Ditchburn founders, Henry J. left and William (Father of Herbert) about 1910

In 1837 a shipwright named Thomas J. Ditchburn, and a naval architect named Charles Mare set

up Ditchburn & Mare Shipbuilding Co. specializing in the new next-generation technology of steam powered iron hulled ships. Mare bought Ditchburn out in 1847, but he himself went bankrupt in 1855, having underbid on several contracts with the Royal Navy. The company was saved by Lord Alan Spencer-Churchill (Winston's great uncle) and Peter Rolt, a descendant of naval architect Phineas Pett, of Royal Sovereign fame. The Ditchburn sons still worked in the company, but as carpenters; the family had no more interest in the business, and in 1869 decided to start over again in Canada. They took what they could get, like Charles Minett, a block of land on big lake in the middle of nowhere. But it was not unnoticed, there were many tourists, mostly coming to hunt and fish. At this point most would bring along a tent and rough it in the bush, to quote Susanna Moodie, only this act was temporary. They would bring packs of food and ammunition and as many were men, beer, and spirits. These were well off people, not workmen. Workmen worked long days from Monday to Saturday, their only real leisure time was in the evening and Sunday afternoon. These were businessmen, doctors, lawyers, politicians, successful professionals, anyone with the independence and power and money to take actual vacations of more than a few hours. Fishing from the shore didn't get you where the real fish, the trout, walleye, and bass were, they needed boats. Successful men were older, they didn't care for sleeping rough anymore, they needed a proper place to stay and someone to cook, a hotel in the wild was just the thing. Also, they had money. For a time, the railroad ended in Gravenhurst; the local business lobbied against an extension to Huntsville and Bracebridge until they were overcome in 1885 and the line was put through, the pressure was not from the lumber but the tourist industry. The Ditchburn brothers went into their old business building watercraft, Charles Minett built a resort, slightly misnamed after his hometown in the old country; Cleeve Land became Clevelands House; it was one of the first resort hotels and is one of the few still in existence and in business today. Over the next decades resorts began popping up all over the Muskoka Lakes chain, Windermere House, The Royal Muskoka Hotel, by the turn of the century there were almost 50 of them, catering to thousands of tourists, not just men with rifles and fishing rods, but whole families. They wanted to fish, and swim, do sports, eat, and chill. The caveat was time, the season was short, from Victoria Day to the first weekend in September, in 1894 the Monday following was declared a holiday and became known as Labour Day. There were a few hunters in the fall and then a long period of being out logging in the bush, then spring, until the cycle would repeat once more.

The original Ditchburn shop was set up in the village of Rosseau, at the north end of Lake Rosseau. At the time, these were more like modern marinas, a combination of boatbuilding, boat rentals, and tourist outfitting services. Henry was the most entrepreneurial of the brothers, and eventually came to own the company. He expanded to locations in Gravenhurst, Port Carling, Port Cockburn on Lake Joe and even a outpost on Georgian Bay. The principal

products were canoes and rowing skiffs, but there was competition. H. L. Bastien established it's own sales office in Port Carling and in the late 1890's a few gasoline engine powered boats began to appear. Bastien and Thomas Jutten were closer to the industrial heartland and were more apprised on engine technology and quickly established themselves in the nascent motor launch industry, in spite of the considerable additional cost of shipping completed boats from Hamilton by rail where they could be launched at Gravenhurst. Bastien installed a notoriously leaky marine gas station at the Port Carling office, where motorboats could dock and fill up. Ditchburn was already falling behind in 1907 when the aging Henry decided to move the company along to his ambitious nephew Herb. The other boys in the business, Ernie Greavette and Herb's brother Alfred seemed satisfied with the employment life. Tom Greavette started off in the shop but eventually migrated to running the sales end of the business and eventually moved to the high traffic zone of Port Carling. Herb Ditchburn updated the canoe and rowing boat line with three motorboats, a 16-foot motor skiff with a square stern, powered by a single cylinder Gray Marine, a 25-foot open launch with what is clearly a twin cylinder Gray Marine engine, possibly 8-10 hp, and a large sedan launch referred to a "cabin day cruiser" probably also powered by the twin Gray, there wasn't much need or point to go faster than 8-9 mph. But the manufacturing operation in Gravenhurst was still just a small shop with 8-10 employees and probably 20 skiffs and canoes a year and a few motor boats and the occasional cruiser, as opposed to the high-volume output of Hamilton Bay.

A well loaded early Ditchburn circa 1909, the first long deck launch, the Memphis style, ready for a cruise.

By 1910 Gilbert was always way out ahead of the pack, the launches were long, but the foredeck had a lower profile. The hull was narrow at the front but flattened out under the cockpit area, giving some water planing capacity at speed; this would be the design standard for launches until the appearance of runabouts in the mid 1930's. The larger 30-to-36-foot boats had 100 hp Sterling 6-cylinder engines and could reach speeds close to 30 mph. By contrast Ditchburn launch design seemed to be stuck in the 1890's, beamy and heavy with a curving hull and small engines and low speeds; they were good for cruising, but boat buyers were men and men wanted to go fast. Ditchburn's signature launch for 1908 had a huge and unsightly raised barrel bulge hatch over the engine, by 1915, they got the message and flattened the foredeck so the driver could comfortably see where they were going.

Ditchburn's Vigilante, built 1912. The overall look, and particularly the raised pumpkinseed engine hatch seems to be a copy of Minett's Norwood, built the previous year. Ditchburn designs have changed dramatically from the 1909-10 Memphis style pictured above. This remained the typical Ditchburn hull style until the late 1920's, except the raised hatch would be replaced with a flush foredeck. Peck family archives

Although the sides were still all cedar and painted white, the decks and interior were finished in mahogany; it had a high freeboard and a folding windshield; the Ditchburn launch was taking it's final and most recognizable shape. The limousine style top would eventually give way to the more familiar curtain rod style that became the norm for the 1920's. Gilbert was shuttered by 1915; Merrill and Fred had enlisted. In Hamilton Thomas Jutten was embarking on a second career in politics and H. L. Bastien was winding down, the owner was in his eighties and there was no heir apparent. The drop off in potential competition was offset by Canadians holding off indulgence purchases because of the war, but the Americans had been neutral until now, so expansion plans would have to wait until it was over. By 1918, Ditchburn was just another small shop with 14 employees. That would change. The only other serious competition was Bert Minett, who was even smaller at about five employees. The Johnston's of Port Carling were making the big business noise, going all out to produce a low-price everyman motor skiff called a Dis-Pro and for a while they would own the small motorboat market. The opportunity was for upscale launches and runabouts.

Two views of 1918 Ditchburn "Pausar" 30 feet long. To date the oldest surviving Ditchburn launch. Author Photo top, Manotick Classic Boat Club photo, bottom

Ditchburn in Gravenhurst: The Brass Ring 1919 to 1926

City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1266, f1266_it1000

A rare sailing yacht from Ditchburn, the Nayada being unloaded for a Toronto customer, 1923

At the Gravenhurst show, Lake Muskoka Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

By 1919, the boat business in Muskoka had changed. The Hamilton Bay builders Bastien and Thomas Jutten had closed up shop; Minett's output was painfully limited. The Toronto builders seemed to be servicing mostly customers in the city and the lake shore towns; the only big boat shop really left was Canadian Beaver, soon to be James J. Taylor & Sons. Alfred Duke's business had fizzled by 1916, his nephew Charlie was yet to start Duke II. The remaining builders were very small operations, not much more than 5-6 workers at any given time, mostly building rowboats and canoes and from time to time landing a launch contract.

The physical plant of Ditchburn had changed significantly over the years. The uncle (William) had originally conceived of the company as boat builder and boat renter, customers could rent a rowing skiff for a day, did they enjoy themselves? Maybe they might be interested in buying a boat; they could rent space for it here during the season. There were five operations; each one had a boat livery with boats for rent and also selling camping and fishing equipment, the original shop at Rosseau, one at Port Carling, one at Gravenhurst, one a Port Cockburn and one

on Georgian Bay. Each shop would also have a showroom with demo models on display. The Rosseau shop was where the boats were originally built, Herbert shifted this activity to the Gravenhurst location and Rosseau was eventually phased out. The Gravenhurst location was right adjacent to the railhead, which bode well for future out of town sales. A stable was rebuilt into a two-story workshop. This somewhat ramshackle structure burned down in 1915, it was replaced with more fireproof two-story brick workshop.

Robin Adair 1927 Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

The look of the launches had changed significantly over the two decades since gas engine was first installed in a boat, the Memphis style open cockpit launch with the barrel like engine hatch from 1909 had given way to a more modern flatter curve flush foredeck. The automobile styled cantilever top, with it's clips and latches and which would so often get stuck when the rain started or would pinch fingers once it was folded back was replaced with a no-nonsense shower curtain style set up that was easy to pull over. The automobile window with its rectangular nickel-plated brass tubing was replaced with a much cheaper and more durable wood frame.

