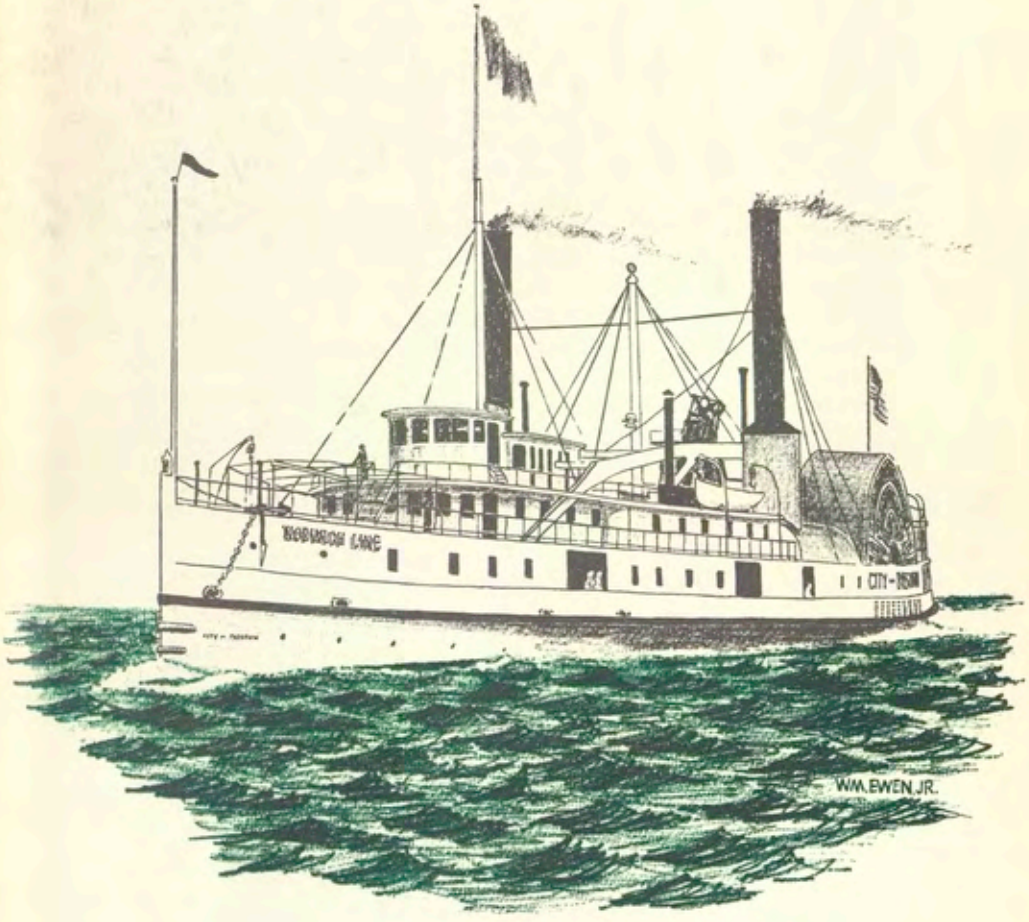
The LOG of Mystic Seaport

Summer 1970



The Marine Historical Association, Incorporated

MYSTIC, CONNECTICUT

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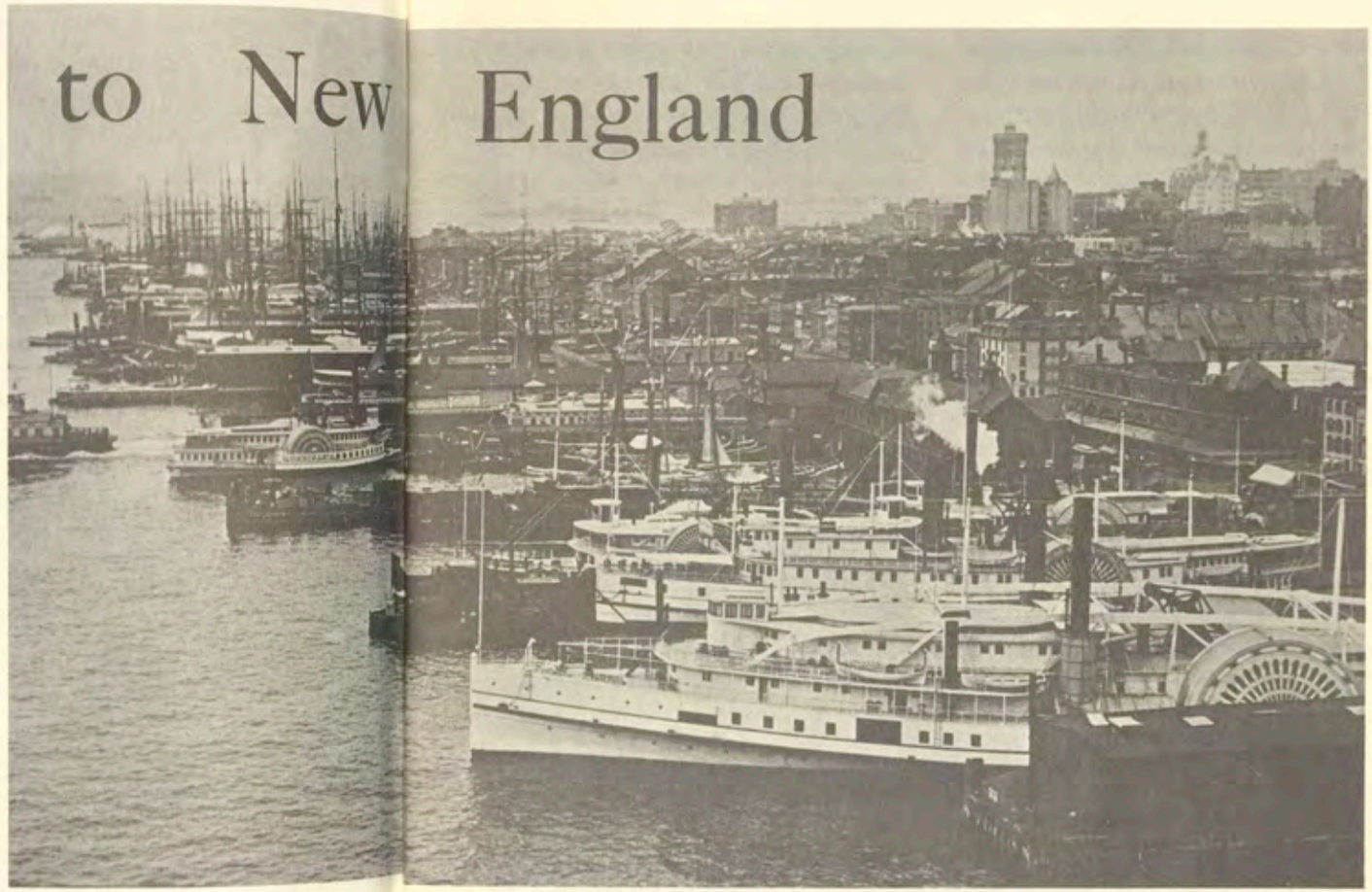
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Steamboats to New England

By William H. Ewen



East River, New York, looking down South Street from the Brooklyn Bridge in the 1880s. Steamboat in foreground is the C. H. Northam *of the New Haven Line. (Author's collection.)*

Somewhat past midnight on July 13, 1937 two of the big Fall River Line steamers passed just west of the Race and, as was their custom, blinked their bow lights in salute. The famous *Priscilla* was heading west to New York, the *Commonwealth*, flagship of the fleet, was on her way to Newport and Fall River. To the passengers who may have been on deck at that hour the incident probably seemed of minor consequence. After all, it had taken place thousands of times in the past as the Fall River Liners made their runs, met and passed. Presumably it would occur the next night, and the next. As it turned out this was the last time that any of the great white side-wheelers of the Sound would be seen under way.

When the *Priscilla* arrived in New York that morning, and the *Commonwealth* in Fall River, they were boarded by union representatives who announced a strike. The crews of both vessels responded by staging a sit-in which appeared likely to last indefinitely. Four days later the company announced that it was suspending service – for good. The action caused a shock throughout all New England, and it brought to an end one of the most famous steamboat services in the world. The Fall River Line was ninety years old when it died and it left a record of service and safety that has hardly been equaled by any other common carrier. Its big side-wheelers, *Commonwealth*, *Priscilla*, *Providence* and *Plymouth*, were among the finest examples of the steamboat builder's art. Their like will never be seen again.

