

# The San Diego Chamber of Commerce Establishes the U.S. Naval Coal Station, 1900-1912

## San Diego's First Permanent Naval Facility

By

John Martin

San Diego's civic leaders faced an economic challenge at the turn of the twentieth century: how to transform San Diego from a sleepy town into the thriving city they envisioned. The "boom" of the 1880s had left San Diego with a city-sized population and several possible avenues to achieve economic success—real estate, tourism, agriculture, maritime commerce—but no definitive niche. Looking to overcome this inertia and get the city moving, the San Diego Chamber of Commerce developed a strategy to persuade the federal government – specifically the United States Navy – to establish a facility on San Diego's "perfect and ample" harbor. The various surveys the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Service conducted from the 1850s onward, and the Army Corps of Engineers' supervision of the ongoing construction of the Zuniga Shoals Jetty, designed to create a deep, safe entry for large



*A pre-1904 view of the quarantine station with the adjacent vacant land where the Navy built the coal station. Courtesy of SSC Pacific Collection.*

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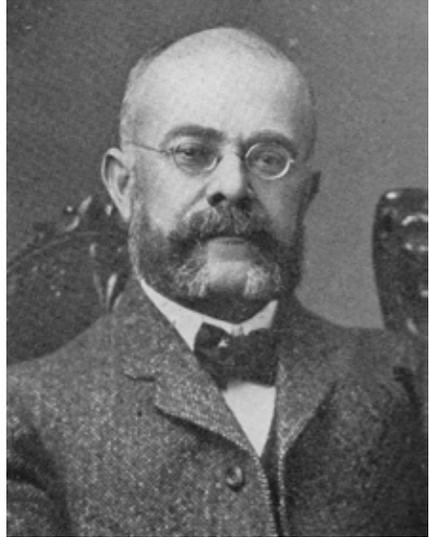
vessels, had thoroughly familiarized the government with the advantages of San Diego Bay. Now, with the harbor as the focus, the Chamber leadership framed their campaign to bring a military installation to San Diego with the tangential expectation that if they could persuade the government to establish one facility, others would surely follow.<sup>1</sup>

This was not the Chamber's first attempt to lure a military facility to the city. Between 1893 and 1900, the Chamber had pondered other schemes to establish a naval presence in San Diego – a training school, a "hydrographic" office, and a dry dock and repair facility – all good ideas, but no successes.<sup>2</sup> But this time the Chamber believed it had the answer—a coaling station. Navy ships generally needed to "coal" every two to three weeks, depending on the size of the vessel, and for ships patrolling the lengthy Pacific Coast, the only functioning coal station was in northern California's San Francisco Bay. So, armed with the belief that the Navy needed a depot in the southern region of the Pacific Coast and that establishing one naval facility would lead to others, the Chamber opened a campaign in 1900 to convince the government to construct a naval coaling station on the shore of San Diego harbor.

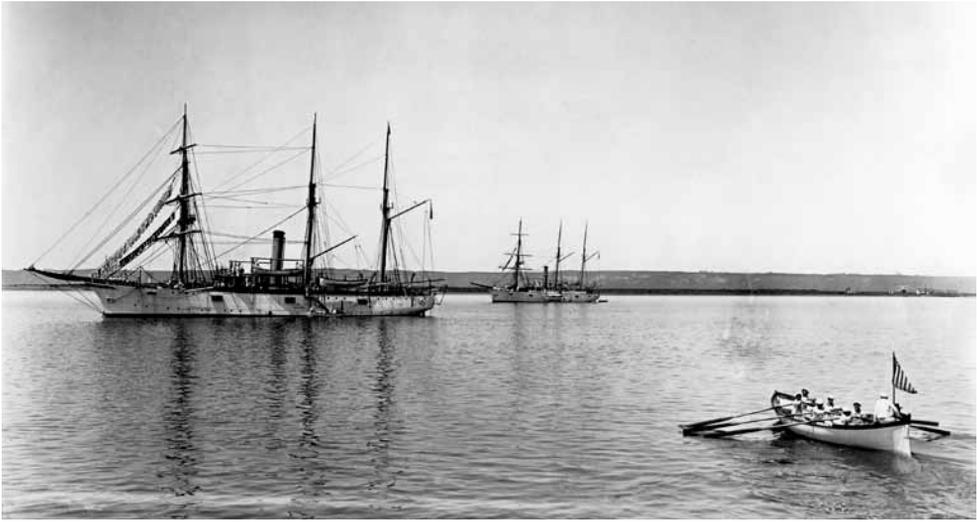
Under the direction of President George Ballou, Secretary H.P. Wood, and the organizations' Harbor Improvement Committee, the Chamber initiated their campaign with an onslaught of communications addressed to California's United States Congressmen

and Senators and the Departments of War and Navy. In April of 1900 the Chamber urged California's Senators Thomas Bard and George Perkins and Representative James Needham to contact Secretary of War Elihu Root "urging the necessity for establishing a coaling station . . . for the navy on San Diego Bay."<sup>3</sup> The Chamber also pled their case to the Secretary of Navy emphasizing the "strategic position" the port of San Diego offered the Navy and encouraging the "early commencement" of a coaling station.<sup>4</sup> If the Navy did not entirely share the Chamber's vision for wholesale naval expansion to San Diego, it did display a tempered interest in a coal station there. The Annual Reports of the Secretary of Navy in 1900 and 1901 reflected the Navy's awareness of San Diego's strategic location and indicated the desire to negotiate with the War Department to obtain land on the Point Loma Military Reservation to establish a coal depot.<sup>5</sup>

Whether it was the Chamber's efforts or the Navy's influence, the coal station crusade appeared to move forward on several fronts. In mid-1900, Congress appropriated \$2000 to investigate the "practicality" and "advisability" of establishing another coal station on the Pacific Coast, which prompted acting Secretary of Navy, F. W. Hackett to select a "favorable site" for the depot near Ballast Point, immediately south of the federal quarantine station. At about the same time, U.S. Senator



*Mr. H. P. Wood was Chamber Secretary from 1900-1905 and the chief lobbyist in Washington D. C. during the "removal" controversy. Photo from Smythe's History of San Diego, p.630.*



USS Ranger and Alert in San Diego Bay - nd ©SDHC 21229.

