West Bay Industrial History from 1891 to 2008

Based upon an historical study commissioned by Delson Lumber Company and Thurston Regional Planning Council in 2004 and written by Shanna Stevenson with contributions from Deborah Ross

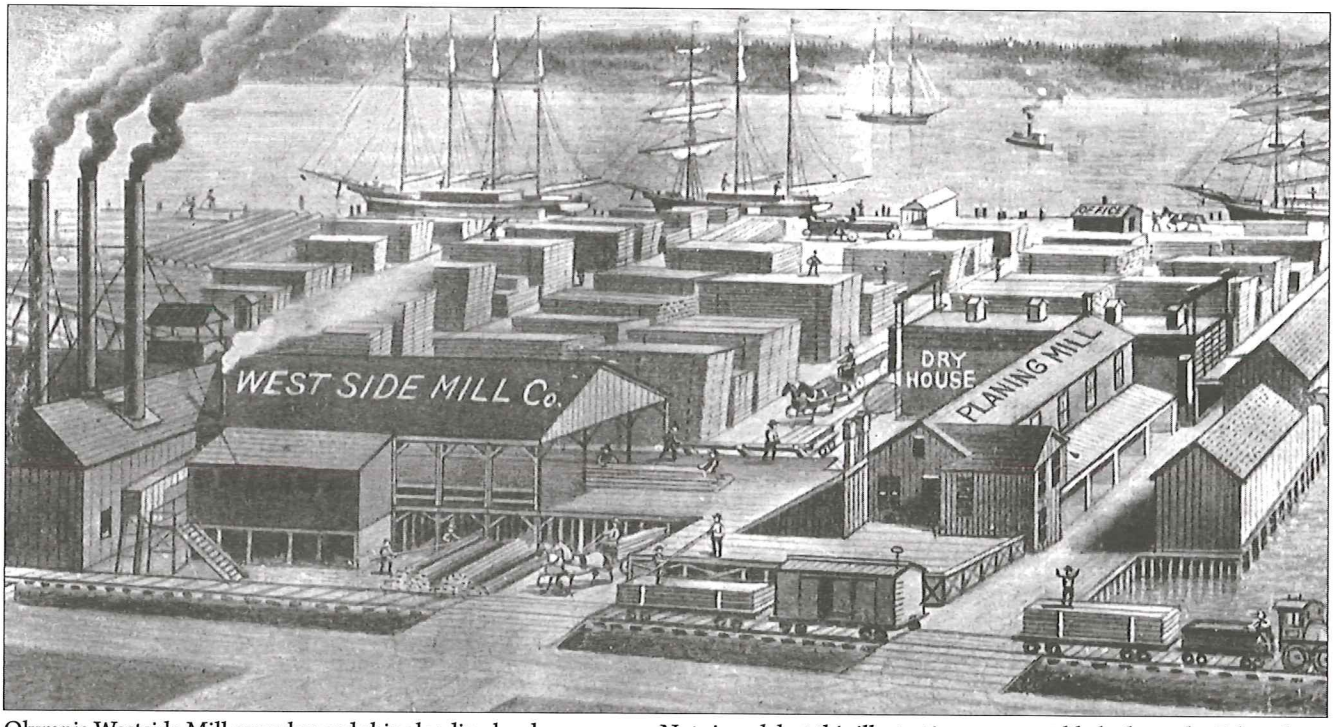
by Sarah Smyth McIntosh

West Bay of Olympia has been home to a succession of industries since the late nineteenth century. Here is the story of some of these business enterprises.

The first major industry in the area was the West Side Mill which was incorporated in 1891. It was located just south of Schneider Creek (the present day location of Hardel Plywood to the south of Delson Lumber and Smyth Landing). This firm manufactured rough and dressed lumber, lath moldings and ran a general hardware store.

Buchanan Lumber Mill was established north of Schneider's Creek on West Bay Drive in 1912 by J. C. Buchanan and R. F. Wright. The firm shipped finished lumber to Asia and Alaska. Buchanan manufactured moldings, shingles, lath, millwork and glass. This firm closed as Buchanan Lumber in the 1930s. It was owned for a time by Olympia Wood Products and re-purchased by Don Buchanan who operated it until it closed in 1969.

