

**A HISTORY
OF SEATTLE
WATERFRONT
WORKERS**

1884-1934

RONALD E. MAGDEN

Funded by

The International Longshoremen's and
Warehousemen's Union 19 of Seattle
The Washington Commission for the Humanities

DEDICATION

*Ballard stetsons drift
out to sea,
return in the flotsam
of memory.*

© – Al Valenzuela

To the longshoremen who lost their lives on the Seattle waterfront.

William Kade	1886	Erling Johnson	1922
Henry Jackson	1886	Magnus Ulrickson	1922
Pat Priestly	1886	E. J. Sorensen	1922
George Water	1886	H. W. Curtis	1922
Angus Johnson	1886	Thomas McCarthy	1923
Hans Hanson	1886	James Henry	1925
Milton McAuley	1887	Robert A. Pelly	1925
John C. Smith	1890	Peter V. Larson	1926
Gus Wishman	1908	Arthur Saboe	1927
Orlando J. Pittman	1908	Hans Hanson	1927
John Ryan	1910	John Tangye	1928
Peter Kavenaugh	1911	Shelvy Daffron	1934
Steven Peseta	1913	Olaf Helland	1934
J. Milmoie	1915	Axel B. Anderson	1936
Harry Ragan	1916	Oscar D. Silow	1937
Joe Goldsby	1916	Gustaf A. Dahlin	1937
A. G. Bryant	1917	John M. Reilly	1938
Samuel Grover	1918	Percey F. Norris	1939
Charles Hallier	1918	Wales C. Fenton	1943
T. Thompson	1918	Tom Rawson	1959
Gust Nelson	1918	Otto L. Blosl	1960
Fred Jackson	1918	Dallas Schachere	1962
Harry Krise	1918	John Josvold	1962
Gilbert Halverson	1918	Donald Scribner	1963
Stockton Rumsey	1918	Dagfin Petterson	1964
James G. Carlson	1919	Ralph Sharar	1965
Edward C. Grampie	1919	LeRoy Parr	1969
Martin Burns	1919	Olimpio Leonardo	1972
John Miller	1920	John W. Miskey	1972
Anatone Olson	1921	Elmer Knutson	1972
Alfred C. Jack	1921	Douglas Farnan	1976
S. C. Sullivan	1921	James R. Kennedy	1984
Fred W. Wilford	1921		

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FOREWORD

The purpose of this book is to give the membership and the community an accurate account of our early years. Two things stand out about life on the early Seattle waterfront. Whether you were a lumber handler, coal passer, or general cargo man, you were part of a work gang. The gang became the center of the early longshoremen's social and economic life. Race, creed, and national origin have never mattered on the waterfront as much as whether you carried your fair share of the work. The most important part of longshoring in the early years was the urge to organize. This is as true today as it was when eighty-two men created the first Stevedores, Longshoremen and Riggers' Union of Seattle in 1886.

In large measure, this volume is the work of old timers who taught us why we have longshore unionism. Brothers and sisters saved the old minute books, the dog-eared contracts, and the parade pictures. They remember the prosperous years and the hard times. They wanted the story told of how the union helped create a world-class port. Were it not for them, we would not have one of the strongest unions in the world.

The local would also like to thank Otilie Markholt for her generosity in making available her maritime history documents, and Grace Elizabeth Dawson for providing materials on the early stevedore bosses. To Martin Jugum, president of the Seattle ILWU Pensioners' Club, we extend our warmest thanks for coordinating our efforts with retired longshoremen. Also, our appreciation goes to Craig Johnson, Pacific Maritime Association Area Director, who made this a complete history by allowing the use of the employer's minutes from their start in 1907 through 1934. Longshore sculptors Ron Gustin and Elias Schultz and poet Al Valenzuela kindly permitted us to use their creative works. In addition, I wish to remember Terry Sweeney, past president of the Seattle Pensioners' Club and my co-project director, who worked tirelessly to support and promote this project. Terry passed away before seeing the completion of our book. We are grateful to the Washington Commission for the Humanities for its financial support.

– David Vigil, Sr. Project Director

DAYS

*In hiring halls
we set to work,
stevedores before
the peg.*

*The lore of ships
and longshore ways.
Bullrail gulls shriek
in defiance
at a ship named
the Mary Luckenbach,
rising from her
watermen's grave.
The once breaker
of backs
lays in the rip
of muscle memory
wings abreast,
We met the hook
and belly packed . . .
deep in the
hatch of days.*

CHAPTER I

FROM TRIUMPH TO TRAGEDY

The serenity of the climate, the innumerable pleasing landscapes, and the abundant fertility that unassisted nature puts forth, require only to be enriched by the industry of man with villages, mansions, cottages, and other buildings, to render it the most lovely country that can be imagined; whilst the labour of the inhabitants would be amply rewarded, in the bounties which nature seems ready to bestow on cultivation.

