

Schooner WAWONA  
1018 Valley Street  
Seattle  
King County  
Washington

HAER No. WA-14

HAER  
WASH,  
IT-SEAT,  
10-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HAER  
WASH,  
17-SEAT,  
10-

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

SCHOONER WAWONA  
HAER No. WA-14

Location: 1018 Valley Street, Seattle, King County, Washington  
USGS 7.5 Minute Series, Seattle and vicinity,  
Washington, 1950  
UTM Coordinates: 10.549920.5274860

Date of Construction: 1897

Designer/Builder: Hans D. Bendixsen, Fairhaven, California

Present Owner: Northwest Seaport, Inc.  
1018 Valley Street  
P.O. Box 2865  
Seattle, Washington 98111

Present Use: Museum exhibit

Significance: WAWONA is one of two large wooden three-masted lumber schooners known to be preserved from scores built in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for service in the West Coast lumber trade. Her builder, Hans D. Bendixsen, was well known in his time for the superior construction of his vessels, and it is perhaps some testimony to his ability that the other surviving lumber schooner, C.A. Thayer (National Maritime Museum, San Francisco), was also built by him. She is a very rare, intact representative of a type of sailing vessel once very common on the West Coast. She was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1970.

Historian: Richard K. Anderson, Jr., Staff Architect  
Historic American Engineering Record

Transmitted by: Richard K. Anderson, Jr., HAER, December, 1986

NOTE: A very thorough, illustrated history of the WAWONA, her builder, crews, ports of call, and career was published in 1985 by Documentary Book Publishers Corporation of Bellevue, Washington: Pacific Schooner WAWONA, by Harriet Tracy DeLong, I.S.B.N. # 0-935503-02-1. The text is based on extensive research into primary sources: logbooks and other official accounts, crew diaries, interviews with former crew members, photographs, and the like. A bibliography is included. What follows below is condensed from the book.

WAWONA was originally designed and built to transport large quantities of lumber (over 500,000 board feet per voyage) from the Pacific Northwest to points further south on the coast. She was built for the Dolbeer & Carson Lumber Company of Eureka, California at a cost of \$29,075 and launched September 27, 1897 from the Fairhaven, California yards of Hans D. Bendixsen. She was officially enrolled December 13 of the same year. Her official description is as follows:

Official number:	81576 K.N.D.S.
Length:	156.0 feet
Beam:	36.0 feet
Depth:	12.3 feet
Gross Tonnage:	468.42
Net Tonnage:	413.94
Constructed of:	wood
Masts:	3
Decks:	1
Rig:	Schooner Billet Head Elliptic Stern

In 1986, HAER found her length at the floating water line (from stem to sternpost) to be about 152 feet 2 inches, and her overall length (from extreme end of the transom to the forward end of the deck) to be about 166 feet 1-1/2 inches. Her beam measured about 36 feet 3-1/2 inches and her light draft about 10 feet. Her keel (originally straight) had a 10-inch hog in it. Her draft under load was estimated at about 14 feet 6 inches from historic photographs.

Lumber schooners built on the West Coast had anywhere from two to five masts (about 1500 gross tons maximum). Like most of these vessels, WAWONA was designed with a large, unpartitioned hold and a strong deck. Ports in her stern permitted lumber to be loaded and unloaded quickly from below. Over half her load could be carried on deck, and her rigging was designed to be handled by a small crew (six to ten men) without interference from large

cargoes on deck.

While East Coast ships were built primarily of oak, WAWONA was reportedly built of Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga Menziesii*) and still retains much of her original material. The bottom hull planking appeared to be original in 1986, and parts like the clamps--single pieces of timber about 145 feet long--were almost certainly original, since shipbuilding timbers of such length became comparatively rare and expensive early in the twentieth century. Her accommodations were "spartan", though the captain's cabin was very tastefully panelled (see HAER photos WA-14-39 to 41). WAWONA's hull, like most in her day, was lofted from a carved wooden half model rather than a detailed set of engineering drawings. This half model is not known to survive.

Bendixsen, WAWONA's builder, was born in Thisted, Denmark in 1842 and emigrated to California in 1863, after training in shipyards in Aalborg and Copenhagen. After working in shipyards in San Francisco and Eureka, he formed a partnership in 1868 with a Eureka shipyard owner, Thomas McDonald. He established his own shipyard in Eureka in 1874, and within a few years almost went bankrupt, apparently due to unreliable suppliers. Once out of difficulty, he built forges, a sparyard, and a large sawmill at his shipyard in order to make his business fairly self-sufficient. He was apparently unique in owning and operating his own sawmill. His reputation grew as one of many honest and competent shipbuilders, and he invested in practically every vessel he built. At the close of his career, he had built 113 ships. He sold his yard for \$250,000 in 1900, but stayed on as shipbuilding supervisor. He died February 12, 1902 and was interred in Thisted, Denmark.

WAWONA was owned by Dolbeer & Carson until January of 1914, when she was sold to Robinson Fisheries of Anacortes, Washington for \$8,000. John Dolbeer, senior partner in the company, had died in 1902, and William Carson proved resistant to investing in modern steam schooners, even though he was "aware that the day of the sailing coaster is past". Upon Carson's death in 1912, all of the company's sailing vessels were put up for sale by his estate. Robinson Fisheries converted WAWONA for codfishing in the winter of 1914, adding New England fishing dories, three-tiered bunks below (to accomodate a much larger crew), and fresh water tanks, among other things.

During the years of World War II, WAWONA was conscripted by the U.S. Army for use as a lumber barge, #BCL-710. When hostilities ceased, her masts and rigging were returned, and she once again plied the fishing trade. Her last commercial voyage came in 1947, her usefulness as a fishing vessel ended by several circumstances. Though WAWONA was in sound condition, the demand for codfish was not returning to its pre-war level, and trained crews and fishermen became less available. She also faced competition from more efficient, powered modern vessels. She was laid up in Puget Sound harbor until 1953, when she was purchased by a Montana cattle rancher, William P. Studdert, who had ideas of using her to transport some of his cattle to the Soviet Union (Kamchatka Peninsula) for sale. Nothing came of this idea, but Studdert apparently held on to her, anyway. In 1964, a group called S.O.S. ("Save Our Ships"), forerunner to Northwest Seaport, Inc., purchased WAWONA

Schooner WAWONA

HAER No. WA-14

Page 4

for preservation. As she has served as a museum exhibit over the years, many restoration steps have been taken. Among them: the captain's salon was stripped of white paint and refinished with a Victorian simulated wood grain finish; in 1972, new masts were donated and installed; in 1980 and again in 1985, she was dry docked for an extensive hull survey, both years revealing that she was in sound condition below the water line, but deteriorating badly above. The lines-lifting project (in which HAER participated) also occurred in 1985 as a prelude to a planned two-million-dollar restoration project.