

Safe Harbor Building 7

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Attachment available until Aug 14, 2022

Hi Everyone,

Thanks very much for the continued good work and care given to both Safe Harbor and School Street last night. As you know, I intend to relocate the building on the Safe Harbor site that is currently referred to as Building 7. For those of you who don't know it's really fantastic history, it was originally the North Tisbury Baptist Church dating back to the early 1800's that was relocated to Tisbury by Erford Burt in approximately 1940. Mr. Burt moved it piece by piece and operated his much celebrated boat shop there.

I will soon (within 30 days) be the owner of the Beach Road sites that have been the DeSorcy families. We will certainly have a great deal of time and occasion to discuss my hopes and vision for that site, but my intention is to move to and restore Building 7 from Safe Harbor as part of the Beach Road campus. It will be driven by the rich history of the site and waterfront. All of the buildings currently on that site came to be around 1940 and played a significant role in our WWII efforts as well as housing Van Riper Boats and others. Gannon + Benjamin still. It is a special place.

I just wanted to make sure that there wasn't the potential for the Safe Harbor folks to demolish that building before further MVC consideration. Chris Scott and his team have been fantastic to work with, but things like Building 7 can sometimes get "accidentally" thrown away.

I've included a very preliminary overview of our project and look forward to your guidance and oversight on it.

Thanks very much,

Jefrey DuBard
617.817.1668

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Beach Road Project Brief.pdf
20.7 MB

Sent from my iPhone



Maciel Marine will soon change to Martha's Vineyard Marina. *Mark Lovewell*

From Meetinghouse to Marina, Boatyard Sails Again Into Future

Mark Alan Lovewell *Thursday, November 14, 2013 - 7:33pm*

Situated on its familiar corner of the Lagoon Pond in Vineyard Haven, Maciel Marine holds a respected place in the long history of boatbuilding on the Vineyard.

Boatbuilder and designer Erford W. Burt purchased the three-acre property in June 1945.

Mr. Burt was one of the most prolific boatbuilders on the Island, and among other things built the Island's first boats powered by engines.

He began his career working with Manuel Swartz Roberts, the iconic boatbuilder who built some 200 catboats at his shed on the Edgartown waterfront. Later Mr. Burt went to work at the Martha's Vineyard Shipbuilding Company. By the age of 42, as World War II was coming to an end, Mr. Burt had distinguished himself in building all kinds of boats, and stepped out on his own at the Lagoon Pond property.

The three-acre lot was mostly fill from Bass Creek and belonged to the estate of Charles Brown. At the time of purchase the site was called the Jedediah Cromwell Place, located below the Marine Hospital. Back then Lagoon Pond Road was called Howard avenue.

The shop, a large building on the site of the boatyard which now houses the offices, was assembled by Mr. Burt and was previously a Baptist church in North Tisbury that had been severely damaged in the 1944 hurricane. Mr. Burt took the structure apart plank by plank and reassembled it on the property. With its history as a church, the boatshed was affectionately dubbed the Bass Creek Meetinghouse.



Bob Maciel bought marina in 1985. — *Mark Lovewell*

In January 1946, the Gazette reported that Mr. Burt had started three boats. All were built of Island oak milled on the Vineyard. One was a catboat; another one was powered by a 25-horsepower engine.

Two years later, the Gazette reported that Mr. Burt was handling one of the first boats made of fiberglass from off-Island, a 12-foot catboat. “The arrival of this craft marks the decline of an era of boat construction and the birth of another, as certainly as ever did the discovery of steam or the process of making metal hulls,” wrote Joseph Chase Allen in the Gazette.

Kayaks, a Maine peapod, well-powered recreational fishing boats and bass boats were all built at Maciel Marine. A few of the bass boats — considered perfect in their day for speeding out of the harbor to a fishing spot, fulfilling a task and coming home in short time — are still afloat. There is one Burt bass boat on site at the boatyard, called Kittiwake III, that was built in 1952 and belongs to John Thayer, who runs a woodworking shop there.

Mr. Burt was perhaps best known for the Vineyard Haven 15, a 21-foot one-design sailboat that he first built in 1934 and continued building until 1970. About 50 of those boats were made according to the Vineyard Haven 15 website.

The Gem is another Burt-built one-design fiberglass sailboat, built in the 1960s. The 18.8-foot sloop included a genoa and a spinnaker.

In the spring of 1967 Mr. Burt’s son Henry O. Burt and his partner Henry R. Fauteaux bought the boatyard. Erford Burt continued to work at the boatyard. He died in 1993 at the age of 90.

In 1985 Robert E. Maciel of West Tisbury bought the boatyard from the Burt family after having leased it for two years. Prior to moving to the Lagoon Pond site, Mr. Maciel ran a small boat repair business in the airport business park. But the Burt boatyard had been a familiar place from his childhood.



“When I was in school, I used to walk past Erford Burt’s boatyard every day. He befriended me,” Mr.

Maciel recalled this week. “When I was in high school the teacher asked the students what they wanted to do when they grew up. I said I want to run a boatyard.” Mr. Maciel said he treasures his memories of spending summers helping Mr. Burt and later running the boatyard.

Mr. Maciel renamed it Maciel Marine and expanded the business, adding docks, more storage space for boats and a service to install and tend moorings.

In 1998, Mr. Maciel leased the business to his son Steven Maciel and Geoff Banfield, but retained ownership of the property.

