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A Marvelous Mystery

In pursuit of a catboat legend

by

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Part 7: Hibernation Activities... *and Surprises*

“When are you going to get that damn winter cover off of her and get the team back to work?”

Now that Spring has sprung many of our project supporters have expressed some version of the above question. “Once the snow stops flying,” constitutes my typical answer. (April)

Turns out though, as you will see, our research and restoration team have been quite busy over the boat’s hibernation period... a period of several months peppered with enough twists and turns to fill a logbook or two.

Before the reveal however, a big shout out to author/historian Stan Grayson, boatwright, George Schuld, The Silent Maid group, boatwright/historian Joe Chatwynd, boat restoration expert and former Catboat Association President, Bob Luckraft, (not to mention the Catboat Association itself), and the dozens of craftspeople and philanthropic supporters of our crowd-sourced project. We would be nowhere without the generosity of all of these supporters.

So where to begin?

This 7th Update installment, follows the timelines as they evolved over the pandemic-challenged, winter months of 2021.

Readers will recall that our marvelous mystery tour rolls along three tracks:

- **Track 1:** Chronologically traces the boat’s provenance from the present backward, i.e a *Top-Down* research approach

- **Track 2:** Chronologically traces the boat's provenance from her build date (1904) forward, i.e. *Bottoms-Up*.
- **Track 3:** Chronologically traces the current restoration project from acquisition to re-launch, now tentatively scheduled for July of this year.

Top-Down Timeline (Track 1)

The winter has not been kind to our efforts in this area. The pandemic thwarted access to many potential sources that would identify MARVEL ownership post WW2. To solicit top-down help, I reached out to longtime friend and fellow catboater and catboat restorer Dan McFadden (His current project is the restoration of the catboat STORM KING). Dan is the Communications Director at the Mystic Seaport Museum in Connecticut. (www.mysticseaport.org). He directed me to Tim Delgado, an analyst with Connecticut's extremely well organized, DMV DEEP-Boating division in Old Lyme, CT. Check them out at:

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Boating/Boating-and-Paddling>.

Tim apologized that, due to Covid-19, the Department was short-handed regarding historical research. However, he did direct me to DMV Form J23V. Using this form, the state could trace registration numbers and, in theory, report past owners by boat name. We filled out and submitted the form, and, as you will see further on, information that came back may have identified when MARVEL first appeared in Connecticut... around 1919. (!)

Unfortunately as of this writing the sailboat named MARVEL disappeared from Connecticut's records after 1921. We suspect that a past owner changed her name. The name change has caused this line of research to dead end for now. (Walter Krasniewiez's family does not know what the boat was named when he purchased it and rebranded her SUNNYSIDE.) We are exploring a few other top-down avenues such as title-searches and boatyard restoration projects and will report any successes (or failures) in future installments.

All of which leads us to...

Bottoms-Up Timeline (Track 2)

We knew that Ira Whittemore, a Boston, MA-based businessman purchased MARVEL in 1904. Official Commonwealth of Massachusetts documentation shows that Ira claimed she was built by Herbert F. Crosby (HFC) and that her home base was the Quincy Yacht Club, in Quincy, MA. Verbal historical guidance supported that HFC built only one, skeg-mounted catboat in 1904. (Written records, if they exist, have been unavailable due to the Pandemic)

With this information in hand, we focused this winter on documenting if and how MARVEL made her way from Quincy, MA to Stamford, CT between the years of 1904 and 1962.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Stan Grayson, we learned that Whittemore very successfully raced MARVEL as a D-Class catboat from 1904 through 1906 for cash prizes. (More on the D-Class boats later). It therefore surprised Stan, and us to discover a **MARVEL FOR SALE** advertisement in a 1907 issue of The RUDDER (**Figure 1**).

No. 21603—For Sale—Champion Crosby Cape catboat, Marvel; 24 ft. 7 in. o. a., 23 ft. 6 in. w. l., 11 ft. 3 in. beam, 2 ft. 6 in. draught; centerboard; cabin will sleep three; can seat 14 in standing room; in fine condition; racing record for 1904-1905-1906, seventy-five races that were finished: 28 firsts, 17 seconds, 15 thirds, 9 fourths, 3 fifths, 1 sixth, 1 seventh; broke down once. She has won three championships, also won \$350 in cash prizes. She has \$100 suit Cousens & Pratt's sails. Considerable inventory. Best bargain in Boston. See RUDDER December, 1905. I. M. Whittemore, 64 McLellan Street, Dorchester, Mass.

