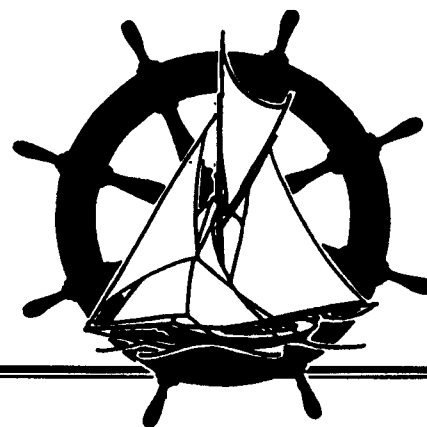


THE HELM

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Elf, past and future



President's Message

Sprint to the Finish Line

... by Rick Carrion

Spring is finally here, my favorite season of the year. I tend to awaken, as if coming out of hibernation and get very busy. As many of you know, the *Elf* restoration has spanned many years, but now the end is in sight. We do, however, have a lot of work to complete before we re-launch sometime during the spring of 2006.

We are about to begin the wiring of all systems (lights, navigation instruments, battery system, charging systems, photovoltaic system, and the list goes on . . .). The real challenge will be to hide the wires and instruments within the cabinetry. Once the wiring is completed and tested we will build the galley ice-box and navigation station. With that complete, we will be able to move on to the decking.

Another big effort will be to putty all the planking seams plus sand and paint the hull. Thanks to International Paints for generously donating gallons of putty, paint, and varnish. We now have all of the materials necessary to do a museum quality paint job. Please keep in mind that you can learn some valuable hands-on skills when you stop by to help make *Elf* come to life again.

"Lawley
Built"

Graham's Letter

"Small World" and *Elf* Updates

It's spring and, as usual, I'm trying to wrap up various projects so I can get back on *Elf*. I must have said that a dozen times over the years but, at this point, I may not have to say it again. That is not to say that there isn't a lot yet to be done. This round, the already fitted and finished covering boards and king planks can be installed for good in preparation for laying the decks.

Before the decks, however, another delicate job of drilling diagonal holes down through the covering boards in the bow, and through the planking just below the sheer line for port and starboard hawser pipes for the anchor chain to play out of the chain locker, must be executed. You may remember the engine drive shaft hole in the stern a while back. Well, these holes will be tricky and, most important; they both have to be exactly the same. We wouldn't want *Elf* to have one "lazy eye."

These hawser pipes will be custom cast by an old gentleman down in Easton (Maryland) I came across some years ago. What a surprise. I noticed an old building and an old sign that said *Tidewater Foundry*. Went inside and found a shop like my own, with piles of very valuable stuff everywhere. I met Harry Evans, Jr., and he showed me around. He was very gracious and proud of his work. I mentioned that there were Smith Island Evans's in my family and joked that we might be related. He looked at me and said, "If they're Evans's, we're related." It was soon clear that here was a man with a 19th century talent surviving in the 21st century. Between bigger jobs, Harry was making beautifully detailed crab ash trays and such. The anti-smoking movement isn't helping that endeavor either. But, we have bigger fish to fry: heavy gauge cast bronze hawser pipes to withstand years of heavy chain running in and out under strain. Harry Evans' shop is just the place for them to be made.

There is one more hole to be drilled and that's the rudder post, but no big deal. So, I'm looking forward to getting started again, with a lot of really nice work ahead.

Elf's Shipwright

The long life of the little yacht Elf

The 117-year-old sailboat was destined for the chainsaw when a young man was smitten by her

By Douglas A. Campbell

SENIOR WRITER

A steel-stiffened spine, a human soul and sweet lines are the secrets to the very long life of the little yacht Elf.

The steel is in a series of small plates, each bent at the ends in precise angles, that were bolted to the oak frames of Elf when she was built in Boston in 1896. The human soul belongs to Richard Canton, 53, who for more than two decades has been the shepherd of Elf's restoration — a project that by next spring may, once again, have the clipper bow of this pretty, historic 36-footer parting the waters of Chesapeake Bay.

But without the sweet lines, Elf now would be little more than a bundle of kindling, a sorry ending for one of George Lawley & Son's 19th-century designs that still elicits from a master slipwright the terms "stunning" and "beautiful" and "really first class."

