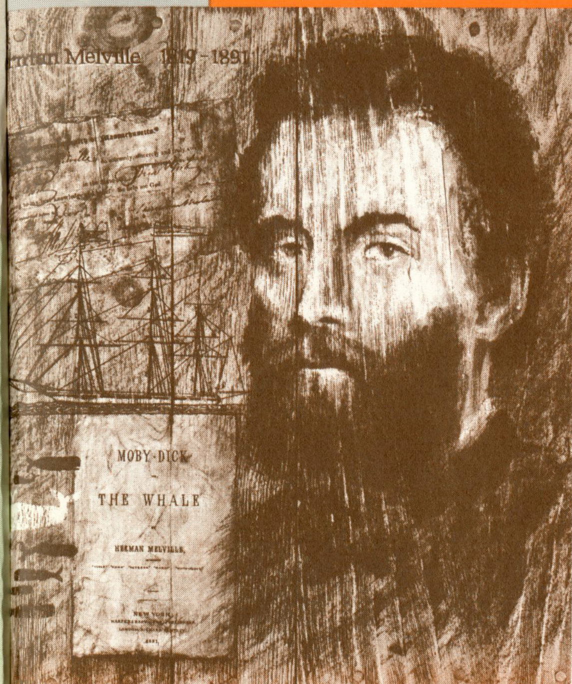
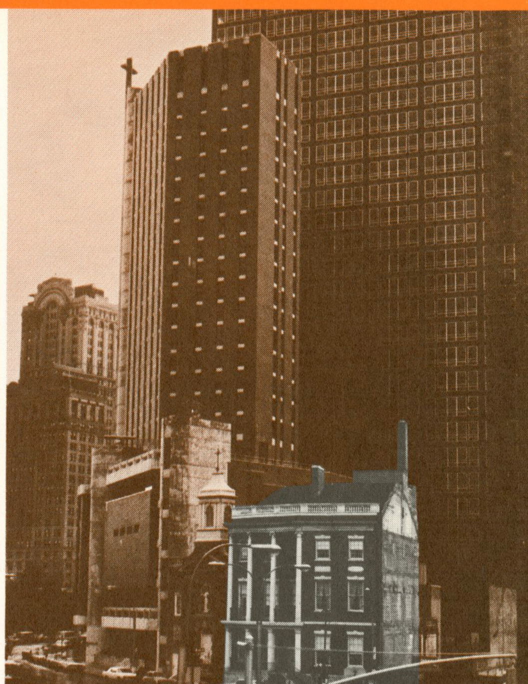
the LOOKOUT

SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE OF NEW YORK





JULY - AUGUST 1969

With this issue of The Lookout we salute Herman Melville on the 150th anniversary of his birth (Aug. 1, 1819) at the site of the present SCI building.

We salute him not because of the coincidence of his birth or that his life-span paralleled the early development years of SCI, but because he was a gifted marine novelist and poet . . . an author whose writings were based on his experiences before the mast.

Melville's youth was spent in and around the lower tip of Manhattan. While still a young boy, he moved with his parents to Albany, N. Y.

In 1839, he went to sea for the first time in a trading vessel, this followed by several stints on whalers, and finally as an enlisted man in the U. S. Navy.

Melville married in 1847, he and his wife living for a time in New York where he continued to write following publication of his "Typee" in 1846. For financial reasons, in 1850, the Melvilles moved to their farm near Pittsfield, Mass. where the writer completed his greatest novel, "Moby Dick".

After a voyage to San Francisco in 1860, he moved permanently to New York in 1863. From 1866 to 1885 he served quietly as district inspector of customs there. He died in New York Sept. 28, 1891.

FRONT COVER: Then *(circa 1859)* — and now: View of State Street looking north from present South Ferry approach area. White-colonnaded, three-story building *(in foreground)* is the only original structure left in the area.

Back Cover: Present site of Institute building *(looking southeast)* as it appeared circa 1858 and 1897. Herman Melville was born in 6 Pearl Street (indicated). Memorial plaque affixed to Pearl Street side of Institute building marks location of former Melville home.

(Courtesy of The New York Historical Society, New York City.)

