



ELF, A FLAGSHIP OF EARLY AMERICAN RACING

~ Andy Slavinkas



The cutter ELF, confidently moving under full sail. Photo courtesy the Francis Russell Hart Collection/MIT.

These photographs often show sleek hulls with long overhangs under an unimaginable amount of canvas, set on an uncrowded sea. It was an era when yacht design blossomed, and these vessels display a timeless mastery of elegance and proportion.

Now, for a moment, imagine an overconfident 19 year-old college student with only 7th grade shop class for woodworking experience, standing at the shore of the Sassafras River contemplating the purchase of a floating apartment called FLYING HIGH.

Explaining what these two subjects have to do with each other was the chore of Rick Carrion and Bill Hamilton on

March 4th at the Red Dragon Canoe Club.

The image above was taken by Nathaniel Stebbins in 1889. Turn-of-the-century black and white photography has recently seen a rise in popularity. An exhibition of photography by Willard B. Jackson was on view at the Peabody Essex Museum in 2006-07, concurrent with a definitive publication on Jackson's work by Matthew Murphy, senior editor of *Wooden-Boat*. The Independence Seaport Museum is currently showing a small selection of platinum palladium prints from Mystic Seaport's Morris Rosenfeld collection.

Rick, the 19 year-old student, ended up buying the boat for \$1500 and lived aboard while attending college. His early experiences would have caused most mortals to count their losses and move on, but Rick reveals his ability to overcome adversity when he admits to walking through shin-deep water to use the head on his first night aboard.

In the coming years, Rick learned to do most of the necessary maintenance work, relying on help from those around him. There were no drawings or manual to refer to, and he carried on for a while using common sense on what he figured was a typical 1920's yacht. It wasn't until four years after moving onboard that he discovered a key to the boat's origins.

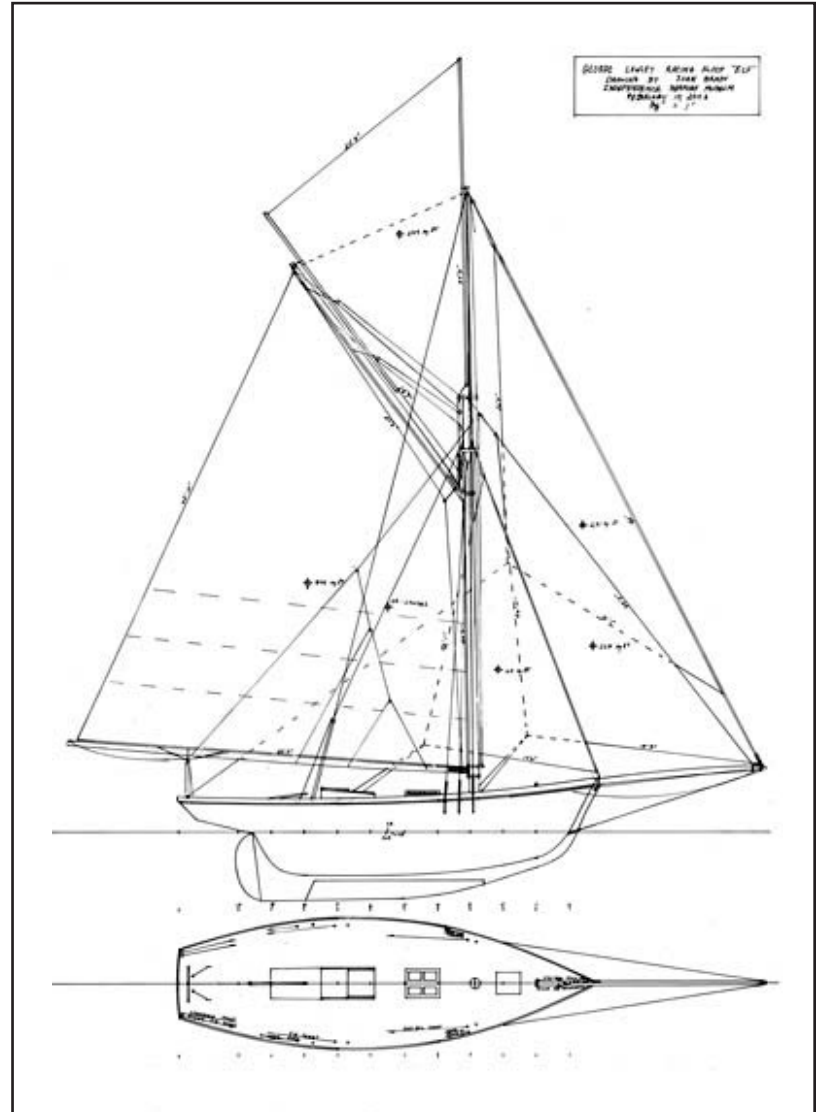
While prying apart a sistered beam, Rick found a US Coast Guard number. He sent the information up and down the coast in an effort to find information on the boat, and the letter of response from the National Archives stunned him. The boat, first known as ELF, had been built and launched in 1888 by the renowned Boston builder George F. Lawley and Sons. Rick discovered he was the owner of the oldest extant racing yacht of North America. He realized then that he needed to set aside his "good enough" program of maintenance and properly restore her.

