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# The LOG of Mystic Seaport



SUMMER 1974

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Summer Girl *on the Mystic River, with the familiar bridge in the background*

# STEAMBOATS IN SUMMER LAND

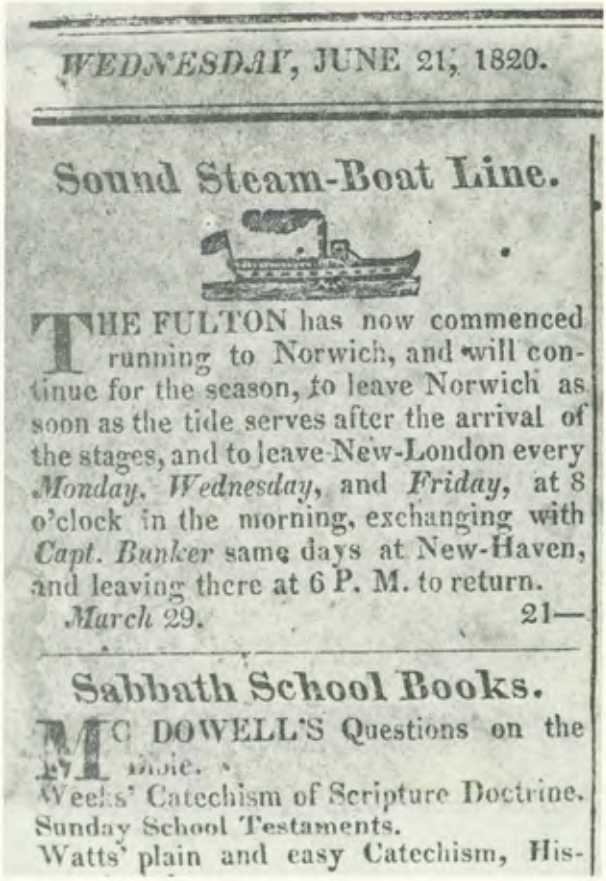
BY WILLIAM H. EWEN

When the little steamboat *Sabino* commenced her service on the Mystic River last May, the area's past became a living reality.

Few visitors to Mystic Seaport today have any concept of the role that steamboats played in the life of America during its "growing up" era, nor do the younger natives of the Connecticut-Rhode Island shore know of the great local steamboat commerce of the past.

*Sabino* is the sole survivor of hundreds of steamboats, big and small, which served Long Island Sound and New England during the nineteenth century. As long as she runs, *Sabino* will make it possible for Seaport visitors and residents to enjoy the sensations of a mode of transportation which meant so much to our forebears.

The first steamboats to venture out into the wide waters of the



*WEDNESDAY*, JUNE 21, 1820.

**Sound Steam-Boat Line.**

THE FULTON has now commenced running to Norwich, and will continue for the season, to leave Norwich as soon as the tide serves after the arrival of the stages, and to leave New-London every *Monday*, *Wednesday*, and *Friday*, at 8 o'clock in the morning, exchanging with *Capt. Bunker* same days at New-Haven, and leaving there at 6 P. M. to return.

*March* 29. 21—

**Sabbath School Books.**

MC DOWELL'S Questions on the Bible.

Weeks' Catechism of Scripture Doctrine.

Sunday School Testaments.

Watts' plain and easy Catechism, His-

Sound came from New York, and initially they did not go beyond Bridgeport and New Haven. The arrival of the first large steamboat in the New London area occurred in October of 1816, when the *Connecticut* of the Fulton-Livingston Line ventured all the way up the Thames to Norwich. Regular service commenced the next year, when the *Connecticut* was joined by her consort, the *Fulton*.

The State of Connecticut objected strongly to the steamboat monopoly granted to Fulton and Livingston by her neighbor, New York, and for a time, attempts were made to bar the monopoly boats from Connecticut ports. *Connecticut* and *Fulton* changed their route to Providence, but resumed landings at New London after the monopoly was broken by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1824.

New London, Norwich and Stonington were important to the

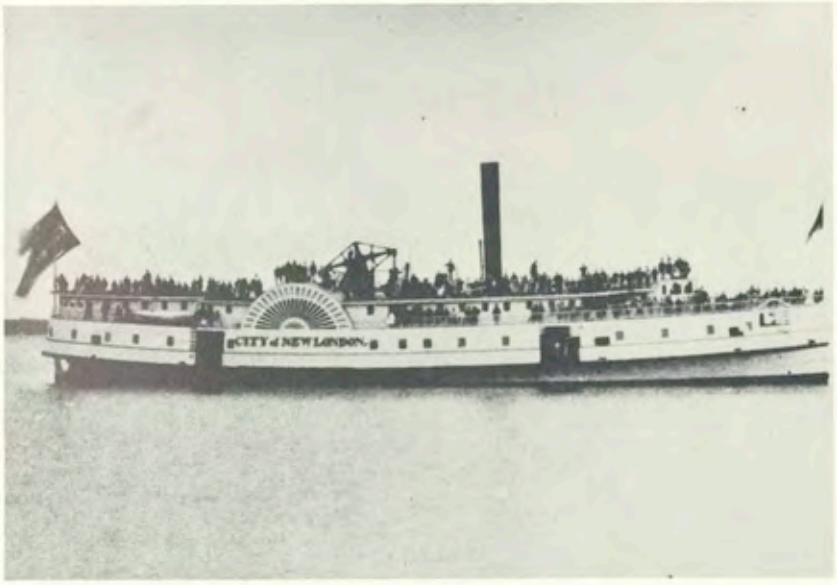


*Norwich, head of steam navigation on the Thames, in the nineties. Left to right are the steamers* City of Lawrence, Ella *and* City of Norwich.

early operators because, in the push to reach Boston, these ports were about as close to the New England metropolis as a steamboat could get without testing the open sea. Few were willing to do that, and so for many years passengers put up with the inconvenience of changing to post coaches and, later, trains to avoid seasickness or a worse fate.

The commerce flourished, and during the mid-nineteenth century, fine big side-wheelers of the Norwich and Stonington Lines rivalled those of the world-renowned Fall River Line. In time, however, the greater convenience of other routes brought an end to the New York service, but not to steamboating in the area. Steamboats prospered in local transportation services, especially in summer, when they carried local residents and vacationers to the islands and beaches.

One of the earliest local vessels was the *John Hancock*, built by Gilbert Brewster of Norwich in 1817. *John Hancock*'s greatest weakness was her boiler which was made of wood. It exploded on a trip from Norwich to New London while the steamer was carrying fifty passengers down the river to meet President James Monroe, who was coming in on the *Fulton* from New York. Had it




City of New London *of the Norwich Line with an overload of excursionists*

not been for the fact that all passengers on the *John Hancock* scrambled out on deck as the *Fulton* approached, many would have been seriously hurt. It was fortunate that her boiler chose that moment to let go. Gilbert Brewster appears to have been the only steamboat owner to have his vessel blow up in front of the President of the United States.

The *John Hancock* was only the forerunner, however, of a large number of local steamboats, many of which were built in the area. Captain W.W. Coit was a noted builder and owner, and a popular vessel named after him, the *W.W. Coit*, was built at the Greenman Shipyard in Mystic. One of his most famous steamboats was the side-wheeler *Norwich*, built in 1836 for service to New York. *Norwich* later became a towboat on the Hudson River and survived until 1923, when she was broken up. At that time she was the oldest steamboat in the world.

