

Lakeboats of the Okanagan

by

R. Bruce Goett

MS 19

Acknowledgments

The author would like to gratefully acknowledge the following persons and institutions, without whose support, information, and interest this report would not have been possible.

- British Columbia Heritage Trust
- Island County Heritage and Cultural Society
- Spokane Museum
- Yakima Museum
- Frank Wilson

ABSTRACT

In this discussion, the boats which provided commercial passenger and freight service on Okanagan Lake from 1882 to 1973 are examined chronologically, and in depth. Though the vessels themselves are of great interest for their own sake, some emphasis has been placed on the role they played in the social and economic development of the area in which they served.

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The subject of Okanagan lake transport has been dissected and its separate parts examined by various researchers over the past several decades. However, as of yet there has not been a single, comprehensive examination of the entire subject. This, I have attempted to provide here. I should point out that I have not considered privately owned tug boats, of which there were several, which were primarily used to tow logs to various sawmills in the area. I have chosen to concentrate, instead, on those vessels which carried passengers and freight as they had a more direct impact on the social and economic life of the valley.

That is the key phrase here. Were it not for the lake boats which rose from very humble beginnings in about 1882, the social and economic history of the area would certainly have been very different. In the paper which follows, I have examined the boats, and I apologize for any omissions I may have made, partially for the sake of the boats themselves, but primarily to show that they were inextricably bound to the social and economic growth of this area. To put it simply, they made life much easier in what could be a very difficult area. It would be impossible, I think, to overestimate the importance of their contribution.

The earliest descriptions of transportation in the Okanagan Valley are found in Hudson's Bay Company records. Bales of furs were loaded onto pack horses at Fort Alexandria on the upper Fraser River and were moved via a trail through the McLeese Lake canyon, down to the North Thompson River valley, and onwards to Fort Kamloops. A trail from Kamloops by way of Monte Lake emerged near the head of Okanagan Lake. Through the Okanagan, the pack trains went where

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the going was easiest; at times along the lake, sometimes in the hills, or perhaps where good feed for the horses could be found (Watt 1963, 50). The group would eventually arrive at the confluence of the Okanagan and Columbia Rivers near the present site of Brewster Washington. The furs were then unloaded and shipped via water to England. This route was abandoned in 1847 (Ormsby 1935, 153).

In 1858, the Palmer and Miller expedition set out from Walla Walla Washington with nine wagons loaded with miner's supplies destined for Fort Kamloops. In order to cross Okanagan Lake, the wagons were dismantled and loaded onto 50 rafts along with the supplies. The horses and oxen then had to be herded back to Penticton and through the east side trail and Wild Horse Canyon, and on to Mission Creek where they met up with the wagons (Watt 1963, 51).

By 1875, the Cariboo gold rush was practically over and many of the miners began to look for land, a number filing claims in the North Okanagan. At that time, the O'Keefe Ranch near Vernon was the most southern point in the area to which a wagon road had been built. In January of 1875, a petition calling for the construction of a wagon road from the head of the lake to the Mission Valley was received by the Provincial Secretary's office in Victoria. The government granted 23,000 dollars and a contract was awarded to Phillip Parke for construction of a road 18 feet wide and about 40 miles long (Watt 1963, 52). As settlement moved southward, more roads were built.

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a dispatch to the home government on July 16, 1861, to propose that as a means of opening up the country and providing practical transportation, a steamboat be placed on each of Okanagan and Shuswap Lakes (Norris 1935). Although the need was recognized, it was not acted upon and an attempt to provide some sort of commercial transportation service on the lake was not to come for another 21 years, and was the product of private enterprise.

Captain Thomas D. Shorts was a true character in his day, and at one point in his life made a living selling self-threading needles on the streets of Philadelphia. Shorts was blessed with a keen imagination, and evidently was a man of some vision. He is reputed to have suggested building a canal from Enderby to the head of Okanagan Lake, but failed in his venture owing to a lack of financial backing (Simsy 1965, 145).

Shorts inaugurated passenger and freight service on Okanagan Lake in 1882 or 1883 with a rowboat he commissioned John Hamill and John Pringle of Spallumcheen to build for him. The 'Ruth Shorts,' named for his mother, was 22 feet long and had a capacity of 2.5 tons. Occasionally helped by a sail, the Captain rowed from one end of the lake to the other, a trip of about 75 miles. If the weather was good, a round trip from Okanagan Landing to Penticton and back took about nine days, with Captain and passengers sleeping on the beach at night and shooting deer for food. When the weather was bad it was an entirely different story. Shorts and a passenger were once marooned for a week while they waited out a storm (Simsy 1965, 145).

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of his trips, Shorts' passenger was the Indian Agent, Dr. I. W. Powell of Victoria, who suggested that Shorts purchase a particular make of marine engine which was very evident in advertisements of the day (Norris 1935, 260). With financial backing from Thomas Greenhow, who owned a cattle ranch at the head of the lake, Shorts placed the first steamboat on the lake and so began an era.

The 'Mary Victoria Greenhow,' named for the daughter of Thomas Greenhow, was launched on April 21, 1886. Built by Hamill and Pringle at Spallumcheen, she was 35 feet long with a six foot beam. The vessel was registered to carry five passengers and five tons of freight (Sismey 1965, 146). The engine, which was built by a firm in Rochester New York, and which is now on display in the Vernon Museum, utilized a coal-oil fired boiler. Unfortunately, the engine was designed for use in pleasure launches, not heavy freighters, and on his first trip, Shorts ran out of fuel before he was halfway to Penticton. He eventually reached his destination with the help of kerosene he was able to borrow from cabins along his route.



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While making a return trip from Penticton in the fall of 1886, Shorts stopped at Okanagan Mission and set out across the fields to Lequime's Store for a fresh supply of oil. When he returned, he found that the ship had caught fire and was badly damaged. He was able to get her back to Okanagan Landing where he attempted to convert her to a wood burner. As this was unsuccessful, he ordered a new boiler (Weeks 1935, 220).

During the summer of 1887, Shorts, with the help of a shipwright named John Hamilton, constructed a clinkerbuilt boat which was 30 feet long with an eight foot beam. The engine from the 'Greenhow' and a new boiler were installed, and the new boat, christened 'Jubilee' in honor of Queen Victoria's fiftieth year on the throne was launched on September 22, 1887 (Weeks 1935, 220).

