

Construction and Site Selection of the Alaska Commercial Fishermen's Memorial in Juneau By Bob Millard

When the Juneau Commercial Fishermen's Memorial first started to take shape, the folks responsible wanted to have a Blessing of the Fleet take place downtown on the waterfront. At the first Blessing of the Fleet, there was still a ferry terminal downtown, on what was known as the Columbia lot. At that time, there was no tram, no fancy restaurant, and the tourist shops had not yet been built around the area where the memorial is located now.

The first Blessing was held at the Columbia Dock adjacent to the downtown Juneau ferry terminal. The name of the memorial changed to Alaska Commercial Fishermen's Memorial in Juneau when the memorial's Board of Directors wanted to emphasize the nature of the memorial over its location. In addition, the Board wanted to recognize fishermen state-wide with a memorial in Alaska's Capital City.



In 1995, the Juneau Commercial Fishermen's Memorial volunteers had raised sufficient funds to begin construction of a memorial on the waterfront. The construction cost of the memorial was funded through donations of money, materials, labor and equipment. The building of the memorial would not have been possible without the generosity of the businesses and people of Juneau. Without exception, local contractors provided manpower, equipment and materials at cost. The construction cost estimate in 1995 was \$ 300,000.

James Bibb, an architect for the firm Jensen, Yorba, Lott, designed the memorial. A design competition was held and Mr. Bibb's proposal was selected from several interesting concepts.

The selected design is a curved wall of granite with a down ramp depressed into the shore on the water front. Names of fishermen are engraved on the curved wall. The memorial must withstand the test of time so therefore only the most durable materials could be used.



With input from the fishing community, the last section of undeveloped land on the waterfront was selected as the site for the memorial. The site fits with the theme of the memorial. It is next to a fish plant/ice house, is quiet and opens to the sea. The uplands are owned by Franklin Properties who along with the City of Juneau granted the organization a perpetual easement for the memorial on the waterfront. The site selected is in front of Georgio's Restaurant which is now the Twisted Fish restaurant.

The Juneau Lumber Mill, also known as Juneau Spruce Corp. and Alaska Plywood Corp., operated on the South Franklin Street site from 1919 to 1963. The sawmill encompassed the areas now occupied by the Taku Smokeries and the Mount Roberts Tram. The Juneau Lumber Mill provided lumber for the community and operated until 1963. The area around the memorial was at one time the location of a conical sawdust burner. All the sawdust from the mills operation was trucked to a hopper and ramp belt that fed saw dust to the burner.



Left: Sawdust Burner and Sawmill Dock, JDCM 85.22.280, Right: Postcard of Sawmill Pond, 1915. Gift of Mark Wheeler, JDCM 98.20.042 – both images courtesy of Juneau Douglas City Museum

The plywood plant portion of the mill and a City warehouse burned to the ground on the morning of August 14, 1959. The suspected cause of the fire was a corroded electrical panel in the plywood plant.



Prior to the fire that destroyed the plywood operation of the mill, which was on the north end of the site; wood cuttings and sawdust from the sawmill operation infiltrated the soil and Gastineau Channel outboard of the mill.



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John Burdick, a structural Engineer designed the memorial foundation to stand independently supported by seven 20 inch diameter galvanized steel pilings.

A geotechnical investigation of the area reveals the memorial site is located on a significant deposit of sawdust 10 feet deep in some places. The deteriorating sawdust is causing the

surrounding ground to sink several inches per year. Note: If you browse the photo gallery you will see that the rock in front of the memorial has settled about 30 inches and the underside of the concrete platform is now exposed. The walkway behind the memorial was filled and repaved in 2004 to repair the settlement.

Prior to structural construction the shore slope was stabilized with large rock rip-rap donated from Goldbelt's Rock Quarry located in Hidden Valley.



Upon receiving the Army Corp. of Engineer's permission to construct on February 15th 1995, construction of the steel pilings, the concrete platform, walls and ramp began. The foundation work was completed in June. Trucano construction was the prime contractor for the site work. The poor soil conditions required the memorial platform be supported by steel casement pilings driven to a solid soil depth of 60 -70 feet. The platform which is supported by the pilings needed to be extremely strong and rigid. Juneau Reddy Mix provided steel rebar and 40 yards of concrete cement for the project.

The platform was constructed with several layers of steel rebar imbedded in a monolithic concrete plane.





The wall and down ramp were built next, but remained unfaced until the following year when the fundraising allowed the purchase of the highest quality granite from a quarry near Barre, Vermont.



The granite was purchased from Rock of Ages, a company that is recognized for having the highest quality granite in the United States. The granite color is Regal Gray with a sanded finish. Its unique portions of quartz and feldspar make it unusually durable, moisture resistant and thermally stable. It has a compressive strength of 23,646 pounds per square inch.



The granite panel and cap facing consisted of curved 2 inch thick cut panels which match the radius of the wall and flat panels to face the ramp.



