

# GLOUCESTER MARITIME HERITAGE CENTER

The Newsletter of the Gloucester Maritime Heritage Center • Gloucester, Massachusetts • Spring 2002

## GMHC's First Haul-Out A Success

Doug Parsons, yard foreman for the Heritage Center, arrived at the site at 7 a.m. on January 30th, a raw and drizzly morning. With a five month repair job behind him and the restoration of the oldest continually operating marine railway in the country nearly complete, Parsons was ready for the big test. In the half light, he quietly took the slack out of the backhaul chain and oiled up the journals on the winch. Come daylight, volunteers started showing up with coffee and the tension began to build.

The plan was to start moving other boats over to the harbormaster's dock starting at 9 a.m. With the way cleared, Parsons and the slew of volunteers would start pulling the 240 ton *Adventure* out of her slip and into the slip housing the newly restored rail. With the help of seven experienced haulers hired from Gloucester Marine Railways (GMR) on

Rocky Neck, *Adventure* would be on the cradle by about 10 a.m. and hauled by noon, while the tide was still high. That was the plan.

### Welcome, *Adventure*!



The *Adventure* is guided on to the cradle of the newly restored rail.

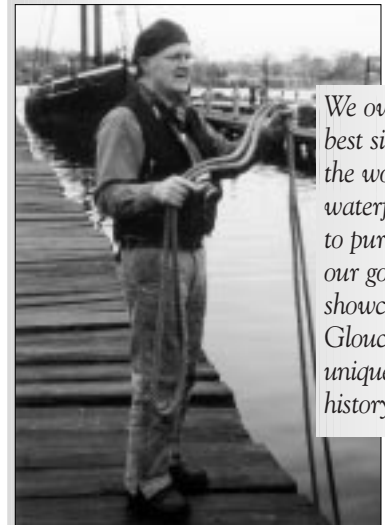
And the plan worked. Directed by Parsons, the volunteers used the harbormaster's boat to pull *Adventure* out of her slip by the stern. Then they brought her bow first into the railway slip. Parsons backed the cradle down. At that point an experienced hand from GMR took over the cradle and Parsons began directing activity from the dock.

"We got the lines on *Adventure* and started pulling her forward," he recalls. "There were about a dozen people pulling on the ropes. Once she was in the

right position on the cradle I gave a deck-hand the head rope and he tied it off. You basically have four lines: two on the bow and two on the stern. *Continued on page 2*

### A Message from the President...

Someone recently said to me that the Heritage Center was financially supported by a very small number of people. I was happy to report that 256 individuals and small businesses had contributed to our success since we acquired the property twenty months ago. That success has exceeded our expectations. We own the best site on the working waterfront for pursuing our goal of showcasing Gloucester's unique maritime history and we have already completed an extensive restoration of the railway.



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I've gotten a lot of personal satisfaction from my involvement with the Heritage Center, not the least of which has been meeting and working with people I didn't even know before this project began. Envisioning and achieving common dreams has brought together a wonderfully diverse group of committed people without whom none of this would have happened.

This summer we will have a far more clearly defined Heritage Center than we had last year. Our office is up and running with Harriet Webster at the helm. The dive shop will be back and *Adventure* is under full restoration on our railway. Plans are under way to develop an aquarium and exhibit space. The ice house will soon be a boat shop, our rowing program is alive and well, and we will be host to some significant vessels like the *Lady Grace*, the Seine boats and guest boats which will be coming and going from our pier.

The Heritage Center is an exciting thing to be part of and I urge you to join us.

Geoffrey Richon, GMHC President

## The Gloucester Gig Rowers

### Early Morning Rowing Group Welcomes New Members

"The sky is indigo, the water swells, and the seals come up around the boat," Barbara Koen muses, her voice a husky whisper. "It's so quiet. Niles Beach looks like a strip of gold as the sun comes up. It crackles. All the buildings are orange and the sky behind is black. It's like being in a tapestry." *Continued on page 3*



## First Haul-Out A Great Success

Continued from front page

These lines hold the boat backwards. The head rope is attached to the cradle and pulls the boat forward. The men holding the bow and stern lines let them out a little at a time as the cradle goes up.

