

Gig Harbor Net Sheds, Novak Net Shed
(Gamira's Restaurant)
3313 Harborview Drive
Gig Harbor
Pierce County
Washington

HAER WA-186-K
HAER WA-186-K

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, NOVAK NET SHED (Isamira's Restaurant)

HAER No. WA-186-K

- Location:** 3313 Harborview Drive, Gig Harbor, Pierce County, Washington
- UTM Coordinates:** 10, 531530.55 E, 5242180.91 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:** Stanley (Stan) Stearns, Isamira's Restaurant, Gig Harbor Marina, Inc.
- Present Use:** Vacant space for restaurant lease.
- 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, of the 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. 1910
2. **Architect/Engineer:** Unknown
3. **Builder/Contractor/Supplier:** Tony Novak
4. **Original Plans:** None found
5. **Alterations and Additions:** The Novak Net Shed was first remodeled in the 1940s. In 1999, the owner, Pete Darrah, erected a second story over the net shed and left a 4'-wide breezeway between the shed and a newly-built café and sandwich shop with an attached fuel dock. The property was transferred to the bank, and Stan Stearns purchased it in 2003. A third renovation of the Novak Net Shed took place in 2009, when Stearns and Co. installed a new floor over the original floor joists, added a metal footbridge between the deck and a shoreline walkway, enclosed the breezeway, and added pile caps to twenty-two of the original piles.

B. Historical Context: The Novak family was one of the earliest families to settle in Gig Harbor and helped establish the Millville plat in the late 1880s. The Novaks built the net shed for commercial purse seining operations, namely storage.

The City of Gig Harbor zoned the land occupied by the net shed "Waterfront Millville (WM)." Pete Darrah purchased the shed in 1999 and developed the property as a café and fuel dock. The bank sold the property to Stan Stearns of the Texas-based company Gig Harbor Marina Company in 2003, and Stearns remodeled the building as Isamira's Restaurant. At the time of the site visit in 2008, the restaurant space was being remodeled, and Stearns was looking for a tenant interested in leasing the space as a delicatessen.

Part II. Structural/Design Information

A. General Description: The net shed is approximately 20' wide x 30' long, totaling 600 square feet, not including the newly attached building to the south. The frame building has a gable roof and is clad in horizontal wood clapboard siding. There are modern doors and windows. A dock extends into the harbor. Both the net shed and dock are elevated on pilings.

1. Character: The addition of the second story to the net shed and the construction of the adjacent building have altered the character of the building since the original form and massing are no longer evident.

2. Condition of Fabric: The building is in good condition, although extensively remodeled.

B. Site Layout: The original Novak family home is directly adjacent to the net shed, upland to the south. As of 1999, “the Stearnses own four-and-one-half contiguous lots on the Gig Harbor waterfront, comprising 1.7 acres upland and 1.3 acres tidelands.”¹ The Novak Net Shed occupies one of those lots. The shed is bordered directly to the south by the Ross Net Shed (see HAER No. WA-186-L) and to the north by the Gilich Net Shed (see HAER No. WA-186-J).

Part III. Operations and Processes

A. Operations: The Novak 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 and then wring it in rollers. The netting would be stacked in the back of trucks and 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 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.

¹ Stearns v. City of Gig Harbor. Court of Appeals Decision II, State of Washington.
<http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=wa&vol=229129&invol=001>.

Part IV. Sources of Information

A. Primary Sources

Moist, John, Arabella's Landing Manager. Interview by Shelly Leavens, June 16, 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.

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 the Novak family and Stan Stearns, the current owner.

ADDENDUM TO:
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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

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