

Basket Case; Restoring a Watch Hill 15 at D.N. Hylan's

February 22, 2015



[Maynard Bray](#)

This boat arrived at D.N. Hylan & Associates in December, 2011, as GERALDINE, and was completely worn out. No wonder; she was almost ninety years old! She came out of the Herreshoff shops of Bristol, Rhode Island, in 1923 named TOBASCO, and was one of eleven identical sloops known as Watch Hill 15s because of their waterline length. She's 24'6" overall, with a 6'9" beam and 2'3" draft with her centerboard raised.

Six months later she left the Hylan shop as KRISTIN, and after sailing trials in Brooklin, arrived back in her Noank, Connecticut, home waters in time to be sailed upriver to the 2012 WoodenBoat Show at Mystic Seaport.

As I hope you'll discover in the photos that follow, the same procedure (outside molds attached to a stiff platform that creates a "basket") that was used in this extensive restoration could be adapted to other types of boats. With KRISTIN, by using her designer's measurements (known in the trade as offsets), precise molds were made that brought the weak old hull back to its original shape.

You'll also note that some strength-enhancing alterations were made—like edge-gluing the three top strakes of planking, using plywood decking, and adding tie-rods to reduce the stress from the shrouds.

With good care, KRISTIN should be good to go for at least another century.



KRISTIN arrived as GERALDINE, looking poorly.



Into a basket she went, the shapes of the molds derived from the original table of offsets.



The loosened-up hull was forced out against the molds and screwed there.



A new keel timber of iroko, built to the pattern lying next to it, is about to be steam-bent into place under the hull.



Floor timbers, with shapes taken from the original offsets, go in next—on top of the new keel and temporarily attached to the hull planking.



Only the bare minimum number of original frames remain in the boat at this stage.



A new transom comes next, after all the floor timbers and new frames have been installed.



Bedlogs and end posts for the centerboard trunk.



Here is the stem whose shape came directly from the designer's dimensions.



And now, with the original sheer clamps back in place for support, it's time for the deck frame and bulkheads.



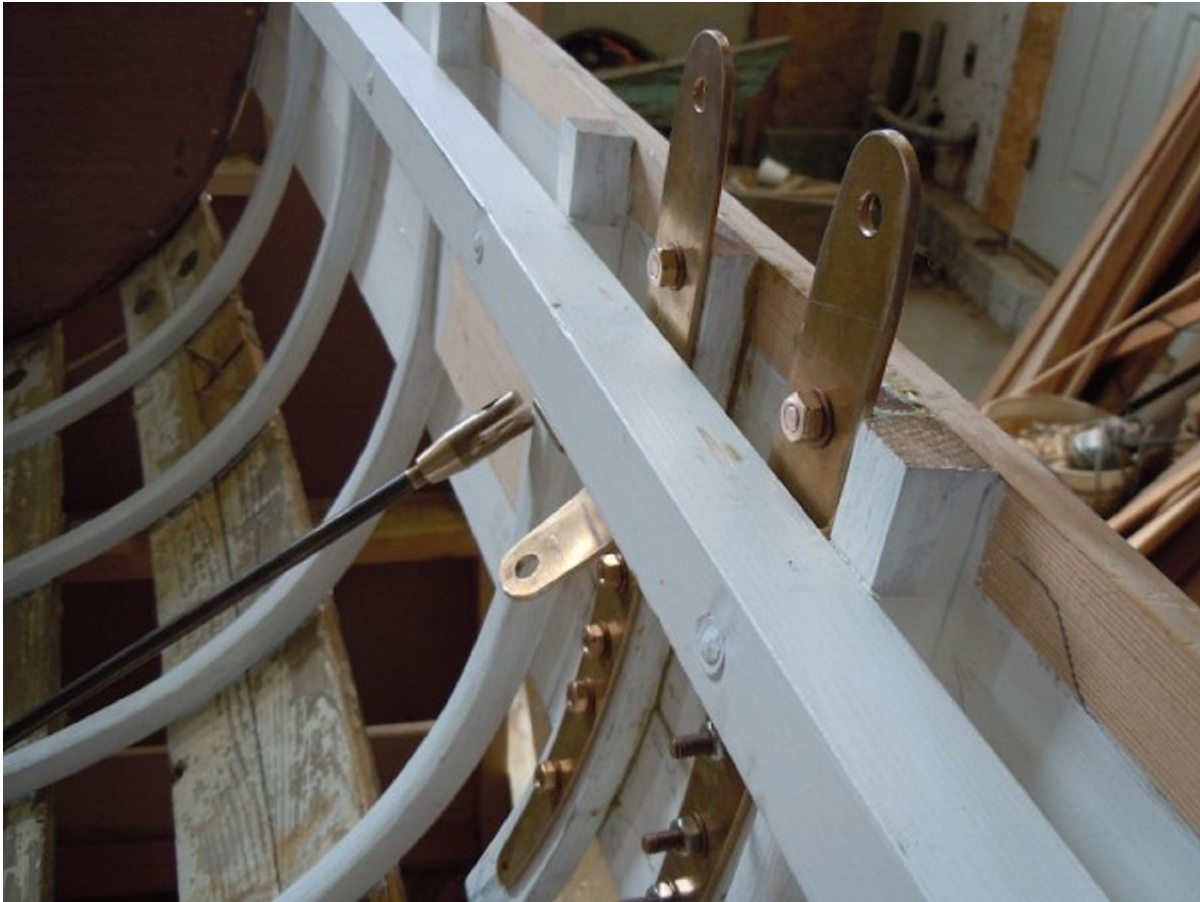
The bow, ready for the remaining deck beams.



