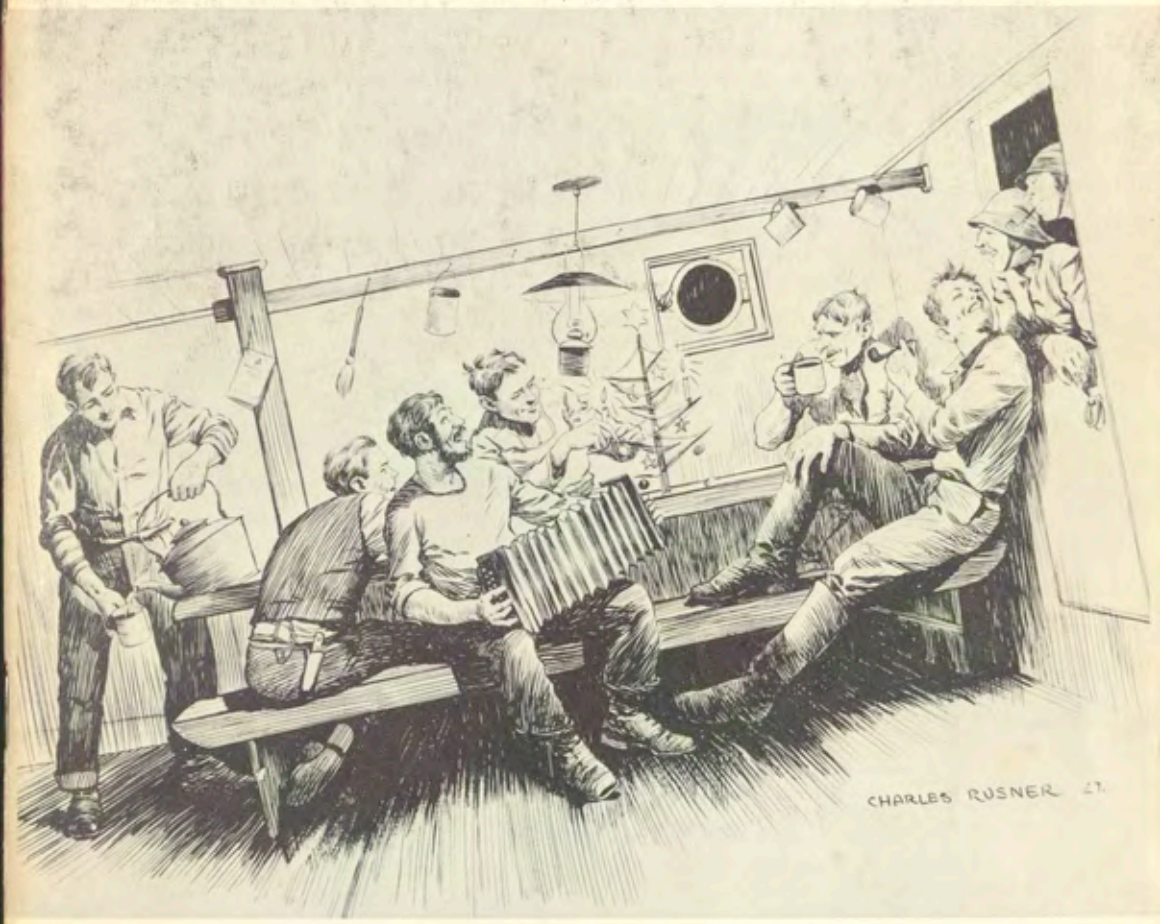
The LOG of Mystic Seaport

WINTER 1971

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The LOG of Mystic Seaport®

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World champion "Paris Crew" of Saint John, New Brunswick, winners of the International Regatta at the Paris Grand Exposition of July 8, 1867.

Early Days of Rowing Sport

By John Gardner,
Assistant Curator for Small Craft Studies

On Friday, October 2, 1846 the four-oared barges *Thomas Jefferson* and *Duane*, manned by amateur crews, rowed a match race on the Hudson for a silver goblet by Tiffany & Co. The course ran from a stake boat off the dock at Bull's Ferry, New Jersey down the river to Day's Point and return. For this gala occasion the steamboat *Boston*, thronged with "ladies and gentlemen" and with Dodsworth's band on board, made the excursion from Manhattan.

The *Thomas Jefferson*, painted white with a blue and gold stripe, carried a crew attired in white shirts and pants and white and blue caps, contrasting with the *Duane*'s vivid scarlet and gold. At the start the *Jefferson* took a slight lead, but it was a contest all the way, with the boats at times bow and bow, until at the end the *Jefferson* moved ahead by three lengths. The prize, presented by Colonel Biddle, was received for the *Jefferson* by C.A. Peverelly, who pulled bow oar.[1]

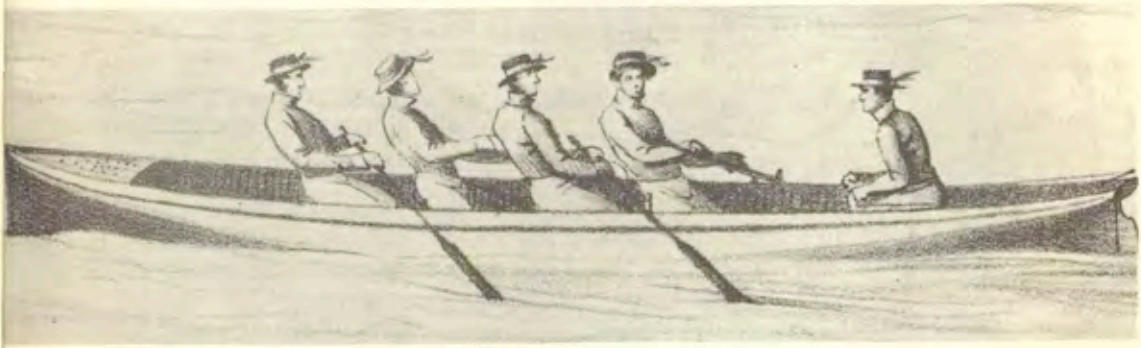
This was the same Charles A. Peverelly whose *American Pastimes*, published twenty years later, is the best and most complete account that has

come down to us of the rise and progress of rowing in America, which for a few decades, or from about 1850 to 1880, led all other outdoor sports in this country. Hundreds of rowing clubs flourished during this interval, and thousands of boats in great diversity were built and rowed. *The Annual Illustrated Catalogue And Oarsman's Manual for 1871* put the number of American rowing clubs, including those in the Canadian provinces, at 237 for 1870 with a membership of 11,076 and a total of 1,676 boats.[2]

Since then, these boats have almost entirely disappeared. Their lines and construction details, with the exception of the shells built by the Waters, Balch Paper Boat Company of Troy, New York were never recorded and if any designs were taken from half models, these have likewise been lost. No photographs have come down to us, and very few sketches. Frequently we know the length, and more rarely the beam. Sometimes the weight is given, and whether lap or streak or shell built. Names are little help, as for example, how to tell what constitutes a gig and what a barge, both of which are mentioned frequently without any clear distinction between the two.

But we are not left entirely in the dark, for there is still enough scattered information from various sources to enable us to work out with fair accuracy what some of these craft were like. A pretty good idea of the appearance and general proportions of the early four-oared race boats or gigs, such as the *Thomas Jefferson* and the *Duane* of 1846, is to be had from a lithograph made from the rendering of a waterfront scene near Astoria, Long Island about 1845 by the architect Alex J. Davis for the Ravenswood development proposed at that time. Among the several craft depicted, one is unmistakably a four-oared race boat or gig of the period. The oars are ridiculous, and likewise the rowing form of the crew, and they are seated too close together, yet the boat in its over-all shape and general proportions is not badly drawn,

Four-oared race boat of about 1845: detail from Ravenswood development proposal by architect Alex J. Davis. Courtesy of the J. Clarence Davies Collection, Museum of the City of New York.



judging from the best knowledge gleaned from other sources which we now have. Note the nearly plumb stem, the rather wall-sided midsection, and the very small, high-tucked stern transom.

Boats of this sort were not too far removed from the working Whitehalls of the period, or from the standard ships' gigs of the late eighteenth century Such early race boats naturally tended to be proportionally longer and narrower and lower of freeboard than the working boats. The "cut-downs,"[3] so called, constitute one stage in the evolution of the race boat, being ordinary working Whitehalls with their sides cut down to within a few inches of the water. Yet all of these early race boats of the 1840s were still rowed on the gunwale.

