

ISSUE 63

THE DEVICE

MAR 2024

DISPRO OWNERS

ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

*For latest news and updates
please regularly visit
our website at*

www.disproboats.ca

Photo: Armstrong Family Album

The propeller and skeg from newly restored Dispro "Early Times", a 1920 boat restored by Ron Armstrong over the winter of 1998/1999. See the photos inside documenting the project.



President's Letter • March 2024

The State of the Association

As of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) on April 28, 2024 in Gravenhurst, I will pass from the Presidential position to a support role on the Executive. As this will be my last opportunity to address the membership through the auspices of the Device, I have decided on providing the members with a candid and frank assessment of where the Club currently finds itself.

From a positive perspective, I must report that the Association remains in a viable financial position. Our Treasurer, Sheila Burk, will be providing the year-end (Dec. 1, 2022 -November 30, 2023) financial details to members at the said Annual General Meeting in April. Also, I am happy to note that our special summertime Dispro excursions (the UUMMTs) continue to be successfully arranged and executed. However, as launching and parking facilities in more popular destinations tend to be crowded and over used on weekends, your Executive has had to increasingly turn to weekday formats. Members have been most generous in assisting and providing stopover destinations for picnicing. Further work, however, is needed to ensure safety compliance, particularly in the operation and responsibility of safety boats!

In terms of volunteers and executive membership, I readily acknowledge the current group as fully committed and dedicated, but overworked! The Association is in need of new blood for the Executive. Every year it becomes more difficult to find intake candidates, even though it is increasingly easy to participate in Executive Meetings as all are conducted via Zoom. As the Executive goes, the Association will follow.

In addition, volunteers/contributors are always needed to help generate content for our newsletter and web-site. Assistance is also needed in identifying new and interesting destinations for our UUMMTs. Fresh ideas and volunteers to help identify possible, less known spots, which have the supporting launching, docking and parking infrastructure would be welcomed. Please check your backyard.

And now, I must turn to an ever growing challenge – The Regattas. The facts have been alluded to for some time, but as an Association, we are now hitting the stone wall of reality. As the old, family owned/run resorts gradually disappear and are replaced by corporate entities geared to profit, our options for the old style resort format have all but dried up. We are now faced with competing with luxury destination weddings and the truth of escalating per person costs. The Executive rightly accepts that there is a ceiling as to what members can afford or are willing to pay. We are trying every device we can resort to, including moving away from the traditional weekend event and considering even modifying the event format. The Regatta Search Committee (Karen Boyer, Sheila Burk and Mary Storey) have ardently endeavoured to keep the original concept in place, but it must be recognized by all that we must think outside the box if some semblance of this event is going to continue. Input and assistance from the membership is required as we reshape this tradition.

I will note some positives in concluding to help allay people's concerns in the ongoing benefits of the Association. The Fall Workshop in Coldwater last November was very well attended and by all reports useful and informative. Members are reported



to be frequently socializing in sub regional groups, particularly in the Muskoka and southwest Ontario areas. The power for members seeking information; parts (like the recent universal joint program); and mentors continue through the convenience of the quarterly newsletter and the Association's Annual Membership Directory. I am sure others will find further value in this worthy institution. They are invited to write letters to the present editor of the Device, Paul Jenner, so they can be shared.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Ian Gibson



2024 Membership Renewal Reminder

Membership renewals have been coming in slower than in other years. As a result, nearly two thirds have had to be reprinted and sent out as a second renewal notice. If you have a second renewal notice enclosed, please return your payment as soon as possible so you will be included in the Directory and maintain membership benefits. If this renewal reminder and your payment have crossed, please disregard this notice.

An e-transfer to

dispropayments@gmail.com

is the quickest way to send your payment.

Barb Dickson

Upcoming Events in 2024

We remind members that UUMMTs (Unofficial Unorganized Mini Misery Tours) are unorganized and unauthorized and as such the DOA leadership is not in any way responsible for any misadventure that might accidentally occur during any such event. These "mini tours" are fun and we look forward to them each year, but please exercise caution and be safe.

