

Derelict Dock Clings To City Shore Though Eyesore

By JIM CAR
Times Staff Writer

Amid the mostly attractive structures of Anchorage's long shore and nestled against, and perhaps shoving, the Port of Anchorage's petroleum dock — lies the remnants of the old Ocean Dock, which once was the only ocean link for the city to the Outside.

It is, perhaps, the community's most tenacious eyesore. And no doubt it will continue to cling — barnacle like — to the city's shore at least a little longer.

Other problems aside — and the other problems are monumental — the cost of its removal alone would seem sufficient to ensure survival of the old derelict.

Experts estimate the price tag at between \$100,000 and \$1 million.

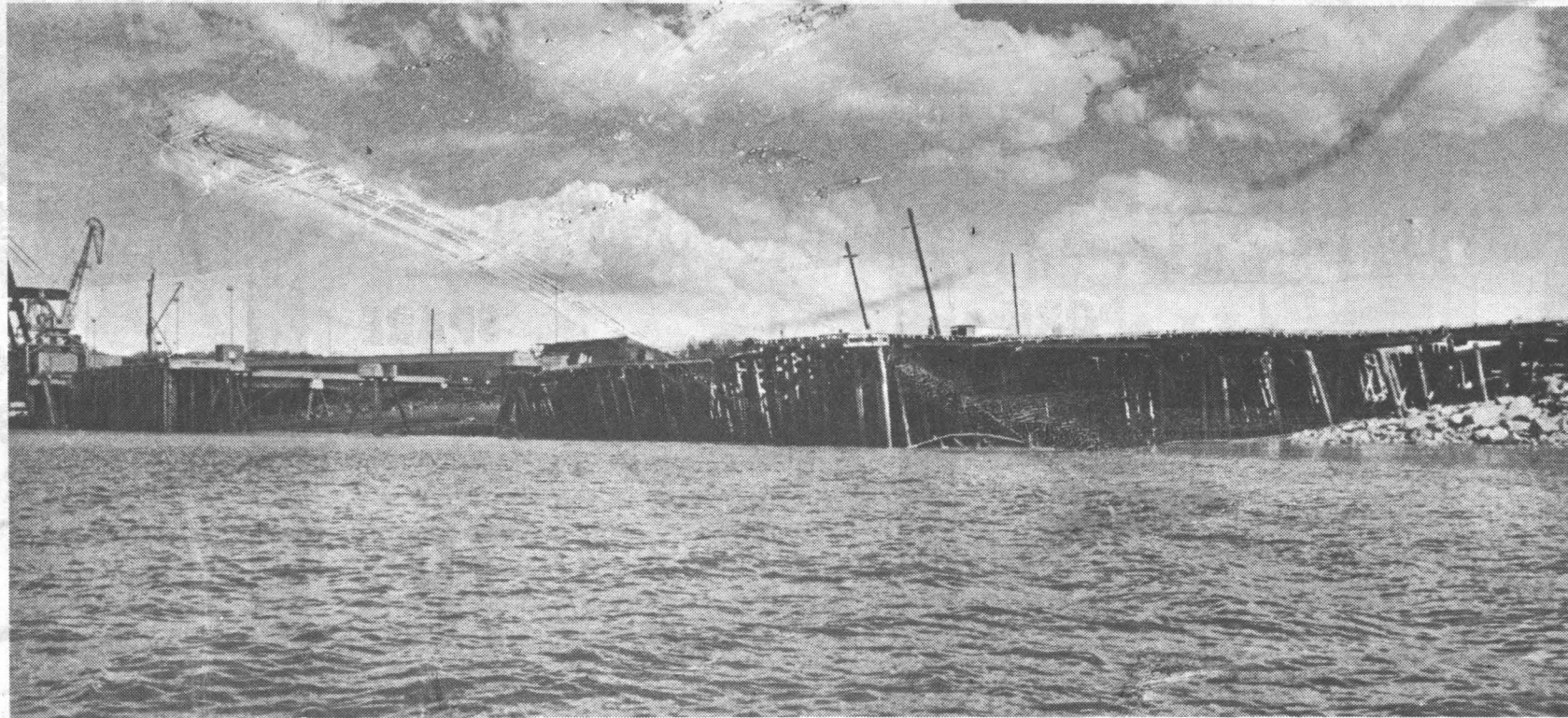
The other problems are mostly legal, and jurisdictional. Their origin is almost as old as the port — which is older than the city, itself.

Beginning in 1919 — four years before Anchorage was incorporated — the old dock withstood the second greatest tidal fluctuation in the world, an annual inflow of ice, the stress of spring breakup, and uncounted earthquakes.

But in 1964, at the age of 45, the dock could stand no more. A powerful earthquake — since referred to as the Great Alaska Earthquake — shattered the structure from pilings to deck, and shook it into ruins.

Still the dock stands. Not straight, not untouchable to the forces. Not usable. Not safe. But it stands. The rear of the dock slopes into the water during daily high tides, and the deck is awash during twice-a-year 31-foot tides.