Underway Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

After the war a conscious decision was made to pivot away from the existing business model. Ditchburn phased out the boat livery business and passed the locations on to new owners, over time they developed into full-service marinas as we know them today. The company discontinued the canoe and rowing skiff products, there was just too much competition from the small shops, at any rate the littlest boats would sell for under $100, leaving $10 of profit each, at best. The small motor skiff market, as noted was being completely sewn up by Dispros; Ditchburn's small motor craft line was also dropped. Henceforth all focus would be on high-end, high-powered motor launches and cruising yachts. They kept the Port Carling office as the sales and marketing division, being at the juncture of the three lakes, Tom Greavette set up his headquarters there and began to place numerous ads in magazines, mostly the type that would be bought and red by well-to-do men. Another type of boat now entered the line, the hard chine racing runabout.

Three shots of a Ditchburn launch, mid 1920's Author photos

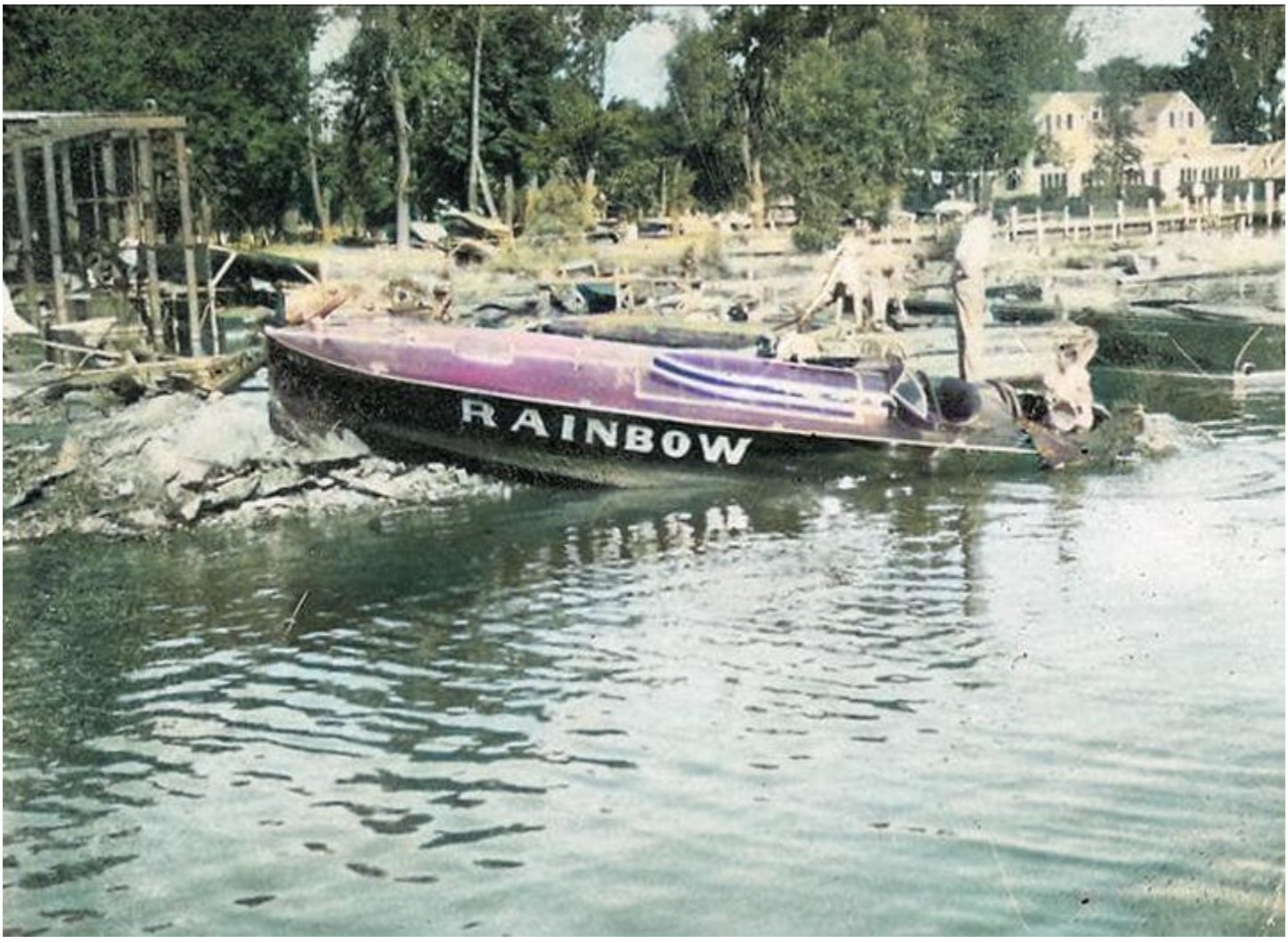
The Americans had already mainstreamed the hard-chine planing hull runabout as a family friendly boat, capable of both high speed and leisurely cruising. By 1920-22 Hacker and Belle Isle and the new Chris-Craft were exclusively building this style, and they were selling. By contrast, Canadian builders maintained the pre-war approach, long deck displacement launches were family boats and hard-chine boats were wild race boats. In theory this was a very good business plan: after buying this nice launch, might I interest you also in a race boat, something to go and zip around by yourself, race the other fellows, have a little fun in after all that slow speed touring? Several thousand for the launch and a further few thousand for the racer? Why not spoil yourself, you can afford it.

Rainbows: Designer George Crouch, owner and driver Harry Greening, builder Herbert Ditchburn mid 1920's

Ditchburn made two notable boats over 1920 and 1922, Rainbow for Harry Greening and Dolly Durkin for the Eaton family. Dolly Durkin (the origin of the name is lost to history, I'm guessing it was a character in a long-forgotten Victorian-era children's book) was 38 foot long hard-chine runabout with an all-mahogany cabin covering the cockpit seating area in the back, a masterpiece of wood joinery. Dolly was fast, powered by the biggest Sterling marine engine available, the 8 cylinder 275 hp Dolphin that could push it to 36 mph. Rainbow was ordered by Greening, CEO of B. Greening Wire, a steel wire and cable products manufacturer in Hamilton. Greening had started informal racing in 1908 with a series of boats called the Gadfly's, presumably the work of the Hamilton shops, alas, there are no photos or details of these craft.

His move into competitive racing began in 1920 with a contract with Ditchburn to build Rainbow (the first), a hard chine runabout with a 6-cylinder Sterling for power. Hawker was good at designing launches and cruising yachts, racers were out of his wheelhouse and Ditchburn went to the man of the hour, George Crouch, mastermind behind a slew of successful boats over the 1920's.

Rainbow was successful and won the Fisher-Allison Cup in 1920 (sponsored by Carl Fisher, of Indianapolis Speedway fame), the boat did not last long. Greening was already on to Rainbow II the next year, Rainbow I was sold to S. B. Eagan, but it was still competitive at the 1921 race, winning a leg, but losing overall. Eagan lost control of Rainbow in a race the following year and ran it up in a rocky shoreline, and that was it.