At the time the Fall River Line commenced operations as the Bay

State Line in 1847, there had been steamboats on the Sound for more than thirty years. Pushing outward from the Hudson River and New York harbor, they soon made great inroads into the trade of the sloops and schooners which served every town and hamlet along the coast. The steamboats were aggressively resisted by the sailormen of that time, and they were sneered at by others who considered them ungainly mechanical contrivances. Robert Fulton's first steamboat on the Hudson, the *North River*, was designed with long, narrow, straight-sided hull, a flat bottom, and a wedge-shaped bow. She had almost no sheer, and with her tall black smokestack and grinding machinery was an ugly duckling among the other craft of her day. Fulton's later vessels showed considerable improvement, however, and with the work of Robert L. Stevens, and others, the steamboat emerged as a unique, often handsome craft by the mid-1830s.

The first steamboat built expressly for service on the Sound was the *Fulton* of 1813. Although staunchly built and faster than most of the sailing vessels, her owners chose to keep her out of the clutches of British warships by running her on the Hudson until the War of 1812 came to an end. She did not venture onto the Sound until 1814, and did not enter regular service to New Haven until the following



On the Thames River, the Block Island *and* City of Lawrence *await passengers at the Norwich steamboat dock. (Author's collection.)*

year. She was probably the first vessel of any kind to go through Hell Gate on the East River against the tide. The newspapers ran lurid stories the first time this exciting feat was performed.

The *Fulton* was quickly joined by a number of other steamboats, each new one being an improvement on its predecessors. Until 1824 the monopoly enjoyed by the Fulton-Livingston company in New York State acted as a brake on steamboat development, but when it was swept away in that year by decision of the Supreme Court of the United States, the steamboat business boomed. Operators hard put to make money in the highly competitive Hudson River service turned their vessels eastward. Some of these, like the little *Fire Fly*, were structurally unsuited to the heavy weather of the Sound, and they did not last long. Partly because of the fear of gales, most travelers between New York and Boston used the stage coaches. The sailing vessels, with limited accommodations, derived most of their income from cargo. It was a truly venturesome landlubber who would be willing to sail around Cape Cod or Point Judith in any but fair weather.

The first steamboats, being slow, were used on relatively short runs. Bridgeport, New Haven and Hartford were among the first cities to have regular connection with New York. Gradually, however, as the steamers became bigger and faster, their runs were extended to New London, Norwich, Stonington, and even to Providence. Stagecoaches then began taking their passengers from the interior to the various steamboat landings rather than hauling them all the way through to New York. In the 1840s railroad lines began to appear in the New England countryside, and at first these followed the routes of the stagecoaches – to the waterside landings and the steamboat lines. A continuing battle for control of favorable routes began, and it continued well into the twentieth century.

The Connecticut River route to Hartford became popular very early. One of the first steamboats in this service was the *Oliver Ellsworth*, built in 1824. Named for a Chief Justice of the United States, she was said to have been the first steamboat with a cast iron boiler. This was considered a great improvement over earlier copper boilers, but it was not explosion proof as the passengers learned with great shock on March 22, 1827. The steamboat had just passed Saybrook on her way to New York when she was rocked by a blast. Two died and many were scalded in the accident.

Accidents of one kind or another were fairly common in the early steamboat days. Each one as it occurred produced brief flurries of

excitement, then was forgotten. The fear of fire or of boiler explosion was not strong enough to deter the ever-increasing numbers of travelers from patronizing the steamboats, and by 1840 the business was thriving as never before. From New York each evening a procession of steamers headed up the East River and into the Sound, bound for their various destinations.

Great and bitter rivalries developed among operators and this led to racing and other dangerous practices. Commodore Vanderbilt became a leading figure in Sound steamboating, as he had been on the Hudson. His steamers *Cleopatra* and *Champion* were involved in many a test of speed, as was his later *C. Vanderbilt.* The Commodore also had an interest in the *Lexington,* a fast vessel which came to a fiery end on the night of January 13, 1840. The blaze started about seven o'clock in the evening when the steamboat was off Eaton's Neck and in a very short time she was afire from stem to stern. The four lifeboats were launched while the vessel was still under way and they were all swamped. When the *Lexington's* engine finally stopped, passengers threw furniture and cotton bales overboard in an attempt to stay afloat. However, the night and the water were both bitter cold and most perished. Of 150 passengers and crew on board, only four were saved. The loss of the *Lexington* was the worst of the many disasters on the Sound, and it brought a great public outcry for greater safety on steamboats.

With the lengthening of steamboat routes in the 1850s, the eastern Connecticut ports of New London, Norwich and Stonington came into favor as steamboat-railroad connection points. Some of the Sound's finest steamers were built for this service, including the first *Commonwealth* of 1854. This vessel was staunchly built and had unusually graceful lines. Her interior was richly decorated to a degree that she might well be classed as one of the first of the floating palaces of Long Island Sound.

Two other noted steamboats of the Norwich Line, the *City of Boston* and the *City of New York,* were placed in service in 1861 and 1862 respectively. Handsome and well-built, these fine vessels provided exceptional service to Norwich and New London until replaced by newer steamers.

Stonington was about the farthest point that one could travel by steamboat from New York without going into the open sea. For this reason it became popular as one of the many rail connection points between Boston and New York. In the early days Stonington was served by many steamboats brought on from other routes. It was not until the '70s and '80s that Stonington came into its own as a steamboat

port, with the building of great side-wheelers like the *Connecticut* and *Rhode Island*. Postcards showing these vessels at the dock near the lighthouse can still be found in and around the village. The low rambling building which served as ticket offices for the railroad and steamboats at the lower end of the street facing the harbor is still standing.

The initial steamboat service from Fall River to New York was with a small propeller steamboat, the *Eudora*, in 1842. She was not a part of the company that later became known as the Fall River Line, and she was a failure in the service. The first steamer built expressly for the run was the *Bay State*, and she commenced operations in 1847, alternating with the *Massachusetts*

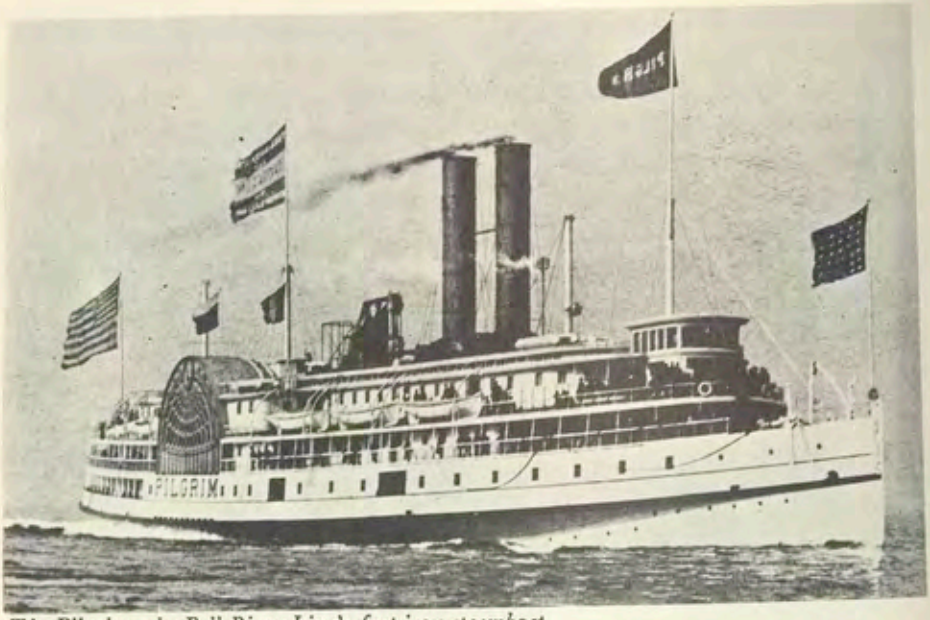


The Connecticut, *one of the giants of the Stonington Line. Photograph by Loeffler.*

Despite the proliferation of routes, and the large number of steamboats operating in the Long Island Sound service, the Fall River Line moved up steadily in the esteem of travelers until its preeminence was not challenged successfully by any other company. Although its vessels had to round Point Judith on each trip, the line's eastern terminus was closer to Boston than that of any other company.

chartered from the Providence Line. A year later the *Bay State* had as her consort another fine new vessel, the *Empire State*. These two steamers, with the *State of Maine* as a "spare" boat, comprised the line until the mighty *Metropolis* came fresh from the builders in 1854.

