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BIG RIVERBOATS ONCE WERE MAIN SKAGIT TRANSPORTATION

Now that there is considerable talk being broadcast about the possibilities of the Skagit River being dredged and improved so as to again make it as navigable as it used to be for many years in the past, it might be worth while to give the people of today a summary of the business, and the boats, and activities that were everyday events on the river in the early 80’s and 90’s.

Ottovo von Pressentin

SKAGIT RIVER BOATS HAD MINING HEYDAY

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new names: The Queen, Henry Bailey, Bob Irwin, Monte Christo, Indiana, Cascade, Mamie of Snohomish. The Skagit Chief, W. F. McDonald, Black Prince, T. C. Reed. The T.C. Reed was the largest of the lot and Mamie of Snohomish was the midsize, being only sixty-five feet long. The Queen, Indiana, and Monte Christo served more years than any others except the Black Prince.

The Monte Christo was built by the Monte Christo Mining Company to carry their supplies as far as the then thriving little town of Sauk City, and do all the other freighting for the mine. From Sauk City to and from the mine everything was hauled over the Cascade Mountains, by horse teams and wagons.

The Bob Irwin, a new boat, was blown up between Sedro-Woolley and Sterling. The W. F. McDonald was smashed between a G. N. Ry bridge pier and a tow of logs just north of Riverside, sunk there and never raised.

When the N. P. railroad built east from Hartford to Monte Christo it reduced the freight and passengers traffic up the Skagit tremendously and rung the death knell of Sauk City. Today there is no sign of a town there. Just a green meadow. The Monte Christo went elsewhere. Then came the Klondike Stampede and the Indiana went north with a party headed for the Klondike. I saw parts of her pilot house, with the name “Indiana” on it on a beach near the mouth of the Skokomish River in 1908.

The Indiana was built, owned, and captained by John Hamilton, son of Wm. Hamilton, the founder of the Town of Hamilton.

Between the years of 1884 and 1894 there was enough loggers and loggers, timber, and everything, freighting hay, grain, groceries, just realize if you can what would tools and etc. together with the become of the wheel of a stern

wheeler if it tried to move through drift so numerous that an experienced canoe man would consider it decidedly risky to venture out on the river. Besides that, the channel with sufficient depth was too narrow on most of the upper river for one steamer to pass another. True, that at one time three steamers came up the Skagit so near to one another each could be seen from the other.

That each boat was loaded with freight and passengers. Two had landed at the Charles Pressentin place to refuse with several cords of wood. The third boat could be seen from Pressentin’s landing, puffing back and forth from shore to shore at the crest of the riffle. It was an hour’s walk up the road to the place of loading. That incident was used to build up stories of racing on the river.

Later we learned what had occurred. Their supply of wood became nearly exhausted when the engineer called the captain and spoke to him through the speaking tube and told him there was only wood enough left to “fire up” once more. The captain was said to have asked: “Do you have anything else there that will burn?” and the engineer answered: “Nothing but some bacon.” The Captain answered: “Throw it in.” Then the engineer had the fireman split the remaining wood—fine. Then piling the wood quickly into the fire box they piled about 140 pounds of bacon on top. That made a fire that made steam enough to push the boat over the riffle. Bacon cost 75 cents per pound and up.

There always was lots of cordwood at Pressentin’s because it was a real source of revenue.

Ottovon von Pressentin

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