

Lesson Eight

*Objectives Match:
The Period of Rapid Population
Growth, Large Scale Agriculture,
and Linkage to the Rest of the United States*

*Timeline:
1850s - Present*

TOURING THE *BALCLUTHA*

As you approach the *Balclutha* on the Hyde Street Pier, this magnificent ship will strike you as exemplary. But in the late 1880s, when it was making its first voyages to the San Francisco Bay, *Balclutha* would have been lost in a “forest of masts.” In fact, it would have been nearly indistinguishable from the hundreds of ships which would have been anchored here.

This was a boom time for the West Coast and San Francisco was a boomtown. Mining, lumbering, and mechanized agriculture developed San Francisco into an economic engine unrivaled on the Pacific rim of America.

In its day, *Balclutha* would have been as romantic and glamorous as a modern ore carrier is to us today. From our modern perspective, however, life on board a wind driven ship voyaging to the far corner of a new country does seem remarkable.

The *Balclutha* will be your time machine back to the era when San Francisco was a lively outpost surrounded by dunes. Back to a time when it would take five months and favorable winds to travel here by sea from London (a time, also, when a sailor might throw a pair of old shoes over the side to bring on a breeze).

What to Know: The *Balclutha* is a steel hulled, square-rigged ship, and it was built on the river Clyde in Scotland in 1886. Its keel was laid after steam propulsion was a standard technology used in ocean-going passenger service.

Why then was it designed as a sail ship with no engine? The answer lies in what it was designed to carry: bulk cargoes. *Balclutha* was designed and built for the California grain trade. The ship was a direct response to the bonanza harvest of the Central Valley of California. More than a hundred ships of *Balclutha's* type were built in the Old World to carry most of this state's output of wheat and barley back to their home ports.

Nearly three decades after the gold rush, the Central Valley became the setting of one of California's most significant economic transformations. Steam driven harvesting combines and the conversion of family plots into large industrial farms produced the wheat bonanzas of the 1880s. The greatest part of this production was exported by ship to Northern Europe while many ships like *Balclutha* brought coal from Europe to fire the harvesting machines.

Balclutha had no use for coal as fuel. Its only power came from the wind. Because the ship's "engines" were its sails, the sailor was an indispensable part of its operation. Unlike a ship with fore-and-aft rigging (such as the schooner *C.A. Thayer*), a square rigged ship like *Balclutha* required sailors to go aloft to set and put away or furl the sails. The ship would leave port only with a full complement of sailors.

Life of the Sailor

During *Balclutha's* working life there were two very distinct and separate worlds on board. Forward, before the mast (forward of the main mast) was the Spartan environment of the ordinary sailor. Aft, behind the rail, was the relatively luxurious environment of the officers, the captain, and his family if he chose to bring them along.

Before the Mast - The Foc'sle

The place where the sailors lived is forward and it is called a forecabin or foc'sle. This is the only space on the ship for the sailors. There is no dining hall, no recreation room, no showers, and limited bathroom facilities. All a sailor's possessions were stored here in a sea chest. (Special note: The foc'sle historically had two tables, but the park has not restored and returned them to the foc'sle.)

Look for the sea chest in the foc'sle. In it a sailor might have kept a change of clothes, some tools, a harmonica or other compact musical instrument, and other useful possessions such as a sewing kit. A sailor could also bring on board a mattress to cushion his bunk. It was known as a donkey's breakfast because it was a long canvas bag filled with straw. Underway the foc'sle would have been a dark, damp, and smelly place. In rough weather it would have been common to have water sloshing back and forth with the pitch of the ship. There is a photograph of a working foc'sle in the panel inside the compartment. Notice how crowded and

cluttered the place looks. This is where sailors were expected to live for the better part of a year. Toilet facilities were just outside the entrance to the foc'sle; one small chamber (locked today) on the right (starboard) side of the ship.

The Deck House

Between the foc'sle and the poop deck lies the deck house. In it lived the cook, the carpenter, the sailmaker, the third mate, and four apprentices. It also housed the galley, where all meals were cooked on board and the carpenter shop. The duties of these tradesmen are self-described. The third mate was usually the youngest and therefore the newest officer aboard; many having only having recently finished their apprenticeship

The apprentices were teen-aged boys who straddled the two social worlds of the ship. An apprentice's family would have paid the ship's company a handsome sum of money to take him on. They were expected to learn every aspect of running a ship: from laying aloft with the sailors, to peeling potatoes, reading a sextant, and taking their turn at the wheel.

Back in *Balclutha's* sailing days the apprentices and sailors would all have been men or boys. Today the navies and many merchant fleets around the world train women to serve as officers and sailors aboard their ships.

Behind the Rail - Captain's and Officer's Cabins

Aft of the poop deck rail lies the exclusive domain of the captain, the first and second mate, the steward, and the captain's family, if they came along. Neither the foc'sle sailors nor the apprentices could come aft unless they were ordered to by the captain or a mate. It is possible that a sailor might complete a round trip, year-long voyage on *Balclutha* without ever seeing the this area of the ship.

