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The shipyard in the 1950s—ways on the right were later moved to the left—with the Withey family home in the background on the *far left*.

Withey's Shipyard in Silva Bay

by Jenni Gehlbach

I am grateful to Fred Withey for allowing me to examine his family's photographs and personal records about his father's shipyard, and to read his mother's journal written between 1939 and 1949. Gabriola Museum's archivist, Janet Stobbs, helped me find photographs and newspaper clippings about the shipyard at Silva Bay, and the staff at BC Archives helped me find corporate and union records.

Just as World War II was ending in 1945, a self-taught boat builder brought his young family to live in beautiful Silva Bay. He quickly developed a thriving shipyard that provided employment for dozens of local men for more than two decades. His name was Leslie Albert Withey.

Les Withey was born in Fort William, Ontario, on March 2, 1915, and after his family came out west he decided to become a fisherman. He'd need a vessel, so he built his first boat in his mum's Vancouver backyard as a teenager. He had no formal

training, but was energetic and creative. His son Fred said:¹

Dad decided to build his own troller so that he could become a fisherman. The problem was that when he got his boat built and launched and was ready to start his fishing career someone offered to buy his boat. He couldn't afford to turn down the generous offer so he sold the boat and immediately began to build another.

¹ In 2004 Fred Withey gave a talk to the Silva Bay Yacht Club recalling his family life on Gabriola between 1945 and 1966. The Gabriola Museum's archive holds a transcript of this talk.

Thus, Les Withey, the frustrated fisherman, became a successful shipwright in his spare time.

The war years, 1939–45

Fred told me that his father worked for a while delivering film cans around Vancouver for RKO,² and it was in their offices that Les met Margaret Naomi Inglis, usually called Marg. They married on September 16, 1939, and after a trip “up the coast” returned to live on Napier Street.

Marg's journal records that they launched the *Naomi I* on November 23, 1939, at Ballantyne Pier, gradually moved their things aboard at Cardero Wharf, and moved themselves aboard on November 30, the same day that Marg's parents moved to Gibson's Landing.³ The couple made their maiden voyage to Gibson's for Easter 1940.

After BC Packers chartered their boat in June 1940, Les headed up to Rivers Inlet to fish. Marg stayed in Vancouver living with “Ma Withey”, and on August 5, Les received a wire while aboard the Union steamship *Cardena* that their son Frederick had been born—Les arrived in Vancouver the next day.

In April 1941, they moved aboard the *Naomi I*, again at Marine Basin in North Vancouver, and Marg records that they took trips up the coast and had “lots of fun”. She wrote that Les worked at first “for salvage” but left that for Wallace's Shipyard in October 1941. “Wallace's Shipyard” was Burrard Drydock, which was building

warships for the Royal Navy and the Royal Canadian Navy.⁴

In *Shipyards of British Columbia*, G.W. Taylor writes:

The military disasters of the spring and summer of 1940 pushed the Canadian government to implement its greatest shipbuilding program in history... representatives of the British Ministry of Shipping were sent to the United States and Canada to find either private entrepreneurs or governments willing to mass-produce steel cargo ships of a standard design in the quickest possible time.

In the United States, big private shipbuilding corporations ...using mass production techniques were delivering the ships from the laying of the keel to completion within 60 days...

The Canadian government welcomed the scheme and arranged with eight yards throughout Canada to do the same. By March 1941, tentative contracts to build 78 of these boats had been signed with British Columbia yards. Burrard Drydock got 38, North Van Ship Repairs 28, Yarrows 2, and Prince Rupert Drydock 10....

The designs were so planned that component parts could be mass-produced in factories many miles from the shipyards.

The building of ships became big business for the steel fabricating plants. Dominion Bridge Co. in its Vancouver plant fabricated most of the steel used by North Van Ship Repairs, as well as for Burrard Drydock...

Taylor also writes:

Within the space of a little over a year, shipbuilding had become a major factor in the BC economy... The industry peaked in

² RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) Pictures was an American film production and distribution company.

³ A *Vancouver Sun* article about Withey on June 5, 1943, noted that his first two trollers were the *Alice*, named for Les's mother, Alice Jane Withey (née Russell), and the *Naomi I*, named for his mother-in-law, Naomi Inglis.

⁴ Wallace Shipyards moved from Vancouver to North Vancouver in 1906, and in 1921 it became Burrard Drydock. Together with the neighbouring North Van Ship Repair yard, which it eventually absorbed, Burrard built over 450 ships, including many warships. (Wikipedia)

1943, when 29,143 men and 2,122 women were working.

Meanwhile, the Witheys had left young Frederick with Marg's parents in September 1941 and moved *Naomi I* back to Cardero Wharf, but they sold the boat in December, bought a new car and a house of their own at 3243 Gravelly Street, moved in on January 5, 1942, and brought Fred home. Of course, in these war years times were tough. Marg wrote:

Sure was hard to get fuel. I spent hours down at the Fuel Control Board. Finally couldn't get any more sawdust. Had to pay \$10.50 for some old ends of wood that must have been in the Inlet for [the] last 20 years.

... had a cold spell in January. The shipyards were closed down for several days but Les only missed one day's work.

Marg's dad helped them renovate the basement and a bedroom, and on May 18, 1942 their baby daughter Dianne was born.

That summer, Les changed to afternoon work at the shipyard so he could get more work done on the 40-foot *Naomi II*, which he was building in the family's backyard. Fred said:

By the time he was 23, he was finishing up his third troller and hoping that there were no more buyers out there. By the time he had finished this one, he had a wife and two small children.

In March 1943, Frederick and Dianne were sent to live with their grandparents in Gibson's Landing, Marg started work in Vancouver, and her dad came over to help paint the *Naomi II*. Preparing to live aboard again, Les and Marg sold their home, and on June 4, Arrow Transport took all day to move the finished boat out of the lane behind the house. They took it to the water next morning.



Vancouver Sun, June 5, 1943, reporting that the boat built by Les in his spare time in his back yard has been transported laboriously through the streets of Vancouver down to False Creek.

An article in *The Vancouver Sun* reported that Les transported the *Naomi II* with "half a dozen husky helpers" through the streets to False Creek for launching. It also reported that the boat was constructed "as a west coast troller or a halibut boat" and was powered by a reconditioned Cummins diesel engine.

But Les worried that the Navy might expropriate his new boat for the war effort. He was partially right—in August 1943, the boat was expropriated⁵ by the RCAF for use in their Marine Patrol, which looked for submarines off the BC coast. Marg wrote:

⁵ It seems that Les must have fought the expropriation of his boat, which was the family home, because there are references in Marg's diary about Les going to the "hearing about the boat" during 1943 and 1944.

