

Manly Ferry Company History

1853-1855

A ferry service was initiated by Henry Gilbert Smith for excursions to Manly, on an irregular basis; it was not a commuter service. Smith built the first Manly Wharf in 1855.

1856-1858

Regular ferry service commenced; Edye Manning leased wharf from Smith and introduced the paddle-steamer *Victoria*. Daily excursion service commenced November 1856, but it was not geared towards commuters.

1859-1867

Establishment and consolidation of the Manly ferry line; *PS Phantom* entered service. Smith entered into agreement with S B Skinner and S H Wilson to run the ferry *Phantom*. There was competition from steamers to Little Manly wharf in early 1860s.

1868-1875

In 1868 the Manly ferry passed to Captain Thomas Heselton, who brought in other investors to aid expansion. The timetable was considerably expanded by 1872. *SS Manly* entered service in 1874.

1875-1881

In 1875 Heselton sold the Manly service to John R Carey, who also bought the wharf. Carey formed the Port Jackson Steam Boat Co Ltd, incorporated in January 1877, and was Chairman of the Board. Council called on him to improve the ferry service in 1876.

The company purchased ferry *Fairlight* (1878), and built the Brightside cargo wharf at Stuart Street. Lease of Manly Wharf was transferred to Manly Council in 1881.

1881-1893

In 1881 the Port Jackson Steamship Co Ltd was formed to take over the Steam Boat Co. Many Manly residents became shareholders. The company survived until 1974. *SS Port Jackson* (1883) and *SS Brighton* (1883) were commissioned. Manly Wharf was extended by 50 yards.

1893-1900

Economic difficulties slowed growth in the 1890s. The Sydney terminus became no 3 wharf at Circular Quay. Manly residents and Council were critical of the company's monopoly, and in late 1893 the Manly Co-operative Steam Ferry Co Ltd was formed, authorized to run from Manly Wharf using chartered vessels. The Port Jackson Co ran to its Brightside wharf and lowered fares first from 1/- to 6d then to 3d single. The Co-operative Co collapsed in May 1896. The new *SS Manly* entered service in late 1896.

1900-1927

With the growth in Manly's population, a regular increase in the ferry service occurred, and the Port Jackson Company thrived. F J Doran served as Manager, 1905-1920. The *SS Kuring Gai* entered service in 1899, and *Binngarra* in 1905. A faster, half-hourly service resulted. A fleet of five additional steel double-screw steamers were built 1908-1922. The opening of the Spit Bridge in 1924 caused a loss in income. W L Dendy joined the Company in 1907, and became General Manager in 1925. The company became one of the most profitable share investments in NSW.

1928-1940

In 1931 the Company constructed the huge enclosed bathing area in Manly Cove as an attraction for visitors. Passenger growth continued. A new passenger wharf was constructed in 1940/41, and the Maritime Services Board took over the lease of the wharf. The *South Steyne* entered service in 1938.

1946-1972

In 1946 patronage reached its high of 14 million fares. The ferry faced increased competition from buses and motor cars. It made its first reported loss in October 1952.¹ In the late 1960s hydrofoils were introduced. *Fairlight* (1966) entered service.

1972-1974

In 1972 the Company lost a takeover battle with Brambles Industries Ltd and became a subsidiary of the Brambles company². Following a series of ferry withdrawals, the ferry operation became unviable. *South Steyne* was gutted by fire in August 1974. The Save the Manly Ferries Committee was formed in early 1974, which attracted widespread support. "The crisis in the ferry service was seen as an Australian problem, not just Manly's", (Curby p200). The Manly ferry passed to NSW Government control in November 1974. However, the resulting co-ordination with other government transport resources by the Public Transport Commission led to a loss of a million passengers over the period 1973-76. Fares rose. Total patronage in 1976 was 3.9 million passengers.

Post-1974

With the election of the state Labor government in 1976, the fleet was upgraded: *Freshwater* (1982), *Queenscliff* (1983) and *Narrabeen* entered service. Passenger numbers rose, due to day-trippers rather than commuters; by 1985 numbers were nearly 8 million per annum. The service became reliant on Government subsidy. A new bus-ferry interchange was constructed at the Manly Wharf. Jetcats were introduced in 1990, but withdrawn at the end of 2008.

Sources:

Prescott, A, *The Manly Ferry* (thesis).

Curby, P, *Seven Miles from Sydney*.

¹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 6 October 1952, p1.

² *Canberra Times* 22 March 1972 p29; 11 April 1972 p18.