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# Wooden Boat News

Volume 3, Issue No. 1, 2011

Look Aft and Learn

## Keeping the Craft Alive

**Adam Randell**  
**The Packet**

About 70 people took part in the 4th Annual Wooden Boat conference when it sailed into Trinity on September 23rd, 2011.

People were able to check out the work of local builder Henry Vokey, followed with sessions and discussions around boat building.

Beverley King, project manager for the Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador said it was on all accounts a success - it was biggest attendance to date.

“We are very pleased with how it all worked out. We also had 22 register for the spouses/partner program that was offered.”

The conference travels the province and focuses on known boat building families in that area. It returns to the Winterton museum every third year.

Trinity was chosen this year at the request of the Vokey Family.

“We are very proud of Mr. Vokey’s work and it was a way of us showcasing his abilities.”

People from across the globe - including France, Australia and the United States - were in attendance to see what the conference had to offer.

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Dale Jarvis (Heritage Foundation of NL) (centre) interviews Frank French (left) - Flatrock Boat Building Workshop Participant and Frank Lane (right) - Boat Builder - Tilting, NL - *photo by Howard Cooper*



Kent & Becky Wick – Moscow, Idaho attend conference in Trinity - *photo by Dennis Flynn*



Sharon Vokey, Conference Chair, gives presentation on Vokey Family of Boatbuilders - *photo by Jennifer Gushue*



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**Wooden Boat Museum**  
of Newfoundland and Labrador



Wooden Boat  
Museum  
of Newfoundland  
and Labrador

The Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador archives, conserves, exhibits and transmits our wooden boat history and its contribution to the province's economy and way of life.

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[www.woodenboatnl.com](http://www.woodenboatnl.com)

#### Membership:

Individual membership is \$30 and includes unlimited free admission to the Wooden Boat Museum in Winterton for one year (and 10 per cent discount on guest admissions); 10 per cent discount at the museum store in Winterton; and free subscription to Wooden Boat News.

For information on other membership categories and benefits, contact Beverley King. Phone 709-583-2070 or email [bkingheritage@gmail.com](mailto:bkingheritage@gmail.com).

#### Newsletter:

Wooden Boat News is published four times a year. Members contribute most of the information and photos for this publication.

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## Sail Away

By Dennis Flynn

The late September wind blows barely a ripple across the inner harbour at historic Trinity, Trinity Bay, as we climb to the deck of the unnamed vessel. The fitted spruce under our feet glistens and the oak hatch covers are smooth to the touch. The smell of fresh paint mixes with wood shavings and the tang of seaweed. Signs of careful craftsmanship abound. The blue sky is tinged with undertones of pink as the setting sun begins its descent far to the west beyond the unfinished bowsprit of the vessel. Somewhere outside Fort Point Lighthouse I hear an outboard motor singing the put-put song of people returning home from the recreational fishery.



Henry and Howard - photo by Dennis Flynn

It's a large day.

On the drive over I had glanced past the 102 foot high spire of St. Paul's Anglican Church toward the formidable Skerwink Head which still guards what Sir Richard Whitbourne in 1620 called "...the best and largest Harbour in all the Land"

It has been a long time since that pronouncement about Trinity and I wonder at the incredible amount of vessels of all shapes and sizes that have passed through this place over the centuries. To that number Henry Vokey is determined to add one more.

On September 24, 2011 during a break from the Fourth Annual Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland Labrador Conference I joined Museum Researcher Howard Cooper as we toured Henry Vokey's latest work in progress. By any standard it's no small undertaking.

Situated outside the workshop behind his home Vokey's schooner is nestled high on the hill where she waits to meet the water in the summer of 2012. Even for a layman like me, the boat is a beauty to behold.



Henry - photo by Dennis Flynn

I'd met Mr. Vokey four years earlier and found him a fairly quiet if not somewhat reserved man, but today, here on the deck of his schooner I realize this is truly where Henry is most at home. The talk flows easily from the great day we share, to the amazing views of Trinity, to several funny anecdotes about boat building and finally to the schooner itself. When asked about his age Vokey (clad in an argyle sweater, blue wind breaker, WBMNL ball cap, beige pants, and running shoes) runs a caring hand along a wooden hatch and says with an easy smile, "Old enough to have better sense".

To this he adds, "I'll be 82 in a few weeks time".

Deflecting my questions about the enormity of the project Vokey, his eyes twinkling behind his metal-rimmed glasses, says, "It is only small stuff boys".

Vokey is being characteristically modest.

Howard Cooper adds, “Henry’s no stranger to this work, are you Henry?”

Vokey says, “Well this is only my third schooner, but I’ve built hundreds and hundreds of other types of boats. There’s no telling the number. I lost count, but I built all kinds from long liners and druggers down to row boats and dories. One thing I never built and that’s a canoe.”

Cooper, getting a rise out of Henry, adds, “There is still time for that yet, Henry.”

Vokey just smiles and says, “No sir, I never had any time for a canoe. They were too tippy. I don’t know how to swim so I never liked a canoe.”

