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"YOUR GOOD NEWS PAPER"

Monday, August 8, 1983

'Old beauties' are F. Todd Warner's first love

BY RUBY STECKEL

"Mr. Lake Minnetonka Antique and Classic Boats" is another handle for F. Todd Warner, owner of Classic Runabout Corp. of America, of which Minnetonka Restoration Co., Inc. is a part. At age 30, Warner is probably the most well-known authority on the old beauties — wooden Chris Crafts, Hackercrafts, Garwoods, Dodges, etc. — so well-known in fact that his notoriety has traveled across the United States.

Warner grew up in Hopkins, spending summers on Lake Minnetonka. "Back in the middle '60s — I was 10, 12, 15 years old — my father collected antique boats," Warner said. "It went back to his father. His father, Harold Warner, used to race Ramaley boats. They were able to go 70 miles an hour. My dad grew up around that. He still has a 1939 19 foot Sportsman that my grandfather bought new." Just by growing up and working around the boats, the younger Warner learned about finishes, motors, history and restoration.

"I pride myself on having

the best selection of the best original condition boats in the United States," Warner said. "You don't buy my boats cheap, but you get the best boats...I feel I deal in the Auburns, Cords and Duesenbergs (of boats)." He deals in rare and limited production antique and classic boats. "Some boats I have, there are only five left in existence, or they only built 17 and I have one."

Just ask Warner about the boats he has stored in his warehouse on the west side of Lake Waconia, and he's able to tell about the history of each one, down to the tiniest detail. Hackercraft: "John Hacker was the foremost naval architect of our time." Garwoods: "Gar Wood's brother Win Wood used to live in Tonka Bay. The Garwood was the best boat ever made. Win had 'Miss Detroit Number 7 with a Liberty engine. The boat went down south somewhere." (Warner is trying to track it to add to his collection.)

Between 1977 and 1981 Warner traveled 30,000 to 40,000 miles per year buying what he terms "good, interesting

boats. It's kind of fun to beat the bushes, but they're getting harder to find." Now that awareness of antique and classic boats is growing, and demand is outpacing supply, they're getting more difficult for even Warner to lay his hands on. "There is a finite number of boats left," he said.

With the increased demand, the boats will go up in value. But, that also means that the ones he owns and the ones he has for sale are more valuable. And, he's thrilled about it, because he has worked for almost eight years to promote just that.

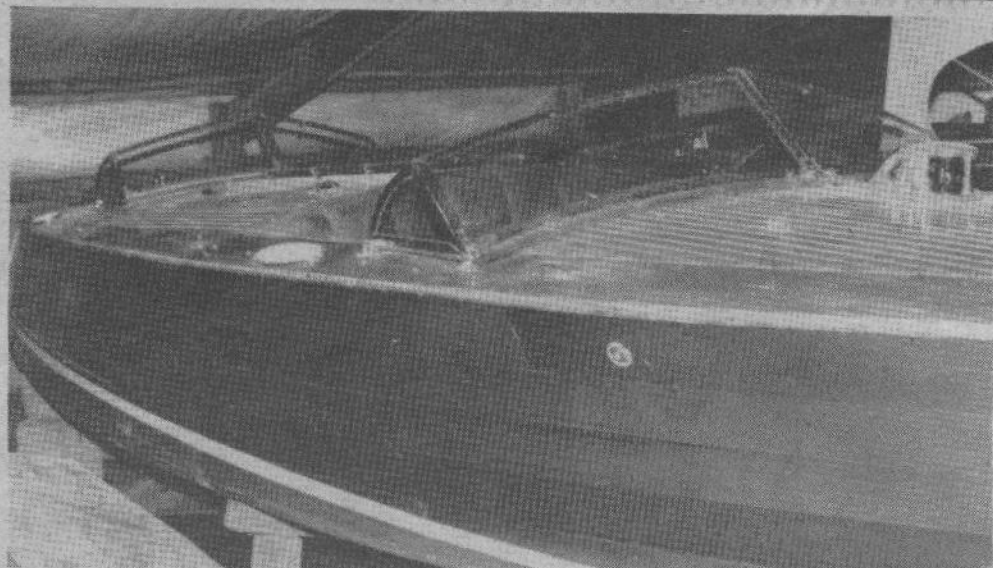
Warner has worked since 1976 on awareness of antique and classic boats. "I tried to set values and standards," he explained. He began by holding a boat show at the Minneapolis Auditorium, he said. He then had a restoration shop for awhile at Tonka Bay Marina. "I thought I could be a foreman...but that was not my forte. I like to work with promotion and selling." Before that he spent some time as the first captain of the cruise boat on Lake Minnetonka called

