



## **ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**An interview with  
Paul A. Kettenburg, 1913-2006**

**February 19, 1991**

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### **PREFACE**

We have on hand a very good 1985 interview of Paul Kettenburg by Bob Wright, of San Diego Historical Society's oral history program.

Now this 1991 interview, one of a series on the San Diego Yacht Club, concentrates rather on the relationship of the Kettenburgs to the yacht club, including both building boats and racing them.

George Kettenburg, Jr., Paul's older brother, appeared to be an absolute genius at designing boats, with no training at all. At 16, when handed some plans and asked to build a boat, he said it would be better if it could be two feet longer. He altered the design and was proved to be right. This started an extraordinary boat building business.

After George died in 1952, Paul, protesting he was no genius, and always working as if George were looking over his shoulder, continued to turn out equally successful craft.

Paul lives in the La Playa house his father built in 1912 on Kellogg Street between San Fernando and San Geronimo. He met me at the door and took me downstairs to his roomy office, with one corner blocked off for a working space and one wall covered with plaques--racing trophies and small-scale models of their different boat designs. After our interview he showed me his latest pride--a meticulously crafted Ford Speedster, one of a series of antique cars he has restored. Mr. Kettenburg is an unusually bright man, an excellent businessman, designer, manager and craftsman. The San Diego Yacht Club owes a lot of their great success to his boats.

The interview with Paul Kettenburg was conducted in his neat, roomy office, lined with books and with models of boats and airplanes, all his meticulous work. In a room next door sits his present joy, an antique Ford, one of ten classic cars he has restored since he retired from professional boatbuilding. He seems too active to be thought of as "retired." Paul Kettenburg got his start with Kettenburg Marine as a schoolboy, running errands for his big brother George, a real genius in building boats. After helping George for years, he finally designed and built one himself, with George looking over his shoulder, and although he designed and built many others after George died, he was always thinking, "How would George do it?"

So George's spirit remained with Kettenburg Marine, capably handled by Paul and the excellent men chosen to carry on the business of designing, building, and re-working boats of all kinds. Great sailors themselves, their boats are classics and have been a notable influence on West Coast Yachting.

There's no question that Paul's story is as factual as it is interesting.

Ruth Held, Interviewer

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## INTERVIEWER'S NOTE

This is an interview with Paul A. Kettenburg of the famous boat building family and well known himself for winning many races. He has been Commodore of the San Diego Yacht Club and the Southern California Yachting Association and the Pacific Coast Yachting Association and on the Board of Directors of the *Star of India*. Today is February 19, 1991. We are at his house on Point Loma and he is being interviewed by Ruth Held of San Diego Historical Society's Oral History Program. It is one of a series on the San Diego Yacht Club.

**RUTH HELD:** Mr. Kettenburg, your family story has been well told in an interview with Robert Wright of the San Diego Historical Society in 1985, but today we'll add to that your involvement with the San Diego Yacht Club. First of all, let's put in a brief story of your family's arrival in San Diego. Was your father the first in the family to come to San Diego?

**PAUL KETTENBURG:** Yes, he came to San Diego with my two older brothers and two older sisters in 1911.

**RH:** And did he come right to Point Loma? And get property?

**PK:** No, he rented a house in La Mesa. He had spent a winter in San Diego and La Jolla a few years prior and he felt that it was too cold in La Jolla, so he thought maybe La Mesa would be the area. Then he decided it was too warm in La Mesa and he looked for property on Point Loma and finally decided on this particular piece of property where we're now sitting.

**RH:** How big was the piece that he bought?

**PK:** It was just a little over one acre, it was a half a block. It is the half-block between San Fernando and San Gorgonio Streets south of Kellogg Street. Kellogg was not paved at the time, neither was San Gorgonio. That was paved along about 1927.

**RH:** There probably weren't very many houses around here either.

**PK:** No. The house next door south of us was here and a house on the far end of the block north of us which was owned by a Dr. Foster. The little house down on the corner in front of us, on the corner of Kellogg and San Fernando, was there. That had been built by Sergeant Clark who was in the Army at the time, stationed out at Fort Rosecrans. Fort Rosecrans was all Army at that time.

**RH:** I remember they had barracks out there and sometimes the local people would have dances out there, parties.

**PK:** Yes, I am sure. My older sisters were involved in some of those receptions and dances that were held on Fort Rosecrans.

**RH:** Didn't your mother worry about them falling for soldiers?

**PK:** Apparently they did all right.

**RH:** Your father's name was George Kettenburg?

**PK:** That is correct.

**RH:** And where did he come from?

**PK:** He came from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My mother and father were both born in Pittsburgh. My two older brothers and two older sisters were born in Pittsburgh.

**RH:** That is a steel town, was he in that business?

**PK:** No. His father had been in the Civil War and he retired from the Army as a captain. There's his picture over there. He went into the plumbing business with a vengeance. Unfortunately, his father passed away in 1893 and immediately my father sold the plumbing business because he didn't want any part of it.

He developed an electric generating plant in the southern end of Pittsburgh, taking care of approximately six or eight square blocks of buildings. This was about 1895 in the very early days of electrical power, or electric lights. He developed that up until 1910, when he sold that out. He started to go to Florida and the ship that he was going to go on went into drydock for two or three weeks. He decided he didn't feel like waiting for that so he got on the train and came back to California where he had spent one winter. He knew what was out here.

**RH:** So that is when he went to La Mesa instead of La Jolla. So he built this home after he moved away from La Mesa and back to Point Loma.

**PK:** He built this home while he was living in La Mesa, or had it built. The house was completed in August, 1913 and I was born in December, 1913.

**RH:** What is your mother's name?

**PK:** Amelia Eythe.

**RH:** Of German background?

**PK:** Yes.

**RH:** What about Kettenburg, is that German, too?

**PK:** Yes. I am as 100 percent German as anybody can figure out. My daughter did the family history and studied the family back as far as into Germany two or three generations on both my father's and my mother's part. Apparently, up to our family there were nothing but German ancestry.

