

Research Reports

Rapports de recherches

The Painter (Tyee) Boat

GRANT MACLEOD

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Introduction

The Tyee or Painter Boat was an adaptation of a classic rowboat design whose modifications were dictated by local conditions and its specific usage. The boat was developed and built in the Campbell River area of coastal British Columbia by E. P. "Ned" Painter between 1923 and 1954. The fishing and environmental conditions of the area immediately adjacent to Tyee Spit on Discovery Passage shaped Painter's design for the boat. Painter's boats are still considered the perfect design for salmon fishing in Discovery Passage and are the boat of choice for the members of the Tyee Club of British Columbia. The symbiotic relationship between the Painter family, the Tyee Club and the local community has been beneficial for all parties

and has helped to make the Campbell River area one of the most renowned salmon sport fishing spots in the world.

Hull Form

The Painter design is based on a classic rowing boat with alterations customized for local conditions and use. It is most probably a variation on the Whitehall rowing skiff, which originated in New York City around 1820. It also bears some similarities to the Acme Skiff built around 1900 in the Seattle area. Having done his shipwright's apprenticeship at Burrard Dry Docks in North Vancouver, Painter would likely have been familiar with both boats. There is also a possible influence on the design by the feature of the indigenous watercraft of the area on the Painter boat. The Painter family first lived in the native community area of Campbell River at a time when traditional native watercraft would still have been relatively common. These boats had developed over centuries for similar uses in the same area and with some of the same design needs and environmental conditions effecting its alterations and adaptations.

The adaptations from the classic Whitehall include lowering the gunwales amidships in order to reduce the effects of wind on the beam and in order to make lifting up to 70-pound Tyee salmon into the boat easier and safer. The boat is rocker-shaped overall, highest in the prow, sweeping low along the gunwales and rising slightly again at the stern. Rounded in cross-section, tapering gradually to a V-shaped and high angular prow. The boat's low freeboard reduces windage. The boat is stable and highly streamlined. Clinker-style planking adds to the stability, as the edges act as tiny bilge keels. In addition there are three horizontal wooden strips running the length of the sides just below the waterline that also act as bilge keels. The keel is shallow in the bow area and deepens gradually to about

8 inches (20 cm) at the stern and acts as the main stabilizer that prevents oscillating or fishtailing in the strong local currents. The strong keel also allows the boat to be dragged up on the beach without risking serious structural damage. The stern is squared off with a wineglass-shaped transom. The transom is much stronger than need be, possibly anticipating increase in use of small outboard motors.

Size

The length over all is typically 14 feet 3 inches (4.3 m), although some 12-footers (3.7 m) and a few rare 10-footers (3.1 m) were built. Beam is generally 4 feet 2 inches (1.3 m) in the 14-foot version, and is scaled down proportionately in the 10- and 12-foot models.

Planking

Clinker style overlapping planks, made of western red cedar that were steamed into shape, then cut in pairs from the same board so that they could be placed opposite to each other during construction to provide balance on each side in terms of weight and flex. There were seven planks on each side including the garboard.

Frames

The boats featured oak ribs; Honduran or Philippine mahogany gunwales on the outside (outwales); Douglas fir, mahogany or occasionally yellow cedar on the inside (inwales); transom, knees, seats and stern were oak or mahogany; the keel, Douglas fir or oak.

Fastenings

Nails, probably copper, were used throughout. There is not much information on this topic. It can be assumed that Painter used the standard shipwright technology of the day.

Interior

Some variation occurred depending on the number of people fishing, one or two. The seats were wooden plank. The guide's seat was fixed athwart the sixth or seventh rib. Originally fishers used a movable seat (fore or aft) and added a second seat as needed, one behind the other. Later versions featured two fishing seats side by side, an innovation attributed to Joe Meredith, one of the Painter's Lodge guides and a helper in the boat-building business in the off-season.

