



The Smoke Signal



VOLUME 14 ISSUE 6

November/December 2008

Newsletter of the BLACKHAWK CHAPTER-ACBS

The Story of Hathor (Continued) THE RESTORATION PROCESS

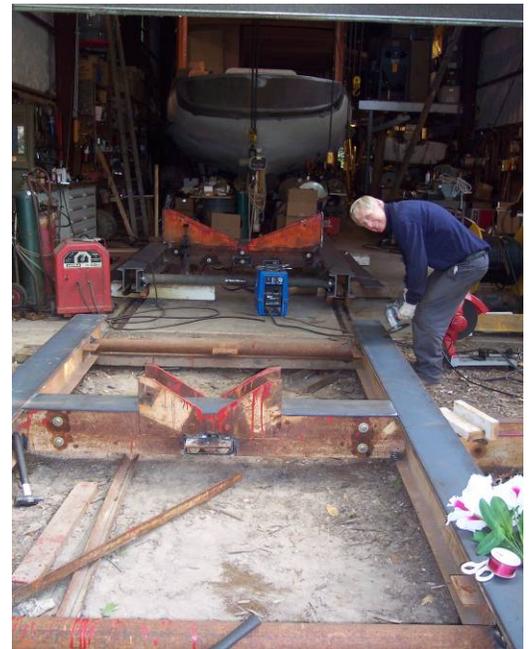
For a number of reasons, in July of 2004 Bill Sills decided to leave the area and asked me if I would take care of HATHOR. I talked with my brother, Walter, and asked him if I could put HATHOR in one of his boathouses. He was willing to do that and became interested in the restoration project. Bill Sills subsequently sold his boat house, where he had been living in one side and kept the boat in the other side, and departed for Idaho. He left the boat tied to my pier on an over-cast mid-September weekend. I walked down to look at the boat, mindful of the old adage not to accept gifts that ate. Here was a gift that had a voracious appetite.

Wow! What have I gotten into? The first thing I would say is that restoration is not for the faint of heart. In my experience, an old boat will have problems that are not within the realm of human imagination, surprises that can only be discovered and properly remedied when every part is exposed to the light of day. And the only way to approach it is to take the boat completely apart. It is also expensive and time consuming. Time and money go in opposite directions. If you have more of one you can get by with less of the other.

The first thing I had to do was remodel the cradle. The track spacing in the old McKee boathouse was 7 feet wide, and Walter's track (and the track in all the other remaining boathouses) was 6 feet wide. So my first effort was simply to narrow the existing cradle which was built in two sections, with each section having a wheel at each corner. What I found was that the existing design was flawed and as the cradle rolled along the tracks, if there were a high spot or a low spot in the track, one of the wheels would lift off. So I knew I had to build a completely new cradle. I built a new steel cradle using 32-foot long steel beams and two-wheel trucks mounted on trunnion bearings at each corner. That seemed to work pretty well.

When the day came to haul the boat out of the water, it was mid-October and there was a chill in the air. I woke up before dawn with the adrenalin rush I'm sure all sailors experience when they are called to battle stations. The day started ominously with a heavy fog. I went down to the pier just as the sun was coming up optimistically expecting to start the engine. What a struggle. Starting fluid, extra batteries, long cranking, increasing smell of gasoline, finally it coughed, spit back at me, and rumbled to semblance of life on about three cylinders. But amazingly, that was enough to drive the boat. Sue had been waiting on the dock to see me off with increasing apprehension. At one point I remember her saying, "Can't we call someone who knows something?"

