

**“To be Minnesotan is to fall in love with a lake”:
A Historic Study of the Alexandria Boat Works,
Alexandria, Douglas County, Minnesota**

**Prepared for the Legacy of the Lakes Museum
Blondo Consulting, LLC Project No. 2021-041**

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FINAL REPORT**



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Management Summary/Abstract

Blondo Consulting, LLC (Blondo Consulting) was retained by the Legacy of the Lakes Museum to complete a historic study of the Alexandria Boat Works (ABW), which involves in-depth historical research and interviews. Kelly Wolf, MA, RPA was the Principal Investigator. The results of this study and recommendations are included in this report. This study will help the Legacy of the Lakes Museum build on narrative themes outlined within the 2015 Interpretive Plan. These themes include: Local Landscapes, Industry and Imagination, People, and Legacy. This report will fulfill the first of three research goals:

1. **Short-term:** to produce a detailed research report and to recommend themes and topics for the exhibit update;
2. **Intermediate-term:** to present research findings to the public as part of the Legacy of the Lakes Museum's free educational programs;
3. **Long-term:** to use the research as the basis for an expansion of the existing ABW exhibit and make the information more publicly available at the museum and on the museum website.

The focus of this report will be on the history and legacy of the Alexandria Boat Works within the city of Alexandria, and within the broader Minnesota and United States. This project has been made possible through a Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grants received by the Legacy of the Lakes Museum. Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grants are made possible through the Legacy Amendment's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the vote of Minnesotans on November 4, 2008. The Legacy Amendment supports efforts to preserve Minnesota's land, water, and legacy, including Minnesota history and cultural heritage.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Legacy of the Lakes Museum retained Blondo Consulting, LLC (Blondo Consulting) to complete a historic study of the Alexandria Boat Works (ABW), which involves in-depth historical research and interviews. Kelly Wolf, MA, RPA was the Principal Investigator. The results of this study and recommendations are included in this report. This study will help the Legacy of the Lakes Museum build on narrative themes outlined within the 2015 Interpretive Plan. These themes include *Local Landscapes, Industry and Imagination, People, and Legacy*. This report will fulfill the first of three research goals:

1. **Short-term:** to produce a detailed research report and to recommend themes and topics for the exhibit update;
2. **Intermediate-term:** to present research findings to the public as part of the Legacy of the Lakes Museum’s free educational programs;
3. **Long-term:** to use the research as the basis for an expansion of the existing ABW exhibit and make the information more publicly available at the museum and on the museum website.

The mission of the Legacy of the Lakes Museum is to be ““dedicated to the preservation of antique and classic watercraft, resort memorabilia and sporting equipment used on Minnesota’s lakes”” (Bluestem Heritage Group, 2015, pg. 3). The Legacy of the Lakes Museum was first established in 2004 and has since expanded to create a facility that brings a “meaningful experience to every visitor” (Bluestem Heritage Group, 2015, pg. 3). In 2015 an Interpretive Plan was established to assist the museum in its growth and to better bring the story of Minnesota’s maritime history to life. To continue the process outlined in the Interpretive Plan, Blondo Consulting was retained to complete in-depth research and address the four narrative themes as they pertain to the Alexandria Boat Works. This report presents the results of that research.

2.0 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The overall Central Interpretive Message outlined for the Legacy of the Lakes Museum in the 2015 Interpretive Plan is the concept of,

Ten Thousand Treasures: Minnesota’s Lakes Culture. To become a Minnesotan is to fall in love with a lake. With endless variety to their shape and size, temperament and depth, Minnesota’s lakes have nurtured life for every generation. Still, geologists struggle to distinguish a ‘lake’ from other bodies of water. In Minnesota, the distinction carries cultural as well as ecological significance; ‘The Lakes’ are what make our state unique. They are the setting for childhood adventures, family retreats and moments of personal repose. Those who sail their shimmering waters or walk their wooded shores have discovered fertile soil, business opportunities, creative inspiration, and sacred sanctuaries. For many Minnesotans, the treasure of a lake is the promise of memory (Bluestem Heritage Group, 2015, pg. 15-16).

The Legacy of the Lakes Museum received a Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grants. Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grants are made possible through the Legacy Amendment's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the vote of Minnesotans on November 4, 2008. The Legacy Amendment supports efforts to preserve Minnesota's land, water, and legacy, including Minnesota history and cultural heritage. The goal of this grant project was to answer specific research questions relating to the four interpretive themes outlined in the 2015 Interpretive Plan related to the Alexandria Boat Works. This report answers the first research goal of producing a detailed research report and to recommend themes and topics for the exhibit update. After reviewing the archive material at the Legacy of the Lakes Museum and what information is currently included in the exhibit, research focused on two main areas: historical archives and personal stories. In-depth archival research was completed at the Douglas County Historical Society, the Douglas County Recorder's Office, and through various digitally accessible archives. Personal stories were collected through interviews conducted with people who had a connection with the Alexandria Boat Works, and through questionnaires presented to members of the public at the annual Legacy of the Lakes Diamond Classic Boat Show and at a Gallery Talks event.

Research questions were developed by the Legacy of the Lakes Museum based on the four Narrative Themes. These include:

- **Local Landscapes:**
 - What makes Alexandria an ideal location for a boat manufacturing company?
 - How did the creation of ABW shape the community and the economy of Alexandria and vice versa?
 - How did Alexandria Boat Works' physical location impact the working-class neighborhood that surrounded it?
- **Industry and Imagination:**
 - ABW existed for 100 years and saw many innovations and changes in the world of boat manufacturing. How did ABW contribute to and influence the boat manufacturing industry?
 - What was the relationship between the local resort and recreational landscape, such as fishing guides, and ABW?
- **People:**
 - Beyond the founder, who was involved in the early creation of ABW and what are their stories?
 - Who were the everyday laborers at the company?
 - Who were the customers?
- **Legacy:**
 - What makes an ABW boat special?
 - Why do people recognize the brand all over the country?

Historical background research was completed by Blondo Consulting staff member Kelly Wolf, MA, RPA with assistance from the Douglas County Recorder's Office staff and the Douglas

County Historical Society staff and volunteers. Interviews were also conducted with living members of the public who have a connection to the Alexandria Boat Works, people that have memories of ABW and the family who ran the business, and people that once worked for the company. Many of the people interviewed were identified through local connections. Other Blondo Consulting staff that assisted Wolf included Stefanie Kowakczyk, MA, RPA, and William Rayson.

To address the four research themes a combination of in-depth historical research and in-person interviews were used. During the research process, it became clear that very little scholarly work has been previously completed around the themes of recreational history of lakes, or the history of small wooden watercraft. Instead, much has been written about the history of sailing and inboard motorboats traditionally used for racing; and the history of recreational lakes and the use of boats for recreation in the upper Midwest, focuses on the Great Lakes rather than smaller lakes and lake chains throughout the state, such as those in Alexandria, Minnesota. What is available, however, is broad historical themes surrounding the history of tourism and recreation in Minnesota and Alexandria, and people with first-hand knowledge of the Alexandria Boat Works. Research began with what is already known and readily available at the Legacy of the Lakes Museum, which provided a baseline for this research and can assist with the continued development of the Alexandria Boat Works exhibit and our understanding of its impact and legacy on the community.

3.0 THEMATIC RESEARCH- FROM THE LEGACY OF THE LAKES ARCHIVES

The history of the Alexandria Boat Works is integrally linked to the lives of Erick and Anna Erickson, which is well established in the current museum exhibit. Much of this established history comes from newspaper accounts and personal stories from the family, specifically from the Erickson's youngest daughter, Mildred. As the story goes, in 1868, Erick Erickson arrived in Alexandria at age 2, immigrating with his family from Mora, Sweden. Growing up in Alexandria, Erick had to hunt and fish for food to supplement the family's farm (Legacy of the Lakes Archives, n.d.).

Young Erick's fascination with boats and water sprang naturally from his environment. At a tender age, Erickson began to build toy and later old-style traditional lapstrake rowboats for his neighbors and friends. As we have seen with others, as more and more people saw the boats Erickson built, they too placed orders so before very long, 'Boat Erick' as he became known, was 'up to his neck' in building fine wooden rowboats for the many lakes in and around Alexandria (DCHS Archives, n.d.).

Anna Byland was born in Sater, Sweden in 1868. In her 20s, Anna worked as a doctor's assistant in Stockholm. To avoid an arranged marriage, Anna fled to the United States in 1892 with a friend who had family established in Alexandria. Once there, Anna worked for Mr. Paige, who owned the Alexandria lumber yard. That same year, Anna met Erick Erickson and on December 21, 1893, they married at a Baptist church in town. The following year, Anna and Erick Erickson

moved to a farm on the outskirts of town. They had their first daughter Ruby on April 13, 1895. On May 14, 1906, their second daughter Mildred was born (Legacy of the Lakes Archives, n.d.).

During the late 1890s, Erick Erickson worked at the Geneva Beach Hotel, building furniture, and making and repairing boats. Eventually Erick and Anna sold the farm and moved back to town. Around this time Erick also bought and fixed up houses for resale. One day, a tourist who wanted a custom launch boat with an inboard motor offered Erick \$500 to build it. Erick worked all winter to build the boat. This is commonly described as the beginning of Erick's professional business as a boat builder. He rented buildings for boat building until 1902, when Erickson purchased a property on the corner of 3rd and Broadway. In 1903, Alexandria Boat Works was officially listed as a business (Legacy of the Lakes Archives, n.d.). That same year, Erick appeared before council to request permission to run a steam pipe from the light plant to his factory (Alexandria Post News, 1903).

In 1904, Erick bought a four-room house on the south part of town and built a boat shop next door at 3rd and Broadway. Mr. Paige of the Alexandria lumber yard sold Erick wood to build the shop. From the Spring of 1905 onward, business soared. By 1906, Alexandria Boat Works was powered by a gasoline engine with an electric motor equipping a large planer, a rip saw, a band saw, a sharpener, a drill, a boring machine, and a rounding machine. That year, the company steadily employed six workers, who built nine gas boat launches and 100 wooden rowboats. The business was also a family affair, as Ruby and Mildred helped with odd jobs like painting oars and varnishing boats. As business continued to grow, Erick built a family cabin on Little Lake Darling, which the Erickson's would use as a vacation home during the off season. The Little Lake Darling cabin was sold in 1919 (Legacy of the Lakes Archives, n.d.).

In 1913 a fire at the furniture factory across the street from Alexandria Boat Works and the Erickson's home destroyed all of the Erickson family's belongings. The boat shop was spared. In 1914, Erick rebuilt the house in a similar location, with cement foundation and modern plumbing. The family lived there until 1921, when the house was sold and the family built a new residence on a farm off Lake Street (Legacy of the Lakes Archives, n.d.).

In 1919, Erick's eldest daughter Ruby married Cliff Movold, who then joined the business. In 1930, Alexandria Boat Works underwent a factory revision to increase production. As a result, 80 boats were shipped out in February of 1930. In 1935 Erick's nephew Harry Bedman became the Alexandria Boat Works Owner of Operations. Around this time, Erick retired and planned to go south for the winter. Harry Bedman along with a partner, Chester Olson, took over operations of the business. Erick bought a Buick and converted it into a camper in preparation for the trip, but caught pneumonia and died in 1936. At the time of Erick's death in 1936, Alexandria Boat Works was the only business still around from 1903 (Legacy of the Lakes Archives, n.d.).

