



The Smoke Signal

Newsletter of the BLACKHAWK CHAPTER-ACBS



VOLUME 17 ISSUE 3

May/June 2011

LAKE GENEVA'S HISTORIC STEAM YACHTS

From the 1870's through the 1920's, dozens of elegant steam-powered yachts glided like graceful swans across the surface of Lake Geneva. The owner would entertain guests, pick up friends for an afternoon of golf at the country club, transport weekend visitors from the train depot to the lake shore estate or simply enjoy a scenic cruise. Often a quiet buffet supper would be served on the after deck as the beauty of the day climaxed in a gloriously colorful sunset. It was an era of serene and ample elegance in which Lake Geneva's golden age evolved and flourished.

With the completion of the Chicago and North-Western Railroad's direct line from Chicago through to Williams Bay in 1871, it was only a short walk across the road from the French-Provincial styled train depot to the municipal pier. There the steam yachts waited for the wealthy estate owners arriving on the "Millionaires' Special," the North-Western's club-car-equipped evening commuter train. The yachts, with their uniformed captains, glistening varnish, polished brass and rich appointments reminiscent of a French brothel, presented an impressive spectacle. Tooting whistles and clanging bells accompanied their departure whereupon they often engaged in impromptu races as their owners cruised home to dinner.

But the steamers were more than just water taxis. The steam yacht became the inevitable focal point in this setting because they excelled as association places, a unique venue for elegant assignations, business discussions, social gatherings, and stylish transportation. When Norman Harris' daughter married, friends' steamers transported several hundred wedding guests to the Harris Estate for the occasion, described by a contemporary observer as: "A festive sight with the



boats all lined up, flags flying, and their captains in dress blues"

The Martin Ryersons' had a red carpet on their pier and entertained such notables as John D. Rockefeller and Theodore Roosevelt as well as many artists, performers, and scientists. Ryerson was a founding trustee of the Chicago Art Institute known for his discriminating taste in art and his wife, Carrie, endowed the Chicago Civic Opera and sponsored a number of aspiring singers.

And hotelier Tracy Drake serenaded guests aboard his yacht with a wind-up Victorla, his son Carlos recalling:

The lovely quiet dinners we used to enjoy aboard ALOHA with the crew forward and ourselves aft listening to Caruso and Farrar singing out of the big-horned phonograph – our slowed down steam engine making hardly any sound, and the yacht gliding along in a path of moonlight on a perfectly calm lake.

But not everyone was of the same mind. Francis Beidler recalls:

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BLACKHAWK CHAPTER

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Fellow Blackhawk Members:

The summer has been busy for the Blackhawk Chapter of the ACBS. Since the last edition of the Smoke Signal we have had the Youth Group Project Launch, the Spring Dinner, a Spring Workshop, the Father's Day Cruise and the Fox Lake Boat Show. Each event was exciting with great turnout from chapter members. Look for details of each a little later in the Smoke Signal as well as event pictures on the Blackhawk website www.blackhawkacbs.com.

The Youth Group Project is off to a great start. As of this writing the bottom was prepped and painted. The boat was turned upright and now the group is well into cleaning, sanding, replacing wood and preparation for staining. Later in the Smoke Signal note the article authored by Gina Wagner, a project team member and official group secretary. Look for future updates from Gina and the crew as work progresses and the project is finished. We are planning an official re-christening of the project boat Saturday afternoon September 24th at the 2011 Geneva Lakes Boat Show at the Abbey Resort. We hope to all of the Blackhawks will be there to support the group. The project team will be leading the boat parade out of the harbor at 4:00 PM. This parade is always a highlight of the show! I would like to thank all of the young adults that are participating as well as Tom Wagner and Dave Vogeler who are serving as host and project directors.

The Spring Workshop was well attended this year. This event, held at Altounian Builders and hosted by Jim Altounian, showcased a project boat Jim has been working on. Over 40 members came out to see the progress on a 1927 26' Chris Craft triple cockpit that Jim has been restoring. The transformation from grey boat to its current state is nothing short of amazing. I am looking forward to see this boat come to life in the not too distant future. A special thank you goes out to George Plamondon for orchestrating this event and Jim Altounian for allowing us to admire his workmanship & progress and hang out in his shop.

