

Nauticapedia.ca Project Article

***EL Sueño* - The Crack San Francisco Racing Yacht which brought Trade to the Core of the Northwest Passage**

by George Duddy 2018



El Sueño Leaving Cambridge Bay, September, 1925 - returning from establishing the first trading post on King William Island. The voyage across Queen Maud Gulf was only the second - the first was by Amudsen. (Photo credit: Archives Canada by L.T. Burwash - 67-1925-L.T.B. H.B.C. Schooner *El Sueño* Peter Norberg)

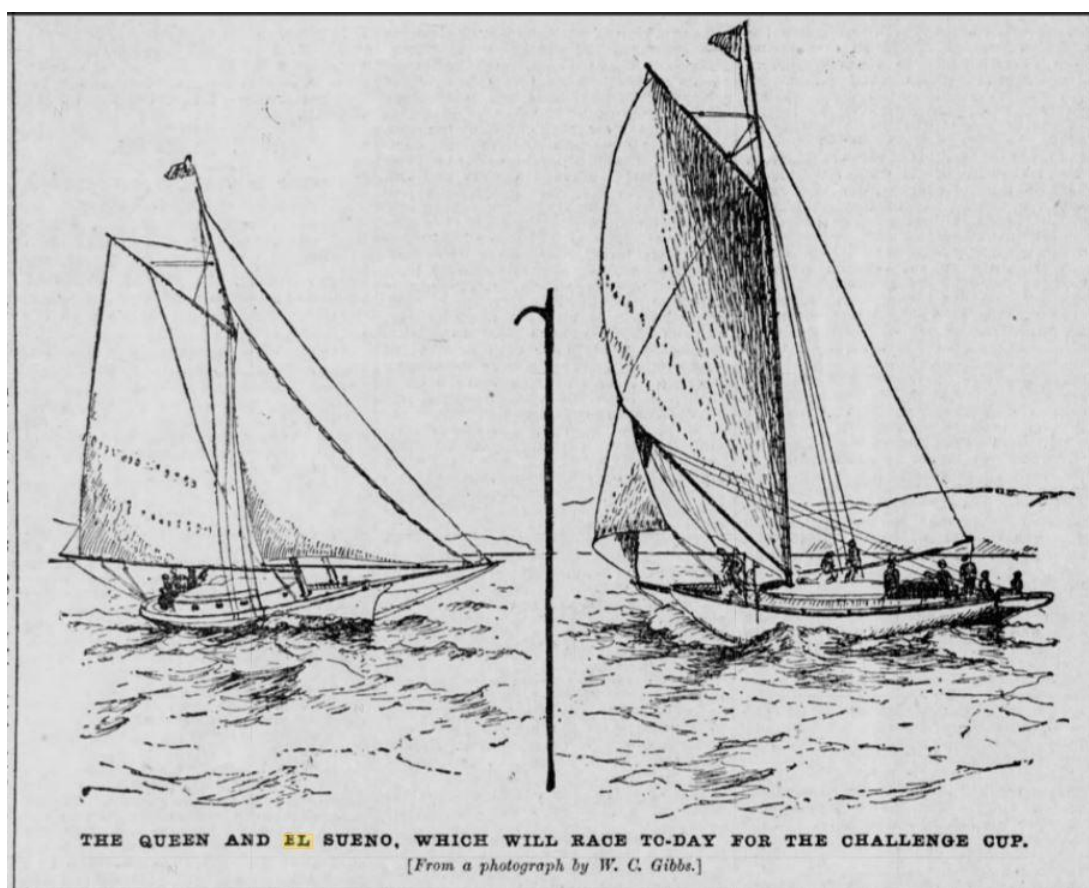
Introduction

Yachts launched with great celebration and the breaking of champagne bottles sometimes later fade from memory having, in old age, been sunk or abandoned as derelicts in some backwater or on a lonely beach. The story of the schooner *El Sueño* is known in the western arctic only through a number of history glimpses. While her complete life, like that for other mysterious ladies may never be completely revealed, a compilation of scraps of her arctic history, with those of other places and times, evidences that she had a very unusual and significant life.

Chapter I – Early Days as a Prominent Racing Yacht

El Sueño was built for San Francisco yachtsman and prominent Alameda real estate developer Joseph A. Leonard. Constructed at Alameda, California in 1894 as a 44-foot sloop with a gasoline auxiliary engine, Leonard spared no expense in equipping her with the finest, most up-to-date furnishings and equipment. A particularly useful feature was a heavy, retractable metal

centerboard that permitted her to operate in very shallow waters. As the most elegant and fastest boat in the Encinal Yacht Club she served as flagship when founder Leonard was commodore. In 1895 she became the first winner of the San Francisco Challenge Trophy, defeating the San Francisco Yacht Club's *Queen* by 11 minutes over a fifteen-mile course. This cup is still in challenge today and is considered to be second only to the America's Cup in prestige. Before the real estate market collapsed about 1898, resulting in Leonard losing his fortune, he and the yacht were feature items of many newspaper articles in the Bay area.

