

# Many questioned in fire inquiry

Investigations continue into the five "suspicious" fires in Port Washington since February.

According to Sgt. Eric Williams of the Nassau County Police Arson Squad, no arrests have yet been made although many persons have been interviewed and questioned. Sgt. Williams said he could make no comment on whether or not there are any specific suspects, but did say the Arson Squad is now following leads that came through as a result of the investigation by the squad, the Nassau County Fire Marshal's office, and the Port Washington Fire Department.

The five fires in which arson is suspected are: last week's fire which destroyed all but the foundation of a house under construction at the end of Soundview Lane; the April 8 fire which destroyed 31 boats and damaged six more at Seaman's Yacht Service; the fire about an hour before which destroyed a 46-foot houseboat dry-docked at the Capri Marina; a fire on April 2 behind Donald Wysong's building at 54 South Bayles Ave. which destroyed several hundred dollars worth of piping; and a February fire at Sigsbee's Marina in which 26 boats and two buildings were destroyed.

## Fires Put Marina Operators on Alert

By Kevin Lahart

Port Washington—Guy La Motta has been spending nights at his boatyard armed with a shotgun and a .45-cal. automatic pistol. M. Elliot Sims spent some time on the phone yesterday arranging to hire an armed guard for his company's property.

La Motta owns the Manhasset Bay Marina, and Sims is one of the owners of Flagship Yachts here; they and other marina and boatyard operators are concerned about fires during the last seven weeks that have caused close to \$1,000,000 worth of damage and destroyed about 60 boats in three of the 10 or more boatyards on the Port Washington side of Manhasset Bay.

The two most recent fires started within an hour of each other late Sunday and early Monday. The first seriously damaged a 45-foot houseboat in the Capri Marina in Manorhaven. The second destroyed 30 boats and damaged six more at Seaman's Yacht Service, 451 Main St. Estimates of damage at Seaman's ranged from \$300,000 to \$500,000.

James Holmes, an investigator for the Nassau County fire marshal's office, said yesterday that arson had been determined as the cause of the Seaman's fire, and that both fires were still under investigation.

In late February, another fire of suspicious origin destroyed 30 boats, 200 outboard engines and two buildings at the Sigsbee Marine Co. on Capi Lane. Owner William Zoller estimated the loss there at \$500,000.

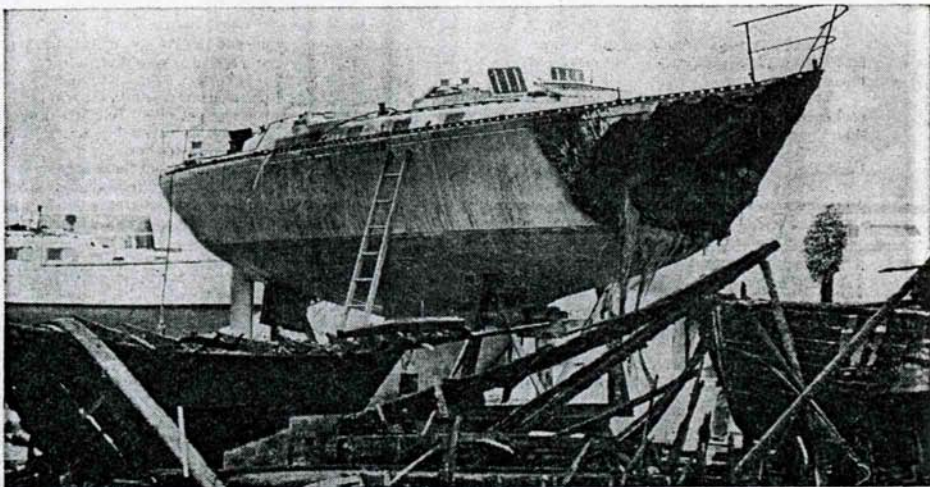
Among the boats lost Monday at the Seaman's fire were a dozen 28-foot mahogany sloops of the Resolute class. The boats, designed by the late Bill Tripp to the specifications of James B. Moore of Plandome, were all built in Denmark in 1955 and 1956. Moore, whose boat was destroyed in Monday's fire, said last night that the boats were irreplaceable. "There's no way we could replace them. There are just not the craftsmen around to do it. The class is dead. They were beautiful. There was just nothing like them out there." In addition to the 12 that were destroyed, three others, built at the same time, were in storage in other places.