This steamboat was more solidly built than any that had preceded her. With a heavily timbered hull,



The Pilgrim, *the Fall River Line's first iron steamboat.*

thoroughly cross-braced, and tied together with iron bands and rods, she was able to support the weight of her four huge boilers and powerful engine without the usual wooden "hog frame" which was a familiar part of steamboat construction until the advent of iron and steel vessels. The single cylinder of the *Metropolis* was 105 inches in diameter, big enough to drive a horse and cart through. It was said that this actually was done before the engine was assembled, to the amazement of all those present in the shipyard at the time.

The *Metropolis* was followed in 1865 by two big side-wheelers even finer in accommodations, the *Newport* and *Old Colony*. The former created a sensation when she first appeared because of her four big smokestacks. The *Old Colony* had two, the usual number for most of the large Sound steamboats.

In 1867 serious competition threatened with the appearance of two magnificent new steamers, the *Bristol* and *Providence,* built to run from New York to Bristol under the newly-formed Narragansett Steamship Company. One of the owners of this line was the flamboyant James Fisk, Jr., erstwhile partner of Jay Gould and Daniel Drew in Erie Railroad manipulation and in other wild stock speculations. Always a showman, Jim Fisk celebrated his entry into big-time steamboating by appearing aboard the *Bristol* and *Providence* in a full admiral's uniform. As passen-



gers came aboard the steamer he would stand at the gangway, a resplendent figure for all to behold. Later as the vessel cast off, he would appear in the pilot house seemingly very much in command of the situation.

In 1869 the Narragansett Steamship Company merged with the old line, then called the Boston, Newport & New York Steamboat Company, and the new combine formed the basis for the latter-day Fall River Line. The steamers *Bristol* and *Providence* served the line well until superseded by later vessels. The *Pilgrim*, known as the "Iron Monarch of Long Island Sound," appeared in 1883, and she was followed by the *Puritan* in 1889, the *Plymouth* in 1890, and the famous *Priscilla* in 1894. The two-stacker *Providence* went into service in 1905, and the *Commonwealth*, last of the Sound's giant side-wheelers, joined the fleet in 1908. The *Commonwealth* was 456 feet long and her paddle wheels were turned by a 10,000 horsepower double-inclined compound engine. Her top speed was 23 miles per hour. (Steamboat men never talk in terms of knots.)

The New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad in the 1890s gained control of the Old Colony Railroad and its steamboats. From that time until the end of service in 1947 the Fall River Line was a satellite to the rail service. It has been said that if the steamboat line had been independent it would have lasted longer, but this is highly

doubtful. To the railroad's credit it must be pointed out that three of the great steamboats were built under their ownership, and that the Fall River Line vessels were all maintained in tip-top condition right to the last.

Actually, the Fall River Line was only one of a number of companies acquired by the railroad at various times. Others included the Hartford Line, the New Haven Line, the New London Line, the New Bedford Line, and the New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard & Nantucket Steamboat Company. For a long period they were all part of the railroad-created combine known as the New England Steamship Company. The only part of this once-prospering business still in operation is the Nantucket-Martha's Vineyard line, and this is now run by the State of Massachusetts.

From the earliest days of steamboating on the Sound, the important vessels were all night boats. Passengers for the most part were bound for a destination and were not just out for the sail. They preferred to sleep as they traveled, thus saving a day. Most were used to rising early, and they did not mind being dumped off on a cold dock at five or six o'clock in the morning to continue their trips by train or stage.

Prior to the 1850s, steamboat sleeping quarters were no more than barracks halls, with tiers of berths lining both sides. The ladies' cabin usually was more comfortable than the one occupied by the "gents," but neither gave the privacy which most Americans came to cherish later on. Meals were usually served at a single large table set up in the men's cabin, and everyone helped himself from the large platters of food, boarding house style. On many of the boats decanters of whiskey or wine were set out on the table, and these were enthusiastically patronized by the men passengers.

After 1850 an era of steamboat magnificence began, and the old system of communal sleep-ins was abandoned for private staterooms and dining rooms with individual or family tables. Genteel waiter service replaced the old "come and get it" mode of the backwoods past.

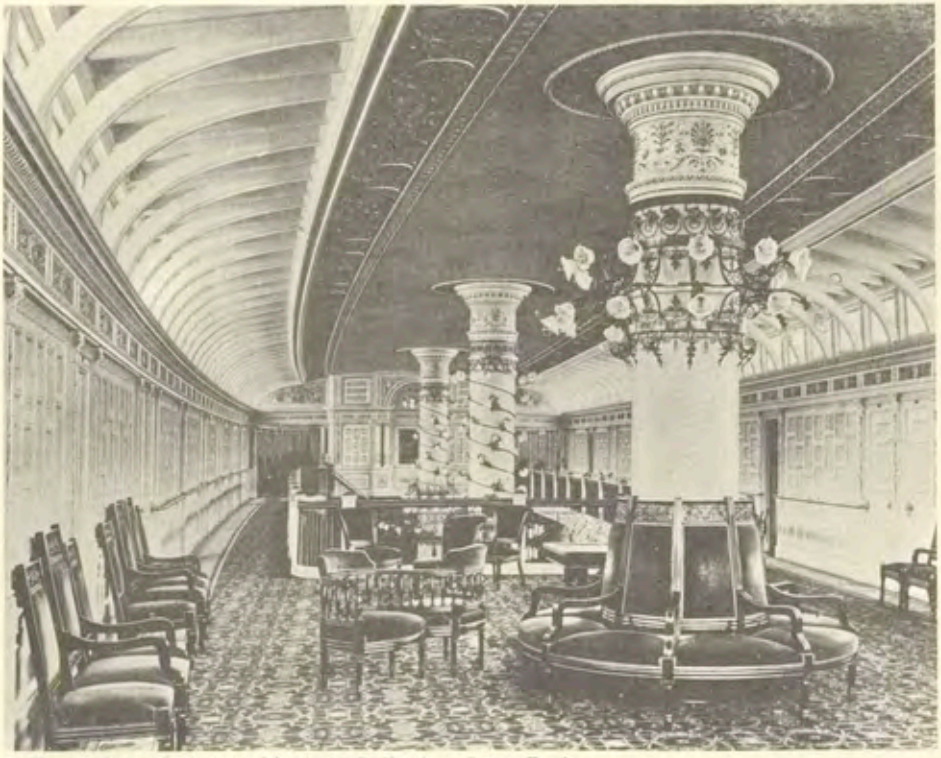
Actually, the age of the so-called "floating palace" began on the Hudson River with the conversion of former day boats like the *New World* and *Isaac Newton*. The Sound lines soon followed the trend and, if anything, surpassed the Hudson steamers in the magnificence of their grand saloons, private parlors and staterooms.

Thus far we have given almost complete attention to the side-wheel steamboats, since there were far more of these than propellers – at least to the turn of the century. However, we cannot overlook some of the fine screw-propelled vessels

of more recent years – steamboats like the *Richard Peck, City of Lowell, Chester W. Chapin,* and the racy freight steamers of the Old Colony Railroad Line. The great twin flyers of the Metropolitan Line, the *Yale* and *Harvard,* which operated on the outside line to Boston will be long remembered for their service on the Sound, and on the California coast between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

There were never any stern-wheelers operating on the Sound, but a few of these craft, usually associated with western rivers, were to be seen on the Connecticut River above Hartford, on the Merrimack, the Kennebec River in Maine and in New Brunswick, Canada. They were useful in the very narrow, winding rivers, but were no match for the side-wheelers in open water.

