

OUR BIG WOODEN BOAT

Part II

Editor's Note: Ever think about flying off to Europe to buy an old vintage wooden boat and rebuilding her for a world cruise? That's what Dottie and Albert Fletcher did. In this, the second part of their series, the Fletchers tell about how they fixed their boat up before setting sail for the New World and Pacific.

By Dottie Fletcher

□ There she sat, *Duen* not looking in any way like my dream of a big wooden sailing boat. She looked big, sturdy and dirty and just like a fishing boat should, I imagined. But our Norwegian friend was so excited about this particular boat. Granted she did look well built.

She was 50 feet on the deck with a large teak paneled pilothouse. Huge doors hanging off the stern that were part of the dragnet apparatus. Winches of the five ton hydraulic type, fish boxes, nets and assorted paraphernalia made it difficult for me to look past. But one look at Albert's face and I knew

he had mentally cleared the decks and was hoisting the sails.

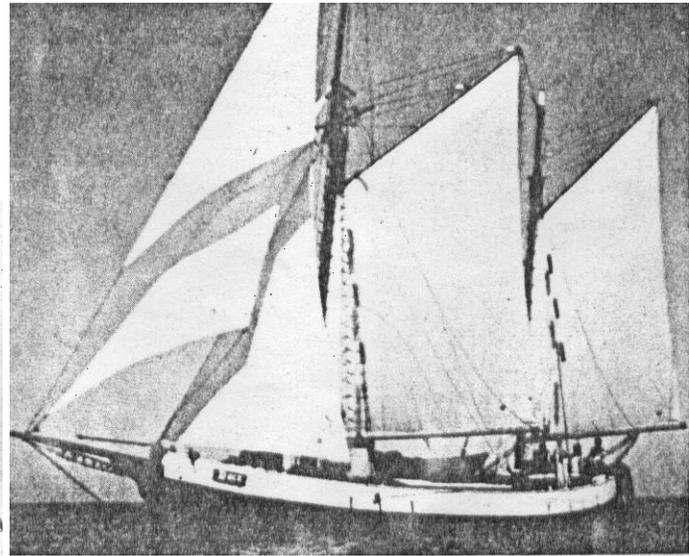
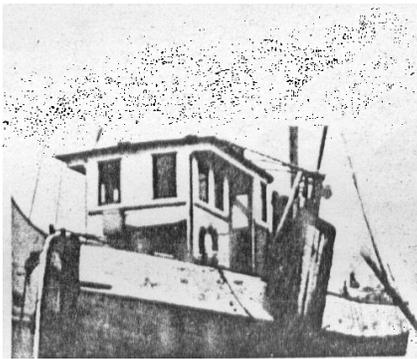
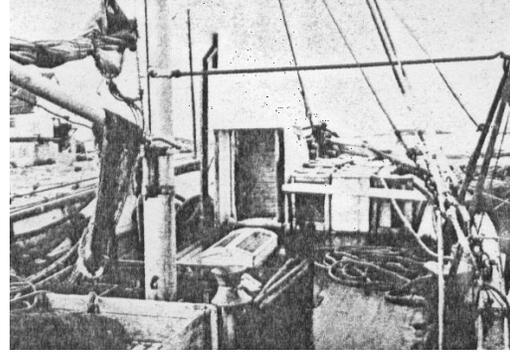
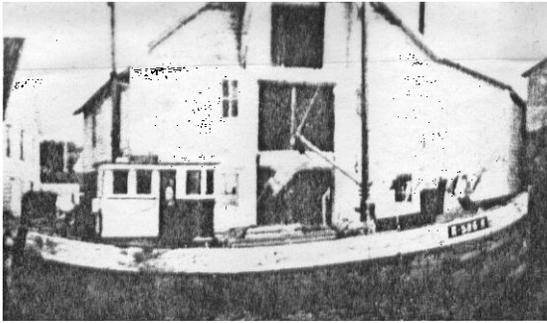
As he poked around the boat he opened up the doors leading down into the engine room. I approached and he shut them, rather hurriedly I later thought, and said, "Oh yes, the engine room looks fine. Since engines were definitely his department I went on my way. Later in the day I discovered much to my horror the engine room contained a monster named Rapp. He, Rapp, our engine, stood eight feet tall and was a one cylinder monstrosity called a semi-diesel. To start it was a unique process quite a bit different than turning the keys on our lovely little diesels in *Serenity*.

It took 14 distinct and somewhat lengthy steps to start that engine including turning a one ton flywheel to T.D.C. (top dead center) which took all my strength. I did learn to start it, but never volunteered. Rapp was about 50 years old and weighed close to five tons. This starting process was one thing tied to the dock and

another altogether on a black night in a rocking, rolling sea and no one awake but yourself. But that I'll talk about later.

As you have surmised by now we bought the *Duen* but not until we had looked at a good many other boats quite thoroughly. With the *Duen*, which means dove or pigeon in Norwegian, (and that depending on your mood), we knew her complete history. She was a bit famous on the island as she was the first "big" fishing boat to come there. She was built for two brothers who lived in Aakrehamn, a village on Karmoy.

