

The Boat Builders of Ontario

1832-2024

Book Three: Goodbye Launch, Hello Runabout

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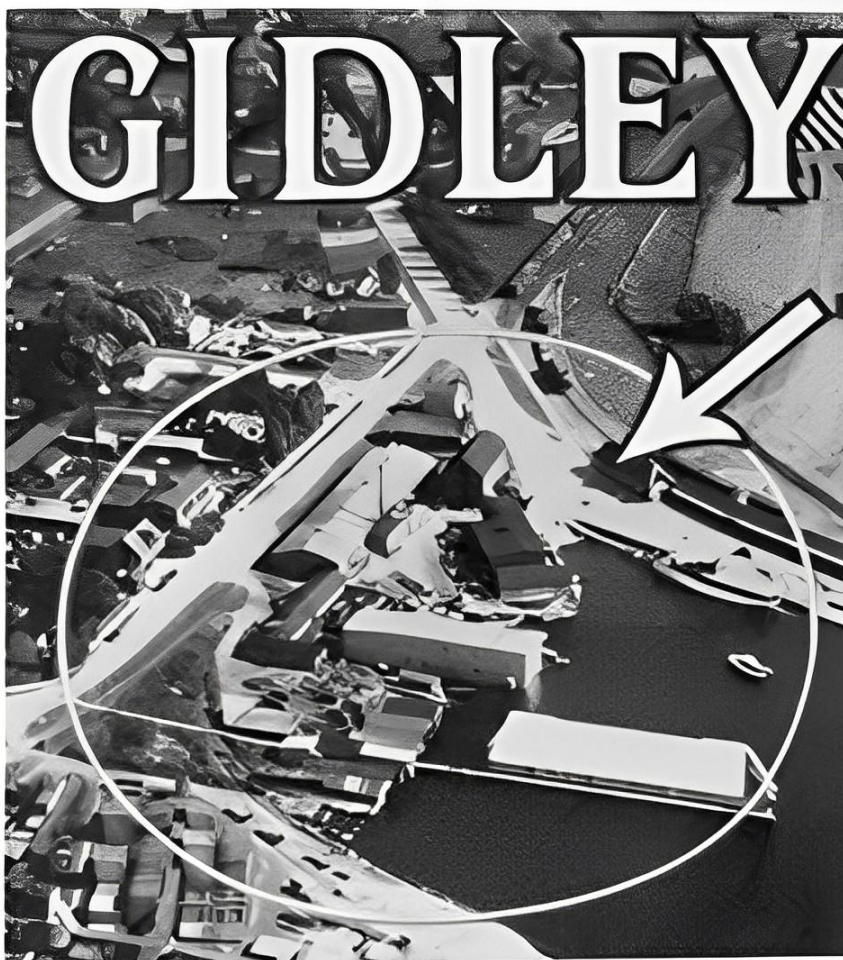
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Gidley and the third life of Grew

Grew *Boats*
LIMITED
Penetanguishene — Jacksons Point
Ont. Ont.

THE GIDLEY YARDS at Penetang, where are turned out the famous GIDLEY Yachts, Cruisers, Runabouts. Make Penetang Harbour — the finest on Georgian Bay — YOUR harbour



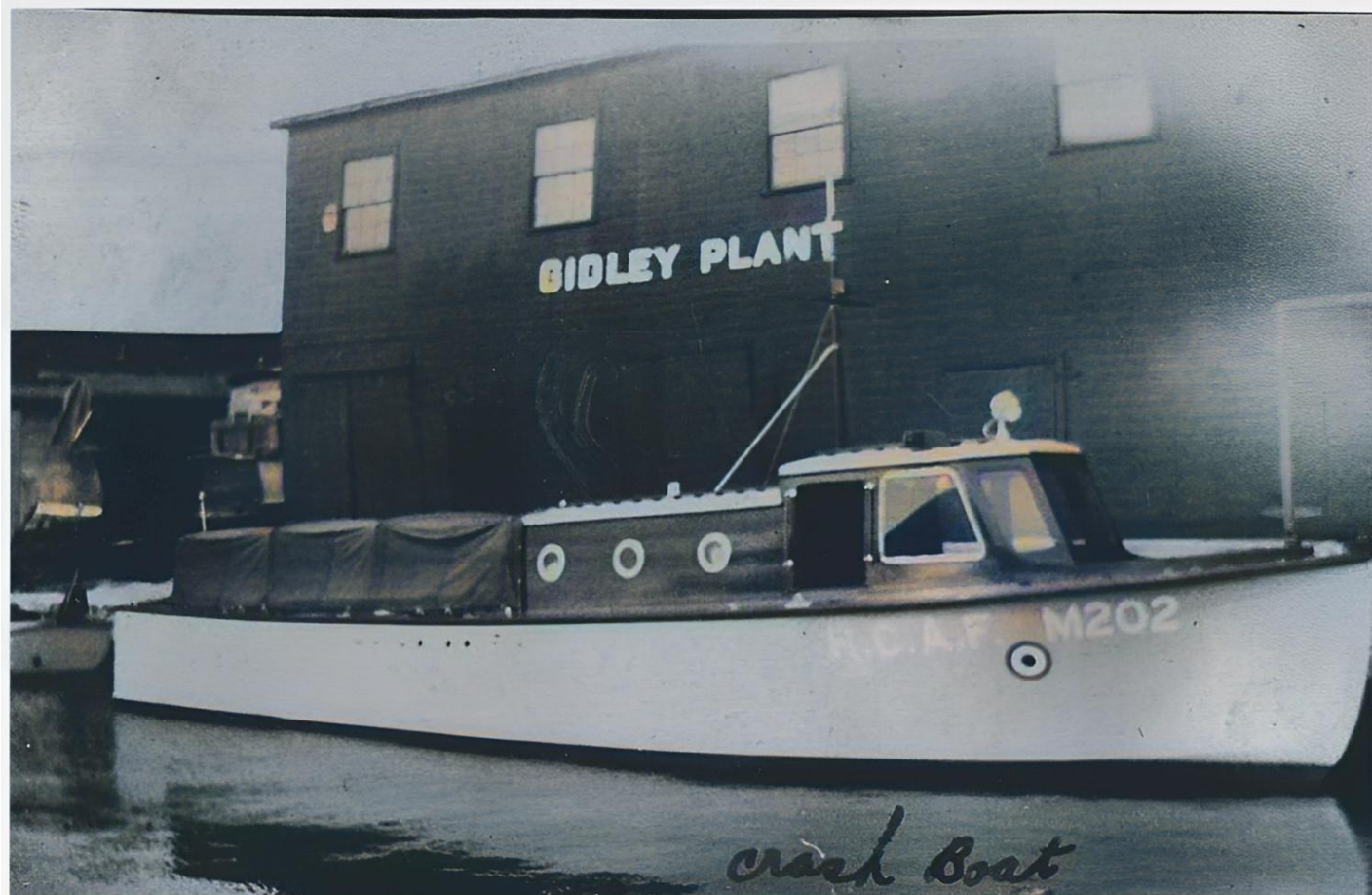
It appears Henry Gidley survived in Detroit; he did not prosper greatly or fail spectacularly. Over the teens and twenties he built houses and raised a family of four children. He had a house on Fullerton Drive; it is hard to tell today on Google Maps what it looked like in better times, there are some nice houses, some small and some not so impressive. He invested in real estate and then when the collapse came in 1931 his fortunes, like so many other small businessmen, went with it. He spent what little money he had left for an operation to remove cancer from one of his eyes, but back then surgery was the only cure for the disease, and if it was metastatic, it was only a matter of time before the end, he died shortly after in 1933. His old company, still under the control of Hugh Warnock was essentially moribund, almost no staff were left, only the building and some repair work was going on.

Arthur Grew had his formative learning experiences at Aykroyd's in Toronto Harbour. He had asthma and in the era before inhalers, a serious attack could be potentially fatal, and in the 1900's the Big Smoke had become progressively smokier, even when I worked there in the late 1980's, there were regular warnings of air quality danger serious enough for those with breathing conditions to stay inside and close the windows. Grew's father lent him some money

and in 1907 he headed up to the town of Jackson's Point on the southern shore of Lake Simcoe to start a new business. His interests at the time were purely in canoes and sailing dinghies and pulling skiffs, exactly what he had been making at Aykroyd's. Like so many other waterside builders, he also added a boat rental operation. It was a modestly successful business and like many luxury products, new customers became very thin in the early 1930's. The only way out was to appeal to an old customer to bail him out. This was Clarence Kemp, vice president of Sheet Metal Products of Canada Ltd. (under the corporate banner of General Steel Wares Ltd., for collectors of gas and oil cans, this had the red label with the letters "GSW" on the side) who lived in Toronto but whose family spent their summers in Georgian Bay. According to the biographical information, Kemp and his partner Eric Osborne "bought" Grew Boats, but other than some lumber and a few shop tools, and maybe a couple of canoes and whatever value the boat rental end had, the purchases was mostly the services of Arthur Grew himself, for a business that given its size and low margin that even in the good times, probably didn't produce much more than a small living for the company principal. The more important purchase was Gidley Boat Co. in 1932. Gidley was a much bigger builder with brand recognition and boats continued to be built as Gidley until 1939, when Kemp and Osborne merged both enterprises under the name Grew Boats, possibly because they had a personal connection with Arthur Grew and he would be the new face and principal of the consolidated company. It was actually a holding of three companies, the original H. E. Gidley, Grew Boats, and Walter Dean Canoe Co., which had been bought after its failure in 1923; there are no known Gidley Sunnyside Torpedo canoes, so it is not clear whether there was any continuation of this model after 1924. Kemp kept Hugh Warnock and Eric Osborne as general managers, and they continued in their jobs through the war, only retiring in 1946-47.

Grew himself remained at the Jackson's Point shop, which continued in the small boat business, making canoes and outboard runabouts while the Penetang shop struggled to get back into the runabout game; the era of the round-bilged long deck launches were past and it was time to move into planing hull runabout designs, the first of which was the 20 foot Grew Sea Master which came out in 1937. This was in line with the design of the time, all mahogany hull with a utility deck and interior configuration. The earlier and first phase of runabout design, originating with Chris Craft, Dodge and Hacker in the early 1920's was based on the cockpit approach, with two or three seating areas, with the seats enclosed and separated from one another. In some cases, there would be the drivers cockpit and the back seat, so to speak, just ahead of the engine, which was under a hatch. This was usually the style of 17-19-foot models. For the 21 foot and up models, there were usually the two forward cockpits and a third cockpit just behind the engine, a sort of marine version of the car's rumble seat. The problem with this

design is that it was not very passenger friendly, once seated in the cockpit you were stuck there for the duration, you couldn't get up and move around. The utility design, updated from the older launch style meant an open deck, you could get up and move around to the various seats, or sit on the engine box, which in some boats had padding on the top so it could serve as a sort of additional seat for less lucky passengers. By the late 1930's the cockpit style was fading out and the utility was the norm. In 1939 the war came and in 1940 the wartime production acts ceased non-war essential manufacturing.



Peacetime to wartime, from luxury cruising yachts to military rescue boats. Luxury cruisers were being built up to 1940, as noted in the top photo. The “crash boat” was named for its ability to go out in all kinds of weather to rescue airmen downed at sea.

I haven't spoken much about wartime boatbuilding largely because this book is primarily about pleasure and cruising craft, but it should be noted that all the boatbuilders who were still active and had going business concerns, the loss of recreational products was quickly replaced by military ones. Davis Dry Dock and Polson Iron works were the only marine military contractors during the Great War that I know of. Davis made lifeboats for transatlantic shipping, Polson landed contracts to build minesweepers and as noted, once these were completed in summer 1917, Polson was stuck in a commercial dead zone with no more naval and no new civilian contracts and finally collapsed. In the Second World War almost all but the smallest shops were able to land something. Gilbert Marine made a single patrol boat, so large it had to be moved outdoors to have the deck and fittings completed. Grew, J. J. Taylor, Hunter, Matlo, Shepherd and Sachau built Fairmiles, which filled the gap between the MTB or Motor Torpedo Boat and the destroyer. By 1945, including the losses, the Royal Canadian Navy had almost 1100 naval vessels (not 600, as many history books attest), running from the little Fairmiles to the Athabaskan Class (Tribal) destroyers, in the sense of carrying weapons and being manned by navy personnel. All commercial shipping owned by Canadian companies (50 ships in total) were engaged under a sort of forced-lease legislation (even Great Lakes grain freighters that would never go into the Atlantic) to serve in the Canadian Merchant Navy, which although engaged in war supply and faced combat in the open ocean, were manned by civilians. All wartime shipbuilding production was under a Crown entity known as the Park Shipping Company, which served as the general contractor for the Canadian version of the Liberty Ship, a quick build freighter referred to as the “Park Ship”. Sachau and Herb Ditchburn teamed up to design and build steel hulled harbour tugs. Myles Jeffrey ignored any military involvement and continued to build boats in his Athens shop up until 1943, although it is not clear where he got the mahogany lumber from; he may have already had it in stock. But before anyone passes judgement, it's worth understanding what the restrictive rules actually said:

The National Resources Mobilization Act was passed in 1940; initially it referred to the requirement for able-bodied young persons (not restricted to men) to

...place themselves, their services and their property at the disposal of His Majesty in right of Canada, as may be deemed necessary or expedient for securing the public safety, the defence of Canada, the maintenance of public order, or the efficient

prosecution of the war...

The Act did not necessarily shut down any business, but it allowed the government to say, you were doing that, now you will be doing this. Therefore it was completely legal to continue to build pleasure boats, at least until the government said otherwise. But as with the Great War, there was no spirit of leisure, everything was in a state of wartime stress, except for light short-term entertainments like sports and movies which would distract for a few hours before it was time to go back to work. With rationing, travel to the cottage by car was basically impossible, unless you need to drive as part of your work, i.e. doctor or milkman, your gas ration was about three gallons a week (according to my mother), not much for the thirsty engines of the time, enough to do basic shopping and urgent needs and that was it, not unlike driving restrictions during the pandemic, vacations were out. As the military geared up for the invasion of France the rules tightened further and required the reallocation of all persons between the ages of 19 to 40 into listed “essential” industries, which included any such person engaged in recreational manufacturing, such as pleasure boats. This meant you could keep the older workmen, but the young guys had to go. Also you would be a fool to turn down lucrative war production contracts with their big revenues and guaranteed profit. There wasn’t much for a small shop in a landlocked village like Athens, Ontario, even if could sell a boat, it would be almost impossible to find the extra gas for a truck to haul it twenty miles down the road to be launched at Portland on Big Rideau Lake.



1949 Grew Utility M'Lora Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

Once VE day had passed, the contracts began to wind down. There was still Japan, but that issue was settled with the A-bomb later in the summer. The problem with the builders was the inevitable gap between the war contracts and the resumption of civilian consumption, and usually countries like Canada were still punch drunk from six years of war; a million service personnel would be looking for work and had to be reintegrated into the economy. Shepherd and Grew got back in the game quickly, Grew's new 24-foot model was the Jolly Giant, a larger and beamier version of the Sea Master. With relatively little competition in the Ontario runabout market, Grew's postwar sales increased to the point where Kemp and his fellow investors could put the company up for sale. The sale was made in 1950, to a William Phillips, known better as Col. W. E. Phillips; at the time it was not uncommon for commissioned officers to require being

addressed with their service rank, even after they had re-entered civilian life. By contrast, in today's forcibly casual offices, even the company president or senior VP insists you call them by their first name. Col. Phillips had come across his rank honestly, entering the British Army as a private, and proving himself to be a gifted soldier, rising through the ranks, and in a move very rare in English society at the time, jumping the class line from non- to commissioned officer, something that didn't happen unless you had some exceptional ability. After his discharge he went into business, one of his most interesting ventures was when he came across a new insulation innovation from Owens Corning, glass fibers. The result was a soft (if very scratchy) mattress-like product that had the unusual ability to trap warm air. Up to that time insulation was simply an air gap between the outer wall of a building and the inner planking and then lath and plaster. Most houses in Canada were cool in the winter and depended on feeding coal into the boiler furnace in the basement, usually a pre-breakfast ritual for Dad or the older boys was to go down and take out the slag, known as the clinker and shovel in the day's fuel. Phillips obtained a license to produce this product in Canada, the company became Fiberglas Canada Ltd. which still makes and retails those big pink insulation bags you see at Home Depot. He didn't see so far ahead to imagine this stuff as future of boat building, but he certainly understood the material to know what it was and could do.



The Jolly Giant, Grew's 22-foot runabout Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

The next phase of Grew was to focus strictly on motorboats. The Penetang plant would be expanded, the original Jackson's Point shop was sold. Arthur Grew was now separated from the company that bore his name. It should be noted that the motorboat DNA of what would become Grew Boats was really the continuation of the Gidley marque, which was about motorboats. Grew had stayed at Jackson's point and focused on what he liked and knew best, which were canoes and small outboard boats. In reality, Arthur Grew never had any connection with the bloodline that became so associated with his name. As noted, Hugh Warnock ran the Gidley Penetang plant until his retirement just after the war; Gidley was largely an inboard runabout maker. The old Grew shop remained a small outboard boat and canoe maker. With the reorganization it became known as Bonnie Boats Ltd. and ceased production a few years after Arthur Grew's passing in 1952. It became Bonnie Marina and was eventually bulldozed for the Lake Simcoe OPP marine station in 2018. Production of the Sea Master and the Jolly Giant at the renamed Grew Penetang plant continued into the late 1950's although usually the hull sides were painted while, only the deck was varnished. Grew was also moving into the cruiser market at this point. The age of varnished mahogany sides was passing by 1960's and Grew starting building boat using designs from the rather blandly named Cruisers, Inc. These were made of cheaper plywood for painted lapstrake hulls. In a few years the era even of plywood lapstrake was coming to an end as well and Grew found itself facing a complete re-think of boat building materials and methods. Carpentry was out, glue and glass were in.

Myles Jeffrey: The next generation (and two more from Will Dowsett)

You never know what you are going to end up doing. Grow up on a farm never even seeing a gas engine or a boat larger than a fishing punt and you end up building high speed motorboats. Myles Jeffery and Lloyd Shepherd were both farm boys from small towns in Ontario who ended up in the mahogany runabout business.

Jeffery started out as an apprentice at the Gilbert Boat works before the Great War. Like so many boat shop workers he was a transient tradesman and moved from one shop to another. After Gilbert's he worked at Consolidated and several other shops after that. This was and still is normal in the industry- ask anyone in the business even today and you'll hear the same story- worked there, then there and now here. They go where the work is. In the 1920's Jeffrey ended up working for Chris Smith family's new enterprise, known by the jaunty name of Chris-Craft.



Racing rivals Deb Campbell and Vince Ryan pose on Campbell's boat Sky Breeze. Campbell owned a funeral home and Ryan a lumberyard. Photo Manotick Boat Club Archives

In the Chris Craft plant, one team of workers cut the boards and frames out of mahogany and oak. Each piece was cut into a specific pattern. The pieces were moved along to the hull assembly area, where the basic hull was put together and then to the painting and varnishing stage and then to the final assembly stage, where the engine, steering gear and other hardware and upholstery was attached. Myles Jeffery was one the very first men they hired and with his experience he was promoted to foreman heading up the hull assembly team. The “foreman” position was usually given to a master tradesman, whether a mechanic, machinist, woodturner or upholsterer. This might have seemed like a comedown to some purist craftsmen, but the monotony was relieved somewhat by the high pay, which for Jeffery was \$220 for four weeks or around \$2,600 a year, which is close to a professional level salary (engineer). The assemblers learned only what they needed to know to do their job, no more. The impression that I got from those who knew Myles Jeffery the Boat Builder was that he was not a patient person nor a kindly tempered man, but good luck finding such a person in a 1920's factory. The picture is that of a cranky, moody, demanding, ill tempered, no-excuses shop boss with a tendency to burn

through staff. Most bosses like that survive as they seem to have knack of finding a few hard-core loyalists who develop a thick skin and can put up with the occasional explosions and can keep the production flowing in spite of the turnover.

Chris-Craft started off with a 22-foot runabout, initially powered by a Curtiss OX-5 V-8 aircraft engine. It was a hit and soon the product line expanded with bigger 26- and 28-foot boats with bigger engines and smaller 17-foot economy models. The assembly line concept was a qualified success. The business model was successful, but wood is, and always will be an unpredictable substance, unlike steel and even at the hull assembly stage would still have to be shaved and planed and sawed and cut here and there to go together, regardless of the accuracy of the original pattern. The company began making their own engines in house, heavier than the lightweight Curtiss but much more robust to cope with the high-torque, high power needs of planing hull runabouts.

When the bust came, not in 1929 with the stock market crash or 1930, where there was brief spring rebound, but actually in the spring of 1931 when the economy began to fall in earnest and the mass layoffs began. The big corporations and banks ran out of cash by 1932 and many US and Canadian businesses were in a state of functional bankruptcy for the next few years. Needless to say, the want list was put aside for the need list. People did not stop buying boats altogether, but sales dropped to a tenth of what they had been in the late 20's, or worse. Other than the inheriting rich, there were still a surprising number of individuals who had money, such as senior military officers and civil servants, doctors, undertakers and presumably bankruptcy lawyers and who would still spend money on a boat. For many builders who had financed big capital expansions, such as Ditchburn, the low sales simply could not generate enough cash to pay interest costs and they had to close down. Ironically, it was the small family shops that survived, such as Dowsett's, Gilbert's or Minett Shields, which had little debt and could scabble along with minimal sales. Chris-Craft mothballed most of its plant and laid off of most of its staff, including its most expensive foreman, Myles Jeffrey in 1931.



The Ryan's at speed in 1936 Shamrock II. This Jeffrey replaced the original Gilbert racing launch Shamrock. The old man, Mr. Ryan weighing down the stern was never crazy about son Vince (at wheel) obsession with boats, be he got used to it. Photo Manotick Boat Club Archives

With nothing in the U.S. Jeffrey went back to work at Gilbert's in 1932 for a cruiser project that Fred had landed, the hull of the Skylark, which had been ordered by Victor Sifton (brother of Sir Clifford). The Skylark hull alone took up almost all of the Gilbert workshop and the topsides were literally scraping the ceiling. It was impossible to finish the cabin in the shop so after it was launched it was towed across the river to Hutchinson's to do the finishing and brightwork. Alas, this was the last boat at Gilbert's of any consequence until 1937. Gilbert survived on repair work and small jobs until then.



Jeffrey's Athens workshop, with boat hoist in place Photo Manotick Boat Club Archives

After the Skylark contract, Myles Jeffrey returned to his hometown of Athens, Ontario. Athens is a small, landlocked village, there isn't even a river through it. Charleston Lake is several km away, Big Rideau 27 km away, in both cases down mostly rough dirt roads. He bought a nice brick house on Henry Street and converted a former blacksmith shop in the back yard into a boat shop. The shop had two stories, the boats were built in the second story and then once completed were run out of a metal gantry system which would lower the craft to the ground. Early on the winch broke and a boat went crashing down to the ground. This is a good 10-foot drop and these type of accidents probably didn't do a boat any good causing all the planks on one side to shear off their screws or just as bad to throw the hull out of alignment. Either way it's a lot of extra work to eat in to your profit. The second story work area was about 25 feet long by maybe seven feet wide by six feet high. It was probably more comfortable for Jeffery, who was about 5'5". When I visited in the mid 1980's there were still some mahogany pieces stored in the ceiling rafters. There was a stove, bare bulb lighting and a table saw. There was a work bench at one side of the shop. Building season started in the fall and continued on all

winter until June of the next year, when the boats were launched, tested, the bugs ironed out and finally sent on their way. The boat would be rolled into the first-floor work area where the engine would be installed, the seats and upholstery fitted and the hardware attached. This way a second boat could be underway while the earlier one waited below for delivery of finalizing components. Like many builders, the work was done generally from September to June and then, as he put it himself, he would “fish and fool around all summer”. Boat deliveries were usually made in late May or early June when the cottage owner would open up for the season.



22-foot Jeffrey at Manotick Club Boat Show, 1980's Photo by author

The boat that Jeffrey began building was his own design. It had the hull and general styling of a Chris Craft but the low-profile deck of a Gar Wood. In the late 1920's Vince Ryan had taken out the 18 hp Erd out of the original Shamrock, which had been seriously underpowered and put in a 125 hp Chrysler, so now it was seriously overpowered. Like all long deck launches the big

power boost gave it a little more speed but a great deal of instability. At full rip the bow would rear out of the water and the boat would be riding on its aft bottom. This was ok as long as the water was calm and you could hold it, but if you tried to turn at speed the boat would roll over on its side and throw the passengers out. This was the same problem Gilbert's had experienced with the Insurgent. The Ryan's wanted a more modern planing hulled boat.



One of the earliest Jeffrey boats built in 1934, the Zipalong, in front of its boathouse. Photo Manotick Boat Club Archives

The Jeffrey boat never had a builder's plate on it. However their signature were two glove compartment doors on the dash, one door was for odd items and the other was part of a seven-foot-long box in which to put the boat hook and paddle. At 19-22 feet and a midsize hull by industry standards was still pretty big and heavy. The boat hull itself probably weighed about 2000 pounds and the engine a further 700 and once you added four riders, a full tank of gas and other bits and pieces you came close to two tons of weight once the boat headed out on the water. Along with the boat trailers of the day, which usually converted farm trailers, no car,

certainly not a Ford and not even a Packard could easily pull this load, at least not very far and not for long before burning the clutch or blowing the transmission. It wasn't until the 1950's with the big V-8's did family cars have enough beef to easily move a boat and trailer around. You hired the local garage to tow the boat and put it in the lake and there it would stay, sheltering in a boathouse until the fall.



The boats were built in the second story and lowered onto a trailer when complete. Photo Manotick Classic Boat Club Archives

Jeffrey's own trailer was a four-wheeled farm cart style with the axles at the front and back. This distributed the weight well and made it easy to move the boat around in the yard but it was slow going on the highway. Farm trailers tend to weave at speeds over 20 mph on the highway. Modern double axel boat trailers have the wheels well back and close together which eliminates the weaving effect and allows safe pulling at modern highway speeds.

The business had started slowly, with one boat, the first, Zipalong to Lionel Williams in 1934. Jubilant and Bluebird came out in 1935 and the orders started to come in. You could race these boats. You could race the long old deck launches, which were fast on the straight but slow on the curve. Up until the 1930's the long launches were the fast boats of choice at the annual Rideau Ferry Regatta. The only really fast modern boat was the 26-foot Chris Craft owned by Mr. Arnstein down the Lake. The Gran D was a fairly fast boat of the type, possible the fastest and it could wind up to 30 mph. But that was the limit.



And ready for transport. Jeffrey was sufficiently established that he no longer had to deliver his boats in a suit and tie Photo Manotick Classic Boat Club

From the looks point the runabouts had a lower profile and were much prettier than similar Gar Woods or Chris Crafts Jeffrey himself had built. The 30's boats, Wiseman's Golden Girl and Dr. Wirt's Connemara looked good and rode the water nicely but were not that fast, mostly due to the relatively weak 75 hp Kermath powerplants. Judson's Miss Joan was boxy and beamy to accommodate the big engine, but it was also the fastest. Ironically, it was the plain-Jane utilities that were the most pleasant to ride in. You could move around, talk to the other riders, get out of a picnic basket, fish, and party all you liked. In the runabouts you stayed in your cockpit seat until the ride was over. You couldn't really stand up and move without difficulty. The cute little gentlemen's runabouts like Felix and Just Fiddlin was basically sports cars and could accommodate two adults and a small child and that was it.

Zipalong was underpowered with a 25 Hp Model A Ford engine. Jubilant was fitted with the new 85 hp ford flathead V-8 and this gave it some decent speed. But it wasn't until Vince Ryan's Shamrock II was built with its 125 Hp Chrysler that the local speed demons took notice. It could wind up to 35 mph. Ben Wiseman had Golden Girl fitted out with a V-8 Ford. The Ford was considerably less powerful than Ryan's Chrysler and he exchanged it for a straight 8 Kermath (about 110 hp) but still couldn't beat Ryan. Lyman Judson killed them all when he pulled up to the 1938 race line with Miss Joan with its two huge exhaust pipes and its powerhouse noise coming from a 220 Hispano Suiza. It was impossible to best this monster engine and Miss Joan pretty much held the title of fastest boat on the lake until the war came.

Bigger and better wasn't always the answer. George and his son Austin Crate ordered a 17-foot speed hull from Jeffrey in 1938. It was the most unusual and beautiful of the boats, a small design jewel with its curving lines and sharp tumblehome, butternut decks and sides. It was powered by a 75 hp Gray Marine Phantom and could do about 40 mph at top speed. The speeders were always tuning their boats up. After the war, the local stock car mechanic, Eddie Mars put a bored-out Mercury V-8 complete with Offenhauser heads into Tom Brown's boat, complete with exhaust pipes poking out the sides rather than the stern. Jeffrey made very little money off the racing but did more for the kick of watching his boats being pushed to their limit. He sponsored his own race -the Jeffrey Cup was for the big boats, which of course were all Jeffrey boats. The Rideau Ferry Regatta, held in August each year, was a big deal and drew crowds of 8-10,000 spectators. even during the depression years. The event also brought in some serious money and serious contenders, such as Charles "Chas" Wheaton (from Muskoka) who brought his Minett-Shields Shadow II and won the 1938 225 class races. Shadow had the same engine as Miss Joan, a 1917 Hispano Suiza, but it was a true three-point hydroplane based on the Arno Apel Ventnor design -the next generation of racing boats. At speed it would rise up

on two forward sponsons like a seaplane and it could go well over 60 mph. Runabouts would continue to get faster but they would always be in second place now. Hydros were the future. Gar Wood wrote them off as “paper boats“, so lightly built they were little more than delicate engine mounts. Unlike the runabouts and launches they could not double as cottage excursion boats. Racing was all they could do.

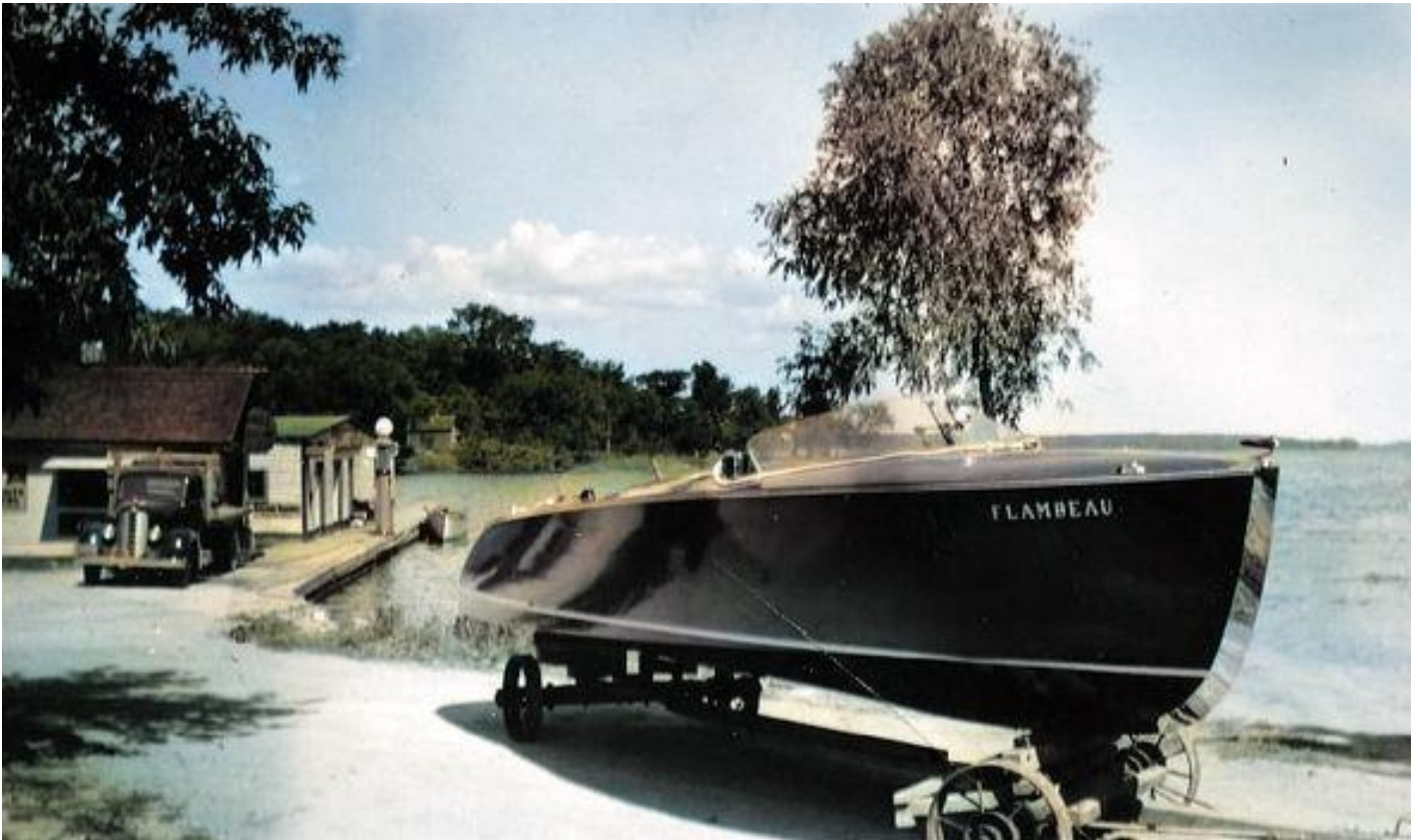


Not being rude at all, Delbert “Deb” Campbell of Charleston Lake pauses with trophies. The competition was almost always other Jeffrey boats. Photo Manotick Classic Boat Club Archives

My great uncle, John Coombs was completely the opposite. He ran a textile company in Smith’s Falls and had a cottage down on the southern shore of Lower Rideau Lake. He ordered a 22-foot triple cockpit runabout. It was completed and delivered in 1938. Coombs was afraid of it. His wife would nag him to take visiting relatives out and he would pause thoughtfully and scan the lake for signs of ripples and the sky for any scheming clouds and if the coast was absolutely clear he would take the guests out on the lake for a dead slow run. The boat rarely ran higher

than idle and as a result the 6-cylinder Buchanan Bulldog engine ran hot almost continuously as the water pump never went fast enough to pump the needed cooling water. When he returned to the boathouse he slowed down and shut the engine off and drifted carefully into the boathouse. Eventually the Buchanan burned out and was replaced by a 6-cylinder Kermath.

Dowsett: Going out, but in style



Launch day for Dowsett's last project, the Flambeau, in 1938. Photo provided by Graeme H. Beattie

In the meantime, things had been quiet at Dowsett's. The big, long deck launches that had made the firm's name in the 1920's were obsolete and after Walgradia in 1931 and Frowildo in 1933, no more launches came out of the Portland shop. But Dowsett wasn't finished yet. Will Dowsett was in his late sixties by 1938, but he did pull two more big boat contracts. This time he used plans from Douglas Van Patten, a sharp young boat designer who had designed the Miss Canada racers for Harold Wilson and Greavette. These were mahogany runabouts, both remarkably pleasing to the eye, with their rounded deck and contoured hull lines. Flambeau, a 21-foot triple cockpit runabout and its utility styled sister boat the Sea Eye, a copy built in an open cockpit form, both ran through the water like a Cadillac on a new highway. Even with plans, success is

not assured, and it takes experience to make a boat work. This was Will Dowsett's last stand.



Sea Eye today

Jeffrey: Postwar



Sedan hardtop Jeffrey circa 1948. Launching in progress Photo Manotick Boat Club Archives

1941 was the last year Jeffrey built boats before the wartime shutdown, evidently finishing old contracts. None of them could be used anyway due to rationing and had to be put immediately in storage. Jeffrey went back to work for Gilberts while the shop worked on its one big torpedo/rescue boat in 1942 and he found other work in 1943 and 1944. The war work petered out in 1944 and he returned home and started work on three outstanding orders, finishing Good Grief for Lloyd Johnson in 1946 and three more in 1947 and 1948. Jeffrey was a production man and knew how to work fast. But he also knew how to apply the care as needed; a longtime Athens resident, Bob Purcell, remembered going into the shop (Purcell was working as a delivery boy for the local hardware store that ordered fasteners for the shop) and watched as Jeffrey ran his hand plane along the edge of a long plank, a single wood curl growing ever larger as he did so. Assuming a 2,000-hour work year, this comes to about 660 hours per boat, and this means from an engine, boxes of fittings, a pile of lumber, stains, caulk, paint, screws, varnish into a complete watercraft from a 60-year-old man working mostly by himself. From time to

time he would draft his daughters into setting in the wood plugs. Other Assistants and helpers came and went. Few, except for his brother-in-law, Perley Chant, could put up with his moody personality and crankiness. One man I talked to wandered into the shop as a boy and was blown back out with a blast of curses. According to Frank Wykes, who knew Jeffrey (but didn't work for him) noted the man would get worked up over something and start fulminating over oppression and wacky conspiracy theories. It's a pity Jeffrey did not live in the modern age, I'm sure he would have loved social media; maybe he would have been easier to work with if he had another avenue to vent his outrage.



