





**Above: The “Deep Creek Boat Co.” was started by Matt Storey, the first builder of wooden boats at Deep Creek Lake.**

**Below: Skeeter Bowman, a native of Deep Creek and featured in this publication previously, is shown in this 1950s photo driving his new Chris-Craft. Notice the undeveloped Wisp area in the background. Skeeter’s airplane, a Taylor Craft, can be seen on display at “Bear Creek Traders” at Market Square in McHenry along with his WWII story.**



By the late 1920s, Chris-Craft extended its market to the middle class by introducing the mass production of wooden pleasure boats to lower costs, and by offering incentives like installment payment plans and a one-year guarantee. New design features included a double-planked hull bottom, forward steering and a windshield. Sales slid during the Great Depression and World War II, but came roaring back in the 1950s, when the company introduced a new lineup of pleasure boats – 159 models in all – produced at the rate of 1,000 per year. With its standardized design and reputation for top quality, the largest of these runabouts earned the “Chris Craft” nickname. By decade’s end, the company had reached the pinnacle of prestige in the small powerboat market.



In 1960, Chris-Craft headquarters moved from Michigan to Pompano Beach, Florida, under the leadership of Chris' grandson Parson. In 1971, the Constellation model became the last wooden Chris-Craft runabout to roll off the assembly line.

An era had ended, but numerous Chris-Craft boats are still afloat, lovingly tended by their owners. Among them are several residents of Deep Creek Lake with stories to tell.

One is Kim Brady, a Garrett County native and proud owner of a 1960 Continental since 1972. Not surprisingly, her father, "Skeeter" Bowman, played a critical role in the acquisition of this boat. Skeeter once ran one of the earliest Deep Creek Lake marinas, located in McHenry at the site of Bill's Marine Service North. He started the business with his dad and ran it until 1972. For a time, Skeeter sold Chris-Craft runabouts.

Thanks to her father's business, Kim recalls a childhood spent in what she calls "a world of water, where summer was about swimsuits and bare feet." A tomboy as a child, Kim wanted to go everywhere with her dad but recalls that she still had to wear a dress. Skeeter helped her find her first boat, a 16-foot Crown Line, but eventually she decided to trade up. So Skeeter took her to a building where he

"I was only six years old when the boat was delivered by Skeeter Bowman on July 4, 1959," he recalls. "My uncle would allow me to steer occasionally and I spent hours sitting in the boat making motorboat sounds." He describes his first solo trip in the boat, at age 12, as "my finest hour."

Time took its toll on the beloved Chris-Craft, and so it was traded for a fiberglass Century Ski Boat. Lou grew up and brought his children to enjoy Deep Creek Lake summers, but started thinking about that beloved mahogany boat. "I realized that there was going to be a part of Deep Creek Lake that my kids could miss, if they could never experience the same throaty sound of a mahogany wooden boat cruising down the lake in grand style," he says.

So, back at his office, he fired up his computer and began his quest. It ended on eBay, where he found "an identical replica to our old boat," a 1959 Chris-Craft Continental. Bidding started at \$9,000, and Lou joined in. Two hours later, the boat was his. Soon Lou and his son Brandon were off to Grand Haven, Michigan, to pick up the boat.

After a thorough inspection, Lou realized the scope of repairs required professional services. Via the Internet, he found the Antique Boat Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, and



rented dry storage space to boat owners. Several boats were for sale, including the Chris-Craft that Kim selected. The size was 18 feet, the engine was a Chevy 287 with only 461 original miles, and it was hers for \$1,800. After restoring the interior, Kim was ready to go out on the water.

One of her most frequent passengers was Muttsy, her Norwegian Elkhound. "The dog was quite the fixture with her feet on the sides and back on the engine box," she recalls.

For Lou Battistella, acquiring his own Chris-Craft was the realization of a childhood dream. As a child, he spent summers at his family's Deep Creek Lake cottage, where he fell in love with his uncle's 1959 Chris-Craft Continental.

he was on the road, Chris-Craft in tow. After six months, the Continental sported all new varnish, bottom paint, chrome, fuel tank, ignition, carburetor and a gold leaf inscription saying, "Peaceful Easy Feeling." The boat's bottom was replaced about a year later.

Lou then decided to track down documentation of his restored runabout. He found the factory boat card with the help of the Mariners' Museum in Newport News, Virginia, which maintains archives of the Chris-Craft Boat Company. He then enlisted the help of Skeeter Bowman to find documents pertaining to his uncle's beloved Chris-Craft. Skeeter found the papers and gave them to Lou. After comparing both sets of documents, he concluded



**Facing page: Kim Brady glides across the lake in her 1960 Chris-Craft Continental, humming along to the unmistakable sound of an inboard V-8.**

**Above and right: Tim Joseph's fully restored 1952 Chris-Craft Riviera gleaming in the sunlight; boat and trailer are in pristine condition.**

that the boats were equipped in similar fashion, and only nine hull numbers apart in the assembly line.

Despite Lou's description of a boat as "the big hole in the middle of the lake that you throw money into," he's happy that his children, now in their 20's, are having fun with the family Chris-Craft. And every ride is a trip down memory lane for Lou.

For Tim Josephs, his 1952 Chris-Craft Riviera has been a rather costly labor of love after a three-year, total restoration. He found this 18-foot runabout in St. Michaels, Maryland. A real estate agent who also designs and builds high-end homes, he has used the boat to show lakefront homes to clients.



*Chris-Craft*



Lou Battistella and son Brandon are great admirers of their Chris-Craft. Photo below demonstrates the solid, steady stance of the V-8 powered wooden boat when running at full throttle.

Lou's boat is a 1959 Continental that has been lovingly restored. The boat is kept at their home on Deep Creek and usually in Brandon's care, but the whole family enjoys spending time with the boat.





"I've had one foot in the boat and then my phone rings," he says. "Now that it's done, we're looking forward to using it."

Tim also owns a 1964 wooden boat, one of the last manufactured by Cruisers, Inc. Aptly named the Sour Apple for a color Tim describes as "seafoam green," the boat is 20 feet long, with capacity for ten, and its own, original Gator Trailer. "Everything has been done to the hilt," he says. He bought it at first sight, after getting a tip from the restorer of his Chris-Craft. "It was produced during the period when people began towing their own boats on vacations," he says.

Now it's a different era, a different world. "These boats take so much work, they're disappearing from the lake," Kim says. "You see few boats from the '30s and '40s anymore."

So a glimpse of these gleaming, wooden beauties is a rare treat indeed, reminding us of a time when simple, elegant style reigned supreme.



**Tim's all original 1964 Sour Apple by Cruisers, Inc. is completely restored to the last detail including the Gator Trailer and original outboard motor.**

**Tim and wife Michelle, are real estate agents for Railey Realty at Deep Creek Lake.**

**Matt Storey, shown here in one of his original boats, was the first wooden boat builder on Deep Creek Lake. He started building his boats in a small chicken coop on the water's edge. Mr. Storey stopped building boats and began selling and renting them. His marina was located along Rt. 219 in McHenry and after 20 years he sold the business because it was growing too quickly; see picture on page13.**

**The boat shown here can be seen on display at Bear Creek Traders at Market Square in McHenry, MD.**

*Thanks to Hugh Umbel for the use of this photo.*