the LOOKOUT

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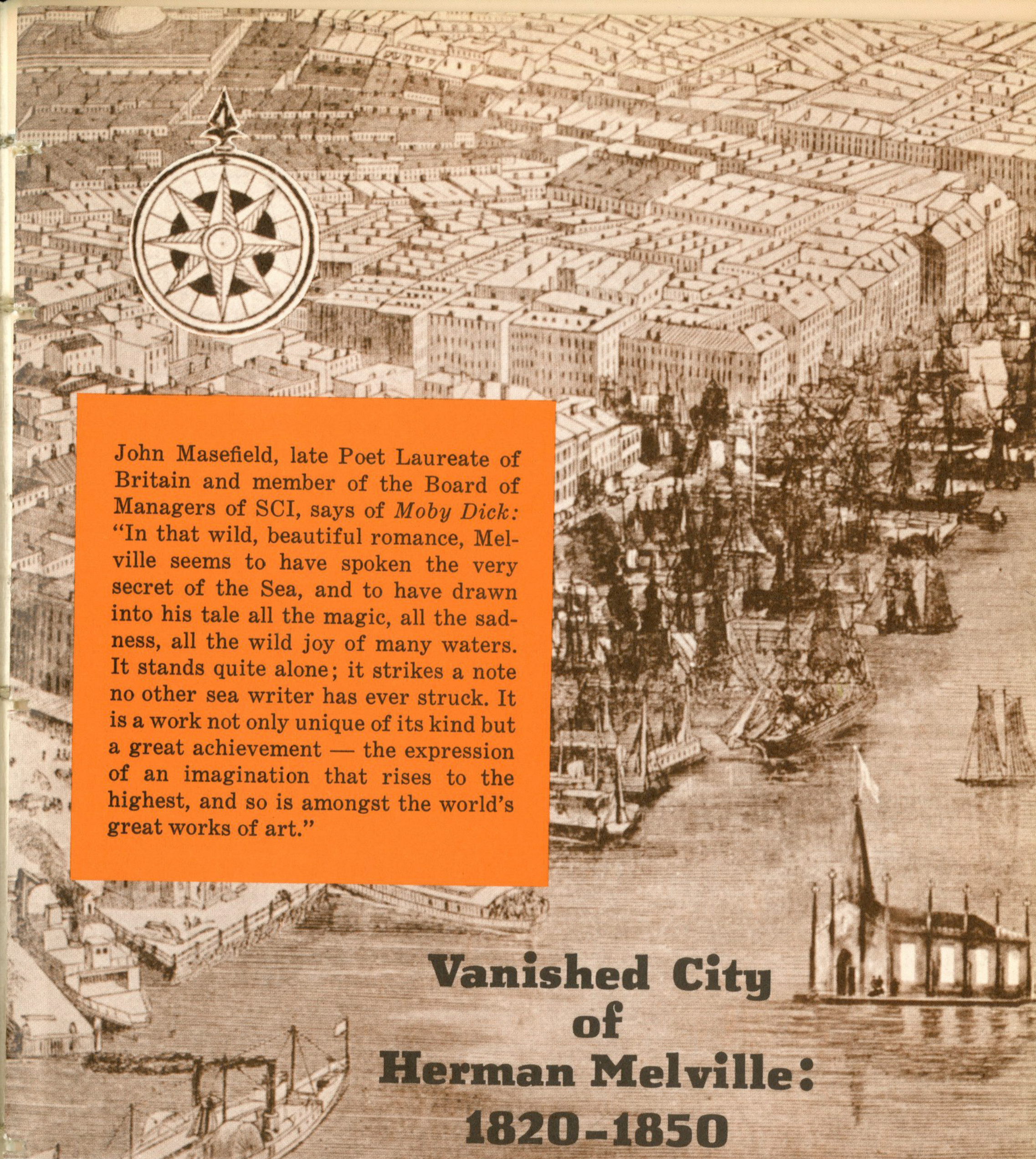


John Masefield, late Poet Laureate of Britain and member of the Board of Managers of SCI, says of *Moby Dick:* "In that wild, beautiful romance, Melville seems to have spoken the very secret of the Sea, and to have drawn into his tale all the magic, all the sadness, all the wild joy of many waters. It stands quite alone; it strikes a note no other sea writer has ever struck. It is a work not only unique of its kind but a great achievement — the expression of an imagination that rises to the highest, and so is amongst the world's great works of art."

Vanished City of Herman Melville: 1820-1850

by the Rev. William Haynsworth of the SCI Chaplaincy Staff

"The figure-head for the bow of Manhattan," is the apt description of 15 State Street offered by an admirer of our new building. Surely "the figure-head" is enhanced by the aura of a genuine local glory stemming directly from ships and seamen: it is a fact that our nation's most famous seafaring man-of-letters, Herman Melville, first saw the light of day in a typically small Federal-style residence on the site of our new building a century and a half ago on August 1, 1819.

While the city of Melville's time was a quite different one from ours of today, the author of *Moby Dick* begins to sound like a present-day New Yorker when, in a letter to Nathaniel Haw-

thorne dated June 29, 1851, he describes his annoyance with "the heat and dust of the babylonish brick-kiln of New York." He wished, he said, to finish the last few chapters of his new novel reclining on the grass at "Arrowhead," his farm near Pittsfield, Mass.

Often irritated by the pace and style of life in New York, he continually returned to his native city throughout the course of his career. New York was the scene of his short-lived literary triumph when he published his most popular novel, *Typee,* and it was here that he chose to make his home for the longest periods of his life. Although he resided in a number of neighborhoods, he lived for the last quarter of a century of his life in a brownstone at 104 East 26th Street where he died in 1891, quite forgotten by the world of his day.

Susan Lyman, a specialist in New York City history, has provided this issue of *The Lookout* with an interesting pedigree of the site of our new building. Here, briefly, I would recall the *ambience* of Melville's home town in those days when Moby Dick was in the making; when the ancestors of the Seamen's Church Institute of New York, newly incorporated, were busily engaged in promoting the ministry of the First Floating Church of Our Saviour. That vanished city merits a brief recollection on the one hundred fiftieth anniversary (this month of August) of the birth of Herman Melville.

During the era of 1820-1840, South Street was the center of New York's commercial life. The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 had confirmed the city's position as the young country's chief port. Trade with China had become an important and fabulously profitable business and myriad packet ships unloaded cargoes of tea, spices, fine silk and Canton china.

More than *two-thirds* of the *nation's imports* were hauled over the cobbles of South Street. Merchants and seafarers transacted their business at "Coffee House Slip" at the foot of Wall Street in what were the most popular meeting places of the day, the coffee houses called "The Merchants," "The Tontine," and "The Phoenix."

It was a small-town community considering what it was to become. The population climbed from 125,000 in 1825 to over 600,000 by mid-century. An informal provincialism pervaded the city's life. It was not until 1825 that a sewage system was provided and a household's water supply was inconveniently obtained from backyard wells. Open gutters and surface drains were probably responsible for the yellow fever epidemic of 1822 and the cholera epidemic of 1832.

