

Cape Charles event to showcase tall ships Lynx and Sultana

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The 1768-replica Sultana will be showcased at the Cape Charles Tall Ships event this summer.

CAPE CHARLES -- Tall Ships At Cape Charles will host the historic tall ships Lynx and Sultana at its June 8-12 festival commemorating the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 and the writing of the Star Spangled Banner. A third tall ship will soon be announced.

The event is managed and organized under the auspices of Eastern Shore of Virginia Festivals (ESVAF, Inc), a nonprofit organization promoting the Eastern Shore of Virginia as a destination for visitors. Cape Charles is an official affiliate port of Opsail 2012 Virginia.

Sultana, a two-masted topsail schooner, is an almost exact replica of a Boston-built merchant vessel that served for four years as the smallest schooner ever in the British Royal Navy patrolling the North American coast just prior to the American Revolution. Her sparred length is 97 feet.

Using the British Admiralty's meticulous documentation of the original Sultana, she has been recreated with outstanding detail and offers all who sail aboard her a terrific glimpse of 18th century seafaring life. Launched in 2001, and based in the historic port of Chestertown, Md., Sultana now sails under the auspices of Sultana Projects, Inc., a nonprofit organization. Sailing as the "Schoolship of the Chesapeake" Sultana provides accredited educational programs in history and environmental science to more than 5,000 students each year.

The 122-foot sparred length Baltimore Clipper Lynx is an interpretation of the actual American privateer named Lynx built by Thomas Kemp in 1812 in Fell's Point, Md. She was among the first ships to defend American freedom by evading the British naval fleet then blockading American ports and serving in the important privateering efforts. To maintain the historic integrity of the onboard experience, the permanent crew of Lynx wears period uniforms and operates the ship in keeping with the maritime traditions of early 19th century America. She sails under the auspices of the Lynx Educational Foundation as a sail training vessel and living history museum.

America's Privateer Lynx

Based in Newport Beach, Calif., Lynx has spent the past two years sailing the Great Lakes and the Atlantic coast. Her appearance at Cape Charles June 8-12 returns her "home" to the Chesapeake Bay for the historic celebration of the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 and the writing of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Lynx is fitted with period ordnance and flies pennants and flags from the 1812 era, and her captain and crew wear authentic uniforms from that time. She is armed with a functioning main battery of four six-pounder carronade and four swivel guns. In addition, a complementary stand of historic small arms, for demonstration and instructional purposes, is aboard, including muskets, pistols, cutlasses, boarding pikes and axes.



America's Privateer Lynx will be featured at Tall Ships At Cape Charles in June.

At the outbreak of the War of 1812, the American Navy consisted of only 17 ships -- eight frigates, two brigs and seven assorted smaller vessels including a few schooners which saw service in the Barbary Wars. When a nation went to war, owners of private vessels were granted special permissions, called "letters of marque," to prey upon the enemy's shipping; thus, "privateers." Among the Baltimore privateers was the sharply-built schooner, Lynx.

While rarely engaging enemy warships, their impact was felt by English merchants who insisted on warship escorts for their vessels. To perform this duty, warships were drawn away from engaging the scant American Navy and blockading our coast, and thus did the privateers, motivated by profit, assist in our national defense. Privateers were so effective at running the British blockade and harassing the British merchant fleet that the ship yards, which built them, became primary targets for British revenge.

But in order to get to them, the British force had to sail beyond Fort McHenry, which protected the entrance to Baltimore's inner harbor and Fell's Point. For 25 hours on Sept. 13 and 14, 1814, the British bombarded the fort with over 1,500 iron shot and mortar shells, but were unable to achieve their goal. It was here that Francis Scott Key, a lawyer from Georgetown, Washington D.C. was moved to write the "Star-Spangled Banner" which, 131 years later, became our national anthem.

The 1768 Schooner Sultana

On March 8, 1768 His Majesty's Royal Navy purchased what would prove to be the smallest schooner ever to see active service in the British Royal Navy. Built by American shipwrights at Benjamin Hallowell's South Boston shipyard, Sultana had been conceived as a coastal merchant schooner. Destined for a life of hard work in relative obscurity, Sultana's fate changed forever when the British Parliament enacted the notorious Townsend Acts, or "Tea Taxes," just as Sultana was being framed up in the Hallowell Yard in the summer of 1767. Along with a handful of other small American-built schooners, Sultana would be bought by the Royal Navy and see almost five years of active duty patrolling for American smugglers from Halifax, Nova Scotia to the Chesapeake Bay. The taxes that Sultana and her sister-ships enforced enraged American colonists as nothing had before and these vessels played an important and often overlooked role in sparking the conflict that would become the American Revolution.

About 230 years later a handful of people from the small but proud town of Chestertown, Md. got it into their heads to build a full-scale replica of Sultana. Though more than two centuries has passed since the Revolution, the story of British taxation was one familiar to every resident of this well-preserved colonial port. Each May, more than 15,000 people assemble on the banks of the Chester River to reenact the day in 1772 when the residents of Chestertown, following the example set by Boston a few months earlier, boarded a ship lying at anchor in their harbor, dumping its cargo of tea overboard in protest of British taxes (www.chestertowntea-party.com). While staunchly proud to be Americans, Chestertown retains an unusual affinity for the British heritage that was central to its founding as one of Maryland's seven original ports in 1706.

The new Sultana was built under the direction of master shipwright, John E. Swain, the man who had first had the idea to build her. Assisted by a small team of professional shipwrights, Swain laid the keel for Sultana in 1998 and launched her almost three years later in the spring of 2001. In every sense of the word, Sultana's construction was a community undertaking. The cost of building the small schooner was paid for by countless donations from local residents. More than 3,000 school children visited the shipyard in Chestertown to assist with Sultana's construction and volunteers traveling from as far away as Ohio and New York contributed over 150,000 hours in labor.

In the decade since Sultana's launch, the schooner has sailed as the "Schoolship of the Chesapeake," boarding 60,000 students from Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C. for under-sail educational programs that encourage students to value the history and environment of the Chesapeake Bay. Sailing with a crew of professional educators, Sultana regularly visits ports throughout the Chesapeake, including Baltimore, Annapolis, St. Michaels, Oxford, Cambridge, Solomons, Washington and Norfolk.

In 2004 and 2007, Sultana's educational accomplishments were recognized by the National Maritime Heritage Society with the Walter Cronkite Award for Excellence in Maritime Education. Sultana Projects was also the recipient of Tall Ships America 2009 Sea Education Program of the Year award. To learn more, visit: www.schoonersultana.org.