– George Vancouver's
*Description of Puget Sound 1792.*¹

On May 19, 1792, Captain George Vancouver and his crew heralded Puget Sound's long and productive maritime history. On that day Vancouver's sloop *Discovery* anchored off Restoration Point, three miles west of the future city of Seattle. The next morning Lieutenant Peter Puget and Joseph Whidbey explored the extensive inland sea southward. To commemorate Puget's discoveries, Vancouver designated the area Puget Sound. Vancouver also named Mount Rainier and Mount Baker, but it was Captain Charles Wilkes who named the harbor Elliott Bay in 1841 to honor his chaplain, J. L. Elliott. Wilkes charted a bay that extended up the mouth of the Duwamish River to present-day South Seattle. On the east side, high tide washed the foot of Beacon Hill, and to the north touched modern-day King Street.²

Ten years after Wilkes's voyage, November 13, 1851, Seattle's original settlers, the Dennys, Terrys, W. N. Bell, C. D. Boren, and John N. Low, put ashore at Alki Point. The pioneers dreamed of founding a town that would one day become a major railroad center and seaport. Within a month

Captain Daniel S. Howard of the brig *Leonesa* stopped at Alki seeking a cargo of pilings. The settlers contracted to have timbers ready when Howard returned from Olympia. Arthur Denny recalled "Some of us went to work cutting the timber nearest to the water and rolled and hauled in by hand, while Lee Terry went up the Sound and obtained a yoke of oxen, which he drove on the beach from Puyallup, with which to complete the cargo."³

Recognizing that Alki Point was too shallow for deep-water ships, in February 1852 Bell, Boren, and Denny made soundings around Elliott Bay with horseshoes attached to a clothes line. They found miles of the northern and eastern shore deep enough for ships to anchor. After the survey the pioneers examined the land with a view to establishing lumbering claims and ultimately laying out a townsite. Bell, Boren, and Denny filed donation land claims from the bay's edge eastward into dense stands of timber, and northward from today's King Street to Denny Way. When an Olympia clerk named the settlement Duwamps, the town fathers got together and picked the name Seattle after Indian Chief Sealth.⁴

The Early Lumber Trade

Captain George Plummer's brig *John Davis* took the first load of roughly cut pilings and squared timbers from Seattle to San Francisco in April 1852. "The timber was taken from the most convenient places about the bay, put together in small rafts, and with boats and poles, directed to the vessel's side." Working block and tackle, men hand-hoisted the heavy green timbers one by one out of the water, over the side of the ship, and down into the hold.⁵

During that same year pioneers persuaded Henry L. Yesler to build the first steam sawmill, skid road, and wharf in Seattle. Yesler's mill was erected on what is now Pioneer Square. The gang saw could produce 10,000 board feet a day.

During the early years Yesler paid from \$5.00 to \$7.00 for 1,000 board feet of timber.⁶ In San Francisco during the first year he sold his lumber, or bartered it for merchandise, at the rate of \$35.00 per 1,000 board feet.⁷ Yesler's sawn lumber quickly replaced the roughly dressed pilings and hand-squared timbers as Seattle's chief export. At first, townsmen and Indians worked at Yesler's mill and wharf. In the late 1860s twenty steady millhands toiled six days a week, twelve hours a day, for \$40.00 a month and board. The mill crew ate in Yesler's cookhouse, ready to work "at the tap of a bell." Yesler paid off the men mostly in merchandise he ordered from San Francisco.⁸

Yesler spent a year erecting Seattle's first wharf. At first it was a flimsy structure, built of planks attached to pilings placed upright in dug-out holes. Coastwise vessels anchored with sterns abutting the wharf. Sailors erected a scaffold so that crew members could shove timbers through hatches in the ship's transom. Inside, men equipped with iron hooks pulled each timber to a place where it fit snugly. Since the first wharf was too short to serve deep-water ships, boom men rafted the lumber out to shipside and hoisted each beam aboard by block and tackle. Business for the new mill and wharf during its first year of operation was brisk. In 1854 twelve barks, brigs, and schooners bound for San Francisco, Honolulu, and Australia called at Yesler's Mill.⁹

From the beginning, Yesler faced stiff competition from other Puget Sound mills. During 1853, Nicholas Delin installed the first sawmill within today's city of Tacoma. That same year, Pope and Talbot's Puget Mill Company at Port Gamble began operations. In 1854 Puget Mill produced 3.6 million board feet of lumber for the Hawaiian and San Francisco cargo trade.¹⁰ By September 1854, thirty-three Puget Sound sawmills produced a daily average of 85,000 board feet.¹¹ The mills flooded the San Francisco lumber market that year, causing prices to fall. Two years of Indian troubles contributed to the stagnation of the Puget Sound economy.¹²

