

SCHOONER LA MERCED  
3022 Oakes Avenue  
Anacortes  
Skagit County  
Washington

HAER WA-223  
*HAER WA-223*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

# HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

## SCHOONER *LA MERCED*

HAER WA-223

**Location:** 3022 Oakes Avenue, Anacortes, Skagit County, Washington

**Date of Construction:** 1917

**Builder:** James Robertson, Benicia, California

**Original Owner:** Standard Oil Company

**Present Owner:** Lovric's shipyard

**Significance:** *La Merced* is listed in the National Register as one of four surviving four-masted schooners and for its role in Pacific coastal trade.

**Description:** The wooden-hull, four-masted schooner was listed as 225' long with a 43' beam, 20'-3" depth, 1,752 tons deadweight, and a speed of 6  $\frac{3}{4}$  knots in 1921. The National Register nomination gives the dimensions of 232' long with a 42.6' beam, 26.65' depth of hold, and 1,938 net tons. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, this ship was converted to a floating cannery, meaning both fishing and canning took place on board. This included the installation of bunks in the hold and construction of a deckhouse and elevated pilothouse. Propulsion was initially by two 160-brake horsepower Bolinder engines.

In 1965, the ship was sold to Railwater Terminal Company, and the propellers, engines, deck fittings, masts, and bowsprit were removed. The ship's hull was moved to Lovric's shipyard in Anacortes, Washington, and filled with sand and mud to serve as a breakwater. The cannery cabin on the weather deck was removed in 1987.<sup>1</sup>

**History:** James Robertson built *La Merced* (official number 215,578) at his Benicia, California, shipyard in 1917. Before it was even completed for buyer Andrew Mahoney, he sold it to Standard Oil Company. Prior to the development of tankers, Standard Oil used *La Merced* to haul petroleum products like gasoline and kerosene in metal containers, known as case oil. The ship plied the Pacific waters, delivering case oil to Melbourne, Sydney, Newcastle, San Pedro, and San

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<sup>1</sup> *Tariff Information, 1921, Hearings on General Tariff Revision before the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives*, Part I (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1921), 1106; *Ship Registries and Enrollments, Port of Eureka, California, 1859-1920* (The Survey of Federal Archives, 1941), 69; James P. Delgado, "4-Masted Schooner *La Merced*," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 1988, Section 7; Charles W. Geiger, "Economical Motorships on the Pacific," *International Marine Engineering* 24, no. 3 (March 1, 1919): A129.

Francisco. In October 1919, Standard Oil sold the ship to Walter S. Scammell of Port Townsend, Washington, who continued using the vessel in the case oil trade. As reported in *International Marine Engineering* in 1919, *La Merced* would go to Melbourne with a case of oil in forty-eight days and return with grain in fifty-three. In the late 1920s, the ship was converted to a floating salmon cannery. Nick Bez of P.E. Harris Company, later Peter Pan Seafoods, Inc., owned the vessel.

Newspapers and journals reveal additional information about the ship's service life. On a foggy October 1921 evening, *La Merced* had just anchored near Alcatraz Island when the Mexican steamer *Korrigan III* rammed it. The captain of *La Merced* reportedly was blowing the fog whistle when the incident, which resulted in significant damage, occurred. Rescue tugs with pumps were able to rescue the sinking schooner, and it was towed to the Moore Shipbuilding Plant for repairs. In May 1922, the ship ran aground in a channel in Honolulu Harbor but was not damaged. It was overhauled at a Portland, Oregon, dry dock in 1923 and had additional work done at the Moore Dry Dock Company in Oakland in 1924.

In 1965, Railwater Terminal Company, Inc. of Seattle, Washington, purchased the vessel for scrapping. Anton and Florence Lovric bought the hulk the following year for use as a breakwater at their shipyard, where it has remained.<sup>2</sup>

**Historian:** Justine Christianson, HAER Historian, 2016

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<sup>2</sup> "La Merced is Floated," *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 1922, 12; "Chronicle Shipping News," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 10, 1922, 22; "Marine Construction News of the Month," *Marine Engineering & Shipping Age* (January 1, 1923), 28 and (January 1, 1924), 29; "Chronicle Shipping News," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 1, 1921, 17; *Pacific Motor Boat* 12, no. 1 (October 1919): 31; Delgado, Section 8; Geiger, A129.