

Ed Convey: Everyman

Corinthian's Seventeenth Commodore

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Many early Corinthian commodores were leading business or political figures or were active in the maritime industry: Ed Convey was none of these things. A second-generation San Francisco butcher, he passed a generally unremarkable life but led CYC during the important time when the new clubhouse was completed and dedicated. He served a single term as commodore; however, many sources credit him with two terms, choosing to ignore the existence of his successor.

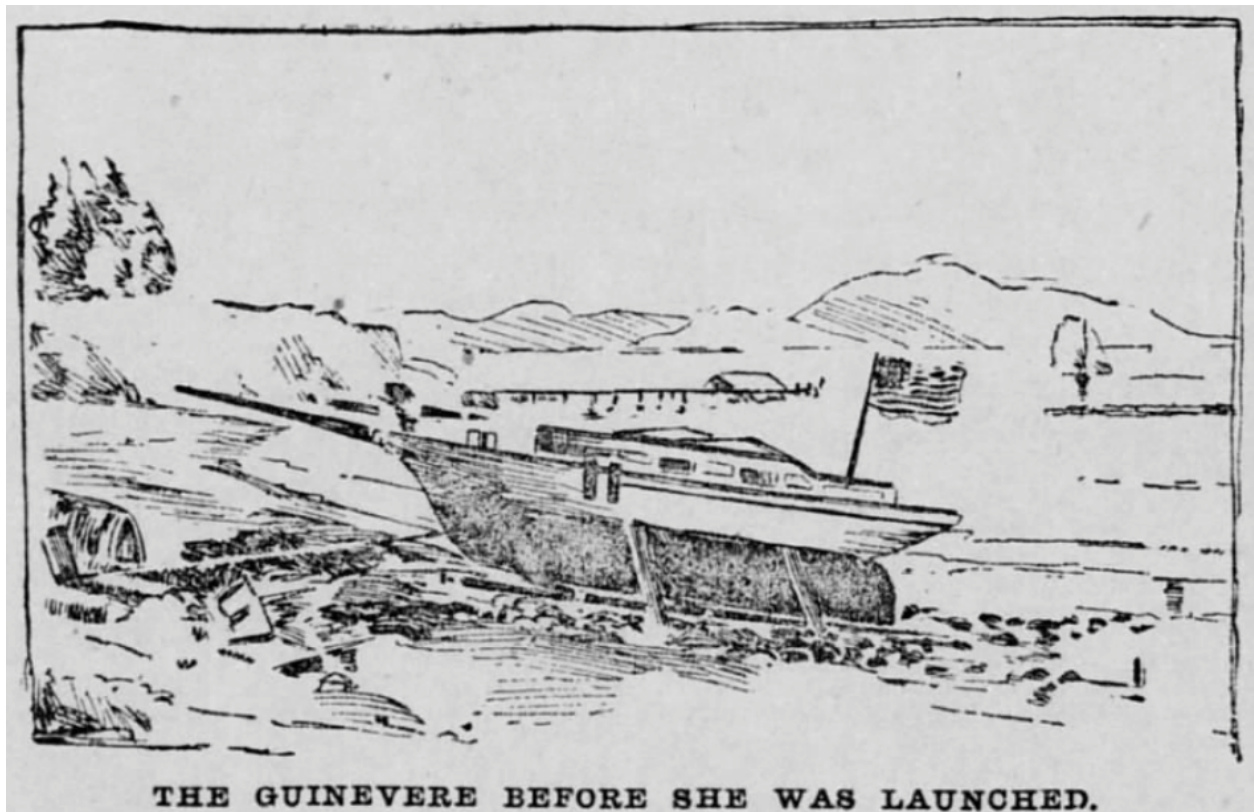


Edward J. Convey, Jr. (1873–1925)
Corinthian's Seventeenth Commodore (1912)
[CYC Archives]

Edward James Convey, Jr., was born in San Francisco in 1873. His father, who had emigrated from Ireland in 1863, established himself as a butcher, then married Margaret Timmons in 1872. Edward, Jr., was born in 1873, followed quickly by another son, John. Both boys also became butchers, and the family business became known as Convey & Sons (a name that

continued to be used even after their father died in 1911). Over Ed's career, the company made only one change of any consequence: in the early 1900s it stopped selling to retail customers and switched to the wholesale market. By the time the U.S. entered World War I, Convey & Sons had contracts to supply meat to both the army and navy.

