

Ferries: 'River of the West' was named after Robert Gray's ship

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History of the ferries

When the bridge was dedicated in 1966, the Oregon State Highway Commission's staff prepared a useful history of ferry operations. Here it is:

The legendary "River of the West," as the Columbia was called by the early explorers, has long defied man. Many of these early explorers passed up the opportunity to sail up this mighty river and claim a vast wonderland for their mother country because of the shifting sands and mighty tides at the mouth of the river.

It remained for an American sea captain, Robert Gray of Boston, to verify the existence of this body of water. He first visited the area in 1788 but in May, 1792, he returned and entered the river, naming it after his ship, Columbia. When the expedition of Lewis and Clark reached the area of Astoria in the winter of 1805, the north-south crossing of the river posed a problem. Their unwieldy craft were often swamped and capsized. They were forced to travel several miles upriver to make the crossing safely. They noticed the Indians employed a specially designed canoe to negotiate the trip.

Intermittent attempts

Stories tell of an enterprising individual who lashed two canoes together and placed a platform over them to establish an early ferry in the 1840s. The stories also relate that the crossings were not always successful. Intermittent attempts were made to start a regular ferry service but it was not until 1921 when the automobile began to be a little more than something to scare the horses with that anyone took a serious venture in this field of scheduled ferry service. His friends called him a "crazy Swede" because he was willing to gamble his life's savings on the chance there were enough people wanting to cross the Columbia River at Astoria to make the venture worthwhile, but Captain S. F. "Fritz" Elfving had confidence in the future.

His service began with the Tourist 1 and ran between Astoria, Oregon and McGowan, Wash. Within a decade as automobile traffic increased, the service proved

profitable enough for Captain Elfving to purchase two more ferries, naming them appropriately Tourist 2 and Tourist 3.

Competition in those days wasn't as refined as it is today and everything short of warfare, and many times it even approached that, was fair. He overrode all opposition, either buying them out or running them out of business. Following the "ferry war" of the '30s, events were fairly quiet along the river front until a real war broke out in 1941. Hardly had news been received that war had been declared when a detachment of soldiers from nearby Fort Stevens deployed on the dock and commandeered the Tourist 2 for the duration of hostilities.

Converted to a minelayer

The vessel was moved to a shipyard and converted to a minelayer. She performed yeoman duty laying and tending the mine fields at the mouth of the Columbia River. For her outstanding service, the U.S. Army awarded her an "E" pennant — the only ship of her type so honored.

In 1946, the Oregon State Highway Commission purchased the ferries and facilities of the Astoria North Beach Company. Following the war and the resulting lifting of gasoline restrictions, Americans were eager to travel and traffic at the ferry site constantly increased. In many instances, cars were backed up waiting long periods of time for a ferry. The Highway Commission approved plans for an addition to the fleet and the "M.R. Chessman" joined the "highway navy" in April 1948. Anticipating increased travel for the Seattle World Fair, the Commission approved the purchase of the Kitsap in 1958.

Even with this added help, long lines of waiting traffic at both terminals of the ferry, in Astoria and at Megler, Wash., where the site had been moved from McGowan, attested to the need of improved transportation. So the automobile which created a need for the ferry system led to its demise — a victim of progress that won't be forgotten for years to come.

Matt Winters is the editor and publisher of the Chinoook, Wash., Observer.

ASTORIA-NORTH BEACH AUTO FERRY SERVICE

Change of Schedule:

Effective SATURDAY, May 27th, 1922.

FERRY "TOURIST"

Daily and Sunday,

Leaves Astoria, 7:30 A. M. Leaves McGowan 8:30 A. M.
 " " 1:00 P. M. " " 2:00 P. M.
 " " 6:00 P. M. " " 7:00 P. M.

STAGE CONNECTIONS:

The Ferry leaving Astoria at 7:30 A. M. and 1:00 P. M. makes through connections with regular stage line to South Bend and Raymond, and returning leaving McGowan at 2 o'clock and 7:00 P. M., connecting with stage line from South Bend and Raymond.

A regular stage between Long Beach, Seaview, Ilwaco and Chinoook connects with Ferry at McGowan on arrival and departure on each trip.

