

A SHORT HISTORY OF BUDD INLET

AUGUST, 1992



Boating on Budd Inlet. Bigelow Family Collection.

Prepared By: Thurston County Historic Commission

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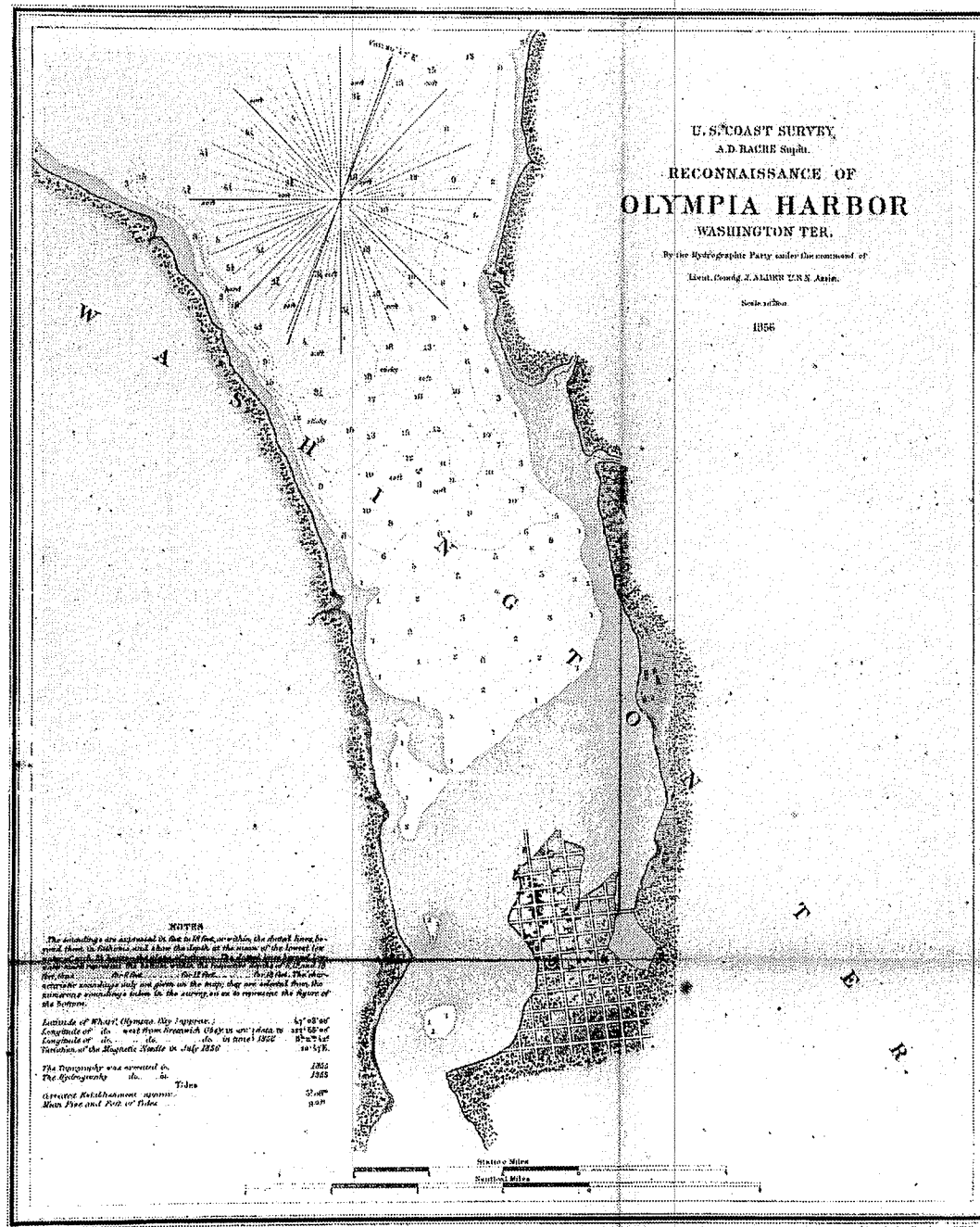
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1856 Harbor Survey. Special Collections Division. University of Washington Libraries,
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Budd Inlet is a shallow inlet of the southern basin of Puget Sound in the State of Washington. This area formed by changes in the earth's crust was carved through several glacial periods which downcut the main channels through glacial erosion and glacial deposition. Olympia at the head of the inlet was the southernmost extent of one the latest of these glacial periods about 13,000 years ago.

Budd Inlet is approximately 7 miles long with an average width of 1.5 miles and maximum width of 1.6 miles. The average depth of the inlet is 9 meters at low tide and 354 meters near the mouth. The major source of fresh water is the Deschutes River, which flows into the inlet at the south end.

Major landforms of the inlet include the Olympia Peninsula, which extends northward from the head of the inlet, with west and east bays extending southward on either side of the peninsula. Other landforms of the inlet include Butler and Tykle Coves on the west side of the inlet, Cooper Point and Boston Harbor at the entrance to the Inlet on the north, and Ellis Cove and Gull Harbor on the east side of the Inlet. The southern end of the inlet was historically an estuary for the Deschutes River, and Percival, Indian and Moxlie Creeks, fresh water streams, also flow into the Inlet at the south end. The Deschutes River was dammed in 1951 to form Capitol Lake, which now has a flood gate to the bay.

Extensive dredging of the Olympia Harbor Area over a number of years has dramatically changed the land and water configuration.

PREHISTORIC CULTURAL OCCUPATIONS

The peninsula now known as Olympia was "the black bear place" to the Native Americans whose village had occupied the site for many generations before the first white settlement was established. As the new city emerged, the area became known as "Steh-chas" the name which is best remembered to identify both the place and the people. Evidence exists that Budd Inlet was a favorite meeting place where neighboring tribal groups gathered to celebrate festive occasions. Indians continued to inhabit the beaches at Budd Inlet after the Euroamerican settlement of Olympia. In 1853, Mrs. Samuel Percival noted that in Olympia "All along the beach were Indian huts and the whole beach was lined with canoes." Early trade was with Indians who occupied "Chinook" street in Olympia in their longhouse located near Columbia Street and 4th Avenue.



Salish Women at a summer camp, "Puget Sound Camp," by Edward Curtis from Volume 9, page 48, of his The North American Indian, ca. 1896.

Indian names for a number of sites along the inlet including Butler Cove, Percival Creek, Deschutes River, Olympia, Priest Point Park, Gull Harbor, and Dofflemeyer Point indicate prehistoric habitation there. Archaeological sites associated with these occupations have been identified at Priest Point Park and other sites along the bay. Descendants of the Indians that lived along Budd Inlet are now members of the Squaxin and Nisqually tribes.