Public refuse carts made their daily rounds to haul away the sweepings and

a European visitor of the period was shocked by the fact that pigs were allowed a free run in the streets and protested that these "assistant street cleaners" were a danger to public safety, "jumping here and there and bowling over richly dressed ladies."

Despite frequent panics and periods of "scarce money", prosperity was in the air and on a good day in 1830 a thousand people would crowd into Astor House on Broadway at Barclay Street to buy their drinks and partake of the famous "free lunch" — until they had eaten a "Yankee sufficiency."

John Jacob Astor, the builder and owner of this famous establishment, died in 1848. He had the distinction of being the richest man in America and his estate exceeded $20 million at a time when the income tax was unheard of and a dollar bought a "dollar's worth." The purchasing power of the dollar was sound!

Room and board at Astor House in 1831 cost about three dollars a week. Rentals, private and commercial, were considered "reasonable"; the famous American Hotel at Broadway near Vesey Street paid an anual rental of $9,000 in 1830; a single-room barber shop on Broadway, well-situated, rented for $500 a year.

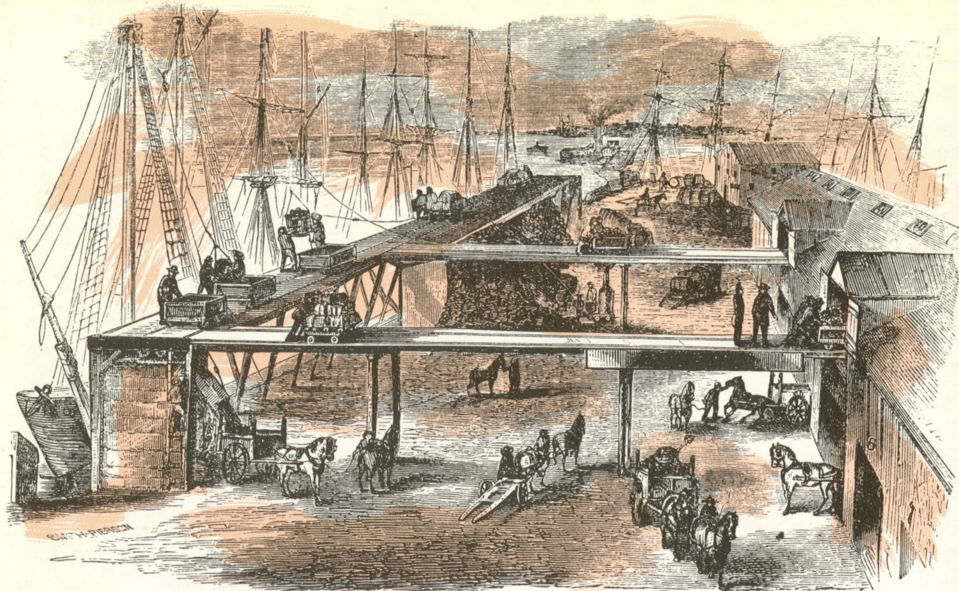
Philip Hone, a debonair "man about town", provides us with a shopping list for a dinner party in 1834: 14 lbs. bass, 2 small turkeys, 3 pairs chickens, 1 partridge, 21 lbs. hinder-quarter of veal, 12 lbs. mutton, 6 pairs sweetbreads. Total cost: $17.31!

New Yorkers of the 1830's could still see ample evidence of the city's Dutch antecedents along Park Row. However, this "uptown" neighborhood was yielding to the inevitability of change as the old Dutch houses were replaced by commercial structures. Park Row offered the cultural advantages of a varied theatrical program at the ugly old Park Theatre, located opposite City

Hall, which was frequently filled to the capacity of its 1,200 seats.

Phineas T. Barnum built his famous American Museum at the corner of Park Row and Ann Street, diagonally opposite St. Paul's Chapel. The site which the great showman selected was on the busiest intersection in the city. The innumerable drays, coaches, and elegant carriages moving north and south along Broadway allowed for few intervals of tranquility. A pedestrian might have to wait half an hour for an opportunity to cross the street!

An exploding population slowly pushed its way northward and, by 1840, there began to appear, amid the open fields beyond City Hall, the familiar "brownstones". These narrow dwellings were designed to conform to a scheme called "the gridiron plan". The plan had been adopted at the beginning of the century by the City Council which had reasoned that "a city is to be composed principally of the habita-



tions of men, and straight-sided and right-angled houses are the most cheap to build and the most convenient to maintain." Hence, the present-day pattern of city blocks separated by vertical avenues and horizontal streets.

The greatest calamity of the century occurred in 1835. The "Great Fire of 1835" destroyed the last vestige of Dutch New York as 750 buildings in the Broad and Wall Street area went up in smoke. Bitter December weather had hampered the fire-fighters, and hoses froze as water was being pumped from the East River. Losses were estimated in excess of $20 million. The devastated area was immediately rebuilt and a "new look" prevailed along South Street when Herman Melville embarked for his first voyage in 1837.

