

Adventurer tells tales of the sea

By DONNA PARKER
Union correspondent

HADLEY — "Life at sea is about making things go that don't want to go. It's mending sails and shattered masts and broken legs. It shows a man he can do vastly more than he thought he could."

So says Irving Johnson, 79, born on a Hadley farm but navigator of the world's waterways since he was 17.

Captain Johnson's seven trips around the world, down the Nile, up the Rhone and to the most remote ports in the world have been documented in countless issues of "National Geographic" and will be released this fall as a television documentary, "High Seas Adventures."

An exclusive showing will be presented in Hadley at 7:30 p.m. tonight in Hopkins Academy.

He and his ocean-going family have discovered, chartered and named five islands north of New Guinea, climbed unexplored volcanoes east of the Solomons, spent sleepless nights among headhunters and cannibals, harpooned whales and sharks, and located and hoisted the anchor of the legendary ship "Bounty."

Before his "retirement" in 1975, the annual return of his sailing ship "Yankee" to its home port in Gloucester was greeted with jet planes dispatched to fly overhead, marching bands and a 23-gun salute.

"Just like the president," chortled the masterful sailor during an interview Sunday at his Hockanum Road home.

Relics from the Johnson's adventures, including the uniform of the last Devil's Island prisoner, fill a large private collection of exotic masks, beads and baskets.

Johnson has photographed it all, including some of the earliest known maritime moving picture footage. Often hanging aloft masts that towered 17 stories high, in winds that sometimes reached 100 mph, the feat is believable because it was so meticulously recorded.

He recalls only once when he passed up a chance to record events on film.

"We were in the middle of a hurricane and the sea was mad. I knew we were going to sink so I didn't take pictures. Damn, if we didn't make it," he says shaking his head.

Before Johnson ever saw salt water, he was climbing telephone poles, perching aloft on the swaying sticks during storms.

"There was never a time I didn't want to get on every sailing ship in the world. I guess I was just practicing," said Johnson, whose white hair and sparkling blue eyes match the sea he has watched for more than 50 years.

Starting as a crewman, Johnson was captaining the yacht of Newcomb Carlin, president of Western Union, when he was 24.

Carlin arranged for Johnson to crew the 8,000-ton "Peking," the largest square-rigged vessel afloat. It moved only with the cooperation of more than an acre of canvas billowed out in 32 sails.

"The sailing ship era had ended and our trip around Cape Horn was the last round-up of the huge square-riggers," Johnson recalls of the 1929 voyage.

Later he met his wife Electa, a Smith College student, crewing a ship in France. Their two sons, Arthur Cook and Robert Christian, are named for the legendary sea heroes Captain James Cook and Fletcher Christian.

The family has owned three ships, a brigantine, schooner, and ketch, all named "Yankee."

"We've easily navigated a half million miles. You take 20 of the most marvelous places in the world, and we've been to 19," he said.

To talk adventure with Johnson, who as a Navy commander chartered the South Pacific during World War II, is to hear about a lifetime of experience most discover only in exotic fiction.

But in Johnson's case, fact is better than fiction.

On one voyage, the Johnsons found the shipwrecked descendants of the "Bounty" mutineers on a lonely island.

"Sterling Christian had fallen in love with a native Polynesian girl, so on returning the pair to Pitcairn Island aboard the 'Yankee,' I, as captain of the ship, married them," says Johnson.

Still, later, while scuba diving near the same Bounty Bay, the Johnsons discovered His Majesty's Ship Bounty's anchor where Fletcher Christians' crew had sunk and burned the boat almost 200 years earlier.

"They've got it mounted on the island. I guess we've become a part of their history," he said.

And during a visit to the Pentecost Islands in the South Seas, the Johnsons stumbled across a native ritual, he describes as "weird."

As part of a manhood rite, island men dove headfirst into the earth from a 78-foot, jungle-built tower.

"They had vines tied to their ankles to reduce the shock of impact, but they still plowed head and shoulders into the dirt. Women would come and massage their discs back into place and, at the day's end, all walked off under their own power," he said.

