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THE Antique Outboard

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John Schubert

at work on Gingerly's
Mark 55H. Page 27

Dad in his first boat.



Family Brings 1956 Raveau Outboard Race Boat Back to Its Home Waters

By Ginger Henry Kuenzel

Our family has a rich history of boat racing on Lake George, a pristine body of water in the Adirondack Mountains of New York State. My great grandfather was Commodore of the Lake George Yacht Club and a member of the Hague Rowing Club, founded in 1880. The club's name was actually a misnomer as they also hosted diving, swimming, and canoeing competitions along with inboard regattas, including Gold Cups.

The Rowing Club changed its name to the more fitting Lake George Regatta Association (LGRA) in 1901. My grandfather competed regularly in his inboard race boats. His older son, my uncle, also raced when he came of age. They both did well, but were no match for Count Casimir Mankowski, who won the Gold Cup in 1913 in his boat *Ankle Deep*, earning the right for the LGRA to host the 1914 race on Lake George. In 1933, George Reis of Lake George became the first driver ever to win the Gold Cup three years in a row – 1933-1935 – with his boat *El Lagarto*.

My dad, Jack Henry, was too young to race the powerful, expensive inboards during those years. But with a father and older brother who spent their summers tuning, repairing, and racing boats, it was pretty much predestined that he would also develop a passion for boats and speed. His father bought him small outboards over the years, and Dad was hooked. But with the advent of the Depression in 1929-30, the LGRA disbanded, and Dad never raced the big inboards.

At the end of World War II, Dad returned to Hague with his new bride. Although his parents and grandparents had been strictly summer residents, he was determined to live on

Lake George year-round. He bought a marina, became the Mercury dealer, and took up the relatively new sport of stock utility outboard racing. The American Power Boat Association (APBA) had begun sanctioning stock utility outboard regattas in 1948, and interest in these boats blossomed.

Dad competed around the northeast, including in the Albany-New York City regatta on the Hudson River. His first stock utility boat was a Speedliner, which he named *Miss Timarine*, after his marina in the nearby town of Ticonderoga. He trailered his boat, with its Mercury KG9, to races on summer weekends. But after seeing again and again how well Raveau boats performed, particularly in the grueling Albany-New York City event, Dad gave up his Speedliner in favor of a Raveau. After all, *Miss Timarine* had not fared well in the 1949 race on the Hudson. Just south of Poughkeepsie, the boat's hull cracked, and despite Dad's valiant efforts to repair it underway with a piece of wood from the river and later with a flattened tin can fastened over the crack, "it became obvious that the only thing between *Timarine* and submarine was a few minutes," as one reporter wrote.

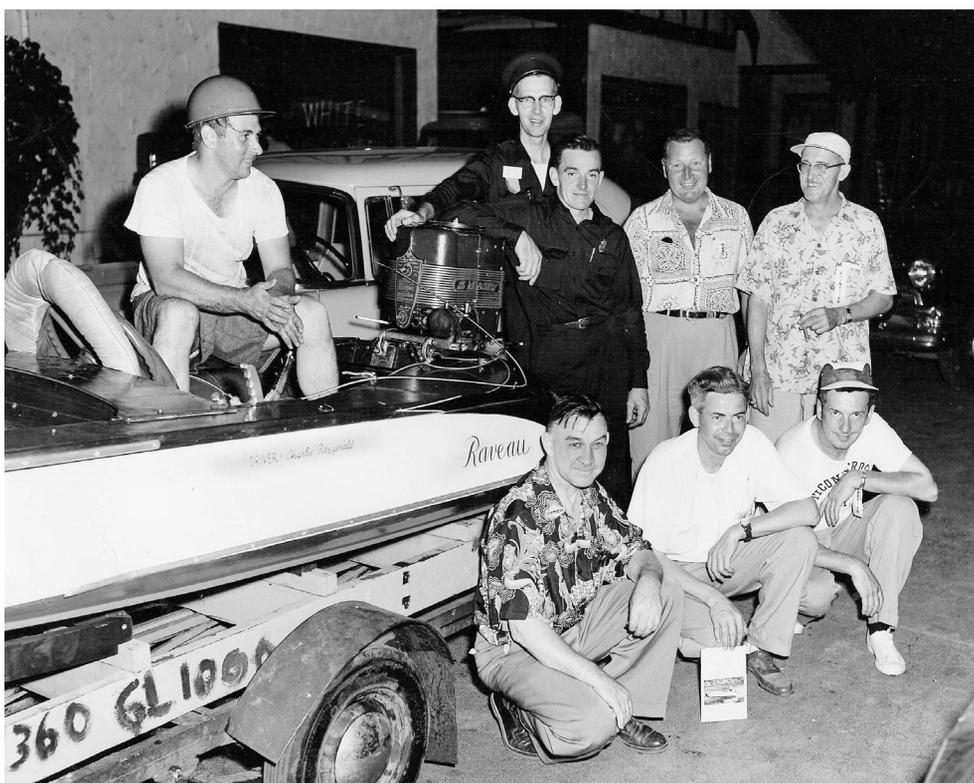
In the early 1950s, the only entertainment on long winter evenings in the tiny village of Hague was hanging out with friends. Some of the guys – likely spurred on by Dad and perhaps also by a few beers – started talking about rekindling the LGRA and holding races on Lake George again. This time, however, it would be outboard racing rather than the high-priced inboards. It didn't take long for the group to convince the Chamber of Commerce that a regatta would bring visitors to town, and they should thus be a sponsor. It helped that

