

SEA SERPENT, 1850

The Sea Serpent, built by George Raynes at his shipyard on the North Millpond in Portsmouth, was one of the first clippers built on the Piscataqua River or eastward. Built under the supervision of William Howland, who served as captain for the first four years of her service, she was apparently designed by Samuel H. Pook of Boston, the talented and prolific designer of numerous New England-built clipper ships including, it is believed, many by the Portsmouth builders Samuel Hanscomb Jr., Fernald & Pettigrew, and George Raynes. Pook's father was a naval constructor, and it is believed that the close association of the Hanscomb, Fernald and Raynes families with the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard led to this local association.

Sea Serpent was built for Grinnell, Minter & Company of New York. According to Fairburn, "the foremost sailing packet shipowner and operator and one of the leading general shipping houses in New York," it also owned the clippers Flying Cloud and North Wind. It disposed of the latter two ships by 1861 because they proved uneconomical to operate after a few years, but it kept the Sea Serpent

until 1874, she being one of the very few extreme clippers which remained economical to operate and maintain. The company's longterm satisfaction with the ship was foreshadowed by its bonus paid to the builder, as reported in the Portsmouth Journal of January 25, 1851:

A New Hampshire Ship Builder.-- Mr. George Raynes, of this city, who built the clipper ship Sea Serpent, received a handsome sum, \$1500, from her owners, for the faithful manner in which he had performed his contract. This was not to cover any expense involved, but was over and above all expenses.

Launched November 20, 1850, the ship was 212' overall with a 39'3" beam, 20'8" depth of hold, and 1337 tons. She had a marked deadrise of 40" at the half-beam (i.e.: Her bottom sloped up that much from the keel to either side). This was a characteristic of many early clippers, believed by owners and builders to contribute to speed, although ships with flatter floors later proved to be just as fast, with more stability and carrying capacity. Pook himself generally disliked extreme deadrise. Regardless of this, Sea Serpent turned out to be a very fast deep-sea sailor which was able, as well, to ghost along in the frequently light airs of the China Sea; moreover, she was reported as a dry boat and good to her cargoes, the owners never having to make any claims for damage to cargo.

Cutler reports the following description of Sea Serpent, which appeared in the New York Herald:

Head on she has a most rakish appearance, and her lines swell along the bow into their utmost fulness, and then taper off again into the clean run, they show incontestably that 'the line of beauty' has been the guide in her construction. They are as perfect as perfection itself.

Her stern is most beautifully proportioned, and is tastfully decorated with two carved full length representations of the Great American Sea Serpent.

Sea Serpent was notable for her speed, the number of her westbound Cape Horn passages to California (14 in all) and her long life. Sold to Norwegian owners in 1874, she was still on the Register in 1890, after forty years of service. Moreover, she was still making fast passages almost thirty years after she was built; in 1879, deeply-laden, she made a passage of 17 days from New York to London, according to Fairburn.

Bayard Taylor, the inveterate writer of travel books, described his voyage aboard the Sea Serpent from Hong Kong (Whampoa) to New York in 1853, in his Visit to India, China and Japan in 1853 (New York, 1875). Quoted by Howe and Matthews in American Clipper Ships, he discusses the ship's characteristics:

I found the Sea Serpent an excellent sea-boat,

in every respect. She behaved admirably on a wind, slipping through the water so softly that we would not have suspected the speed she made. Although so sharp in the bows, she was very dry, scarcely a spray flying over the forecastle.

Her admirable sailing qualities did not prevent Sea Serpent from having the same problems as many other west-bound Cape Horners in 1851; she was among 10 big new clippers forced into Valparaiso for repairs to her rigging in that year. She made an average passage of 126 days, or 118 sailing days, with 8 days in that port. Fairburn attributes these problems to a general tendency of early clipper builders to over-canvas and under-rig their ships.

In 1853, Sea Serpent raced Swordfish from New York to San Francisco, arriving in 109 or 110 days, versus the latter ship's 107-day passage. Swordfish was said to be the fastest ship on the California run in the 1850s. The two beat the 22 other clippers which sailed from East Coast ports between January 28 and March 18, 1853, and completed the passage. Sea Serpent very likely would have won, had the wind not deserted her on the last leg of the voyage.

