



THE AREY'S POND DAYSAILER

A KINGSTON LOBSTERBOAT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

by Reuben Smith

Photographs by Michael Eudenbach

Historian Howard Chapelle spent the 1930s documenting America's indigenous sailing craft. Many of the boats he studied could, in his time, still be found lying in backwaters and decaying in marshes. Among the craft he recorded were two Massachusetts lobsterboats built by a man named Ed Ransom. One was a skeg-built working boat from 1885; another, a shapely racing version from 1893. In 1951, Chapelle published his book

American Small Sailing Craft. Many a shop-worn copy of this cherished work falls open to page 161, Fig. 59, Ransom's racing lobsterboat—arguably the most attractive boat in the book.

In the middle of the 19th century, Ed Ransom and Nate Watson joined a community of small-boat builders on the Jones River in Kingston, Massachusetts. Like other builders of the day, they were fueled by intuition rather



than by hard science, their sensibilities earned from years of working, racing, and building small craft. In 1874, at a customer's request, Ransom and Watson launched a 25' yacht—the first real pleasure boat built in Kingston. A decade later, the two builders were applying yacht standards to the working lobsterboats, developing a full-on racing machine in 1885. Those racing Kingston lobsterboats, represented in Chapelle's book, inspired still-further refinement as recently as a few years ago when three friends, all named Tony—Dias, DeLima, and Davis—came up with a 21st-century interpretation of the old Kingston lobsterboat.

Opposite—Designer Tony Dias and builder Tony Davis took their cues from an old workboat design when they created the Arey's Pond Daysailer. The design of the early boat, called the Kingston lobsterboat, had reached its pinnacle of refinement a century before. The modern designer and builder applied contemporary materials, shapes, and design processes.

Left—Capt. John N. Drew (1821–1906) and his Kingston lobsterboat MATCHLESS adrift on the Jones River, awaiting a breeze. Drew was for many years a ship carpenter in winter and a professional skipper in summer. This photograph was taken in 1890 by his friend, William L. Ames.

Below—Builder Tony Davis at the helm of NIMBLE, the first Arey's Pond Daysailer. The carbon-fiber spars, built by Tony DeLima of ForteRTS, are light and strong; they both improve the boat's performance and ease her handling.

The Original Yacht

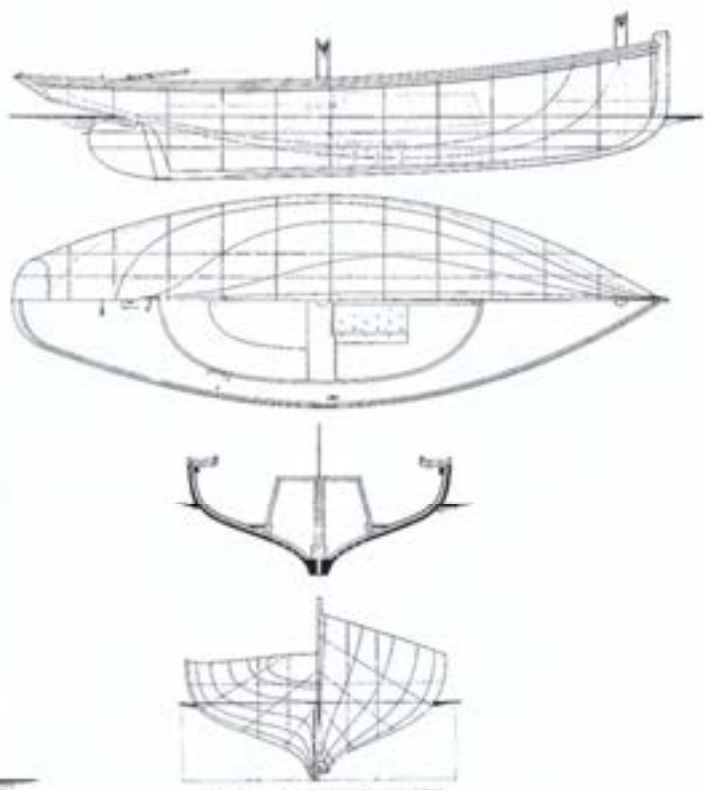
When Ransom and Watson started their work, it was the end of one era—and the beginning of another. For 150 years, the tidal creek where their shop was located was a shipbuilding center producing vessels as large as 600 tons displacement. In 1851, a new railroad bridge rendered the stream impassable for large hulls. All that survived of the once-vital industry was the C. Drew Forge, still hammering out boatbuilding tools, and a few fishermen-boatbuilders who continued to work in the river's old shipbuilding shops. While the great deep-water era of Kingston was over, the time of small-boat development was only beginning.

