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Transcript of a sound recording in MS 608, WLBZ Radio Station Records, Bangor, Maine, 1931-1973

Title: Coverage of Record-Breaking Mass Launch of Ships from Maine, from Todd-Bath Shipbuilding Corporation, South Portland, Maine

Date: August 16, 1942

Recording number: Tape 27, part 2

Length of recording: 15:14

[Transcript begins]

HIGHTOWER: How do you do, ladies and gentlemen? This is Bill Hightower speaking to you from the Todd-Bath Shipbuilding Corporation of South Portland, Maine, where the National Broadcasting Company has set up its microphones to give our coast-to-coast audience a word picture of one of the greatest events to happen so far in America's war effort. We are to see here today the launching of eight ships, eight ships given to the war effort. Five of them to be launched here in our presence in this yard, one across the way from us, the yard is just barely visible, and then 38 miles up the coast of Casco Bay, there will be two new United States destroyers put into the water today. In other words, the freighters to carry it, and the warships to protect them. This is America's war effort and we're on hand today to see the greatest mass launching that the world has ever seen. Eight ships into the water at one time.

On hand, members of the Truman Committee of the United States Senate, representatives of the United States Maritime Commission, the British Ministry of ships and shipping, the Navy Department and the charming sponsors and their husbands are all on hand for this occasion and some few hundred, or thousand people. And now, first off today in our course of events, it is my pleasure to bring to the microphone the Honorable Sumner Sewall, Governor of the State of Maine, who will give the assembly the proclamation and a brief address. Governor Sewall. [Applause.]

SEWALL: Men and women of the Todd-Bath Shipbuilding Company, as long back as we can remember, it seems to me that Maine has always built good ships. In my hometown of Bath we used to have a saying, that when better ships were built, Bath would build them. But since we've lent and shared [?] with you, we're gonna change that slogan. We're going to include Bath-Todd and the South Portland Shipbuilding Company. And we know that [?] is big enough to share with all, so we're glad to see this development here. The facts are that whether we were building sailing ships or steam or wood or steel or carriers or destroyers or submarines, we've built the best. And so today we're proud to see that record carried on. We're not surprised, frankly, that Maine has been the first state in the Union to launch more ships from a single place than any other place or time in the history of this country. It's a grand record and we're proud of it. We're proud that the representatives of the federal government and the representatives of the British government are here to witness this achievement today, so that the challenge can go forth to all other yards throughout the country, throughout the United Nations. A marvelous challenge with which to meet. Maine boys throughout the world are doing their part today, just as these men here are

doing their part in building these ships which are going out on their very grim business of winning the war. These ships are going out, and they're going out to bring back what I believe to be peace. That's the thing we're fighting for and therefore we feel reassured today to see this wonderful sight. We feel re-enheartened. I wish every person of the country could stand here today and see this accomplishment, this fact. It isn't a speech that does it, it is building that does this kind of a job. We're tremendously proud of it. We're glad that it's in Maine. We're glad that we're doing our part here. I'm proud to have this opportunity of extending these words of greeting to you all. I wish you good luck, Godspeed, and keep them launching. [Applause.]

HIGHTOWER: Next, we bring to our microphone the Honorable Harry S. Truman, junior senator from Missouri. Senator Truman.

TRUMAN: Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, Missouri congratulates Maine. Missouri and Maine were made states under the same Act, the Missouri Compromise. We've assembled here to witness the launching of five ten thousand ton cargo vessels which are being built by the top Bath Iron Shipbuilding Corporation under a contract with our British allies. And these five vessels are to be delivered to them. There are a few things today which are as important as the production of ships. Enemy submarines have taken an exceedingly heavy toll of Allied shipping. Measures have been taken to cope with the submarine menace, and we all hope they will be successful, but no matter how successful they are, we have great need for every additional ton of shipping that can possibly be constructed. The capacity of the United States to produce planes, tanks, guns, and other articles of war, is exceedingly great. But all those things are of little importance unless we can transport them to the various areas in which war operations are taking place. To do that, we must have ships. Consequently the United States Maritime Commission has been authorized by the Congress of the United States to carry out the largest shipbuilding program that the world has ever seen. Under that program, the United States will build this year more than 8 million tons of shipping. That stupendous total will be increased next year by more than 15 million ton. The magnitude of this task is apparent when we consider that in 1928, the best peacetime year between the two great wars, the total tonnage of shipping built by all the nations of the world put together was approximately three and a half million tons. The majority of shipyards in the United States which were actually in operation at the beginning of this war had to be utilized for Naval construction so that this gigantic program required the creation in the main of an entirely new shipyard facilities. The Maritime Commission has done a splendid job in providing for the construction of 250 new ship ways at a total cost of approximately 400 millions of dollars. Today more than nine hundred and seventy-five thousand men are employed in the nation's shipbuilding and ship repair industries, and it is estimated that they will ultimately employ a million four hundred and forty thousand men. This yard of the Todd-Bath Iron Shipbuilding Corporation of South Portland, in the state of Maine, is a new shipyard, and is built on a site which only 19 months ago was occupied by a few derelict buildings. Yet today, the yard is complete with seven shipbuilding basins and is equipped with all the tools and machinery necessary to build upwards of a half a million tons of cargo ships per year, and more than 14,000 men are now working here. These great accomplishments were not achieved easily. They have been carried out, and that all over the United States similar accomplishments have been successfully done, is the best assurance that the war can and will be won. Fortunately we possessed in the state of

