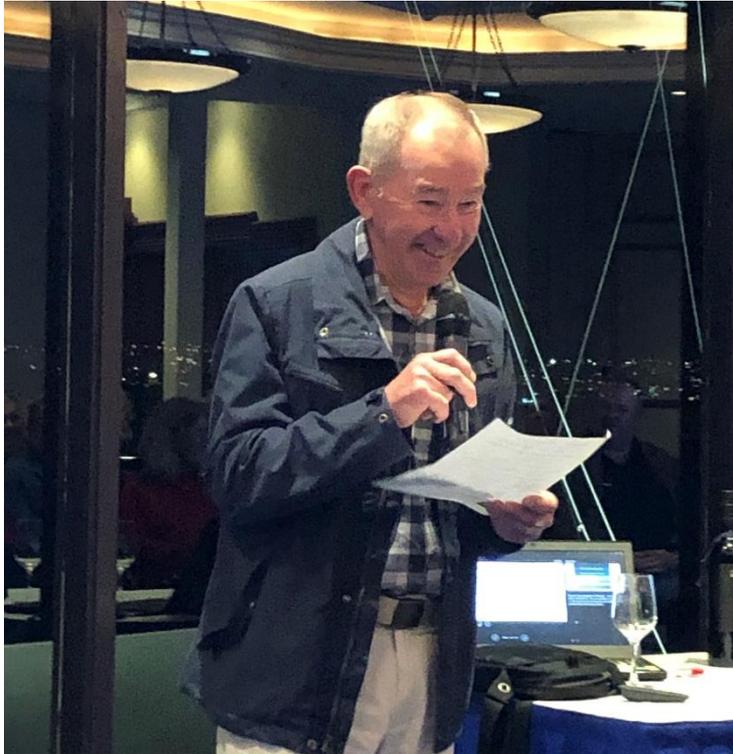


'The Halvorsen Story'
Presented by Noel Phelan

Report by James Merrington

One hundred members and guests packed the Carabella Room to hear the Maritime Museum presenter, Noel Phelan, talk about the Halvorsen family and their incredible impact on Australian marine heritage.



With the family origins in Norway, Lars was the youngest of 10 children, and his father Halvor Andersen was a farmer who decided that he needed to supplement the family income by learning boat building at the age of 58. Young Lars would later join him in this activity. After going to sea for a while, Lars decided he preferred to build boats rather than sail them and returned to boat building. Lars then went to the US to gain more experience in boat building, working at a number of yards. After three years, his girlfriend Bergithe visited him there. However, Lars, afflicted with malaria, was not well and they returned to Norway. They married and set up a boat building business there on the River Nid. They produced five sons and two daughters.

During the post war slump, after an unsuccessful speculative build of a sailing cargo boat, Lars decided to move to Cape Town, South Africa, where he spent some time building boats. Bergithe joined him after the birth of their youngest, Margit. The Cape Town market wasn't large enough to fulfill Lars' dreams of a family business. A South Australian suggested to Lars that a better place for his business would be Sydney Harbour. Lars arrived in 1924 and a year later the family joined him.

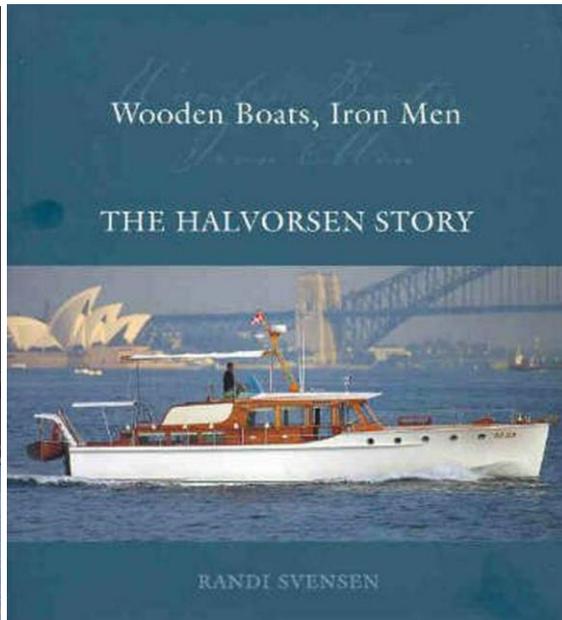
In Sydney, they soon set up in Neutral Bay, their first boat being *Sirius*, a 30 ft sailing yacht, and they went on to build more than 1300 boats of all sizes. As boat designers their recognized characteristics were: Creative Genius; Outstanding Craftsmanship; Talented, Entrepreneurs and Hard Working. Their boats were recognized as being: Sturdy; Practical; Innovative; Distinctive; and Indestructible.

Lars became ill with Osteomyelitis and died in 1936 aged 49. Their Neutral Bay site soon became too small for their expanding business and they found a site at Ryde which was the former home of James Squire. Here the Halvorsens built many fine vessels. At the beginning of the war some of their boats were requisitioned from their owners by the Navy, this led to the Halvorsens building more than 250 boats for the war effort for the forces of Australia, US and the Netherlands.

Shortly after the end of WWII, Carl became aware that the boatshed at Bobbin Head was for sale. They purchased the boatshed and established their boat rental business there. They built approx. 65 boats for their hire fleet and this was a very successful business.

Ever on the lookout for business opportunities, Carl was dispatched to the US along with a 60ft luxury cruiser *Tooronga* to explore the market opportunities there. Halvorsen motorboats also abounded in Sydney Harbour and Cowan Creek.

Halvorsen family members, starting with Maud, began racing. The Halvorsens set sail in Sydney Harbour, then Magnus and Trygve took to ocean racing in a number of yachts, most notably *Freya* which won the handicap honours in the Sydney-Hobart race three times back to back. Harold and Carl tended to race more in one design classes such as the 5.5 metre in which Carl became world champion. Carl also raced Dragons which he continued to sail into his early 90s. Carl's 90th birthday was celebrated on Cowan Creek with a sail past of Halvorsen boats and yachts. This cavalcade of Halvorsens, a 90 boat tribute, demonstrated the legacy of the Halvorsen family. Sydney Harbour was definitely the right spot for the Halvorsens.



For more information, read 'Wooden Boats, Iron Men THE HALVORSEN STORY' by Randi Svensen. (available in local libraries). Randi Svensen is a granddaughter of Lars and she gave a brief presentation following Noel's excellent presentation.