



The tug JOYFUL at the Comox wharf circa 1920. On the aft deck are Capt Charles 'Cap' Nordin (seated) and engineer Jock Smith.

# JOYFUL: 36 Years in Comox Bay

BY RICK JAMES

On August 20 1936 young Charlie Nordin, age 13, had the unforgettable experience of accompanying his dad on board the tug JOYFUL to tow the LAUREL WHALEN, the last of the five-masted auxiliary schooners, to her final resting place. Today, well into his 80s, Charlie says he will never forget playing Tom Sawyer with his pal on the old sailing ship while it was still anchored inside Goose Spit in Comox Bay. Particularly standing out in his memory were the fabulous hardwood floors laid 'tween decks that they scampered around upon back in the summer of 1936.

Charlie's dad, Charles E. Nordin or 'Cap' as he was known around Comox Bay, was in charge of the small harbour tug JOYFUL at the time. The JOYFUL's usual routine was towing eight-section flat-booms from the Comox Logging & Railway Company's log dump and booming grounds, across the bay from Comox at Royston, over to the protected waters inside Goose Spit. On the August day in 1936 the small tug's routine was interrupted to tow the LAUREL WHALEN to the Royston booming grounds, where she was to be scuttled to form part of a breakwater.

Earlier that month the WHALEN had been towed up from Vancouver where some entrepreneurs of the day



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Circa 1914, the JOYFUL has pulled a log boom out of the booming ground and is turning toward the boom tie-up inside Goose Spit. This was well before the breakwater was installed to protect the booming grounds from the prevailing southeasterly winds (the tow is pointed roughly southeast). To the right is the Canadian Collieries coal loading wharf at Royston.

had tried anchoring the stripped down hulk in English Bay and pitching her as a floating dance-hall (with liquor, of course) after they had laid the hardwood floor. But as the *Comox Argus* newspaper reported, "... no licence could be procured; and so after two nights of revelry she was deserted." As a result, the hulk was sold to the Comox Logging & Railway Co for \$452.63.

It seemed straightforward enough when Capt. Nordin and his engineer/deckhand Jock Smith secured the

## Waterfront: Campbell River, Heriot Bay, Comox Harbour

PHOTO FROM THE GLORIA DRAPER COLLECTION



PHOTO BY JACK TUKHAM



The photographer captioned this circa 1925 photo “JOYFUL in Comox most every Sunday during summer.” Sunday was the only holiday of the week and Comox people took advantage of the tug and wharf for swimming. In the inset photo Capt. Charles Nordin is on the deck of JOYFUL with a big Chinook salmon, circa 1925.

JOYFUL’s towline to the old lumber schooner sitting at anchor. Unfortunately, as the *Comox Argus* described, “A west wind sprang up and the old hulk, swinging sluggishly in the sea pulled hard against her fate and the GLEEFUL had a tussle with her in the storm during which her only remaining mast snapped and went through the cabin.” Charlie Nordin Jr. corrects the newspaper account – it was the tug JOYFUL, he knows for sure as he was on board for the tow. The GLEEFUL was one of the larger outside tugs belonging to Comox Logging’s sister company, the Canadian Tugboat Company, and was used to pick up flat booms from Goose Spit and tow them over to Fraser Mills on the Fraser River above New Westminster.

Once the crew of the JOYFUL got the LAUREL WHALEN over to the Royston log dump, Charlie recalls they had one heck of a time wrestling her into place. What with the massive 240-ft wood hull floating high out of the water (the LAUREL WHALEN was stripped of all her machinery, rigging and four of her masts back in the early 1920s) and a westerly wind blowing, the job was almost too much for the undersized JOYFUL. Charlie still vividly recalls all the ki-yiying and off-colour language emanating from Royston’s boom camp foreman Hughie Cliffe as they struggled to get the big hulk lined up exactly where she was supposed to be scuttled. Finally, as the *Comox Argus* described, “Cliffe and his gang bored four-inch holes in her hull ... and she gradually settled down on the beach ...”

The JOYFUL would subsequently tow several more scrapped ships over to Royston to be scuttled in the booming grounds breakwater (see sidebar on page 54). And after his experience with the LAUREL WHALEN, Cap Nordin kept a close eye on the wind and the barometer when taking other large hulks in tow. For many years the JOYFUL was kept busy fulfilling the purpose for which she

was built – towing eight-section flat booms (sometimes double that size) from the Royston booming grounds across to the tie-up in the lee of Goose Spit. There the booms would be made up into tows for the outside tugs of the Canadian Tugboat Company. Their flagship tug ACTIVE could tow 55 sections, the JOHN DAVIDSON 40 sections. The smaller GLEEFUL and PETREL generally towed 24 sections over to the Fraser River.

