

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

### CRAIG CANNERY, WEB LOFT

- Location:** Craig Cannery, Main Street, Prince of Wales-Hyder Census Area, Alaska
- The Web Loft is located at latitude: 55.477073 N, longitude: -133.154872 W. This point was obtained on January 30, 2022, using Google Earth (WGS84). There is no restriction on its release to the public.
- Significance:** The Web Loft, built ca. 1959, is significant at the local level as a contributing resource to the Craig Cannery, which is significant for its association with the Alaska fishing industry and settlement and incorporation of the City of Craig.<sup>1</sup> The Web Loft is notable for supporting the Columbia Ward and Wards Cove seine fleet.<sup>2</sup>
- Description:** The Web Loft is a one-and-half-story industrial building of no particular style. The timber frame building is rectangular in plan, clad in corrugated metal siding, with a front gable roof also covered in corrugated metal. The building is constructed on a concrete slab foundation. The primary façade faces north, toward the beach and water, and features a large central service opening with two hanging service doors. The service doors slide open along a track mounted above the opening and are wood framed and clad in sheet aluminum on the exterior and plywood on the interior. The primary pedestrian entry is located on the west end of the primary façade and is a paneled fiberglass door. A set of seven steps accesses the contemporary paneled fiberglass door. In addition, a pedestrian-sized door is present in the half-story. Clad in corrugated metal, the door provides access to a pulley by which nets can be hoisted into the loft for maintenance and mending.
- No windows are on the building; however, symmetrically placed translucent corrugated fiberglass panels are present on all four facades and the roof. The fiberglass panels are affixed directly to the building's structure and allow light to pass through to the interior of the building, creating much the same effect as windows and skylights. The south façade features a large service opening in the half-story with a hanging, aluminum-clad door. Like the service doors on the north façade, the door slides open along a track mounted above the opening. A shallow awning clad in corrugated metal projects over the track.
- Notably, the building's structure is comprised of square timber framing. The interior walls are open to the structural members and inside-face of the corrugated metal and fiberglass wall cladding and roof covering. The first-story

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<sup>1</sup> Pierce 2014

<sup>2</sup> Pierce 2014

interior is a fully open warehouse accessed via the north façade service doors and a pedestrian door on the south facade. The first-story flooring consists of a concrete slab. Net ties are present, hanging from structural members throughout the first story.

The half-story is accessed from the building's exterior through the pedestrian door at the west end of the primary façade. The half-story floor is constructed from wide plank lumber laid across the first-story ceiling joists. A worn blue tarp is affixed atop the wood floor in the center of the net repair area. The east wall of the half-story interior features a series of net storage lockers constructed of chicken wire and dimensional lumber. The center of the loft is characterized by hanging ties affixed to the building's structural elements. The ties are in place to facilitate net repair. In addition, a large pulley is present at the north end of the loft. The pulley is used to hoist nets into the loft for storage and repair. Graffiti is present on the structural members throughout the loft and often features the names of seine fleet boats and crews, including Libby no. 12, Libby no. 9, and many others.

The building faces the water, opening onto a short, paved driveway leading to the beach. A gravel driveway runs from the Administrative Building down past the Maintenance Building and Maintenance Storage Building, ending at the Web Loft. The west façade of the building also faces the water and is surrounded by grass and a park-like setting. Areas adjacent to the south and east facades are more heavily vegetated with alder, fireweed, and other undergrowth.

Character-defining features of the building include its orientation to the water, the upper story pulley and opening, the interior storage lockers on the half story, the interior net ties on the first and half stories, the robust interior timber framing, and the utilitarian exterior metal cladding and roof covering.

History:

The Craig Cannery's first documented year of operation was 1912,<sup>3</sup> when Lindenberger Packing Company opened the Cannery. Lindenberger Packing Co., owned and operated by brothers Robert and Bernard Lindenberger, operated the Cannery until 1917, when they dissolved their partnership<sup>4</sup> and sold the Cannery to Sea Coast Packing Co.<sup>5</sup> By 1928, the Sea Coast Cannery was packing over 70,000 cases of salmon.<sup>6</sup> In 1929, Libby, McNeill & Libby acquired ownership of the Cannery from Sea Coast Packing Co.<sup>7</sup>

In the early years, the Cannery workers were hired and brought up from Seattle. Edith Rosenberg Lindenberger, the wife of Robert Lindenberger, one of the

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<sup>3</sup> ADFG 1949

<sup>4</sup> Lindenberger 1973

<sup>5</sup> ADFG 1949

<sup>6</sup> Pacific Fisherman, January 1929

<sup>7</sup> Pacific Fisherman, September 1929

Cannery’s original owners, noted most of the Cannery workers during the Lindenberger years were of Chinese descent and brought by steamer ship up from Seattle.<sup>8</sup> She explained that the Cannery would purchase fish from local Alaska Native fishermen, and if additional labor was needed, local Alaska Native workers were hired.<sup>9</sup>

