

BEALS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Vol. XVIII, No. 2 (Spring 2018)

BEALS ELEMENTARY STUDENTS PRESENTATION AND BHS ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

On Thursday, March 15th, the 5th and 6th grade students at Beals Elementary will present their project involving a unit of study pertaining to Medieval Europe. Their presentation will consist of what they learned about the fall of the Roman Empire, the rise of Feudalism, the importance of the Catholic Church in the daily lives of the people, as well as the new architectural styles and building techniques which led to the construction of the Gothic Cathedrals, built at the

time. The students each chose a cathedral or castle to research and will share this information during the presentation.

BHS would like to extend an invitation to the public to join us for this most interesting presentation. It will be held at the Beals gymnasium at 6:30PM. Prior to the presentation, we would also invite you to attend BHS annual business meeting at 6PM. Light refreshments will be served.

PERSONALIZED BRICK ANNOUNCEMENT

For 2018, BHS will be offering the Patio and Veterans personalized 4" x 8" brick at a reduced rate of \$75 each. For the "Patio", this size brick will hold the names of two families with the same last name. It offers three lines each with 21 letters and spaces. We also offer the Veterans Memorial Park Area whereby you may purchase a brick to honor or memorialize a veteran at this same

reduced rate. The veteran brick consists of rank, name, branch of service, and years served. Orders need to be received by April 4th in order to have them in time to set for BHS Memorial Day program. For formatting suggestions, please contact Carol at 497-2675 or email cfDavis44@yahoo.com. Thank you!

A VISIT WITH OSMOND BEAL: CORNED HAKE & GINGER CAKE

By Brian Robbins

BEALS ISLAND, ME – The thermometer was struggling to get above zero – and who knew what it was with the wind chill.

It was a Saturday, the end of a week that reminded you of what winters in Maine used to be: cold with plenty of snow.

You ought to ask boat builder/designer Osmond Beal about the way winters used to be. He knows all about it.

After all, he and his father Vinal built 14 boats together outside years ago ...

that's what they did winters when they weren't fishing.

And if the day was so bad that they couldn't work on the boat they were building, well, they'd go clamming.

A man still had to make a living, after all.

On this day, however, we're sitting in the living room of Osmond and his wife Barbara's home on Beals Island, ME: Osmond and I are in comfy chairs facing each other; Barbara is on the couch beside my wife Tigger, asking her about

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 15th @ 6PM & 6:30PM– Annual Business Meeting/BES Student Wyeth and Middle Ages Projects

May 5th @ 6:30PM – BHS Talent/Variety Show

May 28th @ 10AM – Memorial Day Program

June 18 @ 6:30PM
Arnie Smith Program
Early 19th Century Hay Creek Tide Mill Project

July 7th for the 4th – TBA
Selling crab and lobster rolls hopefully by the bridge

August 18th –TBA

October 20th –
Gospel Concert

Please mark your calendars as we greatly appreciate your support!

2018 MEMBERSHIP REMINDER

For 2018, the membership is comprised of 62 life members, 5 new and 38 renewals. For 2017, BHS annual membership consisted of 117. We are hoping that everyone receiving this newsletter will please consider BHS a worthy cause to support and mail the enclosed application today. Thank you to all who continue to support Beals Historical Society!

the knitting project she's working on.

There's no boat to build this winter – inside or outside. Osmond, who will be turning 87 a few days after our visit, suffered a stroke a couple of years ago and it has slowed him up about getting around.

I know that not being able to work aggravates him, as a man who has kept busy all his life. But his spirits are good – and that smile of his is just as quick as I've always known it to be.

And when we get talking about boats ... well, he's right there.

We're talking about Osmond and his father having to shovel out whatever wooden boat they were building after a snowstorm before they could begin their day's work.

And I mention the largest production model in the Osmond Beal line that H&H Marine in Steuben offers these days: the Osmond 47, 47'4" long with a beam of 19'2".

"That would be a lot of snow to shovel, wouldn't it?" I ask.

"Ohhhh ..." Osmond shakes his head and grins. "Yeah ... yeah, it would."

But he would have.

Days of wood

Osmond's major boatbuilding mentors were close to home: his father Vinal and his uncle, Mariner Beal.

Says Osmond, "Dad had been working for Alvin Beal in his boat shop, but one night he came home and said, 'I think I'll build one myself.'

"And that was it: from then on, that's what we did."

As mentioned, Vinal and Osmond built for years without a shop.

"You'd crawl down behind a snow bank to get warm," he says with a grin, just as if he misses it.

"After a while," he says, "we finally put up a little shop big enough to cover the boats we were building part-way ... the stern still stuck out through, though. The next year, we built an addition so the whole boat would be covered – but we still didn't have heat!"

I remember fellow designer/builder Willis Beal speaking with admiration of what Osmond and his father went through in those early days.

"Our winters were a lot harder back then," Willis told me, "but those fellas' work was never flawed for what they had to put up with ... they were some tough."

In 1964, Osmond set up the boat shop that stood across the road from his house for nearly 50 years. Brother-in-law Harry "Twink" Alley joined forces with Osmond; he was on hand in 1968 when Vinal took sick and ended up in the hospital.

