Anacortes Ice Company and Skagit Maid Timeline

1906: Anacortes Ice Company was established by E. Van Buren in 1906

1917: William “Bill” McCracken bought an interest in the company from Van Buren and Melville Curtis.

1932: “Skagit Maid” is the copyright name selected as appropriate for the new, improved ice cream being manufactured and distributed by the Anacortes Ice Co.” (March 24, 1932 Anacortes American)

Up to the year 1931, ice cream and soda were sold under the Cypress brand name by Anacortes Ice Co.

Anacortes Ice Co. operating from at least 1906. The Anacortes Ice Company sold carbonated beverages and ice cream under the “Cypress” brand until “Skagit Maid” was introduced for the company’s ice cream and beverages in 1932.
Anacortes Ice Company was established by E. Van Buren in 1906 at the foot of O Avenue on Curtis Dock. In 1911 the company officers were listed as E. A. Phillips, president, Melville Curtis, secretary and treasurer. The 4-30-1913 ANACORTES AMERICAN advertised it as selling, "Cypress Brand Ice Cream, carbonated drinks, and Cypress Island Mineral Water." An article also stated the business, "owns and operates the largest feed mill in Skagit County with daily capacity of 25 tons." In 1917 the directory listed Edgar Van Buren as manager of the business, described as "Ice manufacturers and bottlers." That same year, William "Bill" McCracken bought an interest in the company from Van Buren and Curtis. The business expanded by opening plants in Sedro-Woolley (1922) and Mt. Vernon (1942). By the mid-1960s the plant serviced all of Skagit County, Whidbey Island, and the San Juan Islands. It was not listed in the 1975 business directory. Note the delivery truck with "Skagit Maid" products logo. See WF 1083 for an interior view of the office.
Benjamin F. (1852-1916) and his son Will McCracken (1894-1977). This view taken on the NW corner of 4th and Commercial.

(Below: from Images of America: Anacortes)

In 1903, Melville Curtis built the Curtis Wharf at the foot of O Avenue. The Anacortes Ice Company established there in 1906, conducting a versatile business in coal, hay and feed, dairy products, soda bottling, and wholesale meats. From left to right (above) are Charlie Stokes, Lee Neely, and Bill Charlot standing beside two Model Ts and a Mack truck advertising Cypress Island spring water. Glenn Bliss (below) was a driver for the company in 1922, delivering Skagit Maid Ice Cream in barrels on the back; the truck advertises Whistle soda water and Albers flour and feed. (Both courtesy of the McCracken family.)
Posing next to a Skagit Maid delivery truck is Bill McCracken (in suit) with the crew of the Anacortes Ice Company, which he operated. Bill's father, Frank McCracken, settled in Anacortes after prospecting elsewhere, opening the Eureka Club at the northwest corner of Fourth Street and Commercial Avenue. The family home was at 1014 Fourth Street. (Courtesy of the McCracken family.)

1950 aerial photograph shows the new Central Grade School at M Avenue, the Anacortes housing project at the current location of the Anacortes Police Department and Island Hospital, and the structure at 2308 Commercial can be seen at right—then the location of Ben’s Grocery.
Commercial Market history at 2308 Commercial Avenue

1970s yearbook advertising photo

1941  Polk’s Directory listed Ben Bowlin as a grocer at 2304 Commercial
1948  Polk’s Directory listed Ben Bowlin as a grocer operating Ben’s Grocery at 2308 Commercial
1955  listed Ben Bowlin as a grocer operating at 2308 Commercial
1960  Well’s Directory listed Commercial Market at 2308 Commercial managed by Alvin Sparks
2004  Last listing of Commercial Market in Anacortes phone book

Some have theorized that the detail below indicates it was painted in 1905 (see below). This seems unlikely as the brand was not established until 1932.

The Polk’s Directory for 1937 did not list a grocer at 2308 Commercial, and it is uncertain that a structure existed there prior to the end of WWII. Ben Bowlin’s grocery store had been located at 2304 Commercial in 1941 then at 2308 in 1948 – was this new construction, a move to a neighboring building or a new address applied to the same building for some reason?

Bret Lunsford
Anacortes Museum Maritime and Education Curator
1305 8th Street, Anacortes, WA 98221
Phone: (360) 293-1915 Email: bretl@cityofanacortes.org