The years 1888 and 1889 were very good ones for Shorts and the 'Jubilee.' As a result of a gold strike on Granite Creek, large volumes of supplies were being moved along Okanagan Lake to be carried into the Similkameen by pack trains. To handle the increase in business, Shorts built a barge to carry what could not be loaded onto the 'Jubilee' (Weeks 1935, 221).

In December, 1889, the 'Jubilee' was frozen into the ice at Okanagan Landing during a sudden cold spell and eventually sank. Shorts removed the engine and boiler from the vessel, installed them in the barge he had built, and christened the vessel 'City of Vernon.'

In the spring of 1890, Shorts, with money he had received from the sale of his ranch at Shorts Point in the fall of 1889, commissioned a new steamship. The woodwork was contracted to McAlpine and Allen of Vancouver. The boiler and engines were ordered from the Doty

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Engine Company of Toronto. The keel of the vessel was laid at Okanagan Landing in April, 1890, and the hull was ready for machinery in the middle of June of that year. The 'Penticton,' as she was named, was launched in September, 1890, and was the largest boat the lake had seen to that date.

'Penticton' Registered New Westminster no. 96948
Gross Tonnage* 49.69 Net Tonnage* 33.79
Length 70 feet Beam 16 feet

*Gross tons refers to the total interior space of a vessel while net tons is the measure of the space available for cargo.

The 'Penticton' was registered as a twin screw freight and passenger boat with room for 25 passengers (Weeks 1935, 222-223).

When the 'Penticton' was built, Shorts no longer had any need for the 'City of Vernon' which he sold to Alexander McAuley and Alexander Grant who operated a ranch five miles south of Okanagan Landing. Nicknamed the 'Mudhen' because of her tendency to sink, this boat evidently spent as much time under water as she did on top (Weeks 1935).

While Captain of the 'Penticton,' Shorts refused to follow any sort of schedule. Passengers and freight customers simply had to be prepared for the arrival of the boat wherever and whenever. In March of 1892, Shorts sold the 'Penticton' to Leon Lequime of Kelowna for 5,000 dollars (Weeks 1935).

In 1896, the 'City of Vernon' was bought by Ashton, Caesar, and Valentine who quickly realized that it would be necessary to build a new boat around the engine from the 'Mud Hen.' At about that time, they were offered the housework of the 'Penticton' by

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Leon Lequime who was in the process of converting the vessel for towing logs. The new ship, christened the 'Wanderer,' was 40 feet long with a beam of nine feet, six inches. The boat was used for odd jobs up and down the lake. Ore from the Morning Glory Mine was hauled to the stampmill at the head of the lake. She transported dynamite to Penticton as the 'Aberdeen,' which came into service in 1893 was not permitted to do so while there were

passengers aboard (Caesar, no date). In about 1899, the 'Wanderer' was sold to Walter D'Aeth who sold her to William Smith who moved her to Loog Lake where she was renamed 'Violet.'

Returning to 1890, competition for freight and passengers was beginning to appear on Okanagan Lake. At that time, Captain Shorts held a virtual monopoly with the 'Penticton.' In that year, however, a new boat, the 'Okanagan' entered lake service with a very interesting history behind her.

The 'S.S. Red Star' was built in 1887 by J. Nickols in Victoria.

'S.S. Red Star' no. 90787
Gross Tonnage 14.81 Net Tonnage 10.08
Length 33 feet Beam 9 feet Depth 3 feet

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However, when loaded, the vessel drew too much water to get over the sandbars in the Spallumcheen River. She sank in 1888, was raised, beached, and her machinery was removed and placed in a scow shaped sternwheeler built by R. P. Rithet in the same year (Norris 1931). This boat, the second 'Red Star,' was captained by Duncan Gordon Cumming and carried freight and passengers between Sicamous and Enderby during construction of the Shuswap and Okanagan Railway.

Shortly after she sank, Alex Dow and Allan Gillis came up with the idea of moving the remains of the original 'Red Star' to the head of the lake. In 1889, B. E. Young of Armstrong moved the hull which was lying on the shore of the Spallumcheen at Enderby to Okanagan Landing. The vessel was lengthened by 20 feet, and new machinery furnished by Nicholles and Renouf of Victoria was installed (Campbell 1931, 8).

The name of the vessel was changed to 'Okanagan' without the permission of the Governor in Council and in 1890 began unscheduled freight and passenger service on Okanagan Lake. This was shortlived, however, and in 1891 she was sold to the Lequime brothers who used her as a camp tender and for towing logs. In May of 1894, the boat was bought by W. B. Couson and Angus Campbell. In July 1895 she was loaded onto two flat cars and was shipped to Revelstoke. She served on Kootenay Lake until 1915 (Campbell 1931).

In the spring of 1893, a small steamer named the 'Miramichi' stopped in at Kelowna on its way down the lake. It was pulling a scow loaded with materials needed for the construction of a sawmill which was to be built at Okanagan Falls. The boat was owned by W. J. Snodgrass who planned to operate the 'Miramichi' from Penticton,

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on the Okanagan River and Dog Lake, to Okanagan Falls on a permanent schedule (Clement 1959, 134-135). Whether or not he actually accomplished this is obscured by time.

Also in 1893, the tiny steam launch 'Jessie' was imported from the coast, perhaps by W. J. Snodgrass. In that year she ran between Penticton and Okanagan Falls (Affleck 1973). As with the 'Miramichi,' about all we know about this vessel is her name.

At about the time of the sale of the 'Penticton' to the Lequimes, C.P.R. was beginning to realize the potential for growth in the Okanagan and began to plan for the construction of their own vessel. This marks the second era of transportation on Okanagan Lake. This might well be called the Rail Era, and coincides with a period of greatly accelerated economic and social development which occurred in the valley during the last decade of the 1800's, and the first decade of the 1900's. This was a time of unprecedented increases in fruit production and settlement. It was no coincidence that at this time, the Okanagan had, for the first time in its history, an effective, reliable transportation system which offered easy access to formerly inaccessible areas of the lakeshore and hinterland.

