

1940 Census records he is described as “Boat Builder.” There is strong circumstantial evidence that Richards developed his boat building skills during the 1920’s in Thomas R. Keenan’s shop at 249 Jefferson Street in San Francisco. Keenan was born in 1870 and joined the Dolphin Club in 1892 as a competitive rower. In 1895 he entered the boat building business supplying and repairing racing boats for many Pacific Coast clubs. For current Dolphins, Keenan is best known for building the FARRELL in 1917, a double which is still in full service. The FARRELL is used for comparison in the 1936 contract to build CRONIN and HUGHES. Thomas Keenan and his business both died in 1933.

Then in 1934 Bill Richards became closely associated with the Dolphin Club. Living in a nearby apartment at 860 North Point Street with his wife, Richards was the salaried club caretaker for the next decade. Although being a daily figure, evidently he never became a dues-paying club member. In June 1946 handball court “B” was converted into a workshop for his use. In March 1947 the Dolphin Club Board commissioned Richards to build three new boats for \$400 each. These three lapstrake singles, the BAGGIANI, FOSTER, and LANDUCCI, all dated 1948, became the template for future club boats. The club still has his original three boats plus six more of the same design, slightly modified Whitehalls. Also, in 1948-1949 Richards helped to construct the Joseph Keenan dining room, now the club’s gym/weight room.

A brief time later, the September 1950 *Dolphin Log* included a short paragraph beginning with “Bill Richards, the boat builder of Keenan fame, will leave the Dolphin boat shop this week and retire at Oroville.” Also stated was that Richards had built shells and sweeps for practically every club on the Coast, plus two other Dolphin Club boats specified by name but no longer around. Most likely, this describes a worker in Thomas Keenan’s shop in the 1920’s.

Bill Richards retired to Northern California and passed away in 1959. Finding his obituary just recently connected and made sense of these seemingly random stories. Printed in the *San Francisco Examiner*, August 4, 1959, his obituary mentions a surviving daughter, Mrs. Bessie Irving, in San Francisco. Could that name, Irving, be the missing piece of the puzzle? Yes! A review of census and other public records confirmed Elizabeth M. Irving to be the wife of the mysterious O. E. Irving. It was subsequently proven by a copy of their marriage certification in Victoria, Canada, on Sep 10, 1917, witnessed and signed by William Jennings Richards.

So, what can we conclude from this exercise? Payments to build the CRONIN and HUGHES were made to the son-in-law of Bill Richards, but almost certainly Richards participated in the project and was probably the lead craftsman. Maybe Orville Irving then helped Richards build the three boats a decade later. To be sure, Bill Richards deserves even more credit than previously thought for helping to create and preserve the historic wooden boats of the Dolphin Swimming & Boating Club.

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