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## THE BENTZEN BOYS

*as told by John Bentzen*

BY JAYNE HEMMERICH

John, Arne and Leif Bentzen were born in Denmark, in the 1930's. After WWII their parents bought land on Lake Furesø which is about 20 miles NE of Copenhagen and built a house to raise their family. It was on this lake that the three boys learned to love the water, boats and sailing. Their grand father worked for a brief time as gardener to the King of Denmark and their father enjoyed a successful career in the art of silversmithing. Their mother, before getting married, worked for the famous Danish photographer Juncker-Jensen.

FIG 1 - JOHN'S FIRST SAIL WAS IN THIS BOAT AS A TODDLER STRAPPED TO THE MAIN SO HE WOULDN'T FALL OUT!





FIG 2 - JOHN'S FIRST BOAT - A LEAKING 16' DOUBLE ENDER

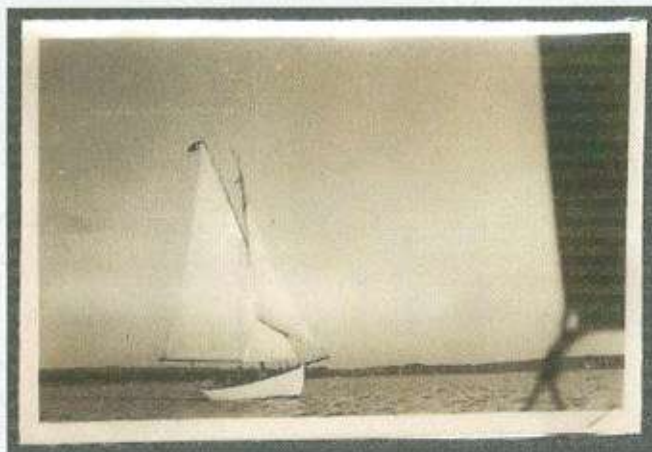


FIG 3 - JOHN'S SECOND BOAT- 24' GAFF RIGGED DOUBLE ENDER



FIG 4 - FIRST BOAT JOHN SAILED ON



FIG 5 - YACHT CLUB IN DENMARK, TENDING THE FLEET

Life living on this lake was good and the boys quickly adapted to it. John's first experience sailing was on a double ender with his parents. He was just a toddler at the time so for safety his parents strapped him to the mast so he wouldn't fall overboard (Fig 1 & 4). Surprisingly that experience didn't deter John's desire to be out on the water and by his 16th birthday he acquired his first boat (Fig 2). It was a 16 foot double ender with constant leaks and cotton sails.

When he was 17 he moved up to his second boat, a 24' gaff rigged double ender (Fig 3), and by now he was hooked to a lifestyle that revolved around the water.

## YACHT CLUB

In 1949, the family joined the Furesø Yacht Klubben (yacht club) and became active mem-



FIG 6 - ICE SAILING DENMARK

bers. To participate in the club's activities the boys would have to row 2 miles across the lake to where the club was. The yacht club's mission was not only to teach kids the love of sailing, but also the skill of sailing. They also taught them about the responsibility that goes with owning and caring for a boat. So it was not surprising the kids were required to maintain the yacht club's fleet (Fig 5). Sailing for these boys was a year round sport even though the lake froze over and winters were bitter. No problem, they just took the masts off and used them to ice sail, getting up to speeds of 50 mph! Back then without all the high tech weather protective clothing we have today, you can probably imagine it was a pretty rugged sport and was only suited for those

