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WING & WING

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Zeb-Schooner Life, written and directed by Gordon Massingham, Detrick Lawrence Productions, Edgartown, MA...A Review:

It's not often that someone makes a film, much less a well-documented history, about someone associated with schooners or the schooners themselves. After all, the prospective audience may be limited. That this film is being considered for airing on PBS indicates that it is something special.

Based on Polly Burroughs' 1972 *Zeb-A Celebrated Schooner Life*, The Chatham Press, it basically recounts the life of Zebulon Tilton who, based in Vineyard Haven, sailed the coasting schooner Alice S. Wentworth for some 40 years from Maine to New York. Zeb Tilton is realistically portrayed as quite a character, but also as a hard-working individual and one of the ablest schooner captains ever. His exploits in the handling of the Alice S. Wentworth, without engine or yawl boat, are literally amazing.

But the film is much more than a story of a man's life. There is a fascinating treatment of the growth and history of whaling in the northeast with credit given to the Wampanoag

natives of the Vineyard and Nantucket for drawing the attention of Europeans to whales as a food source, which later grew into a huge and profitable business. And it is a history of commercial sailing vessels in Nantucket Sound as well, with the harbor master at Gay Head reporting an astounding 26,000 vessels passing Gay Head in a single year. And there are capsule portraits of the inhabitants as represented by the many generations of the Tilton family.

Most fascinating to this viewer, and, presumably to readers of this publication, the film is an amazingly complete history of schooners, from their early use as revenue cutters and privateers, to the coasting schooners, the fishing schooners and, finally, to yachts. The pictures, many of which appeared in the Burroughs book, are excellent but, even better are the many film clips which were obtained from marine museums, historical archives and, probably, personal collections.

And there are appearances and opinions expressed by a number of very familiar schooner people, at least to those from the northeast: Matt Stackpole, former owner of Mya and director of the Martha's Vineyard Museum, now with Mystic

Seaport Museum; Captain Bob Douglas, owner of Shenandoah and Alabama; Captain Doug Lee, builder and owner, with Linda Lee, of Heritage, and the top rigger in the country, Myles Thurlow.

Perhaps inadvertently, the film is a tribute (and a great promotional piece) for Gannon and Benjamin Marine Railway. Both Nat Benjamin and Ross Gannon have prominent roles as observers of sailing and the Vineyard life, and their largest creation, Juno, also has a prominent role.

There is some terrific footage of schooners sailing in the Moffett cup race (I thought I saw Malabar II at a distance) and, in addition to Juno, *When & If* also gets a nice mention and picture. Many people played a part and Jim Lobdell was one of those thanked in the credits.

In short, "Zeb" is a film that should be in every schooner lover's DVD library. It sells for \$24.95 and is available by phone at (508) 627-8844 or by email to richardc@efilmgroup.com. You can learn more about the film at www.zebtilton.com.

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