



# Notes from the Bilge



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March 2022

Newsletter of the Lake Champlain Chapter of the Antique and Classic Boat Society, Inc.

Susan Haigh, President

## President's Message



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As expected, planning for the ACBS International Show has taken front and center stage for the past few months, building to a crescendo as the March 1st deadline approached for the Spring Rudder publication. Planning has been difficult since the pandemic has altered the aspect of doing business as usual, but with our dedicated and supportive team, everything has fallen into place.

As you may know, we were able to rent the Waterfront Park for our event. That news came in the 2nd week of December, 2021. We expect to have a giant tent with lots of vendors, food trucks, etc. Fritz Horton has arranged for a one-design sail boat race outside the breakwater on Thursday, followed by land display also in the Waterfront Park. Lora Nadolski, our new Executive Director, managed to secure 150 boat slips between the Burlington Harbor Marina and the Burlington Boathouse. Steve Pond will be the dock master for the show. Most of hotel rooms blocked by Lora have been reserved at this point, so it looks like we will have a great turnout! To go over our Chapter-sponsored events here is what is on the books. You'll read all about it in the next Rudder:

- Monday's Chapter-sponsored event will be at *Shelburne Museum* with a special presentation about the restoration of the Steamship *Ticonderoga* by Chip Stulen, the Museum's director of preservation and landscape, and the on-going preservation of this beautiful classic boat.

- That evening our Chapter Welcome Reception will be at the *Spot of the Dock*, at the old LCT ferry landing.

- Tuesday we cruise or drive to Essex, NY dock at the Old Dockhouse, go for walking tour of the village and lunch at the Old Dockhouse.

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The Burlington International Airport has identified with the sponsors of the 2022 ACBS Annual Meeting and Boat Show. BTV has stepped forward making its considerable facilities available to store trailers of those at-



tendees who will be trailering their vessels to our week long event. We are grateful for the response from our sponsors and are pleased that BTV has joined this extraordinary group.

### President's Message *continued*

- Also on this day both canal cruises will arrive from their journeys. Some from the Southern Cruise will join us at *Basin Harbor* if they make good time from Whitehall.

- Wednesday we cruise or drive to *Basin Harbor*, tour the *Lake Champlain Maritime Museum* and have lunch at the resort where Art Cohn will give a presentation. That afternoon ACBS kicks off its welcome reception at *ECHO*.

- Thursday will be the annual meeting. That afternoon the chapter is putting on its final Chapter-sponsored event the *Spirit of Ethan Allen* dinner cruise. We are hoping for a big turnout on this since we have rented the entire boat.

Our Annual Spring Dinner is scheduled for May 14th at the *Valcour Brewing Company* 49 Ohio Ave, Plattsburgh, NY. This wonderful old stone barracks building dates back to the 1830's. Holly has arranged for a speaker, Christopher Shaw, an author and professor at Middlebury college, to speak about Samuel de Champlain, and his exploration of Lake Champlain. Invitations will be mailed out in early April.

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## Lovely on the Lake

(Re-printed from *Soundings*, January 2022)

Wendy Mitman Clarke

When Ed Mitchell lived in Maine, he'd hop on his big Harley-Davidson and roll west through the mountains of New Hampshire and Vermont, then into New York's Adirondacks on his way to the family camp in Old Forge on the Fulton chain of lakes. Along the way, he'd stop at Reuben Smith's Tumblehome Boatshop, tucked amid the blue spruces and white pines in Warrensburg, New York, just to see what was cooking on the shop floor.

For a lover of lake boats, the place was a candy store. There might be the sighing sheer and Gatsby-esque fantail of a rare Sound Inter Club sailboat, or the gleaming curves and stiletto bow of an early 20th-century Fay & Bowen launch. Varnish as thick as mercury could illuminate one deck, while another might be raw wood, the boat's skeleton exposed. It was almost more than the eye could take in. Somehow, even sitting still in a concrete-block building, these boats looked like they were hurrying onward.

Naturally, Mitchell would end up talking with Smith, and the conversation would veer to a remarkable piece of American boating history called *Indian* that had been in Mitchell's family since her launch in 1903. She was built by Herbert Leighton, who that same year won one of the first events of the brand-new American Power Boat Association by hitting 21.132 mph in *Adios*, a boat like *Indian*, only bigger. By all accounts a mechanical genius, Leighton designed *Adios*, built her engine and drove her to the victory. *Indian*, which in her day could fly at 18 mph, was the last known Leighton boat of her type still alive. "There are a lot of good shops that restore these mahogany speedboats and do a great job," Mitchell says. "But Reuben's true love is launches. And he understood what this boat was."