"We'd just started a new one with Daddy; just started the keel when he got sick. I told Harry, 'Well, we can't sit around all winter ... we've got to do what we can do.'"

Osmond tells of Vinal eventually getting well enough to come home; when he got his strength back enough to get around a bit, he came out to look at the boat, which Osmond and Harry were nearly finished on.

Osmond says his father slowly climbed

molds leaning up against the side of his boat shop: plywood and 2x4s that had been fastened and refastened, obviously reshaped and resized many times.

"That's it, right there," he told me.

At first, I thought he was messing with me, but he swore those were the same molds that he'd used for years – for both wooden boats and plugs for fiberglass molds.

"Oh, you know ..." Osmond shrugged. "They were all about the same shape ... just bigger or smaller."

Right.

Later on, I found out about the notebook, which explained a little bit (but not a whole lot) more.

Osmond reminds me of the notebook while telling me about the customer from MA who had come up to Beals to run his new boat home.

"We had her all done and tied up alongside the wharf when he got there," says Osmond.

"One fella that was with him grabbed a couple sawhorses and a piece of plywood and sat down. He had a chart spread out, getting his courses from here

down to Massachusetts.

"That fella got looking around and he says, 'Where are your blueprints?'

"I says, 'I ain't got any blueprints.'

"He says, 'Oh, come on – I worked at the Portsmouth Naval Yard and I know you have to have blueprints.'

"I says, 'Well, I don't.'

"What I did have was a little notebook" – he shows me with his finger – "about that long and about that thick. I had a few

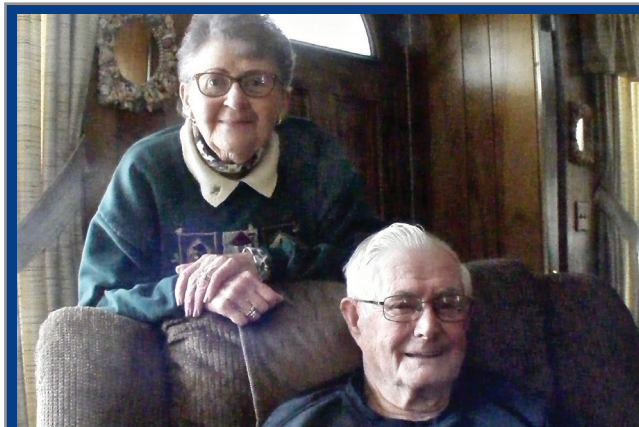
measurements wrote in it: how high the stem was; how high the stern was ... a few things like that.

"I took it over to the fella from Massachusetts and said, 'That's about it, right there.'

"He said, 'There's no way you can build a boat with just that.'

"I pointed and said, 'There's one right there, tied to the wharf.'"

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Osmond and Barbara - 63 years of wedded bliss.

the ladder, looked over the rail ... and said, "Better job than I could do." Vinal stepped back down and went in the house.

That was high praise, right there.

No blueprints

When I first met Osmond back 30 years or so ago, I remember asking him how he worked up his designs.

He pointed to a set of aged wooden

The glass age

By the 1970s, fiberglass hulls were beginning to catch on.

“Oh, land,” Osmond says, shaking his head, “I didn’t want to think about getting into fiberglass in the beginning ... but the wooden boat orders started to slow up.”

When Ernest Libby Jr. brought home one of his fiberglass 33-footers built by the Young Brothers shop in Corea, ME in 1977, it drew a lot of attention on Beals – not only from potential customers, but other boat builders, as well.

“That was the boat that got me started,” says Osmond. “I began thinking about designing for fiberglass if the right chance came along.”

Opportunity soon knocked in the form of Terry Hutchins, who, with his brother Barry, had opened H&H Marine in Milbridge, ME. The Hutchins brothers were doing a brisk business finishing other builders’ hulls and selling engines, but they were looking to have some fiberglass molds of their own.

A chance meeting between Osmond and Terry Hutchins, who was down on Beals to repower a wooden 35 footer built by Osmond, went something like this:

Terry Hutchins: “I’ll tell you one thing: I’d like to have a hull just like this to build a fiberglass one from.”

Osmond: “Well, I guess you’re probably lookin’ at the fella who could do it.”

The brothers Hutchins gave Osmond the go-ahead to order the lumber and the process began – although Terry Hutchins’ request for a 35 footer “just like” the one he’d been aboard kept getting stretched.

“They kept wanting it a little longer ... and a little longer,” says Osmond. “Finally, they asked, ‘How long can you make it?’ I said, ‘About 37’6” and they said, ‘Go for her.’”

The finished plug begat the model that is now known as the Osmond 37 ... and

H&H’s line of Osmond Beal designs was born.

The Hake

Ask Osmond if he has a favorite boat or model out of all the boats he’s designed and built and he won’t hesitate.

“The old Corned Hake.”

The story of the Corned Hake would make a great movie – one of those against-all-odds triumphs that can’t help but tickle you every time you hear it.