We had only two trips to Gibson's out of her and up to Belcarra once, and the airforce took her. August 5th Les turned her over.

Les went to Edmonton in September and signed up with the RCAF—Marg “sure felt low” and left for Gibson's a couple of days later. Fred says that Les had hoped to serve on his own boat, but Marg records that he was posted to the *Haida*, which was then in dry dock in Vancouver. The Witheys took room and board in Vancouver until it put to sea, and Marg worked as a cashier at the Hudson's Bay store.

When Les went to serve on the *Haida* at Port Hardy early in 1944, Marg went to Gibson's Landing. Les got his wish temporarily when at the end of March he was put on the *Naomi II* (which Fred told me had been renamed the *Naomi W* at some point) and sent to Telegraph Cove near Alert Bay. Marg wrote:

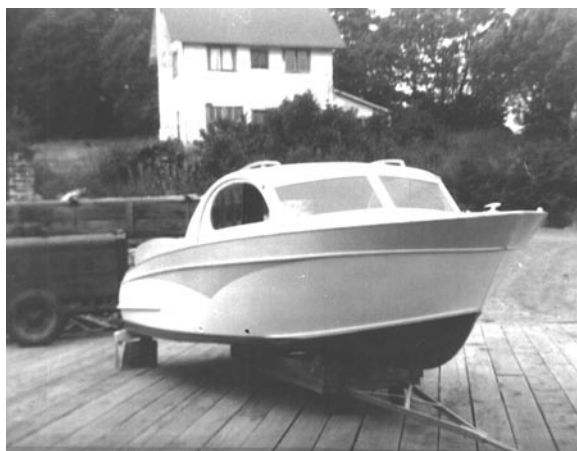
He phoned me he had a house so I packed up and Dianne and Frederick and I left Gibson's Good Friday on the *Lady Pam* and transferred on the *Cardena*. We arrived at Alert Bay...

Les met them in *Naomi W*, and they were together for a couple of weeks. Then “the boys were sent to Alliford”, so Marg and the children went back down to Gibsons via Port Hardy and Vancouver.

Coming to Silva Bay

Described in his discharge papers as 30 years old and six feet tall with medium complexion, hazel eyes, and brown hair, Les was discharged from the RCAF in May 1945 just as the war was ending. The Withey family moved to Gabriola that summer.

He told *The Vancouver Sun's* Barry Broadfoot that while he had been in the Marine Squadron, their vessels patrolled up



The old Sears' house with a sleek boat built at the shipyard ready to go in May 1957.

the west coast and in the Strait of Georgia and every so often they had navigated the tricky entrance to put into Silva Bay. Withey had seen its potential. Fred says he'd already bought land in Pender Harbour but decided he preferred Gabriola's Silva Bay. Les took Marg over from Gibson's Landing to look at Gabriola and she wrote in her diary:

February 19th: Les took me over to Gabriola to a Valentine's dance. Tried all day to get over. Finally made it at night... We stayed all night on the boat and back to Gibson's.

When Withey's requisitioned boat was returned to him “with some compensation”⁶ he quickly sold it to Roy Peterson for \$10,000. Fred has photographs of the boat moored in Silva Bay still painted in Airforce colours. Les used most of the boat compensation money to go into partnership with Norm Sear who was a fisherman and, with his wife Jackie (née Shaw), owned all the Silva Bay property, including the original white farmhouse and orchard, which stood roughly where the pub's parking lot is now.

⁶ Fred Withey said this to Kevin McCollum on September 9, 1997, during an interview for the Gabriola Museum.

Post-war life in Silva Bay

The Withey family was used to change and they quickly settled in—Marg wrote:

Got a cabin at Mrs. Law's. Stayed there six weeks. Then we got into our house, which Les built. It was not finished when we moved in. We finished it as we went along.

Fred remembers having his fifth birthday on Gabriola that August and, after settling in, the Witheys had a grand house-warming party on November 24 with some guests from Vancouver and many from Gabriola—it must have been a good one, because a couple of guests wrote their appreciations: "What a Glow!" and "I'll never forget".

Local guests listed by Marg included Ed, Joe, and Kitty Silva; Ronald and Leslie Page; the McLeans; the Fredettes; the Sears; and the Fields.

When Marg's parents joined them on Gabriola in September 1946, Tom Higgs, who owned Nanaimo Towing, moved everything over from Gibson's by barge. The Witheys quickly became active in their new community and of course the children went to school here. Marg wrote:

Les and I were both in the Ratepayers' and the [Community] Hall Committee and I belonged to the Women's Institute.

Life certainly wasn't all work and social duty though—a note in Marg's diary says:

Herb Williamson came over to the island and Les took accordion lessons off him. He bought Jack Short's accordion...

Silva Bay was the centre of life at the south end of the island. In 2004, Fred told the Silva Bay Yacht Club about his childhood memories:

At that time there was a small store run by Henry Halverson who lived with his wife

Anita in the back,⁷ a fish buyer who sold to Canadian Fish Co., a small set of floats, and a coffee shop run by Bea and Ben Bodaker.

The store sold gas for Imperial Oil and Page's⁸ sold Standard Oil. I used to watch the tankers coming in at night as they shone their spotlights in my window. The fish packers used to come in once or twice a week to pick up the fish and drop off ice...

The area that is now the Boatel was owned by Abe Crocker and his large family... I think Mrs Crocker was a Silva... Abe was instrumental in building the log church and was our local well witcher. He eventually sold to Gordon Burt and George Stewart... At first they worked at the shipyard, but after buying the Crocker property they constructed a small boatyard where they built a couple of boats. They also built the store that Audrey now [2004] operates and lured Henry Halverson to move from this location over to there.

Withey and Sear's first shipyard at Silva Bay

Norm Sear and Les Withey started their boat building and repair company, based in Withey's expertise and Sear's property—Marg wrote in her journal: "Les went into partnership with Norman Sear, named *Withey-Sear Boat Building & Repairs Co.*", although this was not a registered company.

As soon as his family's house was built, Withey began to build the new shipyard. Broadfoot later reported that Les had built

⁷ In his 1997 museum interview, Fred said that Halverson's small store was where the pub was. A few years after his talk, the pub was moved upstairs and the old store space became Silva Bay Marina's business office.

⁸ Page's Marina was owned then by Jack and Les Page.



