

A Brief History
of the
PORT OF EDMONDS

How it began ... What it is today

Revised May 2009

PREFACE

The Port of Edmonds is the centerpiece of the Edmonds waterfront. The pleasant promenade and sturdy covered docks have all but erased the memories of the belching smokestacks and disrepair of the area's early industrial era.

The History Booklet is the story of a transformed waterfront, and how dedicated citizens gave their time and committed their resources to construct what is today the finest and friendliest public marina in the Pacific Northwest. They set out to build a marina and they created a legacy.

THE EARLY DAYS

During the first half of the 20th century, the Edmonds waterfront consisted mainly of boathouses and mills producing lumber and shingles. Up to ten shingle mills operated along the waterfront from the 1890's until 1951. By the end of this period the area had deteriorated into something of a local eyesore. The Great Northern Railroad came to town in 1891. The City of Edmonds was incorporated in 1890. In 1923, the City of Edmonds saw the first car ferry which began operation from Edmonds to Kingston. The 56 foot ferry could carry 12 cars. The Joyce Brothers used the existing city wharf to establish ferry service from Edmonds to Kingston. The Blackball Steamship Company took over the rights to provide service to Kingston, Port Ludlow, and Victoria, B.C. in 1928 from the Puget Sound Navigation Company. The service was transferred to the Washington State Ferry's in 1951. Service was reduced between Edmonds and Kingston.

The waterfront experienced a brief period of national recognition when, in 1936, Chauncey's Boathouse became the training camp for middleweight boxing champion Babe Risko who was preparing for a match with Freddie Steele of Tacoma. A year later, "Wild" Bill Boyd, the Navy heavyweight champion of the Pacific Coast, used the same quarters.

In September 1945 the Edmonds Harbor and Breakwater Improvement Club was formed under the chairmanship of Henry Chandler. Other officers were George Durbin, alternate chairman, Ralph Wilson, recording secretary, and Al B. Miller, financial secretary. A month later, Al B. Miller, Bert Heaps and Victor Holmquist were named as a committee to take steps toward obtaining a breakwater for the waterfront.

Howard Anderson, Sr., opened Edmonds Marine Ways, adjacent to what is now the Edmonds ferry dock, in March of 1945. The business built small fishing boats and cruisers. In August of the next year ground was broken south of the Quality Shingle Mill for a concrete products plant to be operated by Blox, Inc., but the business was short lived. The Schuster Soap Company began a brief period of operation on the waterfront in February 1951. In May of 1947, the Northwest Fur Breeders Cooperative began construction of a concrete building on the Edmonds waterfront for freezing fish scraps to supply its members with animal feed. That building survived until 1994 and was the last of the old industrial buildings to go.

Congress authorized a re-survey of the Edmonds harbor by the Army Corps of Engineers in February 1946. Al B. Miller, president of the Edmonds Harbor and Breakwater Club, called on many industrialists to testify at the public hearing held October 29, 1946 on the proposed breakwater and specifically the damage done on the waterfront by storms. After several meetings, the Army Corps of Engineers decided they wanted an economic survey of the area. A survey was completed which covered Lynnwood, Alderwood Manor, Richmond Highlands, Richmond Beach, and surrounding areas. Information gathered included: volume of sales from all merchants in the area, a school census that went back ten years, bank deposits, number of electrical meters, telephone installations and population growth. This was all done without anyone receiving pay for time and services.

Along with Al B. Miller, Henry Chandler and E. E. Hopper sold tickets for a \$2.00 donation to go for promotion of the breakwater and harbor. Promotional activities were displayed at the Seattle Boat Show for several years. Percy Getz of Pointer Willamette, sketched out the plan of the harbor on an 8 by 16 foot plywood backing. Boaters attending the boat show were asked to sign up if they were interested in moorage at the new proposed harbor. One-thousand and one hundred signatures were collected.

In May 1947 representatives of business and industrial firms along the waterfront formed the Edmonds Port Association. O.S. Whitmore was elected chairman and H.H. Jacobsen, secretary. The association wanted the city to provide better street access to the waterfront. They also conducted a survey in November in support of the campaign for the proposed breakwater.

FORMATION OF THE PORT DISTRICT

With the information collected and after several more meetings with the Army Engineers, the Edmonds Port Association informed the Breakwater Association they would need a “substantial governing body” to continue on with the process.

Discussions were taking place at this time by the Port of Everett to take over the entire Snohomish County as part of their Port District just as Seattle had done in King County earlier. In light of this situation, Mr. Hopper went to the Everett County Courthouse and started the process for an election for the Port of Edmonds. Two things had to happen before an election could take place. Port district boundaries had to be

established and commissioners had to be on the ballot for each of the three districts.

