

Burrard Inlet (2)

Revisited

Gray Scrimgeour

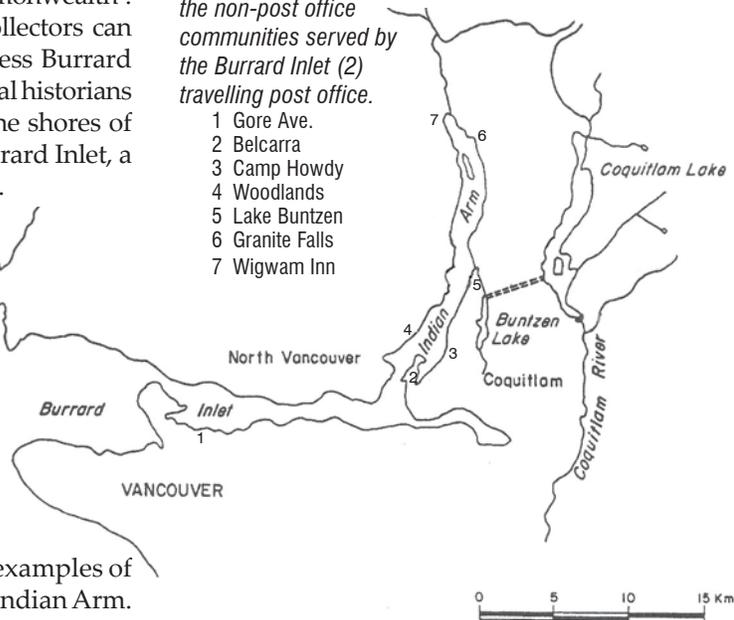
Twenty years ago, Lester Small¹ wrote an article in the *PHSC Journal* describing the travelling post office Burrard Inlet (2). The (2) in the name indicates that there was an earlier BC post office called “Burrard” or “Burrard Inlet”. This earlier office, Burrard Inlet (1) – located five miles east of the main Vancouver office – operated from 1868, and became Hastings in 1897. The travelling post office Burrard Inlet (2) was open from January 1, 1908 to October 30, 1970. This publication greatly expands Small’s article by providing new data on the ferry companies and more examples of mail handled by this office.

Burrard Inlet (2) was claimed to be Canada’s only full-time floating post office and the only water-borne mail route in the Commonwealth². Depending on the time period, collectors can find other examples, but nonetheless Burrard Inlet (2) was both interesting to postal historians and essential for those living on the shores of Indian Arm (the North Arm of Burrard Inlet, a 20-kilometre or 12-mile long fjord).

The outline map of Burrard Inlet (Fig. 1) shows the location of the Gore Avenue Wharf (#1), from which ferries of the Harbour Navigation Co. sailed to Wigwam Inn (#7), at the end of the run. The other numbers show five of the more active settlements on Indian Arm. I will discuss the ships that carried the mails on Indian Arm, then the postmarks used, and finally give examples of mail from and to communities on Indian Arm.

Fig. 1 – Map showing Indian Arm and some of the non-post office communities served by the Burrard Inlet (2) travelling post office.

- 1 Gore Ave.
- 2 Belcarra
- 3 Camp Howdy
- 4 Woodlands
- 5 Lake Buntzen
- 6 Granite Falls
- 7 Wigwam Inn



One of these settlements – Lake Buntzen – had its own post office for a few years.

Ships

Articles and books about the Indian Arm ferry and mail service have conflicting information. Although I have clarified their descriptions by using primary data, there is still some uncertainty about mail ships from 1920 to 1933. Table 1 presents a list of known mail ships and their approximate times of mail service. In the first section, I present evidence for this list of mail ships.

In 1908, when the Burrard Inlet (2) post office opened, the Terminal Steam Navigation Co. provided the ferry service. The Terminal Steam Navigation Co. was started in 1899 by Capt. John Andrew Cates, who purchased the *Defiance* then. This company mainly served Bowen Island and Howe Sound but their 1907 newspaper ads say that “the S.S. *Belcarra* left the Evans, Coleman & Evans Pier daily at 9:15 a.m. for the North Arm and Granite Falls.

