

PRIEST LAKE

J · O · U · R · N · A · L

Priest Lake **Transportation: Work Boats Serve A Growing Community**

by Kris Runberg

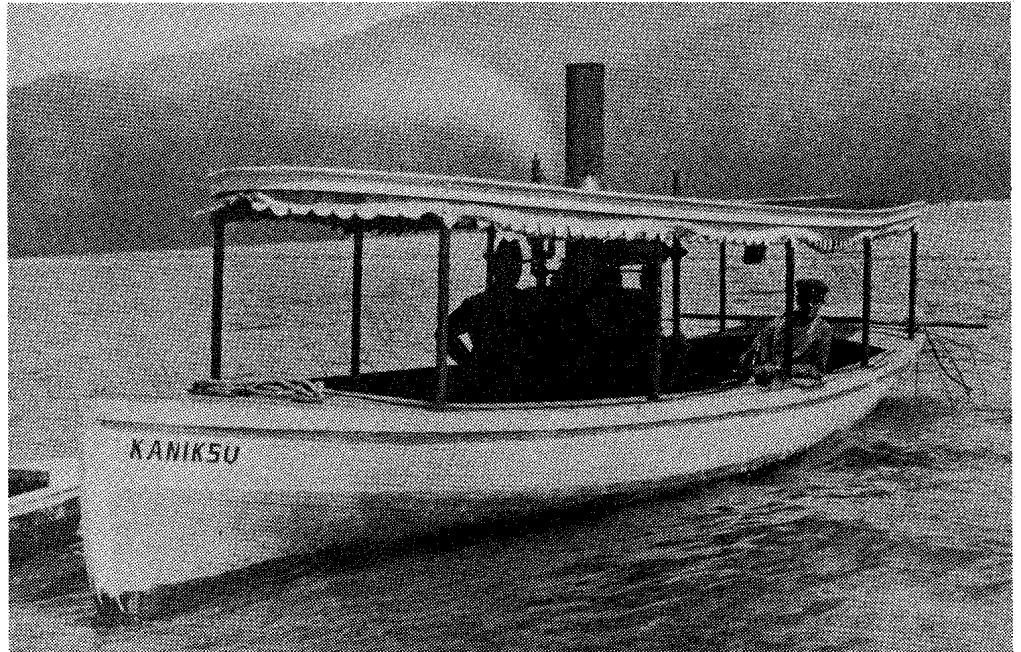
The following article is taken from the Priest Lake Museum Association's travelling exhibit, "Work Boats". Much of the information was gathered through oral histories conducted by area volunteers. Together with other resources, an interesting story emerges of the vital activities that helped form the region. Now, through the efforts of the Museum Association, much of Priest Lake's past is being preserved.

The beauty and resources of Priest Lake attracted interest before the turn of the century although access from Priest River was hard going. Settlers often travelled a road full of stumps, steep hills and mud. But once they reached Coolin, the problems of transportation became easier as the deep, long lake made a natural thoroughfare north.

Canoes, rowboats and sailboats served the trappers and early homesteaders. But as the population grew and various industries were developed, the need for larger boats grew. First came the steamboats, then gas powered boats became an everyday part of life for all who lived, worked and visited Priest Lake.

SLEE STARTS FIRST BOAT SERVICE

The Priest Lake Navigation Company with its boats, the Kaniksu and the W.W. Slee, formed the first transportation company on the lake. After spending several summers camping and hunting on the lake, Spokane businessman J.B. Slee realized the need for steamboats. By 1896 he had brought in the Kaniksu on a lumber wagon from Priest River, providing the first boat service. After the turn of the century, Slee built a larger steamer on his beach in Coolin. The W.W. Slee



was designed to enable Slee's polio stricken son, Walter, to pilot the boat from a chair.

The W.W. Slee became the best known steamer on the lake. During tourist season the boat followed a regular route around the lake, making extra stops when a customer flagged it down with white cloth. During fire season, the boat carried fire fighters at times having to navigate with a compass because of the thick smoke.

The W.W. Slee operated from April through November when it was pulled up on the railroad tracks in Steamboat Bay to weather the winter storms. The Priest Lake Navigation Company dissolved with the death of Walter Slee in the 1920's. His fireman, Bert Winslow, bought the W.W. Slee and operated the boat until the early 1930's when it was scuttled.