The rise of the Kingston lobsterboat was consistent with that of other craft along New England's coast. In early-19th-century fishing craft there were local variations on a few basic themes. One theme was the shallow. These



The lobsterboat **VIXEN** was built by Nate Watson in 1893. She's purely a yacht, and not a workboat, her inspiration being the Edward Burgess-designed **AMERICA's** Cup defender **PURITAN**.

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boats were rowed and sailed, spritsail-rigged with two masts. They were about 18' overall, half-decked, and carried tumblehome aft to help fishermen work over the side. Some were double-ended, others transom-sterned. The Kingston lobsterboat was one of these shallop types.

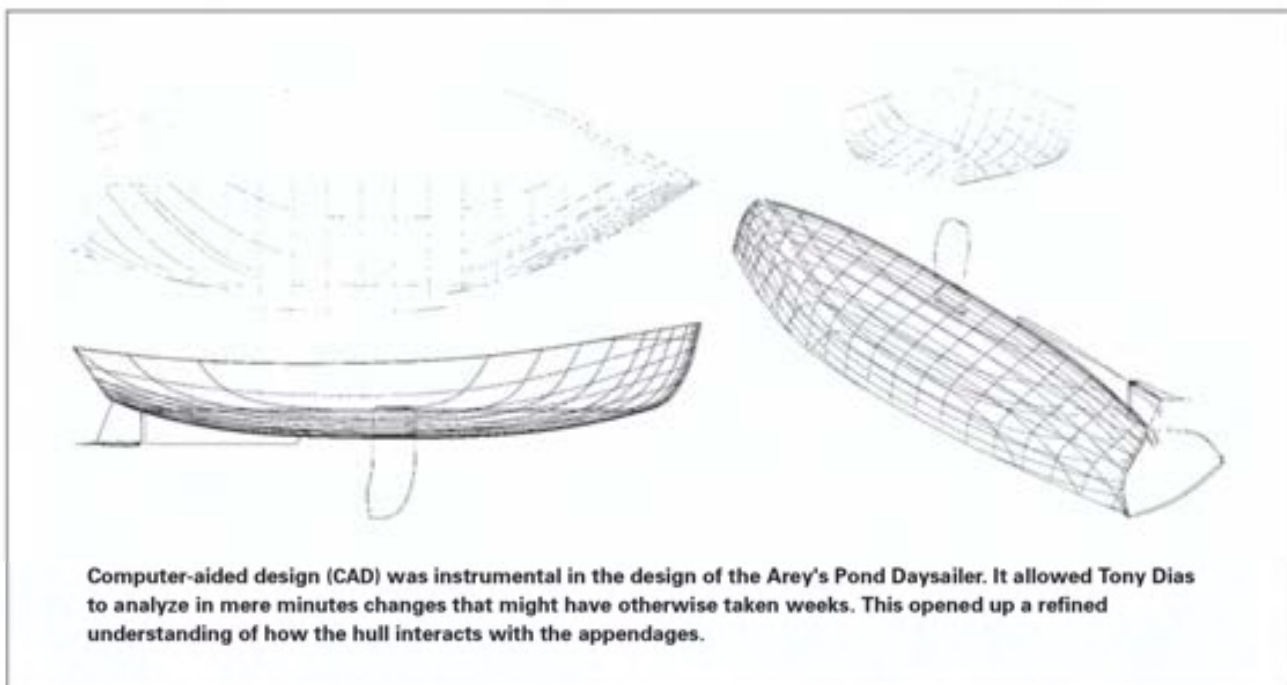
At about the time of the Civil War, Arthur "Ed" Ransom apprenticed with Samuel Alden, the man who developed the first lobsterboat on Plymouth Bay sometime in the 1820s. As a young man making his way in post-shipbuilding Kingston, Ransom worked as a fisherman, sometime skipper, and wintertime boatbuilder; he eventually left Alden's shop to work on his own.

With the shipbuilding days gone by, working the squalid inshore fishery must have seemed a pretty small-time affair to the town's seafaring elites. Still, Ed Ransom was no stick-in-the-mud, and changes in boating were afoot. Boatbuilders and fishermen had held races for years, and the urban rusticators who now thronged the shore during the summer months took an interest in these events. New Englanders began discovering sailing for pure pleasure and sport, and it became something other than a dangerous occupation. It became a pastime.

