

NEITH Sails Into Her 10th Decade

By Van Brown - reprinted from the Herreshoff Rendezvous '96 Race Program



Credit: Paul A. Darling

NEITH racing during Herreshoff Rendezvous '87.

NEITH - LOD: 53'0", Beam: 10'6", Draft: 8'0" - Built in 1907 as hull 665, sail number 123, NEITH started life as a gentleman's weekender, intended for Nathanael Herreshoffs personal doctor. Her life has been rich and full. She sailed to Europe in 1919, only to be blown back by storms. Her rig was changed from cutter to yawl and the next year she made it... to much fanfare. She was given a hero's welcome in England, film coverage, and four consecutive articles in *Yachting Magazine*. It was very unusual for a "small boat" to cross the Atlantic in those days.

She led a very colorful life racing and cruising in England and Scotland, but was very slow in all but a gale with her short rig. Charles Nicholson, much to his later annoyance, convinced her owner to try a new rig, just beyond the experimental stages, called a Marconi rig.

It worked, and that same graceful rig with its distinctive Nicholson masthead, supported only by jumper struts, still stands in her. Nicholson told of a race where he outsmarted all other competitors and emerged from a squall ahead of all the fleet except, "for damned NEITH, who was, as always, right there, close behind me."

She has had few owners, all interesting. There are stories about trans- Atlantic races and all-girl cruises to South Africa. Along the way, her bowsprit was bobbed and then removed all together.

She was always quick and always loved, but time took its toll. She was laid up in Scotland to rot, until four American students found her and bought her to cruise around the ports of Europe. Never having sailed, they used the help of a *Sea Scout* manual and a sixteen year old boy to learn to sail this powerful hull.

They did not know about mast wedges and thought the mast had shrunk. They did not understand tides, did not have a light book, and never had a sextant until a freighter captain, who could not live with his conscience otherwise, gave them one to cross the Atlantic.

Saved once, she returned home to the U.S. The boys sailed her to Marblehead, and talked their way into The Castle, the home of Francis Herreshoff, no mean feat in itself. He had watched them enter the harbor and told them that NEITH was the first boat on which his father would let him work.

Times change, and NEITH was becoming a tired boat. She was sold, and through a misunderstanding, left unattended in the Connecticut River. There she sank. NEITH remained a charmed boat. The sadness of her plight caused a group to form the Museum of Yachting, so that this would not happen to other great yachts. It also caused Elizabeth Hersant to take a huge risk on this pitiful hulk and purchase it for restoration.

Elizabeth and Doug Hersant made the great leap of faith to save this beautiful boat. They poured all they had into renewing and restoring her hull, decks, covering boards and king plank. They sailed her, unpowered, for a glorious summer and participated in the Herreshoff Rendezvous of 1981.

But times continue to change, and the Hersants could not go on. NEITH was abandoned again, though not by choice.

Once again, this incredible boat refused to die. Those who loved her kept bringing me to look at this decrepit looking hulk. NEITH was dirty, empty and derelict. I, like most people, lacked the vision to see what she could become. Finally, my father, Jack Brown, decided that we should bring her back, "equal to" when Nathanael Herreshoff sent her down the ways.

NEITH's restoration was never easy or simple, but we had

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the help of the best craftsmen in the world. The men and women who worked on her believed in excellence, personal pride of craftsmanship, efficiency and, above all else, this 1907 Herreshoff cutter, NEITH.

We had the constant help and support of the Herreshoff Marine Museum, Mystic Seaport Museum, the Museum of Yachting and the people who love these classic boats.

In addition to the fine work done by the Hersants, NEITH received a new interior identical to her original furnishings. Hidden beneath the paint, varnish and raised panels are modern plumbing, electrics, engine and electronics. She has all new deck houses and furniture. Her rigging and tackle are new. Barlow, now gone, made special all bronze winches for her. All her blocks are lignum vitae. She has her unusual flat yellow pine bowsprit. It's been shortened -just a little. Life is short enough.

Her hull is fir (exterior) and cypress (interior) above the waterline and yellow pine below. Her ceiling is cypress. Her interior furniture is cypress and varnished Honduran mahogany with a varnished cypress bulkhead. The sole is teak. Her frames and beams are white oak. Her deck beams are original. Her covering boards and king plank are varnished teak. Her deck furniture is varnished Honduran Mahogany. Her spars are spruce.

Recently, NEITH was reframed, refastened, given new tanks and new floor to frame bolts. Her mast step was redone, to spread the load of her powerful rig. NEITH is ready for her continuing life.

She races throughout New England and collects silver, not only against other classics, but modern racing boats as well. She continues to receive awards in recognition of the depth of her restoration and continuing care.

NEITH has been the subject of a televised documentary and in several other documentaries about the Herreshoff Marine Museum, Herreshoff yachts, and classic yachts in general. She was in the movie "Mystic Pizza." She has been the "cover girl and centerfold" in several yachting publications and has appeared in many articles. She has even been reported on and shown in Forbes magazine, a magazine not noted for its yachting coverage. NEITH has been the backdrop for numerous catalogue photo shoots as well as ads in Wooden Boat and the New York Times. We even have had wedding pictures on board. Every year, NEITH is used to support several charities. We try to keep classic yachts in the public eye.

It is one of our goals to prove that a classic can be raced and cruised hard and still look beautiful.

I would like to express my personal gratitude to all of you who have worked on NEITH to give her back her life. I would like to thank the crew who keep her the beauty that she is, and who protect NEITH and my family on the sea. I am grateful to my family who give this yacht the time she deserves.

There is no way that I can ever give enough thanks to Frances and Jack Brown, NEITH's owners, protectors and sponsors, who make this all possible. Without their faith, this boat would not be here.

And finally, I want to thank the spirit and soul of NEITH. The richness of life, experience, and the connection to the time stream of history you give us is beyond price. We love you.