



MAINE ARCHIVES & MUSEUMS NEWSLETTER



Steamship Katahdin in 1951

THE STEAMSHIP *KATAHDIN* CELEBRATES ITS CENTENNIAL

By Liz Cannell, Executive Director, Moosehead Marine Museum

A National Historic Landmark, the steamboat *Katahdin*, more than any other remaining piece of Moosehead's history, truly reflects the many eras, interests, and businesses of the region's past and present. Affectionately known as the "Kate," she has been a fixture on Moosehead Lake since 1914, when she was introduced,

along with 40-plus other boats, transporting people and supplies to Mount Kineo from Greenville Junction. Now in her centennial year, she is the final link to that bygone era.

The *Katahdin* was built on the coast by Bath Iron Works, shipped north by train, hauled overland by oxen, and finally assembled in

Greenville. She is the oldest floating vessel of BIW—a company famous for, among other vessels, the Navy's Aegis class cruiser.

The Kate's hull is steel with a two-deck wooden superstructure and a raised pilot-house. Early in the 1920s she was converted

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from coal to diesel, and today is powered by two diesel engines in tandem.

In summers past, entire families fled the cities for the healthy and invigorating environment of Northern Maine. Visitors would arrive by train at Greenville Junction and in a few steps were boarding boats to travel up the lake. It was the perfect escape from the stifling heat and pollution of cities like Philadelphia, New York, and Boston.

The grand and luxurious Mount Kineo Hotel was home for the Kate. She shuttled hundreds of guests over the course of those golden years. The attractions of Kineo House were legend: yachting, fishing, golf, horseback riding, and an active social scene. There was even a baseball team and a full orchestra! Scions of industrial America returned year after year. Most would stay at the Mount Kineo, where up to 400 people at a time could be seated for spectacular gourmet dining. Menus included wild local game, fresh fish, and vegetables grown on neighboring Farm Island.

In 1929, the stock market crashed, ushering in the Great Depression. This event, coupled with peoples' increasing access to, and reliance on, automobile transportation, drastically changed the face of the leisure travel industry. Rather than summering far from the big cities, families began taking shorter jaunts, remaining closer to home. The resort business, along with the leisure-oriented transportation on Moosehead Lake, declined.

Big changes altered the life of the elegant Kate. Demands on the logging industry during World War II were enormous, and in the late 1930s she ended up in the hands of the Scott Paper Company, hauling huge log booms. These giant islands of logs, held together by floating restraints, or booms, consisted of up to 4,500 cord of wood. The Kate became a workhorse, pulling these booms to the East Outlet of the Kennebec River, which flowed out of Moosehead Lake. From there, the logs floated down the Kennebec to mills, where they would be transformed into paper, plywood, and other wood products.

The Kate continued hauling log booms until it was determined that the practice polluted the lake and was environmentally unfriendly. She participated in the Last Log drive in 1976 and then retired.

The owners of the *Katahdin*, knowing that they were to be taken out of the log-driving business, allowed the vessel to fall into extreme

disrepair. The running gear had been reasonably well maintained, but the wooden superstructure was allowed to rot, along with roofs and decks. In 1977, she was given to a local board of directors who organized a non-profit corporation. While recognizing the preservation potential of the vessel and its significance to the community, the cost of restoration was thought to be prohibitive. The group concluded she should be pulled from the water and set up to serve as a static exhibit. However, a survey by a marine consultant persuaded the board to keep her in operation. With small grants from the State of

Maine, the Federal government and several foundations, the vessel was made seaworthy, though not fully restored.

It was a resurrection for the Kate. For almost a decade, each season, she made daily cruises, becoming a major draw for visitors to the Moosehead Lake Region. As such, she grew into a symbol for tourism in the area. Despite this, revenues from daily operations, coupled with gifts from small donors, were insufficient to provide the funding for proper restoration. This work was sorely needed if the *Katahdin* were to survive—both literally and metaphorically.



