

THE SHIPBUILDING HISTORY OF THE MATTHEWS FAMILY

(The experiences and history of the master shipbuilders who constructed vessels of Douglas fir lumber in shipyards on the Pacific Coast are invaluable. Their history is essential for the historical records and educational information for the Maritime Museums and Marine Historians.)

Will endeavor to describe some of the experiences of my father, Peter Matthews, when he was an apprentice in a shipyard and his activities in the shipbuilding industry on the Pacific Coast.

Also write some of the experiences of George H. Hithings, his son-in-law, in the shipbuilding industry, of which I was familiar.

In conclusion, I will write of my experiences in the shipbuilding industry, from the time I started to work in a shipyard, until I retired.

My father was born in New Brunswick, Canada, in 1848 of Scotch parents, who lived on a farm. The family moved to Prince Edward Island, when he was an infant and settled on a farm. He attended a small country school for a total of three months. Consequently, he had to learn the hard way. When sixteen years of age he decided to serve his apprenticeship in a shipyard and learn the ship carpenter's trade.

In constructing wood built vessels in that locality in his time, the apprentice had to serve four years to learn the carpenter's trade. When he completed the four years, he was classed a journeyman and received the prevailing wage in that class. He was given every opportunity to advance in the trade. He would be well trained in the practice of using all the hand tools, especially, the ship broad axe and the ship adz. All the fabricating and construction work was completed with special hand tools.

The shipbuilding industry operated many years without mechanical or power driven machinery. Ships were built the hard way, which was the only way. The employees worked long hours and shipwork was considered to be very hard work that required strong, able men to endure it. The majority of the men there, were raised on farms and were accustomed to hard work and long hours. During the long summer days the shipyard operated twelve hours per day. However, there were days when the daylight reduced the working hours in the Fall months. The compensation received by the apprentices for the first year's work included his room and board, also a suit of clothes at the end of the year. The second year he worked for his room and board and fifty dollars cash. The third year he received room and board and \$.50 per day in wages. Providing he continued to work for the same firm the fourth year, he would receive room and board and \$1.00 per day wages, paid monthly. When he completed the full four years, he was classed a journeyman. The prevailing wage for journeymen ship carpenters there at that time was \$3.00 per day.

There were experienced men employed as superintendents and foremen, who were leaders in the shipbuilding industry and they received substantial wages. Several other classifications of leaders received higher wages than carpenters. Sub-contractors were offered opportunities to contract work in the industry. For many years shipbuilding was a leading industry in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, Canada, and provided payrolls in many communities.