

Gig Harbor Net Sheds, Stanich Net Shed
(Ellsworth Net Shed)
8205 Dorotich Street
Gig Harbor
Pierce County
Washington

HAER WA-186-I
HAER WA-186-I

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, STANICH NET SHED (Ellsworth Net Shed)

HAER No. WA-186-I

- Location:** 8205 Dorotich Street, Gig Harbor, Pierce County, Washington
- UTM Coordinates:** 10, 531474.33 E, 5242313.70 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:** Robert Ellsworth
- Present Use:** Partitioned for leased office space, leased art studio space, and the owner's 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 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.

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:** ca. 1940s (replaced the original shed dating to 1918)
- 2. Architect/Engineer:** Unknown
- 3. Builder/Contractor/Supplier:** Martin, John, and Tony Stanich
- 4. Original Plans:** None found
- 5. Alterations and Additions:** The current owner, Robert Ellsworth, has reportedly invested approximately \$350,000 since 1986 in renovations, upkeep, and expansion of the original property. He expects to continue to invest in the property in the future since the pilings and dock need periodic repair.

From 1990-1992, the floats and pilings were renovated and additional ones were installed. New decking and cross timbers were also added. Ellsworth discovered that the lumber used in the original structure was in full dimensional sizes, he had new timbers specially cut at a mill in Enumclaw rather than convert the entire building. A garage door was added on the south-facing side of the shed, and the entire building was commercially rewired. Ellsworth described the original wiring as the knob and tube type with ceramic insulators and varnished linen insulation. He also discovered glass fuses and a one-wire circuit from the street. Ellsworth noted in an interview that the dock had no electricity until the 1930s.

At some point after 1992, the shop area was partitioned into an office space for rental. The office was located in the front of the shed facing the harbor. It is now leased by an architect, while Ellsworth continues to use the back portion of the shed for personal storage.

In 1994, Dorotich Street was paved leading to the shed, and a curb and new sidewalks were installed.

The corrugated, galvanized tin roof was replaced in 2008.

B. Historical Context: Martin and Katherine Stanich, both originally from Dubrovnik, Croatia, met and married in Astoria, Oregon, before moving to Gig Harbor in 1910 with their four children: Lena and Mary (twins), Tony, and John. Their last child, Ann, was born in Gig Harbor in 1915. Martin Stanich and his

friend, Joe Morgan, built the family home and a net shed on the waterfront on Dorotich Avenue. The net shed was built from 1915 to 1918, and there was a dock for Martin's first purse seiner, the *Welcome*, which was built in 1913 by Barbare Shipyard in Tacoma. The family lived in a tent during the construction of the home and net shed. The original net shed was a simple wood structure on pilings with a gable roof. The interior space consisted of one large room used to store the nets, cork, and gear for the *Welcome*. Two planks bridged the net shed to the land. To the left of the entrance was a small outhouse. The first *Welcome* was sold in 1920 after the second *Welcome* was built at the Skansie Shipyard that same year.

Martin believed in diversifying his business, so he purchased the Strout property adjacent to his home in 1924. The property had been home to the St. Peter's Bros. Grocery, which burned down, and was replaced by the Stanich Grocery Store. This store served the commercial fleet by supplying groceries on credit at the beginning of each busy fishing season. Along with his sons, Tony and John, Martin built the second net shed on the waterfront in the 1940s immediately to the south of the original one, which had been demolished. The Stanich family received assistance from their family and community members in the construction of the new shed. John and Tony later added a simple platform float for improved access to their boats at low tide. The new shed provided additional moorage for local fishing vessels because it extended further out into the harbor and had a larger dock.

As was customary in Croatian fishing families, the older son typically took over the business. Following this custom, the fishing boat and original house were passed to John while Tony inherited the net shed, dock, and store. Tony married Adelaid Hubmann and built their home on the lot between the family home and the grocery store. Tony ran the store until the late 1950s when increased competition in the grocery business precluded the family operating it as a "credit store." The Stanich family consequently remodeled the space into a liquor store and small deli. When the liquor agency left, Tony retired in 1971. The space was then rented to a realty company, while the deli remained in use as a bakery/deli along with a nail salon (called NY Nails and Suzanne's Deli). After Tony's death in 1995, the building was sold to Debra and Alan Ross in 1997. Tony's daughters, Irene and Jane, still live in Gig Harbor. Irene resides in the family home on Dorotich Street next to the old grocery store.

