



Biography

Stanley - Ralph Warren Stanley (1929-)

Father: Stanley – Chester Warren Stanley (1900-1971)

Mother: Robinson – Bertha Emily (Robinson) Stanley (1901-1968)

Birth Date: February 9, 1929

Born at: Bar Harbor, Maine

Significant Education:

1948: Pemetic High School - Valedictorian

1950: Ricker Junior College, Houlton, Maine – Associates Degree in Liberal Arts

Spouse Name: Linscott - Marion Louise (Linscott) Stanley (1933-)

Spouse Parents: Linscott - Henry Lewis Linscott (1907-1992) and Cora M. Preble (1910-1991)

Wedding Date: September 22, 1956

Wedding Place: Southwest Harbor Congregational Church, Southwest Harbor, Maine

Occupation: Boatbuilder - Sailor – Historian – Genealogist – Fiddle maker - Raconteur
Ralph Stanley Inc.

Ralph Warren Stanley - 1st Workshop

Adoniram Judson Robinson House

ME - SWH – Main Street – 376

Ralph Warren Stanley - 2nd Workshop

William Doane Stanley House

ME - SWH – Clark Point Road – 102-104

Childhood Home:

Adoniram Judson Robinson House

ME - SWH – Main Street – 376

Home:

William Doane Stanley House

ME - SWH – Clark Point Road – 102-104

Death Date:

Death Place:

Cemetery:

See: Sailing Mentors and Their Summer People.pdf

Ralph built boats for 57 years – built and restored more than 70 boats – everything from ten-foot rowboats to a forty-four-foot lobster boat.

Built violins using wood from local trees and even, once, a stair tread. Played his fiddle in a country band for grange halls in Northport and Surry, Maine and winter Sundays for senior citizens in Bucksport.

In 1950, the Government of Japan began to designate certain individuals or groups who embodied intangible national cultural values as living human treasures, just as places or things of great cultural value are designated as national treasures. The designation, “Living Treasure” has since gained usage in many other countries.

Ralph Stanley, boat builder, sailor, raconteur, genealogist, historian, musician, violin maker and beloved mentor to all who share these interests, has been recognized by the government of the United States, the State of Maine and the citizens of Southwest Harbor as a veritable Living Treasure.

Ralph built his first boats at his father’s house, originally his grandfather, Adoniram Judson Robinson's house at 376 Main Street in Southwest Harbor.

Among many honors, Ralph was made a National Heritage Fellow by the National Endowment for the Arts in 1999. The following biography appears on the web site of the National Foundation for the Arts - www.nea.gov/honors/heritage/ - in the menu accessed by clicking “Profiles 1982-present.”

“Ralph W. Stanley was born February 9, 1929, in Bar Harbor, on Maine's Mt. Desert Island. His mother was a registered nurse and his father was a lobster fisherman who also skippered a yacht for well-to-do summer residents. Stanley descends from a long line of mariners who first settled on the island around 1760.

Stanley grew up in the small island community of Southwest Harbor. Commercial fishing boats and pleasure boats have always been a prominent part of the local landscape, and Stanley was attracted to them at an early age. As a youngster, he made toy boats out of wood and played with them in the harbor, and he enjoyed making drawings of boats, too. When he was old enough, he accompanied his father in his boat when he went out to haul his lobster traps. During his high school years, Stanley became interested in boat-building. World War II was in progress, and since the local boatyards were humming with activity, he was able to observe the construction of large fishing boats, called draggers, and other vessels.

After earning an associate's degree from a college in northern Maine, Stanley returned to Southwest Harbor. Not sure what occupation he wanted to pursue, he decided to try to build a boat. So he earned the money he needed to buy wood and other construction materials and, during the winter of 1951-1952, he built a 28-foot lobster boat. The boat turned out well and a local person bought it. This led to orders for other boats. "I've been building (boats) ever since," he said.

Stanley learned how to build boats not by apprenticing himself to another boatbuilder but mainly by keenly observing and using boats and by observing the activities of several professional boatbuilders who specialized in the Mt. Desert Island version of the Maine lobster boat. As Stanley explained, "I used to go and see what they were doing and talk with them. A lot of times it was better to watch what they were doing and not ask. You'd learn more (that way). Boatbuilders didn't know how to tell you, you know. Stand back and watch, and you'd find out more."