After the Civil War, California investors constructed mills at Port Blakely, Port Madison, Seabeck, and Tacoma. Several of the mills purchased ships to transport lumber to California. The mills also filled orders from Hawaii, China, Australia, and the western side of Latin America. Like many local mill owners, Henry Yesler tried to stay in the lumber export trade. In 1859 he extended his wharf into deep water to serve foreign ships. Laborers dumped rocks, ballast, cut-off slabs, and sawdust between pilings. Planks, sand, and gravel covered the debris foundation.¹³ Despite Yesler's efforts, his sawmill could not produce as cheaply as the big mills. By 1868, Yesler served primarily the Seattle lumber market.¹⁴

As the lumber industry grew, wage workers gradually replaced settlers in forests and sawmills.¹⁵ Loggers cut down trees, teamsters drove oxen pulling logs to water's edge, and skiff men pulled timbers to the mill ponds. Boom men maneuvered logs from the pond into the carriage for sawing. Inside the mill, sawyers operated gang saws that turned timbers into lumber. Outside, a wharfinger met each ship that docked and tied the lines.¹⁶ In the 1860s the ship's crew loaded the lumber under the supervision of a local stevedore contractor. Hand carts brought dimension lumber to shipside. Horse teams pulled larger finished pieces to the wharf. Ship's crew bound the lumber in rope and chain slings. The men swung the bundle over the side and down into the hold.

On deck, men lashed down eighty to one hundred foot long spars and poles. Work continued from dawn to dusk, six days a week, and sometimes at night by the light of the slab fire.¹⁷ Deep-water ships going to the Far East or Europe normally took two months to stow. Crews loaded coastwise vessels in two weeks.¹⁸

On the American side of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, ships called first at Port Townsend, the only United States Customs' Port of Entry in Washington Territory. All foreign ships had to register and obtain permits from the Custom House. In 1858 David C. H. Rothschild established a chandlery and shipping

commission business on Port Townsend's Quincy Dock. Ship captains paid Rothschild a fee to do their Custom House paperwork, find a tug or towboat, and provide a stevedoring contractor.¹⁹

Rothschild had migrated from Germany to California in time to participate in the forty-niner gold rush. Not discovering gold, "Baron" Rothschild sailed the Pacific for three years. Returning to the beach at Port Townsend, commerce became his ruling passion. "The Baron had more business [sense] to the square inch," a Port Townsendite remarked in 1877, "than could be pounded into another man with a pile driver." Rothschild's "Kentucky Store" extended 210 feet from Water Street onto Quincy Dock. The room facing the street housed groceries, hardware and clothing. In the center section was a liquor store. Extending onto the wharf stood a storeroom holding beef, pork, oil, tar, rope, sails, bells, and small masts.²⁰

In a corner of the wharf storeroom were the desks and ledgers of King & Case Stevedoring Company. Since 1867 New England natives Steven King and Charles Case had leased space from David Rothschild to house their office and equipment. Chain slings lay about the wharf. Ship rigging gear, boom poles, peavies, shovels, ropes, rollers, and sledge hammers lay on K&C's two scows. King and Case claimed expert knowledge in directing ship's crews in stowing rough and surfaced lumber. This early stevedoring company worked all Puget Sound ports charging \$33.00 to supervise a two-week job and \$25.00 per 1,000 board feet to stow foreign vessels.²¹

Captain Rudolph Walter DeLion competed aggressively with K&C for deep-water and coastwise stevedoring contracts. Born in Alsace-Lorraine in 1838, DeLion went to sea as a cabin boy at the age of fourteen. By 1870 he owned the bark, *Otago*, that carried Washington Territory lumber to South America. His Chilean crew doubled as lumber handlers when the ship loaded in Puget Sound. In 1876, DeLion hit the beach, starting a shipping commission-stevedore business in Port

Townsend.²² Five years later, DeLion installed the first portable donkey engine on his section of Quincy Dock. The new invention made possible the use of slings to move lumber from wharf to hatch.²³

Origins of Seattle's Maritime Commerce

From the earliest days of Seattle's history, ship captains sold or traded food, clothing, and hardware to people who came aboard.²⁴ When they were about to sail, captains contracted with commission stores to handle unsold food, clothing, and hardware. Selling sea captains' goods contributed to Denny, Horton & Phillips becoming Seattle's largest commission company.²⁵ Crawford & Harrington, Schwabacher Hardware, and Yesler also handled merchandise from ships, which they retailed at the land's end of their wharves.²⁶