For first timers, come prepared for all possible weather and lake conditions. Bring your own lunch, water and supplies to be self sufficient. Your fellow Dispro boaters will be happy to guide and assist you.

Sun. April 28 – AGM – 11:30am

Boston Pizza at Gravenhurst Wharf, 1100 Bay Street, Gravenhurst
Please see enclosed AGM info sheet for full details and how to RSVP

Sat. June 22 – UUMMT 52 – Milford Bay, Lake Muskoka

There is a public launch at 1148 Milford Bay Road. The site can be approached from that segment of Hwy 118 that runs between Port Carling and Bracebridge, by taking the Butter & Egg exit south to Milford Bay Road and turning right. Parking for cars and trailers will be available, but details must still be resolved (check the DOA website for up-to-date information or contact Ian Gibson at 905-468-4646). We will be boating in the Beaumaris area, with special attention to Millionaires Row. Boating routes will be provided. For lunch, please bring your own food. We will be picnicing on the front lawn of Brad and Karen Jackson's cottage, which they have graciously made available to us. The Jacksons will be our hosts and key coordinators for this excursion. Please try to have your boats launched by 10:00 AM for an early start.

continued . . .



Tues. July 23 – UUMMT 53 – Raven Lake

Location: 21624 Highway 35, South of Dorset. Public launch ramp, small dock, vehicle and trailer parking. Seasonal washroom. Lake charts provided. Plan is to circumnavigate the lake. Some cottages but also scenic, undeveloped shoreline and wildlife.

Please arrive and launch your boat to begin our cruise by 10:00 a.m. We will be following the shoreline to the head of the lake with a lunch stop at Dorset Lions Camp. Boats can be pulled up on the beach or limited docking. Grass area for picnic but no tables or chairs. Washrooms in nearby community centre. As Tuesday is a non dialysis day, patients and their families will be invited to visit to learn about our boats. The afternoon cruise will be along the opposite shore back to launch.

For information: Karen Boyer and Kerry Harmon – 705 645 9513 / home land line.
Morning of July 23 – 705 205 6166 / 705 205 9513 / cell.

Sat. Aug. 17 – UUMMT 54 – Port Carling

Graciously hosted by Eric and Cynthia Luks, in honour of their home (the Billie Johnson house) turning 100 years old. A tour of the house will also be offered. People should consider wearing period costumes to enhance the day. The public launch ramp in Hanna Park at the end of Bailey Street will be the starting point at 10:00 AM. The boating routes and parking details are still being worked out. Further details will be announced in the June issue of the Device.

Sept. 6-8 – Annual Regatta – Fern Resort, Lake Couchiching

Please find enclosed Reservation and Registration Forms with this issue. If you plan to attend, please book your reservation at your earliest convenience and also return the Registration Form and payment. This year is also **Auction Year** so start collecting those treasures. It's always a fun event and not to be missed.

Further details will follow in upcoming issues of the Device and also on our website.

Bartleman and Dippies



Former Ontario Lieutenant Governor and diplomat James Bartleman died this past August. His career took him to nearly every corner of the world but, it seemed he was never far from his impoverished Port Carling upbringing and pride in his Indigenous roots.

In 2004, he participated in the 25th anniversary of the club, riding in Paul Dodington's mahogany Dispro, followed at some distance by two large OPP patrol boats.

Mr. Bartleman has several ties to our beloved Dispro boats. He was the guest of honour at DOA's celebration of the 100th anniversary of the invention of the boats in August of 2015. The Port Carling event was held in Bartleman Park, so named for his family. As President of the Dispro Owners Association that year, I was privileged and honoured to meet him and share the podium with him.

His speech that day included a story about his teenage years when he used a Dispro to deliver newspapers to Port Carling cottage docks.

