
Documents

REGATTA AT NEW BEDFORD,
MASSACHUSETTS, 8 AUGUST 1856.

I HAVE before me a newspaper account of a yacht race in the year 1856. This report is signed by the initials 'R. B. F.' The account of the race is so phrased and so accurate as to the essential details of such an event that I have no hesitancy in concluding that it was written by none other than Captain Robert Bennet Forbes; at the time of the race a distinguished citizen of Boston and Milton, Massachusetts, and who, born in 1804, at the age of thirteen was sent to sea before the mast; at twenty sailed from Boston for China as captain of the ship *Levant*; and at thirty, with a comfortable fortune, left the sea to settle down in Boston as a merchant and public-spirited citizen—a career fitting him to take part as an intelligent and accurate observer in this regatta.

The Captain Palmer referred to as the owner of the schooner *Juliet* in this account was without doubt the famous Captain Nathaniel Brown Palmer of Stonington, Connecticut, born in that picturesque town in 1799, who at the age of fourteen was appointed second mate of the brig *Hersilia* bound on a sealing voyage 'somewhere about Cape Horn'; and later, when in command of a sloop on a similar sealing voyage, was the discoverer of Palmer Land in Antarctica.

My records show that the sloop *Julia*, from on board of which Captain Forbes observed the race, was designed and built by George Steeres in 1854, having a length over all of 78 ft. 8 in., water line of 70 ft., beam of 20 ft. 2 in., and draft of 6 ft. 4 in. (I take it without the centre board lowered). Her time over the course, considering the conditions of wind and sea and the fact that it was a

long beat to the weather stake boat, is such as to cause me to use the soft pedal when enlarging upon the superiority of the yachts of today of similar tonnage. 'R. B. F.'s' report follows:

Dear Editor—I had the pleasure of being in the 'Cook's Watch' on board the *Julia* on the 8th inst., when I had nothing to do but to keep dry and take notes. I now beg leave to give you the result of my observations.

The yachts lay with springs on their cables, head to the wind, which was fresh about S.S.W., in a line from Butler's Flats to the Beacon,¹ and about a mile inside of Clarke's Point Light,² the boats of the 3d class being ahead, the 2d class next, and the 1st class last. The former started at the firing of a gun at 10:50 A.M., and consisted of the sloops *Richmond*, *Esperance* and *Ray*. Only the two first went over the whole course. At 10:55 the 2d class started, consisting of the *Sea Drift*, schooner, and *Una* and *America*, sloops; and at 11 o'clock the *Julia* and *Widgeon*, sloops, and *Favorita*, *Haze* and *Twilight*, schooners, started. As my observations apply principally to those of the 1st and 2d classes, which kept near us, I will give you the facts as to their starting. The *Favorita*, Kingsland owner, had the leewardmost position, next the *Twilight*, J. N. A. Griswold owner, next the *Julia*, Waterbury owner, next the *Haze*, Grinnell, and lastly, astern of all, the sloop *Widgeon*, Commodore Edgar, with a large reef in his mainsail, and the bonnet off of his jib, in consequence of a sprung mast. The *Twilight*, also with commendable prudence, had a reef in her mainsail. All the other first and second class boats started under full sail. The second class boats got off well together, the *America*, of Philadelphia, owned by Capt. Loop-

¹ A day-mark no longer in existence just to the east of Fort Phoenix, Fairhaven.

² Butler's Flat Light replaced Clarke's Point Light which has been abandoned.

er, first in order—*Una* next—*Sea Drift* not so well,—and Capt. Palmer's schooner, the *Juliet*, did not get a good start.

The first class got off promptly—*Julia* first, *Favorita* second, *Haze* third, *Widgeon* fourth, the *Twilight* settling down to her work with the utmost dignity, fifth. The excitement and the work now began in earnest. Every man lay close and braced his nose sharp on a wind. The real skipper, or boat-keeper, with an eye like a hawk, at the helm, simply asked: 'Where do you want to go?' and looked ahead.

In six minutes from the start, the *Haze's* masts were in one directly in our wake, the *Favorita* and *Twilight* dropping to leeward, the *Widgeon* looking all the better for her reefs, and keeping her original position very well. The splendid sloop *Silvie* was under way also, but retired from the competition in consequence of slack rigging or of some other indisposition to vessel or owner.

