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Yachts restored

McMillen Yachts Inc. has found and restored a number of classic yachts, each one with a colorful past. Here are a few highlights:

■ **Anitra:** One of six 12-meter sailing yachts built for prominent members of the New York Yacht Club and a sister vessel to *Onawa*, the oldest-known 12 meter in the country. She was built in 1928 for Charles L. Harding of Boston, who sailed her out of Newport, R.I., and the Eastern Yacht Club in Marblehead, Mass.

■ **Alondra:** A 68-foot motor yacht, she was designed and built in 1927 by the J.M. Densmore Co. of Quincy, Mass. She was constructed of yellow pine planking on steam-bent white oak frames and originally was powered by a pair of six-cylinder Sterling gasoline marine engines. She sold for \$60,000 new.

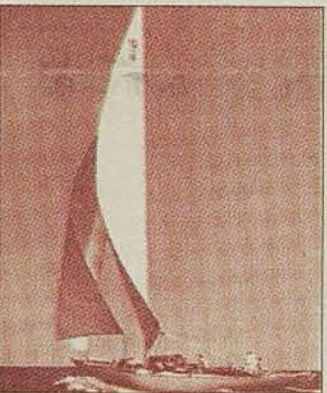


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Belle

■ **Belle:** Originally named *Madge III*, the 77-foot motor yacht was built in 1929 by the New York Yacht, Launch & Engine Co. for Lawrence H. Austin of the American Yacht Club in Rye, N.Y.

She changed hands and names a number of times through the years, and ultimately was bought by country music singer David Allan Coe, who defaulted on the note. McMillen Yachts Inc. bought and renamed her *Belle* in 1996, and she now operates out of Sea Island, Ga.



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Onawa

■ **Onawa:** Designed by naval architect W. Starling Burgess of Burgess, Rigg and Morgan, she was one of six nearly identical 12-meter yachts built for prominent members of the New York Yacht Club in 1928. She was built for W. Cameron Forbes of Boston and was sailed in the summer seasons out of Hadley Harbor. Later she was sold to Horace F. Smith of Philadelphia, who sailed her out of Jamestown, R.I., under the Conanicut Yacht Club burgee.

She was sold to an attorney in New London, Conn., during World War II, ultimately losing her lead keel to the war effort; it was used for submarine ballast.

After 1953 her history becomes vague, but she was found in 1991 by Dan Prentiss, who bought her and brought her to Newport, R.I., where she was restored by Earl McMillen and Will Lobb.

McMillen and others sailed her during the 150th anniversary of the America's Cup in Cowes, England.

■ **Zapala:** Built in 1913 by the New York Yacht, Launch & Engine Co. of Morris Heights, N.Y., for Joseph B. Cousins Esq. of the Manhasset Bay Yacht Club, the 60-foot gasoline-powered yacht was originally christened *SISPUD II*. Over the years she was operated by a number of people including James Adams, owner of James Adams Floating Theater, which towed her around to coastal towns throughout the south. She sank in Thunderbolt, Ga., in 1941. It was from those experiences that Edna Ferber wrote her novel *Showboat*, which later became a smash Broadway play.

* Photos courtesy of the Rosenfeld Collection, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.

Sprucing up old sails



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Onawa is the oldest known 12-meter sailing yacht in the United States. Built in 1928, she was one of six 12-meter yachts built for prominent members of the New York Yacht Club. She was built for W. Cameron Forbes of Boston.

Classic ladies get new leases on water

By JIM TATUM
Gazette staff writer

Since he was a small boy, Earl McMillen has been in love with boats.

Now in his mid-30s, McMillen has found a way to turn that love into a living.

McMillen, an Atlanta native and part-time Beaufort resident, owns McMillen Yachts Inc. He searches out old classic yachts, restores them to their original splendor, then sells fractional ownership partnerships in each vessel.