"As a proud member of the Chippewas of Rama First Nation, Mr. Bartleman was a staunch advocate for Indigenous Peoples, following the guidance of his ancestors by imparting his wisdom to future generations," Elizabeth Dowdeswell stated, former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

He also liked Dispro boats. In conversation with Paul Dodington, Jimmy said that he and his dad had often taken their family Dippy under cover of darkness down the Indian



River to attend to illegal fish nets set out near Keewaydin Island. For some strange reason, his dad could never seem to get the engine to start for the return trip upriver with the catch of illegal fish, so James would be called upon to row all the way home. Eventually, it dawned on Jimmy that the game warden would have been lurking somewhere along the river, so not running the engine was an evasion tactic. Apparently, the 2004 trip was his first ever trip up the Indian River under power in a Dippy!



Mary Storey and James Bartleman at the 100th Anniversary Celebration of the Dispro.

Mary Storey with the assistance of Paul Dodington

Significant Contributors

Jim Domm

Jim has been a member of the Dispro Owners Association since 1981. Shortly thereafter, and with limited Dippy knowledge, he joined the Executive as President for 1983–1984.

He was a cottager on Lake Simcoe where he used his Dippies but also trailered them to participate in many events and trips in Canada and the U.S.

During his watch as President, the DOA executive decided to preserve the available Dippy history and knowledge in book form as a permanent record. Because of Jim's business experience in book printing, he was approached to coordinate the project by arranging a publisher, setting deadlines, and, last but not least, supporting the volunteer authors – Paul Dodington, Joe Fossey, Paul Gockel, Bill Ogilvie and Jim Smith. With some trepidation, Jim accepted the challenge and with a couple of minor glitches and the outstanding cooperation of the authors, Boston Mills Press published “The Greatest Little Motorboat Afloat” in 1983, taking a year to complete start-to-finish. We thank Jim and the authors for this accurate and lasting document which reads as an historical novel while serving as a useful reference source.



In addition to receiving great personal satisfaction by contributing to the book, Jim initiated, designed, and crafted the “Corroded Connection” – the keepsake trophy which is passed from President to President-elect at each of our AGMs. Jim explains the symbolism of this memento as “the development of old friends” (corroded) and “free communication and exchange of information” (connection). These are two of the basic ingredients that have enabled the DOA to flourish since its inception and hopefully will continue to do so for many years to come.

Thank you, Jim for your significant contribution to the DOA.

Mary Storey



Early Times

Ron & Ethel Armstrong's 1920 Uncle Sam

Ron heard mention of a type of boat called a Disappearing Propeller and was so intrigued that he and Ethel went to a DOA regatta to see what they actually looked like. They wandered down to the beach where the Dippies were pulled up and were soon approached by Happy Thompson, who invited them to become members. On the drive home, Ron said since they were now members, they should have a Dippy.

A connection led them to John Dodington who sold them the boat in the bush. The photos show the condition of the boat on first inspection, but that was not a deterrent to Ron. It took one year for him, working daily in his basement shop and then assembling on the gravel driveway, to complete the restoration. From the photos you can see that the rebuilding was definitely a labour of love, along with much skill. Ethel says it has always run reliably. Ron even did exercises to build muscles so he could pull the flywheel.

Ron chose the name "Early Times" after a favourite brand of whiskey and even showed the boat with a bottle on the seat. After the boat was in working condition, Ethel and Ron never missed a regatta. Since Ron's passing, Ethel has been able to keep up the tradition by being faithfully joined by sons Dave, Brad and other family members, including a three month old granddaughter who slept in a laundry basket in the boat during a cruise.

One year Ron and Ethel took "Early Times" to their cottage for the summer, but mostly they cruised on the St. Clair River. "Early Times" has been exhibited at local area boat shows and was a highlight of the DOA display one year at the Toronto International Boat Show.

Karen Boyer

As found in the bush. Ron could see the wreck had potential.



Mufflers make the best nesting sites.



Getting it out of the bush was the first hurdle.



New stem and sternpost for sure.



Exploded view.



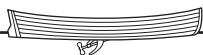
Wait, there's still more bits.



The old bits made patterns for the new bits.