Establishing port boundaries had its problems. Proponents wanted an area as large as possible to maximize assessed valuation. Many were convinced that people would not vote for a port district. It had been voted on before and was rejected.

Several more public hearings took place at Merry Tillers, Pointer Willamette and city hall. Mr. Hopper ran in the central district encompassing most of the city limits of Edmonds at that time. Ted Chittenden ran for the north section of the district and William Ryan accepted the nomination to run for the south section, now south Edmonds and the Town of Woodway.

The Edmonds Port district was created by popular vote on December 7, 1948. Taxpayers approved formation of the district, in part, to retain local control and preservation of the waterfront.

The Port District is shaped like a triangle. Its boundaries remain unchanged today. It comprises an area bounded on the south by the King-Snohomish county line, on the east by 92nd Street, and on the west by Puget Sound. The point where the extension of 92nd and the shoreline meet is the district's northernmost point.

Considering that the citizens of this area were being asked to tax themselves, it is noteworthy that the issue passed by a remarkable 985–58 margin, a 94% majority. After the election, proponents of the Port District had wished that the boundaries were double in size. A wish that is still talked about today.

The first Port Commissioners were T.P. Chittenden, elected from District 1, E.E. Hopper, District 2, and William M. Ryan, District 3. The temporary chair, attorney Al Holte, called the first meeting to order and the three commissioners were sworn into office. They elected Mr. Hopper president and Mr. Chittenden secretary. Al Holte and Jack Tuell were appointed as Port attorneys. Jim Reid was named Port Engineer. Mr. Holte and Mr. Hopper made several trips to Olympia to convince the State to vacate the title to the beach property at the foot of Dayton Street extending both north and south of Dayton, about 500 feet for a public beach. The area was cleared and picnic tables and outdoor fireplaces were installed.

The announced priority of the first commission was to acquire land for a boat harbor. Over the next 13 years, individual parcels of land were acquired from private ownership. Shortly after the formation of the Port District the Commissioners approved construction of the ferry dock. The Port built the dock and leased it to the State on a sixteen year lease. The lease required the State to pay all interest and bond indebtedness. By 1960 the Port owned 14 acres of uplands and controlled approximately 18 acres of

tidelands.

The year 1951 saw the end of the long industrial era for Edmonds. The shingle industry carried the community through a depression and more than one recession. During their peak years the shingle mills allowed the town to weather a series of ill-fated industrial experiments. And they were the mainstays of Edmonds through the critical decades when wage earners could not travel many miles from home.

By the fifties there was only one tall smokestack remaining on the waterfront. The last mill, Quality Shingle Company, closed its doors on June 1, 1951. Workers began dismantling machinery the following day. Skyline Lumber Company erected an all-electric sawmill on the Edmonds waterfront north of the Franklin Boat Works, but operations lasted only a short time. The advent of new building materials, the opening of Canadian timber resources and new types of industry coming to Edmonds combined to hasten the end of the mill era on the waterfront.

THE EDMONDS BOAT HARBOR

The original plan for the harbor was the area just north of the ferry dock. It was to cover just about 1700 feet says E.E. Hopper. The Army Engineers made a survey of the area including test holes and the construction estimate came out to be 1.8 million dollars. The Port had to provide \$800,000. of this amount. This was impossible with the assessed valuation level at the time and limited funds. Mr. Hopper remembers that at about this same time there was a pretty nasty storm that came up. He drove along the waterfront between Admiral Way and the Great Northern Railroad tracks south of Pointer Willamette and saw the area covered with water from the extreme high tide. Mr. Hopper visualized the area full of boats. It may not have been the best location from an engineering standpoint, but this was the start of a plan to move the harbor vision to its present location.

Chauncey's old boathouse was purchased and torn down. Other properties were purchased and negotiations with Union Oil Company for the tidelands were underway. Negotiations with Union Oil were not successful so the Port started condemnation proceedings against Union Oil. The first court proceeding showed that the comprehensive plan that was drawn up was not according to law and the case was thrown out of court. The process was started all over again. In 1957, prior to the second court proceeding on condemnation, agreement was reached with Union Oil Company. \$10,000 was paid along with certain provisions and the requirement that the property be developed within five years. If the property was not developed within five years the deed would return to Union Oil.

McLean and Company out of Tacoma was recommended by the State to help with the financing plan. McLean laid out a plan for the Commissioners and it was accepted. This began the real concrete development for the harbor and a realization of a long time dream and vision. Hopper is quoted on his vision:

“There were many times over this twelve year period when I was working on the development of this harbor that my better judgment told me to forget the whole endeavor, but I never did lose hope that it should, and could, be done, and without any doubt we had the best location on Puget Sound for a small boat harbor.”

