



Photo credit James Poulson

# Sitka Maritime Heritage Society

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## Looking Locally

At SMHS, we often have conversations about boats and boat projects with our members and folks who know we are interested in that type of thing. In a small fishing-oriented city like Sitka, that means we are talking boats A LOT of the time. And we love it! For this issue of the SMHS newsletter, we're going to share some of the projects that have come to our notice recently, such as Mark Howey's skiff building endeavor and the repair of Dewey Torgeson's fishing vessel *The Republic* in Seattle's Fishing Vessel Owners Marine Ways.

We are also including a review of local author Ron Rau's latest book, *As the Gurdy Turns*, by local author John Straley. Double-author fun! And we're sharing events, plans and more for SMHS and 2013. Look for our monthly work parties and our Summer Cruise Fundraiser July 5th!

### Summer Projects at the Boathouse!

Our goals for the season include running electricity to the workshop side of the building, building a new landing and stairs for the entryway, testing the mobility of the boat cradle, and creating a usable workspace for public workshops. Our volunteers have been phenomenal at helping us to meet these goals— check out photos and updates from this year's work parties on our website!

[www.sitkamaritime.org](http://www.sitkamaritime.org)



## Documenting the F/V Republic

by Andrew T. Washburn  
of Seattle's Center for Wooden Boats  
Photos by Abby Ipanbutr

**For years** The Center for Wooden Boats has been the unofficial “historical society” of Seattle’s inner waterways. CWB has been documenting the remaining and still vital working waterfront on Lake Union and Salmon Bay. This spring photographer Abby Ipanbutr invited me down to Fishermen’s Terminal. Abby spent much of her free time this winter capturing images of the regular maintenance of the halibut longline fleet at Fishing Vessel Owners Marine Ways (FVO).

Just inside the doors of the FVO woodshop I struggled to lift a block of wood on the floor. The density was astounding and weight unexpected. I let slip an explicative. Marvin, an FVO Shipwright, chuckled and said something to the effect of “pretty hard stuff, huh.” The block was an off cut from the new gumwood stem he was shaping for F/V *Republic*. She sat, cradled on the ways a hundred feet away.

About one hundred years ago, *Republic* sat similarly on marine ways awaiting launch. She was

one of at least seven vessels built by John Strand’s shipyard in 1913. Today the site of his shipyard, 28<sup>th</sup> Ave in Ballard, is a street end marina and gathering place for some of Seattle’s more colorful characters of questionable intentions. Between 1910 and 1914, 52 halibut schooners ranging from about 50 to 90 feet in length were built in Puget Sound shipyards, mostly in Seattle and most of those in Ballard. It was truly a boom for the community which had just recently been absorbed by Seattle.

These were different boats than anyone had built before. While the influences on the design of these vessels can clearly be seen: steam-powered coastwise freighters, Gloucester cod schooners, pelagic sealers, and Norwegian fish boats, the combination of influences and the emergence of new materials and technologies created a Pacific Northwest original, built to work hard and come home safe from the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea.

It is difficult to call Strand and his Seattle and Tacoma

contemporaries “naval architects.” There is little or no record of any formal training. It is not even clear whether they created plans for these vessels. Yet it is a testament to their skill that later, formally trained engineers and naval architects copied the basic shapes of these early boats.

There were many necessities and opportunities driving the emergence of the halibut schooner form: depletion of inshore halibut banks, opening of eastern markets with refrigeration and railroads, abundance of Douglas fir, and the advent of the marine gasoline engine. All these factors—as well as those more recent—are illustrated in the form of vessels like F/V *Republic*. New bulwarks, bait sheds, electronics, hydraulics have made fishing safer and more efficient. Yet it is astounding that the most important part of the boat (the part in the water) has not been improved upon. The viability of boats like *Republic*, *Vansee*, *Tordenskjold*, *Seymour*, *Polaris* and others illustrate the subtle and humble genius of Puget Sound’s



fish boat builders of early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the business management of vessel owners, and the shipwrights who maintained them over the last one hundred years in the boatyards of Washington, British Columbia and Southeast Alaska.

