



The Diamond Point Quarantine Station, photographed by W. H. Wilcox, is shown. (Jefferson County Historical Society)

## **BACK WHEN: Quarantine Stations, Part I: The Federal Marine Quarantine Station for Puget Sound at Diamond Point**

**AS EARLY AS** 1799, the newly formed United States government began to enact laws to reduce the possibility for the introduction of infectious diseases such as cholera, yellow fever, leprosy and smallpox into the country aboard ships conducting commerce from other countries to our ports.

By the 1870s, specific procedures were in place for inspection of arriving ships. Vessels had to anchor at designated points and hoist a flag to request inspection.

As the designated port of entry to Puget Sound, Port Townsend was responsible for these inspections.

In 1872, a notice to ships arriving in Puget Sound was circulated from the Board of Health for the Puget Sound District, signed by L.B. Hastings, chairman of the board:

“Ordered, That during the prevalence of any epidemic or contagious disease at San Francisco or any port on the Pacific coast, all vessels coming in from sea must come to anchor in the Port of Entry and remain until boarded by the Health Officer and permission given by him to proceed up Sound; and for the purpose of more fully carrying out this order it is Further ordered, That for present, and until the Board shall otherwise determine, the health-line for vessels arriving from sea shall be from Marrowstone Point due east to Whidby [sic] Island, and any vessel passing up the Sound by said line as above designated, without having been first duly examined by the Health Officer, shall be fined as provided by the Statute of Washington Territory regulating Quarantine.”

### **Ships quarantined**

The statute stipulated that a ship carrying any person suspected to be infected with any “malignant infection or contagious disease,” or goods suspected of carrying any such disease, had to remain quarantined at some safe, suitable and convenient place determined by the board.

Any goods landed from such a vessel had to be “purified and cleaned at the expense of the person owning or claiming them.”

The expense of caring for any person afflicted by a disease was to be paid by the person, or “if unable,” the expense had to be paid by the vessel bringing the person into the district.

The person designated on the notice as the Puget Sound District Health Officer was Dr. C.V. Calhoun.

Even before this notice was issued, there were makeshift quarantine provisions for housing victims of contagious diseases arriving in the port.

In cooperation with the Port Townsend Marine Hospital, sometimes a ship in the harbor was designated as a quarantine site or victims of contagious diseases were confined to a “pest-house” two miles beyond the city.

### **Many didn't recover**

James McCurdy wrote: “Here the unfortunate patient was kept under the care of a volunteer nurse, usually an old sailor, and a doctor visited the sufferer when he could spare the time. Under these circumstances, it is not a cause of wonderment that a large percentage of pest-house cases failed to recover.”

Vessels were fumigated in the bay with sulfur pots when they were suspected of harboring diseases or of being overrun with rats, especially if the ship had come from an infected port.

On Aug. 1, 1888, the 50th U.S. Congress passed an act “to perfect the Quarantine Service of the United States.”

Several stations were authorized, with one of them to be located at the mouth of Puget Sound and \$55,000 was designated for site purchase, construction of buildings, etc.

A March 8, 1892, article in the Port Townsend Leader covered the arrival of a site location board, chaired by Dr. Preston H. Bailache, U.S. marine surgeon.

The Leader stated: “... three members of the board ... are all ready to begin work today. ... The places to be visited are Points Wilson and Discovery, Scow Bay and other places in this vicinity. ...

“It is the intention of the board to take several persons on the trip who have property to sell that might be desirable for the hospital site to enable the board to make a deal for the property most preferable for the quarantine station.”

A site on Discovery Bay at Diamond Point was chosen.

### **Picking building site**

On Jan. 10, 1893, the Leader reported that Judge J.N. Scott and Supervising Architect Willoughby James Edbrooke of the U.S. Treasury Department had arrived in Port Townsend to pick the building site for the quarantine station on the 156 acres that Mrs. Cassie Pugh had sold to the U.S. government on July 15, 1892, for \$3,500 in gold.

The Leader explained: “It was found to be excellently adapted for the station and the spot for building was selected on an elevation a few hundred feet from the shore.”

In the spring of 1893 the wooden hulk of a 195-foot Civil War Navy ship, the Iroquois, that had “outlived her usefulness” was towed from San Francisco and moored in Port Townsend harbor to serve as a receiving ship.

### **Temporary location**

A roof was built over part of her deck and she served as a quarantine location for patients and staff, while the new quarantine station was under construction.

### **Completed in 1893**

Charles A. Sayre of Tacoma received the contract to build the Quarantine Station facility in June of 1893, and completed the job by late November.

