



Building of the "Bonaventure"

Boatbuilding During World War II
MDI, Ellsworth, Stonington & Blue Hill

by Ralph W. Stanley

December 7, 1941 - I was twelve years old. Even though I was building a model airplane at the moment the news of Pearl Harbor came over the radio my primary interest was and always has been boats. Needless to say it still is.

With the United States entering the war there was a great demand by the armed forces for coastal patrol boats and for harbor utility boats. Many yachts and fishing boats were taken over by the Army, Navy, and Coast Guard to meet this increased demand. These boats, while they filled the gap, were not entirely satisfactory, and it was essential to build as quickly as possible new boats for the armed services. Building of new fishing vessels was also made a priority to replace those taken over by the government and to add more new boats to the fishing fleet, thereby increasing the national food supply.

There were three boatyards on Mount Desert Island that were suited to build boats for the war effort, The Manset Boatyard, The Henry Hinckley Co., and the Mount Desert Yacht Yard.

The Manset Boatyard was started by a man named Rasmus Hanson, who in 1924 bought the old Parker fish wharf and started a storage yard for a few boats that with a helper he could maintain. The Hinckley family owned the property next to this yard, and in 1928, when Hanson wanted to retire, Benjamin Hinckley bought the yard and continued to run it until his son, Henry, in 1932 (after attending Cornell University) took over the operation of the yard. Henry had always thought the yard was an eyesore and it should be demolished, but in 1932 if you had something that would bring in a dollar you had to stick with it. This yard was probably the location where during the 1870's and before several coasting schooners were built, including the three-mast schooner, "Carrie M. Richardson".

In 1939 Henry Hinckley, together with Lennox Sargent, bought the boat shop that had been owned and operated by Chester Clement since 1929. This boat shop was located at Clark Point in Southwest Harbor on property once owned by the Clark family. This was where the coasting schooner "Kate Newman" was built in 1874. About the turn of the century Sim Mayo built the boat shop where he built launches and installed naphtha and gasoline engines. In 1929 Chester Clement bought this property and built boats steadily until his death in 1937. In 1929 he built a boat named the "Pronto" that was about 48 feet in length and 12 feet beam with 360 horsepower. In 1946 this boat was registered as a yacht, still with 360 horsepower, and named "Wapiti" and owned by Lawrence A. Slatmeyer of Cleveland, Ohio.

In 1930 he built the "Pronto II", about 55 feet long by 12 feet beam with 580 horsepower. In 1946 "Pronto II", was registered as a yacht, still with 580 horsepower, owned by Harry P. Howie of Newport, R.I. I believe these two boats, "Pronto and Pronto II", originally were built to be rumrunners. Chester Clement had the reputation for building fast boats.

In 1932 he built the "Maybe", and I know she was a rumrunner. This boat was about 80 feet long by 16 feet beam with three engines totaling 1650 horsepower. The "Maybe" in 1946 was registered as a passenger vessel named the "Rocket", owned by the Interstate Nav. Co. of New London, Connecticut. The horsepower

had been reduced to 440. Chester Clement also built a number of fishing and pleasure boats. In 1931 he built a fishing boat, 34 feet in length for Harvard Beal. This boat was built in 21 days and was later owned by my father.

After Hinckley and Sargent bought the Clement shop, the yard at Manset that Hinckley had operated under his own name became the Manset Boat Yard, while the Clement shop became The Hinckley Co. Both were run as Henry R. Hinckley Co., Inc. Later the Manset yard became Henry R. Hinckley Co., Inc. and the Clark Point yard became Southwest Boat Corp. In the 1930's Hinckley had devised a production line for building boats from the same model, and this became a valuable asset for production of boats for the war effort.

Located at the head of Somes Sound, the Mt. Desert Yacht Yard was acquired in the early 30's by Farnham Butler. It had been a storage yard operated by Bill Black. Black wanted to sell and Farnham debated whether to buy the yard or sail around the world with Irving Johnson. He opted to buy the yard, giving up the opportunity to sail with Johnson, but later said he regretted not sailing with Johnson as the yard would still have been available when he got back. The Mt. Desert Yacht Yard built a number of boats and sailing yachts before 1940.

