

# Old Lady Ethel

Keith Munro



*Ethel* is an elegant 60ft gaff-rigged yawl yacht and is one of New Zealand's rarest classics. She was originally built by the Logan Brothers in the 1890s as a cutter-yacht, of solid Kauri, for a Great Mercury Island resident, Colonel Herbert Dawson.

Herbert Dawson was in need of a vessel to transport fine wool from his crossbred sheep. After her initial launch on November 16 1896, *Ethel* regularly sailed from Great Mercury Island to Kuaotunu and brought back supplies on the return trip. Occasionally she made trips to Auckland.

*Ethel* was the perfect workhorse for Dawson due to her speed and her 11'6" beam that provided plenty of room. She was subsequently converted into a yawl rig with two tons of lead on her keel and five tons inside.

In November 1911, Dawson advertised *Ethel* for sale through the agency of Sinton and Fisher. She was bought by W. J. Quelch, a wire mattress manufacturer. Quelch painted her white and had her cargo hold converted into a cabin.

In 1914 Quelch sold *Ethel* to a dental surgeon by the name of W. R. Ingram. Ingram thought he would introduce *Ethel* into the racing scene. He installed two more tons of lead and a 12hp auxiliary and set out with the North Shore Yacht Club. After a year of racing, Ingram sold *Ethel* to Captain F. E. Wills who utilized her as a fishing boat outside of the Manukau Heads. From there she travelled down the west coast to Waitara.

After the fishing venture, *Ethel* was bought by Mr. George Murphy and spent many years laid-up at the bottom of St. Mary's Bay Road. It was wartime and there her condition deteriorated.



In 1946, Murphy, with the help of Dick Lang, had her redecked, refurbished and straightened her crumbling keel.

*Ethel*, changed hands once again in the 1970s, and was owned by Mr. Morris Hornsby who then sold her on to Tom Leary of Grey Lynn. Mr. Leary obtained rights to use her as a charter boat, taking passengers out for the America's Cup on the Hauraki Gulf. After Mr. Leary's unexpected death, *Ethel* was purchased by Keith Munro and Kevin Ebbitt.

Keith and Kevin were drawn to *Ethel's* fine lines. In 2011, they lifted *Ethel* into a cradle under a covered structure at the Te Atatu Boat Club and began repairs.

Keith has a background in steel fabrication and a long yachting history. He supplied all the metal fittings needed. Kevin had served his time as a boat-builder with Shipbuilders Ltd. So, between them, they had the skills, knowledge and resources to bring *Ethel* back to life.

It was a long journey and the duo spent every spare minute for the next two years working on *Ethel*. Kevin Ebbitt says the toughest part was deciding whether to use modern or traditional materials.

*Ethel* was completely stripped back to the Kauri. The decking was then relaid, repaired and liquid-glassed. Her hull was filled, splined and glassed. The cockpit was rebuilt, using as many of her restored old fittings as possible. Where additional furnishings were used, care was taken to ensure that they were in keeping with her era. Her body was repainted in her original colours.

After this extensive restoration, *Ethel* was put back into the water in mid-October 2014. She took part in a few races in Auckland Harbour and from Auckland to the Mahurangi and back. Keith and Kevin had trouble getting her to point, but after new sails and more roach she now reaches and runs nicely.

For now *Ethel* is sitting pretty at the West Harbour Marina. Keith and Kevin have plans to sail *Ethel* to the Mercury Islands as a tribute to Dawson.

