Sam Hunt

Sam Hunt is undoubtedly one of our most famous baymen.

He enjoyed freedom early in life. At eleven years of age, he was running his own boat out the inlet to fish. He holds the all-time speed record for building a twenty-six-foot inboard garvey. He got the lumber on Monday and went clamming out of it on Saturday.

It would require a large book to tell all about Sam. He is a musician and builds banjos, tables, chairs, sneakboxes, and other things out of wood. His craftsmanship has been recognized by the Smithsonian Institution. Sam's knowledge of the bay and the woods as they were in the early half of the century is extensive.

One of the musicians from my father's generation, I spent many happy hours playing music with him. I looked forward to meeting Sam at festivals and such.

Written by Merce Ridgeway



Boating

Craftsmen has 'sneaky' tradition

By MARY DURRELL

In Waretown, a tradition of Barnegat Bay is being built, piece by piece. It's a boating tradition which has been in the works for generations.

Sam Hunt, famous maker of the Barnegat Bay sneakbox, built his house on the acre of land he bought for $60, and started building boats in the yard.

"Don't think funny of me," he says, "but I was putting the windshield on a boat the day Pearl Harbor was bombed. Right over there."

He goes on to explain how he had been working on boats since he was 9 years old, working for Howard Prine of Barnegat. Hunt attended school in Barnegat, but the craft of building boats were to become his discipline.

Working for other boatbuilders, watching and learning, Hunt noticed that the techniques many of them used didn't always result in the best-built boat in town.



Sam Hunt

"I made up my mind right there if I ever built a boat, I'd do it different. I have my boats from Maine clear down to Clearwater, Florida, and west to California."

Built for power or sail, the Barnegat Bay sneakbox was originally built exclusively for gunning. But times have changed, and Hunt doesn't seem to mind, saying he sells many to "girls who just want to sail."

A typical 10-foot bare boat, equipped with oars, which he makes when it's too cold to run his equipment, sells for $1,000. Hunt sells a typical 12-foot equipped boat for $14,000.

"I equip each one with a mast and a sail. If the center rig is in right, the boat can sail within 14 degrees of the wind." That's why, he says, boaters from China once bought some boats from him.

His claim to fame is this: "It's the only boat in the world that can go in any kind of ice without scrapping the paint."

His sneakboxes are shaped "like a teaspoon," and are made from swamp white oak, the wood which makes "a strong timbered boat."

To hollow out the planks, Hunt uses a special Skilsaw which "they don't make no more." He adds that five men across the country are looking for one in this style for him. The guard is the key, and the one he rebuilt - and is getting ready to rebuild again - has a guard that swings back and and is hand-

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Sneakboxes

Continued from page 3

held several inches away from the work.

"If I used any other it should take a lot longer and I'd lose my fingers." You can believe that the lose of time is the greater of the two concerns.

Perhaps the biggest testimony to this philosophy is the various contraptions which appear at first glance to be randomly strewn throughout his yard.

Spend a while following him as his mulls around, and the area becomes a well-organized work area, with pulleys, cleavers, a sliding wooden platform, and other updated and renovated innovations, all built to save time. These are also the tools that make it possible for one man to left a huge stump and turn it into the shell of a boat.

"A man ain't nothing without his tools," says Hunt often. "And what he doesn't have he can make!"

He has a quite a few tricks up his sleeves, such as the use of cotton to make the boat airtight. And he likes to demonstrate.

He takes out a basket full of cotton, cut in lengths of about a foot. "Take this cotton and hold it at both ends. Now pull it apart." He watches closely, and smiles sincerely when the cotton pulls freely apart.

"Now, here's something else a lot of people don't know about cotton."

He twists the cotton tight, and challenges you to *try* to pull it apart. And when of course you can't, he revels in it, and goes on to explain how he puts the twisted strips between the planks, which are already tight, and soaks them in oil. "No water gets into that boat," he says.

"I'll tell you another secret..."

But Sam Hunt probably doesn't have many of those secrets left.

Traditions of Barnegat Bay, for one example, is a televised special, shown frequently on local stations, that shows just how Sam Hunt makes a sneakbox.

