

A 1910 Hutchinson Draws Antique Boat Buffs to Hall's Marina

By Buzz Lamb

On any given day there are several boats on the floor of the shop at Hall's Marina in Lake George. Saturday, June 4 was no exception. Three total restorations and one in for minor repairs were on display at the free session presented by boatworks manager, Reuben Smith.

One Saturday of every month Hall's opens its boat shop doors to the public for an "Open Shop" gathering. It's an extraordinary opportunity for anyone who has a zeal for wooden boats or has a desire to learn how they are built. According to Smith, people are welcome to come with questions about the work they are doing on their own as well.

Under restoration are two 1926 Sound Inter Club 30-foot sailboats and "Wenona", a 32-foot 1899 Elco electric launch with her original electric motor. All three boats are scheduled to be completed and launched on Lake George this season.

In for repairs was a 1910 38-foot Hutchinson launch named "Boatacious". "Somebody made a comment that this was one of the oldest Hutchinsons around," Smith said. "Hutchinson did a lot of 'one-off' boats and were active until the 1960s."

Hutchinson Boat Works is one of the best known and longest operating boat building businesses on the St. Lawrence River. The company was started around 1902 by George and James Hutchinson. According to an article written by Bonnie Wilkinson Marks, from 1902 to 1964 Hutchinson's constructed well over 250 boats.

These craft ranged in length

from 19 feet (utility models) to 48 feet (runabouts). According to Smith, initially plans were not used for the design or construction of these boats. Instead, Hutchinson worked with a designer named Forrest Whitaker who came up with a basic profile for their launches. "These boats have a super-fine entry. The bow is basically a knife that cuts through the water as the boat moves forward," Smith said as he pointed to the cutwater mounted on the bow of the sleek watercraft.

Smith said that from the forward-most point to the half-circle arc amidships and the tumblehome stern, each launch evolved as it was being built. "That was sort of their aesthetic; fatter, longer and narrower," he added.

"One thing about the Hutchinsons, compared to other boats of their time, is the planking is heavier and the framing is stronger because they were built to withstand the choppy waters of the St. Lawrence," Smith said. Smith said this particular boat has cypress planks on the hull.

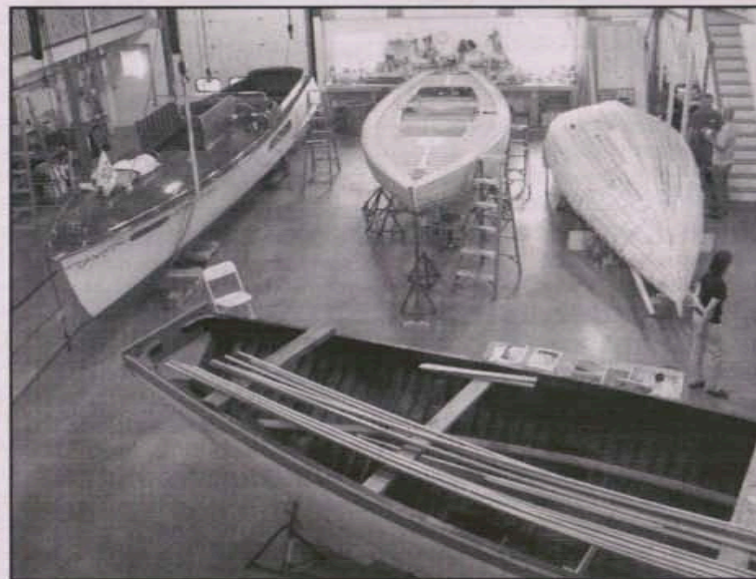
"The issue we have to sort out on



this Hutchinson is shaft alignment," Smith explained. According to Smith, the drive shaft on the 38-footer is approximately 18-foot long and as it pushes the boat through the water it tends to wobble. "There is a carrier bearing about halfway down the shaft to keep it from wobbling too much," he said.

Smith said that if the engine settles on its mounts and goes a little bit out of alignment the increased pressure slowly ruins the bearing. "We are replacing the bearing and we will re-align the motor. With a boat this long, subtle changes in the boat as it sits in the water can change the alignment as well," Smith explained.

Smith said some new systems have been developed to support extra-long drive shafts used in modern-day watercraft. "You actually install a thrust bearing midway up the shaft that carries most of the pressure and a CV Joint (constant velocity joint) is installed where the shaft connects to the engine," he said. "For long, narrow boats like this it could be a good idea."



Smith said that most of the pleasure boats built in the early 1900s were big open vessels with wicker chairs for seating. "As engines became more reliable they could actually put them under a hood because the operator didn't have to constantly monitor it. So, Hutchinson had an enclosed fore-deck which housed the engine and referred to their launches as 'auto-boats' because they were driven like a car," Smith said.

Smith pointed out that, in addition to the automotive styling, "Boatacious" still had the characteristic of an open launch. "Behind the helm there is still plenty of room for wicker chairs," he pointed out.

Smith said the restoration work on the "Wenona" continues to move along. "A new sheer plank has been installed, all the frames have been replaced or repaired and the transom design has been recon-

structed. "There are no 'lines plans' for these boats so we have to study old photographs to determine dimensions," he said.

The restoration of the two Sound Inter Club boats is progressing as well. The "Caprice" is upside down and work on the hull is nearly complete. "Ghost" is upright and work is continuing on the upper framing and the deck. "The plan is to flip them over simultaneously so that we can swap the support jigs during the process," he said. Smith said "Caprice" will be the first to be completed. "We'll probably have her ready in five or six weeks," he said.

The next Open Shop Session is scheduled for July 2, 2011. The sessions are free but registration is required. Call Cynde Smith at 518-668-5437.