

COLUMBIA IS SETTING FOR TALES OF RIVER ADVENTURE

Red-Blooded Pioneers on Northwest Streams Have Breathless History and Made Startling Fortunes in Early Days.



BY DE WITT HARRY. (Copyright by Emma Hyatt Morton.)

As a prolific source of virile American adventure the inland waterways of the United States have no peer. Countless fascinating tales have been written with the mighty Mississippi as a setting, the Yukon has been another source of inspiration, the Yellowstone, the Sacramento and San Joaquin, the Hudson, and almost all of the other streams of varying magnitude, but what of the writer who will sing the praise of the Columbia? Who is the man who will tell the doctory tales of derring-do that have happened on this, the second stream in size in the entire country and the scene of so many fact adventures that fiction fades into insignificance?

Tell the tale of the Lot Whitcomb and her many adventures. Narrate the inspiring deeds that took place as the numberless tributary rivers were explored. How the Portland was swept over Willamette falls. The explosions in the boiler rooms of the Fairy and Washington. The almost unbelievable story of how the Adventure shot the Cascades. Of the ocean trips that some of the staunch river craft made at different times. Of the fortunes made in the traffic in the golden days. How the Tenino made the enormous sum of \$18,000 in one trip. The development of the tiny river craft into the palatial excursion boats of the present day. How Captain Taylor brought the St. Clair over Oregon City falls. Of the boats driven by cattle and Indian power motors. Of the runs at the rapids at Celilo. The long trips on the lower reaches of the upper river for hundreds of miles. Stirring races on the river. Fortunes that have been made. Great men who have started their careers here. Building of the locks and consequent opening of the long stretches of navigable waters. Battles with the Indians. All these and many more, ample material of the highest and most desirable type available for the most exacting of novelists, just spilling for a facile pen.

River History Fruitful in Adventure. Closely coupled with the start of Portland and the rest of the cities of the river is woven the story of the boats. For years many towns and cities had no other means of communication than the boats. Right at the start of this city river transportation played a prominent part. Ocean vessels had early discovered that the Columbia was a fruitful source of delectable cargo and vied in making it a port of call. Residents of the interior speedily realized that the river offered a wonderful means for development of their chosen country and prepared to take advantage of this. In common with most pioneer peoples they were short of ready cash. However, this did not deter them. They had ample faith and knew that their future could repay.

The first steamer built on the Columbia was the Columbia, a tiny side wheeler that made her trial trip July 3, 1850. This boat was built at upper Astoria for Daniel Frost, General John Adair and the firm of Leonard & Green. She was 80 feet long and was commanded by Captain Frost with Thomas V. Smith as chief engineer and Henry McDermot as assistant engineer. She reached Portland at 3 P. M. July 4 and lay here for three hours and the same

evening visited Oregon City, where a great celebration of the event was held. In some parts the story is to the effect that the boat was shipped knock-down and was simply put together at Astoria. If this was the case the Lot Whitcomb, which was on the ways at Milwaukie at the time of the Columbia's epoch-making trip, is the first real Columbia product.

A parallel to the present high wage stage for shipbuilders is found in the construction of the Columbia. For General Adair reported that he was forced to pay mechanics \$16 daily and common labor from \$5 to \$8 per day. The chances are that these men worked longer hours than do their successors of today, but their money had much greater purchasing power and they were paid in gold dust. The promoters of the Lot Whitcomb at Milwaukie paid no such tempting wages, for they were building their boat on futures, and, having no available cash, were forced to induce their men to work on promises of distant pay, which promises were made good, thanks to the foresight they displayed.

Rivalry Becomes Rampant.

In 1850 Portland and Milwaukie were intense rivals, first one then the other budding city forging to the front. If anything Milwaukie had the edge on the present metropolis, as Lot Whitcomb and Captain Joseph Kellogg were located there and the young city boasted a lumber mill and was engaged in shipping its product to San Francisco at '49er gold rush prices. Whitcomb amassed a considerable sum at this game and purchased the old bark Lausanne which had just landed a cargo of 52 missionaries on these hospitable shores. Whitcomb was using the Lausanne in the lumber trade, carrying his boards from Milwaukie to San Francisco and bringing back almost their weight in gold. On one of his investigations into her hold soon after the purchase he discovered a set of engines. The Lord only knows why they were on board this boat with the missionaries, and if the missionaries knew they never told, and what eventual use they were destined for will likely ever remain a mystery. Whitcomb salvaged the engines and conceived the project of building a

river steamboat, as he was plentifully endowed with foresight and realized the opportunity that presented itself. Possibly he was actuated to a certain extent by his jealousy of Portland by the chance that thus presented itself to reap laurels for his city. After the purchase of the Lausanne he and his partner, Captain Kellogg, did not have any too much actual cash, but they were rich in potentialities and could make others realize the possibilities that presented.

