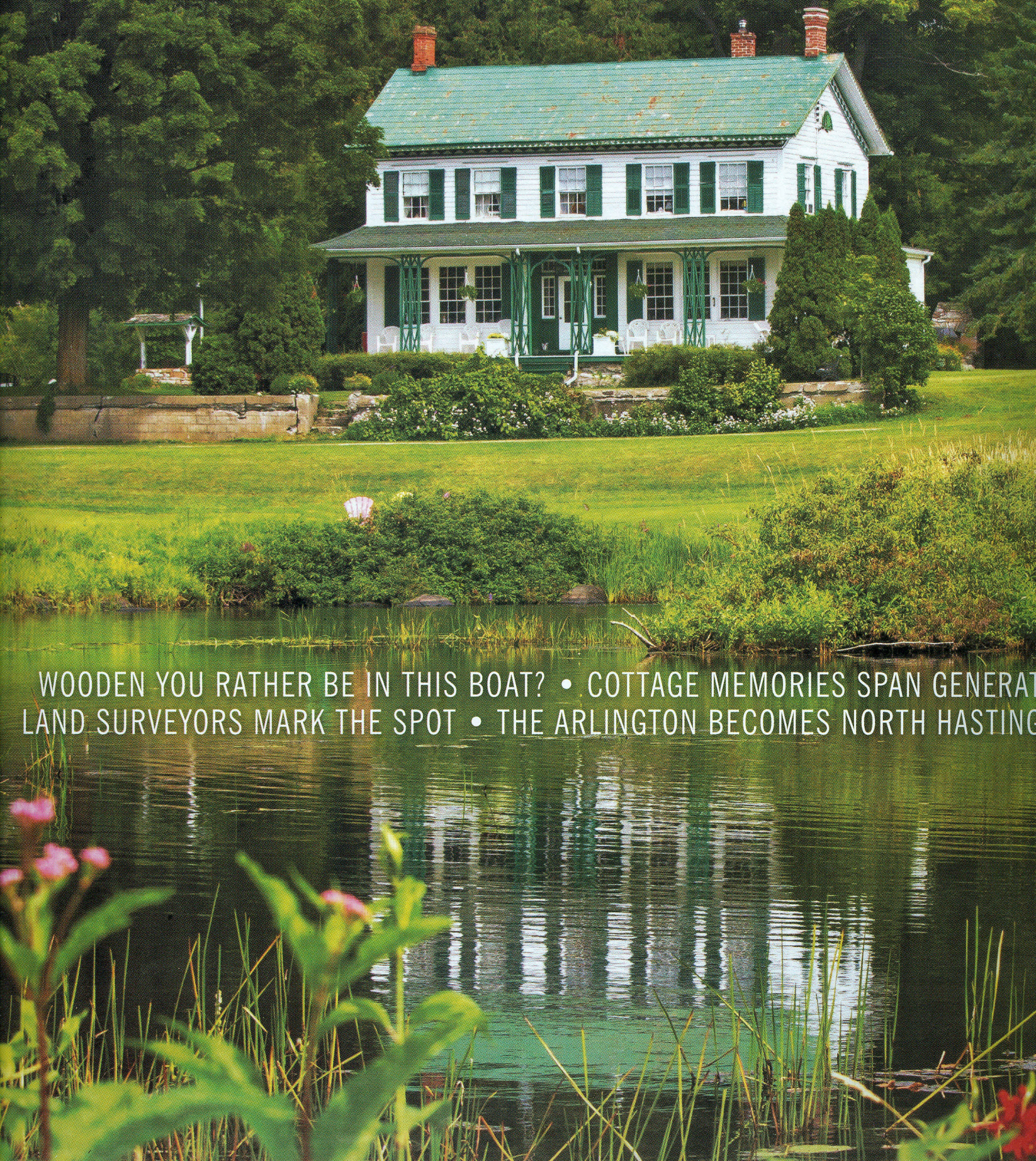


SUMMER 2015

# COUNTRY ROAD

CELEBRATING LIFE IN HASTINGS COUNTY



WOULD YOU RATHER BE IN THIS BOAT? • COTTAGE MEMORIES SPAN GENERATIONS  
LAND SURVEYORS MARK THE SPOT • THE ARLINGTON BECOMES NORTH HASTING



# WATER TIGHT

## Marmora resident preserves boating history

By Angela Hawn  
Photos By Anne Philpot



Although not constructed of wood, this Finn sailboat holds a special place in Philpot's collection, as it was used in the 1976 Summer Olympics by a Yugoslavian competitor. The boat was rescued by Andre's sister from a Toronto landfill!

