

The Ash Breeze

Journal of the Traditional Small Craft Association

HOW TO RUN AN EVENT LIKE THE SMALL REACH REGATTA

IN THIS ISSUE

Building a Melonseed #3

Herring Skiff Resurrection

**Visiting Cape Cod Maritime
Museum**



VOLUME 42, Number 3 • Fall 2021 • \$4.00



The
Ash
Breeze

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.

Communications concerning membership or mailings should be addressed to: PO Box 183, West Mystic, CT 06388. www.tsca.net

Volume 42, Number 3

Editor:

Andy Wolfe

andy@marinermmedia.com

Editors Emeriti:

Richard S. Kolin

Sam & Marty King

David & Katherine Cockey

Ralph Notaristefano

Ken Steinmetz

John Stratton

Dan Drath

Ned Asplundh

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

Cover: Photo by Andy Wolfe. Becalmed in the marsh car Obidian, Pete Peters and Doug Oeller pushed the oars toward the beach and lunch.



Greetings to all TSCA Members!

My name is Ben Sebens, and it is an honor to serve as the President of the TSCA National Council for the next year. We have some good momentum to carry on from last year, and we will continue to hold monthly council Zoom meetings to plan, discuss, and make progress.

Our mission statement says:

“To preserve and continue the living traditions, skills, lore, and legends surrounding working and pleasure watercraft whose origins predate the marine gasoline engine. We encourage the design, construction, and use of these boats, and we embrace the contemporary variants and adaptations of traditional designs.” We all are eager to continue and support that mission. There is a general desire to bring more young people into the world of traditionally designed small craft, as people begin to look for something bigger and/or better than a plastic kayak.

We have a few promotional ideas underway, and plenty of good ideas to consider. We are also interested in what ideas our members might have and encourage all of you to please share your thoughts and ideas with the Council. You can email your ideas to president@tsca.net.

On a personal note, my home waters of Bellingham, Washington, have been a delight this summer, and my family and I have been able to get our old 14' Whitehall out for a few short rows. School looms close in the future, a month away as I write this, but there's time for one or two more afternoon excursions. I especially look forward to the Port Townsend Wooden Boat Festival, which is historically well attended by many traditional small craft, and their admirers.

Wherever you may be, we look forward to sharing the water and our love of boats with you.

—Ben Sebens



The Ash Breeze, Fall 2021

HOW WE RAN THE SMALL REACH REGATTA



by Andy Wolfe and Tom Jackson

The Small Reach Regatta (SRR) has come to a rather spectacular end. I asked Tom Jackson, one of the organizers, a few questions. By sharing this info, we hope that you will gain from their collective experience in planning long term small craft events.

Q: Can you recap the history of the SRR and tell the TSCA membership a bit about the logistics of bringing over 80 boats and crews together?

A: We met every month, usually, to keep track of where we were. In the early years, when we were still settling on what we needed to do, there was more involved in things such as listing the safety equipment. In later years, that legwork had been done, and all we needed were revisions. In December of each year, we would update the “Initial Event Notification,” which included specifics of the coming year’s location and dates. This also included statements of general information, what kinds of boats are appropriate for the fleet, required equipment, a rough chart of cruising grounds, and an initial application for a boat and skipper. This notification was posted on our event

website and available to anyone after the first of January, with a deadline usually in the last half of March.

I’m pretty adept at using databases, specifically FileMaker Pro, and if a boat was returning, all we asked was an email from the returning skipper. For new boats, whether from a returning skipper or a new skipper, we asked for basic information about the boat type and particulars. Most of the boats were returning, so over time, we had quite a bit of data on them. It was a simple change to clear the assigned boat numbers after each SRR, then start fresh the next year. I first added the boats of our core group, then assigned fleet numbers to boats as the emails (or applications) came in. Most boats were appropriate, so it was rare for us to turn a boat down. Sometimes I would send an applicant a note to ask if they were really set for the possibility of rowing considerable distances, and only a few decided not to come with that boat.

After the “initial” paperwork deadline, we set about finalizing the plans. We met to review the fleet and identified any boats that were not appropriate—although most of this was done ahead of time by email. I don’t think we ever rejected a boat from the fleet list at this point.





With the fleet finalized, we asked the caterer for an updated meal price, chose the T-shirt color, confirmed the cost of renting the entire campground, and determined the entry fee. Once we had those final details, we sent out a “second round” of paperwork, usually in late March, to the registered skippers. This asked for additional information on the boat, including flotation specifics, and more information on the skipper and crew, including emergency contact information, experience details, and so on. The second round included a form for the skipper to fill in regarding meal selections, T-shirt orders, camping intentions, and arrival times. A blank crew form went along to the skipper to forward as needed to the crew, asking for meal and T-shirt choices, emergency contact information, and experience notes. As we went along, we refined the forms to make them easier to fill in and easier to deal with on our end.

While the fleet was assembling, David Wyman set about confirming the boats for the chase fleet, usually six to eight boats.

