CORNELL'S INFLUENCE ON WASHINGTON AND WEST COAST ROWING

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John took advantage of the contributions of his grandfather (Mark Odell, Cornell 1897) to Washington rowing, and presently rows (both sweeps and sculls) out of the Pocock Rowing Center in Seattle with a club that uses the classic Thames watermen's stroke taught by George Pocock.

Cornell made a major contribution to rowing at the University of Washington and the entire west coast, a story not well known in Ithaca. Mark Odell, who rowed on Cornell's famous crew of 1897, and the authors' grandfather, coached the University of Washington crew in Seattle in the early 1900s. Odell was one of several influences Cornell had on Washington rowing at the inception of its program.

Washington, in turn, after getting its start as a rowing power with Cornell's help, sent coaches schooled in its rowing techniques all over the country to develop crew programs at many different universities, including a Washington rower who went to Cornell. Rollin Harrison "Stork" Sanford (U.W. '26) coached at Cornell for 33 seasons, winning four national championships in the 1950s.

CHAPTER ONE

ROWING AT CORNELL UNDER COACH COURTNEY: 1897 IRA WIN BEGINS A ROWING DYNASTY

Off to Ithaca

Mark Odell was born on January 13, 1869, on his family farm outside of Baldwinsville, New York. He won an essay contest which provided a state scholarship to Cornell, where he attended from 1893-97.

At nearly 6 feet tall and 184 pounds, which was big for his time, Odell rowed five seat on the starboard side for the Big Red crew of 1897 under Cornell's legendary rowing coach Charles E. "Pop" Courtney. Courtney, the "Old Man," coached from 1884 until 1916, and has been described as the "greatest training master of oarsmen in the

world."[1] Odell's 1897 crew established Cornell's rowing reputation after the school had been overshadowed by Yale and Harvard for decades. To everyone's surprise, the 1897 Big Red crew won the Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) race at Poughkeepsie and became "champions of America." *New York Journal*, June 25, 1897. Cornell beat heavily favored Yale and Harvard in this four mile race, establishing the school as a rowing power and earning it new respect.[2]

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[1] Young, *The Cornell Navy: 1871-1906,* a book published in 1907 that describes the early days of rowing at Cornell. It is dedicated "To the 'Old Man,' Charlie E. Courtney, whose coaching, and to the 'Boys' whose faithful training and earnest work, have combined to make Cornell pre-eminent in Intercollegiate Rowing."

Courtney began coaching rowers at Cornell in 1884, and became permanent residential coach in 1889. Its Varsity crews were undefeated during that period. Courtney, who was raised in Union Springs, N.Y. on the north end of Cayuga Lake, gained fame rowing near Cornell, and influenced Cornell rowing from its earliest days. In 1872, when the school was only three years old, Cornell students talked about the "young countryman down the lake who could row like the wind." Poems were written in his honor. Young, *Courtney and Cornell Rowing.*

> "In future when the windless lake is still,
> and sounds of evening bells float from the hill,
> when skimming shells in straining practice fly
> up past the western shore, with coxswain's cry,
> and oarlock's rhythmic throb and wash of oar,
> 'The Old Man' in his launch will come no more.
> He dwelt among us without blame or fear,
> and trained his oarsmen many a zealous year;
> He taught them manhood also; how to meet
> their fate, unspoiled by triumph or defeat.
> 'Row hard! And may the best crew win,' he said;
> And victory hovered ever 'round his head.
> Alas, the crews, the lake, the changing shore
> shall see 'The Old Man' in his launch no more."

[2] The IRA race was a four mile course until 1919 when it was shortened to three miles. Young, *Courtney and Cornell Rowing.*

Setting The Stage For The 1897 IRA Regatta

The 1897 IRA regatta received extensive press coverage.[3] Not only was college rowing widely followed in the late 1800s, but 1897 was the first time in over 20 years that Cornell raced Yale and Harvard, so the race had special significance. Press coverage of rowing in the 1890s resembled present day coverage of the Super Bowl, the NBA championship, and the NCAA championship combined. Writers from each major paper and magazine attended the important regattas, and provided knowledgeable analysis of the races. There was substantial betting on rowing in that era, and press accounts influenced the odds. The bookmakers had a field day with the 1897 race.[4]

Cornell last rowed against Yale and Harvard in 1875 and 1876. Even though Cornell's rowing program only begun in 1870, it won both races marking the school's

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[3] The authors' grandfather kept many of the newspaper articles discussing the 1897 IRA race. *Cornell Era* of October 2, 1897 included reprints of many of the press accounts from before and after the race, and a four page article written by Mark Odell, "Story of the Race and Return to Ithaca," which appears as Appendix A hereto.

[4] Courtney said that "[t]he mania for betting on intercollegiate contests... is not inherent in or peculiar to this form of competition but is largely fed up by the press." Betting led to crew coaches "lying and jockeying," and dispensing false information about their teams practice times and the rower's medical conditions to influence the odds. Courtney criticized betting's influence on sports. "...the growing practice of betting on games and races is simply that every member of an athletic team has a responsibility imposed on him which tends to distort his views as to what the object of the contest really is. Theoretically it is for the glory of his alma mater, but practically it is for the sake of the money which great numbers of alumni and undergraduates have put up on the contest. If victory is secured, no doubt it is for the University that is so lustily cheered, and not the dollar bills; but if defeat comes, it is not the dimmed luster of the institution that is bemoaned and for which impatient criticism is flung about so freely, but it is the empty pocket-book." Young, *Courtney and Cornell Rowing.*

emergence into the rowing community, and making its oarsmen instant heros.[5] After this humiliation, Yale and Harvard withdrew from the Rowing Association of American Colleges.[6] Thereafter, they rowed only against each other in a self-declared championship, refusing to allow others to join this exclusive club, a self-righteous attitude criticized by the press. *The Rochester Democrat of* June 26, 1897, said:

> The old system which limited the great race of the year to Yale and Harvard...was unsportsmanlike. Time and time again it has left the brawny sons of Eli in the position of claiming a championship which they refused to defend.... College sportsmanship should be as broad on the waterways as it is on the football gridiron.

Since its varsity's last race in 1876 against Yale and Harvard, Cornell sought a rematch but was arrogantly refused. "The two eastern colleges had regarded it as a condescension to permit Cornell to join the contest...," said the *New York Journal*, on June 25, 1897. The *New York Press* of June 26, 1987 sounded a similar theme:

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[5] After the 1875 victory, "[e]nthusiastic Cornellians rushed into the water lifting the oarsmen from the boat, marched them upon their shoulders up and down in front of the grandstand. Upon their return to Saratoga the wildest demonstration ensued, and the Cornell oarsmen were the heroes of the hour....A palace car was provided for the trip home, and the journey was a like a triumphal procession. At Ithaca, a great arch had been erected on campus and the town turned out en masse to join in the welcome."

The crews rowed in six-oared shells in 1875 and 1876. Cornell first rowed in an eight-oared shell in 1878. The Cornell yell originated at the 1875 race. When the Cornell crew was leading the race, spectators yelled "Cornell-ell-ell-ell, Cornell," which was converted into "Cornell, I yell, yell, yell, Cornell." Young, *Cornell Navy*.

[6] The *New York Times* chided them for taking this action: "It cannot be denied that the remarkable and altogether shameless conduct of Cornell in making a clean sweep of everything in the [1876] Centennial Regatta is an excellent proof of the sagacity of certain colleges in retiring from a conflict in which apparently they consider they have no chance." Young, *Cornell Navy*.

> For twenty years...[Cornell] has sought an opportunity to meet on one course the crews of the two superior rowing universities. Through a puzzling policy of Yalensian 'exclusiveness' this opportunity had been until yesterday denied her.

Odell described Cornell's frustration in his hometown newspaper, the *Baldwinsville Gazette and Farmers' Journal,* on July 1, 1897:

> Cornell defeated Harvard and Yale [in 1875 & 1876]... which latter institution has claimed the championship in rowing for years, and which we have been waiting twenty-two long years to get a whack at. We rowed them in 1875 on Lake Saratoga and beat them. The next year they withdrew from the regatta and the only chance we have had since was in 1890, when our freshmen defeated their freshmen, but since 1875 we have challenged them for a 'Varsity race in vain'....