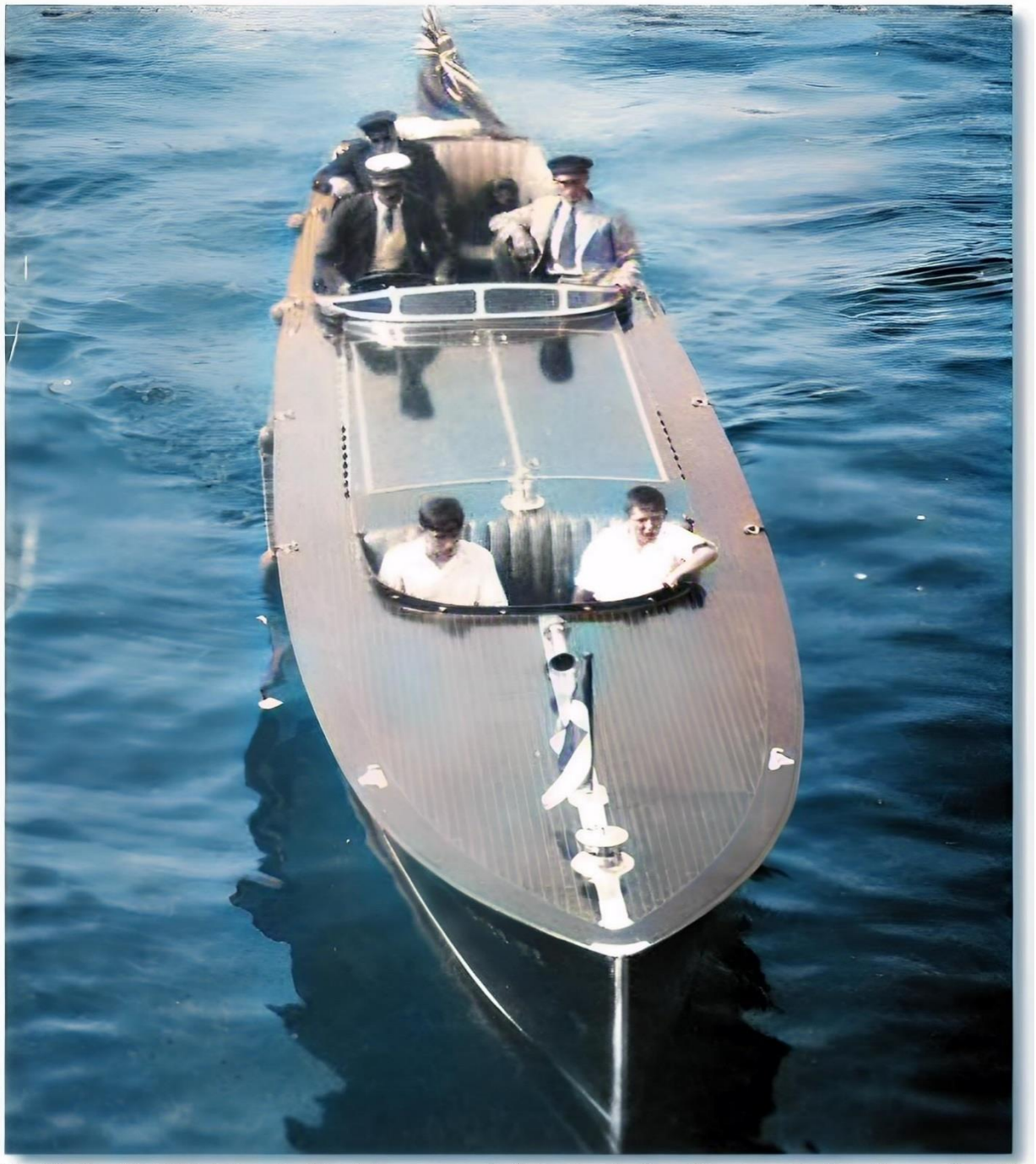


Up on the rocks, the end of the original Rainbow

Then in 1922, one of the strangest rule kerfuffle's occurred, with the A.P.B.A. suddenly banned single step hulls along with multiple engines. The real reason (not mentioned publicly) was to get rid of Gar Wood, who used this technology to rule the Cup straight from 1917 to 1921. It worked and Wood told the A.P.B.A. where to go, but he was the one that left, so job done! Wood concentrated on the water speed record after that. It was the sort of childish move that is often typical of adult competition, but the rule stayed, and the remaining competitors had to figure out what new technology to put in its place. The hulls were, as noted to be pure runabouts, that is no lifting configurations, such as steps. Rainbow III followed the rules and was closing in on the 1923 Gold Cup when a cotter pin broke and the propellor came off. But for the 1924 event Greening wanted some more leverage and he and Crouch came up with lateral steps in the bottom, a sort of lapstrake effect that would work around the new rules without breaking them.

Rainbow IV, at full power.

This boat was Rainbow IV. No one thought it would make much of a difference, but when Greening won the race, the tears and whining commenced. The complaint was that the lapstrake style hull was just another type of step, but the rules only banned the single traditional side-to-side step, not what was on Rainbow IV. Eventually the organizers agreed that Rainbow IV violated the spirit, if not the letter of the rules, and the Cup went to second place Caleb Bragg and Baby Bootlegger. Just three years later the rule prohibiting hydroplane steps was deleted. Greening never took the top prize, but he kept ordering one new Rainbow from the Ditchburn works each year up until the final IX in 1929.



The Wa Chee We 1923: Driver-Carl Reed, Passengers-Carl's brother, Le Grand Reed, and Le Grand's sons, Donald on the right and Kingstone on the left. In rear, Carl Reed's father-in-law, Mr. Fraser

The Wa Chee Wee was sunk in the 1960's and recently raised and restored to running condition

Wa Chee Wee today Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

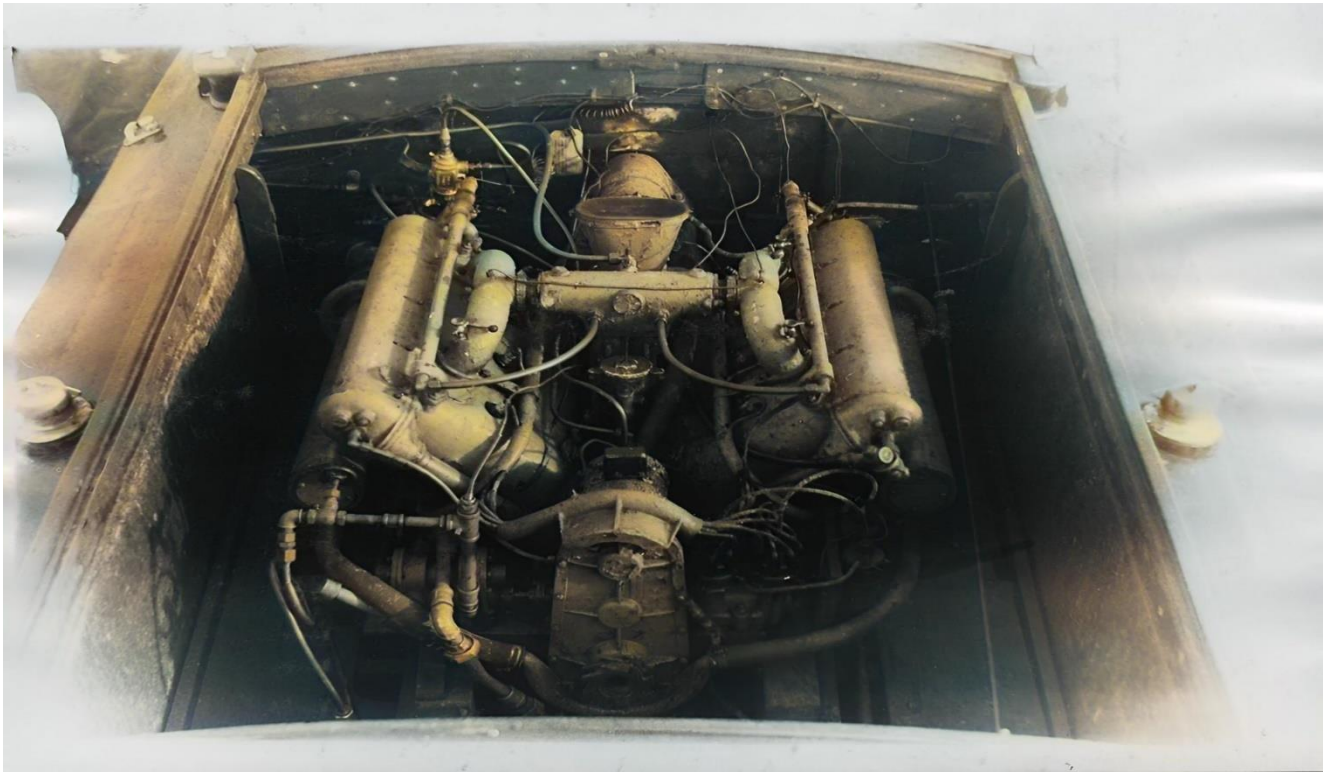
Other than pure racing boats such as Rainbow, Ditchburn also made numerous fast runabouts. They were hard chine, but still had the look of the launches, with the passenger and driver in the rear part, the engine forward and a great long deck stretching into the waves. Rainbow was the pioneer, but an inspiration. B-IV came out in 1921, just a year after the original Rainbow, a 28-foot-long torpedo stern runabout built for Carl Borntraeger; the hull had a low profile but a big Sterling engine, which required a raised engine compartment. Prohibition was one of five gentleman's runabouts with a much higher freeboard than B-IV; at 35 feet they were longer than most of the launches Ditchburn offered. One of the five, the Wa-Chee-Wee was recently recovered off the bottom of a lake and found to be still in solid condition. Dolly Durkin has the reputation as Ditchburn's most impressive creation, but for my money that prize goes to one of the smaller boats, the Dix. The Dix was a torpedo stern gentleman's speeder built for Dick Clemson, an American businessman and long-time Muskoka cottager. It had a cedar hull and mahogany decks and was powered by a 6-cylinder Scripps Gold Cup. It just had that great design, one of those aha moments, that comes around unexpectedly and is so hard to duplicate. Apparently, according to William Gray in Wood and Glory, that Ditchburn did offer Dix as a model, (obviously they had the framing moulds, so why not) to be called "Rainbow". But no trademark was ever registered by Ditchburn with that name, an issue that would cause future aggravation (but more on that later).

Off for a ride in Ditchburn built B-IV Peck family archives

But these were the glamour boats, the ones that get all the attention. What about the taxi boats, the family launches? One of the unspoken issues in Ditchburn history is the boat hulls. Painted cedar or African mahogany? I've only ever seen one modern Ditchburn with a painted cedar hull and that was Spindrift, a 24-foot model owned by a Manotick boat club member in the 1980's. Every other Ditchburn launch you see in real life or can find a picture of has an all-mahogany hull. All mahogany hulls became the norm by 1930, but prior to that they were a lot more common. The standard displacement launches at 24 and 31 feet for the most part came with painted cedar hulls. The decks were mahogany, at least by the mid-teens, although many builders sometimes used cheaper woods and slathered on a muddy reddish-brown stain that made any wood look like mahogany (Myles Jeffrey did this after using cheaper Philippine Mahogany in his 1930's boats). All modern restorations are all in mahogany, period, so an element of historical authenticity is lost. Photos of Ditchburn boats in books and online are all the high-end boats, therefore the hulls are all mahogany.

