

Inside This Section — Classified
Real Estate/Automotive

Island Sets Weekend Celebration

North Haven Dinghy, Symbol Of Yachting's Golden Age

by Steve Heddericg

Assistant News Editor

NORTH HAVEN — The venerable North Haven Dinghy, a shining example of the Golden Age of Yachting, holds its 100th birthday celebration in its home waters this Saturday.

Marine buffs agree that the North Haven Dinghy earned its berth in sailing's record books by establishing the One-Design Class of sailboat racing. That is, all boats are built to the same specifications, making the skipper's skills the determining factor in a race, not the gadgetry of the boat.

The Aug. 15 birthday celebration includes a boat parade off the town landing, followed by five informal races. The afternoon's celebrations end at 5 p.m. with prizes and tea at the Casino, the central building of the North Haven Yacht Club.

The North Haven Dinghy is steeped in maritime history. By 1885, the 14½ foot dinghy was racing in the crisp waters off its namesake, making it the oldest active sailing class in the country, and probably the world. The Water Wag of Dublin, Ireland, came into existence in 1887 and compares in many ways with the North Haven Dinghy. However, the Water Wag no longer exists, and although the Dinghy has fallen from its traditional role as the vessel on which the summer colony's sailing youth cut its teeth, the long-established Monday and Saturday races in the Fox Island Thorofare continue each year.

There are probably 30 or so Dinghies in existence today, according to long-time enthusiast George Lewis, who, as a child, more than 50 years ago, recalls maneuvering his gaff-rigged classic off the shores of his family's summer home. In 1975 Lewis and the late Richard Saltonstall were responsible for taking the dinghy's lines, set down on paper in December 1919 by Boston Naval Architect John G. Alden, and having a mold made to produce fiberglass hulls. This became necessary because the original wooden boats were deteriorating and the cost of building new Dinghies from wood was prohibitive.

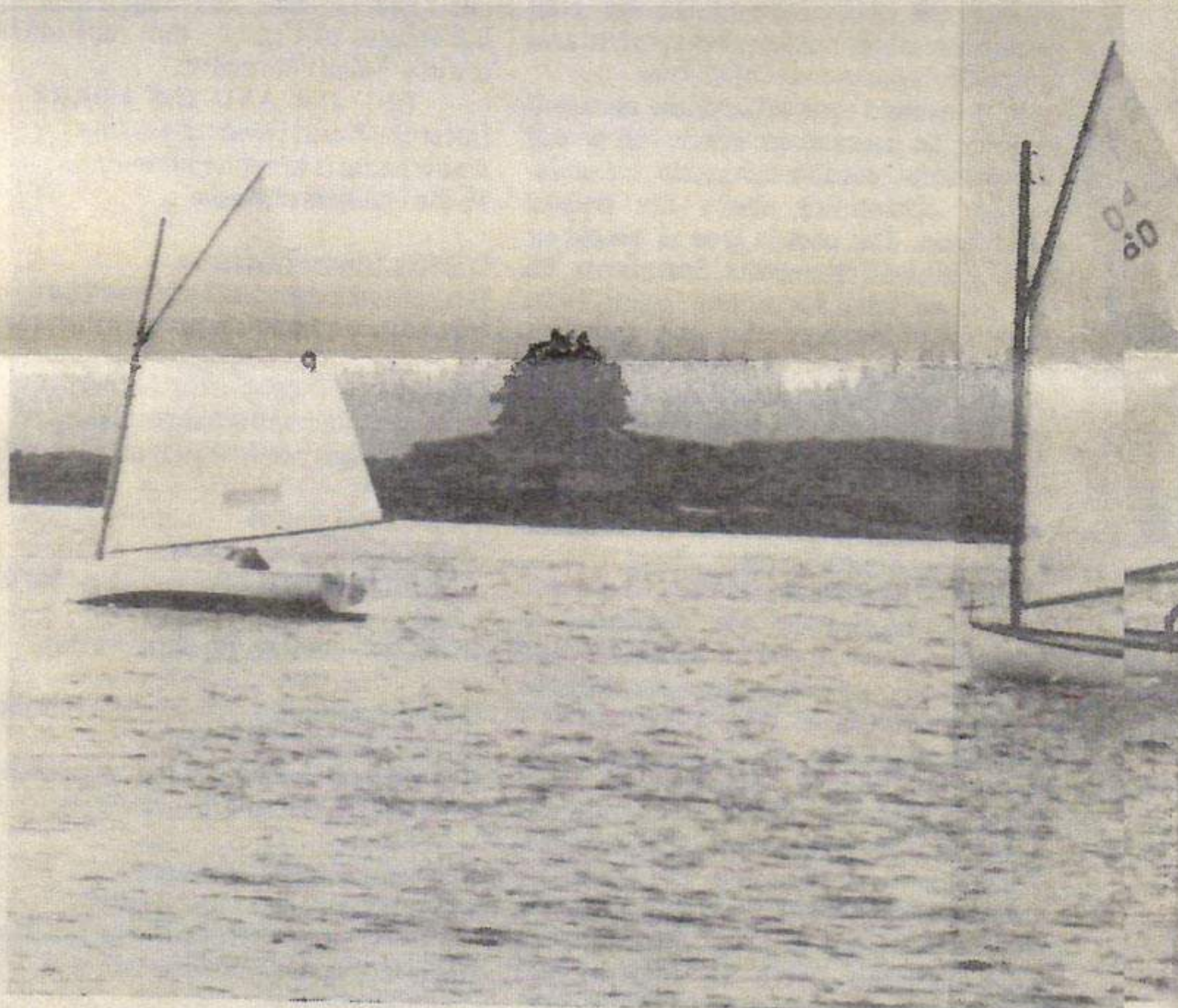
The origin of the dinghy parallels the origin of the island's summer colony, whose beginnings are credited to the 1883 season.

