The Ash Breeze

Journal of the Traditional Small Craft Association

SIXTY SAILORS AT THE 41ST ANNUAL CEDAR KEY SMALL BOAT MEET



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CELEBRATING Traditional Small Craft Association EST 1975 50 YEARS

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The Ash Breeze

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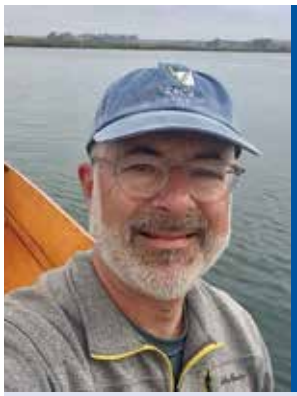
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The Traditional Small Craft Association, Inc., is a nonprofit, tax-exempt educational organization that works to preserve and continue the living traditions, skills, lore, and legends surrounding working and pleasure watercraft with origins that predate 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: The cover boat is a Coquina "Slipper"; the owner-builder is Rob Hazard; the photographer is Ron Honninott. The Coquina was designed in 1889 by the legendary yacht designer Nathanael G. Herreshoff for his own personal use.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Todd Bloch

In my previous message, I wrote about our efforts to better understand how TSCA can serve its members. As my term as president comes to a close, I am happy to share that this work continues and is already proving valuable.

The survey conducted with both members and our broader Facebook community is currently being reviewed by the council, and it is yielding useful and, at times, insightful information. Early indications suggest we are hearing clearly about what draws people to TSCA and where there are opportunities to improve. That input is already helping guide ongoing updates to our website, with the goal of making it a more useful and relevant resource for members.

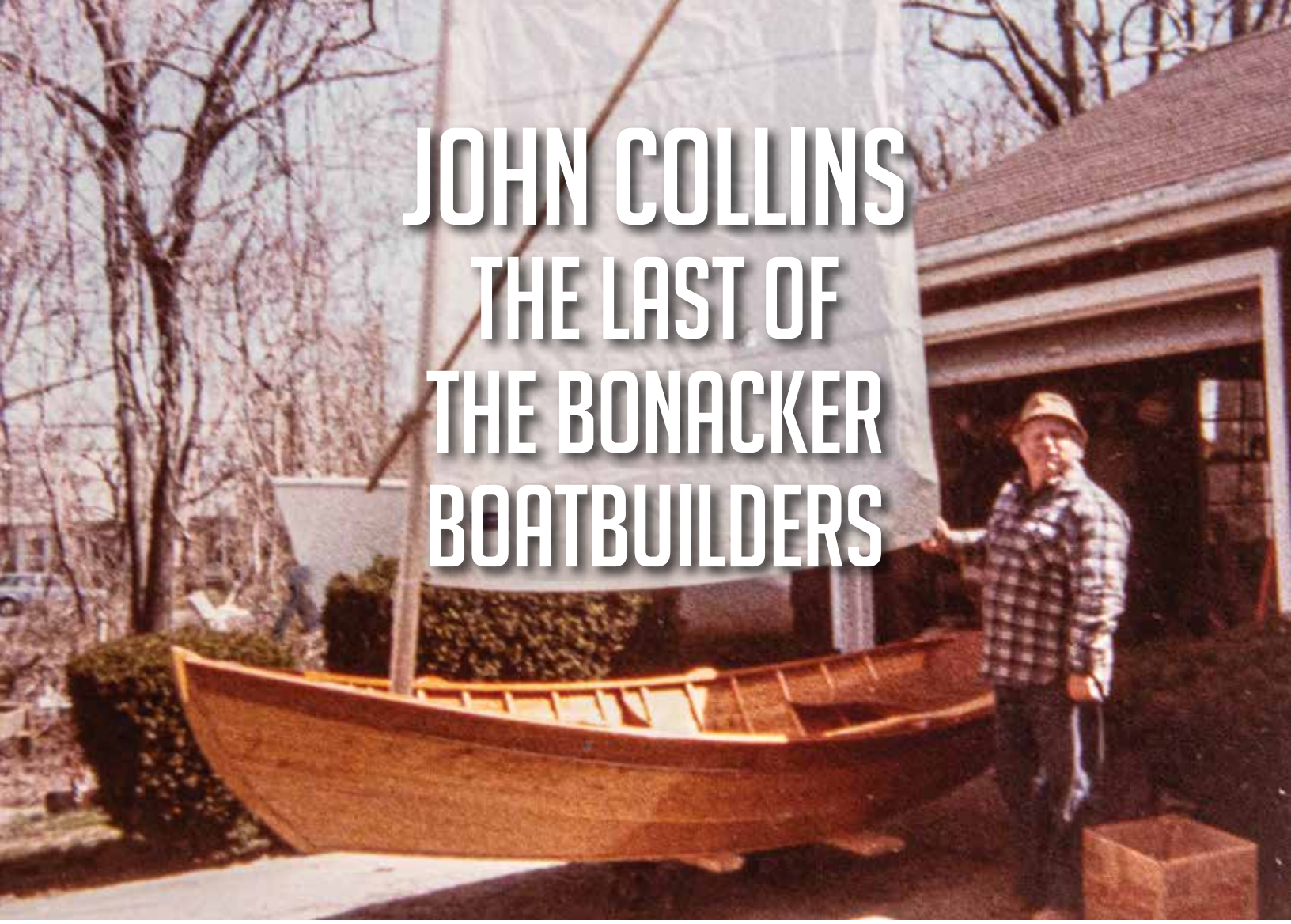
We continue to work on highlighting events that matter to our members. Chapter representatives have been asked to share information about events, festivals, and boat shows in their areas. While we've seen some response, we hope to see more chapters contributing so we can better reflect the full range of TSCA activity. The goals in this effort are to bolster the small craft presence at events and to list TSCA-attended events on our website, giving travel minded members destinations and chapters to connect with.

Our connections with aligned organizations, including the Teaching with Small Boat Alliance and Chesapeake Light Craft, continue to grow. These relationships broaden our reach and strengthen the community we are part of.

From a membership standpoint, our permanent membership numbers have held steady, which is encouraging. The introduction of free temporary digital memberships has also generated meaningful interest. While conversion to permanent membership has been modest so far, it represents a promising pathway for welcoming new participants into the TSCA.

Finally, we welcome the new Cockrells Creek Chapter in Virginia, and we look forward to soon adding the Cypriere Chapter in New Orleans.

See you on the water,
Todd



JOHN COLLINS
THE LAST OF THE BONACKER BOATBUILDERS

By Dan Hays

Pierce Hance swings open a huge door on the giant storage shed filled with boats racked one on top of another—Beetle Cats, with peeling paint and dinghies in disrepair. The shed stands steps away from a shingled boat shop standing on a wooded dune in Amagansett, New York. It's here that members of the East End Classic Boat Society (EECBS) work on building and repairing different varieties of traditional wooden watercraft. EECBS work ranges from the restoration of a 104-year-old Herreshoff 12½ sloop to building an eleven-foot Billy Mink skiff. When the shop completes work on a boat, the boat is sold or raffled off.

Under a plastic covering in the shed, Hance, the EECBS vice president, reveals a boat with a small brass plate identifying it as the work of John Collins. Hance views the boat as a special piece of local antiquity. The craft was constructed by perhaps the last of the Bonacker boatbuilders, he believes.

According to local historians, the term "Bonacker" was first used in the seventeenth century to refer to settlers who lived in the vicinity of Accabonac Harbor. The harbor is located in the Springs area of East Hampton Town, located on the south fork of Long Island.

Bonackers were folks who lived simply on the land surrounding Accabonac Harbor and made a living fishing and farming. They spoke with an intonation that some said made them sound like people from Devonshire, England.

Accabonac Harbor is a small inlet off of Gardiners Bay. It got its name from the Algonquin tribe. Accabonac means "root place" or "good ground roots." Farmers found it a fertile area for crops, and its waters were busy with blues, porgies, striped bass, and flounder, just to name a few.

Bonackers had a reputation as being stoic people of few words. In more recent times, they were known for addressing

Top: *John Collins shows off one of the many boats he built.*

everyone as "Bub." They did their fishing from small boats they built to haul in shellfish or sail out to Gardiner's Bay, where they baited hooks and worked the fish traps they built close to shore on pilings wrapped with nets. For lobsters, they set pot traps.

The Collins boat owned by EECBS is a dory-style sailing skiff. Collins built the boat with lapstrake planking and a narrow stern. "The stern is shaped in a style that's popular in Accabonac for boats like this. The boat is a dory type that curves up," said Hance. It was constructed that way, he explained, so it could be easily pivoted and launched from the beach—unlike a boat with a square stern. The chines of the skiff taper up to the transom. It has an oak frame and mahogany thwarts. A fairly tall mast for the boat carries a cat-rigged sail.

When Collins built his first boat isn't known, but he had a longstanding love of watercraft and, in the course of his career, captained an oyster boat. As a teenager, he piloted his twenty-five-foot wooden Friendship sloop hundreds of miles for a trip up to Maine.