With the engine coughing and running fitfully I backed out of the pier, reassuring her anxiety that everything was going to be OK. After I had gone a short distance, fog enveloped the boat completely and for a time I couldn't see either shore. Rarely have I felt so much alone as I pursued what I thought was a northerly course in the direction of the boathouse on the north shore. Everything was shrouded in fog, the engine was barely alive, at once surging, then seeming to die, copious quantities of steam coming out of the exhaust, the hull slowly filling with water, and noxious oily exhaust smoke billowing up out of the engine hatches and ventilators. Later I found that both water and smoke came from a



Rebuilding cradle from 7-foot rail spacing to 6-foot spacing



Departing in the early morning fog

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

There is so much to say about the Blackhawk Chapter's last workshop, where do you start? I suppose you would start with the significance of the morning. Fifty some odd people (no pun intended) gathered in shop to see and hear about a truly amazing restoration. For those of us who are not quite as gifted, you had the feeling you were in the presence of magnificent artisans which maybe why we are attracted to are hobby. There is nothing I've seen that is quite like restoring old boats, not even cars have this mystique. One of our members told me last summer, "I'm hooked on this stuff" and I want everyone I meet to be the same. I'm just now starting to understand what he means. Blackhawk member and Chairman Ted Mc Nally of The Antique and Classic Boat Museum started the morning with an update of the museum's newly expanded campus, programs and it's extensive collection of boats. It is without question one of the fine regional museums in the country and well worth the trip to northern New York state.

Followed by that, Jim Altounian, our host took the floor. His current project is a 1927 26' triple cockpit Chris Craft. This boat was purchased in Minnesota where it spent the last thirty years stored the sellers back yard. It was, as they say, a pattern boat, but no more. Piece by piece, each piece of lumber has been replaced on the boat except for the two stringers that support the engine. Needless to say, a remarkable project by any standards.

Next on the agenda was John Schnittker who rebuilding the original Kermath Sea Wolf engine. John spent most of his career with United Airlines at O'Hare Field where he ran their maintenance operation. That job made him responsible for some four thousand pieces of mechanical equipment. Since that time, he has been rebuilding and restoring antique and classic engines from the early days of aviation, automotive and marine development. They run from Packards to Auburns to Hercules (Chris Craft). You can imagine the before pictures of Jim's engine being exposed to the elements for some thirty years. I think at the end of the day, most people in the room felt like they in the presents of one of the great masters of the engine world.

While we are a little late in getting out this issue of Smoke Signal, please mark your calendars for the club's tech session on February 21st. Since this has been one of our most harsh winters in some years, an early spring must be on the docket.

Best Regards,
George Plamondon

missing plug in the bottom of the muffler that sprayed exhaust and cooling water into the boat. The steam came because a number of cylinders had their water inlet plugged with zebra muscles, and the exhaust pipe was glowing red hot turning what cooling water that did manage to leak through into steam.

As I crossed the lake barely above idle speed, the engine seemed to stabilize in a consistent rumble and, if you could ignore the periodic volcano-like sputtering coming from the engine room, it became relatively pleasant watching the sun rise and begin to burn the fog away. I was moved by the thought it was the end of an era. Here I was the last captain of this once fine yacht, now needing attention everywhere the eye looked, rumbling along in the dawn's early light, taking it either to its end or to its reincarnation, I knew not which. I emerged from the fog about a half mile east of the boathouse and, with a profound sense of relief and accomplishment, I turned west heading along the shore toward Walter's boathouse.



John attaching crane boom directly to the engine.



John guiding the engine up and out of the boat.



The engine is out of the boat, and the front end of the barge is almost under water.



Lathrop engine on the beach, Walter getting interested!

Two of my sons, Andy and John, and a number of others were there waiting. The cradle was in the water ready to receive the boat, but first we had to remove the ballast. Everyone pitched in and in about 30 minutes we had carried ashore about 5 tons of broken railroad rail that had been placed in the bilge when the steam boiler was removed. I had also arranged for the Reed Pier Company to be there to remove the engine from HATHOR. I thought it would be difficult to take the engine out of the boat while the boat was in the boathouse, so I asked them to bring their crane barge that they used for pier work over to lift it out. I quickly severed the electrical, water, fuel, exhaust lines, and unbolted the engine and propeller shaft coupling. I think it took me less than half an hour to do that. In the meantime, the wind was picking up out of the south and we had large two-foot waves beginning to wash in. The engine was quite heavy, about 3,000 pounds, and it was almost more than the pier barge could lift, the front end of the barge going under water at one point. We did get it out with a lot of pushing and prying, and the crane set it on the beach.

