

## Port of Redwood City History: Still Going Strong....

*"If you wish success in life, make perseverance your bosom friend, experience your wise counselor, caution your elder brothers, and hope your guardian genius."* - Joseph Addison, English writer

**BY JACK CASTLE & DUANE SANDUL**

The year was 1851, and San Francisco was growing by leaps and bounds as Gold Rush fever swept Northern California. Such expansion demanded lumber, and along the hills of the Peninsula there was a mother lode of redwood timber waiting to be harvested. Felling the trees was easy; the cost and difficulty lay in moving them down the mountainsides and wagon-hauling them overland to San Francisco for milling into lumber.

One day in 1851 it was discovered that a creek running through the Peninsula emptied directly into a naturally deep channel of water that, in turn, flowed into San Francisco Bay. Logging companies quickly made use of this valuable natural resource as a water highway, easily and economically moving huge redwood logs down from the hills and into the channel. Once positioned in the channel, the logs were stacked on barges or lashed together for the final journey to San Francisco, where they were ultimately milled into lumber.

Among the first entrepreneurs to use that waterway highway to move their timber to market was owned by Dr. Robert O. Tripp, founder of the historic Woodside Store, and his partner, Mathias A. Parkhurst. Because



### **Lithograph of Early Port - 1878**

Wharves for loading and unloading cargo lined both sides of the turning basin, located behind the intersection of Main and Broadway. During the early years, the wharf was known as the "Redwood Embarcadero." (Photo from RC Library)



### **Turning Basin - 1892**

When not full of ships, the turning basin was a haven for sailboats and rowboats. This 1892 photograph was taken from Broadway, near where the entrance to the new parking garage is today. (Photo from RC Library).

redwood trees were so abundant it's not at all surprising that the creek was named "Redwood Creek," the town that sprang up near it was called "Redwood City", and the waterfront came to be known first as The Embarcadero and then as the "Port of Redwood City". During that era, the Redwood City waterfront area was located in an area near the current intersection of Broadway and Arguello, and stretched as far south as today's Post Office and City Hall.

Redwood City's port distinguished it from other communities developing on the Peninsula – nearby towns such as San Mateo, Belmont and San Carlos. As the only deepwater channel in the southern San Francisco Bay, forest products of all types were brought to the waterfront for export, and Redwood City became famous for its workable port where materials could be shipped without the delay or expense of overland travel. It would be another 20 years before the transcontinental railroad system presented another option for the movement of cargo.

Many different types of businesses found the proximity to a deepwater channel of considerable economic benefit, and wharves and businesses soon occupied the entire length of Redwood Creek. Commercial shipping of products in addition to lumber thrived, especially shingles, grains, and livestock.

There were three main wharves. The two largest wharves were on opposite sides of the creek at Broadway (then called Bridge Street.) The third wharf, owned by Frank's Tannery, was farther

### **Capitol Hotel - c. 1900**

Visitors to the Capitol Hotel had a good view of the Embarcadero and its activity. Built in 1895, the Capitol was located on Broadway between Main and Jefferson Streets. It was torn down in 1906 after suffering considerable damage in the earthquake.

down the creek near where the present-day Mervyn's Plaza is located.

The Port of Redwood City was at its zenith during the days of the Gold Rush. But gradually the forests dwindled and shipping declined. Silt began to fill the channel as dikes and levies were installed to reclaim swamplands north and east of town. Throughout the years

Redwood Creek silted in with mud from land erosion caused by the building of levies and the development of the town.

The building of the San Francisco-San Jose Railroad was a near fatal blow to the port. It was now termed "useless" by its opponents and gradually forgotten as a force in the life of the community. But there was one group that kept its eyes on the port and the possibilities there – the federal government. Uncle Sam had always been interested in navigable channels and small government subsidies kept the port alive during the years of competition with the powerful railroad interests and the battle against civic indifference. As early as 1882 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers voiced its interest in the Port of Redwood City, which was also known then as El Embarcadero. The Corps that year authorized the Port of Redwood City as a "federally approved" project, creating the ability for the port to seek federal funding for maintenance dredging henceforth. This enabled the port to continue to be used for shipping, and to this day, maintenance dredging is necessary from time to time to keep the channel open for commerce.

The port was "moved" further along the existing creek and channel to its present location along Seaport Boulevard east of Highway 101. In 1903, the Corps increased the channel's width to 100 feet. After the 1906 earthquake that devastated San Francisco, the Corps began a five year project to widen the channel to 150 feet.



### **Dredger - 1896**

Throughout the years, Redwood Creek was silted in with mud from land erosion caused by the development of the town. In 1896, the Army Corps of Engineers conducted an extensive dredging project of the slough using equipment like the steam dredger shown in this photograph.



Civic interest in the port re-awakened with increasing government interest and activity. As maritime activity prospered, the

Redwood City Harbor Company was formed in 1912 by businessmen and civic leaders, but before the community could get solidly behind the port, World War I began and the Port of Redwood City was forgotten. The port was not ready to handle the large war-time cargos and most of the business went to ports in Oakland, Stockton, Richmond, and Sacramento.

