
JOHN GARDNER TSCA NEWS NOTES

The Latest from Around Our Chapter

This is the latest issue of our informal “News Notes” which we offer as a way of keeping in touch during these times of COVID Restrictions. While we are still in Phase 2, we in Connecticut continue to improve our numbers. School starts next week led by a fresh group of Covid Heroes: Teachers. That includes the host of our Community Boathouse, UCONN Avery Point. To monitor progress, check their dashboard at reopen.uconn.edu/COVID-dashboard Returning students are required to take a test; faculty and staff are provided free testing. Results so far show no positive cases. Let’s cheer them on!

Visiting TSCA’s Here on a Cruise:

Early in August we had visiting Small Crafters from the Delaware River and Old Bay TSCA Chapters. The day after our mighty blow, August 5th, Doug Oeller brought his 15’ Joel White designed Marsh Cat, Mike Wick his 16’ Melonseed, Phil Maynard his Ed Monk designed sloop with a lawnmower engine that he built from parts and John Blakewell his O’Day Daysailor II. We usually meet at this time of year at the Small Reach Regatta in Brooklin, ME but due to our unusual summer they met here for a Camp Cruise in Fisher’s Island Sound, isolating in individual small boats. They did a sail-by at Stonington’s Wednesday Night Dinghy Races, spent the night off Sandy Point (which was quiet until the power boats came out at 8 am) and visited Stonington Harbor the next day for a sail-around on their way to West Harbor. René Boelig and I joined them for a day sail in our 15’ Bolger Harbinger Catboat. Thunderstorms threatened but did not arrive, the best kind, Mike said. The boats then disappeared in the fog, helped by a fair current, to overnight off Fishers Island as we turned back for our home mooring. Later correspondence confirmed their safe returns home to MA, VA and PA. Trailer sailors range far and wide; our boats have wheels.



Carl Kaufman's response to our article on Brian Cooper's experimental light sails with some interesting historical insight on sail material:

"I Hope Brian Cooper's sailmaking venture works out. Sounds like a good way to go — make a Mod 1 sail out of whatever comes to hand, be it an old nylon spinnaker or a piece of shrink wrap, and get it to fit the way it looks right. Then when you figure out a good spar plan for that type of sail, use your Mod 1 as a pattern to cut a Mod 2 sail using material that has suitable properties -- strength, stretch, etc. But the caution is not to be guided by history and make a sail that looks like pictures of from an earlier century. Those were most often poorly shaped, crudely made, badly fitted sails made for workboats from whatever cloth the boatbuilder could afford.

In these days of recreational sailing, with performance much more a factor, all sorts of materials have been tried for sails. Most have been rejected, and for good reasons - .75 ounce nylon, for instance, proved a good choice for radial head spinnakers but it rarely is successful for a jib or mainsail --- too stretchy to hold shape. Rayon is an elegant fabric to work with but the cellulosic fiber is weak and rayon fabric does not last long in the weather. Mylar film was once touted as great for small boat sails because Mylar is dimensionally stable --and with a transparent main a helmsman can actually see where he is going. But Mylar is hard to fold and stow and it never found a market except as a laminate with other materials. An early attempt was even made to use film of the first synthetic plastic, Bakelite. Decades before nylon was invented, Bakelite was cast into sheet form and made into a sail for a boat at the Baekeland family camp in the Adirondacks. Leo Baekeland, the inventor, was himself was a boater (and a founder of the Cruising Club Of America) but his boat was a big motor cruiser with a square sail on a yardarm, so the needs of sailboats did not fit into his wheelhouse. The Bakelite small boat sail was amber colored and ugly, and it performed so poorly that to my knowledge, no one bothered to repeat the experiment.

Curiously, the man-made fiber that proved to be so successful as a sail material, Dacron, succeeded almost in spite of its creators. Sailmakers got early samples of DuPont Dacron polyester and found that it outperformed the best Egyptian cotton. Dacron sails held their shape better, were light and strong, and could be stowed wet without getting moldy. At first, though, the DuPont Company did nothing to promote Dacron for sails and even discouraged orders from companies making sailcloth. The conventional wisdom was that apparel was where the action was. The sailing market was too small to bother with. Dacron took over the waterfront anyway, just on its merits, and as fast as they could find a way to get around DuPont's patents the competitors came up with polyester fibers of their own. Profits quickly ran into tens of millions of dollars, and doors opened into a whole new branch of sailmaking technology.

