



Maine's First Ship

Newsletter



Spring 2020

Special points of interest:

- Peapod and quilt raffle
- Period costumes provide authenticity
- MFS in the news
- Sails and rigging
- Traditional birchbark canoes during the Pop-ham era
- Volunteers helping the community
- Wharf plans proceeding
- Schools visit *Virginia*

Virginia's launch delayed by global pandemic

Maine's First Ship regretfully announced last month that we are postponing the planned June 7th launch of *Virginia*.

While construction was on schedule for the June launch, "the obstacle we're facing is the lack of a wharf for outfitting at our building site in downtown Bath," said MFS President Orman Hines. "She will need a place to tie up in the Kennebec once she is in the water." MFS was hoping to use one of several existing facilities nearby, "but we were unable to secure permission. We are now faced with raising additional funds and securing multiple permits so we can build our own." Once the permits are approved, volunteers can build the wharf quickly, said Hines.

Fast-changing economic conditions across the globe due to Covid-19 may also negatively affect the fund-raising efforts needed to complete *Virginia*. MFS is planning to launch her as soon as we can.

Up until Governor Janet Mills' "Stay Healthy at Home" executive order in March, volunteers were still working hard two days a week. They were finishing up the deck, starting to work on the bulwarks, and building

an engine bed. In addition, six pieces of external lead keel ballast – at 3,000 pounds apiece – arrived and they had begun to hang the lead keel.

In the lead-up to the closure, said MFS Secretary and docent Allison Hepler, volunteers were "self-selecting whether they wanted to continue during this time, and that created a smaller building crew." She also noted that, with the nicer weather, volunteers were "working outside more, and spreading out their projects as much as possible."

The sails have also been delivered, and the rigging team hopes to bend one on a yard as a display in the Freight Shed. In the meantime, volunteers are still working on *Virginia*-related projects, which readers will see on the inside pages of the newsletter.



Newsletter produced
courtesy of the
Publicity
Committee:
Roger Barry, Lori Benson,
Allison Hepler



President's Notes



As we navigate the uncharted waters of this deadly virus, we want all of our friends and volunteers to be safe; thus we have closed down all face-to-face activity here on Maine's First Ship.

We are doing meetings via Zoom that Lori Benson has so ably set up. Kimberly is still checking the office emails on a limited basis and working from

home as much as possible.

Dan Burchstead, our treasurer, is using Quick Books from his home office to pay bills, and enter donations.

Dan Wood our development director has started a Capital Campaign to raise funds for a dock, to assure *Virginia* will be visible once launched.

We are also polishing up our website and adding some videos from past speakers to our web resources, thanks to Ken Borgendale.

Jim Parmentier is working on a new slide show that will enhance the story of *Virginia* and the Popham Colony.

Stay safe,

- Orman

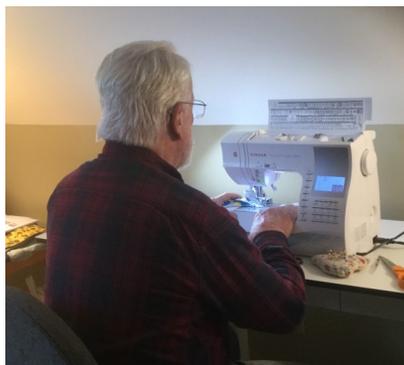
MFS volunteers donate time and talents

The volunteer spirit is alive and well during the pandemic while onsite work on the ship is at a temporary standstill.

Volunteer rigger Bob Ireland, when he hasn't been working on *Virginia* projects at home, has been putting his "fiber" talents to work sewing masks for his community.

MFS Vice President and docent Lori Benson has also

been sewing masks for volunteers who need them. She volunteers regularly at the Bath BackPack Program, which provides food for students for the weekend, supplementing week-day meals from the



schools.

MFS Secretary and docent Allison Hepler, who has no sewing skills whatsoever, has been helping out on one of the school bus deliveries of meals to students.



MFS was also able to donate several pairs of gloves and N95 masks to the Midcoast Hospital in Brunswick.



MFS raffling off donated rowing and sailing peapod, and handcrafted quilt

By Jim Parmentier

Peapods, like dories, are sturdy double-ended boats between 15 and 20 feet long that developed in



many parts of the world for use by fishermen who worked in ocean waters. They had to be reliable and trustworthy in big waves and also easy to row. They had to resist capsizing as the heavy weight of fish nets or lobster traps were hauled over their gunnels. Their oars and oarlocks often were large, and fishermen could row them in either direction and by sitting or standing up. Peapods transported nets, bait and catch to and from ships or to shore with speed and safety.

Doug Hyland, of Hyland & Brown – Boatbuilders, Brooklin, Maine, originally designed the Beach Pea Pod to be 13' long and

to be built using modern glued lapstrake construction. In 2006 students in the Landing School, in Arundel, ME, built a 15-foot

version of the Hyland's peapod design.