One of the boats seriously damaged in the Seaman's fire was a 48-foot custom sailboat owned by Flagship Yachts. Sims said the boat had been stored at Seaman's because of lack of space in his own yard. Sims declined to give its value, but others estimated that it would cost more than \$135,000 to replace the year-old craft.

Nassau County and Port Washington police said yesterday that patrols had been increased in the Manhasset Bay area. Neither the police nor fire investigators would comment on their investigations of the fires.

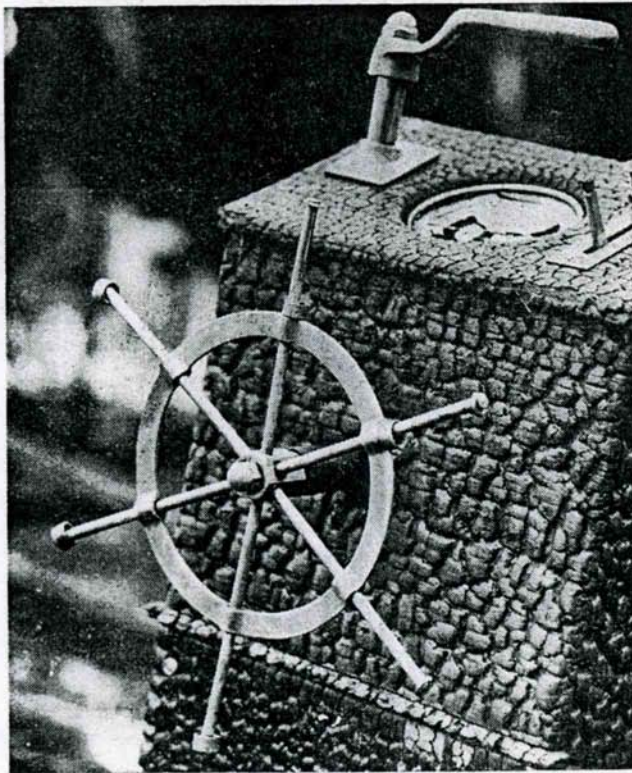
At the Seaman's yard, owner Bert Seaman said that 90 per cent of the boats involved were covered by insurance.

Yesterday, the charred keels and ribs of the boats lay soaking in the cold rain. James Benisch who owned one of the destroyed Resolutes, offered a perspective. "It was a holocaust, but no one was hurt." Still, he continued, "we had 18 years of incredible fun and friendship. Now everything comes to an end."



Newsday Photos by Dick Yarwood

Charred boats at Seaman's, above, and one of the burned helms



***'There's no way we could replace them. There are just not the craftsmen around to do it... They were beautiful.'***

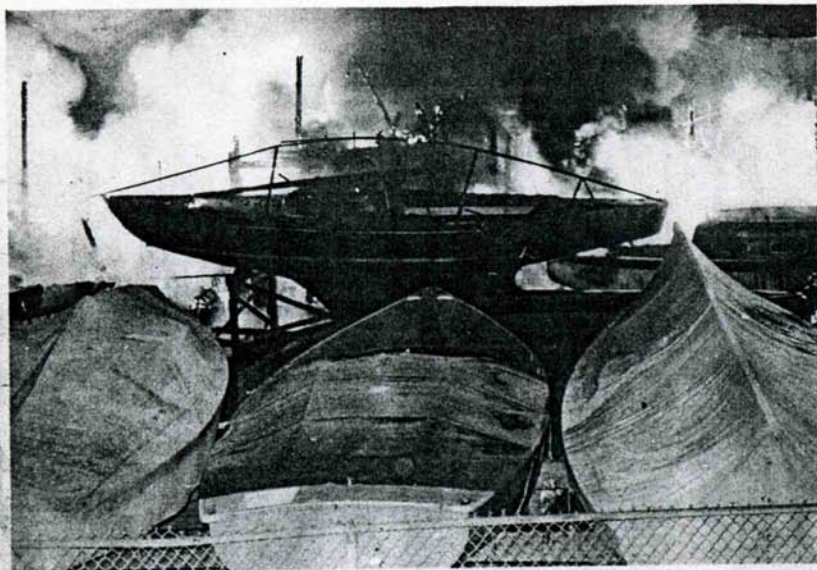


Photo by Willard Baker

## Sigsbee Marine (Continued from Page 1)

enveloped in thick, black smoke from burning petroleum products.

