

Acquisition of the Riverboat Jubilee

I was surfing the internet in November of 2000 looking at classic boats. I really was just looking because I already own three Chris-Crafts. I entered www.1001boats.com, a web site for boats sales. The site was set up to present the longest boats first and the Jubilee was the first boat picture to download. I thought it was a fantastic riverboat replica and it was called the Jubilee. Designed as a tour boat it had an open deck plan with several benches for the passengers to view the landscape, wildlife and the river alligators. I thought that this boat could be perfect to give rides on Bantam Lake, where I have lived all of my life. So many people can only drive by and look at small portions of this beautiful lake without ever seeing all of the shoreline and marshland. In the old days, you were able to rent rowboats but, like everything else lawyers and liability destroyed that pleasure too.

I had seen one other beautiful sternwheeler for sale several months earlier in Ohio named the Dubuque but the ad stated that the boat was too large to transport across land and the \$500,000 price tag still gives me the chills. I contacted the owner of the Jubilee, Dan Blake, and made arrangements to see the boat. I flew into Tallahassee, Florida during the presidential election recount. I expected delays and crowds but all the action was taking place at the courthouse and not in town. I rented a car and drove out the panhandle to Apalachicola and met Dan at his house. We drove down to the marina where I saw the Jubilee. It looked cute from the bow but I was staggered by the length. Having lived all my life on a lake with ski, sail and pontoon boats half this size I wasn't prepared for the fifty-one feet floating here. I was impressed by the attention to detail in the construction being a carpenter myself. After an hour on the river, I was amazed by how well the boat responded to the helm and I knew at that time that I had to have this boat on Bantam Lake. Dan had built the boat with the thought of overland transport in the event of a future sale. He kept the width to ten feet and the height, less the wheelhouse, in the range of ten feet.

I flew home the next day for spousal approval from my wife Kerri. I knew that she also liked the look of this boat and we made the decision to buy it. I sent a down payment in early December and made arrangements with Dan to keep it in Florida at the marina until the end of June when my wife was done teaching and could stay home with the baby so I could help get the boat transported. During this time I once again surfed the internet requesting about twenty or so estimates for boat hauling. I may have received ten estimates online. Many were from brokers that handled several independent haulers so once they knew that I was price shopping the spread in price got tighter. I received prices ranging from \$7000 for just the tractor to \$2900 with most in the \$5000 range. I jumped all over the first bid that I saw that started with a 2 and contacted the hauler to get on their schedule. I heard the many tales that the

higher the price the better your boat would be treated. I don't know if this is true but I figured that you could drag the Jubilee up I-95 from Florida to Connecticut without a trailer and maybe just scratch the paint job so the lowest price was just fine with me.

I know that the wheelhouse had to be transported separately and there was no room on the boat haulers rig. I headed back to Apalachicola to finalize the deal, learn the ins and outs of sternwheeler operation in one lesson, dismantle the Jubilee and prepare it for transport. On June 22, 2001 after having my 1990 Ford Bronco blessed, I headed south towing my little trailer. I found living out of my car to be very inexpensive and I made great time. I couldn't bring myself to get a room at 3 am for just 4 or 5 hours...my seats reclined...a little. I had made arrangements to meet my old friend, Porter Harvey, who drove down from Georgia, to help me keep things in control. We met rather unexpectedly early in the a.m. at the same convenience shop getting that first cup of coffee and we headed over to the marina. To our surprise the boat was still in the water as I had left it in November. I guess I had expected it to be slung, taken apart and ready to be placed on the trailer. Having sent 50% payment to confirm the transport, I was thankful to see the boat hauler's trailer sitting inside the marina gate. The "what-ifs" clogged my mind on the trip down. We caught up with Dan and then went back to the marina where we took the Jubilee out for a ride. This was my only opportunity to learn the intricate starting procedure and learn docking maneuvers with this ten-ton vessel in a current before subjecting my dock and others to this destructive force that no one has seen or heard of before on Bantam Lake. This purchase was kept secret as its early announcement would have started an uproar from people unfamiliar with the beauty of the sternwheeler and who were merely concerned with length. A pre-warning may have triggered a boat length restriction on the lake. While on the river, we saw the tractor from the boat hauling company crossing the Apalachicola River Bridge headed toward the marina. We docked, met the owner-operators of the boat transport company and made arrangements for everything to come together and apart early the next morning.

