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 reprieved 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’ x21.9’  
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