



the LOOKOUT

SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE OF NEW YORK



JANUARY 1967



At 32

I wish I were a Viking bold
To rove upon the waves,
With light abandon plunder gold
And treasure from the caves;

To join the frenzied, fighting crush
As broadswords clash on shields;
To smudge the sunset's gaudy flush
With smoke from torch-burned fields;

Behind the dragon prow to stand
And taste the spuming sea;
To know the praise of comrades and
Retire at thirty-three!

Virginia E. Bradford

the LOOKOUT

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COVER: Figurehead carvings from the *Merrie Monarch*, the *Lady
Edmonton*, *HSM Imaum* and the *HMS Urgent*.

The Rise & Fall Of Figureheads

by Raymond Schuessler

Historically, the practice of decorating ship's bows goes way, way back, probably before the dawn of recorded history. Its origin likely was religiously inspired. To primitive man, a voyage over the "far horizon" was an excursion into the supernatural world. A figurehead, he believed, would guard his ship against such unknown forces.

The early symbol of a figurehead simply meant that the vessel had life of a sort. For instance, the old legend of Jason's search for the Golden Fleece in his ship, *Argo*, tells us of a "speaking" prow to whom Jason talked. The Chinese used huge eyes on the prow of their ships to guard them from evil spirits.

It was probably an ancient ship's ram that was first shaped into an artistic figure. One Roman war galley of 300 B.C. had a bow constructed of sharp prongs for ramming enemy ships. It also had a boar's head ornament, slightly behind the prongs on the bow, which served to identify the ship and also to prevent the spikes in the bow from remaining tightly wedged in the side of the enemy ship. (The custom continued on American ships until about 1860.)





Besides the usual ornamental figureheads, some ships in certain eras — mainly Roman ships and the pirate ships of the Spanish main — used a *human* figurehead. When a prisoner grew unruly, he was simply tied to the ramming rod at the bow and thrust into an enemy's ship.

The Norse ships were known as "serpent" or "dragon" ships because of the figurehead which normally adorned the top of their bow post. This dragon ship was a ferocious looking thing and, in fact, resembled a huge sea serpent in motion: The shields hung over the gunwale certainly looked like serpent scales, and the oars moving in rhythm at her side gave her the appearance of a giant caterpillar.

Animals were primarily used as figureheads until about 1400 A.D. At this time, the figures of saints first appeared. In the 17th and 18th centuries, both the British and Dutch used their national lions, and in the 19th century, the Spanish used figureheads of the Holy Family and the saints.

Old time sailors regarded their ships' figureheads with a feeling of virtual veneration. They were extremely superstitious about any mishaps to the figure, believing it was an evil omen.

The figurehead of Tecumseh, which originally adorned the *U.S.S. Delaware* (launched 1820), is now on the grounds of the Naval Academy, Annapolis,

Maryland. Here it enjoys the high-sounding title, "God of 2.5", the Midshipman's passing grade. Future Admirals toss pennies at Tecumseh for luck on the way to examinations and for victory over West Point in athletic contests.

Figureheads had to be functional as well as attractive. They had to be sturdy and fit the space well; no detail could be carved which might hold water. With these limitations, it took extra fine talent to turn out a handsome piece.

The British used oak and elm wood mostly, which lasted longer than the softer pine woods the Americans used. The figure was usually made from one piece of wood, but in larger, more elaborate carvings, the arms sometimes were fastened on.

After a carver had been hired, the contractor would often demand to see



a preliminary sketch in order to judge the type of design and pose.

After the master carver blocked out the figure on a piece of wood, the apprentice did the rough hewing out. The master then took over for the finer details. The carving finished, the figure was soaked in oil to retard decay and

elegantly painted. Sometimes, female models tenderly undraped about the shoulders were used, but they were scrupulously attended by a chaperon who sat knitting nearby with a watchful eye.

The cost varied and often depended, at least for Navy ships, on the number of guns involved. For instance, in 1800, a carving for a 74-gun ship would cost



about \$700; 44 guns, \$600, and a sloop, \$200. Some charged 60 cents per ton for non-Navy ships.

America developed its own distinct guild of ship carvers as early as 1750, when the demand was heavy along the seacoast shipyards. At one time, there were 400 artisans at work.