As the “second round” forms arrived in the mailbox, I recorded the information in a spreadsheet and got the checks ready for deposit. After they were all received, I totaled up the T-shirt order in various sizes and placed the order with a printer. I also gave the campground proprietor a total number of campers, with an alphabetical list of names. I gave the caterer a total of all meals (breakfasts per day, lunches per day broken down by type of sandwich, and dinners per day). I printed an alphabetical list of dinners and posted laminated versions of this firmly to a tent post, so people could check what they had ordered.

As the SRR neared, I picked up the T-shirts, printed off a by-boat-number list of T-shirt orders, and bundled all of the original paperwork (including check records and original order sheets), and gave it to Paul LaBrie for the arrival day check-in. Paul distributed T-shirts and noted arrivals. I also sent him a digital version of the spreadsheet. It was important to me to pass that on because by then I was pretty well burned out on responding to questions. From then on, Paul took over the financial and ordering side of things. David Wyman and Jack Silverio handled boat and equipment inspections on arrival day. David had the chase fleet well organized. I continued to have a role in the morning skippers’ meetings

and evening announcements, but it was manageable.

Because these spreadsheets and FileMaker forms were built and refined, it got easier over time. I really don’t know how much time I spent on this work. For a no-problem form, maybe 15 minutes each. For forms with errors or problems, anywhere from a half-hour to an hour, including back-and-forth emails. That was, however, spread across quite a number of weeks. The vast majority of returning skippers posed no issues at all.

Q: What are the non-refundable expenses the organizers would be obligated to pay in the event of a bad weather cancellation?

A: It’s really hard to say. We figured we had a moral obligation to the campground. They turned aside regular campers’ reservations during the SRR. We never had to cancel for bad weather—we felt that only a hurricane warning would cause a cancellation. We did get through a couple of tropical storms, which in this area usually involve heavy rain for a day or so.

We would probably have been responsible for the \$2,000 big tent and table rental fee. It’s hard to say what the caterer would have been dealing with, but a full-cost settlement would have been large. (His final invoice to us for the 2021 full-slate was roughly \$26,000.) He had been our caterer for many years (except the first couple and the two Hog Island years), so I’m sure a full-cancellation event would have been negotiated—but still, a substantial amount. I’m sure the campground fee would have been negotiated, too.

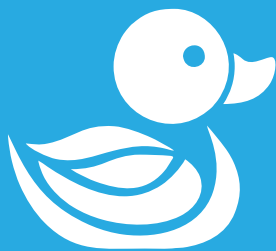
It is worth noting that during the Covid-19 cancellations of 2020, on our own initiative we sent substantial checks to both the campground and the caterer, as good-faith recognition of their difficult seasons.

Q: How many people did it really take to run the event week? (The Small Reach Regatta had a core group of six. Tom Jackson, David Wyman, Jack Silverio, and Ben Fuller were in the group for the running of all 15 events; Paul LaBrie joined shortly after the start, and Steve Brookman came in after moving to Maine about five years ago.)

A: The same six, but we have had considerable volunteer help over the years, at the boat launch, at the campground, at the beach haul-outs, and basically whenever it was needed, which

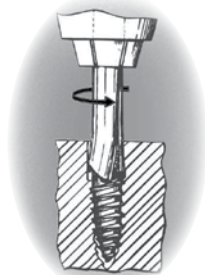


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became central to the SRR. We had help carrying boats down to the water, help moving picnic tables at the campground—people helped in a thousand different ways.

Q: Since the SSR had 215 runs over the years, I asked how many boats took part?

A: In 2006, we had, as I recall, eight boats. We grew quickly, to 30 or 40, and by the time we went to Lamoine State Park, we had about 45 boats in the fleet. At Hog Island, the numbers were about the same, or a little higher. After we returned to Brooklin, we continued to grow. The final fleet was 83 boats.

Q: How many participants were there over the years?

A: It's hard to say—some brought whole families but only a couple sailed while others went off on shore visits. In our final year, we had 160 registered for our most-popular dinner, the Saturday night lobsters. For early planning, we calculated a dinner total of 1.3 per boat, which seemed pretty steady.

Q: How far have folks travel to participate? I know we drove 875 miles, one way, to participate, and I saw plenty of out of state plates.

A: We have had a number of people from Florida over the years, including some from Bradenton, 1,627 miles, and this year one from Tarpon Springs, 1,697 miles away. One from Cleveland, TN, 1,256 miles. We always had quite a group from Virginia. Mike Duncan came every year, starting with No. 2, from Annandale, VA, 778 miles, and another Virginian came from Williamsburg, 840 miles. This year, one from Spring Creek, WI, traveled 1,336 miles, and another from Oconomowoc, 1,351 miles. Andrew Kitchen came for many years from Irondequoit, NY, 625 miles. We had a crew from Buffalo Maritime Center, NY, this year, 685 miles. We always had regular participants from Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

Q: Now that this event is retired, what advice would you give to another chapter wishing to produce a similar, multi-day regatta/event?



A: First, I would say that it would be best to organize under a chapter of the TSCA, or form one to do so. The SRR fell under the insurance policy of the TSCA, and that was a powerful incentive for us. We were independent at first, but very quickly reorganized under the Downeast TSCA chapter.

Next, I would stress how important it is to have a really reliable core group of people who work well together and are eager to keep it fun for everyone.

