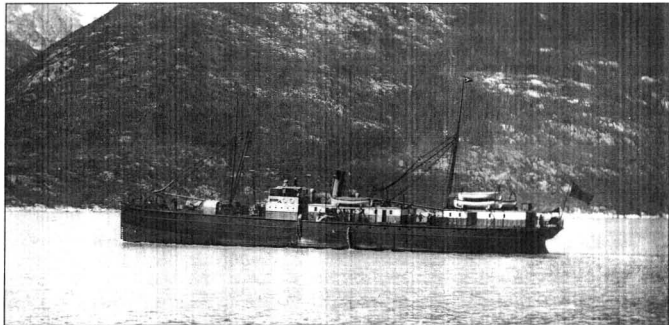


EARLY TRANSPORTATION



The Ss Danube.

Amur, Danube & Tees

The Amur, Danube and Tees were three pioneer west coast steamers that carried gold seekers to the Klondike in 1897-98. They survived shipwrecks, collisions and litigation for a combined lifetime of 149 years.

E.A. HARRIS

DESIGNED primarily as freighters, but with some passenger accommodation, the *Amur*, *Danube* and *Tees* were rather small ships: *Amur* had a displacement of 907 tons; *Danube* 887 tons, and *Tees* 679 tons. They were sturdy seaworthy vessels built along the lines of the North Sea coaster John Masefield describes in his poem "Cargoes." The *Danube*, an iron ship, was the oldest of the three, having been built at Govan, on the Clyde, in 1869. The *Amur* and *Tees* were both steel ships; the former built at Sunderland, England, in 1890 and the latter at Stockton-on-Tees in 1893.

All three had ample cargo space, and during their west coast service it was well utilized. Heavy cargoes of ore, lumber, coal, and canned salmon were carried as well as equipment and general supplies for a string of coastal settlements. Also, over the years, many passengers travelled on these steamers — sometimes many more than the accommodation officially allowed. This was especially true in 1897 and 1898 when eager fortune hunters sought transportation to the goldfields of the Klondike.

Like Masefield's British coaster, the *Amur*, *Danube* and *Tees* on this west coast experienced plenty of

stormy weather and rough seas, despite the fact that much of their voyaging was through the more sheltered waters of the Inside Passage. There the dangers were from hidden rocks and shoals, made more hazardous by a treacherous current and periods of poor visibility. All three vessels had accidents — they ran aground, struck rocks, even sank — but amazingly, they all survived and after repairs were made they were ready to serve again. The *Amur's* career lasted for 38 years, the *Tees* operated for 44 years, and the *Danube* had a remarkable 67 years of service.

The *Danube* was purchased by Capt. John Irving's Canadian Pacific Navigation Company (CPN) in 1890 for \$38,400. She had already been plying west coast waters for the previous two years, operated by the Scottish-Oriental Steamship Company of Glasgow. Its Oriental Line steamers crossed the Pacific from Vancouver in conjunction with the recently completed Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). The *Danube* had been used to transport passengers, mainly Chinese, between the deep-sea ports of Vancouver, Portland and San Francisco.

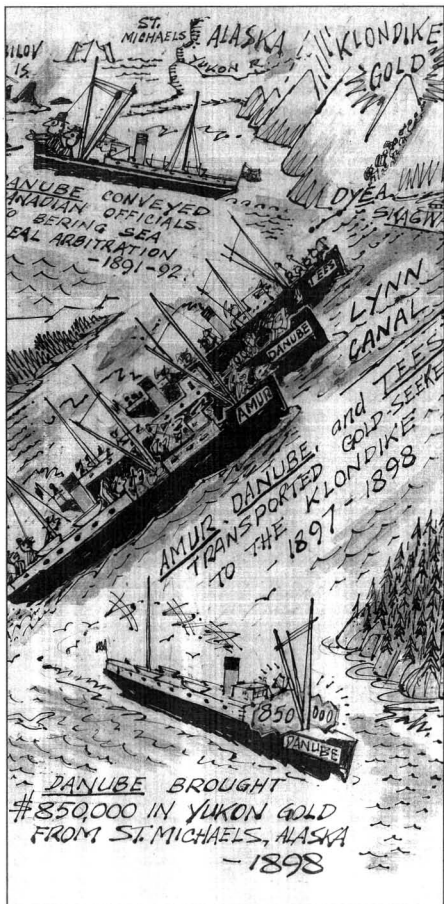
After being acquired by the CPN, the *Danube* was

commanded for some years by Capt. William Meyers, who was later involved with the ill-fated *Cariboo and Fly*. The ship was put on the northern run serving the salmon canneries and settlements scattered along B.C.'s lengthy coast line. One cannery employee left the following record of a voyage aboard the *Danube*, southbound from the Nass River to Victoria, in December, 1890:

