

Ports and Portholes

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Life Through Port Holes and Soft Sandy Beach

*Life Through Port Holes and soft sandy Beach
Some days I just want to be out of reach
Waves viewed through portholes don't seem quite as
strong,
Footprints in beach sand don't last very long.
Some days I just want to sail out to sea,
Go with the wind where it wants to push me,
But peering through portholes gives me time to blink,
Walking on beach sand allows me to think
Deciding how to ride waves big and small,
With no safe harbor away from them all,
Portholes and prints on the beach are the breeze
That give me courage to face stormy seas.*



Looking Back at the Blough in Different Days



In her sixth decade of nautical life, the M/V Roger Blough sits at the Pittsburgh & Conneaut Dock waiting for her final trip. Fifty years ago in 1972, after a start as rocky as the Lake Superior coast, she began her long career on the Great Lakes. The American Shipbuilding Company of Lorain, Ohio built the MV Roger Blough, a self-unloader, for the United States Steel Great Lakes Fleet in Duluth, Minnesota. The Blough cost approximately twenty million dollars to build. Its construction, launching, and christing covered at least a three-year span and cost four lives before she was officially launched on June 5, 1972. She enjoyed a full and varied career until she suffered another fire in layup on February 1, 2021. In 2022 she awaits her final trip across Lake Erie to be scrapped in Canada.

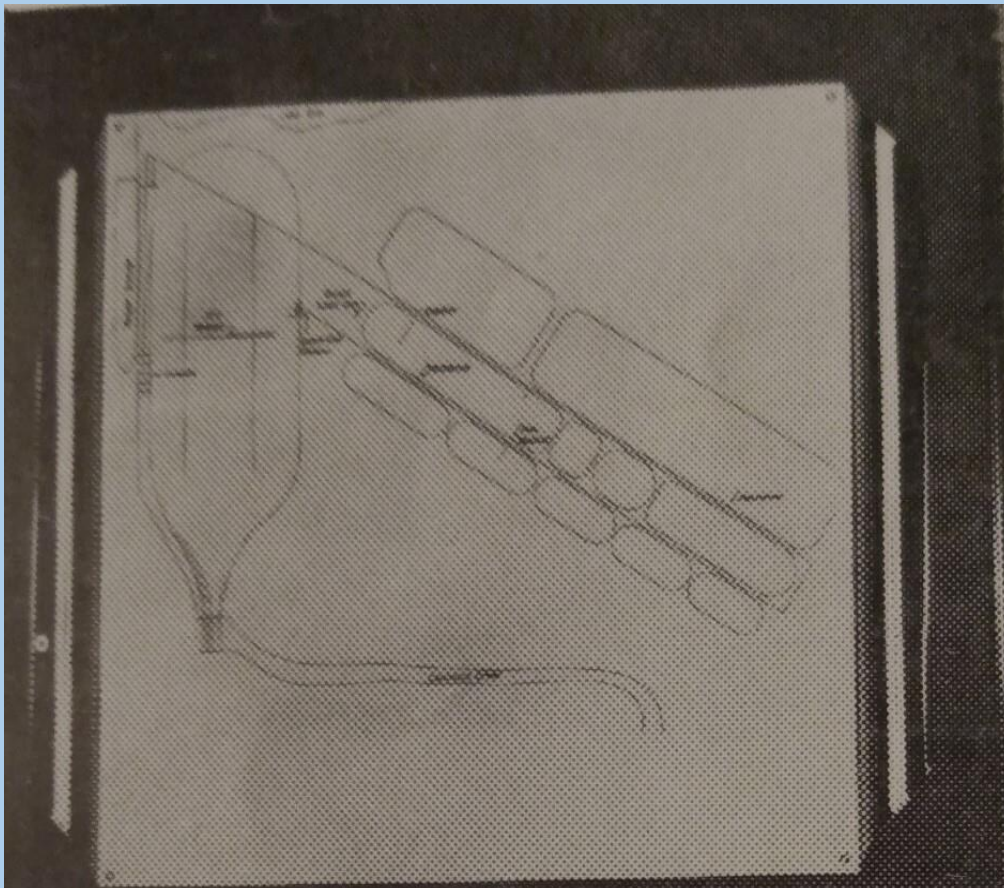
Dock Talk

A monthly publication by and for the employees and retirees of the Pittsburgh and Conneaut Dock Company and their families.

December 1972



In her first visit to the Pittsburgh & Conneaut Dock Company, Joseph Neil Rolfson Jr., Captain of the U.S. Steel super ore carrier, M/V Roger Bough, was presented with a plaque commemorating the event by C.H. McGuirk, Vice-President and General Superintendent of the Dock Company.



