



Recent Acquisitions



Falconer Marine Industries

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then the collection of more than 70 photographs recently donated to the Museum by Mr. J.R. Moran of Vancouver tells an epic story of his father's role in the wartime boatbuilding industry in Victoria.

Armstrong Bros. was a small boat repair business which had been operated since 1909 in Victoria. In 1938, the Armstrongs sold out due to declining health. Arnold Moran, who had joined the firm in 1933, stayed as plant manager for the new owner, Joseph Falconer. Moran's initiative and foresight were the elements that transformed the little boatyard on Kingston Street in James Bay into a high production operation that produced almost 600 wooden vessels during the war years.

First, Moran convinced them that a marine railway should be installed. Then, after hearing that the Victoria Machinery Depot (VMD) would be building some of the desperately needed 10,000 ton Liberty ships, he secured a contract with the Wartime Merchant Shipping Commission for the construction of the ships' lifeboats.

The sturdy clinker-built vessel was built of elm, spruce, cedar and fir. The lifeboat's rig was a standing lug, simple and sturdy because of the shorter spars and lack of a boom.

During the war, labourers were hard to find; men came out of retirement and local housewives were recruited to work at the yard. Young Jack Moran was expected to pitch in as well. "I was a painter's helper in the summer. Lifeboats were built on a production line. I was going to high school at the time and every time a new length of life boat was required, I drew up the plans for it. The steamship inspection people had a handbook ..everything had to be a certain size - most were 26 feet."

As confidence in the firm grew, new contracts were obtained for speedy crash boats for the RCAF, patrol boats for the RCN and diesel captain's cutters - capable of speeds up to 19 knots - for the Royal Navy. The firm built 100 of these cutters to the Royal Navy's stringent specifications.



When finished, these vessels were towed out into the Strait of Juan de Fuca to be shipped overseas aboard "baby flat tops" - small aircraft carriers - which were being produced in the United States.

When the war ended the men returned to building commercial fishing vessels and pleasure craft. One well-known vessel was the Messenger III, a sturdy 50-foot motor vessel built for the Shantymen to conduct their coastal missions, a vessel still seen in the Victoria harbour with owner Blayney Scott at the helm. -Susan Down

Photos: (Top) This dockside scene reveals the range of vessels produced at Falconer's. To the left of the main wharf are eight lifeboats, three 60-foot anti-submarine target-towing vessels and an 84-foot offshore patrol boat. On the left is a shipment of elm, brought in from eastern Canada and used for lifeboat ribs. (Left) The assembly line inside Falconer's. (Right) The crew takes a lifeboat out for a sea trial.

Duncan MacPhail photographs, J.R.Moran Collection, Maritime Museum of British Columbia Archive.

