



WESTERN CANADA
HERITAGE VESSEL
REGISTRY

Statement of Significance

Dorothy

1897



MARITIME MUSEUM
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

Dorothy

Year built: 1897
Builder: J.J. Robinson
Build Location: Victoria, B.C.

Vessel Type: Sailing Yacht
WCHVR Category: B.C. Heritage Vessel
Owner(s): Maritime Museum of B.C.

PRÉCIS:

Dorothy is remarkable not only for her lengthy survival (and rebirth), but also for the unusually rich record of her design, construction, and use that has been assembled. She was built for William Langley of Victoria, to the design of Linton Hope of England. ***Dorothy*** came close to being lost on several occasions in the late 1940s, the 1950s, and around 2000, but her inherent beauty and perfection of form repeatedly attracted people willing to keep her alive. Over her long life, 11 sets of owners have been inspired to keep her sailing, smart, and trim whenever possible, and to bring her back to life when circumstances seemed to have turned against her.



Dorothy under full sail in her home waters

Statement of Significance

When **Dorothy** was launched in Victoria, British Columbia, in the summer of 1897, no one attending could have imagined that she would still be sailing 129 years later. She is remarkable not only for her survival, but also for the unusually rich record of her design, construction, and use. Original correspondence survives between her owner, William Langley, and her English designer, Linton Hope, along with a significant collection of material relating to her construction by J. J. Robinson and fitting out by Langley. **Dorothy** has also never undergone a frame-up restoration. It is estimated that 50 per cent of her one-inch red cedar planking is original, as are most of her oak framing and copper rivets, the keel, the sternpost, and the lower part of the stem. Beneath the plywood and Dynel cloth covering on the deck and cabin top are the original tongue-and-groove decks. The mast, most of its fittings, and the gaff are original, or date from soon after the rig was changed from Gunter to gaff in 1902 and the Turner furling gear—still present today—was installed. The cockpit survived into the early 1950s, when it was badly damaged by fire, and was altered again in the 1970s to make it more useful for family outings. **Dorothy** came close to being lost on several occasions in the late 1940s, the 1950s, and around 2000, but her inherent beauty and perfection of form repeatedly attracted people willing to refit her and bring her back to life.

The current refit, which moved very slowly from 2018 to 2023, was predicated by a mandate from the Maritime Museum of B.C. to create a living display that had the look and feel that **Dorothy** had before 1914. In effect it creates a window into the late 19th century development of the city of Victoria and its waterfront, as **Dorothy** in the period from 1897 to 1914 was a living fixture in the harbour at her mooring and in dozens of pictures from that time. She can be easily spotted as she is the only vessel with a roller furling headsail. Slight changes in her rigging that occurred between 1897 and 1902, being recognized, can actually be used to provide dates for photographs of the inner harbour that are otherwise unknown. From that vantage point, stepping into the photograph and sitting on **Dorothy**, looking around, one can begin to see the rapid development and change that occurred around her at the time.

Dorothy is a product of the time when boatbuilding of all sorts was occurring in Victoria and Esquimalt Harbour. There was a huge demand for working craft and all the affiliated supplies that were needed for fitting them out. At the same time there was a growing interest in recreational boating and a number of commercial builders were contracted to build skiffs, motor launches, naphtha launches, steamboats and yachts of various sizes. Engaging with the archival records of **Dorothy's** construction, one gets a clear idea of how widely varied the process of building a small yacht in Victoria was at that time. J.J. Robinson's \$500 contract with William Langley to build **Dorothy** only covered the construction and finishing of the hull, deck and spars. Everything else was William Langley's responsibility. A lot of the fittings were ordered from England, her first set of sails came from England, but by 1902 a Victoria sailmaker supplied her new set when she switched to gaff rig. The centre board was fabricated in San Francisco and shipped up by

the steamer Umatilla to Victoria; a Bill of Lading for this is still in the archives. Several suppliers in Victoria provided blacksmith work, copper tanks for water, paints and varnishes, cordage, all of the things that were required for any kind of boat building and often at a much larger scale than ***Dorothy***.

Dorothy is a remarkable portal into the past. Over her long life, 11 sets of owners have been inspired to keep her sailing, smart, and trim whenever possible, and to bring her back to life when circumstances seemed to have turned against her. The world into which she was born is long gone, there is no returning to the heyday of wooden yacht and boat construction, when the waterfronts of coastal cities and towns across North America, Europe, and the Far East bustled with the building, maintenance, and fitting out of craft for many purposes. By preserving ***Dorothy*** as a sailing vessel with the appearance and character of her early years, the current refit by MMBC keeps a tangible part of that world alive.

Statement of Significance for:

Sailing Yacht *Dorothy*

Prepared and acknowledged by the
Western Canada Heritage Vessel Registry

Lead Assessor: Capt. William Noon

Signature: _____

Date: September 3, 2026

SOURCES:

- Historical notes and summary by Mr. Robert Lawson
- Nauticapedia: <https://www.nauticapedia.ca/vessel.php?id=4646>
- MMBC archives



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