**RH:** She was born in Pittsburgh, too, and her folks came from Germany? They had four children when they came here.

**PK:** The oldest one was about 15 when they came here. That was Robert.

**RH:** And from here he went to college?

**PK:** Yes. He spent a little time in the Navy during World War I. He graduated from San Diego High School and he was in the Navy for a while then when the war was over he went to college. He went to Stanford. He graduated from Stanford in 1924.

**RH:** How did he get from here to San Diego High?

**PK:** On a motorcycle.

**RH:** Some people went to San Diego High on horseback from here, even to San Diego State in those early days.

**PK:** He had a motorcycle. I think the streetcar line developed on Rosecrans just about that time. I know my other brother and my two sisters went to school on the streetcars.

**RH:** They'd go from here and transfer at Macaulay? Then they'd pick up the Ocean Beach line where my folks were going.

**PK:** That's right.

**RH:** So the second child was George, Jr. He was a real boat designer, they say.

**PK:** It came to him naturally. He never went to any schooling regarding hull design, boat design, naval architecture, or any of those features. He could stand up in discussions with some of the best naval architects, as well as anybody who had been through the complete courses.

**RH:** He just had a natural feel for the shape of a boat and the sails.

**PK:** That's right. Nobody has ever been able to find any connection in any of the relationship back as far as they could go that had any ideas that there was any interest in pleasure boats, or any other kind of boats.

**RH:** Did you follow along with that? Were you good at designing, or what was your specialty?

**PK:** I guess I was good at looking over his shoulder.

**RH:** Of course he was older than you.

**PK:** Yes, he was ten years older than I. Actually when my father got the house finished here, he decided that he wanted to have a boat. Having the bay within three blocks of us he figured he should have a boat. So he bought a little power boat from Dr. Foster who lives in the house just north of us named Joiselle. It didn't have an engine in it. However, my father started out in automobiles in Pittsburgh back when they first came out. His first car was a 1904 Peerless, two cylinder. Then his second car was a 1906 English Daimler that he paid \$6000 for without a body. He never did tell me what he paid for the body. Then when he decided to come to California he took the engine out of that car and brought it out here to California because he thought he probably some day would want to put it in a boat. He junked the car but that car would be worth a fortune today if he had brought the whole thing.

He put that engine in this boat that he bought from Dr. Foster. It wasn't much of a boat. He kind of went along with that until World War I was about over and then he decided maybe he could build a boat for himself. He had never done anything like that but he thought it might be fun. So he bought a set of plans from an eastern naval architect for a 22 foot speedboat. He got it out here and he started laying it out on the floor of the old home to start building it. My brother George kept looking at it and he said, "It'd be a lot better boat if you stretched it out two feet and made a 24 footer out of it." He was only about 15 then. My dad wrote back to the architect and asked him what he thought about doing that and the architect said, "By no means; don't do that." But he did it anyway and it turned out to be a much better boat than it was originally. But still the only engine he could get at that time wasn't a very good engine but it did do pretty good. It did a lot better than the one he had the old English Daimler in.

So they went along with it like that until in the early 1920's the Army decided to sell all their surplus airplane engines over at North Island. Dad got word of that so he went over and bought this Curtis OX5, a 95-horsepower airplane engine that they had in crates by the hundreds. He brought that over and put it in the boat and the boat just almost flew with that in it. Somebody here in town wanted to buy the boat so dad said, "Well, okay, we'll sell the boat." Then they decided to build another one. Only this time they wanted to go to 26 feet and put a French airplane engine in it, which was called a Hispano-Suiza. That was 220 horsepower. That boat could really go and they finally sold that boat to Dick Robinson, who was the builder of the El Cortez Hotel.

About that time he started to build another one and my dad said, "As long as you want to build boats I'll finance you and you go ahead and start building boats if people want to buy them." He built several power boats during that time and finally in 1926 there was. A group of people here in San Diego who were sailors and wanted to start another class of sailboats. They brought their own plans. They were called Sun boats; they were 22' knockabout sloops. There were four people who decided they wanted those so George built those four boats in 1926.

**RH:** It was the first time he had built straight sailboats?

**PK:** Yeah. I think that is where he got some better ideas for sailboats than what were in those plans. There never were any more of those built, but some of them lasted around here up until the 1970's, I think. One of them I know was being sailed up almost to 1980. They were built right up here in the backyard, right behind us. That was in 1926. Actually in 1927 one of the yachtsmen here in San Diego--I'm not really clear now on who it was, it could have been Bob Mahan--wanted a Starboat built.

**RH:** Was this a new kind of boat, the Starboat?

**PK:** The Starboat was an old class of boats and they are still very, very active today. There are very exotic materials that they are building them out of compared to what these old ones were. In those days they were built out of wood. They had to be built to a definite dimension and shape. So when he got the order to build one of them he decided to build two. Apparently he didn't sell the second one so he decided to finish it and put it in the water and sail it himself. I was available as his crew at that point so that was really my first experience at racing.

**RH:** How old were you at the time?

**PK:** This was in 1926; I would have been 13, still in high school. So I crewed for George for at least a year racing in Starboats. There were about six or eight of them as I remember. Joe Jessop at that time was sailing the Starboat. He was so far ahead of the rest of us that we hardly even knew he was in the same race. Everything being equal he was capable, a much better sailor than any of the rest of us. He knew how to get a sail set better and all of this. But that was my first experience at sailing. I had to crew for George. He would let me sail the boat home after the race because he was so tired out he didn't want to sail. So I got to sail the boat home. That was my first real experience at sailing. And I got to like it.

Then of course I built a little sailboat for myself, a 16 footer called an Alamitos Bay Skimmer. I used to sail that around the bay here. That was built in the back yard, too. That I did by myself. Of course in those days the yacht club didn't have any junior programs. Us kids, you know, they just wished we'd get lost. They didn't want any part of us.

At that time the main San Diego Yacht Club was over in Coronado. It wasn't moved over to Point Loma. They had a station in Point Loma which had been the old Star & Crescent landing where the yacht club is right now. They had a big building out there and they used to have dances there Saturday nights. They would bring people over from San Diego on these ferry boats to this place which was really out in the middle of the bay. I have pictures of it. They would have dances there but that kind of wore out. I guess it wasn't making any money so they sold that to the San Diego Yacht Club and they called that their Point Loma station, but the yacht club was still over in Coronado. That I think was in 1936 while I was gone from town. They moved the building physically; they brought it over on barges from Coronado and put it in right where the old boathouse was, where the old Star & Crescent landing was. Then they filled the land in, out to it.