From this point on our subject takes on a very different character. It marks the end of the viability of small, rustic watercraft providing irregular but vital service. We now see the appearance of a regular, reliable transportation service which catered to the economic, social, and cultural needs of the people it served. The new generation of lake boats provided luxury which could not be found anywhere else, and to this day the 'Great White Swans' of Okanagan lake are fondly remembered by many valley residents.

on the Okanagan River and Dog Lake, to Okanagan Falls on a permanent schedule (Clement 1959, 134-135). Whether or not he actually accomplished this is obscured by time.

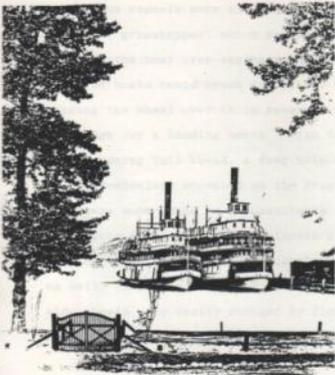
Also in 1893, the tiny steam launch 'Jessie' was imported from the coast, perhaps by W. J. Snodgrass. In that year she ran between Penticton and Okanagan Falls (Affleck 1973). As with the 'Miramichi,' about all we know about this vessel is her name.

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It is not a commonly known fact that sternwheelers were used more extensively in British Columbia than in any other part of North America even though they are popularly associated with the Mississippi River area of the United States (Downs 1967, 7). It was no accident that such a high concentration of these vessels was found here. They could do things that no other type of boat could do, and they could do it profitably.

Early vessels were built with a wooden hull which was not only extremely boyant but fairly easy to repair. For example, on the Upper Fraser, the 'B.X.' struck a rock and tore 60 foot long, three foot wide hole in her hull. Her captain managed to get her to shore



before she sank, and she was back in service a few weeks later (Downs 1967, 7). The paddlewheel had a very practical function in that it needed just a few inches of water to produce very powerful thrust. The construction and maintenance costs of such vessels was low in comparison with vessels of conventional design (Estabrooks 1968, 28).

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Sternwheelers could be run ashore, bow first. For many years, the only way most points along the lake could be

visited by boat. Thus, it was necessary that ships be capable of landing anywhere. In the Okanagan, anyone could call the boat in by signalling with a white cloth, or by building two fires on the shore.

Sternwheelers were equipped with a unique mechanism called 'dual control' which allowed the captain to swing the stern of the boat back and forth, wiggling the bow off the bank. With the wheel running in reverse, a solid current of water was thrown against three or four rudders which were attached to the hull transom. By moving the rudders, the stern could be swung either way. These same rudders steered the boat while moving ahead (Estabrooks 1968, 28).

These vessels were also equipped with a block and tackle device called a 'grasshopper' which was mounted on the bow. It was used to hoist the boat over sandbars and shoals (Downs 1967, 7).

The boats could break ice either by pushing a barge, or by running the wheel over it in reverse. The wheel could also be used to dredge out a landing berth. With the vessel held fast and the wheel running full ahead, a deep hole was soon made.

Sidewheelers appeared on the Fraser River in 1858. However, they were soon found to be unsuitable in the face of the demanding conditions found on British Columbia's waterways. They required a wharfe, something of a luxury in the Okanagan during the early years. As well, they were difficult to handle in narrow channels and the side wheels were easily damaged by floating debris and riverbanks (Downs 1967, 7).

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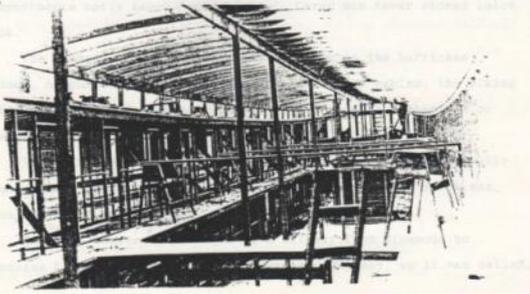
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In terms of construction, all sternwheelers were built along the same basis lines. They were generally quite long and wide, averaging about 125 feet by 30 feet. The hull was flat bottomed, did not have an external keel, and was very shallow, much like a dish. Because of their length and absence of an external keel,

the hulls tended to sag at bow and stern. To combat this tendency, a very simple yet effective rigging system was employed.

Attached to the center keelson and rising well above the top deck was an upright like a mast which was called the kingpost.

The kingpost, or posts, was attached to bow and stern by hogchains. On either side of the kingpost were additional uprights known as hogposts. These were also rigged to bow and stern by hogchains whose tension could be adjusted by means of turnbuckles. Kingposts can often be distinguished by the presence of a brass or gold coloured ball on top while hogposts carried no decoration. The end



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British Columbia sternwheelers usually had three decks. The first, or main deck contained the boiler, engine room, fire box, cargo space, crew's quarters, and usually the kitchen. Between the main deck and the hull there were usually several water tight compartments aptly named 'snag rooms.' Cargo was never stored below deck.

The second, or cabin deck was also known as the hurricane, saloon, or promenade. It contained the passenger cabins, the dining room, and usually a saloon or observation lounge at either bow or stern, or both.

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The 'Aberdeen' was launched on May 3, 1893 at Okanagan Landing before a very large crowd of onlookers. The gross tonnage of this vessel exceeded that of her largest predecessor by ten times.

'Aberdeen' Registered Vancouver no. 100675

Gross Tonnage 554.04 Net Tonnage 349.05
Length 146 feet Beam 29 feet Depth 8 feet 8 inches

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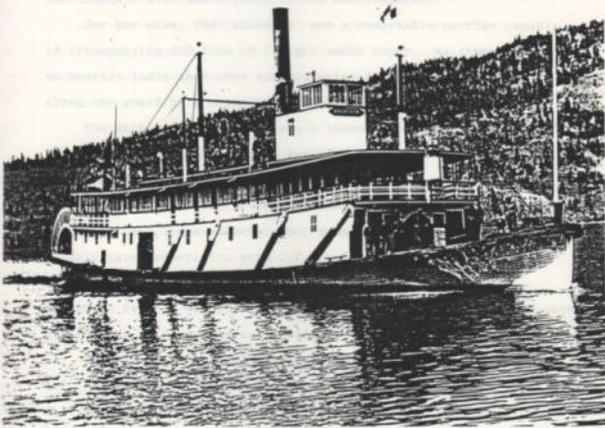
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The ship had a wooden hull, two decks, and a pilot house. Originally a wood burner, she was later converted to coal. For the comfort of her passengers, the vessel was appointed with 11 staterooms and three saloons. There were white sheets on the beds and screens to keep out mosquitoes. The saloons were furnished with easy and comfortable chairs, and a bar was available if the passengers requested. The dining room, which was noted for its excellent meals,

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The ship's boiler, which was a locomotive type, was built by the C.P.R. shops in Montreal. Her twin engines were built by the B.C. Iron Works of Vancouver.

