

Richard Clifford Porter and the SS Palo Alto, a family story

To the grandfather that I hardly ever knew,

Hello, My name is Bruce Porter. I am the grandson of Richard Clifford Porter, a man who once owned the Palo Alto. On the beach here at Seacliff are the remnants of a dream he and a group of investors had to put an unusual amusement enterprise on the north shore of Monterey Bay in 1930. Grandfather Porter bought the ship in 1929 and salvaged the propulsion machinery, boilers, deck machinery and other equipment before selling the ship to the Seacliff Amusement Corporation. As part of the sale, he was given stock and a position on the board of directors of this company. This company had the ship towed from San Francisco Bay to its present location. Among the passengers to ride the ship on its only ocean going voyage was my grandfather. What started out as long-term vision ended in bankruptcy in 1932 with nature delivering the blows that have made this ship a marine habitat.

My grandfather, Richard Clifford Porter, was a man with a true entrepreneurial spirit. He started a business in Oakland in the early 20th century dealing with used machinery. He was very interested in salvaging ships that went aground on the northern California coast. Grandpa Porter was a real risk taker when it came to removing equipment. He was known to go down in a hard helmet diving suit to inspect a wreck that was being salvaged. When he wasn't chasing down a ship to salvage he was supporting a wife and family of two daughters and a son at home on Harwood Avenue in Oakland

The Palo Alto was a risky venture to undertake especially during the Depression. Today it remains as a tribute to determination. My grandfather continued salvaging ships and going into new adventures including a mine in Ely, Nevada. During WWII, one of his ships — an oil tanker — was torpedoed off of Eureka but he managed to salvage some of it. I remember, when living in Alameda where he built the home that I was raised in, he had a garage built where some of his mining equipment was stored. This equipment was sold for scrap.

My recollection of RC Porter is vague and based on stories I heard as a child. He died in 1954 when I was 5. Over the years, my parents would take my sister, brother and I to visit the ship. At the time you could still go onto the stern section of the vessel. Last year, my wife, Hanna, and I visited the ship and visitor center at Seacliff and decided to return for the celebration of the centennial.

Before closing I wish to acknowledge David W. Heron whose book *Forever Facing South: The Story of the S. S. Palo Alto "the Old Cement Ship" of Seacliff Beach* was very helpful in my research.

Thank you.