When the war started these yards all secured contracts to build boats for the government. The Hinckley Co. between the Manset yard and the Clark Point yard built the following boats:

- 9 Twenty foot motorized cargo boats
- 93 Thirty-eight foot picket boats for the Coast Guard
- 64 Twenty-six foot motorized mine yawls for the Army
- 253 Twenty-six foot motorized tow yawls for the Army
- 2 Thirty-eight foot patrol for the Army Engineers
- 20 Twenty-four foot personnel boats
- 42 Eighteen foot life boats
- 6 Thirty-six foot Naval Academy sailing yawls

In addition to these boats, by 1946 six fishing vessels, one passenger vessel and one sardine carrier had been built. Also, a sardine carrier, the "Sewanaka", built at Lubec in 1910 and owned by the R. J. Peacock Co. of Lubec, ME underwent extensive repairs and was

re-rigged as a purse seiner.

The Hinckley Co. built a total of 535 boats for the government. The yard employed in 1942 a total of 227 people at an hourly rate of between 50 and 75 cents per hour. In 1945 when the war started to wind down, June 14th was declared Ship Builder's Day, and a ceremony was held at Bath Iron Works to honor Maine boat builders who had a total of 1358 boats for the armed services. Henry Hinckley was one of the speakers, as his yard built almost 40% of the total.

Farnham Butler at the Mt. Desert Yard secured contracts to build 3 Naval Academy sailing yawls for sail training. This was in 1942-43. Also, he built twenty-five 38-foot boats for the Navy. Some of the ironwork for these boats was done at the Maine State Prison and some at Ellsworth when Mr. Butler, together with Cy Cousins of Blue Hill and Leon Thorsen of Ellsworth, had formed a company called Maine Boat Builders Association. This company built four launches, 72 feet in length, from a British design. These boats were built for the lend-lease program and were supposed to be delivered to Britain. It is doubtful if any ever were. A number of these boats were built in other yards around the country as well. Nelson Rockefeller bought one of them after the war that had been built at Kingston, New Jersey. He had it to 80 feet and used it as a yacht named the "Dragon Lady".

Mt. Desert Yacht Yard also built for the Navy, ninety 15-foot flat bottom boats. These were very lightly built and planked with pine, 3/8 inch thick. The Navy called them working boats but in reality they were throwaway boats for landing in difficult places where they would just be left. A lady from Town Hill called Mr. Butler saying that her son had landed on a Pacific Island in a boat that had a Mt. Desert Yacht Yard tag. These boats were sent to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where they were stored on the top floor of a building where it was hot. Of course the boats dried out and the seams opened up. Someone noticed and called Mr. Butler saying the boats were not usable and what could he do? They agreed to send the boats back to be fixed. Mr. Butler did not say what he did to fix them, but he probably put them in the water and let them swell up, then shipped them back.

Mr. Butler said the Navy didn't realize that it cost more to ship them back and forth than it cost to build them.

Mt. Desert Yacht Yard at the peak of production employed 45 people and the yard at Ellsworth employed 100 people. Cy Cousins, who was involved with the Ellsworth, also operated Webber's Cove Boat Yard at East Blue Hill, and this yard built the following boats:

- 5 forty-five foot picket boats for the Navy
- 10 thirty-eight foot buoy boats
- 30 seventeen foot surf boats
- 1 fishing boat of 17 tons

The Webber's Cove Yard finished the 4 seventy-two foot boats built at Ellsworth as there was not yet sufficient depth of water in the union River to float the finished boats.

Another yard that built boats for the war effort was the Stonington - Deer Isle Yacht Yard. This yard employed about 250 workers, many of whom were quarry workers from the stone quarries that shut down during the war. They built 6 sixty-five foot T-boats for the army. These boats were freight and passenger vessels used around the harbors. A fishing boat, the "Elin B." was also built off the T-boat model but lengthened 4 or 5 feet. A number of 38-foot tug-boats were built for the Army Transportation Corps - V bottom and with a tunnel stern. It was said they were for use in the Amazon River.

