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A Seagoing Tug-of-War: Morans vs. McAllisters

By DAVID F. WHITE

Two of the best views of the tugboat business in New York Harbor are from the 53d floor of the World Trade Center and the 15th floor of 17 Battery Place.

From these points, anyone with a pair of binoculars has a clear panorama of the vessels working below. And if he happens to be watching as a tugboat passes the Battery, pushing a great white plume of water before it, he is likely to see that it bears twin white bands on its mardon and black funnel—the markings of McAllister Brothers—or the large, white block "M" that is the symbol of the Moran Towing and Transportation Company.

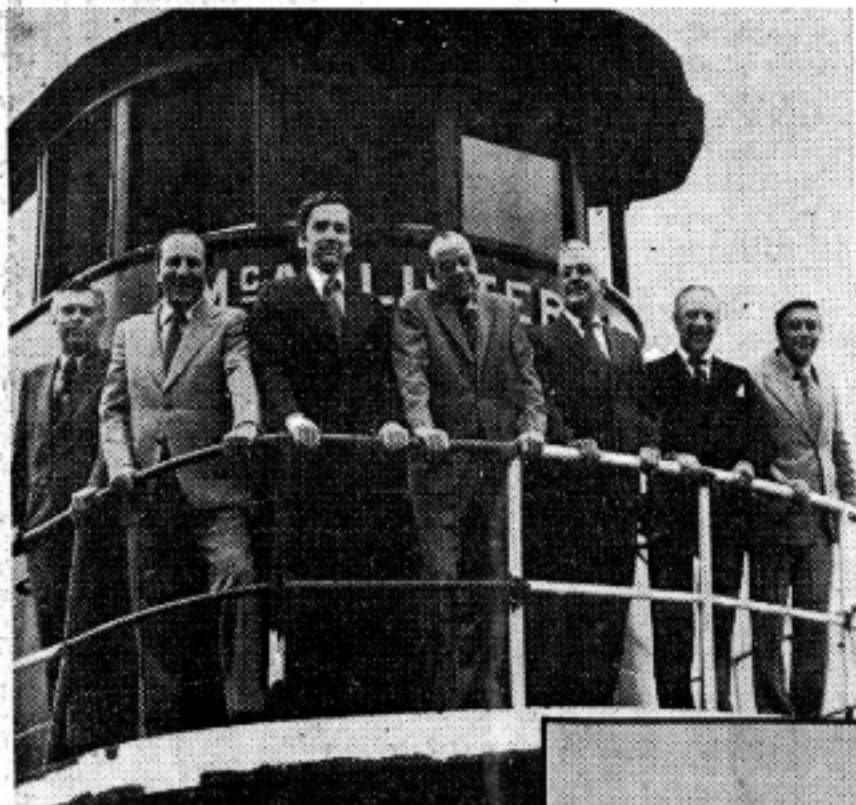
The Morans in the World Trade Center and the McAllisters at Battery Place watch each other's boats pass by every

day, but that is nothing new. They have been doing it for over 100 years.

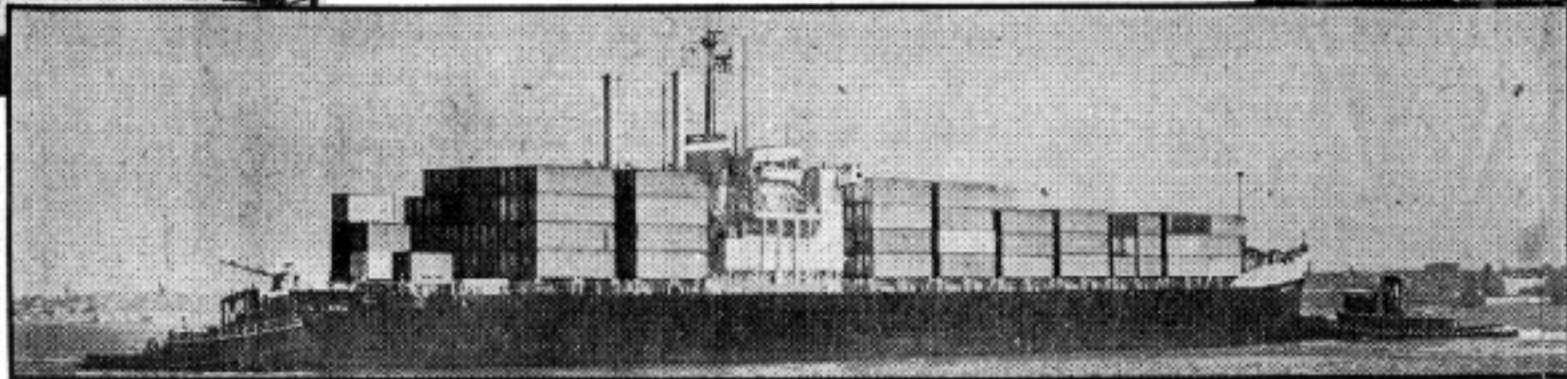
At a time when industry sources say the towing business here has entered a slump, forcing many companies to lay up boats, the Morans and the McAllisters are expanding their far-flung operations. Both companies have new tugboats on the ways. Moran is a participation partner in building four tankers on the West Coast. McAllister has a 10,000-ton barge now under construction.