The 24 foot model, 120 or so were built in the later 1920's Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

The original Struan II at speed, late 1920's. A replica was built by Breen Boats.



Two views of Ditchburn built Whippet The engine is a Hispano Suiza, I expect the higher power model known as the H-3 Peck family archive

Whippet today Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

The shop had maybe 15-20 workmen in 1920, this was expanded to fifty by 1923 and close to 70 by 1929. The average production in the early 1920's was about 18-20 boats a year, by 1929 it was supposed to be a hundred, although the Ditchburn product was mostly big launches and runabouts, and regardless of skill and speed, these were still time-consuming. Bryson Shields had noted that 26–36-foot launches took about 1800-3000 hours of work and even considering that Minett-Shields products were even more fussy and costly than Ditchburn you would still be looking at 1500-2500 hours for a similar sized Ditchburn. Each worker FTE (full time equivalent), as we call it today, would be about 9 hours a day for the weekday and 4 hours on Saturday morning for a total of 49 hours, or considering 50 weeks a year, 2,200-2,400 hours a year, possibly less as most boat shops tended to scale down or close in the summer while the staff catered to tourists. Assuming that of the 70 staff, 20 were office, administrative, bookkeeping, sales, and marketing, purchasing and general plant maintenance staff, their work (at this time in history) was referred as: "non-productive labour". This wasn't a pejorative, it just meant that the individuals were not actually physically building the boats, although they were just as important to the function of the company. The remaining 50 hands-on workers

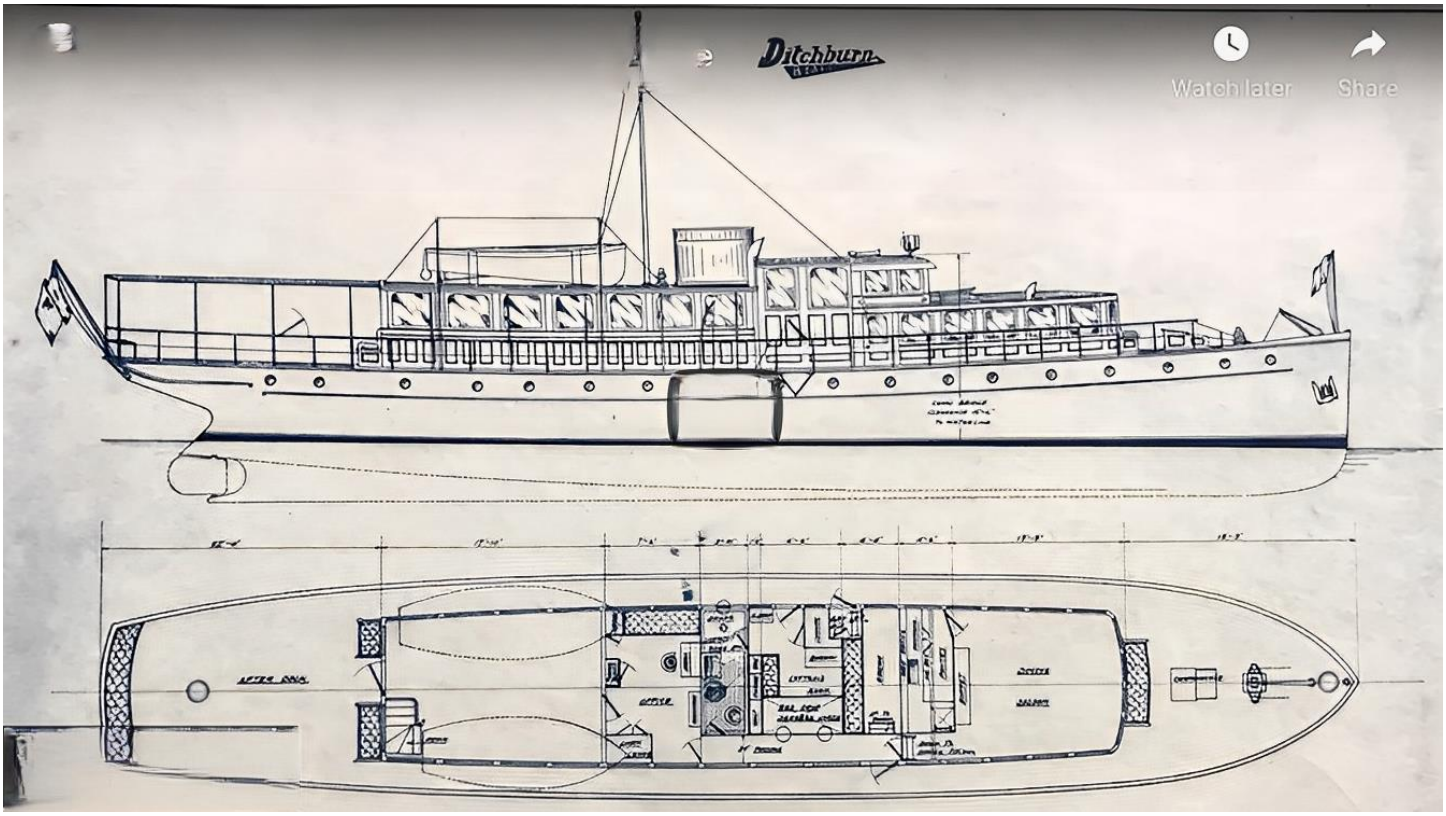
would be able to produce roughly one boat per worker each, so the annual production at maximum would be about 50, maybe 55 boats at year, not 100. Each boat had a simple serial number, the last two digits of the year, a dash, followed by the production number of that boat in that year. The highest recorded number I am aware of is a Commodore Lady Jeane, serial 30-43 (43rd boat in fiscal 1930) so the 50-boat max output seems reasonable, and realistic. But the success of Gravenhurst was only half the Ditchburn story, largely because of the high survival rate of the boats built there, but less well known is the equivalent success of the Orillia operation. Sadly very few of the extraordinary products of this shop have survived, they were just too big to tuck away in a garage or boathouse or barn. In late 1928, the Gravenhurst shop was dramatically extended, as a row of buildings were added to the main brick plant from 1916. Ditchburn had big plans to expand both production and workforce.

Two views of Dix, built by Ditchburn for Dick Clemson Photos Peck family archive

Dix today Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

Ditchburn in Orillia: Big Time Cruising 1925 to 1932

Yes, Ditchburn built sailboats as well, this schooner was for George Gooderham.

