



Building A Dream

In the 1960s, Canada's west coast had drawn many people from Europe who wanted to build their dreams. Most dreams consisted of being free of the confines of the crowded civilization of Europe. They wanted to stretch out to build a house, have a family and work in the highly profitable, and dangerous, industries of fishing, mining or forestry.

Those who kept their dreams general filled the forest with axes and saws, sweated in dark, dusty mines, or hauled over-full nets on the thousands of trawlers along the coast.

A few had a burning in their hearts to control the logging and lumber companies, the mines, or the fish processors. These people worked their way as quickly as they could into the wealthy offices of the owners.

Some people dreamed differently. Their dreams did not mesh well with those around them. At times, that kept them on the outside dreaming dark thoughts. A few of the non-meshing dreams jelled into a shape whose fascinating colours and swirls captured the eyes of people who were disillusioned with the standard colour-palette they worked with on a daily basis.

One such different dreamer was Alexander Brigola. A big man, Alex could sell you his grand dreams and you would stand before him nodding until you found yourself handing over thousands of dollars, or the equivalent in goods, for the privilege of being a shareholder in his dream.

In 1965, Alex's dream was to build a three-masted sailing ship which throngs of admiring landlubbers would pay to board at ports around the Mediterranean.

And so, in an old building by the northwest foot of the Second Narrows Crossing, North Vancouver, British Columbia, he and his fellow dreamers went to work on their exciting project.

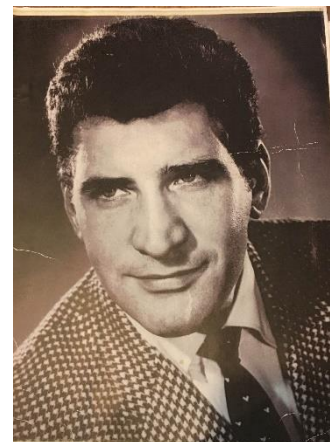


Figure 1 Alex Brigola

Joe, Hans, Crazy George and a few others spent long days with Alex, converting the grand vision into plans and practical lengths of Douglas fir and Sitka spruce beams and ribs.

As the project attracted serious interest over the next couple years, “shareholders” who did not have time to contribute their labour, such as Ron Craig Sr., took on the roles of negotiating with suppliers, raising money and promoting the project. The group came to rely on Ron to perform miracles in attracting the support of a few major corporate interests and government ministers.

Ron was a man who got things done. He owned the successful store, next to Carlings Brewery in Vancouver, called West Coast Toy & Hobby. This was the biggest toy wholesaler in Western Canada. Ron handled the *Jolly Jumper*, made in North Vancouver, and which he promoted across the country.

While in North Van on business, Ron heard about the ship from Joseph Poole, who owned the Jolly Jumper factory. They were discussing sales strategies when Joe casually said, “Maybe we should use that wooden ship they’re building over at Lynnwood Marina. Once they launch that thing, its picture will be in all the newspapers.”

“Ship?”

“Yes, a big wooden ship. We could call the papers, hang a few Jolly Jumpers from the front and bob’s your uncle! The best of both worlds! A sailing ship and smiling babies.”

Ron was intrigued. He drove down to the Marina to see what the fuss was about.

He was directed to a yard behind Lynnwood Marina and the B.C. Fibreglas plant. As Ron walked around the buildings the morning sun was just rising over the Second Narrows

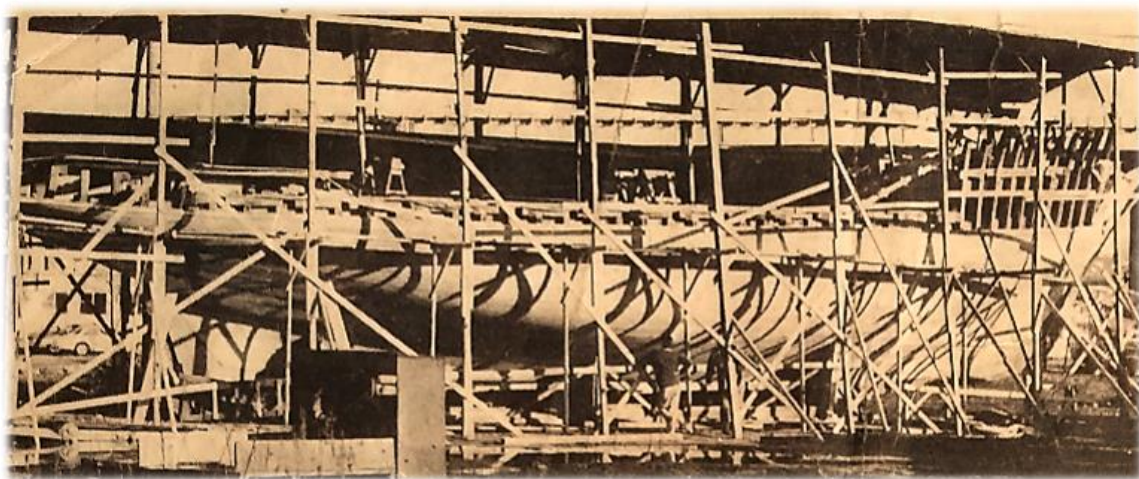


Figure 2 Hull under construction, January 1967

bridge. It illuminated delightfully curved planks, marking the massive hull of a true wooden sailing ship under the canopy gridwork. Ron was transfixed.

Years before the north shore of Burrard Inlet was settled by the British, young James Cook of Yorkshire, Great Britain, was fortunate to be accepted as an apprentice seaman in the service of John Walker. The Walkers owned ships that took coal, primarily, to the insatiable furnaces of London. John treated his apprentice very fairly, giving him lodging in his house, and, when not working aboard ship, permitting him the rare privilege of reading all of the impressive library of texts that he had on navigation, shipbuilding and seamanship.

James surprised himself when he found that he had an uncanny ability in mathematics. He also had a prodigious memory for details. When he read a book, he applied its lessons at the earliest opportunity. Another admirable quality that James had was not wishing to impose himself on others, despite knowing that a task being done by a superior might not be the optimal procedure. He filed away such incidences until he was to be in charge.

It took a mere five years for Cook to rise from a teen-age seaman to mate of a ship he had helped build for the Walkers. As *mate*, he was senior officer of the 600-ton merchant collier, the *Friendship*. Every minor creak of the ship sent him information about its health and how to improve it.

Were James Cook to look down onto the new hull in the shadow of the Second Narrows Crossing, he would have cringed quietly.

Foresters and seamen alike know that trees are either hardwood or softwood. The oak structure of a rugged Whitby collier, like those Captain Cook served on and helped to build, were designed by experienced mariners and fashioned by tradesmen whose life-long work was building the best vessels they could, designed for a particular purpose. Their wide hold would take the pounding seas for decades. Used in a narrow-beamed ship, softwood like Douglas fir or Sitka spruce would look the part, but would last only a few years.

These skills had been lost over the years. If they were to be found again, someone had to be brave enough to put a wooden hull in the water. Alex Brigola was the man.

Speaking to Ron, Alex said, "My friend, whose young imagination has not been captured by a picture of a graceful wooden sailing ship on the open sea? This is a project of the heart. It *must* be built!"

Still staring at the surprising size of the hull, Ron knew he had to be part of this adventure. "Alex, this is a once in a lifetime thing. What can I do to help?"

Knowing that he and the other builders were fully engaged in the details of drafting and construction, "Thank you, Ron. What we need is someone to organize the support, to speak with people in government, to plan for the future of this endeavour. Are you willing to invest your time and money?"

Without hesitation, "I'm on board!"

So, they each set about applying their individual talents to the grand task.

