VACATION DAYS ON A HOUSEBOAT: THE DIVERSITY OF PLEASURE AND COMFORT TO BE ENJOYED: BY BEATRICE GRISWOLD

IFE in the open air, especially in the summertime, is nowadays recognized as an essential rather than a luxury. Some parts of our country, particularly the East and Middle West, are unbearably hot for a few months each year, and many plans have been evolved to obtain for the inhabitants of the sun-baked regions the benefits of cool, refreshing breezes, opportunities for undisturbed rest at night and relaxation from the trials of close sultry days. The exodus from the cities usually begins as early as the circumstances of individuals permit, and the call of the sea or the mountains is eagerly answered by those who may heed it, and stifled as much as possible by those who must ignore it.

The possession of a mountain camp or a seashore bungalow is no longer considered an unattainable luxury by people of moderate means, for life in this fashion has been simplified to such an extent that, after the first cost, it affords a much cheaper and more restful way of spending a summer than can be found at even the simpler summer resorts. Another vacation plan that is perhaps not appreciated as much as it should be is to spend the hot days on a houseboat, which can include in its equipment most of the comforts that can be obtained for any other informal country shelter, and at the same time acquire for its occupants opportunities for water sports and pleasures. There is another advantage enjoyed by houseboat dwellers: It is not necessary to spend the whole vacation time in one place, for the moorings can be slipped at will and the floating house can find anchorage in almost any spot that appeals to the skipper and crew. There is usually a breeze stirring on rivers and lakes, and few nerves will refuse to be soothed and rested by the lap of water against the sides of a boat.

A houseboat anchored within easy reach of a man's business might solve the problem of obtaining for him comfortable nights and recreation all summer long, and a vessel of this kind might also be made to serve a family who wished to spend a vacation near home. There are many streams and lakes near our cities where simply furnished comfortable craft might be stationed, and sometimes delightful opportunities for fishing, canoeing and swimming can be found at the doorway, as it were.

Heretofore houseboating has generally been regarded as a recreation possible only for people with a great deal of money to spend, yet one of these little outing homes can be built and maintained for a very moderate sum, as the first cost of materials is practically the only one for three years. On a boat of even the simpler kind a family of four
A LUXURIOUSLY FITTED HOUSEBOAT WHICH IS USED FOR AN ALL-SUMMER VACATION AND ANCHORED IN ONE OF NEW YORK’S BROAD RIVERS NEAR THE OWNER’S PLACE OF BUSINESS: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SLEEPING OUT OF DOORS IS AFFORDED BY THE PARTICULAR TYPE OF HAMMOCK THAT IS SHOWN AND THE DECK IS LARGE ENOUGH FOR DANCING IN THE EVENING: THIS BOAT IS ESPECIALLY WELL BUILT SO THAT WHEN ANCHOR IS WEIGHED IT IS POSSIBLE TO CRUISE ABOUT IN EVEN COMPARATIVELY ROUGH WATERS.
Photographs by Jessie Turbox Beals.

These little outing homes can be built and maintained for a very moderate sum: Above we are showing an inexpensive houseboat with awning top, and below a larger type of houseboat with a finished roof; the smaller boat will cruise in sheltered waters and the larger one, which is comfortably fitted up for sleeping on deck, can withstand heavier storms and swifter currents.
Photographs by Jessie Tarbox Beals.

A houseboat fitted up with a railing around the upper deck, which affords an admirable playground for children: the arrangement of windows in this houseboat is picturesque in design, planned for excellent ventilation.

The most charming of the houseboats are fitted up with brilliant awnings and bright colored rugs so that the summertime may boast an air of gaiety in material as well as in spiritual things.
Two pictures showing the possibility of cozy living in the houseboat: in addition to cool days and restful nights there is the opportunity for outdoor sports—canoeing, fishing, swimming and these in infinite variety as the houseboat slips about from river to river, with fresh scenes daily for the tired man or the weary woman.
or five can live as comfortably as in a house on land, and still enjoy from time to time a change of surroundings like water gypsies on a floating van.

With the assistance of a carpenter a small boat, fifteen by thirty-five feet, for use on inland streams and lakes, can be built in about a week's time. This size includes a six-foot porch at either end, and there may be two windows and a door in each side wall. The entire cost of such a boat should not exceed one hundred and twenty-five dollars. This allows thirty-five dollars for labor, seventy-five dollars for lumber and roofing, and the remainder for extras.

The floating equipment may be either a “scow,” which is generally used in fresh water, or a number of second-hand cider barrels. They are not fastened to the bottom of the boat in any way, but are held up by their own buoyancy into little saddles made to fit them. About four of the barrels will need replacing each year, in the spring, and this work can be done from a rowboat with a boat-hook. The new barrels should be filled with water, floated into place and the water pumped out with an ordinary bilge pump. The number of barrels required depends upon the weight of the house and furnishings, and a barrel should be supplied for every two hundred pounds.