One person who expressed resentment over the launching of the 'Aberdeen' was Thomas Shorts, who, despite being boatless, threw himself into competition with C.P.R. He found a small boat which he named 'Lucy,' and set out to challenge what he called the 'Canadian Pacific octopus.' His bold attempt was a disaster, however, and he gave up steamboating in disgust (Simsley 1965, 149).

The 'Aberdeen' began scheduled service in June of 1893. She left Okanagan Landing Monday, Wednesday, and Friday upon arrival of the train at 10:30 A.M. The boat reached Kelowna at about 1:00 P.M., and Penticton at 4:30 P.M. A return trip was made Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, leaving Penticton at 12:00 P.M., reaching Kelowna at about 3:00 P.M., and Okanagan Landing in time to connect with the train to Sicamous (Clement 1959). The ship could be called in to any point along the shore, whether for a single package, or for a full cargo.

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Meanwhile, within the Okanagan Valley, Okanagan Center, Peachland, Summerland, Nahun, and other settlements were developing, the 'Aberdeen' bringing settlers and their effects as well as thousands of fruit trees.

In 1894, a second sternwheeler went into service in the Okanagan. She was the 'Fairview' which was built by M. E. Cousens, chief engineer on the 'Aberdeen.'

'Fairview' Registered Victoria no. 103473
Gross Tonnage 42.58 Net Tonnage 26.83
Length 55 feet Beam 15 feet Depth 2 feet 9 inches

The 'Fairview' had a single passenger cabin which was 13 feet by 18 feet, and was operated by a three man crew; captain, engineer, and deckboy. She was designed and built for the run from Penticton to Okanagan Falls along the Okanagan River. However, the river proved to be somewhat shallow and difficult to navigate. On one occasion a snag ripped off part of the ship's sternwheel and rudder. The 'Fairview' will perhaps best be remembered for a voyage during which the limb of a tree tore through the pilot house and knocked the captain overboard (Downs 1971, 21).

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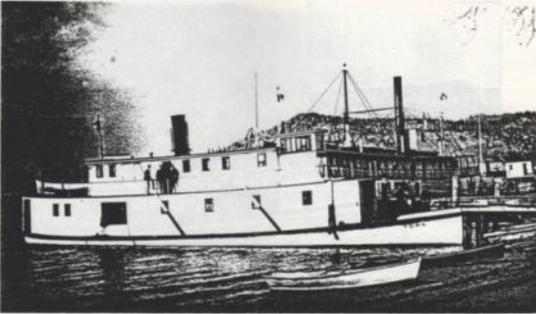
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By the beginning of the twentieth century, the 'Aberdeen' was hard pressed to handle the demand for service. When it came time for a lengthy re-fit, C.P.R. diverted the 'York' which was being shipped in sections from Toronto for use in the Trout Lake service, to Okanagan Landing.

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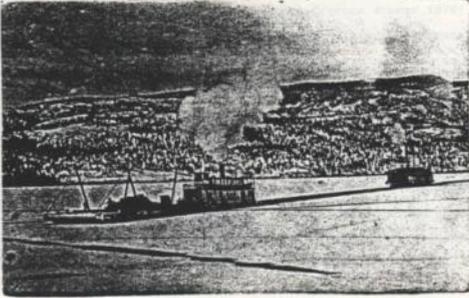
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The steel hulled 'York,' built in Toronto by Bertrams in 1901, arrived at Okanagan Landing on November 28, 1901, and was launched on January 18, 1902 (Weeks 1969; Affleck 1973, 86). By the time the 'Aberdeen' had returned to service it was the height of the fruit season so the 'York' was kept on. She provided way point service, that is, stopped wherever she was called in, while the 'Aberdeen' maintained limited express service. As by this time demand for boat service warranted two vessels on the lake, it was decided the 'York' would remain until a second sternwheeler could be built.

The first decade of this century was a boom one in the Okanagan. Thousands of acres of orchard were beginning to bear fruit, and more ranch land was being converted to fruit growing. The 'Aberdeen,' with assistance from the 'York' simply could not keep up with the



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'Okanagan' Registered Vancouver no. 122379	
Gross Tonnage 1077.78	Net Tonnage 679.01
Length 193 feet 2 inches	Beam 32 feet 3 inches
Depth 7 feet 7 inches	Draft 5 feet

As these figures reveal, the 'Okanagan' was considerably larger than the 'Aberdeen.' She was also much more luxurious. Built with a steel hull, she had three decks plus a pilot house. The express office, galley, washrooms, cabins and messroom for the crew, and the ship's 24 ton engines were located in the lower deck.

The main deck featured two saloons. One of these, the dining saloon was serviced from the galley below by a dumb waiter. Cabins on this deck were decorated in enamel and gold, and one could not expect to find finer furnishings (Vernon Museum 1978).

The third deck contained a small writing room, an observation room/saloon, 16 staterooms, and cabins for captain and officers. Lighting throughout the ship was electric and elegant chandeliers hung in the saloons. The 'Okanagan' could accommodate 250 passengers in unheard of luxury and comfort.



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On the day the 'Okanagan' was launched, the mayor of Vernon declared a half day holiday and a special train ran to Okanagan Landing where a very large crowd gathered to witness the event. On June 6, 1907, she began a limited express service, making a daily round trip between Okanagan Landing and Penticton with stops at Summerland, Peachland, and Kelowna (Turner 1984; Affleck 1973, 89). The 'Aberdeen' continued to make her three trips a week, stopping at all of the way points along the lake.

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and she was sold to the Kettle Valley Railroad and was moved to Skaha Lake in 1919.

In 1910, a third sternwheeler joined the C.P.R. fleet in the Okanagan. The 'Kaleden' was built to operate on the Okanagan River and Skaha Lake.

