

(cruiser *Marblehead* and torpedo-boat *Farragut*) outside the Cove where their searchlights shone upon the proceedings, while owners of arks and of the homes around the Cove decorated their properties, vying for prizes.

On the next day the *San Francisco Call* produced an elaborate front page illustration and a poetic description of the festivities. "Every house was outlined in a hundred different hues...down on the cove and along the waterfront the scene was if anything more beautiful, and thrice as animated...each owner had tried to outdo his neighbor in the beauty and artistic effect of his decorations...no two house-boats were the same, and none exhibited anything but lavishness of adornment, which was only limited by delicacy and good taste....From inception to conception Belvedere's third 'Night in Venice' was an unqualified success. Nothing was left undone and yet nothing was overdone."

"Night in Venice" was not repeated on such a scale after those magnificent occasions in the 1890's. On August 28, 1920, members of Belvedere society rekindled the event, but perhaps because times had changed it was a bit more muted. Houses were still decorated as were the arks and yachts in the Cove, while the Pacific Motor Boat and Corinthian Yacht Clubs hosted dances. Sailboat races took place in the afternoon and fireworks were once again part of the finale.

As the Tiburon peninsula evolved after World War II into a middle class residential suburb, the elegant festival of the late 19th century evolved also. Programs from July 4-6, 1947 and September 1- 4, 1950 describe the event now called "Nights in Venice" as a more family friendly inclusive celebration over three days with events in Tiburon and Belvedere. The 1947 program lists many events over that weekend including sailboat races, baseball games, events at the yacht clubs, and on the 4th: "Night in Venice Fleet and Shore decorations; prizes for sailing yachts and power cruisers...street dancing and fireworks to be announced." The 1950 program includes many similar events, with several dances and parties occurring at the new Southern Marin Recreation Center (now Tiburon Peninsula Club), which was also the beneficiary of the proceeds from all of the events.

In 1956 another "Nights" was celebrated, this time for a whole week, October 8-13, with the main events falling on the weekend. Northwestern Pacific Railroad displayed the engine No. 112 along with a new Southern Pacific "piggy-back" car (truck trailer on a flat bed rail car) along Tiburon Blvd. opposite Main Street. The Navy conducted tours of the USS *George A. Johnson*, a battle scarred destroyer escort anchored off shore along side the USS *Teaberry*, a net-tender. In keeping with the festival's heritage, the Tiburon Peninsula Pelican reported: "A spectacle in lights and color - this is the hope of the Tiburon Chamber of Commerce

in urging all residents, boat owners, and merchants to get out their Christmas lights early and dress up the peninsula next week for Nights in Venice. The lighting of homes and boats is the most traditional aspect of the Festival, dating back to before the turn of the century, a custom which has remained the most effective and dramatic feature of the celebration."

The most recent celebration was on September 28, 1996 as part of Belvedere's Centennial Year. An effort was made to recreate the glory of a "Night in Venice" from 100 years earlier, complete with a parade of boats, prizes for home and boat decorations, fantastic costumes, elegant outdoor dining and dancing with a fireworks finale launched from a barge in Belvedere Cove. Sue Benvenuti of *The Ark* gave the evening its due: "[T]ake a cup of balmy weather, stir in beautiful people, add a glass of music and a tablespoon of fantasy, ice with sensational fireworks and you will understand how Belvedere manages to have its cake and eat it too."

Landmarks brought the event back in 2011 as our annual fundraiser. Centered around the China Cabin, which is one of the very few structures along Belvedere Cove to have had a close-up view of a "Night in Venice" from the very start, we enjoyed a wonderfully calm evening and replicated many of the traditions from the earliest celebrations. Please help the Landmarks Society to preserve our local history and keep it accessible to the community; visit our website at www.landmarkssociety.com.



Front page from the *San Francisco Call*: Sunday, September 17, 1899.

Revelers at "A Night in Venice" a Landmarks Event: October 8, 2011. Photo Credit: Jeffrey Stein

