

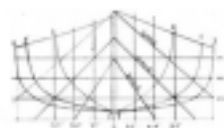
A nonprofit organization devoted to the maritime history of Sitka and Southeastern Alaska

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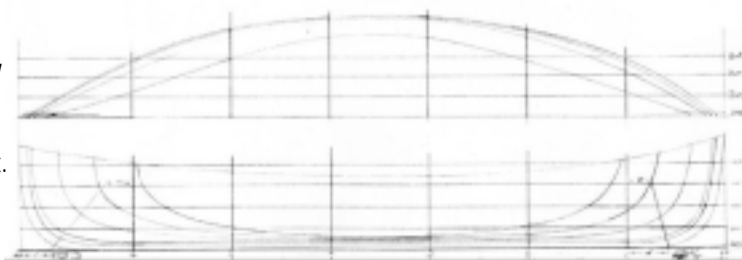
Davis Boats



(right) Lines of a double-ended Davis boat, by Richard Kolin, in the Fall 2007 *Ash Breeze*.

Reprinted by permission.

(above) A photo of a double-ended Davis boat. Photo by Richard Kolin, in the Fall 2007 *Ash Breeze*. Reprinted by permission.



A square-sterned Davis boat, built by the Davis family of Metlakatla, Alaska and on loan from Dewey and Joann Torgenson was on display at the SMHS Japonski Boathouse this summer for the Sitka Sound Ocean Adventure Race and the Paths Across the Pacific conference. Built in Seattle in the late 1940s, when the Davis family tried unsuccessfully to move into the Lower 48 market, this solid, well-crafted boat elicited dreams of building and rowing a boat in more than one viewer.

According to the (out-of-print) book, *Davis Boats*, by Marty Loken, John Davis, a Canadian Tsimpshian, started in the boatbuilding business with his son, Rod, during the 1897 Yukon gold rush, building boats and scows on Lake Lindeman and Lake Bennett for one-way trips to the gold fields. They then set up business in Metlakatla, a community of Tsimpshian Indians from Canada who had immigrated to the U.S. under the leadership of Anglican missionary William Duncan in 1887. The Davises had various enterprises, including a sawmill, which provided the wood for their boat building business.

At first, the boats were all double-enders, though most production over the years was of transom (square) sterned boats for use with outboards. They had patterns and forms for the entire boat, constantly refining their methods, so that at one point, a boat could be assembled and painted in a day from the prefabricated parts. They sold their boats all over southeastern Alaska, mainly through agents in each community. They were common enough, that in Sitka, round-bottom boats were also called "Davis-style boats."

Recently a boatbuilder in Washington, Richard Kolin, took the lines off a double-ended Davis Boat. These plans are now available from the Center for Wooden Boats, and his article and drawings are in *The Ash Breeze*, the Journal of the Traditional Small Craft Association, available on line at www.tsca.org Follow the link to "Ash Breeze Journal" for the Davis boat story in the Fall 2007 issue. Davis boats are high on the list of projects for the SMHS once the Japonski Island Boathouse is rehabilitated and functional.



A Matt Donohoe's photograph featured in the show at the 2008 annual meeting. This one shows the *Helen A* being worked on at Seaward Shipyard in Ketchikan in 1985.

2008 Annual Meeting and Matt Donohoe Photo Exhibit

"Trolling for Salmon" was the theme of Sitka Maritime Heritage Society's 2008 annual meeting in February. Commercial salmon trolling (catching fish by hook and line from a slowly moving boat) has more than a hundred years of history in southeastern Alaska, an industry that has had its ups and downs. One peak was in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Baby Boomers with a penchant for adventure and nature found their way to southeastern Alaska, where they found wooden boats, picturesque cannery ruins, colorful old timers and a unique lifestyle.

Trollers on the annual meeting panel and in the audience shared stories and experiences about learning to fish, characters of the time, and good and bad days on the grounds. Eric Jordan was panel host, and kept everything moving along with warmth and personality. The panel, John Skeele, Sheri Tuttle, Ralph Guthrie and Charlie Wilber, and the fishermen (both men and women) from the audience often evoked laughter that brought onlookers in from other events in Harggan Hall.

The troll fishery seems to foster an interesting community, wonderful storytellers, and some great stories.