By 1897, Yale and Harvard had been the country's rowing powerhouses for two decades, and Cornell was not seen as being in their league. The "smart money" and all of the experts agreed that the 1897 race was between Yale and Harvard, with Cornell having no chance. The betting odds were heavily skewed in their favor.

Two learned writers who covered rowing, A.H.C. Mitchell and Julian Hawthorne, easily picked the winner - Harvard, in the *New York Journal:*

> I had not intended to make any forecast, but I fancy Harvard, and might as well say so. It seems to me the race between Harvard and Yale will be close, and as I have watched the crews in practice, I have wavered more than once. But after all I cannot help believing Harvard will win, with Yale a second and Cornell a third....
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> Yale and Harvard are probably as fine crews as those universities have ever turned out, and it would not be surprising if both of them broke the four mile record tomorrow. I hardly expect Cornell to do this. I cannot see that they have a ghost of a chance with Harvard and Yale...

Robert Cook, Yale's coach, and Rudolph Lehmann, Harvard's coach, had no doubts:

> In the old days of New London, or rather under former conditions, I would say that Yale was a sure winner. But this year Harvard has the fastest crew she

> ever had. I think Harvard and Yale are evenly matched for tomorrow's race – at least for three miles. After that the crew that holds its form and has the endurance should win. Mr. Lehmann and I agree that both Harvard and Yale will defeat Cornell, and from what he said to me tonight I believe he thinks his crew has a slight better chance of winning than my crew.
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> Mr. Lehmann has produced better form than Yale possesses, but I think my failure to get as good a steady swing is due to the difficulty I experienced in changing Yale's stroke this year. For my part, I am in doubt whether it will be Harvard or Yale. (Emphasis added).

The "uneven" match up for the race was described by the *New York Journal*:

> Here were Yale and Harvard, aristocratic and exclusive, standing apart together and communing with courteous hostility as to which of them would cross the finish line first, and in their self-sufficient haughtiness altogether ignoring poor little Cornell, who, it was agreed, had not so much as a 'look-in' in the matter.
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> .
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> And there were about all the most renowned rowing experts in this country and in England adopting the same point of view and standing upon their experiences of ten, twenty, or thirty years....
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> And, after all, poor, slighted little Cornell, with her unconsidered crew, came bashfully to the most remote and cold-shouldered of the three stakeboats, and didn't do a thing but win the race, with so little seeming effort that one could hardly believe she wasn't rowing in a steam launch, and by her haughty rivals, who were staggering and fainting in her wake, in the same glance.

The 1897 IRA race was a high stakes one for Cornell, a chance to prove that its rowing program could compete against the Eastern powerhouses, with nothing less than the honor of the school at stake. The *New York World* reported on June 26, 1897:

> [Coach Courtney said] 'Boys, do you know what this means? It means that you're Cornell or you're nothing.' This was the spirit of the whole contest. Yale and Harvard were trying to win a race. Cornell was struggling for recognition. The race was only an incident. It was their honor and the honor of their college that was at stake. They pulled not against Hudson water, but against the prejudices and pride of a hundred years.
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> For a century Yale and Harvard have scorned the idea of an equal. They have looked with contempt upon other institutions of learning. Cornell has been

> ignored and despised. But once, in 1875, has she been allowed in a great race. She was in this one only on sufferance.
>
> Defeat for Cornell meant an end to her fight for recognition, a ban upon her standing as a university. Victory meant equality, freedom, an assured position, glory for the victors and prosperity for their college. It was this that nerved their arms. It was this that put strength into their muscles, that steeled their hearts in the long, hard struggle against the heavier, more experienced crews of Yale and Harvard.

The Race Atmosphere

College rowing was the era's most popular sport, and huge crowds attended the important races. The 1897 IRA regatta was an extended gala party, as Odell described in *Cornell Era.* "For two weeks Po'keepsie had been festive; parties from the more imposing regatta ball to the unpretentious reception, excursions, moonlight sails, and concerts, had crowded one after the other, making life happy and Po'keepsie gay." The need for a long stay at Poughkeepsie, required for crews participating in the IRA race so they could train on the four mile course, was criticized as "becoming too much of a spectacle of the circus variety, merely a money maker for the New York Central Railroad, rather than a purely athletic event." Young, *Courtney and Cornell Rowing.*

> Race day resembled a giant carnival according to the *New York Journal:*
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> There is still the aesthetic side; one of the grandest of rivers deploying its fairest of reaches under a glorious blue cloud-flecked sky; its lofty banks lovely with foliage, crowded with stupendous masses of human beings fluttering with bright colors; and its bosom freighted with a thousand of the prettiest and most graceful pleasure boats ever designed, all bejeweled with tinted flags; and along its western shore a serpent half a mile in length, red, white and blue, with a head of steam at each end of it, gliding swiftly up and down; and shoutings, steam screamings, and cannon firings – certainly there was nothing lacking to the aesthetic side of the great race, unless it was lemon juice in the lemonade.

The "serpent" was a train that ran along the length of the course allowing spectators

to see the entire race, gayly decorated and filled with boisterous fans loudly shouting encouragement to their favorite crew. Private yachts lined the course, some with cannons which were fired as the crews rowed by, adding to the mayhem.

Coach Courtney inspired his group of underdogs, who had been counted out before the race by all of the experts. "[I]t is hard to discourage a Cornell Varsity crew when Charlie Courtney tells them that they are fast and that the other fellows haven't wings: and it is still more difficult to discourage them when he himself is satisfied with their speed." E.O. Spillman, Captain of the 1897 crew, *Cornell Era.* Courtney's last words to his rowers before the race reflected the seriousness of the occasion: "Boys, do you know what this means? It means that you're Cornell or you're nothing." Id.

Odell described the tumultuous race atmosphere, in *Cornell Era.*

> The only sounds I realized for three miles were the words of our coxswain and the hoarse cheer of exultation from the train when we began to lead. The other yells I did not hear or did not notice, although the din I know was terrific and constant. The last mile was along a flotilla of yachts, which kept up the most infernal pandemonium you can imagine. Not a word could we hear of our coxswain's orders. Cannons were going off right above our heads, which made it feel as though the top of the skull was coming off at each shot, whistles of the most infernal screeching power went off in our ears. "Hell was let loose," as they say in the classics.

Against all odds, Cornell beat its arrogant rivals by nearly three lengths in a memorable race. The *New York Journal* of June 25, 1897 described the race:

> Harvard was the first to reach her stakeboat. Cornell pulled out next, in her colorless, mechanical, uninteresting way, and nobody paid much attention to her. Finally proud Yale deigned to get into her boat and took her position; and it was 3:44 o'clock, local time. The referee's steamer came down within sixty feet of them, and "Are you ready?' "No." Yale was not. But when the question was repeated they all were ready, and "Go!" thundered through the megaphone. They were off, amid a road miles long, followed by a hush, as we bent forward

to see who had the lead.

Yale started behind Harvard; but they were as nearly level as possible after rowing a dozen strokes. Cornell was half a length to the rear, and would, of course, soon disappear entirely. Then, for a moment all were even, or else the slant of the course deceived the eye. The race was really very close here, and we were all so intent and anxious that we forgot to make our usual noise.

At the mile it certainly looked as if Cornell were ahead a little, but it must be an ocular deception; the thing was absurd. At the mile and a half we were forced to the belief that our eyes were truer than we thought; and now Yale was half a length before Harvard. Yale also seemed to be gaining a bit on the weird and incomprehensible Cornell. But at the two miles Yale had dropped back once more, and Harvard was nearer to her than before, though still last. There changes meant desperate spurts that came and died away, but Cornell did not spurt; she didn't have to; she just rowed on the perfect ease and lightness, and at two and a half miles was two lengths to the good. Three miles had been rowed; one remained.