There is a pantry where the steward would bring the best food cooked in the galley and make it taste better by using spices (these would not be "wasted" on the sailors) before serving the captain. The two cabins opposite the pantry were used by the first and second mate. As their titles imply they were in authority beneath the captain.

The ship's store, across from the mate's cabins, were the captain's way of making a little more money while underway. Because his customers, the crew, did not have anywhere else to go, the captain might ask outrageous prices for such items as tobacco, new boots, or a knife. The door just aft of the ship's store would have remained closed at all time. Behind it is a world that the sailors could only dream of in their own dark and smelly bunks.

The captain's parlor was the center of social life aft. It is the functional equivalent of the foc'sle. The contrast between the two is memorable. The parlor also served as the company's office overseas. The captain would negotiate business transactions, and entertain clients, business representatives, and harbor pilots. It was also the common area for the captain's wife. It was not unusual that a captain's family would accompany him on long voyages. The captain's cabin was equipped with its own bathroom with toilet and tub.

The deck above, called the poop or quarter-deck was considered the captain's domain. Sailors would only come up here when it was their turn to steer or carry out other jobs. During good weather, the captain and his family might be relaxing on the combination bench/skylight which is just forward of the wheel. The small deck house on the poop, called the chart house, housed navigational charts and instruments.

While the family and the officers relaxed, one sailor would have been at the wheel. He was expected to remain silent and do his job, and would never have talked to a member of the family or the captain without being addressed first.

Purpose: On board the *Balclutha*, students and teachers will be able to identify the three main living areas of the ship, who lived there, and how they lived .

What to Do:

Duration: 60 minutes

Materials: *Balclutha Handout 1* and a pencil for each group, *Balclutha Handout Two : List of the Crew*, cut into slips and either photocopied onto colored paper or marked by a felt-tip pen in the following way:

- all abled bodied or ordinary seaman with blue
- captain, first, second mate, steward with red

- *apprentices, third mate, sailmaker, carpenter, cook with green*
1. Gather them in the shelterdeck of *Balclutha* (see Example 1, ***Balclutha Handout***, for directions or just remember that as soon as you board, make a right hand turn, and walk through the doorway straight ahead). You'll find a curved bench for the students to set on while you give them and the parents instructions. Once everyone is seated, pass out the slips of paper with the names on them.
 2. Assign at least one parent to each of the colored (blue, red, or green) groups and give a map of *Balclutha* to each. (Hint: Give the blue slips or abled body or ordinary sailors slips out last, but make certain that M. Septache, Denis Dempsey, A. Sanders, George Gilson, E. Bensen, Oscar Hansson, L. McGuinness, Alfred Goss, James Gordon, ands Alex Bern are handed out.) Distribute the *Balclutha* handout to each group, including the parents who will accompany them.
 3. Tell the students that they have been given the names of the crew of *Balclutha's* 1888-1889 voyage to California. Their assignment will be to go to the area of the ship where they lived (as noted on the ***Balclutha Handouts***) and as a group discuss and agree on the answers to the following questions (Hint: Some answers are to be found in the exhibit panels in the three areas to be examined):
 - Where did you sleep? What did you sleep on?
 - Where did you eat? What did you eat?
 - Where is the bath or shower? Toilet?
 4. Each group will start with their area of the ship first. They will be given ten minutes to examine an area, agree to the answers to the questions, before moving to the next area. The groups will rotate in the following order:
 - Blue group will start with the **fo'c'scle**, the green group will start with the **deck house**, and the red group will start with the **cabin** area.

- After ten minutes the red group will move to the deck house, the green group will move to the foc'scle, while the blue group will move to the cabin area.
 - After another ten minutes, the red group will move to the foc'scle, the green group will move to the officers area, and the blue group will move to the deck house.
 - After viewing all three areas noted on the map (30 minutes later), have the groups return to the shelterdeck.
5. Before the groups return to the shelterdeck, take four, white plastic chairs from the video area nearby. When the groups return have them seated in the following manner:
- Red Group on the chairs
 - Green group on the bench
 - Blue group is seated on the deck (floor).
- Have each group describe the living areas that they first viewed with the red group first, the green group second, and the blue group last. Once every group has had a chance to report, ask the groups a few questions to get a discussion initiated.
- Who lived the most luxurious life?
 - Who had the least amount of physical comforts?
 - Who was asked to do the hardest, physical work?
 - Who received the most amount of pay? Who were the least educated?
- [Hint: Examine the signatures of Septache, Dempsy, Williams, White, and Shields. You'll notice an "X" on the line between their first and last names. One of the mates probably wrote it for them, but they still had to make their mark. All were listed as ABs (Able Bodied Seaman) or OSs (Ordinary Seaman).] At the end of the discussion ask that those holding the names of Septache, Dempsy, Sanders, Gilson, Bensen, Hansson, McGuinness, Goss, and Gordon stand up. Explain that these men never made it back to England, but instead deserted and stayed in San Francisco. Why?

Balclutha Handout Two

List of the Crew, *Balclutha*, 1888-1889

**American Male Farm Laborers earned about \$12.00 per month, Women only
\$6.00 per month in the late 1880's**

Wages converted from British Pounds to American Dollars

Directions: Photocopy onto red paper or mark each name with a red marking pen. Cut on dotted line and distribute one name to each student.