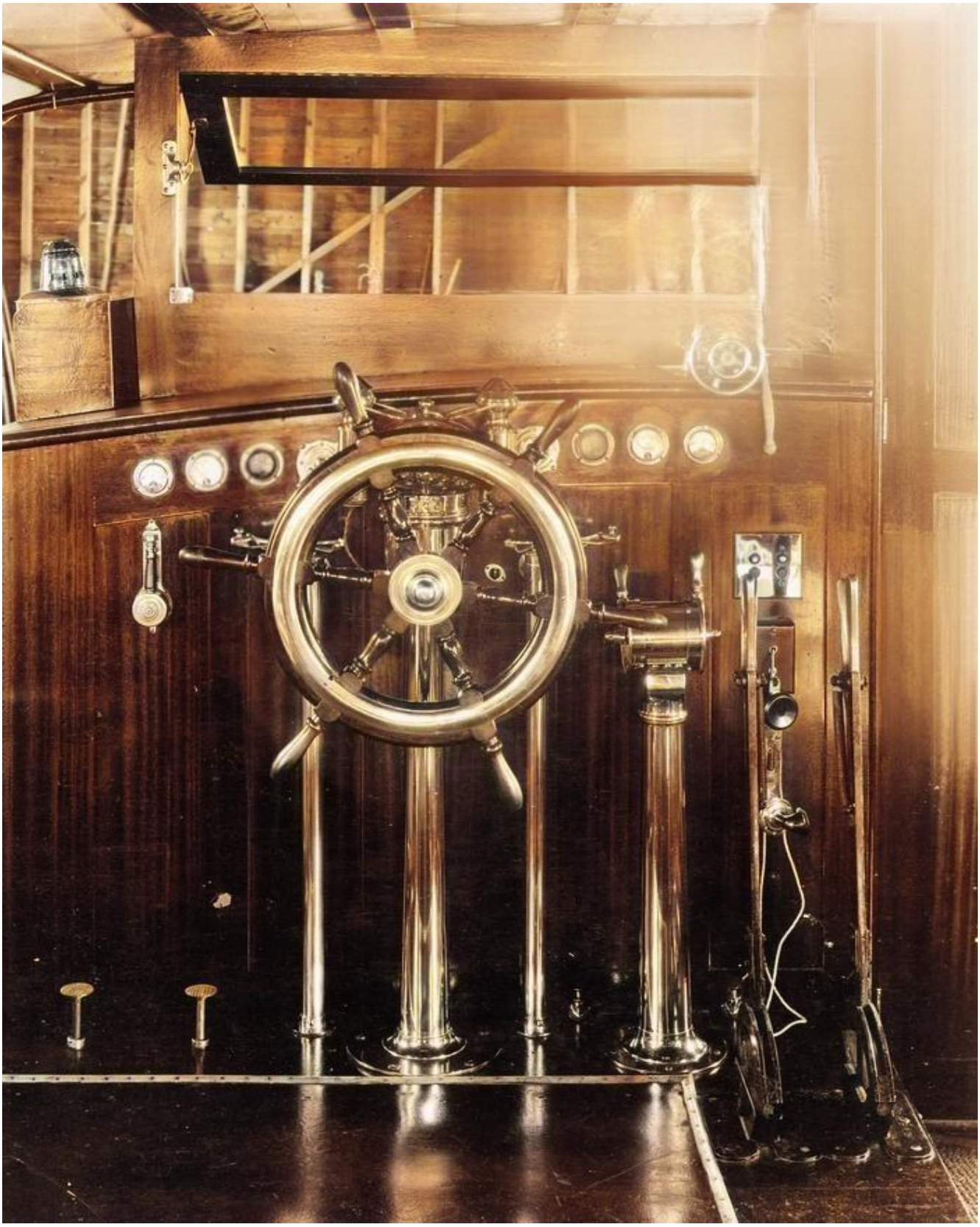


Ditchburn yacht plan

Colborne Street in Orillia no longer goes to the waterfront, the remains of the street are still visible on Lakeshore Road, it seems more like a driveway to long demolished house. Like waterfronts in so many Ontario cities, it has been stripped of any waterside structure and transformed into a largely lifeless boardwalk, an unused beach, a small marina walkway guarded by a metal gate and a punch button combination lock. Even at the height of tourist season, on a sunny Friday evening in early July I noticed there were surprisingly few people out, perhaps because there is so little to do other than go jogging or take your dog for a walk; even then I think I only counted maybe four dogs with owners, there is no off-leash facility, that I could see. But if you look at pictures of any of these places in the turn of the century, at the same times they would be filled with people, businesses, vendors, activities, perhaps a street performer or more. At that time the waterfront, was a busy place, a fun place, with real stuff to do.

Ketch built at the Orillia plant for W. A, Fraser. A ketch is a two-master sailer where the mizzen (or rear mast) is significantly and visibly shorter than the main.

Ditchburn had always built cruisers, but only periodically. The original 1909 catalogue had shown a day cruiser typical of the time, with a cabin amidships and an open area in the rear; it was referred to a "Cabin Day Cruiser" which meant it was good to transport passengers to a Sunday picnic, but nothing longer than that. In 1916 the new brick shop saw the completion of Kawandag, at 73 feet in length and 12-foot beam it was the prototype for the new class of vacation cruiser, although the Eaton family, who ordered it, would likely only ever use it for Sunday afternoon cruises. The design was from the American firm Bowes and Mower, who worked in both building and marine architecture work. Herbert Ditchburn was too busy running a business to also be a designer, so he hired outside help; also the era of the designer-builder was passing, the professions were separating.



Kawandag's steering station. Photo was taken while boat was in winter storage.

Kawandag's open back deck area.

There were and will be the self-taught masters, such as Earl Barnes in the 1930's and Jamie Auld in the 1980's and 90's, but for the most part designers were expected to have a degree in marine architecture or at least engineering. Bert Hawker had gone to the great marine design academy in Glasgow; all the great modern British ship designers went there.

Sterling Petrel, like the bird, not the gas can.

Bert Hawker's military career was over in 1917, a year after joining up, while on PT (physical training) he tripped over a parapet and broke his arm. The injury did not seem serious, but there was nerve damage and reduced mobility and was formally discharged and sent back out on civvy street. He joined Ditchburn, which needed someone with cruiser design experience. Ditchburn was now large enough for an in-house designer, and he filled the job as well as Gravenhurst plant manager. His first big design was the Idylese for a "Col. T. A. Duff" of Toronto. The only such person listed in Might's is Dr. Thomas Alexander Jameison Duff, a surgeon, and a member of the Canadian Army Medical Corps during the conflict and he was demobilized with the rank of Captain, not Colonel. He joined the forces just as Hawker was being mustered out so it's anyone's guess whether this is the cruiser owner. It wouldn't be cheap, Carl Borntraeger had already plunked down $7,500 for Minett's Rita in 1914, which was close to the same general size as Idylese, both were 60-ish feet in length. Still these were

occasional projects, not yet a line, the country was still trying to pull itself back together after the war, the real customers would be once again and as before, wealthy Americans who would make the difference. The United States hadn't suffered the enormous financial and manpower drain as did the Commonwealth (or France) and it recovered quickly in 1919, and then the overconfidence led to a crash in 1920 and then a slower return in 1921-22. By 1924 the rich were ready to buy, the old Polson and Davis yachts were feeling their age and looking it, even with the steam engines being replaced, boats like William Sanford's Naiad looked like something from another century, which it really was.

Idlyese, for Colonel (Captain?) Dr. T. A. Duff.

The economy was recovering, Tom Greavette had scouted some large yacht orders and Ditchburn needed another location to build them, as opposed to landlocked Muskoka. Other than J. J. Taylor in Toronto, stuck in his cramped little shop on Queen's Quay, there was no real

competition in the yacht market. An announcement was made in the Orillia paper in late 1924 and a very basic steel framed structure 40 feet by 125 feet was constructed at the end of Colborne, a long marine railway was built into the water, and the town (it only became a city in 1969). There were two ways to expand a business, debt, or equity; profits alone rarely do the job. Ditchburn chose debt so he could retain full control of the business. The building was finished, and he was able to quickly find workers. It should be noted that at the time Canada had a huge and largely mobile trades workforce, carpenters, machinists, mechanics, painters, and such. Many of them were in the commercial-residential construction industry, which meant working on a factory building or housing development in -15F mid January; the appeal of higher pay in a nice warm boat shop was too good to pass up. At the time tradesman had learned in a very high pressure, on the job environment, not with a nice helpful teacher and a no-fault practice class such as you might find today, but under some tyrannical Scots journeyman who would yell at you and whack you on the head when you did something wrong, or sometimes even when you didn't. Most could easily turn their hand to anything, if needed, a carpenter could fix an engine, a mechanic could set a plank. As with today, you brought your own tools to the job, you were responsible for sharpening your saw or chisel blade; you would lock everything in the toolchest overnight, in many cases you would take it home rather than risk leaving it at work, better safe than sorry. The larger tools, the electric bandsaws, table saws, electric drills, metal lathes, milling machines and shapers would be owned by the company. In earlier years, these would all be run from a system of overhead pulleys, connected to a steam or later gas engine in a room attached to the main building, but by the 1920's shop power equipment was being sold with an electric motor already built in. All midsize towns were fully electrified by now. Even Port Carling had the juice now, courtesy of the Bala Generating Station installed several miles down the road at Bala Falls.

Winton had built 1900's luxury cars, as this became competitive, they moved into commercial diesel engines.

