

Harold George and Victory

One of the major changes in yachting has been the demise of the good old fashioned singalong, on the party boat of the fleet. You know what I mean — one yacht at the end of the cruising race became the mecca for the post-race discussion, which invariably lead to a full-scale party.

This "mecca yacht" usually reflected the personality of the owner and crew. As the liquid refreshment flowed, the singing started and someone always could play the guitar, mouth organ, banjo, or some other portable robust musical instrument to provide the accompaniment.

Today the liquid refreshment still flows, even perhaps more copiously, but gone is the self provided entertainment, replaced by instant music played on multi-tracked recording devices. The good old bawdy songs sung to popular tunes are rapidly becoming a thing of the past — a good or bad thing depends on ones point of view.

Every keeler had its drinking song. the old B Class cutter Waiore was well known for hers, written if that is the right word by the late All Black and Auckland front row forward, Murray Jones Sung to the tune "The Sloop John B" went as follows:

"We sailed on the Waiore.

The skipper, the boys and me
Around Kawau Isle, we did sail
A drinking all night," etc etc.

But the most famous was that of the A Class cutter Victory owned and sailed to the maximum by the great old character of Auckland yachting, the late Harold George. This song, sung up and down the coast with great gusto by the members of victory's crew usually in a very mellow state of mind, had the immortal words:

"Sinful, ginfull rum-soaked men,
Live for three score years and ten,
But we, perhaps the mighty few,
Stay pickled till were ninety-two!"

But then Victory was a special yacht. Built in 1906 by the Logan Brothers, the creators of so many of New Zealand's fine pioneer yachts, she measured 38 ft overall, 28 ft on the waterline, 9ft 4ins on the beam, and had a draft of 6 ft.

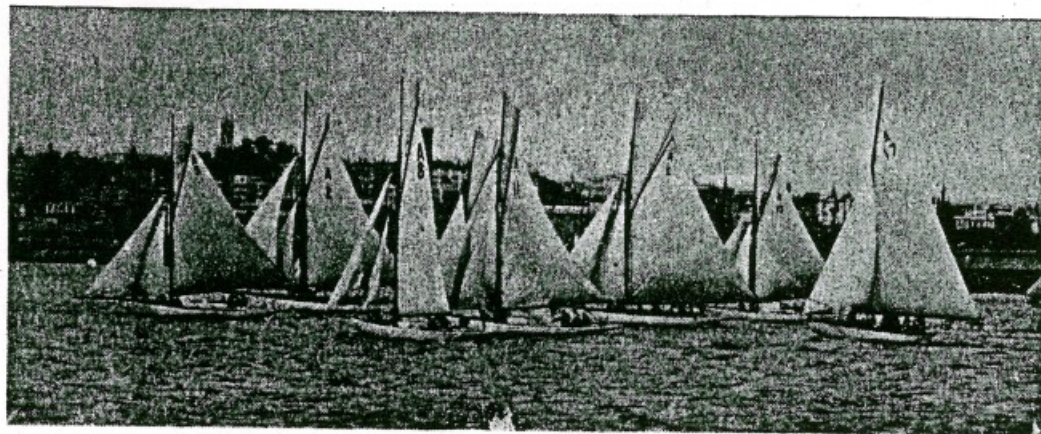
Typical of all Logan yachts, she was constructed on the three-skin diagonal principle of heart kauri, and displaced seven tons. She was rigged as a gaff cutter, sitting a topail when conditions suited.

The George family purchased her immediately after the First World War and raced her very successfully with A Class fleet of the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron.

Victory's design was based on the well-known keelers of the Auckland snapper fleet, which set rudimentary long lines and needed to get back fast to the markets, while their catch was still fresh. A fine example of an Auckland snapper boat was the gaff rigged Rangi which was built in 1904 as the Schopolo by Bailey and Lowe. Rangi competed in the inaugural Trans-Tasman race in 1931 and was on her seventh Tasman crossing when she was wrecked on Norfolk Island in 1951.

The Georges were very well known on the Auckland waterfront. The elder brother was Captain Geoff George, a master mariner who captained many pioneer coastal ships including the ketch Will Watch.

His sister Marie, for years operated the fa-



The A Class fleet await the start of the Auckland Anniversary Regatta Race, started off Kings wharf in 1927. From left the yachts are Rawene, Thelma, Victory, Ida, Ariki, (the winner), Heartscase and Ngatoa with her "new fangled" bermudan rig.

mous Blue Boats, originally founded by the late "Snorky" Inglis and now owned by the Julian family. Meanwhile Harold was a lawyer by profession and mariner by heart.

Late in 1928 Victory was to become a household name throughout New Zealand, for on Wednesday, December 19 of that year, she sailed down the Rangitoto channel en route to Norfolk Island 600 sea miles away. The press of the day gave great publicity to this "daring ocean voyage in such a small craft" as one journalist described it, for Victory's voyage was the first ocean passage to be made by an amateur crew, in a small yacht. There had been other ocean voyages by yachts out of Auckland, but these were in far larger keelers on delivery trips to Australia, sailed by professional seamen.

