

SHIP BALCLUTHA

San Francisco Maritime
National Historical Park

San Francisco



“A friend of my father was a ship broker at Cardiff, so being there at the time, I asked him what chance I had of getting such a trip. His answer was, ‘We are brokers for a new ship loading coal at Penarth for San Francisco, and she will sail this week. She is a ship called *Balclutha* and we can get you a berth’”

“. . . we were towed away from the dock soon after we joined her . . . we headed down the Bristol Channel and Irish Sea under full sail. You may guess how I felt up aloft on a topsail furling sail. I don’t know that I had ever been on a yardarm before, but I had to . . . I suppose I managed alright . . . We had a busy time for there is always plenty to do in a new ship”

(from a letter by Captain Norman Pearce chronicling his experience as an able-bodied seaman on *Balclutha*’s maiden voyage)

CAREERS

British Deepwaterman

On January 15, 1887, with a twenty-six-man crew, *Balclutha* sailed under British registry from Cardiff, Wales, on her maiden voyage. She was bound for San Francisco. The ship entered the Golden Gate after 140 days at sea, unloaded her cargo of 2,650 tons of coal, and took on sacks of California wheat.

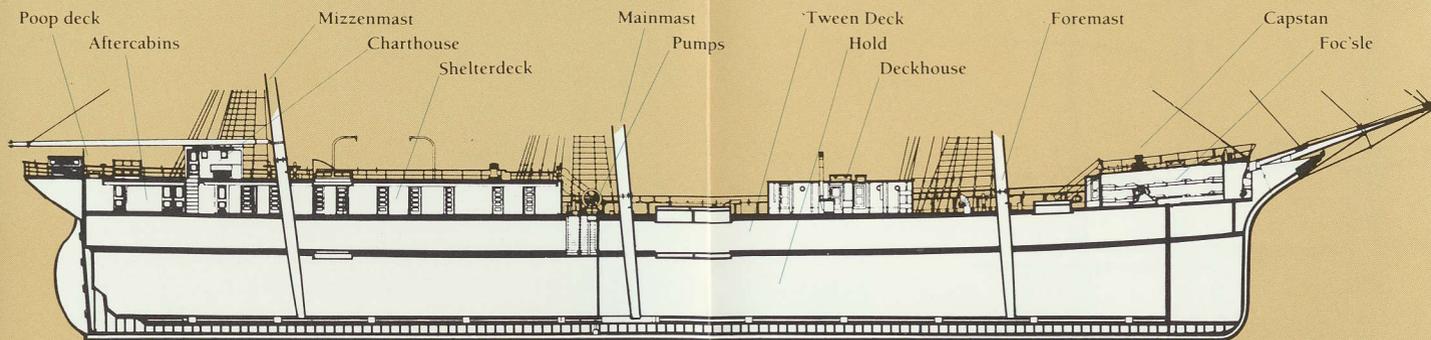
Because of the months-long ocean voyage, *Balclutha* made only one round-trip per year while engaged in the Europe-to-San Francisco grain trade. She arrived with a cargo of coal three times, but also brought pottery, cutlery, and scotch whiskey (from Glasgow and Liverpool) or “Swansea general” (tinplate, coke, and pig iron) to San Francisco.

During the mid-1890’s the ship called at other ports around the world; in South Africa, for example, she loaded wool and tallow for London, England.

In 1899 *Balclutha* was transferred to Hawaiian registry, and she joined the bustling Pacific Coast lumber trade. For three years the ship sailed north to Puget Sound and then across to Australia. Much of the 1.5 million board feet she could carry ended up underground, used for mining timbers in the Broken Hill Mine at Port Pirie.

Balclutha became the last vessel to fly the flag of the Hawaiian Kingdom. In 1901 a special act of Congress admitted the ship to American registry so that she could engage in “coastwise” trade (between American ports). Soon thereafter, the Alaska Packers Association, a San Francisco firm which caught and canned salmon, chartered her to carry men and supplies north.

SHIP PARTS



Aftercabins—Quarters for the captain, his family, and the mates.

Capstan—Used to raise the anchor.

Charthouse—An innovation for its time, here the captain stored his charts and plotted the course.

Deckhouse—Quarters for the carpenter, cook, and apprentices. Galley located here.

Foc'sle—The crew bunked here. Foc'sle is a contraction of “forecastle.”

Foremast—The first mast.

Hold—Cargo area.

Mainmast—The second mast.

Mizzenmast—The third or after mast.

Poop deck—The raised deck at the after end of the vessel.

Pumps—In heavy weather, “manning the pumps” was tedious, hard work.

Shelterdeck—Poop deck was extended in 1911 to house fishermen.

'Tween Deck—The light cargo stored here could be shifted to balance the ship.

Salmon Packet

When *Balclutha* went aground in 1904, the Alaska Packers Association purchased her where she lay for \$500. After repairs, they renamed her *Star of Alaska* (all Packer iron and steel sailing vessels had a “*Star*” prefix).

Typically, the ship anchored out in Chignik Bay, Alaska, in April. After the season’s supplies were unloaded and the Chinese cannery workers settled into the company’s camp ashore, only a shipkeeper or two remained on board. In early September, her hold packed with cases of canned salmon, *Star of Alaska* started the 2,400 mile voyage back to San Francisco. She was considered a fast sailer, averaging better than twenty-two days for the trip north and fifteen days when homeward bound.

