

# *Charting My Life*

BY

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BOSTON

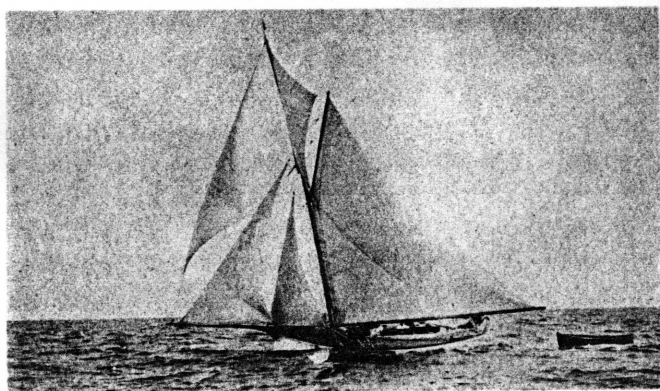
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#### YACHT GRACIE

*Purchased in 1885. I went around Cape Cod in her twice and down the coast of Maine as far as Camden. She was over 25 years old and always leaked when there was a fresh breeze. She was sold in 1890.*



#### YACHT ELF

*Purchased in 1890 when she was two years old. A fine boat designed and built by George Lawley in South Boston for William H. Wilkinson, who raced her for two years in the 30-foot class. I kept her for seven years and sold her when I got married. She was still a serviceable yacht in 1938, and was kept in Chesapeake Bay.*

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an old and leaky keel sloop 24 feet overall; and finally from 1889 to 1897 the fine 30-foot cutter *Elf*, which was still a good boat in 1943 and is now in Chesapeake Bay.

### CRUISE TO HALIFAX IN THE *ELF*

My first long cruise in the *Elf* was an offshore jump from Marblehead to Halifax, Nova Scotia, which we accomplished in sixty-eight hours. On this trip I "shanghaied" my crew because I was afraid they would not go with me and did not actually tell them until we were more than half way to Cape Sable just what our destination was intended to be.

At that time (1893), offshore cruising in small yachts was almost unknown and this sport was really started at Marblehead by my cruise to Halifax on the *Elf*. This cruise was imitated the following year, 1894, by Mr. William B. Fowle in the *Saladin*. Before he had tried it himself, he had been poohpooing some of our accounts of heavy weather and big seas encountered off Cape Sable and the coast of Nova Scotia. But he had a terrible time, as the *Saladin* was not nearly as good a sea boat as the *Elf*. Fowle almost lost his life by being swept overboard by a heavy sea and was only saved by the big Swede, who was his sailor, catching him by the foot and hauling him back again.

A few years ago Herbert White, one of the most notable deep sea cruisers at Marblehead, told me that his first inspiration came from this cruise of the *Elf* to Halifax.

This Halifax cruise was not a haphazard thought. I had been preparing for it for a year. During the previous September, William H. Wilkinson wanted to give me a present as a remembrance for my help on the *Mildred* in winning the Massachusetts Bay Championship. I said that a sextant would be most acceptable, and this gave me my first opportunity to learn something about navigation. I got this at Thaxter's old nautical instrument store on State Street, and the old man in charge very kindly picked out a second-hand volume of Thom's *Practical Navigator* as being better for me to study from than Bowditch. He was absolutely right, and with the assistance of this book I had no great difficulty in studying it up during the winter, using an artificial

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horizon made out of a pan of molasses which caused much amusement among my friends, specially in the autumn when flies would light in it and throw it out of level. A business trip abroad the following spring gave me a wonderful opportunity to practice on the bridge of the small German steamer I crossed on, both going over and returning, so that I had full confidence in my ability when we set sail from Marblehead on the *Elf*.

Our departure was taken from Half-Way Rock, Saturday afternoon, the 15th of July. The wind was west-southwest, our course to clear Cape Sable by a safe margin was east one-half south and we were bowling along hour after hour at almost eight knots, top speed for the *Elf*.