In 2011 a fire broke out at the boatyard, causing extensive damage in the shop. The cause was later ruled accidental and repairs were made.

The sale this week to George Rogers and his wife Sheryl Roth Rogers marks the third family to take the helm at the boatyard, which will be renamed Martha’s Vineyard Marina.

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MARTHA'S VINEYARD SHIPYARD

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The Shipyard at 150

On its sesquicentennial, Martha's Vineyard Shipyard, one of the oldest businesses on the Island, stands at the heart of a working Vineyard Haven harbor.

It is the second to last day of October 1860. A sailing ship rests on a pair of iron rails driven into the sands of a beach. Just to the right of the vessel, as you face the harbor, lies a wharf. To the right of the wharf stands a building two stories high. This is the office of the shipyard, and also its warehouse and shop. Officially, the Holmes Hole Marine Railway has been in business for four years. But as yet no road runs out to the yard from the town, known today as Vineyard Haven.

Those who want to see the launching of this brig must ride a third of a mile over sand from the village to the west, which was then called Holmes Hole. If the witnesses were to keep riding past the shipyard, they will come to a point where the long sand spit ends at the entrance into the Lagoon. Just across the channel lies a lively little village of taverns called Eastville. But with no road to the shipyard and beyond, there is no reason for a bridge over the channel. Residents of Holmes Hole can reach Eastville by crossing the harbor in a boat. And Eastville is the last stop. Beyond it, the future Oak Bluffs is still wilderness.

It is an uncertain time across the country and on the Vineyard. In exactly one week, Abraham Lincoln will be elected president of the United States. This could lead to the breakup of the nation. On the Island, the greatest days of whaling are fifteen years in the past. But on this mid-autumn day, the builders John Cannon and Ephraim Nye, and the visitors from Holmes Hole who have watched the vessel come together on the distant beach, try to put these worries out of their minds.

Inside a circular shed, at the head of the railway, the crowd hears a whip crack. A team of oxen lumbers forward, turning a great windlass. The brig – her bottom coppered to keep down marine growth, but her spars not yet standing and perhaps not even built – begins to inch her way down the rails to the edge of Holmes Hole harbor. It is a Tuesday, so a runner sets off by way of the scrubby inland highway for the newspaper office in Edgartown, seven miles away. The new ship is 109 feet long and measures 280 tons. "She will be called, very appropriately, the Island Queen," reports the Vineyard Gazette at the end of the week, "being at once the largest and best vessel ever built at the Vineyard."

The Island Queen is not yet rigged, but she already has a captain from Tisbury and a cargo

scheduled for her maiden voyage. With secession coming and whaling going, shipbuilding may be the only industry the Vineyard can count on to generate meaningful revenue in the worrisome times to come. But even here there is a problem. On the Island, all the stout, shipbuilding timber is long gone, the trees harvested to build homes and barns and at least a dozen large sailing vessels before this one. Importing timber from Maine, where it still grows straight and tall and wide, will cut into profits. How on earth will the Holmes Hole Marine Railway manage to stay in the shipbuilding business? With the effort it took to build so great a vessel – sawing her ribs and bending and fastening her planking with so few tools on so open a beach – what can possibly follow the Island Queen?

Martha's Vineyard Shipyard stands exactly on the place where the Island Queen crept down to Holmes Hole harbor on October 30, 1860. Counting from the date of incorporation in 1856, the shipyard turns 150 years old this summer. Only one change of name – to the Martha's Vineyard Shipbuilding Company – stands between the Holmes Hole Marine Railway, for which Cannon and Nye built the Island Queen, and the Martha's Vineyard Shipyard of today. If you go back to the very first years of its operation – somewhere between 1840 and 1842 – the shipyard is the third-oldest uninterrupted business on the Vineyard, after the establishment of an inn at what is now the Kelley House in Edgartown (1742) and the Mansion House at the entrance to Main Street, Vineyard Haven (1794).

It's not easy to trace the history of the shipyard. The story is told in fragments, mostly in newspaper clippings. These bulletins take for granted the labors of launching and repairing ships and say almost nothing about how the work was done. James H.K. Norton – college professor, farmer, and tenth-generation Islander – has written the most about how the yard began. In 2000 he wrote a guidebook, *Walking in Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts*, published by the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society in Edgartown. He discovered that an unlikely partnership of Holmes Hole titans, Captain Thomas Bradley and Dr. Leroy M. Yale, established the yard on the beach no later than 1842.

Thomas Bradley was a captain at twenty-five, an entrepreneur of unerring vision after his retirement from the sea, and a holder of every town office imaginable in his lifetime. Dr. Yale was a physician who came to serve the town in 1829 from his studies at – yes – Harvard. At first, the partners called the new shipbuilding enterprise the South Wharf Company because two other commercial piers – the present-day Steamship Authority wharf was one of them – already stood in town to the north and west.

We know the facts of Captain Bradley's life, but we've got the details of Dr. Yale's. He served the village for twenty years, trusted by his patients from the first days of his practice. Yet he was often dismayed by the efficacy of his treatments, wrote Dr. Russell Hoxsie of Chilmark in a review of Dr. Yale's medical journal in the November 2001 edition of *The Dukes County Intelligencer*, the quarterly journal of the historical society. A biography of Dr. Yale by his son Leroy Jr., reprinted in the May 2001 edition of *The Intelligencer*, describes how in February 1849 the doctor tried to treat the sickness aboard a ship that sailed into the harbor laden with Irish immigrants suffering from ship's fever (typhus): "He did what he could to comfort the wretched creatures and the ship proceeded," wrote the son. "But she had done her work with him. I remember his tale of the horrible squalor of the 'tween decks, crowded with young and old in all the terrors of typhus," and of how "through the hatchway, left open for air, the sleet beat in upon the sufferers." Within days of the departure of the ship, Dr. Yale himself fell ill from the disease.