Crew manifests from the Cannery’s early Libby, McNeill & Libby years indicate Cannery positions were segregated, with primarily Japanese workers working Cannery lines and white workers in most other jobs.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the 1930s, Libby, McNeill & Libby contracted with Geo Y. Nishimura in Seattle to hire and supply the Japanese crews.<sup>11</sup> The crews were segregated onto different Cannery-bound ships - a ship for the white workers and a ship for the non-white workers.<sup>12</sup> By the late 1930s, Libby, McNeill & Libby substantially increased the percentage of local residents hired for Cannery positions.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the depression, fluctuating salmon prices, and union activity and labor unrest that characterized the salmon canning industry throughout Alaska and the west coast in the 1930s,<sup>14</sup> Libby, McNeill & Libby’s ownership instituted a period of consistency for Craig Cannery operations that continued up through the 1950s. Often Cannery supervisors opted to return year after year.<sup>15</sup>

**Table 1. Libby, McNeill & Libby Craig Cannery Supervisors between 1930-1956<sup>16</sup>**

Years Operated	Name of Supervisor
1930	Charlie Carlson
1931	Harry Berry
1932	No supervisor named
1933	Minard
1934-1939	Albert L. Dorks
1940-1944	A.R. Pearmain
1945-1954	J.A.(Al) Torwick
1955-1958	A.R. Pearmain

The Craig Cannery was expanded in 1935, and despite government requisitioning of Cannery resources such as boats, the Craig Cannery operated

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<sup>8</sup> Lindenberger 1973

<sup>9</sup> Lindenberger 1973

<sup>10</sup> Libby, McNeill & Libby (Cannery) Collection: Folder “Seasonal Employees, Canneries & Ships, 1936, 1938, 1939”

<sup>11</sup> Libby, McNeill & Libby (Cannery) Collection: Folder “Synopsis of Chinese Contracts, Years 1917 to 1932 inc.”

<sup>12</sup> Libby, McNeill & Libby (Cannery) Collection: Folder “Seasonal Employees, Canneries & Ships, 1936, 1938, 1939”

<sup>13</sup> Libby, McNeill & Libby (Cannery) Collection: Folder “Seasonal Employees 1939”

<sup>14</sup> Arnold 2008

<sup>15</sup> Guy V. Graham papers: Folder “Record and History of Libby, McNeill & Libby Operations”

<sup>16</sup> Guy V. Graham papers: Folder “Records and History of Libby, McNeill, & Libby Operations”

through WWII.<sup>17</sup> By the mid-1950s, however, with declining fish stock and falling fish prices,<sup>18</sup> Libby, McNeill & Libby reduced operations, consolidating Craig operations with the Nakat Packing Co. Waterfall Cannery on western Prince of Wales Island, south of Craig.<sup>19</sup>

In 1958, the Wards Cove Packing Co., owned by A.W. (Alexander Winterbourne) Brindle and family, acquired, in partnership with the Columbia River Packers Association Inc., the Alaska salmon canning operations of Libby McNeill & Libby.<sup>20</sup> As a result, all Libby McNeill & Libby operations, including the Craig Cannery, were consolidated under the Columbia Ward Fisheries name.<sup>21</sup>

That same year, a catastrophic fire destroyed much of the Cannery. The fire was concentrated within the cannery operations buildings constructed over water, and all were destroyed.<sup>22</sup> Also burned was the original web loft building.<sup>23 24</sup> Saved from the fire were the administrative building, warehouse, shop, bunkhouses, and other buildings and facilities located to the south, up the hill, and away from the beach and water. Ralph Mackie, a local Craig resident, remembered the fire as follows:

*"I remember the night of the fire. The fire hall siren went off, and my Grandpa Tom grabbed his coat and rushed out the door. A couple hours later a man knocked and told Grandma Jessie that we needed to leave the house and head down to Shelter Cove, because the Standard Oil tanks might explode, and the whole town could burn. We bundled up and hurried in the dark down to Maudi Richard's place, where the floatplane dock is now. I looked out her kitchen window to the west, and the whole sky was blood red.*

*They fought the fire all night, but it was a losing battle, and by morning much of the Cannery was destroyed. Somehow they got word to Carl [Aspelund, Cannery Superintendent that year], who was down at Dall Island on his way home to Seattle for the winter. When he flew back in to Craig the next morning, he said the burnt pilings were glowing like a sea of birthday candles"<sup>25</sup>*

Following the fire and the Cannery's purchase by Columbia Ward, the Craig Cannery ceased canning operations permanently and became "a major

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<sup>17</sup> Guy V. Graham papers: Folder "Records and History of Libby, McNeill, & Libby Operations"

<sup>18</sup> Pierce 2014

<sup>19</sup> Guy V. Graham papers: Folder "Records and History of Libby, McNeill, & Libby Operations"

<sup>20</sup> Johnson 1993

<sup>21</sup> Stanley and Charles 1996

<sup>22</sup> Pierce 2014

<sup>23</sup> Pierce 2014

<sup>24</sup> Paulu T. Saari Collection: Aerial View of Craig, Alaska, May 1956.

