

The Ash Breeze

Journal of the Traditional Small Craft Association

BUILDING THE SENECA CHIEF

IN THIS ISSUE

Free Breakfast on Smith Island

WoodenBoat Show Walkabout

Gulf Intracoastal Waterway Cruise



VOLUME 45, Number 3 • Fall 2024 • \$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 45, Number 3

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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

Cover: Charlotte Blackwell in her John DeLapp (original) Natoma Skiff. Photo by her proud Mom, Liz Blackwell.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Pete Peters

AHOY! An oft unspoken murmur amongst traditional rowers and sailors is: “Know the captain by the boat he uses.” I think of Captains Bly, Nelson, Slocum, Connor, and Barnes. Although not in those groups, I’d like to introduce myself by the boat I sail and let the rumors happen. I sail *Obadiah*, a Joel White-designed 15-foot Marsh Cat. Since 1993 we’ve trailered and camp-sailed Maine Island Trail, Lake Champlain, Currituck Sound, the Florida Keys, and many places in-between. His home waters are Barnegat and Chesapeake Bays. A simple, cold-molded, somewhat-over-canvased gaffer, he was built by Marc Barto with an eye to detail. *Obadiah* is KISS: Keep it single sail, single halyard, and simple to rig and reef. I often tow a nutshell pram my wife made in a boat building class.

Over thirty years we have gathered with each other around campfires, on beaches, messabouts and raft ups, and struggled with the questions, “What is the future of the TSCA? How to connect with families and younger enthusiasts?” The past two years the Council of TSCA has discussed and developed some ideas. Presently, we have over 1,000 members and are growing. About one half are part of a local chapter.

Our goal is: “To connect the small boat community with people who own or have built a small traditional boat. The Traditional Small Craft Association provides fun and safe events and gatherings and teaches boat building and maritime skills.” Connection begins with conversation. As an association, we can begin the conversation by identifying who we are.

A burgee on our masts at events, a TSCA hat or shirt, or even a bumper sticker are ways to make us recognizable. The Teaching with Small Boats Alliance (TWSBA)—teachigwithsmallboats.org—shares our goal and has 300 sites. I will be speaking at their biannual meeting in October, representing TSCA.

In addition, we have begun a campaign to provide free one-year, digital, non-voting membership to people that have built a boat or purchased a boat building kit or boat building supplies. It is a way for people to participate in our events, use their boats, find a chapter, and discover what a special fraternity TSCA has become over the last half century.

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WOODENBOAT SHOW

2024 WALKABOUT



By Lena Downes

Each year, for many reasons, we look forward to *WoodenBoat* (*WB*) magazine bringing their WoodenBoat Show to Mystic Seaport Museum. Not only does *WoodenBoat* jointly sponsor our John Gardner Small Craft Workshop, but the show also includes their Speaker Series. This year, the series included Walter Ansel, Mystic Seaport’s Shipyard Director, on “Restoring Fishing Schooner L.A. Dunton’s Shape”; “Project Mayflower”; and Richard Stone’s recounting of the original and continuing efforts on the Replica project. The show also included an interesting “Trends in Wooden Boatbuilding” panel discussion, led by Alec Brainerd of Artisan Boatworks, John Harris of Chesapeake Light Craft, and David Snediker of nearby Snedicker Yacht Restoration. Many interesting insights.

Those presentations dovetailed nicely with Mystic Seaport Museum’s Skills Demonstrations in the Seaport’s Shipyard which included “Nellie’s” single sawn frames with Seaport Shipwright Chris Taylor, “Blacksmithing” with Mike Saari, “Oar making” with Clint Chase, and “Sharpening Tools” with Warren Dolphin. And that was just on Friday! Saturday led off

with Seaport Shipwright Mike Coyle on “Keel Replacement of the L. A. Dunton” followed by “Soft Attachment Rigging” with Matt Otto, “Blacksmithing” with Mike Saari, “Carvel Planking” with Walter Ansel and Seaport Shipwright Scott Gifford, as well as “Strip-planking and Fiberglass Sheathing” with Rose Woodyard of Newfound Woodworks. Sunday morning included *WB* Senior Editor Tom Jackson on “Understanding Lines and Lofting.” Lots of knowledge, freely shared.

And that was before one even started visiting the “Concours d’Elegance” lineup of picture-perfect boats along the waterfront or the “I Built It Myself” on the green, a chance for amateurs like us to show their boats and share stories of building them. All this surrounded by good food and vendors both large—like Chesapeake Light Craft’s demo-available boats—and small(er)—like the Kirby Paints booth. Say nothing of the Seaport’s ongoing exhibits: from the *Charles W. Morgan*, America’s oldest surviving merchant ship, to the latest Jules Verne-themed “Voyage to the Deep: Underwater Adventures” that our grandkids loved.

Top: *Rocking the Boat Gig.*



This year's show included two special events: *WoodenBoat's* 50th anniversary celebration with a riveting address by founder Jon Wilson and the kickoff event for the Seaport's Wells Small Craft Hall. All this including free access to the Seaport's Small Boat Livery's row-able and sail-able replicas of the boats in the Small Craft Hall! Wonder how that classic boat design "feels"? Go see Rosie DiMatteo and take one for a ride!

Pictures speak louder than words, so let's go on a quick "walkabout" with camera in hand...

Left Top: Ben Fuller demonstrating the fine points of bending on a spritsail to Pete Peters and Jim Morrow.

Left Middle: Cocktail Racers getting ready to race.
Left Bottom: Combat seasoned SeaBee Bill Womack shows off his company's Beetle Cat aptly named Sea-Bee.
Right Top: An Innovative Design at Australia Beach.
Right Middle: Proud mom and son at the Toy Boat Building.
Right Bottom: The Wells Small Craft Hall kickoff event—free beer.



Below: Not all items in the Small Craft Hall are boats or motors.

Right Top: "I Built It Myself" innovative boat cover capable of taking I-95 at speed.

Right Bottom: Nicky Stimpson of Chesapeake Light Craft helping a client try their latest sliding seat rowing craft.



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TIDINGS' GREAT ADVENTURE UPDATE

THE GULF INTRACOASTAL WATERWAY CRUISE

By Capt. Doug Oeller. Photos by Capt. Matt Jensen Young

On April 11, 2024, I left Corpus Christi, Texas, aboard my modified Cornish Shrimper 19 named *Tidings*, for an 800-mile camp-cruising trip to Carrabelle, Florida. This was the latest segment of *Tidings'* Great Adventure—a circumnavigation of the “Lower 48” that began in 2018. The trip took forty-eight days. Most of those miles were in the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW). The GIWW runs from the Mexican Border at Brownsville, Texas, to Saint Marks, Florida, spanning over 1,100 miles. It connects bays, rivers, and canals to create a safe route for barge traffic and, incidentally, recreational boaters.

