

DO NOT CIRCULATE

I Remember . . .

When Ships Came in to 'Quarantine'

SUNDAY SUN MAGAZINE, AUGUST 11, 1963

By Milton H. Chojnowski

FOR about two years now the United States Quarantine Service has been centralized at the Custom House in downtown Baltimore, but for many years it was isolated on a little neck of land that juts into the Patapsco at Curtis Creek.

The installation was officially called the United States Public Health Service Station, but most people around Baltimore just called it Quarantine. The name, I suppose, harks back to the era of the sailing vessels and the earliest steamships.

In those days, if smallpox, typhus, plague, or the like was discovered — or even suspected — aboard a ship coming to Baltimore from a foreign port, the entire crew was required to stay in the detention barracks at Quarantine for the length of the disease's incubation period. Crewmen who became ill were quarantined and treated. Those who remained healthy were released. Meanwhile, the ship itself was prevented from entering the harbor proper.

I started working at Quarantine in 1926. By that time the old hospital which had housed the smallpox victims had been torn down. The detention barracks — the long building in the center of the picture printed here — was still standing and equipped for use. It was arranged inside like a hospital ward, with several bunk beds in a number of large rooms. In later years, as the incidence of smallpox and the other feared sicknesses declined, the barracks was used for storage.

Quarantine was an almost self-supporting post. It had its own artesian well (water was pumped into the tall

tower you can see in the photo), its own power and its own ice house. Every fall we would dig a large pond in front of the ice house to catch the winter's rain and snow. When the water froze, we chopped up the ice and hauled it into the ice house.

Sun

Only food had to be brought in, and we would take turns going into town on shopping jaunts. Since we inspected ships from sunup to sundown, and since we were on call round the clock, we didn't get off the post often. Our shopping trips were therefore more pleasant than most people's.

Our little community (there were usually only 20 or 25 men there) had a couple of features that were peculiar to it. One was the leper house, a tiny shack set way off by itself. Another was the delousing plant, which was built after the picture was taken. The delousing plant was equipped with boilers to fill special rooms with steam. These steam chambers were designed to unsettle the most tenacious louse, but, for some reason, they were never used.

AUG. 11 1963
IT was my job at Quarantine to board all incoming ships and investigate their general sanitary condition. When a ship coming from a foreign port approached the Baltimore harbor it would pull into one of several anchorages off Quarantine. We had — and still have — several anchorages, because sometimes around ten or twelve ships a day would come into the port. Deep draft ships headed for the yellow buoys. White buoys marked the areas where shallow draft ships could anchor. We had three inspection boats docked at Quarantine. (They can be seen in the picture.) We'd take one of them out to the incoming vessel, board her, and begin our checks.

We would check the galley, the sleeping quarters, the holds — everything. We looked particularly hard for rats, and if we found even one we'd have the whole ship fumigated. The captain of the vessel would be responsible for getting all hands off the ship and onto Fort Carroll. When everyone was off we would place tubs of water and muriatic acid beneath every hatch. Then we'd toss cyanide eggs into them and slam the hatches shut. Actually though, before we filled the ship with the lethal cyanide (or sulphur — we sometimes burned sulphur pots) we fired tear gas into the holds to warn stowaways. Once we smoked sixteen stowaways out of a ship that had come in from Brazil.

While I conducted my inspection of the ship, Quarantine's team of medical men would examine the crew for signs of disease. If we found a person who was ill, we wouldn't take him off and detain him at Quarantine as they did in the old days. Rather, we would send him to one of the city's hospitals. If, on the other hand, he wasn't too sick, we would simply prescribe treatment and let him stay on his ship.

Frequently we'd have to vaccinate entire crews—not because there was smallpox aboard, but because none of them had ever been vaccinated. We at Quarantine had to be revaccinated every year.

