

MARITIME HERITAGE OF THE UNITED STATES NHL THEME STUDY--LARGE VESSELS

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

LEWIS R. FRENCH (Schooner)

Page 1

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Lewis R. French

Other Name/Site Number: Two-masted schooner Lewis R. French

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: Rockland Harbor

Not for publication:

City/Town: Rockland

Vicinity:

State: ME

County: Knox

Code: 013

Zip Code: 04841

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-local:

Public-State:

Public-Federal:

Category of Property

Building(s):

District:

Site:

Structure: X

Object:

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing

 1

 1

Noncontributing

 buildings

 sites

 structures

 objects

 0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

LEWIS R. FRENCH (Schooner)

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this _____ nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I, hereby certify that this property is:

_____ Entered in the National Register _____

_____ Determined eligible for the _____
National Register

_____ Determined not eligible for the _____
National Register

_____ Removed from the National Register _____

_____ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

LEWIS R. FRENCH (Schooner)**Page 4**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1973.² Between 1973 and 1976, the vessel was restored. The engine and 1928 pilothouse were removed, and the masts were reinstalled. French is traditionally rigged and now carries sail in the same configuration she did from 1871 until 1928. The sail plan includes a mainsail, main topsail, foresail, staysail, and jib, totaling 2612 square feet of canvas.³

The deck has an elevated poop, with the break abaft the mainmast. A low deckhouse is located on the quarterdeck. Davits on the poop carry a yawl. A ladder from the deck leads below into the main cabin. The original cargo hold has a scuttle fitted over it and leads below into the hold. The hold is now subdivided into passenger accommodations. French has three single cabins, two double cabins with single berths, and eight double cabins with double berths. The interior joinery is varnished pine, with gleaming brass lamps and fixtures. Sinks with cold running water are provided below, as are the heads. A ladder forward leads into the forecastle, where the galley is located. The construction of the accommodations below deck, completed in 1976, do not impact the integrity of the hold, which has its area and construction characteristics unimpaired and merely covered by the joinery.

² Annual List of Merchant Vessels of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931), entry for Lewis R. French. Also see Frank A. Beard, "National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form, Schooner Lewis R. French," May 1985. Manuscript on file at the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Augusta, Maine.

³ Interview, May 19, 1989, with Capt. John Foss, former owner of Lewis R. French, who undertook the schooner's restoration, Rockland, Maine.

LEWIS R. FRENCH (Schooner)**Page 5**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A X B C X D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):

A B C D E F G X

NHL Criteria: 1, 4

NHL Theme(s): XII. Business

L. Shipping & Transportation

XIX. Transportation

B. Ships, Boats, Lighthouses & Other Structures

XXXIII. Historic Preservation

G. Federal Gov't Enters the Movement 1884-1949

5. Growth in Professionalism & Technology

XXXIV. Recreation

E. General Recreation

3. Other

Areas of Significance:	Period(s) of Significance	Significant Dates
Maritime History	1871-1940	1871
Recreation	1940-Present	1940

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: French Brothers, South Bristol, Maine

LEWIS R. FRENCH (Schooner)**Page 6**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The most common American vessel type was the two-masted coasting schooner. Developed in the mid-to-late 18th century, these vessels reached a more or less standard form by the mid-19th century, a design that continued to be built into the first decades of the 20th century. The only variation of note in the two-masted schooner, aside from the underwater form of the hull, or the lines, was the presence of a centerboard. Tens of thousands of these vessels were built and operated on the Pacific, Atlantic, and Gulf coasts, and on the Great Lakes in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The "freight trucks" of their time, the coasting schooners carried coal, bricks, iron ore, grain, oysters, and numerous other bulk products between ports.

