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Such is the legend of J.P. Morgan's Bath-Iron-Works-built *Corsair IV* that British entrepreneur Neil Young commanded Yantai Raffles Shipyard to build him a 21st century replica. Now one of the world's largest luxury motor yachts, *Nero* can be yours to charter for \$475,000 per week. To learn what happened to the original *Corsair IV*, read on.

END GAMES

Where does a **Bath Iron Works** yacht go to drop her **final anchor**?

BY MICHAEL L. GRACE

ON THE BRINK OF disappearing forever, **Bath Iron Works** was brought back to life by **William S. "Peter" Newell** in 1927, and a yacht named *Vanda* made it happen.

Bath Iron Works had slid into decline when the venerable shipbuilding company was put up for auction in 1925. A speculator and scrap metal dealer from New York bought Bath's key industry for a hammer price of less than \$200,000. Equipment was sold off; ship-fitters, joiners, welders, and carpenters were out of a job; and the plant gathered dust for two years. In 1927, it changed hands again and was put to use making paper pie plates.

Determined to save Bath from this hu-

miliating fate, Newell believed BIW could make a comeback building premium yachts of top-notch American design, craftsmanship, and quality. His enthusiasm convinced naval architect Archibald Main, born to shipbuilding on the banks of the

River Clyde in Scotland, and L. E. Thibault, a leading Bath businessman, to join Newell in relaunching Bath Iron Works Corporation in 1927.

Luck was on their side: The great Philadelphia shipyard William Cramp & Sons was facing liquidation. Meanwhile, Ernest B. Dane, a summer visitor to Seal Harbor as well as a prominent Boston investor and president of the Brookline Trust Company, was looking for someone to build his newest yacht. Newell had landed his first contract: the *Vanda* yacht.

STARRY STARTS: VANDA & HI-ESMARO

Newell spread the word among old BIW



Vanda, named for a tropical orchid, departs Bath to large crowds in 1928.

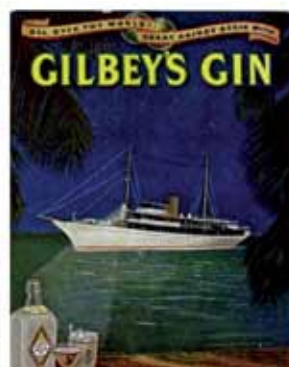


hands, and before long, over 300 men were laboring over the 230-foot *Vanda*. Skilled craftsmen set about creating the yacht's prize features—a luxurious dining salon paneled in black walnut, a grand master stateroom, and a number of guest staterooms.

In a savvy PR move, Newell had news-

papers and wire services across the country cover *Vanda's* launch. By 1929, in the midst of the financial crash, Bath Iron Works was said to be the busiest shipyard in America.

Soon BIW was commissioned to build an even bigger luxury yacht—a 266-foot cruiser for **Hiram Edward Manville**,



From top: Brochures and adverts celebrate the elegance and luxury of the Bath Iron Works yachts. **Top right:** A flyer tempts travelers to cruise to Acapulco aboard the *Corsair*. In a dark twist of fate, the yacht later breached and was abandoned off the coast of Acapulco. **Above left:** Tinplate heir William B. Leeds bought the *Caroline* and renamed her *Moana* in 1938; *Moana* had brushes with stardom as a muse for a Gilbey's Gin poster (center) and frequent host to **Ernest Hemingway** (aboard the *Caroline*, right).

Chairman for the Johns-Manville Corporation. Dubbed “the asbestos king” (Johns-Manville produced the material), he was uncle to socialite Tommy Manville, who married 13 different times and once held the *Guinness Book of World Records* title for the shortest marriage. After one divorce, Tommy lamented to the press, “She cried, and the judge wiped away her tears with my check book.”

**BATH ARTISANS
CREATED REPLICAS OF
THE SWEDISH CROWN
EMBLAZONED OVER
THE STATEROOM BEDS—
ESTELLE HAD JUST
MARRIED INTO THE
SWEDISH ROYAL FAMILY.**

Designed by Henry J. Gielow and christened the *Hi-Esmaro*, yachting enthusiasts dubbed Manville’s strikingly handsome new boat the most beautiful on the seas. Anticipating that Manville’s daughter, Estelle, would use the *Hi-Esmaro*, Bath artisans created replicas of the Swedish crown emblazoned over the stateroom beds—Estelle had just married Count Folke Bernadotte of the Swedish royal family. The yacht was launched by Mrs. Manville in June of 1929 in the presence of almost the entire population of Bath.

During the 1930s, the *Vanda* and *Hi-Esmaro* were a familiar sight at the nation’s great yachting races and cruising the coast of Maine. These large yachts would each employ a crew of 50 to 60 members, sometimes even carrying a surgeon and barber, and a large number these crewmen hailed from Deer Isle.