1940's Jeffrey utility at a boat show, sometime in the 1980's *Photo Manotick Boat Club Archives*

One of his less clever moves was to build his early boats with steel screws. His old employer Chris Craft used exclusively phosphor bronze screws which did not corrode and could be easily removed if you wanted to replace a plank (the Chris Craft plant would send a precut plank

through the mail if you specified which one needed replacing). The early Jeffrey boats would develop black stains as water encouraged the fungus but when you wanted to clean or replace the plank the steel screw was swollen with rust and one turn of the screwdriver would break off the screw head leaving the restorer up that well-known creek. Later he used plated steel screws, this was a little better but not much as the plating would eventually come off the rust process would start later, but it would still wreck the screw.

Most of the boats he built were entirely by his own hand. He had to subcontract some items. The seats were made by an upholsterer in nearby Elgin and were built like house furniture, with steel springs overlaid with burlap and a strange stringy brown substance that was called ‘horsehair’. Horsehair was common in upholstered furniture at the time (until the 1930’s), when foam rubber became the norm. The horsehair substance could be formed to provide curved edges and hide the protruding metal springs. I had to take off the covering on my 1936 Jeffrey as the ties for the springs had broken and had to be replaced. The “horsehair” I uncovered did not seem to be animal, but rather some sort of dried root matter. It was nasty stuff and once it finds its shape, the strands all stuck to each other and that’s it. I suspect it was a Depression substitute; actual horsehair was not cheap. If you disturb it, then you get lumps under fabric; I was never able to get rid of the spring bulges. The early seats were finished in leather, and the original colour was burgundy.

The price for a simple 19-foot Jeffrey utility was \$1,500. There were four equal progress payments, in this case of \$362.50 each, the first to start, the second when the framing was complete, the third after the woodwork was done and the final payment on delivery. Generally the profit on the boats was about 25-30% or about \$450-600 per boat or assuming three boats a year a total of \$1,350-1,800 per year and add to that odd jobs, repairs service in the 30’s and 40’s he probably earned, at the very most about \$2,000 per year. This works out to be about \$1.00 an hour, assuming a 2,000-hour work year. It wasn’t much money and perhaps somewhat less than many small-town tradesman, whose journeyman salaries in the early postwar era tended to be about \$2,500 to \$3,000 per year. Jeffrey never made close to the money he had pulled in with Chris Craft.



Jeffrey 17 foot speedster Felix with original owner Austin Crate Author photo



Jeffrey 17-foot speedster Felix today with longtime owner Lorayne Bradshaw Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

During the war, gas was rationed. Obviously, if you had an essential service such as milk delivery, a medical practice, or a funeral home, you would have more gas, but still it would have to be only for the business. You received a weekly ration card, but where you drove, or what food you bought or whatever was still up to you. Mr. Judson decided to use some of his accumulated coupons for a boat ride around the lake. It was hard to do this quietly as he fired up *Miss Joan's* Hispano engine, particularly on a lake devoid of any engine noise. He apparently netted more than a few dirty looks from his neighbors over the next few weeks, but can you really blame him? I wonder how our impatient generation would deal with things like *conscription* and *rationing*.



Buzz Wiseman's Jeffrey Golden Girl. Photo Manotick Boat Club Archives

Once he returned from the wartime work, boat orders started coming back in. One of the first boat was a hardtop utility used by Smiths Falls man to commute to his cottage every Saturday. The hardtop had curving lines which was unusual since most tended to be boxy and practical. Hardtops tended to subtract from the boat's sleek looks but they paid for themselves when the weather turned. Jeffrey did not grow. His space never expanded beyond the backyard shop and the shop itself never added more space or more tools or more staff. There's no magic in a small business. The more staff you have and the more product you sell, the more money you make. Jeffrey had the ability but by himself his income would always be limited, no matter how hard he worked. He usually had an apprentice or a helper, in one case a young kid named Frank Wykes, but they came and went. His customers were mostly businessmen who knew how to run businesses with employees and they could afford luxury items like boats. Jeffrey never built an inboard boat for himself. As a fisherman, all he needed was a little 12-foot boat (a Peterborough) and a 4.5 hp outboard. He did experiment with an outboard in the fifties, which

was shaped like a mini version of one of his big inboards but was too heavy to be useful.

By the early 1950's the boats were all utilities, as was the norm. However Jeffrey, like Chris-Craft incorporated runabout like qualities to improve the old prewar utility appearance and give them a racier look, with more rounded garboard planks. The boats were getting bigger as well, with wider beams. Bob Layng, one of the earliest customers in 1935 bought a new boat in 1946 which he called the Pardon Me and promptly sold it to Ken Hughes. Hughes ordered the successor, the Pardon Me Too in 1956. Pardon Me Too was Jeffrey's last runabout. It had the rounded garboards of a Shepherd and had a very Shepherd like appearance. The boat hull alone cost \$4,000 and the 325 Cadillac Crusader engine another \$2,000. You could hear this boat all over the lake even when it was off in the distance and watch it charge past in a blast of noise and spray looking like it was going through a brick wall.



Pardon Me Too, the second last boat Jeffrey built before his retirement. Photo Manotick Boat Club Archives

Jeffrey was in his seventies now but still managed two boats a year out of his shop. He finally hung up his shingle in 1957 with Viking II, built for local realtor Will Kerfoot. He stayed active in the business to a limited degree, still serving as a referee at the Regatta and was working on small sailboat when he died in 1963 at the age of seventy-nine.



19-foot Jeffrey built for Alfred and Ethel Lang in 1938, the husband retired from the insurance business the previous year and moved in the summer to the Rideau Lake cottage. He last used the boat in his 80's and still lived an active life to the age of 94. The couple in the boat Mel and Pearl Evans bought the Lang property and the boat was part of the purchase. They had it repaired and re-varnished (it's all original) and are shown here at the Rideau Ferry show in the late 1980's. Author Photo

Jeffrey would never be anything but a one-man operation with one helper, as needed. He knew

that, and I think he was perfectly happy without the burden of a big-time operation like Chris-Craft, looking after hundreds of staff, dealing with endless headaches of competition, labour unrest and economic downturns. By contrast Lloyd Shepherd was a businessman who could plan big and manage a big staff and accordingly it was Shepherd that came to dominate the post war runabout market in Ontario. Jeffrey worked hard and built 30 boats after the war, almost all between 20-22 feet long. Shepherd built over 900 boats, from 14-foot outboards to huge 30-foot day cruisers, weighing several tons.

Shepherd Boats: A little bit of everything



Engine vent plate off 22-foot runabout Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

Shepherd boats always had a distinctive look. There were beamy, handsome craft with rounded garboards, and they were easy to recognize, particularly when one is bearing down on you while being driven by a ten-year-old boy who can barely see over the top of the windshield. This was the author's introduction to the sight of a Shepherd, just under the newly built Rideau Ferry Bridge in 1970.

Lloyd Shepherd was born in Beamsville, on the Niagara peninsula in 1889. His maternal grandfather had fought with Isaac Brock and had settled in the area after the 1812 war. As a

Colonel, he had been given a grant of two thousand acres. Shepherd's father moved to Detroit to get into carriage making but had given up this highly competitive business and moved back home to set up a peach farm, so Shepherd grew up in a farming environment. However it turned out that unlike his father his future was not in farming but carriage making, or its modern equivalent, trucks, and cars. In 1910, he married Kathleen Marsh and had one son, Howard, and two daughters. He served in the Royal Flying Corps during the Great War and afterward took a number of jobs eventually setting up a business building truck bodies for the Dodge Brothers. At this point he was working out of whatever space he could rent, but was steadily building a reputation, if still not much of a business. In 1930 he was able to find an investor in Sydney Symondson, a recent arrival from Winnipeg, "a well-known and respected citizen" as the local paper put it (i.e. he had money). Symondson's reason for leaving the Peg was not mentioned, but it sure was a lot warmer in the Peninsula. The new partnership was Symondson and Shepherd Limited. They purchased a lot at 207 St Paul Street West and built a 66-foot wide, 100-foot-deep building of cinderblock, with table saws, metal bending equipment, lathes, and drill presses. Shepherd was already thinking ahead and had purchased all electric motor-powered shop equipment, unusual for a time when many small factories still used the awkward and dangerous overhead belt and pulley power system. The paper described it as a factory, but it was a modest shop only a little larger than a car garage and the work was on customer order only. Cars were still something of an indulgence at the time, but people needed trucks and vans. Still the economy was hitting bottom, and most small businessmen who had a truck were most likely to keep it going rather than go into debt for a new one; the business also offered auto repairs. Symondson and Shepherd survived but was just barely alive; Shepherd began to consider other lines of business. Symondson had lost interest by 1934, and the business dissolved. Shepherd moved to a new location back across the CNR tracks at the corner of St. Paul Crescent and Pelham Road.

Shepherd was an outdoorsman and enjoyed fishing and hunting, particularly moose hunting, he was familiar with boats, but mostly rowing boats and small outboards, a market already utterly dominated by the Peterborough gang. What about inboards? This market was coming back to life, albeit slowly, Gidley in Penetang, Myles Jeffrey way out in Eastern Ontario, the reconstituted Greavette Boats in Gravenhurst. All were offering mid-size, mid range planing hull runabouts. Shepherd must have known his location was a natural disadvantage, Niagara had few inland waters, the big lakes were in the Muskoka's, Kawartha's and the Rideau and St. Lawrence systems, any boats he built would have the additional cost of shipping by rail. Shepherd had been mulling over the boat thing as early as 1931, and incorporated the

company Shepherd Boats Limited, but given the times, this venture was put back into the icebox for a few years. By 1934, the worst seemed to be over, and he decided to segue into boat building.

At the time most truck bodies were galvanized sheet steel over wood frame, he had woodworking equipment and staff knowhow already on hand; how difficult could it be at least to build a boat? In 1935 Shepherd put out an ad in 1934 for “Shepherd Boats and Equipment” – “Offer Their New 1935 Craft”. Those boats and equipment were as follows:

The Niagara 14 Foot Mahogany Utility Boats

15 ½- foot Runabouts

18 1/3-foot Speedsters

22-foot DeLux (sic) Runabouts

Agents and installers for Kermath engines 8 hp to 450 hp.

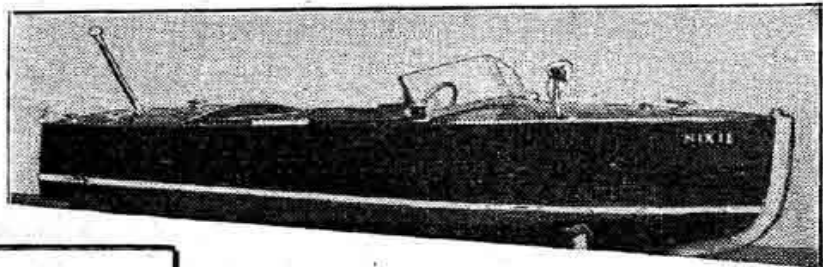
BOATS—BOATS—BOATS

SHEPHERD BOATS AND EQUIPMENT

OFFER THEIR

New Advance 1935 Craft

15½ ft. Runabouts
18'4" Speedsters.
22 ft. DeLux Runabouts
Speed, 20 to 40 m.p.h.



SEE THE NEW
**Niagara 14 ft.
Mahogany Utility
Boats**

NEW LOW PRICE.

*Let Us Quote You
On Our New Craft
or New Installation*

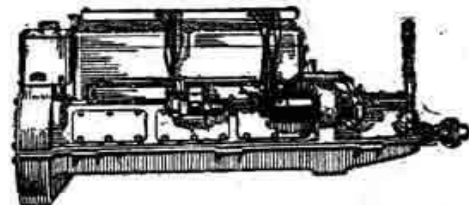
ESTIMATES FREE

NOTICE—We will be moving to our new plant this fall. Boats stored and taken care of at the water front for storage in our spacious new plant.

ANNOUNCEMENT: We have been appointed dealers for the famous Kermath Marine Engines in the Niagara District. Enquiries solicited.

KERMATH

8 H.P.
TO
450 H.P.



ST. PAUL CRESCENT AT PELHAM ROAD

Shepherd Boats begins; they had yet to build anything

“Let us quote you on your new boat or new [engine] installation – estimates fee” was noted on the ad, noting that this was still strictly a custom order operation; the customer came in and picked the boat or engine they wanted. The ad also noted that the firm was relocating to a new shop down by the St. Catharines waterfront. The boat pictured in the ad was basic and rather squarish, when Shepherd did find a customer, possibly his first, the this was an 18-foot twin cockpit runabout with lines very reminiscent of the swept curving stern style of Earl Barnes; Barnes did provide design services to Shepherd after the war and most likely at the beginning as well; Barnes closed his shop in 1937 and went to work for Moffat Industries UK for two years, returning in 1939, so I don’t know what design services, if any, he provided during this break. This boat’s lines are very reminiscent of Barnes’ style and the curves would eventually come to define the Shepherd design style, although a lot less radical than Barnes’ own creations. The Niagara Mahogany Utility boat is also a mystery- was it an outboard? Also what was the 18-foot Speedster? The first boat had slick lines, but it was a traditional family runabout. All this line may simply have been plans, ideas customers could study and then pick out one they liked.

Boats began to trickle out of the shop, but not enough to truly identify as a boat building business. Shepherd Boats were a no-show in the 1937 Federal Government study on the shipping and boat building industry, while other little-known builders such as Oliver Berry, James Dowkes and J. P. Tinkiss were listed. In 1938 he secured plans for a speedboat designed by Bruce Crandall, a 135 cu in class racing boat known as the Crandall Flyer. The Flyer design was popular, as much for its streamlined looks as speed. This boat was raced before the war, but its owner seemed to have ongoing problems with the Ford 60 engine power plant, which kept throwing piston rods. The owner is not known, the only photograph clearly shows the driver as Lloyd’s son Howard, so perhaps this was sort of a demo boat, there to stir interest in the brand. The Shepherd-Crandall, known as Miss Shepherd, participated in races in the late 1930’s and early 1940’s. It was last seen in a field north of Lindsay in 1959.

The 1934 ad noted a move to a waterfront location in St. Catharines; did it ever happen? As near as I can tell, this did not; the business was still way too small for such an expansion. At best 10-15 Shepherd boats were built between 1935 and 1939. The big contract for 1939 were two sedan cabin runabouts, 23 feet long twin 85 hp Kermath engines, one such “Sheppard” was sold to Frank Leslie, who had a cottage on Lake of Bays, and the same style of boat to John David Eaton of Lake Muskoka. A Shepherd, this particular model was

actually advertised in the Eaton's Catalogue for 1939 and 1940, most likely the most expensive item you could order from the company (Eaton's did offer small outboard boats and canoes as a matter of course). Apparently Eaton's would also finance your boat purchase, monthly payments, much like boats today. In 1939 there was a short article in the Niagara-on-the-Lake paper that Shepherd had planned to move to town. The planned location was at the very mouth of the Niagara River, between Collingwood and the tail end of Nelson Street, just behind Ricardo. This property included an old pumphouse and a wood lighthouse building. This kept getting delayed; coming events would force the issue.



Howard Shepherd at the helm of Crandall designed 135 Class racer Miss Shepherd Photo Dave Van de Laar archive

In the early evening of October 10, 1940, there was a fire at the St. Catharines plant in the frame works (main assembly) building. Someone called the fire department, but all their trucks had already responded to an alarm at the nearby General Motors plant. The firemen

spent precious time pulling out hoses before they found out the GM plant alarm was false and that there was a real fire elsewhere. By the time the trucks made it to the Shepherd works it was too late. The workers were able to pull away two finished hulls that were outside away from the building; that was all they could save. The building was leveled and two boats still inside, one under construction and the second ready for delivery and costing \$5000, as well as drill presses and all of the other machinery and equipment was ruined. Mr. Shepherd had been in Hamilton all evening and on the way back home the traffic was stopped by a truck burning on the highway. The fire chief at the scene happened to mention that it was a busy night for his crew as they had already been called both to the nonexistent fire at General Motors and then to a real fire at the Shepherd plant. Surveying the damage the next day Shepherd estimated his losses at 15-20 thousand dollars, not all of which was covered by insurance.



Chris Grant's Lady of the Lake, a 22-footer, on it's hoist, Rideau Lake Photo Chris Grant

There was a real question about what was going to happen with commercial pleasure boat building with the nation at war. Shepherd at least could sell to Americans, who were just a few hundred yards away by water. The government had been dithering about full mobilization but the collapse of France earlier in June meant that Canada would now have to requisition all ship and boatyards to build war materiel. The new shop was an L-shaped building with a barn styled roof and a small semi-circular office tucked in the crook of the wings.



The new plant at Niagara on the Lake, the production line wing at the left with the garage doors, the finishing wing on the right with the four windows, the administration office in the semi-circular structure.

The main wing was an assembly line, the smaller wing serving as the varnish and finishing room. As noted, the wartime production act could force you to divert production, but given the big projects for the navy, you would be foolish not to take advantage of the contracts,

which was basically billed at cost plus 10% operating profit. From what I gather, boats in progress could still be completed; the last prewar project was the most unusual boat Shepherd would ever build. It was a wood hulled 65-foot sailing ketch named the Niagara Southwind. Perhaps this project indicated that the future lay in the big sailboat and motor yacht business. The motor yacht business ultimately prevailed, sailboats were not the boat of the moment, they would be, but years later with a different company and with different materials (and a couple of former Shepherd employees!). The Niagara Southwind was last seen at a yard in New Orleans, unpainted and needing some love and deep pockets. It was later damaged during Hurricane Katrina, and like much of the Big Easy's wooden structures, likely gone to landfill.



Shepherd built sloop Niagara Southwind, at anchor



The Niagara Southwind at full sail, sometime after 1965, given the flag.

Shepherd did not have the staff or the facilities for the big Fairmile contracts undertaken by J. J. Taylor or Minett Shields, but it did build motor torpedo boats for the RCN, a guaranteed run of revenues and profits, but this would eventually run out. On April 19, 1945, as the war was winding down Shepherd announced they intended to buy adjacent waterfront land and install a 100-ton crane. The crane would allow them to pick big yachts out of the water and haul them up on land for storage or repair. Apparently, Shepherd was still unsure about what the runabout market would be like after the war and were planning their focus on repair and storage of work boats and luxury yachts. They stated that they intended to eventually employ 60 people, although they didn't specify what all those employees would be doing. As it was, by 1949, the employees totaled about 25 and all of them were engaged in building runabouts. The 100-ton crane idea as well as the yacht service operation was shelved. Still, Niagara was not an optimal place to make boats. As noted, aside from nearby Hamilton Bay, there was almost nothing in the way of lakes or rivers (aside from the Great Lakes Ontario and Erie) so to be successful, the company had to market and ship anywhere, particularly Muskoka, Kawartha, Rideau, and the St. Lawrence. Boat trailers as we know them today did not exist, therefore the company made frequent use of rail shipping, sometimes finding customers across Canada, and in one case as far away as Manitoba. Lloyd sent his son Howard out to Lake Winnipeg to zip around on the water as a way to demonstrate the product to the local cottagers. They were able to find a U. S. distributor as well, at Jafco Marine Basin (Owned by John A. Frauenheim, hence the acronym) in Buffalo, New York.



Coming or Going
THE OUTSTANDING VALUE FOR 1950 IS THE
SHEPHERD

Acclaimed by boat enthusiasts everywhere as America's outstanding runabout for 1950—the SHEPHERD is available in 17' and 22' models—with Chrysler or Gray power! At better dealers everywhere!

Exclusive U. S. Distributors

JAFCO MARINE BASIN, Inc., BUFFALO 7, N. Y.



The Shepherd Boat Line for 1950

<u>Model</u>	<u>Length</u>	<u>Engine</u>	<u>H.P.</u>	<u>Speed</u>
Utility	17 Foot	Gray Phantom 6	125	n/a
		Chrysler Ace	112	
Utility	22 Foot	Chrysler Crown	140	n/a
		Gray Phantom 6	125	
		Gray Fireball 6	140	



22-foot Shepherd Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

This was Shepherd's classic period. Initially the company produced two runabouts, the convertible which was 17 feet long and cost \$3,000 and the Sportsman model which was 22 feet long and cost \$5,000. Ish might be the best word, there were a range of engines, for the 18, from the Gray Phantom 4 75hp to the Phantom 6 cylinder at 125 hp, for the utility, ranging, at least for Jafco's American customers, from a low of \$3195 to \$3650. The utility had the engine under a box behind the front seat and a straight propellor shaft drive. The 18-foot deluxe came with a V-Drive, the engine was right at the stern and reverse tilted to a gearbox which powered an output shaft. This avoided the awkward presence of the engine (and noise amidships) and gave the passenger cockpit the appearance of more space. In fact it didn't change much of anything except cost \$750 more. The 22-foot utility power ranged from Chrysler Crown at 125 hp to a Chrysler Royal Special at 165 hp. Oddly the 22-foot V-drive went back to using the Crown, was the torque from the 125 hp engine all that gearbox could handle, that would appear to be the case. The supreme being was the 27-foot Express Cruiser (which as noted, could come in both sedan and open top format, with twin Crowns for power. The price was supreme as well, at \$11,950, at a time when the 24-foot Greavette Streamliner was about \$8 grand.

The Sportsman was the boat that observers usually identify as a Shepherd. What was interesting about these boats is that there was a real willingness to take on difficult carpentry. The boats were designed with curved and rounded hull features and the stern pieces, where the deck, sides and stern met were complex pieces of woodworking. Most runabouts of the 20-30's, speaking strictly from a construction standpoint, were a bunch of boards; all same-sized planks either twisted or steam-shaped and then fastened onto the framing. A few deep pocketed enthusiasts who were willing to give builders like John Hacker, or Earl Barnes the green light to design and build some very adventurous shapes, but most boats of the time were flat decked, and slab sided, practical and lower in cost.

Unlike the pre-war runabouts with their airplane cockpit style passenger arrangements, the Sportsman and Convertible were both utilities, you could move around, change seats, and sit where you liked. The engine was covered by an engine box which could be lifted up for easy repair and maintenance access. When set down the engine box served as an uncomfortable seat. On the Rideau and St. Lawrence, it was the Sportsman that became the signature "Shepherd". If you could afford a Shepherd, you could afford the big one. Still, in the earlier years 1948 to 1955 the balance of 18 and 22 footers sold seemed about even.

The new engines that came out in the 1930's and 1940s' had thermostats, oil cooling devices, better carburetors, and ignition systems. You turned the key, and they always went. They didn't have bad days and good days the way earlier engines did and the power to weight ratio was considerably increased. When they didn't work it was due to serious engine wear and a sign of major repairs being needed. The Shepherd plant had yet another fire in 1948. This time the firemen caught it before any serious damage could be done, but the interior of one of the buildings was scorched and the stern of a finished boat was charred. It was, as the source noted "written off", but was it? It wouldn't be that hard to scarp on planks to a boat to make it viable again, the rest of the hull was undamaged; if someone has a boat from 1948 and there is some odd woodwork near this stern, this may be your boat.



Doug and Nancy Porter do a final cleanup of their 22-foot Shepherd at a show in the 1990's
Photo Manotick Boat Club Archives

The factory began expanding in the 1950's. A second production line was added, with the same configuration as the original, a line leading down to a water slip. The varnish and finishing wing was extended, and a showroom was added on the north side. Even with the additions it was still a cramped workspace, the production areas were windowless, the only illumination was from overhead light bulbs, although the plant electrician replaced these with fluorescent light later on when this became widely available.



The final version of the works, Circa 1955, with a second production line, expanded finishing room (under sign) and showroom at top left of photo.

By 1953 the 22-footer was the most popular. From time-to-time Shepherd would build the Express runabout, 25-27 feet long with twin 135 hp 6-cylinder engines Chrysler Crowns. Like all Shepherds the engines were in the stern and used a V-Drive gearbox to power the prop shaft. This is a really big boat, weighing about three or four tons; one owner described its gas mileage as 5,000 feet to the gallon. Like the two smaller models it is also a utility and there's plenty of space not just to walk, but literally to wander around. A more modest sized hardtop boat was available. For years there was a very handsome 24-foot hardtop utility at the southwest side of Rideau Ferry. The design was that of a utility, but it was a smaller and sportier hull. I don't know which model category this fits into; it never had the look of any

of the other Shepherds and might have been a custom (Shepherd also did custom builds).

1958 SHEPHERD RUNABOUTS

MODEL	LENGTH	ENGINE	H.P.	SPEED
75	16'	Chrysler V-drive	110	40 m.p.h.
80	16'	Gray direct drive	109	40 m.p.h.
100	18'	Up to 275 h.p., direct drive		48 m.p.h.
105	18'	Up to 275 h.p., V-drive		48 m.p.h.
110	22'	Up to 275 h.p., V-drive or D.D.		44 m.p.h.
130 Express	27'	Twin engines to 450 h.p.		39 m.p.h.
150 Hardtop	27'	Twin engines to 450 h.p.		39 m.p.h.
155A Hardtop	30'	Twin engines up to 550 h.p.		39 m.p.h.
160 Express	30'	Twin engines up to 550 h.p.		39 m.p.h.
160 Cruiser	30'	Twin engines up to 550 h.p.		39 m.p.h.

The Shepherd line had expanded considerably from 1950



1956 Shepherd 19 foot

The sides were painted white, which was probably original, and the deck was varnished. In 1956 Shepherd changed to a more colourful configuration of yellow bleached mahogany and dark brown. This was spurred on by the two-tone designs of Century and later Chris-Crafts, such as the Holiday and Continental models. Shepherds now had a large blond leaf/slash like imprint on the hull side and dark decks and light wood interior boards. They would maintain this style up until the mid 1960's.

Another new boat for 1956 was the 16-foot Ski-Bee. Waterskiing was a growing sport in the 1950's. Being pulled behind a boat on a rope had been around since the 1920's, but even then, the runabouts were so slow and the engines still too weak to move most of the boats much past 30 mph on a consistent basis. At the time ski boards (known as an aquaplane) were more like a sled and the rider stood on it and steered it with a sort of rope bridle. In the 1930's two former outboard racing brothers named Dick and Malcolm Pope opened up a water themed amusement park named Cypress Gardens. Each day they had a waterskiing show where the skiers would pull off a series of stunts, including jumping off ramps. The skis used were wide versions of snow skis (itself a relatively new sport). There really wasn't much you could do with the two skis - you could move carefully from side to side. The sensation was that the skis were constantly pulling your legs apart, so it didn't make for much flexibility in movement. So the stunts tended to be limited to the aforementioned ramps jumping, multiple skiers, or human pyramids. It wasn't until the single ski came into use that there was some freedom of movement and some interesting moves, such as slalom and wave jumping became possible and sport-specialized boats began to appear. In the US the big name in Ski boats was Correct Craft, which supplied Cypress Gardens and many similar venues. Like the Correct Craft the Ski Bee design was very simple. It was a 16-foot boat with a big engine and robust construction. There were usually two cockpits, the front one for the driver and the spotter and the rear one for the skiers. There was a step attached to the stern so the skier could climb back on board. The preferred launch method for newbies was to sit on a dock while the boat got up to speed and then they would be yanked out onto the water surface although most of the time this meant a quick wipeout. The second and more common method, which required more practice was to sit in the water with the skis in front with the tips just breaking the surface. Both methods require not just engine power but good acceleration, something the 1950's engines had plenty of. The huge carburetors were capable of feeding a lot of mixture into the engines in a short time. This was hard on gas, but

gas was cheap and for the rush you got from flying around the lake, you could afford to indulge yourself and not worry about the cost. The Ski-Bee was still a family boat, and you could still go for a cruise, assuming all your kids could be crammed into the rear seat.



24-foot hardtop, 1959 Manotick Classic Boat Club photo



The 24-foot Shepherd commuter had a commanding presence. Photo Manotick Classic Boat Club

Shepherd's success factor was that it stuck to a simple model formula, little Shepherd, big Shepherd, even bigger Shepherd; 18, 22 and 27 feet. In the late 1950's they added a 15-foot outboard boat to the model mix. These were production boats, but they would still build a custom job, such as Branch Office, a 31-foot commuter runabout completed in 1961.



Brenda Fisher, a long-distance swimmer from the U. K. and her coach stop by the Shepherd Works in 1956 to do a promotional shot. Fisher beat Marilyn Bell's record across Lake Ontario in 1956, but dropped out in a second try the following year.



Mid-1950's Shepherd two-tone blonde and brown wood colouring Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

IN 1958, Lloyd and Howard sold the Shepherd plant to James Hahn, a local businessman. Perhaps they saw that the wood boat business was coming to an end with the increasing presence of fiberglass. Lloyd Shepherd was 68 now and decided to retire. He was able to enjoy 10 more years of this retirement, passing away in 1968. Howard invested some of the sale proceeds in an electrical equipment manufacturing business. This was a failure and subsequently he went to work for C & C Yachts, the sailboat startup begun under Ian Morch, Erich Bruckmann, George Hinterhoeller and George Cuthbertson. Hinterhoeller had immigrated to Canada from his native Austria in 1952 and even though he spoke little English, another friend and fellow Austrian working at the plant was able to translate and convince Shepherd to hire him and put him on the line. In 1958 Hinterhoeller and a Shepherd foreman named Gordon Brinsmead left the company to form their own business manufacturing sailboats. By 1967, Hinterhoeller Boats was booming, and Howard was able to find a position working for his former employee, until health problems forced his retirement. He died ten years after his father, in 1978 at the age of 65.



1959 Shepherd Hahn's redesign did away with the two-tone flashiness *Manotick Classic Boat Club Photo*

Rather than preside over a declining runabout business Mr. Hahn made a shrewd course change for the company, focusing on cruisers. Previously Shepherd did build day cruisers (limited, if any onboard facilities such as a head, bunks, or a galley), but they were more exception than the rule. These were sedan style hulls, where the driver was tucked under the wood cabin, with a limited sightline. The new cruisers were overnight-vacation oriented, with cabins, heads, galleys and a flybridge, a relatively new idea. Now he could see all around and still get the breeze and a good tan. There was a full cover for the flybridge in the event of inclement weather. Most of the boat exterior was painted white now. Brightwork was limited to trimming pieces and the deck. Models ranged from 25 to 45 feet. This was a good business. Big boats meant big margins and the cruisers were selling well. The cruiser boom was underway.

1964 SHEPHERD INBOARDS

MODEL	LENGTH	ENGINE & H.P.	COLOR SCHEME
Combo	16'	Up to 160 h.p., direct drive or V-drive	Varnished hull, decks, copper bottom, white water-line, gold and white upholstery
Runabout or utility	19'	Up to 325 h.p., direct drive or V-drive	Varnished hull, decks, copper bottom, white water-line, gold and white upholstery, green trim on top edge of hull sides, aft
Runabout or utility	22'	Options to 325 h.p., direct drive or V-drive	Varnished hull, decks, copper bottom, white water-line, gold and white upholstery, silver trim on top edge of hull sides, aft

The runabout model line by 1964, showing the substantial scale-down of the line. The 16-foot model was dropped in 1965, leaving only the 19- and 22-foot models to production end in 1968.

The runabouts were still selling well enough through the early 1960's. The 1959 22-foot Shepherd changed to some degree, there was a dark sided hull and a white chisel like flash at the stern. The power was now from the 318 cu in Chrysler.



1963 Shepherd, the final runabout model styling Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

Hahn had been aggressive in pushing Shepherd cruisers and had established a national dealer network. By the early 1960's Shepherd was Canada's largest boat manufacturer and was beginning to ship boats overseas as well. This did not go unnoticed by the US Cruiser builders. The major US builders, were now Chris Craft, Owens, Trojan and the aptly named Cruisers, Inc. They were all trying to gain a foothold in Canada and Trojan won the race when it purchased Shepherd in 1966. For its part, Shepherd now had access to aggressive marketing and deep pockets of a major US concern. Trojan Canada slimmed the Shepherd line down, phasing out the runabout line by 1968. In spite of the line rationalization dollar sales increased the following year, so plans were made for new plant space. Trojan Canada purchased a 47,000 square foot plant in Smithville for \$750,000 and applied to expand the original Shepherd plant at Niagara on the Lake. The city denied the permit. By the mid 1970's the long postwar boat boom was over. Sales were falling. The gas crisis had hurt every vehicle or craft with a big thirsty engine, and no engine is as thirsty as a cruiser engine. The business had shifted heavily to fiberglass cruising sailboats, now being built in high production numbers at the C & C Yachts plant down the road. Sea Doo's made their debut in 1978. Trojan Canada was never able to affect its big expansion, and the Smithville project went nowhere. In 1978 Trojan decided to close the Canada works in February 1978.

The last project was the grandest, a 54-foot cruiser known as the Ozark Star bought by a wealthy family with a cottage on Lake of the Ozarks. This boat would sell for \$275,000. The family had engaged the plant to customize it, so in the final days before the February 28th shutdown the staff worked diligently to install the requested luxury items. Per the newspaper report:

“These included a washer and dryer, a dishwasher, stereo, television, bar, icemaker, king-sized baths, one on the main deck and one in the guest room, and a 4-piece bath in the master bedroom. It will comfortably sleep six. Inside the yacht is finished with teak wood. It has a fiberglass hull and is powered by two 415 cubic-inch diesel engines.”

This was the last of the five cruisers of the Star series built that year. Ironically, Trojan Canada had developed the tooling to build their boats out of fiberglass, so they were poised to take on the future technically, but not economically. It simply wasn't practical to have two boat plant locations, so all building was concentrated in Trojan's main plant in California. The Ozark Star was shipped on May 20 that year and the paperwork was boxed up and moved out. Facing the end, the employees made an offer to buy the works, this was turned down.



MOTORYACHT SEDAN
15,65 - cantiere Shepherd
 Boats (Canada) - anno 1969
 - 2 x 380 cv Cummins -
 gruppo elettrogeno - ice ma-

ker - freezer - ssb - vht -
 lavastoviglie - imbarcazione
 completamente ricondiziona-
 ta nel 1983.

Vendes! - tel. 039/382464.

Details of the Ozark Star series, reprinted from an Italian boating magazine



The Ozark Star series. Six were built before the end

The Shepherd factory was demolished in the 1980's and two very large retirement condo complexes were built on the property, which gives you a good idea of what really matters in our modern society. The former pump house building is now an art gallery to pull in the monied tourists in town for the Shaw festival. The name has been sold and the Bergersen Boat Co. of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin is currently offering new Shepherd boats.

Andress: The St. Lawrence Tour boat

Elva II, Andress's second tour boat project, 1920's. Gananoque Historical Society Archive

The Andress's had started out as farmers with a sideline in boat building. Eventually, two cousins, Ray Andress and Ed Andress carried on the family tradition. Ray Andress moved to Gananoque while Ed started near the family homestead in Rose Mills. In 1920 he moved to Rockport in a small shop right in a little bay, nestled among the waterside granite outcrops that give the village its name. The early skiffs had lapstrake hulls and the seams were filled with candle wicks and then putty. They had a standard skiff half model, carved originally by his grandfather than became the basis for every skiff built thereafter. "You can't improve on that."

said Mr. Andress. As with Mallette, the real money was in building wood touring boats for the various Thousand Island excursion boat lines. From time to time they built a motor launch, again with the lapstrake style. Three small taxi launches were built with lapstrake mahogany hulls. They had a more modern design, with a short wide hull and the planing surface but with rounded chines. However Andress was, and except for the skiffs remained primarily a commercial builder specializing in taxi and tour boats. His tour boats were long elegant creations, with long displacement hulls coming to an elegant tumblehome taper at the stern. One of his last creations was put up on blocks just south of Manotick, where it could be seen for years, its stern slowly drooping down and twisting over from the elements.



