

ASARCO: One Of Tacoma's First Industries

Tacoma was little more than a settlement back in 1880, a small town of 1,000 people living on the shores of Commencement Bay. Less than a decade later, the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad transformed the town into a bustling city. By 1888, more than 17,000 residents called the "City of Destiny" their home. Dennis Ryan, a wealthy St. Paul, Minnesota businessman, recognized the area's potential and began construction on the Ryan Smelter (later the Tacoma Smelting and Refining Company and now known as Asarco's Tacoma plant) in 1887. Ryan wanted to take advantage of the site's convenient location to Idaho mines and its deep-water dock access that allowed for easier shipment.

In 1889, Ryan sold the controlling interest in the plant for \$30,000 to W.R. Rust, a businessman from Aspen, Colorado. After assuming the role of plant manager, Rust changed the plant's name to the Tacoma Smelting and Refining Company, shut it down and had it completely rebuilt. The plant reopened a year later and produced its first load of lead that month.

The plant prospered under Rust's direction. In the 1890 annual report of the Washington State Geologist, the Tacoma plant was referred to as "among the best I have ever seen." Profits made it possible for Rust to install copper furnaces and converters in 1902. Three years later an electrolytic copper refinery was added, the very first on the Pacific coast.

The plant's success began to attract the attention of wealthy east coast investors, in particular, the Guggenheim brothers who controlled the New York-based American Smelting and Refining Company (which later became ASARCO Incorporated) and the Rockefeller family. In 1905, the Guggenheims entered secret negotiations with W.R. Rust to buy the Tacoma Smelting and Refining Company. The talks were held at a warehouse on the Everett waterfront to prevent the Rockefellers from moving in on the deal. At the time, Rust was offered \$1 million, but he refused, saying anything less than \$5 million was

AFTER DOMINATING THE RUSTON/NORTH TACOMA SKYLINE FOR 75 YEARS, THE ASARCO STACK WILL BE DEMOLISHED ON JAN. 17, 1993.

HERE ARE SOME INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE STACK.

- **BUILT:** December 22, 1917, after about six months of construction.
- **COST:** \$ 245,291
- **HEIGHT:** In 1917, the 571-foot stack was the tallest in the world—one foot higher than a Japanese concrete stack. In 1937, after earthquake damage, approximately nine feet was removed from the stack's top. The stack is now 562 feet tall.
- **BRICKS:** More than 2.5 million bricks were originally used to build the stack.

not enough. The Guggenheims gave in a few months later, and offered Rust \$5 million in cash for his stock and \$500,000 for investment capital. Rust accepted the offer, which was said to be more than 11 times the value of Rust's original investment.

Although the Tacoma plant was originally built to produce lead, by 1911 the plant had

become one of the world's largest suppliers of copper, and lead was no longer produced. What had begun as a small company producing five tons of lead per day and employing 50 men, became one of Tacoma's largest industries that produced more than 10,000 tons of copper each month and employed an average of 1,250 people. □



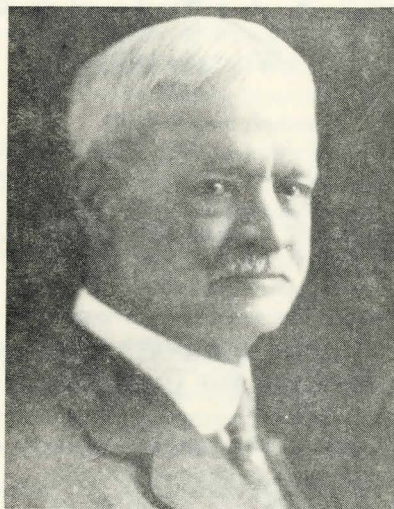
ASARCO WORKERS POSE FOR A GROUP PICTURE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY SMELTER.

The Rust Mansion

At 1001 No. I Street stands a house that looks as if it belongs among magnolias and oak trees festooned with Spanish moss. This house, which the newspapers labelled "the show place of Tacoma," was built for Tacoma business man, William Ross Rust, who made his fortune in mining and smelting. The history of Rust Mansion is both colorful and tragic.

W.R. Rust was born a Philadelphian, grew up in Illinois, and as a young man went west to Colorado looking for gold. After fourteen years of hard work in Colorado, he came to Tacoma in 1890, bringing with him knowledge of smelting and ore sampling. Here he organized the Tacoma Smelting and Refining Company and bought the struggling Ryan Smelter. Having made a success of this enterprise, he sold out to the Guggenheim's American Smelting and Refining Co. for \$5.5 million cash, giving the company's stockholders an eleven-fold return on their investment. Part of Rust's proceeds from this sale went into building the grand residence on a bluff over-looking Puget Sound.

