

THE HELM

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Elf, past and future



President's Message

Thank You for Preserving an American Maritime Treasure

... by Rick Carrion

Over the past few years I have had several visitors come aboard ELF and thank the Guild and me for preserving one of America's maritime treasures. I must admit that it has taken me somewhat by surprise and has been a real ego boost. I told the visitors about the Guild and how we all worked so hard to restore ELF to her 1888 configuration, something that I could not have done alone. Granted it took over seventeen years. Using original photographs of ELF from 1888 through the late 1890's as guides, I am thrilled to say that we finished the restoration and were ready to share her with the world.

When I purchased ELF in 1971, at age nineteen, she was a derelict and no one had any idea of her real pedigree. She was scheduled to be scuttled that fall if no one purchased her. It was a few years later that I found her documentation numbers while scraping paint on the interior. The numbers were carved into the aft side of the main beam, which is directly behind the mast. With such a large rig she worked the beam and needed a sister beam for additional strength. But when the additional beam was installed the shipwrights sandwiched the numbers, hiding them for years, and filling the bottom of the numbers with layers of paint.

After I found the numbers, I carefully used dental tools to remove the layers of paint. Then I painted them with white paint and used a darker color to highlight the background. I then read the numbers by shining a flashlight into the gap between the beams. Once I had the numbers I sent them to the US Office of Documentation. Several months later, I received a copy of the original documentation from the National Archives.

That validated the numbers, and gave me a name to research: ELF. What a stroke of luck!

Where to start the research was the next issue. I sent letters to sixteen Maritime museums along the East Coast and received a mix of stories and associated information. It felt as though I had really hit the jackpot when we received images of ELF on the ways and sailing in the 1880's and 1890's. I was amazed to see ELF in her real glory with her big rig, and it brought tears to my eyes. I knew then that I had to make every effort to restore her properly. The question was, HOW? I knew that it would be impossible on a teacher's salary. My motto was that anything is possible, as long as you want to do it badly enough.

I began by having ELF listed on the National Register of Historic Places, March 26, 1980. In 1982 the Classic Yacht Restoration Guild, Inc. (a 501 C 3 nonprofit membership organization) was formed. The primary goal was to facilitate the restoration of ELF and other classic vessels. A second goal was to educate members with the skills necessary for keeping the vessels alive. We were attending shows, holding fundraisers, and taking members sailing aboard ELF. As the Guild was gaining momentum, I officially donated ELF in 1988 for the restoration effort.

On July 7, 1991 we hauled ELF out of the water and trucked her to my back yard to start the Restoration. Our Boatwright, Graham Ero, and I started taking her apart and getting the restoration under way. At first, we thought it would take only a couple of years. However, after we started to realize her actual needs and the toll a hundred years of maritime conditions had inflicted we knew we had to replace everything but the keel. Therefore, the two-year project turned into over seventeen years of effort. Launch dates were set and missed, but ELF eventually splashed on April 11, 2008, although there was still much work to do.

We have had the opportunity to sail and display ELF at a number of special events over the past four years. Through your generous contributions of time, money, materials, and compliments, we have surpassed our goals. I want to thank you for helping to save and preserve a real American Maritime Artifact. We achieved this success only through your generous help and support! WE THANK YOU!