And here both Yale and Harvard made a final and gallant effort to retrieve themselves. Yale's effort was the stronger, and it shortened the gap between her and her light-footed enemy, but in vain. As they passed along the roaring and steam-whistling array of yachts, Cornell seemed to start forward afresh; but it was only the others dying away. She crossed the line two lengths and a half ahead of Yale, who led Harvard by a length and a half. Harvard, it seemed to me, stopped just short of the finish; her stroke oar dropped senseless in the bottom of the boat; all the men hung limp over their oars; the bow collapsed.

Meanwhile Yale sat still, blown but not knocked out. Cornell, scarcely stopping, rowed lightly on and out of sight, champions of America. It was a proud and joyful hour for her. And in this hour of her rejoicing I will make no remarks that would seem to cast a shadow upon it. It was a great race, splendidly won.

Acclaim after the Race

Cornell's surprising victory overwhelmed the school's loyal supporters who had cheered the crew to victory, as Odell described in *Cornell Era*:

Later when we got to the quarters old men with whiskers crowded around and hugged us. One of our most staid professors embraced the coxswain and actually kissed him. Old alumni came around with tears of joy in their eyes, and voices husky with the feeling as well as cheering, and thanked us over and over again.

In spite of the uproarious response of the Cornell fans, the crew celebrated its victory in a modest manner, according to Odell in *Cornell Era*:

> [t]raining was broken with no loud or resonant crack, but in quite an orderly manner. Long, fat cigars and an old, much caressed pipe or two appeared mysteriously before collars or shoes. The long forbidden plunge in the river was enjoyed and long, deep drinks were taken from the barrel of Ithaca water.
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> Virtually every New York newspaper carried an article about the race. The *New York World* of June 26, 1897 described Cornell's victory in lyric terms:
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> The race resulted in a triumph of brain and soul and spirit over brute muscle. It raises the question whether such athletic sport as this is not a fitting part of a college education – whether it does not broaden the mind and ennoble the spirit as much as Greek and Latin do.[7]

The *New York Times* article about the race referred to rowing's betting connections.

> Once more this week things have been chosen to confound the mighty and the wise have been put to shame by the simple. All persons learned in rowing were agreed yesterday morning that, though they could not with any confidence pick the winner, they could pick the loser, and that the loser would be Cornell. No human person will wish to add a pang to the remorse which these expert persons now feel – especially if their money sustained their judgement – in remarking that Cornell was never headed from start to finish, that her lead was never really challenged, and that she finished three lengths ahead of the second boat. It is true that it was a close and hard race. But that fact brings no comfort at all to the instructed and deluded prophets. (Emphasis added).

Odell captured the tenor of the extensive press coverage of the race, in *Cornell Era.*

> The news stand at the station had reaped a harvest that morning, and for some miles all was quiet in the car while we read in those great metropolitan dailies that see all and know all, just how we did it, and like a revelation it came to us:...how Cornell was the greatest and most glorious institution in the country, and Charles E. Courtney the greatest coach that ever yelled through a megaphone, which we had known all along.

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[7] This description is echoed by Odell's brief summary of the winning effort: "[t]he race was a combination of mental and muscular application." *Cornell Era.*

School pride ran deep. On the victory ride home on the train the next day, the 1897 crew was welcomed by a member of Cornell's victorious crew of 1876.

> Dr. Jarvis of the famous crew of '76, fluttered the faded old banner which had waved in triumph when that crew returned to Ithaca from the triple victory at Saratoga. Sacred was that old flag in our eyes and proud we were to grasp the hand of the valiant old oarsman who had cherished it all these years.

Id. Odell described how Cornell's victory inspired others.

> Near Utica a baseball team boarded the train for a nearby town. Before leaving at their destination, they begged that they might be given the Cornell yell as a final encouragement before they met their enemy. This was finally given as they piled off, and they marched away with renewed confidence in their victory.

The victorious crew anxiously looked forward to the train's arrival at their beloved Ithaca, which Odell described as "the most loyal college town on earth, where feuds between campus and the city are unknown, and where town and gown lock arms and march up the street of brotherly love blowing great blasts of joy through the same tin horn." Id. When the train reached Ithaca, the crew was greeted as conquering heros, like Roman legions returning to Rome after a battle, according to Odell:

> The story of the return of the crews from Poughkeepsie to Ithaca is a tale of hope long deferred....[W]e steamed on towards this ever loyal, wildly rejoicing, loudly yelling, horn blowing, brilliantly lighted, ribbon-bedecked city of Ithaca, whose week of madness closed that Saturday night in a tumultuous frenzy....
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> As we rounded the bend of the lake shore, the lights of Renwick twinkled a welcome; the rails for a half a mile through the city cracked their greeting with torpedo explosions; and as we drew up at the foot of Seneca street and stepped out upon the float proudly conscious of our new crew coats and dinky red caps, the whole city was shining with a brightness of its own, and from the multitude assembled there, a roar went up that died away only to catch its breath and roll out with increasing force on that long ride we took propelled by human energy.
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> A double train of fire works had been lain along the whole route. Touched off as we started, it blazed forth along our path with a dazzling brilliancy, with

> colors red, blue, green , white and yellow, with sparks dangerous and Roman candles uncomfortably aimed....[We went] up Seneca to Albany, Albany to State, State to Aurora, Aurora to Farm, Farm to Cayuga, Cayuga to the Lyceum, where the banquet was given. The banquet! What recollections we have of that pleasant ending to the reception. How tickled we were over some of the sallies of our dignified president of the Athletic Council!

The "Courtney Stroke" Won the Race

Cornell's 1897 win at Poughkeepsie not only established the school as a rowing power, but also proved that the "American stroke" developed by Coach Courtney for the Cornell Navy was superior to the "English stroke" used by both Yale and Harvard. The race established Coach Courtney as a rowing genius. The same writers who had dismissed Cornell's chances and criticized its unusual rowing technique the day before, all of a sudden were instant experts on and cheerleaders for Courtney's miraculous and innovative stroke which represented the future of rowing.

The *New York World* reported on June 26, 1897: "...it was the American stroke that won against the Lehmann English and the Cook modified English stroke." The *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* of June 26, 1897 concluded: "[t]he English stroke taught by Lehmann proved to be exhausting and far less effective than the steady rhythmic motion taught by Courney." *The New York Press* said:

> With a light and hastily, if not ill, assorted crew, rowing a stroke at which the experts of aquatics first shook their heads and then averted them, she has defeated with ease her great rivals on an occasion to which both had been brought in the pink or perfection by the highest coaching authorities of the new and old worlds. Cornell had not only beaten Yale and Harvard... She has beaten the Cook stroke and she has beaten the Lehmann stroke in their latest model and highest stage of development. She has done so out of pure native pluck, vim and attention to the business at hand.

The *New York Herald* chimed in saying:

> There is no moral to be drawn from the result, so far as the race afforded a test of the relative value of the doctrines of Mr. Cook or Mr. Lehman. The pupils of both were beaten by a set of up-country youngsters who pulled in a style that has been condemned by all the great rowing authorities of the world, but was singularly useful yesterday....; let's throw moralizing to the winds and in sportsmanlike spirit hail the victors and the Courtney stroke with generous acclamation, assuring the winners that, whatever way we bet, we all "Yell - Cornell" and hurrah for the boys from Ithaca.

The *New York Journal* of June 26, 1897 agreed, saying:

> Americans not bound by ties of sentiment to either of the contesting colleges in yesterday's regatta at Poughkeepsie will find a certain patriotic satisfaction in the outcome. Cornell was clearly the most typical American crew. It had made, indeed, as all American crews have, certain adaptations from the English stroke, but to a less degree than either of its rivals. In the rigging of its boat and the seating of the crew Cornell adhered strictly to the American system, and good judges ascribe its success in great part to this fact.

Casper Whitney wrote in *Harpers*:

> At no time was there sufficient reason for the supreme confidence which before the race adjudged either Harvard or Yale the winner and entirely ignored Cornell. Prejudice for the 'beef' in the boat and for the rowing fad of the year (the extreme English swing) blinded old college oarsmen to the subtle efficacy of that uninterrupted gliding between strokes of the Cornell boat, caused by the modified back swing, a magnificent leg drive, and a wonderfully smooth recovery. Many reasons have been advanced to explain Cornell's present crew defeating this year's Oxford eight, or any average English Varsity eight. In my opinion the '97 Cornell crew could not be beaten except by eight stronger, better oarsmen pulling the same stroke they employed this year.

