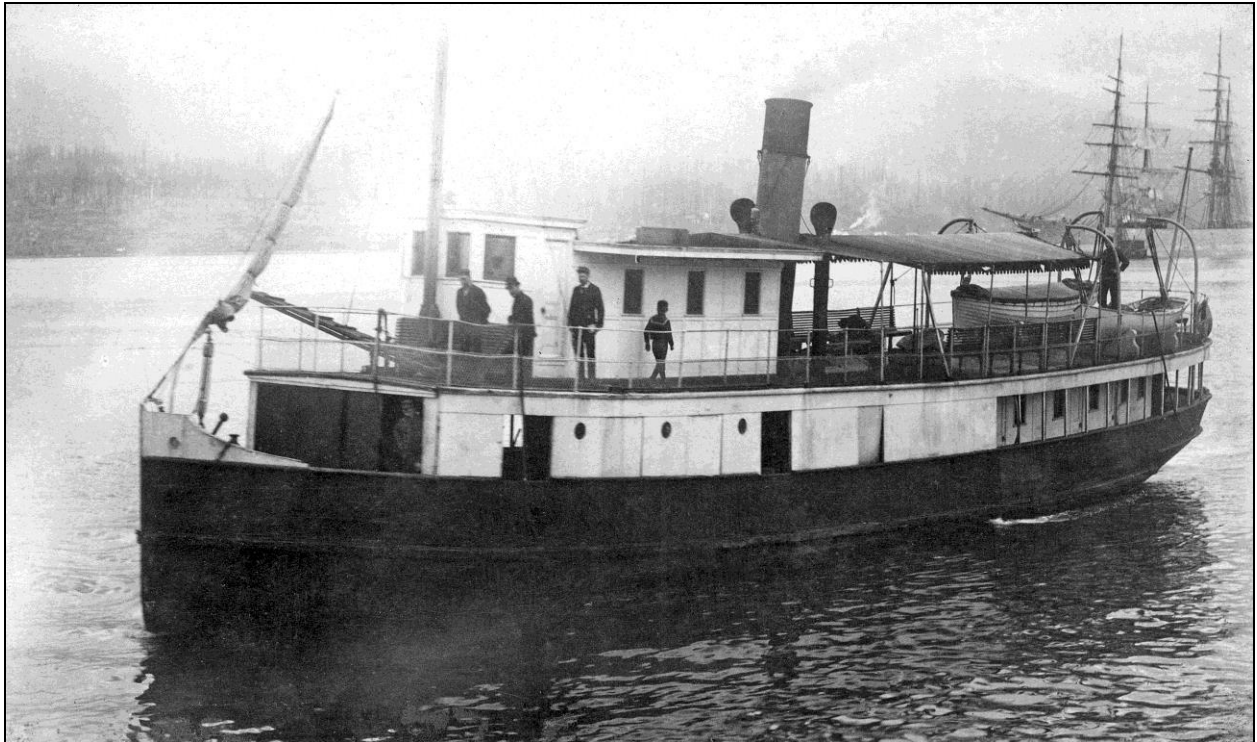


Stories from the Archives —
A Brief History of the 'S.S. Comox' on Indian Arm
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The freight and passenger vessel 'S.S. Comox' was built by 'J. McArthur & Co.' at Glasgow, Scotland, and assembled in Coal Harbour in 1891. She was 101 feet long and 18 feet wide, equipped with a compound steam engine, and was the first steel ship launched in British Columbia. From 1891 to 1901, she was owned by the 'Union Steamship Co. of British Columbia Ltd.', and was rebuilt in 1897. ⁽¹⁾



City of Vancouver Archives (CVA Bo P77).

'Union Steamship Company' passenger vessel 'S.S. Comox' in Vancouver harbour, circa 1892 — built at Glasgow and assembled in Coal Harbour in 1891, she was 101 feet long & 18 feet wide, ⁽¹⁾ and was the first steel ship launched in B.C. — the 'Comox' ferried picnickers up the North Arm.

The 'Union Steamship Company of British Columbia' was originally formed in Vancouver on July 1st, 1889, by Captain William Webster and John Darling, a former Director and General Superintendent of the 'Union Steamship Company of New Zealand'. Both the name of the company and the colours of the funnels were borrowed from the 'Union Steamship Company of New Zealand'.

After raising enough capital, the 'Union Steamship Company' was officially incorporated on November 16th, 1889, when it absorbed the 'Burrard Inlet Towing Company' of Vancouver, which owned 'S.S. Leonora', 'S.S. Senator', the tug 'S.S. Skidegate', and several scows. Consequently, the new company quickly plunged into the hurly burly of the pioneering boom that was shaping-up on the West Coast. Initially, the company's primary function was to deliver cargo to remote communities along the British Columbia's coastline.

The 'Union', as the company was commonly called, first started serving the Vancouver to Nanaimo run, and Burrard Inlet communities. But the early pioneers were already moving north and west along the coast. They travelled in small steamboats, row or sail boats, but the 'Union' company had other transportation in mind for them. Orders were placed in Scotland for three ships, which were built in sections there, and shipped-out to be assembled in Coal Harbour. They were given names of local native origin, a naming policy long followed: 'S.S. Comox', 'S.S. Capilano', and 'S.S. Coquitlam'. The year was 1891, and during the years that followed several new ships were added displaying the 'Union' flag. ⁽²⁾⁽³⁾⁽⁴⁾

Union Steamships started serving the Sunshine Coast with the 'S.S. Comox' about 1892, making the run across Howe Sound, and the vessel provided freight and passenger service to the Sunshine Coast for several years. In the years after 1897, under the 'Union' flag, she served more northern communities along the B.C. Coast.

From 1883 until 1897, the 'S.S. Comox' also was utilized for weekend excursion trips during the summer season, sometimes to see the canneries and salmon fishing boats on the Fraser River, ⁽⁵⁾⁽⁶⁾⁽⁷⁾⁽⁸⁾ and sometimes for picnic excursions up the North Arm of Burrard Inlet to Lake Beautiful (*aka* Buntzen Lake) and Granite Falls. ⁽⁹⁾⁽¹⁰⁾⁽¹¹⁾⁽¹²⁾⁽¹³⁾⁽¹⁴⁾

In 1901, the 'S.S. Comox' was owned by G.T. Legg of Vancouver, B.C. In 1919, she was owned by the 'Vancouver Machinery Depot' for breakup. In 1920, she was rebuilt and renamed the 'Alejandro' for the Mexican coast trade. In 1927, she was owned by the 'Cal-Mex Line'. ⁽¹⁾



City of Vancouver Archives (CVA Out P218.1).

U.S.S.C. vessel 'S.S. Comox' at Cates Bay, Bowen Island, *circa* 1892.

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- (8) S.S. Comox – Excursion to the Fraser River, Vancouver Daily World, Friday, July 30th, 1897, page 8.
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