

CHINA CABIN - A VICTORIAN RECEPTION ROOM

By Dave Gotz

The glitter of 22-karat gold greets visitors to the China Cabin, once the elegant social hall of the paddle steamer China, giving them a glimpse of the old-world luxury and attention to detail that first-class passengers enjoyed when the ship first sailed from its home port of San Francisco in 1867.

The Victorian hall, a gleaming white presence on the Belvedere waterfront, boasts elegant walnut woodwork, etched glass window panes with a floral design and brass chandeliers draped with crystal prisms. The wood walls and arched ceiling panels are painted bright white and highlighted with gold leaf. The walnut border on the white oak floor marks the location of a grand staircase that led to the first-class dining saloon and cabins on the promenade deck below. A circle on the ceiling and a compass rose on the floor indicate the spot where the 100-foot mainmast came up through the saloon.

The Pacific Mail Steamship Company commissioned the construction of the China, a side-wheel paddle steamer rigged for sail, to service the route between San Francisco and the Far East. She was built in the famous William H. Webb shipyard in New York and was one of four sister ships the United States Postal Service ordered to carry mail and passen-

gers from California to Asia. Although she had a colorful life, the ship was destined for a brief career because of her wooden hull. By 1879 iron-hulled vessels had come into regular use, so after 30 round trips to Yokohama and Hong Kong, the China became obsolete. She was brought to Tiburon Cove to be broken up and sold for scrap in early 1886; the social hall was removed intact, barged to the Belvedere shore and set on pilings. The hall took on new life as a weekend home, and during its 90 years as a residence, locals, who regarded the unique shoreline structure with affection, gave it a new name – the China Cabin.

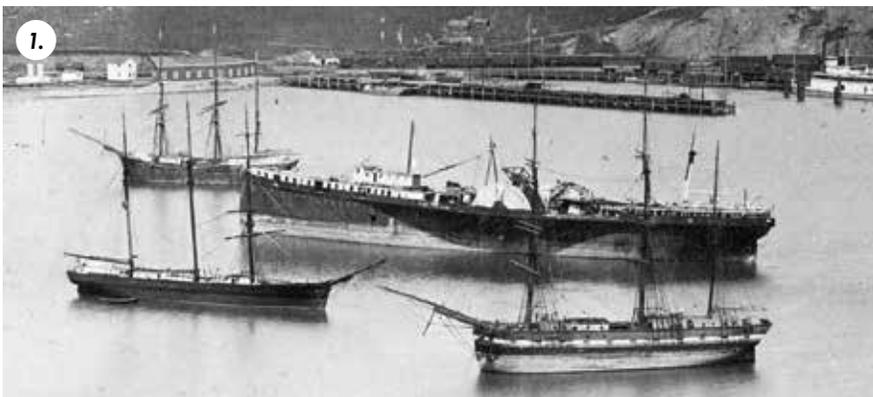
In the early 1970s, the City of Belvedere expressed its desire to create open space along Beach Road; this would necessitate the removal of the China Cabin. When it appeared that the community was not interested in keeping the old cabin, the Landmarks Society stepped in. Negotiating a deal to move the cabin so it was perpendicular to the road the City agreed to let it stay and be restored; over six years and at a cost of \$600,000, generously donated by locals and maritime enthusiasts, Landmarks meticulously restored the cabin opening it for visitors in 1986. The China Cabin is open 1-4 pm every Sunday.



Help Landmarks Society preserve our local history and keep it accessible for the community and visitors. To become a member, or volunteer, visit our website at www.landmarkssociety.org or call 415-435-1853. "The Tradition Starts With You!"

1. S. China being broken up in Tiburon Cove 1886.

2. China Cabin in its original position, parallel to Beach Road. It had a pitched roof from 1907 until it was removed in 1978, shortly after this photo was taken.



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