

A nonprofit organization devoted to the maritime history of Sitka and Southeastern Alaska

P. O. Box 2153 Sitka, AK 99835

www.sitkamaritime.org

Seining Stories

The Sitka Maritime Heritage Society's annual meeting in February featured a panel of fishermen and buyers who shared stories of seining, from the 1940s on. They shared stories of ecstasy and hard work, legendary skippers and legendary disasters, and the surprising changes this fishery has seen even in the last ten or fifteen years. Once again the riches in this topic were too vast for one short program. Seining has been everything from cotton nets and no fish, to low prices and returns that overwhelmed the fleet. There has been an enormous increase in the fishing capacity of each boat, and the future has great promise and potential hardship as the fish runs and fishermen continue to change in unprecedented ways.

Eric Jordan hosted the panel. Panelists and audience members who shared stories and insights included Fred Hope, Karen Johnson, Harold Thompson, Phil Wyman, Herb Didrickson, Sonny Enloe, Mo Johnson, Grace Larsen, and Herman Davis. Roy Bailey did not get a chance to speak but did write down his recollections.

Next year's annual meeting, in February 2008, will feature trolling, with a focus on the 1970s.

Sitka Sound Adventure Race

The inaugural Sitka Sound Ocean Adventure Race, a long distance competition for human-powered craft, was held in Sitka on June 16th. The Sitka Maritime Heritage Society hosted the post-race picnic, grilling salmon donated by the Northern Southeast Region Aquaculture Association.

The highlight of the reception was the opportunity to view the Willits Brothers canoe *Nakwasina*, paddled from Tacoma to Juneau by Jack and Sasha Calvin, immortalized in Jack Calvin's article in the July 1933 National Geographic Magazine. The canoe was available



The *Nakwasina*, as pictured in the July 1933 National Geographic Magazine.



Herb Didrickson remembers seining in the 1940s. Behind him are third generation fish buyer Harold Thomsen, and fisherman Karen Johnson, who grew up working on her family's boat. Photo by James Poulson.

to view thanks to Mary Purvis, Sonia Birkeland, Tonia Birkeland and Larry Calvin. This beautiful vessel, a "floating work of art" has been lovingly preserved and is a joy to behold. The canoe is featured in a recent book, *The Willits Brothers and Their Canoes*, by Patrick F. Chapman.

Beta Sigma Phi Art Auction Benefit

Beta Sigma Phi, with the Fishermen's Eye Art Gallery, held a benefit art auction in March to benefit the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society. Sitka City Administrator John Stein was host and auctioneer. The evening saw some wonderful generosity, some good deals, and many beautiful and unique pieces – including several by the late Dale DeArmond – going to good homes. The generosity of buyers and donors resulted in a remarkable \$7,500 for the boathouse project.

Delta Western Fuel Dock

The major activity of the SMHS board this spring was negotiation of a sublease with fuel distributor Delta Western for a marine fuel dock to be attached to part of the boathouse property. The boathouse is owned by the City and Borough of Sitka, through a transfer from the State of Alaska initiated by the SMHS in 2004, and leased to the SMHS for the maritime heritage center project.

The fuel dock will be located between the boathouse and the city work float. The dock will be similar to the Petro Marine dock across the channel. Underground fuel tanks will be filled from bulk storage tanks elsewhere in town.

The sublease and the city's Agreement to Sublease have been carefully developed by the SMHS board, city staff, Delta Western, and lawyers for all parties. The sublease also went in front of the City and Borough Assembly for approval, which was unanimous. The process also included an environmental assessment and consultation with the Alaska State Historic Preservation Office.

The sublease will result in a minimum of \$50,000 and a cap of \$75,000 annually to the SMHS, based on a rate of 6.5 cents a

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A Short History of Greentop Harbor by Jerry Dzugan

For a half century or so, Greentop Harbor, on the ocean side of the southern tip of Yakobi Island, flourished as a small settlement during the heyday of salmon trolling along that coast. But its fortunes followed the fishery, and it is now fading back to the state of nature in which it began.

The name Greentop belonged originally to a small island, with a distinctive grassy top, outside the harbor. The name was first published by the U.S. Geological Survey in 1928, but had probably been in local use for quite some time before that. By the 1940s the name had been extended to the nearby cove being used by then as a sheltered anchorage by trollers, and was formalized as Greentop Harbor in a 1951 USGS publication.

No trace is now evident of uses of Greentop before the late 1930s, even though it was certainly used and explored over the centuries up until that time. It was probably first used by the Tlingit, and there were Tlingit villages nearby.

It is possible that the treacherous entrance to Lisianski Straits, close to Greentop Harbor, was the place that Chirikov, commander of the second vessel in Bering's expedition, lost two boats and a number of men when they set out for shore in 1741. Chirikov spent several days nearby waiting for his men, who never reappeared.