One of the most famous carving centers in America was Commercial Street in Boston, along the salty wharves. The shops, usually located upstairs in moldy lofts, were busy factories of chisel, hammer and wood chips.

Here, sailors and sea folk gathered to relate the lore of the Seven Seas. The figurehead was thus actually christened like wine in the history and tradition of centuries past. Mark Twain loved to gossip in a ship carving shop and spent many hours there, especially in the shop of the famed carver, John Bellamy, in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

The craft passed down from master to young apprentice and continued

from Revolutionary days until about 1900. An apprentice usually worked five years before opening his own shop.

Certainly, not all carvings were things of beauty, especially when detached from the ship. Figureheads were built to be part of a ship and must be so judged. Even so, some were monstrous even when put in a church.

There were some giants of artistic talent among the carvers: William Luke, Robertson, Bellamy, the Dodges and the Skillens of Boston and many more. The honor of best could well be disputed for ages; but perhaps one of the candidates for "Michaelangelo" of the trade was William Rush of Philadelphia, who came into prominence late in the 18th century.

He was magnificent not only in his craftsmanship, but in the soul he imparted to his figures. His work would be outstanding even in famous museums. Rush is one of the very few who actually modeled Washington from life, and his famous wood carving of the first president now stands in Independence Hall.

He was so precise with a chisel that he carved anatomical models to be used in college classes in medicine.

When not busy on the profit-making figureheads, the local ship carver would make fancy doorways, mantels, furniture, church figures and other domestic pieces. When work became scarce, he would often travel to other seacoast towns in search of a job and would sometimes hire out to a master craftsman. All ship carvers were somehow well known to one another.

What happened to ship carvers when the ships gave up figures just before 1900? Many turned to carving cigar store Indians and figures for the gaudy circus wagons.

The remains of this early American art can still be found in the museums of the land, a genuine part of our heritage and a proud contribution to the beginning of American culture.

**fourteen
thousand
passengers
on a
Victory
ship!**

The S.S. *Meredith Victory*, a standard Victory-type ship built during World War II, reactivated from the National Defense Fleet to carry supplies for the United Nations forces during the Korean conflict, steamed slowly into a small bay in the island of Koji Do, about fifty miles south of Pusan, Korea, and dropped her anchor. The time was Christmas eve, 1950.

The ship was a strange sight. Thousands of people filled every bit of her open-deck space. She looked more like a giant barge loaded with a cargo of humanity than the commonplace cargo ship she was. Below decks and out of sight were thousands more of Korean men, women and children.

She had 14,000 refugees aboard!



Incredible Rescue at Hungnam

by
George R. Berens

Now, a Victory ship is a freighter of moderate size. A number of them were converted to troop transports during World War II. As such they carried about 1600 troops, in addition to a crew of about eighty men. Any seaman who served aboard one of these freighters-converted-to-transport during the war will agree that those ships were crowded when loaded with their complement of troops.

The *Meredith Victory* was not crowded; she was jam-packed with humanity.

On this quiet Christmas eve she had completed the *greatest rescue operation by a single ship in history*.

It all began at Hungnam, a small port on the northeast coast of Korea. Chaos was there. The limited harbor was full of ships and landing craft. The town was packed with thousands of American and Allied troops, and thousands upon thousands of Korean refugees, all fleeing the onslaught of North Korean communists, and the Chinese Reds who had recently swarmed across the Manchurian border to drive back the United Nations forces who had advanced into the communist territory in an invasion that had begun in mid-September with amphibious landings at Inchon.

It was rugged, mountainous territory into which General MacArthur's army had forced its way. There were few roads, and transport of supplies for the advancing troops was a major problem. Then the Chinese hordes had swept down from the north, crossing the Yalu River in overpowering numbers.

The United Nations forces had been forced to retreat, and, with winter blizzards sweeping the mountains, they fell back on Hungnam. A defense perimeter was established well outside of the port. Supported by big guns of U.S. Navy vessels and carrier-based planes, the holding troops fought to halt the enemy advance while a massive effort was mounted to evacuate the

fighting forces and their equipment from Hungnam.