THE CONNEAUT SYSTEM

COMMEMORATION

BY ROGER BLOUGH'S FIRST TRIP TO
THE PITTSBURGH & CONNEAUT DOCK OF
CONNEAUT HARBOR, OHIO NOV 21st 1972
JOSEPH KEIL ROLFSON JR. CAPTAIN

The largest vessel ever built completely on the Great Lakes, the Blough made its maiden trip to Conneaut on Tuesday, November 21, 1972, with 47,000 tons of iron ore pellets from Two Harbors, Minnesota. The Blough's visit was the first in a series designed to test the stocking phase of the Pittsburgh & Conneaut Dock Company's new ore storage and materials handling system now under construction. Completion date of the facility is scheduled for sometime in March of 1973.

Named in honor of Roger M. Blough who served as U.S. Steel's Chairman of the Board from 1955-1960, the Roger Blough is built on a grand scale. It is 858 feet long and 105 feet wide. If placed on its stern, the Blough would reach 17 feet above the 841-foot height of United States Steel's 64-story headquarters building in Pittsburgh.

Captain Joseph N. Rolfson, Jr. is a third generation U.S. Steel master and former skipper of the M/V Callaway. Two diesel engines power the super ore carrier, providing approximately 14,000 horse power and making possible speeds of about 16 miles per hour. The keel for the ship's bow section was laid in September 1968. A little over a year later, the stern keel was laid. The two sections were joined together in July, 1970.

In mid-June of this year, following extensive dock and sea trials, the Blough sailed from the shipyard in Lorain, Ohio, where she was built, to the iron ore loading docks at Two Harbors, Minnesota. Three days out of Two Harbors, the Blough tied up at U.S. Steel's Gary, Indiana works with its initial cargo of more than 46,000 tons of taconite pellets.



Dock Talk

September 1973

M/V Roger Blough Hosts Roger Blough & Guests



While the M/V Roger Blough was docked in Conneaut on August 10, 1973, Captain Neil Rolfson received a group of distinguished passenger guests, including the man for whom his vessel is named. The four couples are shown on deck shortly after they boarded the vessel. Left to right they are; Heath Larry, Vice Chairman, Board of Directors of U.S. Steel; C.H. McGuirk, Vice President & General Manager of Pittsburgh & Conneaut Dock who did not accompany the group as a passenger; Roger Blough, Retired Chairman Board of Directors of U.S. Steel; Mrs. Roger Blough; Neil Rolfson, Captain of M/V Roger Blough; J. Dorrance, Jr, Chairman Board of Directors of Campbell Soup; Mrs. J. Dorrance, Jr.; Mrs. Health Larry; Mrs. C.B. McCoy; and C.B. McCoy, President of DuPont Corporation. F.A. Bartone, Assistant to General Manager of the P & C Dock, was also present with the boarding party, and he is credited with photographing the event.

Watch a video about the MV Roger Blough by clicking this link

[Capturing Conneaut History](#)

Immigrant Engineer Joseph Van Blerck Rethinks Marine Engines



River Raisin, Monroe, Michigan



Akron, Ohio, Big Falls at the Gorge

Cuyahoga River, Akron, Ohio

The River Mark flows near both Oudenbosh and Zvenbergen where Joseph Van Blerck and his wife Dimphna were born. The Atlantic Ocean, the Detroit River, the River Raisin, the Cuyahoga River, the Great South Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, a circular life voyage, are some of the waterways that Joseph C.W. Van Blerck traveled and populated with his marine engines after he immigrated to the United States from Holland across the vast Atlantic Ocean. He spent a lifetime working diligently to invent and manufacture lighter and more efficient engines for newfangled automobiles, boats, and the newer fangled airplanes. His Van Berck engines powered boats navigated and raced through waterways across America and the world and his son, Joseph Van Blerck Jr. carried on his legacy. [\[1\]](#)

After years of collaborating with Henry Ford, Joseph Van Blerck created the Van Blerck Motor Company, pioneering the development and manufacturing of innovative design and high-performance marine engines. His engines were installed in nearly all early hydroplane and racing machines, and in 1914 he drove the Kitty Hawk, powered with a Van Blerck engine, to a record of 60 mph. For years, his engines propelled boats to victories and records in all of the major boat races. He also pioneered design and development of stern drive units. Many of his inventions became standard components on marine engines.