Propulsion

Wooden oars were used; one set in middle of the boat. These were made out of 2 × 8 inch (5 cm × 20 cm) by 8-foot (2.4 m) planks that would be

band-sawn down the middle to get the two oars out of each plank. The rest of the shaping of the oar was done with hand tools. The oars were made with a spoon-shaped blade that many users felt gave better "grip" in the water. Ned Painter and his crew also made these in their workshop. In later years small 3- to 7.5-hp outboard motors were used, but only to get to and from the fishing area. While actually engaged in fishing according to Tyee Club rules, oars only were permitted to qualify any salmon caught for Tyee Club records.

Construction of the Boat

The boat-building season started in March each year. Ned Painter and one or two apprentices would start by getting raw lumber in and then inspecting and sorting according to the quality of wood, based on the grain and number and type of defects, such as knots and what the piece could be potentially used for. The pieces were then cut and planed to length and thickness. The planks would have to be clear edge-grained cedar planed to 1 1/8 inches (3 cm) thick and between 6 (1.8 m) and 12 feet (3.7 m) long. Patterns made from planks deemed too defective to be used on a boat were used to trace out the shape on new planks. These patterns were all Painter used to make his boats; he apparently did not have blueprints or moulds but worked from memory and experience. The shapes were cut out and bevelled. All the other component parts were cut out and shaped at this time as much as possible.

Once all the pieces were ready to make the fifty to sixty boats planned for the season the crew was expanded to five or six, often including Ned's brother Joe. Often the extra help would be Painter's fishing guides, such as Joe Meredith. The actual assembly process was a fast-paced operation. After the keel was fitted to the forms the planks were attached next. Many who worked with Painter describe running the planks from the steamer to the assembly crew who nailed the plank in place while they went back for the next plank. Once the planking started all fourteen planks, seven on each side, would be nailed in place in as little as half an hour.

After the nails had been clinched from the inside, the ribs were bent into place and nailed. This operation used two people, one working from the inside and one on the outside, to complete. Once this was complete the forms were removed and the hull was finished. The next job was to put on the outwales and a temporary spreader/brace to help maintain the hull shape. The gunwales were "sighted" in place "by eye," usually by Ned, and later by the helpers once Ned saw they had

developed an eye for the job. The stem, having been custom shaped by hammer and chisel, was added next, also "by eye," followed by the stemposts, transom and apron.

With the number of workers Ned had he was able to work on a number of boats simultaneously. One group might be loading the steamer and making sure the fire and water supply kept the steamer at its optimum working level. Another group would be running the steamed planks and yet another nailing them in place. If more were available, they might be finishing the hull or painting.

Painter's Boatyard and Tools

The boat-building shed used to make the Painter boats was a rough built construction on the Spit. It was approximately 30 feet by 60 feet (9 m by 18 m) with the floor raised two to three feet (0.5 to 1 m) off the ground. It was built of 2 × 4 inch (5 cm × 10 cm) framing with shiplap or 1 × 12 inch (2.5 cm × 30.5 cm) rough planking on the exterior walls. The floor was rough 2 × 12 inch (5 cm × 30 cm) planking. The cross ties in the open ceiling served as storage racks for long material, such as the planks and keels. Inside there were several workbenches along the walls where the planing, sawing and sanding was done. Each was approximately 20 feet (6 m) by 2 feet (0.5 m) and was equipped with a wooden vice. On the wall behind each workbench hung a selection of saws and a level. Above that was a 2.5 cm × 30.5 cm shelf on which were stored planes, spokeshaves, sandpaper, screws, tacks and other items needed for the construction of the boats. Under the benches were boxes with miscellaneous items related to the construction such as knees, breast hooks, and patterns. In addition to the hand tools, Painter's shed also had a planer and a bandsaw. These power tools were used for roughing out the pieces to the shape and size needed. The rest of the work was all done by hand tools. Just outside the shed but partially sticking inside was the steamer, one of the most important parts of the construction process.

The boat-building area also had an open-fronted storage shed where the boats were kept over the winter. As Painter sold his boats at the end of each fishing season the boats stored were mostly those of locals. This shed was very rustic, just enough to give the boats some protection from the weather and raise it off the ground to allow airflow to prevent rot.