According to an account in "Sail and Oar" by John Leather, summer homes began to dot the shores of the Thorofare at about that time, and as recreation the wealthy families sailed their yacht tenders among the islands and ledges, occasionally informally racing some of the small local boats.

Island carpenter Henry Calderwood built two spritsail-rigged dinghies in an attempt to best the challenge of the "rusticators."

According to Leather, "Racing reputedly stemmed from a challenge issued by William F. Weld, owner of the yacht *Gitana* and a summer visitor to the islands with a home at Iron Point, for anyone to sail against a dinghy he carried on board. It was accepted and Weld lost, but the following summer, 1884, he had a new dinghy which won all the local races."

The excitement was apparently too



CELEBRATING NORTH HAVEN DINGHY — Island sailors and other admirers of boats will take part in special observances Saturday on North Haven marking the 100th birthday of the North Haven Dinghy, a craft that is credited with establishing

much, and it was catching.

Dr. Charles G. Weld had the lines taken off his brother's new dinghy, and contracted with North Haven Boat builder J.O. Brown to have four boats constructed during the winter of 1884-1885.

The dingy *Elfin*, built by Brown, apparently established the template for what followed. Until that time the spritsail rig was used. *Elfin* adopted the single gaff sail on a mast stepped well forward (cat rig) and the hull freeboard was slightly increased, Leather notes.

Not only did this establish the first North American One-Design Class, but adding to the flavor of the dinghy's stock is the fact that the first formal race was won by a woman, Miss Ellen Hayward.

In her "Early One-Design Sailboats," Diane Eames Esterly describes the Grand Dinghy Race of August 1887: "To the chagrin of the two male competitors, Dr. Weld in Tucker Daland's *T.D.* and Charles K. Cobb in an unnamed dinghy, the race was won by a woman, Miss Ellen Hayward, in *Guffin*, owned by Alfred Bowditch. Apparently Dr. Weld and Mr. Cobb engaged in a luffing match while the inexperienced Miss Hayward won the race. In the grandiloquent manner of the day, the popular Miss Hayward was presented a "diamond brooch," (some accounts say it was a sloop named *Wayward*.)"

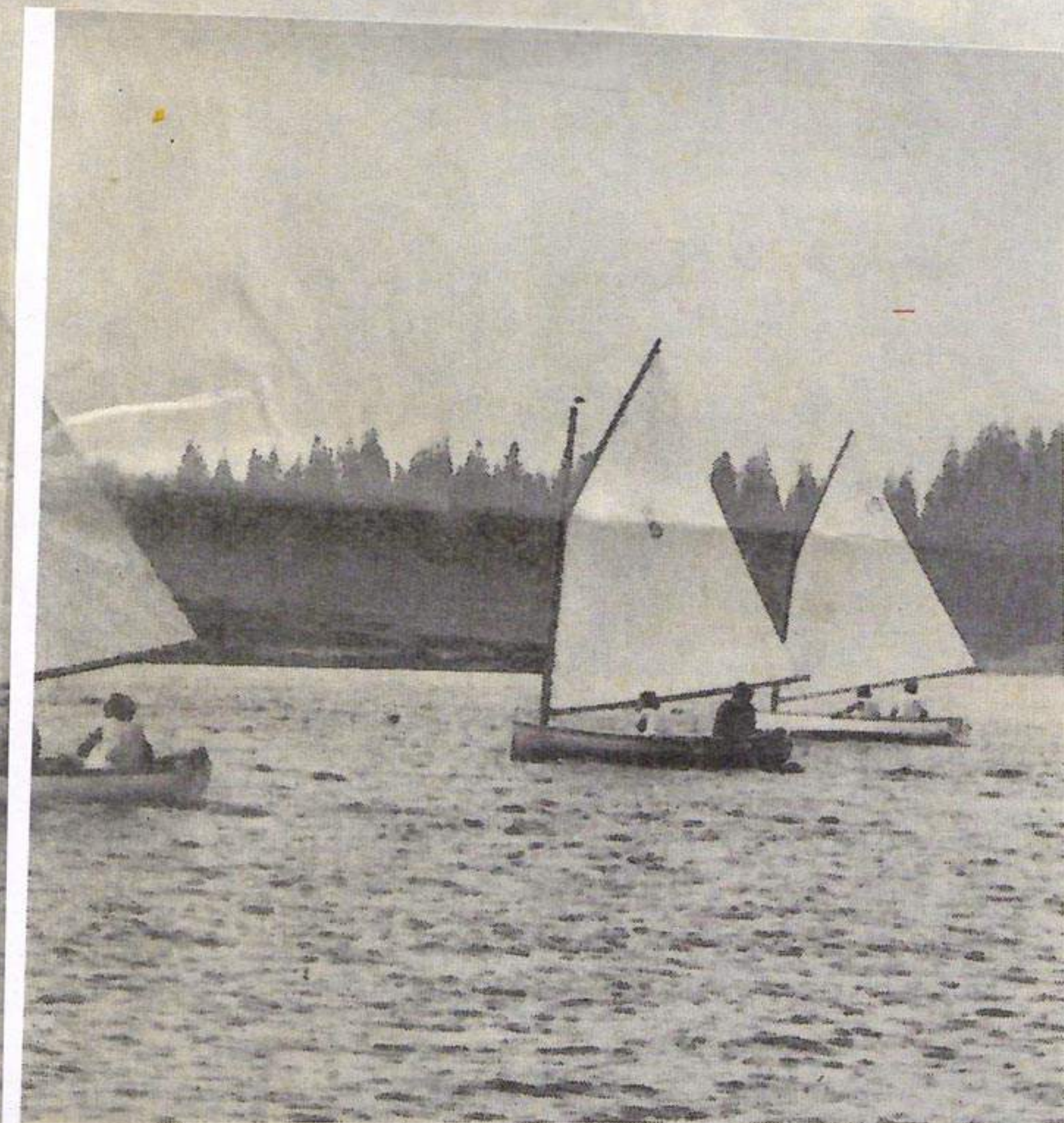
In 1919 Naval Architect Alden was commissioned to take the lines off the dinghy *Kidozo* and draft a set of construc-

