

Matthews Boats



By George S. Nammack

The oohs and ahhs that came from on-lookers' smiles when an early Matthews boat seemed to slide through the water along the wide horizons of so many admiring eyes were entirely understandable. They were a chorus of approval from appreciative people who knew boats, people who grew up with them and used them to make a living and for local travel and, yes, grew old with them proudly. Matthews boats were visually stunning in the late Eighties, when folks were trying to understand the new marine engines powered by gasoline, and they draw kudos today at boat shows, exhibitions and reunions.

Scott J. Matthews lived in Bascom, Ohio. The basement of his father's home was his marine lab where he fashioned boat models and did a great deal of first-class dreaming. In that basement, Scott founded the Matthews Boat Company, but the basement confines cramped his style, so he commenced boat building at his father's sawmill. In a few years, he agreed with The Lozier Company to build boats scaled from 16-foot launches to 45-foot cabin cruisers. Lozier did no boat building. They marketed the vessels which were sent to Plattsburgh, New York where Lozier engines were installed. In 1904, Lozier changed its interest to auto engines, thereby deep-sixing the Matthews connection.

Matthews boats built at Bascom included *Standard*, a boat sold under the Lozier banner, and *Onward*,

a 74-foot double-ender that took the Matthews family more than 9,000 miles from Peoria, Illinois down the Mississippi to the Gulf, around Florida, up the East Coast, through the Erie Canal and back to Ohio.

Scott's activities were very successful and by 1906, supported by local businessmen, he was invited to move his company to Port Clinton, Ohio, a deep-water area from which he could access the East Coast and build and sell larger vessels. Now known as The Matthews Company, it continued to excel, building top-quality boats that soon became world-renowned.

In 1909, Matthews contracted with the government to build utility boats for the U.S. Army. The following year, Matthews built the 85-foot cruiser, *Mahapa*, for Cleveland's H.A. Parsons. In 1912, W. E. Scripps, Commodore of the Detroit Motorboat Club and president of Scripps Motor Company, signed up with Matthews to build a 35-foot LOA, 10-foot beam boat able to cross the Atlantic under gasoline power. Actually, this vessel was an over-sized lifeboat dubbed *Detroit* and

called a "trans-Atlantic liner" by *Rudder* magazine. Thomas Fleming Day, editor of *Rudder*, captained the vessel, which he sailed from New Rochelle, NY some 4,000 miles in 21 days across the Atlantic to Ireland. From there, she sailed to St. Petersburg, Russia. Her power was a 16-horsepower engine. She carried a crew of three and was known to be the smallest gasoline-powered vessel to cross the ocean.

Some "Big Names" became attracted to the Matthews, among them the Ringling brothers, the renowned circus people. They were enthusiastic customers and purchased a total of six Matthews vessels. In 1912, Charles E. Ringling ordered a special shallow-draft 50-foot day cruiser to be used off his place in Sarasota, Florida. The following year, Matthews built the largest pleasure boat in its history, the 110-foot, John Wells-designed *Aeldgytha*, the first all-American diesel-powered yacht. In 1914, the company

general lack of work forced the plant to close that August. The intrepid Scott Matthews invented a lighting plant called the Ker-0-El, used mainly on farms, and a rope "chain" for auto tires to prevent winter skidding. These brain-children provided work for Matthews workers until 1922, when they again took up boat building.

Their new line included 50-foot passenger boats servicing an amusement park, rum-runner pursuit craft for the U.S. government and, for a Joseph Williams of Cleveland, a 95-foot cruiser named *Oswichee*. Scott Matthews was worried about possible future economic slides, so in 1924, he introduced a 38-foot "special". It was the very first standardized stock-built boat in the industry, but it would keep his people busy and employed. In 1925, a New Yorker ordered Matthew's last custom-built boat, the 99-foot *Irwin*. The stock-built group of boats included a 46-footer (1926), a 32-foot speed cruiser (1928), and a 25-foot sailboat (1934).

By 1942, Matthews returned to war vessels, building mostly 36-foot and 38-foot landing craft. Matthews 38's were built as patrol boats, a number through the Lend-Lease plan.

In 1950, Matthews had its 60th anniversary and the following year introduced the first modern-day double cabin vessel, a 42-foot model with flying bridge. At this time then elderly Scott Matthews handed over much of the plant operation to his old-

est son, Carl, who would become president upon his father's death in 1956. Carl trotted out the first flush-deck double cabin model in 1962. By this time, Scott's two sons and two daughters were nearing retirement age, and decided to sell the company to one Charles Hutchinson in 1964, who celebrated Matthew's Golden Jubilee in 1965.

