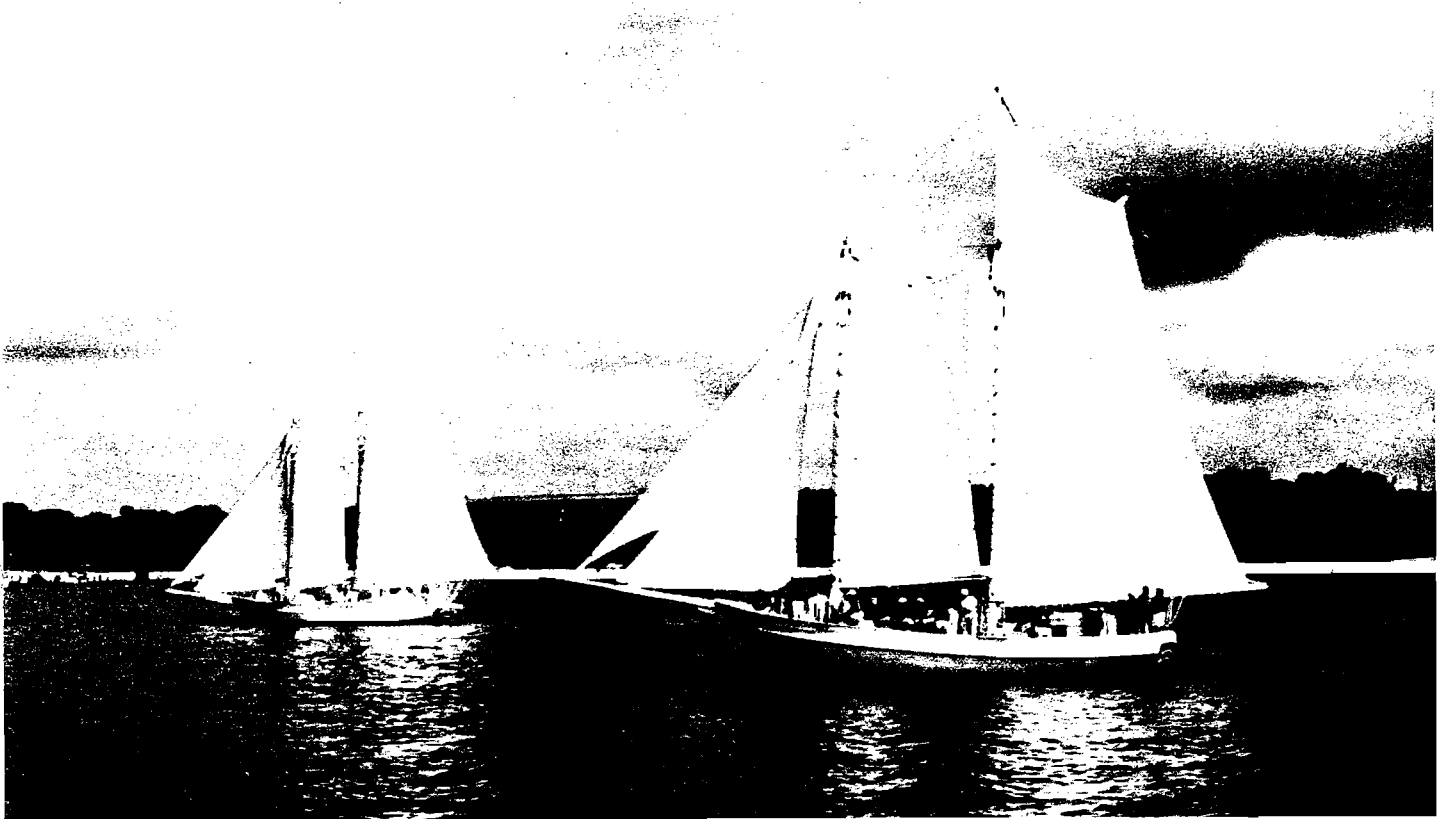




WING & WING

Volume XXII, Number 2 • Summer 1994

The Official Newsletter of the American Schooner Association



THE BILOXI SCHOONER Workhorse of the Northern Gulf

(The first part of this article is excerpted from a paper presented by Dr. Val Husley of the Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum, in Biloxi, Mississippi, at the Museum Small Boat Association meeting in 1992. The paper was subsequently printed in that association's proceedings. It is reprinted here with Dr. Husley's permission.)

Biloxi Schooner History

The Biloxi schooner served the canning factories along the Mississippi Sound from the 1880s to the 1930s. Prior to this, and to the development of the seafood canning industry in the late 1870s, Biloxi had had no need for large fishing vessels. The resort industry which had existed along the Mississippi Sound since the early 1830s had been served by inshore fishermen in small smacks, sloops, catboats, skiffs, and perhaps small schooners as well. Larger schooners in use at that time along the Mississippi coast were transport

vessels, carrying cargos of charcoal, lumber, and food. Although local hoteliers at the various towns along the coast provided a demand for fish, their needs did not warrant large-capacity fishing vessels. The absence of any demand for fish from a large metropolitan market, combined with the lack of ability to preserve catches and the absence of rapid transportation to any distant market, precluded the development of true "market fishermen" or of a processing industry.

In the late 1870s, however, soon after the completion of the railroad connecting

Above photo: The Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum's two schooners. At left, GLENN L. SWETMAN; at right, MIKE SEKUL. Photo provided by the Museum.

(Cont. page 8)

WOODENBOAT SHOW

The 1994 WoodenBoat Show held in Southwest Harbor, Maine, on July 29-31, was nothing short of a phenomenal success. The weather was perfect, the exhibitors were interesting and numerous (some 200), and the attendance was a record-breaking 9700 plus. The attendees came from far and wide, as an informal two-hour survey at the show gates revealed visitors from 32 states and 11 countries.

Some of the schooners attending the show included Mystic Seaport Museum's BRILLIANT, HEBRIDEE II (from Nova Scotia), SEBIM, PHRA LUANG, and the newly restored WHEN AND IF. (The howls of protest from those I've left out will at least generate some mail next month.)

