

# PENOBSCOT MARINE MUSEUM

## The Friendship Catboat

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*Friendship Catboat COTLEY, now in the Penobscot Marine Museum's collection, seen moored in Friendship harbor circa 1998. Gift of Elizabeth Toraason, 1998.27.*

While the traditional range of catboats has not typically included Maine, the Friendship Catboat has found its place in our waters. In 1925, English rusticator William “Billy” Kirkpatrick wanted a sailboat to train children. Summering on Davis Point in Friendship, Maine, he was surrounded by boatbuilders, and approached Archie Thompson and Gene Brown at Friendship Boatshop. Each of the men brought their own perspective and skills to the partnership. Billy Kirkpatrick was an artist and avid yachtsman, so had an eye for design and knowledge of what the boat should do. Gene Brown specialized in workboats and double-enders. Archie Thompson had built Friendship sloops in Wilbur Morse’s boatshop and worked as a foreman in a shipyard around New Bedford, Massachusetts before coming to work for Gene Brown. Together, they designed and built the distinctive Friendship Catboat.

The Friendship Boatshop’s experience with workboats is evident in the design and construction of this vessel. From the side, it shares the profile of a dory, with only two chines, or planks, to a side; a flat, cross-planked bottom with a slight rocker; and a pronounced slanting bow and stern. The Friendship Catboats are also heavily built like a workboat, using the same stock of oak frames and cedar boards lying around the shop. The spruce masts were locally sourced; one Friendship resident remembers watching the builders shape the 18’ mast from a spruce tree chopped near his house.



*The Friendship catboat has a distinctive shape versus other catboats. The Friendship has a flat cross-planked bottom with slight rocker front to stern, two chines or boards per side, and a pronounced slanting bow stem and stern transom. Friendship catboat COTLEY, Gift of Elizabeth Toraason, 1998.27.*

The catboat in the United States evolved from colonial fishing boats working fishing grounds with shoal-draft waters, such as the lagoons of northern New Jersey, lower New York Bay, and the Cape Cod seashore. The result was a shoal-draft sailboat with a small centerboard. The rather simple design could be built in the backyard using a half-model for scaled measurements. It had two sailing rigs. The first was a sloop and jib rig for the light summertime air when more sail area was required. In stormier winter winds, a second cat rig was available with a stubby mast stepped far forward and a smaller sail that could be worked inboard. A catboat has a 2:1 ratio of length to beam, making for plenty of room for the fish or a family of four with a dog. In the 1870s and 1880s, catboats had a brief period as a popular sailing rig, as its single sail allowed racers to sail close-hauled into the wind. One-design sailing dinghies soon eclipsed the racing catboat.



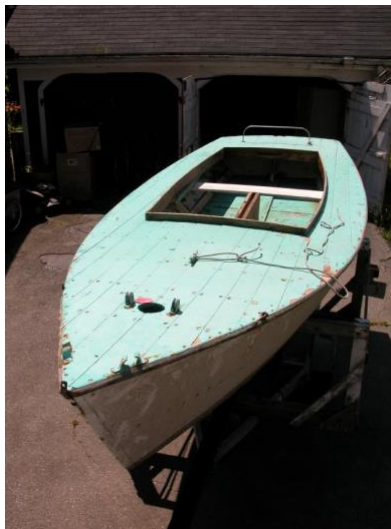
*When most people think of catboats, they think of a Beetlecat, like the one pictured, with the blunt bow, broad beam, and barndoor rudder. The Friendship catboat is narrower with a slanted bow and transom. Maynard Bray Collection, LB2013.1.124.17.*

Despite the catboat's waning popularity as a racing boat, the Royal Friendship Yacht Club fleet of Friendship, Maine has been active since the 1930s. Between 1925 and 1929, Gene Brown and Archie Thompson built the initial fleet of eight boats for the summer residents of the Davis Point and Martin's Point summer colonies, and an additional eight for a fleet on the Hudson River, for \$100 each. They made a metal form over which they built a 16'1" long and 5'8" broad hull, a little narrower than the typical 2:1 length to beam ratio of catboats. They chose cedar for the cross-planked bottom, half-deck, and the two chines or lapstrake boards per side. They used oak for the bow stem, transom, keelson, stern knees, deck coaming, deck beams, and five sawn frames fitted into the high load areas. The rudder fit the slanting transom snugly. The 18' spruce mast supported 130 square feet of sail.



