

The Hudson Bay Company's steamship *Beaver* of 1835

Transcribed by Jennifer Bolstler, Vancouver Island University – June 4, 2015

William Barraclough: The following pre-taped recorded address entitled, "The Hudson's Bay Company's steamship *Beaver* of 1835" was presented as a paper before Nanaimo Historical Society by William Barraclough, Tuesday, November 17th, 1970, in the Credit Union Building, Nanaimo, a good attendance of members and visitors being present. The paper was of one hours duration.

Mr. R. J. Walley presented the speaker to the gathering in a suitable manner, and Dr. R. E. Forrester expressed the appreciation of all those present for the interesting and well-researched article. As a preface to the prepared article, the speaker read an opening paragraph from the Hudson's Bay Company's official magazine, *Beaver*, Summer issue for 1970. And we quote,

"Shoppers at Hudson's Bay Company's stores the length and breadth of modern Canada may not realise it, but they make their purchases from an organization which is not only the oldest chartered trading company in the world but also the oldest ship-owning company. The archives of the Hudson's Bay Company contain what is the longest documented saga of merchant seafaring ever written. In log books, letter books and minutes [in 200 years of archives], and later filed papers, the story of 300 years of ship-owning and management is unfolded in the laconic phrases of ships' masters, the precise instructions of Governor and Committee, the copperplate handwriting of generations of forgotten clerks and the letters of countless factors and Company servants." [additional note is taken from the magazine, inserted by transcriber]

[Presentation commences]

WB: An article concerning the Hudson's Bay Company's steamship *Beaver* was written and recorded by William Barraclough during November, 1970. The subject is in keeping with the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Hudson's Bay Company.

By way of an introduction, the steamship *Beaver*, being the first steamer to ply the Pacific Northwest Coast in 1836, must be associated with much of the early history of this region. Previous to her arrival, sailing vessels were dependant on favourable winds and other conditions to serve the Hudson's Bay Company's posts, from the Columbia River to Alaska. The *Beaver* was also most useful in calling at Indian villages along the indented coastlines to delivery supplies for the pelagic hunters, and to those employed on the [sealing?] vessels.

This article is based on the workings and other items connected with the *Beaver* must not be considered as a complete history of the steamer. It is made up of fragmented accounts from reliable sources and recognized historians that I have gathered together over the years. I

trust that in reciting these items some of the importance and historical records of the *Beaver* will be revealed.

In compiling this article on the steamship *Beaver*, periods of history, dates, persons, and places became so interwoven with events concerning the ship that I have taken the liberty of incorporating brief historical accounts that are inseparable from the *Beaver* alone. This article concerning the *Beaver* is prepared in two parts: firstly, with the construction, her voyage to the Pacific Northwest Coast, and to her destruction near Prospect Point at the entrance to Vancouver Harbour. Part two is compiled from reliable accounts of the ship's working days, covering the period of 52 years of historic service.

[4:17](#)

The Hudson's Bay Company's steamship *Beaver* - a pioneer of the seas.

Previous to considering the history of the *Beaver* itself, and the reason why the Hudson's Bay Company had the vessel built, it may be advisable to give a brief resume of the history of the company. Incorporated in 1670 as the Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay, formed during the reign of King Charles II and consisting principally of the King's cousin Prince Rupert and a few intimate friends, the Company was invested with absolute proprietorship and exclusive traffic rights of Rupertland [i.e. Rupert's Land], which embraced all the lands drained by the Hudson's Bay and its tributaries.

Their explorations and trading posts extended throughout the Northwest Territory and eventually crossing the Rockies and finally descending to the Pacific Coast. We have all heard of the great explorers and traders, some of them associated with the Hudson's Bay Company, as Alex Mackenzie, Simon Fraser, David Thompson, and many other famous men.

At this time and period of 1770 it seems almost incredible that provisions and essential necessities for the men engaged in the operations of the trading post across the country were carried all the way from Montreal, a distance of nearly 4,000 miles, by many modes of conveyances, and over the same trails by which the fur traders first reached the Pacific Coast.

This way of transportation was too costly and time consuming. Consequently, the supplies for the fur stations west of the Rockies were brought in sailing ships around Cape Horn, first to Fort Vancouver and Oregon Territory, on the Columbia River, thence to posts along the Northwest Coast.

Before the arrival of the *Beaver* to the Pacific in 1836, the Hudson's Bay Company had other sailing vessels engaged in commerce along the Northwest Coast, some are listed in Lewis and Dryden's "Marine History of the Pacific", of 1895. Also in Nicholson's "[Vancouver Island's] West Coast [1762-1962]", published 1962. They are the *Nereid*, *Llama*, *Drysdale*,

and *Cadboro*. These ships had a limited capacity for trading and collecting furs from the sea-hunters. The ships could not navigate the many inlets and intricate passages where Indian villages were located. This was the prime reason the Hudson's Bay Company decided to build a steamer able to operate in these areas.

7:16

Of the four sailing ships mentioned here, only particulars of the *Cadboro* can be located at present, and we are fortunate to have a copy of the *Cadboro's* log available on her first journey to this coast. And for the record, I wish to incorporate a brief notation from that source, as the *Cadboro* was closely associated with the history of the *Beaver*.