The Father's Day Cruise was blessed with great weather and a big crowd. Over 60 members and guests enjoyed lunch on the deck of the Columbia Yacht Club ship, the Abegweit. This was preceded by a short cruise through the Chicago River lock and down the Chicago River. Lunch was followed by open boating and a chance to see the Chicago skyline from an offshore cruise. Thank you to Bob Zadek, George Plamondon, and Roger Sippey for hosting and organizing the day's events.

The 27th annual McHenry Boat Show was well attended with over 30 boats at the show. The weather cooperated and we had a beautiful day with a nice breeze. There were a number of new boats at the show this year as well as new Blackhawk members. We had a wide variety of boats and manufactures and this helped made the show interesting for our members as well as the public. I would like to thank the deck crew at Famous Freddie's for their hospitality and great service all afternoon at the show and dinner. I would also like to thank Ted Cartner, Cindy Cartner and Ron Van Horn

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for the fabulous job in preparation, planning and execution of the event.

Finally we are in the late stages of preparation for the 2011 ACBS International Boat Show and Meeting at the Abbey Resort with pre-events starting in Chicago on September 19th and Geneva Lakes events starting on September 21st through the 25th. The Blackhawk Chapter along with the Glacier Lakes Chapter are hosting the ACBS for an International Boat Show & Meeting. With 130 slips available for in water displays, this will be the biggest Geneva Lakes show ever. I urge all of our members to get your registration forms into both the ACBS and the Blackhawk Chapter as spots are filling quickly and the registration fees go up August 1st. Remember the pre-events are coordinated by the local chapters and the boat show events are coordinated by the ACBS so there are two registration forms to submit. Please monitor the website for updates as we get closer to the events and I look forward to seeing everyone in September.

Thank you to every member of the Blackhawk Chapter for your participation and support. I am looking forward to some summer boating and hope to see you out on the lakes.

Best Regards


Mark Svoboda

27th Annual Antique & Classic In-Water Boat Show On the Chain O' Lakes

The 27th annual Antique & Classic In-Water Boat Show on the Chain O' Lakes was a great success. We had a beautiful day and over 30 members presented their boats at the show. There were a number of new boats at the show this year as well as new Blackhawk members. There was a large crowd on hand to enjoy the boats and talk boating with the captains and crews. The staff at Famous Freddie's did a great job and the BBQ dinner was fantastic !



It was exciting to see a boat very similar to the Blackhawk youth project boat at the show. Ken Klein brought his 1956 Wagemaker Wolverine and this is the boat we are restoring with the young Blackhawks. The restoration crew and directors spend some time studying the boat. This was a great opportunity to visualize the finished project and explore some options that we have with the project.

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Dave Vogeler and Tom Wagner talking shop.



Tom Wagner visualizing the finished youth project.

At 2:00 PM we presented the awards for the show. Here is a summary of the 2011 show winners:

2nd Place Outboard: 1956 Milocraft Valkyrie, Andrew Vogeler
Best Outboard: 1956 Wagemaker Wolverine, Ken Klein
2nd Place Utility: 1958 Streblow Rebel, Eric & Kathy(& Lily) Moberg
Best Utility: 1957 Century Coronado, Mark Newell
2nd Place Runabout: 1937 Chris Craft Runabout, George Plamondon
Best Runabout: 1953 Chris Craft Riviera, Skip Bourdo
Skippers Choice: 1957 Chris Craft Continental, Karen Birch

Congratulations to the winners and everyone that presented a boat at the show !



Award winners from left to right: Kathy Moberg, Eric Moberg, Mark Newell, Karen Birch, Andrew Vogeler, Skip Bourdo, Ken Klein and George Plamondon.

Thank you to Cindy Cartner, Ted Cartner and Ron Van Horn for making the show a success. They worked tirelessly to ensure the Blackhawks had a safe harbor for the boats and an enjoyable day. We hope to see more of you at the 28th annual show !

