

The Arks of Arktown.

BY LAURA B. STARR.

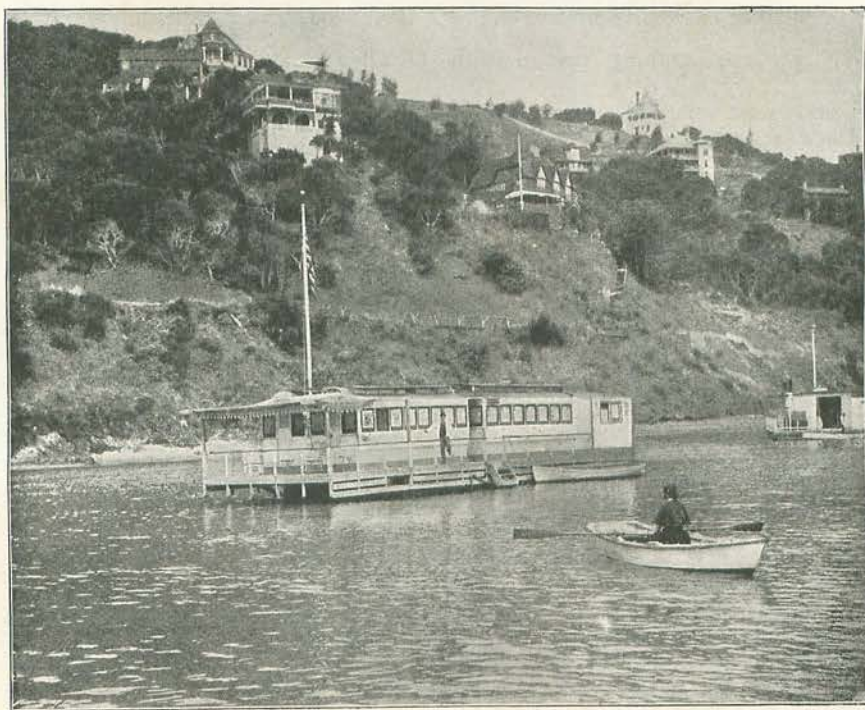
Illustrations from Photographs by Chas. Weidner, San Francisco.



N Eastern fad becomes a poetic fancy when carried out by the picturesque-loving Californians. The gracious climate, the resources of the country which furnish everything man can desire, and the universal heritage of energy, ambition, and love of novelty which comes to them from their immediate forebears, are among the many factors which combine to bring about this result.

It was when they had become a little weary of the annual "camping-out," during the long,

Who first conceived the idea of the California ark deponent sayeth not, but ten to one it originated in the fertile brain of some member of the Bohemian Club, that fountain-head of novelty and unique ideas. The shape it took was much the same as the one Noah built in obedience to the Lord's commandment, little thinking he was starting a fashion that would come sailing down the rivers of the world to the present time. The *Nautilus*, with a flat bottom and a deck-house built of four abandoned street-cars set end to end, two and two in a solid square,



THE ARK "NAUTILUS," AT BELVIDERE, CALIFORNIA, CONSTRUCTED OF FOUR STREET-CARS.

sunny, and cloudless summer, and the semi-occasional "jinks," both "high" and "low," of the Bohemian Club had paled somewhat, that someone suggested house-boats. The idea took root and grew, and the blossoming was a novelty.

The Californian house-boat should be called an "ark," and it should be modelled upon lines differing very materially from the "broad, square-nosed sloop" of the Chinese house-boat, or the more graceful sampan of the Japanese, or the solid, substantial house-boat of the Thames, though possessing the best qualities of all of them.

was the first one, quickly followed by the *Alameda* and others, built on the same lines.

The partitions of the cars were removed, making two lovely rooms with windows galore, and sliding doors at each end; stationary lamps were built into the wall, and the transoms arranged for ventilation. The long seats flanking the walls on either side were upholstered and plentifully cushioned, making comfortable beds by night, and ease-inviting lounging-places by day.

A stationary table in each room was the common centre across which the events of



SITTING-ROOM IN THE "NAUTILUS," SHOWING THE STREET-CAR FRAMEWORK.

form of flattery—soon created a "town of arks" on the west side of San Francisco Bay, just over the way from the city of that name, within full view of the Golden Gate. If you are looking on the map for it, you will find it spelled "Belvedere."

During the summer there are thirty or forty "arks" moored within easy reach of each other, and the constant stream of visitors coming and going for the "week end," and other stated times, prove the

the day and plans for the morrow might be discussed, as well as other things besides liquid air. Oriental hangings and the necessary culinary outfit gave the quaint craft an air of home.

Within is found all the comfort, yea, even the luxury, of Dives; while without is the simplicity of green fields, the grandeur of mountain heights, the lulling, soothing gurgle of lapping waves and health-giving ozone. The deep green of the red-wood trees forms a pleasing background for the golden eschscholtzias, the sweet-scented violets, and delicate fronds of the wild maiden-hair fern which carpet the fields almost within arm's reach.

The first "ark" was such a success that others appeared almost by magic, although the *Nautilus* still bears the palm for uniqueness. Imitation—that sincerest

popularity of the "ark" system. One of the pleasantest things about them is their power to expand: like the omnibus, there is always room for one more: the unexpected visitor never fails of a welcome and a bed somewhere, even though it may be on the top of the dining-room table.