Andress also built runabouts, from time to time. Sandpiper was the last one, in 1964 Photo Graeme H. Beattie

From time to time, Andress would build a custom boat. In 1939 he was approached by Charles Potter from Manotick, who had a milk transport business. Mr. Potter had Gilbert build him a nice 17-footer runabout in 1938, but it had been lost to fire that same year. In 1939, he contracted Andress to build him a sturdy 18-foot runabout that could handle a powerful engine such as a Ford Flathead V-8. Unusual for Andress, this was a carvel planked boat. It was named Riot II. The war years put the boat away and Mr. Potter was only able to enjoy it for a few years

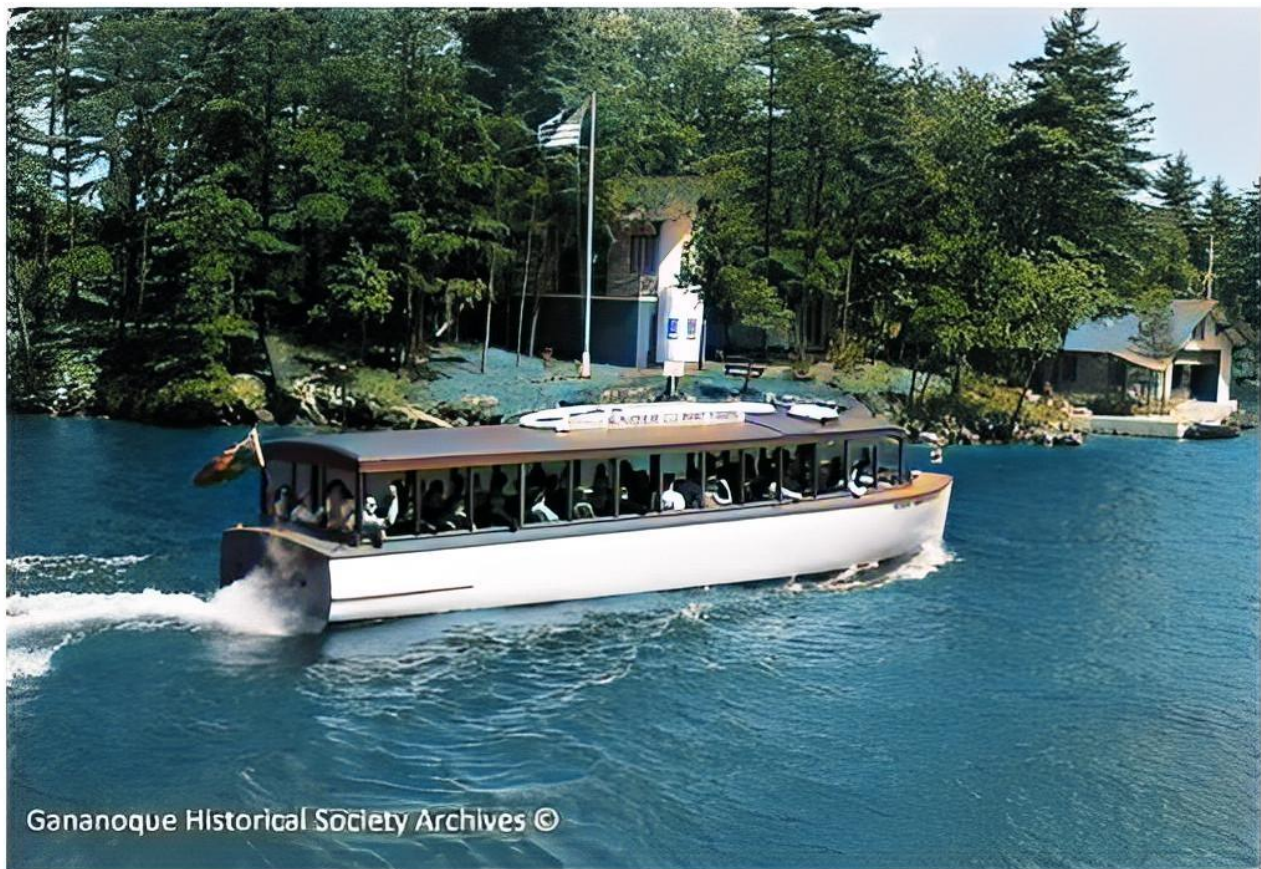
after the war before he had to move it along. But it made a lasting impression on his son, James. Ed and his son Elmer did have the title of the last skiff built in 1975, to a woman who had a cottage in the Islands. This was a skiff purchased on its own merits and for -the same reason that skiffs had been built since the days of the Knapps. The great nostalgia-driven revival of interest in having new skiffs came later in the 1980's. Ed did have one other notable achievement- he was one of the longest lived of the boatbuilders, living to the age of 95, beating Wendell Brown by one year (the champ was Marine Construction's John Robinson, still alert and active at his passing at the age of 99, just missing the century mark by a few months). Andress's built tour boats for a variety of operators, including Paul Duhamel of Paul's Boat Lines in Ottawa and the Snider family in Brockville.



Ray Andress's project, The New Jean

Everett Snider was primarily a tour boat operator and his family business bought, and also built its own boats for tours of the Thousand Islands. This was, and still is a competitive business. In the 1920.s there were several operators other than the Sniders, such as Ray Andress, who had a little tour boat running out of Gananoque. Most of the day trippers ended up in Gananoque and that remained the nexus of the tour boat operations although there were smaller tourist ports

such as Rockport or Ivy Lea. The commanding tour boat operator of the period was Dan Kenney, who had the biggest boats and the largest fleet. The tour boats, as today would wind around the popular sights, the pink granite quarry, the grand cottages of St Lawrence Park, the lighthouse hideaway of 1840's era "Pirate" Bill Johnson (not a real pirate, but a bungling would-be terrorist whose inept exploits would have been comical if they hadn't gotten so many people killed) and finally the imposing sight of Boldt Castle. George Boldt was best known as the CEO of the swankiest hotel in New York, the Waldorf-Astoria but he had only a 10% holding, the rest owned by the Astors. His real money came from a huge commercial farm complex upstate which grew most of the fresh produce used in a number of hotels, including his own. Even so, it was a financial stretch and he had put almost \$4 million into the project when he pulled the plug in 1904. By the 1960's the Castle was a run-down mess, covered with graffiti, only recently purchased by the Thousand Islands Bridge Authority which had plans (at that point dreams) to restore and complete it. Even at its worst, it was still the highlight of the 3-hour tours given by Snider and Kenney.



Snider family tour boat, Miss Gananoque VII

Snider started out life, like so many others, as a river rat, working on a river boat. His father had a small 28-foot cruiser named the Kiddo 2, which he ran out of Brockville. The boat was a cruiser style with a forward cabin and a compartment aft for 12 customers. There was a two-cylinder engine (probably a diesel such as a Kahlenberg), something with at least with some muscle. The boat would chug down to Ivy Leas and back a round trip of seventy-five miles in a boat probably doing not much more than 10-12 mph. This was a slow boat and it was an all-day trip-halfway they would stop on an island for lunch and usually arrive back just before dusk. Compare that to the one-to-three-hour trips today. He made his first trip as captain when he was only twelve, although this didn't make much of an impression on him. He had made the trip so often it was almost second nature. He decided that he really needed to get away from the family business so he went to work on river service boat on the St Lawrence doing marine contracting jobs as far away as Trois Rivières in Quebec.

In 1930 He was working on the service boat and was engaged to help secure a drill barge called the J.B. King. The King's job was to widen the ship channel and it would drill down into the rock bottom, fill the hole with dynamite set it off and then dig out the rubble. One morning it picked up a large load of dynamite and blasting caps and set off for its drill site. Snider took the job of helping them run a control cable from the King to shore and provide some land anchoring against the river current. It had started to rain hard, so the work was delayed and they invited Snider into the galley for a coffee when a lightning strike hit the boat, setting off the caps and the dynamite. The blast atomized the King, killing 33 of the 43-man crew. Although he was in the cabins, Snider was somehow blown free of the galley and knocked a hundred feet into the water, with only minor injuries- he was able to swim to piece of wreckage and hold on until he was rescued downstream by a Coast Guard boat. He was incredibly lucky not to have been killed or severely injured. After that he returned to the family excursion boat business.

His father's tour boat line had several boats, some built by themselves. The largest of these was the Miss Brockville VIII. This boat was designed to be 63 feet long fifteen and half feet wide and capable of twenty miles an hour. I could seat 130 passengers. This was a big project and the Sniders and their hired workmen started in the fall, worked all winter, By the time the season started in mid-May it still wasn't finished and it took until late August before it was ready to go into service, basically too late to make much of an impact on the season. The boat hull was constructed out of B.C. white cedar, which Snider said was better than local yellow or swamp cedar and BC red cedar. They advertised their business with folders which they planted all over the Ottawa-Montreal corridor. Even in 1969 they were still charging only \$4.50 for a five-hour trip and were just breaking even. Snider decided to downsize the business and moved a much

smaller operation to Rockport; it closed in 1987.

J. J. Taylor: Cruisers Galore

The photos of J. J. Taylor himself in the summer of 1945 note a sunny, spirited, and robust man. It's a family photo of the Canadian Taylors, most of his children were working for and managing the company now. J. J. sent out Christmas cards to his customers and vendors in November 1945, he passed away in December at the age of 73. The British Taylors were doing well by now, while most of their building was for commercial craft. Harry had rebuilt the business and it now comprised a large marina and boat service operation lining a significant part of the inlet at Chester, just south of Liverpool. With boating services going back to the 1790's, the area is now considered a historic site.



The Taylor-built Fairmile Penetang 88, decommissioned as a private yacht, later a tour boat. I was on it for a tour with my parents.

Taylor had built Canada's favorite small naval craft, the Fairmile, during the war. When hostilities ceased, Canada's huge navy had to be largely disposed of; Fairmiles could be had cheap. Fairmile 88 rattled around to various private owners and finally became a tour boat operating out of Penetanguishene, I went on the little tour with my parents during our summer vacation of 1967, then the boat was painted all white and was called the Penetang 88. It became a training vessel for naval cadets in the 1970's and was finally burned and sunk, intentionally or otherwise, near Gananoque.



8 metre sloop Buzzy is launched at the Taylor yard, 1956.

The postwar business entered a golden age mostly untroubled with competition. It's great rival in the 1920's Ditchburn Yacht Division of Orillia, was long gone, shuttered in 1932, the successor occupant Hunter focused strictly on runabouts. This was also the case with Shepherd, who did build the occasional cruiser, but this was on customer order only. Hans Sachau's yard had wound down by the early 1950's and the Sachau's were now concentrating on their hotel and particularly the well-known restaurant The Dutch Sisters, which had seating for two hundred and a reputation for a great atmosphere and service and was very popular in spite of the so-so food (per the Toronto Star). Ayling and Ramage built very affordable small 20-foot outboard day cruisers, Cliff Richardson's shop in Meaford built large inboard cruisers, but they were more modest creations for middle-class customers; J. J. Taylor was strictly for the Toronto top end.



Taylor cruiser, launch day

That is not to say that they wouldn't provide a range of offerings. Aykroyd Brothers had closed as a business in 1943, but Taylor had bought the IP and you could still buy a Aykroyd Taylor catboat in the 1950's. One important line they produced were sailboats, providing a link to the future fiberglass sailboat boom in the coming decades.



Taylor Craft sedan cruiser from 1948, same style and model (the same boat?) as in the above photo

Kodachrome came out in 1935, and during the postwar period many middle class people could afford colour movie film. It was not Hollywood level quality, by any stretch, the things in the shot were recognizable but not sharp and the overall effect was faintly muddy. Still there are several home movies of Taylor Craft boats being launched in the early-to mid-1950's. A movie shows the launch of two new Toronto Harbour police boats in 1951, still maintaining the traditional long deck runabout style, one with room for a small rowboat in the rear cockpit. It was not as practical as the sort of police boat we have today, an open deck deep V hull with a forward drive and relative ease of pulling things over the side, but it sure looks cool. Another movie taken in 1948 shows the 40-50 foot long 10 feet beam cruisers Lady Alva and Pixie K. being launched, in each case christened with a champagne bottle wrapped in a towel and once in the water the new owners, all dressed in their seagoing best, white for the women and a navy jacket for the men and a captain's hat for the owner. Another is for Smoothy, a day cruiser with a more low-profile cabin and a canvassed deck painted blue. The film also shows several sailboats, including a 20-foot ish sloop and what is clearly a Taylor-Aykroyd cat. A shot of the waterfront also shows the typical "marina" of the time, a harbour with the boats all moored out on the open water, attached to submarine mooring lines, accessible only by a dinghy; the idea of

boat slips was still off in the future. A large runabout/day cruiser called Mardon V is taken out for lake trials, this is a hefty and solid craft and clearly comfortable on Lake Ontario. The said trials are all taking place next Toronto Island Airport, the original brick building is visible across from the Taylor shop, as well as the Canada Malting elevator in the distance. Again it is important to remember that Taylor was one of the few shops in the country still making sailboats on a regular basis, there is also a film of the launch of Buzzy III, a 6-metre sloop, although this is only the completed hull (no evidence of a shaft log for an onboard engine though) and no masts or rigging. Buzzy is shown at the end being towed away, but to where, and if so will some other yard or person finish the job? Buzzy III is still around, alas the cruisers all seem to have mostly passed into history.



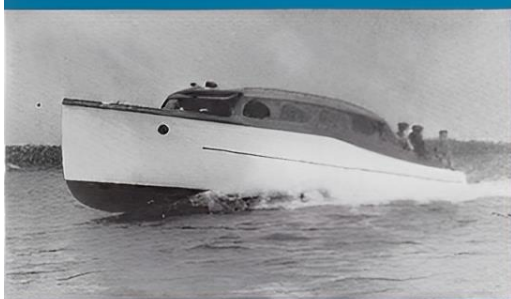


Taylor sedan cruiser steering station

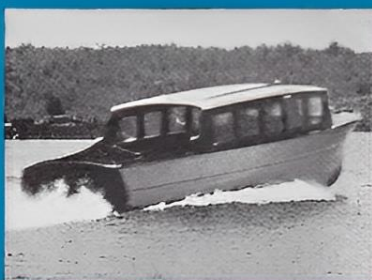
Wood cruisers were built well into the 1960's. The fiberglass takeover was not all encompassing, it started with rowboats and sailing dinghies, then to day sailer sailboats and runabouts, and would finally conquer cruisers starting in 1970. By the 1970's J. J.'s children were contemplating retirement, they were not up to the challenge of converting to a new form of production. Someone else would have to take up that challenge.

Cliff Richardson: Big Boats for a Big Lake

BUILDERS OF PLEASURE AND COMMERCIAL MOTORBOATS



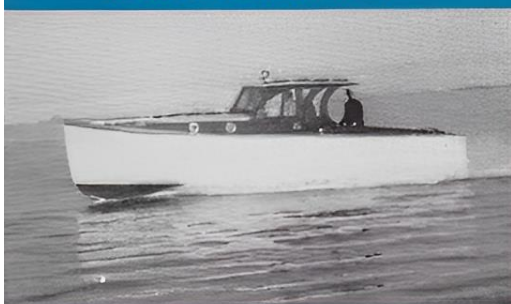
30-foot Sedan Cruiser, 16 m.p.h.



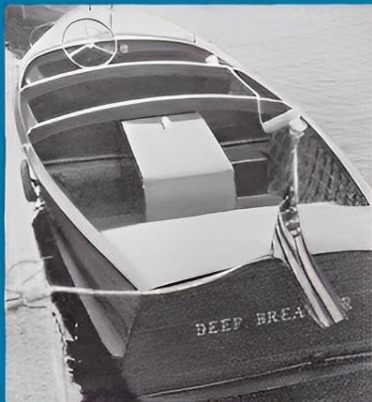
Twin Screw Sedan Passenger Boat



24-foot Taxi Boat, 22 m.p.h.



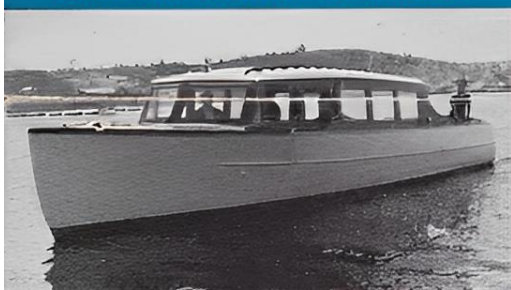
30-foot Twin Screw Trunk Cabin Cruiser



17-foot Utility Boat, 14 m.p.h.



34-foot Trunk Cabin Cruiser



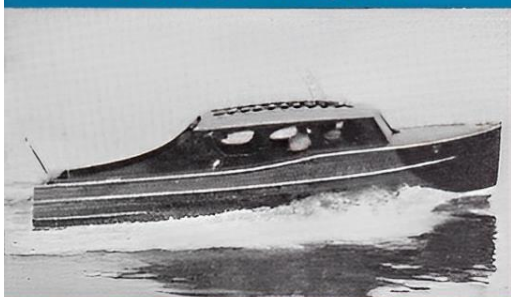
35-foot Sedan Passenger Boat



18-foot Runabout, 33 m.p.h.



30-foot Twin Screw Express Cruiser, 31 m.p.h.



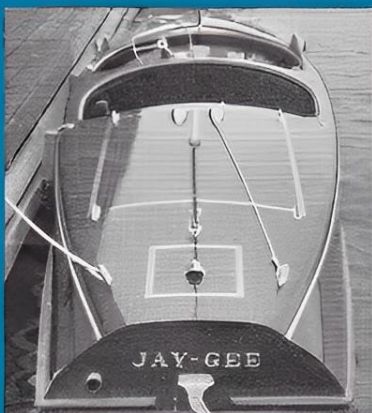
30-foot All-Mahogany Sedan Cruiser



30-foot Twin Screw Express Cruiser, 31 m.p.h.



20-foot Utility Boat, 18 m.p.h.



18-foot Deluxe Runabout, 33 m.p.h.



22-foot Utility Fishing Boat, 28 m.p.h.

The Richardson line, about 1950 or so.

The worst time to get into a business is when it's booming, everybody is trying to get on board, the industry is overloaded and it's only a matter of time before a complete shakeout. The best time is at the absolute bottom, when the economy is flat on its face and customers and competitors are few. Clifford Richardson opened a small boat repair shop in the lakeside town of Meaford, where the mouth of the Bighead River opens out into Georgian Bay. Little notice was made of the company until after the war, when it began to build both runabouts and cruisers. The boatbuilding business always operated in tandem with the boat servicing and storage business; this flexibility had allowed it to stay in business up to the present day.

*Cliff Richardson cruiser in Smith Falls locks.*

The cruisers were all big boats. One Discovery, II (?) is still around, built in 1955 36 feet long with a sleek fully enclosed cabin with the upper deck made out of African mahogany. It is a beautiful boat with restored interiors, recently offered and sold for an outrageously low price under \$10k. There were also runabouts made after the war, generally twin cockpit boats with an

appearance similar to a Greavette Streamliner, except with a rear engine V-drive configuration. Generally the Richardson cruiser look is almost always the low-profile sloping cabin front with the two small windows, square in the early 1950's and with curved corners later on. The company would build you pretty much whatever you wanted, including a custom trawler styled cruiser and much later on, long past the wood era, building a rescue style aluminum hulled boat to be used as a day cruiser. The company built several aluminum cruisers in the 1970's and on into the 1980's.



Harpoon, a Cliff Richardson runabout, 1939 Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

Chapter 16 Muskoka Part III What Now? 1931-1948 Rainbow Craft, Minett-Shields, Greavette, Barnes, Ditchburn

Rainbow Craft: Co-starring Tom Greavette

2 CANADIAN POWER BOATING

October, 1930

MARKS A NEW ERA IN CANADA

Sponsored
by Canada's
Industrial
Leaders...

The Rainbow Craft is launched



Canada from its earliest Colonial days has always boasted of its ship-building but the production of boats on the lines of Rainbow-Craft constitutes an entirely new trend in the boat building industry.

Rainbow-Craft will combine the skill and care of custom-designing with modern efficiency methods. The result will be that motor boats of the highest standard will be brought within the reach of thousands who hitherto could not think of enjoying Canada's unequalled waterways.

Announcing this new industry, it may be added that Rainbow-Craft is to be built by men who have been identified for years with boat designing and who are numbered among Canada's business leaders.

Dealers
throughout
Canada
solicited.

**WATERWAYS ARE SPORT WAYS
ALONG THE RAINBOW TRAIL**

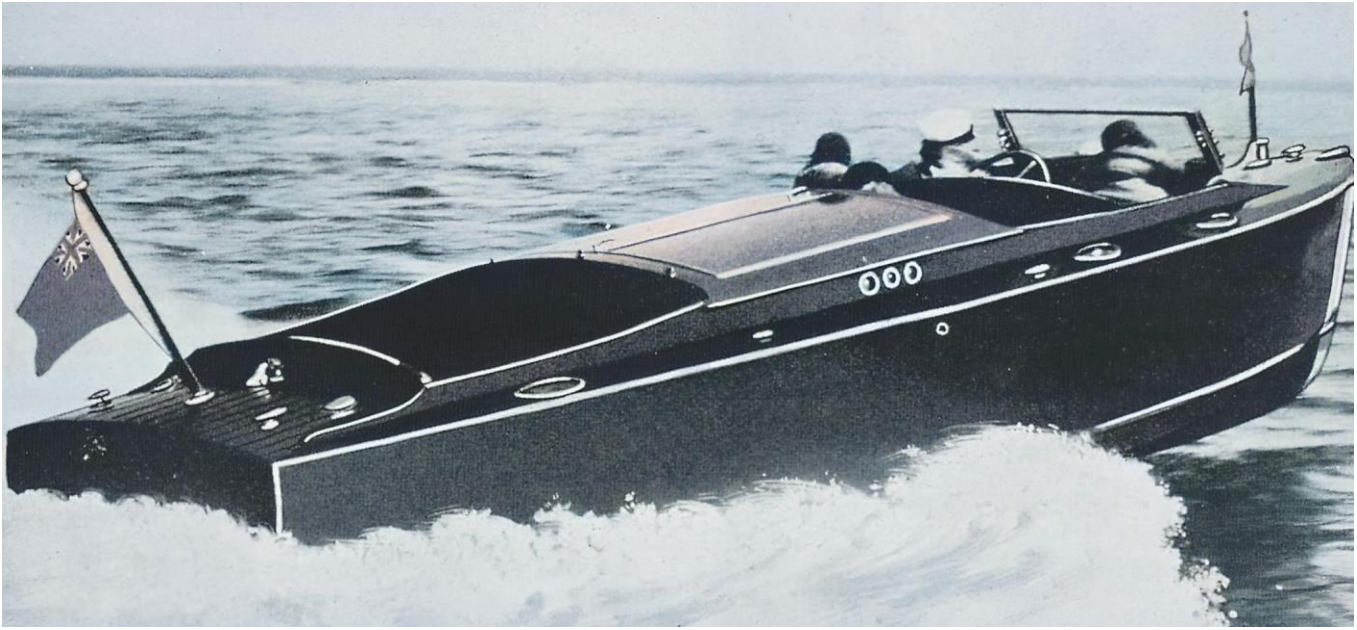
Canada's innumerable lakes and rivers offer recreation, health and sport—but they can only be enjoyed if you own a speedy dependable boat. Plan now for next summer by choosing your Rainbow! Though production will commence at once on the 1931 models, we anticipate such a demand for Rainbow-Craft that orders for early summer delivery should be made in good time. Your enquiries are invited.

**Rainbow
Craft** LIMITED
GRAVENHURST ONT.

1930 ad announcing Rainbow Craft. Other than the rectangular windshield, the drawing didn't look much like the Dart model design.

By 1929 there was room in the market to produce a line of runabouts that were smaller, faster, and more affordable. While still general sales manager at Ditchburn, Thomas Greavette had been secretly meeting with a number of Toronto-based Ditchburn customers to set up a new boat company. Greavette left Ditchburn in late summer 1930 and shortly after the new company was announced in the press as the soon-to-be Rainbow Craft Ltd. Ditchburn was apparently incensed, most likely from both the loss of one of his key men and what he felt was the apparent infringement on his famous “Rainbow” series of race boats. It is possible to trademark a word in the dictionary, but only in a very specific commercial context, such as the usage of that word on a specific product, therefore you could trademark the term “Rainbow”, but you would have to register the trademark with the Federal government and specify what product (or service) the word is in reference to. In this case you could trademark “rainbow” as a name for a series of boat you intend to manufacture and sell, and the name would have to be clearly identified on the product and the invoice. Accordingly, a competitor could not also come along and introduce their line of boats with the name rainbow, the holder of the trademark could legally force the competitor to change the name. But Ditchburn never trademarked “Rainbow” for his company, it does not show up on the Federal registry, it was just a name Harry Greening put on his race boats; there was no legal leverage to force any branding change. Angry as Ditchburn himself was, he and his company were in no real position to mount legal challenges; boat and motor yacht sales were crashing, and he was trying to sort out some sort of strategy to get through the slump and had neither the time nor he means to thrash around in civil court over a naming issue.

It should be noted that this company was not built around Tom Greavette, this is a mistaken impression. Rainbow Craft employed him, he was important, but not the key man. He was a director and apparently had a small shareholding (I’m guessing as the 9th of 9 directors, it was around 9-12%. The company president was Gordon Lefebvre, former president of General Motors Canada. The superintendent of works (viz. Vice-President of Manufacturing) was to be J. W. de Beaubien, a “Major Dyas” possibly Major Arthur William Dyas, a Great War veteran who returned to civilian work as an insurance agent and financial advisor and would be the sales manager (even though this had been Greavette’s background at Ditchburn) and finally Greavette himself as “General Manager”. It’s not clear where Tom Greavette was in the hierarchy, at best he was the executive VP, managing the managers and reporting directly to Lefebvre.



Rainbow Craft Dart licence runabout, 1931 Photo illustration from magazine ad. The picture was created from a photo, and then extensively touched up and re-drawn with an airbrush.

Rather than go through the expense and risk of coming up with it's own designs, Rainbow Craft decided to licence models from Dart Boats Ltd. an American firm that had started up in 1928 as a spin-off of Indian Lake Boat Co. of Lima, Ohio (which made small outboards and canoes) and was already selling well by 1930. But as Rainbow Craft geared up for production, Ditchburn had already laid off a third of his Gravenhurst staff, about 25 of the seventy. Perhaps they went straight over to the startup which was to start full production in the spring of 1931. Production did start, full speed ahead in spite of the economic gloom. According to Gray/Duke the backing was a steamrolling \$500,000, but that may have been authorized capital, not paid up and issued shares. The plant and storage sheds and manufacturing equipment cost \$50,000; the payroll would be \$1,000 a month for forty men. There were probably an additional \$2,000 of costs per week to run the business, as well as \$15-20,000 of lumber, engines, hardware and materials I would guess the total cost of twenty some weeks operation from the original spade turning to the first shutdown would be around \$130 to as much as \$150,000, once the costs of the advertising blitz had been factored in. Boat production started in April 1931. Rainbow Craft was going to open a head office and showroom in Toronto.



The Greavette plant, probably late thirties, early forties

That never happened. There was no head office or showroom ever set up in Toronto, there is no listing in 1930-1933 *Might's Toronto directory* for any company named Rainbow Craft or Greavette. A total of 31 Dart-licenced boats were built in the initial production run (five are in restored and/or running condition, a sixth grey hull was advertised recently for sale on the Dart website; nothing further is known of it). They piled up in the storage building next to the factory.

*Dart licensed Rainbow Craft today**Manotick Classic Boat Club photo*

In late August of that same year, after four months, production was called off and the 35 workers were furloughed. The licensee Dart Boat Co. Ltd. was itself out of business in 1931, it's supporting bank had gone under. The economy was certainly an issue, viz, a near total lack of sales, most likely the main one, but the Dart look was also a problem, it was out of style. Rectangular windshields, a raised engine hatch and square passenger cockpits were the runabout fashion in the mid 1920's but even as early as 1929, with Minett-Shields Wimur II the new look

was airplane, with rounded cockpits, a split V-window, and flush decks. Canada, as I have mentioned was always a few years behind the U. S. in all boat matters, but the combination of problems was deadening to the company. The shutdown was not a bankruptcy, but just a means to shut off the cash losses, essentially the plant was put on ice until perhaps the spring, and presumably the traditional customer high season would begin again. But the spring was 1932, and the western economies were dead in the water; the stock market had bottomed out, even blue-chip stocks were trading for only a few dollars.

There was a very limited amount of custom work for a Harold Wilson, a racing enthusiast (and son of one of the Rainbow Craft investor-directors E. A. Wilson) who would become Greavette's version of what Harry Greening was for Ditchburn, an ultra-loyal customer who have every single of his long series of racers built there, even when one of the Miss Canada series missed the mark, no hard feelings and he would be back the next year for the next project. In 1931 the 135 cubic inch class was created for more affordable race craft and then a 225-cube class in 1933, Wilson wanted boats for both. Still the solitary annual order from Wilson was not enough to sustain any kind of business.

February, 1935

CANADIAN BOATING 1

Custom Built By Greavette



GREAVETTE FLASH

FOR 1935 Greavette brings to you a line of speedy, safe, beautiful, custom built runabouts incorporating many worthwhile features to improve your boating pleasures. And most important . . . the Greavette 1935 runabouts bring you a new conception of softer riding throughout their speed range.

GREAVETTE FLASH . . . A fast, sports 18-foot runabout, the Greavette Flash seats five. A feature is the cleverly arranged forward cockpit which can be opened or closed at will like the rumble seat of an automobile. Closed, the cockpit hatch matches the decking. Beautiful, like all Greavette boats, and a remarkable level-riding, smooth, quiet running boat.



GREAVETTE FURY

GREAVETTE FURY . . . The famous Little Miss Canada III, 225 cubic inch class design is added to the custom built line of Greavette boats for 1935 as the **GREAVETTE FURY**. The performance of this world champion racing craft is proof enough that this model is designed to win races. But not only in racing ability do they excel, for these racing craft carry the mark of Greavette quality—now considered to be the utmost obtainable in pleasure craft.

GREAVETTE CUSTOM 23-FOOTER



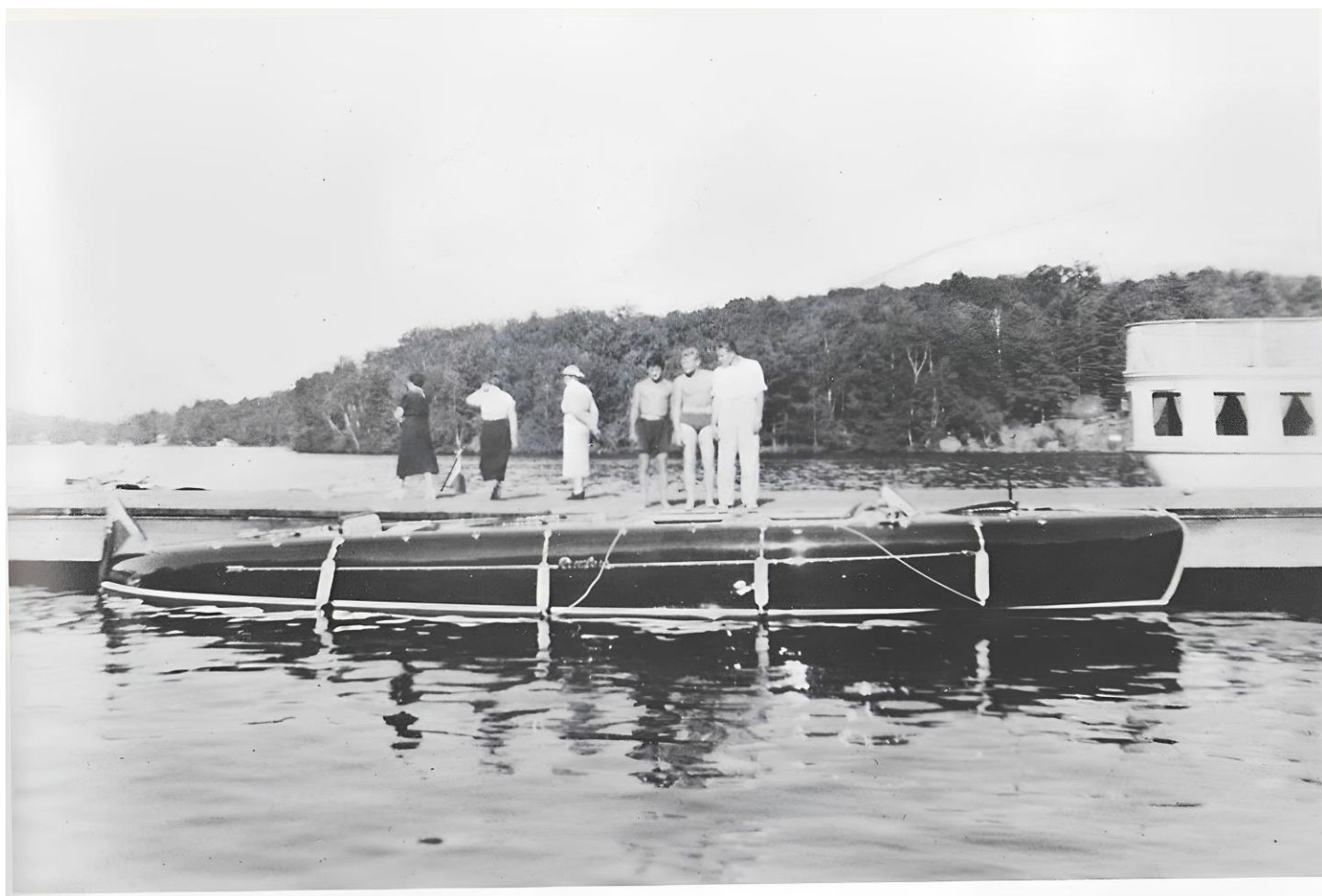
GREAVETTE CUSTOM 23-FOOTER . . .

At last, a positive non-pounding, fast runabout. The Greavette 23 foot runabout shown, as well as the larger 26 foot runabout, have the riding qualities of a round bottom runabout and the speed of a vee bottom. Clever designing brings this great advancement in pleasure boat performance. These Greavette runabouts are round bottom forward and a special design of vee bottom aft, with a wave collector incorporated in the chine, assuring dryness at all speeds. Speedy, safe, beautiful runabouts.

GREAVETTE BOATS LIMITED — GRAVENHURST

The new Greavette's 1934 boat offerings after the Dart era, the Custom 23-footer would become the Dictator

Greavette now ran the business as a sort of one-man shop, managing what there was left to manage, but mostly selling the Dart model inventory through to early 1933. The company was reorganized. There was never any work for Messrs. De Beaubien or Dyas. Rainbow Boats Ltd. became Greavette Boats Limited. Two directors, S. T. Terry and A. L. Ainsworth resigned. It was clear that Greavette, although not initially anointed, was now the true key man of the company and the recognized industry name. Even so, the position of president of the new company was passed from Lefebvre to E. A. Wilson. They would keep the factory, but production was strictly on custom order. One coup was the signing of an exclusive Canada design contract with John Hacker. He was not busy, having been shuffled out of the company that bore his name; Hacker Boats Ltd was now wholly owned by its financier, the McCready family. Hacker would thenceforth stick to boat design and leave the building to those with deeper pockets and a higher tolerance for risk. The newly constituted Greavette and its star designer first big contract was for a 33-foot-long triple cockpit runabout named the Langley, built for the Wardwell family of Lake Joseph. These were rare contracts, there were only two boats over 30 feet built before the war, this one and the pioneer Streamliner, the Curlew, two years later.



The grand 36-foot Curlew, built for Fred Burgess in 1935 after his Minett-Shields burned. This would be the seed idea for the Streamliner, which would be offered in 1938.

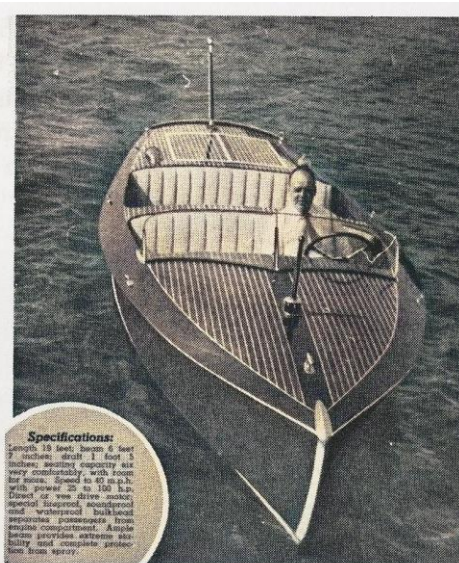

Specifications:

Length 26 feet beam 7 feet 1 inch draft 22 inches, Speed 20 m.p.h., power 100 h.p. engine. Seating capacity 16-18 in cockpit which may be closed tight and with enclosure and two in of cockpit, five in second as shown.

**26' Greavette Commander Runabout—
built from 1934 through 1939**


Dictator...

Specifications: Length 19 feet beam 6 feet 8 inches draft 20 inches, Speed 12 m.p.h. power 100 h.p. engine. Seating capacity 16-18 in cockpit which may be closed tight and with enclosure and two in of cockpit, five in second as shown.


Specifications:

Length 19 feet beam 6 feet 8 inches draft 20 inches, Speed 12 m.p.h. power 100 h.p. engine. Seating capacity 16-18 in cockpit which may be closed tight and with enclosure and two in of cockpit, five in second as shown.

1936 Greavette 19' Special Runabout

Three models, the Special, Dictator and Commander, 1936 advertisement

With the expiration of the Dart license and production plan, a new 23-footer was brought out in 1935, a little more modern style of runabout flush deck and the airplane style cockpits under the now unfortunate name of Dictator (They gave up Rainbow for this?). But at the time, dictatorships, while unnerving, seemed to be the only way to restore any sort of national direction and economic growth, cutting through democratic chaos and getting things done. R.B. Bennett had made a lot of noise and banged his fist on many flat surfaces. But he had accomplished little and had been bounced out that year for a return to the taciturn, unreadable King; the liberal wave also terminated Thomas Jutten's career in politics. At least a little boat could tell the waves and water where to go.

According to Speltz's comments on Greavette the Dictator was available in 19-, 21- and 23-foot versions. You have to be careful about what appears to be a what appears to be a wide choice of style and length. 9 Dictators were made, to the best of my knowledge, all 23 footers, again the company was still dealing with a very limited customer base as the 1930's progressed; it was fairly clear that there would never be a return to a mass production program, neither then nor in the foreseeable future. But a new style was being considered.



