

Ayle of Quinte

Building Canada's first St. Ayles Skiff

It started in Scotland, then it started to travel around the world. Suddenly, a dozen County and area people were stricken with it. No it was not a disease ... it was a

dream. A dream to hand-build a Scottish boat.

The St. Ayles Skiff was designed in 2009, based on the Fair Isle skiff, a Scottish craft influenced by Norse workboats.

Here in the County, a group of people decided to expand their usual fun gatherings into fun work gatherings – to build the first Canadian version of the skiff.

The project took five months, and the efforts of a dozen workers, all with varying degrees of carpentry skills, and average home workshop tools.

The basic kit is made in the U.S., using traditional lapstrake construction. At \$5,000, it is not cheap – though the cost was shared by the group – but the real cost was in the labour. Construction involves 600-800 man hours for the 22-ft. skiff.

Local designer Chris Ireland initiated the project, and according to Bob McKittrick of Prinyer's Cove, who opened the ceremonies, it's been nothing but fun ever since.

"It's been a true joy," he said at the launching. "Every day was filled with everyone's sense of humour ... there was never a dispute."

"We called ourselves The Ayle of Quinte boatbuilders but, if you see the photos, you'll see I'm wearing the same clothing in each shot. So we could be called the 12 apostles, or maybe The Dirty Dozen."

It's this kind of freewheeling attitude that bonded the group together. They worked over the winter in Greg and Sue Leggatt's heated workshop in Napanee, and the

Ayle of Quinte members eagerly anticipated their next session.

Finally, the craft was ready for the road ... er ... the water, and a launching was set in June at the home of Jack and Veronica Cluett on Glenora Road.

Needless to say, the group did a test run first, to make sure their baby didn't sink unceremoniously to the bottom of the bay after its christening.

"We were spotted by the Coast Guard ... five old farts in life jackets, rowing in circles."

Ten of the 12 workers are County people, and four of them had some previous boatbuilding experience.

"Other than that," says Chris Ireland, "some people had wood-working skills, and others learned as we went along."

"There's a lot of hand tool work when you're building a boat," he said. "We had a band saw and a planer, but we used hand routers, orbital sanders and hand planes and chisels."

"It's important that you hand plane all the planks to make sure they fit together perfectly."

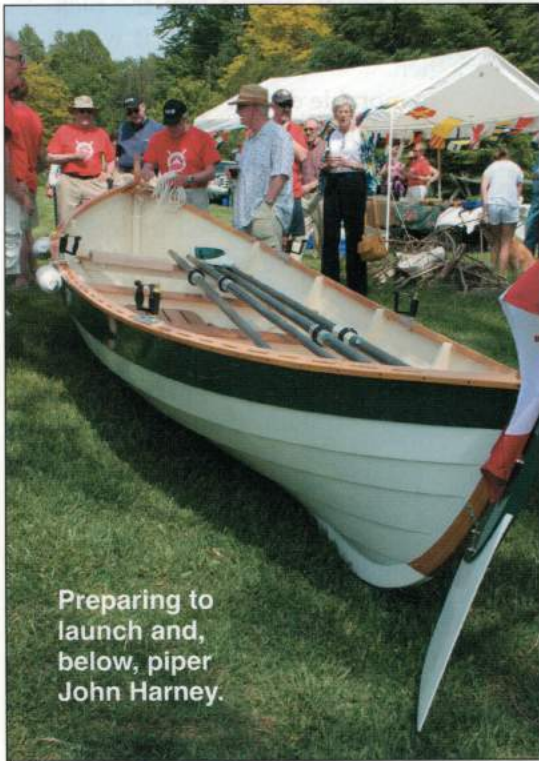
"I'm really happy that it went so smoothly," he said. "Everybody got along, and there was always something for someone to do."

The pride of craftsmanship was revealed at the launching, in a venue that would have made a Scotsman proud – snacks and champagne under billowing white tents; crew and wives sharing cheers, all dressed in red Ayle of Quinte shirts.

It's a Canadian First! But as the dream catches on, it will certainly not be the last!

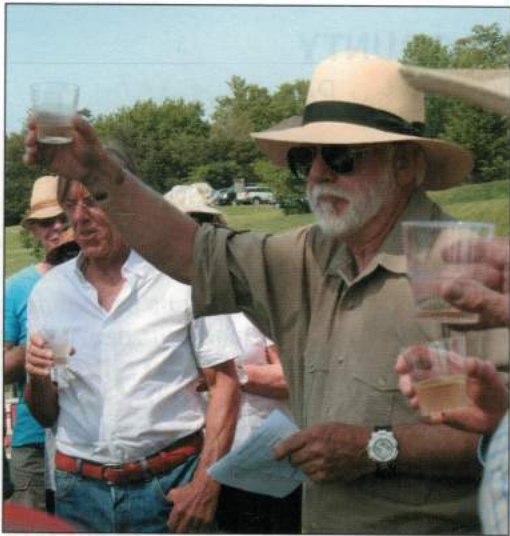
You can see the project from start to finish at:

ayleofquinte.wordpress.com. □



Preparing to launch and, below, piper John Harney.





The Ayle of Quinte
Work Crew:
Chris Ireland,
Bob McKittrick,
Greg Leggatt,
Sandy Pratt,
Duncan Payne,
Gary Osbourne,
Don Farrington,
Doug Macpherson,
Tony Dean,
Jim Vince,
John Fricker
and Barry Tucker.

Above, left: Alan Whiteley performs a traditional mariners' toast for the launching of *Sea Shadow*.
Left: Chris Ireland of Picton was one of the County craftsmen who took pride in the workmanship ... and the fun ... of creating the boat.
Above: The Ayle of Quinte boatbuilders gather for the long awaited launch. The 12 team members, who fought their way through sawdust and sweat, might also be called The Dirty Dozen.

A Quick Review of a Year's Work – From Parts to Finish!

