

The Buzzards Bay 30s

by Arliss Ryan and Eric Sponberg

The building of the one-design class of Buzzards Bay 30s in 1902 probably fell into the category of solid, routine work at the bustling Herreshoff Manufacturing Company. Eighty years later, the glory yachts are gone, but at least six of the Buzzards Bay 30s have survived.

Fourteen Buzzards Bay 30s were built. They were commissioned by a group of Eastern yachtsmen and the Beverly Yacht Club of Marion, Mass., and were center-boarders for the shallow waters of Buzzards Bay. The rating rule to which they were built was the Seawanhaka Rule, established in 1883 by the Seawanhaka Corinthian Yacht Club, and also known as the waterline and sail area rule in which the rating is equal to one half the sum of the hull length and the square root of sail area. To obtain a low rating, the waterline length was kept as short as possible while the overall length of the hull was extended to support the large gaff-rigged sail plans and to give more boat length for speed when heeled. The Buzzards Bay 30s, with their long overhangs, are typical of boats built to the Seawanhaka Rule.

But in February 1902, even as the Buzzards Bay 30s were being built, the New York Yacht Club called for a new rating rule. Boats built under the Seawanhaka Rule had become large and ungainly with little use beyond racing. The Universal Rule, adopted by 1904 and designed to produce more manageable boats, spelled a short racing career for the Buzzards Bay 30s. By 1906 the class disbanded, and the boats went their separate ways. Happily, the Buzzards Bay 30s were already more generously appointed than was usual for a Seawanhaka Rule boat, and they adapted easily to new roles as family cruisers.

The 1983 roll call of the Buzzards Bay 30s reveals six survivors: BARBION (originally YOUNG MISS), LARIKIN, MASHNEE, CATSPAW (originally QUAKERESS II), ARRIA, and ANITA. The first four are afloat and in fine shape. ARRIA is undergoing restoration, ANITA remodeling. It is an encouraging picture; these boats should be sailing for many years to come.

To be continued Fall 1983

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continued from spring 1983

BARBION, the first of the class is owned by Edward J. Madden in Eau Gallie, Florida. LARIKIN is in the Chesapeake where she cruises with owners Jim and Susie Earnhardt, their family and friends. ANITA's remodeling progresses at a yard on Long Island while across the Sound, in Norwalk, Conn., CATSPAW often sets out for a single-handed sail with her owner, John Woade.

MASHNEE and ARRIA have found particularly fitting homes. MASHNEE is moored at Mystic Seaport where, with cabin heater and utility hook-ups, she is a year-round live-aboard for Ken Mahler, Mystic's audio-visual supervisor. ARRIA was recently donated to Full Sea Inc., a non-profit marine historical and educational organization in Sea Cliff, New York. She is in good company; Full Sea is also restoring two other Herreshoff boats, a Bar Harbor 30 and a New York Yacht Club 30, among others.

There are a lot of reasons why a particular boat survives. Herreshoff boats are, of course, renowned for their strong design and quality workmanship. A special feature of the Buzzards Bay 30s (and other Herreshoff boats of the period) is diagonal metal strapping. Six heavy bronze straps crisscross the hull and deck on the inside of the planking, running from deck edge to keel on each side of the hull and across the deck in way of the mast. These bands overcome the tendency of a wooden boat with long overhangs to rack out of shape.

No doubt, a well-built, good-looking boat attracts appreciative owners. Moreover, a check of the ownership lists of the Buzzards Bay 30s reveals several instances of very long-term ownership. MASHNEE had just one owner from 1921 to 1953. Edward Madden has owned BARBION since 1947, almost half her life. CATSPAW had a twenty year period of single ownership between 1948 and 1968. These long periods of stable care probably contributed a good deal to the boats' longevity.

At one point, however, a too-devoted owner nearly cost CATSPAW all of her nine lives. While trying to sell the boat in 1968, Perry Smith became discouraged about CATPAW's future. No one, he thought, could keep up CATSPAW the way he had, the way she deserved to be maintained. He went so far as to obtain permission from the U.S. Coast Guard to scuttle CATSPAW to spare her a graceless demise. Fortunately, a buyer who met Mr. Smith's tough qualifications turned up in the nick of time, and CATSPAW was saved.