Elf is among the oldest — if not the oldest — yachts in the country. Her birthplace, the Lawley boatyard, was the equal of the Herreshoff yard in Rhode Island, according to historians. Lawley built boats of the highest quality during the same span that Nathaniel Herreshoff was winning international acclaim. There are those who will claim Elf was the first small yacht to make an offshore cruise just for fun, without a race or commerce as an incentive. There is no question that she was as beautiful as she was quick.

"She was a boat that everyone knew about in the early days," says nautical historian Llewellyn Howland. "If she was an ugly boat ... I don't think she'd still be around."

It was the use of steel plates that allowed the old lady to keep her youthful figure (more on that later). Her pleasing curves caught the attention of a young man with a keen eye and an ability to fantasize. It was the dreamy imagination of that teenager that assured Elf's survival.

The year was 1970, and Elf's owner, Judson Esauing, brought his wooden yawl — with its 17-foot bowsprit and a 36-foot deck that ended in a perfectly centered transom — up the Sassafras River on Chesapeake Bay's Eastern Shore to a dock at the Gosney Restaurant in Cecilton, Md. The 62-year-old boat, by this time named Flying High, was in sad condition. Much of her original equipment had been replaced over time. Many of her timbers had weakened with age, and her original sail plan as a gaff-rigged topsail sloop had been shortened from an overpowering 2,300 square feet to the yawl rig of much more modest proportions. Esauing's sail up the eight bends of the Sassafras seemed destined to bring the boat home as Elf to her graveyard. Esauing docked her and left her to be overseen by that young lad, Rick Canton, then 16 years old and spending the summer at the Gosney's dock.

"I was dockmaster for Sailing Associates," Canton recalls, "icing boats and gassing them and docking them up. During the week I did a lot of rigging for the boats that they [Sailing Associates] were selling."

Rated on a nearby farm, young Canton had just finished his freshman year at Salisbury State College. He saw the old yawl come in and fell in love. "I kind of watched it that year and kept making sure the bilge pumps were operating," he says.

By the following July 4 weekend, Canton, now halfway through college and fully certain of his ability to judge boats, decided he would make an offer. He had about \$900 in the bank. He told his boss at Sailing Associates of his plan.

"My mother was friends with the people who ran the yard," he says. "They insisted that my mother ap-

prove of this. They didn't think it was a good idea."

Mrs. Canton, however, did not object, and her son — as yet unaware that the boat's owner now planned its death by chainsaw — agreed to increase his offer to \$1,500. The deal was completed; the boy's dream was a reality. He moved aboard, and when he got up in the middle of that first night, he stepped into water a foot above the floorboards. He made some repairs and in the fall sailed his new pickle down the Chesapeake to the Wiconoco River. Flying High had no engine, so he sailed upstream to Salisbury, where he docked her for the school year. The boat became his dormitory room, and when he graduated two years later he sailed back to the Sassafras waters before him of taking the next year off to sail ... whenever.

"And then I was visiting my mom in July and she said, 'Oh, by the way, the board of education called and said they want to interview you,'" he recalls. Canton was nothing if not a dutiful son. "Mom put her



Richard Canton bought Elf in the early 1970s, sailing and caring for her for more than three decades.

foot down," he says. The successful interview ended his dream of cruising, replacing it with a 30-year career as a high school science teacher.

Two years later, older and wiser, Canton placed an ad in Soundings, offering his boat for sale. By this time, he had burrowed into her belly and knew something of her heritage.

"I was scraping paint in the forward cabin in 1972 and found the documentation numbers," he says. "I sent them off and didn't hear anything back until 1973." What he learned then was Elf's name and year of construction. "I didn't think of the historical name until 1975, when I advertised in Soundings," Canton says. "Donald Street Jr. [a venerated cruising sailor] called me and told me I should consider not selling the boat." Canton says Street told him Elf was the oldest existing small yacht in the nation, perhaps the world.

(Halsey C. Herreshoff, president of the Herreshoff Maine Museum in Bristol, R.I., says that Clara, a 37-foot Herreshoff cat yawl named for Nat Herreshoff's wife, was built in 1866 and resides at his museum.)

Canton accepted Street's claim, however. "I took her off the market," he says. "When I saw my first photographs [of Elf] ... it gave me an incentive to restore her. I saw the incredible rig that she carries and was just bowled over, so to speak."