The Port of Edmonds began construction of what was first called the Edmonds Boat Harbor in 1961. With the assistance of the Army Corps of Engineers and an investment of 1.15 million dollars, the Port constructed a breakwater and what is now the south marina. Senator Henry M. "Scoop" Jackson helped dedicate it in 1962. The north marina and breakwater was completed in 1969 at a cost of \$1.18 million. It brought in-water moorage capacity to 741 slips, 468 covered and 273 open.

In 1974, the Port Commission took action limiting permanent moorage to district residents. Two waiting lists were developed, one for district residents and one for non-residents. In 1986 the policy had to be reversed. When the Army Corps of Engineers was called in for a maintenance project on the breakwater, it was noted that the contract with them required open access for everyone. As a result, the Commission combined the two waiting lists into one and opened it to district and non-district residents alike.

By 1979 Port capacity had expanded to include dry storage—198 spaces owned by the Port and another 265 that were privately owned. Support facilities included the fuel dock, transient moorage and haulout and launch equipment. Business tenants at the Port that year included Anchor Boats (boat sales and service), the Boat Loft (dry boat storage), Erik the Shipwright (boat assembly, service and repair), Sea Marine (boat sales and service), Dart Marine (boat sales), Craig Craft (boat sales and repair), Alfab (aluminum boat fabrication), and Edmonds Yacht Sales (boat sales). Sea Charters, a charter fishing boat service, also operated as a short-term tenant. Of these, only Edmonds Yacht Sales remains a Port tenant today. Noteworthy adjacent neighbors still on privately held property were the Fur Breeders Cooperative and the Norsol Company—a crab pot manufacturer—which leased a building adjacent to the Port.

The Port developed the mid-marina area in 1985. Remarkably, the project took 24 years of planning, acquiring land and developing revenue. In 1969 the Port owned approximately 14 acres of land west of Admiral Way. In 1994 additional property both west and east of the tracks was acquired, more than doubling total Port land holdings to 33 acres. The boat loft was purchased in 1996 from the private operator, Boatloft Inc. The old boat sheds were demolished in 1998 to make way for the new Dry Stack Storage facilities in the south marina area. Two new Minuteman Boat Launchers were also installed for the new Dry Stack operations. In 1998, Mayor Barbara S. Fahey, City of Edmonds, signed a Proclamation celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Port of Edmonds.

Today the Port owns and manages just over sixty-five acres of water and upland property. The growth and development over the years was fulfilling one of the Port's

primary objectives—the enhancement of local economic vitality.

HARBOR SQUARE BUSINESS COMPLEX

At a time when environmental considerations were of only passing concern, the Port Commission launched plans for development of the marshland between SR104 and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad tracks. In 1976 they purchased the marshland property from UNOCAL for \$350,000. Material dredged from construction of the north marina was used as fill to create the site of what is now Harbor Square. Three years later, the Port entered into a long-term lease agreement with Harbor Square Associates. Under the direction of Dick Beselin and Ken Hovde, planning for an eight-building complex began.

The first structure was completed in 1981—facilities for Munson Manufacturing Co., a boat builder. In 1984 and 1985 the Harbor Inn was constructed and in 1985 the Harbor Square Athletic Club was built. In 2000, Harbor Inn added conference facilities, a new lobby and 36 additional guestrooms to bring their total to 93. Today, approximately sixty businesses are part of the Harbor Square Business Complex.

April 1, 2006, the Port of Edmonds purchased five of the buildings located at the Harbor Square Business Complex. The Port retained a ground lease with the Harbor Inn (now a Best Western) and the tennis facilities portion of the athletic club. The Port hired Northwest Country Management as the property management firm for the properties.

The Port put together a four year maintenance and capital improvement plan for the grounds and facilities at the Harbor Square Business Complex. This included upgrades to the landscaping, major repairs and painting the buildings.

THE STORM OF DECEMBER 1996

On December 29, 1996, a hundred-year storm hit the Puget Sound area. The unprecedented wet, heavy snowfall caused the wooden roof supports to collapse, resulting in 300 boats sinking and hundreds more damaged. The collapse made local and national news headlines for several days.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW MARINA

A massive cooperative effort among local, state and federal agencies was launched at once and clean up, planning, and reconstruction of the new marina began immediately. The 13 million-dollar project rebuilt all but one covered dock. The new facilities are made of concrete and steel and are considerably stronger than the ones they replaced.

Another element of the reconstruction extended the Port's promenade into the south marina. A pedestrian bridge – built in 1998/1999, connects the Port and Marina Beach Park allowing foot traffic to bypass a new launch area at the south end of the marina. The bridge provides an excellent observation point for launch operations. The promenade provides a continuous pedestrian walkway from the Edmonds fishing pier to Marina Beach Park, a distance of approximately a half mile. The new dry storage facility was completed in 2001 and holds 300 boats.