Not long into a conversation with antique wooden boat collector Andre Philpot, a couple of things become perfectly clear. An engaging and friendly guy, Philpot seems quite prepared to talk about boats for hours, if needed. At the same time, modesty prevents him from talking a lot about himself. Not exactly eager to stand front and centre, Andre consistently deflects the conversation onto other topics: his beloved wife Anne and the beautiful boat named "Annie Doll" in her honour, family, his home community of Marmora, grandkids and, of course, boats in general. They've been part of his life since his Toronto Islands childhood.

But peeling personal details out of Andre about Andre presents a bit more of a challenge. At the same time, he comes across as the type of guy you hope you end up sitting next to at a party: charming, funny and more than prepared to listen to whatever you have to say.

Within minutes, Philpot reveals the following: his multi-talented wife Anne has taken several gorgeous boat photos that (in Andre's opinion) probably make the collection look much better



In the early 20th century English's Boathouse on Toronto's Centre Island was a popular spot to rent Cruisers built by noted Canadian constructor Walter Dean.  
Photo courtesy blogto.com

than it appears in real life. Also, even though Andre seems quite prepared to go into detail about the boats, he wonders if a visit to Peterborough might prove more helpful. His brother owns a

marina on Chemong Lake and his collection apparently far superior to his.  
"Terry ran Woodarts Custor explains the self-deprecating A





Before and after restoration shots of a 1910 Walter Dean racing canoe purchased by Philpot. Canoe racing was a popular sport in Toronto at the turn of the century and famous rower Ned Hanlan may well have paddled a Dean product like this one.

noting his brother's ability to make boat repairs. "He's a far better wood worker than I'll ever be."

Further questioning eventually digs up the fact Andre once served as Marmora's Reeve in the late 1980's and 1990's. But then, unlike most politicians, he deftly swings the conversation away from himself and back to boats, outlining the kind of detailed craftsmanship boat builders exhibited during a pre-mass production era.

Philpot describes with enthusiasm a 21-foot sailboat dating back to the late 1950's. A wonder of hand-built beauty, the boat's plan originated in a long ago issue of *Popular Mechanics*. Every single board matches up, every piece bends in exactly the same way. Some geometrically inclined genius must have poured over those vintage blueprints and taken the task to heart.

"A lot of people in these old barns around Marmora are pretty talented," chuckles Andre, noting most of the boats in his collection have been acquired locally.

In fact, one of the best comes from Bonter Marine, a long-time Marmora family business. A smooth-skinned, cedar strip double-rower, the whole thing has been masterfully fastened together with copper.

"There must be a thousand copper nails in it," jokes Andre, explaining drilling regular nails into the wood would have caused the wood to split.

When you collect antique boats and have a special affinity for wooden ones, who could resist a vintage Sunnyside Cruiser crafted by the legendary Walter Dean? Who cares whether



# Building a business

By Angela Hawn



This 1930's double rower was built by Ruth and Bill Bonter and is part of Crowe Lake resident Andre Philpot's collection.

Photo by Anne Philpot

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Walter Dean wasn't the only one crafting and selling gorgeous boats back in the day. Just ask brothers Andy and Jeff Bonter of Marmora's Bonter Marine. Both have stories about their grandfather's boat-building days back when wooden boats ruled the waterways.

"He used to build these beautiful, all cedar strip boats, nailed together with copper," Andy reminisces. "No stainless steel back then, and copper was good for weight anyway."

Why boats? Andy explains his grandparents, Bill and Ruth used to run a tourist resort up on Crowe Lake near the family farm. And when your tourist business operates lake-side, you need boats.

"They had nine cottages and a fleet of six to eight boats," explains Andy, noting most of the early resort clientele consisted of American families seeking lengthy fishing holidays. "It was usually the same people returning year after year."

As fishing and pleasure craft evolved, a new business opportunity surfaced for talented boat-builder Bill Bonter and his son, Ted. Boaters seeking speed wanted a vessel with an engine. Enter Bonter Marine, circa 1930, one of the first Johnson outboard dealers in the province.

And though Bonter Marine has changed over the years, the actual business has stayed put, standing solidly in its original location on Highway 7 for over 80 years. These days the Bonter brothers might sell more off-road recreational vehicles than watercraft, but boats are in their blood.