CORSAIR IV

When *Corsair IV* slithered down the greased ways of Bath Iron Works on April 10, 1930, **John Pierpont Morgan’s** black-hulled yacht launched a career as the biggest and most elegantly appointed private yacht ever built in the USA. She was the fourth *Corsair* to fly the Morgan colors—each yacht a little bigger, faster, and more comfortable than the last. The *Corsair IV* generated ma-

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for media attention at the time, sparking a quote so familiar it seems trite. “What are the costs for operating such a yacht?” demanded one reporter. Morgan quickly retorted, “Sir, if you have to ask that question, you can’t afford it.”

For Bath Iron Works, the *Corsair IV* was a crowning achievement, unequivocally delivering Newell, Main, and Thibault’s promise to capitalize on BIW’s legacy and provide yachts at a cost for American millionaires.

The \$2.5M yacht, dubbed the “Princess of the Sea,” was a thing of beauty with her clipper-ship bow and teak interior. But for all the press coverage of *Corsair*’s size and accommodations, there were rarely more than a half-dozen guests aboard. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang, was an annual guest while the Morgans cruised in Europe. And while the yacht had none of the gold faucets and marble floors reported in the press, claims that the *Corsair IV* housed no bar were entirely true. Morgan was a teetotaler.

If making money was J. P. Morgan’s vocation, then yachting was his avocation—he rarely mixed the two. The legendary American financier was quoted as saying, “You can do business with anyone, but you can only sail with a gentleman.” He guarded the privacy that the yacht afforded him jealously. Once when a group of photographers edged up to the ship’s side to try for pictures of the financier, Morgan threatened to turn a hose on them if they did not leave instantly.

The *Aras* was built for Oxford Paper Company magnate Hugh Chisolm Jr. and later became the Harry Truman’s presidential yacht. See our story “Dream Boat,” May 2014, at portlandmonthly.com/dreamboat.



ARAS

In 1931, Newell secured a contract from **Hugh J. Chisolm Jr.**, the Oxford Paper Company king and railway magnate. Bath Iron Works would build the *Aras II* to replace the *Aras I* built by the original BIW in 1924. The 243-foot-long motor yacht

CAROLINE II WAS EVEN RUMORED TO BE THE CHOSEN HONEYMOON YACHT FOR EDWARD WINDSOR VIII AND WALLIS SIMPSON.

was an impressive sight, bearing a black steel hull with a 36-foot beam and 14-foot draft. *Aras* (“Sara” spelled backward, Chisholm’s mother’s name) was powered by two large eight-cylinder Winton diesel engines. Throughout the 1930s, Chisholm and his family cruised New England every summer, escaping the harsh northern winters on cruises to Havana, Cuba, and the Caribbean.



The *Caroline II* was sumptuously designed for Eldridge Johnson, featuring four decks and an on-board elevator.

CAROLINE II

One of the last major yachts to be built by Bath Iron Works during the 1930s was the *Caroline II*, designed for **Eldridge R. Johnson**. At 279 feet in length and with a 2,400-ton displacement, the *Caroline II* was the second largest private yacht built in America at that time. She was four decks deep, equipped with an elevator, and capable of carrying a crew of 50.

Johnson was a wealthy industrialist and the founder of Victor Talking Machines Company, often regarded as the first true media conglomerate of the 20th century. In 1929, Johnson sold his company to RCA. *Caroline II* was his retirement project—but she was more than just a pleasure craft. Twenty scientists sailed with Johnson in 1931 in search of the “lost civilization” on

Easter Island. The following year, he sailed for the Yucatan to join a scientific expedition, returning to America with an orange-colored throne belonging to a king said to have ruled in Central America more than 1,000 years before.

These floating palaces of luxury and their millionaire owners were a constant source of gossip and speculation among the press and the public during the hard years of the Depression. From Paducah to Dubuque, local papers filled their pages with wire service stories about famous guests, wild extravagance, and long cruises. *Caroline II* was even rumored to be the chosen honeymoon yacht for **Edward Windsor VIII** and **Wallis Simpson**. For *Vanda* owner Ernest Dane, this public scrutiny posed a true danger. Dane received ransom notes from people who threatened to kidnap his two-year-old grandson. It was the same time as the Lindbergh kidnapping trial. Dane went public, telling reporters he’d put his grandson under constant guard.