None of the local communities had railroad lines in the early days, but communication among them was provided by steamboats. In the early fifties two small side-wheelers called *Tiger Lily* and *Water Lily* were built at Westerly to run between that point,



Ella *paddles out of Watch Hill on a summer's day*

Norwich and New London. Their trips later included stops at Watch Hill, which was just beginning to develop as a seaside resort. Like hundreds of other steamboats, *Tiger Lily* and *Water Lily* were chartered by the government for Civil War service, and after the conflict did not return to their home waters.

Watch Hill became a mecca for local steamboat excursionists after mid-century, and many steamboats over the years served the resort from Norwich, New London, Pawcatuck-Westerly and Stonington. Most of these vessels were owned by local captains who named them after their wives or daughters. There were, for example, *Fanny, Angelina, Florence, Julia, Sadie, Martha, Hildegarde* and *Ella*. Most of these served on the Pawcatuck River out of Westerly, but the last-named vessel was for years the favorite steamer from Norwich to Watch Hill. She had been built by the Mallory Shipyard at Mystic in 1864 and, although intended for local waters, was immediately leased to the War Department as a transport in the Virginia area. Following the War, she ran for a time on the St. John's River in Florida and in Maine before returning home. *Ella* was a handsome side-wheeler, somewhat larger than most of the other craft in local service, and a most popular steamboat for many years. Photos in the nineties show her as a spectator boat when the Yale-Harvard crew races were held in the Thames River.



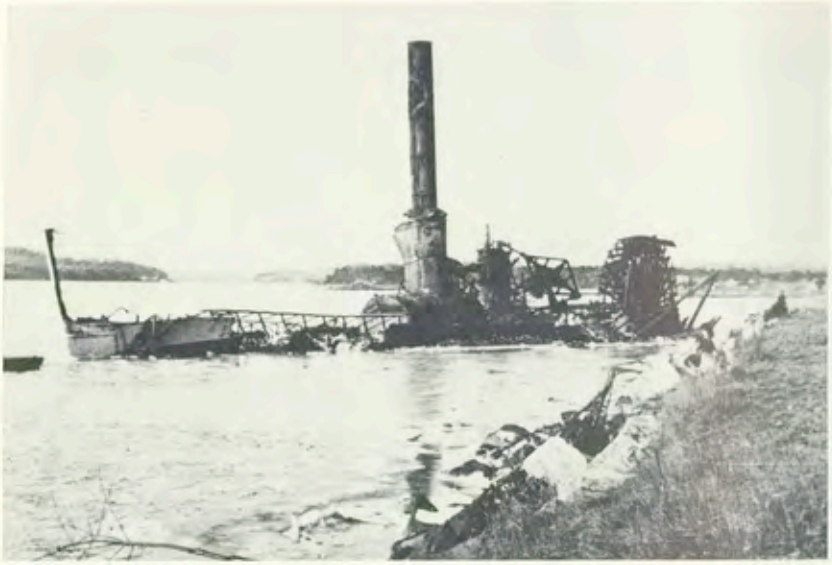
*The Larkin House at Watch Hill was typical of the great wooden summer hotels along the shore and on Block Island*

*Ella* was also big enough to serve on the Block Island run which she did for a time. The Island, of course, was also served by other steamboats from New York, and from Providence, Fall River and Newport. A favorite on the latter route for many years was the side-wheeler *Mount Hope*.

Block Island, at times, appeared like a steamboat convention center. Postcards and photographs of the old landing showed *George W. Danielson*, a propeller built at Mystic in 1880, and the first vessel constructed for service to the Island from New London; *Block Island*, a big paddler built at Noank in 1882 for the route from Norwich, *Mount Hope* (previously mentioned), and *Shinnecock* from New York.

*Ella* finally ended her service when a boiler accident disabled her one afternoon off Ram Island. She was towed to Athens on the Hudson for future service on that river, but was sunk by ice the following year.

One of the largest of the local steamers was the *G.R. Kelsey*. She was a side-wheeler grossing almost 300 tons, built at Mystic in 1878. *G.R. Kelsey* later went south for service in the Plant Steamship Line, and was renamed *Margaret*. The New London *Evening Telegram* of September 20, 1881, under the heading "Laconic Locals" had the following items:



*Wreck of the* City of New London *on the Thames after she had burned to the water's edge November 23, 1871*

> The waning summer is departing with éclat, and tendering a warm reception to the equinox. Ice boxes will soon be relegated to the lumber room, and stoves returned from their summer vacation.
> The steamer *Kelsey* has made her last trip of the season, and is now on the ways at Mystic undergoing repairs.
> The *Ella* is being refitted with a new rudder in place of the one injured in the recent collision.

The same paper, with black-bordered columns, carried the news of President Garfield's death.

The most spectacular steamboat fire in the local area occurred when the *City of New London* burned in the Thames River off Poquetanuck November 23, 1871. Seventeen lives were lost in that disaster, and the steamer was reduced to a twisted mass of machinery in the remains of her hull. Minor accidents such as strandings and collisions in the fog were commonplace throughout the steamboat age.

A source of amazement to anyone looking back into local history is the great amount of steamboat commerce out of Westerly on the Pawcatuck River. Smart little side-wheelers and later, propellers ran throughout the summer carrying thousands of excursionists to the beaches. One of the first of the river vessels of any account was the side-wheeler *Belle*, which began running July



*The landing at Block Island. In the foreground is the propeller* George W. Danielson *out of New London. At the pier head is the side-wheeler* Mount Hope *from Providence and Newport.*

4, 1869. She was an instant success and served for many years on the Watch Hill route with brass bands playing and flags flying.

Steamboats, more than any other transportation medium, have provided true mass transportation. The 400-foot *Washington Irving* of the Hudson River Day Line could carry more than 6,000 passengers in relative comfort at a speed of twenty-three miles per hour. Even the little *Belle* of the Pawcatuck showed her capability on July 5, 1869, when she returned from the beaches with over 1,200 passengers. Considering that her length was 113 feet, and her beam 36 feet, this was an astounding performance. Needless to say, on that trip it was standing room only, with hardly enough room between the bodies for anyone to take a deep breath.

The late Everett Barns, in his delightful paper on Pawcatuck River Steamboats written for the Westerly Historical Society, told many interesting yarns about the local steamboats. One concerns a man who walked up to the door of the *Belle*'s engine room shortly before starting time one afternoon. Observing the steam pressure gauge, he suddenly turned and dashed off the boat, muttering, "Gosh, I didn't know it was as late as that."

Another story tells of a local ventriloquist who often took delight in standing at the engine room door and producing a



Ella, *one of the most popular steamboats ever to run in the Fisher's Island Sound area, was built at the Mallory shipyard in Mystic in 1864. She served until 1903. All photographs from the author's collection.*

regular squeak timed to the motion of the engine. The engineer had a terrible time trying to locate the source of noise, and when he finally did, he had the fireman squirt some oil down the back of the joker's neck.

