

TO AND FRO FOR 67 YEARS: THE STORY OF THE SCHOONER *SANTA CRUZ*

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Abstract—In 1869, Justinian Caire and a syndicate of businessmen from San Francisco purchased Santa Cruz Island. By the 1880s, Justinian Caire took sole ownership and augmented the existing sheep and cattle ranch with a vineyard and other enterprises. By 1893, the need for a dedicated working vessel was apparent, and the schooner *Santa Cruz* was commissioned and built at the Matthew Turner Shipyard in Benicia, California. For the next 67 years, this vessel served the island’s owners, ultimately meeting its demise in a nor’easter in December 1960. This paper will review the vessel’s history and provide current information on the shipwreck site.

INTRODUCTION

In 1869, a syndicate of San Francisco businessmen purchased Santa Cruz Island, with the intent of developing a ranching venture called the Santa Cruz Island Company. By 1888, Justinian Caire had bought out all shares of this venture, and under his direction the island had a fully operational sheep ranch, as well as extensive vineyards and wine-making facilities. Because of the isolation of Santa Cruz Island, some 26 miles from Santa Barbara, California, there was need for a sturdy vessel capable of withstanding heavy weather and of carrying a wide variety of cargo and passengers. Prior to 1893, the island used the *Star of Freedom*, a two-masted schooner. However, recognizing the need for a sailing vessel with an auxiliary engine, Justinian Caire commissioned the Matthew Turner Shipyard in Benicia, California to build a two-masted gas schooner. This auxiliary power provided aid in both calm and rough weather and when navigating through rivers, harbors, and ports. The schooner *Santa Cruz* steadfastly served its homeport of Prisoner’s Harbor for 67 years, earning the honor of being one of the longest operating cargo schooners on the Pacific west coast (Fig. 1).

EARLY OPERATION

The Matthew Turner Shipyard was probably the most well-known and highly regarded of the

California shipyards. Currently, there is a California Historical Marker at the site of the shipyard, and portions of the now submerged work platform are still visible at low tide. Originally located in San Francisco, the shipyard moved to Benicia in 1883, where it operated until 1918. In its three decades of operation, the company launched 228 vessels including 169 craft in Benicia, one of which was the *Santa Cruz* (California State Parks 1987).

Recognizing the frequent heavy weather in the Santa Barbara Channel, Justinian Caire told Matthew Turner to “build her strong,” knowing that the ship would need to withstand gale force winds



Figure 1. Photograph of the schooner *Santa Cruz*, under sail. Credit: Caire Family Photo Album, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History.

(Caire 1993, 61; Gherini 2005, 104). The registry certificate on the schooner *Santa Cruz* shows an overall length of 64 ft (19.5 m), beam 18 ft 6 in (5.48 m), draft 6 ft 6 in (1.97 m), and displacement 43 tons (39 metric tons) with one deck and two masts (Gherini 2005, 105). The registry also notes a 40 horsepower gasoline engine. The ship's Log Book Number four reports the Harding Electrical Works in San Francisco built the engine. The registry indicates that possession was taken on May 5, 1893. The first captain was John Revello, a man who had formerly been the captain of the *Star of Freedom*, the schooner used prior to the purchase of the *Santa Cruz*.

In his 1993 remembrance *On Santa Cruz Island*, former ranch hand and one time superintendent (1919–1921) Clifford McElrath alleges that the *Santa Cruz* once served as an Alaskan icebreaker. There is, however, no evidence to support this contention. Rather, Log Book four notes that the first trial was conducted on June 13, 1893 and the final trial just nine days later.

The *Santa Barbara Morning Press* noted in its June 25, 1893 issue that the schooner *Santa Cruz* had recently arrived from San Francisco, which is where Justinian Caire operated his business called the Justinian Caire Company. The story provided her dimensions, identified the captain, and pointed out that the schooner was about to leave for the island. The maiden voyage to Santa Cruz Island occurred on June 27, 1893. Justinian Caire took his wife Albina, his daughters Aglae and Helene, and his granddaughter Maria Rossi (later Maria Rossi Gherini) (Gherini 2005, 105).

By 1893, Santa Cruz Island was functioning as a fully operative ranch, predominantly raising grapes and sheep. Harvested grapes were made into wine on the island, and the *Santa Cruz* was used to ship barrels to Santa Barbara for bottling and sale. In January 1919, however, Prohibition ended the winery business. The Caires continued to export island grapes until the mid-1930s. Other products mentioned in the ship's log included walnuts and almonds and, later, cattle. The *Santa Cruz* could haul 1400 boxes of grapes each weighing 60 lb (27 kg) (Gherini 1983, 9). She could carry up to 250 sheep, but could hold only 15–20 head of cattle until the deck was reconfigured in later years (Gherini 2005, 105). Annually, the *Santa Cruz* carried

numerous ranch hands from the mainland to the island to perform sheep roundup and shearing.

