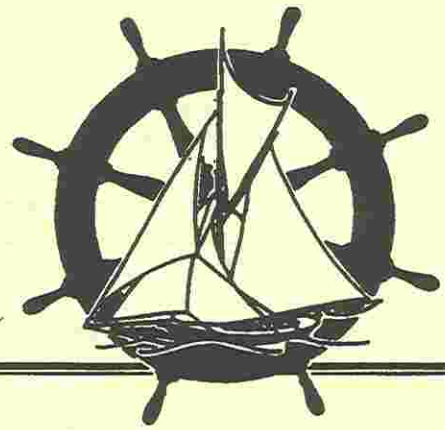


THE HELM

Fall, 2003 - Volume 21, No. 3



A PUBLICATION OF
THE CLASSIC YACHT RESTORATION GUILD, INC.

Elf, past and future



President's Message

Wind . . .

. . . by Rick Carrion

Wind is something we sailors need to move our vessels from port to port. One of a sailor's most valuable talents is the ability to read the sky to be able to anticipate the changing temper of the winds. Those who do it well are able to move along smartly, but there are those who miss subtle features and are at a loss.

The winds of Hurricane Isabel got our attention but fortunately missed a direct hit on the Chesapeake Bay area. We did have a number of storm related problems, including downed trees, electric outages and a seven foot storm surge arriving on top of the high tide cycle. For many boaters and people living along the water, the storm surge caused the most damage. Some bay-side communities are still in recovery. This is also true of many boats in the area, including some of Graham Ero's clients, whose needs are more urgent than ours at the moment. However, we hope to have Graham back on the ELF restoration soon.

On another note, I want to thank everyone who helped to make our 21st annual Crab Feast/BBQ and silent auction a tremendous success once again. September 13th started out rainy and overcast, but I decided to go with it then because I knew that Isabel was likely to shut us down the following week-end. As it turned out, the rain stopped at noon, the sun came out and it was a beautiful afternoon. We all even saw a full rainbow over the water at days end. What a stroke of luck!

Graham's Letter

Boat Builders

Boat builders, or builders in general, are unique people, and not always in the best sense of the word! We can not leave things alone. Even in the most peaceful, remote settings, we need to keep moving otherwise, we become bored and start looking around for something to build, change, salvage or fix. We can't leave well enough alone and just enjoy the unspoiled beauty. It's a sickness!

Nothing exemplifies this more than an incident that occurred during a trip I took into the Canadian wilderness some years ago. Traveling in a beautiful canvas-on-wood J.R. Robertson canoe, which I had restored myself, I found the ultimate in beauty, peace and tranquility.

At a beautiful waterfall setting, I stopped to spend a couple of days. At the base of the falls were natural water slides, rock polished smooth for eons. At the end of the slides came a sharp turn and a submerged overhang. Wedged under the rock overhang was an aluminum canoe, held there by the weight of the running water. Perhaps hundreds of canoeists had visited this site and marveled at this local attraction, probably for years, and went home to tell others about the wrecked canoe below the falls. I'm sure they were satisfied to just pass along the tale . . . but not me.

After one morning of relaxing, I became bored and decided I would not leave well enough alone but would do what no one else had done — salvage the canoe. It seemed other attempts had been made but I could do it. It was not easy, but by the end of the afternoon I dragged the canoe up on the shore, another job well done. However, the canoe was a wreck. What had looked pretty good five feet under the water and half hidden by the overhang was a broken mess on the beach. Now what? I had succeeded in creating a huge piece of trash in the middle of pristine Canadian wilderness. What was I thinking?! But this too I could fix. I pried open the ends, burned the flotation, filled the boat with rocks and, as the sun was setting over the lake, I punched a hole in the bottom of the boat with my hatchet. I pushed it out into the middle and watched it slowly sink to the

bottom some fifty feet below, never to be seen again. The wilderness setting was restored to its original state. Project completed.

