

# North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort

## 40th Annual Traditional Wooden Boat Show

by Benjamin Wunderly

Forty sounds old, but when you are talking about wooden boats, building them, sailing them or just admiring them, time goes by pretty fast.

It was 1975 and Charles R. McNeill and friend Michael Alford were conversing about their love for traditional wooden boats when they decided to hold an event for the community. An event that would inspire others to appreciate something hand-crafted, something worthwhile, something beautiful... wooden boats. McNeill, director of the Hampton Mariners Museum (the original North Carolina Maritime Museum), had the ideal setting for the show, but the surrounding buildings and streets were not quite conducive to such a display; downtown Beaufort was still undergoing a transformation from working waterfront to quaint tourist town. An alternative location was chosen in Morehead City amongst the waterfront restaurants.



Though only held at this locale twice, the idea would be the start of an annual event that pays homage to traditional wooden boats. The first gathering of wooden boats was actually called The Heritage Boat Show and was held in conjunction with a Bicentennial Heritage Week; nine boats participated that first year. In 1976, twenty boats were entered in what was obviously a big hit in the community. Just four years later, the number of boats registered for the show hit fifty.

One of the largest events was in 1982, when over eighty boats were registered. This was also the year that the Hornpipe Dancers of Red Springs, North Carolina entertained the crowd, decked out in the Royal Navy uniform of Scotland and performing a Scottish Highland dance. Other activities that have taken place over the years include boat races, wood carving and knot tying demonstrations, canoe and kayak lessons, live music, toy boats for children, model boat displays and many other special presentations and activities. There are even stories of a performer with bagpipes and a one man band.

Since its inception, the only year that the show did not go on was in 1985 when Hurricane Gloria brushed the coast that September. In order to make up for the cancelled event the decision was made to hold the boat show that following spring, a tradition which has continued ever since. Both Alford and McNeill may have never anticipated that what they started forty years ago would still be going strong today. A gathering of friends and a welcoming of strangers, an event to be looked forward to every year. Through the efforts of Museum staff, their support group The Friends of the Museum and numerous volunteers, the Wooden Boat Show has become a part of North Carolina's maritime history.

The following timeline of the annual Traditional Wooden Boat Show takes a look back at some of the attractions, performances and antics of the longest ongoing wooden boat show in the Southeast. Some of the winners of 'Best in Show' and races are listed for this walk...or sail, down memory lane, but in all reality, when you have a wooden boat, you are already a winner.

- 1975 First Wooden Boat Show is held on the Morehead City waterfront. The event is originally called The Heritage Boat Show.
- 1976 Two of the standout boats include a 1936 Core Sounder, the *Sylvia II*, owned by Bob and Mary Simpson, and the smaller but newer sharpie, the *Idie*, belonging to Charles McNeill and built by George Lawrence.
- 1977 The show is held in Beaufort, home of the Hampton Mariners Museum.
- 1978 Two small craft used in the production of the television mini-series *Roots* are entered in the show.
- 1981 Seventy boats participate this year. A 52' Sparkman and Stephens yawl (built by the namesake company whose vessel, *Dorada*, won the 1931 Trans-Atlantic Race).
- 1982 81 boats are displayed for the event. A 10'6" lapstrake yacht tender owned by Chris Stickney of Wilson's Mills wins best in show. A rowing race, now a part of the annual event, is won by Emerson Willard Jr. of Wilmington. He competed in a 16' dory built at Crown Point Marine in Wilmington.
- 1983 Held September 24th and 25th, a 17' Whitehall rowboat owned by Allen J. Park Jr. from Statesville, wins best in show.
- 1985 The 11th annual show is cancelled due to Hurricane Gloria. After being downgraded from a category 4, Gloria struck the southern portion of Hatteras Island on September 27<sup>th</sup>.
- 1986 The re-scheduled event is held June 7th and 8th on the grounds and nearby waterfront of the newly built and re-named facility, The North Carolina Maritime Museum. John Woltz of Greensboro wins the sailing regatta in a 1952 moth class boat.
- 1989 A demonstration on building a dugout canoe, a primitive boat used by Native Americans, takes place outside of the Museum.
- 1991 Demonstrations by the boatbuilding programs of Pamlico and Cape Fear Community Colleges take place at the event.



A 20' Core Sound sharpie, built by Gary Davis of Harkers Island and owned by Erik Lie-Nielsen of New Bern, wins best in show. Jim Brown of Bridgeton wins the regatta in his 10' spindrift dinghy.

