

32' Albany Boat Company runabout *Corin*

(2000.012)

Artifact Overview

Emmett Smith, 5/2012

Boat Type: Split-cockpit Runabout

Length: 32' Beam: 7' 6"

Date Built: 1923-6

Builder: Albany Boat Company

Model: R-32

Designer: John L. Hacker / Elliott Gardner

Original Power: Sterling Dolphin

Current Power: Scripps 208

Abstract:

Corin is a hard-chine split-cockpit runabout from the 1920s. Though a typical form for the period, due to its provenance the boat is a rare survival. Only two of this make and model are known to exist. Further, this boat was designed, or at least its basic nature derives from, John L Hacker. Little is known about the early history of this particular boat, but it has had three (3) known owners prior to ABM. It has had at least one major high-cost restoration including substantial material replacement, and some details appear to have been altered. The engine is not original to the model but is period correct and is itself a very rare item. Overall, this boat is a large, rare runabout in very good condition. *Corin* was donated to ABM by Bill Kaiser in 2000.

Model Provenance:

The brand name Albany Boat Company was launched in 1916, a joint venture between John L Hacker NA and Leon L Tripp, a businessman from Albany. It was a successor to the first Hacker Boat Company founded by John L. Hacker in 1913. Hacker was the firm's designer, and produced a number of models for the initial public launch of the company in 1916. In 1917 Hacker was forced to sell his share due to poor health. Hacker moved back to Detroit, and subsequently re-started a new firm under his own name once again, the more long-lasting Hacker Boat Company. The company he left behind in New York continued as The Albany Boat Company run by his former business partner and continued to build boats to Hacker's original drawings as well as new models which nevertheless show lineage to Hacker's lines and theories.

The initial models in various lengths were long-decked runabouts, hard-chine but of the "auto-boat" configuration popular with semi-displacement launches. *Corin* is a split-cockpit design designated R-32 and first introduced in 1923. It was powered by a 6-cylinder Sterling Dolphin engine, at the time a premium racing engine.

Albany is often associated with Hacker, its founder and possibly the best-known designer of hard-chine runabouts of the time. Hacker perhaps overshadows the more fundamental contributions of Elliott Gardner, who was a subsequent Naval Architect for the firm and developed its best-known models, including the R-32. It is clear that he learned from and adapted the planing surface designs of Hacker, but there are very distinctive elements such as the deeply swept sheerline and double-tumbled transom that

must be his own. These give *Corin* a high bow and very seakindly appearance for a hard-chine runabout. More research is needed, but it seems likely if not certain that Elliott Gardner was the son of William Gardner, NA, who was active from 1888-1925 and was one of the most celebrated Naval Architects of his generation in steam and sailing yachts.

Albany Boat Company was early in the marketplace as a builder of hard-chine runabouts, and Albany boats were expensive, well-thought-of and considered a premium brand. However, the firm seems to have been outcompeted by the much larger and lower-cost factory builders from the Midwest through the 1920s. They also were slow to introduce smaller and more affordable models, producing mostly runabouts over 30'. This may have made it more difficult for the company to recover from over-inventory after the market crash of 1929. The company ceased operations in 1932.

Individual History:

Nothing is known about the first owners of *Corin*. The train of ownership variously states the year of manufacture as 1923, 26, or even 28. There is no independent verification. Best guess is 1926.

Restoration History:

The boat was restored by Alan Firth in the late 1990s. Research was done including extensive contact with Bruce Hall and John Ford, who restored a boat of the same model in the mid-1990s. The restoration included replacement of most of the deck and coamings, but retained much of the original topside planking. Judging by the fairness and tight bilges it looks like much of the bottom planking has been replaced. The engine, a Scripps 208, was put in the boat at that time. The boat was given a "California bottom", a layer of fiberglass cloth over the bottom which ends at the bootstripe.

Carpentry is high-quality. The fiberglass bottom is well-done, fair and with no blisters. The selection of the engine, manufacture of custom hardware for the convertible tops, hand-stitched flags, and other details indicate a cost-high restoration effort, as would be expected for such a rare boat.

Historic Accuracy:

The Museum has had no direct contact with those who restored the boat. On the whole, the restoration seems to have been careful and accurate.

Certain details seem to be different than the original Albany boats of this model. However, given how long the model was produced, it could be that these details are accurate to the year of the boat's manufacture, or were done to suit the needs of an individual buyer. The covering boards are stepped at the back of the forward cockpit, with the engine compartment being wider than the cockpit. This creates a small corner, where the sidelights sit. This detail is not seen in any Albany literature at ABM, though it does look well on the boat. Likewise, the boat has forward and rear windshields and convertible tops. No such configuration is pictured in Albany literature, but several other likely custom cockpit covers are shown, so this too could be original. (The rear windshield and convertible top are not currently mounted on the boat.)

It seems likely that the topsides were painted during restoration to avoid the need for topside plank replacement. Albany literature clearly shows painted boats being part of their manufacture, so this detail is correct to the type if not to the individual boat.

Forward and rear cockpits are carpeted, which they certainly would not have been. The forward windshield, which is new, seems to be taller than those seen on other Albanys. This could have been done to realize more headroom under the convertible top.

Ownership History:

Alan Firth, Lou & Martin Smith, Bill Kaiser. Last run by Bill Kaiser in the summer of 2000.

Condition:

Corin has apparently had little use and been well-cared-for since her restoration, and is in very good condition. Her varnish has aged slightly but is intact. The topside paint retains its gloss. It has no dings or scratches. Some cracks in the paint reveal filled areas that may be moving slightly. Bilges are dry and clean, engine clean and free. The fiberglass is tight with no blisters, only very slight delamination at the edge above the waterline at the transom.

Corin's last full survey was in 1997, performed by Larry Balcom for Martin Smith and Bill Kaiser. It found the boat in very good condition, and included a running test to 2200 rpm.

Engine:

The Scripps 208 currently installed in the boat deserves mention in and of itself, since it is a rare and remarkable motor. When they can be found these engines are very expensive, and the selection of this motor shows some seriousness on the part of the restorer. Albany did use Scripps motors according to literature, but there is no indication that this model was ever used or put into the R-32. However, this model is of the exact vintage, 1926, of the boat and is very like the Sterling Dolphin. Both are straight six engines in blocks of two of roughly the same displacement. The Scripps is also more reliable and less complex than the Dolphin.

Deaccession Recommendation:

This boat has been recommended for Deaccession as a duplicate to *Weneederagin* (1998.010). *Corin* is an unusual boat to deaccession, being so uncommon and in such good condition. However, she is a duplicate, and *Weneederagin* was selected for retention because she is more original and has a known history in the Adirondacks. It has been noted that *Corin* is in slightly better condition, but from the point of view of conservation it makes the best sense to retain *Weneederagin* for the collection. Retention of both boats was considered, but their size is a challenge, and it would be good to have one of this model in the collector community as well as in the Museum.

Estimated value:

Current market conditions make estimating the value of a boat like this difficult. The appraised value at donation was \$149,000 over ten years ago. In 2006 or 7, a boat of this size, power, and rarity would be in the range of \$225,000-\$275,000. However, this sector of the market—large, rare, production models—seems to have fallen by the greatest amount. One-off custom boats and race-boats of the same period have

retained or increased their value, while smaller, more common runabouts have dipped by a smaller percentage. After some asking around, a reasonable list price would be around \$160,000. However, if we would like the boat to move quickly it is recommended that we list the boat for a more modest \$130,000.