Disclaiming honors for developing the winning method of rowing, the "Old Man" modestly insisted there was no such a thing as a "Courtney stroke."

> The only stroke that wins is the 'hard pull' stroke, where every man pulls each stroke steady and hard throughout, and continues to do so from the time the word 'Go' is given until the course is covered.[8]

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[8] Courtney recognized differences between the American and English strokes. "The essential difference between the American and English strokes dates back to

Rowing analysts differed with Courtney's humble statement, however:

> The stroke taught by Mr. Courtney was distinctively his own, and was never changed in any essential respects throughout his career....The stroke was modified from time to time in certain respects, but there was still the same straight back, the same leg drive, the same quick recovery of the arms and sneaking back of the slide, and no one who has seen the exaggerated swing of the English stroke, with its reliance on body and arms, would be inclined to say that one was a copy of the other.

Id. Courtney's coaching shows clear thought about each part of the stroke.

> Summed up, then, the oarsman should have his oar in the water as long as possible, and the least possible time in the air. He should never overreach, and should be equally careful to avoid going back too far at the end of the stroke. He should catch the water firmly with the blades slightly inclined (a difficult thing to teach a crew, however), and should pull the stroke through from beginning to end, bringing the blades cleanly out of the water at right angles and with a snap. Don't hang when the stroke is finished, but let the hands drop and shoot forward like lightning, the slide following at first quickly but gradually decreasing in speed. Don't lose any time in dropping the blades into the water when they are back in position for the catch. Pull with straight arms until the shoulders are back to the furthest point it is intended to carry them. Never buckle or slide up to meet the handles of the oars. Avoid dropping the shoulders and kinking the back. Bend from the hips. On the recovery, of course, keep the blades as close to the water as practicable without striking the surface. But above all else, remember that if you desire to make your boat go fast, you have got to pull like the devil, and never for a moment forget the fact that the

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the time when sliding seats were invented. In the old days of the fixed seat the general formula for fast rowing was the same on both sides of the water. When the advantage of the new invention was recognized, the tendency in American was to make the sliding seat the basis of a new stroke. The English added the new feature to the old swing of the fixed seat. In this country, the mechanical possibilities of the slide are used to a greater extent, in my opinion. Certainly, the American stroke, if it can be called that, requires a much shorter apprenticeship, and with the rowing career condensed into the four years of an undergraduate course, there probably would not be sufficient time to develop the greatest efficiency in the English style." Young, *Courtney and Cornell Rowing*.

shortest distance between two points is a straight line.[9]

Courtney and Cornell Rowing after 1897

After 1897, led by coach Courtney, Cornell dominated college rowing, winning 14 of 24 IRA championships during his regime, and taking second six times. His crews won 98 out of 146 races, sweeping regattas seven times. Id. Courtney believed in the moral as well as the physical value of rowing. "There are two elements to a contest with oars over a measured course - the mental and physical." Courtney believed that rowing was not only one of the best body developers, but from the moral point of view there was no branch of athletics which was such a character builder as trying for a place in an eight-oared shell. The long period of training offers little to the flabby type of man who must have the prospect of immediate reputation. The long, steady grind, often under disagreeable and discouraging conditions, together with the good comradeship, was to his mind, an invaluable preparation for life's battles. Id.

Although successful, Courtney was a controversial figure because of patrician attitudes that dominated sports in that era. Before coaching at Cornell, Courtney had been a successful amateur rower, but turned professional to race Canadian champion

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[9] Courtney taught that when taking the water, "the blade should not be dropped in at a perfect right angle, but should be inclined just a trifle, so that it will enter the water easily and cleanly, scoop fashion...The important part is to get the blade into the water cleanly, and keep it covered but not to sink it too deeply... When the stroke is finished, the hands should be dropped sharply in the lap, the blades of the oars coming clearly out of the water at right angles to it, and the arms shooting quickly forward as quickly as possible for another stroke." Young, *Courtney and Cornell Rowing*

Ned Hanlan in 1878.[10] Cornell's hiring of Courtney drew significant criticism because he was a professional rower. The *New York Times* editorialized:

> If college boys cannot learn to row without association with persons like Courtney, perhaps they would be quite as well off if they devoted a little more time to classics and mathematics and a little less to rowing.[11]

This patrician attitude in sports was widespread in those times. Participation in the first modern Olympics in Athens in 1896 was limited to gentlemen and the military; professionals and the working class were excluded. Rowing first appeared in the Olympics in 1900 in Paris following this tradition.[12] The *New York Journal*'s article of June 26, 1897 on the 1897 race lauded Harvard's coach for his gentlemanly approach to the sport, even though his crew lost badly to Cornell:

> Mr. Lehmann, despite the seemingly disastrous failure of his crew, has done much to put anew the mark of the gentleman upon college boat racing. His coaching and the practice of his crew have been open and public. With him has been no 'jockeying,' no resort to ignoble devices, either that opponents might be

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[10] Courtney won all 86 of his amateur races. He only lost seven of 46 professional races in a time when oarsmen rowed for "stakes" from regatta committees, and betting winnings. No one but Hanlan rivaled Courtney as the greatest living oarsman of his day. Young, *Courtney and Cornell Rowing*. Courtney won $450 on his first "amateur" race in 1873, and there was a $10,000 stake in his 1877 race against Hanlan. Miller, *Wild & Crazy Professionals*.

[11] Courtney, Charles E., at HickokSports.com. Even before Coach Courtney, Cornell used professional rowers to assist its crew program. Harry Coulter, a former U.S. sculling champion, trained Cornell's crew in 1873. This upset the rowing community, as seen in an article about Cornell's 1873 crew in a religious journal which put the issue in moral terms: "[w]hen the pious lot was cast into the lap, the wicked crew (meaning Cornell) had the worst position." That same year, 1873, it was decided at the convention of the Rowing Association of Colleges "not to allow in future the employment of professional trainers." Young, *Cornell Navy*.

[12] "Crew: U.W.'s Most Successful, Stable Athletic Enterprise," *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, 5/10/03.

> misled or that the betting odds might be favorably affected.... But in any event he may carry away with him the certainty that his influence here has been thoroughly for good and is widely appreciated. (Emphasis added).

Odell gained notoriety from his writings about the 1897 race. He wrote articles for his hometown newspaper in Baldwinsville, and a long description, "Story of the Race and Return to Ithaca," for *Cornell Era* (reprinted in Appendix A hereto). When Odell returned home, he was welcomed as a hero and a parade was held in his honor. With his typical reserve, Odell later said "[c]ontrary to the enthusiastic imaginings of many of my home Baldwinsville friends, I was not the only one in the crew. There were seven other oarsmen and a coxswain in the crew which won the race." Id.

A picture of the 1897 crew still hangs on the wall of Cornell's crew house, a lasting tribute to the "[b]oys whose faithful training and earnest work, have combined to make Cornell pre-eminent in Intercollegiate Rowing." *Cornell Navy*. The caption on the picture lists 20:34 as the time for 1897 race at Poughkeepsie. Odell's obituary said his Cornell crew of held the Poughkeepsie Regatta record for more than 30 years.[13]

Odell returned to Cornell in 1947 for the 50th reunion of the class of 1897. All of his fellow crew members were alive and well and attended the reunion, except for their coxswain. They took out an eight and rowed it for old times sake, likely not equaling their IRA championship time that made Cornell "champions of America" in 1897, but still rowing with enthusiasm and love of the sport.

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[13] "Mark Odell, Insuranceman, Succumbs," *Seattle Times*, June 26, 1963.

