



# HODDER TUG

**“A History”**

Written by Robert Nelson “R.N.” Hodder

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## PREFACE

**HODDER TUG “A History”** was written from the memories of Robert Nelson “R.N.” Hodder. “R.N.” grew up in the tugboat industry with his father and uncle, the Hodder brothers, and is the President and owner of Hodder Tugboat Co. Ltd. He began writing this as a series in “The Hodder Flag”, an employee newsletter published each month. This resulted in an anxiously awaited issue each month by all employees, as they all looked forward to reading about the continuing saga of the “Hodder’s” and the ever-changing tugboat industry. We hope this book serves as much enjoyment to you as “The Hodder Flag” series gave it’s readers.

## **The Hodder's**

The men that worked to build Hodder Tugboat are mentioned frequently throughout this story. In an effort to make it easier to relate to each of these people as they're spoken of, we have written a brief description of them below.

John Jacob "J.J." Hodder - Grandfather to writer, owner of  
J.J. Hodder & Sons

Horatio Nelson "H.N." Hodder - Uncle to writer, one half of  
Hodder Bros. Towing

James Robert "J.R." Hodder - Father to writer, one half of  
Hodder Bros. Towing

Robert Nelson "R.N." Hodder - Grandson of John Jacob  
Hodder, Nephew of Horatio  
Nelson Hodder, Son of  
James Robert Hodder,  
Co-owner and President of  
Hodder Tugboat Co. Ltd., and  
writer of this story.

Robert James "R.J." Hodder - Son of writer, Co-owner and  
Operations Manager of  
Hodder Tugboat Co. Ltd.

### **The Late 1800's**

In the early 1870's, my Grandfather, John Jacob "J.J." Hodder, a rugged "Newfie", left home and headed west across Canada and the United States, walking, riding the rails, and hitching rides where possible. After several months and, I'm sure, some scrapes and adventures, J.J. ended up on Fidalgo Island, one of the Gulf Islands in the Northwest United States. There, he began working on a farm and fishing.

He met and married a local girl, Elizabeth Sharp, in about 1882. Elizabeth's family were said to be direct descendants of Admiral Horatio Nelson of British Navy fame and J.J. and Elizabeth's first child was to be his namesake. After Horatio Nelson Hodder was born in 1885 the young family departed by rowboat for the Fraser River and settled on 160 acres on Barnston Island, Port Kells, British Columbia, Canada. There they farmed, raised various livestock and fished salmon.

My father, James Robert "J.R." Hodder, was born on Barnston Island in 1887. He was followed by two daughters for J.J. and Elizabeth, Dorothy and Margaret.

## **Entering the Twentieth Century**

About 1900, J.J. Hodder and his sons, Horatio and J.R. acquired or built a vessel made from a huge log. She was named the “Burin” and she measured 40’ x 10’. She was a sturdy, stable vessel, although quite awkward and heavy to row and sail. A gas engine was purchased from the Easthope Engine Co. of Steveston, B.C. and the M.V. “Burin” became the first powered gillnetter on the Fraser River.

For years I wondered where J.J. Hodder got the name “Burin” for this vessel. Then, just recently, while reading a Farley Mowat book, “Grey Seas Under”, one chapter stood out for me. It was headed “Burin”. As Mowat explained, Burin was a small, ancient town on Placentia Bay in Newfoundland, famous for it’s seamen. I guess that’s where it originated!

“J.J. Hodder and Sons” soon began doing odd towing jobs for the many small mills dotting the banks of the Fraser River. These small jobs led to more and in 1908 a larger tug was needed.

The M.V. “Hustler” was purchased. This fine vessel was 66’ long by twelve to fourteen feet wide and was powered by a heavy duty union gasoline engine of about 80 h.p. (Many years later the “Hustler” was sold to the Gilley Bros. Gravel Co. and re-named the

“Gillrock”).) The “Hustler” towed logs, hog fuel barges, small train barges, and gravel and rock barges under the command of Captain Horatio Hodder and J.R. Hodder during the years of 1908 to 1925. My Grandfather, J.J. Hodder died in approximately 1916. The family sold the farm on Barnston Island and moved to Sixth Avenue near Oak Street in Vancouver. The company name was changed from J.J. Hodder and Sons Towing to Hodder Bros. Towing.

### **The Roaring ‘20’s**

The M.V. “Hustler” towed for many firms during the First World War and into the “Roaring ‘20’s”. Rat Portage was a prominent sawmill in False Creek just inside the west end of Granville Island. The Hodder’s towed many, many booms from upper Fraser River to this mill. The Fraser River had dozens of logging shows in those days from Pitt Lake up to Mission, Chilliwack, Aldergrove, Langley, etc. Nalos Lumber was a big lumber cedar mill in False Creek. There was Sweeney Cooperage, the barrel makers, B.C. Forest Products Spruce Mill, Bay Lumber and countless shingle and shake producers. Vancouver Harbour had numerous mills as well, including MB King Lumber, Norwood Cedar, Canada Creosote, Moodyville Lumber and another dozen or more cedar mills. Specialty mills like Alberta Lumber and Sigurson

Hardwood also operated in False Creek. Tugboat companies such as Gulf of Georgia Towing, Vancouver Tug (Seaspan), Cates, Coyle Navigation, and Preston Mann were in business. The Hodder brothers towed for many of these companies and sawmills.

