

"Portsmouth-built ships and New York-merchants-  
the superiority of the one is equalled only by the  
enterprise of the other. Possessed of the former,  
the latter may safely defy the competition of the  
world."

(1) Toast at a Portsmouth launching, 1851

Suddenly, in the Eighteen-forties the shipyards of Portsmouth, N.H. erupted with rejuvenated activity. A new era of longer, faster, and more beautiful ships had come to the Piscataqua waters. This was the age of the clipper ships, prompted by a need for ships which could travel faster with great cargoes of tea, slaves and opium from China and reach the gold fields of California quicker. A new type of ship was consequently produced which was long, narrow, high, deep, and designed to enter and leave the water more cleanly. The seven Portsmouth shipyards of this period built a total of 277 ships which compared favorably with the fastest and finest ships of Boston and New York. The foremost among these master builders was George Raynes.

Mr. Raynes was born in York, Maine in 1799 and had been engaged in shipbuilding there prior to his transition to Portsmouth in 1835. His new shipyard was the old Meserve-Royd estate located on the North Mill-pond near the bridge. The estate erected in 1767 with its fine old trees; lawns; and gardens of vegetables, fruits and flowers extending to the clear blue water's edge was a typical example of colonial architecture. This shipyard, in which Colonel Meserve had built his AMERICA and George Boyd had done his pre-revolutionary shipbuilding became known as the Raynes mansion, show place of Portsmouth. "The original beauty of the grounds was preserved as far as possible and this was perhaps the most beautiful and picturesque shipyard of modern times."

It is believed that George Raynes built approximately sixty-five ships, schooners, and brigs in his thirty-one years of shipbuilding.

An accurate list of his constructions has, unfortunately, not been compiled. I have succeeded in securing a list of sixty-three ships which I believe to be as accurate as is historically possible. The last few ships on this list were built by Mr. Raynes in conjunction with his son before the age of steam and iron-hulled ships forced the yard to close. I am going to be concerned in this paper with a few of the more notable examples of the Raynes yard.

The SEA SERPENT, an extreme clipper ship, was launched in December 1850 by Mr. Raynes and was his first ship of that type. "She was a slender rakish, handsome-looking craft comparing favorably with the New York and Boston clippers of that year." Her specifications were as follows: length between perpendiculars, 194:6; over all 212; extreme beam, outside, 39:3; depth of hold 20:8; and displacement ~~XXXX~~ 1402 tons old measurement or 975 new measurement. Her dead rise was forty inches; swell of sides, four inches; and sheer, two feet. The figure head of the SEA SERPENT was an eagle while her name-sake ornamented her stern in green and gold. A.E. Clark in THE CLIPPER SHIP ERA thus describes the ship's stern figure. She "carried a long, slender serpent whose life-like, slimy-looking body picked out in shades of green and gold, suggested his recent escape from the waters of ~~the summer resorts~~ one of the summer resorts along the Atlantic coast." Her lower masts were 83, 87 and 78 feet respectively, and very heavily sparred. The masts were raked  $1\frac{1}{4}$  and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches to the foot.

The SEA SERPENT'S owners, Grinnell, Mintwn & Co. of New York, were so well pleased with her general appearance that they paid her builder a bonus and distributed a considerable sum of money among the men employed in her construction. As evidence of her fine workmanship and materials underwriters were never called upon to pay claims of damage on her cargoes. "She was an excellent and dry sea boat with a sharp wedge bow enabling her to slip through the water in very light winds when other ships hardly had steerage way." This ship is reported to have made a maximum of fifteen knots in her prime. Courtesy of the Portsmouth Athenaeum, Portsmouth, N.H.

The SEA SERPENT was originally commanded by Capt. William Howland of New Bedford and he was succeeded in 1855 by Capt. J.D. Whitmore. She was very successful in both the China and California trades and held many records in the mad race for wealth. A passage of 107 days from New York to San Francisco was made in 1853 under Capt. Howland. Finally in 1874, she was sold by her owner for \$22,500. and renamed PROGRESS to sail under Norwegian colors. She ~~was~~ served in the North Atlantic trade for many years and was to be found on registers as late as 1890.

