



WCHM News

Newsletter of the Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum



Cichanowski Donates Early Royalex

Just as the aluminum canoe replaced the wooden canoe at the end of the Second World War, in the 1970s plastics technology transformed the canoe industry and made the aluminum canoe obsolete. At the time Uniroyal had devised a vulcanized sheet laminate at their R&D facility in Stoughton, Wisconsin, which they envisioned for use in the automotive industry. But it was never applied there, and it eventually became “Royalex,” of which tens of thousands of canoes were fabricated by myriad American manufacturers until the mid-2000s.

The first Royalex canoe hulls, probably only a few dozen, were molded by Uniroyal at their plant in Warsaw, Indiana, then trimmed out and sold to their employees. After this experimental period, the decision was made to sell untrimmed hulls, known in the trade as “Warsaw Rockets,” to manufacturers to trim as they pleased. Eventually Uniroyal made and sold Royalex sheet to manufacturers, who did their own hull molding.

An early Royalex Canoe, circa 1970s, has been donated to the Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum by Mike and Linda Cichanowski, founders of Wenonah Canoes in Winona, Wisconsin. It is one of the very earliest Royalex canoes, molded and assembled by Uniroyal and sold to a Stoughton employee. Still in good condition after nearly 50 years, it shows hull skin splits and blisters that plagued the first Royalex sheets. But once perfected, there is no doubt that Royalex changed canoeing, making this canoe an important part of canoe evolution and history.

Miller Donates Trailcraft Kit Canoe

For many a young person throughout the 1960s and 70s, making your own recreational equipment was the mantra of the day. Lacking the financial means to purchase finished equipment, they made their own from kits that were available from popular brands of the day, like Heathkit radios, Frostline clothing and camping gear, and in the case of Tim Miller and his brother Steve of Florence, Wisconsin, Trailcraft Canoes.

Tim has now donated his 1966 square stern “Trailblazer Canoe” to the Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum, along with the original purchase documents, including twenty-five pages of assembly instructions and a “Canoeing Basics” pamphlet. Tim built the canoe along with his brother Steve from a kit they purchased from Trailcraft of Glasco, Kansas, for \$58.88.

“I would like to take a camping trip with you and dad, up into Canada with the station wagon, tent, and boat in tow. We could have a real cool time just fishing and hiking for a week or so,” Steve wrote his brother to entice him to join in building a canoe with him for a “summer project.” The canoe was used twice and then stored in a garage for the next 56 years. In September 2022 Tim met with WCHM Executive Director Jed Malischke to transfer the canoe to the museum as a representation of the canoe kits that opened the door to many a young person’s adventurism.





Wisconsin Historical Society Examines WCHM Dugouts As Part Of Study

The recent discovery of two ancient dugout canoes in Lake Mendota near Madison, Wisconsin, one dated as 1,200 years old and the other over 3,000 years old, has inspired the Wisconsin Historical Society to research all of the known dugout canoes in the state. Tamara Thomsen, Maritime Archaeologist for the State Historic Preservation Office, and Doctor Sissel Schroeder, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin Madison, two of the researchers for the WHS project, recently visited the Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum to examine the dugouts in its collection.

“The project is an attempt to document the provenance, acquisition history, conservation efforts, condition, measurements, and morphological description of all dugout canoes across Wisconsin,” explained Thomsen. “The effort includes recording handheld LiDAR scans, taking numerous photographs, and creating interactive 3D models. We also hope to take samples of the wood for species identification and radiocarbon dating.”

WCHM has two dugout canoes in its collections. One is a 14 foot dugout found in Bass Lake in Florence County, Wisconsin, some 70 years ago and was donated to WCHM by Russ Anderson in 2018. The other is a 13 foot dugout with decks, seats, a thwart, and gauge plugs. It was donated to WCHM in 2020 by John Gustafson of Wausau, Wisconsin.



The outcome of the project will be a written report describing all of the dugout canoes in the state, with sketches and images of the dugouts, and analyses of length, width, depth of hold, antiquity, wood type (with reference to pre-settlement vegetation), construction method, and associated artifacts. WCHM looks forward to working with WHS on the project.