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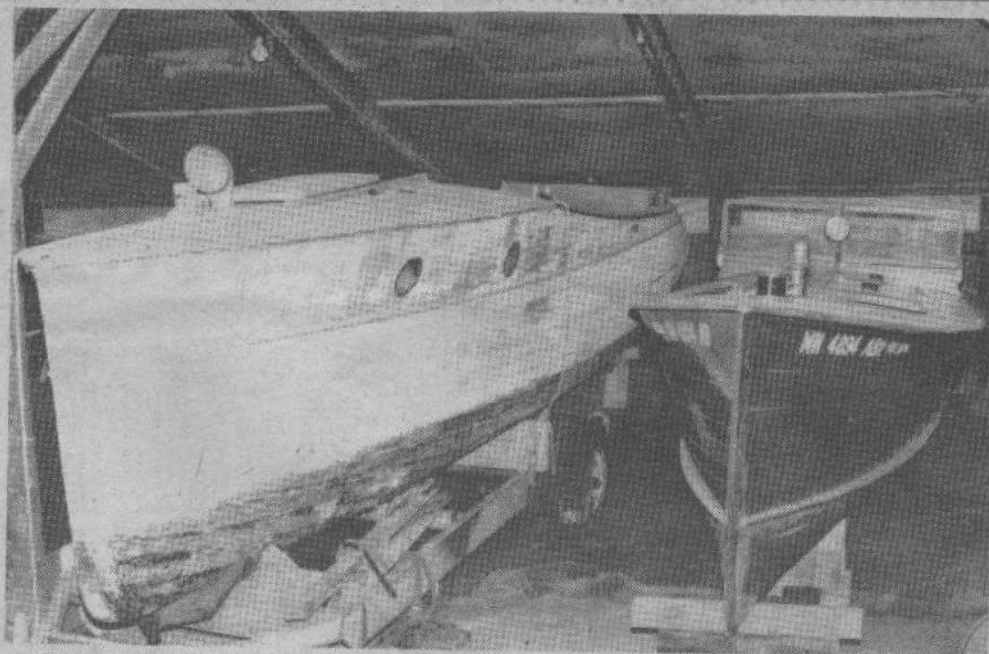


F. Todd Warner wanted to have his photo taken in one of his favorite boats, a 1937 27-foot Chris Craft Custom, one of five originals left in the U.S. Recently Grandcraft, sold by Minnetonka Boat Works, delivered a reproduction of this boat to Lake Minnetonka, called "Miss Lucy II."