Sea Serpent made 14 westbound passages to California between 1851 and 1872, averaging 122.2 days under sail, a very respectable record. She also made 13 voyages around the world, continuing on from California. Between 1851 and 1862, she made 7 passages from China to New York, averaging

97 days in length, with an outstanding passage of 79 days from Hong Kong in 1856, the fastest passage between a Chinese and a North Atlantic port since that of the Sea Witch in 1849. In the 1859 "tea race" from Foochow, China, to London, Sea Serpent beat the four British contestants by margins of from 4 to 17 days, covering the course in 130 days (Fairburn). In 1865-1866, when 15 years old, she made a westward passage of 101 days to San Francisco, said to be the fastest in five years. In 1872, she sailed from the Pacific equator to San Francisco in the very fast time of 17 days, completing the whole passage in the excellent time of 108 days. She was sold to Norwegian owners for \$22,500 in 1874, with the new name of Progress, home port Tonsberg. Thereafter she served in the North Atlantic trade and was still listed in 1890; her ultimate fate is unknown.

Sea Serpent could boast of many records and near-records over the course of her career. For example, in 1852, she had the fastest round-the-world voyage--249 sailing days and a total time of 9 months, 25 days. In a list of the 10 best average passages for westbound ships in the California trade, published by Fairburn, Sea Serpent comes in third, with 122.2 days, next to the leaders, Young America and David Crockett, both averaging about 120 days. Not only one of the fastest clippers, Sea Serpent was also consistent, turning in good performances throughout her long career.

NIGHTINGALE, 1851

Nightingale, originally named Sarah Cowles, her name changed before launching, was built by Samuel Hanscomb, Jr., at his shipyard on the Long Reach of the Piscataqua River, in Eliot, Maine, about three miles from the center of Portsmouth. Her probable designer was the noted Samuel H. Pook of Boston. The Hanscomb shipyard was located at the bottom of "Greenacres", adjacent to the present State boat-launching facility.

Built by a syndicate which went bankrupt during her construction, Nightingale was finished under the auspices of Ichabod Goodwin, a prominent Portsmouth businessman who became Governor of New Hampshire. Due to these financial difficulties, the ship ended up being built 'on spec' by the builders and suppliers. Finished to the standards of a yacht, she was originally intended to take passengers to the 1851 World's Fair in London, where she would serve as their hotel while they visited the Fair. Delays in her construction and undersubscription of the excursion berths resulted in her not being launched until June 16, 1851, and auctioned off later in the summer at Boston. Her sale to Sampson and Tappan of Boston for \$75,000 amply rewarded her builders and launched her on what must have been the most adventurous career of all the clippers. A ship of 1066 tons, she measured 185' long, with a beam of 36' and a

draft of 20'; deadrise was a marked 36". Her figurehead was a bust of the exceedingly popular opera singer, Jenny Lind, known as the "Swedish Nightingale," for whom the ship was named.

Fortune conspired to open a new opportunity for clipper ship employment with the discovery of gold in Australia in February 1851 near Bathurst, and in August of that year at Anderson's Creek near Melbourne. Nightingale became the first American vessel to enter the Australian trade, leaving Boston on October 18, 1851, and arriving in Melbourne 90 days later, under the command of Captain John B. Fiske. The return trip to London via Shanghai took 110 days. Neither passage gave any hint of her future success. In 1853, however, on a passage from Portsmouth, England, to Shanghai, she set a record of 72 days to the East Indies.

As an American clipper engaged in the China to England tea trade, Nightingale had to frequently endure the British touting of their clearly slower ships, as well as dishonest British publicity regarding American ships. As a result, two successive challenges were issued by the Americans to the British in 1852. The first, by the American Navigation Club of Boston, proposed a race from a port in Britain to one in China and back, to be run by ships deeply laden and built and manned by their respective countries, the prize to be L10,000. Although the purse was later raised to L20,000, the British did not take up the

challenge. Subsequently, the owners of Nightingale offered to put her up against any British challenger with a purse of £10,000, an offer which was likewise ignored. It should be noted that the Nightingale, with several other American clippers, had shown her superior sailing abilities against the British clippers Chrysolite, Stornoway and Challenger in the homeward tea race of 1852, and that she was one of a number of American clippers from which the Admiralty took off the lines, for the benefit of British shipbuilders, while they were in Britain.

In 1854, Nightingale was chartered by R.W. Cameron & Company's Australian Pioneer Line and made a fast passage of 75 days from New York to Melbourne. Her passage the following year from Shanghai to London in 91 days was also outstanding. In 1860, the ship was sold by Sampson and Tappan to unknown parties. She was captured by the U.S.S. Saratoga on April 20, 1861, off the coast of Africa with 961 slaves aboard. Condemned and sold to the U.S. Government on July 6, she became a supply ship for the Navy vessels blockading the Gulf Coast of the United States during the Civil War. In 1865, she was sold to Captain D.E. Mayo of Boston, who sailed around Cape Horn to San Francisco, arriving on March 9, 1866. She was then sold to the Western Union Telegraph Company for use in operations in the Bering Strait. In 1868, she was sold to Samuel G. Reed & Company of Boston, which sent her to the Pacific and the Orient. Sold again in 1876 in San Francisco to George

Howes, she went to New York, where she was sold to Norwegians, who rerigged her as a bark, her homeport then becoming Krageroe, Norway. She was engaged in the transatlantic lumber trade when abandoned at sea between Liverpool and Halifax on April 17, 1893, as related by Fairburn.