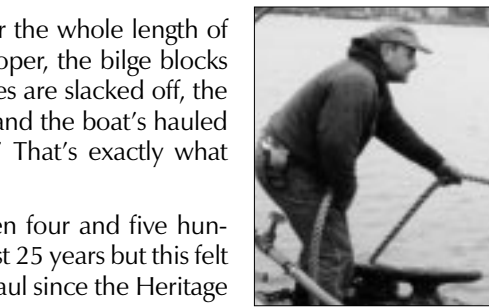


"Once the boat grounds out on the keel blocks for the whole length of the keel and the list is proper, the bilge blocks are pulled in, the four lines are slacked off, the head rope is slacked off, and the boat's hauled out the rest of the way." That's exactly what happened.

Parsons has done between four and five hundred haulings over the past 25 years but this felt different. It was the first haul since the Heritage Center purchased the property. "With everything we'd done to the railway we couldn't help wondering: is this going to work?" Parsons muses. "My heart clicked for half a second every time the chain hung up on the sprocket, but other than that it went real good."

A crowd of about forty celebrated the successful haul with chowder and coffee in the shadow of the elevated schooner.

With the rail in use again, GMHC has a revenue source to help it defray expenses. Visitors are encouraged to stop by Harbor Loop to watch expert craftsmen demonstrate the traditional boatbuilding skills involved in the rebuild of the schooner.



## Dive Exhibit A Big Draw

Paul Harling first explored the world beneath the surface of the sea in 1949 as a teenager. With a diving rig he made himself out of a converted gas mask, an air hose and a couple of tire pumps, he and two friends set out in a skiff on the Annisquam River. Harling jumped overboard and spent a few minutes watching the boats go by from beneath the water while his pals remained aboard, working the hand pumps. It was, he says, "a hair raising experience."

In 1955 Harling began diving regularly, this time with an air tank and regulator. He helped to rebuild one of the tracks at the railways at Rocky Neck and also used his diving skills to help seal up the side of a boat that sank on a rock near the harbor master's dock.

In the 1960s he also had the opportunity to explore the remains of the *Andrea Doria*, which sank off the Nantucket shoals ten years earlier.

Harling still has the equipment from his first dive. It is on display at the diving exhibit in the basement of the GMHC office building. The location -- the old mug up room for the Gloucester Marine Railways -- is a fitting place for this exhibit since this is where divers working on the rails would come in to warm up.

Harling's collection features equipment produced by Morse Diving, the oldest manufacturer of diving equipment, and includes a series of pieces representing the evolution of the commercial helmet. When people come in the first thing they see is the table of copper helmets. Then they notice the suits lined up along the walls. Harling, a true "talker," willingly explains the difference between free flow diving and diving with the use of a rebreather or a regulator. In the near future Harling hopes to be able to show some of the equipment in action. "I'd like to put a diver down when the tide is high to demonstrate some of the gear," he says.

Last year 2,700 people, representing visitors from 46 states, Washington DC, Puerto Rico, most of the provinces of Canada, and 27 foreign countries signed the log book Harling keeps. He welcomes visitors most days from mid April thru October.



## GMHC CALENDAR

- April 17 .....Board of Directors Meeting, 7pm
- April 20 .....Work Day, 9 am
- May 20 .....GMHC / Adventure Yard Sale, 8 am - noon  
Items to sell for the benefit of the Heritage Center can be dropped off at 23 Harbor Loop from May 1st on.
- June 23 .....Rededication of the Railway, 4 pm
- July 20.....Blackburn Challenge, Registration 5:45 am
- July 20.....2002 Gloucester Seaport Festival, 10 am - 6 pm  
To be held at Harbor Loop.

Please call the Gloucester Maritime Heritage Center for more information about any of the events listed above, 978-281-0470.

Please Join Us  
for the Rededication of the  
Burnham Brothers Railway  
Sunday, June 23rd at 4 p.m.  
Gloucester Maritime Heritage Center  
23 Harbor Loop Gloucester, MA  
Refreshments and Music to Follow  
Funding for the restoration of this marine railway was provided by Bill and Mary Kay Dyer in honor of all the members of the Dahlmer and Dyer families who earned their living from the sea and for all of you who love the sea and support our maritime heritage.