Figure 1: The MARVEL *For Sale* advertisement that surprised us all

Further research revealed that Whittemore changed catboats about as often as one changes socks. Between 1907 through 1915, he owned and raced no less than three other catboats including HUSTLER, ALMIRA, and DARTWELL. ALMIRA, the C.C. Hanley boat that replaced MARVEL, has been long considered one of if not the fastest catboat ever designed, built and raced. We assumed that the availability ALMIRA persuaded Captain Whittemore to sell MARVEL. So we expected to see QYC race results for 1908 featuring matches between ALMIRA and MARVEL with another QYC member at MARVEL's helm.

Not so!

Search as we might, MARVEL just seemed to disappear from the scene. Weeks went by in our attempt to learn her fate. Had she wrecked? Been damaged in a fire? Abandoned and "on the hard" in some barn or boatyard? Once again, Stan came to the rescue. On Friday, March 12th he emailed the clip of **Figure 2** taken from the April 14th, 1907 Boston Globe.



Figure 2: The clip that solved the mystery of MARVEL's disappearance

As shown in the clip, Hugh E. Rae, a real estate broker from the then North Beach section of Queens, Long Island, NY became the new owner of this remarkable boat. As mentioned in the Globe article, Rae had MARVEL shipped via steamer from the Port of Boston to the Port of New York on April 15th, 1907. Only one coastal cargo vessel, the Eastern Steamship Lines **SS WILTON**, left Boston for New York that day so we suspect MARVEL was aboard. **Figure 3** shows the WILTON as she entered New York on a previous journey.



Figure 3: The SS WILTON transported MARVEL from Boston to New York on April 15, 1907

Further research revealed that the Rae family served at times as real estate agents for the Steinway (as in pianos) family. Steinway had (and still has) a substantial manufacturing facility on the shores of the East River and Bowery Bay. (**Figure 4**) The Steinway family also owned most of the land bordering Bowery Bay. The southern end of this section was known then as

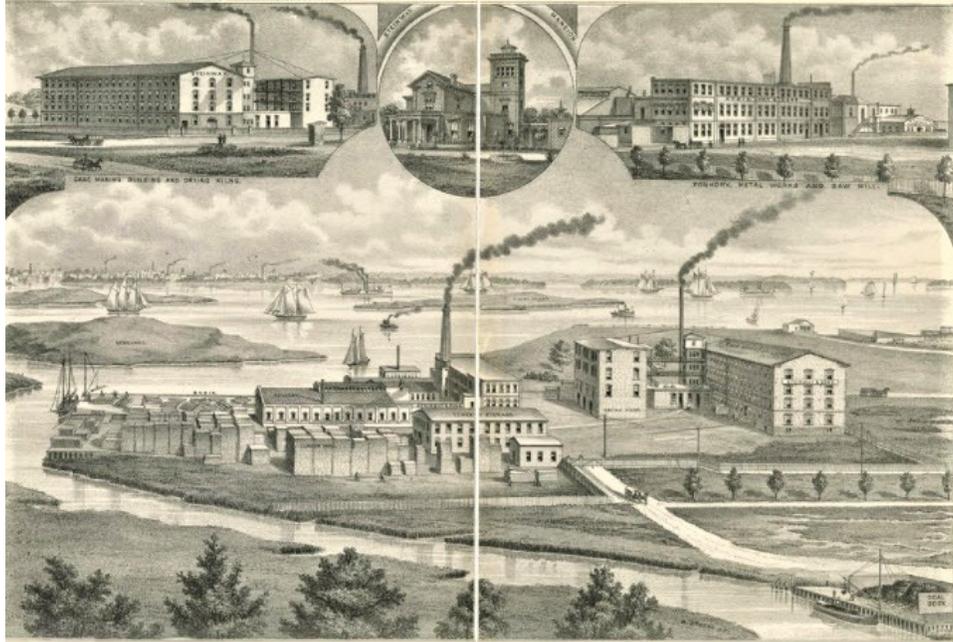


Figure 4: The Steinway factory on Long Island circa 1900

North Beach. Rae kept MARVEL there in a boating complex contingent to the North Beach Amusement Park, considered the Coney Island of Queens. (**Figure 5**)



Figure 5: MARVEL's new North Beach berth was the "Coney Island of Queens"

This was an incredibly popular resort from the 1880's through the 1915's until unchecked pollution ruined it all. The amusement park and the land it occupied was ultimately sold to developers in 1929 who converted it first to the Glenn Curtiss Airport, (**Figure 6**) then to the North Beach Airport and ultimately, on December 2nd, 1939, to LaGuardia Airport. (!)