Such a man must have considered his partnership in a shipyard – a business so disconnected from medicine – to be an investment in the fortunes of the townspeople for whom he cared so much. Dr. Yale and Captain Bradley could not know what good they were doing the town, or how many generations that good would outlive them. With the creation of this shipyard, Vineyard Haven established itself as a harbor that did more than offer refuge and provisions to transient vessels or a wharf to passenger steamers. It would become a harbor that actually produced things – a working harbor, as its devotees call it today. It took imagination and energy to build and launch a dozen schooners and brigs on a beach that had no railway before the spring of 1855 – and may have had no real road to the yard itself until the bridge over the Lagoon was built in 1871.

Dr. Yale could not know any of what was to come, but the first thing the people of Holmes Hole did after his death in March 1849 – from the typhus he contracted aboard the immigrant ship – was to petition Captain Bradley to name a new schooner, under construction at the shipyard, the L.M. Yale. The Yale seems to have been commissioned as a freight-carrying vessel. But in 1849 gold fever was running through the land, and Vineyarders were not immune. The Yale was promptly chartered to carry twenty-one Island prospectors to San Francisco, a fair portion of whom died of illnesses picked up at the diggings. Otis Smith of Chilmark, the Yale's captain, was among them. The Yale never again returned to the Vineyard.

In an office on the second floor of the shipyard, there's a photograph of a man with an extravagant beard laying the keel of a Noman's Land boat – a type of Vineyard fishing dory – at the yard sometime in the 1880s. We know the man's name was Charles Gifford and that he owned shares in the boatyard. And we know that this boat was the last to be built at the yard until the early 1930s. The Island had no wood to build anything bigger. And in the hard years following the Civil War, there was too little money on the Vineyard to import stout timbers from Maine or anywhere else. Another Island industry – the building of substantial ships for a seafaring people – appeared to be on the way out.

Over in Edgartown, Erford W. Burt was a frustrated man. Born to a large family in North Tisbury in 1902, forced out of high school by illness after a week, Burt was serving his second year as an adult apprentice to Manuel Swartz Roberts, the catboat builder who worked out of what is now the Old Sculpin Gallery. It was 1928. The age of sail was done. Marine engines were advancing like nobody's business. But the commercial fishermen of Edgartown didn't need speed. They needed a full and stable hull to hold fish. So they kept asking Manuel Roberts to build the same type of catboat over and over again. And Roberts, perhaps fearing that Burt might become a rival, refused to teach him anything about design – specifically, how to build full-sized boats from the half models he carved in his shop. Burt would sneak back to the workplace during his lunch hour to parse out how the old master was doing it.

By the end of 1929, Burt, twenty-seven years old, knew enough about design and boatbuilding to leave Roberts. He went to work for William A. Colby, who owned what was now called the Martha's Vineyard Shipbuilding Company. (Its name changed after Holmes Hole changed its own name to Vineyard Haven in 1871.) In 1932 – despite the threat the Depression posed to a resort economy – Colby allowed Burt to build a boat on spec. Out of the shed came a twenty-eight-and-a-half-foot sport-fishing boat with a 130-horsepower inboard and a shape never before built on Martha's Vineyard. She was the first boat to be

built at the yard since Charles Gifford finished up his Noman's Land boat fifty years before.

Where a catboat was capacious throughout her hull, this boat parted the water sharply at her bow and flattened it at the stern. "I could see that this was a golden opportunity to fit a boat to the motor," said Burt in a 1990 interview. "I was the first to build a Vineyard boat expressly for modern engines, at the end of the time when people were building and buying catboats." In 1974 he told John M. Leavens that the vessel, named Knot Over (because she would get to where she was going in the predicted time and "not over"), made a weeklong run down to Florida. On the first day, she left the Vineyard at 7 a.m. and reached Shark River Inlet on the Jersey coast at 10:30 p.m. – "a run of about 400 miles in about fifteen and a half hours," said Burt. "That's really moving!"

In 1933, for the shipyard, Burt would design the Vineyard Haven 15, a dandy racing sloop that snapped through a tack, sailed downwind with barely a finger on the tiller, and served for four decades as the main racing fleet of the Vineyard Haven Yacht Club. But it was the advent of World War II that gave the shipyard the chance to show the world what it could do. In July 1942 the War Department was desperate to find small yards that could build barges, as well as fast and dependable auxiliary craft to carry munitions and personnel between larger ships. By the end of the year, the whole length of the Vineyard Haven harbor, from the yard to what is now the DeSorcy Contracting Company near Five Corners, was a shipbuilding facility.

Ralph M. Packer Jr., who runs the eponymous oil-delivery and transportation company just east of the shipyard, remembers seeing huge band saws on the beach as scores of men and women framed and planked the barges. The existence of these scows was supposed to be a secret, though each was 250 feet long and the whole train of them stood high over Beach Road, as the Island Queen must have stood eighty years before. The builders came from the shipyard and William E. Dugan's contracting company nearby. The Gazette noted that "the boatbuilders had not used mill machinery, neither had the carpenters built boats, and clever organizing was necessary in order to fit the two organizations together in a manner that would operate smoothly."