**RH:** You know we've never continued with the rest of your family. The third child was a daughter name Julia, is that right?

**PK:** That's right. She married a doctor, Dr. Ector LeDuc.

**RH:** Then there was Ella.

**PK:** She married John Graff who was a naval aviator. He was killed flying off the *Saratoga* in 1934 right after their second child was born. She remained a widow for many years until both of her children were through the Naval Academy. She remarried Bruce MacMillan whom she had known as a youngster here in San Diego, however, basically he was from Canada.

**RH:** Then you came along.

**PK:** Then I came along. She was seven years old when I was born.

**RH:** And you were born in 1913. That's right, after your folks were here. You went to Point Loma High School and after school you would come down to help your brother work on his boats?

**PK:** Yes. In 1928 he moved down to the present location where Kettenburg Marine is now at the foot of Dickens Street. I would stop by there and do whatever needed to be done before I would come home on the way home from Point Loma High School.

**RH:** So you never got into any trouble then.

**PK:** No, I didn't have much time for that. Of course before they built that I would come home here and even do things here for him that needed to be done. During summer vacations when I wasn't in school, he would order things from the marine hardware store downtown. The streetcar went up Broadway. I'd get off in front of the store; go in and get what he had ordered; come back out and when the streetcar came back down Broadway--they would turn around up at the Plaza--I'd get back on and come home here. I could make a round trip in less than an hour sometimes.

**RH:** It was a rickety old car, as I remember, it kind of rocked back and forth.

**PK:** We never did have very good cars out here. When they started a line that went all the way from here to downtown, we got better cars. The one that used to just run between Macaulay and the entrance to the reservation here, we always called it the dinky.

**RH:** Now first I have to mention the trip that your father took you on while you were still in high school.

**PK:** I was in high school, it was during my junior year. I had just started school for the fall semester. This was in 1930. He decided to take a trip around the world. In 1926 he had taken my two sisters around the world on a cruise ship. They just went from port to port to port and finally ended up in Europe on the ship so they really didn't get to see all the things that he wanted to see.

So in 1930 he decided that he and my mother would take me. We'd go as far as we wanted to go, get off the ship and see what we wanted to see and maybe spend the time we wanted to spend and then catch another ship and move on to the next area. I was gone almost a year, about ten months. My sister who was married to John Graff, was stationed in Manila at the time so we spent Christmas with her in Manila, after having gone through Japan, China, Hong Kong and then down to the Philippines. After Christmas we took another ship out of Manila and went through the Indian Ocean to Singapore and all the spots, Sumatra, and on up through the Red Sea. We got off and spent a little over a month in Egypt.

**RH:** I don't know why anyone would want to spend any more than five minutes in Egypt.

**PK:** You'd be surprised what there is to see there. At that time Egypt was quite different. Of course I climbed to the top of the Pyramids. I went down in the Pyramids. We spent most of the time in Luxor which is where King Tut's tomb is, the Valley of the Kings, the Valley of the Queens.

**RH:** That was all pretty interesting at the time, just after they had found King Tut's tomb.

**PK:** They had found King Tut's tomb a few years before. They had taken everything out of it; everything was gone. The only thing that was there were all of the murals. The walls were just covered with murals, beautiful murals, which gave historically what his life was up to the time of the tomb. I didn't have any trouble enjoying it. I did a little sailing on the Nile in a strange little sailboat, what they called feluccas. I had a little fun there.

**RH:** Was it real different to sail a felucca? They have strange sails.

**PK:** Yes, they have. It is an interesting sail, but not very efficient. They don't want to go very far anyway; all they want to use it for is to go back and forth across the Nile.

**RH:** Let's see, we've got you graduated from high school and you went on a job.

**PK:** I graduated in February, 1933, from Point Loma High School. I should have graduated in June of 1932. I didn't lose the whole year, I made up half of it when I got back by taking extra credits so that I was able to graduate in February. As far as I was concerned all I wanted to do was get out of school and go to work.

**RH:** Did you have any favorite teachers in Point Loma?

**PK:** Yes. My main interest was in math and geometry. We had a teacher, Lillian Troxell; she taught me an awful lot of algebra; it was amazing because algebra wasn't my particular math interest but she did teach me. Then there was Lois Matzen. I thought she was one of the best teachers as far as what I learned in geometry. That was one of the main things that I ever learned the whole time I was in high school.

At the time my brother was building an 83' boat for the Springstead family... Mr. Springstead had George build this 83' cargo-type boat. It was the biggest boat that George ever built. Mr. Springstead had these produce farms down in Mexico and he wanted to haul produce from somewhere near Mazatlan up to San Diego. While the boat was being built the Mexicans decided that all produce had to go out of Mexico by a certain railroad. So he went ahead and finished it pretty much not as a fancy yacht but it was a nice pleasure boat. It was comfortable and had nice accommodations. They were installing this big 200-horsepower diesel engine in it. My father was still pretty much interested in the business at that time and hired a man to come in and do the installation. I worked as his helper. He taught me all about pipe fitting and this sort of work. I really learned a lot.

After the boat was finished I went out as engineer and ran the engine for the owner, Mr. Springstead. We made a trip down to Mexico. He was a great sport fisher; he loved to fish. So he went down to Mexico for fishing. Then we towed a bunch of *PC's* up to Santa Barbara and I was the engineer at that time.

**RH:** *PC's*; how long had you been building *PC's*?

**PK:** We started building *PC's* in 1929, right after they build the plant down there at Dickens Street.

**RH:** Now had George designed the first one or was this a new class?

**PK:** No, George designed it, this was his design, right from the very bottom up.

**RH:** It was a very successful boat.

**PK:** Yeah. Joe Jessop did a lot of conferring with George on it, mainly on what he wanted to end up with in the way of accommodations and what kind of sails he wanted on it; this sort of thing. The hull design itself was strictly George's; he did that right from the first line on it.

