

[5a,5b,5c]

The Alaska Packers Association

Salmon fishing has been going on for as long as there have been salmon and bears. However, humans became intrigued with the idea of reaping where you have not sown just a little after the bears figured it out. West coast entrepreneurs realized the potentials of organized and systematized salmon fishing and not too many years after the Civil War there were planned and organized fishing runs coupled with cannery operations that took salmon fishing to new heights. Dozens of small firms jumped into the salmon canning business. Initially, it seemed that the salmon were inexhaustible. Reality quickly altered that perception as competing fishing and canning companies rapidly depleted Columbia River salmon, Puget Sound salmon, British Columbia salmon, and even Alaska salmon. There was enough profit to be made if costs could be contained and competition managed. Enter a conglomerate (later sneeringly called the “salmon trust”) of the Alaska Packers Association (APA). Organized in 1893, the Alaska Packers Association combined several small canning operations into one that indeed controlled about two-thirds of all the salmon canning on the west coast. With an unerring focus on the profit margins, the Alaska Packers Association hired the cheapest labor (Chinese, Filipino, Italian, Mexican, native Alaskan) and operated their canneries in the least costly manner. They established brand loyalty and recognition and marketed recipe books, similar to Betty Crocker cookbooks—only using salmon—to increase demand. Doughboys in World War I ate canned salmon, and the Association’s success rate was measured by market penetration from North Dakota to Texas and California to New Jersey. Because they were powerful and large, there is an equally large legal history of the Alaska Packers Association dealing with labor issues and litigation against the “deep pocket” combine.

In 1916, the Del Monte Corporation (then known as the California Packing Corporation—another combine) purchased the Alaska Packers Association. Offices of the Alaska Packers Association were in San Francisco with regional offices located in Puget Sound (Seattle).

Of particular note, the Alaska Packers Association from its inception began chartering sailing ships for the annual run to Alaska beginning in May of each year and terminating in September. Sailing ships were cheap to buy, cheap to manage, cheap to lay up—they were just cheap. Part of the Alaska Packers Association drive for profitability as before mentioned, was to control operating costs. Cheap labor and cheap transportation were part of that equation. The ships would sail north laden with cannery supplies, food, canning and casing materials, and also cannery hands (mostly Chinese) and fishers (often Italian). The voyages were slow and often hazardous. The work was intense and unremitting. No one was paid until the end of the season when they returned to San Francisco. Not from sentimental or romantic motives, but hard-nosed bottom-line obsession, the Alaska Packers Association amassed one of the last and largest great sailing fleets. Without intending to do so, this great sailing fleet also became world-famous in shipping circles and something of a local attraction. The last serious fleet voyage north took place in the mid 1920s. The year 1929 was the last year any of the

ships ventured north at all. They were replaced by steamships that could carry more with greater safety and greater speed. Few realize today that the Alaska Packers Association had a longer history managing steamships than sailing ships. APA became known in history by its sailing fleet. The Alaska Packers Association also became known for the names they bestowed on the latter iron and steel sailing ships. Each was renamed with the appellation “Star” and then some geographic locale. Begun initially with the purchase of a few of Corry’s “Star” ships, the APA continued the naming practice. But as the accompanying list amply demonstrates, most Alaska Packer ships did not have the “Star” in their names.

By 1936, Alaska Packers Association had divested itself of all of its sailing ships. There was talk of preserving the *Star of Finland* as a historical reminder (*Star of Finland* was American-built, and not too large), but the bean counters had their way and the ship was sold with the rest. Most of them made one-way trips to the wreckers, but several were sold to Hollywood and made a precarious living reconfigured as pirate ships, clipper ships, frigates, the *Bounty*, and any number of historical and semi-historical vessels. Interestingly, two of these ships managed to survive: The *Star of India* is a surprisingly graceful museum ship located in San Diego harbor. I have been aboard the ship many times. The old *Star of Alaska*, now rechristened with her original name, *Balclutha*, is also a museum ship and lies very close to the old brick Del Monte cannery at Hyde Street pier in San Francisco.

In the off season, the Alaska Packers Association fleet was harbored in what is now Fortman Basin, Alameda, and the first photograph depicts the fleet sometime after World War I and before 1925. The old cliché “a forest of masts and spars” is here strikingly manifest.

The second photograph, looking from inside the basin out, has been identified by others as the *Star of Alaska*, *Star of Finland*, *Star of Italy* and *Star of Russia* trailing on the left.

On the right are the *Star of Holland*, the *Star of Falkland*, and the *Star of Shetland*.

The third photograph is a mass-produced postcard published by Richard Behrendt, of San Francisco. It is printed, and as such appears less distinct than the other photographs; its interest is more social history than documentation. Intriguing that by the 1911 (the postmark on the back) sailing ships had become rare enough that it was considered worthwhile to create cheap colored postcards so that tourists could send greetings back to Chicago (or wherever) with something interesting to view. The emergency of World War I briefly rerieved the sailing ship, but oblivion followed rapidly after the hostilities ceased.

