



The Building of The Boston Tea Party Ships: *Beaver, Eleanor and Dartmouth*

There were three colonial-built vessels that brought the infamous tea cargos to Boston late in 1773: the *Beaver*, the *Eleanor* and the *Dartmouth*.

To fully tell the story of The Boston Tea Party, a flotilla of all three ships is necessary. The Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum illuminates the importance and the significance of this historic event with replicas of two of the three ships involved (to date).

Two of the vessels that are part of The Boston Tea Party Ship s& Museum experience were re-created by local Master Shipwright Leon Poindexter at the Gloucester Marine Railway, the nation's oldest shipyard in Gloucester, Mass. The ships were built out of traditionally built wooden fishing vessels. The third will be newly built, from the keel to the top of the main mast. The construction of the vessels uses the same traditional methods and materials used in colonial days - oak plank on timber frames. It is intended that these historic replicas seem as authentic as possible. When visitors step aboard, they are transported back in time, in part due to the authenticity of every detail.

On that infamous night of December 16, 1773, 340 chests of British tea, weighing more than 92,000 pounds, were dumped overboard. The cargo was worth more than \$1,700,000 in today's money. The event was witnessed by thousands and the implication and impact of this action were enormous.

John Adams, an American statesman, attorney, diplomat, writer, and Founding Father who served as the second president of the United States from 1797 to 1801, wrote in his diary, "*This is the most magnificent Movement of all. There is a Dignity, a Majesty, a Sublimity in this last Effort of the Patriots that I greatly admire. This Destruction of the Tea is so bold, so daring, so firm, intrepid, & inflexible, and it must have so important Consequences and so lasting, that I cannot but consider it as an Epocha in History.*"

The Beaver

The museum ship *Beaver* was built as a schooner 103 years ago on the island of Aero, in Denmark. The ship was used for freighting and fishing. Her voyage to celebrate the United States' bicentennial was nearly a disaster when hot exhaust ignited old timbers in the stern. With flames shooting out of the hatches, the fire crept close to the fuel supply. A lengthy bucket brigade finally contained the blaze and, following the repairs in England, she finished the voyage.

At the nation's oldest marine railway, Gloucester Marine Railway in Gloucester, Mass., the *Beaver* underwent a major rebuild. The vessel has been given new frames, hull planks from the water line up, a new bow and she received new bulwarks, deck, masts and rigging.

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To better replicate the appearance of the original *Beaver*, researchers found that the ship, *Columbia*, famous in her day for the exploration of the Pacific Northwest, was the same size and had been built in a shipyard near the 18th century *Beaver*. Because of her fame, *Columbia* was well documented. Based on the period paintings of *Columbia* and her illustrated logbooks, the look of the *Beaver* was significantly altered during the reconstruction to more closely resemble her sister ship, *Columbia*.

Fun facts about the *Beaver*:

- Fir planks used of the original decking in the on the *Beaver* are 100-year-old wood reclaimed from a factory in Fall River, Mass.
- The 400 sheets of copper on the sides of the *Beaver* were from the Paul Revere Copper Company, founded by Revere in 1810 and still in operation.
- It took 22,000 bronze nails to install the copper.

The Eleanor

The original *Eleanor* was one of several vessels owned by a leading colonial Boston merchant, John Rowe, whose holdings included stores, warehouses and Rowe's Wharf, a current Boston landmark.

No original plans exist of the *Eleanor*. However, it is known from her tonnage figure, as recorded in shipping papers, that she was full rigged and a "constant trader." The design of the *Eleanor* replica is based on colonial merchant vessels of the period that fit her description, particularly the *London*, a ship that carried part of the same shipment of tea to Charleston, South Carolina. The *London* was later sold to The Royal Navy. Carefully measured line drawings were recorded and preserved which were very helpful in creating a set of plans for the *Eleanor*.

Creating this replica involved almost a complete transformation of the retired fishing vessel *Vincie N.* built in 1936. The old dragger had a basic old style sailing hull design that was greatly rebuilt and modified to resemble the colonial ship *London*. The old planking and framework were dismantled foot by foot and replaced with the new design. Now the *Eleanor*, she has reshaped new sides, a new bow, bulwarks, a deck and stern with gallery windows.

The Dartmouth

The original *Dartmouth* was a whaling ship, built and owned by a Nantucket Quaker family. It was docked in London at the same time as the *Beaver* and the *Eleanor* after delivering its load of whale oil. The three ships were looking for return cargos, when their captains unwittingly agreed to transport the East India Company's tea to Boston.

Unlike the other two replica ships, the *Dartmouth*, the third addition to the fleet, will feature 100% new construction. She will be built from the keel up, using the same kind of timbers and building techniques employed in the late 1700s. Drawings for the third Boston Tea Party ship have been completed and the lines, sail and rigging plans will be based on several other merchant ships and whalers of her day. As a tribute to the 103-year old *Beaver*, these same time-tested and proven materials and building methods will produce a fine new vessel that will represent The Boston Tea Party well into the next century.

General fun colonial ship facts:

- A 1773 ha'penny was placed under the main mast of the ships. Tradition was that if the boat sank, the coin could pay Charon, the mythological ferryman of Hades, to transport sailors across the River Styx to reach the afterlife.
- A trap door under the Captain's Quarters conceals the "spirit locker" where alcohol was hidden from the crew.
- Yellow paint was very common to indicate a ship was new. Black paint suggested an old, slow ship that would be an easy target for privateers.

ABOUT BOSTON TEA PARTY SHIPS & MUSEUM

The Boston Tea Party, "the single most important event leading up to the American Revolution," occurred the night of Dec. 16, 1773. The 250th Anniversary of the Boston Tea Party was celebrated on Sat., December 16, 2023 and Boston led the way as America began to celebrate all major historic 250th anniversaries leading up to 2026, the semiquincentennial of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the founding of the United States of America. Opened in June 2012, The Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum, owned and operated by Historic Tours of America, is dedicated to accurately reliving and representing a key time in history (1773-1775). Through actors, tea throwing reenactments, high-tech interactive exhibits, authentic replica ships: the Beaver and the Eleanor, and an award-winning multisensory film, *Let it Begin Here*. The Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum is open 7 days/week from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. (Summer/Spring) and from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. (Fall/Winter). Tours run every 30 minutes in fall/winter and every 15 minutes in spring/summer and last 1 hr. Closed on Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. The Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum was voted 'Best Historical Experience' in *Yankee* '2017 Best of New England', #1 'Best Patriotic Attraction' in *USA Today's* 10Best Readers' Choice Awards 2016, 'Best New Museum' by *Yankee* in 2012 and 'Best of the New 2012' by *Boston Globe Magazine*. To learn more visit www.bostonteatpartyship.com or call 1-855-(TEA)-1773. The Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum is located at on the Congress Street Bridge at 306 Congress St., Boston, MA.

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