Maine a great tradition of shipbuilding. Maine was settled largely by people from England who were familiar with the sea and who undertook the long and perilous voyage across the Atlantic in the small wooden, sailing vessels of that time. They found in Maine an abundance of the finest shipbuilding timber in the world and for generations, Maine's greatest industry the building of ships. The descendants of the English settlers include both the very able and distinguished senators from Maine, the Honorable Ralph Brewster and Senator Wallace H. White as well as Mr. William Newell, Maine's greatest ship builder. And it's a pleasure for me to serve in the Senate with your two able and distinguished Maine senators. Shipbuilding was kept alive in Maine throughout the years of depression by Mr. Newell and his associates. Despite great difficulties, they continued to build destroyers for the United States Navy and other craft in the Bath Iron Works yard at Bath, Maine. That yard has not only built vitally needed destroyers for the United States Navy, but in addition, it has provided managerial talent for many of the skilled workers necessary to create and run this, this huge new shipbuilding plant for the construction of cargo vessels. The 50,000 tons of merchant shipping being launched here today for ultimate delivery to England will make a substantial contribution to the winning of this war.

[Applause]

HIGHTOWER: Thank you, Senator Truman. And now it is the pleasure of the National Broadcasting Company to bring to its nationwide audience Admiral Jerry Land, Chairman of the Maritime Commission. Admiral Land.

LAND: There is the proof that blood is thicker than water. Every one of you men in this great Todd-Bath Shipbuilding organization deserves the congratulations to the Maritime Commission and the appreciation of the people of this nation for the work you have done. We expect, and are confident, that you will do still better. Men who have accomplished what you already have, can and will do more. Undoubtedly every man in these shipyards has silently vowed to do just that. The shipbuilders of the United States are setting the pace today in war production. Each month production records which have been deemed almost impossible in the past are being broken. The Commission is particularly proud of the accomplishments of the men in these shipyards and of the management in your offices. The way in which you are doing your job inspires confidence in the hearts of every American and strike shattering blows on the morale of the active aggressors. You're helping to answer the challenge of Hitler submarines, the challenge which we know must fail. But the job you are doing must be done faster and still faster. Every man must put his heart in his work, his brain and his brawn on the job before him. When you are building one ship today you must build two tomorrow. We have no time to lose. We must make time work for us instead of against us. Allow none of that time to be wasted. Every time you hit of a rivet think of it as Hitler and hit it again. Hit it harder every time you weld a seam, think of the Jap, and turn on the heat, plenty of heat. Every time you finish the day's work, think to yourselves, that's a good lick for Uncle Sam. Shipbuilding efficiency is made up of two major factors, cost and time. Normally the more time taken, the greater the cost. Not only in dollars and cents but in lives that your sons and brothers and friends are paying for victory. Every hour saved in the shipyard may mean a life. Yes, even a dozen lives in the fighting forces of the United Nations. These are the things all must remember, even as we strive to make every day count to the utmost. Recently I testified that shipyard productivity would have to increase by twelve and a half percent this year and 25 percent next year.

You've already beaten that we're proud of you. The shipbuilding boys are going to town. There's no limit, we believe, to your productivity. When all the returns are in, in this great war production effort, I believe and expect that the men in the Todd-Bath Shipyards will be at the top of the heap in shipbuilding efficiency. You're on the way there now. You can't make me believe that the cradle of American shipbuilding Down East will permit the west coast to lead the procession. [Applause.]

HIGHTOWER: Well, now the purpose for which we are all here has just been accomplished. A bottle of champagne has been broken over the bow of the Ocean Seaman by its sponsor, Mrs. Alexander Simon, wife of a member of the British Purchasing Commission who is here for the christening of the first of five of these ships. Incidentally, I might give you a word picture and explain something to you that many people in America have not seen and perhaps do not know about. And that is the fact that these ships are not launched as you are used to seeing them or hearing of them being launched on a sliding ways. Instead these ships have been built in vast basins and have been built on a horizontal plane, thus increasing their efficiency to the workers, speeding up their construction. In fact, the first two of these ships, the Ocean Seamen especially, was built completed from keel to its present formation in exactly 48 days. The other three ships were completed in 51, a tribute indeed to the speed and efficiency of the Maine shipbuilders. Well, as we told you a moment ago, these basins are filled with water and the new ships, instead of sliding down the ways, will be pulled into the water by tugs who are here for that purpose. At the present moment, the sponsors are moving down on the platforms with the bottles of champagne, the various sponsors who are dedicating these ships. The ships to hit the water here will be the Ocean Wayfarer, the Ocean Stranger, the Ocean Traveler, the Ocean Seaman and the Ocean Gallant. Over at the South Portland Shipbuilding Corporation, which is just within my sight over to the left, is one of the United States Liberty ships, the SS Ethan Allen. And then up at the Bath Iron Works Corporation in Bath, Maine, the USS Conway destroyer and the USS Connie destroyer will be launched this afternoon. Well, this is America's answer to the axis threat. This is America's answer to ships that have been sunk. They're coming out, they're coming on as fast as these men can build them. Incidentally, in this yard there have been several records set for riveting and riveting teams. And that's all from here at this present time. This program has come to you from the South Portland Maine Shipbuilding yards of the Todd-Bath Corporation. This is the National Broadcasting Company.

[Transcript ends]

For more information about this transcript, audio recording, or other materials in Special Collections at the University of Maine, contact:

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