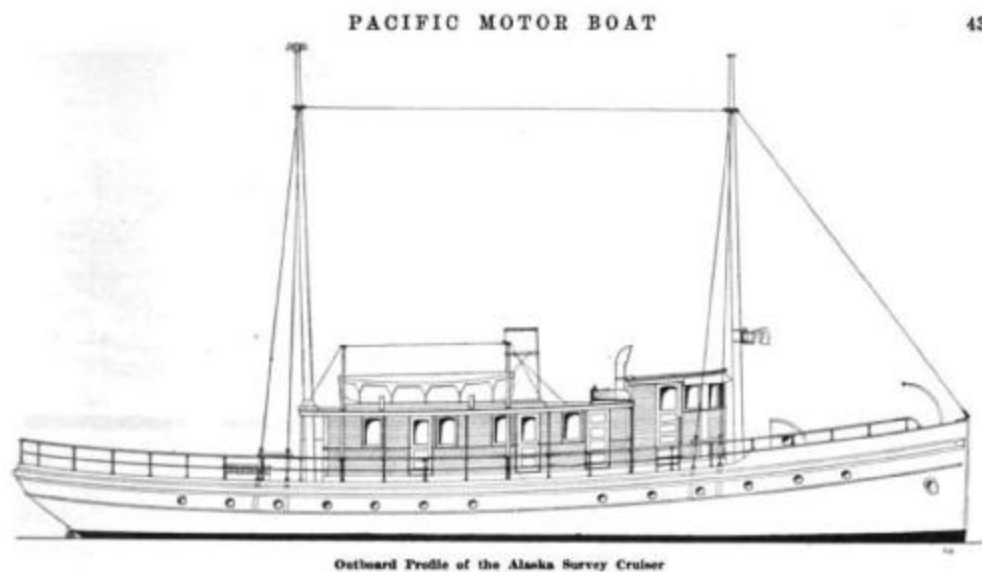


A Short History of the Gyrfalcon

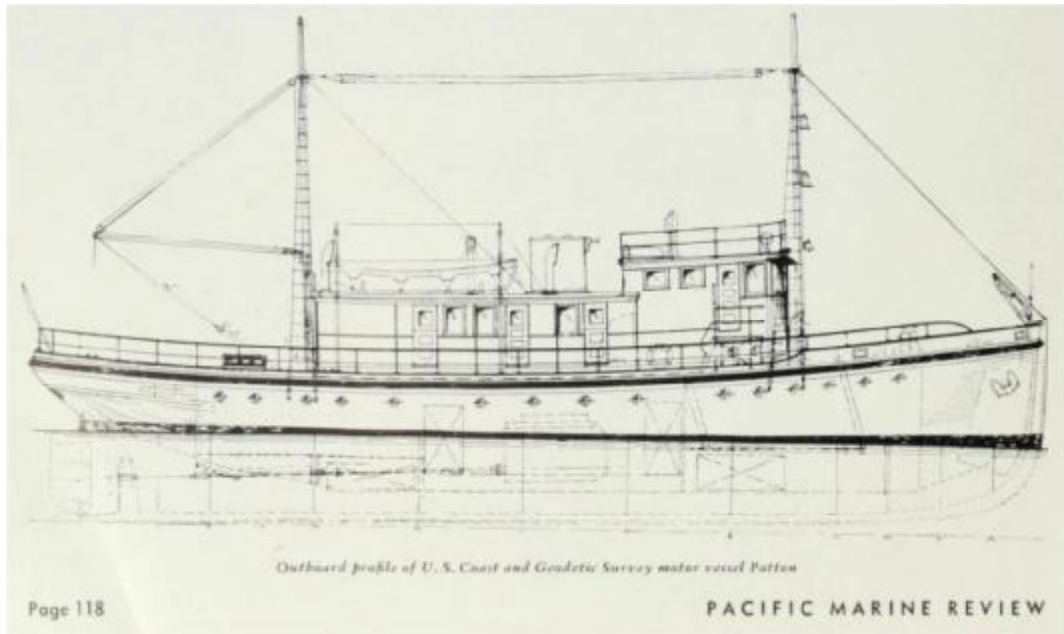
Although the Gyrfalcon was launched in 1941, her history began long before that.

In 1918, E. Lester Jones, Superintendent of the Coast and Geodetic Survey (C&GS), wrote a treatise that included an impassioned plea for small boats to make better harbor surveys in Alaskan waters.