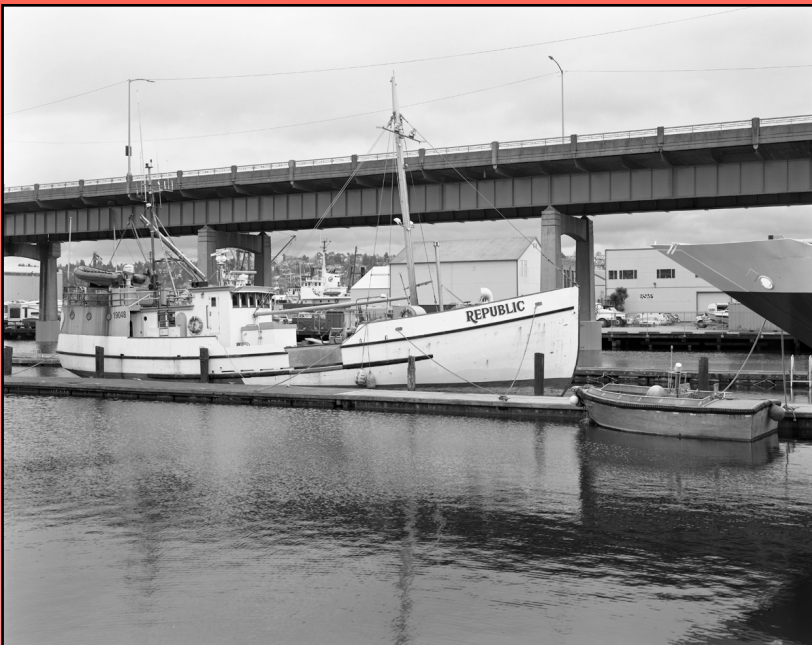
In the 1980s and 1990s Harold Lokken, the retired manager of the Fishing Vessel Owners Association (FVOA), created an inventory of all the halibut schooners operating in the North Pacific past and present. At the time several dozens of these historic vessels were still active. Today only a handful of schooners are still engaged in the halibut, black cod, or other fisheries. The Center for Wooden Boats in partnership with FVOA (celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2014) and with support from King County cultural affairs agency, 4Culture, is undertaking a project to celebrate over 100 years

of this unique, fishery through the collection of oral histories, photo-documentation, and a survey of historic halibut boats (schooners, as well as “house-forward”). The primary conduit for this effort will be an exhibition at CWB’s headquarters in Seattle’s fast growing South Lake Union neighborhood, in 2014 to coincide with the centennial of the founding of FVOA.

However, CWB considers this just the beginning and hopes to lead a regional effort to see watercraft like *F/V Republic* and her sisters appreciated and celebrated as unique examples of innovation, design, and



engineering excellence. This might be an uphill battle in a city like Seattle—intoxicated with the promise of high-tech industries. Maybe not though, halibut is still the best tasting fish at the market!



Andrew T. Washburn is the historical projects manager for The Center for Wooden Boats and a periodic volunteer for the Cape Decision Lighthouse Society. Contact Andrew for more information or to add to this ambitious project by emailing: [awashburn@cwbo.org](mailto:awashburn@cwbo.org).

Abby Inpanbutr is a photographer and exhibition designer whose work is helping to preserve important pieces of the maritime history of the North Pacific.



Photo credit Robert Woolsey

## Ron Rau's *As the Gurdy Turns*

A Review by John Straley

### Book Review

Ron Rau is the Izaak Walton of multiple-hook fish slayers and his new collection of short fishing stories were written for commercial fishing journals or national sporting magazines. Their subject matter is largely the lifestyle of people operating salmon trollers, and bottom fish long liners in the southeastern Alaskan fleet, during the late seventies through the early two thousands. He covers politics, prices, weather, hunting, interpersonal imbroglios, and mostly the pure sensual joy and challenge of commercial fishing itself.

I loved this book, but let me say right off, that the closer you are to the subject matter, the more likely you are going to enjoy it. So if you fished in Alaska during those years I expect you will lap up every page, but if you have, “never gutted a humpy” or have never known what a humpy was, or cared, you may have wished Ron Rau had employed a more heavy handed editor, but then, like a lot of good things in this life, maybe this book was not meant for you.