Reputed to be the costliest ship ever built on the Piscataqua, the Nightingale was beautifully finished because she was intended to be a cruise ship. Due to her sharp lines and pronounced deadrise, she was originally judged unsuitable for the Cape Horn- California trade and a more likely candidate for the China trade or use as a yacht. She was, indeed, very successful in the China trade, although she made her best times in the deep sea portions of that trade, and not in the fluky breezes of the China Sea itself. Her longevity of 42 years was remarkable considering the hard usage to which she was put, although she had several sizable repair bills over the years. She carried gold prospectors, oil, tea, slaves, lumber and supplies for a cable-laying operation, and sailed in the extremes of the Northern and Southern Hemispheres and over most of the oceans of the world. A ship with a romantic name, Nightingale's story is one of the most exotic of all clipper ships.

TINQUA, 1852

Tinqua, named after a Chinese merchant who did business with her owners, was launched by George Raynes on

October 2, 1852. One of four Raynes-built clippers owned or part-owned by Olyphant & Co. of New York, she was the smallest, rated at only 668 tons. Tinquá was 145' long, had a beam of 31'4" and a draft of 19'. She was intended for the China trade and not Cape Horn passages, which must account for her small size, which was thought to be an advantage in the uncertain winds of the China Sea.

On November 24, 1852, Tinquá left New York bound for San Francisco. On December 7, she reached latitude 2.33 North, longitude 31.10 West, "having run to within 153 miles of the Equator in 13 days" (Cutler, 450, from New York Herald, Feb.2, 1853). This was a remarkably fast passage, comparable to the record run to the Equator in 15 days, 19 hours by the enormous clipper Great Republic. The captain was J.D. Whitmore, who was known as a "driver." The following year, Tinquá ran from Amoy in the East Indies to New York in 74 days, which Fairburn lists among the best reported passages on this route. She made only two westward passages to California, of 115 and 123 days.

Tinquá was similar in dimensions to the medium clipper Fleetwood, which had been launched a few months earlier by George Raynes, but was rated as an extreme clipper with lines which resembled those of the Wild Pigeon, a larger Raynes ship. While Fleetwood was slow, Tinquá was extremely fast for her size, and nearly set an all-time record from an East Coast point of departure to the Equator, according to Fairburn. Tragically, she struck

the outer shoal off Cape Hatteras on the night of January 12, 1855, and was lost when only 2 years and 3 months old.

TYPHOON, 1851

Typhoon was built by Fernald and Pettigrew at their shipyard on Badger's Island in the middle of the Piscataqua River, opposite Portsmouth, N.H., in Kittery, Maine. Typhoon's construction was notable in several respects: She was built in the dead of winter (between December 1850 and February 1851) when local shipyards were generally idle, she was the largest clipper ship built up to that time, and she was the first and largest clipper ship built by that firm, which built seven in all. As a Portsmouth-built ship of the mid-nineteenth century, she was also a rarity in leaving from Portsmouth directly for a foreign port on her maiden voyage; most Portsmouth clippers, being owned by Boston or New York firms, left from one of those two ports. Moreover, the Typhoon had the distinction of setting a record on her maiden voyage. Contemporary accounts provide interesting details concerning her construction and departure.

The Portsmouth Journal of February 15, 1851, in an article headed "Great Ship and Novel Launch" says of the 1611-ton vessel:

The Typhoon, the noble clipper ship of nearly 2000 tons, will be launched from the yard of Messrs. Fernald & Pettigrew, in our harbor, on

Tuesday next, at half past 12 o'clock. The Typhoon is full rigged on the stocks, and will on that account attract a large number to witness the novelty of the launch.

The Typhoon, says the Messenger, is the largest clipper ship ever built in the U. States, being 225 feet long over all, 41-1/2 feet extreme breadth, and 23 feet deck [sic: depth]. She is to be owned by Messrs. D.A. Kingsland & Co. of New York, is intended for the Canton & California trade, and will be commanded by Capt. Charles H. Salter of this city.

The Portsmouth Journal of March 15, 1851, reported the departure of the new ship:

Ship Typhoon.