Generous with his knowledge, Hunt must be holding something back 'cause according to him, they come from all over. One man interested in buying a Sam Hunt Original even landed a helicopter in Hunt's backyard.

As he nears 77 years old, the keeper of the Barnegat Bay tradition says the demand for his boats is always great. As he speaks of his age, he draws attention to his good health.

"I'm 76 going on 77," he says, and suddenly hopping backwards on one foot, he adds, "and I can walk a mile on one foot."

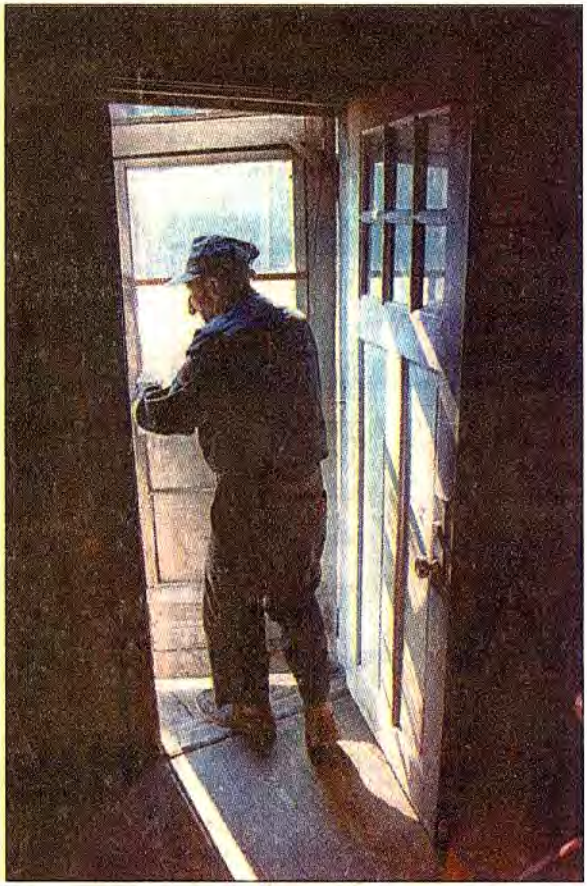
No one who ever met Sam Hunt would ever doubt it.



Times-Beacon photo by Rick Greco

Sam Hunt works on a sneakbox in his Waretown yard. Buyers, he says, come from all over to buy his sneakbox which is made out of white oak.





After reading the newspaper (above), Hunt steps outside his modest house (right) check on his cats. He shows a diagram (below) of the steps involved in building a neakbox, designed for the shallow waters of Barnegat Bay.



Photographs by PETER ACKERMAN
STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Story by KIRK MOORE
STAFF WRITER

Wood smoke and the honk of passing geese carry on the breeze as the old man explains his craft, his mastery of the compound curves that produce sleek, melon-seed-shaped sailboats.

"The design is a curve, every 5½ or 6 inches there is three-quarters of an inch in curve," Sam Hunt says, running his callused hands along a boat-building frame, the mold for one of his famous sneakboxes.

To start a boat, he would steam white oak ribs until they're flexible, then wrap them across the forms, Hunt explains. The ribs are fastened into a