Alex did not suffer fools easily. When he decided that something needed to be done, then, by God, it would be done! He would get along with Ron very well because they both had been captured by the vision of a cloud of sails bursting through the blue Pacific waves. Nothing would deter them from putting their vision to life in the waters of Burrard Inlet.

A person who was to make an indelible mark on Alex's ship-to-be at a later date, recalled *his* first sight of a sailing ship. "When I was able to go to school, my very first day was eventful. Mother dropped me off in front of the school, made sure I had my lunch and left with a, 'Have a good day!'

"As I walked with some trepidation to the front door, a group of the older children saw me approach. It was like a young doe walking into the midst of a wolf pack. They surrounded me and started by asking what I had in the bag. The gang leader grabbed my lunch bag and rummaged around in it. 'Nothing good in here,' he proclaimed. Then they played with their prey, pushing me from one to the other. I was tripped and about to be kicked when an angelic sight burst from the front door to swoop upon the gang. She was, to my child's mind, an older woman, but looking back, she must have been no more than eighteen. Her flowing golden locks flew about her shoulders. Her newly hand-made dress fit her like a queen. She told off the ruffians and bent down to gently lift me off the dusty ground.

"'Are you hurt? You must be young Jeffrey. Come with me.' She led me into her room. It was, as I recall, not well lit. Sitting there while my guardian angel went to the principal's office, I took in the contents of her inner sanctum. On the wall was a calendar, brightly lit by a ray of sunshine. Its picture was of a marvelous sailing vessel, painted with sails full of a strong wind, bursting through foamy white waves. I couldn't take my eyes off it. The painting drew me to it like a magnet. I flipped the pages to reveal one glorious painting of a sailing ship after the next. Some ships danced

gracefully with porpoises leaping ahead of the ship's bow; there were seagulls wheeling around a cloud of sails; one showed a gnarled captain leaning into a gale next to a wooden mast... I was hooked.

"When I returned home my mother asked if I had learned anything interesting at school. I said, 'Yes. I know what I want to be when I grow up!'

"She nodded patiently, 'That's nice, Jeffrey.' She was expecting something like my wanting to be a cowboy or a major-general. When I said, 'I want to be a sailing ship's captain!', she was not pleased. When her same question was asked weeks later, and she received the same firm answer, she shook her head. 'Jeffrey, there are no sailing ship captains any more. And besides, the men a captain would have to lead are, well, uncouth.'

"I devoted most of my free time in those early years to prove to Mother that, yes, there were sailing ship captains. Over the years I had to agree with her that seamen could be uncouth. But they were also more real and full of raw life than a city packed with clerks."

Alex Brigola modelled his own dream from a picture, as well. It was of the brigantine, *Albatross*, in Uffa Fox's *Second Book of Boats*. This dream ship, confided Alex, would bring him the praise that he yearned for in his new country. And it was bound to rake in untold mounds of cash. When pressed for a long term plan, Alex proclaimed that he would "sail it to the Mediterranean to cruise the coast like the tall ships of old".

For the non-sailor, a *brigantine* is a two-masted ship with the rearward mast sometimes having an upper square sail over an arrangement of triangular sails. The foremast is square-rigged (all square sails). A *barque*, like most Whitby colliers, has three or more masts with the rear mast, termed the mizzenmast, holding sails that are not square. The triangular sails on the front are called jibs, while a variety of triangular staysails may come off the mizzenmast. And, mariners do not refer to "tall ships". To a seaman, that is a contrived term.

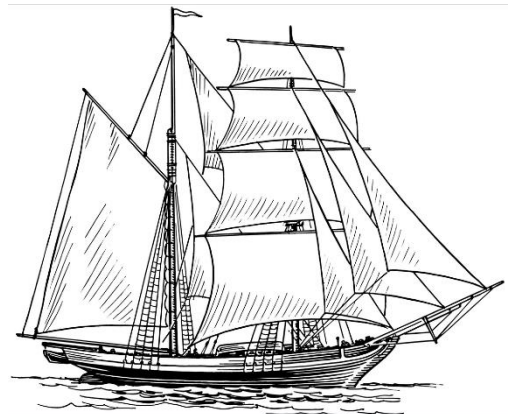


Figure 3 The Albatross, from
<http://de.academic.ru/dic.nsf/dewiki/45845>

Peering up into the canvass draped high over the ship at Lynnwood Marina, we may see a ghostly Captain Cook sitting with a hand slapped to his face. His head will continue to shake as Alex and the hard working shareholders lay timber for the *Monte Cristo*, as Alex named the ship. Bravely forging ahead with unfamiliar tasks, they made up what they could not discern from pictures. Incomplete and sometimes incorrectly read examples of how to build a wooden ship were translated into spars and ribs that were fashioned to “look right”.



Figure 4 The barque *Monte Cristo* under full sail

Joe Klausner was called on to make hardware whose names and full purpose were not previously part of his life’s experience. He did a remarkable job, nonetheless, keeping the project going with his inventiveness and metalworking skill.

From an era when every little part on a ship has been crafted with a particular technique, material, and form, because sailors’ lives depended on it, Captain Cook is not impressed with Alex’s design. *“That chain-plate has not the strength to resist a year’s worth of gales hauling on its shrouds, and by God if it has no backing-plate the bolts will worry through the timber before you see King George’s Island!”*

Sailing to Tahiti was not on Alex’s current agenda. There was too much to be done in convincing suppliers to “contribute” to the grand project, and encouraging the workers to stay all day, converting his drawings into huge lengths of timber that took on the shape of a graceful sea-going vessel.

The ghost of Captain Cook wished he could move Alex’s drawing pencil to his wishes. *“If you place the beams there, the foremast will be too close to the mainmast and her lines will foul on a hard tack. No! You don’t use the deck as the basis for her calculations, you use the waterline! My God, man! The hollow entry of the cut-water will not have sufficient buoyancy to lift her bow in heavy seas and the fashion-timbers are nothing but over-large, pretty skirts!”*

The modern-day builders forged ahead, being pulled by the lure of their dream ship as if it had taken hold of their hearts to build its own life. Creating the *Monte Cristo* became an all-consuming task.

With mounting debts in the summer of 1968, Alex pulled back on his dream of taking his ship to Europe. At a meeting of the financial shareholders in the Bayshore Inn,

Vancouver, called by a concerned Ron Craig, Alex proclaimed his new vision to be a more modest one of sailing the Pacific coast of Canada and the United States, gaining fame and great fortune by inviting the throngs of paying landlubbers on board. Their company would be called the *Monte Cristo Charter Line*.

Ron and the other backers were now seeing this dream ship through different eyes.

The *Monte Cristo* cared not for the machinations of mortals. She needed to be built.

Joe Klausner and his friend Hans Schaer were the mechanical experts who kept plodding forward. While a picture may show rigging with lines and general attachment points, it was up to these two to determine what actual material, strength and size was needed to make it work.



Figure 5 Shareholder Certificate

Jri Novak was a strapping young deserter from the Czechoslovakian army. If there was a huge beam to lift into place, he was the willing man. Crazy George helped in his own weird way. Young Ron Jr., still unsure of his path in life, vacillated between the ship and girls. Other “shareholders” at this time included Arnold Brigge, Jamie Wright, Greg Lee, Buddy Whitehead, Doug Starlatt and Gordy Calder.

On either side of the old shed that had given birth to the *Monte Cristo* were smaller sheds where the shareholders could sleep if they wished, and eat meals. Being European, Alex arranged hearty suppers for those who had worked all day. He had started by providing lunch, as well. He quickly saw that a substantial lunch served only to put his workers to sleep in the afternoon, so that was ended quietly.

Long days of hard work saw the hull taking full shape. It had outgrown its original shed and now was looking like a real ship.