4.0 LOCAL LANDSCAPES

From the Interpretive Plan:

In order to visit Minnesota's lakes we need to know where we're going, but Minnesota's lakes are 'scattered irregularly over the state.' What's more, geologists have trouble identifying true 'lakes.' How can we know if we are swimming in a genuine lake, or something else? And how did this water get here in the first place? Explore the address and origins of Minnesota's Lake Country, from the geologic features of particular lake systems to the roots of their economic prosperity; from their ecological complexity to the Native American heritage they sustain. Learn how different lakes have acquired distinct characteristics, why some lakes have been especially valued for recreation and why others have been split or buried to accommodate new development (Bluestem Heritage Group, 2015, pg. 16).

As the theme of Local Landscapes pertains to the Alexandria Boat Works, questions were developed by the Legacy of the Lakes Museum and include:

- What makes Alexandria an ideal location for a boat manufacturing company?
- How did the creation of ABW shape the community and the economy of Alexandria and vice versa?
- How did Alexandria Boat Works' physical location impact the working-class neighborhood that surrounded it?

In an attempt to answer these questions, research began with the larger themes of environmental history of Minnesota and Alexandria, and the history of the community of Alexandria. These are overarching historical themes that are not currently addressed through the exhibit at the Legacy of the Lakes Museum. The environment and landscape of the Alexandria area is truly unique. It is one of the top features identified through in-person interviews that makes this area special and able to support a company like the Alexandria Boat Works.

4.1 Environmental History

Ecoregions were developed for the entire United States by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The state of Minnesota is divided into seven regions based on "land use, land surface, form, potential natural vegetation, and soils. Of Minnesota's 12,034 lakes greater than 10 acres in size, 98% occur in four of the seven ecoregions: Northern Lakes and Forests, North Central Hardwood Forests, Northern Glaciated Plains, and Western Corn Belt Plains" (Tester, 1995, pg. 198). Each of these ecoregions have then been divided into subsections to further describe individual areas. Alexandria, Minnesota is located within the North Central Hardwood Forests ecoregion. This region is characterized by a long band of deciduous forest, woodland, and prairie stretching from Polk County in northwestern Minnesota down to the southeastern Iowa border. The Alexandria Moraine Complex is the main feature of the Hardwood Hills Subsection, forming a high ridge that is the headwaters to many of the rivers and streams that flow westward. The subsection is made up of steep slopes, high hills, and lakes that were formed through glacial end moraines and outwash plains. Prior to Euro-American settlement the area was mainly maple-basswood forests with oak savannahs, tall grass prairies, and oak forests interspersed. There are over 400 lakes greater than 160 acres within the subsection (Minnesota DNR, 2021).

The city of Alexandria is surrounded by lakes that are a unique feature to this area and helped to shape the local industry. Most of the lakes in Minnesota were formed during the last glaciation through erosion and deposition. Three main processes resulted in the formation of lakes. First, ice moving across the landscape would gouge and scrape the surface leaving behind depressions that would fill with water over time. Second, after the glaciers retreated, buried ice blocks remained behind to melt, creating a depression that would also become a lake. Third, still in other areas, “glacial till, moraines, or the ice itself blocked natural drainage pathways much like a modern dam” (Tester, 1995, pg. 197). The constant action of rivers would also result in lake formation overtime, creating oxbow lakes or natural dams.

Post Euro-American settlement created a strong farming and tourism industry within the Northcentral Hardwood Forest. Tourism was concentrated around the lakes. “Forty percent of the state’s lakes lie in the North Central Hardwood Forests ecoregion... Only 16% of the land is forested. The majority of the land is used for agriculture; 49% is cultivated and 21% is pasture and open. Five percent of the land is developed, and some of the most heavily used lakes in the state occur in these areas” (Tester, 1995, pg. 228). Douglas County, Minnesota is known as the “Parks Region” of the state because of its unique environment with many lakes. Alexandria is unique in that it is platted around its chain of lakes, providing for a “strong and diverse economy [as] a result of the diverse geography of the area” (Smith, 2013, pg. 4).

Many people commented on the lakes and the natural environment surrounding Alexandria during the in-person interviews. When asked what makes the Alexandria area so special and why ABW as a company worked in this area, Jack Achter answered, “It’s because of the lakes... at the time, I’m sure that they probably still are pristine, but at the time I was growing up all of the lakes in this area were just very pristine” (Jack Achter, Personal Communication, July 27, 2021). This was a common answer. Many people also remarked on how the environment is changing. It is not like it used to be, both in the quality of the lakes and natural environment and the habits of visitors to the area.

4.2 Early History of Alexandria

The settlement of Alexandria formed after the completion of the St. Paul and Pacific branch line through St. Cloud in 1867. It was not until the 1880s that the railroad reached Alexandria, however (Schmidt and Pratt, 2013). Early settlers to the area started building overland roads to reach the railroads and connect to shipping routes. In Minnesota, “the first territorial legislature enacted legislation designed to open roads through wilderness country in advance of settlement or contemporaneously with the occupation of the land, and succeeding legislatures followed suit” (Larsen, 1940, pg. 232). This spurred a number of early roads to be built in the 1850s. As roads pushed out from the Twin Cities, various parts of the state that were formerly occupied by Native Americans began to be settled by Euro-Americans and connect trade routes that were previously only accessible by river during the summer months or overland in the winter months. “As early as 1856 a stage line was in operation between Lake Superior and St. Paul, and, during the closing years of the decade, freight and supplies were hauled in considerable volume over a

road from Superior to Little Falls and St. Cloud” (Larsen, 1940, pg. 234). The Red River Valley was beginning to develop into a strong resource region and by 1859, a road was opened “through the woods from St. Cloud, along the route of the Sauk Valley trail, to Fort Abercrombie, the new frontier fort on the Red River” (Larsen, 1940, pg. 235). Stations along this road developed into the towns of Sauk Center, Alexandria, Brandon, and Elbow Lake.

Brothers Alexander and William Kinkead from Delaware were surveyors who were working on the road to Fort Abercrombie when they came upon the chain of lakes in the region and decided to settle. The Kinkead brothers named the city and its lakes after their family members who soon came to settle in the village of Alexandria (Grover, 2014). High numbers of Euro-American settlers were coming to Minnesota.

Hundreds set sail from Europe and whole communities pulled up stakes in Wisconsin, Ohio, and other states to the east to resettle in this new promised land. By the spring of 1862, one settler remembered, ‘so many people came into the country that we did not know half of our neighbors.’ As they set about clearing their farmsteads, they had no idea that they were impinging on land that the Dakotas believed had been wrongfully taken from them (Wingerd, 2010, pg. 295).

At this same time, conditions had deteriorated on the reservations and in August 1862, the situation came to a head and hostilities broke out at the Redwood Agency. Over the course of a few weeks, battles erupted along the Minnesota River Valley, between New Ulm and Fort Abercrombie. The U.S.—Dakota War ended in a trial where 303 men were sentenced to death and 20 sentenced to imprisonment. “The stark facts of the attacks were horrifying enough, but wild stories of wholesale Indian atrocities proliferated, becoming more gruesome by the day, most of which having only slight basis in fact. Newspapers across the state called for the extermination of the entire Dakota nation” (Wingerd, 2010, pg. 315). Any ruling of execution needed to be approved by the United States President, so while waiting for Lincoln’s ruling, former Minnesota Governor Henry Sibley established an internment camp at Fort Snelling to house 1,700 Dakotas that were taken into custody during the war. On December 6, 1862, President Lincoln made the decision to hang 39 of the Dakota prisoners.

With the hanging, which took place on December 26, 1862, in Mankato, the tensions between Native Americans and Euro-Americans did not dissipate, and ongoing fear and turmoil was seen across the state. In Alexandria, the U.S.—Dakota War drove many of the early Euro-American settlers away from the village. As a result, the U.S. military constructed Fort Alexandria, which was a log stockade meant to protect the town and the previously established road between St. Cloud and Fort Abercrombie, serving as a main supply route. Soon after, the next wave of settlers came to the town (DCHS Archives, n.d.).

The state saw a railroad frenzy following the close of the Civil War. By 1866, St. Cloud had become a large freight center as the northern terminus for the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad. Supplies came to St. Cloud on the railroad where they were loaded into wagons and hauled to the interior communities over rough wagon roads. Inland communities grew with an influx of

Euro-American settlers establishing farms and businesses. Towns like Alexandria boomed in the 1860s and '70s.

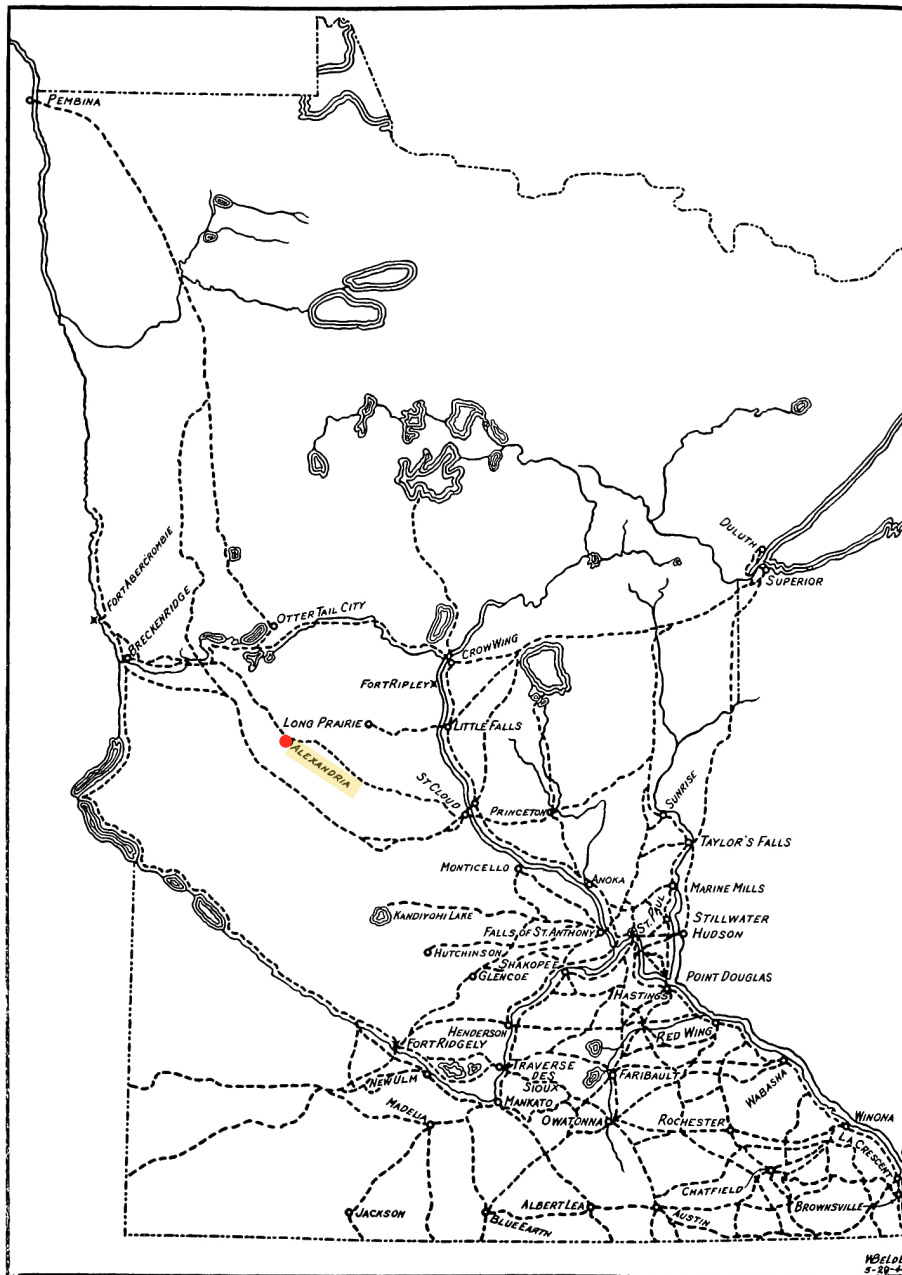
The citizens of Alexandria knew that, if plans materialized, a railroad would eventually be built through their community, but until that time arrived they were dependent upon wagon roads. As a consequence, they were deeply interested in the improvement of their road to St. Cloud. They were well aware that the cost of transporting goods by team as compared with rail was excessive. They estimated, for example, that it cost merchants \$1.25 to transport a hundred pounds of freight by team from St. Cloud to Alexandria—three times the cost of transportation by rail. In 1868 the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad Company began to build its main line west from Minneapolis over a route somewhat south of Alexandria. In October, 1870, the main line reached Benson, only forty-eight miles from Alexandria. Then the ambitious citizens of Alexandria turned away from St. Cloud. Almost a year earlier they had cut out a wagon road to Benson and had made arrangements for the inauguration of stage service as soon as the railroad reached that point. Soon a stage line was operating on a daily schedule, and a prosperous freighting business was being conducted. The ties that bound the community to St. Cloud were severed, because 'in these railroad days the saving of forty-five miles of staging is a great object' (Larsen, 1940, pg. 241).