CHAPTER II

LEAVING THE IVY LEAGUE FOR THE WEST: SEATTLE VIA THE ALASKA GOLD RUSH

Gold Fever

After his graduation in 1897, Odell entered Cornell's law school. However, like many adventurous young men of his generation, Odell caught gold fever. In spring of 1898, Odell suddenly dropped out of Cornell, and he and his best friend from Cornell, Ellis Aldrich, left for what was known as the Alaska gold rush.[14] Although Odell was attending law school, he planned on rowing with the 1898 crew. Coach Courtney and the rowing press were deeply disappointed that Odell would not row again.[15]

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[14] Odell did not spend much time pondering the decision to hunt for gold. His diary shows that he first considered leaving on March 2, 1898, and he and Aldrich left for the Yukon on March 16, two weeks later. The 1898 gold rush actually took place in the Klondike area of Canada's Yukon Territory, although its entry point was Skagway, Alaska.

[15] An article in the Baldwinsville Gazette & Farmer's Journal of March 24, 1898 described Odell's surprise decision.

"The biggest surprise of the season in Cornell crew matters was the announcement at the boathouse tonight that Mark M. Odell, No. 5 of the varsity boat has suddenly left the university to go to the Klondike. Coach Courtney apparently did not like the news a bit. Odell was one of the strongest men on last year's victorious crew and Cornell's coach had counted upon him for the same position, but is doubtful if as good a man will be found immediately....

Cornell lost Mark M. Odell, who pulled No. 5 and it will be a hard matter for Courtney to replace the young man. Odell did not look much like an athlete in his street clothes. He is one of those quiet, unassuming young fellows with a gait that is next to awkward and a swing to his limbs that might mark him as a pedestrian. A casual observer would note the breadth of the shoulders and comment on them. One unfamiliar with athletes would scarcely take notice of the deep chest. But stripped, Odell is a different person. The long siege of training he has undergone at

Ithaca to the Yukon

Odell and Aldrich were part of an Ithaca company organized to mine gold in the Yukon, financed by a wealthy local businessman, likely L.C. Smith of typewriter fame. Smith agreed to fund Odell and Aldrich, paying their expenses and assuring them "of liberal compensation for the venture whether or not they met with success." Id.

Odell and Aldrich left New York on March 16, 1898, taking a train to Seattle which was the jumping off point for the gold rush. In Seattle, they purchased the one year's supply of food and gear (one ton per man) that was required by Canada's Northwest Mounted Police.

Odell and Aldrich sailed on the steamer Al-Ki from Seattle on March 26,1898 traveling up the inside passage to Skagway, Alaska. Odell noted in his diary how beautiful the trip was, saying "[s]hould I return from the Yukon without one ounce of dust which has quite the balance of probabilities, I cannot regret the time spent after passing this part of the route." After Skagway, however, they faced many challenges.

From Skagway, they shipped their goods by lighter (a flat bottomed barge) to Dyea, and then hauled their supplies 16 miles from Dyea to the foot of Chilkoot Pass.

Cornell has made his back a network of muscular tissue, while the muscles of his arms are like steel cables. Fatigue is almost unknown to the man. He is energetic, quick to learn and obeyed instructions.

... His loss will be felt. There are many candidates to take his place but Courtney knows that he cannot duplicate the man he has lost. He may come pretty close to doing so, but the man who rows in No. 5 will not be Odell by any means, and Capt. Colson will know it before that triangular race is finished at New London. Experience is necessary in a good oarsman. He must know the rudiments of the art. Odell was the man for No. 5. Who can fill the vacancy?"

Their first major challenge was to transport their supplies to Lake Bennett following the 32 mile Chilkoot Pass Trail. This involved climbing the grueling three-quarter mile "Golden Stairway" to the summit of the Pass, carrying up to 100 pounds of gear on their backs every trip. Scores of trips were required to transport their supplies. Photographs of the gold rush show a parade of hopefuls carrying their gear up Chilkoot Pass. Canadian Mounties were posted at the top of the pass to weigh each prospector's provisions to ensure they had the required ton of gear.

Odell wrote articles for his hometown newspaper in New York during his time in the Yukon. In one article, Odell described the climb up the steep Chilkoot Pass:

> There is a stream of men passing up the Summit all the time, stepping in the tracks of another, very much like men going up stairs - the incline seems about the same. Every fifteen or twenty feet are resting places where the weary packer steps out of the line to rest his shoulders and catch his breath. From a distance away it looks like a string of toiling ants creeping up a small mound. Such scenes I never saw or imagined, nor can I attempt to describe them. At some of the steeper places on the pass below the Summit men have rigged up pulleys. Several men haul an empty sled down the hill, which sled is attached to a rope running through a pulley at the top of the hill. At the other end of the rope is a loaded sled, which is hauled up as the empty sled is hauled down.

Odell's memories from his Cornell rowing days helped him in the climb.

> Now let me take you to the top if you have rested sufficiently after climbing the mile and half from the Stone House to the Scales. You have only about three-quarters of a mile of slippery stairs. This is the summit proper, very proper indeed. It is divided in two parts, a long hill, and a shorter hill, with a narrow ledge between. Up these hills are stretched ropes. The climber seized the rope in his right hand, a climbing pike in his left, and moves on with the slowly moving line. I packed up two sacks of flour, fifty pounds each, my first trip up. Going up the last hill the one thing in my mind was that last mile at Poughkeepsie last year when I was straining my ears to hear the coxswain shout 'give her twenty-five boys'. When I finally reached the top I was quite ready to fall against a snow bank and rest. There on the summit is the customs officer's tent, and piles of freight on top of the snow, and buried deep under the snow.

(Emphasis added)[16]

Odell said the several trips up and down the pass in one day were "about the hardest day's work I ever did." Odell and Aldrich spent from April 7 to April 21 hauling their supplies over the Pass before they reached the next stage of the trip. The trip over Chilkoot Pass was as dangerous as it was difficult. Odell's diary notes several slides on the Pass while they were in the area, one of which "killed many." One of his pictures shows the place on the Pass where 54 men were killed in one slide.

From the summit, they hauled their two tons of supplies by sled 16 miles to Lake Bennett, where they built a boat to travel down the Yukon River. Planks were made by "whipsawing" logs using a two handled saw, one person working in a pit below the logs and the other working above. The man in the pit got showered with sawdust, a highly distasteful job according to Odell . His diary notes "considerable difficulty and some profanity." After the boat was assembled, pitch and oakum were used to caulk between planks. Oars, a mast, and a pump were built by hand. Sails were handsewn. Odell and Aldrich finally began their journey down the Yukon River in late June, several weeks after most of the other prospectors had left. The Mounted Police gave their boat license number 14,039, showing how many boats had left before them.

Odell and Aldrich proudly hung a small red and white Cornell pennant from

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[16] *Baldwinsville Gazette and Farmer's Journal*, May 5, 1898. The trips down to pick up the next load were quite different. "The funniest sight is the return trip of the packers down the Summit. It is too steep to walk. They sit down and slide in long grooves in the snow worn by many slides down in many days. I tried it yesterday and came down like a whirlwind. It gives one a very exhilarating sensation coming down, and quite like a moist sensation after he gets down. The regular packers reinforce their garments with a piece of canvas or sealskin." Id.

the mast of their boat showing their loyalty to their alma mater. The Big Red was finally off on their Argonaut adventure down the Yukon River.

Their next challenge was to travel down the treacherous Yukon River by sailing, rowing, and floating. At the head of Miles Canyon, they lightened their boat, had their goods transported around the Canyon on a wood-track tramway, and hired a pilot to take their boat through the Canyon and the Whitehorse Rapids.[17] They then had to navigate the Five Fingers Rapids and the Rink Rapids, reaching Fort Selkirk 33 days after leaving Lake Bennett. Fort Selkirk was a trading post on the Yukon River about two-thirds of the way from Lake Bennett to Dawson and the Klondike.

The Search for Gold

Next, they had to find the ever elusive gold. They decided to prospect for gold in the Fort Selkirk area rather than travel further to Dawson where most of the good prospecting sites had already been claimed. Odell and Aldrich joined forces with several other Americans at Fort Selkirk, and prospected on Wolverine Creek, which Odell said was about 35 miles from Fort Selkirk. After finding "colors" or specks of gold by panning in the creek, they dug shafts in the nearby old creek bed. The idea was to dig a vertical hole down to the bedrock, and then fan out in horizontal tunnels just above the bed rock where gold nuggets would hopefully be found. Permafrost started two feet from the surface, so they built fires to melt the frozen dirt, and then

[17] An entry in Odell's diary for July 1, 1898 notes that when they were in Miles Canyon, they "[h]eard of Cornell's victory over Yale and Harvard," the 1898 crew following the tradition begun by the class of 1897.

dug out the mud, dirt, and rocks. They built cribs, or supports, to keep the walls from caving in as they burned and dug their way down. A winch was built on top of the shaft around which a rope was wound, and a bucket attached that was lowered into the shaft to haul out the dirt and rock. Odell's diary indicates the shaft caved in several times. Little "color" was found and the larger group broke up and left the site.

