

Gig Harbor Net Sheds, Mojean Net Shed
(Varabochia Net Shed)
2788 Harborview Drive
Gig Harbor
Pierce County
Washington

HAER WA-186-Q
HAER WA-186-Q

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, MOJEAN NET SHED (Tarabochia Net Shed)

HAER No. WA-186-Q

- Location:** 2788 Harborview Drive, Gig Harbor, Pierce County, Washington
- UTM Coordinates:** 10, 532017.49 E, 5241367.66 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:** Nick Tarabochia, Jr.
- Present Use:** General storage (including nets and tools), net repair, 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 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. Dates of Construction:** ca. 1907 (original net shed), ca. 1943 (second adjoining shed), 1961 (third adjoining shed)
- 2. Architect/Engineer:** Unknown
- 3. Builder/Contractor/Supplier:** Additions by Nick Tarabochia, Sr. and Mike Gallagan
- 4. Original Plans:** None found
- 5. Alterations and Additions:** The first addition to the shed appears to have been the attached south-facing net shed and dock, followed by the north-facing shed and dock. Around 1942-43, Nick Tarabochia, Sr. applied to the War Department to build the south dock. In 1961, Nick Sr. and his fishing partner, Mike Gallagan (a construction worker, pile driver, and dock builder), constructed the north portion of the dock along with the small “bunkhouse” room used by visitors, often fishermen. The interiors of the buildings have been reconfigured for multiple uses many times throughout the years as represented by fishing gear and ephemera from various eras.

A landslide in the late 1970s and early 1980s caused severe damage to the structure and resulted in rebuilding the southwest portion of the net shed’s exterior wall.

B. Historical Context: The original Mojean Net Shed was built in 1907.¹ The Mojean family sold the shed to the Tarabochia family around 1939-41. The Mojean family had a boat construction and livery business. They built flat bottom, two-person rowing skiffs that were popular throughout Puget Sound. When Nick Tarabochia, Sr. bought the property, it was being used as a workshop and as a place to store nets. After Nick Jr. inherited the shed, it still served as a place to store nets and gear. The shed was also a site for loading and unloading gear and nets, as well as a social gathering place. Like many sons of Croatian fishermen in the Gig Harbor area, Nick Jr. started fishing when he was 7 years old. Even now at the age of 62, he still goes out gillnet fishing every summer. His son-in-law (married to his daughter Christine) has expressed an interest in carrying on the family’s fishing legacy.

¹ During repairs to the west face of the building necessitated by landslide damage in the 1980s, a carved “1907” was discovered in one corner of the shed.

In an interview, Nick Jr. remembered how he had to pull up the heavy cotton nets by hand. He would go with his father to take the nets to the family property on the opposite side of town where the Tarabochias would tar the nets and lay them out. The Tarabochias developed a side business tarring nets for other fishermen, which was dubbed “Tarabochia’s Tar Pots.”

Part II. Structural/Design Information

A. General Description: The Tarabochia property is 72’-3” wide x 94’ long. The net shed is comprised of several structures from various building campaigns. The individual structures measure 72’-3” wide x 25’ long, 45’ wide x 29’ long, and 48’ wide x 32’ long. The fenestration is variable.

The original structure abuts the bulkhead, which now serves as the entrance to the shed and workshop. There is a partitioned room to the south, as well as a functioning storage loft above the entire space.

The south building, constructed in the mid-1940s, has markers every 60’ since the nets were in 60’ sections. This building was used almost exclusively for the traditional functions of the commercial fishing industry, such as gillnetting and purse seining.

The north building contains a small room and appears to have been used for general storage and as a social gathering place. Nick Jr. lived in this building from 1990 and 2000. It also served as a bunkhouse for out-of-town crew members working on gear and is still in use as a living space. The entrance is on a narrow porch, which abuts overgrown foliage along the shoreline.

1. Character: The Mojean Net Shed is unusual in that it is situated horizontal to the shoreline. It did not originally have a dock and did not sit over the water. There has been some question as to whether it should be considered a net shed given these deviations from the standard net shed building form.

