Matter of Detail: Bow Chocks

Text and Drawings by Maynard Bray

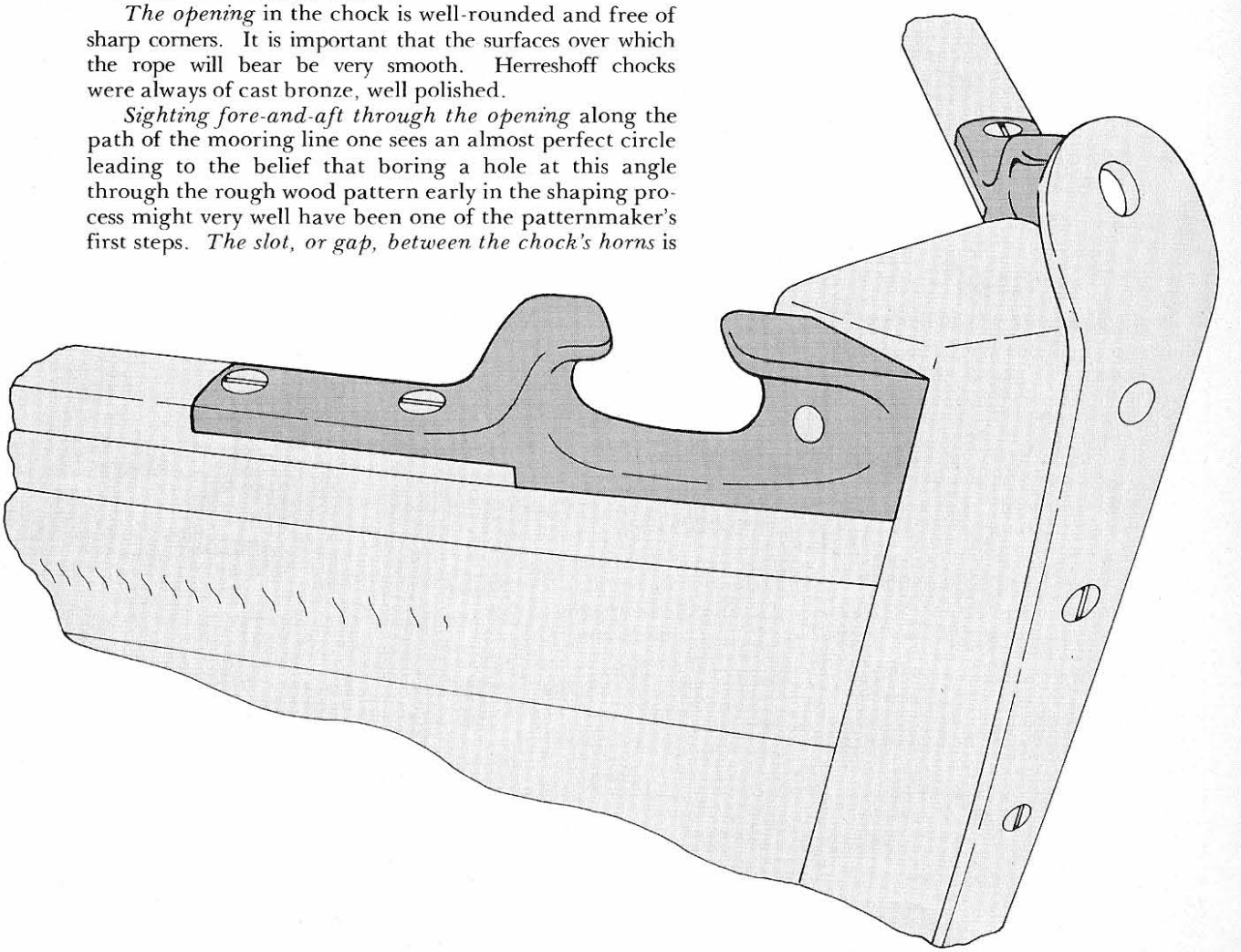
Continuing last issue's discussion of toe rails, this one will take up one effective and very beautiful way of tying them into the stem by means of the bow chocks. These chocks are of the Herreshoff pattern, and ones of similar shape adorned almost every boat to come out of that yard. With skilled pattern makers and a bronze foundry at his disposal, N.G. Herreshoff never hesitated to specify unique cast bronze fittings, such as these chocks, for the boats he designed. While it's true that some of this hardware had a one-time-only use, the patterns for other fittings were employed again and again, sometimes with some minor modifications, for a

Some features of the bow chocks installed on N.G. Herreshoff's ALERION III, now at Mystic Seaport Museum:

Overall height, which determines the size of the chock opening, is pretty much governed by the diameter of the mooring and docking lines one would expect to use. The toe rail itself generally establishes the *height at the chock's aft end,* although on some boats the bow chocks were raised completely off the deck and set on tapered toe rails having considerable height at their forward end. *Width of the chocks* is equal to that of the toe rail while their thickness at the base of the opening is about half this width. Herreshoff made his chock *just long enough* aft of the opening for the two screw fastenings which hold it in place—any longer would have required a curved shape to conform to the deck outline.

