Charles F. Brown: Boatbuilder at Pulpit Harbor

It is believed that large boats and ships were built at Pulpit Harbor at least since the 18th century. Towards the end of the 19th century, Charles F. Brown began a long boatbuilding career in back of his house on the Mill Stream. Very soon, Brown constructed a large boat shop near his home so that boats could be launched directly into the water at high tide. He also stored boats for the winter at his shop.

Brown's boatbuilding was a noisy process with a steam producing boiler to shape timber and planking and a gas powered saw and other machinery. Brown's daughter, Marion, recalled that "rhythmic explosions filled the air", it took years before local horses ceased bolting when in the vicinity.

Brown constructed large sailing and motoring yachts for customers as far away as New York, using the designs of well known naval architects Crowninshield, Burgess and Shene. Brown also built many boats for members of the summer community. Brown's son, Robert, counted 199 boats his father built. When Brown's shop was destroyed by fire in 1906 he relocated east of the present Pulpit Harbor float.

At this second site, previously the location of Leadbetter and Calderwood fish houses and a cooper's shop, Brown built many fewer boats as he had gotten involved in a number of other local projects including farming, working as an engineer for Will Sampson and the construction of an acetylene gas plant.

In 1911 Brown sold his shop to two of Ruben Whitmore's sons, Augustine and D. Alton. The Whitmore brothers continued building until 1916 when Charles Norton purchased the shop. Norton tore the shop down in the 1920's. Since that time there has been little if any boatbuilding at Pulpit Harbor and the Mill Stream, though as always, Pulpit Harbor remains an important working waterfront for North Haven lobstermen.
Boats built by Charles Brown at his boat shop
“Loon” built by Charles Brown at his shop on the Mill Stream.
Charles Brown’s Boat Shop after he sold it to cousins Gus and Al Whitmore, around 1913. A Peapod is shown under construction.