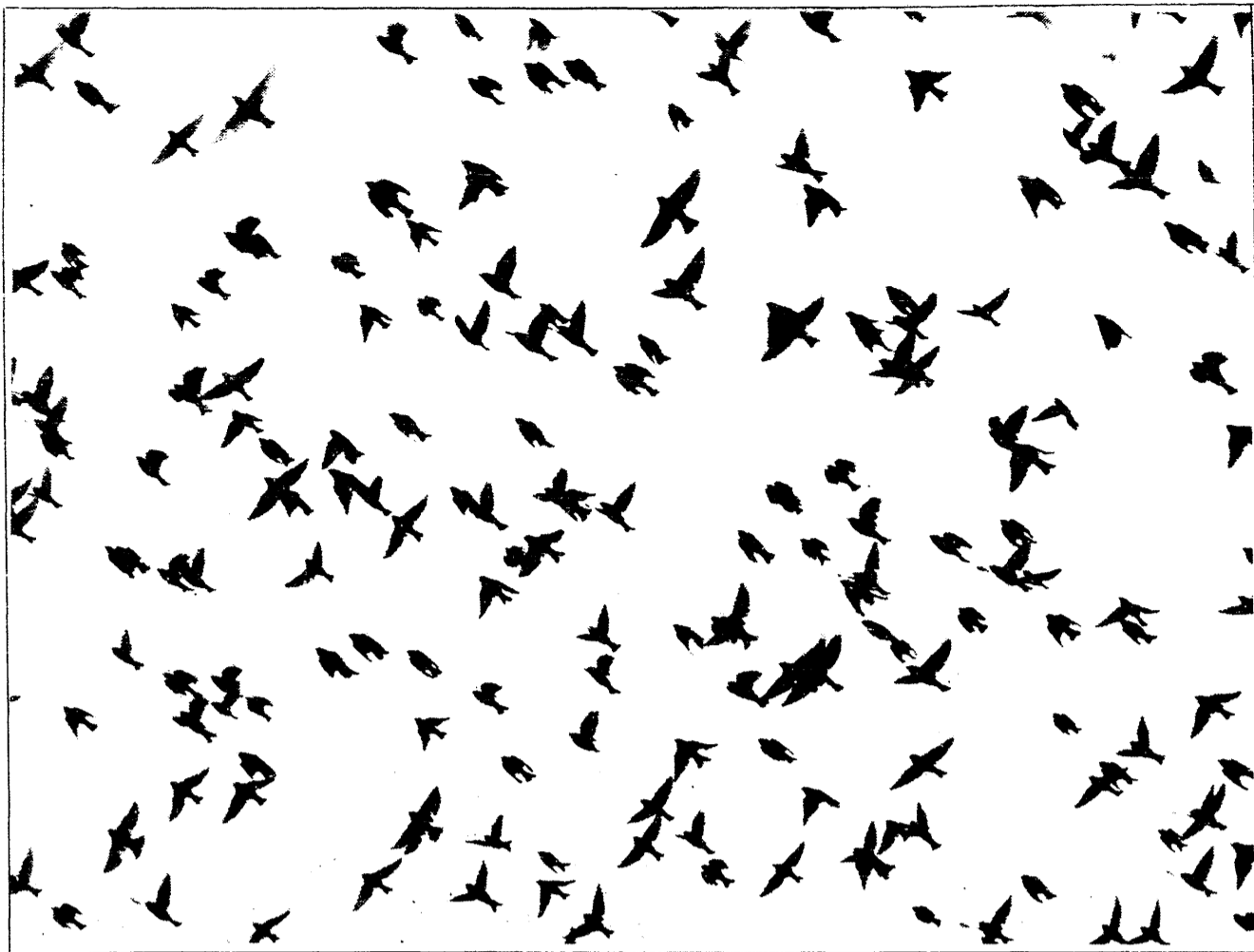
How did the Johnsons befriend a Devil's Island captive?

"We quickly dropped the anchor and rowed to shore before they could stop us," said Johnson, who noted they had to return to the ship early because Electa was pregnant and the seas were whipping up.

The convict, pardoned with all Devil's Island prisoners in 1949, continued to correspond with the Johnsons and when they later met in Paris, he gave them his red-stripped prison garb.

Sharing their voyages aboard the "Yankee" with an estimated 3,000 crew members who contributed labor and expenses, no one has been seriously injured or lost to the sea. Johnson says he is proud of his record and proud of his life.

"I've spent my life always doing exactly what I wanted."



Union photo by Don Treeger

Taking flight

Birds take to the sky Thursday after snacking on grass seed at the Forest Park ballfields in Springfield.

Major progress reported in Mt. Hope sale

By JILL WALLACH
Union correspondent

WILLIAMSTOWN — Substantial progress was made on the sales-purchase agreement for the Mt. Hope Farm during a lengthy hearing Thursday in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Worcester, according to Philip J. Hendel, the Springfield attorney handling the case for the farm's current owner.

Hendel said Thursday night the hearing lasted nearly six hours and has been continued to Oct. 4.

August E. Mansker, the current owner of the 1,100-acre estate, John R. Campbell, the California businessman seeking to purchase the farm for over \$2.2 million, and Williams College, the estate's former owner, were much closer to an agreement on the sale of the property after Thursday's session, according to Hendel.

The 29-year-old Campbell submitted a second sales-purchase agreement in late August and agreed to submit a deposition detailing his financial situation and ability to

maintain the estate after the Mt. Hope Realty Trust challenged the first agreement.

In July, Judge Paul W. Glennon ruled that the U.S. Bankruptcy Court will have to approve any sale of property from the Mt. Hope Farm Estate. The Mt. Hope Realty Trust, now owned by the Purple Mountain Partnership, a group of Williams College alumni, also challenged Campbell's ability to purchase and maintain the estate.

After the deposition was requested, Campbell paid an addi-

tional \$100,000 on the down payment, for a total of \$110,000 and increased his offer for the property to \$2.2 million.