EXPLORATION AND SETTLEMENT

Early Euroamerican explorers to the area include the English Vancouver Expedition in 1792. On May 20, 1792, an expedition of sixteen men under the command of Lt. Peter Puget departed the Vancouver Expedition main ship, Discovery, anchored off what is now Bainbridge Island, in two small boats. Puget explored Southern Puget Sound including Budd Inlet in an attempt to locate the Northwest Passage. After the reconnaissance work of Puget, Vancouver named the area south of the Narrows in his honor. (Meany, "Notes and Documents")

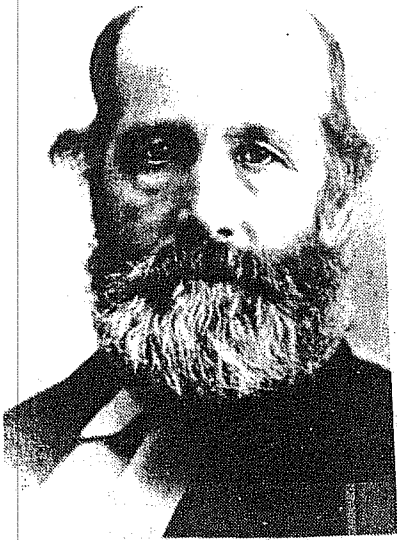
The first Euroamerican settlement activity in the vicinity was by the Hudson Bay Company who first established a storehouse near the Nisqually River in 1832. They had considered the falls of the Deschutes at Budd Inlet as a post site because of its potential as a mill seat for grist and saw mills. This idea appears to have been abandoned because of the poor quality of the surrounding land for agricultural use. One account by a retired Hudson Bay employee, Thomas Otchin was that he was the first permanent settler in what is now Olympia, having spent 1841 there.

In July 1841, the U.S. Exploring Expedition under Lt. Charles Wilkes visited Puget Sound. Wilkes, Lt. Thomas Budd and Mr. Henry Eld set out in 3 boats and reached the head of the inlet on July 9 and described the falls of the "Shutes River." He described it:

"This arm is of about 9 miles deep and the Shutes River falls . . . with its head down a fall of some 65 feet in height it is here about 10 feet wide and 2 feet deep, it forms a basin of 50 feet diameter at its foot from which the land rises and makes a cool pleasant retreat in summer the bubbling of the cascade is agreeable. After forming our encampment and discharging the Boats I dispatched Lt. B (Budd) & Md. Eld to begin the Survey, the head of this Inlet or arm is very shoal for some distance (1/2 miles) from its head & has an extensive mud flat with a channel of 20 to 30 feet in width with water enough for a boat at low water."

Wilkes named the inlet in honor of his Lieutenant, Thomas A. Budd. Budd was acting master of the Peacock in the Expedition. Budd was appointed midshipman on February 2, 1829. He resigned his commission on April 29, 1853. He rejoined the United States Navy in 1861 and was killed in action March 22, 1862 during the Civil War.

EARLY SETTLEMENT

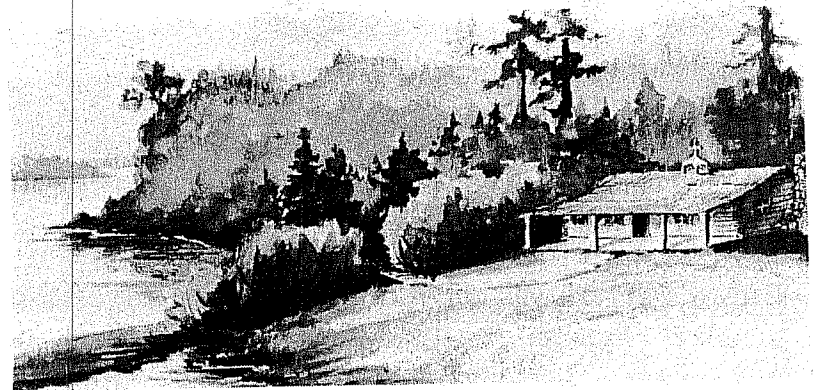


Edmund Sylvester. Photograph from the State Capital Museum.

First documented American settlement of the area was in 1845 when the Simmons Party settled near the falls of the Deschutes River, attracted by the opportunity to harness the waterpower for milling grain and lumber. The following year, Levi Smith and Edmund Sylvester claimed the site of what is now Olympia. Smith built a cabin near what was then the Olympia waterfront. When Smith died in 1848, the townsite passed to Sylvester who platted the city in 1850 reminiscent of his New England origins.

In 1848, a French Catholic missionary group, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, established a mission on the east side of Budd Inlet near what is now Priest Point Park. Fr. Pascal Ricard led the group, who named it St. Joseph's of New Market. Ricard claimed 324 acres of land, and the priests first lived in a house built by Michael T. Simmons and Samuel B. Crockett, New Market (later Tumwater) pioneers. Fr. Ricard and three other priests cleared land, planted a large garden, and later built a chapel and residence for the Indians to whom they ministered. They operated a school there for Indian boys and cultivated a large garden and orchard. They abandoned the site in 1860 and moved mission activities to Canada.

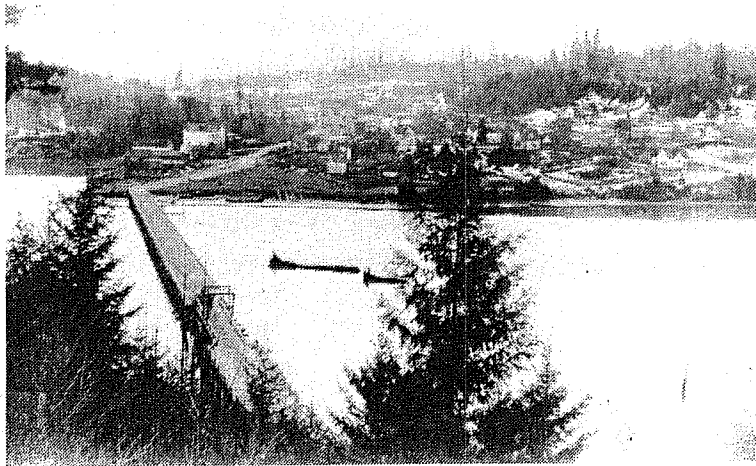
The U.S. Donation Land Claim Act of 1850 granted 320 acres to single men or 640 acres to married men over 18 who had settled in the area by December 1, 1850. Those settled in the territory by December 1, 1855 could claim 160 acres if single or 320 acres if married and over the age of 21. Much of the shoreland of Budd Inlet was claimed under the provisions of the law. Early Donation Land Claims on Budd Inlet included, on the west side, G. W. French, B. F. Brown, John L. Butler, Edmund Marsh, Samuel Percival, Alonzo Warren, George Tykle, E. J. Allen, and David Burntrager. Isaac Dofflemyer (Dofflemyer Point), Pascal Ricard (Priest Point Park), Edmund Sylvester, and Clanrick Crosby established claims on the south end. Daniel Bigelow, John Swan, Pascal Ricard, C. Ethridge, Quincy Brooks, William Billings, Joseph Shaw, George Whitworth, and William Lyle settled on the east side.



