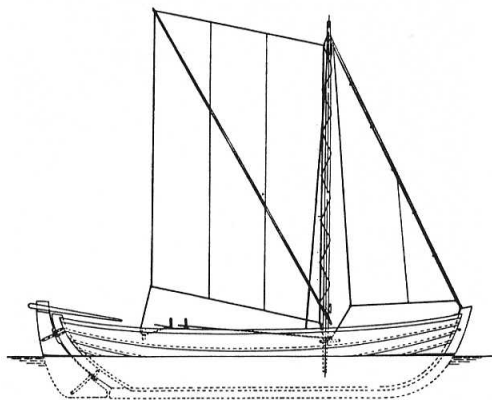




Swedish Boatbuilding In Yankee Maine



In 1984 a Swedish boatbuilder and his family were invited to join The Rockport Apprenticeshop in Rockport, Maine. Umberto and Annika Fallai and their two sons Robin and Linus formed the Swedish end of an international exchange which began with the technology of boatbuilding but quickly developed to include other cultural elements including a trickle of the Swedish language into our community, a flow of English back, and the annual Christmas-time celebration of St. Lucia, a legacy left to Rockport after the Fallais had returned to their native Sweden.

Three tangible outcomes resulted from the exchange: two Swedish watercraft were built and a Swedish publication on traditional boatbuilding, called *Kagen*, was translated.

The Rockport Apprenticeshop can be described as three overlapping rings. The first is the building of traditional wooden watercraft and the seamanship and navigation appropriate to them which form the basis of a two-year apprenticeship program. The second is research and documentation of older and contemporary skills, boat types, and methods. The third is publications: artists' renderings

Umberto Fallai (right) and an intern at The Rockport Apprenticeshop working on the hull of a Swedish "snipa."

and photographs of boats and articles which describe their construction and the cultural context which lends them importance.

As important as these rings is international exchange. In the past four years Norwegian, British, French, and Canadian as well as Swedish and American boats have been built in The Rockport Apprenticeshop. In return, graduate apprentices have found their way to Norway, France, Great Britain, Sweden, and further. Students (both six-week 'interns' and two-year apprentices) have come from eight different countries.

The Fallais arrived in June of 1984. Umberto was used to working alone, swiftly and efficiently in the tranquility of his workshop on the island of Torsö in Lake Vänern in Sweden. At first he was troubled to find how much efficiency was robbed by the confusion of eighteen students and the demands of a "labor for learning" educational process.

Those demands stem from the three elements of The Rockport Apprenticeshop. It is a *boatshop* sustaining the practices of traditional wooden boatbuilding. It is a *school*, the products of which are the

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graduate boatbuilders (the boats are the *by-products*). Finally, it is a *museum*: from May through October an apprentice or volunteer in the Visitors' Loft explains to the visiting public the how, what, and why of the work in progress on the shop floor below.

Rather than being a production shop, The Rockport Apprenticeshop is determined to sustain something very fragile:

the "material culture"—that realm of makers, raw materials, and ingenuity which is thousands of years old but now threatened by utilitarian mass production.

Through efforts to revitalize the older practices, such as those being carried out by The Apprenticeshop, we are today learning how much we are paying for the gains of the Industrial Revolution. The emphasis of the entire program at The Apprenticeshop is on humanism, the transfer of skills, the passing on of a way of life, and the difficult process of building a community of boatbuilders.

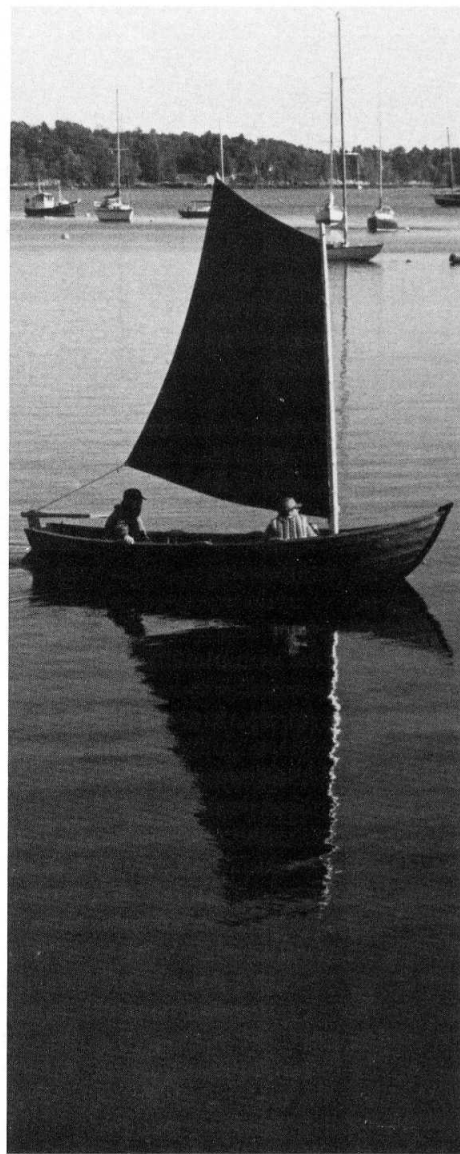
It was agreed that Umberto would build two boats. The first would be an example of *adaptation*. Umberto had redesigned a small 15-foot lapstrake double-ended lake boat called a *snipa* to become a "transom" boat, capable of carrying an outboard motor. The adaptation was from workboat to pleasure craft.

The second boat was a *rundgattung*, the traditional Swedish fishing boat of circa 1900. Technically the most interesting and demanding aspect of the Fallais' stay in America was the practice of "trunneling" the oak planks of this boat. Trunnels are wooden pegs or fastenings which, when wet, naturally swell and tighten in place and render an inexpensive, natural fastening. And a yet more sophisticated technique was employed: pine wedges were driven into the end grain of each locust trunnel as a guarantee of the peg's inability to slip out should it dry out.

Trunnels have been used in much of the world for centuries but rarely in boats under 45 feet long. The *rundgattung*, 15 feet long, represents an example of trunnel fastening which no one along this part of the New England coast had encountered. Almost three years after construction the boat is still tight, corroborating the wisdom of the Swedish technique.

As The Rockport Apprenticeshop had built several examples of traditional double enders and adaptations, Umberto, his family, and The Apprenticeshop students and staff were able to spend many hours sailing and comparing traditional boats and adaptations of the United States and Sweden.

Throughout those six months Annika Fallai translated. At the end of the Fallais' stay in Rockport, the full manuscript of *Kagen* lay ready for publication in English.



The "rundgattung" going through sea trials in Maine's Casco Bay.

This wonderful treatise on the construction and sailing of a classic Swedish double ender, a fishing craft of the Southern Baltic, will be published by The Rockport Apprenticeshop when funds permit.

—by Lance R. Lee

Lance Lee is the director of The Rockport Apprenticeshop and an enthusiastic advocate of international exchange.