

Wooden Clippers Ships Were Like Poetry

For beauty, speed and grace on the waters, nothing equalled the clipper ship. And for excitement and drama, no period in American maritime history matches the "clipper ship" era.

Termed the "thoroughbreds of the seas" for their long, sleek lines, clipper ships raced across the China seas transporting tea and exotic woods; rounded the gale-swept Cape Horn carrying "forty-niners" to the California Gold Rush; or sped restless adventurers to Australia. Clippers were even used to hunt whales.

With their ability to hit and run, clippers also drew a less dubious type of fame — as raiders, privateers and blockade runners.

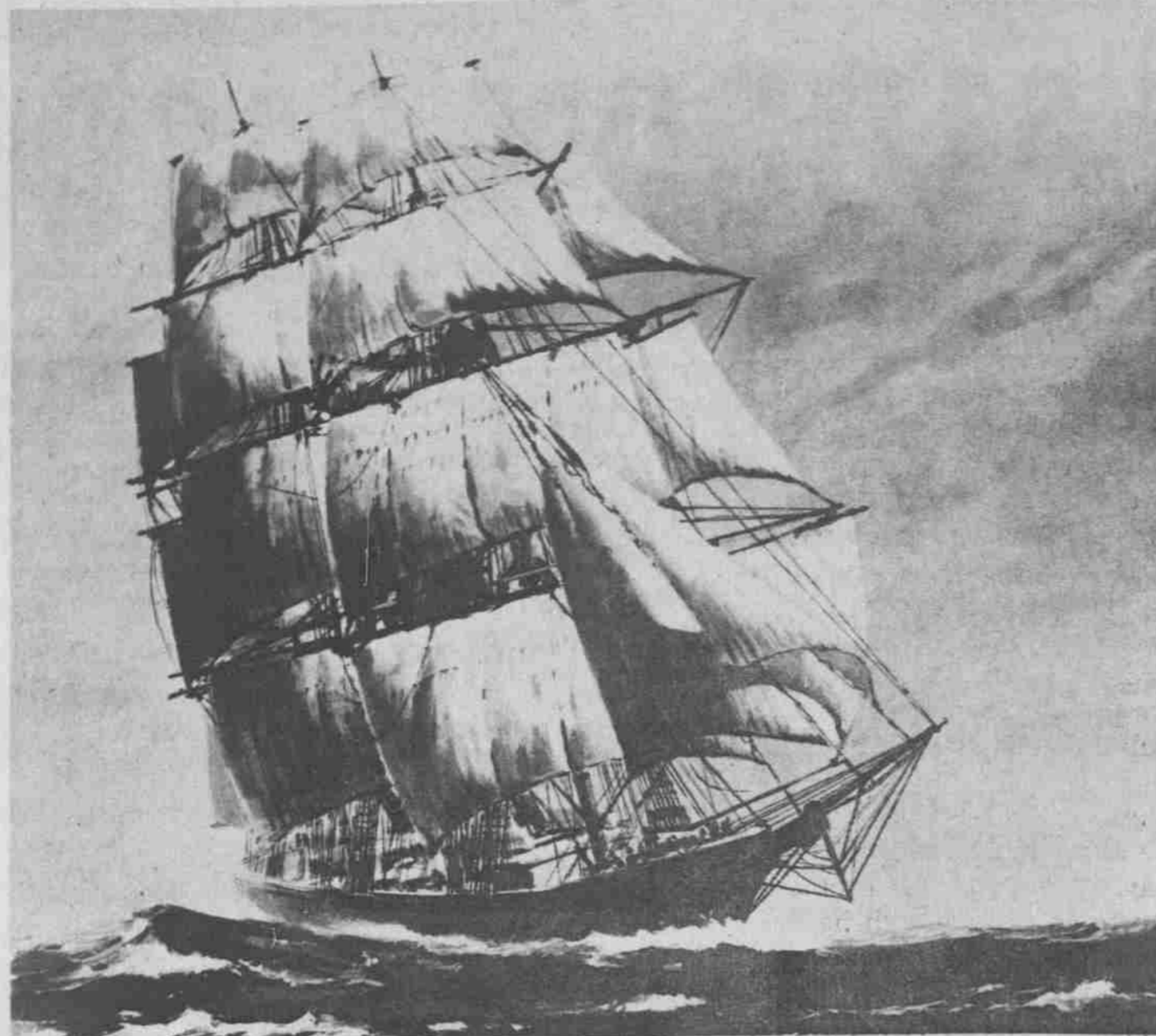
Comelike, the era of the Clipper Ship blazed across the seas for a relatively short time — from the 1840's to the 1860's.

