

Gig Harbor Net Sheds, Skansie Net Shed  
(T orris Net Shed)  
2809 Harborview Drive  
Gig Harbor  
Pierce County  
Washington

HAER WA-186-P  
*HAER WA-186-P*

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 NET SHED (Morris Net Shed)

#### HAER No. WA-186-P

**Location:** 2809 Harborview Drive, Gig Harbor, Pierce County, Washington

**UTM Coordinates:** 10, 532006.26 E, 5241510.84 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 Owners:** David Morris and Thomas Morris, Jr.

**Present Use:** Storage, 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 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

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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 of Buildings

1. **Date of Construction:** 1910-1920
2. **Architect/Engineer:** Unknown
3. **Builder/Contractor/Supplier:** Peter Skansie
4. **Original Plans:** None found
5. **Alterations and Additions:** To the knowledge of the current owners, David (Dave) Morris and Thomas (Tom) Morris, Jr., the Skansie Net Shed has been little altered since the 1920s, although two small interior rooms were added sometime prior to the 1970s.

Dave, Tom Sr., and Tom Jr. have made few alterations to the building since their purchase of the property in the early 1970s. A new rock bulkhead was placed in front of the damaged concrete bulkhead adjacent to and south of the net shed. In 2007, the owners divided the property into two lots. The cabin to the south of the net shed has about 160' of waterfront while the net shed and residence has 115' of waterfront. In 2008, a series of emergency maintenance and repair items were completed because the net shed was tilting landward and in danger of collapse. A defective ceiling beam inside the shed was replaced. Some minor maintenance was done on about six pilings under the deck as well as on some rotten timbers under the deck. The net shed itself was jacked up to make it level, but it still tilts about 6" to the west.

**B. Historical Context:** Peter Skansie came to the United States from the Dalmatian island of Brac and settled in Gig Harbor in the 1880s. He married Melissa Jerisch and built a net shed in 1910. Vince Skansie and his wife Olive were the second owners of the net shed and a small cabin until the sale of the property around 1972 to the Morris family.

Dave and Tom Morris purchased the net shed, along with the upland area, attached deck (formerly a loading dock), the small cabin south of the shed, and a total of 280' of waterfront, in partnership with their father, Tom Morris, Sr. for \$50,000. In 1980, Tom Morris, Sr. and his wife, Dorothea, built a new upland house on the property, and they lived there until their deaths. Since then, this house has been a rental property. Dave and Tom divided the property into two parcels, with the south parcel currently for sale. Dave hopes to replace the upland home and buy Tom's share of the property so he can retire there at a future date.

## Part II. Structural/Design Information

**A. General Description:** The Skansie Net Shed is about 26'-6" wide x 52' long. The deck (old loading dock) is about 58'-6" wide x 52' long. The net shed is a frame, one-story building with a low pitch gable roof that sits on pilings. It is constructed of Douglas fir, and the exterior walls are clad in board and batten siding. Many of the original windows are intact, although the frames have been renovated. Two large doors on overhead rollers are located on the east façade of the building.

The interior of the shed is open in the middle, with two smaller rooms at the north end. Around the perimeter are workbenches equipped with tools as well as objects and from the Skansie family. Some of the original cotton nets hang from the rafters. An unused wooden pit toilet is located in the north corner of the net shed.

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

**2. Condition:** The shed is in fair condition.

**B. Site Layout:** The shed is one of only two that are oriented parallel to the shoreline as opposed to the more usual perpendicular siting. As is the case with most of the net sheds, moorage to the associated dock is dependent on the tide. The site today includes the upland residence and garage area, net shed, and attached deck/loading dock, totaling about 115' of waterfront. The net shed is accessed via steep stairs. Flanking the shed are two small cabins that can be accessed from the shore behind the bulkhead or along the beach at low tide.

## 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 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 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. Machines:** On the southeast corner of the dock is a large steel hoist (to be used with a cradle) for lifting small craft from a cart on rails into the water. Tom Morris, Sr. custom-built the hoist in the 1970s.

**C. 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 1954, seine vessels usually had crews of eight to ten men.

**D. Associated Vessels:** Vince Skansie operated the purse seiner *Veteran*.

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

##### **A. Primary Source**

Morris, Thomas and David. Interview with Shelly Leavens, June 16, 2009. (Notes from the interview are included 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. Image Nos. HV-086-GH, HV-115-GH.

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.

ADDENDUM TO:  
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