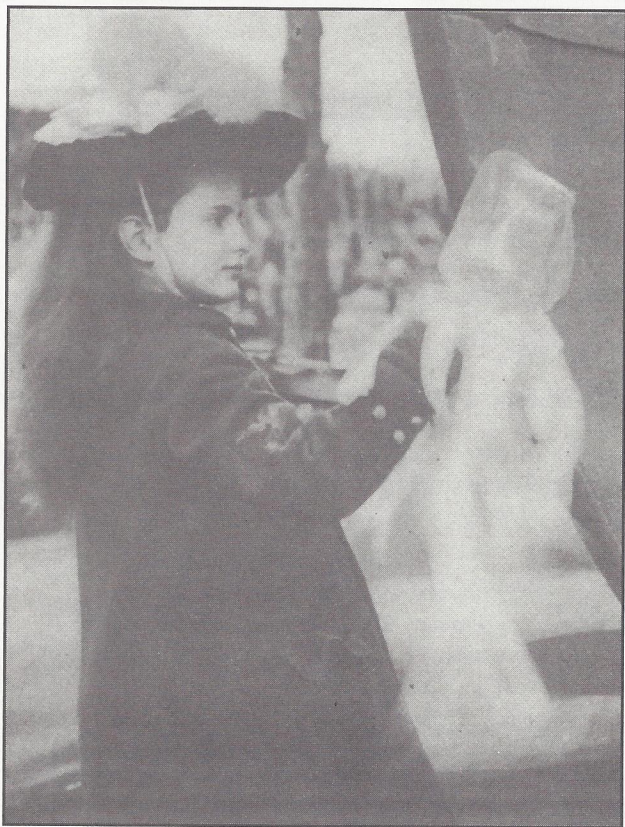




PILOT LOG 2003



Miss Katherine Olcott at the christening.

A Surreptitious Christening

The centuries-old tradition of christening a ship with champagne or similar liquid was carried on by Thomas S. Marvel at his shipyard in Newburgh—or at least it was until Saturday morning, March 31, 1906, when the magnificent steamer Hendrick Hudson was launched for the Hudson River Day Line. Thomas S. Marvel would not launch a vessel, no matter how small, without this ritual—nor would he willingly launch any hull on a Friday.

Eben Erskine Olcott (“E. E.”), the President of the Day Line, was a strict teetotaler, and he decreed that the new steamer would be christened with a bottle of Catskill Mountain spring water. It might have been a fitting ritual for a Hudson River steamboat, but not quite what Captain Marvel had in mind. On the day of the launching, the sponsor, Miss Katharine Olcott, E. E.’s five-year old daughter, and the invited guests stood upon the sponsor’s platform. There were assembled Miss Olcott, her mother and father, other members of the Olcott family and many dignitaries. Among the latter were S. D. Coykendall, President of the Cornell Steamboat Company and Stevenson Taylor, then Vice President of the W. & A. Fletcher

Company (the prime contractor for Hendrick Hudson and builder of her engine and boilers) and later President of the American Bureau of Shipping.

At the first movement of the slender, red lead-painted hull, Miss Olcott broke the bottle of spring water over her stem, proclaiming, "I christen thee Hendrick Hudson." And in that manner the new steamer was well and truly baptized, or so it appeared from the vantage point of the sponsor's party. However, the bottle of spring water, ornamented with white ribbon and sterling silver, and suspended by a white cord, was not the only christening fluid used that day, nor was Katharine Olcott the only sponsor.

Eschewing his rightful position among the dignitaries on the platform, Thomas S. Marvel attended to a much more important task. He dispatched one of the yard workers to a nearby saloon on South William Street for a bottle of champagne. Upon the messenger's return with the flask of the best French bubbly, the seventy-two year-old shipbuilder took up a position far aft and well out of sight of the devoutly dry Olcotts. When the massive hull began to move, he christened the vessel in a manner more appropriate to shipbuilding tradition-but with no festive ribbons, no formality, simply a shower of champagne and broken glass that would assure good fortune for the new Day Line flagship. Thomas Marvel retreated quickly to safe ground once his task was completed. The Marvel family claimed that his escape from the massive oncoming structure was perilously close.

E. E. Olcott apparently never knew of the second christening, but Hendrick Hudson, her good fortune assured, went on to a successful forty-five year life on the river.

William duBarry Thomas

The twice-christened "Hendrick Hudson," steaming through the highlands.