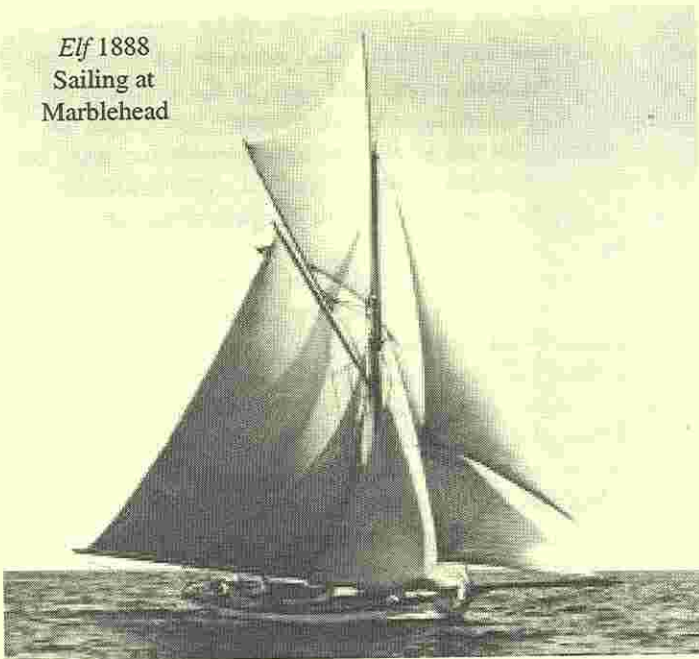
The next morning, while lounging at the base of the falls, I was surprised to hear voices. It was the first contact with people in ten days. A small group of boys was at the head of the falls chaperoned by an older gentleman. He looked ex-military. As the group grew closer I could hear the conversation. The young boys were clearly excited and in anticipation of something. My heart sank. "Where is it?" "Is it over there?" "This way boys, watch your step, it's just over here." The older gentleman guided the boys to the site. They walked to the end of the slides and all slowly peered over to look at the ledge below the running water. The look of bewilderment on the old man's face was priceless. He looked down. Then looked over his shoulder at the falls to confirm his location. Then looked down again. He seemed disoriented. The boys looked confused and a little of their confidence seemed shaken. After a while they moved on quietly. I guess that's life. I didn't have the nerve to say anything. I simply let them leave without a word. I wondered how many trips the man had led to this destination. Perhaps he had been led here as a younger man himself. Get a grip! The legend continues.

This is very much a true story and if there is any point in telling it, perhaps it is that we need to keep our attention focused on worthy projects like ELF.



Elf's Shipwright

Elf 1888
Sailing at
Marblehead



Stebbins, ELF photo courtesy of:
Hart Nautical Collections, MIT Museum

Guild Vision

The Classic Yacht Restoration Guild is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to the preservation of traditional watercraft, both power and sail. Yacht restorations are accomplished through a combination of member donated skills and resources. A cooperative educational setting is provided by the Guild for all members who wish to acquire or sharpen boat maintenance and restoration skills. Our membership is diverse. Each member can participate either as an instructor, a student of restoration techniques, a participant in Guild sailing events and cruises or as a supporter through dues and donations. The Guild also offers a variety of resources and skilled professionals who are qualified and interested in helping you connect with the right people to assist with your project.

Work on our flagship *Elf* currently involves restoration of the original rig, deck, and cabin configurations. In addition, the Guild has received donations of many small craft which are used as demonstration and education projects. Ships carpentry, rigging, mechanics, and fine wood finishing are all topics covered by periodic workshops held while restoration projects are underway.

Once a Guild vessel is made seaworthy, the true pleasure of operating historic or significant small craft begins. Members are encouraged to sail Guild vessels with emphasis on instruction of boating safety, piloting, navigation, and the maritime history of the Chesapeake Bay. The Guild plans several cruises to maritime and waterfront festivals every season. Members serve as crew and staff displays at these events.

As a non-profit organization, the Guild always welcomes tax-deductible contributions. For example, the Guild received a 1963 vintage Lightning class racing sailboat and a large library of titles on boat building, maintenance, and maritime history. Also, donation of items used for restoration or fund raising are also tax deductible.

With a growing membership, the Classic Yacht Restoration Guild looks forward to increasing activity and good times. Please ask a member for further information and details.

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WORKSHOPS

We have many different projects that may be of interest to you. They provide active, hands-on learning opportunities and give the satisfaction of helping with the ELF restoration. Just to name a few of our current projects: glazing, painting, general woodworking, varnishing, and, yes the seemingly endless SANDING.

Please call ahead to announce your arrival: 410-275-2819
EMAIL: elf1888@earthlink.net

A Love of Old Things

... by Wendy Mitman Clarke
Editor, Chesapeake Bay Magazine

So much of the inspiration to continue work on Elf has been due to the inspiration and help of Vida and Gus VanLennep. Their insights have guided many Guild Activities over the years. They have always been there for me like adopted grandparents. I look forward to the day when I can take Vida sailing on Elf.