Fractional ownership, McMillen said, is essentially the same concept as time-sharing. People buy shares in a syndicate set up for a boat. In return for the initial purchase price plus a daily usage fee, partners are guaranteed use of the boat based on availability.

McMillen's group coordinates usage, upkeep, scheduling and all the myriad details of owning and maintaining a classic yacht.

The concept has also been successful with jets, particularly shared corporate jets, McMillen noted. In fact, he said, flex jet ownership is where he got the idea for classic yacht syndication.

One of McMillen's partners is Chuck Parrish, a Bluffton native who now lives in California. Parrish said the concept not only works well, it is in many ways better for the boats. Most people lead busy lives and don't have the time to keep up a classic yacht.

"It's actually worked out pretty well," Parrish said. "In the peak seasons, Earl is good at starting early and working with each one of us. And we try to accommodate each other as best we can."

"It actually is better for the boat," he continued. "They're better off when they're being used than when they sit idle. The arrangement also makes it economically possible to save these wonderful old boats."

McMillen founded his company in 1992. He completed the first syndication and restoration after finding *Zapala*, a 60-foot motor yacht built in 1913 and abandoned in a Maryland boatyard. He paid \$2,000 for the boat, organized its restoration, and now *Zapala* is quite busy, operating out of Sea Island, Ga., he said.

In fact, he has several restored boats that are active up and down the east coast, including *Belle*, a 77-foot motor yacht built in 1929.

But *Belle*, *Zapala* and others like them are becoming harder to find.

"These boats are disappearing," McMillen said. "They are difficult to maintain; they fall into disuse, and they just deteriorate. And many that we do find are just too far gone."

It's not enough to make a classic yacht seaworthy again; true restoration means going back to original materials, furnishings and infrastructure as much as possible, he said. Many of the old boats ultimately ended their days rotting in boatyards, their accouterments, from helmsman's wheels to instrument housing, long since salvaged, sold or simply pirated away, he said.

Other boats McMillen has found and restored include *Scout*, a 73-foot Defoe



Jim Tatum/Gazette

Elizabeth and Earl McMillen own a home on New Street.

express cruiser; *Alondra*, a 68-foot motor yacht built in 1927; and *Onawa*, built in 1928, the oldest known American 12-meter sailboat. The 12-meter was the class of sailing yachts raced in the America's Cup until 1986.

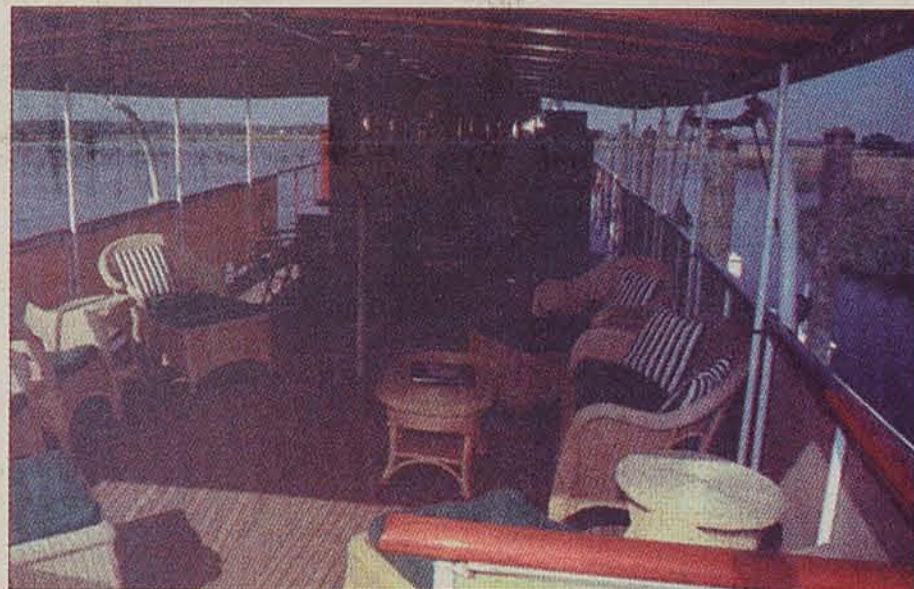
"We took *Onawa* to England last summer for the 150th anniversary of the America's Cup," McMillen said. "It was probably the first time she had been in the water in over 30 years. It was a very satisfying and exciting time."