Convey first came to the notice of the yachting world in 1895, when he helped build a boat. Ed, his brother, and their friends Fred and John Meyer constructed a slipway at the foot of Larkin Street and in January laid down the keel of what would become a 35-foot yawl. Fred, the older Meyer brother, drew up the plans and the group worked in their leisure moments to build the craft. The launching was announced for July 7, and by early afternoon the beach was crowded with people. At half-past four, the Conveys' 15-year-old youngest sister Annie, clad in "a neat yachting costume," took her place on the deck; the boat slid down the ways, she broke a bottle of champagne over the bow, and she was christened *Guinevere*. It was said that the vessel was the first of its class to have been built on the Pacific Coast. The following year Ed joined Corinthian¹.



Convey helped build the 35-foot yawl *Guinevere* in San Francisco in 1895
[SF Call and Post, 8 July 1895]

¹ They built at least one other yacht together, the 15-foot-class yawl *Geniveve*. She had so much success during the 1896 racing season that Corinthian Tom Miller bought her from the boys.

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Sailing was not the only form of water sport in which Ed indulged: in 1904 he and a rowing partner defeated another pair in a Whitehall boat race from Powell Street wharf to Alcatraz and back. But Ed was apparently not yet all that accomplished a yacht sailor. One Sunday in August 1905, he and four other yachtsmen took seven young women out for a day's sail aboard the 25-foot *Mist*. Leaving Tiburon in the morning, they enjoyed fine sailing until the afternoon, when the wind failed. In those days before auxiliary engines were common, they found themselves unable to avoid piling up on the beach at California City. When efforts to refloat *Mist* proved futile, they went ashore in a small boat and while doing so, two of the young women fell overboard (they were rescued). It was a twelve mile walk over the hills back to Tiburon, but the party set out. When they arrived, they learned that the last ferry to San Francisco had already left, and they could not obtain a boat to return them to the City that day. Consequently, all twelve spent the night hanging around the ferry waiting room before they could return Monday morning.

His sailing skills improved with time, and Ed undertook several cruises, to Santa Cruz, Sacramento, and other ports. In 1911, he was elected vice-commodore of Corinthian. In accordance with tradition, he was elected commodore the following year. His 46-foot sloop *Mischief* became his flagship.



Caricature of Convey at Opening Day of the 1911 season
(the newspaper got his middle initial wrong)
[SF Chronicle, 30 April 1911]

With their new clubhouse still under construction, Opening Day 1912 presented a problem for the Corinthians. It looked like the club would be unable to host the usual public open house, but then San Francisco Yacht Club kindly invited the Corinthians to share their facilities in Sausalito. SFYC Commodore Jim Lanagan worked with Convey to plan the event, the first time the two rival clubs had worked together on a shared opening celebration. Enthusiasm for the event ran high, with Convey declaring himself to believe the 1912 season would “surpass in every way any event before known on the Pacific Coast.”

There was extra significance in the cooperation, too: with the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition just three years away, it was the ambition of local yachtsmen to host international races on the Bay, and that would require the consolidated effort of all the clubs. Although PICYA provided a structure for such cooperation, the spirit evidenced by the joint CYC-SFYC opening day activities was the first concrete evidence that it might be achieved.

The most important event of Convey’s term as commodore was undoubtedly the opening of the new Corinthian clubhouse. Characterized by the newspapers as “magnificent,” “the last word in everything appertaining to the needs of the yacht fraternity,” and “a model of everything for which the heart pf a yachtsman could yearn,” construction of the building had been completed in early June of 1912. At the suggestion of founder Joe Tracy, it was decided to defer the opening ceremonies until the Fourth of July “on account of the newness of everything and in order to allow the cultivation of an air of mellowness.”

The new building was considerably larger than the previous one, which had been torn down² in 1911. Among the new clubhouse’s main-floor features that attracted comment were the members’ smoking room, a “bar,” large lockers, showers and tub baths, and a kitchen and dining room.³ Beneath the main floor, just above water level, were accommodations for storage of yacht owners’ “large tackle and other paraphernalia.”⁴ The top floor contained a full-width ladies’ room “fitted and furnished in splendid taste”⁵, directors’ meeting rooms (since replaced by restrooms) and the ballroom⁶.

