

February 2023 Historical Moment-Lake Union Dry Dock Company

Lake Union Dry Dock Company opened in 1919 and was the first substantial boatyard on the lake after completion of the ship canal. Its founders were Otis Cutting, John L. McLean (1871-1942), and Harry B. Jones (1888-1968).

Located at the southeast corner of Lake Union, Lake Union Dry Dock also was the largest of the early boat builders and by 1929 had five dry docks, including one that could lift up to 3,500 tons. This gave the company a competitive advantage, as it could accommodate either a single large vessel or several smaller ones simultaneously. The number of dry docks was later reduced to two, the largest of which accommodates vessels up to 420 feet and can be used at sea. In 1976, the yard acquired ex-USS White Sands (ARD-20), an Auxiliary repair dock ship. This required the ship/dry dock with an 81 foot (25 m) beam to pass through the 80-foot wide Hiram M. Chittenden Locks in Ballard. This was accomplished by heeling the dry dock to 38 degrees with ballast water, then with 1,112 tons of ballast blocks and steel plates. When it returned to Lake Union after World War II, it was tilted again to 45 degrees to make it through the locks.

In 1925 or 1926 the success of N. J. Blanchard's standardized cruisers led Lake Union Dry Dock to start building a similar-looking but larger version, based on the boat built by Lewis Grandy in 1911 to Otis Cutting's design. Twenty-four were produced, and several still can be seen on local waters. Also built during the 1920s was the steam-powered *W. T. Preston*, an Army Corps of Engineers snag boat. It was the last sternwheeler to work in Puget Sound and is now on display at the Anacortes Maritime Heritage Center.

Because of its capacity, Lake Union Dry Dock did more large commercial and military work than the other boat builders on the lake. During Prohibition the company played both sides, building speedboats used by bootleggers and 15 fast Coast Guard cutters used to chase them. From 1928 to 1930 Lake Union Dry Dock produced a bevy of beautiful wooden cruising yachts, all 96 feet long fan tail yachts, all designed by Ted Geary and all still in service, *Principia*, *Blue Peter*, *Electra*, and *Canim* each created with classic lines, luxurious joiner work, and fittings. The company also made two notable sailing yachts that remain active: *Pirate* and *Circe*.

In 1941 Lake Union Dry Dock partnered with Puget Sound Bridge and Dredge, and under the temporary name Associated Shipbuilders produced 16 wooden mine-sweepers for the U.S. Navy at the Lake Union facility, employing as many as 1,000 workers. At war's end the company was reorganized, again as Lake Union Dry Dock, now owned by original partner Harry Jones and George Hobart Stebbins (1894-1991), who had managed the yard during the war. Building and repairing large commercial and government vessels has been its bread and butter, including, in 2002, major repairs and renovations to *Virginia V*, the last operating steamer of Puget Sound's Mosquito Fleet. Lake Union Drydock Company, in its 103rd year of business, remains a full-service shipyard that specializes in vessel repair and conversions.

This is your Station Historian reminding you, that when you try to make a good thing last, it's easy to get buried in the past.....