With the growth of private automobile use after 1900 the local steamboats gradually left the scene, but the part they played in the area's development cannot be disregarded. Last to survive on the beach runs was the 71-foot propeller *Watch Hill*. In 1918 she lost her standing as a steamer by undergoing the ignoble change to gasoline power.

Long Live *Sabino*!

Editor's Note: *William H. Ewen, a past-president of the Steamship Historical Society of America, has one of the largest private collections of steamboat history in existence.*

# THE SALVAGE OF THE *GREAT BRITAIN*

BY RICHARD GOOLD-ADAMS
Chairman, SS *Great Britain* Project

Four years have now passed since the iron hull of Brunel's famous *Great Britain*, the very first oceangoing propeller-driven steamship, was refloated in the Falkland Islands and brought back to England. But already the story has joined the annals of the sea and, among those who know and care, will be retold till the end of time.

The background and the homecoming of the *Great Britain* were described in *The LOG* of Spring 1972. This account will attempt to fill in the outline of what happened during the actual salvage expedition, which lasted from February through June of 1970. In this respect it will be recalled that the saving of the ship had been organized by our British group, calling itself the "ss Great Britain Project." This was formed in May, 1968, received information and sympathy from certain interested Americans and was largely financed – up to £150,000 – by the millionaire philanthropist, Mr. Jack Hayward.

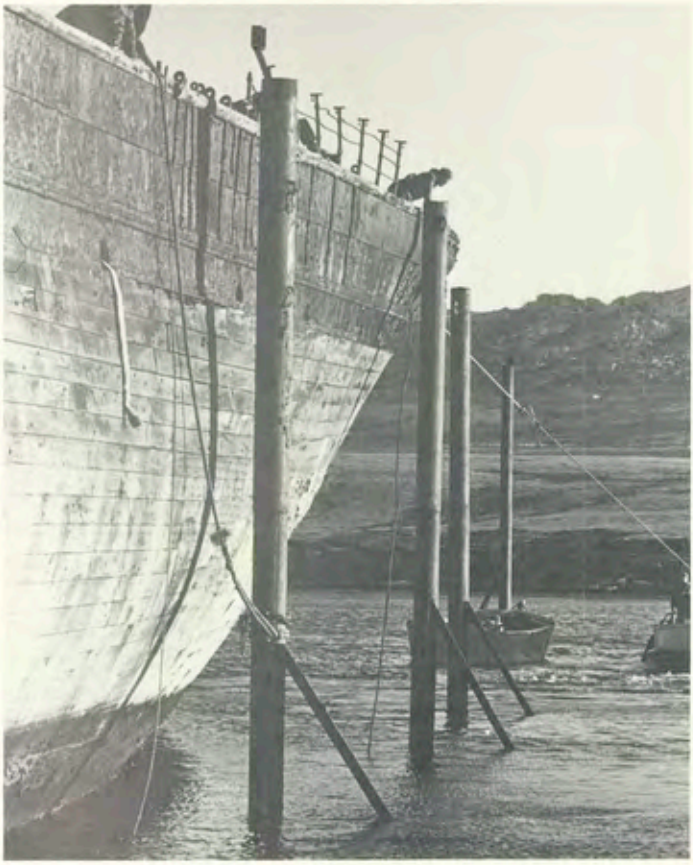
Our original survey had been made personally in November, 1968, by the naval architect, Dr. E.C.B. Corlett, who throughout has been the guiding technical brain behind the whole operation. He identified the main problem as arising from the strain imposed upon the hull of what had originally been a 3000-ton ship, through lying with her fore end on a firm bed of hard sand and



Great Britain *beached in Sparrow Cove, as she was before the salvage began*

small stones, but her stern – particularly on the port or seaward side – suspended over clear water. This was due to scouring by the tide in Sparrow Cove, where she had been deliberately beached in 1937. But it meant that a serious crack had developed at a weakened entry port on the starboard side, and that the hull had become slightly twisted as well as hogged. The problem was made more critical in that the *Great Britain* was constructed not of steel, but of potentially brittle wrought iron, with widely varying degrees of wastage in her 125-year-old plates. The average wastage, calculated with an ultra-sonic thickness tester, was some 40 percent. A Lloyds survey in 1872 had shown that even then, a hundred years earlier, it had been 15- to 20 percent.

The decision to put the *Great Britain* on to a huge pontoon after getting her temporarily afloat, while solving the question of not risking a tow on her own bottom in the open sea, did not of itself do anything to resolve the issue of whether the hull could be straightened without breaking. Dr. Corlett's first plan was thus to straighten her as she lay and to float her afterwards, but he has himself always been confident that the hull would in fact stand up to our operations. And so it has proved.



*The* Great Britain, *afloat, being nosed up between the "dolphins" which had been welded to the deck of the pontoon, submerged under the ship*

We had chartered one of the only three existing suitable pontoons in the world, a submersible German "vessel" of 2667 tons with sixteen airtight chambers and a platform nearly, but not quite, as long as the *Great Britain*'s keel length of 289 feet. This was towed by a 724-ton converted stern trawler, *Varius II*, which also acted as home and workshop for the twenty-one-man Anglo-German salvage party.

The little flotilla, under charter to us, left West Africa on February 4, 1970. It stopped in Montevideo for two weeks to have upright dolphins welded to the deck of the pontoon, to fit a sheerlegs on its bow, to acquire heavy baulks of timber and to ship pumps and salvage equipment sent out from England. After an extremely stormy ten-day voyage it reached Stanley in the Falklands on March 25th, and first dropped anchor three miles

away in Sparrow Cove on March 26th, the Thursday of Easter week. Lord Strathcona had joined the party in Montevideo as our own project representative.

The first proposed method of salvage, however, very soon had to be abandoned. It had depended on making the after engine room bulkhead watertight, repairing several holes in the afterbody shell, including those made for scuttling, and then pumping this stern section out. By lifting and slightly rotating the end of the hull, leverage from this sectional buoyancy was to close the crack, by now about 12" wide at the top, but also some 13" higher on the stern side. Once joined, the crack would be strapped together with steel plates. Unfortunately, it rapidly became clear that the vital bulkhead was not strong enough.

Leslie O'Neil, who was director of operations on the spot, and Horst Kaulen, the pontoon expert, accordingly went ahead with the alternative of trying to float the whole ship in her hogged condition, strap the crack as it was, and then count on her straightening as she settled on the pontoon. Before any of that could be done, however, there were what proved to be twelve hard days of critical preliminary work to be got through.

Depth soundings in Sparrow Cove, taken two years earlier with the help of the Royal Navy's HMS *Endurance*, had shown that the pontoon could be floated end on to the port side of the *Great Britain* and used initially as a work platform. From it, by means of the sheerlegs, the three great masts first had to be lifted out, since there was grave risk of their crashing down on the hull in any sea. The foremast and mainmast weighed nearly 20 tons each, and there was a 4-ton, 106' iron yard still up on the mainmast. The mizzen broke when lifting began, and so the other two were regretfully and exhaustingly cut through with a chain saw just above deck level. Built from four trees 95' long, a diameter of 3'8," and held together by iron bands, they were massive and dangerous objects for the limited facilities available. Full success, however, was achieved.