Ransom's elder neighbor and brother-in-law, Nathan Watson, was a yacht skipper. Sailing beyond the confines of Plymouth Bay, he kept abreast of the latest in boat design, seeing for himself the crack new fishing schooners and the growing fleets of pleasure boats spreading out from Boston. Watson was a boatbuilder, too, and, along with Ransom, saw opportunities in the unfolding changes in waterfront life. In 1874, Watson took an order for the first pleasure boat to be built in Kingston. To fulfill that

contract, he expanded his shop and hired Ransom to help him build the 25' sloop, **IDLE HOUR**, for another friend and neighbor, Lewis Keith. Five years later, Keith sought a bigger boat. Watson was working as a skipper at the time, and was getting around and seeing the developments in yachting. He came across the oyster boat **SIREN** in New Bedford. Having won some races, **SIREN** was pulled from the workboat fleet, given a fresh coat of white topside paint, a cabin, engraved stemware, embroidered upholstery, and a professional skipper: Capt. Ed Ransom. These two collegial boatbuilders, who shared ideas and sometimes worked together, thus entered the fancy world of yachting. Many of their lobsterboats proved fast in the Tri-town (Duxbury, Kingston, Plymouth) races and were purchased by the area's summering Bostonians. Soon there was a fleet of pleasure lobsterboats cruising around the bay. With all those deep pockets around, stakes in the races rose. It was only a matter of time before someone commissioned a lobsterboat with no pretensions of being a workboat; she'd be a racing yacht through and through. It was Ransom who took that order, and he was full of ideas. Skippering a yacht in Boston Harbor, he had come across the Edward Burgess-designed **AMERICA's** Cup defender **PURITAN**, hauled for bottom work. **PURITAN** was a "compromise cutter," and a breakthrough in yacht design. Records suggest that Ransom was working on his own now, though still in Watson's shop while Watson was, perhaps, off skippering. With **PURITAN** on his mind, Ransom turned out the first purpose-built racing lobsterboat, named **SOLITAIRE**, in 1885.

SOLITAIRE incorporated Burgess's latest thinking for



centerboard-yacht design, scaled down to the size of working lobsterboats. She had a sophisticated hull: hollow garboards instead of the traditional skeg, a long counter stern to lengthen the waterline when heeled and to help keep the bow down, and enough sail to make a summertime fisherman blanch. Sure enough, SOLITAIRE crushed the opposition in the races that year. Other Duxbury owners soon hired Ransom and Watson to build boats to beat her. With the market thus established, Ransom bought the old Drew shipbuilding shop, dragged it downstream next to Watson's shop—where it stands today—and began turning out what became his signature Kingston lobsterboat.

These new racing boats cost about twice as much as the old working ones. Yachting-induced refinements in turn influenced the working craft, as lobsterboat builders in nearby towns emulated Ransom's racing designs. The cost of these boats, coupled with the introduction of inboard power, spelled the end of the earlier, simple sailing lobsterboat.

The era of the racing Ransom and Watson lobsterboats lasted only about to the turn of the century. The yachting world was going through a revolution, with designers like Manley Crosby and C.C. Hanley building rule-beating catboats that were useless as workboats; with their huge rigs, they were dangerous as pleasure boats. Sandbaggers in New York and New Jersey were so overcanvased, people were getting killed. Young designers introduced equally outrageous freshwater scows to salt-water races. In response, many yacht clubs sought racing fleets made up of wholesome pleasure boats that emphasized sailing ability and usefulness over gimmicks and deep pockets.

In 1895, George Shiverick built his shop on the Jones River, just a few hundred yards downstream from Ransom's. He built the boats then in demand, turning out enough catboats, sloops, knockabouts, and raceabouts that by 1920 the entire fleet of the Duxbury Yacht

Club was Shiverick-built. To this day, the name Shiverick is spoken with reverence in the shadow of that club's deck.

Ransom and Watson's lobsterboats were eclipsed by these developments in yachting, but the duo continued to be kept well-occupied. B.B. Crowninshield recalled Watson as "perhaps the best-known and most colorful American professional yacht skipper of his time." He certainly skippered some of the eminent yachts of the day, including Burgess's PAPOOSE and Herreshoff's breakthrough 46'-class cutter GLORIANA. He also headed a Norwegian crew on the famous schooner CONSTELLATION. Ransom stayed a little closer to home, earning a steam engineer's license and building himself a 50' steamer, TIGER. He continued building lobsterboats, for pleasure use, rigged as gaff sloops and cats. His shop became a place for people to come and sit by the fire and talk about the old days. In his last years, with failing eyesight, he turned to Clinton Keith, son of his friend and longtime client Lewis Keith, to do the delicate work of measuring his half models. He kept building into his old age, working until just a few months before he died in 1922.

