

Ebb & Flow: Turning Points in West Coast Fishing History

Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society &
Port Edward Historical Society

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Two National Historic sites, The Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society (GOGCS) and the North Pacific Cannery (NPC), utilized a B.C. | Canada 150 grant to produce a documentary on the history of B.C.'s commercial fishing industry. *Ebb & Flow: Turning Points in West Coast Fishing History* was written and produced through a collaboration between Denman Digital and the two organizations. The film explores how colonization, immigration, social movements, technological progress, and growing sustainability concerns have affected the industry's evolution and legacy.

For the GOGCS, *Ebb & Flow* replaces *Journey Through Time*, the introductory film that has been playing onsite in the Boiler House Theatre

since 1996. *Journey Through Time* is a fictionalized account of the life of a worker at the Gulf of Georgia Cannery during the 1940s. While *Journey Through Time* will still play a part in the Cannery's educational programming, *Ebb & Flow* represents a much-needed update to the main interpretive material shown in the Theatre. The film

has also been playing in the NPC's gift shop since May, 2018. The new narrative includes expanded material on the diverse cultural and socioeconomic groups that were involved prominently throughout history, including highlighting Indigenous fisheries and the influence of the Japanese community in the industry.

While it is impossible to tell the complete history of West Coast commercial fishing in a 25-minute film, *Ebb & Flow* highlights the key historical, sociological, and technological milestones that impacted the industry. The film begins with centering the development of the modern fishing industry within the context of a pre-existing history of Indigenous fisheries. The film also discusses how Japanese workers experienced discrimination and xenophobia, and how ultimately these sociological factors impacted the development of the industry's labour movement. Key technological innovations and their subsequent impact on the



Postcard of two Columbia River skiffs fishing for salmon on the Fraser river. The postcard was sent on Dec 3, 1907.

Photo credit: Courtesy of Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society G2009.034.001



The seiner Neekis and crewmember holding up a dip net. ca 1900-1934. Photo credit: Courtesy of Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society G2002.003.001E

industry and its employees are explored through narration and personal testimony.

Denman Digital sought input from multiple stakeholders, fisheries workers, GOGCS and NPC staff, and volunteers to develop the storyboard for the film. A small group of these stakeholders lent their voices to add a personal touch to each section of the film. Sto:lo Cultural Advisor and Historian Albert McHalsie provides an Indigenous perspective on the social history of fisheries in our region. Fishermen Barb Howe and Don Pepper discuss camaraderie and fishing culture alongside the impact of changes in technology on their experiences of work. Fisheries Management and Reconciliation expert Paul Kariya delivers a clear and impactful overview of the environmental consequences of our historical resource management practices

The film explores how immigration, social movements, and technological progress affected the fishing industry's evolution and legacy.

and resultant fisheries decline. The GOGCS is incredibly grateful to the voices that came together to share their stories and perspectives, edit the narrative, and encourage Deman Digital to develop specific themes and stories.

For both organizations, the benefit of creating a new film was greater than simply replacing old interpretative material. *Ebb & Flow* provides a broader view of the commercial fishing industry that was so import-

ant in shaping not just Steveston, but many other communities along the coast of British Columbia.

Redeveloping the film also allowed the GOGCS and NPC to increase accessibility and meet the needs of emerging audiences with particular thought to English as a Second Language learners. *Ebb & Flow* can be viewed with French, Chinese and Japanese subtitles.

The Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society operates the Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historic Site on behalf of Parks Canada. *Ebb & Flow* can be viewed hourly in the Boiler House Theatre. The Port Edward Historical Society operates the North Pacific Cannery and the film has been running in their gift shop/visitors center since May. The documentary can be viewed at gulfofgeorgiacannery.org/learn/resources.