By May 1968, the hull of the *Monte Cristo* was sufficiently complete to do the ultimate reality check. It was time to get it wet. Ron Sr. was able to obtain the donation of about a quarter mile of rail tracks and ties from CN Rail to roll the ship down from the shed to the waters of Burrard Inlet. A D-9 Caterpillar tractor would do most of the hauling. She would then be towed to drydock for finishing work.

Safely hauled into the water from the temporary rail-line by two tugs, the Monte Cristo was towed to the east side of the bridge, to Ballantyne Pier. Here, she was drydocked so the masts that had been hewn to careful dimensions could be installed with cranes.

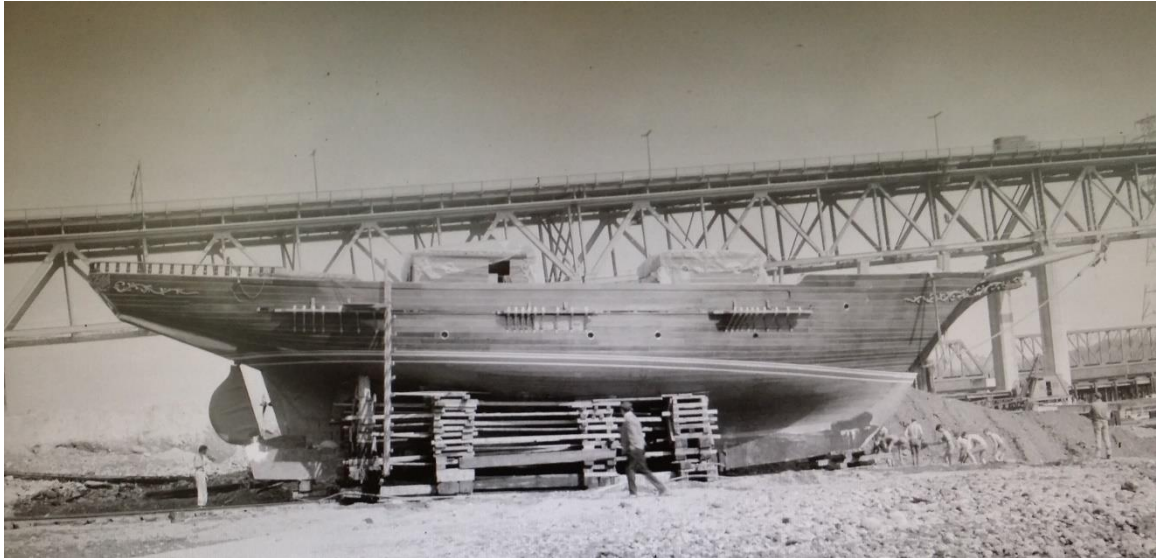


Figure 6 Rolling toward the shore, next to the Second Narrows Crossing

An old diesel engine was dropped down into the engine compartment and attached to the propeller. Joe and Hans struggled with the engine's placement and controls.

In May of 1968, the Monte Cristo was formally launched with the blessing of a member of cabinet in the provincial government, Phil Gagliardi. Hundreds of people were disappointed on the first day of the launch, as the tide was not quite high enough. On the second day, May 16th, with much grunting from the crew, the Monte Cristo slid into the water. From the east side of Burrard Inlet, the ship, sporting her naked masts, was towed to Mosquito Creek near Lions Gate Bridge. There, she would become a proper square-rigged ship.

For the next few months, mariner's terms such as yards, sheets, lines, shrouds and stays would be in common usage by Joe and Hans as they spent many long nights figuring out how to rig the masts and sails so they stayed aligned in the heaviest of winds. This had all been well established over the past few hundred years, of course. The problem was knowing which questions to ask and where to look for the answers.

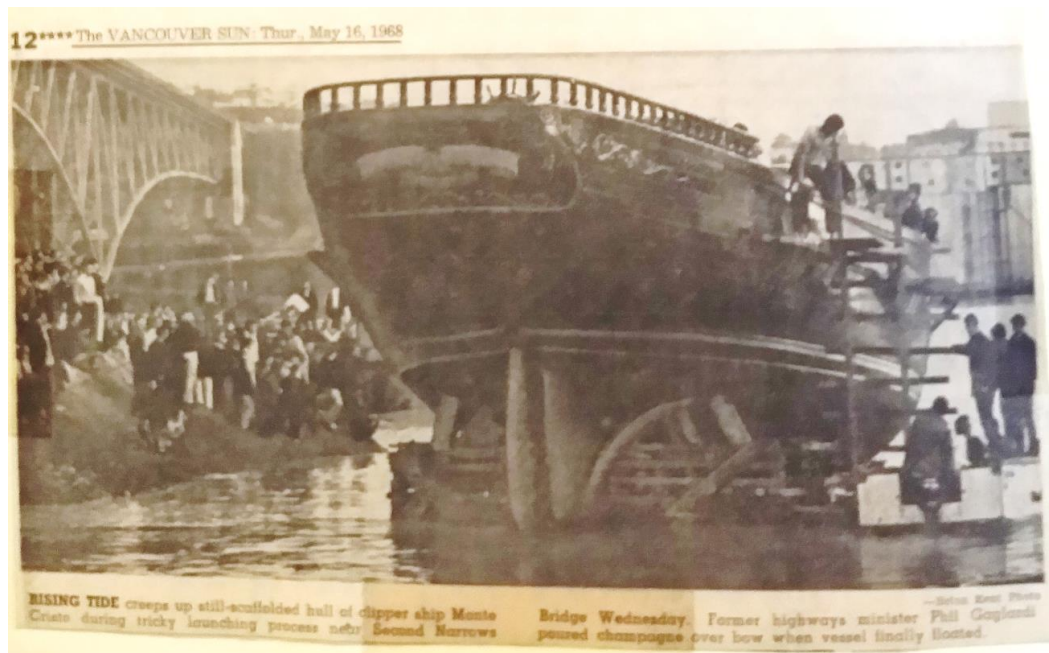


Figure 7 Official launch on May 16, 1968

Had he a voice with which to speak, Captain Cook would have said, "At the very least, you must consult a new text such as David Steel's *The Elements and Practice of Rigging, Seamanship, and Naval Tactics, Including Sail Making, Mast Making, and Gunnery*, 1821. Or John Cock's *A treatise on mast-making*, 1840."

Ron Craig Jr. was soon promoted to the technical crew. Those other young builders who had been at their tedious work for long months did not easily accept Ron Jr.'s immediate placement into the more interesting work of helping Joe and Hans with the steel fittings and rigging calculations. There was muttered discontent.

The *Report of Inspection*, by Marine Surveyors of Western Canada, submitted about the *Monte Cristo* in 1968, included an assessment of the materials and Joe's metalworking, at p. 8:

"The workmanship throughout appears to be of a high standard.

"The trees from which the masts and yards were shaped, reportedly were hand picked, transported to Vancouver following which all masts and yards were hand hewn.

"Iron work on masts including trusses, stirrups, parrals, hound bands, etc. were forged by one of the building crew who doubles as a welder and blacksmith.

"Fuel and fresh water tanks were made by this crew member.

"All deadeyes were turned and iron work fitted, all chain plates were made up by crew members. All rigging was cut, spliced and fitted according to rigging manuals and deadeyes and lanyards are set up in the proper manner."



Figure 8 Joe Klausner

As with many schemes of the heart rather than of the mind, trouble was brewing in the account books.

It was a standing joke among the people working on the *Monte Cristo* that if Alex needed a box of bolts for the project, he would offer the hardware store owner a share in the vessel. Many people around Vancouver became "shareholders". Finally, it came to a head. Ron Sr. and the other financial shareholders had to go to court to wrest the ship project away from the dreamer, Alex.

On an early winter afternoon in 1968, Ron Jr. was told to meet his father during one of Ron Sr.'s hurried business trips through Vancouver. They met at a quiet restaurant in North Vancouver near the ship. While chilly, they only needed light coats, which Ron Jr. hung on the back of his chair. Ron Sr. was in a distracted mood and kept his coat on.

