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Ship ahoy!:

SHIP AHOY!

Paddlewheelers of the
Thompson Waterway



Mary Balf, Kamloops Museum, 1973

THE MARTEN

BOX 3010 KAMLOOPS, B.C.

V2C-5N3
During the summer of 1865 there was great excitement over gold discoveries in the Big Bend area of the Columbia. "Easy" gold had by now been taken from the Cariboo, so that miners were eager for new fields to conquer and at least a hundred of them decided to move. The government sent James Orr on an official expedition of exploration; Walter Moberly cut a trail from Shuswap to the head of the Seymour Arm; Chief Trader Joseph W. McKay of Kamloops opened a subsidiary H.B.C. post here at Ogdenville, soon re-named Seymour City; and Smith and Ladner packed in supplies.

All were very enthusiastic, but all stressed the need for a steamer, and in the fall the government agreed to subsidize one, to be built by the H.B.C. "Steamer 49" was already under construction on the Columbia, and a Shuswap rival was necessary to prevent all traffic using the U.S. route; action was urgently called for!

S. S. Marten was built at Whitfield Chase's Shuswap ranch, with whip-sawed lumber from the vicinity. Brock McQueen was employed for this purpose; his efforts mark the beginning of the lumber industry here. Carpenters A. G. Pemberton and James McIntosh worked with a crew of men through winter and early spring.

Machinery had to be brought in from the coast; this stimulated the building of a road from Cache Creek to Savona to carry wheeled traffic, finished by contractor Gus B. Wright early in 1866. As soon as the ice melted the Marten was sailed and drifted down to Savona's Ferry, and the machinery installed. The steamer was launched in May under Captain William Alex Mouat of the H.B.C. Pacific fleet. She left the Ferry at 5 p.m. on May 26, spent the night at Kamloops, and reached Seymour City at 6 p.m. the next day. Here the population of nearly 300 left their suppers to give her a hearty welcome.

But her glory was short-lived. Fares were high and demand was light; by October she was reduced to towing lumber, and had been slightly damaged on a rock. In April of 1867 carpenters William Reece and George Watt arrived to repair her, then berthed at Savona. But reports from Big Bend were gloomy, and there was no demand for her services. In June she was still idle; Chief Trader Moffat reported that she had been secured as safely as possible. In September she was with difficulty crossed to the south side of the lake for the winter. Meantime few miners had been passing through Kamloops on foot; most returned disappointed, and the following years showed further decline. George Birmingham ran a freight boat during 1867, but little is known of this; it was not a steamer.

The Marten continued useless at Savona. Her furniture was removed and brought to Kamloops in September 1868. Next month William Charles wrote in the H.B.C. journal that Captain White of the Steamer "49" (of the Columbia River) arrived with his pilot Pinkston to investigate the possibility of taking the Marten down to Yale.

Apparently they decided this was not possible; in July 1869 Jean Laveau with two white H.B.C. men and twelve Indians brought the steamer to Kamloops, taking five days. Apparently the engines were not working and there was no wind, so that she had to be "kedged up" the whole way.

She was moored for the winter opposite the H.B.C. post (now West End Auto Court), and held securely by shore fenders. However, on March 11, 1870, just after the ice had thawed, there was a "hurricane", which snapped trees and "the heavy spars acting as shore fenders to the steamer were splintered and bent like reeds". The temperature dropped 16 degrees below zero and the river froze solid, and the steamer was embedded in ice for another two weeks.

The Company seems to have made no attempt to use the Marten again. In May 1874 John Tait, then in charge of the H.B.C. post, commented on the difficulty of keeping her afloat during spring break-up, and the need for frequent pumping at all seasons. Next winter he moved all machinery; both he and Jean Laveau expected her to sink when the ice melted.

However, shortly afterwards, much to Tait's relief, the steamer was purchased by Mara and Wilson, Kamloops merchants. Surprisingly, their engineer was able to patch her up and obtain missing parts for the machinery. There was a prolonged argument over ownership of tools and furniture; most of the latter had been incorporated into the H.B.C. house.

At the beginning of May 1875 the Marten, after a lapse of nine years, resumed regular trips to Savona's Ferry for freight, and went 120 miles up the North Thompson, an amazing feat for what had been regarded as a derelict.