Olympia Harbor Lumber Company was incorporated in 1923 by brothers Sten Anderson, Karl Anderson, Olof Anderson, Ossian Anderson, Arthur Anderson, and Edward Anderson. Members of the Anderson Family founded both Olympia Harbor Lumber Company and Tumwater Lumber Mills which manufactured pre-cut homes and barns.



Olympia Westside Mill complex and ships loading lumber, ca. 1900. Not signed, but this illustration was most likely drawn by Edward Lange, a noted early artist in Olympia. *Courtesy Washington State Library.*

The Andersons moved their Ready-Cut Homes manufacturing to West Bay Drive in 1925. They moved the rest of their operation to West Olympia in 1928, and built a Swedish Gang-Saw Mill at a location just north of Reliable Welding. It was the first saw of the type used in the Western United States. The Andersons later moved to the Anacortes and Everett areas where they established early pulp mills. They closed their operations at West Bay in the 1950s.

Their property ("the old Port lagoon") was sold to the Port of Olympia in 1963 and became the West Bay Terminal. The Port used the property for the storage of logs which by that time had succeeded dimensional lumber as the primary port cargo. When the Port of Olympia built East Bay Marina, they designated the Port Lagoon as a conservancy area under the management of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as mitigation for the impacts of the East Bay Marina construction.

In 1920 Delta V. Smyth began his tugboat business, called Delta V. Smyth Tug & Barge, in Olympia with *The Oysterman*, a tugboat operated in partnership with oysterman Earl Brenner. Eventually, Smyth had seven or eight tugs moored near the 4th Avenue Bridge and Water Street. Delta Smyth had his tugboat offices at the present location of Budd Bay Café on Percival Landing. In 1961 he sold the company to Foss Tug.

Capital Boom Company was also started by Delta V. Smyth on West Bay near the 4th Avenue Bridge at the site of the old Port Lagoon, the present day site of the City of Olympia's West Bay Park. This company was incorporated in 1939 by Delta V. Smyth, M. G. Fairchild and Thomas L. O'Leary. A later partner in the enterprise was the Foss Tug Company. Capital Boom dumped logs brought by land from other parts of the state, then rafted and towed them to mills in Olympia and elsewhere on Puget Sound. Smyth sold the company to Foss Tug in 1961.

