

THE STORY OF LIGHTNING 120

by Ted Siferd

(Editor's Note: Ted Siferd is a former Class President who put the following story on tape to help commemorate the Class's 40th Anniversary in 1978. We feel it gives a bit of information about the people who helped build the Class to where it is.)

Back in 1937, my wife and I and four children were up in Michigan and the row boats to rent were so poor I decided to build myself a boat. I saw a 10' pram advertised in Popular Mechanics so I proceeded to build it. What this has to do with the Lightning is hard to understand, but what I'm leading up to is that I built the boat and used it successfully in trips to Michigan and the Indian Lake Reservoir for fishing. I found out that I could build boats and a friend here who was a Westinghouse engineer, Larry Miller, was interested in the few boats that there were to sail on Indian Lake on Sundays, and we got him really interested in sailing.

Larry had read Yachting Magazine and he was familiar with the new Lightning Class plans which were just coming out in 1938. I had already purchased the plans for an 18 footer, Crosby design, but Larry was so enthusiastic about the Lightning that I gave up the Sea Gull idea and decided we would both build Lightnings, which we proceeded to do in the early part of 1939. I had purchased my plans first, number 45, but Larry was going to be ready to build before I was so I turned my plans over to him and re-ordered plans and they came in as 120. So we proceeded to get busy and build boats.

Larry was an accomplished woodworker and had a shop full of tools. He got along splendidly with his and helped us with ours. He was ready to go in the water in early June of '39 and I think I got in the 4th of July in '39. I'm not sure now, but I think we had just the two Lightnings down there in 1939, although I think there was a carpenter out in the country who was building one for the Morris brothers. Anyway, by '41, we had four boats. We formed our Lightning Fleet here on Indian Lake and got things going.

You may be interested to know something about the cost of a boat at that time. I built my boat with wood frames bought from the Delta Boat Company over in New York and they were \$42.00 including freight. Then I bought the planking and lumber for the boat and the keel from Kels Mill Lumber and Supply Company, which was approximately \$60.00 including the freight. By the way, any of you folks who are interested in working with wood would be interested in knowing that I bought cedar at that time for 20¢/square foot and red cedar at 18¢. I bought Philippine Mahogany at 20¢/square foot and the Oregon pine tongue and groove for the decking under the canvas was 3¢ a foot. The rigged mast complete, at that time, wood of course, was \$50.00 and the sails, from Iry Caldwell down in Boulevard, South Carolina, were \$36.00 for the main and jib and \$30.00 for the spinnaker; so I gave \$66.00 for the sails. I had the centerboard made at the Lima Locomotive Works and it cost me \$20.00 as I remember it, and the miscellaneous hardware from a Detroit firm cost \$27.00 and the extra materials, rope, life preservers, anchor, paddle, and paint ran \$14.00. Regular ship preservers at that time were \$2.25. Making a total of \$279.32 paid for materials. I still have the bills in an envelope here along with

the official set of plans.

It so happened that the boat was constructed lighter possibly than any other in our fleet of four boats, but with my total inexperience as a sailor we didn't do well at all the first year in 1939, but we got on to it the next year. The floorboards ran clear up to the bow in the boats of the original plan and I decided to lighten my boat up as much as possible so we took the floorboards out up ahead of the mast and took them out behind the seats where they ran clear to the transom.

Of course, I was interested in getting a smooth paint finish on the bottom. Copper boat paint was the best at that time and properly put on and hand rubbed it just looked like a sheet of copper and it was as smooth as silk. When we went to South Haven a little later, and as my boat was named the *Jean S* after my wife, there was a standing joke up at the banquet about *Jean S* having the smoothest bottom in the Fleet.

The planking on the outside of most of the boats at that time, except Skaneateles which was a double thickness boat, was planking and of course you had to leave an eighth of an inch approximately opening on the outside and fill that with seam filler. Then after it had been in the water awhile, it swelled up and maybe raised an eighth of an inch or so. You would then have to take it out of the water, turn it over and take a thin razor blade down the whole length of the boat and skin that little raised place off, then give her another coat of paint, rub it in and she'd be good for the rest of the season.