The dock is of no use. Well, almost none. It serves as abode for hundreds of sea gulls, whose day otherwise consists of scavenging the remains of fish from cannery outfalls along the muddy shores and banks.



Remnants Of Old Ocean Dock Still Stand As 'Eyesore and Hazard'

It has been called a menace, potential navigational hazard, an eyesore and a headache. But, since its destruction by earthquake, its remains have hovered above the lucrative tidelands, seeming on the verge of collapse.

About 100 feet of the old dock was demolished in 1965, under the supervision of the Corps of Engineers, to make way for construction of the new petroleum dock.

Still after six years, most of the staggering, ramshackle old has been there.

And in those six years, neither the City of Anchorage, nor the federal government through the Alaska Railroad or the Army Corps of Engineers, has moved to eliminate the hazard. And, apparently, neither shall do so during this summer.

The entire question of the dock is mired in litigation, and until a decision is reached none of the parties will jeopardize its position.

The Alaska Railroad, which

as the Alaska Engineering Commission built the dock in 1919, has appealed to the Ninth District Court of Appeals for ownership of the dock. A federal court ruled in July of 1969 that the tidelands belong to the city.

The City of Anchorage agrees to its ownership of the tidelands, but will not accept the real property connected to it as its property as well. It claims the Alaska Railroad is rightful owner of the dock, although the city owns the land on which it sits — or, rather, tilts.

The Army Corps of Engineers agrees that the dock structure belongs to the railroad, and will not enter on the land to tear it down. Unless, of course, the Coast Guard declares it a navigational hazard.

But the Coast Guard cannot declare it a navigational hazard unless it is actually in the water. Only then could it be considered a potential hazard to shipping, even though

flotsam often washes off the eroding deck section and floats into the paths of merchant vessels.

"As a practical matter," City Manager Robert E. Sharp said, "we know this: the army, the railroad, placed this structure on the land. Now it has become dilapidated and these agencies have a responsibility to get it off the land."

But Alaska Railroad General Manager John Manley doesn't agree.

"We have withheld action for two reasons," he said. "One, if the local court is right, the dock is the property of the city. Two, it's still in litigation, and destruction of it might affect our case."

Mayor George Sullivan is disgusted with the eyesore, and has promised he will send pictures of the dilapidated dock to Russell Train, the President's advisor on environmental quality.

The dock was built in 1919 by the Alaska Engineering Commission and served as the city's Ocean Dock for 45 years.

It was transferred to Emdar's Cannery in 1935, but was reacquired by the railroad in 1941, at the request of the military, for war shipments. The railroad leased the dock space to the military under a use permit.

"It's an eyesore, and certainly a hazard," Port Director Erwin Davis said. "We've been concerned for some period of time — the deck section keeps falling in and pieces 20 to 30 feet across float down the Inlet. We notify the Coast Guard any time a piece goes into the water, and they warn the mariners."

"We're a little concerned additionally. It's leaning on the petroleum dock. The port has its consulting engineer looking at it to see if it is putting undue stresses on the facility."

"The waterfront in general has been cleaning up over the past years, and the city has \$50 million invested there."

The city did officially condemn the structure, Davis

get it out of there," but admits that "We've now reached a point where the mutual cooperation of all concerned will be necessary to remove it."

Burnhart, as representative of the Coast Guard, has no authority to declare the structure a hazard to navigation unless it is actually afloat in the water. "If it ever becomes adrift, we can declare it a menace to navigation. During high tides, it almost comes afloat. It just has some lines holding it. But it has to constitute a menace to shipping, and it just doesn't do that."

Burnhart said one way to dispose of the structure would be to tow the deck section down the Inlet, beach it and burn it. During a low tide workman could saw off the pilings at the mud line. But, sitting as it does in the middle of a tank farm containing thousands of barrels of petroleum, it cannot safely be burned in its present location.

But an agreement must be reached on ownership of the dock, and liability for its

destruction, before it can be removed.

Manley, Sharp and Federal Railroad Administrator R. N. Whitman met last August at the request of Secretary of Transportation John Volpe in an attempt to remove the dock. Whitman and Manley indicated they could run into a legal snag in removal of the dock after the federal court decision that the city holds ownership of the tidelands.

Manley said he would seek a decision from the Department of Justice on the affect removal of the structure might have on the railroad's appeal to the District Court. He indicated that should the Justice Department give its go-ahead, destruction could proceed as soon as funding was approved. The Justice Department hasn't given its approval.

"The fact is," Sharp said, "the federal government placed it on the land. Whether it had a right to is questionable. Now it's in a dilapidated condition, the federal government has a

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(Continued from page 43) responsibility and it is ignoring it.

"The federal government placed it there, used it and should remove it. Why should the city taxpayers pay for something used by the federal government?"

Sharp said the city's legal counsel indicated that removal of the dock would have no bearing on the railroad's appeal.

