

HUDSON RIVER MARITIME MUSEUM  
**PILOT'S LOG 2000**

# THE HUDSON RIVER IN THE AGE OF SAIL

*Len Tantillo*



*The Sloop Experiment*

Detail from the painting *The Return of the Experiment* by L.F. Tantillo

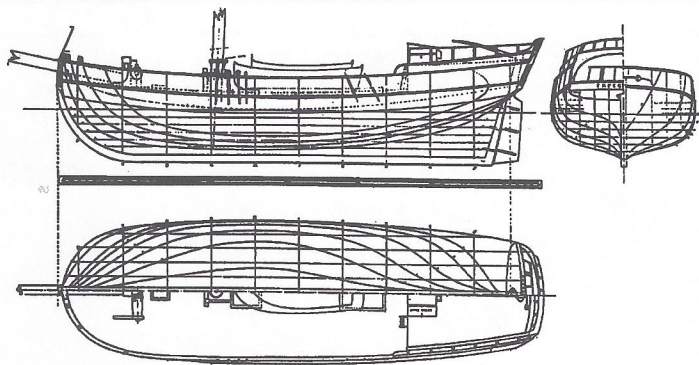
In the long-forgotten passageways of our collective past lie treasures of American history. There in the shadows awaiting rediscovery are the glorious tales of adventure that led us so successfully into this new millennium. It is our duty to once again shed light on these amazing endeavors for this new age.

Commencing in April of 2000, the Hudson River Maritime Museum presented the first in a series of exhibitions focusing on major aspects of our rich nautical heritage. The first exhibit is entitled *The Hudson River in the Age of Sail*. One of the many highlights of this presentation will be the incredible voyage of the sloop, *Experiment*, which sailed out of the Hudson River bound for China in 1785. The story of this small ship and brave crew is as amazing and interesting today as it was in that wind-powered age of

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*Plans of the Sloop Experiment*

drawn by Charles G. Davis  
noted marine historian  
September 1932

so long ago.

Two centuries ago, after America had won its War of Independence, Stewart Dean, an Albany captain and war hero, had a single-masted freight boat built near his home on Water Street. Deans sloop, *Experiment*, was a typical work boat of its day. The deck was wide and low, measuring 59 feet 11 inches by 19 feet 3 inches. The craft was registered at 85½ tons. *Experiment* cleared Albany in July of 1784 on her maiden voyage. She carried a full cargo of grain across the Atlantic to Madeira where it was sold. There he loaded his craft with wine and a few head of cattle. He then sailed to the West Indies and traded his cargo for rum which, in turn, was taken to Charleston, South Carolina and sold. *Experiment* returned to New York in December of that year completing her first successful commercial excursion.

The ventures which followed were less profitable. Dean needed a new approach. With the support of investors from Albany and New York he organized what was to become his most famous voyage.

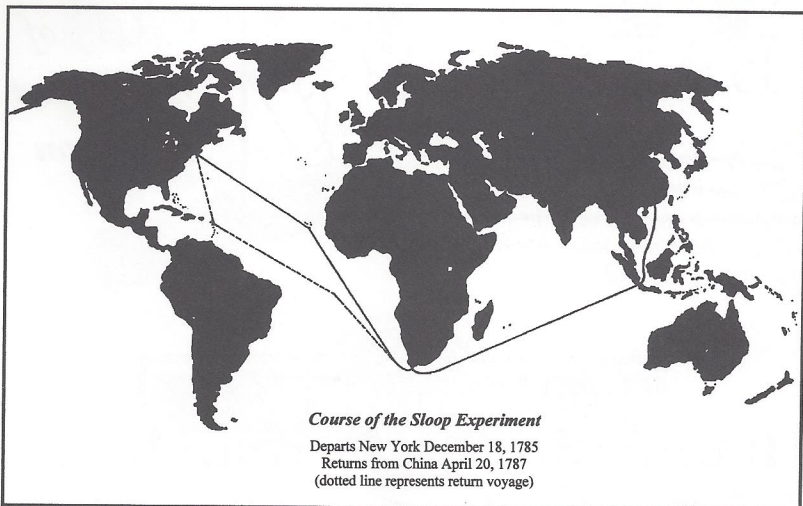
In December, 1785, Captain Dean, with a crew of seven men and two boys, set sail for China. Canton was the world's most prized port, it was the focal point of international commerce and, as such, attracted merchant vessels from all over the globe. Only one ship from the fledgling United States had made the journey before and that was the three masted square-rigger, *Empress of China*.

Loaded with supplies and trade goods, the well-armed sloop, *Experiment*, left Murray's Dock in New York and made for the open sea. Braving storms and rough water and ever-watchful of the treacherous

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pirates of the South China Sea, Dean arrived in Canton in June of 1786. He remained there for six months and negotiated many lucrative transactions with the Chinese Hong merchants.

On December 10, 1786, Dean left Canton. He arrived back in New York on April 20, 1787, one year and four months after his departure. There, *Experiment* was greeted by a jubilant crowd, canon salutes and all manner of fanfare. Miraculously, all hands were safe and in good health. The cargo of teas, silks and chinaware they had carried back was sold for a substantial profit and the voyage was pronounced successful.

With Captain Dean in command, *Experiment* returned to ply the Hudson River trade. In 1789, Hector St. John de Crevecoeur wrote his famous account of "An Eighteenth Century Journey through Orange County." In it he commented on what an exhilarating experience it was to travel aboard the *Experiment*. He described the sloop's unusually large cabin decorated in Chinese fashion with lighted candles in glass bowls. He was also quite impressed with Dean's love and appreciation for the beauty of the Hudson River and his knowledge of its history. However, the story the author was most interested in was the Captain's description of his great adventure to China.

The Hudson River Maritime Museum exhibition opened on April 28 and will run through October 31, 2000. We hope you and your friends will join us in this tribute to the early history of the Hudson River. Take a journey with us back through time to that glorious age when wind and canvas developed a new land.