The story on that, that has been written about the *PC's*, was that Joe Jessop had been sailing the Starboats. They were not the kind of a boat that you would want to take your wife sailing. They were just strictly racing boats, and still are. These fellows who had been racing those boats, Joe Jessop, George Jessop, Alvin Childs, also the Springstead family. Their boys were growing up and they wanted to sail boats. They were going to buy some boats.



Joe Jessop and George Jessop thought maybe they would buy the Atlantic Coast one-design so they had ordered one to bring it out here to see what it would be like. Also there was a Swedish 22-square meter boat which is very similar in size. They brought that out with the idea that they would develop a class of these here so that these people would have something to sail and they could take their wives and their girlfriends.

George (Kettenburg) looked at these boats and said, "I can build you a better boat than that." George and Joe talked it over and they came up with boat which ultimately ended up being the *PC*.

**RH:** Is this called the PC one-design?

**PK:** Yes. Pacific Class is what PC stands for. They got it pretty well designed, so my father said, "I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll finance building one of the boats. If it is a good boat, fine; if it isn't, I'll have a boat to go sailing in." So they went ahead and built the first boat. They went out and raced all these other boats and the PC just sailed off and left all the others behind. The next day these four people all ordered boats. So that gave him four boats to build right away. This was in 1928, 1929 and 1930. Those days they didn't build in high production like we did later. Later and after World War II we were building in high production and we could turn them out pretty fast. But during that time each boat was built as an individual boat. Maybe it was a matter of a couple of months between each one.

At the end of 1933 things had gotten pretty slow. We had built those *PC*'s and it didn't look like there was anybody else who wanted to buy any. There wasn't enough work there and I had a chance to go back to Chicago and go to work for the General Electric heating and air-conditioning distributor.

**RH:** This is where your learning all about pipes came in handy?

**PK:** It came in very handy. As a matter of fact, here I was only a year or so out of high school and I was supervising steam fitters in Chicago, in installing steam boilers and hot water boilers, people who had been working at it all their lives. And here I was supervising them. Most of them I managed to get along with them because they appreciated somebody at least who knows what he is talking about. You work with them and you let them tell you how it ought to be. Then you've got to steer them in the right direction; that is all you've got to do. I got along real good with these fellows. I had only intended to stay there for a year and ended up staying almost ten years.

**RH:** Now in the meantime war is raising its ugly head, isn't it?

**PK:** When the war started I was still with General Electric. I was in a division that wasn't going to be active in the war and they immediately put me in another division that became very active during the war. Shortly thereafter I tried to join the Navy but they wouldn't let me go. At General Electric jobs were frozen at that time. General Electric was doing all this work for the Navy. They were running behind on their schedules and General Electric told the Navy if you don't stop taking all our men we'll never get them anything for their ships. After that anybody's application that went into the Bureau of Ships who was working for General Electric was automatically turned down. Finally I stayed there until the war was kind of winding down and they were relaxing on this job-freeze thing then I came back here.

In the meantime George had gotten involved in Navy contracts here in San Diego. He was building Navy boats here. Those were the little utility plane re-arming boats, they called them.

**RH:** You turned out one every ten days?

**PK:** Yeah, they were turning those out pretty fast. I think even faster than that for a while there after they really got rolling. They were turning those out I think at least one a week.

**RH:** Didn't you need more space?

**PK:** We kept buying more property down there until finally we had almost all of that block and another little piece of a block where the road stops. So we were able to keep up. In the meantime the Food Administration decided they had taken all these big tuna boats, they had all gone to the Navy, because they had refrigeration and they could haul food down to the South Pacific.

They decided that these fishermen were all around here not having anything to do so they decided to build a small fish boat. George came up with a design for a 38' fish boat that would carry ten tons of fish. The Food Administration arranged priorities with the government to get the materials to build these boats. In fact we had better priorities to get materials for them than we did for the boats that were built for the Navy. When we got those into production we built 80 of them. We turned them out one every ten days. We really had production going there. That continued on after the war; we didn't stop building them when the war was over. Of course we couldn't build for the Navy.

While we were building those, we started building *PC's* again in production. During the war George dreamt up the PCC which is a 46' version of the PC, which was 32 feet long. He had this all in his mind exactly what he wanted to do. The minute the war was over we sat down and did the lofting. I mean we laid it out on the floor and started building the PCC. We finished that boat over a period of probably about six months. He got it out and started sailing it. It was so successful that orders started coming in for the PCC's.

**RH:** What was the name of that boat?

**PK:** That was the *Eulalie*.

**RH:** She won a lot of races!

**PK:** You see George was a good sailor. George was one of these people that anything he did, he did good. He won championships with it. During the war when they couldn't do much sailing he got into archery. As a matter of fact when he didn't have anything to do he would make bows and arrows. They had a target down there in the old building and he would sit there and practice archery for two or three hours every day. He won one of the championships here in San Diego in archery.

**RH:** Did any of his men ever do better than he?

**PK:** No. One thing about George, he would encourage anybody to do the best he could. Things like that didn't bother him.

**RH:** Well, he probably figured that if somebody beat him he could do better by taking advantage of their technique.

**PK:** He never had any idea not having anybody do better than he could do. If I could beat him in a race he was just as happy as if he had won the race himself. He never had any thoughts of those that I ever know of, anyway.

**RH:** Now what about the Penguins? In 1942 he came in with the Penguin which was 112', a plywood dinghy.

**PK:** You see that whole thing was almost all over by the time I got back here; that was while I was gone.

**RH:** They said they sold like hot cakes.

**PK:** Oh, they did, they sold a lot of them. After I got back here I did build one for myself and sailed it for a while. They were a great boat because you couldn't go out of the harbor, you know. There was a net across the harbor here and nobody could go out of the harbor. *PC's* were good boats to sail in the harbor. The same thing up at Newport Harbor, there were a lot of *PC's* up there by that time. There was another class of boats up there that were very similar to the *PC's*.

**RH:** Did you build all the *PC's*? You designed it in the first place.

**PK:** George designed it and he licensed the South Coast Company to build three boats up at Newport. They built three, I think it was 13, 15 and 17; those were the numbers. For some reason or another those boats were never too successful.

