

## Postmaster Glad Job's Over

By Marian Bruce, *Vancouver Sun*, "Water-Borne Mail Route Ends 62-Year Service", Oct. 31<sup>st</sup>, 1970.

B.C.'s floating post office made its final run up Indian Arm Friday (October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1970). It was the end of 62 years of service on the only waterborne mail route in the Commonwealth.

**Editor's Note:** Canada's only full-time floating post office was operated on Indian Arm from 1908 until the end of 1970. Captain J.D. Stalker was postmaster and piloted the floating post office *SS Scenic* for more than thirty years, from 1920 to 1951. In 1920 Captain Stalker bought out the *Harbour Shipping Company* for \$16,000 and the name changed to *Harbour Navigation Co. Ltd.* It was *Harbour Navigation* that had begun servicing the North Arm in 1908, under the name of *New Brighton Ferry Company* with a regular ferry service. Before 1920 *Harbour Shipping Company* had been carrying mail along Burrard Inlet for the *Post Master General of Canada*.

**Source:** *District of North Vancouver Archives*, Ref. No. 180957.



**Captain Stalker**

And Skipper Joe Blackmun, who has delivered mail for the past 10 years through rain and fog and wind-swept seas, is glad the task is over.

"It's a tiresome nerve-wracking job," said Blackmun as he eased the *Wee Willie* close to a pier bearing a tiny wooden mailbox.

"It's a lot of responsibility. I have to sort the mail, and deliver it to all these places, and keep on time. And I've got the tide to think about, and the wind, and the fog".

The fog lifted Friday morning by the time the *Wee Willie*, a 20-foot *Harbor Ferries* craft, had chugged past *Deep Cove*. The smooth waters in the sunlight, reflected with mirror-like clarity the densely forested slopes of mountains dropping sharply into the inlet.

"It was," the skipper remarked, "a bluebird day."

Blackmun, in high spirits and nattily dressed in blue blazer and slacks, rammed the *Wee Willie* full speed ahead.

But by the end of the 40-mile round trip he was running an hour late because he'd spent a lot of time on farewell calls to old customers. His first was at *North Woodlands*, 14 miles from *Vancouver* harbour.

**Editor's Note:** The general store at *Woodlands* was owned and operated by Jessie Squire who, with her husband Percy, moved to *Woodlands* in 1936. Jessie was *Woodland's* unofficial postmistress for 29 years. As postmistress she would meet the *SS Scenic* of *Harbour Navigation* and deposit the outgoing mail aboard the boat. She would receive the incoming mail, sort it, and look after letters for residents who were away. The "Scenic" brought in mail and passengers three times a week during the winter and every day during the summer. An empty 5-gallon oil can, painted white, hoisted at the top of a pole, signalled to Captain Stalker to pull into a dock and pick-up a passenger.

**Source:** *District of North Vancouver Archives*, Ref. No. 180980.



City of Vancouver Archives

### **Sternwheeler SS Skeena — Indian Arm, circa 1912**

Then along with a dozen other people who tuned out for the last mail run, she (Jessie) waved good-bye to Blackmun, who threw kisses and waved as he continued up the inlet. As will residents at about 10 other regular ports of call, the *North Woodlands* people will now get their mail at the *Deep Cove* sub-office or at mailboxes at Keith Road and Mount Seymour Highway.

The post office department decided to drop its waterborne service, Blackmun explained, because use has declined sharply in recent years and it hasn't been paying its way.

"Ten years ago I carried three times as much mail as I do now," he said. "I used to bring mail to 50 or 60 people at *Belcarra*, but they've been getting their mail by road for about three years."

"I used to sell \$5 or \$10 worth of stamps up here every trip, but I haven't sold a stamp for three weeks."



City of Vancouver Archives (CVA Bo P182)

### Harbour Navigation Vessel *SS Scenic* — Indian Arm, circa 1939

Past *Woodlands*, the tiny settlements dotting the west shore of the inlet — mostly summer homes and camps — are accessible only by boat.

Residents there, who once depended on visits by the *Wee Willie* or the larger vessel *SS Scenic*, six times a week in summer and two in winter, now use their own boats for mail and other deliveries.

People such as Bill Gardener, who has lived at *Brighton Beach* for 23 years and is the only full-time resident there, will have to depend on friends for pickup and delivery services. The traveling postmaster had a letter and some small talk for Gardener Friday before moving on past *Jubilee Camp*, stopping briefly at the fortress-like Lake Buntzen power house, now a two-man station, and *Buntzen Bay*.

