Form No. 10-300 REV. (9/77)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME
HISTORIC Dickman Lumber Company Head Saw

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER 2423 Ruston Way
CITY, TOWN Tacoma
STATE Washington 98407
NOT FOR PUBLICATION

VVICINITY OF
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT Sixth - Hon. Norm Dicks

3 CLASSIFICATION
CATEGORY
DISTRICT
BUILDING(S)
STRUCTURE
OBJECT
OWNERSHIP
PUBLIC
PRIVATE
BUILDING
STRUCTURE
OBJECT
IN PROCESS
PUBLIC ACQUISITION
ACCESSIBLE
STATUS
OCCUPIED
UNOCCUPIED
WORK IN PROGRESS
OCCUPIED
UNOCCUPIED
YES: RESTRICTED
YES: UNRESTRICTED
NO

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY
NAME Ralph H. Dickman, II
STREET & NUMBER 3710 North Union
CITY, TOWN Tacoma
STATE Washington 98407

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
COURTHOUSE
RegISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Pierce County Assessor (for mill property)
STREET & NUMBER 2401 South 35th Street
CITY, TOWN Tacoma
STATE Washington 98409

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
TITLE Washington State Cultural Resource Survey: Tacoma/Pierce County
DATE January, 1978
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY
Community Development Department, Office of Historic Preservation
CITY, TOWN Tacoma
STATE Washington 98402
The Dickman Lumber Company head saw is an object related to the lumber industry, a significant contributor to the settlement and economic development of Tacoma. While conditions require removal from its original site, the head saw remains the only surviving object which can be associated with Tacoma's early lumber industry once located along the southern shore of Commencement Bay. It is also the only remaining object related to the operations of this particular mill after a fire destroyed the plant in January, 1979. The mill was the last over-the-water sawmill in Tacoma.

The Dickman Lumber Company head saw was manufactured by the Sumner Iron Works of Everett, Washington, in the early 1920's and installed in 1923. It consists of a base and two wheels which are ten feet in diameter and thirteen inches across the rim. The upper wheel is attached to the upper portion of the base. Four supports which extend from the base rest on pilings driven into the ground. These supports, as well as the entire head rig, were at a level above the main floor of the mill. The lower wheel is attached to the bottom of the base. A thin wooden casing was placed between the left side of the upper wheel and the base.

The saw was powered by a Westinghouse 350 horsepower, 440 V., 300 R.P.M. type MR synchronous drive motor. The motor shaft goes directly into the lower wheel. The entire saw weighs fifteen tons and measures approximately thirty-four feet high, ten feet wide from wheel edge to wheel edge, and twelve feet wide from the front of the saw.

The two wheels held and retained the fifteen-inch band saw. The saws were changed twice a day and refilled. When they reached a width of twelve inches, they were thrown away. It took five men to change the saw. It was rolled from the filing room, and placed by hand on the wooden saw loader which was positioned above and to the side of the upper wheel. After the bottom part of the saw was lowered onto the lower wheel the saw loader was pulled by ropes over the upper wheel. The saw would then be slipped on the wheel by hand.

Before the saw loading began, two mechanized columns attached to the base lowered the upper wheel to facilitate the loading operation. After the saw was slipped on the two wheels, these columns were raised. By viewing a gauge located in the interior of the base, the proper saw tension could be obtained by raising and lowering the columns. The entire saw blade loading process generally took five minutes.

To cut a log it was first placed on the twelve foot by forty-five foot head saw carriage, or head rig. Because a log is slightly tapered, it was aligned to assure a straight cut. A saw guide positioned at the front of the upper wheel was then adjusted to fit the size of the log. This guide kept the saw blade taut against the pressure exerted by the log while passing through the saw. A scraper is attached to the base so that it rests on the upper wheel. Any debris which could become attached to the underneath side of the saw could be removed. Debris could affect the tension of the saw. A stream of water ran down the saw to lubricate it.

As logs were cut, sawdust would drop to a chain/bucket conveyor positioned below the bottom wheel. Before the mill was completely converted to electric power the sawdust was burned for steam power. At the time of the mill's closure, it was carried to the sawdust bunker.
Tacoma developed into a city through the processing and shipping of the natural resources of Puget Sound. Early economic activity was dependent upon the deep-water port facility located along the southern shore of Commencement Bay and the impetus provided by the Northern Pacific Railroad. The forests surrounding Puget Sound were one of the natural resources which attracted settlement, prompted the development of the lumber industry, and helped to build Tacoma, not only economically, but also physically. The Dickman Lumber Company was the last lumber mill along the southern shore of Commencement Bay which symbolized this development. Since fire destroyed a portion of this mill in 1979, the surviving head saw serves as a symbol associated most often with the lumber-related commercial activity which dominated Tacoma, as well as the Pacific Northwest.

The lumber industry was a major contributor to Tacoma's economic development. Some promoters would make references to Tacoma as the "Lumber Capitol of America." Local environmental and physical characteristics made the industry possible. The early townsites of both Old and New Tacoma were dense forests. Early explorers wrote of the deep water along the southern shore of Commencement Bay as a potential port facility. When, in 1873, the Northern Pacific Railroad chose the head of Commencement Bay as the terminus for its transcontinental line, it assured that rail transport could carry the resource to the waterfront port from the more distant forests surrounding Puget Sound.