Mr. F. Constable, 43 years old, Born: London, Captain, wages: share of profits of cargo

John Moss, 36 years old, Born: unknown, Mate, wages: \$40.00 per month

Robert Shachan, 23 years old, Born: Glasgow, Scotland, Second Mate,
wages: \$22.50 per month

John Garman, 32 years old, Born: Renfren, England, Stewart, \$21.25 per month

Balclutha Handout Two

Balclutha Crew, 1888-1889

**Note: Wages were converted from British pounds to American dollars
American Male Farm Laborers earned about \$12.00 per month, Women only
\$6.00 per month in the late 1880's**

Directions: Photocopy onto green paper or mark each name with a green marking pen. Cut on dotted line and distribute one name to each student.

Arthur Kerr, 22 years old, Born: Swansea, England, Third Mate, Wages: \$15 per month

S. Mc Linermis, 28 years old, Dumbarton, England, Carpenter, Wages: \$30 pounds per month

Joseph Knight, 32 years old, Born: Jamaica, Cook, \$20 per month

Thomas Fraser, 28 years old, Born: St. Vincent, West Indies, Sailmaker, \$17.50 per month

James Gordon, 18 years old, Registry of Indenture: Glasgow, Scotland, 1886, Apprentice

Samuel Muirhead, 17 years old, Registry of Indenture: Glasgow, Scotland, 1886, Apprentice

Alex Bern, 18 years old, Registry of Indenture: Glasgow, Scotland, 1886, Apprentice

San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park

Thomas Clark, 17 years old, Registry of Indenture: Glasgow, Scotland, 1886, Apprentice

Balclutha Handout Two

Balclutha Crew, 1888-1889

**American Male Farm Laborers earned about \$12.00 per month, Women only
\$6.00 per month in the late 1880's
British Pounds Converted to American Dollars**

Directions: Photocopy onto blue paper or mark with a blue marking pen. Cut on dotted lines and distribute one name to each student. Please remember to distribute the following names on the crew list: Septache, Dempsey, Sanders, Gilson, Bensen, Hansson, Mc Guinness, Goss.

John Sheady, 36 years old, Born: Finland, AB, \$12.50 per month

John X Williams, 26 years old, Born: St. Helena, AB, \$12.50 per month

Mande X Septache, 26 years old, Born: Unknown, AB, \$12.50 per month

William Walford, 23 years old, Born: Swansea, England, AB, \$12.50 per month

Evan Evans, 20 years old, Born: Unknown, AB, \$12.50 per month

Denis X Dempsey, 22 years old, Born: Dublin, Ireland, AB, \$12.50 per month

Anders Sanders, 33 years old, Born: Bergen, Germany, AB, \$12.50 per month

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George Gilson, 43 years old, Born: Unknown, AB, \$12.50 per month

E. Bensen, 36 years old, Born: Gottenburg, Sweden, AB, \$12.50 per month

Oscar Hansson, 25 years old, Born: Gottland, Sweden, AB, \$12.50 per month

L. McGuinness, 22 years old, Born: Dublin, Ireland, AB, \$12.50 per month

Alfred Ryan, 24 years old, Born: Swansea, England, AB, \$12.50 per month

F. Richards, 22 years old, Born: Swansea, England, AB, \$12.50 per month

T. Francis, 18 years old, Born: Swansea, England , OS, \$11.25 per month

J. Roberts, 16 years old , Born: Glasgow, Scotland, OS, \$6.25 per month

S. Anderson, 23 years old, Born: Swansea, England, AB, \$12.50 per month

J. X White, 35 years old, Born: Unknown, AB, \$20 per month

San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park

Martin Bohn, 35 years old, Born: Norway, AB, \$20 per month

Richard X Shields, 32 years old, Born: Belfast, Ireland, AB, \$20 per month

J. Asurdson, 37 years old, Born: Hull, England, AB, \$20 per month

Richard Mentz, 27 years old, Born: Germany, AB, \$20 per month

Robert Hunter, 26 years old, Born: Scotland, AB, \$20 per month

William Brown, 28 years old, Born: Germany, AB \$20 per month

Alfred Anderson, 25 years old, Born: Sweden, AB, \$20 per month

Y.J. Thomas, 14 years old, Born: Swansea, England, OS, \$10 per month

Tour of Balclutha Handout One

Clues to the answers are on the map or in the areas that you are viewing.

Questions for the Foc'scle

1. Where did you sleep? What did you sleep on?

2. Where did you eat? What did you eat?

3. Where did you take a bath? Where did you use the toilet?

Questions for the Deckhouse

1. Where did you sleep? What did you sleep on?

2. Where did you eat? What did you eat?

3. Where did you take a bath? Where did you use the toilet?

Questions for the Cabins

1. Where did you sleep? What did you sleep on?

2. Where did you eat? What did you eat?

3. Where did you take a bath? Where did you use the toilet?

Balclutha
Main Deck (Not to Scale)

