

## Preface

In Michigan, we are surrounded by water. Recreation on our Great Lakes, inland lakes, rivers, and streams is a way of life, and for many of us it involves owning or spending time on boats. Perhaps not surprisingly, our state also has a rich history of boat-building, and investigating how this craft developed can help us better understand why we value recreation on the water so much. This book is intended to provide an overview in the context of the development of the boat-building industry in Michigan, the opportunities and challenges it faced, the nature of the products and their significance, and how Michigan boat builders changed the industry in general. The industry's visionaries, promoters, failures, and entrepreneurs who called Michigan home played a vital role in producing boats to meet the desires and needs of hundreds of thousands of people over a century and a half.

I have attempted to identify the names of individuals and firms of boat builders of Michigan who intended to build and sell boats as a commercial endeavor, so it does not include the people who built boats primarily for their own use, such as commercial fishermen or the backyard builder. By setting the story grouped roughly by decades, I hope to show major transitions in the industry driven by technological changes such as the development of the internal combustion engine or the economic crises of the 1890s and 1930s and national and international events such as World War II. Depending on their longevity, some companies only appear in one decade while others appear in several. To the extent that I could, I have tried to identify the communities the builders worked in and the date ranges during which they existed in the business.

I used a great deal of data from non-maritime sources, such as the *Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory*, corporate annual reports at the Archives of Michigan, genealogical information, newspaper stories, maps, and state and federal censuses, to draw conclusions about where people gathered to build boats, who they established relationships with, and how they built the industry from small workshops to enormous factories, all focusing on people, processes, and products.

The patterns of growth in both the automobile and boat-building industries in Michigan took much the same path after the introduction of the internal combustion engine. An explosion in growth followed by consolidation in hard economic times before yet another expansion is a pattern repeated constantly over the decades. In a few instances, especially in Detroit among the engine builders, the same players led the way in each field.

Michigan became a national leader in the boat-building industry during the early twentieth century. I have tried to show what was happening in Michigan not so much from a geographically myopic viewpoint but more as a representative microcosm of what was going on nationally in a broader context. Michigan boat builders transformed the boat-building industry in many ways, with new subsectors such as knock-down pattern boats, folding canvas boats, and mahogany-planked runabouts. Innovations in the organization of boat production also led the world. Without landing craft built in Michigan, World War II might have lasted much longer than it did.

Michigan boat builders earned fame and fortune with racing performance, endurance runs, design and engineering prowess, creative advertising and marketing, business acumen, and all of the other things that lead to success in commercial endeavors. The failures (which by far outnumbered the successes) all taught the remaining manufacturers more about the nature of the market and the need for products targeted to meet its demands. It is my hope that this work will prove to be a springboard for the further study of historic boat builders around the state, and that boat enthusiasts will find interest and enjoyment, like a good cruise, in what they read herein.