

# The Burrard Inlet Floating Post Office

B.C. Historical Federation, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

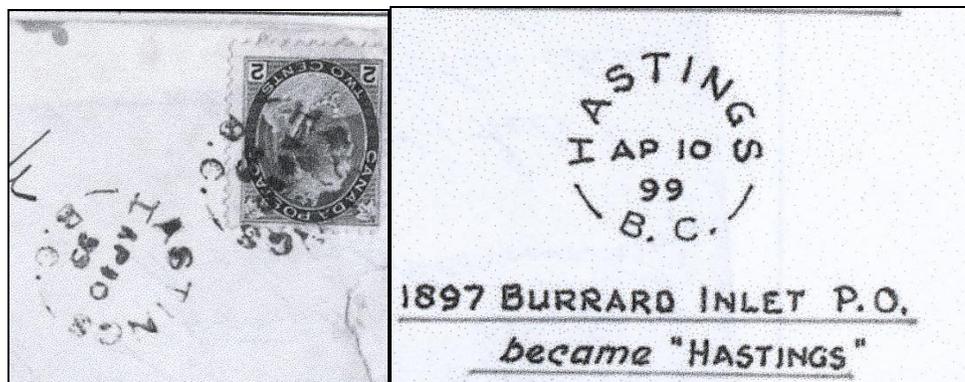
*This is a Member Story — submitted by Ron Hyde, Richmond*



**Captain Stalker**

Captain J. Douglas Stalker came to British Columbia in 1904 due to ill health. He remained and became a timber cruiser, surveyor and time keeper during the construction of the CNR. In 1910, he and Col. W. G. Swan became partners in the passenger ship 'Mina W' carrying men and supplies up to the railway camps along the Fraser River.

Burrard Inlet postal service, established in 1852 [sic 1862] was delivered by ship and named 'Colonial Post Office No. 28' with 'Burrard Inlet' as its official address. [Note: There was no official mail service on the BC mainland prior to establishment of the 'Colony of British Columbia'. Also, there were few European settlers, if any, around Burrard Inlet prior to 1862 when 'Pioneer Mills' was established on the North Shore of the inlet. The first post office on Burrard Inlet was established on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1869, at 'Hastings' with Maximillian Michaud as Post Master. Reference: "B.C. Area Post Offices Pre-1900", British Columbia Postal History Research Group, Vol. 13, No. 3, October 2004.] Operating until 1871, when it was moved to 'Hastings Mill' on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1872, with the name officially changed to 'Hastings' on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1897.



Burrard Inlet and Indian Arm had mail delivered by 'The Burrard Inlet Steam Ferry and Towing Co.' under contract from 1865. The company was sold and became 'The New Brighton Ferry Company' who continued to deliver mail until December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1907.

The first travelling post office on the steamship 'S.S. Belcarra' was established January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1908 servicing Indian Arm and upper Burrard Inlet. 'Harbour Navigation Ltd.' 'MV Lo'Olbee' operated as the T.P.O. from 1920–1933 when the 'MV Scenic' became the T.P.O. and continued as the only floating post office in Canada until October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1970 when it was discontinued.

In 1920, Stalker purchased the 'Harbour Shipping Co.' for \$16,000, which was started in 1913 to service the North Arm of Burrard Inlet and he renamed the operation 'The Harbour Navigation Co. Ltd.' and during the next thirty years operated a fleet that

included *The Scenic*, *Fort Langley*, *New Delta*, *Lo'Olbee*, *Hollyburn*, *Lady Rose* and the *Harbour Princess*.

Captain Stalker was the owner and the skipper and became 'Postmaster for Canada' s only floating post office. The floating Post Office operated as the 'Burrard Inlet Post Office' until 1971 on the steamer [sic] 'MV Scenic' and maintained the regular mail and passenger service to the various isolated communities in the north arm of Burrard Inlet. Stamp collectors from around the world wrote to Captain Stalker to stamp their envelope with the Burrard Inlet cancellation so they could add this floating post office cancellation to their collection.

Captain Stalker built the 'MV Harbour Princess' in 1924 and was one of the first ships on the coast powered by full diesel engines. In addition to running the floating P.O. and excursion services to the Indian Arm area, he also operated the 'Wigwam Inn Resort' at the head of the Inlet, the lovely picnic area at 'Belcarra Park' and the 'Gore Avenue Wharf Co. Ltd.'



**The 'Wigwam Inn' on Indian Arm, B.C.**

Wigwam Inn was a popular place to visit in the 1940s and 1950s taking a ship that cruised the waters up Indian Arm to the Inn on Friday and Saturday nights where dances were held along with food and drink. The ships always got you back to Vancouver to the wharf where you caught the bus to go home.

In earlier days, the T.P.O. operated three days a week in winter and every day in summer when Captain Anderson brought the mail to Burrard Inlet and there wasn't a mail day in the quarter century prior to its closure in 1970 when the 'MV Scenic' or one of her sisters on the mail run failed to get through with the papers, letters and parcels for those living on the Inlet. The Burrard post office has to work through the north winds

whistling down the inlet, dusty weather and rough water but somehow the ship's bow cuts through the worst of it.

Years ago, the mail was extremely heavy almost every day when the Wigwam Inn was operating with customers daily, the Lake Buntzen power plant was being constructed and Granite Falls was a very popular tourist destination as well as the granite being processed for the construction industry.

In addition, the post office kept the communities of North Woodlands, South Woodlands, Iron Bay, Coombes, Cove Cliff, Twin Island, Orlohma Beach, Coldwell Beach, Sunshine and Cosy Cove in contact with family and friends throughout B.C. and the world.

As roads were built, the postal volume continually decreased over three years and the Captain [Anderson] reminisces: "I used to sell \$5 or \$10 worth of stamps on just about every trip but haven't sold a stamp for three weeks".

On October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1970, the last postal run was made and the Burrard Inlet Canada's only floating post office was closed.



**Harbour vessel 'S.S. Scenic' at Indian Arm, circa 1939.**

*Ron Hyde is a Director and Honourary Life Member of the British Columbia Historical Federation. He lives in Steveston, B.C.*

**Sources:**

- [www.ralphdrew.ca/articles/Indian Arm Floating Post Office.pdf](http://www.ralphdrew.ca/articles/Indian_Arm_Floating_Post_Office.pdf)
- Mayse, Arthur, (January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1940), *Floating Post Office Keeps Coves in Touch With City*, Vancouver, B.C.: *Vancouver Province*, page 14.
- Vancouver Province. (March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1955). *Norman Hacking, Indian Arm's Floating Post Office*.
- Bruce, Marian. (October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1970). *Water-Borne Mail Route Ends 62-Year Service*, Vancouver, B.C.: *Vancouver Sun*.
- McKay, John. (April, 1980). *A short history of postal service to Belcarra, Burrard Inlet and Indian Arm*, *Belcarra Barnacle*, Vol. 1, No. 5.
- All Nations Stamp and Coin, Vancouver, B.C.