

Louie Howland - An Appreciation

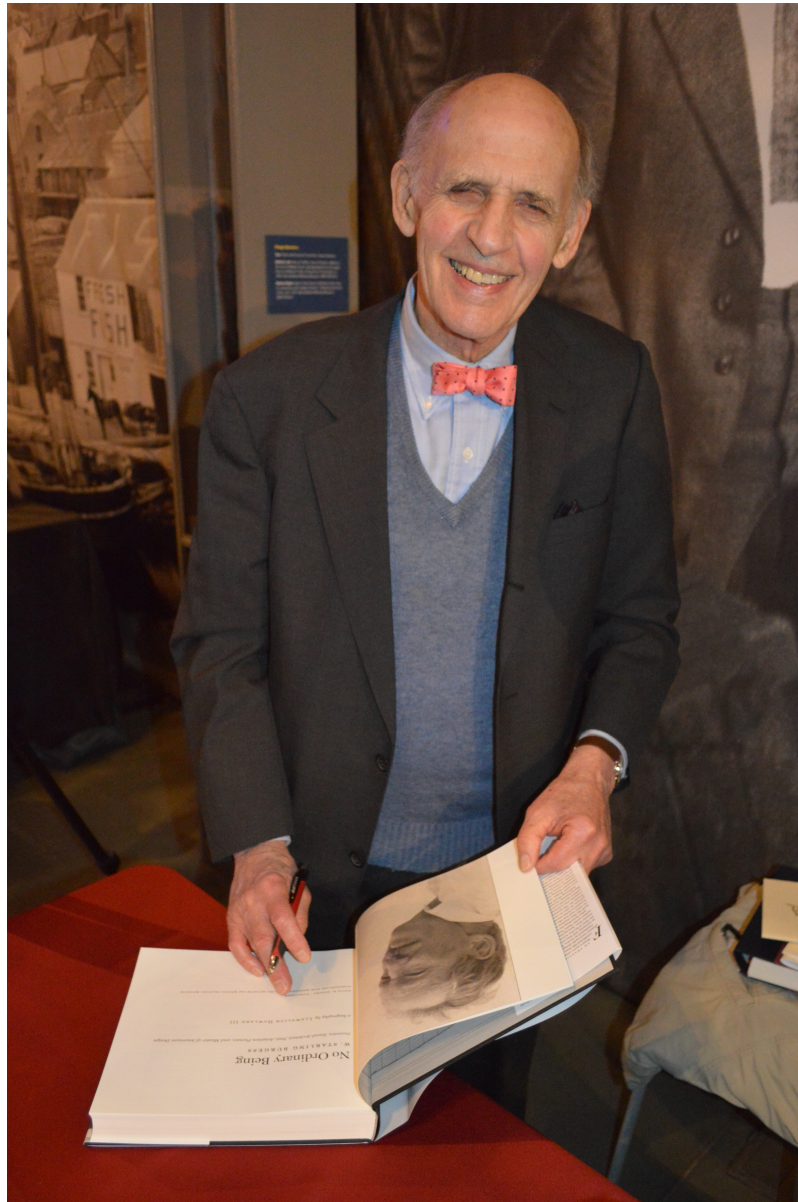


Photo credit: Courtesy of New Bedford Whaling Museum

We have lost Louie Howland. A friend, a yachting historian and an extraordinary bookman.

I first met Louie around 30 years ago when I started attending Mystic Seaport's wonderful Yachting History Symposium. For a relative youngster, these were magic events and Louie's contributions were typical of the man. His knowledge of yachting, of the social dynamics of New England and his mischievous irreverence allowed him to turn potentially stilted taking head sessions into truly insightful events. I fondly remember him gently goading Rod Stephens into wonderful reminiscences of

Dorade's transatlantic race. It took a very special and trusted character to draw out these gems.

It was not long after meeting Louie at Mystic that I made my first pilgrimage to Jamaica Plain, home of Howland & Co. his antiquarian book business. In 1999, Louie wrote "Mine has been a life in books: buying and selling, editing and publishing, agenting, packing and shipping, appraising and cataloguing, reviewing, and, on occasion, even reading." I knew nothing of this and was nervous as I discovered incredible books that I did not even know existed. Louie would offer a 'that's not for you' as I admired an impossibly expensive volume or 'you really should buy that' as he noted some shortcoming in my knowledge.

Louie knew what I was interested in but if he was always pretty fair in letting all his customers work on a first come first served basis, visits to him were always rewarded. In 1993 I had asked him to find me copies of *British Yachts and Yachtsmen* and *Yachts of the R. Y. S.* As we chatted over coffee my eyes drifted to a pile of books which looked mighty liked they contained both these treasures. Sensing my distraction Louie said something along the lines that *Yachts of the R. Y. S.* is just plain expensive so that will stretch you but I have found you a reading copy of *British Yachts*, the binding is tired and its full of notes but its all there. It was Herreshoff's copy discounted and passed on to a young historian he was encouraging.

Early on Louie also gave me copies of the two lengthy articles he had written for *Wooden Boat* on Edward and Starling Burgess. They were wonderful and the best source on the subject. But, for years it was a question of whether Louie would finally complete the biography of Starling Burgess who had first inspired him as a boy when he followed in his footsteps at Milton Academy. In 2014 Louie's magnificent *No Ordinary Being: W. Starling Burgess, Inventor, Naval Architect, Poet, Aviation Pioneer, and Master of American Design* was published.

His more regular publications were his catalogues. They are reference works in their own right, peppered with anecdotes, insights and the inevitable wry comments. The last book I bought from Louie was G. L. Watson's own copy of Philip Marett's *Yachts and Yacht Building* a treasure in its own right and now doubly so. The chance of such treasures always caused a frisson when opening a new catalogue. But, before opening it, like most of Louie's fans, I always turned to the back cover where the *In Harbour* section would list those of his friends and yachting greats who had recently passed. At 81 Louie is now in harbour with the erudition, humanity and friendship he shared so willingly.

Dr William Collier