The last photograph is from the early 1930s and shows the remnants of the Alaska Packers fleet in Oakland Creek, left to right *Star of Shetland*, *Star of Zealand*, *Star of Finland*, *Star of Holland* and *Star of Lapland*. All of them except the *Holland* were the products of the Sewall yard in Bath, Maine. *Stars of Shetland*, *Zealand* and *Lapland* would be scrapped in Japan by 1935/1936. *Finland* would last until World War II.

Alaska Packers Association, San Francisco

Fleet Roster (partial) in alphabetical order by APA ship name. The list is partial because the APA also chartered ships for several years, in addition to owning steamers, tenders, etc.

Ship: *Bohemia*

Rig: Wood 3-mast ship

Launched: 1875

End: 1931

Built: Bath, Maine by Houghton Brothers

Dimensions: 221.7' x 40.2' x 25.5'

Tonnage: 1633 tons

Ship: *Centennial*

Rig: Wood 4-mast barkentine (originally 3-mast ship)

Launched: 1875

End: 1930

Built: East Boston by Smith & Townsend

Dimensions: 190.4' x 38' x 24'

Tonnage: 1286 tons

Ship: *Compeer*

Rig: Wood 3-mast schooner

Launched: 1877

End: 1912

Built: Fairhaven, California by Hans D. Bendixsen

Dimensions: 140.5' x 32.5' x 11.2'

Tonnage: 347 tons

Ship: *Electra*

Rig: Wood 3-mast bark

Launched: 1868

End: 1909 sold as barge

Built: Boston

Dimensions: 168' x 34.8' x 21.9'

Tonnage: 985 tons

Ship: *George Skolfield*

Rig: Wood 3-mast ship

Launched: 1870

End: 1900

Built: Brunswick, Maine by Skolfield Brothers

Dimensions: 187.2' x 38.2' x 23.9'

Tonnage: 1313 tons

Ship: *Indiana*

Rig: wood 3-mast ship

Launched: 1876

End: 1936

Built: Bath, Maine by E. & A. Sewall

Dimensions: 208.9' x 40' x 23.9'

Tonnage: 1487 tons

Ship: *James A. Borland*

Rig: Wood 3-mast bark

Launched: 1869

End: Unknown

Built: New York

Dimensions: 145' x 33' x 19'

Tonnage: 670 tons

Ship: *Llewellyn J. Morse*

Rig: Wood 3-mast ship

Launched: 1877

End: 1926

Built: Brewer, Maine by Joseph Oakes & Son

Dimensions: 198.2' x 36.6' x 24.2'

Tonnage: 1392 tons

Ship: *Metha Nelson*

Rig: Wood 3-mast schooner

Launched: 1896

End: Unknown

Built: Fairhaven, California by Hans D. Bendixsen

Dimensions: 156' x 36' x 11.9'

Tonnage: 460 tons

Ship: *Merom*

Rig: Wood 3-mast ship. Converted 1890 to bark

Launched: 1870

End: 1900

Built: Phippsburg, Maine by C. V. Minott

Dimensions: 179.2' x 37.6' x 23.9'

Tonnage: 1204 tons

Ship: *Nicholas Thayer*

Rig: Wood 3-mast bark

Launched: 1868

End: 1906

Built: Thomaston, Maine

Dimensions: 138.9' x 31' x 19.3'

Tonnage: 584 tons

Ship: *Premier*

Rig: Wood 3-mast schooner

Launched: 1876

End: 1919

Built: Port Blakeley, Washington, by Hall Brothers

Dimensions: 141.7' x 33.4' x 10.8'

Tonnage: 308 tons

Ship: *Prosper*

Rig: Wood 3-mast schooner

Launched: 1892

End: 1924

Built: Pero Mill, Oregon, by Pershbaker

Dimensions: 128' x 32.6' x 8'

Tonnage: 241 tons

Ship: *Santa Clara*

Rig: Wood 3-mast ship

Launched: 1876

End: Sank San Pedro 1939; raised, then sunk at sea 1968

Built: Bath, Maine by Chapman & Flint

Dimensions: 209.5' x 40' x 25.5'

Tonnage: 1453 tons

Ship: *Star of Alaska*

Rig: Steel 3-mast ship

Launched: 1886

End: Museum ship in San Francisco

Built: Glasgow by Charles Connell

Dimensions: 256.3' x 38.5' x 17.5'

Tonnage: 1862 tons

Ship: *Star of Bengal*

Rig: Iron 3-mast bark

Launched: 1874

End: 1908

Built: Belfast, Harland & Wolff

Dimensions: 262.8' x 40.2' x 23.5'

Tonnage: 1694 tons

Ship: *Star of Chile*

Rig: Iron 3-mast bark

Launched: 1868

End: 1960

Built: Dundee, Gourlay Brothers

Dimensions: 202' x 34.2' x 21.1'

Tonnage: 1001 tons

Ship: *Star of England*

Rig: Steel 3-mast bark

Launched: 1893

End: Converted to barge 1935, unknown thereafter

Built: Dumbarton, A. McMillan & Son

Dimensions: 264' x 39' x 23.5'

Tonnage: 2123 tons

Ship: *Star of Falkland*

Rig: Steel 3-mast ship

Launched: 1892

End: 1928

Built: Port Glasgow, W. Hamilton & Co.