The WITCH OF THE WAVE is perhaps the most well known and the best of the clipper ships built by George Raynes. She was launched on April 6, 1851 for Glidden and Williams, Hunt and Peabody of Boston and Captain Bertram of Salem. (1) Her specifications were as follows: 202x 40x21; dead rise, 40 inches; swell of sides, six inches; sheer, 42 inches. She was sparred by Martin Fernald of Portsmouth and it speaks well for the work done that on her first voyage around the world she did not lose as much as studding-sail boom. The foremast was stepped 45 feet aft of the stern; thence to the mainmast, 67 feet; thence to the mizzen, 53 feet; thence 37 feet to the taffrail. The masts were raked  $1\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  and  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches to the foot. The masts, beginning with the foremasts, measured as follows: lower masts, 84, 90 and 79 feet; topmasts, 47, 50, and 41 feet; topgallants, 26, 28, and 22 feet; royals, 16, 18, and 14 feet; shysail masts, 11, 12, and  $9\frac{1}{2}$  feet. The corresponding yards were as follows: 71, 81, and 61 feet; 57, 63, and 44 feet; 43, 48, and 37 feet; 34, 38, and 30 feet; 30, 29 and 24 feet. The bowsprit was 28 feet outboard and the jib boom, 35 feet outside the cap. The spanker boom was 50 feet long and gaff, 38 feet. The main rigging was of  $10\frac{1}{2}$  onch hemp.

The WITCH OF THE WAVE, built as a cost of \$80,000., was the most beautiful and luxurious creation of Mr. Raynes. The ship was lean and long with a graceful and beautiful hull. Her decks were remarkably clear with plenty of room for working ship and her between decks had ample head room and were well ventilated.

Courtesy of the Portsmouth Athenaeum, Portsmouth, N.H.

"Her figurehead represented a young woman partially clad in gossamer drapery of white and gold, with one shapely arm extended and her small bare feet stepping upon the crest of a wave, while the stern was ornamented with a seashell in which a child was being drawn by dolphins." These designs were executed by John W. Mason of Boston, a man of distinguished artistic merit. Her first cabin contained staterooms for her captain and officers, and the second seven statements for passengers. The cabins and staterooms were finished in the most luxurious manner, the wainscot of the main cabin being of rosewood, birdseye, maple, satin and zebra woods, exquisitely polished, with cornices and ~~moldings~~ mouldings of white and gold. The upholstery was of rich velvet and speaking tubes connected the several cabins. There ~~was~~ was also on board a library of one-hundred volumes.

It was usual~~ly~~ in those days for owners of ships to entertain guests, so "the trip of the WITCH OF THE WAVE from Portsmouth to Salem to obtain her register was made an occasion of festivity." On May first many guests arrived from Boston and Salem to explore the ship but as it was raining the cruise was postponed. Many of the guests remained overnight in Portsmouth and the Baynes mansion was the scene of much festivity . The following toast was proposed by Ephriam F. Miller, customs collector of the port of Salem.

"Success to the newest and youngest of the Salem Witches. She perhaps includes in her composition an equal amount of craft with her unfortunate predecessors. Had they possessed a proportional share of her beauty, we are confident that the sternest tribunal before which any of them were arraigned, would never have had the heart to subject a single one to the trial to which their successor is designed-the trial by Water."

WITCH OF THE WAVE champagne baskets are still on display in the Portsmouth Athenaeum, and there is a story that Gov. Ichabod Goodwin threw off his shoes and danced in his stocking feet.

The morning came bright and warm and a company of two-hundred embarked for the cruise to Salem. All sorts of good things, packed in ice to keep them cool were loaded aboard. Portsmouth Athenaeum, Portsmouth, N.H.