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News Briefs & Upcoming Events

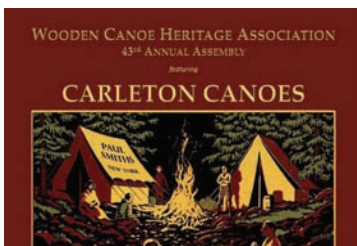


2022 Canoe Raffle Winner Jeff Mueller

Jeff Mueller from Edgerton, Wisconsin, is the lucky winner of the 2022 WCHM canoe raffle. Jeff was a very early ticket buyer, making his annual contribution during Canoecon in Madison back in late February. “Canoecon is a big event in my household,” explained Jeff when he arrived at the museum to pick up his new canoe, “and getting a few raffle tickets at the WCHM booth is always on my list of things to do while there.” Jeff’s winning ticket was drawn during the post-dinner program at the third annual Canoe & Brew event held on Sunday September 25th at the Hunt Hill Audubon Sanctuary in Sarona. Jeff came by the museum in early October to take home a 16’ cedar canvas solo canoe built in the WCHM Canoe Shop in 2020 on the MacKenzie-Yost Nakoma form.

William “Bill” Miller 1945-2022

The family of William (Bill) Miller III of Nictau, New Brunswick, announced his passing on October 3, 2022. Bill was a master canoe builder, following in the footsteps of his grandfather, William (Vic) Miller I. Vic established Miller Canoes in 1925, with three generations of Millers having run it since, making it the oldest and longest operating canoe company in Canada. WCHM was honored in 2016 to have acquired three Miller Canoes, one from each generation: a 19ft Miller Canoe built in 1927 by Vic Miller I, making it one of the very earliest of Miller Canoes; a 16ft Miller Canoe built in 1971 by Jamie Miller, the last canoe he built; and a 19ft Miller Canoe built in 2005 by Bill Miller III, on the same form used for the 1927 model (having continuously used the same mold for over 78 years).



WCHA Assembly Returns To Paul Smiths in 2023

The Wooden Canoe Heritage Association (WCHA) has announced that its National Annual Assembly will return to Paul Smiths College in Paul Smiths, New York, on July 11-16, 2023. The theme of the 2023 event will be Carlton Canoes. In addition, the FreeStyle Paddlers group will hold their annual Adirondack Canoe Symposium in conjunction with the Assembly. Watch for more information at www.WoodenCanoe.org.

Shop Activity Slows During Fall Season

With the rise in available outdoor activities during the fall season, the indoor activity in the WCHM Canoe Shop usually seems to decline. Even so, there are three ongoing projects currently underway. Darwin Karl from Hayward, Wisconsin, is restoring a 1947 Old Town Orca. Gary Hermann of North Barrington, Illinois, is doing some minor repairs and recanvassing a 1912 Old Town Guide. And work is continuing by shop volunteers on restoration of a 17 foot Shell Lake Boat Company canoe for the Museum of Forest Service History in Montana.



Chicago Maritime Museum Connects With WCHM

Jim Jarecki, along with colleagues from the Chicago Maritime Museum visited the Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum in early November to establish a relationship between the museums. The Chicago Maritime Museum has a large collection of canoes and kayaks, many recently acquired from the Ralph Frese estate collection. “The majority of them are stored offsite,” explained Jarecki during the visit, “and we have a lot to learn about interpreting their history.” WCHM welcomes their interest in preserving canoe history.

Thank You to These Supporting Members

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Canoe & Brew Survives Windy and Rainy Reception

The Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum held its annual "Canoe & Brew" dinner event on Sunday September 25th at Hunt Hill Audubon Sanctuary in Sarona. The event serves as an end of the year celebration, a chance to display recent additions to the museum's collections, as well as an opportunity to draw the winner in the annual canoe raffle.

Weather hindered some of the outdoor activities, as intermittent rain showers, strong winds and even some hail forced some of the displays to be taken down and re-setup twice. The sixty plus guests still enjoyed sampling a brew or two from Round Man Brewing and wine tasting from Clarity Wine Shop, while listening to the lively music from The Hampden Rounders. A few folks took advantage of the canoes available at the Hunt Hill waterfront and took a fall colors paddle on Upper Twin Lake. Luckily the heavy rains didn't come until everyone had moved inside for the dinner catered by The Roost.

See You Next Year

The WCHM Exhibit Hall is now closed for the winter season, and will re-open again when it hosts the annual Canoe & Wooden Boat Show on Saturday May 27, 2023.



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