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most in this group of early enthusiasts owned hotels, shops, and other small businesses in town and were Chamber members. A few of the guys bought stock utility race boats and started learning how to drive them. Others volunteered to help with publicity, finances, sponsorships, and the many other tasks involved in organizing a regatta.

In 1954, the 'Racing Committee of the Hague Chamber of Commerce' held its first races on a closed one-mile course, running five laps. By the next year, the APBA had agreed to sanction the race, and the LGRA had been reconstituted as the sponsor. Carlings Brewery also later signed on as a sponsor. The annual races quickly became a huge success, with nearly 150 boats registered in some years and newspaper reports of between 10,000 and 20,000 spectators. In 1956, Dad upgraded his D-U class Raveau to one that he probably custom ordered from Marcel Raveau. Traditionally, Raveau boats were painted cream color, with a stained mahogany deck. But Dad's new boat, aptly named Gingerly, was all stained mahogany above the water line, and its bow was more pointed than other Raveau models.

Dad later replaced his original KG-9 motor with a Mark 55H Mercury and raced Gingerly until 1962, when my



The guys who joined Dad in initiating the Hague outboard regattas.

brother Johnny turned 14 and was old enough to take over the helm. He already had two years of experience under his belt, having raced our smaller A-U class Raveau starting in 1960. When Johnny graduated to Gingerly, he

turned the A-U over to me, and I began gearing up for my first big race. I can only imagine how our parents must have felt about having their 14-year-old son and 13-year-old daughter competing in this daring 90-mile marathon. Dad

Racers at Hague in the 1950s or '60s.



was likely bursting with pride, while Mom was probably terrified. And though I never would have admitted it back then, so was I. As luck would have it, my A-U developed a crack in the hull on race weekend, and I had to withdraw. Looking back on it today, I regret missing that chance to compete. But truth be known, back then I was secretly very happy to watch from the sidelines. As interest in the marathons waned and sponsorship money dried up over the years, the Northern Lake George Regatta became a thing of the past. Its last year was 1964.

Fast forward to the mid-1980s, when my younger brother Ed, who had raced both of our Raveaus, trailered Gingerly and her motor out to his home in Wyoming, with plans to do a complete restoration. The years passed, and Gingerly hung from the rafters in Ed's barn for nearly four decades. In 2022, when our cousin John Beekley asked Ed how he would feel about bringing Gingerly back to Lake George to be professionally restored, Ed didn't hesitate. He knew by this point he'd never get around to restoring her. And he also knew that our family's boathouse on Lake George, built in 1929, was a far more fitting home for Gingerly than a barn in Wyoming.

When Ed arrived in Hague with Gingerly in June of 2022, having driven more than 2,200 miles, we invited nearly 100 friends and family to celebrate her return. The party buzzed with people recounting their memories of Gingerly's glory days in the 1950s and early 60s and the thrill of those race weekends. We were all kids in those years, and the races were a highlight of our summer every year. It was a time when all those drivers from around the country showed up in town with their speedy – and yes, noisy – little boats. None of us had forgotten those days.

Over the course of the next year, the team at Mountain Motors &



Dad with Johnny (L) and Ed.

Restoration in Hague returned Gingerly to her former pristine condition. What started as a relatively routine restoration job for them quickly evolved into a labor of love as they grew to understand just how special this boat is to so many people in our town. She's a piece not only of our family's history, but also of the town's history.

In the summer of 2022, my cousin John had heard that the right man to restore the Mark55H Mercury was John Schubert, top-notch mechanic, former professional race boat driver, member of the APBA honor squadron, and a name known to nearly every outboard



266N lowered from the rafters after 40 years.