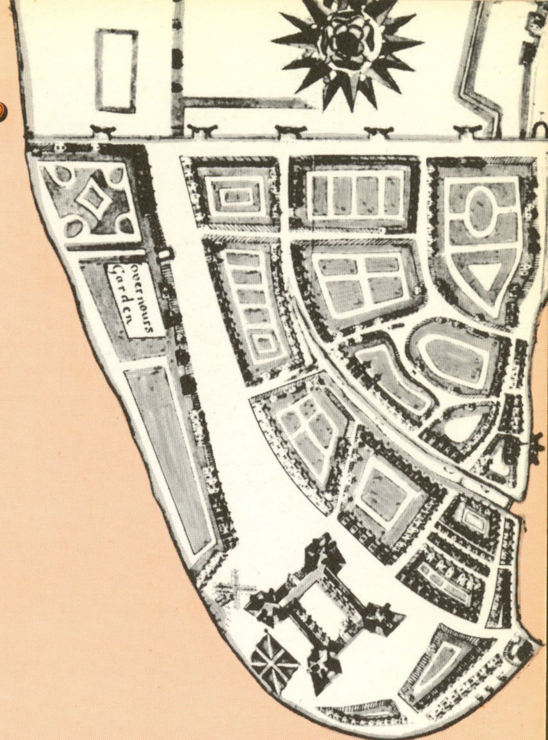
The vanished city of Herman Melville's youth endures only in bits and pieces: St. Paul's Chapel (1766), City Hall (1800), the empty shell of Ft. Clinton (1807) and a hodgepodge of old residences which were long ago converted to other uses. (Fraunces' Tavern, the scene of Washington's farewell to his officers, had been altered beyond anything it resembles today. It was restored to its present condition in 1907).

A writer in *Harper's Monthly Magazine* posed a question in 1856 which is as pertinent today as it was a century ago: "Why should New Yorkers love their city? It is never the same city for a dozen years together. A man born in New York 40 years ago finds nothing of the New York he knew. If he finds a few old houses not yet leveled he is fortunate." In our own time the face of New York is constantly being "lifted" as the city moves skyward. Even the ancient pattern of New Amsterdam's crooked, narrow streets is undergoing alteration!

At night, when Manhattan becomes a "diamond iceberg" and the silence of Wall Street's deserted canyon is punctuated by the pealing of Trinity's bells as they announce the passing of time, one might visualize the spectre of a young seaman, tall and well-favored, toting his sea bag down the ancient thoroughfare toward "Coffee House Slip." The ghost of that young sailor's home town still lives in the pages of Herman Melville's novels, and the sights and sounds which he describes will continue to reveal to present and future generations the spirit of old New York, a city which has vanished forever!

HISTORICAL BATTERY PARK AND SCI

by Susan E. Lyman



The block on which the Seamen's Church Institute stands has been occupied since the earliest days of New Amsterdam and ties in closely with the city's history.

The first structure on this site was a small bakery put up by the West India Company which controlled the settlement, and about two blocks away, near the present Bowling Green, stood the fort — a square of earthen walls with bastions at each corner for cannon.

The original shoreline extended along what is now State Street (the entire Battery Park and the area leading to South Ferry is "made" land) and the dozen settlers on this block were literally living on the waterfront.

They reflected this nautical touch in their occupations: one was a sailmaker, another a ship's carpenter, a third the skipper of the Brooklyn ferry, while a fourth kept a tavern for sailors. Simple though their own dwellings were, they lived near elegance, for at the opposite corner of the block, at State and Whitehall, Peter Stuyvesant built his Great House (later Whitehall) and the succeeding governors lived on that spot right up until the American Revolution.

During the 18th century, the citizens were busily extending the waterfront because they needed more protection and constructed sturdy bulkheads with half-moons or *lunettes* for batteries of guns, several blockhouses and a sizeable barracks. The name, "Battery Park", is well earned, for the section has a long history as a defense post.

In the calm that followed the Revolutionary War, New Yorkers counted on years of peace and recreation. They tore down the old fort and replaced it with Government House at Bowling Green, demolished the barracks and the half-moons, and turned the Battery into a Park with a tree-shaded promenade.

On the SCI site, in 1796, an enterprising exhibitor displayed a small menagerie of wild animals and birds but, due perhaps to the complaints of his neighbors, it was soon closed down as a public nuisance.

Joseph Corré was more successful when he took over the location. In 1798 he opened the Columbian Garden, a pleasure spot and a rival of the Vauxhall Garden across Pearl Street. Corré's place featured music, entertainment in park-like surroundings and fireworks on special occasions such as the Fourth of July; it served refreshments that included ice cream, a new delicacy which quickly became a best-seller. The Garden flourished for at least ten years.

The neighborhood was also having a building boom. Suddenly, in spite of the growth of the city northwards, this area at the tip facing the new park became popular, appealing especially to the ship owners who could watch the arrivals and departures of their vessels from their parlor windows.

A series of handsome houses went up, only one of which remains. That, of course, is SCI's neighbor at 7 State Street built in 1796 by James Watson and enlarged about 1805 by Moses Rogers.

Roger's brother-in-law, Archibald Gracie, who had built the Gracie Mansion (now the official home of the Mayor of the City of New York) at 89th Street and the East River as a summer place, chose this section for his town houses and offices.

He, too, was a merchant prince and owned many ships. His most ambitious undertaking was his federal brick home and garden that filled the State Street front from Pearl to Bridge. Where, Corré's garden had been, William Gracie, Archibald's son, put up a distinguished house in 1817.

Smaller dwellings were going up along Pearl Street beyond William Gracie's and at 6 Pearl Street Herman Melville was born in 1819 — another link with the sea. To the south of State Street, a regular ferry to Staten Island had recently been established, although there had been intermittent service since 1755.

