

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 90000588

Date Listed: 4/17/90

La Merced
Property Name

Skagit
County

WA
State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Jer Patrick Andrus
Signature of the Keeper

4/17/90
Date of Action

=====

Amended Items in Nomination:

Statement of Significance: The Merced is one of four surviving intact four-masted schooners, a type of large vessel that once numbered in the hundreds. During its active service between 1917 and 1966, it played a significant role in the maritime trade of the Pacific coastal region. Criteria consideration g should be checked because the property's significance continued into a period less than 50 years before the nomination.

The level of significance is blank and should be checked as national.

The applicable National Register criteria are blank and should be checked as A and C.

This information was confirmed with Edwin C. Bearss, Chief Historian and James P. Delgado, Maritime Historian, National Park Service.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name 4-Masted Schooner La Merced other names/site number La Merced

2. Location

street & number Anacortes Waterfront off Oakes Avenue city, town Anacortes state Washington code 53 county Skagit code 057 zip code

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: [X] private, [] public-local, [] public-State, [] public-Federal. Category of Property: [] buildings(s), [] district, [] site, [X] structure, [] object. Number of Resources within Property: Contributing 1, Noncontributing buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing:

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] nomination [] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [X] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. [] See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official: [Signature], Date: 4/17/90, State or Federal agency and bureau: [Signature], NPS.

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. [] See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official: _____ Date: _____ State or Federal agency and bureau: _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- [X] entered in the National Register. [] See continuation sheet. [] determined eligible for the National Register. [] See continuation sheet. [] determined not eligible for the National Register. [] removed from the National Register. [] other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper: [Signature], Date of Action: 4/17/90

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Transportation--Water Related

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Breakwater/Laid Up

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A

walls N/A

roof N/A

other N/A

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The four-masted schooner La Merced lies on the shore of Fidalgo Island, between Cap Sante and Shannon Point, in the Guemes Channel and opposite Guemes Island, within the city of Anacortes. Beached and used as a breakwater in the shipyard of Anton "Tony" Lovric, La Merced is surrounded by rock and dredge spoil and is not submerged. The intact hull of the vessel lies on an even keel, bow to shore, and is filled with sand.

La Merced as Built and Operated

As built in 1917, La Merced (official number 215,578) is a wooden-hulled 4-masted schooner 232 feet in length, with a 42.6-foot beam and a 26.65-foot depth of hold. La Merced is registered at 2,146.34 gross tonnage and 1,938 net tonnage. The vessel has a billethead on a raking bow, an elliptical stern and two decks; the majority of the weather deck is a flush "hurricane" deck with a short quarterdeck or poopdeck. [1] An auxiliary motor vessel, La Merced carried two 400-h.p. Atlas diesel marine engines which drove twin screws.

The hull form of La Merced fits the model of a "typical" four-master with "a strong sheer, nearly vertical post, a short counter and raking, elliptical transom. The entrance was sharp and convex, the floors usually quite flat and the run fairly short and well formed....Most of the four-masters, as well as the big three-masters, were built with two decks....There were many four-masters built with flush decks, or hurricane decks, as they were sometimes called....there were also many built with the short quarterdeck, or poopdeck...." [2] The vessel was built with a large hold in which the cargo, usually cases of oil, was stowed.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 2

In the late 1920s or early 1930s La Merced was converted for use as a floating cannery in Alaskan waters. The major alterations to the schooner involved the installation of bunks in the hold and the construction of a large deckhouse which ran from abaft the foremast to the quarterdeck. An elevated pilothouse was erected atop the deckhouse abaft the spankermast. The masts were retained along with gaffs, booms, and sails throughout the vessel's cannery career.

La Merced's Present Condition

Following her sale in 1965 to the Railwater Terminal Co. for salvage, La Merced's propellers, engines, and deck fittings were removed and the masts were cut off near the level of the deck in August of that year. The bowsprit was also cut off. The hulk was moved to Lovric's Shipyard after 1966 and put in place as a breakwater. The vessel retains her form and remains watertight, though she is technically no longer afloat but instead lies nestled in fill and rock rip-rap. Dredged sand and mud from the shipyard has been used to fill the interior of the vessel, though the forecastle and quarters beneath the poopdeck are not completely filled. The interior spaces, though buried, retain their original fittings, including the bunks and accommodations for cannery workers. The engine mounts and shafts are also in place. [3]

