

# MAYFLOWER II LIVE OAKS PART OF LEGACY

- By Mystic Seaport Museum
- March 22, 2017
- 5:46 pm

Live oaks from the Gulf Coast will be part of the restored MAYFLOWER II.





Harvesting live oaks in Belle Chasse, LA. Photos by Matthew Barnes/Mystic

### Seaport

For two of the families donating wood to the *Mayflower II* restoration project, the trees are more than just wood. They are part of their family story.

Shipwrights from Mystic Seaport and Plimoth Plantation were at two sites on the Gulf Coast in Mississippi and Louisiana this week to harvest live oak trees to be used in the ship's restoration, which is being carried out in the Museum's Shipyard.

*Mayflower II* is a reproduction of the ship that transported the Pilgrims to America in 1620. She is owned by Plimoth Plantation, which is restoring the vessel in preparation to take her back to sea in connection with the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the Pilgrims' arrival in Massachusetts.

Wood from the trees will be used to replace frames and other structural pieces on the ship.

"Live oak is highly sought after in wooden shipbuilding because it is very dense, hard, and resists rot better than almost





all other species in North America,” said Quentin Snediker, the Shipyard Director at Mystic Seaport. “The crooks and curves typical of the trees are ideal for the fabrication of many of the structural parts as there are few straight lines and right angles on a wooden ship.”

Sam Bordelon is the owner of the property in Belle Chase, Louisiana, where 12 live oak trees were harvested. The property where these trees are located has been in his family for more than 100 years, and many of the trees are considerably older than that. He loves them — he’s a software engineer by profession, but he is a hobbyist woodworker.

The trees are coming down as part of the construction of a right-of-way by a power company. Sam struggled with the thought of losing these trees and having the pass cutting through his property. But then he spoke with a friend about what was happening, he was reminded of the USS *Constitution* restoration and the use of live oak in that project. (The *Constitution* was originally built with live oak in the 1790s, and saw action against the British during the war of 1812, receiving the nickname “Old Ironsides” due to the strength of its construction.)

Sam did some research online to see if there were any ship restoration projects happening anywhere that might want live oak, and he found the restoration of *Mayflower II* at Mystic Seaport. He reached out to Snediker, and after talking with him and Whit Perry, Plimoth Plantation’s Director of Maritime Preservation

and Operations, arrangements were made for a crew from the two museums to come down to Louisiana to oversee the harvesting of the trees. Sam said that being able to offer the wood for a ship as important as *Mayflower* // made “the best of the situation.”



Harvesting live oak in Belle Chasse, La.

In Pass Christian, Miss., two live oaks saved Diane Brugger’s life during Hurricane Katrina. Diane and her husband Tony owned the Harbour Oaks Bed and Breakfast Inn, and they did not evacuate when the storm neared because they thought the hurricane was headed straight for New Orleans. The inn was 33 feet above sea level, so they thought they were safe, even with the predicted 25-foot storm surge. As the water rose, the Bruggers sheltered on the second floor, and then suddenly, a tornado hit.

“We were sitting in the bed and the dogs were just going crazy, and the house, you would feel it sort of lift up like a boat and then settle back,” Diane Brugger said in an interview with ABC News. “Then when the house went up and it didn’t quite go right back down the way it was supposed to and we got up and then that’s when the walls fell away,” Brugger said. “When the part of the ceiling came down, it caught [Tony’s] head and just took him right under.”

Diane grabbed onto two live oaks in her yard, and clung for six hours as the water swept by.

At one time her property had 12 live oaks, Diane said, ranging in age from 250 to 500 years old. Two remained in the wake of the storm (the ones she clung to had to be removed after the storm because of damage). Of the two, one was recently struck by lightning and had to be taken down. This is the tree she is donating to *Mayflower II*.

"It will make me so happy, and my family, to know that this tree will not wind up in a landfill somewhere but instead with something as historic as where it came from," she said.

Plimoth's Perry appreciates the generous contribution that the landowners have made to the restoration of the historic ship. "These trees will live on in perpetuity, and make it possible for the ship to sail on for generations to come."