

Gig Harbor Net Sheds, Babich Net Shed  
(Üickard Net Shed)  
2915 Harborview Drive  
Gig Harbor  
Pierce County  
Washington

HAER WA-186-N  
*HAER WA-186-N*

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

### GIG HARBOR NET SHEDS, BABICH NET SHED (Rickard Net Shed)

HAER No. WA-186-N

**Location:** 2915 Harborview Drive, Gig Harbor, Pierce County, Washington

**UTM Coordinates:** 10, 531906.97 E, 5241800.38 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 Owner:** Wes Rickard, Land and Timber Investment Co.

**Present Use:** Net and tool storage, workshop, general storage

**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, 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 extant 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.

Other 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:** 1938
- 2. Architect/Engineer:** Unknown
- 3. Builder/Contractor/Supplier:** Spiro Babich, Vince Skansie, and others from the community
- 4. Original Plans:** None found
- 5. Alterations and Additions:** Wes Rickard has done general maintenance during his thirty-seven-year ownership of the property. This has included replacing the original roof with new shingles and adding a ramp and low float for moorage in the 1970s. He replaced the low float in 2005. Most recently, Randy Babich and Wes Rickard completed a general study of the pilings supporting both net sheds, and it was determined that eight of the pilings needed replacement. Rickard has not replaced the pilings as of the writing of this report in 2009.

**B. Historical Context:** The Babich family is related matrilineally to the original settlers of Gig Harbor, the Samuel Jerisch family, who emigrated from Croatia in 1869. Spiro Babich (grandfather of Randy Babich) was born in Croatia and immigrated to the United States in 1910.

The entire Babich property historically consisted of a house, a garage, two net sheds, associated docks, and waterfront land. Spiro Babich and his wife Julia (Skansie) purchased the property and built the house in 1934. Four years later, Babich built the shed and dock. The second shed was built in 1941. Spiro's original Craftsman-style home still stands upland from the shed.

Spiro Babich fished for salmon and anchovies commercially from age 20 until his death in 1957 at the age of 67. Sardines are harvested in the winter and salmon in the summer, so his family lived in both Gig Harbor and California.

Spiro left the family residence and original northern net shed (the focus of this documentation) to his son Paul and the newer southern net shed to his son Peter (see HAER No. WA-186-O). Paul Babich started fishing with his father as a teenager, mostly in the San Juan Islands.

The Babich family linkages to the fishing community are quite strong. Brothers Nick, Andy, and Mike Babich are Peter Babich's nephews, and Joe and Bob

Puratich are his second cousins. All of these men are currently operating commercial purse seiners.

Wes Rickard bought the Babich net shed from Paul in 1971-1972, including the Babich family home. Rickard now has his business based in the home. Currently, the owner of a commercial herring vessel leases the net shed dock space from Rickard and keeps nets on the dock. In this sense, the outside dock space is still being used traditionally.

## **Part II. Structural/Design Information**

**A. General Description:** The Babich Net Shed is over 1,600 square feet. The property is 26'-6" wide x 115'-7" long, and the building is 23'-3" wide x 71'-9" long. A path leads from Harborview Drive along the south side of the house to the net sheds, which are located side-by-side, and to the dock. The net shed is a wood frame building with a gable roof that sits on pilings. The exposed stringers are rough cut, old growth Douglas fir from Gig Harbor. No major modifications have been made to the original frame. Six-light casement windows punctuate the walls. The north side of the shed has a partially covered walkway, which reveals the exposed rafter tails of the gable roof. The end of the shed facing the water is open. The open interior of the net shed was used for storage and work space, with work benches and tools remaining. A large band saw is also still housed in the shed.

An east-facing dock extends from the front of shed and is used for loading and unloading nets to vessels. The exposed portion of the dock is currently still in use as a storage place for anchovy nets. At the end of the dock, a ramp leads to a low float with leased vessel moorage.

A ramp on the north end of the shed's dock extends to a low float where multiple vessels are moored. A concrete bulkhead designed and built by Spiro Babich separates the sloped yard of the home from the tidelands. There was once a gas pump on the property with a 500-gallon tank, as well as apple, pear, and cherry trees.

One of the most unique aspects of both the Babich net sheds is their orientation along the harbor. The sheds are located in an area of the tidal zone that allows boats to be moored directly at the associated docks at all times.

- 1. Character:** The Babich Net Shed retains much of its original character and remains as a typical example of a vernacular Gig Harbor net shed.
- 2. Condition of Fabric:** The building is in good condition.

**B. Site Layout:** The Babich Net Shed is bordered to the south by the second Babich Net Shed (see HAER No. WA-186-O) and to the north by 400' of shoreline in front of the original Babich family home. The two Babich net sheds lie on the south end of Gig Harbor. This shed is accessible via a walkway on the side of the building leading to the open and covered sections of the dock.

### Part III. Operation and Processes

**A. Operations:** The Babich 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. Sometimes a smaller “brailing” net is used to scoop the catch and load it into the vessel’s hatch. A cannery boat or “tender” typically transfers the fish to the cannery. Historically, fishermen of Gig Harbor have used this method to catch salmon, sardine, and herring.

In the 1930s and 1940s, fishermen tarred their cotton seine nets in order to maintain the shape and prevent rotting. The community had a large vat at the current location of the Millville Marina (see HAER No. WA-186-G) where fishermen would soak netting in hot tar, wring it in rollers, stack the netting in the back of trucks, and transport it 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.

Spiro Babich owned and fished only wooden boats, which required two-and-a-half months of maintenance per year. He would haul the vessels out onto a wooden grid he built in front of the house, along the tide line. Babich would bring the vessel in at high tide so the bow was within 15' of the concrete bulkhead. Sister piles to the north would hold the boat in place. Spiro would do his own bottom work in late May to early June during the minus tides and before the approaching fishing season. He last used the grid in 1988, but its remains can be seen underwater just at the tidelands.

**B. Workers:** A crew of five men generally operated each purse seiner, though before the advent of nylon nets (post-World War II) and the power block (1954), seining crews were usually made up of eight to ten men.

**C. Associated Vessels:** The following vessels were associated with this net shed:

Spiro Babich: operated nineteen purse seine fishing vessels in his lifetime. His first boat was the *Ranger* and his last two were the *Julia B* and *Invincible*. Other boats included the sardine seiner *Liberator* and the purse seiner *Crusader*. During 1937 and 1938, Spiro had two seiners, one for sardine fishing in California and one for salmon fishing in the Puget Sound. He diversified to sardine fishing in the 1930s and bought a 92' vessel.

Peter Babich: inherited the purse seiner *Julia B*. When Alaska gained statehood in 1959, the length regulations for commercial purse seine boats decreased from a 68' maximum to a 58' maximum. As a result, Peter sold the *Julia B* in 1960 and purchased the shorter purse seiner *Pacific Maid*. He retired and sold the boat in 1988 at the age of 65.

Paul Babich: inherited the purse seiner *Invincible*

Randy Babich: bought the purse seiner *Paragon* in 1982

#### **Part IV. Sources of Information**

##### **A. Primary Sources**

Babich, Randy. Interview with Shelly Leavens, June 25, 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-133-14a)." 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.

##### **C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated**

Interviews could be conducted with Joseph Pont and Wes Rickard.

ADDENDUM TO:  
GIG HARBOR NET SHEDS, BABICH NET SHED  
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(Paul Babich Net Shed)  
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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

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