

AN INSIDE VIEW OF THE 2017 SAIL BOSTON WINDJAMMER PARADE

Missed Op-Sails

I felt bad missing out on the last big windjammer parade in Boston (in 2000) and the equally big one in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada the same year. I could have easily driven there, but I got totally overwhelmed figuring out where I would see it from and what I would actually see, and how I would get there and stay there, along with the throngs of other spectators wanting the same.

So, when the next big Boston parade of sail was announced, I decided to find a plan B to see those big old windjammers like the ones my grandfather had sailed on as a young man. I felt I owed it to him to gawk, admire and pay my respects to the bygone days of the great commercial sailing fleet. He had told me stories about sailing around the Horn to northern Chile in the saltpeter trade as well as to Sydney, Australia in the wool trade. As a kid I had longingly looked at a picture of him at the wheel, clad in full oilskins, as well as marveled at the smallish bark Minna Helene that he had sailed on. I wanted to do the same, but as you know, German history made this impossible, and I ended up being a university professor in the far-away land of Maine, USA.

But then one day, I heard that the Maine schooner American Eagle was going to sail from Rockland, Maine to Boston from June 14-24, and be part of the Sail Boston parade on June 17. I had sailed with skipper John Foss twice before and instantly e-mailed him that I would be interested in coming along, in cabin J, as before.

Almost a year went by, and I had already given up being one of the 28 lucky guys seeing the parade, when I got a brief note saying "you are on, in cabin J". I was elated. Just think, no long drive to Boston, no transportation, parking, housing, feeding and crowd problems (Boston expected 2 million visitors). I was even going to be part of the parade of 50 tall ships from 14 countries, not just seeing it from some distant, crowded viewing point, without food, beer and bathroom. And to boot, I would get the chance to sail on that lovely, classic 92' wooden Gloucester-built schooner for 10 days, sailing down the Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts coastlines to Boston Harbor and back up again.

It helps to have an understanding wife to let me go, help scrape up the money, and drive me to Rockland, a mere 2 hours away from our home.

The sail down to Bean-town

At 6 p.m. on June 14, 2017, 28 windjammer fans from all over the US as well as 6 crew miraculously appeared at the Rockland dock for the check-in. Skipper, crew and the other 27 passengers were as excited as I was, and everybody could not wait to get going. However, after a brief introduction and the obligatory safety drill, most everybody hit the sack, since we had a very long day ahead of us.

Author about to board Rockland schooner American Eagle

Lines were cast off at sunrise (about 5 a.m.), as we motor-sailed toward the breakwater lighthouse and the entrance of Mussel Ridge Channel in Owl's Head. Breakfast was served on deck in that very protected thoroughfare. Visibility was great, but the wind had sprung up from the southeast, and the seas were getting noticeably rougher. We put in a reef in the main, and we were still heeling, sailing hard on the wind, so that water came rushing through the scuppers, keeping the starboard deck wet and impassable. Everybody on the foredeck got drenched, even after we had lowered main and jib. So Skipper ordered everybody on deck to don life jackets. Most of us wore Gore-Tex rain suits, and quite a number of the guests were already clutching water buckets, looking downright miserable. I loved it! This was sailing for me! On every bigger wave, when the boat fell off the crest, the bell on the fore mast rang with one eerie, ominous clang...

I had thought we would anchor off Peaks Island in Casco Bay for the night, as we did in previous trips, but no, skipper pushed on all the way to Gloucester, Massachusetts, Beauport, "the good harbor", as Champlain had named it in 1605. After 17 hours and 120 miles we finally dropped anchor behind the mighty breakwater off Niles Beach. Many of us were breathing a sigh of relief, finally being able to clutch a drink in one hand, and a hunk o' cheese 'n' cracker in the other. It was 10 p.m. This first day had definitely turned rougher than most of us had anticipated. For many of the other passengers, it was the roughest day at sea ever, and all hoped for a smoother second day into Boston.

We pushed off early again, about 5:00 a.m., but the reef stayed in, and we encountered about the same as yesterday, plus fog. We were instructed by the Sail Boston organizers to anchor off Nahant Island, just north of Boston Harbor, which would serve as the staging area for the parade the next day. Numerous tall ships and schooners were already there, bounding at anchor in the shallower waters and big swells. Skipper Foss wisely decided to sail deeper into Boston Bay and anchor in the more sheltered gap between Long and Spectacle Island. The Camden ketch Angelique had the same idea. Good choice, since the fog closed in for good.

What about the fireworks behind Spectacle Island, but more importantly, the parade tomorrow? Would it be canceled, or would all boats ghost in in a grey cloak of misty, gloomy FOG? We did not come for that! And as I was thinking those bad thoughts, the fireworks started and were even visible high above Spectacle Island. I called everybody on deck to see it, and the mood improved noticeably.