Exhibits on display included paraphernalia for every facet of wooden boat building, maintenance, and sailing imaginable: bits of hardware, tools, adhesives, rope-work, charts, books, models, insurance, and polarfleece clothing. There were displays by museums, schools, charter companies, surveyors, publishers, yards, builders, and sailmakers.

This is the third such show produced by WoodenBoat. Five to ten years ago there used to be an annual wooden boat show in Newport, Rhode Island. It was sponsored by a marina that specializes in producing boat shows, but after five or six shows they dropped it from their roster. There were no shows exclusively for wooden boats from 1988 until 1992, when WoodenBoat decided it was vital for the wooden boat community to have one.

The show provides a forum from which wooden boat builders, maintenance and repair yards, and suppliers can sell their products; owners and charter companies can show their vessels; and the general public gets a chance to watch and learn, touch and mingle with unique and beautiful, traditional boats and yachts.

The first show organized by WoodenBoat was in 1992, and was held at the original Newport site because it was thought that the facility's experience in running shows would offset WoodenBoat's relative inexperience. However, WoodenBoat had always intended to move the show around, possibly to a different region of the country each year. And as this year's show, organized under the direction of Valerie LaFrance coincided

with Wooden-Boat's 20th Anniversary, it seemed fitting to hold the show in Maine and to tie it to a number of wooden boat-related activities and events.

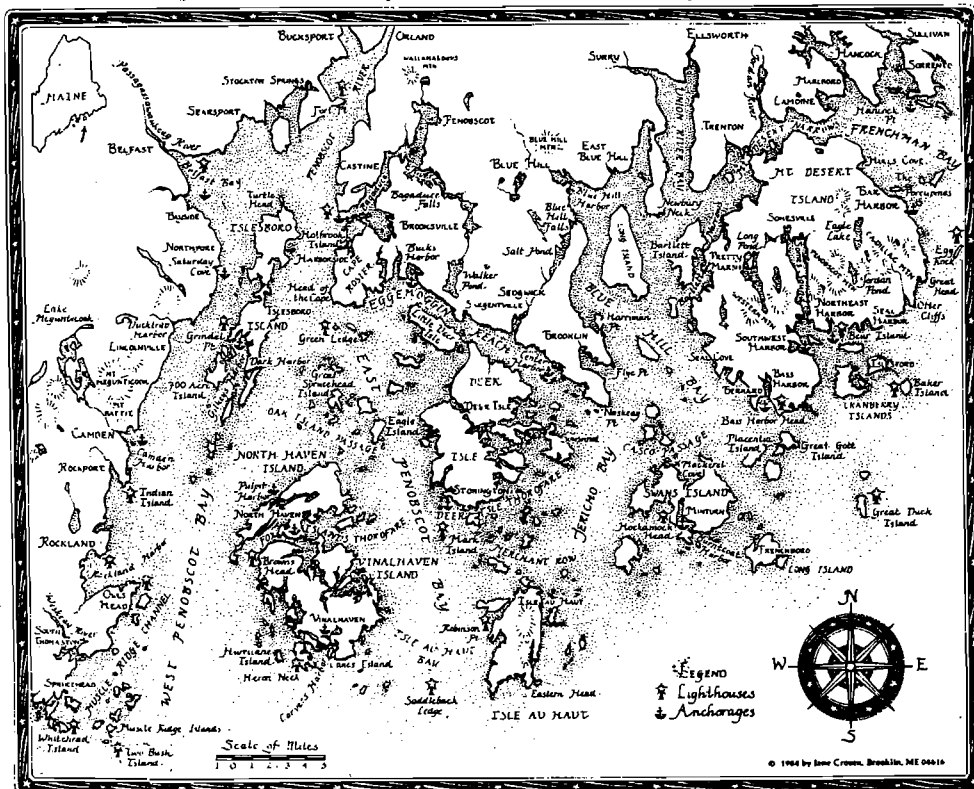
The governor of Maine proclaimed entire week of July 31 through August 7 to be "Wooden Boat Week." On August 1, boats left the marina for a cruise-in-company through Penobscot Bay, arriving in Camden on Thursday, August 4.

The following day came the Feeder Race from Camden to Brooklin (with lots of rain and wind) in preparation for the Eggmoggin Reach Regatta on August 6. (With 130 boats participating this year, the ERR is one of the largest wooden boat races in North America.)

Also during Wooden Boat Week, the Penobscot Marine Museum held a special exhibit honoring wooden boats, and August 3 was "Open House Day" at WoodenBoat's headquarters in Brooklin.

With the 1994 show behind them, WoodenBoat is now looking toward next year. Dates and locations will be decided this fall—possibilities range from a show in Maine next July, to an autumn show in Chesapeake Bay.

"Penobscot Bay to Frenchman Bay" © 1984 Jane Crossen. Reprinted with permission.



As readers of WoodenBoat Magazine know, Jon Wilson is stepping aside as editor to pursue another venture close to his heart. ASA salutes Jon for his wonderful magazine and for his many contributions to the world of wooden boats, the world we love.

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WHEN AND IF LAUNCHED

She starts—she moves—she seems to feel
The thrill of life along her keel

-Longfellow

The Building of the Ship.

On a sunny, warm Saturday in June, a crowd of well-wishers and curiosity seekers cheered as *WHEN AND IF* was finally launched. Her re-build at Gannon and Benjamin in Vineyard Haven had taken three years and an enormous amount of hard work by many people.

Even the launch itself was no small task. The 63-foot schooner first needed to be moved from Gannon and Benjamin to a yard with a railway with deep enough water to accommodate her nine-foot-plus draft. So in a traffic-stopping journey by trailer, she went down the road to Packer's dock, where through the generosity of Ralph Packer, the boat was launched. There were pre-launch remarks by Walter Cronkite, Nat Benjamin, and the Jims—Lobdell and Mairs.

Showing off her once-again black hull (a subject of great discussion and controversy), *WHEN AND IF* then gracefully slid down the railway and was gently pushed alongside a dock (forward gear was still not yet working). The remainder of the afternoon was spent enjoying food (a veritable feast cooked/coordinated by Ginny Jones), beer, music (including the bluegrass band Flying Elbows), and a tour of the boat.

