

## UNION STEAMSHIPS - PART ONE

The Union Steamship Company was established in Vancouver in 1889 by New Zealander John Darling. Within 10 years the company was supplying gold seekers in the Klondike as well as pioneering settlers, loggers, miners, fishers, canneries and First Nations villages along the twisting maze of BC's coastal inlets.

Departing from its Carrall Street wharf the little ships' red and black funnels became welcome sights for over 200 communities in almost 75 years of service.

The prosperity of Texada Island at the turn of the century insured that Van Anda and Blubber Bay became ports of call. In 1902 the *Comox* - the first steel ship assembled in BC - commenced weekly service to Texada.

Other company ships on regular runs to Texada over the years were the *Cassiar* ("loggers' palace"), *Chelohsin*, *Cheslakee*, *Venture*, and the Ladies - *Cynthia* and *Cecilia*.



Early mornings at dockside in Vancouver saw horse-drawn wagons delivering freight of every kind to the company's shed. Flats of groceries, sacks of food, barrels of beer, oil drums, crates of chickens and pigs were loaded through the *Comox's* side doors while 40 or more sacks of mail were passed aboard by hand.

Livestock sometimes presented a problem. Cattle had a habit of dashing in one cargo door and out the other into the chuck. In Van Anda one night the *Cassiar's* mate, Arthur Jarvis, plunged into the harbour water to retrieve an escapee - a white pig destined for

Chow Dan (overseer for Chinese miners). After much splashing and swearing the two emerged coated in black mud. Jarvis's nickname "the Black Mate" stuck.

With passengers aboard, the ship steamed out of Burrard Inlet at 11am to begin the trip north to its regular ports of call. However, nowhere was too small for a delivery, the ships often stopping at makeshift floats anchored in the middle of a bay.

Navigating the BC coast is tricky even in the best weather conditions. Trapped under fog with no radar, captains would use the echo from the ship's whistle to judge its position in an inlet. Sometimes coastal residents hammered on an empty 45-gallon drum to guide the ship to dock. Barking dogs were helpful, Reverend Pringle's lantern in the Van Anda church window was also a welcome beacon at night.

Peter Lock

Texada Island Heritage Society