# Winter Can't Keep The Gig Rowers Ashore

*Continued from front page*

Koen is one of a group of stalwarts who gather at the GMHC wharf almost every morning at 6 a.m. to row in Gloucester Harbor. Together, they're the Gloucester Gig Rowers. Year round, they glide through the early morning darkness and on into dawn. Spearheaded by GMHC board member Ann Banks, the group relies on the *Siren Song*, a 28' long fixed seat single oar wooden rowing craft made by local boatbuilder Larry Dahlmer in the 1980s.

at the rededication of the Statue of Liberty in the 1980s. It was later lent to the Hull Lifesaving Museum. Last spring, Banks recalls, GMHC board member Jim Schoel said, "See if you can get a bunch of women together who want to row and we'll see if we can get the *Siren Song* back."

"We got the boat back in May and got it in the water in June," Banks remembers. "There were about twelve of us then. We scraped and repainted her and refinished the gunnels with varnish." On March 2nd of this year, Banks, Koen, Hagar, Helen Kamins, Sue Mosse, Marian Stanley, and Kathleen Schenk, trailered the *Siren Song* to Hull to participate in the "Snow Row," an annual event that draws together the New England gig fleet for a 3.75 mile race.

Like many activities that take place at the Heritage Center, volunteers have stepped up to the plate to offer a hand where needed. GMHC board member Geno Mondello helped out with refitting the oarlocks and footrests, as well as supplying valuable advice. Bill Van Stigt, Jr., who worked on the railway restoration, built a much needed oar box. And Mark Sheldon and Butch Roth trailered the *Siren Song* to and from Hull.

Approximately fifty people have rowed the boat since last summer and about thirty of those have formally joined the Gloucester Gig Rowers, paying annual dues of \$40 (\$20 for teens). The Gig Rowers are currently exploring the possibility of offering a teen rowing program. Plans are also underway to partner with the Cape Ann Rowing Club in organizing the annual Blackburn Challenge, scheduled for July 20th. For information on joining the group or to set up a time for an exploratory row with experienced rowers, call the Heritage Center at 978-281-0470. Everyone's welcome, and you need never have rowed before to give it a try.



## A Note from the Executive Director

As the first executive director of the Heritage Center, I do a lot of different things. One of them is to identify organizational needs and then try to find funds to support a way of meeting those needs. Recently I telephoned a well respected consultant to discuss our need for some strategic planning.

Eager to provide enough information so that she could envision our situation, I delivered a ten minute monologue about the history of GMHC highlighting the acquisition of the property, the restoration of the railway, and the fact that we were well on our way to developing the revenue sources that will make the Center self-sustaining. Then I asked what else she would like to know.

After a silence that began to make me uneasy, the consultant replied, "Have you any idea how much this group has already accomplished?"

It was a wonderful moment because for me it captured just what makes GMHC such a terrific organization. Things happen. No suggestions or ideas are ever off limits. Creativity is valued, energy is abundant, and the will to make it all work is unwavering.

I am delighted to be here at the Heritage Center and look forward to working with all of you to make this place flourish. There is so much to do – and so much already done.

*Harriet*

Harriet Webster, Executive Director



## Contributions

If you would like to support the work of the Heritage Center, please send your donation to Gloucester Maritime Heritage Center, 23 Harbor Loop, Gloucester, MA 01930. We would greatly appreciate your assistance!

## Thank You!

Thanks to Steve Kent for leading the effort to paint, wash, and scrape three sides of the office building, to Peter Dorsey for donating scraping and painting materials, and to the many volunteers who have helped out with clean up projects.

## Some Like It Cold



A Sampling of the Gloucester Gig Rowers  
Clockwise, from top left: Helen Kamins, Laurie Hagar, Marian Stanley, Kathy Schenk, Barbara Koen, Ann Banks, Sue Mosse

"The design for the pilot gig originated in England in the Silly Isles in the 19th century," observes rower Laurie Hagar. "The boats had to be fast because they were used to take the harbor pilots out to the incoming ships. The first pilots to get there got the jobs, and the first gigs got to haul the cargo." Pilot gigs were also used for rescues and in smuggling operations.

Built under the aegis of the Gloucester Museum School, the *Siren Song* was originally used by a group of women training to row



**The Gloucester Maritime Heritage Center** champions the preservation of Gloucester's maritime industrial history and traditions. It serves as a resource for the study of maritime history, industry and ecology.

