



Fishing *Streets were packed on weekends with fishermen*

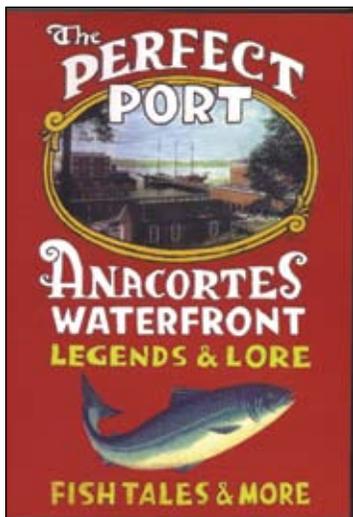
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Perfect Port” include historians Wallie Funk, Mitchell, Terry Slotemaker, Larry Campbell, Eunice Darvill, Carl Wedlund and David Milholland, as well as current and retired fishermen David Wright, Vlatko Kolega, Nick Fahey, Jeff Hendricks and Karen Thompson.

J.A. Matheson built the first codfish curing plant on the West Coast at the foot of K Street. In 1891 his schooner Lizzie Colby made her first trip to the Bering Sea and returned to Anacortes with salted codfish. William Robinson came to Anacortes in 1897 and started another codfish company, which employed the schooners Azalea, Joseph Russ, Wawona and Alice.

David Wright, a former Wawona crew member, describes life on the sailing vessel. Men ate breakfast at 4 a.m. and set out in dories at 5 a.m. The fishery dropped off after World War II and Wright made his last voyage on Wawona in 1947.

Anacortes’ first salmon cannery was built in 1893. By 1915, 11 of the 41 salmon canneries operating between Blaine and Olympia were in Anacortes. Mitchell rattles off some names: Alaska Packers, Fidalgo Island



The cover of the new DVD, ‘The Perfect Port: Anacortes Waterfront Legends and Lore,’ has the flair of a vintage salmon can label, courtesy of artwork by Bill Mitchell.

Packers, Sebastian Stewart, Nackett, Sanitary, Apex, Pacific American Fisheries, Fish Pack, Booth and Western.

Fraser River sockeye salmon was the prized — and plenti-

Filmmaker will appear at screening

“The Perfect Port: Anacortes Waterfront Legends and Lore,” premieres with two screenings on Tuesday, June 6 at Anacortes Cinemas. Filmmaker John Sabella will speak and answer questions at the event. Proceeds benefit the Anacortes Museum Foundation.

Those who can’t wait until June to see it may purchase a DVD copy for \$19.95 at the Anacortes Museum or at the W.T. Preston Snagboat Heritage Center.

For more information, call the museum at 293-1915.

ful — commodity. The same resource had made the Coast Salish people among the wealthiest of all Native Americans.

“My grandfather said you could practically walk across the salmon,” Mitchell said.

Workers, including Chinese laborers who cut off fish heads but were not allowed to

touch the flesh, processed vast amounts of fish. Red salmon, hand packed in Anacortes in bright red cans, was highly prized in England.

“It became a business for the non-Indian people so the tribes started getting pushed further and further away from the fishing industry until we caught just a small portion of the salmon,” said Coast Salish historian Larry Campbell. “They wanted to make farmers out of us. We were described as the ‘Indian problem.’”

Marine Supply & Hardware owner Themo Demopoulos described a time when downtown sidewalks were packed shoulder to shoulder on weekends.

“In those days there were 50 seiners tied up outside and maybe 60 gill-netters. I understand sometimes there used to be over 5,000 fishermen in Anacortes, working the boats.

They used to even have fishermen’s nights and fisherman’s dances,” said Croatian fisherman Vlatko Kolega.

Carl Wedlund said everybody headed for the bars at the end of the day. Stray workers were often rounded up in the morning.

“We had to get them out of the bars to get them to go back to work,” he said.

The Fraser River fishery was nearly destroyed by a construction accident in 1913 and canneries began moving north as early as the 1920s. The last of the old canneries, Shannon Point, closed in the mid 1990s.

“I sure miss the days of the salmon fishing. That’s the thing that I liked the most about Anacortes,” said Jeff Hendricks. “The salmon boats that were here, and all the families that were associated with that industry. It was a lot of fun.”

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