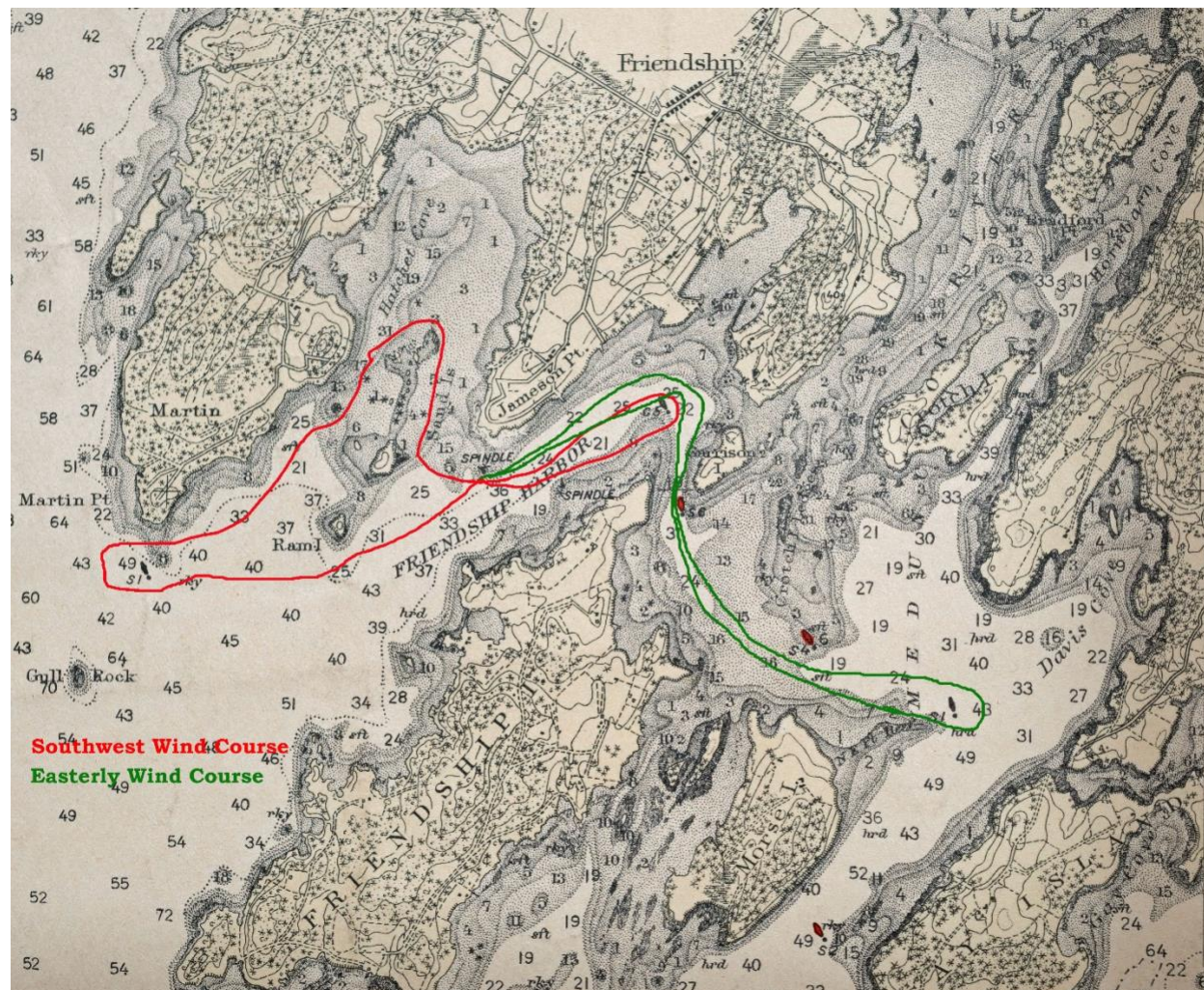
*Friendship catboats, like COTLEY, were designed as light air boats to take advantage of Maine's light winds in island-sheltered harbors. Should the wind gust up, the sail could be reefed. Gift of Elizabeth Toraason, 1998.27.*

The boat sails best when evenly balanced, and, according to at least one sailor, can even get up on a plane when sailing downwind. Should the boat heel, though, the flared design at amidships, as well as some easing of the sheet or feathering the rudder, keeps the boat upright. Staying upright is one thing, staying dry is another. The low freeboard, half-deck, and narrow beam made for a wet ride in rough seas, but with a single reef, the Friendship Catboat sails exceptionally well.



*Although the Friendship catboat is designed for light air, should the wind completely die, the boat could be rowed from the thwart seat just behind the centerboard trunk. The centerboard trunk was supported by the deck beam and thwart. Image of the Friendship Catboat COTLEY, Gift of Elizabeth Toraason, 1998.27.*

Generations of Davis Point rusticators have enjoyed sailing picnics on their Friendship Catboats. Children learned to sail through fog and calms, requiring friends and family to come rescue them. Despite being built for the “kids,” the parents enjoyed the design. A Sunday afternoon racing series sprang up in the 1930s, with all eight boats lining up for bragging rights. Family ties were no match to the competition of aunts and uncles against nieces and nephews or cousin against cousin.