Here is why this book is worth reading even if you never gutted a humpy. Not only does *AS THE GURDY TURNS* brim with wit, and a great voice, but Ron Rau has that rare thing in a writer which is fine judgment in finding the telling detail. He recreates the world of the docks and the boats, the bars, the smells, the hoochies and the gear so accurately that I’m tempted to say that a person digging this book out of the library in a hundred years could almost recreate his world from scratch if need be.

Now why might that be more than an nostalgic exercise? Why is *AS THE GURDY TURNS* in fact, an important addition to the historical record? Well... There is a lot of talk in the flossy progressive salons these days about “resiliency”. (It used to be “sustainability” but that fell out of favor because it didn’t allow enough change for the young folks I guess.) The term that I have always liked to put forward in the face of the soul sucking materialism of the “other world” represented by “the lower 48” that I both love and hate is the “Paleolithic Counter Revolution.” The true subsistence peoples of the circumpolar north and the small boat fishermen in my minds eye are the

last true representatives of this Paleolithic Counter Revolution, the pushback against the corporate loss of individualism. So, this book, *AS THE GURDY TURNS* happens to be both entertaining and funny, and a fine and detailed book of history about how people live by their own labor, free on the ocean, operating as hunters and gatherers, and as it turns out that may be a very rare and important thing in the history of this tired old world.

But you don’t have to worry folks, for Ron Rau does not have a pretentious bone in his body and he does not write one pretentious or weighty sentence in his important book. BUT Rau does have a dirty little secret to reveal here. He is a fine a nature writer as ever read at a flossy progressive think tank. His story of goose hunting on Prince of Wales Island is almost transcendental in the classical sense: the description of the woods, the hunt, the approach of the geese and their breaking over the trees was written by an alert and fully attentive mind, aware of the wonder and beauty of the moment that he was living in. This piece of writing was written by a soulful poet and don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.

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# Support for 2013

We would love to update our database with your support, and continue 2013 with a full membership response!

How can you give? It's easy!

- Through our secure website: [www.sitkamaritime.org](http://www.sitkamaritime.org)
- Mail in the last page of this newsletter with your information and contribution.
- Choose SMHS on Pick.Click.Give.

What does your financial support contribute to?

Oral History Program

Boathouse Restoration

Ground-Source Heat Pump Installation

Maritime History Documentation

Educational Programs

See our website for details on all of the SMHS projects and plans!

[www.sitkamaritime.org](http://www.sitkamaritime.org)



Worn out your favorite SMHS shirt or cap? Order another through our email: [sitkamaritime@gmail.com](mailto:sitkamaritime@gmail.com)

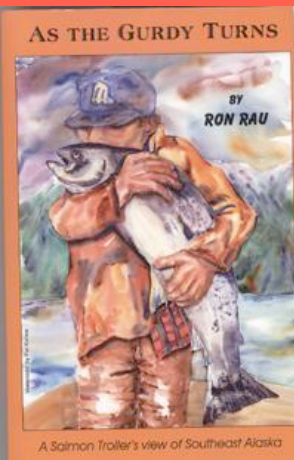


Members receive a 20% discount!

## *Book Review, continued from page 4*

There will be lots of books coming from the troll fleet in the coming years. Just look in the blogosphere and there is great stuff out there now. But Ron Rau has got the jump on many of them because he got there early, he packed his lunch and he had his gear out, working the waters. All of us who wonder how human beings can live on this earth from their own labor, by their own wit will be grateful for Ron's work not only for doing it but for chronicling it in this, readable, and entertaining book. Highly recommended, in any format, for cash money or in trade for gold, fish or firewood.

John Straley is a poet, crime writer and private investigator. He was Alaska's 12<sup>th</sup> Alaska Writer Laureate. In the interest of full disclosure Mr. Straley has had occasional social interaction with Ron Rau over the last thirty years but has never shared a meal or a drink with him. Neither of them is quite sure how this is possible but this goes to show that all writers who drink are not the same kind of drinking writers.