I spent much of the winter of 2023 planning this trip. I traveled the entire distance multiple times sitting in my office chair viewing electronic resources—mostly Navionics and Google Earth. I read and reread the *Cruising the Gulf Coast—Skipper Bob* publication, 2023 edition. I also used Facebook to ask advice from members of the Texas 200 group and the Sailing Texas group. By March, I had a three-page spreadsheet listing daily distances to travel for the entire trip, safe anchorages for each night, and daily route notes that included phone numbers for locks and marinas. I bought two

radar reflectors to attach to *Tidings'* shrouds. And I bought a handheld VHF radio that has AIS receiving capability. *Tidings* towed a 7'7" Nutshell Pram named *P.S.* that carried five extra gallons of diesel fuel.

Tidings is a gaff-rigged sloop, with a waterline length of 17'7". She has a Yanmar 1GM 10 diesel engine, which I refer to affectionately as the “D-sail.” Because the GIWW is narrow in many places and I wanted to complete the trip by June first, we motored most of the time. The D-sail moved us along happily at 4.5 knots day after day averaging more than twenty miles per gallon. There were some days when the wind and waterway conditions allowed sailing. When that happened, I savored the quiet and the way *Tidings* performs under sail in a good breeze. There were also a few times when it was just too rough or windy for small craft, and we stayed put until conditions improved.

The trip exposed me to scenery, wildlife, and commercial marine traffic that most small boaters never get a chance to see. There were marshes, shallow bays, swamps, bayous, and some sections of open water. I saw dolphins, pelicans, and alligators. I passed oil wells, refineries, shipyards, commercial fishing harbors, sunken vessels, and the ruins of marinas destroyed by hurricanes.

And then there were the barges. Many, many, barges. Most were tank barges carrying petrochemical products. But some carried bulk cargo, stacks of containers, or large equipment. A “six-pack” of these barges pushed by a tug has a length of



almost 600 feet and a beam of 52 feet. West of the Mississippi River, it was not unusual to see a dozen or more of these behemoths each day. But there were very few pleasure boats. It was like driving on an interstate highway where most of the traffic is tractor trailers and you are in a subcompact car. Their perspective was different, of course. More than once, I heard *Tidings* described on the VHF radio as the “small black sailboat heading east.”

It is hard to convey in a short article the camp-cruising experience of such a long voyage. There were days of motoring, sweltering in the heat and humidity, and listening to the monotonous song of the D-sail. There were days of blue skies, fresh breezes, and wonderful sailing. Often, I was awestruck by the beauty of my surroundings, grateful to be living in that moment, and trying to assimilate the experience. And there were times when I was frightened. A few memories do stand out.

During the first week of the cruise, with my old friend Mike Wick aboard, we approached the western flood gates of the Brazos River at about 0830 on a clear morning. The gates were closed for repairs, and I was instructed to anchor near the gate and monitor channel 16. The work would stop at 1800, and we would be the first boat through when they reopened. An hour later, we got a call offering to let us through because they were opening the gate to let a small work boat pass. I fired up the engine, hoisted the anchor, and motored full speed (about 5.5 knots) toward the gates, which were opening as we reached them. When those gates opened there came a rush of water and debris moving at about five knots. The flow was turbulent and there were logs the size of *Tidings* swirling toward us. I ran the engine at full throttle and steered to dodge the largest of the debris, struggling to keep us away from the sides of the gate as we inched our way through. The engine roared. *Tidings* pitched and yawed violently as I clung to the tiller. My pulse raced. And slowly, very slowly, we passed into the calmer waters of the open river.

One night, after Mike left and I was alone on *Tidings*, I anchored near Pavell Island, which sits on the Texas-Louisiana



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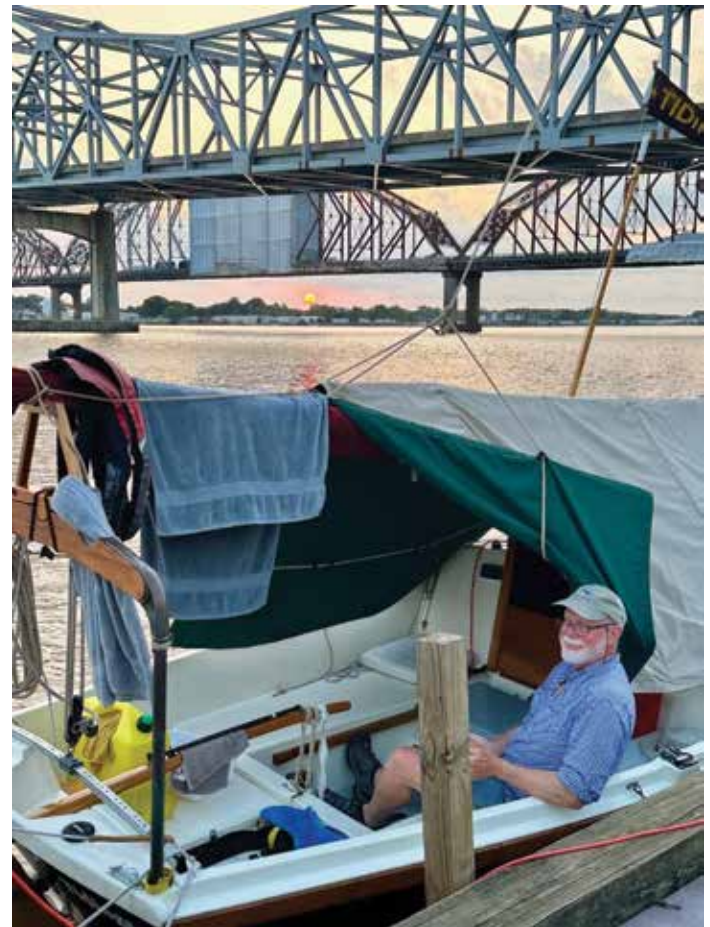
border. The island is marshy and undeveloped. As dusk approached, I took refuge in the cabin behind bug screens to keep the mosquitoes out. I watched a glorious sunset through the screens, and, just before dark, there came the largest swarm of purple martins I have ever seen. They were feasting on the mosquitoes. At times, the birds were so numerous that they blackened the sky. They flew in many directions but never collided. The aerobatics were amazing, and I felt privileged to be viewing the show from my bug-free sanctuary.

Two weeks later, with Matt Jensen Young aboard, we spent a night at anchor in an oxbow off the Mermentau River in Louisiana. Just before dawn a series of thunderstorms with heavy rain arrived. We awoke in the dark to lightning and thunder. A thin stream of water was coming through the cabin top where the anchor light wiring enters the cabin. We set a pan under the leak. I lit the cabin oil lamp to provide a little heat and help dry things out. The lamp gave off a soft yellow glow. I brewed coffee and fixed us a pancake breakfast. When daylight came with gray skies, gusting wind, and persistent heavy rain, we discussed whether to spend the day anchored or get moving. The lightning and thunder had stopped. But the rain and wind would continue for several more hours. Matto, who does long-distance hiking for fun, commented that adults rarely get a chance to “go out and play in the rain.” I thought he had a good point. So, we got suited up in foul weather gear, turned on the running lights, and motored out of that safe anchorage. The wind blew so hard that my hat brim kept collapsing over my forehead and eyes making it hard to see. The rain stung my face. We grinned at each other, and I yelled: “It doesn’t get any better than this!”

