

Mount Clemens Public Library

Local History Sketches

The Mount Clemens Sea Scouts and Sub-Chaser SC-227

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Photo courtesy of The Macomb Daily

During the summer of 1927, Mount Clemens became home port to a World War I submarine chaser, and some local boys had the adventure of a lifetime while bringing the ship to town.

When the **Boy Scouts of America** offered a program called Sea Scouts, designed for older boys, the **Macomb County Boy Scout Council** organized a Sea Scout unit in Mount Clemens under the direction of naval reserve commander **William J. Marshall**. Commander Marshall used his influence with the Navy to arrange the purchase of a decommissioned submarine chaser, hull number **SC-227**, for use as a training ship for the Mount Clemens Sea Scouts. Marshall organized a group of community leaders as the **Mount Clemens Yacht Club**, which paid the \$1000 purchase price and turned the vessel over to the Sea Scouts. In exchange, each member of the Yacht Club was a shareholder in the ship and guaranteed at least one trip per season aboard the SC-227.

The Mount Clemens Sea Scouts, under Commander Marshall, left Mount Clemens for Washington D.C. by bus on June 30, 1927. The bus was provided by the Mount Clemens Yacht Club to transport the boys to the **Washington Navy Yard**, where the ship awaited them. Sea Scouts making the trip were **Emory Nunneley, Jr., Philip Lutes, Carl Hirt, William Koehler, Russell Rooney, Donald Hatzenbuhler, William Elkin, Donald Stuart, Roy Martin, and James Nunneley**. Also serving as part of the ship's crew were **Herman Engelman, James Yates, Alden Cressey, William R. Kibble, Francis Yates and Ralph Carpenter**.

Upon arrival in Washington, the scouts learned that the ship required several days' worth of reconditioning, painting, scraping, and engine tuning before the homeward trip could commence. The boys eagerly lent a hand in the rehabilitation of their new vessel, dubbed *The Griffin*, and even camped out aboard. They also took advantage of the opportunity for a sightseeing tour of the nation's capitol. When the ship was at last found seaworthy, the boys were thrilled to have a send-off visit from **Secretary of the Navy Curtis D. Wilbur**.

An inland route had been mapped out for the SC-227's trip to Mount Clemens. The ship entered Chesapeake Bay and from there passed through Black Creek, the Delaware Canal and the Delaware River to Philadelphia. A day was spent visiting Philadelphia, then the voyage continued. In the Raritan Canal the SC-227 ran aground and was stuck for three days before being released by a tug. The Sea Scouts next found themselves entering New York harbor under the imposing shadows of the Statue of Liberty and the Manhattan skyline. The voyage continued up the Hudson River and then to the Erie Canal, where another misfortune was to befall the intrepid group.

Nearing Rochester, New York, the Sea Scouts were informed that a break in the canal had drained a 9-mile section of the passageway between Buffalo and their present position. The SC-227 turned around and retraced her path nearly 200 miles to Oswego, where the ship entered Lake Ontario. The boys crossed Lake Ontario to the Welland Canal, a passage that required the use of 24 sea locks in a 26-mile route. Following this difficult transit, the SC-227 developed a serious leak and made for a drydock in Erie, Pennsylvania. Upon arrival at Erie, the Sea Scouts were dismayed to learn that the drydock was full, so repairs were effected by stringing cables under the stern and securing them to an ore-loader, which lifted the stern out of the water sufficiently to allow the repair of the leak. Finally, the SC-227 was on its homeward leg. Following the Detroit River and Lake St. Clair, the sub chaser arrived at the **Masonic Country Club** dock on Jefferson on August 14.

A welcoming committee of over 200 people waited at the Masonic dock, and Mount Clemens mayor **William Streit** provided the scouts with a brand new mooring rope for their ship: "This mooring rope is a present from the people of Mt. Clemens. I present it to you with their greetings." Hotel owner **Samuel Elkin**, whose son was a member of the crew, hosted a banquet for the Sea Scouts at the **Olympia Hotel**. A few days after her arrival, the SC-227 was piloted gingerly up the **Clinton River** to **Tucker's dock** in Mount Clemens, where it became a local curiosity.

The SC-227 was built by the **New York Yacht Launch and Engine Company**, Norris Heights, New York, and was commissioned by the Navy on December 24, 1917. She was a wooden-hulled vessel, 110 feet in length with three 220-horsepower engines and a top speed of 14-15 miles per hour. The ship's displacement was 77 tons and her wartime armament consisted of 3 guns. In May, 1918, she proceeded as part of a naval convoy to Gibraltar and participated in hunting patrols for German U-boats off the coast of Spain. In June, 1918, SC-227 was attached to a naval base at Corfu. Following the armistice that ended World War I, SC-227 returned to New York and was decommissioned September 10, 1919.

Her life as a training ship for the Mount Clemens Sea Scouts lasted several years, but she was expensive to operate. She was eventually sold, and a 1952 newspaper item about her noted that her whereabouts were unknown, but that she had last been seen carrying freight on the Detroit River.

For more information about SC-227 and the Mount Clemens Sea Scouts, we recommend:

- "Sub Chaser to be Given Sea Scouts," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, June 14, 1927, p.1, col.4.
- "Griffin is Given Scraping, Painting," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, July 12, 1927, p.1, col.1.
- Malbin, Samuel. "Secretary of Navy Inspects Seascout Ship," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, July 18, 1927, p.1, col.1.
- "Sub Chaser is Caught on Reef," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, July 27, 1927, p.1, col.4.
- "Seascout Sub Chaser Stranded on Bottom by Break in Erie Canal," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, August 5, 1927, p.1, col.6.
- "SC-227 Arrives Here After Six Weeks' Journey," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, August 15, 1927, p.1, col.2.
- "SC 227 Sailors Banquet Guests," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, August 17, 1927, p.1.
- Nunneley, Emory T., Jr. "Seascout Tells Complete Story of Great Trip in Subchaser," *Mount*

Clemens Monitor, August 19, 1927, p.2.

- "Sub Chaser is Docked Here," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, August 23, 1927, p.1, col.3.
- "Reveal Wartime History of Sub-Chaser No. 227," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, August 26, 1927, p.8, col.4.
- Waterbury, Rodney A. "Way Back When in Mount Clemens," *Mount Clemens Monitor-Leader*, March 19, 1952.