With the engine out, we used a small motor boat to pull HATHOR out into the lake and attached long ropes to the various piers to pull and guide the boat into position over the submerged cradle. It was especially difficult because of the increasing wind and waves and we were unsure of just how the new cradle would work out. The tow truck we planned to use to pull the boat out had arrived and connected its cable to the cradle and began to pull the boat out of the water.



HATHOR being hauled from the water and entering the boathouse.

When the boat was about half way out, it unexpectedly slid about three feet back in the cradle. What I learned from this, and this was one of Mr. Sills' problems, was that the boat has some rocker to its keel which made it easy to slide, and it needed to be securely held in place on the cradle. In the future we need to use straps to hold the boat in its proper location on the cradle and prevent it from sliding backward when we launch or haul out.

That first winter and following summer we went through the boat and removed everything that could be taken out. Jordan and Oliver Pringle spent most of the summer working on the boat and did an incredible job. Even their father, Joe, pitched in, Joe having a similar experience to mine with *HATHOR* when he was a young man. We took out shelves, racks, brackets, floor boards, ballast. It was hard dirty work because everything was heavy and was coated with oil from the leaking exhaust and chronic oil spills from the various engines. Some of the grime was 110 years old from the old steam engine and boiler. We then went through the hull and chipped out all the old concrete that had been poured the length of the boat to raise the bilge water level to the limber holes. Later we cut new limber holes in the frames just above the keel to eliminate the need for concrete.

We separated the cabin from the deck and lifted the cabin off the boat suspending it from the boathouse roof. Then we stripped off the old deck. The hull was in surprisingly good shape. From the front of the engine back the oil drippings from first the steam engine and later the various gasoline engines seem to have protected the steel. Under where the steam boiler had been located there was some pitting. After we cleaned up the metal we measured the depth of the pits with a surface micrometer. The steel at that point was $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. We didn't find any pits that were more than .100 deep. There was some rust penetration of the hull at the edge of the deck and behind the wooden rub rail, especially at the back of the cabin where the galley and head had been located, and the transom. We cut these areas out and replaced them.



Second sand blast cleaning entire interior.



Exterior of hull sand blasted and painted with two coats of full immersion epoxy primer.

We pulled the boat outside in January, 2006 to do a preliminary sand blast of the rusted areas so we could determine what to cut out and replace and what was still good. Then I hired three welders to work evenings and weekends to go through

the boat and replace and questionable steel. They put a new transom on, put new plating on both sides of the cabin at the deck line, and installed a new rub rail. That took almost a year because of bowling, deer hunting, etc.

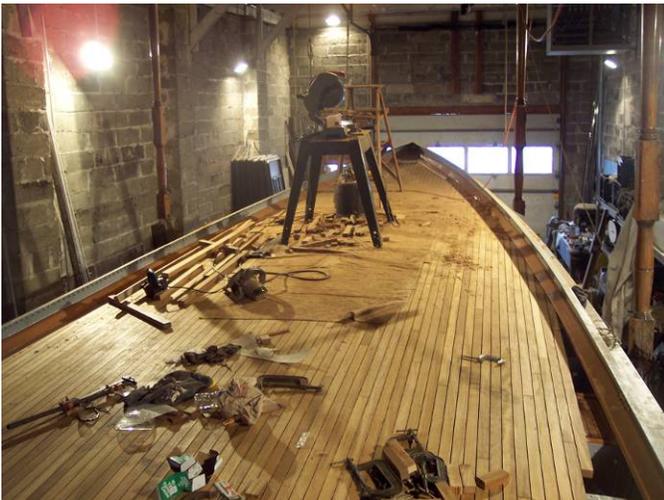
In June of 2007, after the welders had finished, we again pulled the boat outside, this time for a complete sandblast inside and out. The sand blaster took three weeks. Then we painted the hull inside and out with two coats of a Sherwin Williams epoxy primer suitable for full emersion, then a polyurethane top coat on the inside and an anti-fouling bottom coat on the outside. We faired the outside of the hull with a micro-balloon fairing compound above the waterline to fill the rivet depressions and the seams between the hull plates. Incidentally, this was riveted hull. After the frames were erected, the steel hull plates were picked up by clamps and placed in a plate furnace where the entire plate was heated red hot. The hot plate was then lifted and brought over to the hull where it was clamped in place and hammered with large wooden mallets to the shape of the frames.

