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A Summer Day

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Courtesy, Peabody Museum of Salem

The famous "Hesper," for years the pride of the Boston pilots

American Pilot Boats

Part III—The Boston Model

By H. I. CHAPELLE



THE FACT that the abilities of individual designers play a large part in the development of a type of sailing vessel is well illustrated in the case of the Boston pilot schooner. Here was a type that apparently had no great reputation, a mere copy of a model developed elsewhere, which suddenly sprang into prominence when able designers appeared on the scene. In spite of a surprising lack of information regarding the lines and models of early Boston pilot boats, there is a great deal of circumstantial evidence that they were not distinctive in model or fame until well toward the middle of the nineteenth century. As far as has yet been discovered, the only difference between Boston and New York pilot schooners previous to 1840 was the greater proportionate depth of the former, the Boston boats being more or less exact copies of the New York craft in appearance and rig. Perhaps the Boston builders were less progressive than those of New York, or possibly Boston pilotage was less competitive; at any rate there seems to be no mention of distinctive Boston designs nor is there evidence that Boston boats had any great reputation for speed before 1840. Of course, some fast schooners were built at Boston previous to this time, but it must be inferred that Boston schooners had not the reputation of those found at Norfolk and New York. This inference is borne out, to a marked degree, by the fact that,

in the extensive foreign literature on American schooners there was no mention of Boston pilot schooners, though those of New York and Norfolk received special attention because of their reputations.

The designer who probably did most to bring Boston pilot schooners the great reputation they enjoyed after 1840 was a Dane, Louis (or Lewis) Winde. This man had been educated in Denmark as a naval constructor and had emigrated to Boston sometime before 1836. The reputation of American schooners of the Baltimore Clipper type was then very great abroad and Winde seems to have been an enthusiastic follower of the model. The schooner that brought Winde to prominence locally was the yacht *Northern Light*, built in 1838 for Colonel William P. Winchester. This yacht was 62' 6" long on deck, 17' 6" beam and 7' 3" depth in the hold; she was a remarkably handsome vessel. Her sporting owner soon took the measure of the contemporary pilot and fishing schooners, with the result that the *Northern Light* won a great local reputation. There were other sportsmen in Boston, to whom the supremacy of the Winchester schooner was a source of annoyance; these ordered similar schooners from Winde or went to other designers in search of schooners faster than the *Northern Light*. Among the schooners built for these enthusiastic yachtsmen were the Winde-designed crack *Coquette* which beat the great sloop *Maria* in a match race, the fast *Brenda* by the same designer, and the *Belle*, designed and built by Samuel Hall.

These schooners all became pilot boats after the yachts-

Preceding articles in this series appeared in December, 1934, and April, 1935.

Length overall 62' 3"
 bet. perp. 56' 10"
 Beam, moulded 17' 0"
 Depth in hold 6' 3"
 Draft 6' 6"