The operation resembled the Dunkirk exploit of World War II. The advancing communist forces had threatened death to all the civilian population of the territory who they claimed had aided the American and Allied forces.

These civilians, poorly clad and with scanty possessions, without food, fled from their villages and came into Hungnam. It was a scene of desperation, with the scores of ships taking on the troops and their equipment, with guns blasting and bombs detonating.

Into the turmoil came the *Meredith Victory* under the command of Captain Leonard P. LaRue, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His was one of the ships picked out by harassed authorities ashore to take aboard some of the Korean refugees in an attempt to save these condemned people before the rear-guard action was terminated, and the port capitulated to the advancing communist horde.

Captain LaRue ordered his officers to get as many of these terrified fugitives on his ship as possible. Landing craft and crash boats ferried them out from the shore, and up the gangway, jacob's ladders, scramble nets, and even hanging ropes, they swarmed aboard the ship — to them the Ark of Rescue.

Into the cargo holds and 'tween-decks, into stores compartments, into deck houses, crew and officer's quarters they were packed; and when the interior spaces were full they jammed themselves into all open deck areas, the last of them even clinging to stanchions and rigging above the decks.

When the *Meredith Victory* finally hove up anchor and departed from Hungnam there were almost *seven hundred tons* of humanity aboard, and not one area of the whole ship, excepting the bridge and the chain locker, both kept clear for safety, were free of human cargo.

(Continued on page 14)



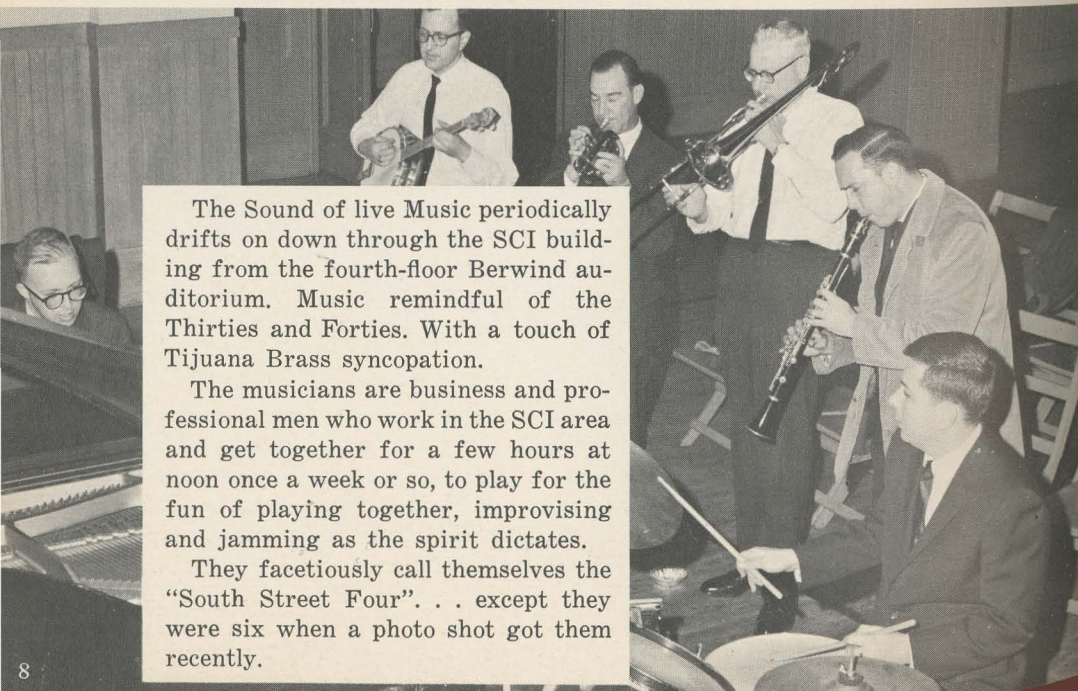
A veteran associate of SCI's administrative staff, Leslie C. Westerman observed his fortieth year of service to the Institute a short while back, a tenure believed to mark a record in the organization.

He is presently general manager. Possessed of the ability of almost total recall, he is the resource upon which both new and old staff members rely when seeking information on the origins of SCI customs and practices.

