

History of a Great Shipyard

The Wallace Shipyard opened in 1906 and grew into one of the most impressive industrial operations in western Canada. Alfred Wallace was the original shipyard owner/operator. The company changed names several times from Wallace Shipyards to Burrard Dry Dock, Burrard-Yarrows and finally Versatile Pacific Shipyards.

The Shipyard's long list of accomplishments included the building of the schooner Mabel Brown (1917), the CPR ferry Princess Louise (1921) and the R.C.M.P. schooner St. Roch (1928). The St. Roch is now a National Heritage Artifact at the [Vancouver Maritime Museum](#). Under the guidance of Alfred Wallace and his sons Clarence and Hubert, the Shipyard was an industry leader in innovation and production.

The Shipyard's productivity peaked during World War II when it became the largest employer of shipyard labour in B.C. During the war, it produced 109 of the 312 "Victory Ships" produced in Canada. Entire subdivisions were created in North Vancouver to house the workforce. The Shipyard's contribution to the war effort was so significant that at the end of World War II, Clarence Wallace was decorated as "Commander of the British Empire". Information and photos of the Shipyard during this period are available at [Industry Canada's SchoolNet Digital Collections Program Site](#).

Clarence Wallace served as B.C.'s first native born Lt. Governor from 1950 to 1955. Following World War II, ship building activities slowed and the ship repair industry became more prevalent. Ice breakers (including the Terry Fox) and super ferries were constructed during this time. The Wallace family sold the Shipyard in 1971.

With a surplus of shipyard facilities in B.C., the Versatile Pacific Shipyards closed in the early 1990s. The easterly portion of the site with the Panamax Drydock has continued to operate as the Vancouver Drydock Company.

The westerly portion of the site has been vacant since the closure of the Shipyard and is used primarily for movie filming. It is that vacant part of the old Shipyard that is now being considered for redevelopment. The Shipyard is identified as a Primary Heritage Site in the City of North Vancouver Heritage Inventory (available at City Hall). Eight historic shipyard buildings and two piers will either be retained or reconstructed as part of the proposed redevelopment. The site will also include extensive historic shipyard commemoration.

For more information on the history of the Shipyard, publications, or artifacts, contact the [North Vancouver Museum & Archives](#).