So, when the time came for *Indian* to leave the family boathouse for the first time since 1903, there was only one place Mitchell considered taking her. Her restoration and repower to state-of-the-art electric propulsion is the kind of project that Smith loves sinking his teeth into—rich in history, mystery, complexity and potential.

The semi-displacement and semi-planing designs of the early 1900s were built to run at moderate speeds with heavy, low-rpm, high-torque engines powering slow-turning propellers. "The boats charge along at 18 miles an hour, but that's just over idle speed. They're very slow, very quiet. I love the sense of it," Smith says. "I really like the nature of these boats in the water, and when they're set up right, they're actually incredibly efficient.



With electric coming online, these older, more efficient hulls are starting to make more sense again."

This kind of restoration is about more than replacing rotten wood or rebuilding a sagging torpedo stern. It is, rather, about restoring a boat to its genuine self, and this ethos informs the work of Smith, his wife and business partner, Cynde, and the small team of craftsmen at Tumblehome. "It's about the history of the boat and what it was meant to be and trying to reproduce that experience in the best way you can," Smith says.

Few of these boats have any plans or drawings, so Tumblehome's task is to research the history, study the photos, talk with the descendants of early owners, discern the boat's original purpose, and spend time with the boat itself to learn structural details. Historical research, Smith says, "can be a good deal of work. The boats are a lot of work already, and then you add that to it. But it's a way we differentiate ourselves from other shops."

John Kelly, who has been boating on Lake George his whole life and has several Tumblehome-restored boats, says Smith "is like an encyclopedia in terms of knowledge and history. He has an incredible network of partners and suppliers for everything you can imagine. And he's as comfortable working on a runabout as he is a 30-foot antique sailboat or electrifying a boat. He's so deep and he's so broad it's absolutely incredible."

Tumblehome does do new builds, but not in a production fashion. Each is custom-built. *Stella Blue*, a Tumblehome 24 designed by Stephens Waring Yacht Design, was created to mimic a 1920s Gold Cup racing boat but with a deep-V hull, a marinized Corvette V-8 and modern amenities. The shop also restores factory-built lake boats like Chris-Crafts and Hackers. But with his particular passion for early-century launches and his commitment to plumbing the past to illuminate a boat's future, perhaps it should come as no surprise that Smith grew up among boatbuilders who struck off on a different path. "My family is like the boat mafia of the Adirondacks," he laughs. In the

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mid-1970s, his father and uncle started building knockoffs of some of the iconic canoes and rowboats that J.H. Rushton built in Canton, New York, between 1875 to 1917. In the mid-1970s, his father and uncle started building knockoffs of some of the iconic canoes and rowboats that J.H. Rushton built in Canton, New York, between 1875 to 1917.

“When my father and uncle did that, no one else was doing it,” Smith says. “They really had to learn everything from whole cloth. There was nothing to look at, no one to talk to. There was no internet, no magazines. So for them it was fully immersive. Every Thanksgiving conversation became about boats and their histories. They took it as a whole-life endeavor. Whatever part of a life you could pour into a thing, they poured into it.”

As they say, apples don’t fall far from the trees. Smith’s father, Mason, now 86 and still building boats, holds a master’s degree in creative writing and a PhD in English and American literature from Stanford. He ended up a boatbuilder steeped in Adirondack boatbuilding history. His son Reuben earned his degree in creative writing. Can you see where this is going? In the meantime, Smith’s stepmother curated the boat collection at the Adirondack Museum (now called Adirondack Experience, the Museum on Blue Mountain Lake), and his uncle and cousin were curators of the Antique Boat Museum in Clayton, New York.

Smith really didn’t stand a chance—although he did move east for a while and took a job as boat shop director of the Hull Lifesaving Museum in Hull, Massachusetts.

“ The saltwater boats are really quite different. Every cove along the coast has its own boat, and each is informed by the materials that are available in the area and the water it rides in, the fish the locals are going after and, of course, what the designers thought was a boat. I think that’s really a fascinating part of it,” he says. “That allowed me to go at it like my father and uncle had in the ’70s. It was almost like another education. I was in museums and libraries all

—other education. I was in museums and libraries all the time reading about boats.”

In 2000, he left the museum and started his own mobile boat shop called Tumblehome Boatworks. He met Cynde and the two settled in Massachusetts. (While she’s Smith’s right hand at Tumblehome, she’s also an ad agency writer.) For a time, Smith taught a special topics course in boatbuilding at MIT, and then in 2004 he founded Mass Bay Maritime Artisans. But in 2008, when the venerable Hall’s Boat Corporation on Lake George sought a manager for a new boatbuilding shop, New York’s freshwater lakes and ancient mountains called him back. Three years later, he launched the new Tumblehome Boatshop in a 6,000-square-foot former heavy equipment storage building with soot-covered walls that took a while to clean up.