The first four-oared race boat to be rowed with outrigger rowlocks, so far as we have been able to ascertain, was the gig *Experiment*, which triumphed at Saint John, New Brunswick about 1850 under the oars of the celebrated Carleton crew, who by extending 3″ of outrigger from their gunwales[4] were able, it is recorded, to cover a six-mile course in slightly less than thirty-two minutes, although this record time may well be questioned.[5]

According to Peverelly, the first "regular shell" to be built in the United States was also named *Experiment*, being launched June 4, 1856 from the Williamsburg, Long Island shop of builder James MacKay,[6] who introduced iron outriggers. Unlike later shells, this craft was 12″ deep with the enormous expanse of beam – for a racing shell – of 2′8″. Its overall length was 37′ and it was rowed by a crew of four. Yet others have claimed that the first shell boat ever built in North America was by another McKay, a Scots boatbuilder settled in Saint John, New Brunswick. This boat, the *Young Neptune*, is remembered for having placed a close second in the three-mile race for four-oared shells in the Boston City Regatta on the Charles River, July 4, 1866. *Thetis*, another Saint John shell by McKay, rowed "by the lightest crew of men ever placed in a four-oared shell"[7] came first in that race, and still another Saint John boat would have taken third money, except that the crew inadvertently stopped rowing just short of reaching the stake boat.

By the middle 1850s rowing in America, including the Canadian provinces, came of age so to speak, achieving thereafter a degree of popularity and widespread participation which placed it in the forefront of major outdoor sports. The previous decade had been one of beginnings mainly, and prior to 1840 competitive rowing in the United States for match stakes seems to have been confined largely to the working boats of the Whitehallers, or boats derived from them, in the waters surrounding Manhattan.

The earliest recorded race of four-oared boats was rowed in the summer

of 1811 between the *Invincible*, a Long Island boat by John and William Chambers, and the *Knickerbocker*, a Manhattan boat built by John Baptiste. The Baptiste boat won, and was placed in Scudder's Museum, but was later transferred to Barnum's Museum where it was destroyed when that building burned in 1865.[8]

The most notable of these New York, Whitehall-derived race boats is the *American Star*, a Chambers boat which in 1825 in a match race from Bedloe's Island to Hoboken and back to the Battery, soundly defeated *Sudden Death*, the four-oared gig from the British frigate, *Hussar*, a boat then renowned for her speed and former victories.[9] Shortly after, the *American Star* was presented to General Lafayette, then in the United States on his last visit. Taken to France, the *American Star* is still preserved there today in close to her original condition, the only race boat of her time to have survived. From the dimensions and details of this unique artifact, it is possible not only to tell a great deal about similar race boats, but also much about small craft design and building practice in the United States at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Of the three germinal centers of rowing sport in North America – New York, Boston and Saint John, New Brunswick – it appears that the first organized rowing regatta was held in Saint John. A regatta in that city, perhaps in 1836, but not later than the following year, included races for four-oared pilot gigs, for skiffs and for double and single sculls. The *Nonpareil*, a four-oared race boat built for the occasion by Charles Lawton, and rowed by an amateur crew of clerks and mechanics, was winner over pilot gigs and pilots, and her victory, it has been said, gave great encouragement to boatbuilding in the city.[10] It is of more than ordinary significance that the builder, Charles Lawton, was a direct descendent of John Lawton, boatbuilder and Loyalist refugee in 1783 from New York and Pennsylvania, the first to engage in his trade in Saint John.[11]

Interest burgeoned. By 1844 the summer regatta in Saint John harbor had become an imposing affair with numerous contests for both oars and sail.[12] In September of that year much of the city apparently turned out for this event. Steamers brought spectators from Fredericton and other parts of the Province. The Queen's survey steamer, *Columbia*, gaily decked with flags, was put at the service of the committee. Races with substantial cash prizes were run off for eight-oared and six-oared gigs, with proportionally lesser prizes for whaleboats, wherries, punts and Indian canoes. A squaw race in the latter provided a touch of comedy. The whaleboats raced were built locally, for Saint John at that time was also a whaling port.[13]

It was also in 1844 that Harvard first turned to rowing as a college activity.



In Boston, the Chelsea regattas initiated in 1842 – largely for working boats in the beginning – had proved highly successful, and it has been suggested that Harvard students got the idea of taking up rowing from this source. The first Harvard boat, originally the *Star* and built for the Chelsea regattas three years before – a low, black, eight-oared boat 37′ long and propelled with plain ash oars – was purchased in the autumn of 1844 by thirteen members of the class of 1846, and renamed the *Oneida*. Rowing caught on quickly. In little more than a year four boats were owned by Harvard clubs. In the beginning, however, college rowing was primarily social, with the emphasis on intercollegiate competition developing later. How it was in the beginning may be seen from the use made of the *Atalanta*, a 26′, six-oared gig of stronger and heavier construction than usual for race boats, acquired by the Oneida Club, class of 1846.

Let Peverelly relate the adventures of this fair craft: "In the *Atalanta*, during the few months preceding their graduation, the crew made frequent excursions down the bay, now stopping for chowder at Point Shirley, now resting their wearied keel on the salt shore of Spectacle or Long Island, and once it is said, they invited the maidens of far-famed Hull to an evening pull. Report adds that even the hereditary horror for 'reckless students' could not withstand such an invitation from so gallant a crew. The damsels





Left, arrival of British Queen *at the Battery in New York. Note four-oared racing gig in center foreground. The painting, by J. Pringle, is from the Stokes Collection, New York Public Library.*

blushingly accepted the proffered compliment, and were afterwards regretfully returned to anxious parents by the gallant rovers, who had not like jolly freebooters, hurried the precious cargo to their College homes."[14]

But actually it was Yale that was first in the field, or rather on the water, for in the spring of 1843 William J. Weeks of the class of 1844 secured a secondhand, four-oared New York Whitehall, 19′ long with 4′ of beam, which arrived in New Haven in the latter part of May. She was named the *Pioneer*, and the formation of the first Yale rowing club followed. Within a month another four-oared, 19′ New York Whitehall appeared on the scene, having been purchased by Edwin A. Buckeley, class of 1844, who named her the *Nautilus*. And just about this same time still another four-oared Whitehall, named *Iris*, was added to the growing fleet. Although these were four-oared boats, a length of only 19′ indicates a working boat rather than a lengthened slimmed-out race boat of Whitehall derivation like the four-oared *American Star*, which is 27′ 6″ overall. Whether these boats were "cut-downs," as they might well have been, is not stated.

But this was not all, for that same spring a singular craft named the *Centipede* was acquired by a member of the class of 1845. This oddity, a dugout hollowed from a single log cut on the banks of the Susquehanna near Binghamton, New York was 42′ long, crank with only 2′ of beam,

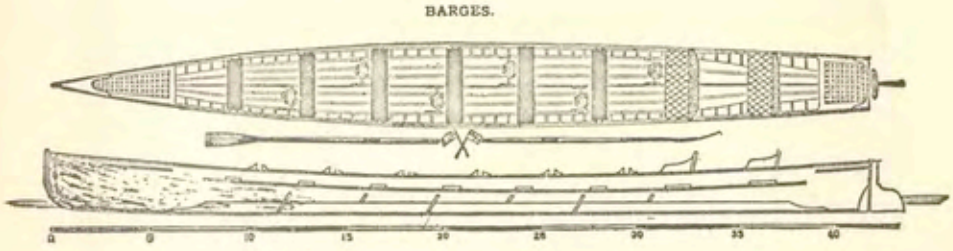
and pulled eight oars. In the early years Yale seems to have been partial to eight-oared boats, for in addition to the 30′, six-oared *Excelsior*, Yale's first race boat, the college clubs acquired three eight-oared craft before the end of their first decade on the water: the *Shawmut*, built near Boston, the *Osceola* and the *Augusta*. This last, a 38′ lapstrake boat planked with red cedar, copper fastened, and ribbed with box wood, cost $170 secondhand, and is said to have been subsequently sold to the class of 1852 for a supper. She went down one blustery day off Crane's Bar while under tow loaded with straw to Fort Hale, where the intention was to dedicate her as a burnt offering to Neptune.[15]

College rowing as competitive sport can hardly be said to have started before 1850, and was limited at the beginning to Yale and Harvard. Their first regatta was held at Centre Harbor on Lake Winnepesaukee, New Hampshire in August 1852, their second at Springfield, Massachusetts on the Connecticut River in July 1855.

