

# History of Argonaut II: The Mission Boat Years, 1937-1966 (Thomas Crosby IV)

By [Lee B](#)

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In 1937 the [Powell River](#) Company sold their company yacht **Greta M** to the Home Mission Board of the United Church of Canada. The United Church renamed the boat the **Thomas Crosby VI**. Though renaming a boat is considered bad luck by traditional mariners, it does not seem to have adversely affected the 73 foot yacht which began as the **Greta M** in 1922, became the **Thomas Crosby**



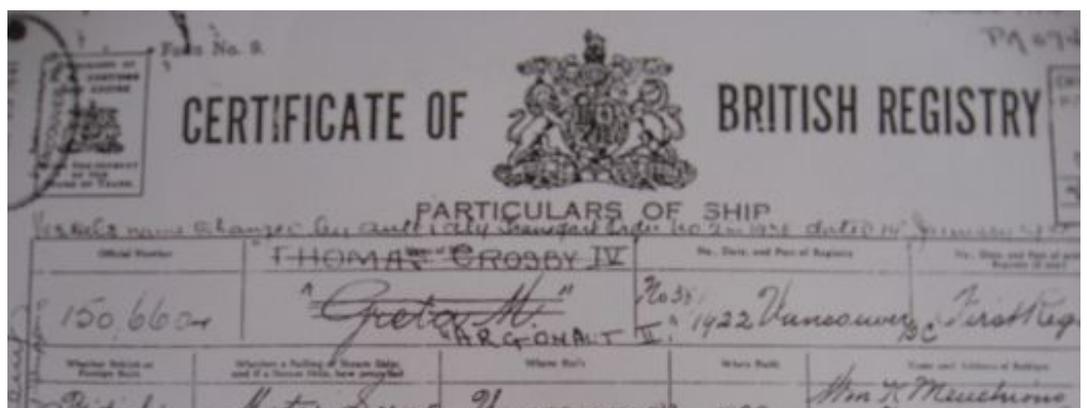
US HAIDA CHIEF, Rev. Dr. Peter Kelly, was skipper of the Thomas Crosby IV for 15 years. The first full-blooded Indian to be ordained in the United Church of Canada. The vessel was purchased by the church as second-hand in 1934 and served continuously on the coast until 1967 when she was replaced by the Thomas Crosby V.

**VI** in 1937, and was finally renamed **Argonaut II** in 1966. **Argonaut II** has “weathered” the name changes and is still afloat today, 88 years later.

In 1937 the newly christened **Thomas Crosby IV** was named for the Rev. Thomas Crosby who ministered to the natives of the West Coast from 1864-1914. One of the many native children baptized by Rev. Crosby was Cle-alls, the son of a Haida chief. Cle-alls grew up to be the first Haida to receive formal schooling and the first to be ordained a minister. In 1937 Cle-alls was known as Rev. Peter Kelly and was a recognized leader of the British Columbian natives—often representing his people in Ottawa and Victoria. Rev. Kelly became the first skipper of the **Thomas Crosby IV** and held the job for 16 years. His life as a seafaring missionary has been immortalized in the book **Roar of the Breakers**.

Rev. Peter Kelly and his wife Gertrude

**Thomas Crosby IV** operated between Lowe Inlet in the north and Smith Inlet in the south, with headquarters at Ocean Falls. She called at



lighthouses, canneries, logging camps and isolated settlements. In addition to serving as a church and mission, she delivered the mail, served as a library and movie theater, and functioned as a hospital and mortuary. A shovel and mattock were kept in a cupboard ready for any necessary burials. **Thomas Crosby IV** also carried a portable organ known as a "little Jimmy," which could be folded up into a suitcase and brought to shore for church services. A visit from the **Thomas Crosby IV** was considered the highlight of the season for many isolated communities.

- [Roar of the breakers: a biography of Peter Kelly. by Alan Morley \(Used, New, Out-of-Print\) - Alibris](#)
- [Maritime Museum of British Columbia](#)  
The Maritime Museum of BC is a principal maritime museum on the Pacific Coast of Canada, and one of the major maritime museums on the West Coast of North America.