The Blackhawk Youth Group Program Is Under Way !

Progress Report by Gina Wagner, Club Member & Secretary



ACBS Blackhawk Chapter
Youth Program



The Blackhawk Chapter of the Antique & Classic Boat Society decided that it would be really fun to have a club that kids could refinish a boat ourselves. So, with some help, they created the “Youth Project”, that gives us a chance to do so.

The first time we got together we got to know each other. After that we all went upstairs to see the project boat and to get a plan on what we are going to do. The first time I looked at the boat I knew it was going to take a lot of time and hard work to make this boat come alive. After all our

“oohs” and “aahs” we went to work.



Before we could work on the boat we had to turn the boat upside down so the bottom was up (the older kids did that). Then we had to sand the bottom. It was really messy because the bottom was already covered in red paint and the red paint was covered in dust and cob webs so red dust was flying everywhere. During that time I had a lot of kids coming out for fresh air because of all the dust. It's really hard to sand red paint. Since all the older kids were on one side and the little kids on the other side the older kids were pushing on the boat as they were sanding and ended up pushing the little kids off their step stools. After that it was time to clean up and end a good day's work.

The second time we got together we had some new people and had to explain what we are doing to the boat to them. After that it was time to paint the bottom. It took a lot of paint.

When it was dry we flipped it back over so it was upright. It took 6 men/boys to flip it back over.

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Then it was time to put on the splash rail. But somebody forgot to sand it. Then we realized that we didn't have the right screws to screw in the splash rails: this is a lesson learned (keep ALL supplies on hand!). But we found some screws. I thought all the bad stuff was over until the batteries ran out in the caulk gun!!! So we had to squeeze the caulk by hand. It took a long time to screw the splash rails on. Then finally it was time to sand the top of the boat down and we all had to wear masks. After that, it was time to clean up and get ready for our next meeting.



Gina Wagner, Age 11, Club Member and Secretary



47TH ANNUAL

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--

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The Clayton Boat Auction is conducted by Antique Boat America the first weekend in August every year at the Antique Boat Museum in Clayton, NY. Last year's auction attracted over 700 attendees, along with 200 registered bidders and more than 60 boats. Against the backdrop of the St. Lawrence River, the event offers a picturesque setting to enjoy the boating hobby.

The Antique Boat Museum is a nonprofit freshwater wooden boat museum with a great collection of launches, runabouts, utilities, skiffs, outboard motors and engines. The Museum receives a significant amount of its revenue from the Annual Boat Auction, and is seeking consignments and donations to assist in its efforts.



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(Continued from page 1)

I loved the steam yachts because I did have enough sense to appreciate their beauty. But at that youthful time I liked to see them best from a distance. I usually succeeded in evading the genteelly somnolent three-hour cruises, but on occasions when I was included I recall being inserted into white flannel pants and blue jacket for which my enthusiasm was tepid. Stiffly correct with a capital C.

As to the yachts themselves, the earliest ones were built locally and it was a stretch to call them yachts. They were built of timbers hand hewn with an adz and planking from local saw mills, and they had little in the way of metal fittings, the cleats, chocks, bollards and such being made of wood. However, the general arrangement of the cabin and deck space that evolved early with the characteristic engine room and steering station forward, a small day cabin that contained a pantry and head in the middle of the boat, and an intimate after deck for the owner and guests, set the style that remained more or less constant for the next fifty years.

“Mate” William Napper built most of the steam boats during the 1870’s and 80’s. He was born in Chichester, England in 1838 and was apprenticed to a shipbuilder at an early age. Having a natural aptitude for wood work, he became highly skilled at the trade. In 1866 he signed on aboard the Great Eastern as Chief Carpenter’s Mate and was actively involved for three years in laying the Trans-Atlantic cable. Quick-witted and deep-



voiced “Mate” was widely known as an entertaining yarn-spinner and congenial companion. He kept a short length of trans-Atlantic cable, and a large hook that was used to retrieve the cable on occasions when it broke, in his shop and he never tired of talking about it.