2. Condition of Fabric: The shed is in good working condition.

B. Site Layout: The Mojean Net Shed is accessible from a dirt path extending from an overlook and parking lot located approximately 50 yards to the northwest. Unlike many of the other Gig Harbor net sheds, this one lies outside the harbor proper and is positioned over more land than water; thus, a fishing boat can only tie up to the shed at high tide. The view to the south is of South Puget Sound, while to the north is the entrance to Gig Harbor. The Skansie Net Shed (see HAER No. WA-186-P) is located to the north of this one.

Part III. Operations and Processes

A. Operations: The Mojean 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 the netting in hot tar, wring the netting in rollers, stack the netting in the back of trucks, and finally transport all the tarred netting 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 after World War II in the early 1950s.

B. Machines: A large Puretic power block is affixed to the front of the building to haul and manage nets. Croatian fisherman Mario Puratić invented the Puretic power block and patented it in 1953. An article in *Fishing News International* described the power block, noting that it “has mechanized the hauling of nets in the tuna, anchovy, sardine, herring, menhaden, pilchard, mackerel and salmon fisheries” and has been used on a number of vessel types. The Puretic power block was a “free-swinging, mechanically-powered, V-shaped pulley with a rubber-coated sheave into which a net could be fed. This invention “became the linchpin in the mechanization of purse seining” and “combined with fluid hydraulic power technology and new large, synthetic nets, it changed the whole character of purse seine fishing.”²

C. Workers: A crew of five men generally operated each purse seiner. Currently there is at least one purse seiner and Tarabochia’s gillnetter operating off of the Mojean (Tarabochia) dock and utilizing the workspace of the net shed. These workers include Nick Tarabochia, Jr. and his crew, with the additional purse seine vessel crew who lease use of the property.

² Quote from “MARCO, the Puretic Power Block, and Purse Seining,” originally published in *Fishing News International* and available from http://www.marcoglobal.com/pdf/History_Marco_FNI.pdf, accessed July 2010.

D. Associated Vessels: The following vessels are associated with the Mojean Net Shed.

Nick Tarabochia, Sr.: purse seiner *Margaret J* (partnered with Mike Gallagan)
Purse seiner *Phyllis T* (named after his daughter)
Purse seiner *Planet*
Purse seiner *Nancy Rose* (named after daughter, Nancy, and wife, Rose)
Purse seiner *Al-H* (named for Alva Hager, founder of New England Fish Company, sister ship to *Barbara S*)
Purse seiner *St. Dominick*
Purse seiner *JoAnne*, Nick Sr.'s last boat before retiring

Nick Tarabochia, Jr.: started seining in 1972 with the 65' purse seiner *Chinook*; sold it in 1975
Purchased 58' purse seiner and tender *Kathy H*, seined in Puget Sound and tendered until 2006 in Bristol Bay
Gillnetter *Jason B*
Aluminum Bristol Bay gillnetter *Christine Jane*, 2000 (named after his daughter)

Part IV. Sources of Information

A. Primary Sources

Tarabochia, Nick Jr. Interview by Shelly Leavens, June 19, 2009. (Copy of notes from interview in field records accompanying this documentation.)

Tarabochia, Christine. Interview by Shelly Leavens, June 19, 2009. (Copy of notes from interview in field records accompanying this documentation.)

Schweitzer, Bill. Interview by Shelly Leavens, June 19, 2009.

Ancich, George, George Bujacich, Nick Tarabochia, and Andy Blair in the Skansie Net Shed. 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. "Net Shed (PC-125-2a)." Pierce County Cultural Resource Survey, 1982.

Harbor History Museum photo archives. Accessed June 2009. Image No. HV-103-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.

"MARCO, the Puretic Power Block, and Purse Seining." Originally published in *Fishing News International*, available at http://www.marcoglobal.com/pdf/History_Marco_FNI.pdf, accessed July 2010.

C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated

An oral history interview could be conducted with Nick Tarabochia, Jr.

ADDENDUM TO:
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