Meanwhile, divers were extremely busy finding and plugging holes in the ship's plating by means of wooden patches with soft rubber edges, hooked through from inside and then backed by quick-setting concrete. Only when it is remembered that this was all taking place in a basic temperature of 40° F., and swept by frequent stormforce winds at the tail end of summer down near the Antarctic, can the full extent of the achievement be pictured. Much of the work was in fact done at night as conditions were usually calmer then.

On board and inside the ship a mass of effort was required to clear accumulated junk, to set up walkways where the decking was



*The pontoon has just got the stern clear of the water as well as the bow. The technique was to raise the bow first, while leaving the stern of the pontoon resting on the bottom in order to retain lateral stability, until the bow section was fully pumped out and could ensure lateral stability by being completely buoyant. This meant, however, the* Great Britain *being tilted back at quite an angle during the process of floatation of the pontoon.*

rotten, to erect the pumps and, above all, to deal with the crack itself. Fifteen tons of further stores had arrived in Stanley direct from England two days before the expedition, and valuable help with manpower was provided by a detachment of Royal Marines stationed in the Falklands – who came to work on a hovercraft.

It was, however, the famous crack which really occupied the center of the stage. In order to investigate fully, mud was sluiced and dug away underneath it with a portable air compressor. This revealed that, although it became eventually only a hairline crack, the break ran rather further than had been thought to somewhere near the keel. This could not be seen from inside owing to the double bottom. The port side of the ship seemed sound, though the movement of the stern had inevitably flexed and weakened the structure. A gentle rocking could be felt, whenever the tide ran in and out of the holes at the stern, or the waves of a major storm broke over the port quarter.

The method adopted was, first – a traditional one – to block the crack itself with old mattresses, for which a radio appeal was broadcast to the Falkland Islanders and, second, to bolt steel straps across it along the stringer plates at each of the three deck levels. These straps were 30′ long, 3′ wide, and 7/8-inch thick. Drilling the appropriate bolt holes in the old iron girders of the ship proved just as laborious as drilling the modern steel.

With the crack thus held in position, de-watering began on April 5th, and as the pumps gradually lowered the level of the muddy liquid inside the ship any fresh holes which were revealed were

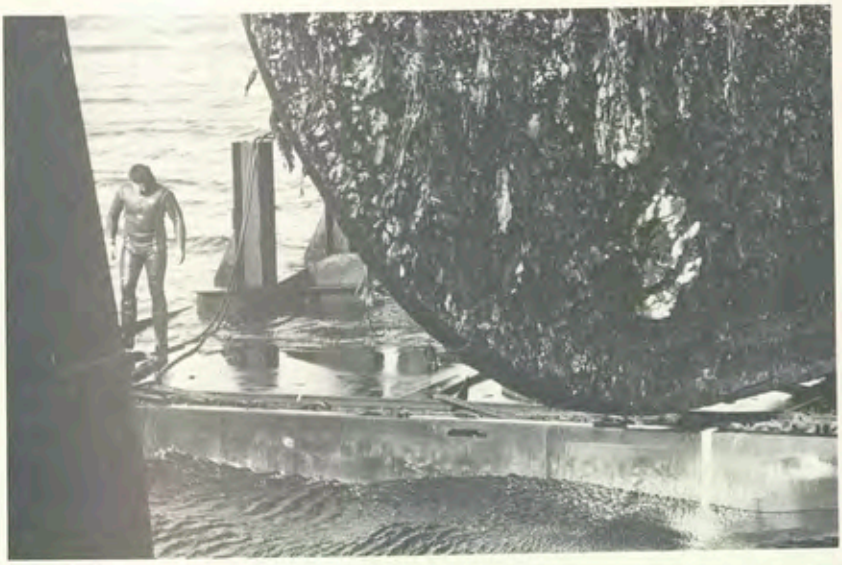


*Cutting the mainmast*

plugged. All through the second night the pumping went on until, unexpectedly and with a quick heave, the *Great Britain* came afloat for the first time with disconcerting suddenness at 5:30 A.M. on April 7th. Vastly successful and exciting though this was, it was disconcerting because inadequate preparations had been made to have mooring lines ready to hold her in the strong dawn wind. And this did in fact rise so rapidly to Force 10 that it was only with the help of two motorboats, which in spite of the early hour had come pelting over from Stanley packed with sightseers, that the danger of the *Great Britain* swinging helplessly out of the Cove was averted. The only safe answer was to let some water back in again, till she was once more held by resting on the beach. And so, incongruously, she remained for the next two-and-one-half days while the storm blew itself out.

On Friday, April 10th, the *Great Britain* was floated again and at the same time the pontoon was submerged in a chosen area some 300 yards away. There then occurred, however, another agonizing hitch. The ship, having been successfully towed to a position with her bow just astern of the sunken pontoon, was slowly being hauled forward when to the general consternation she stuck after only 30'. Nothing would move her further.

It soon became obvious that she would have to be backed off and the pontoon raised and resunk in deeper water. The reason, it came to be realized, was that she was drawing a good deal more water than had been calculated. This was due to the slight hogging,



*The barnacled bow – out of the water at last. The pontoon has not yet been fully pumped out. All photographs courtesy of the ss* Great Britain *Project.*

to the existence of a small but not altogether expected external wood keel, and to the extra weight of mud still in the hold, not to mention an incredible assortment of old metal and other junk, revealed as the water had been pumped out. Instead of a predicted 9'9" at the bow, she was in fact drawing nearly 12' forward and 14'6" aft.

All would still have been well if the weather had not meanwhile seriously worsened again. By the time the pontoon had been brought to the surface, the wind had reached Force 11 on the Beaufort scale and the barometer had dropped to its lowest point for two years. There was nothing for it but to lash their incredible prize to the side of the pontoon and to ride out the storm. And this the gallant old ship fortunately did. During the gale, time was not altogether wasted, since the party managed to free and straighten the rudder which had so far been jammed at 30° to port. This was invaluable for later on in England, since the pontoon was too awkward to go all the way up the River Avon to Bristol, and the *Great Britain* therefore would have to be dismounted in Avonmouth for towing on her own bottom for the last six miles to the drydock in Bristol City Docks.

The final and successful stage of the salvage began late the following day, Saturday, April 11th, when the wind had died down. The pontoon was moved and resunk, and soon after dark

the *Great Britain* was safely manoeuvred over the top. Then, as the tide fell, her keel slowly came to rest within an inch or two of the intended position on the pontoon. Gradually, the weight was taken till, shortly after midnight, everyone was a bit startled by the noise of what sounded like two small explosions on board. It was only two of the bolts shearing off where the steel straps were attached to the stringer plates — and the best news that anyone could have.

For in other places the steel straps were buckling — as had been planned and hoped for — and the crack in the side of the *Great Britain* was closing. The keel straightened fully on the blocks and by the time the pontoon was beginning to be pumped out the next morning, carefully and slowly to start with, the bow end first, they all knew they had won. The *Great Britain* was coming up out of the water, straight and true, all in one glorious piece. As she slowly emerged during April 12th, one of the hardened divers, seeing her beautiful lines for the first time exclaimed: "She looks like a yacht."