There are now only five surviving two-masted coasting schooners in the United States--Lewis R. French (1871), the subject of this study; Stephen Taber (1871); Governor Stone (1877); Grace Bailey (1882); and Mercantile (1916), all the subjects of separate studies. Of all of these vessels, Lewis R. French is the oldest, by a matter of a few months. She, along with Governor Stone, is the only surviving examples of the fixed keel two-masted coasting schooner. French is the oldest surviving sailing vessel built in Maine, the center for wooden shipbuilding in the United States after the Civil War, and the only surviving 19th-century Maine-built schooner of thousands constructed. After more than a century in service, including time as a motor-powered fishing vessel, Lewis R. French was restored to her sailing rig and placed in service as a "Maine Windjammer," in 1976, carrying passengers in commercial recreational service as part of a "dude fleet" that dates to the 1930s. She was and remains unique in the annals of marine recreation and maritime preservation as part of a fleet that first introduced the concept of adaptive reuse to historic vessels.

The preceding statement of significance is based on the more detailed statements that follow.

THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPORTANCE OF THE TWO-MASTED COASTING SCHOONER

The two-masted schooner used for "coasting," i.e., the transport of cargo from one Atlantic coast port to another from the early 19th century to around the outbreak of World War II, was "so common that nobody paid much attention to them."¹ Designed to run fairly close to shore, the coaster lacked the fishing schooner's ability to ride out a gale offshore on the fishing grounds. The coaster never approached the scale of the great four-, five-, or six-masted coal schooners which arose late in the 19th century to transport coal from southern to northern

¹ Nicholas Dean, interview with Capt. W.J. Lewis Parker, Camden, Maine, May 1990.

LEWIS R. FRENCH (Schooner)**Page 7**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

ports. Deepwater sailors, who occasionally took a large schooner across the Atlantic, scorned the useful and ubiquitous little coasters, sometimes accusing their skippers of "setting their course by the bark of a dog."²

One of the earliest depictions of a schooner is shown in an engraving by the Dutch artist, Van de Velde, who died in 1707, that depicts a two-masted vessel with a gaff-rigged sail on each mast. By 1780, Falconer's Universal Dictionary of the Marine defined a schooner as "a small vessel with two masts, whose mainsail and foresail are suspended from gaffs reaching out below by booms, whose foremost ends are hooked to an iron, which clasps the mast so as to turn therein as upon an axis, when the after-ends are swung from one side of the vessel to the other."³ The origin of the term "schooner" is itself obscure. The Oxford Universal Dictionary assigns it an origin of about 1716 and Webster's calls it "of origin unknown."⁴ It has been noted that in Scotland, "to schoon" is to skim along the water.⁵ There is a persistent bit of American folklore which attributes the word's origin to Marblehead, Massachusetts, about 1721, but later scholarship has thrown significant doubt on this theory.⁶

"Coasters, in the United States," according to maritime historian Howard I. Chapelle, "have been schooners since 1800, if not earlier. The early coasting trade was carried out in vessels of all types...but the schooner gradually monopolized the trade."⁷ It is said that "the straight fore-and-aft-rigged schooner is decidedly a coastwise vessel, and attempts to use such craft for long voyages have invariably been disappointing and

² Polly Burroughs, Zeb: A Celebrated Schooner Life. (Riverside, Connecticut: The Chatham Press, 1972) p. 33.

³ E.P. Morris, The Fore-and-Aft Rig in America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927) p. 178, and William Falconer, A Universal Dictionary of the Marine (London: T. Cadell, 1780), p. 257.

⁴ The Oxford Universal Dictionary (Oxford: The Oxford University Press, Third edition revised, 1955) p. 1806, and Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Springfield: G. & C. Merriam, 1981) p. 2031.

⁵ Eric Partridge, Origins (New York: Greenwich House, 1983) p. 594.

⁶ Morris, op.cit., p. 174ff.

⁷ Howard I. Chapelle, The National Watercraft Collection (Washington, D.C.: United States National Museum, Government Printing Office, 1960) p. 258.