It is important to organize chase boats. That can be difficult for power boat owners to travel at slow speeds for several days, but the role is essential—we relied on them to ferry crews to anchored boats, to keep watch on the entire fleet, and assist any boats having trouble, and to stand by any lagging boats to make sure they returned safely.

Use local resources, whatever they are. We don't have large marinas or a network of state parks here in Maine. The Maine Island Trail was a great resource, and Lamoine State Park, too. But the small capacities of most camping areas and anchorages were a real challenge. When Ocean Camping at Reach Knolls opened, we seized the opportunity to settle there for the final six SRRs. Settling in one place greatly simplifies the logistics—although it was great to move the SRR around in earlier years. Hog Island Audubon Camp in Muscongus Bay was one of my favorites—but island logistics complicate things. And every time you move location, you have time involved in scouting and choosing new sites. A lot of that was pleasant work—we did small-group outings to places first, then decided whether the SRR would work there.

And finally, simplify. We went too far, I think, in trying to accommodate every whim or nuance for the fleet. At one launching ramp, we decided it was too rough for everyday vehicles, so we launched using one heavy pickup truck. That remained the pattern until we noted that the ramp we were using could work for anyone. We were making custom laminated charts for a while, which was redundant since we asked people to bring charts. We tried dinner tickets for a while but found them a nuisance and just posted lists of who bought what. Once we pared away what was not necessary, our logistics were much easier.



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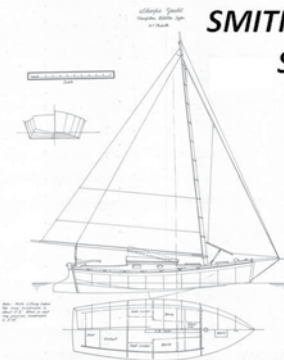
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John Gardner Grant

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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SMALL REACH REGATTA'S REMAINDER GIFTS

From the Downeast Chapter SRR Committee

Everyone paid the same entry fees and meal price, so the event has been egalitarian right down the line. We waived the fees for meals for the chase boat drivers and crews, who earned every bite and paid their own operating expenses for travel and fuel.

Carefully shepherding the SRR resources, we self-insured against the possibility of a total washout, with considerable fixed costs like the caterer's supplies, the big tent, and the campground. We wanted to refund participants in the event of such a cancellation. In the Covid year, recognizing the constraints on our regular suppliers, Ocean Camping at Reach Knolls and Bianco Catering, we took the extraordinary step of making payments to help them over the hump of those times.

Those surplus funds squirreled away left us with the decision about what to do with the remaining money. In a July meeting of the six members of the core group, we agreed to make a series of donations to key organizations. In the name of the SRR and all its participants, we've made the following gifts:

- \$5,000 to the Maine Island Trail Association
- \$5,000 to the Penobscot Marine Museum
- \$5,000 to the John Gardner Fund scholarship program of the TSCA
- \$500 to national TSCA

We had annually contributed \$200 to TSCA in gratitude for their event liability coverage over the years, and we increased it as a final gesture of our gratitude.

We thought you'd like to know!

We wish you all the best, and we are quite confident that here or somewhere, we will cross tacks with many of you again.

It has been a hell of a ride!

Tom Jackson
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Paul LaBrie
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BUILDING A 16-FOOT MELONSEED SKIFF IN A VERY TRADITIONAL WAY ...

PART 3



by Nienke Adamse

Note: Part 2 was in the summer issue.

Fiberglassing and sanding inside the curvy hull turned out to be much more challenging than the outside! But, finally, after the inside was glassed and varnished, I could start building the deck. First, I wanted to put the mast step in place on the bottom of the boat because once the deck would be finished this would be harder to do. I made a mast step from some leftover lumber and left a square 3-by-3-inch hole in it to hold the future mast.

I had an 18-foot-2½-inch diameter ash tree laying around that I cut in half (by hand) to have 17-foot-long gunwale strips. I planed them till they were ½ by ¾ inch. With little blocks in between, I screwed them on the inside of the frames.

Now I could start making the deck beams. The beavers left me another tree from which I split and cut the deck frames. This time they were ½ by 1 inch thick. I used the same steamer and made a jig with a 4-inch-high curve (camber) to bend the deck beams or frames. I did not do much measuring beforehand and hand fit them all in place on eyesight with half lap joints. I reinforced them with leftover ash pieces and made some nice curvy deck supports and was ready to deck it with some cheap ¼-inch-thick underlayment.

I also cut the King Plank to hold the mast that would fit between the beams with a 4-inch diameter hole cut into it. I did not want to cut the hole into the deck until next summer since I would use it as a rowboat for now and a mast hole in the deck would not be necessary. Once I start making it ready





to sail, I will start cutting the holes, including the one for the centerboard in the bottom of the boat!

I varnished the bottoms of the different sheets first before I screwed them in place. Now it really started to look like a boat! I did not varnish the tops because I planned on finishing my deck with pine strips that I wanted to glue on the underlayment.

This time I looked for a bit more expensive boards without too many knots. I had to cut these boards in strips in a creative way because the boat was still on my worktables. In the end, I cut about 150, 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch strips of pine. I added the extra $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch because I foresaw a lot of sanding!



