

EXCURSION LAUNCH *MOUNTAINEER*
Adirondack Museum
Blue Mountain Lake
Hamilton County
New York

HAER NY-346
HAER NY-346

PHOTOGRAPHS
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

ADDENDUM TO:
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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EXCURSION LAUNCH *MOUNTAINEER*

HAER No. NY-346

- Location:** Adirondack Museum, Blue Mountain Lake, Hamilton County, New York
- Date of Construction:** Between 1915 and 1925
- Rig/Type of Craft:** Gasoline launch
- Trade:** Commercial passenger, excursion, and mail service
- Registration Number:** N/A
- Principal Dimensions:** Length: 38'-6"
Beam: 5'-10"
- Designer/Builder:** Jack Rivett, Old Forge, New York
- Original Owner:** Rivett's Boat Livery, Old Forge, New York
- Present Owner:** Adirondack Museum, Blue Mountain Lake, New York
- Present Use:** Display
- Significance:** Excursion Launch *Mountaineer* (originally called *Fulton*) is a rare survival in the Adirondacks of a boat type that was once very common in the region: the excursion launch/mailboat. It is also unusual as a surviving locally-built gasoline launch and is thus a significant example of local boat building. Jack Rivett designed the boat himself and built it without plans. Like several other area builders in the early twentieth century, Rivett was largely self-taught and built and serviced all sorts of boats. *Mountaineer* is the only record of the method and techniques of a significant part of Adirondack history—the boat builders who adapted to changing patterns of tourism in the early twentieth century and attempted to compete with national boat builders.
- Description:** Excursion Launch *Mountaineer* is an open utility-type excursion launch, carvel planked in cedar on oak. The engine is no longer extant. Interviews done in the 1970s with the builder's relatives suggest that the boat was equipped with either a vanBlerck or a Scripps power plant. In the 1960s, it had a 6-cylinder Kermath.

History: Jack Rivett (1869-1949) built the launch, first called *Fulton*, around 1925 for use in the excursion business between Old Forge and Inlet on the Fulton Chain of Lakes in the Adirondacks. The design was apparently Rivett's own, with possible reference to the excursion boats of the Thousands Island region of the St. Lawrence. Rivett did not make drawings or blueprints; instead, he relied upon "templates" (forms) that were still extant in 1976. Local craftsmen Floyd Marks, Jim Rivett, and a man called Yarman assisted him. According to Jack Rivett's son, "craftsmanship was not the goal."

Rivett built a number of launches, including "at least 5 *Geraldines*," another also confusingly called *Mountaineer* and very similar, *Adirondack* (similar but beamier), and a mailboat similar to *Adirondack*. These boats were built of "sugar pine" planking on an oak keel and ribs and took most of the winter to construct.

The Rivett-built launches were used for excursions (moonlight trips being particularly popular in the summer) and could be rented for fishing trips. In the 1920s, a person could buy a complete excursion ticket from Utica with return that included rail fare plus the boat ride for \$2.50. Passengers on *Mountaineer* sat on wicker chairs in the long, open cockpit. A canvas awning supported on a system of bronze bows that could be folded down flush with the deck sheltered the passengers. The boat was often wet underway, and documents suggest a system of canvas flaps provided further protection. The lengthwise spray rail just above the waterline may have been added later for this reason.

The launch changed hands in 1953 but continued in the same business under the name *Mountaineer*. In 1973, a Lake George summer resident purchased the boat and entered it in a boat show that year. Two years later, the resident gave *Mountaineer* to the Adirondack Museum where it was displayed in a pond during the summer season until 1990. (The pond was drained during the winters, and the boat rested on a cradle in place under a cover.) Since 1990, it has been in storage under cover.

Sources:¹

Accession file 75.259.1. Adirondack Museum, Blue Mountain Lake, New York.

Bond, Hallie E. *Boats and Boating in the Adirondacks*. Syracuse, NY, and Blue Mountain, NY: Syracuse University Press and the Adirondack Museum, 1995.

Historian: Hallie E. Bond, Curator, Adirondack Museum

¹ In addition, many historic photographs exist at the Adirondack Museum and elsewhere documenting the appearance of similar excursion craft in the Adirondacks.