Helen McMicken drawing of the Schoolhouse at the St. Joseph's Mission, University of Washington Libraries.

Waterborne transportation was the most accessible means of travel for the early settlers in the days when virgin forests thickly covered the land. To facilitate marine travel, the first wharf on the Inlet was built in 1848. Samuel Hancock constructed this landing to deep water on the west side of Budd Inlet.

In 1849, Sylvester, who had inherited the site of Olympia (then known variously as Smithfield and Smithster) from his deceased partner Smith, purchased the brig Orbit in San Francisco. It was the first American ship to call at Olympia, as the town became known in 1850. The ship loaded pilings for San Francisco.



The Long Bridge looking south toward Tumwater. State Capital Museum photograph.

Still a part of Oregon Territory in 1851, Olympia was named the first Custom House on Puget Sound when the Puget Sound Collection District was established. That meant that all ships had to register in Olympia after entering Puget Sound before proceeding to other ports. Salmon, shingles, wood, and spars went out of Olympia. By 1853 steamboats were calling at Olympia. Edward Giddings built a long wharf extending from the foot of Main street in 1854. That same year the steamboat mail route was begun between Olympia and other points, including Port Townsend and Victoria.

In 1875, John French and his neighbor B. F. Brown built Brown's Wharf about a mile north of Olympia. Here steamers loaded wood which Brown and French cut and hauled. When passengers would arrive by ship they landed at Brown's Wharf and were brought to town by rowboat.

Brown's Wharf was built through a special levy with a tax of 2-1/2 mills. The wharf enabled the Pacific Transportation Steamers to call at Olympia. Cargoes at the Brown's Wharf included the famous Olympia oysters, Horton's Water Pipe from Tumwater, and the rails and locomotive for Olympia's railroad. To connect sea and rail transport, a short logging railroad was built to Brown's Wharf in 1883, but the wharf did not prove to be a viable shipping point.

Sam Percival, a native of Massachusetts, came to the northwest in the 1850's. He built the original Percival Dock in 1860. The wharf was rebuilt many times until it was torn down in 1977. In 1877, Captain Sam Percival turned the wharf over to his son, John C. Percival, born in Olympia in 1861. The wharf was haven for the flourishing steamboat trade which operated on Puget Sound. Steamers were the method of transportation on the Sound because of the difficulty of overland transportation through the

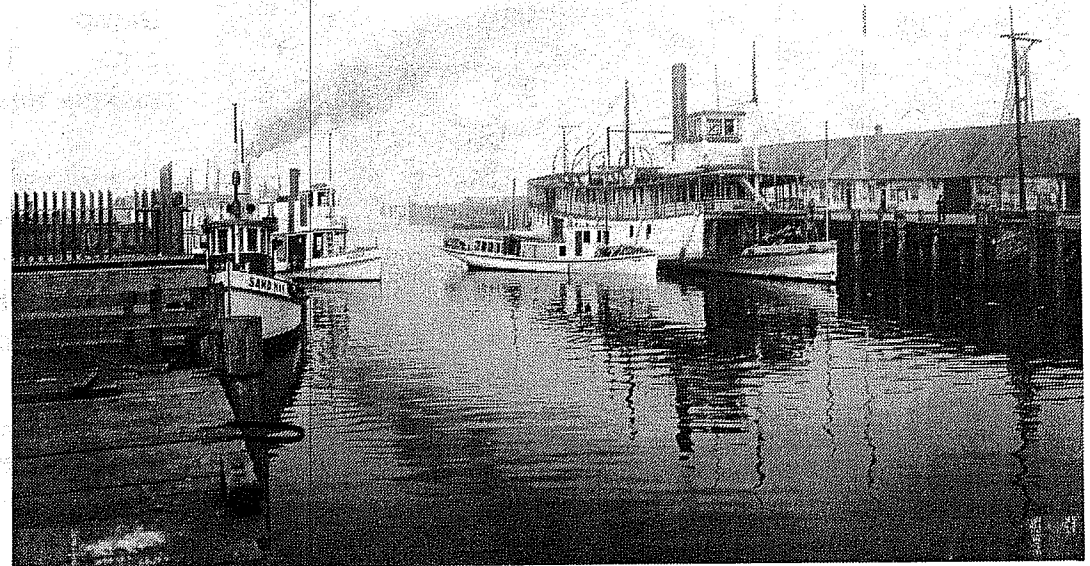


John C. Percival in his office. State Capital Museum photograph.

Percival Landing Park was built in 1977 by the City of Olympia and commemorates the Percival legacy to the history of the city.

Besides Percival Dock, the City of Olympia had a landing for smaller craft along the 4th Avenue bridge, and Samuel Horr's Dock was to the west of Percival's Landing. By the 1920's, local steamboating had given way to the more convenient automobile and highways for transportation.

thickly forested landscape. Water was the highway between settlements along timber laden Puget Sound. The American steamship era began in 1853 with the arrival of the small, side-wheel Fairy steamer in Olympia. Sidewheelers and sternwheelers punctuated the salt air with their whistles when a trip downsound was an adventure. The dock was the off-loading site for passengers and cargo. When the electric street cars came on the scene in Olympia in the 1890's, a spur was built to the dock to accommodate incoming passengers. Olympia Beer was brought by street car to the dock for transshipment. The Fourth of July celebration, a major event in early Olympia, climaxed here with Indian canoe races and rowing contests. The dock was the center for the colorful steamboat trade which brought the sidewheel and sternwheel craft to Olympia's front door. The dock was sold in 1926 to Capt. F. E. Lovejoy, who had the Puget Sound Freight Lines. His ships replaced the steamers. Percival retained his office which was a landmark on the Olympia waterfront until his death in 1945.



Percival Dock, Asahel Curtis photograph from the collection of the Washington State Historical Society.