Regarding the "safe course" which I have just mentioned, this was a matter of some study. The summer before I had been cruising in the Bay of Fundy, and as far back as that I was planning the Halifax cruise. I lost no opportunity to make inquiries among the fishermen as to the strength of the tide and the allowance that should be made to avoid being drawn into the bay by a flood tide. The reply was that if you got the whole of a flood tide as you were approaching Cape Sable, you would be drawn into the bay about twelve miles. For this reason I laid the course for a point fifteen miles south of Cape Sable and then warned my helmsmen to be sure that they went, if anything, slightly to the southward of this course. Hardly anyone realizes that Nova Scotia extends down so far to the south and that the magnetic course, to give it a safe berth of only fifteen miles, is east, one-half south from Marblehead Rock, but such is the fact. The true course is north  $81^{\circ}$  east.

By ten o'clock Sunday night, our log showed that we had run over 230 miles, and as we could see tide swirls in the water, we hove to and took a sounding with a twenty-pound lead and one hundred fathoms of heavy cod line, to make sure that the tide hadn't swept us in too close to shore, the hundred-fathom curve keeping us at a safe distance. We got no bottom and kept on, getting a meridian altitude of Fomalhaut about 3 A.M., placing us nineteen miles south of Cape Sable or four miles south of our intended course, which was what we desired. All day Sunday

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and up to midnight we had been in the thickest kind of fog, but then it began to clear, making possible the observation of Fomalhaut for latitude. About 7 A.M. we got a longitude sight and found to our surprise that we had over-run our log nearly thirty miles and were way out in the Atlantic Ocean beyond Cape Sable. This was due to the drive of the heavy following wind and sea, and especially of the surface water in the strong wind behind us, which caused the log to under-register a little over ten per cent. From this position we laid our course for the whistling buoy off Shelburne and picked it up dead ahead about noontime.

The following clipping, which appeared in the *Boston Globe* on July 28, 1893, gives quite a good account of the cruise. It was the result of an interview with Benjamin Knapp, one of my crew on this trip:

### SHE MADE QUICK TIME

THIRTY-FOOTER ELF'S CRUISE TO NOVA SCOTIA

CAPTAIN HOWARD AND HIS SMALL CREW

KEPT TO OILSKINS 12 DAYS

RETURNED TO MARBLEHEAD DOUBLE REEFED AND BURIED IN WAVES

*Marblehead, July 28, 1893.* One of the quickest and pluckiest runs, and most skillful bits of navigation in a small craft, is down to the credit of Captain Harry Howard, of the 30-footer "Elf."

Each season the Elf has cruised in company with yachts of larger size and has made her runs across Massachusetts Bay or down the coast in shipshape fashion.

But her last voyage is remarkable on account of the distance covered, the quick time, and heavy weather encountered.

The Elf left Marblehead Harbor Saturday, July 15, bound for Halifax. Henry Howard, owner, Captain and navigating officer all in one, had as his guest Benjamin L. Knapp, well-known as "chorister" at the cadets' camp. Two men before the mast completed the little ship's company.

At 5:30 they laid their course from Half-Way Rock east  $\frac{1}{2}$  south for Cape Sable. With a strong southwest wind they ran out across the Bay. The small boat was lashed on deck, for the big following seas often broke over the rail of the staunch little craft.

All night and all Sunday they ran before the gale, and on Monday morning, after 36 hours, they passed Cape Sable, having covered

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a distance of 237 miles, at an average speed of over seven knots.

Their position was determined by dead reckoning and observation, as on the biggest ocean steamer, and in every case the reckoning was correct.

From Cape Sable the Elf was run to Halifax at once, and though becalmed for about eight hours, she reached her destination, 360 miles away, on Tuesday noon, having been only 67 hours from Marblehead.

