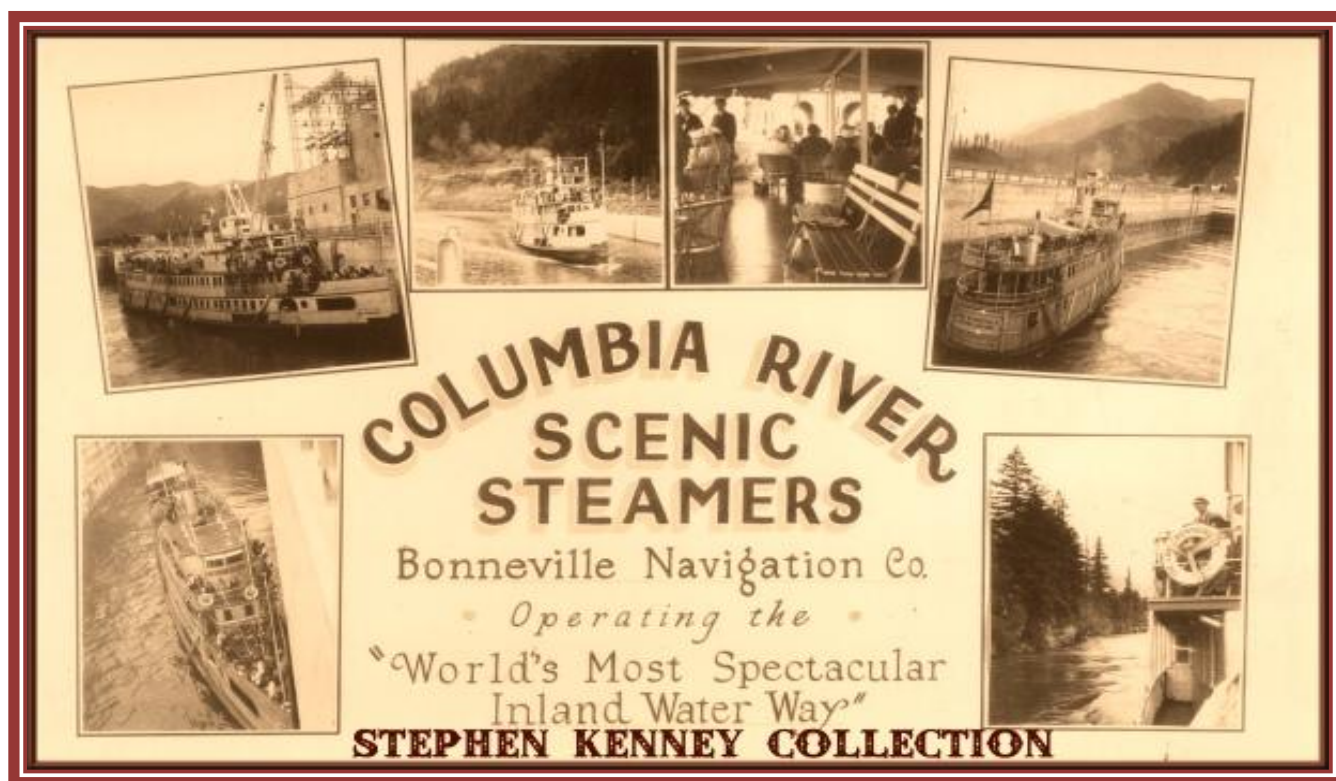




WEBFOOTER EXTRA

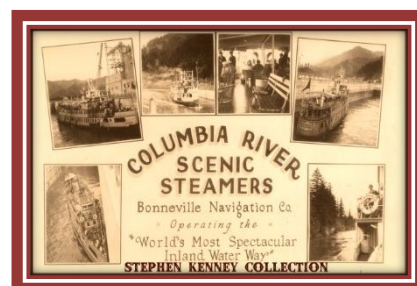
SEPTEMBER 2026

COLUMBIA RIVER STEAM NAVIGATION

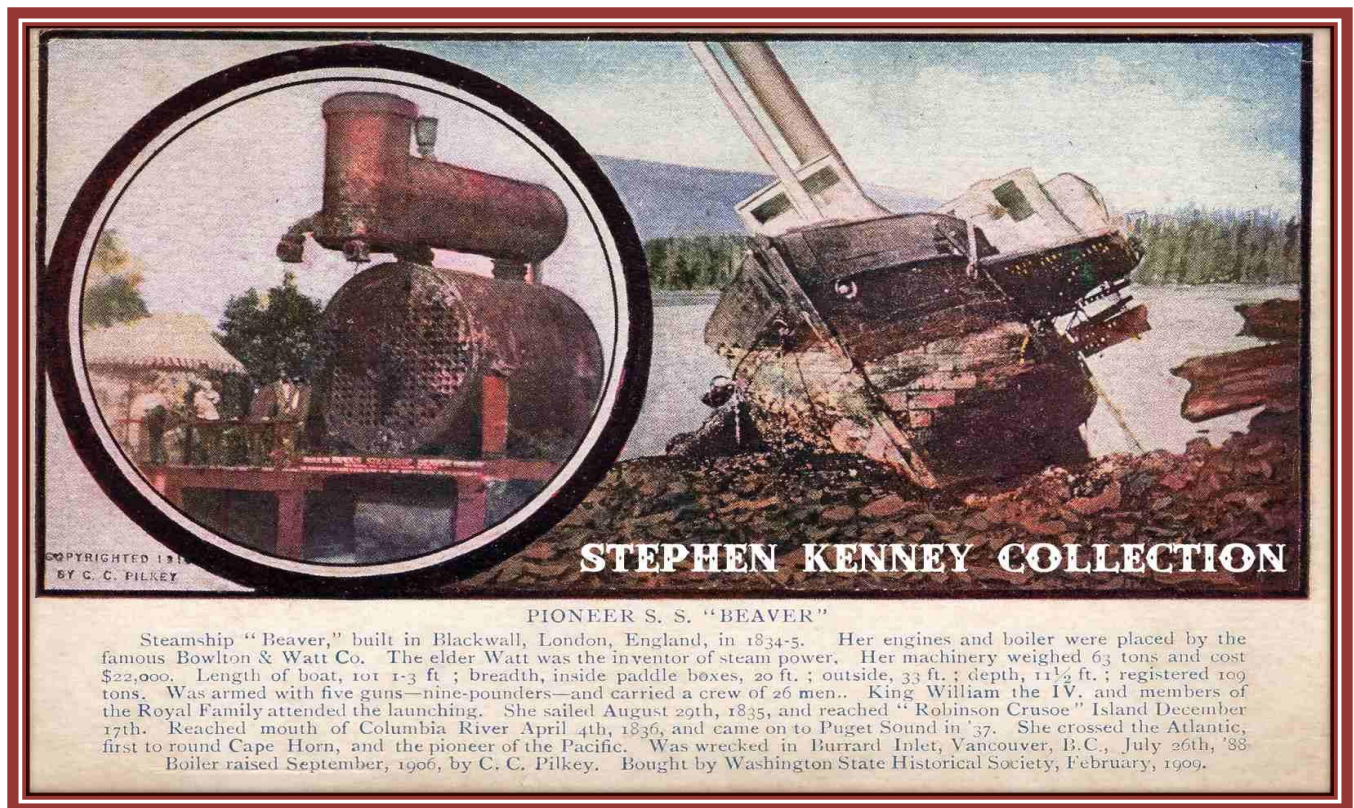


COVER POSTCARD:

Real photo multi-view postcard featuring six Columbia River scenic steamers on the Bonneville Navigation Line, circa 1910. Postally unused.



COLUMBIA RIVER STEAM NAVIGATION



Lithographed postcard showing the raised, wrecked steamship Beaver and the raised, salvaged boiler, circa 1906. Postally unused.

Steam navigation on the Columbia River powered regional commerce, settlement, and transportation from 1836 until 1981. Between 1850 and 1981, hundreds of steam-operated vessels plied the Columbia River system and its major tributaries. While an exact grand total is difficult to pin down, a list of steamboats on the Columbia River on Wikipedia documents nearly 400 distinct steam-powered sternwheelers, sidewheelers, and tugs that worked the river.

The Columbia always has been a river of commerce. Thomas Jefferson envisioned a water route across North America to the Pacific for the purposes of commerce, and he envisioned the Columbia as a key part of it. Inland fur trading routes utilized the river and its tributaries; sea-going vessels increasingly explored the lower Columbia waterway beginning in the late 1700s.

It was inevitable that as river commerce grew, river traffic would grow, as well. Sail power soon gave way to steam power; river traffic grew rapidly in both the number of commercial vessels and the economic importance of the transportation industry. Steadily, the Columbia River country became more populated and the river became an important artery of commerce.