The *Cadboro* was built at Rye County of Sussex in 1824. One deck, two masts, schooner-rigged with a standing bowsprit. She was built and owned by the Hudson's Bay Company, and sailed from London under Captain Swan on her first voyage in the fall of 1826, arriving at Fort Vancouver, Oregon Territory in the spring of 1827 bringing, besides her picked crew, several new servants of the Hudson's Bay Company. There are about 30 persons in all, and she carried six guns.

The *Cadboro* was a big money-maker for the Hudson's Bay Company on her trading trips between Nutka Sound and Fort Vancouver. At that time she was the [crack?] vessel on the Pacific Coast. The *Cadboro* has a prominent place in Nanaimo's history. She took aboard the first shipment of coal to leave here - 450 barrels on September the 10th, 1852.

Now back to the story of the *Beaver*. It was an interesting time among ship builders when the keel of their first transatlantic steam ship was laid at Blackwall, a suburb town of London. The Hudson's Bay Company, in having the *Beaver* built, intended from the start that the vessel should be constructed of the best materials available. The materials used, and the cost of the vessel, must have been enormous for a craft of her dimensions.

Quoting from "History of the Beaver," a publication by Charles McCain, Vancouver B.C., in 1894, we quote, "The *Beaver* was built by Messrs Green, Wigram, and Green, as their certificate states, dated May the 7th, 1835.

Listed here are some of the specifications. The elm keel was of unusual size and strength. The stern and stern-post were of British oak. Along the keel were placed the frames, or ribs, two feet centres. These were of the best oak and greenheart. The spaces between the frames were filled in solid, to a level above the water line, with curved timbers.

The outside planking was of oak and African teak, securely fastened to the frames with copper bolts and oak treenails. This was covered with a thick layer of tarred paper over which was placed a planking [of] fir, held with spikes of a bronze composition. Then to preserve the woodwork from the ravages of teredos, a sheathing of copper was secured all over the exterior hull, with the exception of a narrow strip just below the gunwale. The

inside lining of the frame consisted of oak and teak planking, secured with diagonal, heavy iron straps with riveted copper bolts.

The main keelson was a massive stick of greenheart, 12 inches square, extending the whole length of the keel, secured with copper bolts which pass through both timbers. Parallel to this on either side were sister keelsons, of the same material but not so heavy. Across the keelsons were fastened large greenheart timbers which formed the bed for the engines, as well as the foundation for the furnaces.

The deck was supported by a series of stout beams, mostly of greenheart and African teak. These were placed at frequent intervals across the hull, to which they were fastened, their supports being oak knees and massive angle irons. In addition two these were two oak beams, about 10 by 14 inches, which crossed at the points where the two spars penetrated the deck."

[Quote seems to have been paraphrased or summarized slightly by Mr. Barraclough]

[11:41](#)

At the time of the launching the *Beaver* into the Thames there are various accounts of the event and many conflicting stories. Some report has stated many thousands witnessed the ceremony, yet it would be difficult for a few hundreds to crowd into the small yards.

Alan Morley of the Vancouver Sun for Saturday, August the 27th, 1966 states, quote: "The accounts of the *Beaver* launching are doubtful. It was described as witnessed by a tremendous crowd of 130,000 people, including King William IV, but some irreverent critic points out it was not mentioned in the London Times the next day. The Times kept pretty close tabs on its kings and queens and their public appearances."

Again, Norman Hacking, marine editor for the Vancouver Province, in an article dated Thursday, July the 13th, 1967 states, quote: "The *Beaver* fable of the launching just won't die. The reporters drew on their imagination to make a colourful account. The steamer was launched by Mrs. John Labouchere, wife of a Hudson's Bay Company official and not by a duchess, and King William IV was not on hand." The story was reprinted in the Victoria Colonist in 1892, and again in several publications about the launching.

Next in order is the placing of the boiler and machinery. These items had been ordered a year previously from Boulton and Watt, a most reliable establishment. And I quote here from the Century Cyclopaedia: "The steam engine was brought to a high state of perfection by James Watt, about the year 1782." [end of quote?]

The *Beaver's* engines when packed at the works, together with the boiler and gearing for the paddle wheels, weighed 63 1/2 tons, the cost being 4,500 pounds sterling. There were two engines of the same design, termed 35 nominal horsepower each. These engines were

several times heavier and very complicated compared to the modern steam engine of today of the same rated capacity.

The cylinder stood vertical and had a diameter of 42 inches, with a 36 inch stroke. The piston rods projected through the top of the cylinders. There was a pair of horizontal beams, levers, connecting rods, etc. The crankshaft was six inches in diameter at each extremity. Of the outer portions of this shaft was a paddle wheel 13 feet in diameter, made up of 11 radial arms five feet in width.

14:41

The low pressure boiler, which rested on brick furnaces, and from which steam was carried through large copper tubes to the steam chest... In due course, a trial trip was made, when according to Lloyd's records the *Beaver* gained a speed of 9 3/4 miles per hour, which was considered very gratifying.

The *Beaver's* dimensions were, length overall 101.3 feet; breadth inside of paddle boxes, 20 feet, outside the paddle boxes 33 feet; depth 11 1/2 feet; registered at 109 1/8 tons burden; and she was armed with five guns, nine pounders, and carried a crew of 26 men.

For the passage out from England to the Pacific Coast, the steamer *Beaver* was rigged as a brig, with engines being placed in position and the paddle wheel stored in her holds, covering the whole distance of the voyage under canvas.