John, who had been fishing since the age of 16, took over the *Welcome* in 1920 when his father retired and skippered the fishing vessel for over fifty years. John married Pauline Castelan, and they lived half a block from the grocery store on Harborview Drive. John died suddenly in 1974, and the following year, the *Welcome* was sold. The home that Martin built was then left to John and Tony's

sisters, Ann Manley and Lena (Karmelich) Stanich. Ann Manley's daughter, Mary Ann Jackson, now owns the home.¹

John's grandsons, John and Tom Dempsey, assisted their Uncle Tony with dock maintenance and repairs until the shed was sold in 1983. Three years later, Mike Thornhill and Robert Ellsworth, proprietor of the Ship to Shore and Kayaks, purchased the site. Prior to Ellsworth's remodel of the shed, a local commercial fisherman rented the space and used it to store fishing nets and equipment. The shed now contains a series of rooms for storage, office space, and art studio. An elevated dock extends from the front of the shed, and there are low floats for moorage.

Part II. Structural/Design Information

A. General Description: The Stanich Net Shed is approximately 1,440 square feet. Exact dimensions of the property and shed were not available at the time of the survey. The rectangular net shed contains a central partitioned area that is used for Ellsworth's personal storage, though he plans on renting this section in the future. The structure did not originally have a flushing toilet; instead, it had a "fisherman's trap door" accessed by lifting two small, movable planks.²

In 1986, at the time of the Ellsworth purchase, there were twenty-six fishing vessels, including purse seiners and gillnetters, rafted around the shed's low dock. The only way to get to the boats was to climb down a ladder and walk over the rafted boats. This was a common occurrence at area net sheds prior to the addition of dock ramps. At the time, the fishermen were paying \$70 a month for moorage, but since Ellsworth's purchase, many have left. There are now sixteen boats moored, none of which are commercial fishing vessels, and an aluminum ramp leads to the dock.

1. Character: The Stanich Net Shed has been completely remodeled, but the general form remains the same.

2. Condition of Fabric: Currently, the shed is in good, but non-original condition. Other than the framing and some siding and decking, very little original fabric is left.

B. Site Layout: The Martin and Katherine Stanich house is located upland of the shed.

¹ Mary Katich, Lena's twin, died in the spring of 1972.

² A "fisherman's trap door" is a toilet with a hole that empties into the harbor.

Part III. Operations and Processes

A. Operations: The Stanich 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 either pulled on-board or 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 site of the Millville Marina (see HAER No. WA-186-G) where fishermen would soak netting in hot tar, then wring the netting in rollers and stack it in the back of trucks. The netting was transported 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. Workers: A crew of five men operated each purse seiner. Prior to restrictions on large vessels and the advent of the nylon seine net and the power block in the 1940s and 1950s, seine vessels usually had crews of eight to ten men.

C. Associated Vessels: Martin Stanich owned the purse seiner *Welcome*, which was built in 1913 by Barbare Shipyard in Tacoma. It was sold in 1921 and sank at Admiralty Island in 1961. The second *Welcome*, built for Martin by the Skansie Shipyard in 1920, was sold in 1975. A research vessel rammed the ship near Foulweather Bluff, and it sank in 1978.

Part IV. Sources of Information

A. Primary Sources

Jackson, Mary Ann. Interview, June 19, 2009.

Ellsworth, Robert. Interview by Shelly Leavens, June 18, 2009. (A copy of the interview can be found in the field records accompanying this documentation.)

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.

Harbor History Museum photo archives. Accessed June 2009.

Katich, Peter. "Antone Peter Katich Eulogy." April 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

Peter Katich, grandson of Mary M. Katich (Tony Stanich's sister), could be interviewed.

ADDENDUM TO:
GIG HARBOR NET SHEDS, STANICH NET SHED
(Ellsworth Net Shed)
8205 Dorotich Street
Gig Harbor
Pierce County
Washington

HAER WA-186-I
HAER WA-186-I

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

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