

## The 2014 Annual Mariner Rendezvous August 1-3, Mystic Seaport, CT

Published in *Notice to Mariners* newsletter; September, 2014

If there was anything learned from the 2013 Mariner Rendezvous, it was that people wanted to do it again. The excitement, camaraderie, and just plain fun of last year's event made it impossible *not* to do it again. To have so many 19-foot O'Day Mariners sailing in a non-competitive atmosphere, with a destination like the incomparable Mystic Seaport, was an event people wanted to repeat and first-time members wanted to experience for themselves.

Last year, the Rendezvous enjoyed significant financial support from the Mariner Class Association and several other sponsors since it was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building of the O'Day Mariner; with no such financial support this year, the registration cost was several times what it was in 2013. Nevertheless, a whopping 17 boats (only one less than last year) registered to participate, including a last-minute addition after two registered skippers had to back out for various reasons. Eric Lesniak (#3485 *Shoal Mate*) suffered an incident at his home in New Jersey with his trailer that threatened his participation, but, thanks to another Rendezvous attendee (Ulrich von Hollen, #1830 *Ob-La-Da*) who owns multiple Mariners and had a spare trailer to lend, he managed to show up after all. The docks at Mystic would be full once again!

Most sailors began arriving at the Niantic River boat launch on Thursday afternoon, and I in #1922 *Orion* and James Hollister in #1574 *Lively* took advantage of the beautiful weather and steady winds and sailed around the mooring field in the Niantic River. That evening, the sailors who were around had dinner together at The Dock restaurant adjacent to the launch ramp before settling down for the night, either out in their boats anchored nearby or at local hotels. The remaining few arrived in the morning and, with a few last-minute instructions, we got underway a little after 10:00 am. Steve Pawlowskis (#593 *Good Witch*) called to say he lost a tire on his trailer en route to the launch site, but he was back up and running and would still be there, and only an hour later than expected!



With light winds nearly on the nose and an opposing current, it was a slow and uneventful 9-mile sail across Long Island Sound. We stayed pretty much together, occasionally crossing tacks, taking pictures of each other's boats and looking out for darker patches on the water indicating a little more wind. The sun was hot but not oppressive; what a difference from the year before when we had battled a storm with driving rain and 30-knot winds!

When we finally arrived at the head of the Mystic River, most chose to sail through the mooring field and lower their sails just before the bridges. The Mystic railroad bridge opened in short order, and we made the 3:40 pm Mystic highway bridge opening, although a few stragglers had to wait an hour for the next opening. Those of us who had attended the 2013 Rendezvous knew exactly where to go as we approached the familiar floating docks at the Seaport, and in short order, boats were tied up and legs were stretched. Mystic had become Mariner country a second time.

Friday evening was spent cleaning up our boats, finding supper in town or cooking onboard, and erecting colorful and unique home-made cockpit awnings and shelters in advance of the rain showers forecasted for the night and Saturday morning. I had brought my Dyer Dhow *True Love* along, and both Bill Collins and James Hollister's son Nate had brought a dinghy and a kayak as well, so we rowed and paddled around all the historic boats and ships berthed along the Seaport's waterfront. We even challenged each other to a dinghy race in front of the floating docks which drew a lot of onlookers! Only a few sailors had hotel reservations for the night; the majority stayed overnight on their boats. We were serenaded by the music blasting from the Boat Shed pavilion as a wedding reception was in full swing, although it promptly ended at 10:00 pm as the Seaport has a very strict "all quiet" policy at that time.



Rain showers began not long after midnight, and it picked up to a steady rain which lasted all Saturday morning long. Although it foiled the plans of many sailors who were planning on exploring Fisher's Island Sound that day, everybody was quite happy to spend the day exploring the Seaport and visiting downtown Mystic. The rain finally ended shortly after 1:00 pm, and I hopped in *Orion* with Jennifer O'Connor (#1338 *Hot Flashes*) to sail around the shallow anchorage just north of the Seaport. With the skies still quite dark, there wasn't much wind, but it felt good just to get out on the water again. A short while later, professional photographer Stuart Watson (#2154 *Tussle*) jumped in my boat to take pictures of the Harbor farther south by the highway bridge. His camera chattered as we sailed all around the empty mooring buoys near the pristine houses lining the river.



