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John Cox Stevens

September 24, 1785 – June 13, 1857
Birthplace: New York, New York

“ Although it would be most agreeable to me that this race should be for a c

Anyone who thinks those estimable yachtsmen who wrote the Deed of Gift for the America’s Cup are rolling over in their graves because of the advent of multihull competition should reconsider. John Cox Stevens, a prime mover behind the America Syndicate in 1851, founder and first commodore of the New York Yacht Club, commissioned a catamaran in 1820. He named his boat, *Double Trouble*. If John Cox Stevens were with us, he might be taking issue with San Francisco Bay failing to provide “an ocean course, free from headlands” as required by the Deed, but he would surely be fascinated by the vessels of choice for 2013, smiling at how technology has enabled a concept he embraced 193 years ago.

John Cox Stevens was known as a gambler. His most outrageous gamble might have been conjuring the scheme to send the radical schooner *America* to England to show off American shipbuilding and design prowess, and to challenge Great Britain at its own game. Remember, that was just 37 years after the British had burned The White House during the War of 1812. Fellow America Syndicate member, George Schuyler, was said to comment that Stevens had posted a wager about the race in the Royal Yacht Squadron “with his usual promptness, and regardless of the pockets of his associates.”

One can deduce that Stevens’ gambles were well-considered. His well established colonial family was stable, comfortable; talented and accomplished. His grandfather had been a Member of Parliament. His father was shipbuilder, businessman, and inventor of steam engines. His brother founded the Stevens Institute of Technology. John Cox Stevens ran the first steam ferry company in the world on the Hudson River, and founded a railroad company in 1811. He conceived the idea of a syndicate to raise money for the *America* project.

The (original) America’s Cup Deed of Gift that Stevens surely had a hand in writing, is remarkable for its brevity, and its latitude. It calls simply for a competition in yachts, or vessels, between 44 and 90 feet LWL propelled by sails. John Cox Stevens was not only instrumental in giving us The America’s Cup, he helped assure its vitality.

- Roger Vaughan

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