*Miss London II from 1936, precursor design to the Streamliner series
Manotick Classic Boat Club photo*

Ditchburn in deep waters

By 1931-32 Ditchburn's Orillia shop was inactive, and the Gravenhurst plant had laid off 2/3 of the 70 some staff. Herbert Ditchburn himself had apparently re-mortgaged his house to keep operations going, but the cash position was reaching a point of no return. Finally, he went to the offices of E.R.C. Clarkson & Sons, Trustees, Receivers and Financial Agents, in Toronto and agreed to step down as CEO, he would take on the now vacant position of sales manager, and an R. P. Powell would take over as CEO, with Bert Hawker as general manager. The shuffle was made on May 10, 1932, and the company filed for bankruptcy on May 24. I suspect that Powell was a hired gun who Clarkson had appointed to check out the true financial condition of the company and when he did, he thought it would be better to simply pull the plug. Ditchburn wrote a long mea culpa article in the local paper, stating the obvious; there wasn't enough business to sustain the company in its current form. Clarkson sent out the bankruptcy notification on June 2, 1932, for a June 14 meeting of the creditors at Osgoode Hall in Toronto. This was to assess creditor rank, who was at the top, (banks, being secured) and who was at the bottom (vendors with outstanding receivables, including employees with any outstanding wages owed).

Herb Ditchburn did not declare bankruptcy himself, but he was effectively cleaned out, his shares in his company were worthless, his loans to the company would be at the very bottom rank of the creditor line. The assets were sold over 1932-33, the Orillia plant, which was really just a big storage shed, to their former employee Aleister Hunter and the Gravenhurst works to a slate of Toronto investors who started a new company called Ditchburn Boats and Yachts Ltd. Herb Ditchburn was not an investor, nor did he have a position in this company. He rattled around Gravenhurst for a year, then finally with nothing in town he left for Toronto. He moved into an apartment on the first floor of 321 Bloor Street West and hung out a shingle as Herbert Ditchburn, Boat Builder although it was not clear what these services entailed or if he was even working at all. There was no listing for 1935, but by 1936 he had moved to another apartment at 707 Yonge but did not list any occupation. William Ogilvie, now the sales manager for the third successor company set up the showroom out in the sticks at 22-24 Sheppard Ave. He had settled into a nice house on one the city's ravines at 5 Relmar Gardens.



Early 1930's Ditchburn runabout, nice, if more modest this time around. It wasn't enough to save the company. Author photo

The new company Ditchburn Boats and Yachts Limited. shifted away from high-end custom builds and tried to go with mid-market products. Since all production was now only at Gravenhurst, the “Yacht” part of the name is a puzzler since they no longer had the convenience of the Orillia plant. The boats built in the 1930’s were runabouts, they were nice looking, sensible craft, but with none of the show-stopping grandeur and verve of the 1920’s. Greavette outflanked them in the high-end market with the construction of the groundbreaking 34-foot Curlew in 1936, the first of the Streamliner series. Minett-Shields built a similarly curvaceous boat for Fred Burgess in 1934 and a series of memorable 18-foot gentleman’s racers. Even Port Carling’s put out a dazzling barrel back runabout in 1938. In terms of raw design brilliance, all of them were outdone by the work of Earl Barnes. The name Ditchburn had been synonymous with high dollar, top level quality, but there was nothing about the 1930’s boats that ranked ahead or differentiated from a Duke or a Port Carling. I think part of the problem is that with the endless money troubles Ditchburn simply couldn’t afford to do anything off the wall or genuinely innovative. The company did play around with a an outdrive concept (actually a through-hull steerable drive unit, rather like an avipod on modern tugboats), but this was very limited R & D as rather than designing a new, shorter, and beamier boat, they simply used an existing model and set the engine in the narrow stern, with predictably disappointing results. It was a half-hearted effort and was not pursued. Although their best customer, Harry Greening would be around long enough to pose for a snapshot with the Miss Supertest team in the mid 1950’s, had retired from racing in 1929; there were no more projects. The new racing star Harold Wilson was strictly a Greavette guy, all his Little Miss Canada and Miss Canada series would come out of the Greavette works. One of the enduring problems was that Ditchburn kept the main Gravenhurst factory. The smart move might have been to accept the situation and sell the property and move to a much smaller workspace and avoid the high maintenance costs and business tax levies. Perhaps the new Ditchburn management hoped the business would turn around and increased production would eventually refill the empty space.

Earl Barnes: The curves on that one!



Earl Barnes' workmen, typical of a small shop, pose with Billy Bea II in 1936. The boat will be launched down the street next to the Minett-Shields shop. Yeah, I know the guy at the stern of the boat under the sign looks like he's relieving himself, ha ha.



Barnes himself, right, and the new owner.

As Ditchburn struggled to regain its market or more truthfully, gain a new market, other smaller builders were picking off what prestige contracts there still were to be had. The most formidable designer of the 1930's Muskoka runabout era was Earl Barnes. Barnes was local boy, born in Muskoka in 1895. He could do it all. He was well regarded for his touch as a mechanic, a woodworker, and a designer. He came from a farming family but gravitated to carpentry after a brief stint in the C.E.F. over 1918-1919 (this was a new career, his sign-up papers noted farmer as his occupation, although the actual Barnes family farm was out in Alberta; he'd already moved back). He went to work at Minett's after being discharged. What he actually learned at Minett was hard to assess, since there seemed to be so little in the way of boat building at all over the next few years. At one point in the early 1920's he went to work at Muskoka Foundry, which specialised in forestry equipment, but would cast pretty much anything. (it's still there, now a bistro, curio shopping and a meat smokehouse). In 1925 he decided to strike out on his own. His earliest boat was Princess Paige, modeled very closely on the work his former employer Minett. By 1929 his boats retained the look of long deck displacement launches, but they were actually just very long hard-chine runabouts, the best of both worlds, at least for the Muskoka buyers. Using his background at the foundry Barnes made molds for all the hardware used on the boat, had then cast and chromed, his wife Gladys did the

upholstery work for the boat seats and seat backs.

Built for the Finlayson family, Peggy had a more traditional runabout like appearance with the driver forward of the engine. The long deck style looked cool, but it was never easy to pilot and at speed the foredeck would pitch up and you lost most of your sightline and you had to hope there wasn't anything in your way. No more long decks were made after 1930. Barnes built a racing runabout in 1934 named Will -o-the-Wisp, 20 feet long, originally powered by a 6-cylinder Graymarine. The power had been upgraded to a 283 Ford with Offenhauser heads, notable with aluminum flanges to dissipate heat, as well as a dual carb set up. The hatches would no longer close, so a mahogany scoop was added to accommodate the engine and direct more air into the carbs. As the thirties progressed, Barnes designs became wilder, with Valhalla, with its bullet prow, where the foredeck curved downward and the stem angled upward, ending in a sort of chrome chisel point. Valhalla's unique look was compromised by a strange board seatback set in the stern cockpit. The seat back was too tall, and rose out of the cockpit, interrupting the sleek appearance of the craft; it may have been a later add-on for a customer with spinal issues, I don't know. Later runabouts had a dramatic curve down to the stern; he took this to its logical conclusion with the torpedo stern models. Two torpedo models were Billie Bea II, which was built in 1936 and a second sister boat that was started over the winter of 1936-37. This design was not original with Barnes. Joseph Lodge of the Dwight Lumber Company, a large wood wholesaler in Michigan, had decided to branch out into the motorboat business in grand style with the Dee-Wite line. They started off with their signature super boat, the 35-foot Lodge Torpedo racer, powered with twin Liberty 400 hp aircraft engines and also planned to offer production torpedo styles in both 22-foot and 28-foot models. It never happened. Dee Wite opened in 1930 and closed a year later, it built a few small square stern lower priced family boats, a couple exist today. There are photos of the 22- and 28-foot torpedo in Speltz's Real Runabouts, neither have ever been seen since; it may be there were only they were all one-off demos, there was no business to be made, and they eventually went the way of the wind. The big 35-foot Miss Dee Wite racer is still around and for sale, it needs significant restoration work, but it is mostly still there; the stern was cut off and would have to be rebuilt. The trick to build a torpedo stern is simply to extend the boat out past a square stern, the torpedo stern horn is not a planing surface. Like any sort of sharp curve, special tools and know how is required to shape the wood, and it is also a lot more expensive than the lower budget slab-sided family runabouts. There are three, possibly four known Barnes Torpedo's Billy Bea, Valhalla, Carlann and a fourth unnamed craft. There is a photo of the completed Billy Bea, just outside Barnes' shop in Bracebridge. The shop was at his home on Shier Street; landlocked he had to haul his completed projects to the public launch ramp a few hundred yards away,

adjacent the Minett-Shields shop. The cost of these boats, however striking the look was not always easy to sell at the inevitably high prices. Barnes had a full-time team of six working in his shop, producing about two boats a year, which should give you some idea of the huge amount of man-hours put into each one of his artistic creations. The complete output of Barnes is a matter of conjecture. He was in business for roughly 12 years, from 1925 though 1936-37. 14 Barnes boats have been identified and are still around, in some form or other, the consensus is that he built 22, in reality the output is around 50, which makes more sense given the noted work team.



Manotick Club member Ron Lang in Will ‘o’ the Wisp, 1934 20-foot Barnes fast runabout. Powered by a Ford Flathead with Offenhauser racing heads and dual carburetor setup.

It was worth it in terms of legacy, Barnes should be considered one of the great ones, in spite of his low productivity. As noted, he could, and did it all, design the hardware, design the hulls, and do the carpentry. Even Minett, for all his workshop skills still most often used other’s designs, from Bert Hawker to John Hacker to George Crouch, Ditchburn also used Hawker, Greavette used the work of Hacker and Doug Van Patten. Legacy regardless, this obsessive approach wasn’t sustainable in the long run, Barnes went out of business in 1937. It is not clear whether this was a business failure, there was no talk of bankruptcy filing. My guess is that the business simply wasn’t profitable enough; it was just too much work and risk for too little reward.

Duke II and Port Carling Boat Works: Smaller and sensible



Duke utility Rawley, owned by Ron and Wilma Jelley Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

Other shops went in the other direction; small and affordable. This resulted in the two most iconic budget motorboats in the 1930's the Duke Playmate and the Port Carling SeaBird. After Johnston Jr's ill-fated bid for the assets of the Disappearing Propellor Boat, he and several former employees founded the Port Carling Boat Works. The principal financier was R. A. Shields, who was in much greater comfort zone with Johnston than the shifty and now disgraced J. R. C. Hodgson. Their first product, which was based on the Uncle Sam Dispro, had a fixed shaft with the propellor encased on protective bracket. Unlike a Dispro the propellor was not centred under the hull but set back near the stern, the boat tended to plough at speed. Johnston went back to the drawing board and ditched the motor skiff and sketched out a 17-foot mini launch. At it's core it was long deck displacement hull boat, but dramatically scaled down the engine, a tiny 4 cylinder Universal 4 was placed ahead of the driver and passenger compartment and there was an open cockpit in the fore, in the advertising drawing it was square, with a relatively low coaming, the first real version it was protected by a round and much higher coaming. Thus was born Port Carling Boat Works most successful product, the SeaBird. The stern of launches is always higher than the midsection of the hull, in this case the rise was an unusual 8 inches. The SeaBirds I have seen handle like a car, and they are easy to dock and manoeuvre in a tight space. The early models were carvel planked, later ones had lapstrake planking and a more powerful Buchanan engine, a 30-horsepower engine based on the Continental Red Seal. Continental was the go-to independent engine builder of the motive industry, their engines appeared in all sorts of applications, boats, cars, trucks, buses, and tractors, even apparently an Indian motorcycle. The SeaBird morphed into a forward drive in the mid 1930's with a short, rounded foredeck, it almost looked like an outboard boat from a distance. Eventually the model line was turned over to hard chine planing hull runabouts, at that point the SeaBird was no longer a type of boat but a trade name for the entire line. Still, the latter SeaBirds were still lower cost creations, slab sided, flat decked, no dramatic curved designs, just sensible looking craft. The company stayed in business until 1958, but it had lost it's founders over time, Johnston left in 1935 and went to work for himself in a one-man shop, only Shields and Charles McCulley, one of the original Dispro workmen, stuck it out, and after the war it was just McCulley as the sole owner. But it was the original little SeaBird, simple and affordable, that made it happen.

Likewise with Port Carling, Duke had another low-cost winner with the Playmate. Brothers Charlie and Albert Duke had built several estimable launches before 1914, but Albert had neither the ambition of Ditchburn or the over-the-top perfectionism of Minett and his boat building venture fizzled out. Charlie had worked for his brother off and on, but by 1916 he built a 30-foot-long deck launch named the Speedway as a taxi boat. Like many local boat workers,

summer was for servicing tourists, the other three seasons were for building boats. He worked briefly for Ditchburn in 1918-19 and then went into the finishing room at the Disappearing Propellor plant until it bit the dust, as it were in 1924. A partnership with Ernie Greavette, another Dispro veteran and Tom's younger brother, lasted barely two years. Finally he started a sole proprietorship Duke Boats, in Port Carling in 1926, specializing in small 20-foot launches. By 1929 there were so many big boat contracts it was hard not to land something, and Duke produced two handsome 30 footers, one named Snegdoh for the Hodgens family (get it?) and another for the Douglas family, the name is lost to history, I can only hope it isn't Salgood. Both had long mahogany decks, and the requisite kids' cockpit in front of the engine. These are very fine craft, but as a boatbuilder, or really a maker of anything, you have to define yourself, make a design statement that differentiates you from the rest, something that people will remember as uniquely yours. At that time everyone seemed to be aiming high, going for the big builds, where was the boat for the less monied everyman? Still, Duke continued with launch builds, with two more 27 footers, one of which was saved during a fire. In 1931, a fire in a store wiped out boat shop row in Port Carling. In a desperate but ultimately effective act, the Port Carling staff simply pushed all the boats, new, repair and in process hulls from the workshop second floor through the drop hatch into the water below, 10 feet down; it was easier to make repairs than start over. Amazingly none of the boats sustained any major damage; the only other amazing fact was that this part of the village had lasted as long as it did, it was a natural firetrap, with wooden buildings all packed tight together, all dealing with motorboats, and every kind of flammable substance imaginable, wood, varnishes, motor oil, dust, cleaning solvent, and memorably, H. L. Bastien's notoriously leaky gasoline tanks. The lost buildings were rebuilt quickly enough, but it was clear that a new style of boat was also needed, the big launch era seemed to be over.



Early Duke Playmate, mid 1930's Author Photo

The small motorboat market in the early 1920's had been flooded by the Dispro, by 1929, there was room for more modern and more powerful models. Duke had been contacted by a Mr. Stevenson, a cottager who wanted just such a boat. The initial version was similar to a much wider Peterborough outboard powered with a 15 hp Buchanan Baby Four. The boat was completely open except for a short foredeck, there were three seats, the engine was set in the middle, the driver behind and the stern seat behind him and the front seat aft the engine box. It was easy to cast from, easy to move around in, you weren't in that dark hole the way you were in some of the big runabouts. In later models the steering wheel was moved to the front seat, but for most part this simple and perfect boat remained mostly unchanged, no one really wanted a change and 150 were made over the next 20 years. After the Dispro, it was the Volkswagen of Muskoka inboard boats.



The iconic Duke Playmate.

Dubbed the Duke Playmate, this simple boat kept Duke alive during the 1930's. Duke was able to land some more substantial runabout contracts, but as with all things in the 1930's, high end leisure product builds were extremely rare, and much coveted. You could put about 6 people into the Playmate, and 8-9 into the luxury triple cockpit shown above, the main difference was style and cost.



Duke triple cockpit runabout, finished in 1941.

Small boats were the new it boat, how would this affect the luxury builders? Ditchburn was trying to fit into a small runabout market, it was already having problems. Minett-Shields was not having a good year either. Fred Burgess had received a runabout from the shop in the spring of 1934, by the fall it had burned to the waterline, as a result of a leaking fuel system. He was not impressed, but undeterred in wanting a certain style of boat and in 1935 he went to Greavette's this time. The ill-fated Minett-Shields had been 24 feet, the new project would be even longer at 34 feet, the first new high-dollar big boat build since 1930, to be named the Curlew. Hacker had been brought in as designer for this and he applied the Lockpat II style rounded, almost semi-circular covering board style. Greavette brought in a specialist from the U.S. to teach the workers how to do the covering board, although I think this a bit of overkill. The board is made out of a thick block of mahogany, probably 2 -3 inches wide and eight feet long. The trick is essentially similar to building a dugout canoe. If I had to do it, I would suggest building the hull up to the covering boards and then make a separate mold conforming to the curve of the frames and then use this as your guide as you dug into the mahogany block. Once the interior fits, you could attach it and then use hand planes to shape the outside to the correct appearance. This is custom work, not a production process. The interior, quite honestly, the best tool would probably be the oldest boatbuilding tool imaginable, an adze. I recall an article in Classic Boating magazine that showed a replacement of just such a covering board and the trick was to use an orbital sander to dish out the interior shape, which struck me as an unnecessarily onerous and dusty solution. I don't know how Greavette managed this; it is exactly the sort of process that would have been kept away from prying eyes, highly valuable but not patentable, what companies call know-how. The Curlew was the first of the Streamliner series, the signature boat of Greavette. More would be made, but it would have to wait.

Ditchburn stumbles; Minett-Shields reimagines



The last cruiser in 1935, by Ditchburn Boats and Yachts Author Photo

Sputtering by 1935, Ditchburn Boats and Yachts Limited did produce two big cruisers that we know of: a more 1920's style currently on display at the Thousand Islands Boat Museum in Gananoque, and a spectacular all-mahogany boat with a very modern look, in that it seems to owe more to designs of the postwar than the mid 1930's. The first generation of motor cruisers

were beamy displacement hulls, built like lifeboats off a ship, rarely exceeding speeds of 14 mph. Many, such as the early Taylors had the cabin built into the fore part of the hull, with portholes and the stern a mostly open area, although it often had a fabric top to keep the sun off. This generation was replaced in the mid-teens to early 1920's by semi-displacement hull styles, long, with boxy cabins, often fore and aft. The new style was the more angular and curvy cabin style, with a flybridge; this was the standard for cruiser design right up to today, and the look is still reflected in the multi-million-dollar seagoing yachts built for multi-billionaire owners. This accomplishment was the last gasp for Boats and Yachts, it went under in 1935. Minett-Shields was in trouble in 1934 and could not go on without some sort of restructuring, they were able to find new investors, as always from their loyal customer base. Bryson Shields would stay as President, Minett would not have any ownership interest as was now strictly a contract employee, even though the company name was unchanged. Minett still worked from time to time with the firm, when there was something to work on, but he branched out into other projects, the most notable was converting old steam launches. In 1935 he purchased the Ina, built by Polson Iron Works for the school supplies entrepreneur William Gage in 1901. He stripped out the fancy fittings and interior and turned it into a supply boat for a fruit vendor in Bracebridge, as a sort of floating grocery store to visit the cottagers on Lake Muskoka. Later he rebuilt it again as a gasoline and oil delivery boat, renamed Peerless in 1940. The separation of the person from the name is common enough in business; by 1895 Frank Polson did not own any shares in Polson Iron Works, yet the name still was a valuable brand and remained in 15-foot-high letters on the roof of the Toronto plant until 1919. As noted, Hackercraft Boats had been reorganized in 1933, but without Hacker himself. Minett-Shields had the advantage of a lack of size, it wasn't burdened with huge investments in plant and equipment the way Ditchburn was, repairing it's finances wasn't as difficult; other than Shields and Minett, there wasn't much more than a bookkeeper and 13-14 foremen and tradesmen at the best of times.

In the 1930's buying a big new launch was not in the cards, chances are you already had one and it was probably only ten years old, still just fine for your cruising needs. The notable Minett-Shields boats of the mid-1930's fell into two categories: the gentleman's runabouts and dedicated racing boats. The former were small 18-foot speeders with the driver cockpit at the back and engine amidships; most (not all) had a kiddie seat forward of the engine. The racers were for the relatively new 135 and 225 cubic inch engine classes and were built primarily on the three-point hull model, where the water contact points would be the propellor, and the forward sponsons, or twin mini-V shaped hull structures, realized and patented (but not invented) by the father and son team of Adolph and Arno Apel of Ventnor, New Jersey.

Several of these craft sold over 1934-36, Shadow, Gold Fawn, Black Knight, and Fancy Lady and the most spectacular being the Alzeda, an 18-foot single seater with the engine mounted forward and the driver's cockpit in the stern. There's no point in describing it, you have to see the picture. Even so it was apparently never as good as it looked and was prone to flipping if you took a curve too fast. Minett-Shields was able to produce curves in wood every bit as effectively as Greavette, and they didn't have to import an expert from south of the border to do it. Like the Streamliners, they were custom jobs, and you paid for the time to do the work, and it cost what it cost, these were not high-speed production hulls. Shields had purchased the hull bottom design from John Hacker in 1932 and six hulls followed. The most spectacular is the Alzeda, built for Edward Eaton, son of Lady Eaton with it's unique wildy curved stern. As noted the hull was Hacker, but the topside design is not known, possibly Minett himself, my guess is some work by Barnes, who had a gift for wild curves.



Minett-Shields 1930's saviour, the gentleman's racing runabout. Author photo

At the time the boat racing world had decided to make the sport more accessible, (read: more affordable) and set up the 135 cubic inch class in 1931 and the 225 in 1934. In 1934 the go-to engine in 135 class racing was the 4 cylinder Miller 1.5 liter (126 cid), although Miller was already out of the game as yet another Depression bankrupt, his company was bought by his chief machinist Fred Offenhauser who ran the successor company well into the postwar period. The 225-class favorite was the original Ford Flathead V-8 which had been introduced in 1932. Ford also made a scaled down version which came to be known as the Ford 60 which was supposed to be more affordable. It was just as complicated to manufacture as it's big brother, and not much cheaper at the end of the day, customers just stuck with the 221 series. But it proved to be hugely popular as a racing engine (in the 135 class), appearing in both cars and boats. The cutting edge of racing at the time was, as noted were the three-point racers of Ventnor Boat works in Ventnor, New Jersey. Ventnor was already known, but it was the three-point hydro that put them on the aquatic map, as it were. Of course there was immediate pushback that these were more skimming craft than real watercraft, one that relied more on air under the hull than water to move around. Gar Wood dissed them as "paper boats" for their thin-walled hulls and lack of the sort of robust construction and sheer propulsive power of his Miss America's. But the Miss America series had reached their natural speed limit for their planing hull design at just over 100 mph. The Ventnor's would go way faster, and the governing body gave the new design their blessing. Wood quit the water speed record game and went off into other projects, most notably a 180-foot-long catamaran cruising yacht which he finally finished and demonstrated in 1960. It was not a game changer.

The previous race boats were hard chine planning hulls with a step built into bottom, the new style was the three-point hydroplane, where at speed the boat would rise out of the water until it was balanced on the propellor and very small planning surfaces on the two forward sponsons. In 1935 Minett-Shields obtained the exclusive right to build the Ventnor racing three pointer in Canada and it took off, Miss Quebec's I, II and III, Delta, Marguerite V, all were winners. They were very small craft and therefore not big profit contracts, but they kept the shop busy.



1935 Minett-Shields racer Delta, 225 class. Delta was an unqualified success Author Photo

Unfortunately Minett-Shields managed to piss off some very important customers as well. The burning of Fred Burgess's 1934 runabout was not a good look, Burgess dumped Minett-Shields and gave the new contract to Greavette, itself a shaky enterprise still trying to recover for the grand fizzle of its mass production program. Cameron Peck ordered a 225-class racer which he would name Astrea. The contract signed by the company and its customer clearly stated the boat would be able to reach a certain speed. Peck took it out for a number of test runs, but while Astrea was built off the same general lines as the winning Delta, it apparently was unable to meet the contract required performance. Peck returned Astrea to the Minett-Shields shop in Bracebridge and demanded his money back, legal action was taken, the ultimate settlement was unknown, I don't know what the issue really was; Peck was a gentlemen racer at a time when racing success increasingly required one to eat, sleep and work at the game. But if the contract specified a certain speed and that was not happening, technically Peck was in the right. Regardless, it was an unfortunate parting; Peck was a fan of Minett and Minett-Shields up to that point, and both Scud I and II were Minett-Shield boats. But wrangles like this are part of the custom anything business and the company weathered it and moved on.



Astrea, a qualified failure, in front of Minett-Shields shop in Bracebridge. It was fast but did not make the contract speed, and Cameron Peck expected his money back. Lawsuits are pending. Peck family archives

This was not the case with Ditchburn Boats and Yachts, which collapsed in 1935. Another new slate of investors came together for one more try to resurrect the Gravenhurst operation. The new company was named Ditchburn Boats and Aircraft (1936) Ltd. Again, this was a brand name only, the man himself was not involved with this entity either; the position of General Manager was allotted to former Dispro salesman William Ogilvie. The latter aspect of the corporate name was and remains a puzzler; there was barely a Canadian aircraft manufacturing industry to speak of in 1936. We provided plenty of pilots in the Great War, they were trained in England or down in Plano, Texas, like my grandfather, during the latter period 1917-18 and streamed into the RFC for air combat duty. Canada had been flooded with surplus Curtiss JN-21 Jenny biplane trainers after 1919, this became the workhorse of the early bush flight industry. All of our aircraft, save a few experimental models were all built, again in the US or the UK.

Bob Noorduyn had built and flown the prototype Norseman in 1934, 10 more were made before 1939, but all hand built in a little shop in Montreal; major production only started after the war. The Royal Canadian Air Force ordered 15 Fleet Fawn 7B biplane trainers in 1935, but they were built at Fleet Aircraft's plant in Fort Erie. Two Fairchild Super 71's floatplanes were ordered and built in Ontario; one was totaled after hitting a log. This aircraft was completely aluminum, not much prospect for a wood fabricator. Three Northrop Delta's were also ordered, this was another aluminum monoplane manufactured by Vickers Canada, also in Montreal. Vickers was primarily a shipbuilder, but had a small sideline in aircraft, completing occasional small contracts with the Government. Why anyone would want to build wood framed aircraft in rough, rocky cottage country where the nearest airfield was Camp Borden, 60 miles away by country dirt roads? But the firm was still set up to build boats, and a recovery seemed to be in progress. The model line was formalized under the trademark Sea-Boy, providing a 19- and 23-foot model runabout, both in open utility and hardtop (sedan) configurations, as well as a "cruiser" line, which included a triple cockpit runabout and a day cruiser.

The 1937 fiscal year was actually fairly successful, as 44 boats were built, including several patrol boats for the R.C.M.P., with a small operating loss of \$1,237. Not desirable but clear evidence that Ditchburn, or let's be honest, the Gravenhurst boat factory that had housed the four Ditchburn entities, seemed to be pulling itself out of the dark hole it had been in for the last several years. And then it all went poof a few months later in March 1938, when the bank called in a \$10,000 loan. There was some talk that the company was bleeding from an underbid on the patrol boat contract, but the small 1937 loss doesn't indicate any reason to panic; for any bank a struggling business is more valuable than none at all; one would think, but... The best I can assess is that the bank manager was under pressure to clear the high-risk loans out of the portfolio, and Ditchburn was just another problem customer, too small to succeed and not worth worrying about. Also the pressure of low or no sales revenue during the long winter months may have drained the cash balances and there simply wasn't enough left to sweat it out to the spring and early summer rush. The company did try to fight the bankruptcy petition in court, the case file is *Ditchburn Boats and Aircraft (1936) Ltd. Re 1938 19 CBR 240 (Ontario, Canada)*. The legal issue apparently was that the shareholders of the bankrupt entity claimed that the name and the intellectual property was somehow separate from the business, and present troubles should not include future intangibles, therefore the IP (particularly the name Ditchburn) should stay with the investors, the inference was that they were going to try one more shot at reviving the operation. It was not to be. The judge disagreed with this, and the IP including the name went into the asset bucket along with everything else. The business closed, and the contents were to be sold. As likely secured creditor, the bank was at the top of the list and would

most likely get it's \$10 grand back. Vendors and employees would not be so lucky. The former sales manager William Ogilvie set up a boat brokerage firm called Ogilvie & Le Pan, with a Donald Le Pan.



Greavette was back in the game big time with Miss London II, in 1936. Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

The liquidators parceled out the remaining boat inventory to Duke and Greavette for finishing and sale. By 1939 there was one unfinished (and apparently unwanted) hull left; this was put up for public auction. The winning bid was the senior editor of the Ottawa Citizen, Robert Brown, who family had owned one of the first cottages at Rideau Ferry on Big Rideau Lake. The boat was shipped to Smiths Falls, an engine was installed by local mechanic and racer Eddie Mars, and the family did the interior seats and flooring. The cottage was built out over the water, living quarters on top and boathouse underneath, where you could see the stern of Bonnie Jean II: Mars was a Ford Flathead guy, so that would explain the two exhaust pipes at the stern. Bonnie Jean II was long and slender and seemed to be a throwback to the 1920's displacement style, it definitely did not fit the look of the 1930's runabouts. It didn't look at all like the Sea-

Boy series of runabouts that formed Boat and Aircrafts model line, I wonder if perhaps it was a re-do of an earlier long deck to convert to a forward driver configuration before being interrupted by the business closure. It rode like a Ditchburn launch at speed, with the stern down and the bow high out the water. Later the Brown family sold the boat, I was able to see it while under restoration at Miller-Potter in Manotick. It was solidly built, the bilge stringers looked like squared off telephone poles; that is a bit of an exaggeration, but it is a completely different design philosophy from the aircraft-like Gilbert hulls, which relied more on stressing frames than sheer bulk.

After a brief stint at a salesman with Hans Sachau, in 1938 Herb Ditchburn had entered into a partnership with a Donald Clark, forming Ditchburn Clark Boats Ltd. The exact purpose of this company was not clear (William Ogilvie by contrast clearly listed his new business as “Yacht Broker”), however the anecdotal evidence is certainly involvement in boat sales in some fashion. Ditchburn Clark’s office was in room 513 on the fifth floor of 67 Yonge Street. Ditchburn occupied the office until 1941, although the official name of the business was changed only to “Clark Boats Ltd.” from 1940 on; possibly the new owners of the Ditchburn IP from the Boats and Aircraft bankruptcy had something to do with it. In 1941 Ditchburn accepted a war-work contract and Clark Boats left the premises. Hans Sachau had been contracted to work on military production, he and Tom Greavette were able to arrange for Ditchburn to join the team as a consultant. Ditchburn went to work in Trenton designing an 80-foot rescue boat to pick up downed airmen in open water; six were built. The boats were powered with three First World War era Liberty engines, these were still plentiful; the more powerful Packard V12 was available, but there were sticky rules under the U. S. Neutrality Act, which prevented knowing sales of items and technology to be used for military purposes by a country engaged in war. The Liberty did the job but required a lot of maintenance; at this point, anything was welcome. Ditchburn’s next contract was as plant manager for a navy tugboat contract with Central Bridge Construction Ltd., he organized and oversaw the plant and the 200 company workers. After the war he returned to the boat brokering business, working out of his home in Trenton.

After closing his business, Earl Barnes was able to find work through a customer, John K. Moffatt. Moffatt Industries was the kitchen appliance division of General Steel Wares Group, and Barnes was sent on short term contract to assist with setting up the U.K. branch. In 1939, Barnes returned to Canada to work on an old project, a striking torpedo stern runabout for Carl Sauerman of National Auto Body in Hamilton (a sister boat to Billy Bea). The boat had been started in 1936-37 but the unfinished hull was sent to Mr. Sauerman after Barnes closed up. The

wood curves were not easy to do and required special knowledge, and at that point there was only a little boatbuilding left in Hamilton harbour, so Sauerman hired Barnes and two former Greavette employees to finish the job. After the war Barnes continued to do boat design for a number of clients, including Shepherd, and I am guessing also Matlo and Hunter, given the very rounded look of their hulls, particularly at the stern. He did odd jobs and advertising DIY designs for sale in boating magazines. Barnes also still had the occasional boat project, the last was a small cruiser completed in 1950. He died in 1971 in Muskoka, at the age of 75.

Minett-Shields never truly recovered after the war. Only a few boats were built between summer 1945 and 1948, it seemed to be experiencing a recurrence of the wartime and postwar doldrums that had taken down the predecessor company after the first war.



The last of the Minett-Shields line, 1947 Runabout Woodies Restorations photo

According to jproc.ca history webpage Minett-Shields had built 10 Fairmiles for the Navy during the war, an impressive total for a small shop. ML119 was the last delivery in November 1943, and then two more harbour tugs in 1944; there were no more war production orders after that. Unlike Myles Jeffrey, who never really stopped taking customer orders over the war, there was no apparent return to building over 1945-1946. In 1947 the shop embarked in a new boat line, a large comfortable 19-foot runabout, sensible and attractive, but without the wild curves and grand designs of the previous decades. Three hulls were planned.

Like many shops struggling to get back on their feet, there was always repair and upgrade work with old customers bringing their boat in to repair a leaking bottom or replace the engine. There was some glimmer of hope in a contract to refurbish the Fulford's Moby Dick, the last cruiser off the slips in 1930. Moby Dick had been loaned to the RCN during the war as patrol vessel. Many wealthy families offered their yachts up for military service. The usual story is that these loaner yachts were "handled roughly" and were badly damaged, but this is nonsense. Every naval vessel was expected to be kept in tip-top shape, clean, paint perfect, all systems running and there were plenty of inland captains and admirals to carry out snap inspections to make sure they were in good order or else. What would happen is that upon receipt, if the owner had not already done so, was to strip out all the civilian frills, the cushions, mattresses, curtains, patterned flooring, and any loose items, cups, saucers cutlery and toss it in the trash. The entire surface, inside and out including the varnished brightwork, was all painted naval grey, and a number was put in the forward part of the hull. Holes and other alterations would be made to accommodate radio and communication equipment, perhaps a towing winch would be added at the stern, as well as cabinets to stow charts, and possibly some light weaponry might be added—usually for the large coastal yachts that would be venturing out into the Atlantic, a light deck cannon, possibly a 2 pounder, or an anti-aircraft gun. After decommissioning, all the military equipment would be removed, and all the grey had to be painted over with white and the service alteration and holes filled, but this was routine. The engine most likely had been driven hard and would probably have to be rebuilt. Getting the paint off the brightwork would have been do-able, most of the grey would have been simply used to cover the varnish, so paint remover, in the form of a blowtorch or a mix of Gillett's Lye would do the trick; it might be easier in some cases just to replace it. The problem with Moby Dick, was most likely non-military; the hull bottom had been in the water for fifteen years and most likely needed to be replaced, new keel, stem, planks, frames, the works. What happened is not clear, except that the Fulford's got a bill way over the quoted contract price, much more work was needed than originally thought. They filed suit against the company, and eventually won their case, Minett-Shields had to eat the loss on the contract, although I honestly doubt it was that overwhelming, probably around

\$5-6,000 in 1948 dollars. It wasn't the first time Shields had to go to court over a contract, he already had to face legal action from Cameron Peck over the shortcomings of the little 225 class racer Astrea. But this was too much, or Shields had enough of the boat business and wanted to move on. The shop was closed in November 1948, with the three runabouts still unfinished. Apparently the receivers hired back a few former employees and finished two of the said runabouts, the fate of the third runabout is not known although the very final craft was a small motor skiff. The operation went silent after that, and the building was demolished in 1953. Bert Minett himself was long gone; supposedly working in Hamilton during the war, but I've never been able to find him in any city directories from 1939 through 1948, so I can't confirm where he actually was or what he was doing. After the war ended he was involved in refurbishing decommissioned Fairmiles into motor yachts and then returned to Bracebridge and retired. Shields listed his occupation as "manufacturer" in the 1954 Federal voter's registry, although there is no elaboration as to what this means of what connection he still had, if any with building boats.

The entire output of Minett, in its various incarnations from 1898 through 1948, was supposed to be 200-250 boats. I've been able to track 145 boats so far (including the military production), there may be 20-30 more that I've missed, but I have not been able to come close to 250. Prior to 1907, much of Bert Minett's building was to provide Cleavelands House with taxi and excursion boats, he only went seriously into commercial work in 1910. H. C. Minett, a sole proprietorship that produced 18 known boats including the cruiser Rita. There were about 95 known and mentioned boats during the Bryson Shields era from 1925 to 1948. Even during the busiest years of 1926-1929, Shields' own notes indicate a small production staff and about 8-10 boats a year coming out of the shop, at best.

There is a sad final photo of Herb Ditchburn at the 1950 Toronto Boat Show. He is still working full-time at seventy. He looks tired, being on his feet all day at the little booths boat shows reserve for the non-boat dealers. He is seated on a folding chair, wearing the familiar straw boater hat and drinking coffee from a paper dixie cup. Van Gogh, who sold one painting in his life for 30 francs, said "My work, it will survive here and there." All told the Ditchburn legacy, in terms of restoration and survivor boats is probably worth \$40 million today. Ditchburn as owner had the rights to the profit, when it was made, he also had to absorb the impact of the losses, when they came. Unfortunately, there is no pension for having done great things. But still, it's worth remembering that Herbert Ditchburn did not "build" the boats; rather he managed a business with multiple sales and production locations and a staff of close to 150 workers, the boats were the output of all these persons working in common cause. The sales

staff, office staff, designer, bookkeeper, carpenter, varnishers, and mechanics are every bit as much of the boats as the man with the name.