Tacoma architect Ambrose J. Russell, who also designed the governor's mansion in Olympia, was hired to design the 12,000 sq. ft. house.



WILLIAM ROSS RUST
1850-1928

(PHOTO COURTESY OF TACOMA PUBLIC LIBRARY)

In 1905, at a time when \$6000 bought "a spacious family home," twenty times that amount was lavished on the construction of the three story, 18-room house crafted of hand-cut Wilkeson sandstone. The exterior of the house features a semi-circular third floor balcony supported by four huge columns. A second floor balcony wraps around the front and one side of the house where it becomes part of a porte-cochere. The house is crowned by a roof of green glazed tile.

An additional \$50,000 was spent to decorate the interior with carved oak paneling, mosaic floors (which in the foyer boast Rust's initials), ornate brass switch plates, cut crystal doorknobs and

green and gold silk wall coverings from France. The basement housed a billiard room, a ballroom, laundry, and fuel and furnace compartments. The house had eight gas-log burning fireplaces. The third floor had a spare guest room and quarters for eleven servants.

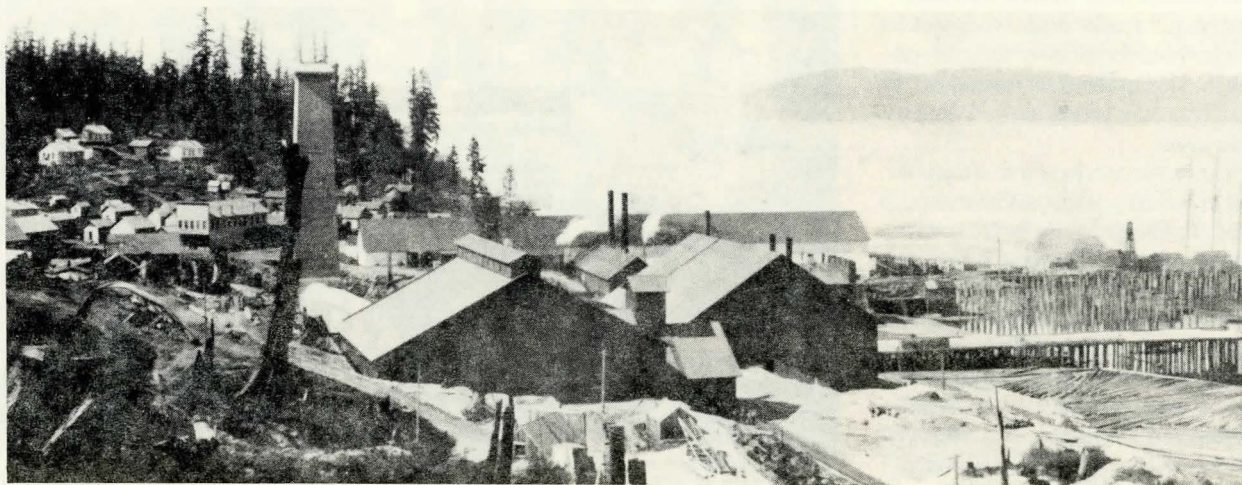
The Rust family lived in its handsome home only a few years. After the death, at age 26, of their older son, Howard, the house was sold.

Over the years, the stately house changed hands many times.

Another owner, who was scheduled to go to trial the next day on charges of statutory assault, died in a shooting accident at the house, felled by a bullet fired from "a revolver held in his own hand."

On a Christmas Eve in the 1930's the elegant house, once the scene of fancy parties and concerts, was turned into an armed fortress by an owner who was trying to evade a sheriff's sale scheduled for the 26th. Barricading the doors, the inhabitants armed themselves with a rifle, double-barreled shotgun, and several revolvers to hold off all comers.

