

*For Immediate Release: Documentary features 100-year old fishing vessel*

# Tordenskjold: Boat of the Century

In 1911, Pancho Villa led rebel forces during the Mexican Revolution. North of the border, John Browning introduced the Colt 45. 1911 saw the first use of aircraft as offensive weapons during the Turkish-Italian war, and the United States Navy ordered it's first airplane, the Curtiss A-1.

In 1911, Sun Yat-Sen overthrew China's Manchu dynasty, Roald Amundsen became the first man to



*A suffragette making her position clear.*

reach the South Pole and the U.S. Supreme Court dissolved Standard Oil. In 1911, Ray Harroun reached speeds of almost 75 miles per hour as he won the inaugural Indianapolis 500.

Federal spending in 1911 topped 500 million dollars and a first class stamp cost \$.02. William

H. Taft was president, the U.S. population approached 94 million people and demonstrators in New York City

demanded that women be granted the right to vote.

Across the country in Seattle, the fishing vessel *Tordenskjold* slid down the ways at a little shipyard in the Scandinavian community of Ballard. Of all the events



*The Curtiss A-1, ready for battle. Photo courtesy Curtiss Museum.*

that transpired 100 years ago, the *Tordenskjold* is one that endures.

Remarkably, as she celebrates her centennial, she is neither relic nor museum piece. The *Tordenskjold* leads a small fleet of hard working commercial fishing

schooners that compete head to head with modern boats on the Alaska fishing grounds.

Marvin Gjerde has owned and operated the *Tordenskjold* since 1979. He's still making a living with his century-old boat: *you make a good living at it. You know they're efficient boats, they're fairly inexpensive*



*Tordenskjold in 1911. This may have been her maiden voyage.*

*to operate. They're easily driven so you don't burn a lot of fuel.*

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Nobody is quite sure how many of the historic schooners are left.

*At one time, I was told there were 100 schooners in Seattle, says Per Odegaard, owner of the Vansee. And now, in the Seattle area that I know of, we're down to about 20. There's a few here and there, a couple in California, a few in Alaska but I don't believe there's 30 left.*

John McHenry owns the *Seymour*, which targets halibut and sablefish just like the *Tordenskjold* and her sisters. An anomaly in the clannish halibut fishery, an Irishman from Pennsylvania, McHenry has been a fisherman for 36 years. For McHenry, operating a 98-year-old boat is no hobby: *It's not really a form of nostalgia that has kept the Seymour going. It's still a very safe, effective platform to catch our fish. At first glance it would appear as though it was a dinosaur but*



*The Tordenskjold and her sisters steam toward their second centuries as working fish boats. From the bottom, Seymour, Vansee, Tordenskjold, Polaris, Resolute, Aleutian.*

*and or third generation, says Wade Bassi, owner of the Polaris. It's a family run business, family orientated, small business, and it gets handed down from father to son to next son and it kind of stays in the family.*

Odegaard, who started longline fishing in 1967, describes the *Vansee*: *she is an 87-foot halibut schooner, traditional wooden schooner, built out of fir, sawn fir frames, old-growth timber. Obviously, these boats were heavily built, that's one of the reasons they lasted so long. It's very similar to a sailboat style when you see the lines of it. And the sister ship Polaris, there's a picture of them when they were built side-by-side and when you see the bottom you can really see the round kind of traditional Gloucester, East Coast sailboat lines which is what they were modeled after.*



*Another day at the office for Seattle halibut fishermen.*

*we'll be out with modern boats competing neck and neck and when we pull up to the fuel dock we usually win that contest.*

Anomalies like McHenry aside; halibut fishing has always been a family affair.

*The boats in the Seattle fleet here, all of them are sec-*

*Obviously they're very good sea boats, they've taken weather for 90 some years. I was in the tail end of a tropical typhoon one time in the Bering Sea and that was probably the biggest storm I've been in, we had 50-foot waves. We were loaded with about 80 some thousand pounds of halibut at the time.*



Early Seattle shipyards like this one relied on the region's magnificent stands of old growth fir.

According to Bassi, the *Polaris* and the *Vansee* were literally cut from the same trees: *when they cut the ribs we got the inside part and he got the outside part so he's about a foot and a half wider than we are.*

Good trees they were, the old growth fir reaped from Pacific Northwest forests. The *Tordenskjold* is planked with 2¼ -inch fir on frames sawn from old growth trees.

*They had really good carpenters and really, really good material to work with, Gjerde says. I don't know how far they had to go to get the vertical grain fir she was built with. They were probably still logging on (Seattle's) Capitol Hill in those days and it was just the finest material you could possibly use.*

*Some of the later ones, they used bent oak frames. With boats like Tordenskjold and the Polaris, they're actually double sawn 8 x 8 frames, all vertical grain fir.*

*Most of the planks and beams that you see in the boat*

*are original, they haven't changed, says Bassi. There are some planks on there that are close to 40 feet long, some of the planks. Everything is fir on here, old growth fir, rims and planks are both fir, and the keel, everything is fir, there's no oak in her at all. I don't think you can afford to build a boat like this anymore, not only could you not get the materials, it would be so expensive to do that it wouldn't be worth it.*

In significant ways, the *Seymour* is much the same as when it came off the ways in 1913. In other regards, it is significantly different.

*The basic hull is very similar, so below the water line, the keel, the bow stem, the horn timber, the real guts of the boat, the frames, according to McHenry. As you get above the water line into*



The Grant en route to the end of a string of the roughly 10 miles of gear she'll set each day.

*the bulwarks, the wheelhouse has been changed; it's a modern aluminum wheelhouse. The masts are now aluminum. It has a modern diesel engine.*

*I'm sure when those guys drug that lumber down to that boat in horse drawn wagons in 1913, they had no idea this boat would be fishing with a computer on it, all the modern navigational devices, watch alarm, satellite phones.*

Now, a 30-minute PBS style documentary celebrates the old schooners and their extraordinary history.

Produced by John Sabella, the program is sponsored by the nearly 100-year-old organizations that represent the halibut schooners and their deckhands: the Fishing Vessel Owners Association and Deep Sea Fisherman's Union of the Pacific. To order copies of the documentary (\$19.95 per copy), call John Sabella & Associates, Inc. at (360) 379-1668 or follow this link: <http://www.johnsabella.com/detail.lasso?title=650716>.



*Although many contemporary Seattleites may not be aware of their existence, the historic longline schooners of Ballard have been significant contributors to the city's economy and culture for 100 years. Aerial photos: Don Wilson. Port of Seattle*

Note to editors: high resolution photograph available upon request.

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