LEWIS R. FRENCH (Schooner)**Page 8**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

disillusioning, if not disastrous to the adventurers."⁸ However, coasters occasionally ventured as far as the Caribbean, the American schooner Success being reported in Jamaica, bound for Santo Domingo, in 1801.⁹ Other surviving accounts from the 19th century indicate a considerable Caribbean trade.¹⁰

The schooner supplanted the squareriggers in the coasting trade for practical reasons:

The fore-and-aft rig came to be preferred for coasting vessels for several reasons. Fewer sailors were required to handle the vessel, and a schooner could be worked into and out of harbors and rivers more easily than any square-rigged craft. Her trips could also, as a rule, be made in quicker time, as she could sail closer into the wind, and it was hardly necessary for her to sail from Maine to New York by way of the Bermudas, as some square-rigged vessels have done during baffling winds.¹¹

Another student of schooners commented that

Such vessels were handy, economical and easily built of readily accessible materials, perfectly suited to their task, and their number was legion. They were the errand boys, the short-haul freight droghers, and the passenger buses for many a year, and their contribution to coastal community life, especially in New England, was substantial.¹²

These unromantic little vessels, described by a man who spent his youth in them as "no more than seagoing tipcarts, hauling their prosaic cargoes from one coastal port to another" were nonetheless important. "Without them the country could hardly

⁸ William A. Fairburn, Merchant Sail (Center Lovell, Maine: Fairburn Marine Educational Foundation, Inc., 1944-1955) vol. IV, p. 2608.

⁹ Charles S. Morgan, "New England Coasting Schooners," in E.W. Smith, ed. Workaday Schooners (Camden, Maine: International Marine Publishing, 1975) p. 158.

¹⁰ Ralph H. Griffen, Jr. ed. Letters of a New England Coaster, 1868-1872 (Published by the author, n.d.) passim.

¹¹ Henry Hall, Report on the Shipbuilding Industry of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1882) p. 93.

¹² Morgan, op.cit, p. 156.

LEWIS R. FRENCH (Schooner)**Page 9**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

have been settled."¹³ They were the pickup trucks of coasts in an era before the advent of good, all-weather highways made land transportation practical year-round, and ubiquitous for several generations.

CONSTRUCTION AND CAREER OF LEWIS R. FRENCH

Maine, with her long stretch of coast with numerous small coves, and rivers lined by thick forests, was a center of shipbuilding and maritime commerce for three centuries. Maine assumed the role of national center for wooden shipbuilding after the Civil War, and by the 1870s, while the construction of large, squarerigged vessels was in decline, was building increasing numbers of two-masted coasting schooners.¹⁴ Among the vessels built in this period was the coaster Lewis R. French. Built and launched early in 1871 at Christmas Cove, at South Bristol, Maine, by the French brothers, French was named for a part-owner, whose brother, Joseph W. French, commanded the new schooner. Registered at the port of Waldoboro on April 28, 1871, Lewis R. French commenced a career in the coasting trade.¹⁵

In 1877, French entered the fishing trade, seining in the menhaden fishery until 1888, when she resumed the general coasting trade. French remained in the general trade for the next four decades, carrying a variety of cargoes--usually whatever paid--until 1928, when she was hauled, dismasted, and equipped with an engine and a pilothouse. Again entering the coasting trade, now as a motor-vessel, French remained in service until 1973, her last trade working as a cannery lighter out of Eastport, Maine, when she was sold to Capt. John Foss of Rockland, who intended to restore the vessel's schooner rig and enter her in the "dude fleet" of Maine.

The only reason for the survival of French, as well as several other historic 19th- and early 20th-century schooners, is that she earned her keep in a new maritime trade. During the Great Depression, scores of old vessels were laid up, and left to slowly rot in every cove and mudflat along the coast. In 1935, artist Frank Swift, then living at Bucksport, Maine, conceived the idea of saving the rapidly vanishing schooners. While watching a coaster unloading pulpwood at a mill on the banks of the Penobscot River near his home, Swift thought of chartering a schooner for extended passenger cruises. While several vessels,

¹³ John F. Leavitt, Wake of the Coasters (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1970) p. 17.

¹⁴ William Avery Baker, A Maritime History of Bath, Maine and the Kennebec River Region (Bath: The Marine Research Society of Bath, 1973) vol. I, pp. 513-514.

¹⁵ Enrollment No. 8, Port of Waldoboro, Maine, April 28, 1871. National Archives Record Group 36, Records of Merchant Vessel Documentation, Washington, D.C.

