

Fun and Education for Younger Sailors

Your Family's Story is History

Did you know that your sister's diary is history? So are the photographs you take of your family and friends. Each of these documents helps tell the story of your family (Although your sister might not want her "document" made public!). Oral histories are another kind of document, something that you can create by interviewing a family member such as one of your parents or grandparents. Oral histories are a great way to discover and record what life was like before you were born.

At San Francisco Maritime there are many oral histories in the park's library. Some are related to vessels in the park's collection and can help us learn more about the ways these ships and boats were used.

Consider the scow schooner *Alma*, that is part of the park's collection. Many years ago, scows were a common sight on the Bay and up into the Delta, picking up cargo such as hay, bricks and grain and transporting it to San Francisco to be placed on larger ships that would then take the cargo around the world. The *Alma*, built in 1891, is the last of those old scow schooners. These scows were often family-run boats, and looking at oral histories of those who lived and worked on these boats gives us an idea of their importance to their owners.

Try creating your own oral history. To prepare for the interview, think about what you want to know about the person. You might research when they were born or where they grew up. Sometimes it's helpful to make a timeline of the person's life. Did they live near the water? Did they live in the city or the country? What was their favorite childhood memory? You might be surprised what you find out!

One oral history we have at our library is an interview with Mrs. Arend Horstmeyer, the niece of a well-known scow schooner owner. Mrs. Horstmeyer remembered living aboard her uncle's scow schooner, named the *James F. McKenna*, after the of 1906 earthquake:

"We had two staterooms, one on either side of the eating cabin. There were two bunks in each; my brother and I were in the same bunk. (Editor's note:

Ewww!) It had a head (a toilet) which was quite something for those days, most of them didn't. ... We loved the boat. We had big picnics on it and sometimes we stayed overnight and slept down in the hold. In hot weather they put a galley (kitchen) out back somewhere, just a stove. The

bucket came over the side and they washed the dishes. They didn't drink river water so they carried their drinking and cooking water with them."

Did your parents or grandparents ever have an adventure like Mrs. Horstmeyer? What did they do for fun? How did they spend hot, summer nights when they were growing up?



The scow schooner, *Charles W.*, ready to set sail from a Sausalito dock with a boat load of picnickers. NPS Photo, A2.20.683n

There's something special for kids every day this summer at the park, and the price is right to bring the whole family! It's always free to explore the exhibits in our Visitor Center and to stroll the Hyde Street Pier. To board our beautiful historic ships costs \$5 per adult; free for kids under 16. Admission is good for 7 days!

Check out these activities:

- Historic Waterfront Walking Tour
- Chantey Sing
- Costumed Living History Program
- Music of the Sea
- Caulking a Seam
- Maritime Crafts
- Sail Raising Demos



Illustration by Inge Wessels