Elf's beauty was the product of her breeding, according to Howland and other historians. "Lawley's the second-most-important yacht builder in American history," says Curt Hasselback, curator of the Hart Nautical Collection at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "All the great designers in America had boats built there."

"None of the builders today that we know of ... are

in that league," says Fred Hecklinger, an Annapolis, Md., marine surveyor and authority on historical yachts. Hincley makes boats of a quality equal to Lawley and Herreshoff, he says, "but to me, it's different in that they are stock builders, whereas every Lawley boat was custom."

"Everyone says Herreshoff was a great yacht builder," says Howland, "and their boats have lasted pretty well." But the historian says that while Herreshoff Manufacturing Co. built their yachts "very lightly," Lawley just built a stronger boat. Another difference between the two premier yards was that Herreshoff designed all of its boats, while Lawley built for many designers.

An example of Lawley's rugged construction standards is found above Elf's keel. Those steel plates spanned the keel and held the ribs at a precise angle, allowing the yacht to retain her shape for more than 100 years. Lawley built Elf for a yachtsman who raced her for two years. She then was bought by a young chemical engineer and yachtsman named Henry Howard, who moored her in Marblehead, Mass., in 1899.

"My first long cruise in the Elf was an offshore jump from Marblehead to Halifax, Nova Scotia, which we accomplished in 66 hours," Howard wrote in his memoir, "Charting My Life," published in 1946. "On this trip, I slaughtered my crew because I was afraid they would not go with me."

"At that time [1893], offshore cruising in small yachts was almost unknown, and this sport was really started in Marblehead by my cruise to Halifax on Elf."

Howard sold Elf in 1897. Over the next 74 years a number of owners cared enough about her to keep her sound and whole, says Howland. "It's incredible how fast these [wooden] boats deteriorate," without that type of attention, he says.

Canton didn't bother with a survey when he handed over the cash for the boat he knew as Flying High. "As time went on, I realized more and more the problems," he says. But he renamed her Elf and sailed her in classic yacht regattas, winning trophies for her appearance as he learned such skills as caulking and carpentry. He had replaced the deck with plywood and fiberglass soon after he bought the boat, and covered the powder blue of the hull with white and painted the bottom red.

But Canton could see that taking care of this boat was more than a one-man job, let alone one working man. So in 1960 he started the Classic Yacht Restoration Guild, an organization that received federal tax-exempt status in 1962. The purpose of the guild was "to teach people to sail and [to] be a network of people, materials, tools and skills to not only sail the boat but to maintain it." Canton was the guild's president. He donated the boat to the group but says he didn't take a tax write-off so that he could place restrictions on the project.

Fundraising began. Guild memberships were sold. The state of Maryland gave a \$25,000 grant, Cecil County \$6,500. By 1991, Canton says, he had accrued \$40,000. The boat was hauled and taken about a mile inland from the Sassafras to his family's farm in Earhills, where in time he built a pole shed to cover her.

It was about this time that Canton was introduced to Graham Rio, a master slipwright and Eastern Shore native who had returned to Maryland after many years of wooden boat restoration in New England. Canton hired Rio as the only paid worker on the project, and together they analyzed the work ahead.

"I don't think either of us knew the extent to which it was going to go," recalls Rio, who is 55. "I should have

“If she was an ugly boat ... I don't think she'd still be around.”

- Lowellyn Howland, nautical historian

known because I had quite a few years under my belt by then. Everything we took apart, there was something else next to it [that needed to be replaced]. And we were putting such nice stuff back that the things that weren't so rotten weren't good enough. At some point, it became clear that we were going to replace everything.”

Evo was the carpenter. Carrion became the procurer of wood. His family farm had a ready supply of black locust, a wood they had learned was equal in strength to Elf's original oak framing, with the added advantage of being rot resistant. Carrion worked for two years with a sawyer in Georgia to get a supply of sawn longleaf yellow pine for the hull planking. And then the work began.

What made it possible for Evo to restore Elf rather than build a replica, was the Lawley yard's use of those pieces of bent steel. The metal had held all of the frames, no matter how rotten they had become, in Elf's original shape. One by one Evo removed the old frames, duplicated their curves, and replaced them with locust before moving on to the next. In a few seasons he did the work that owners might well have done throughout the boat's life span. And since Elf never lost her original shape, the work qualified, Evo says as restoration.

