

THE SUN SHIPBUILDING & DRY DOCK COMPANY

Milestone Series
of the
U.S. Merchant Marine



NUMBER ONE

The Colonial Years



COLONIAL SETTLERS ON AMERICAN SOILS in the early 1600's found themselves in a land where water routes were the only practical lines of transportation. Hence, there was an immediate need for boats.

At first, this need was met by retaining boats from the ships that brought the colonists and by borrowing canoes from the Indians. Soon, however, the colonists found it necessary to send word to England asking for skilled boat builders.

The first vessels constructed by these craftsmen resembled their English counterparts quite closely. They were small and were used for fishing and lighter transportation. Ultimately, larger vessels were built for longer voyages and heavier loads.

Little detailed information is available on the ships of this period. There are no dependable records of the types or tonnage of the craft that were built. And no drawings, as none were made before construction began. However, enough scattered references remain to give some general ideas about ships and shipbuilding of those days. For example, it can be seen in retrospect that the foundation was being laid for what would become the U.S. Merchant Marine. Skills in boat design and boat building in the new country were evolving.

In addition, one of the greatest outgrowths of this early shipbuilding era was the development of the fast, weatherly schooner. In the period

preceding the American Revolution, schooners of this type became quite numerous. The first of these were built around Marblehead, in the Massachusetts Bay area. Appropriately enough, they became known as Marblehead Schooners. They were also called "hoel tappers," but many scholars do not agree on the origin of, or reason for, the name. While Marblehead Schooners were built primarily as fishing and coasting vessels, a number were built to the order of the British Naval Service as dispatch vessels.

The hoel tapper *Hannah* is a good example of this type of vessel. Historicalians can only guess when she was launched, but the date is generally accepted as around 1775. She, too, was built as a fisherman, but she soon became the first commissioned vessel in the United States Navy. Her career as a naval vessel was brief, quite possibly only a few months. After she was released from naval service, mention of her disappeared from historical records altogether.

The scantly material that is available on Marblehead Schooners indicates that the ships averaged about 60 feet long overall and about 7 feet deep. They would look puny, indeed, beside the giants of today's United States Merchant Marine, but they marked an important initial chapter in the merchant marine history of the nation that was about to emerge.

The HANNAH,

Marblehead School, Class 1872



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NUMBER TWO

The Clipper Years



TODAY, NEARLY A CENTURY AFTER the last American clipper ship slid down the ways, the word "clipper" still sparks the imagination of every man who loves the sea. Just the names of clipper ships, themselves, are enough to recall the action and adventure of their time: *Sovereign of the Seas*, *Flying Cloud*, *Challenge*, *Rainbow*, *North's Light*, *San McFin*, *Big Horn* and *Sea Witch* . . . to name a few.

Essentially, the years of the American clipper ships, as we think of the era today, were between 1835 and 1865. The vessels were not the direct result of a specific need for a revolutionary new type of ship design. Rather, they were an evolutionary development, growing out of all accumulated marine design experience up to that time. It almost seems as though the demands of the times, the insights of ship designers and the skills of shipbuilders combined to bring about the spontaneous development of some of the fastest sailing vessels the world has ever seen. For clippers were built for speed, rather than cargo-carrying capacity. They were extremely lofty and spread larger areas of canvas than other vessels of equal size in the drive for greater speed.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO NAME any given clippers as the most outstanding ships of their time. Clipper enthusiasts have their favorites and can support their opinions with facts from the records. However, no one can deny that the *Sea Witch*, launched in 1846, was one of the most

remarkable of these thoroughbreds of the sea. She was 192 feet overall and registered 905 tons. Carl C. Cutler in his book, "Greatest of the Sea," reports:

"She sailed for Canton December 23, 1846. Thus started a career of less than ten years, by all odds the most remarkable ten years of sail in the history of the world. Before her brief life had ended, the *Sun* which had broken more records than a ship of her inches had ever broken and in company with other clippers had established the majority of sailing records that still survive. She was the first vessel to go around the Horn to California in less than one hundred days. Twice she broke the record for speed from Canton to the United States and neither of these passages have ever been equalled by any ship under sail."

On March 28, 1850, the *Sun* struck a reef and became a total loss. It was a tragic end for one of the finest of all the clipper ships, but the continuing advances she inspired in American shipbuilding live on. Her spirit and drive for some of the greatest speeds of her class are still reflected in the ingenuity and advanced performance of American merchant ships today, such a powerful king of the sea . . . stronger, faster, larger, undaunted, determined.

SEE ADVERTISING & SALES INFO COMPANY, CHESTER, PENNSYLVANIA

*Quoted from *Greatest of the Sea* by permission of the publisher, the U.S. Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland.

The SEA WITCH

Cliper, 1860-1861



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NUMBER THREE

The Down Easter Years



THE CLIPPER ERA END in U.S. Merchant Marine history slowly began to decline around 1855-1865. The end marked the beginning of another type of vessel that was to become very well known. This was the larger, fuller, three-masted ship or bark rigged vessel, the Down Eater. The designation for these large wooden vessels derived from the fact that they were built in the Down East shipyards of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine and Connecticut. The Down Eaters were an ideal answer to the newer shipping needs of the time, especially the need for more economical water transportation, and they made history in an era of their own for thirty years.