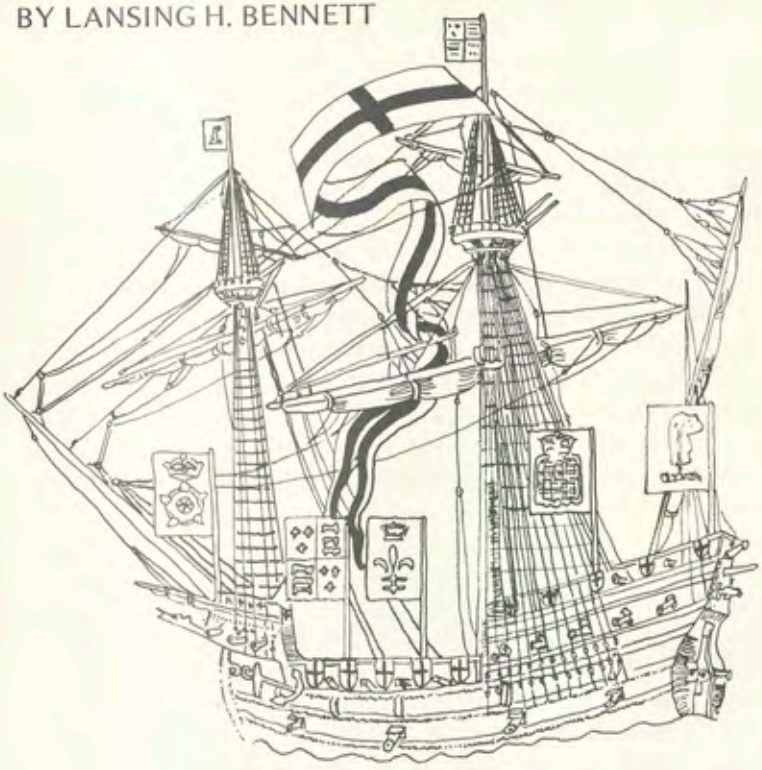
Pumping was completed on Tuesday, April 13th, and the same day they towed the pontoon, with the *Great Britain* riding proudly high on top, out of Sparrow Cove and across to Stanley harbour. It was a journey most people had never expected would take place. As she came in, almost every car in the island was lined up to greet her, and every horn was sounded. By one of the extraordinary coincidences which have accompanied this extraordinary ship through much of her life, the *Great Britain* had risen from the lonely waters of Sparrow Cove thirty-three years to the very day after being scuttled there in 1937.

During two busy weeks in Stanley, ship and pontoon were made ready for the 7500-mile ocean tow. The distorted steel straps were burnt off and then lap-welded into place after being straightened. The remains of the mattresses were also burnt out, and the inside of the crack concreted. Great chains were placed over the ship to anchor her down, big steel wedges were driven under the hull, and more upright dolphins were welded in position.

Finally, on April 24th the flotilla sailed for Montevideo. This first 1000 miles of open sea was by far the roughest they were likely to meet and, although no one could be absolutely certain how ship and pontoon would ride really bad weather, they were fairly lucky with nothing more than Force 8. All went very well. Arriving in Montevideo on May 2nd, after a short rest they sailed for England on May 6th and reached Barry Roads off the Welsh coast on June 22nd. The next day, June 23, 1970, the *Great Britain* entered the port of Avonmouth on her pontoon. Voyage 47, which had begun in 1886, was over at last.

# ON MASTHEAD PENNANTS

BY LANSING H. BENNETT



*A Ship of Henry VIII, circa 1545. From a drawing by Herbert S. Vaughan for W.G. Perrin's* British Flags, *Cambridge University Press, 1922.*

Consider the primal sailor. As soon as he invented a stable craft with a suitable spar he promptly hoisted a decorative banner and started a naval custom. Although the Egyptians appear to have gone about it only modestly, the Carthaginians, with their Phoenician heritage, were "garnishing their ships with flags" in 202 B.C. Regrettably, no one seems to have bothered to describe what vessels carried aloft for the next millenium. The Bayeaux tapestry shows a minimum of trappings on William's ships. Perhaps the Conqueror had other things than old naval customs on his mind at the time. However, from the beginning man has put stars on his banners as symbols of heavenly aspirations, and stripes to represent the rays of the sun.

Shortly after 1066 things began to pick up for the flag and

banner guilds. As the twelfth century rolled in the various Crusades solved the unemployment problem for restless knights. As nearly everyone in those days knew, the way to distinguish a simple knight from his squire, and from a knight banneret, was by the shape of his pennant. The knight carried a long triangular flag called a pennon, while a banneret rode around with a pennon split. These were all wonderful assets in combat. Brave knights were frequently promoted to baron in the field, and to mark this event their pennon was cut square. This, of course, gave great comfort to the yeomen in the ranks, who were unaware that they were witnessing the historic transformation of a pennant into a flag by reason of rank, henceforth a flag officer. It easily follows that these chaps, seldom known for their modesty, hoisted their banners in ships outward bound for the Holy Land. Thus the custom of colors aloft became militarized, and was promptly adopted by the merchants of Florence and Venice, who ran a charter service for crusaders. For awhile these ports were probably the most colorful in the world. But a troop ship is what she is no matter how you decorate her, and masthead pennants maintained their military significance.

The English, always promoting rules and regulations, formalized the whole matter in 1337. Streamers were designed at fourteen to thirty-two "cloths" in length, and three to five "cloths" in width — a cloth was approximately a yard. With this precedent, Henry VIII won the warship-decorating championship of the world. In 1514 he had built the *Henry Grace à Dieu*, known affectionately to all who served in her as *The Great Harry*. Henry managed, among other places, to put a flag on all the mastheads, each round top, the bowsprit, the poop and along the bulwarks, for a total of twenty-five: the world's record for the time. Apparently he was so delighted with the result that he is depicted in a 1520 painting embarking in a ship decorated with multiple flowing pennants. Each pennant is a St. George's cross on a field of white, and reaches from its station to the water. This may have started a fashion trend, for another artist of the time painted the Spanish Armada with flags flying from the mastheads and trailing long red and gold streamers from their yards. Perhaps they had planned to dazzle the English with their flagwork.

The English thought enough about it, however, to spend the next hundred years working on better identification between squadrons at sea through the use of solid-colored pennants. The ship in command was allowed a striped pennant. Unfortunately, in 1652 they ran into the Dutch Admiral Maarten Harpertszoon Van Tromp. This gentleman defeated them rather handily, and to signal his clean sweep he hoisted a broom to his masthead. One

can imagine how this little gesture upset the English. When the next round went to the English, Cromwell's officer ran up either an actual coachwhip, or a long lash-like pennant to represent the whipping. Thus began the custom of hoisting long coachwhip pennants in ships of war.

By the time Samuel Pepys became Secretary of the Admiralty the ensign on a first rate was twenty-six breadths wide and fourteen yards on the fly, with a breadth equalling approximately eleven inches. Pennants were of lesser dimensions, but up to thirty-two yards on the fly. By proclamation in 1661, merchant ships were forbidden to fly a pennant — that right being reserved for men-of-war.