Most recently, McMillen found and acquired *Freedom*, which turns out to be the sister yacht to *Sequoia*, the U.S. presidential yacht. *Freedom* came through Beaufort by barge on her way to Newport, R.I., where restoration work is under way.

While the boats are owned by syndicates of partners, they also hire out for one-time trial cruises.

"It gives people a taste of what they are considering investing in," McMillen said.

For more information, call 401-846-5557 or visit the Web site at www.wooden-yachts.com.



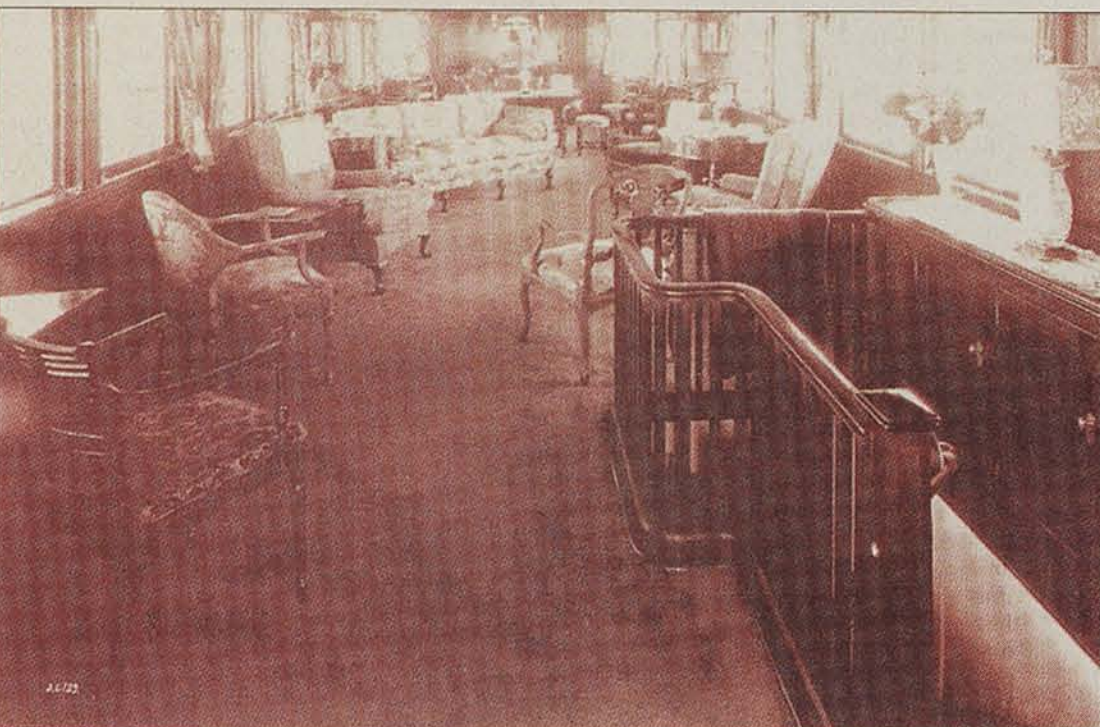
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The sun beats down on the deck of *Belle*. Originally named *Madge III*, the 77-foot motor yacht was built in 1929. She was once owned by country music singer David Allan Coe.



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The *Alondra* is a 68-foot motor yacht built in 1927.



The interior of *Freedom* is shown shortly after launching in 1926. Restoration is not yet finished on *Freedom*. She is the sister yacht to *Sequoia*, the U.S. presidential yacht.

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