Figure 6: MARVEL’s North Beach home became the Glen Curtis, now LaGuardia, Airport

Thus, MARVEL’s storied past includes a berth located next to flying boats. (!) The entire marina complex is now buried under the runways in one of the world’s busiest airports.

You just can’t make this stuff up.

To date we have been unable to find out how Rae used the boat and how long he owned it. However, as we write this, and as previously mentioned, records supplied by the marine division of the Connecticut DMV show a sailboat named MARVEL registered in 1919 to a G. Chard of Norwalk, CT (a boatbuilder!) and again in 1921 to a C. Tyson of Cos Cob, CT. Is this MARVEL the one and the same MARVEL? It certainly would explain how she would ultimately be discovered in 1962 by Walter Krasniewiez in nearby Stamford, CT. Her 1921 papers may also explain why we discovered a 1921 silver dollar within her mast step. Hopefully further research will reveal if this is so and how she made the journey from Long Island, NY to Connecticut.

One tantalizing fact is that the Riverside Yacht Club (RYC) , of Cos Cob, CT, played host to matches between a number of racing catboats including ALMIRA on August 5th 1893. Catboat races in the late 1800’s, in what Stan Grayson calls “The Golden Years” of these boats, was the purview of exceptionally wealthy individuals. Wilmer Hanan owned ALMIRA at that time. He was the wealthy heir to a New York-based manufacturing enterprise, The Hanon Shoe Company: <https://forgotten-ny.com/2015/03/hanan-shoe-factory-dumbo/>

D-Class boats were not one-designs, i.e. they were not identical as far as hull shape, specs and rig. To qualify as a D-Class boat, the vessel had to be a catboat of between 22 and 27 feet in length with her mast as far forward in the bow as possible (The bow's eyes). Overhang had to be less than 20% of the waterline, the hull could have no reverse curves, her cabin had to stand greater than 2.5 inches high for each foot of waterline and she had to carry cruising gear. Thus, these boats were very classic, full belly catboats not unlike the thousands of similar boats built as fishing boats for "a man and a boy."

Our catboat under restoration clearly meets these specifications.

The "used boat" discovery in Stan's research got us to thinking. "Was MARVEL a used boat when Ira Whittemore purchased her?" From her papers and verbal history we believed she was purpose-built by HFC in 1904 for Whittemore. Had we been misled?

To assist in research that would now take us backwards on the "Bottoms-Up" timeline we enlisted the services of Joe Chatwynd. Joe had access to the historical records of the Thomas Crane Library in Quincy, MA. By some miracle he discovered that the library held decades worth of QYC Annuals, i.e. yearbooks of the QYC yacht club. We had been told that these had been lost in a hurricane that destroyed the clubhouse in the 1950's. Not so!

With these documents and with additional Grayson research we discovered that MARVEL was probably built prior to 1900 (!!!) not in 1904. More surprising Herbert Crosby may not have built her but rather his relatives Daniel and Charles Crosby. Joe's research discovered at least two owners prior to Whittemore. They included a Mr. Reed (1900) and a Mr. A.A. Lincoln (1902-1903). Who knew? We've been able to track down the surviving namesake of Mr Lincoln. He is AA Lincoln, Jr, the grandson of AA, Sr. and owner of AA Lincoln Enterprises, a used car dealership in Brockton, MA. Over the coming weeks we hope to learn more about the senior AA and MARVEL from discussions with "Jr."

Once again the marvelous mystery database continues to geometrically expand.

Is the boat under our restoration the MARVEL? Her legal paperwork signed by Whittemore and her HFC builders plate tied to her paperwork say she is. Frustratingly, Whittemore's FOR SALE ad in The Rudder lists her only as a "Champion Crosby" boat. No mention of Herbert, Daniel or Charles. Her journey from Boston to New York then possibly to Connecticut support the theory that MARVEL is the boat purchased in Stamford CT and restored by Walter Krasniewiez in 1962.

Going forward, Bottoms-Up research will focus on what records we can access once the pandemic passes. This should allow research at the Osterville Historical Museum, home of many of the Crosby records. In addition, in a remarkable break for our project, Andy Crosby, great grandson of HFC has joined our restoration effort. (**Figure 8**)



Figure 8: Andy Crosby, great, great grandson of H. F. Crosby has joined the MARVEL team

We've asked Andy to work with his sister, Carol, to see if they can uncover anything that might support our research.

Some have suggested that a detailed comparison of the boat's measurement specifications, as documented in the QYC Annuals and in Whittemore's FOR SALE advertisement in The Rudder, would "clinch the deal." Unfortunately these sources contain three different sets of specs. (The specs in the 1902 QYC Annual are dead-on to the boat under restoration) Others have suggested that we compare sheer lines to validate provenance. However, this is difficult to do from the angles with which the existing photographs were taken. Some have suggested that we compare 1904 photos of the placement of her portholes against what exists today. Unfortunately, we know of as many as two complete reconstructions of her cabin both of which resulted in different porthole placements. **Figure 9** depicts the situation.



