



# Maine's First Ship

Fall 2023

Newsletter

## 2023 — A YEAR of DISCOVERY



If 2022 was a year of celebration, 2023 has been a year of sharing and learning. Maine's First Ship has continued to offer lectures and offer classes, to recruit new volunteers donating their talents, to begin learning how to sail this "pretty pinnace" *Virginia*, and to offer public sails! We are tickled to see how much the community has joyously embraced *Virginia*, whether in Bath or at the events she visited this summer.



## Notes from Co-Presidents Lori Benson & Jeremy Blaiklock



This has been an singular summer for Maine's First Ship; we have been on a roller coaster of emotions. The highs included *Virginia's* inaugural season sailing the coast of Maine, initially with volunteers, then with paying passengers for the first time. We also greatly expanded our educational offerings and had lovely community events, learning, teaching, and making new friends. But sadly, we lost cherished friends and volunteers Paul Gamache, RB Omo, and Dan Burchstead. We will remember them fondly in the coming years. Our crewe, our family, has made this an extraordinary year, and we are in awe of their extraordinary commitment and hard work.



## Sampling of Visitor Comments in the 2023 Log Book

The Logbook at the Jane Stevens Visitor Center holds a cornucopia of comments from our visitors, who, in 2023, came from at least 43 states, 11 nations. We also hosted visits from students from Bowdoin College and Brown University, and local classrooms at Phippsburg Elementary, Harriet Becher Stowe, Hyde School, and Maine Coast Waldorf. In all, we logged over 4,000 visitors, which is conservative because (a) not every visitor records their comments in the log book, and (b) docents often are too busy to keep a good accounting.

"Thank You" by the 1,000s

Thank you to all the volunteers

Inspirational - the workmanship & story

Fantastic! Worth the drive up from CT to supplement the education of our homeschool studies

Amazing tour; great staff

Wonderful to see this history! Now I need to research my ancestors

Great work on the rigging

Fabulous project! history, technology, community

Continue to preserve! Thanks

A fun look into the past. Similar yet so different from MA historical sites

Return visitors & we will be back again

Amazing local history

Thank you for the private tour

Love to see each year

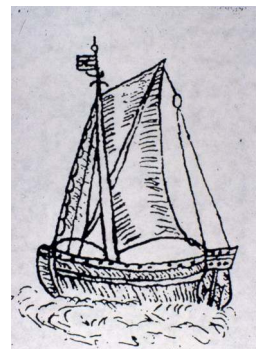
Enjoyed the tour very much

I am a museum educator at Mystic Seaport and thoroughly enjoyed your vessel

Excellent place to come

Mazel Tov! She's a beauty!

Sooo cool! Thank you for the amazing tour & history!!



# Sailor in the making learns the ropes

*By Frances South*

The celebration of the launching of the *Virginia* captured my imagination. It was astonishing to me that my new home of Bath and the surrounding area contained enough volunteers with the enormously varied skills that the project required.

The coming together of the array of carpenters, engineers, riggers, mast makers and, of course, an actual shipwright, among others to make a replica of a 1607 pinnace seemed like nothing short of nautical wizardry.

Last fall, with the *Virginia* safely and triumphantly launched, I noticed a flier in town about a "Women in Shipbuilding Day" at the freight shed. Here was not only a chance to learn something new but also to see what the MFS organization was like as a participant rather than a visitor.

That day our task was to begin the process of turning a 2"x6"x20' chunk of ash into an oar for *Virginia*. That meant getting a quick, entertaining lesson from Rob Stevens in, among other things, the math used to make a rectangular piece of wood into a round piece.

Then we were introduced to the skilsaw, a loud and terrifying tool that became less terrifying but possibly louder over the course of the day.

Our work and learning was overseen by longtime volunteers and by the end of the day the chunk of ash was on its way to becoming part of *Virginia's* gear. Rob told us that volunteers worked on various things on Mondays and Wednesdays and everyone was

welcome to return whenever they wanted. I decided to see what that would be like and the oar crew welcomed me as one of their own.