The deck turned out to be a major task; it is hard to glue the strips sideways in a curve and at the same time find a way to press them down on the deck. I made some push sticks that would press the strips down from the ceiling, and I made some homemade clamps to force the strips to curve sideways to their neighboring strip. I made a pattern of shorter pieces on the mast area of the boat between the coaming and on the deck under the rudder. Once the strips were all in place, another week of sanding followed until I had a nice-looking smooth deck. I varnished it first before I would add a few layers of epoxy later. I cut off the transom top so it would be even with the deck.

Then I started working on more than one project simultaneously. I cut, routed, and bent the coaming and the rub rails, and I started the bulkheads with access doors.

I measured the bulkheads with frame #10 and #4 and pre-fitted it with a cardboard template before I cut the shape out of underlayment. Once I had a good fit, I covered the plywood with leftover pine strips. I cut out the doors with a Dutch hand figure (scroll) saw and screwed them in place on the deck supports.

I waited with the corner pieces because I did not yet know how long I wanted to make the oars and they might have to fit in that space. I made four ash knobs and four locks for the doors. I bent the coaming (made from better quality fir boards of $\frac{1}{2}$ -by-3 inch) between the poles of the shop and clamped them in place.

Once they took the shape of the cockpit, I took them out and stained them with a dark walnut stain. I then screwed





them in place. The coaming over the front deck took a bit longer since it had to follow the rounded shape of the deck and had to end in a nicely shaped tip together. I drilled a hole in each side of the deck coaming to let the spray water runoff. I also stained the rub rail before installing it with plenty epoxy and small screws. I filled in the gaps between the deck and the coaming with thickened epoxy as well as any gaps between the deck and the front coaming.

Even though I am not going to sail the boat this year, I did make a centerboard box for it that I would put it in place temporarily to hold the rowing seat, and I will remove it and make the centerboard opening through the hull when I am ready to do that. The idea of cutting a hole in my hull does not appeal to me right now. The centerboard box is also made of leftover lumber and underlayment. I will fiberglass it next summer. I attached it with screws to the bulkhead but did not cover the screws with wooden plugs like the other screws in the boat.



The second rowing seat needed to have some solid supports, and I wanted to make it removable for when I am sailing. So I made some supports under the deck and tried not to break up the nice rhythm of the deck supports and the frames of the hull too much. Once the second seat supports were installed and the two rowing seats were made (one came from the first boat project), I needed to make four oars.



I did some research and looked up sculling oars but frankly I started to run out of spring and summer time and did not want to delay the maiden voyage much further. I had some old oars, yes, from the first boat project, but they were not long enough so I made them a bit longer with extra wood, a pin, and fiberglass, and I was lucky enough to have a friend who donated her wooden oars, which also needed a bit more length.

Most Melonseed builders place the oarlocks on the deck, but I did not want to drill in my deck, and since I will be sailing it in the future, I don't want any objects on the deck, and I wanted to be able to remove them as well. I came up with this solution and mounted the oarlocks onto wooden "sleeves" that fit over the coaming.



It looked like the boat was ready to move out, and with the same strong family members, we carried the boat out of the





shop and onto the trailer where it will sit for the next years to come.

Then came its first launching! It all worked out well. I was glad I did not have a hole in the bottom yet, and the boat smoothly floated off the trailer on the water. I say on instead of in because it is really light, and it gently floated on top of the water. The oarlocks were held in place with clamps so that I could find out what the best position was.

Back home I screwed them in place, gave the hull another coat of paint, epoxied the deck several layers, and adjusted

the oars to the right length. I then took the first cedar boat apart and used the cedar boards to construct the flooring. I used the molds to bend the floor frames (made of ash again) and screwed and glued the boards on top of it. I placed small pieces of ash in between the frames so the boards would not bend down so much.

Then came the first rowing trip with my eldest son. With two strong rowers the boat sped through the water. It was beautiful! I felt very happy and proud. After 4 years of preparing and two years of building, there it was: my own rowing boat!

When I decided on either plans for a 13-foot or a 16-foot model my husband advised me to choose the 16-foot boat so that we could sleep in it together on a rowing trip. So that was the next thing I planned, a two-day rowing trip with a night on the lakeshore. I bought a hammock cover and made two supports that would hold up the oars so that I could make a tent of it. I already stuffed the bulkheads with empty detergent containers as floating devices and used four of these filled with water to hold the tarp down at night. Even though it was quite windy, I slept very comfortably, being tired after rowing 16 miles that day. My hubby decided to stay home, so I had plenty of space!

The story will continue once my shop is warm enough and my newly made kitchen counters are off the worktables, so I will have space to work on the rudder, the centerboard, the mast, the gaff (no boom), and the sail.






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BLUE HILL MARITIME HERITAGE FESTIVAL

by Steve Brookman

The Downeast Chapter hosted and co-sponsored the Blue Hill Maritime Heritage Festival on Saturday, August 21st. The weather gods smiled upon us with a high overcast and enough of a breeze to fill sails and make an otherwise humid day enjoyable.

