

Frances



Auckland's "Watermelon" boat

By Iain Valentine.

Photos: Lyn Bergquist.

Whenever attention is drawn towards the beautiful Classic Yacht *Frances* – and many admiring comments are made about her every year – inevitably she is cast as the “Watermelon” boat.

A workboat for the Shakespear family of Whangaparaoa from 1908 to 1991, for many decades she would be seen arriving at Auckland’s then busy downtown market area with produce from the family farm at the end of the Peninsula (now Shakespear Regional Park), and departing with supplies for farming operations. In those times the three and a half-hour sailing trip was much to be preferred over the time-consuming and tortuous road alternative.



The gaff-rigged cutter *Frances* was designed by Arch Logan and built by Logan Brothers in 1906 at St Mary's Bay. She was designed as a snapper fishing boat, with a broad beam and open hold for that purpose, but her lines disclose the pedigree of the Logan racing yacht design excellence. For the first two years *Frances* was owned by an Auckland storekeeper, but in 1908 she was acquired by Robert Shakespear of Whangaparaoa. During her long service to four generations of the family, *Frances* carried all manner of cargo between Auckland and Whangaparaoa. Anson Shakespear, Robert's son, said they could get nine bales of wool below decks and as much as four tonnes of cement. At the height of the season *Frances* would carry up to 600 large watermelons from the family farm to the market in Auckland – hence the reference to the “Watermelon” boat.

The yacht is 38ft (11.58m) long, has a beam of 9ft 4in (2.84m) and draws 5ft 9in (1.75m). Construction is three skins of kauri, two opposing diagonal over longitudinal stringers and the outer skin laid fore and aft. She displaces seven tonnes and combines a fixed keel and internal lead ballast. Power is provided by a 27hp Yanmar diesel.

After 80 years in the family and in preparation for her sale, marine surveyor John Harrison, reporting on *Frances* for Mrs. Verna Shakespear in September 1991, said in a covering letter: “I found her to be in good condition, without significant defects. Indeed she is exceptional for her age and it was particularly pleasing to be asked to express an opinion of a vessel of her type which has obviously been well looked after and has not been subjected to all manner of ill-advised modifications as is so often the case. I hope that if she is to be sold the purchaser will be selected with great care as she is unique and irreplaceable.”

In 1991 *Frances* moved to the care of Auckland brothers Paul

and Adam Cato and was moored in the Weiti River. They proved to be just the kind of owners John Harrison had in mind for her. They carried out a major refurbishment of the yacht late in 1999, including refastening the topsides and giving her a new deck and deck beams. *Frances* has regularly taken part in heritage and classic regattas and cruised the Hauraki Gulf and the Bay of Islands.

In 2004 the Cato brothers gifted *Frances* to the Classic Yacht Charitable Trust. Their generous action means that 100 years on the yacht is still generating the sort of public profile her heritage deserves. *Frances* is currently berthed at the Voyager New Zealand Maritime Museum as an on-water display, and is a protected New Zealand antique under the Protected Objects Act 1975.

The Trust has maintained the yacht in excellent condition and has campaigned her regularly in classic yacht events over the last eight years. Many Auckland and visiting sailors and some non-sailors have enjoyed the experience of classic yacht sailing on *Frances*. Enhanced features have been added over recent years, including a head with storage tank, and a topsail. A major re-stepping of the mast was carried out 2012/13 with new standing rigging, running rigging and spar coatings designed to last many more years. Following this work and some tweaking of performance, *Frances* has acquitted herself well in recent races, including the 2013 Mahurangi Regatta (3rd A-Class) and 2014 Mahurangi Regatta (2nd – A-Class) as well as first on line and handicap in the 2014 Anniversary Day Regatta on Auckland Harbour.

Frances is joined by four other Logan yachts owned by the Trust – *Waitangi* (1895), *Gloriana* (1892), *Thelma* (1898), and *Kotiri* (1897). The Classic Yacht Charitable Trust was formed in

2002 by several of the present Trustees, including Chairman, John Street, when it became apparent that the historic classic yacht *Waitangi*, then based in Melbourne, could be lost to not only New Zealand but the southern hemisphere, when it was put up for international tender. However, quick and decisive action by the Trust secured the yacht for the Hauraki Gulf and the people of New Zealand's future enjoyment.

The aims & objectives of the Trust are to promote public interest and education in aspects of the maritime history of New Zealand, the preservation, restoration, purchase, acquisition and maintenance of examples of early yachts, launches, scows, and other vessels designed, built and used in New Zealand. The Trust also aims to create educational opportunities to acquaint the public and young people with the heritage and skills of early New Zealand boat builders, boat designers and the early sailors, and to cooperate with other entities and museums to better promote and achieve the aims of the Trust. For further information please go to www.classicyachtcharitabletrust.org.nz



The work of the CYCT has been emphasized by publication late in 2010 of Classic, Ivor Wilkins' magnificent book telling with wonderful words and pictures the story of the revival of classic boating in New Zealand. It goes a long way to help convince the wider community of the need to build on the work the Trust began.

Frances - facts



Designer

Arch Logan

Builders

Logan Brothers. St Marys Bay, Auckland.

Launched

1906

L.O.A.

44ft

L.O.D.

38ft

L.W.L.

28ft 3in

Beam

9ft 4in

Draft

5ft 9in

Displacement

7.15 tonnes

Sail No.

A11

Sails

Main, Jib, Staysail, Topsail

Owner History

1906 - 1908

An Auckland Storekeeper

1908 - 1991

Robert Shakespear Family, Whangaparoa

1991 - 2004

Paul and Adam Cato Families

2004 - current

The Classic Yacht Charitable Trust, skipper Iain Valentine, (Trustee)