We arrived the next morning at the marina and found the Jubilee in slings being lifted from the water. After many attempts, the boat was maneuvered precisely over the trailer and lowered. Each corner was measured several times to pavement as the maximum height for overpass clearance was 14' 6". After removing the trailer's fenders and some more maneuvering and lowering, all corners measured 14' 6" with the exception of the splash bulkhead. The two supports were made from 4 x 4 x 8 foot white cedar with the splash bulkhead continuing eighteen inches above the upper deck proudly displaying the Jubilee name aft. With a puzzled look, Dan remarked "I guess this boat isn't going to be able to go on this trailer, the back-splash is too high!" Porter and I had worked together solving construction problems for close to ten years and in an instant said in stereo "someone grab a chain saw!" Well Dan

almost passed out saying "you're not going to scratch Danny's boat are you?" He said that he would make the cut and with the whir of an electric skill saw on a squared pencil line, this section was lifted off and secured below. After the removal of some hardware, steering wheel mechanism, wires and cables the wheelhouse was lifted off with another crane, lowered onto my trailer and fastened for its journey to Connecticut. My gas mileage was cut in half and my Bronco never made it into overdrive thanks to the big 'air-brake' I was towing. After settling up with Dan and the marina operator, who by the way doubled all of the regular fees for storage, hauling and crane use, and they say that the north was forgiven, we all headed for our respective homes.

I was in fear that the truck was going to beat me home so I kept my foot in it for the next twenty-eight hours and made it back to Morris a day and a half ahead of the truck. He got stuck in the majority of traffic jams and couldn't drive at night because of the wide load restrictions so violating dozens of motor vehicle laws in six states was not necessary but it felt good to get home with some time to spare before the boat arrived. I finalized plans with the owner of Beverly's marina and the rigging companies' crane operator and then waited for the phone to ring. It was late in the afternoon when I got the call from the truck driver that they were rounding South Bay of the lake on Rt. 209. I could see the tractor-trailer and the Jubilee heading for the marina from my house. I jumped in the car and drove to meet them. After an hour of maneuvering the tractor-trailer and with the help of many onlookers with traffic control, the truck and trailer eased through the two granite pillars that had earlier impeded their entry and into the marina parking lot. The driver uncoupled the trailer and he and his wife headed into town for a well-deserved break and to meet some friends in the area that he had made plans with.

The next morning the crane and operators, the truck driver, friends, helpers and I met at the marina and within the hour lifted the boat off the trailer and into the lake. The weight of the Jubilee is still in question. The truck driver said it weighed 17000 pounds at the highway scales but the crane operator said it tipped the scale at 20000 pounds according to his onboard computer. The crane operator was just able to reach the water's edge when he lowered the vessel into the water from where he was positioned. He then lifted the wheelhouse into position on the upper deck. Everything was untied, reconnected, bolted down, screwed back etc. I fired up the motor late that evening, after finally remembering to turn on the gas at the tank, and brought the Jubilee to its new mooring at my house on the east shore of Bantam Lake. Plying the calm water of Bantam Lake for the first time that evening was the thrill of a lifetime. Even though short, the memory of that first ride on Bantam Lake and that first successful docking with 10 tons of wood and steel will last forever.

Earlier that spring I had built two 4 foot by 16 foot stone filled cribs about sixteen feet from shore, twelve feet apart and parallel, for the Jubilee's anchorage. I knew that if I could limit the boat's movement I would reduce damage to the boat and dock in strong winds and waves. The Jubilee has endured two winters, relentless windy days and many storms nestled between these two well cushioned cribs with only minor cosmetic damage. This resulted when the water is extremely high and the tires are no longer able to keep the gunwales from hitting the wood piers.

With the end of a third season in view, my wife and I and now two little girls, Kelsey and Kennedy, have given over 1200 people the thrill of their day, weekend, week, month...who knows for sure, as there are always many thanks and smiles upon disembarking. Many have been repeat passengers chartering the boat for wedding parties, birthdays, retirement parties, and cookouts or just to get with 25 friends for a 2 plus hour cruise around the 10 miles of shoreline on the largest natural lake in Connecticut. We were able to give the Morris Senior Home residents a great ride this summer and several rides on the Jubilee have been raffled off to raise money for local hospice. Our most recognizable passenger would have to be the Governor of Connecticut, John Rowland who was the guest of honor at a fundraiser given by some of his supporters just before the 2002 election. I display a great photograph of this event on my cabin wall...and one in my office...and one in my living room...

Thank you American Sternwheel Association

Sincerely yours,
Captain Julian Scott Morris