There were lots of smiling faces at the Blue Hill Town Wharf that day. The food vendor sold out early, and over at the Wilson Museum's kiddie pool, an armada of 58 CNC boats donated by Hewes & Co. were launched. The action on the water appeared non-stop, with Blue Hill Community Rowing's St. Ayles skiff providing visitors an introduction to coastal crew rowing. Other TSCA boats, including David Wyman's North Haven peapod, my Hylan Beach pea, Tony Aman's Savo 750, Mary and J.R. Krevans's DeBlois Street dory, and Ben Fuller's North Shore dory gave many visitors the opportunity to get on the water and experience a variety of small craft.

We had several TSCA boats on display on shore. John Hartmann's newly launched *Vivier Jewell* drew a crowd along with Gardner Pickering's Caledonia yawl. John Brooks, teaching boat building at the local high school, brought their St. Ayles and Sea Dog skiff half hull models and gave oar carving demonstrations.

In addition to the boats, there were groups singing sea shanties and maritime tunes, art in the park, wood carving, turning demonstrations, marine science, and historical photos and artifacts as this was also a celebration of Maine's bicentennial, a year late, the 207 turns 201.

Since the Festival went off about as well as we could plan, we're checking the tides now for a Saturday in August to do it again. You can check the festival website at BHMHF.org for updates or go to DowneastTSCA.org/Events.html. We hope you'll be able to join us next summer for a fun summer day by the bay.





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THE RETURN OF THE HERRING SKIFF

by Josh Tolkan

Gitchi Gami. Home of the highest concentration of shipwrecks on the planet. The lake has long been important to the Ojibwe people, and there were many fur trading outposts on the lake through the 1700s. Northern European immigrants started settling Duluth by the 1850s, and Scandinavians started settling Grand Marais and other spots along Lake Superior's North Shore in the 1870s.

Scandinavians came to Lake Superior with a rich boat building tradition and experience fishing for their livelihood. As early as they arrived, they started building simple double ended row boats to haul in as much as they could from the lake. Having come from the North Sea where they fished for herring and cod, the immigrant Norwegians called the small whitefish they pulled in herring, as that was the best they knew to call it.

As settlement grew, the coast of the North Shore became littered with "Herring Skiffs." These vernacular workcraft were all a little different, depending on the builder, but all Herring Skiffs just the same. Despite the immigrants' heritage, Herring Skiffs bear little resemblance to traditional Scandinavian craft. Herring Skiffs were simply built utilitarian work boats; built quickly, so fishermen could get to work, and not really intended to last a very long time. Early Herring Skiffs were double ended, and some were lapstrake, and in a way resembled French lumbering bateaus but wider and with more flare. Over time, Herring Skiffs evolved to use outboard

motors. At first a "middle era" of Herring Skiffs had small transoms which grew wider to accommodate the increasing size of outboard motors. Additionally, as the industrial era grew, and table saws became more prevalent, wide planked boats gave way to strip planked boats. The quick and easy strip plank method must have made a lot of sense to practical Scandinavians as most Herring Skiffs that survive are strip planked.

When I moved to Grand Marais in 2019 to begin a two-year term in North House Folk School's Artisan Development Program, I was interested in building a work boat. I have always liked the proud simple lines of work boats and building a utilitarian boat like that seemed to fit the folk school ethic. I was also inspired by the handsome Hadlock Work Skiff they were developing while I was a student at the Northwest School of Wooden Boatbuilding.

As I was trying to find some opportunity to build a workboat, I thought about fishing history in Grand Marais, and so I decided to go talk to the local Cook County Historical Society (CCHS). They pointed out I had been walking past a rotting old Herring Skiff every time I went to the grocery store. I quickly realized that not only did this boat have the handsome good looks of a rugged work boat, but it also had some very interesting details and regional roots. The stem is raked very steeply forward at close to a 30-degree bevel. That raked stem is shaped from a huge 6x6 timber. Finally, the entire boat, especially aft section has a wide flare, helping for strong secondary stability. This boat is uniquely designed to





bob up quickly in the short choppy seas that Lake Superior gets in storms and has ample room to carry loads of fish. The beefy stem and reinforcements along the bottom are important details for a boat that is typically winched up onto rocky beaches when coming in full of fish.

The Cook County Historical Society had acquired the boat because they believed it was a great representation of late era Herring Skiffs. I enjoyed looking at this boat so much because I kept thinking that these 1940s herring skiffs are not much different from outboard aluminum fishing boats still built today, but with a few hull shape specifics to make them great boats for Lake Superior.

I went about taking the lines.

First thing to do was to take the boat off the blocking it was sitting on that was causing the boat to sag in particular points and replace it with long bunks that ran the length of the boat. With the boat right side up on these longitudinals, I put a string line down the middle from stem to transom. I observed that the sawn frames were quite regularly spaced, and it would work for me to make every frame a station. So, I measured the distance between every frame and recorded that as the distance between every station. Then I hung plumb bobs off the stem and the transom to record the rake of those. To determine

Left: The finished skiff. Above: Plum Bob. Below: Skiff building class.