George Perkins reported to the Chamber that a Naval Appropriations Bill had earmarked \$700,000 for a new station.<sup>6</sup> Shortly thereafter, following a congressional directive, the Navy ordered Captain W. L. Field of the *USS Ranger* to head to San Diego and undertake an investigation of potential depot sites. Field completed his harbor survey and in June 1900 announced that the Navy had indeed decided to build a coal station at a site “just above Ballast Point.”<sup>7</sup> Admiral R. B. Bradford, the Chief of the Bureau of Equipment for the Navy, also added his personal support for a San Diego depot and suggested to Chamber Secretary Wood that any community support in keeping “costs reasonable” would certainly “ease matters” and “greatly facilitate” the chances of the government awarding San Diego the station.<sup>8</sup>

With Congress acting and the Chamber and the Navy in tacit agreement, a San Diego coal station appeared a *fait accompli*, until the Navy unexpectedly imposed the caveat that the depot be located on the site of the existing quarantine station. The Treasury Department had established the health facility on a portion of the Point Loma Military Reservation in 1893 and the station was fully operational when the Navy first expressed an interest in the site. The Navy’s determined efforts to acquire the quarantine site appeared to be grounded in the belief that it was simply the best physical location for a fueling depot. The U.S. Treasury had undoubtedly selected the site for the same topographic characteristics the Navy then observed: a “bayside beach” that featured a gently sloping shoreline that could support buildings and offered ample storage space, a shallow inshore that was perfect for constructing a pier, and enough contiguous deep water to allow vessels to safely approach.<sup>9</sup> The Chamber’s rationale for supporting the Navy’s acquisition of the site was equally straightforward; a depot on a site the Navy favored would, it was hoped, be a precursor to more naval facilities for the city. So began the Chamber’s efforts to resolve the convoluted “removal” issue, an interne-cine struggle between the Departments of Navy and Treasury that would haunt the project throughout the next decade.

Early in 1901, the Chamber sent Secretary Wood to Washington D. C. to represent their interests regarding the coal depot and he quickly made his presence



*Fort Rosecrans Wharf under construction - c. 1918 ©SDHC 6428.*

known. Shortly after his arrival Wood reported back to the Chamber that at his urging, Admiral Bradford had agreed to pay a visit to San Diego to investigate the situation as a guest of the Chamber. The Admiral traveled to San Diego and did not disappoint as he declared his unqualified support for a coal station on Point Loma. Bradford was quick to point out that his approval was not premised on the desire of the “people of San Diego,” but on his assessment that the project was an “absolute naval necessity.” He also strongly advocated that the best location for a new depot was on land the quarantine station currently occupied. Accordingly, he urged the Chamber to apply pressure on Surgeon General Walter Wyman of the Treasury Department to obtain his consent to move the quarantine station to another site. Bradford was so adamant in his preference for the quarantine locale that he averred that if it was not secured, the Navy might cancel the project.<sup>10</sup> Of course the Chamber was more than willing to accommodate the Navy and insure this did not happen.

The seemingly tireless Secretary Wood reacted quickly. He first arranged a meeting with Surgeon General Wyman and General O. L. Spaulding, the Assistant



*Point Loma - Quarantine Station - c. 1900 ©SDHC FEP 2134.*

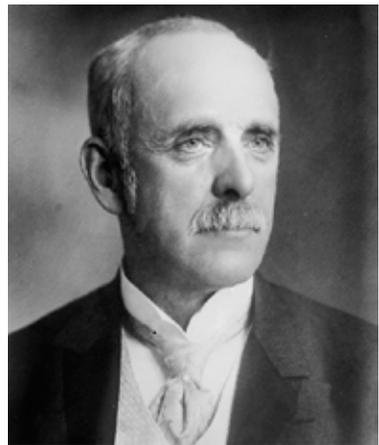
Secretary of Treasury and head of the Quarantine Service, to discuss the “removal” issue. According to Wood the meeting went “affably” but provided no substantive results. Wood then turned his attention back to Admiral Bradford, a known depot advocate. Upon his return to the capital, Wood asked the Admiral to intercede personally with the Secretary of Navy, whose influence Wood believed would surely secure “the removal of the Quarantine Station without difficulty.” In April, Bradford informed the Chamber that Congress had granted the Navy a “good -sized allowance” to establish the station and as soon as the War Department turned over the land to the Navy, work would “immediately” begin. Then, whether it was Wood’s or Bradford’s direct intervention, the Admiral reported to the Chamber in May that he had met with Captain James Meyler of the Army Corps of Engineers, John M. Wilson the Chief of Engineers, and the Secretary of Navy John B. Long, and secured the application for land on Point Loma.<sup>11</sup> In September the Department of War formally transferred to the Navy a 2900’ wide section of their land, immediately south of the Treasury reservation, for a coal station.<sup>12</sup>

The Treasury Department was no idle participant in the matter and naturally took action to protect its interests. In November 1902, J. S. Raymond, a Treasury Department official, arrived in San Diego to investigate and solidify the Treasury’s position. Raymond noted that while there was the possibility of a change in venue, in his view the quarantine station was well located “right where it was.”<sup>13</sup> From this point forward positions polarized: the Treasury Department met repeated relocation entreaties with insouciance and the Navy demanded the station be removed. The Chamber, of course, staunchly maintained their pro-Navy posture and bombastically asserted that the “public interest and the nation’s defense demanded” that the Navy acquire the Treasury lands exclusively for naval use.<sup>14</sup>

As the removal issue progressed, the coal station received a meaningful endorsement in mid-1902 when the Navy’s General Board, an advisory cadre of senior Navy Admirals, which reported solely to the Secretary of Navy, recommended that plans for a San Diego depot go forward. A report from Admiral George Dewey, the Board Chairman, and naval war hero, explained that the Board had authorized the project based on San Diego’s geostrategic position as the only “harbor at the extreme south of our Pacific coast.”<sup>15</sup> The Board’s approbation essentially marked the Navy’s formal approval of the project.