Many factors helped trigger the development and growth of the Down Eaters. The chief of these was the beginning of a huge California grain trade in the early 1850's, virtually on the heels of the gold rush. A new type of ship was needed to transport the grain to the east coast. It had to be rugged enough to withstand the rigors of Cape Horn. In order to provide the desired operating economies, it had to have a larger cargo capacity, a smaller crew and greater speed than the clippers.

In addition to the increasing need for a new type of ship for the California grain trade, the retrenchment in shipping due to the depression of 1857 also helped seal the fate of the increasingly uneconomical clippers. The Down Eaters gained such rapid acceptance that in the period from 1865 to 1875 alone, American shipbuilders launched an average of 90 new Down Eaters each year.

The *Ship* has a unique and almost paradoxical place among the

Down Easter. To begin with, she was built of steel, the first steel sailing vessel ever launched in America. In the second place, she bore no resemblance to the traditional Down Easter, either in hull or deck arrangement. She was a four-masted bark of 4500 tons deadweight, and spreading 13,000 square yards of canvas. However, by virtue of being launched, owned and operated by a Down East firm, the *Deigo* was a Down Easter.

HER LATIN NAME was taken from the motto of the State of Maine, meaning "I lead." The *Deigo* was not extraordinarily fast, but her speeds were reasonable. Typical passages included San Francisco to Queenstown in 107 days and Honolulu to Philadelphia in 118 days. She was torpedoed and sunk on May 30, 1917, during World War I.

At the launching of the *Deigo* in February 1874, the Commissioner of Navigation predicted, "The construction of this vessel marks the beginning of a great new industry in this country. The ship in the future is to be of steel . . ."

BY THE TIME OF THE LAUNCH of the *Deigo*, twenty-three years later, the prediction had materialized in full. American shipbuilding capabilities had swung over almost entirely to steel and steam. These capabilities were to help win the mastery of the sea in the greatest war the world had ever known and keep us into another spectacular era of ever-larger, ever-later ships in the history of the U. S. Merchant Marine.

The DIRIGO

Dear Sirs, 1984-1987



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NUMBER FOUR

The Coasting Schooner Years



IN THE EARLIEST YEARS of the United States, almost everything moved by water, the only practical way. As time passed, an interior network of roads gradually developed and a share of goods, passengers and mail moved overland; first, by horse-drawn vehicles, then by rail and, ultimately by truck, as well. Nonetheless, the need for waterborne transportation remained, especially in localities along the coast where land-based carriers could not compete with the economies of shipping by water.

Before steam-powered vessels came into widespread use, sailing vessels were the backbone of this coastal commerce. Originally, these were small handy ships, though not necessarily fast. The ship designs varied according to the general weather and water conditions of the areas the ships primarily served, as well as the nature of the principal local cargoes to be carried.

AS STEAM-POWERED VESSELS became predominant, sailing vessels were reduced to transporting the more cumbersome commodities which they could still handle more cheaply. These cargoes included such items as hay, pulp wood, oyster shells, paving stones, lumber, coal and farm products.

Although many large vessels were built for coastwise shipping over the course of time, including five- and six-masted schooners, the small two-masted schooner remained relatively unchanged.

Undoubtedly, one of the best-known of these smaller schooners was the *Alta S. Winthrop*. She was built in S. Norwalk, Conn. in 1861. At her launching, she was christened the *Alta A. Talbot*. She registered 85 tons and measured 73 feet, two inches overall. On a change of ownership in 1884, she was rebuilt and renamed the *Alta S. Winthrop*, by which name she came to be best known.

THE *ALICE S. WESTON* MADE RUNS as far south as the Hudson River and Long Island Sound, but the large part of her commercial career was spent around Martha's Vineyard. Many a New England city street is paved with stone brought to the seacoast port by this schooner.

By the middle of the 1930's, coasting schooners had almost completely faded from the scene, except for a few still serving the same remote areas. However, the *Alice S. Weston* was going strong at the end of World War II.

Shortly thereafter, she was overhauled substantially and converted for the vacation cruise business. In the mid-1950's, she was sold for conversion to a dock-side restaurant. In 1967, she sank at her moorings. She was 104 years old!

THOUGH THE LITTLE COASTING SCHOONERS never wrote shipping history as vivid as ships like the clippers, they filled an important need in their day. Their passing marked the beginning of the end of the widespread use of sail in American commerce, a form of shipping which had started over 300 years before in the earliest Colonial days. For with the exception of extremely localized use of coasting schooners today, few sailing vessels are left in the American merchant fleet. Thus, the *Alice S. Weston* was not only one of the last of the best-known coasting schooners, she was one of the last of a great era of sail.

With the ever-changing trends in transportation methods, it is interesting to note that there is a period of less than twenty-five years between the gradual tapering off of coasting schooners and the first of the motorships that we know today.

The ALICE S. WENTWORTH,

County School, 1893-1907