Pilot Schooner
 1845

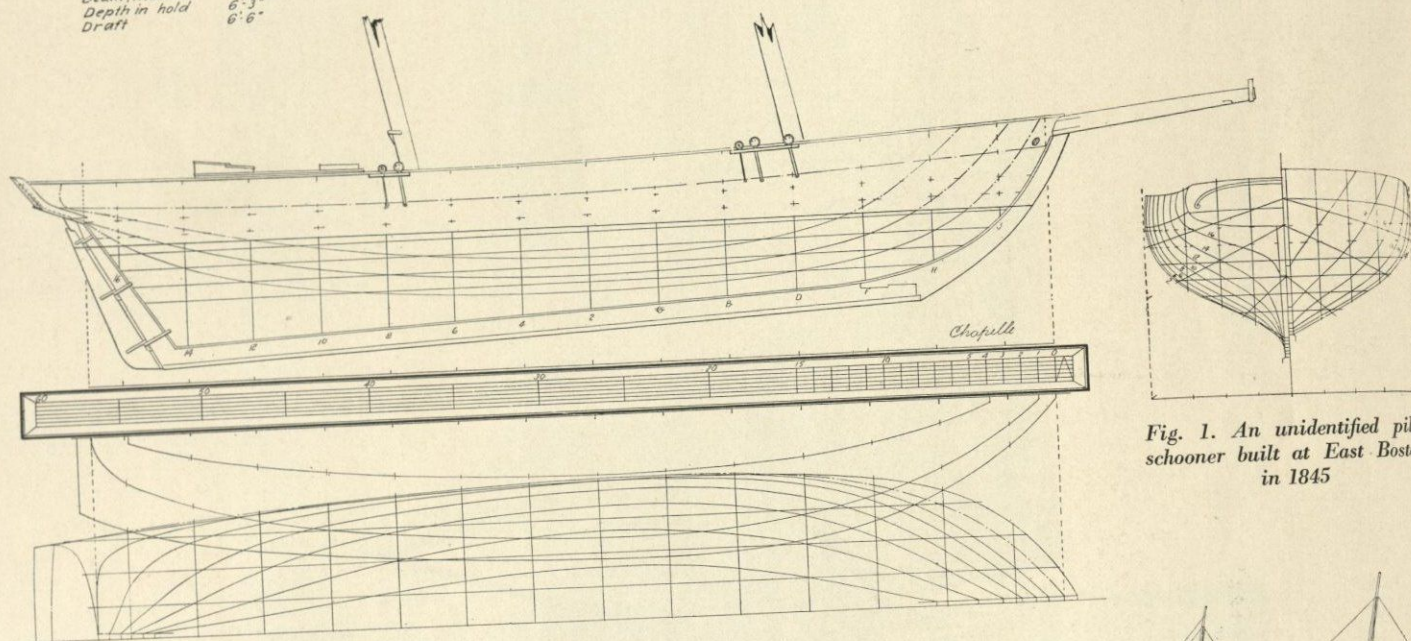
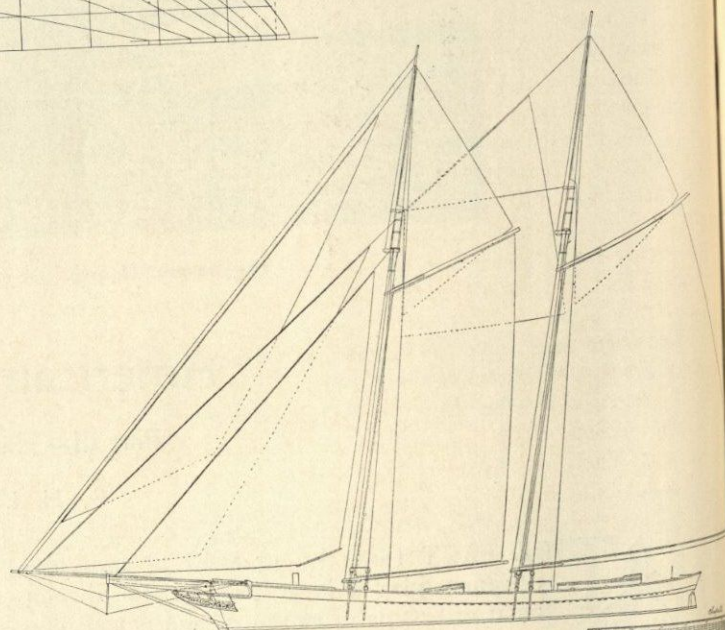