During the time the steamer was under construction, the Hudson's Bay Company was also having a barque built to accompany the *Beaver* across the seas to her destination. The barque was called the *Columbia* and was of 310 tons burden. She was armed with five guns, nine pounders, and carried a crew of 26 men.

The *Beaver*, and the *Columbia* under Captain Darby, must have set out on the journey about the same time, as reference is made in the log the *Beaver* the first day out of- Quote, "Shortened sail to keep in company with the *Columbia*". Lewis and Dryden's register, "The bark *Columbia* sailed with her as consort, but the *Beaver* was too speedy" etc. etc.

Now, the log of the *Beaver*. The log of the *Beaver* has published in Lewis and Dryden's "Marine Register of the Pacific Coast", of 1894, is an extensive account of dates, positions, happenings on board, and general information. There are approximately 226 entries, from August the 27th, 1835, to April the 10th, 1836. Here are a few selected items from the log; this will do for our purpose.

"From Gravesend for the *Columbia*, August 27th, 1835. Crew list upon leaving Gravesend: D. Home was commander; W.C. Hamilton, first mate; Charles Dodd, second mate; Peter Arthur, chief engineer; John Donald, second engineer; Henry Barrett, Carpenter; William Wilson, George Gordon, William Phillips, James Dick, George Holland, James MacIntyre, and William Burns."

"Thursday, August the 27th, 1835. 3:00 PM. Pilot came aboard. Hauled the vessel out of the docks and proceeded towards Gravesend."

"7 AM. Anchored off Gravesend. People employed the rest of the day fitting steering halyards, blocks, and gears."

"August 29th. Dropped down to the head of Lea Reach."

"The 31st. 6:00 AM. Weighed anchor and proceeded towards the Downs. At noon, the pilot left us."

18:13

"September 2nd. Moderate breeze and clear weather. Obligated to carry easy sail to keep in company with the *Columbia*."

From here to September 12th, the log of the *Beaver* gives details of activities carried on board, as sails adjusted, prayers, signals, people employed about the rigging, making mats, etc., and when the ship reached the island of Porto Santo.

"September 13th, noon. Made the island of Madeira. The sails of several ships in the area sighted."

"October 4th. Spoke to a brig bound for Montevideo. Read prayers to the ship's company."

"November 11th. Made the Falkland Islands, bearing south by west."

"The 15th. Weather too unsettled to read prayers. Longitude 31' 33", latitude 56' 33".

"November 18th. Strong breeze. Made Cape Horn bearing south by west. Distance 10 leagues. At noon, Cape Horn, northeast by east."

"November 22nd. Fresh gales with heavy squalls and hail. Weather too bad to read prayers."

"The 25th. A sudden squall carried off topmast steering sail boom. Heavy fall of snow. Rough seas and bad weather caused many changes to sails."

"December 12th. In moderate conditions the ship made the island of Juan Fernandez, and anchored." This island is the location of the famous Robinson Crusoe story, situated off the coast of Chile.

"December the 18th. Weighed anchor and made for the Sandwich Islands."

"December 19th. People employed on bending cable and stowing anchors. Read prayers to the ship's company."

It would appear the officer in charge of entering records into the log of *Beaver* did not think much of social festivities, for on Christmas Day, Friday December the 25th, 1835, is this brief notation. Quote, "Light breeze southeast. Showed longitude to the *Columbia* bearing southeast."

And on Friday, January the 1st, 1836 - on New Year's Day - is this brief item: "Moderate trade wind east by south. Squally with rain."

On January the 27th, "Light variable breeze. Captain Home went aboard the *Columbia*."

"February 1st. Hove to for the *Columbia*. Made the island of Hawaii."

"The 4th. Sighted Woahoo Island at 2:30. Mr. Reynolds came on board to pilot us in. At 3:00 PM, came to anchor in four fathoms of water in Honolulu Harbour. Attended divine service on the shore with the ship's company."

Here is an interesting human story. For February the 14th, "William Wilson went on shore without leave and against positive orders not to go."

On the 17th the mate made the following entry: "At 11:00 AM Captain Charlton, His Majesty's Consul, came on board and reprimanded Mr. Wilson, seaman, for leaving the ship on Sunday last against his orders, also for his insolence to me on the passage and general bad conduct.

Captain Home wrote over this, "Not correct" and a footnote added, quote, "In reference to the log of the 17th, Captain Charlton came on board the *Beaver* at my request to take William Wilson out of the vessel for punishment for having left the vessel without leave, but Wilson, showing great contrition for his offence, and the rest of the people asking that he be not punished, I reprimanded him and sent him back to his duty". So there.

[22:49](#)

"February the 19th. Let the old stock of water out of the boilers, it being very bad, and took aboard 1,000 gallons of water."

"The 24th. Crew being employed preparing for sea."

"The 25th. Weighed anchor and made sail."

"March the 16th. Observed Cape Disappointment ahead at 5:30. Tacked ship at 11:30 and fired two guns. Bearing at noon, Cape Disappointment, north half east, Point Adams, northeast by east."

"March 18th. Calm and clear weather. At 3:00 PM stood in for the bar of the Columbia River, sounding every five minutes. At 2:00 a canoe came alongside with natives. 7:30 anchored in seven fathoms with 40 fathoms of chain."

"April 3rd. Made all possible sail up the river. At 4:00 PM observed the *Columbia* aground and sent a boat to assist."

"April 4th. Columbia hove off at 4:00 AM."

