

THE HELM



Spring/Summer 2016 - Vol. 33, No. 1

Elf, past and future



President's Message Mixed Bag of Weather

... by Rick Carrion

This year's weather certainly has been a mixed bag! It made our annual maintenance and restoration schedule fall victim to the elements. The cool, wet spring made it hard to get varnish on the mast, topmast, booms and bowsprit. Fortunately I was able to get a couple of coats on the mast last fall. Marlin Plymette was very helpful sanding, varnishing, rigging and stepping the rig, then bending on sails with the clock ticking. We were ready with the 6th Annual ELF Classic Race only a couple of days later. In this HELM please find two race articles: one by Dick Cooper and one by Marlin Plymette, each with different perspectives. Then, plan ahead for next year's race May 13, 2017!

As the summer started with one heat wave after another, along with many thunderstorms, it was impossible to get finishes on as needed. We wanted to go sailing more, but it's hard to muster a crew, much less Captain, (!) to sail when the heat index tops 100 and winds are held back by high humidity. Now the hurricane season is getting into full force, so we have just another issue to be watchful of.

Over the spring season we did have a marine survey of ELF completed for insurance, and I am very happy to report ELF is in excellent condition. A few very minor items were found and corrected. We decided not to haul ELF out for painting the bottom this year because our Interlux (International Paints) representative told me last year the paint they give us is good for two years. And secondly, ELF is not leaking.

This is the ninth season ELF has been sailing since the completion of the restoration efforts. And believe

it or not this in my forty seventh year captaining ELF. It has truly been a GREAT way of life.

This year we started taking Miles River Yacht Club Junior Sailors out aboard ELF. It is fun to answer all the questions and impart knowledge about the environment, weather, tides and navigation aboard such a traditional vessel.

We have had much success offering ELF for photo shoots as a new way of raising revenue. We have hosted photo shoots of wedding parties, family reunions, product endorsements, and special events. Please share this idea with friends and associates who may be interested in a real traditional nautical photo experience. Prices range from \$250-\$500 for dockside events. Corporate product endorsements start at \$2,000 a day.

Finally, plan NOW to join us for our 35th Annual Crab Feast-Silent Auction-BBQ, September 17 with rain date September 18. As always, we appreciate donations for our silent auction, as this event is an important fundraiser for CYRG and ELF. I do hope you can make it and bring friends. The price is \$45 for members and \$60 for non-members. The crabs are really great this year, so please send in the form or let me know that you plan to attend by September 14. RSVP's make planning much easier!

Despite the incredibly hot and humid summer, we have been having another fine year at our homeport at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum (CBMM) in St. Michaels, MD. There has been a dramatic interest in ELF, and many visitors have made a special effort to thank us for saving a true national maritime treasure. It is through ongoing support from members like you who have made this wonderful organization continue and expand its outreach. Thank you for your continued encouragement, help and guidance. I look forward to welcoming you on board ELF wherever and whenever possible!!

Thank You!

The Elf Classic: A Yacht Race where Old Boats Rule

... by Dick Cooper

The very name of the Elf Classic Yacht Race says as much about the tone and tenor of the competition as it does the nature of its participants. The words “classic” and “yacht” are much more descriptive of the event than the word “race.” Unlike the more common round-the-buoy or distance sailboat races, the captains do not jockey their hydro-dynamically-designed vessels with bullet-proof sails into just the right spot to catch the perfect zephyr that will propel them hell-bent for the starting line.

the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels.

For the last six years, the Elf Classic has begun when skippers gather their vessels off Eastport Yacht Club in Annapolis and drop anchor. They then nimbly climb into their respective dinghies and row to the clubhouse for a morning cup of coffee, some polite banter and pre-race instructions. While the captains are sipping a second cup ashore their crews ready the sails, watch the breeze and check incoming tide and weather patterns.



Skippers race to their boats for the start of the Eastport Yacht Club

The *Elf* after all is the dowager countess of American sailboats with an impeccable pedigree. The elegant gaff-rigged cutter was built by George Lawley & Sons, a very proper Boston boatyard, in 1888 for sailors in the Gilded Age. An all-out scrum with overly aggressive A-types barging through the fleet yelling “starboard” at each other just would not do.

The *Elf* race harkens back to a time when pleasing seaworthy lines and fine craftsmanship were more important than raw speed. The builders of *Elf* used a smooth half model, fine woods and a keen eye for the asthenic rather than tank testing, computer-aided designs and chemical composites to craft her hull.

