



## Rocking the Boat—the Bronx way

by Greg Rössel

If someone mentions boatbuilding and the Bronx in New York City, it is usually in reference to the traditional yacht yards of City Island. But just a few miles to the west, in the gritty southwest portion of that same borough (but a world away), ensclosed in a most untraditional storefront that is just a stone's throw from the Cross Bronx Expressway, is yet another boatshop that specializes in historic New York watercraft.

The shop, an independent nonprofit organization named "Rocking the Boat," is an after-hours and summer program that teaches inner-city high school students to build boats and to appreciate the history and the environment of waters in and around their city. Through the process, the students acquire practical, academic, and social skills that are hard to come by in a community that has some of the most challenging social and educational problems in the United States. The three high schools that serve this community have the highest dropout rates in New York City. Gangs, drugs, and weapons are an unfortunate everyday reality.

The program originated at the now defunct East Harlem Maritime School, where Adam Green, then a college student, led a volunteer project to build an 8' pram from salvaged lumber, using plans from a magazine. "I wanted to figure out ways to turn kids on to learning, using resources within their reach—things that were relevant to them that they could care

about," Adam notes. "Why should they be locked up in a classroom for six hours each day when there is a whole world out there to learn from?"

By 1998, the concept had evolved into a more formal educational program with a shop of its own. The Whitehall tender was selected for the shop's stock boat because of its historical connection to the New York region. Since that time, neighborhood youths have built seven lapstrake Whitehalls ranging from 14' to 17' long.

Currently, Rocking the Boat runs not only year-round boatbuilding programs but separate environmental education programs on the Bronx River using the boats built in the shop. Six programs are run annually, two each season, coordinated with the fall and spring academic semesters and summer vacation. Students from all programs learn to row and swim, get certification in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and work on boats in the shop and on research and restoration projects with environmental scientists on the river. Each of the programs works with 16 students, allowing nearly 100 students each year to be involved. The shop now has five full-time employees and seven paid part-time "shop apprentices," all of whom are former students. The student body is equally male and female and reflects the rich ethnic mix of the Bronx—Latino, African-American, West Indian, African, and Caucasian.

Through the hands-on vehicle of boat construction, the young builders apply math, carpentry, and organizational skills as well as having the opportunity to practice the nuts and bolts of problem-solving and teamwork.

To get the students practical experience away from the shop, the program has initiated a semester-long on-the-water environmental program based out of Hunt's Point Riverside Park. Every Friday during the school year and every day during the summer, the students get to take out boats to learn seamanship skills and to do environmental research. They also have spent time living and working on the 106' Hudson River sloop CLEARWATER and have harvested oak for boat construction from the property of Pete Seeger in upstate New York. Rocking the Boat now offers daytime and weekend Bronx River environmental education programs for school and community groups of all ages.

The innovative program seems to be working—the student builders are not only finishing high school but some are even applying for college. The students



After a great deal of work, KATHLEEN AND MAY's restoration is well advanced in England—at least for now.

have also become environmental advocates for the revitalization of the lower Hudson and the waterways of the Bronx. Additionally, former students have gone off to work with other local organizations such as the CLEARWATER, The Bronx County Historical Society, and The New Settlement College Access Center.

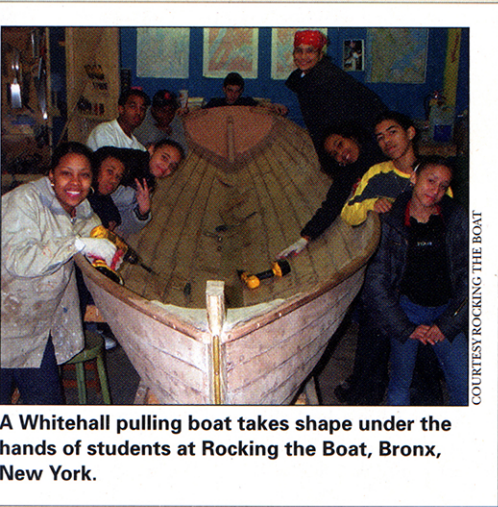
"We are trying to give kids from the Bronx an opportunity to take part in the process of creation—to create something from raw materials that is not only beautiful, but can be used, practically, to access parts of their own worlds that most never knew existed," Adam says.

*Rocking the Boat, 60 E. 174th St., Bronx, NY 10452; 718-466-5799; <www.rockingtheboat.org>.*

## Coastal schooner of 1900 sails again

by Peter Rolt

The last of Britain's wooden coastal schooners—which once numbered in the thousands—is sailing again at last. KATHLEEN AND MAY's restoration was carried out on the quay next to a magnificent medieval bridge over the Torridge River in Bideford, England, where rows of shipyards stood for centuries. Bideford is two miles upstream from Appledore, the schooner's homeport from 1931 until 1960, when her coastal trading days ended. She sails today where she used to



A Whitehall pulling boat takes shape under the hands of students at Rocking the Boat, Bronx, New York.