

UNION STEAMSHIPS - PART TWO

The arrival of the steamship was an important event. Boat nights in Van Anda resembled a “busy anthill” as residents, each carrying a “bug” (jam tin with candle), traipsed downhill to the wharf to greet or bid farewell to visitors and retrieve mail or items ordered from Vancouver.

Texada residents viewed the Union Steamships as an “upcoast streetcar line” and enjoyed the style of coastal travel in the last century. White-coated stewards would bang a gong to announce 4-course meals (75 cents!) complete with full silver service presented on linen tablecloths in the low-ceilinged dining lounge.

First class passengers, dressed in their finest, occupied staterooms while others - loggers, First Nations and Orientals - had separate quarters below in the “bullpen.” Loggers heading south flush with pay were often unruly, no doubt eagerly anticipating their Gastown blowout. It was not unknown for ships’ mates to carry billy clubs!

Ironically the luxurious first class staterooms may have served as a trap for the two lady schoolteachers who were unable to escape drowning in the 1913 sinking of the *Cheslakee* at the Van Anda dock. In 75 years of service the *Cheslakee* tragedy was the only incidence of loss of life on a Union ship.

Another mishap off Texada’s west coast in 1948 involved the *Chilcotin*. An overheated bearing resulted in the ship being towed to the float anchored in the middle of Gillies Bay. Its 102 passengers were transferred to the *Lady Cynthia*.

The float served as a convenient embarkation point for Gillies Bay passengers even though families were sometimes forced to wait on the rocking platform through the night for the boats to arrive. Later Alan Sanderson (son of the doctor) was able to receive more exact ETA’s via his ham radio set.

An earlier attempt by Upper Gillies Bay settlers to attract steamship service resulted in the construction of the 600-foot Shelter Point wharf in 1912 (at a cost of \$6,000). As the water depth proved inadequate it was abandoned, its remaining pylons seen today next to Dick Island.



The Union Steamship Company provided friendly, dedicated service to the people of the coast and, in linking pioneer communities, was a vital factor in BC’s developing coastal economy.