

The Ash Breeze

Journal of the Traditional Small Craft Association

Building a Dory without any Plans

IN THIS ISSUE

Three Additional
Boat Building
Stories

VOLUME 40, Number 1 • Spring 2019 • \$4.00





The Ash Breeze (ISSN 1554-5016) is the quarterly journal of the Traditional Small Craft Association, Inc. It is published at Mariner Media, Inc., 131 West 21st Street, Buena Vista, VA 24416.

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Volume 40, Number 1

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The Traditional Small Craft Association, Inc. is a nonprofit, tax-exempt educational organization that works to preserve and continue the living traditions, skills, lore, and legends surrounding working and pleasure watercraft with origins that predate the marine gasoline engine. We encourage the design, construction, and use of these boats, and we embrace contemporary variants and adaptations of traditional designs.

TSCA is an enjoyable yet practical link among users, designers, builders, restorers, historians, government, and maritime institutions.

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TAB Layout Design: Karen Bowen

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Hugh Lane's rowing boat in front of the Portland Yacht Services launch

President's Message

Steve Brookman



Ah, the spring issue! A sure sign that seasons will be changing, and we will be back to boating soon. As I write this in January, looking out at the frozen tundra that is Blue Hill Bay, with another nor'easter heading our way and more forecasts of wicked negative wind chills, it takes a little imagination to envision that bay dotted with its summer complement of classic pleasure and rustic lobster boats.

Those of us who choose to live in these northern climes often get asked, "How do you survive the winters?" and why. For many, the stark change of seasons divides the year into manageable pieces, a time for being on the water, a time for maintenance, a time for planning and dreaming, even hobbies. Up here in Maine, there's not much boating this time of year. Our New Year's Day row was canceled due to gale force winds, but we're into planning. We've opened registration for our Small Reach Regatta, planned several other boating events, and met to discuss the next Maine Small Craft Celebration. (Check out our MSCC ad in this issue.) As I write this in front of the fire with a swashbuckling Hornblower novel up next, there are worse ways to pass the time.

Onto TSCA news—we had many requests for a TSCA calendar last year, but we were late asking for photos. So, this year we're getting our act together early and asking now for you to send in your best photos of your boats, a TSCA buddy's boat, boating events, or scenic views. Depending on the number of entries, this could turn into a fun contest. Send in your high-resolution photos to our editor, Andy Wolfe, at andy@marinermedia.com. Some of you are aware that Andy is recovering from a recent heart attack. He's on the mend, and we wish him the best. TSCA council members and officers come and go, but it's stalwarts like Andy who keep this ship steaming forward year after year.

Do you have too many boats? (Is that possible?) Extra boating gear cluttering the garage? Check out the brand-new classified section on our website: tsca.net/category/sale/. It is free to our members, another benefit of being a national TSCA member. While you're shopping, isn't it about time to get a new TSCA shirt and/or hat to replace the old "boatified" ones you've had for years?

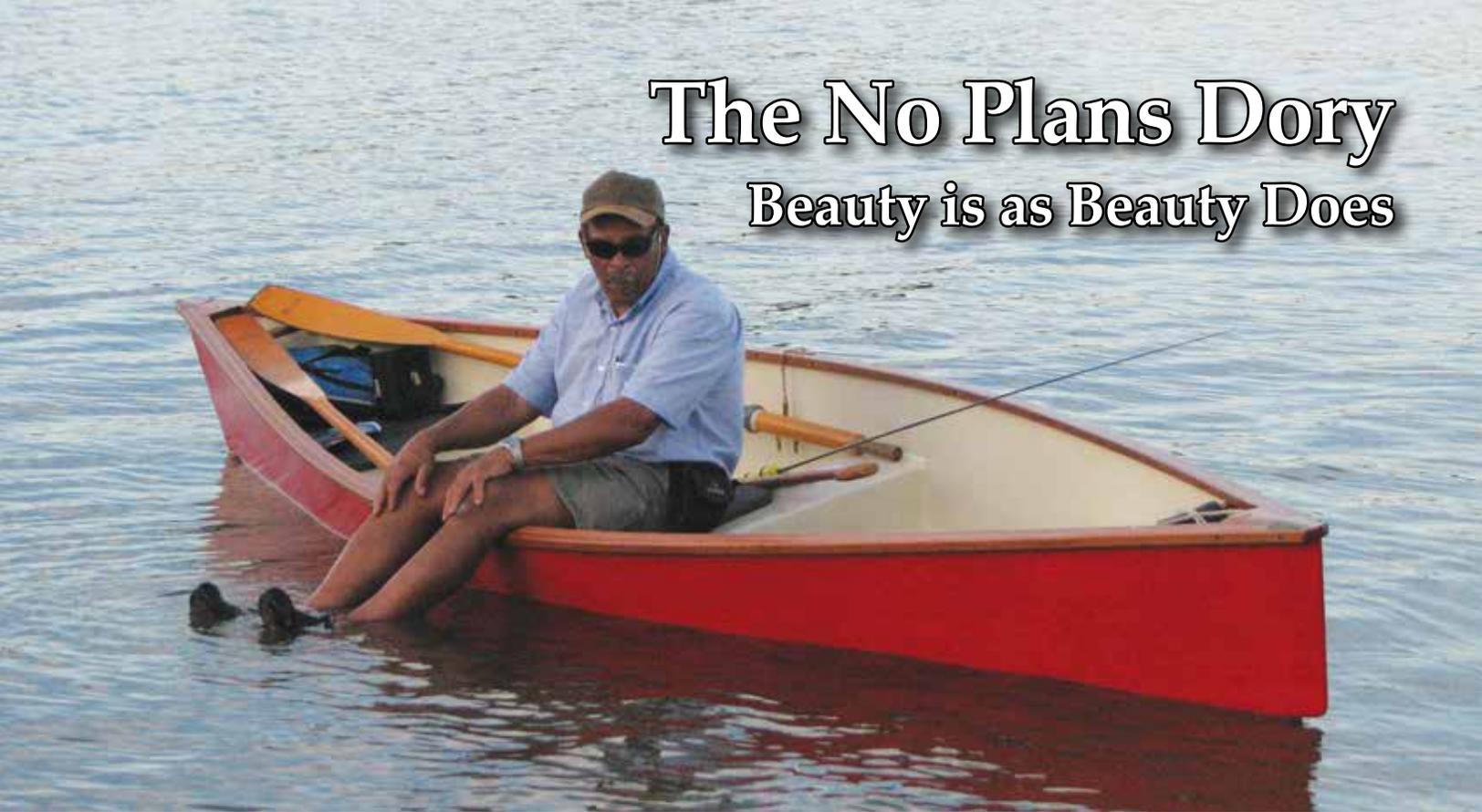
I got a lot of response about the youth initiative we've been discussing. Several chapters have youth boat building programs in addition to our new Brooklin Skiff Club; Cape Cod, Columbia River, and John Gardner. I'm sure there are others. I think where the TSCA can really come into our own is doing what council member Sue Wallace suggests, "Take a kid sailing." We have boats, and there are probably young neighborhood kids or relatives around. Grab one and get them on the water. Come to think of it, it was the

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The No Plans Dory

Beauty is as Beauty Does



by Andre de Bardelaben

Throughout my career designing and building boats, I've touted the virtues of round bottomed, human-powered water craft. Anyone who studies the results of multiple open water races between rowing craft of different types cannot help noticing that the outcomes almost always favor designs with curved hull sections. Those who have had the good fortune to try a wide variety of rowing designs in varied conditions know that foot for foot, well-designed round-bottomed boats are quieter and more comfortable in rough water than boats with flat bottoms and angular hulls.