4th Avenue bridge looking east. To the left is the railroad depot. Talcott Historic Postcard Collection.

The west side of the bay was known as Marshville for Judge Edmund Marsh. The first bridge to the west side was built in 1869. The name "Marshville" was dropped in the late 1800's. The east side of the inlet near Olympia was known as "Swantown" for John Swan, who had a claim in the area. Wooden causeways were built to join downtown with "Marshville" and Swantown" as early as 1856. Later a wooden drawbridge was built which allowed boats to reach the Olympia Brewery at the mouth of the Deschutes River. A series of replacements were built, with the present 4th Avenue bridge going up in 1921 in reinforced concrete. Later the slough separating Swantown from Olympia was filled with dredge spoils.

In the early years, the town of Olympia was oriented toward the bay with the first settlement on the waterfront, since overland travel was difficult. Early travel was most often on Puget Sound, often by Indian canoe, and later by steamboat. Olympia developed southward from the waterfront but continued to be dependent on waterborne transportation until the advent of improved roadways in the early 20th century. The city was without a mainline railroad for many years, making this water connection very important.

In another attempt to provide an adequate dock, the city bought land for a wharf at the foot of Main for \$150, and based on the 1885 Powell Survey of the harbor, thought up a number of ingenious ideas to dredge the mudflats for a port closer to the townsite. Everything from a dam at Priest Point to churning up the water with rakes was conceived. The city finally hired the dredge Umatilla from Portland to dig a channel from Main to deep water, and in 1887, built a long wharf to deep water measuring 4,798 feet and built on 927 piles.

As an aid to navigation, Dofflemyer Point Lighthouse was officially marked by a lens lantern on a 23-foot stake in December 1887. For many years the lighthouse keeper brought a lamp to a post at the site. The present concrete lighthouse was constructed in 1934.

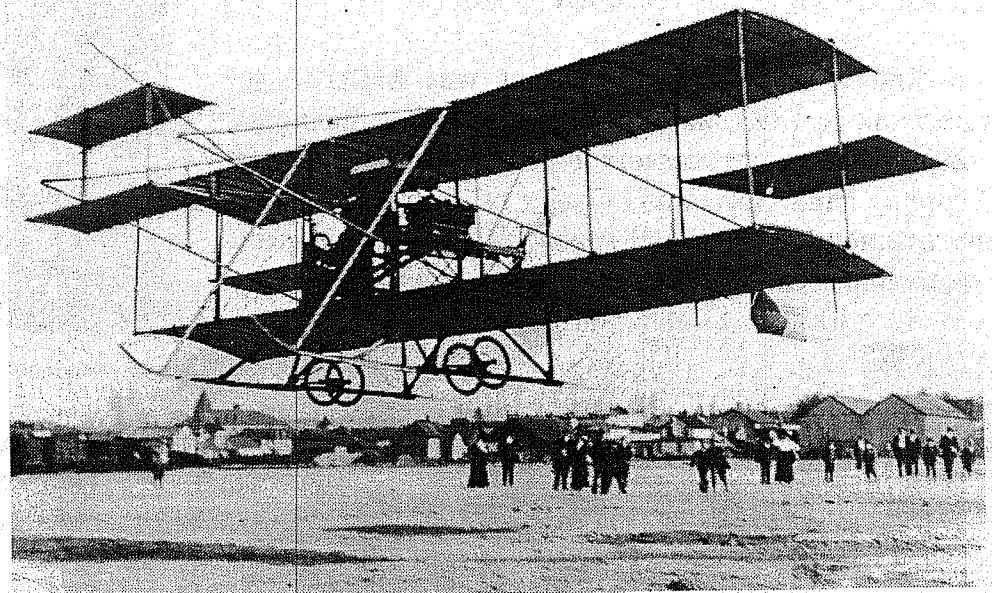
In the 1880's and 1890's, local loggers Ike Ellis and Ben Turner completed short logging railroads terminating on the Bay. Ellis' ran from Plum's Station south of Olympia to the east waterway and Turner's from Black Lake to the west waterway. (Newell, Rogues) Ellis logged much of the virgin timber both east and west of Budd Inlet north of Olympia. Ellis Cove is named for him.

By the late 1890's, sawmills lined the east and west sides of the bay near Olympia. On the west side were Olympia Fir Lumber, Panama Shingle, McCleary Lumber, and Buchanan Lumber. These all burned at various times in the early 20th century. Some mill owners built their homes overlooking the mills.

The relationship of Olympia to Budd Inlet was modified by the long-term dredging and filling of the southern end of the waterway and the eventual damming and bridging of the Deschutes River estuary.

The Army Corps of Engineers dredged the channel in 1893-94 and deposited the dirt under the 4th Avenue Bridge. By 1895, the long wharf was abandoned, as dredging allowed more extensive use of Percival Dock.

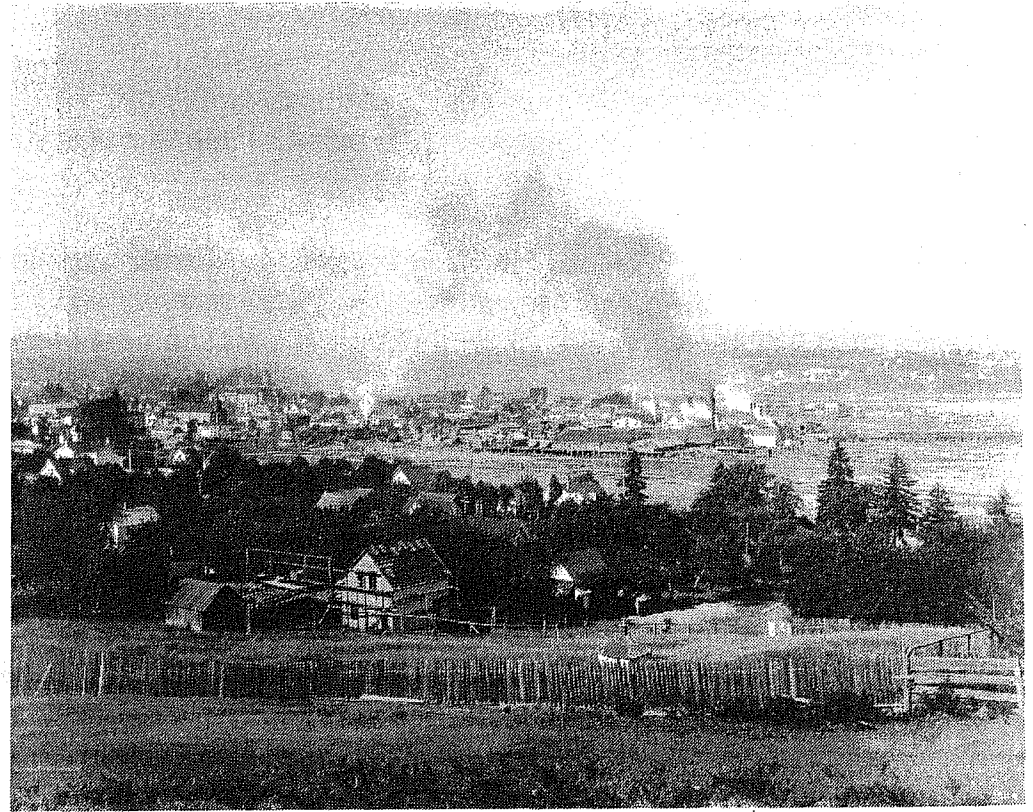
The City of Olympia's waterfront changed drastically during 1909 to 1911 when a dredge returned to fill much of what we know as downtown Olympia and part of the Deschutes waterway and Swantown slough. Known as the Carlyon Fill, after its organizer and promoter, mayor and state legislator P. H. Carlyon, the fill changed the shape of Olympia by adding 29 blocks of land in an effort which dredged 2 million cubic yards of mud. Much of the land north of Olympia Avenue is fill. The cost was \$250,000, and with a civic effort, all but \$48,000 was paid for by townspeople. Included in the improvements were railroad beltlines. The fill provided industrial sites for the prospering lumber mill industry and finally provided a deepwater port adjacent to Olympia.



