

Romance Under Sail: the Life and Legacy of Captain and Mrs. Arthur Kimberly and the Brigantine *Romance*

by Captain Bert Rogers and Captain Daniel D. Moreland

In the last issue of *Sea History*, we met a young Arthur Kimberly and learned about his transformation from Sea Scout to master mariner. We left the tale in 1966, when Captain Kimberly, known as “Skipper,” and his new bride Gloria Cloutier staked all to purchase the brigantine *Romance*. For all those who sailed in *Romance* over the ensuing twenty-three years in voyages throughout the Caribbean, South Pacific, and around the world, that event marked the beginning of the story, the legacy, and the lessons that were learned from a consummate master of sail, a staunch little ship, and the endless challenge of the sea.

The Story of the Ship

Romance was built in Denmark in 1936 and christened the *Grethe*, an auxiliary-powered two-masted trading vessel. *Grethe* was beautifully and powerfully built of Danish oak and beech at the renowned shipyard of J. Ring-Andersen, in Svendborg, Denmark, which carries on to this day. Her design, lines, and construction were typical of the legion of stout and seaworthy vessels built in northern Europe in the early 19th century to withstand the rough weather typical of the North Sea. The *Grethe* made her living, like so many other vessels, trading along surprisingly extended routes from all around Europe, out even as far as Greenland. Modest factories and manufacturing plants up small rivers and harbors needed a steady supply of all the 200 tons that *Grethe* could load and carry.

After nearly thirty years of hauling cargo, *Grethe* was discovered by Hollywood. In 1964, Captain Alan Villiers was contracted by MGM Studios to select and deliver a suitable vessel for the making of “Hawaii,” MGM’s film version of James Michener’s epic novel of the same name. MGM needed a brigantine to sail to Hawaii to star in the movie with Julie Andrews and Max von Sydow. Budget did not seem to be a problem, and Villiers knew just where



PHOTO BY GLORIA KIMBERLY

That the Kimberlys called their brigantine, Romance, concedes at once their allegiance to the quest of transcendent experience in life, intangibles which are often mocked today. Who would use a word like “romance” these days when talking about anything serious? But they sailed under that banner, like Masefield’s “Dauber,” who sailed “in quest of that one beauty God put me here to find.” I think of Art Kimberly in this connection because, in his sailing for far horizons under all conditions of wind and sea, his aims were so exalted—matched to an intensely practical approach to the everyday needs of the ship and her people and a mastery of sailorly arts and craftsmanship, which no one who sailed with him ever forgot. Rather, they have done their best in their later careers to emulate and live up to his standards and pass on to others what they learned from him aboard a most romantic ship. —Peter Stanford, NMHS President Emeritus

to go. He went to Denmark, selected the *Grethe*, and set out to re-rig her as the brigantine that twenty-three years of *Romance* sailors would come to know and love.

The refit of the *Grethe* was something of a national swan song for the old-time marine artisans there. Villiers gave the project his all and so did the Danish riggers, shipwrights, sailmakers, and blacksmiths who were pulled out of retirement.

The job they did was just about as perfect as could be: rigging, masting, spars, iron-work, decks, taffrail, flax-linen sails, hemp lanyards, and all the detailing one could hope. The square-rigged fore-mast of the brigantine was an exact sister to a mast from out of Villiers’s former ship, the *Joseph Conrad* (ex-*Georg Stage*), down to the very last detail.

Meanwhile, Arthur Kimberly had
SEA HISTORY 124, AUTUMN 2008



COURTESY CLYDE SANADI

Captain Arthur and Mrs. Gloria Kimberly aboard Romance, 1973

met and wed Gloria Cloutier in Tahiti in 1961. Kimberly was then captain of the famous brigantine *Yankee*, but he did not own the ship. After they were married, the Kimberlys set out to find their own vessel. They started small, running a little schooner out of the Bahamas, but they had their eyes on another level of seafaring, if they could only find just the right vessel.