Ship	Years Used
<i>Belcarra</i>	1908–1910
<i>Defiance</i>	1911–1913
<i>Alluvia</i>	1914–1919
Harbour Navigation Co.*	1920–1960
<i>Scenic</i>	1933–1960
<i>Wee Willie</i>	1960–1970

* Various ships of the Harbour Navigation Co. performed the mail service between 1920 and 1933.

Sundays at 2 p.m. for Lake Beautiful (Buntzen) only. Calling at Brighton Beach every day.” Cates was the first postmaster of Burrard Inlet (2), from 1908 to 1910 (see Table 2).

Fig. 2 shows a picture post card advertising the Terminal Steam Navigation Co. The card has photographs of four of their ships:

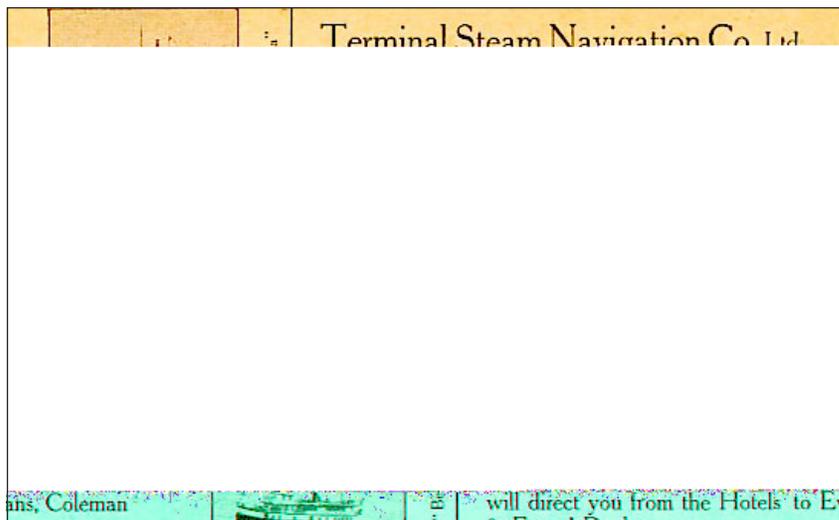


Fig. 2 – Picture post card advertising the Terminal Steam Navigation Co. Ltd. The ships in the two lowest photographs, the *Belcarra* and the *Defiance*, carried the mail as the Burrard Inlet (2) post office.

Fig. 3 – European Import Co. picture post card No. 152, showing Wigwam Inn with the sternwheeler Skeena. This card was mailed at Vancouver in April 1912.

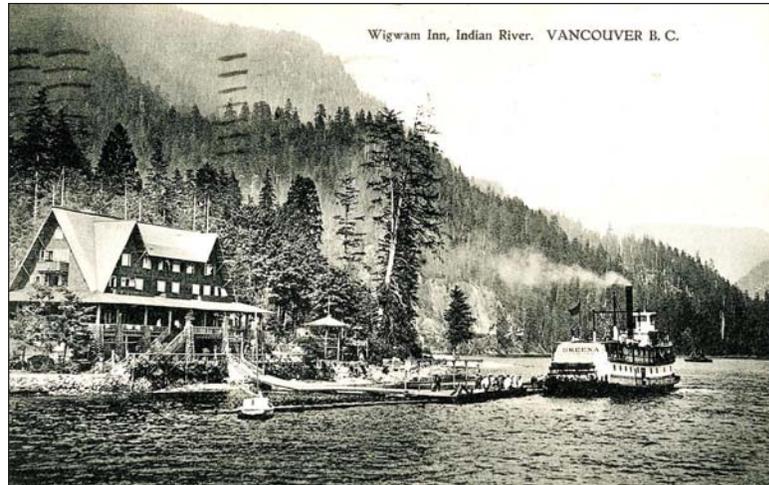


Table 2

Postmasters of Burrard Inlet (2)*

J. A. Cates	1908-01-01	1910-02-03
F. W. Foster	1910-03-01	1913-09-05
Captain H. S. Hilton	1914-01-01	1919-11-26
Arthur C. Ray	1920-01-01	1920-04-09
J. D. Stalker	1920-06-01	1962-05-01
T. J. Manning (acting)	1962-05-01	
Harbour Navigation Co Ltd	1962-11-07	1970-10-03