Reduced Fares on Ferry for 1922:

Small Car and Driver, one way	\$2.50
Small Car and Driver, (30 day Round Trip)	3.50
Large Car and Driver, one way	3.50
Large Car and Driver, (30-day Round Trip)	4.50
Passengers, one way	35c
Passengers, (30-day round trip)	50c
Season Book, 20-trips, small Car and Driver	25.00
Season Book, 20-trips, large Car and Driver	30.00

Astoria North-Beach Ferry Company,
 Foot of 14th street, Astoria, Ore.

F. S. ELFVING, General Manager, Astoria, Oregon

All items from Matt Winters Collection

ABOVE: A 1922 newspaper advertisement shows trip schedules and "stage connections." RIGHT: This type of ferry schedule, also printed in yellow, was in use during state ownership of the Columbia ferry system between 1946 and 1966. It features the M.R. Chessman, which was purchased in April 1948. Compared to some ephemera printed for the ferry system, examples of these have survived in somewhat greater numbers in local attics and closets.

ASTORIA-MEGLER FERRY
OWNED AND OPERATED BY THE
 OREGON STATE HIGHWAY COMMISSION

SCHEDULE OF ONE-WAY FARES
ALL FARES INCLUDE FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION TAX

ADULT PASSENGER	\$.75
CHILD PASSENGER (Age 6-12 incl.)	.45
PASSENGER CAR OR PICKUP (Including driver)	1.25
PASSENGER CAR and TRAILER—(Including driver)	1.50
Overall length: Up to 25 feet	2.50
Up to 35 feet	2.50
Up to 50 feet	2.75
MOTORCYCLE (Including driver)	.50
With sidecar	.75
TRUCK OR BUS, LIGHT WEIGHT—(Including driver)	1.75
Overall length: Under 20 feet	2.50
Over 20 ft., under 30 ft.	3.00
Over 30 ft., under 40 ft.	3.50
Over 40 ft., under 50 ft.	3.50
Over 50 ft. (Max. 55 ft. by permit)	4.25
TRUCK LOAD—Per ton	.25
LIVESTOCK—In truck or trailer only, per head: Cattle and horses	.50
Sheep and calves under 6 Mo.	.25

FARES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE
 NO ROUND-TRIP FARES SOLD

Vessel	MV M. R. Chessman	12' 0"
Clearance	MV Tourist 3	10' 6"
Motor	MV Tourist 2	11' 6"
	Load Limit—27 Tons	

ASTORIA-MEGLER FERRY

Motor Vessel M. R. Chessman
 Motor Vessel Tourist 3
 Motor Vessel Tourist 2

Subject to Change Without Notice

OREGON STATE HIGHWAY COMMISSION
 Salem, Oregon
 Ferry Terminal: Foot of 14th Street
 Astoria, Oregon
 Telephone 69

