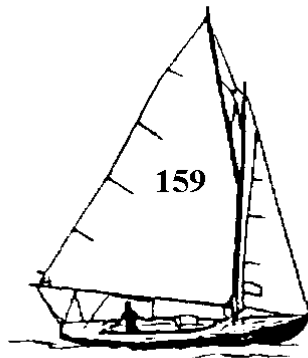


# A Roving Commission

An account of a brief but eventful cruise  
offered as a tribute to the Wianno  
Senior on the occasion of the Centennial  
Celebration of the class, July 25-27, 2014

William L. Henry and *Quest*  
June, 2014



To Malcolm Crosby  
He cares for our Seniors as if his own

Thursday, July 16, 1992, 1950 hours. We are about 500 yards northeast of the Canapitsit Channel bell. We have been for a while, and I know why. Virtually no wind, and the Vineyard Sound ebb has ended. In fact, the Nashawena shoreline that had been slipping behind is now starting to slip ahead. We left Bass River over ten hours ago with Cuttyhunk the intended destination - not today it turns out. So swing around to head back up Vineyard Sound and consult the chart to consider possibilities. The obvious one is easy to spot - a shallow bay on the northeast shore of Nashawena in Quicks Hole with clean, deep water close to the shoreline.

### Plan B

What is Plan B? Plan B is what happens if Plan A doesn't work out. What was Plan A? Cuttyhunk was the destination today for two reasons. One, perfectly straightforward, was to enable getting to Newport the next day. The other, somewhat fanciful, was to walk up the stone path to the lookout the next morning to scan the horizon for vessels sailing from Boston for the Newport Tall Ships Parade of Sail scheduled for Monday, the 20<sup>th</sup>. Whether in Buzzards Bay having come through the canal, in Vineyard Sound having come through Pollock Rip Channel and Nantucket Sound, or having gone outside Nantucket and the Vineyard, I would be able to see them. Then, back to *Quest*, up anchor and sail out on the best course to meet (intercept?) them. As I said, somewhat fanciful.

Being forced to switch to a Plan B is something I have come to greet warmly over the years of cruising *Quest* as it often produces fine surprises. This time provides a particularly rich example. Around 2020 as the flood is carrying us along the Nashawena shoreline in the gathering hazy dusk, out of Quicks Hole appears a square-rigged ship that from the pattern of her ensign design I know to be either the Danish or Norwegian training vessel. In that light she is a remarkable, almost ghostly sight. (I did wonder why she was coming into Vineyard Sound rather than heading for Newport. Many days later back home catching up on the real world, I learned that she was the *Danmark* headed for Edgartown for a party to be given for her crew the next evening.)

With a light evening breeze providing steerage way, and the flashing green bell off Fox Point and the red flasher in the Hole providing helpful reference points, we range in safely around Fox Point in the dark and drop anchor in that cove at 2145. Surprise number two comes at 0500 Friday morning when I wake to the sound of an engine. It is the *Harvey Gamage* which comes to anchor close by. After breakfast at 0800 I row over to ask if I might use their ship-to-shore phone to call home. (While cruising single-handed, I always try to call my wife, Emilie, each day, and today is many years before I finally succumbed to the cell phone.) I am welcomed aboard and taken below to find the crew of young women Sea Scouts just sitting down to a French toast breakfast. My son, James, who is to join me in Newport Saturday morning, answers the phone. I tell him it is too bad that his summer job prevents him from being there with me to enjoy such a happy scene.

Friday, July 17, 1992, 0930 hours. Up anchor in a very light SE breeze. Even though it is essential to reach Newport today, instead of sailing into Buzzards Bay and heading west, I choose to continue down Vineyard Sound and round Sow and Pigs in order to say that I have finally sailed completely to the end of the sound and gained the Atlantic. I do this even 'though I have recorded in the log that the Buzzards Bay SW set starts at 1100, and, more important, the Rhode Island Sound west set east of Newport ends at 1600.

The rest of today is best noted briefly. As the following log entries attest, this leg of the cruise passes very slowly. Foolishness served, one might say.

1050 Bell "CC" starboard 500 yards  
1225 Bell "SP" starboard close  
1307 Buzzards Tower port 500 yards  
1400 Newport-Jamestown Bridge bears 315 degrees  
1546 R/W Whistle "SR" starboard 200 yards  
1700 *Harvey Gamage* passed under power  
1800 Newport Bell "2A" starboard close  
1930 Anchor down NNE Stone Pier

The Sakonnet River whistle entry has the following comment "slowly, slowly, painfully slowly." Another day of very light air and blazing sun. Some years later, while reading each volume of Patrick O'Brian's wonderful Aubrey/Maturin series as soon as each United States edition was published, I came to the following sentence on page 178 of *Blue at the Mizzen*. I knew exactly which page of the log to add it to.