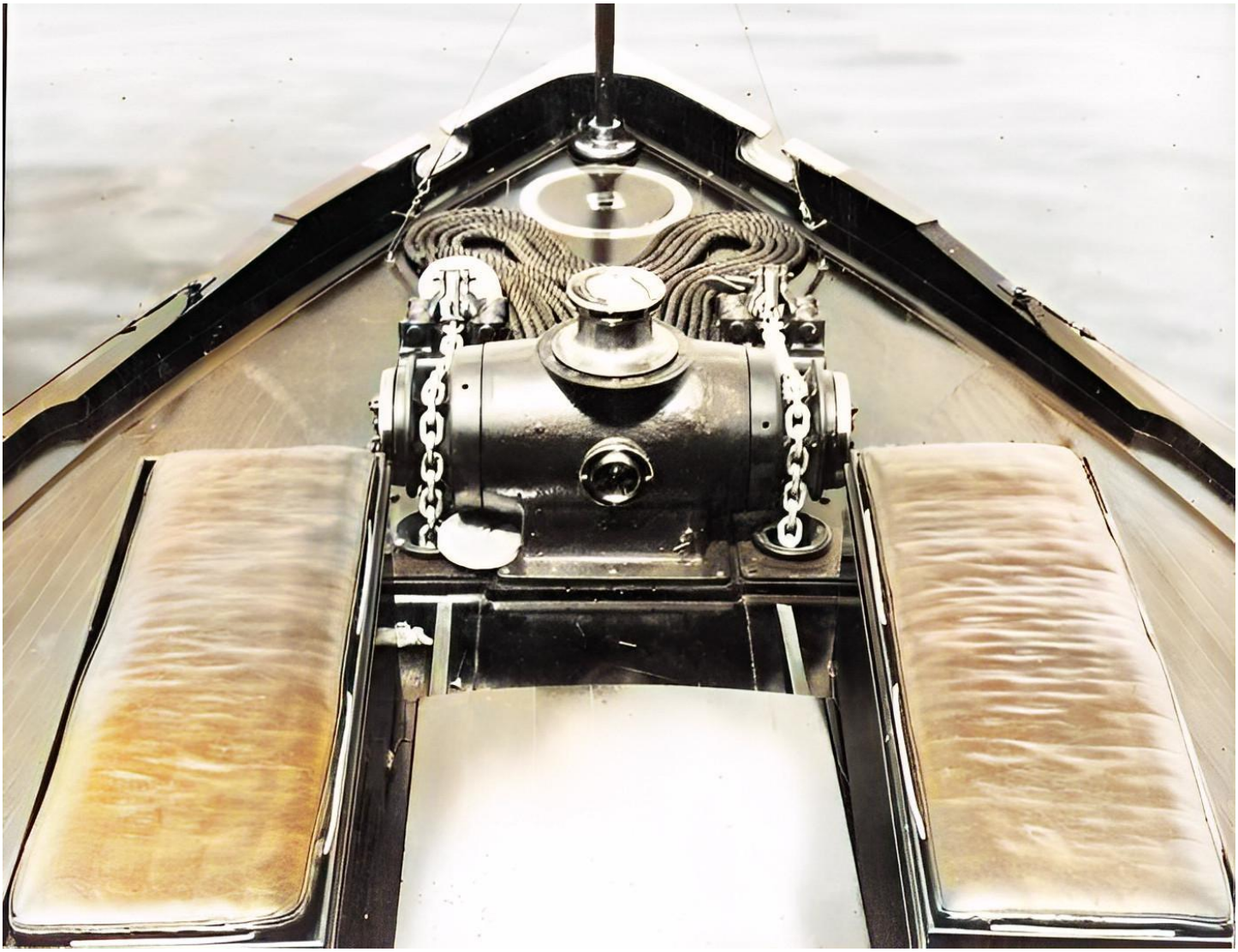
The production of the Orillia plant was impressive, given the standing start in 1925. It was a non-descript building, just a big barn. The factory was 40 feet wide, which meant it could handle two, maybe three yachts at a time, perhaps a seventy-two-footer on one side and two 45 footers on the other. Because most of the survivor Ditchburn's are launches and runabouts, most of the attention is focused on the small boat Gravenhurst works. But the real revenue generator in the latter 1920's was the Orillia plant, it produced about 30 big, sometimes very big motor yachts over its mere seven-year history, not to mention several Customs patrol boats for the Federal Government. The design work on the yachts, and pretty much all of the Ditchburn output at this point was Bert Hawker; he was also VP of manufacturing for both the Orillia and Gravenhurst plants. The inaugural build was a big one, a 100-foot yacht for J. K. L. Ross, son of

James Ross, the first CEO of Canadian Pacific Railways. Ross inherited $16 million on his father's death in 1913 and managed to blow the entire wad by 1928. He loved racehorses and yachts and parties, more interested in living life than worrying about things like old age. He was saved from life on park bench by selling his last asset, his house and using the money to move to Jamaica, where he didn't have to worry about cold winters and Canadian prices. However, Ross's money, although dwindling rapidly by 1925, was still good and his yacht Gannet was launched later that year.

Interior of J.K.L. Ross's Gannet. Having a fireplace on your boat, now that's being rich.

Gannet looked more like a mansion on the water than a boat, it was 12 feet wide, the rooms were rectangular and comfortable, you could walk around the interior without bowing and bending and squeezing, which is so often the experience of onboard cruising life. Taylor's cruisers at that time were exemplars of that, they just weren't big enough. Gannet had a real

dining room where you could sit at a table with chairs and a parlor bordered with chesterfields. All the walls and ceilings were paneled with mahogany. More cruisers followed, including a 78-footer built for Gordon Lefebvre, current vice president of GMC Canada and future president of Greavette Boats Ltd., a 66-footer with twin 250 hp Sterling Dolphins for P. D. Saylors, President of Canada Dry Ginger Ale Co. Ltd. the drink of choice for teetotalling Ontario, and for Harry Hatch, President of Gooderham & Worts, when the Distillery District actually distilled stuff, a 65-footer also with the same pair of Sterlings. One half of cruiser sales were to Americans, to the Atlantic coast Richie-rich crowd, such as a 70-footer for Wharton Sinckler of Maine and a 52-footer for John C. Hageman of Long Island. These were all big boats weighing twenty to thirty tons, and they needed a lot of engine muscle to push them. The biggest since Ross's Gannet was the 100-foot Thalassa, for Chauncey Deveraux Stillman. Stillman was an heir to a banking fortune, and did not run a bank or a business, but did just about everything else, "rich, but never idle or indolent" he wrote books, ran a philanthropic trust, fought in the Second World War as a naval intelligence officer, pioneered modern organic farming on his 1,200-acre farm, and was a senior civil servant under James Forrestal. He was in all respects the opposite to the hapless money-frittering Ross; inherited wealth and their ownership of 100-foot Ditchburn cruisers was the only things they had in common.



Thalassa, built for Chauncey Stillman. Note big cruiser anchor windlass and chains.

By 1929 the shop was so busy that they needed a separate manager for the mechanical team, which was filled by a talented local mechanic named Alestair Hunter, of whom more will be heard. The shop was cramped and noisy, but busy, there were seventy full time workers in a 5,000 square foot building; as soon as one yacht went down the slips, the keel was laid for next project right behind it. In making a name in the yacht business in both the United States and Canada, Ditchburn was now on the same plate as Consolidated, Huckins, and Trumpy. This was a competitive industry, but the easy money of the time made for a lot of customers to go around. The launch and runabout market on the Muskoka's was another matter; Ditchburn's Gravenhurst plant was the only producer of consequence. The Disappearing Propellor Boat Co. was bankrupt, accusations, lawsuits and criminal charges were flying every which way. The only other high-level builder was Minett-Shields, but it was a boutique operation, its products

very expensive, 6-8 boats came out of its small shop each year.

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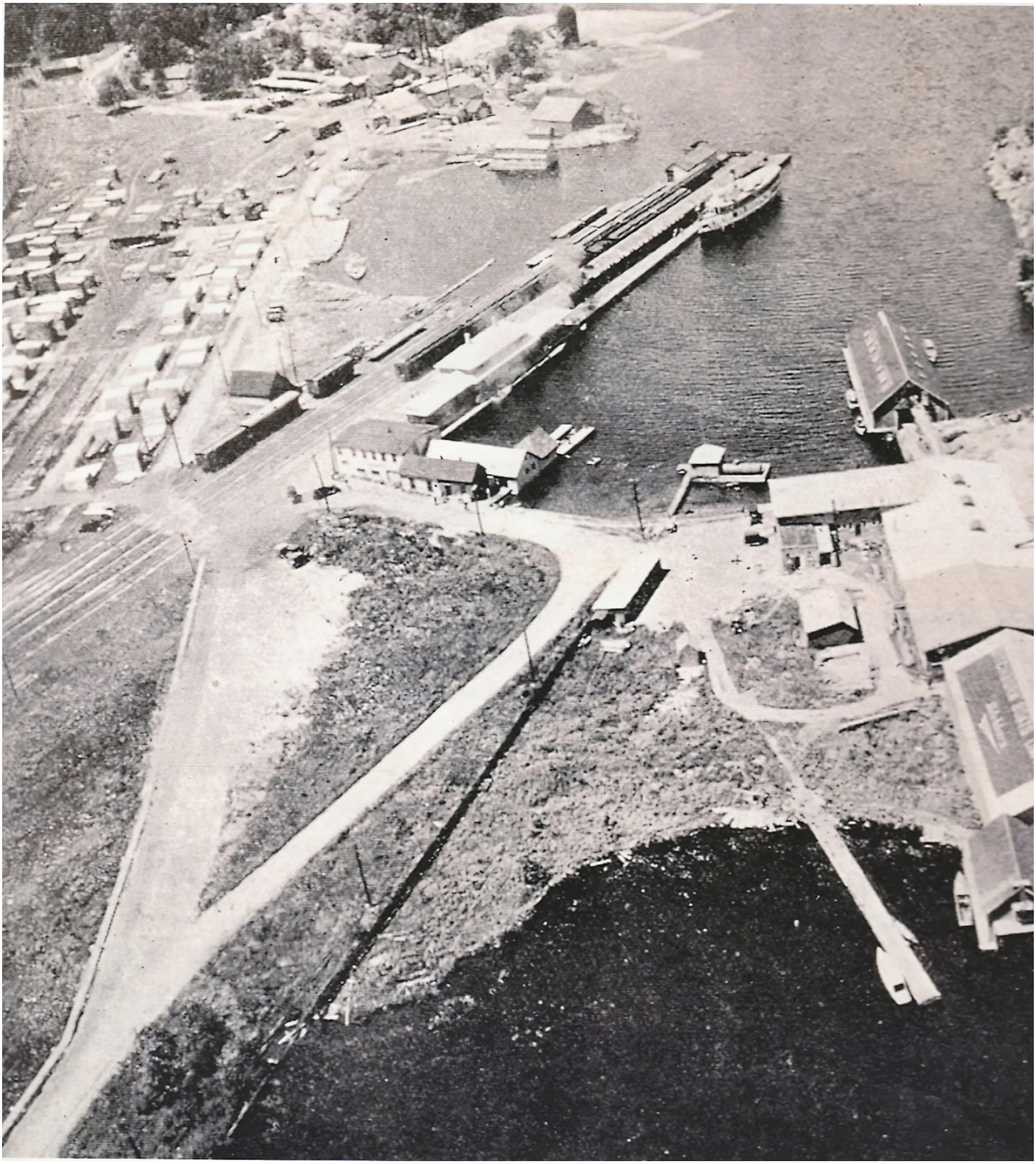
Ditchburn: Bigger, Better, Faster 1927-1931