Two 114-foot and two 147-foot freight and passenger vessels were built there and were all wood. A large building shed was built with enough room for two boats 147 feet in length side by side with room ahead for a framing platform. These large boats had sawn frames 24 inches on centers. In section the frames measured 16 inches by 16 inches at the keel and 8 inches by 16 inches at the sheer. Much of the oak for these frames came from the shores of Verona Island where huge oak trees grew out of the banks of the Penobscot River. Most of the other lumber for these large boats was Oregon fir. Timbers 30 inches by 60 feet came from the West Coast to Rockland by rail and then to Stonington by lighter. These large timbers were then re-sawed at the yard to size as needed. The garboard planks were 5-inch by 12-inch hard pine which was steamed for half a day

and clamped in place with clamps that took two men to handle. The broadstakes were 4 inches thick, and from there on the planking was three inches thick. Keelsons and sister keelsons made these boats solid wood on the very bottom. The freight hold was ceiled with fir three inches thick. One of these vessels was said to have serviced our bases in Greenland.

Getting the contracts was one thing for the boatyards, but producing the boats presented problems. One was financing. The boatyards needed a great deal of money to get things going, secure materials, hire workers and upgrade and expand their facilities. The net worth of the boatyards would not warrant notes large enough to provide the money needed, and the legal limits of the local banks would not allow them to lend the money. They got around this by getting other banks all around the state to chip in for the initial start up loans. Later the Federal Reserve Bank guaranteed the loans. They were reluctant to do this, but they had to because the armed forces needed the boats. Ben Hinckley, Henry's brother, and Tom Searles, an officer of the First National Bank of Bar Harbor, traveled to Boston to secure a loan for the yards at Southwest Harbor. They got the loan, but they also got a stern lecture from a staunch old Federal Reserve officer, as this was against all prudent banking practices.

Another problem was workers. They had a few good boat and shipbuilders, but they had to hire a lot of house carpenters, house painters, mechanics and anyone willing to work and learn. The boat builders with knowledge were put in charge, and a tremendous amount of work was put out. Some of those in charge that I remember were Raymond Bunker, Mickey Fayhe, Les Rice, Norman Farrar, and Cliff Rich along with his sons Robert, Roger, and Ronald. A lot of men had special skills that were useful and essential in boatbuilding. One skill needed was that of a ship caulker. Henry S. (Stan) Mitchell was near 70 years old, and he was given some younger fellows to work with in hopes they would learn the art. Some of them did pretty well and got quite fast at chalking.

They realized they were pretty good, and one time, when caulking a deck, they thought they would get ahead of Stan. Stan noticed what was happening so he put on a little steam and let them sweat while

they tried to catch up. After a while he said, "What's the matter boys, trying to show up an old man?" Stan liked to caulk large vessels that had big seams that he could fill with cotton and oakum. He didn't like to caulk boats with fine seams. Stan couldn't see very well and when walking by a boat being planked he would say, "Open 'em up, boys, so I can see 'em." On jobs like this there is always some joker all ready to play a trick, and some one saw a tight seam, so he put a heavy black pencil mark where the seam got tight up across the plank. Stan came along and caulked the pencil mark and, of course, it ruined the plank, which had to be replaced. Stan took great pride in his work and he was quite upset. Stan lived about 5 miles from the boatyard, and sometimes he walked to work in the morning and home at night. He was still caulking in his eighties and attributed his longevity to the liberal use of Old Medford Rum.



Henry S. (Stan) Mitchell

In 1938 Southwest Harbor had a new high school with a manual training shop. The teacher was Albert Barlow from Boothbay Harbor. He was a fine teacher and he had evening courses for the adults around town where they constructed some fine cabinets and furniture. It may have been a coincidence but some of these men later became some of Henry Hinckley's finest workers. George Smith, a boat builder from Boothbay Haror was Albert Barlow's brother-in-law and he became a foreman at Mt. Desert Yacht Yard. George Smith, Lindsey Smallidge, Charles Savage, Doane Candage, John Manchester, Woodbury Tracy and Lew Mitchell were the key workers in this yard.