* Data from the *Post Offices and Postmasters* file online at www.collectionscanada.gc.ca

Baramba (formerly the *R.P. Rithet*), *Britannia*, *Belcarra*, and *Defiance*. The card is not dated but must have been printed in late 1909 or early 1910. Both the *Belcarra* and the *Defiance* carried mail to and from Indian Arm.

By 1911, newspaper ads for the Terminal Steam Navigation Co. no longer mention trips to the North Arm. The company serving this route now was the North Arm Steamship Co. Ltd. with two ships: the *S.S. Defiance* and the *S.S. Roche Point* (built in 1911). This company was registered on June 29, 1910³. In September

1910, it had three shareholders: Evans B. Deans (broker), Frederick W. Foster (salesman), and Ronald Monteith Maitland (broker). Maitland was on the crew of the 8-metre sailboat *Santa Maria*, which won a silver medal for Canada at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games. Foster was postmaster of Burrard Inlet (2) from 1910 to 1913.

I have a brochure published by the North Arm Steamship Co., Ltd. in 1912. The brochure describes the company's three ships: the *S.S. Skeena* (Captain L. J. McKinnon), the *S.S. Defiance* (Captain John Lawrence), and the passenger launch *Elola*. The brochure says that "The '*S.S. Defiance*' has held the mail contract for years, and therefore can be considered the most reliable and regular steamer on the North Arm." At that time, the *Defiance* sailed twice daily between Lake Buntzen and Vancouver. The *S.S. Skeena* was her relief ship; the *Skeena* normally made one round trip each day between Vancouver and Indian River (site of Wigwam Inn). Fig. 3 shows a picture post card of the *Skeena* at Wigwam Inn. North Arm Steamship ran ads

as late as the summer of 1913 for daily trips up the North Arm by the *S.S. Skeena*. The company went into liquidation on November 5, 1913. The liquidator sold the company's only asset, the *Defiance*.

Ads for a new company with ships to the North Arm – the Harbour Shipping Co. – appeared in 1913. The sternwheeler *S.S. Alluvia* made daily trips to Wigwam Inn. Captain Herbert S. Hilton was owner and manager of this company^{4,5}; he also was postmaster of Burrard Inlet (2) from 1914 to 1919. The company's wharf and offices in Vancouver were at the foot of Gore Avenue. This company continued the route until 1920.

In 1920, Captain J. D. Stalker purchased the Harbour Shipping Co. and changed the name to Harbour Navigation Co. In 1921, this company was using three ships: the *Enilada*, the *Lo-olbee*, and the *Fort Langley*⁶. The *Enilada* – formerly a private yacht – was the company's flagship. The *Lo-olbee* was described as a

“serviceable craft” that carried the bulk of the provisions. The *Fort Langley* was a “river boat . . . of typical ferry construction”. The company soon owned a new boat, the *Lake Buntzen*. The diesel-powered Motor Vessel *Harbour Princess* (with a capacity for 250 passengers) was built for Harbour Navigations in 1924⁵, and served Indian Arm for many years. I have not yet been able to determine which ship or ships carried the mail for Burrard Inlet (2) until 1933, when the *M.V. Scenic* was assigned to the route.

The *M.V. Scenic* (Fig. 4) was the regular mail boat for the longest period. She was built in 1907 in Anacortes, Washington and came to the Port Moody Ferry Co. in 1916⁵. She ran to Port Moody and Ioco until the road there was built, then went up Indian Arm. She was bought by Harbour Navigation Co. in 1930. She was redesigned in 1932 for operation in shallow waters and changed so that her bow could pass over floats for easy unloading. She did the mail run, starting in 1932 or 1933.