While the performance and comfort benefits to be derived from well-designed, soft-sectioned hull forms are undeniable, there are times when the trouble and expense of making or buying them is hard to justify. Sometimes maximum efficiency and/or comfort are just not necessary. When the main focus is catching fish or downing ducks rather than covering miles, ne plus ultra performance is not called for. What you will need on those outings is a craft with sufficient room for the boat's occupants and their equipment and enough stability for the intended activity.

There may also be times when you want a break from fretting about your favorite, meticulously crafted dreamboat. Perhaps you want to introduce youngsters to the joys of life on the water but feel they haven't fully developed an appreciation for fine watercraft, nor the skills necessary to preserve them. Some people simply lack either the money to buy a fine boat or the time or temperament to build one. Finally, a professional boat builder, who could use a respite from the constant pressure

to please fussy clients, might welcome the opportunity to undertake a less demanding project. Several of those factors came together for me when I decided to create a special gift for my favorite fishing buddy/nephew.

What I wanted was an inexpensive, quickly assembled boat that was easy to transport to our favorite fishing spots. It had to be rugged, car-topable, capable of accommodating two persons safely, and easily carried and launched by two persons of average strength at undeveloped sites—not much more than about 100 pounds. I figured a boat 14 to 15 feet long, 3½ to 4 feet wide, with a center depth of 14 to 15 inches should meet my stability and weight requirements without having to resort to exotic materials and expensive building methods. Budget, space, and time constraints limited costs to a few hundred dollars and construction time to a few weeks. Professional pride dictated that it should look good and row reasonably well.

Those parameters all favor a simple flat-bottomed craft built of plywood, something like a double-ended dory. This is the type of craft that any reasonably skilled person with ordinary handyman tools could make pretty quickly. The primary hull planking and the seats of my boat were gotten out of four sheets of ¼" construction grade plywood. The rest of the wooden structural members were made from softwood (pine, spruce, fir) scraps that I had around my house and shop. The single form was built on a half sheet of ¾" plywood leftover

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How to Build a River Taf Coracle

by Walter R. Peebles

The Welsh coracle is an ancient craft, mentioned in written records a millennium ago. It is a simple, skin-covered craft for a single individual to travel upon rivers or streams and maybe ponds or small lakes as they are not particularly effective against the current or wind. Originally built of split willow rods woven into a lattice, hazel rods, and a covering of animal hides, they were more recently made of ash laths and a covering of fabric impregnated with tar or pitch.

There are a number of distinct coracle types differing in size, shape, gunwale construction, seat support, etc. My favorite is the one shown in the photo, which closely follows a design from the River Taf region of Wales. If you wish to build your own coracle, my recommendation would be to look at illustrations of a variety of coracles and simply choose the features you like the best. The books listed at the end of the article will get you off to a good start.

There are many commonalities in construction between the various types, though there were definite regional preferences for overall shape, number of laths and stringers, and whether or not the bottom should include diagonal laths. Several different methods were used for stabilizing the growing structure of the basket-like frame. A few were even built on a rudimentary form, but that may be more trouble than it is worth if you only want to build one.

Taf coracles were typically shaped something like half of a walnut shell. On my boat, the gunwale frame is 41" wide by 57" long. The curved front and back pieces of the gunwale were band-sawed from natural curves of elm branches that came down in an ice storm. The longer, shallow-curved side pieces were cut from a similarly obtained mulberry branch. I laid various branches on top of each other until I could see the right shape. The "ells" at the front corner are cut out of a natural crook of apple. These are all about 5/8" thick and 2½" across. They could be made even smaller but going any heavier would be pointless.

I glued up the elm and mulberry parts of the gunwale frame first with epoxy, with a half-lapped joint at the bow corners, and a shallower overlap at the stern so the stern piece sits 1/8" to 1/4" proud of the side pieces. I then used a benchtop mortise machine to cut rectangular holes about 1/4" by 1" spaced to where I thought the rib tops should wind up. (Of course, the old Welsh coraclemakers didn't have mortising machines, so they drilled, or burned, holes about 3/8" diameter and tapered the ribs and stringers to fit.)

Four ribs are located in front of the seat, spaced evenly between it and the front bar. One rib runs under the seat where the seat support will bear on it, about 3" on center in front of the rear edge. The final rib is about 3" behind the rear edge of the seat. The holes on the longer front bar should be



farther apart from the centerline than the corresponding holes on the rear part of the frame so that the stringers get closer together towards the stern.

The seat is a plank of cedar about 5/8" thick and 11" wide. There is a lot of latitude in these dimensions, depending on how heavy a boat you are willing to carry and what materials are available to you. There is nothing wrong with making the seat only seven or eight inches wide or in using thicker stock but keep the overall weight of the coracle in mind.

There is a divider panel beneath the seat that is about 12½" high (a bit more if you want a deeper boat). At its ends, it more or less follows the curve of the boat. The exact shape and fit is of little importance. This panel forms a shelf on which the coracle fisherman places his net and lunch as he carries the boat on his back upstream to his starting place. On some rivers, the tradition was to only use three square posts running between the seat and a narrow plank that rested on the ribs. Elsewhere a solid panel, or a panel made up of woven laths, or some thin vertical panels set into two grooved planks did the job. The latter is what I did, using the cheeks cut off the sides of the wood I used for paddles and fanning them out a bit towards the top because I thought it looked nicer. Once constructed, this can be screwed to the underside of the seat two or three inches ahead of the rear edge.

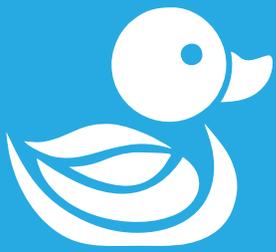
I cut the laths from fairly straight-grained white ash plank, about 1/4" thick by 1½" wide. The basic (canonical?) coracle design has seven transverse ribs, for which you start with stock 5.5 to 6 feet long, seven lengthwise stringers from 7 to 8 feet long, and two diagonals about 9 feet long. The Taf coracles as described in 1938 by James Hornell omit the diagonals and used only five or six ribs, so I used six.

In theory, you could calculate lengths, or measure the ribs on an existing coracle, but the weaving and bending up to the gunwales is all done by eye, so having them all a bit long and then just trimming them off at the end is much simpler. I used kiln dried ash, but air dried or green would be easier to bend. (I've also gotten good results with kiln dried clear poplar and clear pine.) Sand the faces and edges and soften

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Saturday, June 1

Antique & Classic Boat Festival and Arts at Navy Point
Friday and Saturday, June 14 and 15

JUL Big Band Night
Saturday, July 6, (Rain Date: Sunday, July 7)

AUG Watermen's Appreciation Day
Sunday, August 11

Charity Boat Auction
Saturday, August 31 (Rain or Shine)

OCT Mid-Atlantic Small Craft Festival
Friday and Saturday, October 4 and 5

OysterFest 2019
Saturday, October 26

For event details, visit cbmm.org/festivals.



Building the Haven 12½:

Part 2—The Process of Building

by David A. Fitch

Building the Molds

The standard practice for building a Herreshoff boat is to build the boat upside down through the planking phase. Then the boat is turned right side up and finished. On the surface, this concept does not raise to the level of causing a concern. It appears to be quite efficient, and I suppose that it is. However, it does prove to be somewhat of a mind game when the plans constantly refer to doing something to the top of or to the bottom of. One has to constantly remind one's self that the top is the bottom until the boat is turned over. Sound confusing? Well it is.

