

The Sitka Maritime Heritage Society acquired a treasure trove from Sitka's boat building past when Harry Jimmy donated items from his Katlian Street boat shop, recently.

The donated items include several wood planes, boat molds, patterns, lumber and parts for a rowboat all of which the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society will use or display at their Japonski Island museum, said SMH board member Rebecca Poulson.

The items had been stored at Jimmy's boat shop on Katlian Street, next to Fishermen's Quay. The shop was originally built by Andrew Hope, Sitka's best-known and most prolific boatbuilder. Hope built many boats, mostly commercial fishing boats, from the 1920s up to his last boat, the Vali, in the 1960s. Jimmy says Herman Kitka, who worked with Hope, told him the shop was built in 1934.

The donated artifacts were presumably used or made by Hope. Some of the planes have wooden bodies, so date from the early 20th century or before, and some are all metal.

The molds are patterns around which a boat is built and are for a Davis-style boat, a sturdy rowboat probably 12 to 14 feet long. According to Jimmy the boat had a transom (squared off end) for an outboard. These boats were designed to move easily, if slowly, through the water, powered by oars or a small outboard.

The Davis-style is named for the boats made by the Davis boatshop in Metlakatla, which built wood rowboats for sale throughout Southeast Alaska in the 1920s and 30s. The molds donated to the Maritime Heritage Society are for Andrew Hope's version of this classic round-bottomed work boat; and the SMHS is planning to build a boat using them.

One donated artifact is the bowstem for the boat, which will be preserved as an example of Hope's craftsmanship. It is made of yellow cedar, nearly all of it made from one piece of wood. It is smoothed to a polish, and has a rabbet roughed in to receive the planking ends.

Harry Jimmy rented the boatshop in 1968 to build his own boat, the gillnetter Peril Strait. The design is by William Garden, a popular Northwest marine architect. The boat was Garden's version of a Canadian gillnetter, and was still "in graphite," freshly drawn, when Jimmy purchased the plans at Garden's Seattle office. Jimmy says it is a much better sea boat than others of the type. He had no training in boatbuilding, and used books, though he also had assistance later from Herman Kitka.

Jimmy built his first boat at age 12 at the Haines Packing Company plant. He says most of the population of Haines and Klukwan worked there in those days. He built a simple flat-bottomed row boat. The cannery manager let him have the wood to build it, but told him he'd have to pay him back if it fell apart. Jimmy smiled as he recalled how the cannery crew "launched" the boat by throwing it into the water from the dock. It made a very loud noise hitting the water - but didn't fall apart.

Kathy Hope Erickson, a granddaughter of Andrew Hope, was walking down Katlian Street when she saw the door to the boat shop open and peeked in. As SMHS volunteers were getting artifacts down from the rafters, she said she had never before been inside her grandfather's boat shop. She posed for a photo holding one of the planes, likely used by her grandfather, in that very space.