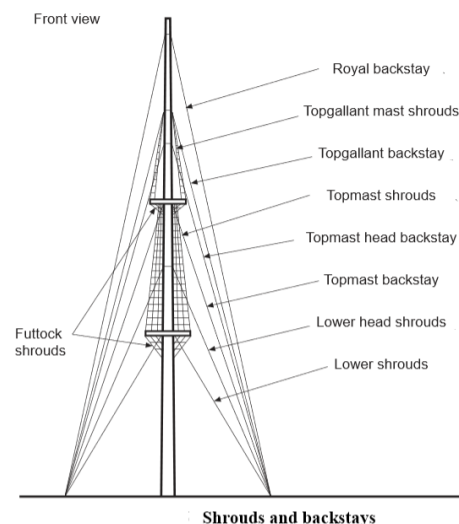


Figure 9 from *Rules for Classification and Construction Ship Technology*: http://www.gl-group.com/infoServices/rules/pdfs/gl_i-4-1_e.pdf

As soon as the server gave them their coffees, Sr. pulled out a sheaf of papers from inside his coat, making room for them on the table. "Son, I need to cash out the six apartments that I placed in your name. Sign here."

"Huh?" He remembered something about having official ownership of the small apartments. It was a method of deferring taxes, he'd been told.

Handing his son a pen, "I have to force Alex out. The Charter Line has been slapped with an excise tax of \$50,000!"

"What? What in the world is that for? We don't..." Ron Jr. had no idea there could be such a thing as a tax on all their hard work.

Ron Sr. has dealt with government before. "Whatever they want to tax, they can. Nothing to do but pay it now and fight it later. Alex wants to run the ship someplace to get away from the tax, but you can't do that. Listen, the apartments can bring in \$35,000 each, and I can sell the limo business to the two drivers who've been with me from the start. That cash and a Corvette from my dealership in Alberta should be enough to save the project from his reckless dreaming. We pay the government and pay him off and get back to business."

Ron Jr. kept a journal for a few months, reflecting that period.

From Ron Jr.'s diary, front page, starting in January, 1969:

*Monte Cristo, W.B., Vancouver, BC
Type – Square Rigged Wind Barque
Weight 94 tons, R.T. 91
Length Stern to Tip 94'
Length Stern to Tip of Jib Boom 131'
Masts 80' – 85'
Waterline Length 71'*

Page 1: February 24th, 1969: *Worked on boat.*

Tuesday 25th: *On Monte Cristo.*

Wednesday 26th: *Lost drivers licence today. I'll get it back when I get insurance.*

Friday 28th: *Worked at ship all day. Got paid 58\$. Got drunk. Donna and I at 1 month now.*

Saturday 1st March: *Moved out of old apt. On ship full time now.*

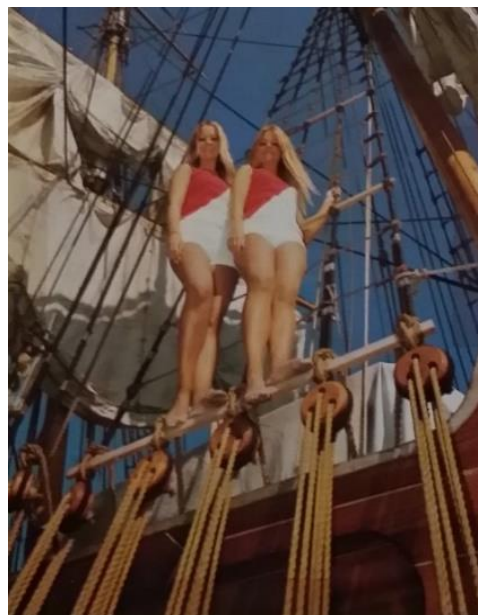


Figure 10 The ship drew visitors

Sunday 2nd March: *Finished moving out of my apt. Tim and I caught a cab to the Boat. Judy & Sue came over. Judy & Sue went and got my girlfriend Donna. Tim is going to ask Dad for a job on the Boat tonight. He asked and got the job. Got Tim's clothes from Richmond.*

Monday 3rd: *Tim and I got up at 10:00. Ate and we started work. Dad had to go to court over Boat business. Tim likes working on the Boat. We started an exercise kick tonight which we hope to keep up. We are listening to records and then we are going to hit the sack. Glad Tim moved out of Stew's. He's more like a brother than a friend. Tim's talking to Judy.*

Captain Cook smiled at the enthusiastic young workers. *"It is ever the way. Were it not for the clouded young minds and their willing backs, our exploration of distant lands would have extended little beyond a day's walk from mother's milk.*

Things came to a head on a late spring morning, 1969. The Monte Cristo was docked at Mosquito Creek for the last bit of work prior to setting off. The crew had finished with her rigging and sail adjustments. Her cabins were prepared with a wide range of exotic woods.



Figure 11 Port & starboard sides of the main cabin

It became common knowledge that the court case brought by Ron Sr. and the other financial shareholders, resulting from the tax bill, was going to be decided against Alex. Distraught, seeing that his dream was to be wrenched from him, Alex fumed in his bunk on board. That evening he resolved to see if any of the crew of the Monte Cristo were with him. At this point, Alex could no longer think clearly. The world was constricting against him.

He waited until they had all returned from visiting their favourite pubs in North Van. As they were gathering in the newly furnished main cabin for their usual card game and chat, Alex joined them. There was tension in the air as he sat at one of the benches.

Alex spoke over the forced chatter. "Men, you know that there will be changes around here."

Sullen nods, not wanting to provoke Alex's quick temper. At least one of the workers – soon-to-be-seamen – was embarrassed. "Listen, Skipper. It ain't right what they're doing to you..."

Alex waved it off. "They won fair and square. I don't have the money to carry on and they do. So that's it, then."

He lifted a sly eye to see who might still be on his side. Every head stayed down or nodded. He thought, *Well alright then. I'm on my own.*

"Nothing left to do about it. Anyways, we'll have a jolly good time with me as the Skipper, sailing down to Seattle! Won't we?"

A few reluctant nods.

"Alright, then. Before we take this fine ship out past English Bay, they've authorized me to take you all to a damn good breakfast tomorrow. I want everyone of you to be at the Bayshore before seven. So get a good night's sleep and I'll see you there. Might be late – I have a quick meeting with the, ah, new owners – so start without me."

The prospect of a breakfast over in Vancouver, across Burrard Inlet, livened up their spirits. They politely wished Alex a good night and wrapped their game up quickly.

Next morning, after the last of the crew left for Vancouver, Alex got to work. He checked the fuel on board, again. He hauled in the mooring lines himself, quickly started the diesel, and shoved off. One of the workers at the marina gave a surprised wave as Alex and his ship left.

The Monte Cristo was not built to be sailed by a crew of fewer than ten men for a day trip. At least twenty would be needed for an ocean voyage. Within minutes Alex was overwhelmed. Manhandling her in the calm waters of Burrard was hard enough. He barely was able to motor her under the Lions Gate Bridge, when the open wind of English Bay hit the tall masts. Even with her sails furled, the wind drove her bow toward shore. To make things impossible, the tide was coming in. Without help, the little diesel was no match for both implacable forces of nature. And Alex simply couldn't handle the tiller and engine himself. Seeing that the shore was coming irresistibly closer, with a huge struggle he managed to drop the smaller midships anchor. As soon as he could, he scrambled down to the old wireless that had just been installed to send out a distress call to the Harbour Master.

Fortunately, a tug was in the vicinity. It was dispatched in time to toss the Monte Cristo a line and be towed ignominiously back to Mosquito Creek.

Alex was ordered to report immediately on docking to the Harbour Master.

