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Bryan's Bridge

Reconstruction of local bridge. See story on page 14.



Moonstruck

WEST SAYVILLE—For the past year, several volunteers have been working on restoring a replica of a Gil Smith Moonbeam, a vessel class from around 1909. The replica, Moonstruck, was built and owned by Doug Westin of Sayville who is pictured here (inset) sailing on the Great South Bay. His family donated the boat to the Long Island Maritime Museum after he passed away in the 1990s. The volunteer boat builders (left to right): Betty Arink, Bob West, Jim Johnson, Lou Merz (seated), John Remmer and Harry Ehlers hope to have it back on the bay again by next summer. Read about their work below.

SCN/Liz Finnegan



Restoring Moonbeam and memories

A vessel from the past is being given a new life

By LIZ FINNEGAN

WEST SAYVILLE—Beyond the many historic buildings on the grounds of the Long Island Maritime Museum is a less visible wood-framed shack that's bustling with activity on certain days: The Bob Grooms Moonbeam Shop. For it is there several Long Island retirees have been volunteering many hours to rebuild a native Long Island south shore vessel that has for the most part disappeared from the waters of the Great South Bay: The Gil Smith Moonbeam.

Gil Smith (1843-1940) was a prolific boat builder on the Patchogue River who constructed several hundred vessels from his shop. He built the Moonbeam — a 22-foot gaff-rigged catboat, in 1909 — a rather fast moving, easily maneuverable small yacht with a broad, shallow hull designed specifically for local waters.

Betty Arink, LIMM trustee and volunteer boat builder, said that the vessel being rebuilt is actually a replica of the original that belonged to the late Doug Westin, an avid sailor, who for many decades ran a marina in Sayville. She noted, "When he passed away, his daughters donated [his Moonbeam] to the museum."

However, after years of being exposed to the elements on the museum grounds, the group decided to dedicate some time to restoring the vessel before it could incur further damage. It was Bob Grooms who had led the charge and resurrected the unused building for that purpose. The building was named in his honor

a few months before he passed away in May.

John Remmer has taken up the mantle. "I miss Bob [Grooms]," he said. "He had a tremendous amount of experience. I've had a lot of boat building experience, but never built one from the keel up," Remmer added.

Although the original design was constructed of all wood, Westin's reproduction named, Moonstruck, was a combination of wood and fiberglass, which is much easier to maintain. And since Smith never left any plans, it was even harder for him to replicate. "[Smith] did everything by eye," Remmer noted.

"We've had this since the 1990s, but being outside it began rotting away," he said and pointed to a curved wood section on the deck that had been replaced. He noted that when examining it before repairs, "As soon as you touched [the wood] it fell out," adding that wood slats from an old barn and new wood is now being used to complete the work. "We've been fortunate to get much of the wood from donations," he said. One thing that's still in relatively good shape though is Westin's original sails: a jib and gaff rigged main, which will be used when the vessel is completed.

As the small group of hobbyists toiled away in the shop, Remmer said, "Everyone has different jobs. Betty is excellent at refinishing.

"Our goal is to restore this boat so it could be readily sailed. It's more for nostalgia though ... to [recall] a time before powerboats when people enjoyed a day of sailing on the bay."

LIMM's executive director, Steve Jones, said that the work being done there and at the museum's other boat building venue, the Penney Boat Shop, tie in well to their educational mission of interpreting Long Island's maritime history.

"We're keeping old boat-building traditions alive," he said, noting that visitors often stop by the shops to see the work in progress and ask questions, learning more than they'd anticipated. "It's better than any static exhibit," he added.

Remmer, Arink and the others said they look forward to having visitors to come in to see what goes into restoring old vessels. However, it means a lot more to them than just passing along a bit of the South Shore's maritime history. Remmer added, "I'm also interested in seeing how I can help the museum."

Arink agreed. "We need to help the museum restore its collection," she remarked, adding that the Penney Boat Shop is equally important. "I love this museum and I love wooden boats. When this one is finished, it will be beautiful," she said.

LIMM is open daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The Bob Grooms Shop though, is only open Monday and Friday mornings. The Penney Boat Shop is open Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings. For more information about the shops and the museum, go to the website: www.info@limaritime.org. ■



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