

# RENOVATED FLYING CLOUD READY TO RACE AGAIN



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE FLYING CLOUD LOG CANOE PRESERVATION TRUST

A relaunching celebration for FLYING CLOUD was held on 17 October 2020.

Captain Kenneth S. Reightler Jr. '73, USN (Ret.), remembers the adrenaline rush from his first experiences on a Chesapeake Bay sailing log canoe.

While the speed was dazzling, the organized chaos of cooperation and synchronization of the crew left an indelible impression on him as a child. Keeping a darting log canoe from capsizing requires teamwork and trust among the crew. Log canoes are built for speed and have no keel. That dictates some members of the crew sitting upon 12-foot boards to counterbalance the force of the wind. The crew works in unison as the canoe tacks back and forth, demanding each member to do his or her part for the team to thrive.

Reightler, a former astronaut, and now the Naval Academy's Tig H. Krekel, Class of '75, Distinguished Chair in Space Science, was introduced to the rigors, routines and exhilaration of log canoe racing as a child when he served as "bail boy," responsible for removing the water that consistently came into the low freeboard boat. Eventually he progressed through boardsman, trimmer, tactician and helmsman. For the past 15 years, he has raced aboard ISLAND BIRD, a log canoe built by his great-great grandfather, William Sidney Covington, in 1882. But thanks to an extensive renovation of another log canoe with family significance, FLYING CLOUD, Reightler and his fellow log canoe enthusiasts plan to race the second-largest craft of its kind under sail this year. FLYING CLOUD was built on Tilghman Island, MD, in 1932 by Reightler's great-grandfather, John B. Harrison, and was relaunched on 17 October 2020.

Reightler said the complete commitment from each team member learned as a child racing log canoes was regularly reinforced throughout his career, beginning at the Naval Academy.

"I saw it at the Academy, in the Navy and at NASA," he said. "I try to reinforce that same spirit of teamwork with the (Academy's) offshore sailing team as volunteer coach. Everyone has to do their job to be successful. It became very clear as a kid going out on these boats that each member of the crew has a role to play, and there were big problems if everyone didn't perform."

The restoration of the seven-log-hulled FLYING CLOUD was organized by the nonprofit Flying Cloud Log Canoe



Preservation Trust, Ltd. Reightler is a trust member. The Naval Academy connection to the FLYING CLOUD project also includes Paul B. Prager '80, whose family provided a \$75,000 challenge match for the vessel's renovation in October 2019. Reightler also plans to coordinate opportunities for Naval Academy midshipmen, faculty and staff to participate in log canoe racing.

Efforts to refurbish the canoe started in 2014, when former owner Allan Noble donated FLYING CLOUD to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels, MD. The Trust raised more than \$150,000 to fully fund the restoration. This winter, FLYING CLOUD will complete the restoration process with newly varnished decks, upgraded rigging and a new set of sails.

With the 2020 racing season shelved by the COVID-19 pandemic, Reightler is eager to get FLYING CLOUD back into competition. FLYING CLOUD last raced in 2016, and during that season she experienced multiple failures of key components, including the deterioration of the logs in her hull. As skipper of FLYING CLOUD, Reightler is excited to lead her back to action this summer. He's responsible for organizing the crew and having her race ready.

"I was thrilled to have the opportunity to work on the boat and just be around her because of my family connection," said Reightler. "It's been a labor of love for many reasons including seeing the skill of the shipwrights, my love of history, hearing the wonderful stories and the physical aspects of racing log canoes. It's old-school sailing. We don't use winches or many of the modern conveniences we have today. These boats are very challenging and there is great camaraderie and support among the log canoe community."

The hull of log canoe FLYING CLOUD was restored at Campbell's Boatyards in Oxford, MD. FLYING CLOUD was built on Tilghman Island, MD, in 1932 by legendary boat builder John B. Harrison. Renovations on 88-year-old FLYING CLOUD were completed in the fall of 2020. More than \$150,000 was raised to restore the historic log canoe.

## STRONG SENSE OF HISTORY

Log canoe racing on the Chesapeake Bay dates to the 19th century. It started with European settlers learning how to build the Native American craft by hollowing out a log, along the shores of the Chesapeake Bay. The English adopted the technique and made the canoes bigger by adding two or three logs to the hull and installing sails.

Early settlers and watermen used local pine to create low-cost crafts to pull crab and oysters from the Bay and its rivers. Log canoes were built for speed. The watermen with the fastest boats would return with their oyster bounties and command the best prices. Ultimately, the human need for competition infiltrated the industry and in the 1800s officially sanctioned regattas began.

In the quest for more speed, second masts were installed and additional sails added, but log canoes now are normally powered by three primary sails. Masts for log canoes, then and now, are removable and must be made of wood. Some



FLYING CLOUD Trust member Allan Noble, in the foreground, works on varnishing one of the sailing log canoe's spars with from left, Ed Schut, CAPT Ken Reightler '73, USN (Ret.), and Marc Castelli.