In 1876 she provided comfortable travelling for the Governor-General's visit to the Interior of B.C.; Lady Dufferin wrote ". . . . found every comfort and luxury surrounding us; pictures in our cabins; books of poetry on the tables; rocking chairs and good beds."

The Marten continued active for the next two years, despite an accident at Savona when she somehow knocked down the east wing of the large H.B.C. warehouse, causing further friction between Tait and Mara. In October 1877, however, she was wrecked on Kamloops Lake, just 30 yards

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from the shore on a calm day, where she apparently ran on a rock.

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She was hauled ashore, but found to be beyond repair. The rotting hulk was still to be seen on the river bank five years later — a sad end to the high hopes once held for the first Thompson steamer.

And yet it was not quite the end of the story. The machinery was preserved, and used by Mara in 1881 for the steamer Peerless, the greatest of his inland fleet in the heyday of water transport.

THE MARA EMPIRE

John Andrew Mara had been a packer in the Big Bend gold rush, and opened a store in Seymour. When activity there died he settled in Kamloops, and in 1872 opened a store in partnership with William Bell Wilson. This competed very successfully with the H.B.C. for local trade, especially as C.P.R. surveying started in that year, and they got the contracts for supplies. They continued to be the leading store until selling to Wood and Tunstall in 1890.

Mara seems to have been the dominant partner, but was often away in Victoria, and later Ottawa, as the local member of Parliament. Store management was largely in the hands of Wilson, who must have been a very competent man of business.

When the Marten was lost transport was very slow and difficult, and the partners therefore decided to build another steamer to carry their own goods, and also continue their monopoly of heavy freighting and passenger traffic. With partners Frank Jones Barnard of Victoria (later Mara's father-in-law), and Thomas Lasher Briggs of New Westminster, in 1878 they brought shipbuilder Alex Watson from Victoria to build the Spallumcheen in Kamloops.

They obtained a 12 h.p. engine made in 1866 by Hoadley Lawrence of Manchester, England, and the steamer was finished in the spring. She must have been a very short broad vessel, since her registered tonnage was 256.03, and length 80 feet, with a round stern, and a single deck and mast.

She ran regularly between Savona's Ferry and Eagle Pass for many years. William Fortune's sidewheeler, "Lady Dufferin", was built at the same time, and there was plenty of trade for both, as there were now many settlers in the Shuswap-Spallumcheen area, and all their freight came by boat.

Michael Hagan, then running the Sentinel in Yale, took a trip in the fall of 1882 to the interior, and spoke very highly of his trip from Savona in the Spallumcheen under Captain August Menanteau.

So great was the success of this ship that another much faster one was planned. Alex Watson again came to Kamloops, to build for Mara and Willson, Barnard, and August Menanteau, engineer. He used two horizontal high pressure engines made by Joseph Spratt of Victoria, and some of the machinery of the old Marten.

The Peerless was 133 feet long, of registered tonnage 250.54, and was launched in the spring of 1881 under Captain Insley. In June she successfully negotiated the Thompson below Kamloops Lake, making a trip to Harper's Mill at the mouth of the Bonaparte. A week later she repeated the Marten's feat of reaching Peavine Flats of 120 miles up the North Thompson.

She was the queen of the Thompson, and a source of considerable profit to her owners. In October, 1882, she brought the Marquis of Lorne and his party from Savona to Kamloops, and then on to Spallumcheen apparently a very pleasant official trip.

Two years later a large C.P.R. construction party, including the powerful Van Horne, Onderdonk and Trutch, were taken to Eagle Pass, and were so impressed with water transport that they built the second Skuzzy at Savona for their own use, believing that Mara's freight rates were too high.

In 1885 steamer transport was at the height of its glory on the Thompson waterways. Fortune's Lady Dufferin was still kept busy, and the Spallumcheen was very active, in spite of having been frozen in Little Shuswap Lake all winter near Chase's ranch. The Peerless had been enlarged under Captain Troup, and was described as truly splendid, the pride of the river. In addition two new steamers were built, the giants of the local fleet.