Fig. 4 – Motor Vessel *Scenic* in Vancouver harbour.
Image D-6740, courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives



Regular year-round stops were “Belcarra, Woodlands, Sunshine, Brighton Beach, Lake Buntzen, Jubilee, Weldwood [logging camp], and Wigwam Inn.” Residents at other locations could signal when they wanted to be picked up to go to Vancouver by raising a large can on a pole. Occasionally stops were made at Dollarton, Deep Cove, Belvedere, Orlohma Beach, Thwaytes Landing, Coldwell Beach, Johnson, and Granite Falls.

The former West Vancouver ferry *MV Hollyburn* was added to the Harbour Navigation fleet in 1954. She usually made the express run from Vancouver to and from Wigwam Inn.

Postmarks

As shown in Fig. 5, there were three broken-circle datestamps related to Burrard Inlet (2). A dater reading BURRARD, B.C. was proofed on September 19, 1907—presumably for use by the travelling post office. I have seen no use of this hammer. In less than three months, a new hammer reading BURRARD INLET, B.C. was manufactured. It was



Fig. 5 – Proof impressions of the three broken-circle datestamps related to Burrard Inlet (2).

proofed on November 29, 1907. Andrew Scott has recorded a strike of this hammer dated March 29, 1909. I have five examples of this hammer: one postal stationery card (January 4, 1911; Fig. 6), two outbound picture post cards (January 25, 1912 and October 9, 1912), one inbound picture post card (October 27, 1916) and one cover (December 21, no year; probably 1915 or 1916). Note that the latter two items were postmarked with the 1907-manufactured broken circle after the 1913 hammer was available.

The second BURRARD INLET, B.C. hammer was proofed on December 19, 1913. It was used until the office closed. I have over 40 examples of this hammer, dating between

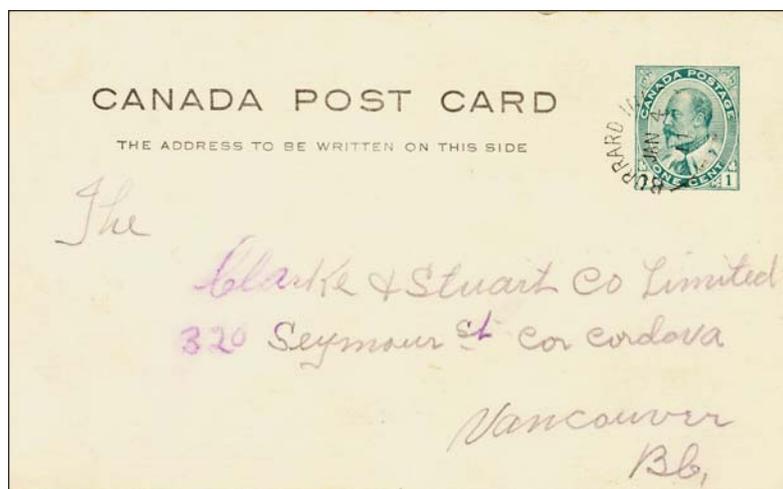


Fig. 6 – Postal stationery card written at Lake Buntzen on January 2, 1911 and postmarked BURRARD INLET, B.C., on January 4, 1911.

July 8, 1914 and June 27, 1969. The postmaster properly applied strikes of the datestamp to the left of the stamp(s), and usually used an 8-bar killer to cancel the adhesive(s) alongside this datestamp. Arthur Mayse wrote in 1940⁷ that outgoing mail was postmarked in the company office of Harbour Navigation Co. by Capt. Stalker.

Until 1950, the shipboard postal clerk on the *Scenic* was Captain J.C. Anderson (“Cap’n Andy”). He delivered and collected mail and sold stamps⁸. J. J. Paddy Gilmore succeeded Anderson; Gilmore’s first runs up Indian Arm were in 1909.

