



Plan view of the rehabilitation of the Japonski Island Boathouse by Northwind Architects. See all the drawings, and the architect's design narrative, at the SMHS website www.sitkamaritime.org.

Architect Plan

The SMHS has commissioned Northwind Architects of Juneau to design the Japonski Island Boathouse Rehabilitation. The project is funded by a National Scenic Byways grant, with additional funding from a Save America's Treasures grant, with matching by SMHS donors.

Northwind was chosen competitively through a request for proposals in January. This firm is highly qualified in a variety of Alaska projects, with a special focus on public facilities, energy efficiency and historic preservation. The SMHS has been very pleased with the firm's approach to the project, taking into account the costs of construction as well as future expenses for maintenance and utilities, while never losing sight of the ultimate goal of preserving an historic building.

This spring Sean Boily of Northwind and a team of engineers did a thorough structural survey and hazardous materials assessment. Sean then met with the board of the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society to develop a plan that will keep the building's vintage feel while bringing safety, comfort and efficiency up to modern standards. The building is part of a National Historic Landmark, and the design follows federal standards for work on historic buildings.

The project by Northwind will culminate in complete, bid-ready construction documents. The stage so far completed, a detailed Schematic Plan (available on the SMHS website www.sitkamaritime.org), has substantial amounts of detail in structural improvements and mechanical systems.

Other important aspects of this plan so far include the theme of the rehabilitation. Rather than a visitor center atmosphere, the board wants the building to feel as if the visitor is stepping into a shop that never shut down, so they feel like they are a part of history. While visitors will feel welcome, the guiding idea for rehabilitation details is "utilitarian." The board got excited about using World War II or 1950s vintage government metal furniture for the office and retail space, for example.

The funding climate has obviously changed over the last year or so, and so another major refinement is to pare the rehabilitation down to the essentials for operation. For this reason the design is slightly scaled back from an earlier concept design, in leaving an outbuilding (for toilets, storage and office space), a kayak and small boat float, and a larger addition for future phases. Also left for a later phase will be removing interior sheathing to add insulation to the walls.

The heart of "Phase I" is the marine ways, with a new cradle and track for hauling boats, and the wood workshop.

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Visitors will have a handicapped-accessible ramp into the building and a "catwalk" bridge across the top of the marine ways, so they can view the work on boats. Signs and a brochure will help visitors understand what they see. The northwest wing, historically used for storage, will be set up with exhibits, retail area, and office. A small office structure now attached to the building will be relocated, and eventually rehabilitated for another use.

Phase I will replace the roofing and add rigid insulation (disguised behind a slightly wider fascia); do needed structural upgrades, which turn out to be relatively minimal; repair or replace doors and windows; add infiltration barrier while replacing or repairing siding; and bring utilities to the building and put in the electrical system. There will be a sprinkler system and an ADA-compliant toilet.

In the short term, heat will be oil-fired heaters, but ultimately the board would like to install a ground-source heat pump, that would take advantage of laying the new marine railway tracks in the tidal zone. Placing the tubing for a ground-source heat pump, which has to be deep underground or in the ocean, is usually the biggest cost in this type of system. In this project the railway tracks need to be placed in the tidal zone anyway, and the tubing can be placed alongside at the same time. A ground-source heat pump is very cost efficient to run, needing only a small amount of electricity. This type of system eliminates carbon emissions, and also minimizes use of the city's hydroelectric generation, which is approaching capacity.



The seiner SJS being built in Peter Simpson's boat shop, 1936-37. Pictured left to right: Joe Ozawa, John James, David Howard, Peter Sing, Les Yaw, and Peter Simpson. Photo Sheldon Jackson College collection.

We need you!

The National Scenic Byways and Save America's Treasures grants for the design are matching grants, covering just over half of the project's cost. The rest comes from private donors - like you!

This is an ideal time to **renew your membership**, and to make additional donations toward this exciting project.

The SMHS has a board committed to making each dollar go as far as it can, and has in place "best practices" financial controls. You can be confident every part of your donation will be used efficiently toward preserving our maritime heritage, and opening a maritime heritage center at the Japonski Island Boathouse.

2009 Annual Meeting Featured SJS Film

The annual meeting of the SMHS in February had the theme of Sitka Boatbuilding. This year, as in the past, we had a panel, this year featuring Nancy Yaw Davis, Fred Hope, and Roy Bailey, with panel host Eric Jordan telling about their memories of Sheldon Jackson School and boat building in Sitka.

The meeting was also the opportunity to show an intriguing film of Sheldon Jackson School from the 1930s through 1940 made by then-superintendent Les Yaw. The film, a window into SJS and Sitka history, was transferred to dvd by Les Yaw's son Charles Yaw and has narration, added years later, by Les Yaw.