Fred J. Wiseman brought a Curtiss Farman Wright plane to Olympia in May 1911 to fly on the new fill. State Capital Museum photograph.

Olympia Oysters or (*Ostrea lurida*) were native to Budd Inlet and harvested prehistorically by Native Americans. The first Euroamericans appreciated the oyster's availability, and a pioneer saying was "When the tide is out, the table is set." By 1868, a brisk trade was underway in oysters with San Francisco, and another adage was born, "Olympia, the home of the gods; Olympia oyster, food of the gods." In Olympia's efforts to maintain its title of state capital, promoters sent the oyster statewide, and the Olympia oyster became known as the "succulent lobbyist."

The first oyster processing plant was built on the waterfront in 1893, and others were rebuilt during the 1920's. Oyster processors included Brenner Oyster Company and Olympia Oyster Company. With improvements in overland roads, processing moved to Totten Inlet (Oyster Bay) where the producing oyster beds were located. Later, sulfite waste and other



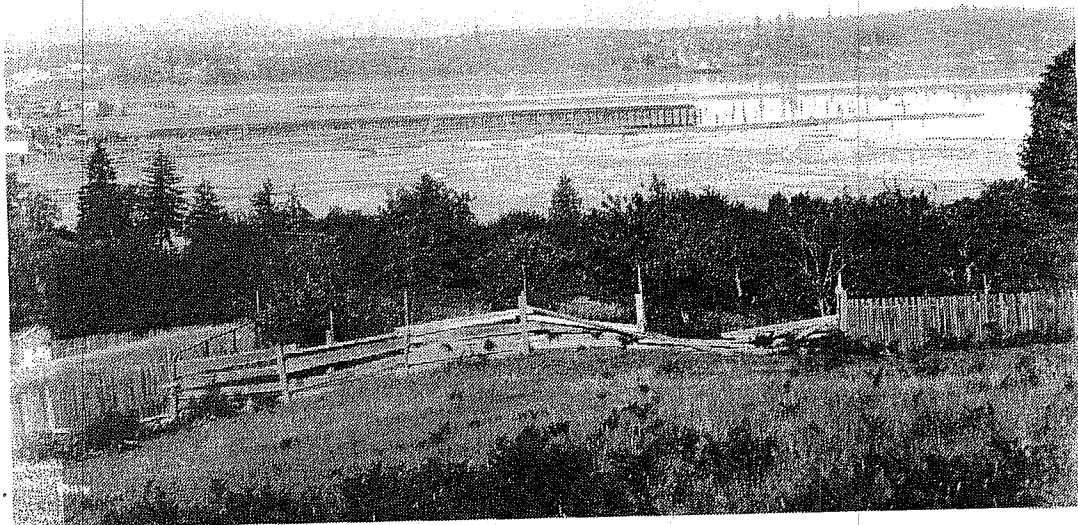
Panoramic view of Downtown Olympia and the Long Bridge.

environmental factors caused the decline of the Olympia Oyster, which has recently been regenerated. The Olympia Oyster House, first built as a processing facility, is still located on the waterfront as a restaurant.

During the Alaska Gold Rush, residents near Gull Harbor saw the market for dried prunes as a non-perishable foodstuff and established prune orchards and large prune drying barns in the area. None of these facilities are extant. Brickyards were also operating around the turn of the century near Gull Harbor, utilizing the natural clay there. Brickbats are still evident in some areas near Gull Harbor. The brick was transported by boat from that location.



Thurston County Prune Dryer. Asahel Curtis Photograph from the collection of the Washington State Historical Society.



Asahel Curtis photographs from the collection of the Washington State Historical Society.

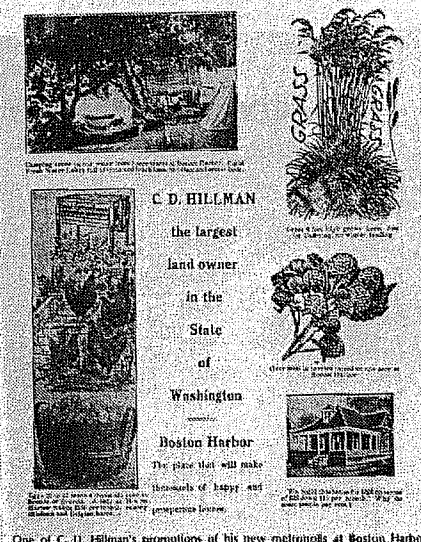
succeeded by C. D. Hillman whose new town "Boston Harbor" was promoted through tours, newspapers and flyers. Some work was begun there, but by 1911 Hillman was on trial for mail fraud and the promotion fell by the wayside with some residents still holding the lots sold by Hillman. Many lived on in the area which has now become a popular residential community with a small marina.

Priest Point Park was purchased by the City in 1906 as one of its first parks and developed through community efforts centered around workdays capped by clambakes. The park is primarily a natural environment with picnic facilities, a playground, and beach. At one time, the park had a large population of peafowl.

