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Shipyard treasure trove given to museum

By Patrick Murphy

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The dedication to history by an Esquimalt shipyard executive has given the Maritime Museum of B.C. the "most significant collection of marine industrial artifacts in North America."

"I lived in antiques. History is an important part of our lives," said Yarrows Ltd. President Don Nicholson in an interview as he turned the truckloads of artifacts over to the museum.

"Without history, we would turn into plastic with no substance.

"The sight and sound of the sea has to mean something and I had the ability and power to save it.

"It could not have been done without the men of the yard who

have saved so much and give it significance."

The treasure trove is about 40,000-plus sheets of ship drawings and another 10,000 documents of all kinds relating the history of the shipyard dating back a century.

There are also artifacts, photos of ships and works in the yard.

This year, Yarrows marks the centennial of the first shipyard on the Esquimalt site.

Nicholson and the workers of the yard created a heritage committee and scrounged through the lockers, vaults and behind machinery to find the material.

He said many items had been discarded as not functional, but he realized they would be invaluable

for the museum which is the record of maritime history on the Pacific coast.

"They are a snapshot of an era," Nicholson said.

"We couldn't risk these from a historical point of view."

The shipyard turned the material over to the museum, but it is up to the museum to look after it.

No problem, said museum President Keith Reed.

"We look at this as one of the pillars of the museum's future," he said.

"This company has touched ships from around the world with repairs.

"This is one of the most significant collections of marine indus-

trial artifacts in North America."

the donation has importance on a continental basis, he said, as it goes back to the days of the Esquimalt Marine Railway shipyards.

"This allows us to see the history of the shipyard, but not only of the vessels, but of the people who worked on them and built them."

The donation follows Yarrows' donation last year of more than 10,000 ships plans. It will be catalogued and stored on computer in the future.

One benefit is the original plans to researchers and model-makers who can see what was done in a bygone era.