The little cutter, jauntily flying the blue pennant of the Eastern Yacht Club, well deserved the attention she received from the Yacht Club at Halifax, and the hardy amateurs who put her down the coast speak in glowing terms of their entertainment in that fine old Port. Invitations to men-of-war Blake and Mohawk were among the kindnesses shown them, and a royal time was had during the two days she lay at anchor there.

Wednesday night they ran to Catch Harbor for an easy and early start on their homeward cruise. And then for a week they jogged westward along the coast of Nova Scotia, finding winds and lots of sea.

It was Captain Howard's intention to skirt the coast all the way, but a telegram received caused a change of plans and at noon on Tuesday the little ship was again headed across the Bay, bound from Cape Sable to Marblehead. With squally winds from all directions and a terrific sea that made oilskins necessary, the Elf made the run. Again the four men stood "watch and watch" for three nights and at 4:30 A.M. today the craft lay at her moorings off the Eastern Yacht Club House.

During the 12 days of the cruise there were only two days when oilskins were not worn on account of rain or heavy weather.

On Thursday, the next to the last day, the Elf was driving along toward Cape Ann under double-reefed mainsail and small jib, half buried in waves and foam.

"She had to go as long as things held, for Harry didn't let her up a bit," said jolly Corp. Knapp of the Cadets, whose sunburned face showed the results of healthy exposure. As he ended his yarn he stepped to take his shot at the pool table.

"Where did you get that nose, Ben? At camp or cruising to Halifax?" asked someone.

Ignoring the question, the Corporal squinted over the bunch of red balls and murmured, "Combination."

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Perhaps because Ben Knapp was a married man, he failed to mention to his newspaper friends that the first night out from Halifax, when we anchored in Catch Harbor, we were boarded by two good-looking girls, eighteen to twenty-two years old, who rowed alongside and asked us to let them go with us to Boston! The request was refused for various reasons.

After leaving Catch Harbor, which was just outside the entrance to Halifax, we cruised leisurely along the Nova Scotia Coast, anchoring overnight in the mouth of the Le Have River, Port Medway, Port L'Herbert, Negro Island at the entrance to Shelburne, and finally, at Barrington, Cape Sable. Each day the weather was fine and moderate in the early morning, but by noon we would have a reefing breeze and heavy sea dead ahead, so that we lived in oilskins and rubber boots most of the time.

In Barrington, we received a telegram from the company I worked for, which had been chasing us up and down the coast. It was calling me home as soon as possible, as most of the buildings in our Chemical Works had burned down. This made it necessary to abandon my plan to cross the Bay of Fundy to Eastport, Maine, and then cruise slowly back along the New England coast to Marblehead. Instead we had to go straight across from Cape Sable to Marblehead against strong winds and rough seas. As soon as my cook learned of this, he deserted, but I paid him off in the presence of the American consul, a precaution which undoubtedly saved me serious trouble later on. I easily replaced him by an excellent young Nova Scotia fisherman.

We finally anchored in Marblehead Harbor after a rough passage only twelve days after we had sailed from there, a truly remarkable cruise for so small a boat without power.

My life as a bachelor on board the *Elf* was enjoyable and perhaps a little unusual. About Decoration Day each year I would move on board. She lay at her mooring in Marblehead Harbor in front of the Eastern Yacht Club, of which I was then the youngest member.

I was working as a chemist for the Merrimac Chemical Company in North Woburn, Massachusetts, and had to take the

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train which left the North Station, Boston, at 8 A.M. This meant taking the 6.45 train from Marblehead to Boston, and in turn meant breakfast at 6 A.M., followed by a row across the harbor and a half-mile walk to the railroad station.

