



Boat Naming

History of boat naming

The process of naming boats began thousands of years ago and was originally based on fear and superstition. As a safeguard from peril, most boats were originally named to honor a god seen as able to provide protection. By pleasing their gods with this honor, ancient Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians thought the gods would then offer the protection being sought. Ancient people also feared angering their gods by not paying homage to them in this way. Similarly, Christians would name their boats after saints looking for their protection.

Naming boats after women

There are two prominent theories about the more recent tradition of giving boats feminine names. As belief in ancient gods faded, one theory states, using the names of goddesses morphed to use of everyday female names instead. A second idea asserts the custom comes from the way some languages incorporate grammatical gender identifiers for objects. Boats and ships were “feminine” objects in most European languages, making the use of female names more reasonable. Referring to boats and ships as “she” likely also comes from this foundation. In addition, the tradition of female names can allow people to infer the presence of a woman, providing some comfort in a potentially dangerous situation in adding a traditional mothering and calming feminine element.

Christening

It is thought that wine was first used by ancient Greek and Romans to christen a boat before it was launched for the first time. This “offering” to the gods poured on the boat was just one part of an elaborate ceremony which included assigning the boat its name, parties, toasts, blessings, prayers and speeches. In some cultures, sacrifices of animals were included. In others, human sacrifices were offered to the gods. It is considered best to name the ship when the sun is out, during a high tide, or when the moon is at its fullest. Champagne has replaced wine for most christenings today. It has become tradition for a woman to perform a ship's christening as its “sponsor” or god-mother, officially declaring the name of the ship while breaking a bottle of champagne on the bow or deck.

Re-naming boats

There is a long-standing tradition concerning the re-naming of boats in order to avoid bad luck. The procedure is considered highly variable, but there are generally five parts: an invocation, an expression of gratitude, a supplication, a re-dedication and a libation. First, however, the boat must be de-named. This involves removing all references to the old name including items like the log book and papers, lifebuoys, transom, topsides, dinghy, oars, etc. Items which included the name can be reused if the name is sanded away or permanently removed in some fashion. Waiting a day before giving a boat its new name is considered appropriate. Some people consider the best times to give a boat or ship its name (new or original) are when the sun is out, during a high tide, or when the moon is at its fullest.

Boat Naming Today

Many people today name their boats after important people in their lives such as a wife, friend, child, or girlfriend. Some think that naming a boat after something they value will bring luck. Naming a boat after a child is not common, though, because it can be considered offensive to siblings. Someone might name their boat after how they obtained it (such as the lottery or stock market fortune) or they may name it after their job. This is especially true for business owners who want to advertise their company. Some assert that a vessel's name should be short and simple in order to help in an emergency. When calling for help, a fast-sounding, easy-to-remember name could help in the rescue process.

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