No review of steamboating in New England would be complete without paying tribute to the hundreds of little vessels which brought so much pleasure over the years to excursionists in their home waters. Throughout every summer season, for example, the waters of Narragansett Bay, Block Island Sound, the Thames River were churned



Gallery Saloon (third deck) of the Fall River Liner Puritan.

into creamy foam by the beating paddles of these smaller steamboats as they sailed gracefully on their way to pleasant places of amusement with banners flying in the breeze, their decks crowded with happy passengers. Even the Pawcatuck River had its own fleet of handsome little side-wheelers sailing to Watch Hill, Stonington and other nearby points. In the late nineteenth century there was hardly a bay, lake or river throughout all New England that did not have its local steamboats.

The American steamboat was a truly unique craft. It became a commercial reality with Fulton's first steamboat *North River*, usually referred to mistakenly as the *Clermont*, and it flourished with the growth and expansion of our country. It provided reliable service from point to point, and it introduced mass transportation, something that had been unheard-of before its appearance.

Some of the best minds in the field of marine architecture and shipbuilding were applied to the constant improvement of these vessels, and the results were spectacular. On the Hudson River, for example, the great Day Liners were developed to a point where a 400-foot steamboat could carry 5,000 or more passengers in reasonable comfort at a speed of 23 miles per hour, and with an engine performance factor of about one horsepower per person when loaded to capacity. In the work of the great designers like George Pierce of the Fall River Line, interiors of the big night boats reached monumental proportions. There is many a building in America today being preserved as a landmark which could not possibly match any one of the Fall River Liners as an example of American constructive artistry. The steamboats of the past were not mass-produced as are many of today's commercial vessels. Each vessel became almost a living thing, a reflection of the hearts and minds of the men who designed and built her.

The steamboat is often referred to mistakenly as a ship. While it might qualify for that definition on the basis of size, its special characteristics made it as different from the sea-going steamship as night is from day. To begin with, the true steamboat had all decks above the hull, and extending outward from it. In the case of some of the side-wheelers the width of the hull might represent only one-third of the overall breadth.

The long racy hulls of the eastern steamboats allowed for speed, while the side-wheels provided a certain degree of stability when under way. The familiar pilot house placed well forward, the gleaming white superstructure topped by tall black smokestacks and most often by a "walking beam"; big ornate

paddlewheel boxes on the older vessels, a conspicuous amount of gold leaf and large flags all made the steamboat an impressive sight.

The last regular overnight steamboat service on the Sound was operated by the Colonial Line from New York to Providence. Their trim, triple-screw turbine steamers, *Comet* and *Arrow*, were the former *Camden* and *Belfast* of the Eastern Steamship Lines. This excellent service ended when the government took the Line's vessels for war service in 1942. The last side-wheel steamboat in all North America still operating a daily service with regular landings is the Hudson River-Day Line's *Alexander Hamilton*. Her summer trips began in late May, and will end in early September. She is the proud survivor of a once-great fleet.

Editor's Note: The William H. Ewens, father and son, to whom we owe this article and our cover picture, are steamboat and maritime history buffs. The senior Mr. Ewen, a former trustee of the MHA and a member of its publication committee, was an incorporator of the Steamship Historical Society of America and has one of the largest private collections of steamboat history in existence. A dedicated conservationist, he has served as chairman of the Citizens' Committee for the Hudson Valley since its inception in 1965. His son is chairman of the Southern New England Chapter of the Steamboat Historical Society of America; his drawings of steamboats are familiar to *National Fisherman* readers.

Attention all Members!

ANNUAL MEETING

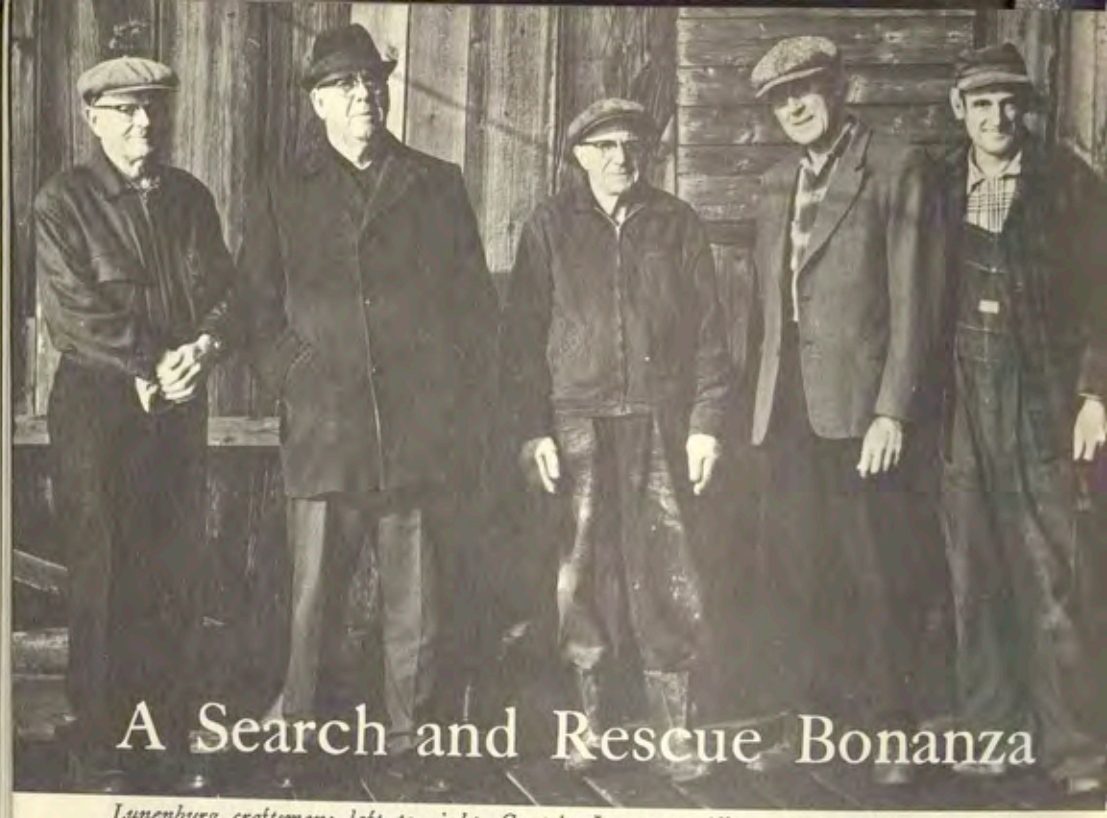
of

The Marine Historical Association, Incorporated

Friday, August 14, 1970

Guest speaker: Vermont Royster, Editor of *The Wall Street Journal*

Details will be announced at a later date



A Search and Rescue Bonanza

Lunenburg craftsmen: left to right, Captain Lawrence Allen, owner of the dory shop, William Crouse, Wallace Schnare, dory builder, Charles Beck and Freeman Rhuland, dory builder. All Lunenburg photographs are by the author.

By John M. Kochiss, Curatorial Research Associate

One aspect of researching for The Marine Historical Association resembles an endless search and rescue operation – but usually with more search than rescue. For some time now we have been looking for old buildings and tools associated with the all-too-frequently ignored maritime crafts and activities of block making, small craft building, ship chandlery, fish houses and such.

In response to offers, various clues and an inquisitive attitude, the search found me scouring the waterfront from Bivalve, New Jersey to Lincolnville, Maine. A few structures chased down proved to be tremendous museum pieces, like the Ames salmon fishing shack and the Block Island Life Saving Station, but most were too young or else butchered or manicured beyond our use. Since tools always abounded they were easier to come by, although even here I usually struck out.

The upshot of the whole search, for me at least, was the sad realization that the things we were looking for in our New England bailiwick were scarce – if not for the most part nonexistent. So the immediate

quest slowed down and I was diverted to other tasks. Then, suddenly, a treenail lathe opened a Pandora's box.

Last summer John Gardner located in Nova Scotia one of those rare items – a lathe to make a vessel's treenails. Without a doubt John has magic powers or a divining rod of sorts, for he possesses the uncanny ability to find and acquire almost any shipbuilder's tool we need. He seldom returns from a hunt without at least one rare tool.

So, following John's lead I drove to Dayspring, Nova Scotia, a couple of miles east of Bridgewater, to look at the lathe in an old boatyard. This time I was in luck and obtained two: a mid-nineteenth-century handmade, handpowered beauty and another manufactured in Lunenburg around 1918.

