

**Dashiell Hammett Society of Studs (DHSOS)
San Francisco International Headquarters**

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Minutes of Meeting

Old Ship Salon and Alfred's Steak House

Thursday, January 19, 2012

Bopping on the Barbary Coast



It had been quite a dry spell for those of us on the Left Coast. We hadn't seen rain for more than a month, and the farmers and skiers were crying the blues. But tonight it was dripping rain as the DHSOS convened for its quarterly business meeting. This time we explored San Francisco's Barbary Coast, seeking strong drink and manly rations in an historic environment.

The PoV found fitting venues that matched our style; starting with libations at the historic Old Ship Saloon, then strolling the Barbary Coast for dinner at Alfred's Steak House.

The Barbary Coast owes its origins to the treasure hunters who began to arrive in San Francisco in 1840s and 1850s, seeking their fortunes in the gold fields of the Sierra Mountains.

"...owing almost entirely to the influx of gold seekers and the horde of gamblers, thieves, harlots, politicians and other felonious parasites who battered upon them, there arose a unique criminal district that for almost seventy years was the scene of more viciousness and depravity, but which at the same time possessed more glamour, than any other area of vice and iniquity on the American continent."

-- The Barbary Coast, Herbert Asbury

At the end of 1849, out of a San Francisco population of between 20,000 and 25,000, only about 300 were women and an estimated two-thirds of those were prostitutes.^[3] Miners, sailors, and transients hungry for female companionship and bawdy entertainment continued to stream into San Francisco in the 1850s and 1860s, becoming the primary clientele of the Barbary Coast.

As the city exploded with the new arrivals, variety of land sharks, con artists, pimps, and prostitutes began to pluck the gold and silver from the pockets of men through liquor, lust, laudanum-laced libations, or just a hard knock on the head.

Sailors in particular had cause to dread the area because of the practice of **shanghaiing**. Many a sailor woke up after a night's partying to find himself unexpectedly on a ship bound for some faraway port. Crime in the streets and corruption in the government offices plagued San Francisco in the 1850s.

"The Barbary Coast is the haunt of the low and the vile of every kind. The petty thief, the house burglar, the tramp, the whoremonger, lewd women, cutthroats, murderers, all are found here."

-- Wikipedia

So this where the DHSOS found itself on a rainy Thursday night: five good friends enjoying a great time together.

Old Ship Saloon

Our first stop was the Old Ship Saloon, aptly described by the PoV:

“We are going to start the evening by having martinis at the second oldest bar in San Francisco. This is according to Carl Nolte. Looking at Carl Nolte’s picture published alongside his column in the *Sunday Chronicle*, it is obvious Nolte is a man who knows his bars. The interesting thing is that this bar is not an establishment ever mentioned when people talk about the old bars in San Francisco. But I believe Nolte knows his history, and I verified it with the bartender I chatted with at lunch today.

The Old Ship Saloon was established in 1851 in the heart of the Barbary Coast on the edge of San Francisco Bay. It is an unmarked establishment, with no sign or shingle what-so-ever, on the corner of Pacific and Battery. In 1851 the water’s edge was only a few steps from the bar, which is certainly not the case today.”

The colorful history of the Old Ship Saloon began in Gold Rush days when a storm blew a three-master aground on Alcatraz Island. The ship was towed to Pacific Avenue and Battery Street, and in 1851, an entrepreneur cut a door in its side, turning it into a Barbary Coast saloon. The 1906 earthquake slid the top story diagonally down onto Pacific Avenue. Tales were told of sailors shanghaied from the saloon after it was rebuilt in 1907, and some say ghosts of those sailors still haunt the place.

Call to Order

The Old Ship Saloon is an after-work type of place, and it was filled with workers of all types. Former San Francisco supervisor Aaron Peskin was there, and there were probably other well-known locals there too, besides us. There was a hum in the air, and the bartenders were busy shaking and pouring on all sides. They pour a good drink at the Old Ship Saloon, and they carry the banter while they do, and it shows that they like their jobs. We stood at the bar, taking in the atmosphere.

DUH PREZ loosened his bow tie, ordered another vodka martini with a twist, and called the meeting to order at 6:38 PM. All DHSOS officers were present, as was Da Burd.

Bar Talk

Much of the talk at the bar this evening was about the San Francisco 49ers, who were in the NFL playoffs, following a fantastic (13-3) season. The previous week the 49ers defeated the New Orleans Saints in one of the best pro football games ever and advanced to the NFC championship game against the New York Giants. That game was just around the corner, and the DHSOS were stoked. DUH PREZ even had on his Jerry Rice bow tie.