Elf's master Rick Carrion, the retired high school teacher who spent much of the last half century caring for and restoring the oldest actively-sailed racer/cruiser in the country, says he got the idea for the race while researching the boats history.

“The Boston yachtsmen of the day used to work half-days on Fridays and take the train to their boats in Marblehead,” Carrion says. “The race would begin when the doors of the train opened and they dashed off to row to their boats on moorings, tip their hats to one another and then race off for the weekend,” he says. “It was a gentlemen’s race.”

And so it was that Carrion and the board members of the Classic Yacht Restoration Guild, the non-profit that owns *Elf*, started the Inaugural Elf Race in 2011. Headed up each year by long-time CYRG Board Member and Race Committee Chair Bill Sonntag and Deborah Albers, the race has continued to grow. Twenty-two vintage vessels participated this year.

The rules were simple and written to conform as closely as possible to the old New England style. There are no handicaps. Trophies are awarded to boats that are “best dressed” at anchor, the first to get under way and the first three to sign in at the official finishing table at

But that all changes with the BOOM of a cannon. All chivalry and manners are chucked overboard as the captains dash to their dinghies and madly row back to their boats. Sometimes their efforts turn into panic as they see competitors getting an upper hand. Some have been known to capsize their small tenders. Others have dropped oars in the rush and on at least one occasion a captain failed to notice a stray dog patiently sitting in the stern, forcing him to briefly abandon course, return to the dock and release the stowaway before heading back to his boat.

Once onboard, the crews haul the ground tackle, run up the sails and try valiantly to get control of their boats. Some fending may be required and in a recent race a crewmember was ordered back into the dinghy to push the bow of his boat through the wind before it drifted onto a nearby shoal.

And then they are off, bound as quick as they can across the Chesapeake Bay to the finish 25 miles away in Fogg Cove off the docks of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St.



Michaels. There the rules call for the captains to again anchor under sail, climb into their dinghy, row ashore and sprint to the race committee tent and sign in their time of arrival.

The Elf Classic has attracted an eclectic collection of boats that run the gamut from day-sailors to log canoes to topsail schooners. Before the start, the anchored fleet looks like an antique show. Captains are more likely to chat about their



Elf sets sail!

40, *Someday*.

Observers should not be fooled by the “old school” look of the boats. Once the race has begun, each skipper is intent on winning. After all, thanks to major race sponsor Fordham Brewing of Dover, Delaware, the winning skipper is awarded his weight in beer. And, like all other races, the captains and crew look forward to the party at the end when they can rehash the day’s events and learn from the competition. At the awards ceremony CBMM President Kristen Greenaway presented the trophies to this year’s winners and thanked Carrion and the Elf Classic organizers for continuing to showcase the history of sailing and honoring classic vessels.



Rick Carrion at the helm of Elf outruns the Storm

favorite brand of teak varnish than what type of ultra-slick paint they use on the bottom of their boats. Two-thirds of the racers have wooden hulls.

The Hudson River sandbaggers, Bull and Bear from the National Sailing Hall of Fame in Annapolis take turns at being regular contestants. The small open boats put up an incredible amount of sail for their size and are accompanied across the Bay by tenders because they have no engines in the event of emergencies or light air. The crew is the moveable ballast and it takes skill and concentration to handle the fast boats. Their lines were taken from the vessels used in the Hudson River oyster trade in the last half of the 19th Century. Their captains would load them up with sandbags

Carrion says that from its humble beginnings, the Elf Classic Yacht Race continues to grow in size and importance as a venue for sailing old boats “It’s more than just restoring these old boats, it’s a way for people to see them in action. Plus, it gives the owners an event to look forward to and yet another reason to save these jewels of maritime history.”

For more information about the Classic Yacht Restoration Guild, the historic yacht *Elf* and the Classic Race, go to www.cyrg.org.



Elf and Someday

as ballast and sail out to the working oyster boats. As they loaded up with the bivalves they would jettison the sandbags to keep them on an even keel before racing back to the New York City seafood markets.

The largest single class has been the Hinckley Bermuda 40s. The relatively “new” boats, once the queens of the major East Coast racing circuit, were designed in the mid-1950s and have become popular Bay cruisers because of graceful good looks and their shallow draft. Richard and Eileen Rosenthal of Great Falls, Virginia, have won that last two Elf Classics with their 36-year-old Bermuda

Dick Cooper is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. An eBook anthology of his writings for the Tidewater Times and other publications, East of the Chesapeake: Skipjacks, Flyboys and Sailor, True Tales of the Eastern Shore, is now available on Amazon.com. Dick and his wife, Pat, live and sail on St. Michaels, Maryland. He can be reached at dickcooper@coopermediaassociates.com.