tion plans, which were revised 10 years later. These drawings show an overall length of 14 feet 5½ inches, a beam of 4 feet 11 inches, a draft of 13 ½ inches with the centerboard up, and 3 feet 10 inches with it down. Six pounds of lead are attached to the centerboard, and 350 pounds of ballast are stowed in the bottom of the boat to aid in stability. Three air tanks are included as flotation in the event of a capsize. The wood dinghies are planked in ½ inch cedar or oak frames, 8 inches on center. The keel, garboards, skeg, stem, centerboard, gunwales and thwart risings are of oak and the fastenings are copper rivets on burrs. The dinghy carries 118 sq. feet of sail, and has two reef points located per order of the race committee; battens are forbidden by rule. Alden's office proposed a Marconi rig but this was rejected.

In the 1920s and 1930s the dinghies were so numerous that the class was divided into two sections.

Since the 1960s a few wooden dinghies have been built at the Brown yard and also by Edwin Thayer, son of a boatbuilder who built many of the dinghies at Brown's yard.

Lewis and Saltonstall began thinking about making the fiberglass hulls around 1973 as a way to preserve the fleet, Lewis said last week. He explained that time was taking its toll on the original boats, some well into their 70's at the time. Twelve years ago there were numerous non-believers in fiberglass' longevity but the pair persisted. A wooden boat built by Bud



the One-Design Class of sailboat racing. Saturday's celebration includes five informal races and a parade of the classic dinghies off the town landing.

Thayer for Charles Cabot was taken to the Eddy and Duff yard in Mattapoisett MA, where a mold, or plug, was fashioned and six or seven hulls were made. Later, Joe Lawrence in Southwest Harbor made a few and Lewis recalls that a boatbuilder in Owl's Head, whose name he could not remember, made a few "three or four years ago."

"We have a plug here when we want some more," Lewis said. "The fiberglass dinghy was about \$4,250, but we haven't been building any more in the past few years. The market is just in the people here. It's just an old fashioned boat."

Lewis' records show there are 21 fiberglass, and 12 wooden dinghies in existence. The sun appears to have set on the dinghy's heyday, but the classic little boat endures the test of time.

Probably the boat's greatest use was as a floating sailing school, mostly for the children of the "summer people." It was encouraged that families provided the boats, rather than the yacht club, as an incentive for family involvement.

Lewis' involvement dates back at least 50 years, and the kids were sailing in them before then," he recalls.

Unfortunately, the use of the dinghy as a learning tool faded about six years ago, he says.

"People have motor boats now," he offers, "things are less competitive."

"Kids have to start with something small," he continues, "now they're using

the Optimist or a small pram."

Looking out his window he counted 10 Optimists zipping about in front of the Casino wharf. "I can see them now."

"The 420 is an International Class," he says "Most colleges race them and they're fun to learn in. You make spinnaker changes and so forth. The dinghy doesn't provide this. It's just an old fashioned boat. It's a class only in this area, it hasn't expanded."

"It's always been informal, I don't want to make too much ballyhoo about this," he says. "I'd like to keep Maine the way it has been."

ue for the