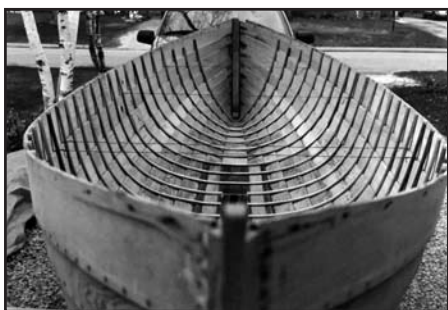


Anyone for barbecued ribs?





Middle of winter? No problem.



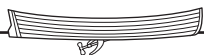
Beautiful steam bent ribs



You've got to have seats.



And now the fun part, applying the shiny stuff.





"Early Times"

**1920 18" Disappearing Propeller Boat Co.
Dispro E1 Single Cylinder Engine**

Owner/Restorer: Ron & Ethel Armstrong

Built by the Disappearing Propeller Boat Co. in Port Carling, Ontario, this 'Dippy' saw regular use for many decades in the Muskoka Lakes. When the present owners found her she was a derelict boat that had been sitting up side down for some twenty years. Covered with a rotted tarp, her front planking spread open several inches from the stem, she had become home to a family of field mice living in the engine's muffler.

Ron restored the boat during the winter of 1998/1999. The cypress planking is original to the boat.

The boat is used regularly by the Armstrong's on the St. Claire River.



**The Antique and Classic
Boat Society
Toronto**



Finished to perfection, inside and out.



Custom details complete the labour of love.



The family tradition continues.



Poonamalie

1920 Port Carling Uncle Sam #2313

What does it take for a Dippy to survive for 104 years? Think about that for a moment. It seems to me that the odds are stacked in the wrong direction! But, as it turns out, it can happen. I have such a boat, and indeed, it amazes me every time I am bouncing along in the right seat on a summer's day chugging down some waterway -familiar, or unfamiliar.

Just for fun, let's make the mental list, the requirements of the owner/operators to make that 100-year mark a reality:

- Knowledge/skills to repair old engines
- Knowledge/skills to repair wood – planks, stems, decking etc
- Clean, dry storage to prevent the boat from rotting
- Willingness to spend many, many, many hours (and the cash) to make it all happen

Owning a wooden boat like a Dippy is a big responsibility, right? A decision not to be made flippantly, right? (like that ever happens?) Sort of like a marriage – not to be 'entered into lightly'. Well, as it would so happen, it also requires a lot of luck too!!! You see, *Poonamalie* has indeed been lucky. Here's the story.

A brand-spanken-new Dispro left the Port Carling factory in 1920 bound for the Light's camp (cottage) on Lang Lake near Espanola. After being trailered to the end of the lake, the family took possession of their new boat. On board that first trip back to the cottage was a baby named Ellen Light in the arms of her mother. Her father steered the boat the 10 miles down Lang Lake to the cottage where they built a small boathouse to shelter it and for 50 odd years the faithful little craft served the family from Toledo well. This 'lucky' boat was looked after and provided for, but remarkably, as far as we know, never named. So far, so good in the life of a wooden vessel. But life always has its challenges, even for boats! Baby Ellen I told you about earlier, grew up and married. Fast forward to the year 1999. Ellen is almost 80 and her husband, Larry Haigh is doing a cleanup at the cottage. At this point our beloved Dippy's luck had dwindled. The lovely cypress boat hadn't seen use in almost 30 years and was in pretty rough shape. Its future was grim! But here's where the story takes a turn for the better.

Larry found Joe Fossey Sr's name listed in Wooden Boat Magazine. I suspect he saw his chance to rid himself of the 'problem boat' without disturbing his conscience! In a phone call to Joe he said, "I have an old Dippy. If you want it, you can have it, but it needs to be out of here in a week or I am using it for firewood." Well, Joe was up for the challenge (nothing was ever too much to rescue a Dippy it seems!). When Joe and Irene arrived at the Haigh cottage four days later, they found a sorry sight. In an email we received later from Joe he said:

