



A Grand Old Lady's Last Cruise



by Bob Cerullo



"Alexandra" cruises Chesapeake Bay

Alexandra has made her last trip up the Hudson. She has gone to a place where she can rest and be admired by generations to come for her classic lines, abundant brass, and lavish, varnished wood construction. In her day, the grand old ELCO was considered the boat to own.

When Charles Lindbergh decided buying a boat would be a good way to have some privacy on his honeymoon, he chose a 38-foot ELCO cabin cruiser and named it the *Mouette*. The "Lone Eagle" had learned to love the ELCO when he chartered a 38-footer one summer. Amid fierce competition from boat builders like Chris Craft, Gar Wood, Sheppard and many others, ELCO was recognized as the premier boat builder of its day. ELCO, which stands for the Electric Launch Company, got its start in 1893, building a series of electric and gasoline-powered launches. The company introduced the first commercially produced electric motor boats at America's first World's Fair, the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. There it supplied 55, 36-foot launches to carry more than a million fair goers, exposing ELCO boats to notables from around the world. ELCO pioneered the mass production of boats before Henry Ford started doing it with the automobile and sold boats on the then-unheard-of installment plan.

During the World War I, the company built 550 80-foot sub chasers for the British Admiralty. Notables such as Thomas Edison, J. P. Morgan, John Jacob Astor, the Grand Duke Alexander of Russia, and hundreds of others who could afford the best chose ELCO. Perhaps the most famous person to have captained an ELCO was John Fitzgerald Kennedy: the PT-109 was one of the 399 PT boats ELCO built for the U.S. Navy.

With the end of World War II, things did not go well for the company, and it closed in 1949, ending a golden page in the history of luxury yachts. In recent years, however, the brand name has been resur-



Tony & Alexandra Hannold onboard the "Alexandra"

rected and is used by the company that recreates ELCO launches.

A working vintage yacht

It is estimated there are still about 200 vintage ELCOs in use, and one of the best still plying the waters is a 1928, 42-foot, flat-top cruiser owned and christened *Alexandra* by Tony and Judith Alexandra Hannold of Mathews, VA.

"I just love lots of mahogany and brass," Tony said. "I guess I love the rare, old and obscure." He found the boat in Hilton Head, S.C., in 1999. The Hannolds like to cruise, and they often commute by boat to their summer home on Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island. "Route 95 is a pain, and I thought it would be nice to go up there by boat," he said.

The original gas engine on the *Alexandra* has been replaced with a 120 hp Ford Lehman diesel engine. Top speed is about 11 miles per hour, a little slow for long cruises, which prompted Hannold to purchase a faster one-off with twin screws, the *Kensington*.

Home port for the two vessels is Horn Harbor Marina near Mathews, VA., a place with a long history of wooden boat restoration and repair. *Alexandra's* hull has undergone extensive restoration to make her safe for the ocean and the frequent trips the Hannolds have taken. She is approaching 80 years old but looks brand new. Many of the modifications made by Hannold to the interior are carefully designed to match the style of construction and original décor of the grand old lady.

A typical weekend cruise takes the Hannolds to Onancock, and a little longer one to Solomons, Md. Hannold enjoys showing the *Alexandra* and *Kensington* at antique and classic boat shows, and one of his favorites is the annual fall event in Reedville, this year on September 9, sponsored by the Tidewater chapter of the Antique and Classic Boat Society and the Reedville Fishermen's Museum. The Hannolds also often travel to shows in Colonial Beach and St. Michaels, Md.

Classic boat competitions include several categories dealing with how well a vintage boat has been maintained, how authentically it has been restored and, of course, how well the judges like it. Hannold has won best in show, best cruiser, Captain's Choice and other awards at various shows, and at the premier East Coast vintage show in Mystic Seaport, Ct., the

Alexandra won for best restoration by an owner. Hannold is most proud of the Captain's Choice award at the show in Hampton, VA.

The *Alexandra* is no museum piece but a working yacht, traveling all over the Chesapeake Bay and from Narragansett Bay to Albemarle Sound in North Carolina. On her 80th anniversary *Alexandra* journeyed (Editor's Note: Trip is scheduled for July 20, 2007) up the Hudson, through the locks, across Lake Champlain, into Canada, the Eisenhower Lock and on to Alexandria Bay and the Antique Boat Museum in Clayton, NY, where she will be retired in the museum's new gallery.

A railroad man, too



ELCO owner Tony Hannold

Hannold describes his occupation as "professional retired." He had been president and chairman of the board of Arkansas Missouri Railroad and Allied Enterprises before retiring in 1998. While he thinks of himself as retired, he's a man of many interests, and it seems that he's simply transferred his energy from the world of work to his new retirement enterprises.

The library in his home is well stocked, and he enjoys reading about the history of trains and railroads. He's also a serious model railroader who builds many of his G-scale trains, as well as the buildings and scenery, from scratch. The layout is hand-made and authentic. If, for example, you lift the roof off the model power house, in it you will find a steam boiler and generator made from an assortment of items, such as an old bracelet and a small funnel. He is in the process of designing and building a model firehouse to garage an Ahrens Foxfire engine model he recently obtained for his train layout.

Tony is something of an ELCO historian, taking great pride in his vintage boats, and a railroad man and proud of it. He also enjoys gardening, but his wife of 50 years, Judith Alexandra, is the boss. "When it comes to gardening, I am just a worker here," he said.

The entrance lane to the Hannold's home in Mathews, VA. is arched by pink crepe myrtle trees that blaze with color in summer, giving an indication that special folks with a passion for living reside in the home at the end of the road.



"Alexandra's" brass binnacle



"Alexandra's" dining table