

87-year-old skipper lays eyes on old friend

By TONI COCCO
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SANTA CRUZ — A famous sailor celebrated a 45-year reunion here Tuesday with the yacht that won him a Gold Medal in the 1932 Olympics.

Owen Churchill, 87, of Los Angeles, was reunited with the "Angelita," the first U.S. sailboat to win the yacht race in that famous international sports competition.

Churchill is the oldest Gold Medal winner in the U.S.

The yacht has been in storage for the past 10 years at Moore Boatyard on Commercial Way, and Churchill was on hand to watch it hoisted onto a flatbed truck to be taken to C and B Marine on 17th Avenue.

Boatbuilder Bob Thomsen will supervise a seven-month project there to restore the vessel to her original beauty.

She is scheduled to preside over the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, where she won the famous race in that other Olympic competition a half-century ago.

Churchill was her owner and skipper for that race, and was the oldest of a 12-man crew. Only two of the crew members are still living. Both reside in Los Angeles.

The Angelita will be returning triumphant to the Olympics as the flagship for the race committee.

"The last time I raced on her," Churchill said, "was in 1938

when we won the San Diego Lipton Cup in Newport."

As the weathered sailboat was hoisted onto the truck, Churchill commented, "She looks better every minute."

Churchill watched the crane hoist her 50-foot mahogany hull onto the flatbed.

The present owner, Alan Simpkins of Santa Cruz, said the restoration project is the culmination of his dream and that of the previous owner, Gene Koblick, who sailed the Angelita to San Francisco in the early 1970s to begin the project. Koblick unfortunately ran out of money.

It was hauled back to Santa Cruz and has stood in the Moore Boatyard, a victim of the elements, since then.

"The desire to have her restored has been there for about 10 years," Simpkins said. Friends of the Angelita, he said, are assisting with the financial end of the restoration, which is estimated to take approximately seven months.

While the boat was being readied for its short trip from the boatyard on Commercial Way, across from Dominican Hospital, across Highway 1 via Soquel Avenue, to C & B Marine on 17th Avenue, members and officials of the Santa Cruz Yacht Club stood by and politely introduced themselves to the aging sailor and enjoying the glory of the beginning of the resurrection of the famous boat.

A ceremony honoring Owen Churchill was conducted by Ernest Rideout, commodore of the Santa Cruz Yacht Club was conducted beside the boat, with yachtsmen honored Churchill hero with an honorary membership in the club.

Churchill had the yacht built in 1930, and raced her until 1938, when the 8-meter class racing class was discontinued.

It is going to be restored to look just like it did in 1932.

Churchill recalls the only race

the Angelita ever lost. "In Kiel, Germany. We got the hell beat out of us," he said, explaining with a chuckle, "She fouled going around the first mark and was disqualified."

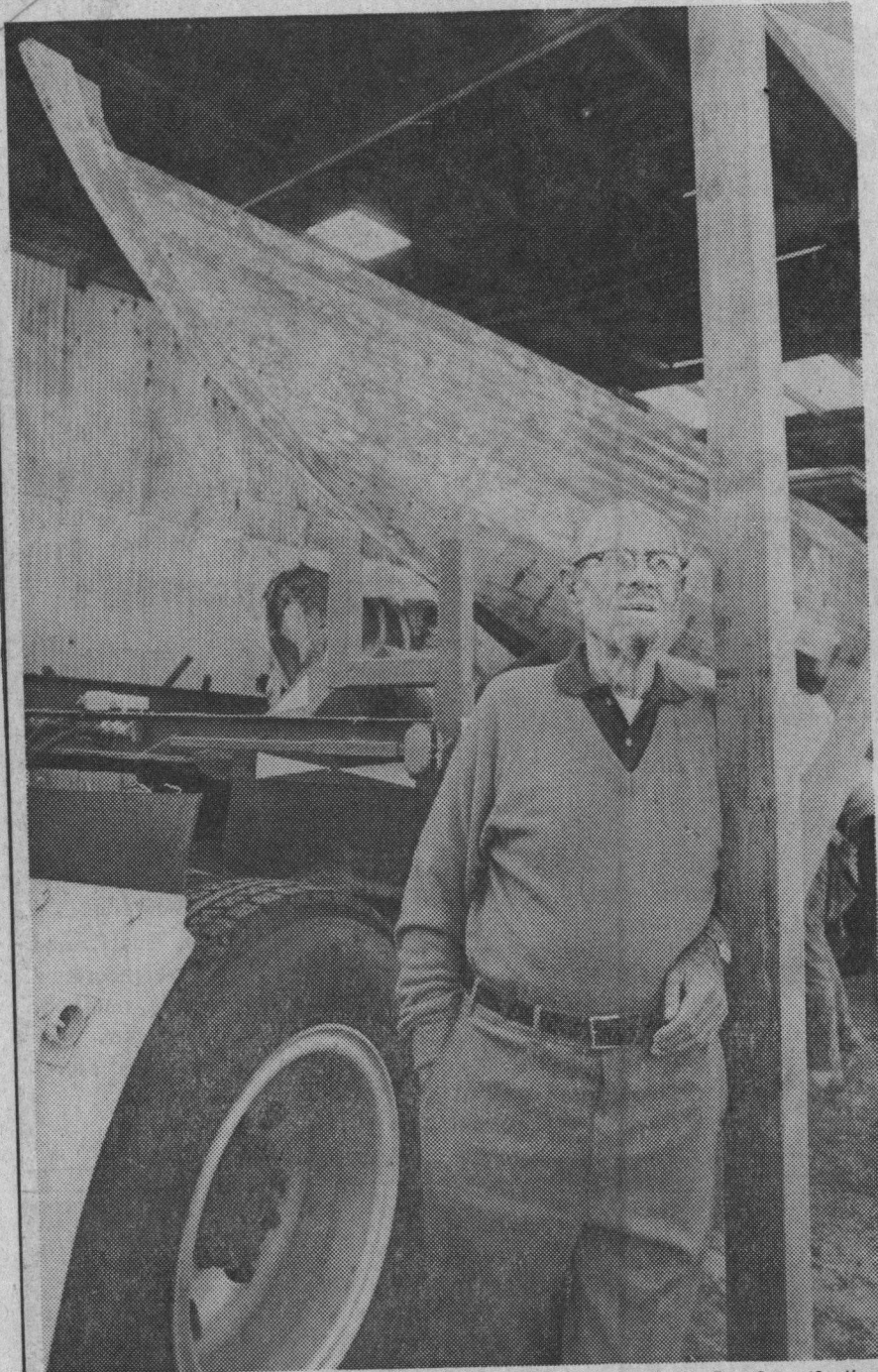
The Angelita holds numerous awards for racing, including the coveted King of Spain Trophy.

The Angelita was sailed competitively in the Monterey Bay, according to commodore Rideout, under a handicap until 1974.



Courtesy of Lee Faraola

The "Angelita" sailing on the original "Mutiny on the Bounty" set in 1934.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Owen Churchill, 87, the oldest Olympic Gold Medal winner in the U.S.