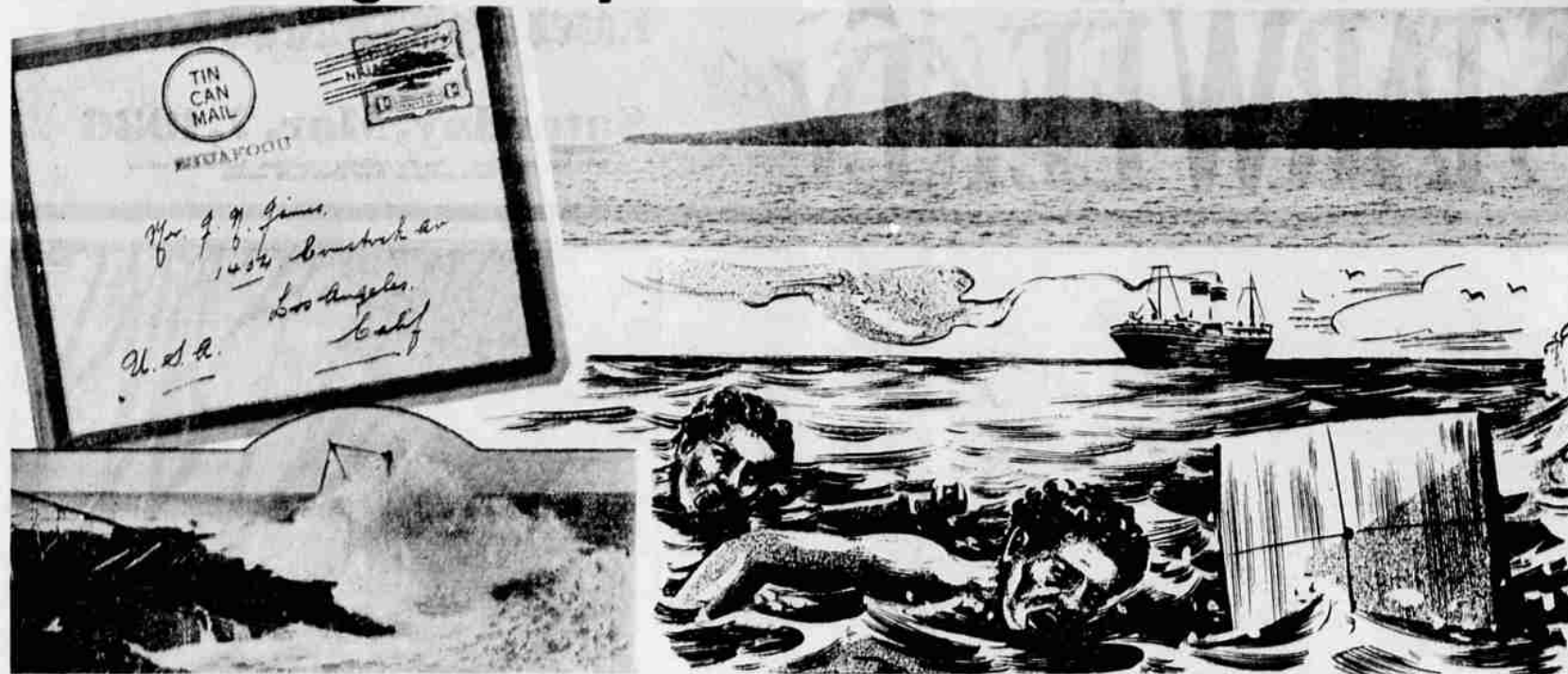


Isolation Again Grips Tin Can Island--Romantic South Sea Isle



Because lonely Niuafuou Island has no profitable amount of copra, trading vessels do not call, and its 1200 inhabitants again face complete isolation. With no harbor, mail is rowed to passing ships, or a strong swimmer essays the task. Above, left, is one of the highly prized covers from this island—"Tin Can Mail"; lower left, a sketch of the way mail is taken to ships. Right, a native.