The following excerpt from a letter written by a former crew member (not quite--see the comment from the Rev. Jack Towers below) of the **Thomas Crosby IV** illustrates one of their many goods deeds, not strictly related to missionary duties:

About the icebreaking incident.

Number of Decks	one	Length from forepart of stem, under the bowsprit, to the aft side of the head of the stern post	61
Number of Masts	two	Length at quarter of depth from top of weather deck at side amidships to bottom of keel	-
Rigged	none	Main breadth to outside of plank	120
Stems	compound	Depth in hold from tonnage deck to ceiling at amidships	7
Build	carvel	Depth in hold from upper deck, to ceiling at amidships, in the case of three decks and upwards	7 1/2
Galleries	none	Depth from top of beam amidships to top of keel	-
Head	straight	Depth from top of deck at side amidships to bottom of keel	13
Framework and description of vessel	wood yacht	Round of beam	-
Number of Bulkheads	none	Length of engine room (if any)	-
Number of water ballast tanks and their capacity in tons	none		



USA

Dear Jerome & Lee Ann

Thank you very much for the donation of the portable organ from *Argonaut II* (ex *Thomas Crosby*, ex *Greta M.*) Julian and Linda Matson were quite concerned that the instrument might at some point be separated from the vessel and with it a large chunk of Northwest Coast history

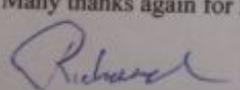
*Argonaut II* was originally built for the Powell River Pulp & Paper Co. as *Greta M.* for use as a company yacht by W.R. Menchions & Co., Ltd. Vancouver, BC in 1922. In 1936 she joined the United Church Mission Service and was rechristened *Thomas Crosby IV*. She was withdrawn from service in 1966 and spent the next few years on charter. In 1970 she was purchased by Julian Matson and renamed *Argonaut II*. Mr. Matson owned her (or she owned him) for the next thirty years in which time he lovingly restored her back to her original condition. In 2001 she was sold foreign to a fellow in Seattle.

In North America, the most common pedal-pumped free reed keyboard instrument is known as an American reed organ, parlor organ, pump organ, cabinet organ, cottage organ, harmonium, and sometimes as a "little Jimmy".

This sweet little organ could tell a few tales I am sure of weddings, funerals, impromptu beach services and harrowing rescues of injured loggers working in the float camps up some isolated inlet. You can read more about her mission days in Michael L. Hadley's *God's Little Ships: A History of the Columbia Coast Mission*. Harbour Publishing, 1995.

Please find enclosed a copy of our gift form for your signature and one for your records.. I am also enclosing a couple of complementary passes.

Many thanks again for helping us in preserving the fascinating history of the Northwest Coast



Richard Mackenzie  
Collections & Exhibitions

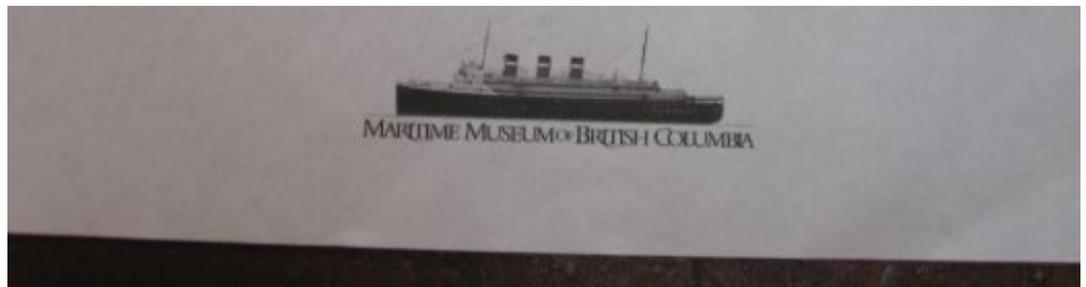


*This was in  
Draney  
Inlet, in, I  
think,  
February of  
that year.  
An old  
Norwegian  
lady stayed*