Capt. Charles Nordin took command of the JOYFUL in March 1913 and manned her, along with his engineer/deckhand Jock Smith, for almost her entire 35-year career on Comox Bay. Richard Mackie’s book *Island Timber: A Social History of the Comox Logging Company, Vancouver Island*, contains Cap Nordin’s explanation of the booming and towing operation to which he and the JOYFUL were inextricably linked. Since there was little room at Royston available for boom storage, the tug was moored ever-ready at the end of the main wharf at Comox. When the whistle at Royston was blown four times that was the signal for the JOYFUL to hustle across Comox Bay and pick up a boom. Nordin and Smith never had a dull moment. “The pressure was on,” wrote Nordin. “Get those booms out of the pockets! They’re holding up the whole industry.” And many times the JOYFUL wasn’t even across the bay to Goose Spit with her tow before the whistle would start blowing again.



PHOTOS BY ROB MORRIS

Charlie Nordin Jr with a model of the tug JOYFUL, April 2011. The model was constructed by

Clarence Hansen in 1937 and donated to the Filberg Lodge and Park Association which is responsible for the upkeep of the 1929-built home and grounds on Comox Bay where Robert and Florence Filberg and family lived. Filberg was chief engineer, then superintendent and, finally, president of Comox Logging & Railway Co.

## Waterfront: Campbell River, Heriot Bay, Comox Harbour

Cap Nordin had good reason to be proud of his long career on the JOYFUL. He could lay claim to having never lost a single log boom. Finally, when her hectic life working for Comox Logging & Railway came to an end in March 1948, Master Mariner C. E. Nordin made his last entry in the tug's logbook: "Thank you, JOYFUL, you have done everything I ever asked and expected of you. Goodbye."

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### Joyful history

ON 130499 Registered: 9/1912 16/1949 New Westminster 150/1961 Vancouver  
Wood: 40' (registered length) x 14' x 5.5' Tonnage: 31 gross 18 net. Built by Westminster Marine Railway Co. Ltd, New Westminster. Engine: two-cylinder, surface-condensing (7" & 14" with 12" stroke) 120 ihp, made by Campbell & Calderwood, Paisley, Scotland.  
1912 registered by Canadian Tugboat Co. Ltd, New Westminster  
1948 sold to Westminster Charters Ltd, New Westminster  
1949 renamed WESTMINSTER MONARCH; re-registered at Vancouver  
1949 rebuilt by Star Shipyard Mercer's) Ltd, New Westminster 53.2' (registered length) x 14.6' x 6.1'; re-engined with a 400-bhp General Motors diesel.  
1959 company name changed to Westminster Tugboats.  
1961 sold to Bridge Towing Co Ltd, Vancouver; renamed MONARCH II  
1962 re-engined with 360-bhp Caterpillar diesel  
1964 Bridge Towing became Marpole Towing Ltd, Vancouver  
1964 company name changed to Westminster Tug Boats  
1966 sold to Seaway Towing Ltd, Campbell River  
1969 sold to Egmont Towing & Salvage Ltd, Vancouver  
1971 sold to Monarch Towing Ltd, Vancouver  
1975 re-engined with 365-bhp Caterpillar diesel  
1990 sold to 374107 BC Ltd, Vancouver  
1992 sold to Ken H. Fox, Cowichan Bay  
1995 sold to Robert A. Boucher, Hagensborg (2003 *List of Ships*)  
[2011 registered to Robert A. Boucher, Hagensborg BC - Ed.]

*Courtesy Frank A. Clapp, Victoria BC*

## Royston's Hulk Breakwater

In 1909 an earlier railroad logging company, the Comox & Campbell Lake Tramway Co., had situated its log dump on the lower reaches of the Tsolum River near where the outdoor pool in Courtenay's Lewis Park is located today. However the narrow meandering waterway proved to be a poor choice because logs frequently got jammed in the river before they reached Comox Bay. As a result, when Comox Logging & Railway took over, they decided to abandon the riverside dump and extend the logging railroad track southeast towards Royston. There a trestle was built out over the wide tidal flats at the mouth of the Courtenay River so logs could be dumped directly from the rail cars into salt water.