We started to reinstall the engine bed, propeller shaft, shelves, and fixtures during the winter of 2007-8. Every piece of steel that was put back was sand blasted and coated with the full immersion epoxy primer.

In January, 2008 we started to re-lay the deck. Choosing the deck material was difficult. We looked at white pine which was the traditional material, but it is high maintenance because it is very soft and every piece of sand or gravel that sticks to someone's shoes makes a little dent in the deck which then turns black when it gets wet. We looked at long-leaf yellow pine which is a little harder, fir, white cedar, mahogany, ipay, and teak. We made up samples of the most promising and placed them outside to weather and we walked on them to simulate what they would see in service. We ended up using teak. The pluses were that is very forgiving of being walked on, it has a wonderful feel of velvet under bare feet, it is durable, and it doesn't rot. The big minus is that it turns dishwater gray after a couple of year's exposure to the sun and weather and it must be maintained, that is, scrubbed and sanded. The decking is 1.5 inches thick.

In the meantime, we were working on the cabin. The outside of the cabin was originally white pine and had been painted with a white enamel. It was in remarkably good condition. The only parts we had to replace were the bottom board on both sides, and the front starboard corner.

The inside was another matter. When McKee did the 1939 restoration, the original cabin interior apparently had been badly damaged. So he removed it and replaced it in a then popular art deco style. Curving panels of blond finished plywood above the window sills, and dark mahogany plywood panels accented by horizontal battens below the window sills. Much of this plywood had delaminated and there were layers of it hanging in space. Also, extensive rot had set in. So we stripped the interior from the framing and burned it.



New mahogany covering boards along the edge of the deck and new teak decking in place.



Engine room with bunks where the old coal bins were located, engine bed visible lower left.

I worked with a talented cabinet maker, Van Krumpen, in Genoa City, WI who had done boat cabin interiors before. We photographed the cabin interior structure and looked for witness marks from the original cabin partitions. These were things like a shadow on the wall where a panel might have been attached and the wood color changed slightly, screw holes where panels had been attached, places that had been chiseled out for panels, remnants of old moldings on the ceiling, marks on the floor where original panels had been attached, and different types of wood framing to determine what

dated from 1898 and what was from the 1939 restoration. We went to old Racine Boat Company catalogs, looked at interior details on other boats, and we studied the two other surviving Racine boats from that era. We also looked at other boat manufacturer's cabin interiors from the 1890 from boat magazines and reference books. Then we tried to recreate as nearly as possible the original cabin interior. That was completed in 2007. The wood has been stained and varnished, and is now being installed.

The canopy is still original. It is made of 2-inch wide fir strips with a little round bead on the edge of each strip. In the 1939 McKee restoration, the workers must have looked at the old varnish on the underside of the canopy and decided rather than remove it and refinish the wood they would put 1/4" plywood veneer over it. So there was a piece of plywood between each canopy beam and each rectangular section was trimmed with a small molding. I suspect the labor in cutting each of these panels and installing the trim was more than the labor to refinish. Anyway, we have removed the plywood which had largely delaminated and we are stripping the 110 year old varnish off. We plan to sand and refinish the entire canopy.