Straightline Marks

I have concentrated on finding commercial mail from Burrard Inlet. Because of the unusual nature of Burrard Inlet (2), many philatelists asked for favour cancels. Philatelic mail is much more common than commercial mail. Some contrived covers have straightline rubber-stamp marks with ship names. These

marks are favour cachets, applied in the company office. The December 10, 1928 cover shown in Fig. 7 bears a strike of the Harbour Princess straightline. The seller considered it to be a commercial cover but I have seen another cover – identical – sent to the same address, the same day. The SCENIC straightline (such as that shown on the 1936 cover in Fig. 8) is the most common ship cachet. Both of these covers show the 8-bar killer.

Registration

As noted by Small¹, Burrard Inlet could register mail. Fig. 9 shows a registered letter written at Lake Buntzen and postmarked January 29, 1944 by BURRARD INLET. The registration box was applied in purple ink. The Original No. was written in pencil below the box. This was done on the other registered covers I own.



Fig. 7 – Cover bearing the straightline cachet “Harbour Princess.”

Fig. 8. Cover bearing the straightline cachet "SCENIC".



Fig. 9 – Cover registered at Burrard Inlet (2) on January 29, 1944.

Non-Post Office Points

The settlements that the ships serving Burrard Inlet (2) called at were non-post office points; i.e., they had no government post office at the settlement. Some were fair-sized communities; others were only a few houses with a float. I have covers from many non-post office points, and will describe a few of these.

One of the busiest points of call was Belcarra. In winter, there were three trips per

week up Indian Arm; in summer, there were daily, multiple sailings. In winter, the first call by the *Scenic* was Belcarra. In summer, the *Scenic* did not normally go to Belcarra. The park there had sufficient business that the *Harbour Princess* made trips to and from Belcarra. The *Hollyburn* made express runs to and from Wigwam Inn, and the *Scenic* served all the other communities.

The pioneer land owner at Belcarra was John Hall, who in the 1870s claimed and

settled 161 acres of Crown land. In 1882, Hall was charged with murder and defended by William Bole. Hall used much of the land to pay the lawyer's fees. In 1906, the Terminal Steamship Company bought 100 acres at Belcarra from Bole, subdivided and sold some lots, and developed the rest as a park, with picnic facilities, cabins, and a dance hall⁹. The Bole family retained, then sold, a parcel of land that later was purchased back by William Bole's son, J. Percy Hampton Bole. Fig. 10 presents winter mail from Belcarra, a cover that contains a card acknowledging an expression of sympathy. The card was written at Belcarra on February 18, 1958 by Norah Kathleen Bole, Percy's wife.

Another busy point for mail was

Woodlands, on the west side of Indian Arm. A narrow road was built to Woodlands, starting in 1915, but most residents relied on the marine service. Fig. 11 shows an inbound cover mailed at Deroche, B.C. on July 10, 1913 and addressed to "Woodlands, N. Arm Burrard Inlet, Vancouver". There is no backstamp on the cover. Inbound mail for any point on Indian Arm is scarce. Fig. 12 illustrates a cover sent from "Copper Beech" Woodlands, B.C. by air mail from Vancouver to Singapore. It bears a May 9, 1953 BURRARD INLET broken circle. The sender of this cover also sent the 1957 registered cover shown as Fig. 1 in Lester Small's article¹.

The store at Woodlands had an unofficial post office. Jessie Squire, the owner of the



Fig. 10 – Cover from Belcarra postmarked BURRARD INLET February 19, 1958.