Ditchburn Viking, underway, This model, from 1929, had a modified planing hull. Author photo

With the new boat builds turning to hard chine runabouts, one thing was clear; the age of the dinosaurs was coming to an end. In the United States launches, or lakers had largely disappeared from boat shows and dealerships; all the major builders exclusively offered runabouts. Chris-Craft had been building hard chine planing-hull, forward driver boats since 1922, Dodge since 1921 and Hacker/Belle Isle since 1918. Now the U.S. economy was booming, at least with cash, and a new slate of competitors were rushing in, such as Dart Boats, Dee-Wite, Gar Wood, the speed king who was adding a consumer boat line to his empire, Ludington, Albany, Dingle and even small, long lived, low production firms like Fitzgerald & Lee and it's next-door neighbor Hutchinson. The onetime king of laker/launches, Fay and Bowen was now pivoting to runabouts under the Fay-Bow brand. If you really wanted a laker in America after 1929, a few firms still would make you one, such as Goodhue & Hawkins which built a 33-foot beast in 1939 (it's not a long-deck, but nearly all-deck; check it out online, it is a head shaker). Canada, as always, a decade behind, was finally changing. Denny Arnstein, the Broadway producer, had already brought his Chris-Craft runabout Let's Go to his cottage on Big Rideau in 1927, it was now easily the fastest on the lake.



The original smaller plant at left-centre, the expanded plant row of buildings at the right circa 1929

The 1928 Ditchburn Viking model, 28 feet long. Restored Vikings are the most valuable Ditchburn these days, going for around $350-400k fully restored. Author photo

Seating area, Viking model. Note the elaborate external rudder and steering mechanism. Not necessary, but it sure looks cool. Author photo

The Viking's secret sauce, the 225 hp Kermath Sea Wolf. Author photo

Ditchburn had been providing planing runabout hulls since 1921, but they were primarily built for speed. The main thrust of the business were the big, long deck launches, this was what you put the family in; the planing runabouts were for the man, this was the sports car to the station wagon (or SUV today), something for him to blast around in. This was the ideal package; you could sell both high value craft to the same person; he could certainly afford it. But he was well aware of the increasing appeal of the runabout, so in 1927 Hawker came up with an idea; why not blend the two? The result was the Viking model. Above the waterline it is one of the most beautiful boats ever built, below, one of the weirdest.

Late 1920's 31 foot Ditchburn Commodore. They had begun to phase out the long deck displacement launches at this point. Author photo

From the stem to just past amidships, the hull is runabout, hard chined and flat bottomed, then it terminates in a race boat step, but the remainder of step to stern is classic round bottom Ditchburn displacement. On land, if you walk towards the stern and look forward from underneath, the step looks like two stereo speaker boxes stuck to a launch hull. I'm not a marine architect by any stretch, it looks very strange. I suppose it worked, I've never seen a Viking at

speed; Mowitza was at our antique boat show at Rideau Ferry in the early 1980's, but only ever moved at cruising speed from the launch ramp to the show dock. But aside from the Viking there was no attempt to shift to runabout production; moreover Ditchburn's and Minett's remained very expensive products, running from $5-9,000. 21 Vikings were made. I'm not sure how many Commodore's, the 31-foot version of the Viking were sold; two were definitely made, one survives to this day.

How many Commodore's were actually made and sold, we still don't know.

One Commodore was made for Rocco and Bessie Perri of Hamilton. The 1930 boat had the serial number 30-43, (the numbering system was simple, the last two digits of the year and number of the boat off the line in the year, so at least 43 boats were made that year, the last before the precipice. At least bootlegging provided a reliable revenue stream, provided you

could stay in business, and alive. Ben Kerr of Kerr's Marine Garage (and certain import-export services) in Hamilton had purchased a 32-foot launch in 1928, he disappeared later that year. The Perri's did not get to enjoy their boat for long either. Mrs. Perri was gunned down the following year, announcing the arrival of the Sicilian-American style of gangland warfare in Canada. There were still moneyed characters who made their fortunes in unusual, but less high-risk professions. John Forlong was a true character, a gambler who married into money, but was more than capable of making some for himself. He won his first yacht Grace Anne in a high stakes poker game and made good use of it on Lake of the Woods. The second time he took a more traditional route and had one built. This was to be Grace Anne II, 85 feet long and with a 12-foot beam. For the winter of 1930-31 there were two projects in the Orillia shop. Once the patrol boat and Grace Anne II rode down the railway into the water, that was it. There was nothing behind them but an empty building. There were no new orders. The entire staff was laid off and the shop was closed. How did things get so bad? According to the Toronto Star Article in 1928, Ditchburn had $300,000 in annual sales. Accordingly, assuming a 7-10% net operating profit, this would infer $270,000 in expenses. When you are running any kind of business and there is a slowdown or sudden loss of customers, you can't just walk out and put a lock on the door and expenses simply stop. Many expenses have an inertial quality, that is to say they keep moving on their own momentum. Lumber, hardware, engines, all these components have been ordered ahead of time, contracts have been signed. You can lay off staff, but they might find jobs elsewhere and not wish to come back or trust you. The plant maintenance costs, insurance, electric power, municipal taxes, and fees have to be paid whether or not you are building anything. The depreciation on the fixed assets has to be recorded, it is an annual expense, one the bank pays attention to, even if no cash is involved. It you are doing custom building, what is the risk a panicked customer might simply stop paying the progress billings. Moreover and this is particularly an issue with Ditchburn, who used bank loans to finance expansion as opposed to selling shares, there is that burden of interest and balance repayments. The prime rate in the 1920's was around 4%, business loans would be around 6-8%. I think the biggest issue of all was strategy. There had been a sharp recession over 1920-21, most boatbuilding firms simply laid off staff or became inactive or buckled down to wait for better economic times, Ditchburn went all out to expand operations, and it paid off. For a nervy entrepreneur, a downturn is sometimes the moment to push hard for sales and jump ahead of dithering competitors. Why should 1930-31 be so different?

Ditchburn in deep waters

What happened next is so well known, we don't have to go into much detail. Ditchburn significantly expanded the Gravenhurst plant, financing the construction with debt. Debt was

riskier, but at least Herb Ditchburn could run things the way he liked, without shareholders and directors constantly asking questions and getting in the way. The 1929 stock market crash was shocking, but by spring 1930 share prices had partially recovered and sales had slumped, but not to any critical point. A few high flyers had been trimmed; business would eventually get back to normal. But governments, feeling the heat from outraged voters decided to clamp down hard on spending and the money supply, boosting the recession into a full-blown depression. The real slide came in spring 1931 and luxury purchases simply ground to a halt. Ditchburn's finances reached a critical point over the winter of 1931-32. Ditchburn Orillia had a government patrol boat contract, when that was finished the plant simply closed. Gravenhurst was not so simple. Staff was kept on longer than they should have and finally 2/3 of the 70 some staff were laid off. Herb Ditchburn had apparently re-mortgaged his house to keep operations going, but the cash position was reaching a point of no return. Finally, he met with the creditors at the offices of E.R.C. Clarkson & Sons, Trustees, Receivers and Financial Agents, in Toronto and agreed to step down as CEO, he would take on the now vacant position of sales manager, and an R. P. Powell would take over as CEO, with Bert Hawker as general manager. The shuffle was made on May 10, 1932, and the company filed for bankruptcy on May 24. I suspect that Powell was a hired gun who Clarkson had appointed to check out the true financial condition of the company and when he did, he thought it would be better to simply pull the plug. Ditchburn himself wrote a long mea culpa article in the local paper, stating the obvious; there wasn't enough business to sustain the company in its current form. G. T. Clarkson sent out the bankruptcy notification on June 2, 1932, for a June 14 meeting of the creditors at Osgoode Hall in Toronto. This was to assess creditor rank, who was at the top, (banks, being secured) and who was at the bottom (vendors with outstanding receivables, including employees with any outstanding wages owed).

Herb Ditchburn did not declare bankruptcy himself, but he was effectively cleaned out, his shares in his company were worthless, his loans to the company would be at the very bottom rank of the creditor line. The assets were sold over 1932-33, the Orillia plant, which was really just a big storage shed to the former engine and hardware foreman Aleister Hunter and the Gravenhurst works to a slate of Toronto investors who started a new company called Ditchburn Boats and Yachts Limited. Herb Ditchburn was not an investor, nor did he have a position in this company. He rattled around Gravenhurst for a year, then finally with nothing in town he left for Toronto. He moved into an apartment on the first floor of 321 Bloor Street West and hung out a shingle as Herbert Ditchburn, Boat Builder although it was not clear what these services entailed or if he was even working at all. There was no listing for 1935, but by 1936 he had moved to another apartment at 707 Yonge but did not list any occupation. William Ogilvie, now

the sales manager for the third successor company set up the showroom out in the sticks at 22-24 Sheppard Ave. He had settled into a nice house on one the city's ravines at 5 Relmar Gardens.