Since I was close to Lunenburg, the Gloucester of Nova Scotia, I made a quick one-hour visit to see what, if anything, was going on. Things now began to happen. To my complete surprise Smith and Rhuland, Ltd., shipbuilders, had recently laid the keel of the *Rose* – a replica of the eighteenth-century British frigate that harassed Newport, Rhode Island during the American Revolution. She is somewhat like M.G.M.'s *Bounty*, built in the same shed in the early 1960s. John Millar, the young and imaginative architectural historian of Newport, conceived the *Rose* and plans are afoot to use her as a floating museum in Newport.

Although little work seemed to be going on inside the shed, the yard was astir with activity. Men were cutting timber, adzing the keelson, shaping frames and shifting timber. From this animated scene I was directed to an equally fascinating one – an old style shipsmith (blacksmith) who will do the *Rose's* ironwork. His shop and working techniques, I learned, are similar in many respects to those in use during the last century.

I returned to Mystic quite excited and with the image of elderly men working with ancient adze and broadax, the hammer and anvil and other tools seemingly right out of a museum. But one question haunted me all the way home. Why all the running about for things that are difficult to find here in New England? Why not thoroughly record these fascinating activities, skills and arts which were being practiced today much as they had been during the days of commercial sail? The thought was not new, of course, but had never to my knowledge been given formal approval at the Seaport. This kind of preservation, however, proved to be a central element in Curator Ed Lynch's philosophy. So with Ed's instructions ringing in my ear, I sped back to Nova Scotia, this time to prepare for what was to be a study on film, tape and paper of

the techniques and use of shipbuilding tools and the shipsmith's art.

By the time I arrived in Lunenburg the Smith and Rhuland yard was busier than before. The stem, stern post and most of the frames on the *Rose* were in place and more than two dozen men – nearly all wearing blue overalls and gray caps – sawed, adzed, hammered, crawled and clambered over the wooden skeleton like so many termites. The spirit and bustle, the odor of newly-cut wood, the sounds of working tools and muffled voices combined to stimulate the mind and heart.

Then, Pandora's box opened wider and I learned that additional and perhaps far more valuable and unique activities buzzed within a few blocks of the yards. To my amazement I discovered a real old seaport carrying on much as it had one hundred years ago. Here was no re-creation but a genuine old seaport – and with no admission charge! In rapid succession and with wide-eyed excitement I discovered a block and deadeye shop, another blacksmith, a dory maker, an oar maker, a cooper, a mast hoop maker, a sailmaker and a small water-powered sawmill. Lunenburg is indeed rich in many of the things we had been searching for in New England. Though the buildings may be out of our jurisdiction, the trades themselves and the art and craftsmanship are not.

I returned to Mystic again dizzy with excitement over what I had seen. Priorities shifted. Original plans had been for Lou Martel, our photographer, his assistant Bob Borges and me to drive back to Nova Scotia with a station wagon full of still cameras, film, lights, cable and rented movie equipment. We were to record the use of shipbuilding tools and the shipsmith at work. Now, after reporting the new finds and studying the situation, the initial coverage lost first place. The block shop and its block and deadeye making took top billing.

Our stint in Nova Scotia found Lou, Bob and me shuttling with heavy equipment from the block shop to the shipsmith and the shipyard. Lou's great skill as a photographer emerged when he was repeatedly forced to solve difficult problems of lighting, floor vibrations, camera setup and the like. Later, our artist, John LaPresle, added to our team his valuable ability to sketch accurately and quickly another man's memory.

The block shop is a three-and-a-half-story red building with a big sign on the front which reads "A. Dauphinee and Sons." Amazing eighty-one-year-old Alfred Dauphinee, the owner, still works here every day at the trade he learned from his father, who in turn learned from his father and so it goes back to family skills practiced in the

early 1800s. The only significant difference between present methods and the old are the powered saws, sanders and lathes that lighten work today. About ten other people, including his son Arthur, work in the shop making wood and metal blocks, deadeyes, oars, trawl tubs, barrels, cleats, belaying pins, fids and many other small items.

Captain Lawrence Allen's two dory shops are as typical small boat shops as you can imagine. They are simple two-story weathered shingle buildings built over the Lunenburg shore line. In one shed the dory bottom is made and in the other it is framed, planked and painted. Old woodworking tools hang from all the walls but most thickly over the one, long working bench in each shop. A unique wood-burning stove made from an oil drum and placed on the harbor side of each shop throws ample heat to warm the sheds during the cold months. Captain Allen learned to build dories from the previous owner after World War II, when he retired as captain of fishing schooners – including the original *Bluenose*. Like Mr. Dauphinee, Captain Allen is not against using powered equipment but, nevertheless, his methods



John LaPresle, left, Seaport supervisor of exhibits, sketches in Allen's dory shop while Captain Allen looks on.



Alfred Dauphinee, owner of the block shop in Lunenburg, N. S. At eighty-one, Mr. Dauphinee is on the job every day.

and small tools hark back to the last century. With power and his two helpers, Captain Allen can build a twelve-foot banks dory in less than two days! His shop and another in Shelburne are the only ones still making dories in all of Nova Scotia.

Although Dauphinee produces exceptionally fine oars that are sent all over the world, they are only a sideline with him. Another firm in Blockhouse just outside Lunenburg specializes in oars. Here again a combination of hand and power tools is used. But the essence and quality of hand craftsmanship show up in all the operations and somehow even permeate the atmosphere. Unlike workmen in a big company, each man in the three-building complex seems to take immense pride in his work.

The cooper is another obsolete tradesman in New England, but in Nova Scotia a few seem to eke out an existence; for example, Mr. Vaughn who operates a small cooperage in Western Shore, a short distance from Lunenburg. Here wooden barrels are made, mostly by hand, for the local fishing industry. As with the majority of old crafts in Nova Scotia, he is perhaps the last in a long family line to practice his trade.

Unfortunately I had no opportunity to visit the semi-active old sailmaker and his loft nor the last Micmac Indian making oak mast hoops. I was told, however, that the two are interesting and singularly worthy of interviewing.

Ivan Cook's water-powered saw mill is a simple, rather shabby-looking shed but completely functional. It sits on the edge of a fast-running stream and only the force of the water on a horizontal wheel operates, through a series of belts, the saw, planer and shingle-making machine. In the past, logs were cut daily into planks for ship and home construction but now only a dozen or two logs are cut on weekends for a local lumber yard.

Lunenburg and the surrounding area has much to offer the student or museum interested in the maritime trades. But in addition to all these current, though fading, industries I was heartened to learn that men still walk the streets of Lunenburg who fished from schooners on the Grand Banks, traded with the West Indies for rum and molasses in schooners and brigs and sailed around Cape Horn in square riggers. Research opportunities existing right now with these men alone are tremendous. With tape recorders, cameras and video tapes one can tap their memories, record their voices and see them relive their old enthusiasms. Our research team hopes to return shortly with our own equipment and a thoroughly planned program to record as much as possible of the old skills, techniques and arts.

THE SPANISH GUNBOATS

By Carol W. Kimball

The case of the Spanish gunboats was a strange drama which involved three Connecticut shipyards with a Spanish captain, a famous Swedish inventor, a Cuban revolution, a Peruvian ambassador and an American president. These diverse elements spun a tangled web of confusion and caused an international furor threatening a Spanish-American confrontation long before the loss of the *Maine*.

The affair began in the drowsy summer of 1869. Along the Mystic River in Connecticut the shipyards were building fifteen small gunboats for the Spanish navy. In May the weekly paper had announced the local contract. "Mystic is to be lively the next three or four months,"[1] wrote the editor, anticipating an influx of ship carpenters and workmen. He hardly expected the little vessels to attract a United States marshal, a revenue cutter, a special correspondent from *The New York Times*, and assorted sightseers.

Mystic was glad to have the shipyards active – after the Civil War there was little to do. The vessels took shape quickly. Their appearance was somewhat disappointing, though. Visitors scanning the placid river for impressive warships saw only a long row of undistinguished wooden hulls like barges, but any Mystic native would declare firmly, "Them's the Spanish gunboats!" When completed and armed at New York they would be more formidable. Yet as the summer grew hot and humid, villagers steamed with equal heat. The mysterious men-of-war abuilding along the river began to raise ticklish international questions concerning Spain and our Latin American neighbors.