Five of us made four oars over the course of the winter. It turned out that our oars would have several distinct parts including a shaft with a circumference that grew smaller over the length of the oar and then the blade was to be beveled to be thinner at the edges than the center.

For each part of an oar a lot of math was involved and always followed by a lot of measuring. When we thought the math and the measuring was right, we used power planers, hand-held tools like draw knives and sandpaper. It was more fun than it had any right to be.

About the time all four oars were completed I learned that I had the opportunity to join a newly formed sailing crew. It had not crossed my mind that such an opportunity would be available and I jumped at the chance. Training included memorizing the names of everything on the boat, especially the lines (this is an ongoing project).

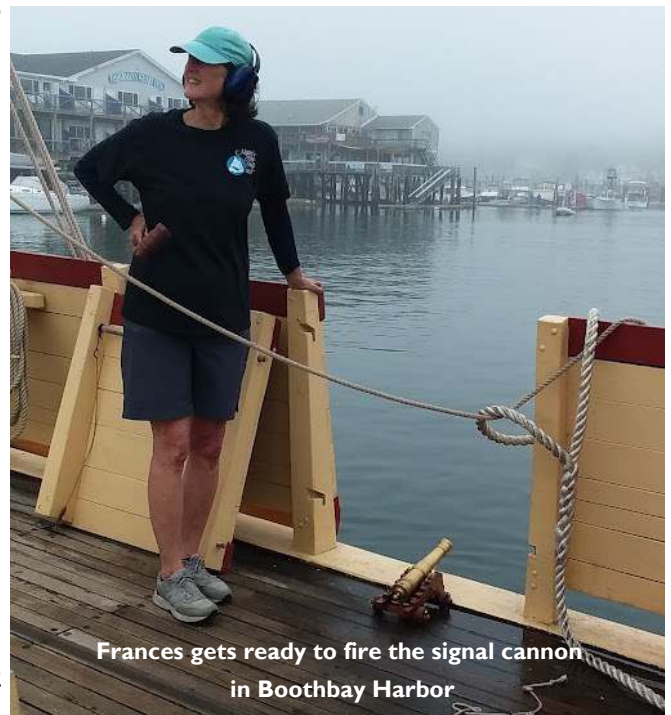
The rich vocabulary of the 17th century pinnace is entertaining as well as important for understanding

something like "the snotter needs to have its rigging adjusted," or "we finally got the kringles and martnets sorted out."

This summer's sailing crew had some practice runs in the river followed by longer sails to Boothbay and Pemaquid. It was thrilling to be under sail and I was grateful that the community of volunteers includes many very able sailors who helped guide those of us who, like me, felt like a bit of an earnest imposter.

I look forward to continuing as a member of the MFS community; there seems always to be a part to play, large or small, in this wonderful "collective anarchy."

*Editor: Frances is a retired attorney who moved to Maine from western Massachusetts 3 years ago with her husband, Ted, and has always had an affinity for open water and boats.*



Frances gets ready to fire the signal cannon in Boothbay Harbor

# Hands On Our History Highlights with MFS

By Ashley Hoskins  
Woolwich Central School

For our final GATE (Gifted and Talented) Day of the 2022-2023 school year, fourth

and fifth graders returned to the Freight Shed in Bath for another round of Hands on Our History with Maine's First Ship.

"Our purpose is to gather young novices together with talented mentors so that mentors can share

handicraft skills and academic knowledge in the informal context of traditional hand craft work groups & free exploration," says MFS Director, Kirstie Truluck.

The day began with an ice breaker, where students made predictions about the insulating abilities of various materials: shavings, sawdust, or daub. Traditional daub is a material made from a combination of clay, wet soil, straw, sand, and/or animal dung, ours was a mixture of clay, soil, and water.

Students were then split into two smaller groups and introduced to the day's task: creating a wall of a wattle and daub structure.