Later in June and July, work was completed on the schooner's rig and *WHEN AND IF* headed up to Maine for the WoodenBoat Show and the Eggemoggin Reach Regatta. Luckily, Jim and Ginny Lobdell were persuaded to loan *MALABAR II* to Kenny Lobdell for the summer and are sailing *WHEN AND IF*. *WHEN AND IF* will also participate in several of the races this fall: the Opera House, New Bedford, Newport, and Mystic.

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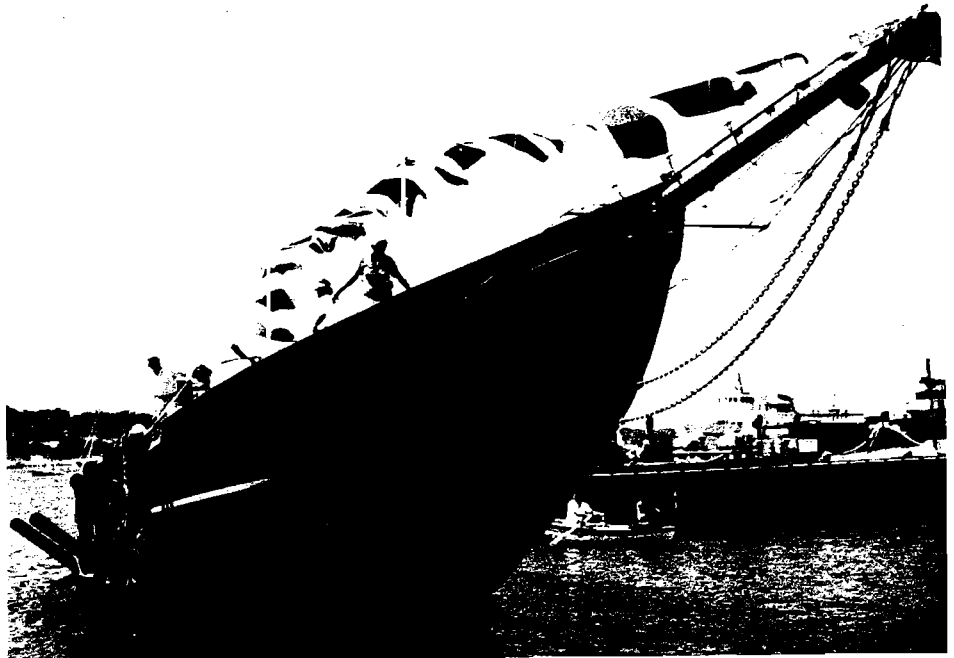


Photo above: WHEN AND IF is finally launched.

Photo below: In his pre-launch remarks, the nattily attired, former CBS anchorman Walter Cronkite surveyed the crowd before stating that it was only appropriate that he should speak, as he was the only one properly dressed.

Photos by Alexandra Mairs.



From the Log of VOYAGER No. 4: The Panama Canal

Through the Canal

Her low profile, gentle sheer, and pristine paint job give her the appearance of a well-maintained yacht. Bright lights on either side of the canal are more noticeable now, as the sun sinks further below the horizon. Flashing red and green markers define the canal's navigational limits. As she approaches the Pedro Miguel Lock, the neatly stacked containers on board establish her length at over seven hundred feet, and close to one hundred feet abeam. She flies an Israeli flag.

In a lock some thirty-five feet above her, a German tanker begins its descent, but it is still two locks away from the Pacific. VOYAGER is stern-to a dock some seventy-five feet east of this procession of ships. At sea we make every effort to avoid these monsters, but as they slide silently by, I find myself mesmerized by their engineering and in most cases, their elegance.

As the ZIM KOREA approaches the quay outboard the double gates of the lock, a row boat with one oarsman and a second person standing, pulls under her port bow. Both men are wearing scarlet life jackets and white helmets. A deck hand, similarly

attired, throws a heaving line into the water. It is retrieved and quickly snapped onto a messenger line, which gets belayed dockside.

As the container ship continues northward under her own power, a dockhand walks the messenger to a large stainless steel locomotive engine and attaches the line to a pulley in the engine's undercarriage. The electric locomotive blinks her orange running lights twice, and, while winching in two steel cables, moves forward, pulling on the ship's bow. In the interim, the workers in the rowboat have attached the midships and the stern of the ship to two other locomotives on shore. Within a few minutes the same procedure is performed on the starboard side and the ship is now controlled completely by the Canal Authority.

Each lock is one thousand feet long and one hundred and ten feet wide, and the ZIM KOREA will have only two or three feet of clearance on either side. The process is precise and professional. Some twenty-four men—pilots, line handlers, and deck hands—board each ship at Balboa, to the south, and Colon, to the north, to guide the commercial craft through the fifty miles of Isthmus dividing the two oceans.