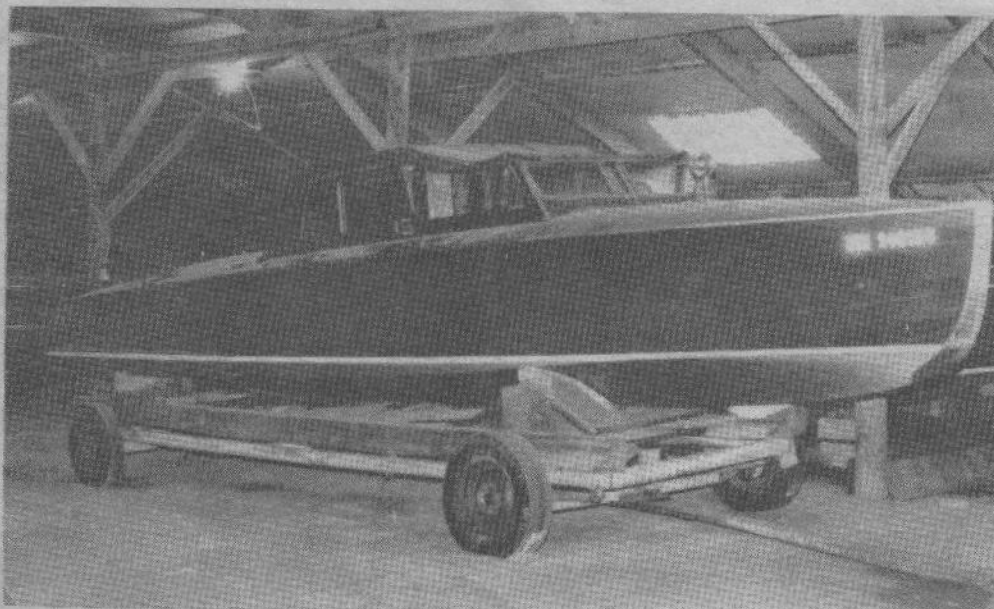
Photos by Ruby Steckel



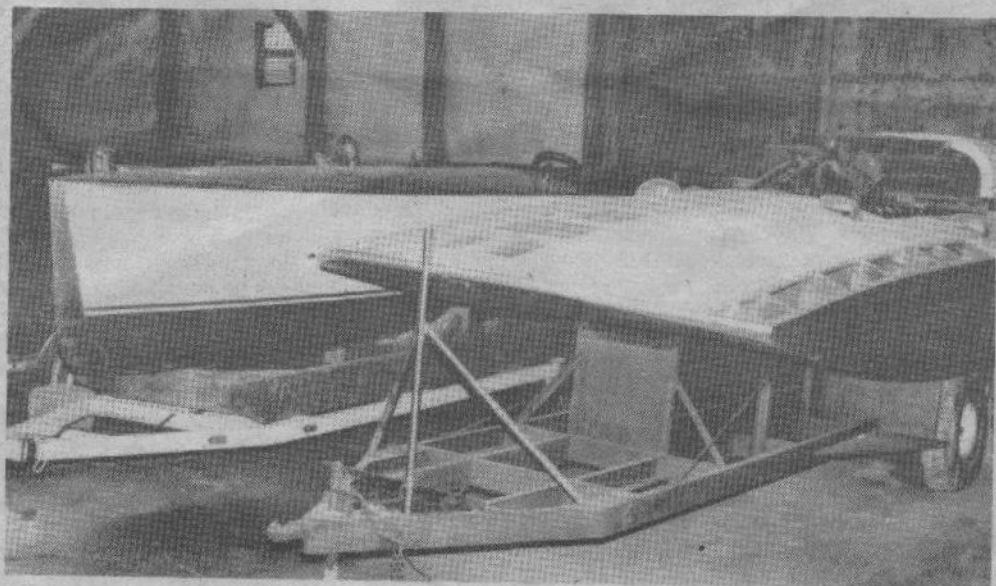
F. Todd Warner found this 1931 21-foot Dodge with a Duesenburg steering wheel and a L-29 Cord Engine in the Ely area. It's one of 7 left in the United States and sold for \$2,100 in 1931. It is made of African mahogany and the hardware is German silver. "This is the finest, best Dodge in the United States," Warner said. It was owned by a Mrs. Gregory originally. The story goes that she traded it and her Cadillac in on a new Buick in 1940 while visiting the Ely area. Warner has located the original owners of the boat and notified them of his find.



In F. Todd Warner's warehouse is this 1921 29-foot Greensport, left, being restored, originally on Lake Winnepausake in New Hampshire. Warner's father chose the boat to get married on eight years ago. Next to it is a 1915 27-foot Dawcett made in Canada.



This boat is a 1930 30-foot Hackercraft, one of a kind, custom built for the Fitzgerald family of Chicago, at a cost of \$12,000. F. Todd Warner found this "old beauty" up on Lake of the Woods.



This 1948 Unlimited Gold Cup hydro, on the right, was found in storage at the Wrigley Estate in Lake Geneva, WI. A man named Nor Hollanback once raced it under the name "Cricket II." On the left is a 1919 27-foot Fay and Bowen built in Geneva, NY. It's one of 10 left in the country.

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'The Northstar,' now called 'The Tiki.' "It was a great summer," he smiled. "I was living on a 33-foot Chris and in the morning I got on The Northstar."