In 1917 Redwood City once again attracted worldwide attention at its port with the construction of the steamship “Faith, the world’s first cement-hulled ocean-going vessel. The “Faith,” constructed at a shipyard on Redwood Creek when the port was still centered downtown, was built for fighting German U-boats in World War I. The ship never saw any military action, however, since the Armistice was signed a few months later.

A local historian recounted the public fascination this way: “During six months of construction, as the 2,700-ton hull took form, Redwood City became a tourist attraction. Representatives of foreign governments became frequent visitors, carefully watching the course of construction. Launching was scheduled for March 14, 1918. Some 5,000 crowded into town for the gala. Many believed “Faith” would sink ignobly into the mud. A band played, 150 school kids chanted the National Anthem, and three aircraft showered participants. Spectators breathlessly watched as the great hull slid into the water, rolled dramatically to within a foot of her top and then, after an agonizing moment, slowly righted. Cheering was deafening. Faith’s birth was heralded as the dawn of a new epoch in ship building. Built at a cost of \$750,000, Faith was the first of a U.C. crockery fleet which eventually number some three dozen merchant ships.” While Faith never saw “war duty,” the vessel



### **"Faith" - 1918**

Many residents watched the launching of the "Faith", the world's first cement ocean-going vessel, in 1918. The "Faith", constructed at a shipyard on Redwood Creek, was built for fighting German U-boats in World War I. The ship never saw any military action, however, since the Armistice was signed a few months later.

did depart Redwood City on May 22, 1918, carrying a load of salt and copper ore to Vancouver, WA.

With the end of World War I, the city saw many changes, beginning with a political upheaval which resulted in a new charter, a city manager and a civic miracle –voters' approval of \$55,000 for acquisition and improvement of port lands, Yachting enthusiasts lined up solidly behind the port and turned the waterfront into a weekend recreation spot.

The Pacific-Portland Cement Company erected its first plant at the port in 1924 and enlarged it in 1927. The company controlled 30,000 acres on the floor of south San Francisco Bay on both sides of the channel from Millbrae to Alviso. The accumulation of clam, oyster, and mussel shells found there represented a reserve of tens of millions of tons of good-grade limestone, and the other ingredients for cement. Suction dredges were used to lift shells and mud to barges alongside, which are then taken to the wharf at the plant where they were unloaded by overhead crane buckets. This was unique, because most cement is made with lime-



### **Aerial View - 1924**

As continual dredging of the creek became cost-prohibitive, the port was moved closer to deep water in the 1920's. This aerial photograph of the "new" port was taken in 1924, just after the Pacific-Portland Cement plant began its operations. The Alaska Codfish Company was located to the east, with a large pier that could accommodate codfish-filled schooners that sailed in from Alaska.

based materials. Even today there are hardened crushed oyster shell remnants at a portion of Redwood Creek and Steinberger Slough.

In 1931 the War Department agreed to allot \$26,000 for harbor development if the voters would pledge a like amount. Plans called for deepening the channel to 20 feet and widening it to 200 feet. This encouraged political leaders from all over San Mateo County to form a countywide committee at the prompting of legendary Burlingame Mayor C.A. Buck and Judge John J. McGrath of San Mateo, president of the Peninsula Industrial Conference, two outsiders who saw the port as an economic engine of countywide importance. McGrath would later be elected to Congress and be a solid promoter of federal port funding.

The Redwood City Council, at the behest of the countywide committee, commissioned Consulting Engineer H.W. Crozier of San Francisco to put together a feasibility report on the merits of a publicly owned port. His findings in September 1931 included:

- The west side of the lower San Francisco Bay needs a publicly owned and sponsored port with deep channel connections to the Pacific Ocean, capable of placing its tributary industries on a parity with any industries anywhere either in the U.S. or abroad.
- Redwood Harbor can be developed to meet the need by concentrating upon a simple, direct and efficient project, the initial step of which consists of improving the channel and turning basin.
- The port channel is short, direct and simple. It must be wide enough and deep enough to accommodate all commerce likely to frequent it.

The *Redwood City Tribune* editorialized on Dec. 29, 1931, in a headline Redwood City's Deep-Sea Port Deserves Spotlight of Activity During 1932: "With Redwood City's harbor a natural, and already recognized by congress as having ocean port possibilities, it is fortunate that the other communities see the wisdom of boosting the lower Peninsula project. Its benefits in spurring industrial development over the entire Peninsula make it of countywide importance..."

Countywide voters on June 28, 1933, by a 4 to 1 margin, formed the San Mateo County Harbor District, a short-lived body that later was established under the same name but for different

purposes. Named as county port commissioners in 1933 were Henry A. Beeger of Redwood City, Percy J. Shaw of San Mateo, and S.A. Keyston of San Mateo. These three commissioners submitted a \$460,000 harbor bond issue to the citizens of the county as a whole, but it was defeated on Aug. 28, 1934, thus ending the prospects of a “countywide” port. Voters in Redwood City had approved the measure, but countywide it failed. After the defeat countywide, little was heard of the port project until the start of 1935 when the Redwood City Chamber of Commerce, at its annual dinner meeting, reiterated its determination to proceed with the development. The recommendation to reduce the district in size to return the port to municipal status was suggested by the port’s long-time promoter, Elmore B. Hinman, in a talk before the Kiwanis Club on Feb. 28, 1935, when he urged that one of two things be done: Either the county port commissioners launch an effective campaign, or that the district boundaries be altered to smaller limits.