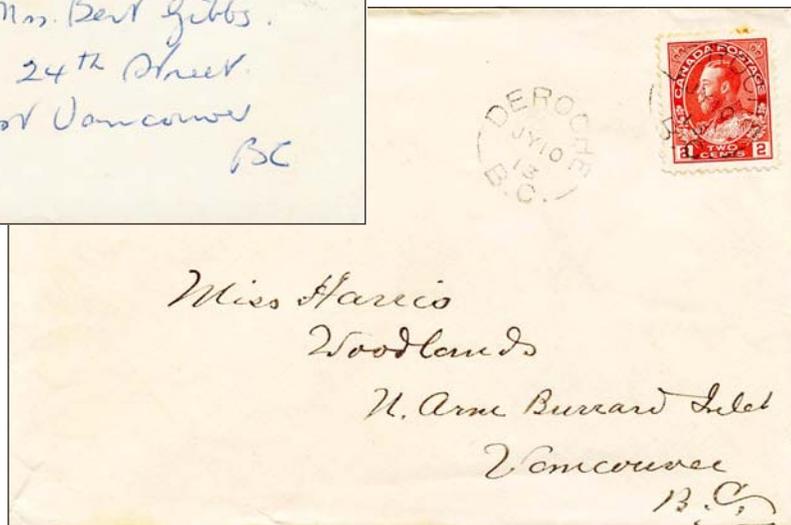


Fig. 11 – July 1913 cover from Deroche to Woodlands. Inbound mail to Burrard Inlet is scarce.

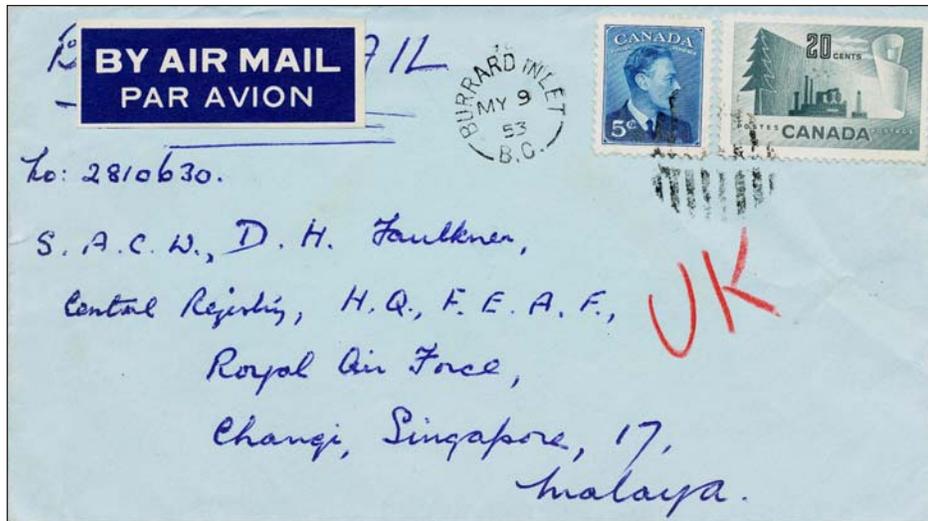


Fig. 12 –
A May 9, 1953
cover from
Woodlands to
Singapore.

store, operated this office for 29 years. She met the *Scenic* and collected the community's mail and sorted it, and delivered outbound mail to the ship².

During World War II, the YMCA purchased the 75-acre property owned by Seattle lawyer George Farrer at Belvedere in Farrer Cove².

YMCA Camp Howdy opened in 1947. In its first years, Camp Howdy gave young Vancouver campers 10 days of rustic living. For many boys, this was their first trip from home, and probably their first time living without electricity. I was a camper there in one of the first years, and a leader for the summer of 1952. Leaders tried to

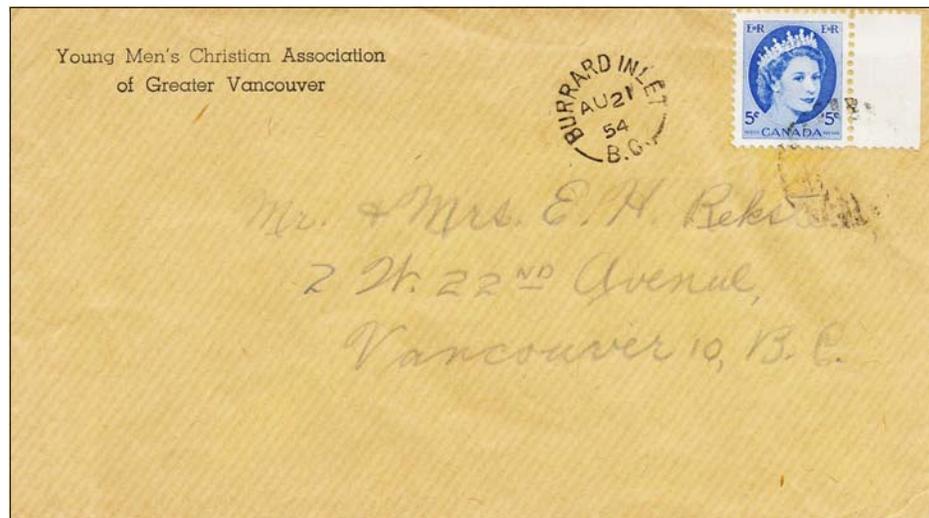


Fig. 13 –
Cover sent on
August 21, 1954
by a Camp
Howdy camper.

