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CHRONICLE

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DILEMMA Returns to Bristol

Now on exhibit in Museum's Hall of Boats

By Carlton J. Pinheiro



Photo by Carlton Pinheiro

DILEMMA arriving at the Herreshoff Marine Museum April, 1999

A RADICAL DEPARTURE from the racing yachts of her lime, DILEMMA, the first successful fin keel yacht built in this country, was placed on exhibition in the Hall of Boats late this spring, on loan from The Mariners' Museum in Newport News, Virginia. DILEMMA is part of the "New for the Nineties" exhibit featuring the Herreshoff Museum's other fin keelers WEE WINN and JILT.

Designed by Nathanael G. Herreshoff for himself, DILEMMA (HMCo. #412) was built and launched in the autumn of 1891. Her designer recollected in 1934, "DILEMMA was about thirty-eight feet overall, twenty-seven feet waterline, and seven feet wide, with a rather large and heavy iron fin keel that had angle irons riveted to [the] upper edge [and] was held by vertical bolts that passed up through [the] floor timbers and sister keelsons. At the lower edge, there was a fish shaped lead of heavy weight cast over it. [The] rig was simple jib and mainsail. She proved very satisfactory and fast except in light airs, when [her] speed was not remarkable. I re-rigged DILEMMA and sold her in the fall [1892] to Gouverneur Kortwright." In 1894, DILEMMA came into the possession of the Fish brothers, Edmund and Latham B., of Greenport, Long Island, and they

successfully raced her for about ten years and always had with them Captain Norman Terry, a noted sailor. Terry always kept the yacht in the best condition for racing. One winter, after DILEMMA had been smashed up in a severe autumn gale, Captain Terry rebuilt her in the Fish boathouse.

About 1927, Miss Julia Fish, a sister of Bert and Eddie Fish, had presented DILEMMA to Mortimer Buckner of Fishers Island. In 1937, Clifford D. Mallory, yachting enthusiast, historian, and preservationist, learned that DILEMMA was on the shore front of Buckner's Fishers Island residence. Mallory informed Buckner that The Mariner's Museum specialized in preserving vessels of importance. Mr. Buckner was agreeable to donating DILEMMA to the Museum providing the idea had Miss Fish's approval. She was contacted and consented to the donation.

In the summer of 1938, Mallory and Captain Roger Williams, vice-president of the Mariners' Museum, inspected DILEMMA at Fishers Island. They discovered that her hull needed paint, but her seams were closed and she appeared to be sound and capable of floating without any repairs. The men accepted Mr. Buckner's offer to present the

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boat to the Museum. Arrangements were made to float her and tow her to the west side of the harbor and from there to New London and New York. DILEMMA was difficult to tow, as the fin keel and rudder had been removed. At New York, the yacht was loaded on a tramp vessel and delivered to The Mariners' Museum at Newport News. All of this was completed before the great hurricane of September 21, 1938. If DILEMMA had not been removed, she probably would have been destroyed by the storm.

When the Museum needed to replace the original keel and rudder. Mrs. Nathanael G. Herreshoff, Capt. Nat's widow, and Sidney Herreshoff, Capt. Nat's son, both became very interested and were able to provide the original drawings. These drawings were used in DILEMMA's restoration. Mr. Buckner was in possession of a short bowsprit, mast boom, and gaff and these went to the Museum with the yacht. DILEMMA was eventually moved to the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company and was reconditioned by apprentices beginning in the fall of 1940 (The restoration is described by Tom Morgan, one of the apprentices, in this issue.) In 1973, a complete restoration of DILEMMA was undertaken at the Mariner's Museum under the direction of the Curator of the Small Craft Collection, C. H. Hancock. This included the removal of a protective fiberglass deck covering, replacement of all defective hull and deck planks, complete caulking of the deck and hull planking, sanding, painting and varnishing. The spars were stripped, sanded and varnished.

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In 1974, the DILEMMA was moved into The Small Craft-Building at The Mariners' Museum. The mast was stepped and the rigging was completed. The loan of DILEMMA was the result of efforts carried out by members of the staff of Mariner's Museum including Maynard Bray, Guest Watercraft Curator, Claudia Pennington, Director of the Museum, Karen Shackelford, Registrar, Chandi Singer, Research Assistance and Small Craft Representative. Halsey Herreshoff, Carlton Pinheiro, and Christopher Trobridge all worked on this loan for the Herreshoff Marine Museum.

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