

## BOAT NIGHT IN VAN ANDA

Boat Nights (the arrival of the Union Steamships from Vancouver) were the highlight of the week for Van Anda residents in the early 1900's. The ships were a lifeline for the isolated community with food, supplies, mail, catalogue orders, livestock, visitors and loved-ones arriving all at once, along with news of the outside world.

Exact arrival times were unknown as the trusty *Chelohsin*, *Comox*, *Cheslakee* and others would stop in at logging camps, settlements and isolated float cabins along the way. Oldtimers would swap stories while gathered around the barrel wood stove at Deighton's store as they waited. A sense of anticipation was in the air.

A blast from the ship's steam whistle would ignite a swarm of feverish activity onshore. Folks emerged from their houses and stores, each carrying a "candle bug" (a candle in a 4lb jam tin) to light their way downhill like a waterfall of fireflies pouring onto the wharf. It often seemed as if all of Van Anda was there.

Kids would vie for the honour of catching the ropes thrown from the ship. The captains were "like gods" to the boys who came to recognize each ship by its unique whistle blast.

Passengers were greeted - old friends, newcomers, miners, loggers, tradesmen - while others stepped onto the gangplank to depart.

Vendors sold "recent" newspapers from the deck while children scrambled aboard seeking candy bars or the rare pleasure of an ice-cream treat.



Winches creaked and groaned under the weight of the rope slings while other cargo was off-loaded through the side doors. Everyone helped carry the packages uphill from the wharf and the postmaster's 2-wheeled cart was in constant demand.

As the ship cast off, the tumult subsided and people gradually returned home with their mail and visitors. All was quiet once more.

The Union Steamship service commenced in 1902 and lasted until 1953 when coastal road access was completed. Travellers from Vancouver could expect deluxe dining room service (tablecloths and silver settings) as they shared passage with the colourful characters who peopled the coast in those days.

Thank-you to Ben Nicholas and Duncan Ross for their recorded memories.