



Roles of Shipbuilding

Did you know the average crew it took to build a ship was between 25 – 40 men?

The Shipbuilder: The word “shipbuilder” generally refers to a person who builds ships as a business. Few shipbuilders were involved in hands-on construction of a vessel. Rather they relied on expert craftsmen to do the building while they financed the work. In the 1800s, the shipbuilders would put together the money needed to buy the materials required for the construction and to pay the labour force. By the end, they would own the finished ship. At that point it could be sold for profit or used by the owner to transport cargo on the seas.

The Master Shipwright: A shipwright is a person who oversees the construction or repair of a ship. Think of it like the role of a foreman on a construction site. Some of the best shipwrights came to Prince Edward Island from the New England colonies and from Britain. When the shipbuilding industry began to die out in Prince Edward Island many of the shipwrights left to find employment in other areas.

Ship designer: The designer or architect of a ship might have been the shipwright, or it might be a specialized ship designer. The English designers used drawings worked out with algebra and geometry to plan their ships. The British Loyalist designers used a method called the half model as their method of building.

Ship Carpenters: The carpenters were craftsmen trained to measure, cut, and shape the wood into the finished product. They were experienced in working with curved surfaces, which was a necessary component of shipbuilding. In the off-season some carpenters would seek employment in the construction of houses while others tended to move from place to place looking for shipbuilding work.

Joiners: A joiner was a carpenter who specialized in joining pieces of wood together.

Caulkers: Caulkers were tasked with making a ship watertight by packing these seams with oakum or pitch.

Blacksmiths: Blacksmiths made nails, spikes, bolts, chain plates, mast and deck hardware, turnbuckles, belaying pins, and any other metal parts needed on a ship.

Sail Makers: The enormous sails on a ship were made from heavy cotton canvas imported from England. Sail makers would cut and sew this fabric called sailcloth into specially shaped sheets that could withstand the winds of the high seas. A five-year apprenticeship was required for a sail maker.

Riggers: Riggers outfit ships with masts, spars, sails, shrouds and sheets.

Block makers: Built the the pulleys or blocks on sailing ships were constructed from wood by a tradesman known as a block maker. The blocks were of different sizes depending on the diameter of the ropes.