By 1871 the head of the railroad reached Morris, Minnesota, which was even closer to Alexandria. Another wagon road was built from Alexandria to Morris. Two years later, the St. Paul and Pacific was extended from St. Cloud to Melrose, which was closer to Alexandria than Morris, so the wagon road was rebuilt again. The railroad finally reached Alexandria by the fall of 1878, ending what was thought of as the “frontier period” of growth within the community (Larsen, 1940).

While the people of Alexandria were so keenly interested in their own problem of communication, that town was itself the center toward which the country beyond it turned. For a decade Alexandria was the last town of any size on the wagon road to the Red River Valley, and it became the market center for the settlers in the country beyond. For several years the flour mill at Alexandria was the only one in that part of the state...[which] provoked the editor of the Alexandria newspaper to exclaim: 'Think of it, ye dwellers in towns and cities, who all your lives have had your barrels of flour rolled to your doors—one hundred and fifty miles to mill!'...The construction of the main line of the St. Paul and Pacific weaned the trade of some communities from Alexandria, and the building of the Northern Pacific Railroad from Duluth drew away others... and the heavily traveled thoroughfares of the 1860's and 1870's [sic] assumed the aspects of lonely country roads (Larsen, 1940, pg. 242-3).

In 1865 William Everett Hicks from New York traveled west by his doctor's recommendation and ended up settling in the village of Alexandria due to the beauty of its lakes. Hicks soon began laying out plans for the city. The wide main street was a feature that was suggested to Hicks by Scottish blacksmith Robert Walker because his hometown was destroyed by a fire that jumped across the main street (Smith, 2013). Today, the wide main street and the planning around the chain of lakes remain features that distinguish downtown Alexandria. Since the town was established prior to the railroad, the commercial center developed around the beauty of the lakes and not around the main source of transportation; therefore, “Alexandria's commercial center is

at the heart of the original plat” (Smith, 2013, pg. 29). The original plat was eight blocks by eight blocks with all lots identical in size (60 feet by 150 feet). When this original plat was established, there was no zoning regulations, therefore commercial, industry, agriculture, and residential uses of the lots were intermingled. The early commercial center naturally established itself around a commercial center along Main Street, between Fifth Street and Seventh Street, and along Sixth Street forming a “T”. It wasn’t until 1931, that the city adopted a zoning policy, pushing the industrial land use to the periphery of downtown, where industries began to develop in the 1940s and ‘50s.



THE MINNESOTA ROAD SYSTEM OF 1860

Figure 1: From “Roads and the Settlement of Minnesota” by Arthur J. Larsen, published in 1940 in *Minnesota History* Volume 21:3(225-244).

4.3 Local Landscapes: Alexandria Boat Works

Erick Erickson took advantage of this large downtown, building both a boat works shop and his home on the same block. In December 1904 Erickson purchased Lots 2 and 3 of the Original Town plat for 560 dollars. As seen on the 1909 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, the Alexandria Boat Works building was well established by then with steam heat, electric lighting, and a gasoline

powered engine to operate the machinery. By 1914, the plat was labeled as the “Lumber Yard and Mill Site Block” (Sanborn Map Company, 1914).

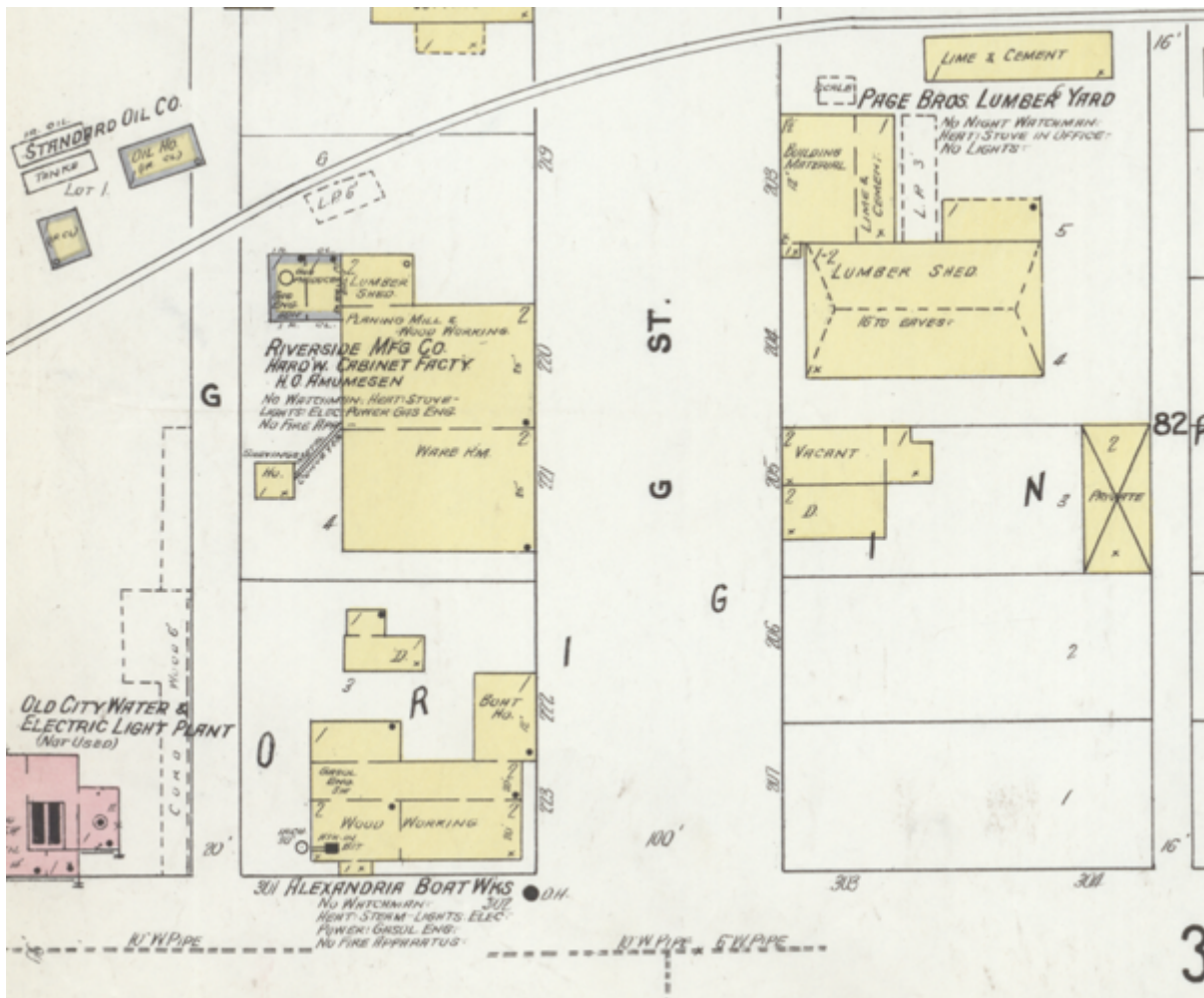


Figure 2: 1909 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map- Alexandria Boat Works is in the bottom left on lots 1 and 2 (Sanborn Map Company, 1909).

In 1912, Erick Erickson purchased lot 1 and the south half of lot 2 to the east of the ABW factory, where he built a house for his family. He sold it in 1921 to John O. Olson. On the 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map it is depicted as being built of stone and cement block. The stone is described by Mildred Wallin, Erick’s youngest daughter, as being collected one at a time by her father on Lake Carlos.

Built in 1915 at a cost of \$18,000 by Eric [sic] ‘Boat’ Erickson, founder of Alexandria Boat Works, the home was located not far from the boat manufacturing plant. In fact, cement blocks used in the building were made at the boat works. The stone came from around the Lake Carlos area and the quarter-inch sawed oak was shipped in from the Fergus Falls mill. Erickson eventually traded the home for a farm in 1921. A widower by the name of John Olson – father of 8 or 9 children – moved in with his family. Later, Olson turned it into a hotel, naming it after one of his daughters (Francis). Over the years the building has remained essentially the same but it has

been used for a variety of things. There were gas pumps outside for a time. Later, it was the site for a monument works and grave stones were displayed on the front lawn. Florence Richards purchased the building in 1973 from the Olson family and turned it into a beauty shop... she sold it to Property 2 [Real Estate Firm]. Officials of the real estate firm... have remodeled the inside and installed a new heating and air conditioning plant. Only two of the four floors are currently being used... A number of other firms are leasing space from Property 2, including Mutual Service Insurance, Kooda Construction, Conn Land Development, Faith Community Church office and several others... Little did Eric [sic] Erickson know at the time that his home would eventually be used as a real estate office (Haaven, n.d.).

The house is still standing in the same location to this day, on the corner of Broadway Street and 3rd Avenue East as a Counselor Realty, Inc.

In 1930, Erick Erickson sold the eastern 80 feet of lot 2 and part of lot 3 to Standard Oil Company, who built a gas station adjacent to the boat works building. It was published in the Alexandria Citizen News on February 13, 1930. "E.G. Erickson has sold the corner where the Alexandria Boat Works stands to the Standard Oil Co. who will erect a filling station thereon... Mr. Erickson retains an L shaped piece of land, which gives him a frontage on both Broadway and Third avenue" (Alexandria Citizen News, 1930, pg. 1). With plans for retirement, Alexandria Boat Works was transferred to Chester N. Olson and Harry J. Bedman in 1935 as a contract for deed. A year later Erick Erickson died. Shortly after, Olson and Bedman decided to try and start their own company, the Bedman Boat Works, therefore, in 1938 Anna Erickson canceled the contract for deed and took back ownership and operations of the Alexandria Boat Works. In 1943, the business was sold to Clifford C. Movold and his wife Ruby (Anna and Erick's oldest daughter). The Movold family continued to run the company until 1988, purchasing a new lot for a bigger building in 1949 and selling the original building to the City of Alexandria in 1962 (Douglas County Recorder's Office, n.d.).

5.0 INDUSTRY AND IMAGINATION

From the Interpretive Plan:

As the lakes became more popular, entire industries grew on their shorelines. Hotels and resorts, outing clubs, and private cabins clustered on lakes from Minnetonka to Superior to Lake Miliona. Boat works and related industries opened throughout the state. The lakes became home to boats of all kinds, including the Lady of the Lakes made by the Alexandria Boat Works. Some lakes were dredged to make them more navigable, while others were drained to provide more farmland. Railroads actively

ERICKSON SELLS PLOT TO STANDARD OIL CO.

Boatmaker Retains Enough Ground
For Building of New Factory With
Frontage on Third Avenue, Route
of New T. H. No. 3

E. G. Erickson has sold the corner where the Alexandria Boat Works stands to the Standard Oil Co. who will erect a filling station thereon. This corner is at the intersection of the two state highways, No. 3 and No. 29.