Eight times in two years the government turned to the shipyard to build war craft. The operation turned out seventy speedboats and sixteen barges. At the first launch, the Gazette said, "The shades of John Cannon, Ephraim Nye, and the other old shipbuilders of Holmes Hole must have prowled the waterfront on Friday, for on that day, the first ship launching in many a generation took place in that Island harbor. . . . [I]n plan, construction, and procedure in launching, all things were done in accordance with the old-time rules of shipbuilding. . . . It was a prideful day for the Vineyard when a gold-braided naval officer, his hair grown gray in the service, stood on a platform at the shipyard and told a thousand people that the Vineyard yard had turned out the finest boats obtainable for the tough job that they had to do."

In 1961 Thomas Hale came to the Vineyard an ambitious man. From Robert M. Love, who had served simultaneously as the Vineyard representative to the Steamship Authority board of governors as well as chairman of the board of Allegheny Airlines, Hale and his wife Anne bought Martha's Vineyard Shipyard – Love changed the name in 1953 – for roughly \$38,000. After the war, the shipyard had again retreated to the world of boat storage and maintenance. There were only four or five year-round employees. Business was so slow

that Bob Love suggested to Tom Hale that he consider shutting down the yard for the winter. Nothing doing, thought Hale. Raised in Newburyport and Dedham, he'd learned to sail in Padanaram (South Dartmouth, near New Bedford) and first visited the Vineyard in 1948. He'd earned his master's degree in architecture at Harvard, but found he was spending his idle moments and hours drawing boats. He wanted to design them, and he wanted to build them.

Those ambitions were enormous. "See, I was thinking – unconsciously perhaps – about Concordia," says Hale, eighty-one, of the yard that built world-class yawls in Fairhaven in the middle of the last century. For all the shipbuilding heritage of the yard he'd just purchased, it was like taking over a well-respected auto-body shop in Nova Scotia and wanting to build Lincoln Continentals. Yet for the next twenty years, the vision served the shipyard well. It built wooden Noank sloops, revived the Vineyard Haven 15 class by building new boats out of fiberglass, adapted a handsome down-east lobsterman's boat as the Wasque picnic boat, and created a new class of nifty double-ended sloops called the Vineyard Vixen. The yard was moving toward the moment when, like Concordia, it might become a brand-name facility – the Wasque yard or the Vineyard Vixen yard. "But we just couldn't do it economically," says Tom Hale. "You could buy a similar boat almost as nicely finished in Taiwan, and that boat could be deck-shipped to San Francisco, loaded on a truck, taken to Newport, and rigged, and launched, and delivered – customs duties and the broker's fees paid – to the owner for less than we could build and deliver the same boat in Vineyard Haven harbor."

In 1986, Philip Hale bought the shipyard from his father, paying nearly \$900,000 for it over the next ten years. From boyhood, Phil, fifty-two, had worked almost every job there was at the yard, from sweeping out the sheds to running the boatbuilding program. The first thing he did as president of the yard was to look at that program pragmatically and shut it down. For the first time in its history, the shipyard was out of the boatbuilding business with no plans to go back.

The new goal was to serve Vineyarders and visitors whose boats were growing ever more elaborate – mechanically, electrically, and by way of fit and finish – and do it as efficiently as possible. "We've got twenty people working year-round, we've got huge skills, we can fix a fiberglass boat, and we handle 400 boats a year," says Phil Hale. (Full disclosure: my Herreshoff 121/2 sloop is one of them.) "We service from Cape Pogue to Quitsa Pond. And I think that's the fascinating piece – being able to do that efficiently. We've learned how to move boats over the water and over the land seamlessly. And that's the fun thing: When a boat comes out of the woods in West Tisbury, arrives here painted, commissioned, launched, her sails on, and is towed to Edgartown in the same day – that's pretty cool stuff."

Shades of John Cannon and Ephraim Nye – but a long way from running a 280-ton brig down a pair of iron rails set into the shifting sands of a beach.

To understand how unique the character of Vineyard Haven harbor is – and how vital the legacy of this ancient shipbuilding yard is to that character – you need look no farther than any other harbor on the eastern seaboard.

In Newport, all three shipyards are gone, the old working waterfront yielding to restaurants, six-story motels, and a highway that mowed down half the harborfront and

walled off much of the rest of it from public use. Hyannis and Nantucket are both given over to boutiques that shutter up, and marinas that empty out, when the first cold winds gust in from the water. For all the merriment of Oak Bluffs harbor, and the stateliness of Edgartown's, there is almost no hint of the year 'round commerce you find on Vineyard Haven harbor, where 230-foot ferries and gravel barges share the water with eight-foot racing prams in summer, and all year-round the Gannon and Benjamin Marine Railway builds sloops and schooners the old-fashioned way, silver-bali planks fastened to white-oak frames. James Lobdell of the harbor management committee points out that Vineyard Haven is one of the few harbors where a regular guy may sail in, pick up an inexpensive mooring, row his dinghy to a public beach, and find himself within a few steps of a supermarket, pharmacy, or post office. Martha's Vineyard Shipyard is the oldest of these harborfront enterprises, and its sesquicentennial is a useful moment to inquire about its fate and that of the harbor its history has so profoundly shaped.