I ask the obvious question, “Henry you have built over a thousand boats and you never learnt to swim?”

Vokey says with a grin, “What did I need to swim for? When I builds a boat then I’m planning on staying afloat as long as I’m aboard her.”

Who can argue with that logic?

After the laughter subsides I learn that the current green-hulled wooden schooner is going to be approximately 43 feet long, have a beam of 14 feet, carry two masts, and five sails. Vokey has been working on it part time for over the last two years. He adds with a straight face, “I only work on it in the summer time really. In the winter I models”.

The banter with Cooper continues as he says, “Henry you don’t mean like a clothes model, do you?”

Vokey shakes his head and chuckles saying, “No boys, in the winter I builds model boats”.

Vokey looks forward to the date of launch next year saying, “I’ll work on her for a bit more the fall and continue doing odds and ends inside her for a few more weeks. We’ll have the masts and all on her before she is launched”.

Henry demurs on what will be the final name of the vessel simply saying, “I’ve got two or three names in mind, but one in particular”.

I really like that answer. I reflect that a man who, at this advanced age, envisions and embarks upon the making of a schooner certainly must have something in mind to call it. Like all great craftsmen Vokey will reveal it only when he is ready. I’m content to wait.

Asking Vokey what he thinks of the project I say, “Henry you must you really love at it?”

Vokey brings us to another round of smiles saying, “Oh I do love it. If I didn’t I wouldn’t be at it.”

Cooper says, “Henry there’s a chance you might even do another schooner, isn’t it?”

Vokey gives a wistful look along the deck and smiling, adds with the optimism of those who live to build, “I might. You never can tell.”

With that we leave Henry to his work.

Days later, looking through my photos and wondering at the significance of this vessel I contact Chris Osmond, Vice Chair of the WBMNL, who notes, “With Henry Vokey’s already immense work throughout his many years as a boat builder, his latest schooner construction is a beacon for all the people of our province, who still hold these skills. It has great importance and is valued. It is great work by Henry.”

While finishing this article the CD player in the background churns out a song made famous by “John Prince and a Piece of the Rock”. It is sometimes called “Sail Away” but it is more often, and more aptly, referred to as simply “The Schooner Song”.

They remind me of my visit with Henry Vokey and his newest schooner. Long may they both sail.

## Conference a Big Hit for 11 year old Jonathan Collett

**By: Kim Furlong, St. John’s**

Jonathan and I wanted to send you a very grateful thank-you for the opportunity to attend the wooden boat conference this past weekend in Trinity. Jonathan really enjoyed the talks, meeting fellow boat builders, seeing your display and Mr. Vokey’s schooner. Everyone made him feel very welcome and willingly shared their experiences with him. He came away with quite a few offers for help with his own boat and a beautiful wooden boat model given to him by Charlie Donnelly. The smile on his face said it all. He says he can’t concentrate in school because all he can think about is building boats.

Our family loved Trinity, the Rising Tide Theatre, the Skerwink Trail, the restaurants and the warm reception from the local community. Our stay at Trinity Cottages was also a big highlight. Please feel free to share our comments with your Trinity organizers.



Jonathan proudly displays his model boat he received as a gift from Charlie Donnelly - photo by Howard Cooper



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Honorary Life Membership



Bruce Whitelaw, Past Chair – WBMNL – presents Hilary with Honorary Life Membership Award  
- photo by Dennis Flynn

Hilary Cass was presented with an Honorary Life Membership Award at the 4th Annual Wooden Boat Conference held in Trinity. Hilary has been the exhibit designer at the Winterton Museum for over 10 years. Hilary, along with her team of Bruce Whitelaw and Jennifer Gushue, recently completed the Museum's Travelling Exhibit – **Before Fibreglass ....Wooden Boats of Newfoundland and Labrador**. The WBMNL would like to take this opportunity to thank Hilary again for the endless hours of work that she has devoted to the Museum.

## Schooner Model

Do you have a schooner model that's looking for a home? We are looking for a typical banks schooner to display in our travelling exhibit. We'd love to hear from you! Contact Beverley at 583-2070 or email [bkingheritage@gmail.com](mailto:bkingheritage@gmail.com).

**WBMNL Top Quality Awards** were presented to Hilary Cass, Jennifer Gushue and Bruce Whitelaw – Provincial Exhibit Design Team. The Provincial Exhibit will be unveiled in St. John's in March, 2012.



Photo Caption: Left to right - Beverley King (Project Manager), Hilary, Jennifer, Bruce, Chris Osmond (Vice Chair)  
- photo by Howard Cooper



Seasons Greetings and Best Wishes for a happy and prosperous New Year from the Board of Directors - Wooden Boat Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador. We look forward to your continued support in 2012.

## Look Aft and Learn is our motto.

Seafarers commonly say "look aft" to mean look behind, to the rear and the wake of the vessel. As a wooden boat museum, we feel it is a fitting expression that shows our commitment to looking to our history and heritage as a means of learning for the future.

