

Nahant Historical Society

Remembering the *Valiant*: A Community Launches a Dream

Special Appreciation goes to the McClain and Palombo Families, who along with many others made this project possible.



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The Society is most grateful for the generosity of Ralph Lowell, Jr.

The Valiant Research Inventory is a summary of artifacts relating to the backyard construction of the *Valiant*, an 80 foot, 90 ton dragger and how the community helped to make that dream come true. The last professional offshore fishing vessel built in Nahant, Massachusetts was constructed between 1955 and 1963 by owners and neighbors Raymond Palombo and Francis “Swede” L. McClain, Jr. in the narrow space between their houses with their “silent partner” Charles Baxter. Both men were native Nahanters with extensive fishing experience. Palombo had built four other fishing boats, but none so large. However, he wanted to pioneer offshore lobster fishing, likely a more lucrative living. His partner McClain was an oil burner serviceman who needed more income as did Palombo to sustain his family. Using surplus and recycled materials to construct the hull and desk with traditional shipbuilding techniques, Palombo and McClain even managed to raise and restore another fishing vessel’s massive engine, left as salvage in a recent wreck. Despite bank loans, both families suffered severe economies. But somehow building went on because it grew into a community endeavor. Other Nahanters pitched in to build this American dream over eight grueling years. Young to old volunteered around their own work schedule elsewhere, gave a casserole or “passed the hat.”

Finally, the *Valiant* was laboriously moved in her cradle over three days (October 14 to 16, 1963) by house riggers, E. H. Hinds, down to the Tudor Wharf at a cost of \$5,000. Crowds of Nahanters and others of all ages followed her every move until she was christened. She slowly floated off her cradle with that late evening’s high tide. Within the week, Valiant was towed to Gloucester for her final outfitting to join the offshore fishing fleet, her value then \$125,000. Unfortunately the Atlantic is cruel to fishing vessels. Valiant stuck a submerged object while offshore fishing and sank in June 1967. Thankfully Palombo and his crew were rescued. But the heroic story of her building and launch continues to resonate today as Nahanters say to one another: “Tell me the story of the Valiant!”

This research inventory was created by Curator Bonnie Ayers D’Orlando with the assistance of the Valiant Committee: Committee Chair Julie A. Tarmy, Curator Emerita Calantha D. Sears, Exhibit Designer, Photographer and Tech Support Robert A. Wilson, Local Maritime Historian Rosamond (Butler) Puleo, Collections Chair Richard Arzillo, Treasurer Suzanne A. Hamill, and Board Member Tess Munro Bauta.

The *Valiant* research inventory is a study aid for research and interest of a maritime episode in the history of Nahant, Massachusetts and its people. Authorization in writing from the Nahant Historical Society is required for any other purpose.

RESEARCH INVENTORY - *The Valiant*

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Sources:

- Nahant Historical Society collections with 2016 gifts towards this project
- Incoming short term loans from private collections for research and short-term exhibition

Access: Open to research with advanced appointment to the Society's collections. This inventory also lists loaned artifacts that normally reside in private collections plus one at the Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island. Please contact the Nahant Historical Society to see if those are accessible.

Range: 1955 to October 2016

Location: Nahant Historical Society, certain private collections, and Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island

Extent and content: The Society's own archives include folders of personal accounts and news articles. Also stored in our Hodges Library and Paterson Room for artifact storage are books, film, oral histories, photographic media, and works of art. Private collections listed contain film, objects, personal accounts and photographs. The Newport Historical Society contains one oral history with one of the owners of the *Valiant*, Raymond Palombo. Total of 39 sets were used for research in this collaborative program, each containing one or more artifacts.

NHS Collections

Archives

1. A2014.1.0026: Ships – General
 - a. Notes on *the Valiant* on list of maritime vessels related to Nahant
2. A2014.1.0026.016: Ships – *VALIANT*
 - a. Three folders of newspaper articles, including the Lynn Daily Item, Boston Globe, Boston Herald along with notes, and personal accounts about the construction and launch of the offshore fishing dragger, *Valiant*. Also included accounts from the Gloucester Daily Times of Gloucester, Massachusetts, chronicling the post-launch final fitting-out of the *Valiant*.
3. 2016 additions to A2014.0026.016 – various additional *Valiant* documentation,
4. Of special note, first, a letter, dated January 13, 2016, from Stephen Robinson to Curator Emerita Calantha Sears; the Robinson family lived next door to the Palombo and McClain families on Forty Steps Lane. Numerous childhood memories include building details, such as use of the long steam box for shaping the rib timbers as well as the tar tub, the waterproofing needed to heavily coat all future underwater parts. Second, a history of USCC *Active*, a US Coast Guard cutter, which rescued the crew of the *Valiant* at the time of her sinking Sept. 1, 1965 from the US Coast Guard's archives
5. 2016 programs: *Valiant – A Community Launches a Dream* – two folders containing documents, newspaper articles and research correspondence.

