

CHAPTER III

BOAT BUILDING AND HAPPENINGS AT CANAL FLAT

On the following day, May 31, I began the construction of a boat to carry me on my river journey. The lumber bought at Wardner had a length of but 18 feet, and as 20 feet was the shortest lumber I had heretofore used in boat-building it was necessary to prepare a new design to obtain the proper dimensions and lines. This I did by constructing a small model, to scale, representing half the boat longitudinally. An inch board, shaped as wanted, served as a bottom. Small pieces answered for stern and bow posts, and for a rib at the middle. Around these I bent heavy cardboard representing a side. From this model I scaled all measurements necessary to give the boat the correct proportions and form.

The depot was too small for a work shop, there was no material available with which to make a work-bench, and all cutting had to be done on the gravel walk in front of the box-car. Fortunately Mr. Grainger, the rancher living near by, had a plane that he loaned me. However, it was slow and tedious work doing everything on my knees on the uneven ground.

While thus engaged, on the first day, another tramp appeared from the south, carrying a roll of blankets and a valise. He was, apparently, partly of Jewish extraction. He claimed to be twenty-one

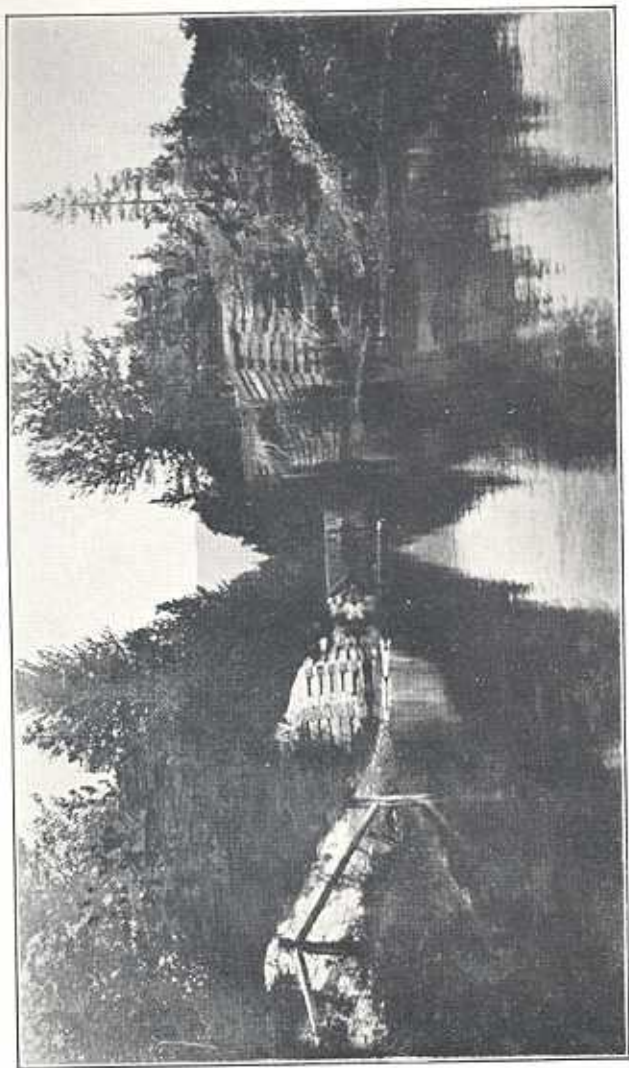
years of age, and bragged that he had run away from home, at Vancouver, B. C., when sixteen years old, and had never worked for a "boss" in his life. He admitted that he was a bootlegger, had been arrested at Cranbrook, and been ordered out of the town. He stayed with me two days, sleeping in the larger section of the depot and eating my "grub." On the third day he jumped the freight train going north. After he had gone I missed a pair of new sheepskin gloves that had never been worn. He was evidently a "bad egg."

During my stay at Canal Flat three other tramps appeared. The first was a large, raw-boned, powerful, middle-aged man, carrying a heavy pack. He was completely exhausted and claimed he could go no further. I gave him supper and breakfast, and he slept out-of-doors in his blankets and in the morning departed for the south. The next to come was a little dried-up Hungarian. He had an old black pipe constantly in his mouth. He too had supper and breakfast and slept outside, leaving for the north in the morning. The last was a Russian with a roll of blankets. His name was Brede. I called him the "Spitter," as he seemed unable to complete a sentence without going through the motions of spitting. He had been working in the logging camps, and was an honest, hardworking, reliable man. He remained with me for the balance of my stay, partaking of my meals, and sleeping in the depot on some sacks of grain that had recently arrived. He offered to pay me for his accommodation, but the offer was, of course, declined.