*on there after a logging camp moved on, living in a float house. Teredo worms, plus January freshets which diluted the salinity of the water, lowered her house to the point that she was doing housework in hip waders. Jack Spinner, the skipper of Thos. Crosby IV had graduated as a civil engineer in Edmonton, but subsequently entered the ministry.*

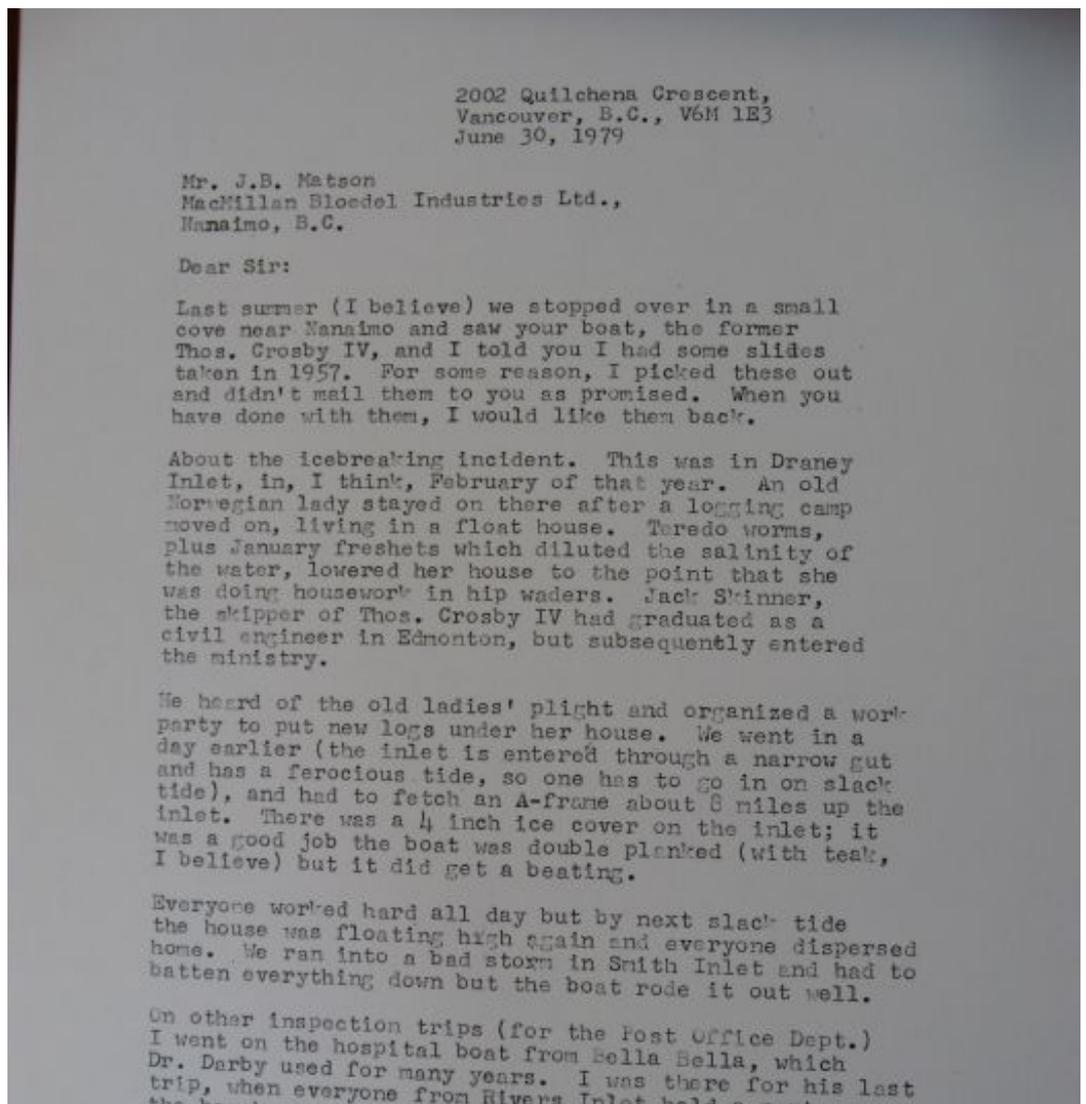
*He heard of the old ladies' plight and organized a work party to put newlogs under her house. We went in a day earlier (the inlet is entered through a narrow gut and has a ferocious tide, so one has to go in on slack tide), and had to fetch an A-frame about 8 miles in the inlet. There was a 4 inch ice cover on the inlet: it was a good job the boat was double planked (with teak, I believe) but it did get a beating.*

