

OTHER INDUSTRIES *of* NEW ENGLAND

Their Origin, Development *and*
Accomplishments, *illustrated by*
many Old *and* Interesting Views



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p33-38 George Lawley + Son

GEORGE LAWLEY & SON CORPORATION

"Lawley built" in the yachting and shipping world stands for honesty in design, construction and finish. Such business probity is not gained in a day, a year or a decade. It came to the George Lawley & Son Corporation, because the ideals which an English emigrant laid down as the bedplates of his little boatyard in Scituate harbor nearly sixty years ago have been maintained for four generations of Lawleys, until the big plant at the mouth of the Neponset is today the leading yacht-yard in the country.

Some years ago a New York copper magnate decided that he wanted a large steam yacht and ordered his secretary to open negotiations with the Lawleys and arrange the details. The usual contract papers were drawn up, calling for a large boat costing several hundred thousand dollars. There were some clauses in the contract, however, that were not acceptable to the secretary, who felt that they might place his employer at a considerable financial disadvantage before the boat was delivered, so he laid the contract before the copper king. "What, question the word of a Lawley?" said the New Yorker. "Here, let me have that paper." And tearing it in pieces, he said: "I don't want any written agreement with George Lawley. Just tell him to build the boat and send me the bill."

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For two hundred years the American sailors had made their way by swapping American products for the products of all other countries, by hunting whales under the equator and in the two Arctics, but giving the merchants of the United States and of Europe a service so superior to that under other flags that there was no competition, and now in the middle of the nineteenth century they were the swaggering lords of the Seven Seas.

Nevertheless, there remained one test of the sea to which the Yankee had not submitted. Ships built for pleasure had had little vogue in America, because all Americans were so busy doing the world's work that they had no time for vacations afloat or for races between such jaunty vessels as the people of England had built and sailed. A few who were able to spare the time and the money, built tentatively and held a few races. Then, when the minds of all Americans were dwelling upon the triumphs of the clippers, they built a schooner, gave her the proud name of *America*, and sent her across the ocean "to wipe the eye of the yachting mistress of the sea."

On her famous cup-seeking voyage to Europe in 1851 the *America* passed a steamer among whose passengers was an English boat builder seeking opportunity on the western continent. George Lawley, Sr., had built small pleasure craft in England for a few years, and hearing of the triumphs of small boats in New York and Boston, and sensing a demand for the best construction, he decided to transfer his activities and his knowledge of boat-building to the other side of the Atlantic.

For generations his family had been boat builders in Limehouse (London), England. His knowledge of the methods of ship construction then in vogue was perfect; he dreamed boats and loved them. His touch in the construction of a boat was that of the sculptor, or the painter in oils. Each vessel was an artistic creation, for in those early days there were no drafts nor blue prints, and the builder of boats followed in a rough way the model whittled out of a block of wood, but more often wove his own personality into each ship as she was built.

George Lawley found his first job with America's greatest clipper ship designer, Donald McKay, in his yard in East Boston, and fifteen years of painstaking effort under the watchful eye of the master prepared him for the career of a boat builder on his own account. With a fellow workman, William Maybury, he opened a yard at Scituate in 1866, and for a few years Lawley and his partner built only small craft, none of them over thirty feet in length, but all with graceful lines, and with the greatest care in workmanship. The "Lawley built" boat stood then, as it did for more than half a century of yachting history, for perfection in every detail.

The elder Lawley took with him to Scituate his son, George F. Lawley, who served his apprenticeship in the yards and rigging loft, and, as Mr. Maybury retired in a few years, the original partnership was superseded by George Lawley & Son.

In 1874 the yachting boom struck Boston, and the firm trans-

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From a photograph

Kindness of George F. Lawley

LAUNCHING OF THE CUP DEFENDER *MAYFLOWER*

A view of the launching of this famous yacht from the City Point yard of George Lawley & Son in the year 1886.

ferred its Scituate yard to a more advantageous location near the city, a fairly large lot being secured next to the Boston Yacht Club station at City Point in South Boston.

