

THE HELM

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Elf, past and future



President's Message

We're Out to Launch!

... by Rick Carrion

I know that we all should remember the tortoise and the hare. Well, I know that some people think that sixteen years of restoration may be a bit long, but you will recall who won the race! I had hoped to re-launch ELF this past summer, but as we all know, that did not happen. I must say that I was pushing very hard to make that a reality. Once we reached the realization that it would be best to address all the needs before re-launch, I was able to rethink everything that we needed to do to make ELF perfect before leaving the workshop. Yes, I was ready to put her in the water without the entire interior completed (although all safety issues were addressed), but realize now that it was a wise decision to get everything done first, since it is much easier to work in the workshop, where the tools are, than to finish the interior dockside at the marina. I keep in reasonable physical shape simply by climbing up and into ELF many times each day — we call it ELF-ERCISE — and I just may get those six-pack abs after all! With excellent help from several volunteers, I have been working hard daily to finish the interior, with the latest focus on the galley. Now I can actually say that the galley is done, all but the gas and water hook up and, as the last item, hanging the brass oil lamp.

The next projects are the head, icebox, and navigation station. All of these issues are working out well, though I must say that having some sort of plan laid out in advance would not only have been helpful, but would have also saved a lot of time. I have had to be visionary on interior details. I have had the good fortune to have sailed a number of other vessels, and have insights as to what works best, and I am incorporating many of these ideas in ELF.

It is my hope that when we do re-launch, ELF will be what some call "turn-key," meaning everything will be totally done, so we can take off in the best of fashions, and not need to stop

for repairs. However, I know that there is always going to be some little detail that creeps up under the radar that will need to be dealt with. I guess that goes without saying. All things considered, I truly look forward to the upcoming sailing season. I have missed too many good sailing days.

Speaking of sailing, ELF will be like having a tiger by the tail, and being at the tiller will be absolutely a heart-throb for anyone. I want all members to have that opportunity, to be at the helm with full sail moving her at hull speed or more. When we sail into a new port of call, ELF will be a vessel of interest.

We are looking forward to a spring re-launch, and then visiting several Chesapeake Bay area events, and sailing up the coast to a variety of shows. I hope that we will be able to attend a number of classic boat rendezvous and races. As far as that is concerned, please let me know of any events in your area that you may want ELF to attend. We are serious about having ELF attend as many events as reasonably possible during the 2008 sailing season. We are trying to set up our calendar now for the 2008 season. We are looking forward to moving ELF from the workshop to Rock Hall, MD in early April, after a rigorous U.S. Coast Guard inspection and an insurance survey, then attaching the keel, and re-launching Friday, April 11th, which is the date ELF was originally launched 120 years earlier in 1888. Then we will let the bottom planking swell before moving to Independence Seaport Museum in Philadelphia for rigging the mast and spars. We should have ELF rigged and ready to sail by June 1, 2008. We are invited to be on display at the National Sailing Hall of Fame & Museum, in Annapolis, MD, so plan to visit and sail. As time gets closer, I will send out updates, and I will be putting more updates and photos on our web site: www.CYRG.ORG. In addition, if you are in the Earleville area and care to visit and/or lend a hand, please plan to stop. It is always good to call ahead (410-275-2819) or E-mail me at Elf1888@earthlink.net. I look forward to your visit. I plan to be working on ELF most every day.

I hope that you have a wonderful holiday, and a very enjoyable winter season, and I will see you in the spring, if not sooner.

The Great Chesapeake Bay Schooner Race

October 11-12, 2007

... by *Bill Hamilton*

What is it that overcomes some men when they look at an old boat in a state of neglect and disrepair and alters their vision to make it appear to be something else? Their minds fill with images of them dancing across the water on the deck of some magnificent yacht, bright-work gleaming and sails filled. It happened to me over 30 years ago, it happened to Rick when he first saw Elf, and it happened to Paul Gray when he stumbled onto Quintessence, the sails frozen to the deck. Her fiberglass hull had been crafted by Jarvis Newman in Southwest Harbor, Maine from a mold that he had made from Dictator, the famous 1904 Friendship sloop in Mystic Seaport's collection. Only one of the boats built from this mold was rigged as a schooner. Quintessence was unique, if not in the best of shape. Some TLC was all she needed to regain her former grandeur! (That's "Time, Labor and Cash" of course.)

I learned about Paul and Quintessence from Greg DeCowsky, one of our board members. Paul wanted to enter the Great Chesapeake Bay Schooner Race in October, 2007, and was looking last summer for a crew that knew schooners and their way around the Bay. I come from a long line of schooner trash and boatbuilders, Greg had lots of experience afloat and been in the race before, Rick knew the bay better than any of us and so it was that the race crew was formed.