Beyond Battery Park, with the threat of the War of 1812, a circular brownstone fort had been constructed offshore. First known as the Southwest Battery, then Fort Clinton (named after Governor Clinton), it was later renamed Castle Clinton. In 1824 it ceased to be a fortification and became an amusement center, the famous Castle Garden, and was connected with the mainland by a covered runway. For twenty-five years this place continued as a leading attraction; probably its best-known event was the first concert given by Jenny Lind in America in 1850.

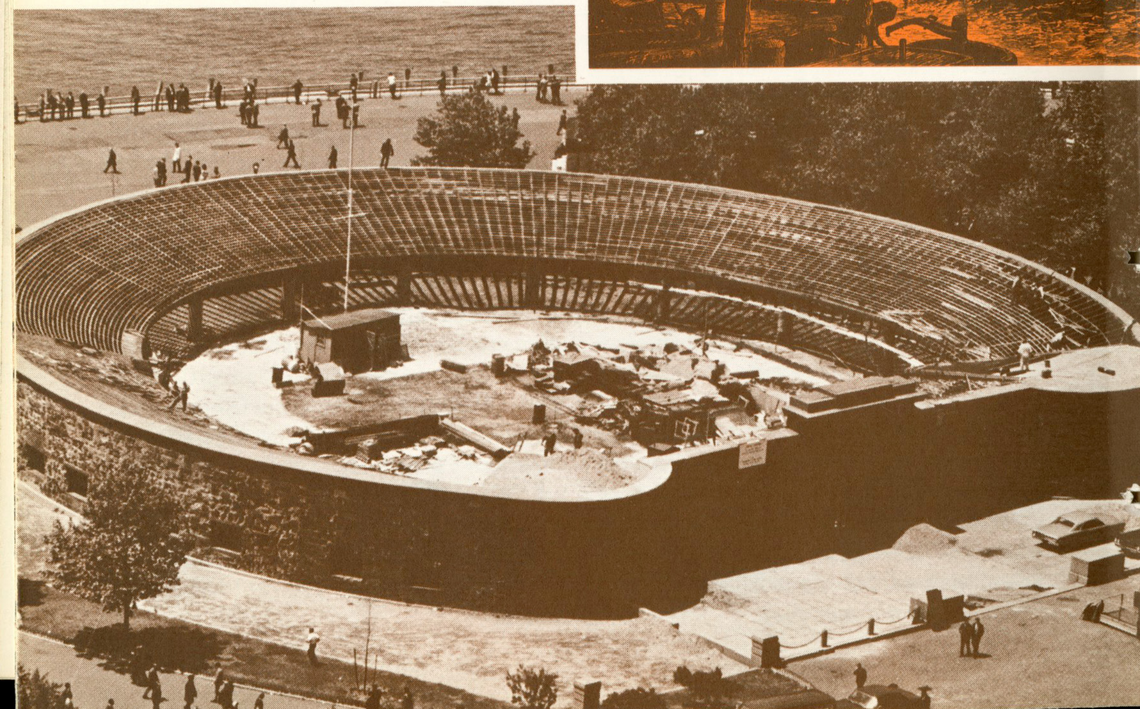
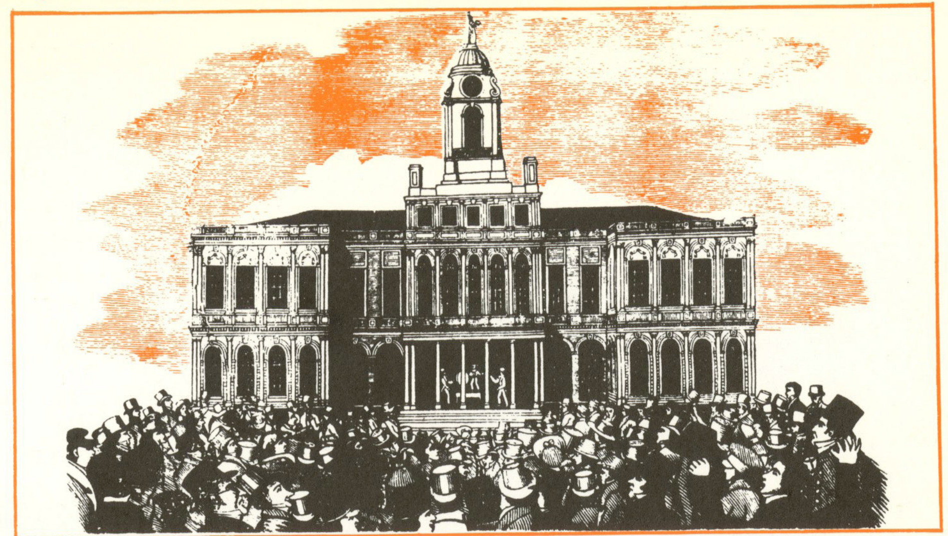


Photo taken from SCI roof *(9 cm. lens used)* of old Fort Clinton now under restoration with federal funds. Roofed portion near walls sheltered guns. Troops slept in tents in central, open area; officers in masonry rooms near main gate. Inset shows old fort after it became "Castle Garden."

City Hall during a drawing for a lottery.



But times were changing. In 1855, Castle Garden, no longer an amusement center, became the federal immigrant receiving station, predating Ellis Island; newcomers, arriving with their bundles of possessions, were as common a sight in the park as were promenading New Yorkers and tourists.

Commerce invaded the neighborhood; it was natural for shipping concerns to settle here and many of the old houses were converted into offices.

Most famous of all was "Steamship Row" at Bowling Green which housed North German Lloyd, Cunard, Red Star, Anchor and the French Line. That boon to old New Yorkers, the elevated railroad, made its appearance on the local horizon when, in 1877, tracks were laid down the park side of State Street to the terminal by the highly decorated and towered South Ferry House.