"We still have the name, Bonter Marine, and we still do winter storage and service," explains Andy. "I can always order in boats for customers looking to buy."

But the days of the Bonter wooden boats are long gone. Andy sounds almost wistful when he talks about them. Sadly, he didn't hang on to any of his grandfather's handiwork, though he's got plenty of memories. With a chuckle, he recalls bailing out the cottage boats after every single rain.

"No wooden boat is ever really watertight," Andy laughs, "but they're sure were some cool designs back then."





The "Annie Doll" was built in honour of Philpot's wife of 43 years, Anne.

or not it's a bit damaged and might not hit water again? Call it a collector's item and consider it a prize.

"I seem to be a sucker for old boats," chuckles Philpot. "Everybody thinks of me when they've got an old boat lying around they're looking to get rid of."

This particular old boat cost Philpot \$50 or thereabouts; he really can't remember. But even though Dean's popularity peaked and fell long before Andre's time, he knows enough about the boat builder's handiwork to appreciate Dean's place in Canadian boating history.

"The boats had an interesting form," claims Andre, the admiration clear in his voice. "Not as many ribs as a contemporary boat and with a

molded flat balsam hull, everything connected by copper strips."

According to Philpot, tourists used to flock to English's boathouse on Centre Island, hoping to rent the boats for a little weekend respite. Considered a "courting boat", Sunnyside Cruisers quickly caught on as the perfect and proper spot to get a little face-time with your sweetheart in Victorian era Toronto. At one point, some of these lovely vessels even sported gramophones, all the better to woo the object of your heart's desire.

"They were extremely elegant boats," explains Andre, "very sporty."

And though Andre usually chooses more practical watercraft when he takes his own





Rear view from "The Peanut", a 1954 Lakefiled Seminole purchased in Eldorado.

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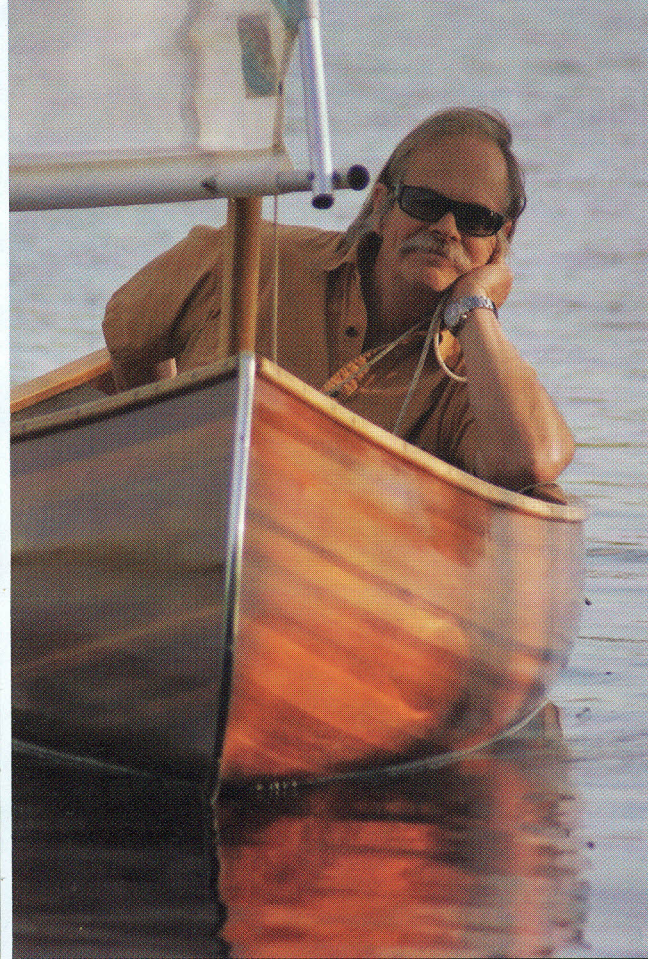
sweetheart, his wife of 43 years Anne, out on the lake these days, he still thinks the Sunnyside Cruiser is a romantic little boat. He's even braved the water with it a number of times.

"You just wouldn't want to do it too often," he laughs. "You'd spend a fair bit of your time bailing it out!"

Though not made of wood, a 1970's Finn sailboat still holds special status in the Philpot antique boat collection. When Canada hosted its first Summer Olympics in Montreal in 1976, this boat saw action in the men's sailing races.

"Rather than bring your own boats with you," Andre explains, "the host country would collect a fleet of matching Finns."