Supporters of FLYING CLOUD's restoration received a section of the canoe's center log as a thank you gift at the 17 October 2020 re-launch.

allowances have been made as technology and materials improved for the racing vessels. While sails are no longer Indian cotton, they can be fashioned using more modern fabrics, but exotic materials like Kevlar are not allowed. Instruments are strictly forbidden.

FLYING CLOUD began racing in the 1930s before she was converted to a cruising boat. She sailed in the New York region for about 10 years before she was reconverted into a racing log canoe. A few years after being donated and raced by the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, major issues were discovered in her masts and hull. A thorough restoration was needed. Due to the specific skills, knowledge and expertise required to complete the overhaul, Campbell's Boatyard in Oxford, MD, was selected to perform the renovations.

Many of the 10 log canoes on the racing circuit are registered historical landmarks. FLYING CLOUD is recognized on the National Register of Historic Places and races under the No. 22, requiring as many as 18 crew to campaign her. Maintaining her historical status meant renovations had to adhere to specific Department of Interior requirements, such as retaining her original hull shape, mast and centerboard locations, and use of wood in the repairs identical to original materials.

History emanates from these vessels. Speed is the most captivating attribute.

With only a centerboard and no keel, log canoes don't have a lot of hull in the water for resistance. With little drag, the sail-powered crafts accelerate rapidly and can reach speeds up to 15 knots.

"When you're out on the boards, you feel like you're going 100 miles-per-hour, skimming across the water," Reightler said. "There's always been a very strong sense of history with these boats, and to preserve that history and traditional ways of building and sailing has been an honor."

The Bay is the only place in the world where log canoe boats are still racing. It's a 150-year-old tradition that racers such as Reightler hold dear. The racing season usually starts in the last week of June and runs about every other weekend through the middle of September. Yacht clubs along the Chesapeake Bay host the races which are held on the Miles, Chester, Tred Avon and Choptank rivers.

Starting this year, the Prager Family Trophy will be awarded at the end of each sailing season to the log canoe winning the most sanctioned races on the Miles River. The Prager Family Trophy includes a metal sculpture of FLYING CLOUD by John C. North II, with the annual winners receiving a keeper trophy to commemorate their victories.

Prager, CEO and Chairman of Beowulf Energy, and principal of Bluepoint Hospitality Group in Easton, MD, said he supports the FLYING CLOUD project because of the passion involved with restoring the historic vessel. He commended North and Reightler for helping revive the sport.

"I thought that was really compelling," Prager said. "Judge North wrote a book about log canoes. He kept them going when others lost interest. He reinvigorated the sport."

"I was blown away by their passion and commitment to it. If you're a man of the sea—an Academy guy—there's an affinity for being on the water. The notion that generations have sailed on this boat and will sail on this boat is both important and wonderful."

During races, FLYING CLOUD will fly a distinctive pennant of Navy blue and gold with a "Blue Peter" inset in honor of Paul Prager, a member of the Naval Academy Foundation's Board of Directors. The pennant is based on an original design by Chesapeake Bay and log canoe artist Marc Castelli.

Reightler said the Prager family was instrumental in getting FLYING CLOUD back on the water.

"We couldn't have done it without their support, contributions and interest," Reightler said. "We are very thankful for their



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—Captain Kenneth S. Reightler Jr. '73, USN (Ret.)

generous donations that allowed this project to work the way it did.”

### MIDSHIPMEN EXPERIENCE

The log canoe racing community unites around its history, culture and traditions. Reightler wants to bring midshipmen into the fold through crewmember opportunities. His involvement as an instructor-skipper and officer in Tactical Command for the Academy’s Offshore Sail Training Squadron, as well as a volunteer coach with the varsity offshore sailing team, has shown him the incredible talent that exists within in the Naval Academy Brigade, faculty and staff.

He said his role as FLYING CLOUD’s skipper presents him a chance to initiate those who have shown an interest into this unique experience.

“It was the perfect opportunity to allow that to happen,” he said. “It’s hard to bring people into the sport who have

not been a part of it or had a connection. I want to be a part of that connection for coaches, adult volunteers or interested midshipmen to help connect Navy Sailing and log canoe racing.”

Naval Academy Offshore Sailing Coach Jahn Tihansky said Reightler’s emphasis on the value of teamwork resonates with midshipmen. Tihansky said a few midshipmen accepted Reightler’s invitation to participate in log canoe racing prior to FLYING CLOUD’s renovation.

Reightler’s focus on properly communicating, coordinating actions, understanding immediate priorities and constantly reevaluating those elements are shared attributes among crews for all types of racing vessels.

“With his background, who would know better about the value of teamwork?” Tihansky said. ⚓



FLYING CLOUD Log Canoe Preservation Trust members Langley Shook, left, and the Honorable John C. North II hold the Trust-sponsored Prager Family Trophy, which will be awarded to the log canoe winning the most sanctioned races on the Miles River at the end of each sailing season.

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