“It is a shame to sit here and let one of our greatest natural resources go undeveloped,” Hinman declared, according to a published newspaper accounting.

A month later, on March 18, 1935, the project was given fresh incentive by inclusion in the congressional rivers and harbors bill for \$94,000 for dredging in Redwood Creek. Eventually, the Redwood City Council decided to hold an election in 1936 in Redwood City only, to formally create the port in the city charter. The intent, as described in the charter as it remains today, was to have “the exclusive control and management of the Port Department vested in the Board of Port Commissioners.” The charter’s authors recognized – as did the public – that establishing a Port Commission with exclusive management powers would enable the City to appoint persons with business experience who could grow the port from a business, not political perspective.

On June 11, 1936, voters approved an amendment to the city charter to establish a Port Department to “control, operate and manage development of the Port of Redwood City.” The Port to this day is governed by the city charter, with only minor voter-approved changes made over the years. Voters passed a \$266,000 bond issue for the development, which was buoyed by the \$94,000 federal government grant that had been contingent on a successful bond election. The 92-acre port quickly became successful and profitable, and repaid the bond quickly. The bond and federal funds paid for channel improvements, including a large turning basin, a wharf 450 feet long, a freight transit shed

150 feet long by 100 feet wide, and a system of railway spur tracks.

Over the next year, as the port project developed, the formal commission began its mission of marketing the port even before the improvements were finished. The charter gave the City Council authority to appoint five port commissioners to terms of five years each, with the Commission having the authority to appoint its executive director, establish its budget, and essentially direct the port. The port then and now has operated without tax funds, sustaining itself through revenues it generates. In fact, over the years the port commission has given millions of dollars of its profits back to the City's general fund, including the funds generated from the 1936 bond election.

Elmore B. Hinman, a vital voice and stalwart of the port project, was selected among his four peers to serve as the port's first commission president. Besides a celebrated community activist for Redwood City, Hinman at the time also served as County Clerk. Also appointed to the first Commission by the City Council were John E. McCarthy, Hendry W. Edmonds, A.B. Cheatham, and Elmer Hurrell. The five new commissioners at the first meeting – Feb. 18, 1937, drew straws to begin the staggered five year terms for commissioners, with two getting five years, two three years, and one a single year to start the cycle. At the end of their terms, they could, if they desired, seek reappointment.

Redwood City Manager C.L. Dimmit served as the port administrator until the Commission could hire a manager, a title that changed over the years from manager to executive director. The commission's first decision was divisive – a 3 to 2 vote on June 8, 1937, to select Walter F. Murphy as the first executive director. Murphy, who had experience operating shipping terminals in Tacoma, Seattle, and Portland, was selected over Frank Pender, who was assistant port manager for the Vancouver Port USA. Commissioner Edmonds quit in protest, because he preferred Pender, and was replaced by the renowned Edmund Scott, who was a long-time San Mateo County Superior Court judge. In those days, judges could simultaneously serve on bodies like the port commission.

On Sept. 9, 1937, the *Redwood City Tribune*, in an editorial recognizing the formal opening of the Port, wrote, in part: “The greatest single step in achievement ever recorded by this community has been completed. The Port of Redwood City, built as it has been through the combined efforts of the entire populace as guided by a few far-visioned leaders, is a monument to their insight and to



## **Navy Ships - 1937**

Two Navy ships, the USS Monaghan and USS Dale, were available for tours as part of the Port dedication in 1937.



cooperation...”

A community celebration that rivaled the one San Francisco had presented four months earlier to dedicate the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge drew thousands of visitors to the “new” port, which, indeed, was new in name only, having already spun a colorful 76 year history prior to 1937. But now the port was a part of community pride that to this day continues, as Redwood City remains the only deepwater port in southern San Francisco Bay. Slightly more than two months after the dedication ceremony, Chairman Hinman died. He was replaced on the Commission by businessman R.C.R. Moser. Visitors to the port today can pass along Hinman Boulevard, an internal port road that was named for the man generally credited with not letting the dream of a public-owned port die.

The first port commission set the stage for what has been a history of precedent – running the port like a business. In the remaining years of the 1930s, which worldwide were unsettling because of Nazi Germany’s invasion of Austria that eventually launched what became World War II, the port attracted significant new maritime business. The Empire Lumber Co. of Coos Bay designated the port as a regular call for lumber schooners. First cargo ship to visit the revitalized port was, appropriately enough, the freighter Redwood, which docked on Oct. 23, 1937, carrying a cargo of 340,000 feet of lumber. Not only was the port receiving imports for the growing Peninsula and San Francisco, it also was continuing exports, including live trees shipped by barge to Treasure Island to spruce it up for hosting the World’s Fair in 1939. Standard Oil Company took a 25-year lease on 2 ¼ acres of land at the port for a bulk distributing plant to accommodate petroleum products shipped to the port. In ensuing years, other petroleum companies would also operate from the port. The third phase in the development of the port in the late 1930s featured warehouse facilities for shipping canned fruit from Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties, which were major agricultural communities then. Fruits like canned peaches were brought to the port for shipment to other destinations reached most efficiently and economically by ship.