Strolling the Barbary Coast

At 7:15 we walked a few blocks down the Barbary Coast to Merchant Street alley between Kearney and Montgomery Streets to Alfred’s Steak House for a 7:30 reservation. This restaurant is in a famous location that has been a restaurant since the 1920s. It was once a speakeasy as well, but Alfred’s has only been in the location for about 20 years.

When the PoV made the reservation, and gave the manager his name, the manager studied his computer and said, “Oh yes, you were here in October, 2000, weren’t you?” He then asked, “Will it be the same five gentlemen?” When he was told it would be, he said, “Fine, it has been long enough since you were here last that we have completely forgotten the last incident. We will look forward to seeing you Thursday evening.” That is exactly what he said. His name was Will and he obviously has a good sense of humor.

Along our walk, our PoV pointed out a plaque that marked the location where the western headquarters of the legendary Pony Express used to be. We wondered how the ponies made it across the bay.

Alfred's Steak House



The DHSOS has dined at a variety of San Francisco eateries: upscale, mid-scale, and some that have added to our scales. Basically, we like places that have some history, would have appealed to Dashiell Hammett, and would be repugnant to our wives. Alfred's is that kind of place. As the PoV wrote, it was time for the DHSOS to have a "manly meal – a red meat kind of meal – I'm talking steak."

Alfred's slogan says it all: "Real Steaks. Real Martinis. Real San Francisco. Since 1928."

The history: Alfredo Bacchini, a well-liked waiter in San Francisco, decided to open a storefront restaurant at 886 Broadway Street in 1928. Alfred's was soon serving the who's who of the city. During the bleak days of prohibition, the restaurant was closed down for a brief, very brief, time - politicians still wanted a good drink and a great steak!

Today, Alfred's is one of the few remaining old-style San Francisco steak houses. It is also the least expensive, a fact not lost on the DHSOS. At Alfred's they serve traditional Caesar salad, cuts of steak by the ounce, and sides of baked potatoes and creamed spinach.

Chick Magnets

When one of us commented on DUH PREZ's bow tie (the one with pictures of Jerry Rice on it), he shared with us his version of the five top "chick magnets"

1. Hot cars
2. Babies in strollers
3. Puppies
4. Large stock portfolios
5. Bow ties

Venue Selection

The PoV had originally hoped to arrange tonight's dinner at legendary Original Joe's restaurant, and he had been closely following the progress of their opening. They were supposed to be open by the middle of December, but no. Then they were to be open by the end of December, but again, no. Same with the first week of January, and the second. So as a back-up he arranged this night at Alfred's.

Although his usual style is to announce the venues a couple of days before our meeting, on this occasion he announced that he had already selected the locations for our next meeting! That evoked a stunned silence, followed by murmurs of approval.

The next DHSOS meeting will involve drinks at The Saloon (San Francisco's oldest bar), followed by dinner at the newly re-located and re-furbished (and newly-reopened) dining room at Original Joes.

There followed a mournful discussion of the impending demise of the Gold Dust Lounge. As our loyal readers know, the Gold Dust is a favorite DHSOS hangout and the site of a recent gathering. Unfortunately, the proprietors have lost the lease and the new tenant will be a woman's clothing store. It is a sad state of affairs, and the DHSOS lamented the impending loss of another San Francisco landmark. We observed a moment of silence, followed by a toast to the Gold Dust Lounge.



Drakesbad



The Flacks: Drakesbad's New Managers

Drakesbad Guest Lodge is very important to the DHSOS, and our annual migration to that haven of tranquility is a highlight of the summer. For nearly as long as we have been going to Drakesbad it has been managed by Ed and Billie Fiebiger, who have pampered the DHSOS and treated us like family. Unfortunately, all good things come to an end, and the end has come for Ed and Billie, who retired from Drakesbad at the end of last season.

Drakesbad has announced the hiring of Pat and Valerie Flack as the new managers. We discussed the announcement, agreed that things will be different and that no one could do things the way Ed and Billie did them. But we didn't want to give the Flacks too much flack before we even met them.

OK ... Next

ListMan shared a story of opening Christmas gifts with his six-year-old niece, Eva, who like most kids her age was in a hurry to have everyone open their gifts so she could open more of hers. As each adult carefully unwrapped and exclaimed over a gift, she would encourage the rotation to hurry by saying, "OK ... next!"

That worked for us, and we used it the rest of the night to encourage movement to the next agenda item.