The honor of developing the commission pennant probably belongs to the British Navy also. The coachwhip streamers, with the red cross of St. George, were ordered hoisted at the commissioning. They were flown day and night thereafter, unless a flag officer hoisted his signal in the ship. But the commission pennants served another useful purpose. Probably the gigantic ensigns described above were difficult to maintain, and expensive to replace — British captains of 1731 were directed to "husband their colours" in foul weather and to fly only their commission pennants. These colors have additional merit when one considers the distance from which they can be seen. This was an important consideration when time and identification were the first two factors in clearing for action.

The Continentals adopted the commission pennant, and in 1776 the Congress, much like their stuffy forebearers, declared that no private ship, when in the company of a continental ship of war, would be allowed to "wear a pendant" without leave of the commanding officer thereof. Apparently this didn't scare anybody, for a goodly percentage of the merchantmen depicted in paintings in the Peabody Museum carry long streamers from their topmasts. Even the venerable *Cleopatra's Barge*, America's first yacht, has a long pennant at the masthead. The current commission pennant adopted in 1933 consists of seven stars on a field of blue, red and white on the fly, and is either four or six feet in length. Only ships or craft "in commission" fly this symbol of the U.S. Navy.

Many of the vessels depicted in the paintings mentioned are homeward bound from a foreign port, and the pennants they are flying are termed Homeward Bound Pennants. The exact origin of this streamer is unrecorded, but the custom of celebrating the completion of a tour of duty on a foreign station by hoisting a long streamer from the topmast again goes back to the British Navy, where it was termed a Paying-Off Pennant. Upon arrival

home the crew was "paid off," and the pennant divided among the ship's company. Some authorities claim that the commission pennant was elongated to make this welcomed signal. In any case, some of the "dandified" ships flew pennants a quarter of a mile in length with a balloon attached to float it when it settled in the water.

In the U.S. Navy this "official" unofficial pennant is properly termed a Homeward Bound Pennant. Since the list of articles does not carry this signal, it is up to the signal crew to make it out of bunting acquired during the cruise. But the Navy, not a group to



*U.S.S.* Oregon *flying a homeward-bound pennant on leaving Honolulu for San Francisco in the latter part of 1906, homeward bound after 543 days in Asiatic waters. From* Ships of the U.S. Navy: Christening, Launching and Commissioning, *Navy Department, 1967.*

leave ends loose, has complete specifications for this unofficial device, together with regulations for its display. The Navy publication, *Flags, Pennants, and Customs*, contains the following instructions:

> A ship on duty in foreign waters for a period of 270 days or more may fly this pennant when getting underway for a port in the United States. The pennant is blue on the hoist and red and white on the fly, with a white star in the blue for the first nine months on foreign station, and another star for every six months thereafter. The overall length is one foot for each member of the ship's company who has been on duty overseas in excess of nine months. The length, however, should not exceed the length of the ship. Upon arrival home the pennant is divided among the ship's company with the Captain receiving the portion containing the stars.

It seems regrettable that these colorful sailing traditions have been largely neglected. The custom of breaking streamers and pennants is seldom seen outside of a rare naval parade. Some years

ago, homeward bound from an extensive cruise along the coast of Maine, we flew a long swallowtail from the masthead of a Cal-40 in Christmas Cove. This device prompted a good deal of researching of their *Lloyd*'s by our neighbors, who were properly mystified.

Perhaps these splendid customs will return with little urging. However, a word of caution to those who aspire to these finer touches. Watch out for skeptics. Recently we were testing an eighteen-foot masthead pennant at the mooring, and a former naval person motored by and hailed us with, "Who do you think you are? Magellan?" Perhaps not, but a little more tradition these days wouldn't do any harm.

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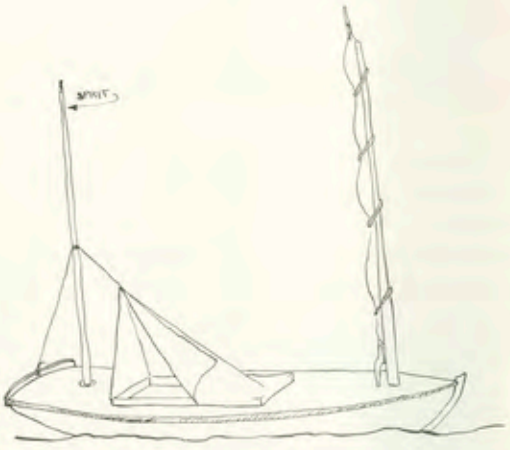
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# THE MELON SEED AND THE SEAFORD SKIFF



MELON SEED WITH CRUISING TENT
(AFTER W.P. STEPHENS)

BY BARRY THOMAS
Small Craft Specialist

Cumuli, broken and ragged, flee down wind and the gulls hover, tilt on a high gust, and are blown away to leeward before they recover. The November nor'wester is cold and puffy, hard puffs which drive widening black patches before them on the river. It is a clearing and cold wind.

The little skiff is restless at her mooring. She is round bottomed, about fourteen feet, and decked over but for a small cockpit. Her spritsail and boom are lashed to the mast. Once aboard, it takes but a minute to unlash the boom and sail, grab the grommet in the madly flailing peak, insert the sprit's end therein and hoist it aloft, pass the snotter through the hole in the lower sprit end and set it up with a rolling hitch on the sprit, ram the tiller into the rudder head, cast off the mooring and sheet her in.

She starts to move, the river wavelets slapping her, then down she lays in a gust, lee bow wave roaring, deck under water in a rush. Don't crack the sheet, and don't let her come up! Just strap her down and she tears along. I see with elation that she handles easily in a hard breeze and that for the first time, as long as the river is ice free, I will be sailing in the winter. And the boat is just right, quick to get underway and secured, simple in gear, and easy to sail. But I hadn't built her for this, I built her for my ten-year-old son, and this is a bonus.

The boat is a melon seed, a type of gunning skiff used on the bays of the New Jersey coast. Little seems to be known about it except that it existed in the late 1800s and its use was rather



*Eleven-year-old David Thomas sailing his melon seed on the Mystic River*

short-lived. No doubt this was due to its being relatively difficult to build compared to the sneak box and thus more costly. After all, a gunning skiff was a roughly treated boat, pushed off beaches and marshy banks, more used to muddy boots than soft-soled shoes. A cheaper boat was therefore in order.

In the Great South Bay of Long Island this boat type with slight differences is known as the Seaford skiff and has survived into the present. Tradition is that it was first built by Samuel Gritman in 1870. Until a decade ago, however, boats similar to the Gritman design were being built in Amityville, Long Island, by Paul Ketcham. One of Ketcham's models is in the Seaport collection and is used during the summer months. She is an extremely fine sailing boat. Of course these later boats were used as pleasure sailing craft and had larger sail plans than did the gunning skiff.

The melon seed and the Seaford skiff were used by market hunters and baymen. In the late 1800s the market hunters were kept quite busy supplying hat manufacturers with birds' breasts and wings to adorn my lady's hats. This was carried on to the extent of endangering several species. In the fall, sportsmen would flock to the Bays and to lodgings well fitted out to accommodate them. The Sportsmen Hotel in Amityville especially catered to Great South Bay hunters, spreading sumptuous tables farmhouse style. In the cold and dark early morning the sportsmen, with local baymen as guides, would set out in the skiffs for the distant outer beaches to await the flights of birds at dawn.



