



Maine's First Ship

Newsletter



Fall 2021

Please contribute to the MFS Annual Appeal as you are able. We appreciate all donations and your support will help keep *Virginia* on schedule for a 2022 launch. Thank you.

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

Bath Farmers Market

Returning to the Bath Freight Shed on November 20th. Make sure to stop by for the freshest finds from your favorite vendors Bathfarmersmarket.com

Women's Shipbuilding Day to be Held on November 7th



and the wearing of face masks while working inside.

The day runs from 9am to 3pm in the boat shed that sits between the Kennebec River and the Bath Freight Shed at 27 Commercial Street. (Parking may be impacted by city work on Commercial Street.) For more information and to register (required) - [mfship.org/](http://mfship.org/events)

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MFS returns with the 7th annual Women's Shipbuilding Day. Although plans for 2020 were cancelled due to the pandemic, Shipwright Rob Stevens and other MFS volunteers are prepared to welcome a small group of women to this unique opportunity. After an overview of the project and key historical information with Rob, the rest of the day will be spent working on our reconstruction of this 51' pinnacle.

No previous experience is necessary and MFS will provide hand and power tools, as well as a snack and beverages. Participants should bring a lunch, and wear closed-toe shoes and clothing they don't mind getting dirty. To protect all in the group, we require COVID-19 vaccination

Women On Our Team:

While the majority of MFS volunteers are men, many women have also joined in support of the project. One of our best building volunteers took part in our first Women's Day and she has been committed to the project ever since. We also have women on our Board of Directors, including two on our Executive team, and within our volunteer ranks, working on educational programming, serving as docents, creating costumes, assisting with events.



President's Notes



Maine's First Ship has had a busy summer with trips to Pemaquid, Mystic Seaport, and lots of visitors in the Bath Freight Shed. Our Strategic Planning Committee is reviewing applicants for an executive director position with several viable candidates who we will be interviewing this month. Another committee is working on the purchase of the Bath Freight Shed which will be a wonder-

ful home for *Virginia*. We had great turnouts for our summer lecture series thanks to Dorsey Harrison's lineup of speakers. Jim Nelson and the rigging crew are installing the beautiful sails on the spars. Our vessel volunteers have progressed nicely on finishing up the bulwark railings, Fred Gosbee has installed the windlass, Dana Leonard and Bruce are installing the en-

gine, and many other details will be finished off this winter before our scheduled launch on June 4th, 2022. Hope you will join us for the festivities.

- Orman



MFS Raffle: "Beach Pea" Winner!

In the Fall of 2019 we announced a donation that we received from Paul Gamache, one of our do-

cents. We want to congratulate **Kent Wittler** for winning the raffle when his ticket was pulled on October 9th during Citizen Appreciation Day in downtown Bath. Paul bought the boat during his 10 years working at the Landing School of Boatbuilding and Design, located in Arundel, Maine. He had the pleasure of watching the 13 foot pea pod being built by students of the school.

For three years Paul rowed the boat in the Kennebec River near Bath; more recently her home has been the Hermit Island Campground on the western side

of Phippsburg in the New Meadows River. Paul recorded his travel in the pea pod and has logged more than 1,000 miles rowing. MFS volunteers gave the pea pod a fresh coat of paint and spent several weeks selling (& buying!) a limited number of tickets.

After much anticipation we couldn't be more excited to announce Kent as our winner!



If you have any valuable nautical items that might be suitable for offering in the grand and glorious **Virginia's Launch Celebration Auction, Raffle and Yard Sale** please contact Jim Parmentier at jparmen@aol.com.

Mystic Seaport 2021 WoodenBoat Show

By Jim Parmentier

Maine's First Ship was well-represented at the 31st Annual WoodenBoat Show which was held again this year at Mystic Seaport. Traditionally held in late June, and not held at all last year, the WBS was purposely delayed this summer until mid-August to allow COVID to diminish a bit from its springtime level. What did not diminish, however, was our summer storm activity. This year's show ended up on the same three days that Tropical Storm Henri chose to wander west from Bermuda and then back east to a landfall at Westerly, Rhode Island, just 9 miles away from Mystic. Friday and Saturday went smoothly enough, but wise heads at WBS cancelled Sunday, much to the relief of the boatbuilders, if not the vendors. Most had boats of our own back home whose safety concerned us.

