

MINNESOTA MADE

BY CHERYL AHLCRONA

I thoroughly enjoyed reading Chuck Dalquist's article in the mid-summer 2013 The Boathouse magazine about the 14 foot Tonka Craft fishing boat from about 1956, made by Minnetonka Boat Works. My father, Edgar Ahlcrona, owned Tonka Bay Boat Works from 1947 through 1972 and manufactured Crona Crafts as a competing runabout. Both Minnetonka Boat Works and Tonka Bay Boat Works marketed these runabouts as the new style trend in the mid 50's. These boats were also shown at the Sportsmen's Show in the winter of 1956.

that you could build a boat by floating it on oil drums. The boat they built was launched on Lake Harriet and caught the attention of the Minneapolis Star in an article that appeared in the July 1, 1939 issue. My grandmother, Stina Ahlcrona, worked with the newspaper to get this published. It is too bad they didn't pursue this idea and they may have been credited with being the first maker of a pontoon boat! According to several websites, the invention of the pontoon motor boat is credited to a farmer who lived on the Horseshoe Chain of Lakes, near Richmond, Minnesota in 1952: Ambrose Weeres.



CRONA CRAFT 14' DELUXE OUTBOARD RUNABOUT IN COLOR

This is it! The pace-setter for runabouts! Crona Craft's new duo-toned sports model sets a new style trend for aquatic adventure. Pink, blue, gold... practically any color of the rainbow is skillfully combined with solid mahogany and bright chrome to give you the smartest looking... smoothest performing runabouts on the market.

Crona Crafts are built to take rough waters with complete safety. Extra heavy construction makes them suitable for any high-powered outboard motors. The sturdy hull is entirely brass-screw fastened and bonded with water-proof glue.

Also available in big-utility fishing models or standard double-cockpit runabouts.

SPECIFICATIONS	
SEATING CAPACITY	6
LENGTH	14'
BEAM	5'6"
DRAFT	6"
FREEBOARD FORWARD	28"
FREEBOARD AFT	17"
BOTTOM	3/8" 3 PLY WOOD
SIDES	1/4" 3 PLY DOUGLAS FIR
DECK	1/4" 5 PLY MAHOGANY
TRANSOM	1" PLY MAHOGANY
KEEL	1 1/4" x 5" - 10' 3" LONG MAHOGANY
CHINES	1 1/4" x 2" SOLID MAHOGANY

See A New Crona Craft Sports Model Runabout Today!

MANUFACTURERS **TONKA BAY BOAT WORKS, INC.** DISTRIBUTORS **Higgins**

RT. 2 EXCELSIOR, MINNESOTA • SERVICE • PHONE GREENWOOD 4-9200

1956 Crona Craft advertising piece.

Boating for my father and his brothers (Robert, Richard and Bertil) began at a young age. They had an idea while they were in their teens



A new and ultra modern boat, floated on pontoons and powered with a motor under an automobile type hood, today appeared on Lake Harriet after its launching by the four lads who built it.

The builders are Edgar, 16, Bertil, 13 and Robert and Richard, 14, all sons of Mr. and Mrs. Nels Ahlcrona, 4312 Ewing avenue S., and three of them Star carrier salesmen.

The boys built the boat at a cost of less than \$35, exclusive of the motor. They did all the work except welding together the oil drums for the pontoons, which job they had done by an expert to insure air-tight buoyancy.

The body of the boat — built like a four-passenger automobile — is made of light, pressed wood.

After World War II, my father and his brothers, enrolled at the University of Minnesota. Shortly after enrolling, Tonka Bay Boat Works became available for sale, and the brothers decided to drop their college plans and pursue their boating passion. They purchased



Tonka Bay Boat Works in 1947. During those first difficult years, my father gradually bought out all of his brother's shares in the business and became the sole owner/president until 1972.



The Brothers Ahlcrona: Edgar, Richard, Bertil, and Robert.

The business grew and Owens Cruisers and Century Runabouts became the beautiful new boats for sale. The marina also became a full service maintenance, repair, winter storage, and summer dockage business. A showroom was built at the corner of Highway 7 and Vine Hill Road and the name was changed to Tonka Bay Marine.

I enjoyed working in the office during my high school summer vacations with accountant George Ostbye and my grandfather, Nils Ahlcrona. Though my sisters and I would have preferred working at the gas dock, our father

on his way to a boat show in Illinois in 1974. I don't remember my father talking about the short-lived venture into boat manufacturing and I didn't know much more about Crona Crafts.