The Victory captured the public's imagination and her crew of Captain George, Harold and Mr C. Bowman of Northcote, were considered to be very brave, to go offshore in an Auckland harbour racer. But Victory was equal to the task and her first days run of 212 sea miles, up the North Auckland coast (after sheltering at Whangaroa Harbour) and into the Tasman Sea proved the ocean — going qualities of the Logan design.

However after this excellent day's run by a 38 footer, the wind eased and it was not until noon on Thursday, December 27 that Victory arrived at Kingston Bay, Norfolk Island. The local people had heard by radio of Victory's voyage and gave her three-man crew a great welcome to the then isolated island in the northern Tasman.

But despite the welcome, Victory did not stay long at the island which for small craft is hampered by the lack of a sheltered anchorage. And on New Years Day, 1929, Victory laden down with gifts of fresh fruit from the hospitable Norfolk people, raised an-

chor and set sail for her home port.

However, light winds were experienced, believing the Tasman's stormy reputation, and it was not until 10am on Sunday, January 6, that North Cape was sighted. After a slow cruise down North Auckland's east coast, Victory entered Auckland Harbour on January 10. So ended the first pleasure ocean passage by a New Zealand yacht to a foreign destination. Victory with her long ends, low freeboard, lofty gaff rig is not perhaps today regarded as the ideal blue water cruiser, but she pioneered the countless thousands of ocean voyages undertaken in the 57 years since.

This ocean voyage by the George brothers inspired many would be offshore yachtsman, notably Johnny Wray, who single handed built his square bilge cutter Ngataki, in the early 1930s from cast up kauri logs, which had broken away from the huge kauri log rafts which were once towed up the Auckland Harbour to the waiting timber mills. Ngataki and Wray covered thousands of sea miles. In fact Ngataki is still sailing the waters of the Hauraki Gulf and Johnny Wray lives in retirement at Waiheke Island.

Victory returned to her gulf and harbour racing with the New Zealand Yacht Squadron, completely unchanged from her launching day, in rig and hull, until late in the 1930s when the George, following the lead set by the Winstone Bros in their Colin Wild — designed and built Ngatoa, replaced the gaff rig with a lofty Bermudan rig, retaining the bowsprit with a three headsail setup — jib, staysail, and jib topsail.

The change of rig did not appear to affect Victory's performance but whether she was easier to sail was debatable. With running backstays on block and tackle and no headsail winches each task needed light separate pulley haulays on the various sheets and

modern crews with all their variable speed winches and go-fast goodies complain!

Perhaps Victory's most famous victory (no pun intended) was in the annual race to the Bay of Islands, which always started on Boxing Day. The 1950 race attracted the usual fleet headed by A Class champion Ranger, and the large cutters Ariki, Prize and Tarawera. **DEC '51**

The race started in a fresh north easter which freshened up the coast. Harold George was in his element, Victory was driven to windward with ever decreasing amounts of sail until the mainsail blew out somewhere off Tutukaka but it was stitched up and course laid for Cape Brett.

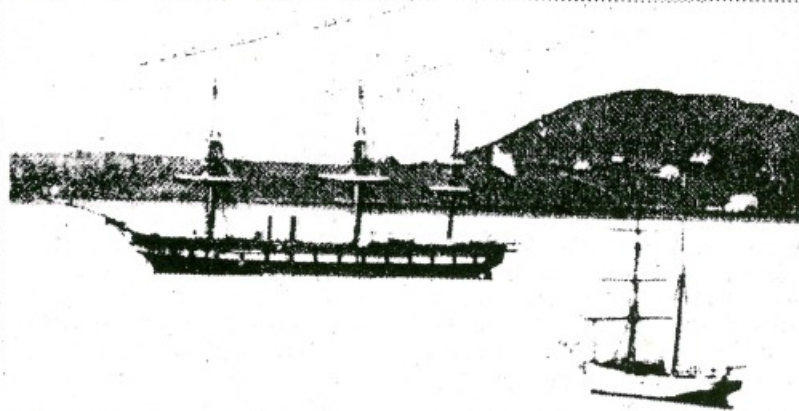
Rounding the Cape, not a sail was to be seen and the tired crew remarked how the big boys would have "enjoyed the blow." Rounding Orakawa to run to the line, still not a yacht in sight, and then both Victory's crew and the mark boat officials realised that they were the first home.

The whole fleet including the might Ranger had put into Kawau, until the front was over.

Victory was the only yacht to carry on. Hours later the rest of the fleet started to arrive but Victory's men were well into the liquid refreshment singing their song "Sinful, ginful, rum soaked men etc, by then.

With Harold George's death some years later the long partnership between man and yacht was over. Victory was sold and still to this day sails the northern waters, nearly 80 years old, as sound as the day she was launched, a tribute to the Logan Brothers who built her and the George Brothers who faithfully maintained her for so many years.

Sea Classics



by Paul Titchener