Bailey Gatzert

By Kathy Tucker

Built when racing was popular among passenger steamboats, the stately Bailey Gatzert was a contender. It was one of the most famous Columbia River excursion boats and was commemorated with a song and a stamp. Seattle’s John Holland shipyard built the 177.3-foot-long, 560-ton sternwheeler in 1890 with wide decks and fine, large rooms. It was named for Seattle’s first Jewish mayor, who served 1875-1876. The Seattle Steam Navigation & Transportation Company ran the Bailey Gatzert in the Puget Sound, where it sometimes raced the T.J. Potter. In 1891, the SSN&TC merged with Captain U.B. Scott’s Columbia Transportation Company, and Scott moved the Bailey Gatzert to the Columbia River in 1892. In 1904, The Dalles, Portland & Astoria Navigation Company (the “Regulator Line”) bought the Bailey Gatzert. During the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition, it made twice-daily runs from Portland to Cascade Locks and was honored with a song, “The Bailey Gatzert March.” Steamboat racing was common on the Columbia River, and the Bailey Gatzert was fast—making it from The Dalles to Portland in a little over five hours. While passengers and shore viewers reportedly enjoyed the competition, common (but unverified) legend has it that the Bailey Gatzert was called the “Daily Bastard” by those hit by its large wakes. In 1907, owners rebuilt the boat with a larger hull (878 tons and 194.3 feet long) and engines. It also acquired a five-chimed whistle from the steamer Telephone. The Spokane, Portland & Seattle Railroad bought the Regulator Line, including the Bailey Gatzert, in 1915, but declining passenger sales resulted in the sale, in 1918, to the Puget Sound Navigation Company. The company moved the steamer back to the Puget Sound and added a car elevator, transforming the Bailey Gatzert into a car ferry. In 1926, the company retired the steamer and removed its machinery. What remained became a floating machine shop on Seattle’s Lake Union. The Bailey Gatzert’s whistle, name board, and pilot wheel are on permanent display at the Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center Museum in Stevenson, Washington. In 1996, the U.S. Postal Service issued a Bailey Gatzert stamp.

Sources

"Old Steamer Sold," Oregonian, 10 April 1918, 16.


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