To Sea

It was in 1966 that the Kimberlys had set up temporary quarters ashore in New England and were in contact with a number of yacht brokers. In the mail one afternoon, amongst a batch of bills and junk mail, was an envelope bearing the listing for the saltiest brigantine they had ever seen. MGM had finished their movie, the *Grethe* was sailed from Hawaii to San Diego and put up for sale at a price to move. The Kimberlys made some phone calls, ran to the bank, quit their jobs, packed their bags and, within days, were standing on the deck of the brigantine that would be their home for the next twenty-three years. They gave her the name *Romance*, partly from their love of the sea and partly hearkening back to a clipper ship, *Romance of the Seas*.

From 1966 to 1989, the Kimberlys sailed their beloved, beautiful, salty, and seaworthy brigantine with young men and women for crew—some paid, some paying. They sailed on many trips to the Galapagos and the South Pacific, two epic voyages around the world and countless eight-day trips in the Virgin Islands and the Lesser Antilles. No GPS, no Loran, no RDF, no Radar, no single side-band radio, no program directors, no office ashore—just their ship, a sextant, a lead-line, Skipper's knowledge, Mrs. K's dedication, and a whole lot of will power.

Romance was Skipper and Mrs. K's ship, their home, their passion, their mission in life. Skipper's "marineros," what they called their *Romance* crew, were the prime beneficiaries of their dedication and commitment to ships and the sea. John Masefield once said that "we will not see such ships again." He was right, but he should have added that we will not see such seamen as well. The offshore voyages were as good as it gets for blue-water seafaring. Weeks and weeks of uninterrupted passages gave fortunate *Romance* sailors the opportunity to feel the



COURTESY MICHAEL DODGE

satisfying rhythm of standing watch. To sail on *Romance* was to be prepared to roll out at—or before—"all hands" was called; to grow to understand the benefits of a daily fare of hard work for the ship between-watch. There was always work to do: sewing sails, maintaining the rig, endless paint and soogee, and as always, fixing what was broken with materials at hand. A deep-sea voyage in *Romance* was a direct connection to seafaring life as it is so often described, but so seldom experienced.

One time during *Romance's* second world voyage, the tiller stub, to which the steering chains made fast, broke off, leaving no way to directly control the rudder. This happened, naturally, as the ship was making up for landfall to the Tuamotus in the South Pacific, known on the charts as the "Dangerous Archipelago." These are low-lying atolls

surrounded by treacherous coral reefs, with the most prominent feature observable from sea being the occasional cumulous cloud reflecting green on its underside from the lagoon below. In a passage of some thousand miles with no electronic navigation, steering a reliable course was extremely important in order to maintain and accurately plot their track using dead reckoning. Skipper and his crew steered with just the sails, while they jury-rigged new steering gear using a spliced wire-strop to the rudderhead and tackles to each quarter.

All in a day's work for a ship's crew at sea, and just one of countless examples of the self-sufficiency that was the culture of *Romance*.

In *Romance*, marinero "self improvement" was always self-directed and self-motivated. There was no curriculum, no reading list. Skipper's formal lessons were reserved for training his crew for the job at hand: wire splicing and seizing when part of the standing rig needed to be renewed; sailmaking when a new sail was ready for second layout; caulking and ship's carpentry when the ship was hauled for maintenance. Studying celestial navigation, meteorology, fancy work, ship lore, and maintaining one's kit filled the quiet hours between watch and sleep. A new crewman was ill advised to brandish a sextant for stars or meridian passage until he or she had first shown that they knew the way of the ship. Once that threshold was passed, though, Skipper became a great resource for advanced knowledge. To be asked by Skipper



COURTESY MICHAEL DODGE

to take a noon sight for the ship was a de facto, if unofficial, rite of passage.

Romance offered about as “real” an experience of seafaring that a young person could get, with everything related to and for the life of the ship and her voyage.