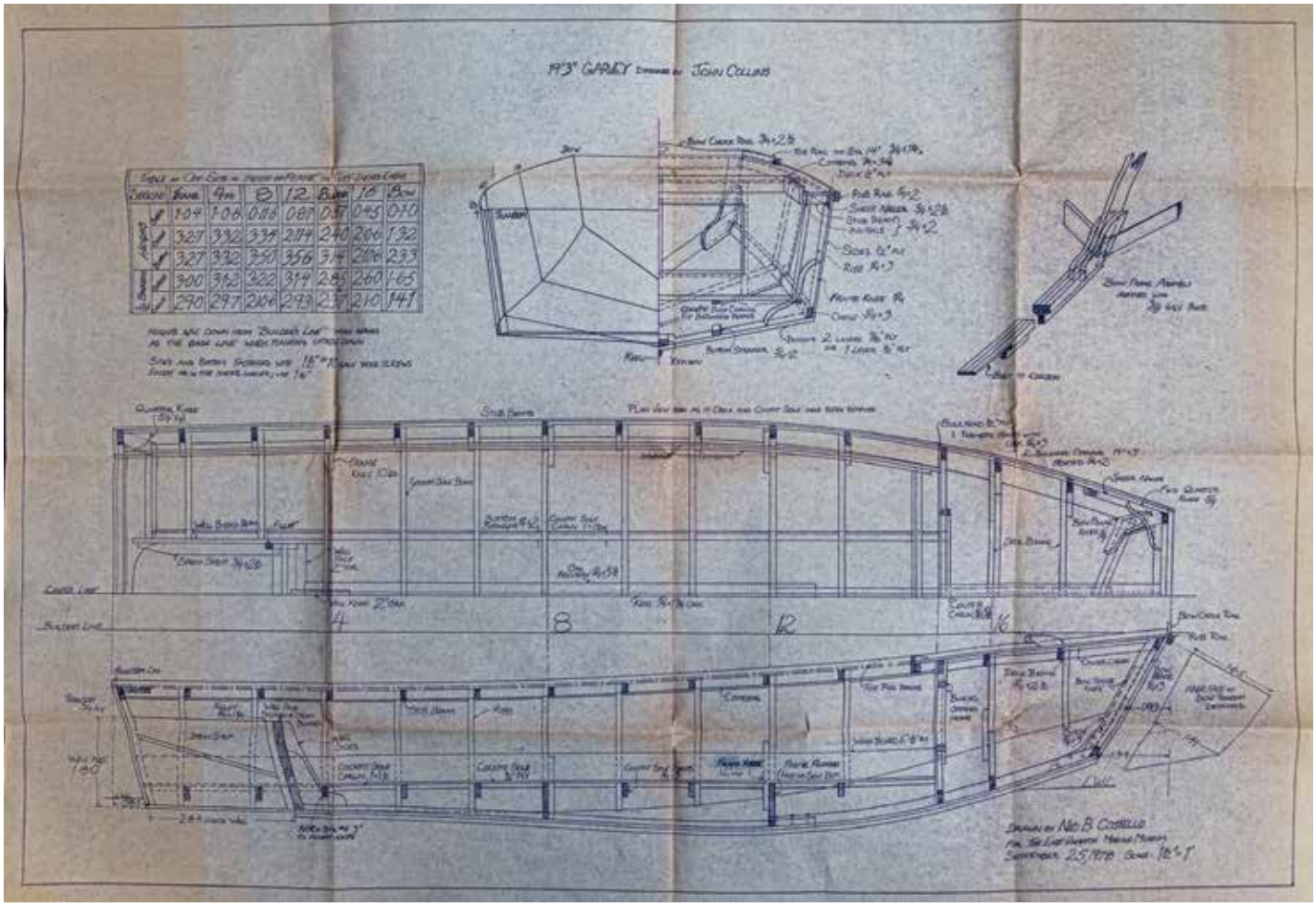
His knowledge of boatbuilding came from various sources and a lot of book study, according to his son Edward. Bert Van Deusen, who was taught by Collins to become an accomplished boatbuilder, said he understood that Collins's family built boats, and that is how he learned.

Collins's wife, Nancy, described him as not much of a mathematician but an excellent and precise craftsman who, besides constructing boats, at one point built a dulcimer and kept a 1930 Model A Ford in good running condition.

At the shop in his home, Collins built things with only a basic nine-inch Rockwell rotary saw. It had no guides, but he still made cuts as straight as an arrow. His abilities led the Town of East Hampton at one point to put him in charge of a program teaching the craft of boatbuilding. The class was first located beside the Commercial Dock at Three Mile Harbor. It was housed in a drafty building that once housed lobster pots. One former student recalled that among the tools it had on hand was a hand-cranked drill press and a barely working planer. After the program on Three Mile Harbor ended, it continued under a tent beside the East Hampton Town Marine Museum. Eventually, the EECBS boat shop was built beside the museum

Van Deusen took the class in the evening at Three Mile Harbor, and Collins taught him how to read plans. He learned

John Collins Garvey Boat plan.



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boat construction while they built a Connecticut River Drag Boat. Van Deusen noted that in the late 1800s, Drag Boats were the most popular craft used by crews that fished at the end of Long Island and along the Connecticut shore. The Drag Boat, Van Deusen said, has "gorgeous lines, the sheer is close to the water." It was shaped that way so nets could be easily dragged aboard, he explained.

Collins, a man of quiet demeanor, was a relaxed teacher who would "let you make a mistake, and then he'd teach you how to fix it," Van Deusen said.

Van Deusen himself went on to build fourteen boats, many of them during a long stint teaching the art of boat construction as head of the building program at EECBS. He related how Collins "showed me how to rivet. I think this is the most important thing I learned from John. Riveting is the most subtle part of making a boat—you're not bending over the metal, you're annealing, and when you tap bronze or copper, the blows have to spread out the metal a certain way. Some people beat it to death."

One of his pupils, Rob Barker, who learned boat construction from Collins, went on to found a boatbuilding shop in Easton, Pennsylvania. Both Barker and Van Deusen praised Collins's ability as a boat designer. Barker, to this day, has kept the plans that Collins gave him.

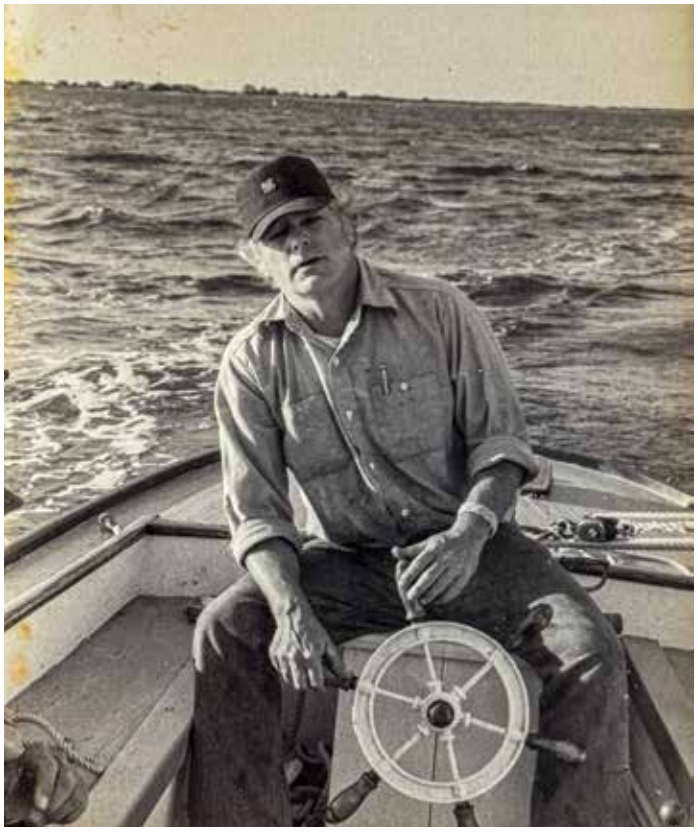
In 1978, Collins came up with the design for a nineteen-foot three-inch Garvey fishing boat. The plan calls for the flat-bottomed craft to be built from marine plywood, with oak frames and fir stringers. His directions call for a bottom made of two layers of three-eighths marine plywood. "This is done if the boat is to be used in rough service. In light service, a bottom of half-inch plywood would be adequate," he wrote. His five pages of single-spaced directions also advise that, "The bow is the most difficult part to construct. There is a great deal of rake to the face, and the notches for the chines take a lot of fitting."

Van Deusen noted that Collins, to the end of his life, was always looking for his next project. Sometime after Collins had been diagnosed with incurable cancer, Van Deusen visited him. Outside Collins's house, against a fence, was a battered Peapod rowboat. Van Deusen said that the builder had told him, "I'm looking forward to restoring it." He marveled that, at that point, "He had two weeks to live."

Hance, after showing off the Collins boat, closes the doors and promises, "This one isn't going anywhere. It's not for sale. It's local history, and we are the custodians of it."

John Collins died in 1996 at the age of fifty-nine.

John Collins takes the helm, sailing.



Top: *The John Collins skiff that is owned by the EECBS.*

Bottom: *Pierce Hance with the John Collins skiff outside the EECBS storage shed.*







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The 2014 edition of our 253-page catalog of boat & ship plans, the *Ship Plans List*, is available for $20.00. For information, search "boat plans" on the Smithsonian web site <***americanhistory.si.edu***>.



