



Avelinda

The Legacy of a Yankee Yachtsman

Tom Cabot

Installments of Tom Cabot's memoirs of four decades of cruising the coast and islands of Maine were published in volumes 7 and 8 of Island Journal. Later, in 1993, the Institute published Cabot's complete account of his Maine cruising memoirs in a book titled Avelinda, after the name of his favorite vessel.

By the spring of 1910, when I was about to have my 13th birthday, one of my uncles evidently thought I was old enough to have a sailboat of my own. He persuaded my grandmother to give me a Manchester one-design knockabout as a birthday present. It was the happiest day of my young life.... To be sure, my yacht was only 17 feet on the waterline, but it had a self-bailing cockpit and a cuddy with two wooden bunks. I named the vessel TULIP and put out a mooring for it off West Beach in Beverly Farms where we were spending the summer. In early July, during a northeast storm, the screw shackle connecting the mooring chain to the pennant let go, and, to my dismay, the vessel came in on the beach where the surf banged it to the point of breaking two ribs and some of the planking. My mother put up the money to salvage the vessel and have it repaired. It was a lesson I never forgot. In a lifetime of sailing I have, of course, had other vessels grounded, but this is the nearest I ever came to a complete shipwreck...

As summer approached in 1919, I found myself with a few weeks free before summer school started at Harvard (I was hurrying to complete my degree so that I could get married), and with my college roommate, Alec Bright, I cruised eastward in TULIP from Beverly Farms as far as Frenchman's Bay in midcoast Maine. It was a memorable trip. I polished my skills at piloting and celestial navigation and learned a lot about the perils of anchoring and how to avoid dragging the anchor if the wind freshened. We also had lots of experience finding the way in dense fog.

To prepare TULIP for the trip, we had a large wooden box nailed down to the cabin sole in which we stored our provisions, cooking utensils, a small Primus stove, and our spare clothing. We had a kapok mattress which roughly fitted the cockpit, a sailcloth awning to stretch over the furled sail at night and tie down to small cleats on the gunwale at either side, and another piece of sailcloth and a couple of blankets to sleep under. All of these were stored below decks during the day.

With a fresh breeze at our backs, we set off from Beverly Farms late one afternoon and rounded Thatcher Island off Cape Ann before dark. We passed to seaward of the Isles of Shoals and Boon Island



COURTESY OF CABOT FAMILY

Tom Cabot on AVELINDA

with its tall lighthouse. Shortly after midnight, the wind being aft, we were carrying the spinnaker and mainsail. While I was napping, with Alec at the tiller, he suddenly let out a yell and put the helm hard down. He thought he had seen breakers ahead. The spinnaker came aback and we had some difficulty getting it down. While we wallowed in the sea with the mainsail flipping, we peered ahead, but I could see no sign of breakers so we resumed our course toward the northeast.

Between 1:00 and 2:00 a.m. it began to rain. In

pitch dark we put on our oilskins. The wind began to slacken, and by dawn it was a flat calm. Our vessel was rocking severely in the remaining waves and we sat there, cold and mildly seasick, eating only a few bites of cold biscuit for breakfast. By noon the seas had subsided. We were still miles offshore and there was still no wind. We decided to try to tow our boat toward the land with the dinghy. With one of us at the helm and one rowing, we took turns at towing shoreward. We could see no recognizable landmarks on the shore

and didn't know where we were. It was nearly dark before we got close enough to shore to identify some lobsterboats moored in what looked like protected water, and it was quite dark by the time we got among them and were able to anchor. We had only a small kerosene ship's lantern with Fresnel prisms, which gave too little light for us to find anything much to eat or to bother with cooking. Having been awake for 36 hours, we had no trouble sleeping.

The next morning, fishermen told us we were in Potts Harbor (near South Harpswell). It was a bright day with a good breeze and we sailed eastward around Cape Small, inside of Seguin Island, and came into Port Clyde in the late afternoon in plenty of time to cook some canned stew for dinner and have a walk ashore before dark. The next day we sailed on through the Muscle Ridge Channel to North Haven for the night, and the following day through the Deer Isle Thoroughfare to Burnt Coat Harbor on Swan's Island. We went ashore for some fresh milk and bread at the small store on the shore near the wharf, which is now the fishermen's cooperative. The two following nights were spent in Northeast Harbor with a full day's sailing among the Porcupine Islands in Frenchman's Bay. We returned by way of Eggemoggin Reach, where we spent a night anchored off the north shore of Deer Isle, not far from where the large suspension bridge now serves that island.