### Board of Directors

Geoffrey Richon (President) • Nancy Sullivan (Vice President)  
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Joseph Orlando Douglas Parsons Michael Patil John Rando Butch Roth  
Joel Schneider James Schoel Mark Sheldon Timothy Thurman

Harriet Webster, Executive Director

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Editor: Harriet Webster Design: Michael Ronan Graphics

## Rebuilding the Marine Railway

Jay McLaughlan *Chairman, Railway Committee*

From its inception, the Gloucester Maritime Heritage Center was envisioned as a working facility anchored by the marine railway (its major financial asset), which suffered from years of deferred maintenance and needed to be rebuilt. Brian Duffey, the head engineer at Crandall Drydock, the company that built the railway in the 1850s, did an inspection and found the machinery to be in good shape but that the chains, rollers and rails needed to be replaced. He also found that the cradle needed to be rebuilt to bring it back to the original 350 ton capacity.



The cost of the project was estimated at \$155,000. Through the generosity of the late Bill Dyer, our first treasurer, we were able to undertake the major portion of the renovation. GMHC board member Doug Parsons, previously employed as foreman at the Gloucester Marine Railways, agreed to take on the rebuilding job. Parson's underwater inspection of the railway showed that at least 40' of bed timber on the north track needed to be replaced.

Since the rails needed replacement on the base of the cradle as well as the ways, the first step was to use Geoff Richon's crane to take apart the cradle, removing weights, scaffolding, bilge blocks, and bearer timbers that connect the rail timbers. The rail timbers were then rolled 180 degrees and the old rails removed. Nearly a thousand feet of 10" x 3/4" base plate and 5" x 1 1/2" rail were ordered in twenty foot lengths and drilled to

accept 7/8" x 8" counter sunk spikes for fastening to the timbers. The timbers were tarred and faired with cement and the rails and base plates laid down on the cradle and railbed.

While the cradle was being rebuilt, the new hauling chain was laid and rove around the sprocket, which was modified to accept the new links. The new back haul chain was rove through the underwater turning sheave in the water. Bill Van Stigt assisted Parsons throughout the project. Ted Hoague, John Harvey, and Tiger Marston also assisted.

Our efforts are directed to long term restoration projects on wooden vessels. After testing, the rebuilt railway proved that the rail system was correctly restored, and the *Adventure* was hauled on January 30, 2002 and is now undergoing the rebuild of the port side forward and foredeck.

The fact that the railway was rebuilt as fast and as well as it was and for less than Crandall's original estimate is due to Doug Parsons, Bill Van Stigt, and the GMHC volunteers, who made this possible, and the vision of Geoff Richon to save this historic site as a working facility. Not only will vessels be preserved, but also the skills needed to rebuild them. Congratulations to all hands.

## GHMC Financial Update

by John McGlennon, *Treasurer*

As the result of a generous anonymous donation, we were able to hire our new Executive Director, Harriet Webster. Through a combination of gifts and purchases, we have also been able to equip our office. Please feel free to drop in.

Our first annual appeal was a great success. We raised approximately \$13,500. Thank you all for your support.

With the completion of the rehab, the railway has become an income producer. This income, combined with income from dockage, has helped put us on a self-sustainable basis. Our operating income now covers our daily expenses. Very few nonprofits only two years old can make such a statement.

We have received several contributions to fund capital improvements including new roofs for the office and ice house. We also received \$10,000 to begin the conversion of the ice house for wooden boat building and repair.

Looking ahead, we are planning a major capital campaign to raise money to finance the construction of our new visitor and education center. The center will tie the property together and will be handicapped accessible. You will hear more later this year. We are also planning to initiate a membership campaign this summer. Our goal is 500 members in 2002.

Thank you for your continued support of this effort. It amazes me how much we have accomplished with so little. This is just the beginning.



### Volunteer Opportunities



*We need your help!* If you would like to discuss any of these volunteer opportunities please call the Center at 928-281-0470.

**Site Guides** Introduce visitors to the property and show them around. Three hour slots are available from 10 am to 1 pm and 1 pm to 4 pm, weekends in May and daily starting Memorial Day. GMHC will hold a training session in May to acclimate volunteers to the features of the site. Sign on for one slot or more a week. Or choose to be a "floater," filling in on an as-needed basis.

**Event Assistants** We're looking for people to help out with organizing the open house we plan to hold this summer, the Blackburn Challenge, and a couple of fundraisers that are in the works.

**Clean Up Crew** Help get the site spruced up for the visitor season. Join us at 9 am on April 20th, prepared to get dirty.