

Capt. J. Herrling,
17335- 59th Avenue, Surrey, B.C.

Interviewed: January 18, 1973.

Capt. Herrling was born at Agassiz, B.C. in the year 1885. At the age of 15 he started his career on river boats as a flunkey. This was the term given to a boy whose duties were to make up beds, clean off tables, etc. He worked his way up as a coal passer then deck hand and then fireman before obtaining his mates papers at the age of 19

His 5 years apprenticeship, if you can term it as such, was served on boats plying between New Westminster and Steves Town which in those days was a 2½ hour trip. One season he spent as engineer aboard a tugboat owned by Brooker Cannery, Deas Island. This tug would take the fish scows up to the fishing grounds and collect fish from the fishing boats.

In those days a ship's crew worked two watches of 12 hours each, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. Pay was \$35.00 per month for deck hand, \$65.00 for mate and \$200.00 for captain, board found.

After the one season as engineer on tugboat he spent 16 years as skipper aboard the Steveston - Ladner Ferry between his seasonal command of Sternwheelers in the North. The 16 years were spent on the ferries - Transfer, Beaver and W.H. Ladner. He recalls fog lasting six weeks and so thick one couldn't see any further than 8 feet. His first encounter with Japanese fishing boats was one day when one of them with a crew of 5 had their nets strung from one side of the channel to the other. As the ferry approached, the fisherman would not give way. Capt. Herrling signalled by whistle a number of times, but to no avail. There was no alternative but to go through their nets, which he did, much to the regret of the fisherman. On

his return trip he was keeping a lookout for the Japanese fisherman which he felt would be more than annoyed, but he never did see them again.

He ventured north to the Peace River country in the spring of 1912 to take command of a Sternwheeler on the Peace River. A crew would sign up in Vancouver and proceed north to start their duties by June 1st at break-up time and be finished by September which was when the river would freeze up again. The season was short and a lot had to be done during this short time. The sternwheeler he is most fond of was the D.A. Thomas, a magnificent looking vessel with a length of 240' breath 42' and the height from waterline to wheel house was 45', and a split funnel arrangement. This is a large vessel to be in charge of, plying waters so swift that at high water 15 m.p.h. was common, then the treacherous waters and channels to contend with was another matter.

Four seasons were spent on the Peace River, the years being 1917 - 18- 19 and 20. The trip involved 700 miles of water from Hudson Hope to Vermillion Rapids which took one week to make either way. A return trip took two weeks.

The pace in the Peace River country wasn't fast enough for Capt. Herrling and he ventured further north to the Yukon in the spring of 1923. He completed 3 years as skipper on sternwheelers running from Whitehorse to Dawson City then returned to the scow ferry W.H. Ladner in 1926 which he commanded for a period of ten years.

Then off again to the far north in 1936 to command a sternwheeler until 1938 at which time he retired.

Capt. Herrling was still very much in demand as a skipper. He was offered a command post with one of the fish packing houses as skipper of a fish scow tug going to the fishing grounds when he was 75

years of age. He declined the offer as he felt he had served his time as skipper long enough.

Capt. Herrling's father came to Canada in 1867 to get in on the Cariboo Gold Rush. From there he settled on Herrling Island in the Fraser River. Finally the family settled 6 miles east of Agassiz where Capt. Herrling was born.

In those days purchasing of food, clothing, etc. was done on a credit basis. For example, Capt. Herrling's father would sell a steer to the butcher for 6¢ per lb. This would be a credit on his account. No cash involved. The steer would be sold after butchering at 10¢ per lb. to other parties.

Note: Refer to Paddlewheels on the Frontier Vol. 1, pages 11, 55 and 62. On page 11 Capt. Herrling is on foredeck of Chilco ready to release line at capstan. On page 55, he is holding hands with young passenger aboard Quesnel. Page 62 - directing winching operations aboard Inlander.

J. Whittle

(no tape)