Paul Gamache, one of our MFS docents, bought that boat. Paul, his wife, Claudette, and their dog Poppy (short for "Popham") where

they live) enjoyed rowing and sailing their peapod for many years. Now Paul has graciously donated his boat to MFS to be raffled as a fund-raiser. The

boat has been barn-stored over the winter and given a fresh coat of paint and prepared for a new owner.

The peapod will be raffled off with two sets of oars and a complete sailing rig. Money raised in the raffle will go into the MFS Educational Fund to support the many

onboard projects and programs we have planned for *Virginia*.

Thanks, Paul, for your generosity!

MFS will also be raffling a handmade quilt designed and sewn by Martha Smith of Sebasco in Phippsburg. She was inspired by the artwork of long-time Maine artist and friend Bev Bevilacqua, who created several paintings of *Virginia*. Thank you, Martha!

Details about tickets and their availability will be forthcoming but keep these items in mind!



Period costumes will enhance visitor experience

By Jim Nelson

Work on *Virginia* (along with most of the world) may be on hold, but thoughts of her future are not, and that means planning for what she'll do when she's complete and floating at the dock.

A big part of her work will most certainly involve inter-

torically accurate crew to staff her.

To that end, a group of volunteers has been busy researching and creating authentic period clothing for *Virginia's* future crew and educators. The focus now is on the clothing of common sailors: shirts of authentic linen, short pull-overs called "cassocks", and the baggy trousers called "slops" that were worn by sailors for centuries. The clothing is being constructed of period-correct materials and hand-stitched, at least where the stitching will show.

The skilled knitters among us have also created an inventory of knitted hats of the type commonly worn in that period. Volunteers are making out-

fits for themselves if they intend to work as costumed volunteers or for the ship's "slop chest", an inventory of period clothes that can be lent out to folks who need them.

Anyone interested in working on ship's clothing is welcome to join in. Alas, our sewing bees have been suspended for now, but folks who might like to work on this project on their own should contact Lisa Nelson. She can be reached at isanelson1993@gmail.com to make arrangements for materials and instruction.



preting the lives of early 17th Century sailors and settlers. *Virginia* will be an historically accurate ship, and she'll need an his-



School groups learn about Popham, *Virginia*

Students from Chewonki Elementary and Middle School in Wiscasset showed up in January to learn about the ship.



Apprentices from the Rockland Apprenticeship Shop visited *Virginia* in December.

Sails for *Virginia* arrive, rigging continues at home



Virginia's sails arrived in March and, before the Governor's "Stay at Home" order went into effect, plans were being made to bend one of the sails on to a yard.

And, while work at the Bath Freight Shed is at a standstill, volunteers are diligently working on various pieces of the rigging.



These are "lizards," which will be tied around the yards to make sure that the running rigging runs the way it's supposed to. You can see how the rope has been spliced around the bullseyes to keep them in place. The rope next to the bullseyes will then be "plaited," which most people call "braided." The smaller twine wrapped around the ropes forms "whippings" to

keep the rope from coming undone. These pieces of art are being crafted by volunteer Dave Bellows.



Maine's First Ship: Reconstructing the pinnacle Virginia

MFS dock plans are moving along

by Dan Wood

As *Virginia* itself progresses toward completion, our next task is planning for her launch and a safe, secure mooring place.

As for the mooring place, we are planning to build a dock, the most efficient and least expensive option. The image as shown indicates that a ramp will start from a 5' x 10' landing on the river's edge in front of the Freight Shed. A 40' x 4' ramp will extend to a 10' x 20' float. That float is in turn connected to three 10' x 20' floats, giving a 60' dock front. This dock float system and the ship will be securely held in place by two dolphins place at

each end of the floats. A dolphin is a set of three pilings held together by steel cables wrapped around them at the top.

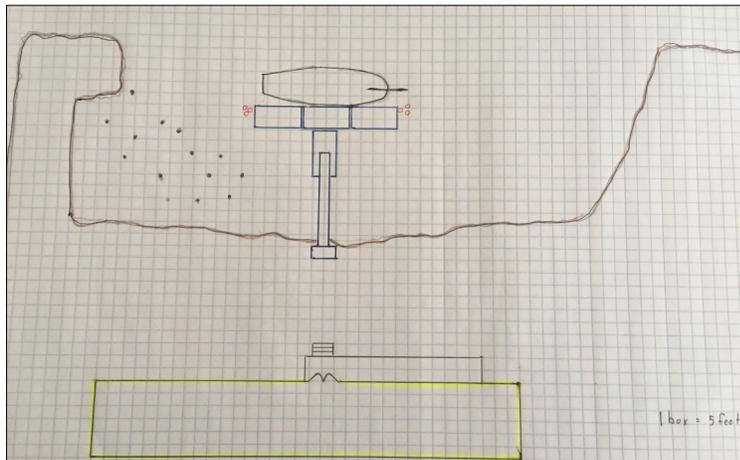
The landing design is being evaluated by the state Department of Environmental Protection and by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Davies Allan of Chesterfield Associates of Westport Island and his assis-

tant, Lucinda Tilas, have donated their services to submit the state application. We expect to hear from them by the end of May. The design will then go to the Bath Codes Enforcement Officer for approval.