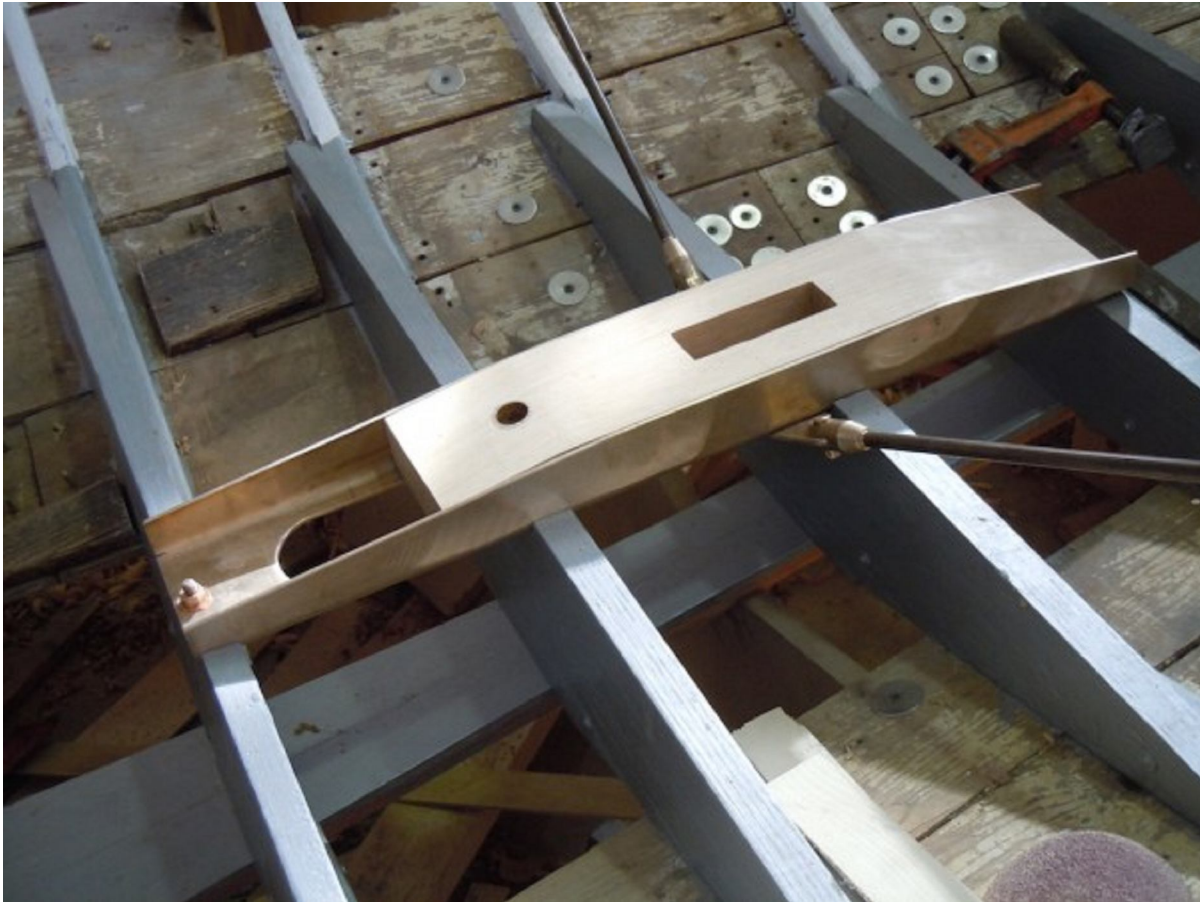
Here is an overview at this stage of the restoration.



For added stiffness, the three top strakes of planking are edge-glued. Ellery Brown fits the third and final piece of this glued band of planking.



New chainplates which will have a tie-rod running down to the mast step.



The new mast step is bronze-reinforced as well as having tie-rods to help support it.



Deck frame is now in, and the deck is about to be laid. Molds were cut down enough to allow hanging the three edge-glued strakes of topside planking.



The old deadwood of yellow pine will be reused, as will the lead ballast keel under it.



Now she's upside down for fitting the deadwood and replanking the rest of the hull.



What few original planks were up to it were reused, but mostly she was re-planked new, using the same species of wood: white cedar. The corners of each new plank have been planed to indicate what the finished thickness is to be.



After planking, fairing, and caulking, KRISTIN is about ready to be turned back rightist-up.



The recycled and worn-away original planks had to be built up to the designed thickness by "mudding" them with WEST epoxy and Microlight.



The new centerboard trunk is now almost complete.



All decked, this time with Dynel-sheathed plywood, she's ready for floorboards and trim,



Ballast keel being jacked into position.



Trim done, now it's varnishing time.



A new hollow mast with spliced rigging, just like when new.



Rigging being checked out before she rolls off for the launching ramp.



Sailing trial by Ellery and Nick.



How fine it feels to bring a deserving old boat back to life!



KRISTIN tied up alongside AIDA at the WoodenBoat Show. Her home port is just downriver from Mystic Seaport, in Noank, Connecticut.

You'll find much more about KRISTIN's restoration [on the D.N. Hylan website.](#)