STEAMERS SUPPORT LOGGING

The Northern Navigation Company operated for the longest time on the lake, established in 1926 when E.J. Elliott of Sandpoint expanded his operations from the Pend Oreille. The Company's first boat on the lake, the steamer Tyee, was built on the Coolin

beach by Captain Melvin Markham. During tourist season, he made daily runs around the lake, and hauled log booms with the boat as well. The Blister Rust and Civilian Conservation Corp Camps also used the Tyee's services.

Elliott moved to Priest Lake in the 1940's where he had a ten year contract to tow logs for the Diamond Match Company. To fulfill the contract, Elliott needed a bigger boat so a second Tyee was built and launched in Coolin in June, 1944. The boat's seven foot draft kept it from going close to shore so the smaller steamer, Ridley, was brought up to Priest Lake from the Pend Oreille to act as a "sheep dog" for the larger vessel.

The Ridley cut out booms from the logs which were held close to shore near the logging operations. The Tyee then towed the booms down lake, a trip that sometimes took up to sixty hours. A crew of three piloted the boat in four hour shifts, ever watchful of changing winds that might force them to tie up. The fireman greased the engine hourly and kept the firebox full, no small task as the Tyee burned up ten cords of wood during a trip. Elliott and his son-in-law, Russell Bishop, along with their

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The Way It Was

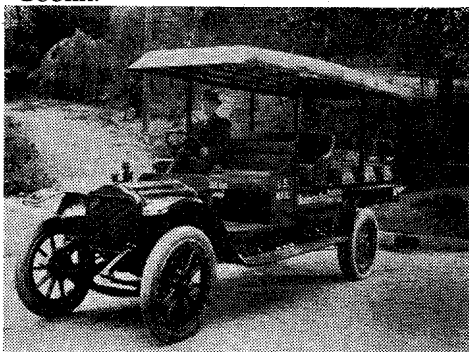
Although Priest Lake never had a newspaper, items frequently appeared in the Priest River Times covering the growing communities around the lake. The following excerpts from the Times provide insights into Priest Lake in the early years.

April 1914

The Northern Hotel in Coolin is being equipped with a veranda for dancing purposes. A new Piano will also be installed for orchestra purposes.

July 1914

Church was held at the Idaho Inn pavilion last Sunday night. Many attended as church is rather irregular in Coolin.



August 1914

C.W. Beardmore performed a stunt with his four passenger White last Saturday that should go down as some record for auto drivers. He left here with 16 passengers and about 500 pounds of baggage, arriving in Coolin on time without mishap or trouble of any kind.

October 1914

There are now 26 head of households at the Big Meadows settlement which is known as Reeder Creek. They are looking for a Post Office to be named Hager in honor of the oldest resident of the community.

June 1915

Two sawmills are running full blast now. Art Marston is running his mill full blast at the foot of the lake and Fred Schneider is not letting Art get the best of him as Fred too is running night and day shifts at his mill in Kalispell Bay.

We understand that the town of Wheatly on the upper Priest Lake is to have a new store. The first thing we know they will have town hall and Dad Moulton will no doubt be city boss.

With the auto service that we have between Priest River and Coolin and the

steamer making round trips each day to and from the head of the lake, weekend parties should be all the rage this season.

July 1915

Owing to the fact that Idaho has another town by the name of Hager, the department will probably christen the new post office Nordman, the second choice of the residents of that community.

January 1916

There will be a hard-time dance at Lamb Creek school house January 15. Anyone attending with good clothes on will be fined \$1.00.

February 1916

Al Roberts ice skated from the Lone Star Ranch at 2:45 and got to Coolin at 4:05 with the mail sack, a distance of 12 miles.

March 1916

A survey has been made and the right of way secured for a railroad from Priest River to Priest Lake into the heart of the mining district. The North Idaho Development Company has been organized for the purpose of putting prospectors in touch with capitalists.



Charles W. Beardmore's horse-drawn stage took passengers and mail to Coolin in the early 1900s. The trip took all day, with a midday stop at Prater's Ranch to change horses and give the passengers a rest.

Historical Photos Copied For Preservation and Exhibit

Over 350 photographs depicting the Priest Lake area from 1900 to 1950 have been collected recently by the Museum Association. The photos have been copied at the University of Idaho and the originals returned safely to their owners. These pictures have been featured in displays at the Bonner County Fair, Priest Lake Mall and Coolin Civic Club. Plans are underway for similar exhibits this summer.