Honestly, it did get much better when my wife, Meg, arrived in Pensacola to sail with me for the last leg of the trip. For most of the trip we motored along holding umbrellas to shelter us from the hot sun. But there was one day of magnificent sailing when we left the GIWW and sailed offshore from Panama City to Port St. Joe, which is a distance of about thirty-six nautical miles. We were on a beam reach under sunny skies with ten to fifteen knots of wind. The Gulf water was clear

and aquamarine in color. And *Tidings* was in her element. She heeled over and came alive under the helm. For weeks she had dutifully motored along. Now she was finally free to be a sailboat, and it was glorious.

Tidings is now back home in Maryland for some minor maintenance. The Great Adventure will continue early next year with a launch at Cedar Key and a cruise to Key West, back north to the Caloosahatchee River and across Lake Okeechobee to reach the eastern intracoastal waterway. In the meantime, there is much planning to be done.



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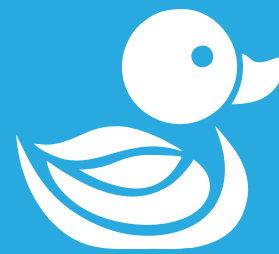
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OVERNIGHT CAMPING ON A 15' BOAT

By Chef Scott Anderson

Camping and cooking aboard a 15-foot boat for overnight adventures is often quite challenging but allows for out-of-the-box creativity. Whether you're on salt or fresh water or heading upriver or finding a unique cove at a favorite lake, preparing meals in such a compact space requires resourceful, *mise en place* planning. Here's are a few ideas to help you make the most of your culinary experiences while navigating the waters. Damn the torpedoes—let's eat lunch!

CONSIDER YOUR SPACE

- **Limited Space:** The confined quarters of a 15-foot boat necessitate compact and multipurpose cooking equipment. If it's a single item like a garlic press, don't pack it! If it's a wooden spoon, toss it in!
- **Refrigeration:** Coolers with ice packs can provide short-term refrigeration, but the best way to do so and be multipurpose is to freeze water bottles, because freezer packs are done once defrosted—you can drink the water.
- **How to Cook:** Simple cooking methods like grilling with portable propane stoves using something like a 2-in-1



3-quart cast iron Dutch oven with skillet lid. It's an open pot for soup, closed for casseroles, and the lid is your skillet—that's only ten pounds.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- **Breakfast:** Pack instant oatmeal, cereal, or bread with spreads like peanut butter and jelly. Fresh fruit like apples and oranges keep well without refrigeration.
- **Lunch:** Sandwiches with cured meats (ham, salami, and pepperoni) and aged cheeses that have less moisture but pack more flavor. Add some prepped fresh veggies and condiments containers that don't require refrigeration and hold enough for two servings.
- **Dinner:** Prepare foil packet meals called Silver Turtles, with vegetables, protein (like beef, chicken, or fish), and seasoning. Prepare them before the trip and pack in the cooler.
- **Snacks:** Jerky, homemade PB crackers, snack bags of your favorite nuts, heat resistant protein bars, or homemade granola and oat bars.

COMPACT ESSENTIALS

- **Portable Stove:** Choose a small butane stove for cooking meals and snacks—perfect for making s'mores.
- **Cookware:** I recommend lightweight pots and pans that nest together. I really like a camping 3-in-1 small cast iron Dutch oven for versatility. Once heated it holds temp for



quite a long time, helping keep food warm during the meal.

- **Utensils:** Bring a rubber and wooden spatula, small metal tongs, wooden spoons, and a sharp 8" knife with 12" wooden cutting board for food prep.

OTHER NECESSITIES

- **Cooler:** Use a well-insulated cooler—don't skimp. Look for one that will stay sealed and stay cold for up to three days. Freeze prepared perishable items ahead of time for freshness and to help keep other food cold. Pull food out a few hours before cooking time and let defrost before cooking (in the 3-in-1).
- **Storage Containers:** Sealable bags and containers keep food dry and organized, reusing them for holding trash and scraps.
- **Utensils:** Pack biodegradable (plant-based) or reusable kits that hold utensils and chopsticks for variations in cooking. Bamboo chopsticks are great for cooking utensils as well.

FOOD SAFETY

- **Storage:** Keep perishable foods in the cooler and monitor ice levels regularly. Temperature danger zone is 41 to 135 degrees, so keep your food below 41 degrees before you pull it out to cook. Once out, you have a 4-hour window before bacteria multiplies geometrically and ruins your boating experience.
- **Hygiene:** Wash hands and utensils with biodegradable soap and water away from the water source to prevent contamination. Use biodegradable wipes, and stay away from (just) hand-sanitizer, it's goes horrible with food. Best to wash your hands and dry with a single use towel, and then prep what you need and wash up again.

SIMPLIFY PREPARATION

- **Pre-cut Ingredients:** *Mise en place*—a culinary statement in which ingredients are prepared and organized before



Colorful food to take on board to cook.

cooking. Everything in its place. Prepare ingredients like vegetables at home to save time and space.

- **One-Pot Wonders:** Minimize cleanup with meals that can be cooked in a single pot or wrapped in foil for grilling.

ENJOYING THE EXPERIENCE

- **Local Flavors:** Consider local produce or seafood that you catch or pick up fresh when you dock for a unique culinary experience and saving on cold storage space.
- **Outdoor Dining:** What can be better than having your meal onboard, relaxing, listen to the waves lap against the sides, or beaching and having a wonderful open-air picnic.

A 15-foot boat offers a delightful challenge that rewards you with unforgettable meals and lasting memories. Preplanning makes all the difference in the quality of food and equipment you choose. Soon, you will be enjoying the fruits of your packing in the form of deliciously prepared meals on the water or on shore. The simplicity and creativity of boat camping cuisine will elevate your senses to the next level, so pack wisely, enjoy your surroundings, and relish the simple ways of cooking during your overnight adventure!



HOW TO GET A FREE BREAKFAST AT SMITH ISLAND

By Kevin Brennan

For thirty years now I have been taking a spring camp cruising trip on the Chesapeake Bay in a traditional small boat. It started out with me being invited to join a small group of likeminded guys. Over the years the fleet has varied from about a half-dozen to as many as double that amount. In that time, we have managed to explore many creeks and rivers of the Chesapeake Bay region. The challenge has always been finding a ramp that would allow for overnight parking and be of sufficient size to handle all of us. What started as picking a long weekend and hoping to get at least one night anchored out somewhere has shifted to picking a week and making a last-minute decision on several days with the best forecast.

This year the fleet consisted of two Joel White Marsh Cats, a Marshall 18 catboat, a Graham Byrne Core Sound 20, Francois Viver's design Ilur, John Welsford's Pathfinder and

Navigator, and a self-designed sailing canoe with a goal of trying to sail to Tangier Island, Virginia.