*The Royal Friendship Yacht Club used one of two race courses for the Friendship Catboat races, depending on the wind. Both started and ended at the Spindle off the Davis Point summer colony on Jameson Point. In a southwesterly wind, the catboats sailed for the nun or red buoy off the Martin Point summer colony, then up into Hatchet Cove, circumnavigating the island clockwise, then past the Spindle to take the Harbor black can buoy to their starboard (right side) and back to finish at the Spindle. In an easterly wind, the course went the opposite direction, passing the black Harbor can to starboard, through the Gut to Morse's Bay to round the black can marking Northeast Point Reef to port (left side) and retracing the route back to the Spindle, taking the nuns to starboard and the cans to port. Route is superimposed on a 1922 Damariscotta and Medomak River Chart from the US Coast and Geodetic Survey, LB0000.01.0507.*

Except for a respite during World War II, the rusticators of Friendship have been holding Friendship Catboat races during the summer under the guise of the Royal Friendship Yacht Club. The culminating event of the season is the Labor Day race, to which an old tin coffee pot known as the “Commodore’s Cup,” is awarded to the winner. Etched with a pin are the names of the winners from 1935 to 1966, with brief lapses. As of 1981, six of the original eight were still racing, a testament to their solid construction and loving care by their owners, such as fiberglassing the original bottoms. The fleet has grown and the construction has adapted as racers sought out an advantage.



*Friendship sloop WILBUR MORSE, built by Carlton Simmons in 1947 around the same time that he supervised the building of the Friendship Catboat COTLEY. WILBUR MORSE at Friendship Sloop Day, July 29, 1978. Red Boutilier Collection, LB2005.24.16816.*

After World War II concluded, the Friendship summer residents were ready to resume racing. Gene Brown and Archie Thompson had split their partnership, with Brown taking the Friendship Catboat building forms and Thompson taking the plans. The racers approached the Friendship postmaster and boat builder Carlton Simmons to build another four Friendship Catboats for the fleet between 1946 and 1947. Carlton was the nephew of noted Friendship Sloop builder Wilbur Morse.

Carlton Simmons found the building forms deteriorated, but with careful measurement of the existing boats, he was able to make near approximate reproductions of the originals. The adaptations he made were a new sail plan with a higher peak on the gaff-rigged sail and making the new gaff and boom out of ash rather than spruce to lighten the boat and improve the sailing qualities. In 1979, The Apprenticeship, then operating out of the Maine Maritime Museum, built three Friendship Catboats based on Billy Kirkpatrick's original ANANANNIE. The Apprenticeship substituted pine planking for the original cedar and drew a set of building plans. Doug Lash, a Friendship boatbuilder, built six more in the 1980s for \$3,000 each, an inflation rate of 2900%! He used an original 1920s Friendship Catboat as his mold and substituted bronze fastenings for the original galvanized steel ones and Sitka spruce masts for locally sourced spruce. Augie Mende of Belfast built two more in 2000 and Dave Edwards, a Friendship summer resident, built two in 2003. Most recently in 2014, Buzzards Bay Yacht Services, down off Cape Cod, built a pair of Friendship Catboats for the descendants of original Davis Point summer residents. These boats were much lighter than the original eight, with a plywood bottom and decking.



*Bob Lane built the Friendship catboat COTLEY while apprenticing with Carlton Simmons in 1946 and 1947. Together, they built four Friendship catboats. In 1951, Bob started his own wooden boatbuilding shop: Penobscot Boat Works in Rockport. He is seen here in 1973 comparing a half-hull to 2-D boat plans. Red Boutilier Collection, LB2005.24.14915.*

The Friendship Catboat COTLEY in the Penobscot Marine Museum's collection was one of the four built by Carlton Simmons and his apprentice Bob Lane in 1946 and 1947. Like the original eight, it is made of cedar planks over oak frames with galvanized steel fittings and a spruce mast. William Vogel, a Professor of History at University of Cincinnati who summered in Friendship for five generations, commissioned the boat and named it for his daughter, either Margaret born in 1944 or Elizabeth born in 1946. Vogel, author of "History of Friendship, Maine" in 1957, wrote self-deprecatingly of the "plague" of summer people at colonies at Martin's Point and Davis' Point, of which he was one. As noted on the chart above, the race course skirted both those Points, giving families on shore a great view of the action. The COTLEY stayed in the family until its donation to the Museum in 1998, but was not a winning boat, having never shown up on the "Commodore's Cup" trophy.

COTLEY's builder, Bob Lane served in a post-World War II apprentice program after serving as a tug boat captain in the English Channel. He became well-immersed in Friendship boatbuilding, apprenticing with Carlton Simmons and marrying into the Lash boatbuilding family. In 1951, Bob opened his own wooden boat building shop, the Penobscot Boat Works in Rockport, Maine. Over the next 25 years, he built skiffs, sloops, and big powerboats, such as the Penbo runabout. In 2005, he built five Friendship Catboats, using the same hull design, but changing the sail configuration to a sloop rig with a main sail and jib, and moving the mast amidships. His plans of that Friendship Catboat can be found in the Museum's research collection.

Although the Friendship Catboat at first glance is not a quintessential Maine design, the boatbuilders of Friendship made adaptations to the traditional catboat to take advantage of Maine's light winds in island-sheltered harbors. The shoal draft centerboard allows the skipper to hug the coastline or thread the guts between islands during a race or picnic cruise. The large mainsail can be reefed for the variable winds. It is for this reason that the summer residents of Davis' and Martin's Point continue to commission and race this class of catboats.

**For more information on Friendship Catboats, check out these references:**

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