

UNION WHARF
Taylor Street End
Port Townsend
Jefferson County
Washington

HABS No. WA-~~137~~
229

HABS
WASH
16-PORTO,
12-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Columbia Cascades Support Office
National Park Service
909 First Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98104

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

HABS
WASH
16 - PORT TOWNSEND
12 -

UNION WHARF

HABS No. WA-~~137~~
229

- Location: South end of Taylor Street, one block off Highway 20, on Port Townsend Bay, Quimper Peninsula, Jefferson County, Port Townsend, Washington.
- Present Owners: Jefferson County owns the structure, the city of Port Townsend owns the access, and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) owns the seabed.
- Present Use: None - the site remains a condemned structure.
- Significance: The Union Wharf was originally owned by the first incorporated company in the Washington Territory, the Union Dock Company. Constructed in 1867, it was the largest and most successful wharf to serve the city of Port Townsend. In addition to providing moorage to great steam ships of the past, Union Wharf supported saloons and many business ventures that covered a period of 114 years (dating to 1981 when the structure was condemned).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** According to historian Rod Freeman, Jefferson County Historical Society, "Captain Henry Tibbals Sr. procured a charter to build Union Wharf in 1865 through his government connection." ("Union Wharf 1994: Relic of a Port Town."). In The City of Dreams by Peter Simpson, it states that the original wharf was built by Henry Tibbal, Sr. in 1867.
2. **Architect:** Not known.
3. **Original and Subsequent owners:** The original owner was the Union Dock Company, owned by Captain H.L. Tibbals Sr., L.B. Hasting Sr. and H.H. Hibbard. Harry Tibbals, Captain Tibbals' son, bought out the owners and took over management in 1882. The Union Wharf sold to the Puget Sound Navigation Company and the Black Ball Line in 1929. In 1973, the wharf was sold to the Union Wharf Corporation, owned by Terry Sommers and Ralph Watson. From here the wharf was repossessed by the IRS for back taxes in 1983. Consequently, it sold at an auction to John Pickett's Service Activities Corp. who were foreclosed on in 1984. Currently, the Union Wharf is owned by three different government entities: Jefferson County owns the structure, the City of Port Townsend owns the access, and the seabed is owned by the Department of Natural Resources.

4. **Original and subsequent occupants:** Union Wharf's original occupant was the Union Dock Company. The principal interest in operations was controlled by H. L. Tibbals, Sr. Throughout the early years, several saloons were housed on the wharf. Among them were the Blue Light Saloon, the Eureka Saloon and a few years later the Gold Room Saloon. Additional saloons that were later located on the wharf were the Bank Exchange Saloon, The Whalesmen's Arms and the Pacific, which was originally owned by George Trenholm. The Pacific Saloon was established in the late 1880s. In the 1870s the B.S. Miller Jewelry, Music Emporium, People's Market, and the Customs House were established. The Pacific Coast Steamship Company, whose main agents were H.L. Tibbals Sr. and his son Harry. Garfield's Launches also occupied the dock. Overall, during the boom years when activity on the wharf peaked, businesses that occupied the wharf were founded, bought, and sold overnight.

In 1882, Henry "Harry" Tibbals Jr. took ownership and became the out right owner. A newsstand was established on the wharf in 1905, Norby and With Hardware opened in January 1907. Then in 1911, a canning factory was installed on the wharf. Operations at the Customs House were shut down in 1913 when its offices were transferred to Seattle. During this period WWI was in progress, Washington went dry and all the saloons that occupied the wharf shut down. The Women's Christian Temperance Union opened the "Hostess House" on the Union Wharf in 1918. The Thompson Steamboat Co. Inc. of Seattle also operated from the dock. Furthermore, during the Tibbals Era, the Puget Sound Navigation Company occupied the wharf and began running ferry service from it in 1925.

In 1929, the Union Wharf sold to the Puget Sound Navigation Co., which operated Black Ball ferries. At this time, Greenwood Printery, Europe Cafe, and Jefferson Fish Market occupied the wharf, and the Quality Fish Market opened. In 1936, Union Wharf was identified as an airway weather station and reported wind speed and direction three times daily to Boeing Field, in Seattle. For many years Black Ball Lines ran passenger ferries and cargo shipments until December 30, 1950, when Puget Sound Navigation Co. sold the Black Ball ferry system to the state. Black Ball finally liquidated the wharf in 1973. Next the wharf sold to the Union Wharf Corporation, which was owned by Terry Sommers and Ralph Watson, who occupied the property till 1981 when it was condemned.

