

What to do with the *Evelina M. Goulart*?

by Deirdre O'Regan

The history of the celebrated Gloucester fishing schooner is inextricably linked to the tiny hamlet of Essex, just up the road, or—by water—to the northwest, counterclockwise around the other side of Cape Ann. There, at the head of the narrow and twisting Essex River, a handful of shipyards built thousands of fishing vessels since the region was first settled by Europeans. Public riverfront land was designated as a shipbuilding site way back in 1668, and over the next three centuries, Essex earned its fame as a town of

shipwrights—equipping New England fishermen with strong seaworthy fishing vessels. In its heyday, the mid-1800s, Essex's fifteen shipyards turned out fifty vessels a year.

Of the more than 4,000 vessels launched from Essex in her 350 years of shipbuilding, only seven still exist. Six of the seven have been, in their lifetimes, converted for other uses and/or substantially restored—some of them several times over. The seventh has not. She is the 1927 *Evelina M. Goulart*, the 82-ton dominant exhibit at the Essex Shipbuilding Museum. The *Goulart* has never been restored—patched, but not restored. As a result, if you are hoping to learn about ship construction and design of historic watercraft, then she's your opportunity to investigate the real thing.

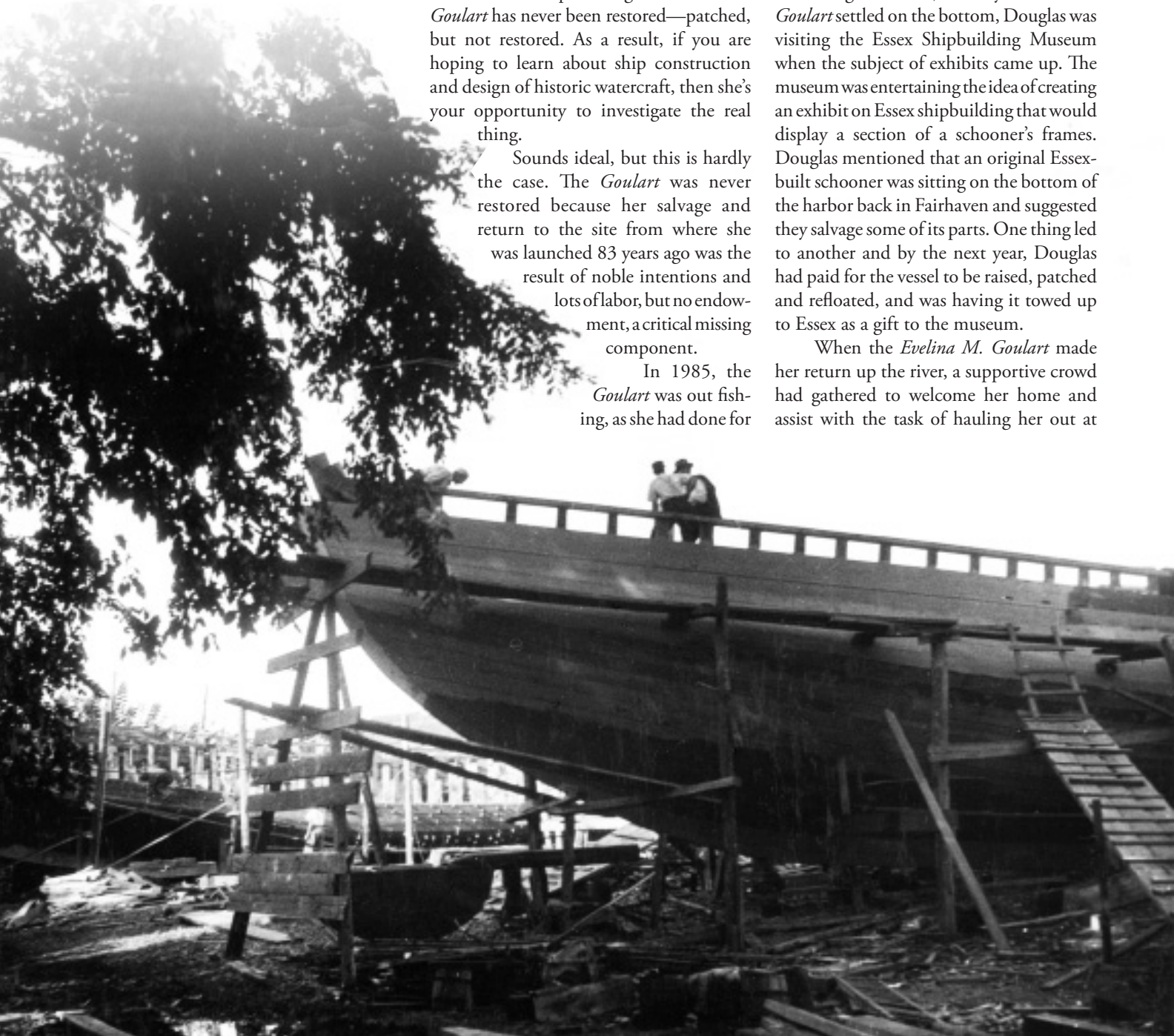
Sounds ideal, but this is hardly the case. The *Goulart* was never restored because her salvage and return to the site from where she was launched 83 years ago was the result of noble intentions and lots of labor, but no endowment, a critical missing component.

