



# The Westward Cup

## Renaissance of the *Big Class* Regatta

By Gerhard Standop

They were kings, princes, lords, industrialists and upwardly mobile businessmen, owners of factories, department stores, railways and aeroplane manufactories. Their wealth had made them yacht owners, and they duelled with one another on the waves. At first it was just for fun, but later more was at stake: notoriety, prestige and influence – or the *America's Cup* or victory in other regattas. This has been going on for well over a century. Initially the yachts were small wooden craft with modest sheet built by local shipyards, often as a sideline to the real business of building ships for the navy.

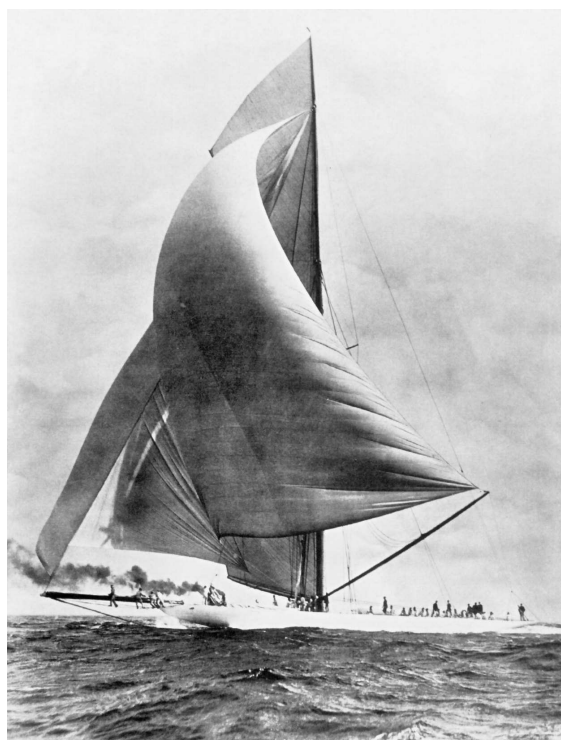
In 1851 the New York Yacht Club schooner *America* defeated 17 British opponents in a race around the Isle of Wight, winning the Royal Yacht Squadron's Hundred Guinea Cup. Renamed the *America's Cup* in 1857, what is today the world's oldest sport trophy was born. Yacht clubs began to issue challenges for possession of the Cup. In the course of the following years and decades England

and the United States vied for supremacy in yacht-building and in yachting competition. Price was no object, then as now. Serious yachtsmen have simple tastes. They are always satisfied with the best, the fastest, the biggest boats. As competitions proliferated, talented yacht-builders on both sides of the Atlantic developed ever new ideas as to how to make sailboats faster.



Nathanael Greene Herreshoff      © Herreshoff Marine Museum

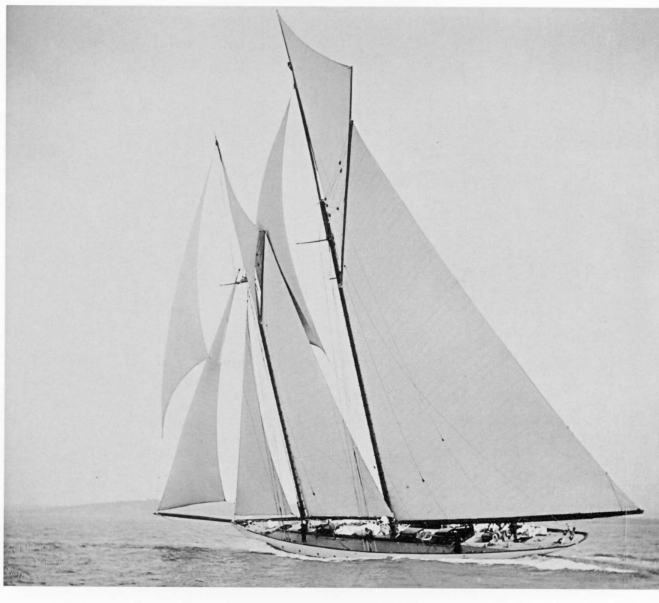
In 1903 *Nathanael Greene Herreshoff*, with antecedents in Potsdam, Frederick the Great's residence near Berlin, was the owner of a shipyard in Bristol, Rhode Island. An astute businessman, he had recognized that as much money was to be made with yachts as with steamers and workaday vessels. He had built many sailing vessels, but his masterpiece was the *Reliance*, built that year, a gigantic boat 61 metres from stem to stern with a mast measuring 63 metres, still the height record for single-masters. A crew of 60 to 70 was needed to sail her. She had been built in secret, being chock-a-block with innovations – winches below



Herreshoff Yacht *Reliance* © Herreshoff Marine Museum

decks, a double helm and a hollow bronze rudder that could be filled with water or air for optimal trim. *Reliance* defended the America's Cup against the *Shamrock III* of Thomas Lipton and was the biggest America's Cup yacht ever seen.