As in earlier years, Orman Hines towed *Jane Stevens* down from Bath on Thursday afternoon to be



the centerpiece of our exhibit. Given a choice of three prime locations Orman chose a wide, busy corner on the Seaport's main quadrangle. Being near both the food services and the latrine assured us of a steady flow of visitors past our tent, as well as electricity to run our slide show. I joined Orman that evening, Dorsey and David Harrison arrived the next morning, and Jeremy Blaiklock came in for Saturday. For those two days we passed out brochures, answered questions about the shallop, and told the story of *Virginia* over and over again.

"You have heard of Jamestown, haven't you?" "Of course!" would come the reply. "Well, do you know what happened

at Popham?" ...and the narrative would begin.

Some folks stayed two minutes, some ten or fifteen, and several hung around longer, eager to talk about boats and history and Maine and hurricanes. Many had their own stories to tell us. We listened, we gathered names for our mailing list, and we collected donations gladly when they were offered. Although our efforts were truncated by a tropical storm we managed to spread the word about The *Virginia* Project.

We invited many people to the launch next summer and some may even come. We felt we made progress on building the foundation of public support that will allow us to move smoothly from the construction phase to the operational phase of Maine's First Ship.

MFS Brick Sidewalk of Support

By Dan Sortwell

The City of Bath has chosen the contractor and initiated the project for the long-awaited installation of a new brick sidewalk in front of the Bath Freight Shed and home to *Virginia*.

The new sidewalk will range from 10-14 feet wide in front of the shed. It will be constructed of artisan brick pavers made by Morin Brick of Auburn using marine clay.

The beautiful construct will include 88 laser-

engraved pieces paid as donations by supporters of the Bath Freight Shed Alliance (which merged with Maine's First Ship in 2017).



Thrum Caps!

By Jim Nelson

For almost two years now, Maine's First Ship volunteers have been turning their hands to creating historical clothing for the use of ship's crew and interpreters. The work has included both sewing and knitting historical patterns, and we are slowly building our inventory. Among our knitted items are two examples of the most delightful of 17th century sailor wear — the thrum cap.

Thrum caps are knitted in the traditional manner, with one exception. Small lengths of yarn, called "thrum" (traditionally the bits left-over from weaving) are knitted into the cap either as it is made or threaded through with a crochet hook after.



The result is a very warm and distinctly unique-looking hat. The thrum wicks moisture away from the head, keeping it warmer and dryer, to the point where the thrum itself can freeze and the hat will still provide warmth. As the thrum felts down over time the hat becomes even more effective.

Thrum caps were common among sailors in *Virginia*'s day, as evidenced by the number of small islands off the coast of Maine that are named



Thrum Cap Island. Our two examples were knitted by the late Nicia Gruener and Vivian Bolt, who for many years, researched and knitted for Plimoth Patuxet Museums. Anyone interested in taking part in sewing or knitting (thrum caps included, and we still have a great need for stockings) should contact Lisa Nelson at lisanelson1993@gmail.com.

2021 Summer Lecture Series



By Dorsey Harrison

Our 2021 MFS Summer Lecture Series at the Bath Freight Shed ran for the first time using a hybrid format, offering our community the choice of in-person or Zoom attendance. We learned a lot working with this new more

complex setup, but feel the benefits of offering the content to our broader community was worth it! We had 168 in person attendees and an additional 258 zoom attendees.

“The 500-Million-Year-Old Geological History of Casco Bay” presented by David West and “Founding Fish-17th Century Cod Fishing” presented by Mike Dekker were jointly sponsored by our partner non-profit KELT.

“The Diseased Ship: New England Sea Captains and the Slave Trade” presented by Meadow Dibble was

offered thanks to a Maine Humanities Council World in Your Library grant.