LEWIS R. FRENCH (Schooner)**Page 10**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

including the schooner Stephen Taber, were available for day-long sails, a prolonged cruise similar to the "dude" ranch experience in the west was a new concept. It was also the first time the concept of adaptive use was applied to an operating historic vessel in maritime preservation. Swift's first vessel, the 1881-built schooner Mabel, was chartered in 1936, with a Deer Island skipper as captain and his wife as ship's cook.¹⁶

At first the concept was slow in catching on, but by 1939, Swift was able to purchase the schooner Annie F. Kimball and began operating her out of Camden, Maine, on six-day cruises at \$32 a head. Around that time, Swift advertised one or two-week cruises:

These schooners are not yachts--just picturesque down-east sailing vessels, clipper-bowed and able, with billowing sails and hempen rigging. Each Monday, from July 4th until September 10th, the Annie Kimball and the Lydia Webster will sail from Camden, Maine for a week's cruise--not to follow an exact itinerary but to use the winds and tides to make the cruise most interesting.¹⁷

Other entrepreneurs and vessels followed Swift's lead, and by the late 1940s several schooners, saved from oblivion, were part of the "Maine Windjammer" fleet, otherwise known as the "dude fleet" or the "head boats."

The trade was declining in the mid-1960s when a new group of entrepreneurs, young men and women who had crewed and skippered the schooners, took over the business. At the same time the old vessels themselves were wearing out, and only a handful were left. In the early days of the trade, with an over-abundance of schooners, Swift and the other owners usually ran a ship hard, stripped and sank her, and bought another. Now, in order to survive as demand increased for the "windjammer experience" in an age of few surviving historic schooners, the young entrepreneurs turned to building new schooners on the lines of the old vessels, with a few modern improvements, or rescuing laid-up or soon to languish schooners, some of them former fishing vessels, for the trade. In 1971, the 1886-built oyster schooner Isaac H. Evans was rescued by Doug and Linda Lee and restored.

The success of Evans inspired John Foss, who bought and restored Lewis R. French between 1973 and 1976. To do the work, Foss and the Lees purchased an old shipyard at the north end of Rockland. Joined by the dragger J & E. Riggin, a 1927-built schooner owned by David and Sue Allen, the fleet, collectively ran out of the

¹⁶ Christina Tree, "Windjammer Days," Historic Preservation, vol. XL, no. 4, July/August 1990, p. 24.

¹⁷ Pamphlet in the collection of Nicholas Dean, Edgecomb, Maine.

"North End Shipyard" as "Maine Windjammer Cruises," and was augmented by the arrival of the Gloucesterman American Eagle, bought and restored by John Foss in 1986 to replace French, which he sold that year to his brother-in-law, Dan Pease, who owns and commands her now.¹⁸

There are now some 15 "windjammers" (seven of which are historic), including Lewis R. French, operating along the Maine coast. The schooners no longer carry loads of wood or granite, but, as owner/captain Doug Lee remarked, "the only cargo that loads and unloads itself."¹⁹ The windjammers are unique in the nation in their offering of marine recreation. They do not provide "sail training," but instead instill a relaxed sense of the sea and travel under sail, in which the passengers are encouraged, not required, to lend a hand as needed. The North End Shipyard continues to maintain and restore the schooners as needed, and offers its services to other historic vessels on the coast. Thus, skills are preserved along with the historic fabric of the vessels themselves--the vanishing trades of shipwrightery and, in the operation of the schooners, the skills of seamanship.

¹⁸ Tree, op.cit, p. 25.

¹⁹ Nicholas Dean, interview with Capt. Doug Lee, Rockland, Maine, May 1990.

LEWIS R. FRENCH (Schooner)

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Footnotes in text.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register.
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # _____
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other: Specify Repository: National Maritime Initiative

LEWIS R. FRENCH (Schooner)**Page 13**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: Less than one (1) acre.

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing

A 19 491285 4883750

Verbal Boundary Description:

All that area encompassed within the extreme length and breadth of the vessel.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary incorporates the entire area of the vessel as she lays at her berth.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Nicholas Dean and James P. Delgado, Maritime Historian

Organization: National Park Service

Date: October 5, 1990

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