

1-1-2003

## The Joint Archives Quarterly, Volume 12.04: Winter 2003

Geoffrey D. Reynolds  
*Hope College*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/jaquarterly>

 Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

---

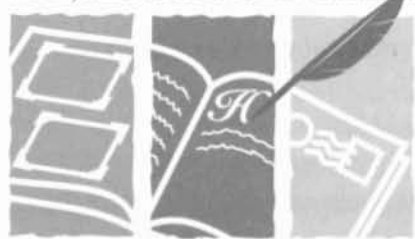
### Recommended Citation

**Repository citation:** Reynolds, Geoffrey D., "The Joint Archives Quarterly, Volume 12.04: Winter 2003" (2003). *The Joint Archives Quarterly*. Paper 56.

<http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/jaquarterly/56>

**Published in:** *Joint Archives Quarterly*, Volume 12, Issue 04, Winter January 1, 2003. Copyright © 2003 Hope College, Holland, Michigan.

This Newsletter is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Joint Archives Quarterly by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@hope.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@hope.edu).



# The Joint Archives *Quarterly*

Volume 12 Number 4

Winter 2003

## *The Mac Bay Boat Company Story*

by Geoffrey D. Reynolds

Since beginning my research and writing concerning the pleasure boat building industry of Holland, I have found the history of the Mac Bay Boat Company one of the most intriguing. Maybe it is the early tale of personal tragedy or its final struggle against a wave of emerging fiberglass boat companies. I may never be able to put my finger on it, but that's what makes studying history fun.



*George Pelgrim*

George Arthur Pelgrim, president of Bay View Furniture, began Mac Bay Boat Company in 1948 after his son-in-law, Jim White, returned from World War Two. According to White's widow, Phyllis Pelgrim White, Jim spent time working in a few areas of Bay View Furniture. Before the war, White had been an avid power boater, sailor, and instructor at the Macatawa Bay Yacht

Club. His love of the water and the many hours spent with local boat builder Kenneth Campbell, of Campbell Boat Company, must have also shaped his desire to start a boat building company of his own. Soon White's father-in-law became involved as an investor and plans were set for starting a new company based in the basement of Bay View Furniture Company. The combination of White's vision and Pelgrim's desire to capitalize on the emerging pleasure boat industry gave birth to the Mac Bay Boat Company. On May 1, 1948,

at 409 West 14<sup>th</sup> Street, the Mac Bay Boat Company was organized with the following officers: George A. Pelgrim, president; Mrs. George (Eva) Pelgrim, vice president; Jim White, secretary; and Henry Hopper, production superintendent. Now all they had to do was hire a crew of boat builders and start producing boats.

From the beginning, the directors of the new company must have decided not to use the standard practice of building small runabouts with mahogany planks. Instead, they introduced a sturdy, safe, and affordable molded plywood hulled boat equipped with quality hardware and inboard marine motors. This type of hull construction was new to the pleasure boat industry since it used heat, glue, and up to six layers of thin mahogany veneers molded together to create a sturdy preformed hull overnight. Other boat manufacturers, like the Chris-Craft Corporation, were still using planks of expensive Phillipian mahogany wood, thousands of screws, and days of manual labor. Mac Bay purchased ready-made hulls from several companies including at least one Canadian company, but mainly from United States Molded Shape in Grand Rapids. The hulls were delivered, sometimes fifteen or twenty at a time, stacked like teacups, via large trailers. Once the hulls were unloaded, the business of making them into boats was begun in earnest.

To turn an unpainted boat hull without a transom (rear portion of a boat) into a finished 16 foot 1,500 pound runabout took an engineer and many hours of labor from the company's small group of employees. Lester Kaunitz was responsible for the design and engineering part of the process. Overseeing the estimated 3-8 workers was Harry Hopper, production superintendent. Under his direction, craftsmen were

*(Continued on page 2)*

## From the Director

In this issue of the *Joint Archives Quarterly*, I am pleased to share with you the history of one of Holland's many pleasure boat-building companies, the Mac Bay Boat Company. The study of this industry in Holland has been a passion of mine since coming to Holland in 1997. Since then, I have been able to identify at least 30 companies that were engaged in making boats used primarily for the sheer pleasure of being on a body of water. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did in researching and writing it.

We have been blessed with a very important collection of archival materials from the Roseland area of Chicago with a donation by Arkansas residents William H. Penn and his daughter Priscilla Wdowiak. Priscilla learned of us through contact with Dr. Robert Swierenga, and these important family papers were donated to the archives. Within the collection you will see some very early glimpses of the Roseland area and how some of the first Dutch immigrants to that area learned to become successful. See the *Processing Table* page for more details on this important collection, as well as a new collection of records from one of the area's oldest congregations, Coopersville Reformed Church.