Both boats are so similar as to be generically the same. Both have an extreme amount of shape considering their length: a hollow entrance, moderate dead rise amidships with easy bilges, long buttocks with good bearing aft, a very raking transom, with very-to-moderately raking stem. The depth of our melon seed from the bottom of her keel to the top of her sheer is a mere twelve inches. Both boats are well decked over with small rectangular or rarely oval cockpits. Sometimes there is a hatch just abaft the mast. As the boats have so little depth, this hatch affords access under the deck forward, perhaps for storage or cleaning-out purposes. Both commonly had a hatchlike cover in three sections to go over the cockpit.

They have wide oak plank keels sometimes twelve to fourteen inches in breadth. Originally the frames were sawn out of cedar roots, but today they are framed out of steam-bent white oak. There are two types of keel construction aft. Generally, but not always, the melon seeds had a skeg with the flat plank keel bent up to the tuck. Generally, the Seaford skiff had a straight keel with the garboard forming a reverse angle with the broad streak outboard and a sort of hollow box inside the boat. There are two Seaford skiffs at the Seaport: one built as a gunning skiff in the late 1800s by Verity is about twelve-and-a-half feet long. The other, mentioned earlier, is the Ketcham pleasure-sailing skiff built in 1958, about fourteen feet long. These boats are very beautiful and well worth seeing.

The melon seed has sixty-five square feet of sail: it is a very low and moderate sail plan, not much in light airs but exactly right for a gunning skiff that would be used in winter winds, and perfect for a ten-year-old boy. A ten-year-old, cautioned not to make fast the sheet, is not strong enough to capsize the boat. Considering its initial stability and small cockpit, it would take an extreme set of conditions to knock her down, not the least of which would be an improbable degree of nonchalance.

Reaching and running she does splendidly, goes well to windward, but is wet in a chop and needs a canvas water apron or spray shield to keep her crew dry. Speaking of crew, two adults is the limit, a man and boy is fine, but the best crew of all is the boy himself, alone or with a friend. I cannot imagine a safer sailing boat and, unlike so many dinky fiberglass boats, the melon seed or Seaford skiff has the feel of a large boat. They are also excellent rowers. With their sharp water lines and moderate weight, they carry well. When the wind blows hard, they can be rowed across wind with no tendency to head up or get blown off. With low freeboard and long straight keel they track well. The oars can be neatly stowed on hooks or lashed under the ample side decks.

The rig is very simple; the single spritsail is always lashed to the mast and therefore never needs to be hoisted. Once the sprit is set up with the snotter, the only line requiring attention is the sheet. I would cut the leech of the sail straight, too, so that there are no battens to mar the simplicity. Low bridges are no problem: unstep the mast, row under, restep the rig and sail away.

With the centerboard up the boats need eight inches of water to float. Their wide flat keel allows you to sail them right up the beach and step ashore: if you want to haul out you only need two rollers. Like anything that is well bred, a melon seed or Seaford skiff will sit upright on her bottom with no fuss.

Eighty years ago there was a kind of golden age of the small boats: J. Henry Rushton and W.P. Stephens were building fine boats as were a multitude of others. They were used by guides and baymen plying their trades, by young people doing their courting – the girls with their laces and parasols, the youths with starched collars and derbys; and by a rugged lot of individualistic sportsmen – Bishop, Sears, MacGregor, to name a few of the well-known. Their famous boats, *Centenial Republic*, *Sairy Gamp*, and *Rob Roy* traveled far. It was no novelty that a small sailing canoe was a cruising boat. So it occurred to me that a melon seed or a Seaford skiff is also a cruiser. Indeed on her launching day when she was carried out of the cellar where she was built, my next door neighbor – who was well above eighty years – came over to have a look. He recalled sailing a canoe of this size all over Fishers Island Sound, cruising for a week at a time when he was a boy. The illustration shows the melon seed equipped as a cruiser.

If you are ten years old I would commend this boat to you, and so I would if you are forty. Now the Verity family of Seaford were builders of these skiffs and Nelson Verity when he was over ninety years of age sat at the tiller of his skiff and said: "I'd ruther be doing this than anything else in the world." When I am ninety, so would I.

# DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

## "RING OUT THE OLD"

One day this spring a wrecking crew will arrive at Mystic Seaport to commence tearing down the old administration building. This long-awaited event will clear the way for construction of the Schaefer Building and the Wimpfheimer Terrace of Sea Sculpture. The Schaefer Building will be the first building at this museum designed solely as a gallery for exhibiting our collection of maritime paintings and prints. The Wimpfheimer Terrace of Sea Sculpture will be, to the best of my knowledge, the only one of its kind in the United States.

Shortly after the terrace and gallery are completed, we shall convert the Bartram Building into a second gallery to provide exhibit space for the Law Collection and additional paintings, prints, photographs, etc. Thus, for the first time in our history, we shall have a complex of terrace and galleries devoted to the art of the sea, a significant step forward for Mystic Seaport.

"Ring in the new."

Yet, as the demolition crew goes to work, some of us will feel a twinge of sadness. Once upon a time, plans were drawn up, skilled craftsmen carried them out, and a new building arose on Greenmanville Avenue. Well constructed to withstand for a century and a quarter the buffeting of New England weather, it must have served well the purpose of the Greenman and Hazlin families; but an ugly duckling it was destined ever to be. For a brief moment, it sheltered those who planned and developed this museum, and for us, at least, history was made within its walls; it was privy to high hopes and aspirations, and moments of decision, courage, disconsolation and renewed faith.

Of late, the abandoned old structure has stood an unwanted blight surrounded by beautiful, well-cared-for buildings; no T.L.C. was lavished on its sagging roof, its cracked walls, its arthritic timbers, and yet it has remained a refuge for stored collections. Its drafty attic has become a condominium for a teeming colony of pigeons. Only their lament and the cry of the gulls will summon the final dawn for the ugly duckling.

"Ring out the old."

Waldo Johnston

April 6, 1974

# NEW EXHIBITS





A totally revised exhibit of the Mallory's of Mystic has been opened in the Mallory Buildings and chronologically relates the story of the family's involvement with American maritime history from 1816-1941. The paintings, prints, models and documents illustrate the radical changes that occurred during this time from early whaling in slow burdensome ships, to the construction of fast clipper ships, to the transition to metal hulls and steam propulsion. The effect that their success had on the family with their active yachting careers and their leadership of Mystic Seaport in the early decades is included. The two photographs above illustrate the sections of the exhibit which relate to the Mallory ownership of early whalers and their shipbuilding during the clipper ship era.

# BOOK REVIEWS

SHIP MODELLING HINTS & TIPS by Lt. Cdr. J.H. Craine ("Jason"). *Acro Publishing Company, Inc., New York. Second ed., revised, 1973.* 37 drawings, 8 photographs. $6.95.

A new edition of this British classic, now some twenty-five years out of print, ought to be welcome news for ship model builders, novices and old hands alike. True to its title, it is a trouble shooter and offers much excellent advice on modelling techniques that are apt to be difficult. No particular vessel or vessel-type receives prior attention from the author; the builder of an Elizabethan galleon ought to find this book as useful as it will be to someone modelling a tea clipper.