A staunch booster of the University of Colorado from which he was graduated, he was chagrined last fall to witness its defeat during the University homecoming football game. While working in a Colorado gold mine during his undergraduate days, Mr. Westerman severely injured his leg, an injury which still gives him some trouble.

We are a kaleidoscope of the waterfront

A look-in on the world's largest shore home for merchant seamen...



The Sound of live Music periodically drifts from the fourth-floor Berwind auditorium. Music remindful of the Thirties and Forties. With a touch of Tijuana Brass syncopation.

The musicians are business and professional men who work in the SCI area and get together for a few hours at noon once a week or so, to play for the fun of playing together, improvising and jamming as the spirit dictates.

They facetiously call themselves the "South Street Four". . . except they were six when a photo shot got them recently.



Those familiar with SCI's history will remember that one of its earliest floating churches was the second floating Church of Our Saviour, moored in the East River off Manhattan from 1870 until 1911.

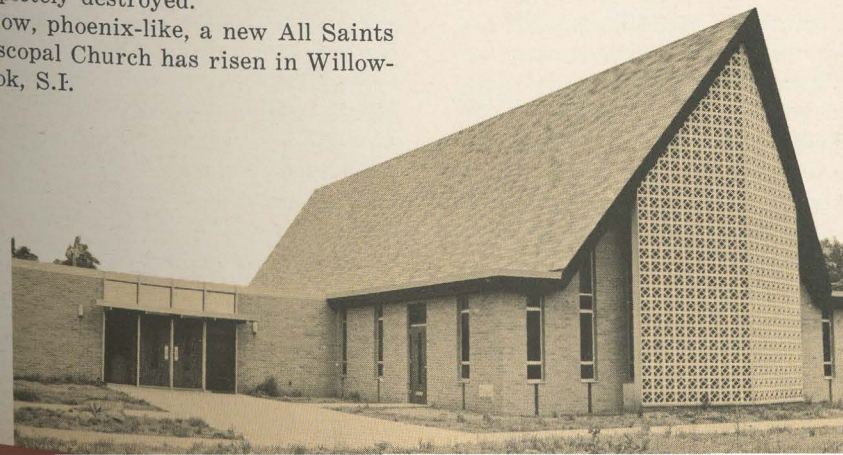
In that year it was towed to Mariners Harbor, Staten Island, and in 1914 it was placed ashore to become All Saints Episcopal Church in Richmond, S.I.

In 1958, the day after Christmas, the historic church caught fire and was completely destroyed.

Now, phoenix-like, a new All Saints Episcopal Church has risen in Willowbrook, S.I.

The influence of the old floating church still shows in the new structure. Its peaked roof and simple yet handsome natural wood beams, which rise in an inverted V, are reminiscent of the floating church.

Last year it was selected as the winner in the category of Religious Buildings in the annual competition of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce.





The Year Ahead

Back in 1966, some of our readers may recall, we asked if *The Lookout's* women readers might not like the publication to contain some pieces relating to what is generally termed "women's interest".

We had a considerable response to this query — mostly from our female readers. And for which we thank you all. In effect, the ladies urged us to adhere to the traditional content — stories about the seaMEN. Not one letter, as we remember, indicated a desire for the "women's angle".

Hence, in view of the expressions received, *The Lookout* will maintain the same editorial policy during 1967 as in the past.

We are, though, beginning with this issue, experimenting with a more open body type format than used previously. Easier to read. We think it may be an improvement, but you may not. We'd like to hear from you on this. Staunch believers in the "democratic process" and all that. Some call it "consensus."

The Editor

The ship was not unknown to me; I had previously seen her in the U.S. And she had won first place in the Atlantic race among all ships participating in "Operation Sail", the event culminating in New York. All of Norway's training ships, including the *Sorlandet* and the *Statsraad Lahmkuhl*, have been in U.S. waters many times.

A visit with the captain of the *Christian Radich* was most pleasant. He was Captain Asbjorn Espenak, who invited me to have dinner with him aboard.

During the course of the visit he pointed out that his ship had been awarded several plaques and trophies, including some from New York and Chicago.