"April the 10th, 1836. At 6:30 PM rounded Parting Point; fired two guns. At 7:30 abreast Fort Vancouver in nine fathoms, and found lying there the Honourable Hudson's Bay Company schooner, *Cadboro*."

The next entries in the log concern the work of fitting the *Beaver* as a steamer.

"Monday, May the 16th, 1836. Carpenters ship in the paddle wheels. At 4:00 PM the engines [i.e. engineers] got up steam and tried the engines. Found them to answer very well."

"The 17th. At daylight got steam up and ran abreast of the lower plain for firewood. At 2:00 PM returned to the Fort."

"May 31st. At 9:30 a party of ladies and gentlemen came aboard. At 9:45 ran down the river under steam and entered the Willamette River then back to [Fort] Vancouver. At 8:00 called all hands on deck to splice the mainbrace."

"June the 1st. Weighed anchor and ran down the river. At 4:30 anchored in Baker's Bay in company with the *Columbia*, and found the engines to work extremely well."

The *Beaver* never returned to Fort Vancouver.

Now we come to the *Beaver's* first trip to the Northwest Coast. On June 26th, 1836, the *Beaver* embarked on her first trip to the Northwest Coast. The crew on leaving Fort Vancouver was as follows:

(And I mention these persons as place names and family names around Nanaimo can be attributed to them.)

"D. Home, Commander; Charles Dodd, first mate; A. Lattie, second mate; P. Arthur and T. Donald, engineers; William Lackey, boatswain; H. T. Barrett, carpenter; William Burns, cook; William Wilson, William Phillips, George Gordon, George Holland, James Dick, James McIntyre, seamen; John McLean, Farquhar McDonald, and two Kanakas were stokers;

Murdock McLeod, Louis Tademier, Tyneas Tozier, A. Martell, Joesph Martelle, Joseph Michael, Hugh Connick, and six Kanakas and Indians, woodcutters."

"June 27th. The aft part of the starboard paddle-box is carried away. At daylight, saw the highland to the north of Nootka Sound."

[26:51](#)

"June 28th. Finding that we had not enough fuel to carry us to Milbanke Sound. Stopped the steam and made sail to the topsail and unshipped five paddle-boxes on each side to avoid holding too much water."

"June 30th. At 4:00, after taking on the supply of wood, weighed and ran up the Sound. Anchored at 6:30 opposite Milbanke Fort. Saluted the Fort with seven guns, which was returned. Arrived at Fort Simpson being six days going up owing to frequent stops for wood."

"July the 14th. Arrived at Tongass and found there the Russian Fur Company's brig *Chitsekoff*." [

From here on, the *Beaver* went into a busy service without delay, running up and down the coast, in and out of every bay, river, and inlet between Puget Sound and Alaska, collecting furs and carrying supplies for the Company's posts. At this time, nearly all of the far Northwest was under lease to the Hudson's Bay Company from Russia.

The *Beaver* made period trips to Alaska with a cargo of produce, cattle, grain, and other goods with which to pay the rent.

The steamer made frequent trips to the American side after the Company moved its headquarters to Victoria, and on one visit in 1851, in command of Captain Stuart, she was seized for an infraction of the laws and sent to Olympia. While lying there, Captain Stuart put the man in charge ashore and steamed away for the British side. Captain Sabitson, the veteran British Columbia pilot, was mate on the vessel at the time.

Amicable relations between the Company and the U.S. were soon restored.

In 1860, the *Beaver* was extensively overhauled and fitted with staterooms, and ran between Victoria and New Westminster. A few years later she passed into the hands of the Imperial Hydrographers under charter from the Hudson's Bay Company. They kept her busy for several years surveying the waters of the Northwest Coast. When the vessel returned to the Hudson's Bay Company on the 21st of December, 1870, at the expiration of the lease, she was hauled out and thoroughly repaired. On examining the hull a ten pound piece of rock was found embedded in one of the timbers, a relic she had carried away after coming in contact with Race Rocks.

Here is a recent item taken from the Hudson's Bay Company magazine, *Beaver*, Summer issue for 1970. Quote, "She came back under the Company flag on December 21st, 1870, with naval pomp and ceremony."

The *Victoria Columnist* for July the 9th, 1967, has an item reading as follows: "The old Hudson's Bay steamer *Beaver* has lately been on Laing's Ways. An examination shows that her timbers are as sound as they were the day she was launched. The *Beaver* will receive her new boilers and resume her serving duties of the Northwest Coast."

30:23

[18]74, the *Beaver* was refitted and made her first trip as a towboat on August the 8th. This proud ship suffered further indignity by being stripped of her masts and other items of her sailing days. The city of Vancouver acquired her main mast - 18 inches at the butt diameter. It was erected at the entrance of Stanley Park.

On August 31st the *Beaver* was sold by the Hudson's Bay Company for \$17,500 to [John] Stafford, [Henry] Saunders, [Charles] Morton, [George] Rudlin, [Edwin] Coltman, and [Frederick] Williams [also William Harrison]. In 1877, Captain J. D. Warren took command.

During her later years of working, the Hudson's Bay Company experienced difficulty in securing engineers who understood her engines, or were willing to handle the old style machines. One would suppose that these old engines would be constantly needing repairs, but such was not the case. They ran remarkably well right up to the last they were in use, according to men who had been part of her crew.

One of her late engineers stated, quote, "You should have seen us fellows jump when we got the signals to go ahead. We had to climb over her engines to humour them so as to strike out for themselves." The engines, having a complicated series of jointed leavers, often getting "on centre," which was their worst feature.