Whitcomb Discovers Jacob Kamm.

Of course it would be impossible to run a steamboat without an engineer and Whitcomb realized this, but he had a further difficulty, he did not even have a boat, all that he possessed was a set of engines and the mental picture of what he thought he could produce from the plentiful product of his little lumber mill, all ways providing he could find the men that could take the materials and manufacture the completed product. He luckily found his dually endowed man in the person of Jacob Kamm, a young and capable river pilot who had received a thorough training in the engine rooms of the fast Mississippi river packets. Kamm was a Swiss, and, in addition to his ability to make a set of engines perform after they were installed, was a skilled mechanic and understood construction in all its branches as applied to river boats.

Whitcomb realized his good fortune in finding this man and bringing all his persuasive logic to bear, convinced the young engineer that his future lay on the Columbia and not on the Sacramento, and the tale of Portland and the river will prove that Whitcomb had the matter thought out about right for the career of Jacob Kamm is a theme fit for any novelist, and is a splendid demonstration of the possibilities that confront any young man when properly taken advantage of.

Christmas Launching Made.

Kamm closed with Whitcomb, to come to Milwaukie and superintend the construction of the Whitcomb at a salary of \$300 per month, jawbone money. On Christmas day, 1850, 60

years and three days ago, the Lot Whitcomb, a commodious craft of 90 feet in length, gracefully slid from the ways and kissed the waters of the Willamette. In our mind's eye we can picture the simple ceremony, the small interested crowd of proud residents of Milwaukie and the possibly few envious visitors from Portland. The Lot Whitcomb was a first-class boat for her time and went right to work earning dividends for her owners on the run from Milwaukie to Astoria, absolutely no stops at Portland, but making calls at all other points on the Columbia river.

Imagine the old days when the Lot Whitcomb was on her famed first voyages. Starting her trip at Milwaukie, the thriving little town six miles above Portland, she would come gracefully cutting through the water past Portland, Captain John C. Ainsworth at the helm and Engineer Kamm in the hold. Kamm kept a full head of steam and the throttle wide open as she dashed by the tiny settlement, and then Ainsworth would jerk the whistle cord and giving vent to a series of derisive hoots at the poor little settlement of Portland as she dashed past. Stephen Coffin, Daniel H. Lowndale and W. W. Chapman were the proprietors of the town-site at that time and they likely stood at the brink of the river and speculated how long it would be until they could get back at Whitcomb and Kellogg as they did not have the faintest intention of giving up the task of making Portland the big city of the river.

Boat Frequents Back Waters.

The Lot Whitcomb, while apparently carefree in her rambles, did not have any too easy a time of it at the start. For one thing she could not poke her graceful prow into the port of Astoria for here was located the United States collector of customs, General Adair, a rival steamboat proprietor and he would seize the craft as she did not, as yet, have any official existence as she had not been registered, and this could not be done until the owners could come into the court and prove that they owned their craft and had no indebtedness. For obvious reasons Whitcomb and his associates could

not do this as they practically owed for the entire cost of construction and W. L. Hanscom was serving as master until he could get the money that was due him for the building of the hull and cabin. Kamm had a mortgage on the craft for his services as constructor of the engine room and as engineer. Kamm had put all the machinery together, even to riveting the boiler sheets, and this was his real start on his progress from a poor engine wiper on the Mississippi to wealthy and powerful owner of river and ocean steamers.

However it took but a short time for the Lot Whitcomb to return to her owners sufficient for them to liquidate their liabilities, and they then went to Astoria, registered their craft and had her free from trouble for the future. In the meantime the Pacific Mail Steamship company had been operating a line of boats from San Francisco to Astoria and they decided to make St. Helens their terminus and abandon their Astoria docks. This worked well for Whitcomb as it made a shorter haul for his boat and he had to supply most of the cargo for the ocean craft.

Whitcomb Handicaps Portland.

While all these good times were working for Milwaukie and her prosperous citizens, Portland was not marking time, but she was not forging to the front as rapidly as her citizens thought she should, and they realized that they must do something to overcome the handicap that Whitcomb made for them with his craft, as by this time he had formulated another scheme whereby he made Vancouver and Oregon City ports of call and gave them service, but refused to do the same thing for Portland. Boosters from this city appeared in San Francisco singing the praises of their young coveys, and their siren song was wafted to the ears of the owners of the Gold Hunter, an ocean-going side-wheel steamer, and they determined to take a look at the city that had such fulsome press-agents.