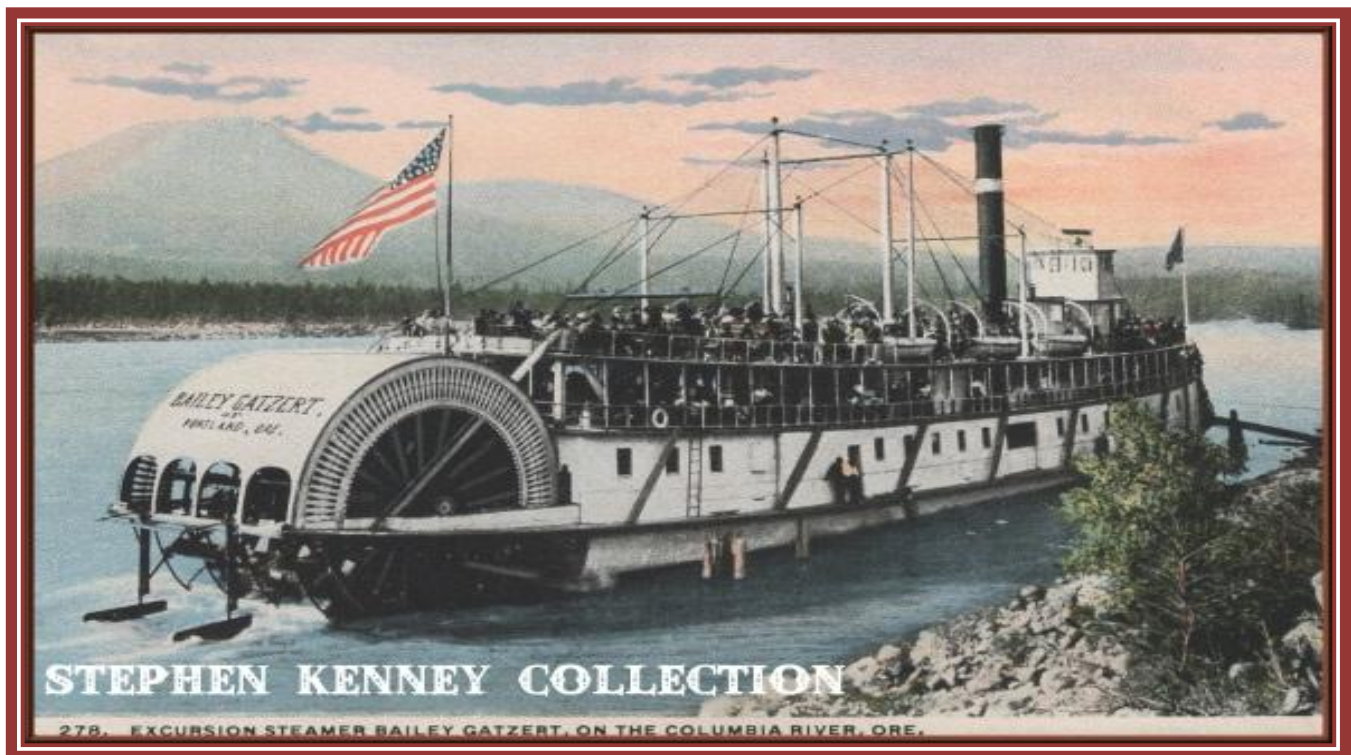
The *Beaver's* first trial run under steam power was on the afternoon of May 17, 1836. Under steam power, the heavy little boat's boilers consumed up to 40 cords of wood per day. So, a long excursion required about as much time tied up along the shore so the crew could gather wood as the boat actually spent on the water. Nonetheless, the *Beaver* strengthened the Bay Company's grip on Northwest commerce.

In an era dominated by sail power, the *Beaver* was something of a novelty. One of the first to ride on the *Beaver*, after it arrived, was the American missionary Samuel Parker, who came west with Marcus Whitman in the previous year in 1835. He had returned east after establishing a location for his mission among the Nez Perce Indians and now was returning, via Fort Vancouver.

Ironically, just a month later, on July 17, the *Beaver* left on its first voyage from Fort Vancouver — and never returned to the Columbia. The Chief Factor of the fort, Dr. John McLoughlin, dispatched the ship to the company's Nisqually trading post at the southern end of Puget Sound, where it was more useful for trips up and down the sound and to locations as far away as Sitka. The *Beaver* was in the company's employ for 40 years before it was wrecked in 1888.



Real photo postcard of the steamer Bailey Gatzert near Cascade Locks circa 1908. Postally unused.