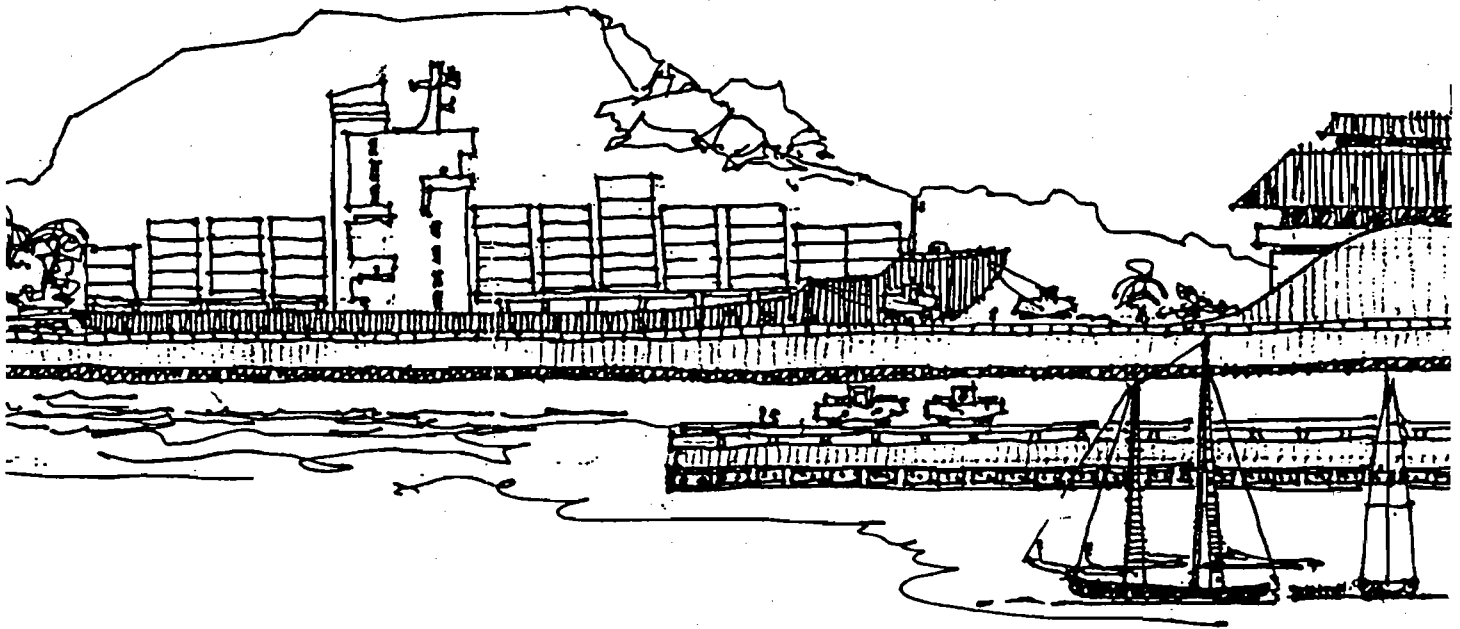
Ships take an average of nine hours to

complete the transit, and some 700,000 have been lifted eighty-five feet, by way of three locks, to a vast artificial lake and back to sea level on the other side.

VOYAGER's transit was smooth in spite of crew hangovers. It was a little scary to Jeanette and me, but nonetheless exciting.

We entered the first lock with a ship out of Keelung. She measured 736'0" by 105'6" by 39'6". The maximum draft that the locks will allow is forty feet, and the Gatun Lock's one-hundred-and-ten-foot breadth left hardly enough room for daylight. The ship's name in English is EVER ADVANTAGE (...perhaps something has been lost in the translation).

The water filled from the bottom of the lock and in fifteen minutes we were thirty feet above sea level. The next two locks were contiguous and between the time when the water first began rushing through the four-foot (in diameter) wells at the bottom of the lock and the opening of the double gates, I looked aft. The cockpit was ninety feet above the Atlantic Ocean. I have been on balconies which were higher, but never on a twenty-ton boat. I could see the harbor of Cristobal, its long jetties and small islands clinging to one another along the



Drawing by Peter Phillipps.

Panamanian coast. I thought I could make out the snow-capped mountains rising out of Columbia at 17,000 feet above sea level, the cliffs defining Venezuela, the Windward and Leeward Islands of the Caribbean, and all the way to Africa. It had been a marvelous passage over those waters, plenty of wind, always aft. For that matter, from Pelham Manor to Cape Cod, to Morocco, to the Cape Verdes, and finally to Panama, we had a following wind—a bit heavy at times, but aft, and therefore manageable.

Repairs in Venezuela

Of the three months we spent in Venezuela last winter, two were spent in the Verodero Caribe Shipyard. To avoid theft, we lived aboard with the galley removed. The water tanks had been pulled and the cabin sole stacked on deck, so as to allow us to replace sixteen white oak frames with purple heart. The acidic oak had waged a war with the galvanized floors and both lost. We also replaced the oak stem, which had cracked on its first sail twenty years ago. With water finding its way in, and the bow planking showing signs of movement, we threw in a two-hundred-year-old *lignum vitae* stem piece.

With the interior torn apart as such, whenever Jeanette did cook aboard, she had to do so with the shipmate stove standing one foot above her head, while she stood on the keel.

To keep the interior cool, we pulled thirty-four planks. While doing so, we found that the wood behind the chain plates (which were recessed) had become soft. We fastened purple heart planks from the rail to the waterline midships, one foot at the stem and two feet aft from stem to stern. The removal of the planks served to cool the interior. However, it also allowed several tons of sand blast material, which was being used on the nearby steel fishing boats, to invade our domicile.

For all the pain and effort, VOYAGER is stronger than ever—fifteen hundred fastening later—and looks a little perkier. Although the work was not absolutely essential at the time, we had decided two years ago that we would attack all problems at the first port which had reasonable labor rates, and acceptable standards of craftsmanship. Verodero exceeded our

expectations. The three sons running the yard were US-educated, quite accessible, and gentlemen. We worked with and supervised their crew—sometimes as many as sixteen. Although language barriers sometimes slowed the process, their cooperative attitudes and our sketches got us over most hurdles. The chief carpenter, Aldo, was a magician with wood, and his helpers were most enthusiastic and conscientious while we worked alongside them (unheard of for gringos). All went well. Venezuela's economy is tenuous; their most skilled workers earn in a day what an unskilled (North) American earns in an hour.

Our mainmast lies across seven oil drums and in a few hours we will have to go over

our bottom—the last opportunity to do so before New Zealand.

While aloft to bundle our rigging, I looked across that broad blue expanse with the Marquesas in the foreground and Auckland more to the south. We are anxious to move on.