When laying out the molds on the paper drawings, take the time to assure accuracy. The ultimate shape of the hull will depend on it. As each mold is completed, go back and double check you measurements and alignments. The black and white pictures in the book are sometimes difficult to understand. I often had to read the text and look at the pictures multiple times. When using the batten, be consistent with where you place your nails for holding the batten. Placing the nails directly on the drawing lines will result in an oversized mold. I found it best to hold the batten so that the outside edge of the batten rested to the inside of the drawing line, then place the nails appropriately to hold the batten in place.

Don't forget to mark the shear line on your molds. This will come in handy later on. I placed the cross brace on each mold in such a way that the bottom edge of the brace (that will be the top edge when you turn the boat over) was on the shear line.

Each mold requires that you cut a bevel to the outer edge. The angle of the bevel for each mold is listed in the materials. The instruction book has this task done after the molds are set. I found it easier to cut the bevel while I was building each mold.

Building the Stem

A little side note here. In my exuberance and ignorance when selecting stock for the stem, I came across a slab of Live Oak. I was so excited that I would actually have Live Oak used in the frame of my boat. Live Oak is a protected species here in South Carolina, so it is not readily available. Boy, was I disappointed. As I started to mill, I found numerous checks inside the slab not visible on the surface. I also found the wood too brittle and very hard to mill. I ended up with a stem that I refused to use. I tried a second time from the same slab with the same results. Yesterday, I bought a quarter sawn 8/4 White Oak board that I will use for my third attempt.



I believe I alluded in the first article that building this boat in some ways is also building me. As a younger man when things did not turn out exactly to my satisfaction, I would say to myself well that's good enough and maybe I'll repair or patch it tomorrow. No more. Now when something is not what I absolutely believe is the best I can do, I throw the piece away, get a new piece of stock and start over.

NOTE: At picture 37 in the book, it says, "Now is a good time to install a 5/8" diameter pine stopwater." I had no clue what a stopwater was and there was no definition on the book. When you run across something like this, STOP everything and do your research.

Building the Transom

I selected Sapele for the transom rather than Mahogany. The appearance is similar to Mahogany, but my selection was more extensive. I think the Sapele may be a little less forgiving for milling. I plan to go slow and easy to mitigate tear out. Allowing for the width of the stock I was using, I calculated the number of pieces needed for the transom. Using the half width drawing, I measured the width for each piece and made my cuts, leaving each piece a bit proud. I arranged the cut pieces on the table and then over laid the template to assure I had adequate stock for the finish cut. I also at this time marked where I wanted the silicon bronze dowels to be located.



Suggestion: This would be a good time to use the template to roughly mark out your finish cut lines. Doing so will prevent you from having a cut line run through a dowel—a lesson I learned the hard way.

I used a doweling jig to drill the holes for the silicon bronze dowels. I also used biscuits strategically placed through the seams to add additional strength. Pulling the pieces together with the dowels in place required a lot of force. I used my pipe clamps for this job. After the glue set and the cleanup, I once again used the template to mark out the cut line for the outside edge of the transom. At the same time, I also use the template to mark the degree changes for the sides. I used masking tape to mark the designated angles around the sides to prevent damaging the surface of the Sapele. Then it was time to tackle the rolling bevel in the transom side, which was no small task for my skill level. I was not able to use a power saw as shown in the book. I used all hand tools: block plane, spoke shave, chisel, and Shinto saw. It took me a day to do each side, but I was one very proud woodworker when I finished.

Building the Centerboard Trunk

This is a fairly straight-forward, simple process. Follow the steps in the book. I ended up laminating the bedlog because I could not find stock of suitable thickness. Be sure to put



a good seal coat on the inside pieces of the trunk before assembly. You will not have another chance. I used two coats of unthickened epoxy.

Setting the Molds

How you set your molds will depend to some extent on what you are using for a base. Again, I used a raised strongback. You can use any flat and level surface to which you can fasten the

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No Plans Dory

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from a flooring project. As I intended to sheath the hull inside and out in fiberglass and epoxy, I assembled the hull using ordinary yellow woodworking (aliphatic) glue and commonly available, non-marine grade metal fasteners (staples, drywall screws). The gunwales and oarlock sockets were installed using corrosion resistant screws. The gunwales on my boat were made from leftover mahogany that I felt didn't make the quality grade for my paying customers. Many other woods would be suitable for trimming the hull.

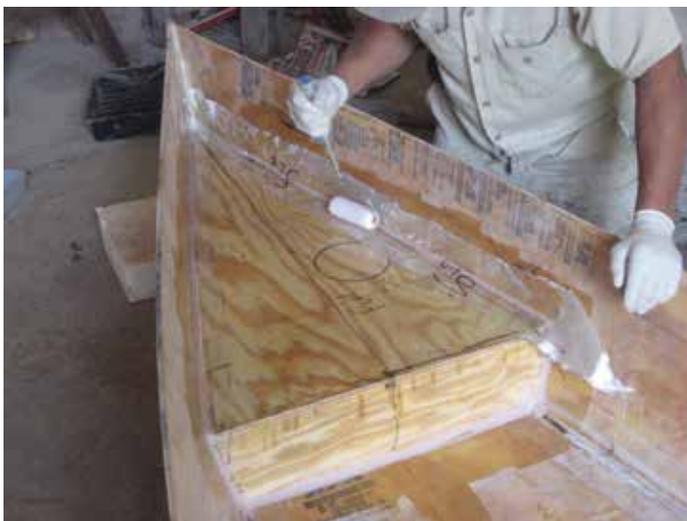
After making a few preliminary sketches to work out the basic hull dimensions and seating layout, I did the actual design work directly on the materials right on the shop floor. While my guesswork was informed by decades of experience, less experienced builders attempting this sort of project would probably feel more comfortable after making scaled down mock ups in cardboard to test their ideas first. Aside from the reasons given earlier, this exercise (building this boat and writing this article) was undertaken to remove some of the fear and mystery from boat building by demonstrating how easily a nice, practical small boat could be made using primarily modestly priced, locally available materials. Every year, hundreds of potential boat builders order plans for boats that are never completed—many are never begun. For first-timers, the psychological barriers to boatbuilding are daunting enough without the added pressure of having to acquire the pricy, exotic, hard-to-source materials that many plans specify. Except for the fiberglass cloth and epoxy resin, which were ordered from a marine supply house, all of the materials used to make this hull could have been purchased at a big box hardware store. The Styrofoam that we used for supplemental flotation was actually free as it was made from discarded packing material salvaged from a dumpster behind a tractor store. Realistically, any first-time builder with modest woodworking skills should get pretty good results just



by looking at a few pictures and following the basic guidelines presented here. Remember, pretty good is what we're aiming for. In truth, nothing resembling perfection is possible using these methods or materials.

If at the end of this project you find that you desire a boat with different characteristics, (deeper, more stable, shorter, lighter, more or less maneuverable, or just prettier) this type of construction lends itself to experimentation. On your next effort, simply make the desired changes. If you find that you absolutely must have more refinement than this method and these materials can yield, at least you'll have gained a heightened appreciation for the skills and patience that go into producing premium boats with more sophisticated hull forms.