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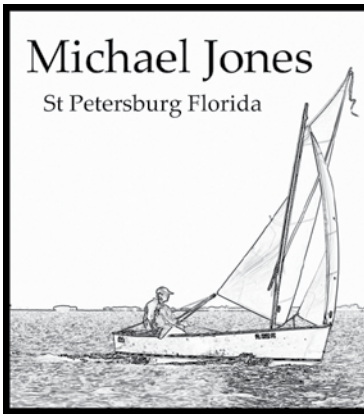
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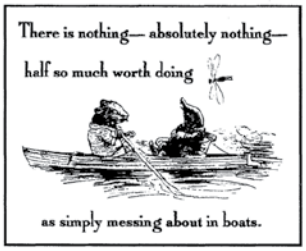
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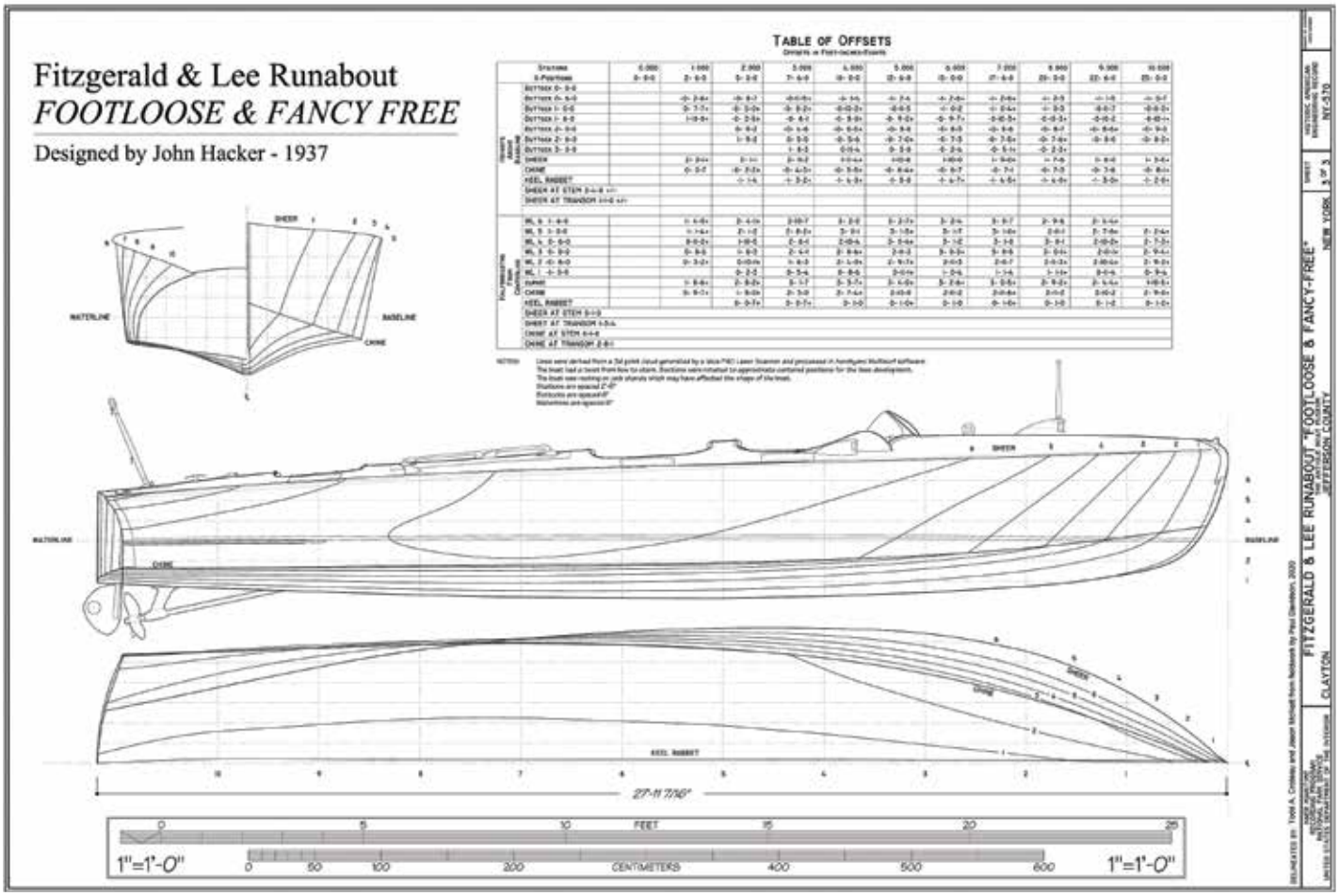
By Todd Bloch

The definition of a "small craft" is debatable; I've heard people say they are less than forty feet. That could be arbitrary, but I'm going with it, making the boat presented here, at a mere twenty-eight feet, within our wheelhouse. Granted, *Footloose & Fancy-Free* is not your average backyard trailer boat, but she is a beautiful vessel and well worth featuring.

Footloose & Fancy-Free (originally named *Messenger*) is the result of a collaboration between a talented designer and a skilled boatbuilding shop. The builder, Fitzgerald & Lee Motor Boat Company of Alexandria Bay, New York, initially opened as a boat and motor repair shop in the early 1920s but soon began producing their own boats and became a dealer for others. Their first boats were versions of John Hacker's Dolphin runabouts, and they represented Gar Wood boats in the Thousand Islands region.

Fitzgerald & Lee quickly developed a reputation as exceptionally skilled craftsmen and caught Hacker's attention. Hacker designed and developed boats specifically for Fitzgerald & Lee because he knew they could execute the complex designs, with some extreme features that would challenge shops with lesser skills.

A custom design by Hacker for his private customer, *Footloose & Fancy-Free*, was completed in 1937 for use on the St. Lawrence River. She is of stout construction—





understandable given the speed she could achieve. Oak frames are 8" on center with oak reinforcing bulkheads every 24". There is an inner layer of diagonal mahogany planking and an outer layer of longitudinal mahogany planking. She is well known for her unique features, including rounded covering boards, a barrel hull and deck, mahogany windshield brackets, and a rounded nose at the stem.

The engine is a 12-cylinder 300 hp marine engine (apparently based on a Liberty aircraft motor, adapted by the Gar Wood Company for use in their boats). With that engine and a single three-bladed prop, she could reportedly cruise between forty and fifty miles per hour.

The boat has three cockpits, two forward of the engine and a small one aft of the engine. A small storage space is accessible forward of the foremost cockpit. With this configuration (and speed), an outing on *Footloose & Fancy-Free* made for a delightful excursion on the St. Lawrence. She was later used on the coastal waters of Florida before returning to home waters at the Antique Boat Museum in Clayton, New York.

According to the Antique Boat Museum website, a cache of blueprints was found in the attic of the former Fitzgerald & Lee offices in 2014. These drawings of their boats are now in the collection of the Alexandria Township Historical Society and illustrate the breadth of work accomplished by their shop before it closed in 1942.

Footloose & Fancy-Free, and several other Fitzgerald & Lee, Chris Craft, and Gar Woods boats are in the collection of the Antique Boat Museum. The Museum continues to maintain and operate a small fleet of classic runabouts on the St. Lawrence.

Citation for HABS documentation:

Historic American Engineering Record, Creator, Frederick Bourne, John Hacker, Sponsor Antique Boat Museum, Todd A Croteau, Matt Macvittie, Jason W McNatt, Todd A Croteau, and Paul Davidson. *Fitzgerald & Lee Runaboat Footloose & Fancy-Free, Antique Boat Museum 750 Mary Street, Clayton, Jefferson County, NY*. Jefferson County Clayton New York, 1968. translated by Mcpartland, Marymitter, and Stranieri, Marcellamitter Documentation Compiled After. Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/ny2463/.

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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 $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:

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FIRST-TIME MESSABOUT ORGANIZER DECLARES PORTLAND'S LOWER COLUMBIA RIVER FALL MESSABOUT A SUCCESS

By Bruce Bateau

On a Monday morning last fall, I recalled that a blister still burned on my palm, my knees were stiff, my nose was sunburned, and if I'm honest, my derrière was sore too. I just pulled off organizing my first official messabout with the Lower Columbia River Chapter. One guy drifted downstream, another lost his wallet in the river, and it rained biblically during our campout, but it still seemed like a success.

Although I've been sailing the Columbia River for at least ten years, the idea of inviting others to join me was daunting. Would they slip downstream? Who might stray into the ship channel? Would someone get pinned against a wing dam?

Situated some one hundred miles upstream of the Pacific, the Columbia River at Portland is nearly a mile wide and has a tidal range of about 2.5 feet. The tide flows another forty-five miles up the Columbia, where it hits the concrete of the Bonneville Dam. Rockier higher up, sandier lower down, the Columbia is 1,240 miles long, drains 258,000 square miles, and is the second largest river in the US. Being near its terminus, there's almost always current going downstream. Our section, known as the "lower" Columbia, has rows of pilings on the edges, known as wing dams, that capture sediment and keep the current focused on the main channel. If the tide isn't pushing inland and slowing the current, one has to row and play the eddies to stay put or hope that there's enough wind to move upriver.

Despite the challenges, the river is quite sailable, once you understand the variables. And frankly, as a sailor in a small motorless boat, I've often felt lonely out there. With that in mind, I felt that the mild conditions of early September would be an ideal window to bring some old salts out, along with newer sailors who wanted to learn the basics of what could be an intimidating river. Besides increasing people's comfort with the river itself, I also wanted to find new folks for overnight cruises, so in addition to an afternoon messabout, I added the option to spend the evening at the dock or anchored in a sandy cove at Government Island State Park, just a few miles from the ramp.