Fishing boats built in the late 1940s. *Gabriola Flyer*, *Gabriola Clipper*, and *Saturnina*, named after *Santa Saturnina*, the small Spanish schooner that visited Gabriola in 1791.

the first of two marine ways “with a boxful of tools and my stake from the packer”.⁹

Withey started to build boats in Silva Bay, and between 1945 and 1949 the business built seven fishing boats, listed in Marg's diary as:

- *Gabriola Chief* for Jack Elliott
- *Gabriola Clipper* for Dick Hokanson
- *Gabriola Belle* for Vic Stevens
- *Rose C* for “Canadian Fish”
- *Gabriola Flyer* for Matt Jupilla
- *Saturnina* for Reg Payne

⁹ Article by Barry Broadfoot in the *Vancouver Sun*, 1955.

- *Hilda R* for Jack Short, who was married to Les's sister Hilda.

They built a six-room house on a landing barge for Tom Higgs who had previously owned the Gabriola ferry *Atrevida*. They built a yacht and also a wheelhouse for a work barge for Nanaimo Towing, and did “all kinds of repairs and several rowboats”.

Transmitted (electrical) power didn't come to Gabriola until 1955. Before that the shipyard had a big Fairbanks Morse generator,¹⁰ which had been used previously in the *Atrevida* ferry. It ran 8am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday, and also supplied power to the store, coffee shop, and the Witheys' and Sears' houses. A whistle blew at startup and shutdown and they had a spare of course to ensure continuous power supply.

By 1950, the yard had also acquired a Petters diesel auxiliary 8hp engine, a 3hp Wisconsin gas engine, and a 1931 Chevrolet engine for the ways. Other equipment listed that year was:

- 1 Crescent Woodworker comprising bandsaw, circular saw, 12" jointer shaping and boring machine
- 1 Parkes planer
- 1 geared winch for inside ways
- 1 12" bandsaw with ¼ hp motor
- 1 main generator 40 amps AC converter
- 1 acetylene welding and burning outfit with 2 burning tips, 5 welding tips, and a 2-wheel truck
- sundry shafting, pulleys, and bearing for main machinery transmission.

¹⁰ It was a 15hp Y-type diesel, serial # 1455. Fairbanks Morse power plants evolved from burning kerosene in 1893, coal gas in 1905, then to semi-diesel engines in 1913, and to full diesel engines in 1924. Fairbanks-Morse became a major engine manufacturer and developed plants for railway and marine applications.

The Witheys move to Bellingham

But the Witheys were restless. Fred Withey told me that his father had five sisters, most of whom lived in the USA, and Les had always wanted to live in the States too. So in 1948, he decided to sell his interest in the shipyard to Ken Alexander and take the family to San Diego.

A new company called *Silva Bay Shipyards*, which did not involve Withey, was registered during this period and in a letter from the District Engineer in Victoria written on February 11, 1948, about the business need for improved ferry service to Gabriola, we read:¹¹

The Sears Store and Fish Buying Wharf is at the far end of the island and supplies are brought in by fish boats. Sears Ship Building is a small concern, building small boats, rowboats, etc., and the freight business for this concern amounts to about \$5.00 per month.

The Witheys' plan to leave Gabriola was serious; Marg wrote that they sold all their furniture except the piano. Early in the year, they made a preliminary visit described by Marg:

We bought an old Chev. from Roy Peterson when he bought our boat, and we sold it to Norm McLearn just before we left in '48. We bought a new Pontiac on March 5th, 1948, and left on the 12th for a trip to California. The only tough thing was the loss of most of our clothes etc. while in Mexico for about an hour.

Undiscouraged, they headed for California again in August, stopping off in Vancouver to get a trailer. The new Pontiac didn't have enough power to pull the trailer, so Withey

traded it for a '46 Buick 8. They drove to San Diego and stayed there until September 8, but Les found no work there. The family worked its way back up the coast route without finding employment until they reached Bellingham, Washington, where Les started to build a boat at the Bellingham Shipyards.

Fred recalls that his father told Talbot (the owner) that he wasn't about to make any money running the shipyard the way it currently worked, so Talbot invited Les to become the manager.

The family took a quick visit to Gabriola for a week in November, then, Marg wrote on January 1, 1949, "Les started as General Manager and Vice-President of the Bellingham Shipyard." They built several big seiners that year.

Ernie and Muriel Swanson came down from Gabriola to join the Witheys working at the shipyard, and Marg wrote, "Evelyn and Herbie [Dick] are coming down soon. They have all their papers."

She also said that she herself was acting as the Secretary/Treasurer of the shipyard, but that it was "all honour and glory"—so presumably she worked without pay.

They were doing pretty well in Bellingham, but all was not well back in Silva Bay. Roy Tufnail told Fred Withey that Alexander had not been successful in running the shipyard on Gabriola and that Les went back the following year to attempt to revive it.

Withey's Shipyard

When Les Withey returned to Gabriola, he not only bought out Alexander, but also Norm Sear's interest in the shipyard. A new company *Withey's Shipyard* was incorporated on February 2, 1950, under certificate No. 25,603, with declared capital

¹¹ This letter to Deputy Minister A.L. Carruthers was quoted by June Lewis-Harrison in *The People of Gabriola*, 1982

assets of \$10,000, and Les and Marg Withey became its Directors on March 1.

Corporate records state that Les had “made advantageous arrangements with Norman Sear...for the purchase of lands... together with the shipbuilding works and facilities thereon, ...for... \$10,500.00 with interest at 4% per annum payable at the rate of \$40.00 per annum.” He had also “arranged to purchase from *Silva Bay Shipyards*....the physical assets of that company consisting generally of machinery and materials suitable for the boat building business...for...\$3500.00 payable at \$25.00 per month with interest at 5½ % per annum.” For this, Withey received 5000 shares of the Capital Stock of his own company on March 31, recorded in an Agreement witnessed by Louis [Lou] Meyer. The 1951 financial statement shows that in addition to the long-term liabilities owed to Sear, Withey also still owed just under \$2000 to Alexander.

The company called *Silva Bay Shipyards* was dissolved in 1950, but Sear stayed involved in the Withey's business by acting as Sales Manager, and he reserved the right to lease part of the ways constructed on the land he'd sold. Fred recalls that some bad blood later developed between Sear and Withey when Sear threatened to foreclose on Withey's debt.

The Memorandum of Association for Withey's new company stated its objectives as to:

- construct and/or repair boats, scows, floats, dry docks, pontoons and the like, whether of wood, metal, or other substances
- operate marine ways, dry docks, machine shops, and any business suitable for supplying any of the same
- assemble, manufacture, repair, and otherwise deal in marine engines,

machinery, ships chandlery and supplies of all kinds and fishing nets and gear, and whether as repairers or merchants

- buy, sell, charter, let out or rent, charter from others, boats, engines, gear and marine and fishing supplies whether new or used
- trade as merchants in all manner of marine goods and to operate a marine service station, supplying petroleum products.



