Stories from the Archives —
A Brief History of the 'S.S. Skeena' on Indian Arm
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The sternwheel steamer 'S.S. Skeena' was one of five sternwheelers built for the use on the Skeena River. She was built in 1908 at Robertson's shipyard in Coal Harbour, Vancouver, and was 121.2 feet long and 26.8 feet wide, with a draft of 5.6 feet. [1] The wooden vessel was built by 'Foley, Welch and Stewart' for construction work on the 'Grand Trunk Pacific Railway' from 1909 until 1911, and began work on the Skeena River in 1909 under the command of Captain Magar. [2]

City of Vancouver Archives (CVA LGN 546).

Sternwheel Steamer 'Skeena' at Wigwam Inn on Indian Arm, *circa* 1912 — the wooden freight and passenger vessel was built in 1908 at Vancouver, and was 121.2 feet long, 26.8 feet wide, with a draft of 5.6 feet. [1]

In the Spring of 1911, the 'Skeena' was purchased by the 'North Arm Steamship Company' and subsequently taken to Indian River and anchored over the winter of 1911–1912. In February 1912, the 'Skeena' was towed to 'Wallace Shipyards' at North Vancouver, where she was overhauled for the summer excursion traffic on the Indian Arm. [3] It was reported that she was practically rebuilt for the excursion trade. [4][5]

During her two years as a passenger ferry on Indian Arm (1912–1913), the sternwheeler 'Skeena' was operated as a rival service to the sternwheeler 'Alluvia' that was owned by Alvo von Alvensleben, who also owned the 'Wigwam Inn' [6]

Sternwheel Steamer 'Skeena' on the Fraser River, *circa* **1914.**

In 1914, the 'Skeena' was sold to Captain Charles E. Seymour of the 'North Arm Steamship Company' for passenger and freight service on the Fraser River. The 'Skeena' was operated for eleven years by Captain Seymour, with W. H. Nesbitt as purser, both well-known figures on the river. [2]

The devotion of her skipper-owner kept the 'Skeena' plying the Fraser River past Surrey, Coquitlam, Maple Ridge, Langley and Mission. Her regular schedule was to Ladner and return on Monday, to Chilliwack on Tuesday, returning Thursday, and to Mission and return on Friday.

On Captain Seymour's death in 1925, the 'Skeena' was tied-up at a New Westminster wharf for some months, despite the futile efforts of the 'Board of Trade' of that city to put her into operation again. [1] Eventually, the 'Skeena' was bought "for a song" by 'Ewen's Cannery', dismantled, tied-up to the wharf, and used as a bunkhouse for the cannery employees. Later still, without the superstructure, her hull was converted to a floating barge for an oil company. From 1919 until 1931, she was owned by 'Mainland Navigation Co. Ltd.'. [7]

Her departure as a passenger vessel ended the historic era of sternwheelers on the Lower Fraser River. [2][7]

References:

(1)   Nauticapedia Online Vessel Database:
       http://www.nauticapedia.ca/dbase/Query/Shiplist4.php?&name=Skeena%20(III)&id=12890&Page=2&input=Skeena

(2)   Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia:
       https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skeena_(sternwheeler)

(3)   "S.S. Skeena Towed In From Indian River", Vancouver Daily World, Thursday, February 15th, 1912, page 20.

(4)   "S.S. Skeena – Summer Service to North Arm", Vancouver Daily World, Thursday, April 11th, 1912, page 17.

(5)   "North Arm Summer Colonies Popular", Vancouver News–Advertiser, Tuesday, June 4th, 1912, page 6.

(6)   "S.S. Alluvia and S.S. Skeena", Vancouver Daily Province, May 28th, 1913.

(7)   George B. White, "Development of the Eastern Fraser Valley", B.C. Historical Quarterly, Vol XII, No 4, 1948, pages 259–270.