Another character I can remember was Clare Klinkard. He was quite an old man, probably in his seventies, and he looked to me just like Foxy Granpa in the funny papers. Clare had the job to make stems for mine yawls. He had a little room all by himself where he worked

away with his adze shaping stems. They were setting boats up pretty fast and the crew was calling for another stem, Raymond Bunker went to see if Clare had a stem ready. Clare thought he had one but couldn't find it as the crew had already taken it. Clare said, "I will have this one done shortly." Raymond went down in the shop, got a piece of oak, marked out a stem from the pattern and sawed it out on the ship saw, sawing the shape to the sides, smoothing it with a plane and cutting the rabbet with his chisel. While Clare was at lunch he took it to Clare's little room and put it behind the door. After lunch Raymond went to see Clare and asked, "Have got that stem done yet?" Clare said, "Just a few more minutes." Raymond turned around and said, "What's this here?" Clare looked up and said, "There, I knew I had one all done somewhere."

On one of the 60-foot draggers built at Southwest Boat, Sargent brought the plans to Raymond Bunker saying, "Here are the plans for the dragger we have to build." About a week later Sargent brought the patterns for the parts, stem, deadwood, horn timber, etc. Raymond pointed to a pile of oak on the floor and said, "There are the keel parts all made." He had put his crew to work, made patterns and got out the parts while Sargent making the patterns.

Vessels constructed at Southwest Boat before 1946:

The "Bonaventure" 119 gross tons, owned by Nicholas Novello, was



"Bonaventure"

completed in 1942 and joined the redfish fleet at Gloucester. However, shortly after joining the fishing fleet she was requisitioned by the Coast Guard for war service. Later, after she was returned to her owners, she was refitted for fishing at Southwest Boat and fished out of Gloucester for many years.

The "Mary Rose". 118 gross tons, owned by Mary Rose Ciarametaro, was built in 1943 for the redfish fleet at Gloucester. She was built to replace the fishing vessel "Baby Rose" that was pressed into government service. When the "Baby Rose" was returned to her owners, she was also refitted at Southwest Boat. Both the "Mary Rose" and the "Baby Rose" fished out of Gloucester for many years.

The "Vinalhaven II", 57 gross tons, owned by the Vinalhaven Port District, Inc. of Rockland, was built in 1943 to serve the island of Vinalhaven with passenger and freight service to Rockland.

The "Cape Cod", 34 gross tons, owned by Manuel Phillips of Plymouth, Massachusetts, was built in 1944 and used as a fishing dragger.

The "Hornet", 36 gross tons, owned by Harvard Beal of Southwest Harbor, was built in 1944 and used as a dragger and seiner.

The "Novelty", 39 gross tons, owned by Ralph K. Barter, hailed from Rockland, Maine, was built in 1944 and used as a sardine carrier.

The "Lubenray", 53 gross tons, owned by Benjamin D. Baxter of New Bedford, Massachusetts, was built in 1945 and was used as a dragger.

The "Sandra and Jean", 39 gross tons, owned by Lew J. Wallace of Rockland, Maine, was used as a dragger. This vessel was built in 1945.

The "Elva L. Beal", 22 gross tons, owned by Harvard of Southwest Harbor, was built in 1945 and used as a dragger and seiner.

Vessels constructed at Southwest Boat in 1946 and after:

The "Ida Mae", a sardine carrier owned by Stinson Canning Co.

The "Connecticut", 57 gross tons, owned by Katherine S. Bindloss of new London, Connecticut, was built in 1946. This vessel foundered September 29, 1948, West/North, 3 fl miles from Gay

Head Lighthouse.

The "Judith Lee Rose", 198 gross tons, owned by Vessel Judith Lee Rose, Inc., was built in 1952 and was used as a dragger.

In addition to this new construction, two vessels were lengthened 10 feet by cutting them in two and building a new section amidships. One was a lobster smack, the "Chester T. Marshall", and the other was a fishing dragger, the "Joseph S. Marshall."

Sources:

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5. Appleby's Custom Records, Stephen Phillips Memorial Library, Penobscot Marine Museum.
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7. Letter from Arno Day to Ralph Stanley.
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9. American Bureau of Shipping List at G. W. Blunt White Library at Mystic Seaport.
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