

THE BEAVER*

The Hudson's Bay Company's steamer *Beaver*, Capt. Swanton, which arrived in our harbor some time since, is one of the most remarkable vessels in the world. Her history, if written out, would fill a book, and the many singular adventures that have transpired on her decks, make a volume more strange than the works of fiction.

The *Beaver*, we are assured is the first steam vessel that ever puffed its smoke in the air of heaven on the Pacific Ocean, and up to the present day she retains her reputation as a pioneer by parting waters undisturbed by sea-going crafts. She scorns to traverse seas known to other vessels, and astonishes even the Indian in his canoe by her temerity and sudden appearance.

The steamer *Beaver* was built in the year 1835, for the Hudson's Bay Company, at Blackwell, England, of the best oak and in the most substantial manner. Her engines are of Bolton & Watts' make, and may be described as the old fashioned "beam engines." Although clumsy in appearance, they work well, and seldom or never get out of repair. Her wheels are placed far forward, are very small, and do not look unlike the forepaws of a land terrapin. Her poop is high out of the water, square, and slanting in toward the rudder. Her sides and timbers are unusually heavy and substantial, and everything about the old ship denotes durability and worth. Nothing for show and everything for use, seems to have been the motto of her builder. In the spring of 1836, she arrived at Fort Vancouver, on the Columbia river, having sailed around the Horn. Soon after she steamed down the Columbia, and has never since entered that river. At that time, with the exception of a few trading posts at distant intervals along the river and coast, the whole of the North Pacific coast was an almost unknown wilderness. San Francisco did not contain more than fifty inhabitants, and Victoria had not been laid out. A few trappers and hunters were the only white men in the country.

For the last twenty years, the *Beaver* has been constantly engaged in running from port to port in the extreme north, and

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trading with the Indians.** Her voyages extend as far north as the 59th parallel of latitude, and 13 seconds—the head of inland navigation, and the beginning of the Arctic region. She is usually absent from Victoria about seven months, leaving in April and returning in November, and deals entirely in skins and furs. The Indians are accustomed to her annual visits, can tell almost the day when to expect her, and are always prepared with their skins and furs, which they trade for blankets, clothing, hard bread, and other articles of prime necessity and ornament. She carries 30 men, 4 six pounders, and a large complement of small arms. Her decks are protected from invasion by a border netting of rope, so as to prevent the Indians from clambering up her sides, and never more than thirty are allowed to come on board at any one time, unless accompanied by their wives and children. The trading is conducted under the direction of one of the H. B. Co.'s "Chief Traders," Capt. Dodd, and is kept entirely separate from the sailing of the ship.

The discipline on board is as strict as on a man-of-war, and the greatest caution is used to prevent being taken at any time by surprise.

The *Beaver* generally, during her cruise, makes six visits with a full cargo to Fort Simpson—the extreme northern post of the Company, and just within the British line—58 degrees, 40 minutes—making that fort her depot while absent from here.

The *Otter* generally pays this port a visit to bring down these extra cargoes, soon after the arrival of the *Beaver* here.

There are many Indian curiosities aboard the *Beaver*—specimens of Indian mechanical skill and ingenuity which, to most people possess great interest, as showing the position the savage nations hold with regard to the arts.—*Victoria Gazette*, December, 1859.

**The above was first published in December, 1859. Those voyages continued until October 13, 1874, when the Hudson's Bay Company sold the steamer to Stafford, Saunders, Morton & Company, of Victoria, B. C., for \$17,500. After that she was used as a freighter and towboat until Thursday night, July 26, 1888, when she ran upon the rocks at the entrance of Burrard Inlet, the harbor of Vancouver, B. C. Charles W. McCain in his *History of the S. S. Beaver*, page 30, says the old craft attracted many visitors until the swell of the steamer *Yosemite* passing near on June 26, 1892, "caused the boiler to work loose, when with a crash it fell outward into the channel carrying with it a large portion of the hull."—Editor.