

Squamish Longshoreman Has Watched Vancouver Grow Into Great Port

By ANDY PAULL

It was a fortunate coincidence to meet Bill Nahanee just where the morning tidal waters encroach upon the low land vegetation of the North Shore. Fortunately because from there he could survey the inlet, allowing his thoughts to wander back half a century—to when the darkling green of virgin forests shrouded its shores, and today's industrial clangor had not yet disturbed its peace.

Billy Nahanee sr., member of the Squamish Indians of North Vancouver, has a unique and first-hand knowledge of this port. Hale and strong in his sixty-seventh year and still one of the most proficient double or single winch drivers on the waterfront, he started his career at the age of 15 as a steam donkey engine driver and has spent the succeeding 52 years loading and discharging cargo ships at Vancouver docks.

"I had to find work and earn a living the best way I could," he says, "for my Hawaiian father died when I was two years old, and my mother, a Capilano Indian, had a hard time to keep up with the customs introduced by the coming of the white men."

Those were the days when windjammers sailed into Burrard Inlet to load lumber for the Orient and South America. Drivers of steam donkey engines were in great demand and 15-year-old Bill soon commanded a responsible job.

A dollar a day was a standard wage then, he says. Bill's first paying job was on the historical SS. Beaver, and before long he became her coal passer, on a trip which took them to Knights Inlet.

Interest In Steam Came While On Beaver

It was while working on the Beaver that Bill first became interested in the mechanics of steam. Indeed, his curiosity about steam engines was what led him to the knowledge that the boiler of the Beaver was leaking, that it could not muster more than the 25 pounds of steam necessary to turn the side-wheels for a speed of four knots.

The Beaver grumbled, heaved and sighed like an old horse with the heaves, he says. This proved very disconcerting to the young Hawaiian-Indian, so he left his ship for a shore job—a lucky move, because after the Beaver's "iron lung" had been patched up, she made her last trip and ended up a derelict on the western shore of Prospect Point.

Bill's brother-in-law was the regular donkey driver at Moodyville. Bill became the fireman and oiler. This gave him the opportunity occasionally to run the donkey. In a short time he was so efficient that, when his relative moved to an engineering job on a tug boat, Bill became the one and only donkey driver in the Port of Vancouver, he says.

As a lad of fifteen he drove donkey for three weeks, loading a sailing ship at Moodyville. When the ship was loaded the longshoremen were paid off and Bill was offered thirty dollars as his wages, a dollar a day. But three dollars a day was an adult's wage, and Bill refused to accept less. The stevedore, in turn, refused to accede to such a demand, so Bill told him to keep the thirty pieces of silver.

A Mr. Ramsden then gave him an easy job operating the lumber rollers at the Moodyville Mill, he recalls. This was acceptable at one dollar a day, since all he had to do was pull a rope at long intervals. All went well until the stevedoring foreman asked him to drive the donkey, as wheat had to be discharged from a ship in a great hurry to start loading lumber and spars.

Bill refused to work for the stevedore

who would not pay him the ninety dollars he had previously asked. By his refusal he staged the first longshore strike, in the Port of Vancouver, for an increase in wages. Next he was ordered on the job by Ramsden, who left hurriedly for the mill office when Bill explained the circumstances.

Before he went on his one-man strike, he had watched a substitute donkey driver, through lack of experience, dump the first load of wheat into the inlet. He was confident he was safe in refusing, therefore, since wheat in those days was worth its weight in gold, and was not surprised when the mill foreman returned, told him to go to the office, collect his ninety dollars and get on with the work of discharging the golden cargo.

And so the first one-man longshore strike in the history of this port was won. Nahanee remembers vividly the time

Half Century's Work On City Waterfront Finds Bill Nahanee Still on the Job

when the stowing of forty to sixty thousand feet of lumber was considered a great accomplishment for a ten or twelve hour day. With present day methods, 100,000 feet of lumber is considered an average amount for an eight-hour day.

A lot of spars were shipped from Moodyville during the pioneer shipping days, according to Bill. Some were 120 feet long, squared on all sides with a broad axe, then floated to the ship's side to be put into the hold through the stern port-holes.

