

Holding Out Hope for the *Falls of Clyde*

An Appeal by Joseph W. Lombardi

Since her arrival in Honolulu more than forty-five years ago, the historic four-masted barque *Falls of Clyde* has been cared for and displayed to the public by the Bishop Museum's Hawaii Maritime Center. Over several periods of overhaul and dry-docking, the vessel was restored to her original glory and has enjoyed much attention by school groups and the visiting public. In February 2007, the ship was closed to the public while the Hawaii Maritime Center (HMC) assessed the condition of the ship, taking the safety of visitors and staff as their first consideration. They determined that the ship's structural condition and rigging require



Falls of Clyde takes center stage at the Hawaii Maritime Center.



significant sums of money for the restoration and dry-docking now paramount to the continued safe display of the ship as a floating museum. The necessary work is far beyond the financial capabilities of the museum and so they must release it from their collection.

Given the sensitivity of the long-term relationship between the vessel and Hawaii/Port of Honolulu, it is hoped that a “white knight” will come forward to finance the ship's restoration for it to remain in Honolulu. The other path that is being explored is the possibility that the ship could be transferred to serve as an icon for either another museum or commercial setting. *Falls of Clyde* is now available for donation to the recipient that can demonstrate a need and the resources to properly tackle such a project and remove the vessel from her current berth in Honolulu.

Falls of Clyde Main Deck, Looking Aft, Port Side (2007)



If no one does come forward to assume the mantle of responsibility of ownership, studies are now being completed for the eventual sinking of the ship in deep water after removal of her historic artifacts and her remarkable inventory of steel yards and other square-rigged components. This, of course, is the least desirable outcome, and it is hoped that individuals or an organization with interest in the *Falls of Clyde* will step forward smartly, as the time line to permanently dispose of the vessel is June/July 2008.

Falls of Clyde requires an estimated \$32 million in repairs and renovation work to be fully restored. “Our first choice would be to move forward with a complete restoration of the *Falls of Clyde*, and we have looked at several options—and continue to seek options—to make this happen. However, at this time, we do not have the finances or staff resources to undertake a fundraising campaign of this monumental magnitude,” said Timothy E. Johns, president and CEO of the Bishop Museum.

Expressions of interest with regard to this historic vessel should be addressed to Joseph Lombardi, Marine Surveyor and Consultant, by e-mail at joe@oceantechserv.com. The ship is berthed at the Hawaii Maritime Center on Honolulu Harbor.

Joseph Lombardi, a marine surveyor with Ocean Technical Services, was commissioned by the Bishop Museum to assess the Falls of Clyde. The museum has authorized Mr. Lombardi to broadcast this appeal for help to the maritime community.

At her berth at Pier 7, Hawaii Maritime Center, December 2007



PHOTOS FOR THIS ARTICLE COURTESY OF JOSEPH LOMBARDI AND THE HAWAII MARITIME CENTER

Ship's History by MacKinnon Simpson

It is a cold December day in 1878 at the Russell & Company shipyard in Port Glasgow, Scotland, on the banks of the River Clyde. Work stops for a time as a graceful, just-finished four-masted square rigger slips down greased planks into the river. Precisely a century before, in December of 1778, Captain Cook's two expeditionary ships were slowly cruising the coastline of Hawaii, as Cook laboriously charted the Islands of "Owhyhee" for posterity. None of that, of course, was on the minds of the Scottish shipwrights as they watched their new wrought-iron creation splash into the Bonnie Clyde. Yet the new ship would eventually become as integral a part of Hawaiian maritime history as Captain Cook himself.

The *Falls of Clyde* was the first of nine ships—big, rangy sailing ships flying more than an acre of canvas—intended for the international trade, an industry then dominated by canny Glasgow shipowners. She sailed for Wright, Breakenridge & Co. and was known among sailors as a fast, easy handling ship. At a time when smoky, coal-burning steamers were inexorably taking over the world's shipping routes, *Falls of Clyde* crisscrossed the oceans between the world's trading centers—Rangoon, Cape Town, Hamburg, Shanghai, Melbourne, Liverpool, Buenos Aires, New York, and Bombay—carrying whatever cargo she could rustle up, including lumber, whiskey, cotton, explosives, jute, cement, and wheat.

She was called a "tramp," with all the vagabond implications of that word. Bob Krauss, a longtime *Honolulu Advertiser* columnist and one of a small band credited with saving the *Falls*

in 1963, described her as "a waterfront woman known in the toughest seaports in the world. She is on intimate terms with fights, drunkenness, cockroaches, hurricanes, prostitutes. All her life she has consorted with rude sailors and stevedores and has been married to no less than seventeen sea captains.

Many men have fallen in love with her and many still do." In her first two decades of operation, *Falls of Clyde* made seventy voyages under the British flag.

Her second career began right around her twentieth birthday, when she was sold to one Arthur M. Brown of Honolulu for \$25,000—not a bad return for a ship, which originally cost her owners \$18,606. The deal was a bit convoluted, as Brown was acting as an agent for Captain William Matson in order to secure Hawaiian registry for the ship. Some six months prior, President McKinley had signed the order annexing the Islands, so a Hawaiian registry provided a backdoor to American registry. *Falls of Clyde* arrived at Honolulu on 20 January 1899, flying the Hawaiian flag.