As Howard Pendell noted, it is interesting to be considered "historic," but this generation of fishermen, with the mix of romance and shrewdness that it takes to carry on trolling, are a part of Sitka's unique heritage.

Dan Etulain recorded the event, and the SMHS hopes to gather permissions and have a dvd available.

A grant from the Alaska Humanities Forum funded a display of photographs by Matt Donohoe as part of the annual meeting. These beautiful photographs, a portrait of the fishing villages and harbors of thirty years ago, will be framed and most will become part of the permanent collection of the SMHS and the Port Alexander Historical Society. They will be on display together at least one more time in Sitka, possibly as part of the 2009 spring art festival.

Eric Jordan also contributed an electronic slide show of his fine photos during the break, with affectionate portraits of fishermen, boats, and action shots of generations of Jordans pulling in salmon.

The Aftermath of War

Steamship Days in Sitka -Part Two

by Bill DeArmond

World War II was hard on the Alaska Steamship Company and its vessels -- as indeed it was hard on most U.S. shipping lines and most Americans -- and the postwar era started off with a disaster, the loss of the SS *Yukon* near Seward in February of 1946 at night in a blinding snowstorm. She was carrying 369 passengers out of Seward, and the wreck claimed the lives of 11 of those aboard her. The loss also meant a 20 percent reduction in the size of the Alaska Steam fleet, which had ended the war with just five of its passenger-freight vessels, the *Yukon* and the four mentioned in the first article in this series: the *Alaska*, *Aleutian*, *Baranof*, and *Denali*.

It was a tough loss for the company to absorb. The *Yukon*, 360 feet overall, had been an occasional caller at Sitka after the Alaska Line acquired her in 1924, though they mostly ran her out to Southwestern Alaska after stops at Ketchikan and Juneau. She was the oldest of the five, built in 1899 at Philadelphia as the *Mexico*, later operated as the *Colon* by the Panama Railway Company, from whom Alaska Steam bought her. Despite her age, she was fast and maneuverable, with twin screws driven by two triple-expansion engines, and was a favorite of many passengers between Seattle and Juneau, at a time when every regular traveler had a particular first choice among the steamers. Many Sitkans came or went south by way of Juneau just so as to be able to travel in her.

Of the surviving four ships, the *Alaska* was one of the very few ships that had been purchased new by Alaska Steam, which specialized in purchasing second-hand vessels and converting them for Alaska service, sometimes rebuilding them quite extensively. In fact, of more than 60 ships the company owned and operated at one time or another from the time it was founded in 1895, just four were acquired new. As mentioned in the first article in this series, the *Alaska* had been laid down for the U.S. Navy as a light cruiser, and when she was made redundant by an arms-limitation treaty while still under construction, was bought by Alaska Steam and turned into a passenger ship.

The *Aleutian* (she whose sojourn on the beach at the mouth of Indian River in June 1935 was pictured in The *Baranof*, the last of the quartet that survived

the previous article) had a good deal in common with the *Yukon*. She had also started life named *Mexico*, was built at Philadelphia (launched 1906), and was a twin-screw steel vessel. She was however slightly larger than the *Yukon* at 6361 tons and 400 feet overall, and was the largest of the five post-war vessels. When Alaska Steam bought her in 1929 they spent more than a million dollars completely refitting her (at a time when that was real money), and called her the flagship of the fleet. She was known as the most luxurious and spacious vessel among those in passenger service, with a capacity of 334 first-class passengers and 162 in steerage.

The *Denali* had been purchased from the Grace Line in 1938; Grace had had her built in 1927 as the *Caracas*. She was a bit smaller than the *Alaska* and *Aleutian* at 4,300 tons, 323.5 feet overall, with a 2,500 horsepower triple-expansion engine driving a single screw.

The *Aleutian*, the *Alaska*, and the *Denali* were all named for a predecessor which had been lost. The first *Aleutian* was wrecked near Kodiak in May 1929, with the loss of the life of one crewman. (Underwater explorers located her remains on the bottom a few years ago.) The original *Alaska* was lost with 42 lives off the coast of northern California when she struck a reef in heavy fog in August 1921; she was under charter to another line at the time as a mail carrier - then an important and lucrative sideline to the passenger trade. The first *Denali* was lost off the British Columbia coast in 1935, with no loss of life.