Figure 9: Comparisons of cabin and porthole modifications

The shot of MARVEL in the lower portion of the photo shows the boat as she looked when Walter Krasniewiez purchased her. Her cabin contains a mix of portholes none of which we believe were original to the boat (for example, Stan Grayson explains that the “cat-eye” lights of early catboats did not have “surrounds” as appear on these). This suggests an earlier replacement of the boat’s cabin. Possibly in 1921. The upper section of the photo shows the 1962 replacement cabin with a completely different set of portlights. (More on these further on). Stan says that many owners of these boats understandably adapted their cabins and layouts to meet the needs of the time.

What to do?

As a next step, we have once again “volunteered” Joe Chatwynd to research the names and builders listed in the QYC Annuals for each of what would become D-Class boats owned and operated by members of the QYC from 1895 through 1915. If our restoration boat is not MARVEL, perhaps she is an HFC, D-Class boat flying under another name? Perhaps she is one of the many D-Class boats as seen on the opening page of the Grayson WB article? Perhaps she is, indeed, the MARVEL. Stay tuned.

Track 3 Update: Winter Work

Our boat restoration team's efforts over the winter months were no less ambitious than those conducted by our historical researchers. Work included centerboard design and fabrication, replacement of rotted deck sections, removal and restoration of the boat's portholes, rewiring of her engine's electrical systems, and refinishing of the brightwork of her gaff spar, dog house roof, engine cover, helm seat and cabin doors.

Centerboard: Thanks to the generosity of Silent Maid funding, we engaged the services of boatwright and centerboard expert George Schuld of DeRouville's Boat Shop in Bayville, NJ to design and fabricate the boat's new centerboard.

With temperatures well below zero and with gale-force winds driving windchills even lower, George made the trek from New Jersey to spend the better part of a day taking final measurements of the centerboard trunk in order to finalize the design of the new board. . (Recall that we had to remove the boat's damaged steel centerboard before taking delivery). George also convinced us that the only centerboard winch worthy for a boat as historic as ours was an antique version that would allow adjustment of the board's attack angle from the helm. **(Figure 10)**



Figure 10: Racing style, antique centerboard winch aboard the catboat FAIRWEATHER

He had located one of these rare birds in a marine antique shop in the UK. Unbelievably, as shown in **Figure 11**, before purchasing the antique, George decided to fabricate a working model of the winch from wood. He brought it with him that frigid winter day to see if it would function as he had planned. (It did!).



Figure 11: Master boatwright George Schuld fitting his wooden winch prototype undercover

Measurements in hand, George headed back to NJ, ordered the antique winch and proceeded to have the centerboard fabricated.

As mentioned in **Part 6**, Schuld chose G10, a super-reinforced fiberglass, as the appropriate material to fabricate the new board. He enlisted the services of Bayville, NJ's Atlantic Coastal Welding Company, a space-age machine shop, ACW used a computer numerical control (CNC) system to design and build the new board. (**Figure 12**)



Figure 12: ACW engineers utilized 21st century tech to design and fabricate the centerboard

ACW engineers cut the G10 utilizing a CNC water-jet cutter. George created a video of this process in action and it can be viewed on YouTube at:

<https://youtu.be/Y7uL2A1e-5Y>

Figure 13, displays the finished product: Once installed, our 19th century catboat will enjoy the fruits of the 21st.



Figure 13: The finished centerboard... a technological work of art.

Deck Fix:

As noted in previous installments, sections of the boat's cockpit sole were rotted out and in need of repair. Some sections merely required a refastening. However, one area in particular, adjacent to the forward, port scupper, needed a complete redo. As some point while the boat was in storage, the scupper had become blocked. This caused fresh water to pool and the rot set in. This section lay atop the boat's stainless fuel tank. This led us to consider replacement not with fixed-in-place teak decking but rather with a removable hatch. This would allow access to the tank and its ventilation and fuel hoses... a desirable maintenance and safety feature.

Figure 14 displays the results of our efforts.