- 1994 Best in show and first in the sailing race goes to Tom Lathrop's Windmill, the *Harbinger*.
- 1995 There is a homecoming for a 1982 15' Whitehall built by Master Boatbuilder and Skills Preservation Program Instructor Geoffrey Scofield. A first ever Traditional Small Craft Association race around Carrot Island takes place. The newly formed Carolina Maritime Model Society displays over two dozen boat models. Best in show goes to a 19' two mast sharpie, the *Sharbeau*, built by Museum staff and volunteers.
- 1996 Boats registered in the show come from as far away as New York and Florida. First place in the Taylors Creek race goes to *Spindrift*, owned by Graham Barnes. The Carrot Island race is won by Bill Kwaak in a Rochford class dinghy.
- 1998 The oldest vessel, a 16' early 1930's Chris Craft, *Fan Fair*, owned by Raymond Jason of Beaufort, is displayed in the show. A 1962 spritsail skiff, the *Ruth II*, built by Julian Guthrie participates in the race from Harkers Island to Beaufort. Best in show is awarded to the *Silver Chalice*, a ship's boat of the replica vessel *Elizabeth II*, built by Michael Alford and Geoffrey Scofield.
- 1999 Best in show goes to a Nutshell Pram, *Water Lily*, built by Julie Powers of Beaufort during one of the classes offered at the Museum's Watercraft Center.
- 2002 Best in show is awarded to *Sea Marie*, a 1950 16' lapstrake day sailor owned by Ken Kaiser of Smyrna. The boat was restored by Dave Wilcox of Pelican Yachts in Smyrna. Brent Creelman of Beaufort wins the sailing race in *Captain Kelley*.
- 2003 A 1948 17' Chris Craft, *Dish*, owned by William Poole of Raleigh wins best in show. The spritsail race is won by the team of Brent Creelman and Mark Stevens.
- 2005 Special guest Roy Underhill, of UNC-TV's *The Woodwright's Shop*, speaks at the opening ceremony. He also participates in many of the activities offered that weekend. Best in show is awarded to a 28' sharpie, *Jayne Ellen*, owned by Tommy Nicholson of Greensboro.
- 2006 Best in show is awarded to a 14' melonseed skiff built by Brush Creek Yachts of Plymouth. Over the past few years more and more categories to be judged are added to the show--Best Row, Best Paddle, Best Power, Best Sail and People's Choice--are just a few.
- 2008 A boatbuilding challenge, sponsored by the Mohring Group AV Mill Outlet, coincides with the Maritime Museum's Wooden Boat Show. In this National Boatbuilding Challenge teams of two compete to build a 12' row boat within four hours. Music performances include Molasses Creek of Ocracoke and the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing Band of Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point.
- 2009 Father and son team, Skip and Sharp Kemp, of Morehead City win the 2nd Annual Boatbuilding Challenge. They went on to compete in the National Championship event held in Georgetown, South Carolina.
- 2010 Best in show is awarded to *Cumulative Errors* by Syd Chipman of Lenoir.
- 2011 Heber Guthrie, nephew of locally renowned boatbuilder Julian Guthrie, demonstrates traditional boatbuilding

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techniques used in making a 24' flat bottomed skiff. Harkers Island Elementary School students enter a 13' rowing skiff. A boat by Mason Cox Jr. takes home best in show. The spritsail race is won by Brent Creelman.

2012 Best in show is awarded for the second year in a row to Mason Cox Jr. for *Trinoe*, an 11'9" boat. Smyrna Elementary School students enter a 15½' rowing skiff as a school project. Brent Creelman takes first in the spritsail race around Carrot Island.

2013 Some longstanding North Carolina boat builders were represented this year. The list included; an Albemarle Shad boat (the state boat of North Carolina!) from Roanoke Island, Bob Simpson's always present Core Sounder the *Sylvia II*, a Carolina custom from Willis Boatworks of Harkers Island, a 1955 Simmons Sea Skiff from the Cape Fear region, two 1953 vessels from Barbour Boats out of New Bern, a 1965 Harkers Island Skiff by Rose Brothers restored by Gillikin Boatworks and one of Heber Guthrie's spritsail skiffs. Best in show is awarded to a 24'4" Ken Hankinson Tahoe run-about, *Legend Has It*, by Gerald Hurst of Jacksonville. Longstanding champion of the spritsail race is once again Brent Creelman, with teammate Jim Zahradka. ■