After a brief history lesson about Popham Colony, volunteer Jim Nelson introduced the students to Wattle & Daub construction and showed exam-

ples of the more modern building and insulating materials that have replaced it over time.

Comparing our modern comforts to the available resources in colonial times, Jim had students take a moment to imagine living outside until their home was built. Being a chilly and breezy day along the river, students understood the point.

Next, students gathered materials for their wattle. Freshly cut saplings were stripped of their leaves and

branches in order to be woven together for the wattle panel structure. Each student had a part in the preparation of the wood, and they lined up to take turns weaving the wattle with the support of volunteers.



After lunch, students removed their socks and shoes to participate in mixing the daub with their feet! Once mixed, it was time to daub the structure.



Despite the seasonably cold day, students were enthusiastic about getting their hands and feet wet and dirty to do the job!

"I learned a lot about the Popham Colony and how they lived. It was fun making the wattle and daub. I like learning new skills and doing hands-on activities... or in this case, feet on!" - Gwen L., grade 4, WCS.

Thank you again to the wonderful people of Maine's First Ship and the fantastic volunteers. Our students are lucky to have such a fabulous local historical resource.



## Year End Appeal for Fall 2023 from MFS

In 2023, our season of discovery, the Maine's First Ship community enjoyed a taste of what's possible. Messing about in boats was educational and fun for so many!

- *Virginia* and crewe sailed over 100 nautical miles to visit ports around the Midcoast including Boothbay Harbor, Colonial Pemaquid, and Squirrel Island.
- The public enjoyed 25 dockside tours & sailing trips aboard our "pretty pinnacle" in addition to a half-dozen sail training trips for crewe
- The land-based educational crewe facilitated over 13 lectures & maritime skills workshops. Meanwhile Docents welcomed at least 4,500 guests to the Jane Stevens Visitor Center.
- Our educational volunteers of all stripes interacted with nearly a dozen curious school and tour groups from Bath, Brunswick, Freeport and beyond - including Tsugaru Japan!



Photo by Russ Bolt

- In addition we shared the Freight Shed with community organizations such as Midcoast Youth Center, Kennebec Estuary Land Trust and Windowdressers to help them meet their missions.

Yes, the Maine's First Ship community has learned a great deal about engaging and inspiring ways to explore History, foster Ingenuity and build Community around a little known story & a beloved ship.

MFS Supporters make it possible for us to plan for a future of increased operating costs, which includes navigation insurance, a consultant to facilitate USCG certification, and a growing program staff along with educational facilities.

Your support during our year end appeal, in this year of discovery, is an invest-

ment in moving the MFS mission forward and a signal of appreciation to the Volunteers who make so much possible in our Hands-On and Place-Based discovery model.

Your investment allows us to amplify the power of a Volunteer crewe that donates the value of their time to the tune of almost \$400,000 annually.

We invite you to invest in carrying the mission forward. Those who supported MFS in 2022 helped to make dreams come true. Your increased investments in MFS' ongoing stewardship of two stunning and historic educational spaces - the Pinnacle *Virginia* and the Bath Freight Shed - makes the magic possible.

- Executive Director Kirstie Truluck and the MFS Board of Directors

## MFS volunteer/instructor: Metal working



*By Mike Foster*

I like making things. All kinds of things out of all kinds of materials. I really enjoy having an idea of something I'd like to create, getting the tools and materials together and trying to make it happen. There's almost always a challenge along the way and I enjoy puzzling it out while I search for new information, new skills and new techniques.

I am a social worker by profession, but a tinkerer, fixer, and builder whenever I can be. I have come to love tools and getting to know how to put them to use. I grew up learning how make repairs, how to take things apart and how to modify and maintain them. I really started learning how to do serious building in my mid 20s.

While in graduate school I worked on a nearby estate, putting in 25 hours a week in exchange for the use of the groundskeepers cot-

tage. The owner later decided to turn the unused stables into a modern house and to sell the traditional one that they were living in.