"We're employing people," says Phil Hale. "I mean, I don't know what Ralph Packer's employment and the Black Dog's and Gannon and Benjamin's comes to, but it's got to be 100 people. That's a huge workforce. And what other businesses could you put there that are going to keep 100 jobs year-round, and all the wages we pay out? I think that the waterfront businesses are a huge economic engine that is not recognized by the town."

Tom Pachico, town selectman, says he recognizes it and the town recognizes it.

"We pride ourselves on having a working harbor. It is a variety of businesses," he says. "I found early on there is a great potential for much bigger income from the harbor" – by raising seasonal and short-term mooring fees, for example – "but the townspeople don't want to do it that way. They want to keep the working, homey atmosphere to it. They liken it to a park. And it is."

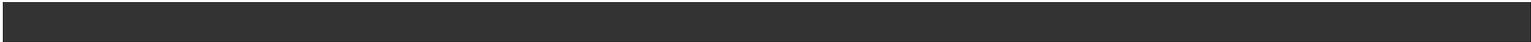
A few years ago, the town adopted a set of rules requiring that any new business on the harborfront be marine-related. It then voted unanimously to designate the harbor a District of Critical Planning Concern, by which developments of a certain size are automatically referred to the Martha's Vineyard Commission, a land-use and planning agency. Pachico says his only complaint is that some of the waterfront rules overlap and contradict each other. He points to an old contracting company on the harbor that can't build a pier because the business is not, strictly speaking, marine-related. He'd like for the town planning board and selectmen to have the final say about how a working harbor can make a profit and keep its character – not the Martha's Vineyard Commission. "There are people that don't want you to do anything on your property. I want you to be able to make money on your property," says Pachico, "but I don't want you to rape the harbor while you're at it. Or the town. Where's that balance?"

Phil Hale can't answer Tom Pachico's question over the long term. No one with a love for working Vineyard Haven harbor can. But on the 150th anniversary, Hale says he's in the boatyard business for the long haul.

The taxes are high, finding and keeping skilled, boat-oriented help on the Island is growing more difficult by the year, and woe betide the boatyard president looking up from his desk at an owner whose sloop or inboard was supposed to go into the water at ten o'clock this morning, and that boat is still in her cradle at eleven. Yet he looks at a newspaper clipping and agrees with something his father wrote in the Gazette some years ago:

"To me, perhaps, the greatest satisfaction is to stand at the end of our pier and see a fleet of boats which we have built and stored and cared for over the past year, just finishing a race. Their owners think they own them. They're wrong, they just pay the bills, but I feel, almost jealously, that they are my boats, and that the owners may use them during two or three months out of the year, provided they bring them back safe and sound in the fall. There are only two straight lines on a boat, the mast and the waterline, and the rest is a symphony of complementary curves reflecting and responding to the boat's two natural elements – the wind and the water. To me, it is a privilege and a pleasure to be able to build and care for such an object."

(Originally published in the July 2006 edition
of Martha's Vineyard Magazine)





WAYNE SMITH

Toy Boat, Toy Boat, Toy Boat

9.1.17

Sure, other Islanders may have built bigger vessels. But no one built a bigger fleet than Van Ryper of Vineyard Haven.

A. Bowdoin Van Riper

Before Gannon and Benjamin made the shores of Beach Road a mecca for wooden-boat lovers, before Erford Burt set up shop in a relocated church on the western arm of the Lagoon, there was another boatyard in the shadow of Five Corners in Vineyard Haven. The vessels built there were miniatures – meticulously crafted scale models made of poplar and brass and automotive lacquer – and they “sailed” to their final destinations in cardboard boxes and wooden shipping crates. They made port at shipyards, in shipping-line offices, and on the curio shelves of travelers eager for mementos of their ocean voyages. They found their way into the homes of two presidents, and played a small role in the greatest war in history. “Van Ryper of Vineyard Haven” – to two generations of residents and visitors, simply “the ship model shop” – is only a memory now, but in its thirty years (ending in 1962) it built a tabletop fleet 15,000 vessels strong.

The story began in the waning years of the Hoover administration with a small boy and an even smaller boat. My grandfather, Charles King Van Riper (Charlie or C.K. to his friends), had brought his wife and son east from California for the summer to visit family: his mother-in-law (whose nickname, Mimi, belied her formidable size and Queen Victoria wardrobe) on the coast of Maine, and his brother Donald, who’d recently settled on the Vineyard. Fondly told that he would soon have a chance to ride on a ferry, my father – according to family legend – asked: “What’s a ferry?” Inspired, Van Riper disappeared into Mimi’s barn and emerged some time later with a toy replica of the then-new Island steamer *Naushon*, cobbled together from wood scraps and whitewash.

Van Riper was no master woodworker, but he had an endlessly creative mind and a boundless enthusiasm for new challenges. Watching the toy *Naushon* he’d built make voyage after voyage across his mother-in-law’s rug, a new idea took hold. Ship models – replicas of particular ships, built to a precise scale – had traditionally been handcrafted works of art built one at a time by individual craftsmen. Representing an investment of hundreds, even thousands, of hours on the part of the builder, they commanded prices to match. What if, Van Riper asked himself, you could build scale-model ships the way Henry Ford built cars: turning them out in large enough quantities that they could be sold relatively inexpensively? Then you could market them to middle-class travelers as keepsakes and mementos. Sail to the Vineyard or Nantucket for the summer, and bring home a model of the steamer that brought you there. Cross the Atlantic on the *Mauretania* or the Pacific on the *Empress of India*, and order a replica for your mantelpiece.