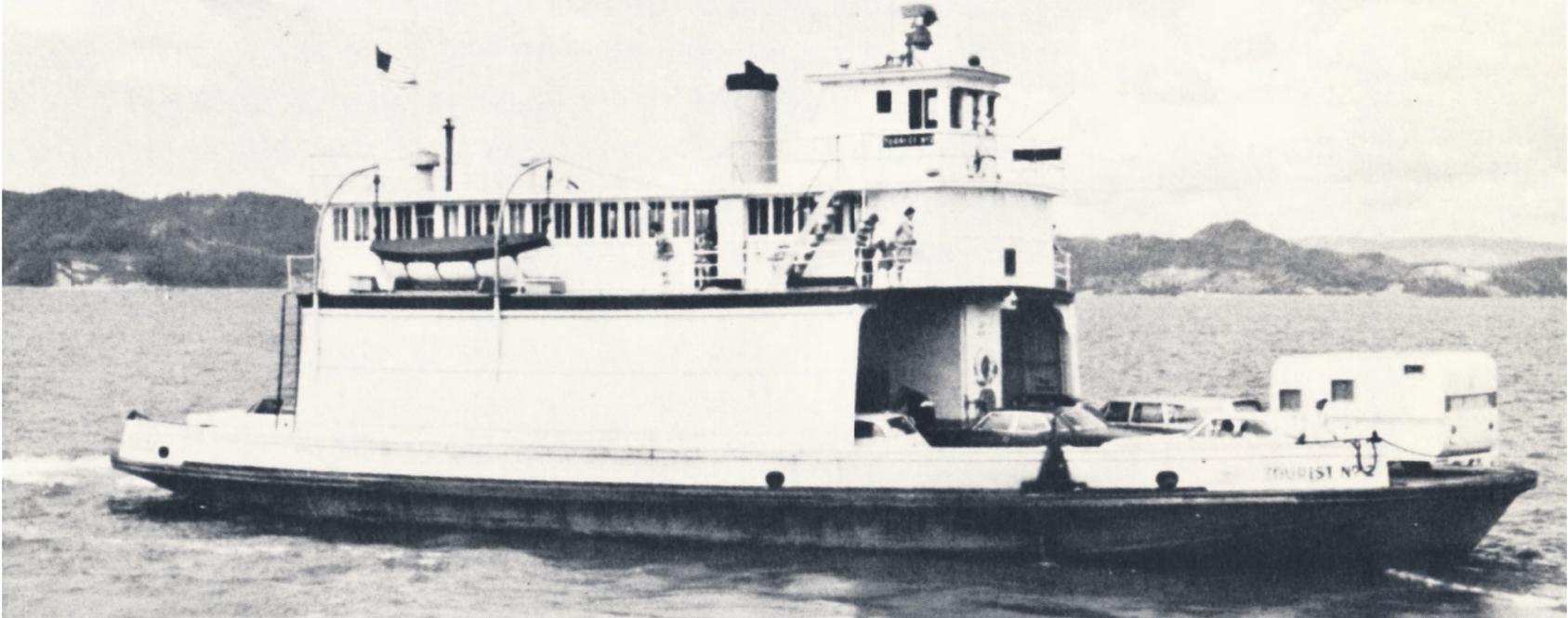
MINIMUM FERRY SCHEDULE FOR EACH MONTH OF THE YEAR
 Subject to Change Without Notice

January, February, March, April, October, November, December		May, First Part of June, Last Part of September		Last Part of June, First Part of Sept.		July and August	
Lv. ASTORIA	Lv. MEGLER	Lv. ASTORIA	Lv. MEGLER	Lv. ASTORIA	Lv. MEGLER	Lv. ASTORIA	Lv. MEGLER
6:30 AM	7:15 AM	6:30 AM	7:15 AM	6:30 AM	7:15 AM	6:30 AM	7:15 AM
8:00	8:45	8:00	8:45	8:00	8:45	8:00	8:45
9:30	10:15	9:30	10:15	9:30	10:15	9:30	10:15
				10:00	10:45	10:00	10:45
11:00	11:45	11:00	11:45	11:00	11:45	11:00	11:45
				11:30	12:15 PM	11:30 AM	12:15 PM
						12:00	12:45
12:30 PM	1:15 PM	12:30 PM	1:15 PM	12:30 PM	1:15 PM	12:30 PM	1:15 PM
				1:00	1:45	1:00	1:45
				1:30	2:15	1:30	2:15
2:00	2:45	2:00	2:45	2:00	2:45	2:00	2:45
				2:30	3:15	2:30	3:15
						3:00	3:45
3:30	4:15	3:30	4:15	3:30	4:15	3:30	4:15
				4:00	4:45	4:00	4:45
				5:00	5:45	5:00	5:45
5:00	5:45	5:00	5:45	5:00	5:45	5:00	5:45
6:30	7:15	6:30	7:15	6:30	7:15	6:30	7:15
8:00	8:45	8:00	8:45	8:00	8:45	8:00	8:45
		9:30	10:15	9:30	10:15	9:30	10:15

STATE PRINTING SCHEDULE OF FARES ON BACK



Megler Cafe offered simple meals and restroom facilities for motorists who sometimes had to endure long lines waiting for a ride across the river.



This is the Tourist No. 2 following modifications late in its time on the Columbia River. This photo was reproduced in the 1966 dedication booklet for the Astoria-Megler Bridge.

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