I had to keep one paid man on board who would get my breakfast and row me across the harbor while I was completing my toilet. In the afternoon he would meet me about 6.20 P.M., on the arrival of my train, to row me back on board. I would then wash, dress and row myself ashore to dinner at the Eastern Yacht Club at 7 P.M., for a very pleasant two hours with a small group of interesting Boston men. One of them was Charlie Longfellow, a great traveler and a son of the poet. He was said to have had a most wonderful dragon tattooed on his back by a Japanese artist when he was in Japan—I never saw it, however. He did have the most beautiful yacht I had ever seen, the *Alga*, 45 feet on the water line and designed by Edward Burgess. Twenty years later, I chartered her for the season and my wife and children spent a delightful summer with me on board.

Other members of the group at the Eastern Yacht Club were Edward Burgess, the famous designer of America's Cup Defenders *Puritan*, *Mayflower* and *Volunteer*; General Charles J. Payne and Malcolm Forbes, owners of the *Volunteer*; Captain Arthur Clark and Dick Milton, who took great interest in me as they had apparently both been in love with my mother before my father married her. I learned a great deal by listening to the interesting conversations of this group. Captain Arthur Clark was the author of the well-known book on the Clipper Ship Era.

Then when the nine o'clock curfew bell rang on old Abbott Hall, across the harbor in Marblehead, it was the signal for me to go on board and go to bed to get a good night's sleep before my early breakfast.

Saturdays, as I was able to get off earlier, I would take the 2.30 P.M. train from Boston to Marblehead, with many other Marblehead yachtsmen. Sails would have been hoisted by our respective boatmen and the weekly race to Gloucester would begin at the railroad station in Marblehead, and continue in our dinghies across the harbor to our boats where we would tumble



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on board, let go the moorings, break out the jib and forestays'l, which had been hoisted in stops for the occasion.

I learned much of seamanship and coastal navigation during these "scrub" races.

For instance, in a southeast afternoon sea breeze, if you sailed the shortest course up the middle of Gloucester Harbor entrance and got too near the high land back of the "Reef of Norman's Woe," you would find yourself completely becalmed, while boats coming along behind you, which kept one-half to three-quarters of a mile to windward and close under the lee of Eastern Point, would carry a good breeze right to their anchorage in the inner harbor and you could see them all snugged down for the night with sail covers on while you were still rolling in the doldrums off Norman's Woe. I have won innumerable races or runs to Gloucester by following the right tactics.

My most memorable victory was in an official race from Marblehead to Gloucester, run by the Corinthian Yacht Club. The preliminary gun was fired at 2.30 P.M. and, if I remember, my class started about 3 P.M., but my train did not arrive at Marblehead until 3.15 P.M. and it was 3.25 P.M. when I got on board and we were under way. However, I crossed the starting line although the last of the yachts were rounding Baker's Island about three miles away. Here they ran into a calm spot while we still held a good breeze. So we quickly began to overhaul them. I realized of course that unless I could do something, we would soon be becalmed ourselves. In the meantime, the entire fleet of fifteen to twenty yachts were heading the shortest course straight from Baker's Island to the Gloucester Harbor entrance. I at once strapped on my binoculars and climbed to the cross trees where there was a reasonably comfortable seat. There a careful study of the situation showed more ripples on the water about three-quarters of a mile to the south of the fleet, and I steered for this spot with the result that within the next hour I was able to pass the entire fleet and got about one mile ahead of them. However, the wind we were in did not extend out to sea as it usually did, and this made me think that there might be a shift of wind starting with a land breeze directly off the shore. I

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was still sitting on the cross trees and a study of the water within a few feet of the shore showed very distinct ripples indicating that a land breeze was in fact starting, so I immediately headed for the shore, crossing about one-half mile in front of the entire fleet, but still with a very light breeze from the southeast. Finally we reached the land breeze blowing fresh in almost the opposite direction and with rail down we made quick time to inner harbor. When we anchored the whole fleet was entirely out of sight astern. When we last saw them they were still becalmed.

With my marriage in 1896 I had to sell the *Elf*. I sold her in the autumn of 1896 for \$1750 after seven years' use. So I felt the original \$2000 had been well spent.