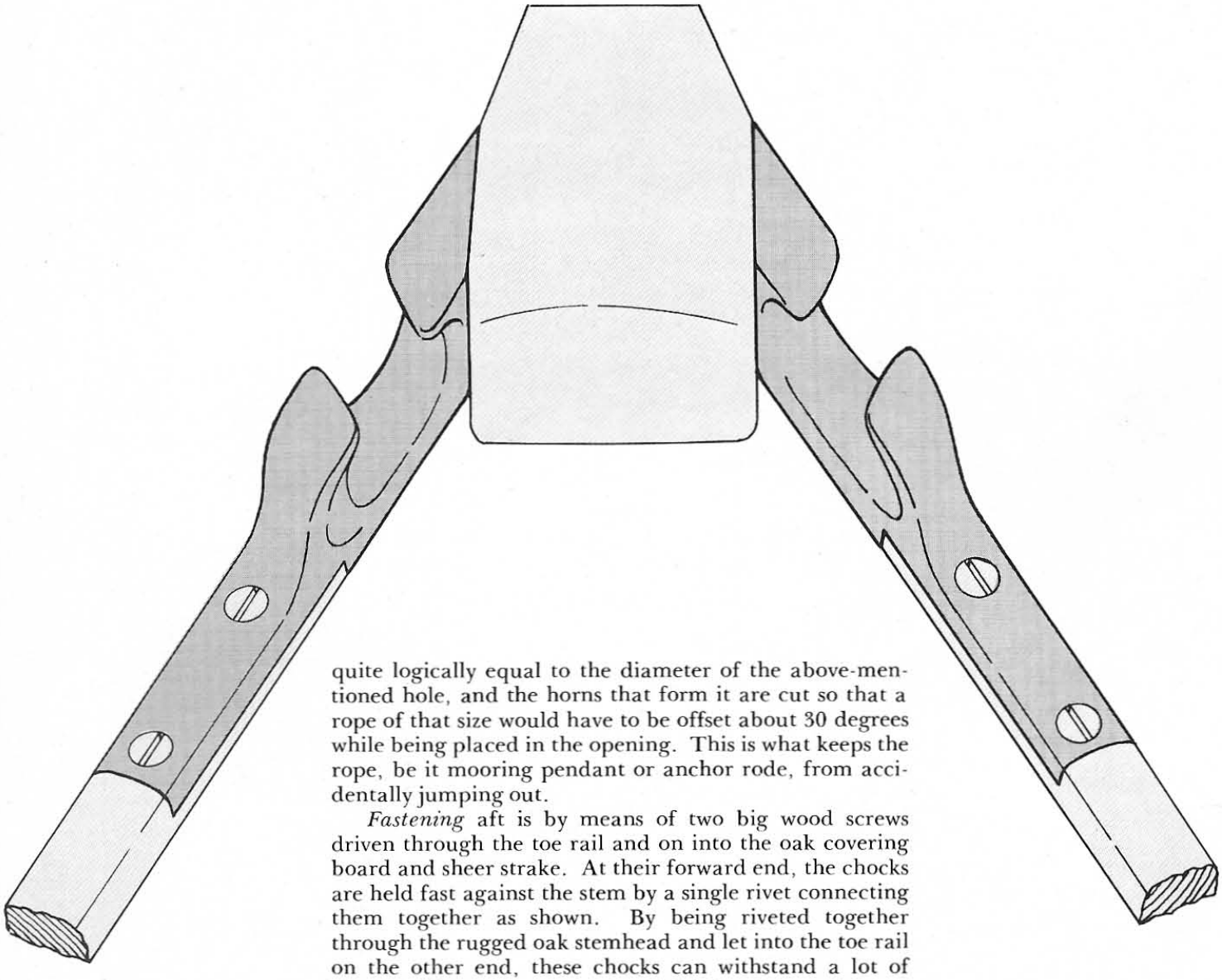
The opening in the chock is well-rounded and free of sharp corners. It is important that the surfaces over which the rope will bear be very smooth. Herreshoff chocks were always of cast bronze, well polished.

Sighting fore-and-aft through the opening along the path of the mooring line one sees an almost perfect circle leading to the belief that boring a hole at this angle through the rough wood pattern early in the shaping process might very well have been one of the patternmaker's first steps. *The slot, or gap, between the chock's horns* is



whole range of boats. So it was with some of the bow chocks—company records indicating, for example, that the chocks originally designed in 1914 for the Buzzards Bay 25-footers were used on more than a dozen other designs, both sail and power.

Herreshoff bow chocks are so functional and so handsome and, as indicated before, so adaptable to a variety of designs, that it's curious the concept hasn't been more widely imitated particularly by the manufacturers of stock marine hardware. Chocks of this type seem like a most natural way to make the transition between the toe rail and the stem head.



quite logically equal to the diameter of the above-mentioned hole, and the horns that form it are cut so that a rope of that size would have to be offset about 30 degrees while being placed in the opening. This is what keeps the rope, be it mooring pendant or anchor rode, from accidentally jumping out.

Fastening aft is by means of two big wood screws driven through the toe rail and on into the oak covering board and sheer strake. At their forward end, the chocks are held fast against the stem by a single rivet connecting them together as shown. By being riveted together through the rugged oak stemhead and let into the toe rail on the other end, these chocks can withstand a lot of abuse. I have yet to see one which has loosened, even though most surviving boats are past the 50-year mark.

Looking along the axis of the chock (i.e., along the line of the toe rail) one sees a rectangle. As mentioned in the last issue (WB No. 29) and as shown in some of the sketches there, this is true of the toe rails themselves. However, when fitted to both a crowned deck and the vertical side of a stem, a rake develops in the forward end of the chock to more or less match and greatly enhance the rake of the stem itself.

Taken altogether, it would be hard to imagine chocks which were a better blend of strength, lightness, beauty, and utility.