

The SS Beaver

THE FINAL RESTING PLACE of the famous steamship *Beaver*, one of the Hudson's Bay Company's most significant ships, is deep in the Narrows at the northern tip of Prospect Point in Stanley Park near the entrance of the Lions Gate Bridge.

The 101-foot-long *Beaver*, built in London, England, in 1835 of English and African oak, was sailed around Cape Horn and arrived on the west coast the following year. Her paddlewheel and boilers were installed at Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River.

In 1858, in response to the sudden influx of miners to participate in the Fraser River gold rush, the *Beaver* carried a party of dignitaries from Fort Victoria to Fort Langley on the 19th of November, where Judge Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie swore in James Douglas as the first governor of the new colony of British Columbia.

The HBC leased the *Beaver* to the Royal Navy under the command of Lieutenant Daniel Pender from 1863 to 1870 to survey and chart 1,000 miles of coastline of the colony. The fur-trading company in 1874 decided to sell the small vessel to a private consortium called the British Columbia Towing and Transportation Company, who used it to tow barges and log booms.

On 25 July 1888 the company's crew ran the *Beaver* aground on rocks at Prospect Point. W. H. Evans, the assistant engineer, recalled that "the tide was pretty near high water, but still running in, because the

captain hugged the shore pretty tight to get past the eddy off Observation Point and the first thing I knew she hit, and that settled it. We all got off. We were in too much of a hurry to pack up...We all got off into the water and waded ashore..." Strong currents and Captain George Marchant's human error caused the shipwreck.

For the next four years souvenir hunters managed to scavenge many of the "fittings and turn them into keepsakes. The paddlewheeler finally sank on 26 June 1892 from the wake of the passing steamer *Yosemite*. The wreck remained visible from the shoreline until finally breaking up 90 years later in 1982.



James Menzies, an early Vancouver house mover, was one of three official salvagers of the wrecked *Beaver*, and for years he stored the side lever from the old ship in his garage on Cordova Street. The relic was later placed on display at Prospect Point in Stanley Park and became a very popular tourist attraction. Menzies lathed these two wooden goblets from one of the hardwood boards of the wreck. They, along with other *Beaver* memorabilia, are on display at the Old Hastings Mill Store Museum.

Picnickers scavenge the wreckage of the SS *Beaver* at low tide at Prospect Point, 1889.



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