**RH:** They couldn't beat the ones you built?

**PK:** No. The ones we built usually whipped the races. They had these team races. People from San Diego would go to Newport, say four skippers and crews, and they would race four skippers and crews up there. They would borrow boats. Then the next week those four at Newport would come to San Diego and borrow four boats and race the team races here. In fact there is a trophy up here for team racing.

That was during the war when you couldn't go outside the harbor; that was about all you could do. The Penguins were ideal because they were a harbor boat anyway. They were just down there in the yacht harbor. They were centerboard; they didn't take much water. It took a pretty good sailor to sail one of them. They were all good sailors; some of the best sailors in the whole area sailed those boats. They weren't out there just puddling around; they were really racing. They weren't kid's boats.

**RH:** Probably one sail?

**PK:** One sail.

**RH:** Did you manage to beat the Newport people often?

**PK:** They were good sailors up there. It was pretty evenly matched. We'd win some; they'd win some.

**RH:** It must have been a lot of fun.

**PK:** Oh, yes, a lot of fun. With a group like that after the race was over everybody had fun,so it made it real nice.

**RH:** And you probably told each other how they could have done better?

**PK:** Oh, sure, naturally.

**RH:** I understand that is one of the great things about the San Diego Yacht Club, people aren't so avid to win that they can't be gracious about losing and then learn from the other guy and win the next time.

**PK:** That's right. That is why we produce so many good sailors in San Diego. There are probably more championship Starboat sailors, big time sailors, out of San Diego Yacht Club. Of course Dennis Conner, one of the outstanding people out of there, probably has done as much as anybody anywhere in the country.

**RH:** I understand that Lowell North has won four world championships in the Stars. And that is more really than anybody else.

**PK:** Yeah, Lowell North, Malin Burnham. Of course Ash Bown was one of the great sailors here in San Diego.

**RH:** Malin--and who was the other one--went in when he was 17 and the other one was 15, whoever it was, the person who went with him, 17 and 15 and they won the world championship Starboat race and everybody was so amazed that anything from the West Coast could be any good.

**PK:** That started a trend of what happened. A lot of that came about because of the Starlets here in San Diego. The Starlet program here in the San Diego Yacht Club probably is one of the most outstanding programs that has ever been developed in any club in the country.

**RH:** How long was the Starlet?

**PK:** The Starlet was 16 feet. That is quite a story in itself. They started in 1933.

**RH:** Is that the one where some man had designed it, brought it over here and your brother said, "I can do better."

**PK:** That's right. That was Joe Ruskie; it was his idea. He scaled the Starboat down strictly as a Starboat to 16'. George looked at it and thought for kids he ought to change the proportions and still look like a Starboat. But he changed it for two things: it would be cheaper to build and secondly, if it went over on its side it wouldn't sink. The boat was wide enough, the cockpit was narrow enough that it could go over on its side. The kids would climb out on the keel and she would come back up, they'd climb back in and sail away. That was one of the big features of it. If the boat went over they wouldn't sink. You wouldn't have to worry about it. Just get out, stand on the keel and when it came back up they could scramble back up into the boat.

**RH:** No wonder it was so successful.

**PK:** It was. It had two sails and was just like a Starboat so that the kids learned how to sail with the jib and the mainsail.

**RH:** Two people on the crew always.

**PK:** This is where they developed some of these real good sailors. That is where Malin [Burnham] got started and that is where Ash Bown got started and that is where Milton Wegeforth got started. And I am sure that Lowell North did.

**RH:** Did the Kettenburgs build most of these?

**PK:** Yes, we built practically all of them.

**RH:** Is this the one that sold for \$250, including the sails?

**PK:** Yeah. We built the first ones. Gordon and Al Frost got either the first or second one that we built. I remember the day they took it and sailed it away; that was in 1933. But that class of course developed and there were a lot of them. There again, during the war, it was something that could be sailed right there in front of the yacht club. So these kids didn't have any place else they could sail, they had to sail there. Personally, I never got very involved with it because I had already grown out of the Starlet by the time we built them.

**RH:** In 1947 the causeway to Shelter Island was built. It must have made quite a difference in the boatyards around there.

**PK:** Well, yes. Of course that made space for several boatyards down off the causeway, as well as having almost double the amount of area for our yard. We had something like about an acre of land there before and then when they built that tidelands in front we winded up with almost an additional acre.

**RH:** At no cost?

**PK:** We had to pay rent for it. We didn't have to buy it; you couldn't buy it, but you had to pay rent for it. It didn't come free but in effect it was very, very helpful.

**RH:** I understand after World War II there were landing craft just lying idle down in the lower part of the bay needing to be repaired and so on, and the Kettenburgs got a big job there.

**PK:** This was during the Korean War. All these landing craft had been built first for World War II for the tremendous South Pacific and all of that. I don't know whether they brought them all back but they had hundreds of them down here at the Naval Station in storage. These landing craft were sitting down there deteriorating and nobody was paying any attention to them.

Then all of a sudden during the Korean War they thought they were going to have to have a big invasion into North Korea. So the Navy decided they had to refurbish all of these. We stopped all other work, just like we had during World War II, and the yard was completely stuffed full of these 36' LCBP's and LCPL's. We disassembled them, tore all the rotten stuff off that had rotted over the years sitting out there. We put in rebuilt engines and tested them. That program lasted for almost a year. We had boats stacked up all over the place. That was in the early 1950's when the Korean war was going on.

**RH:** Getting back to the Eulalia, she won a lot of races. She was a PCC. In 1949 you had a K38 called the *Tomboy*. What does a K38 mean?

**PK:** That was a 38'. The numbers really are virtually the length of the boat. All the K [for Kettenburg] boats were built after George passed away, except the K38, which was my first attempt to design a boat with him looking over my shoulder, keeping me going in the right direction. After we built the K38, that was in 1952, George died.

**RH:** Getting back to this *Tomboy*; this was very successful, wasn't it? It won races all over the place.

**PK:** Yes. It was quite a successful boat. It came at a time that just fit the need for a lot of sailors on the coast here.

**RH:** What was so good about it? Was it the price?

**PK:** That was part of it. We had so much production that we could save a lot of money on the cost of it. Then we designed it to be able to build it efficiently and not have a lot of frills on it. It was really a sailor's sailboat. We kept it as simple as possible. That was my main idea because I didn't have a lot of money to spend on a boat and I wanted something for myself.

