

# WARTIME SHIPBUILDING

**1941-1945** Portland shipyards employed 21,000 IBEW Local 48 electricians, one-third women and minorities. Three “dues windows” open 24/7 accommodated members’ shift schedules. They worked 60-hour weeks, alongside 100,000 welders and riggers in the six shipyards, including the three largest built by Henry J. Kaiser on Swan Island, St. Johns and Vancouver.

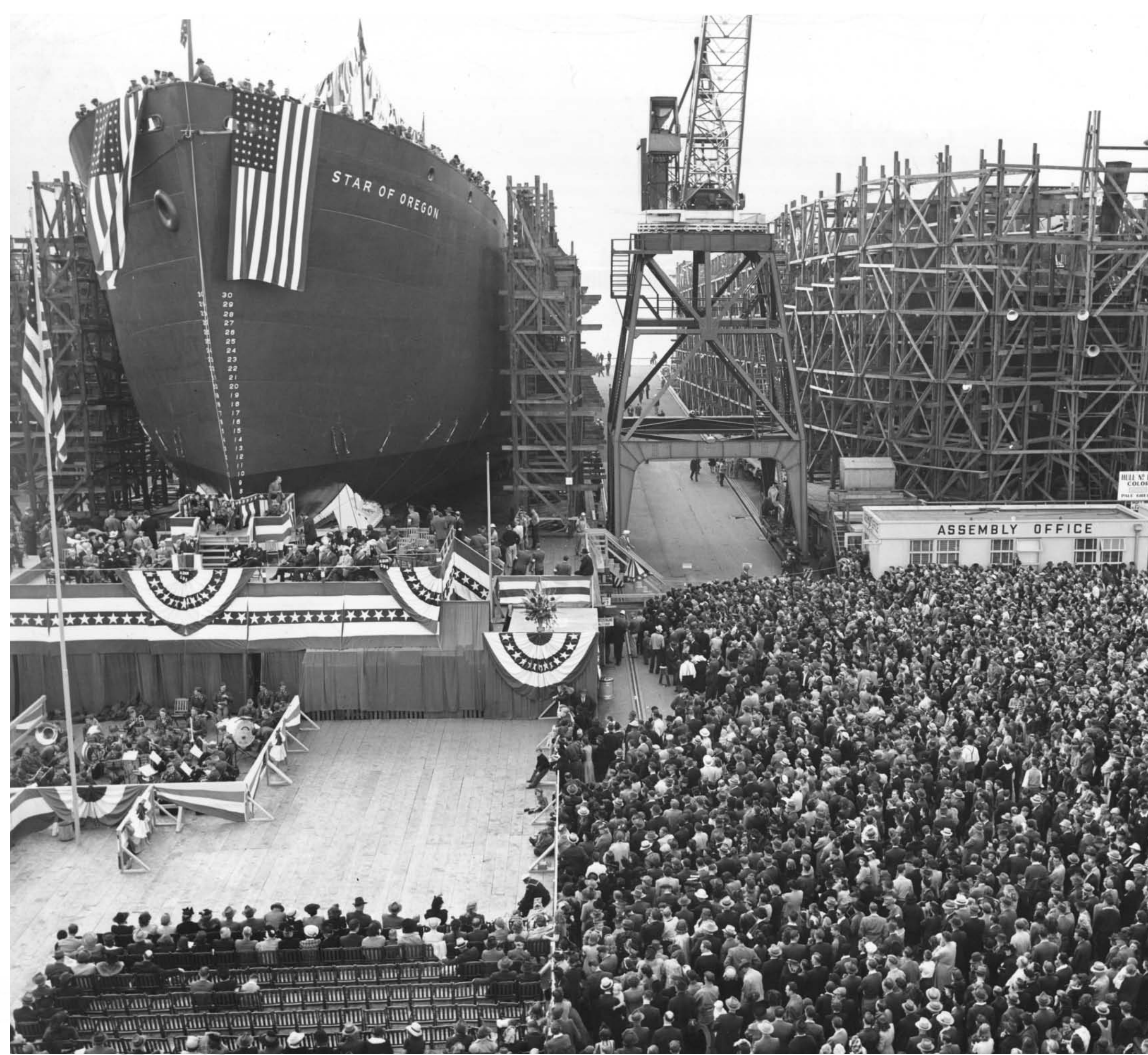
They wired gun fire-controls, rigged aircraft catapults, and equipped for war 1,737 Liberty Ships, T-2 tankers, baby “flat-top” aircraft carriers, attack transports, troop ships and landing craft. At nights, apprentices learned Ohm’s Law, and to unplug power before making connections. Promotion from trainee to apprentice to journeyman increased pay from \$.95 an hour to \$1.10, then \$1.20.

**MAY 13, 1949** After years of inconsistent affiliation since 1911, contractors led by R.C. Kenney, president, S.I. Jaggar, W.R. Grasley, F.E. Webb and Lawrence Rogers, association manager, formed the Oregon-Columbia Chapter of NECA. Early stalwarts and the year they joined NECA would include W.R. Grasley, 1933, A.R. Johnson Electric, 1939, McCoy Electric, 1945, EC Company, 1946, Friberg Electric, 1947, Christenson Electric, 1950, Cascade Electric, 1950, Sirianni Electric, 1950, Adams Electric, 1951, and Graham Electric, 1952.

**1944** NECA/IBEW Local 48 negotiated contracts involving pay, benefits, education and core values in a “harmonious” way that other IBEW locals were urged to consider in this letter published in the October 1944 issue of the IBEW’s national magazine:

*“With an announced theme of mutual interest, it was easy to keep on the beam, everything was ‘laid on the table, in the open,’ and the meetings were the most harmonious, constructive and downright enjoyable that this guy ever attended. The group hopes to eventually establish a labor-management committee . . . . Try it, youse (sic) guys; it may work for you if your bosses are also human.”*

J.A. Erwin  
Press Secretary, Local 48  
The Journal of Electrical Workers and Operators



The launching ceremony on September 27, 1941, of the 441-foot Star of Oregon Liberty Ship at Henry Kaiser’s shipyard in St. Johns presaged the United States’ entry into World War II two months later, and the subsequent hiring of 21,000 IBEW Local 48 marine electricians. The war would make it the largest such local in the nation.



Henry J. Kaiser’s three Portland-area shipyards were “assembly line” operations comprising ships in varying stages of completion from keel block to finished hull at the moment of launching.



In this 1944 photo, an electrical maintenance crew comprised of 29 members of IBEW Local 48, were still smiling even though they had just worked together without a vacation since the summer of 1942.

**1946** Shipyards closed. Forest products boomed. Howard Vollum and Jack Murdock planted the seed of Oregon’s Silicon Forest with their founding of Tektronix. The future beckoned.

**MARCH 1948** IBEW International reorganized Local 48 and appointed H.H. “Hub” Harrison business manager and financial secretary until the next elections, at which time he won the position. He would serve Local 48 until his retirement in 1962.

**1949** Total annual wage & fringe benefits \$3,930,116. 2012- Total annual wage & fringe benefits \$362,336,383.