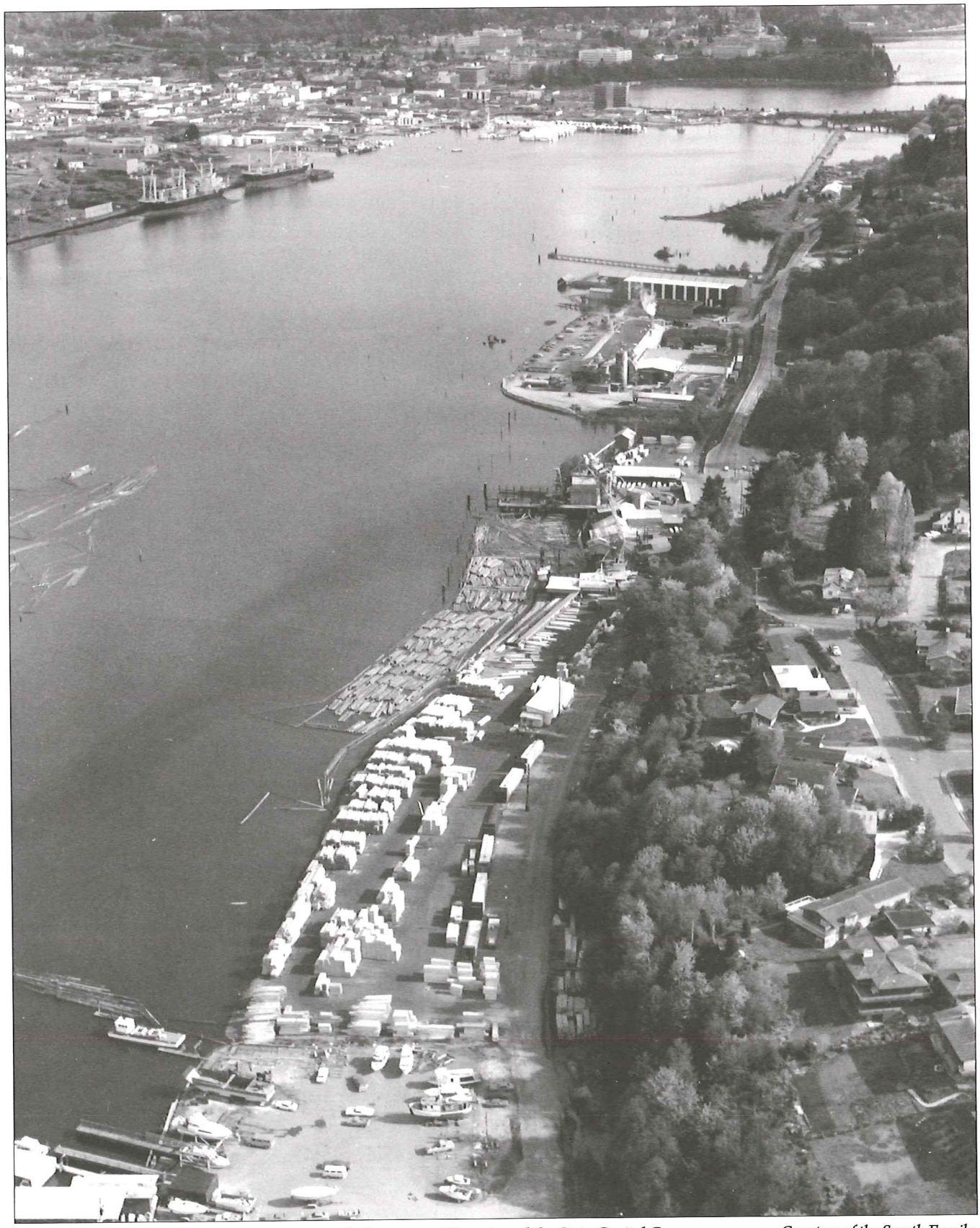
Delta V. Smyth's wife, Ruth Van Eaton Smyth, coined several business names involving the Smyths. One of these was the Ordel Oil Company which was located on West Bay Drive to the south of the current site of Reliable Welding. The name was a melding of Orville Kaiser and Delta Smyth, who owned the business. Ordel, incorporated in 1941, was a wholesale firm for Richfield Oil Products which supplied Richfield gas stations in the area.

Ordel Oil also delivered oil via barge to the Capitol Power Plant which provided heat to the entire west capital campus. Before the creation of Capitol Lake, Ordel took a tug and barge to the plant to unload the product. The tugboat had to lower its mast going under the 4th Avenue Bridge and go through the railroad drawbridge to reach the site.

Hardel Lumber Company was established in 1947 at the site of the McCleary Mill. It was incorporated in December, 1947 by Harold Smyth, C. E. Dickinson, Delta V. Smyth, and E. A. Nelson. The name "Hardel" was coined by Ruth Smyth as a combination of the names Harold and Delta Smyth who were brothers. Hardel Plywood first made sheeting veneer out of four- foot lengths of logs since they only had a four- foot lathe.

The original company was dissolved and reincorporated as Hardel Mutual Plywood in 1953 as an employee-owned cooperative. The six incorporators were Perry Watson, Frank Morris, Earl Stockwell, T. R. Armstrong, Eugene Eddy and Edgar Vosburg. Others involved were L. S. Anderson, Paul Lobe, E. H. Seehafer and Anthony R. Tavelli. When the company became a cooperative, they stopped buying logs and then only purchased veneer from local manufacturers that they remanufactured into plywood. The mill burned in a spectacular fire in 1996 and eventually re-located to Centralia. Presently, Hardel's West Bay site is the subject of a cooperative environmental cleanup effort that spans Budd Inlet, and is poised for redevelopment.

Delson Lumber was another of Delta Smyth's West Bay businesses. This name was also coined by Ruth Smyth. She combined the names of the partners: Delta Smyth, Ed Nelson and Clare Dickison. The company was started in 1945. Delson Lumber originally manufactured "cants" which were squared timbers cut from logs. The cants were then remade into dimensional lumber by other mills.



