

Gig Harbor Net Sheds, Ivanovich Net Shed
3617 Harborview Drive
Gig Harbor
Pierce County
Washington

HAER WA-186-D
HAER WA-186-D

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, IVANOVICH NET SHED

HAER No. WA-186-D

Location: 3617 Harborview Drive, Gig Harbor, Pierce County, Washington

UTM Coordinates: 10, 531179.49 E, 5242386.42 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: Francis (Frank) Ivanovich and Vincent (Vince) Sareault

Present Use: General fishing gear storage

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, of the 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:** 1937
2. **Architect/Engineer:** Unknown
3. **Builder/Contractor:** Mato Ivanovich and Anderson Shipyard
4. **Original Plans:** None found
5. **Alterations and Additions:** In 2002-2003, Frank Ivanovich hired local workers to put new caps on the shed's pilings, install new decking where needed, add floor joists to the outside decking to help shore up the structure, and erect a fence to protect the property. In an interview, Frank stated that he wants to keep the shed in working order in memory of his father and that he spent approximately \$20,000 on maintenance.

B. Historical Context: Mato Ivanovich immigrated to Tacoma, Washington, from Janjina, Peljesac, Croatia, in 1910 as a late teenager. He had a distant relative and friends in Tacoma, so he chose to go there and ended up working at the Tacoma smelter. According to interviews with his son Frank, Mato worked ten-hour days for \$2 a day, seven days a week. His cousin and some Dalmatian friends from Tacoma and Gig Harbor were commercial fishermen. Mato joined Pasko Dorotich's crew in Gig Harbor as a greenhorn fisherman. He loved the work and decided that he too could skipper a boat. Initially he ran a cannery-owned boat before having his own boat built. Mato's son Peter recounted in an interview that his father borrowed money from friends so that he could build and operate his own fishing boat. Mato's fishing venture was so successful he was able to repay his friends and begin a career building, operating, and selling boats. During his years as a fisherman, Mato owned and operated more than a dozen commercial salmon and sardine boats, including the *Forward*, *Silver Wave*, *Mayflower*, *Arizona*, *Southland*, *Frances*, and *Maria Rose*. His success allowed him to provide financial support to his siblings and the children of his late uncle, Ante Ivanovic. This support allowed them to pursue professional careers in law, medicine, mathematics, academia, the priesthood, and the maritime industry.

In the 1920s, Mato returned to Janjina, Croatia, where he married Maria Anticevic (regarded as the village beauty) and brought her to Gig Harbor after a wedding trip and shopping spree in Paris. Their first son, Francis (Frank), was born in

December 1926. Peter was born almost two years later, in November 1928. Rosemarie, their only daughter, was born in April 1941.¹

Frank began seine fishing at age 13. At 14, he was paid a half-share as crew. Mato gave both sons fishing boats to skipper while they were still quite young. Frank assumed Mato's fishing business and also pursued a career in real estate and insurance. Peter studied medicine and now lives in Chicago. After his father's death, Frank sold his father's fishing boats and purchased the *Equator* in 1971. Frank resumed fishing in Alaskan and Puget Sound waters until his retirement in 1992. Christopher (Frank's son), Matthew, Peter A., and Francis (Peter's sons), along with Vincent Sareault (Rosemarie's son) all fished with Frank during their summer school holidays.

Before Mato built his net shed he kept his boat anchored in the harbor. Usually boats were anchored there because the sheds were close to shore and subject to minus tides. Frank recalls that a vessel had to be out at least 150' to 200' to access water. He recalls the Spiro Babich docks (see HAER Nos. WA-186-N and WA-186-O) as being one of the only places where boats could be kept regardless of the tide. He noted that people did not build the sheds further into the harbor because they were frugal, so they would either row out to anchored boats or stay at the Union Oil dock (no longer extant) where one would often find at least ten boats rafted together.

Frank recalls that the net shed and associated upland family home served as a gathering place for local Croatian fishing families who would gather together very Sunday to eat dinner and play cards at the homes of fishing families around town.