Soon the Gold Hunter, and her name proved correct later, filled her holds and steamed out of the Golden Gate on the first journey of any ocean-going ship to Portland. She made the trip safely and came to

anchor at Portland, discharged cargo, and this gave the loyal citizens of the town an inspiration, for they conceived the scheme of purchasing the Gold Hunter, plugging her name, as they afterwards said, and, upon investigation, finding that a controlling interest was for sale for some \$60,000 got busy and raised \$21,000 in the first hour and purchased the control. Now they could afford to smother at Milwaukie for had they not a steamer of their own, and not a mere river boat, but an ocean-going craft?

\$60,000 Takes Wings.

But their pride and rosette dreams were short-lived for the Pacific Mail soon tumbled to the fact that this competition would injure their business and managed to finessse a controlling interest in the Portland-controlled Gold Hunter and had her dispatched to South America and there mortgaged, and the embryo capitalists of Portland fondly kissed their \$60,000 farewell and wrote it off the books to experience. One excellent result was had from the sad adventure with the Gold Hunter, and that was that it proved Portland to have a harbor that would accommodate ocean-going vessels, and right here is where Whitcomb and crew led the wrong suit and lost the odd trick, for they overplayed their hand in their efforts to keep the Pacific Mail at St. Helens and could not furnish sufficient cargo to supply the boats.

Pacific Mail Enters Portland.

They would not call at Portland where there was plenty of goods waiting shipment. The farmers would not haul their produce to St. Helens as it was too far and too difficult a task. Vancouver and Oregon City did not have enough to keep the ocean line busy and the Pacific Mail, taking to heart the lesson that they learned when the Gold Hunter made a safe trip to Portland, moved their craft to Portland wharves and here they have remained ever since. From this time on the growth of Portland was rapid and the decline of Milwaukie's power just as speedy. It must have been a hard blow for the owners of the Lot Whitcomb to have to be forced to make Portland a regular stop, as they soon did, and from this time on the development of the river traffic on

the Columbia and Willamette rivers reads like the most fascinating of romances.

It did not take long for others to realize the possibilities that presented themselves, and the hardy crew that inhabited the river banks at this time built boats as fast as they could get the engines here. In rapid succession appeared the Jennie Clark, Carrie Ladd, Mountain Buck, Sonorita, Haassalo, Mary, Rival, Surprise, Elk and many others, until at times there were as high as three or four boats tied up at Portland at one time and the river front presented an exceedingly busy scene. The profits were big and the fare from Portland to Astoria, at the start of river transportation, was \$20 with meals extra, and the up-river fare was \$22. Freight rates were also big and all was offered that could be carried. Little wonder that as many as possible stepped into the game.

Impetus Given River Traffic.

Portland residents were enthusiastic at this time, and every outside boat brought a fresh bunch of newcomers who had heard of the possibilities that presented themselves here. They all worked together and opened up roads to the surrounding country, the first of which was into the Tualatin valley, and then brought in the produce of the rich country surrounding the city, giving plenty of cargoes. They even started a ferry here, the first attempt being a canoe in 1845 and later a flat-bottomed skiff at the foot of Stark street.

From the little beginning of the Lot Whitcomb came the Oregon Steam Navigation company, which was the inspiration that gave Henry Villard the idea of forming the now powerful Oregon-Washington Railroad & Navigation company. Captain J. C. Ainsworth was the executive head of the original company that was sold to the N. P. interests. Before the upper reaches of the Columbia were opened a pioneer tells of making a trip to The Dalles from Vancouver in a rowboat. It took 17 days of the most difficult toil, in contrast with the later river journeys that consumed but from 10 to 12 hours. With the opening of the locks at the Cascades a large stretch of the upper river was made available for river boats, and with the later construction of the portage railroad at Celilo the immense reach of the upper Columbia and of the Snake was placed in use.

The first inducement that made the river men go after the trade of the interior was the establishment of the United States army posts there and of the Indian reservations. This starting of government bases far inland gave much traffic, and the river boat owners went after it with great profit. Then, closely following, came the discovery of gold in the interior and the consequent rush. Here was where the owners of boats reaped a real harvest and the fabulous sums that were taken in at this time rival the most imaginative tales of fiction. On one trip the Tenino took in \$18,000, and on another, on May 5, 1862, the same boat made \$10,945. The other boats then owned by the Oregon Steam Navigation company were taking in like huge sums and the coffers of the corporation were filled to bursting.

All of this money was taken in from (Continued on Page 6.)