... Rick Carrion

It is a sparkling day at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in Saint Michaels, Maryland, and no one is sitting still. Teenagers charge up the steps of the 123-year-old Hooper Strait Lighthouse and imagine the life of a lighthouse keeper. Toddlers climb into the pilothouse of the buyboat Thor, spin the steering wheel and scramble into the cozy bunk behind the helm. In the museum's boat shop, artisans are restoring a wooden skiff. In the harbor, the gorgeous log canoe Edna E. Lockwood, built in 1889 on Tilghman Island, seems to fly where she floats. And on the skipjack Rosie Parks, men run their hands over wooden spars and wonder what it must feel like to sail her on a frigid winter's morning, dredging for oysters. In the center of it all sits the elegant Tolchester Beach Bandstand, built in 1880 in the age of steamboats and gentility, and if Vida Van Lennep were visiting the museum on this day, one might expect her to be taking in the shade here, her long legs crossed primly. On the other hand, that would presume that ninety-two-year-old Vida Van Lennep might want to sit still. And that is not something this woman—whose inspiration and motivation helped create this remarkable museum dedicated to Bay culture—has ever done.

It's one of life's little ironies that the woman behind this museum isn't even from here. She and her husband Gus Van Lennep, Jr., were from Philadelphia. They had met in Cape May on the Jersey shore, fell in love on a sailboat, and it was a sailboat that brought them to Saint Michaels and the Chesapeake. Specifically, a thirty-seven-foot gaff-rigged beauty called Elf, built in 1888 by the renown Boston boatbuilder George Lawley. "When we were married in 1931 we were given a nest egg of one-thousand dollars, and we saw an ad in Yachting [magazine], and, well, there she is," she says, pointing to a painting hanging near her door of a sharp little boat biting the breeze. "There went our nest egg, plus two hundred dollars." They also saw an ad in Yachting for a reputable boat builder in Oxford, and so after doing what they could with her themselves, they sailed Elf to the Bay for some extensive work. "We just fell in love with it. Saint Michaels was a dear little town. The side streets were all oyster shell. The houses were wood and most of them didn't have much paint. It was a watermen's town and I guess they didn't have time to paint."

For two people who found grace in age and beauty beneath the rough exteriors, the small Eastern Shore

town quickly became home. In 1937 they moved for good and bought Rolles Range, a home built in 1751. "We like old houses—we're a little nutty that way," she says, speaking of Gus as though he is in the room with her, though he died several years ago. "We just like old things." A few years later they bought Crooked Intention, a farmhouse dating from 1710. "All the original paneling was there, so we were intrigued. It needed everything, but we were just young enough and nutty enough to do it." Vida had attended the Philadelphia School of Industrial Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and Gus was a lawyer by training. But when they came to Saint Michaels they ended up restoring old houses, farming, churning butter and cooking on a coal range. One year, Vida says, Gus had an oyster boat built, named it Retriever and went oystering. Just to see what it was like.

It was probably inevitable that their love of "old things," as Vida calls them, as well as their passion for hard-working boats, got them thinking about a museum devoted to the Bay's maritime heritage. "It got started because there wasn't one," she says simply. Though The Mariners' Museum in Newport News, Virginia, had an exhibit about the Bay, its focus was far broader. Nowhere was there a museum devoted only to Bay craft and culture. So they started doing their homework. They visited The Mariners' Museum and soaked up the valuable experience of its then-curator Robert Burgess. They went to Mystic Seaport and consulted with the Maryland Historic Trust, which literally opened up its basement to them to borrow musty old maritime artifacts. Then they made the museum happen. *(Continued on the following page)*



Vida and Rick
Taken aboard Elf in the late 1980's

"She was the catalyst, she and Gus," says John Valliant, now the museum's director. "Without their continued energy and enthusiasm and pushing things, it probably would have just plodded along. It really took off as a result of their involvement." In the museum archives is a yellowed newspaper clipping showing an eager young Valliant, in sixth grade, handing over a check to the handsome Gus Van Lennep, vice president of the Historic Society of Talbot County. The class won the money for its Johnny Applesseed float in the Halloween Parade, and they donated it to the fledgling museum.

In 1963, the Historic Society of Talbot County agreed to develop the museum, formed an organizing committee and raised \$50,000 to purchase three old buildings on the Saint Michaels waterfront that would become its nucleus. "A sudden awakening has taken place to the fact that the bugeye, the skipjack, the log sailing canoe, the pungy, the sharpie, the schooner, the sloop, the crab skiff, the batteau, the brogan would in the not-too-distant future become things of the past," the organizing committee wrote in its prospectus. "So why not do something to preserve them in a museum, on land and on water? Thus tribute would be paid to these vessels and their functioning, and to the men who built and sailed them."

