

# Schooner *Wawona*

by Joe Follansbee

A plan to develop park land near downtown Seattle has upset efforts to preserve a 106-year-old historic schooner. Northwest Seaport, a non-profit, is slowly restoring the three-masted schooner *Wawona*. The ship is berthed next to a city park that the Seattle Parks Department wants to develop into a maritime heritage park. A perfect match, one might think, but given the ship's partially-restored condition, the Parks Department is not convinced and wants the ship moved by summer 2004.

Northwest Seaport board president Joe Shickich says his group is working on solutions to the city's concerns, which could include another location for *Wawona*. She has been at her current berth at Lake Union, a 580-acre urban lake surrounded by both residential and commercial buildings, since 1980. Visitors and school groups can freely wander the site and board the *Wawona* at no charge during the summer. Northwest Seaport also owns the lightship *Swiftsure*, the salmon troller *Twilight*, and the tug *Arthur Foss*. New planking on her starboard bow in 2002 was the most recent restoration work conducted on her.

Northwest Seaport officials have consulted with the city since the 1960s on a maritime heritage park, but Seattle maritime heritage groups appear divided over park plans. Development pressures affecting *Wawona* also come from industry as proposals are on the table to turn the neighborhood into a biotechnology hub, injecting thousands of high-paying jobs into the depressed Seattle economy. City project manager Colleen Browne says *Wawona* could stay at the park if the ship were in better condition. Part of the ship's bow is covered with plastic sheeting; the starboard side below the bulwarks was painted last year, but paint is peeling over the rest of the vessel. The stern and counter behind the rudder post are pulling away from the frames.

*Wawona* played an important role in the economic develop-



ment of the west coast. Shipbuilder Hans Ditlev Bendixsen built her in 1897 at Fairhaven, California, near Eureka. She carried lumber from Washington State to California in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Once a common type of vessel on the west coast, the *Wawona* is one of only two ships left from the Pacific Coast lumber trade. She is constructed from California Douglass Fir and measures 165 feet length overall. The other ship is the *C. A. Thayer*, in San Francisco, built by the same shipbuilder.

*Wawona* was converted to a cod-fishing vessel in 1914 and fished in the Bering Sea from 1914 to 1947, except during World War II. During the war, the US Army chartered the ship and designated her as barge BCL-710; her masts were unstepped and the ship towed around Puget Sound carrying lumber. She



*Tugs alongside for her annual turnaround.*

was returned to her owners in 1946, had new masts stepped, and returned to fishing for two years. Laid up in 1947, she was purchased by Northwest Seaport (then named SOS—Save Our Ships) in 1964. *Wawona* was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1970 (the first time a ship was included in the Registry) and had her lines documented by the National Park Service's Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) in 1985.

A full restoration could cost up to \$10 million. The *C.A. Thayer* is owned by the National Parks Service and is currently undergoing a \$9.6 million dollar reconstruction. †

For more information, contact Northwest Seaport: 1002 Valley St., Seattle WA 98109; ph. 206 447-9800; e-mail seaport@oz.net. Visit the ship at 830 Terry Avenue N, Seattle, WA 98109. Access HAER ship documentation at: [www.cr.nps.gov/habshaer](http://www.cr.nps.gov/habshaer).

*Joe Follansbee is a Seattle-based free-lance writer working on a book about the 1936 voyage of the Wawona to the Bering Sea. He served on the Northwest Seaport board in 2000.*

*Left and Below: New planking on Wawona's bow.*



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