By the end of 1951, Withey had added major equipment to the shipyard's inventory:

- 1 Sterling #1000 electric sander
- 1 16" Bearer drill press
- 1 Hobart gas-driven welder and trailer
- 1 Delta unisaw and motor
- 3 fire extinguishers
- 1 electric shallow well pump
- 1 disk sander
- 2 skill saws
- 1 metal lathe
- 1 50kW electric generator
- 1 100 hp Fairbanks diesel engine
- 1 planer
- 1 Oster pipe threader.

He'd also bought a thousand dollars' worth of additional small tools and various ships' chandlery and lumber stock.

The yard lost nearly \$3000 in 1950, but under Withey's renewed leadership things quickly turned around. In 1951, the yard made a net profit of nearly \$5000. Withey paid out nearly \$33,000 in wages that year—

a considerable contribution to the local economy.

Between 1951 and 1954, Withey's shipyard built several trollers and gillnetters for BC Packers, specifically for Japanese fishermen. Fred reported that in 2004, one of these boats, the 38-ft *Challenger* was still tied up at Degnen Bay and another, the *Edna F* was often at Fisherman's Wharf in Nanaimo. An unidentified 1951 newspaper clipping in the museum archives is headlined "Shipbuilding at Gabriola Booms: April Launchings". It reported:

With four vessels due to be launched at Silva Bay this month, and five others to be started soon as the ways are cleared shipbuilding on the island is booming this year... giving employment to more than 15 workers... the yard is currently engaged in building four 40-foot trollers for the BC Packers of Vancouver, worth about \$10,000 each. These boats were started on January 1 of this year, and two [named *Sharjoan* and *Variant*] will be launched at a ceremony at Silva Bay Saturday night.

Another clipping says that the *Sharjoan* was launched by Mrs. Withey "wife of the owner of the plant" and the *Variant* by Mrs. Sear, wife of the Sales Manager.

In 1952, Withey also built a \$12,500 boat for George C. McTaggart, a Vancouver realtor. In this period the shipyard was expanding to double its capacity (it had three ways by then) including pile driving, new buildings, and equipment installation. New facilities were planned for a machine

shop and for arc and gas welding.

Two newspaper clippings in Gabriola's archives announce Withey's "Notice of intention to lease 2.25 acres of land Nov. 24 1952" and another "Notice of intention to lease 4 acres of land March 26, 1956". They were both concerned with leasing foreshore land designated as parts of Lot 1 of Section 5 "for the purpose of a shipyard". It is interesting that this was not done earlier, but the timing may have been to do with dealing with government agencies to get naval contracts.

Naval contracts in the fifties

In 1952, for the first time since the war years, Canada's navy contracted the construction of four wooden boats in BC, two to be built at Star Shipyard (Mercer's) in New Westminster, and two at Withey's Shipyard on Gabriola Island. Jim Fairley, the Marine Editor of the Vancouver Province, reported that they were to be built for use in Esquimalt and other coastal naval installations, and that "the contracts were



Three vessels built for the Royal Canadian Navy in the Silva Bay shipyard in 1955. It is a myth that naval vessels were built on Gabriola during the war, but Les Withey was employed in the big shipyards in Vancouver 1941–3 before joining the RCAF.

awarded to the two firms on the basis of competitive bids”.

The *Vancouver Sun* reported on March 14, 1952, that this naval contract was:

...the push that sent him [Withey] onward and upward. But it took the self-determination that he could get them, the determination to go after them, two trips to Ottawa and submitting of the proper bids to get them.

In a 1952 cost-estimate, Withey refers to the vessels as 75-ft harbour craft, YAG 306 and 308, and states a contract price of \$208,440. He estimated an eventual profit of \$23,305.74. The *Vancouver Sun* described the two new vessels as “sea-going busses”, each 75 feet long and 18.5 feet wide, with coach-roof cabins fore and aft, and engine room between with a steering shelter above. They would operate with twin-screw 150 hp diesel engines. Another unidentified newspaper clipping reported that this contract was worth \$270,000 and that machinery worth \$35,000 was to be supplied by the navy. This report also said that “Withey expects some extra hands will have to be secured” and that Jack Gilmour of Nanaimo had been appointed as Superintendent.



Les Withey with two newly-built naval vessels in the background.

Thus began a busy and prosperous period for Withey's Shipyard throughout the 1950s. When this first large contract with the navy was completed, others followed. In his 1955 article about Gabriola's shipyard,¹² Barry Broadfoot called Withey a shrewd businessman and refers to several more navy vessels being built in 1955. He wrote:

Right now three sleek and trim Royal Canadian Navy personnel boats, each twin-

¹² “The Shipyard on Gabriola” by Barry Broadfoot, *The Vancouver Sun Magazine Supplement* July 30, 1955

screwed and 75 feet long, lie at the big dock. One is just about ready for final tests; the two others will be ready in a short time. Two others have been completed and are now being used as personnel carriers by the navy. Each is worth \$125,000, with \$30,000 wages in each of them for Les and his workmen.

...In addition there's another navy craft near completion in a high shed covering a marine ways and Les won't discuss it. It's on the "super-secret" list and Department of National Defence posters tacked to the doors warn all strangers away.

Of course, to get these contracts with the Department of Defence, Withey had to prove he had skilled workers. In February 1954, Cdr. Miller, the Resident Naval Overseer for the Vancouver area, wrote to Withey that from the results of his employees' welded test-pieces:

Please be informed that Mr. G. Halliday has qualified for Naval Steel work being carried out at your plant.

The test pieces welded by Mr. N. McLearn have not met with the requirements and therefore he must not be employed on welding of naval work. Mr. McLearn has the opportunity to be re-tested in the future and should endeavour to increase his skill in the meantime.

A similar letter exists stating that in 1955 Halliday had passed the required tests in "Inert Metal Arc Welding of Aluminum in accordance with Specification NCC 136". We have a record that skilled welder Halliday was paid \$115.00 for a 40-hour workweek (about \$2.90 per hour) in May 1955, and had \$13.45 deducted for income tax and 54¢ for Unemployment Insurance.

Naval inspectors followed the progress of these contracts, signing off at various stages of completion and Fred Withey recalls that George Chalmers was the inspector who came to Silva Bay. He tells the following great story about Chalmers:



Royal Canadian Naval vessel YFM317, completed in August 1955. The "Y" is for "Yard", as in shipyard, but "FM" is a mystery.

George was an interesting character who was a senior, possibly retired, very religious, more interested in fishing than inspecting, loved to spend time with me and insisted that I call him Uncle George and, according to my dad, a pain in the ass around the shipyard. As a result, I was usually recruited to take him fishing or doing whatever other activities I could get him interested in. Anything that kept him out of the hair of the shipyard workers. One time I asked my dad where I should take him fishing and dad sarcastically said, "drop him off on a reef".

