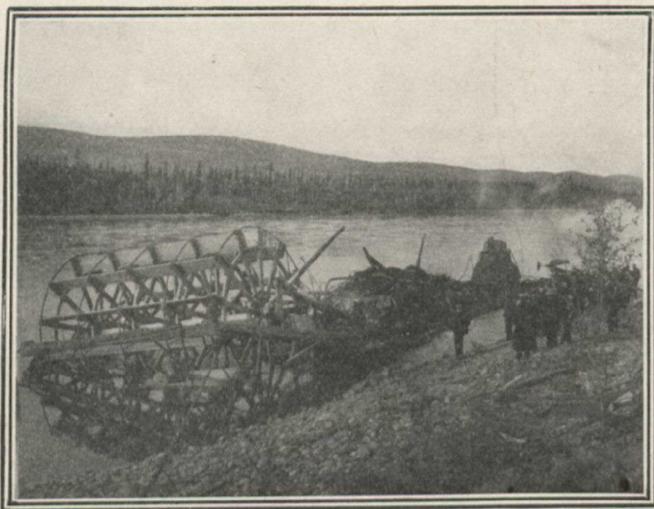


passengers, to be received by steamers waiting below the dangerous spot to hurry them on to Dawson. And just at this place an interesting business began. Enter-



Yukon River—The wreck of the Columbian during the Fall of 1906.

prising men, seeing how difficult it was to carry goods overland around the rapids, laid a wooden tram way along the river for about six miles, over which cars were drawn by horses. Soon an opposition road began on the other side of the river, and keen was the competition till that northern pioneer, Norman MacCaulay, for the sum of sixty thousand dollars, gained full control. For a time it was a great business, and money flowed in like water, which was spent in the most reckless manner. But, alas, when the White Pass and Yukon Railway Company stretched the steel bands from Skagway to Whitehorse, below the rapids, the work of the tram way was done. Only the wooden rails and abandoned trucks remain to tell of the glory that once was theirs.

Though the tram way did a stirring business, yet all the freight was not taken down in this manner. We learn that in 1898 "seven thousand steamers, scows, boats and canoes were lined down or run through the rapids," with not more than thirty boats wrecked, and the contents lost, only three hundred boats more or less damaged.

During these years the romance of navigation was in reality at the highest. Traffic was good, boats were abundant, and competition keen. Those were the palmy days of the country, and money was as free as air. It was a strife between big companies for the mastery, and the survival of the most powerful ensued. Small steamers, which were considered most suited to the river in 1898, were soon out of date, and in their stead, large and finely built crafts, with every accommodation, won the good will of all. These proud "Yukon fliers" opened up a new era of navigation. But the struggle for the mastery continued keen for some time after these new boats made their appearance. The masters fought with bull-dog tenacity for the owners they represented, and no venture was too great for them to undertake to beat a competitor.

RACING STORIES.

Racing was a common occurrence, and when two steamers ran neck to neck for many miles the scene was most exciting. An account in the Bennett "Sun" of 1899, describes the race of two steamers between Dawson and Whitehorse.

"Some times," so runs the story, "they were neck to neck for fifty miles. One grizzled veteran of the Yukon got much excited, and said he'd give a whole sack full of nuggets rather than see the boat he had taken passage in lose the race. He kept shouting 'More steam! More steam!' At last he brought forth a sack of gold, with which he sped to the engine room, when he clapped it on top of the safety valve, exclaiming, 'There, d—n you, I'll see if any more of that steam escapes.' He would have burst the boiler had not the engineer quietly removed the precious treasure."

As the B. Y. N. Company gained control, this dangerous racing became a thing of the past.

This "grizzled veteran" is typical of a class who bulked large on the passenger list in those early days

of navigation. They had gone into the country with the great rush, and returning to the "outside," laden with gold, spent freely as they went. Volumes could be filled with stirring scenes aboard these old steamers. Gambling was carried on night and day, and liquor flowed like water. The time was thus whiled away as the sturdy crafts worked up the devious stream, around bars, through dangerous rapids, and difficult places for weary days till Whitehorse was reached.

During 1898 a steamer left Dawson with one hundred and forty-four passengers, four of whom were women. The fare for each was one hundred dollars, besides two and a half dollars for a single meal. The journey occupied much time, thirteen days, owing to delays on sand bars and climbing rapids. This made the trip an expensive one. But what did that signify! The time was whiled away with gambling, and it is estimated that forty thousand dollars changed hands during that one voyage.

AN AMUSING INCIDENT.

In connection with this run there was an amusing incident. Before leaving Dawson, the steward had brought a barrel of whiskey on board, which he had sold for one dollar a drink. For thirteen days that one barrel held out, and brought the owner the neat sum of three thousand dollars. Nearing Whitehorse, some complained to the steward that the whiskey did not taste the same as when they left Dawson.

"Certainly not," replied the shrewd man. "That barrel of whiskey would not have lasted twenty-four hours, and you would have been the rest of the time without any, so I watered it, and you have been supplied. You didn't know the difference; so what did it matter."

This trick of the steward's vastly amused the passengers, who had a hearty laugh at their own expense.

AN APPALLING ACCIDENT.

The most appalling accident that ever happened on this northern waterway occurred in the fall of 1906. Navigation was almost over, and the employees of the B. Y. N. Company were congratulating themselves upon a successful shipping season, when suddenly a report, like a bolt from the blue, was hurled into their midst. The good steamer "Columbian," with Captain Williams in command, left Whitehorse with a large cargo, including cattle, and five tons of powder. The latter was in kegs placed on the bow. All went well for about one hundred and seventy miles, when the powder exploded, and in the twinkling of an eye the steamer was wrapped in a fiery shroud. Two men were instantly blown to destruction, while the rest of the crew reached the shore. But, oh, what a scene that was; the bleak beach at night, where stood several of the men, with clothing blown from their bodies, and flesh hanging in shreds, looking like awful ghouls, as the steamer burnt to the water's edge. The uninjured men were almost helpless to aid their suffering companions, till a wood-cutter across the river hurried to the spot, with blankets and such supplies as he had. Terrible was the suffering endured by the burnt men, till death relieved their agonies, three not long after the accident, and one in the Whitehorse General Hospital.

The freight taken down the river during one season is considerable. In 1904 the B. Y. N. Company carried twenty thousand tons from Whitehorse to Dawson, not counting that transported by independent boats.

The number of steamers on the Upper Yukon is lessening each year, and in their stead large barges are being used for carrying the freight. One barge handled by a steamer will carry an enormous load, and one crew and propelling power will manage both. In fact the only extra expense is pushing the empty barges up stream, as the swift current carries them down with a remarkable speed. It is a fine sight to watch a strong steamer with a large barge in front working her way up the river, around bars, shoals, and dangerous places.

There is every reason to believe that the traffic on the Yukon River will steadily increase. The country is just in its infancy, and mining operations, which in the past have been rather fitful, are now beginning on a more permanent basis. Large companies are doing splendid work with dredging, and hydraulicking machines, and the future looks very bright. The country is rich in minerals, and though a railroad some day may parallel the Yukon, and divert much of the traffic, yet this noble northern artery of a great land will still command its portion as it has done in the past.