

MV SCENIC **BOAT BRINGS BACK CHILDHOOD MEMORIES**

By Patricia Eaton, *The Sunday NEWS*, July 20th, 1986.

I recognized her immediately as I stood in the West Port lineup at Expo.

She has kept her figure, but she has definitely had a face lift. The *MV Scenic* is still beautiful, and I wondered how many visitors to Expo were flooded with childhood memories as I was.

Who can forget the joyous summer outings to Wigwam Inn or Belcarra Park? Family groups laden with picnic baskets would disembark from the streetcars at Main and Hastings, and walk to the foot of Gore Avenue. There, at the *Harbour Navigation Dock*, they would board the *Scenic* for the leisurely trip along the fjord-like north arm of the inlet. Tickets were 30 cents for adults and 15 cents for children. Roy Barry, the mate, would settle himself on the deck and entertain the passengers with his banjo. Captain McBurney would tell about his pet bear who resided on Mount Seymour, and before long every kid would be staring fixedly at the mountain.

Harbour Ferries' *MV Scenic* has been plying local waters since 1916. Built in 1907 in Anacortes, Washington, for the *United States Navy*, she was christened *Falcon* and served as a tender at the *Bremerton Navy Yard*.

Around 1916, she was purchased by Captains Brewster and McLean of the *Port Moody Ferry Co.*, and was used on passenger service between Vancouver, Port Moody and Iloilo until 1922. As new roads slowly progressed eastward from Vancouver, she was taken off the run and used as a passenger and picnic boat between Vancouver, Belcarra, and Wigwam Inn at Indian Arm.



British Columbia Archives (BCARS D-06740)

Harbour Navigation Vessel *MV Scenic* — circa 1920

In 1930, the *Scenic* was purchased by Captain J.D. Stalker who owned *Harbour Navigation* (now *Harbour Ferries Ltd.*). In 1932, she was completely rebuilt from the waterline up, and redesigned to operate in shallow waters, enabling her to tie up at small floats. She is shallow drafted and her propeller is higher than her keel. Her gasoline engine was replaced by a Superior Diesel.

From 1932 until 1968, she was said to be the only *Floating Post Office* in the British Empire. Her official title was the *Burrard Inlet T.P.O.* (Traveling Post Office). She became known to stamp collectors around the world, who would send letters to be stamped by Captain Stalker, the postmaster.

The *Scenic* had her own special run, six days a week in the summer, and two days a week in the winter. After leaving Vancouver, she would stop at Belcarra, Woodlands, Sunshine, Brighton Beach, Thwaytes Landing, Lake Buntzen, Jubilee, Weldwood and Wigwam Inn. She delivered and picked-up her mail, sold stamps, postal notes, registered mail, and picked-up passengers who wished to go to town.

In the late '30s and during the '40s, residents who lived along the inlet, but weren't on her regular stops, could summon "Captain Andy" (Captain J.C. Anderson) by putting a four gallon gasoline can painted white on top of a flagpole-like structure. *Scenic* would then pull into the resident's dock and pick-up any mail, passengers, or messages to be carried to Vancouver.

Residents could mail their grocery orders to *Woodward's* and in a day or so, the *Scenic* would return their supplies. She also delivered fresh milk. Residents would pre-order their milk through *Harbour Navigation* which kept records and milk tickets, and ordered the milk from *Dairyland*.

In November 1949, when flood waters knocked out the bridge over the Capilano River between North and West Vancouver, *Scenic* transported many stranded people back and forth.

Inevitable, progress brought a road through to Belcarra. In 1968, her famous mail run came to an end. From late 1969 to early 1971, the *Scenic* was used in the cross-harbour ferry service, a venture that slowly died from lack of passengers. In 1979, she was contracted out to the *Provincial Park Branch* on a summer run providing service between Nanaimo and Newcastle Island. In 1982, she carried school children between Protection Island and Nanaimo.

And now she is refitted and overhauled for her stint at Expo.



City of Vancouver Archives (CVA Bo P182)

***MV Scenic* — landing children at *Camp Jubilee*, Indian Arm, circa 1939**

MV SCENIC HISTORY

In 1907 an event took place in the *United States of America* which later had a beneficial and profound impact on the early days of Indian Arm, and indeed, of Belcarra. In that year a ship slid down the ways of a shipyard in Anacortes, Washington. The new vessel was christened *Falcon* and shortly after her shake-down cruise she entered into the service of the *United States Navy*. She was originally designed to serve as a tender at the *Bremerton Navy Yard*.