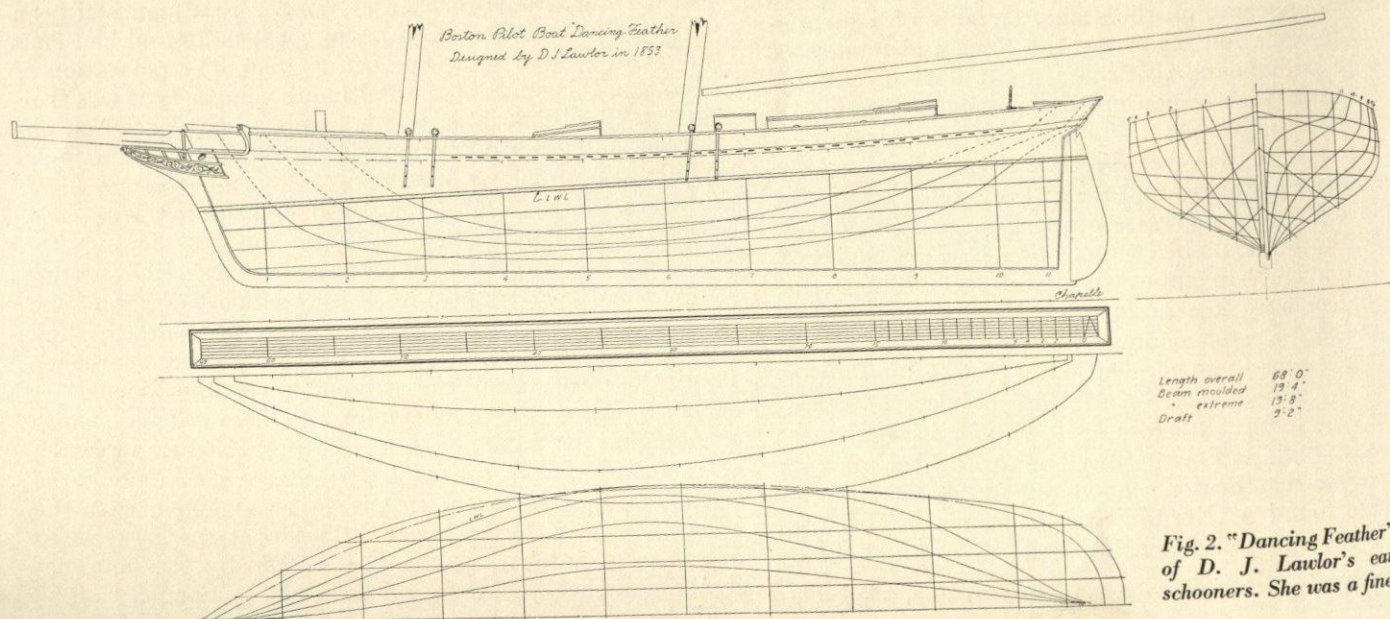
Fig. 1. An unidentified pilot schooner built at East Boston in 1845

men grew tired of them, the *Coquette* and *Belle* remaining at Boston. The pilots had been busy, in the meantime, with the construction of new schooners of larger size and better models than had been seen before in Boston waters. While the new schooners still retained much of the appearance of the contemporary New York pilot boats, they were much sharper and far deeper. Generally speaking, the Boston schooners were narrower than the New York vessels of the same type. A good example of the new class of Boston pilot schooner that appeared after 1840 was the *Frolic*, launched at East Boston in 1843. She was 70' 0" on deck, 18' 10" beam, 7' 10" depth of hold and drew 9' 0" aft and 6' 0" forward. She had but 18" of sheer and the quarterdeck was 6" above the main deck at the great-beam. She carried a 66' foremast, a 68' mainmast, and a bowsprit reaching 13' outboard; she tonned 90. The *Belle*, built the year before as a yacht, was 66' 1" on deck, 18' 6" beam, 6' 10" depth of hold, 72 tons.

It should be mentioned that the *Frolic* followed New York practice in pilot boat design in that she had a raised quarter-deck. This had been a feature of *Northern Light* and *Coquette*. Late in the '40's, flush-decked pilot boats became popular at



Sail plan of "Dancing Feather"



Length overall 68' 0"
 Beam moulded 19' 4"
 extreme 19' 8"
 Draft 9' 2"

Fig. 2. "Dancing Feather" was one of D. J. Lawlor's early pilot schooners. She was a fine sea boat