In designing his boats, Stanley uses locally available wood, including white cedar, oak, and pine. He designs his boats either by drawing scaled-down "lines plans" on paper or by carving scaled-down wooden half-hull models and then drawing out or "lofting" the boat's full-scale lines on the floor of his shop. This drawing provides a full-size pattern for the boat that is to be built.

Over the course of his career, Stanley has built a large number of traditional boats: approximately 70 vessels, from small sailboats to large offshore lobster boats, most of which are still in use. In addition to fishing boats, Stanley has also built a number of pleasure craft. These include engine-powered pleasure boats derived from the lobster boat hull form; they are sometimes called "pleasure boats."

Other pleasure boats he has built are single-masted sailing vessels called Friendship sloops. The sloops were originally built in and around the coastal village of Friendship, Maine, in the 1880s, and were used by commercial fishermen. Eventually they were replaced by engine-powered boats that gave fishermen greater speed and range. However, during the 1960s and 1970s, there was a revival of interest in Friendship sloops by recreational sailors, and Stanley played a major role in the revival by restoring old sloops as well as building new ones in the old style.

Stanley is one of Maine's few remaining professional boatbuilders solely engaged in wooden-boat construction. "Building wooden boats is like climbing a still-growing tree where you never get to the top," he said. "I keep finding new ways of doing things and new things to do. You can always improve; you're always looking to improve."

Like many small Maine boat shops of the past, Stanley's shop is family-run. His daughter Nadine is the bookkeeper, a job previously held by her mother, Marion. A son-in-law, Timothy Goodwin, runs the boat storage and maintenance part of the business. Stanley's son Richard - a talented boatbuilder in his own right - is his right-hand man in the shop.

When he is not making boats, Stanley is a dedicated amateur historian who tries to uncover new information about the history of boat-building on his island and share it with children and adults. He also writes articles based on his research and takes part in symposia sponsored by museums in New England."

"During his captivity [in Cambodia], Dick [Dudman] later told me, he made a promise: "If I ever get out of here alive, I'm going to Southwest Harbor and get Ralph Stanley to build me a Friendship Sloop, I'll call her 'Freedom,' and I'm going to spend the rest of my life cruising the waters of Maine." - "Friendship Sloop Days," The Friendship Sloop Society's 2006 Yearbook and Guide, "Freedom," article by Tom Halstead, p. 13, 2006

Awards Given to Ralph Stanley

Won the Class A Division at the Friendship Sloop regatta for three years in a row. The award for the best maintained wooden Friendship Sloop is called the Stanley Cup.

1999: On September 28, 1999 the Folk & Traditional Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts recognized Ralph W. Stanley as a Master Artist “who has contributed to the shaping of our artistic traditions and to preserving the cultural diversity of the United States” and gave him a National Heritage Fellowship at a ceremony in Washington, D.C. attended by First Lady Hillary Clinton.

See: SWHPL 11753

2002: Boat Builder Laureate of the Maine Coast Proclamation
Angus S. King Jr., Governor

2002: Honorary Degree in Boat Building Technology
William Flahive, President of Washington County Technical College, Eastport, Maine

2004: State of Maine Ralph Stanley Day Proclamation
John E. Baldacci, Governor – SWHPL 9072

2010: Edgar B. Caffrey Award at the Antique & Classic Boat Festival on August 28 in Salem, Massachusetts. Stanley is renowned as a builder and designer of traditional wooden boats, especially lobsterboats and Friendship sloops. According to Festival organizers, the Caffrey award is given “to a person who has made an ‘exceptional contribution to the preservation and appreciation of maritime heritage’” (emphasis original). As an award recipient, Stanley joins company with such boating luminaries as Dana Story, Joseph Garland and Olin Stephens.” – SWHPL 10746

2011: August 19, 2011 – 8th Annual Sunbeam Award given by the Seacoast Mission. Given for many contributions to the well-being of the Mount Desert Island communities.

