As we look forward to the 2024 completion of the renovated Seattle Marine Aquarium, we can take a moment to remember Seattle’s first marine aquarium, which was located just east of the the Ballard Locks near present day Stimson Marina, onboard the square rigger, “St. Paul”.

Built in Bath, Maine, in 1874, the 228 foot long vessel was reasonably swift for its size. It crossed the Atlantic in 16 days, and sailed between New York and San Francisco, around Cape Horn in a brisk 103 days.

St. Paul was put out to pasture in the early 30’s near Carillon Point in Kirkland but the timely intervention of a local band of fervent maritime enthusiasts saved the St. Paul from demolition, for a time.

Founded in 1928, the Puget Sound Academy of Science dedicated itself to the “diffusion of scientific knowledge by means for publications, expeditions and exhibits”. The brainchild of Henry Landes, dean of the University of Washington College of Science, and husband of Bertha Landes, Seattle’s first woman mayor, the academy was also the beneficiary of Arthur Foss, co-owner of Foss Tugs. A collector and history buff, Foss purchased the St. Paul and offered it to the academy for use as a floating exhibit for marine life, to be curated by naturalist, and future peace activist, Floyd Schmoe, (who by the way passed away relatively recently, in 2001 at the age of 106.)

The Marine Museum opened in June 16th 1934, welcoming over 20,000 visitors to its Ballard berth. Admission was 10 cents. In terms of living exhibits, the aquarium level of the museum boasted four saltwater tanks of fish. In them were Alaska stickleback, pipe fish, yellow-banded perch, cultus cod, four-foot sharks, big sea anemones, and an octopus. The museum operated for 2 years, but then fell victim to the Seattle winter climate, and a dearth of regular maintenance. In 1942, at the age of 68, and in disrepair, the St. Paul was towed to Vancouver Island’s Oyster Bay and scuttled, to be used as a foundation for a breakwater.

This is your Station Historian, reminding you that it’s easy to

 get buried in the past.