Vida, in a Washington Star story published March 28, 1965, put it more succinctly: "We want to save what we can, at a time when things are dropping out of sight overnight." As head of the curator's committee, she put out the call that would soon overrun her house with models and books, binnacles and tools. Today, she laughs about trying to stumble around her home without breaking her neck as she frantically stacked up piece after precious piece, waiting for renovations on the museum's buildings to finish so she could install the beginning of its collection. "Our house was so full of stuff we couldn't entertain or anything," she says, "but it was a lot of fun."

Among those early donations were a fifty-five-foot Alden yawl (later sold), an 1895 log canoe, an early 1900s binnacle from the Annapolis sidewheeler Gov. Emerson E. Harrington, lanterns, models and watermen's tools. And best of all, the oyster schooner J.T. Leonard, built in 1882 on Taylors Island, on loan during the off season. When the museum opened on a shining spring day, May 22, 1965, with some 1,500 people looking on, including state and federal dignitaries, the long bowsprit of the Leonard was in the foreground of nearly every photo, tied up along the bulkhead right in front of the new museum. The photos ran in newspapers as venerable as the New York Times and as far afield as the Columbus Dispatch in Ohio. Saint Michaels was suddenly on the map.

Of course, that was only a beginning. The museum had no paid staff, and so Vida signed on as a full-time volunteer curator. Under her inspired leadership and wide open mind, the museum bloomed like a shadbush in spring. In the archives today are dozens of photos of her, usually surrounded by a cadre of men, accepting a log canoe model or a check or a cache of historic photographs. Invariably she stands straight-backed, her feet together just so, wearing a stylish skirt or dress and jacket and a smile on her face. She hadn't been curator a year before she snapped up what remains the museum's showstopper, the Hooper Strait Lighthouse. The Coast Guard was decommissioning most of the Bay's old lighthouses, and Hooper Strait had stood watch over Tangier Sound since the late 1870s. Its charming cottage architecture was pure Chesapeake Bay. It weighed forty tons and

would be sawn in half, disconnected from its pilings and barged up the Bay to its new home on Navy Point. It was a crazy idea. Vida loved it. "It was a big order, that's true," she says. "But it seemed then like anything could happen." When the barge hove into view on a late autumn day in 1966, most of the town showed up to watch, and the schools let the kids out to witness the amazing sight. "It was just sort of breathtaking," she says. "It looked like an old six-sided sugar bowl. They took the top off and set it on the side with the finial on top. That's exactly what it looked like."

Aside from the lighthouse's historical value, it was a brilliant public relations move—the old lighthouse, and the town and museum were written up in magazines and countless newspapers. By 1969, the museum achieved independence from the Historic Society of Talbot County, and had attracted more than 100,000 visitors. In November of that year, it hired its first full-time curator and director, and Vida quietly moved into the background. Today, the museum owns eighteen acres and has nine exhibit buildings and 7,000 members. More than 91,000 people visit annually. Its collection includes 8,000 artifacts, 85 boats, 2,700 photos, 220 oral histories, 73 manuscript collections and an 8,900-volume library. Its auditorium is named after Vida and Gus Van Lennep.

Vida lives quietly in nearby Easton, in a modern home full of lovely old things, like the eighteenth-century mantelpiece over the fireplace and the Schoenhutt dolls she painstakingly restores. She still sits up straight like a proper lady, dresses with style, has a ready sense of humor and may be inclined to call you "dearie"—and you won't mind a bit. Having seen all that has changed on the Chesapeake in nearly seventy years, she is grateful she and Gus never gave up on their dream of a place dedicated to the Bay's maritime culture and past. And so, most definitely, are a lot of other people.

Excerpted from Window on the Chesapeake, published by the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network and the Mariner's Museum, Newport News, Virginia. Used with permission.

*Elf 1888
Off Marblehead
Courtesy MIT Museum*



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We would like to hear from members for a potential letters column. Scuttlebutt is also invited. You could perhaps post interesting upcoming events. Please E-mail to me: elf1888@earthlink.net and CC to ray.zeigler@verizon.net. Be sure to put CYRG HELM in the subject window.

BOOK ON *ELF* IN THE WORKS

We have a member that is starting to organize a rough draft of a book about *ELF*. It will include the history, the people who have owned and worked on her, and the restoration project. Now is the time to think back to some memorable moment you recall aboard *ELF*. Who knows? You may be published. So please send them to me soon and we may also publish them in the HELM.

SHARE THE HELM WITH FRIENDS

We would be glad to send you future issues of our newsletter HELM electronically in pdf files. It would save us time and money and then you could post or forward it easily to friends. Please make a special request on the membership form and be sure to specify the E-mail address you want it sent to.

