

SKEEZIX

The Skeezix is the most famous or infamous boat in Steveston History and part of what was undoubtedly one of the most exciting, but untold, times in Steveston history. While it was built in Vancouver it operated mainly out of Steveston. At the time the main channel of the river from Steveston on the north and Reifel Island on the south was known as the Steveston Cannery Channel.

Initially WH Steves owned much of Reifel Island. He anticipated that Steveston would develop on both sides of the river and indeed two Steveston Canneries the Albion and Harlock were located there. Access was entirely by water across the Cannery Cannel. The pesent Alaksan wildlife preserve was part of W Steves' land. George Reifel built his dock there, across from the Britannia Shipyard, and the island was later named for him.

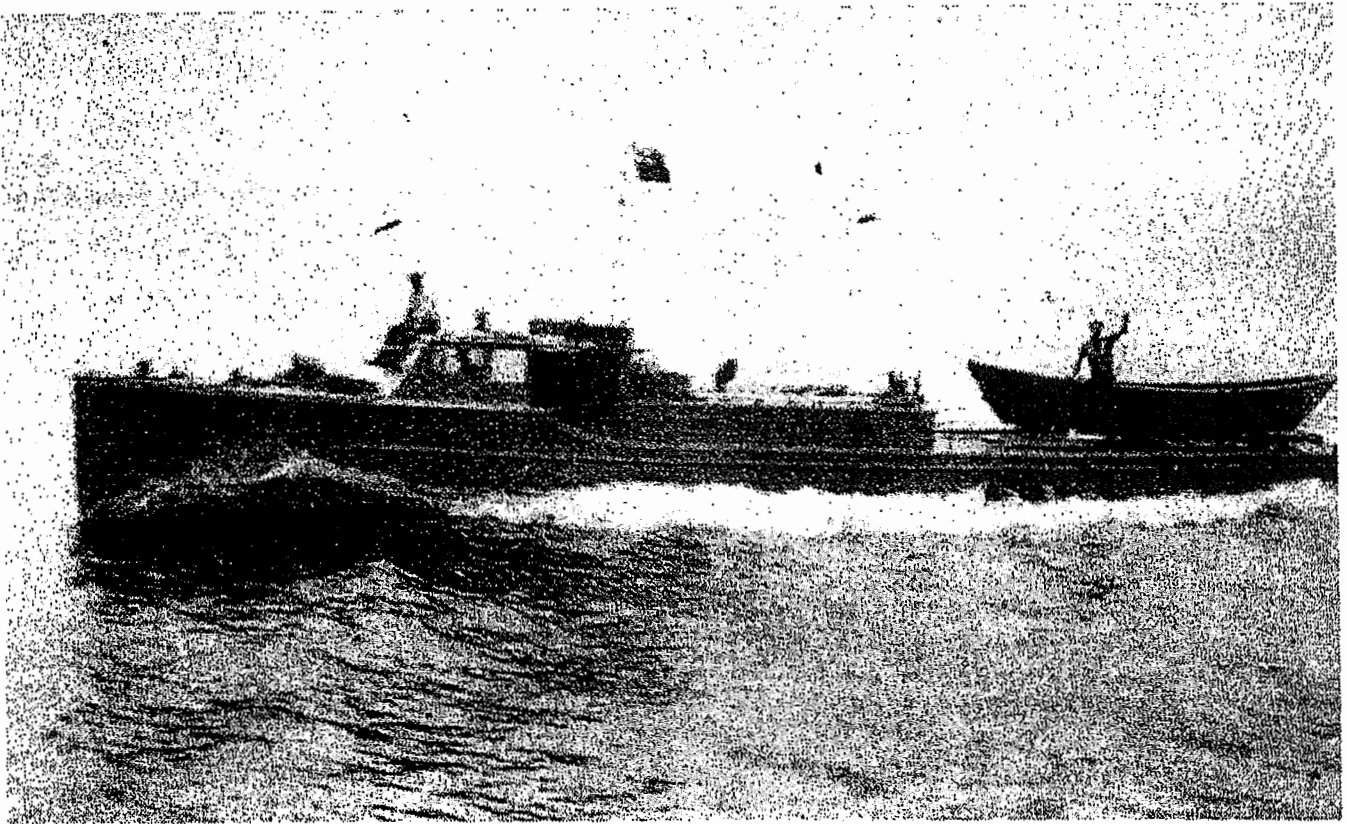
According to Ian Bell Irving, the Skeezix was serviced at Britannia Shipyard before she made her runs, but the Bell Irving family "was not involved in rum running"

To date it is not clear where the Skeezix acquired its cargo. Some of the cargo was imported Scotch Whiskey from Scotland. Henry Ogle Bell Irving was a legal importer. Ian Bell Irving told us a large portion of the cargo imported by Bell Irving on the Titania and other ships was whiskey.

However, Steveston was the rum running capital of the west coast. As well as the Skeezix the fleet was composed of a number of fishing boats and even a mysterious white seaplane tied up near the Britannia. Stills were common and bootleg liquor was sold at the bootleggers' door and in Steveston saloons. There was a major distillery located immediately north of the Britannia Shipyard, south east of Moncton Street and Railway Avenue that likely provided booze for the rum running fleet. There was a major public dock immediately south between the Britannia Shipyard and Phoenix Cannery. The distillery continued in operation, masked as a piggery, until provincial police finally cracked down on Steveston's bootleggers around 1949-50. They arrested and jailed a Mr. Wong, who operated out of a house originally built by my great aunt and uncle at the north-west corner of Third and Moncton Street. While others had made fortunes Mr Wong got six months in jail and that ended Stevestons adventures in the illicit alcohol business.

The Skeezix boat house and a few piles from the original wharf were still standing twenty years ago. The original dory from the Skeezix was found there and added to the Britannia collection.

On shore as a stationary art exhibit of at sea the Skeezix is a very important part of our history.
Harold Steves



Skeezix, Spring 1933. Canadian shore boat 56 feet long, one 80-hp diesel and two 450-hp Liberty gas engines.

