Sitka Maritime Heritage Society

Newsletter Winter 2021

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Reconstruction: clockwise from top left: the Northeast wall "before;" removing the siding, after marking and photographing in place; the wall after repairing framing; plywood sheathing on; beginning the siding, after tarpaper and breather strips were installed; the addition with siding and new windows installed; installing the new windows; the addition in tarpaper and priming siding. Center: the NE wall with new siding in place. Photos by SMHS.

Construction Work 2021

With the shut down due to COVID 19, we focused on work on the building, with small, socially-distanced work parties Saturday mornings since late summer of 2020.

We put our labor toward a match for a Historic Preservation Fund grant, which successfully wrapped up in June of 2021, for rebuilding the wall, putting siding on the addition, getting windows made for the addition, and starting on steps and ramps. Volunteer labor made up the entirety of the SMHS match for the grant, leveraging over $20,000 in grant funds.

Thanks to skilled and able volunteers, we have completely rebuilt the wall, doors and door jambs, the siding is on the addition and our new windows installed. We just put on the last pieces of siding, what on a boat might be called the "whisky planks," on our rebuilt wall.

Still left to do to wrap it up for winter is to reinstall the old windows; we are adding jamb extensions for the added thickness of the wall. We will also install the rebuilt doors and new door jambs.

Since October, we have been applying volunteer hours toward a new grant (see below), which will result in repairs to the main opening and walls, new ramps and stairs, and an accessible restroom.

These grants are Historic Preservation Fund grants, federal grants that pass through the state Office of History

Continued page 3

Building a Sitka Canoe

By Rebecca Poulson

In the carving shed tucked behind the visitor center at the Sitka National Historical Park, Sitka carver Tommy Joseph and his apprentice Tim Flanery are carving a new boat of an ancient type, a 25-foot Sitka canoe. This traditional boat once was common in Sitka and throughout the region.

Tommy Joseph, at back, and apprentice Tim Flanery in the Sitka National Historica Park carving shed in October. Photo by Rich McClear.

This project is sponsored by the Sitka National Historical Park. The spruce log was cut years ago, at the head of Blue Lake before a grove of old-growth trees, that Joseph describes as a "fairy land," was inundated when the Blue Lake Dam was raised. In the long interval before funding was secured, only one section of the log was still useable. Even so, the carvers had to "chase rot" in finding the best section of the log for the canoe.

This type of spruce canoe, or seet yaakw, was also called the "Sitka canoe" probably in part because of the similarity in the sound of the words "seet" and "Sitka." The design for this canoe is based on Tommy Joseph's extensive study of Northern Style canoes in museums. He carved an elegant scale model based on examples of canoes in the City Museum in Juneau, the Sheldon Museum in Haines, and the Sheldon Jackson Museum. He has also studied canoes from our region in museums in the Lower 48. Joseph has also used historical photographs, which have information about design but also offer a glimpse of the multitude of uses the boats had, from groups of traders rafted up next to a ship, a group of women apparently heading out on an expedition, or individuals engaged in hunting or fishing. Canoes like this were also used for hunting fur seals on the open ocean.

Joseph says that some canoes had curved bow and stern, and others had straight ends. While most photos show canoes all of one type or the other, some photos show a mix of both types. Another special type of canoe was made in Yakutat, a small canoe with a cutwater, and canoes for the Chilkat River were carved from cottonwood.

These boats are made for open water, but were mostly used in protected bays. The hull thickness will be 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 inches. The hull of the canoe in the Sheldon Jackson Museum is only 1 inch thick, but it is a smaller boat.

The first step in carving a canoe is to get out the shape of the hull, with the canoe upside down. A line is struck down the keel, and the shape gradually carved down, to marks measured out from the centerline, starting with planing flat bevels, being careful to keep the two sides absolutely symmetrical.

The hull at the two ends is slightly hollowed out. Once the shape is done, a 6-inch grid is drawn over the entire bottom, and pegs that are the length of the ultimate thickness of the hull inserted into small holes. When the canoe is turned over and hollowed out, finding the ends of these pegs tells the builder they have achieved the final hull thickness.

While some canoes are steamed, this one will not need to be. The thwarts, the transverse pieces of wood that can be seats, will be enough to make the final shape.

A 23-foot red cedar canoe is nearing completion at UAS, by Nick Galanin, Will Burkhart and Lee Burkhart for Goldbelt Heritage of Juneau. Two others were built at Sitka, both at the Park, over the past few decades. Other than the ceremonial canoe by Herman Kitka, for the Centennial Building, these are the only canoes built in the past 100 years.

While this canoe will be used at least once, it will ultimately live in the Totem Hall. Joseph has a tree selected for his next canoe. If that tree is sound, he plans to make the canoe on site, that he'd then fit out and use with the accoutrements and traditional fishing gear he has created over the years.