The Dutch Archives show that Josephus Christianus Van Blerck was born on August 16, 1876, in the Netherlands village of Oudenbosch in the Dutch Province of North Brabant and his future wife Dimphna Adriana Goddrie two years before him on February 13, 1874, in the village of Zevenbergen, in the province of Noord-Brabant near Breda. The River Mark flows near both Oudenbosh and Zvenbergen. Rivers, windmills, land reclaimed from the North Sea, and the North Sea itself were wallpaper waterscapes in Joseph's early years. He stated on his United States Federal Census records that he had an eighth-grade education, but his mechanical talent and character carried him to achievements far beyond eight grade. Perhaps he dreamed of boats speeding through the water as swiftly as seagulls and perhaps news about Henry Ford's harnessing horsepower to create fast moving (rumor had it the Model T could do 40 miles an hour) automobiles focused his visions of powerful, reliable engines.

According to the 1910 United States Federal Census, Joseph C.W. Van Blerck and his wife immigrated to the United States in 1902, when he was 26 years old and his wife Dimphna was 28. Other sources say they didn't arrive until 1904. Joseph listed his occupation as a machinist who owned his own shop. The 1910 Census

shows the Van Blerck family renting a house at 366 Hibbard Avenue in Detroit. Joseph, 34, Dinshina, 36, and their two children Cornelia, 4, and Johanna, 2, shared the house with Dinshina's mother, Cornelia Mather, 66, and her brother Christ Goodrie who had just immigrated from the Netherlands. The Van Blerck's had lost one of their children, three-year-old Joseph Van Blerck who was born on November 3, 1902, and who died of pneumonia in Detroit on March 3, 1906. Another Joseph, who would be equally as famous as his father, was born in 1916.

The Detroit Years

Before he created and perfected his first marine engines and established his own shop in 1910, Joseph Van Blerck worked with Henry Ford in his early efforts to develop the 71909 Model T engine. Henry Ford was the first in a long line of prominent and talented people that Joseph Van Blerck's own talent and perseverance drew into his entrepreneurship circle. Often Henry and his young son Edsel would visit Joseph and discuss the practicalities of building his first marine engine in the backyard of his Detroit home. Joe Van Blerck's prototype engine, a one-cylinder, quickly attracted affluent buyers and new business. The Smith-Ryan Boat Company, one of Van Blerck's prominent customers, bought his engines that could travel an astonishing 31 m.p.h. and more for its modern ships.

Marine author Stan Grayson wrote in his book, *Engines Afloat, From Early Days to D-Day* that between 1905 and 1915, innovative inventors greatly improved the weight-to-horsepower ration of marine engines. He explained that after Joe Van Blerck established his own engine shop about 1908, he soon hired John Hacker, a talented designer as manager and in 1912, Charles Page, a Cleveland businessman. Stan Grayson also wrote that Chris Smith of Chris-Craft fame possibly was an early supporter of Joe Van Blerck.

According to Stan Grayson, the Van Blerck Motor Company had problems along with its successes. Rex Wademan who wrote and designed catalogs for Joe Van Blerck reported that the Van Blerck motors were not standardized, and even two motors with the same cylinder size and number of cylinders didn't necessarily have interchangeable parts. He said it was a frustrating and time-consuming chore to replace worn out or broken parts.[\[2\]](#)

Yearly sales increases often countered by the time and expense of replacing custom build parts and the necessity of replacing them kept Joe Van Blerck constantly purchasing patterns, tools, and jigs. His company wrestled with the

problem until 1908, when Joe Van Blerck began to build standardized motors. He ordered another catalog promoting the change in production and his business increased. By 1913, Joe Van Blerck was building a new factory in Monroe, Michigan.

Author James Barry in *Hackercraft* wrote that Joseph Van Blerck immigrated to the United States in 1909 and opened a small engine shop in Detroit where he served as designer, builder, and office manager. About 1912, Charles E. Page, a Cleveland businessman, joined Joe Van Blerck and he set up a new plant at Monroe. The Van Blerck dock fronted on the River Raisin and boats would pull up to have their engines overhauled or new engines installed. George Page took over the office functions of the company because Joe Van Blerck's interests and abilities didn't include office management. Business insiders knew that Joe Van Blerck didn't have time for office work. As a report in *Motorboat Magazine* of August 1914 asked rhetorically: "Can you imagine Joe Van Blerck swearing into a Dictaphone?"[\[3\]](#)