There is an indescribable charm about the life: one has the pleasures of boating



DINING-ROOM OF THE "NAUTILUS."

combined with the "comforts of home"; sea baths are at one's very threshold; fish are caught and cooked while you wait, in a manner that would give pleasure to any disciple of Izaak Walton, or even to that king of fishermen himself.

The monotony of the scenery is varied by the swinging of the ark, as it turns four times a day with the tide. There are neighbours, thirty or forty families of them, within easy reaching distance if one can pull a stroke, for there is always a following of row-boats lazily resting upon the water in the wake of each "ark."

The economy of filthy lucre and the friction of daily life are evident when it is

those who are still in the city.

The majority of "arks" in this little town are built with a square deck-house, which is



CORNER OF BEDROOM IN THE "NAUTILUS."

remembered that one has neither rent to pay nor taxes, only the inevitable bills of "the butcher, the baker, and the candle-stick-maker," which he must meet daily wherever he takes his stand on this wide globe.

The butcher, the baker, and others of that ilk who supply the needs of daily life have each his little boat, which he sends around every morning at the usual hour for his customary order, and the joint for dinner and the ice-cream for dessert are delivered as promptly to the "ark" dwellers as they are to



THE ARK "BELVIDERE."

divided into rooms according to the size of the "ark" and the family of the owner. Some of them present that "curious combination of flat-bottomed punt and tasteful bijou residence, which finds its more florid expression on the reaches of the Thames"; others are more pretentious, with resplendent upholstery, paint and varnish, and a look of newness that is rather a discordant note in an otherwise harmonious creation.

To the generality of Americans this little town of "arks" would be, perhaps, more of a novelty than to the ordinary Englishman, for the reason that house-boats have been more or less of an institution in England since 1884. The boat-life on the Thames is an ideal existence; a joy and delight for the time being, and a rose-coloured memory for all time to come.

The American rivers are too characteristically busy to encourage house-boating, though efforts in that direction are being made at the present time. Few of our people have yet sufficiently learned the delight of *dolce far niente* to introduce that acme of aquatic luxury. Most of us when we go in for aquatics at all want a boat with twin screws, triple expansion engines, and all the other means of "getting there."

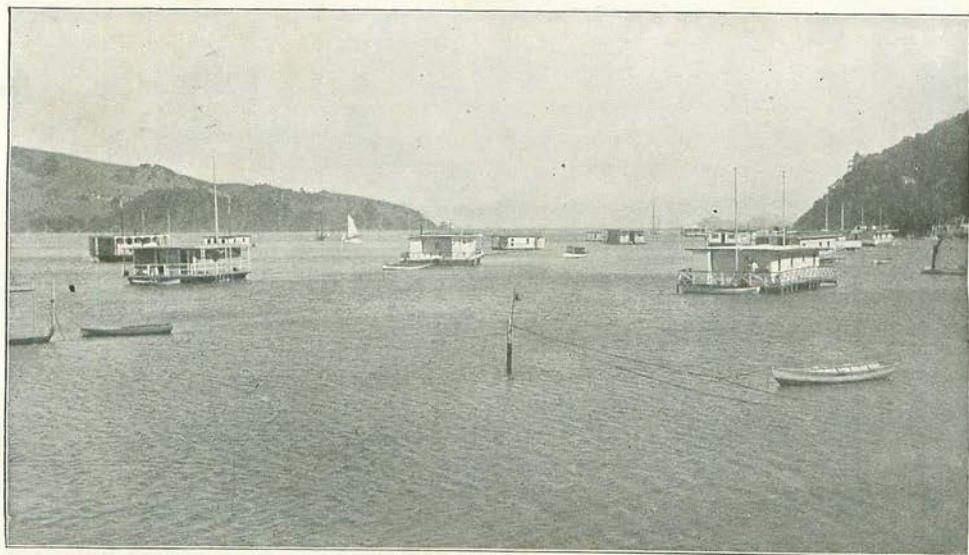
True, there are rare souls here and there, in our bustling commercial crowd, who steal away accompanied congenially and earn for themselves the criticism of being "queer," by taking a trip in a canal-boat through the various waterways of New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, but, compared to the great army of holiday-seekers, they are in a small minority.

A few years ago several members of the Tile Club fitted up a canal-boat with all the comfort of city studios and the luxury of beautiful hangings and odd bric-à-brac, and drifted lazily and happily away in the track of the setting sun. The result was health regained, a fine collection of sketches, and a most fascinating narrative of the trip published in one of the magazines.

Later a quartette of artists—why is it that artists always do the nicest things?—went "Snubbing Through New Jersey" with a "plain, white-painted, three-hatched and pooped-cabined canal-boat, with two mules ahead and a rudder behind. There was a skipper to steer and his wife to help cook; a deck-hand forward to 'snub' the boat in the locks and take a line to the tow-path."

"Snubbing" is a term used by boatmen for checking the impetus of boats on entering a lock; it is a common expression used by canallers. The advantage of a canal-boat, as stated by one of the four, is that if you come up against a stone wall or any other immovable obstacle, you can hitch the mules to the rudder-post and go home backwards.

None of the house-boats mentioned have adopted the plan of decorating the border line of the deck-house with pots of flowering plants, which is one of the most picturesque features of the Thames boat. Many of them have awnings and deck chairs and settees, but there is lacking that cosy arrangement for afternoon tea which is such an important and pleasing feature of English boats.



GENERAL VIEW OF "ARKTOWN," BELVIDERE, CALIFORNIA.