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Restoring Lake George's Wood Boat Heritage, In More Ways Than One

By Buzz Lamb

Hall's Marina in Lake George has a reputation for bringing old wooden boats back to life through restoration. Now, owner Steve Lamando has devised another way to bring them back. He's buying boats that used to be on Lake George and repatriating them to the lake.

Lamando attended the Antique Boat Museum's annual boat show in Clayton, N.Y. this past weekend and snatched four "woodies" out from under other anxious bidders at the boat auction held on Saturday, August 4 on the museum grounds. Two of the boats were former Lake George boats that had been sold and shipped to California.

This is not Lamando's first attempt to bring back a former Lake George boat. "Last fall I purchased 'Wenona' and we are working with Elco restoring it right now," he said. The 1899 Elco 36 foot electric launch was once owned by Rev. Ernest Stires who had an estate at Brook Hill Farm, just north of Bolton Landing. According to Bill Gates' book, "Lake George Boats and Steamboats" the estate is now known as Lagoon Manor. Lamando said he plans on keeping "Wenona" for his personal use.

Lamando admitted this was his first experience buying antique boats at an auction. "I think I got pretty good value for what I purchased," he said. "I had the opportunity to talk to the owners to find out what has been done to the boats. Generally these boats are well kept because of the pride factor." Lamando said he has purchased a few other boats to re-sell at Hall's but never through an auction. "We need inventory for our customers and this is a good way to get some desirable boats at a reasonable price," he said.

The bidding got tough on a 1911 Fay & Bowen Torpedo Stern Family Launch. "I had the most competition on that one because it is so special," he said. The 21 foot launch was a popular model yet few of them exist today which makes them very collectible. "This boat came from Lake Tahoe. I'm not sure if it was ever on Lake George but it is a perfect boat for the lake," Lamando said. "I wanted this boat because Hall's was a dealer for Fay & Bowen until 1928 when they switched to Gar Wood."

Lamando bought another launch as well. He was the successful bidder on a 1916 James Bassett 23 foot Motor Skiff with a 4 cylinder Sterling engine. "The previous owner was a Canadian and he kept the boat exclusively on

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Postage Stamps Honoring Classic Wooden Watercraft

Antique boat owners began lining up at local post offices on Saturday to purchase four new stamps, all featuring classic wooden boats. Portrayed are: "Frolic," a 1915 Hutchinson Brothers launch "Dispatch," a 1931 Gar Wood triple cockpit runabout. "Thunderbird," a 1939 Hacker-Craft commuter boat and "Duckers," a 1954 Chris-Craft racing runabout. The Hutchinson Brothers launch was a popular style for touring and commuting; the long-deck launch was offered with a four- or six-cylinder marine engine capable of reaching 30 mph. Powered by a 110-horsepower, six-cylinder Chrysler Crown engine, the attractive 30-foot craft on the stamp was custom-built in 1915 by Hutchinson Brothers Boat Co. in Alexandria Bay, N.Y. Gar Wood's 33-foot triple-cockpit runabouts are considered some of the finest produced by the famous boatbuilding firm in Marysville, Mich. Elegant and powerful, these craft were offered with engines capable of exceeding 50 mph. Based on the streamlined designs of John Hacker, "Thunderbird" is a 55-foot commuter boat featuring a distinctive stainless-steel cabin top that was built for millionaire George Whittell, who was fascinated with the latest aircraft, automobile and boat technology. Whittell requested that the boat's hull and cockpit be built to resemble the fuselage of a twin-engine aircraft. "Duckers", built in 1954 in Cadillac, MI, has six-cylinder Chris-Craft Hercules engine. The margin of the pane of 12 stamps features a recent photograph of "Miss Columbia" by Benjamin Mendlowitz. The boat is a modern re-creation of the original "Miss Columbia," designed by George F. Crouch and built in 1924.

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the St. Lawrence River. I think he used to spend the summer in Clayton or Alexandria Bay and then go back to Canada for the winter," he said.

One boat he is sure was taken from Lake George and sent to Lake Tahoe is the 1994 Hacker Craft built by Bill Morgan in Silver Bay. "The flag on the bow has Lake Tahoe embroidered on it so this one is definitely returning home," he said. The 31 foot triple-cockpit gleaming mahogany vessel was professionally maintained by Wooden Boat Specialties and is powered by twin big-block Crusader engine. "It is a four-time winner of 'Best Reproduction' at the Antique and Classic Boats Society's Alexandria Bay, N.Y. boat show," Lamando said.

The fourth boat Lamando purchased was a 1935 Hutchinson Utility. "I think this one is my favorite of the four I bought today," he said while standing in the middle of the parking lot where the auction had taken place earlier in the day. According to the previous owner the boat has been used exclusively on the St. Lawrence River. "This is an all-mahogany boat and it has been re-powered with a 318 cu. In. V-8 engine," he said.

Part of the reason Lamando is seeking more antique boats to re-sell is to build on what he feels is his company's mission; "To restore and expand on the quality of boating services that Hall's has provided its customers over the last 78 years and to become the most valued, high quality and comprehensive resource for antique and classic boat enthusiasts in the Adirondack Lake Region."

Lamando said he is not buying the boats just to re-sell them. "I want to sell each boat to someone who wants to keep it on Lake George. I want Hall's to be their full-service marina...buy the boat here, dock it here, store it here, get it serviced here...let Hall's take care of everything," he added. "Bring classic and antique boats back to Lake George, that's what we want to do."