

Gig Harbor Net Sheds, Skansie Brothers Net Shed
3207 Harborview Drive
Gig Harbor
Pierce County
Washington

HAER WA-186-M
HAER WA-186-M

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, SKANSIE BROTHERS NET SHED

HAER No. WA-186-M

Location: 3207 Harborview Drive, Gig Harbor, Pierce County, Washington

UTM Coordinates: 10, 531645.87 E, 5242009.82 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: City of Gig Harbor

Present Use: Skansie Brothers Park and Jerisich Public Dock

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. 1920s
- 2. Architect/Engineer:** Skansie Brothers
- 3. Builder/Contractor/Supplier:** Skansie Brothers
- 4. Original Plans:** None found
- 5. Alterations and Additions:** The Skansie Net Shed has undergone numerous alterations and expansions since its initial construction in the 1920s. A small wood and machine shop was built on the north façade, and four successive additions were made to the south and east into the harbor. These additions were covered with a gabled roof similar to the original, but an end dock was left exposed for loading and offloading nets and gear. The last addition to this structure for the purposes of commercial fishing was made in 1947.

The net shed was renovated in 1955. In 2004, the City of Gig Harbor contracted to have the net shed painted and the roof replaced. Four years later, it was emptied of its contents for a preservation survey by the Coastal Heritage Alliance.

B. Historical Context: Peter Skansie immigrated to Gig Harbor from Croatia in 1886. He established a homestead and convinced his family to join him, specifically his brothers Mitchell, Joseph, and Andrew. Andrew (born in 1876) was a stone mason in Croatia and arrived in Tacoma in 1907. He built the Skansie home in 1908, then a net shed in 1910. Bertha joined her husband Andrew in Gig Harbor in 1909.

Together, the Skansie brothers established a shipyard. According to the 1982 Cultural Resources Survey, “the Skansie Shipyard was begun in the late 1880s and evolved into a major boat building establishment for the Puget Sound purse seine fishing fleet...The Skansie family would fish in the spring and summer and build boats in the winter.”¹

The Skansie family owned and maintained their original property from the late 1880s until its purchase by the City of Gig Harbor in 2002. The sons of Andrew

¹ Caroline Gallicci, “Skansie Boat Yard (PC-55-36a and PC-133-34a and 36a),” Pierce County Cultural Resource Survey, 1982.

and Bertha, as well as Anton and Vince, maintained the property from the 1960s until its sale.

The City of Gig Harbor is in the process of developing the net shed and surrounding property as an historic attraction to be called Skansie Brothers Park as of the writing of this report.

Part II. Structural/Design Information

A. General Description: This description draws from a site visit in 2009 and A. Michael Vlahovich's "Skansie Net Shed Survey" completed in 2008 for the Coastal Heritage Alliance. The Skansie net shed is 80'-9" long x 24'-11" wide at the dock. The shed is more than 2,000 square feet. Drawing from the 2008 Coastal Heritage Alliance report and fieldwork completed in 2009, the shed is built of Douglas fir framing covered with shiplap siding and has a low pitch gable roof. On the west side of the shed and facing north is the shop, which measures 7' x 9'-8". There is a separate door to enter the shop from the shed area, and there are windows on the three exterior walls. A large door is also located on the west wall, which abuts the shoreline and features a small porch. The shed extends into the harbor to the east where there is a covered dock. Both the shed and the dock sit on pilings over the tidelands. The shed has both single and six-light casement windows – three on the north-facing wall and five on the south-facing wall.

As of summer 2009, public entry to the shed was restricted until the site reopens as Skansie Brothers Park under the management of the City of Gig Harbor.

1. Character: The Skansie Net Shed is typical of the net sheds of Gig Harbor and retains the characteristic features of this vernacular building form, including massing and form.

2. Condition of Fabric: The building is in fair condition.

B. Site Layout: The entire Skansie Brothers property encompasses 1.1 acres of land, including three structures (the Skansie home, garage, and net shed) between Harborview Drive and the shoreline of Gig Harbor.

Part III. Operations and Processes

A. Operations: The Skansie 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 on the current site of the Millville Marina (see HAER No. WA-186-G) where fishermen would soak netting in hot tar, wring it in rollers, stack it 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.

B. Workers: A crew of five men generally operated each purse seiner. Prior to restrictions on large vessels, 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:

Independence, built by Skansie Shipyard in 1912

Andrew Skansie: 66’ purse seiner *Avalon*, built by Mitchell Skansie at the Skansie Shipyard in 1929

Vincent, Peter, and Antone Skansie: purse seiner *Avalon*

Part IV. Sources of Information

A. Primary Sources

Ancich, George, George Bujacich, Nick Tarabochia, and Andy Blair. Video-taped interview by Ross Whitney, August 27, 2008.

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. “Skansie Boat Yard (PC-55-36a and PC-133-34a and 36a).” Pierce County Cultural Resource Survey, 1982.

Grulich Architecture and Planning Services. "Historic Structures Report Skansie Brothers Park." City of Gig Harbor, 2004.

Harbor History Museum photo archives. Accessed June 2009. Image Nos. HV-088-GH, HV-062-WS.

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.

Vlahovich, A. Michael. "Skansie Net Shed Survey." Coastal Heritage Alliance, 2008.

C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated

Coastal Heritage Alliance's Skansie net shed object inventory and catalog of data may contain additional information.

ADDENDUM TO:
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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

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