Introduced in 1853, steamboats started scheduled passenger and freight service on Puget Sound from Olympia to Victoria. The sixty-four-mile trip from Olympia to Seattle took thirty-six hours including stops at Steilacoom, Port Orchard, and Port Blakely. Soon regular service connected all of the mill spit villages to Seattle. In 1856 Pacific Mail Company inaugurated scheduled steamship service from San Francisco north to Portland and Puget Sound villages. Thirteen years later Oregon Steam Navigation Company established a water route to Seattle, and in the following year Puget Sound Navigation Company entered the field. General cargo unloading and stowing was accomplished by the ship's crew assisted by local merchants and day laborers.²⁷

During the 1860s, enterprising sea captains created a mosquito fleet to carry passengers, mail, and freight from Seattle to villages up and down Sound. The fleet included brigs, schooners, and smaller sailing craft. Coastwise and deep-water ships transferred merchandise and passengers to the smaller boats for delivery to villages in Snohomish, Skagit, and San Juan counties. The mosquito fleet's trade with

sawmill towns accounted for a majority of Seattle's maritime commerce. The outports sent Seattle lumber, coal, grain, meats, fish, fruits, and vegetables. The Queen City shipped to the hinterland clothing, utensils, furniture, and machinery.²⁸ With a variety of dry goods and reading materials unmatched by town general stores, Seattle businessmen attracted the hinterland family trade. Wives and children sailed to the Queen City, shopped, and returned to the sawmill villages.²⁹ During the winter, loggers, miners, harvest hands, and fishermen headed for boarding houses alongside Seattle's skid road. No other western Washington town catered to single laborers in the extractive industries quite like Seattle. During the 1870s Seattle claimed to have the cheapest boarding houses, strongest nickel beer, and wildest entertainment in the Pacific Northwest.³⁰

The Coal Business

Coal deposits were discovered at Renton, Black Diamond, and Newcastle in the 1850s, but getting the ore from the mine to Elliott Bay proved to be difficult. Eventually, Newcastle coal was brought to bunkers at the foot of Pike Street by way of three tram railway sections linked with barges that crossed Lake Washington and Lake Union.³¹ In 1870, the *Moneynick* carried the first ship load of 405 tons of King County coal to San Francisco.³² In March 1872, Seattle celebrated the completion of the last link of its coal rail line. Men, women, and children crowded into eight coal cars at the foot of Pike Street for free round trip rides through dense forest to the south end of Lake Union.³³

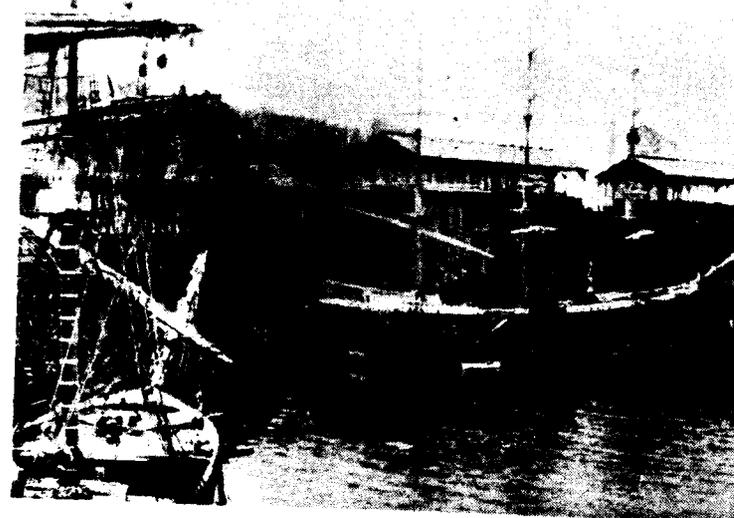
Two months after the coal trams became operational, carpenters finished an 800-foot railroad trestle to two huge coal bunkers in the bay. Engines pushed cars from the foot of Pike Street to a point where 1,200 tons could be dropped through a shaft into the holds of deep-water ships.³⁴ Under the supervision of a foreman, six men handled the coal chute

topside. In the hold four heavers shoveled from the square of the hatch to the steel plates of four coal passers who filled the wings of the steamer. Once hired, coal workers toiled continuously until the ship was loaded. The pay was 30 cents an hour, no matter how long the stowing took.³⁵

Despite the logistical problems of getting coal from the mines to vessels, coal gradually replaced lumber as Seattle's chief export.³⁶ Coal export increased from 4,918 tons in 1871 to 132,263 tons in 1879. Value per ton rose from \$3.00 to \$5.00 during the same era.³⁷ Sometimes "in the [18]70s so great was the California demand for coal that sailing vessels actually stood in line, waiting their turns to load at the bunkers at the foot of Pike Street. One firm alone kept nine of these big carriers going constantly."³⁸