Romance's ocean passages were great for their distance, deep water, and long-term exposure to seafaring life, but the shorter trips in the Caribbean taught her crew just as much, and in some ways more. While on a trade-wind passage under stuns'ls across the South Atlantic, the crew might not touch the braces for days at a time. Sailing amongst the close islands of the Virgins with a much reduced crew, however, was an intensified experience in sail- and ship-handling. In the Virgin Islands, three or four crewmembers would wake up to the sound of the galley water-pump, wash down the decks, scarf breakfast (which Skipper made while listening to VI radio), loose sail, heave up the anchor, set

Sailing and living aboard Romance allowed her crew to learn and master every element of seamanship, from sailmaking to celestial navigation—without any formal lesson-plan. Self-reliance and personal responsibility were the lessons her crew would take anywhere, whether to their next ship or to other pursuits ashore.



COURTESY MICHAEL DODGE

sail, tack up Sir Francis Drake Channel, sail in close-hauled to the Bitter End (Virgin Gorda, BVI), sail out again the next day, end up at Foxy's (Jost Van Dyke), run boats all night after helping out as stand-in bar-

tender while Foxy played his Calypso, heave up the anchor again, paint, tar, varnish, set sail again, tack and wear, furl sails late in the evening and do it all again in the morning.

Kimberly's crew stowed the gear, maintained the ship's engine, sent yards and masts up and down, bent sail and sent sail down, rigged the jib-boom in and out, and hauled braces, hauled braces, and hauled braces some more. *Romance*'s anchor windlass was a machine of solid iron and limited efficiency. One young crewmember straight from college, on his first time at the windlass panted that “this was pretty good,” though the lad was clearly dying. Coughing, sweating, wheezing—he seemed to appreciate the windlass that many others found reason to curse. When asked to expand (over the clink-clink-clink of incoming chain), he gasped “can you imagine how hard this would be without this windlass?” Those were the days when young sailors earned calloused hands, sun-bronzed backs, and bellies you could light a match on from that damned anchor windlass. Once, during a season in the Virgin Islands with just a few young men for crew, Skipper installed a donkey-engine to haul in the chain on the windlass. It took a short time for that to fail and for Skipper to be reminded that Norwegian Steam is more reliable than diesel power. For *Romance*'s mariners, it was back to “hands to the windlass”....again.

The Caribbean seasons were *Romance*'s bread-and-butter, but the lure of the world voyages was always strong with the Kimberlys. *Romance*'s two circumnavigations and subsequent voyages to the South Pacific



COURTESY MICHAEL DODGE



provided long deep-sea passages, often under stuns'ls, following the explorers, whale ships, and South Seas traders of the age of sail to Grenada, San Blas, Panama, Galapagos, Pitcairn, the Marquesas, the Tuamotus, Tahiti, Huahine, Raiatea, Bora Bora, Rarotonga, Palmerston, Samoa, the Tokelaus, Fiji, New Hebrides, the Solomons, Borneo, Singapore, Java, Bali, Cocos Keeling, the Seychelles, the Commoroos, Durban and Cape Town, Rio de Janeiro, Fernando de Noronha and more.

The places *Romance* sailed were awesome, but the ship herself was the thing. The ship came first, and that was deepest lesson to learn. That, and the commitment to the “properly way”—the way that Skipper taught, lived, and sailed the world—the way of the ship.

Skipper and Mrs. K sold *Romance* in 1989. Sadly, she was lost in 1995, after almost sixty years of remarkable service. That stout Danish trader and world voyager had her back broken beyond repair in a devastating hurricane while close to the end of a complete rebuild at West End, Tortola. The damage was extensive; there was no reasonable choice but to give her up. Then, as she was being towed out to sea, she got away from her tug and now rests in the waters off the British Virgin Islands, but we do not know exactly where.