Having finished all the work of "cutting out" the

parts for the boat it was then necessary to assemble them. The little stream at Canal Flat is popularly known as the actual head of the Columbia River. The nearest place where there was water deep enough to float a boat was just above highway bridge "5-39," and 1,400 feet below where the stream starts. Here it has a width of about 30 feet, and a depth of about a foot, and there was sufficient flat ground on the west bank for a little "shipyard." Building a couple of small trestles, or horses, on which to do the assembling, I carried all the material over from the depot, and making a "former" to give the right shape and width, in a comparatively short time the boat was nailed together; and after being thoroughly caulked was painted a silver gray, inside and out, and the gunwales painted dark green. The green paint was obtained from Mrs. Grainger, as the clerks at Wardner had sent me the wrong color. They had also sent me the wrong size of nails, and from that I learned that storekeepers in British Columbia know nothing about nails expressed in terms of the "penny," and if you want the right kind of nails in that country you must order them by their length in inches. I found out about the nails in time to have the train conductor get the proper sizes. I have adopted the name COLUMBIA as being the appropriate one for the new-born boat and that name was lettered in dark green on both sides at the bow.

The COLUMBIA was constructed of the best grade of surfaced, pine lumber. Her full length, from stem to stern, was 17', and bottom length 14'; width of beam 4' 9"; bottom width at mid-



OLD LIFT LOCK AND ACTUAL HEAD OF COLUMBIA RIVER

dle 3' 0"; depth in middle 17", and at ends 21". The bottom was curved both longitudinally and transversely; was straight 2', each way, from the middle, from there curving up 4" to the bow and 2½" to the stern. The transverse curve of the bottom had a middle ordinate of 1". Her sides and bottom were formed of 12" boards 5/8" thick, the bottom projecting ½" beyond the sides to serve as a fender. The bow and stern posts were of 3" x 4" stuff. The side ribs were 1" thick, 2" wide at the lower end tapering to ¾" at the upper. The bottom ribs were 1 1/8" thick and 2" wide. All ribs were spaced 1' 6" apart. The longer seats, at the thwarts, were made of boards 1 1/8" thick and 10" wide. The bow and stern seats were cut from remnants of the bottom boards. Along the sides, inside and out, were placed gunwale strips ½" thick and 2" wide; and on these set rowlock blocks 12" back of the rowing seat. Old ¾" flooring was used as a false bottom, or floor. When fully completed, and before immersion, the boat weighed about 200 pounds.

I was unable to get oars at Wardner but obtained instead a stick of clear spruce 4" x 6" thick and 16' long, and from this formed a pair of 8-foot oars. For this work the axe and spokeshave were the handy tools, but it took me almost two days' time to bring the oars to shapely dimensions. They were then painted a dark green.

Due to lack of facilities, and also of some tools, ten days' time was consumed in building the COLUMBIA and making oars. Prior to this, with conveniences such as a roomy shop, work bench,

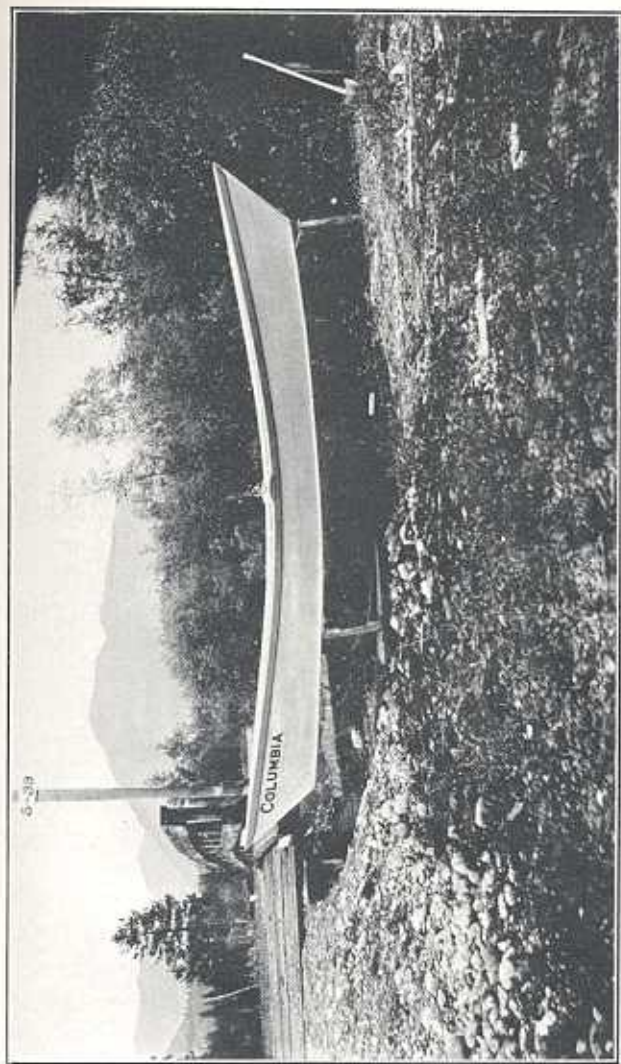


NOTE
In the plan view the floor
boards seen in longitudinal
and cross section are omit-
ted to more clearly show the
arrangement of the ribs.



DESIGN OF ROWBOAT COLUMBIA

with vice, etc., and all needful tools I had cut out and assembled a boat, including painting, and everything except making oars, in three days' time. However, the drawings and photographs here given of the COLUMBIA show that I made a good job; and she proved the most reliable boat, for rough water, that I ever handled. She was of the dory type, a type of boat noted for its remarkable qualities in safely riding waves and breakers.



THE ROWBOAT COLUMBIA BEFORE LAUNCHING