From outward appearances, by 1902 the Navy was committed to establishing the station. The Navy placed Assistant Engineer John H. Koop in charge of overseeing the development of the station and Admiral Bradford requested that the perimeter of the prospective site be fenced and plans drawn up to run a city water line to the area.<sup>16</sup> But at the same time the pesky removal issue remained unresolved.

The removal negotiations continued into 1903 as the Navy still aspired to make the station the “largest on the west coast.”<sup>17</sup> When Wood learned that the Navy was ready to transfer \$90,000 to the Treasury Department as “compensation” for



*Secretary of Treasury Leslie M. Shaw deflected the Navy’s persistent attempts to absorb the quarantine station. Photo from Navel Seabee Museum Collection.*



*William L. Fervert, Chamber President from 1902-1904, was a driving force in bringing the station to San Diego. Photo from Smythe's History of San Diego, p. 627.*

funds it had expended to improve the quarantine station, he quickly arranged a meeting with the Navy Department to ensure that an accurate accounting of the proceedings found its way back to Congress. Senator Bard's personal secretary accompanied Wood to the meeting. Wood left the conference with the impression that "a large coaling station" was in the making and confident that the station's establishment would lead to future military development in San Diego.<sup>18</sup> With a settlement in sight, the Chamber set about to ameliorate the contention between the Navy and Treasury and move the project forward.

Unfortunately the intransigence of both parties continued to stymie any compromise and stymied the Chamber's best efforts. In February 1903 Secretary of Treasury Leslie M. Shaw summed up the opposing viewpoints in a letter to Chamber President William L. Fervert. In his opinion, the Navy stubbornly saw the quarantine site as the only "desirable" location for the coal station,

and the Treasury firmly maintained the stance that any site change was both too expensive to expedite and "disadvantageous" to the department's mission.<sup>19</sup> In an attempt to mitigate discord, the Chamber identified and offered several alternate sites for the quarantine facility and vowed to bring "every influence" in their power to effect the relocation of the station. Following their earlier modus, the Chamber immediately prepared telegrams to the Army, Navy, and Treasury Departments, and to California's Senators and Representatives, soliciting their assistance "in straightening out the differences between the Navy and Treasury departments and urging the removal of the Quarantine Station."<sup>20</sup>

In response to the Chambers' appeals, California's Congressional delegates went to work. Representative James Needham prepared an amendment for insertion into a pending House Sundry Bill that would "move the quarantine station near the jetty and give the whole of the water front to the Navy department."<sup>21</sup> Woods also heard from California Congressman Milton J. Daniels that he was likewise preparing a bill to push the removal process forward. Needham went a step further and met with the new Secretary of Navy William H. Moody, who had earlier expressed some misgivings about the measure, and gained his support.<sup>22</sup> Now an advocate, Moody tried to persuade Shaw that the newly proposed quarantine site was "an excellent one" which fulfilled in "every respect the recommendation of the quarantine officer at San Diego." Exerting more pressure on the Treasury, Moody averred that the people of San Diego were "thoroughly" satisfied with the site and the "California delegation" was pressing him for a solution. As a final jibe, Moody blamed Shaw's refusal to relocate the quarantine station as the reason the coaling project was on hold.<sup>23</sup>

In the Senate, Perkins was equally active. He attempted to attach an amendment

to both a Senate Sundry Civil Bill and a pending Naval Bill to secure a change of venue for the quarantine station; the Conference Committee, however, refused to entertain either action because the deadline to submit new legislation had passed. Perkins then took a different approach and tried to convince the Navy Department to build the coaling station on any "available" government land.<sup>24</sup> Finally, in November of 1903, the California Senator sought to enact a "special bill" as an amendment to a naval appropriations act to facilitate the relocation and "carry out the wishes of the people of San Diego."<sup>25</sup>

Two other bills also circulated through the Congress in 1903 and early 1904. One allocated \$50,000 to prepare a new quarantine site and remove the buildings and "appurtenances" of the old station and another for \$200,000 to place a new quarantine station on a strip of land along the main channel of the bay. Both were designed to facilitate the quarantine removal and to fund the establishment of the coaling station on "blocks 93 and 94 of the La Playa," which the quarantine station currently occupied.<sup>26</sup>