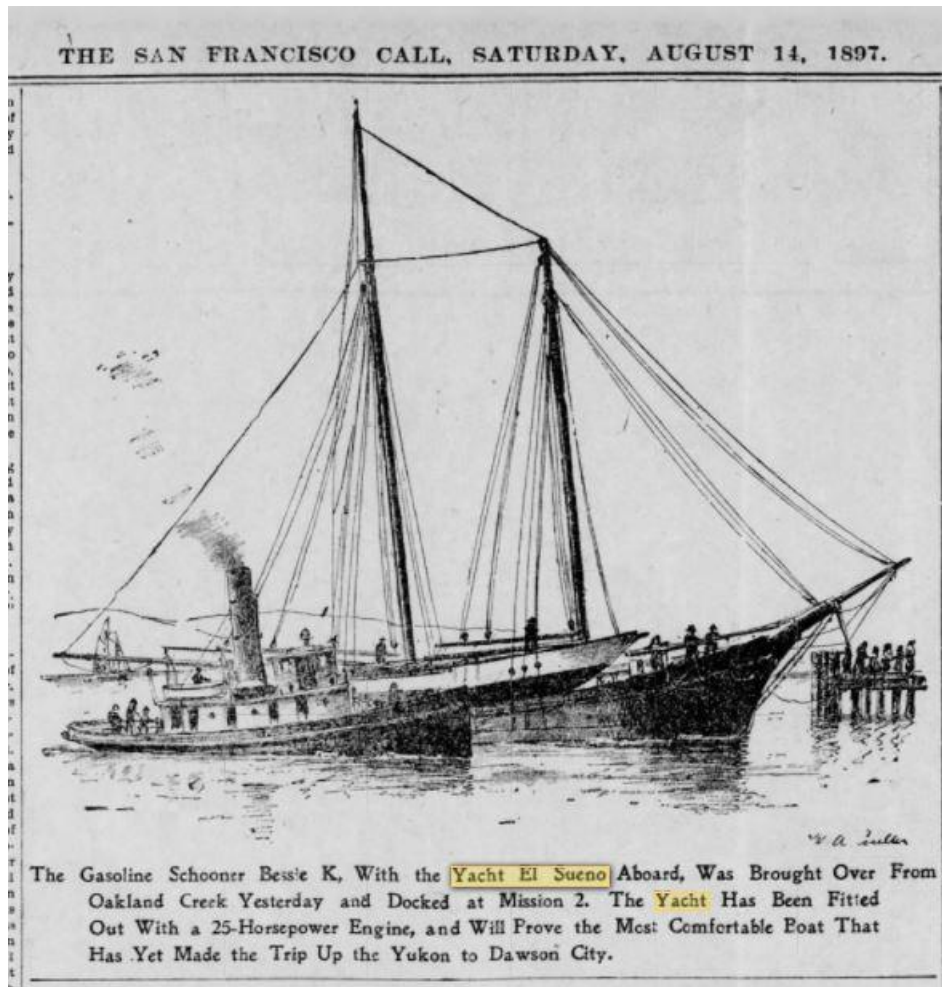


From the *San Francisco Call*, Saturday, August 31, 1895

Chapter II - North to the Alaskan Gold Fields and a Voyage on the Yukon River

By 1897 the interests of those in charge of the yacht (Leonard now had partners in her ownership), along with many other enterprises, had turned from match racing to gold. On July 14, 1897, as the steamboat *Excelsior* arrived in San Francisco carrying half-a-million dollars of Klondike gold dust, as stampedeers rushed to the gold fields of the Yukon and Alaska, and entrepreneurs developed plans for making fortunes. *El Sueño's* owners, along with associates and cronies at the yacht club, devised a unique method of gaining access to the gold riches of the Yukon. A prospecting party was to be engaged and they and the yacht would be loaded aboard *Bessie K*, a larger motor schooner, and transported to the mouth of the river at St.

Michaels, Alaska. The plan was to convert the sailing yacht to a steam vessel complete with a boiler and steam engines while wintering at St Michaels and then proceed in the spring with the rush of river boats bound for the gold fields. Wood cut locally or possibly coal would be used as fuel. This audacious plan, by the newly constituted “El Sueño de Oro Mining and Transportation Company,” and follow-on venture failed to make any money for owners, those grubstaked or investors.



From the *San Francisco Call* of August 14, 1897

In spite of delays deck-loaded aboard the schooner *Bessie K* (diverted to Port Angeles Washington for repairs), *El Sueño* reached St Michaels on October 16, 1897, just as the port and the Yukon River were icing over. With the skipper of the *Bessie K* anxious to sail for home before being frozen-in, it was necessary to hold the schooner’s crew at gun point to keep her in port long enough to unload *El Sueño* and her supplies.

Following the river break-up, *El Sueño* did not reach the goldfields of Dawson in summer 1898, as was planned. She instead, ascended the Dall River to a wintering location approximately 990 miles from the mouth of the Yukon. From there, the remnants of her original eight-man crew were able to make overland forays across a divide to the Kuyukuk (now Koyukuk), a northern

tributary of the Yukon River, where they staked a number of claims. It is not clear why the objective of Dawson was changed. Perhaps it was unobtainable in the short navigation season. More likely it was because by 1898, most of the population of Dawson had already left, migrating down river to the newly discovered gold finds on the beaches of Nome Alaska. Also, apparently as a result of disagreements between Leonard and his associates about oversight of the expedition, Leonard was replaced by Captain McCullough as manager of the venture.

William Mills Coffee was the captain of the field party. The terms of his engagement are unclear, but it was some sort of profit-sharing arrangement dependent on the venture's success. It seems some of the field party were relatives or cronies of the investor group. Coffee kept a personal diary of their activities for his wife to whom he mailed home in installments. In addition to narrative descriptions, it also contained sketch maps of exploration areas and detailed accounts of funds expended. In 2005, his grandson Phillip Michael published the remaining parts of the diary in a book titled, *El Sueño de Oro - The Dream of Gold*. The bulk of the diary was transcribed into typed text and some additional material was included, but the maps, sketches and accounts remained in handwritten form. The diary covered the period from August 21, 1897, when he left San Francisco on the schooner *Bessie K*, until he returned on the steamer *Portland* on August 24, 1899. Unfortunately, a key part of it covering the ascent of the Yukon River from June 1 to September 13, 1898 was lost. A newspaper article indicates that Leonard joined Coffee's expedition late in the enterprise, but had to return to San Francisco when he badly injured his foot.

The diary is a firsthand account of the major difficulties faced by the party, living conditions, winter prospecting ventures under extreme conditions and betrayals and desertions of party members. In the case of Coffee, it revealed a man of immense integrity, loyalty and compassion. He was innovative and possessed many skills. One example was his hand-hewing of a ship's wheel to replace the *El Sueño's* original tiller-helm. It appears it was only because of his immense labour and ability to keep cranky steam engines repaired and fueled that *El Sueño* was able to safely ascend the Yukon River and return to St Michaels in 1899.