The Skuzzy was built by the C.P.R. at Van Horne (Savona), using the machinery of the old Fraser River Ship of the same name. She was 133 feet long, of 297.16 tons. By July, 1885, when C.P.R. tracks were laid in Kamloops, she carried rails, and was used as a floating boarding house and restaurant for the construction workers. At the end of the year construction had progressed to the Rockies, and she was bought by Mara. He was now sole owner; his old partner Wilson had moved to the U.S., and died in 1896 in Spokane.

In early 1885 Alex Watson again journeyed to Kamloops at Mara's behest. The engine came from the old Myra, and had been made three years earlier in the Albion Iron Works, Victoria. She was 126 feet long, with a straight, square stern, sloop rigging, and a tonnage of 268.24.

This new steamer was appropriately named the Kamloops, and joined her sisters Spallumcheen and Peerless in carrying freight and passengers between Savona and Eagle Pass.

Next year, however, the C. P. R. was completed, and the large ships which, in part at least, owed their existence to the demand for men and supplies for C.P.R. surveys and construction now faced severe competition. Rail transport was very much faster, and, for passengers, little more costly; so the steamers gradually lost their lucrative trade. They were doomed to extinction, like the slow and ponderous dinosaurs of an earlier eon.

The Spallumcheen was the first victim, being slow and cumbersome, and now quite elderly. She worked for a few years in the Enderby area, mostly towing lumber and taking grain to the mill, and then was beached in the present Riverside Park. In 1894 she floated free of her moorings in the great flood, and was broken up and destroyed.

The Kamloops and Peerless continued a regular schedule to Spallumcheen up to the fall of 1889, interspersed with excursions of church and fraternal groups, and logging trips. The Peerless, a powerful steamer, was the more useful, since she could negotiate the fast North Thompson water. In June, 1886, she took a large party of prospectors and their equipment up to the mouth of the Clearwater.

The Skuzzy seems never to have been used by Mara, apart from towing lumber occasionally. In 1889 the machinery was removed for use in a Columbia steamer; Mara's interests were now centred there.

In 1890 both the Peerless and Kamloops were berthed in Kamloops; the latter was never used again. She was broken up, and the register closed in 1897. The Peerless, however, was called into service again, after extensive repairs, in 1893 to fetch coal from the fields 52 miles up the North Thompson. This she successfully did, and the coal pronounced of good quality, but the cost of transport was quite prohibitive, and the Kamloops Coal Company closed its books next year.

Pleasure excursions had now been taken over by newer and smaller boats, so the Peerless could only be berthed again, marking the end of an era. Her "obituary" was a brief paragraph in the Sentinel of May 17, 1907: —

"The last of the old Mara steamboats that once plied upon these waters, making regular trips from Savona to Spallumcheen, was destroyed by fire at an early hour on Wednesday morning. When the

alarm was turned in, shortly after 1 a.m., the vessel, which was beached on the river bank, was one mass of flames from stem to stern. The rapidity with which the flames must have spread has given rise to a theory of incendiarism. The machinery on board, which was in excellent condition, appears to have been rendered worthless by the heat."

It was a sad funeral pyre for the Queen of the Thompson River!

THE LADY DUFFERIN

—It is easy to beach a sternwheeler in shallow water where there is no wharf, but a sidewheeler has a more difficult approach — and therefore the former pattern was preferable in the Thompson waterways. The little Lady Dufferin, however, seems to have suffered no inconvenience, and perhaps enjoyed the distinction of being alone in her glory as a sidewheeler; she certainly had a much longer life than most of her sisters.

She was built at Tranquille in 1878 for William Fortune, prosperous mill-owner and farmer. At this period there were a considerable number of settlers coming into the area, and Kamloops itself was beginning to become something more than a small H.B.C. post and farm. There was consequently an increasing demand for transport of freight and passengers from the end of the wagon road at Savona's Ferry, and of farm produce, notably grain and potatoes, from outlying areas into Kamloops.

Up to this date there had been one steamer on the Thompson — the Marten, built in 1866 by the H.B.C. for the Big Bend gold rush. This had been taken over by Mara and Wilson, Kamloops merchants, in 1875, after lying disabled for some years. She was finally wrecked in 1877, and the owners were now planning a second steamer, the Spallumcheen, launched in 1878.

