

ORAL HISTORY 2017-21

Summary of Bryan Hawkins interview

Bryan Hawkins w/Charles Mobley in Homer, AK on 10/10/17 re: Homer Timber Dock's inclusion on National Registry

Summary done by: Robyn Russell

Date: 10/30/17

Born in 1957 in Corvallis, OR. Joyce and Cliff Hawkins are his parents. Grew up in a little town called Shedd, OR, near Corvallis. Major industry was grass seed. Father drove long haul truck and the family had a cabinetry shop. His grandfather came to OR from Missouri during the Great Depression. Grandfather lost the farm, came to OR with a flatbed truck, four sons, and a wife.

Grandfather was a builder and also a water witch—he could find water reliably for people, could trace out a water line. Bryan tried to get grandfather to teach him how to water witch, but he had “dead hands”—no talent for finding water.

Grandfather won a repossessed farm through a lottery. Bryan's oldest brother inherited the farm and bought up his siblings' properties so the original farm has been kept intact.

Big push to settle Alaska when Bryan was a kid. Draw of Alaska was real strong in Oregon. Delivered papers to the Devaney family who had settled in Homer in the 1950s.

Bryan made his first trip to Alaska in 1977, working for Tyonek Timber. Returned home and then came back to work for Devaney's seafood processing plant. Bryan worked in the cannery to begin with and then as a deckhand. Devaneyes had three boats: Miss Charlotte (fishing vessel), Midnight Sun (32 foot fishing vessel which Bryan operated), Violet (fishing vessel), and American Eagle (fishing vessel). Worked as a commercial fisherman for 22 years and got his captain's license. Began fishing in 1978.

Bryan went to work for the City of Homer in 2000 as a harbor officer, became deputy harbormaster in 2004, and then in 2008 was promoted to harbormaster. Homer Harbor has 18 full time employees and nine seasonal hires (to help with summer season). Operations, Admin, Ice Plant, and Maintenance.

1965 dock was still in operation in the late 1970s. Bryan describes it as rickety even then. When the ferry came in and bumped it, the whole dock would shake. Barges with containers docked there until there were better facilities built in Seward and Anchorage. Deliveries would happen monthly. The Tustumena ferry would use the same dock. Materials from the Lower 48 would come up by barge and then loaded onto the Tustumena for delivery further west (e.g. Kodiak). Also used by the Coast Guard in the early 1970s, side berth on the dock which is where the cutter Sedge would berth. Several vessels from the Kodiak area would bring buoys in for the Coast Guard to deploy. U.S. Navy vessels would visit as well.

Navy visits are fun. Sailors are on their best behavior and the town turns out. Navy security team would precede the Navy's visit.

No military transshipment in Homer, but the Homer and Seward docks are a back up if Anchorage is not available. Pioneer Dock was built with that in mind. Homer coordinates with the Navy Captain of the Port regarding security in Homer harbor, Anchorage, and Seward. They have a facilities plan and security screenings of people who enter the facilities and the ships. Hasn't had any serious incidents, just stupid ones. Had one fellow who dodged the gates on the dock in order to take photos of the ferry when the Tustumena was unloading. The fellow ended up getting major attention from the troopers and every other law enforcement officer. The question there is was he testing their defenses or was he just stupid? Community did not like have the gates up on the dock when they first went up. In the old days, used to have shoo the people off the dock so the boats could tie up.

Hawkins says that he doesn't believe current company's plan (Anchors?) will impact the Timber Dock. The company does need to be careful of the Alpha Line which sounds like a power line to the grinder that grinds up the fish waste. Timber Dock is not used for anything and hasn't been used for about four years. The intention is to remove the dock before it falls down.

Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior docked at the Timber Dock. Came to town, got supplies, and left. No protesters.

Abandoned derelict vessels are a subject close to Bryan's heart. He feels that Alaska will soon be overrun with them. Legally, the owners are responsible for derelict vessels, but in practice there's no enforcement so the state winds up stuck with them. The Alaska Association of Harbormasters and Port Administrators has taken on the issue of derelict vessels.

The Chilkat ferry was retired out of state service and sold into private service. Difficult to convert the ferry to other uses. Wound up anchored in Seldovia Bay because they wouldn't let it into the harbor. Eventually ferry wound up in Seattle which is closer to the shipyards that could break it up.

Bryan says that all harbors are dealing with the issue of derelict vessels. Owners abandon the ships and the state winds up with the responsibility of dealing with them. Wrote new legislation that is going to the floor this session. Ships don't last forever.

When Bryan came on as harbormaster, Homer had sixteen large derelict ships tied to the dock. Some they wrecked and sold as scrap, some they forced out. Not proud that they relocated the problem, but Homer needed space at the dock.

Bryan looks to be doing this job for the next eight years. He likes public service even though the process can be frustrating.

End of tape. Length: About 40 min.