PACKET SHIPS

According to records in the famed Marine Library of the Atlantic Mutual Insurance Company, the predecessors of the clippers were the fast packet ships of the Black Ball Line which inaugurated scheduled runs across the Atlantic in 1817 and advertised that, fair weather or foul, its ships would "sail on their appointed days, full or not full."

Other packet lines sprung into operation. The drive to cut down sailing time on regular runs intensified — and the result was the development of the clipper ship.

To be called a "clipper" was the highest honor that could be paid a vessel. Her distinguishing marks were long, sharp lines, a hull built for



THE "SEA WITCH" — fastest ship afloat in the mid-19th century—was equally famous for its skipper as well as its speed. Fanatical "Bully" Waterman, lashed to a deck chair, so relentlessly drove his ship and his men to new sailing records that he became known as "one of the most inhuman monsters of his age," according to sea annals preserved in the Marine Library of the Atlantic Mutual Insurance

Company in New York. The "Sea Witch" belonged to a breed of ship—the clipper—which gave to American maritime history a two-decade era of unmatched excitement and drama. Clippers like the "Stag Hound," "Alice Mandell," "Great Republic" and "Oriental" helped link the worlds of the East and West as they swept across the seas with their precious cargo.

speed rather than cargo, extremely heavy spars, and the utmost spread of heavy canvas piled upon canvas.

The clipper ship era was also an age of masterful ship-builders and colorful captains.

The outstanding builder undoubtedly was the legendary Donald McKay. His first clipper, the "Stag Hound" was designed and built in sixty days. Her hull stretched 226 feet. She had the longest, sharpest ends seen on a ship. Her spread of sails caused on-lookers to gasp.

Despite its size, the "Stag Hound" proved both seaworthy and profitable. When she returned from her New York - San Francisco gold run, she had cleared \$80,000 — a massive sum — for her Boston owners.

Today, in the Wall Street offices of Atlantic Mutual, are displayed models of some of the spectacular clippers which Atlantic insured more than a century ago.

Among the models is the "Sea Witch," which broke more records than any other ship of her size. She was the first vessel to go around Cape Horn in less than 10 days. She twice broke the record from Canton to the United States — a record which no sailing vessel ever equalled.

WHALING SHIP

Another colorful clipper, was the "Alice Mandell" out of New Bedford. She was used almost exclusively as a whaler during her short six-year career.

This clipper ended its short,

speedy career in 1857 when she "was lost on the Pratas Shoal."

Largest of all clippers was the redoubtable "Great Republic." Built by Donald McKay for the Australian trade, she was launched on October 4, 1853. The "Great Republic" weighed 4,555 tons, had a main mast as tall as a twenty-story building — towering a hundred feet higher than the Brooklyn Bridge roadway.

Tragically, the "Great Republic" burned to the water's edge as she was taking cargo for her maiden voyage. Rebuilt and bought by Captain Nat Palmer, a man of legend and former master of the famed "Oriental," the "Great Republic" went on to have a remarkable career.

To get the utmost out of clipper ships, driving, relentless captains were put in command. One of the more famed — or notorious if you will — of the clipper captains was Bob or "Bully" Waterman.

Waterman commanded a packet at 24, switched to clippers, and was given the dazzling new "Sea Witch" to command.

A fanatic, "Bully" Waterman never slept in his bunk. He lashed himself to a deck chair and took a one or two-hour catnap. The rest of the time, he watched, listened, weighed the odds, figuring how much faster he could drive his men and ship.

SEA RECORD

He sailed the "Sea Witch" from Hong Kong to New York in 74 days, 14 hours, setting

the world's first permanent sailing record.

Waterman was so daring and hard driving that he became a tyrant and earned the unenviable distinction of being called "one of the most inhuman monsters of his age."

His ship maintained such speed in all weather that men were shaken from the mizzen-top, sail yard into the sea. Some died of wounds and subsequent treatment.

Once "Bully" Waterman barely escaped a lynch mob, was tried in court, but found "not guilty."

Another legendary skipper was Nat Palmer, less brutal, more cautious, but just as colorful. Palmer who started sailing at 14, commanded several clippers, among them the "Oriental," the first American clipper to engage in the China sea trade.

Shippers paid double freight to have their goods carried on the graceful "Oriental."

MANY SHIPS

By 1850, clippers were thick in every port. Records show that in a forty-eight hour period in November 1850, nearly sixty clippers entered the Golden Gate of San Francisco. The California clipper — born of the feverish Gold Rush — was in its glory and every voyage was a race against time and competition.

Ten years later, the clipper ship era had come to an end — killed by a single word: economics.