“Lawley Built”

Elf is the oldest active American racing yacht.

A CLASSIC ELF CLASSIC . . . BY MARLIN PLYMMETTE



With apologies to Wyle and Schwartz: Just sit right back and read a tale; a tale of a fateful trip. It started at Eastport Yacht Club and ended in the Chesapeake Bay. Well, ...

The main element a sail boat requires is wind. On Saturday, May 14, 2016 that element was lacking and much of the Elf Classic suffered the effects, but none any more than the 1888 racing yacht Elf, herself. Oddly, Elf was most affected by the wind and a series of unfortunate events.

On Friday, Elf, with a crew of four, motored easily from St. Michaels to Annapolis through all day showers. Aside from the rain, the trip to Annapolis was uneventful and smooth "sailing." That would all change on race day on Saturday, as Elf eventually ended the race under tow by BoatsUS and docked at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum (CBMM) late in the day in a heavy rain and wind storm.

But we jump ahead. Let's examine the 6th Annual Elf Classic from Elf's perspective.

Friday evening and Saturday morning, twenty two of the original 25 registered boats gathered and moored off the marina at Eastport Yacht Club in Annapolis in preparation for the Elf Classic.

Boats assemble in Annapolis Harbor for the start of the 6th Elf Classic





As dawn broke with a bright sun, calm air, and calm waters, the captains met on the lawn of EYC to review the race rules as they prepared for the LeMans start. When the cannon sounded at 9:00, captains ran for their tenders and rowed to their boats and hoisted sails. Captain Rick Carrion was the first to round the marina--to the cheers of the crew of 12 CYRG members, friends, and family--leap aboard Elf, salute the judges, and give the command to hoist the mainsail and get the Elf under way.



The 12 crew responded quickly, raising the anchor and hoisting the mainsail. Then—we seemed to sit and sit waiting for a puff of air. Elf and other boats launched and began to **slowly** drift away from EYC in the less than 3 knots air. Captain Rick gave the command to raise the flying jib, flying jib, and staysail.



Weeks of inclement weather had delayed the Elf preparations for the classic and the last minute rigging manifested in the form of fouled lines so we furled the forward sails. The crew hastily adjusted the lines and re-hoisted the forward sails. Meanwhile, all of the boats were encountering varying degrees of the wind frustration and unfavorable tides as they proceeded to sail for their end game at the CBMM in St. Michaels.

Miscellaneous pictures of the Elf Classic progress.



However, today was not to be Elf's day on the Chesapeake to Miles River run. As we battled fickle winds and strong tides, we watched as the competition slowly proceeded to gain a lead. By about 12:15, it was becoming evident that Elf could not overcome the wind and tide and would not be able to reach CBMM by the 3:00 race finish or -- even worse -- ahead of the impending storm threat, so Captain Rick radioed race authorities that we would be stopping the race and going onto engine power. He offered to assist any other boats that were in the same circumstances and may not have engine backup.

Then the next crisis hit Elf; the engine sputtered and stopped. Repeated attempts to clear the apparent water in the fuel lines were unsuccessful. After 30 minutes of failed attempts to restart the engine and with the approaching storm, Rick made the decision to call for a tow. BoatsUS arrived on the scene about 1:15 and threw a life line—our tow rope.



As Elf approached CBMM, the storm pursued. In the last 45 minutes of the journey, the rain and winds caught up with Elf and battered the crew. BoatsUS towed Elf to the leeward docks and we tied up next to the boat shop, bow-to-bow with the *Sultana* that had arrived earlier that day for a week of training at CBMM.

We learned that few of the boats had been able to complete the race by the 3:00 PM (1500 for you nautical and military folks) and the winners were declared by positioning. For a complete listing of the finishes and for additional Elf Classic photos, refer to the list on the CYRG website (www.cyrg.org).

As Elf safely reached her home port at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels, Captain Rick declare what the entire crew was feeling: Any day you get the crew safely to shore is a good day sailing. If not for the winds and the tides and the fact this was indeed a race, it



Marlin Plymette Member CYRG and PROUD member of the crew of Elf for the Sixth Elf Classic, May 14, 2016
It WAS a great day.

