



COURTESY OF MYSTIC SEAPORT MUSEUM,
ROSENFELD COLLECTION

'Freedom,' shown in the 1920s, will be restored to its former glory.

Antique yacht dodges Davy Jones' locker

By Amy Hotz
Staff Writer

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M **Y** **K** A 103-foot Mathis-Trumpy called *Freedom* left Georgia on Monday and is heading up the coast. The 1926 yacht has seen better days and can't make the journey to Rhode Island on its own power, so its new owner, Earl McMillen III, put the yacht on a barge and sent it on its way.

He saved the boat from a worse fate.

Freedom, designed by John Trumpy and built by the Mathis Yacht Building Company in Camden, N.J., sat in the water at a marina in Florida's St. Johns River for years before Mr. McMillen got a phone call from a descendant of the owner.

"The marina was going to tow the boat away and sell it for scrap," Mr. McMillen said.

Mr. McMillen's heart went out to the dilapidated heap of wood and brass, and he decided to add it to his fleet. Mr. McMillen owns McMillen Yachts Inc., based in Newport, R.I. The company owns six fully restored, fully crewed antique boats co-owned by partners who buy interest in the vessels. The program works much like time-share on private jets.

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March 13, 2002

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After doing a little historical research, he found that Freedom's sister ship, the Sequoia, was a presidential yacht built one year earlier. Sequoia served eight presidents from Herbert Hoover to Gerald Ford during a time period that spanned from the Great Depression to World War II.

"Ford unfortunately thought the boat was an unneeded expense and sold the boat," Mr. McMillen said. "Everyone in the yachting community frowns on him for that."

To bring the boats back to their former glory, Mr. McMillen, a former real estate developer, oversees the wood and metal restoration and his wife, Elizabeth Wright McMillen, designs the interiors. Her passion for boat restoration began with an interest in old homes. Her parents, Elizabeth and Thomas H. Wright, helped found the Historic Wilmington Foundation. Mr. McMillen caught the bug from his father's old boat, the Alondra.

"We do use some modern technology. We take advantage of some epoxies they didn't have," he said. "But basically everything you see on the boat is original."

Freedom will stop in Rhode Island, not too far from where it was launched three-quarters of a century ago, and undergo an estimated \$3 million restoration from stem to stern.

Freedom's first owner was a Boston industrialist named Aubert Fay. He sold the yacht in the 1930s to Mrs. J.P. Donahue of New York. In the late 30's the boat changed hands again, this time to a developer who was trying desperately to sell a long stretch of sand now called Miami. He changed the name of the boat to Sunset and wined and dined buyers from its deck.

Wooden boats require more maintenance than today's fiberglass vessels, but to Mr. McMillen and his wife, it's worth the extra cash.

"The only reason fiberglass was ever developed was to make boats for more people," he said.

"(Wooden boats) embody a more elegant and refined way of being on the water."

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