He hired a young carpenter and gave him my hours to be his

assistant. It was a fantastic learning experience. This young guy, a recent Princeton grad, was a meticulous craftsman but also a good teacher. He was willing to explain what he was doing, why he was doing it, and the best ways that he knew to accomplish a particular job.

I spent nearly a year with him, first learning how to take the old structures down while saving useful material. I then began to learn how to build new. With this foundation and additional evening courses in trades like plumbing and electrical work, my wife, Jill, and I were later able to design and build a passive solar house for ourselves.

The course that I am teaching for Maine's First Ship is in metal-work. I came to this area quite a bit later in my life.

For some unknown reason, in my early 50's I got the idea that I wanted to make small fountains that looked like plants. I had no experience working with metal and so that idea just sat there for quite a while. Jill saw an ad for a jewelry making class at a local artisan co-op. Even though that was not what I was interested in, she suggested that I look into it because some of the skills involved might help me build that fountain.

The first class opened up an entirely new world for me. It did, indeed, allow me to make a few fountains, but it also led in many different directions. I began making jewelry and metal sculpture. I took many classes at the co-op and was a key member for over ten years.

After each class I spent time exploring the techniques, tools, and processes I had learned. It is quite remarkable how learning a new technique can stimulate your imagi-



## offers a glimpse into *Virginia's* past



working on *Virginia* for several years.

When I first walked into the hoop shed where she was being built, I couldn't believe my eyes. Here were people like me from many different backgrounds, and with many different skill sets creating a ship.

Having grown up in Connecticut with many visits to Mystic Seaport in my youth, this was an undertaking

nation and suggest ways to apply it to new projects. It is also amazing to become part of a community where people are constantly making new things, seeing new visions and encouraging each other to explore new directions.

When Jill and I moved to Maine, we weren't sure how we were going to find a place in our new community. I was very lucky to meet someone who had been

I could totally identify with. I immediately signed on and have been rewarded ever since by being part of the MFS community.

Now that *Virginia* has launched, we are becoming an educational community. We have been searching for ways to share traditional skills and the love of creating with others. The course I am teaching in basic metalwork-

ing will lead students to make a wind spinner from copper.

The hardware on a ship of *Virginia's* era would have been forged or cast in iron, bronze and brass. While not directly applicable to this ship's construction, this course is passing along traditional uses of tools and techniques that go back centuries.

I hope that students will become comfortable with tools and materials they have not used before.

I hope they will see that they can create something of use and beauty, and that it is possible to learn skills that may have seemed mysterious. I hope that they, too, are stimulated to think of new ways to apply what they have learned.

I hope that they become excited to become part of an artisan/building community where new ideas are appreciated and solving building problems is rewarding and builds friendships.

**Did you know?** You can rent the Freight Shed for your own special events, such as the Bath Chili Chowder Fest. Call 443-4242 or check our website [mfship.org](http://mfship.org) for details.



## Volunteer Wish List for MFS — We Need Your Talents



As Maine's First Ship evolves, so do our volunteer needs. In order to maintain and expand our work in the community — as a visitor center and tourist attraction, as an event venue, as a center for educational programs, as an educational sailing vessel — there are several opportunities for volunteers to contribute. If interested, please contact the MFS Office (207) 443-4242, or email [mfs@mfship.org](mailto:mfs@mfship.org). Join our team!



### Administrative Volunteers

- Volunteer Coordinator
- Membership Coordinator
- Office/Store Manager - filing, data entry, inventory, POS
- Communications Strategist
- Events & Rentals Manager
- Archivist
- Program Coordinator

### Board Service Volunteers

- Fundraising/Donor Relations
- Financial Management/Accounting
- Nonprofit Governance/Board Management
- Maritime Operations/Sail Education Industry
- Experiential Education/Place & Adventure Based Curriculum Development
- Human Resources/Volunteer Recruitment
- Indigenous POV

### Program Volunteers

- Docents - Storytellers for Visitor Center & Demonstrators of Various Traditional Skills
- Helping Hands - Community Dinner set-up & service
- Hosts for lectures & educational workshops
- Tech Support for Website & Virtual Events
- Educators - Deckhand Crew for vessel & Traditional Skills Mentors for workshops
- Virginia Stewards - various skills in rigging, carpentry, mechanical & propulsion systems
- Freight Shed Stewards - general cleaning, Spring & Fall Clean-ups, snow removal, repairs





# Changes to Fort St. George site considered

By Dan Wood

A small committee chaired by Ron Sullivan has been discussing with the state how to optimize signage at the Fort St. George site in Popham in Phippsburg in order to better tell the story of the Popham Settlement of 1607 – 1608.

