



Ed Bossaller prepares 1941 home made skiff for display at the GCHS Museum.

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GCHS Receives 1941-Era Skiff from Leach Family Plan is to Display Old Boat at Future Society Events

The Gasconade County Historical Society recently accepted the donation of a hand-crafted wooden skiff (rowboat) built in 1941 by the late Irvin Leach of the Cooper Hill area.

Yvonne Leach Skouby, the oldest daughter of Irvin and Mae Leach, contacted the Society last June and offered the boat as a museum piece.

"The skiff is special to me and my sisters (Anna Slawson and Jennie Peth), as Anna and I watched our dad build it on our front porch in the summer of 1941," said Mrs. Skouby.

The boat has been suspended in Mr. Leach's garage since 1977.

There are three seating areas on the 11-foot skiff (3 1/2 feet wide), a reflective size of the traditional boats built locally in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The smallest seat is triangular to fit into the pointed bow. The middle seat can fit two small adults. Across the rear is the widest seat. That's where Mr. Leach would sit and run the Evinrude motor.

When he used the oars he would sit in the middle seat.

Over the winter months the skiff was hoisted in his garage. In the spring it was moored either in Third Creek (within sight of the Leach home) or at the Gasconade River, a quarter-mile from home.

"With the boat dad would stretch a trotline from shore-to-shore to fish the Gasconade," recalls Mrs. Skouby.

"Sometimes I would 'run' the line with him and find catfish, drum and carp to take off the hooks, and replace with bait. During times of backwater flooding, dad would use the skiff (with motor) to go to his farm alongside Third Creek, three miles away."

The old skiffs were popular because of their versatility. Fishermen could get in shallow, tight places and marshes to tie-up and set trotlines or fish with cane poles.

When Yvonne Skouby presented her offer to the GCHS, she included a photo copy from a cover of a 1938 issue of Field & Stream magazine that featured an almost identical skiff. Ed Bossaller of Mt. Sterling, a member of the Society's board of directors, picked up the skiff recently and is in the process of cleaning it up. The skiff is in good condition, and even has an old cane pole with line and bobber extending from the bow.

The Society hopes to store the skiff indoors and display it at future events. That would be pleasing to Mr. Leach's siblings.

"I envision children sitting in the boat, outside, during special events of the GCHS," said Mrs. Skouby. "In California I saw happy children sitting in an old rowboat with adults reading stories to them. I think dad would be pleased to have his handiwork preserved and be a joy to many in future years."

The Society is grateful for the gift, and hopes the skiff brings joy and memories for all who spent time on our rivers in such a craft. The boat is an example of the fine craftsmanship from that era.