Nothing further is known of her service in the *U.S. Navy*, but around 1916 the *Port Moody Ferry Co.*, owned by Captains Brewster and McLean, purchased her and re-named her the *M.V. Scenic*. She was bought to be used on a passenger ship service between Vancouver, Port Moody and Iloilo. When the new townsite of Iloilo was originally built there was no road to connect it with the outside world, and the *Scenic* provided a much needed service. But as new roads slowly stretched eastward from Vancouver, ferry use grew less and less and finally the run was abandoned in 1922.

Her next duties were as a picnic and passenger ship plying the waters between Vancouver, Belcarra and Wigwam Inn. She became well known for carrying passengers to the many company and family picnics in Belcarra Park and for the cruises up to the end of Indian Arm.

Captain J. D. Stalker, owner of *Harbour Navigation* (which is now known as *Harbour Ferries Ltd.*) acquired the *Scenic* in 1930. He then completely rebuilt her from her waterline to her mast. She was redesigned with a shallow draft and her propeller was mounted higher than the bottom of her keel. She was thus able to operate in very shallow waters, enabling her to service the many small floats located up the inlet. During her reconstruction she was re-powered with a Superior Diesel. Replacing her original gasoline engine provided increased power and reliability at a lower operating cost.

The *Scenic* was said to be the only Floating Post Office in the British Empire. Her official title was the "*Burrard Inlet T. P. O.*" (Traveling Post Office). She started operating as a floating post office in 1932 and operated for over three and a half decades before her contract was finally cancelled. As her fame spread, she became known to many stamp collectors around the world. They sent stamped letters to Captain Stalker, the postmaster to cancel in order to add a "*Burrard Inlet T.P.O.*" stamp to their collection. These have become a rare and very prized memorabilia item.

Two days a week in winter and six days a week in the summer, the *Scenic* plied her route. The ship carried freight, mail and passengers. On her regular schedule she criss-crossed Indian Arm servicing many communities from her home dock at the north end of Gore Avenue in Vancouver. Dollarton, Belcarra, Coombe, Bedwell Bay, Deep Cove, Buntzen, Woodlands, Belvedere, Sunshine, Cascade, Brighton Beach, Jubilee, Orlohma Beach, Frames, Thwaytes Landing, Coldwell Beach, Johnson, Granite Falls, Iron Bay, Weldwood, and Wigwam Inn all depended on support from *Harbour Navigation Co. Ltd.* The settlements, property owners, squatters, pensioners and workers up and down the fjord also relied on the *Scenic* to transport building materials, clothing, tools, logging and fishing equipment, mail, stamps, postal notes, registered mail, food and booze.

Inlet residents were able to mail grocery orders to *Woodward's Stores*, and in a day or so, the *Scenic* would drop off their supplies. They were also able to pre-order fresh milk. *Harbour Navigation* kept milk tickets and records and had an agreement with *Dairyland* to supply the fresh milk.

In November of 1949, the *Scenic* was pressed into emergency role when flood waters knocked-out the only bridge over the Capilano River. She moved hundreds of otherwise stranded people back and forth between North and West Vancouver.

But once more the steady increase in quick road access caught up with and passed the slow, relaxed service provided by the *Scenic*. By the early '50s a road had been punched through to Belcarra, and in 1968, the *Scenic's* famous mail run was canceled.

Briefly, the *Scenic* was used in the Vancouver cross-harbor ferry service from late 1969 to early 1971. But that venture too, slowly died from a lack of passengers. In 1979, she was contracted out to the Provincial Park Branch for a summer run, providing a service between the *City of Nanaimo* and Newcastle Island. Then in 1982 she carried school children between Protection Island and Nanaimo.

Who, in 1907, at Anacortes, could have ever imagined that the newly launched *Falcon*, a bird of prey, would have such a remarkable and distinguished career? The early name change seemed to indicate a shift in her nautical role in her life. She became a source of happiness to those to whom she showed the splendors of Indian Arm. She became a trustworthy friend of those who counted on her to provide them with food and sustenance. And she became an essential ingredient to many people whose life style could not have prevailed without the support provided by *Harbour Navigation* and the *Motor Vessel Scenic*.



Photograph courtesy of Walter Mechler

***MV Scenic* — landing children at YMCA *Camp Howdy*, Indian Arm, 1953**