2002: "When the USS Constitution was preparing for its 200th Anniversary in 2002, Ralph W. Stanley and his crew were called to help determine if the vessel was seaworthy. Ralph and his son, Richard, and son-in-law Tim Goodwin, went to Boston to conduct a survey of the vessel." – Bangor Daily News, September 25, 2009.
Stanley - Richard Lewis Stanley (1962-)
Goodwin – Timothy Wayne Goodwin (1954-)

2013: June 26, 2013 – 2013 Don Turner Award from the USS Constitution Museum – recognizes a person or team of people, professional or amateur, who have contributed significantly to efforts to preserve important vessels or who have made a significant contributions to our knowledge and understanding of ship design and construction.

Books Written About or Including Chapters on Ralph Stanley

Duncan, Roger F. *Dorothy Elizabeth – Building a Traditional Wooden Schooner* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2000).

Govenar, Alan. *Extraordinary Ordinary People: Five American Masters of Traditional Arts* (Candlewick Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2006) p. 17-29.

Through fascinating profiles of five National Heritage Fellows, folklorist Alan Govenar celebrates the cultural democracy that is America - and honors the endurance of traditional crafts and methods...Ralph W. Stanley keeps the craft of boat building alive in his coastal Maine town...

McCormick, Kevin M. *The Freedom Plant: A Novel of New England Fishermen* (Glencannon Press, Palo Alto, 2007)

Capt. McCormick owned the Ralph Stanley-built Nancy & Ricky named the 'Northern Lights and the Mariah and Megan when he owned her. He used the vessel as the model for the lobster boat Hayley and Blair in his novel. His affection for the boat and Ralph's craftsmanship is evident in his description of the fictional boat.

Milner, Craig and Stanley, Ralph. *Ralph Stanley: Tales of a Maine Boatbuilder* (Down East Books, Camden, Maine 2004).

Ralph's life story told in his own words.

Schreiber, Laurie. *Boatbuilding on Mount Desert Island* (Arcadia Publishing, 2016)

A fun read that gathers the stories of several major Mount Desert Island boat builders and, while doing so, offers a compact history of life and culture as well as boat building on the island. The book is interesting and full of facts.

Walsh, T.B.R., and Stanley, Ralph. *Lasting Friendships: A Century of Friendship Sloops* (The Friendship Sloop Society, 2014).

Wing, Charlie. *Salt in Their Veins: Conversations with Coastal Mainers as told to Charlie Wing* (Charlie Wing, Portland, 2006) 396-407.

Wurmfeld, Hope. *Boatbuilder* (Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988).

Ralph Stanley constructs a sailboat for the 15-year-old son [Alex Forbes] of an old friend, Peter Forbes. Hope Wurmfeld wrote it and took all of the photographs. Grade 3-8.

Videos About or Including Ralph

The Friendship Sloop: A Heritage Retained – The New Film Company Inc., 1986, DVD, 28 minutes.

Directed by Lowell Wentworth. Follows the progress of Ralph Stanley building the wooden Friendship Sloop Endeavor and Jarvis Newman building fiberglass copies of Ralph's Dictator as the Newman 31.

Dancing at the Mill - Life on Mount Desert Island from the mid-1700s through the late 1940s - Jeff Dobbs and Bing Miller of Dobbs Productions, written by Gunnar Hansen, 2011, DVD, 60 minutes.

In 1761 Abraham Somes sailed to Mt. Desert Island and settled in a sheltered harbor at the head of Somes Sound. This film celebrates the generations who have followed. Using the island's rich troves of historical photographs as well as early film footage, the film paints a picture of two centuries of daily life on the island. The film was written by Gunnar Hansen with music scored and performed by Bob Habib and the narration by Jack Perkins. It was filmed, edited and produced by Jeff Dobbs Productions, with support from the Mount Desert Island Historical Society and the Savage family. Includes Ralph Stanley, in costume, playing his fiddle at a barn dance.

Ralph Stanley: An Eye for Wood - Jeff Dobbs and Bing Miller of Dobbs Productions, 2015, DVD, 105 minutes.

The many manuscripts that Ralph has written about local history will appear on this site as they are annotated and typeset.

Author: Charlotte R. Morrill

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