By Woods Peters

A SPUTTERING radio, dependent on a swiftly dwindling gasoline supply, is the last contact for lonely Niuafuou Island in the far South Seas. One ship, perhaps two ships, may call each year if the water is utterly smooth as they pass the island; if not, the islanders may again revert to the use of the fire sticks that served them as late as two years ago. They may be forced to eat only the fish of the sea and the scanty vegetables their tiny island will produce. Twelve hundred people, including one white man and a Catholic nun may be utterly marooned almost in sight of one of the Pacific's busiest shipping lanes, because the copra business there does not warrant regular calls of trading schooners, and the expense of detouring transpacific liners for occasional souvenir mail is prohibitive.

Two years ago, if the name "Niuafuou" was mentioned not one individual in perhaps a million would have recognized it. Today "Niuafuou" is familiar in every city and town in the world where stamp clubs meet. There are more than 30,000 people in America alone who boast letters carrying its unique postmark, for Niuafuou is the famous "Tin Can Island" where mail is—was—swum through the open sea from ship to land. Today that service has been stopped, except for the few letters that travel by casual trading schooners, and philatelists may never again be able to receive its postmark—"DISPATCHED BY TIN CAN MAIL"—unless they chance a wait of months or years upon the erratic wanderings of these casual craft.

Have you ever stood at Waikiki? If you have visited that famed American play-beach in Hawaii and looked down the light-path over the sea just after the moon had passed the zenith, you have

Strange Island of Niuafuou, Ruled by Barefoot Queen, Cut Off From World—"Tin Can" Mail Delivery Suspended As Copra Trade Slumps

looked toward Niuafuou. Lying 2,908 miles west of south of Honolulu, it is 5,312 miles from San Francisco as steamers ply.

THERE is perhaps no stranger island in all the world than is Niuafuou. A unit of the only monarchy left in the Pacific, it is part of the Tongan kingdom. Distantly ruled by a barefoot queen, Salote Tubou of Tongatabu, who on state occasions dons an ermine cloak despite the tropic climate, Niuafuou's native inhabitants respond to the dictates of a much-bearded-and-shelled chieftain with unpronounceable name.

The island, itself, could not be classed as a tourist resort. There is no harbor, nor even a landing place worthy of the name. Opposite the little village of Agaha (pronounced Ahn-gah'-ha) there is a slightly lower place in the cliff where in calm weather whale boats may come within a few feet of the shore. At all other periods he who desires to go ashore must leap into the surf and swim, braving tricky currents and marauding sharks, to be finally hauled bodily by a line up the face of the rocks.

Ashore, the visitor finds himself on a volcanic rock almost 300 miles from the nearest land, halfway between Samoa and Fiji and 380 miles north of Tonga's capital "city" on Tongatabu.

Niuafuou is unique in that it is a volcanic "doughnut." Three and one-half miles in diameter, it holds a roughly circular lake two and one-half miles in diameter and about 70 feet above the level of the surrounding ocean. Within this lake there is another island and on that a smaller fresh-water lake, so, were you a resident on Niuafuou, you

might take an evening dip "in the lake on the island in the lake on the island."

To make matters really enjoyable from the visitor's standpoint, Niuafuou is an active volcano. No later than 1929 it burst into activity, lava streaming down the outer rim toward the sea, wiping out everything in its path with the exception of the Catholic church at Fatu, which still stands today, a white landmark in the desolation of tumbled brown rock.

THE island first came into world prominence back in 1930 when parties of scientists visited it to secure photographs and observations of the solar eclipse which was best visible from that point. Prior to that, W. G. Quensell, trading post operator stationed there, had been mailing a few letters to certain friends scattered about the world, postmarking them with the "Tin Can Mail" cancellation which is now so famous. But the island did not become known to the general public until some three years later.