In this issue we have also included a poem by student research assistant Matthew Nickel, based on local newspaper articles taken from the *Holland City News* for the year 1887. We were amused with Matt's ability to take typical news of that time and spin them into an entertaining look at our local history.

Geoffrey Reynolds

## Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American Studies

### Biennial Conference

June 6-7, 2003  
Trinity Christian College  
Palos Heights, Illinois

For more information, contact Dr. Don Sinnema  
at [Don.Sinnema@trnty.edu](mailto:Don.Sinnema@trnty.edu)

## Mac Bay Boat Company Story (continued from page 1)

foreman Alva Burdett (A. B.) Melton, Donald Van Lare, Gary Versendaal, Doug McKay, Andy Riemersma and his brother, and William De Boer. After about one week of construction, a glistening white or natural mahogany runabout with a mahogany wood deck would emerge from the basement of the furniture company ready for shipment to distributorships around the United States. Each boat was complete with hardware, a choice of a 25, 45, or 75-horse power Gray Marine engine, and seating for five passengers at a price starting at \$1,495. On June 29, 1948, the first of many Mac Bay Boat Company built runabouts, sold under both the Mac Bay and Play Boy names, was sent to a customer in Salt Lake City, Utah. A *Holland City News* article from July 1, 1948, described the new company in detail. According to that front-page article, the Mac Bay model, the Play Boy *Sportster*, was unique for its time. Mac Bay was the first boat company in the United States to produce an inboard motor powered (vs. an outboard motor) mahogany plywood molded speedboat.

**15 1/2 FEET OF ZIP & GO**

**HERE'S YOUR NEW Play Boy**

**YOU'LL THRILL TO EVERYTHING ABOUT THIS BOAT!**

You'll thrill to the way it rides, the way it handles, the way it keeps you dry! Its waterproof U. S. Plywood molded hull is the same as you desire for an all right boat meaning practically no cost.

The Play Boy was designed and styled by top design firm engineers of the country. It's built and finished by skilled Holland craftsmen with years and years of experience in fine quality wood-working. The Play Boy is built to an ideal but its most real feature is its price - it's right for everyone! Priced at just \$1,495! See it at the New York and Chicago Shows or write for free folder giving complete information!

**VICTOR E. WATKINS COMPANY**  
DESIGNER & BUILDER OF THE PLAY BOY BOAT  
HOLLAND, MICHIGAN

1948 brochure advertising the fun you could have with  
a new Play Boy boat, all for \$1,495!

According to newspaper clippings, independent boat broker Victor E. Watkins was said to have come to Holland about 1937, but no records of his presence before 1948 can be easily found. From historical sources, such as local newspapers, *Lakeland Yachting* magazine, and original sales brochures, it appears that Watkins was hired to sell boats to dealers for Mac Bay Boat Company. While this arrangement eliminated the name recognition gained by having the company name on the boat itself, this was not an uncommon practice as investors and owners constantly sought to keep payrolls and overhead low through outsourcing. This practice is still common today. With Watkins selling the boats under the Play Boy nameplate, sales were brisk. According to newspaper sources, trailers loaded with new models left for U.S. distributors as far away as California and international clients in Portugal and Argentina. While the newspapers quoted company officials as producing at least one boat per day with the help of 20 employees, past employees report it took more like one week to produce a boat with the 6-8 employees.

By January 1949, the model name had changed from Play Boy to Grayboy, and Watkins had added Lester Kaunitz as a partner. The change in name might be linked to a trademark infringement on another boat company of that same name. Most likely the name Grayboy came from the Gray Marine brand of engine used in the boats. Other than that, only small changes were made to the windshield brackets and deck hardware. Watkins and Kaunitz took the Grayboy to the New York Boat Show in New York City where spectators were reportedly impressed with America's first molded plywood inboard.

Unfortunately, in August of that same year, the sales momentum that Victor Watkins and Lester Kaunitz had created tragically ended when Watkins was killed in an automobile accident near Elmira, Michigan. Kaunitz, the driver of the automobile, survived with only minor injuries. Evidently, Watkins and Kaunitz were on their way to Petoskey with a Grayboy runabout in tow when Kaunitz was blinded by the headlights of an oncoming automobile and lost control of the car. Their vehicle eventually hit a utility pole and threw Watkins from the car. Watkins died early the next morning, hours before they were to have demonstrated the boat for a potential customer.

