

NORMANDIE RECONSTRUCTION

(This was originally a Power Point presentation for the Blackhawk Chapter of the Antique and Classic Boat Society on September 27, 2013. The text is based on my notes for the program. The pictures from the Power Point presentation have been integrated with the text)

Welcome! We are pleased you could join us this evening. It is always exciting when people with common interests get together to share ideas and we certainly have the experts here tonight.

The subject for tonight is NORMANDIE, one of the oldest boats surviving from the early 1900's on Lake Geneva and celebrating its one-hundredth birthday this year. This was really my first boat and was the platform for learning much of what I know about boats today.

I have had a fascination for these old launches from the time I was quite young. I still recall my first ride on one of them in 1946, the anticipation of getting underway, commands being passed back and forth, starting the engine, casting off lines, and the sense of motion and freedom as the boat left the dock. I still have those same feelings today when we cast off and depart.



HATHOR at the Bates' pier in Rainbow Bay about 1948. Larry and his brother, Walter, are both aboard for a family cruise. These cruises were seminal events in both our lives.



1998 Classic Boating Magazine photo.

NORMANDIE, 63 feet long, was custom built for Norman Harris, founder of the Harris Bank in Chicago. It was designed by Charles L. Seabury and built by the Gas Engine & Power Company in New York City, hull number 2329, original Coast Guard Document No. 211116. Seabury was a significant figure in yacht construction at the turn of the 19th century and many of his designs built at that time were known favorably as “Seabury Yachts.” NORMANDIE, like many of the boats built in the east, had finer fittings and more detailed woodwork than any of the locally-built Lake Geneva boats of that era.

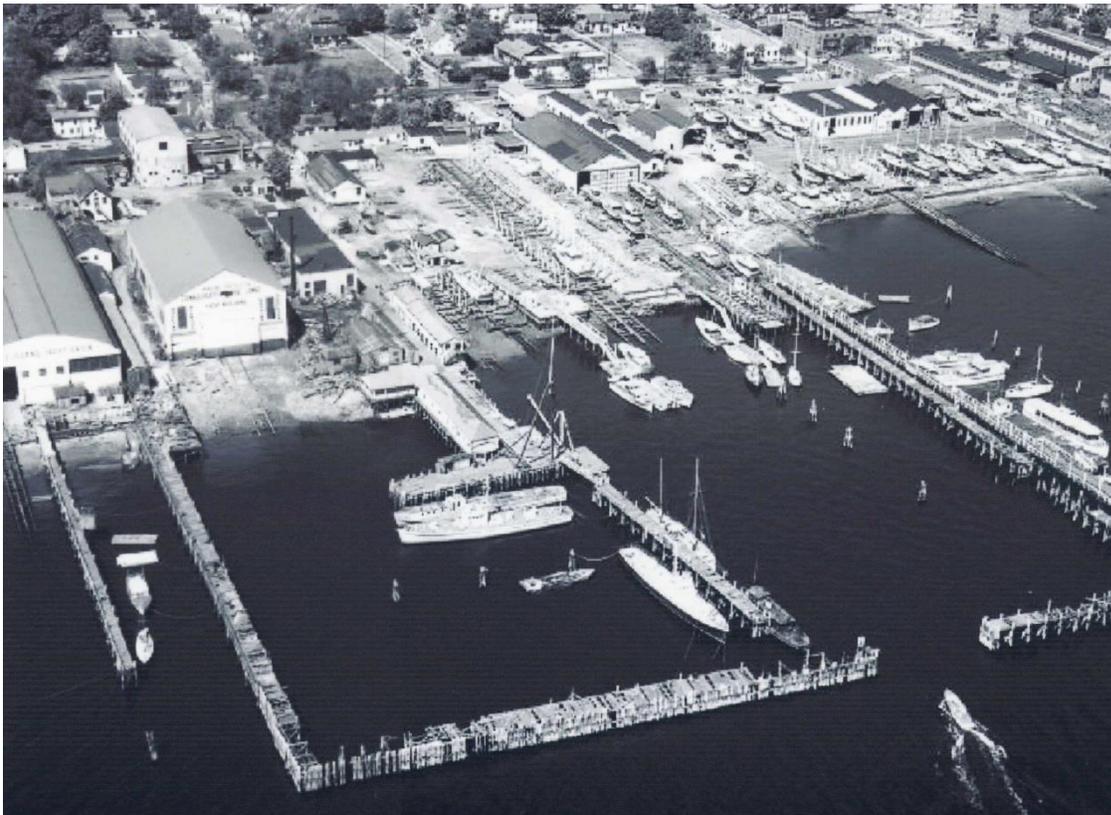


Builder's plate in the front deck of NORMANDIE.



