

TEMECULA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

September 2018
Volume 18 Issue 9

It is our mission to identify, preserve and promote the historic legacy of the Temecula Valley and to educate the public about its historical significance.

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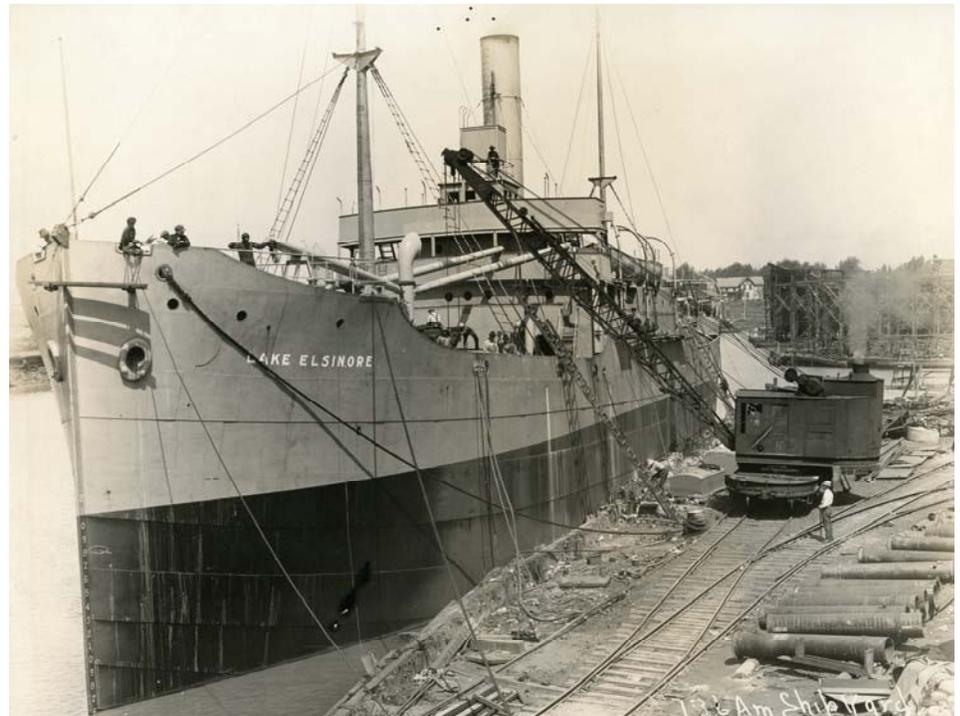
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A Publication of the

Temecula Valley Historical Society
P.O. Box 157
Temecula, CA 92593

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100th Anniversary of Commission

World War I Ship Named Lake Elsinore

By Rick Reiss

At half-past two p.m. on September 13, 1918 the United States Navy took possession of the USS Lake Elsinore and commissioned the cargo ship into the Naval Overseas Transportation Service, or N.O.T.S., during the twilight of "The Great War." The ship was promptly re-fitted and re-furnished in accordance with Navy standards and protocols.

While construction of the cargo ship began a little more than a year after America had entered World War I, in May of 1918 German U-boats had been detected in U.S. waters for the first time. On May 25, the German submarine U-151 sunk the schooners Hattie Dunn, Happaugue and damaged the schooner Edna off the coast of Virginia. These were the first U-boat attacks off of the U.S. coastline.

In the European Theater of the War, the spring 1918 German offensives on the Western Front had yielded continued stalemate and then an ultimate German retreat during the the Second Battle of Marne. French and American forces repelled the offensives and launched counter-offensives

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thereby continually pushing back German forces for the remainder of the war. Just as the USS Lake Elsinore was commissioned into service, U.S. General John J. “Black Jack” Pershing and his American doughboys attacked and routed retreating German forces at the Saint Mihiel salient and broke through German lines to capture the fortified city of Metz.

Coincidentally the USS Lake Elsinore entered service at the height of the 1918 Pandemic Flu. The international mass movement of millions of troops combined with the perils of trench warfare and the mass migration of millions more as refugees exacerbated the spread of the flu virus resulting in an estimated 50 million worldwide casualties. In the United States, approximately 675,000 perished during the flu outbreak. Some of the most contagious areas in America were the military “boot camps” and bases where large congregations of servicemen from geographically widespread American areas were concentrated into small fortress like conditions.

