

"LOG OF AN UNKNOWN SEAMAN"
by
Rowena L. and Gordon D. Alcorn

During those "windship days", hundreds of deep sea vessels came to Tacoma, Washington to transport wheat or lumber to foreign ports. Here was the longest grain-loading dock in the world.

Seamen's Rest, a non-denominational Mission in Tacoma's "Old Town", was maintained by two dedicated Norwegian ladies, Mrs. Birgitte Funnemark and her daughter Christine. From December 1897 until late Spring of 1899, the location was 2802 North Carr Street. Then a larger building at 311 North 11th was purchased. Until the "Rest" was closed in December, 1903, several thousand "lonely men of the sea" came under the good influence of those fine ladies. Collections were never asked, but before every ship sailed, a purse was taken up and brought to the Mission. (Capt. Albert Funnemark went down with his ship Axellius in the violent North Sea storm of 1884).

Among the records of Seaman's Rest is a strange unsigned diary.^① Its red, hard-cover is splotted with ink. The diarist who called it his Log was a young seaman, probably British. That he was ~~well~~ *well* educated shows in the prose and excellent handwriting. It covers a period of slightly over three months. After the final entry dated November 27, 1898, he apparently took his own life.

① All existing records of Seaman's Rest are in the possession of Mrs. Alcorn. Her mother, Mrs. Edward B. Lung, was a longtime friend of the Funnemarks and when Mr. Lung left for the Klondike Gold Fields in 1897, until she joined him in 1899, she often assisted them at the Mission.

TYPE 6" WIDE
IN ITALICS

An entry was made each day, but only those of special interest follow. On page 1 is a poem, "The Helmsman" and there are four other poems, one by Byron, in this notebook.

- August 14, 1898 "Left Steam Schooner Fulton at Seattle. Spend three or four hours on the town. Engage a room at the Leland House."
- August 15th "Rent shack from Jimmie Hiboo for one month. Stock with provisions and take up abode."
- August 16th "Nothing strange or startling happens. Had a chance to ship in Barque Oakland."
- August 17th "Went to the theatre."
- August 19th "Shipped in Barque Theobald today \$40 and overtime. Went aboard this morning and turned to working ballast. Well satisfied with ship."
- Aug. 26th "Busy trimming coal all day. Hot work!"
- Aug. 31st "Sailed for Frisco at 7:30. In 2nd Mates watch. Went below at 8 P.M."
- Sept. 1st "Slept to two A.M. then stood at wheel to four. Turned in at ~~4~~ ⁸ A.M. ~~Slept to 8 A.M. then stood at wheel to four. Turned in at 4 AM and slept to 8 A.M.~~ ^{TURNOED IN AT 8 PM} Been washing paintwork all day."
- Sept. 2nd "Slipped the hawser and set sail at 7 bells this morning. My watch on deck. Good skipper and officers."
- Sept. 7th "Fair wind. Old Theobald more than slipping through water at 6 knots."
- Sept. 11th "Dropped anchor just outside Frisco. No wind and dense fog. Kept anchor watch 8 to 10."
- Sept. 12th "All hands roused out at 5 A.M. Heave up and dropped anchor again just off Harrison Street Wharf."
- Sept. 13th "Went across to Oakland. Start discharging coal. Was made watchman today."
- Sept. 15th "Went across to Beale Street Wharf where commenced discharging lower hold."
- Sept. 19th "The Theobald went to dry dock to get overhauled. Asked to be paid off."
- Sept. 22nd "Paid fare in Steamer Chas. Nelson up to Seattle. Took 59 dollars off my partner who came aboard beastly drunk."
- Sept. 23rd "Hungriest boat I ever struck on coast. My partner is sober now so I returned his money."
- Sept. 25th "Arrived in Seattle 3:15. Not sorry either. Took clothes to office and rented a shack for two months from Father Baiser."
- Oct. 1st "An awful number of men ashore. Don't know when I shall get a ship."
- Oct. 17th "Went to Seamen's Bethel tonight. Enjoyed myself pretty well. It was such a change. Met Mr. McCouls at the Bethel and promised to come and see him tomorrow night. Missed a chance to ship to Honolulu today."
- Oct. 19th "Shipped in Dashing Wave laid at Tacoma. Went across in Flyer. Arrived about 4. Determined to look up Sailor's Friends. Went across in New Town to look for the New Sailor's Home. After a lot of trouble discover that Mrs. and Miss Funnemark keep a Seamen's Rest on Carr Street, Old Town. Paid them a visit and enjoyed myself immensely."

COLLECTIONS BY MAIL 6-9-73

HAWSER FROM TUG

Oct. 20th "Turned to this morning about 10 A.M. Went up to Seamen's Rest."

The next two days were very busy "working lumber".

Oct. 23rd "Went ashore and took a walk up Carr Street, then looked down on Old Tacoma. It was a beautiful sight! The night clear and cold. The moon shown down on the clear placid waters of the Sound so that I thought of the first verse of the "Inchcape Rock"."

Oct. 26th "Guess I shant leave Tacoma in Dashing Wave. Shall give lumber best. Visited Rest."