In 1985, the *Goulart* was out fishing, as she had done for

nearly sixty years, when Hurricane Gloria roared up the New England coast. She suffered some damage to her stern and limped into Fairhaven, Massachusetts, across the harbor from New Bedford. Her owners soon realized that repairing her was beyond their means. They stripped out her engine and abandoned her. In time, her bilge pumps failed and she sank, still tied to the dock.

Enter Captain Bob Douglas of Martha's Vineyard, owner of the schooners *Shenandoah* and *Alabama* (and also of the famous Black Dog restaurant). A few years after the *Goulart* settled on the bottom, Douglas was visiting the Essex Shipbuilding Museum when the subject of exhibits came up. The museum was entertaining the idea of creating an exhibit on Essex shipbuilding that would display a section of a schooner's frames. Douglas mentioned that an original Essex-built schooner was sitting on the bottom of the harbor back in Fairhaven and suggested they salvage some of its parts. One thing led to another and by the next year, Douglas had paid for the vessel to be raised, patched and refloated, and was having it towed up to Essex as a gift to the museum.

When the *Evelina M. Goulart* made her return up the river, a supportive crowd had gathered to welcome her home and assist with the task of hauling her out at





At sea in swordfishing mode: note the bowsprit with the cast iron pulpit, where the striker would stand to harpoon swordfish, and the crow's nest aloft on the foremast, where lookouts were posted to spot the fish. The bowsprit was only carried during the summer swordfishing season. Transitional schooners like the Goulart were powered by diesel engines and did not carry headsails. The foresail and the riding sail on the main mast were mostly used to steady the vessel at sea.

a location without a drydock or a suitable railway. Many townspeople had an emotional response to the arrival of one of their nautical progenies. But not all of the feelings were positive. In fact, Dana Story, the son of the *Goulart's* builder, legendary shipbuilder Arthur D. Story, was publicly against the whole idea. Despite the many reasons there are to preserve historic ships, there are also powerful arguments to scrap them. They usually boil down to money.

Essex is a tiny town. The Essex Shipbuilding Museum is small and so is its budget. The cost of maintaining the 83-foot wooden vessel exceeds all the other museum exhibits and departments combined. Attempting to preserve the *Goulart* could potentially bankrupt the museum.

This fall will mark the 20th anniversary of the *Evelina M. Goulart's* return to Essex. The museum has done its best, but the years have taken their toll. The *Goulart* is falling apart. Now, the museum is faced with a difficult decision: does it pay to have the

ship stabilized or does it cut its losses and have her dismantled?

To make this decision, first we need to address why the *Evelina M. Goulart* is historically important. Why was it deemed worthy to save her in the first place?

New England's fishing history and culture has been well documented, but mostly

from the era of the fantastic sailing schooners that fished for cod from dories on the Grand Banks. These were the schooners that, by the late nineteenth century, started to look more like racing yachts than working craft. The *Goulart* came after that era waned. She is considered a "transitional" schooner—one that bridged the gap between fishing under sail and handlining from dories to dragging trawls behind diesel-powered vessels. Of those types of ships, *Evelina M. Goulart* is the only one left.