Peter Phillipps
Jeanette Phillipps

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

-Coleridge
The Ancient Mariner II

UPCOMING EVENTS

**Traditional Boat Races,
St. Michael's, MD**
Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum
(tel: 410-745-2916)
September 24

Mayor's Cup Race, New York, NY
South Street Seaport
(tel: 212-669-9400)
September 24

**Madisonville Wooden Boat Festival,
Madisonville, LA**
(tel: 601-466-3499)
September 24-25

Race Rock Regatta, Stonington, CT
(tel: 203-536-1524)
September 30-October 2

**Gulf Coast Wooden Boat Rendezvous,
Biloxi, MS**
(tel: 601-466-3499)
October 7-10

**Great Chesapeake Bay Schooner Race,
Baltimore, MD to Norfolk, VA**
(tel: 804-622-2828)
October 12-16

**San Diego Fall Festival and Wooden
Boat Show, San Diego, CA**
(tel: 619-224-9661)
October 14-16

**Georgetown Wooden Boat Exhibit,
Georgetown, SC**
part of the Bayfest Festival
(tel: 803-520-4187)
October 15

**Chesapeake Bay Maritime Festival
and Wooden Boat Show,
Norfolk, VA**
(tel: 804-627-7809)
October 15-16

**Australian Wooden Boat Festival,
Hobart, Tasmania**
(tel: 002-29-3587)
October 19-20

**Cypress Gardens Antique and Classic
Boat Rendezvous, Cypress Gardens, FL**
(tel: 800-942-3448)
November 4-6

**Antique and Classic Boat Regatta,
Stuart, FL**
(tel: 407-229-1025)
November 12-13

SCHOONER MASTER: A Portrait of David Stevens

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The building began with two old bathtubs and a pile of used automobile and truck tires. The bathtubs he suspended between two I-beams set in the tall grass behind his shop, the tires were stacked under and around them and doused with fuel oil. Chunks of lead went into the tubs and the whole mass was set alight. When the lead had melted it was ladled out and carried to the shop, and there poured into a long, masonite-lined trough, a mold for the lead keel, a sixty-eight-hundred-pound bottom piece bolted to the oak keel, providing the ballast for the schooner. A lead keel is a relatively new technique in Nova Scotia, referred to as "outside ballast." In the days of Stevens' grandfather, Amos, "inside ballast" was more often the rule, consisting of good-sized beach rocks laid in the bottom of the hull between the ribs. Inside ballast could shift, of course, but it had one advantage over the lead keel: if the boat ran aground you could throw rocks overboard until she floated.

Although he had in mind to build the KATHI ANNE with his own wood, for the oak keel, the longest and largest member in the hull to which all other structural pieces are attached, he went to two of the lumber yards that he usually dealt with. "I was disappointed right at the very start," he says. "I couldn't find a piece of oak large enough. It had to be twenty-four feet in a piece. Well, I came back here to this lot and I found this stump. You see here." He squats down and points to the pattern of earth around the dual stump. "This is actually an old stump that someone cut years ago, before I had the land. And these two shoots grew out of it. And I looked at them and I said to the biggest one, 'You'll make it.' I went home and got the old tractor and a power saw and came back. This one had quite a bend into it; I had to cut four feet off. But I cut him down and hauled him home, outside the shop. I got

Randy's trailer and I loaded him alone."

"A twenty-four-foot trunk?"

"Yeah, all alone."

On a previous day I had watched Stevens work with a peevee, a lumberman's metal-tipped pike with a curved, hinged claw on one side, moving and sorting a pile of cut timbers. Some were a foot wide and as much as eighteen feet long, but my offer of assistance was refused. He worked steadily, putting some on the pile for firewood, others in the pile for boat lumber, loading a few on a trailer to be taken down to the anchorage, moving the pieces as easily as I would have moved two-by-fours, demonstrating in this matter-of-fact ballet his years of working alone, his by now nearly unconscious sense of levers and fulcrums, using the other pieces, the ground, gravity, as if they were another person.

"So I loaded it, took it to the mill out here about ten miles at Northwest, had it sawed and brought home, and by five o'clock that evening it was sitting on the blocks in the shop, all ready to go."

He straightens up and gives a short nod of his head, "I'm not beat yet!" His voice carries the peculiar resonance of defiance mixed with pleasure, as he acts out again the moment, standing over the roughed-out keel in the old shop, when he felt himself launched on a new and solitary career.

"I'm not beat yet!"

Laying down the lines is the most mysterious, certainly the most complex, part of the boatbuilder's art. In most boatshops it is done from plans that are daunting to a layman. The detailed drawings of the marine architect fan out across the page in cages of parabolic lines, as abstract as music, laying out for the builder in a web of calculus every theoretical moment on every curve of the boat's hull. For builders like Stevens the process is equally mysterious but simpler in execution. After I had puzzled over the maze of lines, steps and formulae in half-a-dozen books on wooden boat construction, I asked Stevens to explain to me how he turned his plan into the hull of a boat.

"Well of course the half-model comes first." He holds up the teak and mahogany model we have been talking about in his

dining room. "And then we draft her off. I've got a drafting board upstairs somewhere."

He leaves the room and I hear him clambering up the narrow stairs to the upper floor. He returns with a one-by-ten piece of pine board about two feet long. The outline of a half-model had been traced on it. To illustrate he takes the half-model from the sofa and slaps it with a dry clack against the profile on the board. I nod to show that I understand at least that much. The hull profile on the board is divided into sections by a grid of regular horizontal and vertical lines. To the left of each vertical a curved line bends down to the bottom on the profile. The curved lines are slim at the bow, belly out into S-curves at points amidships and narrow again toward the stern. It is clear they are sections, as if the hull were sliced through at various points from stem to stern. Looking at them I begin to see the shape to the boat transferred into two dimensions. "How do you get those curved lines?"

"From the model. I just take a thin piece of pine, very soft, very easy to work, and I chip it out until it fits right in here on the model." With his finger, he traces the curve from the sheer line of the model vertically down to the keel. The piece of white pine would fit snugly against the side of the model, reflecting the curve exactly.

"So you just whittle a piece of pine and fit it in there on the side of the model?"

"One at each of these points. Very easy—takes about an hour, two hours I guess to do a half-model like this one. Then I take the pieces of pine, lay them on the drafting board and trace them off."

"And that gives you those curved lines?"

"Yes, the lines of the hull. You could take a piece of sheet lead and bend it and scribe it. Anything that would give you the shape."

"But that's simple!"

"Of course it's simple," he says with a touch of impatience. "Well good grief, years ago a lot of the people who built these boats couldn't read or write. I remember my grandfather getting the newspaper on Tancook [Island], sitting out in summer and reading the paper to some of the people. It wasn't that they were illiterate or anything like that. They didn't ha...

the chance to learn.”