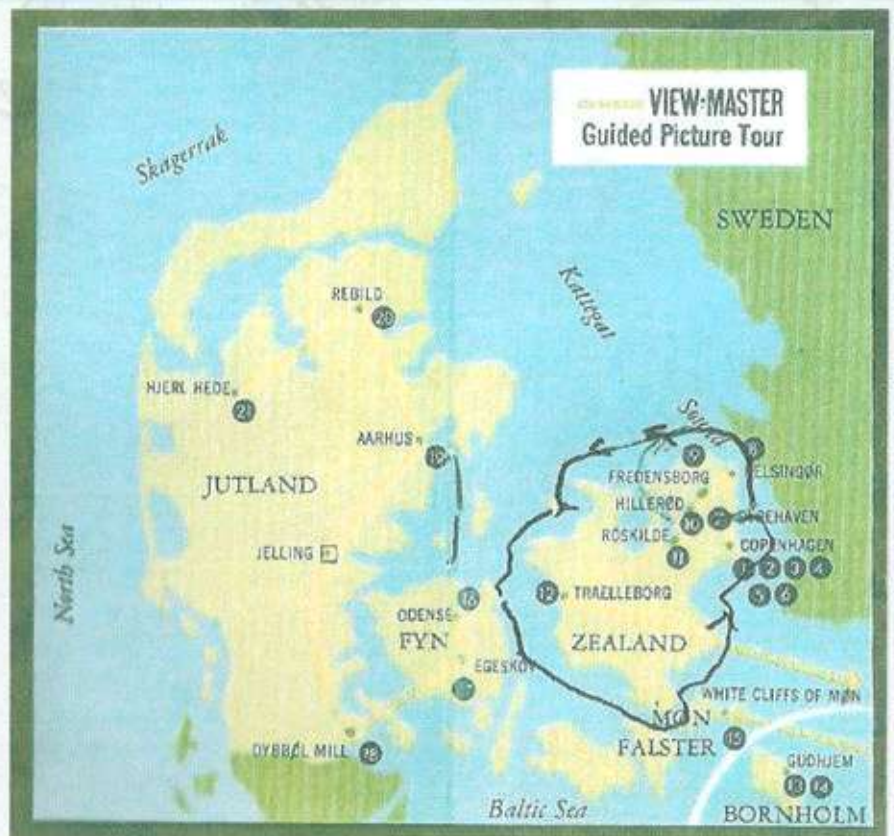


FIG 7 - RACE ROUTES ON THE OPEN SEA



FIG 8 - GETTING READY TO RACE



FIG 11 - NAVAL SHIP THAT THE BENTZEN BOYS SERVED ON

hearty enough to withstand the chill factor of the wind and temps at those speeds!

In summer, they would sometimes trailer their sailboats to the seashore and get a little taste of salt water out on the open seas. Some of their races would include circling the entire island of Denmark. (Fig 7-8)

## WOODEN BOAT BUILDING

All three boys were drafted into the Danish Navy and served together aboard the same ship (Fig 11-12). John's duty was navigator. After their service Arne and John both began their wooden boat building apprenticeships.

This was a natural progression for Arne as John told me that even in grade school Arne knew he wanted to build wooden boats. At the time there were some 160 wooden boat builders in Denmark but by the time they completed their apprenticeships, the numbers had dwindled to only 17 due to the onset and new interest in fiberglass.

The first boats they built on the lake were rowing shells, Klinker built (a process of one board overlapping each other, which is a very delicate process). They graduated to building bigger boats, some even shipped as far as America. Many were wooden outboards, some 18 feet long and had the capability to run 40 mph. With the onset and new popularity of fiberglass they could see the writing on the wall. If they wanted to work with wood, they needed to go to America where the opportunities were more bountiful.

## OFF TO AMERICA

Arne was the first to leave for North America. The year was 1957. He arrived on the shores



FIG 13 - JOHN DOING HIS APPRENTICESHIP

of Lake Superior in the fall just before the onset of winter. He managed to find himself a job with Niemi Boatyard, in Port Arthur, Ontario. It was excellent timing or Bentzen good luck as the the owner had just accepted an order to build a boat "from plans." Though the owner did not know how to read plans - it justso happened Arne could. So Arne got a job and spent a very cold first winter in Lake Superior building his first boat in Canada.

In the spring, John, along with this new bride, took their first flight on an airplane and followed Arne to America. The two brothers



FIG 14 & 15- SOME EXAMPLES OF BOATS THEY BUILT AT PETERBOROUGH BOATYARD IN PORT ARTHUR.

worked together at Peterborough Boats for awhile but Arne having no desire to spend another brutal cold winter working in a boat house with snow piling up to 40 feet high on the shores of Lake Superior, they bought two cars and made plans to head across the Canadian prairies to the West Coast. One was a 1946 Buick that required so many repairs on the trip that they eventually just

strapped the hood to the top of the car for convenience sake and the other was a 1952 Kaiser Manhattan.

