



Parkertown's Adam Price, Boatbuilder

Inventive Craftsman's Works Made Impact Across the Seas

Adam Price was a boatbuilder whom captains say "could make wood talk."

An inventor as well as a perfectionist, Price was called upon to craft more than 100 sportfishing boats, improve the lines of racing hydrofoils and build landing craft for the U.S. Army in World War II.

"There wasn't anything that man couldn't do," were words once spoken by a friend, Captain Fred Kalm.

Born in 1898, the first son of Mason and Julia Spencer Price, Adam later planted the bustling baymen's center of Parkertown on the map as a place where quality-crafted charter boats were built and functionally designed down to the last detail. What Price thought could be improved he made himself, even down to the hardware on his boats.

"He was a crackerjack with wood, he was handy right across the bay, and he knew what we wanted for the public," noted charter boat captain Herb Schoenberg Sr. of Beach Haven. Schoenberg's father, Max, commissioned Price to build the *Henrietta II* in 1934 and later the *Henrietta III*.

When Adam first started out in 1926, his shop on Bay Avenue was equipped with some homemade tools and very little machinery. As his business grew, he acquired enough specialized machinery to make practically anything he needed, his daughters recall.

"He made all his patterns for his hardware. He'd make a paper pattern, then he'd make a balsa wood pattern to take to the foundry in Camden," said Bet-

ty Corlis, who earned 25 cents an hour working for her father. The foundry made the final mold from the wood and cast it in brass, then chrome plated the finish.

Price also liked to use his own design for the fishermen's chairs. "He should have patented those, because he made them later and sold them to people like Johnson and Towers," Price's eldest daughter, Vearl, remarked. Vearl Mathis lives in view of Liberty Thoroughfare, part of an expanse of Beach Haven land from bay to ocean that her father's ancestor Liberty Price sold for \$90 many years ago. Price's family has been traced back through 13 generations of boatbuilders and sea captains who made their home at the Jersey Shore.

Even if Adam Price didn't take out a patent on his fishing chairs, he indeed logged recognition for many other designs, from boats which impacted history in World War II to others which simply made it easier to troll for fish.

From an assembly line in his Parkertown boatworks, Price and a large crew, working three eight-hour shifts, turned out 700 landing craft on commission for the U.S. Army. The boats stormed forth in the Normandy Invasion and in the famous crossing of the Rhine River which put American forces under the command of General Patton into the heart of Axis power in Germany.

But way before that, the first spark of ingenuity had provided young Price with power for his new garvey. He borrowed the engine from his Model-T Ford. Flab-

bergasted and impressed gawkers came from miles around to see a standard garvey outfitted with an automobile engine.

Adam's career had suddenly found new direction. The demands for his boats now took so much of his time that he decided to forgo full-time bay clamming and fishing for boatbuilding.

With the spark of ingenuity came another spark which created a memorable event in Adam's early career. Unbeknownst to Adam, the spark came from a piece of machinery he had been running. While he was in his house next door having lunch, the sparks smoldered in a pile of sawdust and eventually ignited a pile of lumber which had been stored under his shop.

A strong northwest wind was blowing that day, fueling the fire. Fire companies responded from miles around to try and control the blaze, but found that there was no water supply in Parkertown to accommodate the engines.

They managed to save the hull of a large boat which was under construction in the shop, but the boatworks, Adam's house and the neighbor's house were burned to the ground.

Price borrowed \$500 from his brother-in-law, Hughie Anderson, acquired more tools and property at the corner of Route 9 and Bay Avenue, and started the business up again.

Adam's reputation was already growing. Well-known Atlantic City attorney Edison Hedges asked him to construct a racing hydrofoil for the prestigious pre-

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Depression Lower Bank powerboat races. Price's *Eagle*, built to skim the water's surface, once grasped a World Championship in its sleek talons. His hydrofoils were in demand from Virginia to Maine.

After six years in a rented house, the Price family moved into a brand new house that Adam built across the street. "It was the nicest house in town, with modern indoor plumbing and the very first sidewalk. All the kids in town came to roller skate," Betty said.