In 1880, the steamer took fire and her upper works were considerably damaged. The *Beaver* continued jobbing around until 1883 when the vessel struck a rock at the entrance of Burrard Inlet narrows and sank. She was raised and put in good order by the British Columbia Towing and Transportation Company. The *Beaver* served as a towboat until 1888 when she was once more licensed to carry passengers. She continued serving the logging camps along the coast until the fatal of July the 26th, 1888, when she went on the rock near the entrance to Vancouver Harbour.

That foggy morning of July 26th, 1888, the chief officers were George Merchant, Captain; Dave Symmons [Simons?], chief engineer; Charles Johnson [Morris?], mate. When the *Beaver* struck the rock on her way out of the harbour, and Dave Symmons pulled the throttle which stopped the engines for the last time.

She hung on the rocks in a listless manner until June the 2nd, 1892, when a big side-wheeler - the *Yosemite* - sweeping by at high water, throwing a swash which lifted the *Beaver* from the rocks and slipped her into deep water.

That portion of her house and hull, which had not already been carried off by the relic hunters, was gradually pulled apart by grappling hooks to be prized as mementos of the famous craft. The copper bolts and sheathing were melted down and made into medals and souvenirs. Wood fixtures from the wheelhouse and timbers from the hull were manufactured into great numbers of items and sold as mementos, and the cast iron was purchased by the local foundries.

While on the rocks at Prospect Point, 1,085 pounds of copper was salvaged from the bolts, tubing, sheathing, etc. And from this copper medals were struck, the first made in 1891, about the size of a 50 cent piece. They weighed one and a quarter ounces with an illustration of the *Beaver* on one side. There were about 226 issued in number.

34:23

The second lot of medals were of finer workmanship, about 1 3/8 inches in diameter, 3/4 of an ounce in weight. The third issue about the size of a 25 cent piece. Medals sold first for \$1.00 and \$1.25. The latest quotation I've heard about the *Beaver* medals were \$10.00 and up, according to the issue.

All the copper medals were numbered. The exact count of each series we're not able to ascertain. The dies were hand-struck, making some imperfect copies which were discarded. Occasionally one of these copper medals turns up to view by its proud possessor, and many of the medals are on display in the museums.

Here we come to part two of this article.

Over the years I have collected a file of interesting items concerning the steamship *Beaver*. Published by recognized historians, they are of historic information of her journeys along the Pacific Coast and the men who sailed in the vessel. These items are not necessary in chronological order. Since the *Beaver* was engaged in journeys along the coastal waterways, she could not be likened to an historic landmark. The following items must be considered as an anthology of items pieced together.

This part two deals with a more intimate account of the men who sailed in the *Beaver*.

On April the 4th, 1836, the *Beaver* under Captain Home, together with the *Columbia* Captain Darby, arrived at the historic Fort Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia River. Later, the *Beaver* proceeded about 115 miles up the river to Fort Vancouver, then the Hudson's Bay Company headquarters at the Pacific Northwest Coast, arriving there April the 10th, 1836. On hand to welcome the steamer and her crew were John McLoughlin, Governor of

Northwest Coast Affairs; Chief Factor, Duncan Finlayson; James Douglas; John Dunn; and others associated with the Hudson's Bay Company.

Shortly after the arrival of the *Beaver* to this coast in 1836, Captain Home resigned his command of the vessel to Captain William H. McNeill. That was in 1837. He was formerly of the Hudson's Bay Company ship *Llama*. Captain McNeill's name has become inseparably connected with the *Beaver* and the early records of the vast regions of the Northwest Coast.

About the month of July, 1836, Chief Factor McLoughlin issued orders for the *Beaver* to proceed to the north end of Vancouver Island and ascertain if coal did exist, as so reported by Indians at Fort McLoughlin.

Quoting from Dunn's "History of the Oregon Territory", published in 1844 in London, in part. Quote, "Mr. Finlayson, with part of the crew of the *Beaver*, went on shore, leaving me in the ship to conduct trade. Bituminous coal was found of excellent quality." End of that quote.

This was the first finding of coal on this coast by others than Indians. The coal was first tested in the *Beaver's* furnaces. In honour of her captain, the small bay where the *Beaver* first cast anchor was called McNeill harbour, later changed to Beaver Harbour.

Another item by Mr. Dunn, during the steamer's first trip to Fort Simpson in 1836. Quote, "At Fort McLoughlin, we took on board the *Beaver* about 26 cords of wood for fuel, which was ready cut for us. This amount generally lasted us between three and four days running time. Woodcutters were engaged in stacking suitable wood for the furnaces of the *Beaver* at convenient places along the coast."

Here is a recent item taken in part from a lengthy article in the Hudson's Bay Company's magazine, *Beaver*, Summer issue for 1970. "The *Beaver* could not have possibly steamed out to the North Pacific. The most shattering information about her was her unbelievable appetite for wood fuel. She consumed 40 cords of wood in one day's steaming. Now a cord of wood is eight feet by four feet by four, for a total of 5,120 cubic feet of timber.

It took some little while for these implications of her engineers demands to sink in. After two trial runs a gang was kept permanently employed in chopping to feed her hungry furnaces. Unless there were several thousand cubic feet of wood ready chopped to her engineer's tastes at points of call, she lost a couple of days steaming. She averaged 30 miles a day of steaming."