Although the collection focuses primarily on transportation, photographs also illustrate pioneer logging, homesteads, recreation and other community life. This extensive project was made possible by grant funding from the Greater Inland Empire Foundation and the Association for the Humanities in Idaho.

Historical photographs, loaned by generous owners throughout the Northwest, are hand-carried to Moscow where they are copied by the University's Special Collections Department. The negatives remain at the University for preservation and research, and the prints are provided to the Museum Association for a small fee.

These prints are available at the Priest Lake Library, located at the junction of Idaho Highway 47 and the Luby Bay road. Individual pictures from this collection may be ordered from Stan Shepard, Curator of Special Collections, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho 83848. Cost per photo is \$4 plus postage and handling.

If you have early photographs of the Priest Lake area, please let us know. Write to the Priest Lake Museum Association, Box 44, Coolin, Idaho 83821, and describe your pictures in general terms. Do not send photographs through the mail. •

June 1916

The Nickel Plate mine has given up the idea of transporting ore to Priest River this summer on account of the miserable condition of the roads it would have to go by way of Coolin. Both roads leading to the lake are in an outrageous condition. •

Museum Association Awarded Grant For Planning And Development

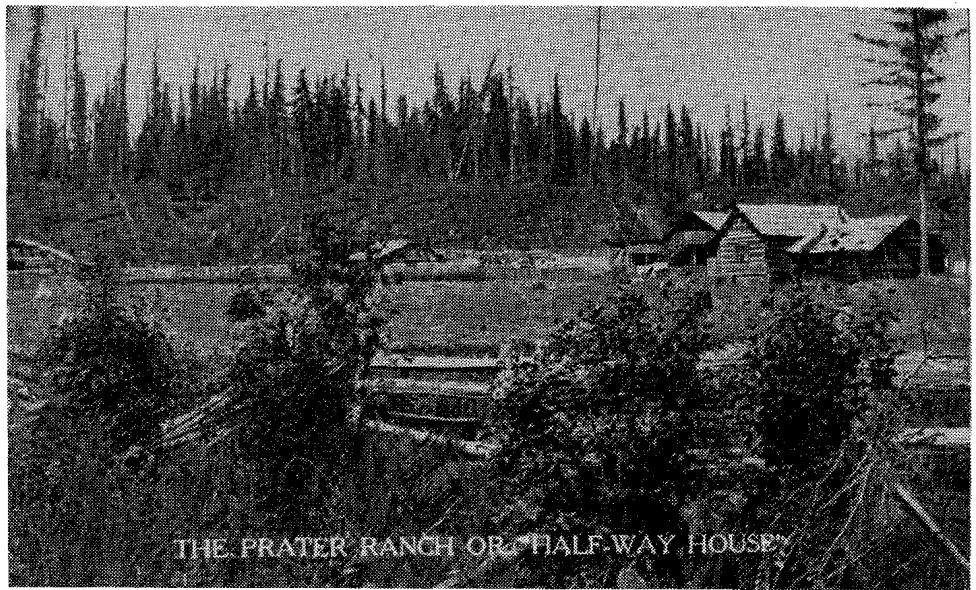
In 1983, the Priest Lake Museum Association received a \$3500 grant from the Association for the Humanities in Idaho to hire professional museologist, Kris Runberg, for the summer months. She assisted with long range planning, trained volunteers to collect taped interviews and developed portable exhibits depicting early transportation.

A five year plan was evolved from a brainstorming or idea session attended by many interested people from the region. The plan contemplates short and long term historical projects that are realistically possible for the membership to accomplish in the absence of a museum building. The newsletter is one of the projects incorporated in this comprehensive plan.

During the summer, Kris trained a team of volunteers to collect historical oral tape interviews according to professional standards. For this pilot program, the team focused primarily on early Priest Lake transportation. Scarcity of recorded history about the lake prompted this oral tape project so first-hand accounts from individuals involved in Priest Lake's earlier days could be collected and preserved. In the future, the team plans to broaden the focus to include interviews about logging, homesteading and recreation.

Fifteen tapes and a cassette player are currently available at the Priest Lake Library. Copies of the tapes are also housed at accredited historical institutions in Coeur d'Alene, Moscow and Boise, Idaho.

Grant monies also provided two portable exhibit cases available for display throughout the community. One exhibit, called "Working Boats — Lifeline of the Lake", features early photographs along with an historical story line. The second exhibit depicts early land transportation. These exhibits will be changed periodically to portray the fascinating Priest Lake story. •



THE PRATER RANCH OR HALF-WAY HOUSE

Prater's Half Way House provided a welcome rest and lunch for the Priest Lake passengers. Mrs. Prater's cookies were a special treat, says Harriet Allen in her oral history interview.