In 1919, Lee & Brinton, Seattle naval architects, drew plans for two 88 ft gas-powered Coast Survey Vessels. With the end of WWI, these boats were never built, and the plans were relegated to a shelf somewhere in Washington, DC.



By the mid-1930s, experts in the War Department became convinced that a war with Japan was inevitable. The need for accurate charting of the coast of Alaska once again became important. The original plans were given to H.C. Hanson, a noted naval architect in Bellingham, WA. Hanson updated the original plans slightly (changed the original gasoline engines to diesels, enlarged the pilothouse, added an additional dory). This time, the government funded the building of both ships. One, the E. Lester Jones, was built in Astoria, OR, while our ship, the Patton (named for Raymond Stanton Patton, the recently deceased Superintendent of the C&GS) was built by Sagstad Marine of Ballard. The winning bid was \$149,995.



Sagstad's boatyard in Ballard was not large enough to accommodate the Patton, so he rented the Maritime Shipyards building across the ship canal in Magnolia on Commodore Way (the building no longer exists). Work began in February 1941 and the Patton was launched on August 8, 1941.



For the remainder of the war, both ships continued surveys in the Aleutians from April through October. In the winter, the boats returned to Seattle for repairs and upgrades. After the war, until their decommissioning in 1967, both vessels continued to survey for the C&GS in the Aleutians, Southeast Alaska, and along the BC coast (in conjunction with Canadian surveys).



At the end of each season, Patton and E Lester Jones raced from Alaska back to their home port in Seattle. Although both boats were built to the same specifications, the Patton ran about $\frac{1}{4}$ knot faster than the E. Lester Jones, so she almost always won the race.



After the 1967 season, both boats were sold at auction in October 1968. The Coast Survey wanted new auxillary survey vessels and were not allowed to requisition them without surplussing the 2 older vessels. We've talked to people who say that the decision was sad for many, as the E. Lester Jones and the Patton were the cush assignment for officers in the Coast Survey. They were sold together for \$57,250 each. Since 1968, both vessels have been based in Seattle. The E. Lester Jones became the Summer Wind, and has mostly been owned by the Schoeggl family, who currently keep the boat on Lake Washington.

Ernest J Ketcham purchased the Patton at the October 1968 auction. In 1971, Frank Prothero of Prothero Boat Building added an aft extension to the salon, and extended the coachhouse roof to the stern. In the same year, David Updike of NW Diesel Repair replaced the original Cooper Bessemer direct reversing engines with the current Caterpillar 3306s (Bob Waterman supplied the 3306s). Direct-reversing engines were the height of technology when the boat was built. They had no transmissions, which meant that the engines turned the prop shafts directly at 300 rpm. However, since they had no transmissions, there was no neutral – the engines were either running forward or reverse. In order to change directions, you have to turn the engines off, wait till they came to a complete stop, flip a cam to reverse the engines, and start the engines again with compressed air (hoping there was enough air in the tanks to start again). This process takes about a minute, during which time 167 tons of boat is still moving forward. It made docking an interesting process. We are very happy to have our “modern” caterpillars with transmissions and neutral. But they don’t sound nearly as cool as the old Cooper Bessemers.

Ketcham sold the boat to Robert S. Lint in January of 1973. Mike R Skalley bought the Patton from Lint in April 1975 and renamed her the St. Croix. Robert Jacobsen bought the boat in March 1977 for \$189,000 and renamed her Triton. Jacobsen took the boat to Alaska every summer as a place to stay in between his job as captain of the Dupont Dynamite boat that made regular runs from the Puget Sound to Ketchikan, Alaska.



Bob Ellsworth bought the boat in April 1988 for \$100,000. He owned the boat for 15 years, based in Gig Harbor, WA. Ellsworth sold the Triton to W. Barklie Henry of Big Sur, CA, in Mar 2003. Legend has it that Henry possessed a map of the Caribbean with Xs marking the location of submerged canons. True or not, he had the massive crane mounted on the coachhouse roof, took the boat through the Panama Canal, and spent several years in the Caribbean.

When the adventure ended, Barklie Henry tried to sell the boat in Miami. Unable to find a buyer, he had the boat shipped on a boat transport ship back to West Coast. In August 2011, he found a buyer for both the boat and its boathouse here in Washington. The boat sold for \$474,076.19. Henry financed the sale himself. Unfortunately, the new owner made one payment, and then vanished with the boathouse, leaving the boat sitting in the mud in Tacoma until March 2012, when Barklie reclaimed it. The boat made its way north to Lake Union Boat Repair (LUBR) in Seattle. Peter and Nancy bought the boat in October 2012.