We concluded in August with a talk by Tim Dinsmore, “Early Shipwrights Along the Damariscotta: An Archaeological View” and “The Conservation of Fort St. George Artifacts” presented by Molly Carlson. Recordings are available at mfship.org/events

MFS Sponsors Bath Rec. Soccer Team

By Kirstie Truluck

As an educational nonprofit, Maine's First Ship is keen to connect with students and young families in our RSU1 community who might not yet know all that is happening at the Bath Freight Shed. This fall we have been pleased to sponsor a grades 3+4 coed soccer team for Bath Parks & Recreation. This means ten young people and their coach, Kirstie Truluck, are sporting their Maine's

First Ship jerseys around town every weekend and ending each practice and game with the enthusiastic chorus of "one-two-three-Maine's-First-Ship." We are fostering conversation and discovery. To help wrap up a great season, MFS has invited all the players and their families to tour our collection of artifacts and the replica of *Virginia*. Thursday, October 21st will be a fun time for the team and the parents to climb topsides

on *Virginia* and hear more about the exciting progress we are making towards our launch in 2022.



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

Virginia is Well-Armed at Last

By Jim Nelson

Recently, Maine's First Ship member Tomm Tomlinson delivered the first of two small cannons, generally known as swivel guns, that were cast by Campbell Cannon and Carriage Works in Florida. The guns were ordered more than three years ago, but due to issues with manufacturing as well as a backlog of guns waiting to be cast, the first has only just arrived,



with the second on its way soon. Nearly all ocean-going vessels in the 17th Century carried some sort of armament, from 4,000 pound "demy-cannons" to small anti-personnel guns such as those made for *Virginia*, a type that is most properly referred to as a "rabbinet". Though there is no record of it, *Virginia* would most likely have carried weapons similar to these. Guns such as rabbinets

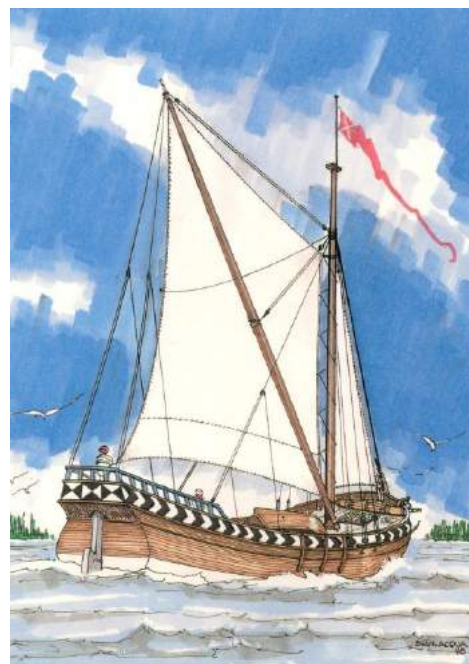
mounted on the ship's rail and functioned like massive shot-guns, in the words of John Smith "to clear the Decks fore and aft, so well as upon the ship's sides to defend the ship and offend an enemy."

The rabbinets that *Virginia* will mount feature the Popham Family coat of arms. The first of the pair, currently on display at the Bath Freight Shed, was donated by Mr. Tomlinson and named "Barbara", in honor of his late wife, who was a great enthusiast of black-powder weapons of all sorts. The second gun, as well as the attendant tools and mounts, were purchased through a grant from Mr. Tomlinson's mother's foundation. Tomm, an experienced gunner, will be offering training for MFS volunteers interested in becoming gunners aboard *Virginia*.

Supporting MFS

Maine's First Ship and our team of volunteers know that our hard work would be impossible without the support of our community, our visitors and donors,

We wanted to make it easier for those that appreciate and support us to buy and sport our merchandise, broadcasting what we do to the public. With recent updates, you can now use credit cards, debit cards and even your phone to make donations and pay for new gear at the Jane Stevens Visitor Center in the Bath Freight Shed. You can also support us online at mfship.org using PayPal.



Virginia today: engine, bulwarks, and pier



Clockwise, from top left: Jeremy, Fred, and Rowan moving the engine; *Virginia*'s waterline; Paul and Paul finishing up the bulwarks; Volunteers ready to help out; windlass ready to raise the anchor (which we don't have yet); pier under construction.