As we began to return to the docks, we noticed several other sailors had followed suit; the harbor was coming alive with people sailing in their Mariners and other small craft rented at the Seaport's Boathouse. We all sailed close by each other, playing games of "chicken" by aiming for one another and turning away at the last moment. However, Bill Eggers (#2280 *Julie B*) with daughters Jillian and Bridget, sailing in a rented catboat, took it to the next level as I passed by only inches away: Jillian, showing her true pirate inclinations, deviously stood up, reached around to my sheet bag on the starboard bulkhead, and grabbed my box of fudge I had put there after buying it at the Seaport's Bake Shop! This, of course, meant war, and as they eventually sailed back to the catboat's mooring ball, I unapologetically sprayed them with water using my handheld bilge pump. It was a good time had by all.

That evening, after the Seaport had closed its doors to the public, all the Mariner sailors gathered at the bandstand at the edge of the Seaport's green. We went around in a circle, introducing ourselves and talking about how we became Mariner owners. It was a great way to become better acquainted with each other, and it was mentioned many times how people really felt as if we were one big "Mariner family". Interestingly enough, of the 17 Mariners that participated, three boats had solo sailors, three brought friends as crew, and 11 sailed with family members, some with as many as four or five aboard! It really was a "family affair". After that, we posed for a group picture in front of the Thomas Oyster House, and then we left to go eat our dinners.



Sunday morning dawned with overcast skies, but no rain. One by one, the cockpit covers were taken down and stowed below. A few sailors made last-minute purchases at the Seaport's gift shop, and boats were made ready for the journey home. The Eggers family joined me in *Orion* for a short yet pleasant trip motoring as far up the river as we could go before having to turn back at the Interstate 95 highway bridges. As an added precaution against the threat of rain, Ed Wise (#2862 *Christina T*) donned his full foul weather gear, promising that by doing so, there would actually be no rain. We hoped he would be right, and after a final few words of instruction, we left the docks to catch the 10:40 am Mystic highway bridge opening. We all managed to scoot through the Mystic railroad bridge as a group and collectively motored down the river through the mooring fields. Once off of Noank, we raised our sails and shut off our motors. Although we were met with light winds, it was coming from the east, and, coupled with the westward current, we made fairly decent time over ground.



We stayed pretty much together, sailing wing-on-wing, and a few sailors even hoisted spinnakers, although the light winds and rolling sea state made it difficult to keep them effectively filled with air. The wind finally died altogether near Goshen Point by Harkness Park, and with many facing long rides back home, we finally surrendered and took our sails down, motoring the last few miles through the Niantic bridges and back to the boat launch. The boats were plucked out of the water with speed, and with the sun finally making an appearance, it seemed as though Ed Wise's prediction had come true – there hadn't been any rain. The process of all the Mariners jockeying for positions at the launch ramp began, and it all went very smoothly. In short order, masts were unstepped and everything was secured for the trips home. It had been another incredibly successful event!

---

The Mariner Class Association was originally formed by sailors in 1966 with the desire to race O'Day Mariners as a one-design fleet, and in 1969, the first Annual National Championships was

established and has taken place every year since then. During much of that time, organized cruises have been somewhat of an afterthought with racing receiving most of the promotion and support. In recent years, there has been a big shift to give cruising and daysailing equal standing within the Association, and the results have been pretty dramatic, especially since the vast majority of the membership doesn't race. There are now several fleets from the Great Lakes to Vermont to Florida whose members engage solely in non-racing, group gatherings on the water. Perhaps the most exciting development of all just happened in July 2014 when, following the success of the 2013 O'Day Mariner 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Rendezvous, the Association formally voted to promote and financially support an Annual Rendezvous at the same level as they would the Nationals. This was an historic move as, for the first time in Association history, it now provides a non-racing, Class-sanctioned annual event for cruisers. Although this does not officially take effect until the 2015 Rendezvous, most everybody considers the 2013 Anniversary Rendezvous as the first "official" Rendezvous, with this year's as the second.

The future for Mariners and the Mariner Class Association looks very bright indeed, and I'm proud to be a member of this fantastic group of sailors. I'm already looking forward to next year's event.

Nate Bayreuther  
#1922 *Orion*