The tug R.B. FORBES shortly "steamed up the river with a big bone in her teeth" to take the ship in tow to Salem. About eleven o'clock the ship proceeded in tow down the river with all colors flying amidst much cheering. It is interesting to note here that the people of Portsmouth had become very proud and enthused over the ship and were actually very sorry to see her leave. After passing the narrows at Newcastle the breeze freshened and everyone was in high spirits. Mr. Raynes suggested to Captain Bertram that perhaps they should set a little sail, "just to assist the tow boat a little," Captain Bertram merrily agreed and gave orders for the top-sails to be set. The WITCH OF THE WAVE soon passed the tug at a speed of about nine and one-half knots. The tug's boiler nearly blew-up in her attempt to keep up with the clipper ship. Amidst shouts to the tug to ask if she would like a tow, the <sup>s</sup>ails were reefed and the towing resumed to Salem. On the way into Salem harbor an elaborate luncheon was served and many speeches made. A ~~new~~ poem in honor of the ship was recited by Johnathan Nicholas of Salem. The festivities were closed by the singing of some lines of Whittier's set to music for the occasion.

"God bless her wheresoe'er the breeze

Her snowy wright shall fan,

Beside the frozen Hebrides

Or sultry Hindostan/

"Where'er, in mart or on the main,

with peaceful flag unfurled,

She helps to wind the silken chain

Of commerce round the world.

"Her pathway on the open main

May blessings follow free,

And glad hearts welcome back again

Her white sails from the Sea."

THE WITCH OF THE WAVE'S home port was Salem, and from there she made many successful voyages under her masters Capt. J.H. Millet. Her best days

run was 338 miles and her best speed 16 knots. She made a run from Calcutta to Boston which was not beaten and only equalled once by the TYPHOON, another Portsmouth built ship. The WITCH also made a record run ~~by~~ of ninety days from Calcutta to London with the largest cargo of tea ever recorded. In 1855 she was sold to a group of Dutch merchants who renamed her ELECTRA. This ship appeared on shipping lists as late as 1871. A second WITCH OF THE WAVE was built in 1856 by Mr. Raynes Jr. for Titcomb and Company of Newburyport, but was comparatively ~~more~~ unsuccessful.

George Raynes launched his WILD PIGEON, an extreme clipper which commanded very high respect July 31, 1851. This ship in many ways resembled his earlier ships the SEA SERPENT and the WITCH OF THE WAVE. She was, at the time of her launching, very highly spoken of by L.M. Goldsborough, one of the leading naval architects of the day. The ship was 189 feet long, over all, by 39:9 by 20; 996 tons american or 768 British measurement. Her dead rise was 26 inches; swell of sides, six inches; sheer, three feet. Her bow was wedge-shaped, with but little flare, and she had neither head nor tailboards. A pigeon was her figurehead and two gilded pigeons ornamented her handsome oval stern. Her entrance and clearance lines were very long and sharp. She was well sparred, crossing three skipall yards and her masts raked  $1\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $1\frac{3}{8}$ , and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches. to the foot. The lower mainmast was 85 feet long; topmast, 47 feet long; topgallant, 26 feet long; royal,  $16\frac{1}{2}$  feet long; and skysail mast,  $12\frac{1}{2}$  feet. The corresponding yards were in length as follows: 76 feet, 61 feet, 41 feet,  $27\frac{3}{4}$  feet, and 23 feet respectively. "She was an out and out clipper in model, rig and ~~general~~ general appearance, being one of the most beautiful and jaunty ships afloat in her time."

She was delivered to her owners, Olyphant and Co., of New York, by Captain Buckingham in the record run of forty hours. Sailing subsequently under Captain Putnam the WILD PIGEON made many near record runs to California. She made a passage of 107 days from New York to San Francisco in 1852 which came very close to beating the record. The New York Herald of

October 12, 1852 thus describes one of her departures.

