



Fishermen's Terminal: Million-Dollar Industry

By Sam L. Sutherland

PREFACE

Seattle's Fishermen's Terminal has occupied the northeastern edge of the Magnolia community for nearly 100 years. This facility serves as a homeport for hundreds of boats and a multi-million-dollar fishing industry, and its resources have been part of Magnolia's history from early on.

Discovering and researching the history, growth and present-day challenges affecting the fishing industry and the Terminal sent me on many paths. I began with the Terminal. I spoke with fishermen, skippers, suppliers, safety experts, government experts and regulators to learn about what goes on at the Terminal. Conversations with the fishermen occurred in the Bay Restaurant at Fishermen's Center, or on their fishing boats. Family stories came easily from the men who talked about their grandfathers and fathers who fished and in turn taught them. These three generations represent 50 to 95 years of fishing in the Northwest. One of the most interesting men turned out to be deaf. He'd worked 40 years on family-owned fishing boats and on his own boat.

I spent a lot of time walking on the docks and fingers (smaller docks projecting at 90 degrees) to look at and to photograph many of the boats. I pondered the differences in their configurations, sizes, rigging and visible gear. Opportunities occurred for visits with individuals who owned boats, worked on them or supported them. My photography was influenced by the physical size of the Terminal, its many buildings and their arrangement, as well as the daily activities of boats coming and going.

Learning about the history of the Terminal began with a visit to the office at the Fishermen's Center. Jim Serrill offered suggestions, and put me in touch with Bill Anschuetz, Port of Seattle Public Affairs. Two members of Serrill's staff, J. Carl Meyersahm and Gwen Savery, provided guidance, suggestions, and opened the door to the day-to-day actions of the Terminal. Contacts with the Port Commission's Ruth Strawser and Peggy Ellsworth, both of Legal Records, brought me together with bound sets of the port commissioners' records and other valuable data.

*Fishing season 2000 takes
off to slow start. Photo
Sam Sutherland, 2000.*

My search also took me to the University of Washington library and School of Fisheries, the International Halibut Commission, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS), the State of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Seattle Public Library. I visited businesses that service the fishing industry. I accumulated a lot of paper, books and publications. The quest for information took me down many paths to many places and people for which I'm grateful. I've gained an appreciation for and some insight into the business of fish.

THE HISTORY:

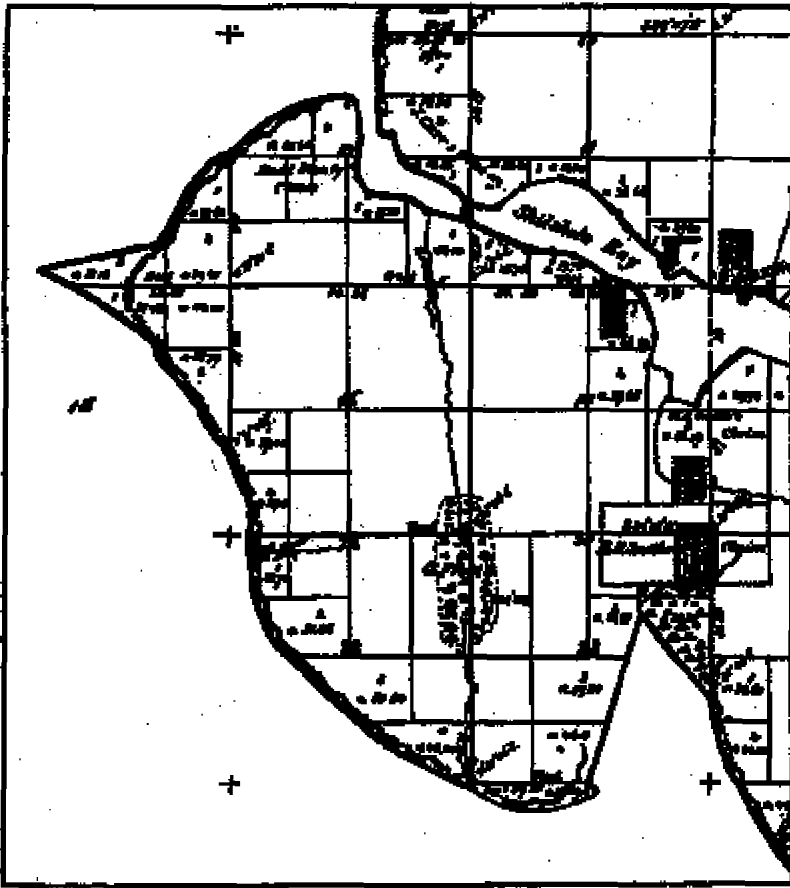
Salmon Bay Before the Terminal

The earliest fishermen using Salmon Bay were American Indians, specifically the Shilshole-Ahmish, or people of Shilshole, who lived in the settlements at the north end of Salmon Bay and fished for their livelihood.⁴

The early day residents lived with mature forests likely fir, cedar, hemlocks and spruce. These trees were the resources for their means of existence. As non-Indian settlers moved into the area, a partnership of James and Daniel O'Leary with William Cochran, put loggers to work, and by the early 1900s only a few old-growth trees remained standing. As time passed smaller trees took over, as did the brush and bushes. Vegetation included wild blackberries, ferns, cranberries, nettles, skunk cabbage, and salmonberry.⁵

In time, modest parcels of cleared land supported houses and outbuildings. Subsistence farming made its appearance.