Though my finished boat ended up with curved sides, raked stems and conventionally upswept sheer and bottom profiles, no curved lines were cut into the side planks. Its pleasant, boaty looks are the result of bending batten reinforced scarfed side planks with straight, parallel top and bottom edges, and



modestly slanted ends around a single vertical building form. Anytime flare is incorporated into the sides and rake in the stems of a panel-sided boat, some spring will automatically appear in the sheer and rocker (upward curving profile) will be introduced in the bottom. I could have gone for a more dramatic hull profile, but, for the sake of building simplicity, I went with straight, parallel top and bottom lines on the side panels. (In a sportsman's boat, a low, moderate sheer is preferable because it's less conspicuous to wildlife.) In that same vein, I limited flare in the sides and kept the stem rake moderate and symmetrical fore and aft. Since the port side matches the starboard side, all "design" work was done on one side and transferred to the other by tracing the first panel overlaid on the second. As the bow and stern ends of my boat's hull are essentially the same, I really only had to design one quarter of the hull. The bottom "planking" began as two end-beveled (scarfed) rectangles glued to the bottom edges of the bent side panels that were trimmed to shape once the glue had dried. Because of the wide, flat floor and relatively short waterline, I decided to add a skeg aft to enhance directional stability. The base material for that appendage was a 2x4 stud shaped to match the curvature of the bottom and glued directly to the hull. While making this boat I tried to avoid several common boatbuilding steps like building a strongback and setting up multiple forms. Also, by covering the entire exterior and interior (seats too) of the hull with fiberglass, I was able to totally sidestep the need for separate, permanent, dedicated, too often in-the-way framing. What might sound to first timers like a complicated building process was easier to execute than it is to describe.

Nobody should be intimidated by this project. Though my boat was built in a shop equipped for and by a professional boat builder, every important part of the building process could have been accomplished by just about anyone in most any garage with tools likely to be found there. Also anyone wanting to build a similar craft shouldn't be afraid to incorporate building techniques favored by other builders/authors. Want to use a hot-melt glue gun, zip ties or copper wire stitching? It's your boat. Did I use my pneumatic nailer or stapler? Not using available tools would have been foolish. Having labored as a tool-poor boatbuilder for many years when I was starting out, I speak from experience when I say if you put forth your best effort, there will be little to distinguish a boat built in a garage from one assembled in a well-equipped shop by a seasoned master. Any applications of advanced equipment didn't noticeably improve the overall quality of my boat or cut more than a day or so of labor off of the time it would have taken an amateur to build this boat. When I chose to use construction grade plywood for the planking and epoxy resin saturated fiberglass sheathing, any pretense of producing a museum quality historical replica went out the

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Gerard Crowley has a team rowing around Ireland for charity (www.rowaroundireland.com). He writes about the Gaco oarlocks: *Hi John. We've hit some pretty rough seas and wind over tide situations along the NE corner and northern coasts of Ireland and the rowlocks are absolutely brilliant and great comfort from the fact that they always stay in position. I'll write you a great endorsement on them when finished.*



John Gardner Grant

In 1999, TSCA created the John Gardner Grant program to support projects for which sufficient funding would otherwise be unavailable. Eligible projects are those which research, document, preserve, and replicate traditional small craft, associated skills (including their construction and uses) and the skills of those who built and used them. Youth involvement is encouraged.

Proposals for projects ranging from \$200 to \$2000 are invited for consideration. Grants are awarded competitively and reviewed annually by the John Gardner Memorial Fund Committee of TSCA, typically in May.

The source of funding is the John Gardner Memorial Endowment Fund. Funding availability is determined annually.

Eligible applicants include anyone who can demonstrate serious interest in, and knowledge of, traditional small craft. Affiliation with a museum or academic organization is not required. Projects must have tangible, enduring results that are published, exhibited, or otherwise made available to the interested public. **Projects must be reported in *The Ash Breeze*.**

Program details, applications, and additional information:
tsca.net/john-gardner-fund/



"To preserve, continue, and expand the achievements, vision and goals of John Gardner by enriching and disseminating our traditional small craft heritage."

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Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum selected to build *Maryland Dove*

The Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum has officially been selected to build a new *Maryland Dove*, a representation of the late 17th-century trading ship that accompanied the first European settlers to what is now Maryland. *Maryland Dove* is owned by the state of Maryland and operated and maintained by the Historic St. Mary's City Commission.

"HSMC and CBMM are natural partners in this project," said Regina Faden, Executive Director at Historic St. Mary's City. "It fulfills both our missions and delivers a new *Dove* to tell the story of (early) Maryland."

Maryland Dove is Historic St. Mary's City's floating ambassador and one of its most popular exhibits. The goal of the new ship design is to be as close to the 1634 original as possible, including features that were not known when *Maryland Dove* was built in 1978.

Ship design work will commence in January 2019, and construction is anticipated to begin at CBMM by mid-year. The launch of the new *Maryland Dove* is targeted for 2021. All work will be done in full public view, allowing the public to experience every stage of the project.

"We are thrilled and honored to have been selected to build a new *Maryland Dove*," said CBMM President Kristen Greenaway. "Over the course of the next few years, our shipwrights and apprentices will build a historically accurate replacement to the existing ship, and we welcome guests to be a part of the construction and education experience."



Maryland Dove, Historic St. Mary's City's floating ambassador, sits docked outside the shipyard of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels, MD, where a new ship will be built over the next several years.

To learn more about *Maryland Dove*, visit the website: bit.ly/marylanddove. For more information on CBMM, visit cbmm.org.



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Cooperation and Collaboration

by Joe Youcha

If you come to the Antique Boat Museum in Clayton, NY, over Columbus Day Weekend (October 11–14), you'll see over 150 folks learning about and sharing their experiences of Teaching With Small Boats. They'll be part of the sixth national conference held by the Teaching With Small Boats Alliance (TWSBA), which encompasses groups ranging from Maritime Museums to backyard builders working with Scout groups.

"TWSBA 2019" is being held in concert with the Museum Small Craft Association (MSCA). It just makes sense. So many TWSBA groups also are part of MSCA. And, the theme of the conference is cooperation and collaboration. Just as there's a lot of overlap between TWSBA and the MSCA, there are many TWSBA members doing TWSBA work—the Lost Coast Chapter and the Brooklin Skiff club jump immediately to mind.

Since a four-person discussion at the 2008 WoodenBoat Show, TWSBA has grown into an organization with 133 Associated Programs (92 of which have attended national conferences). These programs from 24 states and Canada annually serve 106,000 adults and 100,000 youth.

Over 150 people attended the 2017 TWSBA Conference at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels, MD. Those folks got charged up and went off and held 2018 regional gatherings in the Pacific Northwest, New England, the Bay Area, the Mid-Atlantic, and the Great Lakes. As many people attended the regional gatherings as attended the

national gathering in St. Michaels. They worked on regional needs and suggested topics for the Clayton conference. That's how TWSBA works. It's driven by members who participate.

TWSBA teaching is "hands-on teaching." This is what you'll see at the conference.

Planned sessions include:

- A hands-on educational "marketplace"—come try out educational projects ranging from boat building to boat design, lofting, model tow tanks, and navigation
- On the water programming
- A series of "101" instructional sessions on organizational development, program design, fundraising, communications, and governance (It's not all fun and games...)
- Pecha Kucha sessions about exciting and interesting programs

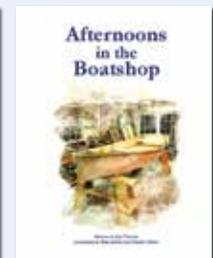
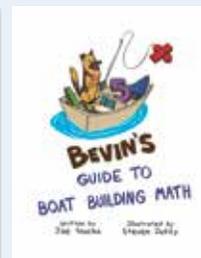
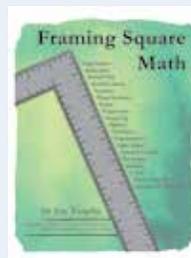
And, as always, there will be the informal down time that's so important for sharing and learning.

