Final Report
Monomoy Boat/Pilot House Restoration

Background and Project’s Impact on the Foundation

On September 4th, 2015, the Overfalls Foundation brought the Monomoy Boat/Pilot House Restoration project to a successful closure exactly as it was originally designed. The crowning event was the dedication of the Monomoy Boat and its display shed. The project, initiated in 2011, came at a time when the Foundation began to broaden its approach to operations. Even though the broadened operational philosophy with a general maritime outreach component had always been in the Foundation’s mission, the previous focus of operation had been to save and preserve the deteriorating Lightship Overfalls. The result was that, while membership was open to all, the Foundation operated more like a club with its tightly focused mission than an extension of a community waterfront park. In retrospect that tight knit club-like philosophy produced an esprit de corps which was probably a necessity to accomplish the task with the derelict lightship.

The year 2011 started a major turning point in the Foundation. The big event was the lightship being designated a National Historic Landmark. Less noticeable but much more profound was a changing of philosophy from being club-like to being more truly a public institution. The first sign of this change was the refurbishing of the old steel whaleboat near the children’s playground in the Lewes Canalfront Park. Though it did little for the Foundation members’ view of how the mission was being met, it did much for the large number of the kids year round who had their photos taken in it as they made the trip to the playground. Unknowingly, these kids were being easily introduced to the maritime environment, clearly an important part of the Foundation’s mission but a part that previously had not received adequate attention. These kids were part of the countless numbers who enjoyed the Foundation’s site as they visited the greater park.

The whaleboat initiative was followed later in 2011 by the Monomoy Boat/Pilot House Project which would open the Foundation up much more. At the same time the Foundation expanded scheduled ship tours from a three to a five day a week format and the Foundation’s social events were expanded from “members only” to “y’all come” events often done in collaboration with other community organizations. With all of this, while the lightship remained the centerpiece, the overall site took on more and more importance as a Lewes maritime destination, especially with the opening of the American Lightship Museum in the refurbished pilot house in June of 2014. Moving further in this direction, the Foundation’s web site was made much more inviting and informative which also attracted an increased number of visitors and the numbers continue to grow.

The expanded operations and staffing the Pilot House/Monomoy Project taxed the Foundation’s all-volunteer work force. To meet the increased labor demands, the Foundation’s work force expanded from members only to all who could be enlisted. The results, both in the work accomplished and the Foundation’s impact on the community, were most positive.

With the change, the Foundation put less emphasis on numbers of paid-in members on the rolls and more emphasis on reaching a wider audience. Though the people involved and working increased, the paid-in membership did not. The total paid-in membership projected to be 613 by 2014 was 537 but, when the other 35 active members of the workforce were added in, it gave an effective total of 572. Also, while the open environment brought more visitors to the site, control and recording of all visitors became an impossible task. Still, a conservative estimate of the registered visitors plus those who came for scheduled, Foundation sponsored events was 6171 in 2014. With the inclusive philosophy, it will be even more difficult to estimate in 2015 and subsequent years but the impact will be tremendously positive.
Project Initiatives and Tasks Completed

The Monomoy Boat/Pilot House Restoration was a single project with two separate and distinct initiatives: restoration of the Monomoy boat and restoration of the pilot house. While the two initiatives were separate and distinct in nature, they were bundled into the same project for overall management and control purposes. The initiatives and their associated tasks are listed below.

Monomoy Boat

The Monomoy boat is a 26 foot open vessel with places for ten people to row built in the early 1940s to train merchant seamen in WWII. She was last used to train cadets at the Kings Point Merchant Marine Academy in New York where time, the elements and abuse took a toll on her. Six of the boats, in derelict condition, were given to the Cape May Maritime Museum in hopes of finding organizations that would restore them; the Foundation agreed to be one of those organizations.

The Monomoy boat fits within the Foundation’s mission and plans in two ways. First, it is a significant artifact that depicts a part of our maritime heritage that is not shown in other places in the region. Second, and more importantly, it will be used as a hands-on platform to teach seamanship and water safety to area youth.