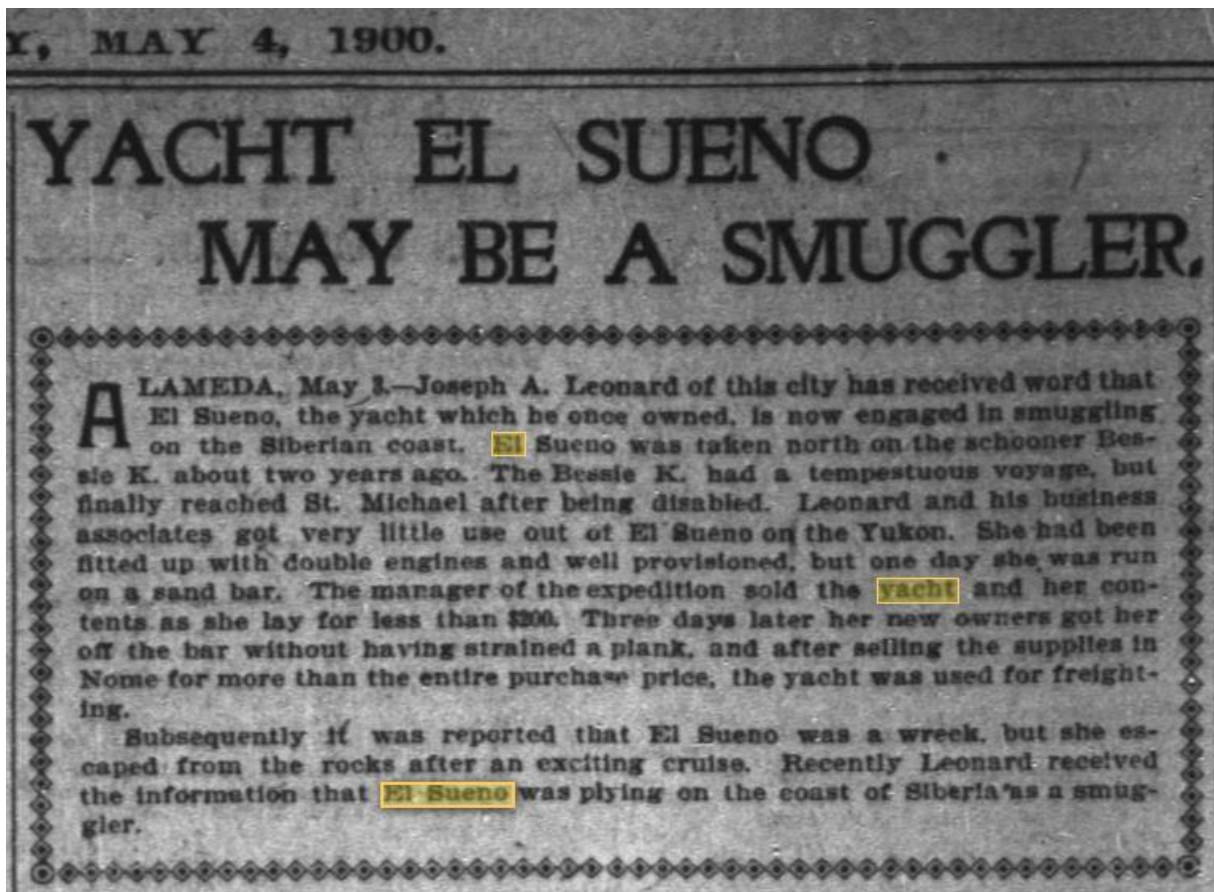
Following this venture and in the absence of official orders from the syndicate (Coffee did meet with Leonard, but at that point he had been disposed as head), Coffee decided to try his luck in the new gold fields at Nome. Almost out of funds but still possessing supplies, he gathered some paying passengers and set off across Norton Bay. By this time all of the original party had abandoned the expedition. Coffee was left with only one loyal subordinate known as Mack. Mack was probably John Moack (a member of the crew listed as "Boat Keeper"), the only salaried member of the expedition.

Together they managed to stake a few claims along Nome's harbor-less coast before *El Sueño* grounded on a sand shoal in huge breaking swells that threatened to tear her apart. In spite of herculean efforts on the crews' part and even with the assistance of others, they were unable to free the vessel from the shoal. Coffee, who had earlier contemplated selling the vessel and her supplies, now yielded to a much harsher "as is" offer and sold the vessel for \$100 to Lord & Klopenberg. The sale of the crack yacht (which originally cost at least \$5,000) at this price later produced huge criticism in the San Francisco press. However, the writers hardly could have

been aware of the circumstances that precipitated it. Embittered and bankrupt, Leonard's ingracious comments probably did not help. (As recorded in the diary he had meet with Coffee in St Michaels before *El Sueño's* departure to Nome and agreed to the sale of her for only \$15 (sic) if all other offers failed). After the sale of *El Sueño*, Coffee and Mack returned to St Michaels on the schooner *Fisher Bro*. After settling the syndicate affairs, they used the remaining funds to book passage on the steamer *Portland* for San Francisco. After two years of grueling effort, Coffee arrived home on August, 24 1899 with 25 cents in his pocket. Like many stampederers who were fortunate to return, his only reward was an adventure he would never forget, one which most men would not even contemplate.

Chapter III - A Shadowy Career as an Alaskan Trader

Lord & Klopberg's purchase of *El Sueño* proved fortuitous. Immediately after grounding, the seas had moderated into a flat calm and they were able to float *El Sueño* off the sand bank. Further they were able to sell the supplies left on board for more than the purchase price.



From the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Friday May 4, 1900

After her salvage and sale *El Sueño* followed a shadowy career as a freighting and fur trading vessel on the Alaskan coast and across the Bering Sea on Siberia junkets. She was reported wrecked several times but like the proverbial cat continued her service—or continued to be put

back in service. One such erroneous citation, from the official list of *Alaska Shipwrecks - A Comprehensive Accounting of Alaska Shipwrecks and Losses of life in Alaskan Waters*, follows:

EL SUENO (1903) The 23 ton steamer *El Sueno* foundered off of Nome December 31, 1903 and became a total loss.

Mapping and Location: Westcentral Alaska 64 39 N 165 25 W Chart 16006

Sources: 1. *The H W McCurdy Marine History of the Pacific Northwest* (1966) Pg 94, 2. *Shipwrecks of the Alaskan Shelf and Shore* (1992)

From *Alaska Shipwrecks*

Her last reported reincarnation from Siberia was from Nome in 1913. One of the survivors Alexander Allen was her skipper when she was brought to Canadian waters.



