

# River served as year-round highway

**Editor's note:** The following story was written for *The Sentinel* by Curt Beckham, well-known Coos County historian who now lives in Myrtle Point. The story is based on an interview with the late William "Bill" Panter about his family and their boating experiences on the Coquille River.

**By Curt Beckham**

When we moved to Bandon in 1922 we went down the Coquille River on the large stern wheeler, "The Telegraph." This was near the end of riverboat transportation on the Coquille as a gravel highway was being constructed down the valley from Myrtle Point to Bandon. This all-year road, when completed in the early 20s, brought an end to the 30 year riverboat dynasty of W.R. Panter, the late Bill Panter's father.

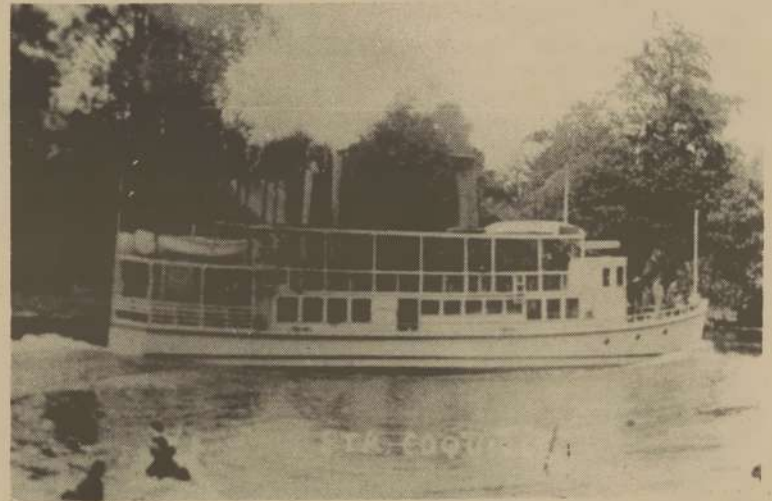
The Coquille River, as well as many of the other coastal streams of western Oregon, had been used by the Indians with their dug-out cedar boats and canoes. The pioneers used the stream to help them settle along its banks. Loggers, then and to the present day, use the river to raft, store and float the timber to the sawmills along its banks. It was a busy waterway between the settlements of Bandon (the seaport town)

Prosper, Parkersburg, Randolph, the sawmill and boatbuilding communities; Riverton, the coal mining village; Coquille, the county seat; Arago, the rich farming community; and Myrtle Point, located at the head of navigation 30 miles inland.

This coastal stream was filled almost beyond today's concept with chinook and silver salmon. This short but wide and navigable tide-water stream served the Indians and our pioneer settlers as a life line of communication as well as with an all important food supply.

William R. Panter was born in 1858 in a covered wagon in Nebraska. His father brought him to Coos County in 1860 where they settled on a ranch near Lampa Creek in 1863, nine miles up river from Bandon. His boating experiences began in the 70s when he worked as a deckhand on the stern-wheeler steamer, "Annie," under Captain Rackleff. He was married to Ella Hutchinson in 1880 and to them were born Walter, William, Mary, Allen, Ruby, Stacy, Dora, Albert and Archie. His early career consisted of mining, farming, and logging, but steamboating became his chosen work for many years.

Before W.R. Panter got into the boating business he was a logger and farmer. He owned a farm along the banks of



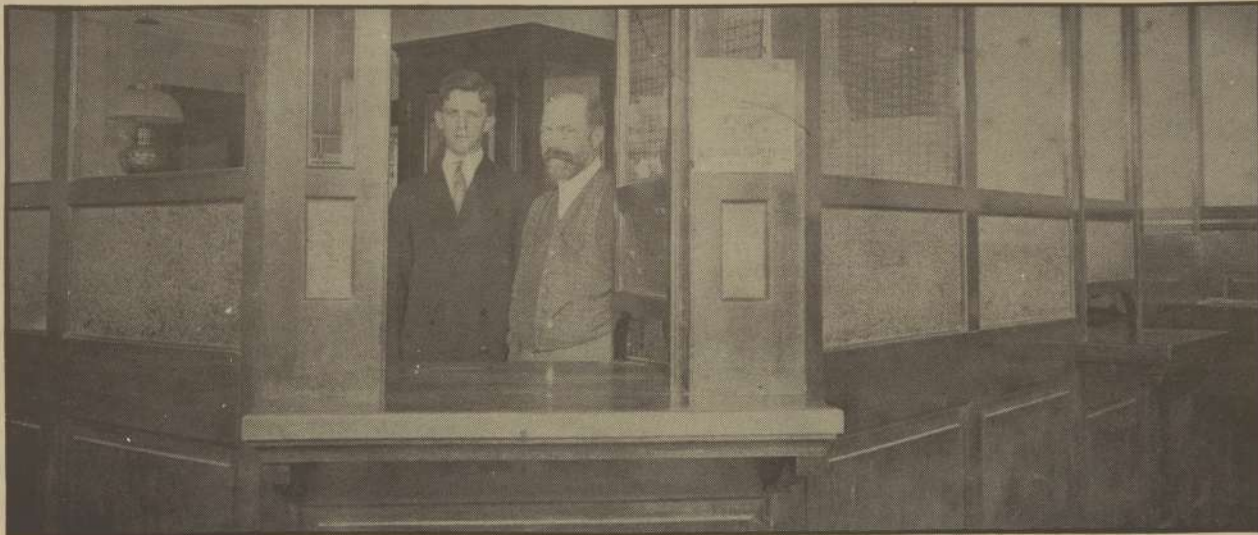
The boat *The Coquille* plied the waters of the river by the same name.

the Coquille River a few miles above Bandon. There were many logging camps located along this river harvesting the huge trees which grew thickly on the mountains reaching down to the river's edge. In the 80s and 90s much logging was carried on by bull teams, but there were also some steam donkey yarding donkeys in operation. Getting

the huge logs into the river was not an easy task. Someone conceived the idea of building a pole chute to carry the logs to the river. The pull of gravity and the slick logs on the poles caused the logs to come down the steep chutes into the river at a tremendous speed.

Panter was a camp foreman for an outfit yarding a tract of Pershbaker's tim-

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