A near disaster happened one night in 1918. When the M.V. “Hustler” was towing a lumber barge alongside in English Bay, a Japanese freighter hit the barge broadside and sent the M.V. “Hustler” to the bottom. My Dad, J.R., was just coming out of the engine room when the collision occurred! He was knocked back down the ladder but somehow fought his way up against the downflood. Luckily, no serious injury was suffered by the Hodder boys or their crew. The tug was salvaged and a judgment issued against the freighter, but no settlement was ever received. The “Hustler” was repaired and went back to work soon after.

About 1922, the Hoddors felt they needed a better tug for the type of work they were being asked to do, which included hog fuel barges to Tacoma and other Puget Sound ports, plus some train barges to Vancouver Island and Woodfibre, and log towing in the Gulf of Georgia and Howe Sound. They commissioned a well known ship designer and builder by the name of Moscrop to build a 65’ tug. She was constructed in False Creek and fitted with a brand new product on the market: A Union “diesel” engine of 110 h.p.



This was the second or third diesel tug in B.C. The new tug was launched in early 1924 and named “Eldoma” after the Hodder girls; mother, Elizabeth and daughters, Dorothy and Margaret.

J.R. Hodder married a young Scottish girl, Jessie Henderson Brown, in the 1920's. They had six children; my sisters, Marg, Anne, Rena, and Lynn, my brother, Blair, and me, Robert Nelson Hodder. J.R. was the only one of J.J. and Elizabeth Hodders' children to marry.



My Uncle, Captain Horatio Hodder always loved sailing ships. Against J.R.'s better judgment (being newly married and starting a family), Horatio seized an opportunity in 1928 to purchase the 300', five masted barkentine “Forest Friend”. This ship had been

built in Victoria in 1916 just as steamships were dominating the oceans. She had made several trips to Australia and Europe during the war, but had been mothballed for many years when Horatio bought her. The “Forest Friend” was towed to Fraser Mills and moored there for the next dozen years.

I remember spending many glorious times aboard the massive “Forest Friend” when I was five to nine years old. The masts were enormous, but to a child they were humungous! She had sail lockers, compasses, steering wheels, hundreds of ropes, crew quarters, a steam winch, shackles, belaying pins, holystoned decks and five rigged masts to climb. What a thrill for a youngster!

The brisk business of the 1920’s caused many new tugboat



companies to form, mostly consisting of one tug operators. The tugs came in all shapes and sizes, as did the captains and crews who operated them.

There was Captain Bruno with the “Eagle V”, John Worsfould and the “Diesel”, Bob Cosilitch of River Towing, Staff Byrnes, Ray Bicknel and George Walkem with Gulf of Georgia Towing’s “Gryphon”.

Canadian Western Lumber Co., touted as the largest sawmill in the world at Fraser Mills, had a yarding steam tug called the “Macormack” driven by two side wheels, making her probably the most awkward yarding tug in the world!

The Hodders, with their new tug “Eldoma”, were beginning to do some towing for Fraser Mills as “The Depression” hit in 1930.

### **The Depression**

As we entered “The Depression” the “Forest Friend” was forced to remain tied up at Fraser Mills and real hard times began in B.C.

Many sawmills cut back production or shut down completely as the market for lumber sagged. The Hodder brothers were

fortunate that their reputation for good work and honesty over the previous twenty or thirty years helped them maintain some of the little work available.

They began towing from Comox to Fraser Mills and from Long Bay and Center Bay storage to the river. They also looked after some of the extensive storage grounds at Point Grey flats. Rates were very low as competition became cut-throat.

Towing rates were so low that despite low wages, fuel at six or seven cents a gallon and other supplies equally cut-rate, it was very hard to break even with a 110 h.p. tug towing 16 sections of flat booms. A 16 section tow from Center Bay to Fraser Mills would have a gross of about \$60.00.

Thousands of young men streamed into the Lower Mainland and the Fraser Valley desperately searching for work or a meal to get by for another day. Wages were 50 cents to a dollar a day plus board on the tugs, and I believe the “plus board” was the important part of the wages for many. The Hodder Bros. kept several young men working through “The Depression” and I remember some of them kindly. There was Harold Dawe, later chief engineer for Swiftsure; Kenny Strong, aptly named as he was an exceptionable athlete who sometimes thrilled me by walking the taut yarding line from the tug to the boom being towed; and Alf and Bill House, whose father,

Captain W. House, lived up on the slope above what is now Stradiotti's dock.

The Hodders decided to re-power the "Eldoma" and in 1935 or 1936 installed an eight cylinder, 230 h.p. Union diesel engine. This was considered to be the ultimate! They could now tow 32 sections. Of course, they still couldn't afford a searchlight or a two-way radio!