It sometimes horrifies me to recall the conditions that existed on some of the

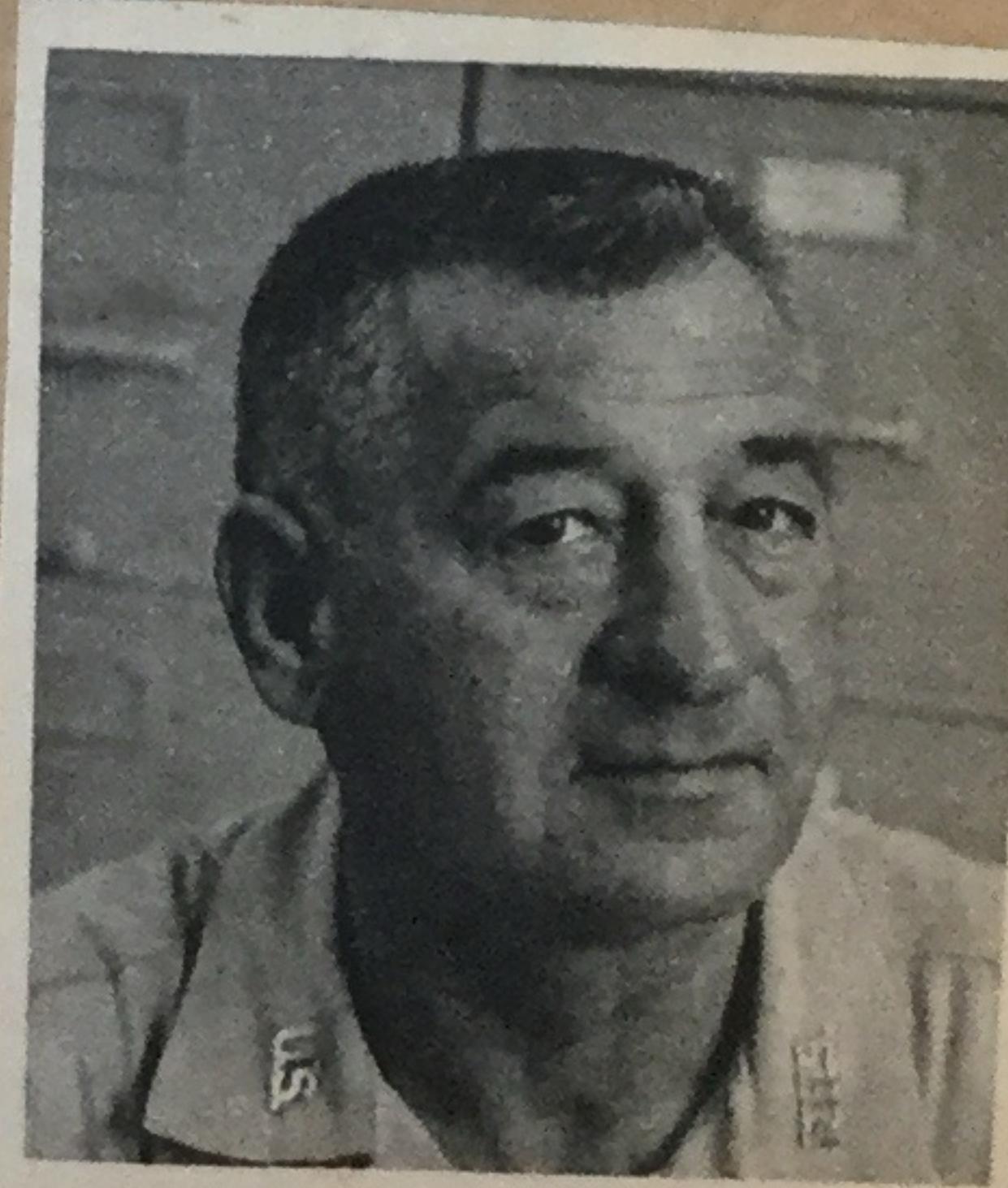
ships in the Twenties. It was not uncommon to see whole legs or other cuts of beef hanging in a ship's galley. When the cook wanted some meat he'd take a heavy cleaver and hack off a chunk of the leg or whatever it was that was hanging near him. The things were usually alive with flies and the stench of rotting meat would fill the whole galley.

VERY few ships then had refrigerated storage facilities. They'd leave Europe or South America with quantities of ice, but the ice wouldn't last throughout the trip, so they'd come steaming into Baltimore full of spoiled supplies. Most of the ships I inspect now, though, have cooking areas that are as clean and up-to-date as those you'd find in a swanky restaurant.

Just as great a transformation has taken place in sleeping quarters. I can remember when the only partitions were those that separated the firemen, who slept in one part of the forecastle, from the seamen, who stayed in the other. The quarters on some of today's ships — especially Scandinavian—are almost elegant.