Interview Tells of Stage Ride to Lake in Early Days

Six volunteers participated in a series of workshops to learn how to collect taped oral histories for the Museum Association. The project was funded by a grant from the Association for the Humanities in Idaho. Below is an excerpt from one of this collection of taped interviews now available at the Priest Lake Library.

Harriet Allen first came to Priest Lake as a child in 1904 to visit her grandfather, Joseph B. Slee. Slee was a boat builder who later developed a marina on the site of Bishops's Marina in Coolin. Mrs. Allen described Coolin in the early days as "the hub of Priest Lake — a good sized little village", with stores, two hotels, two saw mills and several saloons. Today Harriet and her husband, Clyde Allen, maintain an original log cabin on the Chant Homestead near Four Mile Point.

In the following interview, Harriet Allen relates her experiences while travelling to Priest Lake in the early 1900s. She begins, "People had to come to Priest River from Spokane on the train. For a number of years you arrived the night before and stayed at the St. Elmo Hotel. Then you took the horse and wagon stage to the Half-Way House where you had a big dinner at noon and changed horses. You arrived in Coolin by evening or late afternoon."

QUESTION: How many passengers would the stage accommodate?

ALLEN: I think eight or ten. I once asked Dewey Huot (also long-time Priest Lake resident) that question and

he said it depended on how many would be hanging on. It would depend, too, on whether it was fire fighting season when they would run additional wagons. Mr. Beardmore's first regular motor stage carried ten to twelve passengers. As I recall, there were three seats and I can remember some people riding on the running boards.

QUESTION: Tell me about the Half-Way House.

ALLEN: There was a long table under a sort-of tent. And there was another small tent where the ladies rested and changed or nursed babies. There was lots of home-cooked food passed around in serving dishes. I remember corn and stew and lots of mashed potatoes and old-fashioned wilted lettuce salad or cole slaw. The owner, Mrs. Prater, was famous for having big ginger cookies for the children and they seemed wonderful with lots of raisins. I imagine we had pie and cake too. It cost fifty cents or a dollar for a meal.

QUESTION: What changes occurred in the passing years?

ALLEN: When Mr. Beardmore got the motor stage we could take the early morning train from Spokane and arrive in Priest River about 10 a.m. About an hour later we'd leave for the lake on the motor stage and arrive at Coolin by early afternoon. Everyone carried lunch in a basket. We traded pickles and everybody sampled somebody else's cookies. It was very friendly. •

(Transportation, from page 1)

wives, Edna and Mona Jane, made up the crew during the first few years.

The booms were brought down lake and anchored to pilings at Coolin until they could be released down the Priest River in the spring. After a dam was built at the Outlet, the Tyee delivered the logs to Cavanaugh Bay where they were loaded on to trucks.

Elliott sold the boats in 1959, ending more than thirty years of service on Priest Lake by the Northern Navigation Company. The Ridley was moved back to the Pend Oreille and the Tyee was gutted for iron and taken on one last trip up lake, finally coming to rest in Mosquito Bay.