After Watkins' death, sales dipped dramatically according to sources associated with the company. Soon after this



*1949 brochure illustrating the name change made by Mac Bay due to a lawsuit*

tragedy, Kaunitz disappeared from the scene and Mac Bay Boat Company was run by former foreman, A. B. Melton. An oral history interview with William De Boer, who started at the Mac Bay company in 1948, revealed that soon after Watkins death, the employees were given a "vacation" or they could take out their back pay in tools, which he opted to do.

In late 1949, under the direction of Henry Hopper and A. B. Melton, the company struggled to continue the boat line in new quarters located at 9 West 7<sup>th</sup> Street. The two past employees now were running the company using the inventory of unfinished hulls and other parts left after the Pelgrim era ended. Three other employees, Andy Riemersma and his brother and William De Boer, also stayed with the company. In addition, a new set of officers was assembled to include Melton as president/treasurer, William Edward Burns as vice president, and Muskegon resident D. K. Melton as secretary. While in business, the company expanded its offerings to the public with the introduction of a cabin cruiser model powered by a Johnson outboard motor and chartreuse colored rowboats. Past employee William De Boer remembers making about twelve cruisers before Melton and Hopper sold the business to George and Clifford Dobben of North Muskegon. The Dobben brothers had been interested in buying the company outright since its days at Bay View Furniture, and had been loaning money to the pair since relocating the company to East 7<sup>th</sup> Street.

Under George and Clifford Dobben's ownership, the company again flourished still using U.S. Molded Shape hulls, now offering a choice of outboard or inboard motors to its runabout



line, the 13' *Thunderbolt* and 15' *Imperial*. They remained at the East 7<sup>th</sup> Street location for a short time before relocating to an area on Riley Street between Butternut Drive and 144<sup>th</sup> Street. A small strip mall now occupies that area. They then relocated to a new factory on Airline Road in Muskegon Heights in 1956. According George Dobben's son, Clifford, his father thought the boat model was comparable to Chris-Craft or Century boats, but at half the cost.



*Mac Bay Boat Company in Muskegon Heights, 1956*

At the new factory, long time employees A. B. Melton, Gene O'Neil, and Andy Riemersma continued selling and making boats for Mac Bay with new employees Doug McKay, Thomas Fanus, and Otis Averal—growing to fifteen employees total during the good years. William De Boer decided not to continue because of the expense of the long drive and found work with Leon Slikkers, an up and coming boat maker who had just started his own boat venture, Slick Craft Boat Company.

In Muskegon Heights, Dobben was able to put many more boats into production at one time using construction bays, finish bays, and final assembly areas. He also continued to offer the consumer a 45 or 75 h.p. Gray Marine engine in a 17-foot Mac Bay, costing \$1,795 for the larger engine and boat. Clifford believes the changes in colors and styles they made to a quality boat were the reason the company finally flourished with consumers. "We went to the shows and we stuck out, and that's what we wanted—to make and improve sales." They continued to "stick out" by offering seats, hulls, and decks in red, white, blue, and green. By watching the competition at the national boat shows, Mac Bay officials knew what trends were developing and what models needed to be changed. They epitomized the 1950s boating market and worked to meet its needs. According to Dobben, "Color combinations were the turning point for us when we saw our sales volume double after that. We would even match boat colors to the outboard motors the dealers were also selling." Eventually Mac Bay was selling around 200 boats per year until fiberglass boats became popular.

In an attempt to trim costs and still sell a quality boat, Mac Bay outsourced its upholstery and canvas work to Holland based companies. Auto Top did the upholstery work and Holland Awning constructed the canvas covers for many years, picking up and dropping off work regularly. They also cut costs by creating a dealership network that covered the United States and was serviced by salesman traveling with trailers containing the latest models of Mac Bay. Salespersons offered incentives to buy at large amounts at discounted rates. This way the factory could continue to run throughout the year and employ a consistent and trained workforce—the key to quality boat making. Nationally known dealers first learned of the company at national boats shows and would eventually set up dealerships in Brighton, Michigan; Corbin, Kentucky; and Amarillo, Texas, to name a few.



*A 1957 Mac Bay 13' Thunderbolt*

Eventually, the company started hearing from their distributors that wood boats were simply too much work for consumers to maintain, and that they should get into the fiberglass boat making business. Unfortunately, the Dobben family thought like many other longtime wood boat makers that fiberglass was just a fad and soon they were playing catch up with the likes of Leon Slikkers and his Slick Craft Boat Company. At one point, they dropped to 25 percent of the volume they had enjoyed the year before. According to Clifford Dobben, after an unsuccessful attempt at entering the fiberglass boat market in about 1960, the company discovered that it was too late, and they shut their doors for good in 1964.