5. **Builders, Contractor, Suppliers:** Through his government connections, Captain Henry Tibbals procured a charter to build Union Wharf in 1865. A homemade pile-driver and timbers from the surrounding area were used.
6. **Original plans and construction:** Representatives from the City of Port Townsend have not been able to locate any original drawings or plans for

construction of the wharf. Because of the condition of the structure and safety considerations, it was not possible to undertake a complete set of measured drawings.

7. **Alterations and additions:** Constructed in 1867, the original dock extended 342 feet into the harbor and was fifty-five feet wide. The wharf consisted of many wooden structures and had a corrugated-iron warehouse for commercial and maritime operations. Around 1882, Harry Tibbals expanded the facilities and brought the dock to its greatest apex as a commercial center. The steamers *Umatilla* and *City of Seattle* both rammed the dock within a year of each other and forced it to be altered. When the *City of Seattle* struck in 1904, it took out the cannon H.L. Tibbals Sr. used to welcome arriving vessels. The local paper, reported the cannon had become a troublesome nuisance anyway.

In 1925, the Puget Sound Navigation Company (PSNC) installed ferry slips on Union Wharf for ferry service. Once sold to PSNC in 1929, the wharf underwent fifteen thousand dollars of renovation. Five hundred fifty new piles were installed that required a grand total of five thousand pounds of spikes and bolts. At this time, six building were removed and a seawall was constructed. Equally important, the whole wharf was raised two feet to accommodate automobile traffic and renamed Black Ball Dock, after the Black Ball Lines.

In November 1940, the Union Wharf warehouse was completely destroyed by an arson fire. Construction of a new warehouse began in February, 1941. During the summer of 1953 the warehouse was remodeled. From this period on the wharf was not well maintained. In 1981, after passing inspection in the summer of 1980, a semi-truck fell through the dock leaving a large hole. The wharf was condemned at this time and the hole remains unrepaired.

B. Historical Context:

Union Wharf proved to be the heart line for the young seaport of Port Townsend (over the years the “h” was dropped). When Port Townsend was established in 1851, it became one of the primary ports of the Washington Territory. The U.S. Customs headquarters moved to Port Townsend in 1854, thus, leading to an increase in its use. Union Dock Company, the first incorporated company in the Washington Territories, established Union Wharf in 1867. The company was named in honor of the Union’s victory over the Confederacy in the recent civil war. Hence, the building of Union Wharf in 1867, was part of the great westward movement that saw the laying of the transcontinental railroads and rapid growth of countless boom towns. Union Wharf was Port Townsend’s link with that movement. Captain H.L. Tibbals, general manager of the wharf, was an agent for the Pacific Steamship Company. This helped to secure a direct link between San Francisco

and caused Port Townsend to boom. Although Captain Tibbals built many establishments in Port Townsend, none was more important or more impressive as the Union Wharf.

The life of the Union Wharf can be divided into five major Eras according to historian Rod Freeman of the Port Townsend Historical Society: first - the Henry Tibbals Sr, Era; second - the Henry "Harry" Tibbals Jr, Era; third - the Black Ball Era; fourth - the Fish Processing Era; and fifth - the Quiescent Era.

The Henry Tibbals Sr. Era lasted from 1867 to 1882 - a 15 year period. This era was considered a wild time on the wharf because Port Townsend was an unregulated sea town. Henry ran the wharf fast and loose in keeping with frontier times. Captain Tibbals was an aggressive businessman and a civic leader of the town. Accordingly, he proved to be an important "forefather" to Port Townsend.

The Henry "Harry" Tibbals Jr. Era ran for 47 years from 1882 to 1929. At the age of twenty-three, Harry bought out the owners for \$6,000 and took over management of the wharf. Harry expanded the facilities and brought the wharf to its greatest apex as a commercial center. Many respectable business were located on the wharf at this time, but there were also those that were not so respectable. Smuggling was a major activity, according to historian Rod Freeman, " a Chinese person would pay upwards to \$100 for a way into the Washington Territory." Harry probably saw the future of Union Wharf when the first automobile visited the dock in 1902. A mere twenty-three years later he had the Puget Sound Navigation Co. install ferry slips on the wharf. In addition, Harry was a civic leader and was elected mayor of Port Townsend in 1890. He presided two terms through 1892.