## AS THE GURDY TURNS

by RON RAU

Comet Publishing, 2013

Available at Sitka's Old Harbor Books and bookstores throughout Alaska





## Mark Howey's Backyard Dory

*Photos and story by Ashia Lane*



**Mark Howey** spends a lot of time in the backyard of his Sitka home. More specifically, he spends a lot of time in the shed in his backyard, where he's working on one of his hobbies, boat building.

Mark grew up on Camano Island, Washington, and has lived in Alaska since 1972. So you could say that he has always been around boats. In the 1970's he began carving models of fishing boats. Friends encouraged him to try building actual boats, no doubt noticing Mark's abilities as a wood worker and craftsman. Now, some 40 years later, Mark is close to completing his third hand-built dory.

Realizing that this was going to be a lengthy project, Mark first had to build a workshop. He built a comfortable shed in the backyard of the home he shares with wife Susie, and has followed up that project by spending a good portion of the past two years inside the shed working on a 14'2" Swampscott Dory. It's a modified design of the traditional 19th century fishing boat used by coastal Massachusetts fishermen. This style of rowed boat was intended for beach launch and was capable of holding large amounts of fish in all weather conditions. Mark obtained the basic boat design from *The Dory Book*, by John Gardner, which is a comprehensive book about dories,

with their history and full construction designs for 23 boats.

Mark used purchased fir and red cedar from Prince of Wales Island in place of the plans-suggested oak, as they are more readily available and affordable. Some of the fir is actually salvaged scraps from his son Bert's boat. Mark used the lapstrake method of building, in which the edges of the hull planks overlap and the plank edges are joined. He also used hundreds of copper rivets, and a bit of glue for practical purposes—"A perfectionist wouldn't use glue" but Mark feels okay with his decision after two years of building!

*Cont. on page 7*



## SMHS SUMMER CRUISE!

Join us for our summer fundraiser as we cruise around St. Lazaria Island on one of Allen Marine's most comfortable boats. Local historian Matthew Hunter will be on hand to talk about Fort Babcock, and SMHS will provide light snacks and coffee. Come aboard for a beautiful evening cruise during the holiday weekend!

**JULY 5th • 6pm- 8:30pm**

**Tickets \$45, available at Old Harbor Books**



Photo credit Ashia Lane

## SMHS Projects and Events

We're getting new stairs! Thanks to Pat Hughes and board member Joe D'Arienzo, who have been hard at work constructing new a new set of stairs and landing for the front door of the boathouse, and board member Mike Litman, who is fabricating a safe hand rail. You can expect to see the installation this next month!

Along with some of our AMAZING volunteers, SMHS board members and staff have also been getting busy with monthly work parties. Between April and May, we were able to clean out the rail ways area of the Japonski Island boathouse, getting down to the floor! We waded through a lot of debris and trash, and found some neat items to add to our "junk" collection.



Our June 15th work party will focus on cleaning up the property— after all of this nice weather we've had, there seem to be some weeds looking for attention. Join us in your best work clothes and gloves and help clean up the boathouse! Starting at 9am.

And we are planning a Maritime Day BBQ in July! The boathouse will be open, and we will host fun activities for kids and adults, including AMSEA's Water Safety Station. Bring the family and celebrate all things maritime with us!

### *Backyard Dory, continued*

The dory has two rowing stations and will have a small motor, as the boat is intended for recreational purposes. Mark adjusted the angle of the transom to be more upright in order to hold the motor properly, and used strong purple heart wood for reinforcement as well as aesthetic value. The stern knee is also purple heart. Mark built a steam box outside of the shed for bending the cedar planks, and used an easy setup with a tea kettle, steaming half a plank at a time.

Mark says the design adjustments were a bit tricky, but he's the "trial and error type" and seems to have endless patience for this project. He had a tiny bit of help from friends and his son Bert (who attended boat building school), but for the most part, Mark has completed the dory on his own, working around a few structural setbacks and other challenges. He still has the top edge to add, seating, and some small steam-bent frames, but considering the pace of the project to date, Mark feels fairly confident that he will launch the dory this summer. He shared his progress points: the first winter of building, there weren't any planks. The second winter, there were a few planks. But this past winter has been the most productive and he can see the end in sight, and expects to be painting the dory in no time at all.