## *The Processing Table*

This section of the newsletter is dedicated to the announcement of new archival collections that have recently been processed and are ready for researchers to use.

### **H02-1477.** Penn, William H.

Papers, 1829-2002. 2.00 linear ft.

The donor, William Henry Penn, was born in 1917 to Ettie Brandt and Henry Penn. William's maternal grandmother was a daughter of Cornelius Kuyper.

Henry Penn was born in Steenwijkerwold, Overijssel, The Netherlands in 1887. In 1890, he came over with his parents to America where they settled in Chicago. An avid baseball fan and player, Henry played in professional leagues for seventeen years. He was a large man for his time, six foot one, two hundred and fifteen pounds. Scholastically, he received his B.S. in Civil Engineering at the University of Illinois and went on to become a professor in that field at the Armour Institute of Technology and later the District Engineer for the American Institute of Steel Construction.



*Cornelius Kuyper, c.1880*

Cornelius Kuyper was born in the village of Schoorl, near Alkmaar, the Netherlands in 1816. He married Martje Daleburg in 1840. He was the only one of his family to emigrate when he left for America in 1849, then he moved to Roseland, near Chicago. There he founded a general store. A strong Republican, Cornelius supported the Union and aided the Underground Railroad. He became an upstanding, well-known

and respected citizen who served as County Constable and helped organize the Dutch Reformed Church in Chicago along with aiding the general growth and development of Chicago. He died in 1913.

This collection consists of materials inherited by William H. Penn from his pioneering Dutch-American immigrant ancestors and those with whom they interacted. These ancestors include Cornelius Kuyper (Kuijper), John Brandt (Jan Brand), Jacob Pen, Annigje Stobbe, and Maartje Dalenberg. The majority of the papers come from the Roseland, Illinois and Calumet County area near Chicago, where Cornelius Kuyper was an important settler. There is correspondence with relatives and friends in the Netherlands. Also includes early (1850-forward) correspondence with Dutch immigrants in America, in such places as Kansas and Kalamazoo. Correspondents include Jan Bos and Cornelius Hillegonds, and many materials relating to genealogy and the family trees of Brandt, Kuyper, Eenigenburg, Dalenberg, Ton, de Jong, and Penn (Pen).

### **W02-1266.** Coopersville Reformed Church.

Records, 1854-1992. 10.50 linear ft.

The Coopersville Reformed Church was organized in 1854. In the early years, it also went by the names Polkton and Eastmanville. The history of the church dates back to 1846 when a few families of immigrants came to this area. Services were held in their homes until a small log structure was set-aside as a house of worship.

In 1854, a request was sent to the Classis of Holland for organization. On May 10, a church of 21 members was organized. In 1862, steps were taken to obtain a minister. Rev. Jacob VanderMeulen accepted a call on terms that he would also be pastor of a Congregational Church in Eastmanville. This joint pastorate was unsatisfactory and lasted only one year.

A frame church was built in 1866. Rev. James Huysoon was called to be the pastor. A parsonage was built. Membership continued to grow. In 1883, the building was moved to its present location. The building burned a year later. The church was rebuilt and then destroyed again by fire in 1928. The present structure was built and dedicated on March 6, 1929. The church grew from the original 21 members to 628 in 1979 when the church celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The Coopersville Reformed Church collection contains a complete set of bulletins from 1970-92 and the minutes of the consistory dating back to 1854. However, some of the early minutes were destroyed by fire. The collection is complete from 1914-84. Also included is a set of church directories published between 1957 and 2001, including several pictorial directories.

The church newsletter was begun in 1962, and was known by three different names through the years – *Echoes*, *Courier*, and *Love Link*. The set is complete to 1999. Photographs of the church and parsonage, pastors and missionaries, and of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration in 1954 include a total of 62 images. Also included are a program and other materials from the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1979.

Sunday School records from 1900-73, minutes of the various women's groups dating back to 1894, and the records of the Young Peoples Society from 1911-26 are also a part of this collection.

Some of the early minutes and records are in Dutch.

Last May, I spent mornings in a poetry class taught by Jack Ridl at Hope College and afternoons searching through decades of old newspapers in the Archives. The assignment I worked on sent me looking for articles about boats and the Holland Police. With all the personality of the paper in those years, I was easily sidetracked. Most intriguing were the local news items for their genuine portrayal of Holland's character in those years. One afternoon I decided to write a poem using the articles from the *Holland City News*. No words or punctuation were added, some were deleted, and as I found hundreds of clippings that caught my attention, I sifted through and picked my favorite twenty. Please enjoy this portrait of Holland in the year 1887.