Hendel also said that a stipulation might be added to the sales-purchase agreement prior to the next session on Oct. 4. But he would not elaborate.

None of the other attorneys representing Campbell, the Purple Mountain Partnership or Williams College were available Thursday night to comment on the hearing or the progress of the sale.

3 agencies show interest in group home

By DAVID VALLETTE
Union staff

NORTH ADAMS — Three Berkshire County agencies have indicated they will submit proposals for managing the Flood House, a residence in North Adams owned by the North Adams Housing Authority, but serving as a home for 10 retarded adults.

The facility was renovated last year and has been managed by Northern Berkshire Association for Retarded Citizens.

Applications were sought by the state Department of Mental Health after the retarded citizens' group was notified last month it was not progressing rapidly enough with plans to convert the home to an intermediate care facility. The change in designation would qualify the program for Medicaid reimbursement, according to James

Ciullo, DMH associate area director.

Ciullo said NOBARC was given until Nov. 1 to complete implementation of the plans which have been scheduled for the past four years, but was not completed because of other pressing priorities. NOBARC's contract with DMH expires March 1, 1985 and DMH wanted the changeover to be implemented now so state funds can be freed up for other projects, Ciullo said.

He noted that funds for the project will not be available after March 1, 1985, even if NOBARC's contract is renewed.

NOBARC has submitted a letter of intent to continue operating the program. The other two agencies expressing interest are the Center of Humanistic Change, headquartered in Springfield and the Berkshire County Association for Retarded Citizens. None of the executive directors were available Thursday to comment on whether their agencies intend to submit full

applications by Tuesday, the deadline set by DMH.

Ciullo said he has received some information that both NOBARC and the Center for Humanistic Change plan to complete the application process, but he doesn't about the Berkshire County Association's intentions.

Ciullo said that the department will interview the agencies and may reach a decision by Wednesday.

A five member committee will review the applications. The committee includes Richard Merrill, a DMH caseworker from Pittsfield who is chairing the committee, Wayne Johnstone, a DMH caseworker from Pittsfield, Sarah Thrasher from the intermediate care facility board in Boston, Donald Cook, chairman of the area Mental Retardation Committee and Katie Edmonds of Williamstown, an at-large member of the area committee.

NOBARC officials have said the Nov. 1 deadline is unrealistic

because of the process required for approval of the program. Ciullo said that NOBARC's application will be considered equally with the others and the project will be awarded on the basis of who can do it best.

NOBARC also recently lost a contract with the Berkshire Training and Employment Program in Pittsfield for an on-the-job training program. David S. Yorke, executive director of the BTEP charged that only four of the 14 placements with NOBARC over a three-to-four-year period were still on the job.

Grocery workers approve union

ADAMS — Adams Supermarkets, which has seven stores throughout Berkshire County, will get its first union in its 67-year history when the election is certified within the next week by the National Labor Relations Board.

Howard J. Wineberg, president of the supermarket chain, confirmed Thursday that the NLRB accepted five challenged votes on Wednesday from the July 28 election requested by 43 employees of the company's meat department.

The NLRB had challenged four of the votes, saying the employees were not members of the department. The employees' names were apparently left off the list submit-

ted to the NLRB, although they are long-time employees of the meat department.

One vote was challenged by Local 371 of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, headquartered in Westport, Conn. They contended the employee is a supervisor.

The original vote on July 28 was 20 to 18. With the challenged votes accepted, the new vote total was 22 to 21.

Wineberg said the family-owned supermarket chain does not intend to appeal the NLRB decision and will begin negotiations once the NLRB has certified the election. No sessions have been scheduled yet, he said.

Wineberg also said it is too early to tell what impact the union's presence will have on prices in the seven stores or on other services.

"It's a matter of doing business and we will continue to take care of our customers, union or no union," Wineberg said Thursday.

Local 371 has been trying to organize employees at the Adams Supermarkets since 1981, but withdrew its first petition the day before the election in May 1981, because it expected to lose the election.

The union tried again, but lost by a vote of 195 to 86 in an election held Oct. 22, 1982.

Following the election, the union filed unfair labor charges against the supermarket chain, contending the firm intimidated and harassed employees and instituted a new medical insurance plan and better fringe benefits just prior to the election.

The supermarket was cleared of the charges after a hearing on the matter before an administrative law judge in May 1983.

The firm was founded in 1917 by Jacob Wineberg and is now operated by his grandson. The stores are located in Adams, North Adams, Pittsfield, Great Barrington, Lee and Dalton.

Town-gang brawl has unpleasant end

DODGE CENTER, Minn. (AP) — A 23-year-old man has pleaded guilty to a felony riot charge stemming from a brawl between about 125 people from Claremont and a gang from Dodge Center, authorities said.

Rick Johnson of Dodge Center faces up to five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine on the charge, to which he pleaded guilty before

Dodge County District Judge Roger Plunkett.

More than 40 people were charged with crimes including assault, riot and interfering with police in the brawl last May between a Claremont group and the "Seuss Gang" from Dodge Center, police said.

The two towns are less than 10 miles apart in southern Minnesota.

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