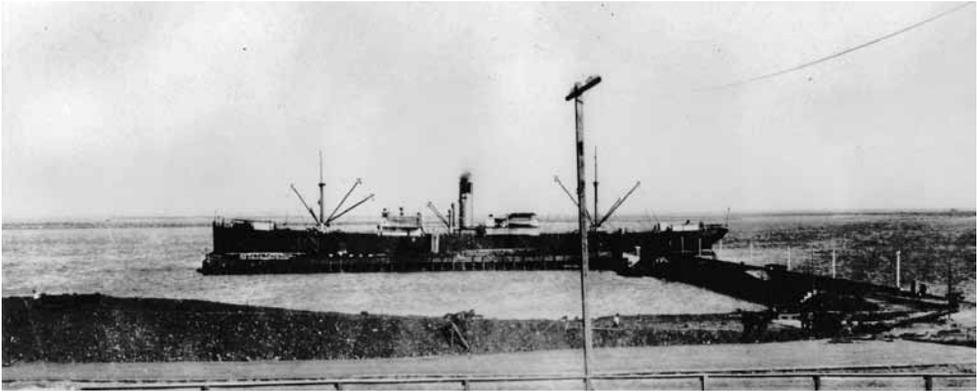
Amid the removal commotion, in 1902 the Navy initiated construction of the coal depot on land immediately contiguous to the quarantine station. The Navy's plans called for a steel pier with concrete supports to provide a working capacity of 3,000 tons, an approach pier with a steel trestle, two coal-loading towers, and an on-shore storage and handling plant with a 25,000 ton capacity. Over the next two years, the Navy Department slowly implemented their proposals and by 1904 had the rudiments of a working facility in place, along with plans for a new staff "cottage" and adjoining horse stables.<sup>27</sup> The year ended with the Navy begrudgingly constructing the coal depot on the land immediately south of the quarantine station, while still coveting the Treasury site.

Supporting the Navy's acquisition aspirations, the Chamber next approached the San Diego business community for support. In August of 1904 the Chamber met with local business leaders and prepared a statement to promote the coal depot. San Diego Mayor Frank Frary, John S. Akerman of the Chamber and forty plus San Diego businessmen signed the communiqué addressed to Paul Morton, the new Secretary of Navy. The Chamber and the business consortium played to the sentiments of the Navy, with the reminder that the service needed a sizable coal station in San Diego and that the land the quarantine station occupied had the potential to house a depot with the storage capacity of 50,000 tons of coal—making it the best choice.<sup>28</sup>

The Chamber's campaign received a boost in late 1904 when Assistant Secretary of War Charles H. Darling paid a visit to San Diego to inspect the harbor. Darling described the harbor as one of the "most important in the United States" and said the completion of the proposed Panama Canal would only heighten that



*Frank P. Frary portrait - 1905 ©SDHC 11928-6.*



*A ship "coaling" at the station pier ca. 1910. Courtesy of SSC Pacific Collection.*

significance. He also mentioned the need for the coal station and, with words that were music to the Chamber's ears, acknowledged the possibility of a naval repair shop to follow, which could lead to a full Navy yard and dry dock facilities.<sup>29</sup>

As the year closed the Navy assigned Assistant Engineer R. E. Carney, USN, as the new station "custodian," the Navy's incongruous title for the person in charge of the coal station, and continued their desultory improvements on the depot. The Chamber also returned the energetic Wood to Washington to track the removal issue.<sup>30</sup>

Wood reported back to the directors at the end of January 1905 that he had again met with Surgeon General Wyman and repeated the Chamber's argument that the quarantine removal was both a "Naval Necessity" and essential to San Diego, for surely "one development would lead to another." The obdurate Wood also contended that the newly proposed quarantine site was much better for their purposes and that the Treasury's hesitancy had impeded the promised improvements at the coal depot. After one prolonged meeting, which included countless telephone calls between Wyman and Treasury Secretary Shaw, Wyman finally appeared to acquiesce to Wood's view. Wood immediately met with Assistant Secretary Armstrong, who was then in charge of all quarantine matters, and obtained Armstrong's promise "to earnestly and actively second any effort" the Navy Department might make in the removal matter.

Wood also set meetings with Secretary of Navy Morton, his assistant Charles Darling, and Admirals Converse and Manney of the Corps of Engineers, in each case securing their respective support. From these conversations, Wood was also able to persuade Darling to write a "strong letter" to Joseph Cannon, the Speaker of the House, requesting that Congress sponsor and "favorably" consider a "removal" bill. In his dealings, Wood reiterated that the Treasury should view relocation as a national measure, not a "local" one and that the action was both a naval necessity and for the "betterment" of the quarantine service. Shaw appeared to agree and co-signed a letter to that effect. Wood felt that while success was not yet "fully assured" he had at least "moved the rock upon which our plans had hitherto been wrecked."<sup>31</sup> But even with Shaw's tacit approval, the reality was that the Treasury, with a fully developed and functioning station in place, was not likely to accept a perfunctory relocation of their facility.

With the Chamber's machinations moving forward at the national level, suddenly a local snag appeared. The ownership of a portion of the submerged land upon which the proposed new quarantine wharf would be constructed came into

question. It took action from the San Diego Board of Harbor Commissioners and a special session of the California State Legislature to successfully resolve that issue and grant the federal government ownership of the land in question.<sup>32</sup> With that problem resolved, it was back to business as usual.

Briefly eschewing the removal issue the Chamber now pressed for more improvements at the depot. In May 1906 the Chamber submitted another formal resolution to Congress to properly “establish” the coaling station. The resolution covered much of the same old ground; it noted that San Diego was the only “deep water harbor South of San Francisco” and that “the necessity” for such a station was “apparent to all.” To accomplish this, the document requested \$300,000 for further construction. In a tangential resolution the Chamber requested an additional \$30,000 to dredge the area immediately in front of the depot pier to ensure that large ships could safely approach.<sup>33</sup> As the Chamber prepared these resolutions, the *San Diego Union* optimistically reported that “one of the biggest naval coal stations in the United States” would soon be completed and that would hopefully spur federal interest in constructing a full naval yard in San Diego.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the Chamber’s political maneuvering and the Navy’s complaints, the quarantine station continued to function and grow. In the midst of the removal controversy the new coal station custodian, Commander John H. Almey, USN Retired, took his shots at his next-door neighbor. In mid-1907, as Dr. W. W. McKay, the surgeon in command at the quarantine station, prepared to fence in his facility, Almey, with a hint of bias, complained that the Treasury had not only acquired the quarantine land in a “surreptitious manner,” but, quoting the Navy Chief of Bureau, had done so in a manner exhibiting a “want of courtesy and good faith.”<sup>35</sup>