Most of the work was done by hand tools, some of which are still in the possession of Ned's son, Joe Painter. Aside from these the two most important pieces of equipment were the band saw and

the steamer. The bandsaw was driven by a six horsepower International engine and could accommodate large stock with its 30-inch (0.8 m) mouth. The bandsaw was used to rough cut the lumber, to split the 2-inch (5 cm) plank pieces in half and to rough shape the pieces. Ned eventually obtained a gang saw that could cut several planks at once. This also enabled him to pick up rejected logs from the Elk River Timber Company, which he could mill himself into usable and valuable lumber.

The steamer was crucial to the boat-building process. Painter's, as would have been the case at the time, was a relatively simple homemade affair. It consisted of four 1 × 12s forming a box about 16 feet (5 m) long. At one end a 45-gallon (205 l) drum with a 15-gallon (68 l) drum suspended inside was used to boil water in the 15-gallon drum. The resulting steam rose through an opening into the 12-inch (30.5 cm) box that was stacked with all fourteen planks ready to be installed on the form. The water level in the smaller drum had to be consistent in order to produce a "wet steam." Wet steam made the planks more supple, easier to bend into place and less likely to pull away once nailed. It also reduced the problem of the planks splitting when nailed.

Features of the Area

The area in which the Painter boat was built and used had one of the most remarkable runs of Tye salmon on the Pacific coast. The topography of the land and seabed sheltered the area from riptides and storms. The larger area encompassed Discovery Passage, a narrow 40-kilometre corridor from Chatham Point in the north to Cape Mudge at the south end of Quadra Island. Halfway along Discovery Passage is Seymour Narrows with tides up to 15 knots. South of Seymour Narrows tides run 8 to 10 knots in the 2.5 to 3 km wide passage. The tremendous tidal flow through these restricted passages carries a great amount of rich nutrient material, which attracts a myriad of sealife. Some of this sealife is the food of choice for the spring salmon and as a result they have been drawn there in large numbers, and because of the abundance of food they have on occasion grown into 70 pound (32 kg) behemoths.

The Campbell River enters Discovery Passage 6.5 km north of Cape Mudge on the Vancouver Island side. At an average flow rate of 115 cm per second it is a large river by Vancouver Island standards. The river deposits large quantities of sand and silt at its mouth, which spreads along the shoreline forming bars and pools, which are excellent spots for the salmon to gather to rest and feed and

wait. Most of these holding pools are at the end of the bar. These spots are consequently the best spots for sportfishing. From the south end of Tyee Pool to the deeper water off Argonaut Wharf are the best spots. Tyee Spit separates the inner and outer estuaries of the Campbell River. The southern part of Tyee Pool is called Potlatch Pool. North of Tyee Spit is Frenchman's Pool. The two largest Tyee ever caught came out of Frenchman's Pool. In 1964 eight-year old Patricia Hughes caught and landed a Tyee of 73½ lbs. (33.3 kg) In 1968 John Saxer brought in one of 77 lbs. (34.9 kg), the largest recorded Tyee ever landed. The record still stands, however neither was caught under Tyee Club regulations and could not be registered with them.

The Fish

The spring salmon — *Oncorhynchus tshawytscha* — is commonly known as Tyee, King, Chinook, Columbia River, or Quinnat. The word "Tyee" is derived from the Coast Salish word for chief, king, or champion. Only the largest of spring salmon earn the right to be called Tyee. The scientific name has its root in the Russian government studies of the area done in 1731 and 1792. The name was confirmed by Pallus in 1811. Only spring and coho salmon are considered game fish. They can be taken on a fly but are usually caught with a spinning and/or wobbling bait.

Origins of the Painter Boat

The design appears to have been based on the classic Whitehall boat originally built in New York City in the 1820s. The Painter and the Whitehall

have very similar lines and construction details. The distinctive wineglass shaped transom indicates some connection. Whitehall Rowing and Sail of Victoria, British Columbia, makes only two boats, fibreglass versions of Painter's boat, and the Whitehall. Many of the descriptions of the rowing qualities of the two boats are also similar.