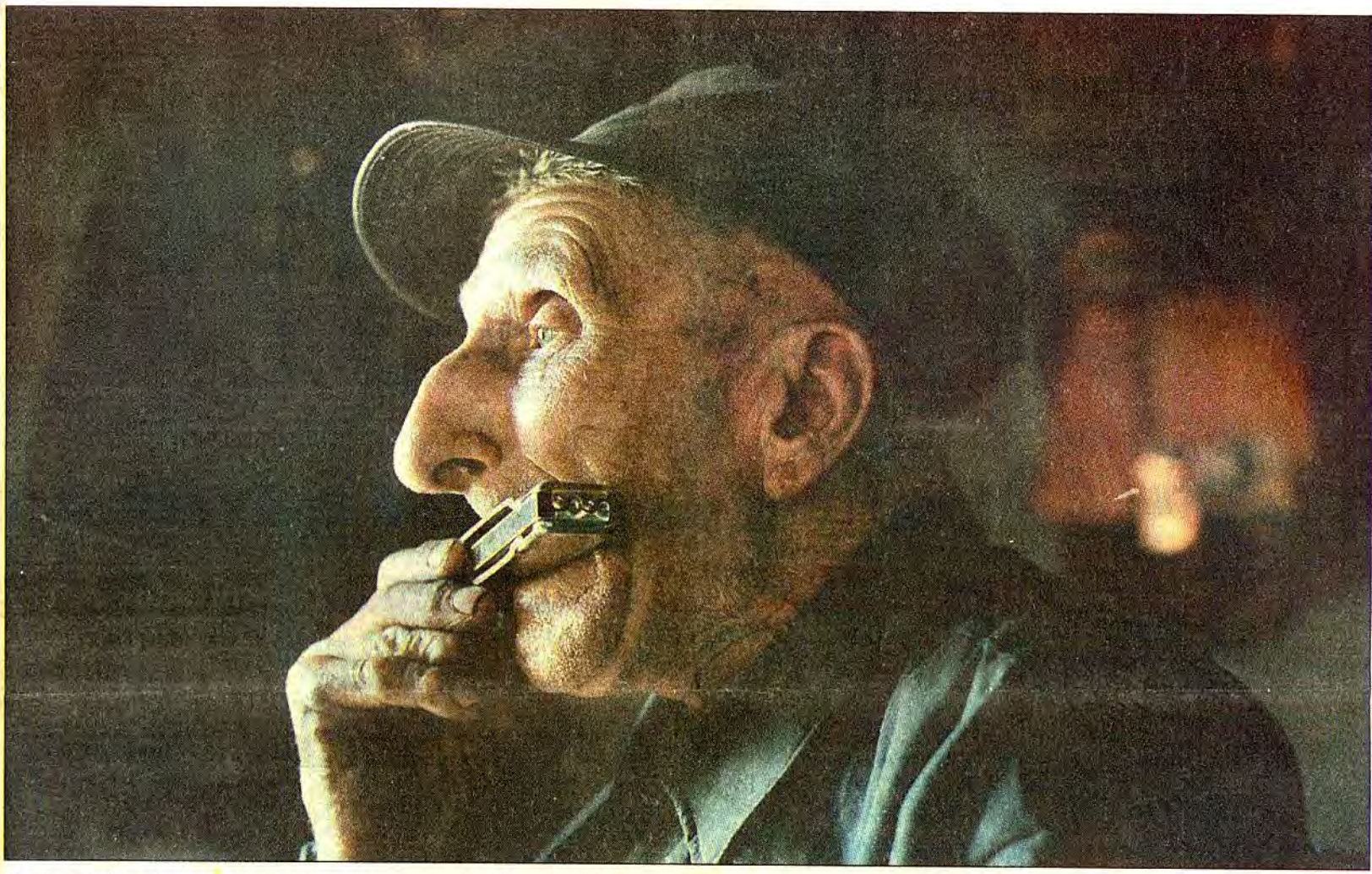
Please see **Boatman,** page **AA8**



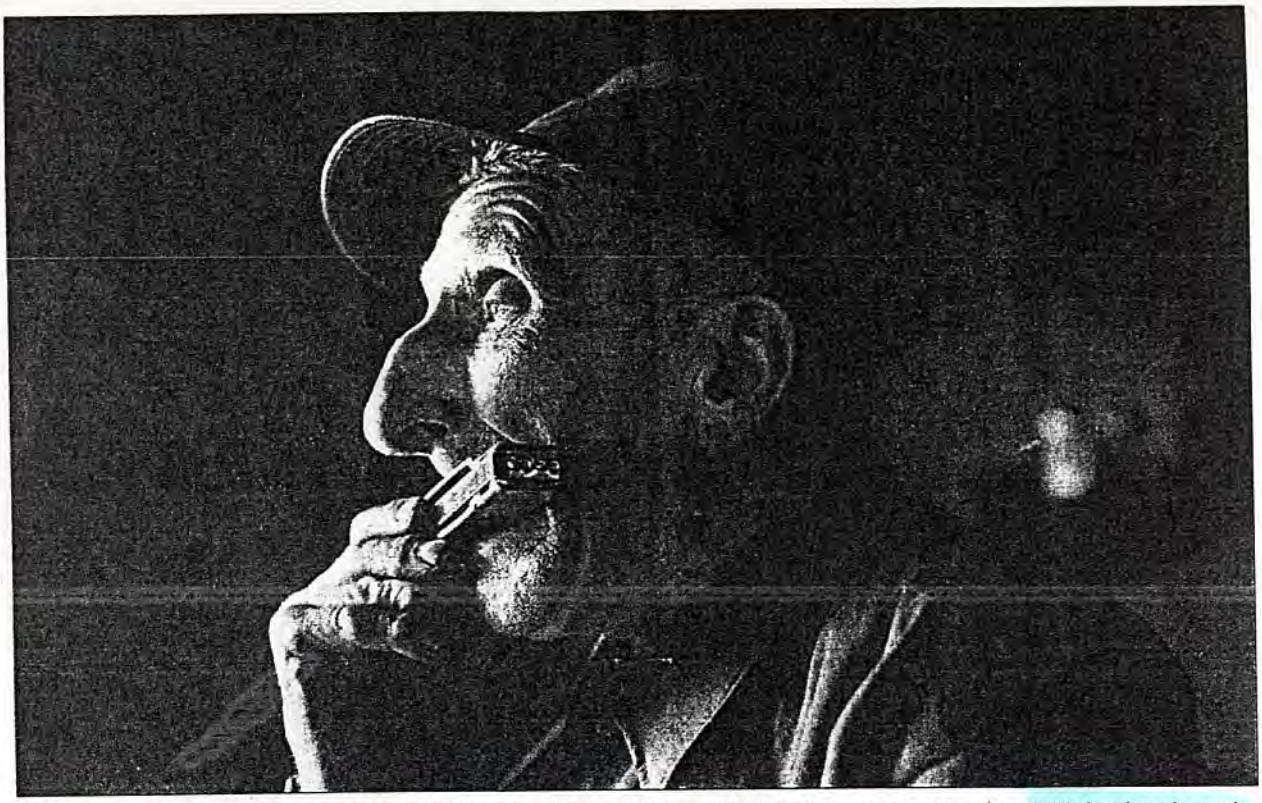
● Sam Hunt, at his home in Waretown, skips an old rope to show he is still agile at age 85.

A BOATMAN TAKES A BOW

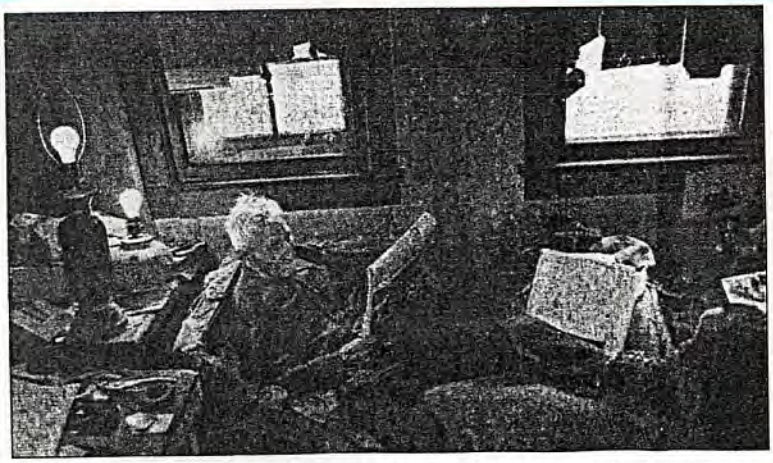
Age has slowed Pine Barrens master boat builder Sam Hunt, 85, but only a little.



● Hunt (above) remembers the country tunes he played with Joe and George Albert and later the Pineconers band. His hand-made sneak-box boats have been displayed at the Smithsonian Institution's folk-life festival in Washington.



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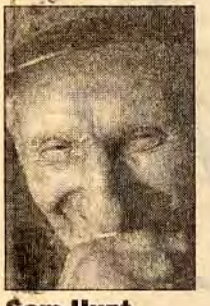
Longtime Pine Barrens boatm

From page AA1

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"You can drag this on its edge over to Route 9 and it wouldn't leak," Hunt declares. "If there's a 16th of an inch out, if it leaks, I'll give you the boat."