The fact that the second *Alaska* and *Aleutian* did not officially carry any "II" or other designation to distinguish them from their predecessors can make it tricky to identify photographs of these vessels. In the years between the time paddle propulsion faded away and the streamline era, there were thousands of medium-sized passenger/freight steamers in service all over the world, and they all tended to look pretty similar, especially in black-and-white photos. That problem exists to a lesser extent with regard to the *Denali*, which made Alaska Steam's last passenger run to Sitka in the fall of 1954. The first *Denali* had been a freighter, with accommodations for only a few passengers, and is fairly easy to distinguish from her successor in photographs.

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The Alaska Steamship Company's *SS Alaska*, from a postcard in the collection of Bill DeArmond.



into the 1950s, had also been purchased, along with the *Mount McKinley* (meaning that that mountain had given both its names to Alaska Steamship Company vessels) from Grace a couple of years before the *Denali*. These were originally named the *Santa Ana* and the *Santa Elisa*. The *Mount McKinley* did not survive WWII; she was wrecked in 1942 while being operated on behalf of the government. The *Baranof*, like the *Denali*, had been built by Grace for the tourist trade, so did not need a great deal of conversion for the Alaska run. The *Baranof* was somewhat the larger of the two, nearer the size of the *Yukon*, at 4990 tons, 360 feet overall. She had been built at Camden, N.J. in 1919. The *Baranof* and the *Denali* provided the bulk of Alaska Steam's Sitka service in the post-war period, though the *Alaska* and the *Aleutian* also called here occasionally.

This writer made his last trip under the Alaska Steam flag on the *Baranof* in the spring of 1949, when the DeArmond family moved from Ketchikan back to Sitka, complete with dog, Blueberry. I remember stopping at Todd Cannery on Peril Strait - then a thriving and very busy little town, now just a green patch of alders on the beach, with some fallen piling and rusty iron - and with my younger sister taking the latter ashore for a walk, which he much appreciated. He did not show similar appreciation, however, for being dragged back to the *Baranof* for the run on to Sitka; he had a particular aversion to the gangway, and it took two of us to propel him up it and on up to his kennel on the upper deck. It had a good location, sheltered between the after side of the wheelhouse and the stack, which radiated a good deal of heat. Jane and I were worried that he was not being properly fed, or anyway provided with the kind of delicacies he could expect at

home, so we made regular illicit visits to him there to augment his diet with morsels from the dining saloon.

Managing the schedules for those ships was always a problem for Alaska Steam, and sometimes they showed up at places other than their usual ports of call. There was a steady traffic in passengers and freight year round between Alaska and Puget Sound, though passengers of course traveled more in the summer, which was also tourist season. Those seasonal differences were ironed out fairly easily by laying up one or two of the ships at times during the winter. However, the picture was also much affected by the cannery trade, then the backbone of the Alaska economy, which hit two frantic peaks each year, in the spring when supplies and crews were coming north, and in the fall, when the crews and the salmon pack went south. Sometimes at those seasons, demand for space exceeded the supply of it in the ships, and cannery owners resorted to all sorts of stratagems to get their crews and cargoes on the ships, and if possible keep the crews and cargoes of their competitors off.

Much of that trade was handled by the freight-only vessels, since passengers, or some of them, did not care much for stopping at the cannery towns, with their unmistakable noises and fragrances, and delays. However, peak demand was such that the passenger ships had to join in the cannery trade, whether the passengers liked it or not.

To be continued in future issues.

Boathouse Rehabilitation Architecture

The SMHS was recently awarded a grant for \$91,000 from the National Scenic Byways program, for architectural blueprints for the boathouse rehabilitation. Once the grant is released, a request for proposals will go out to historical architects. Public meetings will solicit ideas and to review the design as it progresses.

The SMHS is seeking interested community members to participate in an exhibits committee, to plan the exhibits for the heritage center so that the architects can design around them. This will include deciding what to cover and how. Some ideas for interpretation include hands-on fishing gear, video or sound recordings, interpretive panels, and dioramas. Call 747-3448 if you are interested in helping.

Coming Up

On Alaska Day (October 18th) the SMHS is planning to once again offer **grilled black cod** lunches. The SMHS will have a booth at **WhaleFest**, the first weekend of November, with the new t-shirts, featuring a woodcut image of the boathouse and the shore boat Donna.