Job opportunities for Seattle waterfront workers increased on March 31, 1875. On that date Goodall, Nelson & Perkins Steamship Company's *Los Angeles* docked at Yesler's Wharf. The *Los Angeles* inaugurated bimonthly service from San Francisco to Puget Sound ports. Passengers and general merchandise came north and capacity loads of coal went south. Immediately, Pacific Mail Steamship Company dispatched the *Salvador* to Puget Sound. A rate war ensued. The Goodall, Nelson & Perkins line gave up in 1876.³⁹ Four years later, Pacific Coast Steamship Company started scheduled freight, passenger, and mail services between San Francisco, Puget Sound, and Alaska ports. Within a year Pacific Coast Steam had eliminated Pacific Mail from the Puget Sound route. This steamship company dominated coastal shipping from Mexico to Alaska until 1916. As part of Henry Villard's transportation empire, Pacific Coast Steam netted millions of dollars of profit during the 1880s. Villard also controlled the Northern Pacific Railroad, the Oregon Railway & Navigation Company, and most of the coal fields in King and Pierce counties.⁴⁰

In 1883, Victoria stevedore bosses contracted with Pacific Coast Steam to supply cargo handlers on the Puget Sound



The Coal Dock, Museum of History and Industry

run.⁴¹ Bosses picked men at dockside and paid off in cash when the job was finished. Picked first were skilled riggers, men who set the lines through the booms and drums that would handle the slings. Experienced stevedores, that is, men who broke out cargo and stowed the new load in the hold also received special consideration. The last chosen were the less skilled workers, called longshoremen, who hand-trucked sling loads to and from the wharf. Outside of the waterfront community, few people knew of the distinction between the three groups of workers. Newspapers and the general public considered all men who worked cargo as longshoremen.⁴²

Riggers, stevedores, and longshoremen who traveled on Pacific Coast Steam's vessels were all paid the same, 30 cents an hour and board and room. When the men worked company ships in Victoria, stevedore bosses paid 50 cents an hour. If ships proceeded directly from San Francisco to Port Townsend, Seattle, Tacoma, or Olympia, a local boss contracted to get men at the 30-cents-an-hour rate.⁴³ King & Case Stevedoring established a branch office in Seattle to handle general cargo freight in 1880. Four years later, twelve Queen City waterfront men worked steady for K&C. Seattle's first longshore

gang included Peter Carsenson, Frank Clark, James Hamilton, Terrey King, John McDonald, Steven Morris, Fred Nelson, Henry Nelson, Daniel Smith, Charles Steele, Joe Surber, and Harry Wilson. Clark, King, Surber, and Wilson squatted in shanties at water's edge to get the jump on other men when a ship hove into sight. Hamilton, the Nelsons, and Charles Steele were family men who headed for the wharves when runners called for men to work the ships.⁴⁴

On October 22, 1884, fifteen Seattle waterfront workers demanded wage parity with Victoria men. They vowed not to set foot on the *Umatilla* to unload cargo until paid 50 cents an hour. Captain James Carroll and stevedore boss Lorenzo Garrison refused to bargain. Backed by police, Garrison ordered the Seattle men off Pacific Coast Steam's dock. After three days of watching the *Umatilla's* crew unload cargo, the Seattle men surrendered. They loaded coal on the *Umatilla* at the old 30-cents-an-hour rate. The first recorded cargo worker strike on Puget Sound had failed.⁴⁵

Passed by the United States Congress on February 25, 1885, the Alien Contract Labor Act ended the employment of Victoria cargo workers on the American side of Puget Sound.⁴⁶ Port Townsendites looked forward to getting the lion's share of the work. After all, PT had the Custom House and Pacific Coast Steam's Alaska depot. Tacoma longshoremen expected the traveling jobs because the largest amount of lumber and coal loading occurred out of their city. Most shipping lines, including Pacific Coast Steam, chose Seattle, home port for the Sound's mosquito fleet. By the end of 1885, Seattle longshoremen were in a good position to control both Pacific Coast Steam's traveling jobs and mosquito fleet freight loading.⁴⁷

The Origin of Seattle Unions

The mosquito fleet engineers were among the first Seattle workers to organize a union.⁴⁸ In 1883, the maritime engineers created Local 38. Two years later in San Francisco, sailors organized the Coast Seamen's Union with branches in Port Townsend, Eureka, and San Pedro. The seamen created hiring halls in the branches to replace boarding house crimps and shipping agents who controlled the job market. Within a year, 3,000 sailors belonged to this union.⁴⁹ In June 1886, employers established the Pacific Coast Ship Owners' Association for mutual protection against "existing and prospective demands" from the Seamen's Union.⁵⁰ David C. H. Rothschild served as the shipowners' Washington Territory representative.⁵¹