From the *Vancouver World*, Thursday, October 16, 1913

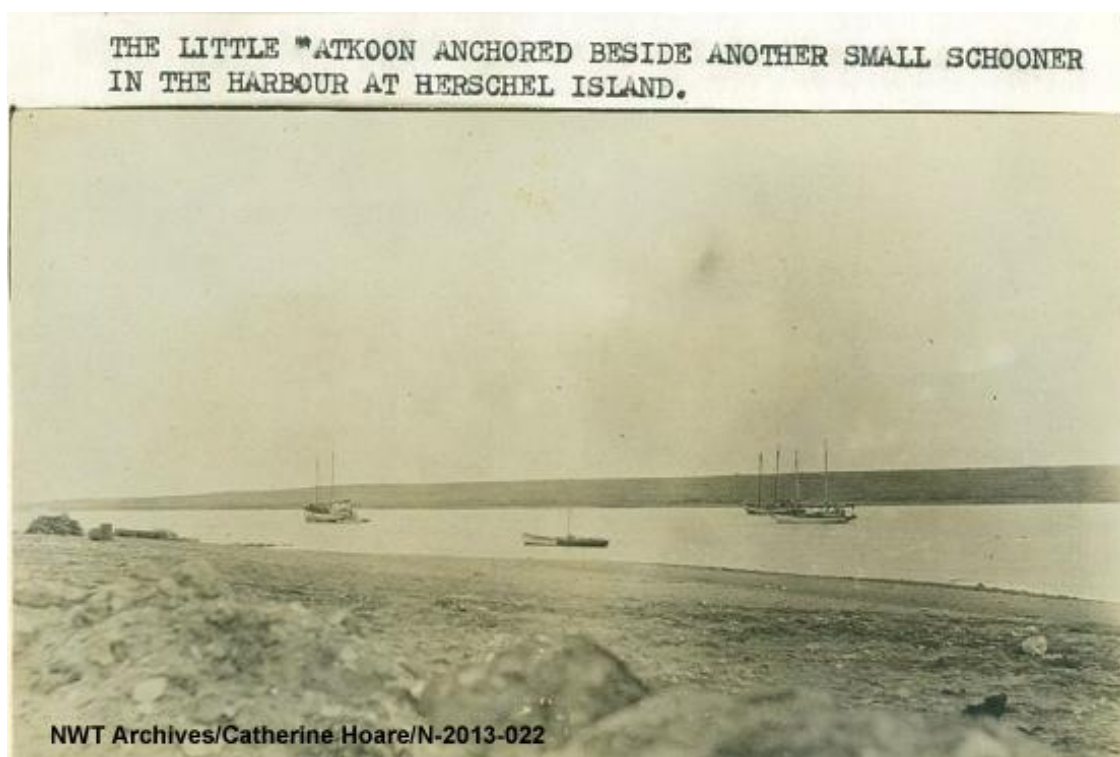
Chapter IV - Captain Allan's Fur Trapping Voyage to the Canadian Arctic

El Sueño was brought to the Canadian arctic by Captain Alex Allan (spelling of name sometimes Allen) in 1915. At this point the vessel had been converted to schooner rig presumably to allow easier handling with a small crew and a club had been fitted to a fore sail.

Her arrival was noted in the Report of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (RNWMP) for 1915:

"The auxiliary schooner El Sueno, Captain Allan in charge, arrived from Nome Alaska August 20, and left for Cockburn point with a load of provisions for the Canadian Arctic expedition on August 23. Captain Allan intended to return to Booth Island, east of Cape Parry, and spend the winter trapping"

The report cited duties paid by five vessels at Herschel Island, *El Sueño's* entry point to Canada and one at which she disbursed \$179.29 customs fee. While at the island, Allan encountered Stefansson (of the Canadian Arctic Expedition, CAE) who had just returned from his famous ice expedition. Stefansson had been rescued from Banks Island by Captain Lane's schooner *Polar Bear*. As Allan had surplus cargo space available, Stefansson hired him to transport supplies to his southern party headquartered at Bernard Harbour. Also, as Allan was skilled at repairing and maintaining marine engines, Stefansson engaged him to go over the engines of the expedition vessels at Bernard Harbour.



A rare image in Canadian history in August 1915: to the left is the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) motor schooner *Fort McPherson* recently arrived from Vancouver after wintering in Teller Alaska, while to the right in the foreground is the *El Sueño* and in the background the HBC chartered power schooner *Ruby*.

The above photograph and a subsequent one showing *El Sueño* in winter quarters are from an unpublished work documenting the arctic exploits of William Hoare when he was with an Anglican group attempting to establish a mission station in the Coronation Gulf area from 1914 - 1918. The work also includes his later experiences with the church and when he was a wildlife field worker for the Canadian government in the arctic together with the related arctic experiences of his wife. Their remarkable stories documented by William Hoare's diaries and photographs are contained in a two-volume document titled *Adventures Unlimited* by Catherine A. Hoare available from the Archives of the Northwest Territories in Yellowknife, Exhibit N-2013-022.

A iconic photograph shows *El Sueño* leaving Bernard Harbour under sail in the late fall of 1915. This was presumably Allan heading back west on his trading and trapping mission.



Photo from Dartmouth College Stefansson Arctic Photos - Schooner *El Sueno* leaving Bernard Harbor by Fritz Johnson - Identifier Stern229_005-23-24-f

Returning from Bernard Harbour, Allan encountered the missionary party of the Anglican church, Herbert Girling, G.E. Merritt, William Hoare and Pouchina (described as "an Eskimo helper") whose vessel the *Atkoon* had also been at Herschel Island. The *Atkoon* had been disabled near Clifton Point when he stopped to offer assistance even though his own vessel, *El Sueño* had been badly damaged.

In the late winter of 1916, Allan and his wife travelled by dog sled to spend Easter with the church party at 'Camp Necessity' beside their beached vessel at Clifton Point. Subsequently Hoare and Merritt of the group returned with them to Pierce Point where *El Sueño* was in winter quarters. Along the way the group encountered Allan's fur trapping partner Nels Holmes and trapper Steen, presumably another of the four partners. The next summer while trying to advance east to Bernard Harbour the missionary vessel was completely destroyed by fire and her crew were forced to spend the winter of 1916- 1917 at another winter camp. During that winter they came across Pete Norberg at his winter trapping cabin and almost shot him mistaking him for a bear. This must have been forgiven as their account mentions Pete's assistance to them at a later time.



