

Brief history of TARKA'S background

Tarka was designed and built by J.J. Taylor & Sons, during 1938/39 at their boatworks located at 2 Stadium Road, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. J.J. Taylor was one of a group of boatbuilders, who made their mark in Ontario, during the first half of the 20th century. This group also included, Minett-Shields Ditchburn, Duke, Barnes and Greavette. During this time, J.J. Taylor became recognised as a Master Boatbuilder in the province of Ontario. In a conversation with Mr. William Garden in 2008, when Tarka was in the yard at Canoe Cove, he confirmed this and added that he was also named, "The Dean of Boatbuilders". He had met J.J. Taylor before he retired from building "plank on frame" boats in 1955. His four sons continued the business, with the maintenance and repair to the boats they had built and later they introduced a line of fibre glass hulls, in a series named Contessa.

According to Arthur J. Taylor, last surviving son of J.J. Taylor, during my conversation with him in 1991, Tarka was one of five cruisers designed, built and marketed, primarily by the four sons of J.J. Taylor, to compete with Chriscraft. The series was named Taylorcraft and consisted of one 28 foot, two 30 foot and two 35 foot cruisers and were completed and registered in 1939 in Toronto, as were all of J.J. Taylor's boats. The 28 and 30 foot cruisers had a single Kermath engine and the 35 foot cruisers had twin Kermath's. The Kermaths were built by Kermath Manufacturing Company of Canada, Toronto Ontario. The transmissions were built by Upton Reverse and Reduction Gear Company of Detroit, Michigan, USA.

The Canadian built Kermaths differed in their names and specifications to the USA built Kermaths. Tarka's "Sea Chief" Kermath engine is a six cylinder, high compression head, 223 cu.in. 100 + HP. The USA built "Sea Chief" Kermath is an eight cylinder with a capacity of 232 cu.in. Fortunately, the USA built "Sea Prince" is exactly the same, except the bore and stroke, providing a capacity of 221 cu.in.

Tarka's engine and transmission are original and were fully dismantled and measured in 1980 by Aaron Machine Company in Toledo Ohio USA to establish the condition. The condition was good, however, as the opportunity existed to improve the condition to almost "new", the crank was reground, main, cam, and rod bearings were replaced, main bearings line-bored, valve springs replaced, seats and valves re-ground, new piston ring-sets, cylinders honed and head milled. Engine was "run-in" on test bed.

I purchased Tarka in 1972 when she was located at Le froy Harbour Marina on Lake Simcoe north of Toronto. I moved her to Port Severn Marina at the first lock of the Trent Canal Water System from Georgian Bay. I cruised her in Georgian Bay, the Trent Canal and the Muskoka Lake district from 1972 to 1976. In 1977 I took a job in Toledo, Ohio and Tarka was transported to Toledo, which is on the Maumee river with close access to Lake Erie. Due to the demands of the new job it was not possible to spend any time cruising so with limited time, I decided to begin a restoration project, which only lasted until late 1979 when I accepted a company position in Mexico City. Tarka was stored in the marina building, in Toledo, used only for building or maintenance of wooden boats, until 1985. I then returned to Toronto and Tarka was transported to Pickering just east of Toronto. Some work continued on the restoration until 1988, when I retired and my wife and I moved to Salt Spring Island British Columbia. Restoration then started again in earnest in 1989 and Tarka was re-launched at the Canoe Cove Marina on September 1996; the first time back in the water in 20 years!! some work has continued, as it always does with a wooden boat, but mainly on what I would name as cosmetic.

This "background" only summarises the periods of restoration, not the actual activity and detail of what constitutes restoration of the original workmanship. I have maintained a written record and photographs of all the work which I completed, which is contained in eight 2 and 3 inch volumes. My hope is that Tarka and the limited writings of J.J. Taylor may retain some of the evidence of the boatbuilding history in Ontario, during the first half of the 20th century.

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