



# Whaling: Crowds came to watch whales be processed



**TOP:** A crowd watches a whale be processed.  
**LEFT:** Mark Dozier processes a humpback whale.

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The Tom & Al was outfitted with a harpoon gun that BioProducts purchased from Norway. The cannon was equipped with a 200 pound bomb-headed harpoon, which was designed to detonate after hitting its target to expedite a whale's death. Frank Parker and Eben Parker's goal was to run a more efficient vessel than the larger whaling operations that had shut down after being unable to support their crews.

From 1960 to 1965, BioProducts processed 13 whales from a range of species living in the Pacific. Chief chemist Lyle Anderson reported that they harvested, "three sperm whales and two humpback whales in 1961, one finback whale in 1962, five finback whales in 1963, one sperm whale in 1964 and one finback whale in 1965."

The company strived to use as many parts of a whale as they could to minimize waste. The meat was used to fuel the mink farms and a few pet food companies in Oregon. Whale bones were also ground up and used for fertilizer. Whale oil was sent to the Mt Hood Soap Co., which used it for various types of laundry soap.

Crowds of locals came to watch the whales be processed, including an estimated 1,000 people when the first whale (a 43-foot sperm) was brought to the plant. Mark Dozier, the com-

**IT WAS ALSO DIFFICULT TO TRANSPORT THE WHALES AFTER THEY HAD BEEN HUNTED HUNDREDS OF MILES AWAY FROM THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER.**

pany's chief flenser, became a coastal celebrity because of his ability to flense — or strip the whales of their blubber — so efficiently.

BioProducts' whaling fishery shut down in 1965 for a few different reasons. First and foremost, the business was getting underway toward the end of commercial whaling in the U.S. The market wasn't profitable anymore as synthetic alternatives to whale oil became more common.

It was also difficult to transport the whales after they had been hunted hundreds of miles away from the mouth of the river. In the

time that it would take for the Tom & Al to tow the whales back to BioProducts for processing, gases inside their bodies sometimes putrefied the meat to the point that it was unusable.

Today, Bio-Oregon Protein is a subsidiary of Pacific Seafood and continues to transform fish and shellfish (but not whales) into a variety of products. While the history of commercial whaling on the North Coast was short-lived, it is yet another window into what makes this area unique.

*Julia Triezenberg is an educator at the Columbia River Maritime Museum.*

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