But 1907 was also a year of improvement at the coal station. The Navy requested and received permission from the War Department to expend \$178,000 to install an upgraded wharf, and a new trestle and bunkers. Under Almey’s supervision, local



*Great White Fleet - first boat to land - Coronado - 1908. ©SDHC 14071.*

San Diego engineer Lew Harris made the soundings for the pier pilings and S. W. Mitchell, the supervisor of the contractor for the Pennsylvania Bridge, completed his preparations and started construction in January 1908.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the best efforts of the Chamber and the Navy, from its inception the coal station had moved forward erratically—a case of progress then pause – but by 1908 the depot was fully operational. Unfortunately, the harbor was not fully dredged and the ships of the Great White Fleet visiting in 1908 had to anchor off Coronado. Viewing the station's situation pragmatically, Almey's replacement, retired Admiral, H.N. Manney, commented in 1909 that any further improvements to the coal storage area would probably "trespass" into the quarantine grounds and affect several of its structures. Perhaps sensing the futility of the situation, he noted that the State of California had offered a new site for the quarantine station, but also observed that even if the State could facilitate the move, it would take years to construct new buildings and a wharf. Manny soberly accepted the "fact" that the continued growth of the health facility seemed to "indicate an absence of intention on the part of the Government to abandon" the present quarantine site.<sup>37</sup>

The relocation issue lingered on beyond the end of the decade with no definitive resolution. Treasury officials rightly based their reticence to evacuate the quarantine site on their physical possession of the land and the time and funds the Department had expended to establish the facility. The quarantine station pre-dated the coal depot by almost ten years and given the improvements, which continued into 1903, the reality of the Treasury abandoning the site, regardless of the collegial relationship of the Navy and the Chamber and their persistent efforts, was problematic at best. The Navy undoubtedly believed the quarantine station stymied the expansion of their coaling depot, but in reality any meaningful recourse was limited. As a consequence, during the years of this protracted debate, the Navy and the Treasury continued to upgrade their respective facilities and conduct operations on the original sites.

While the coal depot officially went on-line in 1904, the Navy's indifferent commitment to the station left it a shoestring operation. In 1905 Carney complained that when the Navy reassigned his four-person staff back to the *USS Chicago*, it left him performing all the depot's duties. As further evidence of the Navy's seeming apathy toward the depot, the Navy Department reduced the depot's staff to the point where the station went unmanned on Sundays and holidays, then released several more civilian employees and proceeded to cut the pay of these still working.<sup>38</sup> As a result, the coal station custodians repeatedly badgered the Bureau for more help at the station. Both Manney and Webb requested a night watchman to guard against theft and be on the lookout for fires, which were common on the brush-covered peninsula. Gunner, USN, Retired, H. Webb, custodian from 1909–1911, also requested that two members of his launch crew be deputized as U.S. Marshalls to help patrol and protect the property around the station. The custodians received repeated requests from local citizens for jobs, but on average there were only two civilian employees on site from 1908 to 1910. In addition to the staff issues, the Navy Bureau slashed the station's operating budget in half and routinely denied requests for additional materials and equipment.<sup>39</sup>

The location of the station's headquarters was equally uncertain. The facilities for the station's staff were so meager that the first three custodians conducted the business of the depot from an office in downtown San Diego. Almey, the fourth

custodian, moved the operations to his leased home in Coronado, but was able to return downtown when the government assigned him an assistant. The custodian's office did not make the permanent move to the La Playa site until 1908.<sup>40</sup>

Even the assignment of station supervisors reflected the Navy's apparent waning interest in the facility. Boatswain L.J. De Ryder, who served from January 1906 into 1907, was the last active duty Navy person to be in charge of the station. Lieutenant Commander Holcombe served an interim position, but from that point forward the custodians were all retired Navy personnel: John H. Almey, Commander, retired, 1907-1909; H.R. Manney, Rear Admiral, retired, 1909; and H. Webb, Gunner, retired, 1909-1911, respectively.

The year 1909 offered the prospect of resurgence when the Bureau of Navigation contacted Manney requesting his views on implementing a new coal storage system at the depot. As per request, Manney issued a detailed report in May that outlined the system that he felt would best serve the station. He recommended a cable car system, the dimensions of the transporting trestle and even delineated the desired material for the superstructure. Manney suggested that the new system use two 500-ton "coal pockets" rather than huge bunkers, which would mitigate the amount of weight on the existing wharf and also allow for two hoppers with car tracks to be placed on each side of the wharf to facilitate loading. The report also included the reminder that the most efficient way to store coal was on

an open concrete platform, or even on the ground; the Navy learned through experience that coal stored in enclosed bunkers was both susceptible to spontaneous combustion and difficult to handle when it became damp.<sup>41</sup> As before, these plans failed to materialize and the station continued to exist on the edge of credibility.