The way it actually came about was that I had been up to a regatta at Newport Beach and after the regatta my wife came up and the two of us cruised over to Catalina. We got over to Catalina and I thought, "Gee, this is fun except this is just a little too much boat, too much for two people to be able to handle." So I sat there and dreamed up the *K38*, sitting on the *PCC* over in Catalina. At the time I had a *PC* that I was racing and I sold that and decided to build a *K38*. I laid it out and tried to shrink down the *PCC* and changed the proportions here again. George, as I say, was kind of looking over my shoulder and not letting me do anything wrong. Charlie Underwood, one of our partners, he and I personally built the boat between the two of us, the first *K38*. We weren't even half finished when people came in and started giving us orders for it. We told them, "We don't know how much it is going to cost and we are still working on it. If you want to put your name down we'll put you in line and when we get it all finished we'll come up with a price that we can build it for. If you still want to do it, fine; if you don't we'll just scratch your name off."

Every one of those first six or seven people that put their names in ended up buying a boat. So apparently the price we came up with was within their budgets.

**RH:** So then you had more than one *Tomboy*. Seems to me you've got even now the *Tomboy IV*.

**PK:** That was a name that I kind of stuck with on all the boats. I wouldn't sell the name with the boat. By this time George had passed away. Then I built the *K40* which was a 40' boat. That was *Tomboy II*. Then we went to the *K50* (those are all the models up there). The *PC* is the lower one of those three, the *K38* is the next one above it, the *PCC* is the next one above that. Then the large one here is the *K50*. Then we went back to the *K46*; then we went to the *K41* which was fiberglass. *Tomboy V* was fiberglass.

**RH:** About what year did you start in with the fiberglass?

**PK:** The *K41* which was fiberglass was started in 1966.

**RH:** Getting back to 1952, George died and what happened [in the business]?

**PK:** George passed away in December, 1952. In the meantime he was arranging over a period of years to turn the business over to his son, Bill, who was known as George Kettenburg, III. He has been known as Bill ever since he was born. And to his son-in-law, Morgan Miller, and to Charles Underwood who had worked for George for many years in the business, and Bill Kearns, who had been in the business many years, and myself. It was to be five of us that were going to buy out the business from George, equal partners.

In the meantime we had insurance on George. I was paying for insurance and Bill Kearns was paying for insurance and Charlie Underwood was paying for insurance. I guess so was Bill and Morgan. This was all arranged. He had no thought that he wasn't going to be here, but when he passed away of course Bill and Morgan, being his son-in-law married to George's daughter inherited their shares from him. The insurance paid for the other three of us for our shares. So his wife was automatically bought out of the business. She had money to live on for the rest of her life.

So the others of us ended up as five equal partners. I ended up being the managing partner. It was a very good arrangement because everyone of us had our own particular end of it to do. Mainly, I kind of kept everything going down the same path. Bill Kettenburg was responsible for purchasing; Morgan was responsible for the store sales; Bill Kearns was responsible for the yard repair work; and Charlie Underwood was responsible for

building boats. My job was to try to sell sailboats, promote them and this sort of thing, and keep everything going and organized. So it worked out really very good. Everybody wonders how five people can get along. Mainly, I think it was because everybody had their own job. We all shared equally in the profits. It didn't make any difference. If it was possible to help someone of the partners show a big profit, everybody got in headed in that direction because everybody shared alike.

**RH:** What a neat arrangement! A neat bunch of guys were able to work together.

**PK:** It was fortunate, I guess that the right people got together.

**RH:** Did you finally turn over the business to someone else?

**PK:** We sold the corporation to Whitaker in 1969 but we didn't sell the property. Part of it is tidelands and part of it is what we call fee property. The fee property is still owned by the five partners. Although one of them [Bill Kearns] has passed away, his widow, Helen Kearns, is still part of it. I stayed on and managed for ten years after we sold to Whitaker.

**RH:** I suppose all of you could have stayed on if you wanted to.

**PK:** Everybody did part of the time. Bill Kearns retired first I think, then Charlie retired.

**RH:** Had Charlie been a designer as well as a builder?

**PK:** Charles was a very artistic type of fellow. He had a lot to do with what you'd say the aesthetics, the appearance, of the boats above the water line. He did most of that. As far as the hull, the sail and that part of it, that is what I did. So we worked together, Charlie and I. He could make a boat look good and I had to make it work. Charlie did some designing of power boats on his own that were very successful. He designed the little fiberglass outboards that we built a bunch of. He designed power cruisers. That was really a nice boat. One thing about them when Charlie designed them they were good looking boats.

**RH:** This is also just about the time of the Korean War and you were doing some Navy rescue boats?

**PK:** They were actually Navy-designed but they were being built for the Air Force. They were called air-sea rescue boats. They were being contracted for by the Navy but they were for delivery to the Air Force. We got a contract to build two boats. We built these first two; they were kind of prototypes; however, it was a World War II design. We built them pretty strictly to a World War II design. When we got those boats finished, the Air Force decided they wanted to make some changes in the accommodations. So we redesigned the accommodations and we contracted with the Navy to become the design agents for these boats. As the design agent we made the design and the Navy put these designs out to various builders to build, all over the country.

When they did that we knew how much they were going to cost so we were not the low bidder. There was a yard in Seattle that bid on a group and they were low on that group. There was a yard in Detroit that bid on a group. There were 101 boats altogether. They were 63', a pretty good sized boat.

Then there was a yard clear up in Stonington, Deer Island, Maine. They were successful in bidding. It turned out that the design agent had to do a certain amount of supervision of the building of these boats. That meant me. So for about a couple of years I was flying from San Diego to Seattle,

Seattle to Detroit, from Detroit on to Portland, Maine, then I had to drive to Stonington, Deer Island. Then I'd fly down to Washington and then fly home.

And that was before they had jets. I was spending a lot of time in the air and most of it was at night. But I never did learn to sleep on an airplane. It was quite a tour of duty, believe me. My family would see me off at the airport and they'd see me come home.

