Addition Foundation and Walls
Grant Work Completed

This spring and summer, contractors Pacific Services and Oceanside Excavation completed work to build the foundation for our accessible entry and restroom, and to bring all utilities into the footprint of the building.

At the same time, volunteer work parties repaired walls, and completely rebuilt the damaged north wall of the east (store room) wing. These volunteer hours provided much of the matching for the Historic Preservation Fund grant we received for the work.

This grant was through the Certified Local Government (CLG) program, as a pass-through grant through the City and Borough of Sitka, which is a member of the CLG program. This outstanding program leverages relatively small, matching grants for high-quality historic preservation and planning all around the country.

Go to the website for more great photos of the work parties this summer.

Grant Awarded

The SMHS has just won a Historic Preservation Fund grant for closing in the new addition and rebuilding the west wall (the long wall that faces Airport Road).

The grant is for $25,000 and will allow us to continue work on the historical rehabilitation of the Japonski Island Boathouse for reuse as a maritime heritage center.

Work will start this fall, with advertising for a contractor and getting necessary permits. Work on the wall will be largely by volunteers in work parties.

Oral History Videos On Line

Videos of some past annual meetings on topics including Cannery Life, Trolling, and Women in Fishing are now online on the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society’s YouTube channel, and linked from our website.

Sitka’s Lione Claire edited the videos for putting online, and created shorter “highlights” videos, with the support of a small grant from the City and Borough of Sitka Assembly.

SMHS annual meetings are in the form of live, oral history panels. Videos are an increasingly valuable historical resource, as elders pass, and traditions fade from memory.

We also put up the video of the recent talk by Josh Wisniewski and Richard Nelson, and will be adding more in the coming year.
Recent Events

On the Fourth of July we hosted a History Cruise of Sitka Sound, thanks to the generosity of Allen Marine.

This year we learned about herring, with Harvey Kitka telling about his knowledge and half-century-plus participation in the traditional herring egg harvest, and Louise Brady sharing the intense cultural connection, and compelling traditional stories of her Tlingit Kiks.adi Clan. Josh Wisniewski told the history of commercial exploitation of herring, including how some whaling stations turned to herring when the whales got scarce.

On June 29 board member Joe D’Arienzo and director Rebecca Poulson spoke at the Greater Sitka Chamber of Commerce, updating the public about the SMHS, our history and plans.

The SMHS hosted a books and authors event at the Paths Across the Pacific conference in July. Authors told of their research from history to science, with a call to action: as oceanographer Curis Ebbesmeier said, the oceans will survive - but will we?

Also in July, we hosted a work party by high school students attending the Outer Coast Summer Seminar, who worked alongside SMHS volunteers to accomplish an amazing amount of work. It was a pleasure to work with these young people and to see their enthusiasm and willingness to learn things like carpentry and painting.

We capped the work on the building walls and addition with an Open House on Saturday September 22, where we gave tours, decorated cookies, and ate snacks, and previewed our new videos.

On October 11, SMHS board member Josh Wisniewski and Richard Nelson presented on their experiences in communities in Alaska’s northwest Arctic, 40 years apart. The video of the presentation is available on our YouTube channel, and linked to our website.

The SMHS also had an exhibit at the library, part of the Alaska Day commemoration, with some of our WWII and Shore Boat artifacts, and by the time you get this newsletter we will have had a concert at the Beak with chantey-man Don Sineti, October 30.

Donations and Thank You

The SMHS has recently received some interesting maritime artifacts, including vintage flag pole lights, to mark the buoys at each end of a longline set, donated by Dan Cushing, and two Japanese longline baskets - one bamboo, and one plastic - donated by Dewey Torgeson. John Bahrt donated a caulking iron for large deck seams, used by his great-grandfather, H. L. Bahrt, a ship’s carpenter who came to Sitka soon after the Transfer.

Lisa Killinger, the granddaughter of boatbuilder Andrew Hope, donated two half-models. One may have been a work in progress, and the other is beautifully finished and seems to be a half model of a seiner.

You can see some of these new acquisitions at our WhaleFest table, and in our upcoming exhibit at City Hall, in the display case in the lobby.

A huge thank you to everyone who has supported the SMHS this year, with memberships, Pick Click Give, labor, attending events, and donations.

Coming Up

Joining the SMHS staff this winter is Edie Leghorn, who will be working on development, events and classes.

We will be at WhaleFest November 2-6, and hold a boathouse cleaning work party November 10.

On December 1, we will have toy boat building and painting for children. These cute boats are functional and engaging to make.

We will spend January dialing in the workshop, setting up tools and work benches. We are looking at doing a class or two for adults, and at least one for kids. If you have ideas or requests, let us know!

Coming up late winter is our 2019 annual meeting, which will be about immigrants in Sitka’s maritime history.
Sitka Boatbuilding 1918
by Rebecca Poulson

In the teens through the 1940s in Sitka, at least eight shops built boats at various times. All of the builders did other things as well, mainly fishing.

Few vessels were recorded before 1915, but between 1915 and 1930, there were at least 43, with 20 of those documented between 1917 and 1919 - nearly all of them seiners.

The early seine boats were large flat-bottomed row boats supplied by the canneries. Nets were pulled by hand.

On Puget Sound, gas engines revolutionized the fishery shortly after the turn of the century. It took around a decade for this innovation to reach Sitka: according to the late Herman Kitka Sr., in 1914 Tom Sanders Jr. fished a motorized seiner, the COMET, that had been brought up from Puget Sound, for Deep Sea Salmon Company. He outfished everybody, and soon all the seiners had engines.

