

M/S BRANDBU – last remaining Norwegian made inland freighter

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*Note: This text was first published on the homepage of A. Wilhelmsen Foundation, one of the projects contributors whom we salute. Since then, the ship is back on water and the restauration work near completed.

Since 2014, Randsfjordmuseet has been the proud owner of M/S Brandbu. Volounteers, heritage institutions and local companies has been involved in restauration ever since. All made possible because of economic support from both private and national contributors.

Whoever visits Hadeland can't avoid being stunned by the beautiful scenery of the large (in Norwegian terms) inland lake, *Randsfjorden*. Nowadays, the lake attracts people for fishing, recreation and leisure. For not so long time ago though, Randsfjorden was the main transporting route in the area, from *Jevnaker* in the south to *Land/Odnes* in the north. Along the route small ports flourished, being part of the system shipping merchandises etc for further transport. In the 1800s and until the early/ mid-1900s, Randsfjorden was not only a busy waterway and important for the transportation of e.g. timber, firewood, charcoal, manufactured goods and so on, but also a preferred way of traveling. To handle all this traffic, a variety of ships and boats travelled the lake. Today, the beautiful steamboats are gone. Only one is left, and although she is not running on steam anymore, M/S Brandbu is the last remaining ship that really tells the maritime story of Hadeland.

The steelboat D/S *Brandbu* was built at *Drammen Jernstøperi og Mekaniske Verksted* in 1906, contracted by the owner of *Engnæs Tresliberi* [pulp mill]. The 66ft freighter (cargo ship) was then transported in large sections with the railway to *Røykenvika*, were it was finished the spring of 1907. Around 1912 the boat was sold to *Onsaker Teglverk* [brickworks] who used it mainly for the transportation of bricks and roof tiles. In 1920 the steam engine was replaced with a new motor (Swedish Avance, 25/30 Hp, single cylinder). In the late 1940s the ship run grounded in *Elnesvika* and was taken out of use. For about 30 years she lay poorly and unprotected, every year being flooded. She was a fascinating playground for



Brandbu at work, last known photo. 1923. (c)



At risk. Elnesvika 1979. (c)

children (although they were told not to). People on both sides of the lake remembers well the excitement in the wintertime; skiing across the ice and jump on to the large ship. In 1979, a young *Roar Otto Sundt* from Gran bought the ship from Onsaker and towed it to Røykenvika. During the next few years he renovated and rebuilt the ship. When looking at Sundts pictures from the first years of the restoration it is almost unthinkable to imagine anyone would start a process like he did. It is only due to his efforts and devotion that the ship still exists. Not only did he rescue her from being totally damaged on site, but he has maintained true to the original parts from the very beginning. Because of his gentle restoration, documentation of replacements and other work, the ship is today stated by the *Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage* as an object of national



Massive work, special skills needed. (c)

importance. MS Brandbu is the last remaining Norwegian inland freighter, with an engine that probably is the oldest still working original boat engines in Norway. This was of importance when *Randsfjordmuseet* in 2014 decided to accept the generous gift from Sundt. Of much importance was also the local engagement. Even before the decision was made, people with interest in the ship established a voluntarily group to help secure the future of MS Brandbu. Today they are formalized as the association *M/S Brandbus Venner* and are of great help in various ways, in both some of the restoration work and in promoting the ship and its history. Although Sundt did an amazing work in protecting the ship from damage, the time worked against him. In 2015, the museum started an extensive restoration project to save her from further decay, bringing her back to her former beauty. Most of the steel work is done by *Bredalsholmen Dokk- og Fartøyvernsester*, a shipyard in *Kristiansand* who professionalizes in restoration of steel ships. It is a massive

and timetaking process, and both the volunteers and the museum started with not much insight in preservation of ships. It is a fantastic journey with lot of skilled people and good practices. One of our volunteers have single handed restored the semi diesel engine, she now runs smooth and awaits finishing the steel structure and sandblasting before reinstalling.

One of the largest obstacles is of course the financial issues. The whole project relays on sponsors, help from locals and professionals, economic support from the authorities. In 2017, A. Wilhelmsen Foundation decided to support the project with NOK 100.000,-. Also, Stiftelsen Uni is one of our large contributors. Most of all, the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage [Riksantikvaren] is the main contributor by far! The gifts is of great importance and inspires both the museum and our volunteers to keep our smiles wide and efforts high. Together, we will do our best to secure the old lady's future and bring back the distinctive sound of her travelling the fjord once again.

M/S Brandbu represents an obvious part of both national and local heritage and fills a large gap in the museum collections concerning the extensive use and importance of Randsfjorden and the resources connected. For the region, she will also have a distinct educational value in communication of a variety of topics related to both cultural and natural subjects, as well as a vivid and intriguing place for youngsters to learn about safety at sea.

If interested, we welcome You to follow our restauration work on facebook: MS Brandbu, a site both the museum and the volunteer's posts pictures and can be contacted. For more information please contact the museum at www.randsfjordmuseet.no. Do you feel the love? All contributors are welcome! The support will help bringing a once condemned ship into its former state and rejuvenate a long-lost history of the inland maritime culture.



Back on water 9th of November 2019. Milestone! Under: The new harbour, somewhat unfinished but safe and happy.

