

The club's monthly story from the the victoriaharbourhistory.com website

The Victoria Classic Boat Festival



The Annual Victoria Classic Boat Festival is a Maritime Museum of British Columbia Inner Harbour event sponsored by Canoe Cove Marina & Boat Yard, and the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority

Since 1977 the Victoria Classic Boat Festival®, initially a “one-time “happening”, has become one of Victoria’s most popular annual events. For over 40 years up to 10,000 from all over the world flock to the Inner Harbour’s floats in front of the Empress Hotel each Labour Day weekend to admire as many as 130 of yesteryear’s most beautiful boats. A number of the vessels are open for public viewing.

For the first time in its 43 year history there will be no festival this year due to the pandemic

A Recognition of Excellence

In addition to serving as a celebratory gathering, the festival serves the development of the classic boat community by offering an optional judging service. Festival’s judges, each an expert in their field, stand by to meticulously inspect participant’s vessels, offering guidance and suggestions to those owners dedicated to the correct restoration of their vessels. Many boats return improved each year until they reach the pinnacle of their restoration and are recognized at the awards din-

ner that caps each year's festival. In this way the festival contributes in a very tangible way to the health of our classic boat community.

The Festival's Story

In the fall of 1977, a group led by Bob Leach of the Sidney Gaffers and Keith Cameron of the Maritime Museum of BC planned to commemorate Captain Cook's bicentenary by building a replica of the first European ship to be built in the Pacific Northwest, John Mears' Northwest America. A request for a provincial grant was denied and sufficient corporate funding was not available. The idea of a classic boat festival blossomed within the group which had grown to include Bev Highton, former owner of the schooner Lorna Doon, and President-elect of the Victoria Real Estate Board (VREB). Bev and VREB agreed to sponsor the festival.

In July 1978 the VREB hired Jim Russell to coordinate and promote the festival. Port Townsend had successfully started their own classic boat festival the previous year and the Victoria group got in touch seeking guidance, which was generously given. The close relationship that developed between the two festivals continues to this day. Labour Day weekend arrived with 32 classic boats moored in front of the Empress Hotel. The first Victoria Classic Boat Festival® was underway!

Frank Fredette, sealer, boat builder, naval architect and Thermopylae Club member served as the festival's first judge and Honorary Commodore. One award, Best Sail was presented at the seafood wrap-up dinner served at James Bay's White Eagles Hall. After the celebrations the participants were loaded onto double-decker buses and returned to their boats. With a good time had by all the weekend generated enough enthusiasm to begin what has become a significant event in the classic boat calendar.

Sponsorship

The festival is made possible through the generosity of Canoe Cove Marina and Boatyard, and the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority, under the umbrella of The Maritime Museum of British Columbia.