

Hubert Stanley Johnson

1887 - 1949

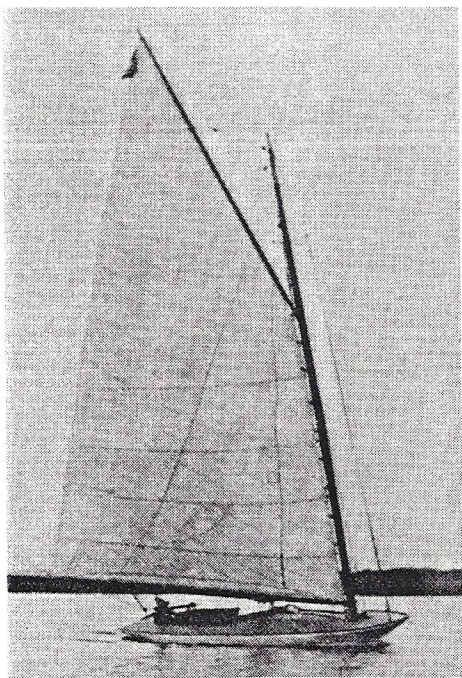
Editor's Note: There were, and are, many families and businesses with the name Johnson in the Bay Head area. Most of them are not related. Hubert Johnson was no relation to the Johnson Brothers Boatyard people; the late Sonny Johnson of the Bluffs; or the late mayor of Bay Head, Ed Johnson.

In the early/mid part of the 1900's, Bay Head had a reputation for quality boat building that far exceeded the small size of the boro. A major part of that reputation came from the mind and energy of Hubert Johnson. He was one of two sons of Morton Johnson who owned and operated a boatyard across the lagoon from the BHYC off West Lake Avenue (where Bay Point Harbor is now). Hubert and his brother Paul both started their boating careers in their father's yard, but Hubert wanted to combine his talent for boat design with his boat building experience and felt he had more chance to do that "on his own."



Hubert Johnson at the helm of "Teal." Note the long sleeved shirt and tie typical of the day.

About that time, the property on West Lake Avenue next to the baseball field (north of the Club) became available, and Hubert was able to acquire that and go on to design and/or build thousands of boats for yachtsmen, sailors and the US Navy. [His brother, Paul, stayed on at the Morton Johnson yard and ultimately became president when Morton died in 1934. The boat yards remained friendly but fierce competitors.]



"Arran"

Four boats (or boat types) in particular accounted for the bulk of Hubert Johnson's fame. The first was his design of the 20-foot Sneakbox "Arran." He did this at the tender age of 14 while he was still a student at the small Bay Head School, and eleven years before he started his own business. "Arran" was built in his father's boat yard and was owned and sailed by O.G. Dale (father of Slade Dale). "Old Man Dale" raced "Arran" with such success that in his first three years of competition (1906 to 1908 inclusive) the boat won 18 cups. By the time Dale sold the "Arran" in 1919 it was the "winningest boat" in the history of the BHYC, and perhaps still is. A photo of "Arran" and some of its trophies hangs, today, in the Club bar.

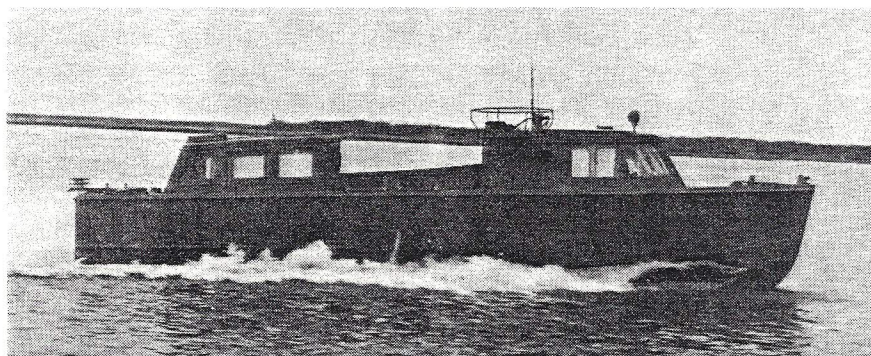
In 1936 Hubert Johnson designed and started building a series of "Sea Skiffs" of lap-strake construction. They ultimately became famous world-wide for their distinctive black hulls and cream-colored decks. He had nine models available ranging in size from a 41' "Double Cabin Express" to a 24' "Sportsman" runabout. His primary tool for marketing these boats was the New York Boat Show where he had extensive exhibits. He was an early and enthusiastic supporter of the boat show, and never missed a chance to be an exhibitor. He would take his whole family to New York for that week to share in the rigors of trade show exhibition.