“The directive to me has been, whatever it takes to do it correctly,” Evo says. “Other than that, the whole thing was to keep it as original as possible, and that's what I love to do. I was delighted.”

Using ancient photographs collected from former owners and museum archives, and original equipment kept by some of those owners, Carrion and Evo were able to replace or recreate every feature of the original Elf but one: her rudder. They still sue



Elf passed through many owners over the years. At one point the little yacht was converted from a gaff-rigged topsail sloop to a yawl. Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum founder Gus Van Lennep, at the helm, owned her from 1932 to 1943.

looking for some evidence that will guarantee an accurate re-creation of that piece.

By this spring much of the carpentry on Elf had been completed. Her hull was planked with the yellow pine, faired to near-perfect smoothness with a buttery glow, even in the shadows of the pole shed. The yacht's interior had been built, then removed for varnishing.

“I like to build an interior that is completely dismantlable,” Evo explains. “You can go down there with a power screwdriver and get it out, so you don't wreck thousands of dollars of carpentry.”

When the interior is varnished and re-staled, all that will remain to do inside the shed will be installing the deck and hanging a new rudder. “We have seen other Lawley rudders,” Evo says. “Beyond that, it's a calculation of sail area, displacement of the boat, and how much rudder it takes to move the boat. Basically, a guess.”

Next spring, when the deck is in place, Elf will be taken to Philadelphia, where the Independence Seaport Museum will install her rigging, thanks, according to Carrion, to a wealthy benefactor who is underwriting that six-figure expense.

Then Carrion, through his guild, will begin using Elf for the educational purpose that justified her restoration. “That's when I want to really campaign her and shake her down and work all the bugs out to be able to go offshore and come home again,” says Carrion, who retired from his teaching career last year.

The ultimate goal: Participating in the 2007 Marblehead to Halifax Race, the biennial contest that replicates that long-ago offshore cruise when Elf first staked her claim to history. ■

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“I enjoyed working with Doug Campbell and helping with his research for this article. His writing accurately captures the excitement and work that are going into the restoration of *Elf*.”

... Rick Carrion

Vida's Dream

Vida Van Lennep shared a dream with me. She had it on board *Elf* while in New York City in 1932. (Vida and Gus Van Lennep owned *Elf* from 1932 to 1943 and are like my adopted grandparents.)

Visions of Lady Liberty crept into Vida's dream sequence. As the story goes, Lady Liberty stood watch over the harbor for

years, seeing people come and go to the Big Apple and having the time of their lives. Late in the evening she got down from her pedestal and went into the city to have a night on the town. Returning at dawn, Lady Liberty climbed back up onto her pedestal and kept swapping the torch and books from hand to hand as if not sure on which side they belonged. That was when Vida awoke, peeked out of the porthole, and viewed Lady Liberty as we see her today.

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Send your email address to:
elf1888@earthlink.net

**Crab Feast/BBQ and Silent Auction
September 17, 2005**

It is time to think of gathering items for our annual silent auction (Elf fund raiser). Please consider donating items that will help us move toward our goal of \$50,000, the approximate amount needed to finish Elf's restoration. We need friends to help plan, organize, and work at the Crab Feast. Just email Rick to let him know how you can help.

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Request for Submissions

Please consider writing an article for our next newsletter. It can be about any aspect of boating, cooking aboard, boat maintenance, or any area of sailing that excites your passion. It may be submitted in writing, or by email to:

elf1888@earthlink.net.

The deadline for the next newsletter is July 30 , 2005.

Book on *Elf* in the Works

We have a member that is starting to organize a rough draft of a book about ELF. It will include the history, the people who have owned and worked on her, and the restoration project. Now is the time to think back to some memorable moment you recall aboard ELF. Who knows? You may be published. So please send them to me soon and we may also publish them in the HELM.

Matching Contributions

We encourage all members to ask their employers if they match contributions made to non-profit organizations. If so, please send along the necessary paperwork with your contribution. We want to thank SAP and CHASE for matching contributions. made by their employees. If your employer will participate, we will be able to double your contribution. I will fill out any necessary paperwork. Please talk to your employer. It could get us into the water much faster!

THE HELM



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