Stories from the Archives —
A Brief History of the 'S.S. Sechelt' on Indian Arm
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The steamer 'S.S. Sechelt' was built in 1893 on Lake Washington by the 'Edward F. Lee Shipyard' at Sand Point, and was originally christened the 'Hattie Hansen'. She was ordered by Capt. J. C. O'Connor for service on Lake Washington, but before construction was complete, O'Connor sold her to Ole L. Hansen (1875–1940), one of the Hansen family which operated steamboats on Puget Sound. [1] In 1906–1911, she was owned by the 'Sechelt Steamship Co.', and in 1911 she was sold to the 'British Columbia Steamship Co.' [2]

During her short working history in British Columbia, the 'S.S. Sechelt' primarily provided passenger ferry service to communities on Howe Sound and along the Sunshine Coast. However, in 1910 the 'Sechelt' had some difficulties on this route; striking a reef near the Prospect Point lighthouse at the entrance to Vancouver harbour in August, [3] and going ashore at Bowen Island in November. [4]

Vancouver Public Library (VPL 2895), photograph by Philip Timms.

Steamer 'S.S. Sechelt' in Vancouver Harbour, 1910 — the wooden vessel was built in 1893 on Lake Washington, and was 82 feet long and 15 feet wide. [2]

For a brief period during September and October in 1910, the 'Sechelt' was chartered by the well-known Vancouver businessman Alvo von Alvensleben to provide passenger ferry service to 'Indian River Park' and 'Wigwam Inn', Alvensleben's newly-opened resort hotel at the head of Indian Arm. [5][6] The steamer provided a double daily service between Vancouver and Wigwam Inn, leaving the city wharf at the foot of Gore Avenue — the cost of the trip was 75¢ each way:

"We also beg to state that the Wigwam Inn is giving a first-class service in every respect, and will continue to do so during the whole season. The trip up the North Arm to Indian River is a most beautiful one, especially at this time of year, when the leaves are coloring, and Indian River Park is the most restful beauty spot on Burrard Inlet. Tourists and travelers have frequently declared that it outrivals Lake Louise and Emerald Lake." [5]

In late 1910, Capt. H. B. James, a former officer in the Canadian-Australian line, and Capt. Harold Gray Jarvis, a former shipmate also in the Canadian-Australian service, organized the 'British Columbia Steamship Company', secured the little steamer 'Tasmanian', and began a service between Victoria and Sooke in January 1911. The business was soon found to be too large to be handled by the 'Tasmanian', and Capt. Jarvis went to Vancouver and purchased the 'Sechelt' which made her first run to Sooke on March 1st, 1911. [7]

On Friday, March 24th, 1911, with Capt. H. B. James in command, the Sechelt departed Victoria harbour at 2:30 p.m. Aboard were her crew of four, an estimated 33 passengers, mostly workers on the 'Canadian Northern Railway' based in Sooke, and about 12,240 pounds of freight, including steel rails. She reached the government quarantine station dock at William Head, discharged about 13 passengers and freight, then left the quarantine dock at 3:58 p.m. [1]

As the 'Sechelt' steamed around Beechey Head on Vancouver Island, she was hit by high winds and seas in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. It was blowing hard from the west, and the steamer was bucking into a big sea. There was also a strong ebb tide and heavy tide rips, and she was rolling due to the prevailing waves being on her side. After about five minutes, the first big wave struck her on the side and put the vessel over about 45°, but she kept going towards the big breakers, when the second wave struck her and laid her over more. Then a third wave struck her and laid her over on her side. About two minutes after she came back on an even keel, only the wheel house could be seen, and about a minute after that, the 'Sechelt' quickly sank. [1][7][8]

References:

(1) Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sechelt_(steamboat)

(2) Nauticapedia Online Vessel Database: http://www.nauticapedia.ca/dbase/Query/Shiplist4.php?&name=Sechelt&id=15129&Page=1&input=sechelt

(3) "Steamer 'Sechelt' to be Floated Today", Vancouver Daily World, Tuesday, August 9th, 1910, page 2.

(4) "Steamer 'Sechelt' Goes Ashore", Vancouver Daily World, Monday, November 7th, 1910, page 19.

(5) "Steamer Service to Wigwam Inn, Indian River Park", Vancouver Daily World, Tuesday, September 20th, 1910, page 10.

(6) "Steamer Service to Wigwam Inn, Indian River Park", Vancouver Daily World, Saturday, September 24th, 1910, page 9.

(7) "Steamer 'Sechelt' Turns Turtle", The Daily Colonist, Saturday, March 25th, 1911, page 1.

(8) "Steamer 'Sechelt' Goes Down", Vancouver Daily World, Saturday, March 25th, 1911, page 1.