

## 2019 Mariner Class Association National Rendezvous

### August 2-4, Niantic to Mystic Seaport

by Nate Bayreuther (#1922 *Orion*)

Maybe it was because *Orion* had such a late launching this spring due to school and work commitments. Or maybe it was because I had recently been reading a number of sailing narratives. Or maybe it simply the excitement of returning to a familiar yet exciting destination. Or maybe it was because so many new people were coming. Whatever the reason, by the time Thursday, August 1<sup>st</sup> rolled around, I was itching like crazy to get to the Niantic River launch ramp to meet up with other Mariner sailors and officially begin the 2019 Mariner National Rendezvous. I had already packed some gear and the sailing rig for my nine-foot Dyer Dhow *True Love* in *Orion*'s cabin the previous week, so when I showed up to Niantic Thursday evening, I quickly rowed out to *Orion*, stowed a few extra belongings, and motored over to the launch ramp to see who was there.

Since 2009, I have organized rendezvous for the Mariner Class Association, an organization dedicated to encourage and promote the use of the 19-foot Mariner sailboat. Designed by the legendary Philip Rhodes and originally manufactured by O'Day from 1963-1979, it was briefly produced by Rebel/Spindrift before Stuart Marine took over in the early 1980s; remarkably, production continues to this day. With over 4,000 Mariners made, they remain extremely popular as a racer, pocket cruiser, and daysailer. Specifically intended for family fun, it's a blast to get together with other Mariner sailors, and the various rendezvous organized here in Niantic, Connecticut have taken us to nearby places such as Mystic Seaport, Essex, New London, Groton, Fisher's Island, and Stonington. Sailors have trailered their Mariners from all across the country to participate over the years. This year, ten boats and 25 sailors registered for the rendezvous, including four new skippers with their families. It was shaping up to be another great event, and I was anxious to meet the new folks and reconnect with rendezvous veterans.

I anchored in the shallow mooring field near the ramp and rowed the *True Love* to the ramp's floating docks. In short order I met up with fellow Connecticut sailors Alan Schaeffer (#2470 *Sialia*) and his children Joseph and Lydia, and Chris Albert (#2714 *Flotsam*). Bruce Robbins (#3200 *Nora Rose*) with friend and crewmate Mural Rao had arrived from New Jersey, and Eric Flower's boat, #1871 *SeaFlower*, was there and fully rigged, but he and his wife Joanne had gone back home for the night since they live only a few miles away from the launch ramp in East



*The Schaeffers rigging their boat.*

Lyme. Later on in the evening, Dave Oatley (#2186 *Nantucket*) came with his two young sons Jackson and Bennett from New Jersey, and after chatting with them for a while, I left *Orion* at anchor and rowed across the river in the *True Love* to spend the night at my parents' house. I was looking forward to seeing the rest of the sailors in the morning.

Sure enough, when Friday dawned and I rowed back over to the launch ramp, the launch ramp was alive with activity. Steve Creighton (#629 *Blind Squirrel*) and Joanne McCarthy from New Jersey were in the process of launching their boat, and Andy Stotz (#3223 *Sheldon Jones*) with wife Bonny and son Andy had just arrived from Maine. Dan Meaney (#2024 *Clew Sea Nuf*) showed up with daughter Madeline from Ellington, Connecticut, and a phone call from Pennsylvania sailors Ed Wise (#2862 *Christina T*) and crew Steve Hock reassured me that despite trailer troubles, they were only a couple hours behind schedule and would meet us later at the Seaport on their own. Everyone was accounted for.



*Eric Flower launching #1871 SeaFlower.*

We left at 11:00 am in order to take advantage of the tide and allow for the wind to gather a bit of strength since it is typically pretty light in the morning. After we all left the launch ramp and motored underneath the Niantic highway and railroad bridges, the wind was still rather faint, but we were able to easily get around Millstone Point and head east. Unfortunately, after only a short time, the wind dropped off almost completely, and the only headway we had left was with what little air remained in our sails and the outgoing current.

Occasionally, a powerboat would roar by, rocking the fleet with its wake and temporarily halting momentum. A number of us started telling jokes on the VHF, and, as I was just about in the middle of the group at that time, I found it very amusing to hear the various laughs and groans all around me as the punch lines were delivered. (How much does it cost a pirate to pierce his ears? A "buck-an-ear.")