The Monroe Years

In 1913, Van Blerck Motor Company moved to a new, more modern facility in Monroe, Michigan. The October 1913 issue of *Motor Boating* reported that Van Blerck Motor Company was building a new factory in Monroe, not too far from the banks of the River Raisin. Engineer McGeorge planned a fireproof brick, steel, and concrete factory, 60 feet wide by 176 ½ feet long that would meet the company's immediate requirements for space. The building, modern for 1913, featured an office, large windows, and state of the art electric equipment. The company also built a power plant and the facility featured a testing room where Joe Van Blerck could operate several engines simultaneously, using handmade stands simulating boat angles. Each engine came with test results. [\[4\]](#)

The opening of the new business created a furor of excitement in Monroe. Joe Van Blerck mailed dozens of invitations, urging everyone to visit his shop, touting its favorable location 45 minutes from Toledo and 1 ¼ hours from Detroit. Gradually, Joe Van Blerck established standardized tooling as the norm in his Monroe operations and all parts became interchangeable. He ran another advertising campaign to promote the benefits of standardization and the public embraced his campaign, buying enough standardized motors to support full time shifts and even overtime at the Van Blerck factory.

As well as racing engines, Van Bleck also built standard models, including D and DD engines that the company sold to use in fire equipment, electrical generating sets, pumping outfits and trucks and farm tractors. A 1915 fire truck sale with a Van Bleck engine to the City of Monroe caused some controversy. In January 1915, the city bought a \$5,500 Watrous fire truck with a Van Blerck engine to replace a horse-drawn steam pumper. A story in the Monroe Michigan Observer repeatedly stressed the unreliability of the cone clutch in the Watros fire truck. In 1920, the truck was rebuilt, leaving some people with dark thoughts about the Van Blerck motor, in truth a marine model, in the fire truck..[\[5\]](#)

Joe Van Blerck introduced three engines while he operated in Monroe: the E, E-Special and the EE. According to Stan Grayson, the new engines were so well made of such high-quality material that they still run the occasional cruiser. Another Van Blerck model, a 6-cylinder, 125-horsepower engine, powered a twenty-foot hydroplane called The Kid, which dominated the 1913 Astoria, Oregon Regatta.

The Van Blerck engines continued to win races and boat builders with sterling reputations including Lawley in Boston, Herreshoff in Rhode Island and Matthews in Ohio used standard Van Blerck engines as standard operating procedure. A boat builder named S.A. Ferris operated with Joe Van Blerck, because at that time it wasn't unusual for marine engine builders to build boats as well. In 1914, Ferris built the Hacker designed Hawk Eye at the Van Blerck shop and Van Blerck installed a 12-cylinder engine of his own design and construction. The hull design was that of an improved Kitty Hawk. Other Kitty Hawks followed over the next few years: Hawk Jr., Kitty Hawk IV, and Kitty Hawk 5 – all with Van Blerck engines.

Most Van Blerck engines ran reliably and long term. Demand for them remained steady or increased. Other countries around the world including China, Australia and New Zealand purchased many Van Blerck Motors. A carpenter living in Shanghai, China, built a Yankee runabout he called Carthay II, and powered her with a four-cylinder Van Blerck Motor capable of reaching 30 miles an hour. The owners of the Carthay II wrote that she is the “fastest boat by far in all China, Japan, and the East. The engine has run ten months and is better than ever.”[\[6\]](#)

Over the next few years, the Van Blerck Motor Company continued its expansion, and Joe Van Blerck continued to attract talented and famous people to his business and to his engines. In November 1915, at an annual stockholders meeting, the Van Blerck Motor Company reorganized and made plans to greatly increase its facility. Officers elected were Joseph Van Blerck, president; Charles B. Page, vice

president and treasurer; and Clifton Knoll, secretary. Thomas B. Taylor, George B. Cross, and F.D. Ames of New York and J.S. Haggerty of Detroit were Directors. By 1916, the Van Blerck Motor Company had a diverse line-up of engines, ranging in power from 40-500 horsepower. The prices ranged from the low \$1,000 to over \$6,000 for the V-12 unit.[\[7\]](#)

During his Detroit and Monroe years, Joe Van Blerck had also opened a New York office. In March 1916, Thomas B. Taylor, a well-known motor boating enthusiast who had been a director in the Van Blerck Motor Company since October 1915, was elected second vice president and the resident Eastern Executive in the Company. Besides the changes in the New York office and its force, the Van Blerck Company opened a Washington office in charge of Horace Ward. In its announcement of the change, the Motor Boating Magazine stated that the rapid increase in the volume of business placed by the United States Government in the Van Blerck Company has caused this action.[\[8\]](#)