If you use small boats to teach in your community, or you're interested in learning more about this type of work, come to Clayton! www.teachingwithsmallboats.org

John Brady led a tour of the Independence Seaport Museum Small Craft Collection for TWSBA Mid-Atlantic participants.



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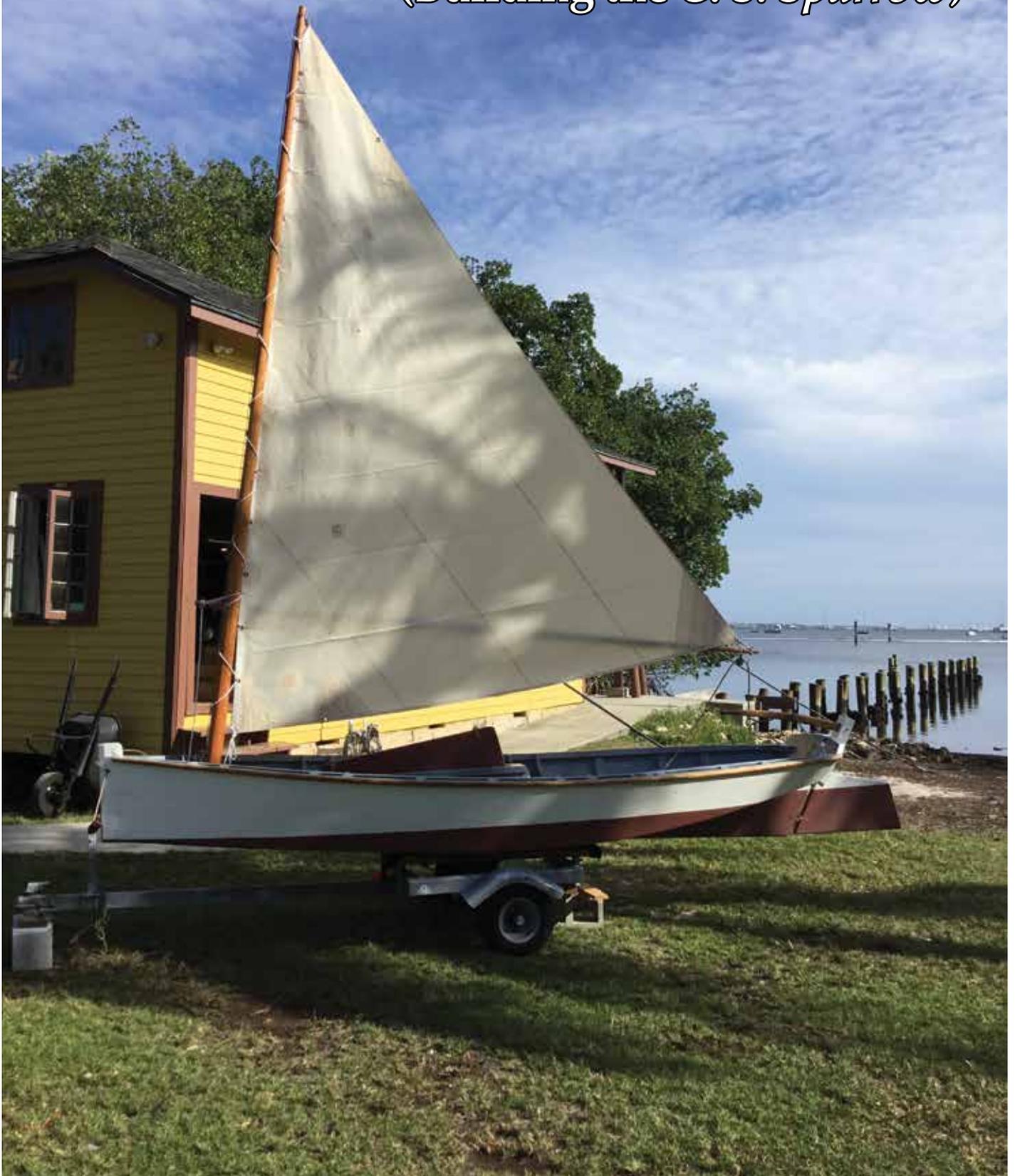


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Cape Sable and the *Sparrow* (Building the C. S. *Sparrow*)



by Michael Chapman

Southwest of Miami lies the peninsula of Cape Sable, an eighty-seven mile drive through Everglades National Park to the end of the road at Flamingo. A short distance west of Flamingo is where the cape joins the mainland. Cape Sable is the southernmost point of the continental United States. The cape is bordered by Whitewater Bay to the north, Florida Bay to the south, and the Gulf of Mexico to the west. Once a coconut plantation, Cape Sable has a long, rich, and interesting history. The Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow, an endangered species of the cape, was the agreed-upon appropriate name, *C. S. Sparrow*, chosen for the next boatbuilding project at the Barnacle.

The Barnacle is a historic state park, the oldest surviving residence in South Florida located on the shores of Biscayne Bay in Coconut Grove. Coconut Grove was the first settlement in this area long before the city of Miami. Ralph Middleton Munroe, “The Commodore,” visited Coconut Grove in the 1870s, moved there from New York in the 1880s, and built a life, family, and home in this tropical wilderness. When the home was completed, Munroe commented the roof structure resembled a Barnacle, and the name stuck.

Munroe was an avid yacht designer and builder with great interest in the New England Sharpie and its possibilities for good service in this area of shoal waters. Munroe furthered the Sharpie design with the Egret, a double ended twenty-eight-foot Sharpie that also navigated offshore between Biscayne Bay and northern Florida tending to the mail service and other duties. This period of history is before roads or rail-service in South Florida; boats were the only mode of transportation. The Egret was built in New York and shipped to Key West on a Mallory steamer. Key West was the only major port in the area. Munroe took possession of Egret and sailed back north to Biscayne Bay.

Munroe perfected what he called the “rounded bottom Sharpie”—the first built was the *Presto*. This was a shallow draft, center-boarded Ketch in the forty-foot range capable of not only shoal waters but also blue water navigation. Sisters of the *Presto* were described as “Presto Types.” The design was controversial at the time due to deep-water sailors who disputed capabilities of the design at sea. The Commodore proved them wrong; one of the later sisters, the *Kona*, logged a total of 4,000 sea miles from New York to Cuba, the Caribbean, and Mexico.

The Egret and several other of Munroe’s designs were cross-planked Sharpies and in keeping with the New England oystering craft design features. The cross-planked Flat Iron Skiff was chosen for the project. Funding for materials was provided by the Barnacle Society, a non-profit organization that supports the Barnacle. Along with assistance from the Park staff, this project was made possible. A deciding factor in this choice of boat was a photograph taken in the 1880s of Munroe’s early design Sharpie Kingfish. In the photo, Kingfish



Early stages

is tied to a pier with a Flat Iron skiff in the foreground. This was the connection to the Barnacle.

The design of the *Sparrow* was taken from Raul Parker’s book *The Sharpie Book*. Parker’s design as described was based on the eight-foot New England oystering Skiff in Howard I. Chapelle’s book *American Small Sailing Craft*. Parker’s design was 14’-1” LOA, the perfect size for the project. In Parker’s book, all of the designs are for plywood construction. Our wish was for traditional cross-plank construction, so based on Parker’s design, I redrew the *Sparrow* for traditional construction.