Outside of the colleges, match races and local regattas, notably at Boston and at Saint John, provided competition and stimulated keen, but limited, interest in rowing prior to 1850, yet formal organization of the sport did not take place until later. While the Atalanta Boat Club of New York, "the oldest rowing club in American waters," according to Peverelly, its president in 1852 and 1853, was formed in the spring of 1848, and the Union Boat Club of Boston three years later, these were the early exceptions by ten years or more. The Hudson Navy, so called, comprising the associated boat clubs of New York, dated from 1860.

Race boats prior to 1850 were not far removed from working types and, generally of clinker build, were rowed on the gunwales. Four-oared boats seem to have predominated. They were frequently called gigs, suggesting a likeness to ships' boats. Thus the 20′ *Phantom* built in 1846 by Brooks & Thatcher and acquired by Yale students in 1851 was sold in 1853 for a vessel's quarter boat.[16]

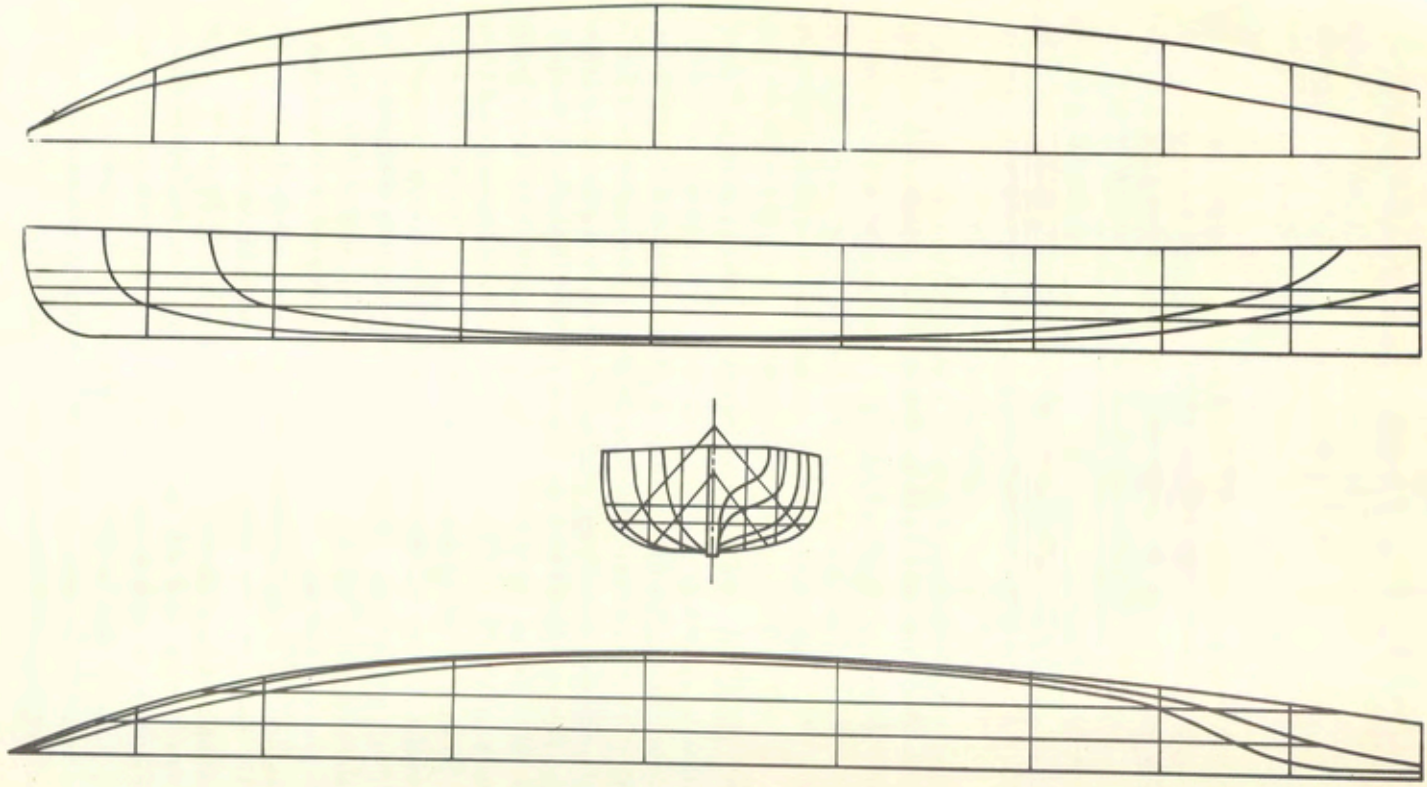
At the Newburgh regatta on the Hudson in 1841 there were eight entries in a race for six-oared barges and ten entries in the race for four-oared barges, the latter being won by the *Thomas Jefferson*, with the *Duane* second – a repeat of their 1846 match. Some idea of what these barges were like may be had from the 1891 catalogue of H.V. Partelow & Co., Boston's leading boatbuilding concern in the 1880s and 1890s. The Partelows were a Saint John boatbuilding family who had removed to Boston a few decades earlier. The cut of their barge shows a long, slim, flat-sheered boat, rowed on the gunwale, and resembling the *American Star* and the Ravenswood sketch, except that the barge has a somewhat wider stern transom.[17]



Six-oared barge built by H. V. Partelow & Co., Boston, 1891.

If only someone in the 1840s or thereabouts had left us a draught of lines, but boatbuilders then had no use for lines and did not bother with them. But perhaps we do have a half model dating from the period in question or even earlier in the collection of the New Brunswick Museum at Saint John. No documentation exists except that the model did come from the estate of George Hilyard (1878-1968), the last of a line of shipbuilders, the foremost of their day in Saint John, having launched forty-six ocean-going vessels between 1853 and 1873. Thomas Hilyard bought the yard from John Haws, who set it up and prospered in the 1830s.

The model is quite definitely for a pulling boat. However, its proportions are obviously not right for a working boat, being too long and narrow and flat of sheer. It could well be an early and not too successful attempt to alter the lines and proportions of the ordinary ships' boats of the early nineteenth century for racing. No doubt there was much rule-of-thumb experimentation among boatbuilders in the early years before the optimum combination of design elements for speed was attained. In profile and in length/beam proportions this model closely resembles the *American Star* and the Ravenswood sketch and, to a lesser extent, the Partelow barge, but its water line entrance is rather too full, and its bilges are quite hard. Perhaps these were kept hard for stability to compensate for the reduction in beam over that of the standard working boat.



Lines of the Hilyard half model. Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum, Saint John, New Brunswick.

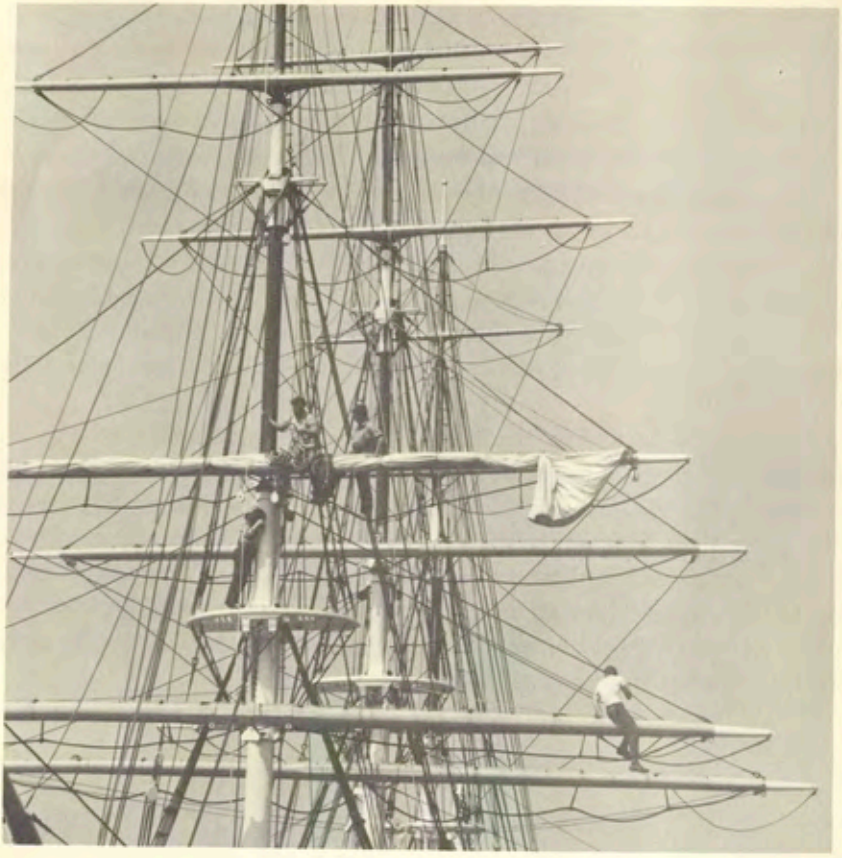
We are told that a Saint John boatbuilder named McLellan produced, presumably about 1840, "a four-oared boat, quite a novelty in her day, very slack in her bilges with wide spreading gunwales." If this was so unusual, apparently it was common practice at the time to build boats more like the model under consideration, with hard bilges and wall-sided above.[18]

