

# Meander... 80 years a lady!

By Robert G. Allan, P.Eng



In the annals of Robert Allan Ltd., there is no vessel more significant than “Meander”.

My grandfather, Robert Allan, with an impeccable sense of timing, commenced his independent private practice as a Naval Architect in 1930. As this was after the stock market crash of October 1929, I can only surmise that this must have been an act of desperation in the very toughest of economies. In the absence of any other paying jobs in his field, it was also likely his only possibility to earn a living. In our family lore, there are stories of slim earnings in the early 1930s in the region of \$100 to \$200 per year. In 1933 however, he was approached by Mr. George Kidd, a prominent local businessman (obviously less affected by the depression) to design a luxury yacht, to be named “Meander”. This was a major commission at the time, and lifted my grandfather out of both an economic and an emotional depression, and consequently paved the way for a further 80 years of our company success. Kidd was a fellow Scot, which undoubtedly had some influence in the selection of my Grandfather to do this work. He reportedly wanted a ship that would carry him anywhere along the Pacific Coast and ultimately to his ancestral home in Glasgow, Scotland. Kidd was President of the Vancouver Power Co., and the Chairman of the Vancouver Board of Trade in 1934-35.

The vessel was built in 1934 at W.R. Menchions Shipyard in Coal Harbour, located just east of where the Bayshore



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*Original Watercolour by Bart Stockdill P.Eng (Robert Allan Ltd). From the Private Collection of R.G. Allan.*

Inn now stands. Although there is no record of her cost, amongst my Grandfather's papers are notes of cost estimates of very similar vessels, and an educated guess would be about \$24,000. Regrettably, I do not know how much he was paid for this design,

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The original design drawings for Meander still reside in our archives. The originals are classic design drawings in India ink on pale blue waxed linen and the Inboard Profile & Plans

# YACHTS



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in particular has a mass of information detailing the construction, machinery and outfitting of the boat.

It is a testimony to the skills of the designer and the shipwrights of the day alike that this venerable vessel was built with just four detailed drawings: a Lines Plan, General Arrangement, Inboard Profile and Deck Plans, and a Midship Section.

The yacht was commissioned on April 24, 1934 — that date is significant as the design drawings are dated October 1933, indicating barely six months from start to finish of the vessel, a remarkable feat even by today's standards. It was also noted by Bert Menchions in his memoirs that the shipyard crew made a serious concession in their mid-depression wages from \$5 to \$4 per day in order to get this rare bit of work. In the same vein, a June 1934 article in *Harbour & Shipping* magazine cites the boat's operating costs at 23 cents per hour.

This classic double-ended yacht was stoutly built from the finest materials available:

- Yellow cedar hull planking
- Bent 2" x 3" white oak frames at 9" centres
- Teak deck planking
- Yellow cedar ceiling (inner planking)

She is powered by a six-cylinder Gardner 6L3 diesel engine, rated at 102

bhp at 800 rpm, which has been in continuous service ever since.

Like many large yachts of the period, *Meander* was "impressed" by the Royal Canadian Navy in 1939 for coastal patrol duty, serving as *HMCS Meander* in the "Fisherman's Reserve" during the Second World War. It is not clear how the Kidd family were compensated for the loss of the vessel, if at all, or if the vessel was returned to them at the end of the war.

*Meander's* post-war life was documented briefly by Peter Vassilopoulos in *Antiques Afloat: from the golden age of boating in British Columbia* in 1980 and also appears in the Canadian Nauticapedia website ([www.nauticapedia.ca](http://www.nauticapedia.ca)) but the latter unfortunately has many inaccuracies. Further research provided the following results (hopefully accurate):

- In 1945, *Meander* was sold to Pacific International Airways, an apparent subsidiary of Pan Am Airlines based in Alaska, but the boat's log books show her owned by and operated for Mr. Edward Lowe of San Francisco who likely had the PIA connection. The *Meander's* log books from this period show the yacht with the Lowes and their friends aboard cruising the coast extensively — from Alaska to San Francisco, but primarily in the Seattle-Vancouver-Gulf

Islands areas. It appears however that the vessel remained in Canadian Registry in spite of her American owner. Lowe was responsible for adding rolling chocks to the hull (crudely sketched into the back of the 1946 log book) and the extended canopy over the aft deck.