I spent all my non-school time on the "Eldoma" and remember fondly the various people we met, including the crews of tugs weather-bound in Snug Cove, Bull Pass, Deep Bay, S.E. Rock, Clam Bay or Dogfish Bay. In the river there was Harry Burt, Jack Reid, Billy Beckman and his son, Amos, Parker Porter and his son, Cyril, Art Cooper, and many others. Their small tugs included the "Young Hustler", "Chugaway", "Tugaway", "Pullaway", and the "Seatowing". Some of these tugs did assist work at the treacherous bridges in Marpole where many a tow would break up on a big flood.

With few two-way radios, the captains of tugs wanting assistance at Marpole would blow pre-arranged whistle signals when approaching McDonald Beach area (for instance; two long blasts for Harry Burt or three long for Billy Beckman), and the assistor would rush from his nearby residence to their tug near Oak Street.

Most of the head end tugs were too high to take the head end under the log span trestles of the Eburne Road Bridge or the old B.C. Electric Rail Bridge which was only 29 sections above Eburne Bridge. This forced the skipper, of say the “Annacis”, to give the head end to the “Chugaway” below Eburne, run through the swing span and re-hook onto the head end again. The assist boat would run back along the tow and punch it past the bridge pier. If the tow was 30 or more sections, the “Annacis” would be approaching the B.C.E. Bridge before the tail end had cleared Eburne. Now the “Annacis” would drop the head end after, hopefully, getting a good aim at the very narrow log span, run through the draw and hook on again! Needless to say, many times their aim was poor and pile-ups occurred, but hiring two assist tugs was deemed very extravagant.

The Hodder Bros. Towing tug, “Eldoma”, was lower profile and with the mast down, could go under these bridges at lower water. Generally speaking, they would tow up to the Sheeting (at Sea Island below the Marpole bridge) on the small tide, lay over for the ebb, and tow through the bridges unassisted at low slack. This certainly was the safest method and almost no accidents occurred.

## **The War Years**

As the “Thirties” drew to a close, rumblings of war were felt in Europe and in 1939 war was declared by England against Germany. Canada quickly joined the conflict.

Until the war started, the tugboat business was still in the doldrums caused by the depression years, as were most industries. There were not many new tugs built during the thirties. With few exceptions, most of the large tugs were steam powered and many still used coal for fuel. The smaller tugs were mostly diesel, although some still had gasoline engines. The massive mobilization for the war effort soon had a tremendous effect on all industry. Mills, mines, shipyards, and sand and gravel companies were all going full blast. Labour was in short supply as thousands of previously under-employed young men were called into the military services.

There weren’t enough tugs at hand after years of down-sizing due to a lack of business. Everything that floated seemed to be turned into a tug or a barge and few new vessels were allowed to be built because the war effort demanded all the manpower and shipyard space. The Hodder brothers were caught up in all this madness along with everyone else.

The beautiful barkentine "Forest Friend" was sold to the Elworthy's of "Island Tug and Barge" and converted to a log barge along with other similar ships such as the "Lord Templeton". As Horatio and J.R. were now in their 50's, they decided to concentrate on towing in the Fraser River working for the Canadian Western Lumber Co. at Fraser Mills. The Eldoma with her new 230 h.p. Union engine was a bit too big for river and shallow water work, so she was sold to the McKeen's of Straits Towing Ltd. "Straits", who were well connected in Ottawa, also bought other tugs including the Preston-Mann fleet of eight or nine vessels. These included the "Commodore", "Robert Preston", "Alert", "Prestige", and others. They raised the foredeck of the "Eldoma" to accommodate military personnel and re-named her the Victoria Straits. She did yeoman service for many years at "Straits" and the last I saw of her was as the "Renner Pass" at Masset in the Queen Charlotte Islands.

In 1940, Hodder Bros. Towing bought the 50' tug "Diesel" from Captain John Worsfould. He had converted this World War I steam powered coast guard patrol boat to diesel by fitting it with an eight cylinder, 160 h.p. Vivian engine. Old Captain Worsfould had been a pipe smoker and during his time on the "Diesel" he struck so many matches under the binnacle shelf that it had become about an eighth of an inch thick from it's original two inches. The tug also



leaked considerably and, when we were not working, one of my chores was to ride my bike or walk to the foot of Blenheim Street at Shell Oil Celtic, where we then docked, and pump out the bilge. This often required two to three thousand strokes of the old hand bilge pump. Oh, how I used to hate that job!

The “Diesel’s” galley was down below, aft of the engine and had a wood-burning stove. We always had a large supply of fir bark for firewood and it was piled everywhere on deck. We were forever tripping over it and J.R. would, every once in a while, heave a cord or so overboard when Horatio wasn’t looking. This would always enrage the normally gentle Captain, but he soon forgot about it ... until the next time!

With a length of 50’, a beam of 10’ and a draft of 6’, the “Diesel” was not one of the best designed tugs to say the least. The old Vivian engine had air start and the reverse clutch was a large wheel in the wheelhouse that required the strength of a gorilla to turn. The steering consisted of wire and chain through many pulleys to a quadrant atop the rudder shaft. The chain often came off during yarding sessions and caused many scary moments.