There was quite a bit of maintenance on a wood boat but it was the maintenance of love, the beauty of the wood and the wonderful feeling you had of having made it yourself so it didn't create any problem. You were just tickled to death that you had such a wonderful boat and having such a wonderful time with it.

The next year, as I remember in 1940, we did a little better in our sailing down here. We had quite a few races and it was a bit competitive and quite interesting at the Yacht Club. We never had a regular race committee because we didn't really have a Yacht Club; we just had a group of people who were anchored in the Bay. On a vacant lot there, a fellow gave us permission to build some docks. We had four Lightnings and an indiscriminate number of boats of all kinds - Snipes, Vampires, Seagull, and several Condors, a Penguin, a Comet. We lined up as near as we could - just sailed down towards the line and tried to get lined up and a fellow stood in a row boat, at the imaginary end of the line, and shot the gun off and we went. We never started with a regular starting line, a regular committee, or five minutes interval between Classes and everything like we have now.

We were quite inexperienced and I told my wife and son, Charles, who crewed for me, that if we did pretty well that year, next year we'd go to South Haven, Michigan and sail up there with those big water sailors out of Chicago. We ought to be able to learn a lot by sailing with those people who had that kind of experience and that background in sailing, because there is very limited sailing down in the puddle here in Central Ohio that we sailed on. So after a fairly successful 1940 season, the 1941 season came along and we had our boat in excellent shape and everything was all set so we decided to take in the regatta at South Haven.

If I remember correctly there were 23 boats started that

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year in the Lake Michigan District Regatta, from the Devils Lake, Indian Lake and the Great Lakes and so forth. So never having started with a starting line and stop watch and all of the formality that the racing is done by, we were quite fearful of fouling out, so we never started better than 17th out of 23 boats. We stayed back in the starting line and were quite surprised to see how well we did. We came within one point from winning the Regatta. Barney Crittenden, as I remember it, from Devils Lake, was coming down on port tack and I was on starboard and I didn't know enough about the rules and he hailed me for the right of way. I turned out of the way and gave him the right of way, so he beat me by about half a boat length, or we would have won the regatta.

One of the interesting things, of course, was coming up along the river there at the South Haven Yacht Club to get to the lake, we sailed through those boats like they were standing still. The only thing I can account for it is the fact that on our small lake here we do a lot of tacking and so forth and we were used to maneuvering and possibly not sailing in a straight line for mile after mile. Anyway, that was our experience at South Haven and what a wonderful experience it was.

So with the success we had at South Haven in the District Regatta, naturally we wanted to take in the Nationals at Skaneateles, New York, on one of the Finger Lakes over there. So we arranged to go over to New York and take that in. We, of course, were sailing there against some of the Eastern sailors, many of them with many years experience in sailing and I think we finished 7th in that Regatta out of 20 or 30 boats.

We were not used to sailing in heavy weather and they had terrific weather, 35 to 40 mile an hour winds. Of course my son and wife weren't very heavy, and as I said, I had my family with me, so we were quite apprehensive, or I was, about sailing in that kind of weather. The early Lightning sails had two rows of reefing points in them, so we were reefed down to the lowest reefing point, shortening the sail as much as we could, and took the jib off but we still had a hard time staying up. John Stern won the Regatta and he had Bob Woods with him, the designer of the Bellaire Cobra of World War II, and Bob weighed 230 pounds or 320 pounds. Anyway, he was just the kind of ballast you needed for that kind of a day and John was sailing around there with all his sails up and, of course, left most of the rest of us far behind.