"The sea, if it teaches nothing else, does at least compel a submission to the inevitable which resembles patience."

There is one new experience that stays with me. In the deep water past Sow and Pigs we start to feel the Atlantic swell - long and subdued on a calm day. So different from the chop of Nantucket and Vineyard Sounds and Buzzards Bay, our normal cruising grounds.

#### A Stress-free Interlude

Saturday, July 18, 1992, 0930. I row in to the Stone Pier, find a nice stable rock to sit on and wait for James to arrive. Two friends have driven him to Newport; they arrive and we drive on to Fort Adams to look over the tall ships docked there for spectator tours. His friends leave us back at the Stone Pier, and we row back to *Quest* for the next leg of the cruise to Bristol. We start by taking the harbor-master-prescribed counter-clockwise loop around the inner mooring area to view even more tall ships at the docks along Thames Street.

On a beautiful day with a decent SW wind we have a fine broad reach up the East Passage, sharing the water with a multitude of other boats, sail and power, creating a virtually constant chop. From one of them comes a call, "She's a

beautiful boat. Is she a Herreshoff?" "No" we reply, "She's a Wianno Senior." But I add to myself that I'll take that as a compliment. Sailing for me has always had an aesthetic aspect; sailing a Senior brings that aspect to the fore.

Friends Suzy and John Adams have arranged for us use a temporarily vacant mooring off the Bristol Yacht Club. We have no trouble finding it as there they are on their sloop, *Liberty*, to greet us and point it out right next to theirs. After dinner aboard we row in to the town and walk down to the Herreshoff Museum and back just to stretch our legs and see the sights.

Sunday, July 19, 1992, all morning. Suzy and John shower us with some superb hospitality, starting in fact with hot showers at the yacht club. Then melon and coffee on board *Liberty*, then the loan of their car to drive to the Herreshoff Museum for a look at its remarkable collection. And days later in the mail some photos they take of us raising sail and setting off for a lovely beat against a light SSW wind back to Newport.

#### The Main Event – and More

Monday, July 20, 1992, 1030 hours. We sail out past Fort Adams to the area between Newport and Jamestown where the vessels are starting to gather. A light SW breeze and a warming land mass on either side tussle to produce intermittent fog, sometimes dark, sometimes brightly glistening, and an occasional patch of blue sky. The changing light quality and visibility create an almost surreal scene, intensified as vessel after vessel joins the maneuvering fleet assembling for the start of the Parade of Sail. The Class A ships, the Coast Guard's *Eagle* and the Chilean training vessel *Esmeralda*, which anchored north of Goat Island and will lead the parade, stay free of the melee. The smaller vessels produce a rich medley of looks and feels around us, almost an ever-changing kaleidoscope as we all tack and reach and run while waiting for the start. We find three vessels particularly noteworthy:

The power of the schooner *Spirit of Massachusetts* as she hardens up and comes past us is palpable.

The extreme rake, long bowsprit and broad yellow gunport stripe of the *Pride of Baltimore II* creates a fine, dashing look.

The heavy gage standing rigging and somewhat blocky look of the brig *Niagara* give her a no-nonsense look ready to fight all comers.

Around 1400, as the lead vessels are passing under the bridge, we head in the opposite direction on our first homeward-bound leg to Westport River. As we enter colder water off Brenton Point the fog closes in, thick and constant to stay that way well into the evening. At 1525 we take our departure from Bell 2A off Newport Neck, steering 115 magnetic for the Sakonnet whistle buoy. We leave the buoy to starboard at 1625, a good side for hearing it in the continuing light SW wind. We alter course to 90 magnetic to take us toward the Elisha Ledge can. It comes out of the fog almost dead ahead, heartening as it is an unlighted and unsounded mark. At 1659 with the can abeam to port we set a course of 75

magnetic for the Westport River bell. At 1820, against a 1750 ETA based on the two previous legs but with no sign of the bell, we are sure that we must have passed it and be well to the east. We turn to 60 magnetic and start sounding to find the two fathoms line that tracks closely the gentle curve of Horseneck Beach. We find it and turn westerly. Staying at two fathoms which puts us about 200 yards off the beach, we cannot see it (now about 1900 and still very foggy) but we can hear gentle waves breaking on it (sea quite calm). From time to time, we think we can make out ghostly figures and sails on the beach.