It would be unreasonable to expect any of the boats to have survived unchanged and, in

fact, their adaptability is another factor in their longevity. The most uniform modification is the rig. Five have been converted from gaff rig to marconi rig; four are yawls. Easier handling motivated the change. MASHNEE'S conversion from gaff rig to marconi sloop in 1944 has an extra point of interest. Her new solid mast came from an Oregon fir tree set roots up and turned down to a 61' spar. This was one of the first upside down masts built in the United States. The purpose was to put the oldest, densest, knot-free heartwood at the top of the mast where strength and stiffness are most essential. Unfortunately, this special mast was lost in 1956 when the boom broke a running backstay during a jibe. It was replaced with a glued box-section mast.

The rig modification aside, honors for the most original Buzzards Bay 30 would probably go to CATSPAW. She has practically all her original equipment and woodwork, an amazing state of affairs considering the accidents and wear that can befall a boat in just one season, let alone eighty. The only structural change to CATSPAW has been to fit her with a new coachroof. She has her original cabinhouse sides with the "trolley car" windows and her original winches and self-tending winch handles. John Woade can't help but be pleased with the "feeling" CATSPAW evokes.

If the other boats are less original, there are never-the-less many instances of faithful reconstruction. Naturally, in the course of eight decades, many repairs and replacements have been required. New decks, frames, hatches, a few new planks — where the old wood deteriorated, new wood was installed. A few pieces of original Herreshoff hardware remain; in other cases, owners have been able to obtain period pieces. A past owner of MASHNEE was particularly ingenious. While refastening the boat he decided to add lifelines. The tops and bases of the lifeline stanchions were formed by melting down and recasting the hundreds and hundreds of bronze screws he removed from the planks.

Modern materials and equipment have also found their way onto the boats. ARRIA, LARIKIN and BARBION have all made use of fiberglass. ARRIA and LARIKIN have new decks and coachroofs built with a fiberglass overlay while BARBION'S entire hull is sheathed with fiberglass. The purpose of fiberglassing BARBION was to protect the hull from teredos and to stabilize the planking against weather and sun. The project was carefully planned and executed. A sample strip below the waterline was tested for adhesion for a year. Then, after assuring its soundness, the hull was dried, refastened and all the floors were replaced before the epoxy resin and glass were applied. More than a dozen years later, the sheathing is still intact.

Other non-original features on the Buzzards Bay 30s are engines, stainless steel rigging, Dacron sails, plexiglass windows, nylon anchor rode, and electronic depth sounders and radios. It is important to remember that these modern additions were introduced gradually; as repairs and replacements were called for, the owners chose from the materials of the day.

Of the existing boats, CATSPAW, ARRIA and LARIKIN have the most original interior. As designed by Nat Herreshoff, the layout consisted of two quarter berths, two settees with outboard pilot berths and a drop-leaf table, then through the main bulkhead to the galley on the starboard side and an enclosed head to port. In the forepeak were two pipe berths for extra crew.

CATSPAW and ARRIA have maintained the Herreshoff layout, and LARIKIN'S only change is a small sink console on the centerline in the galley and a single berth opposite. The original interior woodwork is butternut walnut. Mr. Woade discovered the walnut on CATSPAW just a few years ago because butternut walnut being a very dark wood, it had been painted over to brighten the interior. After due deliberation, Mr. Woade elected to stay with the paint. LARIKIN has gone for gleaming Honduras mahogany in her interior. With little imagination and the layout in mind, one can picture the Buzzards Bay 30s then and now.