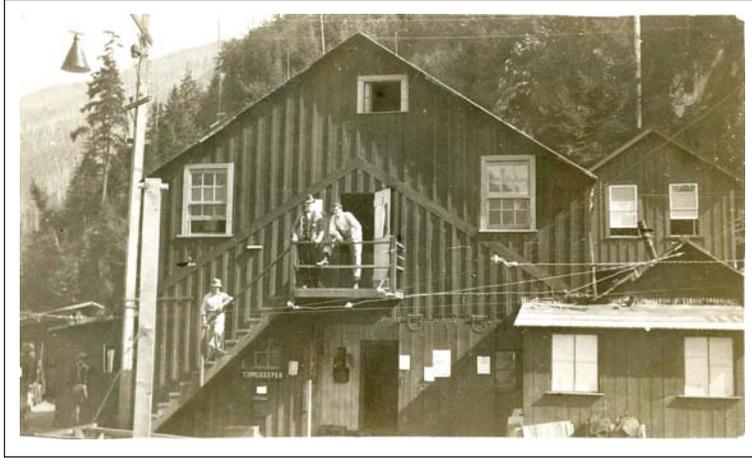
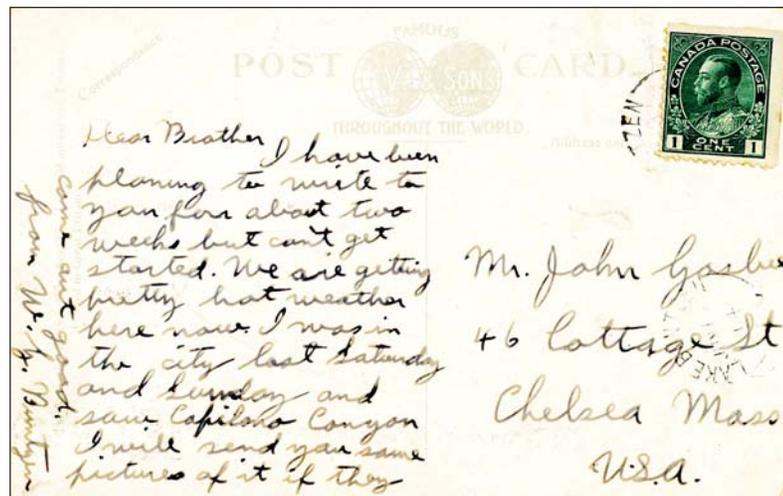


Fig. 14 – Picture post card of the Lake Buntzen store. Presumably the post office, when open, was in the office below the stairs.

Fig. 15 – Picture post card with two strikes of the rare LAKE BUNTZEN, B.C. broken circle postmark.



get each camper to write home once per visit. Fig. 13 shows a cover probably sent home by one of the older campers (or a young leader) in August 1954. The envelope has a rubber-stamped Y.M.C.A. Camp Howdy return address on the back.

For a few years, there was one official post office on Indian Arm – Lake Buntzen. This office was open only from May 1, 1914 to January 31, 1916. It was located at the site of the electrical

power plant that is powered by water from Buntzen Lake and Coquitlam Lake to its east. The two lakes are joined by a tunnel. The first hydroelectric plant was built here in 1903, and a second, larger plant was built in 1914. They were connected to Vancouver by a 17-mile wire system. Today, much of Coquitlam Lake is used for drinking water.

