

GIG HARBOR NET SHEDS, GILICH NET SHED
(Blair - Moller Net Shed)
3802 Harborview Drive
Gig Harbor
Pierce County
Washington

HAER WA-186-A
HAER WA-186-A

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

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HAER No. WA-186-A

Location: 3802 Harborview Drive, Gig Harbor, Pierce County, Washington

UTM Coordinates: 10, 531048.76 E, 5242485.68 N
The coordinate represents the approximate center of the building. It was derived from Google Earth Pro v5 on November 12, 2010. The imagery dates from June 12, 2010.

Present Owners: Andrew (Andy) Blair and Richard (Dick) Moller

Present Use: Net and tool storage, workshop, net repair, social gathering place

Significance: The seventeen extant net sheds in Gig Harbor, Washington, are significant as remnants of the community's cultural heritage and economic development. Families, mostly of Croatian ancestry, have passed down the net sheds and fishing vessels for several generations. Many of the extant net sheds are an integral part of successful commercial fishing operations and are used for storing and mending fishing nets as well as repairing the equipment used for commercial vessels. Except for the remaining commercial fishing boats in the harbor, the net sheds are the only surviving architectural connection between the community and what was once one of the most successful fishing fleets on the West Coast.

Historian: Shelly Leavens, summer 2009

Project Information: The City of Gig Harbor has taken steps to provide incentives for property owners who retain historic net sheds, and in 2006, conducted a general survey of the seventeen remaining structures lining the harbor's waterfront. In 2008, Mildred Andrews of the Andrews Group completed an independent survey of Gig Harbor's historic downtown. The city secured grant funds from the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation to document the net sheds with the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), a division of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, in 2009. Todd Croteau, HAER Maritime Program, supervised the documentation team, which consisted of Brian Diveley and Shelly Leavens, both Sally Kress Tompkins Maritime Documentation Interns. A survey team

of students from Bates Technical College in Tacoma, Washington, also lent support to the documentation effort. The documentation team's liaison to the net shed owners is the City of Gig Harbor's Special Projects Coordinator, Lita Dawn Stanton.

The net sheds documented as part of the Gig Harbor Net Shed survey include the following:

Gig Harbor Net Sheds	HAER No. WA-186
Gilich Net Shed	HAER No. WA-186-A
Morin Net Shed	HAER No. WA-186-B
Bujacich Net Shed	HAER No. WA-186-C
Ivanovich Net Shed	HAER No. WA-186-D
Ancich-Tarabochia Net Shed	HAER No. WA-186-E
Ancich Net Shed	HAER No. WA-186-F
Castelan-Jerkovich Net Shed	HAER No. WA-186-G
Puratich Net Shed	HAER No. WA-186-H
Stanich Net Shed	HAER No. WA-186-I
Gilich Net Shed	HAER No. WA-186-J
Novak Net Shed	HAER No. WA-186-K
Ross Net Shed	HAER No. WA-186-L
Skansie Brothers Net Shed	HAER No. WA-186-M
Babich Net Shed (Rickard)	HAER No. WA-186-N
Babich Net Shed (Pont)	HAER No. WA-186-O
Skansie Net Shed	HAER No. WA-186-P
Mojean Net Shed	HAER No. WA-186-Q

Part I. Historical Information

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of Construction:** 1933
2. **Architect/Engineer:** Unknown
3. **Builder/Contractor/Supplier:** Unknown
4. **Original Plans:** None found
5. **Alterations and Additions:** Few alterations have been made to the original structure. Additions prior to the purchase of the building by Andrew Blair and Richard Moller in 2000 appear to be minimal and include a new interior door and possibly windows. Richard Moller replaced several rotten planks in the dock with new beams in 2000. He added new low floats that extend into the harbor and are connected to the shed via ramp from 2003-2004. Moller and Blair are interested in eventually replacing the roof and perhaps adding a new walkway along the south/west side of the shed.

B. Historical Context: Tony Gilich arrived from Croatia in 1916 and married one of Josephine and John Novak's daughters. Josephine was a member of the Puyallup tribe and eventually became a tribal elder while John was one of the original settlers. Tony Gilich and his wife had a son, Don, in 1920. Tony kept his fishing nets at the Novak family net shed (no longer standing) and moored his boat at the Union Oil Dock until he built this shed in 1933. According to Don, the lumber used to build the shed was salvaged from the local "Silver Glide" dance hall.

Tony passed the shed on to his son Don, who kept the vessel *Victory* moored there for many years. According to current owner Richard Moller, Don seldom used the net shed. In the late 1990s, Don sold the property to attorney John Paglia, who bought it as an investment and moored his yacht at the dock. Paglia owned the property until his death. Blair and Moller purchased it from his estate in 2000.

Part II. Structural/Design Information

A. General Description: The Gilich Net Shed property is 32'-6" x 95'-2", while the building itself measures 28'-9" x 45'-2", encompassing approximately

1,305 square feet. The 1982 Pierce County Cultural Resource Survey described the structure as: “A one and one half story wood frame building with a gable roof and exposed rafter tails. Windows are one over one double hung and single pane casement. The building, as well as a dock area on the water side, rests on pilings.”¹ A 2009 site visit confirmed the net shed basically looks as it did in 1982. A walkway leads from Harborview Drive to the net shed and dock. On the east face of the building are large doors that slide along upper rails. The main, interior net shed storage and work space has open middle that was used for mending and loading nets, while the perimeter is lined with work benches equipped with tools and storage shelving. The rafters are used to store nets, long pieces of wood, and other large pieces of fishing gear. An east-facing dock extends from the front of the shed for loading and unloading nets to vessels. At the end of this dock a ramp leads to a low float where Moller and Blair keep their fishing vessels as well as lease moorage to other fishermen. The north side of the shed has a covered walkway with a railing, revealing the exposed rafter tails of the gabled roof.

