

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 90001470Date Listed: 10/01/90MERCANTILE (two-masted schooner)
Property NameKnox
CountyME
StateN/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

for Beth A. Sarge
Signature of the Keeper

10-1-90
Date of Action

=====

Amended Items in Nomination:

8. Statement of Significance: Area(s)

Because of the nature of the significance of the Windjammer fleet Recreation/Entertainment has been added as an applicable area of significance in addition to Conservation. The creation of the fleet played an important recreational role as well as serving as an early attempt at a method of maritime preservation.

This consensus was reached with Kirk Mohny, National Register Coordinator, MESHPO, and James Delgado, Maritime Historian, NPS.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without attachment)

1470

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

AUG 20 1990

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Mercantileother names/site number Two-masted Schooner Mercantile

2. Location

street & number Camden Harbor☐ N/A not for publicationcity, town Camden☐ N/A vicinitystate Mainecode MEcounty Knoxcode 013zip code 04843

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

- ☐ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☒ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

Noncontributing

_____	_____ buildings
_____	_____ sites
<u>1</u>	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>1</u>	_____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/ANumber of contributing resources previously
listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official

Maine Historic Preservation Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

Date

8/14/90In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

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.
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National
Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.

☐ removed from the National Register.☐ other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Transportation/Water-related

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Transportation/Water-related

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Other: Two-masted Schooner

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A

walls N/A

roof N/A

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The two-masted schooner Mercantile has the following dimensions:

Length on deck: 80 feet

Length overall: 115 feet

Breadth: 22 feet

Gross tonnage: 47

Passenger accommodations: 26

Rig: main, fore, 2 headsails, no topsails

The vessel is framed and planked with white oak, with a deck of southern longleaf yellow pine. It carries neither inboard engines or powered deck machinery, propulsion when needed being provided by a small yawl boat with an outboard motor. It was originally fastened with wooden treenails but is now fastened with six inch galvanized ship spikes. A low deckhouse is located aft and the quarterdeck has turned stanchion rails. There is a centerboard with its centerboard trunk, the main mast being offset somewhat from the center line of the hull to accommodate the width of the trunk. The only significant alteration to the schooner lies in the substitution of companionways for cargo hatches and the installation of staterooms below decks.

It should be noted that the historical record is extremely unclear regarding "standard practice" in the carrying of top masts on coasters along the Maine coast. At present the schooner currently sails "bald-headed," i.e., without top masts. Apparently there was a good deal of variation in rig, top masts being sometimes carried on the main masts in summer months and sent down in winter or not carried at all. In any case, its present rig would not have seemed unusual during the period when the type was common.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally ☒ statewide ☐ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☒ G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Maritime History

Transportation

Conservation

Period of Significance

1916 - 1943

Significant Dates

1916

1943

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Billings Family, Builder

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Originally built between 1913-16 in Little Deer Isle, Maine the two-masted schooner Mercantile is one of only three such historic vessels in Maine. Designed for the "coasting" trade, in 1943 it became a member of the fleet of windjammers developed by Frank Swift for the commercial conveyance of passengers along the Maine coast. Its significance, therefore, lies not only in its design and association with maritime history, but equally for the association with Swift's early and unique approach to the preservation of historic vessels. The vessel meets criteria A and C as well as criteria consideration G.

The type of vessel discussed here, the two-masted schooner used for "coasting", i.e., the transport of cargo from one Atlantic Coast port to another from the early nineteenth century to about the outbreak of World War II, was once "so common that nobody paid much attention to them."¹ However, before examining their development and function, it should be clear what these small vessels were not. Designed to run fairly close to shore, these schooners were neither fishing vessels with the ability to ride out a gale on off-shore fishing grounds, nor did they ever approach the scale of the four, five and six-masted great coal schooners which arose to transport that commodity from southern to northern seaports. While the occasional multi-master even made a trans-Atlantic crossing, the coasters stayed close to home. "Deepwater men often accused coastwise sailors of setting their course by the bark of a dog."²

One of the earliest depictions of a schooner appears in an engraving after the Dutch artist, Van de Velde, who died in 1707 and shows 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 main-sail and fore-sail 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

☒ See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

It is to be regretted that in maritime histories, both general and of Maine in particular, rather scant attention has been given to the small coasting schooners. For example in William Hutchinson Rowe's The Maritime History of Maine (New York: W.W. Norton, 1948), a scant 2 pages out of over 300 are devoted to the coasters. The only work which deals with the small coasters specifically is:

John F. Leavitt, Wake of the Coasters (Middletown, CT, Wesleyan University Press, 1970)

List of Merchant Vessels of the United States (U.S.G.P.O., Various issues and dates) identifies vessels only by rig and tonnage, not by number of masts or function.

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 # _____

☐ See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State historic preservation office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property .1 acre

UTM References

A

1	9	4	9	4	9	0	0	4	8	9	5	0	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

All that area encompassed within the extreme length, beam, and depth of the Mercantile.

