

Exhibition Reviews

Collingwood Skiffs & Side Launches: Building Canada's Marine Heritage. COLLINGWOOD MUSEUM. MOUNTED AT THE COLLINGWOOD MUSEUM. 10 January - 22 April, 1995. 32 p. catalogue.

For nearly a century and a half, shipbuilding dominated Collingwood's economic and communal life. The closure of the shipyard in September 1986 was thus both an economic and emotional blow to the town. Almost a decade later, the Collingwood Museum exhibition *Collingwood Skiffs & Side Launches* examines Collingwood's rich marine heritage through the eyes of former shipyard employees. The exhibition is meant as both a recollection and a celebration of the skills of the men and women who contributed to the growth of a town and a nation.

Boatbuilding activity began in Collingwood around 1850 with the arrival of William Watts. He designed the "Collingwood Skiff," a double-ended, double-masted fishing boat with retractable iron centreboards for fishing in shallow water. Watts's success established Collingwood as the major centre for boatbuilding on Georgian Bay. The industry continued to flourish with the advent of steel ships at the turn of the century. During World War II, the yard produced nineteen corvettes for the Canadian Navy. Building activity persisted in the post-war period under the ownership of Canada Steamship Lines (CSL) until a serious decline in the worldwide shipbuilding industry forced CSL to close the yard in 1986.

While the exhibition gives a good overall history of shipbuilding in Collingwood and its economic context, its strength lies in its focus on the communal aspects of the industry. Many sources for the exhibition were donated by former employees, including a large photographic collection. As a result, display panels are focused on subjects such as "People" and "Life in the Yard." In fact, corporate records of CSL, which are located in Montreal, were not consulted during the research for this project. On the other hand, minutes of the local Steelworkers Union, which represented the yard's employees, were used as an archival source. A great deal of attention is focused on women and their role in the industry. Women assumed many of the traditional positions of men during both World Wars. The yard manager's journal from World War I is of particular interest. He laments the difficulties of bringing bathrooms up to the standards of contemporary feminine hygiene.

Evidence of the community's ties to shipbuilding is best presented in the film footage of a side launch. Collingwood's harbour was too shallow and small to use the

traditional end launching method. As a result, ships were launched sideways using a series of wooden blocks, chains, and ropes. To launch the ship, the launchmaster dropped a white board or handkerchief, signalling to the axemen to cut the ropes which then released the ship into the basin. This task took an immense amount of coordination and was witnessed by thousands. In fact, launchings were always the largest community gatherings of the year.

This exhibition is noteworthy in that it represents the museum's first venture into the world of travelling exhibits. The tour, which was made possible by a Federal Department of Canadian Heritage Museums Assistance Programme grant, will make stops in Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Manitoba over the next two years. It is hoped that patrons throughout the country will come to appreciate Collingwood's place in the development of our national marine heritage. The production of corvettes is a case in point. These vessels were named after towns throughout the country in an attempt to solicit support for the war effort. Town dignitaries were invited to Collingwood to launch the ships and to stock them with items of local significance. A ship produced at Collingwood thus instilled civic pride in another community, thereby creating a bond between distant communities, a bond which this exhibit hopes to rekindle. It is also hoped that the exhibition will provide an impetus to the preservation of marine heritage throughout the country.

Staff at the museum should be commended for their ingenuity in presenting this exhibition. Software for a touch-screen terminal was developed completely in-house. Patrons are able to call up information about each ship, including a description of its design and various components. This makes it possible to see each ship "virtually," if not physically. The exhibition was also designed to be easily transportable. While museums usually have room for a travelling exhibition, they often do not have space for its storage containers. This problem is eliminated here because the containers actually form part of the display itself. Curator Tracy Marsh calls it "the swiss-army knife of travelling exhibits."

On the whole, the exhibition does an excellent job in documenting the social history of shipbuilding in Collingwood. Through a combination of archival sources and artifacts, it chronicles both the achievements and struggles of those who participated in the industry. While much remains to be told about shipbuilding in Collingwood, particularly its economic aspects, it is at least heartening to know that efforts are being made to preserve the marine heritage of the area.

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Survivors - In Search of a Voice - The Art of Courage. ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM. 17 February to 22 May 1995. 60 p. catalogue.

Survivors - In Search of a Voice - The Art of Courage is the successful attempt of an assembly of breast cancer survivors and contemporary women artists to make the public sit up and take notice of a disease that will affect one in nine Canadian women. It is both a personal tribute to women who are sick or have died, and a strident political statement about the way our society deals with women with cancer. In addition, it stands as an example of commitment and political fervour in an aloof