

BALFOUR, GUTHRIE & COMPANY WAREHOUSE  
(Puget Sound Freight Warehouse)  
700 Block of Dock Street on the Foss Waterway  
Tacoma  
Pierce County  
Washington

HAER WA-183  
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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

**HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD**  
**BALFOUR, GUTHRIE & COMPANY WAREHOUSE**  
**(Puget Sound Freight Warehouse)**

**HAER No. WA-183**

- Location:** 700 Block of Dock Street on the Foss Waterway, Tacoma, Pierce County, Washington
- The Balfour, Guthrie & Company Warehouse is located at latitude: 47.25306, longitude: -122.44306. There is no restriction on the release of its location to the public.
- Date of Construction:** 1900
- Builder:** Northern Pacific Railway
- Original Owner/Use:** Balfour, Guthrie & Company leased the warehouse from the Northern Pacific Railway. The company used the building for grain storage and as a transfer dock.
- Present Owner/Use:** Foss Waterway Development Authority currently owns the building, which has been converted into The Working Waterfront Maritime Museum.
- Significance:** The Balfour, Guthrie & Company Warehouse was originally built as part of a “mile-long” complex of warehouses that held for transfer thousands of tons of sacked wheat shipped by railroad from fields in eastern Washington. The complex was the last stop in the movement of grain from the field to rail and finally to sea-going ships via the Puget Sound.
- Description:** As originally constructed, the warehouse was approximately 125' wide x 1,100' long and encompassed 137,500 square feet. The structure was built of heavy timber posts, beams, and trusses. Tracks with a capacity of twenty-three cars serviced the landside of the building, delivering grain for storage. A floating slip on the waterside of the warehouse allowed cargo to be loaded or offloaded from steamers, regardless of the tide.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Welford Beaton, ed., *Frank Waterhouse & Company's Pacific Ports*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Seattle, Frank Waterhouse & Company, 1918), pp. 371-372.

**History:**

The Northern Pacific Railway established its western terminus in Tacoma in the early 1870s. The construction of the railroad and the sheltered harbor allowed Tacoma to soon rival Portland as the West Coast's preeminent grain port. The Northwestern Improvement Company, a subsidiary of the Northern Pacific Railway, built a complex of warehouses that stretched for a mile along the Foss Waterway. Balfour, Guthrie & Company, one of Portland's largest wheat shippers, leased one of the warehouses in this "mile-long" complex. In fact, the company sent the first loads of grain to Tacoma in 1881.<sup>2</sup> Grain shipping was an important part of the city's economy, as evidenced in "The Grain Fleet" that serviced the harbor, but coal and lumber shipping also took place. A list of the other companies that were part of the complex of docks and warehouses in 1918 reveals the city's economic base. The complex included Tacoma Smelting Company, various lumber companies like North End Lumber Company and Defiance Lumber Company, Tacoma Mill Company, flour mills like Puget Sound Flouring Mill Company, grain companies like Tacoma Grain Company, Pacific Coast & Coal Company, International Fisheries Company, and the Milwaukee Railway.<sup>3</sup>

The warehouse was restored in 2008 and converted into interpretive use as The Working Waterfront Maritime Museum. The project is part of the Foss Waterway Development Authorities plan to improve the waterfront and encourage business and recreational uses.

**Sources:**

Beaton, Welford, ed. *Frank Waterhouse & Company's Pacific Ports*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Seattle: Frank Waterhouse & Company, 1918.

"Big Freighters for Ocean Line." *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 11, 1911, p. 2.

*Tacoma: The Western Terminus of the Northern Pacific Railroad*. Tacoma: The Ledger Steam Book and Job Printing House, 1885; reprint, Seattle: Facsimile Reproduction, The Shore Book Store, Seattle, Washington, 1975.

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to its agricultural holdings, the company acted as agents for the Harrison Line of steamers. "Big Freighters for Ocean Line," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 11, 1911, p. 2, reported that the company would be operating freight steamers through the Panama Canal between the West Coast and Europe.

<sup>3</sup> For a description of other buildings included in the complex, see Beaton, pp. 369-373. See also Robert Weinstein, *Tall Ships on Puget Sound* (self published, 1978), and *Tacoma: The Western Terminus of the Northern Pacific Railroad* (Tacoma: The Ledger Steam Book and Job Printing House, 1885; reprint, Seattle: Facsimile Reproduction, The Shore Book Store, Seattle, Washington, 1975).

Weinstein, Robert. *Tall Ships on Puget Sound*. Self published, 1978.

**Project**

**Information:**

The Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) is part of Heritage Documentation Programs, a division of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Richard O'Connor, Manager. The warehouse was documented as part of the HAER Maritime Program, coordinated by Todd Croteau.