Blackmun's welcoming committee at *Buntzen Bay* consisted of one seagull scratching itself with one foot as it perched on top of a metal mailbox at the end of a long float.

"This used to be a logging camp," Blackmun said, "but now there are only summer homes here and I deliver mail to about three families."

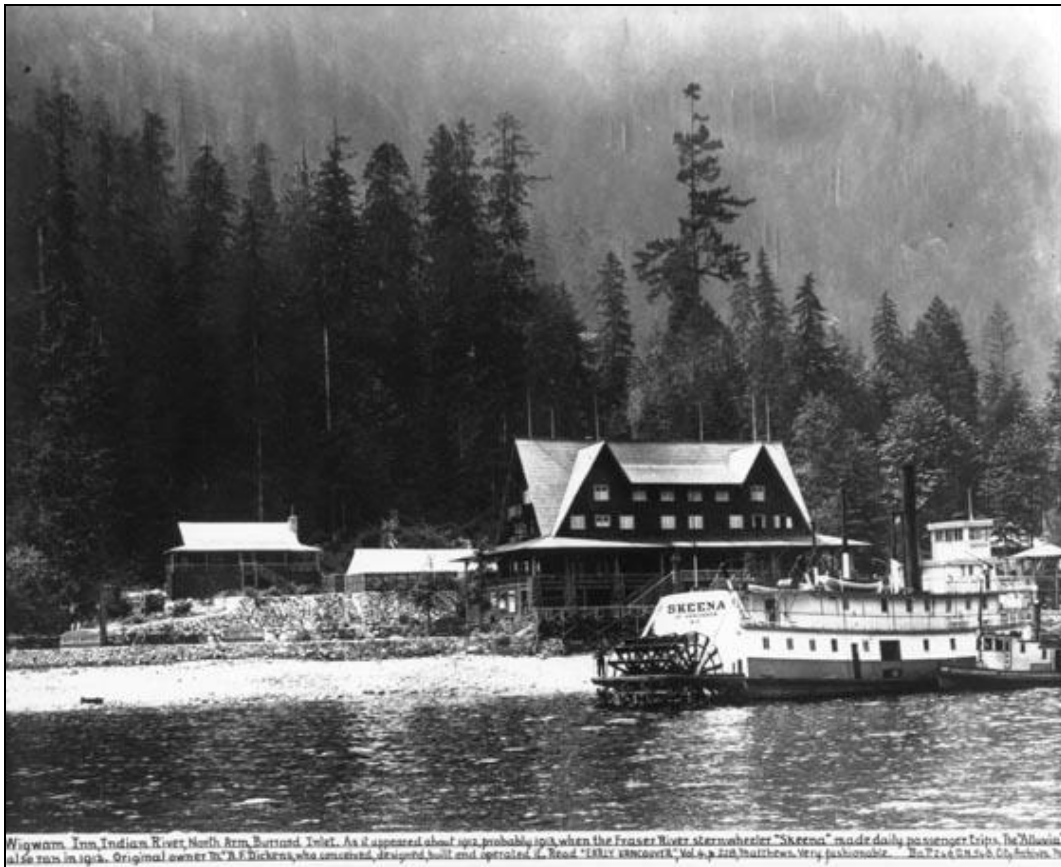


Burrard Inlet Post Mark

"From here on up the Inlet we've had trouble with ice in the winter, because there is so much fresh water coming down."

There was a sack of mail for a logging camp near the end of the inlet — Weldwood's Indian River operation. A tanned workman in cork boots sitting on a log on the wharf acknowledged the delivery with a curt nod, then continued eating his sandwich.

Blackmun swung across the inlet for a last nostalgic look at *Wigwam Inn*, the 60-year-old resort he and his brother once operated.



City of Vancouver Archives (CVA Bo.P.240, N.229)

### **Wigwam Inn & SS Skeena — Indian Arm, *circa* 1912**

The Inn, used as the set in making the movie *The Grove*, last summer is now crumbling and deserted.

It has been replaced as a tourist haunt by a dine and dance spot at *Granite Falls*, just down the inlet from Weldwood’s camp, and run by *Harbor Navigation Ltd.*

Caretaker Gordon Campbell, only occupant of the resort in the off-season, called for a coffee break for Blackmun and his passengers.