The opening event itself was an informal one, with no invitations issued: word was simply passed around to the yachtsmen of the bay that “all are welcome.” SFYC Commodore Lanagan

² Despite oft-repeated stories stating that the old clubhouse had burnt down, it did not. This supposition resulted from misinterpreting a statement in the 1910 CYC directory that mentioned the loss of some club records in “the fire,” undoubtedly a reference to the great 1906 catastrophe that destroyed much of San Francisco (where the records were stored).

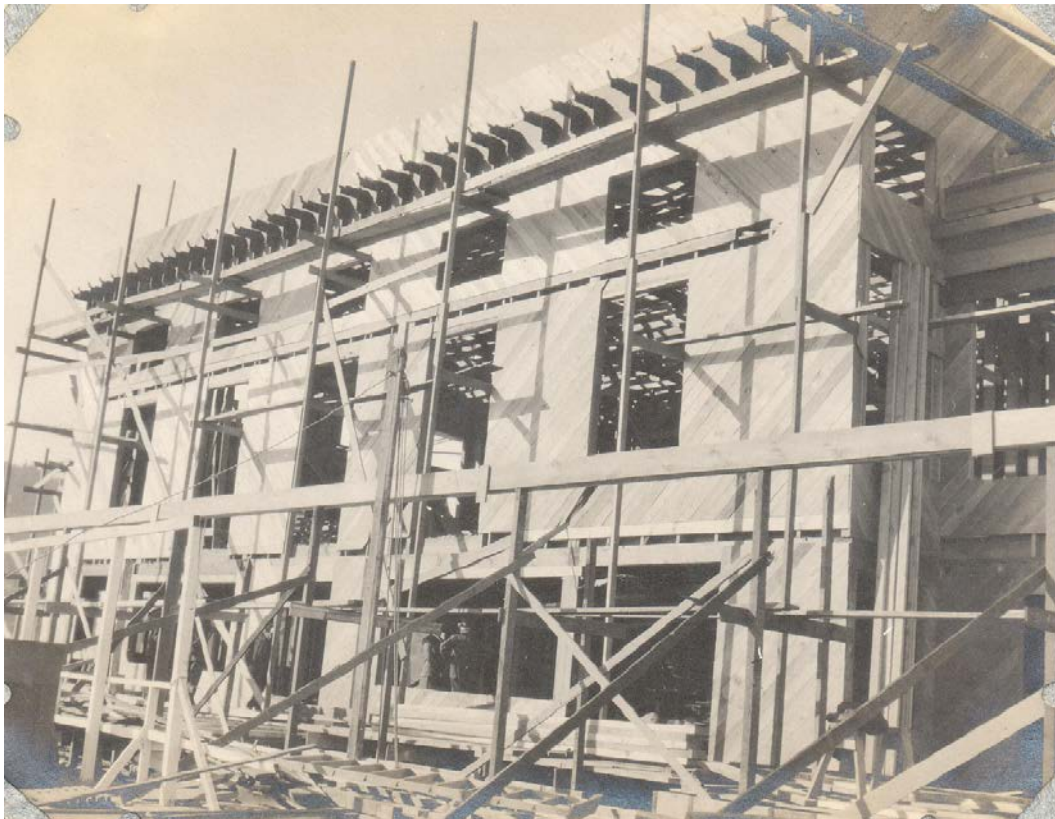
³ Since the club’s by-laws still prohibited the sale of alcohol in the clubhouse, the building was equipped with the “elevator” that had been “an institution in Corinthian circles for many years.” This seems to have been something like a dumb waiter for bringing libations into the building from an outside sales location. The lockers were removed in the 1960s and the rest of the floor plan has been much modified since 1912.

⁴ This area, called “Pneumonia Alley,” had been built years earlier and was simply incorporated into the new structure.

⁵ This is now the upper bar.

⁶ Originally called the “Jinks Room,” this 40’-by-80’ space was fitted with a “regulation stage for the famous jinks of the club.”

promised to attend along with most of his members and Aeolian Yacht Club also planned to be represented. The railroad put on an extra ferry that Thursday that brought more than 500 visitors from The City and it was estimated that a total of "more than 1,000 yachtsmen, their wives, their wives-to-be, their sisters, and other fellows' sisters" were entertained by the Corinthians that day. Convey led the large reception committee, assisted by several others, including Staff Commodores Hogg and Tracy (the latter was also serving as club secretary that year).