He pauses for a moment, as if I had led him away from the subject, and then picks up the pine board from the sofa. “So, that’s the drafting board. Then we lay the lines down on the floor.”

“You do what?”

“I lay the profile, this,” he holds up the drafting board again, “down on the shop floor.”

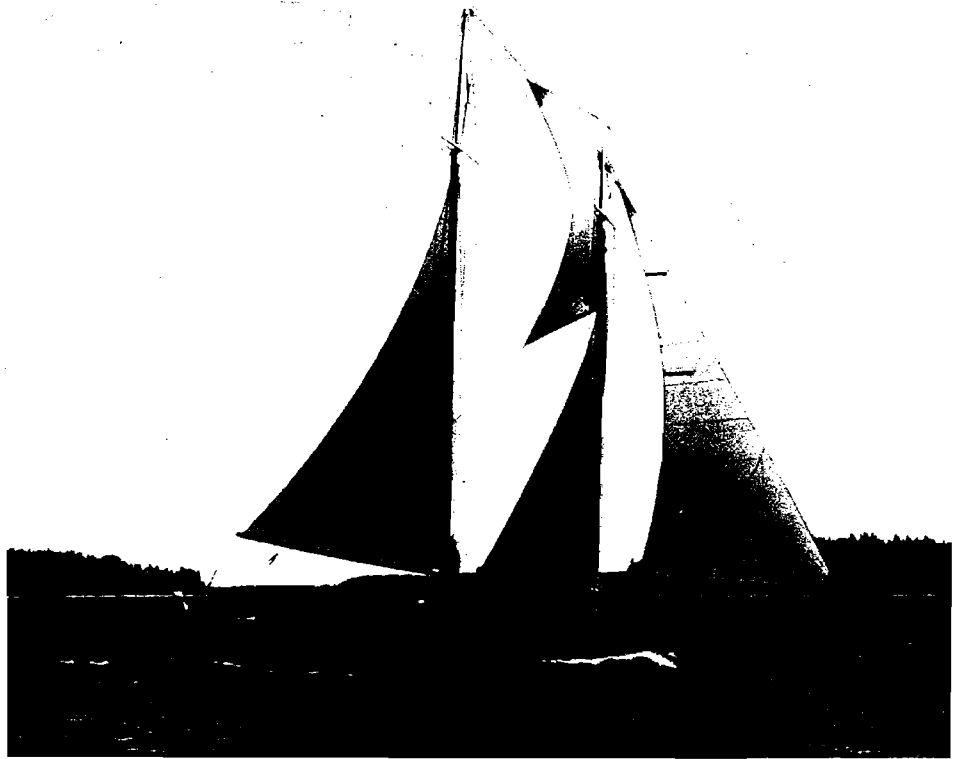
“Full size?”

“Full size. That’s what these measurements are here.”

I inspect the drafting board more closely. It is filled with numbers. The curved sections are drawn at numbered verticals about every two inches from stem to stern. Other numbers, in feet and inches, have been inserted in each box made by the lines of the grid, giving the profile a whimsical cargo, as if it were a drawing by Saul Steinberg called “Ship of Numbers.” The numbered verticals, Stevens explains, are the locations of the key ribs. Applying the half-inch-to-the-foot scale will give him ribs very four feet along the keel, enough to define roughly the shape of the hull. The boxed numbers, which progress from bottom to top—one foot one inch, one foot three inches, one foot six inches, and so forth—are the measurements from each vertical to its curved line. They define the curve of the rib as it is laid down full-sized on the floor.

“As I lay them down, I keep measuring and checking with the drafting board.” Stevens explains that he doesn’t actually draw the section lines on the floor (many boatbuilders do, or draw them on large sheets of paper laid on the floor), but rather moves to the floor of his boatshop at this point and puts down small wooden cleats at the key points of his diagram, to which he bends the actual ribs.

In whatever way the lines are marked on the floor, at this point most boatbuilders would use them to cut molds, full-sized pieces that would reflect the curves of the hull at particular points between stem and stern. A succession of these molds would be set up in the shop on either side of the keel, and the ribs that give the hull its shape bent to the molds. Stevens shortcuts the process by steaming the strips of white oak that will be the ribs and bending them right on the plan, on the shop floor. “Then I put battens on—scrap



After David Stevens “officially” retired from boatbuilding, he went on to build nine boats by himself. Some speculate that KATHI ANNE was his favorite. Above photo of Kathi Anne by Jim Mairs.

lumber that’s lying around—just tack them on to hold the shape when it cools.”

The shaped ribs, held in place by the battens, are lifted off the floor and nailed directly into the keel of the boat at the four-foot intervals indicated on the drafting board. They are held upright from stem to stern by horizontal stringers, ribbands thin enough to flex around the curves of the wide parts of the hull. This is another point at which he checks the hull shape. “When you put these ribbands around, any little slack or high spots, you can always tell. So you’re adjusting as you go.” The ribbands will be removed, each in its turn, as the planking reaches it.

The skeleton of the boat is now revealed, standing upright in the shop, the full height of the hull showing for the first time. It suggests the finished boat to the extent that a structure of dinosaur bones in a museum suggests the living creature, a dramatic sketch but still abstract, full of air.

The use of a few key ribs to establish the shape of the hull could be disastrous

for a novice builder, but Stevens needs only these points of reference to create, with the other ribs that are now steamed, bent and nailed in place, curves as smooth as any architect’s fancy. It is one of the many parts of the process that are so instinctive by now, so much in his hands, that he has difficulty talking about them with his usual precision: “You don’t have to make but a few. You get those right, and then you make it all even.”

“And the others fall into place?”

“Yeah. It’s very simple.”