Books

6. 974.45 D: deStefano, Daniel A. and Gerald W. Butler. *Sails and Rails Nahant, Massachusetts, A History of the Island and Her Ships*, St. Louis, Missouri and Portland, Maine: f/64 Publishing, 2014. (Illustrated by the authors) Gift of the authors
7. New 623.88: 2016. *Valiant – Tarmy & Wilson: Tarmy, Julie A. and Robert A. Wilson, The Valiant: How a Community Built a Dream*. Nahant, Massachusetts: Nahant Historical Society, print copy of the PowerPoint of July 17, 2016 lecture.

Film

8. 2016. *Valiant – Irvine*: Brief digitized footage of the October 1963 second and third days of the move and pre-launch footage at Marjoram Park using a personal movie camera, likely with 8mm film. The film to digital transfer was completed at local chain store. Gift of the Irvine Family

Objects

9. 2015.1.2799: a rectangular lobster trap created by a 5th generation Nahant fisherman. The rectangular wooden frame is weighted with the unique Gove design rather than with stones or bricks. Gove worked with Raymond Palombo, building the *Valiant* as well as fishing. Gift of the maker, Ronald W. Gove
10. 2016. *Valiant - deStefano: Valiant*, watercolor on paper (not framed) by Daniel A. deStefano, 2016; See similar artwork by this Nahant artist and retired director of Nahant Public Library. Gift of the artist
11. New 2016. *Valiant- McClain: Valiant*, oil on canvas of the fishing dragger by Virginia McClain, the wife of one of the owners, Francis "Swede" L. McClain Jr.
 - a. Gift in memory of his mother by Francis "Lee" L. McClain III
12. New 2016. *Valiant-Wilson: Quik Course*, a marine course finder device endorsed by Raymond Palombo, comprised of a transparent plastic chart with compass with detailed instructions and mailing envelope. The device was marketed as an easy to use navigational aid under the company Bayfront Enterprises of Nahant. Gift of Paul A. Wilson