Just as the decade of the 1930s was ending, the port’s first executive director, Walter Murphy,

resigned, and was replaced by the assistant executive director, Leslie M. Rudy. As strong as the port commissions have been throughout the port's history, so have their executive directors, collectively a varied group with divergent backgrounds but all dedicated to growing the port. Rudy was called upon by the War Department (as it was called during that era) in the spring of 1942 to serve in the Office of Transportation, thus he took a leave of absence from which he never returned. As the war escalated, he joined the armed forces as an Army major and his acting successor, Andrew A. Moran, became the permanent port executive director May 1, 1942.

The port's first full decade of operations as a publicly-owned port – the 1940s – were disrupted by the war, but the early years of the decade experienced significant growth. The Pacific Portland Cement Co., which had opened operations near the port in the 1920s, continued to grow in the 1940s. Portland built a new \$5 million plant adjacent to the port on property it owned, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it became known as Ideal Cement. Another famous cement company, Permanente Corporation, a precursor to Kaiser Cement, built new silos and facilities at the Port, some of which remain today. In 1942, the Federal Works Agency granted \$53,000 to the port for construction of wharves that would double the facilities of the port. This was done in part to enable the Permanente Corp. to ship cement from the port through the new silo facilities in which the company had invested \$300,000, a hefty sum for the times. The channel was extended 500 feet west of the old wharves, and a single wharf was built. The volume of business, since the first ship docked in 1937, had jumped from approximately \$85,000 to more than \$1 million.

The Kaiser facility was used during and after the War to ship millions of tons of cement around the Pacific from Alaska to Hawaii to Guam for major construction projects.

The World War II years thwarted port growth because of Navy's use of the facilities for the war effort. By 1943, the port was so swamped with war work that 280 freight cars were lined up on the sidings from Redwood City to Salinas waiting to unload their cargo. Sixty-eight cars a day were handled by the workers at the port, where 20 had been considered a heavy load in the past. The port was taken over totally in 1944 by the navy as use as part of its overseas freight terminals. The navy saw the importance of the port for feeding their sources overseas. From a stockpile that sometimes reached 200,000 barrels, ships and barges of American and Allied nations were loaded with oil drums that were destined for Pacific areas. Over 125 ships docks at the port in a 17-month period and

several times the docks had a full capacity with three ships moored alongside the docking area. The navy's control of the port was not without a battle itself. Reluctant to relinquish operations in the face of considerable growth in less than a decade, the port commission challenged the Navy takeover in U.S. Court, but lost when the Navy filed condemnation proceedings against the port commission. A U.S. District Court in San Francisco gave the navy control over the port effective May 1, 1944. During the war years, even the British Ministry utilized the port facilities, storing 2,000 tons of tin and other materials for eventual shipment overseas. Out of the wartime use came a Navy-funded second wharf of 425 feet to add to the original 825 foot wharf, more warehouse and outside storage space, and better railroad trackage. The Navy returned operations to the port commission on Oct. 17, 1945. The SS Creighton Victory, destined for China with 300,000 barrels of kerosene, diesel oil, and gasoline, was the final "war effort" export by the Navy.

The port clearly lost business momentum during the war years. One of the first new post-war opportunities was creation of a mammoth lumber "stockpile" terminal at the port. The first shipment of 500,000 board feet of lumber from Coos Bay, OR, arrived Dec. 14, 1945. Bolstered by the post-war's insatiable demand for lumber, Oregon-based Pope & Talbot was the primary port tenant that imported and exported lumber, to varying degrees of success based on the economies for the day, finally ending its Port operations in the 1980s. The cement and oil company operations also resumed. But the remainder of the decade was mixed economically, with periods of ups and downs, much like the recovering post-war economy across America. Even the lumber deliveries were sporadic, and in mid 1946 Port Commission Chairman John McCarthy, the only original commissioner still serving, warned that the Port was going to have to develop new sources of revenue or close. McCarthy explained that the port had received very few ships since the end of the war and was faced with the loss of the lumber trade it formerly enjoyed. Whether McCarthy's decree was calculated hyperbole or reflective of the times, the port's fortunes changed as the decade closed. One of the sparks was new management, as Merritt D. McCarl replaced Anthony A. Moran as port executive director on March 1, 1948. McCarl had been traffic manager and assistant port manager at the Port of Oakland for 21 years. He was one of the founders of the California Association of Port Authorities and served as secretary of the Pacific Coast Association of Port Authorities. His experience in the maritime industry and region fascinated the port commission that selected him; the commission in 1948, shortly after



### **Regatta - 1947**

As commercial activities at the port continued to increase, a public marina for recreational boaters was also added along the waterfront. Sequoia Yacht Club was founded in 1939 and has since sponsored many events and regattas along Redwood Creek.

McCarthy's death, was the first five-member commission that did not include at

least one of the original commissioners. Commissioners from that point forward learned from McCarl the value of participation in maritime associations and organizations in order to foster their own education as well as to promote and market the port.

Ironically, one of McCarl's new opportunities was the military, but this time the U.S. Army started using the Port in the summer of 1948 for the shipment of dried prunes, apricots, peaches, and other fruits to war ravaged Europe.