During the mid-1880s farmers, miners, waterfront workers, and tradesmen in King and Pierce counties organized nineteen Knights of Labor Assemblies.⁵² Originating in Philadelphia during 1869, the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor spread throughout the United States during the next decade. The Order appealed to all wage workers, regardless of race, creed, color, sex, or skill. Although pledged to racial tolerance, West Coast Knights strongly opposed the presence of Chinese laborers. Fifteen thousand Chinese and whites had worked in Northern Pacific and Canadian Pacific construction crews. When laborers finished the two railroad lines, hundreds of Chinese and white workers drifted into Puget Sound towns looking for work. At the Hatch Mill in Tacoma white laborers received \$1.75 a day while Chinese did the same work for \$1.00 a day.⁵³

An economic depression during the fall of 1885 aggravated Chinese-Caucasian relations. Over 1,200 unemployed white loggers, fishermen, and miners gathered in Seattle. On September 5, whites and Indians attacked Chinese hop pickers near Seattle. Three Orientals were killed. Several days later Chinese were driven from the Newcastle mines. On September

17, the *Post-Intelligencer* printed on page one an anonymous workingman's warning to Seattle businessmen: "On you who employ Chinese labor depends all; whether the Chinese go quietly and peaceable, or whether trouble arises."⁵⁴ Later that month the anti-Chinese faction formed the Liberal League, and business and professional men established a Law and Order party. When Tacoma businessmen and workers drove 200 Chinese out of the City of Destiny on November 3, Seattle's unemployed pressured political leaders to evict the Chinese. Two days later, Judge Thomas Burke, a leader in the business and professional community, stated the Chinese would leave peacefully. He added, "We are all laborers, and the attempt to draw class lines is false and malicious." Burke blamed alien Irish agitators for poisoning the minds of the workers.⁵⁵ On November 20, Knights of Labor organizer Daniel Cronin warned the "monied power" that the Chinese had to go or there would be trouble. Furthermore, using troops to break the backbone of the Knights of Labor would fail. "The Knights of Labor as an organization will live when the Chinese-lovers will be gone and forgotten in their everlasting home."⁵⁶

On Sunday, February 7, 1886, Seattle's anti-Chinese faction herded 400 Chinese to the gangway of the *Queen of the Pacific*. Captain Alexander refused to take more than 196 deportees, the *Queen's* legal steerage limit. A confrontation ensued between home guards, backed by the business and legal community, and the unemployed laborers. A home guard shot into the crowd. Charles Stewart, an unemployed logger, fell mortally wounded. The two sides continued to argue vehemently. Finally, anti-Chinese leaders directed their followers to go home. Stewart's death marked the first recorded incident in what was to be a long series of face-to-face confrontations between Seattle workers and businessmen.⁵⁷

During the spring of 1886 a sudden upturn in the construction, extractive, and transportation industries caused an acute shortage of workers in Washington Territory. In par-

ticular, employers advertised for construction crews, miners, millmen, shingle weavers, and longshoremen. When Washington Territory employers refused to increase wages and shorten working hours during the summer and fall of 1886, 2,351 men struck.⁵⁸ Among those striking were forty-two Tacoma waterfront workers. On March 22, the south Sound longshoremen struck for hiring preference and a wage raise to 40 cents an hour. After four days, Stevedore Boss Rudolph W. DeLion grudgingly acceded to the men's demands. During the strike Tacomans formally organized the Stevedores, Longshoremen and Riggers' Union of Puget Sound.⁵⁹

Fifty Tacoma union longshoremen created in May 1886 a cooperative stevedoring company designed to eliminate private stevedoring companies. The Tacoma Cooperatives established branch offices to bid on jobs in Port Townsend, Seattle, and Port Blakely.⁶⁰ At the same time, Knights of Labor organizers recruited general cargo men in Seattle and lumber handlers at the sawmills. Port Blakely Mill Manager John Campbell wrote a letter for Stevedore Boss DeLion to show ship captains: "We do not want them to employ any cooperative union stevedores, or men belonging thereto; as we do not countenance the actions of the society."⁶¹ The Port Blakely Mill manager failed to avert labor trouble. On July 1, lumber handlers struck the company for three days. The men returned to work when the sawmill manager acceded to recognition of the union and the ten-hour working day.⁶² Although large sawmill operators continued to contract exclusively with private stevedore operators, the Tacoma cooperative found ample work opportunity at the small mills.⁶³