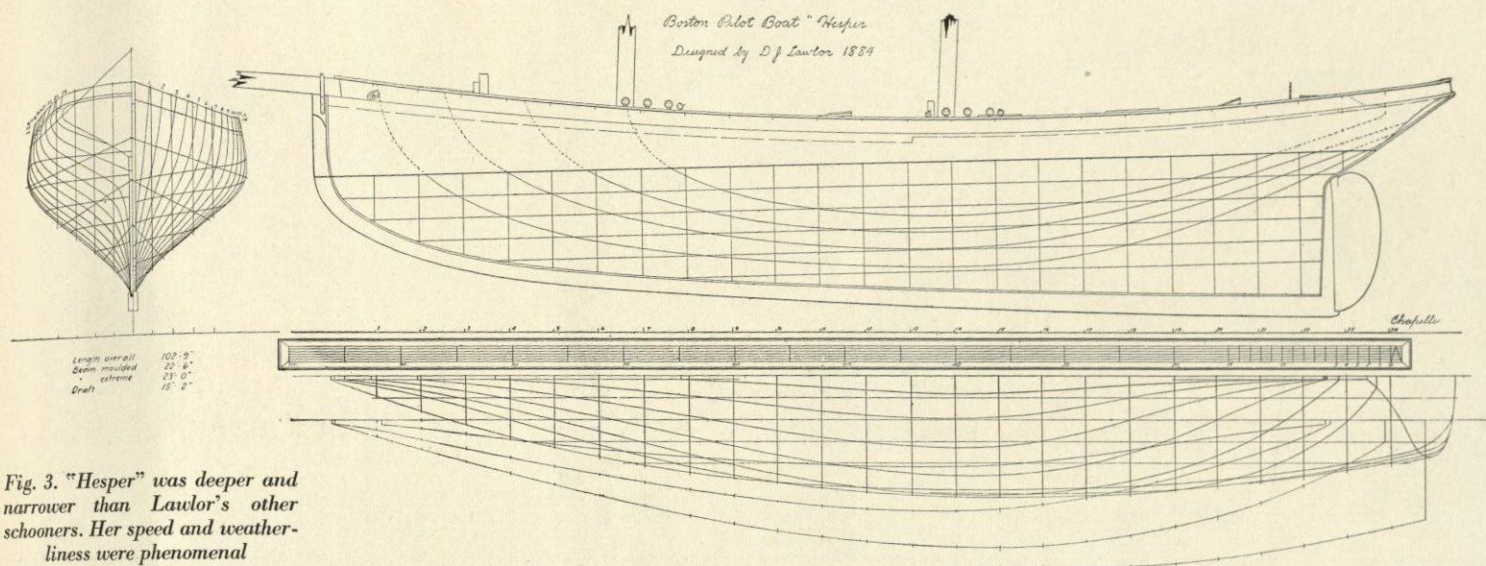


Fig. 3. "Hesper" was deeper and narrower than Lawlor's other schooners. Her speed and weatherliness were phenomenal

Boston; though a few such schooners were built at New York from time to time, most of these were not actually built for the pilot service but for trade, even though their lines had been taken from the famous New York pilot boat model. The reason that Boston pilots liked the flush-decked schooner while the New Yorkers preferred the raised quarterdeck has not been discovered; there was probably a practical reason for the preference, however.

The type of schooner that had been introduced by Winde followed the extreme Baltimore Clipper model, having great drag and much rake to the ends. Perhaps the most marked feature of the new Boston boats was their extraordinary rise of floor; their deadrise was much greater than had been generally used in pilot schooners built elsewhere. During the late '40's and early '50's, the Boston pilot schooners became shoaler but never reached the extremes in this direction that have been noticed in the New York boats. Winde's schooners, and the earlier pilot boats, had the broken sheer that had been popular in the New York craft; when flush-decked vessels became popular, flush sheers naturally followed.

Figure 1 shows the lines of an unidentified Boston pilot boat built at East Boston in 1845. She is much shoaler than such schooners as Winde's *Coquette*, following the trend in design that was appearing at the time of her launch. It might be observed that she was an almost complete reversion to the type of Baltimore Clipper that had been popular in the slave trade twenty years earlier. The scarcity of models and plans of Boston pilot schooners of her period makes any claim that the example is "typical" of her class

extremely doubtful, but she does represent a degree of evolution in the Boston pilot schooner type. Judging by the few lines and models that have been found, the development of the Boston schooners was very rapid between 1842 and 1855. It will be noticed that Figure 1 shows a schooner of the flush-decked type.

Winde's schooners, along with those designed by Joseph Lee and Samuel Hall, had firmly established the reputation of the Boston pilot schooner by 1850, both at home and abroad. About this time another designer appeared whose eccentric genius was to enhance the reputation that the Boston pilot boats had earned through the ability of Winde and his contemporaries. This was Dennison J. Lawlor, born in New Brunswick, who was as remarkable for his designs as he was for personal peculiarities. Temperamental and exacting though he was, Lawlor will long be remembered as the designer of some of the finest pilot boats and fishermen ever seen in New England waters. He was probably the greatest rival of Steers in schooner design, but by the time Steers died Lawlor had outstripped him in experience. Not only had Lawlor designed commercial schooners but he had also turned out yachts, steamers and a number of small brigantines of note. One of the most noted of Lawlor's brigantines was the Mediterranean fruiter *News Boy*, built at Thomaston, Maine, in 1854, a 111' vessel of 299 tons.