At 11:07, or thereabouts, tacked to westward for a few minutes towards Clarke's Point, and at 11:11, tacked to the eastward, Clarke's Point N. N. W. By 11:23 all the yachts were on the same tack: the *Favorita* bearing N.W. by N. 1-2N.; *Widgeon*, N. W. 1-2N.; *Haze*, N.N. W.; *Twilight*, N.W.—from one-third to half a mile astern of us. The smaller boats to leeward, bearing from E. by N. to S.E. by E. and about one-third to half a mile on the beam. Some, if not all of them, went out of their way to leeward of Packet Rock Buoy. But as the directions were to leave North Ledge, Great Ledge, and Wilkes' Ledge to the westward, and Packet Rock, Mosher's Ledge, and Henrietta Ledge to the eastward, we paid no attention to this mistake, and kept our wind, as did all of class first. As we jumped out into the Bay the wind and sea increased, giving the *Julia* just as much as was necessary for comfort, and slightly more than was necessary for speed. At 11:34 the little *Una* passed quite near ahead on the opposite tack, and in less than a minute the *America*,

not being able to weather us, tacked very near us under the lee bow.

At 11:35 the *Una* tacked on our weather quarter to the S.S.E. ward, and when fairly going, was not over two hundred yards from us. Here began the contest so far as related to the *Julia*, *Una* and *America*.

At 11:41, the *Haze*, *Favorita*, *Widgeon* and *Twilight* from 1-2 a mile to 1 mile astern, the *Widgeon* nearest and on our lee quarter. The *America* maintains her bearing but drops gradually to leeward. She appears remarkably stiff and comfortable. The *Una* holds her nose well to windward, but drops astern slowly.

At 11:48, she bears N.W. by N. 300 yards; the *America*, N. E. by N. 1-4 to 1-3 mile.

At 11:50, *Una* directly in our wake; 11:54, bears N. by E. 350 yards; the *Favorita*, N. by W. 1-2 W. nearly 2 miles; *Haze*, astern of her; *Twilight*, uncertain; *Widgeon*, doing well.

At 12, the *Una*, N. N. E., 1-2 mile off; *America*, N. E. 1-2 E., about 1 mile.

At 12:02, the stake boat off Quick's Hole bearing S. W. by W.; 12.6, tacked for her; the *Una* and *America* in one after getting around, the former gallantly leading; *Widgeon* bearing N. E. by N. about 2 miles; *Favorita* N. by E. 1-2 E. about same distance; *Haze* nearly 3 miles, and *Twilight*, N. 1-2 W. about 3 1-2 miles.

At 12:11, *Widgeon* tacked for the stake boat; 12:12, *Favorita* tacked; 12:12 1-2, *Haze* tacked; 12:19, *Una* and *America* in one, bearing N. E. by E.

At 12:22 Robinson's Hole bore S. E. by S. 1 1-2 miles, our course S. W. by W.—strong breeze and flawy; 12:25, eased the sheets a little; 12:27, the *Twilight* tacked to the S. W.—hull down; 12:29, passed the Quick's Hole stake boat within one hundred yards, gunwale to, the *Julia* bounding along like a race horse; 12:31, *Una* passed; 12:36, *America* passed; 12:38, *Favorita* passed; 12:40 the *Widgeon* passed; 12:44 *Haze* passed—*Twilight* too far off to make out her time correctly; 12:39, Cuttyhunk Light bore

S. by W., the sea heaving in by Cuttyhunk; *Una* and *America* still in smooth water, gaining on us a little, the *Una* about 3-4 mile astern.

At 1:01, the *Favorita* nearly up with *Una*—split the bonnet of her jib.

At 1:13, passed the outer stake boat, anchored about half-way between Sow and Pigs Light Ship³ and the Old Cock⁴—the former bearing about South, and tacked ship.

At 1:15 1-2, got fairly round to the N. W., 1:18 *Una* tacked, and at 1:19 1-2 going her course. 1:22, *America* at flag boat, and at 1:20 going her course after wearing ship. 1:23 1-2 *Favorita* passed flag boat, and at 1:24 1-2 going her course and set her flying jib. 1:25, *Widgeon* at flag boat wearing ship, and at 1:26 1-2 going her course still under reefed sails.

At 1:26 1-2 *Haze* at flag boat wore ship, and at 1:28 going her course, set her gaff-top sail, stay sail, and flying jib. The *Haze*, while running between the two flag boats, parted her fore sheet and lost several minutes thereby. 1:29 1-2, the *Sea Drift*, 2d class, passing flag boat, and at 1:31 going her course. 1:31, a large schooner which followed the boats, the *J. W. Reed*, passed the flag boat.

At 1:58, passed Dumpling Light close aboard. 2:06, passed Middle Ledge Buoy; 2:08, Inez Rock Buoy; 2:21, old Bartlemy Buoy; 2:20, Clarke's Point Light, and received the cheers of a multitude of spectators.