"The *Danube* left Cascade Cannery, Nass River, on December 24 and several hours later called at Port Simpson (originally the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Simpson). On Dec. 25 the ship passed the mission village of Metlakatla and entered the estuary of the Skeena River, en route to Port Essington. In the river the state of the tide is always a consideration and the *Danube*, probably not for the first time, ran aground on a sand-bar. After five hours she finally floated free and began loading 7500 cases of salmon. About noon on December 26 the ship left Port Essington and arrived at Standard Cannery, near the river-mouth, at 3 P.M. where another 3000 cases were taken aboard.

"From there the *Danube* continued to steam south reaching Lowe Inlet Cannery about 2 p.m., December 28 and took on 6000 more cases of canned salmon. She left Lowe Inlet about 1:30 the next day but about 5 P.M. was obliged to anchor in Holmes Bay. The *Danube* left there early on December 30 but by 10 A.M. fog rolled in and she had to anchor again. The fog cleared about noon and the ship proceeded but anchored in an unidentified bay that night.

"On New Year's Day, January 1, 1891, the captain found his bearings and continued south. They encountered a gale in Fitzhugh Sound, passed Bella Bella in the afternoon, and later anchored in Safety Cove. Next day they crossed the rough



waters of Queen Charlotte Sound and arrived at Alert Bay about 4 A.M. Jan. 3. There another 4000 cases of salmon were added to the cargo. The *Danube* continued her southern journey and arrived at Victoria on Sunday morning, January 4, 1891 — more than ten days after leaving Nass River."

There was a tragic sequel to the unloading of the

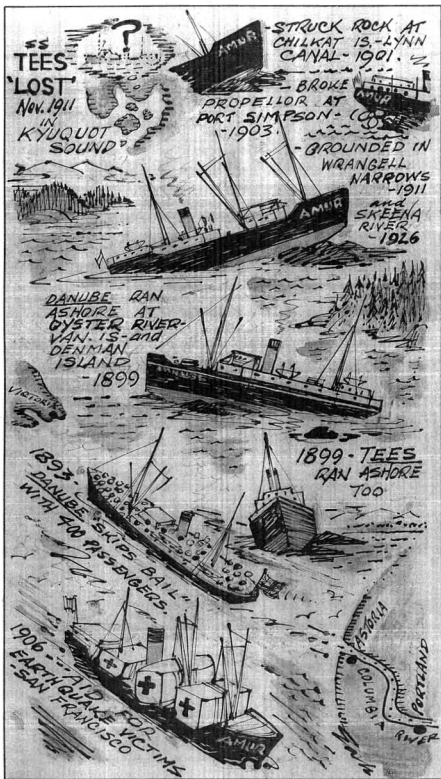
Danube's cargo of canned salmon. On January 12 the deck of the wharf gave way under the extra weight and five longshoremen died in the accident.

The return journey to the Nass River for the 1891 canning season was accomplished in half the time of the southward one. The same diarist recorded a briefer account of the northward trip. He wrote:

"Left Victoria at 11 P.M. March 14 — arrived at Nanaimo on Sunday morning, March 15 — Alert Bay at 3 A.M. — crossed Queen Charlotte Sound — arrived Rivers Inlet at 3 P.M. Discharged freight at two canneries. Passed China Hat and Bella Bella during Monday night. Arrived at Lowe Inlet on Tuesday and on to Standard Cannery at 10 P.M. the same day. Reached Port Essington on Wednesday morning and left the Skeena via Inverness Slough. Departed Inverness Cannery at 10 A.M. Thursday — passed Metlakatla and Port Simpson — reaching Cascade Cannery, Nass River, March 20 at 5 A.M. — five days from Victoria."