**RH:** By the way, we haven't said who your family was. Did you marry a Point Loma girl?

**PK:** No. I married a girl from the Midwest. Her name was Dorothy Johnson.

**RH:** And then you had children?

**PK:** I have two children: Thomas E. and Carol Ann.

**RH:** Have they been great sailors?

**PK:** They didn't get too involved in it. Unfortunately I was so involved. At the time they should have gotten involved in sailing I was so darn involved with this Korean War and then the Vietnam problem. So they never got involved; they had other interests. Of course at that time, too, I was looking for something else to do other than sail. I got involved in restoring antique automobiles.

**RH:** Oh, you had a little spare time?

**PK:** I am still involved with the Horseless Carriage Club.

**RH:** How many cars do you have?

**PK:** I just have one now. I've restored about six of them and then sold them. After I get them restored I drive them a little bit then I look for another project. In fact I'm kind of half-way looking for a project right now. I have a 1912 Model T Ford. My shop is right in the next room here.

**RH:** We had one that my dad bought in 1910. How exciting it was for us to have that car. But of course when we came to San Diego in 1912, you couldn't drive a car from Montana to San Diego so it was a long time before we had another car. Didn't you have that Daimler? Oh, no, it was just the motor from it that your father had.

**PK:** I can barely remember that engine. Until the war [World War I] was over I didn't remember very much. I remember of course a lot of the things going on around here. I remember the airplanes crashing around here and all that sort of thing.

**RH:** So what have been some of your favorite cars to finish?

**PK:** The first one that I did was a 1912 Maxwell touring car.

**RH:** You didn't get it from Jack Benny, did you?

**PK:** No, his wasn't that old. His was one of the little ones; this one was a big car. Then I did a 1910 Cadillac.



**RH:** Where did you ever find those?

**PK:** Oh, they show up. When you get involved you hear about them. Then I did a 1912 Franklin and I did another 1915 Franklin.

**RH:** Were those the steam?

**PK:** No, they were air cooled. I never did any steam cars. I did a 1920 Rolls-Royce touring car. (That is a picture of that one up here on the wall).

**RH:** That must have been a real joy.

**PK:** Oh, that was.

**RH:** You sold it?

**PK:** Oh, yes. I just have a little Model T Ford speedster that I did here about two or three years ago. I've kept that because it is fun to drive, until I find another project, anyway. It is a 1912.

**RH:** As I remember dad paid about \$500 for that 1910 Ford.

**PK:** That's probably about right. When we came back from that trip around the world, I had sold the car that I had been driving to school. When I left somebody wrote to me and said they wanted to buy it, so I sold it. When I got back to New York my dad let me buy a 1930 Model A Ford roadster in New York City. It was used a little bit but it was fairly new. It was still one of the new cars. The three of us, mother, dad and I drove that from New York City to San Diego.

**RH:** Where did you find roads to go on?

**PK:** We had relatives in Baltimore, so we drove to Baltimore; then we had relatives in Pittsburgh, naturally. All my mother's and dad's families were in Pittsburgh. Then we had some relatives in Chicago, so we went from relative to relative as far as Chicago, then from Chicago to San Diego that was really quite a trip. After we got West of Kansas City there were no paved roads until we got into California. This was in 1931. Except in the cities of course there were paved roads, but between cities, going across Kansas, there are nothing but wheat fields as far as you can see.

They were just starting the highway system when Route 66 was just being established. We went out to Kansas City of course and went out through Kansas into the southern corner of Colorado, down into Santa Fe, New Mexico, then across Flagstaff into California. From there on then it was paved, from Needles, California into San Diego. It took us just exactly a week to go that distance.

**RH:** How did the car stand the desert?

**PK:** It ran beautifully. The only thing is, today I look at a lot of those Model A Ford roadsters around and I say there is no way that mother, dad and I could have gotten into the front seat of that thing, to drive all the way to San Diego.

**RH:** In 1959 they had a committee boat and named it *George Kettenburg, Jr.* How long did that remain a committee boat?

**PK:** That committee boat was there at the yacht club for probably six or seven years, maybe ten years.

**RH:** It had been owned by Joe Jessop.

**PK:** It was then known as the Lucia.

**RH:** It was all right to change the name if it was a committee boat?

**PK:** Oh, yeah. Finally they decided they needed a better committee boat and they bought the new one. It is still called *George Kettenburg, Jr.*

**RH:** Who built it?

**PK:** It was built over in the Orient. It was an Art DeFever design. It is a real nice boat but they maintained the name of *George Kettenburg, Jr.* on it.

**RH:** That was nice. And it is still working?

**PK:** Yes.

**RH:** The original one was taken over by Dennis Conner, John Reynolds, Fritz Kunzel and called the *Jorge Viejo* ["Old George"]. When you went into the fiberglass *K41* in 1971, it was just a new thing, wasn't it? Did you have to work out a lot of problems with it?

**PK:** Oh, yes, we worked out a lot of problems. We never had much success with fiberglass. We couldn't get away from building a boat the way a boat should be built. The fiberglass industry turned into a whole different ball game. The ones we built we built way too well. When we built a boat the way we thought it ought to be built, either nobody could afford to buy it or we'd go broke building it. We only built 30 of them. They were a good boat, they are still around. Those boats will be here I'm sure after many other boats are long gone. But to an old wood boat builder fiberglass is kind of hard to swallow.

**RH:** Some interesting people that you've met along the way. For instance: Jim Arness, the big movie man.

**PK:** We built two boats for Jim. We built a *K40* first, then we built a *K50*. He was probably one of the nicest people in the entertainment business that we ever met. He was a real fine person.

**RH:** Did you then build boats for other movie people?

**PK:** We did a lot of work on boats for other movie people. Off hand I don't recall any other movie people that we built boats for.

**RH:** Who were some of your other favorite people that you built boats for? Did you build any for Joe Jessop, for instance?

**PK:** The only boat we built for Joe Jessop was the *PC*. It is kind of hard to say, we built so many. Most of the boats we built were actually for people from out of town. They went to the Los Angeles area, Santa Barbara area, San Francisco, Seattle. As I say, about 80 percent of the boats that we built were for out of town. **RN:** And how many percent of them would have been the *PC's*, or the *PCC's*?