'Kaleden' Registered Vancouver no. 126898

Gross Tonnage 180.14

Net Tonnage 113.94

Length 94 feet

Beam 18 feet 4 inches

Depth 4 feet 6 inches

Draft 15 inches

From her very launching this vessel was to prove to be somewhat of an embarrassment to the company much to the amusement of valley residents who witnessed her comings and goings. On the day of her maiden voyage, the 'Kaleden,' which was of very light construction, could not pull away from the wharfe because of the wind. Then, a joint blew off of the main steam pipe. The engineer was unable to hear the bells from the wheel house through the shriek of the escaping steam and the ship ran ashore opposite Okanagan Landing (Weeks 1969).

By the time the 'Kaleden' was due to begin service on the Okanagan River the watercourse had been dredged and cleared of snags. On her first trip down the river, she had two captains aboard; D. C. McMorris in command, and J. C. Gore as observer. Although the vessel was supposed to be able to navigate bath tub deep water, there was not that depth in the river. She bounced from sandbar to sandbar and from bank to bank much to the consternation of her captain and crew who were forced to jump into the river to push the 'Kaleden' downstream. At one point, she completely jammed herself sideways, creating a dam. It took her crew three days to push and pry her

and she was sold to the Kettle Valley Railroad and was moved to Skaha Lake in 1919.

In 1910, a third sternwheeler joined the C.P.R. fleet in the Okanagan. The 'Kaleden' was built to operate on the Okanagan River and Skaha Lake.

'Kaleden' Registered Vancouver no. 126898

Gross Tonnage 180.14

Net Tonnage 113.94

Length 94 feet

Beam 18 feet 4 inches

Depth 4 feet 6 inches

Draft 15 inches

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12 miles downstream, and a week to get her back up. This was the first and last trip the 'Kaleden' made on the Okanagan River (Downs 1971, 21-22).

The vessel was put into service on Okanagan Lake where she was used primarily as a freighter. During construction of the Kettle Valley Railroad, she carried tons of blasting powder. Ironically, this rail line, which was a C.P.R. subsidiary built to link the Kootenays, Kettle Valley and South Okanagan to Vancouver via Penticton and Hope, signalled the beginning of the end for Okanagan sternwheelers (Downs 1971).

The year 1913 marked 20 years of service for the 'Aberdeen', which was now approaching retirement. Work on the Kettle Valley line was progressing well, and Penticton, a major supply point, was experiencing a boom. In order to maintain continuity of service, C.P.R. began construction of a new ship.

The 'Sicamous' was launched on May 19, 1914, and at the time, with the exception of the 'Bonnington' which had more sleeping accommodation, was the largest and most luxurious member of Canadian Pacific Railway's fleet of inland lake steamers (Orchard City Record, June 18, 1914). The vessel was pre-fabricated by Western Drydock and Shipbuilding Company of Port Arthur, Ontario. When launched, 180,000 dollars had gone into her.

The ship's steel hull had 20 watertight compartments. With her tandem-compound jet condensing engines, the 'Sicamous' was capable of carrying 310 passengers and freight at 17 knots.

'Sicamous' Registered Vancouver no. 134276
Gross Tonnage 1786.65 Net Tonnage 994.39

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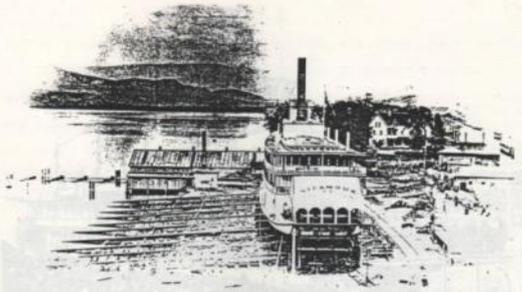
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Length 200 feet 5 inches Beam 40 feet
 Depth 8 feet Draft 5 feet 5 inches

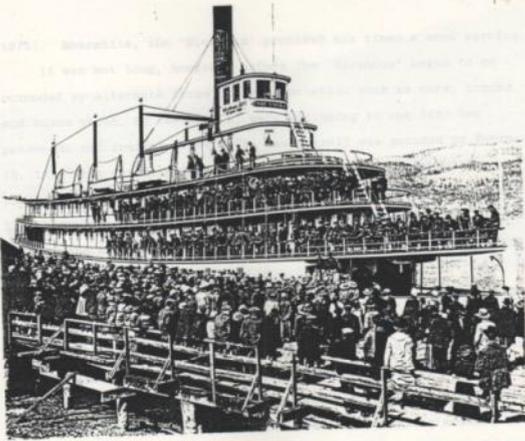
When they stepped aboard the 'Sicamous,' passengers entered a different world. Her interiors were furnished with gleaming British Columbia cedar and Douglas fir, Australian mahogany, and teak from Burma. Her brass fittings and table lamps were imported from Scotland. Stained glass skylights bathed travellers in a rainbow of colour. The ship's 65 foot long dining room could seat 48 people at a time and became famous outside the valley for spotless linen, and excellent food and service. This vessel indeed deserved the title of 'Queen of Okanagan Lake.'

Unfortunately, the 'Sicamous' probably could not have gone into service at a worse time. Her arrival was marked with celebration. She was welcomed at every community by throngs of people on her maiden voyage. War clouds were gathering in Europe, however, and soon her decks were crowded with men on their way overseas.

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In 1914, the 'Okanagan' was withdrawn from service for several months for a re-fit. By 1915, expansion in the valley had ground to a halt. The labour supply virtually disappeared as valley men, the majority of them originally from England, enlisted. The fruit boom collapsed as settlement slowed and orchards went uncared for, and as a result, freight shipments declined. In 1916, the 'Aberdeen' was laid up and was sold out of service (Affleck 1973).

The completion of the Kettle Valley Railway in 1916 caused a further decline in freight volumes. The 'Kaleden' was laid up and the 'Okanagan' was used only as a relief vessel except during the summer when she provided express service for fruit (Affleck

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It was not long, however, before the 'Sicamous' began to be outmoded by alternate forms of transportation such as cars, trucks, and buses which, by the 1920's, were beginning to cut into her passenger and freight trade. The death knell was sounded on February 15, 1926 when Canadian National Railways completed a spur line from Kamloops to Kelowna. Half of the run of the 'Sicamous' was cut off. In the meantime, the Kettle Valley Railway had been handling a great deal of the westbound traffic from the southern part of the valley since 1916.