In addition to serving B.C. coastal communities, including the Queen Charlotte Islands, on a regular basis, the *Danube* performed some special assignments. In 1891 and 1892 the ship was chartered by the Canadian government to convey officials to the Pribiloff Islands with regard to arbitrating the international dispute about seal hunting in the Bering Sea area.

In 1893 the *Danube* became involved in another international affair. She carried an overload of more than 600 Chinese passengers to Portland, Oregon. The United States authorities said they were illegal immigrants and the papers they had testifying that they were merely returning to the U.S. after a visit to China were false. A warrant was issued to hold the *Danube* in port until the legal tangle was resolved. Captain Irving posted a \$40,000 bond. However, when, after a week, fewer than one-third of the passengers had been cleared, Irving ordered Captain Meyers to slip away with 400 passengers and two



U.S. immigration officers still on board. The *Danube* steamed boldly past Astoria, at the mouth of the Columbia River, without being stopped. The U.S. officials were put ashore near Fort Stevens and the *Danube* then returned to Victoria where the Chinese immigrants were disembarked.

All coastal steamers available played a part in transporting gold seekers to Alaska and the Yukon during the hectic years of 1897 and 1898. On August 1, 1897, the *Danube* sailed for Dyea, Alaska, with 150 passengers crowded aboard. A few days earlier, on July 29, the *Tees* had left Victoria with a similar overload. In 1898 the *Danube* made a longer voyage to St. Michael's at the mouth of the Yukon River and returned with \$850,000 in gold.

Later, as the rush for gold diminished, coastal steamers returned to their more regular sailings. However other changes were imminent. In May, 1903, the CPR bought out the CPN, thus acquiring ownership of the *Amur*, *Danube* and *Tees*. The new owners kept the ships in general coastal service for a few more years.

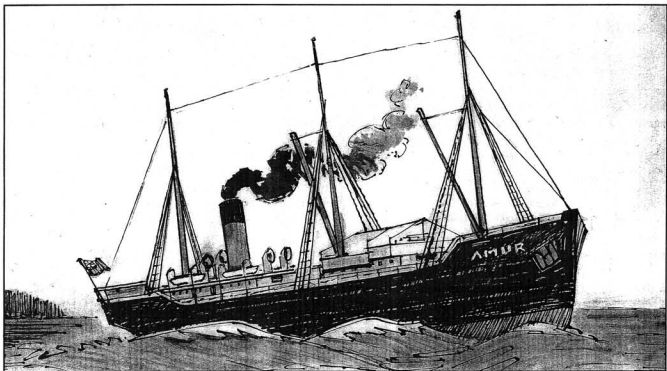
The *Danube*, being the oldest of the three, was the first to be sold. In 1905 she was purchased by the B.C. Salvage Company. Over the years the *Danube* had undergone so many repairs that her original iron hull had been almost entirely replaced with steel plates. Her new owners also installed more powerful engines and, because of her changed function, renamed her the *Salvor*. She operated in this capacity until 1918 when she

was sold to a Montreal firm which used her briefly as a tramp steamer. She was finally acquired by a Spanish company who put her in service as an iron-ore carrier in and out of the port of Balboa. Renamed the *Nervion*, the sturdy old ship's career continued until 1936, when she was broken up for scrap. She had been in service for 67 years.

The steamer *Tees* came to the west coast in April, 1896. Although smaller than the *Danube* — 165 feet long compared to the latter's 215 — she was a more modern ship with a steel hull, a double bottom, triple-expansion engine, and electric lights. Her top speed of 10½ knots was not very fast, but she was an excellent sea boat with comfortable accommodation for 75 cabin passengers. The *Tees* was also equipped with a siren whistle which announced her coming in no uncertain terms. Capt. Joe Gosse reported the siren's wail gave the natives of Port Simpson a startling jolt when the ship first called at this north coast settlement in 1896.

