Bowdoin at 100

Maine’s pioneering Arctic explorer kickstarted crowd funding before it was cool.

BY COLIN W. SARGENT

Kickstarting was first conducted on April 28, 2009, according to Wikipedia. But the Schooner Bowdoin was created through crowd funding that began in 1918. Responding to a slick marketing illustration that showed what the arctic schooner might look like amid the icebergs once she was launched, three hundred fifty benefactors each paid $100 to drum up the $35,000 needed to construct this legendary vessel.

If only one of these original marketing “brochures” still existed. Since this is the Authentic Maine issue, we’ve taken the trouble to discover what may be the last of the brochures from a private collection. Signed by Admiral Donald B. MacMillan himself, the back of the heavy cardboard reads:

Auxiliary Arctic Schooner Bowdoin
To be built for the MacMillan Arctic Association at East Boothbay, Maine, in May-July, 1920.
(Signed) D. B. MacMillan

Rescued from neglect, Bowdoin is now the pride of Maine Maritime Academy.

Bowdoin was declared the official sailing vessel of the state of Maine in 1986. In 1989 Bowdoin was designated a National Historic Landmark in recognition for her significant role in Arctic exploration.

VITAL STATISTICS

Length: 88 feet
Naval Architect: William H. Hand
Shipyards: Hodgdon Brothers, East Boothbay, Maine
First crossing of the Arctic Circle: August 23, 1921
Speed: 10 knots
Voyages to the Arctic: 28
Career: Bowdoin served 27 months as a Navy ship in World War II. She was decommissioned on May 16, 1944. She was acquired by Maine Maritime Academy in 1988.