DHSOS Woman of the Year

DHSOS daughter, Miss Katharine, is often a source of conversation and pride at DHSOS meetings, and tonight her father reported on her sporting accomplishments.

The Communications Czar proudly announced that Katharine has made the Eclipse Ultimate Frisbee team at Carlton College (http://apps.carleton.edu/news/news/?story_id=738354). CUT (Carlton Ultimate Team) is among the nation's best, and they won the Division 1 championship last year. Making the Eclipse team will make her among the youngest team members, involve travel to tournaments at various U.S. locations, and prompted the DHSOS to proclaim her its "Woman of the Year." We texted this information to her, but the honor was apparently not clear as her return message simply said, "That's nice; tell everyone hi."

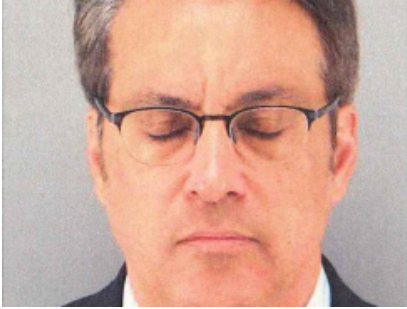
Earthquake Preparedness

The DHSOS is in the heart of earthquake country, and ListMan conducted a survey to determine the degree to which we have made preparations for the "Big One."

- None of us have earthquake insurance. Some had it in the past, but higher premiums and deductions have now discouraged everyone.
- We have all attached our houses to their foundation, and some (but not all) have secured furniture and glassware so they won't fall and break during a big shaker.
- We all have some form of earthquake kit in our house. The PoV, however, has gone above and beyond, with earthquake kits in his bedroom and several days of food and supplies in his garage.

We discussed improving our earthquake preparedness, but decided that was too much trouble. Instead, we all agreed that when the big one hits we will convene at the PoV's house.

New Sheriff in Town



Mug Shot: San Francisco's Sheriff

San Francisco has a new sheriff, and this dude was afoul of the law before he was inaugurated. Ross Mirkarimi, a former city supervisor, was elected sheriff last November. On New Year's Eve, he allegedly grabbed his wife so hard he left bruises on her arm. If that wasn't bad enough, the wife (a recent immigrant from Venezuela), went next door and had the injury recorded on video by a neighbor who reported it to authorities.

Now the wife is denying it all, and is accusing the media and San Francisco politicians of conspiring to bring down her husband.

Meanwhile, the sheriff has been charged with three counts of spousal abuse and given a restraining order to stay away from his wife and two-year-old son. A former girl friend has stepped forward to say that Mirkarimi abused her, too, and she called him "a pit bull and a bully." That's just what you want from your sheriff.

The DHSOS consensus: "His days are numbered."



Beck's Photos



Mr. Beck, a DHSOS favorite son, has posted some of his favorite photos of 2011 on the internet, divided into categories of content:

(<http://beckdiefenbach.com/editorial/>),

The DHSOS took full credit for Beck's success and toasted his accomplishments.

First TV Sporting Event

ListMan asked us to recall the first sporting event we remember seeing on television. The answers revealed a diversity of geography and culture:

Czar: The baseball World Series in 1963, when the LA Dodgers, behind Sandy Koufax, Don Drysdale, Johnny Podres and Ron Perranoski, gave up only four runs in four games and swept the NY Yankees in four straight games.

Notes: Friday Night Fights, including the boxing match in 1960 when Floyd Patterson defeated Ingemar Johansson.

ListMan: Two events: In 1957 the NY Yankees World Series vs the Milwaukee Braves, and in 1959, the Cal Bears won the NCAA and went to the Rose Bowl vs Iowa.

PoV: Friday Night Fights, especially the epic battles in 1951 between Ezzard Charles and Jersey Joe Walcott.

DUH PREZ: Howdy Doody in 1954.



Ezzard Charles vs Jersey Joe Walcott

Presidential Televisions

DUH PREZ told about his recent efforts to upgrade two televisions in his house. To get rid of the old sets (one of which was enormous), he advertised it as free on Craigslist. The gent that came to get it did not have a car (and apparently no friends with cars), so he and a companion arrived at DUH PREZ's house in a taxi, loaded the old TV into the back seat (it wouldn't fit in the trunk) and off they went.

Adjournment

It had been an enjoyable evening with an appropriate mix of fine food, good drink, and noble friends.

So we paid the check, issued hearty handshakes all around, and walked out into the soggy night air.

That's it for now, man.

OK ... Next.

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