



**The Herreshoff Registry**  
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## **Herreshoff 16 Foot Class History**

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The first 16 footers were designed and built by N. G. Herreshoff in 1916 for the Seawanhaka Corinthian Yacht Club of Oyster Bay, Long Island. These boats were known as the Fish class. A total of twenty three boats were built for the 1916 sailing season, seventy five years ago this year. The first nineteen boats were delivered in January of 1916 at a cost of \$875. The second group of four were delivered April 11, 1916, the last three of which were at a cost of \$925. Three additional boats were delivered for the 1917 season, bringing the fleet to a total of twenty six. All of the Seawanhaka fleet carried fish names, a gaff rig and were trimmed with oak, but were built without the characteristic Herreshoff moulded sheer strake. A half round oak rub rail was used on these boats, likely as a cost savings measure. The top strake was white cedar, the same as the normal planking. The transoms, rub rail, coamings, and toe rail were all oak. The Seawanhaka sail numbers appear to have been consecutive, but not in the sequence of the hull number assignments from the Herreshoff yard. The sail numbers were preceded by the letters "SC".

The Fish boat was designed at the request of the Seawanhaka selection committee "to be a safe and seaworthy boat in varying weather conditions, ideal for teaching children to sail, for pleasure sailing and Saturday racing." The design developed by Nat Herreshoff was an enlarged version of the 1914 Herreshoff 12 footers with a small cuddy cabin forward of a very large cockpit. The longitudinal scaling ratio was thirteen to ten and the transverse was twelve to ten. An additional 3 1/2 inches was added to the bow after scaling accounting for the proportionately longer overhang. Communications from the committee indicate that the decision to purchase the fleet was delayed a year, but then went forward based on a price of \$875.

A single boat, Xiphias, was built in 1919. Xiphias did not join the Seawanhaka fleet, but instead went to Mattapoisett, Ma. The sale price was \$1700. This boat is believed to be the first Fish with a moulded oak sheerstrake as well as the last to be gaff rigged.

The next fleet of boats was a group of three built for the Warwick Country Club of Warwick Neck R.I. These boats were delivered for the 1925 sailing season. They sold for \$1750. A fourth boat, Tarpoon II, was built with the group of three for Dr. Halsey Dewolf. Six additional boats joined the WCC fleet in the 1926 season. Once again, the price increased, this time to \$1900. The nine boats of the WCC fleet were marconi rigged, with moulded oak sheer strakes and were named for cartoon characters. They were trimmed with oak also.

The final two Herreshoff Fish boats were built in June of 1936 and 1937. These boats were likely trimmed with mahogany. The total number of fish boats built was between thirty eight and forty, the uncertainty is due to two incomplete entries in the shop records.

Additional 16 footers were built as auxiliary cruisers called Marlins. Four boats are listed in the shop records as having been built at HMCo. These boats were marconi rigged with enlarged cabins, a head, some with inboard engines. The cabin trunk carried forward of the mast as well as extending further aft, reducing the cockpit size. Two oval ports were located on each side, similar to the S boat configuration, with the characteristic pointed forward cabin shape. Unlike the fish class, they were planked with mahogany and trimmed with teak. They were built during the years from 1937 to 1939. One additional wooden Marlin is known to have been built in 1947 at the Warren Shipbuilding. It was planked with cedar on heavier oak frames, fastened and ballasted with iron.

In 1926 the Seawanahaka fleet began to shift to Mattapoissett Ma. About eleven boats in total were owned at Mattapoissett between 1926 and 1938. The names of the eleven were: Cockle, Eel, Morrhue, Nautilus, Pompano, Sculpin, Shark, Skate, Tarpon, Wahoo, and Xiphias. Although many of the names appear to be the same as those listed in the Herreshoff shop records, it is known that some, such as Shark, were given these names upon arrival in Mattapoissett. Many of the boats were converted to marconi rig for the 1930 season. Three boats which were not converted were Skate, Tarpon, and Xiphias. By 1938, many of the Mattapoissett fleet had been sold and migrated away. About four boats appeared in Padanaram between 1930 and 1963. Their names were Harbinger, Hope, Xiphias (later called Green Duck), and a fourth as yet unidentified.

The hurricane of Sept. 21, 1938 effectively ended the Fish boat activity in Mattapoissett. All of the remaining four boats are thought to have been wrecked. It is not known if any of the wrecked boats may have been repaired. The Padanaram Harbinger was totally destroyed in a boat yard fire and not repaired. The information pertaining to Mattapoissett was graciously provided by Edward Wood, Jr., author of The Early Days Of Sailing In Mattapoissett, and former Fish sailor. The Fish activities in Padanaram have become known through the help of Norman Fortier, marine photographer, the New Bedford Whaling Museum, the New Bedford Yacht Club, and Llewellyn Howland Jr. Llewellyn is a former Fish sailor, having owned Harbinger from 1933 until about 1937.

The Warwick Neck fleet only sailed actively for a short time before the members decided to replace the boats with the larger and faster Starling Burgess designed Atlantic class. Upon replacement, many of the marconi Warwick Country Club (WCC) boats went to Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island. From that point the boats began to lose their fleet identity and become harder to trace.

Seventy five years after the first boats were introduced more than half of the forty original Herreshoff 16 footers are still lovingly owned and sailed. At least ten of the original fleet of twenty six are still in existence. The known boats are located from Bar Harbor, Me. to Long Island Sound. Currently the prime area of Fish boat activity is in the Mystic/Stonington area, where approximately seven boats are kept. Many of the boats are active members of the Noank Wooden Boat Association.

More recently, Golden Era Boats of Noank has been producing a fiberglass version of the Fish called Petrel. The Petrel is available as either a gaff or marconi rig, although, to date only three of the thirty boats sold have been gaff rigged. Two boats are currently under construction for the 1991 season. Nine Petrels are located on the Connecticut coast, adding to the Fish activity in the area. The Petrel has been found to be very competitive when raced with the original wooden boats of comparable condition.

In celebration of seventy five years of sailing pleasure given by the Herreshoff 16 foot design, the Fish, Marlin, and Petrel classes are invited to meet in Bristol during August 1991 to race together at the site of their origin.

The Herreshoff Marine Museum has arranged to host the 16 foot class August 17 and 18, for two days of racing, with separate classes for the wooden and fiberglass boats. The weekend of August 24, the combined fleet will race to Newport to participate as a special entry in the Classic Yacht Regatta hosted by the Museum of Yachting over the Labor Day weekend.

*This article was written in January, 1991 by Richard Meyer of Norwell, MA on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Fish class. Permission to reproduce this article was graciously provided by the author.*