

September 2020



# on the Move

*Local maritime news, events and history from the Chicago Maritime Museum*

## CMMFestival is Nod to Chicago Maritime Festivals of the Past

The Chicago Maritime Museum's first "gala gone virtual," ***CMMFestival***, is coming to living rooms, dens and kitchens all over Chicagoland and beyond on October 22 via ZOOM. In addition to an inspiring speaker-- Chicago-born sailor Bill Pinkney, the first African American to solo circumnavigate the globe-- and a lively paddle raise, ***CMMFestival*** will conclude with a Lee Murdock Concert, a performance dedicated to the maritime heritage that built and sustains Chicago and its people.

The online festival is a throwback to CMM's long-lived and much beloved partner, the Chicago Maritime Festival. Here is Part One of the story of how the folk music festival grew from a simple idea to an international event with broad appeal. The October issue of OTM will feature the second half of the story.



Thirty-five years ago, the Chicago Maritime Museum was a distant aspiration. The Chicago Maritime Society had been incorporated in August of 1982, with the goal of establishing a maritime museum on Navy Pier. That goal, however, proved elusive, so the society decided to gradually build its collection and demonstrate its capacity by functioning as a "museum without walls."

"One of the organization's first public out-reach programs was in 1984 when, in cooperation with Loyola University Chicago, the society hosted the Chicago's Maritime Heritage Conference," says long time CMM board member and Loyola history professor Ted Karamanski.

Funded by a grant from the Illinois Humanities Council, the conference attracted scholars from throughout the region. The principle audience was primary and secondary school

educators who attended panels exploring the importance of the waterways in Chicago's past. Continuing education credits were offered to teachers in attendance.

An outcome of the conference was the society's first publication *The Maritime History of Chicago: A Guide to Sources*, a 131-page annotated bibliography of work on the subject and a guide to archival institutions where key primary sources could be found. It was hoped that this book would stimulate teachers and others to explore on their own the city's maritime past.

It was during the conference that the idea of a less academic and more popular program was discussed.



"Along with the popular maritime folk singing duo, Chris and Tom Kastle, in 1985, we planned our first Chicago Maritime Folk Festival," says Karamanski. "Tom and Chris brought their knowledge of the music scene to the project and spearheaded the locating and signing of musical talent."

That first festival included Northland College Voyageurs, the beloved folk singer Art Thieme, Mystic Seaport's Bob Walser and a maritime chorus from Gdansk, Poland. Tom and Chris performed under their group name "Privateer." The event was held in the Crown Center at Loyola University's Lake Shore Campus. Maritime Society board members chipped in to fill the lobby overlooking Lake Michigan with activity stations from boat building (a dingy), ship modeling, knot tying, and a spot where kids could craft their own miniature sail boats.

The success of the festival inspired calls for an encore the next year. The 1986 event was again held at Loyola's Crown Center and the format was extended to an entire weekend. It was again a success but not without a few hic-ups.

Anxious to attract a large audience and media attention, the society booked as "headliners" John Hartford who was then famous for his song "Gentle on My Mind" which won multiple Grammy Awards and Gordon Bok, the nautical poet laureate of Maine, Art Thieme, Talitha Nelson, who later became Talitha MadKenzie, an accomplished Scottish Gaelic singer and lecturer at the Scottish Music Department of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and the Northland Voyageurs.

"The first problem was Hartford's insistence that he be allowed to have his pet dog with him in the auditorium—something Loyola security guards tried to stop," recalls Karamanski. "When that crisis was averted, we scrambled to find a sheet of plywood so he could do clog dancing while he played his fiddle. In the end the concert went off fine, all breathed a sigh of relief when the last song was sung—a spirited version of *Rolling Home* in which Tom and Chris led the entire ensemble."





The successful folk festivals inspired another project. With a 1987 grant from the Illinois Humanities Council, the Loyola University Public History Program partnered with the Chicago Maritime Society to produce a radio documentary “Work and the Waterways: An Aural History of Midwestern Workers.” Tom and Chris, as well as Art Thieme performed classic songs associated with the waterways, which were interspersed by an engaging historical narrative. Melinda Campbell researched, wrote, and co-produced the program which premiered on Public Radio International. She also prepared a teacher’s guide, which allowed a cassette tape version to be adapted for classroom use.

(To be continued in the October issue.)

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## Maritime Folksinger Lee Murdock Headlines the *CMMFestival*



Virtual attendees of the *CMMFestival* on October 22 will enjoy a live concert by renowned folksinger Lee Murdock, who will perform songs about the maritime heritage of Chicago and Lake Michigan.

An avid reader and student of history, Lee Murdock is broadly acknowledged as “the premier interpreter of songs and tales about the Great Lakes.” Blending his stories with verse, melody, meter, and rhyme, his songs bring an atmospheric context and a personal angle on these snapshots in history.

His journey began with the maritime music from the golden age of sail, drawing upon the songs collected from old sailors in and around the Great Lakes by scholars like Edith Fowke of York University in Toronto and Ivan Walton of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Soon finding stories that cried out for their own songs, Lee came alongside that tradition with original ballads of contemporary commerce and revelry in the grand folk style.