George always wanted to hunt rabbits and used to make snares for catching the critters. We set up many snares but never saw a rabbit but we did catch a lot of fish, which he always wrapped in newspaper and put in his briefcase to take home to North Vancouver.

The navy vessels underwent sea trials before delivery. The order for the final acceptance trials of YFM 320 stated:

Vessel will leave Withey's Shipyard, Silva Bay, Gabriola Island at 08:45, November 1, 1955, and will proceed to Nanaimo (C.P.S. Wharf) to embark trials officer at 10:00. Vessel will then proceed to sea to carry out the following trials:

- H-61 Magnetic compass final inspection
- H-68 Anchor windlass final trial
- H-84 Final inspection
- M-18 Final machinery sea and acceptance trial

Acceptance will take place off Gabriola Island, BC.

In the detailed Contract Shipbuilders Certificate for YFM 320, Withey had certified the satisfactory condition of the vessel for removal from his premises and for the purposes of trials. This certificate was countersigned by the Senior Executive Officer of the ship, by the Engineer Officer of the ship, and by Cdr. J.P. Wadsworth, the Resident Naval Overseer for the Vancouver area.

Withey had handed over his first two naval vessels, HMCS YFM 306 and 308, on January 20 and 21, 1954, at Nanaimo. Cdr. Miller signed them off on behalf of the Chief of Naval Technical Services, and Cdr. Ronald Jackson, the Queen's Harbour Master at Esquimalt accepted responsibility for their transfer into the Royal Canadian Navy fleet. HMCS YFM 317 was handed over on August 5, 1955, HMCS YFM 319 on September 7, 1955, and HMCS YFM 320 on November 1, 1955.

But one slightly odd report exists about one of Withey's naval contracts. A 1958 Canadian Press report from Ottawa stated:

Howard Green, acting Defence Production Minister, today informed the Commons that Withey's Shipyard of Gabriola Island, BC,

was paid \$99,102 of a \$119,200 contract price for a small naval vessel though only 50 per cent of the work was ever completed by the firm.

The contract was cancelled by the former Liberal government in 1956, and the ship—a clearance diving vessel—was transferred to the naval dockyard at Esquimalt, BC, for completion.

...[Auditor-General] Watson Sellar said it is accepted practice that progress payments on firm-price contracts be made as various stages of the construction are reached... Mr. Sellar added that certificates as to progress were given. But it turned out that these certificates were “unsupportable” because the contractor was paid more than 80 per cent of the contract price while performing only 50 per cent of the work... Mr. Green added that the progress certificates were signed by the responsible naval overseeing officers of the defence department.

Fred Withey says that this report is “...totally false. If only 50% was done the boat wouldn't float.” He went on to explain:

The problem was that the navy kept changing things and didn't want to pay for the changes. After there was more than \$40,000 in changes with no payment, Dad stopped doing any more work until he was paid. It then became political, and at one point radio personality Jack Webster got involved on our side. However, you can't fight the government, and if my memory serves me correctly there was a change in government while this was all going on and each group was blaming the other. I do remember that we had a number of high-profile people supporting us, but to no avail. The Ottawa people didn't want to hear from any people out west.

Employing Gabriolans—shareholders and union men

The shipyard at Silva Bay hired many local people as their business expanded, and it

soon became a significant employer on the island, along with logging contractors Billy Cox and Tim Brown, various fishermen, and the brickyard at False Narrows,¹³ though this was beginning to wind down by the time the shipyard got going. Many Gabriolans and some Nanaimo men worked at the shipyard over the next twenty years.

Fred recalls that Herbie Dick (remembered by many on Gabriola as an ace badminton player) had served in the Marine Patrol with Les and came over to Silva Bay after the war—Marg writes that Herbie signed on as an apprentice to Les. Phyllis Reeve records that Frank LePoidevin was employed at the shipyard,¹⁴ and Bea Meyer told me that her husband Lou worked as a shipwright there in 1952 after the brickyard closed.¹⁵

A 1951 newspaper story named Cory Johanson and Pete Sandnes as foremen shipwrights, and Wolfgang Stoerzer worked at the shipyard as an electrician in the 1950s. Fred Withey recalls that others who worked there at some point included Nelder Boulton (in the office), Gerald Halliday, Norm Nash, Ken McCollum, Norm Windecker, Frank McLearn, and Joe Davis. A few workers also came over from Nanaimo by ferry during especially busy periods. Broadfoot reported that the shipyard employed 30 people in the mid-1950s, all but one living permanently on Gabriola.

¹³ *Gabriola's Industrial Past: the brickyard in SHALE* 15, May 2007.

¹⁴ *Page's Marina—sixty years ago* by Phyllis Reeve in *SHALE* 6, April 2003. Phyllis Reeve and her husband Ted owned Page's Marina from 1987 to 2007.

¹⁵ Bea and Lou Meyer had first come to Gabriola in 1948 (when there were only 350 people here), and at first Lou worked cleaning up their previously logged land on Coast Road, and Tim Brown transported their wood waste down to the brickyard to be used as fuel.

This continued into the sixties: Robert and Betty Castell arrived on Gabriola on Labour Day 1967, and Bob told me that he too worked at the shipyard for the first few years. He said “Yeah! Oh yeah! They used to build a lot of things. Good boats, big boats. It was a really thriving business at one time.” Peter Boorer also worked there at that time.¹⁶

When Withey formed his company, ten thousand shares had been authorized at \$1.00 par value, and by 1953 only 5004 had been issued: 5001 to Les and three to Marg. But in December 1953 the Directors (Les and Marg) made a special resolution to convert all shares to shares without nominal or par value. The maximum price or consideration for which the shares were to be sold was to be \$15 per share. Although Margaret Withey is consistently described as “housewife” in all the legal documents for the shipyard, she played an important role as Secretary of the company. This was recognized financially on February 11, 1954, by a motion at their Directors' meeting awarding her a substantial number of shares:

Upon it appearing that the company is indebted to Margaret Withey for wages or salary in the sum of \$2000.00 and that she is willing to accept in full settlement therefor 2,000 common fully paid non-assessable shares without nominal or par value, and whereas the Directors are agreeable to allotting her such shares in exchange for a receipt in full for the services performed...

Soon after this, the shipyard workers and others were invited to purchase shares. In a declaration under the Companies Act, explaining the need for a delay in the 1954 AGM, Marg wrote:

¹⁶ Castell and Boorer were friends, electrical-business partners, and fellow volunteers on Gabriola's fire and ambulance crews. See *Gabriola's Ambulance Service—the first 25 years* in *SHALE* 21, July 2009.