Sternwheeler service was terminated by C.P.R. in April of 1931. However, because of protestations from area boards of trade, the 'Sicamous' was kept on for a few more years. It was a futile gesture by that time, and on January 5, 1935 she was tied up at Okanagan Landing. In an attempt to reduce operating costs her top deck was removed but she was used only during the fruit shipping seasons of 1935 and 1936. Her last trip was made in 1936 when she was chartered by the Penticton Gyro club.

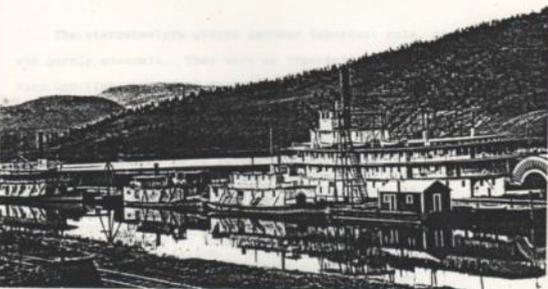
The 'Sicamous' was moored at Okanagan Landing until 1951 when the city of Penticton purchased her for one dollar. On August 31, 1951 she was towed to her permanent mooring place on the west end of Penticton Beach. Today she is one of only two sternwheelers which have survived in British Columbia. The 'Aberdeen' was dismantled in 1917. The 'Kaleden' was scrapped in 1918, her housework becoming a garage and her hull a breakwater. The 'Okanagan' was dismantled between 1938 and 1941. Her housework was broken up into cabins which were to be found on the shores of Okanagan Lake for many years, and

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her boiler was used in a Kelowna cannery (Downs 1971, 24).

And thus, the day closed on a very important period in the history of the Okanagan Valley. It would be very difficult to exaggerate the importance of the contribution these vessels made to the economic and social life of the area. They provided a reliable transportation system which gave great impetus to ongoing development and made it possible to tap the potential found there.

In order for fruit growing as a commercial enterprise to be successful, more was needed than just climate, soil, and water. Fruit had to be moved very quickly, efficiently, and cheaply if the large markets to the east and on the west coast were to be broken into. The sternwheelers were the means to that end. Where roads did not exist the boat simply ran up onto the beach, or up to the wharfe to collect a shipment of fruit. Even the relatively slow 'Aberdeen' could ensure that a box of apples would make it to the railhead from any point on the lake the next day.

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The sternwheelers played another important role, one which was not purely economic. They were an important center for social activity. Mary Orr (interviewed by Wayne Wilson) describes the 'Sicamous':

. . . we would get on the 'Sicamous' and go as far as Peachland to visit our friends, the Harold McCall's. They had children in their family about the same age as my brother and I. So we would do this once or twice in the summertime and they would return the visits, coming to see us, and this was considered a real excursion in those days, as we didn't travel very far out of the valley. (Our) roads, such as they were, were very dusty, very crooked and took such a long time so it was obviously a great treat to go on this beautiful, as I call it, floating palace. . . . I do remember the elegance of the white linen table cloths, and the plush carpets that we certainly didn't have at home. I remember the waiters . . . with white jackets on and a cloth over their arms as they waited on tables. I know a story of a Grade Eight teacher back in 1925, took her class from Peachland for a ride to Kelowna on the boat, because some of the children had never been on, they'd seen it come and go because everyone went to the wharfe in those days, soon as they heard the whistle, that was the signal, drop everything and go see who's coming or who's going or what's happening. Even the dogs would follow along. . . . There were concerts and in those days every town, well, every large town, had its theatrical group. . . . And they would go back and forth with their concerts to entertain the people. . . . I say that the 'Sicamous' provided a stateliness, a dignity, a peacefulness, a nobility to our lives that many of us will never forget.

Joe Harris (interviewed by Wayne Wilson), another long time valley resident, sums up the importance of the lake boats in general to Okanagan Center; 'Okanagan Center always had a crowd, because it was their only communication with the outside world, except by a democrat road over the hill and it was really a part of life, it was something.

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pers. comm.), a resident of Okanagan Center, recalls that one could order meat from Vernon in the morning, and it would arrive on the 'Sicamous' at 3:00 the same day.

The next generation of lake boats installed by the rail companies were the 'regular' tug boats which were contemporaries of the stern-wheelers, but which eventually replaced them. As passenger volumes on the boats began to decline, it became pointless to keep vessels such as the 'Sicamous' on the freight run when much smaller, cheaper, and more economical vessels could do the job as well if not better.

C.P.R. barge service began in 1908 when the 'Aberdeen' pushed a barge loaded with freight cars from the C.P.R. terminal at Okanagan Landing to Kelowna. This method was so successful and economical that service was extended to Penticton, and yards were laid out at isolated communities along the lake such as Okanagan Center, Westbank, Summerland, and Naramata (Estabrooks 1968, 27).

As traffic in car barges increased, C.P.R. began to build powerful tugs for this service. In 1911, the company launched the steam tug 'Castlegar' which was the first of the regular tow boat class of steamers to be built by the company for use on the lake.

'Castlegar' Registered Vancouver no. 130447	
Gross Tonnage 104.15	Net Tonnage 70.83
Length 94 feet 4 inches	Beam 19 feet 4 inches

The wooden hulled 'Castlegar' pushed the first barge to the new Kettle Valley Railway dock at Penticton in December 1911. On October 26, 1912, she ferried the first locomotive to be used on the line (Simsley 1972, 168). The 'Castlegar' was dismantled in 1925 and her boiler and engines were placed in the 'Roseberry' on Slokan Lake.

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In 1913, a second C.P.R. tug entered service. The 'Naramata,' which may be seen at her moorage at Okanagan Landing was built at Port Arthur Ontario by the Port Arthur Drydock and Shipbuilding Company and was assembled at Okanagan Landing.

'Naramata' Registered Victoria no. 134271
Gross Tonnage 149.94 Net Tonnage 73.67
Length 89 feet 8 inches Beam 19 feet 5 inches

The vessel pushed car barges and was pressed into service as an icebreaker when necessary. The 'Naramata' made one last trip on May 18, 1965 while the tug 'Okanagan' was in drydock for an overhaul (Sismey 1972, 168).



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The launch of the 'Kelowna' in 1920, brought to three the total number of C.P.R. tugs operating on the lake.