At that date a story "broke" in San Francisco. The Oceanic liner Mariposa, plying north from Sydney, Australia, to San Francisco, had been flagged down in the open sea opposite Niuafuou by a tiny native canoe. A letter was passed up the side of the liner that told of the cessation of calls by trading schooners, due to the drop in the price of copra, and the breakdown of their radio. "We are making fire with fire stick," it said. For months they had been out of commodities that are usually considered as essentials. "Can you send something ashore for us?"

Supplies were sent, and during the months that

followed, this liner and her sister ship, the Monterey, paused more or less regularly to drop rafts carrying mail and necessities.

"Is Prince George married yet?" one of the outgoing letters had asked. "Are there any wars threatening? . . . What is the depression doing to the rest of the world?"

MAINLAND friends bundled together newspapers and magazines and when weather permitted, set them adrift on the rafts. When currents permitted they were rescued and towed ashore by the native swimmers. Sometimes they went astray. Some may never have been seen again; one, however, carried clear through to an isolated island of the Fiji group and all items came back to the senders endorsed in red: "This mail went astray from Niuafuou and was picked up at Fiji."

Mr. Quensell has been on Niuafuou some 20 years. Other white men, from time to time, have spent a while there, but these men could almost be numbered on the fingers of two hands. It requires a special type of character to enjoy Niuafuou. There must be a streak of fatalism else the presence of the volcano would be a constant worry. There must be a sufficiency within oneself, or the lack of occupation and diversion would be unbearable. On the distant horizon a ship is sometimes seen; that is Niuafuou's contact with the world. At long intervals a letter may come from some "outside" friend. That is an epochal day, one to bring copra harvesting to a stop, while the missive is read and re-read, and dreaming eyes envision in the Tongan sunset far places where the world moves at a truly fearful pace, and steel horses called "trains" thunder louder than does Pelee in her tantrums.

Old Tacoma Tunnel Recalls Colorful Days In Northwest—Was Used By Smugglers

BOISTEROUS days of the old West when men often went unwillingly down to the sea in ships, through the agency of crimps, and when Chinese Coolie laborers were smuggled into the raw country of the Pacific Northwest to work the railroads, were recalled with the recent uncovering of a narrow tunnel beneath the main business district of Tacoma, Wash.

The dark, narrow tunnel, prosaically enough, was discovered by a crew of workmen making excavations preparatory to laying city light conduit. It was located within a block of the public safety building that houses Tacoma's police department.

To many old-timers the "find" brought back vivid recollections of the days when the crimps and Chinese smugglers plied their nefarious trades. The passageway was about three feet in width and arched to a height of about five feet. The destination of the passageway is still a mystery. Indications are that it ran to what formerly may have been an opening somewhere along the waterfront.

Such a tunnel, the old-timers recalled, would have been ideal for shanghaiing drunken men from the rear of some of the notorious saloons that stood in this part of Tacoma a half century ago. In those days, hundreds of sailing vessels from all parts of the world crowded Tacoma's waterfront. Similar tunnels, believed to have been used by the Chinese smugglers, have been found elsewhere in the city.

But whatever the original purpose of the tunnel may have been, there seems little likelihood that it ever will be fully explained, for the city light department, anxious to get its conduit in place, has sealed the opening with concrete.

PAGE TWO

Quit Job to Build Sailboat—Now He's Off to See World

"Crazy" Bennett To Sail On Adventurous Voyage To Far Lands Alone In 34-Foot Boat

THEY called him "Crazy" Bennett. All the long years that he puttered on the ribs of his boat in Los Angeles Harbor, they thought him queer. Now they know better.