While two of the Buzzards Bay 30s, CATSPAW and LARIKIN, seem to have enjoyed consistently good care throughout their careers, for others the eighty years have had both ups and downs. Consider the work done on ARRIA by a previous owner, William Ettich, in the 1960s: sister frames added, planks refastened, floor timbers doubled amidships, new lag screws fastened into the ballast, a new plywood deck covered with fiberglass, the house replaced with a solid mahogany replica, coachroof rebuilt with fiberglass covered plywood, carlins added with vertical reinforcing supports, and a 14-foot section of the keel plate replaced. At the time Mr. Ettich sold her in the 1970s, ARRIA must have been looking very nice indeed.

But just two years later ARRIA sank at the dock in a Port Washington marina. Ice displacement of the propeller shaft fittings was the suspected cause. She was raised, breaking the rudder, one gudgeon, and both pintles in the process, and towed to the nearby yard where she sat for almost four years. The cockpit well rotted out, as did the bulwark. An admirer took one of the broadstrake splines as a souvenir. The bungs fell out. The sun, rain, snow and ice worked on her through the seasons.

To be continued Spring 1984

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continued from fall 1983

Two of the Buzzards Bay 30s have had close calls with hurricanes, and they might not be with us today if not for watchful eyes and an unusual amount of luck. In the early fifties near Mt. Vernon, Virginia, BARBION'S chain fouled on a stray mooring during hurricane Dora. As the water rose to seven feet above high tide, succeeding waves carried the boat and both her fouled anchors back into the woods. During the eye, Mr. Madden managed to board BARBION, raise sail and slip the chain. When the wind returned, he sailed back out into the Potomac River, treetops passing the rail either side. Mr. Madden spent the entire night sailing up and down the river waiting for the wind to die.

In the second case, MASHNEE was on her own for forty hours during a hurricane in Long Island Sound in 1944. She was moored to a 400 lb. mushroom anchor with 68' of heavy chain and 26' of 3" hawser attached to a steel wire pennant. The 90+ mph winds carried boat and complete mooring four miles down the Sound, miraculously avoiding rocks, reefs, buoys and other boats along the way. The storm claimed a number of other yachts in the area, but MASHNEE was found 200 yards offshore, a little worse for wear, but intact and afloat.

MASHNEE may also claim a place in the record books. Until the Buzzards Bay 30s, genoa jibs (at that time called lapping jibs) had been used only for reaching and running. But the year MASHNEE was built, R.W. Emmons, her owner, experimented with carrying her genoa jib close hauled; L. Francis Herreshoff cites this as the first instance in American yachting.

These days, as more people become aware of and appreciate the craftsmanship and beauty of historical yachts, more boats are likely to endure. Owners are finding themselves the center of attention. Photographs of Edward Madden's BARBION have appeared in Florida publications and her portrait graces several public places. Jim Earnhardt was promoted to design a brochure on LARIKIN which he passes out

to interested parties. Now the Baskin Robbins Ice Cream Company has arranged to use LARIKIN as a public relations vehicle for specific events on the Chesapeake Bay. LARIKIN will fly a new set of sails with the Baskins Robbins logo and colors on these occasions.

Is the Buzzards Bay 30 an ordinary boat that has become remarkable for surviving so long? To an extent, yes. Although the present owners agree that the Buzzards Bay 30 is a fast sailer, still competitive in informal racing, none of the boats has an illustrious race record. They have not undertaken any lengthy or unusual cruises, nor is there any unique or revolutionary feature of the design. As examples of workmanship they are as good as any Herreshoff boat (and that is saying a lot), but may not have inspired the extra loving touches that went into a GLORIANA or VIGILANT.

The present group of owners are of the devoted breed. How many owners would, like Ken Mahler of MASHNEE spend an hour every morning polishing the brass? For John Woade, owning CATSPAW has been a learning experience. Initially unfamiliar with maintaining a wood boat, he has acquired both the practical know-how and a sense of historical perspective through his involvement with CATSPAW. Of BARBION, Edward Madden says, "It is and has been one of my life's most cherished and satisfying possessions."

Jim Earnhardt of LARIKIN summed it up. "I know of nothing in life that is of value that doesn't take and deserve lots of attention. LARIKIN is no exception and a fine example of the workmanship and design capabilities of our forefathers. I'm proud to own her and help preserve some of maritime history."

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