

## 2.0 Willoughby District History and Context

The Willoughby District was the open waters of Gastineau Channel until about 120 years ago. The shoreline was the bluff that now runs behind Village Street. For years this area was the site of seasonal fishing camps of the Auk Nu Tlingits whose primary winter village was located north of Juneau near what is now called Auke Bay. The Tlingit name for the Willoughby area was Dzántik'i Héeni (*river where the flounders gather*). These seasonal fishing camps were the main use of the area until western expansion brought prospectors at the end of the 19th century.



Auk Nu Indian Village, 1887. Present day Willoughby Ave is along the shoreline.

In 1880, Joseph Juneau and Richard Harris found promising gold results from Gold Creek and Silver Bow Basin. Prospectors rushed to the region and this area changed from a seasonal fishing settlement of the Auk Nu to a permanent 160-acre town site and mining community. The community first called Harrisburg, then Rockwell, was named Juneau at a miner's meeting in December 1881. The area was composed of tents and cabins constructed of trees which grew throughout the town site, and supplies and materials brought from Sitka.

Many Auk Nu people moved from their winter village to this area to work for wages and took up permanent residence in a segregated area along the waterfront from the mouth of Gold Creek along the beach to Telephone Hill at the edge of today's Willoughby District. The Indian Village residential area was connected in 1913-1914 by a waterfront boardwalk on pilings over the high tide line to the Juneau downtown commercial district. This boardwalk was developed into the current Willoughby Avenue.

Willoughby Avenue is named for Richard G. Willoughby, one of the best known and most colorful of the early miners. Several different birthplaces have been reported for "Uncle Dick" Willoughby. He was most likely born in Kansas. In the Cariboo in the early 1860's he was said to have "cleaned up" more than \$100,000 in a few weeks, and have "blowed" it almost as rapidly. He was on the Stikine and in the Cassiar and in 1875 was running a dance hall in Wrangell.



From there he went to Sitka where he ran a saloon during the winters and prospected in the summer. In 1880 he prospected in Glacier Bay and then reached the new camp of Harrisburg, where he mined around Gold Creek. He owned a cabin near the corner of Main

Willoughby  
Area, late  
1800's, Mount  
Juneau in  
background

Street and Willoughby Avenue and spent most of his time in later years around Funter Bay. Known as a practical joker and a free-wheeling story teller and entertainer, Willoughby was also said to have been a pretty fair fiddle player and to have been much in demand at the miners' dances (The Centennial Gazetteer 1979).



Juneau was incorporated in 1900 and became Alaska's territorial capitol in 1906 when that title was transferred from Sitka. The city of Juneau grew as a regional industrial and political center. The Alaska State Capitol in downtown Juneau was originally built as the Federal and Territorial Building in 1931.

The enlargement of Juneau's waterfront commercial area in what is now the Willoughby District got started as the number of waterside wharfs multiplied, storage buildings were developed, and residential areas enlarged in the 1930's and 1940's.

Federal dock 1930's to service military, now the Subport wharf.

In the 1930's, the Federal Government began developing its own dock structures to service the military presence in Juneau. The dock, located at the edge of the Gold Creek tidelands in proximity to deep water, required pier development from the east defining the current location of the Subport area of Juneau and the southern border of today's neighborhood. The local newspaper announced that the government took possession of Femmer's Dock citing national security and the need to build a sub port of embarkation.

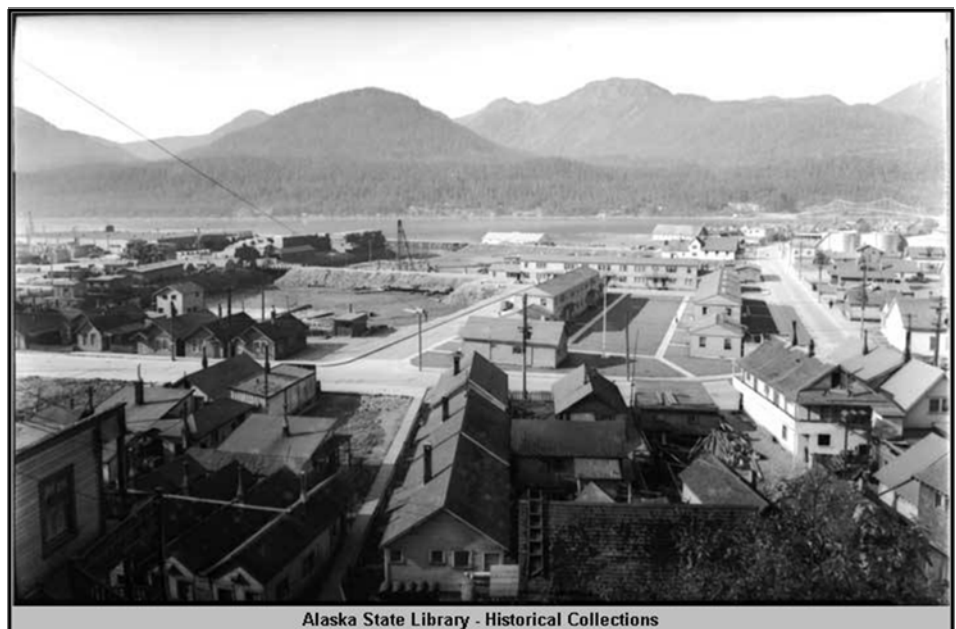
Over the next 30 years, the tideland area between Willoughby Avenue, Gold Creek and the Subport dock was filled in with waste rock from the Alaska Juneau Gold Mine, creating inexpensive, flat, developable land to house marine based storage yards. With Statehood in 1959 and Alaska's territorial purchase reaching its centennial celebration, Juneau experienced a rush of civic and cultural building, planning and construction in this area.