So, at the beginning of October, in spite of days without any appreciable air, Paul managed to get Quintessence from her home port of Forked River, NJ to Baltimore using the iron jib. It was there that we gathered the day before the race to enjoy the pre-race festivities and to renew old friendships. Lots of familiar faces and some new boats were among the 30 or so schooners that had arrived to race the next day. As beautiful as she was with her sleek lines, tanbark sails and classic deadeyes, Quintessence was dwarfed by the likes of the Pride of Baltimore, the Virginia, the Liberty Clipper and the brand new Mystic. We were definitely up against some stiff competition; in our class Linda Meake's Farewell was reportedly the boat to beat.

The race began on October 11th near Annapolis, just south of the Bay Bridge. Race day began with a solid northwesterly breeze of 15 knots and an expectation that it would only get stronger throughout the day and the ensuing night ... a prognostication that would be realized, and then some. With Rick (even with his right hand recently shattered by a confrontation with the Elf shop door) at the helm, Quintessence was skillfully maneuvered into position and was the first Class C boat to cross the starting line. The incredible Nantucket sleighride down the Bay had begun. The field of masts and sails that had been so crowded together at the start quickly spread out. We noticed that most of them seemed to be falling behind us as a number of vessels were reducing sail as the wind continued to build. A wise decision was made to take a double reef in our main before darkness set in; it would be easier to take the jib or the foresail down in the dark of the new moon than it would be to try and reef the main.

Paul and Greg were above decks and Rick and I were below in the bunks when we crossed the mouth of the Patuxent River. I was

on the windward side of the boat and vaguely remember being airborne after being ejected from my bunk. I lay unconscious on the cabin sole for some time and the first thing that I remembered hearing as I came to was Rick snoring. [Editor's note: Rick was awakened by the thump of Bill's body hitting the cabin sole and went to his aid. There was no snoring going on at that time!] It took about another hour or so before I regained what wits I have left. I knew that when we would be off the mouth of the Potomac, much wider than the Patuxent, there was going to be hell to pay. We were exceeding hull speed, the tops were being blown off the whitecaps and the cockpit was awash. Some boats reported gusts above 40 knots. Fortunately the water was warmer than the air. We came out of the relative lee of the western shore into the expanse at the mouth of the Potomac and realized that the foresail would have to come down. We were nearly on beam ends when the radio broke free from its housing and destroyed the laptop that was running the GPS navigation. It took all hands on deck and some rather wild maneuvers to get the foresail down. We finally regained our course and continued down the line. We had not slowed at all and were still exceeding hullspeed over the ground. The handheld GPS was located and at 4:08 AM we crossed the finish for class C and B boats, completing the 80 mile course in under 15 hours. Below decks it looked as if some giant had tossed everything we owned into one pile and poured water on it. We sailed on to Portsmouth, VA, our final destination, exhausted but exhilarated. I was never more happy to see the dawn break.

We docked right beside the Holiday Inn where our thoughtful captain had rented rooms for us. Hot showers and soft beds! Barbecued oysters and pork, cold beer ... could it get better than this? The hospitality shown to us was overwhelming. The award ceremony was the icing on the cake; the master of ceremonies, Al Roper, Rear Commodore of the American Schooner Association called Paul up to receive the plaque for winners of class C. We didn't need a handicap; we won on straight time. Then we all went up for the coup de grace... overall winner on corrected time by an hour and forty minutes! Four old insane guys in an unknown but blisteringly fast boat had won. As we reminded the gathered participants from the stage, "Age and treachery will always triumph over youth and enthusiasm." Elf's future crew had just reared its grey head.

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Rick Carrion

of the Classic Yacht Restoration Guild

If there is a fine line between serendipity and “dumb luck,” as Bay sailor Rick Carrion calls it, he walked it on the Fourth of July in 1971 along the Sassafras River, when he handed over his wrist watch as collateral to buy an old yawl. The 35-foot *Flying High* cost the 19 year-old Salisbury State student \$1500, as well as the embarrassment of having to obtain his mother’s nod of approval before handing over his savings in cash. Despite the mildew and mushrooms thriving in the cabin, Carrion moved aboard and began to sail and work on what the former owner figured was a 1920’s style sailboat. Four years later, he discovered a beam made of two pieces of wood nailed and painted together. When he split them apart, the original, carved U.S. Coast Guard number was revealed. Carrion sent it to the Office of Documentation to learn about the boat’s origins.

The response letter and document copies from the National Archives stunned him. He learned that the old boat—on which he’d just fiberglassed the decks—was originally built in 1888 by George F. Lawley and Sons in Boston as *Elf*, a state-of-the-art racing yacht. Carrion was the owner of the oldest known racing yacht in the world. He knew then he had to bring her back to life.