When Stevens made the decision to build the KATHI ANNE by himself he was practical enough to ask for help at the points where it was essential. The first was the pouring of the sixty-eight-hundred-pound lead keel. The lead had to be ladled from the bathtubs behind the shop, where it was melted, carried in to the long masonite trough that was the mold, and poured. “You must have a continuous pour. With only one hand doing it, it could

(Cont. page 10)

(BILOXI: Cont. from page 1)

New Orleans and Mobile, and then on to points north, local entrepreneurs began to chart the potential bounty of the Mississippi Sound. These entrepreneurs visited the Chesapeake area and incorporated the technology used by that oyster-canning industry into similar enterprises at Biloxi. It is possible that they also scrutinized the keel-model Chesapeake Bay oyster schooner, with an eye toward its use in the tropical south. The Chesapeake Bay skipjack was given a trial run down South, but never became popular with the Biloxi oystermen.

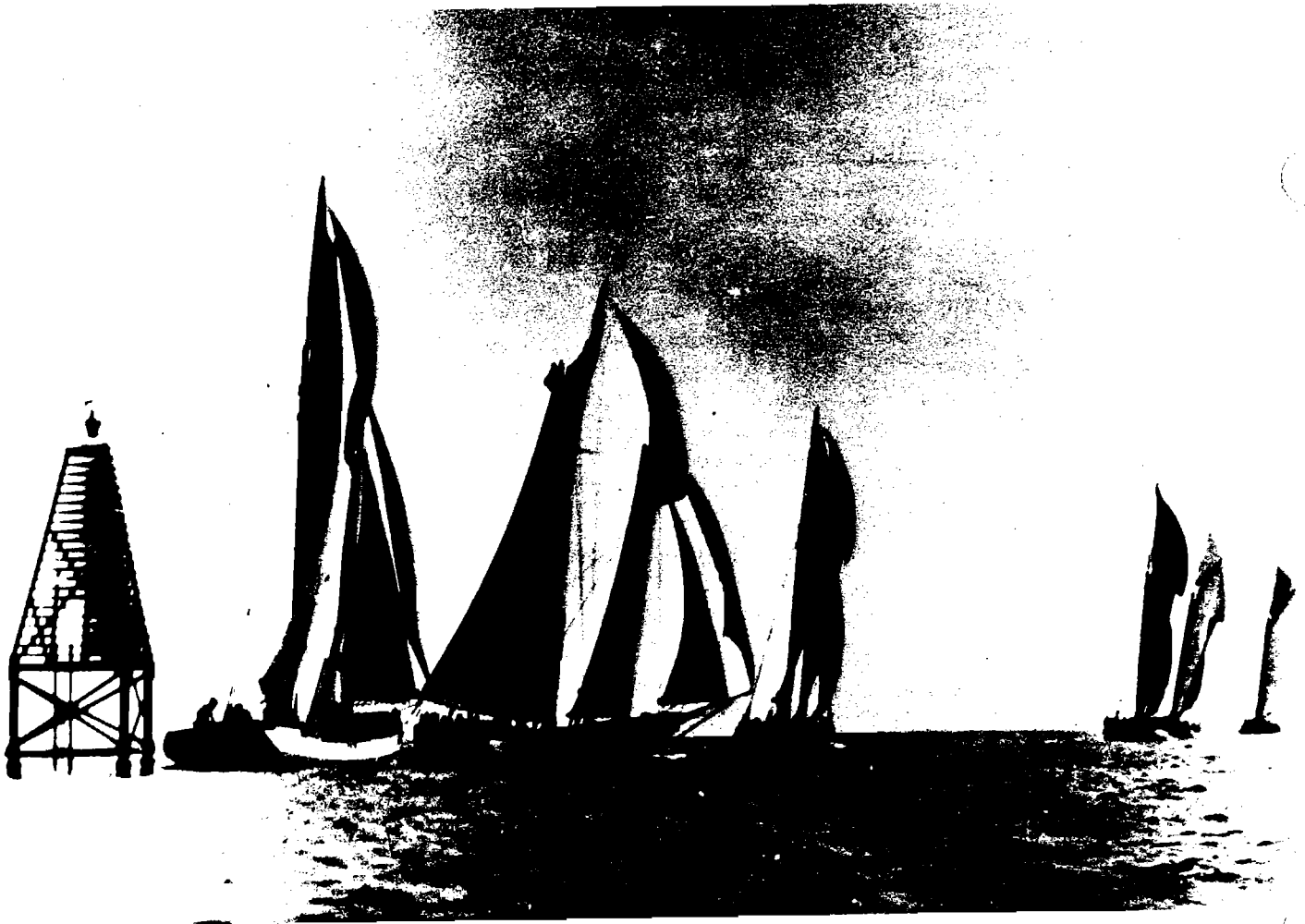
The oyster schooner which evolved in Biloxi varied somewhat in detail from its Chesapeake Bay, New Jersey, and Delaware cousins, as well as from locally constructed freighting models. It has been noted by historians that Chesapeake Bay schooners changed little from 1855 to

1920. Biloxi's schooners, however, due to their later arrival into the workforce, continued to evolve right through the turn of the century. With their gracefully arched sheers, they became broader-beamed, shallower in the hold, and sharper in the rake of the stern. The tumblehome, added to provide a softer ride when heeled over, became more pronounced in the aft third of the vessel. The deck was pierced between the main mast and hatch to allow for a centerboard rod. Biloxi captains, it should be noted, were fond of using their large centerboards as brakes when sailing into a dock, using the centerboard rod to jam the centerboard down into the mud.

The Biloxi schooner had its centerboard and both masts on centerline, the centerboard itself rising above the deckline inside the main hatch. Trailboards, iron head rails, and davits were also absent in the construction of these schooners, although some davits are pictured on ves-

sels around New Orleans. Biloxi schooners favored towing a pulling skiff or carrying one forward on deck to use in oystering or setting seines. The centerboard was very large, running almost full between the main and foremast posts. The centerboard case divided the hatch-covered hold longitudinally.

The materials and methods used in the construction of the Biloxi schooner—sawn frames and carvel planking—were virtually the same as those employed in the building of the New Orleans lugger up through the nineteenth century. Cypress was used for framing and planking, and long-leaf yellow pine was used for the keel and masts. Juniper and cypress could be found in the deck and bulwarks. There was often a small cabin trunk in the bow of the Biloxi schooner, much like that found in the larger luggers. A clipper bow dominated the earlier Biloxi schooner design. However, shortly after the turn of



Schooner race, 1927. Photographer unknown. Photograph courtesy the Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum.

the century, the knuckle or spoon bow began appearing.

