

The Last Sail

“One golden afternoon in late August a summer ago, when the westerly breeze swept across the Bay and rippled the wildflowers on Norton’s point, we cast the *Minuteman* from its mooring and set sail across the Pulpit. It was our last sail ever on the last wooden dinghy built in North Haven.

She was a fair lady, *Minuteman*, built and launched on the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Ben Brown of Y-Knot had lovingly crafted her. With her white hull, blue keel, and red “76” on the mainsail, she was a patriot’s dream on water. I remember the summer morning that year when my son and I eased her out of the slip and into the tide off the beach on the Thoroughfare below the Paralyzo.

We raced for some fifteen summers, all twelve lovely feet of her, and she won a pennant or two before the fleet went to glass and the wooden dinghies gradually slipped behind the wake of the newer boats. Each year the wooden veterans became fewer, marginalized, then finally retired to the dark corners of old boathouses or put to pasture as makeshift flower gardens.

The *Minuteman* stayed on and competed as best she could, the last of a dying breed. We fiddled endlessly, trying to improve her rigging, sandpapering and tapering her centerboard, scrubbing the weeds off her bottom before each race, all to small avail.

We bought a new fiberglass dinghy, lean and spartan. It was all business, a machine designed for combat, no distinguishing scars, no graceful marks of the old classic thoroughbreds. A bit mockingly, we called it the *Glass Act*.

And then one day, in the late 80s, we pulled *Minuteman* out of the Thoroughfare, out of the scrum of the souped-up new models, and brought her to rest in the backwaters of the Pulpit. She lay there for five more years, moored quietly among several old

friends. Each winter we had her scraped and painted and re-caulked. Each summer she got sailed less. An aging beauty with fewer suitors.

Last year we knew would be her last. The cost of keeping up appearances had become prohibitive and she wasn’t one to insist on cosmetics. No more painting or scraping. She sat alone at her mooring throughout the summer, the gleam gone from her, the varnish flaking from her gaff. Someone had even forgotten to affix her wind pennant.

When we cast off for the last time, her rigging creaked, the tiller wobbled in its rudder hold, and the centerboard jammed. Like a dying friend, one could almost feel the system shutting down. But *Minuteman* had one good sail left in her.

She breezed through the last of summer cruisers in the harbor and tacked nicely into the sharpening wind. She beat slowly but profoundly past Cheston Point, and somewhere under the lee of the Cabots, we brought her about and headed for home. We tied her gently to the mooring, furled and stopped her tired mainsail, and left her in the waning summer light .

She never came close to being a champion, no fault of hers. But laying there at the last, the Pulpit slowly invading her leaky timbers, she looked, for all her forlorn state, daunting and defiant to the end. She was at bottom, unmockingly, a class act.”

Lansing Lamont

North Haven, August 1994

Minuteman’s final resting place is the North Haven Historical Society.