Saying that he had been injured, he agreed to report when he was released from hospital. Alex was never seen again in the Vancouver area. Word was that he hopped a train back to Quebec and from there left on a ship to Europe.

The word was wrong. Alex and his family moved to Lions Bay to set up a new life.

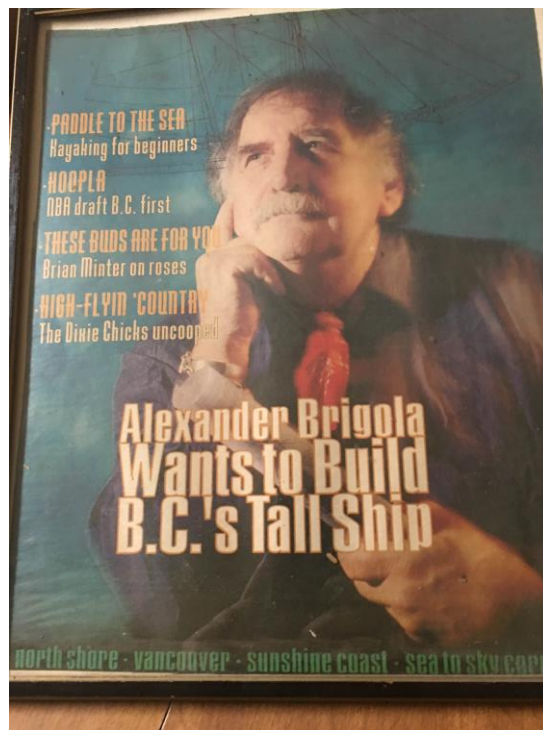


Figure 12 Alex Brigola, dreaming of another ship

In A Cloud of Sails

A sailing ship's broad white sails captures many a heart. They speak of journeys to far lands, where adventure will challenge the stuff of which you are made.

There will be sailors with you who become closer than brothers, and there will be people who stand in the way of your dream. Fights may occur over matters large and small.

For some, the challenge lies in the technical capability of shepherding a large, complex wooden vessel along the fickle waterways of the vast Pacific.

A few see profit in the hazy cloud of sails.

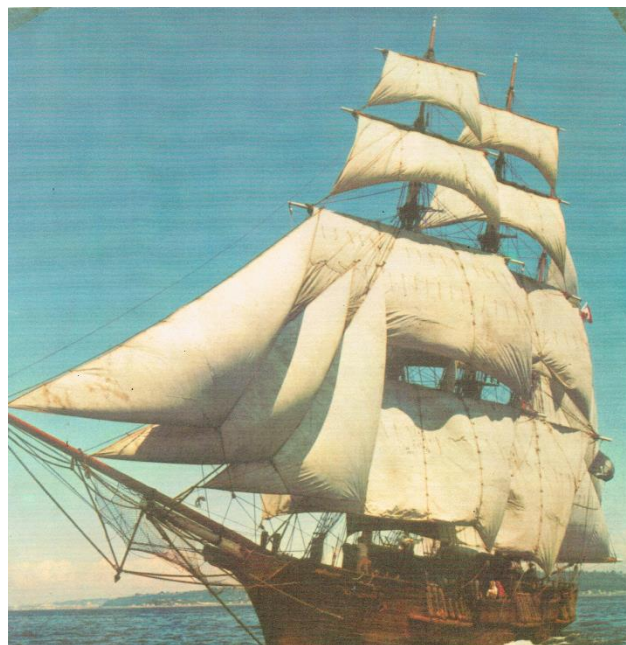


Figure 13 Monte Cristo / Endeavour II

If we gaze up into the sails we might see the images of past vessels. Were they any different from today's sailing ships? Before steam, the commerce of the world ran on the decks of wooden square-riggers. In the mid-1900s, several similar ships sailed the seas, but their purpose was generally for entertainment.

The quest for profit in the heady period of world exploration of the mid-1700s saw English vessels compete with Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish merchant vessels. They often found themselves in the same bays on the opposite side of the world and sometimes at cross purposes.

Cook's Journals - First Voyage - July 7th, 1771, p. 211:

Winds NNE & NW. Courses N 50° E. Distance sailed in miles 49...

Gentle breezes & clear weather...

At 9 am spoke to a Brig from Liverpool bound to Porto and some time after another from London bound to the Grenades, she had been three days from Scilly...

We learnt from this vessel that no accounts had been received in England from us and that wagers were held that we were lost, it seems highly improbable that the letters sent by the Dutch ships from Batavia should

not be come to hand, as it is now five months since these ships sailed from the Cape of Good Hope.

Why did a Yorkshire businessman want to sink his hard-earned money into a ship? Fortunes were being made in private factories that were built to secure trade secrets of how to weave cloth in ever greater quantities. At that time in England, why use one's new wealth to have a wooden ship built? The historically accurate version is given as a rational process.

Cook's Journals – Introduction, edited by Philip Edwards, p. 9:

However important these voyages were for geographical knowledge and the advancement of science... all these expeditions by the competing European powers of Spain, France and Britain were undertaken for the control of new territory for commercial exploitation and strategic use.

There was fortune to be found in the far lands. The new class of enterprising business people rubbed their hands at the prospect of spices, cotton, furs and gold that seemed to lie around for the picking. If they were first.

Then again, what brought a lad from a small farming village in Yorkshire to the sea, and onto a wooden vessel hauling coal up and down the eastern coast of England and across the dangerous waters of the North Sea? Would *you* take that highly risky career move?

As explained by a writer who looked into the soul of young James Cook, the answer is a less rational decision than a businessman would take.

Great Sailor, by John W. Vandercook, pp 14-15:

All tastes are strange to those who do not share them. None, to a convinced landsman, is harder to understand than a love for the sailor's calling... Bad weather – bad, foul and intolerable – is the rule. Winds are cruel and currents tricky... The cave-dark quarters below deck where the crew swung their hammocks were almost perpetually wet. Food, though not outright rotten as so often in the Navy and on all long voyages, was monotonous, cheap, and abominably cooked.



Figure 14 Captain James Cook

The profession that James Cook had chosen did offer one supreme reward. In that reward lies the clue to the repeated mystery. The basic fact of survival was daily bought at the price of skill. If you learned quickly enough the seaman's arts, you lived. If you did not, or if you grew clumsy or forgetful, you died.

That sharp, private joy which comes from the body's aptness, the hands' and the mind's cleverness gaining quiet, recurring victories against the heavy forces of God and earth and the sea, is one of the great intangibles, one of the strongest motivations of the human spirit... The experience of life earned and earned again by wits and courage cannot be bought or borrowed. It can scarcely be communicated.

Once learned, some find it is all they really care for.



Figure 15 Capt. James Cook - statue in Victoria, British Columbia

Adventure Can Be A Business

The *Monte Cristo Charter Line Ltd.* was a company. All it needed was a ship in the water and a good skipper to sail her.

Ron Craig Sr. was the right Master to move the project ahead. As Master, he would find a gnarly old skipper to take the ship along the coast to make money at the many maritime events.

Ron had a good business sense, from the marketing side, with successful businesses in several cities.

Ron's strength was in his network of important people in government and in cities across Canada, as well as in the USA.

