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THE WOLF CREEK BOAT WORKS, CRG-346
A DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY

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The Maritime Industry of Southeast Alaska was extremely significant in the settlement and industrial development of the region. Prior to the advent of the airplane in Alaska during the 1920's, boats and ships provided the only means of exploration and transportation beyond the few communities that had established local roads. Recent archaeological evidence suggests that a developed prehistoric maritime economy was established by 8000 BP in Southeast Alaska. "Natives of the Northwest Coast were master boat-builders- -following contact with early traders and explorers, they were quick to adopt the newcomers boat building tools and techniques - - -"(Cole 1986; 220). ~~Loken~~ Historical development brought change through technology, with continued reliance on the maritime industry. "Boats from canoes to ocean liners are still very important. Tugs and barges bring food stuff and other cargo from Seattle. There is a large fishing fleet, and- - - cruise ships bring thousands of visitors to the Panhandle each summer"(Roppel 1983; 2, 62).

European maritime explorations and the Russian fur trade escalated the need for a variety of ships and boats with innovative designs. The Russian colony in Sitka had established a ship yard for constructing and repairing ships and boats by 1810. During the 1850's and 1860's, two sawmills provided lumber for boatbuilding including steam and sailing vessels that were built in the ship yard (Roppel 1983; 13).

The American purchase of Alaska brought naval ships to establish law and order. Military occupation continued from 1867 to 1877 when Customs Officers administered Alaska with the aid of a U.S. Revenue Marine Cutter or a naval vessel (Roppel 1983: 17). During this transition, boats provided the means for the exploration and development of the fishing, mining, fur, and logging industries and also delivered freight and the mail. Those communities which were served by steamship lines distributed the mail through contract boats (Roppel 1983; 92, 104). Three whaling stations were established at Killisno in the 1880's, at Tye in 1907, and Port Armstrong in 1912. Port Armstrong utilized three ships in its operation. The fishing and mining industries continued to expand and with them community development. A large variety of locally produced ships and boats were required for many uses. The demand for and the expense to repair these ships and boats was considerable and was directly related to the demand of industry.

The first canneries were established at Klawock and Sitka in 1878 which created the need for developing a fleet of boats for harvesting the salmon. The later more successful canneries like the Alaska Packers Association, with canneries at Loring and Wrangell maintained their own fleet of sailing ships to transport canned salmon to the market (Roppel 1983; 78, 92). Each community had its own skilled artisans to provide for local needs, and their boatworks or shipyards were often constructed to service specific kinds of boats or ships (Roppel 1983; 62).





"There were many boat builders in the early days of Southeast Alaska, but one name is legendary: Davis and Son, Master Craftsmen with unusual business skills, the Davises dominated small craft construction for decades from a base in Metlakatla - - "(Cole 1986; 220).

"In the early days, before the shop had electrical power, they used a huge, gas-driven Fairbanks-Morse stationary engine to power a variety of tools. A leather belt ran upward from the engine to a main countershaft across the ceiling. Individual belts reached down to each tool-the bandsaw, planer and circular saw, joiner - - - all run by the great machine - - "(Cole 1986; 227). Most of the lumber for boat building was cut to dimension at their own mill after the best diameter logs were selected and cut into rough dimensions to produce good verticle grain boat lumber. Each piece was air-dried for about two weeks. After the planks were dried and planed, they would be cut to shape by using a template. "The boats would be planked right-side-up. After the keel, bowstem and transom were in place, ribbands would be nailed in position on the molds and oak frames would be steamed and bent in"(Cole 1986: 223).

See what?

The Wolf Creek Boatworks, CRG-346, was established by Israel Stevens under special use permit with the Forest Service on December 12, 1938. The permit area was surveyed by Forest Service personnel, Hodgeman and Blodgett, by compass on January 27, 1939. Stevens constructed a log residence and a boat shop that utilized a waterwheel (specifics unknown) for electrical power and to operate an overhead belt and shaft system which mechanically powered various saws and other equipment. Stevens built skiffs and other fishing boats from 1939 to 1951. The "Stevie", a 36 foot fishing boat was constructed for himself in 1949 and the "Glenda Joe" was built for David Peele in Kasaan. The waterwheel was eventually replaced by a turbine that was salvaged from a cannery in Smugglers Cove and the wooden water line originated at Saltery Cove on Prince of Wales Island. John Stalker purchased the improvements on September 25, 1951 for the purpose of constructing skiffs. Stalker enlarged the frame house, and enclosed the boathouse, however the launching facility for the shop (marine ways) was left unused and deteriorated.

1938

Everett Turner purchased the improvements and acquired the permit on August 23, 1972 and lived in the residence. Turner constructed no boats and performed little maintenance. The improvements were purchased on April 2, 1980 and the permit signed on May 6, 1980 by Daniel Kulin who attempted to rehabilitate the boatworks. Ron Whalen acquired the permit in 1987, and proposes to convert the buildings into a fishing resort facility.

sawmill not previously mentioned

The sawmill location is visible but no machinery survives. The residence and other outbuildings have been greatly modified or replaced over the years and do not appear to be of any significance.





The Wolf Creek boat works produced commercial fishing boats (seiners) and skiffs between 1939 and 1951 for those people who resided or fished in the Twemile Arm and Kasaan Bay areas. Although the operation was of short duration and occurred late in the historical development of the maritime industry in Southeast Alaska, it is associated with the industry and the significant contribution to the broad patterns of the local and regional history and is therefore considered significant under criterion A.

The property is not associated with the lives of persons that were significant in regional or local maritime history and is therefore not considered significant under criterion B.

The Wolf Creek boat works represents the typical construction characteristics of the locality and time, utilizing locally produced rough cut lumber. The tools used in boat construction include belt driven band saws and a planer which were powered by an overhead belt and shaft system attached to the water driven pelton wheel (which was replaced by a water turbine). This machinery is still in place and potentially serviceable. While improvements have been made over the years including repairs, the marine ways have deteriorated and the structure and equipment is not significant for architectural or other values under criterion D.

The Wolf Creek boat works is likely to provide information important to the history of the local area. This significance is derived through the relative integrity of the structure, machinery and power system. A boat works of this type may have been commonplace during its time, but the integrity should be considered a rarity today. There has been no systematic or organized documentation of the ship/boat building industry in Southeast Alaska. The documentation of this significant historical theme is a critical element in preserving the regional and local maritime heritage. For these reasons, the property is considered significant under criteria D and A and therefore, eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

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