- In 1948, the boat was bought by Sydney & Walter Wilson and used as a charter yacht under the name of "Meander Charters Ltd."
- In 1950, *Meander* was bought by the United Church of Canada and from 1950 (or 1951) to 1963, *Meander* worked as the United Church Missionary Vessel *Melvin Swartout II* working up and down the West Coast of Vancouver Island, based initially out of Port Hardy until 1953 she was moved to Bamfield. The log books from this period show a busy life programmed around a multitude of Sunday Services: e.g., March 23, 1961: Morning Service - Ucluelet 11:15; Afternoon Service - Indian Village - 3 pm; Evening Service - Tofino, 7:30 pm
- From 1963 to 1972, *Meander* was owned by Frederick Alexander Menzies of West Vancouver who operated her as a charter yacht. On Mr. Menzies' death, the yacht was bequeathed to his son Robert who appears to have sold it almost immediately.
- In 1972, *Meander* was sold to Art and Norma Clements.

The boat was purchased in 1975 by Hedley Rendell and Dennis Feroce. It was Dennis who wanted the boat and he was helped by Hedley with the



Photo courtesy of [www.nauti-capedia.ca](http://www.nauti-capedia.ca)

*HMCS Meander in the RCN livery, circa 1940.*



*Robert Allan (Sr.) and Robert F. "Bob" Allan circa 1956.*



Dennis Feroce, owner of Meander since 1975, has maintained the vessel in a manner faithful to her original 1930s design.

purchase through his company. For the past 37 years, *Meander* has been under Dennis' care, and since 1995 her interior has been completely restored, greatly benefitting from the contributions of Dennis' wife Jan Iliffe.

In compiling this story, I wanted to include some of Dennis' reminiscences of what must include many adventures

in his years aboard *Meander*. Dennis is typical of many coastal storytellers — get him started and then just sit back and listen. He is a font of coastal anecdotes and stories so in the end there are too many to mention, but the role of *Meander* in Greenpeace colours was too intriguing to pass up and it didn't take too much to persuade him to give

some of the details of those episodes.

Having bought *Meander* as a young man in 1975, Dennis needed to make some revenue from her and that consisted largely of chartering as frequently as possible. But these were the 1970s and Greenpeace was a relatively new presence on the coast whose philosophy of environmental protection appealed strongly to Dennis. In 1977, he offered the boat to Greenpeace as the *Greenpeace IX* and she soon lost her beautiful white hull to the rainbow colours of that organization. Photos of her in those days are unfortunately elusive.

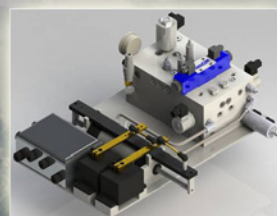
In May of that year the Kitimat Pipeline Company, a consortium of 15 oil companies, hosted the annual conference of the North Central Municipal Association of Mayors. The mayors, with their respective entourages (about 250 people in total), were taken aboard the CP Steamship's *MV Princess Patricia* to transit up Douglas Channel to demonstrate how safe this route might be for tanker traffic. Greenpeace strongly opposed the concept and, with the

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# YACHTS



A 1:24 scale model of Meander built by 18-year-old Robert F. Allan (1933/34).



support of many coastal native bands and fishermen, organized a maritime protest. *Greenpeace IX* led a flotilla that included the United Church Mission boat, *Thomas Crosby 5*, and a large number of coastal fishboats.

The scenario that evolved is well described by Rex Weyler in his book *Greenpeace: The Inside Story*. Weyler describes a tense standoff when Dennis moved *Meander* into the path of the oncoming *Princess Patricia* and radioed to the cruise ship captain that *Meander* was “dead in the water”, legally placing responsibility on the larger ship to avoid a collision. While Dennis backed out of the captain’s way at the last minute, the scene had already captured the attention of the mayors’ delegation and media onboard the *Patricia*.