## CROSSING THE PRAIRIES

Off they went, young immigrants from Denmark, crossing this foreign land of America with no idea what the future would bring for them. All they had was a suitcase each, and the will and skill to work along the seashore. They decided they would head to Campbell River, British Columbia on Vancouver Island. They had cousins living there so thought it would be a good starting point. Their goal was to find a boat builder that would take them in and give them work.

## SEARCHING FOR JOBS

It was evident when they arrived at Campbell River that there were no prospects for jobs in their field. The only work to be had would have to revolve around hunting and fishing at that time. So they headed South along the coastline of Van-



FIG 16 - HEADING ACROSS THE PRAIRIES

driving down each and every road they came to that went to the shore to see if there was a boat yard with the possibilities of work. One car would wait on the highway as the other drove to the shore.

They had no luck until they reached Duncan. It was John's turn. This time he found a place called Maple Bay. It was the end of the season and though they didn't build boats they did have work for someone with the skills to build a wharf. It would be about 10 days of work. So John stayed there to build the wharf and Arne headed on down the highway, continuing the process of driving down each road that led to shore finally coming to a place called Canoe Cove. It just so happened that the owner of Canoe Cove had plans to build a boat yard and marina and "wanted to make it the best in the area!" Arne was hired.

## BUILDING BOATS FOR CANOE COVE MARINA

After John finished his work at Maple Bay he joined Arne at Canoe Cove and this is where the real journey began for the Bentzen boys. It was a journey that led to the development of what has become some of the most popular marinas for cruisers in the Pacific Northwest.

As the boat yard began to quickly grow two more Danes were brought in. In the summer season the Bentzens camped at a nearby park in Sidney. At this point, as immigrants, they had no worldly possessions, only the shirts on their backs or as Arne was known to say, "you only need what you can fit into one suitcase." So at their campground the talented and industrious Danes soon made use of the free kindling that the Forest Ranger brought by for campfires to make furniture for the camp. It wasn't long



FIG 17 - CANOE COVE

before they had a steady stream of admirers and furniture requests from other campers. Before you know it they were invited to stay as long as they wanted.

Soon there was a "family" of 9 Danes camping at John Dean Park and working at Canoe Cove and eventually they made enough money to rent a house nearby. Canoe Cove quickly grew into what the owner originally said he wanted it to be, "a major boat yard on Vancouver Island".

During this time they built many wooden boats, some still to this day out on the water; one called "Baqooba" is close by in a boat house in Otter Bay (FIG. 22) and another, a sailboat, built for the distributor of Pan Abode Log Homes called "De La Mare". Life and opportunities were good in this new land and business at Canoe Cove was flourishing.



FIG 18 - CAMPING NEAR CANOE COVE



FIG 19 & 20 - SOME OF THE BOATS BUILT DURING THEIR TIME AT CANOE COVE

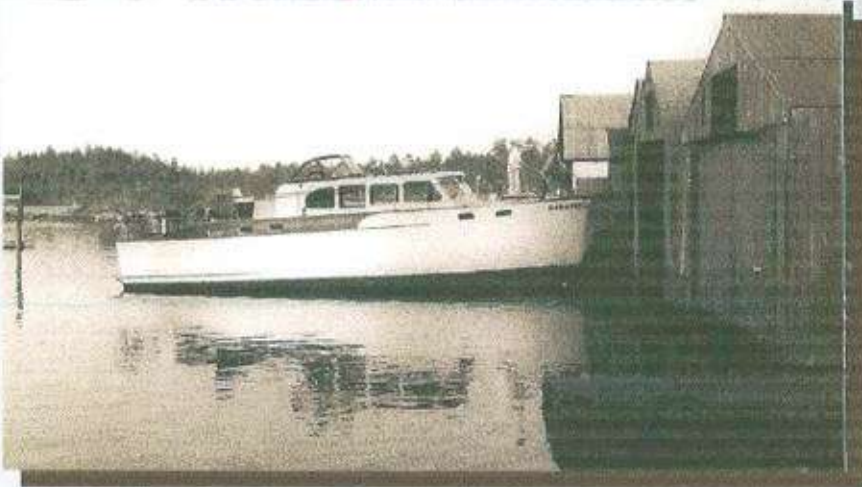


FIG 21 - ARNE BENTZEN - "YOU ONLY NEED WHAT YOU CAN PACK IN ONE SUITCASE!"



