

Orders For Mare Island

By Ernest D. Wichels

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We oldsters often date ourselves by the fashions we wear, by the tunes we hum, or by the furniture we insist on keeping. Today we are going to date the Mare Island Naval Shipyard. Most everyone knows that our great naval plant is 109 years old but it is interesting to read the thousands of Commandants' Orders and Notices which serve as milestones of the past century.

HORSES AND COWS

Today's traffic is concerned with speeding violations, parking problems, Honda motorcycle exhausts, etc. But the pre-automobile days had problems, too. On July 20, 1870, Commandant John R. Goldsborough issued General Order No. 54, "Fast galloping through streets of the Navy Yard is strictly prohibited." The transition from horse to . gasoline gave rise to other worries. Rear Adm. Hugo Osterhaus on Dec. 22, 1910, issued a General Order, "Automobiles will not be driven within the Navy Yard grounds at a greater speed than six miles per hour. Whenever vehicles drawn by horses are approached, the speed will be reduced; and, if there is any indication of animals being unduly frightened, the automobiles will be stopped."

Commandant Parrott on Jan. 23, 1872, issued regulations on the quota of horses and cows by residents of Navy Yard quarters. He ordered that senior officers "will not keep more than two cows and one horse; other persons living on the Yard, who now keep private cattle, are limited to one cow, each." When one considers that junior officers were most apt to have the younger children, and more of them, we wonder why the older officers had a higher quota of cows.

CARE OF GROUNDS

In April of 1911 Admiral Osterhaus ordered that no officer could change the general horticultural plan of the front yard without the Commandant's permission, but concern for gardens and animals appears in many earlier instructions. Commandant George E. Belknap on Oct. 22, 1886, decreed that "no manure is to be taken from the public stables without the knowledge and authority of my office." Commandant F. M. Bennett on Sept. 1, 1915, reminded all Yard residents that it was their "responsibility to perform all work of a sanitary nature in keeping cattle yards, chicken houses, etc., clean at their own expense, and also that any unusual work required, such as labor as burying dead scows, etc., must be at the expense of the owner."

PRINTING PRESS

Mare Island received its first printing press from the Navy Department on Jan. 12, 1869, and Commodore James Alden advised the Yard offices that "Hereafter all letterheads, envelopes, etc, will be printed here. The office for whom printing is asked, will furnish the paper or envelopes."

HOLIDAYS WERE GIVEN

Employees were granted holidays for all unusual events, and guns were invariably fired. One outstanding occasion was for the funeral of President Lincoln. On May 8, 1869, Commandant Craven ordered a holiday, full dress of ships in the harbor, and a 21-gun salute so that Mare Island could join in "a great gala-day taking place in the cities of San Francisco and Sacramento. in commemoration of the connection of this coast with the Atlantic States by rail, stamping the Enterprise as one of the greatest achievements of modern times."

Another holiday, which leaves us puzzled because of the date, was ordered on Oct. 21, 1892, by Rear Adm. John Irwin. (Incidentally, Senior Mare Island Employee Irwin H. Whitthorne is named for Commandant Irwin.) The Order read: "Friday, the 21st instant, being the Four Hundredth Anniversary of the Discovery of America by Columbus, will be observed as a Holiday, without loss of pay to employees. Ships will be dressed, with the Spanish and Italian flags displayed side by side at the main." Today we observe Oct. 12 as Columbus Day.

POLITICS

For more than half a century Mare Island employees have been restricted in their political activity. Exceptions are made, such as non-partisan elections, but on Oct. 24, 1910, Commandant Osterhaus said in a Notice: "Authority has been received from the Secretary of the Navy for employees of this yard to participate in the local movement towards reform on the 'saloon' and 'tenderloin' issues in Vallejo."

SUNDAY SPORTS

We now move from the area of saloons, etc., to a more spiritual realm. On Feb. 6, 1888, Rear Admiral Belknap issued an order, in his own handwriting, "The playing of baseball, lawn tennis or other sports of Sundays on this Island is hereby prohibited."

There is more to this—the enforcement of the rule. At that time the Chaplain on Mare Island was the beloved Adam A. McAlister. Chaplain McAlister took it onto himself, according to our information, to personally enforce the Sunday ban on outdoor sports.

Several Vallejo pioneer citizens tell us of these days, notably the dean of Vallejo's active attorneys, Russell F. O'Hara. But while the padre dampened the ardor of offending teenage baseball players on the Sabbath, he didn't hesitate to use the billiard table located in his own home.

NO COFFEE BREAKS

Recent Mare Island Shipyard Commanders have had to contend with the abuses of the coffee break. It's an old, old story—told in another way. Capt. H. T. Mayo in October of 1911, deplored that men were proceeding to the Gate from five to 15 minutes, or more, before whistle-blow. He wrote "Men not willing to work the full eight hours required will be considered as not desiring to remain in Government employ, and action will be taken accordingly." Rear Admiral Craven on June 7, 1869, wrote: "Any employee will be discharged who neglects his work for the purpose of holding intercourse with others on private or political matters during working hours."

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