While the Allied armies were on the offensive and racking up victory after victory against the Central Powers, the Allies were voracious in their need for food, logistics, ammunition and weapons, and of course, coal. “King Coal” ruled the era, powered the Industrial Revolution, fueled the Naval fleets and Army supply trains, and provided the heat needed for the troops driving eastward on the Western Front.

Such were the conditions that the officers and crew found themselves facing when they commissioned and manned up the USS Lake Elsinore on that early autumn day in Montreal Canada.

The American Shipbuilding Company, a pre-eminent shipbuilder throughout the Great Lakes and based in Lorain Ohio, designed and built the SS Lake Elsinore. The United States Shipping Board (USSB) contracted American Shipbuilding to construct the Lake Elsinore and similar ships through a government run entity then known as the Emergency Fleet Corporation.

The USSB itself, now an obsolete and non-existent government board, was created in the early 20th century to revitalize America’s Merchant Marine infrastructure. The mission of the shipping board was radically changed upon the United States’ entry into WWI in April 1917. At this time in history, America’s Navy was quite diminished. The greatest needs of the Allied armies in the war theaters were for soldiers and logistics. This included a high demand for coal, which cargo ships like the USS Lake Elsinore provided for in steady and reliable abundance.

To meet these logistical demands, the USSB created the Emergency Fleet Corporation and proceeded to launch a massive shipbuilding program the likes of which had never before been seen in history up until that time. America’s WWI shipbuilding program would later serve as a blueprint for an even grander shipbuilding program when the U.S. would enter World War II just a few decades later.

By the time the Armistice was declared on November 11, 1918, the United States had constructed some 3000 ships for the war effort at a cost of \$5 billion. These ships were constructed in 150 shipyards located throughout the country while employing an estimated 300,000 workers.

The Emergency Fleet Corporation Design 1020 ships were built at the Great Lakes facilities and became widely known as the “Lakers” as the U.S. Shipping Board named all 35 ships in this class after American lakes. The 1020 design ships were specifically designed to fit and transit through the confines of the Welland Canal connecting Lake Erie (site of the Lorain Shipyard) to Lake Ontario. From Lake Ontario the newly built Lake Elsinore transited to Montreal where she was commissioned and manned by US Navy sailors.

The specifications of the USS Lake Elsinore classify the ship as a collier, i.e., a coal transport, type of ship with an



**THE SHIPS
ARE COMING**

UNITED STATES SHIPPING BOARD EMERGENCY FLEET CORPORATION

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overall length of 261'; a beam of 43' 6"; a single smokestack; two-single masts; three-raised hull islands; two-coal fired Scotch boilers rated for 180 psi steam; a reciprocating piston steam-driven main engine with a single screw (propeller) with a pitch of 12' 3" and a top speed of nine knots. In addition, the ship had a York refrigerating unit capable of producing one ton of ice per day, and a single 3" 50 caliber gun mounted on the aft deck of the ship. The ship's roster from December 3, 1918 reveals the ship's complement was ten officers and fifty-three enlisted crewmen. This roster would change and dwindle until the ship was de-commissioned and returned back to the USSB in October 1919.

Four days after commissioning, the USS Lake Elsinore deployed to Sydney, Nova Scotia on September 17, 1918. The collier was under the command of Lieutenant Commander Gustave Ernest Wiebe, USNRF, a Swedish emigrant and (presumed) naturalized American. The ship's Executive Officer and second in command was Lieutenant Roswell E. Spicer; the Chief Engineer was listed as Lieutenant James Joseph Fox. The remaining crew was composed of junior officers and an array of enlisted men with a variety of specialty ratings.

On October 8, 1918 the USS Lake Elsinore departed Nova Scotia and steamed ahead to Nantes, France arriving there on October 21. The Lake Elsinore was home ported at the U.S. Naval Base Cardiff, located in Wales. The ship delivered coal and other supplies via the English Channel by steaming from English ports such as Cardiff, Barry Road and Belfast to a variety of French ports and destinations including Roscanvel, Brest and Tonnay Charante.

The deck logs of the USS Lake Elsinore indicate that the ship delivered a total of 2439 tons of cargo to Europe during her deployment. There is no record of the ship encountering any hostiles or engaging any enemy combatant ships. Available ship's deck logs indicate that the Lake Elsinore carried out her missions with no incidents beginning from her deployment date of October 8 until the Armistice was declared in effect on November 11, 1918.

