Weekly work updates from February 2004 through December 2004 on the restoration of the 1895 lumber schooner *C. A. Thayer*

March 1 - 5, 2004

The lower strakes of thin ceiling on either side of the centerline keelsons were removed. We were very pleased with the condition of the framing exposed in this area. As we had hoped, the constant soaking in salt water had preserved these timbers in good condition. The edges were still sharp, and, at least in the midship area, we saw no softness. We had planned to take off the next strake up on either side, but decided to change this to the #5 strakes, in order to see if there was softness this far up. This was done through most of the length of the vessel. A preliminary inspection of the framing shows that most of it is still good, although we begin to see some ominous growth of white mold on some of the faces.

The inner surfaces of the planking also looked generally good, although they were somewhat abraded, presumably by a combination of trash washing back and forth in the bilge and possibly some action by gribbles. (Gribbles are a type of marine borer, which act on the surface of a plank or timber, rather than burrowing inside like a torero worm.) In any event, the damage did not look severe. In some places, there was perhaps a half inch of surface loss. This we can probably live with.

Late in the week, the contractor made another experiment with bottom planking removal, this time working down from the top, and was successful in removing a length of the #16 strake on the starboard side. They managed to wedge the plank off, cutting through any spikes or trunnels, which proved tenacious with a sawzall from the top. The plank came off in good condition. Following this experiment, we authorized removal of strakes 16 through 11 on either side, with the provisions that the planks be suitable for reuse. This will give us a look at the majority of the framing in way of the thick ceiling, which extends down to about outer planking strake #9.

The condition of the thick ceiling remains a critical unknown for the project. In the areas removed thus far, the condition varies radically. A strake will be good for two or three frame spaces and then will be very much rotten at the fourth. Presumably, this relates to the history of fresh water leaks at various points. Will we be able to make repairs from the outside of the thick ceiling, while retaining the structure overall? Remains to be seen. We all agree that this thick ceiling structure is critical to the longitudinal strength of the vessel.

The transom planking was entirely removed, except for a couple of strakes at the top, giving us a look at the framing and fastening technique. All of the framing and blocking here is well rotten and will have to be replaced. It was carefully drawn before being authorized for removal. The startling thing overall was how light and casually fastened this structure was. It seems that most of the strength of the stern overhang assembly came through the continuation of the thick ceiling planking right aft, and most importantly from the structure at the underside of the raised poop deck. Strong clamps ran along the

top of the side framing. The framing along the sides, between the main deck and the poop deck, are double timbers all the way up, unlike the single timbers in the bulwarks forward. A strong clamp ties the tops together, and there is solid ceiling planking, about 2-1/4 inch, over the whole inside. The clamps apparently tied in to quarter knees, connecting a heavy thwartship transom beam to the side framing. The grown quarter knees, lying horizontally in the after corners of the structure, provide great strength to the upper deck rim. In the *Thayer*, these knees had been removed, presumably during the work in Seattle in 1957, and were replaced with shorter pieces of straight-grained blocking. One such knee apparently survives in the *Wawona* in Seattle, and can serve as a pattern for the eventual renewal in the Thayer. As designed, the strong rim structure tied the whole stern overhang together. The weakening of this area in the Thayer was presumably largely responsible for the sagging off of her stern in recent years.

Next week, the removal of bottom planking will go ahead. Inside, the two stakes of thin ceiling will continue coming off. This will involve removal of the pointers, two forward and one aft. These are strong structures of diagonal timbers and knees that tie the “vee” of the ends together. They must come out to get at both the ceiling planking and the lower framing, which at least in the bow we know to be significantly rotten. With luck, they can be taken out whole and later reinstalled.