

From Sea Scout to Master Mariner, Captain Arthur Kimberly Before his *Romance*

by Deirdre O'Regan and Captain Daniel D. Moreland

Captain Arthur Kimberly's legacy aboard his brigantine *Romance* is the stuff of legends, but he would be the last person to broadcast his remarkable story. In this issue, we meet Arthur Kimberly as a young man, just starting out in boats, and follow him through the ships he served to his fateful meeting of a young photographer aboard the famous brigantine *Yankee*. Look for more of the story of his voyages and legacy from the deck of *Romance* in upcoming issues of *Sea History*.

It began with a pony ride in Boston Garden. As a grammar school student in Worcester, Massachusetts, "Zeke" Kimberly entered a Cain Manufacturing Company contest and won a pony. After his victory lap in the saddle during the rodeo at the Garden, his pediatrician father had him hand back the reins of the animal and accept a check instead. With the money, they purchased a small catboat.



COURTESY CAPTAIN ARTHUR KIMBERLY AND JANE MEYER

The pony ride that started it all. A young Arthur Kimberly rides his prize in Boston Garden, led by Hollywood's cowboy, Tom Mix.

Like many of his schoolmates, the young Arthur Kimberly had risen through the ranks of the Boy Scouts, but "their idea of scouting in Worcester was nothing but marching." That held little charm, so the lad started sailing his new boat on nearby Lake Chargoggagoggmanchauggagoggchaubunagungamaugg (not a misprint!) in Webster, MA. By then, obsessed with boats, he found a mentor in Webster's Sea Scout master, Dick Wales. Although he was never an official member of Wales's troop, he worked harder and learned fast. Dick Wales was impressed enough to encourage the young sailor to follow the sea as a career—even though Kimberly's own parents did not.

One summer between high school semesters, he shipped aboard an old Maine coasting schooner, the *George Gress*. He de-

veloped an affection for this ship (as he did for just about every ship he sailed in), despite the grasses growing in the foc's'le—she was wrecked the day after he signed off. In 1939, he joined a club in Boston that gave him many opportunities to crew on some fine yachts during summer breaks, including the 72-ft. schooner yacht *Nordlys* with Chester Bowles, making coastal passages between New York, Boston, and Maine. Yachts were fast and beautiful, but Arthur Kimberly preferred working ships.

During the 1920s and 30s, while he was growing up in Massachusetts, the last of the square-riggers were disappearing from the seas. One of the last to carry cargo under square rig often called at Boston, the Swedish four-masted barque, *Abraham Rydberg*, and Kimberly was there to see her each time she cleared in. From the pier he memorized every line in her rigging; at home, he learned their names in Swedish. He tried repeatedly to get a berth aboard and was turned away just as often. But finally, one night in 1941, just before she was to sail for Brazil, he got word that a

The four-masted barque Abraham Rydberg



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berth was available. The next morning's tide carried the 2,345-ton ship to sea, this time with a nineteen-year old Arthur Kimberly scampering aloft to loose the topsails. Shipping aboard this hold-out from another age would be a defining moment in his life.

The *Abraham Rydberg* sailed to Brazil and back, interrupted



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Kimberly at the helm of his first square rigger, Abraham Rydberg.

by the news that war was declared with Germany. Heavy weather, a run-in with a raiding party (British, thankfully!), and some luck guided the engineless sailing ship safely back to Baltimore, making port on 30 January 1942, where Kimberly signed off.

The merchant marine was losing thousands of tons—and men—in the spring of 1942 to German U-boats and was desperately in need of ships' officers. Experienced mariners could apply for the accelerated program at the US Merchant Marine Academy. At Kings Point, he trained under a Swedish master rigger, working on the barquentine-rigged gunboat *Nantucket*. Kimberly received his commission with the first graduating class at Kings Point. He spent the war as an officer on oil tankers—one of the most hazardous jobs in the already dangerous wartime merchant marine.

As soon as the war ended, Kimberly went back to sailing vessels. He found his first berth as chief mate in the three-masted schooner *Guinevere*. She had been used in anti-sub patrol service during the war but was put back into service as a trading vessel, sailing to the Mediterranean carrying sugar and a little contraband (mostly cigarettes). Arthur Kimberly, as usual, was very fond of the ship. But he had no stomach for smuggling. He signed off in the Mediterranean. Over the next several years, he shipped aboard T-2 tankers as an officer and sailed all over the globe.

In 1956, seeking to learn everything he could about ships

Kimberly served as 2nd mate aboard SS Mobil Gas, a Socony-Vacuum tanker, in 1956.



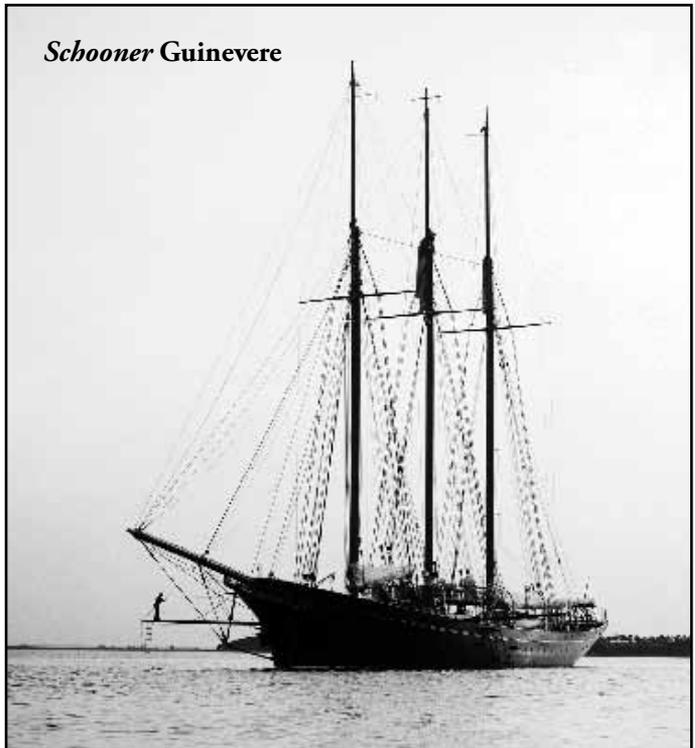
COURTESY OF CARL R. FRIBERG, JR.