It was very important to base all decisions on having connections to the area. Building materials chosen were Florida Cypress for planking, Florida Live oak for structure, and Southern Yellow Pine for secondary structure and deadwood. Mirage Manufacturing Company, builders of the Great Harbor line of Trawlers in Gainesville, Florida, were gracious in not only donating the Cypress and Live Oak but also delivered it. The Cypress came from Griffis Lumber Company, family owned since 1955 and also located in Gainesville. Unfortunately, the Live Oak proved to be in poor condition and was not used; in its place, White Oak was purchased. The wood chosen for spars is not local but the better choice, Douglas Fir. In the matter of the Douglas Fir, we can claim it was salvaged from one of the wrecks off the coast. “Wrecking” in this area is another fascinating story. One of the volunteer’s carved the sheet-line cleat from Florida Lignum vitae. All other hardware is bronze or brass.

The project was started in 2016. In 2017, Hurricane Irma caused a major delay with the project in that during the storm a thirty-foot derelict shrimp boat dragged its improper mooring and caused severe damage to the boathouse at the Barnacle where the *Sparrow* was being built. The *Sparrow* had an unscheduled sea trial, as the storm surge brought a

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Coracle

continued from page 4

the corners a bit to make them easier to weave, but don't get carried away—it's a coracle, not a yacht. The old sources all refer to a framework of "rough laths." It's helpful to mark the centers on each piece to help align things when weaving.

It's also a good idea to practice the weaving pattern with a few lengths of some kind of thin flexible strips, like 1/2" wide plastic shipping straps or cane for seat weaving. You will want something that is fairly stiff to mimic the behavior of the laths. Ribbon, for example, won't really tell you much about how the basket stiffens up as it develops. This is particularly true if you are including full length diagonals in your coracle, as it is far easier to work them in as you go than to try to insert them in a fully woven mesh. For this reason, I suspect, some traditions used partial diagonals that engaged only with the outer two rows of the main grid.

I soaked the ash for about a week in a 4" pvc DWV pipe to try to get some moisture back into the wood to help soften it for bending. A little bleach in the water helps to cut down on the risk of mold. The usual way was to sink the green or air-dried laths in the creek for a few days. If you choose to include full diagonals, you will need to start the weaving from where the diagonals and the center rib and stringer cross and build outward from there. Add a pair of ribs crosswise (one on either side of the central crossing), then a pair of stringers front to back, then crosswise again until all laths each way are in place. Omitting the diagonals allows you to arrange all seven of the stringers roughly in position and interlace the ribs one at a time—a much simpler approach. The spacing depends a bit on the overall size of the boat but keeping the grid to about five to six inches on center is a good start. A rubber mallet is a big help, as are some sand bags or other means of holding things in place while you're whacking away. Some traditions used forked sticks holding things down to the ground, and some used something like a shipping pallet to tie the ribs down.

You can space the transverse ribs that will be under and behind the seat a bit wider, and it will look nicer to narrow the spacing of the stringers so that they get closer together towards the back of the boat, which can be considerably narrower than the front. I used the assembled gunwale frame to check the alignment of the ribs. Some larger coracles benefit from interlacing a few partial ribs that don't bend up around the bilge to stiffen the bottom in front of the seat where you step in and out.

Once the weaving is done, it's time to turn up the ends of the ribs and stringers. I have a commercial wallpaper steamer, so I set up a manifold of hoses and open 1½" pvc plumbing pipes about two feet long to heat several ends at a time. Start with the stringers at the middle of the front and back, and then do some transverse ribs, then return to the stringers, and

so on. The ends can also be bent up one at a time by wrapping rags around the area to be bent and pouring boiling water on the rags to concentrate the heat where needed. When the rib is flexible enough, bend it up and tie or clamp it in place, or cut off and taper the end to fit the hole.

Try to compress the rib end lengthwise as you make the bend to compress the inside of the curve rather than stretch the outside, and don't worry too much if a rib cracks. It is nearly impossible to pull out the busted one and insert a replacement, so just use a few small clamps to try to limit the fracture and plan on smoothing it off and reinforcing the outside of the break with a thin (1/16") layer of ash glued on with thickened epoxy or gorilla glue. Once the cover is stretched over the frame, the patch won't show at all.

As you bend up the ends, be sure to make the front of the boat deeper than the back by a couple inches. It will look a bit nicer and probably trim a bit better in the water. Trim the ends, and either peg or glue them. It is very important that the bottom be pretty flat, for stability. This can be achieved by flipping the frame over and weighting the bottom while the whole thing dries out for a few days. A few boat nails through the rib under the seat into the bottom of the divider will help keep things in place. Be sure to sink the heads below the surface so they don't tear the cover.

After the frame is dry, glue on the apple "ells." If you want, you can drill a few holes into the seat and the ells and insert dowels to give the appearance of a frame that is pegged together. Sand it a bit and put on whatever finish you want. Thompson's Water Seal works fine, or you can varnish it if you wish, but that may be kind of gilding the lily. Some folks painted the laths white to enhance the contrast with the black fabric cover.

For a cover, I used a second-hand 84" square dacron tablecloth (like they use in the fancier restaurants) that I obtained for a dollar or two from my local university salvage yard. A lot of other fabrics could work as well, such as canvas, flour sacks, or even an old bed sheet. (I've thought about taking a finished frame to a marina to have them use their heaviest gauge storage shrink wrap as a covering. How does a clear coracle sound?)

Staple the cloth to the edge of the gunwale, starting in the middle of the sides and ends and working towards the corners. Stretch as much of the shape as you can, then set up a few pleats in each corner, trying to keep them as symmetric as possible side for side. Fold them over towards the back. For a neater appearance these pleats can be sewn flat on the outside using a "Speedy-Stitcher" or similar sewing awl. If you don't stitch them, try to stick them down with whatever you paint the fabric with, but don't fret—a lot of old photos of coracles show large wrinkles.

You can paint the fabric with a variety of things. Heated tar, pitch, or a mixture was traditional. I've tried non-fibered roof and foundation coating, but it takes forever to dry and gets soft



in the sunlight, so you wind up constantly cleaning tarry spots from your hands, clothing and vehicles. I've had somewhat better luck with a waterborne version from Menards.

Black asphalt fence paint seems to dry more thoroughly but doesn't penetrate the fabric as well as the solvent based foundation stuff, so I thinned it about 50% with water to blacken the fabric through, then immediately recoated with the straight stuff. A second coat (especially on the bottom) may be a good idea. The fence paint is still a bit problematic on really hot days and in direct sunlight. I am thinking about using black or dark-colored latex house paint on the next coracle or maybe even black sunbrella fabric and waterborne polyurethane floor finish. I'm not a totally hide-bound traditionalist, but so far all my coracles have been black.

I left the fabric a bit long, so that it protected the frame as I painted it, then trimmed it so that I could fold over about a half inch and staple it down. Then I attached rub rails made of about 1/4" by 1/2" ash, with the edges and corners rounded off pretty heavily, using stainless steel oval head screws

I put a 2" wide carrying strap on mine, in keeping with tradition, but the whole thing only weighs 23 pounds, so unless you plan on hiking a few miles with it, you can easily leave it off.