The engine room had a raised enclosure extending about two feet above the deck, measuring about 16 feet long and 7 feet wide. The sides are still original and are made of riveted steel with rounded corners, a nice piece of work. Originally it had no top, the boiler and steam engine being exposed. McKee had installed a top using mahogany flooring so people could sit on it. At first glance it looked nice and I thought great, I can reuse it just as it is. But as I got into it, the first things I found were numerous chips where the edges of the hatches had been abused and wood splintered out, and many dents where something had dropped on it. So I was faced with filling the imperfections with some kind of filler, trying to sand them out, or cutting in plugs and patches. While I was thinking about this I noticed large egg shaped swirls, some quite deep, cut into the top surface. Looking closer, it appeared that someone had used a belt sander and had let it tip slightly in one direction, and then the other direction, as the sander was moved across the surface, each tilt cutting a swirl. Not to be deterred yet, I decided to take all the planking off and run it through a planer to clean it up. However, when I started to dismantle the hatches and top, I found that the mahogany strips had been toe nailed with steel nails that left little black rust dots where ever a nail was placed. At that point I decided to simply replace the entire top. One of the little unexpected things that come up in any restoration. Then I discovered that the engine box wasn't square. It was an inch longer on one side and about 3/4" wider on one end. Also there was a crown on the front and back but the middle was flat, apparently the carpenters who put the top on during the McKee restoration didn't take the time to cut the crown into all the cross beams. So I worked through it and made a new steel framework that incorporated steel angle iron that had been bent to match the existing crown to stabilize it before I put the new planking down. These were made by Marie Kropp's company, Waukegan Steel. I added four portholes in the sides so we can construct a state room with bunks where the old steam boiler had been located. There went six months of work on one of the few things I thought I could clean up and reuse.

Still to come are the electrical wiring for a 12 volt general boat lighting system for running lights, cabin lights, and deck lights, and a 110 volt system for food service (coffee pot, hot plates) and decorative lighting. Also plumbing for water supply and waste, deck drains. A new steering system with hydraulic steering replacing the original cable system, and new engine controls.



February Tech Session

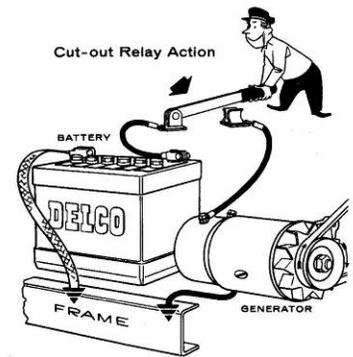
We are planning an Electrical Tech Session Saturday February 21st
10:00am to 2:00pm.

We will cover **basic electricity** as it applies to our engines: **ignition, generators, starters, gauges, etc.** There is also the opportunity to address your particular problem or concern in regards to **starting, charging, 6 to 12 volt conversion, or whatever.** If you have something in particular you would like to discuss, call **Gary Braker (847-875-2534)** or **Ted Cartner (847-395-8902)** and let us know. We'll be happy to include it in the program. Bring in your bad parts.

Lunch will be served. The location is at Bill Nicholson's, 3434 Forest Ridge Dr., Spring Grove, IL 60081. It's 1 block south of Rt 173 at Clark Road. Clark Road is about 3 miles west of Wilmot Road.

\$8.00 per person (16 & under free), you can pay that day but let us know in advance if you are planning to attend.

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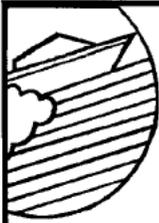
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Commercial advertisements will be run in each issue published during the course of the year unless prior arrangements are made. Six issues per year are published. The following rates apply for commercial advertising, on a per year basis. Contact your editor for more information:

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BLACKHAWK CHAPTER-ACBS

The Smoke Signal

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Calendar of Events

Feb 21	Tech Session 10:00am, Lunch included
June 13	Chicago River Trip Details TBA
July 18	McHenry Boat Show
Sept 24-26	ACBS International Boat Show, Muskoka
Sept 26	Geneva Lakes Boat Show