Left: Charles L. Seabury, designer of NORMANDIE, is pictured here about 1900. Seabury was born in 1860 in Tiverton, RI. After a brief stint at Babbit's marine store in Tiverton, he went to work at Herreshoff's Yacht Works at Bristol, RI. In 1885 he established Charles L. Seabury Co. in Nyack, NY to construct high speed steam yachts. During this time he developed and patented the Seabury Safety Water Tube Boiler for applications where high steam pressures and quick steaming were required. He also produced the Seabury steam automobile for a short time. During his career he designed over 2000 vessels.

Below: Consolidated Shipbuilding Company was the result of the merger in June, 1896 of Charles L. Seabury & Company, already well-known for luxurious yachts, and Gas Engine & Power Company, established about ten years earlier in Morris Heights, NY and known for naphtha-engine powered launches. The company operated under the cumbersome name of Gas Engine & Power Company and Charles L. Seabury & Company Consolidated until after World War I when the name was simplified to Consolidated Shipbuilding Co. At the time of this photo in the 1930's, the company was still located in Morris Heights, directly across the Harlem River from the north end of Manhattan and just south of what today is the location of Roberto Clemente State Park. The company continued to build thousands of ships until operations ceased in 1958.



NORMANDIE'S first owner, Norman W. Harris

Norman Harris traced his ancestry back to Charlemagne on his father's side of the family, and Wadsworth, as in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, on his mother's side. But he also has the Duke of Normandie in his family tree. The Duke is most famous because of his illegitimate son, William the Conqueror, who defeated King Harold of England at the battle of Hastings in 1066. More about him, later. If you go back in the Harris family tree you find the name Norman in many generations along with references to Normandie, the French maritime province. So naming the boat NORMANDIE is consistent with Harris family tradition. Harris was so fond of the boat that in July of 1916, when he was dying, he asked that his bed be put aboard and that he be taken for a last ride. He died the next day, presumably a contented man.



Harris was born in 1846 in Becket, MA. He read adventure tales of the sea as a young boy and at age 11 ran away from home to become a sailor. After a short sea voyage he soon found sailors were so profane and impure that he could not endure that life and he returned home. He enlisted in the army during the Civil war and, after the war, started selling life insurance. In 1882 he decided to make Chicago his home and center of his business activities and he began selling bonds and securities. He established what he called the "Harris Policy: Never misstate or misrepresent the facts..., Attend strictly to our own business..., Spare neither time nor expense in securing reliable information..., Should trouble occur, protect our customers..., Treat our competitors fairly..., In the employment of men, the first thing to be considered is character, then ability." He traveled extensively throughout his life and was known for his extensive charitable works as well as his business acumen.

Left: Norman Wait Harris, founder of the Harris Bank in Chicago, at the peak of his business career, about 1910. This photo, and the preceding paragraph, are excerpted from a biography written shortly after his demise by his sister, Martha Harris.



NORMANDIE, shown in this picture taken in 2000, in front of the Harris home, now owned by Richard Driehaus, in the clearing where it would have been moored 80 years earlier.

NORMANDIE'S second owner, John Borden II



In 1920, NORMANDIE was purchased from the Norman Harris estate by John Borden II. John's father had been a silver mine prospector/investor in Colorado as well as a real estate investor in Chicago. He built a home next door to Potter Palmer on North Lake Shore Drive and together with Palmer and Marshall Field he helped developed what became known as Chicago's Gold Coast.

John Borden II spent his life as an explorer and adventurer and there is some evidence that he served as one of the role models for Indiana Jones. Early on, he went on safari to Africa where he hunted lions. In 1913 he built a ship named ADVENTURESS and went off in search of a bowhead whale, a species that had been hunted since 1600 but which no museum in the world had a complete specimen, with the proviso that he would personally harpoon the whale and claim it as a trophy. In 1916, at the onset of the First World War, he purchased the 200-foot steam yacht KANAHWA (with a crew of 40) and loaned it to the United States Navy. Then, when he received a navy commission as Captain, he took over command of the vessel escorting convoys and patrolling off the English and French coasts during the war. At one point he engaged a German U-boat in a deck gun duel.