Charles Van Riper holds a model of the steamer Martha's Vineyard, 1956.

COURTESY BOW VAN RIPER

The shop opened for business (using the Old World spelling, “Van Ryper,” to make its pronunciation clear) in 1933. A two-story wooden building on Beach Road, beside Harry Peakes’s ice house, served as a combination workshop, office, and showroom. Under its roof Van Riper gathered a small group of talented, eccentric individuals: craftsmen hired to provide the skills he himself lacked. Frank Canha, Arthur King, and Arthur Andrews did the woodwork in the shop’s early years; John Canha drafted the plans; and Benjamin Baptiste wielded the paint sprayer. Mel Doremus handled the fine-detail and finish work, while Ray Chipman acted as shop foreman and bookkeeper. Van Riper himself was the creative spark: publicist, salesman, strategist, and innovator in chief. He filled orders, greeted customers in the showroom, and spun out an endless series of ideas for new products. He was, to use a word not yet common in the 1930s, an entrepreneur.

His first, greatest innovation – the one that made the shop viable and set the stage for the others that followed – was simply this: never, ever make *just one* of anything. The time required for a worker to turn a block of poplar into a precisely shaped hull or deckhouse was, Van Riper realized, mostly spent setting up and adjusting the tools. The actual cutting and sanding was quick by comparison, and making two hulls took only a few more minutes than making one. The vast majority of Van Ryper models were, therefore, made in batches. A woodworker would cut

twenty-four *Mauretania* hulls in rapid succession, reset the guides on his table saw and produce twenty-four deckhouses, then set them a third time and turn out ninety-six funnels (since each model would require four). Once cut, drilled, and sanded, the wooden components would be handed off to a painter who, after loading his spray gun with black automotive lacquer, would paint all twenty-four hulls, before switching to white for the decks and deckhouses, or Cunard Lines' trademark red for the funnels. The shop's final-assembly workers and decorators used a similar approach, setting up for a particular operation and then carrying it out on all the models in a given batch, one after another. The process was mass-production in miniature, and it resulted in a high-quality product that could be sold at prices ordinary Americans could afford.

Van Riper's second critical insight was that shop models didn't have to recreate every detail of the ships they represented – just enough detail to make them look right. “Enough,” he decreed, was whatever could be seen from a distance of two to five miles, as if the observer were viewing it from shore or the deck of another ship. Drawing on Van Riper's suggestions and their own ingenuity, the shop's workers became masters of eye-fooling techniques that suggested, rather than precisely replicated, critical details. Strips of beaded wooden furniture trim were fashioned into lines of lifeboats, finish nails and bent common pins into davits, and glazier's points into the part of the rudder that peeked above the water. Tiny drill holes in the sides of the hull represented portholes, and shallow cross-cuts with a narrow-bladed saw made the “windows” in the deckhouses. Anchors, invisible to Van Riper's imaginary observer and all but impossible to counterfeit effectively at small scales, were simply left off.

The two innovations came together in the Travel Series, a collection of relatively simple models representing the vessels of major passenger lines. Advertised as “Models of Ships on which You've Sailed,” they were the fulfillment of Van Riper's original vision for the business: attractively priced keepsakes for travelers who wanted to remember their ocean voyages. The Travel Series models were built to a standard length of nine to eleven inches long, ensuring that a group of them (the advertising slogan, with its subtle use of the plural “ships” assumed repeat business) would make a harmonious display on a customer's shelf. On most, therefore, an inch on the model was the equivalent of roughly forty-five feet on the real-world ship it represented. However, keeping models of late-1930s “super liners” like France's *Normandie* and Britain's *Queen Mary* to a length of eleven inches – standard for the Travel Series – meant using a smaller scale, with an inch representing roughly sixty-four feet of the actual ship.

Attractively priced – the ferry *Martha's Vineyard* sold for \$3.50 in 1937, and the Cunard liner *Mauretania* for \$5.75 – the Travel Series sold quickly and widely. A brochure from that year listed more than 250 different ships in stock and ready to mail out. Larger, more detailed models of selected ships were also available at higher prices (a sixteen-inch replica of the thousand-foot *Normandie* cost \$15 in 1940, compared to less than \$10 for the Travel Series),

and yacht owners willing to supply the necessary plans and photographs could order a custom replica of their vessel in any size their budget would allow. This ability to mass-produce a wide range of standardized models while simultaneously handling more complex projects became, a few years later, the basis of the Van Riper shop's contribution to the war effort.



The Ucatena, an Island steamer, was the last sidewheeler; 1902–1928.

WAYNE SMITH

The shop's transition to a wartime footing began in 1938, long before the first bombs fell on Pearl Harbor. The Moore-McCormack shipping line, having accepted a contract to operate ten government-owned merchant vessels, wrote to Van Riper to order a replica of one of them. The scale specified by Moore-McCormack (one inch = eight feet) meant that the finished model would be well over five feet long, and capable of depicting the ship at a level of detail unimaginable on a ten-inch *Mauretania* or fourteen-inch *Normandie*. The *trompe l'oeil* techniques used in the Travel Series models would not work at such sizes. Instead, the Van Riper craftsmen scaled up the techniques they had begun to develop for building custom yacht models: working directly from shipyard plans and photographs supplied by Moore-McCormack, and precisely reproducing, rather than merely simulating, details like lifeboats, railings, booms, and winches.