World War I

The Motor Boating Magazine announcement says that World War I brought even more orders rather than a slump for Joe Van Blerck marine engines. Naval architects heard of Van Blerck engines and eventually the engines powered their way to the front lines of the War. A maritime museum, Forum Marinum, in Turku, Finland, has models of patrol boats built for the Russian Navy during the First World War which were equipped with Van Blerck 150 hp engines. [\[9\]](#) Joseph Van Blerck's obituary in the Monroe Evening News stated that he moved his factory east where he designed and supervised building a series of interchangeable motors for the U.S. Navy. A 1924 catalog of the Model N marine engine has the address of the Van Blerck Engine Corporation as Plainfield, New Jersey. The Model N featured one of Joe Van Blerck's favorite cylinder sizes, 5x6' bore and stroke. Max F. Homfeld in Gas Engine Magazine stated that he had little doubt that the Model N was a Naval engine.[\[10\]](#)

An obituary in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle stated that during World War I Joseph Van Blerck had built hundreds of engines for the Navy and was selected to design a special standardized engine for the Navy's lifeboats and launches. [\[11\]](#)

At this point, the transitions in offices and companies of the Van Blerck Motor Company, and the swinging doors of personnel become a kaleidoscope of conflicting documents and speculation about Joe Van Blerck's motives and directions. The February 1917 issue of Motor Boating Magazine states that Joe

Van Blerck had moved his general sales office to New York City at the beginning of the year and opened for business on January 3 in the Hecksher Building at 50 East 42nd Street. The facilities contained 800 feet of floor space to hold a large number of Van Blerck parts. The Company was also ready to open a sales office in Boston, and Joe Van Blerck planned to open a combination sales and service station in Chicago on or about April 1, 1917.[\[12\]](#)

The announcement said that the general sales offices had been moved, but it didn't mention the factory part of the organization. According to Stan Grayson in *Engines Afloat, From Early Days to D-Day*, Joe Van Blerck left Monroe in 1918, and documents at the Monroe County Historical Museum indicate that the company was dissolved on June 23, 1923. There are conflicting documents to this scenario. Joe Van Blerck registered for the World War I Draft on September 10, 1918, and his draft registration shows that he enlisted from Monroe and he listed his livelihood as being president of the Van Blerck Motor Company. The Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory shows Van Blerck Motor Company still present in Monroe in 1921-1922, but with different executives. The *Gazetteer* lists George H. Houston as President, and L.A. Moehring as secretary-treasurer and states that the company manufactured gasoline engines.[\[13\]](#)

Stan Grayson wrote that the details of what might have happened between Joe Van Blerck and Charles Page are known to history. He speculated that a postwar slump may have strained their relationship or that Joe Van Blerck simply was not interested in the new model engine. Since he did not leave an archive of letters and diaries, any statements about Joe Van Blerck's motives are speculative, but studying his life and actions provides some clues. If the 1914 Motorboat Magazine is correct, Joe Van Blerck was more of a dreamer, designer, and doer when it came to creating engines and not a practical, pragmatic, pencil-pushing businessman. He followed his product dreams where they led him, and when someone else couldn't visualize or produce his dream engines, he moved on to more sympathetic environments.

Whatever his reasons, about 1919, Joe Van Blerck relocated to Akron, Ohio, opened a factory there, and introduced the first commercially oriented engine, the Model MM. He left that company a year later and moved to New Jersey.

Van Blerck Motors Race On to Ohio, New Jersey, and New York

The 1920 United States Federal Census showed Joseph Van Blerck 44, living with his wife Dinphina, 46, and their children Cornelia, 13, Johanna, 12, and Joseph, 8, and his mother-in-law Cornelia Goddriek, 74, in Akron, Summit, Ohio. He listed his occupation as an engineer in a machine shop. Even though Joseph Van Blerck had left Monroe, the company that he had founded still remained by the River Raisin. The 1921 Michigan State Gazetteer listed the Van Blerck Motor Company as still located in Monroe, Michigan. George H. Houston was named as president and Lester Ahrend Moehring as secretary-treasurer.[\[14\]](#)

It appeared that Joe Van Blerck created or sold name and engine rights to different companies that he either started or endorsed. A 1920 newspaper advertised the WS-M engine which was a Joseph Van Blerck design. The factory's address did not appear, but the sole distributor was Wilbur H. Young with a Fifth Avenue, New York City address. A 1920 catalog showed the Van Blerck address again as Detroit and the company logo includes the words, "The Standard High-Speed Motor."