Price's early boatbuilding years also saw a demand for a hybrid boat called a bateau. A transition from the utility sailing catboat to a flatter-bottomed, more stable and larger 32- to 36-foot motorboat, the bateau could carry striper fishermen to the open sea, according to a dissertation on the Beach Haven charter boat captains entitled *Sailing Parties*, by Carroll Anne Sheppard.

The Depression shrank the demand for new boats, but Price was meanwhile spending his time learning a skill that would propel him closer to post-Depression prosperity. Carl Adams, considered a brilliant boat designer himself, came to work with Price and taught him, Price later credited, how to lay down the line of a larger boat.

Price's *Southwind* series, beauties in the 42-foot range, were probably his most widely visible recreational creations. "The *Southwind V* he built almost by himself, but it took him a long time to do it," Betty said.

Herb Schoenberg also recalled a two-motor adaptation of the charter boat pattern from which Price built two boats for his father. The *Henrietta II* and *III* both had two motors. "He had a big one put in the middle and a trolling motor on the side." The idea, Schoenberg said, "was unusual at that particular time; it hadn't hit the public yet. He wanted it for trolling more than anything else, because for a certain type of fish you've got to troll real slow." Also, "in case the big motor quits on you, you've got the little motor to come home on."

Launching the boats into the bay from the twisting creek in Parkertown with his brother Harland was the most nerve-racking part of the boatbuilding venture for Price, his daughters recalled. "You didn't have insurance back in those days."

He retired at age 50 to a more relaxing life chartering fishing parties from the Beach Haven Yacht Club and enjoying his winters fishing out of West Palm Beach, Florida. "He always said he wasn't going to work until he was too old to enjoy

some of the money he had made," Vearl recalled.

Adam was known to oblige with helpful advice on how to keep boats running. He was also known to lead fishermen to the tuna waters. "This fella I go with is the best on the coast," credited *Trenton Times-Advertiser* writer Marty Hoagland, who was one of Adam's customers. "His name is Adam Price and he's just great."

During the years before his retirement, the work ethic was one of Price's virtues. Hardworking and very dedicated is how his girls described their father.

"I've seen him work seven days a week, from morning till dark," said Vearl. "He just glorified over the fact that he could do this, because his education was limited." Price did attend trade school to supplement what he already knew or had taught himself.

Her father had been supportive of Betty's working in the boatworks as a young girl. But as the only girl in the shop during the wartime effort, she quit at age 16 to help her mother, the former Leona Handley from Philadelphia, keep the books. "The language (in the shop) was a little raunchy. I said, 'Daddy, I can't work here with all these men.'"

Schoenberg remembered about Price, "He would not talk to anybody with business during working hours. He didn't want to talk when he was working."

Schoenberg lamented the fact that few like Price are around today. "They glass 'em nowadays," he said of the big boats. "You've got to go a long way before you can find somebody who can put a plank in a boat."

Among other boats which Price added

to the area's sportfishing fleet were the following docked in Beach Haven, Sheppard's research noted. *Augusta*, captained by Edward and Bill Howe; *Miraamy III*, Captain Tom Jones; *Swordfish*, Captain Gerald Joorman, and sister ship *Polly*, captained by Herman Joorman; *Kitty Marie*, Captain Edward Sprague; *Chione*, Captain Lauren Beer; *Angler*, Captain George Clover; *Mary Ella*, Captain Lester Cowperthwaite; and *Tulip*, Captain John Crosta.

Adam loved to work, but he also loved to play. He was an avid duck and deer hunter when times permitted. He also loved baseball, especially the Philadelphia Athletics. At one time, Adam was manager of a baseball team in Parkertown. The team played in the lot behind the boatworks. Many after-game parties for the team and their friends took place at Adam's home.

It was said that when Adam Price died, a lot of good stories went with him.

Adam Price lives on, not only in memory and accomplishments, but also in name in his family. "I've got a son Albert Adam and a grandson Albert Adam Jr., and another son Adam Milton and he's got a son Adam Michael," Betty Corlis listed.

Adam died July 17, 1975.

"He loved fishing, taking the charter boats with the parties — that was the way he died, really," said Betty. "When he had his spell he was out in the ocean. He got through the inlet, but he died two or three days after that." Added Vearl, "I always said he died doing what he loved. It makes you feel he got out of life what he wanted."