EARLY CAPTAINS

The vessel appears to have changed captains frequently during her early years. As noted above, John Revello brought the vessel *Santa Cruz* from San Francisco and captained her inaugural voyage to Santa Cruz Island. Customs records and license documents available from 1897, 1899, 1900, 1903, 1906, 1908, and 1909 show Arthur J. Caire as the sole owner of the *Santa Cruz* and described her as a gas schooner of 43 tons enrolled in San Francisco for the purpose of coastal trading. However, the licenses from 1897, 1899, 1900, and 1903 identify Emmanuele Maggiolo as the master and captain, while the license of 1906 lists James G. Prescott as the captain. George Nidever is identified as the captain on the licenses of 1908 and 1909 (Masters' Oaths 1897–1909).

Margaret Holden Eaton, in her book *Diary of a Sea Captain's Wife*, describes her first visit to her family's camp in Pelican Bay on the north side of Santa Cruz Island in the summer of 1908. She recalled meeting Captain George Nidever, son of the famous sea otter trapper George Nidever, as well as his brother, Jay, and son, Frank (Eaton 1980, 47). The same book references Captain Nidever as captain through at least 1913. One story describes the drowning of George Nidever's brother, Jake, on New Year's Day of that year in Prisoner's Harbor after taking a skiff to the *Santa Cruz* to check her lights, apparently slipping overboard (Eaton 1980, 189). McElrath, who worked at Santa Cruz from March 1919 through 1921, notes that when he took the *Santa Cruz* to the island, she was captained by Giovanni Olivari and crewed by both his son, Pete, and a former Santa Barbara resident, Eduardo, who was a Spanish-Indian man about 60 years old (McElrath 1993, 3). When McElrath left the island in 1921, he noted that the *Santa Cruz* was captained by Mike Negro, whom McElrath called a "young aggressive Neapolitan" (McElrath 1993, 109).

Review of Log Book Number four, spanning from 1914 to 1938, includes the handwriting of several different individuals. Most elaborate and detailed writing extended from log entries dated April 24, 1914 to March 13, 1918. Handwriting

changed from May 23, 1919 until February 25, 1920 and then again February 21, 1923 through October 2, 1929. Unfortunately, the authors did not often sign their names and so the specific identity of the captain's log authors is uncertain.

License documents reveal that George Nidever continued to be the master in December 1911. "Endorsements of Change of Master" documents list Frank Magilio as master in April 1917, Michelo Negro in October 1919, G.B. Olivari in February 1920, Clarence Libby in May 1922, Julius Valdez in January 1923, T. Cornell in July 1923, J. Valdez again in September 1923, and J. Bermudez in January 1925 (National Archives 1898–1935, 1925–1970).

GROUNDING AT RINCON

In her early years, the *Santa Cruz* traveled along the central California coast for periodic maintenance and occasional modifications. She continued to work as a gaff-rigged schooner with a single-screw gas engine and received her servicing at various shipyards in San Pedro, California. Returning home from dry dock in San Pedro, where she had undergone over \$1000 in repairs during the summer, the *Santa Cruz* ran aground at Rincon Point, approximately 13 mi (21 km) south of Santa Barbara (Santa Barbara Morning Press 1913).

Santa Barbara's *Morning Press* reported that the *Santa Cruz* ran aground on Friday night, September 19, 1913. Captain Nidever and the crew abandoned the vessel, rowing in the fog towards Santa Barbara. The vessel had been listing heavily and waves were breaking over the deck. Captain Nidever later blamed the grounding on compass error. He noted that he anticipated a one and a half point compass error, but it was actually five points. They rowed the skiff from Rincon Point into Santa Barbara all night, never realizing because of the thickness of the fog that they were actually only a few feet from shore. In fact, they did not even know for certain where they had run aground until the following day when visitors at the Potter Hotel noticed the vessel near the mouth of Rincon Creek (Santa Barbara Morning Press 1913).

On the following day, the *Santa Cruz* was boarded by Mr. and Mrs. A. Raines of Los Angeles, who found the ship's log noting the departure from

San Pedro, as well as a pet cat which was still on board. The next day, Captain Nidever returned to the *Santa Cruz* to assess damage. She did not appear badly damaged at that time. On September 23, two launches, *Gussie M* and the *Otter*, attached lines to the *Santa Cruz* in an unsuccessful attempt to pull her free from the rocks at high tide. By the next day, a portion of her keel had floated ashore during high tide, and one of her masts was toppling. The two boats had succeeded only in moving her approximately 19 ft (5.8 m), having difficulty moving her further because of the heavy pig iron ballast. Over the next one to two days, another launch, the *Marguerite* removed the cargo, including the cat, which was later adopted by that vessel. They had filled the *Santa Cruz* with casks in an effort to keep her afloat until a stronger vessel could be obtained from San Pedro. Unfortunately, this boat was also unsuccessful (Santa Barbara News Press, 1988).

