



Ian McKain/Times-Colonist

■ Computer notwithstanding, MacFarlane has his work cut out for him in keeping track of a growing assortment of marine memorabilia: "It's a bit of an avalanche," he admits.

Maritime Museum has a treasure trove in store

IT'S OFFICIAL. We'll soon have a new maritime museum in the Inner Harbor between the Malahat Building and Ship Point. The design and paying for it aren't done yet, but the project is a natural.

To get a sense of what's in store, I took a behind-the-scenes tour of the present museum in Bastion Square. Come along as the museum's director of new development, John MacFarlane, shows us around their storage.

The Maritime Museum Society was organized by the Canadian Navy in 1953, became a society in 1955 and was then quartered at Signal Hill in Esquimalt. Since 1963 it has enjoyed a remarkable home in the original courthouse in Bastion Square. This building, 101 years old, boasts an ancient and ornate elevator, and the staff are the last, licensed elevator operators in the province. In that gilded cage, we ascended to the top floor where the former courtrooms and chambers house a collection that is literally a treasure trove.

In the first hallway we passed shadow box model of the Victorian, a four-masted ship crowding on every sail possible as it passed a painted view of Trial Island. This was built by Jeune Brothers, the tent and awning people, a long time ago. Beside it was a teletype machine which reported the bombing of Pearl Harbor to Esquimalt. Presented by the Telephone Pioneers of B.C. it's in working condition and, despite



ROBERT AMOS
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the appearance of this dinosaur of information technology, was in service until last year. Nearby, crowded on cases, were plastic models of ships.

"We don't collect plastic models," MacFarlane tells me, "but people give them to us. It's kind of an ethical question. Should we?"

Then he leads me into the former Supreme Courtroom.

Gasp! The proportions of this room, the wooden mouldings, its historic aura . . . all are intact, and the original furniture has been carefully stowed in the balcony. The room is dense, with 20,000 sheets of ships' drawings, the complete records of Versatile Pacific shipyards from 1910 to 1955. On the judge's bench is a model as big as a bathtub of the SS Carmania, somewhat the worse for wear, but magisterial. And tucked behind it are whale baleen, some spars and a carved wooden dragon.

MacFarlane takes me behind the red balse door into the judge's chambers. There, cabinets hold 30,000 leaves of manuscript documents, logs, journals and the like.

"I used to say that 97 per cent of

the collection had never been on show — ever. Now I'd call it 99 per cent. The collection has doubled in the last two years."

Stacked in the corner are the complete furnishings of Rithet's shipping office, which will be put back together in the new museum.

The registrar is across the hall, and Macintosh computer notwithstanding, he clearly has his work cut out for him. A brass lighthouse lamp, a glass fishing float, life rings, lamps, a captain's hat, a contemporary scrimshaw carving . . .

"It's a bit of an avalanche," MacFarlane admits. People are now trusting their treasures to the museum in even greater numbers. "We can offer a certain sort of immortality. Things are safer here than in the rec. room."

One file cabinet holds 20,000 historical photographs of ships in archival folders. Another has the of 10 years of obsessive labor by a dedicated amateur — the complete history of every British ship that called into Victoria, and each file contains a watercolor of the ship.

Back in the stacks are paintings and prints in profusion, and more than 600 marine flags, one of the largest collections of them on Earth. One dim and densely-packed room has enough clothing and accessories to kit out a squadron, and what a parade it would be! The complete gear for everyone from seaman to admiral, from the gold epaulets to shoelaces, is filed here, in styles from 1850 to present.

I learned that there are maritime museums in every province and both territories. Vancouver's museum specializes in the history of Arctic exploration, the port of Vancouver, and shipping lines. The Canadian War Museum has chosen our museum as the official naval museum for Canada west of the Ontario/Manitoba border.

While 20 per cent of Victoria's collection relates to naval history, it's a maritime museum with a balanced collection. Shipbuilding, fishing and undersea cable

are also part of the story.

We reach the major storeroom on this premises, where the steel shelves in close file are freighted with tools for shipwrights, riggers, blacksmiths, sail-makers, divers, radio men. MacFarlane hands me a solid brass gun built to hurl a small whaling harpoon propelled by an eight-gauge shell. A brutish iron spear bigger than me — "such a repulsive thing," he notes, — is part of the history of "the worldwide marine mammal harvest," now hopefully a thing of the past.

Victoria was a world centre for sealing. Around us, top shelves are lined with models of every type of vessel, some finger-sized, some in bottles.

I skip past thousands of items with stories to tell, and enter the main courthouse where a fine library is open to the members. Volunteers field a mushrooming crop of requests in this room full of books, as yet arranged only by sequence of receipt. It's "an area ripe for professionalization," as MacFarlane puts it.

Downstairs, the exhibits manfully bear up under the attentions of as many as 10 school groups a day, some of these exhibits put together by amateurs 20 years ago. There is a constant hunger for this information.

In the ship model room, the tales MacFarlane spins about these labors of love leave me reeling. HMS Duke of York, considered the best model in the building, was recently given by Charles G. Butterworth of Summerland, who spent 10 years on the two-metre-long replica. Its cannons fire 22 bullets! The handsome Empress of Japan II took four years, cost \$100,000 and is more accurate than the builder's own model.

When the new museum is built, we can expect it to feature three main attractions. First, the valiant little Tillicum again fully rigged. Then a working triple reciprocating steam engine, fully five metres tall. And finally, a one-sixth scale

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AT THE GALLERIES

A listing of special art shows in the Victoria region.
IN TOWN

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (1040 Moss St., 384-4101) — *John Koerner: Past/Present* — paintings exploring the relationship of man and nature. Until Feb. 2.

— *Chinese Paintings* — The Beiyuzhai collection from Seattle, dating from the 13th to 18th centuries. Until March 29.

Collection.

— **McPherson Library Gallery** —

— Works by Geoff Hodder. Ends Monday.

Northern Passage Gallery (1020 Government St.) — *Winterfest* — watercolors by Linda Dayan Frimer and Lynne Carmichael. Ends Thursday.

— *Hand in Hand* — group exhibit by Norris, Bibi, Mills, Hunter, Carmichael, Fuller, Shinkaruk, Ley and Frimer. Tel. 381-3380.

Nunavut Gallery (2188 Oak Bay Ave.) — Water-