

discarded for the faster, more economical method of carrying passengers and freight in and out of the rugged mountains. I remember so well when in 1948 the old *S.S. Nasookin* was finally brought to rest in Nelson. Since 1931 she had served on the Kootenay Lake as the government ferry from Fraser's Landing to Gray Creek. She was replaced by the new diesel ferry *MV Anscomb*. By some blunder, the old queen of the lakes was tied up at a point where she was left to the mercy of wind and waves. Within a year after she had been docked the brave old boat lay broken and beaten, a great hump in her proud back. I was with the captain the first time I saw her in this condition and the old man, a hard bristling old Scot, turned his head away and cursed softly. He loved his boat and he could not look upon her in her misery and neglect.

In April of this year we saw the retirement of the *S.S. Minto* at Nakusp. Her end of service was much more publicized than that of the *Nasookin* but here again strong people swallowed hard and wiped the odd tear for a passing friend. There now remains but one of the old veterans, the *S.S. Moyie*, who plies the Kootenay waters from Procter to Lardeau. Soon too she will go, her days are numbered and with her exit will pass a grand and romantic era filled with rugged paths, hope and progress, the building of a mighty portion of Canada via her great natural waterways.

There are twenty-four complete pictures done to date with seven more underway. So many people have given generously of their help in an exhaustive research, in an effort to prevent the old boats from slipping out of sight completely and being forgotten. Already a ways and means committee has been organized to purchase the series when completed as a foundation for a museum in the Interior. Washington too, is interested and is working to secure them on loan for a historical convention to take place in the spring of 1955.

I can truthfully say that nothing I have ever done, has given the complete satisfaction that these boat pictures have given, when I had the conversations among the people of days recalled with the slowing of the old sternwheelers. The "Echoes of the Paddle Wheel," this is to me, reason enough for painting the boats.

Bert Learmonth: Model Maker

Bert Learmonth began recreating the steamships of Kootenay Lake and other transportation artifacts of the West Kootenay in 1984. He constructed his first sternwheeler model, the *SS Nelson*, then continued on to build models of the major Kootenay Lake sternwheelers and tugboats.

Bert Learmonth has constructed models of Nelson's first streetcars and buses and dioramas for Touchstones Nelson, which include a Ktunaxa encampment, the CPR Railway Transfer Warf, and the Cottonwood Falls Power Plant.

Mr. Learmonth's ship models can be viewed at the *SS Moyie* Sternwheeler Historic Site in Kaslo, BC during the summer. His work is included in the Touchstones Nelson Museum display. A model of the *SS Moyie*, commissioned by the City of Nelson, can be viewed at the Nelson Theme Park in Nelson's sister city, Shuzenji, Japan.

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Nelson and District Museum, Archives, Art Gallery and Historical Society gratefully acknowledge the support of the City of Nelson and the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and Gaming Revenue.

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ALEC GARNER Echoes of the Paddlewheel

Collection of Glenbow Museum
Calgary, Alberta



Alec Garner, The Moyie, date unknown

A celebrated collection returns to the West Kootenay

With historical models by Bert Learmonth



WHY I PAINTED THE STERNWHEELERS by Alec Garner, 1954

In all this vast and rugged Interior of British Columbia, the scenery is varied and significant, so much so that one finds himself wondering how it must have appeared to the pioneers and prospectors who blazed the hazardous trails across its forbidden passes. This brings us to the old Sternwheelers, far back to 1865 when the brave little *Fortynine* powered by the old *Jenny Clark* engines, (the *Jenny Clark* was the first sternwheeler of the Pacific Northwest) left Fort Colville, Washington to grope her way slowly up the Columbia River through the ice of the Arrow Lakes, to arrive four months later at the foot of Death Rapids with her cargo of tools, food and passengers for the gold rush to Revelstoke.

While this effort was short lived and her second return trip consisted of a load of disillusioned prospectors, the gold rush was again revived in 1885. This called into service the sternwheeler *Lytton*, a much sturdier craft than her predecessor. But the little *Fortynine* was the beginning of what developed in the latter part of the century into a mighty fleet of sternwheelers, plying the Arrow, Slocan and Kootenay lakes, even as far north as the Upper Duncan.

With Great Northern from the United States and our own Canadian Pacific vying tooth and nail for supremacy, the two great companies opened up by means of the sternwheeler this greatest and most bounteous land. The Interior of British Columbia with its vast acres of timber, its wealth of minerals and metals and its green fertile valleys, to the people of the region the boats meant life itself. One seldom meets a man who has lived here more than twenty years who has not at one time or another worked on one or many of the boats. They were a means of livelihood for the settlements, bringing food, supplies, doctors, entertainment and mail from home. Everything came by boat, even the time of day was measured by the deep throated whistle of the sternwheeler, which consequently became the symbol of well being to all who awaited the smoke of her funnels and the swish of her great wheel.

Then after the turn of the century, the railroads wound their tortuous way through the hills and over the great summits. One by one the old boats were

ALEC GARNER (1897-1995)

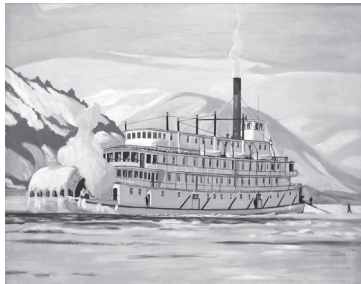
Alec Garner pursued a lifelong interest in art, experimenting with different mediums (oil, watercolour, pastel, lino block), different techniques (brush and pallet knife), as well as various subject matter. He was known locally and internationally for his depictions of paddlewheelers and steam tugs, his portraits and especially his landscapes. Although Garner trained in Edmonton through a correspondence course and under the well-known Canadian artist A.C. Leighton, he was largely self-taught. In his early years he regularly attended the Calgary Stampede as a sketch artist, thrilling tourists with his accurate portraits and giving brief lessons in art.