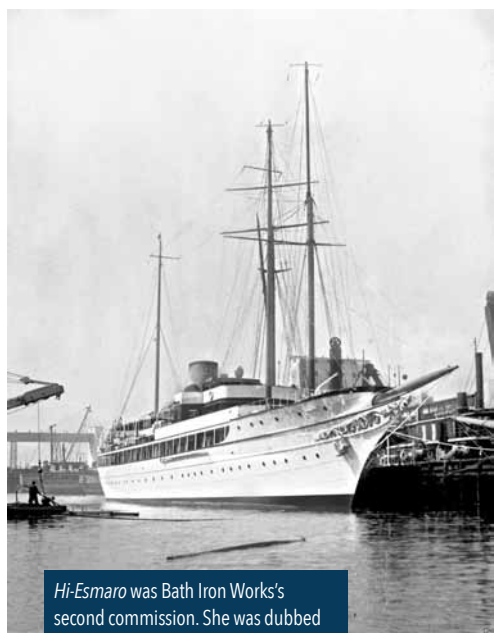
Johnson eventually sold the *Caroline* in 1938 to William B. Leeds, the tinplate heir, who refurbished the yacht and renamed it the *Moana*. Leeds was close friends with **Errol Flynn** and **Ernest Hemingway**, who were frequent guests upon the *Moana*. Leeds made lengthy cruises in the Caribbean, California, Hawaii, and the South Pacific. Besides being a sportsman adventurer, he also used his new yacht to carry food, clothing, and medical supplies to the inhabitants of the Pitcairn Islands and the leper colonies of the Society Islands.

WATERY GRAVES

The era of America’s luxury yachting came to an end as World War II approached. The *Vanda*, *Hi-Esmaro*, *Corsair IV*, *Aras*, and *Caroline* would be soon shrouded in camouflage, hulls painted a dull gray, luxurious staterooms transformed into military crew quarters. But where did fate take them?

The Navy acquired the *Vanda* from Ernest Dane in 1942 and assigned her the name *USS San Bernardino*. She served as a weather station ship and was used by Admiral King to scurry among the Pacific Islands when he was Chief of Naval Operations.

The Navy decommissioned the vessel in 1946. Charles Francis Coe, publisher of the *Palm Beach Post*, bought the *Vanda* but put her back on the market within the year, where she was snapped up by so-



Hi-Esmaro was Bath Iron Works's second commission. She was dubbed "the most beautiful boat on the seas."

cialite shipping heiress **Andrea "Bubbles" Luckenbach**. The heiress sent *Vanda* to a Tampa shipyard to be converted into a "banana boat," the first in a fleet of refrigerated vessels for her shipping company, the Andes Line, that would work the fruit trade between Central America and Florida. But like most things in Miss Luckenbach's life, from her tumultuous relationship with her father to her marriages (including being shot four times by her former husband, Frederick Hammer), the proposed steamship company was off to a rocky start. Before the *Vanda* could touch the water, the Andes Line was being sued, and Miss Luckenbach countersued. The fleet of "banana boats" never materialized, and no record remains of when or where the *Vanda* was scrapped.

Hiram Edward Manville's *Hi-Esmaro* was purchased by the Navy in June 1940 and converted into a coastal minelayer named the *USS Niagara*. Out at sea while the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, she served in the Pacific and became the Navy's first motor-topped boat tender. The ship once called "the most beautiful yacht in the world" was attacked by Japanese Kamikaze in deep waters of New Guinea. None of her 136 crew was killed or seriously injured, but the *Hi-Esmaro* was lost forever.

The *Caroline* transformed into a motor torpedo boat tender responsible for providing logistics to torpedo boats in remote areas of the Pacific. Named the *USS Hilo*, the one-time luxury yacht saw a good

(Continued on page 76)

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End Games (continued from page 47)

deal of battle during her service—even surviving Kamikaze attacks in the San Juanico Straits. After the war, she was decommissioned with four battle stars and sold to Pillsbury & Martignoni Shipping Brokers. From here, *Caroline's* trail goes cold. The yacht's whereabouts remains a mystery to this day, though some records claim she was scrapped in 1958.

For the *Aras*, at least, the glory days weren't quite over. Commissioned the *USS Williamsburg*, the *Aras* was converted to a gunboat during the war, but with duties in Iceland and the East Coast, she stayed mostly out of harm's way. In 1945, the *Williamsburg* replaced the *USS Potomac* as the presidential yacht to Harry S. Truman. Truman loved the *Williamsburg*, and together they cruised the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay regions, occasionally venturing into the open sea for cruises to Florida, Bermuda, Cuba, and the Virgin Islands. The BIW yacht hosted such foreign notables as Secretary of State George Marshall; President Miguel Alemán of Mexico; and two successive British Prime Ministers, Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower was

President Truman lounges on the afterdeck of the U.S.S. *Williamsburg*, in Key West, Florida. Left to right, Charles Murphy, counsel to the President; President Truman; Admiral Robert Dennison; press secretary Charles Ross.