In 1982 Rick founded the Classic Yacht Restoration Guild and donated ELF to the nonprofit organization, hoping to ensure her preservation and restoration. The success of the CYRG's effort to restore ELF comes from a combination of Rick's energy and talent for creating a network of people and skills. By 1991, with the help of grants and volunteers, reconstruction began under a leaky flapping blue tarp with the assistance of marine surveyor John Griffith and master boat builder Graham Ero, proprietor of Graham Ero Wooden Boats in Still Pond, Maryland.

ELF is a "30-footer class" cutter and was built for William H. Wilkinson as a state-of-the-art racing yacht by the same yard that built many America's Cup contenders. Her specifications are: 30ft LWL, 35ft LOD, 65ft LOA (estimated with bowsprit and boom in place), and she carries nearly 2300 sq ft of sail.

Though no line drawings for ELF have been found, Rick discovered a trove of black and white photographs of the boat in the collections of several northeast institutions, among them the Francis Russell

Hart collection of MIT. These photographs were instrumental in restoring the boat to near original specifications. Rick projected the photos onto a wall and took scaled measurements to determine critical dimensions and details of the companionway, deck-fittings, hatches, skylights, and rigging.



ELF's sail plan courtesy John Brady/ISM.

ELF's hull was found to have aged well and remains in shape, in large part due to Lawley's use of iron floors. Her structure was replaced piece by piece in order to leave her hull intact. For example, every other frame remained in place while new sawn frames were installed in an effort to maintain her shape before re-planking commenced. After almost 17 years of restoration work, only the original oak keel remains.

Much of the wood used for ELF came from Rick's 287 acre family farm, and most of it was harvested by Rick himself. Local woods include black locust for structural members and sassafras, cypress, and cedar for the interior. The bulkheads are fashioned out of book-matched burl planks of North American cherry from the centerline outward. Throughout you will find four types of burl—zebra, rope, crotch, and rooster tail. Her hull is planked with longleaf yellow pine sourced from the South, the deck is of Douglas fir, and South American angelique is used to finish the topside details.

The Guild is also duplicating ELF's original tender. On a visit to Rockland, Maine, Rick and Bill found the obvious choice in a 9 foot Lawley lapstrake tender that the Apprenticeshop had built. With a copy of the plans in hand, Rick and Bill made a trip to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum. After meeting with Richard Scofield, the boat yard manager there, and Dan Sutherland, who heads their "Apprentice for a Day" program, all agreed that ELF's tender would be built there with Rick supplying the material. The tender is to carry the name "Vida" on her transom in honor of CBMM's cofounder, Vida van Lennep. Coincidentally, Vida and her late husband Gus owned ELF in the 1930's and 40's.

Once the boat is launched in early April, Rick and crew will allow 10 days for the planking to swell, after which they will head to the Independence Seaport Museum at Penn's Landing. John Brady, who built the rig, will be instrumental in helping ELF's new crew learn to raise the jackyard topsail which reaches nearly sixty feet into the air.

After the shakedown, the crew plans to perform comprehensive

sail training before heading north to participate in as many regattas as possible. Rick expects to need at least eight experienced deck hands for racing and is searching for members interested in applying their skills to the training and racing program. To become a member of the Guild and be a part of the crew on this historic yacht, contact Rick at:

Classic Yacht Restoration Guild, Inc.
P.O. Box 237
Earleville, MD 21919-0237
410-275-2819

email: elf1888@yahoo.com

website: CYRG.org

Even if you don't become a Guild member, keep an eye on the CYRG's calendar of events this spring to watch her make her way on the Chesapeake Bay, and join them in celebrating the re-launch of ELF, one hundred and twenty years after her first launch.

ELF, in the background, ghosting along.
Photo courtesy the Francis Russell Hart Collection/MIT.



NEXT MEETING:

**Tuesday, April 8th at 7.30 pm,
Red Dragon Canoe Club.**

It's the Bid-n-Buy! Bring your nautical-related items, a pocket full of cash, and a weakness for boat paraphenalia. Featured items in the auction are:

Three paddles donated by woodworker Tom Marzolf.