The "El" remained until World War II. Meanwhile, Castle Garden assumed still another role, becoming the Aquarium under the aegis of the New York Zoological Society.

On the SCI corner, the William Gracie Mansion withstood progress until the Nineties when it and the Melville birthplace were demolished to make way for the 10-story structure put up by Chesebrough of "Vasoline" fame.

Some of the other houses on the block lasted a little longer. One State Street, which for a while had been Robert Fulton's home, was once an SCI boarding house for seamen. It has now been demolished.

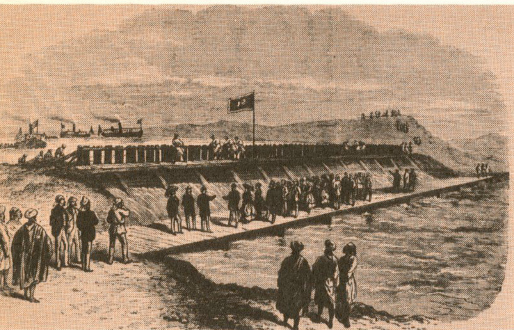
Today's lone survivor, 7 State, a white-colonnaded, three-story building, had served for years as a refuge for Irish immigrant girls under the name of Our Lady of the Rosary. Relatively recently it was made into a shrine to Mother Elizabeth Seton who once lived next door; a chapel has been constructed on this latter site.

In 1966 the Chesebrough Building was torn down to make way for the new SCI — an appropriate addition to this block so long associated with the life of the port of New York.

SUEZ *by Edyth Harper*

By November of this year ships will have passed through the Suez Canal for 100 years.

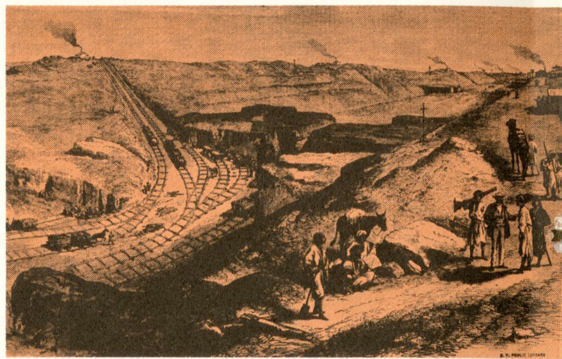
In 1869, Ferdinand de Lesseps saw his dream come true. He had constructed a new route for shipping that saved thousands of miles of travel between Europe and the Far East and tremendous amounts of money for shipping companies. No longer was the long and often dangerous voyage round the Cape of Good Hope necessary. Ships could now pass from the Mediterranean into the Red Sea.



A.

Naturally, there were celebrations when the Canal formally opened. De Lessep's cousin, the Empress Eugenie, and Ismail Pasha, Khedive of Egypt, were among the celebrities present at the ceremony.

Several special events were staged to commemorate the opening and buildings were thrown up. For instance, an Opera House in Cairo was quickly built of lath and plaster. (Today the original gilded crowns and decorations can still be seen.) The first opera staged was "Rigoletto". The Rome Opera Company is repeating the performance this year for the anniversary celebrations. (Another famous opera, "Aida", was commissioned for the opening gala in 1869 but was not completed until 1871.)



B.

As early as 1798 Napoleon had commissioned his engineer Lepere to examine the possibility of connecting the Mediterranean with the Red Sea but Lepere squashed the idea, claiming — wrongly — that the Red Sea was 30 feet higher than the Mediterranean. In 1841, English surveyors proved him wrong and eight years later de Lesseps became interested in the Canal venture. He then persuaded the Khedive of Egypt that the Canal was feasible. Heavily backed by French and Egyptian money, work was begun at the Port Said end in 1859.

There were several major construction problems. One was that 30,000 men employed in that hot part of the world needed drinking water, so a fresh water canal from the Nile to Ismailia had to be constructed, thus delaying work on the Suez project itself. Egyptian politicians created financial crises. But eventually the 100 miles of canal was completed, at a cost of 20 million pounds.

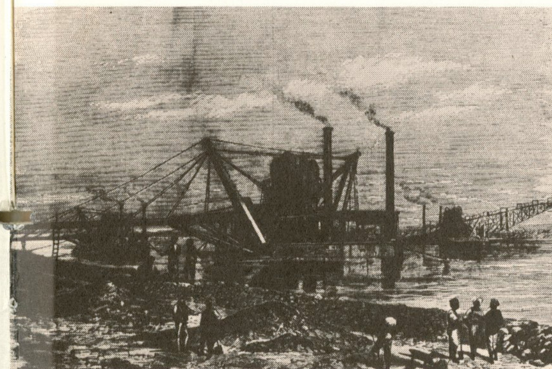
Several valleys along the route became lakes as the water reached them (the highest part of the canal is barely 50 feet above sea-level). Sidings had to be built to allow vessels to pass each other, but despite all the difficulties, de Lesseps completed his project.