What makes this story particularly interesting is that at this time in history the DuPont executive committee included two serious sailors, both major stockholders, both with the last name du Pont: Pierre S. du Pont and Henry B. du Pont (for whom the Seaport shipyard is named). I guess the fellows running DuPont's Textile Fibers Department saw no need to consult with the bosses upstairs on an unimportant market like this one. After all, market surveys made it clear that people wanted outboard motorboats in those days, not sailboats. So there would never be much of a market for Dacron sails, right??"

A Fast Rower Revisited:

We featured Clay Burkhalter reconditioning his Rob Pittaway designed Stonington Pulling Boat in our Nov/Dec 2019 Newsletter (Vol 5, No. 8). Here is a photograph of the completed project, including a drop-in Piantedosi rowing unit. Looks fast. Nice padded leather support. Also shown is the half model Rob Pittaway carved for the original design which now hangs on his living room wall. Masonic Care is not allowing visitors so drop Rob a line or give him call. I can provide his contact information.



A New Book:

This just in from Thad Danielson, a frequent participant in our JG Small Craft Workshop, usually bringing a boat he just built. He has a new book out: "An Introduction to Wooden Boat Building: Always More to Learn" in paperback and on Kindle. This from Thad: "Hope you are doing well there in Stonington. I self published, https://www.amazon.com/dp/098565015X?ref=pe_3052080_397514860 Small boats. Cheers, Thad". He is being modest; in it he presents the processes followed to build both a Norwegian Pram and an Arthur Spurling rowboat. The latter he brought to last year's Workshop. My favorite quote: "Square rarely occurs in boats, Fair and Fit rule."

Mystic Seaport Ship Modelers are busy:

Here is the latest from the Mystic Seaport Ship Modelers who have been actively presenting their models to the public this summer: "Hi All, We still have two more events at the Seaport: Sept 12th and Sept 26th. Please try to attend and support the club. They will be all day events Weather permitting. We will NOT be using the old Dock masters cabin, as there is a Snack Bar there now. Keep the dates open and I will send out more info as we get closer to the dates. Hans"

Some Foreign Correspondence:

This arrived as a surprise in my mailbox from Ronny De Gruyter, Botenmaker, from Belgium:

“This letter to let you know JG has a fan in Europe, Belgium to be precise, and it's me. I started tinkering with the idea of making a boat in 1995, made one and launched her in October 1999. It was the “14 foot row & sail” as described by JG in his book “Classic Small Craft You Can Build”. I have sailed her ever since and have had some boats in between, still, this one is my favorite, and the little gem has served me well in many waters all over Europe. One year ago I started a modest boatbuilding shop/yard. Knowing after 25 years sailing this boat, it's praised and loved by many beholders of all ages -including kids- so I decided to make another instance of the design. With some minor updates mind. The boat was launched last April and did some daysailing in July. The "making of" is documented on the www.Berthas.be website.”

Note, some translation is required on the website; just highlight the text and have Google translate. Thanks to Ronny for sharing his enthusiasm. His boat looks to be the 14 ft. Semi-Dory in Chapter 8 of “Building Classic Small Craft”. Good Boats travel widely....

Brian Cooper was selected to present at Wood Weekend at Mystic Seaport:

Here is his report straight from the deck of the Thompson Building.

“A little rain but a lot of people interested in the Greenland paddle and making it. Two young kids were very interested in trying a hand plane, chisel and drawknife. No blood spilled.

Educated a few people on oars and paddles. (it's the oar lock, shape of paddle/oar doesn't matter). Here is my setup in the morning. I had the end spot. Nice view of the river.”



Are You Up for an Oar & Sail Outing?

While our in-person meetings are on hold, we would like to hold our annual Oar and Sail Outing at Bluff Point State Park on Saturday, September 17th. Meet at 10 am at the Burrows Ball Field Boat Ramp. It is just before the Amtrak underpass on the left off South Road (SR 649). We'll mask and social distance. We're usually back by 2 pm. Let me know if interested. Bill Rutherford smallcrafter@gmail.com

A Quote:

Overheard at the Catboat Association Meeting last January: A definition of Catboats and their Owners: “Simple, Honest and Beamy”.