*San Diego Consolidated Gas & Electric Company Station ca. 1908. Photo courtesy USD History Archives.*

Electricity came to the station in 1910 under Manney's watch. The retired Admiral coordinated with San Diego Consolidated Gas and Electric Company to effect a plan to set poles and run electrical lines across the Military Reservation to serve the coal, wireless and quarantine stations. The coal station received current through a line originating in the quarantine station. In May, Manney reported to the Chief of Equipment that the electricity was in place at a cost of 10 cents per kilowatt-hour, but because of the distance from the city, San Diego charged the depot an additional \$5.00 monthly fee. With the power in place, Manney requested lights be placed on the wharf to make it more visible to ships making the "sharp turn" at the sand bar situated in front of the station. But even the arrival of electricity raised a question of the stations' tenability as Manney pondered if the



*San Diego Chamber of Commerce President Rufus Choate ca. 1912 ©SDHC UT People.*

Navy—or he—would pay for running the power to his living quarters.<sup>42</sup>

Aside from the station custodians, by 1910 most naval agencies perceived the station as a faltering enterprise. When Manney requested a steam launch and lighter for transporting his mail and supplies across the bay, Admiral Ward of the Board of Supply and Accounting denied the request on the grounds that it was his understanding the station was “abandoned.” Adding some salt to the wound, Ward suggested that the depot’s already meager budget should be further reduced. Officials in the Bureau of Navigation appeared to mirror that attitude, as it was their understanding that the Navy Department had “deferred” all action at the station.<sup>43</sup>

If the bureaucratic slights of Webb’s own department were not enough, the local army post heaped on a personal affront. In April 1910 Webb complained to the commandant of Fort Rosecrans that some Army men had become a “frequent source of annoyance” to himself and his family. It seemed the soldiers often returned from town late at night along the military road that bordered the depot and indulged in “loud singing, boisterous and obscene language, catcalls and the like.” Webb complained that one evening at around 1:30am several soldiers stopped in front of his quarters and started using disgusting language: the soldiers apparently met Webb’s demands for quiet with insulting remarks rather than compliance.<sup>44</sup>



*William Kettner - 1915 - ©SDHC 8173.*



*Naval Operating Base (Fuel Depot), San Diego, May 28, 1941. #13111, G.G. Cont. NOy-4355, "Section Base".*

A public view of the station produced a variety of opinions. San Diego civic leader and former Chamber President Rufus Choate declared that the station was never used simply because there was no coal at the site from 1904-1912—a fact that photos of the station belie – and blamed the lack of support on California’s contingent in the House of Representatives. With hindsight, Congressman William Kettner remarked that in 1901 the Navy had performed some dredging to “add a coaling station” but after the construction of a wharf the Navy abandoned the project. Conversely he stated in 1914 that some 900 tons of coal was stored on-site while the Navy awaited construction of the “colliers” to protect the material and thus “complete the plant.” Local reporter and author Max Miller offered a very different, perhaps myopic, perspective as he described the “one-time great coaling station” as once the “toast of the Pacific from Seattle to Mazatlan.” Likewise in 1911, the *San Diego Union* boldly pronounced, somewhat prematurely, that the presence of the coal station had confirmed the government’s recognition of the harbor’s “strategic importance” and San Diego’s value as a future “base of naval operations.”<sup>45</sup>

Most references simply described the station as “incomplete.” In 1910, Congressman Sylvester Smith alluded to the completed “wharf and certain buildings,” but also mentioned that the lack of funding had postponed work on the coal handling plant.<sup>46</sup> California’s U.S. Senator John D. Works pointed out to the Navy, lest they forget, that San Diego had an “excellent wharf” at the coaling depot, but unfortunately no bunkers or facilities existed for handling the coal. The Senator urged the completion of the depot to overcome the “inconvenience” which existed in coaling “government warships.”<sup>47</sup>

The Navy’s disjointed efforts to improve the station continued throughout the decade and by 1918 the depot had evolved into an active, functioning fuel facility. As to the Navy’s irredentist designs on the quarantine station—it finally absorbed the old quarantine grounds some twenty-five years after the removal controversy began.

Between 1900 and 1912 the San Diego Chamber of Commerce waged an aggressive campaign, premised on the advantages of the city’s harbor, to convince the

Navy to establish a coal station on the bay. Looking to expand San Diego's economy, the pro-business Chamber pursued the coal station in the belief that it would be the first of many naval facilities to follow. In this pursuit the Chamber proactively lobbied California's Congressional contingent, the respective government agencies and unflinchingly supported the Navy's efforts to usurp the federal quarantine station to make the depot a reality. The coal station became San Diego's first permanent naval facility and, viewed in retrospect, was the city's first tentative step in the developing relationship with the U.S. Navy.<sup>48</sup>