This was a slow and laborious job accomplished only with the help of a pile driver and a donkey. The former would lift one end of the forest giant to the height of the port hole, when the donkey engine would take over and pull it into the port hole. Then the pile driver would be towed to the opposite end of the spar and the awkward process repeated.

Painful Accident Recalled From Old Days

It was also a dangerous job. Before Nahanee became a donkey driver he was a bell boy, giving signals in the ship's hold, and it was then that he witnessed an accident which he now dislikes to recall. A big spar was being drawn on the wing tier by the donkey, held in place by four men who had no means of escape should the spar fall from the tier.

"I seen it start to roll off, and I pulled the rope, giving the donkey man the signal to stop, but it was too late and it appeared the four men would be crushed to death. Quick as lightning, Tom Cole, the side runner, did the only thing that could be done to save them. He stuck his big crowbar on the floor and on the spar, for a brace, neatly and in the right place, to stop its roll. But in his heroic haste to do the only thing possible to save their lives, he stuck the crowbar through his own foot.

"He stayed there, nailed to the floor, while his partners got their jack screws under the big spar, and they turned and turned their screw jacks, until the spar

was high enough to get the crow bar out from it, then out from the floor, and finally out from Tom's foot."

What did Tom Cole do? "Oh, he limped home. In those days, there was no hospital, no doctor, and no Compensation Board."

Nahanee remembers as a young boy seeing only Indians working at saw mills, loading and discharging the first ships that arrived. He drove the donkey when the first rail, were discharged at Port Moody for the C. P. R., and he helped discharge the first sugar cargo to reach Vancouver, working for Capt. Aleck McDermott, then the principal stevedoring contractor.

He also attended the first school erected in Vancouver. It was at the foot of Dunlevy avenue, but Bill can not remember the name of his teacher, except that she was the wife of the Hastings Mill blacksmith.

Waterfront Strikes In Vancouver

Many labor strikes have occurred since the first ship entered the First Narrows. Nahanee was firing the Hastings Mill engine when he was told to lay off work and go on strike for a 10-hour day, at the same wages of \$1.25, and \$1.50 which they were then receiving for a 12-hour day. Later, he remembers strikes sponsored by the U. B. R., the I. W. W., the I. L. A., and the last strike of 1935.

According to Nahanee, seven stevedoring firms were attracted to this port because of the immense development and expansion of the shipping trade in early days, but most of them were eliminated by the strikes. His own experience as a stevedoring foreman was unique because of the efforts to eliminate opposing stevedores. About 35 years ago he was asked by the late Capt. A. E. Stevens to take four gangs to Chemaluis to load a tramp ship with lumber.

Their greatest rival stevedoring company had a monopoly on the work there, and so unwelcome were Nahanee's men that they were denied sleeping and eating accommodations. Food had to be transported to them by water from Nanaimo. The longshoremen slept on the lumber cargo. Some of the men were even paid to leave the job. But Nahanee succeeded in loading his ship on schedule.

The real estate booms followed when it was announced rail would meet keel. At one time ships from Victoria used to call at Port Hammond, and all the land for miles around was sold with profit.

Then it was announced the railroad terminus would be at Port Moody and here again was another real estate boom. But after the Port Moody land had been cleared and sold, it was announced the terminus would be Vancouver. Once again land was cleared and sold with much profit, but although he earned enough money to buy several city blocks before the boom, Nahanee did not possess the Midas touch, and his golden opportunity slipped by.

Bill Nahanee prefers not to discuss this subject. It still fills him with chagrin.



His first "paying job" was on the historic old Beaver, fifty-two years ago, but Bill Nahanee, Squamish longshoreman, is still at work on the Vancouver waterfront, and hale and hearty at 67.

White Snow and Black Nights

This description of an Atlantic voyage under convoy was written by a Merchant Marine officer of a nation now under German domination. The vessel on which he is serving reached the United States two weeks ago on a return trip. His name is withheld because he is again at sea, in peril of capture by Nazi warships.

By LIEUTENANT X.