Today these two family companies alone—Moran with about 30 tugs operating out of New York and McAllister with about 25—represent one-

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Six McAllisters and William M. Kallop, third from the left, aboard one of their 50 tugs that operate out of three East Coast ports and Puerto Rico, as well as the Dutch Antilles.



Adm. chair bears Moran white sight

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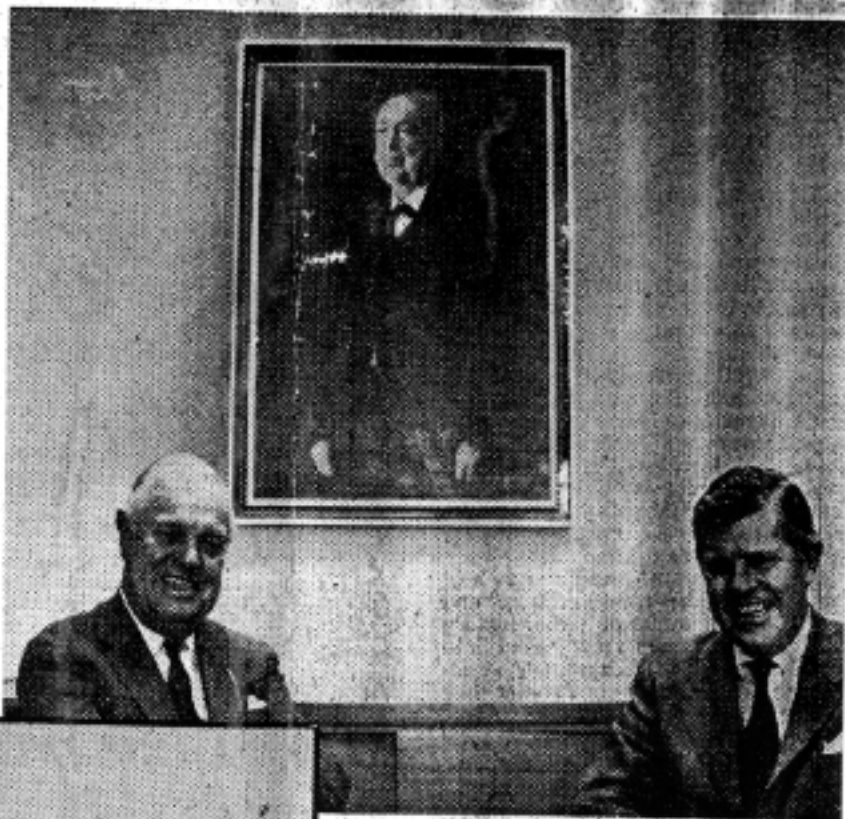
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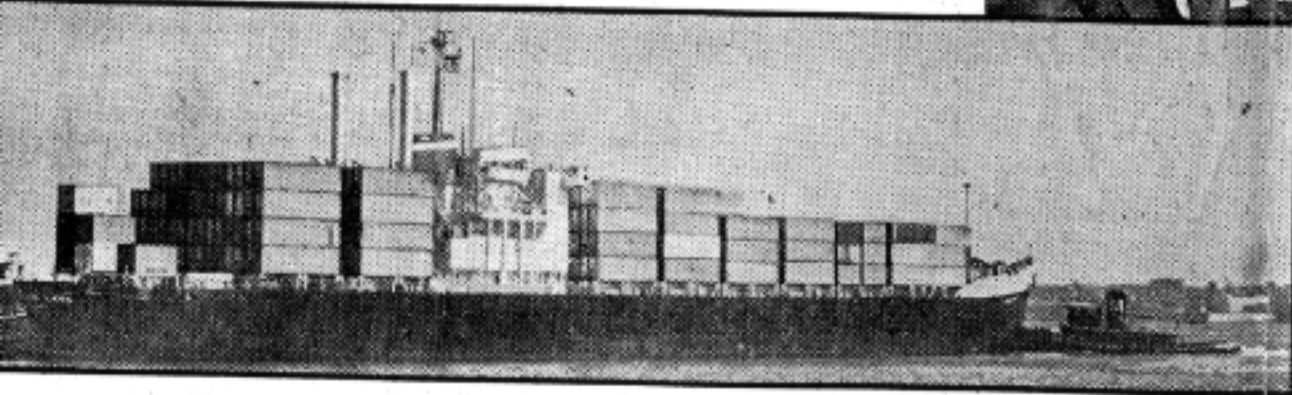
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Adm. Edmond J. Moran, left, chairman of the company that bears his name, and Thomas E. Moran, president. The large, white block "M" is a familiar sight in several U.S. ports.