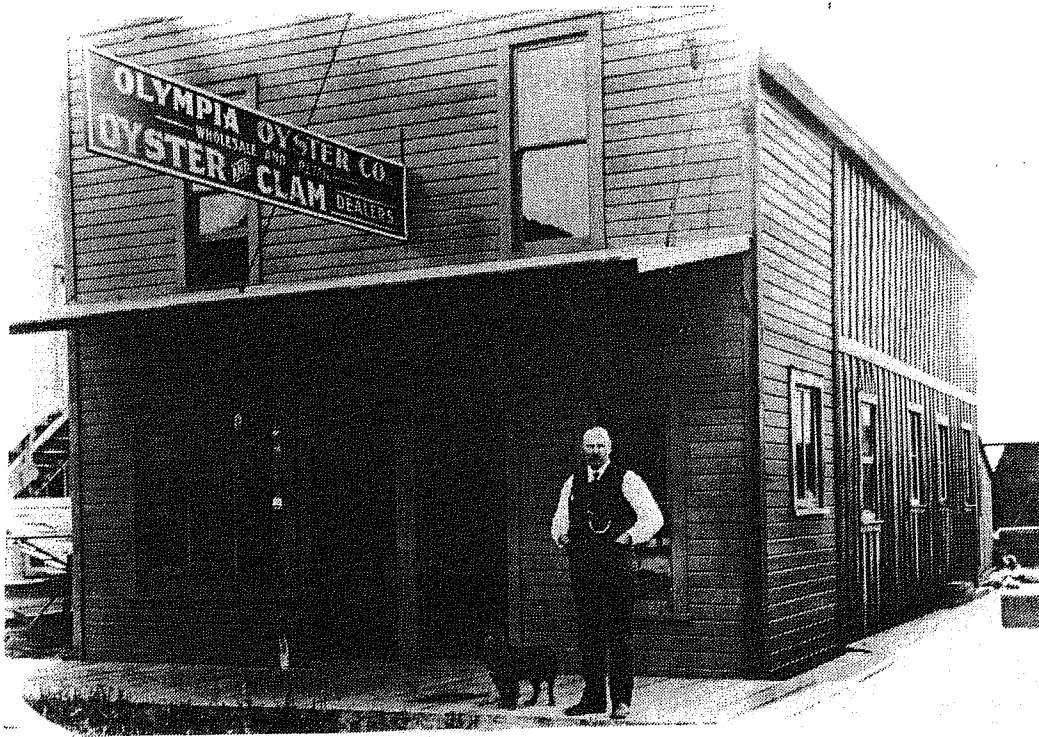
In 1891, a Congregationalist minister, J. R. Chaplin platted the tip of Cooper Point as College Grove. In 1900, he platted "Athens" on Cooper Point, which was to be the site of "People's University." Two hundred acres of his development were reserved for cultivation and university purposes. Although the college never prospered, indeed never moved from its Olympia location, the name is remembered in "Athen's Beach" on the bay.

In 1904, P. P. Carroll, pioneer newspaperman and lawyer, announced plans for a seaport at Dofflemeyer Point. Long wharfs and wide boulevards were to mark the new metropolis. "Harriman City" was to be the terminus of the Union Pacific Railroad. Ideas and action for the new city faded in the fall of 1907.

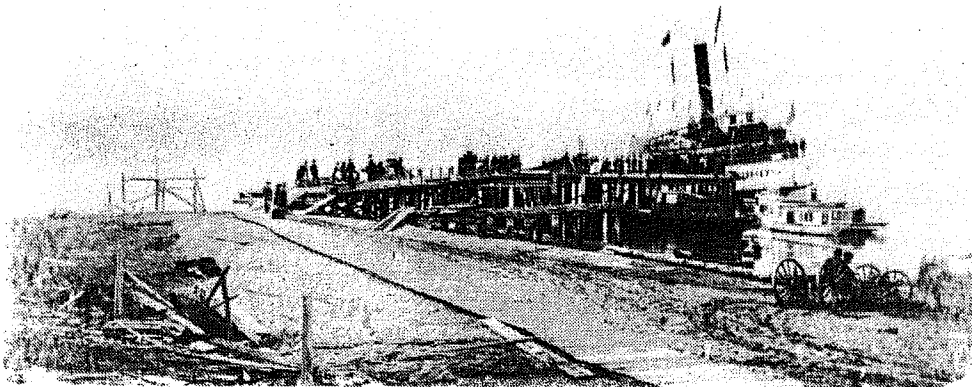
Carroll's efforts were



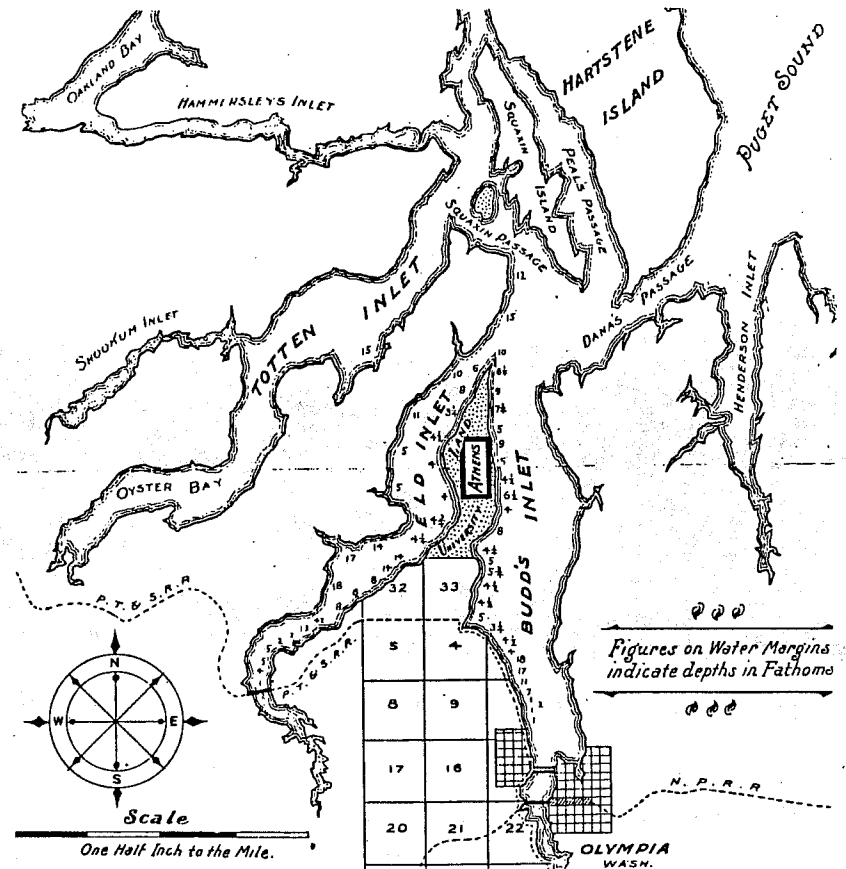
Promotional brochure for Boston Harbor from the collection of Ted and Pauline Robinson.



