

History of the Museum

The Nelson Museum began with the incorporation of the Kootenay Museum Association in 1955, spearheaded by its dynamic first president, Mrs. Mildred Erb. Members of the Nelson Art Club joined with members of the Nelson Oldtimers' Association and others of historical bent to obtain and operate a building in which to exhibit local and traveling art shows, and historical materials of the Kootenay Region. From 1956 until 1960 the museum occupied space in the former federal Post Office, but had to vacate to the former Kansas City House brothel on Lake Street when the City of Nelson decided to convert the Post Office into City Hall. In 1971, a new museum was selected as Nelson's project funded by federal, provincial and local grants, and in 1974, the present building opened moving to year-round operation in 1984. Since 1991, the Board of Directors has been actively seeking a centrally located, larger, and more suitable premises, and is currently working toward moving *Forward to the Past* that is back to City Hall, extensively renovated into a new home for the collections and programs of the MAAG, otherwise know as the Nelson & District Museum, Art Gallery, Archives and Historical Society.

Museum Activities 1984-2002

Although the Nelson Museum had presented many excellent programs during the years preceding moving to year-round operation, there had not been permanent paid staff until 1984. Regular monthly art exhibitions began in 1984 and have continued until today, when exhibitions are professionally curated by the Nelson Public Art Gallery Committee. Through the nearly 20 years, in a most humble space, the Museum has presented the work of many of the major artist of the region. With permanent staff it was also possible to access employment and project funding. This has allowed the museum to prepare and present a major historical exhibition each year, a number of them off-site at the Chahko Mike Mall or an empty Baker Street location. The already extensive archival collection of the museum grew in scope and content in 1989 when the city of Nelson transferred the archives of the former David Thompson University Centre to the Museum.

Amabilis II

In losing the former B.C. Forest Service Launch, the 40 ft. M.V. Amabilis II, the Nelson Museum suffered a major setback. Not only was the Amabilis II one of the last surviving wooden workboats of Kootenay Lake, but it was also well on its way to a role as the major artifact for the museum's West Kootenay Forest History Project. More than \$100,000 worth of restoration and interpretive work had been put into the restoration, including federal, provincial and local government and private sector funding, volunteer time and money, and donated materials, expertise, and services from local mills and forest-related firms. Under shipwright Dick Pollard, a standard of excellence had been set from the first survey of the ship to the last nail hammered into it. For those who have loved her and worked on her throughout the years, be assured that the M.V. Amabilis II and her history will not be forgotten.

Inferno #1

Late on Sunday afternoon, May 4th, Rami Touffaha looked over from his workplace, the Shell Station kitty-corner from the Museum and saw flames shooting out from the back of the museum. He checked again and called the Fire Department to report the flames. Within five minutes of the call, Fireman Jack Chambers was on site with a truck, had called in for help, and with the assistance of two boys who offered their assistance, had water on the flames. Within minutes more, Fire Department reinforcements were on hand not only to battle the towering blaze but also to prevent the fire from destroying the museum and its contents. When the fire started burning in the roof of the main building, Fire Chief Ron Stubbs directed his men to go into the Smokey museum and spread plastic tarpaulins over as many of the display cases and artifacts on both floors as possible. Then the firemen cut into the roof to see how far the fire had penetrated, all the while keeping the pouring water onto the fire to get it under control.

M.V. Amabilis II: History

The Specification for a forty-foot V-bottomed launch for Kootenay Lake drawn up by the Forest Service Draughting Office was presented to the Department of Lands (Forest Branch) on January 12, 1928. Erikson Brothers of Vancouver were awarded the contract, and the completed boat was delivered by flat car to the Kootenay Lake later that year. The vessel was christened *M.V. Amabilis II* as it replaced an earlier launch, the *Amabilis I* which had been wrecked in a storm.

Among her duties on Kootenay Lake were freighting of equipment and men for fire suppression, construction, and cruising, delivering hatchery fish, and even playing *Good Samaritan* to stranded travelers and needy settlers around Kootenay Lake. Although the Amabilis did not have any toilet facilities on board, she did have room to sleep a few men, with lockers for their goods and gear. She could carry 20 men and their gear as day passengers on the decks and in the cabin.

The ship was powered at different times throughout her career by Ballantine, Nordberg, Ailsa Craig (diesel), rebuilt Fordson and Ford-Simplex engines. She was well cared for during her Forest Service years, and had thorough repairs to her hull in the late 1930's.

In about 1954 the Amabilis II was retired and sold to a series of private owners and underwent a name change to the M.V. Vanderhoof, because the Amabilis name was retained by the Forest Service for 2 more boats, none of which was the type of the Amabilis II. She eventually came into possession of Mr. John Dicken Spurway of Nelson. He renamed her the M.V. Kokanee.

Mr. Spurway took many Nelson young people on outings in his boat and also used it for freighting ornamental rock from his *quarry* on the shore across from Nelson to

locations around the lake. She shortened the length of the cabin of the ship to serve his purposes, and also added a *head* and ornamental funnel, but in most ways retained the original structure of the ship.

After Mr. Spurway, the Sea Cadets of Nelson took possession of the boat. They beached it on private land near Nelson's Lakeside Park, but were not able to get the boat into service. They in turn transferred ownership to the Nelson Museum, whose directors realized its importance as an artifact of the West Kootenay history.

The M.V. Amabilis is an important artifact which recalls the days before expanded road building and the helicopter changed how crews were transported into the West Kootenay Mountains for fire fighting, timber-cruising and construction. She is also important in the history of many small communities around Kootenay Lake because of her community service under both public and private ownership.

Restoration Milestones on M.V. Amabilis II

1992: Arrival of M.V. Amabilis II at the Nelson Museum.

1993-4: Construction of cradle and deck to stabilize ship.

1994-5: Survey of ship, expansion of deck, construction of 20 x 50' wooden bow-roofed shed
Covered with Greenhouse plastic and large plastic tarp.

Archival research into history of ship.

1995-6: Restoration of the hull of the ship; removal and replacement of rotten sections of the hull.

Research and development of interpretive materials for display; Technical drawings, signage, etc.

1996-7: Continued hull and other structural restoration.

1997-8: Took a year off for the Centennial celebrations.

1998-9: Cabin restored to original size, and completed the hull decking.

2000-03: Worked on a new building to house and interpret the ship.