The New Clubhouse under Construction, 1912
[CYC Archives]

The afternoon included dancing and a general music program. The opening festivities continued into the evening, when the Pacific Motor Boat Club, whose Beach Road clubhouse was then under construction, held a parade in Belvedere Cove with "the various craft in the pageant being gayly illuminated with varicolored lanterns." All the Corinthian yachts were also decorated with lights, while the army band from Angel Island, stationed on a barge, played popular music.

Perhaps growing out of their opening day planning conversations, Commodores Convey and Lanagan agreed to an "inter-commodore" race later that season. There seemed to be no special

purpose in holding the race, but it was agreed that at its conclusion the loser would pay for the winning crew's dinner at the Miramar Café in Sausalito⁷.

The race itself had its embarrassing moments. Commodore Lanagan, sailing the 30-year-old Stone-built ex-Corinthian 32-footer *Amigo*, won handily, beating Convey's 4-year-old, 46-foot *Mischief* by one minute (actual time; by six minutes on corrected time). *Amigo* was faster on the beat from the start at Meiggs Wharf to the Presidio Shoal buoy, and after the boats had rounded the weather mark, Convey went forward to set his spinnaker. Finding the halyards fouled, he was attempting to clear them when he went overboard. He clung to the lines as he was swept astern, where crewmember Jack Darling fished him out as he was passing the cockpit. Even though climbing the mast to restore the spinnaker halyard cost *Mischief* much time, she managed to catch *Amigo* before the turn for the finish. However, *Amigo* made up the time on the final leg and was victorious.

With 1915 approaching, preparations for the yachting activities at the upcoming world's fair took on increasing importance. By mid-1912 all the local yacht clubs had joined the American Power Boat Association, a New York-based organization that served as the national governing body for motorboating. With their growing motorboat fleets totaling some 700 vessels, the local clubs banded together to form a "self-governing section" of the association. Then, toward the end of Convey's term, Corinthian received a telegram from a rival group, the Seattle-based Pacific Coast International Motor Boat Association, formally protesting the move and requesting that the clubs join their organization instead.⁸ It was thought that if the Seattle group's proposal was accepted, the local clubs might be disenfranchised by the New York association. With planning for 1915 already underway, the potential disruption this might cause was seen as potentially "suicidal." Convey maintained that "unless we are under the auspices of the recognized governing body, we will not have any races here in 1915." With him as one of their leaders, the local clubs seemed inclined to simply ignore the Seattle proposal. A few months later they formally declined the offer from the Northwest.

With Convey's term ending, he declined to run for reelection for 1913, clarifying that his "business interests preclude the possibility of his acceptance of the office for another term." There may have been truth in this: in August he sold *Mischief* to Lee Ellis of Aeolian YC.⁹

Convey was quite a talker. One newspaper story, referring to his Irish heritage, called him a "Blarney-stone licker" who had "a silvery flow of language that would have done justice to a Gladstone." At the 1913 Annual Dinner the Corinthians sent best wishes for the new year to Sir Thomas Lipton. Lipton replied to Convey:

⁷ Built on a long-vanished pier at the foot of Johnson Street, the Miramar Cafe burned twice between 1911 and 1915. The second time the restaurant burned was different, though: the owner was sent to prison for arson.

⁸ Similar telegrams were also sent to PMBC, Sacramento Boat Club, and SFYC.

⁹ By early 1914 she had been converted to an auxiliary yawl and renamed *Ean*.

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Dear Commodore: Your kind cablegram received. Do most heartily reciprocate. Am looking forward with great pleasure to seeing all the boys in 1915. Three cheers for the Panama-Pacific exposition. THOMAS LIPTON

In a quiet and somewhat surprising move, Convey married San Francisco saleslady Lorene Kline in Santa Clara in July 1914; he was forty years old and his bride was twenty-one. Their daughter Elizabeth was born four months later.

The marriage was not successful, and Lorene filed for divorce eighteen months later. Convey continued in the wholesale butcher business until his death in 1925. He was buried in Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery in Colma.

Despite his divorce, when Convey died Lorene applied to administer his estate. This rather unusual request was granted because she was able to show that she was the legal guardian of their daughter, who was Convey's only heir-at-law.