

WHALING HISTORY IN SE ALASKA

Whales and Tales



**The Tye Company
Circa 1907-1910**

In 1907 the Tye Company of San Francisco was founded by J. Barneson, a Norwegian-American, and his colleague Captain I. N. Hibbard. Mr. Ludwig Rissmuller also participated in the venture as an industry wizard, so to speak. He advised the others and designed a large part of the Tye whaling station, which was proclaimed to be the one of the best of its time.

The station was built at the south end of Admiralty Island. A ship, the Tye Jr., was constructed, and operations began in the fall of 1907. The Tye Jr. was 110 feet long, 8 feet in depth with a beam of nearly 18 feet. She brought in five whales within three months of operation. The next three years were busy, with up to six ships supplying whales to the station. It was a rough and rugged business and not without mishaps. The Lizzie Sorenson, one boat working for the company, lost her toss to a whale in 1910 and sank.

Using Rissmuller's techniques, the Tye company's whaling processes utilized nearly all of the whale. The blubber was processed into oil. The oils were used in making soap and lubricants for fine instruments and watches. The baleen was refined into stays for corsets and umbrellas, helping them hold their shape. Leftover liquid was sold to glue manufacturers. The remainder of the whale including the meat, intestines, blood, and bone was ground up into fertilizer.

So what happened in 1910 to change the picture? The whaling grounds had moved too far to make it reasonable to use Tye as a sole processing site. The Tye Company made a decision to put part of the company afloat. They scaled back, converted a ship to a floating oil factory,

and put the Tyee property up for sale. In 1913 Vendsyssal Packing Company purchased the whaling station and its whaling history, though not its usefulness, ended.

For the next 60 years the Tyee station was occupied fairly continuously by fish processors, including Alaska Salmon and Herring Packers, Stuart-Fish Company and Whiz Fish Products.

This story was uncovered and documented this summer as a Passports in Time (PIT) project called Whales and Tales. Participants researched the history of the site and then went to its location on Admiralty Island to look for physical remnants. As expected, there was very little on the ground remaining from the 1910 era. The story isn't finished yet. There are more leads to track down to complete a better picture of a day in the life of a whaler.

Like most PIT projects, this project challenged the participants and rewarded them as their work bore fruit. And in the words of one of them, "We did spend a great week in the field documenting the remains of the cannery era." PIT is a national volunteer clearinghouse that connects people with historic locations across the country to perform a variety of archeological projects.