Major overhaul of the wharf occurred during **The Black Ball Era** that lasted from 1929 to 1973. By the summer of 1932, the wharf was torn down and rebuilt to help accommodate passenger car ferries. When completed the new dock was dedicated, along with a new paved highway which connected Port Townsend to Highway 101 at Discovery Bay. Things started out great in the early thirties despite a strike in 1933, but the depression took its toll on the number of passengers using the service. In 1939, the employees went on strike when runs to Edmonds were canceled. Soon, easy highway travel cut the demand for shipping freight by sea and the need for car ferry service declined. Black Ball suspended ferry service on March 1, 1948, after the state refused to grant a rate increase. At this time Olympic Ferries Inc. started a Port Townsend, Whidbey Island run making use of a new Keystone Harbor. On December 30, 1950, Puget Sound Navigation Co. sold the Black Ball ferry system to the state. The ferry still ran from Black Ball Dock until 1953, when the Quincy Street slip was completed. From here the Black Ball Dock continued by keeping freight runs operating.

The Fishing Era began in 1973 and lasted for eight years (until 1981). Terry Sommers and Ralph Watson, of the Union Wharf Corporation bought Black Ball Dock for \$13,000 in 1973. They changed the name back to the Union Wharf and started processing fish. In short, the Union Wharf Corp. processed everything from salmon, cod, albacore, to sea urchins and dogfish until it was condemned in 1981. In addition, during this Era Union Wharf appeared in the Hollywood movie “Cinderella Liberty.”

The Quiescent Era lasted 14 years from 1981 to 1995. Since the wharf was condemned, the ownership was passed around. After being foreclosed on twice no one bid on the dock the second time; thus Jefferson County ended up with the wharf. In October of 1986, private developers from Seattle proposed a hotel on the site; however, because the proposed wharf was larger than the existing footprint, and eel grass would be destroyed, environmentalists stopped the proposal in 1991.

So now a new era begins in 1996 with a smaller, public access dock. Although, the new wharf will not be as colorful and profitable as the past; it will benefit the community. Equally important, all who visit the wharf will learn of its rich history and the important role it played in Port Townsend’s history.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** The wharf was a functional structure made up of large wooden beams, creosote pilings, and a large wooden warehouse.
2. **Condition of fabric:** The wharf and the warehouse are both in poor condition. Grass is growing out of the wooden decking and a large hole in the dock still remains from where a semi-truck fell through. The warehouses’ roof collapsed in certain places and water stains mark the inside of the structure.

B. Description of Exterior:

The fish processing plant warehouse was a typical period structure. Cedar boards and battens made up the front facade which had a large arching top. Corrugated metal siding, painted plywood and miscellaneous wood siding made up the other three sides. A few single pane, glass windows, encased in wood, were scattered throughout. The roof was a low slopping asphalt bunt up construction.

The exterior was worn and showed many years of neglect. Large portions of the roof had collapsed, and were rotted from a leaking roof. Some rear sections of the walls had collapsed from rot as had the floor structure.

C. Description of Interior:

The plywood walls were painted with lead based paint and exposed roof framing could be viewed in the ceiling. Concrete slabs and wood decking made up the floor structure. The building was uninsulated except for the freezer section which was made up of asbestos covered foam. In general the interior is a very functional warehouse - fish processing plant.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Miscellaneous Primary Sources:

Freeman, Rob., Union Wharf 1994: Relic of a Port Town., Jefferson County Historical Society.

Jefferson County Historical Society., Museum & Library., - Early phone directories, obituary lists, early newspapers, old fire maps, files, photos, pictures, and list.

B. Bibliography:

Jefferson County Historical Society., With Pride in Heritage., Portland: Professional Publishing Printing, Inc., 1966.

Leader Publishing Co., The Port Townsend Leader., 1880-present.

McCurdy, James G., By Juan de Fuca's Strait., Portland: Bindford & Mort, 1937.

Shrader, Grahame F., The Black Ball Line., Edmonds: Edmonds Printing Co., 1980.

Simpson, Peter., City of Dreams., Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1986.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was prepared by Adam Logue, 1996 summer engineering intern for the city of Port Townsend. The HABS Level 1 documentation was completed prior to the demolition of the Union Wharf, which will be replaced by a smaller dock for general public use. All photographs were taken by Paul Boyer, and prints of old photos were obtained from the Jefferson County Historical Society in Port Townsend, Washington. The architectural section was prepared with the help of Bob Little, of Little & Little Construction, because of his opportunity to briefly view the site and his architectural knowledge. In addition, editing and proofreading was done by was done by Diana Logue.