The 1950s spurred a bevy of growth, as Kaiser Permanente grew and Leslie Salt began harvesting along the bay, giving birth to the famous salt pile that was a Redwood City visual landmark for nearly half a century. With congress still appreciative of the port's role in World War II, the port received congressional authorization in mid 1950 to further extend the port channel so as to provide a 30-foot channel 400 feet wide for the entire length of the port area. A second turning basin for deepwater vessels was also authorized. This enabled vessels to proceed upstream past the existing port facilities to the new wharf of the Leslie Salt Co. At the outset of the 1950s, three Kaiser vessels home-berthed at the port – the Harry Lundeberg, the Permanente Cement, and the Permanente Silver Bow. The Lundeberg brought gypsum from the lower coast in Mexico while the other two Kaiser vessels exported cement.

In December of 1952, Redwood City port history was made when for the first time cargo was loaded here to be shipped directly to European harbors outside the war effort. The SS Garden State loaded 2,000 tons of bulk magnesite consigned to Antwerp, Belgium. The big shipment of magnesite was transported to the port in 40 drop-bottom gondola cars by the Southern Pacific Company, brought from Kaiser's Moss Landing plant near Salinas.

Not only was Kaiser booming in the 1950s, so too was the Ideal Cement Company, which had assumed the facility adjacent to the port originally started by the Portland Cement Corp. New trans-Pacific shipping service from the port was launched with arrival of the Pacific Far East Lines at Ideal Cement to take on a load of bulk cement for shipment to Guam. The SS Luckenbach was assigned to make periodic exports to Guam, starting with 2,000 tons on the inaugural export.

Encouraged by the increased business as well as the steady business by the oil companies and occasional fruit company exports, the Port Commission authorized a \$1 million bond issue in 1953 that would be matched by a \$1 million federal grant if approved. The bond would have paid for expanded facilities to handle increasing shipping and warehousing. The port bonds received 2,966 voters for and 1,804 against, but 214 votes shy of the required two-thirds vote. The commission tried twice more during the 1950s to pass the bonds, only to be narrowly turned back each time, the last on April 8, 1958, when the 5,068 yes votes were 240 short of the two-third majority needed, this time to approve a \$350,000 bond issue that if had it passed would likely have triggered a \$1.7 million federal government grant for dredging to deeper depths.

The '50s featured several "firsts." The W.R. Chamberlain & Company lumber ship, Alaska Cedar, steamed into the port with the first full shipload of lumber since the end of World War II. The Alaska Cedar brought 2.35 million board feet for the Hubbard and Johnson Lumber Company from Crescent City. The first scientific vessel ever to leave from the port set out Oct. 14, 1954, for a month of trawling research in the ocean off the California Coast. Without fanfare the Motor Vessel N.B. Scofield cast off to gather marine information for the Marine Fisheries Branch of the California Department of Fish and Game. The goal: develop information to improve business for California fishermen. The port also became "home port" for five days for the USS Grady, an ocean escort patrol vessel that participated in action on the China coast in Iwo Jima and Okinawa. The 306-foot long ship was used to train naval reservists with a secondary mission as an anti-submarine warfare unit. That same year – 1957 – the port put out the welcome mat for the largest ore carrier ever built for west coast ports, the SS Kaiser Gypsum, a new 16,000-ton, 525-foot craft that discharged chrome ore for the Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical



Corporation for use at its plant at Moss Landing. It was the largest single cargo of chrome ore ever brought into the Bay Area.

The 1950s also witnessed the reaffirmation of a strong port commission empowered by charter to run the port without political interference. “A move to put the port under the restrictive thumb of the city council has failed,” is how the *Redwood City Tribune* reported the defeat of a recommendation of a Citizens Charter Study sub-committee that operations of the port be put under stricter supervision of the council. The committee as a whole rejected the sub-committee, agreeing that the existing charter was far better and more explicit than the curbing proposals, reported its chair, former Port Commission Chairman Perry Bygdnes. Sentiments of some of the city council members were voiced by Councilman Paul Jones, who said: “Our port is in the nature of a business enterprise, and with certain restraints, should be given full control of its own affairs. The council need have no jurisdiction over the technicalities of its operation and its people.” Port Executive Director McCarl put it this way: “Advancement of the port is still in the pioneering stage—although wonders have been accomplished. We have met many obstacles from private and public competition. We have worked hard to put the port forward in its present favorable position. It is not the time to hamstring the port with restrictions.”

A study by Stanford Research Institute (SRI) in 1957 provided a blueprint for the port’s future, provided it could be funded. The 123-page report concluded that the port’s history was promising, though the rate of development would not be rapid, and most of it was contingent on improvement of the channel to Redwood Creek. The SRI study was a harbinger of the port’s future, as it remarked, “the best possibilities for additional cargo movements through the port lie in expansion of bulk cargo operations.”

The decade ended happily for the port, as in 1959 the 14-year battle for federal funds to improve the port succeeded, as congress authorized nearly \$1.4 million in federal funds for channel development to allow deep draft vessels to reach the port at any time without waiting for a high tide as the big ships had to during low tide. The dredging project kicked off the 1960s, as the long-desired project that was authorized in 1945 but not funded until 1959 included expanding the harbor channel from 27 to 30 feet in depth and from 700 to 900 feet in width. The turning basin was brought from

200 to 300 feet in width and 1,800 to 2,200 feet in length.