Spain needed the gunboats to put down a rebellion in Cuba, a desperate bid for freedom begun in 1868 by wealthy Cuban planters. A year later, when the revolt had settled down to brutal guerilla warfare, Spain realized she was in for a long struggle. Anxious to cut off insurgents' supplies and to prevent the landing of any eager expeditions to aid the revolution, the Spanish government sent Navy Captain Raphael de Aragon to America to purchase patrol vessels for Cuban bayous and inlets. The captain's arrival in New York set off a chain of events which brought work to Mystic shipyards and problems to the State Department.

[1] *Mystic Pioneer*, May 8, 1869.



Thirteen Spanish gunboat hulls tied up at a shipyard on the Mystic River in the fall of 1869. Ship in background is Greenman brothers' Frolic.

De Aragon had plenty of money but no plans for the vessels; however, he soon had the best advice possible. He talked to C. H. Delamater, owner of the famous Delamater Iron Works in New York, who in turn consulted a good friend and longtime business associate, John Ericsson, of *Monitor* fame. Thus it happened that Spain's vessels were designed by one of the world's foremost naval experts. The inventor suggested a mosquito fleet of thirty small gunboats, each carrying a heavy 100-pound pivot gun in the bow. When Aragon agreed, Ericsson drew up specifications for sturdy 170-ton steamers, 105′ x 22′ x 8′, each carrying thirty-five officers and men. Schooner-rigged, but also equipped with twin propellers which could drive the vessel at 10 knots and turn her on a dime, the swift pursuit craft drew only 4.5 feet of water when fully loaded, and was ideal for use along Cuban shores.[2]

Delamater signed a contract promising delivery in eight months. To meet the deadline, hull construction had to be subcontracted. Charles H. Mallory, wartime associate of Delamater, agreed to build fifteen hulls in Mystic; others would be built near New York. Contracts for pivot guns went to Kimball's Foundry at Cold Spring; Delamater would manufacture the engines.

Work on the hulls at Mystic began in mid-May. The need was urgent, for Cuban rebels were on

[2] *New York Times*, Oct. 15, 1869.

the march. At three Mystic shipyards workers rushed the gunboats – two at Geo. Greenman & Co., at the present site of Mystic Seaport, five at Hill and Grinnell's yard below the highway bridge, and the others at the Mallory yard. Lieutenant C. Petory came to Mystic to represent the Spanish government and Captain de Aragon arrived regularly to inspect progress.

Mallory launched the first completed hull on July 17, the second followed a week later and two more went into the river before the first of August. Everything pointed to the contract's swift completion.

Then on August 4 Mystic citizens awoke to find themselves blockaded – and all because of those innocent-looking "barges." The U.S. revenue cutter *James Campbell* lay off Noank a mile down the river, ready to capture any of the gunboats on their way to be completed at New York.[3]

U.S. Marshal Barlow had ordered the move and had also seized eight gunboats lying at the Delamater Works. The Peruvian minister had complained that the unfinished vessels were intended for Spain's continuing war against Peru. They could prey directly on Peruvian commerce, but even by operating against Cuba they could free other Spanish navy vessels to move. Because the United States was at peace with Peru, the marshal acted under a general commission to preserve American neutrality when he seized the gunboats.

The eight vessels in the North River were secured to docks with hawsers and chains while the well-armed U.S. gunboat *Maria* and two smaller vessels sailed back and forth to prevent their escape. Each patrolling vessel carried a detachment of marines from the Brooklyn Navy Yard.[4] Hastily interviewing Barlow, C. H. Delamater learned that the marshal had his orders from the State Department. Thirty gunboats armed with swivel guns appeared to be a threat to peace.

Strangely enough, even after seizure, work on the vessels continued, although under careful navy surveillance. It was rumored that Delamater had arranged a working agreement, giving his solemn pledge that no gunboats would leave for builders' trials or even change moorings without first notifying the admiral at the Navy Yard.[5] And work went on in Mystic while at the river's mouth the revenue cutter continued watchful waiting.

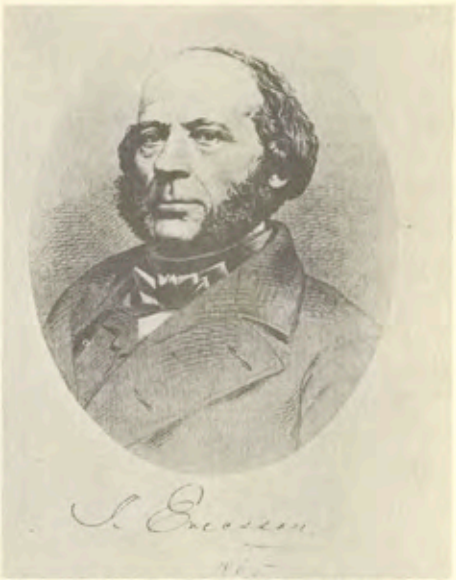
The marshal's action brought much publicity for the gunboats and the purpose for which they were intended. Stories of Cuba's patriots recalled our American Rev-

[3] *Mystic Pioneer*, August 7, 1869.

[4] *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Dec. 18, 1869.

[5] *New York Times*, Oct. 15, 1869.





Cornelius H. DeLamater, left, owner of the DeLamater Iron Works, called the cradle of the modern navy, and his friend Captain John Ericsson, right, famous designer of the Monitor *and of the Spanish gunboats.*

olution, arousing sympathy for the underdogs. Newspapers took up the Cuban cause, printing anti-Spanish articles. Some called openly for acknowledgement of Cuban independence, which many felt would lead to war with Spain.

At the same time the Spanish press protested that Cuba was receiving aid from American adventurers contrary to international law. Vitriolic attacks on the United States appeared. In late September the *Mystic Pioneer* quoted an article from *El Cronisto* which boasted that the United States was weak and worthless, and that a tiny fraction of the Spanish navy could blockade Chesapeake Bay and New York harbor and subdue the American nation in two months. "Spain provokes us to war!" thundered the *Pioneer*.[6]

Now the importance of the half-finished gunboats increased, with interest so high that *The New York Times* sent a special correspondent to Mystic to inspect the fabled craft. Arriving October 13, and unimpressed with what he called a "straggling town and sluggish river," the reporter found it hard to understand all the fuss about the incubating gunboats. Pending settlement of the legal question between the United States and Spain the boats were swinging idly at their moorings, waiting patiently for

[6] *Mystic Pioneer*, Sept. 25, 1869.

masts, engines and armament. The correspondent, who signed himself "E.C.," wrote that they looked like logs of wood in the water and came up with a great plan for smuggling them out of Mystic:

> Should their lines be cut some dark night they could float out on the tide to the Sound and be taken in tow by a fast tug and be moored in the Delamater Basin at the foot of West 13th Street before daybreak.[7]

But less than a week after E.C.'s visit the Mystic blockade was over. On October 19 five of the boats left Mystic escorted by the faithful revenue cutter and on October 30 the steam tug *Gladiator* took three more. The rest left November 10, some not quite complete, carrying shipjoiners and painters to finish up in New York. Watching them leave with their future still unsettled, the Mystic editor speculated, "Will they furnish material for future items or will their career be the subject of important articles and lengthy state documents?"[8]

In the meantime at New York the first trim scrappy gunboat was complete at last. *The New York Times* described her rakish appearance thus: "Smokestacks lean toward the rear, giving an air of almost piratical mischief."[9]

But it was still not smooth sailing. On November 30 the gunboats were libelled for infringement of neutrality laws with all work stopped. Back in Mystic, contractor Isaac D. Clift was forced to halt work on his $30,000 contract to outfit the gunboats with sails of the best imported Scotch linen duck. The East Coast seethed with criticism of the administration on the one hand while contractors worried lest they lose their pay.