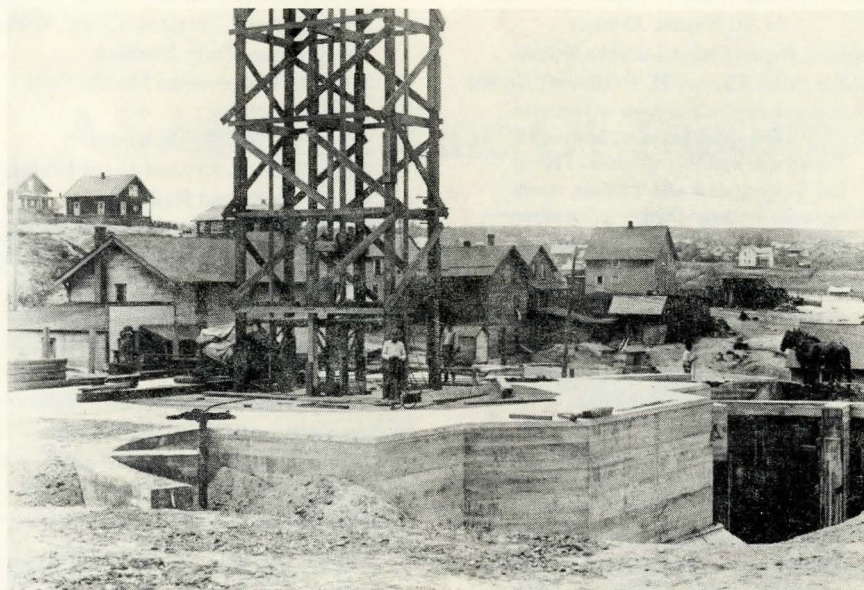
Subsequent owners partitioned the mansion into apartments. After many decades as an apartment house, the Rust Mansion is once again in the hands of private owners. It is being handsomely restored. — *Dace Pedicis, Tacoma Historical Society Member.*



RYAN SMELTER, 1889, TACOMA, WASHINGTON TERRITORY

(PHOTO COURTESY OF WSHS)

The Ruston Smelter — Croatian Influence



BASE OF BRICK STACK- 1917, COMPLETED TO A DEPTH OF 30 FEET.
BACKGROUND: "LITTLE CHICAGO," CROATIAN COMMUNITY. (WSHS PHOTO)

On January 17, 1993, a landmark will be permanently removed from Ruston, in the north end of Tacoma. The old ASARCO smoke stack will come tumbling down. Few people know that prior to its erection in 1916 a whole community of Croatian immigrants inhabited homes where the smoke stack now stands.

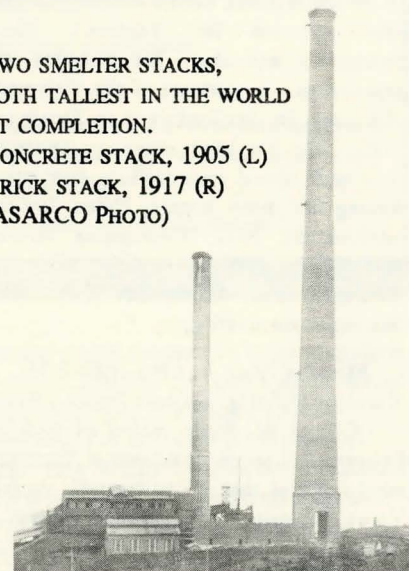
The base of the stack is actually one third the way up the hill from the plant. Around the turn of the century, a Croatian community had been built immediately adjacent to the plant

fence. This colony at that time was called "Little Chicago." When the new smelter stack was built the colony, along with some of the houses, was moved to the top of the hill. Over the years, this small group of citizens was known by the name of "Croats," "Slavonians," "Nashki," and "Yugoslavs," but the name "Yugoslav" today would cause some argument, due to the war in Croatia.

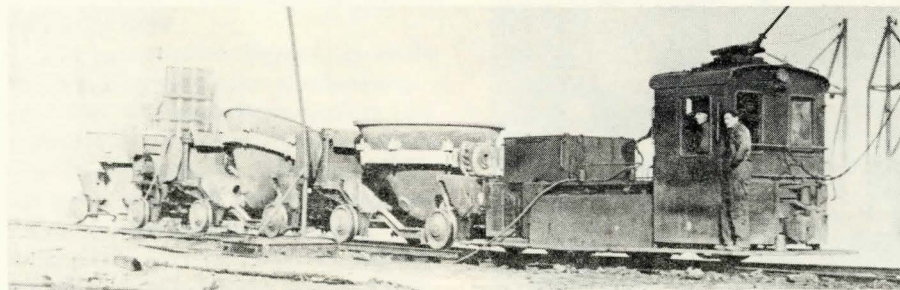
Two years prior to the erection of the smoke stack, in January 1914, a bitter strike developed involving the

immigrant workers, which resulted in a shoot-out and the death of one Croatian. Thousands of sympathizers attended the funeral and parade, including a stand-in for the dead man's bride-to-be, who remained in the homeland. The records showed then that of the 270 male Croatian workers, only 17 had wives. Later, the unmarried men acquired wives and had families.