Cocks said the fire was under control at 3 a.m. but that the vamps stayed until 7 a.m. At 7:41 that morning Port Police again were called with a report the fire had rekindled and was burning again. Deputy Fire Chief Weyant was notified and dispatched a truck to the scene.

Zoller said he had been "dealt a mortal blow." He was not insured, he said, because of the exorbitantly high insurance rates on frame buildings used for boat storage.

"But," he added, "I have every intention of rebuilding the yard to better serve the people in the area." Sigbee's employed six highly-skilled mechanics, Zoller said, and six young people to handle the boats. It was the home for 200 small boats, he added.

Three Port firemen taken to St. Francis Hospital included John Findleton, Jr., who suffered minor smoke inhalation, and Harold Leeds, Jr., who suffered burns on the back of his hands, both of the Flower Hill Hose Company, and John Mackey of Protection Engine Company who fell and injured his chest. All were treated in the hospital emergency room and released.

Sigsbee Marine is believed to be the oldest waterfront shipyard on Manhasset Bay. The property had originally been a sandpit in the 1840's and was Captain Stannard's ship wrecking yard in the late 1880's until it became a boat repair and storage yard prior to the turn of the century. It is said that the yard was used to construct aircraft during World War I and was particularly known for the construction of a seaplane that was to be used for a transoceanic flight that proved unsuccessful in 1919.



# Fire Destroys Sigsbee Marine

## Port, Manhasset Vamps Called

By Jacklyn Farrell

A spectacular early-morning fire last week destroyed 26 boats and 2 frame buildings at the Sigsbee Marine Co., Capi Lane, Port Washington. The Friday, February 22, fire also claimed 175 outboard motors valued at \$700 each, 45 outdrive units valued at \$1,000 each, heavy boating equipment and tools.

A 55-gallon drum of ethyl glycol (anti-freeze) exploded and 400 gallons of kerosene in 55-gallon drums were also consumed by the fire. Several empty gas cans also exploded, according to Port Washington Fire Marshal Robert Cocks who said the fire of undetermined origin is undergoing routine investigation.

The Manhasset-Lakeville Fire Department stood by for any emergency fire in Port Washington and then was called to assist the Port Washington Fire Department under the direction of Deputy Chief Burt Monfort.

Despite the herculean effort of the 125 volunteer firemen in Port's Fire Department and 50 men from Manhasset-Lakeville Companies 2 and 3, under Fire Chief Leo Sniadecky, both buildings were burned to the ground. Some damage was sustained by the adjacent Harbor View Boat Yard from the fire's intense heat, but firemen managed to save the boatyard by hosing down boats there and the building.

William Sigsbee Zoller of Dunes Lane, Sands Point, owner of the boat yard, said the fire started in a boat outside the smaller building and spread to the larger "exposure" building about 20-feet away.

The fire was reported to Port Washington Police Headquarters at 1:46 a.m. by Steve Oldford of Neulist Ave., who told police he saw smoke in the vicinity of the Port Washington Yacht Club.

When he arrived at the scene, Cocks said, flames were shooting as high as 60 feet in the air. He said the entire waterfront area was

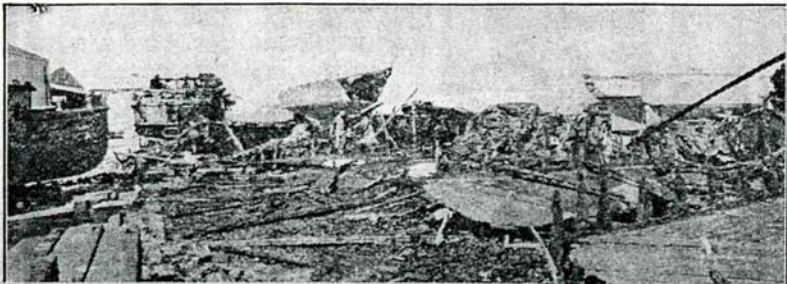
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1974