Fortune's desire for a steamer was probably due partly to his awareness of the growing demand for transport facilities for settlers, partly to the need to convey lumber from his sawmill to the ready market in Kamloops, and to collect grain for his flour mill — and partly, one would guess, to prevent Mara's monopoly of the steamer trade. There was no love lost between these pioneers!

In the spring of 1878, then, Neil Morrison, shipbuilder of Victoria, came to Tranquille to build, using lumber from the adjoining mill. Two new horizontal high pressure engines, made by Joseph Spratt of Victoria, were brought in; they had 8 inch cylinders, with a combined horse-power of 20.

She was a small ship compared with the Marten and later monsters of the Mara fleet, being 87.5 feet long and 16.0 breadth. The depth of the hold was 5.5 feet. She had one deck, a round stern, and a registered tonnage of 52.38. She is pictured at Sicamouse on the cover of this booklet.

The name Lady Dufferin honoured the wife of Canada's Governor-General. She had been very well-liked when they had visited this area in 1876. It has often been reported that they travelled from Savona to Kamloops on this steamer — a manifest impossibility, since it was not then built. Lady Dufferin's Journal describes their trip on the Marten.

The ship was finished in the summer of 1878, and launched by Wilhamena, a daughter of cattle rancher Louis Campbell. The Victoria Standard of Sept. 20 describes her first trip across the lake inlet to Kamloops, and then the journey to Savona to begin regular trips.

Despite an obvious rivalry between Mara and Fortune, both seem to have found it expedient and profitable to work in conjunction to some degree. Both the Spallumcheen and Lady Dufferin had regular runs between Savona and Spillamachene, with additional short trips to Kamloops only, and their schedules seem to have been sensibly dovetailed.

Passengers from both steamers used the Fortune ranch as an overnight stopping place, and probably also bought supplies from the Mara and Wilson store in Kamloops, conveniently near the wharf.

None the less, it was a business rather than a friendly relationship. James Andrew Mara was by now a wealthy member of the legislature, and a man of considerable dignity, but apparently not suitably respected by the Fortunes. One story tells how "Lady Jane" (Mrs. Fortune, business manager for her husband) clinched a heated argument with Mara by shoving him overboard into Kamloops Lake.

In 1880 Bishop and Mrs. Sillitoe visited the Interior for the first time; after travelling through the Okanagan they embarked on the Lady Dufferin at Lake Head, going to Eagle Pass and on to Kamloops, and later on to Savona. It would seem that the ship did not cater to passengers, and the Bishop, being unaware of this, was too hungry to appreciate the scenery fully!

The steamer continued very profitable for the next few years, in spite of much competition, as railway construction was planned and executed. During 1885 five steamers were kept busy — Mara's Spallumcheen, Peerless, and Kamloops, the C.P.R.'s Skuzzy, and the Lady Dufferin. Her captain at this time was Jules McWha, nephew to Mrs. Fortune.

In June 1886 Tranquille Mill was almost completely destroyed by fire, and the steamer, berthed alongside, was considerably damaged. She was soon repaired, but apparently not to her former glory for comfortable passenger transport. By now the C.P.R. had taken over this role.

However, the Lady Dufferin continued active for a while, mainly in transporting lumber for the sawmill, which was rebuilt, and in freighting for the outlying farmers, including Fortune's own fine crops of vegetables and fruit.

There is no mention of her after the summer of 1888; the official register was closed in 1897, when it was reported that she had been broken up and destroyed at some unspecified time.

THE QUEEN

The mortality rate among steamers on the lower Fraser was shockingly high; the Thompson had a much happier record. But there was one tragic incident — the drama of the Queen's short sad life.

She belonged to Jean Ernest Saucier, a French Canadian jeweller who had moved from Granite Creek to open a store in Kamloops in 1886 — a most energetic and inventive young man. In 1887 he visited Quebec to marry, and within two weeks of returning with his bride, he had rigged up a private telephone line between his home and store. Next year he moved to a new store just west of the Post Office, and started the Telephone Company, with 20 lines, and the exchange in his store.