Our plan is for the landing and the floats to be constructed by volunteers in the early summer. Once we receive approval from the state, we will order the ramp from Herb Freeman, owner of Kennebec

Marine Services. Davies Allan will be installing the dolphin pilings.

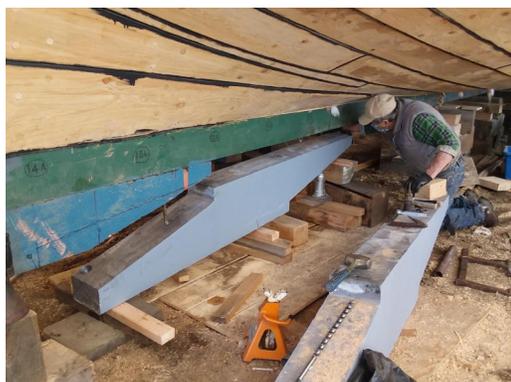
With some luck we hope to have the dock in place by early August. Our upcoming Capital Campaign, which focused on the engine last year, will highlight funding for the dock in 2020.



MFS in the news



Virginia decking nearly complete; bulkheads, bulwarks, and keel being readied



Clockwise from top right: Allison and Rob stick white pine bulwarks to be dried; bulwarks under construction; Fred Gosbee fashions the tiller; Paul fits the covering board; Elise and Gail bung the transom; Matthew Henson stands guard; Charlie fits the first piece of lead keel in place; and volunteers muscle 6 pieces of lead, which will be *Virginia*'s ballast, off the truck.





Maine's First Ship: Reconstructing the pinnacle *Virginia*

Popham colonists and Indian birchbark canoes

by Robert Stevens

When the Popham colonists showed up in 1607, after having been visited by Native Americans in shallops, they then had numerous sightings of Indians in their indigenous birchbark canoes.

In his Journal, Captain Davies writes of encountering Indian canoes on a couple of occasions. After arriving at the River of Sagadahoc and commencing to build the fort, storehouse and a "small penis," Captain Gilbert with 15 men go to the westward exploring. Strong winds limit their travel. On the second day, not being able to make more than 2 leagues rowing to windward, they come to anchor. While anchored, 2 canoes passed by

but would not come near. These two canoes can take to the ocean while the colonists are windbound in their shallop. This is the third instance Davies writes of canoes

passing and being unwilling to stop.

After the explorers return to Popham, 9 canoes with 40 men, women, and children come in the mouth of

the Kennebec around noon, most likely having come from Pemaquid that morning and early the next day return to Pemaquid. Cap-

tain Gilbert, with 22 men, take 3 days in the shallop, against the wind, to travel around 20 miles to meet them at Pemaquid.

On September 23, Captain Gilbert and 19 men sailed the shallop up the Kennebec. Here they have a bit of an encounter with the locals in their canoes. The final mention of canoes is at the beginning of October when Skidwares and Nahanada, along with others, came to Popham. Here the daily entries of the journal end.

It is thought that the birchbark canoe was developed around 3000 years ago, based on the stone tools associated with building birch bark canoes replacing the tools used to make dugouts and settlement sites on smaller streams that would be hard to travel in a dugout. Different tribes developed different styles to meet the needs of the job on hand. There are canoes developed by the Wabanaki, Mi'kmaq, and Beothuk for ocean going and to hunt seals and swordfish.

The canoes are built with the bark of the Paper Birch tree inside out, Maine cedar planks, ribs, and stems, and Black Spruce roots. Lashing and tiny holes were covered with a mixture of Black or White Spruce Gum and animal fat. The gunwales were made first, the bark lashed to the rails, the planking laid in place, and the heads of the ribs forced up between the inner and outer gunwales, holding the planks in place.

Indian birchbark canoes were faster, lighter, and easier to repair than the English shallops. Interestingly, Davies does not mention the construction of the canoes.

Illustrations: Etching by J.F.W. Desbarres, circa 1770.

Mi'kmaq canoe built by Todd Labrador (pictured), master Mi'kmaq canoe builder, Nova Scotia.

Maine's First Ship

PO Box 231

Bath ME 04530

Ph: 207-443-4242

Visit *Virginia* at

27 Commercial Street

(on the water side of the
Bath Freight Shed)

Like us on
Facebook

Keep up with our
progress on the web

www.mfship.org