Carving frame ends.


the heights, I shot a laser level across the middle of the boat around where I thought the waterline might be. From there I measured up to the sheer and down to the chine and keel. The hardest part about this boat was to get the widths of the chine. I did this by hanging a plumb bob off the sheer at each station, then using a rule and level to find the distance from the plumb line to the chine. Using the widths from the sheer to centerline and the distance from sheer to chine I was able to calculate the distance from chine to centerline. I used these measurements to create a line drawing of the Herring Skiff. There was a good amount of fairing necessary due to the sagging that happened

over the years as the boat was sagging on the blocks, and likely due to some error in my measurements. However, I was able to produce a very nice drawing that included construction details of the various components.

The product of taking the lines greatly satisfied the Cook County Historical Society, and I think that they would have been pleased if the project stopped there. But I was determined to revive the work boat tradition in Grand Marais with an actual new boat. With assistance from the North House Folk School, I set about finding some funding to build a boat from my lines plan. Funding came from the Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation of Northern Minnesota, and a Traditional Small Craft Association John Gardner Grant. Additional support came from a private donor to North House Folk School as well as revenue generated from a class we held to build the boat.

Building the Herring Skiff started with a class held in January of 2020. Scholarships were available for local students, so we had a course that really consisted of local people and other friends of North House and the Historical Society. I was assisted in teaching the course by long time North House boat building instructor John Beltman. I had lofted the boat before the course began and transferred the lofting to a piece of mylar transfer to 1/8" plywood stock from which we would make patterns.


The Herring Skiff is a V-bottomed boat, so we built the frames first. The white pine frames are a simple construction, but still not easy for beginners. The frames are trapezoidal constructions consisting of a floor timber, two vertical timbers and a temporary cross spall. The shape of the V-bottom is sawn into the floor timbers, so they are five-sided figures with a flat spot in the middle for the keel plank, sloping sides for



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the floor, and mating surfaces for the side frames. The side frames have a half lap sawn into them where they meet the floor timber and are bolted into the floor timber with two 5/16 bolts. On the one hand this seems like an easy joint, just one piece to cut joinery on, simple. It would have been considerably easier to cut a mating half lap notch on the floor timber, or not worry about notching and use gutter plates at the joints. Anyway, we built it with the historic details and suffered through the frustrating joinery. Finished frames were installed upside down with cross spalls fastened to the strongback.

The stem was shaped from a 6x6 and installed on the strongback. We wanted to use local lumber and were having a hard time finding a 6x6 but ended up using a piece of a red elm tree that had recently been cut down on the side of the highway in Grand Marais. The community had been upset to see several of these healthy elm trees cut down and encouraged artists to make things from them. I had never used elm but had read that the Cornish Pilot Gigs were built with elm. We had the elm sawn just 6 weeks before the build and were worried about checking. I covered the ends with lots of oil and paste wax and put the timber vertically on a workbench I have right next to a radiator to try to help it dry. When we went to use it, of course it was still wet. Since this boat has an outer stem that screwed over the main stem, we faced the heart wood side forward, knowing that before we put on the outer stem we could fill any checking with epoxy. Our elm stem is heavy, likely heavier than the original, but I sure do like using elm and hope to work with it again in the future.



The transom is an interesting assembly. Built of 5 staves of black ash, joined together with 4 crosswise pieces; two are cheek pieces to make a wider landing for fasteners on the transom, and



Frames up.

two slightly skinnier pieces, parallel to the cheek piece on its side, to support the cut out for the motor in the middle of the transom. These pieces are all bolted to the transom staves with a careful bolt pattern that gives the outer face of the transom a sort of studded leather jacket look.

After the stem, transom, and all frames are in place the keel plank was sprung on down the middle of the boat. At this point the strip planking began. While I have built a couple cedar strip canoes, neither John nor I had built a boat with this industrial era strip planking technique. Each strip is 2 inches wide by 3/4 thick. We were lucky to have a local logger donate some beautiful white pine to our project. We were given some gorgeous 20-foot clear pine boards of quality I might never see again. This allowed plenty of length for each strip to run the entire length of

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the boat with no scarfing or plank butting necessary. In the original boat, some sort of early industrial era seam putty, likely white lead, was put in between each strip. We substituted that with Sika Flex 291, which isn't as toxic and has the advantage of being a mild adhesive. New to this planking method, we learned some lessons the hard way about clamping the new planks to the ones below it to eliminate gaps. Even a 2" strip has a bit of its own mind and needs to be made to set into shape or will have a bit of a permanent gap. The lumber we used also shrank quite a bit, requiring even more gap touch ups. While strip planking is less complex than some methods, it has some finesse to it, and we were learning as we went.

In carvel planking each plank divides the girth of the boat evenly into equal widths across the length of each plank. In this way, all planks share the shape of the boat. In the strip planking technique, the strips essentially create a rectangle covering the side of the boat. The bottom plank goes on last and takes up all the remaining shape in the boat, so it must be spiled and carved to shape, much like you carve a carvel plank.

The hull of this boat was built, as described above, during the winter class of 2020. We had intended to finish this boat in the summer of 2020 as an interactive community boat building process. Covid-19 obviously got in the way of that, and the community boat building was pushed back

to the summer of 2021. For five weeks in June and July of 2021, over 30 volunteers came down to North House Folk School's campus to help finish the boat. Together volunteers did things like attach the outer keel and stem, fair the hull, install the foredeck, seats, inwales, and knees, and touch up imperfections. Volunteers included young people who were new to the Grand Marais community, old timers who had been involved with North House or the Historical Society for a long time, and tourists who had heard about the skiff and wanted to help. While at times chaotic, and not always efficient, it was a fun, wonderful way to work on the boat. Many people learned a lot through volunteering, new friendships were made, and the boat is better for having so much good will around it.