He soon expanded his business by opening a branch store in Farwell (Revelstoke), and had agents in several interior centres. He also ran a small launch, Antoinette, named for his baby daughter.

In 1890 he stimulated the formation of Kamloops Electric Light Co., designing the plant and building the power house himself. James McIntosh was president, and W. T. Slavin a third partner, but the technical work was all Saucier's. Street lights were operating at the beginning of 1891 — an amazing achievement for a small village.

In 1892 he became a partner in Kamloops Coal Co., which hoped to develop coal deposits found about 50 miles up the North Thompson. Two years later, probably partly with a view to transporting the coal, he decided to build a stern-wheeler. In April the keel was laid, and Mr. Martin arrived to take charge of construction. Length was 78 feet, with 14 feet beam, and five feet depth of hold, with a passenger deck above. The sternwheel was 12 feet circumference. The draught was to be 18 inches when loaded, and the speed was expected to be 14 mph.

She was launched on May 16, 1894, and christened Queen by little Antoinette Saucier. The boiler from the old Lady Dufferin was installed when she reached the water, and tested by Inspector J. A. Thomson, who issued a permit for 85 lb. of steam.

She made her first trip, to Savona, on May 24, and this was followed by several excursions. By mid-June regular trips to Savona and Enderby were advertised; the ad, oddly enough, showed a small sidewheeler, probably that used earlier for the Lady Dufferin.

In July she left Kamloops early in the morning with freight for Louis Creek. There were eight men on board — Saucier, Captain Ritchie, Engineer J. T. Martin, the crew of fireman, cook, and deckhand, and passengers P. Olsen and F. Townson. At 7:30 a.m. she had gone about 10 miles up the river, just above Manahan's brickyard and McAulay's Ranch on the west bank, when she suddenly exploded. The cook and fireman were lost; the captain, engineer and deckhand were all scalded, and taken to hospital by Dr. Lambert when he arrived. The Inland Sentinel reported: —

"Mr. J. E. Saucier, describing the accident, says he was lying on a mattress when he heard a noise, like someone striking the boiler with a crowbar. He looked around quickly, and caught an instant glance of the boiler opening. When next he could realize his position he was whirling through the air, and fell upon the water, the mattress still below him, alighting quite softly. There were the bodies of the others just falling amid a shower of wood and debris from the boat. He scrambled to get on the largest part of the boat he could see floating, and to assist the other men.

Mr. P. Olsen, one of the prospectors of the Homestake Mine, was sleeping at the time. He clung to a piece of wood, and then helped extricate the captain, who was held between timbers. He afterwards got ashore by swimming. The captain, who was at the wheel, the boat being about to land, did not know what had happened to him until he found himself among the timbers at the bottom of the boat. Mr. Martin got hold of a piece of floating timber and so saved himself, scarcely getting wet. Louis Broulette was thrown into the water, and on coming to the top was so excited he swam ashore as fast as he could, and ran up the bank screaming.

Nothing was seen of the unfortunate man who were lost. One was Joseph Rushond, the fireman, uncle of Mrs. H. Duhamel of Kamloops. He leaves a wife and child in Vancouver. The other was Joseph Priette, the cook. Nothing is known of him but that he came from Massachusetts.

Frank Townson had been aboard, but went ashore a few minutes before to get Mr. McAulay to pilot the boat over the rapids. Several citizens had thought of going on the trip to J. F. Smith's landing for ore, but luckily changed their minds before departure of the boat."

The above report was later corrected; the scalded deckhand was Louis Brunelle, while the body of Louis Broulette, cook, was found a month later near Kamloops Lake, and identified by papers he carried. 1894 was the record flood year, and the current very powerful; the remains of the boat were washed inshore after drifting.

The other victim, Joseph Rachon the fireman, was not found until June of the following year, when Alex McLean discovered it in driftwood near the old Mission building. His niece, Mrs. Duhamel, was able to identify his watch and good-filled teeth.