This noble ship was taken down the river on Tuesday afternoon by the steamer R.B.Forbes, and on Wednesday morning, March 12th at sunrise, she left our outer harbor with a fair wind, and with speed which almost equalled steam. With a favorable wind she will be able to reach England in fifteen days.-- Among her passengers were Messrs Edward F. Sise of Portsmouth, and John Lowe and George Gardner of Exeter.

Typhoon was built for D.&A.Kingsland of New York,

apparently from designs by Samuel H. Pook of Boston. The Kingsland firm evidently supplied the rigging plan as well as many of the materials and fittings used in the ship's construction. Fairburn remarks that they were knowledgable about ships and knew what they wanted; for example, they specified that the stern timbers should be arranged so that an auxiliary engine could be installed later, if desired. The combination of an outstanding design, interested owners, and an ambitious and innovative shipyard proved to be a happy one, as was demonstrated immediately by the new ship.

Typhoon had a very fast maiden voyage to Liverpool, despite being undermanned with a very poor crew, as reported by E.F.Sise, who was the supercargo. The exciting passage was reported in the Portsmouth Journal on April 19, 1851:

Clipper Ship Typhoon.-- We stated last week that one of the most remarkable passages ever made across the Atlantic, under sail only, has just been accomplished by the new American ship Typhoon, from Portsmouth, for Liverpool, on her trial trip, completing the passage in the extraordinary short time of 13 and 1-2 days from port to port.

The Boston Journal has the following information concerning her passage:--

We learn from a correspondent who was on

board, that the Typhoon sailed one third faster than any ship they saw on the passage. She made repeatedly fifteen miles per hour under single reefed top-sails. Her greatest day's sailing, says our correspondent, was three hundred and fifty-nine miles. This is almost incredible; but we learn from another source that the Typhoon made six hundred and fifty-nine miles in two days!

The Typhoon left Portsmouth on the 12th ult. On the morning of the 16th, while all hands were on deck, taking in sail, Mr. Kingsbury was disabled by a fall, the decks being slippery with ice. On the same day, says our correspondent, a severe gale, accompanied with thunder and lightning, was experienced. William F. Badger, one of the hands, from New Hampshire, was struck by lightning, making a hole in his oil cloth about the size of an ounce ball, setting his under clothing on fire; he was badly burnt from his shoulder to his feet, the fluid running down his back. On the arrival of the vessel at Liverpool he was taken to the hospital. The lightning struck the ship a second time, passed into the after cabin, making visible marks on the gilding, and passed off

without damage to the ship or passengers. On the 17th passed an iceberg, lat. 42 50 lon. 48 30.

The Typhoon is of sixteen hundred and eleven tons register, and was built for the Canton trade. She has created much sensation in Liverpool. We learn from the Liverpool Times that since her arrival at that port she has been visited by hundreds of admiring spectators.

According to Fairburn, Typhoon was "the first American clipper and the largest merchant vessel ever seen in Liverpool when she arrived there on her maiden voyage." That author calls her "...among the best clippers ever launched." She made only two westbound passages around Cape Horn to California, being mainly engaged in the India and China trade, where she made many outstanding passages. For example, on a voyage begun in New York on August 2, 1851, she sailed around the Horn to California and thence to the Far East, continuing on to London. On the passage from Sand Heads (Calcutta) to the Cape of Good Hope, she set a record of 37 days, which was never beaten and only broken once--by the Witch of the Wave (Fairburn). In 1854, Typhoon made a voyage from England to Calcutta and return, a fast voyage of 87 days out and 94 days back, setting a record of 80 days for the passage from the Lizard (coast of England) to Sand Heads. After briefly engaging in the

North Atlantic trade in 1856-57, she returned to the India/China trade; in 1863, due to conditions caused by the American Civil War, she was sold at Singapore to British interests for \$39,000, seemingly a good price for a 12-year-old clipper. Fairburn notes that in 1869, she was registered as the Indomitable of Dublin, John Martin & Sons, owners.

A large and powerful ship classified as an extreme clipper, Typhoon was much-admired from the time before her completion when the builder's model was put on display in the Portsmouth Athenaeum. Her winter building, launch fully-rigged and extremely fast maiden voyage immediately put her in the public eye, where she remained due to her wonderful record over the years. She was much-admired for her lines, as well as for her finish, centering on her very appropriate figurehead of a racehorse. Finally, her history reflects the economic history of the times: Hurried winter construction to capitalize on the clipper boom of the early 1850s, a spectacular early career followed by soft demand for shipping in the latter part of the decade, and sale to British interests in 1863, marking the decline of American shipping in response to the Civil War and the westward movement, along with the rise of the British merchant marine.