For those who have not visited this site before, it is on the site of the current Fort Baldwin.

Although the two plaques there have been renovated this year by the state, a group of MFS supporters met with archaeologist Dr. Jeffery Brain at the site. Dr. Brain and Bob Weggel are both very supportive of doing more.

The meeting was attended by Karen Jorgenson representing Dr. Ted Abraham who owns much of the

adjoining property. Dr. Abraham is also generally in favor of improving the site.

Two suggestions were put forth to try to accomplish by next

year. First would be markers, perhaps granite slabs, in the ground outlining the storehouse.

Second, there would be a kiosk showing a picture of the original site similar to the Champlain illustration on the wall of the Jane Stevens Visitors Center.

Another picture could be an aerial shot of the site with a



superimposed drawing of the 1607 plan drawn by Hunt. These will allow visitors a clearer idea of the site when it was occupied by the colonists.

*Note: In the photos, please note where the rope outlines the storehouse.*

## In Memoriam

Maine's First Ship lost three valuable friends and volunteers this year. Paul Gamache was an early

Treasurer on the Board of MFS, and stayed dedicated to the project until he died. He had recently donated a well-loved peapod that MFS used for fundraising. RB Omo volunteered his talents building *Virginia*. Dan

Burchstead was also one of MFS's Treasurers, serving on the Board, and many of us remember him as a "gentle giant." All three were devoted to building the ship, and were beloved by all of us.



# Union + Co. Lunch and Learn's MFS Visit

Union + Co Coworking and Office Space

**Lunch and Learn**

October 12, 2023

Maine's First Ship - the 1607 ship *VIRGINIA*

Comments from MFS Board Member Jim Parmentier

## INTRODUCTION

I'd like to thank Union and Company for this opportunity to speak about Maine's First Ship, as a local non-profit organization, and about the *Virginia*, our 17th century reconstruction of the first ocean-going ship built by Europeans in the New World . . . the ship that began a 400-year PLUS history of shipbuilding and associated maritime enterprises that we have here in the City of Ships. Our nonprofit work is to serve as stewards of this history for Maine and beyond as the Popham Colony is a nearly forgotten chapter of our Amer-

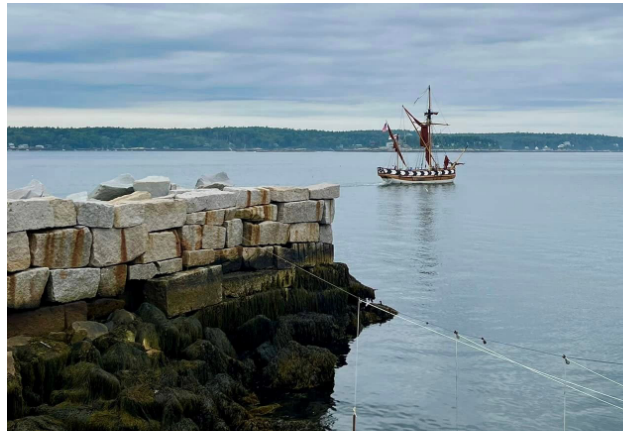


ican Experiment. At Maine's First Ship we are stewards of history, of a new traditional wooden sailing vessel AND of the historic Bath Freight Shed - and we make all of this available to our community for both Educational and Economic benefit.