"The device was out of it and it had bad bottom planking (would not float) so we had no alternative but to hire a barge contractor to pick it up and transport it about 10 miles to the landing. Slipped off onto the dock, some jokers watched and asked, "Hope you are taking this wreck to the landfill!" "No we are not", Irene said, "but we would really appreciate some help to lift it onto the trailer". The rest they say is history. Now I'm sure you will agree there has to be much providence in these happenings...it's difficult to put the pieces together at the time." (more luck)





That escapade cost Joe and Irene \$1000. Enter Fred Forester, from Keene, Ontario. Fred is a canoe builder with strong ties to the Canoe Museum in Peterborough. He took on the restoration. He wanted the boat for his own use. John Thompson restored the original D1 engine. Fred meticulously worked his magic and so did John. But a tragedy in the family led Fred to sell the boat in 2002.

OK...so we bought the boat! For the first 2 years I'll admit the pretty Dispro was a bit of a 'Trailer Queen', winning awards in Peterborough and Clayton. But as my confidence grew, she saw more water and we both learned to cope with her eccentricities and enjoyed putting around Ontario.

I could extend this story well past your interest, and tell you how it was Robert's deceased brother Allan's trailer Joe used to rescue the boat, or how my new brother-in-law, Patrick Wren, hoodwinked me into falling in love with Dippies and twisted my arm into purchasing this beloved Dispro. Or how my pilot husband sold his old airplane and told me I needed to buy the 'next adventure' and 'pilot it myself'! Or how we took the boat to Peterborough (100th anniversary of the lift lock) and ended up being trailered by Prior Smith and towed much of the way by Billy Cleland. Or how Paul Gockel has helped us jerry rig a few parts and limp home on a number of occasions! Or how Poonamalie finally got her name from a trip down the Rideau that took us (with 3 kids and a dog) through the beautiful, peaceful, hand-cranked Poonamalie Lock. Or how I grew up around boats on Lake Erie. But that would be a much longer story. Suffice it to say, my ownership and enjoyment of this boat has led Robert and I to a wonderful community of Dippy owners, without whom I would still be out in some lake somewhere looking for a tow! To own and operate a dippy happily and most successfully you need to 'go for the ride' with a community of equally crazy, knowledgeable, helpful and smitten dippy people. I am truly the least likely, least qualified, but happily committed owner/skipper of a Dippy you are ever likely to find. But it only goes to show you that with a lucky little boat and great friends, a memorable story can unfold.

Pamela Gibson



The History of the “Corroded Connection”

This piece was written by Jim Domm in 1983 when he created the ‘corroded connection’. Jim states that he was President of DOA that year and anticipated some hijinks as he lead the Executive during the meetings. Thus, the Corroded Connection was built as a method of gaining order.

Dispro Regatta, September 1983

At our meetings, there’s an unruly, nosy, verbose and sometimes somewhat rude group of members.

I have polled your former and present executive and as Rodney Dangerfield says, “We don’t get no respect!” In years to come and as our association flourishes, I thought we should provide a symbol of authority for our futured leaders.

I have taken a page from (heaven forbid), our federal parliamentary system procedures and practices. Many of you will recall at the opening of parliament, the antics of an appointed official called the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod

History indicates that the parliamentary appointment dates from the reign of Henry VIII but picture if you will, our Rod (Maxwell that is) and our next President fulfilling the role of ‘Gentlemen Usher of the Black Rod’. The ancient decree established that the position be filled by a gentleman “famous in arms and blood”.

Official dress – a black cut-away tunic, kneed breaches, silk stockings, silver-buckled shoes, a sword and a cocked hat carried under the left arm. He carries a short ebony rod of office – hence his name: Black Rod.

One of the functions is to gain admission to the House at the opening of parliament. On every such occasion, this ancient ceremony is repeated of barring the door of the Commons chamber until he has rapped three times with his ebony rod – a real attention getter!! More importantly, however, his job is to commit parties guilty of breach of privilege or contempt – a common occurrence in our meetings.

I felt that that to gain our collective respect and to maintain order, our Rod – your next President and future Presidents for that matter, should be provided with an official weapon. And in true Dippy tradition, that weapon could be the CORRODED CONNETION.



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