A wharf and six buildings were erected: a surgeon's house, attendants' quarters, a big water tank building, a smaller warehouse and the detention building.

The water works was completed in January of 1894 with water piped from a spring about a half mile behind the buildings, then pumped up into two "mammoth" tanks in the "tank house" elevated high enough above the other buildings to provide sufficient gravity feed to them.

A disinfection plant was built in the summer of 1894, and another warehouse, two barracks buildings, an isolation hospital and other support buildings were erected in later years.

Eventually the station had 27 buildings.

In 1896, the Iroquois was towed to Diamond Point to be used as emergency housing when large groups were quarantined.

Later a storm washed the ship ashore.

In a Leader history column, James Hermanson reported that a Seattle wrecking firm purchased the Iroquois for \$5,100.

"She was dismantled at Diamond Point and, according to news reports of the period, was a veritable treasure mine of usable materials that yielded over \$20,000. What was left of the hull was then burned."

Initially, Dr. S. B. Conover, the quarantine officer in Port Townsend from 1889 to 1894, was designated as officer-in-charge.

Dr. William G. Simpson took over in the fall of 1894, after the surgeon general of the Marine Hospital Service declared the station complete.

### **Longest-serving doctor**

Dr. Llewellyn T. Seavey served the longest at the Quarantine Station, from 1900 to 1929.

His assistant, Dr. Milton H. Foster, arrived in early 1900, just before the ship Nanyo Maru arrived Jan. 31 with cases of plague aboard that had at first been thought to be beriberi, and had not been noted when the ship had previously docked in San Francisco. Seventeen cases of plague were treated with three fatalities.

All ships had to stop at Diamond Point before entering Puget Sound.

Typically it took a medical officer 30 to 90 minutes to inspect each vessel before it was cleared to sail to its final destination.

The quarantine station also owned a boat used to intercept incoming ships.

The first was a naphtha-powered launch, the Cascade.

In 1909, a sturdier 72-foot vessel with a 65 horsepower engine was placed in service.

Groups of detained passengers were held for as long as two weeks.

The station staff examined cargo ships, as well as passenger vessels.

Records indicate that sailing ships arrived from nearly every Pacific port including Hong Kong, Kobe, the Philippines, Panama and Mexico.

Though ship brokers and customs agents were not supposed to board ships before inspections, some did, and a few found themselves quarantined along with passengers and crew members.

People who arrived ill were taken to the hospital for treatment.

The disinfection plant was used to treat all materials that were suspected of being contaminated.

Items such as bread and candy that could not be disinfected were destroyed.

The ships were fumigated to kill rats that might carry plague, and mosquitos that could carry yellow fever.

The first case of cholera treated at the station was found on the Antwerp City on July 26, 1895.

The vessel was fumigated and its crew was held in the isolation barracks.

Ships coming from Honolulu, where there was a cholera epidemic that autumn, were all quarantined for fumigation, whether or not there was sickness on board.

### **Turned back**

On Aug. 17, 1901, the Leader reported that the Albatross was compelled to return to Diamond Point due to smallpox that had developed on board during a trip to Alaska.

Health officers in Sitka had quarantined the vessel, but the disease spread and the return to Diamond Point was ordered.

After determining that the disease had been confined to crew in just one area, the ship was released from quarantine the next day.

Also in 1901, the ship Kintuck, transporting soldiers and horses returning from the Philippines, was detained for further fumigation, after it was learned that

there had been a person aboard who had died of bubonic plague in Nagasaki, where the ship had initially been quarantined for 10 days and fumigated.

The sulfur fumes at Diamond point killed an estimated 4,000 rats.

The most feared disease to be subject to quarantine was leprosy before ways to treat it were discovered.

In addition to the few who arrived at Diamond Point by ship, a few people with leprosy were also sent there from around the country for confinement for life.

Some periodically escaped, with one man making it all the way home to Italy.

Another, from Spokane, was finally permitted a visit from his wife and family shortly before he died.

At one time, Protection Island was proposed as a colony just for “lepers”, but that proposal was rejected.

[More information on leprosy in this area can be found in Thomas W. Camfield’s book, “Port Townsend: An Illustrated History of Shanghaiing, Shipwrecks, Soiled Doves and Sundry Souls.”]

The July 15 “Back When” column will reveal the further history of Jefferson County Quarantine facilities.

The USS Iroquois is shown aground at the Diamond Point Quarantine Station sometime between 1896 and 1900. (Jefferson County Historical Society)