Saturday, the scheduled messabout day, dawned warm and sunny. The wind forecast was light, but I was hopeful that as the sun rose, a breeze would follow. The parking lot at the boat ramp near the Portland International Airport could hold at least a hundred rigs and trailers; when I arrived at 11 a.m., I was the only one there. Where aluminum fishing boats usually dominate, one by one, more than a dozen sail and

Mast Rigging.



Parking Lot Gam.



oar craft turned up: two SCAMPS, a Storer-designed Viola, a rowing craft of regional design known as a Lake Oswego Boat, and more.

It didn't take much more than gathering to get people talking, but eventually we did a more formal show-and-tell boat tour, taking about two minutes at each boat to get to know the skipper and the boat's backstory. In fact, the sailors were so excited about checking out each other's craft, they failed to notice a nearby flag coming to life. I encouraged folks to wrap up the shore talk.

A prudent sailor always starts their journey on the Columbia by going upriver. The current will surely take you home, but there's no guarantee of a breeze. I really wanted to get everyone on the water and moving together while I could.

A few hands went up when I asked who'd sailed this section of the river before. That was a promising start—it meant I wouldn't have to shepherd everyone. I gave a crash course in river navigation, currents, and our plan for the day. I wish I'd reminded everyone to turn on the VHF radios to the same channel, however. Slowly, but surely, everyone got afloat.

We agreed to hang out together near the launch ramp for a while, then those who were overnighting would continue upriver. As is common, several of us swapped boats, noting differences, preferences, and, silently, minor grievances. Mike, in his well-canvassed Thistle, zoomed about. I rowed and sailed as zephyrs arrived, stopping to chat with people I didn't know, encouraging others not to get too far behind, and eventually started heading upriver.

All went well for the first half hour or so, but as the breeze trailed off, some of the craft with smaller sail plans started to drift downstream. A few went back toward the beach or the ramp, but one went beyond my comfort zone. I asked Mark, sailing a Sea Pearl, to motor down and see if a tow was needed (it was). Crisis averted.

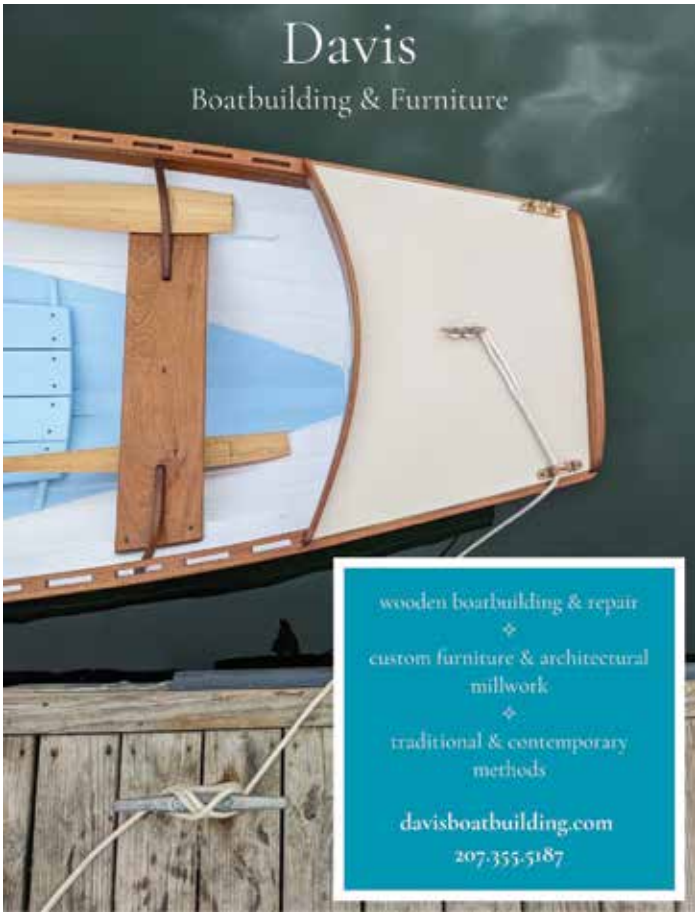
Somehow, the overnighters got a bit of breeze that the day sailors did not, and we slowly drifted away (they all made it ashore safely). I had a higher confidence level and greater familiarity with this group, and any anxiety about the first part of the day dissipated.

Our motley crew was now down to six boats. Four sailors worked their way up through the more trafficked main channel, while Dan and I, both in Oughtred yawls, opted for the quieter, but riskier path of shallow water between several islands. A gentle breeze allowed for a downwind run, which was good because my centerboard began to plow a furrow in the sandy bottom. Moments after raising it, I had to retract my rudder and steered primarily by leaning since I was now in less than a foot of water. Dan followed, getting stuck here and there, shifting to oars, and eventually finding his way to deeper channels and returning to sail power.

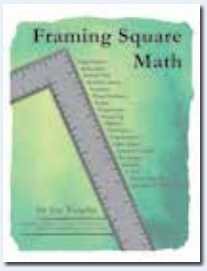
The crew reconvened a few hours later at the State Park Dock. After answering the usual questions from keelboats and motor cruisers there—How did you get here? Where are you going? Are you going to sleep on those things?—we traded stories of the day as clouds gathered above us. Retreating to our cockpit tents at sunset, it drizzled, and by bedtime, a deluge pelted us. Thankful not to be camping ashore, I fell asleep to the soothing patter of the rain. At dawn, many of us realized it had rained so hard that water infiltrated our boats, but it was nothing a sponge and some sunlight couldn't clean up.

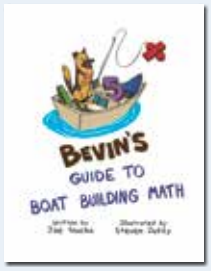
The next morning, a breeze was building, and the clouds began to part. For some, that was a call to head directly home, but for three of us, it was an invitation to sail another ten miles to complete a circumnavigation of Government Island. We had steady winds, mostly on the nose, but once we rounded the far end of the island, the current was with us, which allowed long tacks and lots of windward sailing… so long as we didn't get too close to the many sand bars on this lesser-traveled side of the island. Running aground is a Columbia River tradition (at least for small boats) and part of the fun of cruising on small craft, and it happened a lot. Shoving off with an oar or by retracting a centerboard was all it took to get going again.

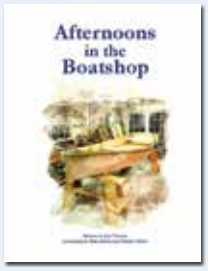
It took us the better part of the day to get back to the ramp, but with each mile it became sunnier, our grins larger, and the number of tacks made uncountable. The messabout wasn't perfect, but I think we all learned something about the river and ourselves.



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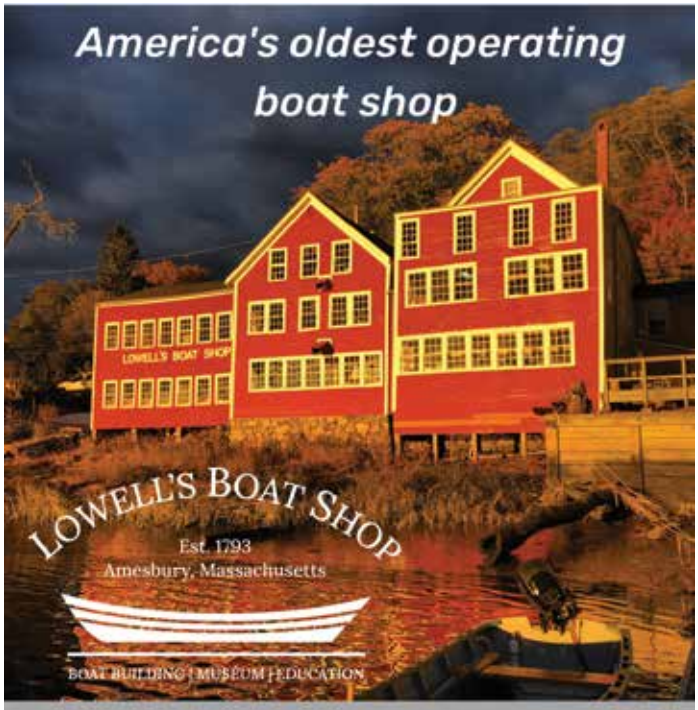
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2026 COUNCIL NOMINEES

DICK VERMEULEN



380 Hope Rd., Lincolnville, ME 04849; Downeast Chapter; dick@mecat.com; 207-319-9518

As a kid, I sailed competitively in wooden prams and Sailfish on Green Pond Lake in Northern Jersey. Graduated with a degree in Mechanical Engineering from Ohio University in 1970. Started Maine Cat, designing and building performance composite foam-cored sailing catamarans 22' to 41' in 1991 and retired in 2020. Joined the Downeast Chapter and TSCA in 2025. I enjoy writing about building and sailing small wooden boats. I built a Calendar Islands Yawl 16, designed by Clint Chase, in 2025, and provided sailboat rides at the Blue Hill Maritime Heritage Festival last August. I would like to become a member of the TSCA council to learn more from other council members, so I can bring that back to the Downeast Chapter and provide more opportunities for folks to build their own boats and expand the TSCA membership. Love to see more regional events with kids building or fitting out simple skiffs, and bringing their parents along to get involved and see their children embrace the thrill of piloting the boat they helped build.