In the summer of 1997, we purchased a cabin on Lake Mille Lacs from my father's brother, Richard. On the property he had saved an original Crona Craft, which he had planned to restore. He never restored it. He hoped I would have an interest in it so he gave it to us. I was so excited to see the boat, learn more about the boat, and restore it to its original "smartest looking" appearance. When we moved the boat out of the woods and uncovered it, we were so disappointed to see its deteriorated condition. I knew its restoration was beyond our capabilities.

Determined to pursue a restoration, I brought pictures of my now treasured Crona Craft to the boat restoration booths at the Minneapolis Boat show, including showing the pictures to Todd Warner. Todd's first boating job was working for my father at Tonka Bay Boat Works. Todd and the other restoration experts I spoke with assured me that nothing was beyond restoring, as long as I was willing to take the time and/or make the investment.



Tonka Bay Boat Works, from the lake. Time to gas up!

wouldn't allow it. I thought that would have been more fun! Many years later I heard stories from the "boys" who worked on the docks. My father was probably right.

After deciding to sell the marina, my father was tragically killed in an automobile accident

The boat would probably only serve as a pattern and a source for parts.

Encouraged, but not yet ready to invest the money, in 2008 I went on a self-declared





Tonka Bay showroom at Vine Hill Road and Highway 7 with a nice tri-tone Crona Craft out front.

mission to see if I could locate any other 14 foot Crona Crafts. My father's last surviving brother, Robert, did not know how many Crona Crafts had been manufactured. He remembered taking them out on test-drives from the marina and around Big Island. He also

designed the advertising brochure for them. He unfortunately did not remember any other facts. He had saved pictures of the boats, which were proudly displayed in front of the new show room.

I started my pursuit by naturally doing a Google search and was amazed to find a question on the boating website forums.iboats.com from a person in Stillwater who had just pur-

Tonka Bay

offers year 'round service to you and your boat...



EDGAR A. AHLCRONA
President



NILS AHLCRONA
Vice-President

Established 1919
(Under present management since 1947)

MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR SERVICE

No matter what repair, emergency or maintenance service your boat may need, Tonka Bay is equipped to deliver it at fair and reasonable prices. Complete hull repair and refinishing inside and out; engine tune-ups or overhauls, propeller repairs, battery service, etc. Much of this work can be done during the winter lay-up. We have service boats for towing and emergency calls anywhere on the lake during the boating season. You can depend on Tonka Bay to put the fun in boating and keep it there.



GEORGE OSTRYE
Accountant



HAL BERLIN
Sales Representative

WINTER STORAGE—INDOORS and OUT

For those who cannot or do not wish to store their own boats, Tonka Bay has facilities to store 220 boats, and this will be expanded. Storage includes proper servicing of engine, battery, hull, etc., when your boat is taken from the water in the fall, and again in the spring to be sure everything is in proper operating condition for safety and performance.

SUMMER DOCKAGE

for your Convenience

Tonka Bay maintains summer dockage for about 70 boats. This includes marine gasoline and oil sales every day of the boating season, to 9 P.M. during summer months.