The legacy of Skipper, Mrs. K, and the brigantine *Romance* is carried on in the contemporary world of tall ships and sail training. Many of the mariners of *Romance* have gone on to command their own ships and to found sail training organizations. Some work as sailmakers, riggers, and shipwrights; others as teachers, writers, and marine environmentalists. *Romance* mariners and even her marinero “descendents” are at the heart of some of today’s most active

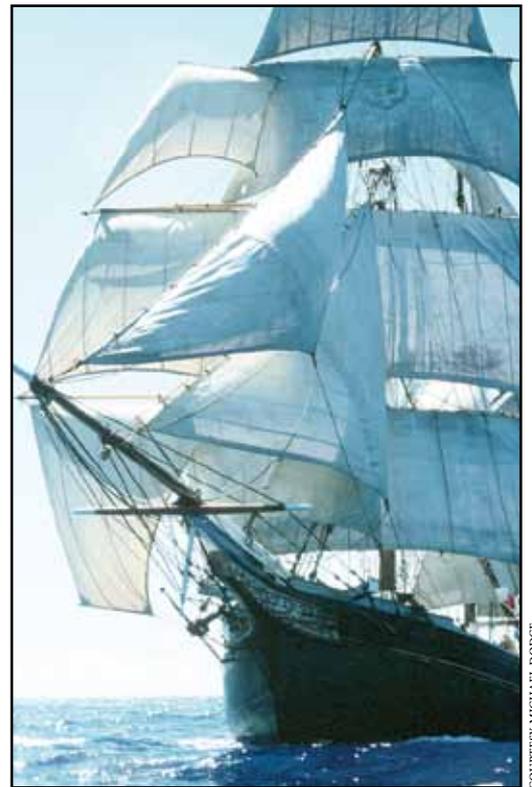
sail-training organizations, including the barque *Picton Castle*; the brig *Niagara*; the schooner *A. J. Meerwald*; the schooners of the Ocean Classroom Foundation, *Harvey Gamage*, *Spirit of Massachusetts*, and *Westward*; the American Sail Training Association, and *Sea History* magazine—just to name a few examples. The mariners have taken the lessons from *Romance* and expressed them again to their own crews and colleagues, maintaining the unbroken commitment to seamanship and the properly way that is the core of the *Romance* legacy.

The following excerpt from Gloria Kimberly’s unpublished memoir, perhaps sums up the mission and the meaning of *Romance* best:

For decades, there were no sailing square-riggers in the world, save only Irving Johnson’s famous Brigantine *Yankee*, now gone, and the sail training ships open only to naval and merchant cadets.

An era was done. All that remained were the legends and pictures. Few men would ever again stand spread-legged on a wooden deck and look up into that maze of wire rope, hemp, and soaring spars, to wind-swollen canvas overhead.

Aboard Romance, young men and women learned the value of hard work: taking care of the ship, their shipmates, and the oceans—lessons taken ashore or to another ship that have served them well. (left to right) Barque Picton Castle’s captain/owner Dan Moreland, Clyde Sanadi, Clark Voss, and “Big John” pause for a photo in the midst of an adventure of a lifetime.



Romance’s suit of sails, including stuns’ls, were made onboard, hand-sewn by Skipper and his crew.

Few would hear again the windsong in the high rigging, or smell the clean tang of spray, oakum, and tar. Surely we need sailing ships today, as much as we ever did. It is far too good a life to be lost forever. It tests the mettle of a man’s soul, yet rewards him with freedom, peace, and beauty, which those who are bound

to the land will never know. There is a further need for square rig today, a chance for a young man or young woman to go to sea. Even a small ship will do, as long as she is the real thing, and sailed by a seaman.

Such a ship was the brigantine *Romance*. Such a seaman is Arthur Kimberly. And such a soul was Mrs. K. ⚓

Captain Bert Rogers is the Executive Director of the American Sail Training Association and the former captain of sail training ships, including the Spirit of Massachusetts, among others. One of the Kimberlys' "marineros," he joined Romance in 1978 and served as sailmaker for her second world voyage, 1979-81. Daniel Moreland served in Romance from 1973-77 and is the captain of the world-voyaging Picton Castle.

(right) Children tend to flock to Capt. Kimberly. The world-voyaging master mariner has always shared his adventures with children. Even in his retirement, he occasionally visits elementary schools to share the stories of his adventures and teach a little bit of knot tying.



COURTESY MICHAEL DODGE