*Dave Oatley sailing with his sons to Mystic.*

Although progress was slow, it was a beautiful day, and there was plenty to look at. We took pictures of each other's boats, observed a wooden schooner slowly plodding along on the horizon, waved at passengers on the Orient Point Ferry, and even spotted two nuclear submarines, one coming into the Thames River in New London and one headed out to sea. Both were escorted by heavily-armed patrol boats and tugs, and it was really quite something to witness. At this point, we finally broke down and motored with our sails up for about a half hour before the wind picked up off Ledge Light and we were able to do some honest-to-goodness sailing.



*Mural Rao sailing in #3200 Nora Rose with Chris Albert in #2174 Flotsam in the background.*

We had an easy passage to Noank before the wind died again, but we simply took our sails down and motored up the Mystic River, passing through the mooring field and gathering just before the Mystic Railroad bridge. After waiting until the bottom of the hour, it opened for us, and we made our way to the Mystic Highway bridge which opened ten minutes later. It's always a wonderful experience to make the approach to the Seaport and see the empty floating docks waiting for us. Having radioed the Mystic Seaport dock office after going through the bridges, a number of dockhands were waiting to help us tie up. One by one, Mariners made their way into the slips and motors were shut off, awnings were erected, cockpits and cabins were tidied – we had officially arrived.

For the rest of the afternoon and evening, sailors walked around the Seaport, made their way downtown to eat dinner and generally hung around the docks. Only a couple of hours after everyone had tied up, Ed Wise and Steve Hock were seen motoring up the River, and we welcomed them as they joined the rest of the fleet. I spent a good deal of time simply laying back in the cockpit of *Orion*, watching the sun go down and chatting with fellow sailors. A tasty meal at the nearby restaurant Latitude 41 was most enjoyable, and an evening beer with Steve, Chris Albert and Dan Meaney onboard *Orion* was



*Mariners getting settled at the Seaport docks.*

a great end to the day. It was pretty late by the time I walked with my gear bag to the north end of the Seaport to take a quick shower, and although it was a bit of a hike from where we were berthed



at the south end, the heads were clean and no one else was around. I returned to *Orion* where I read a few chapters of a book, listened to a little Vivaldi, and turned in for the night, exhausted yet happy.

I was surprised when I woke up the next morning to find us completely immersed in fog. Everything in the cockpit was dripping wet when I crawled out of the cabin, but the rising sun quickly dissipated the fog and eventually dried our boats. Other sailors were also stretching their legs, but a few were still appreciating the chance to sleep in. Some walked to the Seaport's bakery to find breakfast while others walked downtown; a number of sailors simply made their own meals onboard their Mariners. The rest of the morning was taken up by two excellent tours provided by the Seaport exclusively for our group. We enjoyed an in-depth tour of the Henry B. duPont Shipyard where the multi-year restoration of the *Mayflower II*, owned by Plimoth Plantation in Massachusetts, was coming to a successful conclusion. Later, we toured the Watercraft Hall across the street where more than 450 small boats are stored, and everyone thoroughly enjoyed both tours.

The rest of the day was spent visiting the Seaport exhibits, touring the historic ships, shopping at stores in the downtown, and simply enjoying our incomparable surroundings. I sailed around in the *True Love* and Steve Creighton and Joanne McCarthy hopped in #629 *Blind Squirrel*, sailing up close past the docks and even photographed by curious museum visitors. In the late afternoon, everybody gathered for an "open boat" time, where sailors can tour all the Mariners docked and chat about new ideas and interesting tips. This year, I encouraged everyone to bring snacks to share, and everyone did. Eric and Joanne Flower's boat was the most popular; Eric had spent a tremendous amount of time restoring and upgrading #1871 *SeaFlower*, and she was really a sight to see. The cabin, complete with a premium sound system with speakers, electrical panel, lighting,



*The morning fog begins to lift. Photo: Steve Hock.*



*Steve and Joanne touring the Seaport in their Mariner.*

bedding, window shades, cushions and more, looked as if it could comfortably sustain a cruising couple for a month or more. The exterior was just as elaborate with immaculate wood trim, a new forward hatch, cockpit speakers, stanchions with lifelines, and a beautiful paint job. They also won everyone over with the “snack” they supplied: a cooler of beer.

