

The Merrimac – a Wonderful Saga

by Nancy MacGregor, Portland Yacht Club Historian with contributions by John Lebens, Pacific Northwest Fleet

It was with very mixed feelings we learned last Spring that *m/v Merrimac* was being donated to the Columbia River Maritime Museum. On one hand, we know one of the finest classic yachts on the Columbia River will be preserved for years to come. On the other, we hate to see a vessel like her being taken from her natural home on the water. Merrimac is among the last and best of many vessels built by The Astoria Marine Construction Company. The owners were aware of the fate that can befall these old gems and decided preservation was the best option.

The 45-foot *Merrimac* was custom built by Astoria Marine Construction Company's owner Joseph Dyer for J. Walter McCrea.

The 82-year-old classic yacht was launched on August 27, 1938 and had been cruising in the northwest ever since. She was maintained by her owners in



MaryMack going down the ways in August 1938. photo provided by Portland Yacht Club Archives

pristine condition. The cruiser originated as a kit-boat from Michigan based Bay City Boat Inc. The kit was ordered by McCrea and shipped by rail to Portland. The first boat builder hired to construct the boat turned down the job upon opening the door of the boxcar and realizing the enormity of the project. McCrea turned to Joe Dyer of Astoria Marine Construction, who agreed to build the boat and use as much of the kit as possible, but would build the boat "his way" and redesigned the boat and obtained lumber from a local mill. The original Bay City Boat catalogs, kit plans and revised AMCCO drawings are still kept aboard the boat.

Christened the *MaryMack* in Astoria the boat was soon moored at Portland Yacht Club. At the beginning of World War II the boat was requisitioned for patrol duties and her highly varnished topsides were painted gray, numbers replaced the name, and, according to lore, a 50-caliber machine gun was mounted on the fore deck. The boat patrolled off the Oregon Coast out of Nehalem Bay.

After the war Charles Wegman purchased the boat, renaming it *Dee Dee Jo* after his daughters. The boat was still gunmetal gray when he took over ownership, and restored the boat to her original condition.

Around 1950 the Wegmans sold the boat to Horace Williams who named the boat *Princess* and owned it for three years prior to selling the boat to Joe Dyer. Dyer used the boat as his personal yacht renaming it *Merrimac*. He added the flybridge and made numerous improvements. *Merrimac* cruised throughout the

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Advertisement for kit boat used for *Merrimac*. image provided by J Fettig

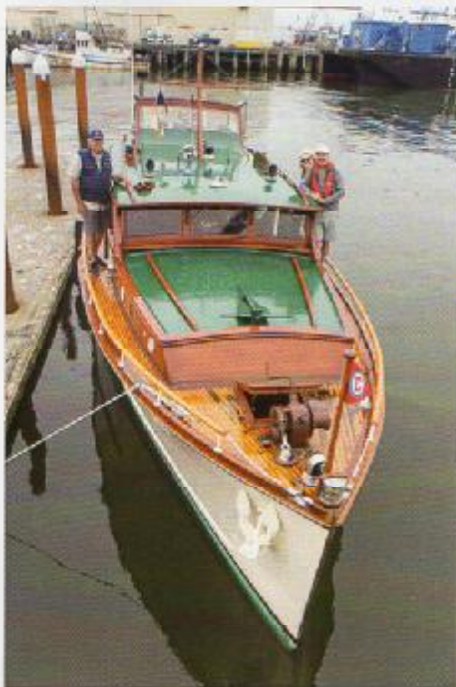


Merrimac on opening day 2019. photo provided by Portland Yacht Club archives

northwest during the 19 years Dyer owned her.

Portland Yacht Club member Jim Stacy purchased the boat in 1972 and for the next 23 years the boat was maintained and cruised extensively, including trips circumnavigating Vancouver Island and going as far north as Alaska. He was known to leave Portland in June and return in September. Stacy repowered *Merrimac* with a 450 Cummins V-8 and that engine is still powering the boat today.

Stacy sold *Merrimac* in 1993 to George Beall. Fortunately, the boat has always been maintained to a high standard with attention to original design and upholstery, hunter green carpet, varnished mahogany, and polished chrome. Much of the interior remains original, including hand water pumps in both heads and fixtures throughout. The original solid mahogany galley table – for years hidden under a layer of Formica – was recently restored to its original luster and embellished with gold



Merrimac at Port of Astoria, August 9, 2022. George Beall (left) Karen and John Fettig (right). photo courtesy of Columbia River Maritime Museum

leaf design. In 2010 Beall sold the boat to John and Karen Fettig. George and Patty Beall had an especially strong connection with Astoria and the Classic Yacht Association. They knew Bob Ekoos, founding member of the Classic Yacht Association and its first Commodore. Bob grew up in Astoria and when he died in 2008, Bob and Cherry Beall, and other friends carried Bob Ekoos' ashes to the Columbia River aboard *Merrimac*. His ashes were spread on the river near Tongue Point, just upstream from Astoria. According to Skip Hauke, a close friend of Bob's, *Merrimac* was beautifully decorated with flowers for the trip. Today the boat is a beautiful example of excellent boat building and a testament to Dyer and AMCCO's legacy. According to John "the boat is original and had no wrecks or structure mishaps. It is a rare gem and takes work and money to keep in top condition". The boat is kept in 'ready to show' condition and has won numerous awards in shows around the northwest.

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As the *Merrimac* arrived in Astoria on Monday, August 8th, 2022 it motored past the museum wharf and was greeted by family members, museum staff and spectators. Once moored at the West Basin moorage, the daunting task of removing personal items, gear and assorted equipment from the boat began in earnest. The following morning *Merrimac* was scheduled to be hauled-out at nearby Port of Astoria, power washed, and then loaded onto a trailer for transportation to the museum's boat storage warehouse.

When the exquisite and beautiful 84-year old *Merrimac* left the moorage, it was the last time she would be seen motoring gracefully on the water. Watching the process of the haul-out and loading the boat onto the trailer was fascinating, and the onshore crews worked expertly and quickly. Once the boat was loaded and secured, the semi-trailer left the yard, turned east onto Hwy 101, and *Merrimac* made her final journey to the museum through downtown Astoria on busy Commercial Street.



Merrimac being towed down Commercial Street, August 9, 2022. photo courtesy of Columbia River Maritime Museum

