A CENTENARY EVENT - 28 April 2012

Great Schooner Coronet, her place in history of sailing development.

Abstracrt;
Constructed just a few years after the end of the Civil War (recognizing that this period was a deep recession for some time) and the end of the clipper ship era, Coronet is a great example of Victorian racing schooners. The era was that of post recovery of the mid 1870's recession created by excessive railroad bond speculation. Her heavy wood construction was transcended by successor yachts over the next fifteen to twenty years later took advantage of the plentiful and cheap iron to build lighter faster hulls. Yet Coronet is in herself, just as the later schooners of the very late nineteenth century and early twentieth are all just steps along the way to faster boats that sail higher.

The restoration.
In truth the hull of Coronet was, under the cover of the topsides and below the ceiling completely rotten. The dismantling of the vessel was merely a matter of pulling the topside oak off, rotten and almost not attached, in many cases and knocking the 9.5 inch oak frames apart with a hammer. The restoration has been largely devoted to new keel, stem and frames. The number of futtocks saved (and there was a $500 reward for each futtock saved) is two. Eric Theasen and his crew have done a massive and wonderful job of accurately building the frames, completing the stem to foremast and now working on the transom to the end of the deadwood. This summer the middle will be filled in. Hopefully planking will begin this fall.

Where the project is true restoration is the interior paneling and overhead materials. The mahogany paneling of the guest cabins, hall way and main salon have been saved and is in the process of restoration. The process is one of saving all the wood that is not rotten which means much piecing and repair of this material. It also entails the use of detective work to understand what the main saloon was actually like because a third of it was sacrificed for an engine room. The team has spent considerable time on this and with the discovery of some mirrors stahed away and not employed in the main saloon as was in 1998 we think we understand how this grand room was paneled out.

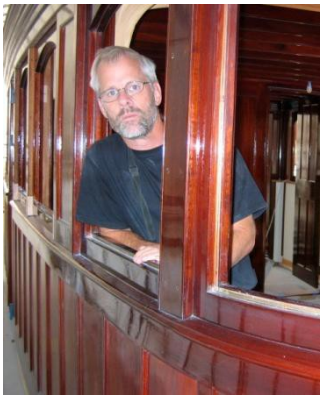
Why restore Coronet?

But why restore this vessel? The process of building a faster more seaworthy and greater capacity vessels is an age old process of man. Clearly we were building boats for fishing purpose fifteen thousand years ago. Egyptians, Phoenician and others were involved in ocean trade five to seven thousand years ago with vessels that could carry meaningful cargos. All through history man has worked to increase the size and speed of ships. An important element has also been the ability of ships to sail to weather so higher and faster is the thrust of this evolution. Both design and materials have played important roles in this quest.

Americans from the earliest colonial days on were engaged in this design race. Coronet is a step in that path. We will discuss the evolution of sailing vessels to increase the displacement/righting moment ratios through the past 125 years. Coronet represents sawn oak frames with treenailed planking. With the advent of relatively inexpensive iron designers began to build larger hulls of riveted iron which would support outside ballast. Great examples are the turn of the last century schooners discussed here. On to steam bent oak frames for smaller yachts. There is a lineal progression to the "lead mines" of the late 1990's. The hulls grew lighter and stronger and the ballast ratios increased to give truly high righting moments. In the mid 1970's there began a new evolution in ocean racing vessels. A small plywood light weight boat "Ragtime" raced the Transpacific Yacht Race and finished first, ahead of Windward Passage. This was the beginning of the "sleds". The story of righting moment to displacement was to evolve over the next twenty five years to the canting keel maxi's of today. Just evolution, just part of a long history, just more application of design that was enabled by materials. These schooners are part of that evolution. Magnificent, fast for their day, they are part of this history of sailing vessel design.

The restoration of Coronet continues. Eric and the rest of the crew are working to standards not used when Coronet was first constructed. The careful and meticulous building of the keel and stem are complete. The placement of the frames up the deadwood is in process so that the horn timber can be placed and the transom completed. This summer the intent is to fill in the frames of the middle of the vessel (waiting for wood to dry) and then planking and deck 2013. In the meantime the interior is under restoration and will be ready to install 2014.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



After being laid off from his warehouse job in New York City at the age of 20, **Jeffrey Rutherford** spent a year sailing in a workboat delivering grapefruit around the Caribbean. Watching men build boats on the beach with little more than a handsaw, a hammer and an axe, Jeffrey decided he wanted to try boatbuilding. He went to Maine in 1976 and apprenticed at the Northend Shipyard rebuilding a 95' passenger schooner. He returned to California where he was born, and after being a union shipwright at Pacific Drydock, he took a job as construction foreman at Pacific Fishboat Co. building a 75' wooden fishing boat. In 1982, after several years of freelance boat repair dockside, Jeff started Rutherford's Boat Shop in Richmond CA. The shop specializes in building and restoring classic yachts and general marine woodworking. Some notable projects include the 53' Edson Shock cutter BRIGHT STAR; the 58' N. G. Herreshoff P-Class sloop JOYANT; a 4-oared lifeboat for the squared rigged ship BALCLUTHA; and an L.F. Herreshoff Buzzards Bay 14.