



Mystery #7 Boatbuilding

Fishermen have a special relationship with their boats. At certain times of the year they spend more waking hours on the water than they do at home. Today's fishermen know a little bit about everything that makes their boats run and take special care to keep everything in tip-top shape. Getting towed in because of a malfunction means a loss of income and at the very least, a trip out of town to get parts or repairs. During peak season, these down days are especially frustrating and costly.

Boat building began in the Boothbay Region in the early 1800s. It was often a family affair and Adams, Hodgdon, McDougall, Murray, Reed, Rice, and Sawyer are some names of note. Boats were needed to transport goods and passengers and for the fishing industry. As a result, earlier vessels were working vessels which included schooners, coasters, steamers, trawlers, sardine carriers, barks, and bankers. Harold Clifford describes the local boat building industry on page 105 in his book, *The Boothbay Harbor Region 1906-1960*,

"East Boothbay had a shipbuilding tradition which went back a hundred and twenty-five years to the days of the pinkies, Chebacco boats, clipper ships, down-easters, coasters, and fishing schooners for the Grand Banks. By 1906, capital was going into steamships for coastwise and oceanic service, into tugboats and strings of barges. Hodgdon Brothers and the W. Irving Adams yard were no longer called on to build the fast and able bankers which would pitch and roll off Newfoundland and then fly home with a hold full of cod in the first stages of salting."

The first decade of the 1900s was a time of prosperity. There was a new and increased market for pleasure boats. Seasonal summer colonies and grand estates up and down the New England coast were more and more common. Yachts and pleasure boats became a status symbol for the wealthy. Shipyards catered to this market and built sloops, ketches, schooner yachts and knock-about. Rice Brothers outfitted their 20-foot motorboats with their own 4-hp engines. A fire in July of 1917 consumed the Rice yard and 50 stock pleasure boats completely finished and ready to be shipped. Pleasure boats went down east to Bar Harbor and south to Cape Cod. In 1916 U.S. shipyards were reported as launching a ship a day.

Working vessels were busy transporting passengers from the Boothbay Region to Bath and on to Boston. Vessels built in the Boothbay region were delivering rum to West Africa, barrel staves to Barbados, and spruce lumber to South Africa. Fishing vessels supplied the canneries, processors, and freezers with mackerel, herring, and lobster. It was an exciting time to be a mariner and a prosperous time to be a boat builder or sail maker.

The location for Mystery #7 is in an area where shipbuilding was the principal employment for the community in the early 1900s. It is now a town park and public boat launch.

Resources:

The Boothbay Register Anniversary Edition

The History of Boothbay, Southport, and Boothbay Harbor by Francis Greene

The Boothbay Harbor Region 1906-1960 by Harold B. Clifford

The Shipping Days of Old Boothbay by George Wharton Rice

"Earle Barlow's 1890 view of East Boothbay", Boothbay Region Historical Society

Photo Requirements: Include the informational kiosk at this location in your photo.

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