Yet, there was one post Armistice Day incident that occurred on the morning of November 23, 1918. While steaming up the Charante River the USS Lake Elsinore collided with the French steamship SS Vidar. The collision left virtually no damage whatsoever to the Lake Elsinore, but the Vidar sustained more moderate damage as the ships collided at an estimated 120-degree angle (from the vantage point of the Lake Elsinore). Subsequent investigations and US Navy boards of inquiry placed the blame on the Vidar for obstructing the channel while connected to an onshore cable while other reports concluded that both ships were at fault.

In the end, there was no disciplinary action taken against anyone. The incident had crossed the desk of then Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin Delano Roosevelt as memorandum indicating that he had reviewed and signed off on the paperwork in his then current position, and as Acting Secretary of the Navy. Other documentation indicates that the French had pressed the US Navy for damages and compensation but US government officials denied the request citing the collision investigation reports and results of the inquiry boards.

It was likely that diplomacy ruled the day in regards to this collision at Tonnay Charante. The damages to both ships were minimal; in the case of the Lake Elsinore the damage was actually negligible. As the United States and France were both allies in The Great War, it seems evident that this incident faded quickly as there were more pressing issues for the Allies as Europe and the Middle East faced a post-war recovery and a massive political re-configuration.

For her service to the war effort, the USS Lake Elsinore was awarded with the World War I Victory Medal (at right). After The Great War, the medal was referred to as The Victory Medal. After World War II, the medal was re-designated as the WWI Victory Medal. Those officers and crewman who were with ship's company up until Armistice Day, November 11, 1918, received the award and were authorized to wear the medal. The Lake Elsinore's officers and crew were also entitled to wear a Navy operational clasp on the medal in which the metal bar would read "TRANSPORT."

On May 5, 1919 the USS Lake Elsinore was transferred to an Army account from which she continued transporting coal and other



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WWI Cargo Ship Named Lake Elsinore

materials for the war recovery and de-mobilization effort. Sometime during the early summer of 1919 Lieutenant Commander K.J. Powers replaced the Lake Elsinore's commanding officer Lieutenant Commander Wiebe. It was left to Captain Powers to oversee the de-mobilization and de-commissioning of the "Laker" class collier.

On August 26, 1919 the USS Lake Elsinore departed US Naval Base Cardiff for Saint Nazaire, France for her last war related supply run. On September 10, 1919 the Lake Elsinore departed Saint Nazaire with orders to report to the N.O.T.S. shipyards in Brooklyn, New York. The collier arrived in New York on September 25, 1919 upon which the ship was then inspected and inventoried.

On October 4, 1919 the USS Lake Elsinore was officially de-commissioned from the US Navy and returned back to the inventory of the U.S. Shipping Board. As she was no longer a U.S. Navy vessel, her name reverted back to SS Lake Elsinore. Little more is known of the collier's fate other than in 1926 she was sold to the Ford Motor Company for scrap.

The officers and crew of the USS Lake Elsinore performed their duty with honor, efficiency and ingenuity. In the words of Franklin Delano Roosevelt: "To the men who took part in this great work too much credit cannot be given." For the people of Lake Elsinore California, the USS Lake Elsinore should easily come as a source of pride and reverence for a namesake ship that diligently answered the call of our nation in time of war.

Donations Needed for Annual Dinner

TVHS is seeking donations of event tickets, goods, services, or destinations, to be auctioned or raffled at our Annual Dinner on 11/17/18. Funds raised go to restore and preserve Temecula's historic past and fund college scholarships. New items of value are sought, i.e. balloon ride tickets, golf, hotel vouchers, gift certificates or items from local merchants. Items will be combined to create baskets worth a minimum of \$50. Auction and raffle items have been a staple of TVHS' ability to fund projects preserving Temecula's wonderful history. To donate, please contact Shari Crall at 951-323-6509 or sscrall@gmail.com.

All donations must be received by October 1.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Sunday, Sept. 2 — Sunday Fundays at Vail HQ each Sunday 11 am to 4 pm. Demonstrations, vendors, music, rides on train and stagecoach. Family fun free. First Sundays Mompreneurs are vendors with their home-based business products. Also be sure to visit the VaRRA folks in the cookhouse antique store.

Friday, Sept. 14 — 7:30 p.m. at the Vail HQ stage — Friday Night Movies "Coraline" Free outdoor summer activity, family friendly movies. Bring lawn chairs and blankets.

Saturday, Sept. 15 — 10 am to 3 pm "Western Days" to be held in Sam Hicks Monument Park, activities and the Old Town Temecula Gunfighters to perform bank robbery at noon in Old Town.

