

John Remsen Sr.
Interviewed by Nancy Solomon
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How he learned to build a boat. Other people who built garveys. Grandfather advised him but did not teach him. Needed and wanted to build garveys. Father had one built by a professional so he emulated the designs.

Used cedar – went to New Jersey mills – New Gretna, bought oak from Commack. All wood originally. Now they are fiberglassed. No local cedar.

Dry the wood at home – air dried. Steamed the ribs – trimmed wood – planed and sawed. Put in 55 gallon drum and burned excess, and light fire to steam the oak. Held shape. 1 hour per inch to steam. Pipe was attached. 15-18 foot long, 1 foot square. Needed green oak. Dried oak would crack. Biggest boat was 25-foot. Amount of wood needed.

One piece lumber. First started in 1958 - \$350 for one boat, today it's \$2500. He's slower today. 100 garveys in his lifetime. 5 per year on average. Can build an 18-foot garvey in 6 hours. Could retire and make a living - enough demand.

Son can build a boat. Planking. Cedar and oak decks. Whatever the person wanted. Builds for anyone. Some recreational customers. Word of mouth is his advertising. Build duck boats too. Smaller than garveys – 12 foot, and camouflage – thatch rail. Made of plywood. Does not make cedar boats anymore. No longer hunts. Feeds them instead. Clammed and worked on the bay part time.

No family helped built boats. No brothers. Worked on the bay growing up. Fished with nets – haul seine. Father did it until they outlawed it. Mother's father made his living haul seining-Ellison. Lessons learned – be careful, respect for the bay.

Also built gil net boats. Designed by Brewer in Deer Isle Maine. Kept one and sold the other to someone in Shinnecock. Could work in the surf – wide bow. Powered by Flagship engine made in Freeport. Same as Chevy car engine for boats. Built mostly outboards. Once made a sailboat.

Can pick his boats out. Certain style. Higher bow than others. Standard cut out for stern. Interior was made based on customer's use – clammer, etc. Developed understanding with customers before they started. Selects his customers. Started when he was 24 years old. Some mistakes. Ribs were bolted. Stainless steel bolts. Notched the ribs. "Rabbit cut." Other types of notching – square cuts.

Son can build them now – uses patterns – has 20 or 30. Different patterns depending on length and how high the bow and sides should be. Clammers need low sided boats. Eelers like Cory would want a high sided boat. No seats. Covering on front gives boat strength. Styrofoam is underneath for flotation. Started using foam 10 years ago.

Uses fiberglass – started in the 1960s. Faster. Plywood does not leak. Cedar boat leaks when they are first built. If you planked it tight the boards would buckle. Fiberglass gives strength. No need to paint. Becomes maintenance free. Some boats are 20 – 25 years old. Fiberglass boats will get beat up. Last 5 – 10 years.

Patterns save time. Keeps them in shed. Some are old – 30 years old. Use good material in the pattern. First “V” bottom garvey did not come out well. Customers liked it. Saw V bottom boat in Virginia. Seen on Long Island. Common today among sports fishermen. Started about 15 years ago. Garveys are good because it only needs a few inches of water.

Built boats for fishers – Fred and Dott Verity, Elwood Verity, Jacki, the Millers - clammers, Billy in Oceanside, others. Some clammers in Amityville.

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