'Kelowna' Registered Vancouver no. 150271
Gross Tonnage 95.97 Net Tonnage 34.69
Length 89 feet Beam 19 feet 4 inches
Built by Nickson Construction at Okanagan Landing at a cost of 35,700 dollars, this vessel had a wooden hull and was powered by a 150 horse-power engine which was taken from the C.P.R. tug 'Watschan' on the Arrow Lakes (Weeks 1969). The 'Kelowna' was sold for scrap in 1957.

The last of the C.P.R. boats to ply the lake was the motor vessel 'Okanagan.' This was the first diesel ship built by the company to serve on Okanagan Lake. The vessel was built in Seattle and was shipped to Kelowna by truck, and was launched on February 18, 1947.

'M.V. Okanagan'
Gross Tonnage 204
Length 110 feet Beam 23 feet

With her 800 horsepower Washington diesel, the 'Okanagan' could push two loaded barges each weighing about 700 tons at 11 miles per hour (Sismey 1972).

The 'Okanagan' made her last trip on May 31, 1972, and after 80 years of service on the lake, the red and white checkered flag of Canadian Pacific came down. The 'Okanagan' was moored at Fintry until 1981 when she was bought for conversion to a floating restaurant. This venture failed, however, and the vessel is now moored at Kelowna.

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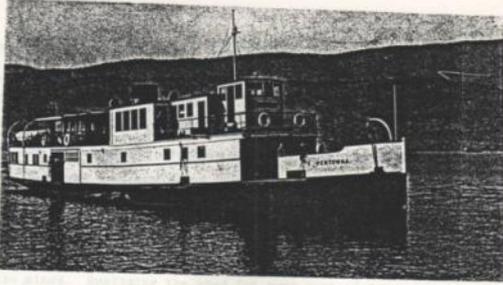
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Like the sternwheelers, the railroad tugs provided an essential service in the years before it was practical to move large volumes of freight through the Okanagan by land. However, as with the sternwheelers, progress brought about the demise of these vessels. Their decline in importance may be traced to the opening of the Okanagan Lake floating bridge in 1958, which produced an unbroken corridor by road from one end of the valley to the other. Perhaps a more decisive factor was the refusal, by the city of Kelowna, to renew C.P.R.'s lease to waterfront property upon which its operations were based, and which the city wanted for development. On May 31, 1972, Canadian Pacific lake operations in the Okanagan ended. Canadian National, having experienced no appreciable increase in traffic ended their

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No examination of Okanagan Lake transportation can be called complete without consideration of another facet which was once very much in evidence. Though they lacked the grace and sheer novelty of the sternwheelers, ferries also provided a vital service in the years before the completion of a bridge across the lake.

During the 1885 Granite Creek gold rush, many miners bought their supplies at Kelowna which is situated at the narrowest point of the lake. These then had to be carried across the lake and packed into the mines. Realizing the need for some sort of ferry service, Eneas and David McDougall placed a scow on the lake in the same year. Their vessel, which was 16 feet long and 10 or 12 feet wide depended on the rowing ability of its passengers for its motive power. Its capacity was three heavy horses or five pack horses (Hayman 1943, 39).

This first ferry was not outstanding for its efficiency of service, and after the Granite Creek rush died out it was used only occasionally. When a person seeking passage arrived on the west side, he first had to find the trail to Eneas' house which was four miles away. If McDougall happened to be away, which was often the case, the traveller had to swim his horse across the lake. This was accomplished simply enough by two people and a rowboat, one rowing, the other holding a rope tied to the horse (Hayman 1943, 39-40).

For the next 20 years, irregular ferry service was provided by several small boats including the McDougall scow. By the time the election year of 1905 had arrived, the community of Westbank had grown to some significance and local residents, at a meeting for candidate Price Ellison, requested a ferry. Ellison was elected and

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No examination of Okanagan Lake transportation can be called complete without consideration of another facet which was once very much in evidence. Though they lacked the grace and sheer novelty of the sternwheelers, ferries also provided a vital service in the years before the completion of a bridge across the lake.

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This first ferry was not outstanding for its efficiency of service, and after the Granite Creek rush died out it was used only occasionally. When a person seeking passage arrived on the west side, he first had to find the trail to Eneas' house which was four miles away. If McDougall happened to be away, which was often the case, the traveller had to swim his horse across the lake. This was accomplished simply enough by two people and a rowboat, one rowing, the other holding a rope tied to the horse (Hayman 1943, 39-40).

For the next 20 years, irregular ferry service was provided by several small boats including the McDougall scow. By the time the election year of 1905 had arrived, the community of Westbank had grown to some significance and local residents, at a meeting for candidate Price Ellison, requested a ferry. Ellison was elected and

a petition calling for the establishment of a regularly scheduled ferry on Okanagan Lake was circulated in Kelowna, Vernon, Peachland, and Summerland (Hayman 1943).

Tenders were called for, and a subsidy of 1000 dollars per year was offered to provide two round trips, weather permitting, daily, except Sunday, commencing April 1, 1906. H. B. D. Lysons won the contract and built the 'Skookum,' also known as the 'Tut-tut' which was 30 feet long and powered by a one cylinder, seven horsepower Turscott engine, and a scow measuring 40 feet by 16 feet (Hayman 1943, 41).

In 1907, the ferry charter along with the 'Skookum' and scow was bought by L. A. Hayman who had a new boat, the 'Clovelly' built in the fall of that year. With this vessel he ran ferry service to Westbank, made two trips per week to Bear Creek, and hauled feed and lumber to ranches along the lake, and fruit back to Kelowna (Hayman 1943).

Meanwhile, in 1907, Naramata was an isolated community. A trail offered access to Penticton but the only regular contact with the outside world was via the 'Okanagan' which called in twice a day. A small steamer called the 'Maude Moore,' owned by J. M. Robinson and based in Summerland made occasional trips to Naramata.

Late in 1907, Robinson persuaded the provincial government to grant a subsidy for operation of a regular ferry linking Summerland and Naramata. Tenders went out, and the contract was awarded to C. Noel Higgin. Avis Boat Works were commissioned to build a 30 foot cabin launch named the 'Mallard,' and the James brothers built a 25 foot scow. The ferry made two scheduled return trips a day, more if

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Figure 1: Kelowna-Westbank Ferry Petition
From the Kelowna Clarion, February 9, 1905.

To Cross the Lake.