During the winter, the ship was laid up with the rest of the Packers’ fleet of thirty-odd vessels in Alameda, where shipwrights performed repairs and maintenance. In 1911, the ship’s poop deck was extended to house the Italian and Scandinavian fishermen. Later, additional bunks were added in the ‘tween deck for cannery workers. As *Balclutha*, the ship carried twenty-six men; on *Star of Alaska*, over 200 men made the trip north.

Star of Alaska was the only sailing ship the Packers sent north in 1930, and when she returned that September she was retired.

Movie Star

Frank Kissinger purchased *Star of Alaska* in 1933 for \$5,000 and renamed her *Pacific Queen*. Kissinger took the ship south and, while anchored off Catalina Island, she appeared in the film “Mutiny on the Bounty” (which also starred Clark Gable and Charles Laughton). For a time Kissinger towed her up and down the West Coast, usually exhibiting her as a “pirate ship.” *Pacific Queen* slowly deteriorated, and she barely escaped World War II scrap drives.

Restoration

In 1954, the San Francisco Maritime Museum purchased *Pacific Queen* for \$25,000. Assisted by donations of cash, materials, and labor from the local community, the San Francisco Maritime Museum restored the vessel and returned her original name. The ship was transferred to the National Park Service in 1978, and *Balclutha* was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1985.

TIME LINE

- 1886 Launched at Glasgow, December 9
- 1887 Departed Cardiff on maiden voyage, January 15
Arrived San Francisco in grain trade, June 9
- 1899 Entered Australian lumber trade
- 1901 Last vessel to fly Hawaiian Kingdom flag
- 1904 Purchased by Alaska Packers for salmon trade
- 1906 Renamed *Star of Alaska*
- 1911 Poop deck lengthened
- 1930 Last Packers' sailing ship sent to Alaska
- 1933 Purchased by Frank Kissinger, renamed *Pacific Queen*,
displayed as "pirate ship"
- 1954 Purchased by San Francisco Maritime Museum
- 1955 Restored, *Balclutha* opened to public at Fisherman's Wharf
- 1978 Transferred to National Park Service
- 1985 Named National Historic Landmark
- 1988 Joins historic fleet at Hyde Street Pier

A rare photograph of a steel sailing ship's foc'sle, ca. 1919.





Balclutha at San Francisco in the 1880's.

THE GRAIN TRADE

The '49ers panned for fortunes in mountain streams, but less than twenty years later farmers discovered California's real wealth: its hot, fertile valley floor. Soon horse-drawn wagons laden with sacks of wheat rolled from the fields to landings on the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. Steam-driven sternwheelers and railroad boxcars hauled the 100-pound bags along the Carquinez Straits to Port Costa, where deepwatermen (large, ocean-going vessels like *Balclutha*) loaded.

California's grain crop drew hundreds of British vessels through the Golden Gate each year. The hard, dry California wheat traveled the 14,000 nautical miles to Liverpool unusually well, and the amber grain always brought a high price. The many ships coming to load grain resulted in low shipping rates for imported coal and other incoming goods and materials.

Like the Gold Rush, the grain trade shaped California's future. The lowered cost of high-quality coal spurred the growth of manufacturing and transportation. The access to international markets won California a measure of independence from the East Coast and the railroads. In banking, in shipping, and in agriculture the grain trade attracted investment and created jobs. The demand for grain sacks alone pumped \$2 million per year into the local economy. Growers paid ten to fifteen cents apiece for the bags that Chinese workers wove from Calcutta jute.

THE LIFE

The long months at sea made for a hard and lonely existence. Crewmen, hired by the voyage and not paid until the voyage ended, were often "encouraged" to jump ship. Only the captain, who commonly stayed with a ship for many voyages, had any measure of security.

And only the captain, whose wife sometimes accompanied him, had any opportunity for family life. On *Balclutha's* last voyage under the British flag, Captain Durkee's wife, Alice, gave birth to a daughter. They named the little girl Inda Frances because she was born on the Indian Ocean while the ship was bound for San Francisco.

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BALCLUTHA: A SHIP PRESERVED

In 1886, Charles Connell & Company built a three-masted, riveted-steel ship "to the highest class in Lloyd's registry" near Glasgow, Scotland. Her owner, Robert McMillan, named that 256-foot vessel "*Balclutha*"—the Gaelic name for Dumbarton, Scotland.

In her long and varied career, the ship rounded Cape Horn with grain for Great Britain; ran Pacific Coast lumber to Australia; and carried hundreds of men to the salmon-fishing grounds of Alaska. The San Francisco Maritime Museum and the Bay Area community rescued *Balclutha* from decay in 1954, and restored the square-rigger as a memorial to the men and times of the grand days of sail.

After more than 100 years, *Balclutha* (now designated a National Historic Landmark) still floats, now part of the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park's fleet of historic vessels.

BASIC FACTS

Overall Length	301'
Length of Deck	256.5'
Beam	38.6'
Depth	22.7'
Gross Tonnage	1689
Height of Mainmast	145'

Star of Alaska under sail off the Golden Gate, ca. 1925.