The next year we came back to the Lake Michigan District regatta held at Devils Lake. Barney had won the regatta by a half a point over me, so naturally we were anxious to go up there and get our revenge on him. This regatta was held in mid-summer and it was a very lovely regatta. We were able to win it and the Lake Michigan District Championship. Many of the early sailors we were competing against became very active in the Lightning Association:—Len Ladenberger, President from South Haven; Walt Swindemann, National Championship several times from Toledo; Bill Girkins; Art Bercher was Chief Measurer; Walt, of course, was National President; and Dick Krause was also sailing. Karl Smithers sailed with us at South Haven then in the Wartime Regatta, so we were getting quite deeply involved in racing at this time.

It was now wartime and of course our good sailors were in the service and only got a chance to sail when they were home on leave. Also it wasn't possible to transport our boats any distance and we had to use borrowed boats, so the Wartime

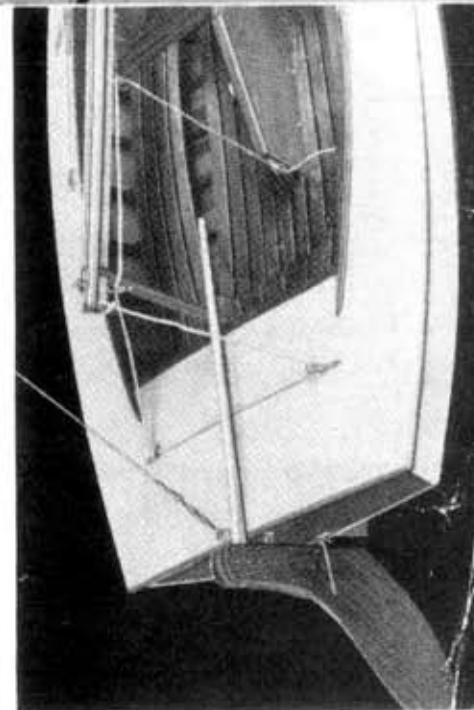
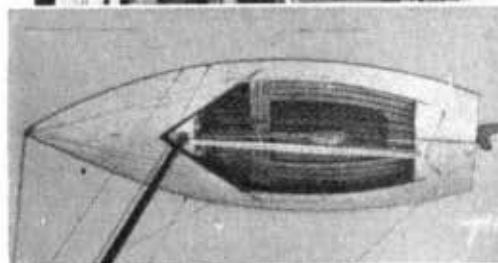
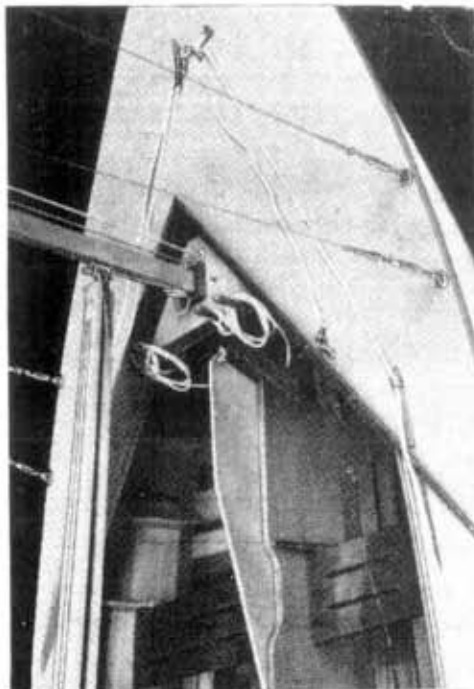
Regatta in 1942 was moved from the East, to South Haven Yacht Club in South Haven. One of the reasons being that South Haven had the largest fleet of Lightnings of any of the Yacht Clubs in the organization. They had started their new club there with 12 Lightnings and consequently that provided a large number of boats from the local area, and of course a lot of the sailors from the Mid west and Chicago area were able to bring their boats because they didn't have too much distance to travel.

