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## The Circumnavigation of Penobscot Bay

Boies Penrose

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Pamp  
1842

With the season's greetings  
of Boies Penrose

THE  
CIRCUMNAVIGATION  
OF  
*Penobscot Bay*

THE  
CIRCUMNAVIGATION  
OF  
*Penobscot Bay*

BY THE

Official Historiographer of the Expedition



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*Camden, Maine*

1941



# The CIRCUMNAVIGATION of PENOBSCOT BAY

*By the Official Historiographer of the Expedition*

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THE genesis of the celebrated voyage chronicled in these pages goes back to the dim antiquity of the Sexton family, even to the time when Eric, the present scion of that house, was being portrayed at the helm of a barque and was in the throes of acute acne. Years had in fact been spent in its conception and its planning, but as all great undertakings demand long periods of preliminary spade-work, so this odyssey was not ripe for realization until the Year of Grace 1941. For in that year an event took place of prime importance in the fulfillment of all hopes, in truth an event of such earth-shaking significance that it is doubtful if the voyage could even have been contemplated had not said event transpired; to wit — Eric bought a boat.

This craft was so intimately bound up with the performance of our great expedition that a word or two of technical description (purposely simplified for the average reader) may not be superfluous. She was a vessel classified under the Linnaean system as *Chris Craft*, and had taken the water at a Michigan shipyard some years previously, since which time she had passed through

numerous hands. Her present proud possessor acquired her at a price of about one tenth of her original value from a ship-breaker, thereby preserving her for the enjoyment of posterity. In length she was 26 feet, in beam wide enough for three adults to crowd in side by side, in draft too deep to take chances in waters marked as dry land on the charts. Her deck plan was a hatch in the fo'castle (unsuitable for sleeping), three cockpits (of which two were reserved for polar bears and mermaids), and the engine hatch between cockpits 2 and 3. She had little freeboard and no tumble-home, while her scantling was limited to an ineffective wind-shield; but her massive timbers of West Indian mahogany were a worthy tribute to the craftsmen who built her, and reassured the timorous voyager—at least as long as she was in dock. Most important of all her appointments, however, was her engine, a 540 h.p. 64 cylinder, 16 cycle, triple-expansion Rolls-Royce Merlin turbine, replete with vacuum-brake ejectors and head-code signals.

So much for the good ship; now for the crew. To praise, or even to describe, our skipper, Eric, would be superfluous, so adept is he on footplate or in cockpit alike, never lacking in ideas, enthusiasm, or resourcefulness. Seconding him in the direction of the cruise was one B. Penrose, a puissant navigator and skilful cartographer, who although previously a victim of mal-de-mer had acquired a stout pair of sea-legs through con-

stant perusal of the pages of Hakluyt & Purchas. As passenger we were accompanied by an unregenerate landsman, Dr.-Emeritus Douglas Gordon, whose trenchant criticisms showed that he was rather out of his depth on the briny.

Our captain had previously made several experimental reconnaissances of the Bay, comprising two several trips to Pulpit Harbor which proved excellent substitutes for a cross-Channel swim; and a nocturnal spin along the coast during which the good ship behaved in such an alarming fashion that we were constrained to commend our souls to Providence. This latter experience necessitated a thorough overhaul of the engine and its several parts; a broken gasket was secured with a piece of pack thread and a hole in her bottom was covered with a loin cloth. Meanwhile ashore our preparations proceeded apace; chronicles of the great navigators of the past were read and re-read, coast pilots, waggoners and periplus were studied; backstays, binnacles, and astrolabes were polished up; chronometers were adjusted (to D.S.T. or fast time to you); even the experiences of veteran mariners were listened to and noted down. In short nothing was left undone for the success of a voyage on which so much of geographical importance was to depend.

Consultation with the local haruspex indicated that Friday, August fifteenth, would be most auspicious for our designs, and as the glass steadied and the wind dropped on Thursday evening

we realized that the next day was to see the accomplishment of our hopes. That night was indeed a solemn one in the Sexton household, as we mutely meditated over the Horation

*Nunc vino pellite curas,*

*Cras ingens iterabimus aequor,*

and indeed Vasco de Gama's mariners at their final mass in the chapel at Sagres before the voyage of 1497 were no more conscious of the gravity of occasion than were we three sea-beaten travellers.

Morning dawned on August fifteenth upon a household radiant with expectation, that gazed from the windows to find Apollo already journeying in his gilded car along his appointed course. The car was albeit slightly tarnished, and the atmospheric air was somewhat thickened with water vapor, but the wind was slight (number 2 on the Beaufort scale), the sea was only choppy, and the tide was on the flood.

Apprehension of the fateful occasion limited our breakfast to a few dried herbs; and after putting our affairs in final order and leaving a few last instructions we bade a tearful good-bye to the fair ones and proceeded to the harbor.

At 10:30 all was in readiness, the boat came alongside of the jetty, we jumped aboard and stowed the dunnage—then a few words of parting, a rough handclasp, and we were off!

Standing out SSE we soon cleared the roadstead of Camden, and with Mark I. as well as

Robinson Rocks and the whistling buoy abeam, we held our course for the extreme point of North Haven. At eleven, with Stand In Point abeam, we wore the reef and entered Fox Island Thorofare, having made the crossing of West Bay with no more incident than the shipping of a few seas which landed on Dr. Gordon. To celebrate so happy a passage our skipper entertained the ship's company with the dexterous execution of a *pas seul* on the transom aft.