History of the Painter Boat

Edward Petchell Painter, usually known as Ned, was born 11 May 1887 in Vancouver, British Columbia. In 1922 he moved to the Campbell River area from Port Alberni where he had had a marginally successful boatbuilding business for two years. He was a master boat builder who had apprenticed at Vancouver Shipyards at the age of fourteen. He had been a naval diver stationed in England during the First World War. He came alone at first on a reconnaissance mission, leaving his wife, June, and young daughter, Joan, in Port Alberni. He immediately liked the area and felt it had much better prospects for the future because it already had an established and renowned sport fishing industry.

The family first built a cabin in the native village area of Campbell River. In 1923 they set up a boat-building shop on Tyee Spit along with a tent camp for sport fisherman. He started renting his boats from the Spit in 1924. Ned was joined at the Spit camp in 1924 by his brother Joe from Vancouver who, in addition to helping in the boat-building business, went on to become a well-known local fishing guide.

Painter sold a fleet of his boats to Melville Haigh, the manager of the Willows Hotel, who was trying to revive his flagging business. Although the Willows

Fig. 1

The Painter rowboat fleet and guides, 1926; left to right: Herbert Pidcock, Charlie McDonald; Ned Painter (boat builder); Joe Painter, Sr; Tom Perkins; Jack Perkins; Ed Forrest; Dave Vanstone; Grant Allen; Cecil Smith; Frank Shaw; Cecil Fitzgerald; Joe Meredith; Herbert Smith. (Courtesy The Museum of Campbell River, no. 11542)



was the only real hotel in the area at the time it was deemed to be too far from the fishing grounds off Tyee Spit. As a result Painter was encouraged to build accommodation nearer the Spit. The Willows Hotel continued to decline in almost direct proportion to the Painters' operation's rise.

By 1928 he had a fleet of sixty rental boats. On average Ned and his crew built forty to sixty boats each winter with yearly production peaking at sixty-five. Boats rented for \$3 per day plus \$8 for a guide who worked a fourteen to sixteen hour day on the water.

Painter also built larger boats, such as the 40-foot (12.2 m) "Edward White," which was built for the United Church Coast Mission, and ran up the coast. The camp was run by his wife, June. They rented and sold the rowboats Ned built for fishing in Tyee Pool directly in front of his camp. The Second World War interrupted the business, but it resumed afterwards. Ned Painter finally retired from boatbuilding in 1954. He passed away in Campbell River at the age of 72 on 5 December 1960.

Painter's Lodge and the Painter Family

The Painters became involved in offering accommodation to sportfishers in 1926 after being persuaded by A. N. Wolverton that they must offer accommodation in order to keep the fishing and boat rental business flourishing. A camp was started on Tyee Spit with five tents and by 1928 had expanded to ten. The first cabins were canvas and board shacks. The impetus for starting the camp at all arose from the complaints of guests at Willows Hotel (too noisy and too far distant from the

fishing grounds at Tyee Pool and river mouth area). For Ned this worked out well as it provided a ready market for his boats. Before long the resort business had outstripped the boatbuilding side and basic rental and guiding aspects of the operation. The tents were spartan but had wooden floors and solid framing against the often-inclement weather, even in summer. Patrons had to bring everything with them. The camp provided a bed, a table, a chair, and a cook stove. The tent camp was in use for forty years. The big plus to having the camp on the Spit was that salmon-rich Tyee Pool was right in front and the patrons could literally fish from their doorstep. It also eliminated the need to row from town to the fishing grounds and back every day.

After the first bridge over the Campbell River was completed in 1928, a second fish camp called the Tyee Auto Camp was started by the Vanstone family, overlooking Frenchman's Pool. The Painters bought the operation in 1939 and it was run by Joe Painter's wife, Madge, until it closed in 1961.