PORT OPERATIONS TODAY

The reconstructed and reconfigured marina has approximately 700 wet moorage slips and 300 dry storage spaces. Additionally, there are typically up to fifty slips available for guest moorage. The Port provides showers, restrooms and launch facilities for both tenants and guests. In addition, there is a boater's pump-out and dump station and what has been called the most environmentally-conscious work yard in the Puget Sound area. Trained security and Port personnel patrol all Port facilities, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. For guests wishing to visit downtown Edmonds, the Port provides complimentary two-way transportation.

The Port started operating a self-service fuel dock in June 2000 and updated it in 2009. Qualified tenants are able to pump their own fuel or diesel for ten cents a gallon less than non tenants. Over 700 of them use the system each year. Self-fueling users are required to attend a training class on how to properly use the equipment and what to do in case of spills, fires, and other emergencies.

Commercial firms leasing Port property include Anthony's HomePort Restaurant;

The Landing, which includes Arnie’s Restaurant, a deli, All-Season Charters; Edmonds Yacht Sales, Bud’s Bait, Harbor Square Athletic Club, the Best Western Edmonds Harbor Inn and over 50 other businesses.

The Port Commission has an interest in providing amenities for the general public. During 2003-2005, for example, Port staff built several view cutouts with picnic tables and flower containers in the North Marina. In 2006 the Public Plaza was constructed.

In 2000, while developing its Strategic Plan and Master Plan, the Port completed an extensive public involvement process.. Professional consultants conducted focus group interviews with residents of the Port District, local business operators, tenants and community leaders. The process was instrumental in helping the Port re-draft its vision and mission, and it laid the groundwork for a strategic plan in harmony with community values. The Port’s Strategic Plan and Master Plan is reviewed each year by the Commission. As it states, “The unique environmental location for the Port provides it with attributes and opportunities for a vibrant future.”

COMMISSION CHANGES

The voters of the Port District approved three initiatives in the Fall of 2001. They expanded the Commission from three members to five, reduced the years of service from six to four, and voted that the two new Commissioners will be at-large positions. The intent of the increase in size was to ensure that a broad base of citizens and taxpayers are represented.

N-P DOCK RECONFIGURATION

In 2002, the Port of Edmonds went out to bid for the reconfiguration of N-P docks. O dock (the last remaining wooden structure after the 1996 storm) was completely removed to make room for ten new 50-foot slips on the south side of P dock and ten new 54-foot slips on the north side of N Dock. The contract was awarded to Culbertson Marine Construction of Anacortes. Construction began in late 2002 and was completed in early 2003. The final project cost was \$758,464.

DESTINATION PORT OF EDMONDS

In 2005 the Port instituted a program to attract visiting boaters to Edmonds. Called *Destination Port of Edmonds* it offers guest boaters an exceptional value while increasing usage of the Port's transient moorage and bringing traffic to businesses and restaurants in downtown Edmonds. Guest boaters are able to call ahead and make moorage reservations in advance. Once here, the Port courtesy van is available to transport them to and from downtown Edmonds for shopping, dining and entertainment.

WEATHER CENTER

In 2006, the Port of Edmonds Weather Center was created. It stemmed from a request by the Rotary Club of Edmonds to dedicate a memorial to longtime Rotarian and Port Commissioner, Harold "Babe" Bucklin. The Rotary Club made a donation of \$5,000 for the memorial. This added feature to the programs at the Port is a benefit to the local community, as well as to visitors and guests who visit here. It is totally dynamic in that it can be viewed over and over again with information that changes in real time. Some of the information is also available on the Port website, www.portofedmonds.org.

MARINA OF THE YEAR

In 2006, the Port of Edmonds was named National Marina of the Year by *Marina Dock Age* magazine. This very prestigious honor was the first ever awarded to a West Coast marina. Executive Director Chris Keuss accepted the award on behalf of the Commissioners and staff. Several hundred marinas nationwide were considered but the Port of Edmonds won out over all of them.

PUBLIC PLAZA

After several years of interest, in early 2007 the Port Commission approved construction of a Public Plaza in the mid-marina area. It was completed at the end of June of that year. The plaza is a family-friendly addition to the waterfront. People are able to sit, visit and

enjoy the expansive views of Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountain range. It was built for both the boating community and the general public and features grassy knolls, an outdoor area for small gatherings and a number of enhanced landscape features. There is even a sandbox for young children.

EDMONDS YACHT CLUB

In August 2005 the Edmonds Yacht Club and the Port of Edmonds agreed to pursue negotiations for the construction of a new yacht club building on Port property. The ground lease agreement was finalized in December 2006. The permitting and financing processes are complete and at this writing the Yacht Club plans to have the new building open and operating in early 2010.