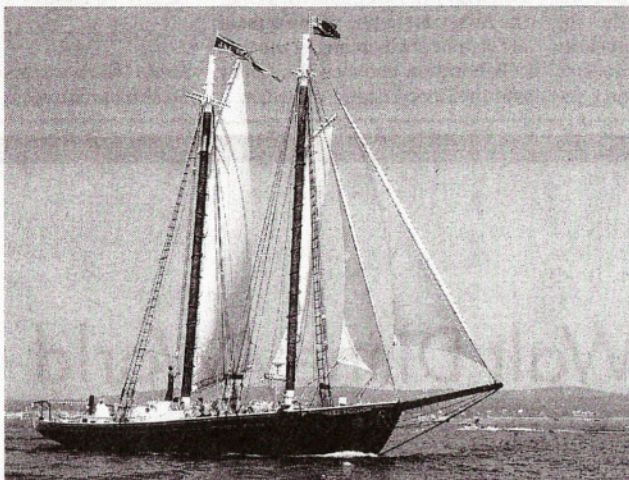


N.E. Travel

BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE SEPTEMBER 4, 2005



Onboard, Anne Mahle is chief cook and more. Here she comforts Kalie McGuirl, 6, a friend of her daughter Chloe Finger, 7, right, while husband Jon Finger steers.



Seasonal galley

Where passengers' meals are shipshape and homemade

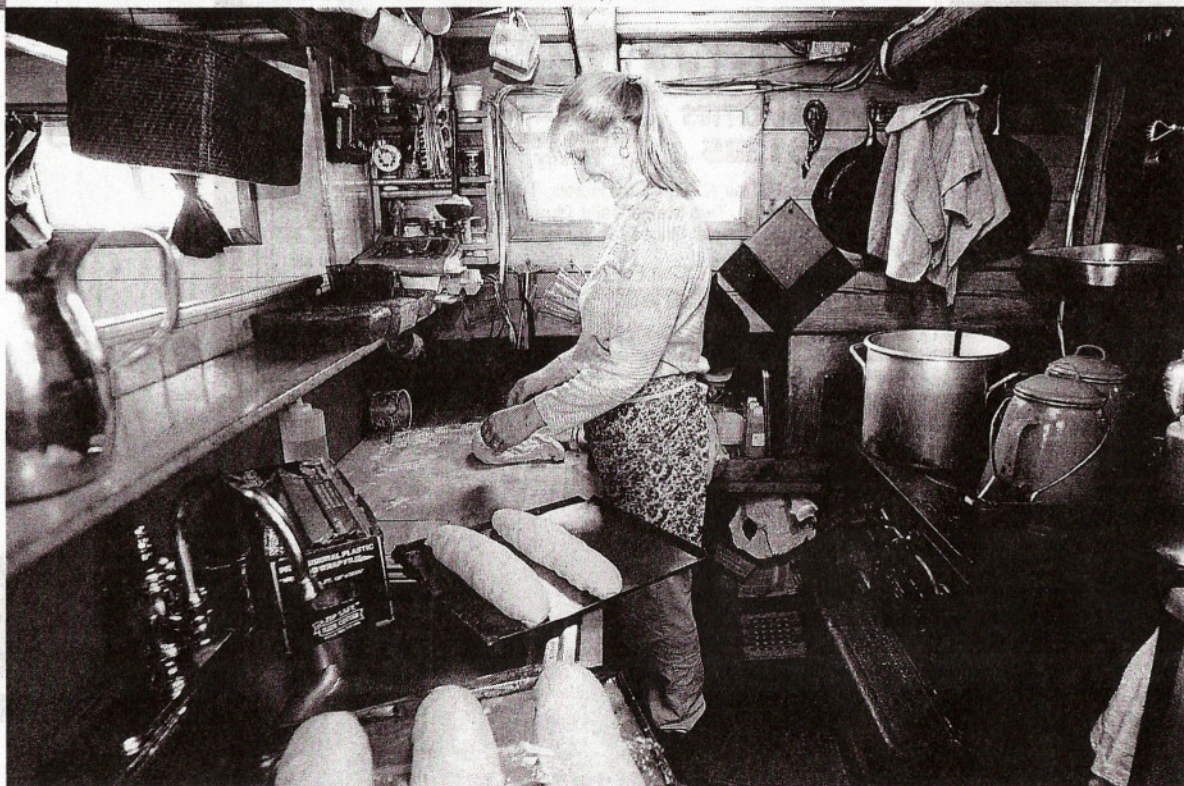
By Letitia Baldwin
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

ROCKLAND, Maine — Wood smoke. That comforting smell, which permeates clothes and conjures up foggy Maine days spent close to a fireplace or woodstove, fills the air. Grayish blue smoke is drifting out the Charlie Noble, an old British Merchant Navy term for the galley smokestack, on J. & E. Riggin in Rockland Har-

bor. Metal pitchers of lilacs grace a red-and-white checked tablecloth spread out on the cabin top of the black-hulled schooner tied up at a slip.