Tangier Island, Virginia, and Smith Island, Maryland, are remotely located islands on the Tangier Sound of the Chesapeake Bay that are mostly wetlands and barely visible from the mainland. To get to either one requires crossing the Tangier Sound, which can be a tricky crossing if you don't pay attention to the weather. While we have made several trips to Smith Island, Tangier Island has been a bit more elusive since conditions need to look really good for two days to be able to safely make the passage out and back. Both islands are home to watermen and their families who rely on the rich fisheries of the region for their livelihood and whose ancestors have inhabited the island for centuries.

This spring we found ourselves back at Janes Island State Park in Crisfield, Maryland. Janes Island is a rare gem of a state park because its location provides many options for great sailing waters. The campground is also really nice and adds the option to use it as a land base should we decide that is needed. The goal was to try for Tangier Island if the weather would allow. We started the week with some sporty conditions that kept us in more protected waters for a couple of days. Saturday was a washout for sailing but a great day to look over one another's boats and gear for "R&D" (Research and Duplicate) opportunities. Tangier wasn't meant to be this time, but a run to Smith Island was doable. Nine salty dogs set off on six boats for Smith Island. With the famous Smith Island eight-layer cake as our motivation we headed west with favorable winds and calm seas. Once there, we got a slice of well-earned cake and visited the small museum. Six of us decided to make an overnight of it, and this is where things got really interesting.

We happened to be tied up at the small and new 3 Knots Marina in the village of Ewell. Being in a bit of a sugar coma, we weren't especially motivated to find a place to anchor and raft up for the night. Staying tied to the dock sounded like the easy way out, so we dutifully called the number posted to find out if we could stay for the night. Arrangements were satisfactorily made, and we were told that the owner would be arriving on the evening ferry boat. Sure enough, Patrick Welsh arrived, got us all squared away, and started asking questions about this traditional small boat fleet. We stood around for about an hour learning about some interesting history and



facts about the island when Patrick shared that he was a pirate reenactor, not the cliché eyepatch and parrot pirate but the original swashbuckling kind. When we mentioned that we would be breaking out the musical instruments later that evening he promised to be back, and boy did he.

As we gathered in the small marina lobby to sing some seafaring songs and shanties and beat the heat, along came Pirate Patrick in full garb with a tankard for his daily ration of rum, which happened to be contained in many bottles of rum in the locker that we thought was just a decoration. Things were looking up! With several instruments out we played some tunes, sang a bunch of songs, imbibed in several rations of rum, and just had a grand old time. At one point Patrick texted his buddy, Buddy, and told him to come to the marina ASAP. Buddy, a waterman, thinking something must be wrong hustled over and was pleasantly surprised with what he found. However, being a waterman he had to hit the sack since his day begins at 4 a.m. He promised to rev his engine a couple of times as he passed us early in the morning, you know, like an alarm clock. As midnight approached, we decided to call it a day, and Patrick announced he had such a good time he was going to fix us all breakfast in the morning, and darned if he didn't.

So, the moral of the story is to live life to the fullest, get to know strangers you meet, and share some experiences that will become memories for a lifetime. Who knows? You just might get breakfast out of it.



CROSSING THE BAR

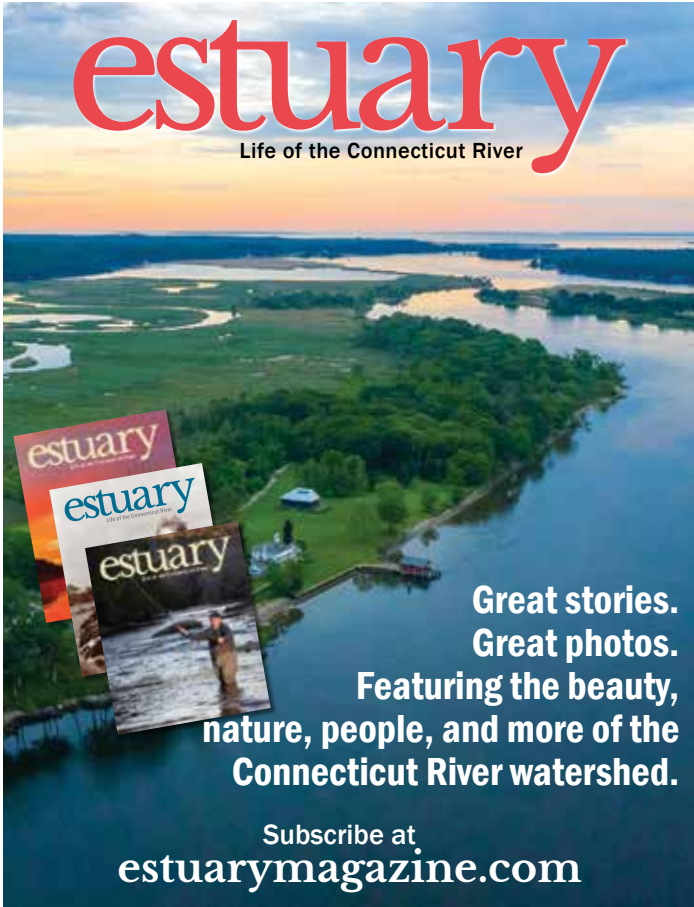
Rodger Clarence Swanson developed and sold Oarsman Marine Tallow and oar leather kits. He was a presence in the small boat and rowing community. He was instrumental in bringing the Finnish Savo boats to the US. He crossed the bar on Friday, May 24, 2024, following a fall.

Rodger, born a farm boy from North Dakota, spent his years around the Great Lakes and the Northeastern harbors, gleaning everything that he could about traditional wooden boats. He began his education in a one-room schoolhouse and finished with a master's degree at the University of North Dakota. Rodger's vocational life was spent helping people navigate life's upsets. He provided counseling and worked to connect people with resources for independent and healthy living following injury and disability, employment disruptions, incarceration, addiction, and other brain health issues.

Rodger was an exceptional woodworker and artist. He built wooden canoes, boats, oars, waterfowl decoys, and half models of boats that the family treasures. In the 1980s he built a large collection of versatile, rough-hewn, wooden crates that appear all over the family landscape.

His love of wooden boats spans his entire life. He created the Swanson Boat Company to develop and provide traditional boating resources and to teach people about traditional boating. He helped lead the All Hands on Deck organization in Green Bay, Wisconsin, which teaches young people about traditional boating. He was particularly interested in preserving the unique history of the Mackinac Boat, a key work boat used on the Great Lakes. His great claim to fame was as the only producer of marine tallow in the US. His daughter, Kate, continues the business.





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ST. LAWRENCE RIVER SKIFF

By Todd Bloch

This series began with several boats of unique design and history but perhaps beyond the scope of the typical small boat builder. Featured in this edition is a boat that can likely be found on some of our own trailers—the St. Lawrence River Skiff.

This particular skiff is a bit of an enigma in that it has no name, the builder is unknown, and the year of construction is a mystery. Nonetheless, it serves as a good example of a small recreational boat type that has a long and storied history. Previous articles have highlighted the graphic documentation efforts of HABS/HAER/HALS; most of the material for this article came from the HABS/HAER/HALS history.