Several creeks emptied into the Salmon Bay from Magnolia and Ballard. At low tides, muddy tidal flats appeared. An 1884 City of Seattle report noted that the beaches near the entrance to the Bay were excellent



Kroll Deed Claim Map.
Circa 1860s.

for clam digging, and that there was an abundant supply of crab, clams, oysters, mussels and shrimp. In early time photographs, the beaches appeared open, with a few snags deposited by the tidal action.⁶

Early non-Indian settlers appeared in the mid-1850s and began filing land claims in the 1860s. A Land Office map revealed Edmond Carr, H. A. Smith, and John Ross filed claims on areas that are the site of today's Fishermen's Terminal.⁷ An 1884 Seattle Public Library map, prepared by F. C. Tucker, Civil Engineer and Surveyor, for Eshelman Llewellyn and Company, placed the area for the Fishermen's Terminal in the Pike Addition. This map indicated that a creek flowed through the Terminal area and the water came from the northwest side of Queen Anne. Today, there is no evidence of this stream.⁸

As reported by the *Ballard News-Tribune* July 26, 1902, “A war has broken out between the Puget Sound fish trap owners and the gill net fishermen.” The gill netters went into the Salmon Bay traps and fished and the trap owners had them arrested. The gill netters then declared the presence of traps in Puget Sound contrary to federal laws. At the time more than 500 men were engaged in trap fishing. The number of “trappers” at work gives substantial evidence to the presence of large numbers of salmon in Salmon Bay.⁹

After condemnation and land acquisition in 1912, construction began on Fishermen’s Terminal in 1913. At that time Magnolia consisted of a few hundred residents, and a small number of subsistence farms. Two wooden bridges provided access to downtown. Construction of the Hiram Chittenden Locks was underway following groundbreaking ceremonies November 10, 1912.¹⁰

Terminal Creation, Growth and Expansion: 1912 - 1987

The first significant step in the creation of Fisherman’s Terminal was when the Port of Seattle Commissioners (General Hiram Chittenden, Judge C. E. Remsberg and Robert Bridges) voted to adopt changes in the harbor lines of Salmon Bay in December 1911, which would result in one of the “districts” becoming Fishermen’s Terminal.

The motion of Judge Remsberg carried unanimously. The Counsel was instructed to report on the question of creating one or more improvement districts for the purpose of raising a portion of the necessary funds for such sites and improvements, the remainder to be charged against the entire port.¹¹

On January 26, 1912, the commissioners abandoned their proposed cooperation with King County in the work of improvement of Salmon Bay and lower Duwamish, and determined that the Port would provide the \$350,000 needed for the Salmon Bay development.¹²

**A TERMINAL IS BORN:
PORT COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES AND
REPORTS**

“On Friday, January 26, 1912, the Commissioners abandoned its proposed cooperation with King County in the work of improvement of Salmon Bay and lower Duwamish. Instead the Port would provide the entire funds for the Salmon Bay development, \$550,000.” (Minutes of a special meeting of the Seattle Port Commission, January 26, 1912.)

“On May 31, 1912, by Resolution 55, the Commission of the Port of Seattle provided for the condemnation of land and other property for the purpose of creating, maintaining and operating the Salmon Bay Improvement. This action was a part of a larger action known as the Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvement of the Port of Seattle. The land condemned consisted of approximately 55.4 acres between 15th Avenue West and 20th Avenue West, and between West Emerson and Salmon Bay Waterway.” (Port of Seattle Commission Records)

“To acquire for future development a considerable tract of ground on the south side of Salmon Bay in the immediate neighborhood of the Interbay railroad yards and best situated at any point of the bay for future commercial development. As an initial step in this development the commission will make provisions on the east side of the tract for the purse seiners’ fleet of Puget Sound. This provision will consist of slips for laying up boats, a marine railway for hauling out for repairs, places for drying out nets, sheds for storage of the paraphernalia of the boats, oil tanks for supplying installation. Plans for this work are completed and bids have been accepted for the dredging and bulkhead work. The plan ought to be ready for use in six months.” (Commission’s Annual Report, Port of Seattle, December 31, 1912.)

