

Gadfly, Restored by Lake George Area Boatshop, Launched at Antique Boat Museum

By Buzz Lamb

The Gadfly is a 33-foot 1931 Hutchinson Island Commuter built specifically for folks living in the 1000 Islands area of the St. Lawrence River. The Island Commuters could handle the current and conditions of the river and were a stylish, safe and reliable means to carry people and goods out to the camps and houses on the islands.

In 1994 Gadfly was donated to the Antique Boat Museum by Margaret H. Wallace. As part of the museum's in-water fleet, Gadfly provided hundreds of museum patrons the opportunity to take a ride on the St. Lawrence in the comfort that is the quintessence of her style.

According to Ruben Smith, owner of Tumblehome Boatshop in Warrensburg, a few years back the folks at the Antique Boat Museum realized that Gadfly was in desperate need of repair. The boat was running on an 80-year-old bottom and needed to be restored in order to be safe to use as a tour boat.

Smith said he submitted a bid which recommended the boat be restored using original construction methods since it was, in fact, a museum piece and had survived so



well for all these years. "We were awarded the contract and started the restoration in 2013," Smith said. Smith and his staff launched the boat at the Mary Street ramp in Clayton, N. Y. on August 1. "Gadfly is back home," Smith said.

Smith said the job initially was to simply replace the bottom and reassemble the boat. "But, during the disassembly we found that the superstructure was badly deteriorated and needed to be replaced as well," he said.

Smith said replacing the bottom turned out to be an interesting project. "We replaced the stringers, chine logs, keel, bottom framing and all the planking," he said. Smith said they surmised that when

Hutchinson built the boat they must not have been happy with the shape of the bottom. "Before routing the frames for the battens they tacked shims onto the bottom of each frame and then reshaped the frames to suit their eye," he said.

Smith said not all the frames had shims installed. "This meant that the bottom of the boat was not shaped according to a plan, or a lofting, but rather to the eye of the builders. It also meant that the bottom was not symmetrical which complicated our work," he said. Smith said the bottom his workers built is much more symmetrical but essentially in keeping with the



original Hutchinson form.

Smith said the restoration project entailed 3,500 man-hours. "In the end, we replaced the house (cabin top) with new mahogany bulkheads and interior paneling and the black landau covering. Nearly all the side framing had to be repaired or replaced along with some deck planking." Smith said a brand new carbureted V-8 engine and wiring harness was installed along with all new systems wiring as well.

David Dodge, a retired New Hampshire schoolteacher who grew up in the 1000 Islands came back to the area in 2004. Dodge planned on spending a lot of time in his boats on the river so he decided it would be a good idea to take the Coast Guard Masters License course just to garner more information about boating. Once he received his certification the folks at the Antique Boat Museum asked him if he would like to become a captain for their in-water fleet of eight boats. Dodge said he jumped at the chance.

Dodge said Gadfly is the finest example of its type (sedan commuter). "It's always been the favorite of all the captains and the passengers as well," he said. "I'm looking forward to taking passengers for rides again," he said. Dodge said the museum runs two

in-water programs all summer long. "One is a 30-foot Hacker Craft triple cockpit for the general public and a whole separate program for patrons. Gadfly is one of the boats reserved for patrons who can call up and reserve the boat for a two or three hour ride," he said. "The boat is a perfect three-season boat because of the intimacy of the house (the enclosed part of the boat)," he said. "Passengers can ride inside, roll up the windows and stay warm and dry."

Dodge said he skippered the Gadfly prior to the restoration work done by Tumblehome Boatshop and was the first behind the helm when it was launched on Saturday. Dodge said that as coordinator of the in-water program at the museum the thing that pleases him the most is "the really extraordinary work that was done at Tumblehome has added 30 years to the life of this boat so that another generation will be able to ride in the boat and enjoy the St. Lawrence River."

The launching of the Gadfly at the Antique Boat Museum in Clayton last weekend after being restored at Reuben Smith's Tumblehome Boatshop in Warrensburg. Photos courtesy of Tumblehome Boatshop.