Another Van Blerck Motor Company advertisement dated January 1921 promoted the "Lucetta," built for H. De Ver Warner, Bridgeport, Conn. *Designed and built by Wm. H. Hand, Jr. Powered with an eight-cylinder Van Blerck engine. Speed, 30 MPH. NE of the most successful boats of the past season is "Lucetta" and one of the best things about her was the splendid way in which she maneuvered at all speeds. From dead slow to full speed ahead, the engine instantly answered the throttle. No backfiring, no stalling—just an even, consistent flow of power as and when required. The Van Blerck Engine, plus the Van Blerck Fuelizer, makes an altogether desirable combination — add this combination to your boat and you have the Ideal. VAN BLERCK MOTOR COMPANY Also Makers of High Duty Commercial Motors OFFICE AND WORKS AT MONROE, MICH, New York Sales and Service Branch—30 Church Street*[\[15\]](#)

In January 1921, Power Boating Magazine announced George Sykes as the new general manager of the Van Blerck Motor Company in Monroe, praising his trained executive mind and splendid experience in production methods and executive management.

In September 1921 Power Boating printed a notice about Guy W. Vaughn, who had been the vice-president and general manager of Van Blerck Motor Company since 1919. Guy Vaughn resigned as general manager, but would still remain as

vice president and a member of the board of directors. Power Boating commented that , “Mr. Vaughn’s remarkable record with the Van Blerck Motor Company which company he entirely rehabilitated, increased their business, and made their balance sheet a pleasant sight to behold,” a statement that tends to support the people who believed that Van Bleck’s engines were in production decline and had become obsolete before the advent of World War I. Guy Vaughn would remain vice president and a member of the board of directors of Van Blerck Company, but he accepted a position as vice president and general manager of the Standard Steel and Bearings Company of Philadelphia, effective on August 8, 1921. [\[16\]](#)

The June 25, 1922 Motor Boat Magazine section called The Trade announced the latest Joe Van Blerck move.

Joe Van Blerck to Supply Van Blerck Motor Parts

An interesting announcement made in a rather modest sort of way is to the effect that Joseph Van Blerck is prepared to take care of all owners of Van Blerck Motors in the way of service and parts. It will be remembered that several years ago, Mr. Van Blerck severed his connection with the Van Blerck Motor Company, then at Monroe, Michigan.

Since severing his connection with the Van Blerck Motor Company about two years ago, Mr. Van Blerck has received many requests from Van Blerck owners for his services for the repair and rebuilding of the Van Blerck power plants. It was the number and character of these requests as well as Mr. Van Blerck’s own personal interest in all motors which bear his name and for which he still feels responsible which caused him to undertake to supply proper parts service to all owners of Van Blerck motors. Perhaps the idea of maintaining the representation for quantity which had been earned by Van Blerck Motors also helped to prompt this move.

Mr. Van Blerck opened offices at 90 West Street, New York City, where he will be prepared to supply parts built under his personal supervision for all models. This service will be rendered at very reasonable prices. For this work, Mr. Van Blerck has enlisted the services of a number of men who were formally associated with him and who were directly in charge of the production of practically every Van Blerck motor now in service.

Low prices will be possible because of the fact that it will be unnecessary to carry a heavy overhead burden as in the case of a company manufacturing motors on a large scale. The savings will be on such items as sales expenses, the necessity of carrying a large shop and the elimination of developmental and experimental work.

This is a move that might be expected from Joe Van Blerck by anybody who has followed his career in the Marine Motor Industry. The Van Blerck Motor made its personal appearance 15 years ago when Joe Van Blerck made a few engines at Detroit into which went every speck of capital he could scrape up. From that beginning the business grew rapidly and steadily until the Van Blerck Motor Co., became one of the leading manufacturers in this industry. War expansion of the business caused the control of it to pass into other hands and on January 1 of this year (1922) the manufacture of Van Blerck Motors ceased. Since that time owners of Van Blerck Motors in need of parts or service found that repairs entailed great expense and many of them took up the matter with Joe Van Blerck. His characteristic answer to these inquires and requests is found in the present announcements. The business will be conducted under the name of Joseph Van Blerck, Inc. [17]

One of Joe Van Blerck's associates, Leonard Ochtman Jr., automotive engineer, came to Akron to continue his association with Joseph Van Blerck. He was born in Riverside Connecticut on March 22, 1894, to Leonard and Mina M. Ochtman. His father, born in Holland, was a noted artist. Leonard Jr. was educated in Greenwich, Connecticut Schools and graduated in 1915 from Cornell University with an M.E. He worked as a draftsman and designer on gasoline and light automobile engines in 1913 and in 1914 as an inspector of automobiles at the Saxon Motor Company in Detroit. He worked at Van Blerck Motor Company in Monroe as a chief draftsman from 1915-1919. By 1922, he was the chief engineer for Joseph Van Blerck Inc., in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio.