Dimensions: 276.8' x 40.2' x 24.2'

Tonnage: 2163 tons

Ship: *Star of Finland*

Rig: Steel 3-mast bark

Launched: 1899

End: Rigged down as a barge in 1941—may have lasted afloat into the 1960s

Built: Bath, Maine, by A. Sewall & Co.

Dimensions: 225.7' x 42.3 x 20'

Tonnage: 1699 tons

Ship: *Star of France*

Rig: Iron 3-mast ship

Launched: 1877

End: 1940

Built: Belfast, Harland & Wolff

Dimensions: 258' x 38' x 22.8'

Tonnage: 1766 tons

Ship: *Star of Greenland*

Rig: Steel 4-mast bark

Launched: 1892

End: 1957

Built: Glasgow, Charles Connell

Dimensions: 270' x 38' x 22.8'

Tonnage: 2179

Ship: *Star of Holland*

Rig: Steel 3-mast bark

Launched: 1885

End: Barge 1937 then scrapped some years thereafter

Built: Belfast, by Harland & Wolff

Dimensions: 284' x 39.7' x 23.5'

Tonnage: 2131 tons

Ship: *Star of Iceland*

Rig: Steel 3-mast bark

Launched: 1896

End: 1930

Built: Port Glasgow, by W. Hamilton & Company

Dimensions: 267.3' x 40.1' x 26.3'

Tonnage: 2161 tons

Ship: *Star of India*

Rig: Iron 3-mast bark

Launched: 1863

End: Museum ship in San Diego

Built: Ramsey, Isle of Man, by Gibson & Company

Dimensions: 205.5' x 35.2' x 23.4'

Tonnage: 1318 tons

Ship: *Star of Italy*

Rig: Iron 3-mast ship

Launched: 1877

End: 1927

Built: Belfast, by Harland & Wolff

Dimensions: 251.5' x 38.2' x 22.9'

Tonnage: 1784 tons

Ship: *Star of Lapland*

Rig: Steel 4-mast bark

Launched: 1902

End: 1936

Built: Bath, Maine, by A. Sewall & Company

Dimensions: 332.4' x 45.4' x 26.1'

Tonnage: 3381 tons

Ship: *Star of Peru*

Rig: Iron 3-mast ship (later bark)

Launched: 1863

End: Hulked in 1926 or 1929, ultimate fate unknown

Built: Sunderland, England, built by Pile, Hay & Company

Dimensions: 190.2' x 33' x 20.2

Tonnage: 1027 tons

Ship: *Star of Poland*

Rig: Steel 4-mast bark

Launched: 1901

End: 1919

Built: Bath, Maine by A. Sewall & Company

Dimensions: 332.2' x 45.4' x 26.1'

Tonnage: 3288 tons

Ship: *Star of Russia*

Rig: Iron 3-mast ship

Launched: 1874

End: 1953

Built: Belfast by Harland & Wolff

Dimensions: 275.5' x 42.2' x 24.2'

Tonnage; 1981 tons

Ship: *Star of Scotland*

Rig: Steel 4-mast bark

Launched: 1887

End: 1942

Built: Port Glasgow by J. Reid & Company

Dimensions: 300.2' x 43.1' x 24.2'

Tonnage: 2598 tons

Ship: *Star of Shetland*

Rig: Steel 4-mast bark

Launched: 1899

End: 1936

Built: Bath, Maine by A. Sewall & Company

Dimensions: 332' x 45.3' x 25.5'

Tonnage: 3345 tons

Ship: *Star of Zealand*

Rig: Steel 4-mast bark

Launched: 1900

End: 1935

Built: Bath, Maine by A. Sewall & Company

Dimensions: 332.3' x 45.4' x 26'

Tonnage: 3292 tons

Ship: *Sterling*

Rig: Wood 3-mast ship

Launched: 1873

End: 1898

Built: Bath, Maine by E. & A. Sewall & Company

Dimensions: 208.3' x 42.7' x 17.3'

Tonnage: 1731 tons

Ship: *Tacoma*

Rig: Wood 3-mast ship

Launched: 1881

End: 1918

Built: Bath, Maine by Goss & Sawyer

Dimensions: 222.2' x 41' x 17.7'

Tonnage: 1738 tons

Ship: *Will W. Case*

Rig: Wood 3-mast bark

Launched: 1878

End: Coal barge 1920, sunk as breakwater after 1924

Built: Rockland, Maine by F. Starrat

Dimensions: 143.1' x 31.7' x 17.6'

Tonnage: 582 tons