...during 1954 certain of the employees of the Company have taken stock in the Company and it is most desirable that they be provided with a full, complete, and accurate statement of the financial affairs of the Company at its annual meeting.

A list of shareholders submitted to the registrar of companies that year included many familiar local names and records their jobs, mostly at the shipyard:

- Ernest D. Brown (helper)—3 shares
- Gordon F. Burt (shipwright)—3 shares
- Robert Cox (truck driver)—3 shares
- Abraham C. Crocker (helper)—5 shares
- Francis P. Gibson (helper)—10 shares
- Gerald H. Halliday (machinist)—10 shares
- Francis H. Holland (storekeeper)—10 shares
- Frederick W. Inglis (stockroom man)—10 shares
- Walter Krull (shipwright)—10 shares
- Frank H. LePoidevin (shipwright)—110 shares
- Louis C. Meyer (shipwright)—10 shares
- Norman P. McLearn (mechanic)—10 shares
- Herbert A. Olsen (shipwright)—3 shares
- Hans Pedersen (shipwright from Nanaimo)—5 shares
- Robert Pullen (office clerk)—3 shares
- Albert E. Rowland (painter from Vancouver)—5 shares
- Norman F. Sear (salesman from Victoria)—300 shares
- Rowland Dudley Simpson (accountant from Victoria)—10 shares
- Peter F.J. Slade (shipwright from Portland, Oregon)—5 shares
- Roy Tufnail (fish buyer)—200 shares
- Norman R. Windecker (helper)—3 shares.

Fred still has Halliday's share certificate—he bought shares #5075-#5084 on June 5, 1954.

But, such investment was not considered enough protection for BC workers in the 1950s. In September 1956, Withey signed a two-year agreement with Local 527

(Nanaimo) of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, affiliated with the AFL. The agreement specified a regular workweek of 40 hours, and a 35-hour second shift with eight hours pay for seven hours worked. Overtime was to be double-time for any hours beyond the regular day or week, and for all Sunday and holiday work. The contract specified the statutory holidays and established vacation pay at 4% of straight time. It said that dirty work was to be paid at time and a quarter and laid out how dirty work was to be defined.

All employees were to become Union members after 30 days' employment (the probationary period) and a grievance procedure was established. By mutual consent, after three months it would be possible to amend the clauses regulating hours of work, overtime, and statutory holidays. But overall employee relations at Silva Bay appear to have been very smooth—there is only one record of employee-employer conflict, and that was quite a bit later, in 1965 at Withey's Restaurant.

Withey provides work, homes, and barbecues in Silva Bay

After interviewing Les Withey in 1955 about his successful Gabriola business, Broadfoot exclaimed: "All of this in 10 short years?" and quotes Les replying about his various enterprises:

I learned economics the hard way, not in university. Every nickel I earn goes back into the shipyard. The rest are sidelines necessary to a one-industry town.

It's always been a struggle keeping the yard and the workers busy but I've always made it. The main thing is to keep the economy stable. I bring in the workmen and so have a responsibility to them. The money comes in



The Silva Bay coffee shop, to the right of the telephone kiosk and next to the chandlery, emitting, as all good coffee shops do, hot air and steam. It was added in the 1960s, but there was an earlier one dating back to 1954.

in the form of contracts, is processed in the building of boats and is passed on to the workers. That's the way it works.

Broadfoot referred to the "trim homes of his workmen back among the trees," and says that after only ten years on the island, the Withey family now lived in a green-painted ultra-modern home overlooking Silva Bay "which would compliment any high-cost Vancouver district". He also mentioned that it had perfect reception of Vancouver and US television programs.

Withey also of course owned the big white farmhouse that had dominated the isolated bay when he first saw it, and a big pale green Cadillac. Fred recalls that Withey owned 37 acres including Commodore Heights. Broadfoot also reported that

Withey had bought the General store and coffee shop in 1954 and leased it to Henry Halverson.

By 1955, Silva Bay had become a busy centre of island life. In her history "Page's on Silva Bay; memories of fifty years 1943-1993", Phyllis Reeve wrote:

A major Gabriola tradition has its beginning in the late summer of 1955, as islanders and yachts people talked about having a "Fishing Derby and Dance". The idea comes to life. Two families produce a clinker-built rowboat as first prize; the Vancouver folks obtain donations from companies dealing in fishing rods, dipnets, and other gear. Signs are made and distributed about the island and even to



Above: An early Gabriola Salmon BBQ, still an annual event on Gabriola. This one was in Witheys' Orchard in 1958. Lemon gins were served—no roped-off area necessary—and in the evening, there was dancing at the Community Hall. The photo album caption identifies Terry McErlean, Lorna Piper & son, Ken Capon, Marcia McKenzie, Jim Piper, Jim Gray, Dianne Withey, Vicki Halliday, Judy Halliday, Terry Hill, Richard Easthom, Pat Hiley?, and Pat Smith? (Ross).

Right: The *Lady Rose* in Silva Bay.

some Vancouver yacht clubs. Everyone pitches in, and a Salmon Barbecue is held in the field by the store. The ladies make potato salad, coleslaw, pickled beets, and buns. The men cook the salmon, as fresh as Les [Page] could catch it. In the evening, island men turn up to drive yachts-people to the South End Community Hall for the dance, and then back to Silva Bay after the dance is over.

The Salmon Barbecue becomes an annual event, at Page's, or in Withey's field, eventually on the grounds of the Community Hall. Always there are fish and ice cream, sack races and a tug o' war, good fun and friendship, islanders and summer visitors.

Fred remembers that the first salmon barbecue in 1955 was held in the Witheys' orchard and Phyllis told me that most of the old-timers she has talked to agree that the Witheys, the Pages, and Tom and Frances McDonald were all involved in the original barbecues. Fred Withey recalls driving people over the gravel roads to the old Community Hall after the barbecues, and

Phyllis said: "In the brush off Withey Road are the remains of a pickup truck. Fred told me he learned to drive with it."



The *Lady Rose* comes to Gabriola

One of Les Withey's enterprises in the 1950s was helping to work out a deal for the 105-foot cargo and passenger vessel *Lady*

*Rose*¹⁷ to have Silva Bay as one of its stops on its weekly voyage out of Steveston. Broadfoot says that Withey wanted to see Gabriola become a famous vacation spot because of its fine fishing and clamming, protected anchorages, and good swimming. Fred Withey recalls that also part of the *Lady Rose* deal was to haul livestock feed and store it in the empty shed beside the dock. Local farmers would (they hoped) buy the feed and subsidize the service.