The facts of this account do not agree with Mr. Dunn's notes, as stated her previously. Mr. Dunn stated 26 cords lasted three or four days steaming time, which sounds reasonable. I think the writer of that article must have drawn on his imagination.

40:03

From Fort Simpson journal, August the 10th, 1837. "On his way southbound from Fort Simpson, Captain McNeill and the *Beaver* explored the south end of Vancouver Island and found an excellent harbour, and the fine, open country along the seashore, but saw no river sufficiently extensive for a mill."

And then quoting from Coats and Gosnell, 1910. Quote, "As early as 1837 McNeill had explored the southern end of Vancouver Island, and had found an excellent harbour and fine, open country. McNeill is credited with discovering the Esquimalt and Victoria Harbours." Gosnell was a former British Columbia provincial archivist.

In the spring of 1840, James Douglas proceeded northwards in the *Beaver* to establish Fort Durham and Taku Inlet, the northern most post of the Hudson's Bay Company. He was accompanied by R. Finlayson. Finlayson autobiography in Howay and Scholefield's "History of British Columbia".

In May 1840, James Douglas proceeded in the *Beaver* to Sitka, Alaska, where he met the Russian governor Etholin, when the Hudson's Bay Company acquired the rights to occupy certain southern portions of Alaska in exchange for farm produce, cattle, and other provisions. These items came from the Company's farms at Nisqually on the Columbia River. Afterwards, they were provided from the Hudson's Bay Company farms at Fort Langley, which was established in 1827.

Sir George Simpson, in his narrative of a journey towards the end of September, 1841, speaks of a cruise in the *Beaver* from Puget Sound to Alaska, where he and James Douglas spent a most enjoyable time with Governor Etholin, who visited the little vessel dressed in full uniform. Quoting here, "No man-of-war ever maintained stricter discipline along this coast than did the little black steamer, *Beaver*." End of quote.

The following item is a diversion from the main subject, but it leads up to that part the steamer *Beaver* took in establishing Fort Victoria. Sir George Simpson, the reputable governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, having decided to establish a new post north of Fort Vancouver in case the boundary lines should follow the proposed compromise of the 49th parallel. Dr. McLoughlin was instructed to carry out the undertaking.

Early in the year 1842, James Douglas left Fort Vancouver for Nisqually, where he embarked with a party of six men on the schooner *Cadboro*, and proceeded to explore the southern end of Vancouver Island. He inspected several areas. Finally he made a choice of Fort Camosack, known later as Camosun.

[43:18](#)

As reported in Howay and Scholefield, volume one: March the 1st, 1843. Douglas, with 15 men, set sail from Fort Vancouver, calling at Nisqually and Cowlitz for supplies. Here the steamer *Beaver* was waiting for them. Crossing the Straits of Juan de Fuca, they landed from the *Beaver* at Shoal [Schole?] Point, now Clover Point, on March the 14, 1843. Douglas

reported on the 15th, "Went this morning to examine the harbour. Commenced to build Fort Camosun".

Tuesday, March 21st, 1843. Douglas and party journeyed northward in the *Beaver* to Fort Simpson, then to dismantle Fort Durham at Taku Inlet, and Fort McLoughlin on Millbank [Milbanke] Sound in accordance of instructions of Sir George Simpson, who ruled these points north, would being in future supplied by the *Beaver*. Douglas and his party arrived back at Camosun, the 1st of June, 1843.

In 1843, Captain William H. McNeill resigned his command of the *Beaver* to Captain Charles Dodd, who was second mate when the vessel left England in 1835. Dodd Narrows is named after him; he was one of the first captains to navigate the narrow waterways.

In 1849, three years after the 49th parallel of latitude had been established as the national boundary between the United States and the Hudson's Bay Company domains, the *Beaver* was engaged in the removal of effects from Fort Vancouver to Fort Victoria.

We come to the year 1849, and the account of the first coal workings on Vancouver Island at McNeill Harbour, later Fort Rupert, and the part the steamship *Beaver* played in servicing the project, as recorded in the private diary of Andrew Muir. We take in parts of it during the years 1849-50. The diary is preserved at the B.C. Archives at Victoria.

The miners Muir and McGregor left Victoria on the 27th of August, 1849, in the brig *Mary Dare*, and after tedious passage arrived at Beaver Harbour the 27th of September. The Muir diary is one of the most remarkable pieces of history about Vancouver Island. It contains a total of 121 pages, dating from sailing from England to leaving Fort Rupert. There are 36 pages of factual day-to-day happenings of the early coal mining project, working conditions etc., and at times the brutal treatment received from the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company in charge at the mines.

Noting a few brief items. The Muirs' and McGregor were charged with insubordination for not doing extra work ordered by the officers, that in no way was part of their duties, and fined 50 pounds. On May the 2nd, 1850, the *Beaver* and the barque *Cowlitz* arrived from Victoria. After tea, the miners went on board the *Beaver* and no doubt told the conditions prevailing there. On Friday, May the 3rd, Andrew Muir (son of John Muir - overman at the works) and John McGregor were called to the main hall before Blenkinsop, Breadmore [i.e. Beardmore], and McNeill, which officers appeared to act like mad men, with drawn pistols and swords.

Andrew Muir and John McGregor were put in irons and fed on bread and water for six days, and quote "Treated in a shocking manner, even threatened to be shot like dogs". Muir was placed in the upper Bastion and McGregor in the lower. The miners pleaded with the doctor at the fort for relief from the cold and damp conditions they were subjected to.

