

Gig Harbor Net Sheds, Babich Net Shed  
(Pont Net Shed)  
2700 Harborview Drive  
Gig Harbor  
Pierce County  
Washington

HAER WA-186-O  
*HAER WA-186-O*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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 (Pont Net Shed)

HAER No. WA-186-O

**Location:** 2700 Harborview Drive, Gig Harbor, Pierce County, Washington

**UTM Coordinates:** 10, 531911.54 E, 5241795.73 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:** Joseph Pont

**Present Use:** 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, 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:** 1941
- 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:** Peter Babich added a wall to reinforce the merging of the two Babich net sheds and to provide a windbreak, replaced some windows, and added another dry dock ramp (underwater grid) to work on his power skiff and other small boats in the 1970s. In 1971, Peter's son Randy replaced the shingle roof with anodized steel that was laid over the original low-pitch gable roof frame.

Recent changes have included making the shed seismically stable. The Babich Net Shed is the only one in Gig Harbor with this feature. Randy Babich contracted for a study of the piles, which found that eight needed to be replaced. All of the piles under the dock have 6" x 8" cross bracing with through bolts. Fifteen creosote piles were replaced with steel piles and those that could not be replaced were given "inserts" for stabilization.

Other minor additions (from 2000 to 2008) included adding surfacing material to the dock to create an anti-skid surface in winter, replacing the ramp that leads to a low float with a steel version that has grating for more light to fish, and adding a new low float in 2007. Randy Babich estimated that he invested about \$500,000 in renovations, maintenance, taxes, and insurance during his ownership of the shed.

Randy sold the net shed to Joe Pont in 2008, as well as plans for an additional \$90,000 in possible renovations. When first built, the shed had a 200 amp line, but during the subsequent 2008 remodel, an additional line was added so that the boats moored on the low float could have shore power. Pont also added a handrail on the ramp leading to the dock, changed the timbers along the sides of the dock, and placed brackets around the piles. Interior modifications by Pont included laying new flooring over the original timbers and painting the entire building.

**B. Historical Context:** The Babich family is matrilineally related to the original settlers of Gig Harbor, the Samuel Jerisch family who immigrated to the

United States in 1869. Spiro Babich, grandfather of Randy, was born in Croatia and immigrated to the United States in 1910. Historically, the Babich property consisted of the house, garage, two net sheds, associated docks, and waterfront property. Spiro and his wife Julia (Skansie) purchased the property and built the house in 1934. The net shed and dock were erected in 1938. The second net shed dates to 1941. Spiro's original Craftsman-style house is still located upland from the shed.

Spiro fished for salmon and anchovies commercially beginning at the age of 20 until his death at age 67 in 1957. He diversified to sardine fishing in the 1930s and consequently bought a 92' vessel. The family lived in both Gig Harbor and California since sardines are harvested in the winter and salmon in the summer. After Spiro's death, the house and original northern net shed (see HAER No. WA-186-N) went to his son Paul while the newer southern net shed (which is the subject of this report) went to his son Peter.

Born in 1929, Peter started fishing with his father at age 15 as a summer job. Spiro and his sons fished mostly in the San Juan Islands. At the age of 24, Peter bought a boat and sailed to False Pass, Alaska, in the Aleutians. He fished in Alaska for the remainder of his career. Peter left the net shed to his son Randy, who had started purse seining at the age of 15-1/2, much younger than the rest of the crew whose mean age was 53. Randy commented in an interview that he remembered crews being older and professional, and he believed that the professionalism of fishermen had declined, marking a major shift in the industry.

The Babich family has strong ties to the fishing community. Brothers Nick, Andy, and Mike Babich, who are Randy's cousins, currently run commercial purse seiners, as do Joe and Bob Puratich, who are Randy's second cousins.

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

**A. General Description:** The Babich Net Shed is just over 2,000 square feet. The property is 24' wide x 115'-7" long, and the building is 24' wide x 83'-8" long. The original wood frame building has not been seriously modified and is now used as a social gathering place. The exposed stringers are rough cut, old growth Douglas fir from Gig Harbor. French doors open to the covered portion of the shed. An east-facing dock extends from the front of the shed and was traditionally used for loading and unloading nets to vessels. The interior has been cleared of its original contents and is now open in the middle. It is nearly empty, except for chairs and a table.

**1. Character:** The Babich Net Shed retains the general form of the Gig Harbor net sheds and is a typical example of this vernacular building form.

**2. Condition of Fabric:** The original fabric is extant, and the structure is in excellent condition.

**B. Site Layout:** The two Babich net sheds are located on the south end of Gig Harbor and are oriented in the tidal zone in such a way that boats can be moored directly at the associated docks at all times. This net shed can be accessed from a path extending along the south side of the building or from the west on the shoreline.

### Part III. Operations 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 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 location 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.

Spiro Babich owned and fished only wooden boats, which required two-and-a-half months of boat maintenance per year. He would haul the vessels out onto a wooden grid he built in front of the house, along the tide line. The vessel would be brought in at high tide, with the bow resting 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, and remains of it 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:** Vessels associated with the Babich Net Shed included the nineteen purse seine fishing vessels owned by Spiro Babich during his lifetime. His first boat was the *Ranger* while his last two were the *Julia B* and the *Invincible*.

Peter Babich inherited the purse seiner *Julia B*. When Alaska gained statehood in 1959, the length regulations for commercial purse seine boats changed from a 68' maximum to a 58' maximum. As a result, Peter sold *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 Source**

Babich, Randy. Interview by 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, the current owners of the two Babich sheds.

ADDENDUM TO:  
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(Peter Babich Net Shed)  
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