Aerial view of West Bay industries looking towards downtown Olympia and the State Capital Campus, ca. 1970s. *Courtesy of the Smyth Family.*

Upon his return from World War II, Delta's son, Delta Wayne Smyth, joined the company. The other partners were eventually bought out. In Delta V. Smyth sold his shares to his son, who then became the sole owner.

Wayne Smyth built the business with his father from a small not very successful mill on a one and one-half acre location on West Bay to eventually encompass more than 12 acres at the site. Initially the cants manufactured by Delson were sold to the Olympia Harbor Lumber Company just a mile and a half south of the mill. They were shipped via rail and then re-manufactured at that location.

After about four or five years, Wayne Smyth was determined to install a planing mill and manufacture finished products. Over time, Wayne Smyth increased the land base by filling in part of the bay, filling the upland area around Schneider Creek and leveling the bluff. They also purchased property from Buchanan Mill directly north of the original mill. The new land accommodated a timber sizer, green chain sorting, new saws, planers and a new railroad spur.

Products of Delson Lumber included 2x4's, timbers and other construction products. After 1968, the company specialized in dimensional lumber as well as cedar paneling and beveled siding. They shipped its product to domestic markets via rail and truck, and to overseas markets through the Port of Olympia dock.

At first, Delson Lumber sold only to wholesalers. In 1961, however, they started its own direct marketing and sold directly to more than 70 retail lumberyards. The firm had a sales office in downtown Olympia. At the height of Delson Lumber's operations the company produced 5.5 million board feet of finished lumber per month or about 60-65 million board feet per year. They shipped about four to five boxcars per day.

The original Delson Lumber office was a small building on the water side of West Bay Drive. The office eventually moved to a house on the upland side of West Bay Drive. This building served as the corporate headquarters for Delson Lumber on West Bay in Olympia and Skookum Lumber near Shelton for fifty years. It was demolished in 2006 upon the redevelopment of the old Delson Mill site into Smyth Landing Condominiums.

Delson Lumber developed an additional facility, Little Skookum Lumber, near Shelton beginning in 1975. The new Shelton mill specialized in cedar products including siding and fencing. At one time, the two mills combined employed over 250 people. The mill at West Bay was unionized, but the Skookum mill was not a union shop. When the Union went on strike in the early 1980s at the Delson Mill, and the market for logs got increasingly difficult, Wayne Smyth decided to just shut the Olympia mill down.

Like many mills, the economic downtown of the 1980s affected the lumber business. The limitations of the Olympia site and increased pressure from residential development along the hillside in addition to new environmental restrictions hampered the economic viability of the mill.

The Olympia mill was eventually leased to WTD Industries in 1985. WTD operated the mill for five years, and actually purchased the mill equipment, but never purchased the land. In 1990, WTD Industries filed for Chapter 11 reorganization, shut down the mill and auctioned off its equipment.

Wayne Smyth asked his daughter, Sarah Wayne Smyth, to help redevelop the site, clean up the residue of industrial uses, and prepare it for redevelopment into condominiums and offices and a waterfront park for the community to enjoy. In 2004, Sarah Smyth (now Sarah Smyth McIntosh) finally broke ground on the first phase of redevelopment, Smyth Landing Condominiums. The second phase includes plans for 42 more condominiums on the northern end next to West Bay Marina on eight acres of the waterfront. The Smyth family has opened up a portion of their property to the public as a waterfront park for the community.

Gordon Johnson started the Solidwood company. D. Wayne Smyth also had an interest in this business enterprise, which was situated on West Bay at the Old Port Lagoon next to the 4th Avenue Bridge. Solidwood manufactured four- foot veneer sheeting