Miles River Yacht Club: Junior Sailors aboard ELF

... by Captain Rick

One of the more rewarding things about being the Captain of ELF is that I get to visit a variety of sailing clubs, organizations, history buffs and restoration enthusiasts who are excited to learn the details of ELF's life. In February, I made a Power Point presentation to members of the Miles River Yacht Club and mentioned that I would like to invite their junior sailors aboard ELF. We always need crew, and what a great way of developing a future crew base who just happen to live around the corner from ELF's home port at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum (CBMM)!

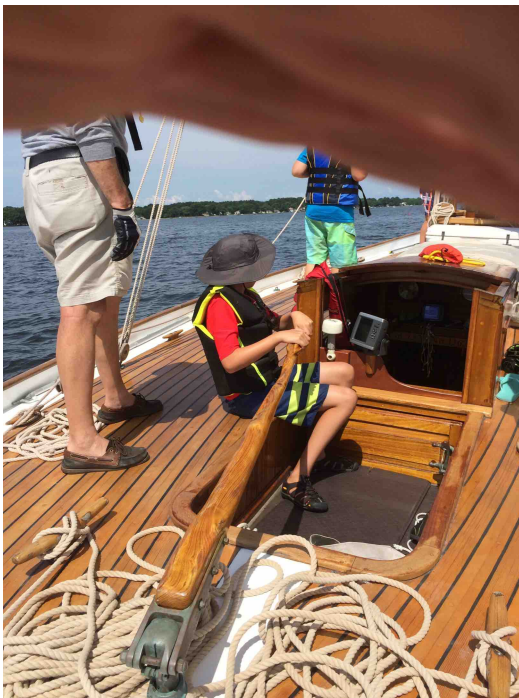
MRYC responsibly required a drug test and background check, and then we were off on adventures on the Miles River! We got as much sail up as deemed safe with such a young group of girls and boys. Most every child jumped at the chance to take the helm, certainly a bit more challenging and exciting than sailing their 8' Optis.

Carl Pergler, a CYRG board member, MRYC member and Auxiliary USCG safety officer helped coordinate this event, and did an excellent teaching job with the students steering ELF. They were excited to see the Captain crawl out to the end of the bowsprit while underway to ready the Flying Jib. We talked about how to read the wind and skies for storm potential. A

number of good sailing questions were forthcoming. It is important to engage these children at an early age to appreciate a great sport and create lasting memories. They came to understand the significance of preserving maritime history.

In addition, we explored a number of environmental issues as we watched Bald Eagles, Brown Pelicans, North American Great Blue Herons, Osprey, and Terns all hunting for their next meal. The health of the Bay is important to me and the young people on board could sense that I love it and want them to jump on the Bay bandwagon! CYRG members should be proud of our programs that engage students in the health of the Chesapeake Bay and respect the many elements that contribute to its history.

At the program's conclusion, each MRYC junior sailor received a frameable Certificate of Participation. It was not as meaningful, I think, as *our* satisfaction at providing such a fulfilling experience. This is something we can duplicate at other yacht clubs and sailing organizations and I hope CYRG members will explore options in their



Guidelines for HELM Article Submission

Articles for HELM are invited. They should be submitted, preferably in Word with .doc appended so they may be edited, if necessary. They may also be sent as a text file. Photographs are also encouraged, if available, as a jpg. Please send to Rick Carrion at cyrg.elf@gmail.com. (New address)

35th ANNUAL CYRG CRAB FEAST - September 17 (Rain Date: September 18)

DIRECTIONS TO CHERRY GROVE FARM WATERFRONT

From the North:

Take I 95 or US 40 to Elkton. Then take 213 South. Cross the second major bridge (Bohemia River). Take immediate right on Glebe Road, then see below*.

From the South:

Cross the Bay Bridge at US 50 & 30 split. Take 301 North for about 25 miles. Take left on Maryland 313 toward Galena (at yellow flasher). 313 becomes Maryland 213 North in Galena. Follow until just before Bohemia River Bridge (second major bridge). Take a left before bridge on Glebe Road.

* Follow Glebe Road for about 1.5 miles to Cherry Grove Road. Turn Right. Follow for about 1.7 miles and turn right again onto a dirt road. This will be marked for the Crab Feast. Follow straight for about 1.2 miles to the beach.

Crab Feast, BBQ, and Silent Auction Guest Registration Form

Name: _____

Number adults: _____

Members: _____ @ \$45 each

Number Children: _____

Non-Members _____ @ \$60 each

Children under 12 admitted free.

Total amount enclosed: _____

Registration Deadline: September 14

Elf, past and future



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