A. The prince letting the waters of the Mediterranean into the Bitter Lakes.

B. The cutting of the Canal near Chalouf.

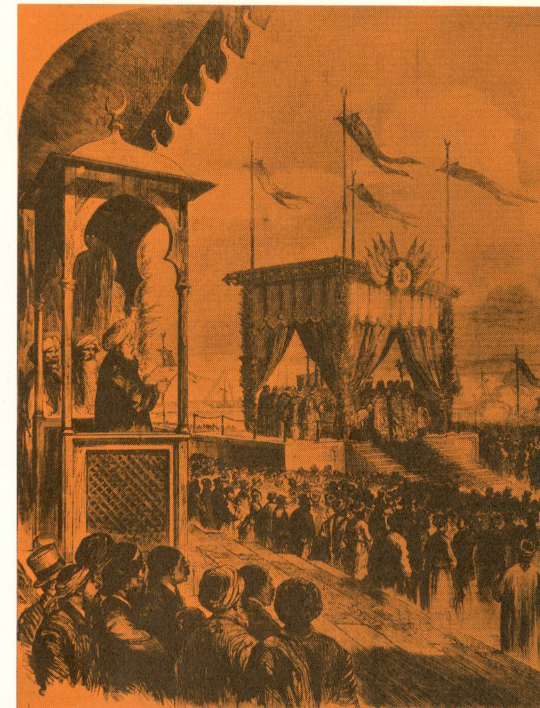
C. Dredges and elevators at work.

D. Blessing the Canal at its opening in 1869.



C.

There have been many canals built— some as long ago as 2000 B.C. when the Egyptians under Rameses II connected the Nile with the Red Sea — but few can have caused so much concern as did the Suez Canal politically and internationally.



D.

It has caused the downfall of statesmen and governments because such a vital shipping route became the basis for power. Today, under Egyptian control, it is closed. Ships lie trapped, waiting for restrictions to be lifted.

But whatever the political aspect, from the engineering point of view its conception and completion was a triumph — undertaken against the counsel of many engineering authorities.

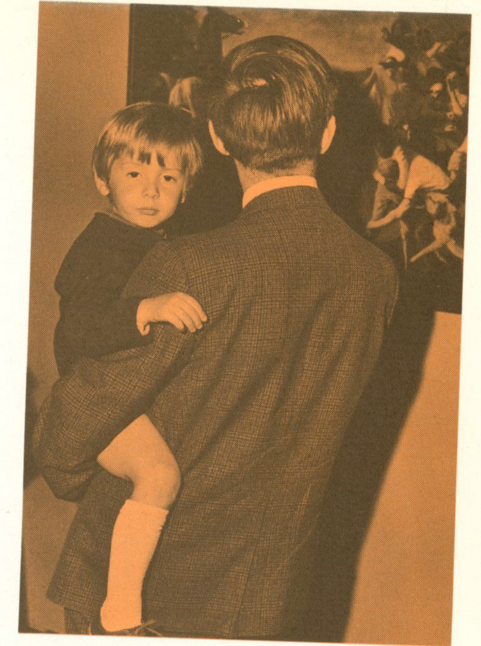
Honors were showered upon de Lesseps. He received decorations from Queen Victoria, the Legion of Honor Grand Cross from France and 5000 francs from the French Academy.

He began the construction of the Panama Canal but this proved his downfall. It is for the Suez Canal that he is best remembered.

The first two Episcopal baptismal services ever to be held in the State Street SCI chapel were conducted recently — for an infant and for an adult. Both ceremonies, by coincidence, took place the same day.

In the morning, Bob Louis Entsuah of Cape Coast, Ghana, was baptized by the Rev. William Haynsworth, SCI chaplain, with Dr. John M. Mulligan as witness. In late afternoon, three-months-old Andrew Seton Post Lindh was baptized by Dr. Mulligan. The infant is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry C. B. Lindh. Mr. Lindh is treasurer of the Institute.

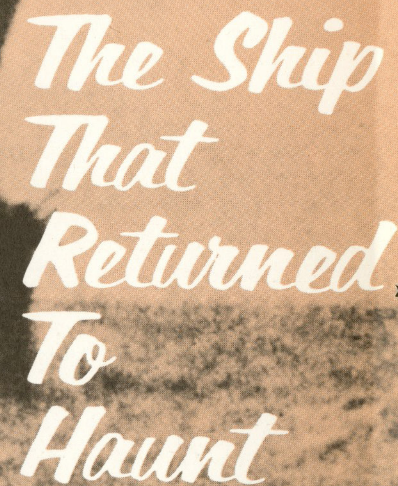
Taciturn art lover levels steady gaze at gallery visitors while father examines painting.



An exhibition of paintings by artist John Leavey was held in the Institute during June. Mr. Leavey *(extreme right in photo below)* is an instructor for the art classes held regularly in the buidling.

The Ship That Returned To Haunt

by
Brenda Ralph Lewis



She came at them out of the chill Arctic mists, a black, twisted hulk, creaking and groaning as she sliced through the icy sea. But this was no helpless wreck, drifting at the whim of wind and current; the grey waters parted smartly before her prow, sending up a bow-wave of white foam.

The crew of the exploration whaler *George Henry* crowded to the rails. In their eyes, in their hearts was not only fear, but incredulity, and the certainty that something supernatural was happening here in the somber grey wastes of the Canadian Arctic.

They knew this ship. It was the *Rescue*. They had *watched* her become wrecked — smashed to splinters on the rocks of Frobisher Bay *nine months before.*

It had been September, 1860, when *George Henry* and her supply ship *Rescue* had first come to the Arctic to explore and chart the coasts, to catch whales and trade with the Eskimos.

One evening, as the ships lay at anchor, a gale suddenly blew up, clutching huge waves from the surface of the sea and turning the Bay into a churning mass of grey water.

From the bridge of *George Henry,* Captain Hall could see *Rescue* was in difficulty. The waves seemed to be playing with her, throwing her backwards and forwards, but always bringing her a little nearer to the wicked-looking jagged rocks that fringed the shoreline.

