

Weekly work updates from February 2004 through December 2004 on the restoration of the 1895 lumber schooner *C. A. Thayer*

April 19 – 23, 2004

The first of the new frame timbers were dry fitted this week. In both frame 20 and 25 on the starboard side, three of the four new futtocks were in place but not fastened. This included the uppermost timber, #5, which rises above the deck line to form the bulwark stanchion. For the fitting of the butts, a two-man buck saw was passed through the joints. This is a reasonable way to do it, but does call to mind visions of the old days, before power hand tools. In some cases, the old tools are still the most suitable.

The fitting of frame timbers also brought up questions of how the new timbers will be treated. Clearly, all of the newly-cut surfaces will be treated with two coats of sodium borate in water. We all agree on this, and it is in fact being done. One result is that all of the lines marked in pencil on the timbers, for ribband locations among other marks, wash off with the soap-like borate. We realize that the marks will have to be done in indelible marker.

A question arises however, as to what to do with the butts. Should they be painted? Or painted and bedded in bedding compound? Or maybe bedded in something else? After considerable discussion, the consensus among the staff seems to be that the butts should be painted with an oil-based primer, after the borate has been soaked in, but not bedded. Nor should the inner or outer faces of the frames be painted. Clearly, they were not painted in the original construction. We would have found some trace. As to the bedding at the butts, a bit of scraping around on several original butts is inconclusive. There may be a bit of pine tar in there, but maybe not. The idea of painting the butts is to prevent water from running into the end-grain, and is probably worth doing for this reason.

We looked at the lower frame futtocks forward, to determine how best to replace the rotted members. The problem is that the lower ends of these frames are locked between the keelson structure and bottom strakes of outer hull planking. All of the forward full frames, forward of about Frame 12, are more or less rotten in the area where a pool of fresh or brackish water lay, as a result of the hogged keel. Below the freshwater rot layer, apparently, the timber is largely sound, because it remained largely salt-water soaked. We hope to be able to make replacements only outboard of the line of the sister keelsons. It looks like we will be able to do a series of short scarfs, just hooking in under the sister keelsons, without removing any more of the bottom planking.

We begin to face the realities of budget limitations on the job. While it might be best to lift and replace the forward and after ends of the sister keelsons on each side, it is probably not financially feasible to do so. In this case, the material is sound enough that we will do well enough in scarfing the frames outboard. But there will certainly continue to be a series of balance points. No job is done on the basis of unlimited funding. Our challenge will be to compromise at times, but not to compromise the basic integrity of the job. If corners have to be cut, we will try to cut them at the back end - on the degree to which the vessel is entirely finished out under this contract. We would rather emerge from this contract with a sound boat, still with work to do for full completion, than with a finished looking boat concealing bad material in her hull. It will be a continuing struggle to get this balance right.