The Moore-McCormack job led to a steady stream of additional requests for similarly sized models: from the Maritime Commission, charged with overseeing the expansion and modernization of the U.S. Merchant Marine, from other government agencies, and from the shipping lines themselves. Van Riper, always with an eye to publicity, offered to build a “liner of the future” for display at the 1939–40 World’s Fair in New York, but the organizers demurred. “Eighth scale” (as the shop crew called it, because 1/8–inch on the model represented one foot of the actual ship) quickly became the shop’s standard for corporate work, and over the course of the wartime and immediate postwar years, the shop’s magnificently elaborate eighth-scale models found their way into government agencies, corporate boardrooms, and the reception areas of shipyard and shipping-line offices. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a former assistant secretary of the Navy and lifelong aficionado of all things maritime, kept an eighth-scale Van Riper model of an EC-2 freighter (the prototype, ironically, for Henry Kaiser’s mass-produced Liberty Ships) on display in the study of his Hyde Park, New York, mansion.

Even the big eighth-scale models were dwarfed, however, by a model of a T-2 tanker ordered in 1942 by a Kaiser shipyard in Portland, Oregon. The T-2s were petroleum-carrying counterparts of the Liberty Ships, and like their more famous cousins they were mass-produced: built in sections that were welded together during the final assembly process to make a complete ship. The Portland yard wanted its model made, like the real thing, in five separate sections: a three-dimensional reference to show the foremen of their construction crews exactly how the finished product went together. Virtually every part of the full-sized hull, except the outer hull plating and some of the braces and bulkheads, was to be replicated in the model in its proper shape and position. The miles of pipes and cables that knitted the ship together would all be there in miniature, routed through the model just as they were through the actual ship. The completed model would be twenty-seven feet long, each of its five sections as long as an eighth-scale model of a freighter.

Four sections of the metal model had been completed, crated, and dispatched to Portland, Oregon, by rail when, on a July night in 1942, disaster struck. The workshop caught fire, gutting the interior and melting the almost-complete fifth section into unusable slag. Surveying the ruins the next morning, Van Riper purchased the Chimney House across the street and moved production of the T-2 model into it. Working from a new set of plans flown in from Oregon, Stan Lair and his crew of metalworkers worked overtime cutting, soldering, and welding together a new fifth section. The contract was met, and the final section dispatched to Portland, without even a single day’s delay.

Across the street, the woodworking crews rebuilt their workspace and restarted production of Van Riper’s other major contribution to the war effort: recognition models. These also were training aids, used to teach sailors and naval aviators how to recognize enemy warships by their

distinctive silhouettes. Studying the models from multiple angles would, the Navy believed, help to ensure that new recruits would not misidentify enemy destroyers as enemy battleships or mistake Allied vessels for Axis ones. An order for 2,300 models representing the entire Imperial Japanese Navy was placed and filled before the United States officially entered the war. Similar contracts for the German and Italian navies soon followed, as did contracts for recognition models of German and Japanese warplanes. Built mostly at a scale of one inch = sixty-four feet, the recognition models were similar in spirit to the Travel Series: representations of what the full-size ship would look like if seen at sea from a distance of several miles. Ranging from eight to twelve inches long and painted a uniform medium gray, they captured the shapes and positions of turrets, smokestacks, and deckhouses with perfect fidelity, but omitted small details like lifeboats and anti-aircraft guns. The aircraft models were similarly designed: built with landing gear retracted, bomb bay doors closed, and details that would interrupt their basic silhouette omitted. Test photos taken outside the shop show them dangling from barely visible fishing line with celluloid disks representing their spinning propellers, “flying” through the bright blue skies of summer.



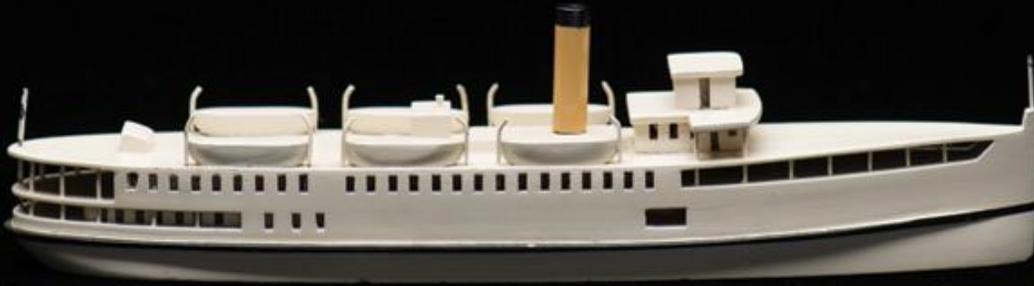
A. Bowdoin Van Riper, grandson of the model maker.

WAYNE SMITH

At its wartime peak, the Van Ryper shop ran double shifts to keep up with the demand created by government contracts. In peacetime, it shrank back to its prewar size, and shifted back to liners, freighters, and yachts. New “Models of Ships on which You’ve Sailed” – similar in size to the prewar Travel Series, but more finely made and richly detailed – filled the showroom, now located in a small building of its own just in front and to the right of the main workshop. There they mingled with a handful of large eighth-scale ships that displayed the shop working at the peak of its abilities, along with model-embellished lamps, desk boxes, and wall plaques. The most famous of the latter displayed a half-model of the lightship *Relief*, her name written in large white letters on her fire-engine-red hull. Designed to mark the door to “that certain room” in one’s house, the plaque was the shop’s all-time best-seller. The showroom was a favorite destination for ship lovers and, especially on rainy days, families with small children. Charlie Van Riper – as always, the public face of the business – welcomed them all.

