



"Share the Gift of Summer Camp!"



# THE GULL ROCK GAZETTE

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## NEW CANOES; OLD SOUL"

By: F. Nelson Archer, Gazette Staff Writer

**P**icture this, friends, if you will: mid-July, Gull Lake. You are just off Chapel Point, soloing a canoe as the sinking sun's final rays, illuminating the sky orange and purple and red, dissipate dully into the aluminum hull of your boat. Uhm, wait. Picture it: mid-July, Gull Lake. You are just off Chapel Point, soloing a canoe as the sinking sun's final rays illuminate the sky with hues of orange and purple and red, the black and vermillion waves lapping at the Kevlar of. . . . No. Stop. Who am I trying to fool? We all know that there is no substitute for a traditionally-made, hand-crafted, finely-finished cedar and canvas canoe. Anyone who has paddled one of Kilcoo's boats knows this all too well.

At one point, Kilcoo had 75 such canoes. Unfortunately, less than two-dozen now remain. Time and tripping have taken their toll. These boats, some at least thirty years old, are in a sad state of disrepair, held together (literally) with caulking, duct tape, and lots of varnish. Kilcoo Camp has made a bold move to begin re-building our fleet. Bold, because in this modern age of space-age synthetics and mass-production, we have decided to preserve both our Canadian camping heritage and the dying art of canoe-building by outfitting the new fleet solely with cedar and canvas canoes.

The original Kilcoo canoes were made locally, in Minden, by a woman named May Minto. She made both 12- and 16-foot canoes, from the early 1950's until her retirement in 1983. Kilcoo purchased mostly the 16-foot version, and these boats became so popular that camps like Onondaga and Gay

Venture also began to use them exclusively.

However, the Minto Canoe Company no longer exists. While many boat companies still produce wooden canoes, retail pricing far exceeds Kilcoo's budget. The solution? We'll build 'em ourselves!

The idea was brought forth by Ian Currie (canoeing instructor, extraordinaire) who contacted Scott Walker ('84), who himself re-finished Chief's own Minto for Kilcoo in 2008. Like a shoe, canoes are built on a mould. Over the years many attempts were made to locate the original Minto mould; it is very likely that it no longer exists. Thus, the decision was made to find a very good example of one of the "Mintos" and reverse engineer a new mould with it. A number of good boats were located, but David Blandford's ('85) boat (one of the last three ever made by May) was the best candidate as it is in pristine condition and a near-perfect example of a newly-made 16-foot Minto.

The Canoe was taken to the Canadian Canoe Museum in Peterborough, where it was scanned using a custom-designed 3 dimensional boat (or hull) scanner created by well-known Canadian marine architect, Steve Killing. Once scanned, Steve was hired to take the raw data and create blueprints for the "New Minto" and corresponding machine instructions for a computer-navigated cutter to make the skeleton of the new mould. Rather than be restricted by the limitations of the past, we used this opportunity to clean-up and "fair" the shape, stability, and handling of the boat – something that was not possible when May was building – to, essentially, make these new "Kilcoos" even better than the real thing without compromising the traditional design.

Once the mould skeleton was cut, renowned Canadian canoe builder Ron Frenette acted as mentor and guide to transfer his skills and knowledge to Marc Russell (former Program Director, etc.), who would build the new mould



L-R: Steve Killing, Ron Frenette, Marc Russell, Scott Walker; the "Kilcoo" mould on left, the first "Kilcoo" on right.

and begin the process of building the first new Kilcoo canoes in 25 years.

Marc has been working away at a private wood shop in Caledon, but by summer he will transfer the Project to Kilcoo Camp. He estimates that we'll have six to eight new "Kilcoos" by September. Have no fear; these boats will retain the characteristic orange and green paint of the Kilcoo Mintos. "We – Lub, myself, Scott, everyone! – knows how important tradition is to Kilcoo. Restoring the existing boats is just not an option; they're just too far gone," states Marc. Lub agrees: "We could have gone for a cheaper alternative for the fleet, like plastic or Kevlar, but there is really no question in our minds that we're doing the right thing. We're using the finest materials; Kilcoo is putting a lot into this. These boats are awesome." Moreover, arrangements are being finalised to make this boat available for private sale (those interested in buying their own "Kilcoo" should contact Marc, through the Kilcoo office in Toronto).

Since the beginning of the Project, Scott has been an instrumental source of information about the Minto Canoe and its history at Kilcoo Camp. He has done extensive research in the field, research that will hopefully see the light of day. Special thanks to Scott and Ian Currie for their vision. The Gull Rock Gazette will continue to keep you, our beloved Alumni, informed of progress in this exciting venture – just one of the many ways that Kilcoo is striving to merge our time-honoured traditions and values with current demands to keep our camp thriving!



F. NELSON ARCHER