Lawlor's pilot boats are our particular concern, however, so we must return to them. Figure 2 is a reproduction of the lines of one of the early pilot schooners from the board of this remarkable man. This schooner is the *Dancing Feather*,

(Continued on page 110)

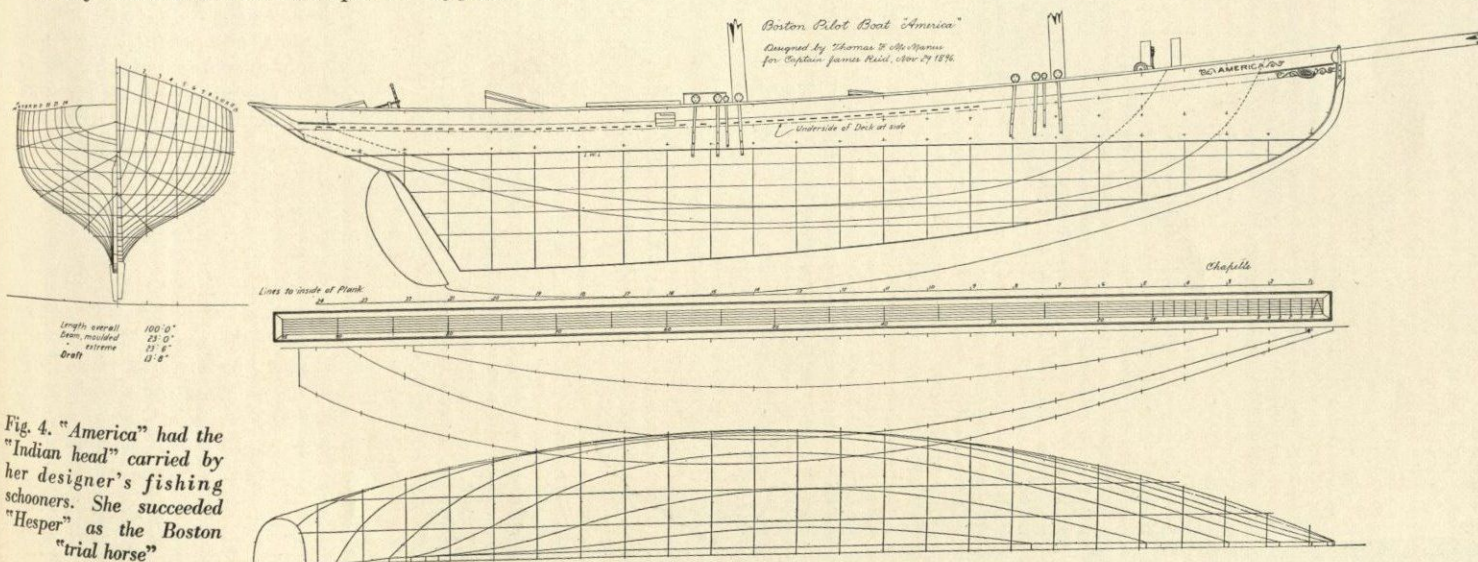


Fig. 4. "America" had the "Indian head" carried by her designer's fishing schooners. She succeeded "Hesper" as the Boston "trial horse"

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American Pilot Boats

(Continued from page 55)

built in 1853; her model is in the Watercraft Collection in the U. S. National Museum, Washington, D. C. The lines do not give a really accurate impression of the beauty of form that is apparent in the model, as is so often the case. This beautiful schooner had black topsides and green underbody, with her billet, headrails and trailboards picked out with gold leaf. Compared to Lawlor's later pilot boats, the *Dancing Feather* was rather shoal but she was considered a fine sea boat; her motion was very easy in heavy weather.

The importance of easy motion is appreciated by yachtsmen who have had the misfortune to be caught out in an uneasy yacht. Pilots attached a great deal of importance to this quality for they had to live on their vessels for long periods and an uneasy vessel would have exhausted them to such an extent that their efficiency would have been impaired. Hence a schooner that did not possess this quality was soon disposed of.

