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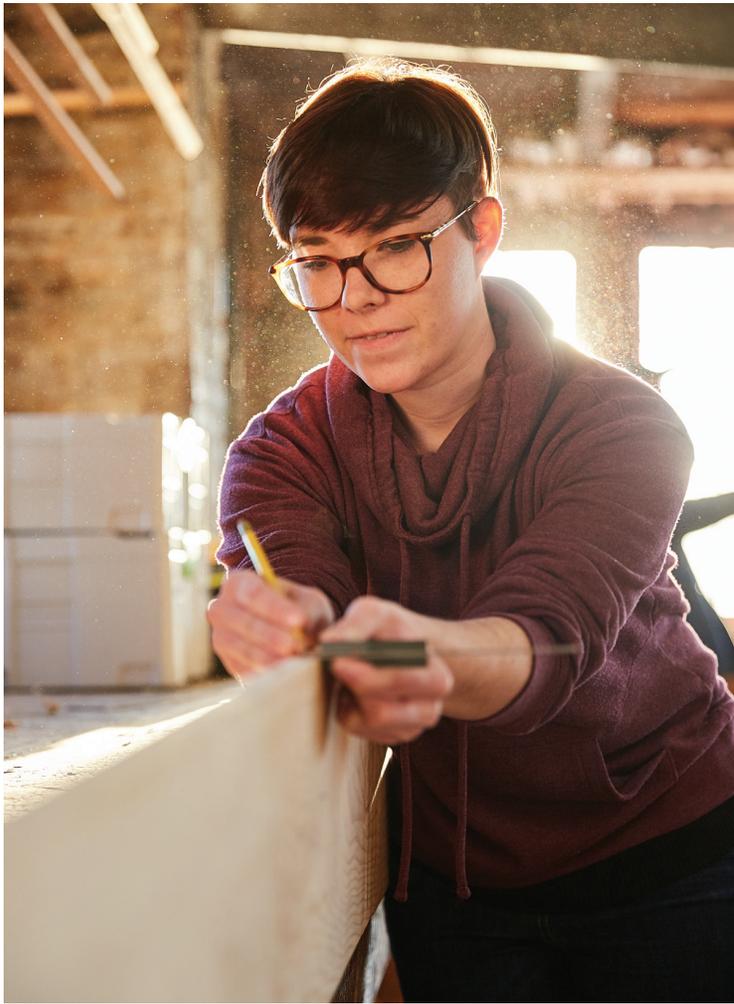
# HAGERTY<sup>®</sup>

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## *THE VECTOR W8*

AND THE MAVERICK BEHIND IT





A high-school field trip brought Brianna Wickard to Lowell's Boat Shop, founded in 1793, and an apprenticeship in boat building.

*RPM Foundation provides scholarships, formal training, and mentorship to the next generation of automotive and marine restorers and preservationists. Learn more at [rpm.foundation](http://rpm.foundation).*

had some background paddling kayaks and canoes as a child, but something about rowing the classic wooden dories—replicas of the same Lowell-built boats, once the heart of the Gloucester fishing fleet—spoke to her. “The real-world application of complicated math concepts, plus learning that the boat shop had been there since 1793—everything about the experience just blew my mind.”

That was four years ago. Wickard, now 21, is a rasp-wielding, plank-bending graduate of Lowell's boat building apprentice program. Established in 2012, this after-school program has quickly expanded into a three-stage curriculum that now accommodates “juniors” as young as 13, along with 12 to 15 high-school-age students annually. There's also a senior-level course for grads like Wickard who want to stay on as mentors and docents of the boat shop's maritime museum.

Wickard is currently a junior studying French and English at Merrimack College. In her spare time, she works at Lowell's conducting museum tours, doing member outreach, and organizing summer programs and maritime exhibits. She's also helping inspire the next generation of boat builders. Owing to its incredible growth and a reputation that draws students from as far away as New Hampshire, Lowell's apprenticeship program received its first RPM Foundation grant in 2017.

“There's something about rowing on the river, interacting with this historic place in a wooden boat that you made yourself,” Wickard says. “Like a lot of our new apprentices, I came here with no interest in boat building. But the whole experience and the strong community here are inspiring. Right now, I can't imagine doing anything else.”

Wickard sees her old self in the faces of many new students. “The process of boat building—learning the skills and how to use the tools—gives kids a strong sense of personal agency. You apply math and work with your hands while learning a real-world craft with a long history. By the end, even if you don't go on to build and restore boats professionally, you carry yourself with more confidence.” To see a boat being built by your own hands, Wickard argues, is nothing short of transformational. It's part discovery, part spiritual journey, and your connection to the past provides a rewarding path forward.—  
*Bob Butz* [editor@hagerty.com](mailto:editor@hagerty.com)

## APPLIED MATHEMATICS

The oldest boat shop in America preserves the shipbuilding tradition while instilling life skills in young students.

**BACK AT AMESBURY HIGH SCHOOL,** Brianna Wickard easily could have been voted “Girl Most Likely to Never Pick Up a Tool.” The self-described “musical theater nerd” was terrified of shop class. “I was always the kid in the back, holding a paintbrush and trying to look busy,” she says. But a senior-year math field trip had Wickard suddenly charting an unexpected course.

Amesbury, Massachusetts, is located on the banks of the Merrimack River and is

home to Lowell's Boat Shop, the birthplace of the New England fishing dory. Now in its 226th year, it is also the oldest operating boat shop in the country. “To help us learn trigonometry, our teacher took the class to Lowell's, where they taught us to row the wooden boats and use sextants to measure distances from shore,” Wickard says.

Wickard is a transplant from the Finger Lakes region in Upstate New York and was 14 when she first laid eyes on the ocean. She



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