Standout bits are the scenes of teenage boys hard at work with hand tools, giving a grin to the camera; the sawmill, put together by SJ staff and students, which would not pass a single OSHA requirement; and appearances by Peter Simpson and Andrew Hope, important Native leaders in the fight for land claims.

Charles Yaw has generously allowed reproduction of the 27-minute film on dvd, and it is available at the Sitka Historical Society Museum (which also has Les Yaw's book *60 Years in Sitka*, an ideal complement) or through the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society by calling 747-3448 or emailing heritage@sitkamaritime.org. Copies of the dvd are \$10 unless you are in it. One dollar of each sale goes to a fund for reprinting Les Yaw's books. ❀

Sitka Boat Builder George Howard

by Rebecca Poulson

George Howard was a boat builder, one of several Alaska Native fisherman-boat builders in Sitka in the first half of the last century. Many of their vessels are still in use.

George Howard died of tuberculosis in 1956, at the age of 55. But he made an effort before he died to pass on his skills and love of boats to his sons; his son Glenn Howard recently shared some of his memories of working with his father.



The Howard family boat shop. The site is now part of the Seafood Producers Coop.
Howard family photo.

Glenn's father George Howard had probably learned to build boats from his own father, also named George Howard, and from his uncle Peter Simpson. These two men had begun building boats at the Cottages soon after the turn of the century. Both had attended Sheldon Jackson School, a Presbyterian mission school for Native children, and had married sisters, Lottie and Mary Sloan. The Cottages was a model settlement for former Sheldon Jackson students on Kelly and Metlakatla Streets, next to the Sitka National Historical Park.

This first George Howard, Glenn's grandfather, built his own home and boat shop at the north end of Katlian Street around 1913, where he built and repaired boats with his sons, David and George. He died some time before 1940, when his sons rebuilt the shop as the large, sparsely-built structure many Sitkans still remember, that stood until 1990.

Glenn Howard was born in 1934, the third of sixteen children. He remembers his father stood only about five foot eight, but was remarkably strong - Glenn tells how, even as a big young man of 17, he still could not keep up with his father caulking boats (pounding caulking into the boat's seams). He remembers his father "lighting his Camel cigarettes saying, 'hurry up, hurry up, the tide's coming in,' " because Glenn was still three rows behind him.

He never met his grandfather, but remembers Peter Simpson, who he called Grandpa, coming often to the shop to talk to his father. Simpson would also teach the children about the Bible, and the importance in life of good manners.

George Howard was mainly a fisherman, and his sons were his regular crew. In those days before hydraulics Glenn says "you worked." They fished for halibut in May, "out among the albatross," where the only land they could see was the tip of Mt. Edgecumbe and Mt. St. Elias. Power for

winch was by chain drive from the engine, but they would sometimes have to pull their lines by hand. Seining in the summer was also a lot of work, with long nets and a dozen or more sets in a day.

The boats Glenn remembers include a 46-foot cruiser his father took down to the keel then rebuilt. Glenn would clean up after school, and would find pennies in the shavings between the ribs. He later figured out they had been put there for him to find, which explained the grins on the faces

of the men working there.

During World War II, when he was quite young, Glenn went with his father by shore boat to caulk barges and do other work for the Navy on Japonski Island. Everyone was frisked and Glenn had his pocket knife, which he used to cut oakum (a heavy-duty caulking material), taken away.

Glenn also remembers later going to "break out" his father from the Alice Island TB sanitarium (opened after the war, replaced in 1950 by the Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital). He and his brother had been instructed by their father to meet him after dark, with a skiff, and they took him home.

Glenn tells how his brother Louie was also diagnosed with TB and had to leave school. He was fortunate enough to recover, after spending the spring and summer among the islands, and drinking "gallons" of a medicinal tea their mother made from plants like devil's club and Hudson Bay tea.

Most of the materials George Howard used were Douglas fir and oak that came up on the steamers, but Glenn remembers one yellow cedar bow stem he worked on after school. His father roughed it out and "had that adze *really* sharp," so that it was "easy" for Glenn to follow his father's lines. Glenn would also put the caulking bevel on planks, which "had to be just right." His father told him a good boatbuilder would use 2/3 of his wood in the planking, in order to have good lines of planking. (If you tried to use a straight board, in order to get the most out of your wood, it would make a crazy line on the curved hull of the boat. The board has to be cut into a curving shape in order to make a nice line on the boat.)