"Teal" - For many years the flagship of the BHYC. Hubert Johnson built it for himself. Later he sold it to Syl Smith, Commodore.

Among Bay Headers, Hubert Johnson is best remembered for his own boat, "Teal." Although Fred Geiger was the "designer of record," Hubert collaborated in the basic design parameters and was responsible for many of the details. The Hubert Johnson Boatyard was always known for its quality workmanship, and in "Teal" that workmanship was truly exquisite. "Teal" was a sloop 42 feet long with a 4' 2" draft (board up). It was his pride and joy. From its launching in 1940 to 1947 he won many ocean races with "Teal." Of course the war years forced ocean racing to be suspended, but when it resumed in 1947, Hubert was again at the wheel battling it out with a new crop of competitors. [Including the "Golden Fleece" on which your historian crewed. -Editor] But that fall, his declining health forced him to give up his beloved boat, and reluctantly he put "Teal" up for sale. Fortunately, Sylvester Smith, then Commodore-elect of the BHYC, stepped in and bought it. "Teal" remained a fixture at the Club for another decade or more.

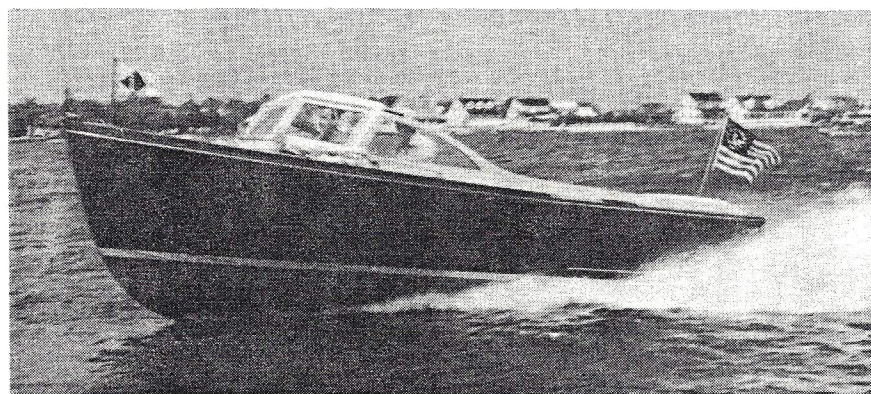
During the war years, the Hubert Johnson Boat Yard switched to military work, primarily the design and production of 42-foot picket boats, and 43-foot plane rearming vessels. Perhaps Hubert Johnson's most spectacular contribution to the war effort was a "special order" for silent-running picket boats which were designed, built, tested, and delivered in the amazing time of three weeks. All this was done in super secrecy and round-the-clock work. Only after the Anzio landings south of Rome in January, 1944 was it revealed that these "silent pickets" from Bay Head were the first boats ashore at this now-historic "Operation Shingle."



One of the Johnson 45' picket boats. They saw rigorous service in WWII.

Hubert Johnson married Florence Isabelle Johnston from Brooklyn. They had three children: Isabelle (Liz) Johnson Bauer, now living on Bayberry Lane in Bay Head; Florence (Flo) Johnson Allsopp living next to her sister; and Hubert Stanley (Stan) Johnson, now living in Florida.

The strain of war work sapped Hubert's health to the point where, in 1948, he retired from boating and his boat yard. He died a year later. His three children ran the company for another decade, and then sold it. It continued for another four years under its new owners until it closed down in 1968.



One of the famous Sea Skiffs from the Hurbert Johnson yard.

A fitting tribute to Hubert Johnson's professionalism appeared in the January, 1950 issue of New Jersey Boating Magazine: "Mr. Johnson has bequeathed much. He proved in his lifetime that there is no substitute for craftsmanship that comes from a full knowledge of one's trade, and a desire for perfection."