From "Adventures Unlimited." - *El Sueño* in winter quarters at Pierce Point 1916

An entry at page 275 in the 1916 RNWMP Report chronicles Allan's and the missionaries activities during the winter of 1915-1916:

" The Rev. Mr. Girling, Church of England mission, arrived at Bernard harbour on Oct 9, his boat, the schooner *Atkoon* (sic) having been driven ashore in a storm near Clifton Point on September 4; all his party are safe and the schooner undamaged; he returned to Clifton Point on November 10. Capt Allen of the schooner *El Sueño*, who brought supplies here this summer, is wintering at Pierce point, with four other men, trapping "

The next recorded mention of Allan and the vessel is in Bishop Stringer's diary of 1917. Stringer was the Anglican churchman who first established a Christian mission on Herschel Island in 1897. He urged the RNWMP to establish a presence there to bring order to the former whaling community. During that summer he met Allan at Herschel Island. Allan offered to sell the vessel to him for \$1,600.

A last report of Allan is contained in the RNWMP Report of 1918. In July 1918 Allan was traveling with companion Gonzales from Kittegaruit (sic) to Hershel Island by whale boat. Gonzales was a former CAE member who had been fired by Stefansson in 1917. While en route they rescued Superintendent Phillips and Constable Doak of the RNWMP. The pair had been travelling by whale boat from Aklavik to Herschel Island along with Constable Cornelius. The boat had been wrecked ten miles east of the island. All eventually reached Herschel Island safely including Cornelius who had set off on foot in an attempt to get help. Doak along with Hudson's Bay post manager Binder were later murdered by Inuit Alikomiak at Tree River. In a trial held at Herschel Island in 1923 Alikomiak and Tatamigana, another accused murderer, were found guilty. They were subsequently hung in 1924. The trial became famous and still attracts controversy to the present day.

It appears that at the time of the rescue of the police officers, *El Sueño* had been sold to the Hudson's Bay Company. According to his September 17, 1918 diary entry; when William Hoare arrived at Bernard Harbour that summer, he became aware of the sale of the *El Sueño*:

"The *Challenge* has gone east with Pete Norberg as skipper and trader. The Hudson's Bay Company had bought the *Elsueno* (sic) for \$2,000 without engine."

Challenge was a small schooner owned briefly by the CAE, sold in 1917 to a partnership of Otto Binder, Frank Noice and A. A. Carroll for use in fur trading. Carroll was a former employee of Northern Traders a rival of the HBC while the others were former members of the expedition. Stefansson reported the vessel was subsequently wrecked in winter quarters during the first winter on the mainland coast of Amundsen Gulf. Both Carroll as manager at Herschel Island and Binder at Tree River, who was later murdered, became HBC employees. It is not clear about Noice, who obsessed in collecting native artifacts; but it is noted that he was the individual who rescued Pete Norberg when the latter was a trader at Kent Peninsula, and angry natives were crushing his head in a fur press.

Sometime after the loss of *Challenge* and the collapse of the partnership, Norberg turned to the HBC, beginning a long association with the company.

Chapter V - As a Hudson's Bay Company Vessel trading in the Coronation Gulf

By 1918, under District Manager Chris Harding, HBC fur trading posts had been established eastward from Herschel Island as far as Bernard Harbour. Harding's only transportation tool prior to the purchase of *El Sueño* was the stalwart motor schooner the *Fort McPherson*. His successor Herbert Hall continued the push eastward into the Coronation Gulf area under the local leadership of inspector H.C. Clarke. Before this the gulf had been mainly the preserve of independent American traders such as Christain Klengenber and Joseph Bernier. By 1920 posts had been established as far east as the Kent Peninsula, while the Northern Traders post at Tree River had been purchased and opened as a company post under Otto Binder.

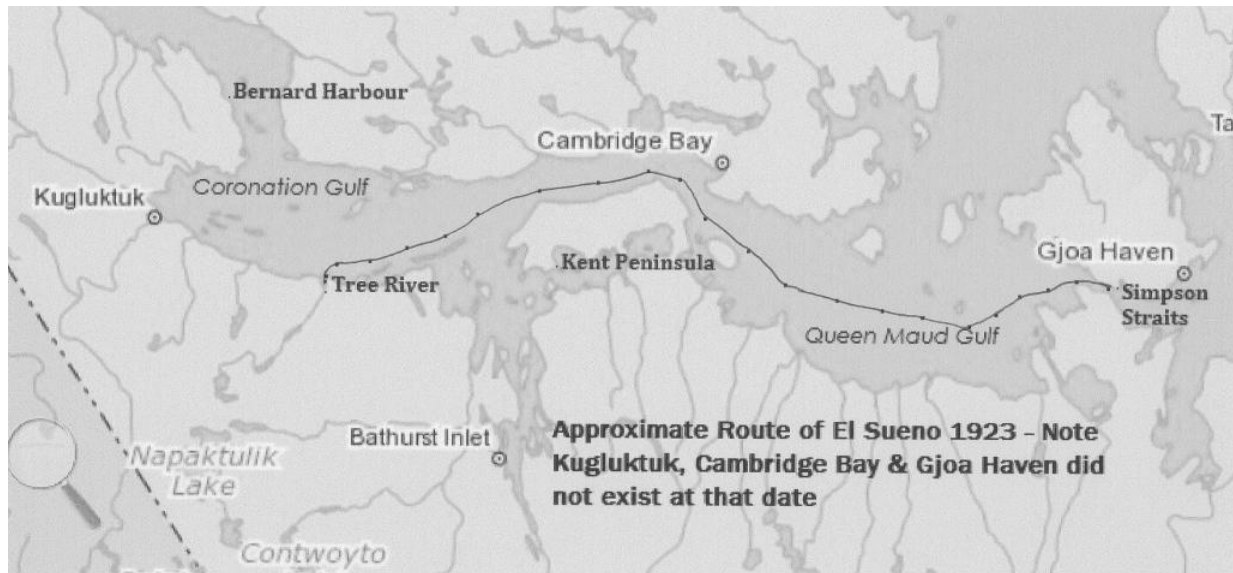
Even before and prior to erection of post buildings at Kent Peninsula, trading from the schooner *El Sueño* had commenced. The Kitikmeot Heritage Society records that Kent Post was established by H.C. Clarke and fellow HBC employee Rudolph Johnson in 1920. Though details are vague, it is likely Pete Norberg initiated trading using the schooner as their trading post. The RNWMP Report of 1920 described an encounter with him during the winter of 1919-1920:

"Constable Brockie's patrol to Kent Peninsula, where he found the *El Sueno* wintering and Mr. Peter Norberg established as a trader for the Hudson Bay Company, is chiefly noticeable for his friendly dealings with the Eskimo."