At this point the President of the United States took a hand. Recognizing the controversy in a message delivered December 13, Ulysses S. Grant devoted considerable attention to the Spanish gunboats, defending the administration's attempt to execute the neutrality laws in good faith, no matter how unpleasant the task. But, Grant concluded, the Peruvian government had taken no further steps to prevent the vessels' departure and

> not feeling authorized to detain the property of a nation with which we are at peace (Spain) on a mere executive order, the matter has been referred to the courts to decide.[10]

The decision came three days later. District Judge Blanchard ordered the gunboats released to Spain. Immediately fifteen were put into commission; ceremonies were

[7] *New York Times*, Oct. 15, 1869.
[8] *Mystic Pioneer*, Nov. 13, 1869.
[9] *New York Times*, Sept. 24, 1869.
[10] *Mystic Pioneer*, Dec. 18, 1869.

conducted in New York harbor by signal from the Spanish frigate *Pizarro*.

Now all made haste before luck changed again. At Mystic sails were quickly finished. In New York the commissioned steamers were coaled and prepared for the trip to Cuba. Jerry Mulford, Delamater's outside superintendent, scoured the neighborhood for crews. With the promise of good pay he induced men to sign for four months. *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* carried a front page picture of the crowd of engineers, firemen and coal passers at the corner of West and 13th Streets, waiting to enlist.

On December 19 eighteen of the mosquito fleet left for Cuba, passing Governor's Island at 11 A.M. convoyed by the stately *Pizarro*. The others left January 7, 1870. In spite of controversy and delay the vessels were ready before the eight-month contract deadline.

Their triumphant departure was accompanied by dark rumors that Cuban sympathizers lay in wait between Sandy Hook and Morro Castle, ready to attack. It was even whispered that torpedoes had been



SPANISH GUN-BOAT No. 1—TESTING HER GUNS AT COLD SPRING, ON THE HUDSON.—[See Page 663.]

Finished gunboat. From the first page of Harper's Weekly, *October 16, 1869.*

secretly fastened to each vessel, set to explode after seventy hours at sea. Nevertheless, they reached Cuba safely. Chief Engineer G. H. Reynolds of the Delamater Works went to Havana himself to supply the finishing touches. Returning in February he reported that Spanish authorities were highly pleased with the gunboats.[11]

In the United States sympathy grew for the Cuban patriots and when the vessels sailed, indignation arose against Spain. In Mystic former U.S. Consul Moses H. Sawyer wrote a fiery letter to the *Pioneer* demanding that the United States cease to be an ally of Spain by assuming a neutral position:

> Thirty gunboats sail from New York harbor to crush the struggling Cubans, causing tyrants to rejoice, liberty to weep and Americans to blush![12]

But in spite of a clamoring press, United States intervention in Cuba did not materialize at this time. Mr. Delamater got $60,000 in gold – estimated the equivalent of $90,000 in currency – for each vessel. Mystic contractors were happy to receive their share to tide over a bad maritime slump. The little gunboats did their part to put down the revolution, for with them Spain was able to control the island's seaport towns, denying the insurgents a harbor where they could land supplies and reinforcements. Later both Delamater and Ericsson were decorated by the Spanish government for their services.

The rebels were subdued after ten years of fighting and the Spanish gunboats that had excited America were all but forgotten. A century later the story of their wartime exploits as well as their disposition after hostilities remains hidden. Were they converted to merchant vessels? Did they lie unused, rotting away at some island pier? Perhaps someone may yet discover the fate of the controversial little steamers.

[11] *New York Tribune*, Feb. 19, 1870.
[12] *Mystic Pioneer*, Feb. 5, 1870.

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HENRY BELIN DUPONT 1898-1970

Over many years The Marine Historical Association has drawn to its Board of Trustees distinguished men of firm conviction in America's cultural institutions. Second to none among these was the skipper of *Cyane,* Henry B. duPont, whose keen interest in Mystic Seaport and his thoughtful awareness of the Seaport's requisites have played a remarkable role in the growth of this museum. A man of observant nature and acute perception, he frequently was first to recognize a need and act to meet it.

Hank's love was a many-faceted thing and his generous impulse was as vibrant as the countless interests he pursued. His love of the sea and wind and sail, his belief in the future of this institution, his commitment to quality in all we undertake and his devotion to the cultural aspects of Mystic Seaport—all represent the highest ideals toward which we aspire. In particular, Hank's confidence in our capability and his steady encouragement in our efforts provided inspiration and reassurance.

Already contributions are being made to Mystic Seaport to honor the memory of this quiet man. Nothing could be more appropriate in the name of one who gave so much and asked for nothing in return.

Waldo Johnson

April 1970

Small Craft Laboratory

By John Gardner, Research Associate

The future, these days, is galloping toward us at an alarming rate. Some of the things which could be in store for humans are less than attractive. One fanciful writer has described a time in the future when every material need is anticipated and taken care of by benign and super-efficient robots. There is nothing at all left for humans to do but to relax and be waited on, and they are bored to desperation and revolt.

Such a time and condition may not be as remote as one might suppose. Already the mass of the population has ceased to produce anything tangible, having become mere consumers of products, often inferior, which they had no part in making. Children growing up today in Suburbia, as well as in the ghetto, are being robbed of their heritage of manual skills. Many never experience the satisfactions of purposeful work and creative achievement, nor can they begin to imagine what life was like for past generations who actually, and pridefully, did things and made things for their own use with their own hands.

Yet a counter current is stirring. It is particularly discernible where boats are concerned. A sizable number of enthusiasts are now building their own boats, although not a few have the means to purchase them ready-made, if they wished. But they choose to do the work themselves, in good part for the age-old satisfactions inherent in craftsmanship, for if mankind is not biologically endowed with an instinct for workmanship, a feeling for workmanship is deeply ingrained in the social inheritance.

Boatbuilding is folk experience with its roots deep in man's remote past. Even as recently as the middle of the last century, the building of native small craft along our Eastern seaboard was still largely unspecialized, with fishermen and others building boats as they needed them from local materials according to methods passed down from generation to generation. They built for utility, but for beauty also, with building a distinct source of esthetic fulfillment. Building a boat in those days was also a social happening with neighbors lending assistance and stopping by now and again for a gam, to see how the job was going, to offer comment and advice, or just to share silently in the appreciation of sweet lines and work well done. The professional builder of small boats as a specialized tradesman and wage earner was a



Working on a half model in the Small Craft Laboratory. Photograph: Louis S. Martel.

late arrival on the New England scene.

It would be a rare feat, indeed, for one to build with his own hands, and largely unassisted, an automobile in which he would dare venture forth on modern freeways; much more, an airplane that would safely fly. Yet it is not at all unusual with some simple hand tools and ordinary materials for an amateur of no exceptional aptitude or skill to build for himself in cellar, garage or barn a staunch little vessel of classic design, capable of taking him safely, if need be, over many miles of stormy ocean. Building a traditional boat by oneself is an adventure in self-reliance. It leads back to a past less complicated than the present, and in some respects more humanly wholesome. To return thus to the past is not to regress, but rather to revive and to restore values lost or presently in danger.

It hardly needs saying that one of the classic functions of the historical museum is to preserve and exhibit artifacts representative of peak past achievements of human culture. And it is now coming to be recognized that the museum has the additional and more difficult function of preserving and transmitting the skills which produced such artifacts, when this is possible, and when these can be adapted to present and future use. Our heritage of boatbuilding skills is a particular case in point. But such skills are vital processes which live on only as they are practiced, and like all living things must continue to grow and to adjust to the changing world. To preserve the best of the past is not enough; it is also necessary to assimilate the best of the new.

To the service of these ends Mystic Seaport has undertaken a Small Craft Laboratory. Already an interim boatshop has been set up in the Carriage Barn, which besides affording ample building and bench space and a good wooden floor to work on, provides an appropriate setting as well, for much of traditional New England boatbuilding

was carried on in similar buildings, as is still the case along the coast of Maine. A solid planking bench has been erected, circular and band saws installed, and early in April molds will be up for the first boat, a fourteen-foot round-bottom, lapstrake, copper-fastened pulling boat to be ready for the Rowing Workshop scheduled for June 6 and 7 at the Seaport.

Later this spring an apprentice program will get under way, with the construction of a sixteen-foot Maine peapod now in the process of design, which includes working up a set of lines and testing them by building a scale half model. It is a truism that the only way to become a boatbuilder is by building boats.