Competing boatbuilders became ever more daring in their designs, and soon it was entirely normal for a boat, if at all, to last only one season. Thereafter they were obsolete – or had come to grief. This was the heyday of the so-called *big class*, what we might call megayachts. In time some buyers began to order more robust two-masters, without wanting to sacrifice sheet area. These were still very much big boats, with no reduction in size or beauty. And they had to be high-seas vessels able to sail on their own keel to competitions across the foaming main, as was often required for participation.



The Herreshoff schooner *Ingomar* © Herreshoff Marine Museum

The sailing capabilities of the *Ingomar* were phenomenal. Even Kaiser Wilhelm, an enthusiastic sailor, was so taken with the *Ingomar* that he wanted Herreshoff to build him a similar vessel. But the Kaiser wanted so much say in the design of the boat that nothing came of it. With the success of the *Ingomar*, Herreshoff contracted to build eight more schooners, some significantly bigger.

In 1909 the carpet manufacturer Alexander S. Cochran, a member of the New York Yacht Club, ordered such a schooner, the third of its type. The *Westward* was launched in 1910 – and Cochran set sail for Europe, where he wanted to make his mark on the regatta scene in England and Germany. Herreshoff had had to apply the one or the other sleight of hand in the design of the boat so that it would meet European rules. For example, the keel had to be somewhat flatter and thus longer, and the bottom had to be rounded to reduce the so-called

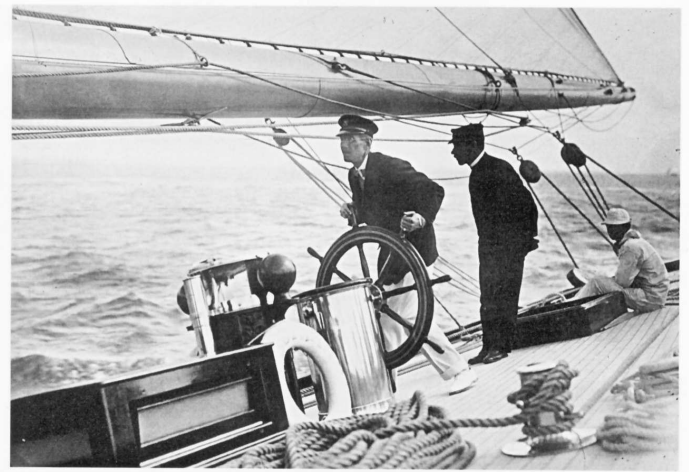
So it was in 1903 that Morton F. Plant, the owner of a company for the construction of underground railways, called on Herreshoff to order a two-mast schooner. Capt'n Nat, as Herreshoff was called by friends and competitors alike, had not built a schooner for 30 years, unconvinced as he was of the sailing capability and ease of manoeuvrability of such craft. But Plant finally persuaded the Capt'n to try his hand at schooner-building again. The upshot was the first big two-masted schooner from the Herreshoff yard, the 26-metre steel-hulled *Ingomar*.



Scene on board the *Westward*, Charlie Barr at the helm..  
© Herreshoff Marine Museum

chain length and lower the handicap against the European competition.

The *Westward* was soon the nemesis of European racing yachts, winning all of its races in Germany and almost all in England. As his skipper Cochran had not hired a fellow countryman, but the Scotsman Charlie Barr, who had a sixth sense for the wind, waves and tides in European waters and had won many regattas already – including the America's Cup. Herreshoff, Cochran and Barr would be called a dream team today. But after every *Westward* triumph the Europeans tightened the rules. In the end Cochran turned his back on Europe in frustration and returned home secure in the knowledge that he owned the most successful racing yacht of his day.



*Westward*, at the helm A. Cochran, watched by Charlie Barr.

© Herreshoff Marine Museum

After winning many races in the late 20s and early 30s, *Westward's* last owner T.B. Davis wanted her to be used for sail training, but this could not be achieved. So he wished that she was to be scuttled. And this is what was done in 1947, in the English Channel off the Channel Islands.