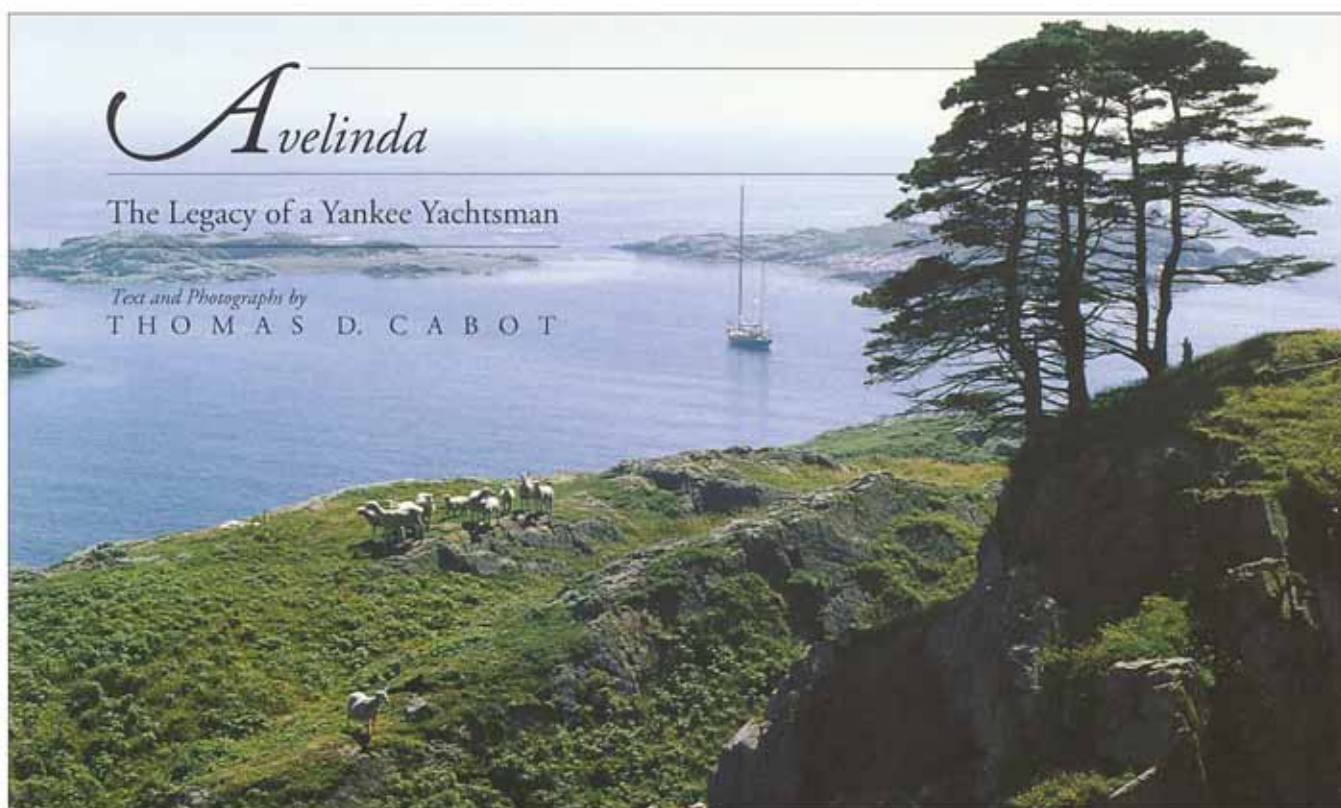
There was thick fog the following day. We missed a buoy and got lost. We found ourselves

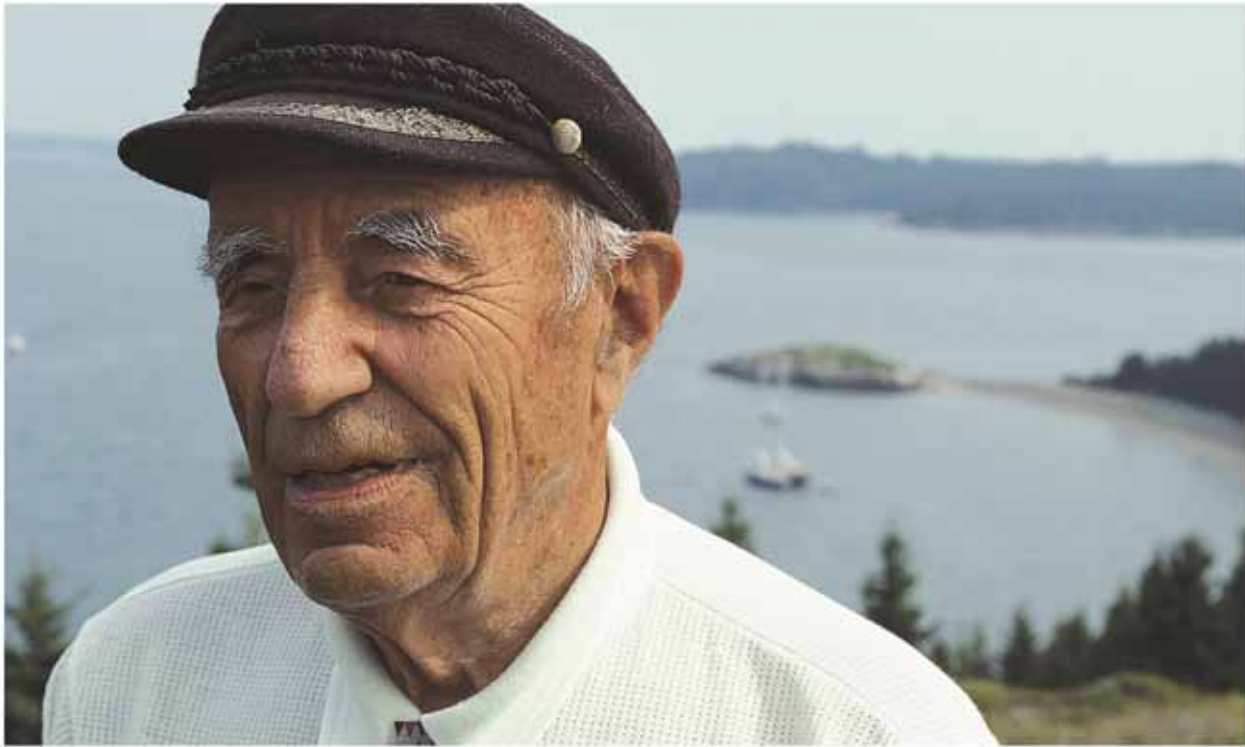
among ledges and hit one lightly with no damage. We tacked into a light southwesterly wind all day in the fog, not knowing where we were but occasionally seeing an island shore, and finally anchored in the lee of a wooded island for what proved to be a rather restless night. It began to rain shortly after dark and by midnight the wind was freshening into a storm. We had only about 15 fathoms of half-inch hemp rope for our anchor, which was the old fisherman's type. None of the modern patented anchors had been invented. The depth of water was much greater than we had anticipated, and although we were close to the shore, there was very little more than enough rope to reach bottom. About midnight we realized that our anchor had dragged and we were adrift in deep water.