A favourite of Philpot's is this old boys' camp sailing canoe, which is over 70 years old.

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This particular Finn hit the water of Portsmouth Olympic Harbour near Kingston (which hosted the sailing events) with a competitor from the former republic of Yugoslavia at the helm. And where did the Yugoslavian place?

"I don't think he did too well," recounts Andre wryly. "I remember I looked it up once and I think he was in the bottom third."

That said, the Olympian probably fared better than his boat. Just before the Finn entered Andre's possession, it resided in a Toronto landfill.

"I got a call from my sister," says Andre. "She had gotten hold of it and I guess she thought 'this is

probably something Andre would be interested in.'"

And the price was right. Andre just had to figure out a way to make the old sailboat seaworthy again. Thanks to some floorboards and a rudder from a similar vintage Finn found on Kijiji, as well as a little elbow grease courtesy of an avid boat collector, the sailboat now makes regular voyages again on Crowe Lake.

"It was in pretty rough shape," remembers Andre, recalling the patch job required to cover a good-sized hole in the side. "But it's all fixed up now and I got a pretty decent little yacht out of it."

One of Andre's personal favourites is an old boys' camp canoe attached to a sailing rig. Over 70 years old, the boat can be steered by paddle, though an apt sailor might rely on the rudder, too.

"It looks nice against a sunset," claims Andre with a smile.

And the sunsets on Big Island in Crowe Lake where Andre and Anne now live are glorious. Once Marmora townies, they moved out to the island just before retirement, seeking the solitude of country life and ready access to the water.

"We first moved to Marmora looking for a good place to raise a family, and we certainly found that," says Andre, noting the Philpot brood consists of two daughters and a son, plus five grandchildren. "Not a bad one in the bunch," he adds with a smile.

And, for over 40 years, Andre worked as the only lawyer in town, practising a bit of every kind of law, filling whatever need existed. Over the years, two young lawyers articulated with him but neither took up permanent residence in Marmora. Now that Andre has retired, the town remains essentially "lawyerless," though Andre still tackles the occasional legal project.



"That seems to be the way of rural life," he laments, musing briefly about previous boom-times in small towns years ago. "Lawyers, the butcher, the baker...now everyone seems to be leaving for bigger centres."

But just because many leave their small town roots these days in search of opportunity elsewhere doesn't mean some don't return. Andre quickly points out that tourism frequently leads the way as a major source of employment in the beautiful area he calls home. His own son operates a thriving Kingston-based business selling high-end motor boats. Good chance some of those boats see action on the gorgeous waterways around the Land O' Lakes area.

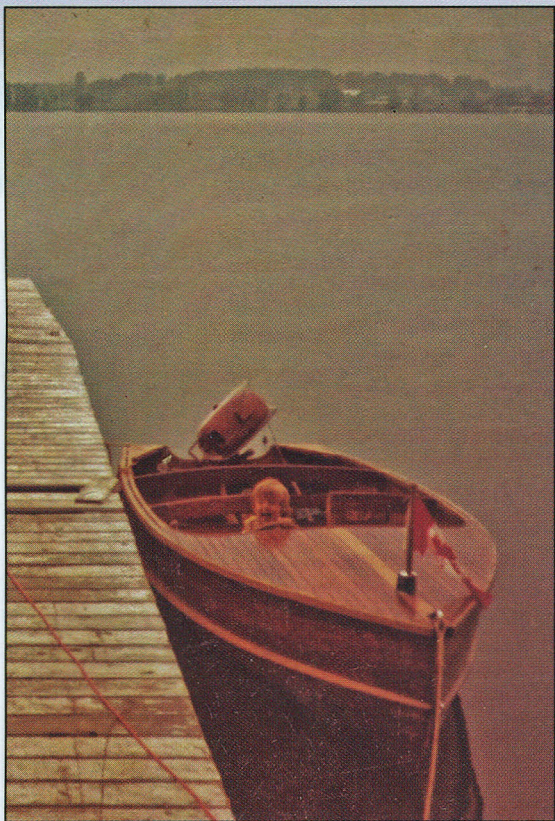
In fact, the Marmora Tourism Information office is the best place to head if you want to see one of Andre's beautiful boats for yourself. Simply go inside and look up. Lovingly lodged in the rafters sits a splendid cedar strip canoe, immediately alerting visiting watersports enthusiasts they've come to the right place.

"The staff have decorated around it and put up some bullrushes," says the always self-deprecating Andre. "They made it look really nice."