The small town of Cowes on the Isle of Wight became the capital of English yachting in the age of the big boats in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Numerous sailing clubs established themselves in Cowes to take advantage of the sheltered channel between the Isle of Wight and the mainland of Hampshire, the Solent, which became the site of regular regattas, including the annual Cowes Week Regatta. The waters were not undemanding though, with tricky tides and winds

requiring tacking and navigational skill and hidden sandbars lying in wait for the unsuspecting.



Members of the Royal Yacht Squadron, 1894. From left: Kaiser Wilhelm II, the Earl of Dunraven, Rear-Admiral Victor Montague, the Prince of Wales, the Marquis of Ormonde, the Earl of Lonsdale.

© The Royal Yacht Squadron

The Yacht Club had been founded in London as early as 1815, with King George IV later adding the 'royal' appellation. In 1833 the Royal Yacht Club became the Royal Yacht Squadron, domiciled in Cowes as of 1858. From the beginning the Royal Navy was closely connected with the RYS, with Admiral Lord Thomas Hardy, Nelson's commander at Trafalgar, one of the first members of the club. Even

today, the RYS is the only institution outside the Navy privileged to fly the white Navy flag. This privilege is exercised with due pride, and RYS members are frequently seen aboard their yachts in



white shirt and trousers, blue jacket and tie and white cap. Nevertheless, the RYS is not the UK's oldest yacht club, that distinction belonging to the Royal Thames Yacht Club of 1775.



The cannon are still functional and signal ...



Cowes. Inauguration of the Jubilee Harbour in front of the Castle, the seat of the RYS, in 2006. Brass cannon still guard the harbour.



...Start and finish with a mighty roar and cloud of smoke.



Now as then, etiquette and proper dress are taken seriously at the RYS.



Cowes, yachting capital on the Solent.



Historic yacht models on display.

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2000, the Dutch businessman Ed Kastelein, fascinated from earliest childhood by the great yachts of yesteryear, 90 years after the *Westward*, was able to witness the launch of his replica yacht *Eleonora* at the Van der Graaf shipyard. The *Eleonora* was the child of detailed study of photographs by the famous yacht photographer Beeken of Cowes and original blueprints from the Herreshoff shipyard. Much credit is due to Halsey C. Herreshoff, the grandson of the founder, who had preserved the construction plans in the company archive and is director of the Naval Museum and the America's Cup Hall of Fame in Bristol, Rhode Island. The Hart Nautical Collection of the MIT Museum in Boston, Mass., was a further resource. Kastelein for his part soon sold the *Eleonora* and turned to new projects.

The present owner of the *Eleonora*, Zbynek Zak, had the idea of reviving specifically the *big class* regattas of the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not just to organize another classic regatta. Thus the *Westward Cup* with the largest of the classic yachts was born. It was immediately clear that the venue must be the Solent off the Isle of Wight, the historic site of the *big class* regattas of old – with the *Royal Yacht Squadron* as home club, together with the *New York Yacht Club*, the *Yacht Club de Monaco* and *Boat International Media*.

In July 2010, a century after the launch of the *Westward*, four yachts met off Cowes for the first *Westward Cup* regatta.

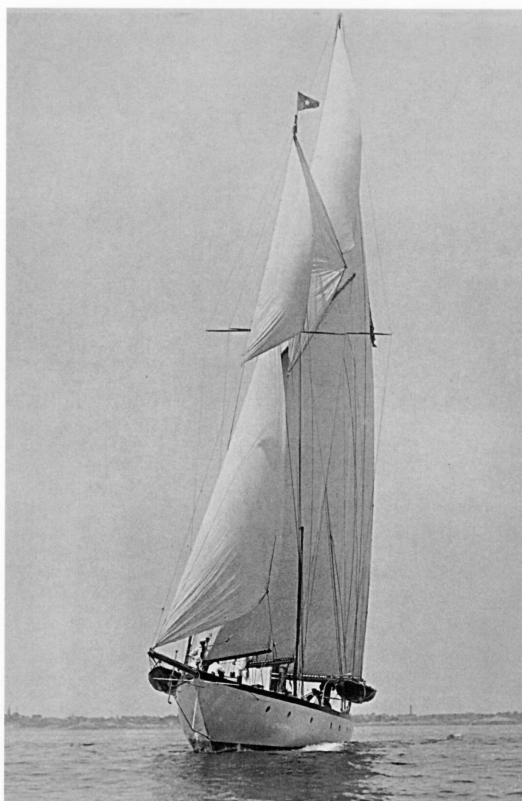
The *Britannia* had initially been the second entry, after the *Eleonora*. A predecessor yacht of the same name had been built in 1893 for the then Prince of Wales and later Edward VII and had seen success in numerous regattas in the latter 19th and early 20th centuries. King George V skippered the *Britannia* to many further victories until, in 1936, the yacht was given over to the same fate as the *Westward* and scuttled by her last owner south of the Isle of Wight. The Norwegian sportsman Sigurd Coates had had the *Britannia* replicated in Russia according to original plans and old photos. The final touches were to be made in England in 2010, but owing to delays the new *Britannia* had to be withdrawn from the *Westward Cup* competition.

The 42-metre Herreshoff yacht *Mariette* was a further *Westward Cup* participant, having been built for a Boston wool magnate in 1915. She is one of the only three surviving steel-hulled Herreshoff schooners. The third and fourth entries, after the two Herreshoff yachts *Eleonora* and *Mariette*, were the 31-metre *Mariquita* and the 27-metre *Tuiga* from the Yacht Club de Monaco.



Proudly flagged.





*Mariette*, c. 1920.

These two yachts were built in 1911 and 1909, respectively, by the Scotsman William Fife III, as talented and successful a yacht-builder as Herreshoff and the latter's toughest competitor in Europe. The *Mariquita* is the last surviving so-called 19mR yacht and hence priceless, while the *Tuiga* is one of five surviving yachts constructed according to the 15mR formula.

Apart from these four, two further yachts had seemed likely contestants for the *Westward Cup*, but finally didn't sign up: the *Thendara*, built in 1936 at the yard of Alfred Mylne in Scotland, and the Herreshoff schooner *Elena*, a replica (2009) just as *Eleonora*.

**T**he 2010 *Westward Cup* regatta, consisting of four races, lasted a week. The courses sailed followed as closely as possible the historic courses sailed by the original *Westward* and her competitors, account being taken of present-day safety necessities.

The size, sail expanse and speed of the participating yachts differed significantly. Fairness demanded that a handicap be determined for each boat to account for these differences.



*Eleonora*.

The crews generally being more at home in the Mediterranean or the Caribbean, the boats had navigators and tacticians on board who were familiar with the waters, especially the tides. Harold



And they're off! From left *Tuiga*, *Eleonora*, *Mariette*.

Cudmore and David Arnold served as tactician and navigator on the *Tuiga*, both successful past participants in America's and Admiral's Cups and Cowes Week races. Their experience, a favourable rating and light winds during the races paid off too: the *Tuiga*, although the smallest boat in the regatta, did not cross the finish line first in each race, but ended the outing as the overall winner and recipient of the first-ever *Westward Cup*!



*Mariette*.

A regatta event like the *Westward Cup* naturally included a comprehensive shore programme. On their race-free day off, crews were able to



*Tuiga*.



see the sights on the island or swap seamen's yarns. Owners took advantage of the opportunity to show interested guests their yachts. And of course the RYS and the other clubs and sponsors were not to be outdone in their offers of the social programme. There were high class dinners, hosted by the three yacht clubs and Boat International, very special events, basically for the owners and their guests



*Mariquita.*

only, reflecting again the spirit of this *big class* regatta. The commodores and senior officers of these yacht clubs participated in all these events and took very keen interest in this regatta.

Thanks to the initiative of a single individual and the enthusiasm of the participating owners and crews and the support of the three yacht clubs and the main sponsor, the first *Westward Cup* was a big success, attracting numerous spectators on land and sea. It is certainly to be hoped that the renaissance of the *big class* regatta at Cowes will become a regular event attracting increasing numbers of race participants and yachting enthusiasts. The Isle of Wight venue is a worthy addition to historic yacht regattas in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean. –

#### *Acknowledgements*

I am grateful to Peta Stuart-Hunt of PR-Works and to the owners and skippers of the participating yachts *Tuiga* and *Mariette* and the RYS motor yacht *Running Bear* for their hospitality on board. I also thank Halsey C. Herreshoff for permission to use historic photos from the Herreshoff Marine Museum taken from *Herreshoff Sailboats* by Gregory O. Jones (MBI Publishing Company, St. Paul, MN, 2004, ISBN 9-7603-1160-9). -- All other photographs by the author. – Further Westward Cup information and photographs at [www.standop.net/Segeln/Div](http://www.standop.net/Segeln/Div)



*Regatta impressions:*





















































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