

HENRY B. NEVINS

► In the death of Henry B. Nevins, of City Island, the boat building industry has lost one of its very finest yacht builders, and yachting has lost one of its most respected and well liked figures. He passed away on January 6, at the age of 72.

For many years the name of Nevins has meant the very finest in yacht construction and workmanship. He, and the boats he built, were known from coast to coast, and the product of his yard ranked with that of such great figures in the boat building field as Herreshoff and Lawley, of an earlier period. In addition to this, he was an active sailor himself and in his last two yachts, both named *Polly*, he has cruised and raced extensively in New England and east coast waters.

Henry Nevins started his building career with the Consolidated Shipbuilding Co., New York, but in 1907 he bought the old Hansen Yard at City Island. Reorganized as Henry B. Nevins, Inc., he started the development that is today one of the finest yacht building and repair plants in the United States. Many famous yachts and racing classes have come from that yard, including, to mention but a few of them, the 12-meter sloop *Vim*, for Harold Vanderbilt, several of the Class M yachts of a decade ago, the schooner *Brilliant*, and the famous 32-foot class for members of

HENRY B. NEVINS, MASTER YACHT BUILDER

A Craftsman Under Whom the Art Attained Its Peak

By WILLIAM H. TAYLOR



Chapman

Henry B. Nevins

WHEN Henry B. Nevins died last January, yachting lost one of its greatest exponents of the art of building fine yachts. In half a century of applying this art, he equalled and even surpassed the traditions of such predecessors as George Lawley and Nathanael Greene Herreshoff, and the yard and the organization he built up at City Island continues as a fitting monument to his lifetime service to a sport he loved for its own sake.

Henry B. Nevins was born in New York City on February 9, 1878, the son

of Dr. Russell O. Nevins and Catherine Brown Nevins, formerly of Westerly, R.I. He was educated in private schools in New York and originally intended to become a doctor, as his father had been. But when the time came, money to complete a medical education was lacking. Probably he wasn't too disappointed, for he had already started, as a hobby, what was to become his life work. He had loved boats from boyhood and had already built a sizeable cat-boat for himself.

Starting as an apprentice just before the turn of the century, he learned his trade in the old Harlem River yard of Charles L. Seabury and the Gas Engine and Power Co., Consolidated, as did several other men who were to become outstanding yacht builders. This old firm, under the shortened name of Consolidated Shipbuilding Co., is now a neighbor of the Nevins yard on City Island.

By 1906 Henry was ready to branch out for himself, and he bought the Hansen Yard, a small boatshop and storage yard on the marshy east shore of City Island. A few years later he bought the Byles Yard, abutting his property to the south, and subsequently added surrounding land. The property now includes about eight acres.

In 1910 a fire virtually wiped out the yard, but he borrowed money, built a new shop, and started over from scratch. For many years before he died, Mr. Nevins, through his corporate organization, owned the yard and equipment free and clear — an interesting commentary in these days when many builders declare it impossible to remain in business by building only top-quality, custom-built yachts.

Those were the only kind of yachts Henry Nevins ever built, the only kind he was interested in. Others might strive to give a customer the biggest boat, of acceptable quality, that a limited amount of money would buy. Nevins would strive to give a customer the finest boat, in every respect, that the best in materials and workmanship could produce, at a fair price commensurate with the material and the labor required. If a buyer could afford the finest possible 30-footer, Nevins would build her; if he wanted a 50-footer for that same amount of money he could go elsewhere. The first cost of Nevins-built boats was always high in comparison with boats of the same size and general type built in the average yard. But owners who had boats built by Nevins

rarely complained of the price — they got their money's worth. And Nevins-built boats 30 years old bring premium prices today.

Mr. Nevins set down his principles and his practices in a series of articles, "On the Building of a Yacht," which were published in *YACHTING* in March, April and May of 1935. Any man who intends to have a yacht built would do well to read them over, whether or not he demands or can afford the kind of perfection Mr. Nevins advised and lived up to.

Aside from the practical knowledge of yacht building to be gleaned from them, they give an insight into the author's attitude toward his craft. "The relations of owner and yard," he wrote, "are most important to the eventual good of the sport. . . . The man who builds your yachts is a craftsman; outside of yacht building there are few craft industries left. A good craftsman must have, first of all, a basic sense of integrity and pride in his work, or he is no good. He is only secondarily materialistic, which is pretty foreign to the modern trend in industry. . . . A prudent person making an investment is not apt to ask his broker for the cheapest bond

Rosenfeld

Fitting out time. A section of the Nevins yard as seen from the window of the office