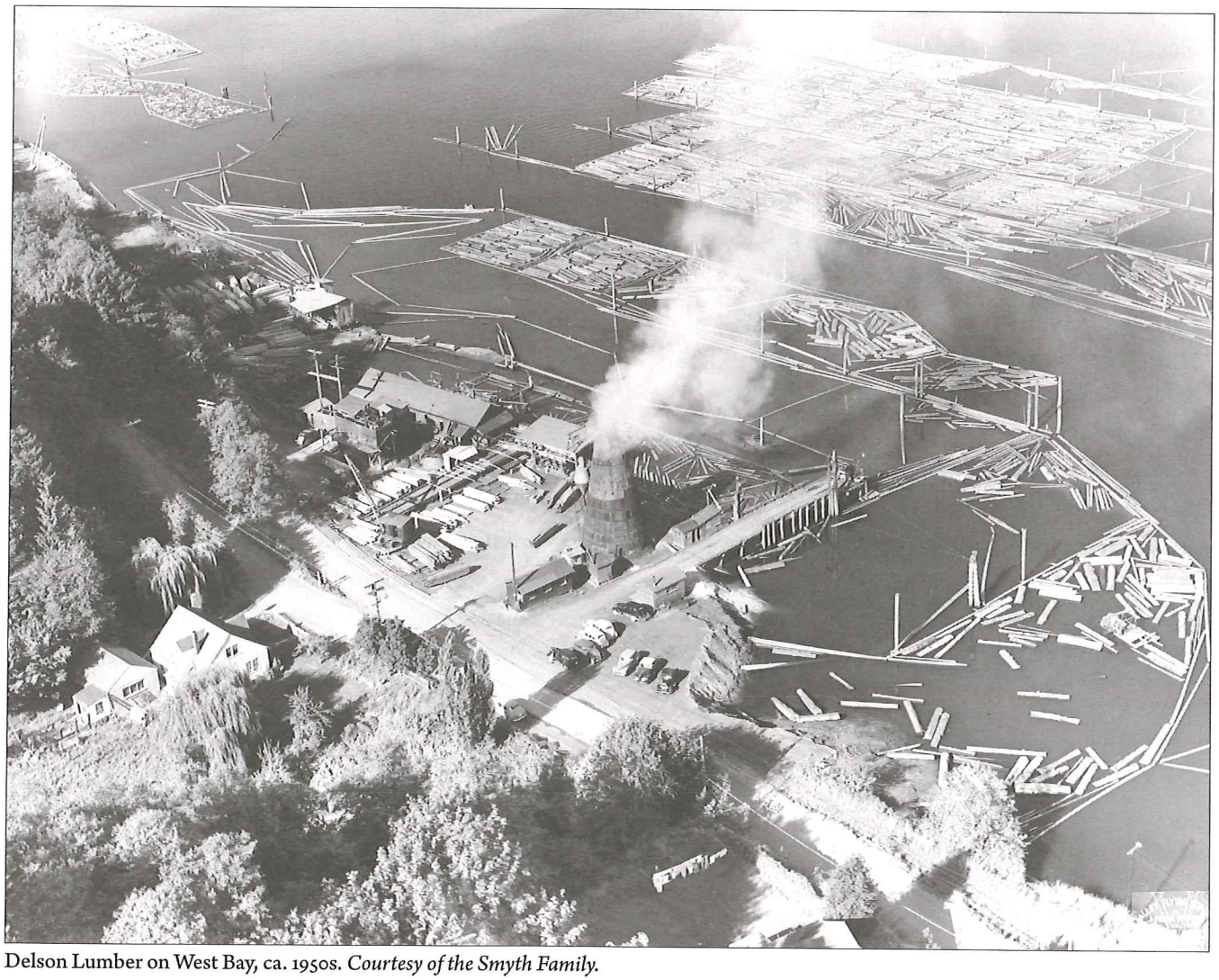
used to make plywood. The veneer was sold to Hardel Plywood and other plywood mills throughout the state. Solidwood shut down its facility after Hardel plywood relocated and there was a downturn in the industry.

Al Lewis began building small steel craft in association with H. C. Hanson in 1929 on West Bay. The firm constructed welded steel oil barges of 100,000 gallon capacity at the site in 1941. During World War II, they built 16 steel tugboats and received a contract for six, 85- footers with 600-horsepower diesel engines in 1943. In 1946, the Company built *F. H. Lovejoy*, the flagship of the Puget Sound Freight Lines fleet.