I am also looking forward to writing stories for *The Ash Breeze* about some of the interesting Maine islands I will be visiting this summer, including Warren State Park, Hurricane, and Rogue.

BILL VOGEL



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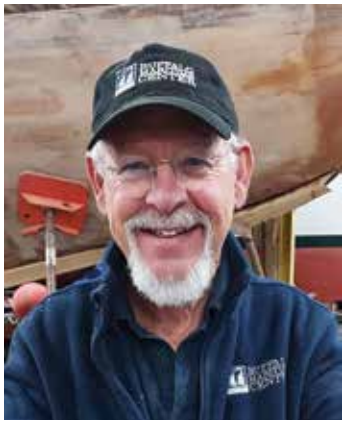
I have been sailing boats since I was "knee high to a Coke bottle," from 10-foot Dyer Dhows to multiple catboats and larger cruisers/racers. I imported traditional trailer sailboats from England (Swallow Boats) for several years and have been a ComPac dealer. Sailing and boating have been my life's passion.

Although not a boatbuilder, I am particularly drawn to traditional boat lines and currently own a Menger 15 Catboat. In the early 1990s, I owned a Menger 19 catboat, and that craft opened my eyes to the advantages of owning a small, trailerable boat. I trailer-sailed and camp-cruised that catboat from Cumberland Island to the Florida Keys, Sanibel and Captiva, Tarpon Springs, and points in between.

I am a strong advocate for trailerable boats and all the advantages they offer. I am currently a member of the Florida Gun & Tackle Club, the Jacksonville Rudder Club, and a former Commodore of a 300-member sailing club (NFCC).

I would be honored to serve on the TSCA Board and devote my energy and efforts to advancing and growing the Association.

ROGER ALLEN



9993 N Otto Rd., Cattaraugus, NY 14719; Buffalo Maritime Center Chapter

I was hired as Shipkeeper/Curator of the 157' wooden Barkentine *Gazella Premeiro*, at the Philadelphia Maritime Museum, in 1978, where I initiated the Workshop on the Water, a floating workshop housed aboard the 110-foot barge *Maple*, located at the heart of Philadelphia's working waterfront, and started the TSCA Delaware River Chapter.

I love small-craft adventures and have spent extensive time on Barnegat Bay, the Delaware River, the Chesapeake Bay, North Carolina's famed Outer Banks, and the Gulf Coast of Florida. I have sailed on such exotic bodies of water as the inner sea of the Netherlands, the canals of England, the Mediterranean, the North Sea, and the Great Lakes.

Professionally, I have led museum programs in Philadelphia, Penssylvania; Beaufort, North Carolina; Cortez, Florida; and the Buffalo, New York, Maritime Center, where I retired and became Master Boatbuilder for the building of the 73-foot replica of DeWitt Clinton's Erie Canal boat *Seneca Chief* and the Center's workboat *Buffalo Sal*.

Editor's note: Roger served on the TSCA national council several times during his forty-five-plus-year association with TSCA.



SIXTY SAILORS JOINED THE FUN AT THE 41ST ANNUAL CEDAR KEY SMALL BOAT MEET

By Mike Jones

The Cedar Key Small Boat Meet is an anomaly among small-boat gatherings; its structure is that of a small messabout. It is actually a group of messabouts that take place at the same time and location every year. "All small craft are welcome," is more than a slogan; it is what makes the walk down the beach of Atsena Otie key so interesting.

The 41st Annual Cedar Key Small Boat was a perfect demonstration of "the wind and tides control the schedule." Friday was a beautiful day—partly cloudy with a light breeze. With a strong storm front moving through on Saturday, the prudent sailors stayed ashore and enjoyed being with friends. From the safety of our living rooms, we could enjoy watching the squall lines move into and out of the area, bringing some much-needed rain.

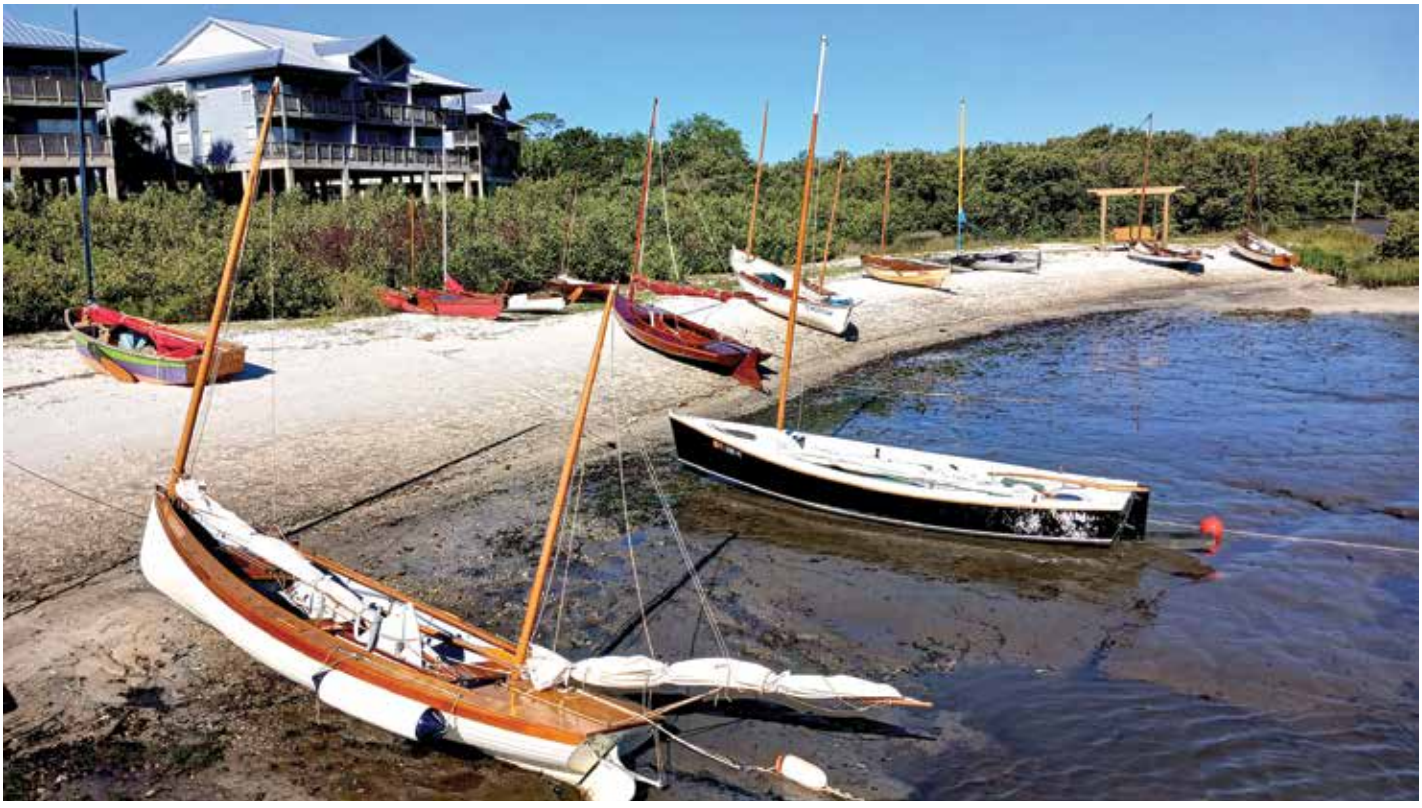
Saturday night dinner, hosted by the local Episcopal Church, had a capacity crowd of about sixty, with good food and much laughter. Sunday brought blue skies streaked with cirrus clouds, but the winds had pushed the low tide much lower than expected, making for a late-morning start to the sailing and a light breeze that disappeared by the end of the day.

What makes this place and this event special enough that many have been returning every May for decades?

First is the relaxed nature of the event—no registration, no fees, and make your own plans. Come a few days early or stay a few days extra. Cedar Key is still an affordable destination with a small walkable downtown. And of course, the camaraderie of people who share the simple pleasures of messing about in boats.



Left: *Sunday. Photo by Mike Jones.* ***Above:*** *Whitney Sanford dragging anchor.* ***Below:*** *Low tide. Photo by Greg Gregor.*

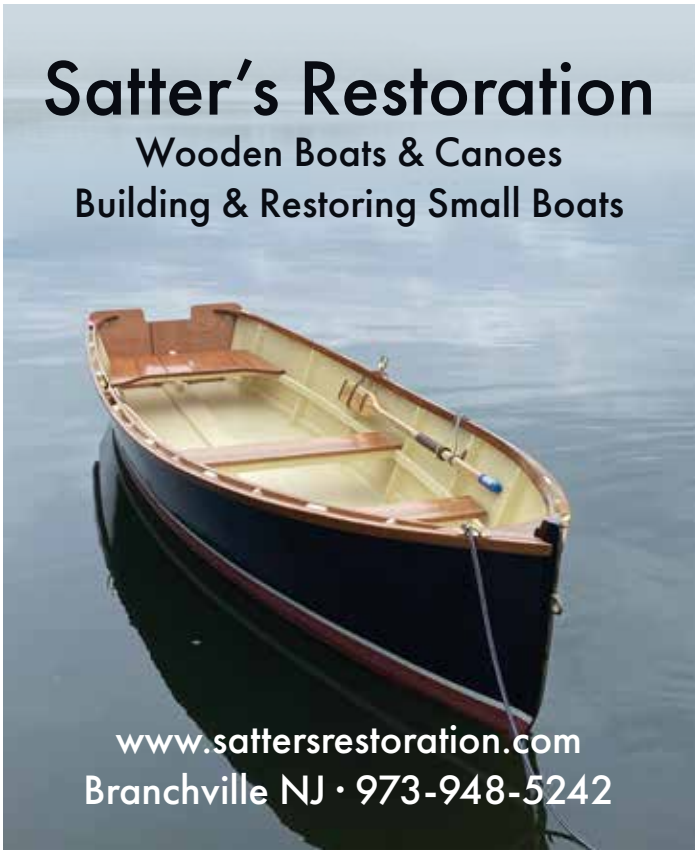


Cedar Key, with its unique history, is one of the very few communities still centered on working watermen and aquaculture, and it is working to maintain a balance between the economic needs of tourism and the preservation of its working watermen and aquaculture. The Small Boat Meet is welcomed as an income source with minimum costs for the city, with the added benefit that everyone loves seeing sails on the water. Remote enough to have avoided overdevelopment, but still close enough to be easily accessible.