The inquest on Broulette, followed by a belated and most unsavory official enquiry, showed that the safety valves were not working properly, and had most probably been screwed down to secure high pressure when going upstream against the flood water. Apparently the government safety valve had not been locked at the time of inspection, and the other valve had later had weights added. It seems that such illegal action had been fairly common in the early steamboat days below Yale, with explosions resulting occasionally. In the case of the Queen there was no proof of tampering, but many hard words were reported between Captain and Engineer.

The remains of the boat were towed to Kamloops, and next year the hull was fitted as a barge. Shortly afterwards Saucier left Kamloops, having applied for a coal licence near the mouth of the Clearwater, and his stock in the jewelry store, together with their household goods, were sold by the bailiff. He later returned to Quebec.

RAILWAY LINERS, LOGGERS, AND LADIES OF LEISURE!

In 1872 a small steamer, the first named Kamloops, was built for use by the C. P. R. Surveyors, then planning to build along the North Thompson route. She was used to take supplies from Savona at least as far as Clearwater until about 1878. August Menanteau, after his earlier training at sea and his subsequent handling of the Marten, made an excellent Captain, and was succeeded by A. J. Tolmie.

The last steamer built in the district had a similar purpose, but was the biggest of all in these waters — a monster of 379 tons. This was the Distributor, built by Twohy Brothers in 1912 for Canadian Northern Construction. She was reconstituted from dismantled parts of an earlier Distri-

butor, built by Alex Watson in 1908 for the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. She coped very efficiently with the fast North Thompson, but when her job was completed she was again dismantled, and achieved her last and longest incarnation for freight and passengers on the Mackenzie River.

In addition to these railway ships and the similar Skuzzy, mentioned earlier, there were many much smaller vessels, built for pleasure excursions or logging.

The Selkirk was built by Alex Watson in 1895 for Harold E. Foster — a small boat of 36 tons, mostly plying the North Thompson. She capsized in 1898 but was promptly resurrected. Soon afterwards she was partially dismantled, and shipped by rail to Golden to begin a new and successful career on the Kootenay service.

In 1895 Kualt lumberman Joe Genelle built the Thompson, an attractive ship, intended for excursions. But the demand was limited; after a few pleasurable outings and dignified protests that she was not a tow boat, she had to swallow her pride and turn to logging, and proved very useful under Captain W. F. Monteith.

G. B. Ward, himself both boat builder and captain, in 1896 built the little Fawn, but sold her next year, when she was shipped to Nakusp. He then built the Scud, soon changed to Ethel Ross, an elegant ship of 51 tons, much in favour for holiday trips and dancing by moonlight. As she grew older, however, she took to logging for Kamloops Sawmill, and was finally broken up in 1912.

The little Riffle was built by George Brown and Theodore Brookfield in 1902, and proved very popular for smaller groups on picnic trips. But she turned traitor to the paddlewheelers; in 1905 a screw propeller was installed!

Some vessels were unashamedly loggers. The Florence Carlin did sterling service for the Columbia River Lumber Co., while the Crombie and the Helen gave long and valiant years to the Adams River Lumber Co.

In 1907 Ward and his sons, Elmer and Arthur B., now old enough to be shipbuilding partners, tempted patrons to excursions on the Silver Stream, soon renamed Andover. She ran a regular service to Sicamous until 1915, and was revived after the war until 1921 on the Shuswap.

The Wards built a larger ship of 120 tons in the same year for Arrow Lakes Lumber Co., named C. R. Lamb for their president. Later, during the

Next year he refurnished her thoroughly, and in July advertised trips to Sorrento, where it was possible to connect with the Whitesmith under Captain J. J. Smith, then plying to Salmon Arm, Sicamous, and Seymour Arm. The return fare to Sorrento was \$3.50 with a good meal for 50¢ and a berth for \$1.00 on board, or a bed in Sorrento Lodge. A good orchestra was added, with dancing from 6 p.m.

One sometimes wonders whether this is necessarily the last chapter. The earlier excursion steamers failed when the inhabitants were few and the tourist industry minimal. Now we have a relatively huge population, and a crying need for something ‘different’, as our natural tourist attractions steadily decline. Perhaps some enterprising businessman will again set the paddlewheels in motion – although, sadly, not at Wm. Louie’s prices – and we can again enjoy the romance of dancing by moonlight as we churn our way along the placid South Thompson.

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