"There's no reason the dock couldn't be removed as well now as after the appeal," he said. "If they were fearful that it would hurt their appeal, the city could stipulate that it should have no bearing. We're not trying to use removal to better our position on the appeal."

But, Manley insists, "I want the Court of Appeals to make a decision before we make a decision."

That decision may be forthcoming in August,

Manley said. Preliminary indications are that the appeal will be on the Court of Appeals' docket for August.

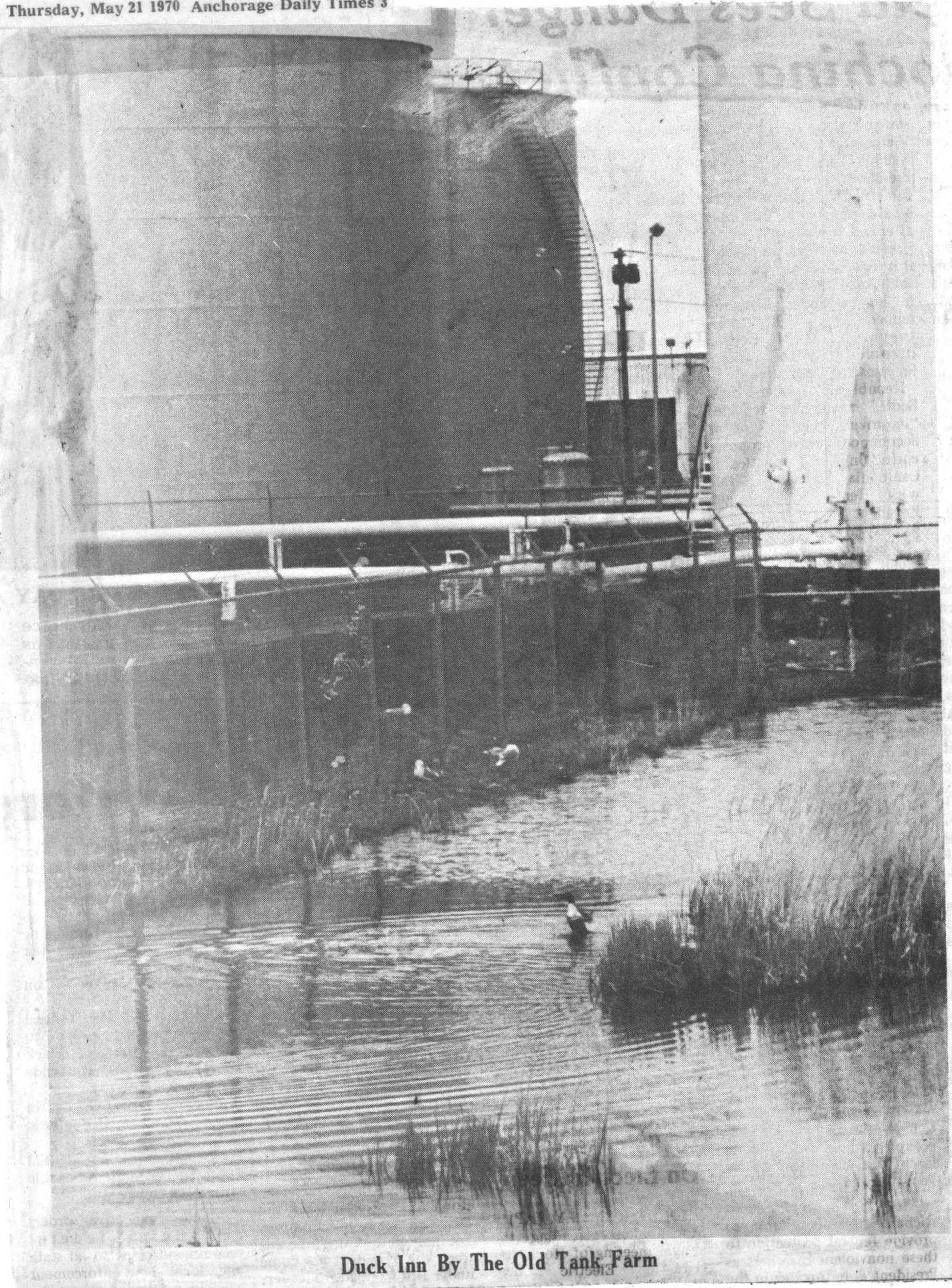
It might still be possible to remove the dock this season, even as late as August. The second equinoxial high tides will come in the next month, leaving the possibility of floating the deck section off the pilings.

But the expensive part — removal of the old pilings and

old oil lines laid in the mud of the Inlet — would remain. No accurate estimate on cost of demolition has been drawn up by any of the agencies, but most agreed that it could run to the six figures already suggested: between \$100,000 and \$1 million.

"Getting rid of the thing is definitely a problem," Burnhart said. "But we've got to get rid of it. It takes up valuable space."

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Port Area A Nesting Ground For Arctic Terns