St. Lawrence Rivers Skiffs are native to the Thousand Islands area of the St. Lawrence River, the waterway separating Canada and the United States in upstate New York near Lake Ontario. The design is thought to have evolved in the mid-

to-late-1800s through the hands of various designers and builders, as there is no known record of an original. The type was favored by local guides as the region became a popular destination for fishing excursions (note the rod holder on the drawing). Reportedly, US President Ulysses S. Grant spent three days on the river in St. Lawrence River Skiffs in 1872. One can imagine that the publicity bode well for marketing—if it is safe enough for a sitting US President, it is safe enough for the rest of us.

The skiffs varied in length, from 14' to 22' but with a consistent beam of 42"—this boat is 17'-10³/₈". The slender hulls, rowed with overlapping 7½' oars, made the skiffs efficient rowers. This was an attractive benefit, given the long distances guides would row in search of fish—often twenty to thirty miles.

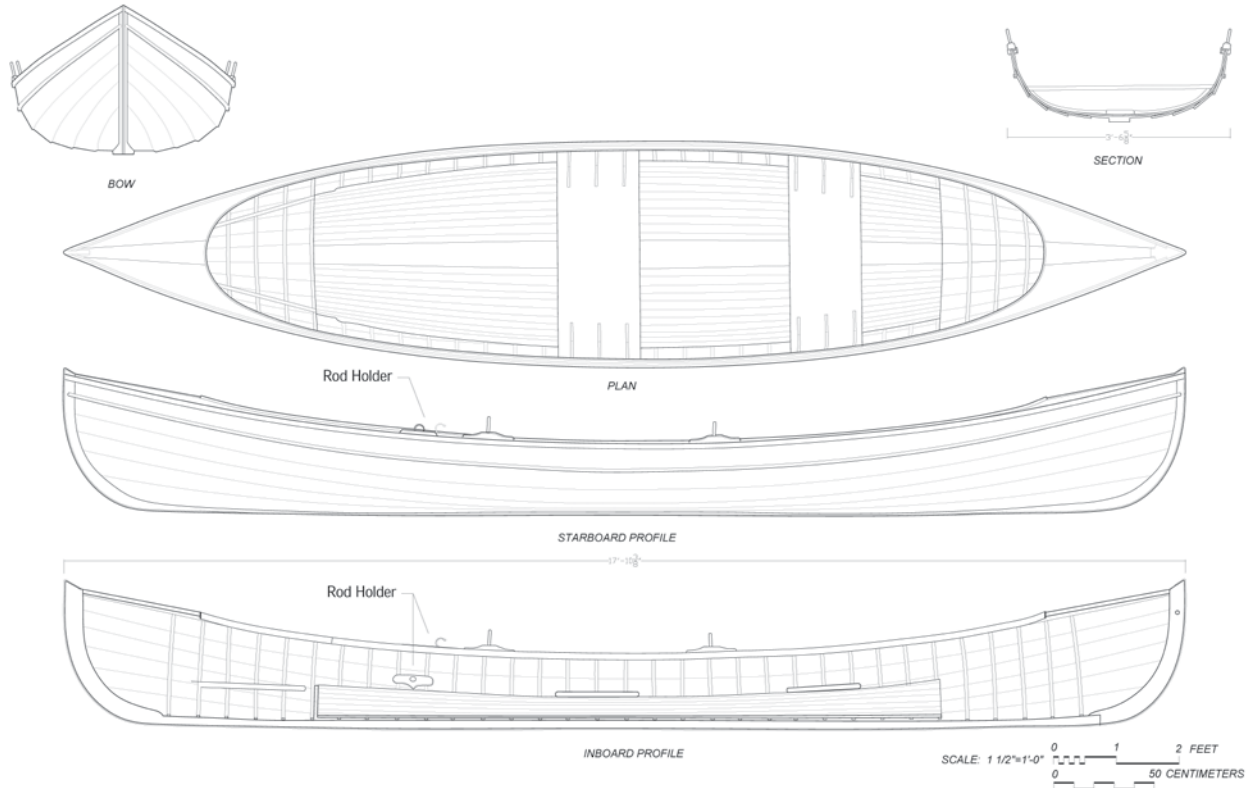
With their elegant appearance and ease of rowing, the skiffs

St. Lawrence River Skiff, Accession No. 2006.001, Antique Boat Museum, Clayton, Jefferson County, NY



St. Lawrence River Skiff - Accession No. 2006.001

Plans



EVALUATED BY: MIKE PERCE AND TODD A. CROTEAU 2005
 DRAWN BY: MIKE PERCE
 ST. LAWRENCE RIVER SKIFF - ACCESSION NO. 2006.001
 ANTIQUE BOAT MUSEUM, CLAYTON, JEFFERSON COUNTY
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 SHEET 2 OF 3
 HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
 NT-562

became popular general recreation boats in the early 1900s. Many hotels along the river kept a fleet of St. Lawrence River Skiffs for their guests. To accommodate the growing demand from buyers with varying budgets, boat builders began offering versions at different price points.

One such builder was the Skaneateles Boat and Canoe Company. Skaneateles offered a high-end version featuring white cedar planking on red elm ribs. Decks and coaming were mahogany trimmed with black walnut; the shear strake and rudder were mahogany. The boat came with spoon blade oars featuring leathers and copper plated tips. The final touches were a wicker boat chair and carpeted floor, and it sold for \$235 in 1920. At the other end of the scale was a \$75 model, featuring oak breast hooks in lieu of decks, galvanized hardware, straight blade oars, cypress seats, and a painted interior.

St. Lawrence River Skiffs remained a primary recreation boat until the 1930s, when motorboats became favored. This St. Lawrence River Skiff is in the collection of the Antique Boat Museum in Clayton, New York.

More information about the HABS/HAER/HALS Collection at the Library of Congress can be found at this link: <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/>.

Citation for HABS photographs, drawing, and history: Historic American Engineering Record, C., Spalding St. Lawrence Boat Company, Skaneateles Boat And Canoe Company, Bowdish, N., Bain, A. L., Smith, G. [...] Pierce, R., Croteau, T. A., photographer. (1968) *St. Lawrence River Skiff, Accession No.001, Antique Boat Museum, Clayton, Jefferson County, NY*. Jefferson County Clayton New York, 1968. McPartland, M., trans Documentation Compiled After. [Photograph] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ny2434/>.

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BUILDING THE SENECA CHIEF



By Roger Allen, Master Boatbuilder

In October of 1825 New York's Governor, DeWitt Clinton, was able to make an inaugural voyage east from Buffalo for 365 miles across the whole of the Erie Canal to Albany and then down the Hudson River to a relatively small port that was New York City. The trip was the culmination of decades of politicking by a whole crew of visionaries and a few more worldly businessmen, with planning by amateur engineers who learned their trade on the job, and years of hard hand digging begun in 1817 by an ethnically-mixed crew of new Americans.

