

TEXADA'S WATER TAXIS

When Texadans experienced water taxi service this past winter many were reminded of the efficient little boats of the past.

In 1903 a colourful character captained Texada's first water taxi, the *Wood Nymph*. Englishman Walter Pinnock ("Steamboat Bob") would fire up his driftwood-burning steamboat for transport to any "dawnce", even dropping towing contracts for the occasion. Passengers were used to Walter pulling up to beaches to collect enough fuel to finish the trip. "Speed and Safety", as the locals nicknamed the boat, retired in 1908 when new government inspection rules sidelined her. She now rests somewhere under the landfill at Marble Bay but her steam whistle was used by Ideal Quarries and now lives on in the Van Anda museum.

Bill Young picked up the slack. He had built a gas-powered boat, the *Comeback*, which he also used for beach combing and twice-weekly mail transport to Blubber Bay.



In 1912 Bill had a new water taxi built in Vancouver - the *Louvain*. Named after a Belgian city, the 30-foot long double-ender sported a 2-cylinder 18HP engine and carried 20 passengers. Its familiar engine coughed out "two bits, two bits" (the price of a ticket) which became its nickname. The *Louvain* also carried liquor orders and sometimes acted as a towboat, beachcomber and, always, an emergency boat. Many stories tell of Bill forging through the night in raging storms to transport a woman in labour or to save a life.

When Bill Young retired in 1951 Ben Nicholas bought the old girl and continued the runs as Ben's Water Taxi Ltd. Competition from a Powell River company running the faster *Westview Flyer* caused Ben to have three speedboats built in Vancouver (1953-54). The *Texada Ladyslipper*, *Moccasin* and *Bluebell* featured twin V8 engines (225HP) and could be seen from some distance by their huge white bow waves flying across the water.

Ben sold the business in 1961 to Chuck McCallum and Ralph Coomber. Their boats ran from Van Anda wharf and Blubber Bay where Domtar used them for emergency runs, replacing the *Palico* originally commissioned by Pacific Lime Company.

The 5-car *Atrevida* ferry commenced operation in 1955 but the water taxis continued until 1969 when BC Ferries took over.

Many residents enjoyed the comfort and efficiency of Texada's water taxis and truly appreciated the dedication of their captains.

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