Russian naval officer Juri Lisianski named Yakobi Island in 1804 for a Russian official. During the Russian-American Company's sea otter hunting efforts over the next 60-odd years, Russian promyshlenniki or Aleut hunters could have put ashore at Greentop. Likewise prospectors, in the American era, almost certainly combed over Greentop, as there were at least four hard-rock gold mines established within 25 miles of the site.

Commercial troll fishing for king salmon was a substantial industry in southeastern Alaska by the time of World War I. Over the years the fishery gradually moved north, and was centered off Sitka and up the coast to Cross Sound by the mid to late 1930s. That development led to the founding of Pelican in 1938, and to the first on-shore settlement at Greentop Harbor about that time.

Bill Mork of Pelican fished out of Greentop in 1935, and said "there were no boats going in there then." Bill Hills, a long-time Greentop resident, said that by the late 1930s there were a few old bachelor fishermen, who lived on their boats. Bob DeArmond visited the spot in the spring of 1939, and saw no boats or structures.

In 1940, the U.S. Forest Service initiated a system of permits to allow individuals to build on Forest Service land, and a total of ten such permits were granted at Greentop starting that year. Some of them changed hands, for a total of 17 permit holders over the years. Not all permits had structures.

Joe Paddock and Bill Hills say Al Wright, who had fished out of



Ruins of one of the Thompson buildings in Greentop Harbor in 1994.

Greentop for some time, was the first to settle there. The substantial log cabin he built for himself over six years reverted to the government in 1961, and is now one of the finest of the Tongass National Forest recreational rental cabins.

When Bill Hills first met him, he was having a hard time learning to fish. One day Bill Hills told him that the fishing was good right outside the harbor and he could make four or five hundred dollars a day. The next morning Al got out but he didn't understand that the bottom wasn't all smooth and even, and soon broke his trolling poles and stripped his gear. He was next seen ten miles offshore with his gear only ten fathoms deep, missing all the fish.

By November of 1939 A. Stanley Thompson of Hoonah, one of the first to fish out of Greentop, built a store on the north side of Greentop's inner harbor. He obtained a USFS permit for 167 acres in 1940 and built a dock, shop, and house. The buildings were plumbed with running water from a creek, the only buildings that had it in Greentop Harbor. The ruins of these three buildings can still be seen.

Thompson's fish-buying operation was serviced by a series of vessels all named Nuisance, the original one followed by the Nuisances II, III, and IV; those boats were well known around the region for years. The Nuisance II was quite large, a 115-foot former navy vessel, but managed to run in and out of the tricky Greentop entrance for years, often towing buying scows.

Thompson bought fish in Greentop from at least 1940 to the mid to late 1950s with his wife, daughter Geraldine and sons Mike and Stanley Jr. (Steamy). The Thompsons were remembered as a hard-working and ambitious family. Bill Hills, asked if there had ever been any of the "red light" barges at Greentop, said that Mrs. Thompson never would have tolerated that: she believed that "fishermen were supposed to catch and sell fish and not mess around."

Stanley Thompson lobbied to have the harbor officially named Greentop Harbor, and for the light to be placed on Greentop Island itself to mark the entrance.

Another prominent buyer at Greentop was Clarence Moy, also from Hoonah; he and his family bought for years for Engstrom Brothers of Juneau and Wrangell. A third major operator was Whiz Fisheries. Although they were a big company they were not without a sense of humor (of sorts), as they called their boat the Golden Mist. Their other fish packing boats had names that were a variation on this same theme.

During the 1940s, as many as 50 trollers fished out of Greentop, so that at times it was hard to find a place to anchor. Some of those who fished out of that harbor in its glory years included Bill and Alice Mork; Joe Hanus; Jake and Nancy Phillips; Carl Pearson; the brothers Bill Hills and Jim Hills; Joe Scott; Magnus Larsen; N.C. Christensen; Nils Oberg; Jack Roddy; Joe Paddock; and Frank Ganz.



New! Pigment-dyed T-shirts with woodcut image by Rebecca Poulson of shore boat Donna on the boatshop ways. Also on ladies t-shirt and totes, \$20. \$25 for long sleeve and \$20 for short sleeve shirts.

Cannery label T-shirts are also still available.

Hats with shore boat Arrowhead. Oilskin caps, black or brown are \$25, and cotton caps, blue or red, are \$20.

Limited edition Nancy Taylor Stonington painting of the boathouse is \$95.

Members receive 20% discount on shirts and hats. To buy goods call 747-3448, or send a check (include \$2 postage per item) to the SMHS, P. O. Box 2153, Sitka, Alaska 99835.

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Carl Pearson on the Patsy was one of the last old time fishermen to fish out of "Trollers Cove" when he retired in the early 1990s. He was one of the many "down below" boats that fished out of Greentop in the summer and returned to the Seattle area for the winter. Perhaps typically for these fishermen, when he came in to Pelican he would clean up his boat, put on his suit, his Filson jacket and his Stetson hat before walking up the dock.