The Olson family operated Reliable Steel until the sons, Bart and Jerry Olson sold the business and leased the land to BMT Minneapolis in 2002. BMT made some of the largest tanks on the west coast and shipped them via barges to Alaska. The Olsons then sold the property to Triway Enterprises in 2008 for redevelopment into condominiums, and BMT moved its operations to Satsop.

M.C. Willie moved to Olympia in 1919. He worked at Olympia Shingle Company which was a cooperative mill on Washington Street in Olympia. M.C. Willie bought out all of the stockholders of Olympia Shingle Mill in the mid-1940s and became the sole owner. Olympia Shingle Company operated until 1972.

In 1927 Willie started the West Side Log Dump and Olympia Towing Company. He also owned Willie Logging Company. His first partner was Hillyard Davis, then later T. H. McCafferty. They had three railroad dumps and six truck dumps on West Bay. The



Delson Lumber on West Bay, ca. 1950s. *Courtesy of the Smyth Family.*

company also had five roll ways, rafting pockets and a booming ground at Tumwater. They usually had eight boats moored in the bay at one time. The tugs were operated by members of the Inland Boatman's Union.

Olympia Towing had a 1,000 foot long trestle extending into the water just past Reliable Welding where their principle log dump was located. The tugboat docks were there as well. West Side Log Dump had storage in the water all along the bay. They stored logs for mills all over Puget Sound including Seattle, Port Townsend and Bellingham. They contracted for dumping, rafting, storing and towing logs. The Willie Logging Company also bought and sold logs which were rafted in the bay.

At one time there were 25-30 tugboats in the Olympia harbor. Other tugboats besides those of Olympia Towing were owned by Delta V. Smyth and Volney Young who operated Capital City Tug and Barge. Capital City Tug Company was organized in 1917. By the early 1920s the company had two tugs and several scows. Olympia Towing also had about six rafting pockets near the 4th Avenue Bridge as well as rafting pockets and a rail dump on East Bay.

Gordon and Leroy Willie, M.C. Willie's sons later owned and operated both the Olympia Log Dump, the Westside Towing Company, and the Olympia Sand and Gravel Company, which was headquartered on the west side of the port peninsula.

In 1972 the towing company was purchased by West Bay Partners, a partnership between Dunlap Towing and Port Townsend Paper which continues to own the operation on West Bay Drive. Mac Willie, M. C. Willie's grandson was also a partner in that company. They have a chip reloading business which loads barges with chips for paper mills at Port Townsend. Dunlap has three dumps, at La Conner, Everett and Olympia.

In the fall of 2009, Dunlap Towing and Port Townsend Paper put the 14-acre property up for sale at an auction for 6.5 million dollars. This is the last log dump available to local mills for transporting logs in the south Puget Sound area.

As early as 1900, Mason County Logging Company established a booming and rafting operation on the West Side as the Olympia Log Dump and Booming and Rafting Grounds. By 1953, 200 million board feet of logs were dumped into Budd Inlet each year by truck and train. Logs were sorted and taken in rafts to local mills and also Shelton, Tacoma, Seattle and Everett. Booming businesses at that time included: Capital Boom Company, West Side Log Dump and Olympia Boom Company.

Olympia Tug and Barge was operated by Arthur J. Weston. Weston incorporated the business in 1908 with Volney Young and his wife Carrie Weston. He came to Olympia in 1887 and built the Tug *Sand Man* which he owned for many years. *Sand Man* has since been owned by Delta V. Smyth, Franz Schlottman, and Bob Powell. It has been renovated by the Sand Man Foundation and still plows the waters in the local Harbor Days Tug Boat Races.

Sarah Smyth McIntosh is a fourth generation resident of Olympia, Washington. She grew up on the West Side of Olympia. Her family has been in the boat building, tug and barge, forestry and sawmill business for four generations. She is a land use attorney and developer who has been active on the drafting of land use plans for the West Bay and the revitalization of Olympia's urban waterfront. Sarah developed the former family sawmill site, Delson Lumber, into a mixed use condominium complex with a community waterfront park where her family still lives and works. She is very interested in preserving the history of what it was like to live and work on West Bay, and the contributions of these industries to the community. Sarah would like to help our present day community make a positive connection with our pioneering past.