However, Comox Logging soon discovered that its Royston log dump and booming grounds came with its own set of drawbacks. The Royston site not only went

### References:

Richard Somerset Mackie, *Island Timber: A Social History of the Comox Logging Company Vancouver Island*. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 2000.

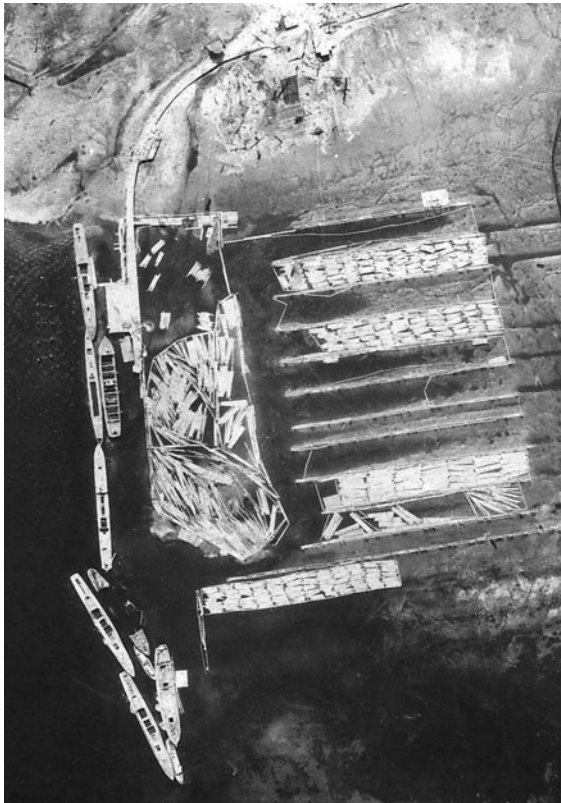
Rick James, *Ghost Ships of Royston*. Vancouver: Underwater Archaeological Society of B.C. 2004.

dry on a low tide, it was also exposed to southeast gales blowing in from the Gulf of Georgia during the fall and winter. The men who worked there remember it as rough place before the hulk breakwater was built. Old boom man, Ray Stockand, recalled, "When the storms came ... waves!! Why, the logs would be jumpin' up and down!"

In a first attempt to knock down the swells, 60-ft boomsticks and old donkey sleds were hauled out of the woods and strung around the log dump and booming grounds. These proved next to useless and in 1936 the company came up with a better idea: use scrapped ships, starting with the LAUREL WHALEN, to form a breakwater on the weather side of the site. The strategy quickly proved successful and over the next 25 years 13 more hulls were scuttled to situate them permanently on the sea bottom. REJ



The 240' x 44' five-masted auxiliary schooner (twin Bolinder semi-diesels) LAUREL WHALEN, a Mabel Brown-class lumber freighter, is shown here in 1917 in the Upper Harbour at Victoria BC. She was launched that year by Cameron-Genoa Mills Shipbuilders Ltd.



LEFT: This 1957 Dept. of National Defense photo shows the alignment of the hulks in the breakwater. From bottom to top in the photo with the year (in brackets) each was scuttled: the LAUREL WHALEN (1936) with the white float tied to her port side; off her starboard bow (the lowest vessels in the photo) are the steam tug NANOOSE (1946) and the frigate HMCS EASTVIEW (1948); off the LAUREL WHALEN's starboard stern quarter are the steam tug QUALICUM (1946) and the frigate HMCS DUNVER (1948) with the bow and stern of the iron sailing ship MELANOPE (1946) on the inside; central in the breakwater is the long hulk of the destroyer HMCS GATINEAU (1947) with the destroyer USS TATTNALL (1947) outside and the barkentine FOREST FRIEND (mid-1950s) inside; the ship nearest the shore is the frigate HMCS PRINCE RUPERT (1948). Beneath the surface, not visible: the steel whalers BLUE and BLACK (1947). Scuttled in years after the photo was taken are: the salvage tug SALVAGE KING (1959); the steel sailing ship RIVERSDALE converted to log barge CZ-3 (1961); the barque COMET ex ORATAVA converted to log barge CZ-2 (1962).

BELOW: From the shore looking in a northerly direction, the Royston booming grounds breakwater, 2010. The hulks have eroded and collapsed and many of their remains (including the LAUREL WHALEN) were buried under rock ballast installed in the 1960s and 1990s to reinforce the breakwater. Left to right: the stern of the HMCS PRINCE RUPERT; the bow of MELANOPE; the bow of RIVERSDALE; the stern of MELANOPE; the stern of COMET. ◀