Herman Kitka said that the earliest motorized seiners had loose decks of 2 x 12's which were picked up to empty the hold. This was not the case for more an a couple of years, because of the problem with rain water and snow in the boat in the winter.

Many of the seiners built in Sitka were financed by the canneries. Sometimes they were built for the cannery, and sometimes they were built for an individual fisherman, who would help build the boat. The canneries had boats built for good producers, obligating the fisherman to fish for that cannery to repay the debt. Some fishermen would eventually buy their boats, but others fished on cannery boats indefinitely.

In the 20th century there were canneries in Sitka itself (Pyramid), at Sitkoh Bay (George T. Myers, Chatham) and Lindenberg Head (Todd) in Peril Strait, and at Ford Arm (Deep Sea Salmon Company) on the west side of Chichagof Island.

The late Herman Kitka, Sr., a Tlingit boatbuilder and fisherman, said that his father, Frank Kitka, built the NECKERBAY, documented 1915, for John Young; OLYMPIC, 1918, for himself; ZINGO, 1918, for John Joseph, financed by the Deep Sea Salmon Company; BUSY BEE, 1919, for George T. Myers (cannery); and the ATLAS, his last boat, for himself in 1920, documented 1922. He also built the PTARMIGAN and the DIXIE, which may have been too small to document.

He first built in a shop at the old Brady sawmill, near the present Thomsen Harbor. When that building collapsed, he built boats in a shop on Charcoal Island, which had machinery powered by a gas engine. That shop was on the beach below the site of the current Shee Atika Business Center, and burned down before the military took over the island. Frank Kitka built his last boat, the ATLAS, in 1920, on Katlian Street.

Another Tlingit builder, George Howard, in 1912 or 1914 built his own shop and home on Katlian Street, on the town side of what is now the Seafood Producers Cooperative plant. The shop was replaced by a larger one in 1940. The house and shop were torn down in the summer of 1990.

George Howard probably built the ACTIVE, documented in 1917, for himself and his sons, and he built the U & I, documented 1919.

Every summer the Howards closed up shop and went fishing. George Howard built the seiner PROGRESS, documented in 1923, for himself, his sons, and son-in-law Andrew Hope.

Herman Kitka Sr. said that Peter Simpson, who was Tsimshian and who lived and worked at the Cottages, built the DREADNAUGHT, 1915, for Myers Cannery, for Jimmy Keunz; the ALBATROSS, 1917, for John Cameron, another resident of the Cottages; the BARANOFF, 1918, for Ralph Young, of the Cottages; the EAGLE, 1919 for Pyramid Packing Company; the MARY WARD, 1919, for Deep Sea Packing Company for George Ward; and the KATHARINE, 1919, for Deep Sea.

The Cottages was a model Christian community for Alaska Natives on the Presbyterian mission school grounds. It is adjacent to the Sitka National Historical Park, and Simpson's boat shop was on the small point of land where Merrill Rock is today.

Simpson is said to have built the MOONLIGHT, 1918, although the documentation lists her owner, Edward Grant, as the builder. Grant fished the boat into the 1940s, when he was killed aboard the boat when his neck scarf caught in the exposed engine. It was beached on Graveyard Island at Hoonah, until bought by a troller, Pete Moe, who became known as Moonlight Pete.

The MOONLIGHT is still fishing, and currently for sale; the boat was completely rebuilt in 1979. That owner said that before the rebuild the boat was unusually lightly built, with widely spaced frames, and no floors, the pieces which join the pairs of ribs. This might indicate the speed with which these boats were built, although it may be a characteristic only of this particular boat.

Peter Simpson built the troller SMILES, documented in 1920. According to the 1920 census, Cottages residents Raymond James and Simpson's son Louis Simpson were building boats with Simpson.

In addition to these boats, Sitka builders documented the NICHOLAI in 1915; the ALMS in 1917; the DORA B.H., the ELsie, the ESTHER, and the JOHN D. in 1918, and the LOUISE in 1919. That adds up to at least eight boats documented in 1918, and another eight in 1919.

The surge was partly due to US military purchase of canned salmon for the war effort. Guaranteed prices to fishermen and to canners led to 13 new canneries in southeastern Alaska in 1918, including Pyramid Cannery (Fisherman's Quay) in Sitka. But after the war, prices dropped, and many canneries closed, which was probably fortunate, as the fishing levels were unsustainable.

This overproduction of fishing boats meant that many were still around during the longline boom years of the 1980s, and some even survive today - a tangible connection to those days a century ago, when fresh new wooden seiners, and their builders and crews, were the pride of Sitka.
**Japonski Island Boathouse Rehabilitation**

The Sitka Maritime Heritage Society is working to restore the historic Japonski Island boat shop as a working boat repair facility and museum. Your support also leverages grant funding.

As a member, you will receive the newsletter and a 20% discount on t-shirts and other goods, and you will be a part of preserving Alaska’s maritime heritage.

The SMHS is a 501(c)3 nonprofit so your donation is tax deductible.

If you would like to join or renew, please fill out the form below and return it, along with your check, to:

**Sitka Maritime Heritage Society**

P. O. Box 2153

Sitka, Alaska 99835

or, use your credit card using this form, or online at [www.sitkamaritime.org](http://www.sitkamaritime.org)

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In addition to my membership I would like to make a donation of $_____________ to the building fund.

Thank You!

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**Sitka Maritime Heritage Society**

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