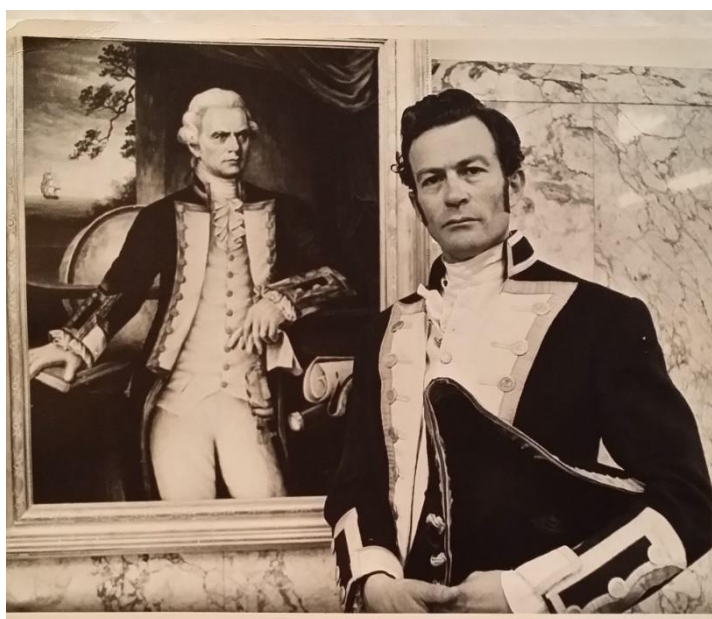


Figure 16 1970 - Ron Craig Sr. in Australia, before a painting of Captain James Cook

Ron would wryly admit that he did not always make the best choices. He had been selling a novelty item for cars such as the newly popular Volkswagen Beetle. His "Continental" kit was a hit for those who liked to attach what looked like the grill of a limousine to their little putt-putt. That success brought the offer of a Volkswagen dealership in Alberta. Ron declined, saying that the Bug was just a short-run fad.

Other than that one miss, Ron generally had a good sense for what the public wanted. He was certain that the *Monte Cristo Charter Line* would be a hit with companies that wanted to treat their management and staff with a special event on the high seas. Everybody was enthralled with sailing ships, weren't they?

Ron was well thought of by all who knew him. Later in life, at his place in Palm Springs, the regulars called him *Skipper*. Young Ron found his father's address book once. It contained Marlon Brando's personal phone numbers, along with other interesting numbers like Cher's mother, and that of the Prime Minister of New Zealand.

Ron Sr. had no qualms about picking up the phone to speak with any mover or shaker he felt could help him achieve his goals.

The Monte Cristo needed more than a Master on shore. She needed a Skipper with experience in sailing square-riggers. The man that fit the bill seemed to be a local character by the name of Captain Gilchrist.

Capt. Tom Gilchrist was taken on after Alex Brigola tried to make off with the Monte Cristo. The old sea-dog had an impressive résumé, having sailed the western coast of Canada for years, on ships that he stated included large sailing ships. Recently, and more easily authenticated, Gilchrist had been a writer for radio and television shows such as the popular “Tidewater Tramp”.

As the Monte Cristo began sea trials in Burrard Inlet and English Bay, Ron made long term plans for his company of adventurers. The British Columbia government was going to participate at a major trade exhibit in Osaka, Japan, at Expo '70. Ron established the contacts and first broached the possibility of a cross-Pacific voyage with Captain Gilchrist, then having the vessel as a feature at Expo '70.

Meanwhile, the crew had to be paid, so Ron arranged for his ship to participate in upcoming local marine events like the Kitsilano Yacht Club's Sail Past, the Vancouver Sea Festival, and summer festivals in Victoria, Nanaimo and Powell River.

He obtained a business license for his charter company in the State of Washington, with plans to take the USA west coast by storm.



Figure 17 Monte Cristo Charter Line USA registration

Joe and Hans had given their notice to Ron Sr. as the construction and rigging were being completed. They would be around the project for another few weeks but were in demand for their engineering skills in the real world. As one of his remaining tasks, Hans replied to a letter that was sent from Hong Kong by a young fellow who sorely wanted to sail on a square-rigger. That man's name was Jeff Berry. He was to join the crew as soon as he could arrange passage.

With prospects of actually sailing the high seas, the dozen or more regular young workers began getting stars in their eyes. Shortly it would be time to exchange their

eager discussions about sailing off to distant lands, to having their destiny entirely in each other's hands on the Pacific Ocean. The ship's dock at Mosquito Creek was a hive of focused activity aloft and below decks.



Figure 18 March 1969, from the Vancouver Sun

More Adventure Than Expected

In the white shrouds of the Monte Cristo, Captain Cook's long shadow fumed. *"This ship has been built with no purpose! Having no purpose, it is an abomination! Is she to traipse about the shore, in protected shoals, playing nursemaid to landsmen, or is she to sail the far seas, over which I have navigated with crews of brave mariners? In three expeditions aboard ships tried and true, I can modestly say that I have made no very great discoveries, yet I have explored more of the Great South Sea than all that have gone before me!"*

"With this I give fair warning to the Monte Cristo. Beware! This ship without a purpose, crewed by landsmen with no training, the sea shall smite you!"

Captain Gilchrist was very pleased to have found such a prestigious posting as Skipper of an actual square-rigger. To celebrate on the first evening of his appointment, he treated himself to a few drinks in Vancouver. Actually, he needed no excuse to partake of a few drinks. With his captain's hat jauntily perched over his white hair, Gilchrist strode along the sidewalk to his regular drinking establishment. On entering the still empty pub, he was warmly greeted by the bartender.

"Captain Tom! We missed you yesterday. Were you at the television studio?"

"My usual, Rick. Is the new waitress..."

"Emily?"

"Is Emily working tonight?" His lecherous expression could not be mistaken.

Rick received a cut of whatever proceeds his girls made, so he was genuinely disappointed to say, "Sorry, Captain. Emily didn't show up since you saw her last... What happened between..."

Gruffly, "Nothing. Forget about her. Give me a double for now."

Rick poured an almost double whiskey. He came around the bar with the drink. "Here. I can sit with you for a few minutes." They took a table in front of the bar.

Gilchrist cupped the glass reverently for a bit then downed a satisfying quantity. Rick nodded. "My best whiskey. For my best captain and favourite movie star. So, did you take that job?"

With a broad smile, Gilchrist appreciated his audience. "Yes, I decided to accept the position. I am in the middle of writing a new novel – a murder mystery on the high seas

– so I felt it would be...” he easily downed the remainder of the glass, pushing it toward Rick for a refill, “so I want to use this as research.” He allowed a twinkle in his eye.

Smiling, Rick got up, taking the glass behind the bar for another almost double.

A few more glasses and Gilchrist was immune to the slings of the world.

With a slur now on his tongue, Gilchrist propounded, “So I told him, this is what I want and nobody else in the world can sail her for you!” His fist pounded the table, jiggling his glass.

Encouraging the old man, as much for the entertainment as for the fact that the pub contained only one young couple in the corner sipping on a single glass of wine between them, Rick prodded. “So you’ve been captain on a tall ship before?”

The whiskeys were finally slowing Gilchrist down. “Well. Sort of.” He leaned closer to Rick across the table. “Just a ketch. And I was on a schooner. But it’s all the same, isn’t it? It’s wind pushing canvass...” He waved his arms to create the wind. Arms still up, thinking about it, he added, “Have to read about square sails. They’re another kettle of fish...”

Picture Captain Cook in a dark corner giving himself another face-slap.

A week after signing on, the new Skipper decided to take the freshly-rigged ship on trials out past English Bay. He announced his intention to the crew the afternoon before.

With a young crew, most of whom had never even sailed a small yacht, Gilchrist was anxious to prove his own seamanship.

On the night before their sea trials, Ron Jr. joined the other crew members in the main cabin. Having already taken the Monte Cristo out for brief runs in Burrard Inlet – “motoring” is the term used when running with sails furled – the crew was beginning to get into the sailing ship mentality. They especially enjoyed the way young ladies in the pubs swooned over them.

To encourage their recognition, most of the crew bought and wore what they felt were sailor’s shirts and pants.

As usual, of an evening in the main cabin, a card game was begun. Ron Jr. brought out some bottles of beer from the cooler.

“Here you go, fellas. Let’s drink to a fine day of sailing, tomorrow!”