Passengers, clapping mugs of coffee, chat on deck and gaze out at the still waters, hazy shapes of islands, and long breakwater silhouetted against the tangerine sky.

At 8 a.m., the ship's bell sounds eight times, calling people to breakfast. Below, the scene resembles a Matisse still life. Yellow bowls filled with cantaloupe crescents and small pots of butter decorated with single catmint blossoms have been laid out amid vases of flowers on knotty pine tables. Plain white platters laden with rosy



Skipper and chef make windjammer cruises

Travel M5

a family affair

► **WINDJAMMER**
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rashers of bacon and blueberry pancakes dusted with confectioner's sugar arrive in swift succession.

In the galley, the J. & E. Riggins' head cook, Anné Mahle, eyes the pancakes cooking on the griddle of an old wood-fired stove. As bubbles pop in the circles of batter, she neatly slides a spatula under each and flips it in one rapid, precise motion. The flapjacks cook until the other sides are golden brown.

Mahle slips pans of brown bread into the oven, adjusts the damper, and greets passengers.

"I would like to welcome you to the galley just as if you were guests in my home," she tells the dozen or so men and women sitting on stools and red-cushioned seats. She tells them to keep the same coffee mug during their six-day sail. "You are in charge of it to wash, to have, and to hold, and to hang when you are not using it."

For more than a decade, Mahle has fed and seen to the comfort of guests and crew aboard windjammers plying the Maine coast. As a twentysomething fresh out of college, she got her start as a mess cook on the schooner Stephen Taber and continued sharpening her culinary skills on the three-masted Victory Chimes. Seven years ago, Mahle and her husband, Jon Finger, acquired the J. & E. Riggins and have worked ever since taking people "gunkholing," or poking about among the islands and in the myriad inlets and coves of Maine's Penobscot Bay.

The J. & E. Riggins is among more than a dozen schooners in Maine's windjammer fleet. The tall ships take people for three- to six-day sails late May through mid-October. Passengers help furl the sails, take a turn at the wheel, and help with other functions on deck. The experience gives them a taste of what life was like aboard these ships a century ago.

From late May through September, Mahle, 38, and Finger, 44, and their daughters Chloe, 7, and Ella, 4, live as a family on the J. & E. Riggins. Their life and the rigors



GLOBE PHOTO/ERIK JACOBS

Anne Mahle presides over breakfast with a Girl Scouts group before the J. & E. Riggins sets sail on a five-day excursion.

and pleasures of cooking at sea are captured in Mahle's "At Home, At Sea: Recipes from the Maine Windjammer J. & E. Riggins." The book, part cookbook and part travelogue, includes recipes, practical cooking tips, and poignant slices of shipboard life.

Frank M. Chillemi, a photographer and author of "Windjammers Lighthouses and Other Treasures of the Maine Coast" (Down East, 2005), shot most of the color photos in "At Home, At Sea." Passengers also provided touching snapshots like one of baby Ella, sporting a man's tweed cap, plunked down in front of her father at the helm.

"The place I used to plop her was the navigation station (where the charts and compass are) right in front of Jon," Mahle writes. "She ended up acting as a chart weight to keep the charts from blowing away. She'd watch the wheel turn, the GPS screen change, and the flags flying."

The J. & E. Riggins was built in 1927 by New Jersey oyster fisherman Charles Riggins, who named it after his two sons, Jacob and Edward. The 120-foot ship worked Delaware Bay, winning the one and only Oyster Schooner Race ever held, in 1929. The windjammer was converted to a passenger vessel in 1974 and declared a National Historic Landmark in 1991.

"This is our tenure. We will eventually pass this National His-

toric Landmark, a beautiful example of our collective American history, onto another," Mahle reflects in "At Home, At Sea." "What makes the Riggins ours during our tenure are the special touches that we bring to her."

Mahle and Finger are both licensed captains, but each has a separate role on board. She runs the galley while he skips the ship. Besides many summers cooking at sea, she gained further experience working for a Swiss chef at a European-style bistro and studying at the Culinary Institute of America.

Mahle, whom passengers quickly learn to call Annie, is the same friendly, funny, and down-to-earth person she seems to be in her book. Onboard, she helps raise the windjammer's huge canvas sails, and she ferries people and provisions from shore in the yawl boat. But the galley is her domain.

Below, in a corner the size of a hall closet, Mahle has only one mess cook to help turn out three hearty meals daily for 30 people at a time. She must keep the old Atlantic Fisherman stove stoked with hardwood logs, 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," she said, kneading and shaping crusty 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.”