This model also resembles to a surprising degree the engraved likeness of a race boat appearing on the business card of Edward Baptis, son of John Baptiste, builder of the *Knickerbocker* and the *General Lafayette*, who carried on his father's business at 660 Water Street, New York City from 1824 to about 1835. The Baptis boat has the same bow, flat sheer, wall sides rising from a hard bilge, and small high-tucked stern as the Saint John model.[19]

No scale is indicated on the model, but the assumption of a scale of an inch to the foot gives the most likely dimensions. The resulting 22′ overall is not too short for a four-oared boat. Forty-two inches of beam is considerably more than later race boats would have, and 19″ of depth amidships is more like a working boat and not like the "cut-downs" previously mentioned, yet even so these are plausible dimensions for an early, and perhaps not overly successful, attempt to modify the standard ships' gig of the early nineteenth century for racing.

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1. Charles A. Peverelly, *American Pastimes*, New York News Co., N.Y. 2nd ed. 1868, p. 257.
2. Waters, Balch & Co., *The Annual Illustrated Catalogue And Oarsman's Manual for 1871*, Troy, N.Y., p. 325.
3. Peverelly, op. cit., p. 248.
4. "Early Days of Boat Racing In The St. John Harbor," *The Evening Times and Star*, St. John, N.B., August 21, 1915.
5. *Journal of The New Brunswick Society For The Encouragement of Agriculture, Home Manufacture & Commerce*, Fredericton, N.B. 1851. p. 312.
6. Peverelly, op. cit., p. 249.
7. Early Days of Boat Racing . . . op. cit.
8. Peverelly, op. cit., p. 243.
9. Ibid, p. 245.
10. Early Days of Boat Racing . . . op. cit.
11. *St. John And Its Business, A History of St. John*, St. John, N.B. 1875, p. 106.
12. *The Courier*, St. John, N.B. Tuesday, Sept. 21, 1844.
13. Early Days of Boat Racing . . . op. cit.
14. Peverelly, op. cit., p. 119.
15. Ibid, p. 135.
16. Ibid, p. 135.
17. Catalogue, H.V. Partelow & Co., Boston, Mass. 1891, p. 12.
18. Early Days of Boat Racing . . . op. cit.
19. Holograph letters from Miss Erunia H. Stevens and Mrs. Edward T. Coons, William P. Stephens Papers, Coll. 91, Box 8/1, G.W. Blunt White Library.



Bending the fore topsail on the Conrad. *Photograph: Les Olin.*

SEAMANSHIP ALOFT

By Robert R. Boulware, Rigger

One feature of shipbuilding often overlooked by visitors to Mystic Seaport is the rigging of our vessels – the many miles of hemp, wire and chain that stay their masts and support and control their sails. Often it is only after a stop at the rigging loft and sail loft that some of our non-seagoing visitors understand the importance of this apparatus. Sails, spars and rigging are the engines of a wind-driven ship, and their manufacture takes as much time and care as the construction of the vessel herself.

In order to show the Seaport's vessels as they were in their working days, constant maintenance and periodic overhaul by a crew of riggers – specialists in their phase of shipbuilding, are required. Like many of the trades peculiar to sailing ships, this type of rigging has lost most of its commercial value and is all but dead. This is one of the problems faced by the shipyard staff, for as a marine museum our responsibility is to display our vessels as though they were ready to sail – with every piece of gear intact and usable. This requires people with a thorough background in marlinspike seamanship – that phase of seagoing that deals with splicing and knotting, and in general turning lengths of wire and fiber rope into useful shipboard appliances, but it involves more than that. Making the standing rigging for a vessel means combining the skills of sailor and carpenter, sailmaker and mechanic, because the materials used include wire, hemp, wood, leather, canvas, bronze and iron.

As in any field, some of the work is routine: hemp rigging, to be preserved, must have a periodic coating of Stockholm tar; wire rigging must be "slushed" with white lead and tallow, and spars oiled or slushed with tallow or vaseline. A wide variety of gear must be continually inspected, and chafed or rotten seizings, lashings, ratlines and serving renewed. As the elements take their toll, halyards, lifts, sheets, braces and other items of running rigging must be replaced.

While all this is going on, occasional rerigging of vessels at the Seaport is necessary. When *Emma C. Berry* arrived here, she was schooner-rigged. She was built as a sloop, so the conversion back to her original rig required all new standing and running rigging. Two years ago it was discovered that some of *Charles W. Morgan*'s standing rigging was nearly falling apart with age, and the fore and main lower rigging had to be replaced. The manufacture of this standing rigging gives an idea of what is required of a rigger.

Before any major work is done on a Seaport vessel, it is necessary to learn the methods and materials used at the time that vessel was in service. This sometimes means going through old photographs in the Seaport library to determine shapes of mastheads, proportions of spars, arrangement of gear and, if possible, material for standing rigging. (Hemp was commonly used before about 1860, and then served iron wire gradually came into use.) Sometimes curatorial department files on individual vessels are helpful. In unusual cases, such as the *Nellie* and *L.A. Dunton*, people who sailed in similar vessels are available and willing to assist with their knowledge. It is impossible, however, to learn all the details of rig from photographs, which aren't usually available anyway, and judgment acquired through sailing fills in some of the gaps.





Putting on a throat seizing on the Morgan. *Photograph by the author.*

Next, the materials must be obtained – not as easy a task as it sounds. Rigging hardware made from lignum vitae, a very dense tropical hardwood, is available in very few places and must be made to order. This includes deadeyes, hearts and bullseyes. Ship's ironwork, such as chain plates and bands for spars, is difficult to find, and fine quality fiber rope is scarce. Top quality manila is rare, and the hemp rope we use must be made specially to our order by a cordage factory in Italy. It's anyone's guess how long these sources will last.

In the *Morgan*'s case, we ordered the heavy deadeyes, the one-inch diameter plow steel wire rope, and the hemp spun yarn, and then measured the existing shrouds and backstays. Had we been rigging a new ship, we would have taken these measurements from the sail plan.

Whenever iron or steel wire is used on shipboard it has to be protected from corrosive rain and salt spray. In the *Morgan*'s day, galvanized wire

Partly completed eye splice for new Charles Morgan *rigging, below. Photograph by the author. Left, seizing off a lanyard on the* Dunton.





wasn't available, so all the shrouds, backstays, headgear and any stays that weren't to have sails set on them were wormed, parceled and served. Once we cut the wire to length, we stretched it out in the rigging loft with tackles at a convenient working height. Then, a preservative was applied – in this case a fish oil-base paint. Lengths of spun yarn or marline worming were laid between the strands and the whole was covered with long strips of canvas parceling wrapped tightly around the wire in spiral fashion. This was tarred, and the wire served – wrapped with tarred spun yarn for its entire length. Serving cannot be put on tightly enough by hand, but a serving mallet, utilizing friction and leverage, can stretch it on at slightly less than the breaking strength of the spun yarn.

The *Morgan*'s shrouds were made up in the usual way: in pairs – that is, one piece of wire going from the side of the ship up around the masthead and back down to the same side. An eye is formed at the masthead by mak-

ing a strong hemp seizing binding the two parts of the shroud together. Additional protection from chafe is given to the eye in the form of another heavy canvas parceling, bound with marline hitching. In some cases, elk hide is sewn over the entire eye to act as chafing gear.