May 24th, the steamer *England*, Captain Brown, from San Francisco, arrived for coal.

On June 1st, the steamer *Beaver* arrived, and the miners had a visit from the second mate of the *England* who heard their story.

June the 15th, "Went on board the *England* in our own canoe."

June the 27th, the *Beaver* called, bringing letters. The miners laid their grievances before Dr. [John Sebastian] Helmcken. This morning the *Beaver* left for the north end.

On July 9th, they were taken up on the *England*, and very badly off as he states. The miners returned to Victoria in due course. We might add, when word of the trouble at Fort Rupert reached headquarters of the Company in London, the Governor wrote a scathing rebuke to Chief Factor James Douglas at Fort Victoria, declaring those officers had no legal right to imprison the miners, let alone put them in irons.

Dr. J. S. Helmcken of Victoria gave an interesting description of the steamship *Beaver*, the first steamer to ply along this Northwest Coast, he quotes, "In 1850 I was a passenger on the *Beaver*. Captain Dodd was commander. She had the appearance of a small man-of-war, armed with four brass cannons, muskets, and cutlasses around the main mast. Along her sides were boarding nettings. She had an old fashioned steering wheel. No horse existed in those days. Carried plenty of hands not for defence, but to cut wood for furnaces, there being no coal in her early career. And she was flush fore and aft." End of that quote.

50:00

From "Vancouver Island's West Coast, 1762-1962", by George Nicholson. "When the *Beaver*, leaving Victoria, she was saluted by the Fort with five guns, as it was a matter of policy to keep up the dignity of the Hudson's Bay Company not only at Victoria but all along the Company's posts along the coast to impress the Indians."

The steamship *Beaver* and items concerning Nanaimo Harbour.

James Douglas may have come to Nanaimo in 1852 and confirmed the report of coal deposits. An historic document written and signed by Douglas to Joseph William McKay, dated at Fort Victoria, the 24th of August, 1852, where in McKay was instructed to proceed with all possible diligence to Winthuysen Inlet, commonly known as Nanaimo Bay, and formally take possession of the coal beds lately discovered there for on and behalf of the Hudson's Bay Company, etc. etc.

We have seen it reported that McKay came to Nanaimo in the *Beaver* to follow out his instructions from Douglas, however at present we do not have official confirmation of that item. If McKay left Victoria early in the morning of the 25th, which was the usual custom of

all such undertakings, then arriving at Nanaimo on the 27th (being only two days travel time), it is unlikely he would have journeyed either by canoe or sailing ship.

From August 1852, the *Beaver* was a regular caller at Nanaimo, in and out of the Harbour on Hudson's Bay Company business.

January 17th, 1853, was an event of [moment?] history with the *Beaver* and Nanaimo Harbour. It concerned the first trial by jury on Vancouver Island, or the mainland of British Columbia, which was held on the quarterdeck of the *Beaver*, conducted by a James Douglas. Two men were charged with murder. They were found guilty, and hanged at the south point of Douglas Island, now called Gallows Point, Protection Island.

Quoting, "The trial and execution taking place on a frosted day between the hours of 10:00 AM and 3:00 PM." Communicated by admiral, then lieutenant, John Moresby; and by Mr. Joseph William McKay. This account is taken from the Hudson's Bay Company records at Nanaimo, by Captain John T. Walbran.

The *Beaver* brought supplies to Nanaimo while the Bastion was being constructed, which was completed in 1853. The Hudson's Bay Company warehouse and yard, situated below Wharf Street as pictures show, were built shortly after the Bastion. Freight, trade goods, supplies, etc. were unloaded from the *Beaver*. The late Mr. William Lewis, then being a centenarian, told me many anecdotes of visiting this warehouse below what is now Whore [Wharf??] Street.

[53:29](#)

One item of interest - he saw two barrels of gunflints there. These boys used to have competitions, who could throw the flints furthest over the water.

November 27th, 1854, is an historic date for Nanaimo, when the passengers who had sailed from England in the *Princess Royal* to Esquimalt were brought ashore here at 11:00 AM, November the 27th, 1854, by the steamer *Beaver* and the sailing ship *Recovery*.

Here are two items concerning the *Beaver* taken from the diary of Cornelius Bryant, whose activities during the early period of Nanaimo are of particular historic interest. Mr. Bryant left London, England on the sailing ship *Princess Royal*, August the 19th, 1856, arriving at Fort Victoria on January the 17th, 1857, being 151 days at sea.

Quoting from his diary, "On entering the Strait of Juan de Fuca we were met by the steamer *Beaver*, and the *Otter* from Victoria, and hearty cheers were exchanged. His Excellency of the [Governor?] was aboard the *Beaver*. On January the 17th, we went ashore at Fort Victoria and were met by Dr. Johnson and Dr. Benson. On January 31st, left Fort Victoria in the steamer *Beaver* for Colville Town and arrived there on the next day, Sunday, February the 1st, 1857, where we met with a hearty reception."

It would be fitting at this time to briefly review a few items about Cornelius Bryant. He played a prominent part in Nanaimo's history. Mr. Bryant entered upon his duties as teacher in the colonial school and acted as postmaster. He held the first religious service here, February the 15th, 1857, and organized a Band of Hope for the children. Later Mr. Bryant entered the ministry, and served the church in Nanaimo for two separate three-year terms. Afterwards moving to Chilliwack [Chilliwack] and Sumas to continue his work in the ministry.