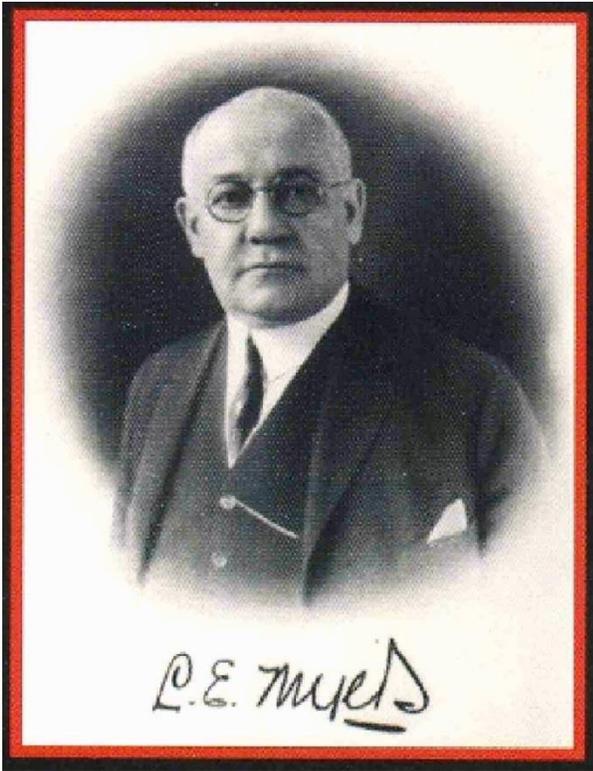
After the war, he purchased a summer estate for his family on Lake Geneva where they had vacationed for many years. The estate at pier number 30, known then as Snug Harbor, would later become Covenant Harbor Bible Camp. He also acquired NORMANDIE at the same time. He sold Snug Harbor in 1923 and he sold NORMANDIE four years later in 1927.

Also in 1927, Borden built another ocean going sailing ship named NORTHERN LIGHT, which was designed by well-known Chicago boat builder Henry Grebe. He sailed the vessel from San Francisco to Alaska on an exploration expedition for the Field Museum. This adventure was memorialized by his second wife in a book titled: [The Cruise of the Northern Light](#). His daughter, Ellen, would later marry Adlai Stevenson.



Captain Borden at the wheel of ADVENTURESS circa 1913 in a futile search for a bow head whale trophy.

NORMANDIE'S third owner, Lewis E. Myers



Lewis E. Myers founded L. E. Myers Company in Chicago in 1891 with a vision of bringing electrical power to the rural villages and towns throughout the Midwest. His business plan was to construct high voltage power lines along railroad right-of-ways that would connect these small villages to the electrical power grids in major cities. By 1920, the MYR Co as the company was then known, was recognized as the premier constructor of electrical power distribution systems across the nation. The company still exists today.

Myers was instrumental in creating Wisconsin Power and Light Company that currently provides electrical service to Lake Geneva. In 1925, he built a summer estate at pier 765 on the south shore of Lake Geneva.

He purchased NORMANDIE in 1927 and renamed the vessel ALLEGHANY, a region familiar to him because of his electric power construction projects. His neighbor's caretaker recalls that he enjoyed playing poker and smoking cigars with his friends in the boat's cabin.

When Myers died in 1939, the estate was sold to E. C. Styberg, owner of Styberg Engineering in Racine, WI, and NORMANDIE was sold to Nathan B. Hunt.

NORMANDIE's fourth owner, Nathan B. Hunt



Left: 1973 photo of Nathan Hunt

Now we need to say something about Nate.

Nathan's father, Charles Hunt, and maternal grandfather, Nathan B. Helm, had a hardware business in Harvard, IL in the late 1800's. Henry Ferris was an inventor. The three of them founded Hunt, Helm, and Ferris and manufactured and sold farm equipment. After a time the firm became Starline, Inc. After Nate's father died, Nate continued to have an office at the company, but he wasn't involved in the day-to-day operations.

Nate built a beautiful red brick home located at pier 88 on the north shore of the lake in the narrows. The house, which still exists today, was elegant with a mahogany paneled library, field stone fireplace, screened-in porch, and beautiful grounds. The garage had ceramic tile on the walls and contained two sporty Oldsmobiles, one a convertible, at a time in the 1950's when these were known as high-powered performance cars with their Rocket V-8 engines. But a unique feature of the house was a wing on the east side that was built for his yacht captain. That portion of the house had its own kitchen-living room on the first floor and a bedroom on the second floor with its own stairway as well as door to the outside

In those days, NORMANDIE was launched and hauled out of the water for winter storage using a horse and capstan to pull the long manila hemp rope connected to the cradle. Old timers would tell of Nate riding the horse along Snake Road down to the boat house for those occasions.