Fig. 14 shows a picture post card of the store at Lake Buntzen settlement. It was

postmarked by the BURRARD INLET first hammer on October 9, 1912. The message says, "This is the store. I am half way down the stairs. This looks into the wharf in front & the office is below." The postmaster at the Lake Buntzen office was W. Saville. I have found out nothing about him except that he was a long-time employee of the B.C. Electric Railway Co. (the electric power authority).

Fig. 15 illustrates a post card written and mailed at Lake Buntzen to Massachusetts on June 17, 1914. It bears two strikes of the LAKE BUNTZEN broken circle. This postmark is rated E by Topping¹⁰; only three items bearing the postmark have been reported¹¹.

The farthest north calls on the mail route were Granite Falls and Wigwam Inn (Indian River Park). Granite Falls was the site of a quarry and there was logging nearby. From the 1960s, for about three decades, Granite Falls Holiday Resort was in operation. This property is now in Indian Arm Provincial Park. The picture post card shown in Fig. 16 has a BURRARD INLET postmark dated June 16, 1966. The view on the card is looking north

from Burnaby Mountain, up the Indian Arm. Notice the advertising message printed on the view: "Greetings from Spectacular Granite Falls. Mailed at North America's only floating Post Office - 'M.V. Scenic'."

Wigwam Inn was a destination resort near the mouth of the Indian River. This summer resort inn opened in 1910. The Harbour Navigation Company operated it for many years. In summer, their ships made express runs to Belcarra and Wigwam Inn. Harbour Navigation newspaper ads in the 1920s described the trip to Wigwam Inn as "The finest scenic water trip on the coast." Picture post cards written at Wigwam Inn and postmarked BURRARD INLET are fairly common; I have a half dozen of them.

Several post offices near the south end of Indian Arm - Deep Water (called Deep Cove after 1940), Dollarton, and Barnet - may have occasionally received or sent some of their mail by ships of the Harbour Navigation Co. There is a report that Harbour Navigation dropped mail at the Government Dock in Deep Cove¹², presumably in the 1930s.

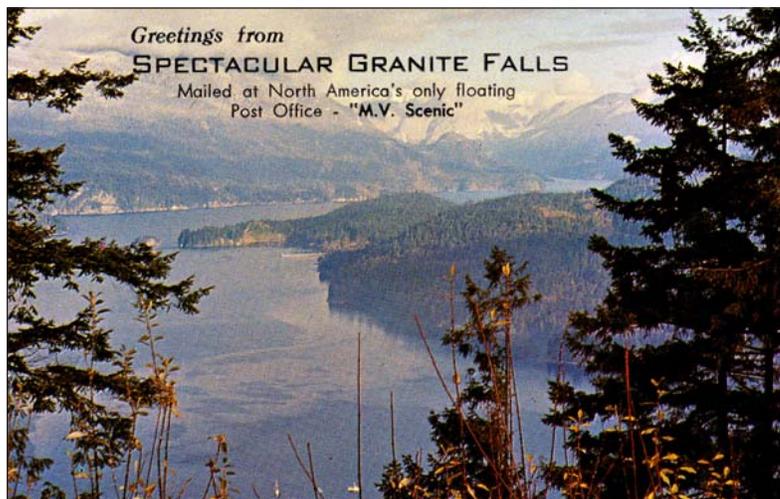


Fig. 16 – Picture post card advertising "Spectacular Granite Falls" and mailed on June 16, 1966 on board the MV Scenic. The view shows the mouth of Indian Arm from Burnaby Mountain.

Residents of these larger settlements may have taken their letters to one of the *Scenic's* ports of call. For example, I have a cover with a Barnet return address that was mailed through Burrard Inlet (2).

For the last 10 years of Burrard Inlet (2), mail was delivered in the Harbour Navigation's 20-foot craft *Wee Willie*¹³. Joe Blackmun skippered the boat that delivered the mail. By 1970, the service was not a paying proposition. The travelling mail service of Burrard Inlet (2) came to an end primarily because roads reached the communities at the southern end of Indian Arm. For example, Woodlands receives mail by road, and one can now drive to Belcarra, Camp Howdy, and Lake Buntzen. Residents without roads were using their own boats for mail and groceries.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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