1. Character: The Gilich Net Shed is intact and retains its original character.

2. Condition of Fabric: Good

B. Site Information: The Blair-Moller parcel (3802 Harborview Drive) occupies 400’ of waterfront. A use area extending into the harbor from the shed is leased from the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and contains the floats and pilings used to moor fishing vessels. The Gilich residence, which was originally located directly upland from the net shed, has been demolished.

The Morin (Lovrovich) Net Shed (see HAER No. WA-186-B) is located on the adjacent parcel to the south. The harbor parcel to the north is void of structures.

Part III: Operations and Processes

A. Operations: The Gilich Net Shed was used in commercial fishing operations, specifically purse seining, and for storage and repair. A purse seine is a large net hauled out by a smaller boat or “skiff” to form a large circle. Fishermen pull the bottom of the netting, “pursing” it closed to capture schools of fish. Once the net is pulled aboard by a “power block” or “reel,” the final length of net full of fish is pulled on-board. A smaller “brailing” net may also be used to scoop the catch and load it into the vessel’s hatch. A cannery boat or “tender” typically transfers the

¹ Caroline Gallicci, “Net Shed (PC-133-4a),” Pierce County Cultural Resource Survey, 1982.

fish to the cannery. Historically, fishermen of Gig Harbor have used this method to catch salmon, sardine, and herring.

In the 1930s and 1940s, while the Gilich Net Shed was in high use, fishermen tarred their cotton seine nets in order to maintain the shape and prevent rotting. The community had a large vat on the site of the current Millville Marina (see HAER No. WA-186-G) where fishermen would soak netting in hot tar, wring the netting in rollers, stack the netting in the back of trucks, and transport them to a nearby field to be spread out. As the nets dried, the crew would take the net strips and tear them apart to prevent the pieces from sticking together. Typically, a crew would tar and mend nets every two to three months prior to leaving to fish as part of overall preparations. Cotton nets required more mending and patching than nylon nets, which did not come into use until the early 1950s.

B. Machines: A large Puretic power block, invented by Croatian fisherman Mario Puratić and patented in 1953, is affixed to the front of the building. The power block was used to haul and manage nets. An article originally published in *Fishing News International* noted the Puretic power block “has mechanized the hauling of nets in the tuna, anchovy, sardine, herring, menhaden, pilchard, mackerel and salmon fisheries” and had been used on a number of vessel types. This power block was a “free-swinging, mechanically-powered, V-shaped pulley with a rubber-coated sheave” into which a net could be fed. This invention “became the linchpin in the mechanization of purse seining” and “combined with fluid hydraulic power technology and new large, synthetic nets, it changed the whole character of purse seine fishing.”²

C. Workers: Moller and Blair currently own and work around the net shed property equally. When Moller is out fishing, Blair is using the shed and docks, and vice versa.

Crews of five men generally operate each purse seiner. There are two purse seiners (one belonging to each owner) operating off of the Blair-Moller dock and utilizing the work space of the net shed.

D. Associated Vessels: Vessels used in conjunction with this net shed include the following:

Tony Gilich: *Indiana*

Tony and Don Gilich: purse seiner *Victory*, built in Tacoma in 1920

Andy Blair: purse seiner *New Oregon*, 1928

² “MARCO, the Puretic Power Bock, and Purse Seining,” originally published in *Fishing News International* and available from http://www.marcoglobal.com/pdf/History_MARCO_FNI.pdf, accessed July 2010.

Dick Moller: purse seiner *Island Queen*, built in Seattle in 1960 and acquired by Moller in 1990.

Part IV: Sources of Information

A. Primary Sources

Moller, Dick. Interview by Shelly Leavens, June 19, 2009. (Copy in field records accompanying this documentation)

Gilich, Don. Interview, October 27, 2009.

B. Secondary Sources

Ancich-Stanton, Lita Dawn. "Gig Harbor Net Sheds Survey." City of Gig Harbor, 2006.

Andrews, Mildred. "Andrews Group Report." The Andrews Group, 2008.

Gallicci, Caroline. "Net Shed (PC-133-4a)." Pierce County Cultural Resource Survey, 1982.

Harbor History Museum photo archives, accessed June 2009.

Lepow, Hannah. "Washington's Fishing Sheds Get Boost." National Trust for Historic Preservation, July 8, 2008. Available at <http://www.preservationnation.org/magazine/2008>, accessed June 2, 2009.

"Living on the Edge: Most Endangered Historic Properties List – 2008." Washington Trust for Historic Preservation, 2008.

"MARCO, the Puretic Power Block, and Purse Seining." Originally published in *Fishing News International*, available at http://www.marcoglobal.com/pdf/History_Marco_FNI.pdf, accessed July 2010.

C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated

Sharon Eckman, daughter of Don Gilich, could be interviewed. She is in possession of all the genealogical research for the family.

ADDENDUM TO:
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