering wheel

Saucelito/Sausalito (Continued on Page 5)



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARGARET BADGER

This 2009 photograph of the *Sausalito* shows a main deck entrance and the pilothouse sitting above. The doors pictured slide into a curved arch designed to fit the tops of the train cars that rode on it during the first years of operation. The Antioch Sportsmen Yacht Club maintains this esteemed structure almost entirely with volunteer labor.



PHOTO: SHS COLLECTION

In 1902, the ferry Sausalito is approaching a landing. Notice the distinctive paddle wheel as well as the walking beam and the two pilothouses, one at each end. Double-enders like this ferry never had to turn around.

(relocated from the pilot house) sits at the “San Francisco end” and a ladies bar from the 1939 World’s Fair at Treasure Island sits at the “Sausalito end.” (An enormous steering wheel was necessary on the large ferries for driving the ship through turbulence and current. Before the invention of “steering motors” to leverage the ship’s weight, steering was accomplished exclusively by manpower.)

The main deck of the *Sausalito*, which used to carry trains, cars and/or cargo, is now divided into 60 unique cabins for the

use of Sportsmen Yacht Club members. Rented by the year, these cozy retreats are one of the benefits of club membership. Kathie Hammer, volunteer Club historian and guide for the *Sausalito*, has personally assembled hundreds of *Sausalito* related artifacts into a small museum next to the cabins. Her enthusiasm and hard work epitomize the energetic volunteerism that has kept the *Sausalito* alive as a bit of living history on the shores of the San Joaquin River.

— Margaret Badger

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Membership Survey Results

by Sharon Seymour, SHS Membership Committee Chair

The SHS board is interested in learning what you as members like best about the Society and what suggestions you have for improvement. To this end, a survey was sent to all members in October 2008. Thanks to the 35 members who returned the survey. This was a return rate of a little over 11%. Here is a summary of the results.

The majority of those who completed the survey have been members of the Society for ten or more years, but nearly 43% joined within the past nine years.

The annual fundraising dinner and Phil Frank events were at the top of the list of events that members enjoyed the most

in the past few years. A variety of other events received one-three votes. One member commented: “This year is fantastic.” The Holman Photographic Exhibit of Marinship during WWII and the Craig Sharp Photographic Exhibit both received three votes in the “most enjoyable” category with other exhibits receiving one to two votes each. Two members suggested that we do more lectures in the future. A variety of subjects were suggested.

The survey results indicate that few SHS members utilize the on-site resources. Those who do come to the Sausalito Historical Society rooms at City Hall conduct research, see an

Membership Survey Results (continued on page 6)

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

SHS Embarks on Project to Create Digital Catalog of Collection

by Sharon Seymour

Currently, those who want to do research on something in the SHS collection do it the old fashioned way. They visit the Society when we are open and look up names or subjects of interest in the card catalog with the assistance of a docent. But all that is about to change. The SHS has just embarked on a project that will in the future enable researchers to search our archives online through our website.

To achieve this goal of providing online options for research, SHS has purchased PastPerfect Museum software, a program that conforms to the latest standards for cataloging archive, library, historic object, art object, and photograph collections. PastPerfect has become the most widely used museum collection-management software, with thousands of organizations using it worldwide. A SHS board sub-committee has met and determined the process we will use for the data entry of our collection, and a small team has already begun to enter data on all of our collections, from 1975 to the present. As you may guess, this means that thousands of records will need to be processed. No small feat! We anticipate it will take a year

or two at minimum to complete the task. Once we gain some experience with PastPerfect, we plan to expand the data entry team. If you think you might be interested in volunteering to help out, please contact Sharon Seymour at the Society at 289-4117. Training will be offered.

In addition to providing descriptive cataloging, PastPerfect software will also benefit the Society in a number of other ways. It provides us with the capacity to keep digital records and produce reports on accessions, loans, and exhibits, as well as membership dues and donation receipts.



PHOTO: SHS ARCHIVES

SHS copies of the Sausalito News in bound copies will soon be digitized.

Membership Survey Results (continued from page 5)

exhibit or make a donation.

Most responses indicated that the current open hours (Wednesday and Saturday 10-2) are convenient, but six suggested other, more convenient days and hours.

Most of those who responded to the question about satisfaction with SHS service overall (18 of 21) indicated that they are very satisfied. Satisfied comments included: docents are knowledgeable, helpful and enthusiastic; they care about history; conversations are interesting and relevant; the newsletter and the articles in the MarinScope are good; events are affordable to all. Those not very satisfied wrote: boxes are disorganized; research room seems cluttered and difficult to use; exhibit space seems cold. Several suggestions for improvement were offered: make rooms more user-friendly; increase the number of docents and hours.