Odell, Aldrich, and two others later returned to the site on Wolverine Creek, where they built a cabin for the winter and hung their Cornell pennant on the cabin's wall.[18] They dug three shafts, one reaching thirty feet. The Fall of 1898 and Winter of 1899 were very cold and dreary. Odell's diary recorded temperatures of 45, 46, and 51 below zero, and noted that the prospectors were frequently sick.

The men made weekly treks by snowshoe from their cabin to Fort Selkirk for supplies, and to get away from the cabin to break up the tedium of winter. Odell's diary says the trip was 35 miles one way, and the men hiked it in one long day of 14 or 15 hours, although the distance may have actually been shorter. The rigors of the hike were noted in Odell's diary. One day, a member of their group "gave out half way to Selkirk," and the men took five hours to cover that part of the trip which usually

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[18] Odell's diary describes the shopping list for their trip to Fort Selkirk before they return to their camp on Wolverine Creek for the winter. "25 lbs. peaches, 40 lbs. corn meal, 350 lbs. flour, __ lbs. baking soda, __ pkgs magic yeast, 2 lbs. soda, 50 lbs. pea meal, 50 lbs. potatoes, 175 lbs. beans, 25 lbs. raisins & plums, 20 lbs. rice, 150 lbs. bacon, 5 lbs. pilot bread, 85 lbs. sugar, 25 lbs. apples, 15 lbs. tea, 9 lbs. coffee, 4 pkgs. Grampa's Wonder, 7 pkgs. Ivory soap, 2 jars extract of beef, 1 lb. Eggs, 2 ½ lbs. citric acid, ½ lb. Ginger, ½ lb. mustard, 1 lb. pepper, 2 bottles vinegar, 16 cans condensed milk, 2 boxes candles, 4 panes glass."

One can only imagine what "Grampa's Wonder" is or how it is used.

took two. It was too cold to wear boots so they wore two pairs of heavy German wool socks and moccasins. On one trip his diary notes: "moccasins and socks wore through, wrapped feet in flour sack." Odell's family still has a pair of his moccasins.

Gold Dreams Fade: Leaving the Yukon for Seattle

Their last challenge was the long trek back to Skagway. As was true for most lured to the Yukon by the dream of striking it rich, their claim failed to yield any significant amounts of gold. Several small nuggets were found, not much to show for their efforts. After a harsh winter of prospecting, reality set in, and the men decided to get on with the next phase of their lives. Odell's diary notes "not very cheerful."

Odell and Aldrich left Fort Selkirk in mid-February 1899 on the 400 mile trek back to Skagway. A last photo taken at the prospecting site shows several men pulling a sled with a horse collar, with a caption saying "lean into the collar, the unspoken slogan of '97." Odell described the effort to haul their supplies to Ft. Selkirk as "regular horse work." Apart from a few nuggets and many memories, these attempts at humor were all that Odell and Aldrich brought home from the Yukon. "Buck," their trusty buckskin horse, and dogs pulled their sled from Ft. Selkirk to Skagway. Each day they hiked between 12 and 30 miles, and slept in dirty, cramped bunkhouses. After three weeks they reached Skagway, no longer cheechakos but hardened and weary sourdoughs. A real hotel room, steambaths, medicine, and new clothes were the first order of business.

Aldrich returned by boat to Seattle and train to Ithaca, where he finished his law degree in the Autumn of 1899. Aldrich practiced law in Maine for many years

thereafter. Odell remained for several months in Skagway, acting as an agent for the newly constructed White Pass and Yukon Railway, and later the Alaskan Steamship Company. Odell moved to Seattle in late 1899.

The gold rush caused Seattle to grow substantially in both population and wealth. Seattle was the jumping off point for the gold rush, and its merchants prospered by outfitting prospectors heading north. In addition, all of the gold found in the Yukon, and most of the wealth generated in the gold fields, ended up in Seattle. The gold rush pulled the entire country out of economic doldrums, and ended the worst depression the United States had experienced up to that time.

After moving to Seattle, Odell formed a construction company which specialized in concrete work. His firm took advantage of Seattle's growth, paving many of the city's sidewalks in its downtown area, paving the ship canal built in 1916 which linked Puget Sound with Lake Washington, and paving Snoqualmie Pass through the Cascade Mountains, the present day route for the I-90 freeway extending from Seattle to Boston.[19] Odell's financial benefactor, L.C. Smith, invested in Seattle, building the Smith Tower in 1914, the tallest building west of the Mississippi until the 1960s.

In 1960, Odell described his time in the Yukon in his typical modest way: "A year of wonderful adventure and experiences. But remember - there were thousands

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[19] Odell's modesty was seen in his professional as well as in his personal life. It was traditional for contractors who paved Seattle's sidewalks to put the name of their firm on their work. Odell refused to do so, saying that he did not want people walking on his good name.

upon thousands of people who did this in 1897 and 1898. In Seattle, above tale is commonplace."

The Cornell pennant Odell took to the gold rush, which had been given to him by a fraternity brother when he left Ithaca for the Yukon, was proudly displayed in his house in Seattle as a constant reminder of his Alma Mater and his Yukon adventures.

> Brought it out over the ice with us on our four hundred mile walk [out of the Yukon]. Now faded and grimy it adorns my rooms [in Seattle], a remembrance of happy days in college, of wild free life in the Yukon wilderness, and now above all love for Alma Mater and brotherly affection between boys of a fraternity.

Odell's Cornell pennant remains in the family.

Odell died in Seattle in 1963 at age 94. Vigorous to the end, he continued to go to work and do his own gardening until the summer of his death.

CHAPTER III

ROWING STARTS AT WASHINGTON WITH CORNELL'S INFLUENCE

The Early Days

Cornell influenced rowing at the University of Washington from the beginning.

E.F. Blaine, a lawyer and land developer, lived in Ithaca before moving to Seattle in the late 1800s. Blaine knew of Cornell's successful rowing program, and wanted to start a similar program at Washington to take advantage of Seattle's mild weather, accessible water, and tall young men mainly of Scandinavian descent whose families had moved to the area for its logging and fishing. In 1899, Blaine donated $200 to start a rowing program at Washington, and later Blaine and other Seattle businessmen spent $650 to build two training gigs and a boathouse for the U.W. crew.[20]

Washington hired its first crew coach in 1903, James Knight, the football and track coach who had rowed at Princeton. Washington's first inter-collegiate race was in 1903 against Cal Berkeley, in fours-oared gigs without coxswain. Washington won the race by over three lengths beginning its winning tradition.[21]

Cornell's influence on Washington rowing continued in 1904 when the school purchased a four-oared shell from Ithaca for $400, and expanded in 1906 when Washington did not have funds to hire a rowing coach, and turned to local rowers to fill the void. Mark Odell, Cornell 1897, who learned his rowing under Coach Courtney,

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[20] "Rowing Begins at the University of Washington on December 15, 1899," *Historylink.org*

[21] "Husky Crew 100 Year History," University of Washington crew website.

and George Strange, two businessmen and ex-college rowers living in Seattle, were recruited by the University's athletic manager to coach Washington's crew in 1906.[22] The 1908 University of Washington *T*yee said:

> Rowing prospects for the spring of 1906 did not look bright at the outset, as the A.S.U.W. felt unable to pay for the services of a coach. But through the efforts of General Manager Grinstead and the coaching of George Strange and Mark O'Dell [sic], the Varsity Four promised to be a winner.