The fog on the morning of June 17 was even thicker, but nobody spoke of canceling the show. First we had to sail out again to the staging area off Nahant, where we saw even fewer boats...but they were there, for sure. We heard a chorus of foghorns. We were then notified the parade was postponed for one hour, then two... And would you believe it, the fog lifted ever so slowly. We could see the big 3-masted barque Europa as well as the sleek schooner Adirondack, with whom we were to parade in. I also recognized the Canadian schooner Bluenose II, as well as the two Massachusetts based schooners Adventure and Roseway. The Coast Guard barque Eagle led the parade, followed by

the huge square riggers Esmeralda, Union, Guayas and Alexander von Humboldt II. There even was a reproduction of a 16th-century Spanish galleon in the parade, the El Galeon Andalucia.

When we finally got to the entrance of the inner harbor at Castle Island, it was jam-packed with spectators, and the fog was nothing more than a minor nuisance. The full parade made it fine towards the Charlestown Navy Yard, where tugs with big, padded bow pushers stood by to assist the bigger boats turning around. We headed for pier #4, right beside the USS Constitution dock, in full view of the Charles River locks, the Zakim bridge and the impressive Boston skyline. Four other schooners tied up, two abreast, at that same pier #4 (Angelique, Spirit of South Carolina, Harvey Gamage, Shenandoah). It turned into a jolly schooner gam.

This was it, we were in, and the parade, according to the news media, was a great success, the biggest one ever, we learned, when they came aboard to interview a few of us. As the sun came out, we felt very accomplished and proud. We jovially waved to the endless stream of spectator boats filing by. I was sipping a proper Sam Adams Boston Lager, while taking many too many pictures. It felt good! I did it! It all worked out, but was not really easy.

On shore, spectators ambled by, oohing and ahing at our boats, and asking many questions, which I never mind answering, being an old teacher and all that. Then suddenly there was a loud, agonizing scream from a little girl who had scraped her knee bloody tripping on the hard concrete sidewalk. I told the concerned young mother not to worry, I would be right there with my first aid kit. We washed the wound carefully, dried it and put anti-inflammatory bacitracin and 2 large Band-Aids on it. A granola bar from my pocket made the little girl smile as she walked away with her mom. My Red Cross wilderness first aid course has come in very handy in past years, for me and others around me. I know, you don't need wilderness first aid to administer bacitracin and a Band-Aid, but please do consider signing up for some version of first aid and CPR, my friends. It does not hurt at all!

It was sunny and warm, and we had the entire day off till supper. The docks were full of people, and there was lots to see and do. There were 5 schooners tied up on our pier alone, and there was the huge, old warship, the USS Constitution, Old Ironsides, so named because of her sturdy planking. However, she was still in dry dock getting a major overhaul, including new copper sheathing below the waterline (to keep marine growth from penetrating the wood). I also visited the USS Constitution Museum, which I found interesting, but less exciting than the real world outside.

After listening to two bands, mostly playing sea shanties and Irish fiddle and squeezebox music, I returned to my little world aboard ship, wrote my diary, phoned Nancy on my satellite phone (it was Father's Day) and alternately drank coffee and yet another Sam Adams. Life was good.

Angelique, who was moored inside of us, was itching to get back to Camden, hopefully in one long day and evening. So we had to shift lines to let her out, and decided this

was our signal to leave also. The sun rose beautifully in the east, as wood smoke wafted from the stove pipe, promising hot coffee and biscuits. Nice, not to have to cook, I thought. How different from all my coastal boat camping I do in my 17' sea canoe, carrying all gear and food supplies for up to three weeks without re-supplying, except for topping off my drinking water, of course.

The return trip up to Gloucester was smooth with winds from abaft, and very familiar. We saw a number of whales, but most of them, so it seemed, surfaced on the other side of the boat and were too far away, so that I only saw half of them, if that. But it was nice to know they were there. In Gloucester we tied up at the Gloucester Marine Museum, where we had tied up twice before, for the big schooner races there on Labor Day weekend. The museum was again somewhat disappointing. There was no picture of the local fishing schooner that won the first hotly contested race between Gloucester and Lunenburg, Canada, the Esperanto. Nor did I see any photo of the eleven-time winner of the more recent races, our Gloucester-built American Eagle. I pointed it out to an official, but only got a shrug in response.

What picked me up again, was seeing our skipper rowing off in the smart little dinghy Roscoe to fetch lobsters for the big dinner tonight. Oh, were they good! And I have to admit, I did not stop with one, but went right on, since there were so many extras. A glass of white Moscato wine washed lobsters, corn on the cob and garden salad down beautifully. This was our celebration of the big event, as well as a celebration for our schooner American Eagle, which was built here in 1930.