Few vessels built of wood could survive the twisting, cracking leverage of the immense spars for more than a few years. Repairs became extremely costly. Since clippers were built for speed, their cargo capacity was limited and cargo rate high.

The clipper ships required large crews to handle the complicated web of spars. Inflation, depression, and the advent of the Civil War literally drove the clipper fleets off the seas.

Blind Student Feels No Different From Others At Appalachian State

From the Durham Morning Herald

BOONE — Larry McCreary tries very hard to be a typical college student.

Larry doesn't like 8 o'clock classes. He has trouble with math and science.

A 23-year-old junior from Granite Falls, Larry is majoring in sociology at Appalachian State Teachers College.

He has a steady girl, and when he's not in classes, he spends most of his spare time with her.

In between classes, you'll usually find him down at the bookstore drinking coffee and talking with friends.

He likes football. Doesn't miss a game all weekend on television, in fact. Or few Appalachian football, basketball or baseball games.

But no matter how hard he tries, Larry is not a typical college student.

He's a B student, and one of the most popular students on campus. Larry is more familiar to Appalachian students than the quarterback on the football team, the leading scorer on the basketball team, the homecoming queen, the head cheerleader or the president of the student body.

Larry is blind. He's been blind since birth.

"I'm no different from any other student," Larry says. "I don't want to be different. The biggest thing for a blind person to have is a feeling of being independent. I wouldn't be going to college if I could not do everything for myself on my own."

"The students at Appalachian are the finest people that I've ever met. I don't go through a day in which four or five people don't try to help me. Lots of times I don't really need help, but I never turn it down. I never know when I will need help."

"It doesn't hurt me one bit to have somebody help me, and it makes them feel good," Larry says. "I always remember to say 'thank you' to everyone who does anything for me. It means so much those two little words. It helps so much to make friends."

Academic work for Larry is accomplished with the aid of a slate and stylus to take notes

in class, readers who record the material in his textbooks on tape, a Braillewriter — a special kind of typewriter that types in Braille — and plenty of memory work.

Larry takes many of his tests orally. In oral tests, he only gets one chance at the question. He has to keep a B average to stay at Appalachian. It's a state rule for blind students, Larry says.

"Having to keep a B average used to worry me," he says. "But I realize that I have to do it. People told me when I came to Appalachian that I would have a hard time and that the winters would be hard on me."

"I haven't had much trouble at all. People try to help me on the snow and ice. I wear ice cleats and can usually stand up better than the people who are trying to help me, and end up helping them."

Larry graduated from the N. C. State School for the Blind in Raleigh. He taught Braille at the Butler Rehabilitation Center for the Blind for a year and attended Mitchell College in Statesville for a year before coming to Appalachian.

After graduation, he plans a career in counseling with the blind. "I feel a certain sense that rehabilitation work is my life," he says. "I feel that I have something to contribute."

Sometimes people are overly sensitive to the fact that Larry is blind. "One time I had a reader who would not read the word blind," he says. "When I meet some people for the first time, they feel very sensitive about not trying to say anything that would possibly hurt me and it gets embarrassing. As I get to know them, they relax and everything goes smoothly."

"Being blind doesn't bother Larry. "There've been times when I have hated being blind," he says. "When I was little, I couldn't understand. I have always wanted to play baseball and I couldn't."

"When I go to a baseball or football game, I can see it in my mind. I can imagine the plays and the positions of the players. At a movie, I can see the same thing that you do, although an extreme amount of movement is hard for me to follow."



LARRY McCREARY has no trouble walking around the Appalachian campus. His hearing enables him to sense sound bouncing off objects such as cars and trees, and his cane detects steps and other objects which might provide blocks in his path.

Larry remembers many things he's done as the greatest thrills in life, things that would seem commonplace to others. He took a ferry to Jamestown, Va. one time, and remembers sticking his hand out of a porthole and feeling the spray from the waters of the James River on his arm and the smell of the water.

He went to a Dodgers' game against the Pirates in Pittsburgh a couple of summers ago.

He's proud of his brother, Bob McCreary, who played offensive tackle for the Dallas Cowboys.

He's proud of Appalachian, where the students are the friendliest anywhere and the teachers are very cooperative and have taken extra time to

help him with his work. And friends who think he's no different from anyone else, who speak to him where ever he goes and feel good when Larry makes a special effort to remember their name from the sound of their voice.

His friends talk about a bad second gear in his cane and play jokes on him, and Larry plays jokes on them.

Appalachian means a lot to Larry McCreary, and Larry McCreary means a lot to Appalachian. As one of Larry's teachers puts it, "he's an inspiration to all who know him."

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—Richard Schickel, LIFE

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