Generally speaking, the modelling techniques described are sound, and if sensibly followed, should produce accurate and durable hull construction, fittings and rigging. Chapter Six will be of limited usefulness to American model makers, for it describes woods and metal stocks as available in Great Britain; many woods described do not correspond in species or in physical properties to American counterparts, and this review takes issue with some of the author's views on their uses. Teak, for instance, is probably unsuitable for anything on a model, but it can make handsome base-boards and case moldings; it is not all that tough, becomes brittle with age, and has far too coarse grain for producing parts with fine detail or texture. Holly is here very much neglected, for it is one of the freest-bending woods when steamed or soaked, is far better than oak or ash for bent frames (let's see an oak or ash frame sided 1/32" and molded 1/64"!), and extremely stable when dry. American modelers can add several more woods to this list: cherry for nearly any hardwood application except heavy bending; basswood (linden) for very stable resin-free block hulls; lemonwood for spars that won't warp; American birch and maple for short lengths requiring strength, such as timberheads, cavils and bitts. Rosewood and even lignum vitae are splendid woods for small ship model parts, particularly when turned or machined to produce windlass barrels, deadeyes, steering wheels, block sheaves, etc. Here no author's recommendations can fully substitute for trial and error by the model maker.

Chapter Six also contains much dated material on the use of brass on ship models. With the abundance of so many grades of brass, and in so many sizes and shapes, it is a shame not to make more use of this metal. There are now many techniques for oxidizing and plating brass to tone down its appearance, and proper finishing techniques can allow it to replace many painted wood parts where strength or sharper detail is necessary.

The above criticisms notwithstanding, this reviewer finds Cdr. Craine's span of knowledge, whether it deals with the actual vessels and their histories, or with modelling

techniques, most impressive and of immense value. The author's respect for all aspects of, and attitudes toward, ship model building is a rare trait in itself and lends as much authority to his words on miniature ships set in putty seas as to his discussions on admiralty-type models with their very formal aspects.

The text has been written in a lively and seamanlike fashion with plenty of anecdotes, all of them pertinent and instructive. Indeed, this reader has found this book to be as stimulating and enjoyable as a good many of his benchside "gams" with fellow model makers. The many fine drawings by George Campbell complement the text perfectly and make the book a very professional-looking job, as indeed it is.

One parting broadside: of the eight splendid models appearing in photographs in the book, *not one* straightforwardly identifies the model maker! If the author could take pains to identify the photograph's source, why couldn't he extend the same courtesy to the artisan? In several cases, the photograph sources were also the model makers (Ike Marsh for one; Donald McNarry for another), but neglect of this sort is really inexcusable. Another case in point; knowing the size or scale of a model can reveal a lot about both the object and the craftsman. Mr. Marsh's splendid model of *Thermopylae* is to scale $3/32'' = 1'$, the model being about twenty-seven inches long (an unusual scale for such fine detail), and who but admirers of McNarry's work would realize that his two models herein are but little larger than the photographs? Crediting the model maker and stating the model's size or scale is a courtesy long overdue in ship model books; considering the time and effort expended in his work, this might be the model maker's minimal reward for sharing the results.

ERIK A.R. RONNBERG, JR.
Rockport, Mass.

# LETTERS

Dear Helen Grey,

You may not remember sending me a copy of your book about the restoration of the *Emma C. Berry*; but I think you should know that your kindness has borne fruit.

The Tamar Barge, *Shamrock*, had fallen into decay and a local grocer, Mr. John Fildew, after sorting out a very complex ownership bought her outright. Finding the job of repairing her beyond his financial and technical resources, he wrote to the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich who were good enough to pull me in.

Fortified by the story of the *Emma C. Berry* we got down to a careful survey of her structure as she lay in a backwater near Plymouth. This was less than encouraging, especially as she was being vandalised by souvenir hunters and children alike. A voluntary committee was formed to plan her restoration and raise funds, but first move her to a site where she could be repaired.

The National Trust, who undertake to preserve beauty spots and historic buildings left in wills to them, had just excavated an old trading dock at Cothele on the river Tamar, and made this available to us. John Fildew then gave the *Shamrock*

to the National Trust on the condition that they would carry out the restoration.

We then found a shipwright who had worked on these barges; a Mr. Perkins, who set about making her watertight – temporarily – as she is pretty ripe with gribble. Last Sunday, we floated her off and on Monday undertook the 18 mile trip up to Cothele Quay. Though we had 3 pumps available these weren't needed; and the only eventful parts of the trip were the four occasions the rowing vessel went aground and the *Shamrock*, carrying her way, slipped the tow and carried on up river on her own until the tug freed herself and caught up again. Not once did *Shamrock* find the bottom, which was just as well, she knew the way.

There is now a four year programme of repair and replacement to be faced. We hope to get her under sail again, but that is someway off.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely,
Eric McKee
Plymouth, England

Editor's note: *The LOG* does not ordinarily report on any donations made to the Seaport. These two letters, however, were unusual enough for us to bend our rule.

Dear Mr. Johnston,

Since I received your first letter in early December I have thought off and on about making a contribution to the cause. There are several considerations which cause me to hesitate. 1) though I am a member, I have never been to Mystic, and it shall be some years yet before I shall be able to make such a trip. 2) It is hard to justify donating money to a foreign organization when there are probably equally sufficient causes in this country. 3) Tax deductable considerations do not apply.

However, all the same, I am sending you this small donation because I am a woodworker and a craftsman. It is my desire before I pass on to create something of wood that people after me will treasure and preserve. Not that they should remember my name but only my craft and what I put into it. So it is with the *Morgan*. She was crafted from many thousands of pieces. She was built to live in the sea. For the hundreds of men who built her, we know them by their crafts.

Yours truly,
James G. Lorriman
Ontario, Canada

Dear Mr. Johnston:

In the Log of Mystic Seaport, Vol. 18, No. 1 of January 1966 page 19 – I quote as follows:

"On the long mould loft in the shipyard, David Brayton scaled off lines of the ship in chalk. In the yard, at the foot of Spring Street, bordering the harbor shore the long keel was laid."

On the same page it shows that he owned a 1/16 interest in the *Charles W. Morgan*, in the amount of $3,053.12.

David A. Brayton was my grandfather, born in Swansea, Mass. in 1824 and died in London, England, in 1881. He resided in Fall River, Mass., taking a great interest in the textile and banking business.

In his memory, I enclose my check for $2,000 to be used in the restoration of the *Morgan*.

Sincerely yours,
David Anthony Brayton
Little Compton, R.I.



Above, a mother with her children examine the minute detail of this fine model of the *Raleigh*, built by Charles G. Davis, and now on exhibit in the Mallory Buildings. Front cover, this ship chandler's sign is a recent gift of Rudolf F. Haffenreffer III. The polychrome wood figure, which stands 44" tall, dates from the mid-nineteenth century and would have been displayed outside a chandlery. Very few of these trade figures have survived, and this particular one is considered to be one of the finest in existence. Back cover, a scene at the Seaport. Photographs: Mary Anne Stets.



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