Launching through the Surf Traveling Exhibit Panel 15: Yamhill County Connections

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Launching through the Surf: The Dory Fleet of Pacific City

Although a few fishermen ventured into the ocean before 1927 to the mouth of the Nestucca River or the beach at Cape Kiwanda, most of the commercial and sport fishing at Pacific City took place on the Nestucca River. On January 27, 1927, two Oregon state representatives from McMinnville, Arthur McPhillips and Walter W. Russell, introduced House Bill 282, calling for the closure of the Nestucca Bay and its tributaries to commercial fishing. The bill passed both the House and the Senate and was signed into law by Governor Patterson on February 19, 1927. Although it may have been inevitable, this government action forced commercial fishermen to find ways to adapt to ocean fishing in order to maintain their livelihoods. They did so by modifying their boat builds to become seafaring dories. This event, put into motion in part by two McMinnville residents, was the catalyst that led to the creation of the Pacific City Dory Fleet.

The Yamhill County residents trekking over the Coast Range in horse-drawn wagons to enjoy the beaches and Nestucca River fishing.

Many McMinnville residents built summer homes in Pacific City. John and Frank Wortman built the first home on Hill Drive in 1926. Other McMinnville residents built homes on Hill Drive, many of them on the Nollette family property. In the summer and early fall Yamhill County residents trekked over the Coast Range in horse-drawn wagons to enjoy the beaches and Nestucca River fishing.

During a reunion, members of the McPhillips family pose at Cape Kiwanda. Bernard McPhillips is the gentleman in the lower right corner of this 1990 photo.

The family of Mel Ferris now includes five generations of Pacific City dory fishermen. Mel began dory fishing at Pacific City in the 1940s. His wife, Joan Nollette Ferri, fished with her father, Lawrence Nollette. Their children, Bill Ferris and Sherry Ferris McConkey, began fishing with them as youngsters. Sherry’s daughter, Shawn McConkey Ferri, also began fishing at a young age and now contains the tradition with her husband, Zach, and daughter, Rusty, who experienced his first dory fishing trip at age three in August 2014. Sherry and the Ferris family continue to live in McMinnville.

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Pacific City Dorymen’s Association
Exhibit Design
Alicia Schnell
Dave Larkins

Dennis Brutke and Stan Gooffs, both from Amity, began dory fishing in the late 1950s. Dennis and Stan often competed in the Dory Derby at Depoe Bay’s double ender. In 1967, they won several individual races and the grand prize, a new 40hp motor.

Steve Larkins of McMinnville began commercial dory fishing in 1971. He eventually moved to Pacific City. His second dory, pictured above, was named Darlene.

While it is impossible to include a comprehensive list covering more than a century of interactions, the images in these panels provide a glimpse of a few of the many people who, through fortuitous connections between Pacific City and Yamhill County, formed part of the Dory Fleet of Pacific City.

The Dory Fleet of Pacific City