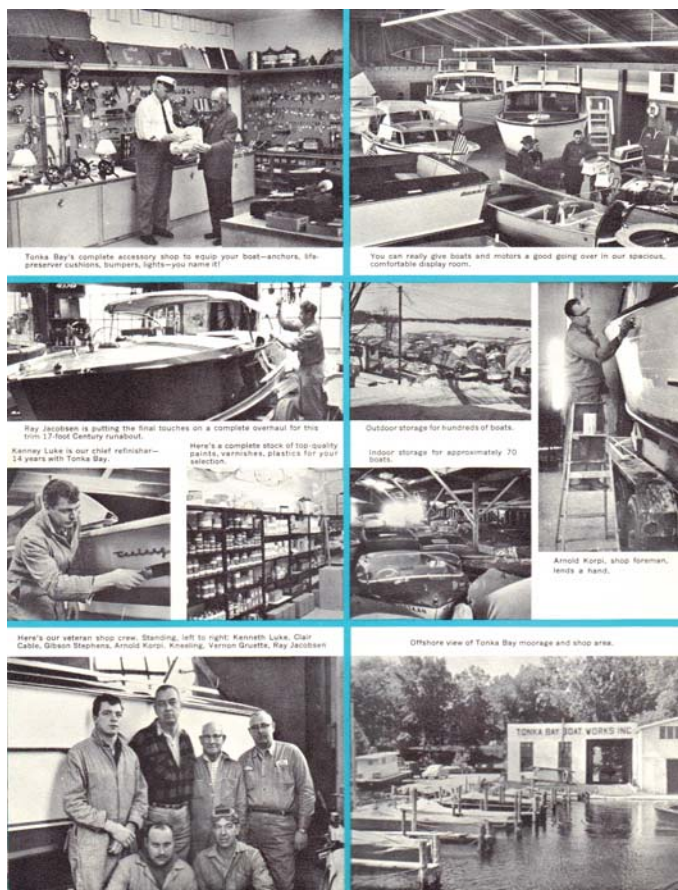
ARNOLD KÖRPI
Shop Foreman



KENNETH LUKE
Expert Refinisher







chased a 1956 Crona Craft. I quickly added my comments to the Forum but never received a response to my comment. I searched on eBay, searched Craig's List, and continued periodic searches looking for other Crona Crafts. After a couple of years, my search once again found the Stillwater boat, this time on Craig's List! Not wanting to give away my identity, I submitted questions to the owner. I printed off the pictures from Craig's List and waited for a response. Again, I did not receive a reply because I provided very little contact infor-



Cheryl and her Crona Craft.

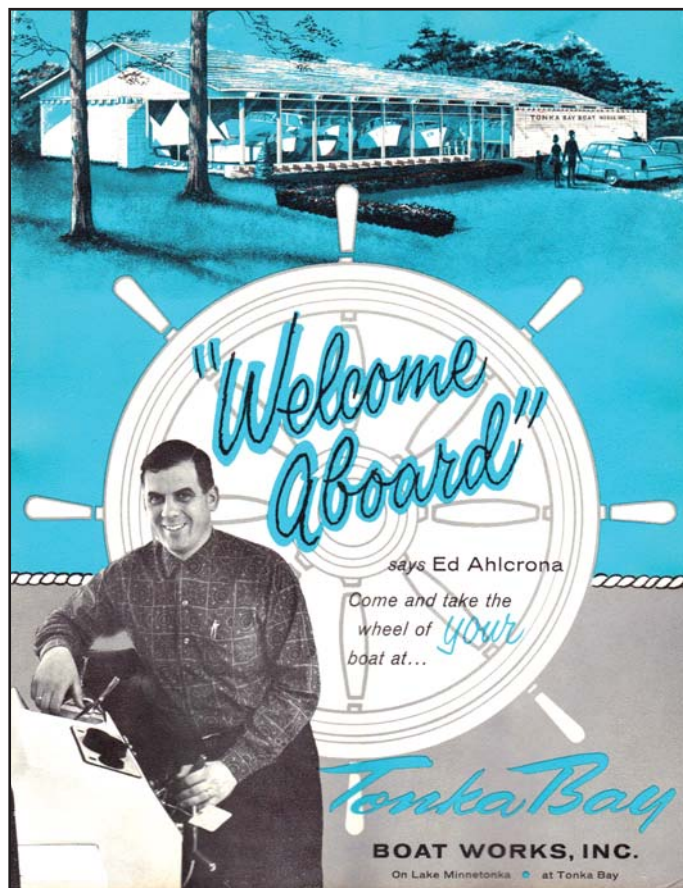
mation except for an email address. The ad disappeared and I assumed that the boat had been sold.

Discouraged, I lost interest until a couple of years later. I was cleaning my desk and I found the pictures that I had printed. I did one last search on the internet. This time, the boat appeared on eBay! It was the same Stillwater boat and I noticed the listing did not include the picture of the brass plate, with the serial number, which had appeared on the Craig's List pictures. Again, not wanting to reveal my identity, I started bidding. When the bidding ended, and no one had met the minimum required, I submitted a question to the owner, requesting the picture of the brass plate. We started an email discussion and I asked if I could see the boat in person.

We drove to Stillwater to meet the owner. He began to tell me the limited information he had about the history of Crona Crafts and Tonka Bay Boat Works, when I began filling in information for him. I revealed to him my name and that my father had built the boat. He was shocked because he shared with me that he had refused to sell the boat to anyone outside of Minnesota, or to sell it to someone who

had just wanted a cheap, small fishing boat. He wanted to sell it to someone who cared about its history. Other than my family, there couldn't have been a more passionate buyer. Five years after my searches, I was the owner of a working Crona Craft.

My brother-in-law decided he would tackle



Ed Ahlcrona - "Welcome Aboard"

the original Crona Craft, which I still had in our cabin garage. Coincidentally, that fall, another Crona Craft appeared on Craig's List from someone who had lived in Long Lake. He had used it for fishing up by Aitkin with his children, not far from our cabin! In 3 months, after all these years, we had located another boat. Between these 3 boats, we hope to have 2 restored boats, using parts from the first boat, which had led me on this search. I haven't tried to find any more Crona Crafts – we are out of garage space!

I think my father would be surprised and proud that I have "Taken the wheel of OUR boat! Welcome Aboard."