Chapter 17 --- You Can Build This: The Home Built Boats, 1909-1965 Coward & Deane, 135/225 Class Racers, McEwen, Johnston, Canada One Design

Eastern Ontario, After the War

When the war ended, the military contracts ended and the boatbuilders were free to return to their peacetime customers. For some of the older builders, it was time to quit. Will Dowsett and Davy Nichols either closed up shop or passed on their businesses. Clare Dowsett ran the shop for a few more years before his death in 1947. He died suddenly one winter evening, collapsing while reading the paper. There was no such thing as the privacy of an ambulance or a hearse in Portland, and Wendell Brown remembered Clare's body being pulled to the funeral home on a wooden sled by a team of horses. Mr. Dowsett retired shortly after, selling the business to a Tom McIntyre. He died in 1955 at the age of 90. The shop passed through more owners and by the early 1960's one of the old carpenters, Hiram Carr, was still working there, doing the occasional repair job such as fitting a new transom on the Sneyd family's Peterborough. The shop was torn down shortly after, and only a small storage shed was left of the original business. Wendell Brown operated a lakeside resort, (really a motel with small cottages) and a main shop until the 1950's when it was sold to Len Horsfall and was redeveloped as a marina (now Len's Cove). Len's Cove built some cruising boats in the shop after the war, but eventually the slips filled up with cruisers built elsewhere: Shepherd, Chris-Craft, Owens and Trojan.

With all his siblings gone Davey Nichol passed into a solitary retirement, still carving his duck decoys and sharpening saws. He stayed in his little house in Smiths Falls, doing saw and tool sharpening, living alone and occasionally heading down the street to hang out at the Lockmaster's office, sometimes joining in the conversation, more often simply silently watching the passage of the world from his chair. He died in 1963 at the age of 91.

Frank Dey passed away in July 1943 at the age of 83. In August 1936 while being interviewed as Frank Amyot's mentor he indicated he was done:

“But I am getting ready to retire” He told the Citizen. I am thinking of selling the forms on which I have built so many prizewinning canoes. Although I receive enough requests for shells to enable me to start up in business again if I cared to do so. I have had enough.”

Fred Gilbert returned to the Brockville shop in 1945. Merrill was still there, still working on his beloved canoes. Fred had built three successful runabouts before the war, perhaps this was the way of the future. However, he fell ill later that year and had to be hospitalized. By the time the doctors made any kind of diagnosis or treatment plan it was too late. The shop continued to operate under Merrill and in the early 1950's produced three more runabouts. Merrill retired shortly after and Fred Gilbert Jr. took over and he and his son continued to operate it as a marina.

The St Lawrence Engine Co was still in business and still making its little engine. In the 1930's they fitted some of the single cylinder models with an electric start unit and sold them to Greavette for use in their Dispro boats. The starter worked reasonably well although it was a bit modernizing overkill on an engine that was easier to start with flywheel flip. Greavette ended the St. Lawrence contract at the end of 1949. The little 3hp was made sporadically until the late 1950's and some old timers still remember a few engines still being assembled in the mid 1960's. Going and Charlie Wilkinson sold the business in 1947 to Jack Langmuir. Harry Going died in 1951.

Green Bay was in decline after the war. Henry Knapp Jr. built one last boat in 1945: a 14-foot outboard. It was more busy work than a business venture as it was impossible to compete with the assembly line boats coming out of Peterborough. He closed up shop, ending a family business that had lasted 113 years. His son-in-law continued to build boats sporadically although most of these were for his own use. All of the other builders were long gone by then. By the 1960's there was clutter of abandoned buildings, shops, mills, including the abandoned Knapp shop and William “Dollar Bill” Allen's seaplane hangar -rooming house/bootlegging depot/ and all-purpose establishment. Technically, the military owned or had responsibility for the shoreline in the Bay and they had become concerned about liability from all the abandoned structures, so they leveled all of them except for one unique boathouse that was actually built on the water and therefore legally outside the military's wrecking ball. It was still there in 1998 when I visited Green Bay and one local was trying to repair it, even though technically, no one actually owned the structure. It was one of the Knapp buildings, the middle period shop shown

in the 1907 photograph on page. It had been moved out onto the water to serve as a boathouse and repair facility and the boat lifting rail was still visible protruding over the boat slip.

Little boatbuilding was going on in Kingston either. The great shipyard of Dexter Calvin was long gone, as were the little rowboat shops and liveries at the Kingston waterfront. A.C. Knapp's son took over his father's business at the Kingston side of the bridge and he and his descendants; continued to run it as a marina until the early 1980's. Canada Dock and Dredge Co Ltd. had taken over the assets of the moribund Davis Dry Dock operations in 1930 but concentrated on repair and service of smaller service ships such as tugboats, ultimately the plant was taken over in the 1960's by a Yugoslavian-Croatian immigrant named Peter Music. Music had learned the boatbuilding trade servicing the personal yacht of Josip Broz Tito. Tito liked boats and had been trained as a shipwright himself before becoming a political agitator. Music started a new boatbuilding business specializing in steel hulled commercial craft, including tour boats, fireboats and small tug and towboats. After Music's retirement, the company was sold and now operates as Metalcraft Marine Ltd., so it is, technically, the oldest surviving boat building enterprise, operating, albeit with many ups and downs over the decades, continuously since its founding in 1879. Metalcraft has recently been added to the Connor Industries group, maker of Stanley boats. But by the 1960's little by little, the small boat building shops had begun to disappear, what would fill the gap?

Doing it Yourself

The first boats built in Canada were all owner projects. The early pioneers copied the canoe building methods of the First Peoples or simply built the square box punts familiar from the poky rivers of the old country. At that time in history a craftsman could build anything. Tinsmiths built houses, blacksmiths could build furniture and carpenters were expected to be able to build anything made of wood. Once you have the experience of building something with your own hands and are familiar with the hand and eye control necessary to make pieces fit and look correct and work well, this skill will go almost anywhere. A typical example of this was Ephraim Lindsay, the wharf manager at Kars, on the Rideau River. Aside from the wharf business, Lindsay was a carpenter, tinsmith, and blacksmith. In 1914 he built a metal hulled launch, using galvanized sheet steel formed over wooden frames. The boat was very modern in design, about twenty-five feet long and about 4 1.2 feet wide, with a type of long displacement hull that guaranteed good speed through the water with minimum power. The engine was a 2 cylinder 8 hp or so engine, from the photograph probably a Lockwood Ash, which was sold through Frank Dey's Capital Boat and Canoe. Even with his family of five he should still have

been able to get 10 mph out of this light craft.



Ephraim Lindsay and family in his self-built sheet metal hulled Kars, on an outing in 1914. Photo Manotick Boat Club Archives

This should not be underestimated, it was a potential game-changer, a light, simple and mostly leakproof boat, not to mention considerably cheaper than one made of wood. Alas, Lindsay was not willing, or perhaps unable to capitalize on this and turn it into a business. Perhaps the thought never occurred to him. Edward Mullins had the same product but being American had the entrepreneurial drive to build his steel hull idea into a big manufacturing enterprise.

People bought boats from a boat builder because they didn't know how or didn't have the time or most often simply were more interested in what the boat could be made to do rather than challenge themselves in building one. A few were up to the challenge, or thought they were. For every successful do it yourself boat project there is a dud, disappointment, or disaster. Lack of skill, lack of time or lack of money, and the deadliest of sins, motivation failure or a lack of stick to it-follow through- see it to the end needed for these projects.

A transitional business was tried in 1908. An itinerant carpenter and sometime jail inmate named Alfred Coward set up a kit boat building business in Kingston. His background, according to the ads, was that he had been working for several major US boat builders and he was now bringing this valued expertise to Canada. However, from 1905 to 1908 his home address was listed at the city jail in Kingston. His company, known as Coward and Deane featured mail order kit boat ads, clearly copied from the big US based kit boat builder Brooks Boat Co. Ltd and offering to send the ship a knock down boat to a customer or assemble the pieces on site and sell the completed craft. The kit boat pieces were all precut, the ribs already steamed into their shape although more often the kit boats used frames rather than ribs. Along with the pieces, the kit usually contained the nails and screws the hardware, jigs to set the boat hull on and an instruction booklet. The purchaser had to assemble all the pieces themselves, attach the hardware, fit in the engine, caulk paint, and varnish the completed hull.

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ALF. COWARD, Prop.

Coward also provided mail-order DIY boat kits.

The knock down option faded a bit from the ads and Coward switched over to low-cost boat building. In 1911 he advertised his business as the “Largest Boat Factory in Canada”! Your guess is as good as mine. He listed several style of boats for sale, some with interesting dimensions. The cheapest was \$85 for a 16x4 foot boat with a 2.5 hp Belle Isle engine. The most expensive was a 30 foot long by 5-foot beam mahogany deck launch with a 20 HP 4-cylinder Wonder engine. He also advertised “hydroplanes” although whether or not these were true Fauber style multi stepped flat bottomed true runabouts is not known. Hydroplanes had completely seized control of all the racing classes in the last year alone, so they were very much in boating news. But for the old school displacement speeders there was an 18-foot 3 ft 2 in wide racer with a nine HP 3-cylinder Wonder engine. This boat must have required balancing as well as steering skills. Coward’s operation lasted until 1913. There were no more kit boat operations after that. More often when someone wanted to build their own boat they simply bought a boating magazine for a copy of boat plans which were usually included in every issue.

ROD AND GUN AND MOTOR SPORTS IN CANADA.

39



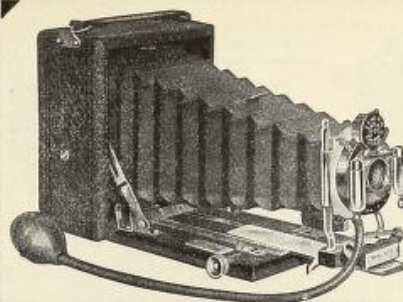
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A FEW SECOND HAND BOATS FOR SALE

Agents Wanted

About 1913 James Higginson's grandfather started work on such a project; a cruiser. The cruiser was typical of day cruiser design for the period, there was no flybridge, as is the case with most modern cruisers, the cabin was under the foredeck and there was a steering station at the back where there was a small open deck. Many cruiser owners opted to build a roof over the steering station and install windows. This was a big boat for one person to build and very demanding on time and resources. He did secure an engine for it out of an Apperson Jackrabbit one of the high-end sports cars of the day. The original Jackrabbit car had been purchased by a man from Montreal in 1915. He had been in an accident and the damaged car was put up on blocks after he enlisted, planning to get back to repairing the car when he returned from overseas. He did not survive the war and the family sold the remains of the car. The engine was sawed right out of the aluminum frame of the vehicle and fitted with an aftermarket electric starter. The engine had a peculiar drive mechanism typical with racing cars, it used a chain to provide power to the driveshaft. Furthermore the drive unit came out of the flywheel end of the engine, and it would have been an adventure just to fit this into any boat. This was an interesting engine but wholly unsuited for the low-speed high torque demands of a cruiser- just adapting it for use in a boat would have been difficult, if not impossible and chances are that it would have failed after a short period of use. Perhaps the difficulties of this engine slowed the cruiser project down. No further work was done on it until late 1930, when Mr. Higginson launched a renewed effort (very rare in this type of projects, when interest is usually permanently lost) and finished the boat in 1939, albeit and wisely with a better (Buchanan) engine.

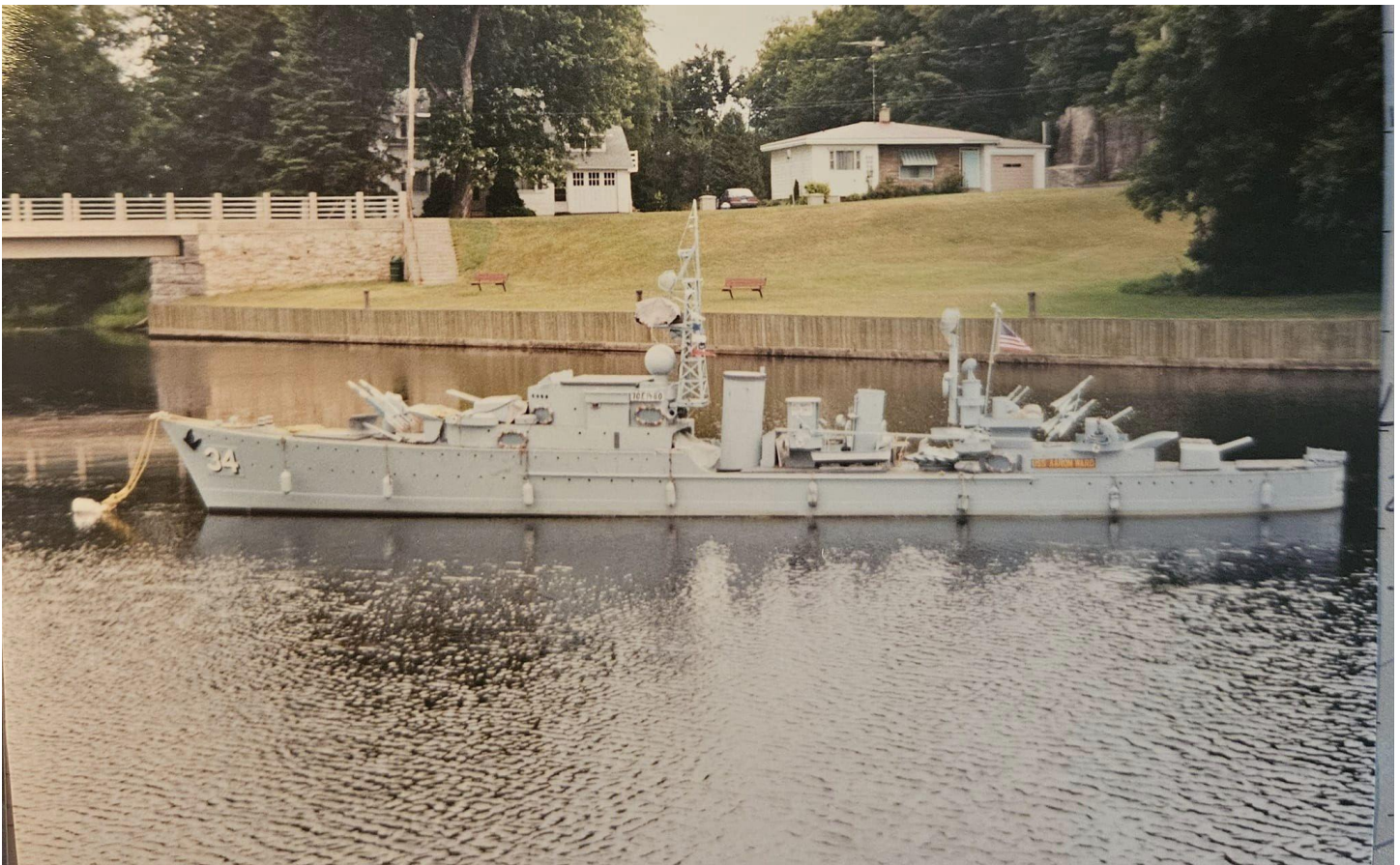


Winona, built by and for the Higginson family Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

Another enterprising speed man was Art Bassett. His initial project was not a success. While there will always be debate about what the fastest, best, most luxurious boat in Ontario, there is no question about the worst. This concoction was known as “The Stone Boat”. In the late 1930’s Bassett bought an inexpensive used hull. The original builder was not known but he had managed to put every wrong feature into his boat. The hull was long and deep, with no real planing surface. The engine was placed almost perfectly amidships. It was very heavily built but poorly sealed and leaked continuously, even after it had been in the water for several weeks. Bassett installed a Ford Flathead V-8 which produced 105 hp. Even with this power the boat still would not plane but ploughed through the water like an orange crate, so heavy the bow would never lift but instead producing a bow wave so high it was impossible for an onlooker to see the boat at all, except for a piece of the stern. After each short trip the boat would take on so much water it had to be bailed out. Even at rest it would continue to leak, and it ended up eventually sinking at the dock, which it did several times. Each time the boat had to be raised, pumped out and the engine cleaned out and restarted as soon as possible to avoid water damage. At the end of the season Bassett gave up and he and his friends pulled out the engine and gave the boat a proper Viking funeral. Undaunted, Bassett obtained plans from Myles Jeffrey for his 17-foot sports racing runabout, used for the Felix, and later Just Fiddlin. Bassett built his own copy of

Felix's hull, albeit with a more conventional tumblehome. He installed his Flathead and now had a fast boat that was actually seaworthy and planed on the water rather than through it. This boat, named Joy, was not perfect, it had a slight out of line at the stern but with the big power for such as small craft, Bassett had what he really wanted, which was speed.

One of the most unusual projects was a scale model of the Tribal Class Destroyer HMCS Haida. This was actually the project of boat building and boat repair shop run by William Walker of Port Elmsley on the Tay River. This was forty foot long hull, made of marine plywood fastened to internal frames. This was perfect scale recreation of the Haida, complete with the four 5.9 in twin gun turrets, bridge (which actually served as the bridge, providing a lookout port for the driver), smokestack and even a model lifeboat. Walker had a grand time driving the ship up and down the Rideau, taking it to events and exhibitions. I well remember one foggy wet Saturday afternoon when the Haida II appeared at the end of the lake. Silhouetted against a wall of grey mist, seen from a distance it almost looked like a real warship coming into view. It fell out of use in later years as time affected both boat and builder.



One of Walker's earlier destroyer models, a U.S.N. style

One name that resurfaced after so many years was Wendell Brown. After he left Dowsett's he was involved in several jobs and after the Second War started a successful lumberyard in the Portland Rideau Lake area. He had never lost his love for boat building in all the year since and had built several small motor boats over the years, mostly as a sideline as it never developed into a business for him. At one point he was working on a ship that was sailing in the North Atlantic. He was impressed by the study fishing trawlers used in the Icelandic fishing fleet. When he got back to Canada he kept the design in mind and in the 1970's he began to build an ocean-going cruising replica. The result, built for the Burchell family was finally launched in 1979 was the Rideau Spray. The Spray is a unique looking boat, and probably the last new all wooden cruiser made in Ontario. The planks and trim are mahogany, and the sides and cabin were painted blue. The sides are unusually high for a cruiser, more befitting the trawler design. This boat is 40 feet long and the dimensions were not just eccentricity. Rideau Spray was meant to go to sea, the real thing and not just Lake Ontario. The high wall freeboard provided cabin space you can actually walk comfortably around in- you're not crouching the way you have to in so many cruisers, even modern ones. It has one of the most comfortable cabin appointments - it has to look almost of a small apartment at sea. The 40-foot length is also important as that is the normal width between ocean wave crests; that is what I have been told by those who have been on the ocean, many sailors have gone to sea in much smaller craft, most notably Tania Aebi and her 26-foot J. J. Taylor Contessa sloop, so I don't know, this rule may affect motor cruisers more than sailboats. Much shorter boats are hard to control in rough ocean weather and can be rolled over end to end if the waves are big enough. The Rideau Spray had to deal with such waters on voyage to the Barbados in the mid 1990's. Brown was a remarkably durable man- he had finished the Spray shortly before his 80th birthday.



PETER & TOOTS BURCHELL'S **RIDEAU SPRAY II**

Wendall Browne built this 42-foot displacement cruiser, with its high freeboard and offshore trawler design, at his home on Briton Bay, Big Rideau Lake. Launched in 1979, it was finally completed in 1987, after being purchased by Peter Burchell of Perth in 1986. It has a double-berth cabin, wood stove and copper-plate chimney.

1987 BEST BOAT ON THE RIDEAU LAKES & BEST CONTEMPORARY CRUISER
(MCBC)

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He was active and even dangerously agile at the age of 94 (actual) or 96 (he said) when I interviewed him in 1996. I well remember him walking along a 6" wide plank over the boathouse slip, using his walking stick for balance. I was afraid he would lose his balance and fall in, but he never even flinched. The Spray was stored in the boathouse at his magnificent lakeside property off Briton -Houghton Bay Road. He'd done pretty well for himself, considering the rough start he'd had in life.

One of the more interesting projects was another sea going vessel that the builder had planned to go around the world with. This was an all-metal sailboat built by Bob Bramwell of Manotick. Bramwell had been one of the early antique runabout enthusiasts and he kept two small

inboards at his waterside property in Manotick's mahogany harbour. He began to assemble this 40-foot sailer in the early 1980's building it out of shaped stainless-steel plates and doing the welding himself. The outside remained unpainted for years and it had the look of a would-be project he was still diligently at work, methodically finishing the interior. Once the interior was completed and the engine installed, he painted the hull and finally launched the craft in the mid 1990's. The trip around the world was not workable, but he made several more manageable local voyages with it.

The Home Built Race Boats: Outboards

November 3, 1945

Stanley McDonald
formerly of Plaunt's Hardware

Announces the Opening of

STAN'S OUTBOARD SHOP

at a convenient uptown location.

Headquarters for

Evinrude Sales and Service
Canadian Canoe Co. Boats

Repairs on all makes of motors.
Prompt and courteous service.

340 Sparks St. 2-4303



Stan McDonald's shop in downtown Ottawa was a regular marine products dealer, he was also the go-to for custom built Evinrude C-Service racing outboards, one of the most popular and durable racing classes.

The most sustained and important home boat building movement were the racers. A whole new generation of boat racing fanatics emerged after the war. This was nothing new. Power boat racing had been around as long as there were power boats but almost all race boats built were intended to be dual purpose, they would be able to run races and still serve as regular use boats as well. The new hydroplane era changed that. In the 1950's the low end of boatbuilding was the Minimax or Sea Flea. This was an ingeniously simple, inexpensive design and a wonderful way to introduce a teenager to boating. The MiniMax, the correct name (Sea Flea was local

term) which meant *Minimum* cost and size for *Maximum* speed. Plans were published in Popular Mechanics, the omnibus do it yourself magazine of the age. You could build it out of scrap wood or spruce 2x4 leftovers. The key was a sheet of 1/4 plywood. Basically you would make some frames, attach them to a keel and screw nail the plywood on the frames for the hull, turn the boat over and attach the remaining pieces of the plywood sheet to make the decks. Attach a transom usually a 2" x 8" board, paint and you have a speedboat. Any outboard would do, even a potty little 5 hp little green Johnson would still give you, well, a lot more speed than a regular boat, more often, a 7-10 hp was the norm and you could get a good windup of speed out of these little things, as much as 30-35 mph. They were completely useless in any kind of waves so as soon as the wind died down they would come out like insects after a rain. You could hear them buzz down Rideau Lake, going full tilt, with some teenage boy at the outboard tiller. Many of these teenage boys would grow up to buy big \$40,000 adult speed boats, although with steering wheels, cupholders and nice comfortable seats. Hundreds of these were built and there was ubiquitous in Ontario waters in the 1960's and 70's. They raced at the Rideau Ferry Regatta until the 1970's. These boats were for kids. More serious outboard racers built proper racing boats. Officially there were several outboard classes, from Midget to Class X or over 60 cu in, but locally most of the attention was on Classes A,(12 Cu inch), B (20 cu in) and C (30 cu inch). These racers were amateurs, but very serious amateurs and the best of them won not just by ability, but an obsessive attention to detail.



Two Stan MacDonald C-Service racers, at center of shot Owned by Mike Krzyzanowski Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

Most were amateurs, but a few were able to make something of a business out of it. Stan McDonald, who had raced in the 1920's and 1930's set up a small outboard shop in 1945 in the landlocked town of Maxville. The bread and butter was outboard sales and service, but he also built outboard racing engines. His class of choice was C, and his base engine was the model 6039 Evinrude Speeditwin. The 6039 Speeditwin was the largest two cylinder built by OMC and could produce, under normal stock usage, about 22 hp. It weighed about 125 pounds, so this was a motor that would tend to stay on a boat all season. It was well protected with aluminum covering the spark plug and a big shroud completely covering the carburetor. These had been developed partly for use in the war, where the engines were used in assault boats and needed protection from bullets and shrapnel that might disable the spark plug or carburetor. On the civilian side the coverings gave the motor a sleek modern appearance, but the carbs tended to leak gas and it was not uncommon to have a fire ignite under the shroud that you could not put out easily, even with the dry chemical extinguisher still in use. MacDonald threw away the

shrouds and virtually the entire powerhead. He installed cylinders with greatly oversized fuel mixture channels, high compression cylinder heads, and took off the heavy flywheel and coil plate and replaced it with points and a flat stainless-steel flywheel. He used battery ignition, which was more dependable than the magneto. The small carburetor was replaced by a big greedy Vacturi model with a wide throat opening the size of a toilet paper roll and big wide brass high speed fuel jets (the pipe conducting fuel from the float bowl into the air channel) specifically for racers. The only thing that he kept from the power head was the gas tank. The entire lower unit was also a MacDonald creation, cut down, as was the rest of the engine to the bare bones. The lower unit was a sleek affair with a special custom-made racing propellor.



Bev Hall (60N, in foreground) and a rival battle it out, the engine on Hall's boat, is, I believe, a Mercury Mark 58H, a dedicated racing engine.

Once the Mercury engines came into racing in the late 1940's they put the old OMC opposed twin racers out of business. The only surviving class was an offshoot of C known as C-Service, which Mercury did not have an engine for and was dominated by MacDonald's machines, as well as built up racers from MacDonald's American rivals, such as Wiseco or Randolph Hubbell. Mercury's unique engines reflected its creator. E.C Kiekhaefer was a classic 1950's

tycoon, cigar smoking, employee firing and rehiring, porterhouse steak burning, loud talking and hard driving. Buying the sorry remains of the Thor Outboard Company in 1939, he almost singlehandedly blasted his way into an industry then virtually owned by OMC. He was brilliant but like many brilliant entrepreneurs he also had trouble concentrating on anything for long, at one point putting aside the outboard business to concentrate on stock car racing and threatening his outboard engineering staff for daring to do any research and development work that was not dedicated to the stock cars. His business drifted for the three years of the stock car frenzy and when he got tired of that he charged back into the outboards, igniting the development of a second wave of high-powered super performance motors that had reached 75 hp by 1957.

The green onion fleet was not popular with fishermen in East Ontario. The engines were superbly engineered and demonstrably superior to OMC products, but they were overpowered for their rating and almost impossible to service by the owner. They could only be taken apart with an odd-looking collection of special tools that were available to the dealership and service reps. Furthermore, they were the most expensive engine going, something that was not endearing them to buyers who could buy a similar Evinrude or Johnson for \$100 less. The KG-7 service model was slagged in the recreational boating press as “a very expensive racing motor”, overkill for a casual user who just wanted to go fishing or cruising. But needless to say they were taken to heart by the racing community. There were a few non-Mercury engines, such as the Chris Craft Commander, Martin 200 and High Speed 60, the Champion Hot Rod that challenged the Mercs, but they didn’t last long. Kiekhaefer ran Chris-Craft outboards down with patent-infringement lawsuits, Martin imploded and Champion faded away, unable to handle the competitive heat.

There were three key engines, the KG-7H, a 10 hp rated racing version of what was sold as a fishing engine, the KG-9H, the first in line four producing 25+hp and the successor the KG-7H, the Mark 20H. The Mark 20H was a silver and gold outboard that looked deceptively like any other fishing engine. The racing community bought these engines and completely rebuilt them, exchanging the sleek lower unit for a strange looking inflated exhaust expansion chamber. The result was the legendary “cornpopper”. This became the gold standard for Class A outboard racing and has never really been replaced. It was so successful, stock 20-H’s are extremely rare, and a collector’s item in their own right. Local Class A outboard racer Keith Cavanaugh used a Mark 20H to win his way to the Canadian National points championships.

The Inboards



Preparing for a race, 135 class, somewhere on the Rideau River, near Ottawa Photo courtesy Graeme H. Beattie

They were easy to make. Like the outboards, the key material was plywood. The conscientious spent money on real (and really expensive) marine plywood, with its water-resistant glues. Others simply used the sort of home improvement plywood you could buy at the local lumber store. There was no guarantees (recall how much trouble Minett-Shields got in with Cameron Peck over the failure of Astrea II to reach the contracted speed). Drivers experimented all the time with modification to hull shape, making a sponson a little deeper or wider and putting more of a curve into it. Consequently some of these hulls were an improvement and won races, some made no difference and others were duds or simply dangerous. Problem boats usually

ended up crashing.

For the 225 class there was the Canada One Design. The Canada One Design was based on the Pacific One Design which was simply a collection of rules that laid down specific size and shape restrictions on the boat design. This focused more attention on the engine set up and the driver's skill. Ernie McEwen and Don Johnston were not professional boat builders. They did have enthusiasm. It was a start. In the late 1940's, with no experience in either racing or boatbuilding Johnston decided he wanted to build an inboard speedboat. He ordered plans and went to work. It was not long after that work came to a stop when Johnston realized he didn't really know what he was doing. He knew of another fellow locally who was into building plywood boats. so he struck up a friendship with the man, who was Ernie McEwen.



Peter Burchell's My Tootsy, a Canada One Design.

Burchell Family

McEwen had learned the wood trade as a patternmaker (shaper of wood molds for metal casting) at Frost and Woods in Smiths' Falls before the war. During the war McEwen worked at Canada Veneers Ltd. making plywood frames for aircraft (specifically the Mosquito bomber). After the war he turned this experience into building plywood rowboats. McEwen was the man to talk to. The only other boatbuilder in town, Davey Nichol was still alive but had no experience with plywood and probably would tell anyone who asked to stick with plank bottom construction. MacEwen was knowledgeable about plywood, but he had also built traditional style mahogany plank runabouts in his shop. The fact was, building boats with plywood was not unknown it was uncommon and before the war had been seen only in few outboards. The prewar glues tended to be water soluble, and everyone knew what happened to veneer constructed furniture or radio consoles left out in the rain. The new phenol formaldehyde glues developed in the war were extremely tough and water resistant.

He showed Johnson how to make the frames, which were cut out of 3/4" by 2" tough kiln dried pieces of Sitka Spruce, which was usually used to build airplanes and how to glue on the 3/16" plywood skin, which was made of glued sheets of a type of Asian "mahogany-like wood. The bottom of the boat was virtually one solid sheet of plywood. Well, perhaps four, but still this was a pretty radical change from the old plank style. Plywood would bend, but it would not swell up like plank bottom boats so sealing the few seams had to be done properly. When the hull was finished Johnston installed a Ford Flathead. The boat was fast but it was a pleasure boat, not a racer. Johnston wanted a racer.

Now that he knew how, the next one was easier. This was a 135-class racer. There were several classes going, from 45 cu in to unlimited, or Gold Cup level, but only two really mattered locally, the 135 and 225 cu inch classes. A small businessmen or even a tradesman could compete in these classes without it costing him a bundle. Indeed one of the rules was that you could spend no more than \$600 on your engine, although any judge could make that call is anyone's guess. The Gold Cup level was only really for big companies with deep pockets such as J. Gordon Thompson's Supertest Petroleum Corp., which sponsored the famous Miss Supertest fleet in the late 1950's.

Prior to the war, the 135/225 classes were run with lovely mahogany racing runabouts known as gentleman's racers, which were usually two seaters with long foredeck, essentially waterborne sports cars of the type such as the Crandall Flyer built by Lloyd Shepherd in 1938. They could be raced, but they could also be used as regular boats, although like sports cars they were not family friendly, good for taking your spouse out for an evening cruise but not something the

kids could play on. The modern hydroplane which at speed rode up on two forward mini hulls, known as sponsons, so that only part of the bottom of these hulls and a small part of the stern (or just the propellor) was actually in the water reducing water drag to almost nothing. The old gentleman's racers were history. The Jeffrey runabout still had their race at the Rideau Ferry regatta. But the real action was elsewhere. But that action was purely racing, as the new hydros were useless for any kind of cruising activity and usually were kept on land when not in use.



150 Class racers, Skippy is Don Johnston

The engines most commonly used were the Ford Flathead 60 and the regular Ford Flathead. The common flathead was Henry Ford's last triumph, a wonder engine that put Ford Motors back on the technological edge in 1935. It was the first truly successful mass marketed V-8 engine, a configuration that previously had been only for luxury cars. The Flathead, so named for its valve in block configuration and contoured single piece aluminum cylinder head put out 85 hp and was the beginning of real power for the ordinary motorist. But he followed this accomplishment with the 60, a perfectly rendered mini copy with 2/3 the power but all the

complexity. This engine was only marginally cheaper than the regular Flathead and few car customers bothered with it. But it turned out to be a big hit with the race crowd, since it was a high performance 135 engine it was perfect. Previously 135 class had been dominated by the Miller and the Peerless, both super expensive custom built racing engines. With appropriate modifications, the tricked-out Ford 60 could meet these engines on their own terms.

The St. Lawrence Engine Co. took the lead in marinizing this engine, changing the water pumps and distributor and adding a custom designed reverse gear where the car transmission would normally attach. They also added a wedge flange to the carb mount so the carb would remain level when the motor was set on the sloping engine beds in the boat. They sold these engines through their Brockville shop, adding a good business in re-powering runabouts.

Johnston's 135 racer was named Fo-Go. Ready for the 1951 racing season Fo-Go was powered by a stock Ford 60 and proved to be a moderately unsuccessful boat. It did float and it would move forward but was so slow, as Johnston put it himself. "It was said when Johnston was reaching the finish line you knew it was time to start the next race. Determined to go better the next time, He selected a design based on the successful Gold Cup racer "Alter Ego" built by a young Texas race boat whiz named Henry Lauterbach. The only place the design was available was in an Italian boating magazine. The lines and specs were printed in the magazine, but they were all in metric and it took some time to painstakingly convert all the dimension back into feet and inches. Alter Ego was a three-point hydro and for this one Johnston decided to call the experts back. Three-point hydros were still cutting-edge boat racing technology, and it was vital to build it properly, not just to win but to avoid breaking your neck in a crash. As one racer put it 'With runabouts they let you know when they're going out of control, so you have a chance to correct. With hydros you never know-all of a sudden they just decide to go and that's it.

Johnson had a shop in the abandoned mill in downtown Smith's Falls (now the Museum) where he built the new boat, once again with the sure hand of Ernie McEwen. He and a mechanic friend named Bob Allan took the stock Ford 60, completely dismantled it and gave it a makeover. They bored out the cylinders and put in oversize pistons, put on Edelbrock heads, which were not aluminum but made of an alloy which allowed for better heat drainage which helped prevent the engine from overheating at high speed. They ordered special racing camshafts and crankshafts from a boat racing components specialist in California.

Johnston won because he was determinedly fussy and put a perfectionist attention to his boat. He would install his engine in the boat and take it out on the water and run it. Then he would

pull the boat out and move the engine a little forward onto the engine bed, tighten it down and go out again to see if performance had improved. Even if it had he would move the engine forward a little again and test it and keep on adjusting the engine location until the boat was perfectly trimmed. He tested a number of wood shims on the forward sponsons to see which ones provided the best handling. He spent \$100 (Imagine probably \$1500 today) on a special racing prop and took the boat out on Rideau Lake for a test run. He wound the engine up to 8500 revs, well over the red line, and the propellor shaft snapped and the shaft stub and the precious propellor sank to the bottom of the lake. It was possible to recover large items that sank in the lake. A C-Service outboard racer named Jack Weston built a sort of diving bell device he could climb into and be lowered down to the bottom to recover outboards that had come off during a race flip over. but the chance of finding a lost propellor on the Lower Rideau's muddy, weed filled bottom would have been almost impossible. It was probably left there for pike to chew on, no doubt attracted by the stainless-steel flash. As it turned out 8500 revs was overkill, and 6500 revs gave the same result without losing the prop.

DON JOHNSTON ADDS TO RACING LAURELS*SMITHS FALLS Record. August 12, 1954*

Don Johnston, Smiths Falls powerboat owner-driver who captured the Wiseman Trophy for the second year in the 135-Class at the Rideau Ferry Yacht Club Regatta August 2, continued his winning ways over the past week-end with victories in four heats at Toronto. In photo, Johnston strikes a victory pose in his boat, "Skippy". In background is another 135-Class boat, "Scamp", owned by Cliff Arnold, of Hamilton.

Don Johnston, in his 135 Class hydro Skippy. Smith Falls Record News, Aug 12, 1954

All of this took hundreds of hours of work and numerous Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Not every racer was willing to put in this kind of effort. Many preferred to rely on their driving to make up the difference and the more aggressive they got, the more risks they took. Finally, Johnston was ready to go back out to the race course. At the time the 135 class had become very popular and there were a number of hot boats competing, with some very determined amateurs. Davie Belfie, the Ynyescraig onetime helmsman and his brother Bill both raced. Bill owned a boat called the Farmer's Wife which they later renamed Static I. Static was not a very successful rig. At speeds it tended to nose under, which would result in a colossal burst of spray and usually knock out the engine. This was blamed on an accident during construction where the boat had apparently fallen off its jig and this had twisted the hull. It's hard to say. Wood boat hulls may go out of alignment if dropped, but it's hard to imagine a light boat like a 135 Hydro hull being twisted significantly from a three-foot drop, particularly considering the pounding it would take on the water when completed. Like most problem boats, the problem usually originates with the builder. Bill Belfie's next boat Static II, again built on the winning Lauterbach three-point model, was much better.



Davie Belfie takes his afternoon rest on the deck of Family Curse



Bill Belfie's Static II today, now owned by Andreas Reissmann. Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

Bill Belfie was a fairly cautious driver, possibly due to poor eyesight and tended to keep to the outside of the course. But Davie, who owned his own boat named "Family Curse" was the original wild man racer, pulling all kinds of hairy maneuvers on the course, always on the verge of a wipeout, completely the opposite of the fuss and focus brought to the race by Johnston. Belfie's presence was memorable, but he was only in the game for three years, until 1952. Belfie was a true river rat, he had worked for Mrs. Williams, driven the Ynyescraig launch as a

young man and now was working as a boat salesman for Link Boats.



