



City of Gig Harbor

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HISTORY OF GIG HARBOR, WASHINGTON:  
A RICH TAPESTRY OF PIONEERS  
[www.gigharborguide.com](http://www.gigharborguide.com)

Gig Harbor's history is a rich tapestry of pioneers in fishing, mills, farms, steamboats, ferries and bridges. The area was named in 1841 during the U.S. Exploring Expedition commanded by Captain Charles Wilkes. During a storm, several longboats and the Captain's "gig" sought shelter in a small bay. Later, Captain Wilkes named the haven that sheltered them "Gig Harbor."

In 1867, fisherman Sam Jerisich became one of the first white settlers on the shores of Gig Harbor. Others arrived from Norway, Sweden and Croatia and lived side by side with Native Americans already residing in the town. Commercial fishing and related industries, like boat building, dominated the local economy and rhythm of life in the community for more than 100 years. Several sawmills also operated in Gig Harbor from the 1880s through the 1950s.

As the area thrived and population increased, steamboats began to carry passengers and freight around the Peninsula and to Tacoma in the 1880s. Car ferries began to transport automobiles between Gig Harbor and Tacoma in 1917. The first Narrows Bridge, linking Gig Harbor and the Peninsula to Tacoma, was completed in July of 1940. It soon became known as "Galloping Gertie" - "Galloping" because of its rocking motion in strong winds and "Gertie" because it was made of girders. The bridge collapsed in a windstorm just four months after completion. The existing bridge opened to traffic in 1950. In 2007, a second span was opened to take place alongside her older sister. Today, traveling to and from Gig Harbor along this toll route is a breeze.

To learn more about the region, a visit to the Gig Harbor Peninsula Historical Society & Museum is a must. Located at the Northwest corner of the bay, the museum provides a place to experience the history of Gig Harbor and the surrounding area. Informative displays and artifacts tell the story of the Croatian fisherman, Scandinavian farmers and civil war veterans who settled the area. Videos of the Narrows Bridge collapse and infamous rooster races highlight the community's colorful past.

Harbor History Museum

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Open Tuesday-Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 a.m., closed Monday

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