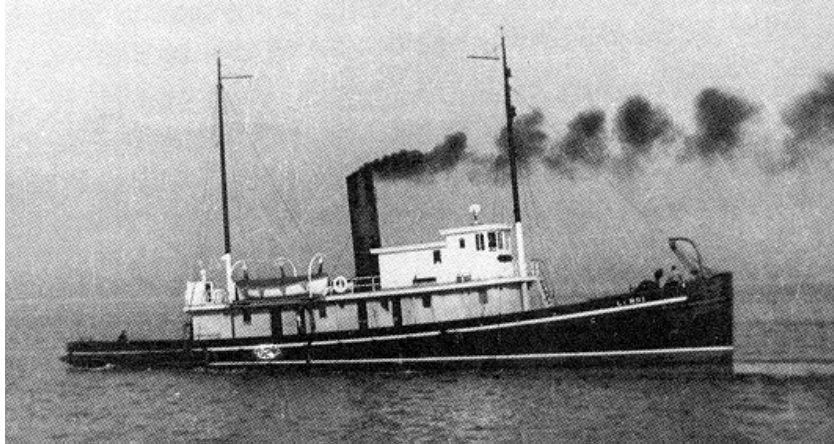
One such moment occurred while towing through the Queensborough Bridge. We were normally without assistance when towing through this bridge. We would just drop off the head end and

run down the north side to punch the tail end, but this particular time, just as we turned into the tail of the tow, the chain came off the quadrant. We managed to get a bow line on the tow and pushed and pulled it through safely while we peeved the chain back in place on the quadrant.

We towed log booms from the storage grounds in the Point Grey flats to Fraser Mills and assisted the Canadian Tug fleet into the North Arm Fraser River with log tows. Their fleet consisted of the "Active", "John Davidson", "Gleeful", and "Petrel". The river work kept the "Diesel" very busy, so Hodder Bros. Towing leased a small tug called "Seatowing" and my Dad and I ran this boat whenever I was available. Horatio ran the "Diesel" with various other crewmen.

By 1944 I decided to get a job on another tug and went to the old "Towboat Employment Agency" run by Cyril Andrews and lied about my age. I was 13 at the time! I soon found a position with Coyle Navigation Co. on the big old steam tug "Leroi". We were towing train barges and occasionally a small Davis raft from the west coast of Vancouver Island to Vancouver Harbour. The "Leroi" was about 110' long with a 40 nominal h.p. engine (about 400 b.h.p.). Coyle Navigation wasn't in very good financial condition and my first cheque for \$51.00 (a month's pay) bounced at the bank

when I tried to cash it. I had to take it back to Doug Coyle for re-issue. To my dismay he discovered I had only worked half a month and the new cheque was for \$26.00.



Things at "Hodder Bros." carried on fine with J.R. and Horatio towing to Fraser Mills with the "Diesel" while I continued first with Coyle and then with Dola Towing, as well as occasionally helping my Dad and Uncle until the war ended in late 1945.

### **The Boom Begins**

How the times got busy. I spent most of the years between 1945 and 1965 raising a family, working 25 to 30 days a month, and coping with all the various problems which would arise over this period of time.

When the war ended in 1945 a boom in domestic building had begun. Housing, autos, manufacturing, etc., all had a lot of catching up to do. The towing industry also needed a major overhaul. During the war effort, very little private building or upgrading had taken place. Now with the country's economy roaring, the need for modern tugs was overwhelming. Many U.S. army and navy tugs were mothballed or sold to private industry. In B.C., dozens of fine, nearly new tugs and barges became available to enhance the aging fleet of steam tugs and old wooden scows.

There were the 120' Miki-Miki type of large wooden diesel powered tugs such as the "Island Navigator", the "J.S. Foley", the "Mary Mackin" and the "Florence Filberg" (some of these names acquired at a later date). Also, there were many of the 90' single screw wooden ships ie; "Island Champion", "Island Challenger", "Anna Gore". The Miki's generally were twin screw 1200 to 1400 h.p. Fairbanks-Morse powered vessels and the "Island Champion" type hulls were single screw 400 h.p. to 500 h.p. Several of the 90' steel tugs such as the "Isabella Stewart" were also put into services in B.C.

In the late forties I worked on various tugs for other companies, but also with Hodder Bros. Towing when they needed me. In 1947 I worked for Cliff Towing as deckhand on the

“Prospective II”, mostly towing logs from Salmon River to Howe Sound, and as mate on the “Annacis” (later M.R. Cliff) and the “SeaSon”.

In January 1949 I joined the Navy and went to Cornwallis, Nova Scotia. That was a good experience for a 17 year old not yet able to figure out what to do with his life. The navy life, although very enlightening, was not for me, so I got out honourably 13 months later and soon had a job at Cliff Towing again.