Figure 19 “Brothers Four”

Ron's friend, Tim, looked more nervous than usual. He downed half a bottle with his first swig.

Trying to calm him down, Ron asked how he and Judy were getting along.

"Oh, alright, I guess. She says she can't understand why I spend all day working on the ship and then spend most nights sleeping aboard. Sometimes I wonder..."

Ron sympathized. "Yeah, Sue says the same thing. Women! They just don't get it, do they? You know, when I use Joe's crab net, like the catch for tonight's supper – fresh crab – you can't beat that! And..."

He stared deeply into his beer, a grin forming. "You know how we have fun by racing up the rat lines and climbing to the top of the main mast and then wrapping our legs around the top and holding on as the ship sways, sipping a beer up there and enjoying the view while..."

Then he remembered Tim's fear of heights.

He glanced at his friend. Quietly, "Are you going to be alright tomorrow? You know you're going to have to climb up past the main yard. We all have to pull our weight on the sea..."

Tim turned his back and sucked down the rest of the beer.

The next morning broke with a red tinge on the southern horizon.

Captain Gilchrist came aboard early. Ready, he was, to take on his next challenge! Reaching back to the days when he actually skippered a ship (metal-hulled trawler, though it was) he greeted the crew with gusto as they started rolling out on deck.

"Ahoy there lads! I hope you learned something while building this fine ship!" He looked at each of the crew with sincere hope.

"Young Ron! I'm going to appoint you First Mate. That means you are my right hand."

Ron was caught by surprise. He turned to Crazy George, next to him by the mainmast, and shrugged sheepishly. What he received in return was a dagger stare. Others muttered a variety of salty terms. Even a cousin of Ron, a skilled carpenter by the name of Earl who had been working on the ship for a year, joined in the discontent.



Figure 20 Ron Jr. aloft

Pushing past the less-than-joyous reaction, Gilchrist announced, "We are finally going to put this ship to the test! I have planned a series of sea trials that will show us how she handles. The light westerly out on English Bay is forecast to change to a brisk sou'westerly for us out in the Strait, some time this morning. We will motor past Lions Gate Bridge then raise sails and make for the Strait of Georgia..."

He explained the duties of each of the dozen crew members, as well as he could remember them from his past few days of reading.

The crew's sour mood couldn't be dulled by the disconnected instructions that Gilchrist was giving. At the first opportunity they started dispersing around the deck. On the way by, Earl brushed roughly against Ron. A shove back followed, and they were at it in close quarters on the aft deck. Gilchrist didn't react at first, then started shrilling at them.

"Stop that! STOP I SAY!" The others started to circle around the combatants encouraging the fight, but Gilchrist pushed through. "Enough! I will have none of that with my crew! If you want to be sailors you will learn to work together!"

The fight broke up, with Gilchrist shoving everybody away. Earl climbed the mainsail as high as he could. Others busied themselves around the deck or on a yard. Young Ron stood near the wheel breathing hard. His friend Tim, who had been moping on the foredeck during the excitement, shuffled back to offer a few consoling words to Ron.

Shaking his head sadly, Gilchrist gave orders to loose the moorings and start the old diesel.

As planned, the Monte Cristo kept her sails furled under the Lions Gate Bridge and until the middle of English Bay. At the Skipper's command, the engine was stopped. Ron relayed the Skipper's orders to set sails. The crew who weren't already on a yard scampered aloft, all but Tim and Ron, as the Mate. Gilchrist, wanting to impress what he felt would be a huge audience ashore, ordered all sails. He started at the wheel then called Tim over to be coxswain.

With all 8500 square feet of sail out, she was, indeed, a magnificent sight. The light wind caught the sails as they were each put to the wind and pushed the wooden ship at a good clip. Gilchrist ordered a tack to starboard, intending to pass Point Atkinson then tack aggressively across to Nanaimo. Waves were three to four feet. One of the design factors caused the Monte Cristo to dive into each wave, to hobby-horse, deeply. Neither the Skipper nor crew had the experience to know if this was normal. Tim was looking decidedly pale.

The ship was fairly quick but the rudder had marginal effect. More to the point, the crew had not received the detailed training that a seasoned skipper would have put them through before leaving a safe harbour.

The crew fumbled with orders, the press of sail overwhelming them. Canvass flapped and yards swung perilously close to fouling against stays on the next mast. After a few blank stares from aloft, they finally understood the Skipper's order of "ready about!"

Newly part of the crew, Jeff Berry had done his own reading so he passed on random bits of knowledge to others near him. "When you can, stand to windward against a yard so you won't get blown away!" "*Flatten in the sail* means bring the clew of the sail toward the middle so the sail is more effective." And so it went, all hands very busy learning the ropes. Jeff had been in the US Navy so he did not disparage the Skipper. Like Captain Cook, he kept any critical thoughts to himself.

High in a luffing topsail, Captain Cook's visage could be seen alternately shaking his head sadly, and nodding at the advice being given individually by Jeff.

Almost an hour past Point Atkinson, Gilchrist failed to notice the white caps approaching from the southwest. The storm was upon them in minutes and at that point he was broadside to it. Before he knew what to do the Monte Cristo, horrifyingly, keeled over, the starboard gunnels being awash and the sudden gale shaking the terrified crew in their precarious perches.

Completely at a loss, Gilchrist dithered and then reacted in the way he would have for a schooner in similar distress, which happened to be exactly the wrong thing to do for a square-rigger. "Hard aport! Ron! Tell them to haul the lines to put her bow-on!"

Fortunately, the crew aloft couldn't respond, even if they heard him, as they held on for dear life.

The Skipper was saying, in his frail voice, to bring the bow of the ship into the wind. Either not hearing or ignoring the Skipper, the new First Mate, young Ron, and two others on deck managed to haul in the correct lines to turn the Monte Cristo, still dragging her starboard side in the water, so that the sails could be filled from the stern. If they had quartered the wind from the bow much longer the masts would likely have failed. Unlike a schooner, a square-rigged ship is not built to take heavy winds head-on.

Ron and the few crew on deck struggled until the gusts abated, allowing the ship's own will to live to pull her back from a cold, humiliating grave in Georgia Strait. Those aloft, with enough sense, listened to Jeff and ignored Gilchrist's continued high-pitched screams. They roughly furled in as much canvass as they could.

Ron remembered the day plainly. "When the storm broke it hit us without warning. Everyone was panicking and did what we could for a few minutes then went into the galley to gain some composure, even as the ship was rolling violently. It was very exciting – everything was bouncing around – organized confusion – propane tanks smashing into things and everyone wide-eyed and nobody knew what to do. I remember the noise from the wind, creaking the ship coming from all sides and her keeling over. Anyways, while in there we looked at each other and I said, if this is it and we're going to die, let's not do it without trying, so out we went again and climbed up. I went and others fell in to play and got the ship in order until we were hauled in to Nanaimo."

Once they successfully returned to Vancouver, Tim left the ship.

A harrowing start, and not even on the high seas, yet.