At that point, we had been talking about what we wanted to do in our retirement, and had decided we would get a big boat, and do some chartering in Alaska. We were early in the process, and certainly not ready to buy a boat, when one day on a cruise in our 30-foot Monk (Guillemot), we saw the Triton on the ship canal at LUBR with a For Sale sign on the side. We called Dan, the agent, who said he would be glad to show it to us but warned us it was a "Project Boat". The next day when we met him, he said, "I'm going to show you the worst cabins first – the last couple I showed the boat to took one look at the mold and mildew and ran away." Dan was right – she was in sad shape. Since the boat had been sitting in the weather for several years, she leaked and there was mold and mildew everywhere. All of the cabins had dropped ceilings with vinyl headliner fabric (1980s) with can lights. There was soggy carpet on all the floors. But, oh my, she had great bones. The fact that she was built as a work boat and not a yacht spoke to us – it was exactly the type of boat we wanted. We crawled around for 45 minutes, looked at each other and made an offer. After some price negotiations, we became the owners of the Triton.



Every big boat seems to come with a "guy", who either lives on the boat, worked on the boat, or has extensive knowledge of the boat. In our case, the guy was Ben Harry, the owner of LUBR. At the time we bought the boat, Ben was in his mid 60's, but has been working on the boat on and off since he was a teenager. His first job in the maritime industry was cleaning the bilges on our boat. Ben had a vision of the what the boat needed to be functional and safe for the 21st century. He also felt he knew what we wanted for the boat.



This led to some spirited discussions, but we must admit he was mostly correct. He immediately began constructing a tent over the boat, so that the shipwrights could work through the winter.



Construction on the tent began in late September. When we pointed out to Ben that we didn't even own the boat yet, he replied, "We need to get the tent up before the rains. You guys are going to buy it. Don't worry." We asked Ben what he thought it would take to restore the boat, and he gave us a number. Having owned a wooden boat before, we immediately doubled the figure. We should have quadrupled it. What we didn't know then was that as boats get bigger, the costs increase logarithmically!

We spent the next year docked at LUBR. The crew there rebuilt the coachhouse roof, remodeled the galley and salon and the master stateroom. The topsides were painted and the brightwork varnished. New appliances were installed in the galley, and the entire electrical system was rewired. We spent all of our free time in sweat equity – painting the interiors, and doing small carpentry projects. We had a tremendous amount of help on the interior painting from Jorge, who originally came to work for us for a week as a gift from our friend Diane Lander on the Olympus. Jorge could sand overhead all day,

while either of us lasted about 15 minutes max. When the week was over, we contracted with him to stay for the rest of the project.



Early on in the project, we had a “Before” Party for all our boating friends in the Classic Yacht Association (CYA). They made lots of good suggestions. We later learned that the general feeling after seeing the boat was that we wouldn’t last six months before we threw up our hands and ran away. These people did not know Nancy. Once she puts her mind to something, it will happen. And it did!



We knew from our pre-purchase haulout and inspection that cutless bearings on the shafts were both gone. These are the bearings that hold the shaft in line with the engines. LUBR did not have the ability to pull a boat of our size out of the water, so we began our relationship with Haven Boatworks in Port Townsend, across the Sound. The first year we had the cutless bearings and pillow bearings replaced, and the shafts and engines rebalanced and adjusted, all the old thruhulls replaced, as well as a few planks replaced. We were on the hard for 2 months.

The following summer (2014), we took our first voyages – to the San Juan and Gulf Islands in July, and later to the Victoria Wooden Boat Show over Labor Day. Over the next several years, we made numerous trips to Port Townsend for haulouts, LUBR for in-water upgrades, and countless adventures

traveling the waters of the Salish Sea and adjacent waters as far north as the northern end of Vancouver Island. All of these experiences are detailed in our blog. www.gyrfalcon88.com/blog.

For the past three summers (2021, 2022, 2023) we have taken the Gyr Falcon to SE Alaska. We have welcomed family, friends, and a few paying customers to share the wonders of Alaska with us. We have circumnavigated Admiralty Island several times and spent time in Ketchikan, Wrangell, Petersburg, Juneau, and Sitka, and have visited numerous small villages and harbors. We have gone to Glacier Bay National Park each summer, and seen whales (humpback, orca and sperm), bears, sea otters galore, and tons of seabirds. We have learned a lot about the boat, the Inside Passage, and ourselves. Truly, we have been living the dream (except for those few days when we lived the nightmare).