Was Success a Success?

Edward A. Mueller
A great "success" at exhibitions after the turn of the century was the Australian convict ship SUCCESS. She was built for the East India Company as a full-rigged ship, entirely of teak, in 1790. She voyaged to Burma and was an armed merchantman, similar to many others of that period. She had teak sides, 2'6" in thickness. Her lower masts were built up using teak strips bound with copper bands half an inch thick.

SUCCESS was sold to the British government to be used as a convict ship soon after commissioning and served in that
work until 1858 when she was scuttled. Five years later she was raised and served as a floating prison in Sydney, New South Wales (Australia) until the vicious penal system was abolished in 1890.

The SUCCESS was then sold and sailed to England to be refitted as a museum. She was exhibited around the British Isles until April of 1912 when she sailed to New York. After a 90-day passage, she was picked up by a tug off Cape Ann and towed into Boston harbor for repairs. She was leaking badly, the crew was almost out of water and completely out of food.

**A "SHOW" AT NEW YORK**

For the first time in her history she received a coat of paint on her bare teak hull while on Green’s marine railway at Chelsea, Massachusetts. Later she sailed south and was exhibited at New York, starting in the spring of 1913.

In New York, she was moored at the 79th Street pier on the Hudson River and entertained visitors, all for a sum, of course. After her stay in New York she was reported as going to the Panama-Pacific exhibition in San Francisco. She also visited the Great Lakes and the Ohio and Mississippi area as well as southeast Atlantic points and Gulf ports.

According to an account in a May, 1913 New York paper, we learn: "The visitor who goes up her broad gangway will see ... a ship typical of the merchantman of a century ago. On board, however, he will find relics of a barbarism that now seems almost incredible.

**THE 'IRON MAIDEN'**

"There is a lecturer to lead him over the ship. The upper deck shows the branding room where the men received the brand arrow; the leg irons and punishment balls worn by famous convicts; straightjackets, spiked collars, flogging frames, the 'Iron Maiden' and a dozen other instruments of torture that were accepted as quite the thing in the days before penal commissions and reformatories.

"There is a compulsory bath, too, in which, it is said, more men were drowned than cleaned.

**CONVICT SHIP SUCCESS**

Ideals are like stars, you will not succeed in touching them with your hands but like the sea-faring man on the desert of waters, you choose them as your guides, and following them, you reach your destiny.

-Carl Schurz
"Aft, on the quarter-deck, is an exhibit of old documents, mostly death warrants, with here and there an old engraving showing some famous criminal at his deeds." Several of the documents bore the signatures of King George III and Queen Victoria.

"On the middle deck below begins the tiers of cells. Prisoners confined here had passed successfully through years of solitary confinement on the deck below and were permitted the fresh air that a small barred port could give them.

**THE PRIZE HORROR**

"Here is also the 'Tigers Den,' where the worst prisoners were confined in a body, in the hope . . . that they would fight among themselves and so kill each other off." The lecturer perhaps embellished the truth when he stated that this was a frequent occurrence.

"The lower deck is the prize horror. It is dark and seemingly damp. Here are the dark cells and those of solitary confinement. The only light and air that the prisoners got filtered through tiny holes drilled over the door. Manacles of the cruelest sort, still in place, show how the denizens of the cells were forced into positions in which standing straight and lying or sitting down were alike impossibilities.

"The old ship leaves a vivid impression of the inhumanities accepted as a matter of course a hundred years ago and the visitor wonders how it ever happened to be christened 'SUCCESS'."