The final year of the '50s also gave Redwood City bragging rights. According to a report released by the U.S. Army Engineers for the year 1959, the outbound ocean commerce of the Port of Redwood City exceeded that of the Port of San Francisco by 123,205 tons. Commodities handled during that era included cement, gypsum rock, lumber and lumber products, petroleum products, newsprint, canned goods, salt, sand, and shell, with points of origin or destination including Japan, Philippine Islands, Mexico, Guam, Hawaii, Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, California, and inland waterways ports. In fact, the 1950s could be considered the golden years of port maritime activity, as more than 27,000,000 tons crossed port docks over the decade, a fete that would never be duplicated over the next half-century as changes in how commodities moved would change ports across the world, beginning in the 1960s. The 1950s also answered the question of whether former Commission President John McCarthy was using hyperbole after the war years for decrying what he considered a slow post-war revival for the port. The numbers don't lie – exaggeration, it was.

The 1960s continued to be strong years for the port, but they also signaled changes ahead that would eventually change the character of the port. The biggest single contract in the history of the port at the time – a 25-year lease with Texaco on nine acres—was approved by the commission in the fall of 1963. Texaco became the fifth oil company to lease port property, along with Shell, Standard Oil, Richfield, and Union. That same year, the port's first out-going non-bulk cargoes since before World War II, 1,300 tons of canned fruit cocktail, sailed for Liverpool, followed by 1,600 tons for Hamburg, Germany. That year also saw Executive Director Merritt McCarl retire, ending a 47-year maritime career, his last 14 guiding the Port of Redwood City through its greatest expansion and business period. He was replaced by Howard A. Harris, who had been with the port for 14 years as well, the final two as assistant manager.

One of the last major channel expansion programs was completed in late 1964, a \$660,000 federal project that widened the port channel to 400 feet and deepened it to about 30 feet, making the port more accessible to ships and to the shipping operations of Leslie Salt Co., which owned and operated a private wharf adjacent to port facilities. Leslie sold its bulk salt to industries throughout the state, to the Pacific Northwest, and Japan. The following year, the port used revenue bonds repaid

from port revenues to construct a new \$850,000 concrete pier. This helped serve major tenants of the time, including Kaiser Cement, Hubbard and Johnson Lumber Co., United Sand and Gravel Co., Permanente Cement Co., and the five petroleum firms. In fact, the first ship to tie up there was the 560-foot, 18,000 Norwegian oil tanker, Annikken, which came from Oslo.

As the '60s progressed, four of the port's five petroleum firms served notice that they planned to move out when their leases expired because it would be cheaper for them to transport their petroleum products through pipelines, which were being build under the bay and down the Peninsula. The fifth firm, Texaco, actually increased its importation of jet fuel, including a tanker that arrived in 1967 from Trinidad. For years, these companies moved millions of tons of barrels across port docks. Also in 1967, the oceanographic survey vessel Polaris arrived at the port for the first time, operated by the U.S. Geological Survey, which at the time leased the old marine barracks erected during World War II at the port. USGS would later become a port-tenant for 25 years before leaving in 2005. The Polaris began conducting research in San Francisco Bay that year. The Polaris was featured in the Nova television series, "Inside the Golden Gate," and has been featured in articles in Sunset Magazine and National Geographic. The port served as home port to the Polaris and other USGS research vessels, including the 208-foot research vessel S.P. Lee.

In late 1968, two of the biggest shipments for two port industries that would stop or be diminished in the 1970s because of changing technology and trade patterns, occurred almost simultaneously. A cargo of redwood that was hailed as the largest bulk redwood cargo ever to leave the port for overseas shipment featured 9,000 tons of redwood logs destined for Tokyo, Japan. The logs were smaller than those great timbers shipped from Redwood City before the turn of the century. Many were less than a foot in diameter, which likely would have been rejected by most American sawmills but were eagerly awaited by Japanese sawmills because most sawmills in Japan at that time couldn't handle giant logs. Not far from the redwood stockpile in the port yard, another ship loaded 750 tons of canned fruit for shipment to London, England. At that time, Libby, Sunsweet Growers, Mayfair Packing and other food shippers, provided a volume business for the port.

The 1970s saw rapid and dramatic changes at the port as some of the industrial tenants who had provided the port with most of its income had moved out or curtailed operations. The face of the



port was changing. To wit:

- Many of the fuel storage tanks were torn down, as all petroleum companies but Texaco had moved on because of their uses of pipelines instead of shipping barrels.
- As containerization grew in the maritime industry, industries like canned foods found it more economical for ship their goods by container; at the same time, most of the food growers and packers in Santa Clara County were beginning to be displaced by what would be the beginning of Silicon Valley type industries.
- Leslie Salt scaled down salt production in the west bay in 1974, the same year that Ideal Cement closed its operations. Though both Leslie and Ideal owned facilities adjacent to the port, for many years their tonnage was included in port figures.