A Report from our Dory-Master, Phil Behney:

“Hello Everyone, Bill Armitage and myself have been pecking away at the Dorries. Repairs are complete on number 4, and number 3 still needs some modifications to the oarlock sockets which I am doing. Both boats will need paint and stenciling. (Bill stopped down and painted the dories on Tuesday - Thanks, Bill).



The building 36 needs some attention. I looked at replacing at least 4 windows 34" X 33". I suggest we go with PVC this time.

They have the divided lights so should look the same; the cost would be about 50 to 60 dollars per unit.

The PVC would cut down on maintenance and they cost less. The exterior of the building is looking a little ragged. There is some green mold on the north side which should be scrubbed off. There are a few more rotted clapboards that should be replaced (Dan Nelson fixed the south side 2 years ago) and there is chipped paint that could be touched up. The front steps are pretty sketchy and have been patched up over the years; may be time to replace. I have met the head of maintenance about two years ago and he takes very seriously the look of the campus, our building is not in his budget per se and I think we need to take some pride in keeping up its appearance.

Mystic Shipyard East could also use some care as far as clearing and cleaning up the overgrown Bamboo and brush. Also a few repairs to the rack.

This sounds like a lot and I do not have a good feel for what the membership's abilities are anymore, but it behooves us to pay attention to caring for our assets or risk losing the valuable spaces that have been graciously provided to us. So please step up, help organize a work party, or do a little bit on your own, or try recruiting new members, whatever you can do, it all adds up. I have been spending a few hours in the mornings down there and people wander in to see what we are all about, there is good potential to revitalize our membership and recruit new people.

I hope to do a club row sometime around the Autumn Equinox Sept 22 so look out for an update when we get closer. Phil B.”

Contact Phil (I have his email address if you need it) to pick a project and run with it.

A fund has been set up to cover expenses and contributions are rolling in. Send your checks to the attention of our Treasurer, Ellie Czarnowski at Community Boat Building #36, 1084 Shennecossett Rd., Groton, CT 06340

Sid Whelan's New Boat:

Here is Sid Whelan's 91st Birthday present to himself, a hand-crafted Adirondack Guideboat being built at Adirondack Wooden Boats in Lake Clear, NY by Allison Warner, Adirondack Museum's Boat Builder-in-Residence, and her husband Rob Davidson. They use only traditional materials and methods to build their wooden Adirondack guideboats. "We get the White Pine used for planking in log form before milling it ourselves; it is then air dried for at least a season before using. The Red Spruce knees we use for ribs and stems we dig, mill, and air dry for 3 or more years. The Red Maple and Cherry used for seats, oars, gunnels and details are obtained likewise. The brass hardware is forged by a regional craftsman custom for each boat we make." Visit them at adkwoodenboats.com to see fantastic photos of their craft.

Sid advises: "This is a Caleb Chase (of Newcomb) design, that Rob Davidson recommended when I asked for a 16 footer with plenty of beam to carry kids, supplies and gear. Chase is credited for being one of the first, if not the first of the 19th century master builders to discard the high tucked, wine glass transom for a double end, which was more practical to build and also made it a more useful workboat, more cargo space, and lighter on the carries.

Chase's boats have little dead rise, which has the downside of being less curvaceous and therefore less beautiful below the waterline, which I admire in the Brown's Tract (Grant, Parsons) boats, but I've experienced difficulty in turning that fine entry, hollow dead rise beauty in a chop. Slow and stubborn to turn, while the white caps are slamming your beam.

The Chase design is easier, Rob tells me, in that situation, with a wider entry to the chop. Easier to angle against the weather, he also has added an inch to the freeboard of the original design to provide even more buoyancy."

Some Progress Photos:





Here she is with ribs trimmed and her sheer beautifully apparent.

Thank you, Sid: We look forward to viewing more in-progress photos as the build progresses.

That's it for this issue. We hope we've given you some positive food for thought as we navigate the end of this unusual summer. Please send a photo and a few words of what has entertained you during this time and we will pass it on on to our readers.

Meanwhile, Fair Winds and enjoy the onset of Fall,
Bill & Karen Rutherford