Oct. 30th "Turned out early. Went up to New Town and had breakfast, then went to Seamen's Rest to accompany Miss Funnemark out to ship Sir Robert Fernie. Got wet through coming home. Went to town and had dinner then came to Rest again where I had a long talk with Miss Funnemark being greatly touched by her wonderful faith in God. I am determined to lead a different life."

Nov. 2nd "Made up mind to go to Seattle on boat Sentinal. Leaves Commercial Dock 12:30. Arrive at 2:35. Parked with my companions."

Nov. 4th "Times are rather dull here. Unless something turns up shall have to go down to San Francisco again. Met two shipmates from Dashing Wave last night. They were both going up to Skagway in the Dirigo. Last evening was spent at the Neptune's Club listening to political speeches."

Nov. 5th "Received a letter from Miss Funnemark this morning. Missed a chance to ship in Cheney. At our meeting last night there was an old Sea Captain stood up and told us that for 6 years and some months he had held his job as Mate in the Black Ball line running between New York and Liverpool simply by being a brute knocking his crew about until the poor fellows had to run away. Yet people that we meet every day say the poor sailors used to have a hard time at sea, but he is looked after properly. I say he is not looked after at all. Jack suffers at present just as much if not more than he ever did.

Go aboard any English ship in a foreign port and see how many hands are by her. When will the time come when all the sons of Neptune shall stand forth and say We are slaves no longer, we are men henceforth masters not dogs. But we sailors can not be prevailed upon to stand together."

Nov. 6th "Sunday again. Last Sunday I was in Tacoma. Shipping is very dull. Now we have some hundreds of men ashore here and we are shipping say only 12 a week. If things don't change pretty quick there will be trouble I fancy."

Nov. 7th "The sailors of the Union intend marching in their uniforms today. Politicians think Jack an alright fellow about election time, yet after election they won't look at him. Port Blakely shipping seems to be picking up a little."

Nov. 8th "Turned in at 7:15 and went to office and shipped on Sch. Coleman. Went aboard Multnomah at 1 P.M. and sailed for Olympia via Tacoma. Arrived in Olympia at 6:30. Had some trouble finding our ship as we were all strangers. When we got aboard we were too late for supper. There was no place for us to sleep and a drunken sailor was making things lively in the focs'le. Now the focs'le itself is without exception the most miserable hole I ever saw. Went up town for the night and put up I don't know where. Met our skipper last night and he was very smoothe spoken. Beware of him of the smoothe tongue!"

Nov. 9th "Captain Trainor has a bad name. I generally pull best with a man with a bad name. He is a Novia Scotia man commonly called a Blue-Nose."

Nov. 10th "I am not much stuck on milling lumber, however, the skipper asked me if I understood a donkey so I expect I shall be a donkey driver. Expect lower hold will be filled tomorrow - May haul into the stream on Sunday. This is a disagreeable place to load - at low water there is only five feet of water, so we have to finish loading out in the stream. Sent a letter up town with a shipmate to be mailed to Tacoma Seamen's Rest."

Nov. 11th "Could not help wishing I had a few politicians down on the wharf today. Capt. Trainor rushing us on the wharf this morning. Shall not go ashore before Sat. night. The Olympia Mill manager got held up last night by two unknown footpads."

Nov. 12th "An old scow was sinking this morning when we were called to tow it to shore. The skipper was shouting in great shape and everybody was rushing around like an electric man. Finished the lower hold today at six o'clock. When I knocked off tonight I could scarcely walk because of bad shoes. Mailed a letter to Tacoma tonight."

Nov. 13th "Went up to the house of a farmer not far from where we are laid. We had some apples and apple cider. This is a wonderful place for fruit. I am thoroughly disgusted with our focs'le. It would make anyone with a weak stomach sick. The Schooner Fulton and Barque Theobald suited me to a T. Do not know whether I shall stay in this scow or not. It would pay me to make a round trip but not to make a passage. Tried to get a job with a farmer to pick fruit for a dollar a day and board. He wouldn't have me. Went up town with the Mate and Second Mate. First time since I joined the Coleman."

Nov. 14th "Started deck loading this morning. Took in quite a number of big timbers. Was donkey fall-tender. Would like to make the round trip, then I don't think I should go to Sea for some time. Turned in about 9 P.M."

Nov. 15th "Today everything went wrong. Was shoving a truck load of scantlings aboard when one struck the ship's side and rebounded striking me on the head knocking me silly for the time being. The result was that I got paid off last night. I had a notion to make the round trip, but it was not to be. Packed up and turned in as my head is still dizzy."

Nov. 16th "Turned out at 6:30. Went aft and siddled with the skipper 7:20 P.M. Went aboard City of Aberdeen for Tacoma. Arrived 7:20 P.M. After an hour or two of vain effort to get a car to convey me to Old Town, set out on foot. Got down to Seamen's Rest at 9 P.M. Was greatly disappointed to find the folk were down at a meeting in Seamen's Bethel. Rented room in Pioneer Saloon. Intended to go across to Seattle the following night."

Nov. 17th "Went up town then had breakfast and came down to Seamen's Rest where I spent most of the time. Left shortly after 5 P.M. for Commercial Dock. Found my clothes all right. Came back to Rest and left about 11 P.M."