The paddle is five feet long with a shaft about 1 3/8" to 1 1/2" diameter and a 3 1/2" wide blade about 24 inches long. I made mine out of a fine-grained douglas fir 2x4 that I salvaged

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Sharing the Joy of Small Boats



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No Plans Dory

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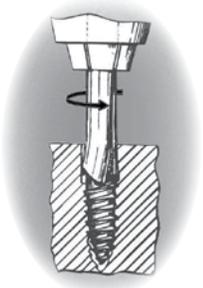
window. Yet, my dory is no less authentic than any found anywhere. Do you think they wouldn't have resorted to these methods at Lowell's Boat Shop had they been available in the 1880s? The addition of epoxy resin, modern plastic fillers and synthetic sheathing fabric is undeniably an improvement over 19th century technology.

So you might be wondering, "How does your boat row?" It rows about as well as any dory near its size—not brilliant, but competent—safe and reassuring. If I were to build another, would I change anything? Yes, but not very much. Every time I complete a design-as-you-go project like this, I wish I'd had done a few things differently. (In a how-to companion piece, I corrected some of the errors that I made when building my boat.) My boat turned out a little heavier than hoped for, but the stability and roominess of my 15'x44" dory far exceeds that of most 18' tandem canoes. It can safely and comfortably accommodate up to three adults. If I built another, I would work on reducing the weight some and maybe tweak the shape to give her somewhat more conventional aesthetics, but overall I'm satisfied with this boat. Functionally, both the concept and methods behind project Sow's Ear (that's what we call her) have proven to be completely sound. As I said at the outset, sometimes perfection isn't necessary, nor is it appropriate. Indeed, it's the roughness of craft like these which allows us to put them in the background and concentrate on the task at hand. Though my family has access to some very sophisticated rowboats, this one gets used the most. It's the one that I'll lend to my duck hunting neighbors without hesitation. It's the one that I can take my semi-invalid, octogenarian mother-in-law out fishing in, and it's become our go-to choice for navigating our rocky local rivers. It has served us admirably on our local ponds, marshes, large reservoirs, and even Lake Erie. Based on my experiences rowing this boat, I wouldn't be afraid to take it out on the Chesapeake Bay or other coastal haunts. As if that isn't enough, she draws compliments everywhere we take her.

So far, our budget drift boat has delivered all that we could reasonably ask of it. The reception this boat has received has been so positive that it's easy to forget about the quick and dirty nature of this project. A design like this could well serve as the basis for an affordable livery fleet. Think about it, over a long summer you could build six nice rowboats for less than \$5,000!



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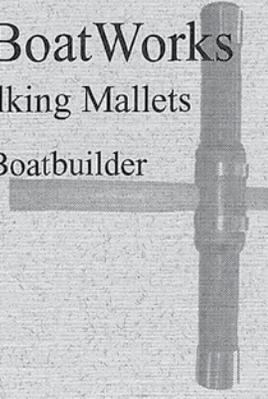
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Pres. Message

continued from page 2

neighbor down the hill when I was growing up that taught me how to sail on his wooden Lightning. Even though it was fresh water, it got in my blood and led me to the Navy, a lifetime of sailing, and eventually the TSCA.

It's not too early to start thinking about the upcoming council elections. Council members serve a 3-year term starting on June 30th, so we have 3 vacancies to fill this year. Last year, we had a record number of volunteers opting for the council seats and had an actual election. I hope that the enthusiasm continues, and you'll put your name in the hat. The workload really is light, consisting mostly of voting by email, and it gives you the opportunity to make your voice heard about TSCA matters.

That's it for this issue. Send in your photos and stories and stay warm. I hope to be back on the water and writing about boating in what will be my last column.



Calendar of Events

Port Aransas Wooden Boat Festival

April 12–13, 2019
Port Aransas, TX

Beaufort North Carolina Maritime Museum Annual Wooden Boat Show

May 4, 2019
NC Maritime Museum
315 Front St.
Beaufort, NC 28516

Beaufort North Carolina Round the Island Race

May 5, 2019
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Go to tscanet.net/events/ to submit events from your chapter and in your area.

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Haven 12½

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molds. The operative terms here is fasten. You will need to secure the molds to the base. This would be a good time to have a helping hand. The molds are not heavy, but they are unwieldy. In addition to fastening the molds to the base, they have to be square to the centerline and level. A person on both sides makes this task a lot easier. The first mold set, usually #13, also has to be secured in such a way as to support the rest of the molds.

In the next article, I will cover steam bending the oak frames, fitting the frames to the molds and attaching to the floor timbers, building the keel, and getting it all ready for planking.

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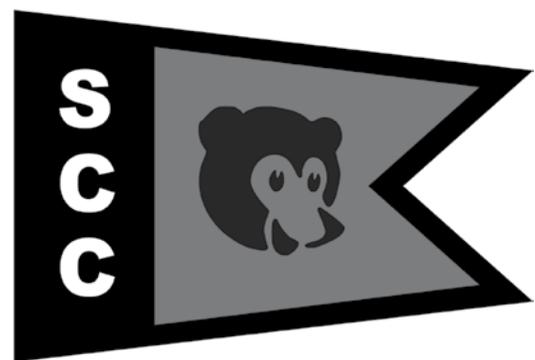
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Sparrow

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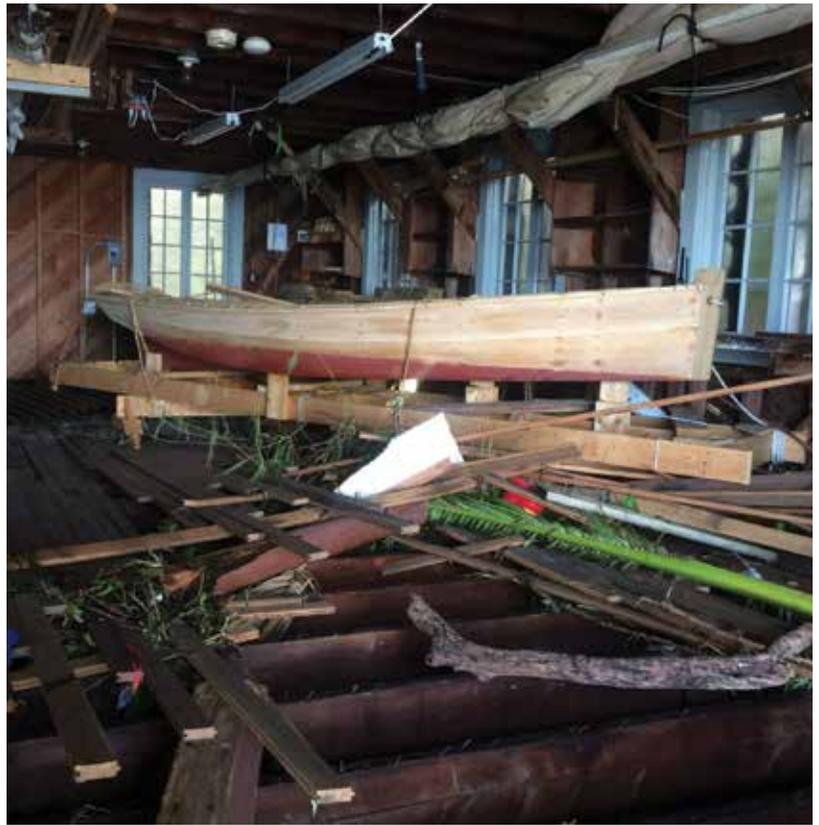
four-foot water level inside the boathouse. The *Sparrow* was lashed to the strong-back, floated, strong-back and all into a corner in the boathouse with no damage. Repairs to the boathouse were completed in November 2018.

