

Both Choy's *Paper Shadows* and Ng's *The Chinese in Vancouver* attest to the increasing maturity of Chinese Canadian historical writing. They analyze identity as complex – rooted in time, generation, locale, and interaction with other Chinese and European groups. To sum up, Chinese Canadians

imagined their identities while being engaged in many layers of community interaction. More books like these would continue to build the nascent field of Chinese Canadian history and would also make important contributions to Canadian immigration history.

Ships of Steel, A British Columbia Shipbuilder's Story

T.A. McLaren and Vickie Jensen

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SHIPS OF STEEL tells the story of the careers of two men, William Dick McLaren and his son Thomas Arthur McLaren, and is set within the context of British Columbia's steel shipbuilding industry, from the 1920s through the 1990s. The McLaren story begins in Scotland with the shipbuilding endeavours of W.D. McLaren, which included converting war surplus minesweepers into passenger vessels for the Union Steamship Company. In 1927 McLaren moved to Vancouver and worked as a consulting engineer.

The Second World War created an urgent need for merchant ships, and W.D. McLaren served as manager of the newly established West Coast Shipbuilders. His son Arthur, as a new graduate of UBC's engineering school, joined him. The wartime ships, including

the famous "Park" vessels, were designed for mass production, and, although their construction produced a surge in shipyard activity, it did not prepare the industry for the postwar period. "The experience," notes Arthur McLaren, "was doing the same ship fifty-five times, not building fifty-five different ships" (69). The details of the wartime program are fascinating and well illustrated, but more credit should have been given to the way that H.R. MacMillan and his West Coast cronies stole the march on eastern shipbuilders when establishing a Second World War shipbuilding program.

After the war Arthur McLaren decided, against sound advice, to establish his own shipyard. And, with considerable perseverance and imagination, he succeeded in making it a

sound and innovative company. The book provides a detailed record of Allied's production up to the construction of British Columbia's infamous "fast ferries," parts of which were built by Allied, but the discussion of these vessels and what went wrong with the program is very limited.

Ships of Steel recounts the details of design and construction of many important BC vessels, particularly from the post-Second World War era. These include the *Sidney* and *Tsawwassen*, the first vessels built for BC Ferries; the ferry *Anscomb*, with a service record of over fifty years on Kootenay Lake; the *Omineca Princess*, built in 1976 for service on Francois Lake; the successful *Spirit* Class BC Ferries; and a host of less obvious or little known, but collectively very important, tugs, barges, special purpose craft, and fishing vessels.

Although *Ships of Steel* may be a BC shipbuilder's story, the book has broader interest as Allied Shipbuilders became particularly expert at building vessels that could be constructed, cut into sections, and then reassembled in remote areas such as the Upper MacKenzie River and the Interior of British Columbia. Allied's accomplishments in sending sectioned vessels to Waterways, Alberta, were impressive, as were the many vessels it built for use on the lakes and rivers of British Columbia. Similarly, Allied became a major builder for Arctic and North Sea oil exploration in the 1970s and constructed many

supply vessels, ice-breakers, and similar ships.

Perhaps one of the most useful features of this book is the many insights it provides into the nature of shipbuilding, ship design, ship construction for remote locations and the operation of a shipyard on the Pacific Coast. Offering numerous details and perspectives that would be difficult or impossible to find in other published sources, the book includes appendices that list all the vessels built by Allied as well as by other shipyards in British Columbia.

This highly recommended and very readable book presents useful introductory and contextual material and a large selection of diverse illustrations that depict not only a wide range of vessels but also many aspects of shipbuilding. Our quibbles are minor: the organization of chapters, which are defined both chronologically and topically, is sometimes confusing; no references are included for the text; and some of the shipbuilding terminology may be too specialized for general readers. Finally, we must take issue with T.A. McLaren's comment, (50-1) "You don't build ships on the sides of hills," to which Ken Mackenzie retorts, "Oh yeah? There is a successful aluminum shipyard halfway up Mt. Maxwell on Saltspring Island." Perhaps the Saltspring Islanders talked to Arthur McLaren about the difficulties he had when launching vessels on the flat lands around Burrard Inlet.