

# Schooner *J&E Riggin* BY LETITIA BALDWIN



Frank M. Chilleini, courtesy J&E Riggin

*Stephen Taber.* Seven years ago, Mahle and her husband, Capt. Jon Finger, acquired the *J&E Riggin* and have worked ever since as a husband-and-wife team taking people gunkholing among the islands and in the myriad inlets and coves of Maine's Penobscot Bay.

From late May through September, Finger and Mahle and their daughters live onboard as a family. Their unique way of life, and the rigors and pleasures of cooking at sea are captured in Mahle's recent book *At Home, At Sea: Recipes from the Maine Windjammer J&E Riggin*, published last year. The book—part cookbook, part travelog—features recipes, practical cooking tips, and descriptions of slices of shipboard life.

Working in a space the size of a hall closet, Mahle has only one mess cook to help her turn out three hearty meals daily for 30 people at once. And she must consider factors beyond her control as she plots the day's cooking.

"You need to be able to go with the flow," Mahle said, kneading and shaping peasant bread dough with large, capable hands. "It's kind of like sailing. You need to be aware of what the weather is doing and what the wind is doing."

Mahle has learned how to deal with the quirks of cooking at sea and on a

**W**OOD SMOKE. That comforting smell that permeates clothes and conjures up foggy Maine days spent close to a fireplace or wood stove fills the air. Grayish-blue smoke is drifting from the Charlie Noble aboard the schooner *J&E Riggin*, tied up at a slip in Rockland Harbor. Lilacs in metal pitchers grace a red-and-white checked tablecloth spread out on the cabintop of the black-hulled vessel. Passengers, clasping mugs of coffee, softly chat on deck and gaze out at the still waters, a long breakwater silhouetted against the tangerine sky, and the hazy shapes of islands in the distance.

Down below, yellow bowls filled with cantaloupe crescents and pots of butter decorated with single catmint blossoms have been laid out amid vases of flowers on several knotty-pine tables. White platters laden with rosy rashers of bacon and blueberry pancakes dusted with confectioner's sugar arrive in swift succession.

In the galley, head cook Anne Mahle eyes pancakes starting to set on the cast-iron griddle of an old wood-fired stove. She cooks the flapjacks until both sides

are golden brown. She briefly cools her heart-shaped face, flushed from the heat and wood smoke, in the crook of her arm, slips several pans of brown bread into the oven, adjusts the stove's damper, and greets passengers.

For more than a decade, Mahle has fed and seen to the comfort of guests and crew aboard windjammers plying the Maine coast. Fresh out of college, she got her start as a mess cook on the

## Lemon Lobster with Sun-Dried Tomatoes

1 Tbsp. butter  
8 oz. Maine lobster  
2 tsp. shallots, minced  
1/4 cup sun-dried tomatoes  
in oil, chopped  
1/4 tsp. salt

Freshly ground pepper  
1/3 cup white wine  
Juice of 1/2 lemon  
1 Tbsp. butter  
Grated Parmesan cheese  
Minced parsley for garnish

Melt the butter in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the sun-dried tomatoes; sauté for one minute, then add the shallots and cook until soft. When the shallots are done, add the lobster meat and sauté for 1 minute. Add the white wine and lemon juice; cook for another 30 seconds and remove from heat. Gently stir in the butter until it's completely incorporated. Serve over pasta and garnish with the cheese and parsley.



wood stove. She constantly shifts pots and pans to hotter or cooler spots on the stovetop, and closer or farther away from the firebox in the oven.

Mindful of her limited water supply for dishwashing, Mahle has simplified the process of making bread, biscuits, muffins, and cakes under sail. She creams together sugar and butter in one big bowl. Dry ingredients are added after being sifted onto a plate. She adds liquid ingredients last and mixes it all up. "One bowl, no lumps," she writes in *At Home, At Sea*.

With limited storage space, Mahle is good at improvising. She is, though, particular about her raw materials. She makes it a policy to shop locally, laying in stores of seafood, smoked salmon, artisanal goat cheese, jam and jellies, and other quality Maine products. She gets fresh fruits and vegetables from a local farm. Herbs and flowers come from her own extensive kitchen garden in Rockland.

Midday, on board the *J&E Rigg*, it's plain that Mahle's efforts in the galley have paid off. On deck, where lunch is served buffet-style, conversation ceases. Murmurs of pleasure can be heard as people taste a rich black bean and zucchini soup and revel in the salt air and scenery. They help themselves to brown bread, sharp cheddar cheese, and fresh baby greens tossed with walnuts, apples, raisins, and tahini dressing. Banana and chocolate chip cake is served for dessert.

For Paul Santino, a passenger who hails from Queens, New York, food is recreation. In his home neighborhood, he can get anything from falafel to hand-rolled udon noodles. He likes to cook and enjoys shopping for ingredients for paella at local markets.

"This is almost like riding the New York subway only the scenery is better," he quipped. He slowly sipped his soup and gazed at the smoky-blue Camden Hills. "There's cumin in the soup. I can taste it. I am going back for more."



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#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

The schooner *J&E Rigg*, sails out of Rockland, Maine. 800-869-0604 or 207-594-1875; [www.mainewindjammer.com](http://www.mainewindjammer.com). *At Home, At Sea*, Baggywrinkle Publishing (2004), \$24.95. Available through bookstores, via 800-869-0604; or [www.athomeatsea.com](http://www.athomeatsea.com).