

Moments in Time # 7

Australian Coastal Steamship SS. Casino 1882 - 1932

Belfast and Koroit Steam Navigation Company Ltd.

Compiled and Edited by Geoff Walker



The iron Steamship **SS Casino** was built in 1882 by Gourlay Bros & Co Ltd., Dundee, Scotland, originally for B.B. Nichol of the **Newcastle and Hunter Steam Navigation Company** – Sydney, Australia. However, the company known as **Belfast and Koroit Steam Navigation Company Ltd.**, which had been formed in March 1882, took delivery of the **SS Casino** the same year, so the ship never did visit **Casino** the town on the Richmond River in NSW, after which it had been named.

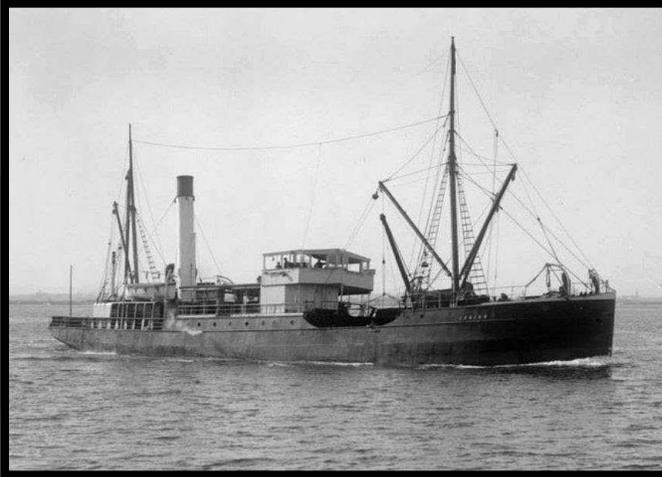
The ship departed from Dundee on 18th March 1882 on a voyage to Sydney, via the Cape of Good Hope. En route, the ship stopped in Warrnambool, a small port in the western region of Victoria, to replenish her almost depleted supply of coal bunkers. Whilst in Warrnambool, where she was also fixed to load a cargo of potatoes for Sydney, the Directors of **B.K.S.N.** learned of the vessel's arrival in the port, so being in the market to procure such a vessel, they inspected the **SS Casino** and decided to purchase her. Thus, ownership of the ship was transferred to the **Belfast and Koroit Steam Navigation Company** (Belfast being the earlier name for Port Fairy). Having completed her voyage to Sydney and landing her cargo of potatoes, the **SS Casino** then returned to Melbourne to begin the west coast service, under the flag of her new owners.

SS Casino was a three mast, riveted iron single screw coastal vessel with a length of 160 feet. She was a single deck, iron framework, schooner rigged coaster, with an inverted compound two-cylinder, 65 horsepower coal fired steam engine driving one shaft, with a single boiler, and 3 furnaces. She had her machinery and boiler room located aft. The ship also carried sails and during her early days, she was sometimes rigged as a topsail schooner as the ship's large spread of canvas helped improve her speed, thus reducing the amount of coal she consumed. She also had a capacity to carry 25 passengers.

Port Fairy was busy with competing steamers from various other companies in the early years, transporting a variety of general cargo and passengers, but the **SS Casino** became a premier vessel on the west Victoria coastal route, especially amongst the passengers that used her services.

On 10th July 1932, off Apollo Bay, near Cape Otway in Victoria, she keeled over and sank after striking the seabed, whilst attempting to berth at Apollo Bay jetty in heavy seas. Unknowingly her hull had been pierced with the fluke of her anchor. She put about again and headed for the beach but sank. The steamer was subsequently wrecked about three hundred yards from the shore, with the loss of 10 lives. From a crew of 16 plus 2 passengers, there were only 8 survivors.