The lower, deadeye ends of the shrouds are usually not completed in the rigging loft. These are spliced once the rigging is put on the mast and the eyes seated firmly at the masthead. A staging is erected on deck with a rigging screw (combination clamp and vise, used in splicing) mounted on top. In this way, a rigger can make the lower ends and deadeyes line up in a neat row.

After worming, parceling and serving the splices, the final step is to make the hemp lanyards, reeve them off, and set the shrouds and stays up tight, using tackles.

These are some of the jobs required of riggers at the Seaport, and the Seaport is one of very few places where this kind of work is still done. How, if the arts of rigging are almost gone, can we continue to practice the trade of a rigger and make all the necessary gear for a sailing ship?

The only answer is that we cannot preserve the vessels without preserving the associated trades. A formal apprenticeship program for rigging, as well as the other marine trades, would be the best means of learning, if we could find and hire people capable of teaching. In the meantime, since experienced riggers aren't available, we have to settle for people with some experience in sail who are willing to learn what they can on the job.

How, then, might a person learn this trade in an age of nuclear powered ships and giant supertankers? Rigger Chris Wick explains that it often begins with repairs and "jury rigs" made at sea. "I think anyone who has done any extensive sailing has seen something break. Here's where the interest changes from just going out and sailing to dealing with what holds the sails to the spars – to what keeps the forces of a sailing vessel in check. In the trans-Atlantic race in 1966 we lost a mizzen mast entirely. We sawed off the heel of the spar and started to rig a new mizzen from the pieces we had left. That was my first rigging job." Other examples aren't necessarily the results of accidents, but age and use gradually take their toll on equipment, and it is the sailor who must make and repair gear.

This provides a basic knowledge for any young rigger at the Seaport, but the experience we have generally provides us with only the barest essentials. Written works have very limited value, as very little has been written about rigging of any kind. The Seaport library has fewer than a dozen technical manuals and most of these, for various reasons, don't apply to our ships. Some are too old, some too general, and some presuppose a familiarity with square-riggers that few people have. Darcy Lever's *Young Officer's Sheet*

Anchor, first published in 1808 has been helpful, but much of it is devoted to the gear of warships and much of it predates our vessels or deals with different rigs. Harold Underhill's *Masting and Rigging*, still in print, is excellent for its drawings and descriptions of gear, but often assumes a working knowledge of this gear on the part of the reader. The library is important in our restoration work, but its main value is in its photographs and written descriptions of particular vessels.

Since, for most of us, our experience at sea is greatly limited, we must often seek the advice of men who have broad backgrounds at sea. At the Seaport we're fortunate to have Captain Carl (Charlie) Andersen, ex-sailor in square-riggers and schooners, and ex-boss rigger who, now retired, works as an interpreter in the sail loft. His knowledge of sailing ships and boats has been extremely valuable to us. Although Henry Jarvis is a shipwright here, he has spent considerable time in working vessels, and he, too, is a willing and good source of information.

Rigging in the presence of such men, in effect an informal apprenticeship, is the best way we now have to continue the trade, but it is also where we are most vulnerable. When Adolph Dobbertin, for many years a sailmaker, died a year ago, his skills and artistry died with him. A sailmaker had to know virtually as much about rigging as the rigger himself, so another rare source was lost.

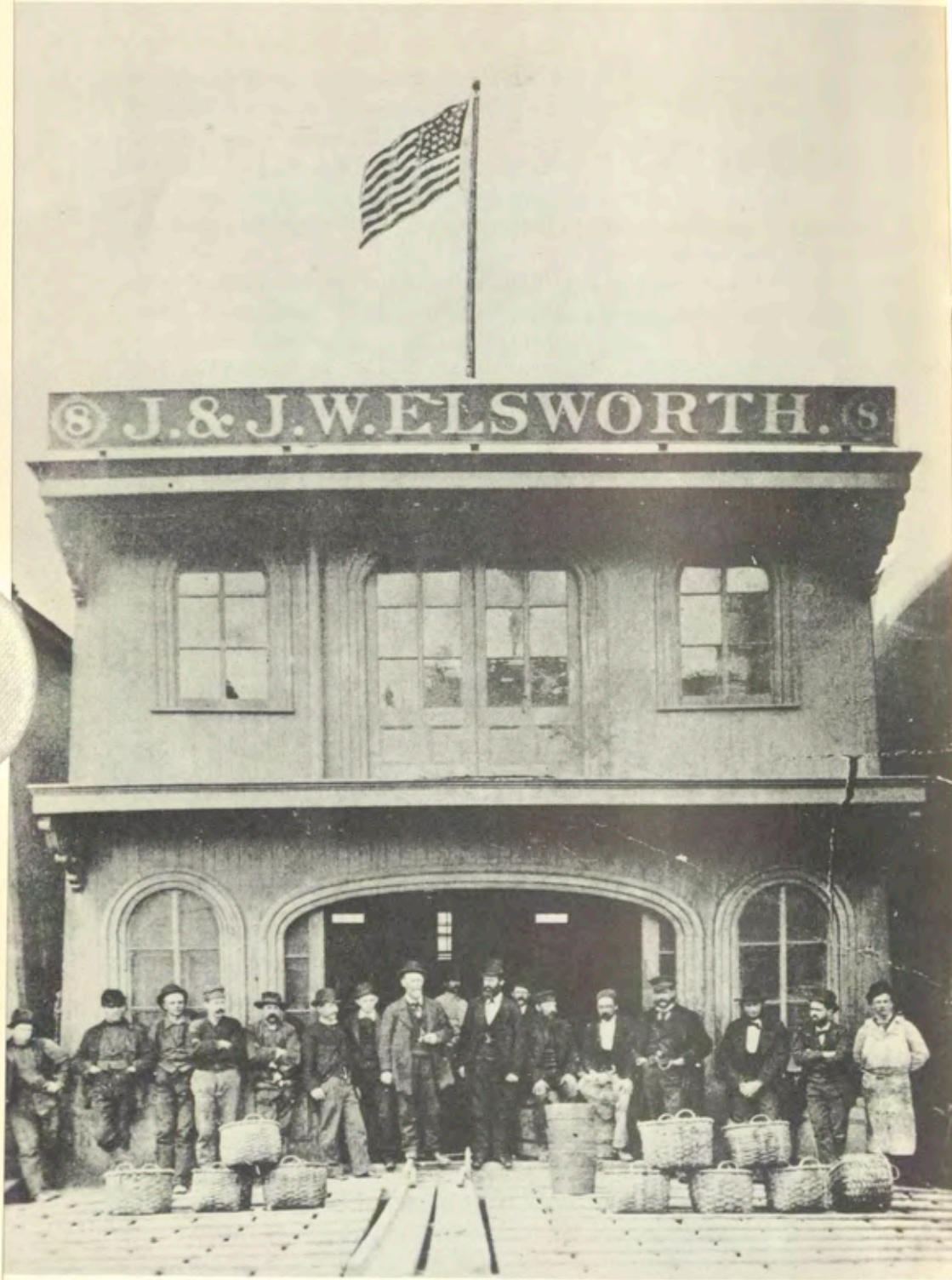
The twilight of sail has passed, but there are still a few men who can be of immense help to the Seaport by teaching what they know of trades now rendered obsolete. We must devote our energies toward learning, recording and preserving the crafts of shipbuilding and rigging, for unless we do, we can't hope to keep our vessels alive.

Looking for a Christmas present that serves two worthwhile purposes?

A gift membership in The Marine Historical Association not only brings year-round benefits to the recipient but also enables us to move ahead with priority projects and program development in ship preservation. Annual dues are as follows:

Individual	$15	Participating	$ 50
Resident Family	20	Sustaining	100
Family	25	Associate	250

Flora H. Fairchild, Executive Secretary
Membership



Courtesy Emil Usinger, Sayville, New York.

New York's Oyster Barges

By John M. Kochiss, Research Associate

We all have our own special hang-ups and for some crazy reason I have one on barges – but not the ordinary sand and coal barges one sees most any day on the Sound. My barges are oyster barges. "Now really," you may say, "a barge is a barge no matter how you look at it." Well, that's not so – at least not an oyster barge – for *they* were really unique. They weren't pulled or pushed by tugs like the ordinary barge but they did hold a cargo – a most delightful and succulent cargo – oysters. Scores of these barges made up the old New York floating oyster market, and back a half century ago and more, when people loved oysters almost as we do hot dogs today, these barges, scows or arks as they were called, acted as depots for the millions upon millions of oysters that flowed into New York. From here the local oyster houses, bars, cellars and street peddlers were supplied. Also barreled oysters were sent from the barges to points out west and to Europe as well.