COURTESY CAPTAIN ARTHUR KIMBERLY AND JANE MEYER

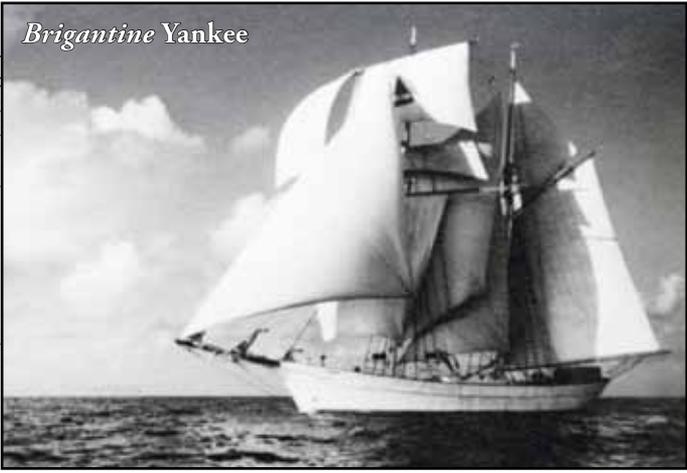
When the United States entered World War II in December 1941, the US Merchant Marine Academy responded by channeling all its efforts toward meeting the need to train merchant marine officers. They created an accelerated program at Kings Point, condensing the traditional four-year curriculum into 18 months. Arthur Kimberly graduated from this program as part of Kings Point's first graduating class in 1942.

Schooner Guinevere



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Brigantine Yankee



and the business of shipping, he took a year off from sailing to learn about the boatbuilding business and spent another year working in Ted Hood's sail loft in Marblehead, Massachusetts—back when Ted Hood worked in the loft himself.

Now a master mariner, licensed to ship as master in both steam and sail, Kimberly embarked on a voyage that would take him to sea, sailing what he considered the perfect rig, a brigantine. In January 1960, he signed as mate aboard the brigantine *Yankee*, made famous by Irving and Exy Johnson, under its new owner Reed Whitney. This ship would have lasting ramifications in Arthur Kimberly's life. The concept of the world voyage with paying crew or trainees would prove a useful model when he eventually got a ship of his own. The sail configuration for this sort of

The crew aboard Yankee welcomed back their captain-groom and his bride with the "Wedding Stuns!" in Tahiti in 1961.



passage-making was ideal. A brigantine would allow a relatively small crew the opportunity to cruise under square rig, just right for following the trade winds and for mastering the seamanship required to maintain and operate them.

While cruising in the Bahamas as mate in *Yankee* in March of 1960, a halyard block aloft broke and crashed to the deck, leaving him with a fractured skull and serious injuries. A radio call for help took the thirty-seven-year-old mate to an Iberian freighter to a helicopter lift to Corrientes Bay, where Fidel Castro gave clearance to a US Coast Guard plane to fly at low altitude in Cuban airspace to race the injured seaman to Miami. The incident relieved him of an eye, but Kimberly returned to his ship. When Captain Whitney passed away, Kimberly took command.

It was aboard *Yankee* in May of 1961, during one of her bread-and-butter Caribbean cruises, that her new master met his soul mate and soon-to-be permanent shipmate, Gloria Cloutier. A photographer from Detroit, Ms. Cloutier took a short vacation sailing aboard *Yankee*. Not long afterwards, she was back aboard for a round-the-world voyage. By Tahiti, they were married.

The Kimberlys (known to those who sailed with them as "Skipper" and "Mrs. K"), stayed at sea aboard sailing vessels for the next three decades. In time, they acquired their own ship, the brigantine *Romance*—a ship with its own interesting history. Movie studio MGM had hired Alan Villiers to purchase, re-rig, and sail the little ship from Denmark to Hawaii to use in the epic movie "Hawaii." After the film wrapped, the producers had no more use for it and were looking to unload it "cheap." The Kimberlys took it off their hands.

This seafaring couple's legacy from their 23 years in *Romance* reaches far and wide. They lived the traditions of the sea through many voyages across the Caribbean Sea, the South Pacific, and two circumnavigations. In twenty-five years aboard their own ship, hundreds of young men and women experienced the rare opportunity to share in this life at sea under a true master of square rig. "The Kimberlys did this without presumption and without apology," reflects Captain Bert Rogers, executive director of the American Sail Training Association, who sailed in *Romance* for nearly three years in the late 1970s. "To sail in *Romance* was to drink deep of the traditions and values of seamanship. The inherent worth of these things was rarely discussed. It simply was the absolute and fundamental fact of life on board, sustained by the will and mastery of Skipper, the loyal support of Mrs. K, and the demands of the ship herself."

Captain Arthur Kimberly is retired and lives in New Smyrna Beach, FL; his bride and chief mate, Gloria, passed away in 2006. In October, the NMHS will bestow the Karl Kortum American Ship Trust award to the Kimberlys and *Romance* for their lasting contribution to our maritime heritage. ⚓

Capt. Daniel Moreland served in Romance from 1973-77 and is the captain of the world-voyaging Picton Castle.