Lithographed postcard of the steamer *Bailey Gatzert* near Cascade Locks, circa 1908. Published for American Art Post Cards by Lipschutz. Postally unused.

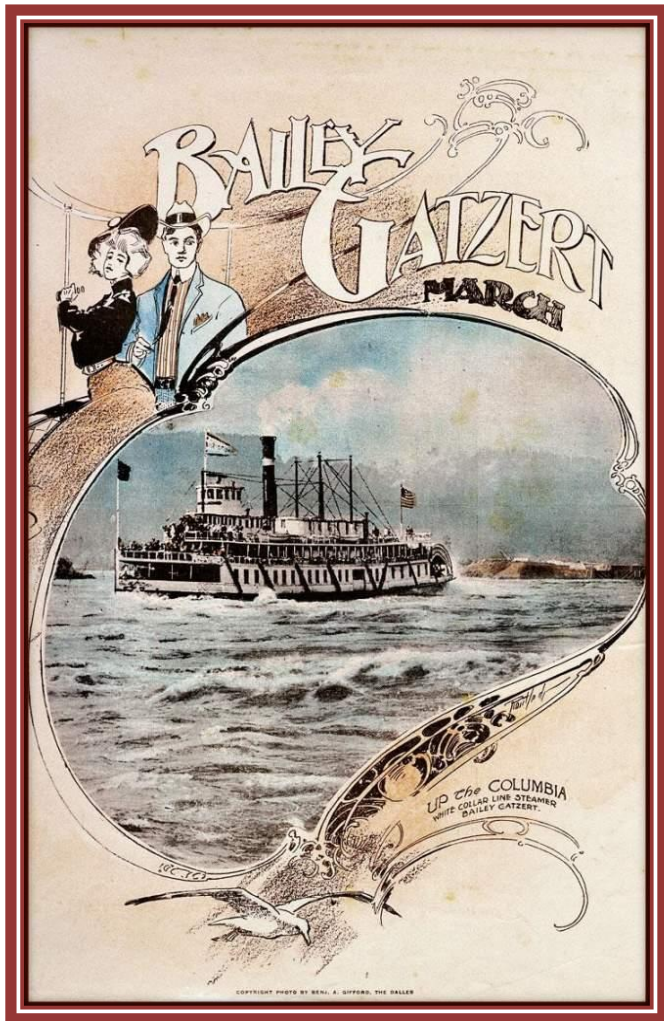
The *Bailey Gatzert* was a wood-burning sternwheel steamboat that ran on the Columbia River and Washington's Puget Sound from the 1890s to the 1920s. This vessel was considered one of the finest of its time. It was named after Bailey Gatzert, an early businessman and mayor of Seattle, who was one of the closest friends and business associates of John Leary – the person who financed the ship.

The *Bailey Gatzert* probably carried more passengers than any other Columbia River steamer. It was considered to be one of the most beautiful river boats on the river, mainly because its upper deck ran all the way out to the bow.

The *Bailey Gatzert* was launched on Saturday, November 22, 1890, at 1:00 p.m. from the shipyard of John J. Holland at Ballard, Washington before 1,500 spectators. The launch was originally scheduled to occur at noon, but was delayed for an hour to allow the tide to come in.

The *Bailey Gatzert* made only a few runs for its original owners before being sold to the Columbia River and Puget Sound Navigation Company (CR&PSN), which was also called the White Collar Line.

During the Lewis and Clark Exposition of 1905, the *Bailey Gatzert* made two excursions a day to Cascades Locks, departing Portland at 8:30 a.m. and at 5:30 p.m., with a fare of \$1.50, including meals served on board. A special tune was written for the steamer at this time, the "Bailey Gatzert March."



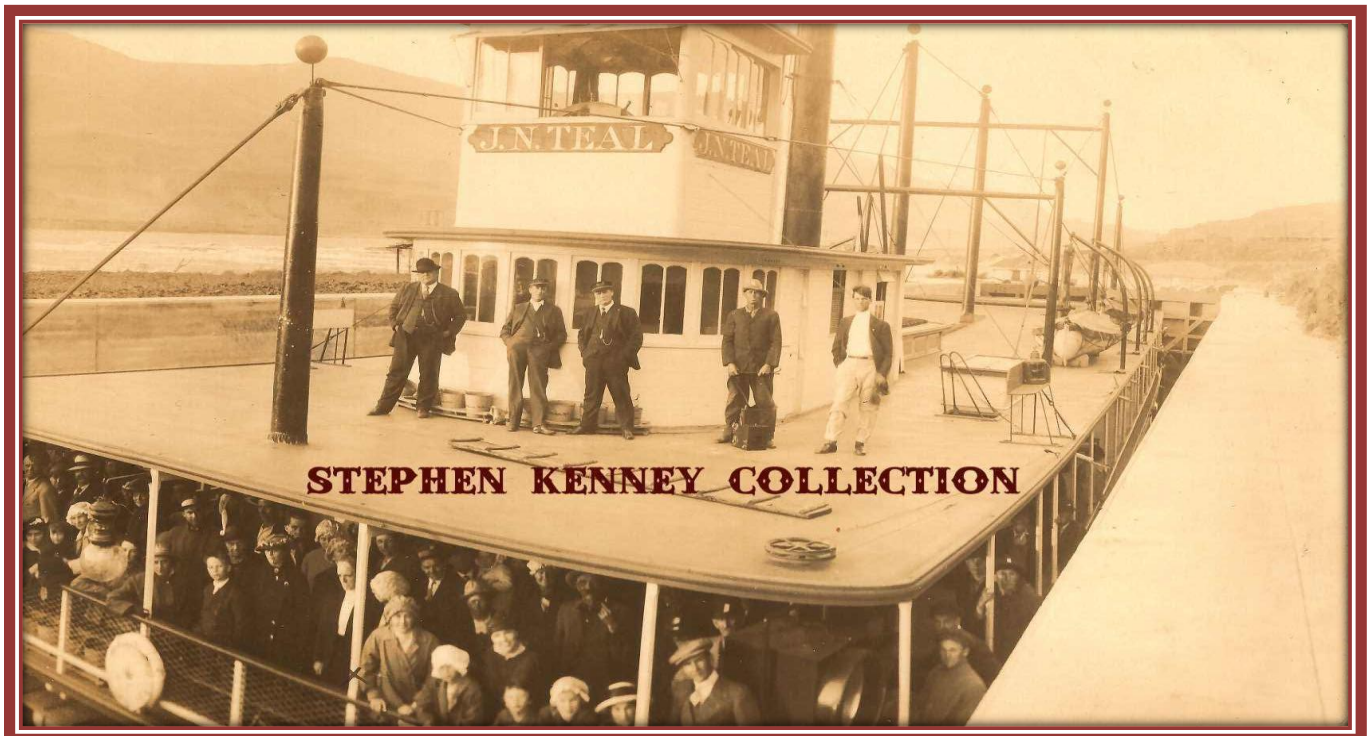
In 1907, the *Bailey Gatzert* was rebuilt with a new and longer hull. Engines which had previously been in the *Telephone* were installed into the *Gatzert*. The boat was converted to an oil-burner from a wood-burner.

On Saturday, August 24, 1907, the new *Gatzert* was launched from the Portland Shipbuilding Company at 11:30 a.m.

On April 10, 1918, the *Gatzert* was purchased by a shipping line known as The Navy Yard Route, an affiliate of the dominant Puget Sound Navigation Company, and placed on the run between Seattle and Bremerton, Washington.

In 1930, the hulk of the steamer was sold to the Lake Union Drydock and Machine Works, of Seattle, which built a four-story structure on the old hull, which was still sound, and used the vessel as a floating shipway and machine shop in Lake Union.

Cover of the *Bailey Gatzert March* which was written for the Lewis & Clark Exposition in 1905.



Real photo postcard of the J.N. Teal at Cascade Locks, Oregon circa 1915. Postmarked July 2, 1915 in North Yakima, Washington.

STEPHEN KENNEY COLLECTION



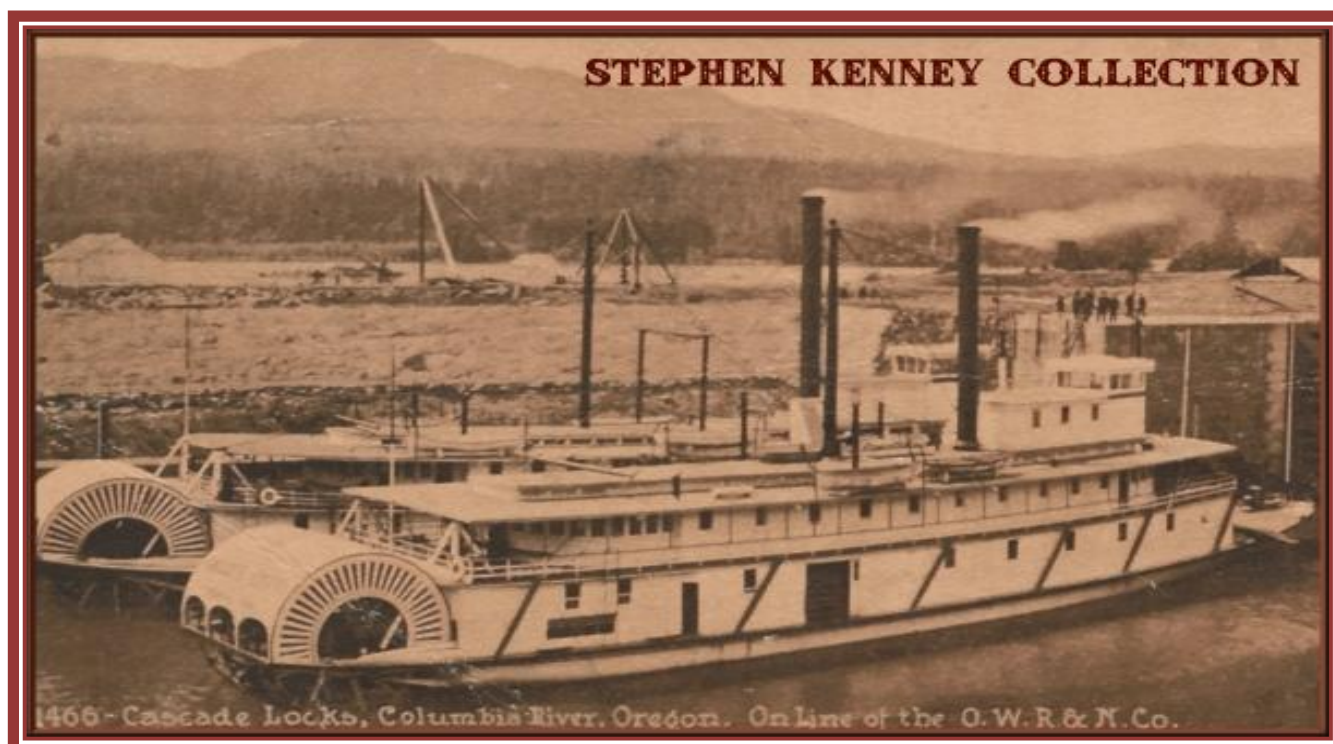
Woodfield real photo postcard of the steamer Lurline at Astoria, Oregon circa 1910. Postmarked May 18, 1912 in Portland. The Lurline was one of the longest-lived steamers on the lower Columbia operating for 52 years from 1878 to 1980.

As rail competition grew, and forced steamboats off their old routes, shippers and steamboat lines began agitating Congress to allocate funds for improvements to the river, in the form of canals and locks, that would restore their competitive position relative to the railroads. The two main improvements on the Columbia were the Cascade Locks and Canal, completed in 1896, and the Celilo Canal and Locks, completed in 1915. While these projects did open the river first to The Dalles, and then all the way to Wallula, there was no long-term improvement for the steamboats' position in their losing competition against the railroads.

By 1915, steamboat operations had dropped sharply, and the only boats regularly running on the Columbia above Vancouver were few, mainly the *Bailey Gatzert* and the *Dalles City*, with the *Bailey* running excursions and passenger traffic from Portland to The Dalles, and *Dalles City* running freight and passengers along the same route, but making more stops. Downriver to Astoria, the *T.J. Potter* had been condemned in 1916, and, with some exceptions, the boats of Harkins Transportation Company, including the new steam propeller *Georgiana* (built 1914), were the only major boats on the river.

The *Bailey Gatzert* excursion runs up the Columbia came to an end in 1917 when the *Bailey* was transferred to Seattle, Washington, to serve the Seattle-Bremerton route, then much in demand because of wartime marine construction at the Bremerton Navy Yard.

Railroad and highway construction in the early 1920s finished off the steamboat trade. By 1923, major passenger and freight steamboat operations on the lower and middle Columbia had ceased, except for towboats, and until 1937, the passenger and freight boats of the Harkins Transportation Company on the lower Columbia, including the *Georgiana*.



Mitchell lithographed postcard of two paddleboats at Cascade Locks. Postmarked in The Dalles, Oregon on July 2, 1918.

Sources for this article:

Google, Stephen Kenney, Northwest Power and Conservation Council, Oregon Encyclopedia, Wikipedia.

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