The *June K* was a 48-foot seiner built for Charlie Bennett of Angoon, launched in 1945. Glenn says his father and his crew worked 18-hour days to finish the boat in just 18 months because "the guy wanted to go fishing!" That boat

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is no longer around, but the Jenny, a 37-foot troller, is still fishing out of Sitka. The Jenny was built in 1947 for Nestor Laakso. The boat was later purchased by George Sarvella, after the boat was found washed up at Sinitsin Island. Glenn's brother George said Oscar Isaacson completed the boat when their father was too sick to work on it. Isaacson or Laakso stacked and restacked the planking as he treated it with diesel, a technique Glenn still uses. "So it smells – it lasts a long time."

The *Göta* is also still in Sitka - a 40-foot troller built for Oscar Isaacson in 1950. According to Glenn's brother George (in an interview in 1988) she was completed by Richard Peters, again due to George Howard's illness, and the builder's certificate is signed by Andrew Hope. Andrew Hope, a prolific Sitka boat builder, was married to George Howard's sister Tillie, and had his own shop, which is still standing, south of Murray Pacific.

Most of George Howard's boats were built from carved red cedar half models. Glenn remembers the half model his father carved for the *Göta's* hull. His father cut it into sections, one section for each foot of the actual boat, which is quite a bit more than is usual. He made patterns for all the ribs on the floor, and steamed the ribs and clamped them to molds there, also an unusual technique. George Howard also built twin 27-foot cabin cruisers in the shop, the *Lucky Lady* and the *Danny Boy*. Cabins were built by eye.

The shop was built in 1940, replacing a much smaller one. The *Princeton Hall* was built in the new shop in 1941. An extension had to be added on for this 65-foot yacht, built as a mission boat for the Presbyterian Church and Sheldon Jackson School. Andrew Hope signed the builder's certificate, and he was also building a boat in his own shop at the same time. Other workers included Sheldon Jackson School students, including Roy Bailey, who worked on the boat half-days as part of their vocational training.

Other boats built before Glenn was old enough to participate include the *New England*, 1935; the *Betty K*, 1940; and the *Denny Jo*, some time in the early 1940s.

George Howard tried to teach his son about boat design, pointing out how the bow waves and wakes of boats they would pass indicated the hydrodynamics of the hull shape.



The *June K*, built by George Howard in 1945. Original photo on the wall at the Pioneer Bar.

"You see that one is pushing the ocean. You could put a million horsepower on it and it would never catch up to its own bow wave." His experience halibut fishing probably informed his preference for deep-draft boats. He told Glenn a boat with 25 percent of the boat under water was not seaworthy. He said fifty percent of the boat under water gives you a 50 -50 chance of making it in bad weather, the ride depending on the shape of the stern. He preferred double enders or horse-shoe sterns, for more control in a following sea. He said the "cut-off" or square stern dragged water. He also told Glenn the boat needed to have a v-shape on the bottom, and not a "bathtub" shape, so that it would "cut the water."

Glenn remembers what may have been his last project at the shop under his father, which was to add flare to the bow of a troller for Tommy Jackson. They used threaded rod and bolts to force the ribs into the new shape, then replaced the ribs and planking. The flare keeps the bow from plunging as far in rough seas.

They hauled and launched boats on a wood cradle, made of 12x12 timbers, up a heavily-greased wooden skid. There was also a tidal grid alongside the shop.

Glenn inherited his father's love of building boats, and built his own boats in the shop after his father's death. He built the 25-foot *Captain Kidd* using all hand tools, just because he preferred using his "hand and arm." He also built the 35-foot *Miss Howard* after his shifts at the Alaska Lumber and Pulp mill – coming home at 10:30 or 11 knowing exactly what the next piece of wood would look like. (He says he made his wife into a "boat widow.") He has also built six 16-foot plywood skiffs, and four 8-foot punts that he could build in just four hours. He also built cabins on boats - one friend told him years later the cabin he built "made it look like a boat."

Most of his work he did for himself or friends, who would buy the plywood. Glenn did do some work for money but found that "it's hard to get the money from some guys." So now he does it for friends, not for money. "I feel like what goes around, comes back – I like to see them smiling – looking at me, trying to figure out what I'm thinking." Last summer, 2008, he built a cabin on a friend's boat, in his yard on Merrill Street. "You want to make something that's stronger than what's put on by the factory – something my dad showed us. How to do it." ❀

Alaska Day Black Cod

The SMHS will once again sell grilled black cod tips and rice lunches at the Crescent Harbor shelter on Alaska Day, October 18th, from 11 a.m. to 2 or until sold out.

Come join us for this tasty, rare treat. Dvds and t-shirts will also be for sale.

WhaleFest

The SMHS will have a booth at WhaleFest at Harrigan Centennial Hall November 6-8, with t-shirts, dvds, a fine art print of a watercolor of the boathouse by Nancy Taylor Stonington, and historical displays. WhaleFest has become a Sitka tradition, with educational speakers, special events, and even a Maritime Monthly Grind.