☐ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses the entire area of the vessel as she floats at her berth or operates at sea.

☐ See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Nicholas Dean, Historian/Kirk E. Mohny, Architectural Historian

organization Maine Historic Preservation Commission date 7/1990

street & number 55 Capitol Street telephone (207) 289-2132

city or town Augusta, state Maine zip code 04333

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The origin of the term "schooner" is itself obscure. The Oxford Universal Dictionary assigns it a date of 1716 and suggests an American origin,⁴ while Webster's calls the word of "origin unknown."⁵ It has also been noted that in Scotland, "to schoon" is to skim along the water.⁶

That noted, "Coasters," in the United States, have been schooners since 1800, if not earlier. The early coasting trade was carried out in vessels of all types... 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 on the high seas have invariably been disappointing and disillusioning, if not disastrous to the adventurers."⁸ However, coasters ventured into the Caribbean, the American schooner Success being reported in Jamaica, bound for San Domingo in 1801.⁹ Other surviving accounts from the later 19th century indicate a considerable Caribbean trade.¹⁰ The schooner supplanted the square-rigged vessels in the coasting trade for very 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

Along the Maine coast, for many years the little schooner filled the transportation iche today filled by vehicles ranging from pickups to two ton trucks. First, until roughly fifty years ago many of Maine's secondary roads could hardly be classed as "all weather," and along the numerous peninsulas north-south transport of staples such as firewood and hay was, during spring "mud season," more easily and safely achieved by water.

Second, Maine's deeply indented coastline made waterborne commerce a matter of economy. It is but 293 miles by road from the Maine-New Hampshire border at Kittery to Maine's eastern-most city, Eastport,¹² but the state has some 3,500 miles of coastline.¹³ In addition, to a greater extent in the nineteenth century than now, Maine's numerous small islands required transport of freight.

Finally, many of the products requiring transport were produced at or near the shore. These included brick, fired from estuarine clay; granite, often quarried on off-shore islands; and wood, rafted to a convenient loading point. The coasters carried box boards and empty cans to sardine canneries and delivered the processed fish.

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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.¹⁴

They were unromantic little vessels, described by a man who spent his youth in them as "no more than sea-going tipcarts, hauling their prosaic cargoes from one coastal port to another."¹⁵ He added, however, that "without them the country could hardly have been settled."¹⁶ Another of the few historians who has bothered to examine the small coasters described them as:

the errand boys of the coast. They averaged around a hundred tons and were found in every river, bay, and inlet from Quoddy to Cape Fear. To southern cities they delivered the products of Maine farms, shores, forests and local industries... In turn they brought back southern pitch pine, pitch and turpentine to the yards in which they had been built.¹⁷

By the early 1880s, a definite small coaster type had been in existence for at least 20 years, and probably longer. In his 1882 Report on the Ship-building Industry of the United States, Henry Hall described it as "center-board vessels with flat bottoms. In all cases, however, the models are full, the beam large, the bow sharp and long, the run clean and the sheer considerable forward." To Hall such schooners had "the jaunty air of a yacht." He observed that "schooners with sharp bottoms do not pay, and few are built."¹⁸

Chapelle described them as "2-masted fore-and-aft rigged schooners 50 to 75 feet long, having short, high quarterdecks with bulwarks or turned-stanchion rails."¹⁹

Such are the Grace Bailey and Mercantile, two of the last three survivors of this type of vessel, the third being the Stephen Taber (N.R. 7/30/84). They will be described in more detail below, but its significance to the coastal Maine scene in general was summed up by the late John F. Leavitt, who has already been cited. In his Wake of the Coasters, published in 1970, Leavitt reminisced:

There was a time when spars and rigging made a commonplace pattern against the Maine sky. It was in 1938 when the last cargo-carrying schooner was launched in the state of Maine, yet today there seem to be very few who remember when the reaches and thoroughfares swarmed with coasting schooners. Perhaps that is because the sight

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was so taken for granted. On the other hand, until the advent of good roads in the middle to later 1920s, most of the isolated towns east of Portland depended upon the schooners for connection with the outside world, particularly during that part of the year when the dirt roads were nearly impassable.²⁰

Nine years after John F. Leavitt wrote the passage quoted above, there was an attempt to revive the working cargo schooner on the Maine coast. Launched in 1979 the 97 foot, two-masted John F. Leavitt obtained a cargo for the Caribbean - and was lost on her maiden voyage. In addition, though subsidized by a matching grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, in that same year students at the Maine Maritime Museum's Apprentice shop built a smaller schooner, the 42 foot Vernon Langille, and began a program of freighting firewood out to offshore islands. The Langille is still afloat, but the experiment was ultimately abandoned.²¹

For all practical purposes, the coasting schooner ceased to be economically viable in the thirties. No four-, five-, or six-masted schooner survives today save as a derelict hulk, while three three-masted schooners remain, two as west coast museum vessels and one, the Domino Effect ex Victory Chimes, carries passengers on the Great Lakes and Atlantic seaboard.²² One early two-masted cargo schooner, the Alvin Clark, survives at Trenton, Mississippi, though in deteriorated condition.²³