Oh, he still does restoration, but he prefers to restore something of his own, or to do it for someone who really appreciates his efforts. ("If the right customer comes along. "Don't tell me to do a \$20,000 job for

\$5,000. You invest money in something not only enjoyable — you can enjoy making it perfect. It appreciates while you appreciate it. All these old boats have done nothing but go up in value," he says.)

What Warner can do for an old boat is evidenced by his winning a blue ribbon at the State Fair in 1980 for the most outstanding exhibit. "Someone stole the blue ribbon," he laughed, "but the Fair gave me a permanent building on Commerce Boulevard, by the grandstand, next to the Beer Garden. My exhibit is called Classic Boats of Yesteryear."

Besides all of the above, Warner was instrumental in gaining a charter for a Land 'O Lakes Chapter of the Antique and Classic Boat Society in the spring of 1977. "We started with 15 members," he said. "We have 140 now."

The antique and classic boat show held each year, at Mai Tai and Stonewings restaurants on the Excelsior end of Lake Minnetonka, was also Warner's idea. This year the "old beauties" will be lined up

for judging from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday Aug. 13 with a parade following at 3 p.m., and for viewing from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Sunday, Aug. 14. An awards ceremony follows on Sunday. The show has grown so much in popularity, Warner said, that "last year we had 10,000 people come to the boat show. This year we're going to have 90 boats, so it should be a good show."

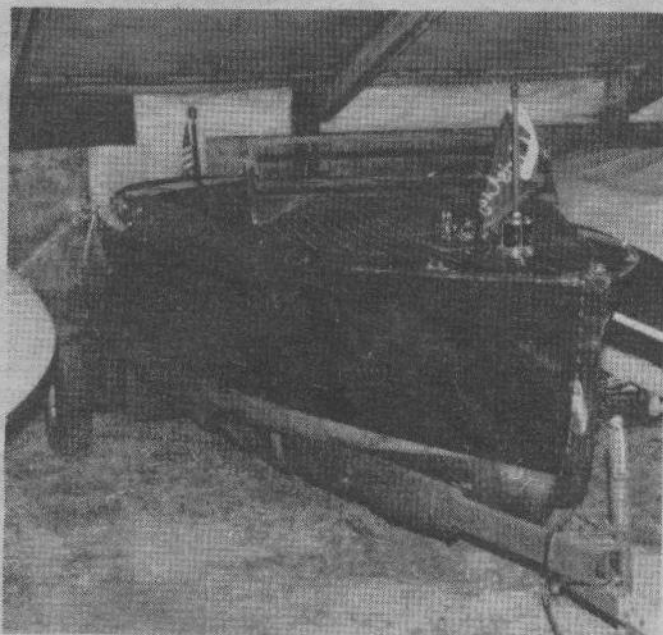
Warner also offers storage space in his 30,000 square foot warehouses (he has two buildings on four acres), and not only to owners of classic and antique boats. And, he said he has several nice old boats for sale. "Tell them that Todd has too many boats," he laughed.

Warner's latest venture is chartering boats on Lake Okoboji near Spirit Lake, IA. He calls that business the Iowa Great Lakes Boat Lines, Inc. He has a 1924 41-foot, 49-passenger Muller boat called "Robert C"; a 1956 29-foot Chris Craft Sportsman called "Acapulco," once owned by the Engler family of Engler Theaters and Charlie Sweatt, well-known on Lake Minne-

tonka; and a 1950 27-foot Chris Craft, semi-enclosed, called "The Boji Belle." At present he is trying to save a 1925 50-foot, 80-passenger craft called "Showboat" to add to his fleet. "The Robert C. carried 1,000 passengers the first 10 days," he said. Lake Okoboji is the only "blue water lake" in North America, Warner said. "It's 140 feet deep and spring-fed. The only other two are Lake Geneva (Switzer-

land) and Lake Lucerne (Canada).

For further information regarding storage, restoration, or buying an old boat, call Warner at 474-8891 or 472-4187. For information on joining the Land 'O Lakes group or the boat show, call John Kinnard at 472-1303. The chapter has a newsletter and offers workshops on restoration and maintenance of classic and antique boats.



This restored 1931 20-foot Chris Model 1000 will be in the antique and classic boat show at Mai Tai and Stonewings and is for sale through F. Todd Warner. A ballpark figure on its value is \$15,900. Repros go for much more, Warner says.

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