less enamoured with the yacht, and the *Williamsburg* was decommissioned after one very short journey and transferred to the National Science Foundation, where she floundered for nearly 50 years. There was a two-year stint as a hotel-restaurant-museum in Pennsville, New Jersey, followed by several years as a floating restaurant in nearby Marlboro Marina. Later, the former *Aras* yacht was sent to Italy, where brokers tried and failed to find a buyer with the guts and imagination to recreate her former glory. Their tired sales pitches didn't work, and the yacht was finally scrapped at La

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A verse from a song sung by sailors of the *USS Niagara* (née *Hi-Esmaro*), lost in battle in the Solomon Islands:

*Sleek Hi-Esmaro, the pleasure ship,
Built for a sportsman's pride.
Trivial, jaunty, and pleasure bound,
Comforts on every side...
Now are you consecrated, girls:
Blackened and burned you lie.
Fair Hi-Esmaro the rich man's yacht
That died as the bravest die!*

Spezia in 2016.

And what about John Pierpont Morgan Jr.'s crown jewel, the *Corsair IV*? Morgan would surely never have imagined his prize yacht serving the British Admiralty during World War II before meeting a tragic end as a converted cruise ship in California, but that's exactly where the tides took her.

In the wake of the war, surviving cruise ships were limited, particularly on the West Coast. The magnificent pre-war Canadian Pacific and Japanese liners that once roamed this stretch of coastline had been brutally sunk in seagoing battles. Spotting a gap in the market, the Skinner and Eddy Corporation, owners of the Alaska Steamship Company, created Pacific Cruise Lines in 1946. The newly formed subsidiary immediately went looking for a ship—and quickly found its star. The *Corsair* (the IV was dropped) was taken to Todd Shipyards in New York for repair and then sailed to the Victoria Machinery Depot in Victoria, Canada, for conversion to a luxury cruise vessel.

William F. Schorn Associates of New York was responsible for outfitting accommodations for its 82 passengers. The *Corsair's* staterooms were much larger and more commodious than normally expected on shipboard. No expense was spared in furnishing each room with the very finest of materials available. All bedrooms and staterooms were fitted with carpets and air-conditioning, practically unheard of at the time.

Top European chefs were hired to pre-



The magnificent *Corsair* met a watery grave off the coast of Acapulco in 1949. The ship was abandoned and can be seen only by scuba divers in the crystal blue waters.

FROM LEFT: U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION; PUGET SOUND MARITIME HISTORICAL SOCIETY - SSMARITIME.COM



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pare haute cuisine for the *Corsair's* guests. A total of 76 crew members and officers worked aboard the new cruise ship, making the passenger-to-crew ratio almost one-to-one, equaling or surpassing the most high-end cruise ships operating today. Each was responsible for the sole purpose of catering to the slightest desire of the carriage trade passengers.

The new *Corsair* made her debut on September 29, 1947, offering two-week cruises from Long Beach, California, to Acapulco, Mexico. Tickets averaged \$600—more than a quarter of a typical American family's income in 1947. Despite the high cost, demand was high and wait lists lengthy.

During the summer of 1948, the *Corsair* was repositioned to serve Alaskan tourism. Sailing out of Vancouver, British Columbia, she provided the first deluxe two-week cruises ever offered to the Inside Passage. *Corsair's* new career was smooth sailing, until tragedy struck in November, 1949.

During a cruise of the Mexican Riviera, *Corsair* breached a rock and beached at Acapulco. There was no loss of life—her crew and 55 passengers were put ashore in lifeboats and evacuated, but the *Corsair* was determined to be a total constructive loss and abandoned to Davy Jones's Locker. Today her legacy lives on only for divers willing to explore the remains of the vessel deep in the warm seas off Acapulco.

There would be no more Bath Iron Works luxury yachts built following the war. Taxes were sky high and millionaires would soon look to Europe for new luxury yachts. They wouldn't be staffed by Deer Isle mariners and would no longer fly the American flag, instead registered under foreign flags to avoid U.S. taxes. The grand days of American luxury yachting had come to an end. ■

Michael L. Grace is a journalist and writer-producer for TV & Films. He was the original co-producer/co-writer of the musical *Snoopy*, based on Charles M. Schulz's *Peanuts*, which has had over 1,000 productions worldwide, with a new U.S. national tour starting in 2018. Based on his experiences as a staff writer for the long-running hit *Love Boat* series, Michael is writing *It's The Love Boat*—a new book on how a TV show created today's billion-dollar cruise industry and the historical phenomenon of cruising by ship. His lifelong passion for travel and social history can be seen on his award-winning website: www.cruisingthepast.com.



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