“Actual construction work on the fishermen’s dock was begun February 15, 1913.” (Commission Records)

Four months later, the Commission of the Port of Seattle approved land and other property provided for “the purpose of creating, maintaining and operating the Salmon Bay Improvement. This action was a part of a larger action known as the Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvement for the Port of Seattle.” The land allocated for the new terminal consisted of approximately 35.4-acres between 15th Avenue West and 20th Avenue West, and between West Emerson and Salmon Bay Waterway.¹³

By the end of 1912, the Port of Seattle Commission’s first annual report called the project “snug harbor” and proposed acquiring more land in the Interbay railroad yards for future commercial development.¹⁴

The construction work on the fishermen’s dock began February 15, 1913, according to the Commission records. At the time the Commission reported the fishing fleet of Puget Sound “as a large one, there being about 250 purse seiners, together with gill netters, trollers [sic], cannery tenders, etc.” The boats were dispersed up and down the Sound. With facilities at Salmon Bay, the fleet would be concentrated at the “snug harbor.” Revenue projections estimated \$150,000 per boat for outfitting, and provisioning.¹⁵

The Commission’s plan called for timber bulkheads with the area behind them to be filled to a height of 12 feet above the present high tide level. The cost of fill at that time was 15 cents per cubic yard. This provided a 4-foot height above the water line when the Hiram Chittenden Locks became operational. On the west side of the property, the development included a wide slip nearly 1,000 feet long with a wharf and large merchandise shed on each side. The facility design supported transfer of freight to and from large ocean steamers to

meet the needs of US Army operations at Fort Lawton. As work proceeded problems developed in dredging out the former tideway swamp. “*The blue clay muck, when dredged up, prevented the fill from being consummated in 1913,*” and delayed the net warehouse and the marine railway, according to Port of Seattle records.¹⁶

In 1913 Fishermen’s Terminal became a functioning, identifiable facility on the edge of Salmon Bay alongside the Northern Pacific Railroad trestle, a wooden structure that connected Magnolia, Queen Anne and Ballard. At this time, the Salmon Bay waterway connected directly to Shilshole Bay and was subjected to the daily tides and the salt water of Puget Sound. This condition

would change when the Hiram Chittenden Locks began operation in 1917, and fresh water flowed from Lake Washington and Lake Union and surrounded the Terminal’s piers and docks. Fresh water eliminates the barnacles, which in salt water, attach themselves to the hull and increase vessel drag.

In late 1914, the Port of Seattle exchanged title to a portion of Smith’s Cove Waterway Commission with the Great Northern Railway Company, receiving in return title to the property consisting of the Salmon Bay Terminal property and what was called “Tract B” which included approximately 7.67-acres south and .83-acres north of West Emerson Street.¹⁷

Opening day at the Terminal, 1913.
Courtesy of Gordon Strand, Nordic Heritage Museum.



While the Hiram Chittenden Locks were under construction, the Port of Seattle completed a permanent bulkhead and a new pier to expand Fishermen's Terminal. Completion of the \$500,000 facility heralded a new era in the fishing industry, according to the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. A parade of nearly 200 boats led by the *F/V Inga* opened the celebration. General H. M. Chittenden, president of the Port Commission, formally dedicated it on this date. H. J. Hemen of the Salmon Bay Improvement Committee read the General's prepared address. Cavanaugh's Band provided music and the Norwegian Singing Society sang.¹⁸

The water's depth in Salmon Bay alongside the wharf was reported to be 25 feet, sufficient without further dredging for ordinary fishing vessels. In 1932, the *Ballard News-Tribune* reported the need to dredge the Canal from Salmon Bay to Lake Washington. Shippers claimed the canal inadequate to handle large, loaded vessels as the average depth at the time ranged from 25 to 26 feet. The Port of Seattle engineers recommended a depth of 30 feet.¹⁹

In 1934, Port Commissioner J. A. Early conceived an overall expansion program for the Terminal to keep up with the growth of the fishing industry, but five years passed before construction began in 1939. The changes included one new net shed and installation of saw-tooth mooring piers of a unique design by the Port of Seattle engineering staff. These were later duplicated by other facilities.²⁰

The Terminal site grew slowly until the 1940s. During this era new net sheds, four new docks, and an extension to an existing dock increased the facility's size. The United States entered World War II December 7, 1941. A photograph taken in 1942 shows a large ship under construction in an area now occupied by the north ends of docks 3 and 4.²¹

On July 14, 1945, the Port of Seattle bought 15.73-acres of additional property from the Union Pacific Railroad for \$25,130. The property was west of the Salmon Bay Terminal.²²

On February 5, 1946, the Port Commission bought an additional piece of property from the Great Northern Railway Company to include Block 97, Gilman's Addition: Lots 1,2, and 3 and a portion of lots 4, 5, 6, 7, 46, 47, and 48 for \$703. Additional land acquired at Salmon Bay Terminal was Lot 10, Block 100. Gilman's Addition would provide a level entrance to the eastside of the Terminal.²³

A voter-approved bond issue in 1948 provided \$1-million in financing for the Fishermen's Terminal. Charles Regal wrote in the September 9, 1949, issue of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, "They're letting out the seams." Regal reported that the Port of Seattle officials intended to better San Francisco. The Great Northern Railway participated in the plans for future expansion. The new access to the facility was greatly improved with the completion of the Emerson Street Viaduct. The Northern Pacific Railway, the Port of Seattle



Above: Look at the Terminal facility on opening day. Courtesy of Gordon Strand, Nordic Heritage Museum.

Below: F/V Inga leads the parade from the Terminal. Courtesy of Gordon Strand, Nordic Heritage Museum and relative of boat owner.

We hope you enjoyed this excerpt from our recent book, *Magnolia: Making More Memories*. There are another 14+ pages of this chapter in the book.