When the HBC arctic supply ship *Lady Kindersley* made her maiden voyage to the arctic in 1921 it was the farthest post to be visited by any HBC supply ship from the Pacific Coast. En route at Bernard Harbour she encountered Pete Norberg with *El Sueño*. While they were there Norberg, together with HBC employees C.H. Clarke and Tom O'Kelly and his wife Frances, were witnesses at a wedding. Afterwards Norberg piloted the *Lady Kindersley* to Tree Island towing the *El Sueño*. He then sailed the schooner from Tree Island after she had been loaded with supplies for the Kent Peninsula post.

Norberg continued to work in the eastern gulf area until the spring of 1922. Reported to be manager of the Kent Peninsula post, he left Tree River post on April 22 to help Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Constable Stevensen escort charged murderer Alikomiak to the west for trial. The trip consisted of a 726-mile-leg by dog sled to Kittigazuit, followed by a further 125 mile one by native schooner to Aklavik. In an interview reported in a 1929 article in the *Victoria Colonist*, he indicates that he spent the winter of 1922 in Winnipeg. It is not clear if any of his children accompanied him. Caroline, his youngest, lived with relatives at Old Crow in the Yukon while the others Agnes and Johnny had been attending residential school at Hay River. It appears likely that he visited Old Crow on his journey down the Mackenzie in the summer of 1923 as he is reported to have joined Scotty Gall and the other members of HBC's new arctic motor schooner *Aklavik* at Fort Simpson after "coming over the mountains". There, he took charge of the vessel and helped her navigate through the difficult and shallow Sans Sault Rapids. Norberg continued with the vessel to Aklavik where Henry Bjorn took over for the final leg to Herschel Island. District Manager Hall had arranged for the building of the vessel for arctic service, along with other vessels, at Fort McMurray by Vancouver ship builder George Askew.

Chapter VI - As the Hudson's Bay Company Vessel that Extended Fur Trade to King William Island



Eastward Extension of the Fur Trade - From the Atlas of Canada - Toporama marked-up by the Author

Prior to his inspection trip of arctic trading posts for fur commissioner Angus Brabant in 1923, Hudson's Bay Company inspector Phillip Godsell had been informed that the company wanted to extend its coverage eastwards from the Tree Island and Kent Peninsula posts by establishing one or two posts on Victoria Island, and also to send an expedition to King William Land (King William Island) to establish trading. This is the island where the Franklin expedition of 1845 had come to grief. Reaching the island meant navigating across Queen Maud Gulf, a feat that had only previously been accomplished by Roal Amundsen in 1906. His vessel *Gjoa* had been equipped with an engine. The distance from the Tree Island post was approximately 420 miles.

Pete Norberg was selected to lead the expedition. This was likely arranged in Winnipeg when he was on furlough during the winter of 1922. Hall had visited Winnipeg that winter and it is probable that Norberg and he had met with Brabant. At the time, Norberg was one of the few local inhabitants who could communicate with the poorly understood inhabitants of the central arctic region.

Godsell, district manager Hall and district inspector Clarke had been present at the famous trial of the accused Inuit murders at Herschel Island in July 1923. The trial, which ended with a guilty verdict for both, concluded with the departure of the judicial party by schooner to reach an upstream river steamer at Aklavik. Godsell and the HBC employees travelling to the Tree Island Post, the planned start of the expedition, awaited the arrival of the HBC supply ship *Lady Kindersley* from Vancouver at Herschel Island. She arrived on August 3 and after discharging and transferring cargo sailed to the east. On board (as mentioned by Godsell in his books *Arctic Trader* and *They Got Their Man*) were Pete Norberg, Otto Torrington and HBC company accountant and replacement Tree River post manager R.C. MacGregor. Godsell made no

mention of Henry Bjorn who was probably also on board or of HBC district inspector Clarke. That Clarke was aboard was confirmed by *Kindersley's* radio officer Reginald Harold Fricker. Fricker also noted that Danish photographer Leo Hansen, who was scheduled to join Knut Rasmussen 5th Thule Expedition at Kent Peninsula, was also on board.

In his book, Godsell mentions an animosity that had developed between himself and Clarke over Clarke's action at Herschel Island. Clarke had sold a large number of pelts from his personal trapping to an independent trader in contravention to HBC policy. Godsell also noted that Clarke tended to turn a blind eye about a large amount of personal trapping done by HBC employees. In the western arctic employees often used their employment with the HBC as an opportunity to advance their own interests over company interests. This practice was peculiar to the western arctic where the company had to hire local trappers instead of traditional HBC apprentice trained traders in order to remain competitive.

After a rollicking voyage on the *Lady Kindersley* from Herschel Island with Godsell and other fur traders, Norberg arrived at the jumping off point at the Tree Island post. By previous arrangement with company officials he had brought with him an old motorized scow dubbed "*The Hobo*". Remaining at Tree River was *El Sueño* the only vessel available though lacking a motor. Together with the scow they were to be the means of extending the company's line of posts across Queen Maud Gulf to King William Island. The assistant for the voyage as reported by Godsell was to be Otto Torrington, who had travelled with Godsell from Herschel Island.



Danish Arctic Institute Photo ID 122347 - Barge Unloaded at Herschel Island 1923 - By Leo Hansen Photographer to Knud Rasmussen's 5th Thule Expedition - It is not known if this is the "*Hobo*" but she would have been handled on/off *Lady Kindersley* in similar manner

Their departure is described in Godsell's books *Arctic Trader* and *They Got Their Man*.