Odell and Strange donated their time to coaching Washington rowers because of their love of the sport. Early morning turnouts were held so the coaches could go to work afterwards. Beck, *Rowing at Washington*. Beginning in 1906, Washington rowers were taught the Cornell rowing techniques developed by coach Courtney which had dominated east coast rowing since 1897. Odell brought to the shores of Lake Washington, his experiences learned rowing on Cuyuga Lake under the "Old Man," and the winning ways of his 1897 IRA championship crew.

An article on Washington rowing later reported that Washington's crew program "started" under Mark Odell, and Odell's obituary said that he "organized a rowing club

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[22] "Stepping up were George Strange and Mark O"Dell [sic] who with the help of General Manager Loren Grinstead, oversaw the program and selected a crew." "Husky Crew 100 Year History." Grinstead later wrote that "[r]owing was carried for the 1906 season through the gratuitous assistance of Capt. Balliet, Mark Odell and George Strange, the later being from Toronto.... Both Odell and Balliet did considerable." Beck, papers.

Little is known about George Strange. Years later, Mark Odell said he believed that Strange had rowed at Yale. Strange was identified as "a member of that Argonaut Crew which had such a reputation at the St. Louis Exposition crew races." Beck, *Rowing at Washington*. The Argonauts were a famous rowing club in Toronto Canada. Ned Hanlin, Couch Courteny's opponent on the professional rowing circuit, was from Toronto.

which was instrumental in establishing rowing at the University of Washington."[23]

1906 also was the year that Washington's crew program took a major step forward by acquiring two used eight-oared shells (from Cornell, of course), financed by Seattle businessmen, likely including Odell. Beck, *Rowing at Washington.*

> Again, through the generosity of Seattle business men, Washington was enabled to purchase two eight-oared shells from Cornell, one of which is the 1902 Henley shell that established the record on the Poughkeepsie course....The Washington Navy now consists of two eight-oared boats, two four-oared shells, one eight-oared barge and two four-oared barges. With this equipment, our natural advantages, and hearty support of both students and citizens of Seattle, there is no reason why the University should not turn out winning crews.

University of Washington *Tyee* of 1908. Acknowledging Cornells' dominance in rowing circles since Odell's 1897 crew won the IRA championship, the annual established a lofty goal for the school: "It is now up to Washington to prove herself the Cornell of the Pacific Coast." (Emphasis added). Id.

The acquisition of eight-oared shells allowed Washington to engage in serious crew racing for the first time. The University of California at Berkeley purchased three eights from Cornell at the same time. Eight-oared competition began on the west coast in 1907 with the annual Triangle Regatta, where crews from Washington, California and Stanford competed against each other. "Husky Crew 100 Year History."

The Conibear - Pocock Era

Washington's crew program took a significant step forward in 1907 when Hiram Conibear (later known as the father of Washington rowing) was hired as crew coach.

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[23] Evans, Walter, "Hiram Conibear: Revolutionizer of Crew Racing", Bicentennial Biographies, *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, spring 1976; "Mark Odell, Insuranceman, Succumbs," *Seattle Times*, June 26, 1963.

Conibear was lured to Washington in 1906 from Chicago by Dr. Bill Speidel, a former U.W. quarterback studying dentistry there, and a relative of the authors through marriage. Conibear had been a professional bicycle racer, the trainer for the Chicago White Sox, and the trainer for the football teams at the Universities of Illinois and Chicago (under coach Alonzo Stagg). Conibear was hired as the athletic trainer for Washington's football and track programs, and as assistant football coach. He decided that crew was the perfect off-season sport for conditioning his football players. Daves and Porter, *The Glory of Washington;* Beck, *Rowing at Washington.*

When Conibear became Washington's crew coach in 1907, there was one problem: he did not know how to row.[24] When asked about being the crew coach, he replied "I'd make a good one...[but] to tell you the truth, I don't know one end of the boat from the other." Daves and Porter, *The Glory of Washington.* Conibear described his initial coaching technique as follows: "I have to yell and cuss a little in order to bluff my way along until I have a chance to grasp what I'm trying to coach."[25] Given Conibear's rowing limitations, it is fortunate that Seattle had experienced volunteer coaches available. Odell continued his assistance to Washington's rowing program.

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[24] Conibear had very limited rowing experience, but what he knew shows another debt to Cornell. He said that Dr. A.L. Sharpe, "now coaching at Cornell," gave him his first lesson in "the art of pulling an oar." Conibear, Hiram, "Coaching A Varsity Crew." Conibear attended a summer session at Chatauqua Lake in New York in 1905 where he rowed in a four-oared barge coached by Dr. Albert A. Sharpe. Beck, *Rowing at Washington.* Sharpe said that Conibear attended the Chautauqua School of Physical Education in 1905. Dr. Albert H. Sharpe, M.D. was later Cornell's athletic director. In 1923, Sharpe was the Director of the Ithaca School of Physical Education. Beck, papers.

[25] Evans, "Hiram Conibear: Revolutionizer of Crew Racing."

Conibear brought enthusiasm and success to the Washington rowing program. The *Tyee* of *1910* stated that "[n]ever in the history of the University of Washington has the crew had a more successful season than that of 1908." In 1908, 54 men turned out for crew along with 50 women. Beck, *Rowing at Washington.* Acknowledging again its debt to its mentor in Ithaca, the annual stated:

> Washington has made a mighty stride toward the goal of her ambition, to become the 'Cornell of the Pacific.' Her rowing traditions have a broad foundation upon which to become fixed.... Washington bids fair to become the premier rowing institution in the United States. (Emphasis added).

Showing the program's growth, 165 men turned out for crew in 1910. Id.

Conibear learned the art of rowing from his assistant coaches and from his own novel experiments: "[w]hat I know about rowing has been learned largely as a result of observation and study." Beck, *Rowing at Washington.* Conibear took a skeleton home from the biology department, placed it in a shell, and used it to study the anatomical movement of the stroke and the physiology of rowing. Conibear placed a broom handle into the skeleton's hands to serve as an oar. He moved the skeleton through the motion of a stroke noting the position of the bones at each stage. He then turned a bicycle upside down and turned the wheel with his hand, the wheel serving as the water and his palm the oar blade. He realized that unless the oar blade struck the water at a speed equal to or greater than the water's speed, there would be a moment of unwanted drag. Daves and Porter, *The Glory of Washington.*

Conibear used this bizarre experiment, along with advice from his assistants, to develop the "Conibear stroke," into which he later incorporated elements of the

English traditional method of rowing (the Thames watermen's stroke).[26] Conibear is "... the most famous rowing coach in Washington's history [who] never rowed a stroke in a racing shell in his life, but his innovations revolutionized the sport." Id. The Conibear stroke influenced rowing in the United States for many decades.

One of Conibear's major accomplishments was to convince George Yeoman Pocock, and his brother Dick, to move from Vancouver, Canada to Seattle in 1912 to build shells for Washington's crew program. The Pococks came from a family of boatbuilders and rowers in England, and were accomplished rowers themselves who had immigrated to Canada in 1910 to seek their fortunes in the new world.

George Pocock came from a family of well known boat builders in England. His great uncle, William, built the first seamless rowing shell around 1845 (previously they were of lapstrake construction). George's father was the boat builder at Eton College, a prep school which had an extensive rowing program, and was later manager of Eton's boat house. The entire Pocock family rowed well. Dick Pocock won the Doggett Coat and Badge Race, the oldest rowing competition, rowing against professional watermen. His sister Lucy won England's women's rowing championship in 1910. George learned to row by emulating Ernest Berry the professional rowing champion of the world at the time. George won the award in 1908 as the best rower in England, when he was 17, an award coming with 50 pounds sterling. Newell, *Ready All.*

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[26] The Conibear stroke has been described as having a shorter layback, a snap of the oar blade the instant it was inserted into the water, and a "shot" of the blade out of the water at the completion of the rower's drive. Id.

The Pococks' first meeting with Conibear shows how little he knew about rowing. The Pococks were living on a houseboat near Vancouver, Canada, accessible only by boat. One day they saw a man rowing toward their houseboat, lurching so badly they feared he would capsize. They thought the rower must be "under the influence of alcohol" he was rowing so poorly. It was with great surprise that the Pococks learned "this clumsiest of oarsmen" was Washington's rowing coach. Id.