After participating in the Klondike gold rush during 1897 and 1898, the *Tees* continued serving the north coast and the open waters of the west coast of Vancouver Island where her seaworthiness was fully proven. However the *Tees*, like most coastal steamers, did suffer some mishaps. In 1899 both the *Tees* and the *Danube* ran aground — the *Danube* ran ashore at Oyster River on Vancouver Island's east coast on May 25 and again on June 19 at Denman Island. The *Tees* had a similar misadventure later in the year. Both accidents necessitated

The Ss Amur, built at Sunderland, England in 1890, was named Famous. In 1898, she was brought to the B.C. coast and renamed Amur, a name she sailed under for 26 years. In 1924 she was stripped of passenger accommodation, and reverted to her original name, Famous.



some costly repairs.

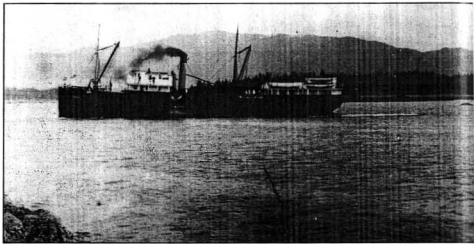
After being acquired by the CPR in 1903, the seaworthy *Tees* was kept on the west coast of Vancouver Island run for the next 10 years. The *Tees* stood up to plenty of battering from rough seas along that rock-bound coast. In November, 1911, the *Tees* experienced a rather unusual adventure by getting lost in the vicinity of Kyuquot Sound, near the north end of Vancouver Island. A weak wireless call for help from the *Tees* was received, but it faded before her position was given. Naturally this caused much concern and four ships were sent to Kyuquot Sound to look for her. Their search was made difficult by extremely stormy weather. However, after three days, the *Tees* was located in a protected inlet safely tied to some convenient trees. After leaving the settlement of Kyuquot she had struck a rock which had put her rudder and propeller out of action. The high surrounding hills had muted her distress calls. After the necessary repairs were made the *Tees* returned to the west coast service for another two years, but in 1913 she was replaced by the newly-built *Princess Maquinna*.

In 1918 the *Tees* was chartered by the Pacific Salvage Company (PSC) to replace the *Salvor* (formerly *Danube*). In this capacity the *Tees* was sent to Alaskan waters to assess the possibility of salvaging the stricken *Princess Sophia*, which had sunk with the tragic loss of 353 lives, after grounding on Vanderbilt Reef in Lynn Canal on October 24, 1918. Divers from the *Tees* inspected the wreck, which was badly damaged, and salvage was deemed not to be feasible. However the ship's safe containing \$62,000 in bullion was recovered.

In 1925 the PSC bought the *Tees* and renamed her *Salvage Queen*. She worked as a salvage vessel until 1933. That year she was sold to the Island Barge and Towing Company who changed her name again to *Island Queen*. The former *Tees* had now become a tugboat towing scows loaded with hog fuel from the Chemainus Sawmills to Port Angelas in Washington state.

The old steamer performed this duty competently, but in 1937 she suffered a fatal accident. The barge she was towing into Victoria harbour one stormy day crashed into her with such force that it reduced the former *Tees* to a floating wreck. Her owners decided she was beyond repair and the once sturdy old vessel became scrap metal.

The *Amur*, the latecomer of these pioneer steamers, did not arrive on the west coast until 1898. A typical British coaster, she had been built at Sunderland on the Wear River in 1890. She was 216 feet long, 28 feet wide, and could travel at a speed of 12 knots. Although pri-



Steamer Tees entering Metlakatla Harbour, on the northern coast of B.C.

marily a freighter, she had accommodation for 60 passengers. She was originally launched as the *Famous*, and operated for several years under that name.

