



## **Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historic Site of Canada**

### **Introduction**

The Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historic Site of Canada commemorates the history of Canada's West Coast Fishing Industry. The site is nationally significant because of its association with the fishing industry from the 1870s to the modern era; its location in Steveston, historically the most important fishing village on the West Coast; and the Cannery buildings and extant resources which reflect the industry's development.

Perched on a wharf and piling structure over the south arm of the Fraser River, the Gulf of Georgia Cannery is a commanding structure in the village of Steveston, a small community in Richmond, British Columbia. The Cannery was built in 1894 and was the largest cannery in the province at the time. It stopped canning salmon in the 1930s but remained active as a net loft, fish depot, and later as a herring reduction plant until its closure in 1979.

The Cannery is one of only a few canneries that survived from among over 200 canneries that once dotted the coast of BC. It is an iconic building in the community of Steveston. The location right at the doorstep of the working docks, fish sales and fishing fleet provides visual ties between history and the vibrant industry today. As the location which commemorates the *West Coast Fishing Industry*, the physical structure of the Cannery is very important as it depicts the changing nature of the fishing industry.

The Cannery offers a variety of interpretation programs and special events for the general public, schools and other groups. Walking through the buildings, visitors embark on a journey through time, dictated by the changing needs of the industry.

Key exhibits include a historic salmon canning line that presents both the social and technological history of the canning industry, a herring reduction plant, and a space to feature annual exhibits. The Cannery also houses a gift shop which carries a wide variety of westcoast themed merchandise.



### **Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society**

In 1975, members of the Steveston Historical Society started on the long road that led to the Gulf of Georgia Cannery becoming a National Historic Site and the active museum that it is today. All levels of the government were approached and, in 1976, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Parks Canada gave the National Historic Sites designation to the building.

The same group then helped form the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society, which was incorporated in 1986. This group has played an integral role in the conservation and presentation of the site throughout the Cannery's evolution from closed fishing plant, to commemorated buildings, to public heritage attraction. The Society assumed full operational responsibility for the Cannery in 2000, through an agreement with Parks Canada; a role which continues to present.

The Gulf of Georgia Cannery NHS is one of a few Parks Canada sites that are managed by a non-profit society. The Society is responsible for all day-to-day aspects of the site's operations including visitor services, interpretation, programming, marketing, collections management and ongoing maintenance. Parks Canada retains responsibility for major repairs and renovations, permanent exhibit redevelopment, setting user fees, and developing and implementing guidelines for conservation and maintenance of the historic fabric. Together, the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society and Parks Canada, work to preserve, present and promote the history of the Cannery and the *West Coast Fishing Industry*.

### **Permanent Exhibits**

The historic salmon **Canning Line** exhibit demonstrates the process of canning with 1930's to 1950's era machinery. See and hear how salmon was processed from receiving floor to can and learn about the cannery workers who were tasked with each position along the line. Interactive displays and videos will enhance the canning line story; machine demonstrations are also offered during the peak summer season, where the belts and gears of the machines spring to life (at a safe one-tenth of the original speed).

The **Herring Reduction Plant** features the machinery and processes of herring reduction, which took place inside the Gulf of Georgia Cannery from the 1940's to 1979, when the plant closed down. See the larger than life machinery which once processed the herring into nutrient-rich fish meal and fish oil.



### **Feature Exhibit**

The Cannery presents a new feature exhibit on an annual or bi-annual basis. The current feature exhibit, on display from May 2021 to 2023, is ***Waves of Innovation: Stories from the West Coast***, featuring stories of innovation in the West Coast commercial fishing industry and the effects on their communities. The cause and effect of changes in energy, preservation, and fishing methods, and their impacts on people's lives are explored throughout this interactive exhibit.

### **Collections**

The Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society cares for artifacts in two collections: one belonging to Parks Canada, and the other to the Society. In addition to these objects, there is an archive of historic documents, images, sound recordings, and reference books. Collectively, these items tell the story of the West Coast fishing industry, and reflect the people, places, and events that were integral to this history.

### **Visitors**

Annual attendance is approximately 60,000 visitors, with the summer tourist months of July and August traditionally being the busiest. Special events draw most of our visitors, with total attendance exceeding 27,000. Over 5,000 students visit annually on School Programs to the Cannery, with 6 different programs currently on offer for all grades and age groups. The Cannery is also host to programs for special interest groups and rental events.

### **Annual Events**

The Cannery presents a variety of annual events for the local community throughout the year. Major events include:

**Spring Break** – Programming for families, including the Parks Canada Xplorers activity booklet

**Easter at the Cannery** – Annual 'salmon egg' hunt inside the historic cannery

**Canada Day** – Celebration in conjunction with the Steveston Salmon Festival

**Music at the Cannery** – Friday evening concerts in July and August

**The Haunted Sea** – a family-friendly Halloween exploration of sustainability and our oceans

**Festival of Trees** – Local merchants in friendly competition with best decorated Christmas tree inside the Cannery