There they were, a long row of scows – surely the product of a toy maker's dream of so many Noah's arks, bobbing about with the tide and waves yet secured by hawsers and barge-wide gangplanks to the water wall of lower Manhattan's waterfront streets. There was something fascinating about their pink or yellow or green two-storied houses with inward sloping sides that sailors term "tumble home." Especially attractive were the balconies and overhanging roofs on the ends braced by ornamented curved supports such as those on the old lifesaving stations. And above those crowned roofs stood big, wide signs displaying the richly painted names of the oyster company each barge represented. Even the names ring out to us today with a certain haunting charm: Houseman, Fraser, J. & J.W. Elsworth, Van Name Bros., Silsbey and Still. Affixed to the name board was a number – just as any house number on any respectable street. Only here there was no order – number eight might be neighbor to number fifteen. It mattered little though on that single row of floating houses.

High over each barge flew an American flag and on the cold, gray days of winter they played tag with the ribbons of white smoke pouring forth from the narrow chimneys below. On festive days and at the beginning of the oyster season in September every barge was aflutter with gay buntings and pennants of every description.

Inside on the top floor the Housemans and Elsworths and the others carried on their bookkeeping in small but sometimes fancy offices. The rest of the floor was a storeroom full of cedar oyster tubs smelling (when clean) like hope chests, and oak lathe bushel baskets and barrels and other quaint objects of the now almost forgotten oysterman's trade. Below this on the main floor – curved like a ship's deck – sat a row of burly men on three-legged stools on either side of the barge opening oysters piled in front of them. And down about six feet under them in the hold lay more oysters living in salt sea water ready for future shucking or barreling.

Outside, on the gangplanks that joined the floating world to the solid one, carefully trod the oyster retailers and delivery men loading their horse-drawn carts and wagons. At the rear on the riverside a porcupine maze of masts thrust above the roofs and flags of the floating city.

At high tide, when the barges rose to street level, any passerby could grab a look through the wide sliding doors and over the shuckers' heads clear to the rear to the oyster sloops unloading their newly arrived cargoes. Here, as anywhere else near that marvelous community, motion and life prevailed. Like southerners unloading cotton from river steamers, husky men calling themselves "carriers" unloaded the sloops. With bushel baskets heavy on their shoulders and every oyster counted, they made their path from sloop to scow and back over narrow, swaying, sagging planks as sure-footed as tightrope walkers.

On the sloops, skippers and crews filled the baskets, joked or rested as the bargemen toiled. Only at nightfall did the scurrying and hustle cease. And then the lanterns glowed and gossipy, muffled voices flowed from the idling sloops far into the night, almost till sunrise. At daybreak the empty sloops were off to the oyster beds for another fresh load and the army of bargemen returned from rest ashore for another go at it.

But those were days long past and most likely you have never even heard of the arks unless you are acquainted with the *Tenth Census of the United States* (1881) and its classic oyster report by Ernest Ingersoll, or *The Fishing Gazette* and the *Oysterman* of those days. It's a real mystery to me why they were, and still are, so ignored. I suppose tea from China promised more romance than oysters from Blue Point. I guess, too, a clipper ship's spars rose far higher than a barge's flagstaff. Yet, in their day they were considered rather "picturesque" by the ordinary folk – the same who probably enjoyed the sights and smells of the old Fulton Fish Market or the West Side Washington Market – now, like the barges, long removed from the New York scene.

Fortunately, however, the life story of the barges is not completely lost



Early photograph from the Oysterman and Fisherman, *September 1912.*

to us. It appears that their roots reach back to the days of the Dutch in the 1600s when oysters grew wild and splendid off Staten Island, Bedloes Island and even in the Harlem River. Indians in their canoes and the burghers in oyster-laden sloops traded at the Strand, an enclosure near the market place. Today that old place lies fathoms below Broad Street, where everything else but oysters is sold.

In those bygone days oysters were pickled in small casks and fried, then preserved in glass jars and earthenware. The tasty morsels were loaded aboard grand big Colonial sloops and sent to the Barbados and other exotic, far-away islands of the West Indies. Up until the Revolutionary War, oysters were a staple food, especially with the poor, and were still traded at the Strand. As time went on the dealers bought oysters directly from the boats selling here as well as at other city wharves. Trade increased and the boats in their constant trips to the beds and back could not meet the daily demand so middlemen emerged and so did an oyster depot and market place. They first gathered at Coenties Slip sometime in the 1840s or 1850s, then split – some going to Catherine Slip on the East River and the others to the "Vlie" or "Bear" near the Washington Market on the west side.

At first permanently docked sloops acted as lay-boats or storage depots for oysters. In time they did not prove large enough for the burgeoning business nor did they provide sufficient shelter for oysters or man. "So the half of a 'lemon squeezer' or a Morris and Essex canal boat was procured, and a rude shelter of boards, with a roof erected upon it, worked very well, until as business increased, large scow-shaped boats were built, with a hold of from four to six feet in depth for the purpose of stowing oysters."* The first oyster arks were one-storied affairs some thirty feet long by twelve feet wide. Later they evolved into the two-storied kind about seventy-five feet long and twenty-four feet wide.

From the very beginning the oyster barges were shunted from place to place in a constant effort to make room for the more prestigious ocean steamers then blossoming into the maritime world. They were located at one time or another on the Vesey Street pier, Spring Street, West Street, Christopher Street and West Tenth Street, where they remained the longest – from 1866-1891. Then they moved to Bloomfield Street and in 1912 ended up at Pike Street, near the Manhattan Bridge. Through the years as a barge became old and useless it would leave, until the last one, belonging to Geo. M. Still, Inc., faded into oblivion in the early 1940s. Still, by the way, is in business today – ashore, however.

Now, I never saw an oyster ark – in New York, that is. But in one of my wanderings through Fair Haven (New Haven), that ancient center of Connecticut's oyster industry, to my utter amazement I spotted one ashore on the edge of the Quinnipiac River. There she was and still is, until urban renewal claims her, almost intact! This time she serves beer, ale and whiskey and perhaps a beef sandwich, for she is a waterfront bar. High over her arched roof where the flag pole once stood rises a T.V. antenna. But a long signboard – Old Barge Restaurant – still decorates her front. Asbestos sheathing covers her and the scow bottom has been filled in and is not visible. She is solidly constructed but you must enter to see what she really looked like. Apparently little has been altered inside, but you must look beyond the shovels and rakes and other collections of an attic and cellar that clutter the first floor. Upstairs in the bar the beautiful beaded beams and studs can still be seen and admired. She belonged to either Alexander Fraser or I. E. Mersereau and was towed to New Haven in 1921, the year both firms went out of business.

Next time you drive along the lower East Side Highway in New York City get off, if you have time, and sit on a pierhead in the shadow of the Manhattan or Brooklyn Bridge. Allow the river and even the oily debris

*_The Fishing Gazette_, January 5, 1893.



Photograph by the author

and whistling tugs, the pungent fish-filled air and mewing gulls to mesmerize you back to the busy days of long ago. Hear that clamor, that shoveling of oysters, the crack, crack of the oyster openers, the creaking cart wheels? Ah well, if you can – then you will feel as I do about those oyster barges.

Editor's Note: *This article is an offshoot of the author's research on his forthcoming book "Oystering from New York to Boston," to be published by the MHA in 1972. The illustrations are also from the book.*

The Seaport Family

The operation of Mystic Seaport and the safeguarding of our ships, buildings, collections and grounds are only as effective as the expertise and TLC administered by the staff. It is this company of 254 permanent members who hold in trust the fortunes of this museum and who watch over our destiny day and night 365 days a year.

It is thus with affectionate gratitude that I dedicate these two pages to our staff and present about half of its members to you – the remaining are absent "minding the store."