Goods

Pigment-dyed T-shirts with woodcut image of shore boat Donna on the boatshop ways. \$25 for long sleeve and \$20 for short sleeve shirts, or \$20 and \$16 for members.

Pyramid Cannery label T-shirts are also still available.



Large, heavy-duty natural cotton tote with boathouse image. \$25, or \$20 for members.

Hats with embroidered picture of the shore boat Arrowhead. Oilskin caps, black or brown are \$25, and cotton caps, in tan, blue or red, are \$20, or \$20 and \$16 for members.

Limited edition print of Nancy Taylor Stonington painting of the boathouse is \$95.



New! 27-minute **DVD of Sheldon Jackson School in the 1930s**, filmed and narrated by Les Yaw, is \$10. A dollar goes back to a fund to republish Les Yaw's books.

All items can be mailed. Send a check, including \$2 per item for postage, to the SMHS, P. O. Box 2153, Sitka Alaska 99835.

Artifact Donations

The SMHS would like to thank Michael Bezekoff for contributing a matchbook cover, dark blue with "Naval Air Station Sitka Alaska" and an image of an amphibious plane printed in gold, and a 1946 Canadian nickel. These were found by his son when remodeling a building on the former Naval base.

Emma Kohler donated two framed photos of shore boats, in honor of her late husband Carroll Kohler, who used to run them. Both are of the shore boat Donna, coming in to the float next to the old Sitka Cold Storage. One seems to be a rare view of the shore boat taken from the bridge while it was under construction. The shore boats were the ferries between Japonski Island and Sitka, so didn't run once the bridge was completed in 1972.

boathouse property (the dock will be about midway between the boathouse and the city work float) were finally implemented in the fall of 2008, just in time for the worldwide financial crisis. Delta Western is delaying construction until next winter, 2010-11, opening for business in May, 2011.

Fuel distributor Delta Western will build and operate the dock, with underground fuel storage tanks that will be refilled from bulk storage elsewhere. They will pay the SMHS a minimum of \$50,000 and a cap of \$75,000 per year, which will go to hiring the SMHS's first staff.



New - Donate On Line

The Sitka Maritime Heritage Society is pleased to be a participant in the 2010 Pick.Click.Give. program, which allows Alaskans to contribute directly to nonprofits through the Permanent Fund Dividend program. It is fast, easy, and safe. Your donation to the SMHS will be used to create a working maritime heritage center, preserving maritime heritage and perpetuating maritime skills for the next generation.

Your contribution will give you the same membership benefits as the old fashioned methods. Also consider using this convenient opportunity to make an additional gift to the SMHS.

When you sign up on line for your PFD in January, choose "The Gift of Giving," then go to our region, and Sitka Maritime Heritage Society. Don't forget to add your contact information so the SMHS can acknowledge your gift.

Fuel Dock Update

Zoning changes to allow operation of a fuel dock at the



The Japonski Island Boathouse, a painting by Nancy Taylor Stonington, 2004. Limited edition prints of this painting are available for \$95 from the SMHS with all profits benefiting the heritage center.

The board of the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society is comprised of: Matt Hunter, Linda Blankenship (Secretary), Mike Litman (Treasurer), Jerry Dzugan, Jan Steinbright, Rebecca Poulson (President), Mark Gorman and Joe D'Arienzo (Vice President).

Japonski Island Boathouse Rehabilitation

The Sitka Maritime Heritage Society is working to raise \$1.4 million to rehabilitate the historic Japonski Island boat shop as a working maritime heritage center, with boat repair, oral history, activities and exhibits. The SMHS has been awarded a prestigious Save America's Treasures grant of \$325,000, and is actively seeking private foundation and government grants. Local support, your membership and donation, is the keystone of the project, leveraging further funding and showing that we value maritime heritage.

As a member, you will receive the newsletter and a 20% discount on t-shirts and other goods, and you will be a part of preserving Alaska's maritime heritage.

The SMHS is a 501 (c)3 nonprofit so your donation is tax deductible.

If you would like to join or renew, or donate to the building fund, please fill out the form below and return it, along with your check, to:

**Sitka Maritime Heritage Society
P. O. Box 2153
Sitka, Alaska 99835**

I would like to get my newsletter by email regular mail

Name _____

Address _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

\$15 Students and Elders

\$30 Crew member

\$40 Entire Crew (family)

\$50 Mate

\$100 Navigator

\$250 Captain

\$500 Pilot

\$1000 Old Salt

Other _____

In addition to my membership I would like to make a donation of \$ _____ to the building fund.

Thank You!

If you received this newsletter by mail, your most recent membership expiration date is above your address. If there is no date, your membership expired more than one year ago.

**Sitka Maritime Heritage Society
P. O. Box 2153
Sitka, Alaska 99835**