

# PENOBSCOT MARINE MUSEUM

## The Maynard Bray Photographic Collection



In certain circles of the boating world, Maynard Bray needs no introduction. His absorption in the design, construction, use, and enjoyment of traditional small boats, and his advocacy for these activities, has made him a beacon for others who share his interest.

Fortunately for those people, he has also been an assiduous photographer for most of his life. With an eye for form, detail, and craftsmanship, Bray produced a long, running visual record of the boats he's admired and known. The photographs, which he carefully preserved over the course of several decades, seem to unify his personal and professional immersion in the boating world. Since he's been well known to the curatorial staff at Penobscot Marine Museum (PMM) for a number of years, we were in the fortunate position of offering an ideal permanent home for his legacy, and Mr. Bray donated the bulk of his 120mm and 35mm film to the museum in 2013.

As stewards of Bray's collection, PMM is dedicated to both preserving his photographs and making them widely accessible and available to the public. One key piece of this stewardship is the digital capture of Bray's images. Our Photo Archives has a demonstrated history of digitizing photo collections and has developed specialized expertise. We know that this process is essential for many reasons. Primarily, digital capture creates a number of avenues for sharing important photographs with a broad audience, both locally and on the web. Since film negatives are small and by definition have their dark and light values reversed, digitization renders them visually meaningful, and at significantly lower cost than traditional enlarging and printing. Further, recording information about the photographs in a collections database is an integral part of the process, which provides necessary context for understanding them. These steps make it easy to then publish our described photo collections to the web, which we've been doing since 2011. Additional measures to embed the information directly into the image files and then process them with preservation software helps ensure that the resulting digital collections will be intact and available to audiences in the future.

Since acquiring Bray's collected work, PMM has made a respectable start on digitizing and cataloging it. Volunteer efforts centered on our digital camera capture system, and on our collections database, have yielded a high quality of output. However, we feel a growing need to increase the pace and are now

seeking funds to dedicate specifically to the processing and dissemination of the Maynard Bray Collection. We're deeply fortunate that Mr. Bray is still with us. Being the foremost expert on his own images as well as a veteran of traditional boats, his ongoing collaboration has been invaluable; it means that current and future audiences will have a thorough understanding of the resource. Our goal of completing the project within his lifetime is paramount.

## **The Collection**

A brief survey of the collections' photographs will help emphasize their importance. The work covers considerable ground, spanning around 50 years. The earliest images date back to Bray's adolescence, when he and his friend Don Merchant dogged the postwar waterfront of their native Rockland, Maine. At this young age, they were thirsty for any contact with the countless boats that passed through the harbor: sardine carriers, wood hulled draggers, Coast Guard cutters from the Rockland base, lobster smacks, skiffs, dories, the numerous styles and shapes of mostly working watercraft. They were all ripe subject matter for the boys' Kodak Brownies, as were their own adventures in the small sailboats and skiffs they owned or had access to.

During Maynard's younger years as a photographer, medium format film was common, easy to buy and to find cameras for. It had the advantage of a fairly large image area (its 120-millimeter width gives the format its name), providing relatively fine detail in a hand-held system. He continued using this film type throughout the years of his courtship and eventual marriage to Ann Bray (née Tracy). Their partnership would forever include a mutual love of boats and boating. The photographs from their early years together in Maine, where the couple continued to live while Maynard worked on his BS in mechanical engineering, and Connecticut, where his career began at Electric Boat in Groton, document their ownership of a number of sloops. Knowledge of their storied provenance was clearly part of the couple's enjoyment of these sailboats.

Sometime around 1956, Bray switched to the use of 35mm film, which has the advantages of a threefold increase in the number of images on a single roll, and the further increased compactness and convenience of those cameras. The images he captured during his time as shipyard supervisor at Mystic Seaport give us a glimpse of ships and boats built during the Age of Sail, and the efforts to restore, preserve, and replicate them as living examples of New England's maritime heritage. The Brays, of course, continued to spend much of their free time on the water. This time often included friends with a similar bent, and their boats, if they caught the photographer's appreciative eye, were also captured on film.

When the couple moved back to Maine in the mid-1970s, Bray was offered a position as technical editor at *Wooden Boat* magazine (which he still holds to this day). Maynard and Ann introduced their young children to the joys of sailing and rowing as soon as they were old enough. The images of their time together evince the photographer's ongoing love of legacy boats. Anyone who takes the time to study his later Maine images can't fail to be impressed and engrossed by the range of restored, preserved, new, and derelict vessels he encountered. We see the burgeoning windjammer fleets of the 1970s and 80s, the hulking wrecks of steamers, pedigreed Herreshoff sloops, wooden commercial fishing boats still in use in the late 20th century, catboats, yawls, ketches, wood-hulled ferryboats, and countless other styles reflecting regional needs and sensibilities.

## **The Project**

The Penobscot Marine Museum aims to raise \$50,445 to support this project. Altogether, the collection is comprised of some 20,000 frames. Approximately half that number remain to be digitized. Of these, roughly 50% will be cataloged. With the funds raised, we will hire a Project Photo Technician to dedicate 990 hours to completing digitization and a Project Cataloger to dedicate 840 hours to cataloging. The two sets of tasks will happen concurrently, with a slight lag of cataloging behind digitizing. Given the current and anticipated restrictions on the use of shared space during the pandemic, we propose to complete the work over the course of 18 months from the project start date (to be determined by the availability of funding).

Additionally, the project will entail some staff time and technical costs. PMM Photo Archivist Kevin Johnson and Digital Collections Curator Matt Wheeler will each help oversee day-to-day operations and inspect volunteer work routinely, dedicating 5 hours per week and 7 hours per week, respectively, to the project. Wheeler will also complete the technical tasks associated with data upload to the web and digital preservation. Also, the cumulative addition of 5,000 records to our online database will increase our annual hosting fee. We are seeking a small additional sum in order to offset these costs for the first 3 years of offering the Maynard Bray Collection online.

## **Significance**

Given the scope of the Maynard Bray Collection, its publication to the web will provide lasting value to a large, specialized audience.

Bray's knowledge of boat construction has helped inform the nature of his photographs, which thoroughly explore the details he's been drawn to observe. Boatbuilding, unlike house carpentry, involves diverse elements with complex forms, most of which have to be custom shaped by the builder according to a set of plans. His many images of these particulars can be of great utility to boatbuilders and designers looking for inspiration or clarification. By extension, the photographs could be used as an educational tool for boatbuilding instructors and students.

Standing back to admire the whole vessel, his expert eye for classic and otherwise distinctive design has made the photographs an informal compendium of wooden boats. Any boat owner, prospective buyer, or aficionado will find this work an engrossing source of insight. Likewise, anyone researching the history of a particular class of boats, a regional style, or the work of a particular builder or designer, will find the collection to be a comprehensive source.