Racers congregate in front of the Gananoque Canoe Club, many US competitors are there (viz Miss Coral Gables). Dave Belfie's Family Curse is at center of shot Dark reddish-brown building at upper left is the former Jack Malette shop, now a family cottage. The boats are all gone, the buildings are still there.

Johnston's strategy was to get out in front early and stay in front, the farther back you were the more wakes and waves you had to crash through. He considered this early lead more important than skill in handling the curves. The race was over five miles, comprising three laps of a total course length of 1.66 miles, which meant that the straight was less than a half a mile long, barely enough time to think in a boat averaging 70 m.p.h.

All of these men had regular jobs and racing in the 135/225 classes was just a hobby, albeit a demanding one. The only professional drivers were at the unlimited level, and they really functioned as employees of their various race teams belonged to, which in turn really acted as promotional contractors of the big companies who sponsored them whether makers of cigarettes, crusty bread (Such Crust) or engine lubricants. The big unlimited races took place at Picton on Prince Edward County Island, where tens of thousands would turn out to see the likes of Bob Hayward, the king himself, race the Miss Supertest's. Prizes at the 135 races were usually \$35, \$25, and \$10 for first second and third place finishes. The prizes were really tokens, just to help cover the cost of travel, food and most importantly, unequal shipments of both the day's racing fuel and evening's party fuel.

All the set-up work paid off and Johnston dominated the 1952 season, taking first place in 38 out of the 40 races he entered, the only two losses were due to engine failure. This was not just luck. Much of the winning take's place in the shop between the races. He checked the boat over, pulled the engine out and usually replaced the rings after every second race. The wear on the rings was serious enough after this much running that there would be enough power loss to lose the next race without a refit. This sort of thing was normal in the professional circuits but unusual at the amateur level- but that's what it took to win. The boat racing national trophy was based, not on one Grey/Stanley cup style blowout, but on points accumulated at each win during the season so it paid to be on your game at all times. Even concentration couldn't prevent the occasional nasty surprise. There were crashes, injuries and occasionally somebody would buy it. Police usually supplied a picket boat for the race and posted signs around town warning of fines up to \$500 for interfering with a race heat. This didn't and still doesn't stop boaters - and it's not kids playing chicken by driving across the course -that happens a lot less than adults behaving like children, which is something that seems to happen frequently in a boat. Even at the Antique Raceboat Regatta in modern day Clayton New York, people still idled their boats a few hundred feet in front of a screaming 7-liter hydro and then get all offended when police or race marshals yell at them to get out of the way, frequently coming to the pits to continue arguing their water rights. There are also non-human problem, such as dead heads and other floating junk. Once while chasing Jack Weston around a course, Johnston's Skippy hit a dead head and bounced up in the air for a full 40 feet before diving back in and sinking right up to the mouth of the two carbs. Johnston thought the fun was over. McEwen and Lance Kerfoot, a realtor by trade and enthusiastic racer by inclination pulled the boat out, drained the water out of the boat replaced the tainted engine oil and restarted the engine. The news of his crash had gotten to the next race at Cornwall and the hopeful competitors let out a groan when they saw Johnston and his team pull into the pits.



Canada One Design racers in front of the CNE, Toronto in the mid 1950's.

He finished the season, as John Robinson, Art Holden, and Fred Gilbert years before, at the rock lagoon out in front of the grounds at the CNE at the end of August. This was the nastiest course he had ever been on. The waves from the boats bounced off the breakwater and the shoreline riprap creating a constant chop. Nonetheless, he prevailed in all four heats beating out Toronto's best drivers and picking up the points he needed for the 1952 Canadian Championship. The next year he went down to compete against the Americans at Biscayne Bay in Florida. This was a different experience than the enthusiastic if knockabout boats back home. These were tough, organized and truly aggressive competitors; American's considered winning, even at non-professional sports, a very serious matter. All he came back with was engine damage from running in salt water. The Americans had begun to make the trip up to Canada in the following years and he began to lose the fire for the sport. He built one 225 class racer and raced it exactly once and sold it right after to one of the Hall brothers. In 1956 he sold Skippy to Ernie Dowsett of Ottawa and the engine to Ralph Wiseman. The much-used Ford 60 finally had enough and blew itself up the following year.

Others picked up where Johnston left off. George Reynolds built two 135 class boats Hornets I and II. both based on a Hallett 3-point design. Like many, he needed a prototype boat to learn how to build and drive and then a championship boat. Reynolds picked up the 135 Championship for the successive 1953 and 1954 seasons before smashing up Hornet II. He took the remains home and rebuilt it into a third boat "What's Left". Sadly Reynolds died later that

year and never had a chance to see if there was anything left in What's left“.



Ernie McEwen's shop in Smiths Falls I don't know how it got down. Photo Manotick Boat Club Archives



E. McEwen - Built, Runabout

But somehow, it did. Photo Manotick Boat Club Archives

Ernie McEwen continued building boats. He left Frost and Woods and opened up the Maplecrest Motel, a perennially popular fishing establishment located at the east side of the Rideau Ferry bridge, serving a real life and actually functional version of Red Green's Possum Lodge, becoming a magnet for Pennsylvanian fishermen, who had no lakes of their own and weren't welcome in New York state, so they came north to Rideau Lake every year. The

Maplecrest had its own dock with several rental boats available for those who just brought their car and gear. He built simple plywood rental fishing boats and when fishing season wound down, he built double ended duck boats, known as duck monitors, essentially kayaks that could be used as based for building a duck blind. He also built two planked mahogany Jeffrey styled runabouts for two local doctors as well as a day cruiser. These were really busy work, fun business projects. He never made any real money from boatbuilding or racing. It was the motel that paid the bills.



Somewhere on the St. Lawrence, most likely Prescott, given the grain elevators, McEwen launches a 15-foot runabout. He seemed to have a knack for doing everything the hardest way possible Photo Manotick Boat Club Archives

Chapter 18: Little Outboards Everywhere 1945-1968 Peterborough, Lakefield **Gren-ell, OMC Canada, Link Boats**



Mother and daughter on the dock at Honey Harbour Boat Works, 1950's

Peterborough at the helm

Claude Rogers' health was in decline after the Second World war, he was suffering from emphysema, a not uncommon late-life disease for Great War veterans, even those who had been scrupulous about donning gasmasks when the warning call "Gas, Gas, Gas!" was heard. He moved to Arizona to escape the cold (although Arizona can get chilly in the winter season, like most desert states). He kept on in the position of a Vice-President of Peterborough subsidiary Canadian Ventilating Shades, but this was not much more than a ceremonial post with an income. William Richardson also retired in 1949, turning the presidency over to his son Jack. Jack had learned his way up through the ranks in 1941 as an assistant manager. Like many sons of founders, Jack was a competent and conscientious if not necessarily visionary executive.

Others such as Paul Larson, Howard Lund and the Baril brothers from Princeville, Quebec were already forging their way into the future with aluminum. But the small wood boat market was still hot and growing, changes could be dealt with when they came.



Peterborough Comet, one of the larger outboards, capable of handling a 35 hp Johnson Javelin Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

The great expansion took place after the Second World War. With the postwar boom in recreational boating. In 1949 Peterborough Canoe employed 150 workers. Most of the production was still for Canada, as in the past, there were some exports and usually between 10-12% of total production that was shipped outside Canada, probably mostly to Europe and relatively little to the US, which had its own intensely competitive small boat industry.

The Peterborough outboard boat, as we know it is a mass-produced product. Each piece of wood in the hull is precut from a standard model, the cedar strips are knot-free 3/16 wide boards of varying widths, but usually about 2 inches wide, made from local white or swamp cedar (red cedar is prettier, but also more prone to splitting). A lap edge is cut into each side of the plank, so the planks overlap, providing greater strength and sealing qualities. The ribs are 3/4-inch oak

and are finished in a semicircular shape. This was for looks only but provided a means of distinguishing the boat from the rival Lakefield hull, which used square cut ribs. The planks were not fitted into a keel but rather the keel was split into an inner and outer piece and fastened to either side of the planking. Two more oak runners were attached to the bottom of the hull so minimize damage as the boat was dragged, as it would certainly be, over rocks, docks, dirt, and grass. The boat had hefty oak gunwales and stringers inside the hull which made it very durable, the seats were also made of wide one-piece cedar planks and the stern was made of mahogany. Notwithstanding the light planking, the heavy girder woods added to the 1 1/2' stern planking made for a heavy boat and the 14-foot models were well over 300 lbs. Peterborough outboards in the 1930's had been rather lightly built and had a low profile.



Peterborough Royal Deluxe Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

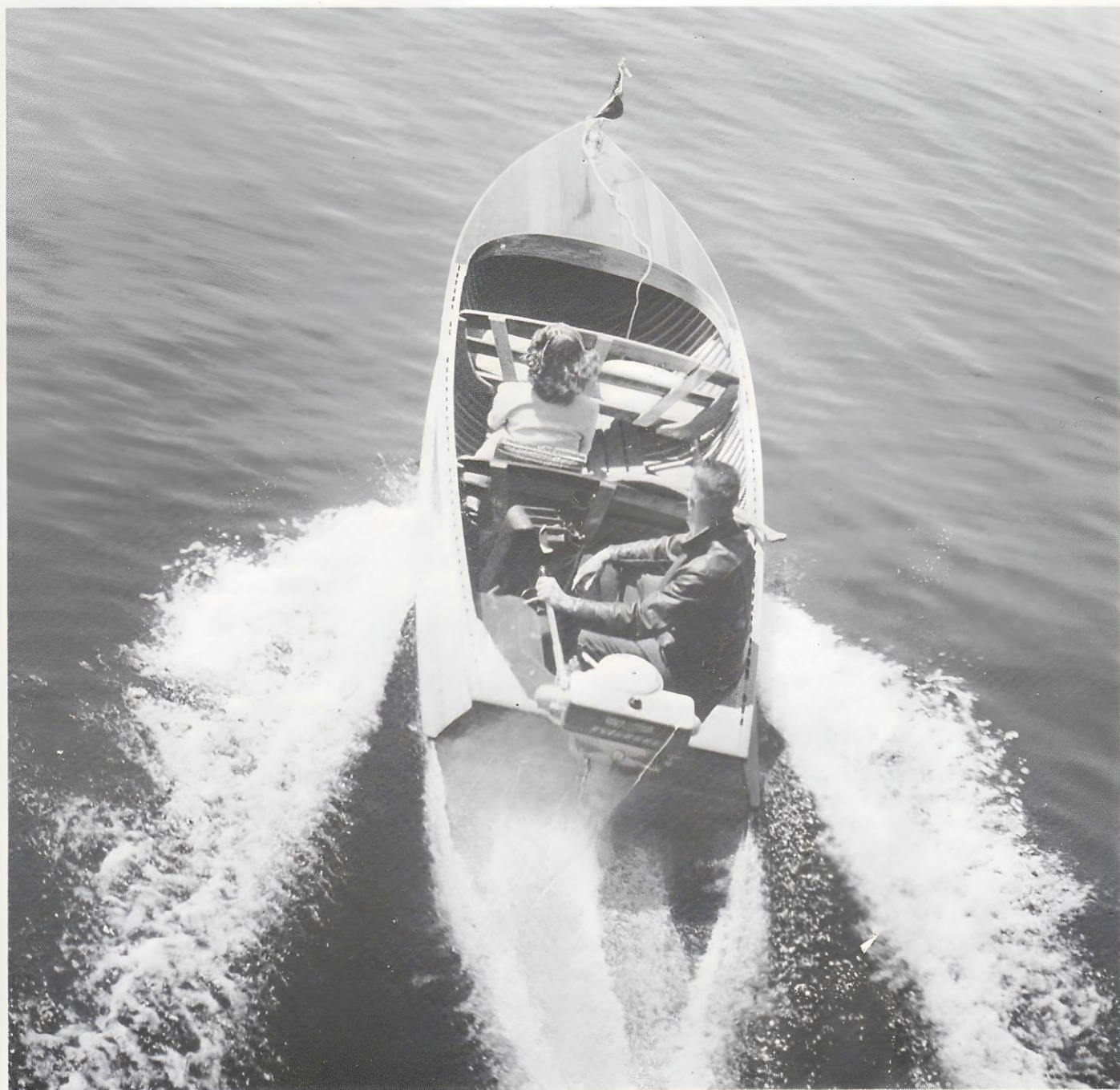
They did make a dedicated racing boat, such as the Bullet, John Mackay's little racing runabout from 1928. This was a very low production model; Mackay's boat is the only known survivor. There were so many small race boat building shops as well as numerous talented amateurs such as Keith Cavanaugh, there wasn't much opportunity here. Secondly there were so many quirks and special knowledge required in this activity that the big manufacturers couldn't match. The Speedster was as close to a speedboat as it would get. Peterborough had built inboard runabouts before the war, but after the war the boom in the little outboards made these type of side ventures more or less irrelevant and they were discontinued. Boom or not there was plenty of competition and you had to focus on being successful.



1951 Lakefield, with 18 hp Evinrude for power Author photo

Now after 40 years Peterborough's rival Lakefield Canoe Building and Mfg. was now starting to catch up. The original 1902 merger between the Gordon and Strickland enterprises had not gone well. The original founders had been friends, but their business merger was not working, and Gilbert Gordon had left in 1909. The business tottered, and finally after further problems exacerbated by the war the company was reorganized as Lakefield Canoe and Boat Co. in 1919.

Lakefield seemed to recover during the 1920's although it was still primarily a canoe builder and did not get involved to any great extent in the new outboard business as had Peterborough. Once again, it staggered under the depression and declared bankruptcy in 1938. A Mr. R.T. Bell purchased the company and renamed it Lakefield Boat Factory, but he had little success and sold it to the Risher Brothers who renamed it Lakefield Boat Co. There was plenty of war work for all the boat builders but in 1945, Lakefield, after so many years of drift finally came back into its own. They designed and began to sell the Lakefield outboard boat, which was a no-nonsense fisherman's outboard. There was no fuss or fiddle or elegant curves on this boat. No half round ribs for this boat- they were square. The foredeck was flat and there was no corner rounding or other attempts at elegance. The Lakefield was a workingman's boat. Sales took off.



*Curry family in Peterborough with Evinrude Speeditwin 22 hp.
Classic Boat Club*

Photo Ernie McEwen/Manotick

The prewar boats were more lightly built and tended to have much less freeboard. Just before the war, Peterborough had switched to a heavier built and more durable boat, with a much

higher freeboard. Motors were getting bigger. In the 1920's the most powerful motor used was generally the 7hp Johnson K series. By the late 1930's a very popular all Canadian brand of Johnson, the OK series was being made at the OMC plant. Ironically, the K model itself had switched over the more efficient alternate firing twin style and just before the war had begun to sport recoil rope starts. The OK-55 was originally a concoction made out of spare parts just to scrape together payroll cash for the plant in the bad 1933 season. Yet it, and its descendants, all based on the now obsolete opposed firing configuration proved so popular that the plant tooled up for large scale production. Tens of thousands of these engines OK-60, the ubiquitous OK-15 and the final variant OK-20 were produced up to 1951. The OK engines were cheaper, simpler, easier to take apart and fix, ran like a watch assuming you could start them and were almost indestructible. Collecting these engines in the mid 1980's I could never figure out why some of them had a straight semicircular dent in the pressed aluminum gas tank until I asked one old timer who said that he and a friend had taken the friend's engine out on the lake for one last ride. They brought along a bottle of whisky and took turns sipping and pulling for two hours until the friend picked up the oar and brought it down on the gas tank. Hence the term for those mysterious semi-circular tank dents: "oar mark".



Peterborough with 10 hp Johnson Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

The postwar 14 and 16 footers were big boats and needed a fair amount of power to make them go. My grandfather bought a Martin 60 7.2 hp engine for the 1949 14-foot Lakeside and that provided some speed, but the boat did not reach its potential until my father brought along his Elto 12 hp so that it was able to reach its potential. The Aquaflyer and the speed model, the sleek Speedster were happiest with the Evinrude 18 hp or a Martin 200 17 hp and could easily

handle the 22 hp Evinrude Speeditwin and the Johnson PO-15. After the war Outboard Marine ran an unintended monopoly on outboard production. That would change.



By the late 1930's the outboard was taking on a modern appearance Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

In Wisconsin two engineers, George Martin and Carl Kiekhaefer set up outboard factories. Kiekhaefer was financed by his family while Martin sold his project to a cookware manufacturer that wanted to diversify into marine products. Kiekhaefer's Mercury line has a cultlike status among collectors today, as much for the engine's deserved kick-ass reputation as for the founder's colorful personality. In reality it was Martin's engine that exploded OMC's grip. The Martin 40 (4 hp) and 60 (7hp) were common sights on Ontario lakes. By contrast the rival green shrouded Mercury models KG/KH 4, 7, and the big 25 hp+ KG9 were rare, and both models were way too expensive and overpowering for the fishing boats of the time. The Martin line took off in 1947 (our family bought a model 60 in 1949) and over 800,000 engines were sold in the next five years. The parent, National Presto (aka National Pressure Cooker Co. Ltd) somehow threw it all away, and with amazing speed. Inter-divisional battles between the pot and pan division and the outboard division, unionization wars and general mismanagement (George Martin had been eased out by the end but he was so incensed by the problems he walked into the division president's office and yanked his framed royalty agreements off the wall) brought it down in 1952. Mercury sold out to bowling alley products company Brunswick Corp. Kiekhaefer was shown the door in the late 1960's and the company toned down the products and the off white and chrome shroud and later all black Mercury's began to show up on the Rideau waterways. But most of the time it was Evinrude and Johnson, with a scattering of Elgin's, colorful green and gold Scott Atwater's and blue and white Firestones that dominated the waterways.

In 1950 OMC brought out the next generation of outboard. All models were now alternate firing twins, with recoil starters, reed valve mixture controls, modernized carburetors, and fuel flow systems. The old 22 hp monsters were gone, replaced by the Johnson 25 Hp with its greed aluminum shroud and recoil rope start. They started, almost guaranteed on the first or second pull. The 1955 Evinrude Lark 30 hp had dependable electric start. The biggest engines, the V-4 50 hp or the "fat-fifty" series brought out in 1957 had the works, electric start, and enough power to pull a water skier. The Lark could pull a skier, as long as it was a relatively light young man or woman, and it was not a very exciting ride. Boating was changing as well and the majority of boats were now big 16 footers with big engines, the small 12-footer outboards were strictly for fishermen.

OMC of Canada

JOHNSON
Sea-Horse
OUTBOARD MOTORS

MODEL HD 2.5 H.P.*
Johnson's smallest model with all the refinements of Johnson master craftsmanship including ALTERNATE FIRING, Full Pivot REVERSE and Dual Carburetion. Lightweight for ease in handling, it's ideal for the fisherman... so smooth and economical, so high in performance. Check these many features built into this "baby" of the Johnson family.
Basic Weight.....31 lbs.

MODEL SD 16.0 H.P.*
Power lies under this streamlined power head... power at the command of your fingertips with a twist-grip throttle control. Fast pick-up and surging speed on larger run-about type boats. Positive primer for ease in starting... ALTERNATE FIRING for maximum smoothness in operation. Built with the finest lightweight materials... DEPENDable.
Basic Weight.....92½ lbs.

MODEL TD 5.0 H.P.*
Most popular of all Johnson Sea-Horses is this streamlined all-deluxe model — product of 25 years of experience. Power always under control makes this the fisherman's pride... a smoothly operating motor for slowest trolling. The "Big Three" — ALTERNATE FIRING, Full Pivot REVERSE and Dual Carburetion — plus many other fine features.
Basic Weight.....44 lbs.

MODEL PO 22.0 H.P.*
Johnson's largest motor for super-power and speed with heavy loads. Extensively used for commercial purposes. This model motor has been in the Johnson line seventeen years... real proof of its public acceptance. Constant improvements over this period by Johnson engineers assure ultimate performance. It's the motor with built-in DEPENDability.
Basic Weight....115½ lbs.

MODEL KD 9.8 H.P.*
One lever Synchro-control is one of the many features of this large ALTERNATE FIRING twin. Built for higher speeds, larger boats and heavier loads. Full Pivot REVERSE for tops in maneuverability... and exceptional ease in starting makes this model a family favorite. It's been in the Johnson family fifteen years... truly a motor experience built.
Basic Weight.....70½ lbs.

*O.B.C. Certified Brake Horsepower at 4000 r.p.m.

The Johnson line, both Canada and the U.S. circa 1948.

The OMC plant in Peterborough had some challenges getting back on its feet after the war. After VE day it laid off 320 of the wartime staff of 822. The plant had expanded to 88,000 square feet during the war; however, it was quickly apparent that even this was still too small. The sharp postwar shortage of aluminum cut outboard production in half for 1946. This was a

temporary problem and the rush of outboard orders led to a new construction doubling the plant size to 160,000 sq feet. In 1950, the original boss HM Campbell retired, and his deputy Charles Neal took charge. Neal was a visionary and he helmed the plant through the boom years of the 1950's. He came up with the idea of adapting the utility Johnson service motor to a lawnmower engine, revitalizing the moribund Lawn Boy brand. This was the right product at the right time, it came along just as the suburban housing boom hit.



The common man's fishing motor Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

But as was always the case with so many Canadian factories, the big decisions and the creativity were back in the US. The new line of Johnson and Evinrude motors were the creation of US research departments, and the Canadian plant was ordered to tool up for them. There are few real differences between the Johnson and Evinrude brands now, except for the cowl. In 1950 Johnson was green and Evinrude was blue. In theory the Johnson was supposed to be the second-class brand, the plainer of the two, but in reality there were no performance differences. The reputations stuck around for an amazingly long time though, and up until a few years ago some people still thought of Johnson as the cheaper, lower cost brand. Ironically it was the 1956 Johnson Javelin 35 hp that had and still has the Classic 1950's look with its gold and chrome flashes and accents and the rival Evinrude Lark has the plainer blue and white stylings.

Another impact of postwar prosperity was that the growth products were with the big motors. The reason for this was the introduction of electric start. With bigger engines people needed larger boats. The Aquaflyer was a fairly solid craft and could easily accommodate a 25 hp or even the 30 HP Evinrude Lark when it came out in 1955.



As the horsepower wars geared up, the 1956 Lark was quickly upgraded to 35 hp in 1957

The stylish 35 hp Johnson Javelin came out in 1956, with its classically 50's styling reminiscent of the auto industry with a gold hood with chrome fittings and accents. Some buyers wanted even more outboard power and they found that if they could mount two 25 hp engines on the stern of the boat you could use the power to pull a water-skier. This was too much for the Aqua flyer. Therefore Peterborough came out with its biggest outboard hull. Peterborough built it to accommodate the twin outboard design and the result was a very high freeboard hull. The transom, however, was high where it joined the hull and then there was a dramatic drop by almost eight inches to accommodate the outboards. Even with this, the 25 hp OMC products had to be bought with an extension to the lower unit just so the propellers would be low enough to catch the water underneath the hull. It worked but the lowered transom looks odd, as if a piece had been cut out of it.

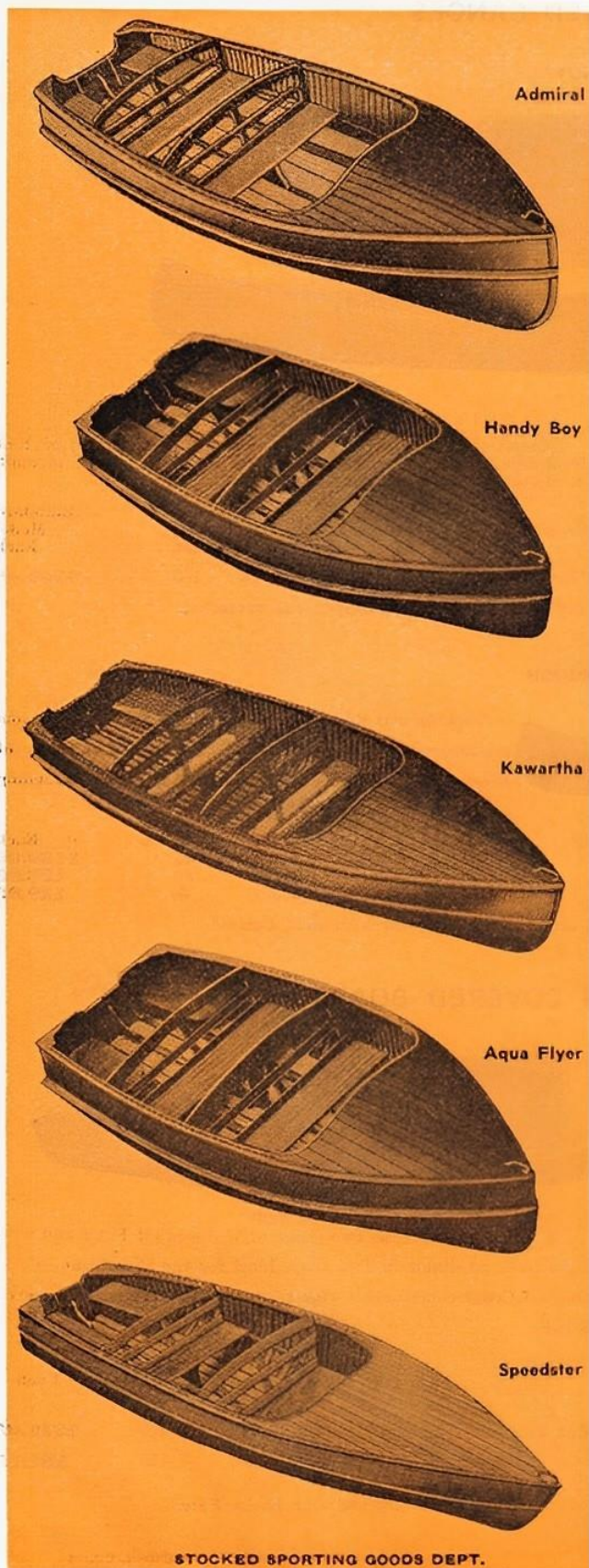
Peterborough Boats, Shoot to the top, drop to the bottom



In

1950's Peterborough Speedster, with 1949 Evinrude Speeditwin for power Author photo

1956, Peterborough Boats built 8,000 boats and recorded sales of \$1.5 million, the best year ever. For all this success, there were numerous problems which were starting to catch up with Peterborough Canoe. Prior to the war they changed their employee pay structure from a straight per hour salary to a mix of low base salary and piecework income. They cut the salary of the single workmen by one half and the married workmen by one third. However, the difference was to be made up by a piecework system, so the employee earnings became a mixture of base salary plus piecework earnings. This was a very common way of rewarding employees for productivity, even governments still use it. Slower employees can at least earn their wage while high producers get a bonus for their extra effort. The key to managing this is a very strong quality control system, as high production invariably leads to sloppiness and corner cutting. However after the war, the young ex-serviceman began to get aggressive about their share of the pie and many factory workmen began to unionize. Unlike the failed unionization attempts in 1919, this time it worked. In 1955 the workers at Peterborough boats formally unionized and as part of the collective agreement the piecework system was canned, and they went back to straight wage per hour system.



Admiral

Handy Boy

Kawartha

Aqua Flyer

Speedster

Peterborough MOTOR BOATS

Varnished natural inside and outside. Oak Keel. Natural Cedar Deck is 5 Feet long.

Standard Equipment—Full length Splash Rails, Two Removable Back Rests, Floorboards, Bow Plate, One Pair Oarlock Sockets, Tool Drawer.

Motors Recommended—9 to 50 H.P.

Speed Obtainable—10 to 35 M.P.H.

Seating Capacity—10 or 11 persons.

Construction—Longitudinal Strip.

Model	Lgth. Ft.	Beam, Ins.	Depth, Ins.	Transom Ins.	Shipping Wgt. Lbs.	Each
Admiral 149	18	62	25	53	430	\$600.00

Varnished natural inside and outside. Oak Keel. Natural Cedar Deck.

Standard Equipment—Full Length Splash Rails, Two Removable Back Rests, Floorboards, Bow Plate, One Pair Oarlock Sockets.

Motors Recommended—9 to 50 H.P.

Construction—Longitudinal Strip.

Seating Capacity—8 persons.

Speeds Obtainable—10 to 40 M.P.H.

Model	Lgth. Ft.	Beam, Ins.	Depth, Ins.	Transom Ins.	Shipping Wgt. Lbs.	Each
Handy Boy 147	15	60	24	53	345	\$505.00

Varnished Natural Inside and Outside, Oak Keel, Natural Cedar Deck. $\frac{5}{8}$ Inch Cedar Planking.

Standard Equipment—Full Length Splash Rails, Two Removable Back Rests, Floorboards, Bow Plate, One Pair Oarlock Sockets, Tool Drawer Under One Rear Seat.

Motors Recommended—Up to 25 H.P.

Construction—Longitudinal Strip.

Speeds Obtainable—Up to 30 M.P.H.

Seating Capacity—7 persons.

Model	Lgth. Ft.	Beam, Ins.	Depth, Ins.	Transom Ins.	Shipping Wgt. Lbs.	Each
Kawartha 148	17	57	24	48	360	\$485.00

Varnished Natural Inside and Outside, Oak Keel, $\frac{1}{2}$ Inch Cedar Planking.

Standard Equipment—Full Length Splash Rails, Two Removable Back Rests, Floorboards, Bow Plate, One Pair Oarlock Sockets

Seating Capacity—7 persons.

Construction—Longitudinal Strip.

Speeds Obtainable—10 to 45 M.P.H.

Motors Recommended—9 to 50 H.P.

Model	Lgth. Ft.	Beam, Ins.	Depth, Ins.	Transom Ins.	Shipping Wgt. Lbs.	Each
Aqua Flyer 1828 (1493)	14	57	24	53	315	\$470.00

Varnished natural inside and outside. Oak Keel. $\frac{1}{2}$ Inch Cedar Planking.

Standard Equipment—Full Length Splash Rails, Two Removable Back Rests, Floorboards, Bow Plate, One Pair Oarlock Sockets.

Construction—Longitudinal Strip.

Motors Recommended—Up to 25 H.P.

Seating Capacity—7 persons.

Speeds Obtainable—Up to 30 M.P.H.

Model	Lgth. Ft.	Beam, Ins.	Depth, Ins.	Transom Ins.	Shipping Wgt. Lbs.	Each
Speedster 1827 (182)	16	55	24	48	300	\$420.00

Above Motor Boats are not Equipped with Oars.

All Boats shipped, Wrapped and Protected

FREIGHT CLASSIFICATION—L.C.L. 1

Secondly, the additional demands from the 1950's boating boom required an expansion. In 1947 the company purchased 14 acres on Monaghan Road. A new finishing operation was built on the site and the in 1958 The Peterborough division moved into the new plant and the Canadian Canoe division moved in the old Peterborough factory on Water Street. But the cost of this move was over \$1 million, financed entirely with debt. Additional employees have been added, bringing the total staff to over 200 for Peterborough Canoe alone. Perhaps there was no need to be worried. Fiberglass was a success in the canoe market but had been less successful in the small outboard fishing boat market place- the boats were heavy, and the sprayed fibers were ugly and scratchy to the touch. Still, small fiberglass builders were popping all over up in the US, with their wild stylings and soda fountain colors but this had little appeal in the no-nonsense fishing boat world. Their boats tended to be cruising and performance models.

March, 1953

Ashdown's

163

Peterborough MOTOR BOATS

Varnished Natural inside and outside. Oak Keel. $\frac{3}{8}$ Inch Cedar Planking.

Standard Equipment—Full Length Splash Rails, Two Removable Back Rests, Floorboards, Bow Plate, One Pair Oarlock Sockets.

Motors Recommended—Up to 18 H.P.

Construction—Longitudinal Strip.

Seating Capacity—6 persons.

Speeds Obtainable—Up to 20 M.P.H.

Model	Lgth. Ft.	Beam Ins.	Depth Ins.	Transom Ins.	Shipping Wgt. Lbs.	Each
Lakeside						
1826 (183)	15	52	22	48	260	\$375.00
Shipped Specially Wrapped and Protected—Oars Extra						

Varnished Natural Inside and Outside. Oak Keel.

Standard Equipment—One Pair Flat Blade Selected Oars and Locks, Two Pair Oarlock Sockets, Floorboards, Paynter Bow Clip.

Motors Recommended—Up to 18 H.P.

Construction—Longitudinal Strip.

Seating Capacity—7 persons.

Speeds Obtainable—Up to 28 M.P.H.

Model	Lgth. Ft.	Beam Ins.	Depth Ins.	Transom Ins.	Shipping Wgt. Lbs.	Each
Fisherman						
184	15	52	20	48	220	\$290.00
184S	Same as above, but with Splash Rails					\$305.00

Varnished Natural inside and outside. Oak Keel. $\frac{3}{8}$ Inch Cedar Planking.

Standard Equipment—One Pair Flat Blade Selected Oars and Locks, Two Pair Oarlock Sockets, One Rowing Foot Brace, Floorboards, Paynter Bow Clip.

Motors Recommended—Up to 6 H.P.

Construction—Longitudinal Strip.

Seating Capacity—5 or 6 persons.

Speeds Obtainable—Up to 12 M.P.H.

Model	Lgth. Ft.	Beam Ins.	Depth Ins.	Transom Ins.	Shipping Wgt. Lbs.	Each
Camp Mate						
141	15	46	16	38	170	\$240.00

Built of Canvas covered construction. Varnished Natural inside, painted Green Outside. Keel with Skog.

Standard Equipment, Both Models—One Pair Flat Blade Selected Oars and Locks, One Pair Oarlock Sockets. Three Tie Rings. (One on Bow, Two on Stern).

Model 1829

Motors Recommended—Up to 7½ H.P.

Seating Capacity—3 or 4 persons

Speeds Obtainable—Up to 10 M.P.H.

Model 1811

Up to 10 H.P.

4 or 5 persons

Cap. to 15 M.P.H.

Model	Lgth. Ft.	Beam Ins.	Depth Ins.	Transom Ins.	Shipping Wgt. Lbs.	Each
Auto Boat						
1829 (1412)	12	44	37	37	115	\$190.00
1811	13	46	40	40	125	227.00

Oars only Furnished with Boats as Shown in Illustrations

All Boats Wrapped and Protected

Stocked Sporting Goods Dept.

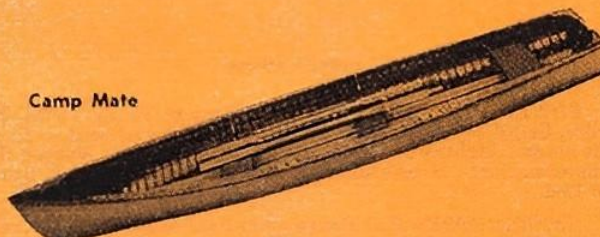
Lakeside



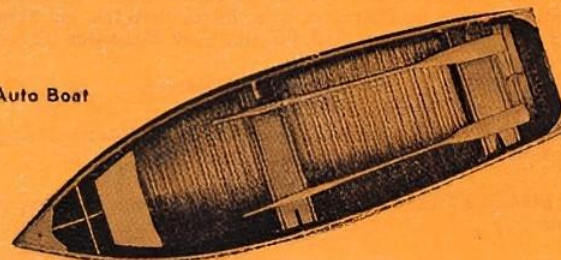
Fisherman



Camp Mate



Auto Boat



The success of real Boating Pleasure depends definitely on specific needs. Such details as size of waters to be navigated, required carrying capacity, speed and size of Motor required should all be carefully considered before final choice is made.

Freight Classification—L.C.L. 1

Prices for the 1954 model year

Model	Length	ID	Price	Feature
Zephyr	15	1819	315.00	Centre deck with Steering
Lakeside	15.5	1826	360.00	Centre deck with Steering
Speedster	16	1827	400.00	Open deck
Sportabout	13	1822	420.00	Centre deck with Steering
Aqua flyer	16	1828	460.00	Open deck
Rambler		1825	460.00	
Kawartha	17	148	470.00	Open deck
Handy Boy	16.5	147	500.00	Open deck
Monarch		1819	520.00	Runabout cockpit style
Admiral	18	148	590.00	Open deck
Royal	14	1820	620.00	Runabout design Mahog deck
Monarch	16	1819 SD	695.00	Larger for 35 HP
Royal	16	1820S	755.80	Runabout design Mahog deck
Seafarer	16	1835	795.00	Heavy dual o/b wide beam
Mercury	16	1833	900.00	Mahogany runabout
Cruiserette		1834S	1400.00	
Cruiserette		1836D	1700.00	

Our family and I have owned, in order, a 1949 Lakeside, a 1953 Aqua flyer and currently a 1951 Speedster. They are the most basic of the line, all open. A centre deck with a steering column was an extra for \$75 over f.o.b. The Speedster was supposed to be the “fast boat”, but this was only marketing and it certainly looked sleek and quick, again it had the same bottom style as all the others. The Sportabout was the pee-wee of the fleet, at a mere 13 feet, while the Admiral was the longest at 18 feet. Once over the \$500 threshold you were now in the more deluxe models. The Monarch looked like a mini-inboard runabout, but both decks and hull planked in cedar. The Royal had mahogany planked decks and cedar sides and a red painted bottom; it comes in both 14- and 16-foot versions, I assume the price difference is reflected in the length. The Seafarer was wide and deep and could mount dual outboards; in 1954, the most powerful outboards were 35 hp, so you could mount two 25 hp units for a total of 50. The twin power mount disappeared over the next few years as outboard engine power zoomed to 60 and then to 75 hp and this was a much muscle as boats of the time needed or could handle. The Mercury

was the priciest, at \$900 fob and had mahogany plywood sides and mahogany planked deck, this was the only model that could take on the newly arrived, high end all mahogany planked Gren-ell. I don't know anything about the Cruiserettes, I've never seen one as is the case with the solitary inboard, the Sagama. Peterborough never had much success with its launches or inboards, they were always advertised and available, the low-cost brand of Peterborough may have interfered with the selling capacity for higher end items.