Mike Wick will also be bringing his Mohawk Ultima sailing canoe (pictured below). It is 17 feet long and fully equipped for ACA and C Class racing. This boat is identical to BLACK SWAN, Bill Covert's sailing canoe that took first place in the 2007 Union Lake Messabout, the 2007 St. Michael's Regatta, and the 2007 C Class Nationals. Four rigs are included: a 44 sq ft ACA rig; two 55 sq ft C Class sails; and a 66 sq ft windsurfer rig. It has a drop rudder, two leeboards, and two automatic bailers. It is a hot boat, but unfortunately Mike no longer has hot knees, so he is letting it go to make room for his new Cortez Melonseed project.



BULLETIN BOARD

CORRECTION: In the March issue, we mistakenly attributed the design of the A-cat SPYDER to Charles Mower. It is being built from a Francis Sweisguth design.

John Brady is bringing the ISM's tuckup from storage into the boatshop. He asks if TSCA members are willing to help paint her on weekends. Email Wendy at uubyar@gmail.com if you are interested in helping.

Boat Camp

This summer build a boat on the banks of the Delaware River.



Ages 13 - 17

July 7 through August 8, 2008



Monday Through Friday
9:00 am to 4:00 pm
\$850 for Museum Members
\$895 for Non Members
www.phillyseaport.org

Independence Seaport Museum
Workshop on the Water
211 S. Columbus Blvd. at Walnut St.
Philadelphia, Pa. 19106
215-413-8630
groupsales@phillyseaport.org

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY
JUNE 14 AND 15, 2008

DELAWARE RIVER TRADITIONAL BOAT FESTIVAL



INDEPENDENCE SEAPORT MUSEUM
211 S. COLUMBUS BLVD. AT WALNUT ST.
PHILADELPHIA, PA. 19106
215-413-8630
GROUPSALES@PHILLYSEAPORT.ORG



MUSING ON TUCKUPS, part 1

~ Roger Allen

The Tuckup was built at the ‘Workshop on the Water,’ a program and facility that I started in 1979 at the Philadelphia Maritime Museum, aboard a 110 foot by 40 foot steel lighter barge called MAPLE. A lighter barge is like a big floating warehouse, and it made a great shop except that you couldn’t use a level. We bought the barge for scrap value from Independent Pier and Lighterage, a tugboat outfit that had been working on the Delaware since 1870 and literally raised her off the bottom of the river. After power washing and pumping a foot of Delaware River mud out of her hull, we wove galvanized chicken wire and re-bar through her angle iron floor beams and then poured in eight inches of concrete to seal off the places in her bottom plating that had rusted through since she was built in 1947. How about that for a volunteer project? Raising a three hundred ton sunken barge isn’t a job for the faint of heart, and I couldn’t believe that we did it. I say “we” because then, as now, I worked with some really great

folks who volunteered to help. That crew really put up with some hard and lean times because we worked hand to mouth most of the time. Money was scarce, and supplies and materials to build the shop and set up the program often came when volunteers were able to “find” something we needed somewhere along the commercial waterfront. It’s always been amazing to me how resourceful a crew can be when they believe in what they’re doing. It’s even more amazing how much work can be done and how much knowledge is out there to bring to bear on a worthy project when you get everyone involved in solving problems. Of course, Philadelphia was one of the most important yacht and ship building and service ports on the East Coast so there was lots of talent and stuff laying around that was “not being used by anyone else” when we needed it. In any case, MAPLE swam on the bottom for well over 18 years and served us well as an all around boatbuilding shop and classroom, floating in a

waterfront park called Penn's Landing in the heart of downtown Philadelphia. She has been scrapped over the last few years, I've heard, but I guess we all end up in the scrap yard eventually.

The Tuckup that Tom Shephard and the Delaware River TSCA sail was one of three that we built at the Workshop, in 1986 I believe. Barry Thomas, working with Ben Fuller at Mystic Seaport, built another four. By the time of the project I was doing much of the administrative and fundraising stuff to keep things going, and we hired a boatbuilder by the name of John Brady to handle the fun stuff. I taught boatbuilding occasionally, did the exhibits, and raised money, but I don't think I did much more on the Tuckups than a single plank, a couple of hundred rivets, and a steam-bent coaming. (It's always been like that, by the way. I build the programs so that I can build the boats but then find out that for the boats to continue being built, I have to do the work of keeping the wolves from the door while someone else comes in to have the fun of building the boats.)