FIG 22 - BOAT BUILT BY JOHN & ARNE, STILL ON THE WATER. OTTER BAY





## PARENTS JOIN THE BOYS

In 1961, mom and dad, sold everything in Denmark and speaking not a word of English immigrated to Canada to be with their three sons. They settled in nicely and their



FIG 23 - BENTZEN'S DAD INTRODUCED THE ENGLISH CUCUMBER TO BC

father went back to his roots of gardening and soon had a thriving crop including a strange looking new vegetable that he introduced to British Columbia, called what we familiarly know today as the English Cucumber.

## BUILDING MAPLE BAY MARINA

While working at Conoe Cove, John got a call from Maple Bay Marina, where he got



FIG 24 - BENTZEN'S DAD HAD A GREEN THUMB his first part time job building their wharf. They offered him an opportunity to buy a portion of the ownership in the business and so the Bentzen boys moved to Maple Bay Marina and between 1961 to 1978 they sub-

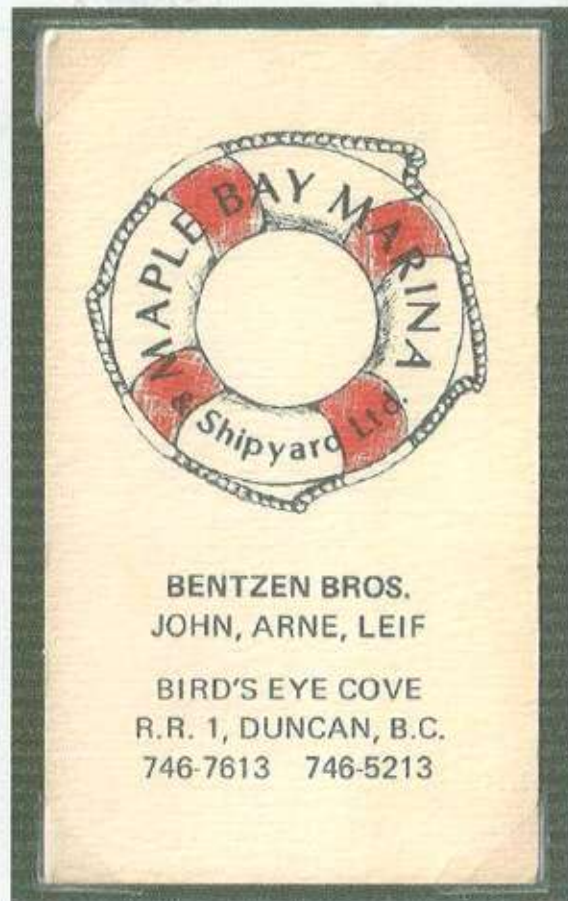
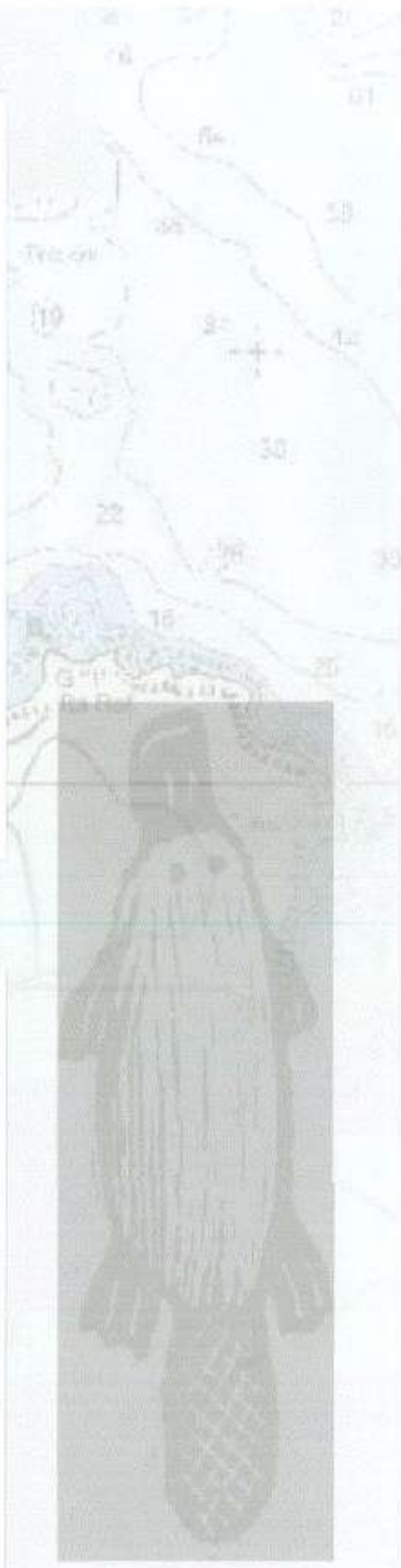
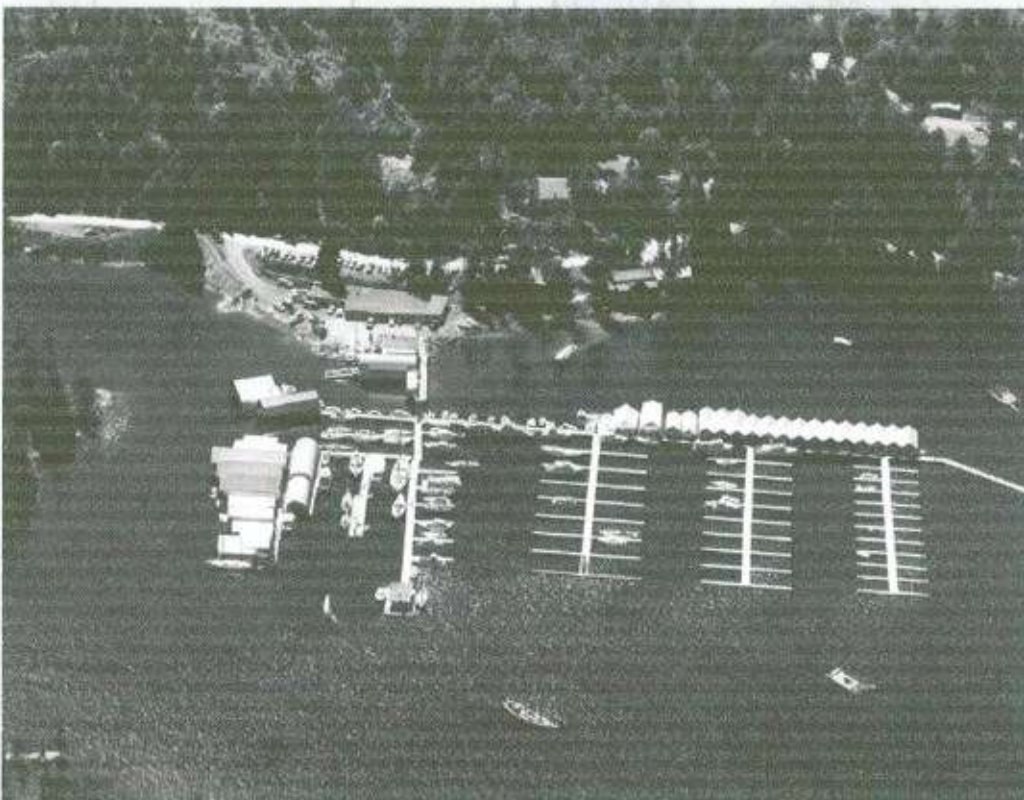
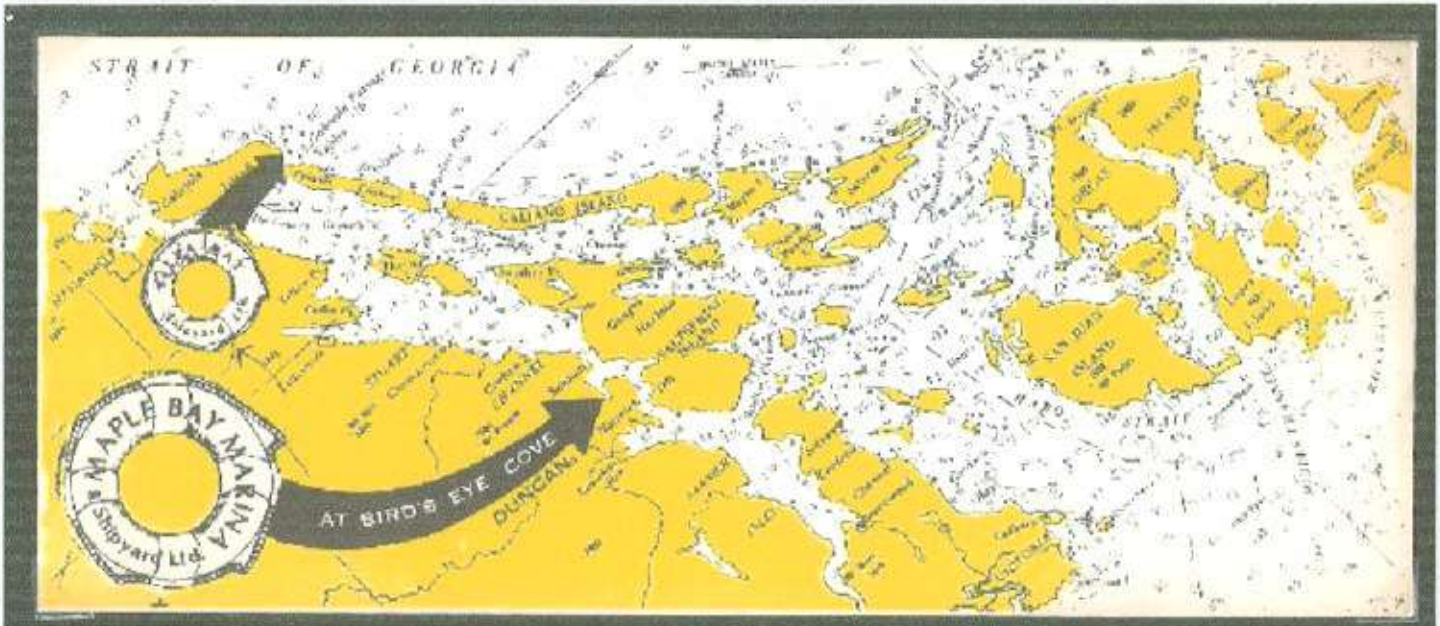




FIG 25 & 26 - CHANGES MADE TO MAPLE BAY BY THE BENTZENS





## SILVA BAY

Yet another opportunity came into the picture for the Bentzen's. There was a rumor that the Vancouver ferries were going to be coming to Silva Bay. So the Bentzen's also bought Silva Bay on Galiano Island and built a home overlooking the harbor in 1978. Arne took on the job of operating the shipyard which he quickly expanded to include a complete Ship Chandlery. Turns out the ferries never did come to Silva Bay but there are still the rumors floating around like ghosts.

Still another excellent opportunity presented itself which enabled the three brothers to sell Silva and Maple Bay and finally settle in San Juan Island where they live today and begins a whole new chapter.



## SUMMARY

There's much more to the fascinating Bentzen story but time and space don't permit in this month's issue of the newsletter. I feel very fortunate to have had this opportunity to sit down with John Bentzen. I think is an important record about our local maritime history.

Thanks to John Bentzen for being so patient with me while sharing his story and to Gloria for having pictures and info that I requested so handy. It was a real pleasure.

Jayne Hemmerich  
Editor