The top of the wall was capped with 5 inch thick stone. The granite panels and cap were cut with a wire diamond contour saw and a diamond circular saw. The diamond cutting edge and stone are cooled and lubricated with a steady stream of water to maximize the life of the cutting edge.



In March of 1996, the granite in 9 wooden crates weighing 18,000 pounds was shipped from Barre, Vermont to Juneau, Alaska. The Granite was shipped cross country to Seattle by truck. Glacier Marine Transport, now Northland Services, donated transportation from Seattle to Juneau via tug and barge. The panels were stored in a board member's garage until the snow melted and better weather prevailed. The CBJ Public Works Department provided a boom truck with a flatbed to move the panels to the site. A Master Stone Mason from New Hampshire and an apprentice set the stone panels in typical spring wet weather.





The panels are hung from clips or brackets that are fastened to the concrete wall.



The panels are installed consecutively from one end of the concrete wall to the other end and if they are to be removed for repair would have to be dismantled in the reverse order of installation.

64 names were engraved on the four center panels at Rock of Ages prior to shipping to Juneau.



There was concern that the memorial would not be finished by the May Blessing of the Fleet because the stone setter needed three consecutive dry days to caulk the joints between the

panels. Good weather arrived for three days during the last week of April and the panel's portion of the project was completed.

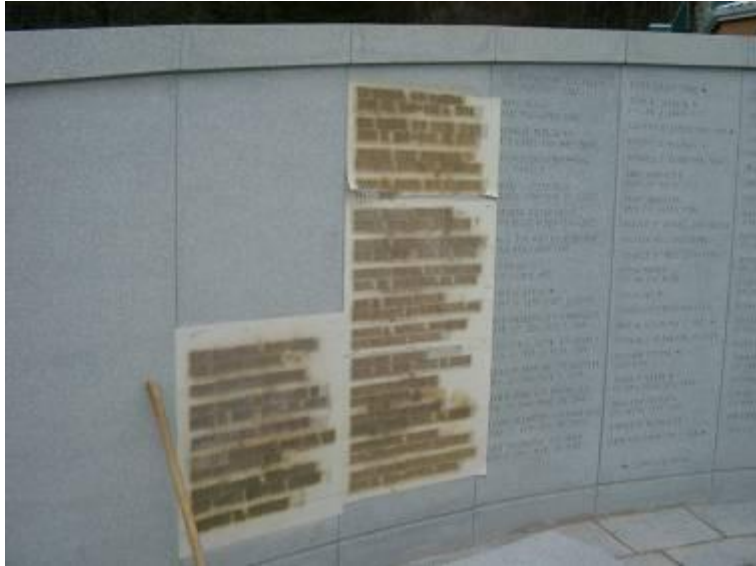


After 1996 the fishermen's names were engraved by a stone carver from Quiring Monuments in Seattle Washington.

Each year in March the Memorial Board of Directors reviews and evaluates applications for engraving on the memorial wall. Once the list of fishermen and women's names are approved by the board they are sent to Quiring Monuments. At Quiring the names of the fishermen and fishing vessels associated with the fishermen are transferred to rubberized stencils. The rubberized stencils and a stone carver are sent to Juneau from Seattle 10 days prior to the Blessing of the Fleet which is held the first Saturday in May.



The engraving process is simple, but a difficult art form. The stone carver glues the stencils to the wall with a temporary adhesive.



The letters on the stencil are sand blasted at high pressure with very hard sand made of crushed garnet. The sand bounces off the rubber and cuts into the granite.



Ultimately, the best weather for engraving the names is dry without a lot of wind. Weather is a critical factor in the engraving. If the weather is wet and windy the engraving is made more difficult because the wet abrasive garnet sand agent used as the cutting medium is overcome by the density of the granite and the sand which is sprayed at 120 psi will not cut as deep.

Each year before the Blessing of the Fleet the Harbor Department crew thoroughly cleans the memorial.



The floor of the memorial remained concrete until 1999 when granite pavers were purchased from a Yukon company. The paver supplier Sidrock, located in Whitehorse, Canada also provided a jade disc mined from a jade quarry in Watson Lake. An aluminum rail fabricated by T&S Welding was installed about the same time.



520 pavers were bedded to the floor with mortar by Alaska Stone and Concrete, a Juneau masonry company. The paver rows were set radially with the wall and around the jade disc. The

remaining floor pavers were set in a grid pattern.



In the center radius of the floor is a large jade disc showing a fishing vessel somewhere in Alaska's waters. The name of the vessel is the ECHO. The picture is engraved in the jade.



If one stands on the disc facing the wall and talks, the sound true to the engraved boats name is echoed back and amplified. To complete the project a brass plaque describing the purpose and need of the memorial was fastened to the exterior wall.



The following picture of the finished memorial was taken from the deck of a cruise ship in 2007