Dennis’ recollection of events was somewhat less dramatic than Weyler’s, but no less colourful, and he described the meeting of the two ships in the fog as almost accidental as they had not

known exactly where *Princess Patricia* was at the time. This caught *Greenpeace* unprepared for their act of formal protest, so they hastily launched balloons as the *Patricia* bore down on them. Regardless, the protest had the right effect and the blockade created the awareness that effectively stopped the planned tanker route into Kitimat. It is not difficult to imagine similar blockades taking place in the near future as the contemplation of major tanker routes continues for B.C.’s North Coast.

Dennis also recollected when shortly thereafter *Meander* was chartered to take Thomas Enders, then the U.S. Ambassador to Canada (1976 to 1979) on a trip to Haida Gwaii as part of the process of educating various politicians about the true nature of the B.C. North Coast and what a serious threat an oil spill would present. Dennis described the hilarity of the patrician Enders being put ashore on Graham Island, clutching his briefcase as he

was presented with raw oysters off the beach for lunch, and an earful from Gary Edenshaw and others about the sanctity of those islands.

Dennis still lives aboard *Meander* with his wife, Jan. For many of the last 30 years, *Meander* has been operated as a charter yacht, but has also been their cozy and comfortable home. The 1975 purchase was a fortuitous thing for *Meander* as Dennis, a Master Woodworker, has maintained her in absolutely pristine condition and most importantly, maintained her in a manner faithful to her original 1930s vintage design. Jan has lent a very talented decorator’s touch to restoring and showing the boat off beautifully with refined paintwork, beautiful upholstery and fine artistic touches throughout.

It is abundantly clear that this is a boat much loved and that shows in every aspect of its hull and outfit which, according to all recent surveys,



*Meander*, having been kept in pristine condition for over 35 years by Dennis Feroce and his wife Jan, is now for sale.

is in excellent condition. The hull has never been re-planked, nor had any major re-construction. Dennis takes great care to maintain thorough circulation of air through all parts of the hull. Regrettably, Dennis and Jan have decided that it is time for a lifestyle change and they have reluctantly put *Meander* up for sale — they will do their future “meandering” on the open road.

As an anecdote to this story of the yacht itself, there exists a rather fine model of *Meander* with its own local history. This model was built by my late Father, Robert F (Bob) Allan, in 1934 when he would have been just 18 years old.

My Grandfather had the careful habit of writing drafts of letters, even personal letters. Presumably, when he had no money to spend on note paper in those tough days, he used the pages of various old design workbooks for this purpose, sometimes even writing over the old calculations. As I was searching for technical details of *Meander* in a design notebook from the 1920s and 1930s, I found one of these draft letters written in 1934 to his friend, architect Frank Gildersleeve (with whom he had collaborated on the interior design of the CPR's *Princess Louise* in 1920):

*“Boatbuilding here is almost an extinct business; only a small amount of work keeping the yards open. Since the completion of Mr. Kidd's yacht **Meander** there has been nothing much larger than rowboats....Bobby (i.e. my father) is attending university having obtained a small scholarship which has enabled him to do so. He has made a beautiful model of the **Meander**; really the best I have ever seen. Everything in exact replica, even to the furniture inside the cabin. It is all lit up with electricity. Our hope is that Mr. Kidd will purchase it at a decent price.”*

According to my late Father, Mr. Kidd did indeed come through with “a decent price”, enabling Dad to complete another year at University. A bit of detective work uncovered the model, still in the hands of Mr. Peter Kidd, the great-nephew of the original owner. I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Kidd and seeing the model just a few weeks before Christmas. It's a bit the worse for wear after nearly 80 years, with a notable gap in her starboard bulwarks and

a few other missing small bits, but it is easily restorable. It is obvious however that the entire model is built in exactly the same manner as the real boat. The deck is built with individual teak strip-planks, each barely four mm wide. Peter Kidd has never been on the real *Meander* as the boat was impressed by the Navy when he was a very small boy, but the *Meander* is clearly a very important part of their family lore as well.

It is gratifying to know that the roots of Robert Allan Ltd. were laid on the

ways with this beautiful classic yacht, and that this wonderful example of the skills of previous generations still graces B.C.'s coastal waters.

*Robert G. Allan took over from his Father as President of Robert Allan Ltd. in 1981 and is currently Executive Chairman of the Board. The company is established as an international leader in commercial small craft design with a staff of highly qualified professionals who handle a wide variety of projects for clients around the world.*



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