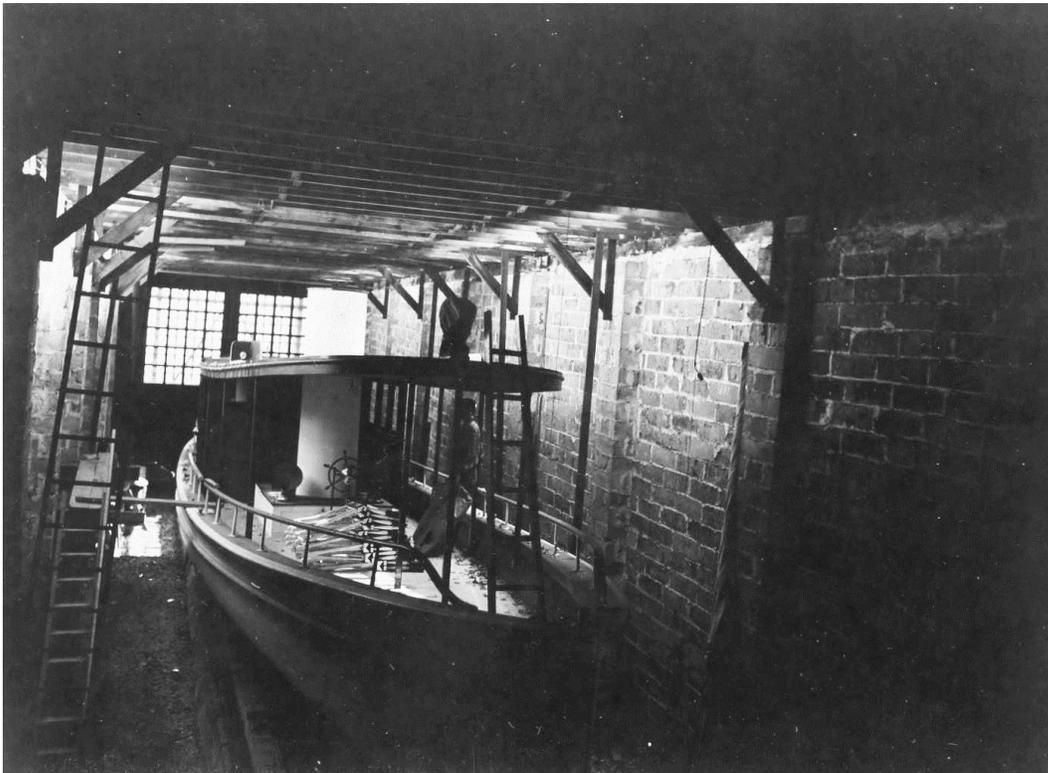
Nate also had an apartment on Astor Street in Chicago and he spent time in Pasadena, CA. In the 1960's, a young lady who worked in the local telephone exchange told me that Nate often called movie stars such as Kim Novak and Ginx Falkenburg and the operators would all listen in to his calls. He never married, but he lived a good life with many men and women friends. He was very much a gentleman, very genteel and courtly with refined manners. He was very generous and kind, and used NORMANDIE extensively for entertaining his many friends. He called it the Floating Booze Bazaar, FBB for short, which he would tell the uninitiated stood for Flat Bottom Boat. The boat was often seen at the waterfront in Fontana and other watering holes around the lake where libations and refreshments were served.

For years after selling NORMANDIE, he would talk about the boat fondly and he would mention any small changes that I had made that he had noticed. If he happened to be out in his speedboat when NORMANDIE was out cruising, he would follow NORMANDIE along. Whenever I saw him, he would ask about NORMANDIE and would leave me with a kind comment or observation.

NORMANDIE'S fifth owner, Larry Larkin

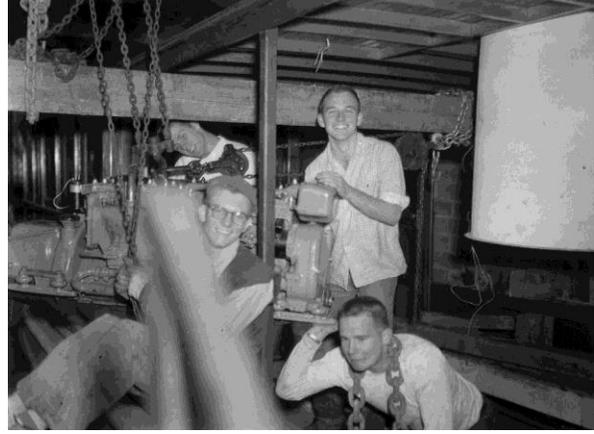
In 1953, when I got my driver's license, I went around the lake and located every one of these old lake boats that still survived. I wrote to each owner and offered to buy their boat. No responses. Then, months later, I had a phone call from Nathan Hunt who owned NORMANDIE at that time. He said he didn't want to sell but would I be interested in being his captain. I thanked him but told him I really wanted to buy one. A few months after that he called me again and said he couldn't find a captain and he decided to sell the boat. But he wanted to sell both the boat and boathouse. I didn't have enough money for both, so I called my brother Walter who was in the Army in Louisiana at the time and asked him if he wanted to buy the boathouse if I bought the boat. Without much hesitation he said yes, so he became the owner of the boathouse and I became the proud owner of NORMANDIE.