*Everyone worked hard all day but by next slack tide the house was floating high again and everyone dispersed home.*



Stern view of the Thomas Crosby IV breaking through ice.

The **Thomas Crosby IV** was retired by the United Church of Canada in 1966 and sold to a marine firm in Canada. The church requested that the name **Thomas Crosby IV** be removed from the boat now that it was no longer in the service of the United Church missionaries. She was sold at least one more time between 1966 and 1970, used as a dive charter, and then left lying idle for several years. At some point during these years the name of the boat



was changed to ***Argonaut II***. Apparently an owner during the 60s was particularly fond of the television program *Sea Hunt*. Another proposed origin of the name is the *Argonaut*, a British sailing ship from the 1700s.

In 1970 the *Argonaut II* was purchased by Julian Matson.

### Sources compiled by Julian Matson

*Resolution* (a Maritime Museum of British Columbia publication), Autumn 2001

*The Town Crier* (a Powell River, BC newspaper), "Greta M is sold to Missions," December 15th, 1937

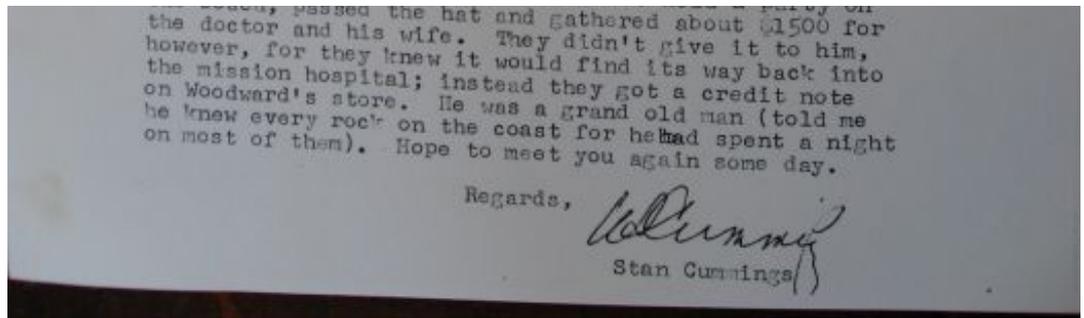
Letter written to Julian Matson by Stan Cummings (former crew member of the *Thomas Crosby IV*), June 30, 1979

Donaldson, Morris. *Pacific Yachting*, "Argonaut II," July 1990

*The Westcoast Mariner*, "Grand old lady of Boat Harbor," March 1989

Southern, Karen. *The Westcoast Mariner*, "The Argonaut II: A Coastal Classic," March 1989

*The Westcoast Mariner*, "Christmas on the Thomas Crosby IV," December 1996





[God's Little Ships: A History of the Columbia Coast Mission](#)

**Amazon Price:** \$23.95

List Price: \$28.95



[Electronic Battleship Advanced Mission](#)

**Amazon Price:** \$62.99

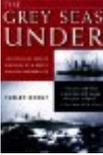
List Price: \$44.99



[LEGO Agents Mobile Command Center](#)

**Amazon Price:** \$168.00

List Price: \$89.99



[The Grey Seas Under: The Perilous Rescue Mission of a N.A. Salvage Tug](#)

**Amazon Price:** \$8.98

List Price: \$16.95