# Arson Claims 30 Boats

1974



News photos by Dan Godfrey

A worker picks his way through boats (▲) destroyed by what is called an "incendiary fire" by the Nassau County Fire Marshal's office, at the Seaman's Yacht Service, 451 Main St., Port Washington. Arson has been determined as the cause of the blaze which claimed 30 boats and damaged seven others. Anchor (◀) is the only item that will be salvageable from this boat at the marina. Fire was the third blaze in the past seven weeks at Port Washington marinas. Fires have caused \$1 million in damages and destroyed 60 boats. Some of the 10 marina operators in the area have armed themselves and are standing watch around the clock.

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FIRE CONSUMES 31 BOATS AT SEAMAN'S EARLY MONDAY MORNING, SIX ARE DAMAGED.

## Arson suspected in boatyard fire

# Aftermath: 'It was like a funeral'

By Amy Pett  
Photos by Everitt Hehn

A boat is more than an insurable pleasure. To a sailor it is a beloved companion with a soul and a personality and a name.

A boat is very special. When a sailor loses his boat he tends to mourn first and think about insurance and replacement much later.

By about 8 a.m. this Monday morning, dozens of local sailors were standing stunned and occasionally weeping amid the charred remains of 31 boats and the burned hulls of six more. They had been summoned by an informal chain of phone calls

that began shortly after the fire in Seaman's Yacht Service, formerly called Petersen's Boat Yard, was put under control.

"It was like a funeral," said Karl Maier, one bereaved boat owner. "The first reaction is disbelief. I've seen boat yard fires before, but if you have a personal stake in it, it's an entirely different thing. It's like losing a member of the family."

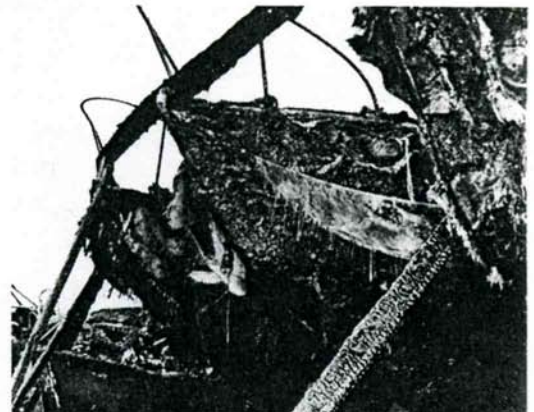
"I felt terrible," said Joe Wing, whose year-old 28-foot Triton was also destroyed. "I could hardly recognize the boat. Of course, a lot of them were burned beyond recognition."

"I felt sick," said a woman. "I said, 'Oh, my God,' when I heard. I felt lousy," said her

husband. Their company, Flagship Yachts at 405 Main St., had bought a Cuthbertson and Cassian 48-foot Bermuda racer last November, and had sailed it for just about eight hours. It was due to enter the June 21 Bermuda Race from Newport, R.I. to Bermuda. Their boat was not destroyed, but its prow was completely burned and they said the whole inside was scorched and the boat would have to be carefully inspected to determine if there was any "molecular damage" to the fiber glass it is made of. However, it will certainly not race to Bermuda this year.

Bert Seaman, owner of the

(Continued on Page 12)





RESOLUTE in ruins after fire is



MEANWHILE, AT CAPRI, firemen fight blaze in houseboat which started in one cabin on starboard side.

### 'It was like a funeral' (Continued from Page 1)

boat yard, heard the bad news on the telephone some time after 1 a.m. "I zipped right over here," he said. What he saw when he arrived gave him a "pretty horrible feeling." Seaman had managed the yard for the past five years and just took it over at the beginning of this year.

At the boat yard on Monday afternoon, dazed boat owners, curious passersby, and other boat people wandered in a cold rain through the grim black rubble. One sailor, looking at a row of piles of debris, pointed to one and said, "This is me." He pointed to another and said, "That's Howard."