On the Riggins and other windjammers, Mahle has learned how to deal with the quirks of cooking at sea and on a woodstove. When the schooner heels or comes about, she must keep everything in the galley from sliding around. She constantly shifts pots and pans to hotter and cooler spots on the stovetop and closer or farther away from the firebox (where the wood fire is) in the oven.

With limited storage space, Mahle has pared down her larder and is good at improvising. When a recipe calls for buttermilk, she adds lemon juice or cider vinegar to whole milk rather than keeping two kinds of milk on board.

Still, she is particular about her raw materials. She shops locally, procuring seafood, smoked salmon, artisanal goat cheese, jam and jellies, and other quality Maine products. She pays a lump sum each spring to a local farm and gets a share of fresh vegetables and fruit throughout the growing season. Herbs and flowers come from her own extensive kitchen garden in Rockland.

“Our commitment to buying local produce is one of our stronger decisions and is a cornerstone of my cooking,” she writes.

At midday, it's plain that Mahle's efforts 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 drink 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, who lives in Queens and works as a US Customs agent at Kennedy Airport, food is recreation. At home, he can eat everything from falafel to hand-rolled udon noodles. He likes to cook and enjoys shopping for saffron, peas, pimento, clams, and squid for paella at neighborhood markets.

He and his wife, Barbara, always wanted to sail on a windjammer. She chose the J. & E. Riggins because of its reputation for fine food.

“This is almost like riding the New York subway only the scenery is better,” quipped Paul Santino, referring to the schooner's gentle rocking motion as it sliced through the water. He slowly sipped his soup and gazed at the smoky blue Camden Hills. “There's cumin in the soup. I can

If you go . . .

How to get there

Rockland, Maine, is about a four-hour drive from Boston. Take Interstate 95 to Augusta and Route 17 east to Rockland.

What to do

J. & E. Riggins

136 Holmes St., Rockland
800-869-0604; 207-594-1875
www.maineWindjammer.com

E-mail: info@mainewindjammer.com
The windjammer can take up to 24 people and sails through Oct. 1. Cruises, which run three to six days, cost \$495-\$831 per person. A 5 percent discount is given for reservations made before Feb. 1. Passengers board after 5 p.m. the day before the sailing date. Three-day “Kids and Family” cruises (children 6-12) offered.

Downeast Windjammer Cruises

27 Main St., Bar Harbor
207-288-4585, 207-288-2373,
207-546-2927 (winter)
www.downeastwindjammer.com
Daily morning, afternoon, and sunset cruises on the four-masted schooner Margaret Todd. Adults \$29.50, seniors \$27.50, children \$19.50. Dogs welcome.

Where to stay

LimeRock Inn Bed & Breakfast

96 Limerock St.
800-546-3762
www.limerockinn.com
This Victorian house boasts a wrap-around veranda. Rooms, \$125-\$215 per night, are lavishly decorated. Locally roasted coffee and Italian frittatas and pastries are among the breakfast offerings.
Berry Manor Inn
81 Talbot Ave.
800-774-5692; 207-596-7696

taste it. I am going to go back for more.”

Mahle delights in seeing Santino and other passengers savor her cooking and fall under the spell of windjammer sailing, whether it's the balm of sea air, the aroma of wood smoke, or the sound of waves lapping against the hull.

www.berrymanorinn.com

A shingle-style mansion, this bed-and-breakfast is famous for its homemade pie. Both innkeepers' mothers make pies daily from scratch. The comfortable rooms, only one of which doesn't have a working fireplace, are \$145-\$235 per night.

Where to eat

Conte's Fish Market and Restaurant

Next to the Rockland Public Landing
No phone, no credit cards accepted
A local institution, it looks like a bait shack on the edge of a pier. Known for fresh seafood and generous portions. Entrees \$15-\$25. Daily from 5 p.m.

Primo

2 South Main St. (Route 73)
207-596-0770
Melissa Kelly, featured in *Gourmet* magazine as one of the nation's top chefs in 2001, and her pastry chef partner, Price Kushner, serve savory, sophisticated fare in a Victorian house. Entrees \$21-\$32. Wednesday-Monday from 5:30 p.m.

Information

“At Home, At Sea: Recipes from the Maine Windjammer J. & E. Riggins”

Anne Mahle (Baggywrinkle, 2004)
Available in many New England bookstores, at amazon.com, or by calling 800-869-0604, e-mailing info@AtHomeAtSea.com, or visiting www.AtHomeAtSea.com.

Maine Windjammer Association

800-807-9463
www.sailmainecoast.com
Information on J. & E. Riggins as well as 13 other windjammers that sail from Camden, Rockland, and Rockport. Prices \$395-\$875 for three- to six-day cruises, including all meals.

“She loves what she does,” mess cook Erika Schwendy says of Mahle. “If you enjoy what you do, little glitches are not going to make or break your day.”

Contact Letitia Baldwin, style editor at *The Bangor Daily News*, at jbh1b@prexar.com.