A newspaper account of the first docking of the *Lady Rose* at Silva Bay tells that the electrician at the shipyard, Wolfgang Stoerzer, had the presence of mind to sound a welcome greeting from a nearby small craft in the absence of Withey, who was ill with 'flu. The newspaper report continued:

As the ship docked, Captain Gillespie stepped out of the wheelhouse to join Les Rimes, Norman Hacking, and Oswald Sparky New, all of Vancouver. The last mentioned is president of the recently organized Gulf Islands Navigation Company. Some of the stock in this company is owned by the Islanders.

The newspaper account also mentions Joint Master Jim Brayshaw supervising the unloading of feed and building supplies, and the museum has a copy of an undated flyer advertising building supplies for sale at the shipyard. But sadly, this *Lady Rose* service to Gabriola lasted only a year or two.

¹⁷ MV *Lady Rose* is a small, diesel vessel operating on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Originally owned by the Union Steamship Company of BC, it was used for day-trippers. It is the smallest ship ever custom-ordered for the company, built in 1938, and last survivor of the USS fleet. Today she operates on routes between Port Alberni, Bamfield, and Ucluelet, all near or on Barkley Sound. Owned by Lady Rose Marine Services, and well-known to kayakers, she remains a vital cargo link to Bamfield, although her primary cargo has always been passengers.



The *Cee-Aer*, the largest pleasure vessel built in the Silva Bay shipyard. Launched in 1968.

Private contracts

After the navy contracts were completed in 1955, the shipyard built 10 or 12 "Fleetwing" pleasure craft—21-foot cabin cruisers, powered by outboards. They were very modern looking with "fins" like the cars of the day, and one was on display at Simpsons Sears in Nanaimo. The biggest outboards then were 50 hp Johnson or Evinrudes, and the shipyard was a Johnson dealer, displaying one in the chandlery, though they didn't sell that well.

In this period, Les also built a 38-foot boat "on spec", which was eventually bought by Roy Tufnail.

Over the next decade or so, the yard also built some larger yachts for Canadian and American clients. On September 9, 1968,

Nanaimo's Daily Free Press reported the launching of *Cee-Aer*, the largest pleasure craft ever built at Withey's shipyard. It was built for BC broker Robert Hall and was 65 feet long, 17.4 feet wide, and powered by two 300-hp Cummins diesel engines. The project employed 15 men for 10 months. This report added that Withey "will start work on another 43-foot vessel in a month's time". The launching of *Cee-Aer* apparently attracted about 400 people—which was roughly the population of Gabriola at that time.

The luxurious, 47-foot MV *Siboney* was built in this period for Dr Roger Delgado of El Paso, Texas and launched in Silva Bay by the owner's daughter, with introductory remarks to the large crowd made by local pioneer farmer and businessman Bill Coats. Fred came down from Prince George for the launch of this \$60,000 boat, which was built of Canadian yellow cedar with red cedar for planking and slept eight—four in two double bunks amidships and four in single bunks in the bow. It had twin diesel 100-hp Ford engines made in England and could be controlled from a flying bridge in fair weather. Its cruising range was 1000-1500 miles when its 800-gallon tanks were full and a 110-volt generator provided auxiliary power.

Another large luxury boat built by Withey was the *Mardik*, a 52-foot yacht contracted by R.H. Jones of Seattle. It was launched mid-winter in Silva Bay but was christened later in Seattle and Les and Margaret went down for the occasion.

Not all the boats being built in this period were luxury yachts though. Les Budd's new West coast troller replaced the *Mardik* on the ways. It was described in the newspaper as a 43-ft modern version of the *Saturnina*, with a 12-ft beam and powered with a Gardiner diesel (6 cylinder) engine. The

report stated, "Les will have a sturdy, practical, and comfortable craft. He intends to have every modern piece of electronic gear on board..." The report also said:

Riding the ways in the next bay is a jaunty looking craft, the *Sheju* belonging to Mr. McAllister. She is well known locally and is in for minor repairs. Withey's Shipyard is rated ninth in size in BC.

The ship building business was very stressful because it tended to be all or nothing, but there was always maintenance and repair work. Less navigation equipment was used in those days, which meant more accidents and damage. Damaged propellers and bent shafts were the most common. Fred says that Les wore overalls and did a lot of the machine work himself, despite being the owner.

A new Director and developing the marina

On September 6, 1957, formal notice was given under the Companies Act that Norman W. Hullah,¹⁸ an Executive living in West Vancouver, had been appointed a Director of Withey's Shipyard. Until 1960, Hullah held only one of the 7605 company shares that had been issued, but in 1960 and 1961, Les Withey bought out all the local small shareholders, and in May 1961 he and Marg sold or gave a substantial chunk of shares to Hullah. Fred recalls asking Les why he had given shares to this wealthy man. After

¹⁸ In 1948, Norman Hullah was a 29-year-old contractor and had borrowed \$10,000 to secure an option on a site cleared a year earlier for a small plane airfield in North Vancouver. By 1952 he had built 500 houses on 60 feet by 100 feet lots, offering them for sale for \$9000 each. [From *District Of North Vancouver Socio-Historical Service Infrastructure*, Chapter 11, Part 12, "A Brief Chronological History Of Lower Capilano".] Fred Withey recalls that Hullah was smooth and drove a Cadillac and made fantastic marinated fried chicken.



The evolution of the Silva Bay Coffee shop in the 1960s to Dinner and Restaurant. Its first liquor licence was acquired in 1965.

these transactions, Les held 3021 shares and Marg 857; their daughter Dianne Withey had one, and Hullah held 3726. This arrangement remained until 1965, when Withey re-acquired all of Hullah's shares.

Fred recalls that Hullah had been brought in because he had some expertise in building

and managing marinas, but that he in turn introduced a rather shady character, supposedly an accountant, called Fred Conrad who quickly established himself in the Silva Bay community and began making extravagant changes at the marina. Fred Withey, who was managing the hardware store and chandlery at this time, didn't trust Conrad at all, and soon left to go live in Nanaimo for a while. Conrad turned out to be a "con" man with several aliases and a police record, and his involvement in Withey's marina soon ended.

Into the 1960s, *Withey's Shipyard* expanded the Marina from a few log floats to something closer to the size it is now. They also changed the location of the marine ways from the other side of the wharf ramp. Talking about the ways, Fred says one of his jobs as a teenager had been to grease the cable and axles of the ways, and "I still have some of the steel spurs embedded in my hand from the experience!"

The old coffee shop was torn down and a new small one built into one end of the chandlery, next door to the shipyard and marina office. This coffee shop was managed at first by Marg and later by Ev. Stewart. There are photos of the small block



The Withey family—Fred, Marg, Dianne, and Les.

with its sign painted by Les and a telephone booth nearby.