Mr. Erickson retains an L shaped piece of land, which gives him a frontage on both Broadway and Third avenue. He is now engaged in tearing down the old building and will put up a new building for his factory, fronting on Third avenue. The new building will be about the size of the present building, but will be modern and more substantial.

In an interview with a Citizen News representative Mr. Erickson says he has a stock of eighty new boats on hand, which will take care of his trade until the new building is finished and ready for operation.

Mr. Erickson is the pioneer boat maker of this section, and for years has been manufacturing boats and launches that have gained a state-wide reputation for their excellence.

To say that a boat was "made by Erickson" was all the recommendation that was needed. Launches are only made now on special orders, as the general use of the out-board motor on two boats has largely displaced the demand for launches.

promoted resorts and service industries boomed. Minnesotans began to believe that a trip to the lake was the sort of modest luxury to which they might reasonably aspire (Bluestem Heritage Group, 2015, pg. 17).

As the theme of Industry and Imagination pertains to the Alexandria Boat Works, questions were developed by the Legacy of the Lakes Museum and include:

- ABW existed for 100 years and saw many innovations and changes in the world of boat manufacturing. How did ABW contribute to and influence the boat manufacturing industry?
- What was the relationship between the local resort and recreational landscape, such as fishing guides, and ABW?

In an attempt to answer these questions, research began with the larger themes of boating history of Minnesota and Alexandria, and the history of industries that developed in and supported the community of Alexandria. These are overarching historical themes that are not currently addressed through the exhibit at the Legacy of the Lakes Museum. Highlighting the importance of boat manufacturing, and later distribution, to the boating industry in the region will help to fill the gaps in the historical record. Each time the company transitioned, first from wooden boat manufacturing to adding retail, and then from retail to distribution, it reflected the company's ability to change with what was in-demand from consumers and changes in technology. This also increased the company's business both economically and socially with the ability to offer more jobs to the community. The Alexandria Boat Works exhibit would benefit from bringing the history all the way up to the 1980s and highlighting both the importance of the wooden boat manufacturing, but also the importance of distributing Glastron boats. In-person interviews helped to shed light on just how important that partnership was to the post-war boating industry.

5.1 Boating History

Boating history in Minnesota is intertwined with the history of shipping on the Great Lakes. Very little information is available on the history of recreational small craft boating in the state. As Bonnie J. Wilkinson recognizes in the article, *Building Wooden Boats: A Lost Chapter in Maritime History* for the Journal of Preservation Technology,

Little information about the history, significant innovations, or names of important builders was available. Built by small boat yards or individual builders, historically significant small craft and the history of their construction was scattered... By 1870, there was a 57% increase in the number of boat yards operating in the United States. In New York State the number of yards grew from 72 to 233. Of the 233 yards, 32 of these were employed in the construction of small craft to use in protected waters. These vessels 'were generally rowed or paddled, not fitted with sails, and included canoes and skiffs' (Wilkinson, 1988, pg. 62).

It is clear, however, that Minnesota has a strong history of small watercraft development. Minnesota has more boats per capita than any other state, which means there were many small

strip boat builders to meet demand. “Being a state greatly inhabited by people originally from Norway, Denmark and Sweden, often they learned boat building in their native land before migrating to the Midwest where many went right back into the boat building business” (Speltz, 1982, pg. 41).

The history of recreational sailing and sailing technology in the United States is more heavily studied and documented than other small recreational watercraft, however many of the trends are the same. The popularity of recreational boating really took off with the Industrial Revolution and the growth of the middle class. This brought, “sufficient wealth to facilitate the development of sport sailing, and workboat builders began to fabricate recreational vessels for amateur sailors who came from a growing middle class of businessmen, bankers, merchants and managers” (Williams, 2013, pg. 135). This is about the same time that Erick Erickson was getting his start and establishing the Alexandria Boat Works. The popularity of recreational boating really exploded following World War II with technological advancements that streamlined production and the manufacturing of boats. Fiberglass and aluminum were introduced as new materials that could be used to make boats lighter and required less maintenance. Alexandria Boat Works continuously capitalized on these technological trends, first by standardizing and streamlining wooden boat production through the use of templates and mechanized equipment; then by adding a retail and repair aspect to the business with outboard motors; and finally transitioning the business over to mainly the distribution of fiberglass boats and other sporting goods.

5.2 Early Industry in Alexandria

Early industries that dominated Alexandria included agriculture and tourism. Originally, Minnesotans farmed wooded land near lakes and rivers, which took twenty years to turn into proper soils for crop growing. Eventually, settlers discovered that prairie soils took only three years to produce crops. Alexandria has both prairie and woodland soils. During the 1880s Douglas County was prized for having the highest yield of wheat per acre over every other county in the state. In 1888 the city got its first silo and by 1892, Alexandria had roughly 150 silos (Smith, 2013). Today, agriculture is still big business in Alexandria; the 2012 Census of Agriculture lists 10,091 farms in Douglas County (Census of Agriculture, 2012).

Alexandria was also an early resort destination in Minnesota, owing its success to businessmen and conservationists who saw the potential for a resort industry based on the clean waters on the chain of lakes that surround the city. The 1878 completion of the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba rail line in Alexandria made travel accessible for upper class vacationers. In 1880, James H. Letson opened Alexandria’s first luxury resort, the Letson House, in Alexandria’s town center. Three years later, Letson opened Hotel Alexandria on Lake Geneva, just a few hundred feet away from the train stop (DCHS Archives, n.d.). As of 1894, additional early resort clubs included The Chicago Club, The Missouri Club, and At the Arlington (Alexandria Post News, 1894). Wealthy vacationers from the southern United States would travel to resort communities like Alexandria to escape the heat of summer. These vacationers often returned the same time every year, forming a community of wealthy summer tourists and shaping the burgeoning economy of the city. The arrival of the Soo rail line to Alexandria in 1903 coincided with the Alexandria’s resort

boom of the early 1900s (Barduson, 2020; Smith, 2013). During this time, additional resorts that opened included the Linwood Hotel in 1900, Hotel Blake in 1905, and the Idlewild/Fairview Hotel sometime around 1900 (DCHS Archives, n.d.).

The highway to Alexandria was completed in 1930 (Smith, 2013). From 1910 to 1930, automobile registration in the US increased from 500,000 to 26 million (Haidet, 2020). Cars made travel more affordable and accessible for working class families. During this time, resorts communities like Alexandria began incorporating cabin lodging to meet the new demand for affordable vacation packages. An example of this includes the Brown American Family Plan Resort, which opened in Alexandria in 1945 (Barduson, 2020). Later, smaller family owned “Mom and Pop” lodges became popular in the 1950s and 1960s (Smith, 2013). During the 1960s, Alexandria experienced a decline in tourism, possibly due to competition from north woods tourist destinations (DCHS Archives, 1961).

5.3 Outdoor Recreation

Throughout the state, recreational fishing and hunting centered around lakes popular with both residents and tourists. After WWI, the gasoline powered motorboat gained popularity and quickly became an important part of watersports tourism in Minnesota. In 1922, Minnesotan Ralph Samuelson invented and publicly demonstrated his ability at the sport of waterskiing on Lake Pepin in Lake City, dubbing the Minnesota city “The Birthplace of Waterskiing” (Lake City Tourism Bureau, n.d.). The rise in population nationally after WWII known as the Baby Boom sparked an increased demand for outdoor recreation during the 1960s. At this time, the Northwoods and border lakes communities in Minnesota began capitalizing on their abundance of aquatic resources (Enger, 2015). The Boundary Waters Canoe Area was officially designated as a wilderness area in 1964 and quickly gained a reputation for its pristine wilderness (North County Canoe Outfitters, n.d.).

As recreational boating became more popular, boat building within the state grew and changed. Originally ABW,

sold boats mostly in the summer and built up its stock during the fall and winter months. Most small midwestern boat builders worked this way. Oftentimes many of their plant workers were local farmers who tended their crops in the spring and summer and built boats in the off months during the rest of the year. By the 1950's [sic] as outboard boating continued to grow, it became necessary to build boats all year around as by then many firms sold boats nationwide and even worldwide, and boating was a year-round sport in warmer climates (DCHS Archives, n.d.).

Today Minnesota continues to be known as a destination for tourists seeking clean lakes and rivers to recreate and relax. Tourism in Minnesota is a 16-billion-dollar industry annually, providing over 11% of all private sector jobs (Explore Minnesota, n.d.). By the 1990s,

About 500,000 visitors come to Minnesota each year to fish in clean, natural settings. Among the state's residents are nearly 600,000 hunters and over 1.5 million anglers. Visitors and permanent

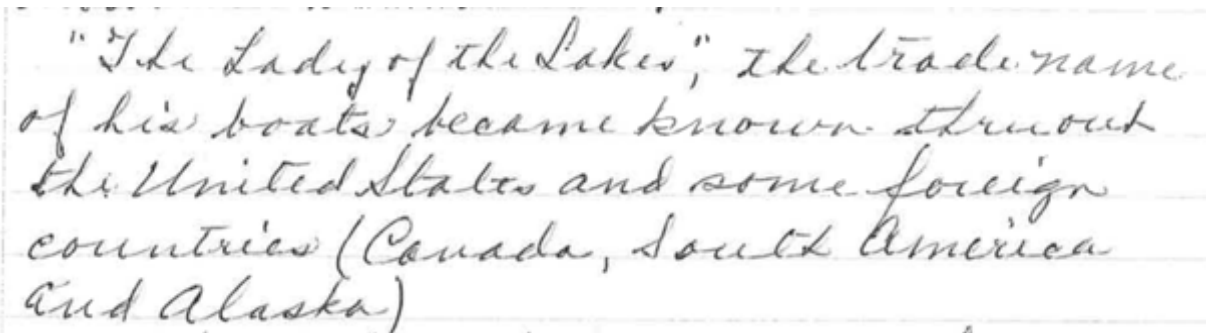
residents spend over \$1.5 billion each year on fishing-related activities, and hunting and fishing combined contribute over \$2 billion each year to Minnesota's economy. The cabin and resort industry, bait and tackle shops, restaurants, and many other businesses rely on revenues derived from outdoor recreation. This is especially true in northeastern Minnesota, where nearly 8% of the economy is tied to water-related outdoor recreation spending (State of Minnesota, 1998, pg. 4).

Alexandria is also still known today as a destination for visitors seeking the water sports and leisure that its chain of lakes has to offer. In 1971, the Darling Dude Ranch rebuilt and rebranded as the Arrowwood, which introduced the first indoor pool in the area and emphasized the all-seasons aspect of the community (Barduson, 2020). The Alexandria Boat Works also began selling and distributing snowmobiles as well as boats and other outdoor recreational equipment. By 1978, construction of Interstate Highway 94 was completed, which offered a nonstop drive from the Twin Cities to Alexandria (DCHS Archives, n.d.). During the 1990s the population of Alexandria grew 27 percent. As of 2014, the population of Alexandria was 11,680 and is estimated to be 13,885 after the 2020 census (Population.us, 2016; United States Census Bureau, 2021). Alexandria was settled because its founders recognized early on the beauty of the chain of lakes and the potential the area has to offer. The city continues to benefit from early conservation efforts ensuring its lakes remain a valuable resource for generations to come.

