

Seabeck, Washington, once known as "**The Liveliest Town of Puget Sound**," is the home of Seabeck Conference Center. How the area, once known as L-Ka-bak-hu by the local tribes, changed from untouched land, to booming industrial center, and back to this restful setting is quite a story.

The Beginning: In 1856, Marshall Blinn sailed the Brontes into this bay looking for a spot to build a lumber mill. His crew was lumbermen and his cargo was modern equipment. Blinn and his partners had formed the Washington Mill Company in San Francisco to supply lumber to the gold rush cities of California. As the ship sailed along the verdant shores of Hood Canal they came upon a secluded, deep-water harbor with an endless supply of giant trees at water's edge. Legend says that they named it "Seabeck" after Blinn's hometown of Seabec, Maine. More likely, it is the native word, Scabock. As they unloaded their cargo and built their mill the town of Seabeck was born; and the quiet bay would never be the same.

The Milltown: A modern mill and good location helped Seabeck grow. Seabeck lumber was shipped around the world. The Company had to build their own shipyard to have enough vessels to accommodate their output. The company store supplied the residents with all their needs. Families lived in company-owned houses. Soon the town found that they needed things like a school as well as a cemetery. Ships left the quiet harbor loaded with lumber and returned with people, goods, and news from the outside world. The Company spent over a year hauling sawdust and moving dirt to create a level place large enough for a baseball field to play against teams from other mill towns. Blinn's desire that his town remains free of alcohol and sin turned out to be wishful thinking. By 1877, Seabeck was much larger than Seattle. It boasted a population of 400 people along with four saloons, two hotels, two stores, a church, a little red school house and a five-acre cemetery. In the lobby of the Historic Inn, once the United States Hotel, hangs a wooden grave marker. The epitaph tells us only that Hiram Bryant was "Aged about 47 years old" and was "killed in a dispute."

The Fire: On August 12, 1886, the steamer Retriever sent a spark onto a pile of lumber. Soon the entire pier was ablaze. Up in the same smoke as the lumber mills went the future of Seabeck as an industrial center. The fire was so hot it cooked the apples on the trees in the orchard. Without the mill to provide jobs the population scattered to other mill towns and Seabeck became a near ghost town within a month and remained that way for almost thirty years.

Rising from the Ashes: In the early 1900's two prominent Seattle men, Laurence Colman and Arn Allen formed a similar partnership to realize a dream for a facility for YMCA and YWCA groups to hold summer conferences. Laurence Colman was the son of timber pioneer, James Colman. Laurence and his brother George purchased the town and surrounding land in 1914. Many of the old buildings were restored. For 29 years, Arn Allen managed Seabeck as part of his YMCA responsibilities. His influence on the mission and character of Seabeck are still felt today.

The Colman Era: In 1936, Laurence Colman's son, Ken Colman, deeded to the corporation the ninety acres that now make up Seabeck Christian Conference Center. Today, as you cross the bridge over the old mill pond there is a strong sense of the past. In the lagoon, rowboats are floating instead of giant logs. Except for a few modern structures, Seabeck looks much the same as it did back then; back when life was less complicated, issues were clearer, and values were stronger. **The Meeting House**, built in 1857, was once the Mess Hall for the mill and community center. Today it serves as an auditorium. The bell that once called the mill hands to meals now calls guests to meetings and services. Many of the houses built by early pioneers have been converted into guest lodging.