In fact, conditions have improved so much that a few years ago — I don't remember exactly how many — we got orders to destroy all of our fumigating equipment. We still inspect vessels and their crews, and we still issue certificates of passage, but we no longer fumigate.

This May the land occupied by Quarantine was bought by the Maryland Port Authority for \$269,500. The Authority intends to develop the area as a waterfront facility.



Mr. Chojnowski



View of the U.S. Public Health Service Station at Curtis Creek in 1932. To most people, it was known as "Quarantine."

Quarantine Station, Baltimore

Maryland Vertical
File

New Quarantine ~~Station~~
SUN Vessel Due Here
AUG 10 1938
Health Service Craft, En Route
From Detroit, Will Arrive
Tomorrow *Bals.*

A fast new craft for transporting United States Public Health Service officials about Baltimore harbor will arrive tomorrow at the Leading Point quarantine station.

Designated the Q11, the forty-foot high-powered boat sailed from Detroit, where it was built, on July 28. It is accompanied by a sister ship, the Q12, which will proceed down the Atlantic Coast, around the tip of Florida and across the Gulf of Mexico to the New Orleans quarantine station.

Aboard the two craft is a party of high-ranking officials of the United States Public Health Service, headed by Dr. Thomas Parran, surgeon general. He is accompanied by three of his sons.

Others include Dr. Joseph W. Mountain, assistant surgeon general; Dr. Louis R. Thompson, assistant surgeon general; Dr. R. P. Sandidge, Dr. C. B. Spencer and Dr. C. F. Blankenship.

Dr. Spencer and Dr. Blankenship will remain aboard the Q12, proceeding to New Orleans. The rest of the officials will disembark here and go to Washington.

DO NOT CIRCULATE

SUN Speed For U.S. Public Health Officials

AUG 14 1938



This 45-foot 22-knot cabin cruiser will transport quarantine officials from the Leading Point station to ships in the harbor and anchorages and to flying boats in the transatlantic service off the municipal airport. The first craft of its type, Q-10, has been delivered here. An identical boat, Q-11, has been assigned to duty at New Orleans, La.

**EAST HEALTH BOAT
TO OPERATE HERE**
SUN Quarantine
Federal Craft Will Go Into
Service In Harbor
This Week
AUG 14 1938
Designed To Expedite Boarding Of Ships And Examination Of Seaplanes

The speediest water craft of the United States Health Service will start operations here this week to expedite the boarding of ships in the Harbor and anchorages and the examination of flying boats.

Designated Q10, the craft in tests conducted yesterday afternoon, developed a speed of more than twenty-two knots. It will replace the Diesel tug T. B. McClintic and the Diesel-powered launch Q26, which make less than ten knots.

Both Standardized Cruisers

The acquisition of the Q10 and a sister craft, Q11, which is to be used by the New Orleans (La.) quarantine station, is said to mark a new epoch in speeding up operations of the public health service.

Heretofore, craft for boarding purposes have been built to order for the department. The boats just purchased are standardized cruisers, built by a Detroit firm, modified to suit the particular needs of boarding officers.

Hull Of Mahogany

The craft measure forty-five feet over all, have a beam of eleven feet and a draft of thirty inches. Two six-cylinder gasoline engines turning up 135 horsepower each drive twin screws. The hull and superstructure are of mahogany. The former is painted white. The latter is varnished. All fittings are chromium plated and streamlined.

An eighteen-inch companionway, around the cabin of the craft, facilitates boarding vessels anchored in the stream. The windows of plate glass are raised and lowered by a crank. The cabin is screened.

Captain Schlicht Skipper

Capt. Otto Schlicht has been named skipper of the Q10 by Dr. L. B. Byington, medical officer in charge of the Leading Point quarantine station at Curtis Bay.

Wednesday the Q11, in command of Capt. James R. Galloway, of Mobile, Ala., aided by George Crevy, of New Orleans, engineer officer, will clear for New Orleans. The trip will require about three weeks.

A number of United States Public Health officials from the Washington headquarters are expected to make the trip.

SUN - Sept. 10, 1938.

Unmarked Graves

Plot Marks End Of Era For Quarantine Station

Eve. Sun

APR 17 1961

By DONALD KLEIN

In a small cemetery overlooking Curtis Bay from Leading Point lie a number of unmarked graves. Only two have headstones.

They represent an era which finally came to an end in February, but which had been disappearing gradually for decades.