5.4 Industry and Imagination: Alexandria Boat Works

More was uncovered about the Alexandria Boat Works through the archival research process. In a letter written for a time capsule in 1958, Ruby Movold, the Erickson's oldest daughter, wrote that Erick learned woodworking from his father, who was a carpenter and cobbler in Sweden. This was common in early boat builders in Minnesota. Both Ruby and Mildred describe Erick as building his first boat at the age of 17. The neighbors were impressed with his boat and Erick began making boats for them, this is what started his boat building career, although he had many other odd jobs at the beginning. His first commission was to build a launch with an inboard motor from a tourist visiting the area. Erick was given 500 dollars and all winter to build the boat. The exact date of this first commission is unknown; however, it took place sometime after Erick and Anna were married in 1893. Two years later marked the beginning of the Alexandria Boat Works by the company (Robin Neidenfuer, personal communication, July 27, 2021). By 1904 the business was doing well, and Erick purchased the lots in town to build the first Alexandria Boat Works shop.

Erick became well known for his boats and the business prospered. He was well regarded as an inventor and always working to improve on the design and construction of boats. Mildred remembered her father as a “boat building genius” (DCHS Archives, n.d.). His first boat design was a clinker, or lapstrake, style with overlapping planks to form the hull. Erick then patented the concave, convex strip boat, “which really insured his success” (Movold, 1958).



"The Lady of the Lakes," the trade name of his boats, became known throughout the United States and some foreign countries (Canada, South America and Alaska)

Figure 4: “The Lady of the Lakes,’ the trade name of his boats became known throughout the United States and some foreign countries (Canada, South America, and Alaska).” Excerpt from a handwritten essay by Ruby Movold dated June 12, 1958 from the Douglas County Historical Society Archives.

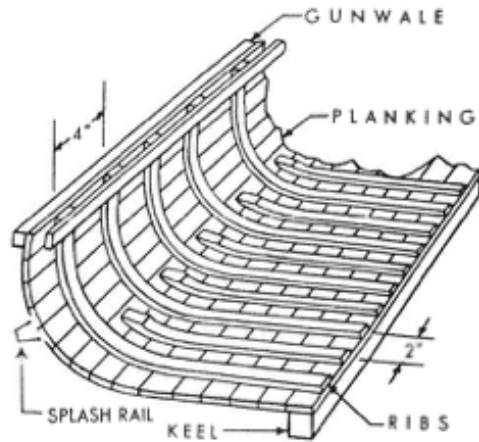
The Alexandria Boat Works thrived with the tourism and recreation industry. As the company developed, Erick standardized and streamlined the boat building process. “The bulk of models completed were the big 14’, 16’ and even 18’ open fishing boats with high sides, wide, semiflat bottoms and plenty of seating and storage space for fishing gear” (DCHS Archives, n.d.). Other recreational industries capitalized on having a boat works in their backyard. “Resorts bought loads of Alexandria Boat Works craft for their huge rental and cabin fleets. Each year many boats had to be replaced, so it made for a steady market that continued year after year” (DCHS Archives, n.d.). Local fishing guides also used these boats. In an audio interview from the DCHS archives of Walter Leuthner by Richard Kracht from June 26, 1979, Leuthner describes the boat he used when he was a young fishing guide, “16-foot wooden boat. An Erickson boat. It was made here.” Following World War I mass-production techniques helped to standardize the boat building industry nation-wide. This made boats more accessible so everyone could own their own boat.

As the trends in boat recreation changed, so did the boat building industry. Alexandria Boat Works continued to update their business to stay current with the trends. The company introduced new models for the increasingly popular outboard motors; gas powered motors were first developed in 1896. Erick was known to have invented his own single-cylinder outboard motor, but then added Evinrude motors to their retail store (Speltz, 1982).

In those days boats were mostly sold during the summer months, not through dealers but customer-direct right from the factory. You ordered your boat by mail or phone, seeing what the boat looked like from a catalog. When the boat was ready it could be shipped to you by truck or

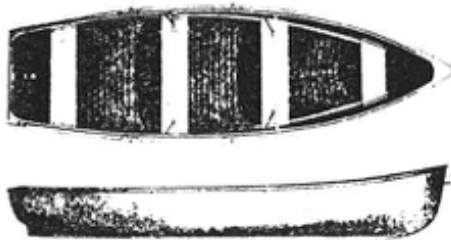
railroad, often packed in celluloid or wrapped in burlap and heavily banded in metal strips, or packed in a wooden framed shipping crate (DCHS Archives, n.d.).

Terry Niedenfuer, a former ABW employee, described this early ordering process, “They took the time to respond to everybody... people were ordering boats by mail...they took the time to write a letter to just about every customer thanking them for their order and telling them when they could expect it” (Terry Niedenfuer, personal communication, July 27, 2021). Members of the Movold family still have some of these letters.

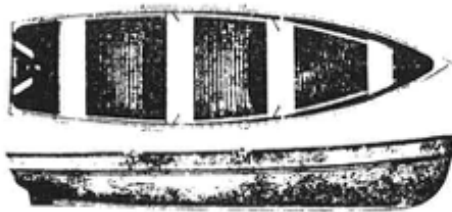


The Alexandria Boat Works were the first to build a smooth strip-built boat using concave and convex joint on strips.

1956 diagram showing strip boat construction used in all Lady of the Lake cedar strip hulls at that time.

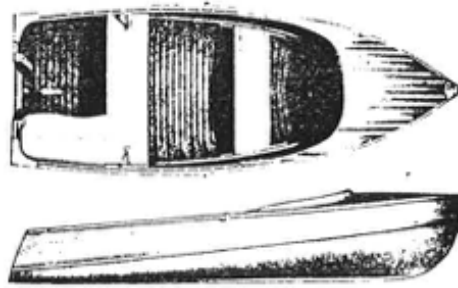


1956 15 1/2-foot Lady of the Lake rowboat. Was a popular fishing and rental hull.

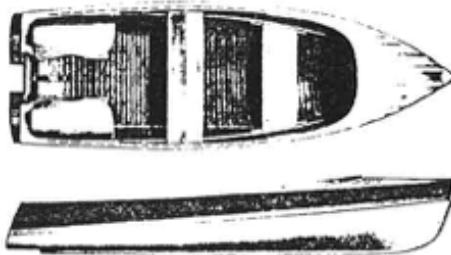


A 1956 16' Hi-Stern rough water fishing boat by Alexandria Boat Works of Alexandria, Minnesota.

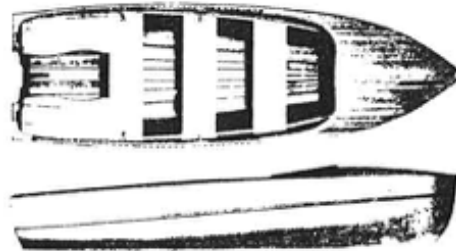
We shall now move on to another favorite Minnesota-based cedar strip boat builder, namely Hugo Boat Works of Onamia, Minnesota. Hugo Gross is unusual in that he still builds a goodly number of his fine craft for resale. I think you will enjoy learning about him and his wife, Janet, who make up the total work force of this firm.



A 1956 12-foot Junior Speedster runabout. Designed for speed and safety. One model could even hold up to 50 h.p. motors.



Queen of the 1956 Alexandria Boat Works the Deluxe 13 1/2' or 15 1/2' runabouts. The stern extends 9 inches beyond the transom to form the planing apron that acted like a trim tab.



Alexandria Boat Works also offered big and deep hulls in 1956. The Super Deluxe runabout shown here came in lengths of 17' 1/2' and 19' 1/2' in length. This hull was a semi-V style and could handle 50 h.p. motors with ease.

Figure 5: From “Alexandria Boat Works, Alexandria, Minnesota” an article found in the Douglas County Historical Society Archives, no date.

Erick Erickson is also credited with inventing such accessories as a patented self-locking lift, a cloverleaf anchor, self-locking oarlocks, and a surfboard with an air chamber (to be towed behind a motorboat). During World War I, Erick Erickson and a colleague submitted a design of a submarine model to the United States government (Legacy of the Lakes Archives, n.d.).

By 1902, Erick was proclaimed to have patented a new system of convex-concave planking which he used in the building of his strip boats... What it meant was, your boat was built with each strip fitting into the next, therefore eliminating the tedious task of caulking each seam. With an Alexandria Lady of the Lakes fishing boat, a soaking of 2 or 3 days would cause each seam to swell and fit tightly into the next one, thus making a tighter boat that would remain tight all season (DCHS Archives, n.d.).

In the early 1900s, Erick is noted to have been among the first of Alexandria's residents to own an automobile, delivering boats by car all over Minnesota, and sometimes Canada. Erick also invented an early underslung boat trailer. "This trailer came out in the 1920's [sic]... With this trailer you need only back out into the water, float your boat over the sling in the rear, attach the boat to the trailer at the bow, pull up out of the water and you were ready for the road" (DCHS Archives, n.d.). Around this time, the trade name *Lady of the Lakes* became associated with the Alexandria Boat Works brand (Legacy of the Lakes Archives, n.d.). According to Mildred Erickson's account, by the early 1900s boats were beginning to be sold all over Minnesota, Wisconsin, and "a few even went to the Philippines" (Lehman, 1981). Erick Erickson also inspired two of his workers to start their own boat shops, helping them to get established (Legacy of the Lakes Archives, n.d.).

By 1952 the Alexandria Boat Works had twenty-one different wooden boat models for sale had constructed approximately 15,250 boats in their 67-year lifespan. That same year, Alexandria Boat Works acquired land to build a new modern facility on the east side of town. Just two years later the company stopped making wooden boats, focusing on the sale of the more popular aluminum and fiberglass boats manufactured by other companies as well as the retail of other sporting goods. The wooden *Lady of the Lakes* boats were officially retired and would occasionally come back on trade-in during those early years. For a short time,

There was an aluminum 'Lady of the Lakes'... that was made for ABW by Lund up in New York Mills. [Lund was] building at the time... a fourteen- and a sixteen-footer and they were what most people would call a rowboat, a basic rowboat... So, Jack [Movold] made a deal with them to build a thirteen-footer and a fifteen-footer for ABW and we would put our name on them, our 'Lady of the Lakes' name on them. And that's what they did (Terry Niedenfuer, personal communication, July 27, 2021).

In 1957, Alexandria Boat Works became the first distributor of the newly formed Glastron boat company and remained one of their most important partners over the next twenty years. Alexandria Boat Works was the sole distributor of Glastron boats in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and parts of Canada, becoming a very centrally located northern hub for the manufacturing company. In later years, Sno-Jet snowmobiles were added to the

distribution network as well as many other year-round sporting goods. By the 1970s, Alexandria Boat Works was one of the largest distributors of Glastron boats.

During the 1980s, Glastron eliminated regional distributors of their products, and Alexandria Boat Works lost a significant portion of their business. In 1988, Alexandria Boat Works, having been in operation for almost 100 years, closed its doors (Legacy of the Lakes Archives, n.d.).

6.0 PEOPLE

From the Interpretive Plan:

The experience of 'Lake Culture' has never been homogenous. For some, the lakes have been a critical source of food, for others a source of accessible leisure. Many came to Lake Country seeking steady employment or fertile farmland. Large immigrant populations have settled in Lake Country and large tourist communities make seasonal pilgrimages to the lakes. What has 'Lake Culture' meant for these different groups? To whom do the lakes 'belong'? How have demographic relationships shaped the character of Minnesota's Lake Country? Who is a member and who is a guest in Lake Country (Bluestem Heritage Group, 2015, pg. 18)?

As the theme of People pertains to the Alexandria Boat Works, questions were developed by the Legacy of the Lakes Museum and include:

- Beyond the founder, who was involved in the early creation of ABW and what are their stories?
- Who were the everyday laborers at the company?
- Who were the customers?