Surviving and Thriving Through the 1930s

The 1930 United States Federal Census showed that Joseph Van Blerck, 52, lived in Red Bank, Monmouth, New Jersey with his wife Diaphinia, 54, and his son Joseph, 18. He listed his employment as a manufacturer at a boat works.

Part of Joe Van Blerck's strategy to survive during the Depression and beyond included rebuilding and converting used automobile engines. He advertised five different models in 1934 and 1939 for Joseph Van Blerck Boat Engines, Inc., Long Island City, NY. He used the car clutch and transmission, modifying the gears to provide a 1:1 reverse similar to the JVB and Model N. He designed marine conversions for truck and tractor engines. He designed engines to power midget race cars and to replace less efficient outboard motors, and he built many engines

for early Elco-Electric Company Motor Yachts.

Van Blerck engines didn't seem to have geographical or territorial limits. In 1931 when the Van Blerck 16 valve engine was advertised from 2200 Diamond Street in Philadelphia. Van Blerck made copper exhaust pipes for Elco-Electric Launch Company in Roosevelt and Freeport, Long Island and provided technical and transportation support for the company. Joseph Van Blerck Jr. oversaw most of the Long Island operations and became an acclaimed speedboat racer in his own right.

The variety of his company names and locations reveal Joe Van Blerck's tireless quest for better quality and quantity engines and his sheer love of imagining and designing them. The names of the companies that he founded or was association with in some way include:

- Van Blerck
- Van Blerck Motor Company
- Joseph Van Blerck
- JVB
- Joseph Van Blerck Motor Corporation
- Wellman-Seaver-Morgan Company
- Elco-Electric Launch Company
- Fay & Bowen
- Navy
- Continental Motors

He also has a varied list of company addresses including Detroit and Monroe, Michigan, Akron, Ohio, Plainfield, Red Bank, and West Bank, New Jersey, and Philadelphia Pennsylvania. His company timeline is just as varied (although these times are estimations):

- 1909-1911-Detroit
- 1913-1920-Factory in Monroe, Michigan
- 1918- New York City
- 1920-Cleveland
- 1921-JVB in Akron
- 1923-24-Plainfield, New Jersey
- 1926-New York City
- 1928-Red Bank, New Jersey
- 1934-1939-Long Island City

- 1949-Fort Lauderdale, Florida

The Engines Keep Racing Through the Waters

In 1935, Joseph and his wife Dinphina lived in Free Park, Nassau, New York, where he and his son Joseph Jr. actively designed, manufactured, marketed, and adapted marine engines.

Years later, Joseph Jr.'s obituary in the New York Times reveals more of the complicated interchangeable engines that were the lives of the Van Blerck father and son. Some of Joe Jr.'s maritime achievements included championship speedboat driving. He set a record 39 minutes in the 1947 Manhattan Island Marathon in his 225-cubic inch class hydroplane Alijo V. In 1949, he broke the one-mile world's record off Aberdeen, Maryland, with a mark of 92.3 miles per hour and in 1950, he won the national championship in the 7-liter speedboat class at the Buffalo Launch Club Regatta. He often raced with Guy Lombardo, his Freeport neighbor.

Joseph Van Blerck Jr. was born in Detroit and proved to be a chip off the engine block son of Joseph Van Blerck Sr. In 1912, the family moved to Red Bank, New Jersey, where the Senior Van Blerck designed and built marine engines. After graduating from the Pratt Institute, Joseph Jr. joined Van Blerck Motor Company in 1929, and ran it after 1938. During World War II, he discontinued the business and designed and built PT boat exhaust systems for Elco in plants at Freeport and Roosevelt, Long Island. He also serviced and sold parts for the 1,500 horsepower Packard PT boat engines in yards at Ocean Avenues in Freeport. [\[18\]](#)

Even though he apparently turned over some of the businesses to his son Joseph Jr. Joseph Van Blerck Sr. listed his occupation as manufacturer in the 1940 U.S. Federal Census. The Census also shows that Joseph Van Blerck, 63, and his wife, Dinphina, 66 lived in Fort Lauderdale, Florida at this point in their lives.

Florida records chronicle some of the last years of Joseph Van Blerck's life. His wife Dinphina died and he remarried Reta Mary Crosthwaite in 1949. He kept his fertile imagination and literal and figurative fingers in the workings of a marine engine. When he died on September 5, 1949, in Fort Lauderdale, news of his death appeared in newspapers and magazines and saddened the hearts of internal combustion engine lovers around the world. One of his obituaries appeared in Motor Boating-ND in October 1949.