1951 Peterborough Speedster Author Photo

A game-changing rival had appeared, in the form of Canbar Marine, a division of Canada Barrel and Keg, a maker of oak barrels for whisky, owned by Seagram's. With flavoured booze sales flat, Seagram's decided to diversify and set up Canbar Marine to produce a series of small aluminum boats under license from Paul Larson's Crestliner. Their signature product was the

Commander, 12 feet long and available in painted and bare aluminum. The bare metal was cheaper, but it would also absorb heat on a hot sunny day, whereas the white paint would reflect it; this may be relevant to fisherman who prefer overcast days which are better for catching fish, which tend to get dozy by a warm afternoon.

My grandfather bought a used Lakeside in 1951, along with a Martin 60 for power. We bought the Crestliner Commander in 1967 for \$300. It sounds comparable-ish, but the above prices are straight from the factory, most boats were bought at a dealership, so add another \$100-140 to the \$360 for \$460 to \$500, against the said retail \$300 for the Commander, and it is easy to see who will win the price battle. The Lakeside's ash ribs began to crumble after a decade and it was pretty much done by 1966, the Crestliner is still going strong in 2024. Peterborough was fighting an impossible battle. Further, when you are making low-cost production items, profits depend on high volume and at a certain point, even if you are still selling a lot of product, you simply can't make the gross margin necessary to cover the fixed costs, and shareholders begin to assess whether there is any point in continuing.

In 1959, Peterborough, with small cedar strip sales dropping sharply, began to realize that it was time to phase out the wood boats. They invested heavily in aluminum presses and riveting machines as well as in developing molds for fiberglass canoes. Fiberglass finishes have to be perfect. Cedar strip boats can be forgiving- a gouge or an error or a too short or long piece can be hard to see in the complex visual text of the wood boat, but an error- a blot or discoloration on the uniform gelcoat hide of glass boat stands out like a sore thumb. These boats were not as simple to build as wood boat fans realize and require a lot of attention to detail, and an entirely different skill set. There was a long learning curve and there were a lot of factory seconds at a time the factory could ill afford it. The master wood boat builders, many of them who had been with the company for years, were having a hard time learning the new methods. The production transition costs mixed with the losses on the falling wood boats led the firm to a crisis point. Canadian Watercraft's canoe division, Canadian Canoe was the first to go, declaring bankruptcy in 1961 with debts of \$2m. With wood boat sales crashing and the new aluminum and boats and glass canoes not coming through the Peterborough division itself went under in 1962.

The remaining inventory was sold off over 1962-3 and in 1965 the remaining molds and IP was sold to Aluminum Boats and Canoes Ltd. operating out of Princeville, Quebec. The original company was started by the Baril brothers, Lionel, Roger and Sarto, who went straight into building small boats out of aluminum in 1954. The Baril's sold out to the Brillant family in 1968, which sold out in 1970 to Giffen Enterprises, a California firm who sold it three years

later to Alcan Aluminum, which had decided to branch out into end-use products for its metal and later merged Peterborough-Aluminum Boats and Canoes with Alcan's own Springbok line.

Model	Type	F. O. B. Price	Estimated Current Values Less Repairs		Code	Lgth. Ft.	Beam In.	Wt. Lbs.	Trans. Hgt. In.	Trans. Wdt. In.	Max. Horse Power	Type Fib.	Const. Mat.	Pas- senger Cap. Lbs.
			LOW	HIGH										
PETERBOROUGH														
CANADIAN BOAT MFG. CO., LTD.														
Room 814, 1440 St. Catherine's St.—Montreal 107, Quebec, Canada														
PETERBOROUGH														
1 9 7 0														
Huron 14'	C	198.00	85.00	114.00	140P00	14'	34"	75				2	Foam	Alum.
Huron 16'	C	234.00	100.00	135.00	166P00	16'	36"	90				2	Foam	Alum.
Pointed Canoe 15'	C	234.00	100.00	135.00	166P00	15'	40"	75				2	Foam	Alum.
Pointed Canoe 17'	C	247.00	106.00	143.00	175P00	17'	40"	95				2	Foam	Alum.
Freighter V Stern	C	243.00	104.00	140.00	172P00	14'10"	38"	75	11½"			2	Foam	Alum.
S.S. Canoe 16'	C	247.00	106.00	143.00	175P00	16'	40"	150		16"		2	Foam	Alum.
Neptune 9'	P	166.00	71.00	96.00	118P00	9'	39"	70	15"	35"		4	Foam	Alum.
Neptune 12'	P	225.00	96.00	130.00	159P00	12'1"	39½"	100	15"	39"		6		Alum.
Neptune 14'	P	260.00	111.00	150.00	184P00	14'	45"	120	15"	35"		7½	Foam	Alum.
Cartop	UT	234.00	100.00	135.00	166P00	12'	50"	102	15½"	40"		7½	Foam	Alum.
Seabreeze	UT	260.00	111.00	150.00	184P00	12'	50"	135	15¾"	43"		7½	Foam	Alum.
Hudson	UT	300.00	129.00	174.00	214P00	12'	53"	135	15¾"	48"		15	Foam	Alum.
Yukon	UT	387.00	166.00	224.00	275P00	14'	59"	180	15¾"	50"		25	Foam	Alum.
Kingfisher	UT	438.00	188.00	254.00	312P00	15'	64½"	190	15¾"	55"		30	Foam	Alum.
Royal	UT	553.00	237.00	320.00	393P00	15'10"	72"	285	15¾"	63"		35	Foam	Alum.
Spray	D	625.00	268.00	362.00	445P00	11'1"	65"	120	15"	58"		4	Foam	Alum.
Corsair	RB	438.00	188.00	254.00	312P00	12'	48"	195	15½"	43"		15	Foam	Alum.
Gadet	RB	585.00	251.00	339.00	416P00	14'5"	58½"	265	15"	50½"		35	Foam	Alum.
Lark	RB	715.00	307.00	414.00	509P00	14'	61"	430	15½"	56"		40	Foam	Alum.
Titan	UT	840.00	361.00	487.00	599P00	18'	81"	400	21"	66"			Foam	Alum.
Dinghy	D	185.00	79.00	107.00	131P00	7'3"	48"	65	14½"	40"		3	Foam	Fbg.
Sioux 12	UT	283.00	121.00	164.00	201P00	12'	39½"	100	14½"	39"		6	Foam	Fbg.
Sioux 14	UT	390.00	167.00	226.00	277P00	14'	61"	165	15½"	55"		25	Foam	Fbg.
Surfer	SR	517.00	222.00	299.00	367P00	10'6"	62"	250	15½"	58"		20	Foam	Fbg.
SS 145	SR	1125.00	483.00	652.00	801P00	14'6"	71"	450	21"	65"		50	Foam/Bal.	Fbg.
Fury Std.	RB	922.00	396.00	534.00	656P00	14'9"	71"	500	16"	64½"		50	Foam/Bal.	Fbg.
Fury Dix.	RB	1125.00	483.00	652.00	801P00	14'9"	71"	500	16"	64½"		50	Foam/Bal.	Fbg.
Catalina O/B	RB	1255.00	539.00	727.00	894P00	15'5"	75½"	575	20½"	68"		75	Foam/Bal.	Fbg.
Continental O/B	RB	1870.00	804.00	1084.00	1333P00	16'2"	82"	1050	20½"	75"		120	Foam/Bal.	Fbg.
Sunliner O/B	RB	2150.00	924.00	1247.00	1533P00	17'	82½"	900	20½"	75"		125	Foam/Bal.	Fbg.
1 9 7 1														
Jet Star	RB	675.00	324.00	418.00	514P00	10'6"	62"	310	15¾"			20	Foam	Fbg.
Corsair	RB	695.00	333.00	430.00	528P00	14'2"	58"	220	15¾"			35	Foam	Fbg.
Playboy	RB	1345.00	645.00	833.00	1024P00	14'	69"	585	20½"			50	Foam	Fbg.
Dart	RB	995.00	477.00	616.00	757P00	14'2"	65"	500	20½"			50	Foam	Fbg.
Fury	RB	1295.00	621.00	802.00	986P00	14'9"	71"	600	20½"			50	Foam	Fbg.
El Dorado	RB	1495.00	717.00	926.00	1138P00	15'5"	72"	650	20½"			70	Foam	Fbg.
Cutlass	RB	1695.00	813.00	1050.00	1291P00	15'5"	75"	700	20½"			85	Foam	Fbg.
Fleetwood	RB	1795.00	861.00	1112.00	1367P00	16'4"	80"	765	20½"			135	Foam	Fbg.
Starflite	RB	2295.00	1101.00	1422.00	1749P00	17'	82"	950	20½"			135	Foam	Fbg.
LeMans	RB	2550.00	1224.00	1581.00	1944P00	17'	82"	860	20½"			135	Foam	Fbg.

Aluminum Boat and Canoe's/Canadian Boat Manufacturing (as of 1970) Peterborough subsidiary model, specs and factory price list.

The plan, started by the Brillant's and continued into the future was to have Peterborough branded boats in both aluminum (the small fishing craft) and the larger runabouts made in fibreglass. The modern Peterborough had the unmistakable slanted yellow-orange-blue mark on the hull side. Some had six colours, underneath the first three; orange-red-mauve. Over the next

decade, the aluminum Peterborough branded boats were dropped in favour of Springbok and Princecraft, the Peterborough became strictly a fibreglass line. The official end came with Alcan dropping the fibreglass Peterborough line in 1982 completely to focus strictly on the aluminum line. After multiple sales, the company is now part of Brunswick Marine Group.

Even after his layoff, Peterborough's president, Jack Richardson still thought there was life in the wood boat business. He bought some molds from Lakefield shortly after Peterborough closed down, renaming it Rilco Industries Ltd. producing boats under the trade name of Richardson Aquacraft. Little changed at the new company and it kept on building wood boats the old-fashioned way; there were still buyers. However Rilco couldn't delay the inevitable forever, finally closing for good in 1969. It wasn't just the fiberglass and aluminum that was killing the Peterborough industries. The popular boats were becoming larger. Boat buyers had more money, and they wanted a versatile boat that had plenty of power for cruising, waterskiing, or fishing. This was something Peterborough was simply not making, and the market for the small outboard was shrinking. Once the common man's boat, it became a niche market, catering to fisherman for its ability to go into shallow areas where the fish were and cottage owners who wanted a light modest craft that could be pulled up on shore easily or let the kids bang around in without getting in too much trouble. Jack Richardson rattled around with several business ventures after Rilco, starting H. E. S. Management in 1969, which went nowhere, then working briefly as a salesman in the early 1970's before becoming an investment advisor, which he kept at until the late 1980's. It was not a great second act, but one distressingly common for several men who had once commanded some of the largest and most successful boat factories in Canada; once the business was gone and the money exhausted, like Herbert Ditchburn and Howard Shepherd, it was back to punching the clock or pounding the pavement. Richardson's last home was a ground floor apartment in Peterborough in 1991, after that he disappeared from any sort of public notice.

Link Boats

People who read National Geographic in the 1960's remember Edwin Link as an elder statesman of oceanography, working the hydraulic levers of his submersible project, *Deep Diver*. A few might remember his WW II era flight simulator known as the Link Trainer or actually practiced in one. The author did as an Air Cadet and found it, like a real airplane, not very forgiving; it took me a while to learn what the term "flat spin" meant. The trainer was a big hit in the war and all the allied air forces bought them, both a land based as well as the seaplane version. The seaplane trainer, unlike the land version, was actually capable of going in the

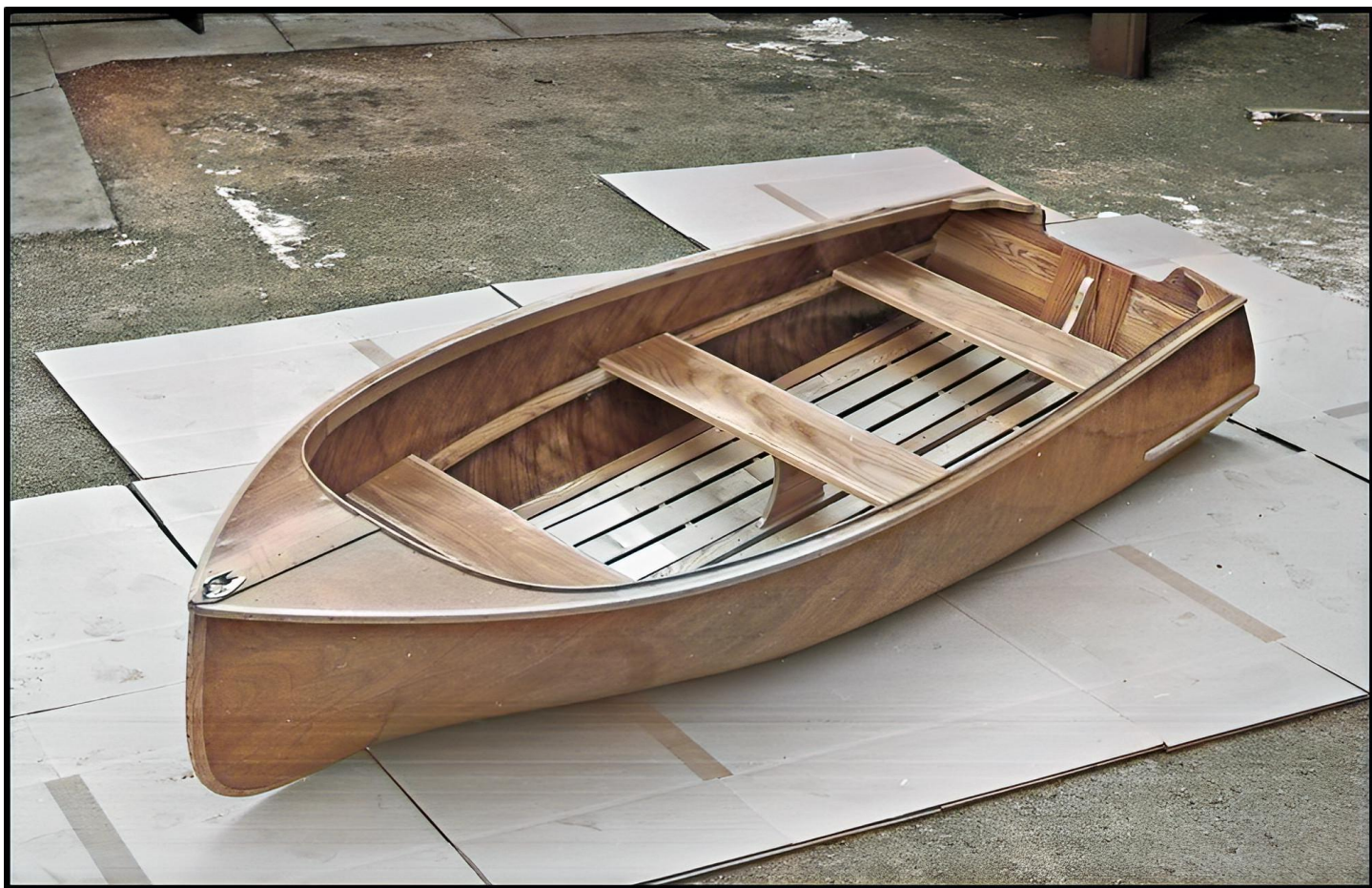
water. Powered by an outboard motor, it would give the student a live-on-water floatplane experience, without the dangers of actual flight.

Link had started work in his teens building player pianos but eventually turned his attention towards the aircraft business. He learned to fly and then pondering how to build a ground-based method of flying without the risk of actual air time, he began developing a machine that would simulate flight effects, both the positive successful turns as well as those flat spins and out-of-control dives. His big break came at the best time in 1935 when the US Army Air Force put in an order for the flight simulators. As the war neared, the nervous US and UK air defense bureaus began to expand their orders. He purchased a plant in Gananoque and began to use it to build the trainer there, where he could ship directly to the UK. It didn't seem to make much sense to build a second factory in Canada only an hour's drive away from the main plant in Syracuse, New York. But in the pre free trade days there were harsh duties on importation of foreign made goods, so much so that it was cheaper to set up a production line in Canada.



A deluxe Link, although the Martin 60 would not provide much power. Photo for Link Boats by

After the war, the need for such items as land-based flight trainers dropped considerably. The Grumman Aircraft Company turned its aluminum forming know-how into making aluminum outboard boats. With money from the trainer, Link turned the Syracuse plant to building outboard boats and canoes full time. The next product was the knock down outboard boat that could be dismantled and fit into a carrying case. He also had purchased a commuter float plane, a Grumman Widgeon and used it to fly from Syracuse to Gan, as well as to take weekend trips to Northern Ontario Lakes. On these trips he began to ponder how he could get a boat up in the plane and this triggered the development of a sectional boat he called the Linkcanoe. The Linkcanoe was made in ten pieces and weighed 40 pounds and supposedly drew 5 inches of water with an 800-pound load. It cost \$179.50, which was much higher than a Peterborough canoe of similar size. Each piece was made of a formed sheet of fabric and resin, a precursor to fiberglass and widely used in the electrical industry as an insulator. Each piece had couplers at each corner and each edge was covered by a piece of nickel-plated brass. It was a beautifully made setup to look at, if a little complicated with all the metal fittings and it seemed a little inappropriate that the hull was covered by an ungainly and rather poorly fitted waterproof canvas bag. Nonetheless, it was perfect for the postwar fisherman, who could easily pack both motor and boat into the car without worrying about roof racks or trailers. Even better the boat could easily be taken aboard a Norseman or Beaver for a trip up to a remote northern lake. In the 1950's flying up to a fishing camp in Northern Ontario or Quebec was the ultimate guy's status symbol- it meant you were a big shot or knew somebody that was. All the lads went, from Hollywood and Broadway stars to cabinet ministers and corporate bigwigs. Women and children stayed behind and did their fishing from the dock.



A very basic Link outboard, 10 feet long, most likely for a 5.5 Johnson

Link hired a man named Frank Fish to run the Gananoque plant and Fish hired a young local named Charlie Cliffe to help run and repair the plant machinery. Fish, a tough-minded self-taught engineer ran the plant from its set up in the late 1930's to the 1960's. Fish was a demanding boss, although Cliffe was able to keep in the boss's good graces by mastering the production machinery and keeping it going.

The popularity of sectional canoes lasted until 1950. About 4,000 were sold, but they were complex and expensive and margins were very low and eventually it simply wasn't worth the trouble to make them, particularly when the cedar strip boats were now doing so well. Cliffe joined the plant at the age of 18 in 1949, just as a big order of several hundred sectional boats to South America had just been cancelled. Nonetheless they took a sectional boat to the Toronto Boat Show. Cliffe and Davie Belfie, the Link boat salesman were manning the booth when the well-known Toronto Star columnist Greg Clark stopped by to look at the boat. Belfie said that it could be assembled in 10 minutes. Clark didn't believe it and made a bet that if that was possible, he would buy the boat. Belfie and Cliffe must have been practicing as they were able

to beat the 10-minute bell as Mr. Clark doubtlessly stood there checking his watch. He bought the boat.



The Linkanoe: it comes apart at the rib joints

In the early 1950's Link began to pursue other interests, including yachting and began to step back from day-to-day operations at the plants. He sold the trainer devices division in 1954, leaving just the boat building operation. The Link boat works was a production line, just like Lakefield and Peterborough. Boats were built over a metal frame, which looked like a boat hull but was made of flat 2" or so wide strips of steel. The keel was laid down on the steel frame and then precut 3/16 thickness planks were laid down over the hull form and clamped into place. Once the planks had reached the gunwales, the form was flipped over and the steamed ribs could be pressed on the hull boards in the space between the flat metal strips. Once the ribs were in place the gunwales, stringers, seats and decks and transom were added. Some of the parts of the resin knock down boats were made at the Syracuse plant - at least the resin plates were formed there and then the fittings and plates were shipped north and assembled in Canada, thereby qualifying as "Canadian Manufactured" and qualifying for the duty exemption. I wonder how many people bought the Link Sectional Boats, but never actually used them for a floatplane trip to a hidden far away lake in Northern Ontario. So many unique things have been

sold for their very uniqueness, the idea often overwhelms the actual use.

Gren-ell: Outboards and Luxury do mix.

For a while, at least, Gren-ell was the top of the line of outboard boats, even Peterborough didn't have anything quite this grand, although they came close with the too-fussy Comet and Royal lines. Gren-ell was a planked mahogany outboard boat, arriving just in time to match the electric starting outboard. Johnson Motor Company, through Johnson Canada had introduced the matched unit program in 1929, with a finely appointed runabout and an electric starting outboard, in some of the more expensive models, hidden under a hood. In theory it was supposed to go right up against inboard runabouts, as a class product, something you could step into in your best clothes and run. But the high price (over \$1,000) and the problem-plagued Owens Dyneto starter took the wind out of the sales, and the Depression crushed what was left. For the next twenty years an outboard went back to being a small, pull start contraption on a small cedar strip boat. But by the mid 1950's the larger outboards were covered once more, such as the 30 hp Evinrude Lark (soon to be 35 hp) and had a more reliable electric start unit. Therefore an outboard could be as much as class act as an inboard, at less cost. The 1957 Johnson Golden Javelin, with its dull gold cover and chrome accents was the outboard equivalent to the cars of the same period, it is the outboard Chev Bel-Air. The Lark and Javelin had less power than an average inboard, but the boats were also lighter, which compensated for speed. But this was the limit of outboard power for the time. There are photos of a 35 hp pulling a skier; the background behind the engine was very fuzzy, the skier was probably a young woman.



Gren-ell Golden Hawk, the top-of-the-line Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

Brothers William and Peter Greenhill had trained as cabinetmakers, but that was a crowded profession and in 1947 they found a niche in the outdoor advertising sign business. Now almost all signs are made of metal, or at least a metal frame with a plywood sheet to glue posters to, although these are now being replaced by metal frame with an LCD screen. But after the war the wood billboard was the king of ads, and the brothers set up Greenhill Advertising Co. Ltd. listed in 1947 *Might's* under Advertising Displays. The billboard business was a success and in 1955 they moved out of their cramped industrial shop at 2488 Dufferin to a much larger location at 17 Gurney Avenue, rebranding as Greenhill Wood Industries Ltd. They continued with the billboard business but extended their carpentry knowledge into boat building as well.

The name Greenhill wasn't very maritime, it sounded more like a lawn care company, so the boat line brand was altered to Gren-ell. This should not be (but sometimes is) confused with Glen-L and Grenfell. Glen-L is a boat design company that sells boat plans to DIY builders, Grenfell was a Vancouver based builder that specialized in big seagoing mahogany runabouts in the 1950's to the 1960's. Gren-ell focused on upmarket all mahogany planked outboards. Their most popular and enduring boat was the Golden Hawk, a 16.5 foot all mahogany outboard that could match for looks any inboard, as noted with less cost. Gren-ell also put out a larger 18-foot model known as the Riviera, although this boat did not arrive on the line until later in the 1950's possibly 1959. By 1960 a new model was added to the line known as the Parisienne, although it was 16 feet. Was it intended as a replacement for the successful Golden Hawk? I have never been able to track a model list for Gren-ell. Pictures of the Parisienne make it look identical to the Hawk; it was introduced at the 1960 Toronto Boat Show as a new model.

Gren-ells were all mahogany planked on the sides and the deck was also mahogany. The engine well for the outboard featured a sort of shape-cup formed mahogany tray under the outboard transom clamps, for what reasons I don't know, but it looks neat; most would just have an open hole with a peer in view of the boat bilge. This shows the extent of the quality and fuss put into a Gren-ell boat. It has period-style ribbed rubber foam, leather covered bench seats for both the driver and the mid-section, it could, with a little effort seat six adults, these are beamy craft, at least six feet wide. It is clear that Gren-ell had its eye trained firmly on disrupting the high-end runabout market from below; why spend all that money on an inboard when you can buy one of our boats and have the same luxe style and experience.

All this time outboards had steadily increased in power, culminating with the introduction of the Evinrude Starflite V-4 50 hp. Mercury derisively referred to it as the "Fat-Fifty" neatly eliding that their high-power breakthrough Mark 58 inline 4 was only 45 hp. Scott Atwater had the 40 hp Royal Scott in 1958 and the Flying Scott 60 hp in 1960 and were working on the R-120, a 4 cylinder aircraft-style radial engine supposedly capable of 125 hp (it never happened, there are artist renderings only). Gren-ell's were delivered into the Muskoka and Lake Simcoe and the northern cottage country lakes and the company departed the Gurney Ave shop for a much larger plant in Brampton in 1956.



Gren-ell with modern power **Manotick Classic Boat Club photo**

A boat collector and Gren-ell Golden Hawk Owner David MacDonald posted the following reminiscence:

I grew up in Port Credit, Ontario across the street from my childhood friend Bruce Greenhill. His father Bill and uncle, Peter started building Gren-ell boats in the mid-fifties. I remember visiting their shop in Brampton with the smell of fresh cut mahogany and vanish. They were cabinetmakers by trade so their runabouts and small cabin cruisers were built like fine furniture. In the early sixties, I remember waterskiing on Lake Ontario behind a Gren-ell runabout, outings with both our families on cabin cruisers and even accompanying Bill and Bruce on customer deliveries up north to Georgian Bay and the Muskokas. Gren-ell was a small company in operation for only about ten years and went out of business as fiberglass boats came into vogue. For this reason, not many come up for sale. Their most popular model was the Golden Hawk.

Gren-ell's fall did not come from aluminum or fiberglass, although that was coming, it wouldn't start to seriously alter the market until the mid-1960's. The fatal plan was to venture into the big cruiser business. Gren-ell did produce a big cruiser, the Express at 36 feet, of which at least one is still in existence. Shepherd was already making the transition into cruisers and did so very successfully, as was Chris-Craft, which had botched its entry into the small fiberglass runabout market and now was pivoting hard to big boats. The big dogs in Ontario were already

established, J. J. Taylor in Toronto and Cliff Richardson in Meaford. But these were medium-sized and large enterprises with substantial financing, Gren-ell was a small-sized small-boat maker and simply didn't have the necessary funds to keep building the big boats and declared bankruptcy in 1964. There is an ad online for a "1969" Gren-ell 36-foot Express cruiser, although the date is likely wrong as Gren-ell was long gone by this point. The Greenhill's went back into advertising and billboards; they are in business to this day.

Chapter 19: Muskoka Part IV: Runabout and Comeback, 1949-1975

Greavette, Duke, Hunter, Matlo, D. Cameron Peck, Port Carling

David Cameron Peck: Foundation and Empire

Bert Hawker's position as general manager of Ditchburn had lasted two weeks in 1932 before the company went under. He returned to the boat business for a short stint in 1934 with Greavette, that lasted less than a year as that company itself went into reorganization mode. He was finally able to find permanent employment managing the local liquor store. After war service employment, he returned briefly to his job at the LCBO (brought about in 1927). He made no efforts to return to the boat building or designing world, instead it came to him, for one last time. A most unusual request, coming from a well-known Muskoka summer resident, Cameron Peck, to design an antique boat. This was to be a re-creation of a displacement racing launch from about 1904.

Hawker would be well acquainted with these boats, having worked at the Jutten Boat works in Hamilton from 1908-1912. The model he had in mind would be along the lines of the ill-fated Nicholls Bros. racer Little Star II, later picked up and the mechanical work completed by John Robinson's Marine Construction and Power Ltd. The finalized boat, Blue Streak was raced in both Toronto and Hamilton Harbours over 1906-1909, when it was outclassed by much faster narrow beamed racers like Schofield Holden's Miss Fidgety and Gilbert's Smalley. Most of the early racers had been very lightly built, with 5/16-inch-wide planks and 3/4 inch ribs; they were long gone now. What would Mr. Peck want with such a boat? He had a 1905 Standard engine and needed the right boat for it. What was Mr. Peck doing with a 1905 engine? He was a collector.



Cameron Peck's collection boat house on Lake of Bays, Naiad tied up next to Phoebe.

After a certain amount of time has passed, people begin to collect artifacts from before that time. The artifacts aren't being made anymore, most of them have been lost or destroyed or sent to the junkyard or the dump (old-timey terms for recycling and landfill). Some brass and bronze had been lost to the scrap drives in the war, but this was mostly a civilian feel-good act with little practical application, most of the material was too contaminated to be of use in anything as precise as ammunition. But people (mostly middle class) with little metallurgical knowledge unscrewed bronze water spigots, gas petcocks, carburetors, and water pumps off the old boat engine in the shed out back and threw them in the collection bin. Several of the prewar engines in my collection came that way, almost everything that was not iron had been stripped off, only the rustiest or dirtiest were saved because no one must have known what was under all the grime.

Cars were only four decades old when Cameron Peck began collecting them. The Peck money

came from their holdings in Bowman Milk Company of Chicago. The Bowman family had started in the delivery business, with the iconic horse drawn wagons delivering milk bottles door to door. The breakthrough came with the marketing of pasteurized milk, which had a much longer shelf life than the straight from the cow variety, soon Bowman products ruled much of the north-mid west dairy industry. Comfort Edson Peck, a physician, married the only daughter of company founder Robert Bowman and his son Dr. David Peck took over as Corporate CEO in 1935. The “milk wars” of 1930’s Chicago were less bloody than the beer and booze wars of the 1920’s, mostly involving unions and those trying to bust them. The only way to survive was absolute domination, which Bowman finally achieved, only to arouse the ire of the anti-monopolist crusaders. It’s no wonder the family longed for the peace and quiet of summer in Muskoka.



Astrea I, I presume a 225-class racer, basically a copy of Delta, supposedly faster, that was the plan Peck

family archives

David had two sons, Edson, and Cameron; the latter born in 1912, in the late 1930's the Bowman company was doing well, as it had during the Depression, people still needed food and milk, there was money to spend, and Cameron started spending on the oddest sort of hobby, collecting old cars and boats. The old boats and cars from 20 years earlier were simply used boats and used cars, and could be had remarkably cheap, even by the standards of the time. They were taking up space in sheds, boathouses, and garages and many were happy just to get rid of them for a few dollars, given Peck's enthusiasm which seemed to suggest the old machines would be well taken care of, or even restored. Almost no one else was doing this. He gathered his collection in a disused warehouse in Evanston, a small town north of Chicago, it grew to encompass over 1,500 cars, many of Pebble Beach quality; it would easily be worth over a billion dollars today. He also applied his collecting fervor to boats, although not as spectacularly as with cars. He was able to purchase Senator Sanford's Polson steam launch Naiad, as well as Wanda III, the Eaton's cruiser, the last steamer on the lake, and the last yacht out of the Polson yard, as well as Dr. Brashear's 1915 Davis Dry Dock launch Phoebe II. While at the Eaton cottage, he came across the Standard, a four-cylinder 4 cycle engine from 1904 or possibly earlier, built by Carl C. Riotte's Standard Engine Co. The engine was a mere 20 hp, but had the unmistakable Standard look, it was built on the lines of a steam engine, there was no upper crankshaft housing at all. The crankshaft and the piston rods were all visible, held only by the lower housing and its brackets. The powerhead was supported by a system of metal rods and was started by an automotive hand crank with a starting chain attached to the flywheel. When the engine was running it would tend spit oil all over the place. Peck was sure it was a racing engine, maybe yes or no, at the time any large engine with more than 2 cylinders could be used in a race. The original boat it was in was long gone, therefore he contracted Hawker to design a 1900's racing hull. Lightning was built at the Greavette plant, and the engine installed. The engine does run and had been run, it is a museum piece now, for guests to gawk at.



Cameron Peck taking Lighting out for a run. Peck family archives.

Peck was also a fan of Muskoka builders, having bought Scudd II from Minett-Shields in 1930, one of the last large runabout builds prior to the slowdown. Aside from Naiad and Wanda, he also purchased an early planing race boat named Redskin (an early Adolf Apel -Ventnor creation), named for the red painted hull, and in 1948 he ordered a unlimited race boat from Greavette, designed by Doug Van Patten called simply U-9 -it never received a name, basically a copy, more or less of the Wilson's Miss Canada IV, except U-9 was powered by the engine used in PT boats, the Packard 1500 hp model. The boat had engine trouble in its first races and was not seen after that.

Over 1949-51 his entire car collection was auctioned off. It was rumoured he was under treatment for skin cancer, or that he was in trouble with the IRS, these were never substantiated. It should be noted that the few biographies suggest he had 1,500 cars at once in his Chicago

warehouses; this is not the case. He never explained the reason, but when interviewed about the auction, he referred to the cars as “his children”; was this an unwanted development? I would say not, but rather part of a grand plan. According to the website bio, he would accumulate a few hundred vehicles, then sell them, accumulate a few hundred more, then sell them as well, restoring, repairing and detailing to original or better than original condition and then passing them along, at a time when historic car collecting was still in its formative stages. I would call him a sort of real-life Hari Seldon, the curating librarian-scientist from Asimov’s Foundation novels, accumulating and protecting valuable things to await a time when they would be wanted once more. Peck left Chicago for good in 1953 and moved to Arizona and lived there for 27 more years, passing at the age of 77 in 1990. There were no more acquisitions after that. There is no question the car collection was liquidated, but what happened to all the boats is less clear. Naiad was sold to a resort on Lake Temagami, eventually scrapped. Phoebe II, B-IV, Wanda III, Lightning survived and are restored and in show condition, U-9, the early Ditchburn launch Vigilante and Scudd II seem to have disappeared.

The Re-Awakening, 1948

Today the total cottager population of the Muskoka Lakes region in 2023 was 81,452, which makes it Canada’s unofficial 73rd largest city, wedged in between Peterborough, Ontario and Repentigny, Quebec. The population in 1948 was probably half that, there was a dramatic increase in cottagers after the war, even more so on the Rideau system, as Ottawa residents began to buy up (then) relatively cheap waterfront lots, as our family did (\$4,000). The road system was better, but still not great, most were dirt only, so narrow that passing cars would have to pull onto the grass to squeeze by. Cars were bigger and better and faster and more reliable, the road handling and suspension systems dramatically improved, engines for most family cars was in the 100 hp range and could safely handle speeds of 50-70 mph. Road speed limits were set at 25 mph in the early 1920’s and 35 mph by 1929; the final pre-war jump was in 1937 to 50 mph. It was lowered during the war to 40 mph, although at that time there was little non-commercial highway transit due to gas rationing. Suburban Toronto to Beaumaris was a 140 miles, in the 1930’s a four-hour drive (if you were lucky and there was no traffic). A weekend getaway was difficult, you worked Saturday until noon and then were away north after lunch, you would get to the cottage around 4:30 or 5:00 pm, just in time for dinner, and then back into the car on Sunday evening at 7:00 pm to arrive back home yawning and bleary eyed to fall into bed at 11:30 pm. The more common experience was that the wife and kids would stay at the cottage all summer (July and August) and Dad would show up on weekends. In the late 1920’s my Grandfather made the 3-hour drive from his Ottawa office on Saturday noon to

our family's first cottage (a rental) on Upper Rideau Lake. He would arrive at the village of Westport at 3 pm and then row a skiff another half hour to the cottage.

By the postwar era, you now had a faster car and a full weekend, now you left home with the kids and a car packed with supplies on Friday after dinner and joined the traffic jam heading north. But at least you had all Saturday and Sunday. When it came to cottage construction, for the rich and the very well-off, the sky's the limit, for everyone else, a new build was usually a 20' by 20' one story square building, framed with two by fours and sided with interlocking pine clapboards, so named for the sound it made as it was set into place with a mallet and a fist. The building was set onto limestone pilings (Rideau Lakes) or on beams set directly onto granite boulders (Muskoka). The cottage was usually divided inside into two, maybe even three bedrooms, and then a kitchen/living room; remember this is 400 square feet, smaller than most downtown Toronto low-end condos. Sometimes a half-second story was added on this rickety structure, sometimes more rooms were added on the sides; in our case a dining room and master bedroom. A dock was needed, this could be stuck together by the owner, often using cedar trees felled after clearing the property. The boathouse usually required the work of a professional contractor, like Mr. MacLean, who would arrive on Friday afternoon wobbling down the stone steps to the excavation site, dynamite sticks in one hand and blasting caps in the other, leaving a contrail of booze breath after a mostly liquid lunch at the Rideau Tavern in Smiths Falls. The excavation was completed, the boathouse was completed, solid and level. Somehow, Mr. MacLean was able to function in spite of it all; he died at his home at Rideau Ferry at the age of ninety-four.