Then Port Executive Director Howard Harris put it this way: “We used to figure about a million tons a year for ocean shipping, plus two million tons for inland shipping (barges) – but now we figure about a total of one million tons, both ocean and inland.” In one sense, the practice of counting the Leslie and Ideal tonnage as part of the port made the changes look more significant than they were to the genuine port tenants that utilized port docks.

Harris retired in 1973 and was replaced by Fred DiPietro, whose maritime experience included trade promotion at both Port of San Francisco and Port of Oakland, and sales manager for a company supervising cargo procurement and international trade development. DiPietro developed a reputation for a fiery personality whose business style was going for the home run, which in many instances frustrated him and the port as many “big deals” fell short of fruition, including bringing in a car terminal and international cement plant and coal factory.

In 1975, the port signed a lease with then Levin Metals Corp, now known as Sims Group USA Corporation, to launch one of Northern California’s largest recycling centers. In fact, by the 1990s, Sims was regularly listed by the *San Francisco Business Times* as the No. 1 recycling firm in the Bay Area in terms of tonnage. Sims recycled more than 200,000 vehicles annually at the port, along with other scrap metals that it shipped overseas to destinations such as Japan, Korea, Malaysia, and India.

While the business climate was changing at the port in the 1970s, the public began a 10-year



(CNN)



### **the Glomar Explorer**

fascination with the mysterious Hughes Barge, the Glomar Explorer, starting in 1972. The presence of the gargantuan barge – in actuality a floating dry dock – was impossible to conceal, since it was bigger than the landmark Leslie Salt pile. The Explorer, 618 feet long with a 23-story derrick amidships, became the source of intrigue in 1975 when news broke that it had recovered a sunken Soviet submarine at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean 750 miles northwest of Hawaii for the Central Intelligence Agency. Even before that time, the construction of a huge barge for the Explorer alongside Redwood creek, under the auspices of Hughes Tool Co. and Lockheed Missiles, aroused considerable curiosity because of the tight security around the vessel. Hughes had said the Explorer was designed to extract minerals from the ocean’s floor. The mysterious barge was in and out of the port for a decade. Ironically, it took another decade before the navy announced that the barge was known internally as the Sea Shadow, built to test various types of naval Stealth technology. Its \$195 million budget, including \$50 million for construction, came from the Navy’s “black budget” for secret programs.

The 1980s began as did the 1970s – bad news from a fuel company tenant. Texaco announced plans to close its tank-farm terminal by the end of 1982 to revert, as other oil companies had done 10 years ago, to more economical pipeline shipments of fuel. For most of the ‘80s, the port pursued potential new business in cement, autos, and coal, but none came to fruition as the repressed world-wide economy during some of the years made businesses and investors cautious.

The port in 1981 received nine acres of land with a boat launching ramp and storage yard funded by Lincoln Properties, which in turn received 200,000 gallons of sewage capacity that the port owned in the sewage treatment plant then under construction in Redwood Shores. Lincoln needed the capacity for its Seaport Centre, which featured 500,000 square feet of office space in 13 buildings.

The 200,000 gallons, which cost the port \$200,000, were swapped for \$3.7 million worth of land and launch ramp improvements. Over the years, the port has received more than \$1 million in state grants for expanding and improving the launch ramp, the only public facility of its kind in the south Bay. In 1983, the first commercial project on port lands opened – Portside 1, a “New England village” style development that featured 45 offices and a waterfront restaurant. The project was initially planned to be a boutique plaza, but the economy turned before it could open in that capacity, so Portside became home to waterfront offices walking distance from the Redwood City Marina. The offices became so popular, that in 1992 Portside II was developed, a two-story, 32,000 square foot office complex that faces the Marina.

The 1980s were a tough time for the port and the general economy as a whole, and there were times that the port finances were at their lowest points in history.

In mid 1987, Floyd Shelton replaced DiPietro as port executive director. Shelton was a Coast Guard veteran of 20 years whose maritime experience included two years as manager of the Port of Astoria in Oregon and six years as director of the Oregon Ports Division, responsible for planning research and economic assistance for Oregon’s 23 ports. Shelton initiated a marketing approach that helped turn the port into a “niche” port that recognized the Port of Redwood City was a small port, but could be of significant importance to the region as a bulk port. By the end of his second full year as executive director – and the end of the 1980s – port tonnage had tripled from 139,000 metric tons to 437,000 metric tons.

The 1990s featured several new port tenants that strengthened the port’s plan to find its niche as a successful small port.

Romic Chemical Corporation (now U.S. Liquids) joined the port’s growing family of industries involved in environmentally-related recycling ventures in 1991. Romic opened a rail transfer facility to transport alternative fuel to cement kilns in the Midwest. Romic recycled used solvents, antifreeze, and soils. Some non-recyclable chemicals are blended to make alternative industrial fuel.

The fiscal year that ended July 30, 1992, featured an \$850,000 net income, an 89 percent from the year before and the highest in port history up to that point. That year Thomas J. Dowd, professor at the Institute of Marine studies at University of Washington, who regularly analyzed

financial statements of the majority of the nation's ports, placed the Port of Redwood City in the top 10 percent of all U.S. ports in financial performance. Also in 1992, Cargill exported salt for the first time in 20 years, shipping from the port 23,000 tons of salt to Japan. A first in the history of the port was accomplished that year as well, with the import of 26,500 metric tons of bauxite ore from northern Australia, destined for cement plants in Northern California.

