

ODYSSEY OF THE CENTENNIAL

Silvanus Smith, who built *Centennial*, learned his trade working in the shipyards of Samuel Hall and Donald McKay. *Centennial* had the elegant lines of the clippers built by McKay. Illustrated is *Glory of the Seas*, the last of the great clippers built by McKay.

THE SAILING SHIP *CENTENNIAL* BEGAN LIFE SURROUNDED BY MASTER SHIPBUILDERS, LEGENDARY SEA CAPTAINS, AND HISTORIC MARITIME EVENTS. WHEN HER 55-YEAR ODYSSEY WAS COMING TO A CLOSE, SHE GAINED NOTORIETY AS A MOVIE PROP, GAMBLING BARGE, AND PIRATE GALLEON

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Named after America's forthcoming anniversary celebration, the *Centennial* splashed into the world auspiciously. She was crafted as a "Down-Easter," with the clean, fast lines of a clipper ship, but deeper and fuller in shape to carry more cargo. A three-masted wooden vessel, she was 206 feet long, 38 feet wide and measured 1233 tons. During the 1875 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, she was displayed as "the finest example of shipbuilding."

The *Centennial* was fashioned by prominent shipbuilders Smith & Townsend of East Boston, Massachusetts. The duo owned controlling interest in the vessel, acted as her managers and took great care in her creation. "Her timbers had been extra well-seasoned," historian Frederick Matthews commented, "and she was slowly and carefully built."

Silvanus Smith, the son of a sea captain, learned his trade working in

the shipyards of master shipbuilders Samuel Hall and Donald McKay. Hall and McKay became two of the country's most famous clipper shipbuilders. After constructing three vessels on his own, Smith entered into business with Paul Curtis who was known for "crafting ships that never foundered." Around 1873, Smith partnered with James L. Townsend who was previously associated with William Currier with whom he created many fine,



The *Centennial* was launched in 1875 as a three-masted Down Easter. Years later, she was rigged as a four-masted barkentine. (San Francisco Maritime National Historic Park)



Painting of the *Centennial* done in 1877 by William Hoard Yorke.