**PK:** The *PC's* of course, we ended up building about 80 of those. The *PCC's* I think we built 24 of those. Then we built like 40 of the *K38's*, 49 of the *K40's*. Just kind of taking the average of all of them, one time I figured out there were somewhere around 75 to 80 percent of the boats that we were producing were going to other than San Diego.

**RH:** A lot of them on the West Coast, I suppose.

**PK:** Oh, yes. We did a few for the East Coast, but not many.

**RH:** People in the East didn't really feel that the West Coast had anything much to offer.

**PK:** They didn't agree with our thinking on boats, most of the Eastern people. When they would come out here, to live out here and sail out here, then they'd buy our boats. But when they were back there they didn't think our boats would stand up in what they were doing.

However, we built a *PCC* for Henry DuPont. At that time he was chairman of the board of the corporation, E.I. DuPont. It was kind of interesting working with him. It was kind of a different thing than we had ever encountered before. A very fine person and very easy to work with and very interesting. It is interesting that when we were out checking the boat out, he had his valet with him. When we were out sailing all day and came back in he'd ask Mr. DuPont which clothes he wanted laid out so he could put them on when he got back to the dock. That was kind of a different approach to sailing than we had ever seen.

**RH:** Tell me about M.O. Medina.

**PK:** Of course he was the leading fisherman here in San Diego. He originally lived in a little house down here on Rosecrans Boulevard. He was one of the most aggressive of all the fishermen. In fact, he was always the first one to build a bigger boat. We never built any boats for him. One thing, he did confer with George on the design of this 38' fishing boat that we built so many of during the war. He gave George a lot of suggestions on what it should be. M.O. Medina of course and those people all started out with boats with sails on them, right down here.

**RH:** Just little boats that would go out and come back the same day.

**PK:** Then they got them a little bigger and a little bigger. But M.O. was always the first one to go bigger. Finally, when he came up with the boat *Atlantic*, the 110' tuna boat, everybody said, "That's the end of M.O. That will break him up for sure." All he did was cry all the way to the bank.

**RH:** Is he the one who started putting carpets on the floor?

**PK:** Oh, yes. He was the first one to really make them into something other than just an old fish boat. He did very well. He was referred to, and he was respected by the Portuguese community, as their leader.

**RH:** And of course he gave a lot of the Portuguese jobs.

**RH:** Now, you won the Lipton Cup from 1948 to 1951. Every single year? With the *Eulalia*.

**PK:** That was George.

**RH:** Did you ever win the Lipton Cup?

**PK:** No. I crewed for him. I would have liked to have sailed for the Lipton Cup, but at that time when we were sailing of course there was only one boat from San Diego that could be in the race. I crewed for quite a few of the people that were sailing and did win it, but I was never the skipper.

**RH:** What about the company's involvement with the America's Cup; did you get into any part of building those boats, designing them, or whatever?

**PK:** No. We never got into any design work on them at all. We did a little work on one of the boats that Lowell North was involved with; we did some mast work and rigging work for him. I don't even remember what year it was. We never really got involved with the America's Cup. Driscoll did with the 12-meters. I think one of the reasons we got into it was one of the ones that Driscoll had worked on. How we got into it I don't know, but we never got into very much of that.

**RH:** Driscoll was pretty enthusiastic about the whole idea of the America's Cup.

**PK:** Driscoll has been very active in the America's Cup every time that it became something to get active about.

**RH:** So now the Italians are using his property.

**PK:** They took over his yard. That is quite a deal they put together down there.

**RH:** He was telling me that they worked with the environmentalists some so that they had a slanted floor with a groove down the middle. The water comes down and is recirculated; they don't dump a bunch of stuff in the bay.

**PK:** Oh, you can't put anything in the bay any more. Our yard was the first yard that they put that rule into effect, that we were not allowed to dump anything into the bay unless at first we had to filter it. So we built a filter system so that all the water that ran into the bay out of the yard was filtered through our filter system. Then they decided that wasn't adequate. Now they put the water through the filter system but then they pump it into the sewer from the filter system. That is for water for washing out the boats and this sort of thing.

Today with the type of washing that they do they use such a small amount of water. It isn't like the old days when we really used a lot of water.

**PK:** One of the problems of course was the environmental situation. The way it is, it is making maintenance costs for boats skyrocket. I worry about it to the extent that there are going to be a lot of people who are not going to be able to afford maintaining their boats after leaving the water. It used to be that people with boats, maybe 35-40' sailboats, would arrange to have them hauled out on Friday afternoon. The owners and the crew would come down on Saturday and Sunday and would clean and paint and put them back in the water on Monday. All it would cost them was the haul-out.

Now a 40' boat to haul it out, people are not allowed to work on it themselves. The yards can't allow it because they would get them in trouble. So they have to pay the yard to do that. You take a 40' boat into a yard today and for a bottom job it will probably cost you \$600 or \$700.

Of course, fortunately, most boats only have to be hauled every year or maybe every two years, but it still is expensive. Fortunately, a lot of them are fiberglass boats so if they don't haul them very often it doesn't do them any real harm. That is going to be the advantage of fiberglass. Being an old wood boat builder I hate to admit something like that.

**RH:** Ann Jessop was telling me that she went back one year to Marblehead [Mass.] She went with the Frosts. They had a good boat and they were going to enter into some races there. So she got herself one of their little Starboats or a Starlet and she paid to use one of their boats. It had been up on the ways for a long time and she said you could look in between the planks and see the daylight. The wood was so dry; so she spent three days caulking it, sanding it and painting it and put it in the water. It just ran away from everybody, but by the end of the week the wood had picked up some water and was heavy and she never won another thing.

**PK:** Yeah, while it was light she probably did real well. This certainly is increasing the cost of maintaining a boat, the environmental problems that we are running into.

**RH:** She said that on that particular trip, the Frosts did very well with their boat and it really changed the attitude of the Eastern people toward the "uncouth" Westerners.

**PK:** I am not surprised. They find out that people out here are humans, too.

**RH:** What have we forgotten to talk about? Is there something that I should have asked you that I didn't yet?

**PK:** I don't know.

**RH:** I think, then, that we will conclude this interview. The Historical Society thanks you, and I thank you.

**PK:** I hope it will be of some use to them.

**RH:** Yes, let's hope so.

***END OF INTERVIEW***

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