

# THE CONCRETE HERALD

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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.

### Otto 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 midget, 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 passenger 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 Skeena 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 freighting hay, grain, groceries, tools and etc. together with the

To begin with we will name the first stern wheel steam boats that started operating on the Skagit in the spring of 1880 in the freight and passenger business, which was brought on by the discovery of placer gold by Otto Klement, Jack (John) Rowley, Charles Pressentin, Sr. and another man. The gold discovery precipitated a tremendous stampede. People coming from as far away as Australia. So the steam

business created by new settlers to more than keep one steamer busy. The boats would land at any camp or any homesteaders place along the river. From 1889 to 1903 there was little business for steamers on the river. Then in 1904 there started up a little towing business with very small gas engine powered boats. By 1905, there were larger and more powerful tug boats built and put on the river and the steamers, Black Prince, the W. F. McDonald and the F. C. Reed joined the fleet of gas powered tugs in developing the business of log-towing. Then for forty years the towing business continued. Hundreds of million of board feet of logs were towed down the Skagit. Besides the logs, there were thousands of fir piling and thousands of cedar poles. This was a much cheaper method of transportation than is being used today.

In 1903 and 1904 the Tale Mine located about seven miles up river from Marblemount operated a gas-powered boat called the Talco to freight the output of the mine to market. In 1905 they built and operated a larger boat called the Tolo. In 1905, the Black Prince took a large steam boiler up to the tale mine. That was the second steam boat to go up the Skagit that far. There were quite a number of other steamers besides those named here that operated on the lower river from Sedro-Woolley down to the sound.

There have been some that have tried to add romance to steam boating on the Skagit by telling how the boats raced each other. To tell the truth and explode those myths I can tell you that every steam boat captain knew he had a race on his hands every trip up the Skagit. Not in racing another boat (something entirely out of the picture) but racing against the current and the vagaries of the rise and fall of the river. In the old days a minor quick rise could bring down millions of pieces of drift logs, trees, stumps and everything. Just realize if you can what would become of the wheel of a stern

boats came in too. There was the one hardy captain took his boat Josephine, Chehalis, Fanny Lake as far as the present site of Nestos Lily, Nellie, Glide, Lady of the Lake, all loaded trip after trip from Bacon Creek. The beginning of 1882 saw the finish of the gold stampede so many of the first boats named sought other runs and another crop of boats took over. A number of these were newly built so from '82 on to all the later years we had the following:

A few boats made runs up as far as Durand's Riffle, which is about one mile down river from Marblemount, but most got no further than the present site of Rockport. and some not that far. Though (Continued on page two)

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 refuel 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 a quarter of a mile down stream trying to make its way over the crest of the riffle. After about an hour a tremendous black smoke suddenly belched from its stack and over the crest of the riffle it came. Then at that a mighty hurrah went up from the passengers and they fired guns and revolvers in a wild up-roar. 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 finer. 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 cord-wood at Pressentin's because it was a real source of revenue.

Otto K. von Pressentin

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