The reconstructed ship you see docked at our wharf on Commercial Street represents the culmination of over thirty years of effort, almost entirely by volunteers. Her history includes

- 1) ten years of archeological research to establish that the original ship was built where local legend said it had been . . . at the mouth of the Kennebec River, in the area we now call Phippsburg,
- 2) nine more years of research, planning and nautical design to develop working blueprints to guide us in her construction, and finally . . .
- 3) eleven years of actual construction on the site where you see her now.

In August of 1608 a re-supply ship arrived at Fort Saint George - modern name Sabino Head - and reported to the colony's leaders that their investors, back in England, had decided to abandon the settlement. That October, 415 years ago from this month, in company with the re-supply ship, the colonists sailed their newly-built vessel back across the Atlantic. The Popham



investors sold the *Virginia* to the Jamestown investors, and in 1609 the little ship crossed the Atlantic a second time as part of a convoy to re-supply the colonists in Jamestown.

## MORE RECENT CHAPTERS OF OUR STORY

Over the winter Maine's First Ship joined the Tall Ships Association, which has helped us move forward as a non-profit sailing organization. We are both their newest vessel and we represent, along with the *Godspeed*, at Jamestown, their oldest time period. We invited Eric Speth, Captain of the *Godspeed*, to visit here in early June to give us advice on *Virginia's* rigging and sail handling. Later that month *Virginia* made her public debut at the Boothbay Windjammer Festival. With her tanbark sails she was a clear "standout" partly because the day was so foggy. And just this month we underwent a US Coast Guard "courtesy" examination which resulted in *Virginia* receiving license to operate as an uninspected passenger vessel with 6 passengers - a "6-pack" in mariner's parlance. That allowed us this past weekend to take paying passengers aboard with us for the first time.

(Continued)

## Union + Co. Lunch and Learn's MFS Visit (Continued)

### EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

The mission of Maine's First Ship is to use our reconstruction of the original *Virginia* to help the public explore Maine's early maritime history, nautical craftsmanship, and community relationships - History, Ingenuity, Community.

In our Jane Stevens Visitor Center, in the historic Bath Freight Shed on Commercial Street, we've developed a collection of displays and programs that help visitors gain an appreciation for Maine's maritime heritage and an understanding of the significance of the Popham Colony.



We are preserving the Bath Freight Shed, both as a home for *Virginia* and a site for community activities. Many of you know that we rent the Freight Shed for community activities - organizational & private - and we historically offer preferred rates to local nonprofits. Later this month Window Dressers will host a community build with us. Just this past

weekend it was wonderful to see the space full of happy people for the Midcoast Youth Center's Chili-Chowder Fest.

Some of the "Learn Traditional Skills" projects we offer include being a Maker's space for boat building, toolmaking, and musical events. Some of you may have attended our 17th Century Foodways demonstrations in April or Fiber Day earlier this month. This summer we had another first when we offered tuition-based courses on traditional maritime skills such as coastal navigation, metal working, lofting, rigging, and woodworking. We've also had a very successful summer Lecture Series running now for the past four years. Much of the organization's sharing of skills & knowledge have been offered for nothing or next to nothing for over a decade. We use a "Suggested Donation" model for exploring our Visitor Center. **Offering tuition-based courses and fee for tickets aboard *Virginia* is a shift for us, and we are making small shifts to improve our sustainability while maintaining accessibility.**

This Fall we will again offer Women's Shipbuilding - more on that soon.

### THE DREAM

Since 1997 - has been to earn a full USCG Certificate of Inspection, so we can take up to 25-30 passengers - students or visitors to Bath - and offer cultural & his-



torical education as well as sail handling, navigation, marine sciences, and more. The ship will be available for educational classes, river tours and other summer sailing experiences someday - These kinds of Vessel-based programs with passengers will likely begin in late 2024 - 2025.

For the 2022-23 school year, before we could welcome groups aboard, we launched the beta test of a program we call **Hands On Our History**, and we've had the RSU I students from the Gifted and Talented program here in the Freight Shed discovering history through Fiber Arts and Wattle & Daub Construction. This fall that same group will experience history through Woodworking and Rigging & Rope work. It's great to have young people back in our spaces after those quiet years of the pandemic. This program is supported by the Maine Community Foundation /Belvedere grant.