Olympia Oyster Company. State Capital Museum photograph.



Steamer carrying sightseers to Boston Harbor in 1907. State Capital Museum photograph.



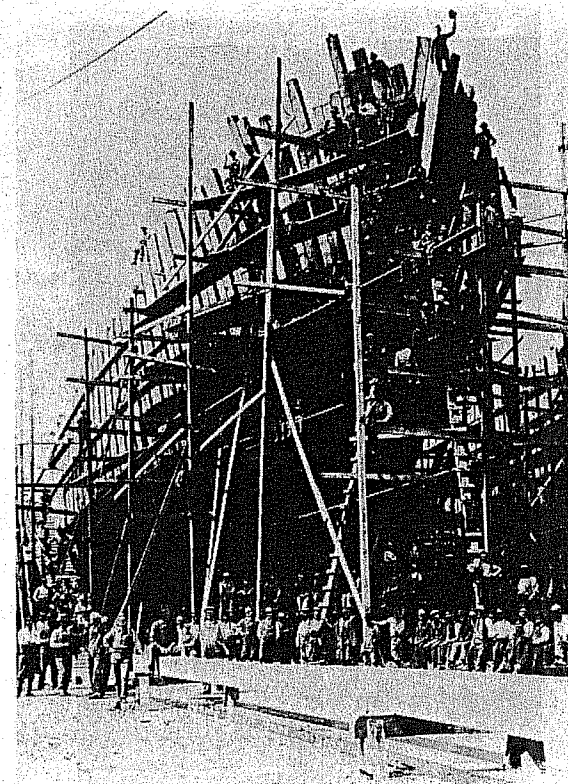
The Sunnybay Plantation located near Gull Harbor was part of the operations of the Olympia Canning Company, which began about 1915 and was owned by Mark Ewald and West Coast Grocery of Tacoma. Land was cleared after World War I for the Cannery Ranch near Gull Harbor. The farm encompassed about 300 acres where pie cherries, Italian prunes, strawberries, raspberries, and loganberries were grown. Fruit was hauled daily to the cannery via truck, and the ranch also used a long dock for transporting other goods by steamer to and from Olympia. At peak berry time, 200 girls came from the surrounding area to stay at the facility, where they had cabins, a cafeteria, and a recreation room. The ranch installed its own light plant, and water was pumped from a nearby creek by hydraulic ram to a water tower. The ranch had experimental crops such as black, pink, and white strawberries, and thornless youngberries and boysenberries.

The company's products sold worldwide, many shipped through the Port of Olympia. Norpia Real Estate sold lots in Gull Harbor to ranch workers, many of them farmers of German and Russian descent from eastern Washington. The cannery operated until 1959. Later the ranch had turkeys and black angus cattle. Still later a golf course was proposed for the property but never materialized.

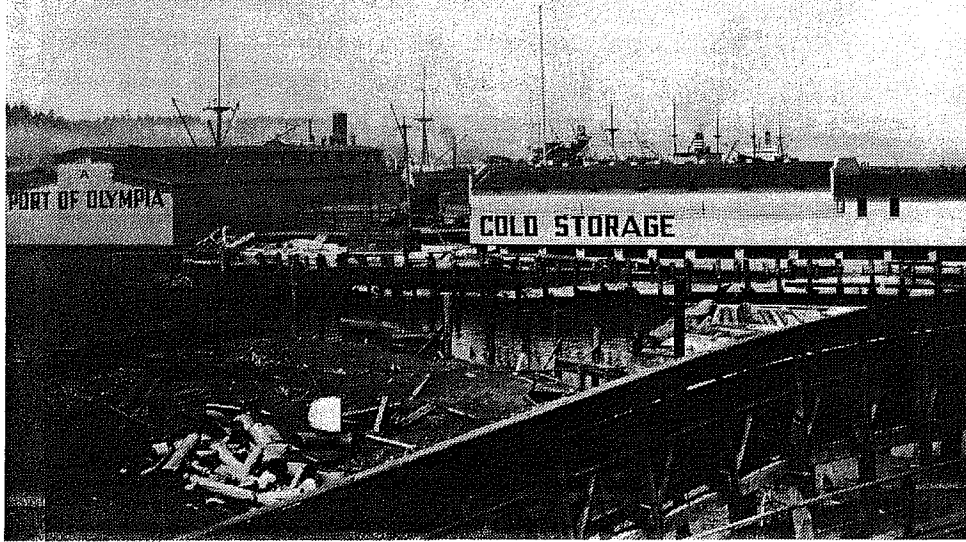
Ivan Moorhouse, the site manager, and owner Mark Ewald built homes adjacent to the ranch. With the formation of the Port of Olympia, the Olympia Canning Company located their processing facilities adjacent to the Port Docks. It processed fruit grown at the Cannery Ranch at Gull Harbor and in Eastern Washington. The cannery buildings later became the Yard Birds shopping center.

Olympia shipbuilding for the First World War commenced in 1917, when the Olympia Ship Building Company built schooners on the fill. Later Sloan Shipyards took over the site.

The Port of Olympia was officially formed by a county-wide vote in 1922, and wharf facilities were established at the Sloan Shipyard on the Carlyon Fill. Wharf facilities were built throughout the 1920's. Formation of the port spurred continued widening of the port area and dredging to maintain depth, as the size and number of ships calling at the site increased. Bulkheading for piers, and use of the port area for lumber processing and log booming followed the formation of the port.



Sloan Shipyard. Henderson House Museum photograph.



Port of Olympia. State Capital Museum photograph.

During the early part of the 20th century, some recalled that Butler Cove was a popular picnic place and "almost the whole town would turn out to attend the clambakes. (Basse, Told) Butler Cove also had a dance pavilion. Butler Cove and adjacent "Silver Spit" (now Tamoshan) were popular sites for tent platforms where Olympians spent the summer. The "Lester D" was a grocery boat owned by Lester Darling which served these summer residences. Since overland roads were slow to develop on Cooper Point and to Boston Harbor, traffic was by boat to these locales.