However, on the Maine coast the Grace Bailey, Mercantile and Stephen Taber not only have survived but turn a profit for their owners because, in 1936, Captain Frank Swift conceived the idea of converting small two-masted cargo schooners to passenger vessels. In an early brochure, undated but probably from near the beginning of his venture, Swift offered a one week cruise for \$32 or a two week cruise for \$60 and described it as follows:

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.²⁴

Swift purchased the Grace Bailey in 1940 and the Mercantile in 1943.²⁵ Today fifteen "windjammers" operate out of mid-coast Maine: ten out of Rockland, one out of Rockport and four out of Camden. They no longer carry lumber and granite, but, as is often remarked, "the only cargo that loads and unloads itself."²⁶

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It must be emphasized that a week on a windjammer is more in the nature of a "maritime experience" than "sail training," per se. Passengers are encouraged, but not required to lend a hand as needed. In addition to whatever better understanding of America's maritime heritage the windjammers such as the Grace Bailey and Mercantile may foster in laypersons, on a practical level they are an instrument for the preservation of both schooner sail handling and maintenance and the wooden shipwright's skills as well. For example, the Grace Bailey's recent thirteen month refit employed an average of ten hands at any one time, with the Mercantile's earlier refit running at roughly the same figure.²⁷

The Mercantile was built by the Billings family over three winter seasons, finally being launched in 1916. Like the Bailey, she is a shoal draft, centerboard schooner, drawing ten feet seven inches with the centerboard down and six feet seven inches with the centerboard up. She was owned and operated by the Billings family from 1916 to 1943, and then was briefly in the coasting and mackerel fisheries trades in the Narragansett Bay area of Massachusetts. In 1943 she was purchased by Captain Frank Swift of Camden, Maine for use as a "windjammer." Her subsequent ownership history is:

Frank Swift, Camden, Maine	1943-1961
Jim Nisbet, Camden, Maine	1961-1969
Leslie E. Bex, Jr., Camden, Maine	1969-1986
Schooner <u>Mercantile</u> , Incorporated, Camden, Maine	1986-

In 1988-89, renovation of the Mercantile was carried out under the direction of Captain Ray Williamson, the only essential difference between work on the Mercantile and work on the Bailey being that the Mercantile renovation occurred in two sequential stages.

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Endnotes

1. Nicholas Dean, interview with Captain W. J. Lewis Parker, Camden, Maine, May, 1990.
2. Polly Burroughs, Zeb: A Celebrated Schooner Life (Riverside, Connecticut: The Chatham Press, 1972), p. 33.
3. 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.
5. Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Springfield, G. & C. Merriam, 1981), p. 2031.
6. Eric Partridge, Origins (New York: Greenwich House, 1983), p. 594.
7. Howard I. Chapelle, The National Watercraft Collection (Washington: United States National Museum, Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 258.
8. William A. Fairburn, Merchant Sail (Center Lovell, Maine: Fairburn Marine Educational Foundation, 1945-55) Volume IV, p. 2608.
9. Charles S. Morgan, "New England Coasting Schooners," in E. W. Smith, ed. Workaday Schooners (Camden: International Marine Publishing, 1975), p. 158.
10. Ralph H. Griffin, Jr., ed. Letters of a New England Coaster 1868-1872 (no place of publication, Ralph H. Griffin, Jr., 1968), passim.
11. Henry Hall, Report on the Ship-Building Industry of the United States (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1882), p. 93.
12. Maine Department of Transportation, Official Transportation Map (Augusta, Maine Department of Transportation, 1979), Mileage Chart.
13. Jim Brunelle, Maine Almanac (Portland: Guy Gannett Publishing, 1979), p. 5.
14. C. S. Morgan, "New England Coasting Schooners," p. 156.

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15. John F. Leavitt, Wake of the Coasters (Middletown, Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 1970), p. 17.
16. Ibid, p. 17.
17. P. Burroughs, Zeb, p. 33.
18. H. Hall, Report, p. 94.
19. H. I. Chapelle, National Watercraft Collection, p. 40.
20. J. F. Leavitt, Wake of the Coasters, p. 3.
21. Jane Day, "The Return of Working Sail" (Wooden Boat #31, November-December, 1979), pp. 18-23.
22. Norman J. Brouwer, International Register of Historic Ships (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1985), pp. 216, 283, 286.
23. Ibid, p. 205.
24. Brochure in possession of Nicholas Dean, Edgecomb, Maine, n.d.
25. Maine Windjammer Cruises brochure (Camden, Maine, 1990).
26. Nicholas Dean, interviews with Parker Marean, Wiscasset, Maine and Captain Douglas Lees, Rockland, Maine, May, 1990.
27. Nicholas Dean, interview with Captain Ray Williamson, Camden, Maine, June, 1990.