Matthew Nickel

**Hot Off the Michigan Press:  
*Holland City News*  
and the Urgent Issues of 1887**

I

It came  
Pretty near snowing  
Last Tuesday.

II

Wood or potatoes  
accepted  
for subscriptions.

III

The schooner Wollin  
arrived in harbor  
"laid up"  
for the season.

IV

The topic for bible study  
next Tuesday evening  
at the YMCA:  
Acts 1, 15 to 26.

V

It is a strange fact,  
*you can take our word for it*  
that wise men often learn  
more from fools  
than fools learn from wise men.

VI

President Cleveland  
presented  
Postmaster Jake,  
his brother Ben Van Putten  
and John Pleters  
each a knobby silk hat.

VII

Moral drama  
"Ten Nights in a Bar Room"  
presented at the Opera House  
Tuesday evening.  
Should call out a crowded house.  
The company presenting,  
highly spoken of,  
undoubtedly merits a liberal patronage.

VIII

Readers who are members or attendants  
of Third Church  
please do not blame us  
for discontinuing the publication  
of the "church items" of that society.  
The pastor refused us usual information  
about services at his church.

## IX

Judging for the large number of apples  
daily brought to this city  
by the farmers in the vicinity  
the crop must have been a large one.

## X

The *City Hotel* is filled with guests,  
every day Landlord Williams  
frequently is obliged to disappoint  
people  
who apply for a place to stay.

## XI

During the thunderstorm  
of last Thursday night  
a barn of Mr. C. Kickover,  
of Overisel,  
struck by lightning  
set on fire  
was totally consumed.

## XII

After a season  
uninterrupted by pleasant  
weather turned cold  
on Wednesday night last,  
Thursday morn a *sugar snow* fell.

## XIII

Mr Goodrich's class of scholars,  
taking lessons on the violin,  
increases.

## XIV

The sign painter, W. Brewer,  
placed signs at the corner of  
Eighth and River  
designating the streets.  
Would it not be a good idea  
to place street signs  
on every corner of the city?  
Mr. Brewer also contemplates  
numbering the houses  
and store buildings.

## XV

Dr. and Mrs. O.E. Yates  
were in Plainwell last Saturday.

## XVI

Ice is the easiest thing  
in the world  
to fall on.  
Yet, when you fall,  
it is the hardest thing  
in the world  
to fall on.

## XVII

Have you heard of the law  
preventing a man marrying  
his widows's sister?  
Several legal  
minds were puzzling  
over that one recently.

## XVIII

J. H. Nibbelink, the Ninth Street  
Livery stable keeper, added  
Undertaking  
to his business.

## XIX

The Holland City Butter Tub Factory  
Made large shipments  
of tubs this past week.

## XX

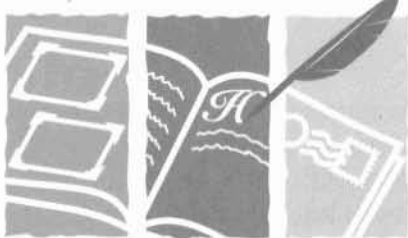
Have you seen A. C. Van Raalte's  
Fast horse?

**The Joint Archives of Holland**

**is open to researchers**

**Monday through Friday  
8:00-noon and 1:00-5:00 p.m.**





HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER  
Hope College • Western Theological Seminary

P.O. Box 9000 | Hope College | Holland, MI 49422-9000

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Hope College

Contact us at (616) 395-7798 • Fax (616) 395-7197 • Email [archives@hope.edu](mailto:archives@hope.edu) • [www.jointarchives.org](http://www.jointarchives.org)

*Looked at from any angle . . .  
the PLAYBOY Sportster is  
your boat for all-round  
pleasure and utility.*

15' 10" of speed and class.  
7'2" beam — lots of room.  
Genuine Solid Mahogany deck and trim.  
Waterproofed one-piece Molded,  
U. S. Weldwood Hull.  
25—45—75 H.P. Gray Marine Engine.  
Speeds up to 40 M.P.H.

*In design, engineering, workmanship and finishing, the PLAYBOY has had the  
benefit of the best in everything. Low upkeep. Easy portability . . . weighs only  
1350 lbs. Trailer, trailer, canvas cover available.*

DEALER  
BRESLIN — RADOLAN BOAT CO.  
New England Distributor  
Phone HU 4-2324  
74-76 Prospect Street  
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

VICTOR E. WATKINS CO.  
Office: 5 E. 9th St. — Holland, Michigan.  
*Price subject to change without notice.*