

Letters

To the Editor:

As promised, here is my account of my brief stint as skipper on the *Atlantis*, a stint which mercifully seems to have been omitted in all accounts of the *Atlantis*. This should complete the record:

Bill Cooper's description of the glory days on *Atlantis* in the summer *Spritsail* courteously omitted a not so glorious exploit by a substitute skipper.

In the spring of 1946 after my discharge from the Coast Guard, I came to Woods Hole, my home town, to await entering graduate school in geology in the fall. Jane and I rented the Cowdrey house on Millfield Street and I got a job at The Oceanographic (we never called it Whoee then) helping Frank Mather take the *Risk* or *Asterias* on daily trips to Cuttyhunk to service a wave-meter. Gil Oakley was then in charge of the waterfront. He and I each had skippered converted Boston fishing trawlers in the Coast Guard's Greenland Patrol; so when a temporary captain for *Atlantis* was needed for a short trip to the Gulf Stream, he asked me to take her.

We had calm summer days in the Stream under power as the knowledgeable crew seemed to have little enthusiasm for the back-breaking chore of getting up sail for little wind. I spent most of the time reading detective stories and operating the vintage Loran A receiver for positions. The Norwegian First Mate scorned the notion that matching pips on the screen of a newfangled electronic black box could get an accurate fix and so carried on the standard daily celestial navigation routine.



Atlantis moored starboard-side-to at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution dock, ca. 1945. Her gallows frame for deep-sea anchoring juts out from the bow toward those "derricks and little shacks along the dock edge" described in Olcott Gates' letter. Small boat basin in foreground. Photo by Paul Ferris Smith.

Consequently the scientists had the luxury of two different positions for their oceanographic stations.

As we approached the Oceanographic pier Columbus Iselin indicated he wanted us to come alongside port-side-to. The tide was with us along the dock and the Mate asked if I wanted him to dock her. I had spent five years at sea in the Greenland Patrol trawlers and on a frigate on weather patrol in the North Atlantic and fancied myself a fine ship-handler and so I told him I would do it myself. On a trawler, a port-side-to landing is a cinch. Approach at a low angle, and when the bow almost overhangs the dock, back down briskly, and the large propeller walks the stern in to the dock.

Following the trawler procedure, I approached at a low angle, and when the gallows frame for deep-sea anchoring on the bow of *Atlantis* was almost overhanging the pier, I rang the engine room for reverse – which I found out too late *Atlantis* did not have much of. A mild gurgling sound under the stern was the full extent of the ship's backing ability; the stern made no move towards the dock, and the tide carried *Atlantis* at the original approach angle along the pier. The overhanging gallows frame cleaned off all the derricks and little shacks along the dock edge. The mate finally got a spring line aft which stopped us and pulled the stern in.

Columbus with a big grin assured me that he was planning to take down all those in-the-way structures anyway. He let me take *Atlantis* a few days later to New London for overhaul and thus ended my brief career as skipper of the *Atlantis*, undoubtedly soon enough.

Olcott Gates
Wiscassett, Maine

To the Editor:

I enjoyed Bill Cooper's reminiscences in *Spritsail* enormously; the pre-war and post-war differences in the whole life of the vessel were enormous, as were the like changes in the whole fabric of American life.

I spent five years involved with the A-boat and loved her dearly. I shipped in many other research vessels of five nations, but she was the lady of my life.

There is only one fault I have to find with Bill's elegant story, and that is Bill's conclusion that "Much younger and far less professional men would replace them." They were different men, to be sure, but no less professional and far more successful in getting out of the fo'c'sle. To name only three, there were Captains Colburn, Palmieri and Howland – first rate professionals all. They couldn't slave before the mast in square riggers because there were none left, and just as well.

Congratulations on a fascinating article.

C. Dana Densmore
West Falmouth

To the Editor:

Jean and I want you to know how much both of us enjoyed the Summer, '97 issue of *Spritsail*. So much nostalgia! The names, the events, the feeling of the time!

Our personal reaction is, of course, conditioned by our having been on the scene. It would undoubtedly be less intense if the description were more remote from personal experience, but it is a very fine document from any point of view. *Spritsail* is always interesting, but, for us, this issue is something special.

Arnold Arons
Seattle, Washington

To the Editor:

I enjoyed the recent *Spritsail* and wondered if my enclosed memo would be of interest. My family rented the Olney house for nine years before we moved to Gansett.

Frank Minot, the Naval Architect in the Boston firm of Owens and Minot and who designed the *Atlantis*, had familial ties to Falmouth. His grandfather, Richard Olney, was Secretary of State and Attorney General under President Grover Cleveland, and Mr. Olney built the large summer house on the corner of Surf Drive and Mill Road. This house was so badly damaged in the 1938 hurricane that it had to be torn down.

Frank Minot's mother, Agnes Olney Minot, served as hostess for her father, Richard Olney, and summered in Falmouth for many years with Frank Minot's family in the '20s and '30s.

Frank Minot's daughter, Agnes Olney Minot Gilmore, presently lives in Hyde Park, Vermont, and has a house in Sandwich.

Anne Sawyer
Woods Hole

To the Editor:

I have in front of me the tenth anniversary issue of *Spritsail*, and want to tell you how beautiful I find it. The story of the Oceanographic is forever tied to the story of its great ships, and Bill Cooper's descriptions of life aboard *Atlantis* in the mid '40s add fascinating detail to the Institution's early history of ocean research.

Congratulations on a well-conceived and finely-executed issue!

Jane Bishop Neumann
Director of Development
Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution