

Black Prince sailed Skagit

By RAY JORDAN

Though half a century has passed, nostalgic twinges grip the writer at times as he seems to hear the melodious whistle, faint and far away, of the old sternwheeler Black Prince as she boils up the Skagit with cool-headed Captain Forrest Elwell at the wheel.

He can still hear people say, upon the sound of the whistle, "Here comes the old Black Prince."

Highlights of this historic steamer is contained in a letter received recently from Captain Elwell:

"In the late summer of 1900, Capt. Charles Wright sold the City of Bothell and then the Snohomish and Skagit River Navigation Company was formed by Capt. Charles Wright, Capt. Charles Elwell, and Capt. Vic Pinkerton. It was then decided to build a boat for towing on the Snohomish and Skagit rivers.

"Capt. Charles Elwell made the hull model and Bob Houston was given the job of building the Black Prince."

Work was started in the winter of 1900, at the Ferry Baker Mill on the Snohomish River where the Canyon Mill stands today.

DIMENSIONS

Dimensions of the Black Prince were: Hull, 93 feet; overall length, 112 feet; beam, 19 feet; depth of hold, 5 feet; tonnage measurement was 159 gross tons, according to the captain. When the hull and superstructure were completed, she was towed to Seattle by the tug Nellie Pearson, where a pair of 10x48 steam engines and a 100 horsepower brickyard boiler, 150 pounds working pressure, were installed.

"After completion, the Prince came back to Everett under her own power and then went to the Skagit to tow logs and piling," Elwell wrote.

The first crew on the Prince in 1901, was Captain Elwell; Captain (Engr.) Wright; engineer Mike Hertzberg; Captain Pinkerton; Forrest Elwell, deck hand, and Wes Harbert, fireman.

"In the late summer of 1901, she made a trip between Novelty and Tolt. In 1902, the Prince took a tow from Haskell Slough (near Monroe) to the mouth of the Snohomish River.

LOADS

"On July 7, 1903, loaded 50 tons of machinery at Mount Vernon designated for the old Talc Mine about 12 miles above Marblemount. (A former employe of the talc mine remembers the date as 1906. The distance is an estimate of river miles. Actual car mileage distance is about 6 miles). This trip took three days to get up the river and unload," the captain continued.

To negotiate Sticks Riffle (named for the old Indian, Johnny Stick, who lived there) below Bacon Creek, the crew found it necessary to pay out 1200 feet of line and employ the boat's winch to pull the heavily laden Prince over this shallow, swift piece of water.

"Before this trip was made, Captains Wright and Elwell decided to decrease the diameter of the paddle wheel by about one foot. This was done to give a little more power on the wheel. They also set up the safety valve another 10 pounds carrying a boiler pressure of 160 pounds. After this trip, the wheel and safety valve were

returned to their original settings."

This trip by the Black Prince may have been the farthest upstream penetration by a steamer since the gold rush of 1880.

REACHED PORTAGE

One sternwheeler, the Chehalis, is reported to have reached the Portage, a mile or more above the old talc mine, during the gold excitement. One old-timer, who has lived on the river since 1877, is inclined to believe this. He says that a river-wise boat captain conceivably could have made it over the riffles above the talc mine during real high water.

He added, however, that most of the gold rush steamers got no farther than Durand Riffle, a mile or so below Marblemount.

"In 1906, the Company operated a logging camp across the Skagit from Birdsvew. The logs were towed to the mouth of the Skagit and later to Utsalady

by the Prince," Elwell wrote.

"The writer well remembers towing from Birdsvew, and especially through the Dalles (above Birdsvew) which is like the letter "Z." If you were lucky okay, but if the raft broke up, you were in a mess, as logs would be all around and under the Prince, which would almost spin like a top.

FISH TRAP

"I also remember a trap (fish trap), pile that went through the bow, and as luck would have it, the pile tore a hole in the forward tank, or else the boat would have sunk. The Prince ran on the Skagit for some time before this hole was fixed. The first time (after the damage was done) that she took a tow to Utsalady, they put the Prince on the beach and when the tide went out, the hole was repaired.

In 1910, the company sold the Prince and the T. C. Reed to Elwell, Pinkerton, Ira Hall and Tom Measher, who organized as the Washington Tugboat Company. Elwell was master of the Black Prince from 1907 to 1922. Before the year of 1910 was out they sold out to the Puget Sound and Baker River Railroad (the logging line that hauled Deomsey and Lyman Timber Company, and later Scott Paper Company logs down the river).

GETS NAME

How the Black Prince got her name: Captain Wright had a dream that he had a boat that was all black and called the Black Prince, so that is where her name came from, Elwell recalled.

An excerpt from a paper read to members of the Everett Yacht Club reveals the fate of the colorful Black Prince:

"In 1922 Captain Harry Ramwell of the American Tugboat Company purchased the Black Prince. She was sold to the Everett Port Commission in the year of 1935 for one dollar. The Port Commission then turned her over to the Everett Yacht Club.

"Time marches on and we found that the Black Prince was too small, too old and too expensive to repair. She was dismantled in the late fall of 1956 to make room for a larger clubhouse.

"As a memorial to the sternwheeler days the paddle wheel of the Black Prince sits on the lawn at the Port Commission Office on the Everett waterfront."

But she still sails on in memory's stream.

Note — Capt. F. M. Ewell, now aged 84, resides in Everett. His last tour of duty was with the Black Ball line as captain of one of the large ferries on the Sound.

SKAGIT VALLEY HERALD

OCTOBER 8, 1964



TOW ON SKAGIT—The Black Prince on Dead Man's Slough above Sedro-Woolley with tow of Bradsbury Logging Company logs. On top deck is Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Wright and son Vernon, and Mrs. Bird, cook. Main deck: From left is F. M. Elwell, Frank Anderson, deck hands, and Wesley Harbert, fireman.