The appeal to small-boat, skinny-water aficionados is the undeveloped islands that make up the Cedar Key archipelago. With several islands to sail to and around, while navigating the shoal waters and the changing currents the tides create, there are endless places to explore. The islands are bird sanctuaries, where you can beach the boat on the shore but not walk inland.

Everyone left looking forward to next year: April 30–May 2, 2027.

The Florida Gulf Coast Small Boat Meet at Cedar Key is early this year (date is chosen for the best tides): November 6–8, 2026. Everyone is welcome.







CROSSED THE BAR

Edited by Andy Wolfe

"I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar."
–Alfred, Lord Tennyson

In this issue, we remember two men, Sam Johnson and Bob Hicks, from opposite coasts, who made a huge impression on the American small-craft community.

Sam Johnson spent fourteen of his last seventeen years guiding, building, and growing Oregon's Columbia River Maritime Museum. He was eighty-two. Bob Hicks, founder and publisher of *Messing About in Boats* (*MAIB*), produced 760 issues of his "Non-Corporate" magazine. He was ninety-six.

We are including edited, excerpted comments and remembrances of both men in this issue.

Susanne Altenburger's blog post #1271 informed most of us of Bob Hicks's passing. As you all know, Phil Bolger and Bob struck up a productive friendship in the spring of 1991, with Bob offering a distinct Non-Corporate magazine format in which no advertisers could dictate content, while Phil suggested that he would not run out of designs to discuss in *MAIB* anytime soon.

Bob, Jane, and their daughter, Roberta, ran the magazine for 760 issues, initially every two weeks, then monthly with a higher page count, and finally saw postage suggest going bimonthly with double the page count, ending with Vol. 40, Issue #1.

So, here is a guy who has not wasted his life by pursuing his "leisure interests," but, through modest commerce, has come to touch and influence countless lives, all while earning a living with Jane, raising kids.

Good to have known him. And for us all to know his legacy on boats, as now permanently secured with the *MAIB* archive.

A REFLECTION FROM TONY DAVIS

SHARING MY MEMORY OF BOB HICKS

In 1984, I was twenty-five years old and launched a Lyle Hess Cutter I had built in Maine as an apprentice to Arno Day. The cutter *Syrinx* became my home, and after a year of sailing around and working in different boatyards, I settled in the Charlestown Navy Yard on Pier 3 as a boat carpenter to help finish the interior of the Schooner *The Spirit of Massachusetts* that had been launched in '84. At this time, I was committed to trying to become a boatbuilder like my mentor, Arno, so I started Davis Custom Boats and set up a business as a contractor and built Arno Day Skiffs in a garage shop I rented.

I met Bob for the first time while working on *The Spirit of Massachusetts* in 1985. He suggested I run an ad in his magazine; at the time, this was a big decision for me. In some ways, it meant I was committing to a career, so I said *Yes*. He helped me design the ad. I ran my ads in every issue after until he stopped publishing a year or two ago. I honestly can say that *Messing About in Boats* was key to my success, having built boats for four decades now.

During our eighteen-year run at the Maine Boatbuilders show in Portland, Maine, Bob would always stop by our booth and check in with a smile and a positive message about building small boats. He always made me feel like I was his only advertiser by the way he communicated his interest in how I was doing, growing the business.

Every now and then, over the years, I would send Bob a story on something going on at the boatyard, and he would take the time to edit my horrible writing and publish it. He never rejected something I wrote; he always made sure the story would fit into one of his issues.

Thanks to Bob, my message to young boatbuilders today is to advertise and get your work out to the public for people to see.

Bob will be missed, but his legacy is sealed in the issues of *Messing About in Boats* and his many other accomplishments. He was the best. Thank you, Bob. Rest in peace.

FROM SAM JOHNSON'S OBITUARY

Samuel Edgar Johnson, II, retired Executive Director of Columbia River Maritime Museum (CRMM), passed away peacefully at home in Astoria on Sunday, March 22, 2026, surrounded by family and friends, after a courageous struggle with pancreatic cancer.

Sam was a passionate botanical and bird illustrator, natural historian, scientist, and book collector. He was also an accomplished woodworker, boatbuilder, and bronze caster. During his retirement, he devoted himself to his passions, completing many new watercolor and botanical illustration courses. When not at his drawing table or in his woodworking shop, Sam could often be found at his kitchen table, admiring

the songbirds at his bird feeders, with a view of the Columbia River in the background.

Sam came out of retirement to serve as CRMM Executive Director from 2009 to 2023. During his tenure at CRMM, Sam was responsible for significant growth, including the transformation of the abandoned Astoria Railroad Depot into the Barbey Maritime Center; the addition of the Maritime Heritage Resource Center, which serves as CRMM's collections storage facility; preservation and display of the pilot boat, *Peacock*; and the building of the Warnock Commons and Model Boat Pond. In addition to significantly increasing CRMM's endowment, Sam also spearheaded CRMM's first major Indigenous exhibit, Cedar and Sea: the Maritime Culture of Coastal Indigenous People.

REMEMBRANCES

A REFLECTION FROM MATT WINTERS

"He never stopped being fascinated by the world."
–Excerpt from his story, published on Wednesday, March 25, 2026

Sam Johnson fit several lives into one. Johnson died in Astoria this week after eight decades brimming with enviable personal and professional achievements. At an age when many start coasting toward trivial pastimes, he was just beginning an incredibly rich fifteen-year period of reimagining the Columbia River Maritime Museum. If you encountered Johnson sipping coffee in an Astoria restaurant, you might have mistaken him for a college professor, rather than a hands-on boatbuilder and expert at so many other things.

A REFLECTION FROM DAN PENCE

Sam was one of the first people I met when I moved to Portland back in 1993. I had joined RiversWest Small Craft Center and was displaying my recently built Acorn Tender when Sam stopped and introduced himself. He noticed details of the boat and was complimentary. Later, I learned Sam was the guy who arranged for the "Boat Build in the Window" at the Oregon Historical Society in downtown Portland. The volunteers building that boat later formed RiversWest.

Sam was one of the founders of the Portland Nautical Book Club and had the best collection of nautical books in his basement. In 2001, I needed a crew for my Bolger Light Schooner, *Wing-Ding*, on the original Silva Bay Shipyard Raid. Sam signed on along with my neighbor, Aaron Starr. That was a tough week for us. *Wing-Ding* was a lively sailboat but a marginally bad rowboat. And we rowed every day. All day. And we were usually the last to get in for lunch, so we got the least rest between the morning and afternoon legs, and we ate the leftovers. We were sore and tired, our hands bleeding from popped blisters, sleeping in a small tent that smelled of sweat and frustration. But Sam, the oldest and wisest, never complained, was always willing, and pulled hard.

Sam was a terrific fount of information, and I used him shamelessly in my various boatbuilding projects over the years. "Hi Sam, this is Dan. How are you doing? Yeah? Great! Hey, how do you calculate the area of a rudder for a 1900 Victorian Steamboat?" It was typical. Sam didn't like being treated like a book on a shelf. But would sigh and either give me a formula from memory, or a ratio, or refer me to a table in an obscure book. The last time I worked with Sam was when he provided a bronze casting workshop at his house. It was a terrific experience, and I brought home a bronze vase for my sweetie and a piece to fix my old bandsaw.

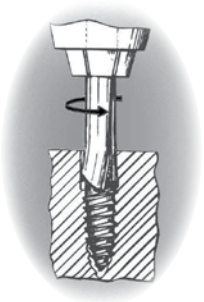
The last time I talked to Sam, I was calling about the whereabouts of any huge old Gardner Diesel engines around the Northwest. I knew he had cancer, but I couldn't think of another oracle of all things maritime. He referred me to a guy with Foss Shipping in Seattle. Sorry Sam.

A REFLECTION FROM JULIUS DALZELL

My introduction to Sam occurred at the Barbey Center in mid-August 2013. In June of that year, a small crew working with the nonprofit "Wind and Oar" launched the St. Ayles skiff *Doineann*, following two years of great effort.

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The annual Astoria Annual Regatta was underway, and, in conjunction with the event, CRMM was hosting a Wooden Boat gathering. So off to Astoria it was! Upon arriving, the only person found at the Barbey Center was this guy hovering over an uncooperative melting apparatus of sorts. It was Sam.