It may interest you to know that in the early Lightning sailing there was no bent masts and no mast rake of any account. The original plans called for 12 inches of rake and the mast straight at the dock. This was interpreted by most everybody we came in contact with that the mast was supposed to be perfectly rigid at all times. If you will look at the early Year Books, back in the early 40's, you will notice that the mast is as straight as a toothpick and no bend. But in this year of '42, we began to have our eyes opened. A young 16 year old sailor, Dave Cruett, came out from the east and took an old clunker that had never done anything in the South Haven Fleet at all, (*Butch II* was the name of it), and then proceeded to show the top sailors in the Class just what can be done by tuning the boat a little differently than we had been doing. Dave's mast was bent backwards, had a curve in it, and it also fell off to the side.

We had very heavy winds – South Haven is famous peach country and, at the time we were there, the peaches were ripe and of course we were all presented with peaches. So we were out racing one day in very high winds, 8 to 10 foot waves. That's not my kind of sailing, the boat swamped full of water, the peaches even sailed right out over the cockpit, we were that swamped at times. That didn't appeal to me, so we came in.

However back to Dave, he really showed us how to tune the boat. He had the mast up toward the slot and had the back shrouds a little loose so it fell off a little bit and would bend a little bit. Dave also showed us true seamanship; one of the side shrouds came out of the spreader in that heavy weather so one of his crew stood on the deck with his hand on the mast and the other hand holding the shroud out so that they could finish the race. It dropped him down to about 5th place in that race, but nevertheless he regained enough points to win the Championship. I believe Karl Smither took 3rd in that, if I'm not mistaken.

It's been quite a pleasant experience in my life to have had the connections I've had and the contacts in the Lightning Class Association. I've met so many fine people and made many fine friends over the many years. During the course of event, I became President in 1943. Judge L. Stauffer Oliver was the President before me and at Bay Head, New Jersey in 1943 he proposed that I become President. I wasn't even at the meeting and had never met Judge Oliver except once several years before, so I was quite thrilled that he thought enough of my enthusiasm for the Lightning Class to suggest that I be President. And then my experience as President was very gratifying. I travelled to Columbus where there were about 10 boats being built by a group of fellows there and I helped to develop the enthusiasm and organize the Fleet at Leatherlips Yacht Club. I had an unusual experience as time went on; one of the fellows that built his boat privately outside of the group that was building cooperatively and he wanted me as President to just write him out a Measurement



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Certificate. Of course, his boat didn't conform, so far as the deck specifications were concerned, to the Class Specifications and I had no way of knowing how close he might have conformed to the actual specifications of the hull shape. This rather perturbed him; in fact, it made him mad, and he later left the Class although he had had some success in sailing in the Class and winning consistently at Buckeye Lake. We then went on to Cincinnati and met the wonderful group there, Frank Pfefferle was a long time friend and helped to organize that fleet, and over at Mansfield later. My family enjoyed the sailing and they all participated. I had one son and three daughters. The three daughters' families now all have sailboats of their own and my son sails my boat down here at Indian Lake. He regularly takes out friends and uses it for part-time relaxation for him, his family and friends.

As the years went by, of course my Grandsons and Granddaughters graduated into sailing with me. We travelled quite a bit of the time, as I got older, I couldn't participate too much in distance regattas but the Grandsons went on and crewed at different places, so it's been a very enjoyable experience in our lives, the sailing and the special involvement in the Lightning Class. We still sail. We have 12287 now and we still are able at our age to go down and have a little fun sailing. Last summer in '76, we raced in lighter airs and got quite a thrill out of it. My wife and I both enjoy it very much and we hope this year to participate again, at least to do some day sailing. Last fall we both attained the three quarter century mark and almost half of that time it's been involved in the Lightning Class Association and it has been a very pleasurable experience.



To celebrate the 40th year of the launching of the Lightning a four color decal has been designed and is available from I.L.C.A. Headquarters, 808 High Street, Worthington, Ohio 43085. It can be used or displayed on boats, cars, foul weather gear, jackets, notebooks, etc. Cost for 1 - \$1.00. 5 - \$4.00. 50 - \$37.00.

When ordering specify whether or not you want the outer rim with black or white ink. (Black will show better on white boats and vice versa.) Actual size is 5½" diameter.