

Cottardo Stagnaro... Saga Of The Santa Cruz Main

His Life Story Reflects 60 Years Of Progress At Municipal Wharf

By Skip Littlefield

Memories came merging down the long wake of weathered waterfront years that have been—as sorrowful Santa Cruz fisherfolk heard the keel of an ancient lateen craft grating the sands of an outgoing tide yesterday morning. (Ed. note—traditional sign of the passing of a fisherman.)

Cottardo Peter Stagnaro II, patriarch of a noted wharf family, had set sail in his beloved "Buona" on a last and greater voyage.

are told that history is but the lengthened shadow of

measured by these standards the story of Cottardo Stag-

...serves a chapter in the chro-
...this seashore community.
...and his work belongs to
...moments of an age that
...bearing rapidly in this

changing Santa Cruz.

Seventy years ago witnessed the advent of the unfurling of lateen sails on the waters of the Santa Cruz main. Cottardo Stagnaro, the elder, first Genoese fisherman on the Pacific coast, had arrived on Monterey bay.

Stagnaro's father came of a stern and hardy race born of generations of sea faring men. Fortified with a consuming determination to bring his family to America from the little village of Riva Trigoso near Genoa, his savings soon purchased land on the block at Laguna, Bay and Lighthouse. For 60 years this has been the home of generations of Stagnaros.

Washington's birthday, February 22, 1898, found an Italian mother with her son watching in awe as an ocean liner sailed past the Statue of Liberty. The elder Stagnaro had sent for his wife and son to join him in far away Santa Cruz. Young Cottardo was enrolled at the old Bay View school. In a strange land with a strange people and a strange language the youth not only mastered English but learned Spanish quickly—the speech of the California of yesterday.

Santa Lucia—hark how the sailors' cry. The soft sweet scent of the sea soon beckoned the youngster to the beaches—a locale that was to claim his attention for a half century.

Cottardo's first commercial introduction to the business of fish was a job with John "Tick" Faraola on the old railroad wharf in 1906. In a few months he was working for Alex Paladini, the San Francisco fish baron, off Fishermen's wharf in the big city.

After the earthquake of 1906 Stagnaro returned to Santa Cruz. The house of Faraola with its great fleet of fishing boats—the "Leland F," the "Faraola I," and the "Faraola II" reaped golden harvests of fish.

Days of wooden ships and iron men. To earn a livelihood from the sea required a race against the swift turn of the seasons. The Stagnaros, father and son, by 1908 were the proud possessors of a lateen power boat—the 5 h.p. 20 foot "Buona Madre."

If ever a concern could boast of a humble origin—it was the C. Stagnaro company. The Stagnaros rented a spot on the railroad wharf from the late Domenico "Sunday" Faraola that was hardly large enough for a respectable horse stall.

Two up-ended fish boxes passed for a counter. The father fished and the son retailed the products of the Pacific. Eventually the busi-

ness paid for a horse and cart. Delivery service was added and the Stagnaro family was launched. In late 1914 Fred Howe officially opened the new municipal wharf. The late John Perez opened the first fish market in the new location quickly followed by Stagnaro and son.

In the years from 1911 to 1919 the big money in fish was derived from drag boat operations. At the peak of the drag boat years the Stagnaros were teamed with Battista and Domenico Castagnola until the flat bottom fishery played out in 1920.

First of a long line of Stagnaros to be added to the business was Cottardo's brother, Malio, "the dry land admiral," fresh out of high school in 1919.

The father and brothers had amassed enough capital to buy two small fishing barges in 1929—the "Stagnaro I" and the "Stagnaro II". The Stagnaros had ventured into the realm of deep sea pleasure fishing trips.

Under the guidance of Cottardo the business progressed slowly and cautiously—according to his means. Father of 10 children the concern automatically grew as the children became older.

Cottardo, by nature and rearing, held a cautious and conservative rein on family affairs. He always admonished against "over-extending." He often said "Malio is the cash register and I'm the safe deposit."

Malio and a younger generation of Stagnaros finally received Cottardo's consent in 1933 to go in the speedboat business off the end of the Pleasure pier. They built the celebrated "Miss Stagnaro" and added the streamlined "Sea Stag" to the fleet in 1934. Before they were requisitioned by the navy in 1942 the boats had carried over two hundred thousand passengers.

Cottardo loved to stand at the fish market and listen to brother Malio spiel the speedboat rides off the smaller pier on Sunday. "Hear him—ride the bay the speedboat way—in the 250 h.p. Miss Stagnaro. If business is bum that Malio will raise the boat rating 100 horse power an hour. By 5 o'clock that boat will have 500 horses."

Between 1931 and 1934 the Stagnaro fleet was swelled by the addition of the deep sea barge "Ohio," "Marie" and "Old Tom." The first two vessels were lost during a storm last year.

In 1939 Stagnaro purchased the marine holdings of the late Wm. Johnson from Mrs. Bessie Fridley. The Johnson barges became an in-

Getting Together For A Christmas Greeting



The late Cottardo Stagnaro, right, confers with Tommy Thompson, center, and Malio J.

Stagnaro, left, over the plans for last year's cartooned Christmas

card. Thompson is the sports cartoonist with the San Francisco Call-Bulletin.

'White Gold'



Cottardo stands with two big albacore, the rich "Chicken of the Sea."

benefits of the land of his adoption.

Fifteen hours a day—364 days a year—continuous labor for a half century with only Christmas a day of rest finally convinced Cottardo that he needed a vacation.

Two years ago the veteran fisherman returned to his place of birth near Genoa, Italy. At the end of three months he was glad to be back at the wharf.

From a humble beginning he lived to see the name of Stagnaro rank with the greatest deep sea sports fishing enterprises in America. He lived to see his boats carry a half million sportsmen out on the briny. He was in truth as the Chronicle's Tod Powell has related—"the pioneer of the poor man's fishing trip."

Perhaps the words of Ernest Otto, lifelong friend who has witnessed the ebb and flow of the tides of 70 years on the waterfront's roster of fishermen—to a sorrowful family yesterday might well be summed...

"You have only the best to look back to."

egral part of the deep sea fleet. Mrs. Fridley is still associated with the Stagnaro pleasure trips.

Cottardo Stagnaro was the one man on the whole waterfront with anything in his heart but a dollar sign. Down through the haggard depression years with his own business hanging by a thread he gave fish to the needy as though they came from a modern "Sea of Galilee."

We can remember Cottardo on the day of Pearl Harbor. His brother and two sons were rushing to naval headquarters. The wharf became strangely quiet.

"Fate corraggio" (keep your courage). To many a man it might have been a private Dunkirk. "Fate corraggio—now we got a war to win."

And with the return of the family after V. J. day the shout echoed across the waters—"Avanti tutta forza" (full speed ahead).

Ever alert to a changing public Cottardo put his blessing on plans in 1946 that called for the building of the largest and fastest commercial speedboat on the coast. Santa Cruz became the home mooring of the new super "Sea Stag II"—a \$32,000, 650 h.p. craft.

Eyeing the sleek 45 m.p.h. boat the head of the house of Stagnaro sagely opined, "business better be gold—that Malio will have a thousand horse rating in no time."

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The Cottardo Stagnaro company was incorporated in 1940 with Malio as president and Cottardo vice president. Included in the corporate listing are five sons and a daughter.

FROM ONE affection of a close-knit family Cottardo found the joy of life in his work and will to give his children the