



Perhaps the word “twin” does not really define the two Irish lobster boats *Fiona* and *Hanorah*. The boats were built 126 years apart, after all. Burger Boat Chief Designer Don O’Keeffe has sailed both of them, and is the owner of *Fiona*, a replica of a lobster boat from his childhood.

“*Fiona*’s exactly like *Hanorah*, so that’s the wonder of the whole thing,” O’Keeffe says.

O’Keeffe sailed *Hanorah* around Carbery’s Hundred Isles in Roaringwater Bay during his boyhood on the south coast of Ireland. In his new home, *Fiona* bobs up and down on the waves of the Manitowoc Marina. O’Keeffe visits her every day.

“A lot of people admire the boat tremendously because she is easier to sail,” O’Keeffe says. “You have to be an acrobat to sail some of the faster boats that are available today of that size.”

As a replica, *Fiona* exactly follows the draft of the Irish-built *Hanorah*. The Irish government digitized the design of several old boats to promote the preservation and possible replication of traditional vessels. *Fiona* and *Hanorah*’s dimensions are identical at 25 feet, 6 inches long and 6 feet and 11 inches in breadth. *Fiona* differs slightly in that she is lighter and contains strip planking. Dayle Ward made the sails and Rick McDonough built the boat over a seven year period in Kewaunee, completing the project in 2019. McDonough is one of the few wooden boat builders left in the area.

“When I went to build *Fiona*, I looked all up and down the coast,” O’Keeffe says. “There’s nobody who builds boats that way anymore. I am very pleased with Rick’s work.”

Fiona is named after O’Keeffe’s granddaughter, exemplifying the family’s close bond with boating. O’Keeffe’s uncle Paddy taught him to sail, which he did with great frequency with his eight brothers and sisters.

“We all grew up with boats as a young people,” O’Keeffe says. “Nowadays, you give a child a bicycle. We had a boat, so we spent a lot of time boating, and that’s what everybody did.”

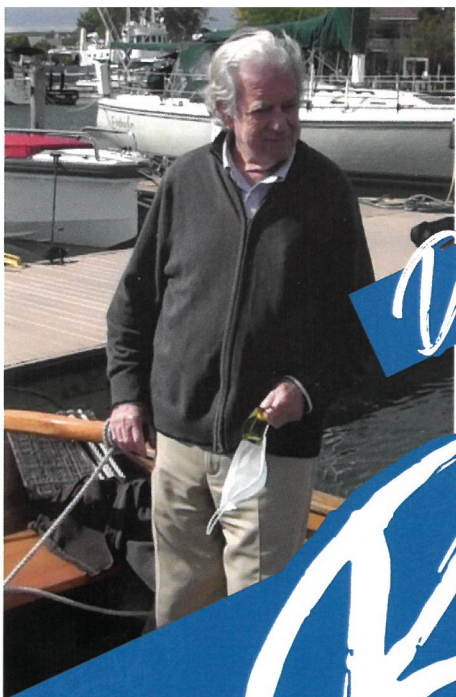
O’Keeffe learned boat craftsmanship from his boat designer and builder grandfather Maurice O’Keeffe. Not far from Maurice’s home in Derreenatra Manor, Richard Pyburn built *Hanorah* in 1893 on Heir Island. Cormac Levis writes about both the boat and the island in *Traditional Boats of Ireland*. Lobster fishing was a common sight in Roaringwater Bay as early as the mid 1700s, but the Great Famine of the mid 1800s interrupted the trade. Lobster fishing saw a small and concentrated resurgence in the late 1800s.

Twin Lobster Boats

BORN 126

Don O’Keeffe visits *Fiona* in the Manitowoc Marina every day of the boating season.





Don O'Keeffe
BURGER BOAT CHIEF DESIGNER

BY
SHANE
LEE

Ten Boats EARS APART

Top: Don O'Keeffe's *Fiona* floating in the Manitowoc Marina under the clouds of an October sky

Bottom: Don O'Keeffe with his hands on *Fiona's* rigging in the Manitowoc Marina in October



"Yet while many other fishermen from all over the bay concentrated on the mackerel fishery, Heir Island remained a stronghold of the lobstering tradition," writes Levis (2008, p. 239).

In the district of Baltimore, there were 211 fishing boats, 40 of which were lobster boats. About 75% of those belonged to Heir Island, which was home to 45 families in 1891. That means about two-thirds of Heir Island's population was in the lobster business, despite the difficulty of the trade. The average catch per week was about 280 fish.

"There was no engine, of course. They rowed or sailed, and the men used to sleep on board these boats at night," O'Keeffe says. "They'd put a little canvas covering over the bow, and they would lie on the sole of the boat and sleep. They stayed out fishing for up to seven weeks, so men were tough in those days."

The Heir Island lobster boats worked steadily until the 1940s when World War Two decreased the demand for lobster. The lobster demand surged in the 1950s, leading to the building of more advanced and comfortable boats. Many of the old crafts were abandoned, but a few still remain today. One of them is *Hanorah*.

"I remember sailing *Hanorah* when I was a young boy," O'Keeffe says. "Now, it is wonderful to have *Fiona* here." ■