## NOTES

1. The Chamber published several booklets touting the harbor between 1897 and 1900: "The Pacific Wave" was compiled to compete with San Pedro for federal funding for the harbor and "The Port of San Diego" was essentially a plan to improve the harbor with 174 fanciful piers situated around the perimeter of the bay. It is important to appreciate that the Chamber's membership represented the most influential individuals in the city and their "resolutions" carried considerable weight in determining civic matters: the membership included, G. W. Hazard, George Marston, James Pierce, M. T. Gilmore, I. W. Hellman, Philip Morse, William Frevert, John Forward, Rufus Choate, Dr. Edward Grove, James A. Jasper, Waldo Waterman and Julius Wangenheim.
2. For the Chamber's earlier activities in improving the harbor, see the San Diego Chamber of Commerce Regular Meeting Minutes, meeting, February 6, 1878, p. 65, Journal April 3, 1871 to March 3, 1887; meeting, December 13, 1893, p. 75-76, Vol., January 1893- July 1895; meeting, February 2, 1894, p. 93, Vol., January 1893- July 1895; meeting, April 27, 1900, Vol. 1900. Hereinafter cited as SDC-CRMM. See Bruce Linder's *The Navy In San Diego*, for a great overview of San Diego and the Navy.
3. SDCRMM, meeting, April 6, 1900, p. 102-103, Journal 1900.
4. National Archives Branch Depository, Washington DC, letter, July 31, 1900, Wood to Secretary of Navy, Record Group #80, General Correspondence, Box #484, file 10924. Hereinafter as NARA, GC.
5. See, *Annual Reports of the Secretary of Navy*, 1900, Vol. 24, p. 297 and 1901, Vol. 25, p. 366, respectively. On a practical level, the war with Spain revealed the deficiencies of the Navy's coal storage and handling facilities and the lack of conveniently spaced fuel depots. See the *Annual Reports of the Secretary of Navy*, 1898, Vol. 11, p. 26.
6. NARA, GC, April 5, 1900, letter, Perkins to John D. Long; SDCRMMM, letter, April 26, 1900, F.W. Hackett to Perkins, p. 131-132, Journal 1900. SDCRMM, letter, April 27, 1900, Hackett to Ballou, p. 128-129, Journal 1900; NARA, GC, Bradford's remarks in letter, April 27, 1900, Hackett to Ballou; SDCRMM, letter, May 8, 1900, Perkins to Wood, p. 136, Journal 1900.
7. SDCRMM, letter, May 8, 1900, Congressman James C. Needham to Wood, p. 138, Journal 1900; letter, May 11, 1900, Bradford to Perkins, p. 133, Journal 1900; meeting, May 25, 1900, p. 141, Journal 1900; meeting, June 1, 1900, p. 155, Journal 1900; *San Diego Union*, May 6, 1900, "Coaling Station for Magdalena Bay," p. 8 and June 17, 1900, "The Navy Department Decides To Establish It," p. 1. Hereinafter cited as *SD Union*. SDCRMM, letter, July 16, 1900, Bradford to Wood, p. 174, Journal 1900. In mid 1900 Captain James J. Meyler of the Corps of Engineers, who was in San Diego supervising the Zuniga Jetty project, recommended some land north of the Quarantine Station. Navy Captain W. L. Field had earlier suggested an area near China Point, to the south, half way between the Quarantine Station and Fort Rosecrans, but Meyler objected that the channel there was too narrow, making it difficult for ships to maneuver.
8. SDCRMM, letter, July 16, 1900, Bradford to Wood, p. 174; letter, May 12, 1900, Perkins to Wood, p. 134, Vol., 1900.
9. This space at La Playa was the same location the *Californios* selected for constructing a warehouse that supported the hide and tallow trade between 1825-1850.
10. SDCRMM, meeting, August 17, 1900, p. 176-177, Journal 1900. There was a lingering question on

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- the title of these lands so the Navy instructed Captain Meyler to prepare a report to confirm the government's ownership to the land. See, Army Corps of Engineers, D. E. Hughes' Report, "Quarantine Station – Point Loma," February 23, 1901, in the San Diego History Center Collection.
11. SDCCRMM, letter, February 8, 1901, H.P. Wood to the Chamber Board, p. 280-281, Journal 1901; meeting, May 17, 1901, p.302, Journal 1901. *SD Union*, December 24, 1901, "Chamber of Commerce the Past Two Years," p. 6.
  12. SDCCRMM, letter, February 8, 1901, Wood to SDCC, 280-281, Journal 1901; SDCCRMM, meeting, May 17, 1901, p. 320, Journal 1901. *SD Union*, April 20, 1901, "Ready To Build The Coal Station," p. 8. NARA, GC, May 11, 1901, Letter Frank W. Hackett, Navy to Secretary of Treasury.
  13. *SD Union*, November 27, 1902, "As To The Quarantine Station," p. 6.
  14. *SD Union*, November 22, 1902, "Directors Pass Many Resolutions," p. 6.
  15. *SD Union*, January 1, 1903, "Spending Much Money on Harbor," Part II, p. 6.
  16. National Archives Branch Depository, Laguna Niguel, CA, Naval Coal Station Letters Sent, April 1904 – January 1911, Record Group #181, letter, May 3, 1902, Admiral Bradford to Secretary of Navy, Vol. I, File, #10924-14. Hereinafter cited as NARA, NCSLS.
  17. SDCCRMM, letter, February 16, 1903, Needham to H.P. Wood, p. 361, Journal 1903. Proof that political exigencies create stance shifts, when Needham toured the quarantine station in 1900 he pronounced it in "excellent" shape and vowed to work for an additional appropriation to enlarge and "complete" the station. *SD Union*, April 16, 1900, "To Complete the Station," "Congressman Needham Asks for \$23,000 for Our Quarantine," p. 6. *SD Union*, May 3, 1900, "San Diego Quarantine; Appropriation For The Station," p. 5.
  18. SDCCRMM, letter, February 24, 1903, William H. Moody, Sec. of Navy, to Leslie M. Shaw, Secretary of Treasury, p. 489-490, Journal 1903.
  19. SDCCRMM, meeting, March 25, 1904, p. 108, Journal, 1904.
  20. SDCCRMM, letter, April 12, 1904, Moody to Wood, p. 137, Journal 1904.
  21. *SD Union*, Jan. 1, 1903, "Spending Much Money On Harbor To Build Naval Coal Station," Part II, p. 6.
  22. SDCCRMM, letter, February 16, 1903, Needham to H.P. Wood, p. 361, Journal 1903; letter, November 18, 1903, Daniels to Wood, p. 583, Journal 1903.
  23. *SD Union*, January 1, 1905, "Most Important Harbor on the Pacific Coast," p. 13.
  24. SDCCRMM, letter, March 16, 1903, Perkins to Wood, p. 408, Journal 1903. The Sundry Civil Bill, HR 17202, stated that "certain land adjacent to the quarantine station near San Diego, was transferred to the Treasury department, and for the preparation of a new site for the Quarantine station and the removal of the present quarantine station buildings thereto."
  25. SDCCRMM, letter, November 11, 1903, Wood to Perkins, p. 569, Journal 1903; meeting, November 12, 1903, p. 570, Journal 1903; letter, November 18, 1903, Milton J. Daniels to H.P. Wood, p. 583, Journal 1903; letter, November 14, 1903, Perkins to Wood, p. 584, Journal 1903.
  26. SDCCRMM, letter, November 19, 1903, Daniels to Wood, p. 587-588 and letter, November 27, 1903, Perkins to Wood, p. 593, Journal 1903. SDCCRMM, January 19, 1904, a copy of HR 10432, 58<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, p. 90. Journal 1904.
  27. *SD Union*, January 1, 1903, "Spending Much Money On Harbor To Build Naval Coal Station," Part II, p. 6.
  28. SDCCRMM, letter, August 4, 1901, Mayor Frank Frary, J.S. Akerman, and others to Secretary of Navy, Paul Morton, p. 221-223, Journal 1904.
  29. *SD Union*, January 1, 1905, "Most Important Harbor on the Pacific Coast," p. 13.
  30. The source of the appellation of "custodian" for the person in charge of the station remains unclear, but was the title the Navy used in their official correspondence. The custodians were: John H. Koop, 1902; Assistant Engineer, USN, R.E. Carney, 1904- January 1906; Boatswain L. J. De Ryder, January 1906–October 1907—he was the last active duty custodian; LTCDR Holcombe, October 1907–interim; Commander, USN, Retired, John H. Almey, October 1907-March 1909; Rear Admiral HN Manney, USN, Retired, March 1909-December 1909; Gunner, USN, Retired, H.