Wednesday, Sept. 19 — Tour of San Pasqual Battlefield State Historic Park, near Escondido. Meet at Red Barn for carpooling and 9 a.m. departure.

Monday, Sept. 24 — 6:00 p.m. monthly program of the Temecula Valley Historical Society to be held at the Little Temecula History Center (Red Barn), the Camp Pendleton Historical Society will present a program about *Las Flores and the Magee Family*.

Friday, Sept. 28 — 6 pm to 10 pm. Last Friday each Month May through October "Starlight Bazaar" at Vail HQ. Night markets with vendors, live music, carriage rides, displays, and entertainers.

**** Mark your calendar ****

for the TVHS Annual Dinner

Saturday, November 17th

at the Assistance League

See below, more info to follow.

NOTABLE WOMEN NEWS

On September 10th, Julie Gilbert will perform as Jean Bethell for P.E.O. Chapter FE at Wilson Creek Winery.

TVHS member, Michele Elling, will become a Notable Woman of Temecula in 2019, and will portray Edna Swanguen. The Swanguen's owned Hall's Café for years.

TVHS member, Shelley Leddy, will be joining the NWOT in 2019 as well. Shelley will portray Catherine Fernald who owned a photography studio in Temecula. Her husband, Frank Fernald, owned an automobile repair shop. There is much more to the story...so stay tuned.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Thank you for renewing your membership:

Ann Woodward

Spotlight on Members – Featuring – Duane Preimsberger

Duane was born in Little Falls, Minnesota, a place with only two months, August and Winter. After WWII he and his family moved to So. CA and he grew up in Van Nuys. After graduating from Notre Dame High School and knowing absolutely everything that was needed, he gained employment with the So. California Gas Company. Soon, he became very familiar with ditches, pipeline installation and the workings of an Acme shovel. One August day while peering over the lip of a ditch he had cleverly crafted he happened to see an air conditioned Los Angeles County Sheriff's patrol car glide past his ditch. The guy driving the car was neat, clean and cool and at that moment, sweat drenched Duane experienced an epiphany. Soon after, he filed an application for the position of Deputy Sheriff and after being fired by the Gas Co. for doing so, he was accepted as a trainee. On October 19, 1961, Duane received an \$89.00 a month raise to help support his wife and two kids, \$489.00 was quite a step up from \$100.00 per week.

In 1961, his time at the Sheriff's Academy acquainted him with a training program based upon boot camp and in no time he was running through the tortuous hills of East Los Angeles, doing countless pushups on the Academy grinder and sitting through hours of classroom instruction as he learned the ins and outs of police work. His weekends during the rigorous 16 week training program included at least two shifts spent riding in the back seat of a patrol car watching real police work being done. Receiving his Academy diploma from then Sheriff Peter J. Pitchess at the Hall of Administration in downtown Los Angeles was a very proud day for him.

His thirty four year long career with the largest and most diverse Sheriff's Department in the world, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) included a variety of assignments in Custody, Patrol, Detectives, Administration and a few provided unique opportunities. Duane has delivered several babies in the days before paramedics. He helped police many large events including the Rose Parades and Watts Summer Festivals, the 1984 Olympic Games, raging out of control brush fires and the devastation following earthquakes. He and his wife Judy, who was also a LASD Deputy Sheriff, formed a fund raising and blood donation chapter for the City of Hope, a research and treatment facility specializing in catastrophic illnesses. It is the first law enforcement chapter of its kind in the Nation and it has raised several million dollars and arranged the donation of gallons of blood.

When he retired in 1995, Duane was the Assistant Sheriff of Los Angeles County, overseeing a budget of almost one billion dollars, the delivery of law enforcement services through 18,000 personnel to 3 million + residents. Additionally, the LASD operates the world's largest coun-

ty jail and provides civil law enforcement to a huge court system. The only really unfortunate experience he had as a member of the LASD was the loss of his left eye caused by breathing cancer causing fumes a number of times while on duty.

Since retiring, Duane and Judy have made their home in Temecula and have been involved in a number of community activities as well as enjoying the beauty of the area and an occasional visit to tastings in the Wine Country carefully monitored by Duane's reluctance to incur a drunk driving charge.



Duane showing trophy won at a recent Peg Leg Smith Liars Contest held on the Saturday closest to April Fools Day in Borrego Springs each year.