The Norwegian trainees are young boys ranging in age from fourteen to seventeen years. They come not only from the coastal regions but from inland as well. The three-months course includes an ocean-going cruise.

Captain Espenak feels there is nothing quite like sea training aboard a sailing ship. He said many masters now in command of large modern ships had their first preliminary training on the *Christian Radich*; that many come back for a nostalgic visit.

Before leaving I took photo shots of the ship and passed out some copies of *The Lookout* to the crew, also extending the courtesies of SCI to the crew members should they ever come to New York.

—Thor Dahl

zil, Japan, Yugoslavia, Chile, Italy, France, Germany, Russia and Indonesia. The United States has, among others, the beautiful full-rigger, the "Eagle".

This past summer, while on vacation in my native Norway, I visited Oslo. There I spied one of the Norwegian training vessels, *Christian Radich*, docked near the City Hall. I am a ship-visitor for SCI, so what is more natural than that I would stop aboard the *Christian Radich* for a visit?

Sailing ships are still utilized as training vessels for career seamen by most of the maritime nations. This seems to be the practice even though it is unlikely that few — if any — of the trainees will ever again man a sailing vessel, except for pleasure purposes, after completing a course in this special kind of seamanship.

Among the countries which maintain sailing ships for training purposes are: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Bra-

Phantom of the Arctic

It was in November, 1931, after a heavy three-day gale, during which no one dared venture outside, that men in a makeshift cabin on the northwest coast of Alaska realized that their ship had vanished.

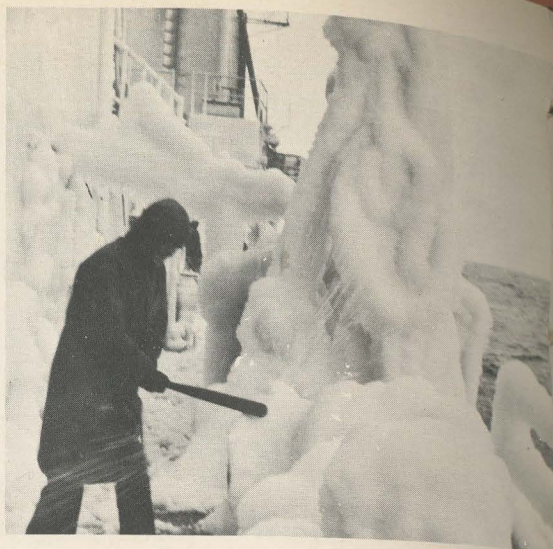
They had, of course, expected her to remain ice-bound where she had been beset, off Franklin Point near Cape Barrow, most northerly tip on the continent, until the ice went late in the following summer. Now, however, as she was no longer visible, she had clearly been crushed and sunk under the millions of tons of ice heaped over her anchorage during the gale.

This, they thought, was the end of the poor old *Baychimo*. They were wrong — very much so.

The story began with the departure of the Hudson's Bay Company's steamer, *Baychimo* from Vancouver in the summer on her yearly mission to the Company's trading-posts along the desolate Arctic coast. Captain Cornwell and his men knew it would as usual be an arduous, not to say hazardous, trip.

But his 1300-ton steel vessel was stoutly built, with a raised, reinforced stem and, under normal conditions in those high altitudes, was well able to take harsh treatment from the ice. However, this time, conditions were to be anything but normal, had he known it; and this was actually to be Cornwell's last trip in the *Baychimo*.

For a time, all went well, except that the ice was more than usually severe,

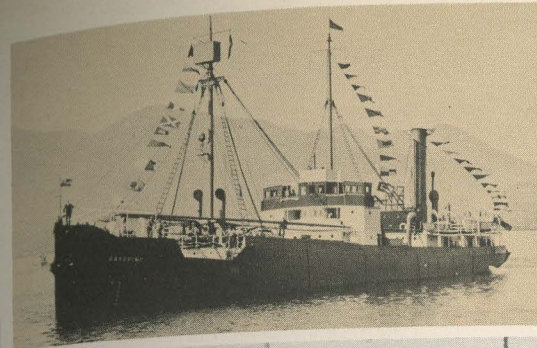


and the ship was often delayed by it, a fact that began to cause uneasiness. However, the itinerary was hurried along as far as possible, compatible with safety, and at each station supplies were landed and pelts taken in without delay.