Working from drawings by William Bates, an itinerant naval architect from Manitowoc, WI, “Mate” built a series of robust, attractive vessels for affluent Chicagoans newly settled along the lake shore. Typically they were from 50 to 70 feet in length and were usually painted white or in strong colors such as green or blue, with very little in the way of varnished bright work. They were powered by small one- and two-cylinder low-pressure steam engines developing 50 or so horsepower with steam provided by a wood-fired vertical boiler.

By the 1890’s, the influx of more affluent lake shore residents produced some good-natured competition for larger and finer vessels and the emphasis shifted to boats with finer woodwork, more detailed trim, and more refined appointments. Along with this was the desire for more horsepower (some things never change) and the boats, now in the yacht category, came with two-cylinder compound engines and eventually with triple-expansion, high-pressure, condensing steam engines that developed up to 200 horsepower. Steam for these engines was now supplied by water-tube horizontal boilers that burned hard coal.

The Ryerson yacht, HATHOR, when launched in 1898, was described in the local newspaper:

The Ryerson's \$30,000 steam yacht is a glory of mahogany with brass and silver fittings. The roomy cabin is finished in mahogany and handsomely fitted up with lounges, sideboards and other conveniences of the modern pleasure boat, having great crimson silk cushions bearing the name HATHOR woven in to the fabric, and a complete electric system installed at a cost of over \$1,000. The HATHOR is seventy-three feet in length, built with a flush deck, and draws four feet of water. It has a triple expansion engine of sufficient power to give a lively brush to some of the older boats on the lake, but whether there will be any rivalry in this line remains to be seen.

Because of the relative sophistication of these yachts, they were beyond the ability of local craftsman and most were built in Racine, Wisconsin by the Racine Boat Manufacturing Company or in Chicago by Great Lakes