That inaugural voyage was made in the *Seneca Chief*, an Erie Canal "Line Boat" built for canal promoter Thaddeus Joy by boatbuilders from the Blackrock section of the Niagara Frontier. Unlike pure passenger carrying Packet Boats, Line Boats carried passengers and cargos of raw materials and finished goods, and Clinton filled the hold for his trip to showcase exactly what could be shipped on his newly dug

ditch for a tenth the normal cost and less than a quarter of the usual time previously required to make the trip in 1824.

On May 7th, 2024, the Buffalo Maritime Center (BMC) launched a traditionally-built 73' by 12'6" recreation of the 1824 *Seneca Chief*. This modern-day community boatbuilding project occurred in downtown Buffalo in a fine new building that was made available to BMC by the state of New York, once funding for the actual build of the boat was in hand. Of interest to some, the building, known as the Long Shed, was a state project that came in ahead of schedule, on budget, and is quite beautiful, being paneled inside and out with miles of clear, tight grained, western red cedar that made every boat builder weep to see it used so.

The Long Shed sits next to what is the original western terminus of the Erie Canal in what was the old heart of Buffalo until Robert Moses isolated it from the rest of the city with another of his six-lane civic catastrophes. While not frequently



recognized as such by the general public, the Medina stone walls of the old canal frame were what was the true gateway to what became the heartland of the new country.

From 2019, when the keel was laid, until 2024 when the new *Seneca Chief* rolled out on an amazing 48-wheel trailer, more than 120,000 visitors from around the world came to watch as the boat was built. The first of two waves of the Covid pandemic also swept through just as the first timbers of the long straight keel were being scarfed together. An appreciation of the popularity of the project is reflected by the number who came, saw, and returned again. Building a big wooden boat in a modestly wonderful place like Buffalo makes you an exotic animal to be looked at.

As “Master Boatbuilder” for BMC for the last few years it has been my task—and joy—to encourage a lot of people to immerse themselves in the craftsmanship and skill sets required in the building of wooden boats. At the outset of the *Seneca Chief* project I worked with John Montague, a visionary teacher/historian/artist/boatbuilder who helped found BMC.

It was John who first posited the idea that Buffalo and the Erie Canal needed to have a true recreation of *Seneca Chief*

to focus attention on the upcoming Bicentennial. Despite the scale and scope of such a project for an organization with only 2.5 paid staff, John needed no encouragement to accept that BMC would not be raising the required funds to hire one of the State’s boatbuilding yards, but that we would proceed with it as a typical BMC community boatbuilding project. From conception the building of the boat was intended as a community educational project to be built for the public, by the public, and in the public eye just in time for the Canal’s Bicentennial celebration.

As with most vernacular boats from before the mid-nineteenth century, unless the British captured a ship or boat, there were no drafts for Erie Canal boats from 1824. Luckily BMC has always attracted some really amazing volunteer amateur historians and engineers. John and I were able to add our own research into esthetics and structure of the boats to volumes produced about them by engineer Frank White and historian Chris Andrlé. That research included period harbor records that gave *Seneca Chief*’s actual “as built” dimensions. Ultimately, I sent off our effort and then worked with naval architects from Fast Forward Boats in Arundel, Maine, to get us the required lines drawings and offsets for lofting the

Left: The Erie Canal Boat Seneca Chief is the Flagship of the Erie Canal Bicentennial, and in 2025, during the World Canals Conference, it will travel from Buffalo to New York City, two hundred years after the original trip. After the Bicentennial Voyage, with Buffalo as its home, the Erie Canal Boat Seneca Chief will continue to travel and connect communities while sharing stories and techniques of traditional boatbuilding, exploring the history and impacts of the Erie Canal, and fostering a sense of responsibility for the environment.

Below: The author studying the construction drawings and developing the build schedule.



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 \$2,000 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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73' boat. I feel that our *Seneca Chief* would draw no stares for being strange if we could somehow launch her back two hundred years ago into that original canal. There surely would be some admiring gazes for her quality of fit and finish, though.

Along with the actual job of getting the boat built, with the title of "Master Boatbuilder" came two additional tasks unique to the time and the way we built the big boat. First was the sourcing of all of the materials for the project. Unlike most boatyards the Long Shed was a brand-new building in a downtown park setting that a street sweeper regularly visited. There was no space outside of the building for stock to be accumulated, sorted, stacked and seasoned for years in advance. Everything needed for the boat was in ever-shifting, borrowed storage spaces in scattered locations throughout the city.

Finding the combination of secure space that would allow access at any time of the day for at least three years was difficult at best. Having space that was dry, lit, and spacious enough to allow a forklift and a car-carrier-sized trailer was an ongoing problem. When all was said and done, the more than two hundred 8"x10"x12' white oak beams for framing stock, 7,000 board feet of live edge 18' long, 5/4" cypress, ash, larch, and yellow pine had to be moved three times in short order, as generous donors eventually needed the loaned spaces over our four-year building time frame. Most of the stock was moved by trailer in batches every day from remote warehousing or BMC's main shop in the northern part of the city, as there was just enough space in the Long Shed for final sizing, shaping, and assembling. It has veritably been a "moving" experience.

Actually, sourcing the stock itself provided an eye-opener for us about the state of forest products in the US. I trailered white oak from north-central and southeastern Pennsylvania, northern Virginia, and central and eastern New York. Larch

came from north-central Pennsylvania and southwestern and south-central New York. Cypress came from North Carolina (and if you have time for a "one-on-one" I will let you know who not to buy from).

The quality of lumber delivered was equally problematic. We did not have the luxury of going to local mills and developing a relationship so that they could be counted upon to provide boat building stock. The grants providing most of the funding had deadlines by which large sums had to be spent by a certain date for the specific material described in the grant application. That meant that I was placing large orders with vendors who would guarantee a delivery date, a quantity, and a quality at a select stock price.

For decades I've been buying stock for boatbuilding shops, and for most of that time a hundred boards from a random sawmill would provide thirty boards that were marginal-to-useless, fifty boards that were useful, maybe five boards that you would want to save for your own boat, and five that must have come from Eden when it was clearcut.

If you're doing a project like this, now, it is my strong advice that you take a few years beforehand to gather what you need and get to know your sawyers. As stock came in we soon found that the top boards in any large bundle mostly reflected what you'd like to see in fair numbers throughout the rest of the order of select stock. But for the rest of the boards in the bundles I don't think I'd be far off in reversing the proportions of quality stock to boards that would break heart and budget from today's mills. Thankfully we had great financial support from our wonderful donors and the Canal Corporation of New York and were able to replace questionable stock before desperation set in. We got the cabin closed in before I seriously had to reconsider twice rejected stock for "shutter planks."

I mentioned that there were three hard tasks that came with being Master Boatbuilder on this project. Getting the boat built and sourcing materials were the first two. The third difficulty was keeping my hands in my pockets. I have had a 65-year love affair with boats and the tools and materials used to build them. While I can honestly say that I personally moved every single piece of wood that went into *Seneca Chief*, despite my near addiction to pushing a sharp hand plane, I am proud to admit that I personally disciplined myself into shaping less than 10% of those pieces of wood before they were fastened into place. For the most part I had my hands on it when I was needed after hours to keep us on schedule. There were few tasks that Greg and I felt our crews could not handle, and the reward was that skill sets grew to meet our expectations.

