

Across Oceans, Across Time® ...
Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center



A builder of boats – During World War II a wide variety of posters were created to celebrate and promote participation in the war effort on the home front, from buying wartime savings bonds to planting Victory Gardens. Some of these, such as the image of the female worker in the red-dotted scarf under the motto “We Can Do It!” have become American icons. Danish immigrant Niels Peter Jacobsen was featured in one such promotional poster in 1942. Born into a smallholder family in Køge in 1877, Jacobsen joined the Danish merchant marine following his confirmation. He left Denmark for foreign parts in the fall of 1896, taking work on various ships as a carpenter. Just before the turn of the last century he settled in Westchester County, New York, where he began working as a boat-builder. In 1906 he married a Swedish immigrant, Gunhild Pettersson, by whom he had four children, and also became an American citizen. For several decades he owned his own boat-building firm in Yonkers, where he made the acquaintance of John D. Rockefeller, who, impressed by his skills, hired him to work on his country house in Tarrytown. Jacobsen’s boat-building business was one of the victims of The Great New England Hurricane of 1938 that destroyed over 57,000 homes and businesses. Undeterred by his losses, he went to work for the Petersen Boat Yard in Upper Nyack, New York, walking across the frozen Hudson River in the winter from his home, and then, when WWII began, transferred what was by then a lifetime of boat-building knowledge to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. -- According to his grandchildren, Niels Peter remained an attractive, extremely strong and fit man his entire life, probably one of the reasons he was tapped as the appealing subject for this war-effort poster, a copy of which was found stored in a barrel in fragile condition. He was active into his 80s, only dying as the result of an accident in 1959. Information on this immigrant boat-builder who made his contribution to the war effort may now be found in the FHGC.

The Danish Immigrant Museum

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