Another popular waterfront home was "The Firs" on the west side of the Inlet. It was known as "one of the best known summer cottages on the Olympia waterfront." Theodore Brown purchased part of his father's original Donation Land Claim and built the cottage expanding a tent platform into a house called "Auntie Brown Beach House," which was a social center from around 1910 until 1930.

Port development brought a number of industries to the area adjacent to the docks. Lumber mills processed the bounty of nearby Black Hills forests, their smokestacks a sign of prosperity. Washington Veneer, which was built in 1925, shipped out finished 3-ply veneer to all parts of the country, and Olympia Door Company specialized in millwork, sash, doors, and interior finishings. Other nearby mills shipped dimensional lumber and shingles.

Over the docks also went two of Olympia's most famous products: Olympia Beer and Olympia oysters. Oyster opening houses were located along the west causeway early on and were replaced with more substantial structures in the early 20th century. The Olympia Brewery located below the falls of the Deschutes River in Tumwater, and at high tide shipped beer through the estuary to Budd Inlet.

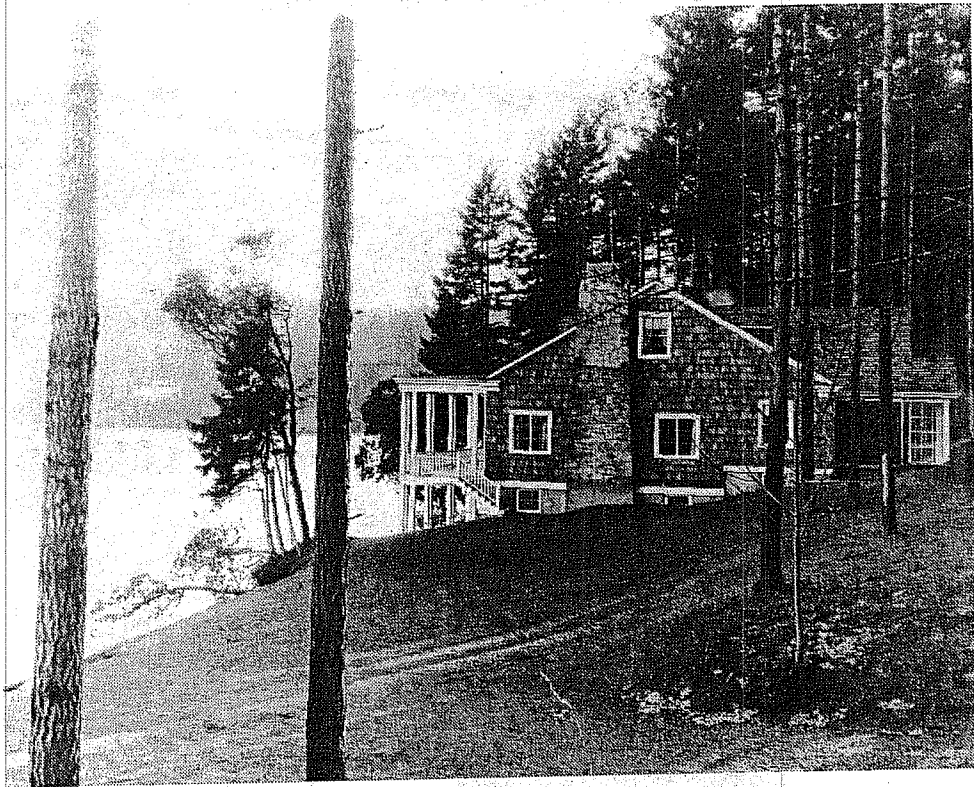


Summer camp on Puget Sound. Bigelow Family Collection.

The Olympia Yacht Club, founded in 1889, was a mecca for the avid boating community in the area. Located at the end of the inlet, the group built a clubhouse in 1930 which was rebuilt in the 1950's.

According to one reminiscence, during the years of prohibition, stills operated extensively between Walnut Road (14th Avenue N.W. and Little Cove Road (now 52nd Avenue N.W.) on the west side of the inlet.

In 1923, the Olympia Golf and Country Club bought part of the John L. Butler Donation Claim for a golf course. Members of the club bought waterfront lots to help provide funds to build the course, club house, and dock. Joseph Wohleb designed the clubhouse in 1925. Many of the homes built during the period were built by club members along Butler Cove.



Olympia Golf & Country Club. Thurston County Historic Commission Collection.



"Little Hollywood" before the formation of Capitol Lake. Jeffers Collection courtesy of Susan Parish.

A reserve mothball fleet anchored off Gull Harbor after World War II. Channel dredging was done in 1945 to accommodate the fleet. Some of the ships were used in the Korean conflict and Suez Crisis. The remaining ships became a storehouse for 16.5 million bushels of wheat, beginning in 1953 and ending in 1959. The Reserve Fleet reached its peak of 185 ships moored in Budd Inlet in 1960, and departed the inlet in 1972.

The Port continued improvements during the 1920's and 1930's, building extensive bulkheads and wharves, as well as a number of transit sheds and related structures. In the 1940's, a Port office building and cold storage plant were built.

During the 1950's, Capitol Lake was formed from the estuary at the mouth of the Deschutes River and dammed at 5th Street. Percival Cove was filled in at this time, creating Deschutes Parkway. This changed the character of the inlet by limiting the tidal flow/mudflats at low tide.



Port of Olympia looking northward toward the mothball fleet. Port of Olympia Photograph.

By the 1960's finished lumber and cargo operations had declined at the Port, and shipment of logs took precedence. Lumber processing moved to other locations, primarily out of state. Many of the former cargo buildings were demolished in the 1970's and 1980's to provide large storage areas for dry-store logs brought by truck for export.

In the early 1980's, a large dredging operation was undertaken at East Bay to provide for a private boat moorage facility, land for development, and to regularize the boundary on the east side of the port peninsula.

CONTEMPORARY APPEARANCE

Budd Inlet is lined with prime residences along the bluffs overlooking the bay on both the east and west sides. The port peninsula remains primarily industrial in character, as does the West Side which is still lined with lumber processing/industrial businesses. Private boat moorage dominates the East Bay. Moorage is also located along Percival Dock and the West Side. The City of Olympia has replaced the historic Percival wharf with a public boardwalk along the southernmost part of the inlet. Office and commercial buildings are now being built, replacing the earlier manufacturing and maritime related businesses formerly at the wharf. Other public access on undeveloped shorelines is centered at Priest Point Park, the DNR Research facility at NE 47th, and Burfoot County Park on the East side.

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