The Kate today

At the point when the fundraising for restoration began in 1993, one could poke a broom handle through the steel hull in some places. The gracefully turned stanchions supporting the roof over the second deck had been replaced with white three-inch plastic drainpipe. Three-eighths inch plywood covered a main deck, which was ready to collapse.

Repairs and restoration to a vessel the size of the *Katahdin* are not simple; workers need to access parts of the superstructure that normally remain under water. Getting a 110-foot-long, 120-ton boat out of the water requires significant feats of engineering, ample time, and substantial sums of money. Fully half the funding for the project was devoted to the task of pulling the *Katahdin* out of the lake.

The corporation was fortunate to have a board member with a long-standing family history of interest in the region, as well as the means to see the operation through the inevitable losses from the early days. What was clearly needed was a major fund drive, to once and for all restore the vessel to its former self. In 1995, the Moosehead Marine Museum began a five-year plan to raise \$500,000 for this restoration. The goal was helped considerably by large donations from Elizabeth Noyce and the aforementioned board member.

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It was a labor of love. The various agencies and companies involved with the project were propelled by a sense of proprietary ownership. Bath Iron Works contracted to re-plate the hull at a loss; other contractors participated on a slim or losing margin to complete the hull; and no cruising time was lost. This is notable, considering that it was necessary to raise the vessel vertically in winter over the then-ice-bound lake, and take exacting measurements for forming the new plates at the shipyard in Bath. This was no simple task for a 110-foot vessel, nor was the installation of the new steel skin in Greenville during the winter while the boat perched over three feet of ice. The town of Greenville came together with money, commitment, and a lot of hard work, all of which had the effect of bonding the Kate more closely with her community.

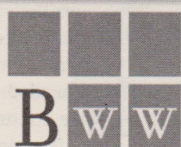
Smaller projects were completed as money became available. The second deck was fiber-glassed. The roof over the first deck, which had been removed by Scott Paper Company, was restored, and a fire extinguishing system was installed. Ice Eaters, which churn warmer water from the depths to the surface, were put in place to keep the immediate area of the cove from freezing to the hull or the wharf during winter.

In 2010, the Moosehead Marine Museum raised approximately an additional \$500,000 to rebuild the *Katahdin*'s wharf. As the project began, the Kate began taking on water. An inspection of her keel

revealed significant corrosion. It would need to be replaced. This presented quite a dilemma for the museum. Immediately raising the additional half million dollars needed for keel repair would stretch the resources and creativity of all involved!

Bottom line—people love the Kate—and once again, the ensuing fundraising push gave evidence to the reverence the community holds for this cornerstone of the local economy. With strong local support and the assistance of the Piscataquis County Economic Development Council, the Town of Greenville was awarded a Community Development Block Grant. This grant put fundraising efforts over the top and enabled the museum to hire Prock Marine. This specialty marine company, from Rockland, built a drydock and re-clad the Kate's keel. They completed the project on time during October and November of 2012. Many people came to see the process, snapping pictures and marveling at the size of the Kate's graceful hull.

During her cruising season of 2013, from late June to early October, she boarded over 7,300 passengers. These "Lake Cruisers" came from 48 states as well as a variety of other countries, including Australia and the Netherlands. Fifty-one percent of the ridership comes from Maine. The Rock 'n' Roll Cruises are especially popular! As the Kate sails into her 100th year, many festivities and celebrations are planned. Her birthday will be celebrated in August. To participate in these special events, visit online at katahdincruises.com or call (207) 695-2716 for information – you're invited! •

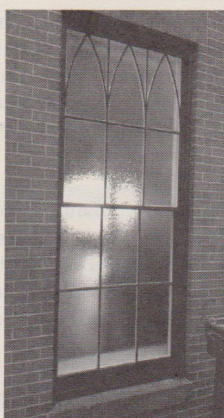


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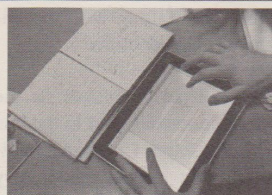
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