A guide to the Robert J. Ferrand motion picture films of C.A. Thayer (built 1895; schooner, 3m) and Wapama (built 1915; steam schooner), 1983, 1984

Processed by: Taylor Horton2015.
San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park
Building E, Fort Mason
San Francisco, CA 94123
Phone: 415-561-7030
Fax: 415-556-3540
SAFR_Historic_Documents@nps.gov
URL: http://www.nps.gov/safr
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A Guide to the Robert J. Ferrand motion picture films of C.A. Thayer (built 1895; schooner, 3m) and Wapama (built 1915; steam schooner)

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**Acquisition Information**
SAFR-00001
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**Historical or Biographical Note**
C.A. Thayer (built 1895; schooner, 3m) and Wapama (built 1915; steam schooner) Vessel Histories
C.A. Thayer (built 1895; schooner, 3m)

In 1895, Danish-born Hans D. Bendixsen built C.A. Thayer in his Northern California shipyard (located across the narrows of Humboldt Bay from the city of Eureka). She was named for Clarence A. Thayer, a partner in the San Francisco-based E.K. Wood Lumber Company.

Between 1895 and 1912, Thayer usually sailed from E.K. Wood's mill in Grays Harbor, Washington, to San Francisco. But she also carried lumber as far south as Mexico, and occasionally even ventured offshore to Hawaii and Fiji.

Thayer is fairly typical of West Coast, three-masted lumber schooners in size (219' extreme) and cargo capacity (575,000 board feet). She carried about half of her load below; the remaining lumber was stacked ten feet high on deck, and secured
with chain (as illustrated in this 1912 photo). In port, her small crew (eight or nine men) served double-duty as longshoremen; unloading 75,000 to 80,000 board feet was an average day's work.

After sustaining serious damage during a heavy, southeasterly gale, C.A. Thayer's lumber trade days ended in an Oakland shipyard, in 1912. But it was really the rise of steam power, and not the wind, that pushed her into a new career.

Early each April from 1912 to 1924, C.A. Thayer hauled 28-foot gill-net boats, bundles of barrel staves, and tons of salt from San Francisco to Western Alaska. This deck view shows her underway, in 1914. She spent the summer anchored out at Squaw Creek (see photo) or Koggiung; the fishermen worked their nets and the cannery workers packed the catch on shore. Thayer then returned each September, her hold stacked with barrels of salted salmon.

Vessels in the salt-salmon trade usually laid up during the winter months, but when World War I inflated freight rates (1915-1919), C.A. Thayer carried Northwest fir and Mendocino redwood to Australia. These off-season voyages took about two months each way. Her return cargo was usually coal, but sometimes hardwood or copra (dried coconut meat, from which coconut oil is pressed).

From 1925-1930, C.A. Thayer made yearly voyages from Poulsbo, Washington, to the Bering Sea codfishing waters (off the Alaskan coast). In addition to supplies, she carried upwards of thirty men north, including fourteen fishermen and twelve "dressers" (the men who cleaned and cured the catch).

At about 4:30am each day, the fishermen launched their Grand Banks dories over Thayer's rails, and then fished standing up, with handlines dropped over both sides of their small boats. When the fishing was good, a man might catch 300-350 cod in a five-hour period.

After a decade-long, Depression-era lay-up in Lake Union, Seattle, the U.S. Army purchased C.A. Thayer from J.E. Shields (a prominent Seattle codfisherman) for use in the war effort. In 1942, the Army removed her masts and used Thayer as an ammunition barge in British Columbia. After World War II, Shields bought his ship back from the Army, fitted her with masts once again, and returned her to codfishing. This bustling photo (ca. 1946-50, P9,8493.) illustrates her post-WWII period.

With her final voyage, in 1950, C.A. Thayer entered the history books as the last commercial sailing vessel to operate on the West Coast.

The State of California purchased C.A. Thayer in 1957. After preliminary restoration in Seattle, Washington, an intrepid volunteer crew sailed her down the coast to San Francisco. The San Francisco Maritime Museum performed more extensive repairs and refitting, and opened Thayer to the public in 1963. The vessel was transferred to the National Park Service in 1978, and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1984. After three full careers, and over 100 hundred years, she remains -- restored and maintained for future generations -- to be experienced at the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park.

Wapama (built 1915; steam schooner)

Constructed in 1915 almost entirely of Douglas fir in St. Helens, Oregon by the St. Helens Ship Building Company. A wooden steamship and the last survivor of the approximately 235 steam schooners that were built on the West Coast. The Wapama, and similar steam schooners, transported lumber from Northern California and the Pacific Northwest, that was used to build California cities. These large, wooden vessels also provided the only effective passenger service from the 1880s through the 1930s.

Known as a "single end steamer," Wapama has her engine and machinery housed aft. Some vessels had their engines housed midships and were known as "double ended."

A high superstructure on the stern and a high forecastle on the bow are distinctive features of Wapama. The masts and spars support booms for loading and off-loading cargo and are equipped with two sets of friction winches. These powerful winches were designed to allow Wapama to load and off-load by herself without the use of shore cranes. The ability to do this was an asset in the lumber trade, where ports were primitive and lacked shore facilities for cargo loading.

Wapama had one main hatch for loading. In addition to 60 passengers, the ship could carry 1,100,00 board feet of lumber, which included a deckload 15 feet deep.

The vessel was powered by a triple expansion engine, Indicated Horsepower (ihp) 800, built by the Main Iron Works of San Francisco.

In 1930 Wapama left the lumber trade for the "White Flyer Line" which ran between San Pedro and San Francisco. In 1937 she turned northward, and ended her active career under the flag of the Alaska Transportation Company in 1947.

The State of California acquired the vessel in 1958 and displayed her at the San Francisco Maritime State Park at Hyde Street Pier. In 1977 Wapama was transferred to the National Park Service. She was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1984, and became part of the part of the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park in 1988.

Wapama was displayed afloat at Hyde Street Pier until 1980, when her wooden hull was so badly deteriorated that she was removed from the water and placed on a barge. In 1986 she was moved to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers facility in
Sausalito, CA where she remained until 2000, when she was towed to her current Richmond, CA berth. After a series of condition assessments and stabilization measures, including removal of heavy deck machinery and bracing the hull, the park concluded that, due to her extremely poor condition, the dismantling of the Wapama, as outlined in the 1997 General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, must begin.

The Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) documented the vessel with drawings and photographs, and continued to document and capture important construction details throughout the dismantling process.

Wapama's 30-ton steam engine was removed and will be displayed on the park's Hyde Street Pier. Other significant elements, artifacts, and pieces of machinery have also been saved and, combined with material from the park's museum collections, will be used to create a permanent interpretive exhibit which will tell her story, and preserve her place in history.

The dismantling process began with the removal and encapsulation of hazardous material, then the pilothouse was detached, lifted off the vessel, and transferred to a storage facility. The engine was picked out of the vessel with a shore-side crane and has been transported to Hyde Street Pier. The dismantling was completed in August, 2013.

Source:


Collection Scope and Content
The Robert J. Ferrand motion picture films of C.A. Thayer (built 1895; schooner, 3m) and Wapama (built 1915; steam schooner) consists of 3 reels of 16mm silent color film.

The film has a run time of 00:26:06.


Per CAVPP digital transfer notes, reels 1 and 2 consist of footage of C. A. Thayer restoration work in 1983 and reel 3 consists of footage of the 1984 dedication of Wapama by the National Park Service.

Collection Arrangement
Arranged on single reel chronologically.