“I didn’t understand the magnitude of money I would have to generate,” he says more than 30 years into a tremendous, grass-roots effort. “There were moments when it looked like it might not happen. The naysayers almost won a few times. But, I decided I wasn’t going to let them make the decisions.” The knowledge that he could always donate *Elf* and the fear that if he did so, he might lose contact with her, have kept him going.

In 1982, Carrion created the Classic Yacht Restoration Guild (CYRG), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to fostering the American maritime culture and boat building traditions, particularly those of the Northeastern United States and the Chesapeake Bay. Restoring *Elf* with dedicated volunteers under the supervision of a professional shipwright has been CYRG’s focus to date.

Eastern Shore native Graham Ero re-discovered *Elf* while out rowing his skiff upon the Sassafras, shortly after relocating his wooden boat building business from New England to Still Pond, MD. Two decades before, he had camped out on Carrion’s boat with the crew of the then fledgling *Wooden-Boat Magazine* during the Annapolis Sailboat Show. Wooden boat surveyor, John Griffiths—whose expertise has been crucial to the restoration effort—reconnected the owner and shipwright. Ero became the only paid professional on the CYRG crew and the one with a reputation for having the highest standards.

Sixteen years ago, the boat was hauled and moved into Carrion’s backyard on a parcel of his family’s 287-acre farm in Earleville, MD, next to his self-built solar house. He built a workshop around the boat and with a team of volunteers began restoring the small yacht in earnest. What started as a few years’ worth of work ended up being a thorough, historically accurate, museum-quality yacht restoration.

Volunteer Bill Hamilton says, “there is a core of people that have been dedicated to the boat for along time. It’s a real camaraderie. First of all, we’re all crazy.” Born into a family of shipwrights and sailors, Hamilton specializes in joinery and art work (such as finely painted “duckweed” on the bow to match the yacht’s original ornamentation preserved in photographs). He says, “This boat is a work of art. It’s more like working on sculpture or a piece of furniture.”

Much of the boat’s wood came from Carrion’s family farm and neighboring farms: black locust for structural members; North American black cherry for interior furniture; sassafras for the base of the bunks; cypress for the interior ceiling; and aromatic red cedar for the engine cabinets, (which will smell like the wood when warm). *Elf*’s hull is planked with longleaf yellow pine, while the sleek deck is composed of Douglas fir with rails, hatches, a cockpit, and a companionway fashioned with South American angelique (which proved to be sandy and tough on tools, however beautiful).

Although he was hopeful to have splashed the boat by this summer, Carrion, who is a retired environmental science teacher, sees the value in having the winter to complete her interior work and systems without being rushed. The spars and sails are ready. The bow piece and tiller are carved and varnished. In spring of 2008, *Elf* will be christened. After two weeks in Independence Seaport Museum in Philadelphia, her crew will sail her around the Chesapeake Bay to exhibits and festivals all summer to show her off and fulfill their mission of education in yacht restoration, the art of seamanship, and traditional sail handling.

There seems to be a consensus among CYRG team members that Carrion’s strengths lie in his organizational abilities and incredible drive. His former professor, friend of 35 years, and CYRG newsletter editor, Ray Zeigler says, “I don’t know that I’ve ever met anyone who has spent this much time on one thing. It is going happen. He *made* it happen.” Having sailed on *Elf* in the early years and been closely tied to the project, Bill Sonntag agrees. He says, “This simply would not have happened without Rick and all of his energy. What he has done with this boat is extraordinary.”

“Not quitting has always been a big thing for me,” says Carrion, standing on the cool, brick floor of his “air-conditioner-free” solar home on a hot summer day. “People said I was crazy to build this house.” He shrugs and says, “You can do anything you want to do. All you need is to want it badly enough.”

When he looks at old black and white photographs of *Elf* under full sail, Carrion’s passion for the project shines through. He has a series from Marblehead, MA circa 1889 and some from St. Michaels in the 1930s and early 40s when the boat was owned and happily sailed by Gus and Veda Van Lennep, the founders of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum. Pointing to sections of the photographs he knows by heart, Carrion notes the heel of the boat, even in light air, and he can envision his dream—so close to

fruition—of burying her rail under full sail on the Bay.

As she did at the end of the 19th century, the historic yacht will cruise and race the waters off New England, but home will be where Carrion's heart is. He says, "Elf will live on the Chesapeake Bay. She has spent half of her life here."

Look for updates on *Elf* in *SpinSheet* next spring.

CYRG's "wish list" includes corporate or private funding for a professional quality DVD of the vessel's history, restoration, and future sailing activities.

To learn more, visit www.cyrg.org or email elf1888@earthlink.net



Built in 1888 in Boston by George F. Lawley and Sons at a cost of \$3500, *Elf* was a cutting-edge racing yacht. After undergoing an historically accurate, museum-quality restoration, the 30-foot beauty will be splashed on the Chesapeake Bay in the spring of 2008.

Photo courtesy of Francis Russell Hart Collection/MIT

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