Hodder Bros. Towing had carried on with the “Diesel” through the war and into the fifties, towing mostly to Fraser Mills. The old “Diesel” was on to her last legs so my Uncle Horatio bought a forestry patrol vessel called “Euclataw”. This wooden ship was about 50’ x 12’ with a pointed stern and definitely was not a tugboat! Nevertheless, J.R. and Horatio put a tow post on her, took the stern handrail off and continued towing to Fraser Mills.

The “Euclataw” was powered by a semi-diesel Washington or Fairbanks of about 150 h.p. It required blowtorch heating of each cylinder prior to starting with compressed air. It wasn’t long before a 165 h.p. Gray-Marine diesel engine was installed which made the “Euclataw” a little more useful.

The local towing industry began to utilize the influx of these Gray-Marine Detroit diesel engines which had been built by the thousands for use in military dredges, landing craft, tanks, trucks, and patrol vessels. These six cylinder, 165 h.p. engines became the godsend for the small tug business.

Local shipyards such as Storneiss, Mercers, Vancouver Ship, and Bensons churned out dozens of thirty to thirty-six foot wooden tugs in the late 1940's and early 1950's. These included the "Jarl", "Harken I", "Haulaway", "Plower", "Skooter", "Virginia G.", "Jaeger II", "GM Flyer", and the "B.C. Falcon". Chappels Shipyard in Richmond, near the B.C.E. Bridge, built the "Yardaway" for Towers Towing and re-built the ex-army patrol vessel "Deerco" for Amos Beckman of Richmond Tug.

After my jobs with Coyle Navigation and Dola Towing, Fraser Mills bought two ex-U.S. army tugs later named "Mary Mackin" and "Florence Filberg". These were beautiful, 120' wood, twin screw tugs, almost brand new. I applied for and got a deckhand job on the "Filberg" in late 1947.

The tugs were docked in New Westminster at the old Webb and Gifford wharf (later Swiftsure Towing's dock) and minor work was done to get these ships ready for log towing. The "Filberg" had

two 600 h.p. Fairbanks-Morse engines, while the “Mackin” had two 680 h.p.

As these ships had spent some time in the South Pacific toward the end of the war, there was considerable work to be completed before seaworthiness inspections were obtained. One of my jobs was to tighten the thousands of bolts that held the hull frames together. I probably spent two months on that job alone, commuting from home in Vancouver by inter-urban trams daily. It was sure a good job and the company paid \$117.00 a month for an eight hour day. Better than Coyle!

When the “Filberg” finally sailed, with Jim Goodwyn as the skipper, we ran to Ladysmith for a log tow. I believe the company was just starting to bundle booms out of the new camp at Ladysmith and we towed three wide to the Main Arm Fraser River and up to Fraser Mills. This was our normal tow, although sometimes we would go to the North Arm where Hodder Bros. Towing would meet us and take care of our tow.

Canadian Tug began upgrading. Their old fleet was sold off to Cliff Towing and to Coastal Towing which was owned by “Sparkey” New. Among the vessels Canadian Tug added to their fleet was the 90’, 400 h.p., steel tug “Isabella Stewart” (later the “Fraser Crown”).

After getting married to my sweetheart Kathleen “Kay” Boyd in 1949, I wanted to get off the outside tugs. Kay and I moved into an attic suite in an old house on Hudson Street in Marpole and a job close to home was preferred. Towers Towing located on Sea Island near the present Chevron Marine Station hired me and I went to work on the “Haulaway” with Herbie Holms as my skipper in late 1950. The Hurschman brothers, Lorne and Lyle, worked for Charlie and Bill “Sedge” Towers at this time.

Lorne Hurschman was the dispatcher and Lyle Hurschman the shore mechanic at Towers when I started and when Herb Holms went to work for “Curly” Snider on the “G.M. Flyer”, Lorne gave me the skippers job on the “Haulaway”. Our first son, Robert James , was born in December 1950 and the extra money was welcome. The pay was \$300.00 per month.

Hodder Bros. continued working with Fraser Mills, towing up river and looking after the storage grounds at Point Grey with the “Euclataw”. One of the reasons why the Hodders kept the towing for Fraser Mills over the years was their quality of work. Horatio would never leave a chain or shackle on a boom that wasn’t being used. These, along with straps or towing gear were always returned to the proper locations. Also, booms were tied up doubly or triply safe, even if it required many extra no charge hours to do so.



The Hurschman's left Towers in 1952 to form Point Grey Towing. Charlie Towers took over dispatching and things went downhill slowly. Amos Beckman took his tug "Jaeger II" and Stan Larson's "B.C. Falcon" and formed Richmond Tug in an office next to Grauers Store on Sea Island.

"Towers" still had some work including a big job towing rock from Indian Arm to the Steveston Jetty Rebuilding Project. Two loads a day were required and the "Haulaway" became the main tug on that run.



I was the number one skipper, Basil Dorey was the deckhand with me as well as the number two skipper with a third man as

deckhand. We worked six days on and three off with two men at a time. The "Haulaway" only had a 165 h.p. GM engine for power, but we seemed to be able to make a round trip every 24 hours if the weather wasn't too horrible. It was a good job for me because for the first time I could get some days off and now I had a second son, Michael, born in 1952.