Fred says that the long building (around 75 feet) was the drafting shop, where the boat patterns were laid out. The crane that was used to lift the stacks of yellow cedar, which came by barge from the Chemainus sawmill, originally had a crank winch, but later it was electric. People in those days were less aware of their adverse impact on the environment, and Fred recalls that paints, oil products, and other scraps were usually just dumped in the bay. Despite this, Fred says the Withey family regularly ate oysters off the reef and never got sick!

The old Sear house, which had often been rented to shipyard workers, was torn down in the 1960s. Henry Halverson moved over to the Boatel to run the store that is now owned by The Village Market. A third coffee shop was built as part of the marina where Halverson's store had been, next to the old pub (now an office). The dining room became Withey's Restaurant, which got a liquor licence in 1965—the third on

the island (previously only Surf Lodge and the Grande Hotel had licences on Gabriola).

Silva Bay Marina was taking shape. Float pontoons were built using fibre-glassed wood with decking on top. They had a contract with British American Gas to sell marine and auto fuel, using the first modern gas pump and “offering to clean windshields and check oil”. By now, young Fred was married and the couple had begun to manage this part of the business, but he and Les had their differences, which had been aggravated by Conrad and

Hullah's involvement in the marina's development. So, after turning down an offer to manage a marina in Stockton, California, Fred moved to Prince George in 1966 to work for the Independent Order of Foresters. Five years later he started his water treatment business there.¹⁹

Les Withey had to borrow money in 1965, either to buy out Hullah or to develop the marina (or both). That year, Withey mortgaged Water Lot Lease 284 for \$40,000 borrowed from the Industrial Development Bank, and he borrowed another \$40,000 against Lots 1 and 14, Section 5. From 1966 to 1973, *Withey's Shipyard* was again solely a family enterprise with Les holding 6747

¹⁹ While living in Prince George, Fred and his family would drive their motorhome down to visit Gabriola and set up camp in Page's campground. They eventually returned to live on Gabriola in 1997 and Fred ran *Withey's Water Treatment* here until he sold his business and retired. They still keep their boat at Page's Marina.



A thriving business—two at the same time on the ways in 1968.

shares, Marg 875, and Dianne (now Mrs. Anderson) holding a single share.²⁰

Winding up Withey's Shipyard

Les Withey had begun to think about retiring in the late 1960s—he and Margaret looked forward to a more leisurely life afloat. They now had two successful and time-consuming enterprises—a marina and a shipyard. Fred said that his father sold the marina first, in 1968. The deal with *Silva Bay Resorts* must have been satisfactory because that year Withey discharged his mortgages for \$80,000 with the Industrial Development Bank. An additional small Bill of Sale for \$4,000 for “goods and chattels” is recorded on April 2, 1968.

A couple of years later, Norman Hacking reported in his “Ship and Shore” column in *The Vancouver Province* that Les Withey “...sold the Silva Bay Marina two years ago, and this year he sold the shipyard and

marine ways to Ian McKinnon”. Ian A. McKinnon made his offer for the shipyard on April 17 1970, but the sale didn't work out. Fred said that Withey held McKinnon's mortgage and reluctantly had to take the business back when McKinnon couldn't manage it. Fred also told me that bailiffs had arrived at the shipyard, but Les “ran them off with a shotgun”. Once again Les took back the shipyard and revitalized it.

Withey eventually successfully sold his shipyard in 1974 to Arne and Judy Bentzen who had come to live on Gabriola that Spring from Maple Bay, where they had owned *Maple Bay Marina and Shipyard* with Arne's brothers. Judy told me, “Before we bought the yard we used to haul our commercial tug on the Withey's ways every year.” They did not buy Withey's company, but paid \$120,000 for his business assets and \$40,000 for the house and land.²¹ The sale was subject to the Bentzens getting a first mortgage of \$25,000 at the Royal Bank of Canada. Withey loaned them \$15,000 until March 1975, or until they were able to sell their boat, *Rover Number One*. The deal was settled and the Witheys could retire.

The Bentzens formed their own company and changed the name of the yard back to *Silva Bay Shipyard*. They continued to build commercial vessels and yachts up to 50 feet, employing between four and seven workers depending on their workload. During their tenure they filled in the back area, installed

²⁰ Until 1970 Marg's holdings were recorded as 857 shares rather than 875. Fred never held shares in the *Withey's Shipyard* company.

²¹ Lot One, Section Five, Gabriola Island, Nanaimo District, Plan 22775.

the first travel lift in Western Canada, and repaired and upgraded the buildings and marine ways. The old hardware store was long gone, so they added a ship's chandlery and parts sales, and also a general store for food supplies and gifts that operated from May through September. Judy said:

At the time we bought the yard from the Witheys there was no chandlery. There was a fellow that rented space in the upper part of the building that sold second-hand stuff... We terminated that rental after a short time and moved the parts department up there in the back of the space along with the business offices. It expanded into a pretty well stocked chandlery. In the front space we put our store and sold everything from imported cheese to fishing tackle and Indian sweaters.

The Bentzens in turn sold the shipyard to Ken and Kathy White in 1981. The Bentzens now live in Friday Harbour, where Judy is an accountant and Arne, a Marine Surveyor, manages *Shipyard Cove Marina*.

Les and Marg Withey's retirement

Hacking reported that after Les and Marg sold their Gabriola home they lived with their dog, Buster, on the converted tugboat *Point Hope*, which Les had bought in 1971 and rebuilt—it was 63-feet long and 60 years old, but Les told Hacking, "Her hull is sound as any boat I've ever examined".

Hacking reported that it was "one of those wonderful old wooden steam towboats built on this coast early in the century by master builder Arthur Mostrop, which never seem to wear out". Les re-powered the boat with a 260 hp Gardner diesel engine with wheelhouse control so that he and Margaret could manage it without crew. The tug had "all the amenities of home, with a master bedroom and bathroom on the main deck, and a large lounge, which can be converted into a guest bedroom on the boat deck".

When Hacking wrote his column, the Witheys had just arrived in Vancouver on their "first voyage of rediscovery of the BC coast. Mrs. Withey's first task ashore was to buy fishing tackle at the Army and Navy".

A few years later, Les sold the *Point Hope* and bought the 115-foot tug *Ivanhoe*, which had belonged to Kingcome Navigation Co. and used to tow barges from Powell River to Vancouver. Les converted eight crew staterooms to four larger ones, then he and Marg spent several years living aboard and chartering, and cruising the west coast and Gulf of Georgia. Fred says that after they sold the *Ivanhoe*, they "followed the sun pulling an Airstream trailer behind a truck".

The Withey family's company *Withey's Shipyard* remained on the Corporate Registry until 1983, when it was formally dissolved.

Les Withey died in 1987 and Marg in 1992.

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