Over the years, his inspiration has come from the research done by many Great Lakes historians including the likes of Walter Havighurst and William Ratigan, as well as colleagues like Fred Stonehouse, Ted Karamanski, and Victoria Brehm.

In addition to 21 CDs, Lee Murdock transcribed the musical scores from Walton’s collection as his contribution for the landmark book, *Windjammers, Songs of the Great Lakes Sailors*, published by Wayne State University Press in 2002. Two years later, Lee and his wife, Joann, published their own book, *Lake Rhymes, Folk Songs of the Great Lakes Region*, an 18 song study guide (with CD) for use in the classroom.

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## *the Curator's Corner* by Dylan Hoffmann

### The Racine Canoe



For almost fifty years, Racine, Wisconsin boatbuilding companies constructed canoes. The first company, established in 1874, was called the **Racine Hardware Manufacturing Company**. And while the company did not own a boatyard (they also built furniture and many other items), their veneer “Racine Boat” became well known and was exhibited at the Columbian Exposition World’s Fair in Chicago in 1893. After the fair, the financial panic of 1893 caused the Racine Hardware Manufacturing Company to file for bankruptcy.

When enough capital was raised, a new boatyard, the Racine Boat Manufacturing Company, opened on the Root River in Racine. The yard expanded to include steel and aluminum construction to its traditional wood boats. In the early 1900s the company could build any type of boat. They produced canoes, rowboats, small craft, and custom yachts.

In 1903, the boatyard was destroyed by a fire and relocated to Muskegon, Michigan. Employees became homesick and frustrated with the change from traditional wooden boatbuilding as the company constructed more steel vessels to pursue government contracts. In 1906, many employees returned home and founded the Racine Boat Company. It closed permanently in 1928 due partly to the availability of the automobile in the 1920s.

Many of the Racine canoes survived, as they were built in larger numbers and stored in sheds or barns during the winter. A 14-foot lapstrake canoe built by the Racine Boat Company is part of the Ralph and Rita Frese Canoe Collection at the Chicago Maritime Museum. The design is light weight with great strength due to over-lapping planking nailed together along the edges and half-round ribs to tie it together on the inside. The brass plate on the deck reads “Racine Boat MFG. CO. Builders Chicago.” The local historical significance and quality construction make this canoe an impactful artifact in the CMM collection.

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## Great Footage from 1956 Chicago River Boat Ride

This 16mm silent Kodachrome film includes spectacular shots of the 1956 Chicago skyline, as well as wonderful views of downtown Chicago from the river.



[Watch Video Here](#)

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## Former Librarian Brings Sailors, Quilters and Hyde Park Neighbors Together to Make Thousands Of Masks



Hyde Parker Leslie Travis has tapped her numerous connections — including a sailmaker

and quilting guild — to create a massive mask-making operation.

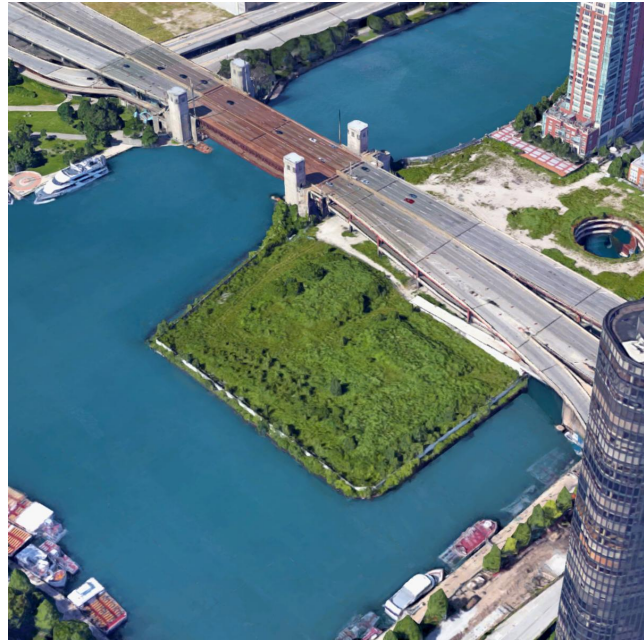
[Read More Here](#)

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## Plan to Rehab Chicago's DuSable Park Moves Forward

The City of Chicago has authorized a further cleanup of the lakefront peninsula's contaminated soil.

[Read Article Here](#)



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## Maritime Event Calendar

Check out local maritime events at the Chicago Maritime Museum website calendar page:

<https://www.chicagomaritimemuseum.org/events.html>

Submit maritime events in the Chicagoland area or story ideas to Mary Ann O'Rourke at [maorourke@ameritech.net](mailto:maorourke@ameritech.net).

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*We hope you've enjoyed our monthly e-newsletter, On the Move.  
If you have a Chicago maritime story idea please forward it to  
[maorourke@ameritech.net](mailto:maorourke@ameritech.net)*



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