John Schubert talks about his work on Gingerly's Mercury Mark 55H motor:

Because this project was so important to the family of Gingerly's original owner Jack Henry, I agreed to take it on. Many motors are restored solely for purposes of display, but this was different. The Henry family was planning a huge event in June of 2023 for Gingerly's re-launch, including fly-bys for the crowd. The motor had to start. Some pressure!

I finished the restoration in the fall of 2022 and turned it back over to John Beekley. Over the next months, I began having premonitions that things would not come together as planned. How right I was. I arrived in Hague Friday afternoon, planning to spend Saturday doing some fine tuning before launching the boat on Sunday and making some carburetor adjustments. Early Saturday morning, Ed came over with his nephew Toby, who had flown over from Germany and was excited to learn about the motor and its workings. We became a well-oiled team.

After some prep work, we were ready to try to start the motor. Just before adding fuel to the tank, Toby noticed that the gas cap had no gasket. I pulled a quick MacGuyver, asking Toby to find some twine and wind it around the base of the cap to make a temporary seal. After considerable priming, we confirmed fuel to the pump and carburetor. An ignition test ensured there was spark at the plugs. Time now to attempt a start. Ed pulled the starter rope, and it stayed out. We removed the top cover to repair the retainer, add sufficient spring tension, and re-install the top cowl. We needed narrow fingers, with the dexterity to reach up alongside the starter solenoid to fasten the front starboard nut to the top cowl stud. Ah, Toby was our man. After two or three removals and re-installs, Toby suggested using a nut without the elastic retaining material and a star lock washer so the process would take less time. Excellent idea!

Saturday rolled into Sunday, and we were still at work in the garage. During the next attempt to start the motor, it backfired. The timing belt had broken. Fortunately, a Mercury dealer down the lake had the belt we needed. Unfortunately, it would take us an hour to get there and back, and time was running short. But we had no choice. Off we went. Back in the garage, we installed it, set the timing, and put the cover back on. Several attempts later, we were finally able to get the motor to start, with the celebration just hours away! We just had to hope that it would start again when we launched the boat.

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enthusiast. Cousin John was convinced and drove the motor out to John's home in Illinois. [See the sidebar for John's own story of his work on the motor.]

We scheduled a Gingerly launch party for June 11, 2023, with family and friends from near and far, including my sons – who had only ever heard tales of Gingerly and her racing career, but never seen her in action. The excitement mounted in the days leading up to the party. Would the motor start so Ed could do a fly-by? We didn't want to overpromise, but the guys working on the motor in the garage during the 48 hours before the party – my brother Ed, John Schubert, and my son Toby, who had flown in from Germany – were bound and determined to deliver a crowd-pleasing show.

Once our guests had arrived, the ceremony on the beach began, in front of a veiled Gingerly. Cousin John, Ed, the Mountain Motors restoration team, John Schubert, and I each spoke briefly about our role in the story of Gingerly – then and now. My cousin Julie, an Episcopalian priest, asked for a blessing for “all the big little boys and their fast toys, and for Gingerly as she begins her new adventures. Grant her sunny skies, smooth waters, and safe, speedy drivers. May she bring terrified delight to all the many lovers of speed.”

With that, Gingerly was unveiled and carried down to the water. Ed donned a life jacket, waded into the lake, and climbed in. As the guests looked on, shouting words of encouragement, Ed pulled the rope. Nothing. He pulled again. Still no spark. After numerous attempts, the boat was carried back up onto the beach. The crowd murmured in disappointment and turned back to their conversations and cocktails. Meanwhile, Ed, John, and Toby weren't willing to give up. They performed some tests and made a few adjustments, and Gingerly was carried back to the water. The motorheads in the crowd, who had hovered around the boat watching the work, started cheering, and the other guests' attention turned back to the boat once again. Ed climbed in and gave a short pull, and then another. And another. Anticipation was running high. Shouts of encouragement came from the crowd: “You've got this!” “Pull it!” “You gotta want it!” “What would Jack do?” Finally, the motor sparked. The crowd cheered, but still no start. On the 11th pull, we saw a puff of exhaust and heard the roar – from the motor and then from the crowd. Gingerly took off, creating as much excitement as she had all those decades ago – perhaps even more.

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Dad in Gingerly in 1956, with KG9 motor.



Ginger and Ed on launch day.



The restoration crew. (L-R) John Beekley, Ginger Henry Kuenzel, Ed Henry, John Schubert, and Fran Sisca and Jimmy Jordan of Mountain Motors and Restoration.