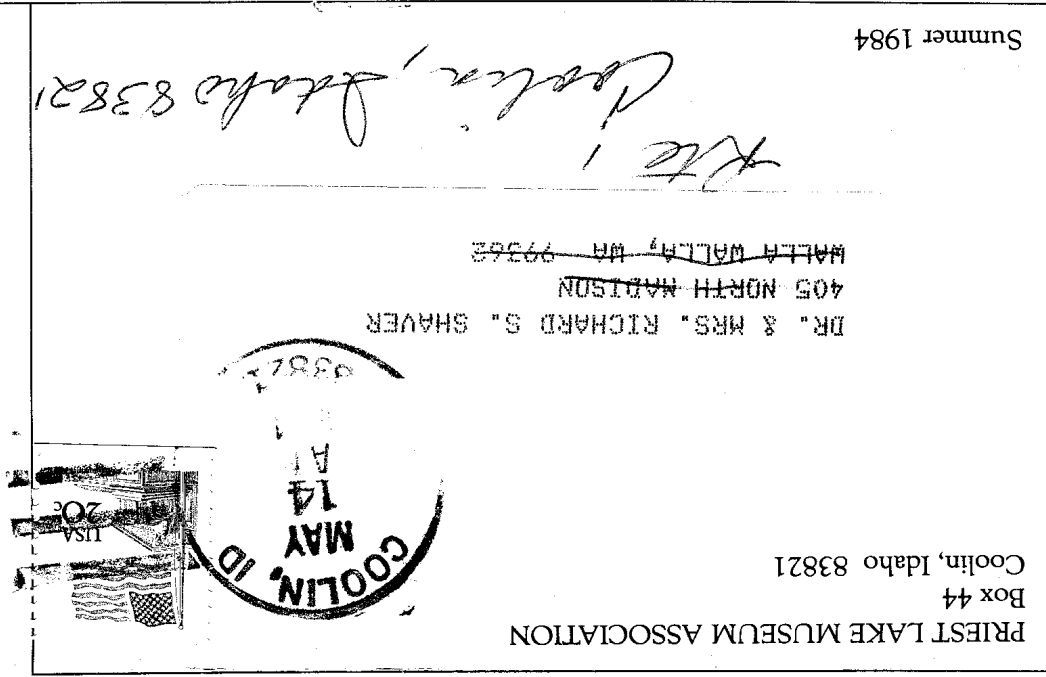
BOATS SERVE AREA NEEDS

In addition to the private companies on the lake, the Forest Service also ran boats. With few roads into the Kaniksu National Forest, water transportation provided the best way in. The earliest dock was at Coolin where rangers patrolled by rowboat, attaching a sail on windy days to make the job easier. Later activities shifted to the Beaver Creek Ranger Station at the north end of the lake. The Forest Service also enlisted other boats such as the W.W. Slee especially during fire season when men, equipment and pack strings had to be moved quickly around the lake.

The Firefly was one of the first motor boats used by the Forest Service. Besides towing barges, the small work boat also made runs to Coolin to pick up supplies and mail. A second boat, the Kaniksu, was acquired to help move fire crews. This sleek boat once served rumrunners on the Puget Sound before the Coast Guard confiscated it. The Forest Service shipped it to Priest Lake where the Northern Navigation Company transformed it into a work boat that served until 1948.

Blister Rust Camps under the Forest Service required additional boats so the rather ungainly BRC-1 was built with Civilian Conservation Corp labor. Captain Markham was hired to build a second boat, the much more skillfully crafted BRC-2, or the Clear-Jo. Markham had previously worked under the Forest Service, running freight and mail up to Beaver Creek before 1935. But for this service he used his own gas powered Seneacquoteen.

Along with the navigation companies and the Forest Service, numerous other work boats operated on the lake. One of the earliest was Priest Lake's only paddlewheeler, the Banshee. C.H. Wheatly built it in the late 1910's to



transport prospective buyers for lots to the town he laid out on Upper Priest Lake. According to stories, the boat made only one trip because Wheatly hit Indian Rock. To keep the boat from sinking, the winter grubstakes for homesteaders aboard were thrown over. The boat made it back to Coolin where it sat on the mud until World War II when it was scrapped for iron then burned.

A few years after the demise of the Banshee, Moses Fish, a Palouse farmer with a cabin at Twin Islands, brought in a small steamer. Besides using it for his own family, Fish also helped out neighbors. In 1918, he sold the boat to Sam Byars who started his own transportation company. It was Byars who hauled movie actress Nell Shipman and her zoo up to the head of the lake in 1921. Byars operated boats until his death in 1930.

Most everyone on the lake had a launch, or at least a rowboat with a one lung engine. Today the steamers and old launches seem more interesting than the power boats, but to those who worked and lived on the lake, they were a vital part of everyday life. The work boats gradually became obsolete with new technology and improved roads. Abandoned but not forgotten, these boats played an important role in the development of Priest Lake. •

Special thanks to friends who contributed in memory of G.T. McAlexander Donald Gumaer

The Priest Lake Museum Association is a non-profit organization. All dues and contributions are tax deductible.

The Priest Lake Museum Association was founded to preserve and promote the rich heritage of the surrounding region. Address all correspondence to Box 44, Coolin, Idaho 83821.

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THE PRIEST LAKE JOURNAL is published periodically by the Priest Lake Museum Association. Its purpose is to inform members and friends about past, present and future events and to stimulate volunteer involvement.

- Editor Jeanne Tomlin
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- Photos courtesy of: Harriet Allen, Vivienne McAlexander

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

The Annual Meeting of the Priest Lake Museum Association will be in September.