The hull is in good condition with no readily apparent distortion or warping and little evidence of change with the exception of the counter and transom, which have been covered with welded steel plate to reinforce the hull in this area. This repair was reportedly done during the Second World War. The cannery cabin on the weather deck was pulled off and burned in 1987 by Mr. Lovric because of rot and the danger of imminent collapse. [4] The weather and poop decks are intact, though there are holes in a few locations. The mounts for the steering gear are present on the poopdeck. The vessel's original patent windlass is in place at the bow; nearby several loose rigging fittings, including a block, lie on the deck. The bulwarks are intact, and all of the vessel's original bitts are attached to the deck along the port and starboard sides of the deck. The stubs of the schooner's strap-iron chainplates are attached to the hull; some of the chainplates, complete with turnbuckles and pieces of steel cable, lie alongside the schooner on the rip-rap. The appearance of the vessel is that of a well-tended, laid-up hulk that retains her lines, form, and evidences a high level of preservation.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

NOTES

- 1
Certificate of Registry, Permanent Register No. 223, Port of Seattle, Washington, May 8, 1959. Original copy in the possession of Anton and Florence Lovric, Anacortes, Washington. Also see U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Navigation, Annual List of Merchant Vessels of the United States... (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920) p. 268.
- 2
Paul C. Morris, American Sailing Coasters of the North Atlantic. (New York: Bonanza Books, 1979) pp. 32-33.
- 3
Interview with Anton "Tony" Lovric at his yard, Anacortes, Washington, April 28, 1988.
- 4
Ibid.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D NHL CRITERIA 1, 4

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Maritime History

Architecture (Naval)

Commerce

NHL: XII L
Business: Shipping & Transportation

Period of Significance

1917-1966

1917-1966

Significant Dates

1917

1917, 1926

Cultural Affiliation

Significant Person

Architect/Builder

James Robertson

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The 1917 four-masted schooner La Merced, a historic vessel used as a breakwater in Anacortes, Washington, has the best-preserved hull of four surviving intact hulks of this once-common vessel type which formerly navigated all the coasts of the United States as well as the Great Lakes, ranging into international waters. While built in Benicia, California, La Merced's hull form and rig are typical of hundreds of other four-masted schooners built on Chesapeake Bay, in Maine and throughout New England, and on the Gulf coast from 1880 through the end of the First World War. While the shattered wrecks of several four-masters lie on North Carolina beaches where they were lost, or lie broken down where they were laid up in Maine coves and ports, only four of these vessel survive as intact entities; Hesper and Luther Little lie bilged at Wiscasset, Maine, and Albert Cummins lie awash in the Delaware River off Philadelphia. La Merced, while dismasted, is intact, watertight, her decks are sound, and she possesses structural as well as architectural integrity. Additionally, La Merced was engaged in maritime trades of significance to the entire Pacific coastal region, including the petroleum trade and fishing and canning operations in Alaska.

The preceding statement of significance is based on the more detailed statements which follow.

See continuation sheet

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF FOUR-MASTED SCHOONERS

The schooner created a long and lasting maritime tradition in the United States. From their origins in the 18th century through the early years of the 20th century, schooners carried the bulk of American coastal trade; "At the turn of this century (1900), the Atlantic coasters constituted a vast armada. Built mostly in New England, the wooden bottoms carries every conceivable commodity of their times: coal, ice, lumber, bricks, logwood, phosphate rock, lime, salt, naval stores, locomotives, pins, sewing machines, notions---the list is endless." [1] Schooners lasted to the very end of sail, being the "last representatives of commercial activities under sail." [2]

The earliest form of schooner was the two-master. Developed in the 18th century, the two-masted schooner had the greatest longevity. Though the peak period of two-master construction was between 1825 and 1885, these vessels continued to be built, the last being launched in 1938. [3] The two-masters were typically small vessels. "Originally registering no more than 40 to 50 tons, the schooner has become in course of time a large vessel, the two-masters ranging from 100 to 250 tons...." [4]

Following but not supplanting the two-masters were the three-masted schooners. The first three-masted schooners appeared around 1795-1800, though the rig did not gain popularity and wide-spread use until after the American Civil War. The number of three-masters increased after 1865, but by 1880 these vessels had reached their practical size limit. "The popular size now for a three-masted schooner on the Atlantic is 550 or 600 tons." [5] To carry more freight and command better profits, larger hulls were needed. The larger hulls required more sail, and as a result the four-masted schooner was developed.

The first four-master built was William L. White. White was constructed in 1880 at Bath, Maine.