NORMANDIE in the boathouse. I took this picture on my first visit in 1955. This was the first time I saw NORMANDIE. The person aboard the boat on the port side is Grant MacLaren.

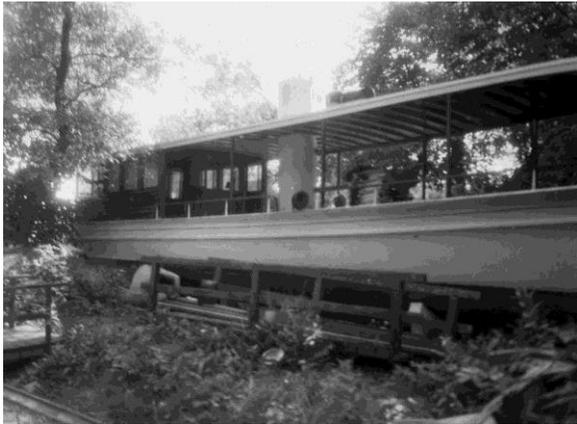




Original Speedway engine built by the Gas Engine and Power Company. The engine takes it's name from the road that ran along the Harlem River by the ship yard which was known at that time as the Riverside Speedway.



Friends (from left) Bill Daily, John Lund, Grant MacLaren, Don Jugle helping install the Gray Marine Super 8-160 engine in 1955.



First launching in 1955.



The boat's cradle slides into the water on wood timbers greased with lard.

It took about two weeks for buyer's remorse to set in. Although I had done the traditional ice pick test before I bought the boat, the surface of the planks seemed hard and I didn't discover the extensive deterioration inside the wood until I started to work on the boat. What was I in for? I tried to use the boat as it was but the leaks were unmanageable. When I tried to caulk the seams, the caulking iron sometimes went right through the hull.

About this time I got a lesson in how to find rot from a local boat builder named Dude Assman. He didn't use an ice pick - he used a hammer. He would smack the wood with a firm, sharp blow. If the hammer head went into the wood, the wood was rotten. If it bounced back with

the wood resonating, the wood was good. All I heard were dull thunks with the bottom looking like it had come down with a bad case of chicken pox from the hammer head divots.

So in September the following year I started to take the planks off the bottom. Where to stop? Each time I took a plank off, the edges and ends of adjacent planks showed the black color of incipient rot. These photos from 1957 show the extent of the deterioration.



Old frames consumed with rot.

New frames installed.

In my first battle with this deteriorated wood, I replaced about 1/3 of the bottom, 20 or so new ribs, and as many 1-inch thick planks. It helped for a while, but the leaks continued and I continued to replace deteriorated ribs and planks from time to time for years.

About 1972 I decided to fiberglass the hull. My idea was to make the fiberglass so thick it would support the boat even if the old wood hull completely deteriorated. I think we had about a half-inch thickness of fiberglass mat and resin in the underwater area by the time we finished.



Spraying the fiberglass cloth with resin.



Sanding the resin impregnated fiberglass smooth.

Although the fiber-glassed hull gave twenty years of service, things still weren't stable. The old wooden hull continued to swell and shrink from water that got inside from rain or from continued leaking which also caused the rot to continue. Eventually large areas of fiberglass separated from the wood. When I cut out samples where this separation had occurred to study them I noticed that the fiberglass had not separated from the wood but rather the wood had failed. There was a thin layer of wood, maybe 1/16 inch thick, where the resin had soaked into that was still bonded to the fiberglass cloth. So the wood had actually come apart with the failure line being inside the wood where the resin had ceased penetrating.

I decided in 1990 the only way to save the boat was to replace the entire hull. At that time it was almost 80 years old. I looked at all the possibilities: using wood again, more fiberglass, steel, or aluminum. I decided on aluminum. It doesn't rust like steel, doesn't leak like wood, doesn't age like fiberglass, has good longevity in fresh water, and is relatively easy to work with common tools. I hired a naval architect, Tim Graul from Sturgeon Bay, to help me plan the new hull. My idea was to reuse the cabin, canopy, hardware, electrical, and mechanical equipment, just move everything over to the new hull.

