

First Sail Delayed, But Blue Skies Ahead



The historical tall ship Kalmar Nyckel



by
Joyce
Rowley

The historical tall ship Kalmar Nyckel arrived at New Bedford State Pier Wednesday at 4 p.m. for its five day stay in New Bedford Harbor. But wind gusts out of the north kept her in the harbor Friday morning.

"The winds are coming down the (Acushnet) river," said Captain Lauren Morgens, who has been sailing the Kalmar since 2004. "It makes the hurricane barrier look awfully narrow," she said.

The Schooner Ernestina was able to take advantage of the Kalmar's downtime and planned an impromptu adventure for about 50 children that were visiting that tall ship. They'll be treated to a tour of the replica 17th century three-masted pinnace this morning, in addition to seeing the 19th century Ernestina.

From the green-faced gargoyle holding the ship's bell, to the wind gods, mermaids, and other mythic symbols, the children will learn about the superstitions of sailors who sailed for years to reach unknown shores.



*One of four cannons on
the Kalmar Nyckel*

No whistling—you might whistle up a storm. Gargoyles scare away evil spirits and evil winds. Two carved watchdogs sit on the port and starboard rails with one eye open on the water to watch for bad weather but a blind eye to the antics of the crew.

Morgens said some figures represented the King of Sweden's patronage, from the royal red lion on the bowsprit to the Kalmar castle aft. Kalmar Nyckel means "Key to Kalmar" in Swedish. In keeping with tradition, there are carved heads on the stern of the Governor of Delaware and members of the Kalmar Nyckel Foundation who had the vision of building a replica ship. The first captain and the shipwright are also represented.

Researchers found that the original paint pigment was bright, almost gaudy, like a gypsy caravan. The Kalmar was built to be a merchant ship. It's thought that its colors helped display the company's ability to create brightly colored pigments. Then as a naval ship, bright colors demonstrated power and strength.

Four cannons on deck protected it from pirates, as Sweden was at war with Spain at the time. Pirates were state-sanctioned back then, said Morgens, and the Kalmar was under orders to capture a Spanish ship if possible. The Kalmar's companion ship purportedly took a Spanish ship but the captain was fired for failing to share the bounty with the King.



*The Kalmar Nyckel's most
loyal mate!*

The Kalmar replica's devotion to detail has drawn researchers from the Vasa Museum in Sweden who are recreating a 17th century warship and trying to understand how the technology works. The windlass, a human-powered winch that halls up the anchor or unfurls the foresail, may be easy to figure out. But the seven to eight miles of ropes that are connected by pulleys to sails, jib, masts and yards, take years to learn. Hence the phrase, "learning the ropes."

Those who went learned the ropes by helping the crew pull up the anchor, haul up the sails, and set sail for an adventure on Buzzards Bay.

Oh, and the green-faced gargoyle? That's Fred—the longest volunteer crew member, who occasionally get seasick.

The Kalmar Nyckel Foundation is a maritime-based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that promotes education while preserving the Kalmar Nyckel's role Delaware's history.

More photos of this fantastic ship can be seen in the NBG Photo Album.