The graveyard lies on a small plot of land, guarded on three sides by a heavy chain and on the fourth by a boundary fence in the northwest corner of the United States Quarantine Station for Baltimore.

"They were probably victims of then unknown diseases or plagues while in port here in the Nineteenth Century," surmised Bernard J. Loher, Jr., officer-in-charge of the station.

Unknown Diseases

"Being well before my time, I have no idea where the records of their deaths are kept. In those days, when seamen died of unknown diseases, they were buried as fast as possible to prevent epidemics," he explained.

Louis Trossbach, maintenance supervisor of the 20-acre Federal station, said that stories passed down from one generation of public health inspectors to another tell of placing ailing seamen in isolated shacks until death came at which time the remains would be quickly buried and the building burned down to cleanse the area.

No Longer Requires It

But this practice had long ago been abandoned. With the aid of modern science, plagues and rare illness just are not what they used to be. Hence, there is little need to isolate ailing seamen in out-of-the-way locations like the Curtis Bay station.

In other ways, too, the functions of the Quarantine Station no longer require the maintenance of so large a piece of real estate in such an industrially attractive location.

At one time, more than 40 inspectors, clerks, immigration officers and groundkeepers were employed there. Now the number is down to 11.

There was a time when the station's 22 buildings, including a detention hospital, shower bunkers, staff residences, garages and shops to care for the unit's numerous automobiles and three launches, were teeming with activity.

But as the years passed, less and less ships arrived at the port even though gross tonnage continually increased. New ships are

larger and faster and more sanitary. Health standards around the globe have improved through the work of the United Nation's World Health Organization.

Ordered Closed

For years Washington had considered the idea of closing the station and moving the personnel and quarantine officers to more economical quarters.

Last year the Federal Government's axe fell and the station was ordered closed. The actual physical transfer of operations to the Custom House, in downtown Baltimore, took place February 16.

Meanwhile, the Public Health Service is maintaining the property while an inventory is being made. When the value of the land and facilities is established, Washington will decide whether to turn the acreage over to another Federal agency or put it up for bids.

Mr. Loher said the property originally belonged to the State of Maryland and was turned over to the city of Baltimore before

it was sold to the United States Government 40 years ago. He said the city, or the State, or one of their agencies, might want to regain control of the land.

Heavy Industrial Area

But no doubt its greatest value would be in the sale to a private firm since its location is in the midst of one of the most rapidly growing heavy industrial areas of the State.

In their new quarters in four rooms on the fourth floor of the Custom House, one quarantine employee complained that "we are all getting claustrophobia." He quickly added, however, that this will pass once the staff gets used to their new home.

While the living will have plenty of company in its downtown offices, the dead of the small Curtis Bay graveyard will be resting in more peace than ever before at the abandoned station — that is, until the property is sold and becomes the focal point of activity again.



UNMARKED GRAVES—Only two of the graves have headstones at the old United States Quarantine Station graveyard. Unknown diseases and plagues brought death to the seamen in port.

Plot Marks End Of Era

Quarantine Station, Baltimore

Maryland Special V. F.

DO NOT CIRCULATE

ALLOTS \$45,000 TO QUARANTINE STATION HERE

Public Works Adminis-
tration Provides For
Two Buildings

PROJECT INCLUDED
IN \$2,273,671 LIST

Twenty-Two Cities And
Towns Benefit By
New Approvals

[Washington Bureau of The Sun]
Washington, Sept. 9—Baltimore will
get a new \$45,000 quarantine station
under a \$2,273,671 Federal buildings
allotment to the Treasury Department
announced tonight by the Public Works
Administration.

The \$45,000 grant will be used for
two new buildings, one of which will
house new disinfecting facilities at
the station at Leading Point. The
other will be new quarters for the
station's personnel of eighteen men.
Plans for both structures already have
been drawn and, it is expected, that,
with the awarding of the \$45,000 grant,
they soon will be advertised for bids.

Former Fund Held Up

The station, under command of Dr.
H. F. White, chief medical officer, is
an old one and long has needed in-
creased and more modern facilities, it
was said here. The \$45,000 allocation is
the stepchild of a \$50,000 grant made
by the Treasury Department in Feb-
ruary, 1931, at the request of the
United States Public Health Serv-
ice, and subsequently held up by the
Federal economy program.

Sun - Sept. 10, 1933.