He briefly studied the skiff and then invited me to position *Doineann* directly under the big windows at the west end. Massive pride ensued. And we were now introduced!

Lots of future conversations and mutual interests were to follow and be shared over the years, maybe even a few divergent perspectives. In retrospect, I must admit that Sam usually prevailed in that regard. One can sense that Sam is still there, questioning our judgment.

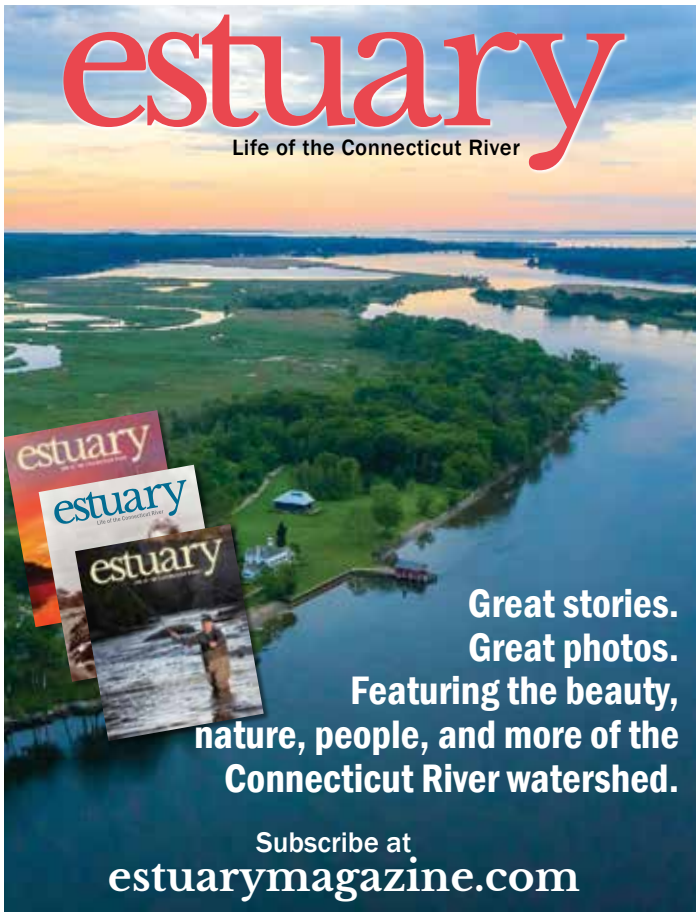
Not to be forgotten!

A REFLECTION FROM BILL COOK

I remember Sam and I sitting in front of the woodstove in my shop having tea, and during Covid, we sat separated. We talked about totem carving, my history with Nathan Jackson in Ketchikan, and vintage hand tools we still used. I showed him the Louderback skiff that was Marion's first boat in 1935, which I restored, but if donated, it would go to the Willapa Seaport Museum (he was always working for CRMM). Sam was generous with his time and supported the Ol Coots visiting the museum annually. On one visit to the storage facility, Sam was describing the Big Ass fans they had recently installed. A woman of my generation pulled my sleeve and whispered, "Did he say those were 'Big Ass fans'? My word!" I kindly pointed up and asked her to read the label on each unit. A hilarious moment, but for a minute and not asking, she may have thought differently of Sam; the brand is BAF. He was a man of many interests and talents, and we should all remember his bringing Northwest Indian culture to light at CRMM with the Cedar and Sea exhibit. Brilliant. RIP, Mr. Sam Johnson. You did us all well with your presence.







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CAPTAINS' TRICKS

IT'S GOING TO HAPPEN OUT THERE

By Pete Peters

Captain Ron's poetic sailors' Murphy's law: "If it's going to happen, it's going to happen out there!"

As small boat sailors, we have all experienced a fouled main sheet or halyard happening at the worst possible time—the main sheet tangles around the centerboard trunk or my ankle, or the peak halyard wraps as I approach the spectator-filled dock.

The solution: Flaking into a dishpan!

Flaking a rope is the sailor's act of laying a rope out loose, back and forth, with folds or small S-bends rather than coiling. Flaking prevents knots and kinks. For this purpose, a small dishpan is located on the floor near the main sheet block, where the camp completes, and the bitter end is simply placed in the pan. The rest of the main sheet is flaked on top.

Halyards and anchor roads are flaked in a similar manner. (Remember the Figure-8 stopper knot.) In heavy air (15 knots), the main sheet of my fifteen-foot catboat is a 5:1 purchase, so there is fifty feet of main sail to be flaked into the dish when closed hauled, which prevents one less mishap "out there."

Fairwinds, Capt'n Pete

Mainsheet flaked into dish pan. Note level under seat to gauge fore and aft position to sail on waterline.



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LANDING SCHOOL CLOSING AFTER 47 YEARS

Edited by Andy Wolfe

After nearly five decades of preparing students for careers in the marine industry, the Landing School Board of Trustees decided to close the school in response to sustained declines in enrollment and financial headwinds. The administration notified students, faculty, and staff as it commences an orderly winding down this summer.

"For forty-seven years, The Landing School evolved alongside the industry it served by adapting programs, embracing new technologies, and refining its approach in service of its founding purpose. What the school could not overcome was declining enrollment," said John V. Caron, President of The Landing School. "The broader forces reshaping higher education—rising costs, shifting workforce trends, and changing perceptions of higher education—have hit small, mission-driven schools like ours especially hard."

The Board of Trustees considered multiple paths forward to grow enrollment and explored strategic partnerships. Ultimately, none provided a sustainable way forward without compromising the quality of the student experience that defines The Landing School.

"The Landing School lives on in every graduate who carried their skills to a boatyard, design studio, or workshop," said Susan Swanton, Chair of the Board of Trustees. "It lives on in the vessels built, the careers launched, and the communities strengthened by the marine professionals we helped shape. Nearly five decades of craftsmanship and passion do not disappear; they endure in the hands and work of the people we were privileged to teach. To our students, alumni, faculty, staff, industry partners, and supporters: you are The Landing School. You gave this institution its meaning and its heart. We are profoundly grateful. That legacy will endure."

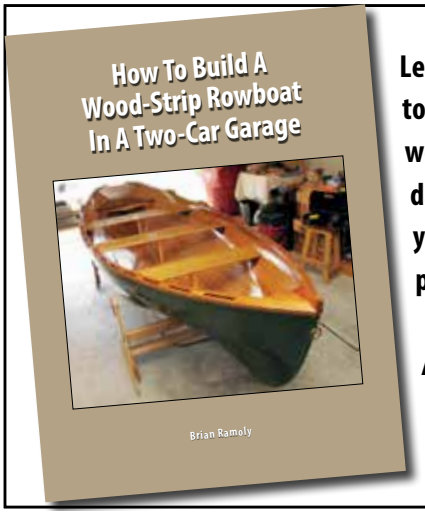




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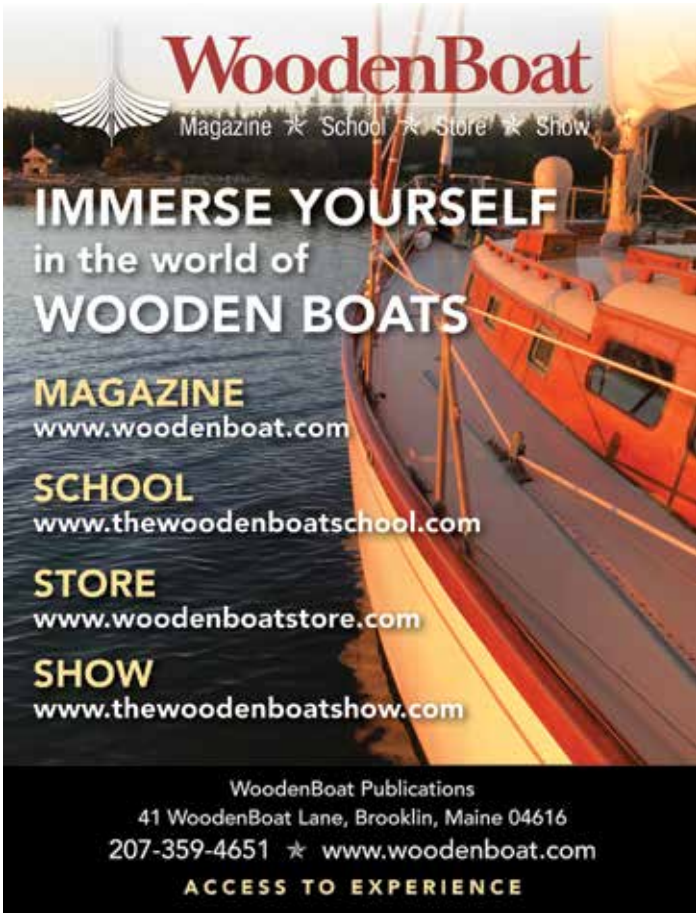
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FAVORITE TOOL TIPS

MOCOTAUGAN CROOKED KNIFE

By Roger Allen, Master Boatbuilder

Here's another in a regular series of articles in The Ash Breeze *about favorite tools. Consider this also an invitation to send us a text or email (716-861-6570 or RBAboats@hotmail.com) with your thoughts on a favorite tool you use in building or repairing boats, and we'll go from there. It doesn't matter how fancy or simple the tool is, as long as you value it as an aid in your craft. I would like to know, in as many words as you have, why the tool is your favorite, along with additional information about how it functions. Any history of the tool, or the story of how it came into your kit, will also add a nice dimension. If it is a tool you have made, and you can do so, provide a brief "how-to" guide that others can follow to make one for their kit. We have some talented artists who've done measured drawings for such tools to help. Any thoughts on how to acquire a commercially available example of the tool would also be helpful. We generally include three or four images that illustrate the tool and it being used.*

Jonathon Thornton retired in 2019 after a long stint as Professor of Art Conservation of Three-Dimensional Objects at Buffalo State University, but he's really a blacksmith, silversmith, metalworker, woodworker, and woodcarver. He's been one of the crew at Buffalo Maritime Center (BMC) since retirement and has carved a wonderful warlike eagle for the transom of the replica 1812 Sloop of War, US *Trippe*, as well as designing and carving an astonishing bas-relief of the inaugural voyage of the Erie Canal boat, *Seneca Chief*, which adorns her transom. Currently, he works as a mentor with our boatbuilding program for students at St. Marie's School for the Deaf and has been one of the crew building a lovely birchbark canoe for our exhibition.