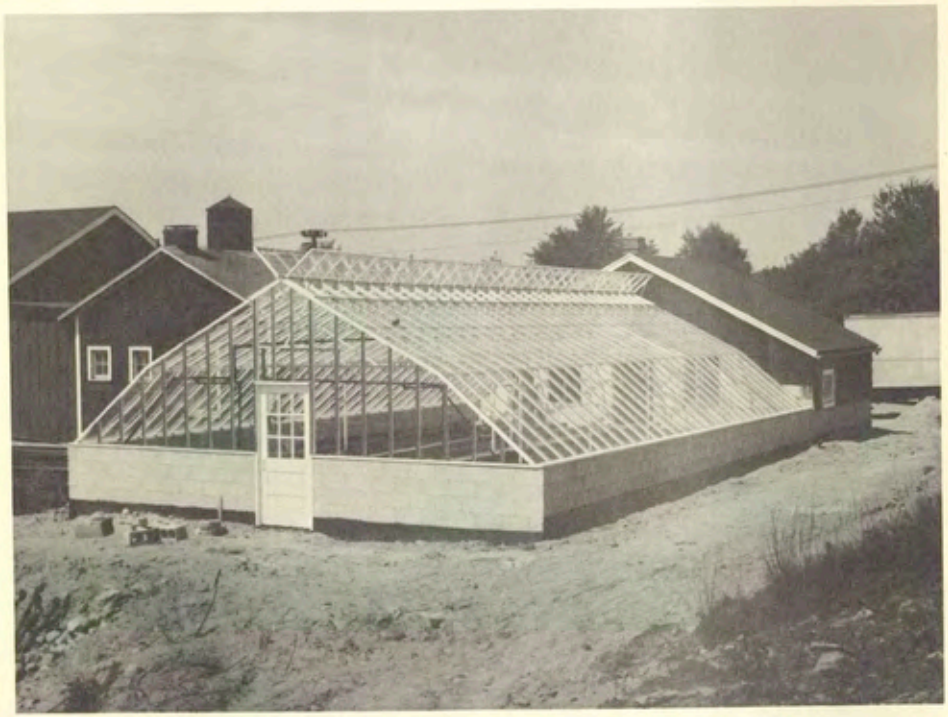
It is a goodly company in which to entrust our future.

Waldo Johnston



Photograph: Russell A. Fowler

ACQUISITIONS



More scope for Lou Pellegrino's gardening activities: this greenhouse from the former property of Horace Lamb, well-known nurseryman of Connecticut and longtime friend of the Seaport, has been given to us by Mr. and Mrs. Harold Greene. It was moved to the Seaport grounds and installed in its new home through the generosity of Mrs. Clifford D. Mallory, Sr. Photograph: Russell A. Fowler.

The G. W. Blunt White Library has received an important gift of an eighty-volume first edition collector's set of Captain Frederic Marryat's works, handsomely bound in green leather with spines hand-tooled in gold lettering. These volumes, the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Burt Eddy Taylor, Jr., of Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan, were published in London between 1829 and 1849.



Brand new Beetle Cat (shown here with Leo Telesmanick, foreman of Beetle Cat production at Concordia Company, South Dartmouth, Massachusetts) for the Seaport's collection of historic small craft. This 12′ catboat, presented to the museum by Concordia, is probably the only boat still built in the traditional way and still in quantity production in this country. Photograph: Claire L. White.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE WAR WITH CAPE HORN by Alan Villiers. *Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1971.* $10.

The war documented by Alan Villiers in this recent work is the age-old battle between men, ships and the sea. It began in the days of Drake and Magellan and continued as long as sailing ships struggled to get from one great ocean to another around the dreaded promontory marking the southern extremity of South America. In the year 1905 over 4 percent of all British sailing ships were lost at sea, most of them off Cape Horn, and if the ships survived, many of the officers and crews did not. In the ten-year period between 1900 and 1910 over 10,000 seamen died in British ships, a large proportion on a Cape Horn passage.

In recent years, a large cache of logbooks and other material came to light in a government storage repository in England and hearing of it, Alan Villiers undertook to evaluate it. He found crew lists and logbooks for the years between 1905 and 1909 and while these constituted only a small lot of material in what was to be the last two or three decades of sailing ship operation, it furnished a grim but fascinating detailed report of losses of men and ships.

Among the ships were those who had taken their way around the Horn at the cost of sails, spars and rigging, bent plates and gutted cabins, losing men overboard from aloft or having them washed out over the bulwarks to disappear in the bitterly cold black and white maelstrom of a Cape Horn sea. On a few rare occasions, ships rolled their spars out in a Cape Horn calm or drifted ashore helplessly only to break up and sink as their plates were torn open by the jagged ledges which line the shore in that part of country. In one instance, a ship actually rolled over and capsized, leaving her master as the only survivor – picked off the keel by a passing ship several days later. The vessel was in ballast and the air trapped in the hull kept the derelict afloat, but even so, only the master survived the ordeal.

Other ships were the victims of ice which probably accounted for many which had to be reported as "missing." Crews died from cold and exposure down in the high latitudes, sometimes from near starvation and scurvy and from a wide variety of other causes. A few were killed in mutinies, although a mutiny in those later years was often no more than a protest against poor food and intolerable living conditions. Many died of old age and illnesses far beyond the power of the master to diagnose. Possessing only the most rudimentary medical knowledge and working from a medical book for the use of shipmasters and officers, the average captain was far from qualified to handle serious illnesses or accidents. If his patients survived, it was only because of their incredible toughness and endurance.

One would have thought that all material on Cape Horn had been exhausted, but in this book Alan Villiers has again contributed meaningfully to the history of men, ships and the sea. To anyone interested in the subject, it is a difficult book to lay down.

JOHN F. LEAVITT
Associate Curator

SUN UNDER THE SEA by Jacques Piccard. *Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1971.* $12.50.

Sun Under the Sea is a rather lengthy and detailed book which, in the main, describes the development, construction and operation of the mesoscaphs *Ben Franklin* and *Auguste Piccard*. Dr. Jacques Piccard, the son of Dr. Auguste Piccard – both well-known physicists and pioneers in inner space – is one of the most experienced individuals in the world in the area of deep submergence, and is one of only two men holding the record for a seven-mile dive in Marianas Trench in the Pacific Ocean. This famous dive was made in the bathyscaph *Trieste* in 1960.

A mesoscaph is a small, self-propelled, manned submersible designed for intermediate depths as opposed to a bathyscaph – which is designed for very great depths. A bathyscaph is usually operated with a slight negative buoyancy on or very near the bottom. A mesoscaph, while capable of operating on or near a shallow bottom, is designed for operation at depths of a few hundred meters in a condition of exact neutral buoyancy.

The book is in three major sections. The first, consisting of ten chapters, briefly details history of the first mesoscaph *Auguste Piccard* from its conception through its operation in Lake Geneva during and immediately following the Swiss Exposition in 1964. During this period it carried over 33,000 passengers to the bottom of the lake. The exposition was a disappointment to Piccard, for while the operation of the mesoscaph was highly satisfactory, the politics and the management associated with it excluded him from the organization and the exposition. This experience, and perhaps others, may well be the basis for a thin thread of "technician versus organization" which runs throughout the book.

Parts two and three – fifty-four chapters in all – describe the *Ben Franklin* from its inception through its historic month-long drift in the Gulf Stream in July and August 1969. The *Ben Franklin* was built in Switzerland for Grumman Aerospace Corporation and is operated by them from Palm Beach, Florida; it was designed for scientific research with the drift mission specifically in mind.

It is difficult to write an interesting and entertaining book based on basic scientific research, particularly research in the ocean. While this area is as important as research in space it has not yet seemed to capture wide lasting attention. The ocean is a cruel and frustrating place to work, and while it is potentially very exciting, excitement is usually a brief and infrequent event.

Piccard's treatment of the thirty days while *Ben Franklin* drifts north in the Gulf Stream is excellent, written in brief chapters, and providing the reader many convenient places to lay down the book without interrupting the story. He describes the attack on *Ben Franklin* by a swordfish who got away before the crew could get a picture. A swordfish who attacked the deep research submersible *Alvin* was not so fortunate – he caught his sword and was captured. During the thirty-day drift northward in the Gulf Stream the mesoscaph was ejected from the stream only once about ten days into the trip. While surfacing to regain a position in the center of the Gulf Stream the crew was treated to views of barracuda and several kinds of sharks through their port holes. And while surfaced, under tow by her surface escort ship, *Privateer*, the *Ben Franklin* did not open the hatch in order to preserve the integrity of its long-term scientific experiments. Once back in the center of the Gulf Stream it submerged again for the remainder of the mission. The latter portion of the drift

involved an extended visit by a school of tuna, the threat of a hurricane, and a brief passing visit by the research vessel *Atlantis II* from Woods Hole. On completion of the mission the crew of the mesoscaph was returned to port aboard the Coast Guard cutter *Cook Inlet*, while the *Ben Franklin* was towed to Long Island by the *Privateer*, with the traditional welcome to New York City marking the official end of the Gulf Stream Mission. The *Ben Franklin* is currently undergoing an extended overhaul awaiting a new research assignment.

