

## SAWYER'S CANOE

Sawyer's canoe was built in what is now Hyde county North Carolina near Fairfield. When it was built Fairfield was part of Tyrrell county. Exactly when it was built know one seems to agree. Some say it was built around 1850 or 1860. According to Mr C. D. Gibbs of rose bay, she was launched in 1886.

Mr Gibbs was a good friend of Charlie Alton Sawyer, better known as Mr Alton. They would sit and talk for hours on end about old times. On many occasions they would talk about the canoe. I was told by Mr Gibbs that the boat was built by my great great grandfather Benjamin Franklin Sawyer Sr. I have also been told this by my father Luther Graham Sawyer. This seems to be one of the few things that everyone agrees on.

The location of the construction of the canoe is also agreed on. It was built at Head of the river in Hyde county. The old house was located 3 miles south of Fairfield bridge on the intercostal water way. This is the bridge where highway 94 crosses the waterway. The old house set on the right hand side of the waterway. The old home sat about 500 yds. west of the waterway. At the time the canoe was built the waterway had not been cut.

Head of the river is where the Alligator river starts. The people of this area call it Head the river. some of the old timers called it Durance island. So named for Durance Cahoon, who first settled there.

The history of the canoe is quite interesting. It has changed hands many times. Many changes have taken place to the canoe over the years. It has also been use as a cattle feed trough.

The canoe was built from three logs. Each log was cut and reshaped where they were cut. Each log was cut in a different piece of woods. After the logs were roughly shaped. The logs were hauled to the house and there the assemble began. Each of the three major parts were fitted together. Gauge holes were drilled through the sides to check the thickness of the sides. These holes were then plugged when they reached the right thickness the holes were plugged. Ribs were cut from the roots of cedar and cypress trees. Each root was chosen for just the right curve to fit the curve of the sides.

When the canoe was first built the bow stem was made of a cedar root like the ribs. There were no gunnels on the canoe. I have been told that when the canoe was built, it was fitted out to have sails. I don't know if this was done when it was first built or added later.

In the year 1888 Benjamin Franklin Sawyer Sr. died. At the time of his death, he had 3 sons. Ezekiel H. Sawyer, Benjamin Franklin Sawyer Jr. and Eben Sawyer. Benjamin Franklin Sawyer Jr. was my great-Grandfather. He was called Franklin.

I am not sure if Franklin inherited the canoe or not. The next owner of the canoe that we know of was Eben Sawyer. I have been told that Eben lived on bells island near Rose bay. The canoe was a way of life. Not only was it used to hunt, fish and trap. It was used as transportation. I have been told that it was used to take Eben's son, Charlie Alton Sawyer to school in Fairfield.

Somewhere around 1920 Little John Oneal bought the canoe. It must have been in need of repair. This is when it was used as a cattle trough. My father has told me on many occasions of seeing the canoe in the field and of the cattle eating out of it.

Around 1930 Charlie Alton Sawyer built a small canoe. Mr. Alton traded it to John Oneal for the old canoe.

Mr Alton and his father did the much needed repairs. This is when the bow stem was replaced by the blocks we see today. The keel was extended and gunnels were added. An air cooled motor was installed.

On April 20 1932 Eben Sawyer died. Mr Alton was Ebens only son. Mr. Alton made most of the changes that were made to the canoe. He added the cabin. Most of the plank patches were installed by Mr Alton. He also added at one time a V-8 motor around 1943.

Mr Alton moved to Charleston S.C. and went to work there at the shipyard. He worked there for a while. Then he moved back to Rose Bay N.C.. Mr Alton started to build larger work boats at his home. I'm not sure how many he built. The last boat he started to build when he was 80 years old. He hand hewed the keel an dead rise. He had the bottom on and one plank on the sides when he died.

Mr Alton died on June 26 1977. Mr Alton had 3 sons. Ralph Ernie Sawyer, Sherwood Sawyer and Bernard Sawyer. Ralph Ernie Sawyer was known by the name Ernie.

Ernie inherited the canoe and the unfinished work boat he had started. Ernie was not as interested in boat building as his father. Ernie did do some work on the canoe but I'm not sure just what was done by him. Ernie died on Oct. 4 1985 of cancer. Ernie's wife Mrs Shelby Smith Sawyer called me later that month. Miss Shelby had heard that I was interested in collecting and preserving the old tools that were in our family. Around Oct. 20 1985 my father Luther ~~Ernie~~ Sawyer and myself went to Rose Bay N.C. to look at the old tools and the canoe. At that time miss Shelby told my father that Ernie wanted him to have the canoe. I loaded up the tools and one week later on the 27 of October of 1985 we picked up the canoe. The cabin was about to fall off so we removed it. My father had planed to restore it but his health would not let him. Then he told me it was my canoe now but that is when i started talk to him about donating it to you. You know the rest.

Steven Ray Sawyer



P.S. as I get more info. I'll Let you know.