"Yesterday the beautiful clipper ship WILD PIGEON, Captain Putnam, hailed out of her berth, at the foot of Wall Street, and sailed for California. The bark SALEM, Captain Millet, also cleared yesterday for the same destination. Both vessels have large and valuable cargoes. The agent of the first named vessel had to refuse some one-thousand barrels for want of room. The WILD PIGEON has only been in port twenty nine days, and in the short space of twenty-eight working days discharged and received cargo, and is now again on her way to the Pacific." The ship was later sold to a Spanish concern and was lost on February 17, 1892.

The WILD DUCK was launched on April 13, 1853 and was the fiftieth creation from the yard of George Raynes. She was built for the owners of the WILD PIGEON as a result of its fine record and performance. The new ship resembled the PIGEON but is said to have been, "sharper through a somewhat heavier carrier." The WILD ~~PIGION~~ DUCK measured 175x 33:6x20, and displaced 861 tons old measurement. Her figurehead was an eagle on the wing and her stern was ornamented by "a sporting dog, surrounded by gilt scroll."

She made many successful voyages under Captain A.G. Hamilton and fully came up to the expectations of her owners. Her life was short, for in 1856 she was washed up on the bank of the Min River in China. It being impossible to refloat her the insurance of \$250,000. was paid on the vessel and cargo.

The TINGUA, launched October 2, 1852 for Olyphant and Company of New York, was a direct result of the favorable performance of the WILD PIGEON. The models were very similar except that the clear forward lines of the TINGUA were hardly as fine as those of the PIGEON." She measured 145x31:9x19 feet, and displaced 668 tons old measurement. She was not as much ~~like~~ like the PIGEON as was the WILD DUCK although she was built a year earlier than the latter. Her figurehead was a

ferocious dragon whose tail extended along both trail boards. The name TINQUA was that of a prominent Canton merchant, a close business connection of her owners. Captain Jacob D. Whitmore, later to become master of the WILD PIGEON, supervised her construction from keel to truck and became her first commander.

The TINQUA during her short career gave evidence of being a very fast ship. Her service ended short in 1855 when during a storm she struck a shoal off Cape Hatteras and her bottom being torn open she sank in 24 hours. The ship during her three years had made many fast and successful trips to China and California and at the time of her loss was valued at \$40,000.

The COEUR DE LION was medium clipper ship launched in January 1854 by Mr. Raynes for W.F. Parrot of Boston and Captain Tucker of Portsmouth. Her dimensions were 198x36:2x2:6 feet and her tonnage was 1090 old measurement or 915 new measurement. The dead rise of the COEUR DE LION was 15 inches while the swell of her sides was seven inches and her sheer three feet. Her figurehead was a representation of King Richard and her semi-circular stern bore the escutcheon of that monarch. Her entrance lines were slightly concave and quite sharp. She was designed to sail quite fast, and yet carry a heavy cargo. Her lower masts measured 80,82 and 76 feet long, and the corresponding yards 69,73 and 56 feet.

She proved to be very fast and reaped great profits for her owners under Captain George W. Tucker, a past owner, until she was sold to a foreign power in 1857. The ship changed flags several times and in 1869 while under Russian colors she made a run from Newcastle, N.S.W. to Hong Kong in 39 days. This record was never surpassed by any other clipper ship. She was finally lost in the Baltic in August of 1915 having outlived a great majority of the other clippers.

The FLEETWOOD , another medium clipper, was launched in 1852 by

the Raynes yard. Her displacement was 663 tons and she was owned by Sewell, Johnson & Company of Boston. During her whole sea life she was commanded by Captain Frank Dale, and aside from her maiden voyage was operated exclusively between Boston and Calcutta. In 1859 she was lost in a storm off Cape Horn with all but five of her crew. The captain, his wife, and son were also lost in the disaster.