Around the boat yard it was possible to pick out arrangements of charred timbers resting on charred keels that had once been boats. Craft not demolished by the fire stood around the perimeter of the black mess. Some were charred. Some, those of fiberglass, had tatters of the glass fabric, the resins which hold it together burned away, fluttering in the wind like funeral banners.

Perhaps the saddest loss in the fire, for Manhasset Bay boaters as a group, was that of almost all of a racing fleet. The 28-foot Resolute had been designed by the late Bill Tripp of Port Washington and Jim Moore of Plandome especially for the Manhasset Bay Yacht Club. There were only 15 in the world, and they were all in Manhasset Bay and had all been built in Norway in the 1950s. They were made of solid mahogany from Africa. Most of them were still varnished and had never been painted. Twelve of the 15 were stored in a shed at the boatyard. The shed and those 12 boats were totally destroyed early Monday morning. The other three had been stored elsewhere.

Moore, who was described by one mourning Resolute owner as "the father of the class," was standing in the rain and the wreckage on Monday afternoon. "I owned number one. I had the fleet built. Bay racing will never be the same. We'll never have anything like that in the bay again." "They were a pretty boat," he added softly.

Moore said they could not be replaced, even for a great deal of money. "They just don't build boats like this anywhere... You can't find the guys to build these things anymore. You can't even find the mahogany."

The Seaman's fire early Monday morning was the worst of a series of waterfront fires which have occurred here since the fall, when a rack of dinghys south of the Port Washington Yacht Club was burned. The Riviera Res-

taurant, an old Port Washington landmark, was totally burned early in January. In February 26 boats and two buildings were destroyed in a fire at Sigsbee Marina here. And just about an hour before the Seaman's fire Monday morning, at about 11:30 Sunday night, a 46-foot houseboat in dry dock at the Capri Marina was also completely burned.

According to a spokesman for the Nassau County Fire Marshal's office, arson is suspected in the Seaman's fire, the Capri boat fire is "suspicious," and the cause of the Sigsbee fire is still undetermined. All three blazes are being actively investigated by the County Fire Marshal's office.

Port Washington Fire Marshal Bob Cocks said of Seaman's, "It was an inferno by the time they got the information to us. That building was burned down in 10 minutes." Cocks said the fire started near the demolished boat shed, which measured about 100 by 30 feet. The fire was under control in an hour; Cocks said, but a truck was kept at the scene all night to make sure it would not rekindle.

Estimates of the damage at Seaman's range from \$300,000 to \$500,000, but Cocks said it would take months to get an accurate figure.

Meanwhile, other boat yard and marina owners are nervous. Guy LaMotta, owner of Manhasset Bay Marina has already hired armed guards to patrol his place at night because of fear of fire. The patrols will continue, LaMotta said, "until we get these boats in the water so they'll be safer."

Also under investigation by the County Fire Marshal is an April 2 fire behind Donald Wyson's building at 54 South Bayles Ave., which Port Washington police say was deliberately set. The fire was extinguished by three men using shovels and fire extinguishers at the scene. About \$464 worth of piping was destroyed.

**Pix Of The Week**

**HOLOCAUST** at Peterson's Shipyard on Manhasset Bay destroyed a half-million dollars worth of boats early Monday morning, April 8. (see story at right) (Photo by Willard "Bud" Baker)

# Boatyard Holocaust;

## 42 Boats Go In Fire

By Jacklyn Farrell

Approximately a half-million dollars worth of boats were destroyed in a fire of undetermined origin early Monday morning (April 8) at Peterson's Shipyard on Manhasset Bay.

According to Albertson "Bert" Seaman, shipyard owner, 42 boats including 35 sailboats and 7 powerboats, from Sunfish sails to 42-ft. cruisers were completely destroyed. Two boats may be salvageable, he said. Also completely gutted by the fire was the 30 x 100 wood frame storage building. Seaman said boat owners carry their own insurance.

Police said the night watchman, Carl Matrishan at the Manhasset Bay Yacht Club, 455 Main Street, next door to the shipyard, reported the fire at 12:58 AM. Port Washington's volunteer firemen are credited with preventing the blaze from spreading, so that the fire was confined to the shed and contents.

