

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

CHAS. M. FARRELL

HAER No. CA-2359

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

The watercraft *Chas. M. Farrell* 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: 1917

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

Trade: Recreation

Principal Dimensions: Length: 18', Beam: 4'-7-1/2"

Designer/Builder: Thomas R. Keenan

Original Owner: The Dolphin Swimming & Boating Club

Present Owner: The Dolphin Swimming & Boating Club

Disposition: Active: Recreation, regattas, and piloting swimmers

Significance: The *Chas. M. Farrell* is an elegant wooden pleasure craft hand built by Thomas R. Keenan over a century ago and still expertly maintained and rowed on San Francisco Bay.

Description:

The *Chas. M. Farrell* is a sliding seat, lapstrake, double, wooden rowboat. In 1917 boatbuilder Thomas R. Keenan constructed this sea-kindly, graceful, and burdensome watercraft in his shop just down the street from the Dolphin Swimming and Boating Club (San Francisco, California). The boat was named in honor of Dolphin Club member Charles M. Farrell. It was intended for local recreational rowing, 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.

During its 1986 restoration, *Chas. M. Farrell* was lofted full scale by boat builder Jon Bielinski in the Dolphin Club boat shop. In 2020 boat builder Julia Hechanova generated offsets and scale drawings from that lofting. In addition, she made detailed construction drawings from measurements taken off the restored vessel.

The *Farrell* is 18' long between perpendiculars, 4'-7-1/2" beam width, and currently weighs 350 lbs. White Oak is used for the keel, hog, frame, inwale, rub rails, oarlock blocks, rudder, and name board. Planking, riser, fore deck, and burden boards are Port Orford Cedar. Other parts are made from Douglas Fir, Coastal Live Oak, Iron Bark, Black Locust, and Mahogany.

Nine-foot D section wood oars power the boat. The scantlings of the sliding seats minimize the weight of the metal 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: White Oak, Port Orford cedar planking, plus various woods including Black Locust, Mahogany, and Douglas Fir. Silicon Bronze bolts and screws, Copper rivets, and Brass fittings. Le Tonkinois varnish.

History:

The *Farrell* is a sliding seat double rowboat with a dolphin artfully carved into the foredeck. The 18' long *Farrell* has been a favorite of countless Dolphin Club rowers competing in regattas and for piloting swims in San Francisco Bay.

The boat is named for Charles M. Farrell who was born in June 1868, joined the Dolphin Club in May 1891, became a skilled oarsman, and served as club president in 1903 and 1904. Respected by the rowing community, he was chosen to head the newly founded Pacific Association of Amateur Oarsmen in 1904. As a civic leader, Farrell fought long and hard for the transformation of Black Point Cove into the public recreational Aquatic Park as it is today.

The *Farrell* was crafted by another Dolphin Club member, Thomas R. Keenan, in his shop at 249 Jefferson Street, San Francisco. Keenan was born in September 1870 and joined the club in July 1892 as a competitive rower. In 1895 he entered the boat building business, supplying, and repairing boats for many West Coast clubs. The oars he made were considered the best and used exclusively by Pacific battle fleet crews.

These two legendary club members, Charles M. Farrell and Thomas R. Keenan, both passed away in 1933.

The *Farrell* was christened and launched on Sunday, August 12, 1917. Although rowed mostly on San Francisco Bay, the *Farrell* has often been chosen for unique events both locally and far beyond. An early assignment for *Farrell* was to help pilot the very first Dolphin Club Golden Gate Swim on September 9, 1917, and later once again in 2017 for the 100th anniversary swim and celebration.

In October 1926, several Dolphin Club members rowed *Farrell* the eighty-five miles from San Francisco to Stockton. It was a leisurely pull through the Delta, up the San Joaquin River, and taking several days. However, other rowing clubs were inspired and proposed a non-stop race in 1927. Ultimately, four clubs entered boats like the *Farrell* with three-man crews, and the race began from Aquatic Park at 5:30 in the afternoon on August 27, 1927. They raced

through the night with the winning boat from the South End Rowing Club finishing in 15 hours and 31 minutes. The *Farrell* crew took third.

With those long rows to show the way, the Dolphin Club began a tradition in 1956 that continues most summers with fun rows upriver 90 miles to Sacramento, California. *Farrell* has made the journey dozens of times.

Moreover, in September 1980, the *Farrell* competed in a thirty-six-mile, open-ocean regatta from Catalina Island to Marina Del Rey, California.

Keeping any wooden boat operational for a century is not easy. To survive, the *Farrell* has required regular maintenance by boat shop volunteers, a lofting and major keel-up restoration by Jon Bielinski in 1986-1987, plus tender loving care by all rowers.

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.

Pickelhaupt, Bill. *The Rowing Clubs of California, 1851-1933*. New Braunfels, Texas: Flyblister Press, 2016.

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, January 2021.

Appendix: Illustrations

Figure 1: The *Chas. M. Farrell*, Photograph by Richard B. Cooper, December 14, 2016



Figure 2: The *Chas. M. Farrell* Name Board, Photograph by Richard B. Cooper, December 14, 2016



Figure 3: The *Chas. M. Farrell* Foredeck, Photographer Unknown, Ca. 2008