At this point the skipper went below to the engine room, and the navigation of the ship was taken over by B. Penrose who, by virtue of his consummate skill in pilotage, took the vessel through the tricky and difficult waters of Fox Island Thorofare with his customary verve, *éclat*, and abandon. The Thorofare presented a great contrast to the watery waste which we had just traversed; a broad bight narrowing to the dimensions of a river, low hills completely clad in conifers, or else wild treeless sheep-walks with an occasional farm building; then many wooden houses of summer residents, most of which suggested affluence; then North Haven, with a water front of piers, docks, and boatyards that recalled Henley-on-Thames; then countless vessels of every shape and size, wherries, gigs, trows, dingys, cutters, sloops, yawls, pinks, snows, and cogs; then more summer houses and pine trees; then various islands; and finally the open sea again.

After leaving Calderwood Neck on our star-



board beam we stood ESE across East Bay, rising Isle au Haut through poor visibility off the starboard bow. Heavy weather prompted Dr. Gordon to solicit the seat in the middle, which B. Penrose gallantly surrendered to him. We left the mid-bay whistling buoy well on our port beam and entered the straights south of Kimball I. at 12 M. precisely. Isle au Haut presented the profile of a wooded ridge 500-600 feet high with a village combining the features of a Maine church and a settlement in Labrador, with a small settlement of summer places NE through the Thorofare at Lookout. The tide was still low and the Thorofare was impassible, while our plans to refuel were thwarted by the impossibility of approaching the wharf. We sounded and found rocky ground in half a fathom, so we clawed off and wore Kimball I. in spite of a heavy swell on our starboard beam. From Kimball Head we bore NE to Merchant's Row, passing between Pell I. and Burnt I., both small pine-clad islets. Then heading her up a bit to port we stood for Egge-moggin Reach, keeping Enchanted, Saddleback, Phoebe, and Shabby Islands to port. We kept Swans Island well to starboard, while Mt. Desert was visible and we rose Cadillac Mountain through the haze well off the starboard bow. Throughout this reach we were troubled by a heavy following ground swell, which made our frail craft wallow a good deal and occasionally nose under; so that it was with feelings of some

relief that we wore Green Ledge to port and entered the more placid waters of Eggemoggin.

This fortunate event, happening at 1 P.M. was the signal for mess, so we fell to and had an elegant repast of hard tack and salt horse, washed down by grog. We accomplished the processes of deglutition and alimentation with only slightly reduced speed, and passed Brooklin and Sargentville, both trim summer resorts on our starboard beam. The scenery resembled North Haven, but there were more signs of cultivation and more hardwood trees; and toward the West end of the Reach the banks were higher. In truth the Reach was a romantic fiord, whose sombre features under the lowering skies recalled the stern beauty of the Hardanger; save for some human embellishments displaying the finger of taste, the scene was one of wild nature, a scene calculated to fill the breast of the observer with awe. Few spots on this rock-bound coast could indeed compete with the romantic majesty and the sombre beauty of this watery glen.

Holding our course through the Reach we passed under the new Deer Island Bridge (a splendid structure) and proceeded to South Brooksville, with its superb little circular harbor—with a circular island in the middle. At this place we made fast to a rickety float, and set foot ashore for the first time in more than three hours. Our skipper enjoined us to repair to an establishment nearby renowned for its ice-cream; so with that

rolling gait so characteristic of sailors we proceeded to the confectioner's and completed the meal which had been begun with so nautical a bill-of-fare.

But all was not well; the sun had disappeared, it was blowing up, heavy weather was impending; so our captain commanded us to rejoin the ship without delay. An application of fuel at the next dock—to the annoyance of a natural son named Dr. E——, who felt crowded out—completed our preparations, and with hatches battened down we stood out of the harbor. Cape Rosier was next doubled, a rocky and wooded headland named after the historian of Weymouth's expedition of 1605, which first explored Penobscot Bay. As the seas were by now quite rough we bore across to the lee of North Islesboro, leaving Castine well to starboard, barely visible through the mist. We held this course to Turtle Head which we doubled and then bore S. on the home stretch, right into the teeth of the wind. In spite of the heavy weather considerable shipping was sighted; off Castine we spoke the schooner *Paul J. Sachs* standing in for Searsport, off Northport we overtook the freighter *Father Sill* beating to leeward, and later we spoke the single tow, *Mrs. Moore*, five days out of Philadelphia for Bangor. Clouds scudded by and small fowls screamed overhead. Until we were past Northport we had some lee, but from Spruce Head onward we fairly took it on the chin, and

it was only the reassuring sight of Camden's magnificent coast line, Battie and Megunticook, that prevented us from reconciling ourselves to a watery grave. But all's well that ends well, and at 4 P.M. we wore Northeast Point to starboard and a few minutes later we set foot on the float of the Camden Yacht Club and devoutly gave thanks to Almighty Providence for so safe a delivery from such perils and hardships.

So ended the great voyage, a veritable epic of heroism, endurance, and seamanship, which should take its place beside the sagas of antiquity.