The technical aspects of the mesoscaph and the scientific experiments are well treated in non-scientific language. For the scientist or engineer a brief but more detailed discussion of the experiments is contained in an appendix of some forty pages. These include studies relating to the characteristics of the mesoscaph itself, to survival in a confined space, oceanographic studies, and additional studies conducted for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

CDR. ARTHUR H. GILMORE, U.S.N.

Editor's Note: *Commander Gilmore has a wide acquaintance with the Deep Submergence Community. As a member of the staff of Commander Submarine Development Group Two, he participated in the search operations for the U.S.S.* Thresher *in 1963, making two dives in the bathyscaph R/V* Trieste. *He served a year as the Deep Submergence Program Coordinator in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations in Washington. He also took part, as a member of the staff of Commander Task Force Sixty-Five, in the successful location and recovery of the unarmed nuclear weapon off the coast of Spain in 1966, an operation involving the deep submersibles* Alvin *and* Aluminaut.

IN THE VILLAGE by Anthony Bailey. *Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1971.* $5.95.

It has become increasingly apparent in recent years that Stonington Borough (commonly referred to as the "Village" by newcomers) is now one of the most storied towns in New England or elsewhere for that matter, appearing in several books along with assorted articles, histories and poems in magazines and newspapers. The latest to appear is *In the Village*, a compendium of local folklore and happenings and arguments favoring village life by Anthony Bailey, an English-born, Borough resident.

Bailey has managed to weave a delightful and accurate (with minor exceptions here and there) and down-to-earth account of goings-on among Borough inhabitants, written and described not from afar but from the very center of things – the most densely populated part of Town where everyone knows what everyone else is doing. He is a keen observer and he has listened well. What is more, he has a genuine feel of the place.

This is the story of life in the Borough from the inside out, more from the native's point of view than from the newcomer's (the latter being roughly defined by the former as anyone who hasn't always lived there). Unfortunately, in the telling Bailey inadvertently and unexpectedly stepped on several toes, but this is inevitable wherever live characters appear in a book, their names real or fictional, and Bailey uses both. Those about whom complimentary and flattering remarks are made rush for extra copies, while those who fare less well (either actually or imagined) sulk and sometimes threaten suit. And so it was among certain Borough folk whose names appeared in *In the Village*. Some took it calmly. Others thought Bailey had clearly overstepped the bounds of privacy and decency. Still

others vowed never to speak to the bastard again.

"What right has he to bring up an old scandal?" angrily shouted one native son referring to the account of a local man who died while spitefully setting fire to a fellow townsman's fishing dragger. "Absolutely uncalled for" irritatedly remarked a summer newcomer referring to Bailey's description of his church. "Look at me," slyly remarked the man described as egg-shaped. "I'm egg-shaped," and indeed he was.

Anthony Bailey has discovered what Borough residents have known all along – that village life agrees. Fortunately for them the place can never turn urban because of geographical limitations, so they need not fear an influx of cityites seeking the perfect existence. Nevertheless, there are those who have newly arrived, who have sneaked under the wire into the Wadawanuck Club, who yell "keep them out." "Get it zoned!" cry others who have finished blocking other's views with storied edifices "before someone blocks ours."

Unlike many old New England towns that knew but one era and whose houses as a result are as alike as peas in a pod, Stonington knew several, and the variety of architecture identifies them like artifacts dug from some ancient site where one ruin lies upon another. This is the basis of the Borough's charm, and although Bailey never actually says so in so many words, one feels he senses it.

Borough history runs deep and is rich in lore – much of it connected with the sea, for from its harbor sailed sealers and whalers, clipper ships and coasting schooners (many of them built along its shores and in neighboring Mystic). Generations of people (probably not at all unlike those Bailey describes in the book) have walked its streets and lived in its houses, have made their marks in the world, have carried on their business, have suffered and been joyful. There is far more to the place than meets the eye of the newcomer, more to it than just a spot on the sea with cool breezes and no beaches to attract the undesirable, more than picturesque streets and stately mansions, more than beautiful people. Bailey appears well aware of all this, and *In the Village* captures much of the Borough's atmosphere and charm. The book of course has great appeal to Boroughites. As an insight into village life in America today it should prove no less interesting to those in the outside world.

HENRY R. PALMER, JR.

Editor's Note: *Henry R. Palmer, Jr. is ninth in a direct series of generations of Stonington-born Palmers and has lived in the Borough most of his life.*

SOUTH STREET: A MARITIME HISTORY OF NEW YORK by Richard C. McKay. *7C's Press, Inc., Riverside, Connecticut, 1969.* $9.95.

Many books have been influenced by the times in which they were written – this one to a greater degree than most. Originally published in 1934 and consequently written during the era between the two World Wars when the American Merchant Marine was at one of its lowest points, it was logical for author McKay to look back upon the "good old days" and glorify the leading figures of that era.

Three classes of men evolve as heroes for McKay. First were the New York merchants who owned the ships and were responsible for the importation of vast quantities of both luxuries and necessities from every corner of the globe. They also saw to the distribution of any excesses

of the fruits of the labor of their fellow countrymen. Second were the shipbuilders, of equal status with the owners, who built the vessels that made the trading possible. Third were the high-minded, righteous and upright shipmasters who commanded the multitude of vessels which carried all these commodities. They accomplished this objective in spite of the obstacles posed by drunken, trouble-making crewmen, whom many considered to be the scum of the earth. If one reads very many journals of these seamen, he quickly learns that McKay's view of the maritime history of New York is rather badly distorted.

The original edition of *South Street* was divided into nine chapters or parts, chronologically divided as follows: 1783-1789, 1789-1799, 1800-1812, 1812-1815, 1815-1829, 1830-1840, 1840-1850, 1850-1860 and 1861-1914. This new edition has a tenth part comprised of a photographic record of developments at the South Street Seaport Museum during 1967-1969. It also has forty-seven illustrations not found in the original. Although McKay established time periods for each chapter, he seemingly paid scant attention to them in this writing.

The reader is constantly shifted back and forth in time as new subjects or mercantile firms are introduced. In almost any given chapter, a firm name may be brought up and have its entire history, from 1790 to 1850, capsulized. This is likely to be followed by a similar account of another house. Such jumping around causes considerable confusion.

In a preface to this new edition, the president of South Street Seaport readily admits that McKay literally lifted large segments of this book from the works of others. He excuses the author for his plagiarism, which is being considerably kinder than the publisher of the first edition was. When Dr. Robert G. Albion pointed out what McKay had done, that publisher withdrew the book.

Of the three books reprinted by 7 C's Press, Inc., *South Street* is the best in quality of reproduction. This is unfortunate in view of the fact that it probably did not deserve to be brought back into print. A much better history of the Port of New York by Dr. Albion has recently been reprinted.

CHARLES R. SCHULTZ

Mystic Pioneer, November 10, 1860

The bark *Romulus*, formerly of Mystic, but recently sold to parties in Cold Spring, has filled for sea in an unusual manner. Her lower hold was filled with casks of water. She was also visited by night by steam tugs from New York, which delivered articles and passengers on board. On Wednesday night of last week, she hauled into the Sound, when a steam tug took her in tow, and she proceeded to sea. From the suspicious manner in which the cargo was taken on board, and other circumstances, it is supposed that the vessel is intended for the slave trade.



The Seaport's Brilliant, *left, crewed by Captain "Biff" Bowker and staff members, competing in the Piper's Cup race off Newport. Shown here with* Golden Eagle, Brilliant *won second place. Photograph: Ernest A. Myette.* Front Cover: Pen and ink drawing of Christmas at sea by *Charles Rosner, 1927.* Back Cover: *An unusual New Year's greeting in this scrimshaw bird etched on a cross section of elephant tusk by a seaman on a ship in the African trade of the 1870s. Both from the museum's collection.*



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