Across from the Thompsons' buildings is a small inner bay nicknamed "Million Dollar Cove," site of the cabins of Bill and Jim Hills and Joe Scott, the only permanent residents in Greentop from the 1940s to the 1980s. Flo Reed, asked why it was called Million Dollar Cove, said, "it must have been because those guys had everything they needed. They were a pretty happy lot". Many boaters and kayakers who visited Greentop in the 1970s and early 1980s have fond memories of visiting the Hills brothers or Joe Scott, known for their hospitality and prolific gardens.

Bill and Jim Hills' permit was initiated in 1948. The brothers came from Iowa, and were commercial fishing by 1938. Bill was fishing out of Greentop by 1946, after having spent the war years in the army in Sitka building and repairing the small boats used to supply the bunkers in Sitka Sound. Both of the brothers were involved with labor organizing in the 1930s and 1940s.

Bill entered the Sitka Pioneer's Home in January 1980, and sold his buildings at Greentop to a consortium of six people, including this author. He left Greentop with only a couple of suitcases, leaving his tools and most of his other possessions behind.

By the 1980s the salmon drag off Greentop Harbor had ended.



Annual meeting panel host Eric Jordan telling a story involving closing up the seine. Photo by James Poulson.

Explanations include the discovery of the Fairweather grounds, or the dams built on the Columbia River. The last of the "gentlemen fishermen" of Greentop have passed on, and just two private cabins remain in seasonal use. Though Greentop Harbor is no longer the busy little place it was sixty years ago, it still offers peace and shelter to weary boatmen who make their way there.



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gallon of fuel sold. This will be used toward hiring the SMHS's first staff. It will be a major step forward for the organization and in winning the confidence of potential major funders.

Delta Western plans to open for business next summer.

\$10,000 Grant from Tourism Cares

The Sitka Maritime Heritage Society was proud to be awarded a \$10,000 grant from the organization Tourism Cares this spring. From their press release:

As part of its mission, Tourism Cares distributes grants to worthy nonprofit organizations worldwide. Of 200 applicants, 7 were selected based on the recommendations of a Blue Ribbon Panel. "The restoration of this historic World War II building in Sitka, Alaska will educate current visitors and future generations about the region's maritime heritage." said Bruce Beckham, Executive Director of Tourism Cares.

Tourism Cares is a 501(c)(3) non-profit public charity that brings people together to give back through grants to natural, cultural and historic sites around the world, through scholarships and educational programs that nurture tourism's future workforce and through volunteering to help preserve and restore tourism-related sites in need of care and rejuvenation. For additional information about Tourism Cares, visit www.tourismcares.org.

Northwest Passage, Black Cod, Captains

Other events sponsored by the SMHS this year include the slide presentation by Martina Kurzer of her journey through the Northwest Passage in 1993 aboard the wooden adventure ship, ex-fishing vessel Dagmar Aaen; a display at Kattleson Memorial Library; presentation to submarine veterans visiting Sitka aboard the Oosterdam; a matinee of the 1937 classic Hollywood film *Captains Courageous*; and grilled black cod tips at Alaska Day.

Upcoming Events:

Friday, November 16th: The Sails of the Vasa, 1628, by sail-maker and sail historian Louis Bartos, 7 p.m. at Harrigan Centennial Hall.

Saturday, November 17th: Essential Knots for the Mariner, a hands-on workshop by Louis Bartos, 10 a.m. to noon, Harrigan Centennial Hall.

If you received this newsletter by mail, your most recent membership expiration date is above your address. If there is no date, your membership expired more than one year ago.

Japonski Island Boathouse Rehabilitation

The Sitka Maritime Heritage Society is working to raise \$1.4 million to rehabilitate the historic Japonski Island boat shop as a working maritime heritage center, with boat repair, oral history, activities and exhibits. The SMHS has been awarded a prestigious Save America's Treasures grant of \$325,000, and is seeking private foundation and government grants. Local support, your membership and donation, is the keystone of the project, leveraging further funding and showing that people value maritime heritage.

As a member, you will receive the newsletter and a 20% dis-

count on t-shirts and other goods, plus being a **part of preserving Alaska's maritime heritage.**

The SMHS is a 501 (c)3 nonprofit so your donation is tax deductible.

If you would like to join or renew, or donate to the building fund, please fill out the form below and return it, along with your check, to:

**Sitka Maritime Heritage Society
P. O. Box 2153
Sitka, Alaska 99835**

I would like to get my newsletter by email regular mail

Name _____

Address _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

- \$15 Students and Elders
- \$30 Crew member
- \$40 Entire Crew (family)
- \$50 Mate

- \$100 Navigator
- \$250 Captain
- \$500 Pilot
- \$1000 Old Salt
- Other _____

In addition to my membership I would like to make a donation of \$_____ to the building fund.

Thank You!

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