The *Dancing Feather* had the clipper bow that had become popular in contemporary fishing schooners of the "Sharpshooter" class, which undoubtedly added much to her beauty. The clipper bow was more in favor with the Boston pilots than at New York, probably because of the tradition started by the old *Coquette*. Throughout the last portion of the nineteenth century there were clipper-bowed pilot schooners in use around Boston, though the utilitarian straight stem so characteristic of the New York boats was generally most common. The round stern seen in the plan of the *Dancing Feather* seems to have been an importation from New York and enjoyed only a short popularity around Boston. The trunk cabin seen in the plan was used in a number of the smaller Boston boats; the larger boats had flush decks, broken only by companionways and skylights. The rig of the schooners of the *Dancing Feather* type was similar to that of the "clipper" fishing schooner — fore and main topmasts fidded, and jibboom.

The list of pilot schooners designed by Lawlor during his long career is not available at present. There is a good selection of his designs in the six half-models in the Watercraft Collection, including the *Edwin Forrest*, 1865; *Florence*, 1867; the sisters *Phantom* and *Pet*, 1868; *Lillie*, 1876; and the great *Hesper*, built in 1884. Another of his designs was the *D. J. Lawlor*, but her model has not been found. All of the models in the Watercraft Collection represent fast schooners, the *Forrest*, *Lillie* and *Hesper* having the greatest reputations, perhaps. All were straight-stemmers. The *Lillie* was considered the hand-

somest of the Boston pilot schooners in her time. She had a graceful sheer and a well proportioned rig. The V-shaped transom was used in these schooners in place of the round stern seen in the earlier *Dancing Feather*.

Lawlor's pilot boats, from 1865 on, had sharp, hollow bows and short, though well-formed, runs; the quarter beam buttocks were usually quite straight aft. Lawlor also employed hollow garboards in most of his designs, usually using very rising floors. Though he retained the drag of the earlier boats, his schooners generally had upright sternposts combined with a rock-ered stem. There is a slight similarity between his designs and those of Steers, though Lawlor's vessels showed much less rocker on the keel. One characteristic of the Lawlor models is their very thin deadwood at the heel of the sternpost, resulting from their extraordinarily fine water lines aft.

The lines of the best known of all of Lawlor's pilot schooners is shown in Figure 3. This is the *Hesper*, whose speed and weatherliness were phenomenal. The proudest boast of any fisherman or schooner of her time was that she once "beat the *Hesper*." This was often a matter of an active imagination rather than of fact, for some of the "races" were run off when the crew of the *Hesper* were wholly unaware of the fact that there was a race. Properly handled, the *Hesper* would work to windward better than any of her contemporaries and in a blow she was almost unbeatable.

This pilot schooner was built in 1884 and was a departure from Lawlor's earlier practice. She was much deeper than any of his other schooners, in proportion to beam, and was rather narrow. When she was building, some of the pilots were rather skeptical as to her stability because of these features in her design. To some extent, their skepticism was well founded for the *Hesper* was found to require a little outside ballast, a method of gaining stability that was not regarded with much enthusiasm by the pilots. However, the *Hesper* was so smart a sailer and so able that this fault was forgiven her; for years she was the pride of the Boston pilots.

The *Hesper* was one of the largest schooners that had been built for the pilot service at Boston, measuring about 102' over all and 23' beam. Most of the earlier schooners were under 80' over all. The *Hesper* differed from most of her contemporaries in having a raised quarter deck, though her rail was flush. She was not a particularly handsome vessel, judging by photographs, for she had a high, bold bow which gave her an appearance of great





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power rather than grace. When she first came out, the *Hesper* had the old-fashioned jibboom but this was replaced with a spike bowsprit shortly after her launch. Photographs of the *Hesper* in dry dock show her to have had much of the appearance of the contemporary English cutter yachts, at least so far as her forebody was concerned. It is quite probable that Lawlor was influenced by the cutter, for it will be remembered that the controversy between the "cutter cranks" and supporters of the "skimming dishes" was then at its height. Boston leaned toward the side of the "cutter cranks" and Lawlor was keenly interested in the matter; he was an advocate of the keel type, it is said.