A Seagoing Tug of War: Morans and McAllisters

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fifth of the port's tugboat fleet. The fleet comprises roughly 150 boats operated by some 25 companies, and it includes such other well-known names as Turecamo, Bushy and The Bronx Towing Line.

But the four Morans and nine McAllisters who hold high-level executive positions in their companies have come to preside over two navies bearing family names that travel far beyond Sandy Hook.

The 4,730-horsepower oceangoing tug Helde Moran, named for the president's daughter-in-law, may be towing sugar through the Caribbean Sea. The Helen McAllister, rated at 4,000 horsepower and named for the wife of the chairman of the board, may be somewhere off Puerto Rico with an oil barge at the end of her towline.

Both families are spreading into new areas of marine transportation, and they occupy a corner of harbor history and commerce that they moved into from very similar backgrounds at almost the same time. It is a corner they have competed over since the 1860's, while many other family-owned companies have disappeared.

Old-Time Waterfront Recalled

Four generations later, the two companies have grown, but the waterfront their ancestors worked is still close in memory, a waterfront peopled by "tough-looking guys with mustaches, cigars and derby hats," according to Thomas E. Moran, 51, president of the Moran Towing Corporation.

"They all had offices at South Street, they all gathered at a saloon down there," Mr. Moran recalls. "Most of them would race out to Sandy Hook when a ship came in and haggle about who could give the best price. They would hear of a ship sighted and usually the first one out got the ship."

The bargaining has since moved in from Sandy Hook, but the Morans and McAllisters are still competitors.

Anthony J. McAllister, 78, was board chairman of McAllister Brothers before the company passed into the hands of fourth-generation McAllisters in 1974. Sitting in his warm-toned office overlooking the Hudson River, he says he knows Morans, some of them well, and likes them.

"But sometimes when people ask me when we met, 'Do you know the Morans,' I like to kid them and ask, 'Who are the Morans and what business are they in?' Mr. McAllister says.

A few blocks to the north, Adm. Edmond J. Moran, 79, board chairman of his company, although he is in semi-retirement, sits across from a brilliantly colored painting of Moran tugs docking the liner France. He talks about relations between the two clans plainly and with a smile:

"Sure we're friendly, in the sense that you're friendly with the next cop. We know they're here. They know we're here. We know how they work. They know how we work. We're out to get each other."

This year Moran took a Prudential Lines contract away from McAllister. McAllister says it has taken many accounts away from Moran, but will not divulge the details.

Such competition is not new. It was that way when two Irishmen, Mike Moran of the County of West Meath and Capt. James McAllister of County Antrim moved here in the 1860's to start towing concerns and dynasties.