About that time, some members of the Antique and Classic Boat Society came to see me and said they thought NORMANDIE was historically important and should be preserved in its original form and put in a museum. They offered to put an endowment with the boat to ensure its preservation and prepare the boat for exhibit. I thought that was a good idea and I told them if they wanted to do that, I would give them the boat. That would be my contribution. So I changed course, saved NORMANDIE intact, and built my new boat from scratch. That new boat became SEALARK.

In the meantime, the ACBS group that was going to preserve NORMANDIE slowly diminished because of the demise or divorce of some of the people involved. I wrote to those remaining from time to time and told them how I was getting along and that they could have NORMANDIE whenever they were ready, but I never heard from any of them again.

So when SEA LARK was launched in 2006, I had to deal with NORMANDIE myself. I decided to disassemble NORMANDIE and put it in deep storage. Before doing so, I asked Mark Pudlo, an associate of Tim Graul's, to come down from Sturgeon Bay and measure the hull.



Canopy lifted off.



Cabin being disassembled.

The following pictures show the hull on the way to deep storage.



The hull still has an attractive sheer line.

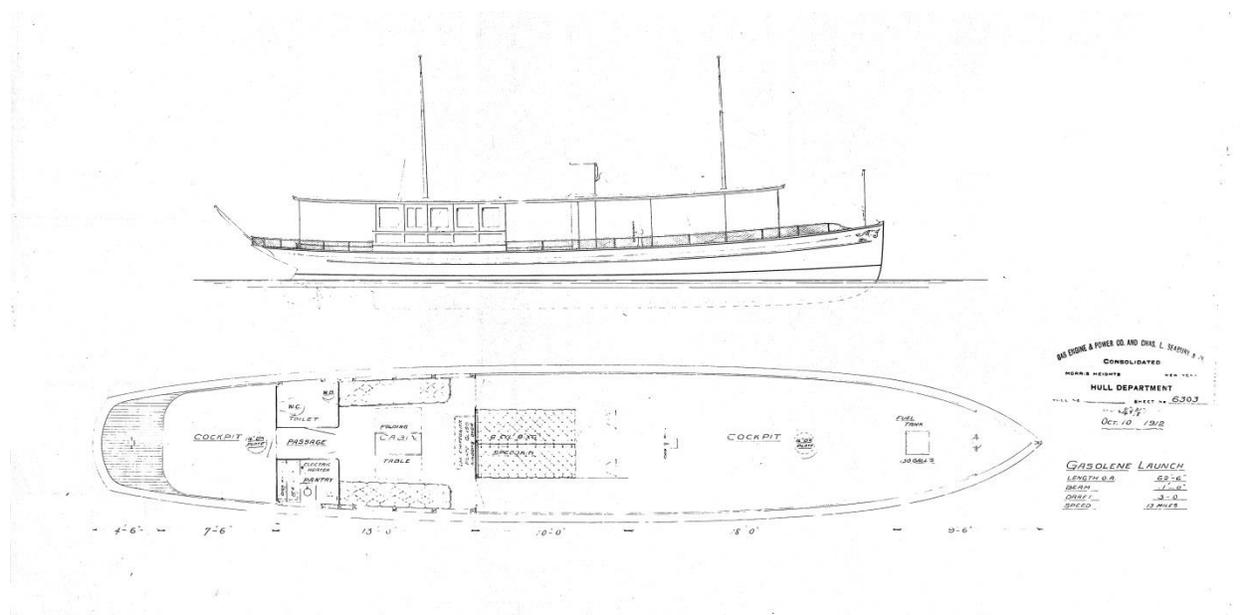


NORMANDIE being lifted from the water and transported to Walter's farm.

On to "Plan B." I talked with the people at Mystic Seaport and a couple of other museum/restoration schools about taking NORMANDIE as a project where their school would restore the boat and they could then put it on exhibit and actually use it as a living example of early twentieth century lake launches. They all expressed interest but no commitments. And they all asked what kind of endowment came with the boat.

About 2011 I got tired of climbing over all these parts from NORMANDIE that I had stored anywhere I could find space, and I decided to do the restoration myself. I think I was motivated in part by a movie I saw as a kid, The Treasure of Sierra Madre. If you haven't seen it, it is a classic Humphrey Bogart film where these three guys of mixed character team up with an old timer and go up in the Sierra Madre Mountains hunting for gold. They dig into the mountain and they do find gold. When they think they are rich enough for the rest of their lives, they decide to return to civilization. The old timer says they have to restore the mountain or it's going to be bad luck. They ignore his warning, leave the mountain scarred, and start down. On the way they are all robbed or killed or end up in jail. So reflecting on this, I thought I should restore NORMANDIE before I leave this world. I'd like to meet my maker and tell him that I left the world a little better than I found it, that my presence helped preserve the past and gave some promise for the future.