It was the race against the *Hesper* that made the reputation of the Burgess-designed fisherman *Carrie E. Phillips*. The *Hesper* was beaten by the *Phillips* in a strong breeze, with the result that the latter won tremendous fame locally. Moreover, I have been told by yachtsmen who saw this famous race that the pilots did not do justice to the *Hesper*. It seems that the pilots had a balloon jib of which they were inordinately proud; this they tried to carry to windward in the race, with the result that their great schooner sagged off to leeward. Many expert onlookers were of the opinion that had the *Hesper* been properly handled she would have won, though the result would have been a very close race. It must be remembered that the *Hesper* often suffered, during these test races, by having to sail under her working rig while her opponent was generally a new vessel with a new set of sails and carefully tuned up.

The rivalry between the pilot schooners ran very high, and pilots on each vessel were fanatical supporters of their vessel. The *Hesper* had a large "gravy-boat" in her mess service and this was known by the pilot number of her greatest rival, to the great annoyance of the pilots in that schooner. Because of the pride of her pilots, the *Hesper* was sailed very hard, day in and day out, with the result that she is remembered as having been a "workhouse" by many of the pilots who were apprentices in her.

None of the schooners built after the *Hesper* achieved anything like her reputation, though the *America* came nearest to it. The *America* was designed by Thomas F. McManus who is best known for his fishermen. She was built in 1896-97 by Bishop at Gloucester, to the order of Captain James Reid, a well-known Boston pilot. Captain Reid had commanded the yacht *America* during the latter part of that famous vessel's career and he named the new pilot boat in her honor. The *America* was quite different from the *Hesper*, as may be seen by the

former's lines, shown in Figure 4. In many respects, the *America* was much like McManus' fishermen, having the "Indian Head" and the rather round midship section. The new schooner had a long run, but it was slightly fuller than in McManus' later schooners. The small transom was a distinct departure from previous practice and the fullness of the *America's* quarter beam buttock may be traced to this feature, at least to some extent.

The *America* succeeded the *Hesper* as the Boston "trial horse" and in this capacity sailed against most of the Boston fishing fleet. After many years of service, she was finally sold as a yacht. Throughout her career as a pilot boat, the *America* proved herself to be not only fast but a most comfortable sea boat. Like most of McManus' schooners, the *America* had all her ballast inside.

Following the success of the fisherman *Carrie E. Phillips*, the pilots had some schooners designed by Edward Burgess, of which the *Adams*, named for the Essex ship-builder who laid her down, is the best known. This schooner was a very able boat but never developed much speed, probably because she had a very full run. If there was any severe criticism of either Lawlor's or Burgess' pilot boats, it was the tendency to get the center of buoyancy too far aft. It must be added, however, that this was due largely to the trend of "scientific" yacht design at the time these designers were active. The fullness in the runs of many of the schooners of the '70's and '80's, both yachts and commercial craft, can be traced to the over-enthusiastic acceptance of the pseudo-scientific "wave-line theory" by the leading designers of the period. After the great work of the English yacht designer, Dixon Kemp, became available to designers in this country, it is noticeable that there was a reversion to the better formed runs of earlier times, following Kemp's investigations of the quarter beam buttock. Incidentally, Kemp's theory is carried out in the design of the *Hesper*.

There was one other designer of Boston pilot schooners who was very successful. He was Captain Martin, a Boston pilot, who modeled the schooners *Columbia*, *George Warren*, *Louise* and *Liberty*. It was the handsome *Columbia* that lay on Scituate Beach, near the old lighthouse, for so many years. She was embayed during the famous "Portland Breeze" and came ashore there during the height of the storm, all hands being lost. For years she was a landmark, resting on her side, in a good state of preservation; when the new concrete breakwater was built a few years ago, the wreck was removed. The *Columbia* had a handsome clipper bow and was one of the many Boston pilot schooners built by Bishop, at Gloucester.



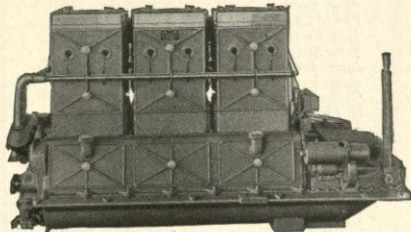
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Though steam pilot boats have not been employed at Boston, the old sailing vessels have partially disappeared. The last of the old boats is the *Liberty*, recently condemned. A number of yachts have been purchased by the pilots, though this practice is not a recent one, as is evidenced by the case of the *Coquette*. Among the yachts that became Boston pilot boats, the *Tarolinta* and *Fleur de Lys* are best known, though neither was particularly fast. The latter had been a centerboarder, but it is believed that the board was removed when she became a pilot boat. The only Boston pilot boat that was built with a centerboard, and designed for this particular business, was the Burgess-designed *Varuna*. It was hoped that the use of a centerboard would produce a fast vessel, but in this case the pilots seem to have

been disappointed for the experiment was never repeated. So far as can be learned, most of the centerboard pilot schooners were built for southern ports.