A few of the Ransom boats reportedly survived to the late 20th century, though I've found none extant today. Some were very well documented; besides those in Chapelle's several books, plans are also available through Mystic Seaport. Writers such as John Gardner and Ben Fuller have shown an admiration for the type. In 1974, the first issue of *WoodenBoat* brought an awareness of the Kingston lobsterboat to a wider audience with a reprint of a William Lambert Barnard article from a 1905 issue of *Boating* magazine. A few lobsterboat replicas have been built over the years—most recently at the Arques School, in Sausalito, California.

The New Daysailer

It's 2002. Tony Davis, of Arey's Pond Boat Yard on Cape

A RUDDER WITH WINGS

by Tony Dias

The Arey's Pond Daysailer was designed for sailing on the skinny waters of Pleasant Bay on Cape Cod, where crossing sandbars and beaching for picnics are commonplace occurrences. Many boats of 13" draft would employ a drop rudder to accommodate grounding. I've used drop blades with success in the past, but I've never been satisfied with their added complication on boats beyond the size of a light dayboat. Also, a drop-blade rudder under an overhanging stern is inaccessible if there is a problem.

Tony Davis is a longtime catboat builder and sailor; I, on the other hand, am partial to the sloop rig. The conversation between catboat aficionados and sloop fans can grow rancorous at times, and I've enjoyed debating Tony on the ways this new boat would differ from his cats. Much of the talk has revolved around the rudder. Cats and sloops have very different ways of dealing



The most innovative feature of the Arey's Pond Daysailer is the shallow-draft rudder. Shallow-draft blades tend to lose lift early, and thus stall. The swept-back, foil-shaped endplate solves this problem, with an incidental benefit: It also lifts the stern at speeds at which the boat would otherwise squat.

with shoalwater sailing. A cat's wide beam, enormous gaff-headed sail, and barn-door rudder attack the problem with vigor, using tremendous power to bluster on their way. Sloops are more subtle, using a finer balance between power and drag. The barn-door rudder and its strong braking effect would not fit a high-aspect ratio sloop with its narrower, finer hull.

Cod, markets a fleet of catboats, available in either wood-composite or fiberglass hulls. He has a customer who wants to sell his Arey's catboat and get a new sloop. The customer is loyal to Tony, and appreciative enough of the quality of his work, to not go somewhere else but to ask this dedicated catboat builder to develop a new boat for him—one with two sails.

So Tony Davis calls Antonio Dias, a yacht designer from Rhode Island. For years, the two had been on the lookout for a project to do together. They share a mutual desire to develop traditional boats for contemporary uses. I should mention that I know these two Tonys, and I also know the third one who later came into the project—DeLima. Dias, in fact, is a good friend and colleague, and it was over late-night raving on the morality of replicas and reconstructions of old workboat designs (oh, the conversations of boatbuilders) that the notion of this article hatched. I know something of how Tony Dias thought about this order. The new design would not be new in the sense of radical departure. It would instead exist deeply in the context of a historical arc.

Tony Davis thought the new boat—to be called the Arey's Pond Daysailer—should fill the niche so long occupied by the venerable Rhodes 19. This design, first built in wood in the early 1960s and still manufactured in fiberglass in both centerboard and keel versions, was among the last commercially successful boats with a direct connection to the Kingston lobsterboat. Despite the rough 'glasswork and 1970s styling, the aging aluminum spars and sun-stained Dacron, people have hung onto these boats. Both Davis and Dias felt that just such a shoal-draft, half-decked boat could combine traditional strengths with convenience to meet contemporary needs.

Tony Dias is one of those wooden-boat revivalists whose copy of Chapelle's *American Small Sailing Craft* opens

automatically to Fig. 59. He had lofted this old design while still in boatbuilding school in Lubec, Maine. For Dias, the Ransom model became a touchstone, embodying much of what was appealing about 19th-century New England boats; it had echoes of the fishing schooners and the great yachts of the period, all in the reasonable scale of a small boat. He felt a connection, too, with Kingston, having grown up across Cape Cod Bay, in North Truro.

As any careerist in the wooden-boat field must, Dias had to balance his enthusiasm for craft like the Kingston lobsterboat with a realization of how impractical such boats have become. A boat intended for a man and a boy to wrest a living trapping lobsters in Plymouth Bay just doesn't meet the requirements of a contemporary day sailor, traditional enthusiasts aside. Much as a builder might lust for the fine work of bending those tight S-shaped frames aft, and backing out planks for the run and tightly tumblehomed topsides, the fact is that the hull would be expensive to produce. Building a plank-on-frame boat for contemporary small-boat life on a trailer is a dubious proposition, as well. While that old two-masted sprit rig had great drive, even Ransom's contemporary pleasure sailors found reason to re-rig the old boats as gaff sloops and cats. Still, the old hull shape remained a recurring source of inspiration, and over the years Dias mulled ways of adapting the boat for present times, much as Ransom and Watson had for theirs.