Periodic entries in the *Santa Barbara Morning Press* indicate that *Santa Cruz* had not broken up one month later, and an attempt was made to use balloons to free her from the rocks. Unfortunately, this did not work either. Almost three months later, on December 18, 1913, a vessel from the San Pedro Salvage Company owned by Ira T. Fleming was successful in towing the *Santa Cruz* into deep water at high tide. She was then towed back to San Pedro where her engines were reinstalled and repairs were made. In the spring of 1914, the *Santa Cruz* returned to Santa Barbara. The fact that the *Santa Cruz* remained aground near shore for almost three months without thoroughly breaking apart is a testament to the ship building skills of Matthew Turner (Santa Barbara News Press, 1988).

RESUMPTION OF OPERATION

After its repair, over the next 23 years the *Santa Cruz* continued to operate as a cargo and transportation schooner without undergoing significant external changes. On December 23, 1927, the schooner's owners installed new 534-gal (2021 L) gas tanks. Although she was expressly built to handle transportation between the Channel Islands and Santa Barbara, one of the schooner's greatest problems was that her round bottom caused her to roll heavily as the prevailing seas in the Santa

Barbara Channel struck across her beam. Consequently, when a new deepwater port was opened at Port Hueneme, California in May 1942, the *Santa Cruz* became the first vessel to enter there and continued to use this anchorage regularly thereafter. Port Hueneme is located 30 miles southeast from Prisoner's Harbor and offered a calmer passage than Santa Barbara with seas that ran astern (Gherini 1983, 1).

In June 1937, the Caire family sold almost 90% of Santa Cruz Island to E.L. Stanton, a Long Beach oilman. The sale included the schooner *Santa Cruz*. Local newspapers indicated that at over one million dollars, the sale was the largest real estate transaction ever recorded in Santa Barbara County (Gherini 2005, 162). When Stanton took over the island, he evicted Ira Eaton who had been the captain of the *Santa Cruz* in the early 1930s (Eaton 1980, 249), and was operating a camp at Pelican Bay that had hosted numerous movie stars during the preceding 25 years. Red Craine took over as captain of the *Santa Cruz* in 1933, and continued to captain during the first years of the Stanton era, though some sources reference an H. Hoskins as captain between October 2, 1929 and September 28, 1938 (Gherini 2005, 4–5).

Upon taking possession of the *Santa Cruz* in June 1937, Stanton installed a new Buda diesel engine (6LDMR 909 C) with 920-gal (3,482 L) fuel tanks, a 9-ton (8 metric ton) lead ballast keel, and extensive wiring changes including a four outlet fire extinguisher. Over the next nine months a deckhouse was built over the aft cabin, and in September of 1938, an anchor winch was installed. Port of origin was also changed from San Francisco to San Pedro. The Buda engine was probably less than optimal because in April 1942, a new D-13000 Caterpillar diesel engine was installed. This more powerful and reliable engine eliminated the need for sail power, and in April 1943, the main mast and bowsprit were removed. (*Santa Cruz Log Books* four and five).

In July 1947, the Caterpillar engine had almost 4200 hours and was rebuilt. This occurred again in June 1950. Repairs at that time also included a new heat exchanger, new shaft for the fresh water pump and new oil cooler case (*Santa Cruz Log Book* 5). During this period, the deck was also modified as the ranching operation changed from predominantly sheep to cattle. Photographs of the vessel during this

period note dramatic changes in the deck with installation of pens to hold cattle. By this time, while the *Santa Cruz* had lost none of her seaworthiness, the graceful sleek lines of her initial design had greatly deteriorated. She maintained this appearance until her loss in December of 1960 (Fig. 2).

FINAL DAYS

Because of her stronger engines, the *Santa Cruz* continued to operate as a motor vessel during the Stanton years. During World War II, she even carried soldiers back and forth to the island. As always, she sailed out of Prisoner's Harbor. When not in use, she would be moored to a buoy 20 to 30 yards (6 to 9 m) from the dock. Prisoner's Harbor generally affords good protection from heavy weather except when "Santa Ana" winds blow from north and east. These winds often originate from a high-pressure zone that forms over Nevada, circulating in a clockwise direction and seeming to come out of the northeast. Weather is usually clear, but seas are exceedingly rough.