When the Monomoy boat arrived, at first glance she looked pretty good, much better than her actual condition. Closer examination revealed almost all of the ribs broken, corroded keel bolts, disintegrated wood, and signs of years of patch work maintenance designed to get just one more year out of a dying vessel. The broken ribs were removed one at a time and drafted so that new white oak could be steam bent to take the same shape. Any other wood that was serviceable was saved and rehabilitated; that which was too far gone was replaced. The process was slow and tedious but slowly she started to take shape. Then came caulking, painting and the final trim such as a new oak cap rail put together with scarf joints giving many pieces the appearance of being one plank. Also part of this initiative was constructing a shed on the Overfalls Foundation’s grounds to display the restored vessel.

Key tasks in this initiative were:

- The interior of the vessel was completely stripped away to allow access for interior work.
- The broken ribs (90% of the ribs were broken) were removed, new white oak ribs (and in some cases sister ribs) were cut, steam bent to fit and installed.
- Stainless steel brackets were fabricated to attach the ribs to the keel.
- The old paint and caulking was removed and the boat was recaulked.
- Bad planking was removed and replaced with butt blocks for strengthening.
- The stem and stern (front and back) were opened up and completely rebuilt with epoxy.
- All other wood that was deteriorated was removed and that which was salvageable was rebuilt with epoxy; that which was not was cut and shaped from new.
- The old iron and steel parts were galvanized.
- The exterior and interior of the boat was sanded, primed and painted.
- Custom built oars were specified and purchased.
• Life jackets and other miscellaneous gear to comply with Coast Guard regulations for the boat was specified and purchased.
• Antique oars which will be part of the historical display were primed and painted.
• The display/storage shed for the boat was built and fitted with lights and appropriate historical artifacts.
• A cradle to ensure that the boat would maintain its shape was designed and built.
• A historical description sign (in keeping with the 12 Preserve America’s Treasures signs existing in Lewes) was designed, ordered and installed.
• A specially designed trailer for launching and moving the boat on the open road was purchased.

Pilot House
The pilot house came from a local charter fishing vessel which was being rehabbed into a yacht. Part of the rehab process was to replace the old pilot house with a larger deck house. Even though the old pilot house was no longer needed, the rehab crew recognized its historical value and donated it to the Foundation in hopes that it would survive.

The Foundation saw a way to use the pilot house to create a land-based museum to house a collection of artifacts which would complement its ship and tell the story of lightships and the crews who served aboard. The land-based museum fit within the Foundation’s mission and was specifically mentioned as a major initiative in the Foundation’s five year strategic plan published in 2006. The finished product was dedicated as the American Lightship Museum on June 4, 2014, the 76th anniversary of the launch of the Lightship Overfalls.

The pilot house came to the Foundation in essentially the same condition as the Monomoy boat, possibly worse. When the restoration was completed, all that remained of the original structure were the windows, doors and a little of the framing. Despite the major rebuild, the Foundation did retain the character of the original structure.

The key tasks in this initiative were:
• The entire structure was completely rebuilt with a fiberglass roof and three feet of length were added to the rear of the structure.
• The insides were finished out with electrical wiring & fixtures, wall paneling, vinyl floor covering and air conditioning.
• The structure was moved to the Overfalls Foundation’s site and attached to the existing Ship’s Store with an enclosed hallway.
• Some artifacts were installed such as an engine order telegraph, engine controls and a ship’s wheel.
• The inside of the structure was fitted out with display cases to hold maritime artifacts in the new museum.
• Outside of the structure, the ell formed by the pilot house and the Ship’s Store was laid with concrete pavers and covered with a shade sail canopy to serve as an orientation area for visitors prior to boarding the lightship.
• Coming out the door of the pilot house (not the hallway from the Ship’s Store) a landing and steps with a hand rail were built and installed.
• A rotating display of artifacts was placed in the display cases in the new museum.
Key Project Photos

Pilot house as originally received

Stripped down, early in restoration

Restored pilot house going into place

Cutting the ribbon at the dedication, 6/4/14

The pilot house, as it sits in its current setting
Monomoy boat as it arrived    Shaping a new rib just out of the steam box

Stripping the old paint off of the hull   All of the new ribs are installed

The finished display shed is ready for the boat   The boat is ready to leave the work site
The boat in her new shed, home at last

Evening as the lights come on in the shed

The Foundation thanks its supporters

Mayor Becker & Al Didden cut the ribbon

The end of a good project and all is well at the Overfalls Foundation site