Ditchburn stumbles again: 1933-1935

The Orillia plant was gone, but Ditchburn Boats and Yachts Limited did produce one big cruiser that we know of; a spectacular all-mahogany boat with a very modern look, in that it seems to owe more to designs of the postwar than the mid 1930's. The first generation of motor cruisers were beamy displacement hulls, built like lifeboats off a ship, rarely exceeding speeds of 14 mph. Many, such as the early Taylors had the cabin built into the fore part of the hull, with portholes and the stern a mostly open area, although it often had a fabric top to keep the sun off. This generation was replaced in the mid-teens to early 1920's by semi-displacement hull styles, long, with boxy cabins, often fore and aft. The new style was the more angular and curvy cabin style, with a flybridge; this was the standard for cruiser design right up to today, and the look is still reflected in the multi-million-dollar seagoing yachts built for multi-billionaire owners. This accomplishment was the last gasp for Boats and Yachts, it went under in 1935.

Early 1930's Ditchburn runabout, nice, if more modest this time around. It wasn't enough to save the company. Author photo

The new company Ditchburn Boats and Yachts Limited. shifted away from high-end custom builds and tried to go with mid-market products. The boats built in the 1930's were runabouts, they were nice looking, sensible craft, but with none of the show-stopping grandeur and verve of the 1920's. Greavette outflanked them in the high-end market with the construction of the groundbreaking 34-foot Curlew in 1936, the first of the Streamliner series. Minett-Shields built a similarly curvaceous boat for Fred Burgess in 1934 and a series of memorable 18-foot gentleman's racers. Even Port Carling's put out a dazzling barrel back runabout in 1938. In terms of raw design brilliance, all of them were outdone by the work of Earl Barnes. The name Ditchburn had been synonymous with high dollar, top level quality, but there was nothing about the 1930's boats that ranked ahead or differentiated from a Duke or a Port Carling. I think part of the problem is that with the endless money troubles Ditchburn simply couldn't afford to do anything off the wall or genuinely innovative. The company did play around with an outdrive concept, but this was very limited R & D as rather than designing a new, shorter, and beamier boat, they simply used an existing model and set the engine in the narrow stern, with predictably disappointing results. It was a half-hearted effort and was not pursued. Although their best customer, Harry Greening would be around long enough to pose for a snapshot with the Miss Supertest team in the mid 1950's, had retired from racing in 1929; there were no more projects. The new racing star Harold Wilson was strictly a Greavette guy, all his Little Miss Canada and Miss Canada series would come out of the Greavette works. One of the enduring problems was that they kept the main Gravenhurst factory. The smart move might have been to accept the situation and sell the property and move to a much smaller workspace and avoid the high maintenance costs and business tax levies. Perhaps the new Ditchburn management hoped the business would turn around and increased production would eventually refill the empty space. It did not, and Boats and Yachts was closed in 1935.

In 1936, another new slate of investors came together for one more try to resurrect the Gravenhurst operation. The new company was named Ditchburn Boats and Aircraft (1936) Ltd. Again, this was a brand name only, the man himself was not involved with this entity either; the position of General Manager was allotted to former Dispro salesman William Ogilvie. The latter aspect of the corporate name was and remains a puzzler; there was barely a Canadian aircraft manufacturing industry to speak of in 1936. We provided plenty of pilots in the Great War, they were trained in England or down in Plano, Texas, like my grandfather, during the latter period 1917-18 and streamed into the RFC for combat duty. Canada had been flooded with surplus Curtiss JN-21 Jenny biplane trainers after 1919, this became the workhorse of the early bush flight industry. All of our aircraft, save a few experimental models were all built, again in the US or the UK. Bob Noorduyn had built and flown the prototype Norseman in 1934, 10 more

were made before 1939, but all hand built in a little shop in Montreal; major production only started after the war. The Royal Canadian Air Force ordered 15 Fleet Fawn 7B biplane trainers in 1935, but they were built at Fleet Aircraft's plant in Fort Erie. Two Fairchild Super 71's floatplanes were ordered and built in Ontario; one was totaled after hitting a log. This aircraft was completely aluminum, not much prospect for a wood fabricator. Three Northrop Delta's were also ordered, this was another aluminum monoplane manufactured by Vickers Canada, also in Montreal. Vickers was primarily a shipbuilder, but had a small sideline in aircraft, completing occasional small contracts with the Government. Why anyone would want to build wood framed aircraft in rough, rocky cottage country where the nearest airfield was Camp Borden, 60 miles away by country dirt roads? But the firm was still set up to build boats, and a recovery seemed to be in progress. The model line was formalized under the trademark Sea-Boy, providing a 19- and 23-foot model runabout, both in open utility and hardtop (sedan) configurations, as well as a "cruiser" line, which included a triple cockpit runabout and a day cruiser.

The 1937 fiscal year for Boats and Aircraft was actually fairly successful, as 44 boats were built, including several patrol boats for the R.C.M.P., with a small operating loss of $1,237. Not desirable but clear evidence that Ditchburn, or let's be honest, the Gravenhurst boat factory that housed the four Ditchburn entities, seemed to be pulling itself out of the dark hole it had been in for the last several years. And then it all went poof a few months later in March 1938, when the bank called in a $10,000 loan. There was some talk that the company was bleeding from an underbid on the patrol boat contract, but the small 1937 loss doesn't indicate any reason to panic; for any bank a struggling business is more valuable than none at all; one would think, but… The best I can assess is that the bank manager was under pressure to clear the high-risk loans out of the portfolio, and Ditchburn was just another problem customer, too small to succeed and not worth worrying about. The company did try to fight the bankruptcy petition in court, the case file is Ditchburn Boats and Aircraft (1936) Ltd. Re 1938 19 CBR 240 (Ontario, Canada). The legal issue apparently was that the shareholders of the bankrupt entity claimed that the name and the intellectual property was somehow separate from the business, and present troubles should not include future intangibles, therefore the IP (particularly the name Ditchburn) should stay with the investors. The judge disagreed with this, and the IP including the name went into the asset bucket along with everything else. The business closed, and the contents were to be sold. As likely secured creditor, the bank was at the top of the list and would most likely get it's $10 grand back. Vendors and employees would not be so lucky. The former sales manager William Ogilvie set up a boat brokerage firm called Ogilvie & Le Pan, with a Donald Le Pan.

The liquidators parceled out the remaining boat inventory to Duke and Greavette. By 1939 there was one unfinished (and apparently unwanted) hull left; this was put up for public auction. The winning bid was the senior editor of the Ottawa Citizen, Robert Brown, who family had owned one of the first cottages at Rideau Ferry on Big Rideau Lake. The boat was shipped to Smiths Falls, an engine was installed by local mechanic and racer Eddie Mars, and the family did the interior seats and flooring. The cottage was built out over the water, living quarters on top and boathouse underneath, where you could see the stern of Bonnie Jean II: Mars was a Ford Flathead guy, so that would explain the two exhaust pipes. Bonnie Jean II was long and slender and seemed to be a throwback to the 1920's displacement style, it definitely did not fit the look of the 1930's runabouts. I wonder if perhaps it was a re-do of an earlier long deck to convert to a forward driver configuration before being interrupted by the business closure. It rode like a Ditchburn launch at speed, with the stern down and the bow high out the water. Later the Brown family sold the boat, I was able to see it while under restoration at Miller-Potter in Manotick. It was solidly built, the bilge stringers looked like squared off telephone poles; that is a bit of an exaggeration, but it is a completely different build philosophy from the aircraft like Gilbert hulls, which relied more on stressing frames than sheer bulk.

In 1938 Herb Ditchburn had entered into a partnership with a Donald Clark, forming Ditchburn Clark Boats Ltd. The exact purpose of this company was not clear (William Ogilvie by contrast clearly listed his new business as "Yacht Broker"), however the anecdotal evidence is certainly involvement in boat sales in some fashion. Ditchburn Clark's office was in room 513 on the fifth floor of 67 Yonge Street. Ditchburn occupied the office until 1941, although the official name of the business was changed only to "Clark Boats Ltd." from 1940 on; possibly the new owners of the Ditchburn IP from the Boats and Aircraft bankruptcy had something to do with it. In 1941 Ditchburn accepted a war-work contract and Clark Boats left the premises. He went to work in Trenton designing an 80-foot rescue boat to pick up downed airman in open water; six were built. The boats were powered with three First World War era Liberty engines, these were still plentiful; the more powerful Packard V12 was available, but there were sticky rules under the U. S. Neutrality Act, which prevented knowing sales of items and technology to be used for military purposes by a country engaged in war (that would be moot a few months later, with the attack on Pearl Harbor). The Liberty did the job but required a lot of maintenance; at this point, anything was welcome. Ditchburn's next contract was as plant manager for a navy tugboat contract with Central Bridge Construction Ltd of Trenton, he organized and oversaw the plant and the 200 company workers. After the war he returned to the boat brokering business, working out of his home in Trenton.