Like other public institutions, museums are feeling the effects of the population bulge. How to meet the needs of seriously interested individuals without shutting out the more casual crowd, and yet not to be overwhelmed by it, is one of the first big problems which the Small Craft Laboratory must meet and solve. Already inquiries about classes and courses of instruction are being received, although no formal announcements of such have yet been made. Such early interest is auspicious and exciting, but we are entering upon uncharted seas. The old cut-and-dried methods of instruction simply won't do. Our approach must be fluid and experimental. Yet one cardinal principle is plain: no amount of talking and writing about building can take the place of building itself.



John Gardner sawing a thwart knee of hackmatack for a boat in the Small Craft Laboratory. Photograph: Louis S. Martel.

Recommended Reading

DOWN EASTER CAPTAIN by Capt. W. J. Moore. *Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd., Devon, England, 1967.* Seven map sketches, eleven illustrations, 238 pages, index of ships and place names. $4.00.

"So much nonsense has been written by authors and journalists with no first-hand knowledge about rounding the Horn that I think a detailed description of this passage may serve to explode some of the myths. I can claim to know something about it for I am now making my fifty-first passage round, the largest vessel in which I have rounded it being the ship *Matchless,* of 1,198 tons. It often seems to me that any rubbish written about the sea, no matter how absurd from a sailor's point of view, or how far from the true facts, will find a publisher and readers, while a true sailor's yarn seems too tame for them.

"Cape Horn is bad enough without trying to make it appear worse than it is, but we all know that forty feet is about the limit to the height of a wave and that it does not always blow a gale here. If it did we should never get round. There is a constant current setting round the Horn, from west to east, at a rate of one to three knots, and but for that current there would be nothing to it. The weather is no worse than in the Atlantic between Europe and America and there is never a hurricane in this area. All a man wants is a good ship, properly loaded, with a good average crew of seamen."

Thus wrote Captain Walter Lyman Josselyn aboard the bark *Nuuanu* en route from New York to Honolulu in 1905. From a wealth of journals and manuscripts written by Captain Josselyn, his grandson, Captain William Josselyn Moore, has compiled the life story of a Yankee lad from Duxbury, Massachusetts who shipped before the mast in 1859 and rose to command of ships and barks in the East Indies and Cape Horn trades. Captain Josselyn's sea life extended from the end of the great era of the clipper to the opening of the Panama Canal, which rang the death knell for the American Cape Horner.

Although *Down Easter Captain* was published in 1967 and I have just discovered it, I am delighted with my find. Captain Josselyn would be aghast at the amount of "rubbish" that has been produced by authors looking for a "fast buck" and publishers completely unconcerned with authenticity. Anybody seems to be able to sell a book about the sea if he can gather up enough good pictures and design an attractive dust jacket. There is no longer any need to do research in any depth, just change the wording of someone's published material, pack in a few quotes and you have a book.

One must be absolutely certain to have funny captions. Captain Josselyn would have enjoyed the captions in one recent work where a photograph of several men hauling a small towline aboard a four-masted schooner reads, "The anchor is brought up by hand." In the same work a man standing on the fore crosstrees of a fishing schooner gets the following treatment: "On the fore trestle-trees a sailor stands ready to loosen the jib." Newspapers and magazines are notorious for the trash they will publish. Editors can't be experts in everything; if it reads well it will sell.

Down Easter Captain joins *Coasting Captain,* the edited journals of Captain Leonard S. Tawes, by Robert H. Burgess of the Mariners Museum, as being

high on my list of factual histories of life in American sailing ships during a period when such vessels were gradually losing ground to steam and foreign competition.

It took energetic captains to keep full holds in those years and both Captain Josselyn and Captain Tawes were men capable of securing freights for their ships while others waited, and of handling all manner of crews without brutality. These were men proud of their vessels, proud of their ability and proud to be Americans. They wrote their journals in the honest manner in which they lived. If they liked a man they would say so but they also named the lazy, incompetent and dishonest.

Down Easter Captain is a sailor's story written for the sailor. It is also a book that can be used with confidence by the historian of the future. Captain Josselyn readily admits that part of his early story was written from memory and there might be an error of time or place, but these are probably no more serious than his misspelling of the name of the schooner *Kineo*.

This book is one I treasure.

FRANCIS E. BOWKER,
Captain of the *Brilliant*

FAMILY UNDER SAIL: A HANDBOOK FOR FIRST MATES by Jane Kirstein and Mary Leonard. Illustrations by Mary Leonard. *The Macmillan Company, Collier-Macmillan Ltd., London, 1970. $6.95.*

As an old skipper's mate, or as the old mate of a skipper, or as the mate of an old skipper, the writer is well qualified to comment upon the delights of *Family Under Sail*, which is written with warmth and wisdom by Jane Kirstein and Mary Leonard and illustrated with wit by Mary Leonard.

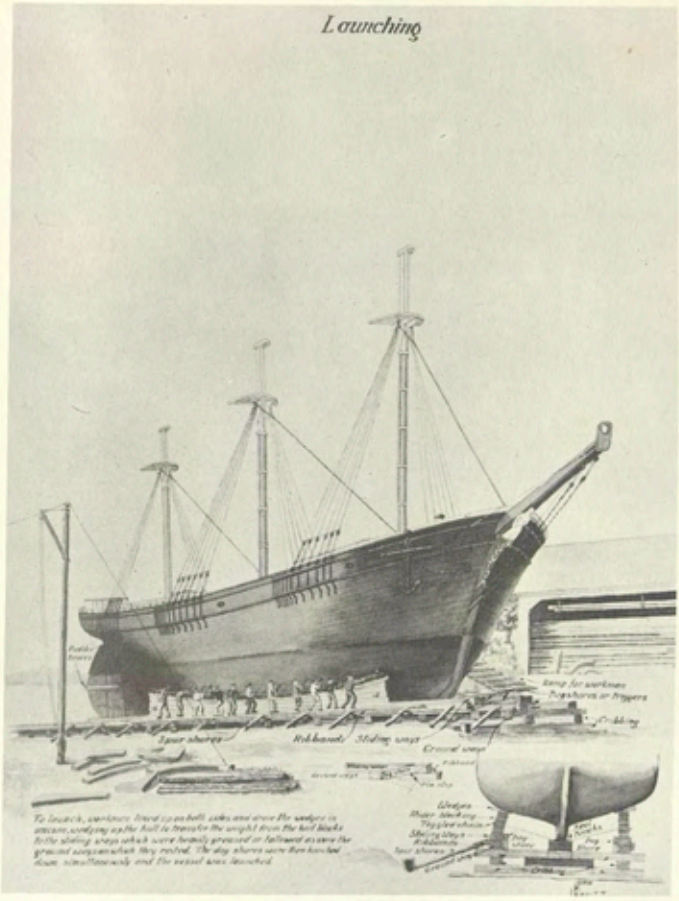
The fact that a skipper's wife of long standing can open a book reasonably sure that she has nothing left to learn and can close it a better mate than she was before speaks for itself, and underlines the fact that this book has as much to offer the old hand as it does the new – perhaps more because it straightens her out on that bit of unmerited know-it-allness which can surely set the stage for a mighty knockdown!

Family Under Sail deals with all the particulars – from the built-in compromises in choosing a boat, sloop or yawl, fiber glass or wood, to race or to cruise, for the old or for the young – to the problems of bunk colors and icebox placement. The reader is also led into the path of a better understanding of where she and her skipper fit in the broad spectrum of other sailors. Questions are posed: i.e., "Are you a big strong girl, healthy and happy" or do you really shine at the garden club or at cocktails for sixty? Is your skipper a "hard-driving executive . . . on time every time," or patient and philosophical and happy-go-lucky? Does one of you sail for quiet and relaxation and the other to be gay and strenuous? It is very important to know these answers and to act upon them.

The book discusses guests and clubs and pets and mildew and, of course, children in general and teenagers in particular. Housekeeping and racing and emergencies are covered with specifics, and even fear is brought into the light of day.

Buy the book – read the book, but look at the pictures. The line drawings are charming and irreverent (which is often how a mate really feels).

ELINOR D. JOHNSTON



Water color by John Leavitt, one of series illustrating shipbuilding.

Front cover: Drawing of *City of Boston* by William H. Ewen, Jr., done especially for *The Log.*

Back cover: John Leavitt, associate curator, teaching interpreter's class. Photograph: Les Olin.



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