Port Washington Fire Marshal Robert Cocks and Nassau County Fire Marshal Holmes, at the scene, reported a full investigation will be conducted. Cocks said the fire was under control within the hour, but men stayed on until 6:30 AM to eliminate

(Continued on Page 3)



**CHARRED REMAINS** of a few of the 42 boats that were destroyed by a fire of undetermined origin early Monday morning, April 8, at Peterson's Shipyard, 451 Main Street. Port Fire Marshal Robert Cocks and Nassau County Fire Marshal Holmes are conducting investigation. (Photo by Everitt J. Hehn)

### THANKS TO VAMPS

To the Editor:

(The following is a copy of a letter sent to Port Washington Fire Chief Jesse Salerno.)

I want to express our sincere gratitude and thanks to all of the personnel in the Fire Department for a job exceedingly well done in containing and extinguishing the fire at our boat yard on April 8.

Everyone from insurance adjustors to boat owners have commented on the excellent job the men from all departments did in keeping the damage to a minimum.

Again our thanks to one and all.

Albertson H. Seaman  
President  
Seaman Yacht Service, Inc.

The organization of a department by the fire companies of this village is practically settled and a committee has met to draft a constitution and by-laws governing the same. It will be known as the Port Washington Fire Department, and will be composed of Atlantic Hook, Ladder and Hose Company, Protection Engine Co. and Flower Hill Hose Co. The officers will consist of a chief, second assistant chief, surgeon, secretary and treasurer. 1967

## Fire

(Continued from Page 1)

sparks or possible rekindling. The Manhasset-Lakeville Fire Department stood by "on call" for any other alarms while Port Vamps were busy.

It was learned at presstime that 12 of the Resolute Class sailboats out of the fleet of 16 were destroyed in the fire.

Port's volunteer firemen were kept busy this past week. Besides battling the fire at Peterson's shipyard early Monday morning, they also fought several other fires. On Sunday, April 7, at 11:47 P.M., they answered a call for a fire in a houseboat in the Capri Marina, off Orchard Beach Boulevard in Manorhaven.

On Saturday, April 6, at 8:46 AM, there was a call for a car fire on Cross Street near Avenue A. However, police reported a water heater hose broke on a 1970 Buick sedan, owned by Lora De Santis and the car was not on fire.

Nassau County Arson Squad is investigating a fire on April 2, at 1:22 PM at the rear of 54 South Bayles Avenue that damaged building materials owned by Donald-Wysock, Inc. The fire was extinguished by Carl Schroeter, who reported the fire, and two other men using shovels and fire extinguishers. Police said some

unknowns did set fire to the building materials valued at \$464 that were stored at the rear. Port Washington Fire Marshal Robert Cocks was notified and after investigating, determined it was an Arson Squad case and notified the Nassau County Fire Marshal's Office for further investigation. The building supplies destroyed included 100 lengths of Orangeberg Pipe, 3" x 10 Ft, valued at \$4.64, each

Port's vamps also answered a fire on April 2, at 5:45 AM at the Hostess Laundry, 26 Davis Avenue. It was reported the fire was caused by a presser which caught on fire while being used. Damage was confined to the presser machine in addition to smoke damage to the building contents.

On April 4, at 7:03 AM, Mr. R. Tarleton of 89 Longview Road, called Port Police Headquarters to report a tree on fire in his rear yard. One truck from the Flower Hill Hose Company responded to the call. Port's firemen also extinguished a brush fire on April 3, at 8:08 PM at the rear of Noga's Service Station on Manorhaven Boulevard and a grass fire on April 1, at 8:08 PM at the end of Soundview Drive.

One of the most important meetings in a long time was the joint meeting of the three fire companies of this village on March 25, 1907. The three

### Drawing for the Benefit of the PORT WASHINGTON FIRE DEPARTMENT SOFTBALL TEAM FUND

1st Prize: Giant Basket of Cheer  
2nd Prize: 50 Points

Drawing to be held March 18th 1974

0713

A TIP OF THE HELMET to