

Channel Crossings

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Newsletter of the Los Angeles Maritime Museum, San Pedro California



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**The L.A. Steamship Company:
From Hollywood to Honolulu**



**Los Angeles
Maritime Museum
Channel Crossings**

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San Pedro, CA 90731
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www.lamaritimemuseum.org

Museum Hours:
Tuesday–Saturday
10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.
(last entry 4:30 p.m.)
Sunday
12:00 noon–5:00 p.m.
Closed Mondays

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The Los Angeles Maritime Museum is a special facility of the City of Los Angeles, Department of Recreation and Parks, operating with the financial assistance of the Los Angeles Maritime Museum Foundation, a 501(c)(3) corporation.

The Los Angeles Maritime Museum creates an awareness and appreciation of the maritime history of coastal California, with an emphasis on the contributions of the people and institutions of the port city of Los Angeles.

Director's Message

By Marifrances Trivelli

Welcome to the first issue of *Channel Crossings*, our new quarterly members' newsletter. We are pleased to offer this publication for your information and enjoyment. Our first issue features an essay by noted steamship historian and guest curator Gordon R. Ghareeb, introducing us to the history of the Los Angeles Steamship Company. Gordon reveals how the romantic notions of sailing to Hawaii on a white steamer actually originated here in Los Angeles Harbor. But discovering a link to Los Angeles' maritime history is not so unusual. In fact, the connections are more common than you think!

This is an exciting time for the museum as we approach our 25th year. The proposed waterfront promenade will revitalize San Pedro "From the Bridge to the Breakwater." New visitors will discover San Pedro as a place to meet, relax, and realize for themselves how our amazing maritime history impacts their lives.

Changes are underway inside the museum, as well. Our mission is to create an awareness and appreciation of the maritime history of coastal California, with an emphasis on the contributions of the people and institutions of the port city of Los Angeles. This focus shapes the content of future collections, exhibits, and programming. Our traditional displays will be gradually replaced with more relevant exhibits appealing to a broader audience. I am pleased to announce the first step in this direction—a large-scale, permanent exhibit documenting the San Pedro fishing industry, set to open in the fall of 2005.

Once, Los Angeles Harbor ranked among the leading fishing capitals of the world. Familiar operations such as Star-Kist and Chicken of the Sea were located on nearby Terminal Island. How did members of our local community revolutionize the way fish was caught and processed? And how did their achievements impact commerce and diets around the world? Visitors will discover the answers through an interactive exhibit combining rare artifacts with today's technology. With your support, we can communicate the sights, sounds, and even smells of what once was a thriving industry. Future generations may not remember a harbor filled with fishing boats or canneries operating around the clock. But here at the museum, they can discover how the legacy of fishing shapes our community.

Upcoming issues of *Channel Crossings* will provide new information as the exhibit takes shape. Though the museum is a facility of the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, we receive no budgeted support for any exhibits or educational programming. The costs of a large-scale fishing exhibit will be \$100,000, and we will soon be inviting you to show your support by participating in our fundraising drive.

Looking out onto the Main Channel, the legacy of the past and the promise of the future are seen daily right outside our windows. Your support will make this journey possible. Won't you join us?

THE L.A. STEAMSHIP COMPANY: FROM HOLLYWOOD TO HONOLULU

By **Gordon R. Ghareeb,**
Steamship Historian and Guest Curator

The S.S. City of Los Angeles

Probably the most romantic of all sea journeys is that from Los Angeles to Hawaii. When one thinks of a cruise today, an image is usually envisioned of a majestic white ocean liner gliding effortlessly past a beach festooned with willowy palms, tropical flowers, and native dancing girls.

In the Roaring '20s—an era famous for the Charleston, Rudolph Valentino, and bathtub gin—the concept of a tourist vacation was just beginning to take hold while a band of observant Southern California businessmen set out to harness that force and channel its monetary rewards through the Port of Los Angeles.

The vision of a gleaming cruise ship making landfall in the Hawaiian paradise became the emblem of their dream and survives today as a legacy to their inventiveness and creativity. It was the essence of sailing from Hollywood to Honolulu.

Until the advent of the First World War the only way to reach the island territory—or “Alohaland” as it was then more affectionately known—from California was from San Francisco aboard the sturdy, yet lackluster workboats of the Matson Line.

The opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 brought with it a commercial influx of deepwater

shipping from the east coast and a desire to reach further out into the Pacific. A group of Los Angeles entrepreneurs spearheaded by Harry Chandler, Max Whittier and Fred Baker set their eyes on launching the first transoceanic liner service to Honolulu from Southern California.

To this end the Los Angeles Steamship Company was formed in 1921 to create and maintain a reliable fleet of steamers to connect the two growing industrial and agricultural centers. Quickly becoming known simply as “LASSCO,” the voyages of the S.S. *CITY OF LOS ANGELES* and S.S. *CITY OF HONOLULU* became legendary among the traveling public.

A typical LASSCO sailing for Hawaii would find movie stars, business moguls, and the social elite of the day aboard ship for the six-day voyage to the islands. Deck sport tournaments, swimming in the liner's pool, gala masquerade balls, and movies shown on deck under the brilliant night sky found their way into the daily routine of the three hundred lucky individuals making the trip every other week.

The ship's orchestra would jazz it up with signature tunes like *Aloha Oe* and *Alexander's Rag*.

L.A.S.S.C.O.

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time Band to provide a melodious background for the idyllic ocean crossing. Meals in the two-story sky-lit expanse of the dining saloon offered such gastronomic delights as Broiled Spring Chicken with Parsley Butter, Creole Bisque of Crab, and Fresh Pineapple Fritters Glace.

Then came the much anticipated arrival off the silver strand of Waikiki Beach where fleets of islander canoes bearing a cargo of local *kabuanas* and *wabines* to greet the *malibini* newcomers with strings of floral orchid *leis* would race out to meet the approaching stately white steamers. The Royal Hawaiian Band could be heard on the dock at the Aloha Tower serenading the



“Sand beach” and swimming pool located on the foredeck. (Private collection.)

arriving passengers with refrains of popular toe-tappers including *Hapa Haole Hula Girl* and *Yaka Hula Hickey Dula*.

It was a privileged world that for one brief glittering decade

selfishly tethered Southern California to the mid-ocean paradise. In 1927 the LASSCO steamers for the first time in history landed more passengers in the islands than did the rival vessels of the



Film star Laura La Plante (center) doing the hula at Waikiki with actor Eugene O'Brien, director Bill Sieter, and others. (Private collection.)

Matson Line. The onset of the Great Depression in 1929 began the curtain's descent upon the fabled LASSCO extravaganza and the loss of the line's newest steamer by fire in 1930 brought with it the financial distress that threatened the very existence of the Los Angeles Steamship Company.

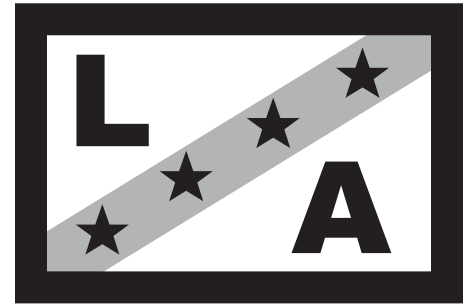
The Matson folks recognized a golden opportunity when they saw it and stepped in to merge the two great fleets into the Matson-LASSCO Line. Matson obtained the now lucrative Hawaiian route from Los Angeles and LASSCO personnel found further careers aboard the newer ships of the joint venture.

Slowly the older vessels of Los Angeles Steamship Company were phased out of service in deference to the new Matson luxury liners bearing the names *MARIPOSA*, *MONTEREY*, and *LURLINE*.

Although the LASSCO trademark quietly disappeared altogether in 1935, the new Matson steamers carried on the unique LASSCO paint scheme of brilliant white hulls perpetuating the image that the founding directors had strived so very hard to plant in the minds of the American

public. These ships continued to ply the ocean route to Alohaland until 1970 when the last of them was plucked from the local sea lanes, never to return under the Yankee flag.

To this day, the thought of traversing the 2,500 miles between Los Angeles and Honolulu by sea conjures up the memory of those wonderful white liners arriving in the mid-ocean playground.



The line's house flag featured a dark green border, "LA" and four stars on a diagonal orange band, all on a field of white.



Left to right: Socialite Mabel Thomas and friend with Paulette Goddard and Charlie Chaplin aboard the CITY OF LOS ANGELES. (Private collection.)