Simply put, it is not the Master Boatbuilder's place to build the boat in a community boatbuilding project like this one was. That task fell mostly to Lead Boatbuilder—the brilliant, talented, patient Greg Dudley—and our incredible team of over two hundred volunteer boatbuilders.

I am lucky in that I love to teach, because other than

The boat building center.





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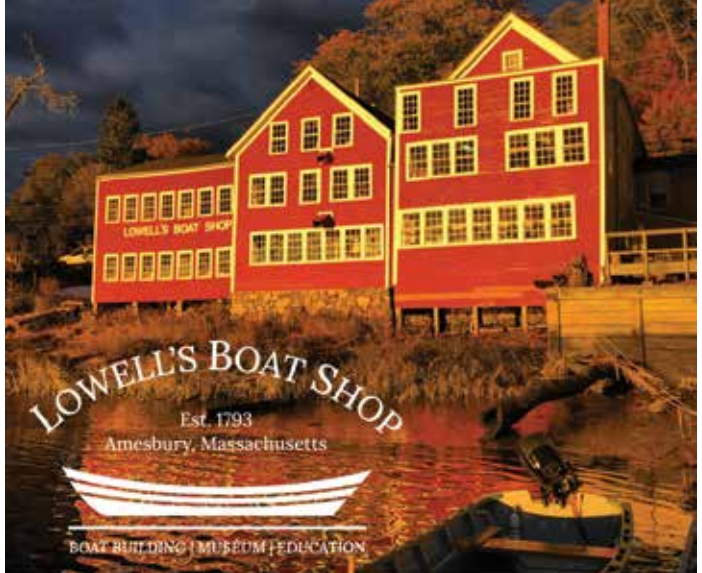
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moving wood and acquiring other supplies needed to get the boat built, I have spent the last four years teaching, as a Master Boatbuilder should. Suppressing the anxiety caused by beautiful clear boards being cut too short before you can get to them is a skill. Resisting the urge to just pick up my beautiful tools to do a job that I know would take fifteen minutes and instead spending the time to wrap someone else's hands and mind around the delicious woodworking that needs to be done is truly what "mastering" is all about.

Working on a large boat building project with volunteers who are actually building the boat requires that you are able to really get them to a point of true competency and productivity. For example, you must be able to teach a crew with amazingly diverse backgrounds and degrees of hand-eye coordination to spile a plank, use a hand plane to back out the plank so that it fits the frames it attaches to, figure and plane an accurate caulking bevel, and measure and plane a rolling bevel, on a plank that is maybe 18' long. It is not a classroom exercise, because the planks they are learning on have to be good enough that they can actually become part of the floating boat.

On any given day Greg and I would work with crews of up to twelve individuals including rocket scientists, history teachers, engineers, and store clerks, most of whom had never picked up a hand plane before. At the end of that day, we

would expect to hang two planks. Joy comes as each week the tally of how many planks got hung would increase. It had to, to meet the launching deadline.

Two things helped me to keep my hands where they belonged—in my pockets and not working a plane. The first was the enthusiasm and intense involvement of our crew. When everything else about doing a big project like this (i.e. budgets, bureaucracies, acquiring suitable stock) would become exhausting, a few hours working in company with people who knew that what they were doing with you was surely the most interesting thing they'd ever done would easily adjust my attitude until I felt the same way. I can't list the names or go into detail about our wonderful crew, but if you need people to do the work with humor and care, they are the *Seneca Chief* crew with us at BMC.

The second thing that kept my hands pocketed was Greg Dudley. Greg was hired to be my assistant at first, just a boatbuilder, because in truth he had only built a couple of lapstrake double enders before I hired him. In no time I realized just how lucky I was the day he showed up at BMC to talk about wanting to build more boats. I don't think he truly understood the full scope of what he would be doing until *Seneca Chief* was launched, but working with him as he grew into the position he earned, that of Lead Boatbuilder,

All of the above arose out Buffalo Maritime Center's mission to inspire meaningful connections and life lessons through community boatbuilding, preserving maritime culture, and exploring the waterways of Western New York. The newly launched boat, which does float on her designed waterline, will become a living museum to educate and inspire the people of New York State in reimagining the Erie Canal.



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Contact if you would like to assist in reorganizing the chapter.

has been delightful. People my age usually worry a lot about how things will go after we're gone, but with Greg around, I worry a little less about wooden boat building. Great brain. Great hands. Great attitude.

Seneca Chief is launched now and sits gleaming in her fresh George Kirby custom paint colors right where the original *Seneca Chief* began her inaugural voyage in the Erie Canal. She meets all expectations to the point where I am proud of us. We have spent a few days teaching the crew how to tow her around the harbor in Buffalo with the wooden Tugboat *Churchill* in preparation for what comes. The story of the build includes countless details that won't fit here, but there is a great book, *The Erie Canal*, just printed about the project, and there are several documentaries in production about her as part of next year's bicentennial celebrations that will be available soon.

PRES. MESSAGE

continued from page 2



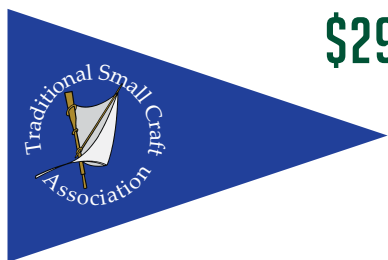
In closing, I invite you to contact me with any thoughts you may have about these ideas.

I thank the hard work of the previous council members, Michael Jones, Roger Allen, and Douglass Oeller, for their dedication and enthusiasm. And I look forward to the upcoming year.

Respectfully submitted,
Pete Peters
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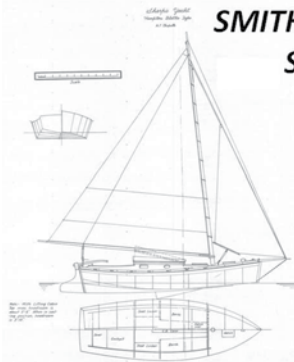
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URBANPROMISE ACADEMY

By Kevin Callahan

In the beginning of the school year, Pablo, a 9th-grader at the UrbanPromise Academy, said after the messy job of fiberglassing a cedar strip canoe: “I had a fun day. I learned to fiberglass, I liked it. I like coming to the boat shop because it’s fun.”

Since 2009, Urban BoatWorks has been providing enjoyment for the youth of Camden, New Jersey, while also building character, teamwork, and skills through the craft of wooden boat building.

From the program’s beginning, with the mentorship of a core group of twenty adult volunteers, middle and high school youth have handcrafted over fifty sailboats, canoes, kayaks, and paddleboards and launched them on local waterways.

“It has been great working with students and to see this progress over the years,” veteran volunteer Andy Field said.

In addition to being introduced to the basics of boat building, such as stitch-n-glue and cedar strip construction, our young boatwrights also learn how to loft measurements from a blueprint and onto the plywood to be cut, are taught maritime history, and paddle on the city’s local waterways.