The Biloxi schooner usually worked under three sails—main, fore, and a club-footed jib—as it “drugged,” pulling its forged-iron dredge across Gulf Coast oyster beds or reefs. At other times, for example trying to catch a light breeze when returning to its factory base or running back to a reef, or while engaged in racing, three additional sails were added: a flying jib, a fisherman, and a topsail. It was this use of the boat under full sail that brought Biloxi schooner captains and boatbuilders considerable fame. What began during the early years of the industry, as friendly challenges between rival captains to race back to canneries with their catches, became full-scale regattas. By the turn of the century schooner regattas were being staged under the auspices of the Biloxi Yacht Club, with all of the attendant fanfare and audience-packed piers and shorelines. These annual summer contests, held during the canning industry’s slow season, continued until the mid-1930s. Although Sunday racing was popular, the annual Fourth of July race became the sailing event of the year.

In addition to dredging for oysters, Biloxi schooners also employed lengthy seines for catching shrimp. The schooner utilized a pair of skiffs to deploy the seine in an ever-tightening circle. Dip nets were used to extract the shrimp from the circled seine. Once in the schooner’s hold, the shrimp were iced down by the crew, who used ice chippers to break up large blocks of ice which had been carried from the factory and insulated with sawdust from local lumber mills.

After 1915, the introduction of the gasoline-powered engine and the otter trawl to the Biloxi fishing industry brought about the rapid decline of its grand sailing fleet. After the first drag by a motorized vessel yielded three times the catch brought in by a schooner working several days, Biloxi’s “white-winged queens” were doomed. Although by State law oystering continued under sail for a while, that too changed in 1933, with a change in the law.

However, the schooner did not completely disappear from the Mississippi Sound and the Louisiana marshes. Its hull was adapted for motorized use, by remov-

ing the mainmast and adding a house aft. The house covered the popular Lathrop engine, which became the primary power plant for the converted schooners. In many cases the foremast was left for use in deploying the trawl for shrimping. The foremast was also used with its sail for auxiliary power. Biloxi schooner hulls, some dating back as much as ninety years, can be found today, diesel powered, working oyster beds in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama.

The Present

In 1986, in an effort to expose the public to an important part of the region’s maritime history, the mayor of Biloxi, Gerald Blessey, encouraged the Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum to build two replica schooners. The work performed on the boats would educate people to local historical traditions and lore, while sailing the completed vessels would revive the Great Biloxi schooner races of 1888-1933.

The schooners were budgeted for \$150,000 each, to be paid for with public donations. Funds were raised, the researching of plans was done, and the keel for the GLENN L. SWETMAN was laid December 1, 1986.

Now complete, the schooner measures 67 feet overall (50 feet on deck), has a 17-foot beam, but only draws 4½ feet—which allowed boats like it to fish the shallow coastal waters of Mississippi and Louisiana. The vessel displaces approximately 24 tons, and its fixed centerboard keel attaches to the hull with preset bolts to allow for easy removal.

GLENN L. SWETMAN was built by

William Holland, a 42-year-old Biloxi native. Holland built his first boat when he was 13 years old, and then built a second boat two years later. Holland was assisted with work on GLENN L. SWETMAN by a large crew, mostly volunteers. The boat was launched in July of 1989.

The museum’s second boat, MIKE SEKUL, is quite similar to her sister, except for MIKE SEKUL’s broader bow. Another difference is that she is built mainly of cypress, while GLENN L. SWETMAN is built of juniper, with cypress frames.

MIKE SEKUL was built by 72-year-old Neil Covacevich, whose father started the family’s boatbuilding business. The boat was launched this past April.

Both schooners were named at a bidding party, during which individuals contributed hundreds, even thousands of dollars. GLENN L. SWETMAN was named after the president of Peoples Bank of Biloxi, and MIKE SEKUL was named after a prominent seafood processor and factory owner.

The museum keeps the two schooners busy. They are used primarily for chartered cruises and educational programs, although GLENN L. SWETMAN has hosted a number of weddings also. Both boats participated this year in the Race of the White Wings, in competition against some of the area’s other schooners. The traditional Biloxi “White Winged Queens” are once again a visible part of the Gulf.

(Thanks to Dr. Val Husley and to Robin Krohn at the Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum, in Biloxi, for their assistance.)



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(SCHOONER MASTER: Cont. from p. 7)

cool and you'd have a break and it'd be no good."

He enlisted Jim Rhodenizer, a nephew of the cousins who had been his construction crew on the original S-boats and one of his best workers during the later years of his boat business, to help pour the lead and help with the setting of the ribs and the beginning rows of planking. By this time, however, [Stevens's son] Murray had begun work on his first commissioned boat and part of the agreement between father and son was that the crew members would follow the business. So Jim Rhodenizer went down the hill to Murray's new boatshop and Stevens faced the problem of planking.

"I'll never forget, when the ribs were in, one of the men that worked with me for twenty years, he stood there and looked at it and he said, 'You know you can't plank this boat by yourself.' I said, 'Is that so?' 'No,' he said, 'you can't.' 'Well,' I said, 'I'll show you.'"

Now he began his odyssey in earnest,

working out the long familiar actions of his boat-building crew in terms of a single man, two hands, one point of support. This time, to escape from his metaphorical island, he had to build the boat alone.

David Stevens 1907-1989 was born and lived in the the Mahone Bay area of Nova Scotia. Originally a farmer, he did not begin building wooden boats until he was 38. He built more than seventy boats, including some fine, fast schooners.

At the time of his death, David Stevens had another schooner partially completed in his barn. The Nova Scotia Schooner Association reports that Henry Endres—former owner of Vern Brady's SEBIM—has purchased the hull and the work is being completed by Jim Rhodenizer, who worked with David Stevens for many years.

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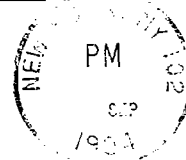
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