The LASSCO legend lives on today at the Los Angeles Maritime Museum. Steamship historians and guest curators Martin Cox and Gordon R. Ghareeb have stunningly recreated a bit of the shipboard aura that was a hallmark of this pioneering Southern California operation. Through rare archival photography, first class table settings, menus, and memorabilia, the spirit of this magical sea-borne era has been brought back to life for 21st century residents to sample. An oversized longitudinal cutaway of the CITY OF LOS ANGELES, the flagship of the fleet, is surrounded by corresponding depictions of onboard activities, accommodations, and shipboard life to illustrate what went on where during the crossing. And encapsulating the entire venue are the unmistakable and addictive sounds of popular Hawaiian tunes from the era wafting hauntingly throughout the exhibit bringing the 1920s back to life. One feels like exclaiming "23 skidoo" when experiencing this, the "bee's knees" of local maritime lore. Come see it soon. The Hollywood to Honolulu exhibit runs through August 29.



Fore and aft views of the ANGELS GATE at the Al Larson drydock show her newly-scraped and painted bottom with new zinc anodes.

Thank you to Llewellyn Supply, Wilmington California; Muldoon Marine Services, Long Beach, California; and Manson Construction Company, Long Beach, California; for their in-kind services. Special thanks to Al Larson Boat Shop for its support of the museum and tug ANGELS GATE.



A Visit to the Shipyard

By Ron Tobin of the “Tug Boyz”

Our resident tug, ANGELS GATE, is maintained and operated by the “Tug Boyz,” an all-volunteer crew. But on June 3, the Tug Boyz turned over her care to the capable workers at the Al Larson Boat Shop on Terminal Island. She needed some “TLC” that we could not provide ourselves. It was rather like sending a 60-year old lady to a spa for a makeover. Before she got all dolled up with new paint, she had to undergo a “marine dermabrasion”—getting her bottom scraped and inspected. How embarrassing!

The good news is that our tug, with its 1944-built steel hull, checked out in pretty good shape. Among the jobs completed at Larson’s were the relocation and installation of a large electric motor into the engine room and welding work which

we are not equipped to do at the museum.

The shipyard workers were polite and helpful. Although their work was fascinating to watch, we tried to keep out of their way and not ask too many questions. While ANGELS GATE was in the drydock, there wasn’t much we could do to help, although most of the guys stopped by at least once to check things out. Engineer Pat Carney served as the liaison between the museum and the repair crew, and was aboard each day the tug was in the yard.

On Tuesday, June 8, we rounded up the crew, and sailed ANGELS GATE back to the Maritime Museum. We’re glad to have the old girl back, and hopefully good for many more years of sailing!

One of the benefits of Museum membership is a harbor cruise on ANGELS GATE. See the back page for details.

Adventures in Diving at the Sea Chest Gift Shop



Renowned diver Murray Black, whose new autobiography is featured at the museum's Sea Chest Gift Shop. (Photo courtesy of Leslie Jacobs)

By Leslie Jacobs

Those of you who enjoy the adventures of hardhat diving will be sure to enjoy the new autobiography by the famous deep sea diver, Murray Black. His autobiography—*Between the Devil and the Deep*—has been called a “roller-coaster ride through an action-packed life.”

The book begins with his rebellious childhood and teenage years, takes the reader through his early training under the legendary E. R. Cross at the Sparling School, and his rise through the ranks from offshore oil diver to President of DIVCON, at one time the largest international diving company in the world.

Murray's story is a riveting read, guaranteed to thrill anyone with a taste for adventure. Not only did he achieve professional heights as a diver and underwa-

ter contractor, but he also served his hometown of Jacksonville, Florida, as a volunteer auxiliary police officer during the period when the city was wracked by crack cocaine crime. After hanging up his dive gear, Murray began a second successful career as an underwater explosives expert.

Shining through the exciting, harrowing, and funny anecdotes is the man's indomitable spirit and sense of humor. *Between the Devil and the Deep* is a fascinating memoir of an extraordinarily talented and courageous man.

Between the Devil and the Deep is a limited edition work, available this summer at the Sea Chest Gift Shop. Members receive 10 percent off the \$37.50 list price.

Celebrate the San Pedro Fishing Industry...



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