Towers Towing was going farther and farther downhill. Sometimes our pay was not available and we would have to wait a day or two for wages. About this time Amos Beckman offered me a job on the "Jaeger II" and a \$25.00 per month raise, so I took it.

Amos gradually built up a fleet of several tugs including the "Deerco", "Skooter", "Plower", Stan Larson's "B.C. Falcon", Len Griffith's "Jarl", and the "Jaeger II", and after working on the various tugs for a couple of years I went into the office to dispatch in about 1955.

Horatio and J.R. were now approaching their seventies and the work for Fraser Mills was increasing. I began to do their telephone work for them and used Richmond Tug to complete the excess towing. After a year or two of this, Amos began to think the work was his and instead of letting the Hodder's choose which tows they would do, Amos just sent his tugs to the jobs whenever I was away on special contracts, which was quite often. This and other

things drove me to quit in 1958 and go to work steady with my Dad and Uncle once again.

The “Euclataw” was sunk by a passing log tow at the Celtic Shell Oil dock soon after I started with Hodder Bros. Towing and deemed not worth salvage, although the hull was later sold to Gordy Kleaman and made into a pleasure boat.

“Hodder Bros.” bought an old 165 h.p. wooden tug named “Quinsam II” and we continued towing and yarding for Fraser Mills. Kay and I were blessed with the additions of our daughters, Shelley in 1955 and Kathy in 1958.

The old “Forest Friend” ended her days as a breakwater at the Comox booming grounds, and Hodder Tug was about to evolve into new directions.

### **Hodder Tugboat Co. Ltd.**

During the fifties and sixties, towing rates had been very low and although Hodder Bros. Towing and other small companies were busy, it was difficult to do much more than break even, so raising capital was near impossible. The forest and building supply companies had their own towing firms ... Ocean, MacMillan Bloedel, Fraser Mills, Lafarge, etc. Others who did not have tugs began to acquire them. B.C. Forest Products bought out Jack

Bruno's Swiftsure Towing, Weldwood got the Escott (Thor Larson companies) and mergers between towboat firms were prevalent. Vancouver Tug, Island Tug, Victoria Tug and Barge, Young and Gore, and Dolmage merged to become Seaspans and later Gulf of Georgia Towing joined them. Rivtow was joined by Straits, which had taken over Coyle Navigation and Cliff Towing. Also, log barging was becoming more of an option. CW Lumber (Fraser Mills) was taken over by Crown Zellerbach. H.R. MacMillan had merged with Bloedel, Stewart & Welch, which owned the Powell River Co. and Kingcome Navigation.

In 1961 Hodder Bros. Towing became a limited company under the name of Hodder Tugboat Co. Ltd. with the Hodder brothers, Horatio and J.R., becoming equal partners with myself, R.N. Hodder.

The B.C. Towboat Owners' Association had been formed many years earlier as a bargaining organization to deal with government regulations and the unions and set up some standards for towing rates. Hodder Bros. Towing was a member, but not very active in the B.C.T.O.A. until the mid-sixties. The small towboat companies had very little influence in the B.C.T.O.A. when the large towboat companies merged and the forest and gravel "in house" tug companies grew larger. A "rate book" was produced by the

B.C.T.O.A. and all members were urged to use the published rates. What a joke! The usual dialogue between a potential customer and the towing company was “How much below the rate book?” and the usual answer was “What about 45% off?”.

Another problem was the huge subsidy program introduced by the federal government in the sixties. This program was supposed to help shipyards, by reducing the end cost to shipping and towing companies by forty to fifty percent. As the subsidy did not apply to vessels under fifty tons it was no help at all to the smaller, poorer companies who couldn't afford, or didn't need, a fifty to sixty foot tug. Instead it drove the price of hulls up at a tremendous rate.

It did, however, help the big companies renew and add to their fleets of tugs and barges and also keep some otherwise inefficient shipyards busy. At the same time, wages and conditions were beginning to escalate on the tugs and elsewhere in the industrial sector.

In 1962 we bought a 42' tug, “Ossian A.”, from Canadian Forest Products at Englewood. The “Ossian A.” was a fine little ship with a 160 h.p. Vivian diesel. She was in great condition, having done nothing but tow bag booms in Nimkish Lake to the Railhead. We were now able to tow for other customers such as Bay Lumber, Giroday & Nalos in False Creek, Horne Bros., MB King, L&K

Sawmills, Bestwood, Norwood, and Flavelle Cedar in Vancouver Harbour. In 1963 we built our first steel tug and named her “Eldoma”. The original “Eldoma” had been sold to “Straits” in 1939 and the name was changed to “Victoria Straits”, enabling us to use the name “Eldoma” once again. She was 33’ long with a new 240 h.p. GM 8V71 engine. In 1964 we re-powered the “Ossian A.” with a 335 h.p. GM 12V71 engine. Now that we had these two tugs we were able to sell the poor, old “Quinsam II”.

