

# Shipbuilding, World War I

By Benjamin Gifford

The shipyards at Grant-Smith-Porter Ship Co. still show considerable activity just after WWI. Wartime shipbuilding provided a bright exception to Portland's otherwise lackluster economy during the First World War.

Although Portland experienced a sustained economic and industrial boom from 1905-1912 — after the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition — its economy was sensitive to fluctuations in international trade since Portland was essentially a shipping town rather than a manufacturing town, exporting lumber, wheat, and fruit. When World War I began in Europe, a sharp decrease in the demand for products regularly shipped through Portland occurred and sunk the city, and state's, economy into recession. Other factors that contributed to recession were competition from Seattle, which enjoyed rail advantages — and was by then the larger of the two cities — and the reticence of Portland's financial institutions to speculate. Real estate was the one area where speculation was deemed both acceptable and highly profitable during Portland's boom.

On the other hand, in the period between 1919 and 1926, just after World War I, Portland's lumber exports increased five times, and it became the world hub for the water export of lumber, actually manufacturing more lumber in 1926 than any other city in the world. Wartime voter approval of bonds for expanded dock facilities and harbor development facilitated completion of the first unit of Terminal No. 4 in April of 1919. The marked increase in export tonnage was directly related to this voter approved expansion.

**Further Reading:** Abbott, Carl. *Portland: Planning, Politics, and Growth in a Twentieth-Century City*. Lincoln, Nebr., 1983.

MacColl, E. Kimbark. *The Growth of a City: Power and Politics in Portland, Oregon 1915-1950*. Portland, Oreg., 1979.

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