In an attempt to answer these questions, research began with the larger themes of ethnic heritage of the Alexandria area following the Civil War and significant individuals associated with the Alexandria Boat Works. These are overarching historical themes that are not currently addressed through the exhibit at the Legacy of the Lakes Museum. Highlighting the personal stories of those that have a connection to the Alexandria Boat Works will create a stronger, more direct connection to the public. The Alexandria Boat Works exhibit would benefit from bringing the history all the way up to the 1980s and highlighting many different types of people including the founder, Erick Erickson and his family, the Movold family, the Bedman family, and other people who helped the company to succeed day-to-day such as those that were interviewed—Alan Olson (a salesman), Jack Achter (a motor repair man), Terry Niedenfuer (who worked his way through many departments), Robin Niedenfuer (the daughter of Jack Movold and a member of the ABW staff), Connie Martin (the great-great-grand daughter of Erick Erickson's sister, Christine), and Loene and Bob Bowlin (long-time members of the community). In-person interviews are a key part to this theme. Many members of the Alexandria community can still connect to the Alexandria Boat Works and have strong impressions on the value of the company.

6.1 Alexandria Ethnic Heritage

Euro-American settlers that came to Douglas County following the Civil War mainly originated from Sweden and Norway. This may have been influenced by “the fact that Lars K. Aaker, the federal land agent in Alexandria from 1869 to 1875, was also president of the Scandinavian Immigration Society in Minneapolis” (Holmquist, 1981, pg. 273n.26). Many Swedes worked for the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad as hard laborers, building the branch line that connected St. Cloud, Alexandria, and Moorhead. As the railroad was constructed, many new settlements were established. Many of these new settlements were established as agricultural service centers and included, “heavy Swedish rural settlement [by 1905] ...Alexandria, Moorhead, Red Wing, St. Peter, and Wilmar eventually took on the ethnic flavor of their trade” (Holmquist, 1981, pg. 261). By the 1890s, ethnic trends were represented through the area churches, Swedish Lutheran, Swedish Baptist, Free Methodist, German Evangelical, and Methodist Episcopal (Alexandria Post News, 1894).

Those that came to Alexandria for recreation at the turn of the 20th century were also of Euro-American descent, but were of a different economic class. Tourism in Alexandria drew wealthier people from all over the country. Early visitors came from Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City, “coming north for a respite from the summer heat...and became the nucleus of an ever expanding summer migration from the hot South to the cooling lakes of Douglas County” (Anderson, n.d.). Generally, early tourism within the United States was confined to the elite classes, people who were able to travel for “lofty purposes... seen as extraordinary behavior” (Weiss, 2004, pg. 291). This was a result of greater wealth and more leisure directly tied to the industrial revolution. Travel for pleasure and summer resorts became fashionable, popularized by society’s elite and more easily accessible by improvements in transportation (Dulles, 1965).

6.2 Minnesota Tourism Trends

Early tourism in Minnesota is tied to water travel. The arrival of the first steamboat to the state marks the beginning of tourism, traveling up the Mississippi River in 1823 (Lake City Historical Society, n.d.). A decade later, in 1835, artist George Catlin traveled up the Mississippi River on steamboat and painted a series of panoramic murals of the river valley, which were used as advertisements for travel companies. In 1854, former president Millard Fillmore led the “Grand Excursion”, a tour on steamboats up the Mississippi River Valley to promote the first railroad to reach the Mississippi River (Haidet, 2020). Once the railroads were established, communities rapidly formed and resort areas like Alexandria grew. “Railroad construction throughout the state was accompanied by the development of more widespread tourism. Many of the railroads developed promotional materials to stimulate recreational travel along their routes” (Schmidt et al., 2013, pg. 164). From the late 1800s to the early 1900s, the three main resort destinations in Minnesota were Alexandria, Lake Minnetonka, and White Bear Lake.

By the turn of the 20th century, incomes began to rise, and the cost of travel more broadly decreased, so recreational travel became more accessible. This rise in accessibility and popularity of travel transformed tourism into a product. Spending time in the outdoors, walking, hunting, camping, etc. became more popular. “The outdoor movement was gathering increasing

momentum” (Dulles, 1965, pg. 202). Summer resorts began advertising based on these societal trends appealing more towards the middle class, making leisure travel no longer just for the elite society. Recreation and leisure travel became widely advertised and,

produced on a large scale by profit-seeking firms. Foster Rhea Dulles put it this way for America: ‘The wealthy could make the fashionable tour in 1825, the well-to-do built up the summer resorts of the 1890s, but every Tom, Dick, and Harry toured the country in the 1930s—thanks to the automobile’ (Weiss, 2004, pg. 291).

From 1910 to 1930, automobile registration in the United States increased from 500,000 to 26 million (Haidet, 2020). Cars made travel more affordable and accessible for working class families. During this time, resort communities began incorporating smaller cabin lodging to accommodate the new demand for affordable vacation packages. The gasoline powered motorboat was also becoming increasingly popular during this time.

6.3 People: Alexandria Boat Works

Erick Erickson died in 1936, just as he was starting to plan for retirement. Ownership of the Alexandria Boat Works was going to transfer to Chester N. Olson and Erick’s nephew Harry T. Bedman. On December 3rd, 1935, a Contract for Deed was drawn up.



Figure 6: “Lloyd Hutchinson of the Alexandria Boat Works” ca. 1950. From the Browns Geneva Beach Resort Scrapbook (DCHS Archives, n.d.).

The Alexandria Boat Works... has been sold to Harry Bedman, a nephew of E. G. Erickson... who has been actively engaged at the plant, and Chester Olson, formerly associated with the Buick Service Garage on Seventh Ave. West. Although the actual contract for the sale has not as yet been signed, the transaction for the sale is complete in all other respects. Mr. Bedman has been actively engaged at the Boat Works for the past few seasons, and is well acquainted with the firm’s management. Mr. Olson will take up his new duties at the plant this week (Park Region Echo, 1935, pg. 1).

However, the contract was canceled in October 1938 when Bedman and Olson left to start their own boat works—the Bedman Boat Works—and Anna Erickson took back control of the company. Anna ran the business by herself until it was sold to her daughter Ruby and son-in-law Clifford Movold in 1943. Cliff ran the shop until his retirement in 1946, when the company was handed to his son Jack, who ran the business until its closure in 1987. Anna died in 1951 at the age of 83. In 1962, Jack’s brother Mark joined the company operations. The changing hands of ownership after Erick Erickson’s

passing resulted in a gradual focus away from boat manufacturing and towards distribution (Legacy of the Lakes Archives, n.d.).

6.3.1 Erick Erickson

As both Ruby and Mildred have described, Erick was born in Mora, Sweden in 1866, coming to Minnesota at the age of 2 in 1868 with his family. His parents homesteaded on a piece of land on the west shore of Lake Ida. Erick's father was a cobbler and carpenter by trade, teaching his son woodworking. Erick took advantage of this learned skill by making boats, first for himself and his neighbors, then professionally, establishing the Alexandria Boat Works.

At the age of 69 years of age, he sold the Boat Works and meant to retire, but passed away, Jan. 7, 1936... The new owners were not successful, and in 1943, Mrs. Anna Erickson asked Mr. Movold, her son-in-law, who had built boats at International Falls, Min. for seven years – to buy the plant. Mrs. Movold sold out his plant and bought the Alexandria Boat Works (Movold, 1958).

6.3.2 Anna Erickson (nee Johnson)

Married Erick Erickson in 1893. They had two daughters, Ruby and Mildred. Anna helped Erick run the business “helping to make it a success” (Movold, 1958). She was born in Sater, Sweden coming to Alexandria in 1892, where she soon met Erick. In 1894 the couple moved to a farm outside of town, where Ruby was born in 1895. Once Erick established the Alexandria Boat Works, the Ericksons moved into town, building a house across the street from the boat works in 1915. Following Erick's death, Anna took over operations of ABW, continuing to stay involved until her death in 1951 (DCHS Archives, n.d.).

6.3.3 Clifford and Ruby Movold

Ruby was the eldest daughter of Erick and Anna Erickson, born in 1895. In 1920, Ruby married Clifford Movold. As the Alexandria Citizen News reported, “The marriage of Miss Ruby C. Erickson to Mr. Clifford C. Movold of Fosston was solemnized at the home of the bride's parents, Mr. and Mrs. E. G. Erickson, last Saturday evening. Rev. A. A. Secord performed the ceremony in the presence of a few intimate friends” (Alexandria Citizen News, 1920). They had three sons, John, Robert and Mark. Cliff bought the Alexandria Boat Works in 1943, running the company, with the help of Ruby until his retirement in 1946 (DCHS Archives, n.d.).

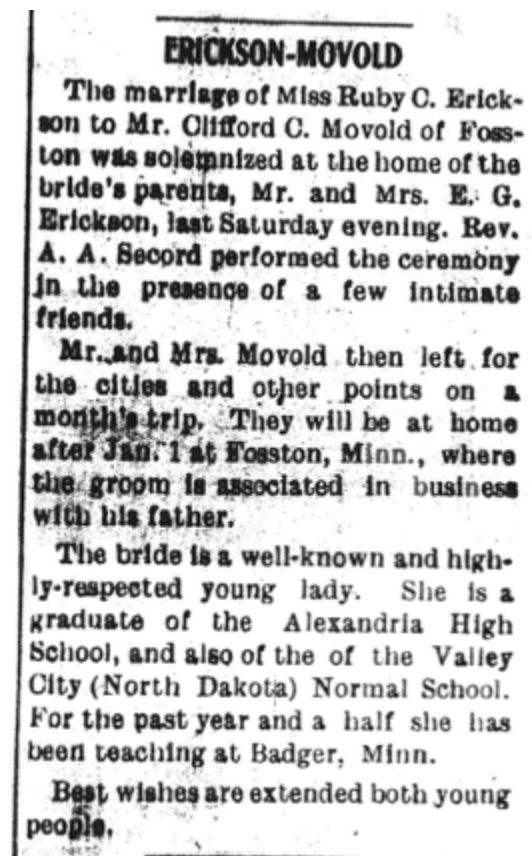


Figure 7: Alexandria Citizen News, December 2, 1920. From the Douglas County Historical Society Archives.

6.3.4 John “Jack” C. Movold

Jack took over ownership of the Alexandria Boat Works in 1946, following his father, Cliff's retirement. Jack built a strong reputation as a good leader. As one former ABW employee remarked, “Jack had the vision... [he] saw the need for a change” (Terry Niedenfuer, personal communication, July 27, 2021). In 1956, Alexandria Boat Works stopped manufacturing wooden boats, “a tradition that lasted for 71 years finally came to an end. The firm’s management decided to switch from retail and dealer sales to straight distribution and wholesale operations” (DCHS Archives, n.d.). Jack was responsible for expanding the business into a successful sporting goods distribution company, contracting with “Mirrorcraft boats, Porpoise sailboats, Shoreline trailers and boat lifts, Sno-jet snowmobiles, and Yardman outdoor power equipment. During the past year [1973], it sold its retail sporting goods division and is concentrating solely as a wholesale distributor. Their trucks can be seen delivering the items described above to dealers in North and South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Manitoba and Western Ontario” (Lake Region Press, 1974, pg. 20-C). The Alexandria Boat Works continued as one of the best marine industry distributors until Jack Movold’s death in 1988.

6.3.5 Robin Niedenfuer (nee Movold)

Robin Niedenfuer (nee Movold) was interviewed by Kelly Wolf, MA, RPA on July 27, 2021 as part of this project. She is the daughter of Jack Movold, the last owner of the Alexandria Boat Works, and the grandson of Erick Erickson, the founder. Many of Robin’s memories are tied to her dad. She believes that he was a huge part of the evolution of the company and why they remained so successful in later years. Jack Movold was known to be very gregarious and had a good business sense.