TWO SMELTER STACKS,
BOTH TALLEST IN THE WORLD
AT COMPLETION.
CONCRETE STACK, 1905 (L)
BRICK STACK, 1917 (R)
(ASARCO PHOTO)



A total of 500 men worked at the smelter in 1914 and of these the Croatian workers, typical of most immigrants in American history, had the hardest and lowliest jobs. However, in the Ruston community the immigrants provided the basic work force. For example, of the six Ma-and-Pa grocery stores in the area, five were Croatian owned and operated. Later the descendants of these Croats entered into all types of occupations and professions in the greater Tacoma area. Their heritage still exists as evidenced by the Croatian Fraternal Union, Lodge 246, the Croatian dinners at the Holy Cross Catholic Church, the bi-annual Nashki Festival, and their humanitarian aid to their war-torn homeland in the "old country." — *Bob Gunovick, Tacoma Historical Society Member.*



THE SMELTER TRAIN HAULED AND DUMPED THE SMELTER WASTE PRODUCT, SLAG, INTO COMMENCEMENT BAY, BY PERMISSION OF THE CORPS OF ENGINEERS. THE SLAG BUILDUP DEVELOPED A SAFE HARBOR BETWEEN THE SMELTER AND THE PT. DEFIANCE FERRY LANDING FOR HUNDREDS OF PUGET SOUND PLEASURE BOATS. (PHOTO COURTESY OF WSWS)

Calendar of Events

Monday, Jan. 11, 1993 7:00 P.M.

Carnegie Building, Tacoma Public Library
A night of farewell to the ASARCO smelter stack. ASARCO spokesperson, Doug Bowen, will relate the story of the Tacoma smelter, from the days of William R. Rust, to the implosion scheduled for Jan. 17th. Say farewell to this long time landmark of the Tacoma skyline.

Monday, Feb. 8, 1993 7:00 P.M.

Carnegie Building, Tacoma Public Library
In celebration of Black History Month, Dr. Helen Stafford, former teacher and long time advocate for Tacoma's Black community will share her thoughts and experiences. A graduate of the University of Kansas, Dr. Stafford came to Tacoma in 1926. She has been active in numerous civic and cultural organizations ever since. Among her many honors, Helen Stafford received the 1992 "Courageous Woman Award" from the Tacoma Women's Awareness Week Committee. Don't miss this important meeting.

Monday, Mar. 8, 1993 7:00 P.M.

Carnegie Building, Tacoma Public Library
George W. Walk, author of Fighting Fawcett, will speak about one of Tacoma's most colorful and feisty mayors, Angelo Vance Fawcett. First elected mayor in 1896, A.V. "Turkey" Fawcett survived losses in several close elections and being recalled from office in 1911, to serve five times as Tacoma's mayor. His spectacular career in city politics ended in 1926. Come hear why South E street was renamed Fawcett Avenue.

**WANTED - MEMORABILIA
OF TACOMA PAST**
Call Sally Kappahn, 572-8172
or Polly Medlock, 752-7722

Annual Meeting

Monday, April 12, 6:30 P.M.

Roof Garden- Historic Masonic Temple
47 St. Helens Avenue

Program: Puget Sound Lumber Barons
Speaker: Mrs. Samuel H. (Nathalie) Brown

Nathalie Brown has been a Tacoman since 1950. Her husband, Samuel H. Brown was with Weyerhaeuser Timber Co. in Longview and Tacoma where he was in their Public Information Office. Nathalie's great grandfather, William H. Laird, was vice president of Weyerhaeuser Timber Co., 1900-1910; her grandfather, F.S. Bell, was president and chairman of the board, 1928-1938, and her father, Laird Bell, was vice president and chairman of the board, 1934-1955.

Nathalie, lumber family historian, was chairman of the Book Committee of Laird Norton Co., and produced Branching Out, The History of the Laird-Norton Family by Patricia Latourette Lucas (Presidio Press, Navato, CA). Education: BA, Bryn Mawr College.

1992 Tacoma Historical Society Murray Morgan Award Announcement
Election of Officers
Complimentary Buffet

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1991 Pearl Harbor Day: Polly Medlock
1992 Tacoma Theaters: Cheryl Wiebe, Joe Heiman, Polly Medlock
Historic Preservation Month: Polly Medlock
Railroads: Jim Fredericksen
Early Tacoma Art and Local Mushroom Prints: Dode and Rudy Trip
THS Promotional Brochure: Polly Medlock, Nick Peters and Jeanne Klaus of Printing Plus
Indexing of Three Volumes of Hunt's History of Tacoma: Chairman, Polly Medlock, Volunteers, Frank Green, Jean Sienko, Mary Selig, Rebecca Race, Darwyn Batway, Bob Meade, Nina Goslind, Gary Letzring, Helena Checopolous
Union Index: Gary Reese, Marilyn Allen

The Tacoma Historical Society Founded in 1990 to Preserve and Present Tacoma's Heritage

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☞ Our thanks to ASARCO for the article on Page 1.

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