



COURTESY OF SHEERY STREETER



WoodenBoat's library finds a new home

by Tom Jackson

Shortly after I started as an editor at *WoodenBoat* in 1997, I wrote an article about LE LÉZARD, a replica built in France to a design by the impressionist painter Gustave Caillebotte (WB No. 146). I learned in the course of fax communications (in French, no less) that a lines plan had been published in *Forest and Stream* in February 1892. Holding very little hope, I walked downstairs to check the WoodenBoat library—but, sure enough, there it was. The value of that resource proved itself to me again and again over the years since. It was an easy library to get lost in.

When Jon Wilson found his way into boatbuilding in Maine in the 1960s, he, like a lot of us, started collecting specialized books. “I loved books as much as I loved good tools,” Jon said, “and so it started out as my library at my shop or at my house.” He added to his collection over the years, and when he founded *WoodenBoat* in 1974, and especially after moving the company to Brooklin in 1977, he continued collecting with a passion. “It is so ‘Jon Wilson’ to just want to collect books, whether we could afford them or not,” he said. *Forest and Stream* was one example—that magazine had written about Commodore Ralph Munroe, one of Jon’s favorite designers; the Bangor Public Library had a full set and allowed him to copy the boat-related sections. That’s one small example of how a boatbuilder’s collection of perhaps 50 books reached a total of more than 6,700 volumes, each one with its own story.

“That changed my whole way of understanding how to research these boats or boat types,” Jon said. “It just woke me up to the possibility of what you could find in old books and old magazines in a way that I hadn’t been awakened to before. *Forest and Stream*, maybe more than anything else, kind of opened up that possibility for scholarly research, and that probably also has played into where I wanted the collection to go. I didn’t want it to be owned by an entity; I wanted more people to have access to that experience, because that had been unbelievable for me, and I thought it could be for others.”

In January 2021, when Jon sold the WoodenBoat Publications company to employees Andrew Breece, chief operating officer and publisher, and Matthew Murphy, chief content officer, he retained the library collection (in addition to the property upon which the business operates). Like any collector, he

The library that *WoodenBoat*’s founder, Jon Wilson, built up over decades has been donated to the Friend Memorial Library at the center of town in Brooklin, Maine.

faced the looming issue of what would eventually become of his books. He had an institution or two within Maine in mind. But with the encouragement of a few people in town—most notably Maynard Bray, the maritime historian and longtime *WoodenBoat* technical editor—the Friend Memorial Library in the heart of Brooklin expressed an interest. Board member Eden Cowart approached Jon in spring 2022 about donating the bulk of the collection to the library. Jon and the library board president, Ed DePasqual, signed a letter of intent to that effect on October 20, 2023.

The Friend Memorial Library is a nonprofit organization supported almost wholly by donors and volunteers, along with a small endowment, and its five-day-a-week operations are uncommon for a town of only 827 (as of the 2020 census). Its board was already in the midst of planning an expansion, because, as Ed said, the building has been “bursting at the seams.” The plan is being refined by Elliott Architects in nearby Blue Hill, who also designed an expansion completed in 2000. The library’s existing square footage is expected to just about double this time, to about 4,000 sq ft. About one-third of a new building, connected by a glass corridor to the existing one, is envisioned to hold what is now known as “The Maritime Research Collection.” (The library board has launched fundraising for the overall project, seeking \$1.5 million for the expansion and \$1 million for an endowment; the contact is Robert Baird, robert@rabassoc.com.)

“It’s just a great thing for the town,” Ed said. “This town is about boatbuilding, and we want to have this library stand out from other libraries.”

The Brooklin library has a storied history. It was founded in the first years of the 20th century by summer residents of an enclave in town known as The Haven Colony, among them John Wesley Powell, a Civil War officer, Grand Canyon explorer, and U.S. Geological Survey director who was a summer resident. (Powell died in Brooklin in 1902.) The Friend family for whom the library is named came from Brooklin but made their fortune in Massachusetts with Friend’s Brick Oven Baked Beans. Among the library’s many supporters over the decades were noted authors and editors E.B. and Katharine White; Katharine especially played an active role as a trustee.

The concept for the maritime collection is that it will remain intact. The collection is especially rich in full or nearly full sets of periodicals, among them *The Rudder*, *Yachting*, *Yachting Monthly*, and many others. “We could see what we were doing in the magazine, so we knew that others had done this same thing before us, realizing that we’re part of that continuum,” Jon said. “The periodicals were hugely important to me.”

“Half the town is involved in this thing because we care,” Maynard said. He notes that Brooklin’s seventh- and eighth-graders in a school boatbuilding program can find inspiration in the bookshelves, along with WoodenBoat School instructors and students and anyone else—even out-of-towners with the idea of having a yacht built at one of the town’s boatyards.

The books are arranged topically. “That’s the unique aspect of this whole collection, I think,” Maynard said. He recently was looking for a topic to describe for a video, “So I picked steamboats just because it was on eye level and easy to do. All the steamboat books are right there, a whole rack of them together. You can’t find that anywhere else in the country, I don’t believe.” And open stacks simplify searches and