In the meantime, Joy Rasin, who had lived in the Harris home for many years, found an original 1913 drawing for NORMANDIE in the attic. And a few other original construction drawings had shown up at the Mystic Seaport library.

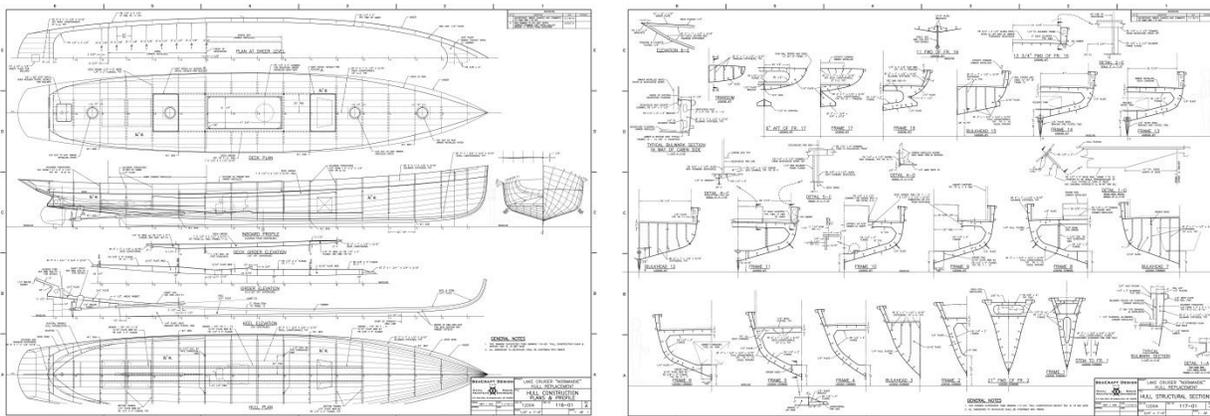


Original 1913 drawing found in the Harris attic by Joy Rasin



Mark Pudlow and Nate Smith at Seacraft Design discuss the plans for NORMANDIE'S new hull in 2013.

Mark Pudlow and Nate Smith, Tim Graul's successors at Seacraft Design, used these drawings and their earlier measurements to finalize the plans they had started in 1990. The design they created is excellent. Not only did they capture the essence of the boat, the hull structure they created is robust, the mechanical elements such as the drive train and steering employ the latest technology, and the accessories such as water and fuel tanks are thoughtfully placed.



Computer generated drawings for new aluminum hull.

With their help, I found a builder in Saugatuck, Michigan, David Andersen, who was willing to build the hull. We started in May of 2013 with their assurance that the hull would be finished and be here by September 27 for the boat show. So much for good intentions.

Technology today is marvelous! The drawings that Mark and Nate created on their CAD system were loaded directly into the computer of a plasma cutter and all the frames and structural pieces were cut out in a day.



Left: Frames being cut out on a computer driven plasma cutter.



June 5, 2013



The hull is being built upside down. Here the frames for the mid-section have been set in place.



Patrick Borst and Dave Andersen begin to form a hull plate by rolling a compound curve into the plate.



The first hull plates have been laid over the frames and tack welded in place.



Hull is well underway in early July, 2013. The keel is in place and all the frames except the very back end of the boat are in place.

Today, the keel, deck beams, and longitudinal stiffeners are standard extrusions that can be ordered out of a catalog. The entire hull will have taken less than 5 months to build. I can't say enough good about these guys. The crew at Andersen Boat works: Patrick Borst, Rick Borst, James Dearborn, and Chris Carr, did a marvelous job of bending plates and fitting the boat together. The boat is square and true, and the measurements of the frames and structural components are very precise. The quality of the welding is outstanding.



July 10, 2013



August 1, 2013



September 25, 2013



October 20, 2013: The hull has been sand blasted, primed, faired, and received the first coat of paint.

In the meantime, I sent the cabin components over to Van Krumpen in Genoa City, the cabinet maker who built the cabins on the other two boats I have done. He spent the winter reassembling the cabin and repairing or replacing anything questionable.

Right now, the canopy is still in my boat house here. The engine and transmission have been built up and are ready to go into the boat.



The old hull is still on Walter's farm. But not for long. The current promised date for delivery of the new hull is November 7 and I need the cradle the old hull is resting on to support the new boat when it arrives. After that the old hull will be dismantled.

