

Hurley Conklin Award

Presented to people who have lived in the Barnegat Bay tradition. This award has been named in honor of the last of the Great Old Time Barnegat Bay Carvers, Hurley Conklin.

This year's recipients:

Thomas R. Beaton

Donated by
New Jersey Decoy
Collectors Association

Robert Beloff

Donated by
Ocean County Parks
& Recreation

Paul N. Smith

Donated by
New Jersey Decoy
Collectors Association

William de Rouville, Sr.

Donated by
Ocean County Parks
& Recreation

Thomas R. Beaton as told to German Georgieff

Tom Beaton is the 3rd generation boat builder to own Beaton Boatworks located on Barnegat Bay in West Mantoloking. The boat works has a history of meeting the needs of both Barnegat Bay clammers and duck hunters plus the wealthy summer people that enjoyed racing on the shallow bay.

“My grandfather, David, emigrated from Scotland in 1925. He was a boat builder and he came here for more opportunity and a better life, which he said he did get,” said Tom Beaton. “He had friends here already so he came over first and brought the family over once he was settled.”

David Beaton started work at Morton Johnson Boatworks of Bay Head. In 1928 David Beaton started his own boat building business with partners in Bay Head, but that broke up in the 1930s. Then he went to Mantoloking in 1937 and built David Beaton and Sons Boatworks.

He had six sons and he put them all to work. They built all the buildings themselves. The oldest building still standing is the carpentry shop built in 1937, said Tom. “It’s on cedar pilings -- they drove the cedar into the ground, put a string around it and framed up the building. This was way before building codes,” he noted. “They started to build boats -- skiffs and then sailboats.”

According to Tom’s late father Lochlan, a 1993 Hurley Conklin awardee, everything was done by hand at first -- there were no power tools as there were no poles in place to carry electricity to the shops. They had an automobile gasoline engine to run the big bandsaw. Later, a wealthy client paid to have the poles put in.

Beaton Boatworks made approximately 200 sailing sneakboxes (duck boats) that were not just employed by baymen and duck hunters but also young sailors, particularly young women who joined in local racing derbies.

Wooden boat building was the main business until the late 1960s when fiberglass came on the scene and seemed to be a kind of miracle material, explained Tom. “My father realized at the time that we would have to change the business and started to make it more of a boat yard and marina-type operation. That seemed to



Photo Credit: Awardee's Family

work -- we had lots of winter storage and dockage (fees). We never gave up building boats but we didn't depend on it. We did it in the winter -- we built sneakboxes and a few A-cats, plus a bunch of row boats."

Tom was eager to follow in the family business.

"I'll be here 50 years next year," he said. "I used to come here after school and scrub boats, we didn't have a power wash -- we had a brush. We'd rub it in the sand and scrub the boat (to remove barnacles). We didn't have a travel hitch -- we had just one lift. I liked it once I started working. It's nice in the fall around here -- we're always a little more casual, low key. Plus, I was helping my father and we had a good relationship. --It's a nice way of life."

On the other hand, running the business doesn't leave much time for doing traditional boat building work. "I always say you're more tired running your computer and doing paperwork than you are doing physical work in the yard. "I'm always hoping I can do more building -- I've got all my tools sitting over there...but we don't have the help.

"I have a son who likes the business. He graduated college and is going for his MBA. I don't encourage or discourage -- he's only 22 so he has to figure out what he wants to do. I want to build a double-ender when my son is home more."

Although Beaton skimmed over the importance of the Boatworks in the resurgence of A-cat sailing on Barnegat Bay, his legacy is well noted.

Catboats, with a shallow draft and wide hull, were traditionally used as work boats on the bay, employed as fishing boats, charters and even in the salt hay industry. Baymen might sometimes race them to the harbor when work was done. Then in the early 1900s yachting architects reconfigured the workhorse into a sleek design to add to the sport of sailboat racing. Historically, the first A-cat was commissioned by a Philadelphia judge in 1922 to compete in the Toms River Yacht Club Challenge Cup. The *Mary Ann* and other early A-cats such as the *Lotus* in 1925 and *Spy* in 1924 were built at the Morton Johnson boat works, where David Beaton first learned his trade.

By the 1980s some of the early A-cats were ready for the scrap heap unless a boat works could be found to do the heavy restorations. Tom Beaton was able to restore both the *Lotus* and the *Spy* at his boat works. Then, in 1993 the boat works built a new A-cat to ply the Barnegat Bay -- *Ghost*.

"The problem now is getting the materials. We get our cedar, when we can get it, out of Virginia. And you have to be a pretty wealthy guy to pay for a wooden boat these days," said Tom. "But we do a lot of repairs. So we're still here."

Editors Note: The Beaton family is credited with modifying the design of the duck boat to prevent its bow from submerging when sailing with the wind. Most of the Barnegat Bay yacht clubs used the Beaton duck boats. Currently, that tradition is celebrated at the annual World Championship Duck Boat Race at the Mantoloking Yacht Club, which is held every August. Tom Beaton is the official duck boat evaluator for the race.