

JULY 21, 1958 1ST FERRY - 1886

1st Ferry Dates Back to 1886

Della Pulled Barges to Coronado

EDITOR'S NOTE—This is another in the Evening Tribune series about famous firsts in San Diego history.

By JOE STONE

The first ferryboat to ply between San Diego and Coronado began her work in the spring of 1886 and finished it the same year.

Her name was Della. She was a steam launch 25 feet long with a two-horsepower engine.

She was built in Waltham, Mass., in 1885 for Hampton L. Storey, Chicago, one of the founders of the Coronado Beach Co., which started a city on a thinly populated peninsula.

She was shipped to the West Coast from Chicago on a flat car.

She was named after Storey's wife.

Land Grant Told

The story of the need for the Della begins in Mexican land grant times when the peninsula was given to the Carrillo family.

In 1869 Archibald C. Peachy and William H. Aspinwall got title to 4,185.46 acres from Pedro C. Carrillo.

In December, 1885, the Coronado Beach Co. purchased the same land for \$110,000.

Storey, Elisha S. Babcock, Jacob Gruendike, and Joseph Collett were the company. Babcock was the moving spirit.

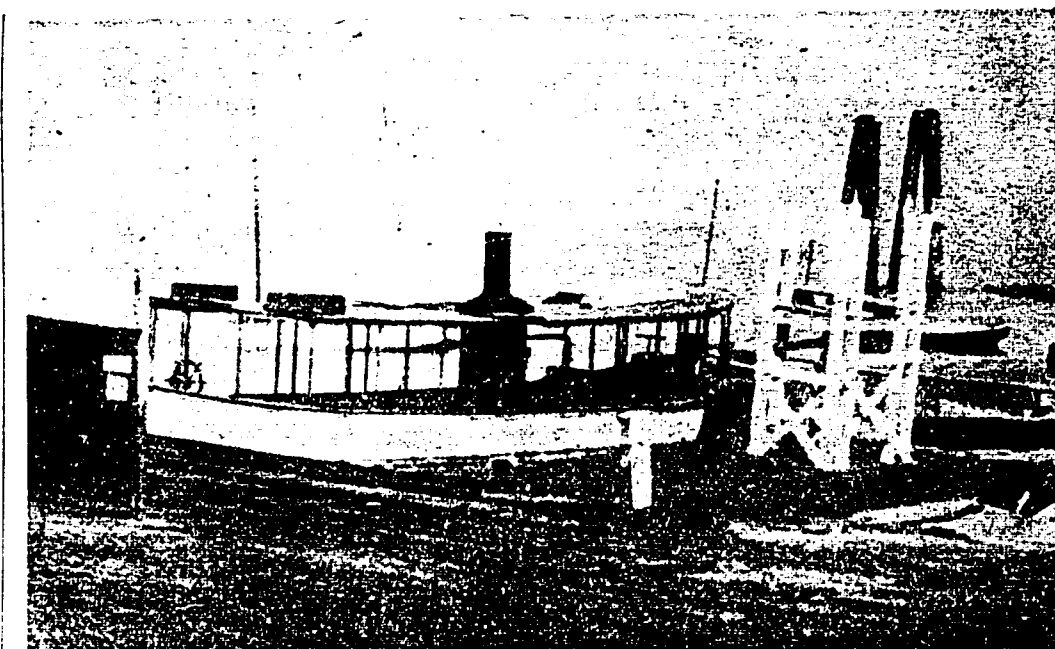
Sometime in the spring of 1886, only a few months after the company was formed, the Della made her first trip across the bay as a ferryboat.

Babcock was at the wheel. Storey was engineer. It was the usual ceremonial occasion. No work done.

Barge Claim Disputed

When the Della got down to the work of hauling people from San Diego to Coronado to look over the property the passengers, if there were more than a half dozen or so, rode on a barge she towed.

Some historians say she towed two barges. A current researcher, Gerald F. Mac-



TRAVEL AID—The good ship Della was the major means of travel across the bay in 1886. It was re-

placed by the more powerful tug Rover, that year. —Historical Photo, Union Title Insurance Co.

Mullen, Serra Museum director, looked at her specifications and said:

"Two horse power! She could hardly get out of her own way. I'll bet she never towed two barges. She probably towed one, a small one."

The reporters and historians of the Della era have an annoying habit of writing with an everybody-knows-all-about-that-anyhow attitude.

But a former Evening Tribune reporter, the late Herbert Hensley who, before he died last year, left a few hundred precious words about the Della.

Round Trip Made

She plied from Orange Avenue, Coronado, to 5th Avenue, San Diego. At each point she swung herself and her tow into wharves for unloading. She used no slip. She made a round trip each two hours.

Her freeboard was slight midship and aft, her coaming only three or four inches high. Finally, on a choppy San Diego-to-Coronado run, she shipped water dangerously.

Her return trip was delayed

two hours while eighteen inches more coaming was installed. It was tongue and groove redwood strips. Installed vertically. It did the trick nicely.

On one trip a gang of young boys tied a home made row-boat behind her barge, hooking a free ride. In the middle of the bay the entire front end of the flimsy boat was pulled out.

Boys Picked Up

The boat passengers all got to the stern and stayed afloat. The Della cut loose her barge, circled and picked up the boys.

Well she might. Leaders of the aquatic hitch hikers were Arnold and Graham Babcock, sons of Mr. Coronado himself.

Just how long the Della served is not known. Even-

tually her tiny engine became so feeble it was a question of whether she was towing the barge or the barge, and the currents, towing her.

Passengers took some long, hilarious detours before the company hired the 15-ton, 49-foot tug Rover to tow the passenger barge.

On Aug. 10, 1886, the Coronado, a steam, sidewheel, 100 foot ferryboat built in San Francisco for the company arrived and retired the Rover from the ferry business.

The 178-foot, 29-year-old Coronado now plying the ferry lanes is a namesake of that first sidewheeler.

Della Sinking Bared

The Della was sunk some years later. Hensley reported he couldn't recall whether she hit, or was hit by, a large steamer.

She was raised and became here.

the property of Pat O'Day, a well known waterfront character, father of Jackie O'Day, the cork legged newsboy who was one of the close associates of San Diego's immortal town dog, Bum.

Pat O'Day took out the Della's engine, rigged her with sail. He put a roof across the high coaming installed in the emergency of her ferrying days. It made a snug cabin. He used her for fishing.

Where she lies now is not known.

Oil Leases Acquired

LOS ANGELES (UPI)—Oil leases covering 1,000 acres in the San Emidio Nose area in Kern County have been acquired by Bandini Petroleum Co. and Hamilton Dome Oil Co., Ltd., it was announced here.