Photographs and Slides

13. 2014.3.2339: Two color photos of launch day at Tudor Wharf by Nahant photographer Philip Goddard, showing the *Valiant* on her cradle at Tudor Wharf waiting to be floated off at high tide later that evening October 16, 1963. Documents local support by crowd presence. Donor unknown.
14. 2014.3.2340: Six color photographs by Winthrop Donnison Hodges, Jr. showing the slow progress of the *Valiant* as it is moved by E. H. Hines, Riggers from Forty Steps Lane to Walton and onto Wharf Street. Note planks and ironwood rollers used in that transport, October 14 or 15, 1963. Gift of Winthrop Donnison Hodges, Jr.
15. 2014.3.2341: Four color photos of the Gove Family shown along the *Valiant's* move route from Forty Steps Lane along Wharf Street, illustrating the multi-generational support by the Gove Family, October 14 to 15, 1963. Gift of Richard S. Gove
16. 2014.3.2342: Eight black and white photos, showing the *Valiant* moving among the local crowd down through the Tudor Wharf parking lot and Marjoram Park towards the water, October 16, 1963. Note E.H. Hines, Riggers' truck in #5. Gift of the photographer Winthrop Donnison Hodges, Jr.
17. 2014.3.2343: Two black and white photos showing the *Valiant* moving into Marjoram Park, just prior to being eased down to the water, October 16, 1963. Note crowd in both and E.H. Hinds truck in #2. Gift of Susan Bushnell Kane in memory of her father, master shipbuilder Joel Bushnell who worked 20th century renovations of USS Constitution.
18. 2014.3.2344: Two color photos of the move of the *Valiant* just prior to entering Marjoram Park, note size of vessel dwarfing people of all ages. Estate of Stanley C. Paterson.
19. 2014.3.2345: Five black and white photos of moving the *Valiant*, October 14-16, 1963 by Boston Globe photographer Samuel B. Hammat. #2 of 5 shows Virginia McClain with her husband Francis "Swede" L. McClain, Jr. towing. These are study images only. Permission to publish or other use requires written permission from the Boston Globe. Gift of Stephen Robinson.
20. 2016 Valiant – Oxton: Roland "Rollie" Oxton; 5 black and white photographs in launch day series, documenting the tremendous size of the fishing dragger compared to all the people involved with her move or just out in community support. One in particular shows the two owner-builders with certain vital Nahanters during the move with the *Valiant* looming above them. This Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer and Nahant resident honed his art serving with the photo corps of the US Army during World War II in both European and Pacific theaters. Afterwards, he worked for almost three decades as a photojournalist for the Boston Herald Traveler and Record American, specializing in breaking news. Gifts of the photographer and his son David Oxton.
21. 2016 Valiant – Roland: color Kodachrome slides (eight displayed in the exhibition) of the move and launch of the *Valiant* October 14-16, 1963. A self-taught amateur photographer, Phillips Hood Roland II shot perceptive views from his family's multi-generation family florist and greenhouse business close by to the action. Gift of the Phillips Hood Roland II family.
22. 2016. *Valiant*- Bryant: 10 black and white and 10 color photos of the move and launch of the *Valiant* October 14-16, 1963 by the donor's mother, Alice "A" P. Bryant. Some close-ups show how planks and rollers were periodically repositioned during the move. Gift of Judith Bryant in memory of her mother Alice P. Bryant
23. 2016. *Valiant*- Cadigan: six black and white photos and eleven color photos by Nancy Cadigan of the last part of the move of the *Valiant* into Marjoram Park with crowd attending the Champagne christening. Gift of Laurie Cadigan Peterson in honor of her mother Nancy Cadigan
24. 2016. Valiant- Gallery: Photographs from the Gallery Family collections. Charles C. Gallery was a plumber, selectman and unofficial town historian. He also served with the US Navy Seabees during World War II. Gift in memory of his father by Thomas W. Gallery
25. 2016. Valiant – Robinson, Basil and Mary: Nine photos by Basil Robinson who lived next door to the boatbuilding site - first two rare winter color photos of the Valiant under construction between the

Palombo house at 33 Forty Steps Lane and the McClain house at 8 Walton Road in the late 1950s. Note smaller lobster boat in outdoor winter storage. Second, one black and white image of the stern of the *Valiant* during the October 14-16, 1963 move with one of Basil's brothers, Kevin, in the foreground. Third, six color photos of the move 1963. Gift of Basil and Mary Robinson.

26. 2016. *Valiant* – Tarmy: One rare winter black and white rare photo of the framework of the *Valiant* (1957-1963) with Almena Rynders Palombo and Raymond Palombo, Jr. in foreground on Forty Steps Lane by photographer Thomas A. Levangia, another neighbor who lived at 32 Forty Steps Lane. Gift of his neighbor Julie A. (Robinson) Tarmy

Recordings – digital

27. 2006. NHS Oral history-Gove, Hodges and McClain: Ronald and Frederick Gove, both brothers and 5th generation Nahant fishermen, Winthrop Donnison Hodges, Jr and Francis “Swede” L. McClain, Jr (co-owner of the *Valiant*): Focus on the *Valiant* with mention of other boatbuilding, such as the Gove 4th *Generation* fishing boat by interviewer Curator Calantha D. Sears.
28. 2010. Oral history- Gove: Frederick and Ronald Gove about their maritime family, building Gove boats, such as, the 4th *Generation* plus helping with the *Valiant* by interviewer Intern Douglas Meyer
29. 2010. Oral history-Puleo: Rosamond “Roz” M. (Butler) Puleo and her husband Andrew F. Puleo, detailed fishing around Nahant because her father was a master fisherman and mariner. Of note, are Mrs. Puleo's childhood memories add her bit on the *Valiant* with other children by walking and pressing on steamed planking to shape them. Such fun! Interviewer Intern Douglas Meyer.
30. 2016. NHS Oral History: Nancy Wilson: a unique view of the building and launch. Ms. Wilson was then married to master mariner and boat builder Louis J. Letourneau Jr., who occasionally assisted the *Valiant*'s owners with construction, by interviewers Curator Emerita Calantha Sears with *Valiant* Project Chair Julie (Robinson) Tarmy

2016 Incoming Loans for Project Research and Short-term Exhibit

Film

31. 2016. *Valiant* – Palumbo Family Archive: Extensive footage of on the water dragging scenes (pre-*Valiant*), early boat yard scenes, the *Valiant* under construction, the October 1963 move and launch and a brief clip of *Valiant* being outfitted in Gloucester, Massachusetts circa 1964. This family footage was shot using personal movie camera, probably 8mm film. The footage then was videotaped directly to VHS from a small projection screen so an effort was made to maintain image quality when the VHS was digitized or exhibit use. Loan of Marc Palombo and family.

