

# NAHCOTTA

## OYSTER PARADISE



A little rind of ice lines the Nahcotta shore on Willapa Bay when drone photographer Bob Duke captured this photo in early 2017. Nahcotta, Bay Center and South Bend offer close-up looks at Willapa Bay's important oyster industry. — BOB DUKE PHOTO

**N**ahcotta is a great place to experience the traditions of Willapa Bay, centered on oysters, clamming and other pure and healthy “fishy” business.

A stroll around Nahcotta, looking at the boats and oyster processing equipment, is a great appetizer before sampling some fresh local seafood.

Wandering around Nahcotta these days, one finds a tiny village rich in tradition and history, but little evidence of the battles that nearly tore the community in half more than a century ago.

If the birth of Nahcotta came about with its platting and the struggle surrounding it in 1889, its conception may have taken place decades before when bands of Chinook Indians — among them Chief Nahcati, for whom the village was named — lived along the western shore of what was then Shoalwater Bay. Nahcati's camp was said to have been nestled near Paul's Slough just south of the present Nahcotta mooring basin.

Here the Indians found an abundance of fresh water, dry land, ample clams, oysters and salmon from the Shoalwater, and wild game in the forests. The settlements were well out of reach of the cold winter winds off the Pacific and far from the noise of pounding surf.

By 1888, the first five miles of narrow-gauge railroad was laid northward from the docks at

Ilwaco, and by 1889 it reached Nahcotta. Here the tracks turned directly east and shot out over the bayshore on pilings to the deep Shoalwater channel, separating the community north from south.

Ilwaco cannery owner B.A. Seaborg platted the town of Sealand on the north side of the tracks, while railroad owner Lewis Loomis took ownership of the Nahcotta townsite to the south.

Both worked hard to reach their goals. The Sealand Hotel and the first post office rose on the north side, a general store and another hotel on the south. In fact, the town had almost two of everything — two hotels, two saloons, two meat markets — and only Loomis and Seaborg seemed to care.

Despite the dispute between the two men, the community as a whole prospered. Oysters and other seafood was loaded on trains for shipment to Ilwaco, from where it was forwarded to San Francisco and other points to the south.

Loomis won an eventual lawsuit, but the town's luck was about to run out — for a few decades at least. In 1915, a chimney fire got out of hand and a strong southeast wind quickly spread the blaze throughout the business district.

From that point on, the center of business on the Peninsula's north end shifted largely to Ocean Park, Nahcotta's other sister village to the west.

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