100 Years Ago in Temecula

Selected events from Lake Elsinore Valley Press, Temecula Gossip Column – September 1918

Issue of September 6, 1918

Carmelita Angel and Julia Vejar arrived in town the first of the week to spend a few days at Pechanga.

Henry Gray left for San Diego Monday afternoon. He will spend a few days there looking after business interests.

Mr. and Mrs. Lyn Smith spent a week's vacation at Whitewater fishing. Mr. Smith expected to take a longer vacation but being shorthanded at the meat market he could take only a week. Business before pleasure.

Alfred Knott has engaged for his garage, Rehkopf of Los Angeles he is one of the best mechanics around the country. He has had ten years of experiences and can repair any kind of automobile in good shape. He is one of those mechanics that can be trusted with the most delicate parts of a car. He is here to stay. He has been here a week and already has his hands full. He has rented the Welty's house and will move his family soon.

Elmer O'Connell returned from Los Angeles the last of the week where he spent a few days looking after business interests.

Mrs. Pedro Miranda who has been visiting Mr. and Mrs. George Maruffo for the past week left for her home in San Jacinto Monday.

Mr. and Mrs. Albert Banks made a trip to Highland the last of the week with a party of women from Pechanga who went there on business.

Mrs. J. E. Freeman and children, Mrs. Francisca Escallier and R. M. Estrada spent part of Labor Day in the country.

Smith and Dirr both carpenters of Elsinore are building a church at Pechanga.

Luis Moren spent a few days of last week at San Bernardino and Riverside.

Mrs. Dunlap and the baby are this week guest of Miss Bessie Escallier.

This week Henry Gray had a hard luck with his trucks while hauling rock from Pala. Both his trucks were damaged at the Pala grade. They were left there and towed in the next day to the garage.

Frank Tripp is building a house on the north side of town.

Mrs. Mac Machado returned home from Los Angeles the last of the week. She spent a few days there visiting friends.

Mr. and Mrs. Lyn Smith last week moved from town to the Cantarini place and are occupying the house where the late C. P. Shumate lived.

Miss Camilla Trujillo returned home from Los Angeles the last of the week. She had a two weeks' visit at the home of her uncle and aunt.

Mr. and Mrs. Banks and children spent Sunday at the home of their daughter and son-in-law Mr. and Mrs. J. Rodriguez near Warner's ranch.

Ole Larsen is employed by the beet factory of Anaheim. He is taking care of the weighing of the beets as they come in.

Issue of September 13, 1918

A.R. Fredricks of Nuevo has been employed by Alfred Knott in his blacksmith shop.

Mrs. Irene Noble, who for the past few months has been keeping house for Eli E. Barnett, left for Riverside the latter part of the week.

Mr. and Mrs. Banks spent a few days visiting at the home of their daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Rodriguez at Santa Ysabel last week.

George Street of Los Angeles is this week visiting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Adrian B. Barnett.

Mrs. Nieves Mouren and Mrs. Rosa Arviso and children spent Sunday at Pala.

P. T. Hoffman, superintendent of the Pala Indian agency, was a business caller in town the first of the week.

Mr. and Mrs. James O. Freeman and children spent Sunday motoring through the country.

Roy G. Fernald is the happy owner of a new run-about Chevrolet. He bought it through the agency of Alfred Knott.

Elmer O'Connell left for his home at Whittier the first of the week, where he expects to remain for a few days transacting business.

George Maruffo left Monday for San Jacinto taking with him the trucks that were used to move his house some time ago.

At the Pauba Ranch a Mexican baby died Sunday night and interment was made at Temecula cemetery Monday afternoon.

Charles McVicker and H. D. Wilson went deer hunting to the mountains the last of the week. They were unsuccessful.

Alvin Smith, who recently enlisted in the navy and is stationed at San Pedro, came home the last of the week and will spend a few days with his folks when he will return to camp again.

Pete Escallier Jr. left for Riverside the last of the week and from there he was sent to Camp Kearny. Pete is one of Uncle Sam's Liberty soldier boys.

Last week a valuable horse died belonging to George Maruffo.

Mr. Burdett, the stage driver from San Diego to Los Angeles, was taken ill on the road on his way from San Diego. He stopped in town and was so sick that he could not go any further. The Murrieta Hot Springs doctor was called and soon after Mrs. Burdett and the doctor from Escondido came and immediately the sick man was taken to his home at Escondido. Since then we have heard that he was a little better. All his friends here wish him a speedy recovery.