John later built melon seeds with the help of John Tohanczyn, a friend of ours who now runs the SPIRIT OF MASSACHUSETTS, the HARVEY GAMAGE, and one other big schooner out of Maine. Both are giants in this business. Brady left to go out on his own for a while but came back to the Museum a few years after I left and has kept that shop going. John Brady is one of the best boatbuilders in the country and a very talented designer as well. John Tohanczyn

is one of the most knowledgeable folks in the business when it comes to big boat care and feeding. Tow, as he is generally called, is one of those folks you want in your lifeboat when the world goes to "Harry in a handbasket." He is one of the very few folks in the whole boatbuilding world that I'd hand a belt sander to (and for those of you who have known me for any length of time, that is true high praise). All of us who are citizens of the Coast meet eventually, and I'm sure you'll bump into John or Tow one of these days. You



Mike Wick and Tom Shephard enjoying a moderate breeze on Union Lake.

will be glad you did.

Anyway, I won't tell you about why we built the Tuckups or about capsizing them for now.

(Those stories and more will be in the May Issue.)

Tom Shephard shares his own thoughts on sailing a Tuckup...



ONCE WENT FOR A SAIL
ON A TUCKUP IN A GALE
T' WAS THE BREWINGTON VS THE SEEDS
A RACE OF LOST BREEDS
FOR THOSE WHO LIKE TO BAIL



THE MAINE BOATBUILDERS SHOW

~ Jenny Thompson

Three Delaware River TSCA members attended the Maine Boatbuilders Show on the weekend of March 14-16. Housed in the sprawling brick warehouse complex of the Portland Company at the eastern end of Portland harbor, the MBS is an annual event that showcases boats made in the region. (Although Maine is in the title, exhibitors from Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, Rhode Island, and further afield were well represented.) The show is a much anticipated and welcome event that allows local boaters a chance to forget the snowbanks and to dream of the coming season. This helps to explain the long, eager line of boating enthusiasts waiting at the door on Friday morning; more than 9,000 people were expected to attend the show over three days.

The 200 exhibitors represent the strong boating industry in the region and range from major manufacturers like Hinckley and Sabre Yachts who were there with luxury picnic boats to Beetle Cat with its eponymous and appealing design, Artisan Boatworks and their exquisite daysailers, Lowell's Boat Shop with miniature and full-size skiffs and dinghy-shaped planters and boat-building schools like the Apprenticeshop and the Landing School. Though MBS is not strictly a wooden boat show and includes many fiberglass boats, there is plenty to appeal to traditional boat enthusiasts. Coquinas and Herreshoff 12 1/2s abound as well all types of dories, skiffs, and tenders.

The show's distinctive character owes much to the series of interconnected buildings—many of them built in 1846 as a locomotive foundry and later used to build iron clad ships and equipment for the Panama Canal—that have remnants of old belt-driven shafts on the ceilings, uneven floors, and rickety staircases. The dense indoor space makes for a congenial setting and is surprisingly accommodating to fully rigged dinghies as well as large power and sail boats. The upstairs spaces are devoted to vendors of boat-related merchandise and equipment including the latest in



One of the Coquinas on display built of glued lapstrake plywood by Schleiff Boatworks.

electronics, composting heads, fitted sheets for the v-berth, and photographs by Alison Langley. The show is slight on books, charts, and other chandlery items, but perhaps this is because no one wishes to compete with Hamilton Marine, a hundred yards down the road.

On the same weekend, the Civic Center in Portland hosts a second boat show that focuses on mass-produced boats and has a sports-fishing emphasis; consequently, each show has developed a particular character and audience. Although the Maine Boatbuilders Show is billed as a chance for boat builders to meet boat owners and to receive custom orders for boats, many vendors confess that they make



Above—BERNICE, a P-class yacht restored by Rockport Marine, attracted a constant flow of visitors to her deck.

cannot help being drawn to her long overhangs, sumptuous teak deck, and bronze fittings. The scale and costliness of the P-class soon gave way to the smaller and more manageable R-class boats, and today the opportunity to admire a P-class boat is a rare one.

Andy and I were in Maine visiting family (on a trip deliberately planned to coincide with the boat show) so we were surprised and delighted to find Phil Maynard pouring over a wooden boat, video camera in hand, also taking advantage of family obligations in New England to sneak in a few hours at the show.

few sales at the show and use it instead as a chance to chat about boats and build relationships with potential clients. The sense of pride and careful workmanship that each boat builder or boatyard places in its work is a palpable aspect of MBS, as is the opportunity to rub elbows with the builders themselves.

Among the highlights of the show for this reviewer was the chance to climb aboard the newly restored BERNICE, a P-class sloop designed by George Owen and built by Hodgdon Bros. in East Boothbay, Maine in 1916. She has been the loving subject of a two-year restoration by Rockport Marine (see *WoodenBoat* # 196) and demonstrates the care required to bring a boat of this magnitude and grace back to her original specifications. Built to race with the Marblehead P-class fleet, she soon made her way to the Royal Canadian Yacht Club and has sailed on Lake Ontario ever since. Though she is beyond the scope and budget of most sailors, one



Right—A first floor exhibition area dedicated to small craft.

MAINSHEET

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