

# WHITLOCK'S CLIPPER PACKETS

The following is an extract from the book *Merchant Sail* sent in by Chuck Rockett.

"William Whitlock Jr., of New York, was interested in sailing packet lines from the early twenties and made the first sailing of the *Cadmus* (306 tons) in the New York-Havre Whitlock Line in 1823. He was also one of the pioneers in the New York-Savannah packet line, which commenced weekly sailings between the ports in early 1824. Whitlock, who was unique in being the sole owner and operator of several packet ships, came from a New Jersey family and was the son of a sea captain. Joseph A. Scoville says that the first business ventures of Whitlock soured him against partnerships and that he played a lone hand. 'Even in ship-owning he preferred to hold an undivided interest if he could. If there was a loss, he could stand it, and if a profit, he did not wish to divide it with anybody.' In his early life, Whitlock spent some time in Georgia as a cotton factor, and this experience really got him interested in ships for transporting cotton from Georgia to New York and to markets in continental Europe. In the thirties, Whitlock owned a few Havre packets outright, operating them in his own name, but ran them for some time in conjunction with James J. Boyd's Havre Second Line and later with the 'Fox & Livingston line.' Samuel M. Fox and Mortimer Livingston, sons-in-law of Francis Depau, took over the Havre Old Line, which had been founded by Depau in 1822, upon the latter's death early in 1830. Later, the Havre Old Line and the Whitlock Line were joined and operated as the Havre Union Line. Scoville has also written:

Mr. Whitlock made a mint of money in his share of the line. He did not confine his shipowning to this line. Whenever he could buy a ship he did so and placed her in the general freighting business. This was also profitable to him, and he coined money in it, when others would have lost... Mr. Whitlock was one of the independent shipowners who, when freights were dull, had capital to invest in cargoes, so as to load ships quickly. He was always fortunate in such purchases and not only made food freights for his ships but also a good percentage on the investments.

William Whitlock, Jr., aside from his ownership of transatlantic and coastwise packets, owned one extreme clipper and one more full-bodied, or medium, clipper during the clipper ship era. Both were constructed by George ("Deacon") Thomas, the first at Rockland, Maine in 1852 (launched October 15) and the second, and last (A medium clipper packet), at Quincy, Mass., in 1855.

There was surprise in shipping circles when the conservative William Whitlock, Jr., bought the newly launched extreme clipper ship *Rattler*, which was described as 'sharp as a razor.' The ship was very well built, and Whitlock, buying 'on spec' when the demand for speedy floating tonnage was great, paid a scant \$60 per ton for 'a sharp-lined ship built to carry passengers and suitable for any trade.' Within a year he had several chances to see her and make about \$10,000 net profit on the transaction, but he refused to do so. Whitlock sent the *Rattler* out to California from New York January 8, 1853, on her maiden voyage, and she made a passage of 121 days."

The article goes on to describe the "Logan" and the "Rattler" and their record breaking voyages

between New York and San Francisco between 1853 and 1860.

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