In 1852, before the arrival of the railroad, Nicholas De Lin established his sawmill, the first mill and one of the first settlements in Tacoma. Sixteen years later, in 1868, the Hanson Ackerson Mill (later the Tacoma Mill Company) was built two miles northwest of the future railroad terminus. Old Tacoma, located adjacent to the mill, was being promoted as the potential terminus at this time, and the mill was used to attract the railroad. The area was logged to aid settlement as well as to feed the first sawmills. When the New Tacoma townsite was developed after 1873 the area west of the tideflats also had to be cleared. The promotion of the area by developers and early settlement were the first causes for the establishment of the lumber industry in Tacoma.

1. Sam Wilkerson was one of the early promoters who lauded the economic advantages of Puget Sound to eastern railroad financiers, especially Jay Cooke. As the financier behind the Northern Pacific Railroad, Cooke was instrumental in the selection of Tacoma as the railroad terminus.

2. The De Lin mill was located in the vicinity of Dock Street and Puyallup Avenue at the head of the present City Waterway. Old Tacoma was logged for this mill, and San Francisco served as the major market for the lumber.

I. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Thomas W. Prosch, McCarver and Tacoma. Seattle, Lowman and Hanford, 1906.
O'Neill Blacker, "A Short History of the Dickman Lumber Company." City of Tacoma
Archives of the Dickman Lumber Company, privately owned by Ralph H. Dickman, II.,
Tacoma, Washington.
Telephone interview with Brent Lambert, Preservation Planner, Snohomish Co., Everett, Wa.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: Less than an acre

QUADRANGLE NAME: Tacoma North

QUADRANGLE SCALE: 1:24000

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

UTM REFERENCES

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Dickman Lumber Company head saw, as an object, sits on the mill dock, along the
Commencement Bay shoreline, at 2423 Ruston Way.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE: Caroline Gallacci/Patricia A. Sias
Preservation Planners

ORGANIZATION: Community Development Department, Office of Historic Preservation

DATE: July 13, 1979

STREET & NUMBER: 740 St. Helens - 10th Floor

TELEPHONE: 206-593-2830

CITY OR TOWN: Tacoma, Washington

STATE: 98402

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE
In January, 1979, a fire destroyed a major portion of the Dickman Lumber Company mill. The only portion of the head saw which was completely destroyed was the thin wooden casing located between the left side of the upper wheel and the base. A layer of rust is beginning to accumulate due to exposure to weather. It has been determined that damage was not of a nature to keep the saw from being restored and used again.

The Dickman Lumber Company head saw currently sits in its original location on the mill site. However, the property has been sold and new development will not be compatible with the maintenance of the saw on this site. If the saw is not moved, it will be dismantled and sold as scrap metal. The City of Tacoma, the owner of the saw (which bought it back after it had been auctioned by the new property owners), and a local neighborhood organization are working together to have the entire saw moved from the site and placed in a nearby waterfront park within view of the Dickman Lumber Company site. During the site preparation phase, the head saw will be placed in a building for protection and restoration.

Item Number 8 -- Significance (cont)

As development continued in Tacoma, new markets were found and the lumber industry grew. In 1887, there were nine lumber-related businesses located within the city. Two years later, in 1889, there were twenty-five. By 1890 there were at least twenty sawmills alone operating in Tacoma. (4) Two mills established during the period have long symbolized the role of the lumber industry in Tacoma's history. One was the St. Paul and Tacoma Lumber Company, founded in 1888 by Chauncy Griggs, Henry Hewitt, Jr. and Charles H. Jones. This mill was built on the east side of the present City Waterway when most of this area was still part of the Puyallup Indian Reservation. It is now part of the St. Regis Paper Company plant.

The other mill was founded by Abraham Coon Young in 1889 and was built northwest of Old Tacoma along the southern shore of Commencement Bay when this area was Tacoma's port. (its later address was 2423 Ruston Way.) In 1922 it was acquired by Ralph H. Dickman, and continued to operate until September, 1977, when the mill was closed. In January, 1979, a fire destroyed a major portion of the plant. At the time the Dickman Lumber Company closed it was the only industrial complex located along the waterfront between the ASARCO Smelter and the central business district which symbolized early lumber-related marine and commercial activity. It was also the last over-the-water sawmill in the city. (5)


This area along the shoreline was the city's first port facility, and remained so until the 1920's when the Port of Tacoma was firmly established on the tideflats. During the peak of activity, between the late 1880's and the 1930's, at least eight sawmills were located along the four mile area between Old Tacoma and the ASARCO Smelter. Three boat builders were situated near the lumber mills and their work, in part, helped to foster the western purse seine fishing industry. Three flouring mills were located between Old Tacoma and downtown. The Northern Pacific wharf and "halfmoon" railroad yards, as well as the coal bunkers (where coal was shipped after being transported from the mines in eastern Pierce County) were also located here.