Apprentice Tim Flanery comes from Ketchikan, and has both Tsimshian and Tlingit heritage. He is a marine mammal hunter and has captained canoes for the biennial canoe voyages to Celebration in Juneau. He's studied at the Totem Heritage Center, where Tommy Joseph periodically travels to teach classes. He says that a canoe is actually better for seal hunting, because the gunwale can get lower to the water for rolling a seal on board. Flanery also has plans to build canoes after this one, for use in hunting and for culture education, bringing back into use a great, local vessel.

Continued from page 1

and Archaeology, then through the City and Borough of Sitka as a Certified Local Government. We are grateful for our relationship with the City and its Historic Preservation Commission, in bringing federal dollars to Sitka to improve our historic infrastructure and interpretation.

Special thanks to volunteers Megan Propst, Greg Watchers and Terry Perensovich who made this all possible. Work parties are continuing and involve donuts and training in historic preservation methods and theory. If you have interest in volunteering, email **sitkamaritime@gmail.com.**

Grants Awarded

In early October, 2021, a $24,000 grant from the Historic Preservation Fund for work on the Japonski Island Boathouse was officially authorized, through the City and Borough of Sitka as a Certified Local Government. This grant is to rebuild the main opening on the beach side of the building, rebuild the wall next to the addition, build decks, stairs and ramps, and start on installing an accessible restroom in the addition. We are keeping right along with the volunteer work, all of which can be used as match on this grant.

We also received grants from the Rotary Club of Sitka, and from the Sitka Legacy Fund, for building the ramps, stairs and decks, to be done by a contractor in spring or summer 2022. All of this work should culminate in getting public occupancy, and full accessibility, in 2022. Thank you.

New Materials on Website

Recently added materials to the SMHS website (sitkamaritime.org) include our updated **walking tour map**, which includeds an identification guide to Sitka's fishing fleet, and a brief **maritime history of Sitka.**

We also have a copy of a letter describing memories of early 20th century gold mining town of Chichagoff, written by Larry Freeburn to Jack Calvin, and shared with us by Jack's nephew Larry Calvin.

2022: Maritime History Tour and Book, Annual Meet, More

Plans are in the works to conduct live **Sitka Maritime History Walking Tours** in the summer of 2022. The tour text was presented on our 2021 4th of July cruise, where it was well received, and is now on our website, including the little-known "real" story of Alexander Baranov and the relationships between Tlingit people and the Russians.

The **walking tour map** is on the website and can be downloaded. We will be printing and distributing the map as a brochure to visitor venues next summer.

Most exciting, we are working on publishing a small **book of Sitka's maritime history**, that will be based on the Sitka fishing history exhibit that will be in the northeast wing of the Boathouse. The fishing history exhibit was developed in 2019 with the help of the Sitka Tribe of Alaska's Cultural Resources Committee. Installation was put on hold until the space meets standards for occupancy as a museum, which should happen in 2022.

The **2022 Annual Meeting** is tentatively scheduled for late March. Other events, including a historical maritime true crime presentation, talks and workshops are planned for when it's safe again to gather in person.

Do you have ideas for the Annual Meeting theme, or events or classes you'd like to see? email sitkamaritime@gmail.com or leave a comment at sitkamaritime.org with your ideas!