The skiff was launched on July 26, 2021. Many Grand Marais locals were there to see the first Herring Skiff grace the harbor in 30 or 40 years. The boat handled super well, as it took corners comfortably and handled a lot of weight without any discomfort or loss of stability. More importantly, it sat just perfectly in the water, with the forefoot of the stem just gracing the surface of the water. The boat looked proud, able, and graceful. I'm quite proud of the accomplishment, but all thanks are due to the many volunteers who lightened the load and kept me motivated. I am eager to further my work in celebrating boating heritage in Minnesota.

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Downeast Chapter

Steve Brookman
117 Parker Point Rd.
Blue Hill, ME 04614
239-822-1318
Steve@DowneastTSCA.org
DowneastTSCA.org

Floating The Apple

Adina Taylor
1225 Park Ave., Ste. C10
New York, NY 10128
212-564-5412
floatingtheapple@earthblink.net

Florida Gulf Coast TSCA

Michael Jones
4721 16th Ave N.
St. Petersburg, FL
727-560-5782
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Friends of the North Carolina Maritime Museum TSCA

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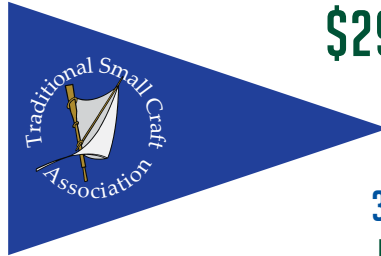
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PETE WILL BE RIGHT BACK

by Andy Wolfe

Like most of you, I visit maritime museums while vacationing, and sometimes even plan the vacation to a place where a maritime museum is located. This past June, we traveled to Cape Cod to spend a week in a rented cottage with two granddaughters we hadn't seen in a long time thanks to the pandemic. The visit also meant I could visit the Cape Cod Maritime Museum on the harbor in Hyannis, and row in their gig on Lewis Bay.

We had lived on the Cape thirty years ago, when I published the *Cape Cod Guide*, and a lot has changed over time. The harbor still feels the same, and the museum was easy to find. The summer issue of *The Ash Breeze* featured a story about the restoration of a historic surf boat from the Nauset Life-Saving Station in Eastham. As it happened, the Cape Cod TSCA Chapter was working on the surfboat that day, so my son and I got to meet some of the members and see the project firsthand. There is a lot of talent in the Cape Cod membership, and I was quite impressed by the new hoods scarfed to the ends of the original planks.

There is a boat barn on the museum's waterfront, and there, we were introduced to museum curator Don Stucke. He showed us some beautiful Pete Culler-designed-and-built small craft and invited us to see Pete's shop. Capt'n Pete had lived and worked just a few blocks from the museum's present location, and I thought we were going to walk up the street.



Top: Pete Culler's Shop. Above: Capt'n Pete.

Don said, "Follow me," and he led us through the museum's harbor level boatshop and up a flight of stairs. As you come around the corner from the lobby, you are transported back in time to the shop where simplicity and functionality blended with clean sweeping lines of the boat designs that made Capt'n Pete Culler famous. You walk into his shop, and you



have this incredible feeling that Pete just left the room and will return in just a moment. His wooden plane on the bench with ribbon shavings that look as if it were just set down. As a boat nerd, I just stood there taking it all in.

I was reminded of a tale my father told me about meeting Capt'n Pete, who had sailed his oyster sloop, a replica he had built of Joshua Slocum's *Spray*, to Nantucket. He asked Pete how the boat sailed. I laugh when I think of his reported reply, "It's a pig! I don't know how he sailed it around the harbor, let alone sailed around the world."

Don suggested that we might enjoy the art gallery, and we crossed the foyer and first saw an exhibit on the history of celestial navigation, and to our delight, a photo of my great-grandmother's great-aunt, Maria Mitchell, the woman who hand calculated the astronomical positions of the "Evening Star," Venus, for a 100-year time period. I've asked Don to write a story on this exhibit for a future edition. The Art Gallery contained some wonderful landscapes, albeit abstract; they were all a beautiful blend of shape and color. To our surprise, Don said, "These are all photographs, by Milton Moore, of the water lines of vessels in calm harbors." I looked closer still and was just amazed—right there in plain sight, and probably in every harbor, anywhere.

There's was more to see. Dinghy's being built in workshop, educational programs for kids, and much more for such a compact museum. If you make it to Cape Cod, head to Hyannis for a visit.



Top: Waterline Landscape. Bottom: Maria Mitchell.