The seventies in American yachting were the days of deep draught vessels, and the Lawley cutters turned out by father and son soon became famous along the coast. Within a few years after the South Boston yard was opened, the demand for new yachts became so great that the plant was moved to the north side of City Point, and in 1902 additional area was secured when the city abandoned the old House of Correction property.

It was at this City Point yard that two of Boston's greatest yachts, the cup defenders *Puritan* and *Mayflower*, were constructed. Edward Burgess, their designer, had long recognized Lawley's superiority of construction and finish, and with the syndicate which built the *Puritan*, headed by General Charles J. Paine and J. Malcolm Forbes, he naturally turned to the City Point yard. For weeks the quiet, whiskered designer, who, by the way, was educated as a naturalist, lived at the Lawley yard, directing the carrying out of his designs, never brusque nor interfering, but always kind and encouraging until he was loved by every man from the foreman to the water-boy.

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How the *Puritan* took form, how she brought honor and fame to her designer, her builder and her owners, by humbling the pride of New York, and more than all, by hurling back the cutter invader, the *Genesta*, with Cohasset's great skipper, Captain Aubrey Crocker, at the wheel, and how as she crossed the line a winner, the Boston designer suddenly threw off his sedateness and turned a somersault on her after-deck, is enshrined in the yachting annals of the country. But neither the *Puritan* nor her speedier successor and almost sister ship, the *Mayflower*, would have attained such fame, had not they been "Lawley built," which then, as now, spelled success.

Thirty years later the Lawleys launched another cup yacht, the *Vanitie*, built of bronze, which all but won the honor of defending the trophy against the fourth Lipton challenger. Up to the time the *Vanitie* was built for Alexander S. Cochran it was thought that Bristol was the only port that could produce a bronze boat, but the shining sides of the Gardner-designed and Lawley-built craft showed that there were other creators and other constructors.

The year after the *Mayflower* was launched, the third Burgess cup defender, the iron sloop *Volunteer*, came up from the Delaware to be rigged at Lawley's. To no other yard would Edward Burgess intrust this important work of outfitting, and it is interesting to note that no cup defender or cup-defending aspirant produced or rigged at Lawley's ever broke down during an important race. Other cup boats might be dismasted, as were the *Columbia*, *Constitution* and *Resolute*, but the *Puritan*, *Mayflower*, *Volunteer*, *Jubilee* and *Vanitie* went through strenuous seasons without developing any structural weakness either in hull or rigging.

The launching sheet of the George Lawley & Son Corporation makes a fairly good history of American yachting. Hundreds of the craft which floated away from the yards at City Point or Neponset gained fame in one class or another, won races that are looked upon as establishing new eras in design and construction, or made long cruises that have been embalmed in song and story.

One recalls the victories of the schooner *Harbinger*, sailing under the famous house flag of Russell & Co., of China, and owned by John M. Forbes, of Boston; the schooners *Sachem* and *Merlin*, both Burgess boats, which vanquished the entire New York fleet; the *Papoose* in which the Adams boys made such a record; and the *Harpoon*, another Burgess boat, in which they won the Goelet cup in 1891.

In 1900 the *Endymion* was produced by the Lawleys, a contender five years later in the German Emperor's cup race across the Atlantic, and the next year the *Idler*, a two-masted auxiliary, built for Henry T. Sloan. In 1905 Frederick F. Brewster came up from New Haven to Lawleys for his famous *Elmina II*, which won more Astor schooner cups than any other boat in this American yachting classic, capturing no less than five of these trophies. Six years later the Lawley Company built the great 100-foot schooner *Enchantress* for William E. Iselin, the only yacht up to the year 1924 which had twice won the King's cup, another classic.

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Power boats became popular after 1897, and there were built and launched by the Lawley Company many well-known boats too numerous to mention.