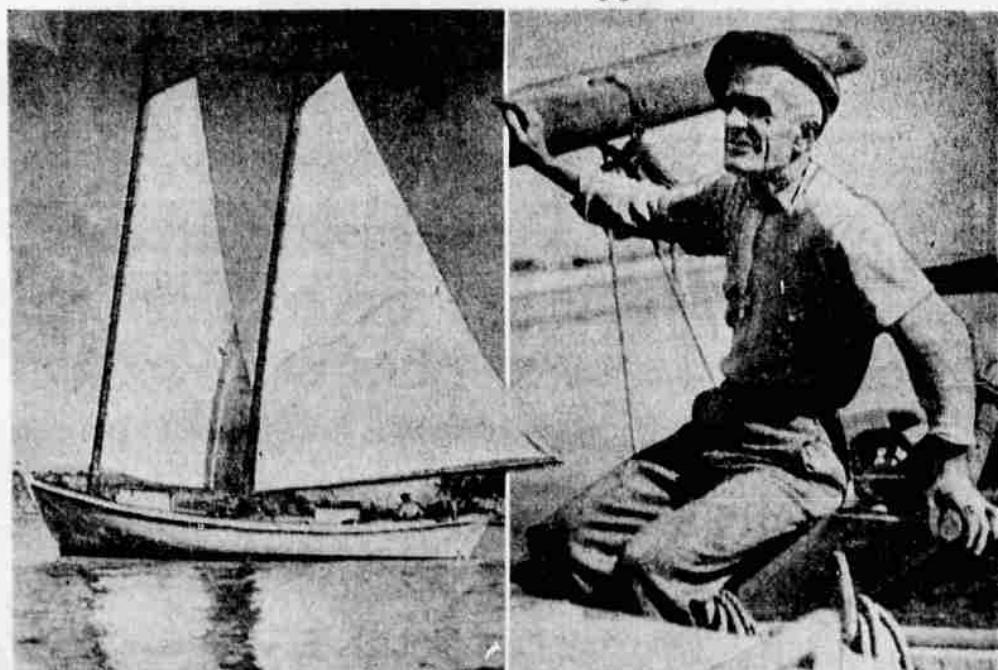
For "Crazy" Bennett, William P. Bennett, who used to be a life insurance salesman, has thrown away 38 years of his life to resume, at 58, an around-the-world voyage which he abandoned in 1897 at Galveston, Texas.

Since he was a youngster in knee breeches, Bennett has dreamed of a voyage to the far romantic spots of the globe—not the places frequented by tourists, but the remote still primitive places. To him strange horizons call—Zamboanga, Sandakan, Noumea! Mixed in with a good percentage of practicality is much of the dreamer in Bennett's make-up. Adventure and romance have been beckoning to him in the last few years, and at last he has heeded the call of the "blue road."

"It's no use talking about those 38 years," he said, the other day, while his hard knuckles gripped the tiller of his 34-foot sailboat, *Island Belle*. The wind, fresh off the Pacific, blew his graying hair back from a seamed and leathery face. The two sails swelled and tugged, the water sang under the bows, and between millionaires' yachts the *Island Belle* slipped out toward the inlet of Balboa Bay.

Bennett is no millionaire—far from it. He sailed, when he was 19, on the bark *Guy C. Goss* from Santa Monica to San Francisco and around the Horn to New York. Sick as a pup, he had to leave the ship at Galveston, Texas, and his seagoing days ended—almost forever.

"I sold insurance and real estate in Colorado and California, but I never forgot the sea," he said,



William P. Bennett, who was called "Crazy" Bennett for quitting a safe and comfortable career just to resume an old adventure, is shown here at the tiller of his boat, "Island Belle," which took him six years to build. He will follow the sea trails of famed Captain Harry Pigeon, his friend. The "Island Belle" is shown catching a light breeze.

while the *Island Belle* set her broad beam smashing through the surf of the inlet.

"There were troubles in those days that I'm going to forget if I can—but no matter. Eight years ago I woke up. I gave up the selling game. Two years later, I laid the keel of this boat, and it took me six hard years to build her, because money was hard to get. Now she's done; she'll outlast any-

thing her size. In a week, two weeks at most, we'll be gone. In three or four years, maybe, we'll be back."

And if all goes as the courageous ex-salesman hopes, the staunch *Island Belle* will have carried him alone to Hawaii, Samoa, the Fijis, the Solomon Islands and Australia. Veteran seamen, who know him, believe he will succeed. Those who don't know his story are still calling him "Crazy" Bennett.