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THE UNLIKELY VOYAGE OF JACK DE CROW: A MIRROR ODYSSEY FROM NORTH WALES TO THE BLACK SEA

BY ALEXANDER JAMES “SANDY” MACKINNON. SEAFARER BOOKS, 2002

Reviewed by Roger Allen



What was intended to be a two-week trip beginning on the Llangollen Canal in North Shropshire and ending up sixty miles away at Gloucester near the mouth of the River Severn somehow “got out of hand.” It ended up, instead, being a yearlong, three-thousand-mile trip that included a confused eight-hour crossing of the Channel, a slog through the northern European canals, a rowing sprint over and down a few of the legendary rivers of that part of the old world, and finally, a meander through war-torn Croatia and Serbia to the mouth of the Danube where it empties into the Black Sea at Sulina, Romania.

The voyage made in a Mirror dinghy borrowed “just for a bit” from Ellesmere College where author AJ “Sandy” MacKinnon taught subjects relevant to literature and drama begins in 1997. Just as Slocum’s world circling *Spray* was found sitting in a pasture, the Mirror, named *Jack de Crow*—and there’s a story in the name—was found long retired, “smothered in thistles and golden ragwort, it’s pram bow lost in a tangle of blackberry brambles” on the banks of the local mere. While Slocum substantially rebuilt the century-old New Jersey oyster sloop, *Spray*, for his incredible single-handed voyages, *Jack de Crow* needed not much more than some screws in her oarlocks, a coat of yellow paint, and some varnish to make his equally amazing voyage.

This really wonderful book had too many coincidences for me to avoid reading it during my Covid-19 confinement. When I was a young sophomore in high school, and very new to my own love of wooden boat building, the father of my older brother’s high school sweetheart (and now wife of 50 years!) decided to build a Mirror dinghy. Roger Strong was, like Sandy Mackinnon, quietly very funny, friendly, worldly, and an eager teacher who patiently explained just how brilliant the Mirror dinghy is as a boat to learn to sail in. He also waxed poetic about her designer, the legendary Jack Holt, who cleverly had amateur builders cobbling the 11’ Mirror together from weirdly shaped panels of 1/4” marine plywood, stitched together with twists of copper wire, and taped with epoxy saturated glass cloth.

The end result was to me, and some 70,000 other young sailors, a relatively inexpensive, tough, capable, nearly

unsinkable Gunther rigged jib and mainsail boat. Even though Mackinnon’s approach to camp cruising was as a minimalist, sans cooking gear for example, the Mirror is burdensome enough to have handled more than the backpack, a series of books, logbook, screwdriver, pliers, hatchet, bed roll, pocketknife, oars, and anchor that completed his cruising kit. His only improvement to the design before leaving was to install floorboards that could be raised up level to the watertight bench tops to make a sleeping platform, and a three-sided boom tent.

“I exaggerate for effect,” is the author’s self-described motto, and he does so throughout the book in such a way that I could not help but read most of this book aloud to my wife, when I could finally stop laughing that is. In between the parts that keep you snorting and giggling, however, Mackinnon’s prose is nothing short of descriptive poetry. If you like to read travelogues, this would be a favorite. It made me want to stuff my backpack and slip through Pandemic-restricted travel barriers for my own view of idyllic riverscapes he delightfully describes. He teaches literature and should because his onboard traveling companions are Yeats, Tolkien, Dr. Doolittle, and the Swallows and Amazons (forever)!

I’ve done a lot of sailing in big boats and small, sometimes racing round buoys, sometimes making deliveries on a deadline, a lot of times just messing about. I think for me one of the best aspects of this book is Sandy Mackinnon’s fine example of how to travel well in a small boat. His boat is not a capsule that isolates him from his surroundings as he passes through them in a bubble. The boat has no engine making enough noise to block the sound of someone saying, “Hello,” from the tow path. Mackinnon fills the book with descriptions of hot showers, clean sheets, fresh baked crusty bread, and the folks who have just brought him into their homes after meeting him that day on the riverbank. New friends share campfires, sample local foods together, help him repair his boat, and proudly show him how wonderful their country is. I’d suggest that you turn your computer and phone off to read this book to see how nice people really are, how beautiful the world is, and how fun messing about in small boats really is.



CHIP CARVING A FANCY TILLER

Edited by Andy Wolfe

We watched Richard, his granddaughters, and a young neighborhood apprentice build a 13' peapod over the past year. I saw a posting by Richard on the finishing touches and asked him to tell us a bit about how he created his fancy tiller.

Richard said, "The project for this old, retired guy, entailed making a mahogany tiller for my Peapod. Never to keep things simple, I decided to carve the end to mimic rope. This is just some basic chip carving using a Stanley utility knife, a rasp, a file, and some sandpaper.

"I started by wrapping and taping some plain old cotton string around the last five or six inches of the tiller in a spiral. A quick spray with a black aerosol rattle-can and then I removed the string to expose spiral image imprinted on the tiller.

"Using my Japanese pull saw and a black Sharpie to create a 1/4" depth mark, I carefully drew the saw following the spiral pattern of the string down the length of the tiller grip cutting a quarter inch deep slot.

"Using a common Stanley utility knife, I did a little chip carving. I followed the rough carving with a rasp and then a file followed by lots of sanding. 'Shazam,' a carved rope handle appeared on my tiller. A little more bit sanding and it was ready for some paste wood filler/stain and an application of TotalBoat Lust varnish."



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The Ash Breeze

Winter 2021 Volume 42 Number 4

Editorial Deadline: November 1, 2021

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