Then it was back down the inlet for the final mail delivery, a small bundle of letters for residents at *Belvedere*, near a YMCA camp (Farrer Cove).

It was 2 p.m. and Blackmun had been on the water for four hours and he still had an hour to go, pushing the *Wee Willie* at 14 knots or less against the tide, back to *Vancouver*.

“This is my grand finale, and I’m glad of it,” he said. “I’ve got lots of other things I can do with my time — like working in my garden.”

## **Floating Post Office Keeps Coves In Touch With City**

By Arthur Mayse, *Vancouver Province*, Tuesday, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1940, page 14.

If a letter with the postmark "Burrard" turns-up in your mail, you may search coast maps in vain for any community so labelled.

But if you wander down to *Harbour Navigation Co.* dock at the foot of Gore Avenue in Vancouver, you'll find Burrard post office rocking, gently at her moorings while Postmaster J. C. (Andy) Anderson sorts the outgoing mail in his cabin.

Captain Anderson, weathered of face, quizzical of eye, pilots the only post office of its kind in Canada. He brings the mail to a score of isolated bays and coves of Burrard Inlet and Granite Falls and Jug Island and Scott Goldie and other centres whose names are heard once in a blue moon by their big neighbour, Vancouver.

### **QUITE A SERVICE.**

"It's quite a service," Captain Anderson says. "Myself, I haven't been in it very long."

"How long would that be captain?" you ask.

A smile lurks behind his trim moustaches as he replies: "Oh, I'd say about twenty-five years!"

Three days a week, in winter, every day in summer, Captain Anderson brings the mail to Burrard Inlet, and there hasn't been a mail-day in the last-quarter century when the staunch little *Scenic*, or one of her sister vessels on the Indian River run, failed to get through with the letters, papers and parcels that make life happier for Inlet folk.

"You should have been here around Christmas," says the captain, "That's when we're at our busiest. It's pretty light today — just the one sack of mail, as you'll see. In summer, too, when the vacation people are at the resorts we often have a good load."

The Burrard post office sometimes bucks dusty weather to get to the floats where a population that in some cases totals less than a dozen waits for its mail. There are days when the north wind whistles down the inlet as if through a funnel; but somehow or other the post office shoves her bows through the worst of it.

Outgoing mail is postmarked in the company office by the official postmaster of Burrard, Capt. J. D. Stalker, another veteran of the inlet run.

It was in 1920 that Captain Stalker received his appointment, and even then the service was well established. Officials, in fact, are a little hazy as to just when the service was launched.

The busiest days were when Wigwam Inn was going full blast some years ago, and when the Lake Buntzen power plant was being constructed.

Here are a few more of the settlements that are kept in touch with the outside world by the sea-going post office: Cove Cliff, Coombes, North Woodlands, South Woodlands, Iron Bay, Twin Island, Deep Cove (not the summer resort), Orlohma Beach, Coldwell Beach, Cosy Cove and Sunshine.

## **Indian Arm's Floating Post Office**

By Norman Hacking, *Vancouver Province*, "Ship and Shore", March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1955.

I took a trip on Vancouver's famous *Floating Post Office* the other day, the little vessel that serves the scattered population who live on the precipitous slopes of Indian Arm. Nowhere in the world is there such a unique trip. Two hours after leaving the Gore Avenue wharf we were in the primeval wilderness, and without even going outside the harbour. Regular ship on the run is *Harbour Navigation Co.*'s little *Scenic*, but this week she is being relieved by the launch *Tymac*.

Skipper on the run... and postmaster, too... is Captain J.J. Paddy Gilmore who first started to run up to Indian Arm back in 1909, when Count Alvo von Alvensleben built Wigwam Inn, at the mouth of Indian River. Everybody up Indian Arm knows Paddy Gilmore, for he is their only contact with the outside. He brings them their mail and their groceries, sells them stamps and money orders, and passes on the gossip from the remote world of Vancouver.

Official name of the post office aboard is Burrard Inlet, and it covers nearly a score of tiny landings from Belcarra up to Wigwam Inn. During the winter there are only a few dozen people living in the entire Indian Arm, mostly pensioners, watchmen of camps, loggers or quarry workers. Some of them don't come down to civilization for months at a time, quite content with the thrice weekly visit of the *Scenic*.