Sneakboxes are so called because duck hunters consider them a stealthy craft, with "box" being an old name for floating blinds.



Sam Hunt

It's been a long time since Hunt — one of the better-known exponents of old-time Pine Barrens skills, and now 85 years old — has built a boat.

The framing guides are weather-beaten, the faded oak ribs of the last project still bent over the 10-foot hull form. In the grayed wood around Hunt's yard lie local boat-building skills and woodworking technology handed down for generations: "I learned this when I was young from men who were 70 or 80 years old."

Strangers who know Hunt by reputation still seek him out, coming by his Waretown home to talk about boat-building, hunting and the old days.

Born in Glendora, Camden County in 1911, Hunt says he started coming to Waretown as a boy with his mother, returned often for the outdoors, and bought his own place at age 30, paying $50 back in 1941. "I saw the woods, and the hunting and the fishing and the boats, and I knew this was the place for me."

He delivered boats from a builder in Marblehead, Mass. to wealthy owners wintering in Florida during the 1930s, piloting them along the then-new Intracoastal Waterway and the Great Dismal Swamp through Virginia and North Carolina. "They were $10,000, $15,000 yachts, beautiful boats."

At home Hunt was a commercial fisherman, bringing in mackerel and striped bass from the ocean on a 42-foot boat he built himself. He clammed inside Barnegat Bay on what was called Sea Dog Shoals, long since bisected by the Oyster Creek Channel and buried under islands of dredged sand. "They ruined about 4 square miles of good clamming," he still laments.

In fall and winter he hunted deer with brothers Joe and George Albert back in the hills known locally as the Forked River Mountains. "I hunted all over and walked from here to the mountain and back (about 25 miles) in those days," Hunt said.

Hunt married and raised three daughters in Waretown. In later years he worked with the Ocean County road department as a driver, quietly ignoring the retirement age "until I was 68 or 69 and they caught up with me."

A county pension and Social Security allow him to stay in his home of 55 years, amid the woodworking tools and memorabilia that signify Hunt's role in preserving Pinelands culture.

There are plaques and awards from folk-life shows, ancient sawmill equipment, autographed photographs from presidents who examined Hunt-made boats and furniture at the Smithsonian Institution.

