

YORKE, WILLIAM GAY (1817-1892?), b. St. John's, New Brunswick, England

William Gay Yorke, *The Great Republic*, 1861, oil on canvas **Gift from the Pfizer Corporation**

- Self-taught. Had natural artistic talent and spent his early years as a shipwright, painting in his spare time.
- By the time he had reached his early 30s, he was successful enough as a painter of ships to give up his trade and paint full-time. He also painted private yachts, tugboats and steam vessels.
- Worked in Liverpool where he taught his son to paint and the two collaborated until 1870 when they had a disagreement and the father sailed for America. In the US, he lived in New York City aboard his sailboat, which later sank in a collision with a steamboat. The accident caused him to lose an eye, and much impoverished, he lived in a shanty on a canal boat in Brooklyn. Eventually, the owner of the steamboat provided lodging for him and his family on a boat at Staten Island.

#### INFORMATION ABOUT *THE GREAT REPUBLIC*

- Launched on Oct. 4, 1853, the *Great Republic* was the largest wooden clipper ship ever constructed. Designed by naval architect/shipbuilder Donald McKay as a four-deck, four-masted medium clipper barque, the *Great Republic* (at 4,555 tons registry), was intended to be the most profitable wooden sailing ship. After its launch, the *Great Republic* sailed from Boston to New York where in December 1853, its first cargo was loaded.
- On December 27, 1853, a fire broke out in the buildings near the piers where the *Great Republic* and other vessels were moored. The ship was consumed by the fire to near the waterline. The remaining hulk was sold to Captain Nathaniel Palmer who salvaged and rebuilt the *Great Republic*. Still the largest clipper ship in the world at 3,357 tons registry, the *Great Republic* started back in service in February 1855, when her maiden voyage brought her to Liverpool in 13 days! In 1862, the 4th mast was removed, the others re-rigged and the clipper became a three-masted, full-rigged ship (three-skysail-yarder). In 1869, she was sold to the Merchants' Trading Company of Liverpool and renamed *Denmark*. She continued sailing until March 5, 1872, when a hurricane off Bermuda caused the ship to leak badly and be abandoned.
- During its 19-year merchant career, the *Great Republic* proved to be very fast under leading breeze conditions and often out-distanced the fastest merchant steamers on Mediterranean routes. Sailing around the horn of South America, the *Great Republic* averaged 17 knots (31 km/h) to set a record by logging 413 nautical miles (765) in a single day.

#### *The Republic* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Thou, too, sail on, O Ship of State!  
Sail on, O Union, strong and great!  
Humanity with all its fears,  
With all the hopes of future years,  
Is hanging breathless on the fate!  
We know what Master laid the keel,  
What workmen wrought thy ribs of steel,  
Who made each mast, and sail, and rope,  
What anvils rang, what hammers beat,  
In what forge and what a heat  
Were shaped the anchors of thy hope!