The story of the vessel is as typical of New England's fishing history as her construction. The *Goulart's* owner, Manuel Goulart, named the ship for his daughter. He fished the North Atlantic with her for more than twenty years, but the *Goulart* worked hard for fifty years, fishing the North Atlantic. She was versatile—swordfishing in the summer, trawling for groundfish in the colder weather. Each year at the beginning of the summer season, she underwent a transformation to configure her for the lucrative swordfish trade. This entailed, among other changes, removing the pilothouse—needed only when trawling—and fitting the bow with a 20-foot-long bowsprit equipped with a cast iron pulpit, where a striker would perch himself to harpoon the massive swordfish. When Manuel Goulart retired in 1948, the crew pooled their money, bought her and kept on fishing until time and Hurricane Gloria put an end to her productive life.

When the museum accepted the *Goulart* from Captain Douglas, it never



PHOTOS FOR THIS ARTICLE COURTESY OF THE ESSEX SHIPBUILDING MUSEUM

The Evelina M. Goulart sunk at the wharf in Fairhaven, Massachusetts.



Evelina M. Goulart returned home to Essex in 1990, 63 years after she was launched from the A. D. Story Shipyard.

planned to restore her to seaworthy condition—that would have been far beyond its means. They hoped, rather, to stabilize the hull and maintain her as a static exhibit. She was repaired, painted, and cleaned up but not rebuilt. Her hull planking was removed from her starboard side, which was in poor shape, so that visitors could get a look at her frames and learn something about how the ship was constructed. She has been stored as an outside exhibit, out of the water and protected, but just minimally, under a corrugated tin roof.

According to Essex Shipbuilding Museum board member Barry O'Brien, it was the *Goulart's* arrival in Essex that set in motion a series of events at the museum.

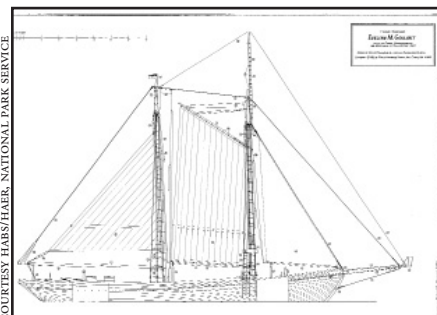
Generous donations were made. People came together and acquired the A. D. Story Shipyard, the last of the historic Essex shipyards. Professionals volunteered their time, expertise, and materials, and people started donating maritime artifacts to the museum that had been stored in family attics and basements for decades. Stories began

to emerge. But, the *Evelina M. Goulart* did not arrive with an endowment. For twenty years, the museum has done its best to preserve and interpret this vessel, but her wooden hull is deteriorating to the point where some hard choices have to be made. Preliminary estimates suggest that it will cost well into six figures to stabilize and further interpret this schooner. Alternatively, it will cost tens of thousand dollars to dismantle and dispose of her, if that is the ultimate decision. This is a quandary for such a small enterprise. When you have to raise every dime for museum exhibits and programs, we have to decide: "Do we save this vessel or create more educational programs?" This is not an easy decision, or one to be made lightly.

To help make the appropriate and responsible decision of what to do with the *Evelina M. Goulart*, the Essex Shipbuilding Museum is holding a four-part symposium to investigate its options. Participants range from museum staff to experts on the history

of the *Goulart* and its role in the history of the Northeast fisheries, ship preservationists, museum professionals, and individuals who have played a variety of roles in taking care of and documenting the vessel. You can catch the final presentation on 27 May 2010 at the museum, when Dana Hewson, the Vice President of Mystic Seaport's Watercraft Preservation and Programs, will join them to discuss the broader role of historic ship preservation as a museum artifact and share some experiences he's had in taking care of a fleet of historic watercraft. Erik Ronnberg Jr. will also be there to discuss "Chainsaw Archaeology" as one way of preserving and interpreting historic artifacts. In the next few months, the museum will be actively recruiting volunteers to form a steering committee to finally decide the fate of the *Evelina M. Goulart*. They welcome your input.

For more information on the 27 May symposium and on the history of the *Goulart*, contact the Essex Shipbuilding Museum (Box 277, 66 Main St., Essex, MA 01929; Ph. 978 768-7541; www.essexshipbuildingmuseum.org). ⚓



COURTESY HABS/HAER, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

The Evelina M. Goulart has been well documented, both by the museum in Essex and by the Historic American Buildings Survey / Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) of the National Park Service. You can view the full HABS/HAER report online at www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hbs/, and do a search for "Evelina M. Goulart."