Our next stop were the Isles of Shoals, off Portsmouth, right on the New Hampshire/Maine border. A group of islands (Star, Cedar, Smuttynose and Appledore) formed a perfect anchorage for our boat. This place (Gosport Harbor) was used as a major cod fishing port in the old days. After that, it was used for fancy summer vacationers, who lived, dined and mingled there in a huge wooden hotel. Nowadays it is used for conferences of all sorts, mostly with an environmental or religious thrust. An over-sized lobster boat serves as a ferry to the mainland, Portsmouth, that is.

I finally got the chance to row little Roscoe around the island archipelago. A beautiful sunset in the west levered up an equally stunning moon in the east. It was a beautiful, clear, starry night.

Leaving the Isles of Shoals, we saw some more whales, even followed them at a distance, but then went back on course towards Portland and anchored behind Peaks Island in Casco Bay. I got yet another chance to row little Roscoe, just as the sun set with a glorious golden glow. It was summer solstice (June 21), the longest day of the year.

Ironically, on the first day of summer, the good weather pattern ended. It was a grey, subdued day along a very familiar shore all the way into Port Clyde, where we anchored off the ferry dock to Monhegan. The wind had dropped, and rain was forecast. We put up a canvas sun/rain tarp, and enjoyed a somewhat drippy supper of roast beef with all the fixings, including hand-cranked ice cream. Not too shabby, wouldn't you say? But

the row ashore was canceled, which gave me more time to read my book *Tides*, by Jonathan White, a great read, and very much in keeping with my surroundings. Most everybody else escaped into their own little world, staring into their laps, twiddling their smartphones.

The trip was definitely coming to an end as we hit thick fog all the way to Owl's Head Light and to our anchorage just around the corner in Broad Cove. Most everybody seemed talked out, started pre-packing for tomorrow, making phone calls, and having one more last glass of wine or beer.

Early next morning we motored to our dock in Rockland, very matter of fact, tied and cleaned up and got off the boat. End of trip. It always happens very quickly. An exchange of e-mails, a last wave, and everybody drove off in their cars to wherever they had come from. My Nancy was there with a smile, and we did not stop talking till we hit Orono, where our big yellow Lab gave me a huge welcome after my 10-day absence, but also insisted we go for a walk in the park immediately...which we did.

The greater picture

What a historic trip, seeing all those windjammer giants, square-riggers and schooners, all in one place. I felt very fortunate having been part of it. And as I found out, the Sail Boston event was only a small part of a much bigger sailing adventure, the Rendez-Vous 2017 Tall Ships Regatta. It all started in Royal Greenwich, UK as a race to Sines, Portugal, and from there to the Canary Islands, then across the Atlantic to Bermuda, where they met up with another group which had raced there from Charleston, South Carolina.

After the big rendezvous on the island which was getting ready for this year's America's Cup final races (June 17-26), all windjammers raced on to Boston. The final leg would see the fleet race back from Halifax, Canada to Le Havre, France, thus finishing a big circle around the Atlantic. And since the year 2017 is also Canada's 150th birthday, most of the windjammers would sail up there after the Sail Boston event: to Québec City, Charlottetown (Prince Edward Island, the cradle of Canada), to various ports in the Gulf of St. Lawrence as well as Nova Scotia and even Newfoundland.

In mid-August, Nancy and I watched the windjammers come into the harbor of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, for yet another parade. There were the three large square-rigged barques *Picton Castle*, *Lord Nelson* and *Europa*, as well as the schooners *Bluenose II*, *Spirit of Bermuda*, *Wylde Swan* and also our Maine schooner *Bowdoin* (plus a few other boats). What a sight! It was Sail Boston all over again for me, and I felt good being able to show Nancy many of the boats I had just seen there.

We got out of Lunenburg, though, before the throngs of people descended on that little, tight, former fishing/ship-building town. I again celebrated the occasion with a home-cooked meal of steamed mussels, washed down with my all-time favorite Canadian beer "La Fin du Monde".

While in the area, I also did a week's worth of solo outriggering on Mahone Bay, a bay filled with 365 islands. You can find it between Lunenburg and Chester, just a tad to the south of Halifax.

So, go to Halifax, my boating friends! You will like this area, "Canada's ocean playground".

Happy birthday, Canada! We love you!

Keep sailing/boating! Be safe, be cheerful and enjoy!

Your boating friend,
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For extra info, check out:

SAIL BOSTON: A special issue of MARLINSPIKE, Summer 2017, Number 15, Salem, Massachusetts, 2017.

Allan Billard: PORT OF CALL, Tall ships visit the Maritimes, Nimbus Publishing, Halifax, Canada, 2017.

Jonathan White: TIDES, Trinity University Press, San Antonio, Texas, 2017.

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