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MARITIME HERITAGE

A New Boat Shed Links an Industry With Its Past

By STEWART AIN

Port Jefferson, N.Y.

SUSAN BAYLES FOX watched as a wood-frame wall of what would become the Bayles Boat Shed was lowered by crane and slid into steel slats protruding from the shed's foundation at Harborfront Park here.

The Bayles Boat Shed, whose frame is built of wooden timbers with oak pegs instead of nails, is a modern link to the boat-building industry, which dates to the 1790s here.

Mrs. Fox, 55, who is from Port Jefferson and is a descendant of James M. Bayles, who started a shipyard on this site in 1835, called the shed "a visual symbol of the vitality of this community."

"It's hard to come to this village and not be struck by the sense of history and tradition," she said.

Until the United States entered World War I in 1917, the many shipyards that lined the waterfront here built 350 deep-water vessels, said Charles F. Kenny, coordinator of the boat shed project for the Long Island Seaport and Eco Center in Port Jefferson, a nonprofit organization that promotes appreciation of maritime heritage.

It took more than two weeks last month for 30 workers to assemble the frame of the boat shed. Many of the workers then helped guide the crane that put the walls in place on Oct. 20.

After the first wall was lowered into place, Joel C. McCarty, the executive director of the Timber Framers Guild in Becket, Mass., which supervised the construction, picked up a heavy wooden mallet and tapped one side into place.

"Now a stainless steel pin goes in and is covered with a wooden peg so that it will not get corroded," he said. "This is a very harsh environment."

Kathy O'Sullivan, president of the Long Island Seaport and Eco Center, said the building would be open to the public next summer. She said it would be used to teach boat-building and hold maritime educational programs "using Long Island Sound and the harbor as a learning laboratory."

The project cost \$230,000, with \$50,000 coming from a state grant and the rest from donations. Most of the workers were volunteers from the Timber Framers Guild. They came from throughout North America to build the boat shed using timber-frame construction that was prevalent in the 1800s and that the guild is

dedicated to promoting.

Among the volunteers was a 69-year-old retired lawyer from New Jersey, a banker from Chicago and at least two men who said they had their own timber-frame businesses and had come to learn more from the guild's six instructors.

"I learned a ton from the older guys," said one of them, David G. Petrina, 39, of Vancouver, British Columbia. "It's unbelievable how smart they are."

"These buildings are made by craftsmen and not just a bunch of guys with air nailers," he said.

The 24-foot-high boat shed, which Mr. McCarty said was built with 35 tons of timber and is 30 feet by 48 feet, was designed by a Port Jefferson architect, Jacques J. Garant. A member of the Long Island Seaport and Eco Center, Mr. Garant said he had worked on the project over two years "while riding on the Long Island Rail Road and at night — whenever I could find the time."

Christopher W. Koehn, 44, of Sheboygan, Wis., project manager for the guild, said he was excited because the boat shed "is going to be a great thing for the community."

"These projects have a magical way of bringing a community together," he said. "These buildings have a soul. That soul comes from being handcrafted."

As he watched the shed go up, Frank Childs, 85, of Port Jefferson, another Bayles descendant, recalled that his mother used to live near the boatyard and would wake up "hearing the tapping of the mallets when they were building the boats."

"She loved that sound," he said. "I'm glad it's being used this way again."

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