

**Thomas C. Gillmer and G. Edward Reed, on Gillmer,
*Pride of Baltimore: The Story of the Baltimore Clippers, 1800-1990***

Sirs:

In the recent Volume III, No. 2, I have read the review of *Pride of Baltimore: The Story of Baltimore Clippers* of which I am the author. The reviewer, Mr. G. Edward Reed, is kind and courteous enough to refer to me as an experienced naval architect. I believe I am. Unhappily he considers me a poor historian and that may be so. However, I have thoroughly studied and researched the history of Baltimore Clippers and their construction. That is a name which has been made quite well known, if not actually originated by, my late friend Howard I. Chapelle.

In his review Mr. Reed centres on mainly one or two complaints. Both seem to be revolving about my belief that the ship *Ann McKim*, built in Baltimore in 1832, has some legitimate evidence of being the first Clipper ship. ("Clipper ship" is an elusive term with less definition than "Baltimore Clipper.")

I have cited the ship's origin and a brief of its history which is well recorded and needs no substantiation. I have described its form and its similarities as well as differences with its predecessors, the sharp built Baltimore schooners. The relationship between ships of different size and their speed capabilities is difficult to express without some hydrodynamic reference. And this is frequently a barrier to understanding between historians and more technical writers. However, there is a rigorous relationship that supports a linkage of speed capabilities under sail between Baltimore Clippers and the great Clipper ships of the mid-nineteenth century. This is my book's message. The *Ann McKim* sailed in that same path.

My feeling that our New England friends are often too quick to express their determined belief of nautical superiority is shared by a rather abundant number of my colleagues, and I do not have to cite titles of several published books on Clipper ships with this bias. I do not believe that it is very evident in Howard Chapelle's work, *Search for Speed Under Sail*, even though he may treat the New England ship builders with more respect. I do not believe that I made any statement in my book that "seriously misrepresents" the work of Chapelle, as Mr. Reed claims. Also he charges that in making a "case for the *Ann McKim*," I reject the work of Chapelle. I would call attention to the footnote in my book in which I quote Chapelle in this regard: "Chapelle in *The Search for Speed Under Sail* refers to the *Ann McKim* as the first Clipper ship of the pre-Clipper ship era." (p. 220, n2)

I would say in self defence, responding to Mr. Reed's offensive statement referring to my "acerbic remarks" toward Chapelle's work, that I have a considerable respect for him as well as his work. Further, I believe I am in a better position than most writers for this expression. Howard Chapelle was my good friend, personally and professionally — I was asked among others by the well respected publication *WoodenBoat* to write the eulogy for his untimely passing. I have travelled with Chap to international congresses and Symposiums, worked with him in researching the working fishing boats of North America's coastal waters, commiserated with him about the tyranny of book publishers, and we shared, with only one other American, membership on the United Nation's Panel of Experts on Fishing Boats.

So I resent inference that I lack respect or understanding for Howard Chapelle and his work. I regret that he was not alive to design the *Pride of Baltimore*, which he would so very

much have loved to do. He may have also enjoyed writing a second edition of his book, *The Baltimore Clipper*, which my writing will not replace, but I hope may extend.

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The reviewer responds:

Sirs:

I regret that Thomas Gillmer has taken offence at my review of his book; I certainly did not intend to offer any. However, having reread both Gillmer's book and my review, I believe that my criticism of the way in which Gillmer attempts to prove the hypothesis that the launching of the *Ann McKim* at Baltimore during 1832 marked the beginning of the Clipper Ship Era remains fair and valid. The burden of that criticism was and is two-fold: first, that the case for the *Ann McKim* is asserted rather than proven and second, that, by proceeding in that manner, Gillmer dismisses or gives the impression of dismissing too quickly and unfairly the work of maritime historians, Howard Chapelle among them, that has a bearing on both sides of the case. I was sorry and surprised that Gillmer, given his evident desire to make the case for the *Ann McKim*, had not critically assessed the work of maritime historians who have written on the origins of the clipper ship — something that Gillmer undoubtedly had a responsibility to his readers to do, given the contentious nature of his claims. Instead, Gillmer merely broadly characterizes arguments that have been made by earlier and unnamed historians as "hollow, unspecific, and unsupportable rhetoric" — which they might very well be, but how is the reader to judge for himself without having had those arguments presented to him and assessed? Furthermore, Gillmer simply asserts that the role of the *Ann McKim* in the development of the clipper ship has been "falsely minimized" by, again unnamed, historians. Given the passion with which Gillmer argues the case for the *Ann McKim*, it does not seem unreasonable to describe these characterizations and assertions as "acerbic." These characterizations and assertions, because they are so sweeping, do misrepresent the work of maritime historians who have written on the origins of the clipper ship and do ignore the complex evolution of that ship type. Chapelle, for example, acknowledges, in *The Quest For Speed Under Sail*, that the Baltimore clipper, represented by the *Ann McKim*, was one of the three basic models for the clipper ships of the 1840s and 1850s, setting the role of the *Ann McKim* in proper perspective but not minimizing her role. Gillmer's respect for Chapelle and for Chapelle's work is evident in his letter, but it is not evident in his book — a point that is also made by Frederick C. Leiner in his review of the book in the current number of *The American Neptune*.

I should perhaps also add that I have not been able to find the point in *The Search For Speed Under Sail* at which Chapelle refers to the *Ann McKim* as "the first clipper ship of the pre-Clipper ship era." In Plate 83 of that work, Chapelle presents a draught of the "pre-clipper-era clipper ship" *Ann McKim*, a label that he also applies, at p. 257, to the *Bolivar*, built at New York in 1822, and to the French *La Vengeance* of 1800.

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