

STORY OF “HANS THE BOATMAN”

By Charles M. Defieux, *Vancouver Sun*, Saturday, September 21st, 1968, page 17.

Hans Hansen was hired as caretaker for the Bole property [in Belcarra]. Hansen had “jumped ship” or left the Norwegian ship *Esmeralda* known as the “hell ship.” (Defieux 1969)

(Bole’s son Percy met Hans by accident near Campbell River in the 1930’s and was able to renew the family friendship — resulting in a newspaper article which recorded these facts for posterity.)

“My husband went to him, touched him on the shoulder and said, ‘My name is Bole and I’m from Belcarra.’ The old gentleman replied ‘I’m Hans Hansen’, and this was an amazing coincidence,” recalled Kathleen.

What had happened was back in 1881 [most probably 1883] when her father-in-law was walking down the street in New Westminster a young fellow stopped and asked him for a job. He said he had jumped a Norwegian ship and wanted to stay in Canada and needed work.



Hans Hansen c.1890

“My father-in-law said he had just acquired this place past Port Moody in the inlet and could use a caretaker and took him on. The young fellow was Hans Hansen,” stated Kathleen.

She said after all those years of not being in touch the family friendship was renewed quite by accident and she still keeps in close contact with them although Hans has since passed away.

[Editor’s Note: Sven Hans Hansen was born at Husø, Tonsberg, Norway (near Oslo), in October 1859. At the tender age of fourteen, he accompanied his father and a school companion to sea. Starting off as a cabin boy, he worked his way to other positions during his time on shipboard, and encountered many hardships and interesting experiences. *Source*: Edith Bendickson *nee* Hansen.]

Mention of “Hans the Boatman” in a recent column on Inlet ferry history has brought a letter from his daughter, Edith [*nee* Hansen], now Mrs. H.L. Bendickson of Hardwicke Island who uses the Kelsey Bay P.O. [Post Office]

“My father came to Vancouver in 1877,” Mrs. Bendickson writes. “He was on the ‘hell ship’ *Esmeralda*... and with a friend jumped ship. He was befriended by... John Haning Coulthard and got a job in the old Hastings Mill at \$1.00 a day. He had planned to return to Norway, his homeland, but after losing his left hand when his muzzle-loading gun exploded, he remained in *Gastown*, having a blacksmith make an iron piece for him, which buckled to his arm, enabling him to row a boat.”

“For some time after losing his arm Dad shot and sold deer hind quarters for 50 cents apiece, perfectly legal in those days. Next, he got work at George Black’s store, and the hotel in *Hastings*. He looked after the first post office, and when the first train came in with mail to Port Moody ‘Hans the Boatman’ was there to receive it.”

“Around 1881 [most probably 1883] Dad was caretaker of the W. Norman Bole estate at Belcarra. In later years he sailed up the coast trading with the Indians and for a short time, was in the store business with his friend Nels Hjorth at Buckley, near Shoal Bay (a Surrey road is named for Hjorth). When he finally landed at Port Neville he thought it was an ideal place to settle. It was his home most of the time from 1881 until he died in 1939.” [Sven Hans Hansen died on December 3rd, 1939, at age of 80.]

“He started the first post office there in 1895, a post office still in our family and operated by my older brother and his wife. The love of the sea is in the blood of all his family. We live just 10 miles from my old home, the old Hansen home at Port Neville.”

“My husband and three other brothers are in the logging business”.

Her brother-in-law, Capt. B.I. (Harney) Bendickson of Vancouver, is a member of a family that holds a respected place in the history of up-coast logging.

To these pioneers and descendants of the old-timers, historians such as myself owe so much.