In 1969, Mr. Hutchinson signed up with Halmatic of England to build 46-foot hulls that were almost identical in weight, dimensions, appearance and performance to the wooden-hulled Matthews 45-footer. The Halmatic hulls were shipped to Port Clinton, where cabins, interiors and bridges were built.

The only Matthews fiberglass hull was the 56-footer, appearing in 1971. This boat was available as a motor yacht, trawler, flush-deck double cabin, and sport fishing vessel. Production and sales tanked in the early 1970s, so Matthews closed in December 1974 and declared bankruptcy in 1975.

If you spot one of these magnificent boats, salute. Your action will be fully understood and forever appreciated.



Early home of the Matthews Boat Co., Bascom, OH.

came up with *Marold*, a 100-foot cruiser which was the nation's highest-powered yacht propelled by 900 hp engines that delivered a cruising speed of 30 knots, unheard of in those days.

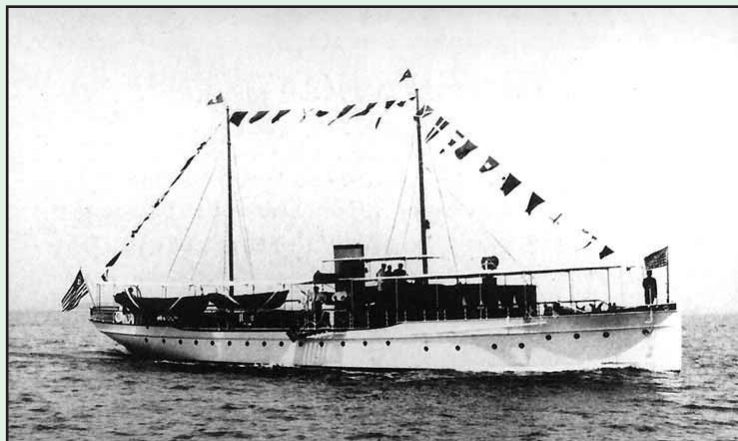
In 1915, Scott J. Matthews began to diversify the company and, because he was unable to find electric specialties for his boats, began to develop them himself. He came up with his own electric power capstan, automatic lighting and power plant, electric pump and hoists. In 1916, the firm shortened its name to The Matthews Company, dropping the word Boat, by that time a nautical duh. They were successful bidders for government contracts during World War I and in 1917 built 110-foot sub chasers as well as wingless airplane hulls they delivered to the East Coast.

After the war, the economic depression forced Matthews to again diversify. In order to keep the employees on their payroll, they started making towel racks, meat cutters and talking machine cabinets. They did design and build the 60-foot *Whitecap* in 1919 but the

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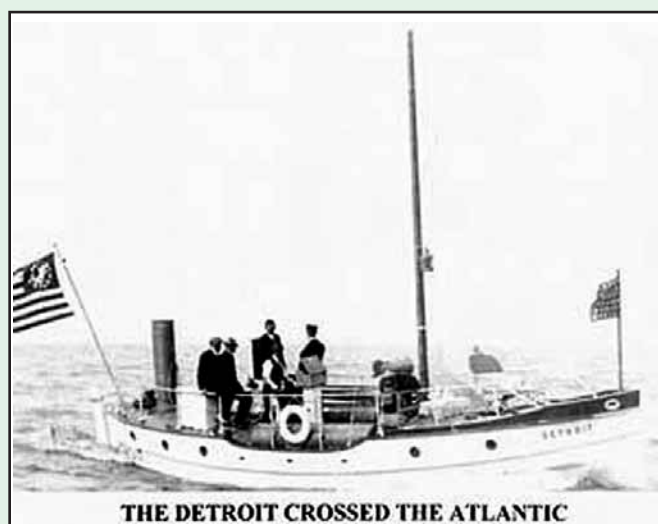
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The motor yacht "Clarinda", built by Matthews Boat Company in 1913 was later acquired and commissioned by the U.S. Navy in 1917.



In 1913, Matthews built the 110' "Aeldgytha", the first all-American diesel-powered yacht, the largest pleasure boat ever built by Matthews.



THE DETROIT CROSSED THE ATLANTIC

The "Detroit" was the smallest gasoline powered vessel to cross the Atlantic, carrying a crew of three and powered with a 16 hp Scripps engine.



38' Matthews MY 1929



42' Matthews Cruiser 1959



40' Matthews Sedan Cruiser 1948