One of the most successful small boats of twenty years ago was the *Sally VII* built for the 25-foot class, and raced with remarkable skill and success by Lawrence F. Percival, of Marblehead. This boat was designed by Fred D. Lawley, son of George F. Lawley, member of the third generation who had entered the firm. Studies in naval draftsmanship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology had fitted him to become the principal designer of the firm, and it was he who laid down the lines of the schooners *Agatha* and *Taornia* for William S. Eaton, the *Shiyesa IV*, later the *Shawna*, and the *Indra*, *Scimitar*, *Sitarah*, *Zuhrah*, *Valmore* and *Vision*, and the steam yachts *Kateda*, *Incas*, *Valda*, *Anona* and *Halawa*.

The Lawley Company was practically crowded out of its City Point yard in 1910 by an overflow of work, and inability to expand, so the plant was moved across Dorchester Bay to the old Putnam Nail Works at Neponset.

Here at the Neponset yard was built the largest American yacht in modern times, the steel auxiliary three-masted schooner *Guinevere*, for Edgar Palmer, president of the New Jersey Zinc Company. The *Guinevere* was the first yacht ever fitted with Diesel oil engines motor-ing her electric Westinghouse equipment which propelled the boat, hoisted the sails, lighted, heated and "cooked" the craft, and twirled the big gyroscope which keeps the boat on even keel.

Trial trips on big yachts, government vessels and great warships have often been in the nature of junkets. Champagne was frequently opened in the early days of the steel battleships, when the contract for speed was exceeded. But when the *Guinevere* went on her trial in the summer of 1921, the only food on the ship was what a few joiners and interior furnishers carried in their dinner pails, all hands from the owner, builder and engine-room force finding upon getting outside that there was not a scrap on board, due to a misunderstanding. "I'm mighty glad that this trial is only for ten hours instead of ten days," said Mr. Palmer, when he discovered that the cupboard was bare.

It is the remarkable personality of George F. Lawley which is the real basis of the continuous growth and success of the Lawley concern. Every yachtsman of any prominence in the country knows George Lawley, his genial ways, his inexhaustible fund of stories, and his staunch business acumen. Wrote the President of one of the largest banks in Boston not long ago: "Dear George: Enclosed please find my blank check which fill out for whatever I owe for fitting out my boat, as I am going away unexpectedly." When a man gains such a place in the hearts of his business friends that they can intrust him with checks signed in blank to pay their obligations, he has won a true championship.

There are now three moving spirits at the Lawley works besides George F. Lawley, the President of the corporation; Fred D. Lawley, the General Manager; Albert E. Eldridge, the Treasurer; and George

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F. Lawley, 2d, who has recently joined the working force. Mr. Eldridge of course hails from Cape Cod, and became Director and Treasurer of the Company in 1917, having spent his business life in the yacht-building industry and during the war superintending the construction of a fleet of mine sweepers in New York.

The fourth generation at the Lawley Company, George F. Lawley, 2d, a son of Fred D. Lawley, finished his course in naval architecture last year at the University of Michigan and he is now learning the business from its practical side. In his preliminary work at designing during several summer vacations he revealed many novel and progressive ideas regarding the theory of yacht construction and the possibility of securing greater speed, grace and ease of handling without the sacrifice of the dependability that has always characterized Lawley boats.

There is something about a Lawley yacht which makes it a supreme achievement. This is due partly to the wonderful facilities of the Lawley organization, such as the recently erected 200-foot four strut steel crane, the only one of its kind in any yacht-building yard in the country. Then again the Company employs the most expert workmen in every department, men who take as much pride in their work as if the craft were for their own use. The care in draftsmanship is another factor in the success of the Lawleys, for a beautiful boat is now always preceded by an accurate plan.

Behind it all, however, is that initial determination of George Lawley back there in the sixties, that he would build the best yachts that could be built, measuring his service to the yachting world in terms of quality of his product.

Fifty-eight years have elapsed since George Lawley signed the contract for building his first boat. His pride in his product, energizing the Lawley organization from that day, has given the phrase "Lawley built" a significance, throughout the country and throughout the world, that is the envy yet the inspiration of every high-minded business man. His company certainly should be included among New England's great industries.