

TALL SHIPS

2008 NORFOLK HARBORFEST

by Jay Jensen



News for pennies (Photo by Wendy Jensen)

We arrived at Norfolk's Freemason neighborhood early enough to secure a great parking space on that sunny Sunday in June 2007. We stepped out of the car and, much like Alice jumping down the rabbit hole into Wonderland, found ourselves enveloped in a slice of life as it was in Freemason Harbor in 1907. Strolling past beautifully kept period homes, we encountered young boys hawking the latest news for pennies. A high-wheeled bicyclist rode by as Mark Twain entertained us with a literary discourse. We even chatted with Teddy Roosevelt and his wife, Edith, for a bit before tactfully excusing ourselves from the political discussion of that day. We had much yet to see.

Passing Town Point Park, we found the clock had been turned back much further—to 1607. There were recreations of costume, music, dancing and theater from those early days surrounding the establishment of the Jamestown settlement. These were all part of the 400th anniversary of Jamestown celebrations held at Harborfest 2007. Our goal was to see the many beautiful tall ships that had arrived to participate in



Godspeed under full sail (Photo courtesy of Godspeed)



Captain Miranda's crew in parade dress (Photo courtesy of Captain Miranda)



There is no mistaking
Schooner Virginia.
(Photo courtesy of
Schooner Virginia)

Sail Virginia's commemoration of the Jamestown anniversary. The constant backdrop of masts, flags and rigging sprouting up beyond the trees and buildings fueled our enthusiasm. It was breathtaking to come into full view of this wonderful collection of early sailing vessels.

Fast forward to June 2008, and we once again found ourselves in Norfolk, this time as visitors to Harborfest 2008. We love to stroll the streets of Freemason. Gone this year was Mark Twain, Teddy and the newsboys. Mark would have been off creating his imaginative fables and short stories. Teddy that year told Congress, perhaps inspired by our earlier conversation, "The conservation of our natural resources and their proper use constitute the fundamental problem which underlies almost every other problem of our national life." But the tall ships were back.

The 2008 assemblage of tall ships was scaled down as compared to the 2007 commemoration of Jamestown. But those that participated were remarkable. On display for the first time was *Spirit of South Carolina*. Returnees from 2007 and prior Harborfest celebrations included *Captain Miranda*, *Kalmar Nyckel* and the host ships *Serenity*, *Godspeed* and *Schooner Virginia*.

At 205 feet, *Captain Miranda* was the largest ship present. She is the official sail-training tall ship of Uruguay. Built in 1930, she is the Uruguayan ambassador on the world's seas. She was built at the Matagorda Shipyard in Cadiz, Spain. (That city gave a bon voyage—in Spanish, of course—to a rather adventuresome sea captain named Columbus and his crew as they set off on his second and fourth voyages to the new world.) Her black hull is in contrast to the gleaming gold bow figurehead. The *Captain Miranda* proudly displays the figure of a bright sun, which lights her way as she sails to the horizon.

Next in size is the 140-foot *Spirit of South Carolina*. She was commissioned in 2007. Reminiscent of an 1879 design, she serves as a platform for the

Palmetto State's youth education, responsibility and character development. A six-year project entailing over 100,000 man hours and several million dollars, she was conceived "to revitalize the rich maritime history of South Carolina and to honor the region's seafaring past in a meaningful and lasting way." Built in Charleston, South Carolina by traditional methods with local materials, she was the first genuine wooden sailing ship to be built there in over one hundred years.

Kalmar Nyckel is a 1998 replica of the Swedish ship that in 1638 brought the first permanent European settlers to the Delaware Valley. The Swedes established the colony of New Sweden in present-day Wilmington, Delaware, and she made a total of four round-trip crossings of the Atlantic—more than any other ship of that era. The historical significance of this remarkable journey rivals that of the *Mayflower*, but her story has seldom been told. She serves as the state of Delaware's ambassador of goodwill and promoter of social and economic development. Her home port is Wilmington, and at sea she can berth a crew of 32, plus the captain.

Serenity is a 65-foot two-masted gaff topsail schooner whose home port is in Cape Charles, on Virginia's Eastern Shore. Sailing out of Bay Creek Marina, she takes passengers on daysails and group and specialty charters on the Chesapeake Bay. *Serenity* has ventured south to the Cayman Islands and north through the Great Lakes. She was built in 1986 in North Carolina and was lovingly restored in 2000 when moved to her new Virginia home. She is Coast Guard-certified to carry 30 passengers. She performs well in tall ship races such as the Great Chesapeake Bay Schooner Race.

Godspeed is the recreation of one of the three ships that brought America's first permanent English colonists to Virginia in 1607. Her home port is Jamestown Settlement, and she is one of three ships the Virginia General Assembly designated in 2001 as the official fleet of



Spirit of South Carolina en route from Charleston Harbor (Photo courtesy of *Spirit of South Carolina*)



Kalmar Nyckel shows off her artistic stern at Harborfest. (Photo by Wendy Jensen)

the Commonwealth. The current replica was built in 2004-06 in Maine, to serve as an exhibit at Jamestown Settlement, which is a living history museum replicating life in 17th-century Virginia. Her design is based upon Captain John Smith's documented cargo-carrying capacity of 40 tons. Design proportions were established by using rules for tonnage measurement found in 17th-

century naval treatises.

Schooner Virginia, built in 2004, is a 126-foot recreation of an early 20th-century pilot schooner. These pilot schooners guided ships safely through the shoals of the Virginia Capes and the Chesapeake Bay to ports, and – world renowned for their speed, seaworthiness and easy handling – they endured long after



A sunset Chesapeake Bay cruise on *Serenity* (Photo courtesy of *Serenity*)

other vessels turned to steam. The original *Virginia* served as a floating home and training vessel for pilots, and she worked

until 1926, when she too was replaced by a steamship. She carries students – young and old – on educational voyages and as an

ambassador of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Her home port is Norfolk.

Friday marked the Parade of Sail, an opportunity to see these wonderful vessels in motion. Dockside tours gave the public the opportunity to go aboard, interact with crew members and see first-hand how captains and crew coped with life at sea, facing all the adversities that Mother Nature could, and did, give these hearty sailors. These tall ships, by their very existence, are a testament to our appreciation of that bravery and will.

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Jay Jensen and his wife Wendy share time between their mountain home in West Virginia and Virginia's Chesapeake Bay. He works in environmental planning and administration and enjoys carrying Wendy's luggage to new adventures.