The construction of the skiff was straight forward cross-planked, starting with the strong-back and building the skiff up-side down. Traditional construction was very important, but a few twenty-first century materials were used. Grooves were cut into the edges of the bottom planks, when screwed in-place sealant was applied to these grooves. This created an unseen, flexible, water-tight seam. This detail is similar to splining using sealant rather than wood. Bronze screws and bolts were used throughout, epoxy glue was used in structural joints, and all components were bedded in sealant. The Pintles and Gudgeons were custom made, and to utilize at least a piece of the Live Oak, the tiller was shaped. Synthetic manila and cotton cordage was used for rigging along with a Dacron sail. The sail was built for vertical reefing to the mast. The skiff is done-up in red bottom, white topsides, and gray inboard colors. The inside bottom, rub-rail, and spars were oiled and on the stern seat the Cape Sable Sparrow was carved.

The *Sparrow* is a beautiful little skiff, with pleasing lines and double hanging knees at each thwart, also a very pleasing detail.

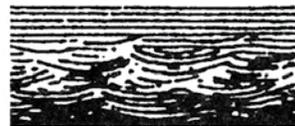
Building the *Sparrow* in the historic boathouse at the Barnacle on the shores of Biscayne Bay has been a fulfilling experience for all involved.

The launching of the *Cape Sable* and the *Sparrow* took place on December 8, 2018. Shake-down sailings will follow in preparation for the 2019 historic Washington's Birthday Regatta.



After Hurricane Irma—Sparrow weathered the storm!

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Recommended reading:

The Commodore's Story: The early days on Biscayne Bay

By Ralph Middleton Munroe and Vincent Gilpin

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2018 reprint is available from

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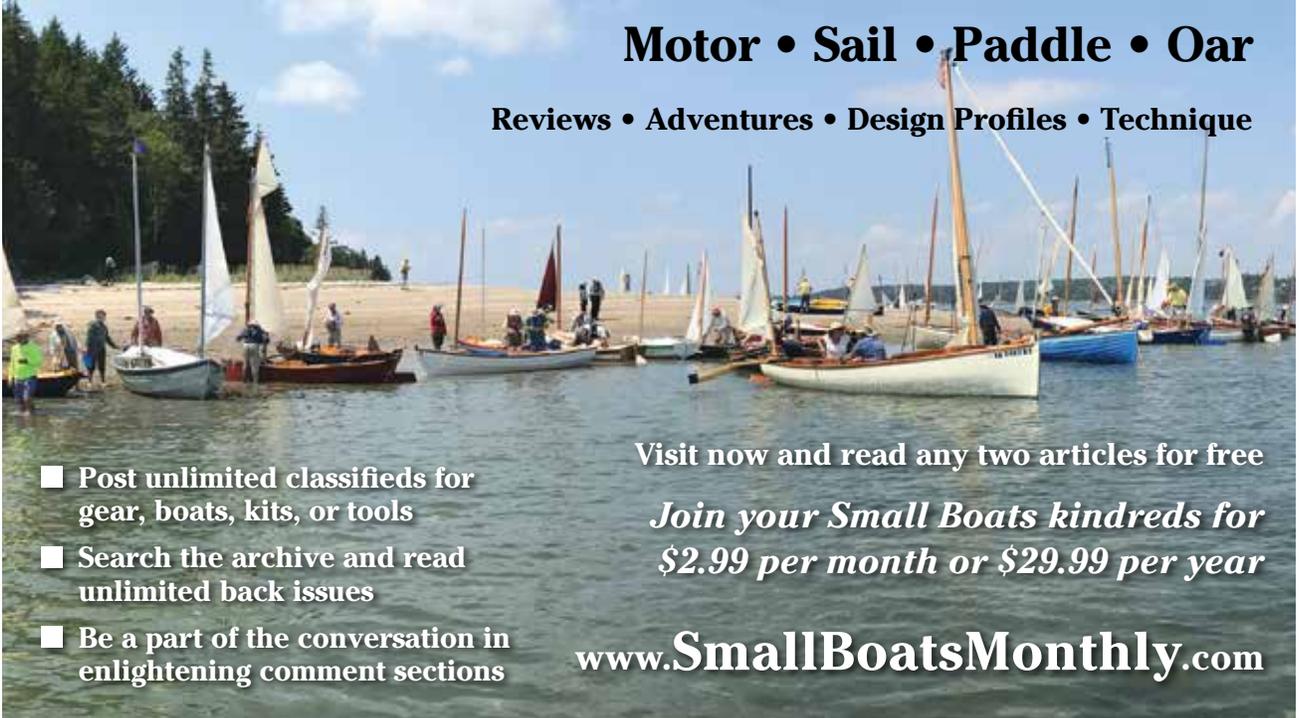


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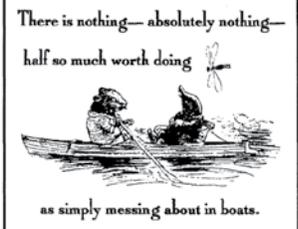
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Coracle

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from an ill-conceived 1950s addition to my house that I tore down. Since you propel the coracle with a sculling stroke off the bow, it's helpful to have a narrow paddle rather than a canoe paddle.

If you don't want to bother with the flat gunwale I used, you can cut a half dozen extra laths about eight feet long, and use them as bow and stern gunwale hoops, one pair overlapping onto the ends of the seat to which the ribs are clamped as they are bent up, a second pair attached outside the ribs, and a third pair outside the fabric as rub rails. You can use boat nails, canoe tacks or screws for this work. With this style of gunwale, a thicker seat is nice because there is more "meat" to which to attach the hoops, or you can use a short cleat to add attachment surface. The seat can be mounted between these gunwales, or below or above, at the builder's discretion.

Launching day may come with a mixture of excitement and trepidation. If you've never been in a coracle before, you may not be quite sure what to expect, but you probably know enough not to hope for a lot of stability. While a kayak may roll over on its side, a coracle rolls just as readily in any direction, and your center of gravity in a kayak is much lower!

I encourage you to try building your own coracle. It's a great little boat for a lazy trip down your local stream or

river or to explore a small pond, and it will give you a new appreciation for the technological ingenuity of a thousand years ago. Be prepared for interesting conversations with just about everyone who sees you with your coracle.

Suggestions for further inquiry:

British Coracles and Irish Currachs, James Hornell, The Society for Nautical Research, London, 1938. A comprehensive historical source, long out of print but available through inter-library loan or at stiff prices on the rare book market.

The Coracle, J. Geraint Jenkins, Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, Llanwurst, Wales, 2006, ISBN: 1-84527-045-2. Still in print, with some very useful drawings and measurements. Draws heavily on Hornell.

The Coracle, Elin Meek, Gomer Press, Llandysul, Ceredigion, Wales, 2007. ISBN: 978-1-84323-839-3. Short, but has useful photos of several steps of the building process of a River Tywi coracle.

Coracles of the World, Peter Badge, Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, Llanwurst, Wales, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-84527-255-5. A worldwide survey of coracle-like boats, including some British Isles coracles not covered by Hornell or Jenkins.

How to Make a Coracle, Sean Hellman, Crafty Little Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-9931861-2-7. A thorough and well-illustrated 22-page pamphlet on building a generic coracle.

The Coracle Society website: www.coraclesociety.org.uk/



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Summer 2019 Volume 40 Number 2

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