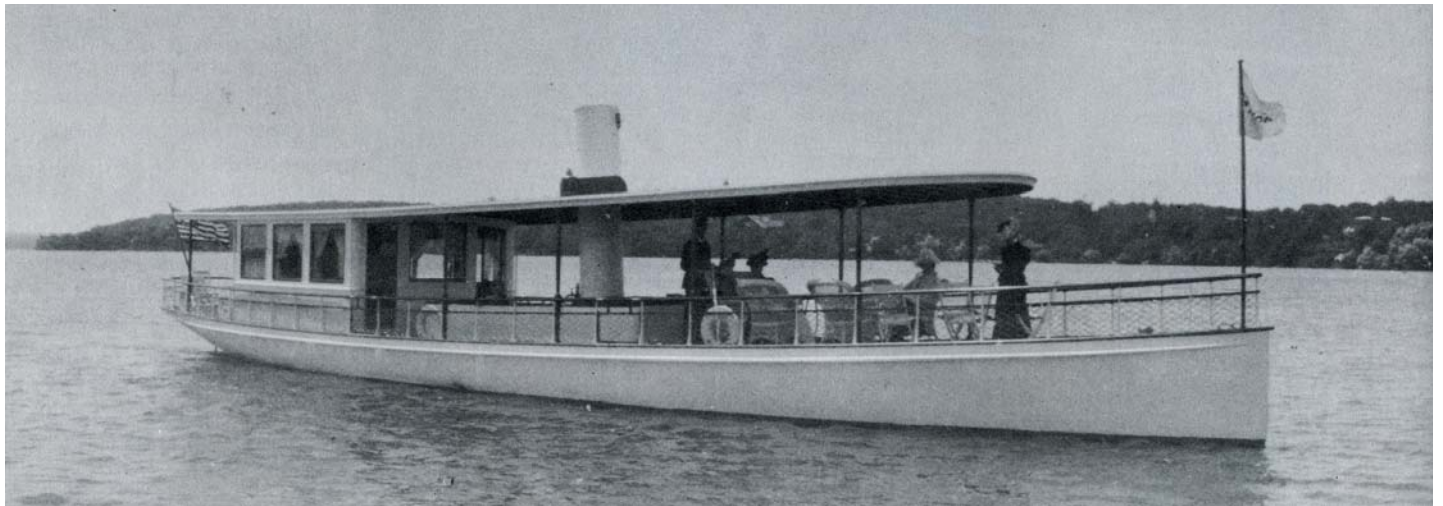


Shipbuilding Co. They were transported to Lake Geneva by rail using a flat car that had been specially built by Allis-Chalmers Co. to transport large pieces of farm equipment and heavy electrical machinery and was used by the boat builders when needed. The railroad track ran along the lake shore in Williams Bay, about a hundred feet from the lake, between the train station and the round house. There the yachts were unloaded sideways and slid into the lake on greased timbers, a process that usually took a week.

The yachts were now made of riveted steel plates, their length increased to 70 – 90 feet, and the displacement rose to 40 tons in the larger boats. Many of these yachts were designed by naval architect George Warrington who Theodore Roosevelt would later name Director of Lighthouses and Lightships for the United States Coast Guard. These vessels were models of naval architecture with smooth, graceful sheer lines complimented by tasteful proportions. Brass hand rails and fittings, polished to a mirror-like finish, abounded throughout the elegantly appointed craft. Electric light fixtures illuminated the cabin interior and were also hung like Japanese lanterns along the edge of the canopy. The decks were bleached-white, holy-stoned, and lined with glistening varnished mahogany covering boards. Clipper bows with towering masts began to appear.

The Racine Boat Company catalog published in 1900 describes one of their boats:

"This steam yacht is of our own creation being built for pleasure purposes on Lake Geneva. It is constructed entirely of steel with five watertight compartments. The machinery consists of a Racine water tube boiler and one of our 6, 10, & 16 x 9-inch stroke triple expansion engines developing 200 indicated horsepower giving a speed of 15 miles per hour. Mahogany finish throughout; electric lights and modern conveniences. Very beautiful, speedy, safe, economical craft that will meet the views of the most fastidious in every particular.

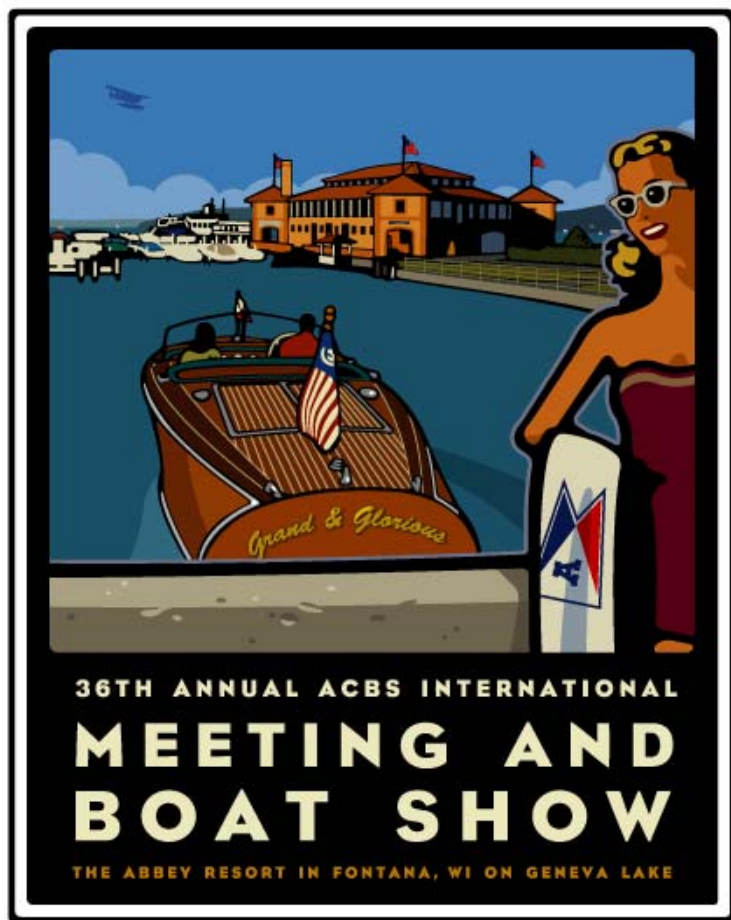


By 1910, the steam engine had passed its apogee. The last two Lake Geneva yachts were built in 1911 and 1913 by the Gas Engine & Power Company and Charles L. Seabury, Consolidated, in New York City which shortly thereafter became Consolidated Shipbuilding. These boats came with a higher level of appointments – beveled glass windows with Belgium lace curtains, nautical creatures hand-carved in the mahogany paneling, oriental carpets, silver plated fittings in the head and galley– but they were now powered by Speedway gasoline engines, and one of the boats had two such engines.