Mike Moran came first. Arriving in 1850, he started by working along the Erie Canal until, in 1860, he had saved \$2,700. It was enough to buy him half ownership in the steam tug Ida Miller. He rented an office on South Street, and the "Big M" was on its way.

In 1864, Captain McAllister arrived in New York and shipped out as a mate on a Ward Line vessel. Soon after, he, too, had saved enough money to buy his first sailing lighter. With his brothers as partners, he formed the Greenpoint Lighterage Company on South Street.

'Genial and Tough' Forebear

Admiral Moran, born in 1897, remembers his grandfather as "genial and tough."

"He never spared himself," the admiral says. "He got to work early and got home late in the evening."

Apparently clumsiness and bungling were not things for which Mike Moran had great patience. As a boy, the admiral once cut off the tip of his finger

in a contraction meant for the ends of cigars.

"I remember holding onto the finger and hiding it so he wouldn't know what a gosh darned fool I was," says Admiral Moran, who still has the scar. Mike Moran never found out.

James P. McAllister, 71, formerly president of McAllister Brothers, and now chairman of the board, remembers growing up "when you could still see the bowsprits over South Street and the horse-drawn carriages underneath."

He describes Captain McAllister as "a very handsome man."

"He was well-dressed and some days wore a top hat. The outstanding thing about him was his integrity," says Mr. McAllister, who now devotes much of his time to collecting and racing vintage cars.

Long Voyages Dispatched

After a century, stove-pipe funnels and steam boilers in the tugboats have given way to the throb of mammoth diesel engines, and horsepower is counted in thousands instead of hundreds.

Today a tugboat captain standing in the pilot house of his 120-foot floating power plant, may get a call from the company dispatcher's office asking him how much fuel and water he has on board, telling him to pick up a barge of oil or coal and set his heading for Boston or Philadelphia.

Moran has about 80 tugboats operating out of ten United States ports under different company names and colors; McAllister has roughly 50 tugs in New York, Philadelphia, Norfolk, Va., Puerto Rico and the Dutch Antilles in South America.

Both companies have become heavily involved in moving bulk cargoes—oil, grain and metals, among them—to points up and down the Eastern Seaboard and all over the world.

Each company has its own shipyard; each has a variety of subsidiaries and holdings in the marine transportation field. Neither company reveals its revenues or net worth. Moran employs 1,115 people; McAllister employs about 1,000.

Thomas E. Moran, the admiral's son and now president of the company, is pushing Moran more heavily into transportation of bulk cargo by tug and barge. The emphasis, he says, is due in large part to his background as a shipping executive at Marine Transport Lines, which he joined as a typist in 1946 and left as a vice president in 1964 to take over the family business.

He describes himself as "more of a businessman than a mariner."

"I do enjoy sailing, but I'm more turned on by a favorable balance sheet than by going out on tugs," he says. "I can't talk about reduction gears, for instance, some people can talk for hours about reduction gears. Business and doing deals excites me more."

He adds that when he joined Moran, 75 percent of the New York company's revenues came from docking and undocking ships, while today that is 25 percent of the business here.

Bruce A. McAllister, the 40-year-old president of McAllister Brothers, says he regards the Dutch Antilles fleet as an important first step for the company. The areas he is swatching for growth are the placing of fleets in distant waters on long-term contract and the providing of vessels to serve development offshore oil rigs, nuclear power plants and mineral deposits.

A Background in Law

A Harvard Law school graduate, he, too, began outside the family company, working for the admiralty law firm of Healy & Baillie until 1974, when he left as a partner to join in taking over McAllister.

By and large, it is the members of the older generation who speak most warmly about one another. Anthony J. McAllister says he enjoys visiting the admiral in Florida—"he and I used to go out with the same girls in Brooklyn."

And over these 100 years, only once has there been even a remote possibility of a marriage between the families. That was formerly executive vice president and general counsel in the third generation, was seeing the daughter of Eugene F. Moran, his company's second president.

"Everybody was watching it, but it didn't occur," says a family friend, smiling as he remembers the episode. "I think they would have accepted it. I think they would have been very happy."