Thank you for letting me tell you some stories about the second largest shipyard in Bath!

# Crossing the Ocean in Small Pinnaces

By Rob Stevens

*"[The Squirrel] is most convenient to discover upon the coast, and to search into every harbor or creeke, which a great ship could not do." Ship Master Edward Hayes, 1583*

One comment that I often hear when people first see "Virginia" is that they would never cross the ocean in such a small boat. The original *Virginia* is described as being a pinnacle of "about some thirty tunne." Our *Virginia* is actually 38 tons. We made her beamier so as to be large enough to carry a full classroom of kids.

The fathers, uncles, and neighbors of the Popham colo-

nists crossed the Atlantic multiple times in much smaller pinnaces. Second in command Raleigh Gilbert's father Sir Humphrey Gilbert crossed to Newfoundland with the 8 or 10 tunne *Squirrel* arriving before the 3 other vessels in his fleet of 40 to 120 tunnes. The *Squirrel* and Gilbert were lost on the return north of the Azores in "outrageous seas never before seen." Gilbert's largest ship, 120 tunnes, had already been lost earlier.

John Davis, neighbor of and married into the Gilbert family, made numerous voyages looking for the North West Passage. On the second trip he used the 10 tunne *North Starre* and on the

third trip he used the small lapstrake pinnacle *Ellen* or *Helene* and spent much time among the ice. A relation between the two colonists James Davis and Robert Davis, and the explorer John Davis is unknown. There was a Ship Master Robert Davis on Gilbert's trip to Newfoundland in 1583 but he would likely have been too old to be part of the Popham colony.

Martin Frobisher, an Arctic explorer, financed by Sir Humphrey Gilbert, went on an arctic voyage with only three vessels of 15-30 tunnes, 20-25 tunnes, and 7-10 tunnes.

Lastly, the smallest ship *Discovery* of the Jamestown fleet was 20 tunnes.

## Thank you to our business/corporate sponsors

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## Full Moon Dinners build community

Building Community is an important part of our work at Maine's First Ship. The tradition of the Full Moon Dinner goes back to the early days of the Bath Freight Shed Alliance when the nascent nonprofit sought to bring people together to enjoy sustainably raised food in a gorgeous spot on the banks of the Kennebec.

These events would bring friends new & old together and foster a sense that these historic places and natural systems deserved investment and stewardship. That spirit continues today.

Spearheaded by MFS board co-president Lori Benson, the Full Moon Dinners celebrate local food & local talent. This year's Full Moon Dinners in August and September were sold out events full of curious people with a desire to try new tastes and meet new folks.

We are grateful for this year's talented chefs - Chris Toy, Jeff Mao and Molly Jellison. Each dinner event brings fresh faces to the Freight Shed and raises essential financial resources which are invested into the care and keeping of this magical space in which we dine by the river.

We invite all to help us celebrate History, Ingenuity, and Community in many ways throughout the year. Keep an eye on the Full Moon calendar for 2024!

NOTE - the Bath Freight Shed Alliance and Maine's First Ship merged together in 2017. Maine's First Ship serves as steward of two stunning and historic educational spaces - the Pinnacle *Virginia* and the Bath Freight Shed.



## Grateful to all of our Full Moon Dinner donors and helpers

Our 2023 Full Moon Dinners were each a fun evening of good food and community. Thank you to all those who made the magic happen:

MFS Volunteers

Guest Chefs:

- Jeff Mao, Chris Toy
- Molly Jellison & Long Reach
- Kitchen & Catering staff

Musical Guests:

Castlebay  
Kat Logan

Along with  
Bath Garden Club  
Bath Regional Career and  
Technical Center

Lori Benson  
Emily's Oysters  
Goranson Farm  
Dorsey Harrison  
Hannaford Cook's Corner

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