



J. Taylor Crandall sailing with his son Chase.



Childe Hassam, *The West Wind, Isles of Shoals* (detail), 1904. Oil on canvas. Book and Manuscript Library, 1952.25.1.

## THE ALLURE

### Finding home: J. Taylor Crandall

BY LISA KOSAN, CONNECTIONS EDITOR

Back in the day of navigating with a compass and nautical charts, a sailor who was just a few degrees off course would be “toast,” courtesy of the fog or gauntlet of rocks between Marblehead, the Isles of Shoals and the Maine coast.

Happily, J. Taylor Crandall learned his skills from his father, Fletcher, and now he’s teaching his youngest son, 6-year-old Chase. The discipline of sailing, finding one’s direction and always knowing which way is home extends beyond the sea. Though Crandall now lives on the West Coast, he’s forever drawn east, back to Marblehead every summer to reconnect with family and friends.

“Mine is an amazingly small world when you connect all the dots,” Crandall says, “but sailing is clearly the magnet that brings me back. Like the old adage says, you can take the boy out of New England but you can’t take New England out of the boy.”

Crandall loves to share stories that illustrate his fierce loyalty to place, a theme that’s celebrated in the exhibition *American Impressionist: Childe Hassam and the Isles of Shoals* and is interwoven with PEM’s embrace of community.

A founding managing partner of Oak Hill Capital Partners private equity firm and a graduate of Bowdoin College (1976), Crandall’s grandparents took him frequently to the Peabody Essex Museum. Doris and Frank Byron Crandall lived on Winter Island in Salem. Frank was the Unitarian minister at the First Church in Salem, next to the

Witch House. Doris grew up in Athol, a champion rug hooker and collector of rose medallion china that is now in the PEM collection.

Doris summured with her children, Fletcher and Prudence, on Lunging Island, one of the Isles of Shoals that her husband purchased around 1920. The lone house was built by Oscar Loughton, brother of poet Celia Thaxter who lived on neighboring Appledore and whose gardens were a favorite subject of Hassam’s paintings.

Doris also loved to sail, but one beautiful Saturday, when she was in her 80s, she needed a lift to Lunging Island. Crandall was about 14. He and his brother, Whit, left Marblehead in their small sailboat, a Bristol 32, and passed through the Annisquam Canal with a light wind. Around noon, the winds picked up. “It was 35 knots, right on our nose,” Crandall says. “We’re taking white water over the bow. Grandmother puts on her foul-weather gear. She’s getting hit in the face, wearing glasses like the bottom of Coke bottles, and she’s smiling through the whole thing.”

A usual three-hour trip takes close to eight and they are forced to stop at the safest harbor off Star Island just short of their destination. “Grandmother strips down to her underwear, turns on the stove and cooks up my mother’s famous clam chowder that was packed for the trip,” Crandall says. “I fall asleep. My brother falls asleep.

“I wake up two hours later. I look around and I can’t find my grandmother. I wake my brother up. Oh my God, I think, she fell overboard. Then I see the dinghy is gone. I don’t believe that old bird. We power out to the end of Star to get a view of the harbor. Sure enough, the rowboat is pulled up onto the beach. It’s about 2 miles over there to Lunging. I see a light on in our cottage. It’s got to be midnight.



Yale University Art Gallery, Bequest of Sinclair Lewis to the Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare

## OF SPECIAL PLACES

“Next day we power over and have to swim ashore. I say, ‘Grandma, what the hell were you thinking about in the middle of the night?’ She tells me, ‘I wasn’t going to sleep in my wet underwear with my dry bed so nearby.’”

In hindsight, Crandall gets it. He understands the comfort of home.

He feels it when he sees children learning to sail at Marblehead’s Pleon Yacht Club and he recalls being 10 and saving a youngster who was pinned underwater by a wooden mast. He remembers his old friend Robert “Robby” N. Shapiro, president of the PEM Board of Trustees, who was a “stud sailor” at the Pleon. And he laughs when he tells his wife, Suzanne, that the two guys from the Marblehead DPW who knock on the door one day are friends from elementary school.

“We love the community we have here,” Crandall says. “Our kids get that, too,” — Kate, 4, Chase, 6, Will, 16, Alexa, 25, and Caroline, 28, “hanging out in a good environment, and growing up level-headed about working hard and being a good citizen.”

The ocean, on either coast, remains his true passion. So he sails every day with Chase, who can steer and is learning navigation and the vocabulary of sailing. Pinching, for example, means sailing at less than 45 degrees to the wind, an angle that decreases efficiency.

“I’m at the helm listening to music on a beautiful sunny day and Chase says, ‘Dad, you’re pinching.’ I thought he was just saying that, but I say, ‘OK, thanks.’ I’m a little off course and I correct myself. And then I test him. And Chase says, ‘Dad, you’re pinching again.’ I gave him a high five. I’m one proud dad.”

*“Like the old adage says, you can take the boy out of New England but you can’t take New England out of the boy.”* — J. TAYLOR CRANDALL

Dear Friends,

Happy September to each member of the PEM family. When you saw our last *Connections* cover of the breathtaking Childe Hassam painting *Sunset at Sea*, what was your first reaction?

Did the vibrant colors remind you of a summer day in a favorite spot?

September is often a time of beginnings and a new, energized rhythm of daily schedules. And

yet against the whirring fall pace, we also spend time sharing tales and photos of summer afternoons and remembering delightful summer events with good friends.

The memories of summer days will continue to brighten the grayest days of other seasons. Those lingering images and the feelings they evoke may become the magnets that pull us back each year to those places.

Childe Hassam returned for 22 summers to Appledore Island to paint and to share with a community he cherished. He once said his summer friends were a “jolly, refined, interesting and artistic set of people, like one large family.”

When you think of communities to which you are connected, you might share Hassam’s views. You might recall the “jolly” group that feels like “one large family.” And maybe, in part, it is this community that draws you back to special places each year and makes those places especially powerful and comfortable.

We hope you’ll enjoy the Childe Hassam exhibition at PEM and that your experience will not only remind you of the special places and people you cherish, but will deepen your connection to the PEM community. Together we will continue to be, as Hassam describes, “a set of people like one large family” sharing “interesting and artistic” experiences.

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