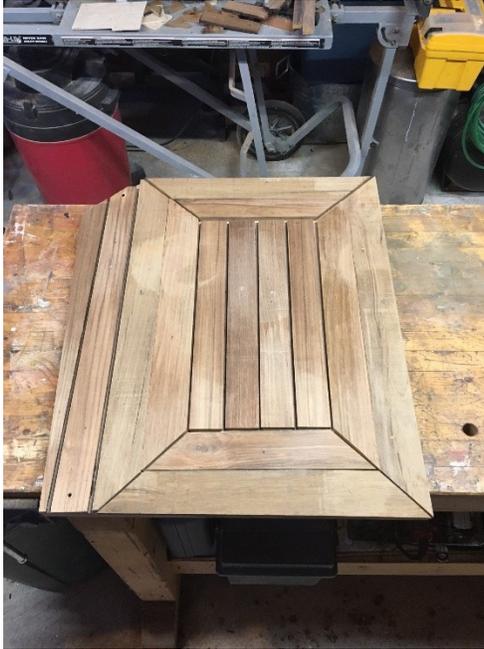


Figure 14: A newly created port-side hatch would replace and repair a rotted deck section

To keep costs under control (have you priced teak lately?) we “thieved” a teak board from a little-seen section of the interior cabin sole and used this in conjunction with a number of deck boards salvaged when we exposed the rotten substrate. **(Figure 15)**



Figure 15: Teak salvaged from the rotted deck section and elsewhere was recycled for the hatch

We epoxied and screwed the teak components onto a piece of ¾ inch marine grade plywood purchased from our favorite supplier, Boulter's Plywood of Malden, MA. (**Figure 16**).



Figure 16: Malden, MA-based Boulter Plywood specializes in marine-grade sheet-goods.

The final teak/plywood hatch will be secured in place once the winter cover is removed.

Portholes:

As mentioned earlier, the boat's cabin had been replaced at least twice and probably more times than that in her lifetime. The portlights in her current cabin walls did not match any of those shown in any earlier photographs and were almost certainly installed during the boat's 1962 "resurrection."

During the 10 years the boat sat on the hard on Cape Cod, the elements had worked their nasty best to make them totally non-functional. We originally thought that we could repair these in place but this proved impractical. So one by one we removed all eight "lights" (six large, oval units and two, small circular units) and brought them into the shop for servicing.

Upon removal we made several discoveries.

The first of these was that we noticed that the boat's cabin walls were fabricated using a unique cabin construction feature we had never seen before; i.e. the walls were comprised of a five-

layer lamination of what appeared to be a Masonite/resorcinol glue sandwich. The flexibility of the Masonite-like material certainly made it easy for the boat builders to bend and shape the cabin's curves. However, Masonite is not known for its weather-keeping properties... Once wet, the stuff usually quickly decomposes. Members of our restoration team speculate that this material may have been a special MIL-Spec Masonite with the build approach a technique used by the Luder's folks in building the NAVY minesweepers simultaneously under construction during MARVEL's restoration. Are any readers familiar with this technique? Please let us know.

The second discovery involved the large portholes themselves. While they all looked similar in construction it turns out they represented four different design versions among the six. As shown in **Figure 17**, the lights differed in height, mechanicals, and size.



Figure 17: Though similar-looking from afar, the large portholes differed in design

We speculate that Walter Krasniewiez , MARVEL's owner when the new cabin was built, possibly accumulated a number of these from different sources connected with his metal salvage business. Perhaps they were the inspiration for acquiring MARVEL in the first place.

After a few week of cleaning, lubricating, repairing, polishing, and re-gasketing. (**Figure 18**) the portholes will be ready to rejoin their place in the MARVEL's cabin walls late spring. (**Figure 19**).



Figure 18: Lots of wire brushed elbow grease began the process of porthole restoration



Figure 19: The refurbished and restored large portholes are ready to return to service.

Electrics:

Major rewiring of the entire boat would wait until spring. However, we were able to repair and rewire the instrument panel located in the engine cover. (**Figure 20**) Come summer, the boat will sport a new set of engine gauges, senders, transducers and along with their associated wiring harnesses.



Figure 20: With new gauges installed, the restored engine cover is ready for reinstallation

Brightwork: Prior to covering the old girl for the winter we carefully removed all loose woodwork/brightwork. This included her panel doors, doghouse roof, cockpit bench seats, engine cover and helm seat. In the warmth of our various team-member's winter workshops, all were lovingly refinished with eight coats of spar varnish. All now await reinstallation.

Can summer really be that close?

As you read this we hope that the long awaited relaunch of MARVEL/SUNNYSIDE/SUSAN is just a few weeks away in July. But it now being April, lots of elbow-grease and research work remain. Stay tuned.

(To be continued)

The author would greatly appreciate donations as small as \$1.00 to support the grassroots project restoring this historic catboat. These can be directly made to:
<https://gogetfunding.com/marvel-an-historic-boat-restoration-project/>