A large number of Boston pilot schooners were built for other ports; some went to China in the '40's, and more recently one or two went to the West Coast. The day of the sailing pilot boat is now over, however, for the few that are left in service have their rigs so cut down that they are but "motor sailers," with the emphasis on "motor." The types of boats used in the past are of interest, at this time, for they offer suggestions for an excellent type of seagoing auxiliary cruiser. If reports are to be relied upon, some of our modern ocean racers are far less comfortable than these old schooners, so perhaps something can still be learned from them.

Maiden Voyage—Winter Style

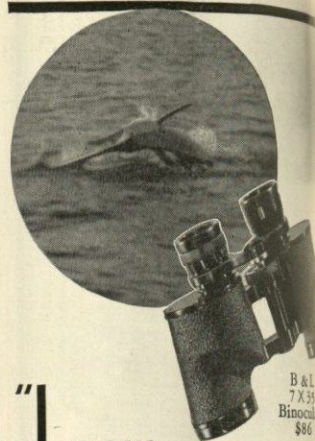
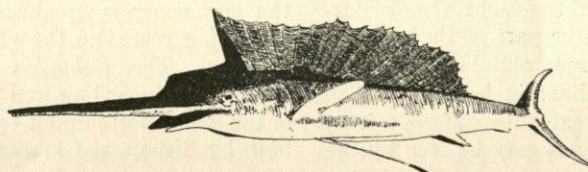
(Continued from page 39)

seemed to be pneumatic cushions under her keel. We hung on and peered into the distance for Brenton Reef. Skipper was improving on the compass a bit. After all, it was as new and untried as we and that dark devil, deviation, might be lurking about. On and on, but no lightship; surely that was Point Judith ahead? "Cap" came up from toasting his toes in the after cabin and calmly pointed out the little ship, just abeam but five miles inshore. Maybe the compass was right! On the crest of rollers that might have troubled the *Europa* but were much too big for the *Black Penny* to trifle with, we waved to an old coasting schooner beating out toward Block Island. Five days later we saw her pass Execution.

Hot lunch chased away the shivers and our spirits soared. The worst was definitely over. The Sound could offer no terrors. Our beautiful *Black Penny* — and she is a snappy-looking craft — had proved herself in weather worse than any summer thunder squall could bring. We knew our motors would start despite the cold, and run cool and smoothly. One warm stuffing box had been our only care, and it was a minor one. The afternoon sun shone on snow-covered Watch Hill. Its fading light just saw us past Fishers Island and its perplexing maze of buoys. Five o'clock found us safely tied up by the New London station. There was plenty of ice in the streets, but the stars were bright and the wind was piping.

I suspect that whoever wrote that line about the last laugh must have been a sailor. Half an hour out of New London it almost seemed that we had cheered too soon. A fresh wind slapped the spray in our faces and did nothing to increase the visibility, which was never more than a mile. A strong head tide across the shoals at the mouth of the Connecticut was beastly. But it was today or an anticlimax. Choosing a longer but milder course closer to the shore, we plugged along. With no sun, no company but a lonely tow and an oyster boat, it was a long, cheerless day. But surely and steadily she ran. At three o'clock we began to strain our eyes. "Cap" has seen his threescore years and ten and more boats than he can count, yet he caught the spirit too. Finally a shadow rose ahead and, dead on the nose, exactly on schedule, Execution came abeam at 4:30 — twenty-four running hours out of Boston. We had made it just in time. The gathering darkness shrouded the ghostly shapes of mere summer yachts on City Island. No flags greeted us; there was no float to tie up to, but we lassoed the dock and made her fast, safe and sound. Fingers were stiff and toes numb, our faces as covered with salt as the mahogany.

Perhaps we had not come very far; still, we had worked hard. Certainly, it was a far cry from the sunbaked deck we had drawn on that piece of paper. But she was a swell boat, and a helluva lot of fun!



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