One of America's pioneer marine engine manufacturers, Joseph Van Blerck, Sr. passed away September 5, at Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Mr. Van Blerck, born in Holland 74 years ago, contributed much to the development of internal combustion engines for boats. Before entering the marine engine field in 1910, Mr., Van Blerck was associated with Henry Ford in the early development of the Ford Car aft. After the day's work, Henry Ford and his young son Edsel often spent many pleasant evenings with Mr. Van Blerck when he was building his first marine engine in the backyard of his Detroit home.

During the first World War, Mr. Van Blerck built hundreds of engines for the U.S. Navy and was later selected by the Secretary of the Navy to design a special standard engine for the Navy's life boats and launches. Mr. Van Blerck is survived by two daughters and one son, Joseph Van Blerck Jr. of Freeport, Long Island, New York. He was a member of the Society of Automotive Engineers.[\[19\]](#)

Notes

[\[1\]](#) The variety of documents about Joseph Van Blerck list various dates and data about his life and his engines. It isn't possible to reconcile them all, although I have attempted to accurately cite the conflicting stories and documents.

[\[2\]](#) Engines Afloat, From Early Days to D-Day, Stan Grayson. Devereaux Books, 1999. Chapter 5, Volume I, "The Gasoline Era."

[\[3\]](#) Hackercraft. James P. Barry. Voyager Press, 2009.

[\[4\]](#) Motor Boating, Volume 12, No 4, October 1913, p. 94. 1913- In a booklet titled Review of the Racing Season of 1913, the address shown is Monroe, Michigan, location of factory.

[\[5\]](#) Monroe Michigan Observer, November 21, 1942.

[\[6\]](#) Open Exhaust, July, 1915. p. 11

[\[7\]](#) Open Exhaust, Volume 6, November, 1915

[\[8\]](#) Motor Boating Magazine, Vol. 17, No 3. March 1916, p. 40.

[\[9\] Forum Marinum, Turku, Finland](#)

[\[10\] Gas Engine Magazine](#). Max F. Homfeld, September/October 1993.

[\[11\]](#) The Brooklyn Daily Eagle (Brooklyn, New York) · Wed, Sep 7, 1949 · Page 21

[\[12\]](#) Motor Boating Magazine, February, 1917. Volume 19, No. 2, p. 46. 1918. A 1918 Catalog shows the company address as 50 East 42nd Street, New York City, rather than Detroit or Monroe

[\[13\] Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory 1921-1922](#)

[\[14\]](#) [14] [Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory 1921-1922](#)

[\[15\]](#) Motor boat Magazine, January 1, 1921, Volume 18, part I, page 52

[\[16\]](#) Power boating, Volume 23, January 1, 1921, p. 62; Power boating. Volume 23, p. 62. September 1921

[\[17\]](#) Motor Boat Magazine, The Trade, June 25, 1922, p.40

[\[18\]](#) New York Times, July 8, 1974. Joseph Van Blerck Jr. Is Dead; Set Many Speedboat Records[\[19\]](#) Joseph Van Blerck Sr. Obituary in Motorboating – N.D. , October 1949, p. 77
Pinney Dock, 1998

Pinney Dock



Pinney Dock Back in the Day

Pinney Dock 2023

Specifications: 310 acres located on Lake Erie Storage Capacity: 200 acres of open storage (seven million tons) 400,000 sq. ft. of warehouse space 7,500 NT of bulk cargo silo storage

Commodities Handled: Iron Ore, Limestone, Salt, Fertilizer, Pig Iron, Steel, various Bulk Commodities and General Cargoes

Access: Marine service via three fully dredged slips and six docks totaling 15,000 linear feet of vessel berth space (28' draft) Accessible by Lake Erie; Highway access from Ohio SR11, Interstate 90 and Ohio Turnpike; Rail access from Norfolk Southern and CSX Terminal Services: Loading and Unloading Services by Vessel, Tank Truck and Tank Car Approximately 49,000 Linear Feet of Rail Trackage Available Unit Train

Capabilities Terminal Address 1149 East Fifth Street Ashtabula, OH 44005-0041 440-964-7186 Business Address One Terminal Road Carteret, NJ 07008 732-541-5161.

Kinder Morgan provides energy, transportation, and storage services in a safe, efficient, and environmentally responsible manner for the benefit of people, communities, and businesses. Delivering Energy to Improve Lives and Create a better world.

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