The third Tony to enter the project, Tony DeLima, is the founder of MAS Epoxies. In his latest endeavor, ForteRTS, he's developed a line of carbon-fiber spars suitable for small boats. Dias had used DeLima's light, strong spars on boats before the Arey's Pond Daysailer, to great advantage. He would use them on the new boat, too.

The hull Tony Dias drew for the Arey's Pond Daysailer does not have all of the radical features of Ransom and



Long blades generate more lift than short ones. A typical problem of shallow, low-aspect rudders is the tremendous loss of lift at the rudder blade's tip. This

happens because lift is generated by the differential pressure on either side of a rudder (or wing, or keel); on a short blade, the low-pressure and high-pressure sides mix abruptly at the tip, resulting in a loss of lift. An endplate—a surface set at 90 degrees to the rudder blade—will contain some of the otherwise lost lift, but I've never found a simple endplate to be a satisfactory solution. While it lessens tip loss, it's liable to generate a lot of wasteful drag.

Along with my lifelong interest in boats, I've been fascinated with flight. Through aeronautics, I've found clues to dealing with the problems of a shoal rudder. This led me to modify the simple endplate into a pair of swept-back, foil-shaped winglets. These not only allow this rudder to steer the boat effectively at 13" of draft, but they also noticeably counteract pitching forces. Being delta-shaped, they will not stall even at steep angles of attack, enabling them to provide lift continuously while traveling through waves; there is sufficient lift aft to keep the boat from squatting as it travels well above nominal hull speed.

Tony Dias is a yacht designer based in Narragansett, Rhode Island. You can view his work at <www.antoniodiasdesign.com>.

Watson's racing boats; it doesn't have the long counter, and it has a skeg, unlike the old built-down hulls. The appendages represent the latest in contemporary sailboat design, and include, especially in the rudder, some real innovation (see sidebar). Dias chose a fractional, bendy-mast rig, in part because the owners of the first boat are in their early eighties. While one might think of this sort of rig as appropriate for athletic sailors, the same advantages they look for—ease of sail shape adjustment, high power for a given heeling force, ease of stepping and rigging off a trailer—make the rig handy for anyone.

Dias begins his designs on a drafting table, but does the final developments on his computer. One of the great advantages of this method is that it eliminates the fun but time-consuming process of lofting, patterning, and mold-making. Dias sent his digital file to Bill Young in Virginia, and a few days later a truck arrived at Arey's Pond with a load of computer-cut molds, bulkheads, and other parts. The Daysailer's building jig was set up and the keel laid in one day. The hull was in $\frac{3}{4}$ " bead-and-cove-edged cedar strips, and sheathed inside and out in biaxial cloth set in epoxy. The deck was built of $\frac{1}{2}$ " plywood covered in Dynel. On a gloomy, foggy day, the three Tonys put the newly launched NIMBLE through her paces. The carbon-fiber mast, with sail, weighed just 16 lbs—half as heavy as an equivalent wooden spar. She sailed on her feet, the lightweight rig drove her along nicely, and the effect of the winglets on the shallow rudder was uncanny. The stern wave rose well aft of the transom as the boat accelerated beyond hull speed. Passing through the wake of

a powerboat, NIMBLE didn't pitch at all. As Tony Dias put it in a letter, "The loss of buoyancy aft as she leaves her stern wave behind is matched by a gain in lift from the winglets. The net effect is balanced trim even at speeds where a conventional hull would be squatting."

The story of the Kingston lobsterboat's evolution is one of groups of friends who adapted for their era a historically successful boat. Ransom and Watson brought their on-the-water experience into the shop. Today, the three Tonys are doing a similar thing. They were able to focus 125 years of technology and insight onto a boat that is just as shapely as the original, but more efficiently built, better suited for modern-day life on a trailer, and faster over the water. 

Reuben Smith does business as Tumblehome Boatshop at the old Shiverick yard just downriver from Ed Ransom's and Nate Watson's shops. He's also Director of Massachusetts Bay Maritime Artisans at Jones River Landing, in Kingston.



The Kingston lobsterboat influences—half-deck, counter stern, high deadrise, moderate freeboard—are apparent in the Arey's Pond Daysailer. But, still, she's a modern and innovative boat.