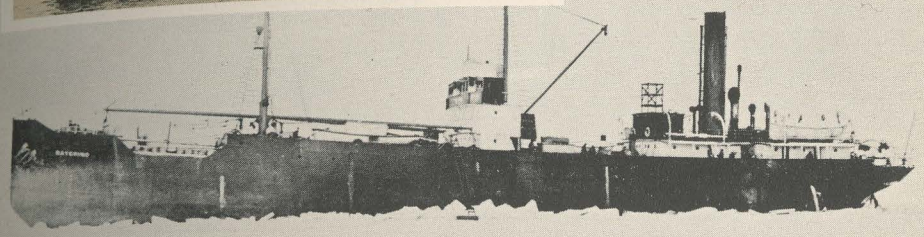
Herschel Island was reached on August 26, and after discharging there with dispatch, Cornwell rammed his way through to Fort Hearne at the mouth of the Coppermine River. But from there, in view of the conditions, Cornwell decided to make for home without fully completing his task. Posts to the eastward of Coppermine would be supplied by local schooners, and remote Fort Collinson in Victoria Land would have stores, mail and Christmas fare delivered by aeroplane.

After pushing his way back through 400 miles of scattered ice, Cornwell was relieved when Point Barrow was weathered, and only another hundred miles separated the ship from open water. Unfortunately, *Baychimo* soon ran into vast, impassable icefields which had been driven hard against the Alaskan coast by prolonged westerlies.

All he could do now was wait for



by
Cuthbert
Bridgwater



favorable easterly winds to open a passage along the coast; and as days dragged on, he began to question whether they would come before really cold weather cemented the floes and completely boxed the ship in.

October arrived with a temperature of ten below, and with new ice making fast and still no sign of a change of wind. By the tenth, it became sadly clear that *Baychimo* was hard beset and immovable until next summer. Cornwell accordingly made arrangements to fly to Nome, 600 miles away, as many hands as he could spare.

Those left behind saw their shipmates depart, high above the desolate Alaskan mountains, with mixed feelings. But their general spirits were high, they were in good shape, and, when they might, played football on the ice.

Apart from the danger of their ship being crushed, it was clearly impossible to heat the ship during the long winter night ahead. So Cornwell and his men built a rough cabin ashore, about half-a-mile from the ship, using hatch covers, tarpaulins and timber

from the ship's lining; and they stocked it with extra stores, food and heavy clothes carried for just such an emergency.

These supplies were later supplemented by reindeer meat from Eskimo herders and luxuries sent by plane, while the ship's radio set up ashore kept the men in touch with civilization.

One morning they awoke to find that the *Baychimo* had vanished — like a ghost. No trace of her remained.

On finding that their ship had disappeared, they were naturally saddened and greatly puzzled; but, making the best of matters, settled down to put in the winter as best they might, in sight of the sea, frozen solid far towards Siberia.

But the *Baychimo* was not done with yet. Before long an Eskimo reported her drifting northwards, fast in the midst of an ice-pan. And once again Cornwell thought she had gone for good into the Arctic night; and once again he was wrong.

Next spring, he and his remaining men were flown back to Fairbanks, and *Baychimo* was officially given up as

(Continued on following page)

lost. However, soon after Cornwell and the others had left their cabin, a trapper spotted the elusive *Baychimo* not far from the Alaskan shore; and a year later Eskimos in kayaks boarded her — and got the fright of their lives. A blizzard blowing up, it was a week or more before the scared Eskimos dared to leave the frozen, foodless ship, by when they were half-starved.

Later that year, the *Baychimo* was seen and also boarded by a party of explorers. Next autumn she was back again more or less where she started. At times drifting in open water but more often beset, her survival seemed

a miracle. Nevertheless, she was continually reported, though, like a jack-o-lantern, she always avoided capture. During the war, she was sighted by a ship whose Master managed to scramble on board her; but once again hard weather and threats of besetting ice foiled his thoughts of salvage.

Since then *Baychimo* has been seen on many occasions by aircraft, Eskimos, explorers or traders, ghosting for thousands of miles, alone and deserted. She was last seen in the Beaufort Sea a few years ago and may be afloat yet.