There aren't many passengers these days. We had two paying passengers each way the other day, Captain 'Paddy' remembers the good old days before World War One, when many Vancouver business men lived up Indian Arm and commuted to town every morning. "We used to have at least 60 passengers into town every morning," he recalls. "Now in the winter, we don't have that many in a month."

Things are different in the summer months, of course but there is nothing like the amount of passenger traffic up the arm there was 40 years ago. In those days the sternwheelers *Skeena* and *Alluvia* used to make regular moonlight excursions, with a band aboard and dances on deck, and there were half a dozen other little ships on the run.

Captain Gilmore first came to Vancouver from Ireland as a boy of 13 aboard the full-rigged ship *Falls of Dee*, which loaded lumber at Moodyville for Australia. For several years he sailed to the Orient in the old clipper stemmed Empresses, and then in 1909 he started on the Indian Arm route.

He worked in the summer months, and in the winter he would sign on a sailing ship on the Hawaiian Islands run, or take a few trips down to Acapulco. It was easy then for a sailor to pick-up a job at any time, he says.

He joined the *Royal Canadian Navy* in World War One as an officer in *HMCS Shearwater*. He was on of the crew of the Canadian submarines C-1 and C-2, which made a notable five months trip in 1915 from Esquimalt to Halifax, back in 1915.

In the years between the wars, Captain Gilmore served as Captain or mate aboard most of the ships in the BC Coastwise Service, CPR, Union, Waterhouse, All-Red Line, and many others. Four years ago he decided to return to his old run up to Indian Arm. To enjoy the matchless scenery he had known as a youth. Sometimes he alternates on the Howe Sound run of *Harbour Navigation Co.*

Paddy knows all the folks in out-of-the-way places, and all the folks know Paddy and wait for the sound of his whistle.

## **A SHORT HISTORY OF POSTAL SERVICE TO BELCARRA, BURRARD INLET & INDIAN ARM**

By John McKay, *Belcarra Barnacle*, Vol. 1. No. 5, April 1980.

Postal Service to Burrard Inlet was established in 1852 [*sic* 1862] and delivered by ship. It was called *Colonial Post Office No. 28* and its official address was *Burrard Inlet*. [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.] It operated until 1871 when it was moved to the *Hastings Mill* site on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1872. The name was officially changed to *Hastings* on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1897.

Mail was delivered to upper Burrard Inlet and Indian Arm also by ship. The *Burrard Inlet Steam Ferry and Towing Co.* delivered the mail from 1865 under contract. The company sold and became *The New Brighton Ferry Company* and they delivered the mail until December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1907. The first *Travelling Post Office* (T.P.O.) was established January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1908, on the steamship *SS Belcarra* serving Indian Arm and upper Burrard Inlet. In 1920 the *MV Lo'Olbee*, owned and operated by *Harbour Navigation Ltd.*, took over as T.P.O. until 1933 when the *MV Scenic* took over the position as T.P.O. It continued as the only "floating post office" in Canada until it was discontinued on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1970. The advent of roads and the decline of ferry traffic made it an uneconomic operation, and ended a long era of mail delivery by ship for this area. The following list of Post Masters served on Burrard Inlet's floating post offices:

J.A. Cates	1908-1910	A.C. Ray	1920- (4 mos.)
F.W. Foster	1910-1913	J.D. Stalker	1920-1952
Capt. H.S. Hilton	1914-1919	T.J. Manning	1962-1970

The residents of Belcarra now receive their mail by rural delivery to group boxes. In the mid-1950s when the road to Belcarra was first opened, residents picked-up their mail either at the *loco Post Office* in the loco Store, at the *Pleasantside Post Office* in the Pleasantside Store, or from the T.P.O. on the *MV Scenic*, depending on how they addressed their mail.

The *loco Post Office* was established on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1916, and operated under eight different Post Masters until July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1970, when it was moved to Port Moody. Dennis Sherk operated the loco Store selling groceries and meats until the late 1970s and was the last Post Master at loco.

The *Pleasantside Post Office* was established on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1944, with Mrs. M.E. Ronco as Post Master until June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1965, when the store was sold and the Post Office moved to Port Moody.

### **Sources:**

1. Canada Post Office.
2. *The Post Offices of BC*, by G.H. Melvin.
3. Harbour Navigation Ltd.