Also coming up this fall, the SMHS will be teaming with the Sitka Historical Society to show film taken by Les Yaw in 1935-36 of Sheldon Jackson School. Les Yaw's son Charles had the film transferred to dvd. The film shows boatbuilders Andrew Hope and Peter Simpson, the school sawmill, and the building of the school seiner *SJS*.



Northwest Coast Carver Tommy Joseph created this bentwood box, with a porthole framing a painting in the interior, for the maritime art show and auction the SMHS held in March as part of Arti-Gras/Sitka Spring Festival. Thank you to all the artists and purchasers who made this event such a success.

Photo by James Poulson.

NEW T-SHIRTS, HATS AND TOTE BAGS

The new SMHS T-shirt has a woodcut image by Rebecca Poulson of the shoreboat *Donna* going in to the Japonski Island Boathouse.

The shirts are available in a variety of colors, short-sleeve, \$20, long-sleeve, \$25. This same boathouse image is also on Tote Bags, a large, heavy duty natural cotton canvas bag, for \$25.

They are easily the size of a grocery bag.

Our hats have the shore boat (ferries between Sitka and Japonski Island) and Arrowhead embroidered on the front. They are pigment-dyed cotton caps and are in blue or red, for \$20, or oilskin caps, in brown or black, for \$25. The shirt from 2006 features a canned salmon label found in the old Pyramid Packing Company cannery, built in 1918 and now home to Fishermen's Quay and Murray Pacific, on Sitka's waterfront.



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SITKA MARITIME HERITAGE SOCIETY

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Rebecca Poulson, board president (907) 747-3448
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August 15th, 2008

Dear Supporter of Sitka's Maritime Heritage,

The board of the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society would like to update you on the progress on the Japonski Island Boathouse rehabilitation, and invite you to consider contributing to the construction fund, as we work toward rehabilitation and operation of the Japonski Island Marine Ways building as a working maritime heritage center. Boat and canoe building and repair, oral history, hands-on displays and classes will preserve history and perpetuate Sitka's traditions.

- The SMHS has been busy year-round with heritage events, including a reception for the Sitka Sound Ocean Adventure Race featuring a Davis boat; a maritime art auction in March featuring creations by local artists; and the annual meeting in February on Trolling for Salmon with stories, photos and history.
- A \$91,000 grant from the National Scenic Byways program was awarded the SMHS in December, for complete architectural blueprints for the rehabilitation. It has been working its way to us over the past six months, and we can soon begin this exciting work.
- The Delta Western fuel dock project continues to move forward. The sublease of the tip of the Boathouse property (which the SMHS leases from the City and Borough of Sitka – which received this land in a deal initiated by the SMHS) to fuel distributor Delta Western was signed in early spring. The fuel dock will have underground storage tanks, to be refilled from bulk storage elsewhere in Sitka. The Assembly recently voted to ask the Planning Commission to rezone this area Waterfront, to reflect the need for more services for Sitka's maritime sector. The sublease will bring in a minimum of \$50,000 and a cap of \$75,000 a year to the SMHS, which will go toward hiring our first staff, a director.

This will provide operating funds, the biggest challenge for nonprofits today, as well as stability to the SHMS.

The SMHS hopes to go directly from architectural blueprints in spring '09 to construction on the rehabilitation. The fuel dock income, the architectural plans, the over \$500,000 in federal grants and all the volunteer work so far put us in a good position to apply to regional foundations for the rest of the funds needed for construction.

The most important element is local support. Mmemberships and local donations demonstrate that this project is locally supported, and has viability into the future.

Please join or renew your membership if expired (your membership expiration date will be on your mailing label) and, consider making a donation to the construction fund. The SMHS is a 501-c-3 nonprofit, so donations are tax-deductible.

Enjoy the newsletter, and check out the website at www.sitkamaritime.org for the schematic design, military and maritime history, and lots of pictures. Feel free to contact board members for more information.

Thank you for your support.

Rebecca Poulson, Board President

for the board of the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society: Matt Hunter, Joe D'Arienzo, Linda Blankenship, Mike Litman, Jerry Dzugan, Mark Gorman, Jan Steinbright.