<sup>25</sup> Mackie 2018

*maintenance and supply station*<sup>26</sup> for the purse-seine fleet. Fishermen would offload their catch at the Craig Cannery and sell it to a tender, who would haul the fish to a cannery elsewhere. Seiners used the Craig Cannery as a base. They could store gear and mend and maintain their nets in the Web Loft and haul their boats onto the semi-submerged grids, wait for the tide to go out, and then perform boat maintenance work during the few precious hours of exposure at low tide.<sup>27</sup> Grids (also known as ways) located above high tide on the beach in front of the Administrative Building were used as a dry dock for the seine boats in the winter.

During its time of operation (both as a cannery and as a seine fleet support center), the Craig Cannery was *“like a vital organ, the heartbeat of town and the primary source of livelihood and activity.”*<sup>28</sup> Ralph Mackie recalled that as a child in the 1960s, the Cannery provided annual seasonal excitement:

*“it was a fantastic playground. The large green lawns were freshly mowed, and we were allowed to play there. We gathered for games of steal the flag and various forms of tag. At noon the cannery cook rang a big triangle, calling the crew to lunch, and all the kids in earshot to the back door of the kitchen for cookies...the sandy beach in front of the cannery office was our favorite spot to go swimming. The low grids...were just right for wading on and jumping off of, depending on how high the tide was.”*<sup>29</sup>

Over the years, the Cannery became known as the Wards Cove Cannery (not to be confused with the Wards Cove Cannery on Revillagigedo Island near Ketchikan). In 2002, Wards Cove Packing Co. ceased Alaska salmon operations, shuttering its Alaska facilities, including the Craig Cannery.<sup>30</sup> In 2006, the City of Craig purchased the Cannery complex and has used the buildings for various community-related purposes since that time.

Built ca. 1958-1959, the Web Loft served as a storage and maintenance facility for the Columbia Ward/Wards Cove purse seine fleet. Using the pulley on the second story, fishermen could haul their nets into the loft for mending and maintenance. Storage lockers in the second story allowed for the storage of gear. The first floor allowed additional net maintenance and storage space. Since the closure of Wards Cove operations in 2002, the web loft has been used by the City of Craig for storage, community space for net mending and maintenance, and community gatherings such as weddings.

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<sup>26</sup> Mackie 2018

<sup>27</sup> Mackie 2018

<sup>28</sup> Mackie 2018

<sup>29</sup> Mackie 2018

<sup>30</sup> Alaska Journal of Commerce 2002

- Sources: Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG). Annual Report No. 1 for the Year 1949, Alaska Fisheries Board and Alaska Department of Fisheries. Juneau, Alaska. 1949.
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- Historian: Tracie Krauthoefer, Corvus Culture, 2021-2022

**Project Information:** The Web Loft was documented in October of 2021 under the guidance of Brian Templin of the City of Craig Planning Department per a draft Memorandum of Agreement between the Alaska State Historic Preservation Office, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the City of Craig. Brian Templin provided helpful information on the history of the use of the buildings, and Anjuli Grantham assisted with Cannery research leads. Tracie Krauthoefer completed the short form report and field photography.



Figure 1. Web Loft, North and East Facades. View looking S.E.



Figure 2. Web Loft, Primary (North) Facade. View Looking S.





Figure 3. Web Loft, East Facade. View Looking W.



Figure 4. Web Loft, Service Doors and Second Story (Loft) Opening, North Facade. View Looking S.





Figure 5. Web Loft, West Facade. View Looking E.



Figure 6. Web Loft, South and East Facades. View Looking N.W.





Figure 7. Web Loft, Interior of First Floor. View Looking S.



Figure 8. Web Loft, Interior of First Floor, East Wall. View Looking NE.





Figure 9. Web Loft, Interior Half Story (Loft). View Looking S.



Figure 10. Web Loft, Interior Half Story (Loft), East Wall Gear Lockers. View Looking E.





Figure 11. Web Loft, Interior Half Story (Loft). View Looking S.



Figure 12. Web Loft, Interior Half Story (Loft), Gear Locker. View Looking E.





Figure 13. Web Loft, Interior Half Story (Loft), Pulley in Loft.



Figure 14. Web Loft, Interior Half Story (Loft), Graffiti in Loft.





Figure 15. Web Loft, Interior Half Story (Loft), Graffiti in Loft.



Figure 16. Web Loft, Interior Half Story (Loft), Gear Locker Label.



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**Figure 17. 1942 Historical Photo of Seine Fleet at Craig. “Libby 1, Libby 2, Libby 3 docked at Libby, McNeill & Libby cannery, Craig, Alaska, 1942”. From Guy V. Graham Libby McNeill & Libby Photograph Collection. PH Coll 1033. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries.**