Of course, we needed more crews, so over the next few years several good men were hired including my brother, Blair, “Hitch” McCormick, “Bumper” Terry, Johnnie Wells, Les Lukenbill, and Bob McNab, to name a few.





By 1966 or 1967, with new tugs coming into service every few months, our competitiveness was waning. We had many chances for good tows, but didn't have the capacity to bid on them and could not get adequate financing to build anything.

In 1970 a hull was available at Vito's shipyard in Delta, so a group of five of us (Joe Smith, Jim Lane, Ron Wilson, Ed Probyn and myself) put up the money to finish the tug at Vito's. We formed a company, Sea Island Towing Ltd., and each put \$25,000. into the pot. I don't know where the others got their twenty-five G's from, but I know I borrowed mine from the Bank of Montreal in Richmond, with our house as collateral!

The new tug was named "Seatow". She had a 480 h.p. Cat engine with a steering nozzle and proved to be a very good sea boat

and a good puller. Running with a four man crew, we were able to take advantage of our Howe Sound potential and later on, we got the Field Sawmill towing to Courtenay. We also were able to do many barge contracts for Ocean Construction and others. The tug was very successful and over the next two or three years we were able to buy out our partners. By this time the original Hodder brothers, HORATIO and J.R., had retired.





In 1972, Ron Wilson of Pacific Towing Ltd., approached me about building a 75' tug in partnership with him. With many new rules about noise levels, accommodation, and ship safety coming on stream at that time, we decided to try to come up with a design that would address the new regulations properly. With much practical input from Ron and myself, and the added expertise of Cove, Hatfield Naval Architects and John Manly Ltd. Shipyards, a very good design was agreed upon. Financing was of course, not as easy as we had figured! The subsidy was being phased out by the federal government and was at about 9% when we applied. The bank would only finance 66% of the \$450,000 contract with "Manly Shipyard", so Ron Wilson and I had to bring in a third partner, and Ron and I put up our homes again as further collateral!

In the meantime, Rivtow bought out John Manly Ltd. Shipyard, so our new tug was to be built at the Rivtow Shipyard in the North Arm by one of our competitors! I must add that the yard did turn out a fine tug close to the contract quotes.

In June of 1973 the new tug, "Kaymar", was launched. We had a great christening party at the new Hyatt Hotel in Richmond. My wife, Kathleen (Kay) and Ron's wife, Marguerite (Mar), were the champagne busters. My dad, J.R., my uncle, Horatio, and my

mother, Jessie, were on hand, as were two or three hundred others. Now we're really in debt!

By this time we had rented an office on Sea Island with water frontage on the Middle Arm. We were getting to be a tangled mess of companies and partners. Joe Smith and I owned Sea Island Towing, my brother, Blair, had the "Kenmac", and Joe also had the "Signal IV" as well as part of the "Magna" with Martin Higgs. The "Ossian A" and "Eldoma" were owned by Hodder Tugboat Co. Ltd. and the "Kaymar" was part of H&W Towing Ltd. owned by Ron Wilson, myself, our silent partner and the Royal Bank!

Despite all this, when Crown Zellerbach put the "Mary



Mackin" up for sale we just had to put a bid in, so Joe and I and two other investors formed CJR Marine Services and bid \$72,000 for the

old beauty which by now had two 800 h.p. Stork-Werkspoor engines for power. Although she was thirty years old, the hull was in good shape, so we did not think our bid would be accepted, but it was! I'll always remember the thrill I got when we backed out of the berth in Vancouver Harbour to sail to our dock at Sea Island. After all, this was the fine sistership of the one I had decked on thirty years earlier.

Our crews had grown and changed over this period and included many fine deckhands, mates, engineers and captains, some of whom still work for Hodder Tug. There was Les Lukenbill, Doug McDonald, Alex Ince, Dave Myles, Gil Derrien, Norm Finley Sr., Dave Harmon, Mike and R.J. Hodder, Dave Michelanko, Claude McAstocker, Doug Newman, Brian Pickup, Bruce Lockhart, Jim Lane, Sam Behramfram, Bill Cullen, "Hitch" McCormick, Ron Fawcett, Art Smith, Joe Smith Jr., Barry Higgs and Ray Kight.

R.J. Hodder came into the office in 1974 to help dispatch. Pat McCormick, and later Erna Boor, did our invoicing and secretarial work. Claude McAstocker came ashore to take on the mechanical duties. Harry Rothera moved to our dock and became a valuable additon to Hodder Tug with his wire rope expertise and general willingness to help. Joe Smith ran the water taxi, "Blueback", and various tugs, as did yours truly.

We bought the barge “Westshore I”, a 240’ x 48’ ship bow type to give the “Mackin” something to tow and did get a few trips towing for White Pass to Skagway, Alaska, one to Anchorage, Alaska, and many local rock and gravel loads, but basically the “Mackin” and “Westshore I” were not very busy. By 1979 we had sold the “Mackin” to an oil barge towing firm and the “Westshore I” went as a logging camp barge. Meanwhile, our partnership in the



“Kaymar” wasn’t going too smoothly, although Ron Wilson and I got along fine, so “Pacific Towing” bought out our silent partner and myself and that tug continues to

do a great job for them today.