In 1930 the Painters built nine solid and "luxurious" rental housekeeping units northwest of the river mouth also on the other side of the new bridge. One of these cabins became the first clubhouse for the Tyee Club in its early years. (The Tyee Club now has its own clubhouse on the Spit but annual meetings are always held at Painter's Lodge). A dining room was added in 1931.

A beautiful and cozy lodge was built in 1940. There were twelve units in the lodge when it opened and two years later it had expanded to eighteen. The lodge became a local landmark and the centre of the sport fishing industry. A later version of the lodge was a Tudor-style building with a dining hall, lounge

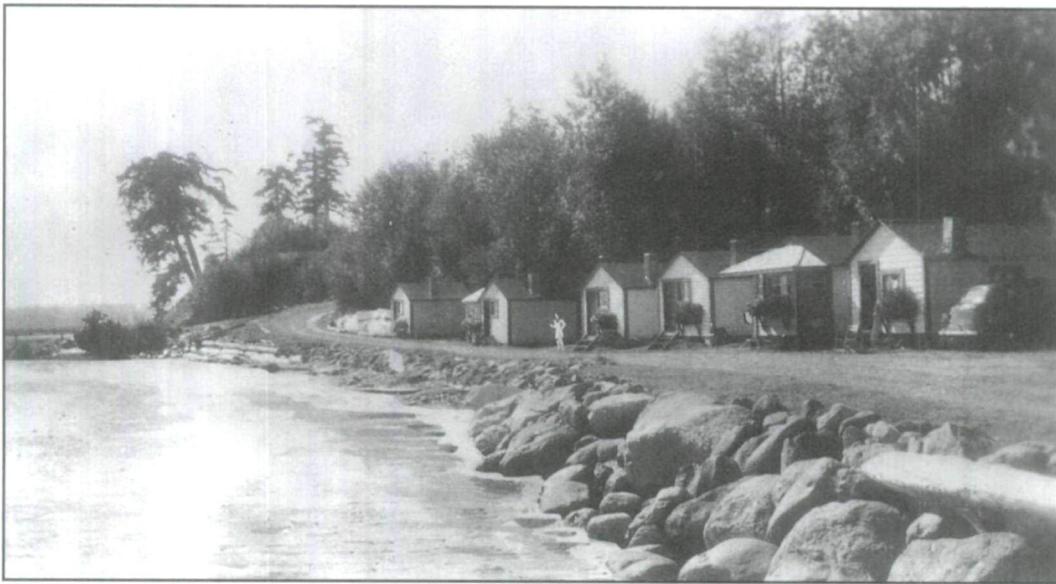


Fig. 2
Tyee Auto Camp on the shores of Frenchman's Pool, ca 1940s
(Courtesy The Museum of Campbell River, no. 11881)

Fig. 3
King Prajadhipok of Siam fishing with guide Herbert Pidcock, 1931. (Courtesy The Museum of Campbell River, no. 11100)



and room for twenty people, plus the twelve original cottages. It was now owned and run by June's half-brothers, Peter and Herbert Barclay, and Ned. But it was still June who really made the place work.

Over the years many famous people have stayed there, including Bob Hope, Sir John Asser (Governor of Bermuda), Lord Astor, and U.S. Senator William Humphrey. The most memorable guests for the Painters and the community were the King and Queen of Siam (Thailand) on 10 November 1931. The original lodge was tragically destroyed by fire on 24 December 1985, and many historic items and memorabilia were lost. The Painter family had sold the lodge to a syndicate in 1948 as the result of what is described as a family dispute, but the sight of the burning lodge still had a great impact on the family. A new Painter's Lodge is today owned by the Oak Bay Marine Group and still ranks as a world-class destination for salmon fishing.

The Painters had five children of their own and raised two of June's sister's children. Many of the family worked in the business over the years and some descendants still live in the area and work in the sport fishing industry, mostly as guides. Most notable is Ned's son Joe who still owns some of his father's boat-building hand tools and is a director of The Museum at Campbell River, which has two of his father's boat in their collection.