Dock or boathouse, either way you now needed a boat to complete it. For the majority of Muskoka and Rideau cottagers, this meant a Peterborough, usually 14 feet with an 18 hp Johnson or Evinrude on the back. 7.2 hp Martin 60's were a thing for about two years (1949-51), cheap at \$295, but as quality problems and disappointing performance began to manifest, the boating public quickly lost interest. The Mercury KG-7 was too expensive at \$550 even though it delivered well over it's rated 10 hp. Most purchased a cheap and reliable TN little green Johnson at 5.5 hp; you weren't going anywhere fast, but you'd get there eventually. At the time OMC's high-power engine was the Evinrude Speeditwin or Johnson PO-15 at 22 hp, but it did not have a recoil start, but still the old-fashioned wrap and pull. There was no relief valve and in opposed twin configuration, so you would be roping over the whole compression. It was definitely for the burlier sort of fellow. The next step up was an inboard runabout.

Greavette



Cameron Peck's Astrea II U-9 Unlimited Hydro: A winner in the looks department, if not on the race course. Peck family archives

Actually, there was an alternative to an inboard, and that was a Dispro. Greavette had purchased the trademark and the molds (the two key patents of 1915-17 had long since expired) from Sam Botting in 1936. They kept the St. Lawrence for a time and had the company put an electric starter and ring gear (the XAE Model), which worked for a while, but the engine would always stop at a certain point and the starter would always engage the same gear teeth until they wore out or simply broke off. In 1950 they discontinued the St. Lawrence and replaced it with the British made Coventry Victor, a light twin cylinder marine engine. Greavette was the last customer for production St. Lawrence engines, when the contract was discontinued, engine production also ceased. It would be easy to say that Greavette was the last builder of motor skiffs at that time, but it's not easy to define. People were still putting small engines into rowboats and sometimes turning their Peterborough into an inboard. A low-cost solution was to

put a lawnmower engine into a canoe, you could throttle it right down and use it for trolling, I saw such a set up running on the lake, a very relaxed ride with Dad and his two kids. There was a mini-inboard on our lake that would chug by occasionally, a single cockpit with an older couple on board, it was 10, maybe 12 feet long. I saw it years later, abandoned at a local marina, very well and possibly professionally built, with a single cylinder something for power, possibly a 5 hp Kermath Sea Pup sailboat motor, although there was no boat or engine ID. Greavette took some criticism over continuing this anachronistic product, but there was still a market for small, slow, reliable low-power boats. The problem may have been that the 1954 base model sold for \$1,125, a Peterborough Aquaflyer was \$450 and a 10 hp Johnson outboard was \$400; the Dispro was not unwanted, it was simply no longer price competitive.



Greavette display at the 1954 Toronto Boat and Sportsman's Show Sheerliner in foreground, 16-foot utility next, and Dispro at the top.

But this was the only the smallest and most modest boat in the Greavette line. The principal and

most popular product was the Sheerliner, a traditional looking runabout with flat covering boards. This was the successor to the problematically named Dictator. The Sheerliner doesn't get as much attention for being a more commonsense product, but it was more affordable, and had some clever interior design ideas, one of which was a combination of runabout and utility. The 23-foot Dictator had the traditional 1930's cockpit arrangement, two seats forward, then the engine and finally the kiddie seat at the back, you got into the boat, you stayed where you were. By contrast, the Sheerliner's front, back and middle seats were set so there was a S configuration path, and passengers could easily walk to any seat in the boat, much easier than clambering over deck separations to get from one cockpit to another, if one of the kids in the back wanted to sit with one of the parents up front, they could do so simply by walking. You could party on a Sheerliner. The boat came in 20- and 24-foot-long versions. The other boats were flashier, but it was the Sheerliner that paid the bills and kept the business running.



Streamliner Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

The flashy boat was the Streamliner. The Streamliner was designed by Doug Van Patten, but Van Patten was mostly relying on the original work by John Hacker on the Lockpat II, incorporating the rounded covering boards but building a much shorter craft than the 40-foot Lockpat. But Lockpat was a cost-is-no-object one-off, Greavette had to find a way to build a boat with striking curves, a custom job to be sure, but the build costs and ultimate price, although high, still had to be manageable. All the side plank boards have a compound curve, they had a c-shape from the top to bottom sides, and a long twist from end to end, sometimes as much as 45 degrees. How did they do it? For the pioneer Streamliner, Fred Burgess's Curlew, I suspect they used an adze on the interior and a plane on the exterior, but that is not really practical for a more production-oriented process. The first reality is to accept you will need mahogany blocks, not boards. You cannot steam bend $\frac{3}{4}$ inch mahogany, it cannot be done. I was able to steam bend $\frac{5}{16}$ inch mahogany, but it was a battle for the ages, as I slowly tightened the clamps waiting for the death snap. There are always stories of boat builders sinking boards in the nearby water and waiting a few weeks, this is mostly baloney. The wood will swell up and then once into place, it will shrink once more, leaving big gaps. It may and probably will become stained. I tried it on some air-dried oak ribs once, leaving them at the bottom on the boathouse slip for a month, they came out covered in green slime and Zebra Mussel sprat. By the time I cleaned off the organic material, I found the surface had turned dark brown or completely black, which would not come off. They all went into the fireplace, lesson learned. I keep hearing that this is being done, and it works, I would need videos, and a notarized attestation if I am to believe.



Greavette plant workers put a newly built Streamliner into a power slide, I would say late October or early November given the heavy coats and huddling. Photo Speltz Real Runabouts III

My best guess, and really the only possible way is that the planks were sculpted, carved into the desired shape out of a solid board block of mahogany, 8 feet long, or 6, 6-8 inches width and a thickness of 2, possibly 3 inches. I would assume step 1 would be set it up on its side and marked off the curves on pencil on the top and then run through the bandsaw, following the pencil line. Then you would have to set up some sort of jig, with the board on one end and a mold on the other and then carve it out the same way you would have a key cut at the local hardware store. The cutting tool would have to be some sort of saw, or router like cutting device with infinite settings so that it would move along the area to be removed in concert with the guide sensor on the mold. A very special tool would have mostly likely have been ordered from a tool and die making machine shop. This is all a semi-educated guess from a semi-educated wood worker, the process, as noted, was seriously guarded, and locked away but for the knowledge of the few workers that did the work. The work on the 1920's long deck launches is all of the highest quality, but that is all application of flat planks; the Streamliner is way above and ahead of anything like that, not even modern custom wood boat builders have been able (or were willing) to duplicate it. It is not the next level of wood forming, it is the last level, there is nothing after. This did not come cheap. According to John Storey in an article in Canadian Boating in 2018:

Five models were offered in a range from 18' to 28' carrying 5 to 8 passengers at speeds up to 45 mph. These luxury runabouts came very well equipped with unique chrome fittings, grated flooring and leather upholstery justifying the high price to be paid for a fine boat. According to a 1954 Greavette brochure the 22-footer was offered at \$5622, the 24-footer was \$6019, 26-footer at \$6821 and the 28-footer at \$8324 not including the price of engines. Various interior layouts were offered customized to the owner's requirements with many featuring a walk-around engine compartment.



Streamliner ready to ship, not quite the time for launch, given the snow on the parking lot. Photo Speltz Real Runabouts III

These were custom projects only, you went to Greavette and picked the one you wanted (or could afford) out of a set of plans and Greavette would build it. You would also choose the engine, and it would be installed. A brand new 150 hp marine engine would probably need for the larger hulls, just to reach a satisfactory speed. 60 Streamliners were made, perhaps 15-20 still exist. If you wanted the big 28-foot model you were looking at over \$10,000 for a motorboat; at the same time, my parents bought our house, a suburban ranch in 1959 at \$16,500, or the equivalent of two 24-foot Streamliners, along with the selected engine. The Streamliner was really the runabout descendant of the grand 30–36-footer launches of the 1920's, only for the very few. Still the rarest Streamliner of all would be the 18-footer, I have never seen one at a show, nor ever read an article about one. I have not seen a picture, but I did

see one in the wood, so to speak, hanging in the Quonset storage barn along the Port Carling waterfront. It was intact, a little rough, but all there. This was in the fall of 1989; I have no idea what happened to it since.



Streamliner—▲

Here is truly the finest of all Greavettes, acclaimed far and wide as the world's most beautiful runabout. Nothing in the water compares with it in beauty, finish and workmanship. Engineered for a luxury ride, you'll thrill to its dry non-pounding performance no matter how rough the sea.



Sheerliner—▶

The Greavette Sheerliner is a companion craft to the Streamliner in beauty, performance and finish. A fine example of the craftsmanship

This ad really shows the difference in appearance and dimensions between the Greavette Streamliner and Sheerliner models. Be prepared to drop \$3,000 more on the Streamliner, in 1955 dollars.

Matlo Boats: Short and Sweet

Many boat building companies and boat building hopefuls thought the end of the war would bring a rush of new orders. It certainly would bring a lot of cheap labour, in terms of returning soldiers eager to find any kind of work at any rate of pay. But 50,000 soldiers had died and many more had life altering injuries so severe manual or trade labour was no longer something they could do. Still a number of small enterprises took a shot at it; nothing ventured, nothing gained, as they say. Matlo started up in Foots Bay on Lake Joseph in the late 1940's. I'm assuming the design is yet another product of Earl Barnes, Mr. Curves.

The builders were Frank Cull and Dick Steele. Steele was a well-off kid, attending Upper Canada College and studied engineering at the University of Toronto. Both had served in the RCN during the war and after demobilization, decided to go into the boat building business.



Andreas Reissmann in his 17-foot Matlo Manotick Classic Boat Club photo



Matlo Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

The boats were all small 17 footers, there was a plywood hull version and the mahogany planked version, more expensive known as the Meteor. Six boats were made in total, it appears this was not a successful business, the wood bending most likely pumped the production hours, and eventually ate up any profits. The program fizzled after a few years, Steele went to Detroit to work as an engineer for the auto companies, Cull to work in a marina in Portland, Ontario.



Matlo 16-footer from the stern, a beauty, but this is probably where the profits went *Manotick Classic Boat Club photo*

Hunter Boats evolves



1948 Hunter, has to be a Barnes design. Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

By 1949 Minett was gone, but a number of other 1930's shops had come back to life. Gidley Boat Works changed its name to Grew, but shed the original Grew shop at Jackson's Point on Lake Simcoe and concentrated exclusively on building runabouts. Myles Jeffrey was now turning out two boats a year out of his tiny double decker back yard shed, a new low-cost plywood builder named Ayling and Ramage had set up in Arnprior and was making a selling 20 to 30 units a year. Hunter Boats, under the former Ditchburn mechanical foreman, Aleister Hunter had been formed in 1932, but build contracts were slow in coming. In 1934 Hunter, a motorboat man to the core (he had built his first motor skiff in 1908, at the age of 16), suddenly found his company with contracts to build two 24-foot gaff-rigged sailing sloops. The term gaff rigged needs a brief (revisited) explanation for the non-sailboat crowd. Each sailboat has a mainmast, which extends vertically, and a boom, which extends horizontally, if you just attach a sail to the outer ends of the mast and boom you have a triangle; this set up is usually used on a small single mast single sailboat known as a catboat (Aykroyd's bestselling product). The gaff rig is where a third mast is set up on the upper part of the mainmast, this allows for more sail area, basically set your hand on a table extend your thumb, forefinger and little finger and imagine a sail between the latter two.

The Hunter works was just a big empty building; inboard projects were painfully few. A total of six inboards were built in the 1930's; five utilities, two 20 footers, two 26 footers and one 23 footers, one of which was ordered by Catholic priest to make visits to a classroom on an island in Lake Simcoe. There are two islands in Lake Simcoe, Thorah, which is mostly settled on the northeast side by cottagers, and Georgina, which is home to a Chippewa First Nation, so I assume that the "classrooms" the priest was visiting was most likely a residential school. The smaller utilities used a 45 Buchanan, the larger ones (built in 1935-36, including the priest's used an 85 hp). There was also a 18 foot all mahogany runabout, but that was it.



The former Ditchburn, now Hunter Boat Works in Orillia, Photo taken in 1943, Fairmile in progress. Writing on building roof identifies the town for military aircraft.

During the war Hunter made Fairmiles, as did Midland Boat Works, J. J. Taylor, and Minett-Shields. The wood hull made them impervious to magnetic (not contact) mines as well as magnetic torpedo's, although the chances of a U-Boat hitting this fast, tiny craft were pretty much zero, also a waste of ammunition. It was, I believe, the last wood hull surface combat vessel built. They were all declared surplus after the war, like many such items, they could be had very cheaply. Several were made into private yachts, or in the case of the Penetang 88 a tour boat. After the war Hunter returned to building pleasure boats, and developed the Hunter look, a beamy runabout with a square stern and rounded covering boards. There was a 30-foot cruiser, a 20 foot and 27-foot runabout. The 20-foot runabout was fairly successful, the 27-footer is rare, there is one recently advertised for sale (I don't say currently, as the boat ads on the web are often out of date, the boat gets sold, the ad stays up forever). Even in it's rough condition and set on a boat trailer it has a commanding physical presence and if I had the choice of boat to drive on the water during a storm, I would definitely choose a Hunter.

[illegible]

1948 ad for Hunter boats.

As the war work wound down, peacetime building returned, and Hunter began offering a new line of mahogany runabouts. I can't say for sure who the designer was, but curving sterns many bear the unmistakably work of Earl Barnes, who was now designing full-time. Barnes did designs for Shepherd and most likely Matlo and Hunter. A pair of 26-foot customer runabouts with a rather wild stern were built in 1946, this helped put Hunter on the boatbuilding map.



Spectacularly curved stern was a custom order only on this 26-foot Hunter. The test driver I believe is Aleister Hunter's son Don. One of these, named "Hurricane" was owned by a member of the Manotick Classic Boat Club back in the 1980's, I don't know where it went since then.

Hunter Boats adopted the rather clunky advertising moniker "Hunter's Aqual-ity Craft" and it appeared on all of their print ads and promotional material. Whether or not it worked in terms of drawing attention, it stuck. Compare it with the sly brag of Minett-Shields Limited, "Built for those not satisfied with ordinary standards", clearly taking a shot at their smug and much larger rival Ditchburn.



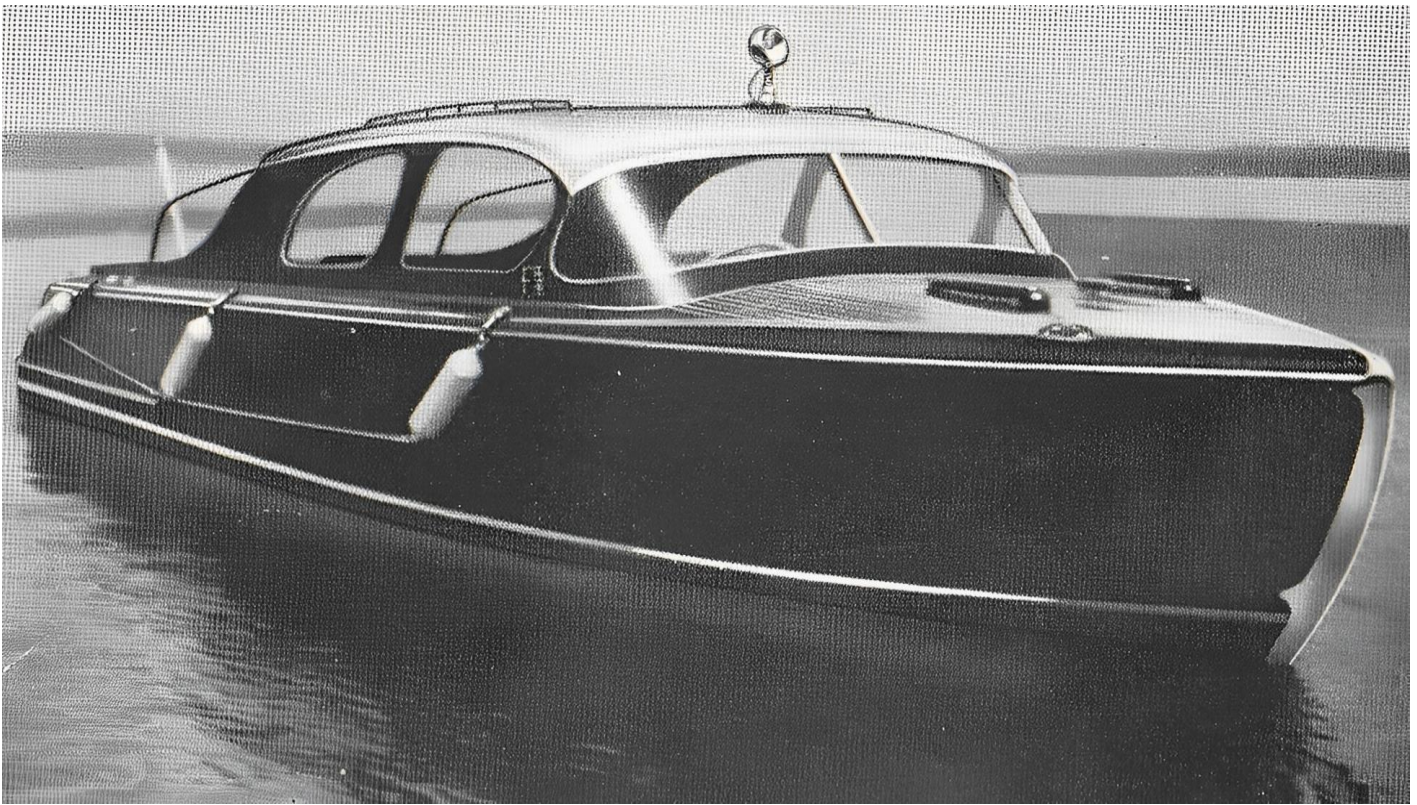
A big Hunter boat, good for Lake Simcoe or Georgian Bay Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

Hunter boats included some innovative features, the notable was the electric blower fan, which sucked up air from the bilge area and engine hatch and vented it out decorative vents on the stern. As engines began to be covered over (at least for the larger boats) by 1910, it was common safe practice to open the engine hatches to let out any gas vapor that accumulated around the engine (although this did not always include the bilge). Sometimes the carburetor would leak, even just a little bit, and fumes would accumulate in the enclosed space. It did not take much to set it off, generally the starter motor brushed would generate a few sparks when the ignition key was turned and that did the job. Boat hulls were often shattered beyond repair, the passengers and driver could be seriously injured or killed. In this case rather than lift hatches you could simply turn on the blower switch and wait a couple of minutes and then get going, or

you forgot or had other things on your mind and up you would go. In fairness almost all inboards began to instal this feature, you can usually tell with what looks like an oblong chrome grille on both sides of the stern. Hunter also used splash rails, a triangular piece of wood set along the waterline to keep the splash from curling up the side of the hull and into the passenger's face. This worked at low speeds or in relatively calm waters, not so much once it got rough.



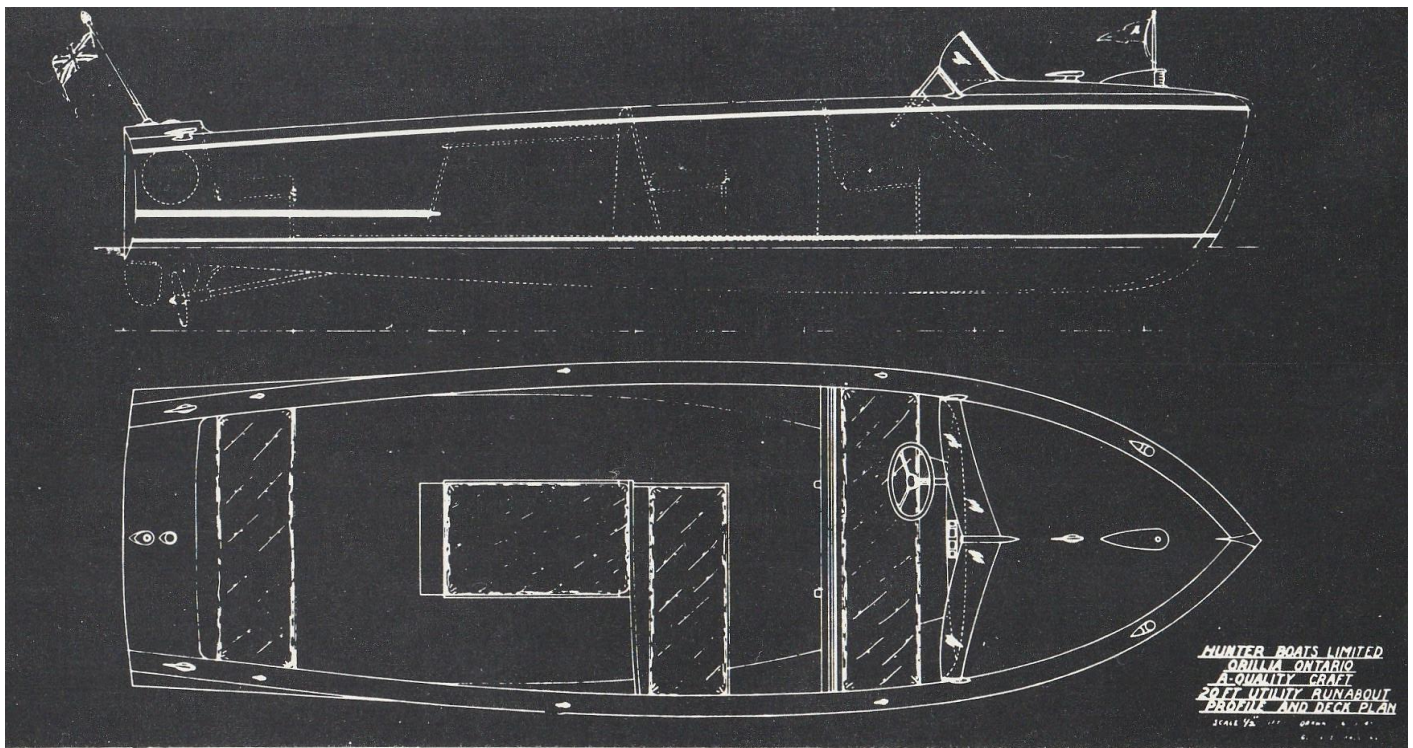
But for the less adventurous and more average runabout customer, here was the 22-foot utility.

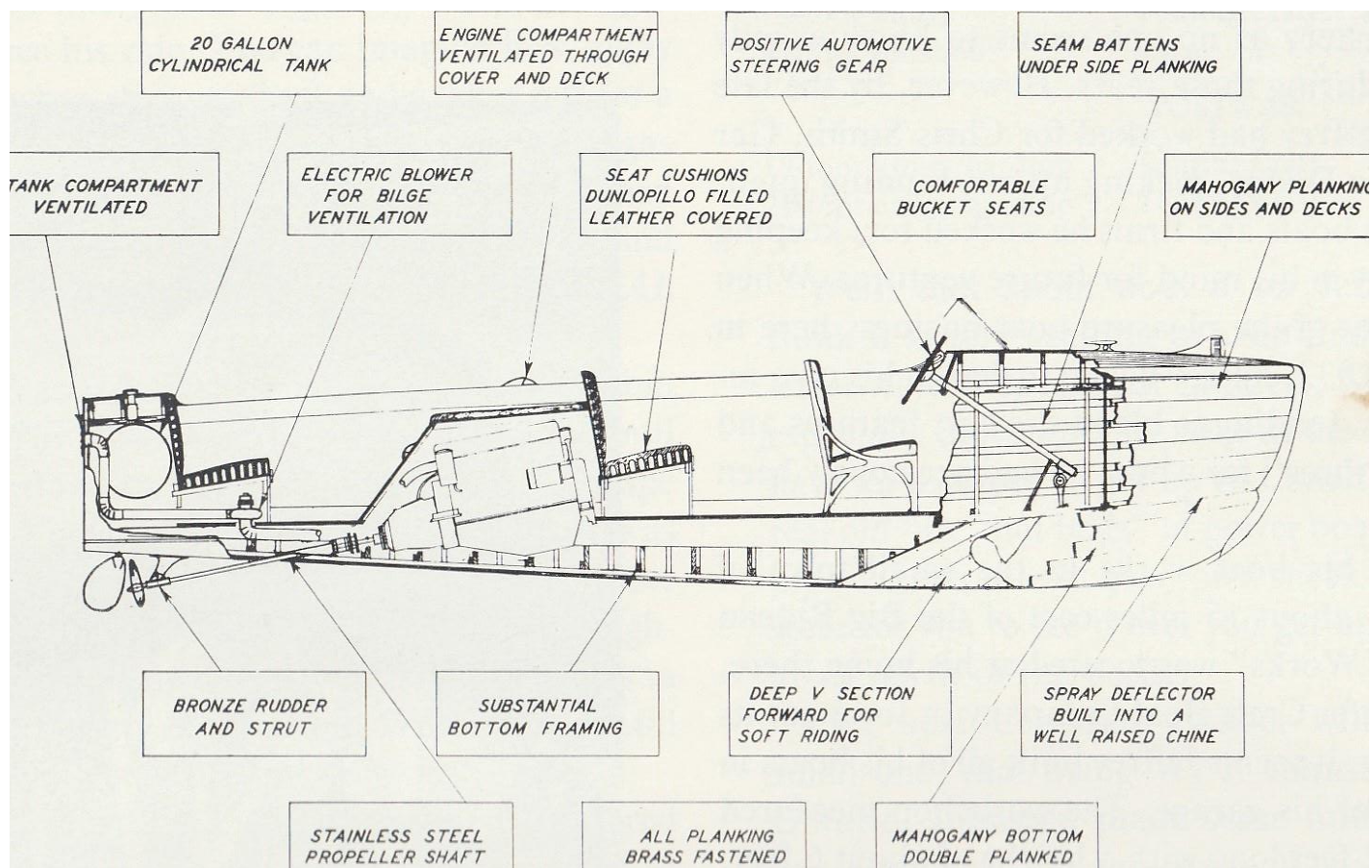


The 22-footer also came with a hardtop as an option

Another important improvement was the use of latex foam in seat upholstery. Prior to the war, seats were made of wire springs, tied together with twine and overlaid with horsehair, or as in the case with Jeffrey, what I would best describe as dried peat moss, pulled up from the ground and left in the sun and was certainly cheaper. Latex or foam rubber had been developed by Dunlop Tire in 1929, by stirring up and bubbling liquid rubber and then getting it to set in a mould. This understandably did not see much boating application in the desperate thirties, when

it was easier to find roots from the back yard to do the job. Genuine foam rubber is extremely expensive, but thick and dense and holds a person's weight a lot more comfortably than the cheaper polyurethane foam we use today. The trade name at the time was and still is Dunlopillo; you can still buy it, as long as you are ok with departing with a lot of cash. A single sleeping pillow with Dunlopillo filling will run you a whacking 100 pounds in the U.K. The seat coverings up the 1960's were all leather, another expensive product until displaced by Naugahyde, a vinyl rubber substitute sprayed onto a cheesecloth backing, and for marine purposes, treated with an anti-mold agent.





The 22-footer, design and feature specs.

Power for the Hunter fleet came from a mix of locally made Buchanan engines for 45-110 hp and the Gray Fireball at 150-175 hp for the larger boats, or those customers who wanted a hot rod, a big engine in a small boat. This program paid off and Hunter built almost 100 runabouts over 1946-50 and continued successfully putting out runabouts into the early 1960's. It did experiment briefly with jet propulsion outdrives in the 1960's, but jet boats, while they sounded cool and powerful, invariably underperformed relative to a plain old propellor. It should be remembered that Thomas Jutten had built a prototype jet-powered launch for a customer in the 1910's, thousands attended the test run in Hamilton Bay, only to leave with a wave of eye-rolling. A saying about this type of engineering is "how do you make a 150 hp engine into a 100 hp engine? Answer: put it in a jet boat." The drag caused by the intake process only slows the thrust from the output. But you might say, look at how fast Sea-Doos go these days. Yes, it's because the engines put out a truly insane amount of power for a very light and small watercraft. The 2022 Sea-Doo GTR-X Rotax puts out 300 hp for a top speed of 67 mph (110 Km/h), so the smallness of the boat and the sheer muscle under the hood does a good job of hiding the fundamental inefficiency of the system.

The mid- 1950's Hunters became beamier and heavier, perhaps not surprising given the tendency of Lake Simcoe (actually a "Great Lake" in it's own right) to get unnervingly rough.

Aleister Hunter passed in 1965; the business was sold in 1976. The wood boats had been phased out in the early 1960's, but Hunter apparently moved to building a 21-foot fibreglass runabout. It was never produced in any quantity and eventually was discontinued. Some of the old-line wood builders had taken a shot at least once in building a fibreglass hull. Both Peter Ayling and Charlie Cliffe built one each and swore off it for the smell and hassle. Fibreglass was not really a custom boat substance, the very nature of the production, with a very expensive mould and specialized equipment and dedicated work space and specialized workers, meant that it was only suited to mass production.

Greavette & Port Carling, a toast to the future?

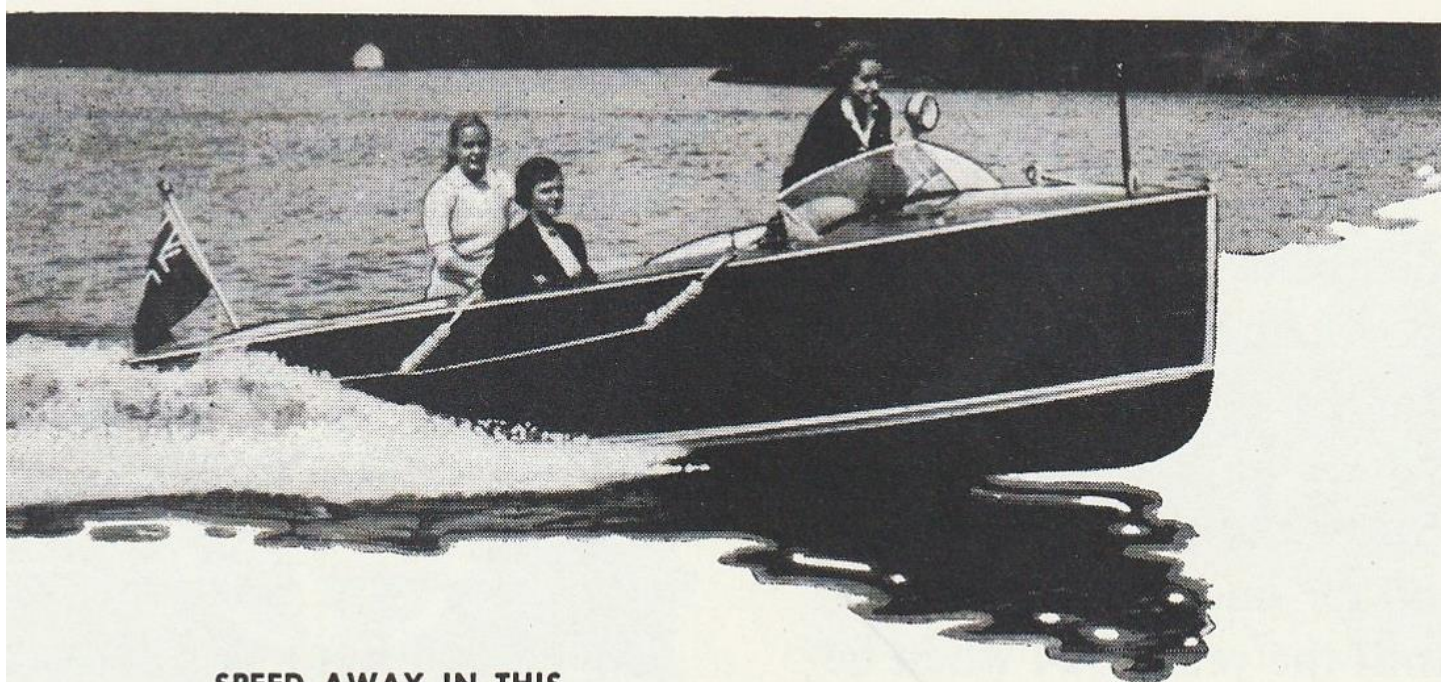
The original investors in Port Carling Boat Works had fallen away after the war, it was now owned by Charlie McCulley. This was the same with Greavette Boats; originally planned as a runabout version of General Motors, (even going so far as to recruit GMC Canada boss Gordon Lefebvre as it's first president, eventually the nine investors bailed out until Greavette himself was the last man standing.



Billy Johnston's utility Miss Jane Owner and driver Carman Keyes Manotick Classic Boat Club photo



A Port Carling runabout from 1954.



SPEED AWAY IN THIS
18' "LOON"

BE SURE IT'S A



SUPREME IN THEIR CLASS

Here is a runabout beauty that is as smart in appearance as it is dependable in performance. Built of selected smoothskin mahogany, "LOON" is easily-handled, level-riding, soft and dry even in rough weather. Its 57 H.P. Buchanan motor gives speeds up to 27 m.p.h. A roomy, comfortable boat, ideal for family use, and "a whole lot of boat for a very reasonable price."

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Port Carling, Ontario

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Young's Point, Ont.
TEL. Lakefield 219R4*



The Muskoka builders referred to the 1950's as a "golden age". It was in terms of sales, productivity, relative freedom from violent economic downturns, no wars, except for the mostly compartmentalized Korean conflict. For a workman there was more or less uninterrupted employment for about fifteen years from 1947 to the early 1960's. Cottagers were getting richer as they advanced in their careers and businesses, the little Peterborough was joined in the boathouse by a 21-foot mahogany runabout, or in many cases, simply banished outside to the boathouse finger dock, with a war surplus tarp draped over it, a handy craft to go fishing in. It was good time except for designers, as the decade progressed the runabouts began to look more and more alike. Decks flattened out, sides and sterns became straight. The standout boats in the 1950's, the Greavette Streamliner, the Duke Playmate, and the Port Carling Seabird had all been designed and introduced in the 1930's. The public wanted a boat they could use comfortably, less so a floating piece of art. The wild curves of the 1930's mostly disappeared, except for the Streamliner, which was, for all it's beauty, a very expensive indulgence at several thousand dollars a hull, a Sheerliner would get you across the lake just as easily.



*The final iteration of the Dispro, built by Greavette up to 1957 with Coventry Victor 6 hp engine
Manotick Classic Boat Club photo*

Canada, as so often noted, was so often ten years behind in marine products, fibreglass boats were quickly taking over American waterways by the late 1950's (there was a short interregnum of plywood, with the hugely successful Lyman). Charlie McCulley sold Port Carling to a new owner in 1958, who transitioned it into a repair and service facility. Similarly with Duke Boats, it kept building, but scaled down in the early 1960's and also moved into repair, and a new business, least to the baffled workmen, restoration of the older launches (What for? Why not just buy a new boat?). Hunter made the change as well; the last boats came off the slips in the mid 1960's. Greavette introduced a lapstrake outboard model, large enough to handle the big engine of the day, the 60 hp Evinrude Starflite, a V-4 configuration, at a mere 180 pounds no longer portable, and a long way from the 60 pound 2 hp 1910 model A. The 17-foot Sunflash came out in 1963 and even experimented with six boats with a fibreglass hull, and a wood deck and interior. This sounded like a good idea; however it was only an interlude, the carpenters were kept busy. It brought out the last model, the Executive, with all the modern bells and whistles, including an inboard-outboard drive. It had very much the look and stylings of a fibreglass boat, except that it was still made of wood. Greavette had pushed hard against the rising tide of fibreglass boats; Grew went all in. It was Grew that survived and prospered, Greavette called it after the 1975 Executive and tried to rebrand in the nascent wood boat repair and restoration business, but there weren't enough customers willing to spend the dollars (important note: at the time) to make it happen. Greavette closed for good in 1979.



Greavette Sunflash sport runabout, 1970's. Photo by author



1969 Greavette Executive Manotick Classic Boat Club photo



Aqua Velvet, a 1969 Greavette executive today. Manotick Classic Boat Club Photo

I often wonder why Greavette, or really any of the other wood boat shops and plants didn't invest more effort in fibreglass conversions. It was difficult but once the initial hassle of building the mould and training up the staff, the moulds could be used a few hundred times and building costs went way down in comparison to wood. Greavette, and particularly Shepherd had a skilled workforce on hand; granted there would be some cranky types who disdain change of any kind, but most were probably glad just to have a job, particularly in this sparse, unprosperous part of the country. Part of the issue was that the owners, not to be too rough, but the reality was that they were almost all old men, many well past the normal retirement age. A photo from the 1956 Toronto Boat Show has Tom Greavette, Lloyd Shepherd and Charlie McCulley sitting together at the Shepherd display. Shepherd is 66, Greavette the oldest at 75, McCulley a mere 60, but he looks older (still he lived to an active 90). Greavette and McCulley had been building boats out of wood since their early teens. Out east, Myles Jeffrey was 71 and scaling down to one boat a year out of his little one-man shop. Herb Ditchburn, Fred Gilbert and Will Dowsett were all gone, as were their boat building businesses. Bert Minett was 75, Earl Barnes was 61 and Charlie Duke had passed the previous year. Alestair Hunter was 64, although much of the day-to-day work had been passed to his son Donald. Billy Johnston, who had knowledge and experience of high-volume production had just retired that year at the age of 75. Greavette had ordered that the company keep building Dispros right up until his passing two years later, it was a struggle to unload these living fossils, and it took three more years before the inventory was finally cleared out. By contrast, Grew had been sold to a group of Toronto investors who were willing to put the money into the business and to take advantage of the

latest technology; Grew eventually prospered by being willing to do whatever the Americans were doing, and match them idea for idea, and it paid off.



The old guard: from left, Tom Greavette, Lloyd Shepherd and Charlie McCulley at the 1956 Toronto Boat Show A toast to what, I wonder?