

GIG HARBOR IN FOCUS

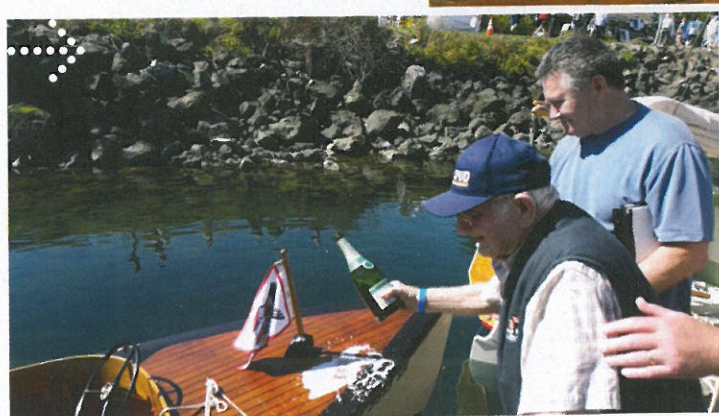
ONE BOAT AT A TIME

Keeping Gig Harbor's Nautical History Alive

By Sarah Polyakov

Photos courtesy of the Gig Harbor BoatShop

Little did Captain Charles Wilkes know that on a stormy day in 1841, history would be made. In 1841, traveling only in a small captain's gig and attempting to find respite from the storm, the captain could not have imagined that this serendipitous moment would be the beginning of something much bigger. So it was and continues to be that Gig Harbor and its nautical history are undeniably tied together to this very day.



Reminders of our nautical history and those who selflessly built our community are everywhere. Fortunately, community members are equally aware that our nautical history is priceless and well worth being maintained. The Gig Harbor BoatShop, which is a nonprofit and located at the historic Eddon Boatyard, plays a large role in preserving our history through on-site education and a multitude of hands-on programs.

John Humphrey, the community development director at the BoatShop, notes that its mission is to "preserve the historic Eddon Boatyard and its traditional uses to perpetuate and build awareness of the cultural livelihoods on Gig Harbor's working waterfront and to serve as a model for other communities and organizations that wish to preserve the cultural heritage sites on which they depend."

Preservation of vessels is done in a multitude of ways. The Gig Harbor BoatShop engages in all of the essential activities of a traditional boatyard. These activities include boatbuilding, boat repair, vessel restoration, boat use, community launching events, and the documentation and preservation of historically significant boats. They also sponsor programs that enable community members to learn how to sail.

While the Gig Harbor BoatShop Family Boat Building Program is one of the most popular, there is so much more going on there. Nowhere else in Gig Harbor can historical boat building techniques be passed along to the next generation. The Gig Harbor BoatShop even has an internship for college students where they can work on a project with a master boat builder using centuries-old techniques. A group of passionate volunteers along with a couple of interns keep these remarkable projects humming along.

But all of this knowledge was almost lost to the Harbor since the historic Eddon Boatyard almost met its demise at the hands of commercial development. Fortunately, Eddon Boatyard was saved by members of the community who believe in historical preservation. After the Eddon Boatyard was saved, community members went a step further.

Humphrey notes, "after this occurred, the nonprofit Gig Harbor BoatShop was formed to introduce this important structure to the community. The leadership felt an urgency to get back to the core of what a boat shop does, and they decided to start a restoration program and have it open to all members of our community. This allows community members to see and experience a piece of Gig Harbor's working-



ABOVE
93-year-old Lee Caldwell christens the newly restored boat, which he built over 75 years ago.

TOP RIGHT
The restoration of boats by Gig Harbor BoatShop and others helps to keep the nautical history of our community alive.

BOTTOM
Many gathered in September to celebrate the completion of the boat, Gaylann, sharing the history of the boat and other vessels of the region.



Gig Harbor by the Numbers

1888
The year that Gig Harbor was platted.

1946
The year that Gig Harbor was incorporated.

2012
The year that Gig Harbor was named one of the 20 best towns in America by the Smithsonian.

Each vessel has a compelling story that is echoed through wind-battered boards that make up the historic hulls.

▶▶ waterfront heritage — that of restoring historically significant boats in the historic Eddon Boatyard.”

The Old Man and the Sea

When a historic boat is brought to the Gig Harbor BoatShop restoration, sometimes it is difficult to envision what the vessel looked like during its glory days. Nonetheless, each vessel has a compelling story that is echoed through wind-battered boards that make up the historic hulls. Sometimes, a very rare story emerges where the past and the present collide. Such is the case with the historic vessel, Gaylynn.

Back in 1940, the vessel Gaylynn was no more than yet-to-be-named dream. A South Kitsap High senior, Lee Caldwell, had a dream to build a boat as a senior project. With a custom set of plans in hand and a resolute mind, he started the construction of the boat that would eventually be named Gaylynn, after his first daughter. After he graduated in 1941, he continued working on the boat when he had spare moments. A Navy boatwright named Tom Tomlinson agreed to let Lee work on his boat in his shop. He often worked on the boat with Tom each night until 10pm, and then after getting off work, do it again all over the next day.

Lee married his sweetheart in 1943, and soon after the happy couple welcomed their daughter Gaylynn to the world. Lee’s boat finally had a name — Gaylynn. But the next few years the happy couple welcomed more children and life

got busy. In 1949 and with a family and a busy career, Lee stored Gaylynn away in an open-air shed where it remained out of the water for over 65 years.

In 1989, Lee’s good friend Allan Kane, pressed Lee to sell it so that Gaylynn could be restored. He convinced Lee to sell him Gaylynn, and he transferred Gaylynn into a shop on his own property. Of course, even life can get in the way of the best laid plans, and so Gaylynn sat out of the water for many more years. In 2013, Allan Kane had started volunteering for the Community Boat Restoration Program at the BoatShop where he helped restore a 1927 custom motor launch. As the project was reaching its end, Allan was struck with an interesting idea.

Full Circle

Allan generously donated Gaylynn to the BoatShop in early 2014 so that a crew of volunteers could restore her to her former glory. In September of 2015, the volunteers at the BoatShop brought Gaylynn up to the Port Townsend Wooden Boat Festival and shared her story and other stories from the BoatShop with more than 600 people. But presenting a restored Gaylynn to others would not be complete unless Lee Caldwell attended.

Allan Kane brought the now 93-year-old Lee Caldwell up to the show for a small ceremony to honor the Gaylynn, Mr. Caldwell, Mr. Kane, and those who put their hearts and souls into restoring the vessel. The 93-year-old Caldwell,

with one hand shaky holding his walker and the other shaky hand holding a bottle of champagne, blessed Gaylynn by pouring the champagne onto her bow. The very boat that he built over over 75 years ago would now be given a second life.

Just about every vessel found at the Gig Harbor BoatShop has an interesting story or historical significance. But the best part is that community members can rent or tour in many of these vessels during the summer. For example, there is a historic Thunderbird #2 sailboat that has been restored, and the shop conducts seasonal tours in it around the harbor. The thunderbird is a must-see for sailboat enthusiasts. Next summer, Gaylynn will also be available as a day-rental that can be used within the harbor.

The Gig Harbor BoatShop has a lot more to it than meets the eye. They welcome community members to shop by to learn about all that they do. If you would like to learn more about all of their activity offerings or if you would like to become a volunteer, please visit their website at: www.gigharborboatshop.org.



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