In 1978 we bought the “Dolphin Point” from Shields Navigation Ltd. and another company was required. We called it Ak-Tran Enterprises.

With all the menagerie of companies, owners and partners, we needed an accountant, so Grant Sundahl was hired in 1977 and we began to straighten out the company.

As we bumbled along through the seventies, we didn’t make much money, but were able to pay our bills, reduce debt and start to consolidate our various companies. With the eighties approaching,

our lease at Sea Island was running out so finding a new property was essential.

### **The Beginning of The Future**

In 1979, due to Federal Government re-valuation, our rent at the Sea Island dock was quadrupled!! We felt this huge increase was unfair as we only used about 20% of the property. Nevertheless, our moaning did not influence anyone in Ottawa, so we began looking for a waterfront property near our Richmond location.

Property values were ballooning. We, luckily, found our present dock location on River Road in Richmond and made a purchase in 1981 at an inflated price, but at least we had a home for Hodder Tugboat.

At the same time we really needed a continuous operating tug to replace the “Seatow”. New accommodation and noise level regulations plus manning rules made the “Seatow” non compis gratis. Prices were skyrocketing in 1980 / 1981 as we tried to find a replacement tug to do our outside towing, which was increasing. Unable to find a suitable replacement tug for the “Seatow”, we contracted to build a well designed tug with Canada Marine in New Westminster. Our contract price was \$825,000 for the future “H.N.

Hodder”. Interest rates were now in the high ‘teens and financing was a very tenuous item. However, we did manage to convince our bankers to go along with us, mostly because we had a good, long, proven history with our main financial institution.

We worried about the progress of our new tug under construction! Months went by but other than an upside-down hull and some gear and engines (which we later learned were not yet paid for) not much was being accomplished at the shipyard.

The yard was “broke” and the owner would not admit it. We had paid several hundred thousand dollars in progress payments above the actual progress and things were getting worse every day! Some of the shipyard’s creditors forced it into bankruptcy. To keep things simple, we managed to make a deal to take over the construction ourselves and pay out the creditors involved with respect to our hull.

This may sound sort of routine now, but it was a crisis of major proportions in 1981. We were into the bank for six or seven hundred thousand and the tug required another seven or eight hundred thousand to complete. Our bank did not feel they could go the route with us, which would have meant the end of “Hodder Tug”. Luckily there was the Bank of British Columbia who believed in our ability to repay. We switched banks, got the financing we required, and in April 1982 the “H.N. Hodder” was quietly launched. Other than the Fraser River Pile Driving derrick crew, who lifted the “HN Hodder” from the dock at the shipyard into the water, there were only five people in attendance along with a cheap bottle of Spanish champagne! No party!





Meanwhile, we somehow moved to our River Road property, built a dock, drove piling, built floats and re-vamped the sixty-plus year old house into an office.



The “H.N. Hodder” has proved to be one of the finest multi-purpose tugs in B.C. Her accommodations for five crew are good, noise levels low, log and barge towing capabilities better than anyone had hoped for, and after 15 years, she still does everything asked of her.



That period in the history of Hodder Tugboat Co. Ltd. was certainly the scariest in our lifetimes and also the most rewarding. The “H.N. Hodder” somehow got good weather, good tows, great crews ..... everything worked. Despite costing double her quoted price, with high interest rates, she somehow paid for herself in a few years.

That was the turning point for Hodder Tugboat!!

Since those bleak days in the early eighties, we have acquired the “Piper”, the “Rustler”, and built the “J.R. Hodder” and the “Jessie Hodder”. A new crewboat was recently completed and plans are in the works for some major dock and office upgrades. The majority of our office staff, shore workers and tug crews have been with us a number of years now and consist of a hard-working, dependable group of employees. R.J. Hodder has grown up in the business and is now the office / operations manager as well as my partner. All of this has allowed Hodder Tugboat Co. Ltd.’s reputation to continue in the same respected manner as it’s founders had insisted on.

### **Epilogue**

Writing this “History” has been, at times, very difficult for me. History means the past and Hodder Tugboat also most certainly

has a future. However, it has made me look back to those days of being a young lad climbing aboard the “Forest Friend” with all its mysteries, helping out on the “Eldoma”, picnics in Snug Cove with all of our crews and families and various relatives, my mother worrying that I might fall off a log boom ... how ridiculous Mom, the thousands of strokes on the leaky “Diesel’s” bilge pump, the countless days and nights on the “Quinsam”, the awkwardness of the “Euclataw”, the purchase of the “Ossian A”, the construction of the new “Eldoma”, and so many other memories.

Also remembered so fondly are my Uncle, Capt. Horatio Nelson Hodder, so kind, so true, and my Dad, James Robert Hodder, who never did an unkindly deed in his 99 years of life, and my Mother, Jessie, who never wavered in her support of those two old seamen.

That is a glimpse of the history of Hodder Tugboat, but all the younger men and women who are now a part of the future of this little company will be the next “History”.