LONG LEAFYELLOW PINE

It was reported in WOODEN BOAT MAGAZINE that there are only about 1,000 acres of boat quality long-leaf yellow pine on earth. My sawyer in Georgia recently called and informed me that he had just received permission to cut some that will make top quality spars and bowsprit for *ELF*. Needless to say I was delighted to hear the news. While he is set up and cutting, he will rough out two of each piece we need. We ordered two of everything to reduce down time in the case of any failure. We also ordered extra planking stock to be cured and ready for any of *ELF*'s future needs. If you have a boat building project in need of some, please let me know ASAP!!!

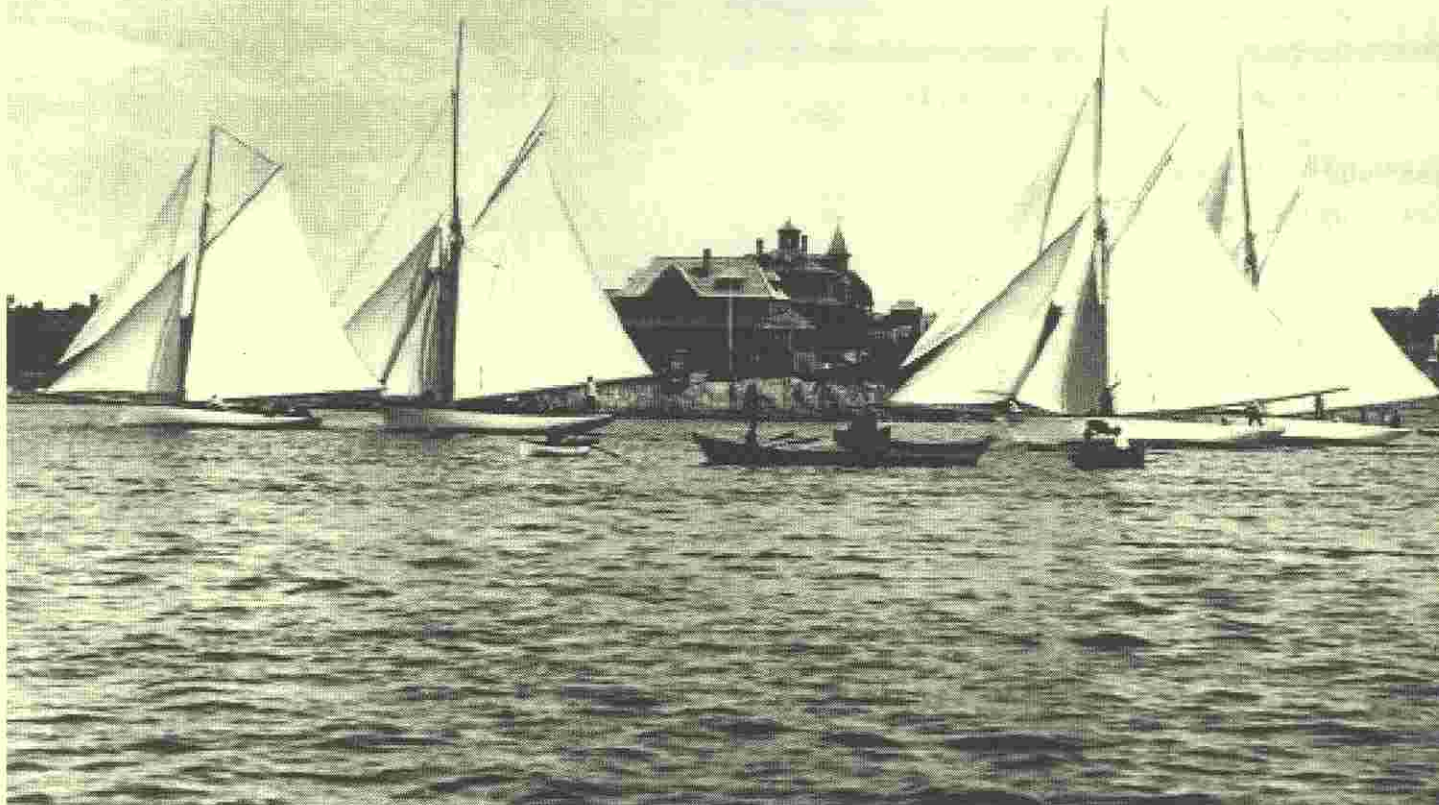
Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing-absolutely nothing-half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats.

Kenneth Grahame

Landfall and Departure mark the rhythmical swing of a seaman's life.

Joseph Conrad

Elf 1888
The Gentlemen's Race at
Marblehead
Courtesy MIT Museum



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The Classic Yacht Restoration Guild, Inc.
P.O. Box 237
683 Pond Neck Road
Earleville, MD 21919-0237