And are there plans to display a few more boats from the collection? Perhaps Andre is thinking of opening up his own boat museum and showing off his 25 plus boats to the public? What about a smaller version of Peterborough's Canoe Museum, located just a bit further east?

But Philpot just laughs off this suggestion. Right now the only plans on the Philpot books involve an outing with the grandkids when they stop by this evening. Will they be heading out on the water? You bet, though Andre notes they'll be playing it safe and



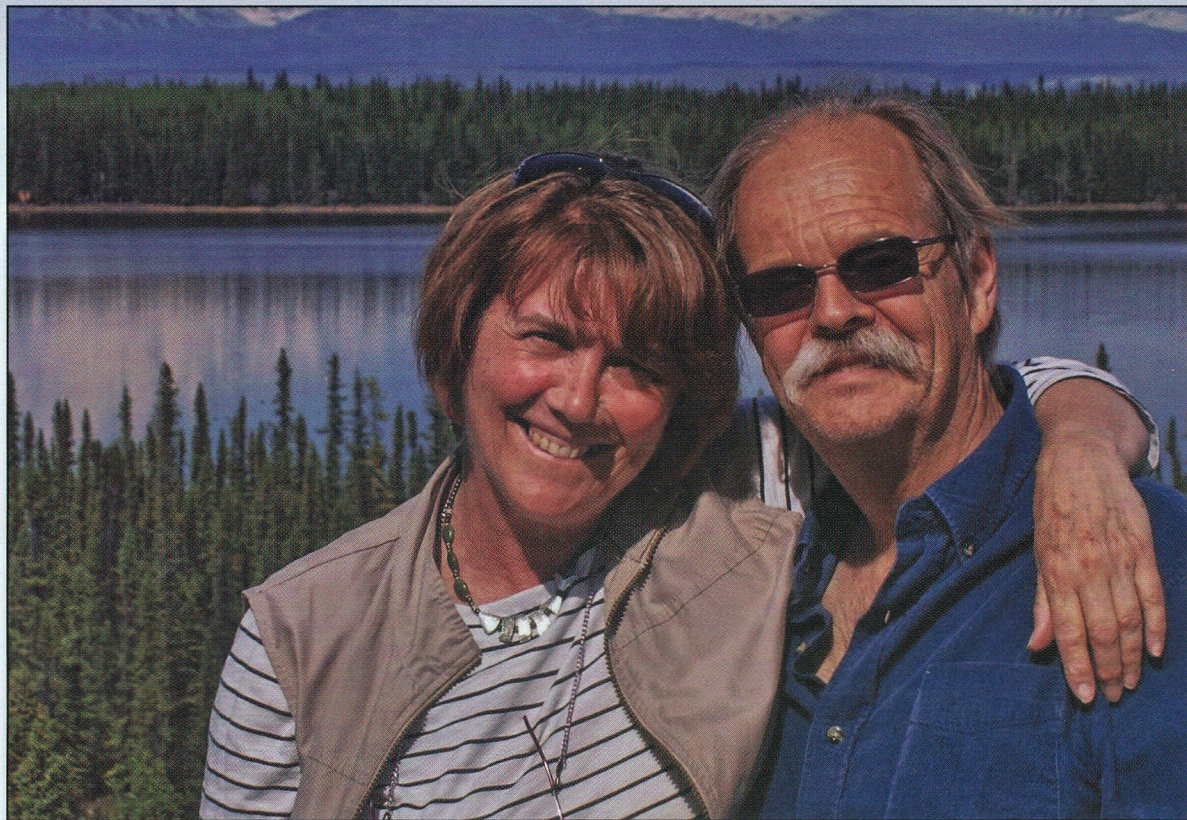


The "Ellie B" was named after the woman from whom it was purchased, Ellenore Bicknell of Deloro.

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using a contemporary fibreglass boat for the trip. None of the wooden boats are water-ready yet. That process involves finding a quiet, relatively wave-free spot and letting the boat sink straight under. Within a couple of days,





Andre Philpot worked as a lawyer in Marmora for 40 years before he and Anne retired to Big Island on Crowe Lake.

the craft resurfaces, all of its seams sealed by virtue of the very water responsible for sinking it in the first place.

“Wood isn’t the most practical material to make a boat out of. You leave it in the water

and it rots,” muses Andre, explaining none of his wooden boats could ever claim complete “leak-proof” status. “But it certainly is the most beautiful.” ●