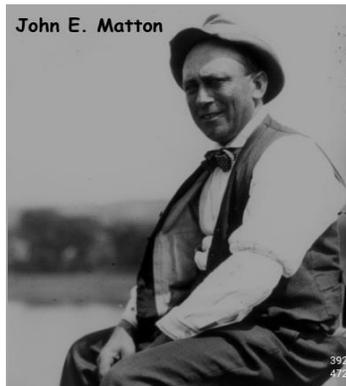


# This week in Saratoga County History

## Matton Shipyard Company - Waterford, NY 1903-1972

Submitted by Russ Vandervoort August 27,2020

Russ Vandervoort in the Waterford Town Historian and can be reach at [russvandervoort@gmail.com](mailto:russvandervoort@gmail.com)  
To share your ideas for future articles to this series, please contact Jim Richmond at [saratogacohistoryroundtable@gmail.com](mailto:saratogacohistoryroundtable@gmail.com)



John Matton opened a boat repair business in Waterford in 1903. His father, Jesse Matton had operated a boat repair and boat building business in West Troy, (Watervliet) New York. In his enterprises in Waterford John utilized lumber from New York State and Vermont much of it NYS white pine, white oak, and chestnut, shipped on the Champlain Canal. By 1916 he started building boats as well as repairing.

He lived at that time on the Waterford - Mechanicville Road, Routes 4 & 32. He usually resided there during the offseason, generally December through April, and at the business during the canal season. About 1916 he moved his residence to Lansingburgh.

He was able to establish his business in Waterford due to the aftermath of a Champlain Canal enlargement. The area of the Champlain Canal from circa 1860 - 1880 was known as Champlain Locks 5 - 6 & 7, or the Waterford 3 Locks. These locks were very close to each other, were wooden and time-consuming to pass through. After the enlargement, the three wooden locks were replaced by two stone locks and the canal route saw a minor change. During this construction period, the three wooden locks were kept in use until the stone locks were completed. This kept the canal in operation during the building period. The new locks became known as the Upper and Lower Two Locks. The wooden locks were abandoned. Years later Matton saw the possibility

of utilizing the original canal prism and remains of the old locks as a dry dock and area to repair boats and have access to the canal. What steps were taken to make it a reality, we don't know.

The wooden canal boats of the day would have a life expectancy of about 18 years. By nature, repairs and caulking were just a matter of fact and necessity. Waterford was a busy canal area and in need of this service. His father's business was about seven miles south and the one in Crescent/Vischer's Ferry about an equal distance to the west. All of those were on the Erie Canal. There were at least two others on the Champlain Canal but they were far to the north.

By 1916 Matton had gained the experience and good reputation to enter the boat building phase of his operation. In the next several years he was responsible for the construction of many boats. The following is a partial listing.

**Built in Waterford at Old Champlain site Partial Listing**

HULL#	BOAT NAME	OWNER	TYPE*	YEAR
163908	Clinton Wilson	R. G. Hays	Canal Boat 102	1909
163909	Helen Janet	R. G. Hays	Canal Boat 100	1909
164648	Thompson Smith	Thomas J. Burns	Canal Boat 105	1911
165305	Dr. G. W. Crissey	Edgar Noel	Canal Boat 104	1913
165670	Edna M. Matton	Edmund M. Glode	Canal Boat 104	1914

\*Note TYPE 100 102 104 105 May represent length of boat, not sure.

HULL#	BOAT NAME	OWNER	TYPE*	YEAR
165971	Joseph Glode	Merritt E. LaChance	Canal Boat 104	1915
165972	Molly D. Roberts	Alexander Robert	Canal Boat 104	1915
166091	George E. Weightman	Delia McIntyre	Canal Boat 108	1915
166337	Edward L. Archer	Gabriel Robert	Canal Boat 108	1915
	Later Helen F. Kennedy	name change		
166339	Mary E. Nealer	F. A. Poissant	Canal Boat 108	1916
166340	Robert B. Weightman	Napoleon Surprenant	Canal Boat 108	1916

\*Note TYPE 104 108 May represent length of boat, not sure.



*A canal boat under construction at the original plant.*

The Robert B Weighman represents the last canal boat built at the Waterford Dry Dock. (note it is still in use 24 years later). The Erie and Champlain Barge Canal construction was well underway and the Waterford Section of the Erie Canal was completed. John Matton found a new location on Van Schaick Island, just outside Waterford. There he continued his wooden canal boat building and started building tug boats as well. The Matton Tugboat line went on to be one of the most respected for the next 50 years.

There is an historical marker at the site of the original Matton Boat Builders, but no visual evidence that it ever existed. Matton was a frugal man. He disassembled the entire operation, even saving the pounded-out nails, moved the pieces by barges and tugboat down the Champlain Canal into the Hudson River at Waterford, and reassembled the whole complex.

During WWI Matton continued to build wooden barges. These were used in New York Harbor to supply freighters with ammunition, food, and supplies for the troops in Europe. Wooden barges continued to be built by Matton until the 1930s. The shipyard was the most active during WWII building submarine chasers for the Navy and tugboats for the Army. Ultimately, over 350 vessels of all types were built at the new facility.



*The "new" plant on Van Schaick Island.*