2021 Annual Business Sponsors - THANK YOU for your support!

Old Salt Level ($1000)
- ✯ Hames Corporation
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- ✯ Sitka Soup
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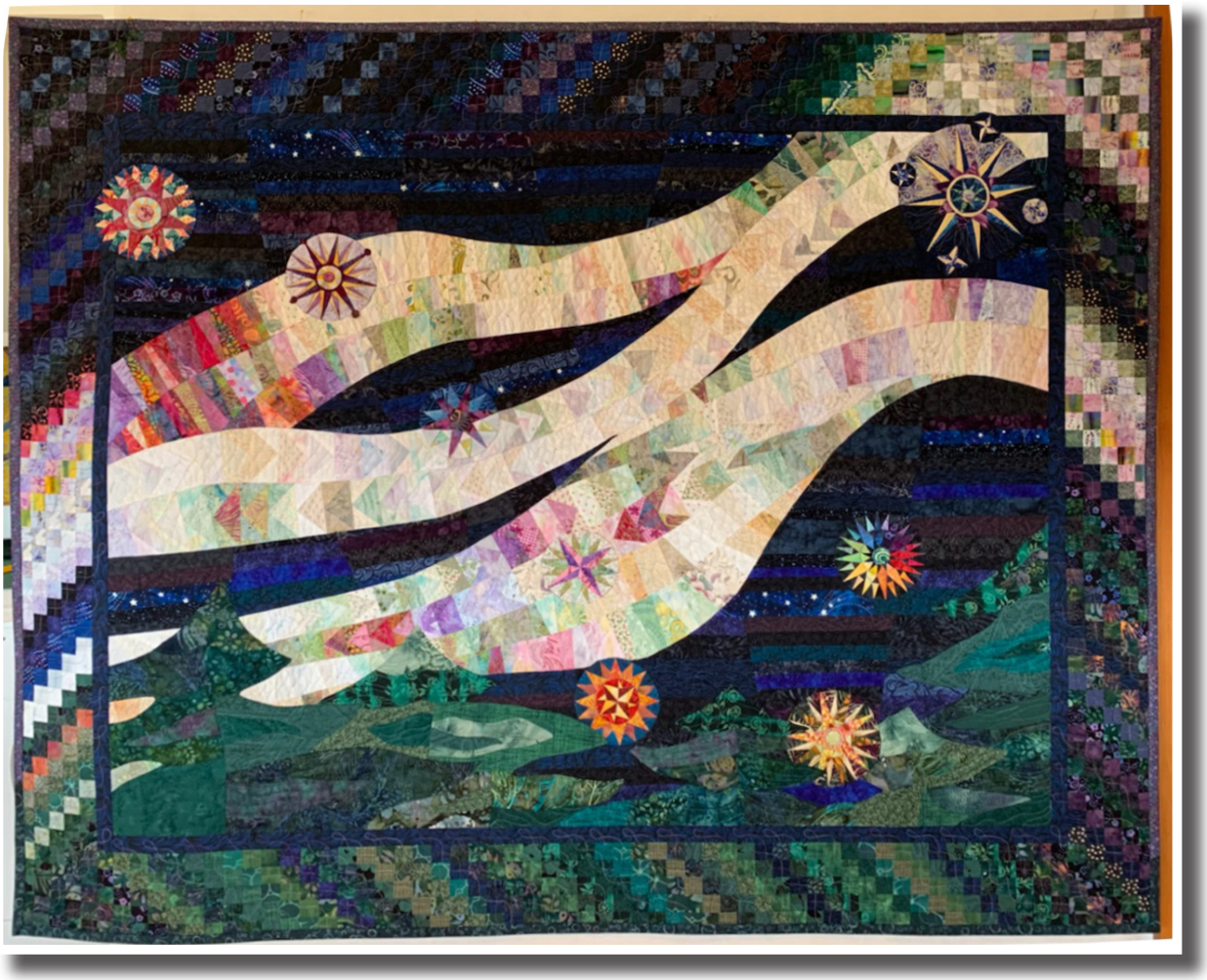
- ✯ Skookum Canvas Works
- ✯ M/V Eigil B
- ✯ Norcoast Marine Surveyors

Our Annual Business Sponsors help us to cover the core needs of operations and allows us to continue our important work, preserving and sharing Sitka's maritime heritage.

For more about becoming an Annual Business Sponsor for 2022 see the Join/Donate page of our website, or call (907) 623-8054



This quilt, titled A Beacon Bright, designed and created by Joanna Perensovich, is the top prize for a raffle that will run through our Annual Meeting in 2022. This original work of art measures 64 inches wide by 52 inches high. This would be a stunning focal point for your home or workplace, a thing of beauty and delight.

Win This Quilt!

Sitka artist Joanna Perensovich has designed and created this gorgeous quilt as a fund raiser for the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society. 500 tickets, at $20 each, will be available by contacting us at sitkamaritime@gmail.com or calling (907) 623-8054.

Check the website, **sitkamaritime.org**, for special times and locations they will be available for sale.

In addition to this work of art other prizes are a framed reproduction of a painting of a sailing ship, and a portable VHF radio, generously donated by LFS Marine Supplies.

2021 Fourth of July Cruise

Thanks to the generosity of Allen Marine, we were able to do our annual July 4th fundraising wildlife and history cruise, with reduced capacity to keep it safe.

This year, in addition to seeing whales, whales, and more whales, provoking gasps from the most seasoned observers, and seeing sea birds and sea otter, we had a presentation on the maritime history of Sitka, busting some myths about the Russians and bringing in the major contributions and achievements of Sitka's Tlingit and Tsimshian boatbuilders, fishermen and civil rights leaders. Text from the talk is at sitkamaritime.org/maritime-history.

Apply to the SMHS Board

If you'd like to be part of shaping the direction of SMHS and projects moving forward, we are looking for new members of the board. Do you have an interest in creating a world-class maritime heritage programs, in an authentic, WWII boat shop? email sitkamaritime@gmail.com or fill out the form on the website to apply!

Be Part of Preserving Sitka's Maritime Heritage

The foundation of our work is membership and donations. Use the enclosed form or go on line to **join or renew your membership, good through March 2023.**

Your support is more valuable than ever as we emerge from the pandemic. The downturn meant our director Laura Bennett had to move on, but her excellent work laid the foundation for moving forward, preserving this National Historic Landmark building as a fully functioning, and fully staffed, public maritime heritage center. Thank you for being part of it!