The longest rope we had was the peak halyard so we unrove it, attached it to the anchor rope, and got the vessel head to wind again, but we couldn't be sure in the dark whether or not we were still dragging.

By dawn it was still raining but the fog had cleared. After some study of the chart, we found our position to be between Great Spruce Head Island on the west and the Barred Islands on the east. There was a large house on the northeast corner of Great Spruce Head Island, and we decided to row to it.

All our clothes were soaking wet and we were miserable and cold. We wrung what water we could out of our wet underwear, put on oilskins with nothing but underwear beneath, and in short





Tom Cabot on Butter Island

order made it to shore. It was about quarter of seven in the morning, and a young boy and a girl our age were playing ping-pong on the screened porch. They asked us in, lit a fire in the living room, and invited us to stay for breakfast. It was the Porter family from Chicago. It was Nancy, the oldest, who had been playing ping-pong against Eliot, her brother. Two younger brothers, Fairfield and John, soon appeared with the parents. We were much embarrassed, having only underwear under our oilskins, so before breakfast we rowed out to our vessel, got some more wet clothes on, and rowed back for a meal. We wound up staying all day and spent the next night in the shelter of their harbor, leaving the following morning to sail to Tenants Harbor.

That was our first cruise of Maine. I can't possibly remember the scores of cruises we had later and all the places we anchored, but I can clearly remember some of our misadventures and many of our favorite harbors and gunkholes....

Our first family cruise in a larger vessel along the Maine coast was in the summer of 1931 when we chartered the schooner *PORQUE NO*, a vessel out of Camden. On the first day we sailed over to Great Spruce Head Island and anchored in the private harbor of the Porter family. Before dark, John Porter came alongside and told us that there was a radio prediction of high winds before midnight and that he thought we would be less exposed if we anchored in Barred Island Harbor nearby. He offered to pilot us there. It was low tide and twilight. On entering the harbor we hit on a sunken ledge halfway between the northernmost island of

that archipelago (then called by the fishermen Peak Island but now called by the family Escargot) and Western Barred Island. We were soon off the ledge and anchored in the harbor of the night. It was our first night on the vessel and there were only four berths below deck. There being five of us, Tom Jr. was nominated to sleep on deck. He had a mummy-shaped sleeping bag with no zipper. He was only eight and not a strong swimmer. About 2:00 a.m. I was awakened by a call. I thought he had called in his sleep but a moment later I heard splashing. I rushed on deck. The rising tide was streaming by the vessel, and in the wake I could see astern something on the water. I dove for it; when I came up, I had only an empty sleeping bag. In a panic I started yelling hysterically. While the rest of the family swarmed on deck, I splashed around trying to find my son. After what seemed like hours, someone heard a faint cry from the bow of the vessel and there was Tom Jr. hanging onto the bobstay, the only part of the vessel that he could get a hold of from the water. He and I were both pulled on deck with his wet sleeping bag, and he was put in my warm bed below deck while I was relegated to sit with dry clothes on the deck for the rest of the night. The afterthought of that near drowning haunted me. From terror or cold, I'm not sure which, I shivered through the remainder of the night. In the beautiful dawn, I was near weeping with emotion. It seemed the most beautiful dawn I had ever witnessed and I resolved then and there to try to buy the surrounding islets.

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