Honolulu Harbor was the economic center of the Islands, almost from the time of its discovery by a British sea captain around 1793. It was the only accessible natural harbor, created when the swift freshwater of Nu'uaniu Stream poured into the ocean and prevented coral from growing. The early Hawaiians used the area



Falls of Clyde was re-rigged as a barque by Captain William Matson in 1899 to reduce the size of his payroll by reducing the size of his crew.

for fishing and little else. They much preferred Waikiki, with its rich food supply and wide beaches to launch their canoes. Unlike Hawaiian canoes, which could be easily dragged up on a beach, Western ships needed a sheltered anchorage with deep water. As the trading ships visited with greater frequency, the rude huts of a small village sprang up nearby. That village became a town, with ship chandleries and saloons to serve the ships and their occupants and a huge coral fort to imprison the rowdier ones. The town evolved into a city, wholly dependent upon its harbor. It was into this harbor that the *Falls of Clyde* sailed, the newest and largest member of the sugar fleet.

Captain Matson would employ her in the Hawaii sugar trade, specifically servicing the plantations of the Big Island, bringing goods and machinery from the West Coast to Hilo and returning with burlap sacks full of raw sugar on its way to the California refineries and then on to the markets of the rest of the country. The British had sailed her with a crew of about 25, but Matson pulled the yards and square sails down off the jigger mast and replaced them with a fore-and-aft rig, thereby reducing the number of sail handlers needed. With her altered rig, *Falls* usually sailed with about a dozen crew, an enormous savings in operating costs, even in those days of paltry pay. Matson also had a deckhouse and charthouse built and had her aft quarters modified to carry passengers. From 1899 to 1907, the *Falls* made over sixty voyages be-

tween these ports, with an average passage taking seventeen days.

Never one to miss an economic opportunity, Captain Matson recognized that Hawaii's coal-fired sugar mills might operate much more efficiently on oil. He invested in a hundred-mile pipeline running from California's inland oil fields to the coast, ending at Gaviota, near Santa Barbara, and he converted several of his ships to sail-powered oil tankers.

A maritime rarity when she was built, the *Falls of Clyde* became even more a curiosity in 1907 when she was converted to a sailing oil tanker to begin her third career. Her sturdy wrought-iron hull, almost 3/4-inches thick, was fastened together with thousands of hand-hammered 7/8-inch rivets. Her interior spaces were gutted and ten large tanks were built along both sides and the bottom, giving her a capacity of 756,000 gallons of oil. Heavy-duty pumps and a second steam boiler to operate them were also installed.

She was transferred to the Associated Oil Company, in which



Crewmen of the sailing oil tanker Falls of Clyde in 1917

Captain Matson had a large interest, and sailed between Gaviota and Honolulu Harbor, where she discharged oil into tanks at Oahu Railway & Land Company's Pier 16. She often sailed back to California with a load of molasses, a few passengers, and small amounts of cargo t'ween-decks. By 1920, her 42nd year, she had become obsolete was sold to G.W. McNear of San Francisco. He sent her on two charter trips carrying oil from Texas to Denmark before selling her to the General Petroleum Co., also of San Francisco. Under their ownership, *Falls of Clyde* was sent on a voyage to Buenos Aires by way of Tampico, Mexico.

In early 1922, *Falls of Clyde* was towed through the Panama Canal back to San Pedro, California, where her rig was cut down to her lower masts before being towed to Ketchikan, Alaska. In Alaska, she served the next thirty-seven years as a floating fuel depot for the offshore fishing fleet. By 1959, General Petroleum Company had built shore facilities in Ketchikan and *Falls of Clyde* was no longer needed as a fuel depot.

William W. Mitchell purchased her and towed her to Seattle, intent upon turning her into a museum ship—not an inexpensive or easy task. For the next five years, she was offered to city after city—Seattle, San Pedro, Long Beach, Philadelphia, and Honolulu.

As a bankruptcy court prepared to sell her to a Canadian logging company to be scuttled as a breakwater at Vancouver, a few local citizens took action. A newspaper announced the campaign to "Save the *Falls of Clyde*," and it was the people of Hawaii (and some financial support from the Matson Navigation Co.) who responded by raising over \$35,000, most of it quite literally nickels, dimes, and dollar bills, just weeks before she was to be sunk. The old hulk was saved!

A Navy tug towed the dismantled, dilapidated *Falls* from Seattle to her new home back in Honolulu. In time, she would be restored, using the combined skills of shipwrights, riggers, iron workers, welders and, always, volunteers. A gift of four new iron masts

Falls of Clyde was towed back to Honolulu in 1963 from Seattle.



arrived from Scotland, built at the same shipyard from which she was launched, by the grandsons and great-grandsons of the men who had built her eighty-five years before. Yards and rigging were fashioned locally, and her hull, superstructures, and cabins were chipped, painted, and varnished. In 1969, she was opened to the

Despite her appearance, the Falls of Clyde received a warm reception when she arrived in Honolulu in 1963.



Fully restored in 1970, Falls of Clyde in her new role as a museum ship and educational platform.



public. The shouts of the mates and men aloft have given way to the shouts of Hawaii schoolchildren, learning about the *Falls* and their islands' history.

The *Falls of Clyde* is one of the most important museum ships in the world; she was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1989 and is the last remaining four-masted, full-rigged ship left afloat, as well as the only sail-powered oil tanker and the only

member of Captain William Matson's original fleet. She's been on a lee shore before, but, unless help comes fast and in a big way, she may not be able to claw off the rocks this time. There is no time to waste. ⚓

Historian and author MacKinnon Simpson has authored and designed more than twenty books on Hawaiian history. He is the former historian and exhibit designer at the Hawaii Maritime Center.

Falls of Clyde is 266 feet in length, 40 feet on the beam, and has a 23-1/2-foot depth of hold. She is registered at 1,807 gross tons.