In 1993, after approval of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, Canada, and the U.S., the port approved an agreement with a Mexican company to import gypsum rock used for wallboard by Pabco Company. New port facilities to accommodate the gypsum included an on-dock hopper and 600-foot conveyor system which enabled self-unloading ships to efficiently and economically unload the gypsum rock onto a two-acre stockpile near Wharf 3. The port also approved a new oil reclamation facility on 2.25 acres adjacent to the metals recycling facility in 1993, that operated under two different owners specializing in recycling oil products for resale. Also that year the first Russian ship to load bulk cargo from the port loaded scrap metal from Sims facility. The vessel "Kapititan Betkher" left for India with 25,000 tons.

Also in 1993 the port launched a major renovation of the Redwood City Marina, the first since it was constructed in 1959. The project entailed dredging about 65,000 cubic yards of silted material from the marina basin, replacing 28 timber guide piles and rehabilitating 25,000 square feet of timber decking (docks). The \$1.4 million project included a new concrete dock system configured so that all berths for the 207-berth public marina were single berths. The busy year of 1993 also introduced cruises to the Port of Redwood City. The 138-passenger **Yorktown Chipper** (pictured) began cruises embarking and disembarking from the port, usually five-day voyages of San Francisco Bay and the Delta that became so popular, that the cruise line scheduled several voyages annually for several years.



In the summer of 1994, a chemical company that started in Redwood City in 1959 relocated to the port from a mile away. Pressure Vessel Service, now Basic Chemical Services, distributes acids and alkalis for use by businesses and public services, such as food processing, water treatment, electronic

manufacturing, and school facilities. That same year Spinnaker Sailing relocated its sailing school and boating services to the port, providing sailing and other boating courses to more than 1,000 persons per year.

Toward the end of 1994, Shelton retired after successful seven year tenure as port executive director. The Commission in 1995 appointed Shelton's assistant, Michael J. Giari, as the new executive director. Giari joined the port in 1988 after seven years with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, where he was assistant manager of Fisheries and a marine transportation planner.

The decade between 1995 and 2005 featured the highest port tonnage and most successful stretch of profits and success since the 1950s, and the only thing that kept the statistics from matching that golden decade was how they were kept. But in any event, from 1995 to 2005, port tonnage increased every year but one, 540,000 metric tons to just under 2 million metric tons. The port had found its "niche," and interestingly, during the 10-year run that revitalized the port and enabled it to give millions of dollars during the decade to the City's general fund the commission was in tact with the same commissioners. It was the longest run of continuity on the Commission in port history. As the fiscal year 2005 ended June 30<sup>th</sup> of that year, the commission line-up featured Dick Dodge, 25 years of service; Guy Smith, 21 years; Jack Castle, 18 years; Lewis Miller, 12 years; and Larry Aikins, 10 years.

During the decade, the port became essential to the building trades industry because of the shortage of construction materials available in the Bay Area, in large part the result of quarries that had closed after reaching capacity and no new ones planned. Consequently, the port became the hub for cement, gypsum, and building aggregate materials like rocks and sand and bauxite, all needed for the burgeoning Peninsula. Cement imported to the Port during the decade was used on such high profile projects as the San Francisco Airport expansion and construction of the new baseball stadium for the San Francisco Giants. During the same period, Asia was growing dramatically as well, requiring huge amounts of steel and metals for construction. This pushed the exports of the Sims Group metals recycling plant to record highs while at the same time removing millions of abandoned and derelict old cars from the Peninsula.

The success was helped by two factors. First, RMC Pacific Materials, later purchased by

Cemex, resumed cement and building material operations on property adjacent to the port. And a creative land swap the port commission approved in the mid 1990s with the developers of an office park near the port, Pacific Shores Center, gave the port nearly 10-acres of waterfront land in exchange for the 135-acre Deepwater Slough Island, which was unbuildable due to environment restrictions.

RMC/Cemex built a new cement marine terminal in 2001 that replaced an outmoded cement unloading facility with a new, more efficient cement unloading facility. The new facility and new equipment allowed a ship carrying 30,000 to 40,000 tons of cement to unload in 3 to 5 days instead of 12 to 15 days. The new terminal was built on both Port and RMC property and involved the sharing of Port-owned and RMC-owned improvements. So successful was the new terminal, that it took less than three years for RMC/Cemex to celebrate the one millionth ton to cross the docks, all imported from the Fair East.

And so in 2007, as the community was celebrating the 71<sup>st</sup> year since voters approved a charter amendment and bond issue that gave birth to the “modern” port, and the 70<sup>th</sup> year of it officially opening in 1937, the port had come full circle. Cement and construction materials again were at the cornerstone of success – and the Port of Redwood City had found, and was enjoying, its niche.

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**Jack Castle was raised in Redwood City and raised his two sons here with his wife Raegene. He has been on boards and commissions, including the Port Commission, for more than 30 years. Mr. Castle owns a family-run insurance business. Duane Sandul is a former writer/editor with the original Redwood City Tribune and San Mateo Times and retired owner of a public relations company that represented several Redwood City clients, including the Port of Redwood City for 20 years).**