Notwithstanding his lack of rowing skills, Conibear convinced the Pococks to move to Seattle with a vision of building a rowing dynasty at Washington, and a promise to buy 12 racing shells they would build for its program, an offer the Pococks felt was too good to be true. It was. There was only money available to buy one shell.

The Pococks settled in Seattle nonetheless, and built their first eight-oared shell for Washington in 1912. They sold an eight-oared shell to California the next year as their reputation for building quality boats spread. The Pococks earned their living by building floats for seaplanes being built by Bill Boeing, a young Seattle businessman who started the Boeing Aircraft Company, while they built rowing shells on the side. In 1922, the Pococks went into the boat building business full time, and George Pocock built rowing shells on the University of Washington campus for over 40 years, supplying the Huskies and virtually every other crew program in the U.S. and Europe with finely crafted wooden shells that became the world standard.[27]

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[27] The Pocock motto about boat building that guided their work came from George's father. "No one will ask how long it took you to build it, they will only ask who built it." Newell, *Ready All.*

Washington rowed in its first IRA race in 1913. Cornell was the heavy favorite, but Syracuse won the race with Cornell finishing second and Washington a surprising third. The complexion of American rowing was irreversibly altered, and east coast schools were put on notice that Washington rowing was for real. This race put Washington rowing on the national map. Washington did not return to the IRA regatta until 1922, where they took second behind Navy. Washington won its first IRA regatta in 1923, beating Navy by a length with other great east coast crews trailing. Beck, *Rowing at Washington;* "Husky Crew 100 Year History."

George Pocock helped coach Washington's crews for decades, and his Thames waterman's style of rowing was integrated into Washington's stroke.[28] Pocock's statement that rowing is "rhythm, balance, and harmony" still best describes the sport. George's son Stan Pocock, rowed at and later coached at Washington and Lake Washington Rowing Club (his rowers won medals in the 1956, 1960 and 1964 Olympics), and joined his father in the boat building business. Pocock, Stan, *Way Enough*. The Pocock Rowing Center, a master's rowing facility near the U.W. campus, is a lasting memorial to the contributions the Pocock family made to rowing.

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[28] When the Washington crew went to race in Henley in 1958, George Pocock sent them off with this message: "Racing is an art, not a frantic scramble. It must be rowed with head power as well as muscular power. From the first stroke, all thought of the other crew must be blocked out. Your thoughts must be directed to you and your own boat, always positively, never negative. Row your optimum power every stroke, try and increase the optimum. Men as fit as you, when your everyday strength is gone, can draw on a mysterious reservoir of power, far greater. Then it is you who can reach for the stars. That is the only way champions are made. That is the legacy rowing can leave you. Don't miss it."

Mark Odell continued to work with Washington's rowing program into the 1920s. Newspaper clippings show Odell as the race steward, refereeing a meet between Washington and Cal in 1922. Washington beat Cal. "Washington Oarsmen Defeat California by more than Ten Lengths," Seattle Times, April 23, 1922. Odell's son Mark, Jr. earned a letter in 1935 rowing on Washington's lightweight crew.

Washington Becomes a Rowing Dynasty and Influences Rowing Throughout the Country

Washington's crews, well coached because of Cornell's early influence, dominated west coast rowing for much of the 20th century. Washington crews, both men and women, compete nationally and internationally.

Conibear lobbied early in his career to make woman's rowing a part of the physical education program at Washington, and the school had an active woman's rowing program from 1906 - 1917. Women rowed in fours, doubles and singles initially, and got their first eight in 1915. In 1908, 50 women rowed, in 1910 over 40 women rowed, followed by 60 in 1911. By 1916, two regattas were held for women, with four eight-oared shells competing, representing each class. The rules of competition for women were different in those days, with the crews judged on "posture, appearance (and) oarsmanship." Women's rowing was dormant after World War I, beginning again in 1969 as a club sport, and in 1976 as a varsity sport, becoming a hugely successful program thereafter. "Husky Crew 100 Year History;" Beck, *Rowing at Washington.*

By 2003, Washington men's eights had won 28 out of 43 Pacific Coast titles, its women's eights won 22 out of 27 titles, and Washington crews had won 68 national titles, the first in 1923. Washington rowers have participated in many Olympic events,

winning gold in the men's eights in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, gold in the men's four in 1948 in London, and a bronze in 1952 in Helsinki.[29] The Pocock built shell rowed by Washington's crew that won a gold medal in the 1936 Berlin Olympics is on permanent display at the Pocock Rowing Center.

Washington rowers went on to coach a number of crew programs throughout the country, spreading Washington rowing techniques to most major institutions in the United States. By 1937, virtually every major rowing program in the US "enjoyed the benefit of a Washington coach." Mendenhall, Tom, *Short History of American Rowing*.

Returning the favor to Cornell for its early assistance to Washington's rowing program, Rollin Harrison "Stork" Sanford (U.W. '26) coached at Cornell for 33 seasons winning four national championships in the 1950s. Norm Sonju (U.W. '27) was Sanford's assistant at Cornell, and then coach at Wisconsin for 22 years.[30]

Ed Leader (U.W. '16) coached at Washington after Conibear, and in 1922 went to Yale as crew coach taking Dick Pocock with him as an assistant. Russell S. "Rusty" Callow (U.W. '15) coached at Washington (winning the IRA championship in 1923, 1924 and 1926), became rowing coach at Penn in 1928 where he coached for 20 plus years, and later coached at the Naval Academy where his crew won a gold medal in the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki, Finland. Carrall M. "Ky" Ebright (U.W. '17) was an assistant to Callow at Washington, and in 1924 left for Cal Berkeley where he coached for 35 years,

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[29] Wahl,Grant "The Evergreen State Boasts an Unmatched Rowing Tradition 100 Years in the Making," *Sports Illustrated*, November 13, 2004.; Raley, Dan,"Crew: U.W.'s Most Successful, Stable Athletic Enterprise," *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, May 1, 2003.

[30] Raley, "U.W. Has Wide Coaching Legacy."

from 1924-1959, making Cal's program into a rowing dynasty. His rowers won three gold medals in the Olympics, including gold in the 1948 Olympics in London, and five national championships. The Cal boathouse is named after Ebright.[31]

Seattle has become a center for masters and youth rowing as well for collegiate rowing. Nine rowers with Seattle area connections went to the 2004 Olympics in Athens, competing in men's and women's eights, women's singles, men's pair, men's quad, and men's lightweight doubles. Five rowers from Washington's crew program rowed in Athens.[32] Four Seattle coaches, including two sculling coaches from the Pocock Rowing Center, coached US rowers in Athens, and a Pocock Rowing Center rower competed in the woman's singles. "Our Local Olympic Hopefuls," *Seattle Times*, August 10, 2004.

Cornell can take a great deal of pride knowing that its highly successful rowing program played a major role in starting and influencing rowing at the University of Washington. Washington thereafter helped to influence rowing throughout the west coast and indeed the entire country.

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[31] Tom Bolles (U.W. '26) coached at Harvard. Mike Murphy (U.W. '22) coached at Wisconsin. Bud Raney (U.W. '35) coached at Columbia. Gus Eriksen (U.W. '38) coached at Syracuse. Delos Schoch (U.W. '37) coached at Princeton. MIT hired three Washington rowers as coaches, Bob Moch (U.W. '36), Jim McMillen (U.W. '37), and Bruce Beall (U.W.'73). Beall also coached at Cal. John Bisset (U.W. '58) and Jerry Johnson (U.W. '64) coached at UCLA. Navy hired Lou Gellerman (U.W. '58) and Rick Clothier (U.W. '65) who has coached there for 29 years. Kjell Oswald (U.W. '96) coaches at Oregon State. Id.

[32] Anna Mickelson (U.W. 2002) and Mary Whipple (U.W. 2002) rowed in the silver medal winning women's eight, and Matt Deakin (U.W. 2003) rowed in the gold medal winning men's eight.

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APPENDIX A

"STORY OF THE RACE AND RETURN," BY MARK ODELL

CORNELL ERA, 1898

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