Sadly, this period of beauty and serenity was destined to end. The great depression sent most of the remaining steam yachts into storage and the use-tax of World War II kept them there. A few were cut up for scrap for the war effort, others were burned - one still having coal in its bunkers and ready to launch but without an owner who could afford to use it. Because of their age, their rarity, the uniqueness of this particular design to Lake Geneva, and because of the role the boats and their owners played in the lifestyle of early Lake Geneva, the boats are historically important and worthy of preservation.

Today, only five of these yachts remain in their original form, painstakingly maintained by their dedicated owners. HATHOR (1898), POLARIS (1898), MATRIARK (1899), and LOUISE (1902), now restored to steam power although modified by the addition of a second deck, will be in use for the Wednesday, September 21 home tour held in connection with the ACBS 2011 Annual Meeting and Boat Show at the Abbey Harbor in Fontana, Wisconsin.





2011 ACBS International Boat Show Poster

In keeping with tradition artist Neal Aspinall has created this years boat show poster. Neal has a talent for capturing the life style of wooden boating on Geneva Lake. You can view Neal's other work at www.nealaspinall.com

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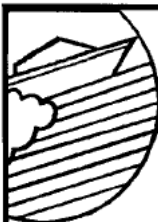
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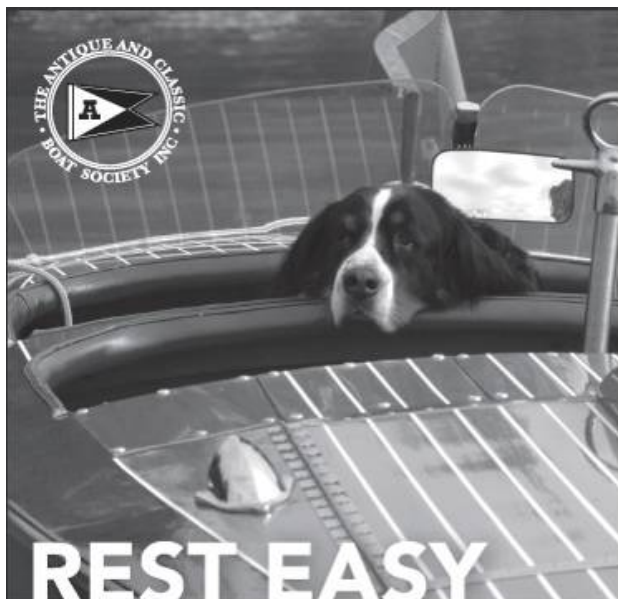
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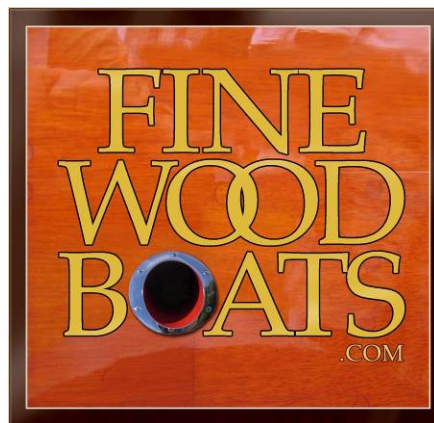
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Calendar of Events

August 5th-6th - 5th Annual Madison Area Antique and Classic Boat Show

August 22th - 5th Annual Pewaukee Antique/Classic Boat Show

September 19-25 - ACBS Annual Meeting and Boat Show, Geneva Lake