

# Sailboat Still Searching For Its Long, Lost, Home

BY TERRY POPE

When Horton Milliken of Shallotte found the model sailboat back in 1954, all that remained was its lead-filled hull amid the scattered ruins caused by Hurricane Hazel.

Hazel had just slammed into the Brunswick County coast and Milliken had returned to Oak Island to help repair a friend's service station. It was there, while clearing away debris, that the hull caught Milliken's eye.

The model boat builder pulled the hull from the ruins, but decided not to repair the boat. Being somewhat of an expert in the hobby, Milliken wanted to give the boat a reconstructed body based on its original appearance. But Hurricane Hazel may have robbed the boat of that chance.

From 1954 until 1984, the boat's hull sat idle until Milliken's grandson, Bobby Williamson of Shallotte, decided to give the vessel a complete body and a name. Now 30 years later, Williamson is seeking the boat's original owner, to see how well he fared in his first adventure in building a model boat.

"I was wondering if anyone remembers the boat in its original form," Williamson said. "This boat had a lead hull, so I tend to think it was a working model that someone use to tie a string to and sailed in ponds or lakes."

Williamson, whose favorite hobby is sailing, was skimming through a magazine on sailing prior to Thanksgiving last year and noticed an article on the J-Class yachts which were very popular in the 1930s, the golden era of sailing.

It was the J-Class hull that caught his attention, because he knew that he had seen one before. It matched the hull of the mystery sailboat that his grandfather had salvaged from the debris left by Hazel.

"So I rigged it back in that fashion," Williamson said. "I modeled it after the 'Rainbow,' which won the America's Cup back in 1934."

Everything about the model sailboat has been reconstructed according to scale, Williamson said. According to the information he received, the mast on a full-size J-Class sailing yacht stood 150-feet above the water level. It was the type of yacht that only the sailing elite could afford. Its body measured over 130-feet long.

Model boats were often made by hand from the originals. Milliken has constructed a number of model boats from memory of the ships that once sailed up the Shallotte River to supply the town with goods.

"Back before the turn of the century, Shallotte was supplied by schooners," Williamson said. "It was the fastest way to get freight in. My grandfather worked in that trade until the roads and trucks came along."

Such large vessels had to drift in and out of the Shallotte River according to the tides, because the river

wasn't large enough for sailing, Williamson said. His grandfather has built at least six models of the old schooners that once docked in Shallotte.

Williamson used fishing leader and a white fabric to reconstruct the sails on the "Rainbow" which included a "Park Avenue boom" so wide that two men could have walked down it side-by-side, he said.

It is the only model boat that Williamson has ever repaired.

"The interesting thing about this one is, maybe it didn't look like this in its original form," Williamson said. He painted the hull white, trimmed in red. It was originally a clear varnish, along with the refinished deck. He began repairing the boat last Thanksgiving.

"It took a couple of months at different times," he added. "The problem was figuring out what it was supposed to look like. I didn't have anything to go by."

Williamson is hoping that someone may remember the boat from its days spent on Long Beach. The

chance of finding its original owner is "probably slim and none," he said. "But you can never tell."



BOBBY WILLIAMSON of Shallotte reconstructed the model sailboat that was found amid the ruins caused by Hurricane Hazel in 1954. Williamson is hoping to find the boat's original owner.

STAFF PHOTO BY TERRY POPE

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