SEALARK, the first boat I did, took 15 years to finish, HATHOR, the second boat, took 7 years. I'm hoping I can do better this time. We'll see. In any case, I have a vision for the re-commissioning ceremony of William the Conqueror arriving on horseback in full armor to open the festivities. Maybe some Wagnerian music like the Flight of the Valkyries to accompany the boat as it enters the water. We'll stay in-touch.

In the meantime, Thanks to all of you for coming, we'll see you at the boat show tomorrow.

(This concludes the Power Point presentation for the Blackhawk Chapter of the Antique and Classic Boat Society in September, 2013)

NEW HULL ARRIVES

RECONSTRUCTION BEGINS

The new hull arrived at Gage Marine in Williams Bay on the morning of November 7, 2013. There was a brief ceremony prior to launching.

I think it was 1994 when we last stood here and launched a bare hull that became SEA LARK. It took me another 12 years to finish that one, at that rate I'll be about 90 when I finish this one..... but I've gotten better....

I'm often asked why I'm doing this....

I think NORMANDIE has historic value.... Not only because it is one of the few remaining vessels from 100 years ago... but also because of the role this boat and others like it played in the early development of Lake Geneva.

It is also a very pretty boat, it has nice lines, good proportions, all together an elegant craft.

And it has sentimental value... it was my first boat, I bought it in 1955, and I met my wife Sue when she stepped aboard one romantic evening in June of 1958. I tell my kids - without this boat they wouldn't be here today.

It also gives me a great deal of artistic satisfaction to take metal and wood and fashion these basic raw materials into something of beauty and utility.

But I also want to leave this world a little better than I found it... I want to think that my presence here has helped preserve something of our heritage, something unique that we can pass on that will show people 100 years from now something worthwhile from our era. I hope NORMANDIE will last another 100 years. We have used the best materials and the best workmanship and we have incorporated as much of the original boat as possible to preserve the essence. I hope it will bring as much pleasure to a future family as we have enjoyed these past 58 years.

May God Speed her voyage.

The following pictures were taken the morning of November 7. The hull was towed to my brother, Walter's, boathouse on the north shore by John Anderson and Bob Klockers.



Launching at Gage Marine.



Towing by John Anderson and Bob Klockers.



Going into Walter's boathouse.

November 7, 2013



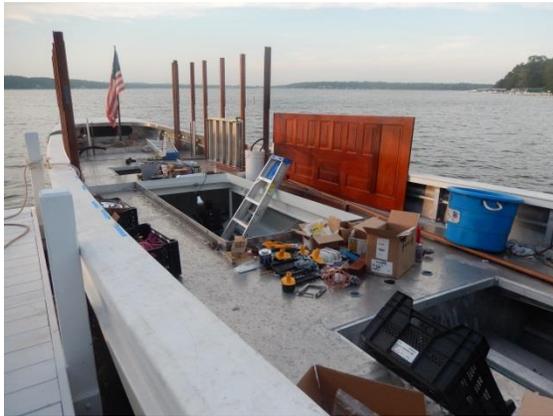


February 2, 2014, most of the time since November has been spent installing tanks, running pipes, and wire ways. We have just started erecting the cabin framework to use as a guide in drilling access holes in the deck for pipes and wires.

It was a long, cold winter with temperatures frequently below zero. There is a space heater in the boathouse but it was too expensive to run all the time. So we just used it when we were working on the boat. The rate of rise was about 10 degrees per hour, so when the temperature was below zero it never got above freezing in the three or four hours we worked there. If the temperature outside was 20 degrees or above, we could turn the heat on and in a few hours it would be comfortable enough to work.

After securing the boat and leveling it, the first thing we worked on was the plumbing. We ran hot and cold water lines, drain lines from the sinks and toilet to the holding tank, fuel lines, engine cooling water lines, hydraulic steering lines, roof drains, engine exhaust pipes, bilge pump discharge, every kind of piping imaginable. When people ask how the boat was coming along, I told them progress was invisible. If you looked at a photograph of the boat taken in November 2013 and one taken in April 2014 you would think we had not worked on the boat at all because everything we did was buried inside the hull.

On June 26, 2014 we put NORMANDIE'S new hull back in the water, towed it over to my place, and pulled it out of the water into my boat house for the summer so it would be easier to work on.



The hull has just finished the journey across the lake.



Into the boathouse for the summer.

The first thing we worked on was rebuilding the cabin so we could drop the canopy down on the boat. It took about two days to fit the front and back of the cabin on to the hull and another three days to lower the canopy onto the hull.



Pictures taken July 4, 2014

Above: Aft cabin wall installed.

Left: Forward cabin wall installed. The engine and generator are also in place but not installed.



July 13, 2014, canopy in place.



July 15, 2014 Interior partitions in place.