A compact arrangement of the interior of a floating house is to set apart two corners for the sleeping equipment, which may be in the form of full-sized beds or folding cots that may be used as sofas during the day. Another corner of the boat can be portioned off for the kitchen and should contain cupboards, shelves for dishes, an oil stove, a sink and a pump that will supply an adequate amount of fresh water. In the remaining corner may be placed the metal fireplace which on chilly days will radiate cheer and comfort from a driftwood fire.

The side walls would be effective if stained or covered with birch bark held in place by tacks. For partitions, curtains may be hung on wires near the ceiling; they can be pushed back when not in use, thus making it possible to throw the entire house into one large room. Several light-weight wicker armchairs, a stationary table or two and a hammock swung on the awning-covered deck will complete the furnishings.

If it is intended that the houseboat is to remain in one spot all summer, one way to ensure a fresh supply of vegetables every day is to plant a garden near the anchorage; it is usually possible to rent a bit of ground for this purpose. The garden should be near the water's edge, so that the crop will not be seriously endangered by drought.

Of course, houseboats are not confined to the simple type just described, for they may be as elaborate in equipment and as costly as
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desired. A twin-screw power houseboat, in which it is possible to cruise along most navigable rivers, drop anchor in some snug harbor for a day or two, and continue the journey when fancy dictates, may be built for two thousand dollars or more. Adequate power for propelling the boat can be furnished by two gasoline engines.

Outwardly, the appearance of a houseboat of this kind is similar to that of the simpler craft, except for a broader deck and a little hooded cockpit. Inside it may be made as comfortable and homelike as sailing requirements will permit. The two cabins, one at either end of the boat, would be effective finished in plain dark-toned wood, as this would subdue the glare of light reflected from the water on sunny days. Uncovered rafters make interesting ceilings, and the walls may be fitted with built-in bookshelves, and lockers behind doors made in the form of panels. Both cabins can be used for sleeping rooms as well as for general living purposes, as they can each contain beds as well as clothes presses and lavatories which are cleverly concealed in the wall.

The kitchen is situated in the center of the boat and may be fitted out so as to satisfy the most exacting housewife. It should hold a gasoline stove, a refrigerator, a pump and sink, a wall table, cupboards for supplies, a closet for brooms and dusters and a rack for dishes. A big sliding door, which works up and down like a window sash, can shut this compartment off from the rest of the boat.

MANY people who are able to indulge their desire for pleasure and comfort in any way they choose have succumbed to the delights of houseboating, and there are colonies of this particular kind of pleasure craft to be found on our principal rivers and lakes, from the St. Lawrence River to the Florida coast,—on Alexandria Bay, the Housatonic River, Long Island Sound, Manhasset Bay, Lake Michigan and the smaller Wisconsin lakes. One of the most elaborate power houseboats ever built, the Osiris, cost forty-five thousand dollars. In this it is possible to cruise along the coast and also a short distance out to sea, as the windows and hatches are made watertight. It is one hundred and ten feet long, twenty feet wide and contains five staterooms, baths, a large saloon, servants’ rooms, crew’s living quarters, captain’s room and galley.

The saloon is almost in the center of the boat, and opening off this at the bow are the staterooms with comfortable berths, hot and cold running water and convenient baths adjoining. The captain’s room is at the stern of the boat, while the engine room, the galley and the crew’s quarters are in the middle. Leading from the saloon are the stairs to the deck, and in this spacious, awning-covered spot the houseboaters may comfortably spend every moment of clear weather out of doors.
The cost of running a boat of this type amounts to several thousand dollars a season, as the wages of the seven men in the crew are about five hundred dollars a month.

The houseboat was introduced into America when the people of the Eastern coast settlements first felt impelled to go to the great West. The vast rivers which the daring pioneers encountered, the Mississippi and the Ohio, in a short time teemed with keel-boats, flat-boats and rafts, on which eventually small houses were built to shelter the adventurous families and their belongings.

The little houseboats which today line the shores of the Mississippi have been evolved from this early type of craft. These modern boats foster a gypsylike kind of life, for they drift down the stream with every freshet and when the water is high the occupants earn a livelihood by fishing and working on board other vessels. When the flood recedes the boats are stranded on the land, gardens are planted in the fertile soil and the floating homes become farmhouses until another freshet sweeps down to send them drifting again along with the current.

The cost of anchorage for a houseboat in American waters is about five dollars for the season, or as long as the craft is stationary. This remarkably low rental very materially reduces the living expenses of permanent dwellers in houseboats. An enterprising resident of New York City has proved the economy of this sort of life. He and his family make their home from October to May on a houseboat which has been specially constructed for cold weather. Light and heat are derived from oil lamps and stoves; five dollars a year covers the cost of water supply from a nearby hydrant. As this boat is anchored at a public pier in the Harlem River, the city makes a charge of five dollars a month for the privilege. The mooring is at the foot of a street, so that the postman is able to deliver mail every day, and it is possible for the tradesmen to come on board with family supplies. In summer the family leases the houseboat and goes for a vacation in the mountains.

There is no registry of American houseboats, but it is estimated that there are about one thousand on the inland streams and lakes.