The Tyee Club

The impetus for the Tyee Club can be traced to famous American author Zane Grey who was an avid fisherman and long-time visitor to the area. More importantly, Grey was a member of the Tuna

Club of Catalina, which would serve as the model on which the Tyee Club of British Columbia was based. Grey was convinced that the premise behind the Tuna Club, that "real" sport fishing was done with lightweight tackle from a rowed boat, could be applied to salmon fishing in Campbell River. One of Grey's entourage, who achieved immortality as "Lone Angler" in several of Grey's fishing stories, Dr J. A. Wiborn, was keen to establish just such a club for tyee fishing. In 1924 Wiborn, along with A. N. Wolverton and Melville Haigh, met at the Willows Hotel and formally drew up the plans for the new club.

Ned Painter and his family's history was closely tied to that of the Tyee Club of British Columbia from the very beginning. The club's first clubhouse was one of Painter's cabins on Tyee Spit and Painter acted as the first weighmaster for the Tyee Club. The Painters also acted as the club's record-keepers. The official meetings of the Tyee Club were always held at Painter's Lodge, even after they built their own clubhouse. And, of course, the boats built by Painter became the vessel of choice for anyone wanting to acquire membership in the club.

The relationship with the Tyee Club was of great economic benefit for the Painters and the larger local community. Salmon sport fishing had begun to decline after 1919 and fishers' allegiance to an area could be fleeting if fish stocks declined. Haigh, it is believed, as manager of the Willows Hotel, was well aware of this and saw in the formation of the Tyee Club and its connection to the prestigious Tuna Club something that would help revive the industry and make Campbell River again the Mecca for sportfishing. He appears to have been right.



Fig. 4
Arriving at the Tyee Spit; Dr J. A. Wiborn (left) with guide Herbert Pidcock with a good fish, believed to be the 58½ pound [26 kg] Tyee caught in 1925 (Courtesy The Museum of Campbell River, no. 10613)



Fig. 5
The first elected Directors of the Tyee club, 1926; left to right: Sir John Asser, Governor of Bermuda; Dr J. A. Wiborn, Avalon, California; A. N. Wolverton, Vancouver, British Columbia; Walter P. Miller, Seattle, Washington; Melville Haigh, Campbell River, British Columbia (Courtesy The Museum of Campbell River, no. 8175)

The Painter Boat Today

There is no large-scale commercial building of the original Painter boat in its classic wooden form. Dr Richard (Dick) Murphy made a mould from his own Painter original in 1974 and began making fibreglass copies. He and others made dozens of Painter boats using these moulds. A few small-scale

attempts at commercial production of the fibreglass versions were made to keep up a supply of boats as the number of Painter originals was decreasing. There were probably a few enthusiasts who have made authentic wooden versions of the Painter boat, but these are an expensive and time-consuming venture and are usually only made for personal

use. Recently a small commercial venture, Hilmark Boats, started in Campbell River by retired pilot Hilford Burton, began reproducing the Painter boat in an authentic wooden handcrafted version. Hilford was assisted in the initial process by advice from "Doc" Murphy. Whitehall Rowing and Sail in Victoria, British Columbia, is now making and selling commercial fibreglass versions of the Tyee boat in both a rowing and sailing version.

Dr Murphy, who is credited with almost single-handedly keeping the Tyee Club alive through some difficult years, died in late 2002, but others have picked up the torch and the Tyee Club of British Columbia is carrying on. Regular meetings are held by the club executive and sportfishers still come to challenge the great Tyee from the seat of a Painter boat and to fall asleep in Painter's Lodge dreaming of their next day on the water.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their assistance and support in the production of this article: Dr Del Muise, Centre for Public History, Department of History, Carleton University, Ottawa; Garth Wilson, Curator, Transportation, Canada Science and Technology Museum, Ottawa; Sandra Parrish, The Museum at Campbell River, Campbell River, British Columbia; the Tyee Club of British Columbia, Campbell River, British Columbia; the National Library of Canada, Ottawa; Garth Rustand, Nanaimo, British Columbia.

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