In the early 1950's AEL&P located a new electric generation plant at Gold Creek along with a fuel storage yard to supplement Juneau's energy needs. The military docks were transferred to the new Coast Guard Station Juneau and there were large-scale suburban style neighborhoods developed, such as the Casey-Shattuck neighborhood to the north to meet continued growth and housing needs. Public and private housing were located in the Willoughby Flats area and Willoughby Avenue began to support shopping and retail establishments. Willoughby Avenue was no longer a waterfront street edge, but a vital main street connector to this new urban expansion.

In 1967 the 100 year anniversary of the purchase of Alaska was celebrated locally by several projects including sponsorship from the Gastineau Channel Centennial Committee (GCCC) of projects intended to be permanent fixtures in the community. The committee had two totem poles carved and presented to the community and they published a history book, *The Founding of Juneau*, written by Robert N. DeArmond.

Many communities in Alaska had one large project or exhibit in addition to the locally sponsored initiatives. Juneau saw tourism as a growing industry in the 1960s, especially after the arrival of the first Alaska Marine Highway ferry in February 1963. Juneau's signature

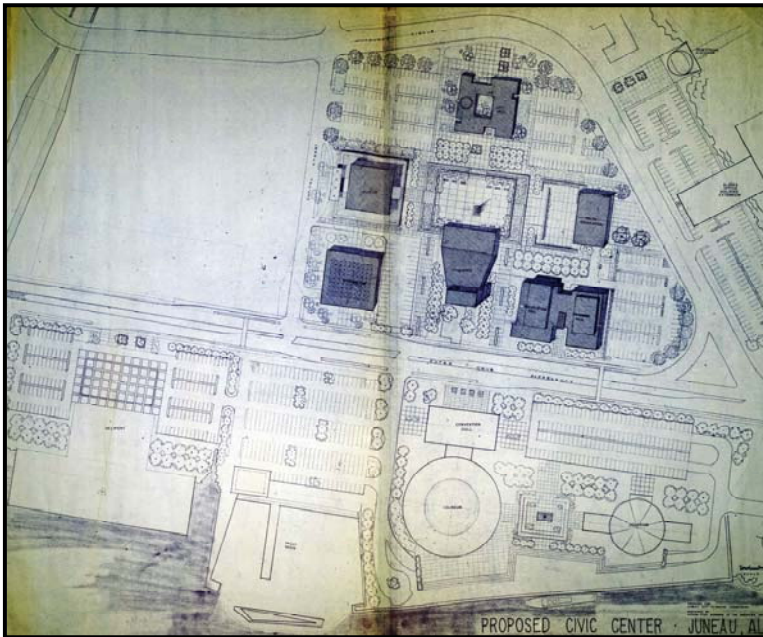


Photos Circa 1940's-50's. Top photo: Willoughby area land reclamation and infill. Bottom photo: Channel Apartments built on reclaimed land after WW II. Willoughby Ave now fully developed. Area to left of subport is army facility.

Centennial project was construction of the new Alaska State Museum on Whittier Street, which was offered as a gift to visitors and Alaskan residents and helped capitalize on Juneau's place as a tourist destination. In August 1966 Juneau area voters went to the polls and overwhelmingly voted yes for a 1% sales tax increase to help fund construction of the Museum.

With continued growth, Juneau's Willoughby District experienced its first urban renewal projects in the late 1960's. While offices, civic buildings and the Parkshore Condominiums were constructed, this also included displacing large areas of housing and local businesses. This effort forced long-time residents out of their homes without replacement housing, resulting in the wide scale transfer of land from lower income people to commercial entities and higher income residents. Additionally, the promise of additional modern housing to be constructed in this area was never realized. These actions are clearly remembered by residents of today's remaining Indian Village and the Central Council of Tlingit Haida Indians of Alaska.

The Federal Government developed a new nine-story regional office building just outside and northwest of the district in the early 1960's.



Willoughby District Plans from 1960's showing Civic Center around central plaza.

The 1960's through the early 1980's experienced a newly found economic and symbolic optimism as the state was rich in oil resources. The city and state began looking ahead by developing civic and cultural master plans recognizing the need to bolster Juneau's identity as a State Capitol. Earlier urban expansion plans were implemented at the state and local level by the addition of a large, new state office building (1971). Other privately developed, leased office buildings were developed to help supplement the requirement of a growing state administration. Juneau's Centennial Hall conference center was built in 1983-84.

The Zach Gordon Youth Center, in downtown since the 1940's, was established at its current location in the Willoughby District in 1968. Zach Gordon who deeply believed in teenagers, envisioned a "home away from home" for Juneau's teens, and provided it until his death in 1977.

In the early 1970's a new four-lane arterial roadway, Egan Drive, was constructed connecting Juneau's suburban areas north of the city with

downtown Juneau. This created a hard boundary separating the Willoughby District from the waterfront. In 1970, Juneau was incorporated as a unified City and Borough, consolidating the City of Douglas, City of Juneau, and Greater Juneau Borough.

In summary, the history of the Willoughby District is of a neighborhood that has experienced all of Juneau's many economic, civil and cultural changes. Built history began as a traditional Auk Tlingit fishing site. Expansion and rapid development over the past 130 years occurred as the area's initial residential area and Indian Village grew to include industrial, military, civic, and cultural uses. Growth in this area has continued through the 1980's to the present day. This Plan intends to guide the direction of future redevelopment and investment in the District, to realize the ideal of being a capitol and civic district that showcases Juneau to residents, visitors and all Alaskans.