When veteran fisherman Ivan Ray of Milbridge, ME first talked to Osmond in the early 80s about building him a lobster boat that he could take to the races, Osmond was interested.

But when Ivan started to spec out the dimensions of what he wanted – something 40’11” long by 14’6” wide with an 11’ stern – Osmond shook his head.



“The Corned Hake” - built for Ivan Ray in 1983. Osmond’s favorite boat of all the ones he’s designed and built. Pictured here in the lead at the 1984 Moosbec’s World Fastest Boat Race.

“I told him: ‘Ivan, that’s too big!’”

Ivan persisted, however, and Osmond started the project.

“The thing was, everything about her was heavy,” he says, “right from the keel up. I’d never put in more than a 4-1/2” keel ... but Ivan had to have his 6” wide with enough room to swing a 34” wheel. That’s a lot hanging down there!”

“Of course, bigger keel meant heavier fastenings ... her planks were thicker; timbers were bigger ... the engine beds were 12” wide and 6” thick by 14’ long ... everything about her was big and heavy.”

Osmond and Barbara both drove up to Milbridge to see the Corned Hake’s

engine when it landed at Ivan’s shop.

Osmond remembers looking at the TAMD120 Volvo (rated 384 hp from the factory) with its humungous offset gear sitting on the pallet.

“I could just see over the top of it,” says Osmond.

“I told Ivan he’d be better off putting it in one of his sardine boats,” says Barbara.

As the summer race season approached and the Hake’s launch loomed, Ivan Ray started taking some serious ribbing in the local restaurants from his fellow fishermen.

“I remember Ivan coming in the shop shaking his head,” says Osmond. ‘Cap,’ he says, ‘They’re gonna beat us.’

“‘Ivan,’ I told him, ‘All we can do is try.’”

Local Volvo man Harold Tyler was brought in to tweak things up once the Corned Hake hit the water. Osmond remembers the afternoon he was working on traps on his dock, watching the Hake make repeated passes up and down Moosabec Reach as Harold dug into the big block for a little more.

“The last time they took her out, the black smoke would pour out of her like you had a brush fire going,” says Osmond. “When you came down on the throttle, you knew it.”

So did everyone else that summer, as the Corned Hake nailed her share of wins. Anybody who saw her run remembers how she made the water fly off her haunches, her Volvo roaring and belching a trail of black smoke out of its dry stack.

“I lost more sleep over that boat when we were building her,” says Osmond. “But it was worth it.”

The stable

Over the years, H&H Marine (now owned by Bruce Grindal and Eric Moores) has built up its Osmond Beal line to span from 27’ to 47’ – a total

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of a dozen advertised models with the ability to modify to meet the customer's needs. Included in the line-up are two models Osmond originally designed for the now-defunct Glas-Spec shop in the early 1990s: the 34 and the 42. (Those molds were owned by another shop – Maine-Way Boats – before being acquired by H&H.)

Osmond himself owned two of the H&H hulls – a 29 and a 27 – as he continued to split his years between summer/fall lobstering and finishing fiberglass boats.

The years of hard work were catching up with Osmond, however, and during a visit in late 2008, he told me he was “done with building boats. My knees won't let me do all that crawling around ... you're on your hands and knees a good part of the time.”

By then, grandson Erick Blackwood had built a new shop on the property where Osmond's old building stood. For

a while, the two structures – the shiny new one and the old veteran – eyeballed each other; the old shop was eventually torn down.

One of Osmond's biggest regrets was that he never had the opportunity to build a wooden boat from start to finish with his grandson.

“I told Erick I wish I could build one more wooden boat with him so he could see how it was done,” says Osmond. “It's one of those things that you just can't tell somebody how to do it – you have to be there every day and be part of it.”

Dreams

That work ethic that has driven Osmond Beal for most of his 87 years is still inside of him.

As we move over to the table for some blueberry ginger cake – Barbara's not letting Tigger and me leave without eating – Osmond tells me that his nights are full of projects these days.

“It's true,” says Barbara. “When he sleeps, he dreams: he builds boats; he lobster fishes; he builds wharves ... all kinds of things.”

“I'll wake up in the morning and I've been working all night,” says Osmond. “I'm exhausted!”

When I ask him if he's ever tallied up the boats he built – from working with his Uncle Mariner and his father to his own designs in both wood and fiberglass, Osmond shrugs. “I don't know ... a hundred? It was getting up there.”

He looks out the window at the ice-and-snow-crueted landscape.

“Don't I wish I could do it now ...” “Even the part where you were lying in a snow bank with a bit brace?” I ask.

“Oh, yes,” Osmond says, turning to me with a grin. “We were just doing what we needed to do ... that's all.”

BEALS HERITAGE CENTER BEALS HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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*Annual memberships are for the calendar year
and expire December 31st.*

Over and above dues, I wish to donate

_____ for _____ operating expenses, _____ building fund, or _____ endowment fund.

Receipt and membership card
will be sent to you.

Instructions: Please print, complete and mail this application, together with tax-deductible check or money order payable to Beals Historical Society to:

*Membership Chairperson,
Beals Historical Society,
P.O. Box 280, Beals, ME 04611*