At 1930 we hear breakers dead ahead and tack to sea. At this point, not seeing a good solution, I tell James that it looks like a night of sailing off-and-on until daylight. Not many minutes later we hear a bell dead ahead; of course, it's the Westport River bell! We plot a course for nun 6 west of Halfmile Rock, see nothing until we pick up a nun just inside The Knubble at the mouth of the river. At 2010, after two light touches, probably on Lions Tongue, trying to stay in the narrow and somewhat confusingly buoyed channel, we pick up a vacant mooring off the Westport Yacht Club which Emil Durand of the club kindly allows us to stay on for the night.

James is due to be back at work on Tuesday, so we row in to the club to phone Emilie to drive down from West Newton to pick him up. At which point James says, "Dad, why don't you come back with us, get a good night's sleep, and I'll drive you back early tomorrow morning." I like the idea; I really like it. It's been a long day, the cooler is warm and empty, *Quest* and my clothes are full of fog, and I have two or three days sail back to Bass River ahead of me.

The experience of Monday afternoon and evening suggested an assessment was called for. After the cruise ended I added the follow comments in the log.

"More northerly courses after the Sakonnet Whistle and Elisha Ledge enabled east set to set us south of desired course made good.

"Breakers ahead at 1930 hours were on Halfmile Rock. Closer inspection of chart would have assured me that that was where our careful soundings and coasting had taken us."

Tuesday, July 21, 1992, all morning. James drives me back to the WYC where we find it still quite foggy. I walk across Horseneck Point to look out over the water and think I see some signs of clearing. After stowing my replenished provisions and gear, making shipshape and eating lunch, with the Westport River flood nearly done, we unmoor at 1315 and sail out in a light SW breeze. The sky clears in time to give me my first view of the wrecked barge off Hen and Chickens. The standard chart symbol for visible wrecks depicts the grim sight well – very dark and sticking out of the water at a rakish angle. After a pleasant, low-key sail we anchor just clear of the northeast corner of the Cuttyhunk Pond mooring area. Then dinner on board, row ashore and walk up to the lookout. A splendid sunset but nary a tall ship in sight!

Wednesday, July 22, 1992, 1200. We are through the Canapitsit Channel and start up Vineyard Sound in a moderate easterly. At 1620 off the Lake Tashmoo entrance with the wind cycling through 30 degree arcs and not showing much strength, we decide to call it a day. Despite a light head wind and a gathering ebb we are able to beat in through the narrow cut and channel and have the anchor down at 1649. That gives me plenty of time to walk in to Vineyard Haven for dinner at the Linden Tree Café and ice cream at Mad Martha's, fast becoming a tradition.

#### 'We' and a Very Different Day

The reader may wonder about my use of 'we' when single handed. Starting in 1978 our two sons and various nephews regularly cruised with me, so using 'we' in logbook comments seemed right. When that generation became busy starting families and careers, single handing became the norm. Gradually, I came to feel that *Quest* and I were cruising together, so 'we' again seemed right.

Thursday, July 23, 1992, 1035. We clear the Lake Tashmoo entrance and head for home in a fine SE wind. We make good time, ducking inside the Succonneset flasher at 1300, wind now ESE. By 1415 the wind has strengthened and backed further into the east, so we are on port tack gaining sea room off the Wianno shoreline. The sky is now overcast. At 1500 we tack to stand Point Gammon but soon find the wind has backed more to ENE and we can't even stand Hyannis Harbor. By 1530 it is raining, the wind is quite strong, the waves increasing. Enough of this; we've done plenty of sailing into the evening for one cruise! We bear off for the West Bay entrance and are there by 1615. Twenty minutes later the anchor is down off the Wianno Yacht Club. I am glad to be at rest but not enjoying the hard, driving rain. *Quest* is probably disappointed that we aren't still out there.

I row ashore, call my brother, Andy, in Bass River and ask him to come pick me up. Back in Bass River, a hot shower, dry clothes and a good dinner cheer me up. I spend the night there and drive home to West Newton the next morning to catch up with the real world on Friday.

Saturday, July 25, 1992, 1632. Emilie and I have driven down from West Newton, and she has left me off at the yacht club on her way to Bass River. We clear the West Bay entrance, again headed for home in a light southerly. A fair current pushes us along past old friends Colliers Ledge flasher, Hodges Rock nun and Gazelle flasher (and new friend "HH") to reach the Bass River mouth at 1900. Finally home after a fine cruise with plenty to remember, savor and ponder.