“Just as midnight approached and the sun dipped momentarily below the horizon, Pete and his helper, Otto, shook hands, stepped on board “The Hobo” cranked up the engine and were away. Soon the *put, put, put*, of the motor was lost in the distance. Pete had left for the Unknown”.

While this dramatic account lends colour to Godsell's book, it is doubtful that it happened in the manner described or that in fact Godsell was even present at the midnight departure. Two photographs by Leo Hansen from the Danish Arctic Institute shows the players in the adventure at Tree Island Post. Godsell is not included in the group. A third photo shows the schooners *El Sueño* and *Fort McPherson* in the anchorage roadstead but the *Lady Kindersley* is not evident. Godsell, an ardent photographer himself with hundreds of photos, does not appear to have taken any of this important event.

Torrington was a former Edmonton taxi driver who later became well known in the region as a trapper and efficient winter traveler. In the later days of the HBC motor schooner *Fort McPherson*, he was her engineer during the summer transportation season. Renowned Danish explorer Knut Rasmussen who witnessed the arrival of *El Sueño* at King William Island on September 23, 1923 mentions that accompanying Norberg was Henry Bjorn a HBC employee of Danish origin. Either Godsell was mistaken, not actually present at the departure or an exchange had been made along the way. The Company motor schooner *Fort McPherson* had been at Tree River to load supplies when the *Lady Kindersley* arrived. Her normal engineer was Rudolph Johnson but during the winter of 1923-1924 he assisted Clarke at the Kent River post. As previously mentioned Otto Torrington later became the engineer on the vessel. It is likely he replaced Johnson so Bjorn had to be reassigned to the King William Island mission. Jacobsen was likely the captain of the *McPherson* at the time but probably exchanged with Seymour sometime after. Seymour had been ice pilot for the *Lady Kindersley* for the trip around Point Barrow. Jacobsen, in accordance with HBC records, spent 1923 as manager of a new outpost at Cambridge Bay. There were very poor Company records at this time so this theory is somewhat speculative. Also, because there was “bad blood” between Clarke (the local man-in-charge) and Godsell, Clarke may have simply have refrained from informing Godsell of the substitutions.



Danish Arctic Institute Photo ID 122484 - Happy HBC Adventurers at Tree River Post 1923 - By Leo Hansen Photographer to Knud Rasmussen's 5th Thule Expedition - Author's researched guess of those shown, left to right: Henry Bjorn, Pete Norberg, Otto Torrington, Rudolf Johnson, William Seymour, and Fred Jacobsen.

Nearly a year after the departure, Godsell received a report from Norberg advising of the early outcome of the mission. Godsell's summary of it is quoted below:

"With fair winds they had sailed the "El Sueno" and towed "The Hobo." When the wind or ice were bad they cranked up "The Hobo" engine and towed the "El Sueno". On the southern shore of King William's Land they built their shack of sailcloth and lumber and covered it with snow blocks when winter came along. Afterwards Pete scoured the country with his dog-team. He visited Adelaide and Boothia Peninsulas and at these two places, and the mouth of Back's River, located altogether four hundred unknown Eskimos with whom he had done a thriving trade. Knud Rasmussen, the Danish explorer, had passed through the Arctic that winter so he received one visitor to break the monotony of his isolation."

The report probably reached Godsell as a result of a winter trip by Bjorn. William Hoare in the early winter of 1925 (then working on field wildlife research for the Canadian government) reported travelling the final part of a journey to Fort Norman with Bjorn and his Inuit travelling partner. Bjorn informed him that their journey had started on King William Island in December 1924.



Archives Canada Photo by L.T. Burwash, 81-1925-L.T.B. -canvas house HBC King William Land Sept 1925 - This was the post established by Pete Norberg and Henry Bjorn in 1923.

The year of 1924 was a difficult one for the HBC as the *Lady Kindersley* was lost near Point Barrow and as a result there was an extreme lack of new goods for the trading posts. Personnel were scrambling to distribute available goods and few records of events were kept. The activities of *El Sueño* during this period are unknown, but it is unlikely that she remained idle. Norberg's inclinations would be to take his fur trading returns out and to resupply his trading goods. As recorded in HBC post records, Sergeant Barnes of the RCMP detachment at Tree Island did make contact with Norberg on a patrol to King William Island in the winter of 1924 - 1925. It is noted in the post record of June 3, 1925 that Norberg reported to Barnes that he had traded for 400- 500 foxes but was not contemplating making a dog team trip out that spring.

El Sueño and Norberg returned to the Tree River Post on September 20, 1925 after stops at Cambridge Bay and Kent Peninsula. Her entrance to Cambridge Bay on August 30, was too late for Norberg to meet the HBC supply ship *Baychimo* aboard which fur commissioner Angus Brabant was travelling (that vessel had previously sailed on August 22). Brabant must have been very interested in Norberg's venture as he had the *Baychimo* make a second visit to Tree River on August 25 to seek news about Norberg's return. As no note in the Tree River post records of his fur trade appears, it is presumed these were left in the warehouse at Kent Peninsula.

Norberg arrived with Otto Torrington (presumably picked up at the Kent Peninsula Kent post) and also brought an accused murderer from King William Island along with several other natives. The accused had voluntarily given himself up and was being transported to the police post at Tree Island to be arrested. The latter individuals were witnesses and their wives, and the wives of the accused.

Well-known Canadian government travelling investigator Major L.T. Burwash (who had disembarked from the *Lady Kindersley*) was residing in the vacant HBC company camp building at Cambridge when the *El Sueño* arrived. He was waiting for the *Fort McPherson* to pick him for transport to King William Island. Burwash photographed both vessels, the prisoner, the witnesses and the wives as well as other scenes around Cambridge and later the post building at Simpson Strait on King William Island established by Norberg's mission. He and replacement HBC Post Manager Paddy Gibson as well as the crew of the *Fort McPherson* resided at the post during the winter of 1924-1925. In addition to the canvas residence house shown in the photograph in this article, the post contained a cache/store structure. It appears from other of Burwash's photographs that the base of this structure may have been the old scow *The Hobo* that Norberg and his partner used to bring their supplies and trading outfit to the location. The entire building was supported by and rested on old oil drums.