Then, suddenly, the sea tired of the game. One huge mass of water rose up, caught *Rescue* broadside on and slammed her down with a hideous splintering of wood.

Then it began to snow and a curtain of white mercifully hid the terrible scene.

When the storm subsided, crewmen from the *George Henry* searched the area for some sign of the *Rescue.* But there was not a trace. Nothing what-

ever. Shaken, Captain Hall ordered the crew to weigh anchor, *George Henry* continued its explorations alone.

Eight months later she returned to the Arctic and Frobisher Bay.

It was on July 27, 1861, when, incredibly, the "wrecked" *Rescue* first loomed towards them out of the icy Arctic mists.

She came on fast, headed directly for the *George Henry* and as she drew nearer, it could be seen she was totally unmanned. The *George Henry* mate — more clear-headed than the rest — rushed to the wheel and swung it hard. *Rescue* swept past only feet away.

By now, *George Henry* was a ship of fear. Every creak of the yard arms, every flapping of a sail seemed an omen of more evil to come.

Fears deepened when a gale blew up, a gale as strong and as malevolent as the one which had destroyed *Rescue* the previous year.

Great blocks of ice began crunching against the hull, and as the ship began to drag her anchor, the crew hacked and pushed at the ice with pikes and crowbars. No use: the ship was trapped, immobile.

Then, on the horizon, a jagged shadow appeared. Yes! — *Rescue.*

It came like a black ghost, making straight for *George Henry* once more, side-stepping the ice floes as if guided by some expert hand.

As she approached, the crew shrank back from the rails, expecting to be flung within minutes into the freezing Arctic waters in which no man could possibly survive.

Rescue was two hundred yards away, then one hundred. Her speed quickened. Fifty yards separated the ships . . . thirty.

Then, miraculously, she turned and with only inches to spare, scraped past, her yards brushing.

Under the incredulous eyes of the watchers, the black hulk faded once more into the mists and disappeared from sight.

This time, she left behind the certainty that this was no accident, that the drama was not over.

Rescue, it seemed, was tantalizing them, bringing them face to face with sudden death. Then a sudden reprieve.

That night was a wild one, with a high wind screaming in the rigging and the sea tossing restlessly about the ship. Anxious eyes peered into the blackness, fearing *Rescue* would appear again, but when morning dawned, the

sea was empty except for the ice floes.

Yes, that evening . . . there was *Rescue* again, but this time she was not moving, only rising and falling gently with the swell, and at the *exact spot* where these same *George Henry* sailors had seen her smashed to pieces on the rocks nine months previously!

No one slept that night. The crew stood mute and motionless on the deck, never taking their eyes from *Rescue.*

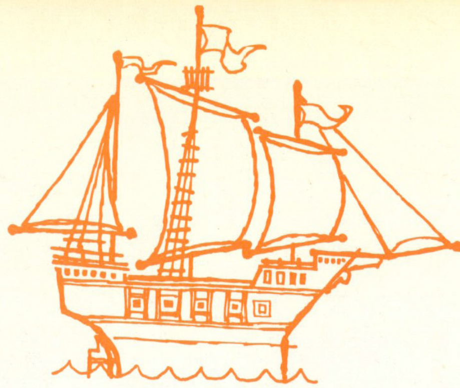
Then, at three o'clock in the morning, the phantom began to move closer; this time in a gentle motion, as if whatever devil had steered her before had gone, leaving her nothing but a pathetic derelict.

All day the crew watched her. By evening, when the wind freshened she was moving away. She was going out to sea.

Slowly, she disappeared from sight and the icy mists closed behind her. No one ever saw her again, and no one has ever been able to explain the mystery.

How could a ship which was so completely, irreparably destroyed before the eyes of so many witnesses have materialized nine months later to terrify a ship's crew?

Against all logic, those who endured the experience were sure it really happened, but only the sea knows the truth, and the sea keeps its secrets forever.



INSURANCE

On this narrow sea I sail
susceptible to storm and whale
and wondering, Can I afford
to travel and go overboard
unless my policy includes
protection when the Lord intrudes?

— Thomas John Carlisle

INCOMING TIDE

I am only a hermit crab at low tide crawling
in the borrowed hotel
of the shell of a snail,
a cornflower sky above me, shawling,

while bouquets of growing blooms, new breakers mating,
rise, crash, pound,
like the sound of roots
cracking rocks of the universe, creating.

— Othelia Lilly

PERSISTENT EXPLORER

Every separate seaman of us
steering for lost Atlantis
without compass or a star
drives in the urgency of
discovering what anchor
out of the past will hold
when we are blown landward
pitted against storm tides
still shaping words of hope
wind-swallowed in the storm.

— L. A. Davidson

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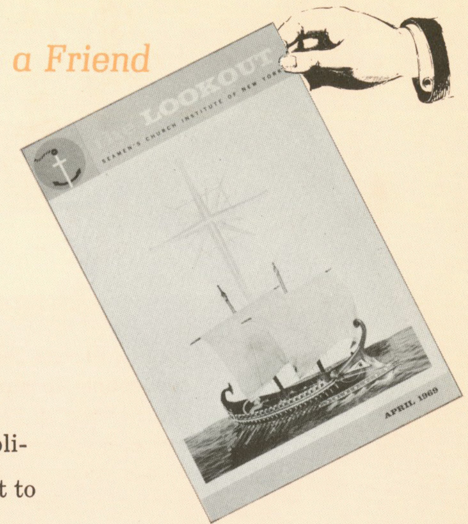

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