While Robin worked odd jobs with the company as a teenager, including running a lunch counter for the employees when she was 15, she started working for the company full-time in 1972. Robin worked in the recreation supply department and oversaw the development of the distribution catalog each season for the recreational items the company dealt in. By that time, Alexandria Boat Works had sold its retail store and it became Stub’s Marine, which is still in business today. By the 1970s, the company had become a distributor for sporting goods and had six departments—Boat Sales, Trailers, Lifts, Snowmobiles, Recreation Supply, and Pontoons. They distributed to about 500 dealers in a seven-state area, which meant Robin was developing 600 to 700 catalogs each season to showcase the boating accessories the company distributed through their recreation supply department. The company was making around 10 million per year in sales and had about 125 employees. Robin has fond memories of working for her dad and described everyone being happy working in the marine business. When Jack Movold died suddenly, in 1988, they made the difficult decision to close the doors of the Alexandria Boat Works. She said it was “probably the most difficult thing I’ve ever done” (Robin Niedenfuer, personal communication, July 27, 2021).

6.3.6 Terry Niedenfuer

Terry Niedenfuer was interviewed by Kelly Wolf, MA, RPA on July 27, 2021 as part of this project. He worked for the Alexandria Boat Works beginning in 1974. Through his working experience,

first for the Alexandria Boat Works, then for the Glastron boat company, Terry has a unique perspective on the distribution years; he described it as being a natural evolution for the company moving from the manufacture and sale of wooden boats to adding other marine-related retail items, then to the distribution of other boat lines and supplies. As the company grew, they did not want to compete with other local retail stores, therefore the decision was made to move away from retail (Terry Niedenfuer, personal communication, July 27, 2021).

The Glastron company started in 1955 in Texas as one of the first manufacturers of fiberglass boats. A connection was made between Alexandria Boat Works and Glastron at one of many marine tradeshows and a partnership was formed. In 1956, Alexandria Boat Works became the first distributor of Glastron boats. This partnership lasted until the 1980s. Terry described a number of factors influenced the end of this partnership; however, the split was amicable. One factor was a change in the size of dealerships, which eliminated the need for a distributor, or “middle-man” and allowed consumers to buy direct from the manufacturer. Another was a change in ownership at Glastron as well as the failing health of Jack Movold (Terry Niedenfuer, personal communication, July 27, 2021). Glastron was the first fiberglass boat company to go national. One of the first companies to start manufacturing fiberglass boats following the War. Jack Movold was introduced to Glastron at a boat show in Chicago in 1956. Bob Hammond-founder of Glastron [Terry has a video interview of Bob talking about this].

Throughout the history of the Alexandria Boat Works, the company was able to mold and change to fit the trends within the marine business, while maintaining a strong reputation as a one of the best and most personable. They were always there as a people-oriented company, caring for their employees and their clients and consumers. Terry remembers the marine business as special, an industry that was fun to work in (Terry Niedenfuer, personal communication, July 27, 2021).

6.3.7 Alan Olson

Alan Olson was interviewed by Kelly Wolf, MA, RPA on September 14, 2021 as part of this project. He was a former salesman for the Alexandria Boat Works between 1966 to 1977 “and have owned a Glastron boat ever since” (Alan Olson, personal communication, September 14, 2021). He graduated from Sales Training Institute and started working in sales in the Twin Cities before coming to ABW. Alan started in the retail store and was trained by Jack Movold,

one of the finest salesmen I've ever worked with. He taught me all about Glastron boats...He was a close friend and confidant of Bob Hammond, the owner of Glastron boats in Austin, Texas. He was the first distributor of Glastron boats that set up a dealer network in the seven states here. He knew the performance capabilities and the ride and the handling of Glastron better than anybody and he taught me all of that. It became natural to me to be able to sell that product (Alan Olson, personal communication, September 14, 2021).

Alan really has a strong memory of working with ABW and selling Glastron boats. He feels that the boating industry has really changed in the last ten years or so. When asked about the legacy of ABW he explained, “Undoubtedly here locally it's going to be the Glastron boat. You go out

on the lakes today, even though there isn't a Glastron dealer anymore, the boats that you see the most of are the Glastrons, even though they're older. And the legacy is the styling of the Glastron and also the ride handling and performance. Most boats built today don't have that" (Alan Olson, personal communication, September 14, 2021).

6.3.8 Jack Achter

Jack Achter was interviewed by Kelly Wolf, MA, RPA on July 27, 2021 as part of this project. He grew up in Glenwood, Minnesota and spent two years while in high school working for the Alexandria Boat Works. He started there after his father died in 1963 when he was 16 years old. His father worked in outboard motor repair at the Alexandria Hardware store, where Jack learned the trade. After his father's death, Frank "Frankie" Becker, head mechanic for the Alexandria Boat Works, hired Jack as an outboard motor repair man. Jack remembers working with Evinrude motors at the Alexandria Boat works, "The Evinrude outboard motors they sold and serviced were made by Outboard Marine Corporation, nearly identical to the Johnson Motors I was used to working on. The outside cover and paint color were different, but they were mechanically the same" (Jack Achter, personal communication, July 27, 2021).

Jack has many memories growing up on the lakes around Alexandria. He spent some time working for one of the local resorts maintaining their fleet of *Lady of the Lakes* boats and doing other odd jobs in the summer. He remembers when many of the resorts transitioned to using aluminum boats. By the time Jack worked for the Alexandria Boat Works in the 1960s, the company was well established in the new building on Highway 52. He remembers the large variety of sporting goods for sale, including water skis and a variety of boats displayed in the windows made by Glastron and Alumicraft; among others. Jack recalled, "my portion of [the Alexandria Boat Works] was so small in comparison to the larger history" (Jack Achter, personal communication, July 27, 2021). However, his experiences are no less valuable.

6.3.9 Connie Martin (nee Bedman)

Connie Martin (nee Bedman) was interviewed by Kelly Wolf, MA, RPA on September 13, 2021 as part of this project. She is the great-great niece of Erick Erickson. Her great-great-grandmother, Christine Erickson (Erick's sister) married Charles Bedman. The Bedman's established a resort on the south end of Lake Ida. They had a son, Harry, who continued operations of the resort. Harry had two surviving children, a daughter Liliias and son Harry Jr. (Connie's father). Harry Jr. was the last Bedman to operate the resort, closing it in 1989. Connie has many memories of growing up in Alexandria and working at the Bedman resort when she was young including the maintenance of the old wooden boat fleet. "All family members on board.... The youngest kids, they would be put on boat detail. They had to clean the boats, so they'd lift them, throw the buckets of water and scrub them down so they'd be clean for the next person" (Connie Martin, personal communication, September 13, 2021). She remarks on the depth of the family history and the community connection to the resort and the boat works.

I think my dad got some of those boat building genes. He built sailboats and he loved doing woodwork, he was an industrial arts teacher. His dad, my grandfather, worked for Alexandria

Boat Works. At one point, he was co-owner or was part of that for a very short time. He was one, I think there were three different men that worked there, that went off and started their own companies. He and Chester Olson did that, it was during the time of the Depression and people weren't buying boats, so his company [the Bedman Boat Works] didn't last very long (Connie Martin, personal communication, September 13, 2021).

Her grandfather, Harry Bedman Sr. was the last direct connection to the Alexandria Boat Works, learning a lot from his uncle, Erick Erickson; everything from woodworking to administration.

6.3.10 Loene and Bob Bowlin

Loene and Bob Bowlin was interviewed by Kelly Wolf, MA, RPA on July 27, 2021 as part of this project. The couple are longtime summer residents of the Alexandria area. They currently reside in Texas during the winter, where Bob grew up. Loene was born in 1941 and started coming to Lake Minnewaska with her family in 1947. When she was young vacations were multi-generational family trips where they spent the whole summer together at the lake. Over the years it has changed to just weekends spent at the lake during the summer. Today the couple owns a cottage on the lake. They feel as if it anchors them to the traditions of spending summers on the lake and to family. Loene and Bob have seen trends change over the years here in the change from using wooden boats to fiberglass and aluminum, to the advancement in technology that allowed them to enjoy more water sports like skiing. With this change, they feel there has been a loss in the art of making wooden boats and the quality it represented (Loene and Bob Bowlin, personal communication, July 27, 2021).

7.0 LEGACY

From the Interpretive Plan:

Minnesotans have always found cause to celebrate The Lakes. Beaches, boats, docks and clubs have served as venues for recreation of all kinds. At the Missouri Club, 'the general purpose' was 'the instruction and mutual improvement in the art of angling and the social culture and entertainment of its members.' Entire entertainment industries grew from local tourism industries, such as lakeshore roller rinks that felt like the center of the universe for teenagers in summer. For others, the thrill came from an afternoon in the water, fishing or racing or drifting. Almost all travelers in Lake Country had a passion for boating; on Lake Pepin some were even inventing waterskiing. Adventure and discovery have always been central to the experience of Minnesota's lakes (Bluestem Heritage Group, 2015, pg. 18).

As the theme of Legacy pertains to the Alexandria Boat Works, questions were developed by the Legacy of the Lakes Museum and include:

- What makes an ABW boat special?
- Why do people recognize the brand all over the country?

In an attempt to answer these questions, research began with the larger themes of Minnesota and Alexandria "lake culture" and how the Alexandria Boat Works is linked to the recreation

and tourism industry. These are overarching historical themes that are not currently addressed through the exhibit at the Legacy of the Lakes Museum. Highlighting the personal stories of those that have a connection to local “lake culture” and to the broader community of Alexandria will help to illustrate the importance of a company like Alexandria Boat Works and create a more direct connection to the public. The Alexandria Boat Works exhibit would benefit from bringing the history all the way up to the 1980s and highlighting the many different ways the company contributed to the concept of “lake culture;” from first making wooden boats for members of the community, local businesses, and summer visitors, to distributing Glastron boats and other sporting goods to a broader Midwestern region. All the while maintaining a strong, positive, reputation and being one of the best in the industry. In-person interviews are a key part to this theme. Many members of the Alexandria community can still connect to the Alexandria Boat Works and have strong impressions on the value of the company.

7.1 Lake Culture

The concept of Lake Culture for the Alexandria area revolves around the outdoors and recreational opportunities. Early in the history of Douglas County the name “Park Lakes Region” became synonymous with the area. “Lovers of wild life and natural beauty find it hard to leave the Park Lakes Region and as a result the shores of a number of the most beautiful lakes are dotted with summer homes and cottages... Naturally, the Park Lakes Region is a fisherman’s paradise in more than name only” (DCHS Archives, n.d.). Fishing was an important aspect to the tourism industry and one that the Alexandria Boat Works was able to capitalize on. Many people would hire a fishing guide who typically had an ABW rowboat, or they would rent a boat from the fleet of boats that many resorts had. As one former fishing guide remembered, “The heavy wood boats had to be rowed or, in time, run by small unpredictable outboard motors. Harry Bemo’s guiding career started around 1935 and even then he has vivid memories of rowing up and back through all four Lobster Lakes” (Schoellkopf and DeLay, 2011, pg. 32).

Today, the concept of Lake Culture continues to have a connotation of nature and recreation. As part of the research for this project, questionnaires with questions about Lake Culture and the heritage of companies like the Alexandria Boat Works were filled out by members of the public during the annual Legacy of the Lakes Diamond Classic Boat Show and at a Gallery Talks event (see Attachment I for the questionnaire responses). There was a small pool of respondents (22), and they more heavily represented year-round residents (59%) rather than seasonal residents (27%). As expected, 73% of the respondents identified themselves as being in the 61+ age group with the 55 to 60 age group representing 14%, the 46 to 50 age group representing 9% and the 41 to 45 age group representing 5% of the respondents. Only one of the respondents was a former employee of the Alexandria Boat Works (ABW) themselves, but 23% did know/know of someone who was a former ABW employee. The majority of respondents (68%) own/owned an Alexandria Boat Works boat although only fishing boats, the “Lady of the Lakes,” and a Runabout were specifically mentioned.