56:00

For the next few years the *Beaver* was constantly engaged, filling various assignments along the coastal waters. In 1858 came the famous gold rush to the Fraser River. The little black steamer conveyed thousands of miners and prospectors across from Victoria to the Fraser River.

On November 18th, 1858, James Douglas, accompanied by Rear Admiral Robert Lambert Baynes; David Cameron, Chief Justice of Vancouver Island; Matthew B. Begbie, judge of British Columbia; and Captain Robert Mann Parsons, in command of a detachment of 20 men, left Victoria on Her Majesties ship *Satellite* to Point Roberts, thence by the Hudson's Bay Company vessel *Otter* to Derby - that was old Fort Langley - where the official party boarded the historic *Beaver*, arriving at Fort Langley some 2 1/2 miles beyond, where they landed November 19th, 1858. Quoting, "The natal day of British Columbia. A salute 18 guns was fired. The Union Jack was run up over the principle entrance."

Here is an interesting article by Bruce A. McKelvie, the noted historian. Writing on the history of Fort Langley, he states, "In March, 1834, John McLoughlin, the dictator of the Columbia, wrote to J. M. Yale 'You will keep the Fort in repair and sow as much grain as you can'. At that time the Hudson's Bay Company were considering moving Fort Langley to an area near to Lulu Island. The arrival of the steamer *Beaver* to work on the Fraser removed one of the obstacles to the Fort's continuance on the banks of the Fraser."

This piece of history is worth repeating here. I'm quoting, "The ceremony took place in the main building of the Fort. Douglas, after administering the usual oaths to Begbie, and handing him his commission as Judge of British Columbia, took the oaths of office and Allegiance. The Governor then issued a proclamation revoking the Hudson's Bay Company's license of exclusive trade with the Indians, so far as the new colony was concerned. Three other laws were proclaimed:

- 1) The Act creating the Colony of British Columbia.
- 2) Another, validating the acts of Douglas and all the officials under him.
- 3) A third declaring English law in force in the Colony."

That is from F. W. Howay.

November 19th, 1866, the proclamation read uniting the two crown colonies of Vancouver Island and the mainland of British Columbia.

In 1859, the San Juan Island Affair developed, known as Pig War. The *Beaver*, being well armed, carried several officers from Victoria to the trouble spot. Included were A. G. Dallas and Dr. William F. Tolmie. San Juan Island was ceded to the U.S.A. on October the 21st, 1872.

When the replica of the *Beaver* arrived at Nanaimo Harbour, Tuesday, August the 16th, 1966, at 7:00 PM, there was a large gathering of people to welcome the ship. Referring again to our old friend Mr. William Lewis, then aged 103 years, he remarked of often seeing the *Beaver* in the Harbour. Also that he'd been aboard the ship, and on one occasion the *Beaver* was stranded on the rock behind the post office, as he said, "High and dry".

This item is interesting: from brief, descriptive notes about Nanaimo in 1874 by Mr. Mark Bate, in part. Quoting "Where Dobeson ironworks are established there had been machinery for operating the [slip for a ways/weights? slipway?]. A powerful windlass, and other requisite appliances. The [weights/ways] were built by [Bolton and Cooke?], who hauled up the old historic *Beaver* and effected extensive repairs to her forefront, etc., etc." End of quote.

[60:51](#)

In viewing pictures of the *Beaver* which were taken over the years there is a mark contrast in the upper structure. In some pictures it is difficult to recognize her as the same vessel.

Here is an interesting item concerning the steering wheel of the steamship *Beaver*. On making inquiry at the Maritime Museum on the subject, we received a reply dated August the 19th, 1969. Quoting in part, "This museum holds what we understand is the original wheel of the *Beaver*. There are other wheels reputed to be from the *Beaver*, but their size, condition, and method of construction indicate that they are later ones."

And from the Maritime Museum of Vancouver, in a reply dated the 8th of September, 1969, we quote in part, "We have in our possession a large, relatively intact standard 19th century oak wheel. This was donated to us by a local prominent businessman, who located it in a private collection outside the province. It had been acquired here in British Columbia before the turn of the century as the wheel of the *Beaver*, and attested to by several of her past crew members. The Maritime Museum in Victoria too has a wheel that is attributed to have come off the *Beaver*. This one, of a different type to ours, was acquired when the museum was located at the Esquimalt base, and was also, I believe, guaranteed authentic. You pays you money and takes your choice." End of quote.

There are several place names along the coast named after the steamer: Beaver Point, Beaver Rock, Coal Island, etc.

From Victoria Colonist, October 20th, 1963. "There was more than one *Beaver*. In 1898 another *Beaver* was built at Victoria; the first steel ship to be built in British Columbia.

Registered as 427 tons gross, a sternwheeler. Length overall - 140 feet, beam 28 feet, and draft 5.1 feet.

One of Aster's ships called the *Beaver* arrived at Astoria May the 10th, 1812.

I have made only a few references to Sir George Simpson, the Hudson Bay Company's governor of Rupert's Land and all the vast domain to the west, concerning his journeys along the Northwest Coast in the steamer *Beaver*.

[End of recording]

Note: The quotes mentioned are transcribed chiefly as Mr. Barraclough states in the recording and may be inaccurate or incomplete. Please refer to original items mentioned for exact details.