She was 205 long on deck, 40 feet beam, and 17 deep in the hold, being 309 feet in length over all from the end of the jib-boom to the end of the spanker boom. She registered 996 tons. This vessel was rigged as a four-masted schooner. To have fitted her out with out three masts would have required such large

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

lower sails that the strain upon the masts would have been destructive, and she was therefore furnished with four. This divided her 5,017 yards of canvas into smaller sails and made her a good schooner, easily handled, and requiring a crew of only five men. This was the first four-masted schooner built for actual ocean service in America. [6]

Four-masted schooners were built throughout the remainder of the 19th century and were being constructed well into the 20th century, some of the last being constructed during and immediately after the First World War to offset the deficiency of ships caused by the increased tonnage needs and the sinking of allied vessels. Four-masters increased in size through those decades, some of the largest built being William Palmer of 1,805 tons and Marie Palmer of 1,904 tons. [7]

The hulls of the four-masters became "almost standardized in form":

It had a strong sheer, nearly vertical post, a short counter and a raking, elliptical transom. The entrance was sharp and convex, the floors usually quite flat and the run fairly short and well formed. Most of the four-masters...were built with two decks, though occasionally the 'tween decks were only a tier of beams. Some of the larger four-masters had three decks, which were called the upper, main, and lower decks respectively. In cases where the three decks were used, the lower deck would be completely planked and the main deck was just a tier of beams at the load waterline. This arrangement was...of absolute necessity in helping to strengthen the hull in the very large schooners. [8]

The four-masters were the predominant large schooner of the eastern seaboard; in all approximately 450 of these vessels were built on the Atlantic coast and approximately 100 were built on the Pacific coast.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 4CONSTRUCTION AND CAREER OF LA MERCED

La Merced was built side-by-side with her sister ship Orinite in 1917 by James Robertson at his shipyard in Benicia, California, on the shores of Carquinez Strait, the body of water that separates San Pablo and Suisun Bays. A talented shipbuilder of regional reputation, Robertson had designed the vessels along the standard, accepted lines and plans for four-masted schooners that had been developed through decades of experience and innovation by various shipbuilders throughout the United States. The development of a "typical" design and form for these vessels was best illustrated in the publication of standard treatises on wooden shipbuilding between 1917 and 1920 to aid apprentices laboring to construct schooners and wooden steamships needed to offset losses during the First World War. Plans similar to La Merced can be found in a treatise published in 1919. [9]

According to Russell Robertson, James Robertson's son, "My Dad had a contract for two 4-mast schooners for....Mahoney lumber interests. Before finished they were sold to Standard Oil Co. who added a 'tween deck which increased their draft 9 ft. They were launched as "La Merced" and "Orinite." [10] The half-completed schooners, laid down at the end of 1916, were sold in January 1917 for \$275,000 each to Standard Oil; with the sale, the schooner Andrew F. Mahoney was renamed Orinite. [11] La Merced was the first to be completed and was launched on May 8, 1917:

Without a hitch of any kind, the Standard Oil power schooner La Merced was launched at 1:00 a.m. Wednesday morning....There was a large crowd present in spite of the late or early hour, chosen on account of the tide, and the vessel presented a beautiful sight as she glided slowly into the water. The Merced was built by James Robertson for Andrew F. Mahoney, a San Francisco shipper, but it was sold with its companion of the same size and type before it was half completed. Mahoney makes \$100,000 it is said for the deal. The Merced will be used for shipping case oil from here to Australia. She is 243 feet over deck, 43 feet beam, and the depth of hold is 28 feet. It is estimated when registered she will weigh about 2000 tons. [12]

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 5

After her launch, La Merced was rigged and fitted out during the summer of 1917, departing for San Francisco to make her maiden voyage on August 1. [13] Sailing to Astoria, Oregon, on September 2, La Merced returned on September 15.

Entering the sailing fleet of Standard Oil, La Merced entered into a little known aspect of the international petroleum trade. Prior to the construction of modern "tankers," square-rigged sailing vessels, usually large iron or steel hulled former grain trade "deepwatermen" carried "case oil"--all kinds of petroleum products, usually gasoline, kerosene and benzine, which were shipped in metal containers packed in wooden boxes or cases. The case oil trade boomed after 1885:

In the late eighties and early nineties case oil in ever increasing quantities was being shipped from New York and Philadelphia to the Far East and Australia. With no great necessity for speed, sail bottoms suited this trade very well, and at first sailing ships of all sizes, rigs and nationalities crowded into the Schuylkill River in order to load....The trade grew by leaps and bounds, and before the end of the nineties the requirements of Australia and New Zealand alone amounted to over a million cases, and with the need of India, China, Japan and the East Indies even greater than this, it was soon recognized that ships of large carrying capacity were required for the trade.... [14]

La Merced's typical ports of call as a case oil "tanker" were Melbourne, Sydney, and Newcastle in addition to coastal voyages between San Pedro and San Francisco to pick up case oil at that booming Southern California oil port. [15]

After two years of operation by Standard Oil, La Merced was sold to W.S. Scammell of Port Townsend, Washington, on October 15, 1919. [16] She remained in the case oil trade, voyaging from Astoria and Seattle to San Pedro, Melbourne, Sydney, and Newcastle, as well as Callao, Honolulu, the Solomon Islands, and Victoria, British Columbia, through the 1920s. The vessel's career was largely without major incident with the exception of

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 6

two groundings and a collision off Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay on September 30, 1920, that cut her to the water's edge amidships on the starboard side. [17] The vessel was sold again on January 30, 1926, to "Seattle parties," and commenced her career as a floating salmon cannery in Alaska. The Alaskan waters, rich in salmon and cod, began to be actively harvested just ten years after the 1867 American purchase of Alaska. By 1892 Alaska accounted for the "greater part of the American pack" of canned salmon. [18] Alaska's salmon was an important commodity which, along with cod, seals, and whales, were more significant to the development of the 50th state and the economy of the United States than Klondike gold.

