

"UNOFFICIAL" VESSELS

According to the "official" list of vessels built at Mare Island, the first was the sidewheeler SAGINAW, commissioned in 1860 and the second the cruiser MOHICAN in 1885.

In between however, at least two little boats were built here, ostensibly from "left-over" timber from the SAGINAW.

In 1874 a small schooner was constructed and named for the Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, the JOSEPH SMITH. Apparently he did not object to this honor, but the schooner is not listed in the DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN FIGHTING SHIPS although it gave faithful service here for the next fifteen years, until old age crept into its joints and it sank at the dock.

After the JOE SMITH came the FREDA, a 70-foot schooner built in 1874 while Rear Admiral John Rodgers was Commandant. The Shipyard Log for Thursday, April 30 reads: "Cloudy, rainy. New Yard Schooner FREDA was launched at 1:45 p.m."

The VALLEJO EVENING CHRONICLE reported it as a social event. Before the appointed hour many officers of the Yard and civilians gathered around the vessel, "to admire her beautiful shape..."

The paper also noted that several employees who had

work, "went over to give Uncle Sam a free lift in launching the vessel."

The little schooner was christened with a small vial of wine, and "the vessel glided off smoothly and gracefully into the water."

The masts were stepped on May 6 and a week later FREDA spread her sails on a gentle southwest wind and took off down the bay. She was a speedy little boat, and before she was a month old had made several "trial trips" in which she outsailed all local boats.

Admiral Rodgers was invited by the Vallejo Yacht Club to enter FREDA in a race for the cup, but fearful of the reputation the papers were building for his slightly illegitimate schooner, he put her to less glamorous work carrying freight from San Francisco. She made good time at that, too.

One hundred and ten years ago, FREDA was involved in an adventurous quest. A steamer had reached San Francisco with survivors of the ship MATHILDEZ which was wrecked off the Mexican coast by a hurricane. The captain, mate, and part of the crew had sailed a small boat to Clarion in the Revillagigedo Island and left there two St. Bernard dogs; they then sailed on to the coastwise

There was an unscheduled race between FREDA and the steam yacht LANCASHIRE WITCH to head south in search of other possible survivors. On July 28, FREDA left Mare Island, towed by the steam tug MONTEREY, encouraged by whistles and toots from the Vallejo ferry and a brass band. Late in the afternoon she cleared the Golden Gate, just thirty minutes ahead of the LANCASHIRE WITCH. A month later the British ship returned; they had found no survivors, but brought back the dogs. At 10 p.m. September 11 on a dark Saturday night, the empty-handed FREDA returned and unobtrusively slipped into port.

The St. Bernard dogs got much publicity, and FREDA quietly returned to prosaic Shipyard business.

According to the DICTIONARY, little FREDA served as a powder boat at Mare Island from 1881 to 1884. Her fate is unknown.

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