Sales were another matter. Rising postwar wages, and rising prices for materials, meant that a model that sold for \$5 or \$6 in the mid-1930s now retailed for \$10, \$12, or \$15, edging out of the reach of less-prosperous customers. Postwar liners, like William Francis Gibbs’s magnificent *United States*, featured elaborately curved hulls and complex superstructures that required more time and expense to replicate than those of prewar ships. Eighth-scale models remained popular with shipping companies and big-city travel agencies – the Isbrandtsen Line ordered a replica of each vessel in its fleet in the early 1950s – but the market was limited. Few individuals could afford to pay for a five- to six-foot ship model, let alone a house with room to display it.

Van Riper’s biggest postwar challenge, however, was that the pool of Americans who traveled by ship was shrinking. The Fall River Line, once the preferred carrier of New Yorkers headed to the Vineyard, went out of business in 1937, a victim of improved road and rail service in southern New England. A decade later, Northeast Airlines began service from Boston to the newly opened Martha’s Vineyard Airport, making the trip in less time than it took a ferry to cross from Woods Hole to Vineyard Haven. Airliners also brought Hawaii, South America, and Europe within the reach of America’s coastal cities, rolling out no-frills, tourist-class service in the early 1950s that captured precisely those travelers who had once gone by sea and then turned to the Van Ryper shop for mementos of their sea voyages.



The Nobska, a Martha's Vineyard steamship from 1925–1973.

WAYNE SMITH

Van Riper, ever inventive, compensated by expanding into new areas. There were maritime-themed lamps and wastebaskets, wooden fishes (as carefully shaped and painted as duck decoys) to be hung on the wall as works of art, assemble-it-yourself wooden model kits, and a table-top game of his own invention in which players raced liners across the ocean. The shop accepted orders from customers with models that needed cleaning or repair, and built a replica of Noah's Ark based on a design that one customer had extrapolated from Genesis. Models of sailing vessels – whether modern racing sailboats like the Vineyard Haven 15 or the whalers and cargo schooners of days gone by – became a larger proportion of the output. Among the latter was a model of the Continental Navy's sloop-of-war *Wasp*, ordered in 1960 with the condition that the unnamed buyer be allowed to inspect it at his home before closing the deal. Van Riper agreed and, with the *Wasp* safely nestled in a custom-made wooden case, set out for the mainland; the destination was an address in Hyannisport, and the buyer was Senator – soon to be President – John F. Kennedy. The model found favor with JFK, and (despite a lifetime of voting Republican) Van Riper emerged from the meeting a committed Democrat.

The crew, by then, was the same size it had been in the early days, but the old-timers had long since moved on, and their replacements were now old-timers in their own right. Eldon West acted as foreman and built yacht models in a corner of his office; Freeman Leonard focused on

corporate work, including exotic projects like river dredges and offshore oil rigs as well as ships; Cliff Dugan handled the woodwork; Stan Lair the metalwork; and Phil Horton oversaw the decorating and detailing. The business itself had entered old age as well, however, and Van Riper recognized that the end was coming. Jet airliners, capable of crossing the Atlantic nonstop in six hours, had put most of the traditional passenger liners out of business in the late 1950s. In 1960, after suffering a stroke, Van Riper closed down production at the shop. He kept the showroom open for two more years, selling off the remaining stock and keeping his hand in the part of the business that had always brought him the greatest satisfaction.

Charlie Van Riper died in 1964, and my father (for whom that first *Naushon* was made) in 2001, but “Van Ryper of Vineyard Haven” never entirely faded away. Models that originally sold for \$5 or \$6 now regularly change hands for \$200 to \$500, and though the shop has been closed for fifty-five years, I still get phone calls that begin: “Are you related to the Van Ryper who built the ship models...?” “Yes”, I answer, knowing that the response will likely bring forth a fond memory of long-ago visits to the shop, or news of a model still proudly displayed far from Vineyard Haven harbor. The world that gave birth to them is long gone now, but the miniature fleet launched on the shores of Beach Road still sails the seas of the imagination, their bright-colored funnels gleaming in the sun.



Charles K. Van Riper, whose Beach Road ship model shop operated from 1933 to 1962, reaped the benefits of Vineyard Haven's transformation from a commercial port to a tourist center. MVM Photo Collection.

Article Describing Van Riper Ship Model Shop

Caption: "Nearly all types of vessels that sail the seven seas have been constructed at a unique shipyard on Martha's Vineyard in business for almost a ...*"

* ... quarter of a century. The thousands of ships built in the small boatyard of the shore of Vineyard Haven have never gone to sea and for a very good reason. They are models. / The Van Riper ship model shop is world famous for its reproductions of perfectly-scaled ships of all types from all corners of the globe. Employing a half-dozen skilled men and women, this unusual firm, headed by Charles K. Van Riper, turns out with painstaking care handmade replicas of past and present marine vessels complete in every detail except for a crew. /

Most of the firm's business is devoted to filling orders from ship-builders, steamship lines and naval architects who desire models of ships they either own or are planning to construct. ..."

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Can you identify any people, things, places, or events in this photograph? How about the time period? Or do you know where this photo came from? Email me at cbaer@vineyard.net.

*
Location: Vineyard Haven - -
People: Van Riper, Charles K.

Keywords: models; model making