Built in Flekkefjord, Norway in 1939, her hull design was that of a galeas. A galeas being a ketch in Norwegian. Her hull was fastened completely with trunnels or wooden pins used in place of nails. Her frames were nine and one half inches by six inches and only seven inches of space between frames which gives you an idea of her tremendous strength. The outer hull was made of two inch planking and inside the frames were three sets of



This series of shots shows *Duen* at the time of purchase and a little more than a year later when she was sailing as a yacht. Note the absence of the wheel house.

stringers, 13 inches wide and two inches thick, that went from stem to sternpost. The complete center of the boat was fish- hold and was completely double planked with two inch planking with air space between the two hulls. There was *no doubt about* the construction being sound and strong.

We had her hauled in Skudesneshavn and thoroughly checked the bottom. Excellent condition. So despite the

fact that our dream boat was a Colin Archer design used for the life-saving service and pretty much ready to go we talked ourselves right into buying a fishing boat with all the work that that entailed.

We purchased *Duen* on January 27, 1971 and worked on her steadily until the day we left Karmoy which was May 3, 1972.

The first piece of great fortune we had was getting a free dock to tie

to in the lovely protected harbor of Sevlandsvik. Along with this we also had the use of a three-story boat house which was once a herring factory. We rented this for the entire time for a very nominal fee. This gave us a huge area in which to work out of the icy wind, snow and rain. Most important it gave us electricity for our power tools. We stepped from the boat to the dock and two steps into the boathouse.

Our first month or so was spent just cleaning the fishing gear off the boat. She had been a herring boat with one and a half mile long drift nets, a codfish boat with longline gear and winches and just before we bought her a shrimp dragger. It seemed no gear had ever been removed --just added. Everything was extra heavy duty. Huge rusty bolts frozen tight, giant square nails all to be removed without a cutting torch. The fact that it was January in Norway made it no easier. Our poor frozen hands felt like pulp after a few hundred misses with the hammer.

After all the fishing gear was removed we completely gutted the boat, removing even the bulkheads so we could stand in the stern and see the stempost. We completely sanded down the interior of the hull which almost proved our undoing. - During the later days of *Duen's* fishing career they had done "trash" fishing. That was keeping everything they brought up in their net and dumping it in the fish-hold. They then put some chemical on the fish to harden them and the fish were sold to be made into fertilizer. This chemical must have penetrated the wood.

As we ground down the interior we naturally inhaled a good deal of it despite the fact we wore masks. By the end of the day, a day of solid grinding, we began feeling a little strange. First we got chills and then fever and sick at our stomachs. It took us two days to recover from that episode and equally as long to find out why it had happened.

Duen already had some ballast amidships. We added more cement ballast amidships, iron pigs in the bow and boiler punchings in the stern. Shoveling up a couple of cubic yards of cement into buckets, hauling it aboard the boat, lowering, placing, and smoothing it was something of a task.

The day Albert and I lowered a 5 KW diesel generator into the hold amidships, rigged blocks and tackles for pulleys and planks for a runway and by ourselves moved that huge machine to the stern and up on a platform we felt from then on we could tackle anything. It was good we had that confidence because when we lowered our 350 gallon steel water tank in the hold and tried to place it--well--it took us two days and five hydraulic car jacks to finally succeed. So you better believe we

felt we became a good working team. The very little outside help we had was in the area of making the metal work and then only because we didn't have the equipment. Albert is a fine welder.

Then the big day came, the day we really started rebuilding. Our first project was the galley deck. We celebrated finishing that by moving aboard. Sleeping bags on the new deck and a borrowed two burner stove for cooking and a purchased electric heater kept us from freezing to death. This was now home.

Step by step the work progressed. Sometimes easily, mostly difficult and always it seemed cold. Never having undertaken such an enormous project before (and really a little power boat was no learning ground for what we had to do on *Duen*), we found ourselves doing and redoing. Since we had never sailed either we just studied Norwegian rigging and did ours the same way. As we later found out, this both was good and bad. For the rough northern waters the short rig was great and we didn't get into too much trouble. When we hit the less windy southern waters we found we had a very slow boat. But at the time, with just the two of us aboard, I'm sure we were guided correctly.

To detail, our conversion would be a book. So many incidents funny and sad: good and bad. Perhaps the greatest part of the conversion were the many friends we made during our stay on Karmoy. It was indeed a sad day when we left them all behind.

The day our sails arrived from England was cause for a celebration with homemade wine and moonshine (it being a dry island) furnished by our friends. Headaches were the order of the following day as we excitedly bent on our sails. Then our trial runs.

Since neither of us were sailors we had planned on learning and practicing in Norway. The bitter cold and hard winds were such a discouraging factor that we finally decided to heck with it. We would learn on the way. And learn we did. Which really is a whole different story. ❁