

Boats built by Tisdale kept the city folk afloat

The pounding of hammers and the whirr of electric saws coming from Leonard Tisdale's workshop was in marked contrast to the quiet bliss enjoyed by his customers as a result of the racket.

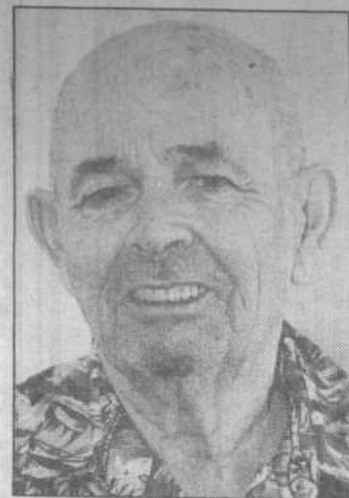
Tisdale was a local boat builder in the first half of this century. He also rented skiffs, canoes and docking space at his boathouses on South Front Street.

Belleville resident Alex Tisdale is the son of Leonard. Alex's grandfather, also named Alex, and great uncle, Joseph, operated the boat building company, Tisdale Brothers, in the previous century. City directories show they were in business here as early as 1879-80.

By the time Leonard took over the company, the family lived in a house on South Front Street, immediately east of the family's boathouses and workshop.

He rented skiffs and canoes for 25 and 35 cents an hour respectively, says Alex. There was also a daily rate but Alex doesn't recall it.

He does remember hearing that his grandfather built 15-foot boats, with oars or a rudder, for \$25. During that time there were no electrical tools so every piece of wood had to be cut by hand. The strips were placed in hot water to make them malleable. When the



Alex Tisdale

boat was nearly finished there would be marks in the wood from the hammer; so water was splashed on it and the wood expanded, covering the dents. For some reason Leonard did his work on the second floor of his shop, so he then had to lower the boats to the ground through two sliding doors with the help of someone below.

Leonard built both skiffs and outboard motor boats. They ranged in length from about 15 feet to 17 feet. By this time electrical saws were used but there was still a lot of fine carpentry to be done, says Alex.

Material for the crafts came from local wood lots, which Le-

onard perused personally, selecting the trees he wanted. They were then cut, planed and taken to Houston Lumber where they were cut into finer strips. The stem and keel of Leonard's boats were oak and the ribs were cedar.

Alex says his father was approached by employees of the Eaton and Simpson-Sears companies to work for them (evidently they sold boats then) but refused their offers because he preferred being self-employed.

Leonard died unexpectedly on Dec. 6, 1941, around age 60. His widow, Nettie, was going to sell the business but her son, Jack, took over the operation. Alex says his brother ran it for several years, although he only built one boat during that time. He then liquidated the business.

Alex was in the army when his father died and when he returned to Belleville he worked at Dunlop Tire for one year before taking a job in Toronto with the Toronto Transit Commission. After 30 years he retired and moved to Whitby. In 1982 he returned to Belleville where his grandfather and great uncle had begun working more than 100 years ago.



Nettie and grandson Alex, 1941, near the workshop.

Intell.
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TISDALE
Leonard