The SHS Board thanks all those who responded to the survey. Your suggestions will guide the Board in making future decisions.

Friends of the Library Sponsored Talk on Houseboats

The first presentation by Larry Clinton, President of the Sausalito Historical Society, and Richard Cunningham of the Larkspur Heritage Preservation Board on the topic of houseboats was sponsored by Friends of the Library at the City Council Chambers in Sausalito on January 12, 2009. This presentation and the two upcoming ones (see Calendar of Events in 2009) have been organized to celebrate Phil Frank's book *Houseboats of Sausalito* that was published posthumously by Arcadia in the Images of America Series. Phil left a legacy of research and writing about the history of houseboats dating back into the 1880s. The program is rich in visual content and in stories about the challenges and joys of life afloat in Marin County.

SAUSALITO HISTORICAL SOCIETY SPECIAL EVENTS FOR 2008–2009

A Series of Talks, Tours and Special Receptions

In a 2008–2009 series, the Historical Society will host events that explore the history, diversity and resources found along the Sausalito waterfront. Members will receive a post card announcement of each offering (excepting the houseboat talks).

MARCH 19, 2009, 7 PM

HOUSEBOATS OF SAUSALITO, AN ILLUSTRATED TALK

Larry Clinton, President of SHS and Richard Cunningham of the Larkspur Heritage Preservation Board, will speak about life afloat in Marin as outlined in *Houseboats of Sausalito* by Phil Frank. This presentation will be held at 400 Magnolia Ave, upstairs in the Council Chambers, in Larkspur. It is sponsored by the Larkspur Heritage Preservation Board. (See also, April 22)

MARCH 26, 2009, 6-8 PM

SPAULDING BOAT WORKS

An evening talk and reception in the last remaining historic wooden boat yard on the Sausalito waterfront. We'll learn about the history and current work of the Spaulding Wooden Boat Center and the Arques School of Traditional Boatbuilding.

**APRIL 22, 2009, 12 NOON-
1 PM**

HOUSE BOATS OF SAUSALITO ILLUSTRATED TALK (REPEAT)

A daytime presentation by Larry Clinton and Richard Cunningham about the history of life afloat in Marin County as outlined in *Houseboats of Sausalito* by Phil Frank. Sponsored by the Anne T. Kent California Room at the Marin County Civic Center, Room 330.

The Owl, designed by legendary waterfront artist Chris Roberts, is still riding high on South Forty Pier and has become a floating homes icon.

APRIL 23, 2009

ANNUAL DINNER:

HORIZONS RESTAURANT

This festive occasion will include a dinner, featured speaker and live auction.

JUNE 8, 2009

EXHIBIT OPENING AND RECEPTION:

BRUCE FORRESTER'S PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE SAUSALITO WATERFRONT IN THE 1970s.

The exhibit will be upstairs in the Sausalito Historical Society Exhibit Room and the reception in the City Council Chambers.

SEPTEMBER, 2009

A Walking Tour of Sausalito's Downtown Historic District

A reception will follow at Teatro Piccolo restaurant.

NOVEMBER, 2009

AN EVENING AT THE SAUSALITO WOMAN'S CLUB

This event will feature highlights from the history of Sausalito followed by a reception.



PHOTO BY JUDYTH GREENBURGH

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

We're excited to announce that we've embarked on several long-term projects to bring the Society into the 21st century. First, we have begun entering our collection catalog into special museum software, a project that may take a year or more to complete. Once accomplished, researchers will be able to search our archives online at any time, either at the Society or from home.

Secondly, we are collaborating with the Sausalito Library Foundation to digitize the *Sausalito News* from 1895 to 1922. Within six months, we should be able to post a link on our website that will allow researchers to review back issues, and even search them by key word.

Finally, we are going to upgrade our website (www.sausalitohistoricalsociety.org). These ambitious projects entail a major commitment of time, talent, money and computer equipment. If you have any of those precious commodities to share and would like to participate, please contact us at info@sausalitohistoricalsociety.org.

—Larry Clinton, President

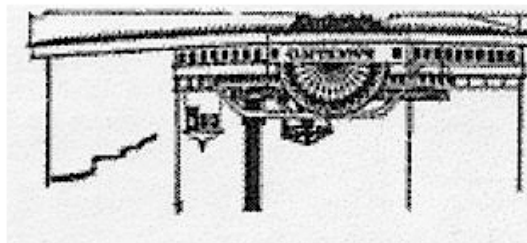
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