Frank and his wife moved from Gig Harbor to Treasure Island after his retirement. He now owns an upland home and dock to provide moorage for the *Equator*. Vince Sareault (Frank's nephew) owns the net shed because after Mato retired from purse seine fishing, Rosemarie Sareault inherited the net shed from her mother. Rosemarie then bequeathed the shed to her son, Vincent.

Part II. Structural/Design Information

A. General Description: The property is 26' wide x 77'-8" long, and the building is 20' wide x 42' long and encompasses 840 square feet.

The Ivanovich net shed is an unpainted, one-story wood frame building with a shingled, low-pitch gable roof, and exposed rafter tails. The structure, including a

¹ Frank and Peter traveled by ferry to Tacoma to attend high school at Bellarmine. Rosemarie commuted to Tacoma's Aquinas Academy over the newly-constructed Narrows Bridge. Both sons obtained their BS degrees at Seattle University, although Frank left for a brief tour of duty in the Army at the end of World War II (1945-46). Rosemarie pursued a degree at Long Beach University.

dock area on the water side, rests on pilings. The building is clad in horizontal wood siding. On the landside, a wood ramp leads to the shed, and there is also a door that slides on upper rollers. Windows are located on the side walls. The waterside façade has a large door that slides on upper rollers. A northeast-facing dock extends from the front of the shed.

The building's interior consists of storage and workspace. Work benches equipped with tools line the perimeter along with storage shelving. Nets, long pieces of wood, and other large pieces of fishing gear are stored in the rafters. There is a small skiff and a large pile of seine nets in the middle of the room.

The shoreline area is unkempt with overgrown foliage and a deteriorating wooden boat resting in the mud of the tidelands.

1. Character: The Ivanovich Net Shed is intact and retains its original character.

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

B. Site Information: The Ivanovich Net Shed is one of a cluster of four sheds along this section of the harbor's shoreline. Frank recalls that the first shed of this group was the neighboring shed to the east, the Ancich shed (see HAER No. WA-186-F), built in the 1920s. The Bujacich shed (see HAER No. WA-186-C) was built ca. 1939-1940 just to the west. The Ivanovich and Bujacich sheds share a dock. The fourth shed in the cluster is the Ancich-Tarabochia Net Shed (see HAER No. WA-186-E).

The upland area of the property includes the Ivanovich family home (a one-story cottage) with a sloped grassy yard area leading to the shoreline and net shed.

Part III. Operations and Process

A. Operations: The Ivanovich 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.

Purse seining required tending to the nets, which took place at these net sheds. In the 1940s, when Frank was fishing with his father, cotton seine nets were still in

use. He recalled caring for and working with the cotton nets and stated “it was brutal.” The nets had to be tarred so they would keep their shape and not rot. The community had a large vat where the Millville Marina (see HAER No. WA-186-G) is now located where fishermen would soak the netting in hot tar and then wring the net in rollers. The nets were stacked in the back of trucks and taken to a nearby field to be spread out. As the nets dried, the crew would take the net strips and spread them apart to prevent the pieces from sticking together. Typically the crew of the seining operation would do the tarring and mending of nets two or three months prior to leaving for the fishing season as part of overall operations. 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.

Women are usually not involved in Gig Harbor’s Croatian seine fishing businesses, although local memory indicates that in the early 1900s women played a large role in providing support for the fishermen. The fishing vessels were small, so the crew did not eat on the boats. Instead, they would go out to Eagle Point on San Juan Island (referred to as Old Camp) where women would set up camp and cook for the fishermen, who returned each evening. They would stay for one to two months of the summer. However, by the time Frank Ivanovich was fishing with his father, this was no longer happening.

C. Associated Vessels: Vessels used in conjunction with this net shed include the following:

Mato Ivanovich: purse seiner *Equator*, built in 1923 at the local Anderson Shipyard

Frank Ivanovich: purse seiner *Equator*, moored at a dock in front of his home on Treasure Island. He fished with the vessel until 1992. The vessel only fished in Puget Sound because it was built as a cannery tender and was over the length limit to purse seine in Alaska.

Part IV: Sources of Information

A. Primary Sources

Ivanovich, Frank. Interview with 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.

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

Vince Sareault, now co-owner of the net shed, could be interviewed.