



Gil Smith was born in 1843 near Fannings on the south shore of Long Island. He spent his younger years as a sailor aboard ships, trading on the east coast of the continent. In 1876, Gil and Charlie Saxton became partners in a boatyard on the west side of the Patchogue River. The partnership was dissolved after a few years. Gil continued on his own, building boats and opening a shipyard. The yard was located on the east bank of the river at the foot of Amity Street, only a few hundred feet from his home. Gil Smith was famous for his fast sailboats; each one was faster and an improvement upon the previous one. Gil worked with little help and he was a man that never stopped working to talk. There is no record, but it is estimated that he built approximately four hundred boats. There were no power tools in his shop – everything was handcrafted. He made half models of many of his boats, and three of them are on display in the Smithsonian. Many others are on display in the Suffolk County Historical Museum in Riverhead. Gil Smith continued building boats until 1936, when he had a stroke at the age of ninety-three.