There were only three questions where respondents overwhelmingly tended to either Agree Strongly or Agree with the statements on the questionnaire. 82% Agree Strongly with the

statement “Being in Alexandria makes me MORE appreciative of the beauty of the lakes;” 53% Agree Strongly with the statement “Minnesota lake culture is something that can, and does, belong to a variety of people;” and 50% Agree with the statement “Learning about the history of the Alexandria Boat Works (ABW) makes me MORE appreciative of the industries that built the city.” The responses to the other four questions had either more diversity in the responses or more of an even divide in responses.

It is interesting to note that while 53% of respondents Agree Strongly with the statement “Minnesota lake culture is something that can, and does, belong to a variety of people,” only 47% of respondents Agree with the statement “I know and understand what Minnesota lake culture means;” and 10% of respondents chose Neutral/No Opinion as their answer. If there is a disconnect between why people are less adamant to admit they know what Minnesota lake culture is than they are to say it is for everyone, it should be explored. Perhaps it is a result of the high number of seasonal residents responding to the questionnaires, or perhaps the definition of Minnesota lake culture has changed over the course of a lifetime, so older respondents are not as sure how to define it anymore. The one written response to the statement “Minnesota lake culture is something which can, and does, belong to a variety of people” references those who “get it” and that phrasing in itself is vague. What is being “got” and who is judging whether or not someone “gets it” – the participant in lake culture, or someone watching those who they feel are appropriately or inappropriately participating in lake culture? It’s also interesting to point out that one respondent felt that “Minnesota lake culture” involved having a cabin up north in addition to having grown up around water. This subtly hints that at least one respondent felt as though “lake culture” was tied to a certain socio-economic status.

One of the 2015 Interpretive Plan’s key questions is: “What are the lakes?” and it explores the topic of the natural development of the lake (i.e. geological history) but also the roots of a lake’s economic prosperity. This was developed into the research theme of *Local Landscapes* (addressed in detail in Section 4.0). As a city with a long history of tourism and conservationism – one of the keys to the economic prosperity of Alexandria – it is interesting that while a small majority (55%) of respondents Agree with the statement “The beauty of the lakes is highlighted by the development of the city of Alexandria,” almost as many Agree Strongly (23%) with the statement as are either Neutral/No Opinion or Disagree (18%). While one respondent was disappointed with the continued development, traffic, and pollution, another was happy to see more locals living on the lake than in the past. It is a small sample size, but based on these responses, it seems like the question ‘what are the lakes?’ means ‘the lakes’ are either tourist towns or local communities. One respondent pointed out the beauty of the area, but suggested “more mall development.” For visitors to Alexandria, especially long-time visitors, is one of these more important for the continuing prosperity of Alexandria than the other? How does this affect, as the interpretive plan states, “how different lakes have acquired distinct characteristics” (Bluestem Heritage Group, 2015, pg. 16).

Finally, the 2015 Interpretive Plan asks, “Who lives in Lake Country?” which was developed into the theme of *People* (addressed in detail in Section 6.0). This theme seeks to explore both the

immigrant community who moved to the area for jobs and the seasonal tourists from “away” who shaped Alexandria. However, it is clear from the questionnaire that a slight majority of respondents (42%) Agree with the statement “The city of Alexandria is a more diverse place because of the legacy of the Alexandria Boat Works,” while 37% are Neutral/No Opinion and only 16% Strongly Agree with the statement. Although the pool of respondents is small, it seems as though the museum and the seasonal residents (the majority of the respondents) are possibly not viewing “diversity” in the same way. How do the seasonal residents, inherent outsiders, view themselves? How does this correspond to the vast majority of respondents’ strong agreement with the statement “Minnesota lake culture is something that can, and does, belong to a variety of people”? It would also be interesting to understand more fully what group of immigrants the Alexandria Boat Works was hiring. For example, Minnesota has a long legacy of Scandinavian settlement, and if the ABW was hiring from this pool of available workers, would they encapsulate diversity in the same way a Latin American or Eastern European immigrant work force would? These are avenues that can be further explored in the future.

7.2 Legacy: Alexandria Boat Works

It is clear from the research and during the interview process that the community highly values the Alexandria Boat Works and recognizes its contribution to the area’s lake culture and recreational industry.

Today if you want to separate the men from the boys, ask somebody if he remembers the Lady of the Lakes and the Stanley Hook. Those two words are as dated as the Model T and every bit as much a collector’s item. The Lady of the Lakes, made in Alexandria, was the most famous of the old wood boats-sturdy and so maneuverable that a whole fleet of them has been transported to a fishing club near Dallas where the guides still use a paddle. Alexandria’s guides rowed with oars from the bow (into the wind) while their passengers fished from chairs whose legs had been removed and the bottoms attached to the two stern seats. Almost certainly their tackle consisted of a bamboo rod, a silk line and a Stanley Weedless Hook, so called because of the two long ‘feelers’ that protected the hook from hanging up in the coon-tail on the bottom. Dangling from this unwieldy contraption would be either a minnow or a bright green frog (Schoellkopf and DeLay, 2011, pg. 32-33).

Many of the people interviewed expressed a sense of nostalgia for the old wooden *Lady of the Lakes* boats and the way people once vacationed on the lakes surrounding Alexandria. As the *Park Region Echo* wrote on September 26, 1935, “The Alexandria Boat Works is one of the best known concerns of its kind in the country, and is one of the oldest boat manufacturing plants in the state. Its products have been distributed to all parts of the country, and its boats are to be found on many lakes” (*Park Region Echo*, 1935, pg. 1). Connie Martin describes the importance of the legacy of this area,

Growing up family was a huge thing...all the stories that have been told. My dad was the family historian and he loved to keep that history alive. The more that I read and the more that is shared by other families, the more I realize that it’s not just a Bedman family, it’s not just an Erickson family, or an Anderson family, it’s so many people in this area that came over looking for the

hope, looking for a new start and bonded together because that's what they needed to do to survive and to help one another. People from all walks of life. I just think that is such a big part of Alexandria, there are so many different walks of life. There are people from the halls of Washington D.C. and there are people who have worked hard and been on their own properties for years and generations...Everybody has an important story... That's the beauty of preserving that and sharing it. Your story might shed light on someone else's story and then they might get to know a little better about where they came from... It's so diverse (Connie Martin, personal communication, September 13, 2021).

Continuing to share the story of the Alexandria Boat Works and to tell that story through many different people and perspectives will continue to keep alive the legacy of the company.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Alexandria Boat Works was something special and the community can still connect with it. Bringing more of the local voices into this exhibit to highlight those that once worked for the company or used and cared for a *Lady of the Lakes* boat, or those that had a connection to the family that owned and operated the business for almost 100 years, will make for a stronger narrative and a more personal connection to museum visitors. One aspect that could be addressed in the future would be the national and global reach of the company. This could be further explored through additional interviews, particularly of buyers and dealers from out of state, as well as a deeper look at the company's advertising campaigns. Additionally, by bringing the Alexandria Boat Works narrative up to the 1980s and highlighting its unique partnership with Glastron will make the history and community connection stronger and the story of ABW more vibrant.

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Attachment I: Questionnaire Results

- 22 questionnaires were completed
- 19 questionnaires were completed entirely (front and back)

Results Broken Down by Question:

Age range:

- 18-25: 0
- 26-30: 0
- 31-35: 0
- 36-40: 0
- 41-45: 1
- 46-50: 2
- 55-60: 3
- 61 + : 16

I live in Alexandria:

- Year round: 13
- Seasonally: 6
- Former resident: 0
- I am a tourist: 0
- no answer: 3

I am a former employee of ABW:

- No: 21
- Yes: 1

I know/knew of someone who was a former employee of ABW:

- No: 17
- Yes: 5

I own/owned an ABW boat:

- No: 7
- Yes: 15

Question	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neutral/No Opinion	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	No Answer
Being in Alexandria makes me MORE appreciative of the beauty of the lakes.	18 (82%)	4 (18%)	0	0	0	0
The beauty of the Lakes is highlighted by the development of the city of Alexandria.	5 (23%)	12 (55%)	4 (18%)	1 (5%)	0	0

Question	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neutral/No Opinion	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	No Answer
Learning about the history of the Alexandria Boat Works makes me MORE appreciative of the industries that built the city.	9 (41%)	11 (50%)	1 (5%)	0	0	1 (5%)
Being in Alexandria helps me to feel connected to the lake and to the lake culture of Minnesota.	9 (47%)	9 (47%)	1 (5%)	0	0	
I know and understand what “Minnesota lake culture” means.	8 (42%)	9 (47%)	2 (10%)	0	0	
“Minnesota lake culture” is something that can, and does, belong to a variety of people.	10 (53%)	8 (42%)	1 (5%)	0	0	
The city of Alexandria is a more diverse place because of the legacy of the Alexandria Boat Works (ABW).	3 (16%)	8 (42%)	7 (37%)	0	0	1 (5%)

**Questions in the orange boxes are from the back of the questionnaire where N=19

Results Broken Down by Short Answer:

- Of the respondents who own/owned an ABW boat:
 - 1 had a 1953 ABW Runabout “owned for 18 years, still used every summer”
 - 3 had generic “fishing boats” (12-foot, 14-foot, and 16-foot)
 - 1 had a boat from or in the year 1946
 - 4 had a “Lady of the Lakes” (1951 and date not given) with one respondent owning two “Lady of the Lakes” (1914 and 1930s)
- Four respondents expanded on the statement: Being in Alexandria makes me MORE appreciative of the beauty of the lakes.
 - Agree Strongly: the museum and lakes are beautiful
 - Agree Strongly: you live here, you love the lakes
 - Agree Strongly: the clarity of the different lakes is amazing making enjoying the

lakes easy. Beautiful sunsets and sunrises.

Agree Strongly: beautiful seasons!

- Five respondents expanded on the statement: The beauty of the lakes is highlighted by the development of the city of Alexandria. Their degree of agreement and written statements varied.

Agree Strongly: The maritime museum and boat show are a favorite for us

Agree: Today local people live on the lakes in greater numbers than 50 years ago

Agree: Great resort/cabin destination. Many business opportunities because of the lakes

Agree: Quaint city with shops and eateries mostly privately owned. Could use some mall development.

Disagree: Seeing too much development, too much traffic on the lakes, too much impact from pollution – especially last 10 yrs

- One respondent expanded on the statement: Learning about the history of the Alexandria Boat Works (ABW) makes me MORE appreciative of the industries that built the city.

Agree Strongly: Certainly was informed about the Erikson and Movall (?)

families – great vision and leadership from their ownership

- Two respondents expanded on the statement: Being in Alexandria helps me to feel connected to the lakes and to the lake culture of Minnesota.

Agree Strongly: We enjoy living on Lake Darling. Much history.

Agree: Spending time on the clean lakes on a hot summer day is a way of life

- Two respondents expanded on the statement: I know and understand what “Minnesota lake culture” means.

Agree Strongly: we’re recently moved here from another lake that we lived at for 21 years and not nearly as nice as these lakes.

Agree Strongly: having also a cabin up north in the woods and having experienced growing up around lakes

- Two respondents expanded on the statement: “Minnesota lake culture” is something that can, and does, belong to everyone.

Agree Strongly: Absolutely – all Minnesotans have access to the lakes – many hospitality venues and sporting goods builders opportunities etc etc.

Agree Strongly: You see those who “get it” across all socio-economic strata

- One respondent expanded on the statement: The city of Alexandria is a more diverse place because of the legacy of Alexandria Boat Works (ABW).

Agree: Legacy of the Lakes Museum and Gardens is a great example. Many definitions of diversity. Many apply.