

# Launching a Restoration Project

By Peter Marks

Centerport — Yesterday, they put the Little Jennie back where it belonged.

As hundreds of well-wishers watched from the banks of Centerport Harbor, a huge crane lifted the creaking wooden ship from its makeshift dry dock and lowered it into the harbor. And as the historic vessel bobbed in the water for the first time in many months, the crowd cheered.

"This is a big day. This is just the beginning," declared William Perks, the Centerport man who is spearheading the effort to restore the 101-year-old Chesapeake bugeye ketch in time for Operation Sail 1986, the tall ships festival to be held July 4 to celebrate the Statue of Liberty's centennial. The 86-foot ship is expected to be the oldest American sailing vessel at the event.

The relauching yesterday of the Little Jennie — which had been rotting away at a Huntington boatyard until Perks bought it last year for \$1 — was an important milestone for Perks and a small band of volunteers who have been restoring the ship's hull since March.

With the ship moored at its "restoration berth" at the head of the harbor, work will begin over the next several months on refurbishing the Little Jennie's exterior.

So far, said Perks' wife, Laura, a fund-raising campaign for the ship, which is now owned by a nonprofit corporation, has brought in about \$10,000. Perks, 33, hopes to raise \$300,000 to obtain an engine, restore, and outfit the craft, whose colorful past has included stints as a commercial hauler, pleasure boat and a rum-runner during Prohibition.

"It's a tremendous project," said

Rear Adm. Thomas King, superintendent of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, who attended the launch and toasted the Little Jennie at the reception that followed. "This schooner is a classic piece that we should preserve."

The launch began with Laura Perks cracking a bottle of champagne against the hull and announcing, "It may seem like a waste of

champagne, but here's to the Little Jennie. Long may she sail." The ship was then lowered into the water near the Perks' harborside home and towed across the harbor by tugboat to its berth in a Centerport marina.

The festivities continued on the marina's docks, as about 300 people sipped free champagne, munched on hot dogs and bought "Little Jennie" T-shirts and balloons. Some were

taken with the community spirit of the event. "It's like America of 100 years ago," said Thomas Losee of Cold Spring Harbor, whose son, a college student, is working as a carpenter on the ship this summer.

John Fullerton of Oyster Bay, vice president of Operation Sail, said: "It's the love and the sweat of these individuals who have made her come back to life."



The Little Jennie is lowered into the harbor

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