In 1924, Ralph H. Dickman acquired the mill from the estate of the previous owner, C.D. Danaher. Dickman came to be known as one of Tacoma's major lumbermen and was responsible for introducing the eight-hour, one-shift working day to the lumber industry in Tacoma. His mill was the only one in Tacoma which specialized in custom, out-sized orders.

After acquiring the mill, Dickman engaged in an extensive remodeling program and converted the plant from steam power to electricity. When he had this work done, he kept some of the steam equipment alongside the electric which replaced it. The mill remained this way until its closure. Dickman also purchased a head saw from the Sumner Iron Works, one of Everett, Washington's first industries. (6)

The head saw was the major piece of equipment in any sawmill which had to cut the large Pacific Northwest logs. In the Dickman mill, logs up to thirty inches in diameter would first be faced, or squared, to determine the quality of wood grain. The sawyer would then determine what orders would fit the log and it would be cut to fit the order. (7) In the 1920's and 1930's, the period of peak production for the mill, the head saw cut up to 150,000 feet of lumber a day. It has been estimated that between 1923 and 1977, enough lumber was cut to build all the housing in the city of Tacoma. (8)

6. The Sumner Iron Works was founded in Everett, Washington, in 1892, the same year as the city. By 1900 this company was the major supplier of heavy equipment for Puget Sound mining, logging and marine industries. Snohomish County Cultural Resource Survey. Telephone conversation with Brent Lambert, Preservation Planner.


The head saw came to symbolize the operation of early sawmills throughout the Pacific Northwest region. (9) It was indispensable in cutting the large trees which covered the area, and which led to the development of the lumber industry. Today re-forestation allows smaller trees to be harvested in forty to fifty years. The head saw has outlived its usefulness. More and more sawmills are converting their plants to accommodate smaller trees, and the obsolete head saws are being either altered or dismantled for scrap. Because of changes in the lumber industry, the Dickman Lumber Company head saw has become the only known remaining, unaltered head saw in the state which can be preserved and exhibited completely intact as a symbol which illustrates the importance of the sawmill. This piece of equipment also symbolizes one aspect of settlement and economic development in Tacoma and the Puget Sound region. (10)

9. One other symbol of the early sawmills has almost totally disappeared from the American scene. This was the sawdust burner, the use of which ceased as a result of recent environmental legislation.

10. Although considerably altered, the head saw at the Tacoma St. Regis Paper Company plant is still in operation. There are some head saw wheels on exhibit. Two in the vicinity are located at Shelton and Snoqualmie. Harold C. Dixon, President, Cole and Weber Advertising Agency, George Williams, Vice President, St. Regis Paper Company, and Alexander Fisken, Senior Vice President, Weyerhaeuser Corporation, were interviewed by telephone, July, 1979, to determine if there were any other head saws not in operation and still intact in the state.

Item Number 9 -- Bibliography (cont)

Personal interviews (those interviewed have direct knowledge of the lumber industry in the Pacific Northwest, economic activity along the Tacoma waterfront, and the operations of the Dickman mill). All interviews were conducted in June and July, 1979.

- Ralph H. Dickman, II, Dickman Lumber Company
- Adolph Cummings, Cummings Boat Co., Inc.
- Ron Karabaich, Old Town Photo Studio
- George Williams, St. Regis Paper Company, Vice President
- Alexander Fisken, Weyerhaeuser Corporation, Senior Vice President
- Harold C. Dixon, Cole and Weber Advertising Agency, President
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- ENCLOSE WITH PHOTOGRAPH

NAME

HISTORIC Dickman Lumber Company Head Saw (Sumner Iron Works, Everett, Wa., c1920)

AND/OR COMMON

LOCATION

CITY, TOWN Tacoma

VICINITY OF

COUNTY Pierce

STATE Wa.

PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT Rick Thacker

DATE OF PHOTO December, 1978

June, 1979

NEGATIVE FILED AT Community Development Department, Office of Historic Preservation

IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

Before fire: left side of head saw base, column in center; wooden casing at top and to the left; portion of carriage shown at lower left. (December, 1978)

Before fire: right side of head saw base; upper wheel; column in center; saw guide at left center; scraper at lower center; saw blade loader at upper right. (December, 1978)

After fire: looking northeast towards water; left side of head saw; shows base and upper and lower wheels; part of drive motor shown at lower center. (June, 1979)

After fire: looking northeast towards water; left side of head saw; head rig at center left. (June, 1979)
Dickman lumber Company Head Saw, before fire (Rick Tacker, December, 1978)

Left side of head saw base: Column in center; wooden casing at top and to left; portion of carriage shown at lower left.
Dickman lumber Company Head Saw, before fire (Rick Thacker, December, 1978)
Right side of head saw base: upper wheel; column in center; saw guide at left center; scraper at lower center; saw blade loader at upper right
Dickman Lumber Company Head Saw, after fire (Rick Thacker, June, 1979) hooking northeast towards water - left side of head saw; shows base and upper and lower wheels; part of drive motor shown at lower center.
Dickman Lumber Company Head Saw, after fire (Rick Thacker, June, 1979)

Looking northeast towards water; left side of head saw; head rig at center left