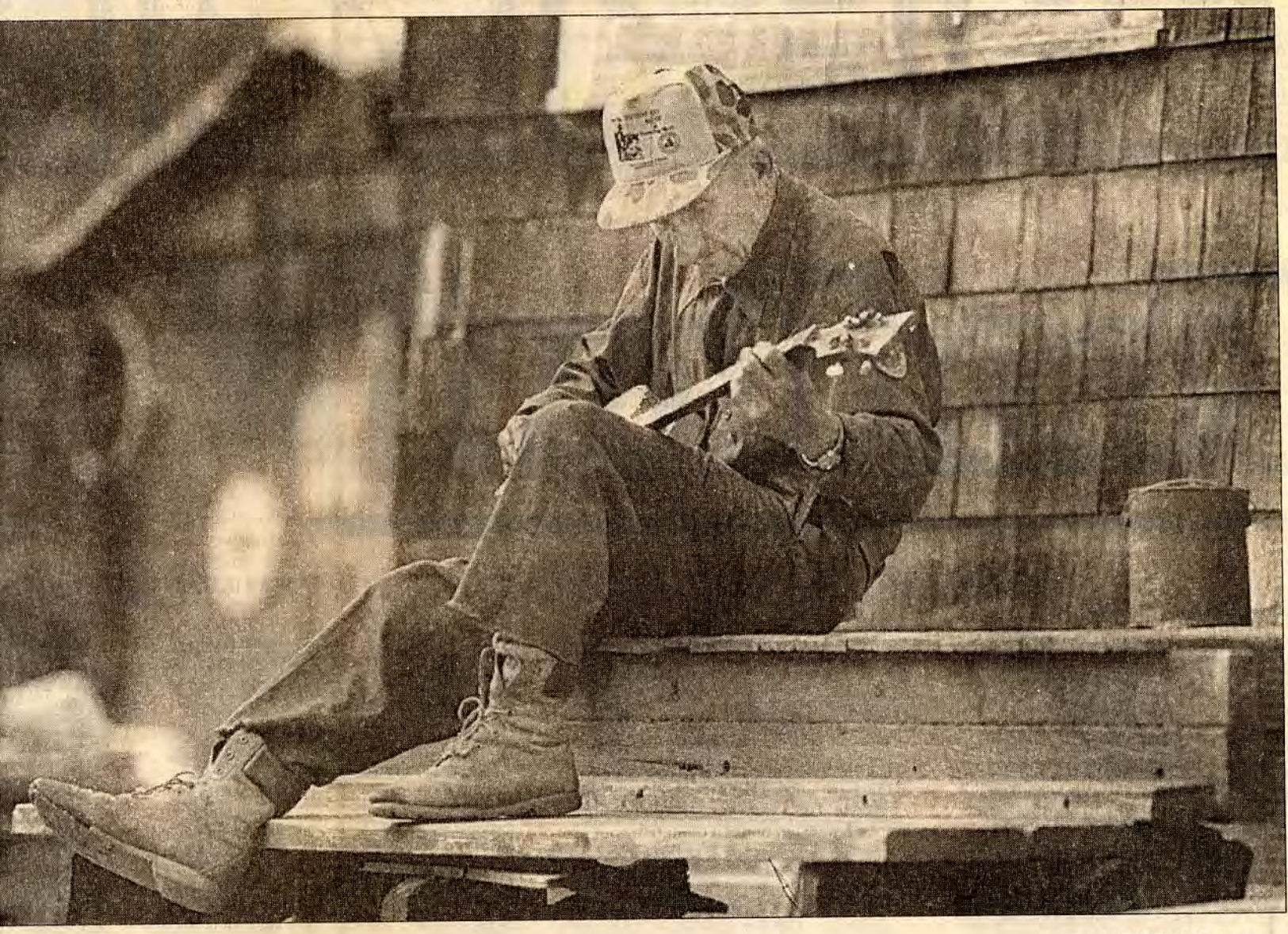
Hunt says the life outdoors, and years of playing country music with the Albert brothers and later the Pineconers band, and dancing, has kept him physically fit. To demonstrate, he leaps into the air with both feet, springs on his tiptoes and bends to slap the floor with a hand: "No problem there!"

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Barrens boatman takes a bow



PETER ACKERMAN/Staff Photographer

Sam Hunt, 85, plays his banjo in front of his Waretown home on a recent warm morning.

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"I can remember things 50 years ago better than I can remember from last week," he said. "That's terrible when you get that way.

"But the world don't owe me nothing. I've had a good life."



