

Bringing Sail Freight Back to Brooklyn, Schooner Apollonia Delivers Goods to Red Hook



Photo by Susan De Vries

Brooklyn Life Red Hook by Susan De Vries

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Packed in the hold of a 1946 steel-hulled schooner, sacks of Hudson Valley malt and corn sailed into Brooklyn last week. The journey of the Schooner Apollonia down the river from Kingston wasn't a living history exercise, but an effort to bring carbon neutral shipping back to the Hudson River.

While planned well before the pandemic shut down New York City, the delivery of freight via sail seems fitting for a time when vehicular traffic slowed and alternative transportation methods became a reality. The journey began on August 13 when the 64-foot vessel left Kingston, N.Y., with stops in towns along the Hudson River as part of a collaboration with the Hudson River Maritime Museum.



Light falls in front of the darkened hold



Barrels in the hold of the schooner

The bulk of the cargo was destined for Brooklyn, including wooden barrels, corn and malt, petroleum-free pillows and even some skeins of alpaca yarn. It's not clear exactly how long it has been since the last sail cargo runs were regularly scheduled into the city, but certainly decades. While steam, rail and then trucks enabled perishable goods to move at a faster rate, the slower speed of sail-powered ships is still a green delivery possibility for nonperishable items.

There have been other attempts to bring sail freight back, including The Vermont Sail Freight Project. Their boat Ceres sailed into New York harbor in 2013 and, while the project folded, it inspired the Apollonia crew. Beginning in 2015 the crew, including Captain Sam Merrett, began overhauling the Apollonia and carried the first load of cargo in a short Hudson Valley trip earlier this summer.



The schooner docked at Pier 5 in Brooklyn Bridge Park

On its first New York City run, the schooner moored at Pier 5 in Brooklyn Bridge Park on Friday morning before heading on the final leg of the journey to the GBX Terminal in Red Hook.



The schooner being greeted at GBX Terminal



Tossing a line at the dock

Slipping slowly past the hulking cargo ship Loujaine and with the Red Hook Grain Terminal as a backdrop, the schooner's arrival was cheered by a small group of onlookers.



Cargo being carried from the ship



Barrels made by Quercus Cooperage being unloaded



The crew of the Apolonia along with the unloaded cargo

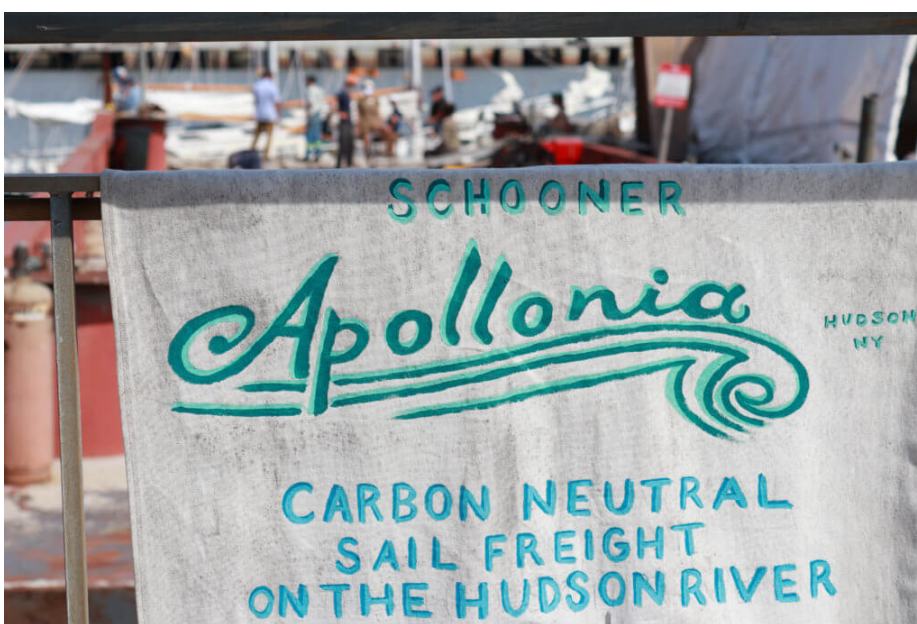
Some of the onlookers were awaiting cargo. Bags of malt were destined for Strong Rope Brewery in Gowanus while the specially made barrels, corn and more malt were for Van Brunt Stillhouse in Red Hook. The pillows from LikeMindedObjects in Hudson, N.Y., were headed to the Hester Street Fair on the Lower East Side.





To continue the earth-friendly delivery on land, the barrels and some sacks of malt were loaded onto trikes designed by Gowanus-based Upcycles for delivery to Van Brunt Stillhouse. In a year or two the bourbon to be crafted from the malt should be ready.

The trip was part fundraiser, part educational venture for Kingston-based nonprofit Hudson River Maritime Museum (and part of the nonprofit's RiverWise educational program). It was business for the for-profit Schooner Apollonia, whose mission includes creating green jobs and shipping local products in a carbon-neutral way.



If you missed the Schooner Apollonia you might still be able to spot the Hudson River Maritime Museum's solar-powered boat Solaris around the harbor this week while it awaits some repairs. You can also read the log of the trip online.

[Photos by Susan De Vries]

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