George Raynes also built two small 300 ton, clipper-schooners for the opium trade. The MINNA and BRENDA were twin ships from the same model and were launched simultaneously in September 1851. They were "beautifully modeled and equipped with long raking masts and plenty of canvas." "They looked more like yachts than merchant vessels and presented a wide contrast to the clumsy junks of China." The MINNA and the BRENDA, the last of the opium clippers, were a very special type of craft. They, like their predecessors, were swift in order to contend with the tides of the China coast, strong to withstand the monsoon, and above all able to carry a tremendously heavy cargo for their size. These ~~ms~~ ships carried large crews and were heavily armed against the threat of Chinese pirates.

The BRENDA which was built for Russell and Company of Boston and the MINNA, built for John M. Forbes of Boston, plied their illegal trade successfully and were well known along the China coast. These schooners were not ~~restricted~~ confined to the opium trade and it is interesting to note that they took a hand in the opening of Japan. "As early as the summer of 1853 we find the BRENDA under Captain Stone taking coals from Hong Kong to Nagasaki. On her previous voyage she had sailed from San Francisco on February 26, 1853 and arrived at Hong Kong on April 16, 49 days out. Leaving Hong Kong on June 16 for Japan, she anchored at Shanghai 20 days later, in ballast from Loochoo." The MINNA under Captain Pulsipher made many similar swift voyages. In the famous typhoon of September 21, 1853 the MINNA was nearly lost when washed up on the south bank of the Shanghai River.

George Raynes also built several other ships of note such as the ROMAN, the EMILY FARNUM, the WITCH OF THE WAVE ~~II~~, and the SHOOTING STAR. All were

excellent sea-boats and achieved great success in the China and California trades. They were all vessels of which their builder and their owners were justifiably proud.

On July 4, 1851 Portsmouth staged an industrial procession. Shipbuilding was represented, and the riggers, painters, caulkers, joiners, and ship's carpenters from the Raynes yard paraded in full force. "Midway in the ranks of carpenters was a large car drawn by oxen and lined on each side with models of vessels built by Mr. Raynes. This was a very interesting feature of the procession."

I have, in my research, had related to me a very humorous incident concerning Mr. Raynes which would not be out of place to include for illustration. Mr. Raynes shipyard, as I have previously said, was located on the North Millpond, with the only exit between Noble's Island and the Piscataqua shore. The Boston and Maine Railroad, at the time, had a wooden bridge across the passage with an extremely narrow draw. Mr. Raynes had tried for several years to have the railroad widen the draw but to no avail. Finally he launched a ship which was too wide to pass through the draw of the bridge. He again went to the railroad and they again refused to take any remedial steps. The next morning he sent a crew of his shipwrights to the bridge with axes and had them chop it down. He was then able to sail his ship out very nicely. The Boston and Maine Railroad hailed Mr. Raynes into court for his actions but lost the suit on the grounds that it was unlawful to obstruct navigation.

With the opening of the Suez Canal and the start of the Civil War the stately clipper ships gave ground to the age of the auxiliary vessel. Their glory, however, lived on and it was more than a decade later before their record voyages were beaten by steam propelled ships. The story of the clippers built by George Raynes serves adequately as a sounding into the most dramatic period of Portsmouth shipbuilding. The shipyard of George Raynes, like those of his contemporaries, fell victim to the new trend and the glamorous clipper building waned sharply. All that remains of the Raynes yard today are a few rotting pilings and a weather-beaten shed. The mansion, which had remained a show place

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to the end, was torn down in the late nineteen-thirties to make room for more modern buildings. A very old and distinguished, oil portrait of George Raynes now hangs in a house close-by his old yard and silently watches therein, wistfully remembering the bygone ~~his~~ days of a great era in shipbuilding.

"The life that engaged the labors of a large part of a people; that colored their speech; vitalized their commerce, industry and literature; and shaped to an extent their morals and ethics has passed away forever."

*The above was written by Kennard Palfrey  
great grandson of George Raynes  
while attending the U.S. Maritime Academy;*