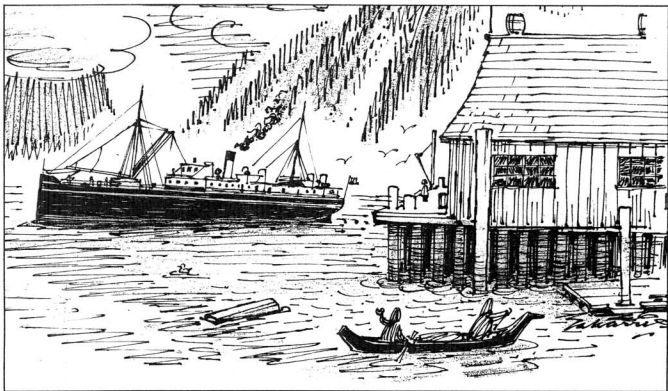
In 1898, the Klondike Mining and Transportation Corporation, eager to cash in on the gold rush bonanza, purchased the *Famous*, brought her to B.C. and renamed her *Amur*. However their venture failed, and a year later the *Amur* was bought by Captain Irving's CPN for \$39,350 — a bargain price. The *Amur* operated successfully in west coast waters, but she did experience some misadventures. In September, 1901, she ran ashore on Chilkat Island in Lynn Canal and was out of service for a month undergoing repairs. Soon after being acquired by the CPR in 1903, the *Amur* struck a reef off Port Simpson, breaking her shaft and propeller. In 1905 she grounded on a rocky shoal in Wrangell Narrows. These accidents were not necessarily the result of navigational incompetence but because some mishaps were almost bound to occur, especially during bad weather, in the poorly marked channels of this rugged coastline.

A newlywed couple, travelling north to the Skeena River in November, 1905, kept a record of their journey aboard the *Amur* and noted the precautions the captain took when landing them at Port Essington:

"We are now (10 p.m., November 20, 1905) on board the *Ss Amur*, northward bound. This boat is tiny compared with an Atlantic liner but very nicely fitted up. We have about the best cabin on the boat, with a settee, making it quite comfortable. There are about 20 passengers. We are going through an inland sea between islands and mainland. The water is very calm and it is raining.

"About 7 P.M. (November 21) we reached Alert Bay — where one passenger landed. There are houses all around the bay with totem poles in front of them. Many Indians were at the wharf.

"During the night we crossed Queen Charlotte Sound and this stretch of water was very rough. We were tossed from side to side, our trunks slid across the



The Ss *Danube*, built on the Clyde in Scotland in 1869, served on the B.C. coast from 1888 until 1918.

cabin, everything in chaos. However when we reached the sheltered channels again the water was calm. Passed two steamers southward bound. Heard from the Purser that our furniture is not on board — left behind for the *Tees* to bring up, which means we won't get it for another two weeks.

"About 11 P.M. (November 23) we anchored off Port Essington, about 15 miles up the Skeena River. Captain McLeod is very cautious and said because the *Amur* draws 10 feet of water he could not go to the wharf to land so we had to go ashore in a small boat. The baggage was taken ashore first and it was 2 A.M. before we landed. We had to climb down a ladder into the little boat, which had several inches of water in it. It was quite a distance to shore and pretty rough. We were carried in from the boat on to rocks and then taken by a wooden walkway to the Hotel Essington."

The *Amur's* accidents were trivial compared to the San Francisco earthquake and fire in April, 1906. However the *Amur* helped to ease the distress by carrying from Vancouver a cargo of relief supplies to aid the shattered city.

The *Amur* continued on the run to ports of call in northern B.C. and Alaska until June, 1911, when she again struck a rock in Wrangell Narrows, suffering severe damage. As she was due to be replaced by the nearly completed — and later ill-fated — *Princess Sophia*, the *Amur* was laid up and not repaired. In April,

1912, she was sold for \$11,000 to the Coastwise Steamship and Barge Co. of Vancouver.

Her new owners had the ship refitted as an ore carrier and she functioned in this utilitarian way for the next 12 years. The *Amur* transported ore from Britannia Beach on Howe Sound, and later from Anyox on the north coast's Observatory Inlet, to the copper smelter in Tacoma, Washington.

In 1924 the *Amur* was sold again, this time to Captain Berquist who operated the old ship as a coastal freighter under her original name of *Famous*. In 1926 she was wrecked in the Skeena River but was salvaged to sail again for another two years. In 1928 her active career ended and for the next four years the *Famous* lay in the graveyard of old ships at Dedwell Bay in Burrard Inlet. In 1932 she was stripped and her hull sank in the deepest waters of Burrard Inlet's North Arm.

Such, in brief, was the story of three pioneer steamers. Each played an important role in the maritime history of B.C. Their namesake rivers continue to flow as they have done for many centuries, although much more polluted than in former times. As for the steamers *Amur*, *Danube* and *Tees*, they exist today only in written records, relics and photographs, and in a few personal memories. ☼

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