Who knows?

(Condensed from *Nautical Magazine*)

INCREDIBLE RESCUE AT HUNGNAM (Continued from page 7)

Frightened, scrawny, ragged, shivering human cargo. Captain LaRue wrote afterwards in his voyage report, "The nearness of Christmas carries my thoughts to the Holy Family — how they, too, were cold and without shelter. Like the crucified Christ, these good people suffer through the actions of guilty men."

The Captain was so stirred by the horrors of the evacuation that memories of it were partly responsible for a major decision he subsequently made, on his return to the United States.

Down the coast the *Meredith Victory* steamed, through waters mined by the enemy, and in danger of attack by hostile craft. Through the night with its chilling winter winds throwing spray over the jumbled mass of people on the open decks.

There was not food or water aboard enough for this multitude.

There was no doctor, no one who could understand the language of these people. But they did not mind. Used to hardship, privation, and living under tyranny and without sympathy they were prepared to endure. Five new lives came into the world, and a few were snuffed out as the ship sped south to safety in a passage of less than five hundred miles.

On August 24, 1960, many government officials, the Korean ambassador and other notables gathered at the National Press Club in Washington, where the *Meredith Victory*, her captain and crew were honored with the presentation of the Gallant Ship Plaque, awarded to ships of the Merchant Marine that, with their crews, perform outstanding services in action against the enemy, or in saving life.

Captain LaRue was now Brother Marinus, of Saint Paul's Abbey, Newton, New Jersey. He had chosen the life of the religious. He was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal at the ceremony for his outstanding leadership in the incredible rescue.

In August 1966, the *Meredith Victory* was taken from the Reserve Fleet at Olympia, Washington to be again put into service and operated by the American President Lines, probably on the Viet Nam supply line.

Thus this 'Gallant Ship' will re-enter an area of conflict very similar in many respects to that where she gained her fame. Her crew will, no doubt, be inspired by the record of the past; and wonder, as they gaze on her decks and holds, where that ship could have packed over fourteen thousand people.



Members of SCI's building committee have their own distinctive headgear — protective "hard-hats" — ready for use when necessary to make on-site inspections of progress on the new State Street SCI. Shown at a recent committee meeting are: (from left) Leslie C. Westerman (staff), the Rev. Dr. R. T. Foust (staff), David W. Devens (Board), John G. Winslow (Board), the Rev. John M. Mulligan (staff), Monroe Maltby (Board), Richard H. Dana (Board).



MEET THE BOARD

CLARENCE F. MICHALIS

Clarence F. Michalis, who became a member of the Board of Managers in 1947 and a lay vice president in 1959, has served on a host of SCI committees. These include planning, business operation, executive, pension, trust funds and special services.

He is also a trustee of almost a dozen other philanthropic and educational organizations, ranging from St. Luke's Hospital of Manhattan to the Foxcroft School in Middleburg, Virginia.

A graduate of Harvard, Mr. Michalis served in the U.S.N.R., attaining the rank of lieutenant, and seeing duty in several world areas from 1943 to 1946.

He is financial vice president of the Bristol-Myers Company. Mr. Michalis and his family live in Locust Valley, Long Island, New York.

SEA DRAMA

Fathomless waters dancing greens and blues,
White-caps play in the summer breeze,
While flying fish skim the deck
Escaping the leaping dolphins.
Those ham actors skirting the ship,
Breaking monotony with their rendezvous.

Ceaseless are the restless seethings
On the ocean's gigantic mirror,
Where-on the solar light embraces
With joy this gleeful witchery . . .
Creating a Siren's angry mood.
Batten down the hatches, weather the gale!



No mere hand can paint this pageantry,
Magnificent drama all defying
The craftsman's skill of desire or design.
Cobalts, greens splashed with violet
Twisting, writhing like sea serpents
Jetting foam like a huge water-spout.

Then a moment, an hour the murmuring sea
Courts your heart with lilting music.
But she is wedded to the sun, the wind
Checked only by the earth's gravity.
What sweet madness basking in the moonglow
Or racing with the tide . . . nature's way.

BLANCHE DYER BALLAGH