“Just as the environment shapes boats, I think our property has helped to shape what we do,” he says. “It’s just a nice big space, so you can get big boats in here.”

Among his first boats were John Kelly’s Sound Inter Clubs. Restoration began while Smith was at Hall’s and was completed at the new shop. At 29 feet long, with just 19 feet on the waterline, these graceful sloops were designed by Charles Mower and built from 1926 to 1927 at the renowned City Island yard of Henry B. Nevins.

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**President’s Message** *continued from page 1*

On March 8th, some of us will meet via Zoom to plan rendezvous for the upcoming boating season, hopefully adding a couple new destinations on Lake Champlain and nearby lakes as well. I’ll send out an update as soon as we pick tentative dates and locations.

We recently acquired another 25 Chapter Burgees. They are for sale at \$30.00 each, \$25.00 if there is no shipping. Let me know if you would like one.

On a sad note, Gene Porter, our Show Committee Co-Chair and Director, lost his wife and companion, Nancy Garceau on February 25th due to an aneurism.



*Build me straight, O worthy Master!  
 Stanch and strong, a goodly vessel,  
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*- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

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Initially raced on Long Island Sound among the top sailors of the day, many of the boats eventually migrated to Lake George. Kelly had stumbled onto them while researching the history of a 1936 Gar Wood utility runabout he'd bought sight unseen and had asked Smith to restore. Among the many photographs of the Gar Wood, Kelly saw a beautiful sailboat.

"So I bring the picture into Reuben and say, 'What's this boat?' And Reuben being Reuben says, 'That's a Sound Inter Club. They only made 26 of them, and I know where there's one, maybe two, but you know they need restoration.' And I said, 'Great, let's find them.' "

That led to the restoration of *Caprice* and later *Ghost*. Kelly wanted the boats to return to their original purpose, match racing, and to ensure that the design wouldn't die. (Since then, Tumblehome has also restored a third boat, *Aileen*, and also builds the boats new, using lines taken from *Caprice*.) More than anything, Kelly says, restoring a boat with Tumblehome is a relationship with the boat, with history and with the shop. "Reuben draws you in at every step of the process," Kelly says. "It's not like, drop your boat and come back when it's done."

Over the years, Tumblehome has restored a half-dozen boats for Kelly, among them two Fay & Bowens, one a 1926 24-footer named *Achilles*; the other a 1916 torpedo-stern called *Fanita Jr.*, of which they believe only two were made. "They're just beautiful to ride in," Kelly says. "They cruise quietly because of the big original Fay & Bowen engines with high torque and low rpm."

This is a signature feature of the early launches that intrigues Smith. "I'm really interested in the earliest days of motorboats, when builders were really trying to figure out how to make the boats go and feel nice to be on. I think there is a thread that got lost by the 1920s and '30s, when Chris-Craft, Gar Wood and Hacker came along with straight exhaust pipes and big engines. That really changed boating."

In earlier designs, cockpits were arranged so that people could sit across from one another and talk as the boat skimmed across the water, its low-rpm engine muffled quietly beneath. In the new, faster boats, seats were turned to face forward, "like driving a car," Smith says. "You're not conversing, you're just darting across the lake."

The slippery hull designs of the early launches, Smith says, are uniquely suited to re-powering with today's highest tech electric engines. On *Indian*, after months of research into electric propulsion options, they settled on a three-phase, AC-powered

*continued—next column ->*



Transfluid engine with a lithium-ion battery bank. In weight and trim, it's nearly identical to the boat's original propulsion. "It's a very modern setup, but it's designed for a high-torque application and that's why I wanted it. It's the equivalent to about 26 hp but with a lot of torque," Smith says. Early boats would have engines "rated at 40 hp but they'd have 250 foot/pounds of torque, and that was key to how they worked. It's not like having a 40-horse outboard. It's much more powerful than that."

This marriage of historic design with cutting-edge technology perfectly reflects Smith's driving purpose for restoring any boat, as well as the longer-term goal of keeping historic, lovely lake boats not just alive, but thriving.

"At Tumblehome, you know it's going to be done right, you're going to have fun in the process, and you know you will end up with a boat that's going to outlast the owner for sure," Kelly says. "My kids and probably my grandkids are going to be in the boats that Reuben restored."



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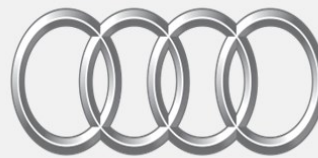
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