The canoe project has been part of BMC's larger effort over the past seven years to tell the full story of Erie Canal communities, including its impact on Indigenous Peoples

Jonathan uses a true beaver tooth crooked knife on a birchbark canoe gunwale.



The crooked knife has been used to trim the board edge but works just as well to cut a hollow in the board surface for spoon carving.



in this area. It was during the birchbark construction that Jonathon showed us his amazing collection of "Mocotaugan" crooked knives. Crooked knives seem to be a northern-latitude tool that was used by the Sami People of Finland, Denmark, and parts of what is now Russia, and across the Arctic and Subarctic lands of the Inuit nations as far as the Aleutians. The distinct curved blade of the modern knife is believed to have evolved from the beaver tooth, which provided the first blades for the original tool before the availability of steel. Jonathon actually followed the custom that spread steel blades across the original territory, where the crooked knives were essential tools, by buying a steel blade from the Hudson Bay Company. Hudson Bay brought crooked steel blades to northern North America beginning in 1670, and they were quickly adopted by locals. Jonathon followed the evolving tradition by making subsequent razor-sharp blades from dulled files.

An image included shows multiple crooked knives that he has crafted. Each one has a unique blade shape and a distinct handle that combines different materials, from leather to pewter, and is fitted to his hand. He first models a bit of nonhardening plasticine artist's clay into a close likeness of the handle he has in mind. Then he roughs out a blank from a variety of materials, including cherry burl, apple, boxwood, or deer antler. He fine-tunes the shape with chisels, knives, rasps, and scrapers until he is grasping a mountain lion, or beaver, or a softly sweeping curve that wraps around his hand to make for a firm grip. The blade is inset into a slot in the handle and bound in place in a variety of ways, from epoxy to leather lashing. He makes a sheath for each knife from an equal variety of materials, including wood, leather, and bone.

The size and grip of the handles Jonathon has made reflect the equally unique blade shape. Some blades are thinner, some quite wide. The amount of curve is varied as well, but a single knife is literally as good as a set of gouges because different parts of the blade can be used to make different cuts.

The Mocotaugan, a Cree/Algonquin-derived word, is one of three essential edged tools used in building an elm or birchbark canoe. A hatchet and a knife are the others. The crooked knife is used primarily to split spruce roots, cut bark, and shave the ribs and lining boards. It is also handy for carving spoons and bowls. The cutting is done, either aggressively or very precisely, like with some spoon gouge "planes," by pulling towards

A fine display of Jonathan's art and craft in the production of a variety of useful crooked knives.



you, much like a draw knife. It has actually been described as a single-handed drawknife, but it really offers many more cutting options and better control than the straight bar can. It takes up almost no space in your backpack, too.

Crooked knives are available from almost every carving supplies catalog. Some really beautiful, unique examples are also available from custom toolmakers in Ukraine, and I highly recommend supporting their economy right now for obvious reasons. The tools are exquisite and worth the price. The Mocotaugan is also just one of those tools that you really should make for yourself over a long winter. Make it comfortably fit your hand, alone, and make the handle into something that makes you smile every time you pick it up. Once you've shown your kids or spouse how to use one, it'll make a great personalized gift, too.

Below: *The two crooked knives pictured show variations in blade size and shape, materials used to make handles, and distinctive handles*
Right Top: *Jonathan uses plasticene art clay to develop a perfectly fitting new crooked knife handle.*
Right Bottom: *The eagle carving is decorative but provides a full grip as the knife is pulled through the workpiece.*





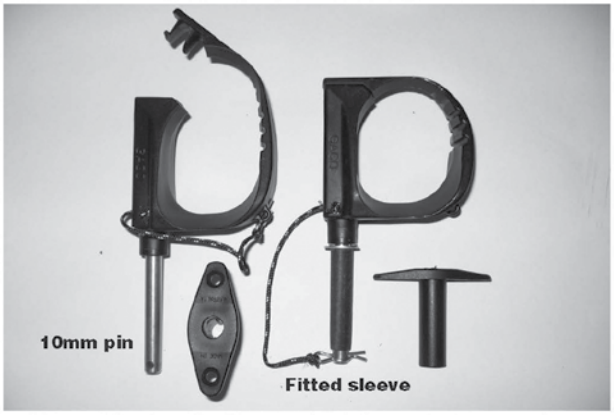


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Gerard Crowley has a team rowing around Ireland for charity (www.rowaroundireland.com). He writes about the Gaco oarlocks:

Hi John. We've hit some pretty rough seas and wind over tide situations along the NE corner and northern coasts of Ireland and the rowlocks are absolutely brilliant and great comfort from the fact that they always stay in position. I'll write you a great endorsement on them when finished.



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The Ash Breeze

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Articles: ***The Ash Breeze*** is a member-supported publication; members are welcome to contribute. ***We strongly encourage you to send material electronically***. Send text in an e-mail message or as a Microsoft Word attachment. Send photos as e-mail attachments, in TIFF or JPG formats, as large and/or as high-resolution as possible. Please give captions naming people, places, and to whom photo credit should be given. You may also submit photographic prints, clean line drawings, or ***typewritten*** material by US Mail. ***Please contact us IN ADVANCE if you must submit handwritten text or material in another word processing or image format.***

E-mail to: *andy@marinermedia.com.*

The editors reserve the right to refuse publication of any material deemed not to be in the best interest of the TSCA.

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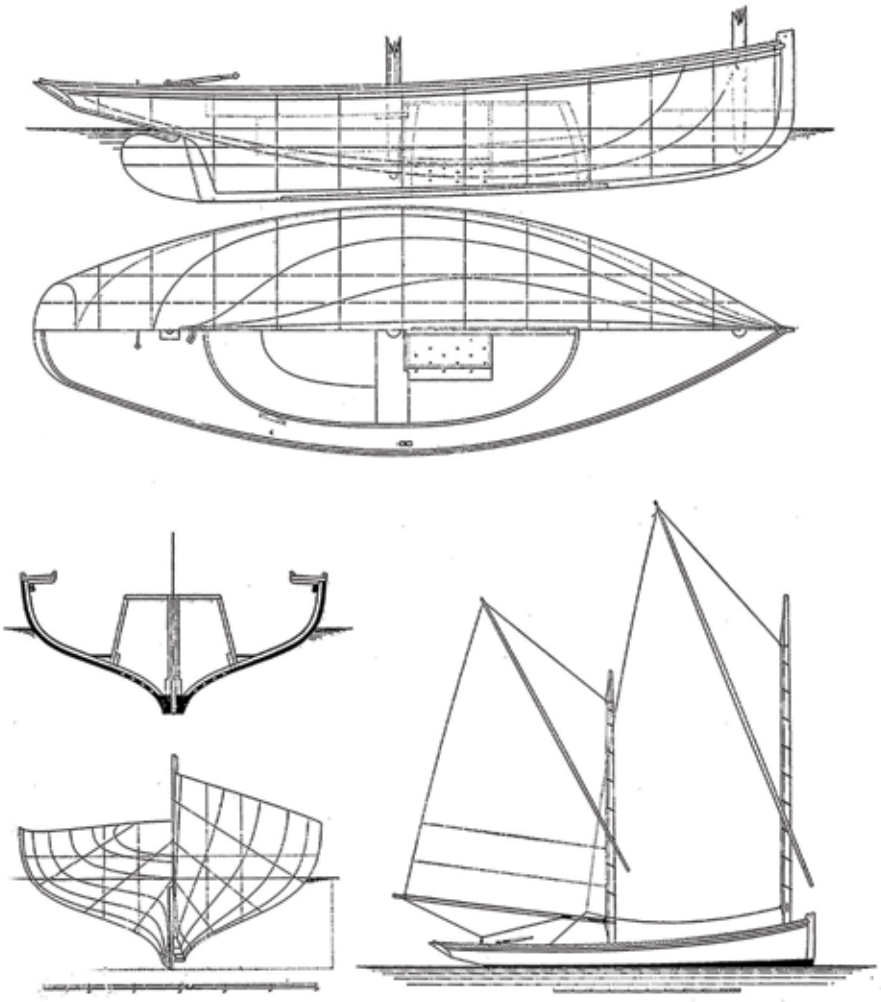
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