Mr. McLennan has charge of the following petition for the placing of a ferry on Okanagan Lake. Copies will be circulated at Kelowna, Vernon, Peachland, and Summerland, and will be handed to Price Ellison, M. P. P. for presentation to the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works. We will expect to see the ferry established next summer.

TO THE HONORABLE,
CHIEF COMMISSIONER OF LANDS
AND WORKS,

VICTORIA, B. C.

We the undersigned residents of _____ and vicinity respectfully desire to draw the attention of the Government to the great and pressing necessity for the establishment of a ferry on Okanagan Lake between the town of Kelowna and McLennan's Landing on the west side, or at some point near the latter place, for the following reasons:

1. The country is practically broken in two at this point, the road from the north terminating at the water's edge at Kelowna, and from the south at McLennan's on the west side; hence the need for a ferry to supply the missing link and make connection with points further south.

2. There is a large amount of good agricultural land on the west side of the lake, which, if a ferry were on the lake, would at once be occupied and improved, and would thus become a source of revenue to the Government as well as an important addition to the agricultural area of the Okanagan. A large amount of this land is at present unsettled owing to the fact that there is no communication with the outside world except by row boats, and people hesitate to settle in a district under such conditions.

3. To secure safety of life to the settlers already on the west side and to the travelling public in general. Sad drowning accidents have already occurred at this place, and, as the people increase in numbers, the greater will be the degree of accident.

4. The Okanagan Lake is about eighty miles in length, and has no ferry crossing it anywhere. Kelowna is situated at the centre of the narrowest portion of the lake, it would be the most convenient for all sections concerned.

So, for the preservation of life and the convenience of the public, we respectfully request the Government to establish a ferry at this point.

Figure 1: Kelowna-Westbank Ferry Petition
From the Kelowna Clarion, February 9, 1905

necessary (Higgin 1951).

Competition arose between the 'Mallard,' which could carry 12 passengers, and Robinson's 'Maude Moore.' In 1908, however, the rivals consolidated to form the Okanagan Lake Boat Company. The 'Mallard' was sold to James Ritchie who placed her on Skaha Lake. The official ferry was then the 'Maude Moore' which was a 42 foot long, wood burning steamer built in Peterborough in 1899.

Shortly thereafter, a second boat, the 'Rattlesnake,' was brought into service by the company. Originally called the 'Orillia' before she was bought and renamed by Robinson, this vessel was launched in 1907 and was intended to be used for towing logs.

'Orillia' ('Rattlesnake')	Registered New Westminster no. 111610
Gross Tonnage 12.40	Net Tonnage 8.56
Length 36 feet	Beam 8 feet 2 inches

In 1911, the Okanagan Lake Boat Company was sold to Peter Roe. Later, he replaced the 'Maude Moore,' which was beached and eventually burned on the shore at Naramata, and the 'Rattlesnake' with two gas boats. There was a boom for three or four years while the Kettle Valley Railway was being built. However, this died out when the line was completed, and when the Naramata-Penticton road was built the need for a ferry disappeared and the charter was discontinued (Higgin 1951, 94).

From 1912 to 1916, the Kelowna-Westbank ferry was operated by J. Y. Campbell who had the motor vessel 'Aricia' built in 1912. The vessel was 50 feet long with a 12 foot beam. The ferry charter and 'Aricia' were bought by L. A. Hayman in 1916.

In 1924, the 'Aricia,' with Captain Hayman in command provided

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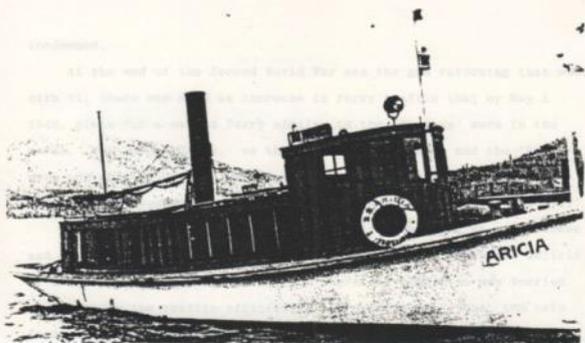
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what was probably the most exciting episode in Okanagan Lake boating history. The ferry ran onto the rocks near the Westbank Landing during a gale one night in the fall of that year. The passengers took to the lifeboat, and the scow, which had been cast off was blown down the lake. It was retrieved by another boat and every passenger and car was safely landed at Westbank just an hour and a half late (Hayman 1943).

In 1927, the provincial government took over ferry service and launched the wooden hulled 'Kelowna-Westbank.' By 1938, however, the single ferry with 15 car capacity could not keep up with the demand, and the Kelowna Courier began a campaign for improved service. In 1939, the 'Pendozy,' an all steel ferry which could carry 30 cars was launched. Shortly after the 'Pendozy' went into service, the 'Kelowna-Westbank' was inspected, found to be suffering from dry rot, and was

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At the end of the Second World War and the gas rationing that went with it, there was such an increase in ferry traffic that by May 1 1946, plans for a second ferry similar to the 'Pendozy' were in the works. The 'Lloyd-Jones,' as this vessel was called, and the 'Pendozy' were not able to keep up with increasing traffic volumes so in July 1950, a third vessel, the 'Lequime' was launched (Gellatly 1983, 211).

As it turned out, this was something like shouting at a hurricane and by the late 1950's the ferries were operating at an annual deficit of 250,000 dollars (Marriage 1959). There was simply no way ferries could handle the traffic efficiently and profitably. Thus, the only logical solution was to build a bridge across the lake. This was accomplished in 1958 and the ferry service was discontinued.

The boats which once played such a crucial role in Okanagan life are long gone now, and sadly, few people realize the importance of the contribution they made to the development of this area. Today we take for granted the highway through the valley and the Okanagan Lake bridge. But, one simply has to hike along the east side of the lake towards Wild Horse Canyon to appreciate the trying conditions under which early settlers in this area were able to carve out a flourishing existence. The lake was their road, and the lake boats, be they rowboats, steamers, sternwheelers, or ferries were vitally important to these people, many of whom had no other regular contact with the outside world. I hope that this work will lead to heightened awareness and appreciation of this subject, as it is well worth our attention.

1983 The Okanagan-Sarawak Ferry. In The Okanagan Journal of the Okanagan Historical Society, pp. 20-21.

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