Triumph

In Seattle on Monday, June 9, 1886, a longshore committee called on Wharf Manager William Van Waters and the officers of Pacific Coast Steam's *Mexico* with this ultimatum: Until guaranteed 40 cents an hour for day work and 50 cents for

nights, the men would not unload the ship. The committee told Van Waters Seattle longshoremen deserved pay parity with Victoria, San Francisco, and Tacoma. Moreover, Seattle men carried around the Sound by Pacific Coast Steam must be paid 40 cents an hour and board and room.⁶⁴

At first Agent Van Waters refused to bargain. He asserted Pacific Coast Steam already paid Seattle longshoremen \$800 to \$900 to discharge and load each company ship. The wharfinger met with waterfront workers a second time, but failed to dislodge the men from their demands. Finally, Van Waters telegraphed the strikers' terms to headquarters in San Francisco. Seattle longshoremen did not wait for a decision from California.⁶⁵ The next day they posted handbills on all Elliott Bay wharves and sent copies to the other Puget Sound ports. The circular proclaimed:

**NOTICE TO LONGSHOREMEN
AND WORKING MEN**

Notice is hereby given that the Seattle Longshoremen have struck for 40 cents per hour day work and 50 cents per hour night work.

All Longshoremen and working men on Puget Sound are requested to stay away from Seattle until the difficulty is settled.

Respectfully,
SEATTLE LONGSHOREMEN⁶⁶

On June 12, 1886, several strikers gathered in the shack of Terry King, a long-time waterfront worker. The men voted to organize the Stevedores, Longshoremen and Riggers' Union of Seattle (SL&RU). The waterfront workers drafted a constitution. Instead of emphasizing the "struggle between the Capitalist and the Laborer," as did many trade unions and the American Federation of Labor, SL&RU followed the principles of the Knights of Labor. "In all of our dealings," the SL&RU Constitution declared, "we shall be guided by the eternal



Original Banner, ILWU 19 Archives, Photo by Gail Rieber

principles of right and the glorious standard of justice." Other principles of the union included the Knights' adages, "An injury to one is the concern of all" and "Absolute justice is the right of every being."⁶⁷

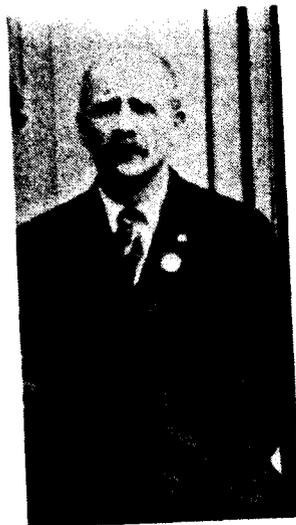
Article X of the SL&RU Constitution created a Working Committee composed of the president and two rank-and-file members. This committee maintained the record book containing names of members in good standing. The president or a rank and filer dispatched men to work ships in alphabetical order to assure equal opportunity. Job control has remained the cardinal principle of Seattle longshore unionism for over 100 years.⁶⁸

Charter members elected Henry Nelson first president of Seattle's Stevedores, Longshoremen and Riggers' Union on June 13. Nelson presided the next day at a formal meeting in the Opera House. Eighty-eight men signed the roll.⁶⁹ Most had

been members of the Sailors' Union who had hit the beach and joined the Knights of Labor. Charter members hailed from the United States, Canada, and western Europe. All had to be American born or prove intention of becoming citizens. The ages of the first members ranged from twenty-one to fifty-nine.⁷⁰ At least thirty-four were married. They bore western European surnames: Allen, Connell, Donnelly, Eckert, Good, Hamilton, Johnson, Kennan, Manning, Miller, Price, Root, and Seymour.⁷¹



SL&RU Charter Member
Dan Connell, ILWU 19 Archives



SL&RU Charter Member
Tom Stenson, ILWU 19 Archives

When the *Queen of the Pacific* docked on June 14, Captain Alexander informed SL&RU's walking delegate that Pacific Coast Steamship would pay 40 cents an hour. The union delegate then insisted that five warehouse truckers also be paid 40 cents an hour. Alexander pointed out that the Columbia and Puget Sound Railroad Company controlled warehouse wages. When CPSRC agent Van Waters refused to increase the pay of the truckers, all union men stopped working. Alexander countered by hiring strikebreakers. Bargaining resumed. Forty-five minutes later the parties reached a compromise. Bosses agreed to sort the *Queen's* freight inside while