After a great time of visiting and taking pictures, we gathered for a group picture before dispersing to find our own dinners. I ended up joining some friends at the famed Mystic Pizza downtown, and afterward we moseyed back to the docks. I took the opportunity to walk around alone a bit and take some pictures as the sun was setting and before I went to bed. All those who visit the Seaport by boat and rent dock space are given freedom to wander around the grounds at night, and it is a completely different place when the gates have shut to the public and the place is seemingly all yours. Everything is very quiet, and you start to feel the sense of history all around you. Once a busy shipyard in the mid-1800s, the Seaport embraces its past, and it is a unique experience to be there after hours.

Sunday morning dawned with a bright sun and clear skies, and once again, sailors slowly emerged from their cabins and went to go find some breakfast and coffee. Most awnings were left up as long as possible to let the sun dry them off, but eventually those were stowed below as preparations were made to depart the Seaport and make the 9:40 am Mystic highway bridge opening. I de-rigged the *True Love*, securing her spars and oars and putting her sail inside *Orion*’s cabin. A few last-minute purchases were made, and after a short meeting on the docks for some final instructions, we all cast off at the bottom of the hour, patiently waiting for the bridge to open, which it did, right on schedule. We powered through both the highway and railroad bridges and all the way down the Mystic River until we got to open water off Noank. A decent breeze greeted us, and we happily raised our sails and headed west to Niantic. Although the wind was on our nose, the current was with us, and we had a fine time tacking through Fisher’s Island Sound.



*Talking on the docks during the “open boat” time.*



*Dan and Madeline Meaney sailing home.*



As each boat entered Niantic Bay, sails were lowered and outboards were started to get through the Niantic railroad bridge. Everyone was on their own to get to the launch ramp and haul out their boats as promptly as possible to make way for other boats coming in, but unlike last year, the ramp was not overcrowded, so all the Mariners were retrieved from the water in good order and without incident. I was able to tie up on the end of one of the ramp's floating docks, and I went ashore to assist with de-rigging boats and take some pictures. After one last group picture was taken, I went to *Orion* and motored her back to her mooring, cleaned out her cabin, and rowed the *True Love* to the beach. It was another successful event I know I'll be thinking about for a long time.

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*Five Mariners in a row derigging all at once.*

A number of Rendezvous veterans were unfortunately unable to attend this year – one had sold his boat, a few had prior commitments, others had work and health issues. Their presence was greatly missed, and I hope they'll be back for next year's event. I was thrilled, however, that four new Rendezvous skippers with crews were able to participate. Dave Oatley came with his sons in #2186 *Nantucket*, herself a Rendezvous veteran having participated with then-owner Bill Collins in 2012 and 2014 as *Gypsy Rose*. Bruce Robbins (#3200 *Nora Rose*) came with friend Mural Rao; Bruce had actually been a Mystic Seaport employee 40 years ago, and this was his first time back. Andy Stotz (#3223 *Sheldon Jones*) came with his family and promised he would be back after they all had a fantastic time. Although Eric Flower (#1871 *SeaFlower*) has lived in East Lyme for a number of years, this was the first time he and his wife Joanne were able to make the Rendezvous, and it was great to finally sail with him.



*The Stotz family cleaning out #3223 Sheldon Jones*

One memory of the event that particularly stands out is when I was simply walking around the Seaport grounds, relishing the sunshine and watching all the visitors taking in all the sights. I would frequently see a Mariner sailor in the midst of them, and we would exchange smiles and

waves before continuing on our way. This happened all weekend long, and it was nice to be surrounded by our own little Mariner “community” enjoying each other’s company. We’re a tightly-knit bunch, us Mariner sailors, and I look forward to this gathering on the water every year.

On my drive home that evening, I happened to see a Mariner at a rest stop on Interstate 95. I pulled into the parking lot and immediately recognized #2862 *Christina T*. Sure enough, Ed Wise and Steve Hock were inside getting a bite to eat, and I surprised both of them before continuing home. It was a great little postscript to the whole Rendezvous, and plans for the 2020 event are already in the works. You’ll come, now, won’t you?



*The group picture taken on Saturday. Photo: Steve Hock.*