Objects

32. IL.2016.*Valiant*.ALC Corporation: Three moving rollers made of hornbeam, either *Carpinus carolinianus* or *Ostrya virginiana*. These are similar to the rollers used by E. H. Hinds Riggers who moved the *Valiant*. This was and is the preferred wood for this difficult work. Unfortunately it is now increasingly difficult to find in wide enough diameters to be serviceable. The lender acquired the original company E.H. Hinds Riggers, which moved the *Valiant*. George Derderian, grandson of the late Edward H. Hinds still works for the new firm. Courtesy, ALC Corporation, Watertown, Massachusetts, courtesy George Derderian.
33. IL.2016.*Valiant*.Dineen: Sea-aged laths or side pieces of a lobster trap, side pieces salvaged by the donor off his home in Nahant. Loan of John K. Dineen
34. IL.2016.*Valiant*.Gove: Rare piece of Lignum vitae (Latin for wood of life), either *Guaiacum sanctum* or *Guaiacum officinale*, similar to that used for repairs on the *Valiant*. Although the species grows from Florida to northern South America, they are now on the endangered list of International Union for Conservation of Nature. Loaned by Frederick S. Gove, fifth generation of the Nahant maritime family

35. IL.2016. *Valiant*. Letourneau: 12 shipbuilding tools: round clamp, large red square clamp, pattern tool, compass and protractor with pencil, bevel square, gouge hamper, caulking tool with cotton wadding, caulking wheel, folding gouge tool, small plane, draw knife, and brace with bit, which belonged to Louis J. Letourneau Jr., Nahant master mariner and boat-builder. He occasionally assisted with the construction of the *Valiant*. A more modern material, cotton wadding, rather than the traditional oakum, was used to caulk or pack the timber joints of the *Valiant*. Loaned by the Letourneau Family

Photographs

36. IL.2016. *Valiant*. Cormier: 35mm Kodachrome slides scanned to create 11x14 prints by the late Nahanter Robert F. Cormier, a US Navy veteran, longtime Nahant Police Officer, he also served on the town's Tudor Wharf committee and was deeply familiar with both its professional fishing and recreation use. Officer Cormier is seen in other photos on duty during the three day move and launch of the *Valiant*. Loaned by his widow Carmella L. Cormier
37. IL.2016. *Valiant*. McClain: 9 silver gelatin black and white photographs of the *Valiant*'s owners and their families, activities during the move and launch October 14 to 16, 1963 by the late Ted Polumbaum, awarding-winning *Time/Life* photographer journalist. A detailed and dated official Life Magazine photo stamp was on the verso of each photograph confirming the photographer covered all three days in Nahant. Polumbaum was famous for his acute and sensitive portrayal of the hardships and triumphs of everyday Americans. The "*Backyard Boat*" story and images were supposed to appear in November 1963 Life magazine issue but was never published due to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Loan of Francis "Lee" L. McClain III and his wife Claudia
38. IL.2016. *Valiant*. Wilson: Sixteen color photographs (11x14) made from original Kodachrome 35mm transparencies documenting steps of the three day move and launch of the *Valiant* by the loaners' late father Nahanter Fred A. Wilson, II, using an Exacta 35 mm camera and Kodachrome 25 slide film. These include close-ups of owners Ray Palombo and "Swede" McClain and their family plus longer views, showing narrow roads and Tudor Wharf. Wilson has passed his artistic eye for light and composition to the next two generations. Loaned by the Fred A. Wilson II family, courtesy of Robert A. Wilson
39. Former Senator Benjamin Smith collage print 11x14

Recording – digital

40. IL.2016 *Valiant*. Newport Historical Society: 1987 oral history by Raymond Palombo (co-owner of the *Valiant*) for Newport Historical Society discussing his life and his work as a master mariner and boat-builder with Newport Historical Society interviewer Jennifer Murry. After leaving Nahant, he spent his last years working in Rhode Island. Loaned by Newport Historical Society, courtesy Molly Bruce Patterson, Collections Team Coordinator and Manager of Digital Initiatives