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A BOATMAN TAKES A BOW

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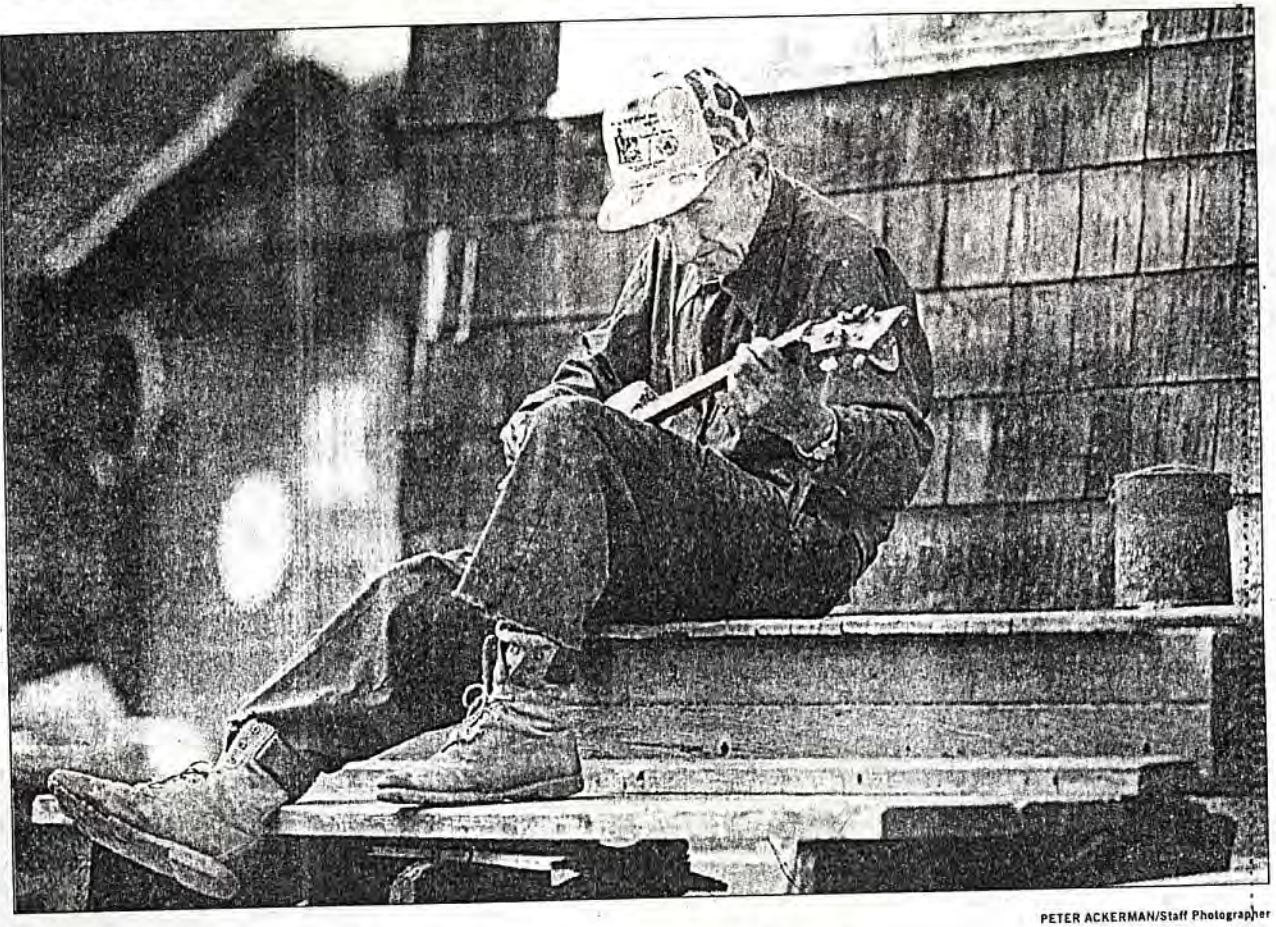
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Pinelands legend featured at Jamboree

■ Renowned carver Sam Hunt, 87, will be doing his thing Oct. 10 at Wells Mills County Park.

Staff report

WARETOWN — If it can be done with wood, Sam Hunt's done it.

He's turned white cedar into sneakboxes and garveys, bent red cedar into rocking chairs, even made his own banjos and clamming tongs.

Despite his 87 years, he promises to outdance anyone south of Toms River.

Hunt is the featured artisan at the fourth annual Pine Barrens Jamboree set for Oct. 10 at Wells Mills County Park.

Hunt is a walking encyclopedia on the crafts, lore, and music of the Jersey Pines.

He was one of the musicians who gathered at the Albert Place, performing the music of the Pinelands every Saturday night.

An original member of the Pinelands Cultural Society, Hunt continues to challenge anyone to flip one of his hand-made rocking chairs.

One of his sneakboxes is displayed at the Smithsonian in Washington. New Jersey Network made a documentary of Hunt building one of the boats.

Hunt's been a baymen, mackerel fisherman, and a guide for duck and deer hunting parties.

Few people are more qualified to present the down home melodies and memories of the Pine Barrens than Hunt. Those are the fare of the jamboree that begins at 10 a.m. and continues until 6 p.m. Oct. 10.

There will be music present by Albert Music Hall throughout the day, Pine vittles, demonstrations of traditional crafts, and history and nature programs. Admission is free and shuttle bus service will be provided.

For more information, call (609) 971-3085.