

## HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

### *LAWTON C. HUGHES*

#### HAER No. CA-2376

**Location:** Dolphin Club, 502 Jefferson Street, San Francisco, San Francisco County, California

The watercraft *Lawton C. Hughes* is located at latitude: 37.80767100, longitude: -122.421293, which represents the Dolphin Club building. The coordinates were obtained from Google Earth in 2019. There is no restriction on their release to the public.

**Date of Construction:** 1938

**Rig/Type of Craft:** Dolphin Club Rowboat, Sliding Seat Double

**Trade:** Recreation

**Principal Dimensions:** Length: 18' 4-1/8", Beam: 4'-7"

**Designer/Builder:** Orville E. Irving

**Original Owner:** The Dolphin Swimming & Boating Club

**Present Owner:** The Dolphin Swimming & Boating Club

**Disposition:** Active: Recreation, regattas, and piloting swimmers

**Significance:** The *Lawton C. Hughes* is an elegant pleasure craft, made of wood, launched in 1938, and still expertly maintained and rowed on San Francisco Bay.

#### **Description:**

The *Lawton C. Hughes* is a sliding seat, lapstrake, double, rowboat. It was designed for recreational rowing on San Francisco Bay, piloting swimmers in open water, and occasional racing in competitions. Its unique hull form can take passengers or cox, yet it is still capable of the impressive ergonomic benefit of sliding seats.

Although 1938 is carved in the boat's name board, its genesis began several years earlier. On July 8, 1936, the Dolphin Club contracted with O. E. Irving to build two boats. Subsequent research identified this person to be Olville Eden Irving, a carpenter and cabinet maker in San Francisco. More significantly, Irving was the son-in-law of William "Bill" Richards, a skilled boat builder for the Dolphin Club and other rowing clubs (Refer to HAER-2358). It is believed that Richards had a significant role in the construction of the *Lawton C. Hughes* and a nearly identical boat, the *James J. Cronin*, both dated 1938.

Both craft have required regular maintenance and repairs to keep them operational for over eighty years. In 1986, Dolphin Club boatbuilder Jon Bielinski created a compressed lofting and construction molds during restoration of the *Cronin*. More refined construction details of the *Hughes* were recorded during a 1987 restoration. In 2021 boat builder Julia Hechanova generated offsets, scale drawings, and construction details from measurements taken off the restored vessel in addition to Bielinski's lofting.

The *Hughes* is 18' 4-1/8" long between perpendiculars, 4'-7" beam width, and currently weighs 380 lbs. White Oak is used for the keel, hog, frame, inwale, rub rails, riser, rudder, and name board. Planking and burden boards are Western White Pine and Spanish Cedar. Replacement frames are Black Locust. Other key parts are made from Douglas Fir, Black Locust, and Apple Wood.

Nine-foot D section wood oars power the boat. The scantlings of the sliding seats minimize the weight of the silicon bronze wheels, with sufficient buoyancy from the wood to allow the seats to float. The coxswain maintains the course using a yoke and steering lines.

Summary of Materials: Pine and Cedar planking, White Oak plus various woods including Black Locust and Douglas Fir. Silicon Bronze bolts and screws, Copper rivets, and Brass fittings. Le Tonkinois varnish.

### **History:**

The sliding seat double rowboat, *Hughes*, has been a favorite of countless Dolphin Club rowers for over eighty years competing in regattas and for piloting swims in San Francisco Bay. In addition, the *Hughes* has often hauled rowers, gear, and supplies for overnight outings around the Bay, as well as for much longer pulls upriver to Sacramento.

The boat is named for Lawton Clarence Hughes who was born on December 21, 1899, in San Francisco and joined the Dolphin Club in March 1919. He was a Pacific Coast sculling champion in the 1920's and 1930's, and later matured into the wise rowing coach for younger crews. Moreover, Lawton displayed a lifetime commitment to the Dolphin Club, serving as rowing and swimming commissioner for many years, as Treasurer for over two decades, and as President in 1938 and 1966. Lawton Hughes passed away on August 7, 1982, at the age of 82.

**Sources:** Dolphin Club Board Minutes, boat shop records, publications, and membership records. These club materials are preserved in the Dolphin Club Archives, 502 Jefferson St, San Francisco, Ca 94109.

Bielinski, Jon. "San Francisco's Oldest Rowing Clubs." *WoodenBoat* 40 (1981), 46-49.

Additional research used historic copies of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Call* and *Examiner* newspapers and genealogical data bases accessed on Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org.

**Project Information:**

The Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) is a long-range program that documents and interprets historically significant engineering sites and structures throughout the United States. HAER is part of Heritage Documentation Programs, a division of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Todd Croteau, HAER Architect, manages the HAER Maritime Program.

Julia Hechanova prepared the technical specifications and measured drawings. Richard B. Cooper contributed historical data and the photographs. Both are members of the Dolphin Swimming & Boating Club, June 2022.

**Appendix: Illustrations**

**Figure 1:** The *Lawton C. Hughes*, Photograph by Richard B. Cooper, December 14, 2016





**Figure 2:** The *Lawton C. Hughes* Name Board, Photograph by Richard B. Cooper, December 14, 2016



**Figure 3:** The *Lawton C. Hughes* Foredeck, Photograph by Richard B. Cooper, December 14, 2016