The ship had become renowned for her longevity of service to Victoria's western coastal trade - sadly meeting her demise on the eve of celebrating her 50th anniversary. The ship had a colorful history, spanning some 2500 voyages



Left, the **SS Casino**, following the removal of her center Mast. She had been modified sometime during 1924, at which time the central Mast was removed

The Belfast and Koroit Steam Navigation Company also operated several other ships in Australian coastal services; **Casino** (1882-1932), **Bellinger** (1884-1887), **Dawn** (1885-1896), **Coramba** (1932-1934) and **Wannon** (1935-1939)

(unknown photographer)



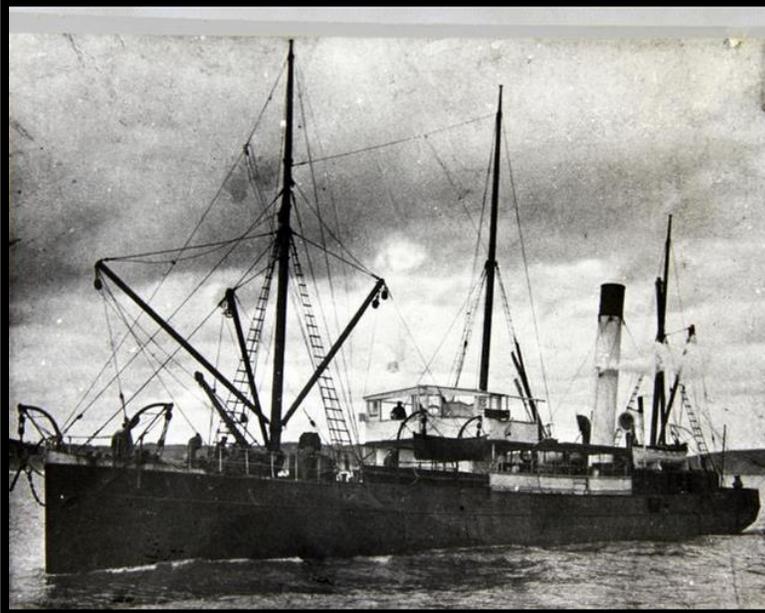
(Port Fairy Historical Society Museum)

An early photo of **SS Casino** at Port Fairy, Victoria, prior to 1924 as the ship still has 3 masts. Due to her size, navigating **SS Casino** in the narrow river was hazardous and incidents were not unknown. The steamer had several brushes with disaster; it collided with another ship off Point Gellibrand, ran aground on a reef near Grey River, and was beached at Warrnambool while entering Lady Bay, during a power blackout. Following each incident, the steamer was repaired and returned to its West Coast service.



A Memorial for the SS Casino at Port Fairy. A bluestone cairn supporting the Casino's propeller and the town wreck bell. On one side a bronze plaque carries the names of all ten lives lost, on the other side is a bronze plaque marking the 100th anniversary of her registration, dedicated in 1982

(Port Fairy Historical Society Museum)



An interesting vintage photograph showing the **SS Casino** approaching the Victorian coast, presumably approaching Apollo Bay and Port Fairy. Note that the vessel still retains its central Mast, so the photo must be dated prior to 1924 when the center mast was removed.

(unknown photographer)

Following their catastrophic loss, the Belfast and Koroit Steam Navigation Company stopped its vessels from using Apollo Bay as a port. The loss of **SS Casino** was a death knell to coastal cargo and passenger transport in Victoria generally, when only a few years later in 1936, their steamer **Coramba** whilst on a passage from Port Fairy to Melbourne disappeared without trace and loss of 34 crew, in a fierce gale. The Belfast and Koroit S. N. Co ceased to operate in 1939 with the advent of road transport and communications. The **SS Casino** was a grand little ship that served the State of Victoria very well over a prolonged period. Regrettably, she met an undignified end, but nevertheless her memory continues to live on in local history and, nostalgia as well as being a very fitting "Moment in Time".



Australian Coastal Steamer “SS Casino”

A scale model from the Author’s collection.

End

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References: National Library of Australia

Port Fairy Historical Society Museum and Archives

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