FREIGHT cars of relief supplies from the American Red Cross, airplane motors, cases of surgical instruments—these we see stowed in the hold of our liner, lying at a dock on the Atlantic coast. On the deck are lashed, with all security possible, great bombing planes. Near us, loading with similar cargoes, are many other ships. At sea, under convoy, are more ships that have sailed ahead of us.

Most of our passengers are young men. They are volunteers for the Royal Air Force or other units of the British defense. Some have come all the way from China, others from the United States, one from Venezuela. They all have the same thought, they are doing something that calls them like a duty.

After dark we shall make half-speed down the harbor. Our course is to the north. Soon we arrive at the rendezvous where we are to join our appointed convoy. It is night when we reach it. The sea is rough. Our eyes are looking, looking. All night we must keep near that spot, waiting for the others who will come.

Next morning the sea is better. Slowly our convoy assembles. About 40 ships are sailing with us. Our ship is the biggest and we are "convoy leader." A high-ranking British naval officer comes to us, brought alongside by a naval vessel. He comes aboard and joins the officers of our ship on the bridge. He is the convoy commodore, a nice, tall fellow with a big load on his shoulders.

Visibility is poor as we set out for Britain. It is snowing and our deck is soon white and our clothes caked with ice. The seas break over the bow and soon our ship is covered with ice. Faintly through the driving snow we see the silhouette of our escort, a British warship.

Closer and closer we come to the danger zone. In the radio room the operator listens constantly and sends messages to our navigation room. On our chart, tacked on the chart desk, we mark small crosses for every position of ships sending out "SOS, torpedoed" or SOS, attacked by submarine." We put other marks for positions of enemy submarines reported by messages from patrols.

We are now ordered to carry or wear our lifebelts all the time. Between watches we officers sleep in our uniforms, awaiting a sudden call to collision stations. We see our escort ship swing and head back to the west. Over the horizon to meet us come six British destroyers.

From ahead of us we hear a report of an old freighter sailing alone. She is a Greek ship. Perhaps she has been lost or fallen out from lack of speed from some other convoy. Later comes a new message

crackling through the air, a new cross to put on our chart, close ahead of the track of our own course. The Greek ship Ioannis Embiricos is sending out a call: "... Ioannis Embiricos. Bombed and machine gunned. Have wounded on board. Engine disabled. Position—SOS, SOS."

This cry is to the British Navy. We are not allowed to respond. Our business is to sail on to Britain. The navy will answer this call of distress. Our convoy commodore gives orders and signals are made to the other ships of our convoy. Our submarine gun is stripped for action. Anti-aircraft machine guns are set up on the deck, crews waiting by them.

The darkness comes. At midnight the siren sounds. I leap from my berth and run on the bridge. A submarine is attacking our convoy. We hear the depth bombs of our escort destroyers. Minute by minute in the darkness we are in suspense as we steam ahead.

Then on our faces we feel the snow. Visibility is bad again, thank God. Who thinks about the cold, or the rough seas? The danger is past. The snow has saved us from the bombing planes that might be above, working with the submarine.

Eight hours later we catch our first glimpse of the British Isles. Our passengers are happy. Life seems good again after the black night.

Moonlight

By SIR ROBERT VANSITTART
(In the London Sunday Times.)

Time was when we were closer, Moon and Earth.

I was still-born and silent, while you cooled

And came to Life. I watched you giving birth,

And envied you—perhaps we both were fooled—

Yet, though we drifted evermore apart, I was no stranger to your children's heart.

Theirs was my hour. Thy cry craved the Moon's return.

I was the friend of lovers, All romance Flamed to my pallor. I disguised the stern

And pelted sum of human circumstance. I silvered slum and wilderness. The sun

Has never loved your shores as I have done.

And then the German came, and from the sky

Slew babe and woman, mangled age and youth.

My light became my lover's enemy.

My sickle cleared the very heaven of ruth.

Men saw my face with horror, and between My risings wished that I had never been.

Now I, your satellite, do thank my stars That I am lifeless. I would sooner have

No warmth at all than suffer total wars. No Man at all than Huns who rape and rave

And rack. I have no History to tell. Their feet have never soiled my asphodel.



Picture at top shows Vancouver's first school, which Nahanee attended. Below is a scene on the waterfront at Moodyville about 1905.