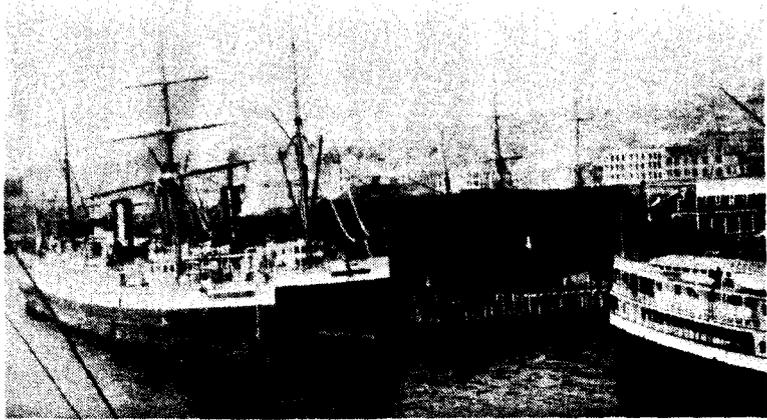
SL&RU warehousemen worked on the ballast pile outside. In the meantime, stevedores stowed cargo, then made the run to Nanaimo to load coal.⁷² A week later, Pacific Coast Steam's *Mexico* arrived with 309 tons of cargo. Seattle union longshoremen started to work at the guaranteed 40 cents an hour. Again the railroad company refused to pay truckers 40 cents an hour. Dock men knocked off while stevedores unloaded the *Mexico*. Afterwards truckers and bosses met to discuss the pay issue.⁷³

The crisis continued. During the week of June 21, Albert Johnson, a railroad straw boss regarded as obnoxious by union longshoremen, became chief warehouseman. Speaking for SL&RU, J. J. Sullivan told a reporter, "The employment of Mr. Johnson in the warehouse is an entering wedge for the disruption of our organization which I know is very much to be desired. Our demands have been acceded to by PCSC but never by [Road Superintendent] Mr. Milner, except under circumstances over which he had no control."⁷⁴

When the *Queen* arrived from San Francisco on the night of June 28 a longshore committee told Van Waters that the men would not work under Johnson. The committee cited a union rule prohibiting members from working with nonmembers. Van Waters telephoned Superintendent Milner who came down from his home at three o'clock in the morning. Accompanied by Police Captain DeWolfe, Milner ordered the men off the dock. At the same time the superintendent instructed Stevedore Boss Lorenzo Garrison to give section hands 40 cents an hour to discharge freight from the vessel.⁷⁵ Longshoremen refused to work the Columbia and Puget Sound Railroad Company wharf until July 23, when both Chief Warehouseman Johnson and Wharfinger Van Waters resigned their positions.⁷⁶

The June 1886 victories over Pacific Coast Steamship and the Columbia and Puget Sound Railroad established the longshore union as the force to contend with on Seattle wharves. Nine shipping lines and seven dock managers recognized SL&RU as the primary source for longshore and

warehouse workers. Not only did the union control job dispatch, it also set the wage scale. The single exception to union authority was at the coal bunkers where Stevedore Boss Lorenzo Garrison did the hiring. After several months SL&RU reached a compromise with Garrison. Union longshoremen would load coal on all Pacific Coast Steam vessels. Garrison could contract with all other ships. Garrison gave his word not to bid on cargo handling at the ten other Seattle wharves.⁷⁷



Queen of the Pacific, 1890, docked beside the Walla Walla, San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park

Tragedy

At five minutes before noon, July 28, 1886, at the Nanaimo, British Columbia, coal bunker a traveling gang of six Seattle union longshoremen shoveled coal in the lower hold of the *Queen of the Pacific*. "Instantly, as a large mass of coal struck the lower deck, a concussion [clap] shook the boat and a sheet of flame flashed over and through the lower and upper decks where the coal was being loaded, and thence down into the coal bunkers and furnace room." SL&RU members Hans Hanson, Henry Jackson, Angus Johnson, William Kade, Pat Priesly, and George Water were badly burned. "Their flesh hung in shreds and their cries were heart-rending," declared an eyewitness.⁷⁸

Five men working in the furnace room also appeared to be gravely injured and five others on the upper deck slightly burned. The sixteen victims were taken to the hospital. At first doctors hoped all would survive, but the six Seattle longshoremen and three furnace tenders died over a two-month period. The flame had severely scorched their throats and lungs. Death came as a welcome visitor. They are buried together in Nanaimo Cemetery.⁷⁹

The tragedy that befell Hanson, Jackson, Johnson, Kade, Priestly, and Water at Nanaimo is the worst longshore accident ever to occur on the West Coast. A marine inquest held at Nanaimo on August 20, 1886, established that the accident had been caused by a spontaneous coal dust explosion. The inquest officers held no one responsible and knew of no preventive measures to recommend.⁸⁰

Ten months later, on May 3, 1887, a coal dust explosion occurred in the Number One Shaft of the Victoria Mine Company at Nanaimo killing 155 miners.⁸¹