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*Captain
 John W. Small*



Tales of Our Deep-Sea Skippers

He Went to Sea for Thirty-Five Years and Never Stopped for Weather

By KATHARINE CROSBY

→ **W**HEN I went into his little shop in Provincetown, next door to the historical museum, Captain Small was behind the counter negotiating the sale of a vial of Fleurant perfume to a husky truck-driver. Only when the transaction was concluded, to the satisfaction of both, did he consent, with some reluctance, to talk over his sea-faring days.

He had shipped at the age of twelve, not because he specially wanted to, or felt the call of the sea, but because it was really the only thing for a boy to do if he wanted to earn any sort of a living. There was no choice. Any boy who wasn't sick or maimed, the Captain said, went to sea. It paid better than anything else he could do, and every able-bodied youth turned to it as naturally as he would now to the magnetic attraction of the city.

Sheer necessity compelled the little lad to do something, for his father had been killed in the Civil War, and there was a widow with three young children to be supported. Each one had to turn to and help just as soon as he was able. So, though he did not care for the life particularly, and never became enthusiastic over it, he went to sea with the rest of the boys.

He began, not as a cook, like so many youngsters, but as a boy on deck. Starting out in 1864, he went up through the different grades until he became master of his own vessel. For thirty-five years he followed the sea, and must have followed it well, for he remembers no adventures or untoward happenings in all that time.

In the days when oil, lumber, pianos,

organs, sewing machines and even window panes made a general cargo out of New York bound for Australia or South America, Captain Small was one of the few masters of deep-sea vessels to have Provincetown for a home address.

"The mixed cargoes got along well in any kind of weather," Captain Small says, as he looks back on those crowded days of routine and long voyages. Everything was "choked down solid" in the hold and there was no breakage. Many of the wares were intended for home builders in the newer countries and not a pane of window glass was broken on any one of the Provincetown captain's several ships.

He took out the merchant ship "Sachem" on numerous voyages from New York to Australia—Melbourne, Sidney, Adelaide—loading coal at Newcastle, the inevitable coaling station of the picturesque days of shipping. Some times the port was Singapore, sometimes one of the South American harbors. Another of the ships Captain Small commanded was the bark "Minnie Allen," and she was from New York, too. The voyages seldom took less than a year.

For eight happy years Mrs. Small went with him, enjoying meeting the wives of other captains wherever the vessel might put in. There was a lot of "sociability" whenever the paths of these travelers crossed, the Captain remembers vividly.

The last trip Captain Small took before coming ashore for good was to deliver a steamer for halibut fishing to Vancouver. She was the "New Eng-

land," from Philadelphia, and he took her around much as the expert delivers a special automobile from the factory at a great distance. He came home over-

land by himself. The crews of the merchant ships were not very large, but the master always prided himself on making his scheduled trip regardless of weather.

"No, there isn't much to tell about the weather, because it made no difference to us," he said decidedly. "We had to go ahead and make the trip no matter what happened, and there weren't any adventures to speak of, either. You had to get your cargo delivered when and where it was expected." That was all there was to it. He leaves the adventure stories to those who had the adventures. A straightforward, business-

Capt. Small's little shop mentioned in the first paragraph can be seen on next page top right photo.

like man, he must have been in his own quarter deck.

The opening of the Panama Canal removed half the danger and most of the chance of the trips around the Horn, and when the steamships drove the sailing vessels from the sea, that finished the matter in the eyes of such men as the Provincetown skipper. The good ships and the men who commanded them have lost their picturesque old jobs. Many of the ships have been converted into barges.

"Take out their marsts, and they make good barges," was the skipper's epitaph on these once gallant vessels. He has pictures of some he commanded, as do most of these men. A good ship, like a good horse, generally was immortalized in paint and canvas and cherished by the family whose father, brother or son had taken it on so many voyages. They all have their histories, to be told when the spirit moves the story teller.

These sturdy, upstanding men of the sea, with their inevitable sea-blue eyes (yes, Captain Small has them, too!), turn to their shore avocations with varying degrees of contentment. But Captain Small is happy in his work. His little shop, where he sells films, stationery and novelties of one sort or another, is as shipshape as was ever the good bark "Minnie Allen."

He was born in Provincetown seventy-five years ago, and counting out his voyages, which took a year at a time, he has lived there all his life. Naturally he is well known all over the Lower Cape. Not long ago his dignity in some business matter led an irate lady to exclaim:

"You think you're pretty well known round here, don't you?"

"Well, I ought to be, maybe," answered the Captain, mildly. And he was right!

Like most of the older skippers, Captain Small has a healthy Cape sense of humor, an inheritance from generations of ancestors who have known a good joke when they saw it. Until you get acquainted with him you do not get even a glimpse, however, of his faculty for seeing a chuckle in most situations.

Although so many ship masters went out from other Cape towns, few went from Provincetown. One or two other captains are still to be found there, Captain Caleb Rich among them. But there is no sea captain's club there as there is in New Bedford, Captain Small points out, and perhaps in other coast-wise towns. Just why the tip of the Cape, which has been so generous in providing men for the sea-faring business, should have had so few captains is a question that he does not try to answer.