A number of American companies, notably the Alaska Packers Association of San Francisco and many smaller companies based in the Pacific Northwest, annually sent vessels north to fish and can their catch. La Merced entered this trade which at the same time was also employing the former British Cape Horner Balclutha, (now a National Historic Landmark vessel at the National Maritime Museum, San Francisco) in 1926, running each year from Seattle to Alaska. Ultimately owned by Nick Bez of Seattle, owner of P.E. Harris Co., later Peter Pan Seafoods, Inc., La Merced kept to a regular schedule that was described in 1947. In the May 31 edition of that year's Marine Digest, the pending departure of the schooner from Seattle to False Pass and Port Moller, Alaska, on June 3 was noted:

The La Merced, a veteran of the Seattle waterfront, has been traveling north for numerous years....The vessel operates on a three and one plan. Salmon are caught by the fishermen aboard the vessel, cleaned and canned, and transported to shore. The vessel this year is carrying a canning and fishing crew of fifty Filipinos, a ship's crew of twenty white men, and an additional eight men for assorted duties. Last year the La Merced brought back a total of 61,000 cases of canned salmon. This year an even greater catch is anticipated.

La Merced continued her career as a floating cannery until 1965. On May 13, 1965, Bez, acting as President of Peter Pan Seafoods, sold the schooner to the Railwater Terminal Co., Inc., of

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7

Seattle. [19] Railwater commenced scrapping the vessel, removing her machinery, cable, anchors, and masts. The dismantled hulk was sold to Anton and Florence Lovric, the present owners, in 1966, and has since been employed as a breakwater at their Anacortes shipyard.

NOTES

1

Fred Kaiser, introduction, in Robert Burgess, Coasting Schooner: The Four-masted Albert F. Paul (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press and the Mariner's Museum, 1971) p. xi.

2

Edouard Stackpole, introduction, in Paul C. Morris, American Sailing Coasters of the North Atlantic (Chardon, Ohio: Bloch and Osbourne Publishing Co., 1973) p. ix.

3

Morris, p. 20.

4

Henry Hall, Report on the Ship-Building Industry of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1882) p. 94.

5

Ibid.

6

Hall, P. 94.

7

Morris, American Sailing Coasters, p. 32.

8

Ibid., pp. 32-33.

9

Charles Desmond, Wooden Ship-Building. (New York: Rudder Publishing Co., 1919) p. 191.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8

- 10
Russell Robertson to Charles M. Loring, Alameda, California, October 27, 1961. Manuscript on file at the National Maritime Museum, San Francisco.
- 11
Benicia [California] Herald and New Era, January 12, 1917.
- 12
Benicia Herald and New Era, May 11, 1917.
- 13
Benicia Herald and New Era, August 1, 1917.
- 14
Basil Lubbock, Coolie Ships and Oil Sailors (Glasgow, Scotland: Brown, Son & Ferguson, Ltd., 1955) p. 113.
- 15
San Francisco Marine Exchange Record Cards for La Merced, 1917-1928, unprocessed manuscript collection, National Maritime Museum, San Francisco.
- 16
Ibid.
- 17
Ibid.
- 18
Earl Pomeroy, The Pacific Slope: A History of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, & Nevada (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1974) p. 119. Also see Daniel B. De Loach, The Salmon Canning Industry (Corvallis: Oregon State College, 1939) pp. 15-16; and Ralph W. Andrews and A.K. Larssen, Fish and Ships (New York: Bonanza Books, n.d.) p. 53.
- 19
Bill of Sale of Registered Vessel, oil screw La Merced, May 13, 1965, original copy in the possession of Anton and Florence Lovric, Anacortes, Washington.

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE FOOTNOTES IN TEXT

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

National Maritime Museum, SF (NPS)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property less than one acre

UTM References

A

1	0
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5	2	6	1	5	0
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5	2	3	7	1	6	5
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Zone Easting Northing

C

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B

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Zone Easting Northing

D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

All that area encompassed within the extreme length and beam of the vessel.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses the entire area of the vessel as she rests high and dry on fill as part of a breakwater.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title James P. Delgado, Maritime Historian
organization National Park Service (418) date July 9, 1988
street & number P.O. Box 37127 telephone (202) 343-4104
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20013