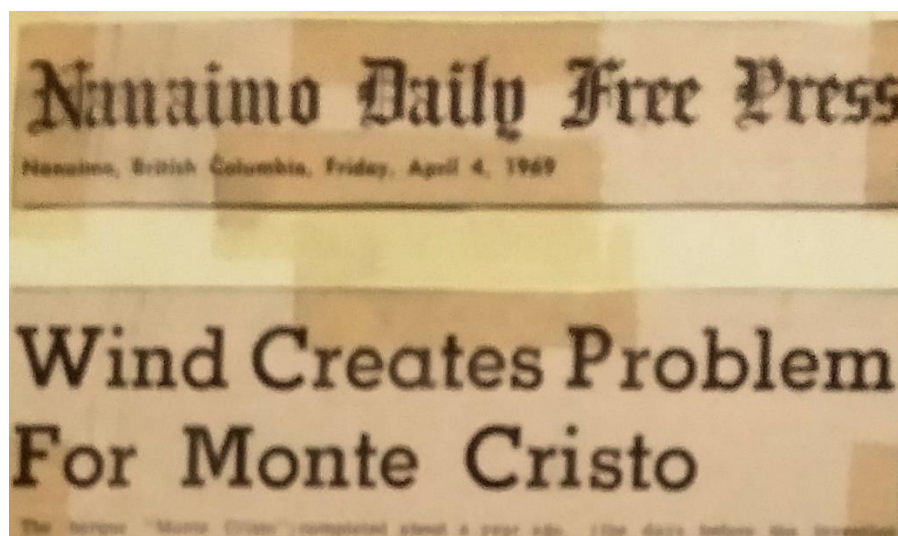


Figure 21 Gale on Georgia Strait

Life On Board

A wooden sailing ship is a thing alive. Masts settle into their footings, the stays and lines are cinched ever tighter, sailcloth droops, seams at the garboard streak (the first range of planks laid next to the keel) open and need attention. With her builders having no real mariner's experience, the ship speaks in creaks. A well-built wooden ship doesn't actually creak.

This ship was built without the benefit of life-long skills of a ship-builder or a sea-farer. The Monte Cristo was certainly not as solid as a Whitby collier. An aeronautical term applied: she was a collection of ship parts sailing in close formation. Each pounding



Figure 22 Ron Jr. at the helm, directly in front of Captain Gilchrist, on English Bay, Vancouver

wave sent shudders, as the 20th century ship groaned across the width of her timbers and beams. It stretched her rigging and squeezed her deck boards so that she became a noisy creature with a personality of her own. Not knowing any better, the crew believed that this was normal.

Despite these underlying issues, the Monte Cristo looked impressive! Even motoring across the calm Burrard Inlet, her three wooden masts festooned with many yards commanded attention. She did represent a long and gallant tradition. During weekend regattas on English Bay, with a cautious few sails pulling her through the water, mere yachts looked inadequate.

The fact remained, however, that her original builder had made mistakes that were to be discovered as she sailed further away, so she was entirely dependent on the ingenuity and persistence of those people scampering along the lines and sleeping below decks.

As happens between men and their technology, the crew grew attached to their ship as a trusted partner, together bravely facing the terrible sea and wind. Each little victory over a salty death was celebrated in the evening by the young men. This intimate relationship between ship and her crew had been accepted as obvious in previous centuries when so many plied the oceans hauling cargo across the world. These days, that relationship sneaks up on a young sailor.

Young James Cook, at the same age, was already Master of a Whitby collier.

His wispy visage, head shaking slowly, might be glimpsed in a high shroud of the Monte Cristo, marveling at the spotty work ethic of these modern seamen. And yet, he felt a pride that his tradition may continue.

The Monte Cristo had been returned to Mosquito Creek for re-fitting after the adventure on Georgia Strait.

One of the problems that contributed to the near disaster was laid at the feet of the way she was rigged. Rigging was a complicated task that very few seamen knew about in this era. A square-rigger has a most intricate arrangement of stays and lines needed to maintain the integrity of the masts and to orient each sail with wind under every possible weather condition. Getting that done correctly while in Burrard Inlet was of critical importance, as it would not be possible to pull over to the side of the sea-lane during a gale for a bit of work.

Ron Jr. recalled that time fondly:

“While we were docked with the ship and they were working to prep it seaworthy, Joe had a crab net that we used to throw over the side of the ship on the North Van side and catch fresh crab, which we ate for dinner on many occasions. The inlet was not as polluted then, I guess? At least we never got sick from it – lol!

“When we moved to the Bayshore Inn dock, eating on board the ship was a real treat as we would all take turns in the galley cooking eggs, lots of hash browns and canned bacon for breakfast. This became a tradition, carried on to all of the ports that we sailed to around the BC coast and down to Seattle and Olympia. As young crewmen it was also a thrill as each port no matter it be Nanaimo or Seattle – we were treated like celebrities! People would ask us for our autographs, pictures and what duties we had on board the ship.

“And I have to tell you the young girls would flock to the ship to see the young crew. Some of the maritime fairs that were on in these different ports that we toured allowed us really strut our stuff, as we wore our striped uniforms and gear. A lot of times we had parties on board with the young ladies and even some of the mothers would come on board later in the night as well.



Figure 23 Early crew – 1969 – with Ron Craig Sr. at the wheel

“I remember as a crew member giving guided tours of the ship to the young kids, and telling them stories like I was an old pirate, about the ship and the gold coins under the main mast for luck. Stories about when they would keel haul the bad crew, etc. We even added in the walking on the plank bit too. It was a lot of fun, as you could see the young kids eyes just wide open with these stories they would hear. Of course we gave real information to the adults as well and demonstrated the workings of the ship, and our knot work, and the use of the belaying pins as clubs in case of a battle with another rogue ship crew. Lots of hours working swabbing the decks and oiling the many different types of wood that the ship was made of.”

Swabbing, by the way was not only to clean off the gull deposits. “If the deck dries, it dies.” The wood above the water can dry out so much as to warp and begin to dry-rot. This is one of the thousands of lessons learned by the young crew.

Fun, frolic and danger, as Ron Jr. remembered it:

“One time I was racing up to the top and I slipped and missed one of the rungs of the rat line and slipped back down cutting the inside part of my arm leaving a long scar which I have today. I managed to keep ahold of one of the cables on the way down to the upper topsail. I fell only a couple of feet but it was up so high that my heart was beating double-time!

“Another favorite of the crew and myself was climbing into the jib netting under the dolphin striker and going up and down, in and out of the water as the ship sailed along. The nights were beautiful as well, even though we were up and down the BC coast and gulf. With the stars out it was an awesome sight and especially when you lay flat on the deck looking at those stars with the ship rocking back and forth and the rigging moving as well, along with creaking of the ship, the waves splashing off of the sides and the wind in the sails that would be flopping away.”

Where else would a lad want to be?



Figure 24 Vancouver Archives - CVA 447-7004.2 - Sailing Ship Montecristo

Getting Ready

Once it became known that a real sailing ship was touring the BC coast, all the maritime events from Powell River to Seattle wanted the Monte Cristo as an attraction.

The owner, Ron Sr., was kept busy scheduling the ship's visits. He had little time to try to replace old Capt. Gilchrist. "He'll work into it," was Ron's standard response to questions from the other financial shareholders.

Ron's brother, Fred, was particularly concerned. "Listen Ron. We are barely making costs with all these excursions along the coast. Gilchrist is not a businessman. He spends our money like a – ok, I have to say it – like a drunken sailor!"

Gilchrist's antics were past laughing at. He would spend all evening and as long into the night as he could at the nearest bar in every port. There, he would talk up the female barkeeper, promising her a position on board as ship's cook if she showed up next morning.

At early light, sure enough, the hapless woman would be dropped off by a taxi, her bags in tow, having given her sudden notice the night before.

She would drag her bags to the Monte Cristo where one of the patient crew would jump down to the dock to explain to her that they already had a cook and the Captain must have been drunk when he offered her the position. If the crew member was Ron Jr. or Jeff Berry, they would dig into their last few coins to give the poor woman taxi fare back to town.

Fred Craig was an airline pilot with a good business head. He wanted to see action. His brother Ron was reluctant to rock the boat. "He'll work into it."

"How long are you going to sit by and let Gilchrist play with his toy in this little pond? We have to make the Charter Line pay its way!"

Ron nodded. "I'm in contact with some very interesting people in the States, Fred. Gilchrist and the crew need to get their sea-legs."

Meanwhile, the Monte Cristo sailed into ports along BC's coast, on both sides of Georgia Strait.