When *El Sueño* eventually arrived at Tree Island she was taken over from Norberg by HBC Post Manager Ray Ross. Ross immediately readied the vessel for a winter trading venture to the west in the Coppermine area under employee Ambrose (a former CAE employee thought to be the long-term HBC interpreter and trapper Ambrose Arnavigak, reported in the Beaver magazine of March 1936 to have died along with his wife of measles in 1935).

Reverted to free trapper status, Norberg sailed with the vessel along with some of the prisoners' group to aid in navigation and her establishment in winter quarters. Norberg intended to spend the winter trapping in an area about 40 miles east of Tree River but because of weather delays the vessel did not get away until September 28 when there was a favourable sailing wind. The departure was the last record of *El Sueño* found in HBC records. Based on interviews and personal communications by John MacFarlane in 1991 with both Sven Johansson and Scotty Gall, it appears the vessel was eventually sold to Pete Norberg who fitted her with an engine. Afterwards she was apparently passed to his son Johnny.

An introduction to the Captain Gustav Foellmer album kept by Ian Malcolm "Jack" MacKinnon (now held by the Vancouver Maritime Museum) indicates that *El Sueño* was one of three HBC vessels lost in the arctic along with *Fort McPherson* and *Fort James*. MacKinnon was a HBC employee who served on the *Lady Kindersley* and was post manager at Cambridge bay from 1927 -1932. A photo of *El Sueño* grounded and angled against a shore in the album captioned "Schooner '*El Sueño*' Lost at Tree Island 1922" is either mislabeled or simply another one of the apparent losses she recovered from during her long life.



Courtesy Vancouver Maritime Museum - From Captain Gustav Foellmer Album

Aftermath and Conclusion

Further glimpses of the final fate of the *El Sueño* remain shrouded at the present time. One of the final photographs of her taken at Cambridge Bay reveal her original fine lines as those of a racing yacht. Her wheel, a racing tiller-helm replacement and presumably the one loving crafted and described by William Coffee, is evident on her cabin wall.



El Sueño at Cambridge Bay 1925 - the vessel behind her is the HBC trading schooner *Fort MacPherson* - Photo from Archives Canada - Photographer Major L.T. Burwash - MIKAN 3394078

The life of *El Sueño* as a HBC vessel is closely aligned with that of Pete Norberg. He died in 1933 while trying to shoot Bloody Falls in a canoe. His body was never found. His extraordinary life and valuable exploits have now been documented in a film made by TV Ontario "Edna's Bloodline" narrated by his granddaughter Edna Elias, the former Commissioner of Nunavut.

C.H. Clarke left the HBC in 1924. After a brief business venture in Vancouver he returned to the arctic as a principal with the newly formed Canalaska Fur trading company that was partly owned and closely associated with Captain C.T. Pederson. Canalaska competed with the HBC until Pedersen sold out to the HBC in 1939. It appears that former HBC employees Johnson and Henry Bjorn joined the new company. In 1927 the trading post which Norberg had established at Simpson Strait was moved east to where Amundsen had wintered in 1905 -1906 and where the rival Canalaska Company was setting up a competing post. These two trading posts evolved and became the permanent settlement Gjoa Haven (named for Amundsen's ship) in the heart of the Northwest Passage.

From the date of *El Sueño's* initial voyage many other fur trading vessels visited Gjoa Haven from the west. In 1928 Major Burwash made a second wintering visit to King William Island, this time on the government schooner *Ptarmigan*. In 1929 a vessel of different origin wintered there. She was the HBC's *Fort James* out of St. Johns Newfoundland. She had wintered at Oscar Bay north of Gjoa Haven in 1928-1929. Her arrival marked a significant achievement for the venerable Hudson's Bay Company, whose vessels had finally completed the navigation of the long sought Northwest Passage. Indeed, considering that Company vessels had previously reached the Pacific Coast both by the Panama Canal and via Cape Horn, they had circumnavigated not only North America but all of America. Little fuss was made of the event. The venerable old company continued on exchanging their tea and rifle cartridges for fox pelts.

As a final thought it is noted that the *Fort McPherson* was the most frequent of the visitors. Her final voyage to the island was made in 1930 just before she was wrecked off the south coast of Victoria Island. Her master was David Morris, and her engineer, Otto Torrington. Like the schooner it was also his last voyage in arctic waters. After the wreck Otto attempted to return to the "bright lights" of the city but he had been in the north too long. Almost broke, he returned to the north to try to settle down at Port Radium on Great Bear Lake but even this compromise did not work for him. In his book *Lure of the North* Richard Finney reported: "one day, not long ago, he was found in a cabin, dead, a gun beside him."

Many vessels have long and varied careers. *El Sueño* and her pioneering voyage across Queen Maud Gulf without an engine in uncharted waters stands as a magnificent piece of seamanship that extended settlements along the Northwest Passage. With this achievement she put the HBC out in front of the opposition in the western arctic fur trade and gave the Company bragging rights to claim a first in the west-to-east navigation of the Northwest Passage. Her significance in helping to establish early arctic trade cannot be overstated.

References and Acknowledgments

Most of the books, websites, archival sources and articles used for reference purposes are mentioned directly in the article or shown as notations on the exhibits and watermarks on the photographs.

The following books were used as sources for the article: "The Friendly Arctic" by Vihijalmur Stefannson, "They Got Their Man (1932)" and "Arctic Trader (1946)" by Philip H. Godsell, "Lure of the North" by R.S. Finnie, "The Big Ship" by Henry Larson, "The Making of an Explorer - George Hubert Wilkins and the Canadian Arctic Expedition 1913- 1916" by Stuart E. Jenness and "Canada's Western Arctic - Report on Investigations in 1925-26, 1928-29 and 1939 " by Major L.T. Burwash, "Baychimo Arctic Ghost Ship" by Anthony Dalton, "Acts of Occupation" by Janice Cavell and Jeff Noakes and "Across Arctic America" by Knud Rasmussen, and "The Ramblings of a "Matelot" by Reginald Harold Flicker. John MacFarlane's Nauticapedia article "Ernest J. Scotty Gall as well as "Interview with E.J. Gall" from HBC archives, Accession HB 1984/15 Number T11-27, on-line Photograph album and Daily journal for 1921, diary of Mrs. Frances Glades O'Kelly, 1925 post journal for HBC Tree River post and Beaver magazine article "On Furlough from the Arctic", May 1923.

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END