On the second Saturday each June, two or three more canoes built at the BoatShop during the school year are launched at the Cooper River Yacht Club.

“It was really nice to see the improvement in the kids, both emotionally and skill-wise, over the course of the school year,” volunteer Bill Judd said.

In the 2022–23 school year, there were ten cohorts from Camden schools and after-school programs as well as the UrbanPromise International Fellows program who worked on the three boat builds—the 16-foot cedar strip canoe, a 12-foot cedar strip canoe, and a 16-foot stitch-n-glue Merrimack canoe—inside the BoatShop located at the Camden Shipyard and Maritime Museum in the Waterfront South section. All totaled, seventy students worked on the boats or woodworking projects in their classroom this year.

At the end of the school year, Pablo said coming to the BoatShop every Monday with his six other classmates has been “a life changing experience.”

“I’ve been learning more how to build boats, like how to drill and saw and sand many boat parts,” he explained.

Pablo said he didn’t expect the experience to be “life changing” but now recognizes “this can help me more in the future.”

“It’s been amazing,” Pablo said. “I’ve bonded with my classmates, too.”



BOAT SHOP VISIT

By Bill Stirling

Many of the members of the Cape Cod chapter are also volunteers at the local Maritime Museum's boat shop, in Hyannis. We provide: instructors for the Bevin's boat building classes; workers for the complete rebuild of a 1944 Coast Guard 25' surf boat; coxswains for the rowing program; and workers for the Thursday evening "work night." Our projects consist of: preparing kits for the Bevin's Skiff classes and refinishing a recently-acquired 19' version of a John Gardner modified Herreshoff wherry (thanks to Russel Smith and Floating the Apple). We have built a pair of oars for the wherry, are working on building a set of oars for the surf boat, and helped prepare the museum's 19' catboat, *Sarah*, for the spring.

In an attempt to change up our routine of having our monthly meetings in the museum's boat shop, we schedule some winter visits to the nearby commercial boat shops. We are lucky to have on the Cape a number of boat building shops that are still building wood boats. The owners are nice enough to welcome us in for a visit, to observe their work. In past winters, we have visited Arey's Pond Boat Yard in Orleans, First Light Boat Works in Chatham, E. M. Crosby's Boat Works in Barnstable, Beetle Cat Boat Shop in Wareham, Ballentine's Boat Shop in Cataumet, and Damian McLaughlin's Boat Shop in North Falmouth.

At the Cape Cod Boat Builder's Show this past winter, I met Ross Gannon, Nat Benjamin, and Brad Abbott of Gannon & Benjamin (G & B) Marine Railway, of Vineyard Haven on Martha's Vineyard. They specialize in designing, building, and maintaining traditionally built wood boats. Ross and Nat got together and started the shop in 1980 and have since built over eighty new boats, ranging from eleven-foot tenders to a sixty-five-foot schooner named *Juno*. Nat has designed many of the boats they have built, including the 25' "Canvasback" sloop named *Sally May*, for singer James Taylor. They also maintain and repair many of the numerous wooden boats that call Martha's Vineyard home.

In April, on a very rare, warm, and sunny spring day on the Cape, a group of us took the ferry from Woods Hole to Vineyard Haven. A short walk brought us to the G & B boat shop. We met up with Brad, and he spent the next two hours with us. He walked us through both of their shop locations and explained every project they had in progress. A few of the ongoing projects included a keel replacement, a new tender, a total rebuild of an S class sloop, and the repainting of *Sally May*, among many others.

I had not been to Martha's Vineyard for many years, so it was good to visit the island, and Brad was a great tour guide on a subject we all enjoyed hearing about.

Below Left: Alan Reed, Ray Ward, Brad Abbott, and Dick Petterson discussing the new tender. **Below Right:** Ross Gannon and Nat Benjamin showing us a tender they were working on. **Right (Top to Bottom):** Carl Lubelezyk, Alan Reed, Ray Ward, and Liam Henry meeting Brad Abbott, center. G & B's water front shop. James Taylor's 25' Sally May, the first Canvasback designed and built by Nat. New keel installation.





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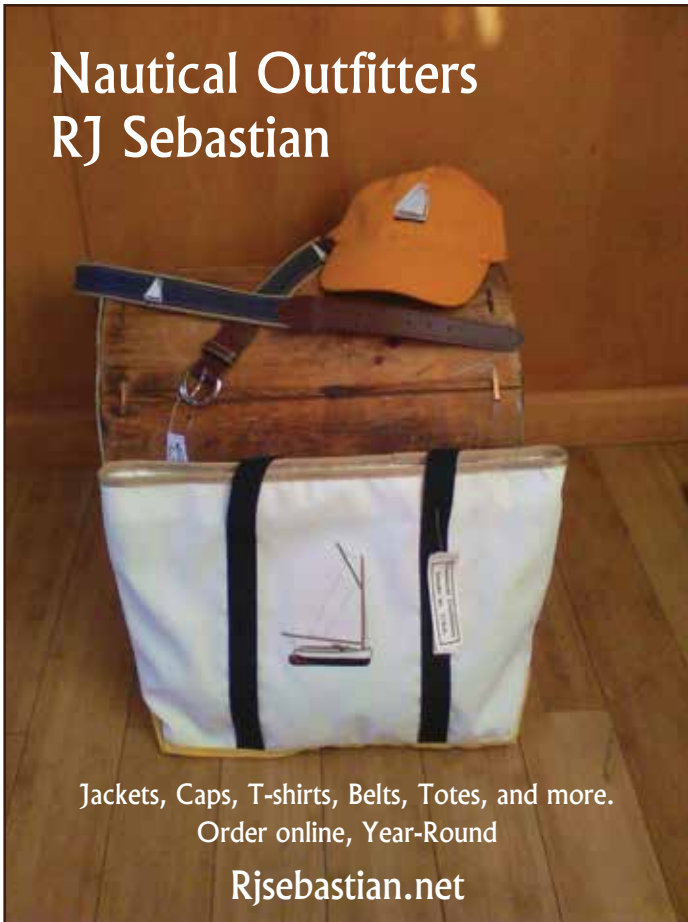
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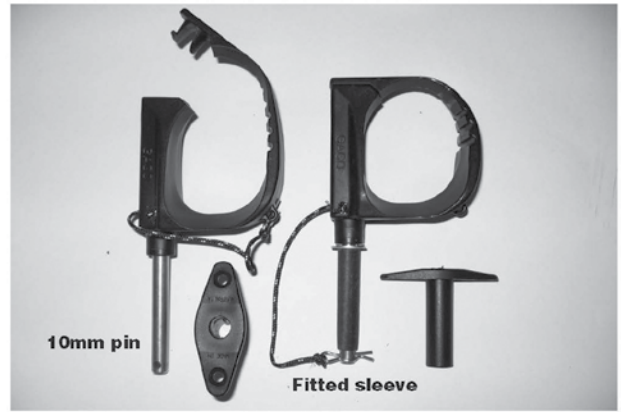
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Winter 2024 Volume 45 Number 4

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