2:23, passed the starting point near the steamer *Eagle's Wing*, and received the hearty cheers of hundreds filling her decks; 2:29 *Una* passed the goal; 2:33 1-4, *America* passed; 2:34, *Favorita* passed; 2:34-45, *Haze* passed; 2:40 *Widgeon* passed; the *Twilight* came along about 1-4 past 3 according to the newspapers, we being snugly moored off the city.

³ Not to be confused with the present Vineyard Sound Lightship. The Sow and Pigs Light Ship was to the north and east of the present Vineyard Sound Light Ship.

⁴ Spindle on outer rock of Hen and Chickens Reef.

It was impossible, from our positions in the *Julia*, to keep the run correctly of the small boats; but we could not fail to notice the little *Richmond*, of Mystic, 27 tons, which was compelled to reef during the course. She parted her jib hal-yards during the run to the outer stake-boat, and lost something by it. We also noticed the little sloop *Esperance*, belonging to Mr. Crawford Allen of Providence, only 23 tons, going over the course like a seagull, without reefing.

I make the distance, carefully measured on the chart in nautical miles, as follows:

	Distance	Time
	Started at 11 o'clock	
First stretch to S. E.,	1 ¼ Miles	11:07
Second, towards Clarke's Point,	1 "	:11
Third, towards Naushon to S. E.,	6½ "	12:06
Fourth to first stake boat,	4 ½ "	:29
Fifth, to outer stake boat,	7 ¼ "	1:13
Home stretch, to goal,	11 ¾ "	2:23
Time of <i>Julia</i> , 3 h. 23 m.	32 ¼ miles	

By the rules of the Club, schooners have an allowance when running against sloops, and the prizes are awarded under certain rules, as to the number of yards of canvass carried, during the race. Under these rules, the 3d class prize fell to the *Richmond*, the 2d to the *America* (although the *Una* came in before), and the 1st prize to the *Julia*.

A little sloop called the *Washington* started, though not in the race, and gallantly battled the winds and waves until she split the end of her bowsprit, and was nearly unmanageable in consequence of the springing of her rudder-head. She is only 17 tons and sits like a shell on the water. She was built by Fish & Morton of New York, and would have gone around the course but for the accident to her spars.

The little schooner *Juliet*, Capt. N. B. Palmer of Stonington, also started and did well. But she early took in her fore-sail. Not being in for the race, Capt. Palmer concluded to take it easy.

The race between the *Julia* and the *Una* actually began only when the latter tacked on the weather quarter of the other, at 11:35—when we started equally. The *Julia* therefore beat the *Una* only six minutes from there to the goal, a distance of twenty-seven or eight miles. The *Una*, in running free, got a good deal of water into her through the rudder case, which may have kept her back a little. Taking her size into consideration, it may be said that she beat all her competitors, though she did not, under the rules, win the prize.

The *Favorita* appears to be a superior model, but is not sufficiently sparred or ballasted for an occasion like this. This cannot be said of the *Haze*; she carried a cloud of well set canvass, and would have done better with a single reef fore and aft.

The *Julia* carried her canvass wonderfully and needed no humoring; she was well steered and well managed, excepting at the outer stake boat, when in paying off after tacking, the weather jib sheet was let go by accident, which caused a slight delay. The boats which 'wore ship' at this point gained perhaps a minute by this process, which was not safe for the sloops to do under full sail.

The race was most exciting throughout and was gallantly contested, particularly by the *America* and *Una*. Having always been greatly opposed to centre-board vessels for rough water, I must now confess that they are the true thing, rough or smooth, for superior sailing.

The *Haze*, belonging to Mr. Grinnell,

was in splendid order, clean as a lady's boudoir, and her crew in uniform.

It was matter of much regret that the splendid sloop *Sylvie* did not join in the sport—slack rigging at such a crisis was unfortunate. It is to be hoped that she will make a match with the *Widgeon* and *Julia*.

The Club were much delighted with the handsome manner in which the people of New Bedford turned out en masse to entertain them; many of the shops were closed, and thousands of the inhabitants lined the new road. Every inhabitant of Pune Island,⁵ consisting of three males and one female, turned out also to see the yachts pass. No serious accident happened to mar the beauty of the occasion.

Yours truly,
R. B. F.

It should be borne in mind that the New Bedford Harbor of 1856 was a very different one from the New Bedford Harbor of 1949; for at that time it was a seaport pure and simple—clean, free from dust and dirt—with houses and buildings on the shore suggestive of Nantucket and Edgartown, instead of as today with gas and electric light works, mills, smoking chimneys, oily water, and all the desecrations of an 'enlightened [?] age'—conditions that would not have induced the gentlemen meeting here for the race to anchor 'snugly off the city.'

⁵ Old name for island now known as Penikese.

Contributed by Llewellyn Howland.