In 1939, two of his watercolour landscapes were chosen for exhibition at the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts 70th annual exhibition in Montreal. At this time he was active in the Edmonton Art Club and Alberta Society of Artists, serving on the executive committees of both.

The beauty of the Kootenay region drew Garner and his wife Ethel and two sons to relocate in 1944.

The move from Edmonton to Procter provided Garner the landscape and time to focus on art and become a self-supporting artist.

A variety of jobs including setting up a commercial garden, carpentry and custodial work provided income but reduced the time he was able to dedicate to painting. This issue was resolved when he took the position of the local school bus driver, which allowed uninterrupted time between the morning and afternoon runs to paint.



SS Nasookin, No 1
Collection of Glenbow Museum,
Calgary, Alberta

Alec Garner's reputation as a painter was known in Alberta, primarily in Edmonton and Calgary, where he regularly sold his work. Little was known of his talents in the Kootenay region until he received a commission in 1949 from Mr. & Mrs. Erb to paint portraits of their children. Mrs. Mildred Erb, who was one of the founders of the Nelson Art Club that eventually became part of what is now Touchstones Nelson: Museum of Art and History, became a strong supporter of his work. The Erb commission generated others, two of the better known were Selwyn G. Blaylock, President of the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company in Trail and Frederick Clark, Anglican Bishop of the Kootenays.

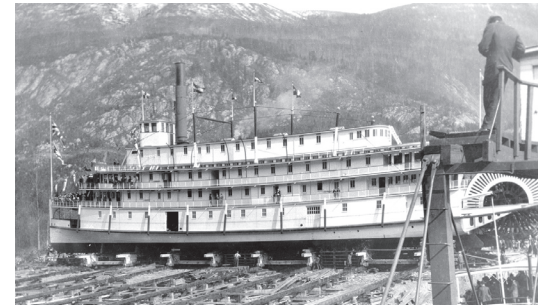
When he had established his name locally, Garner joined the Nelson Art Club and began teaching classes. His work became a perennial favourite and was the benchmark that many were measured against.

In the early 1950s, with the *SS Moyie* coming into her last days of service and having watched her sail regularly past his studio window, Garner and his wife began to research and document the paddlewheelers that once plied the Kootenay, Slokan, Arrow and Okanagan Lakes and the Columbia River. After more than two years of research, Garner began to paint the ships in meticulous detail. The research paid off - the paintings passed the close scrutiny of locals and old-timers. *Echoes of the Paddlewheel* documented the end of an era - illustrating the ships in various locations, seasons and operations and capturing the essence of the working vessels. It has become an historical record of the paddlewheelers.

The first exhibition of the *Echoes of the Paddlewheel* series was in May of 1954 for the Nelson Art Club at the Women's Institute - it was the best-attended show on record. The series toured to Spokane, Washington in May 1955 as part of the Eastern Washington State Historical Society Annual Conference. The exhibition was scheduled to remain for one month, but due to public interest and demand, it stayed on for another six. The paintings were then shown in Calgary at the Hudson's Bay Company store, where

they were well publicized and warmly received. By the end of the year, the paintings were sold to the Glenbow Foundation in Calgary to become part of their Western Canadiana collection.

Alec Garner was a life long artist, recognized for his landscapes of the Kootenays and Rockies. His paintings are widely collected, from local private collections to provincial and national galleries. Treasured by those who have them they are a testament to a life dedicated to recording the natural world.



Launch of the SS Nasookin, 1913

Clarification of the terms 'Sternwheeler' vs. 'Paddlewheeler'

Paddlewheelers are ships that use a wheel of planks fixed to the circumference of the wheel that push the water as the wheel rotates. They can be either sternwheelers or sidewheelers depending on the location of the paddlewheel. Sidewheelers have the paddlewheel located on the sides of the boat, which allows for improved navigation. Sternwheelers were used on the inland lakes and rivers because they are more suited for the area.

A Sternwheeler is a ship that is propelled by a paddlewheel on the stern, or rear of the ship. Sternwheelers were preferred to sidewheelers in this region as the shallow hull allowed the ship to land on a beach or shore with the stern in the deeper water, enabling it to pull away from the shore and back into deeper water.

The Significance of the Paddlewheelers to Trade and Commerce in the Kootenays

The role of the paddlewheeler and steam ships in the development of the Southern Interior of British Columbia cannot be underestimated. The rich ore deposits and lush forests of this mountainous region remained largely untouched and unavailable to the outside world until a reliable and cost effective mode of shipping was established. The geography of the area, with its steep mountains and water-filled valley bottoms, restricted rail development in many areas and water travel was the most effective means to transport goods and people.

Economic and population growth in the Kootenay Region blossomed with the development of shipping routes on the lakes and rivers. The local mines and lumber mills were able to establish themselves and prosper because of the availability of a reliable transportation system. Many of the areas serviced by the ships were never accessed by railroads and it was only the establishment of the highway systems in the early to mid 20th Century that relegated the boats obsolete.

Paddlewheelers were the lifeline to the outside world, bringing news from beyond the narrow valleys as well as mail, visitors and supplies needed by the local people. The boats were also used to transport materials for building railroads, smelters, lumber mills, and towns. Passenger transportation provided an opportunity for people to travel to work by boat and enabled safe passage through the region for travelers and investors who were seeking to finance the development of new industries.

The industrial growth of the area was, and continues to be, reliant on access to its natural resources. When the waterways of the region were made passable, access to its natural resources was made possible. The development of a reliable and effective transportation system connected sites throughout the interior lakes and rivers and tied in with the outlying railways. This enabled construction of infrastructure and supported economic growth.