On December 6, 1960 at 8:30 a.m. during a "Santa Ana" storm, the *Santa Cruz* drifted from her anchorage onto the rocks at the western edge of Prisoner's Harbor on Santa Cruz Island. The report of marine casualty, completed and signed by Edwin Stanton on December 13, 1960, notes that the vessel was at anchor. Mr. Stanton's son Carey had gone to check the dock at Prisoner's Harbor, which was being battered by heavy seas, when he noted that the



Figure 2. Photograph of the Schooner *Santa Cruz* moored to a buoy at Prisoner's Harbor, Santa Cruz Island, August 1960. Credit: National Maritime Museum, San Francisco.

vessel had parted from her anchorage. In the report Mr. Stanton noted, "It was later discovered that a link in the anchor chain had parted permitting the vessel to drift from her anchorage onto the rocks along the island shoreline. Stanton went on to state, "The vessel was a total loss." At that time, she was valued at \$75,000. These statements were reported in the "Oath of Master to Loss Document" filed by Mr. Stanton on December 14, 1960 (National Archives 1935–1970). There is no subsequent mention of the items that were removed from the stranded vessel. However, she was surely lying in shallow water with ample time and ease to remove machinery and any other valuable parts. It is interesting to recall that when she was stranded at Rincon Point in 1913, her value was placed at \$3000 with damages totaling \$1500 (National Archives 1898–1935).

RECENT SURVEYS OF THE WRECK OF THE *SANTA CRUZ*

In the summer of 1989, both authors were invited to participate in Project Ocean Search sponsored by the Cousteau Society and held for the first time on Santa Cruz Island at Prisoner's Harbor. At that time, The Nature Conservancy was maintaining the western 90% of the island, and the eastern 10% of the island was under the ownership of the Gherini family, descendants of Justinian Caire. Over the subsequent days, with the assistance of others, sketches were made of the wreck site. After completion of Project Ocean Search, several other trips to Prisoner's Harbor were made by the authors to survey, map, photograph, and videotape the site. This effort resulted in a detailed site map with extensive notes. Copies of this data were provided to the National Park Service. This was published as the Submerged Cultural Resources Assessment, authored by Don. P. Morris and James Lima, and published by the Park Service in 1996. This too contained a map of the remaining shipwreck site, though somewhat less detailed than the author's initial map of 1989 (Morris and Lima 1996, 173). For reasons unknown to the authors, the 1989 map was not included in the National Park Service assessment.

Robert Schwemmer of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) completed a photographic survey of the *Santa Cruz* wreck site in October 2007. These photos, when compared with photographs of the vessel prior to sinking, help to document other items previously not identified. Additionally, visits to Santa Cruz Island have identified parts that were removed from the ship including portions of the pile driver onboard at the time of sinking, the two gaff spars, two ventilators, and a ship's lantern. A ventilator and the schooner's compass are on display at the Santa Barbara Maritime Museum.

During the course of research, the authors discovered a hand-written letter in the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History's library, dated August 12, 1960 and addressed to "Karl" from "Bill," whose last names are unknown (Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Library 1960). Presumably, however, Karl refers to Karl Kortum, founder of the San Francisco Maritime Museum, an individual who worked tirelessly to discover, save and restore historic nineteenth and early twentieth century vessels. The letter notes a visit by Bill to see the *Santa Cruz* at mooring in Prisoner's Harbor. He noted that the vessel was in good shape but had been considerably altered from its schooner days. He reported that several feet had been cut off the stern and that the mast and spars were on shore. He also reported that below deck the stern cabin appeared unaltered. Bill also talked to Edwin Stanton's son, Carey, who was the primary owner of the island at that time, from whom he received a promise to be notified if Dr. Stanton ever chose to dispose of the vessel. He reported that the vessel usually floated on an even keel but the accompanying photograph taken by Bill was captured just as the boat was rising on a swell (Fig. 2)

Another curiosity discovered by the authors during the Project Ocean Search survey was the finding of the ship's anchor in the haws pipe with chain still attached to the windlass. This would suggest that the *Santa Cruz* actually did not separate a chain link from the anchor causing her to break free, as was reported by Stanton, but more likely separation occurred at the chain or rope to the buoy where she usually moored.

CONCLUSIONS

The gas schooner *Santa Cruz*, built in 1893, played an integral part in the history of Santa Cruz Island during the twentieth century. It served as the main conduit for people, goods, and products to and from the island and had a remarkably long career as a ranching schooner for 67 years. Her ship's logbooks document the ranching history and migration of residents of Santa Cruz Island, while also documenting the military presence in the Santa Barbara Channel during World War II. The schooner withstood extensive modifications, endured a three month stranding on the rocks at Rincon Point in 1913 and weathered numerous storms in the Santa Barbara Channel. While little of the *Santa Cruz* remains in the sands of west Prisoner's Harbor, the vessel's history stands as a tribute to the versatility, adaptability, and perseverance of vessels from the Matthew Turner shipyard.

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