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31. SDCCRMM, letter, January 23, 1905, Wood to SDCC Board, p. 348-349, p. 348-349, Journal January-September 1905. Also see, meeting, September 23, 1905, Wood's parting remarks to the Chamber membership upon his resignation, p. 593-594, Journal January-September 1905.
32. SDCCRMM, letter, February 17, 1906, Sylvester Smith to J. S. Ackerman, Chamber President, p. 136-137, Journal September 1905-February 1906; letter, February 12, 1906, V. E. Shaw of Shaw and Winnek, Attorneys at Law to SDCC President James J. Jasper, p. 139, Journal September 1905-February 1906.
33. SDCCRMM, "Resolution Regarding Establishment Of A Coaling Station At San Diego, California" and "Resolution For Deepening The Harbor At San Diego, California," p. 516 & 517, Journal August 1906–January 1907. The resolutions were undated but chronologically placed in November or December 1906.
34. *SD Union*, January 1, 1907 "Some Facts on San Diego Harbor," Section 5, p. 33; and "San Diego Harbor," Section III, p. 17.
35. NARA, NCSLS, letter, May 12, 1907, Almey to Chief of Bureau, Vol. 2, p. 260.
36. *SD Union*, December 3, 1907, "Soundings Will Be Verified By Engineer," p. 7. NARA, NCSLS, letter, May 15, 1909, Manney to Bureau of Navigation, Vol. 2, p. 8-15.
37. NARA, NCSLS, letter, May 15, 1909, Manney to Bureau of Navigation, Vol. 2, p. 5.
38. NARA, NCSLS, letter, February 23, 1907, Almey to Chief, Vol. 1, p. 241; letter, September 23, 1910, Webb to Admiral Ward, the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts, Vol. 2, p. 336-337; letter, March 1, 1905, Carney to Manley, Vol. 1, p. 105.
39. NARA, NCSLS, letter, September 23, 1910, Webb to Admiral Ward, Bureau of Supplies and Inspections, Vol. II, p. 336-337; letter, June 9, 1910, Bischoff to Chief of Navigation, Vol. 2, p. 41; letter, July 13, 1908, Almey to Chief of Equipment, Vol. 2, p. 271. Manny even offered to remove one of the depots' three telephones to save some money.
40. NARA, NCSLS, February 19, 1906, letter, Ryder to Gearing, Vol. 1, p. 109; letter, November 27, 1906, Almey to Chief, Vol. 1, p. 221; letter, December 16, 1906, Almey to Paymaster, Vol. 1, p. 229; letter, January 24, 1907, Almey to Paymaster, Vol. 1, p. 234-235; letter, April 8, Almey to Chief, Vol. 1, p. 122.
41. NARA, NCSLS letter, May 15, 1909, Manney to Bureau of Navigation, Vol. 2, p. 8-15. Into the 1920's the coal was stacked in the open space on wooden platforms.
42. NARA, letter, September 23, 1910, Webb to Admiral Ward, Bureau of Supplies and Inspections, Vol. 2, p. 336-337.
43. NARA, letter, November 16, 1909, Manney to Bureau of Navigation, Vol. 2, p. 151; NCSLS, NARA, LN, memo, September 9, 1910, Admiral Ward to the Secretary of Navy, a separate document, no page number, Vol. 2, chronologically placed.
44. NARA, NCSLS, letter, April 19, 1910, Webb to Commandant Fort Rosecrans, Vol. 2, p. 262. The over land route from downtown to the depot was around 8.5 miles and the nearest trolley stop was 3 miles from the depot.
45. Edgar Hastings, "A Taped Interview of Reminiscences," *The Journal of San Diego History*, vol. 2, no. 3 (June, 1965), p. 47-48. Joan Jensen, "The Politics and History of William Kettner," *The Journal of San Diego History*, vol. 2, no. 3 (June, 1965) p. 26-36. Max Miller, *Harbor of the Sun*, Doubleday, New York, 1940, p. 253-254. *SD Union*, January 2, 1911, "San Diego Harbor is Safest and Most Beautiful in Entire World," Section V, p. 5.
46. NARA, GC, letter, January 14, 1910, Congressman Smith to Navy Department.
47. Ibid.
48. In 1910 the Navy had twenty surface vessels, and briefly, two Plunger Class "submarine torpedo boats," based in San Diego, but within the next decade the government had established the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, the Naval Hospital, the Naval Operations Base, Naval Base San Diego and the administrative base for the Eleventh Naval District and the city was on its way to becoming a principle port for the Pacific Fleet. As the Navy's commitment increased, the city also grew: from 17,700 in 1900, to 40, 000 in 1901 to 75,000 in 1920.