

The National Maritime Heritage Grants Program

The United States is a nation with a rich maritime history, and it is desirable to foster in the American public a greater awareness and appreciation of the role of maritime endeavors in our Nation's history and culture.

So it is declared among the findings of the National Maritime Heritage Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-451). These findings further observe that historic maritime resources are being lost with increasing frequency and current public and private efforts are unable to ensure their preservation for future generations. The suggested remedy is a national maritime heritage policy providing leadership and financial support. This policy is realized in the authorization of the National Maritime Heritage Grants Program.

Conceived as a partnership between state and local governments and private nonprofit organizations, the grants program is administered by the National Park Service and State Historic Preservation Offices. The National Maritime Heritage Grants Advisory Committee, whose 21 members are from the private and public sectors, provides funding recommendations and suggests priorities for achieving the national maritime heritage policy. Revenues for the program come from 25 percent of the proceeds from scrapped vessels of the National Defense Reserve Fleet, administered by the Maritime Administration.

The grants program is national in scope, features a competitive selection process, and requires a one-to-one match of federal to nonfederal resources. Eligible applicants include state and local governments and private nonprofit organizations. In general, the program supports maritime heritage education and preservation projects designed to reach a broad audience and enhance public understanding of America's maritime past. Educational projects focus on conveying information about this maritime legacy through curatorial, instructional, and interpretive activities. Preservation projects encompass all facets of

preservation planning and treatment for historic maritime properties and archeological sites.

The first round of maritime grants commenced in February 1998. In all, 342 proposals requesting approximately \$10.3 million were received. About \$650,000 was available for awards. Proposals were evaluated by State Historic Preservation Offices and forwarded with comments to the National Maritime Heritage Grants Advisory Committee. Final review and funding recommendations were made by the committee.

In evaluating proposals, the committee assessed the quality of the proposal and its potential public benefit. They also considered the significance of the maritime resource and if it was at all threatened. The need of the organization and the capacity of an applicant to complete the project in a timely, professional, and cost-effective manner were also important factors in deciding whether or not to recommend a project for funding. As well, the committee worked to ensure an equitable distribution of awards among small and large organizations, resource types, and education and preservation project categories. Overall, the selection process for the first maritime grants was very competitive, final funding decisions quite difficult, and many worthy projects simply could not be supported.

However, the projects receiving awards represent a group of maritime resources that are unique on a local level, important within a national context, and have the potential for broad public impact. Included are preservation efforts involving large vessels and small craft; lighthouses and life-saving stations; a maritime warehouse, store, and observatory; as well as canal locks. Several proposals to make maritime manuscript and photographic collections electronically accessible were also funded. The unique heritage of rivers and inland lakes will be conveyed through the support of projects involving documentation, conservation, and interpretation of associated watercraft. Underwater archeology efforts receiving grants include survey, artifact conservation and interpretation, and public outreach and education pro-

For a list of the 1998 maritime heritage grant awards, see this issue of *CRM* Online.

grams. As well, organizations involved in developing maritime heritage tourism and maritime heritage curriculums are represented among the grant recipients.

In all, the maritime grants program is supporting 39 projects totaling \$652,616. Three non-profit organizations specifically named in the program's legislation each received a grant. The remaining 36 grants were awarded to 20 State Historic Preservation Offices. These projects will be carried out as subgrants through those offices. In formulating the final amounts for each award, partial funding was recommended for 36 of the 39 proposals in order to support as many projects as possible. Thus, while most of the applicants did not receive the full amount requested, partial funding ensured that more worthy projects could receive at least some level of federal support.

The maritime heritage grants program has been met with great enthusiasm. The number of proposals submitted and the amounts of funding requested represent not only the tremendous efforts currently being made in the maritime heritage field but also the tremendous need for continued federal assistance. The projects receiving awards under this first round are, however, only a fraction of the maritime resources worthy of preserving and interpreting. Many organizations are looking to this program for continued support.

Unfortunately, at this time there is no funding available for a second round of grants in 1999. It is also uncertain when, and if, enough funds will be available for future grant rounds. This is due to the recent rise in environmental concerns associated with the vessel scrapping process. Because of these issues, current practices are now being re-evaluated to determine more appropriate procedures for avoiding environmental contamination during scrapping. However, an adequate solution has yet to be reached. As a result, there have been delays in the sale and scrapping of vessels as well as significant losses in the revenues returned. This translates as a dramatic decline in the funds available for the maritime heritage grants program.

Preserving significant historic maritime resources through the disposal of obsolete government vessels is a

seemingly resourceful use of public funds.

Unfortunately, the environmental concerns linked to this funding source were not anticipated when the program's legislation was drafted. If maritime heritage grants are to continue, a satisfactory solution to these issues must be achieved or alternative sources of funding must be found.

The United States is a nation with a rich maritime history, and it is desirable to foster an environment in which resources that exemplify this legacy may be preserved for future generations. Such is the thinking behind the National Maritime Heritage Act and the National Maritime Heritage Grants Program. Through the cooperative efforts of federal, state, and local governments and private non-profit organizations there is now in place a program for distributing grant awards to a maritime community very much in need of such assistance. It would be a shame if unforeseen financial difficulties prevented this program from continuing as a long-term, reliable resource for preserving the maritime heritage of the United States.

Hallie Brooker is an employee of the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO) working with the National Maritime Initiative in the NPS and is the grants program coordinator.

Information about the grants program is available on the National Maritime Initiative's web site at <<http://www.cr.nps.gov/maritime/grants.htm>>. Contacts for the program are Hallie Brooker and Kevin Foster, Chief, National Maritime Initiative, National Park Service (2280), 1849 C Street NW, Room NC400, Washington, DC 20240.

Information about the environmental issues associated with vessel scrapping may be viewed on the Defense Environmental Network and Information Exchange web site: <<http://www.denix.osd.mil/denix/Public/public.html>>. The Maritime Administration also maintains a web site at <<http://marad.dot.gov>>.

The National Maritime Alliance, a private nonprofit organization, coordinated the national effort that supported passage of the National Maritime Heritage Act. Information about the Alliance, its current activities and its role as an advocate of the Act may be obtained by contacting Dr. Timothy J. Runyan <runyant@mail.ecu.edu>, Eller House, Program in Maritime Studies, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC 27858.

Point Sur Lighthouse lantern, c.1914. Photo courtesy U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office.