Nov. 18th "Am in a very uneasy state of mind. A sense of foreboding evil overpowers me. Had breakfast and hastened to Seamen's Rest. On the way I met Miss Funnemark who told me I should not do anything crooked. Cannot peel off the feeling of uneasiness, am sure

something is going to happen. Sat around the Rest for a time. Heard of the loss of the Atalanta ② I feel badly for poor Gallagher. Sometimes when I get to thinking about my life it nearly drives me mad. No man has ever had better chances and yet here I am."

Nov. 19th "Turned out at 10. Came up to Seamen's Rest I feel uneasy about something. Expect to leave Tacoma tonight. Got in a horrible drunk with the boys from the Boarding House (Evans) then went to the Rest. Oh how I felt when I came to myself and found out how I had been and where I was. Nobody can imagine what I thought of myself."

Nov. 20th "Went over to Seattle. Arrived at 6 P.M. Went up to Union office and met some old-time friends."

Nov. 22nd "Could find nothing but assistant cook @ \$10 per month. Could not accept that, of course. Shipped in Barque Coloma 1 P.M. Went aboard Flyer 2:45 P.M. Arrived in Tacoma 4:25 P.M. Went aboard Coloma. After supper reported myself to the skipper who told me I was too small to be a good lumber man. Asked my age and told me I was only a boy."

Nov. 23rd "Find the Coloma a fine living ship, the best I have been in on this coast. Capt. seems to be a good sort. Expect a holiday tomorrow shall take one anyhow. Thanksgiving Day."

Nov. 24th "Visited Seamen's Rest. Loafed around. Did not know what to do with myself. Went to Seamen's Rest with three or four of our crowd where I stopped until about eleven P.M."

Nov. 26th "Felt very unsettled for the past few weeks. Can't understand it. Worse than ever. Guess the Coloma will be the last ship for me for some time."

On Nov. 27th the diarist fills four pages of disturbing thoughts indicating his very distraught condition. He ended with this:

"I believe one could easily tell my character by reading these pages and I feel confident the opinion of me will not be favorable. I cannot help thinking there is very little in this world to live for. Can't understand why I have received no mail. Guess I had better finish my log now. Spilled a bottle of ink all over it."

Then there is this last pathetic entry:

"There is a ship comes back in shreds
Its sails loose, its hull a wreck
No need to tell that hopeless tale
Fast to a quiet dock it lies
The crew have sadness in their eyes.
Failure its name."

Weep not for Him That Dieth!

Finis

TYPE IN #10
ITALICS 6" WIDE

② The Atalanta's Capt. Charles McBride was racing under a wager with two other captains of large wheat carriers, Imberhorne and Earl of Dalhousie from Tacoma, to the Cape of Good Hope, Africa, when it crashed onto a reef off Alsea Bay, Oregon on Nov. 17th, 1898. Of her crew of 27, only 3 seamen survived. Michael Gallagher was among those crewmen who perished in that appalling tragedy.

On November 27, 1898, the Tacoma Ledger printed this: "Mysterious Shooting in Old Town":

"Last night two men carried a badly wounded young man to the house of Dr. Charles S. Tripler of 2402 North Carr Street. They said that they had found him down on the wharf at the foot of McCarver Street. The doctor dressed a gunshot wound on the unconscious man, but he warned the men who claimed that they had never seen the victim before, that he must be taken at once to the Fannie Paddock Hospital or the wound would prove fatal. The last Dr. Tripler saw of them was when they placed the man, whom he recalled had red hair, in an express wagon and departed. Dr. Tripler then immediately notified the police."

The wounded man undoubtedly was the diarist and his final entry dated ~~Nov. 27, 1898~~ ^{was probab} Nov. 27, 1898 was probably made soon after midnight. He was found at 2 A.M. bleeding profusely from what appeared to be a self-inflicted gunshot wound. The Ledger was a morning paper and so the story could have been printed within a few hours after the police officer and a news reporter arrived at Dr. Tripler's home to investigate his report.

The mystery was to remain unsolved. That wounded man never arrived at the Fannie Paddock Hospital, and his body was never found! Those two men probably threw the unconscious victim into the Bay off the Wharf. It was a very stormy night with high winds and lashing rain and if the tide were changing from a long run-out, the swift current could easily have carried a body around Point Defiance and then into the deep swirling waters of the Narrows.

It is not known how Christine Funnemark came into possession of that unsigned, ink-splattered notebook. She never mentioned it in later years. On April 23, 1960 she died at age eighty-one.③

③ In 1947 Charles Scribner's Sons published a book Focs'le Days written by Anton Otto Fischer who came to Tacoma in January 1899 as a crewman on the windship, Gwydyr Castle. He was an artist and one of his illustrations for the book shows his remembrance of Christine Funnemark when she came on board the Gwydyr Castle to invite officers and crewmen to visit the Seamen's Rest.

From Chapter 5 of Focs'le Days is his fine tribute to Birgitte and Christine Funnemark: "These two ladies did a wonderful work and thousands of sailors must hold them in grateful memory."

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