

# NOW AND THEN



COURTESY OF THE ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS



PAUL DORPAT

**Above - The ferry Kalakala makes its way through Chittenden Locks on April 24, 1947. Behind her is the Ballard skyline.**

**Left - Going through the Chittenden Locks is still a popular rite of passage for local tour boats like the one on the left, passing through the small lock. This view is through one of the arches of the locks spillway dam.**

## Flying Bird

WRITTEN BY PAUL DORPAT

Before there was the Space Needle there was the Kalakala.

The ferry was introduced in 1935 to help locals take their minds off the Great Depression. The Black Ball Line named her after the native Indians' mythical "flying bird" and advertised her as the "world's first streamlined ferry." The publicity worked. Puget Sound's first streamlined symbol was known from Peoria to Peking.

The Kalakala's function, however, did not follow its form. It vibrated badly, and was not particularly fast. Its daily wartime work of transporting nearly 5,000 shipworkers between Seattle and Bremerton earned it the proletarian title "Workhorse of the Sound."

The tear-shaped vessel was first sketched by the avant-garde industrial designer Norman Bell Geddes, not by a Boeing engineer as is widely assumed.

Bell Geddes managed to design an auto ferry that did not resemble a steam-powered garage. The Kalakala's aluminum skin was stretched over the burned-out hull of the San Francisco Bay ferry Peralta, towed north in 1934 for its transmutation.

Here, the Kalakala is on an excursion through the Chittenden Locks on April 24, 1947. Twenty years later, her wings were clipped and she was towed to Kodiak, Alaska, where she was landlocked as a crab-processing plant.

Ever since, persons of energy and imagination have labored to bring the "flying bird" back to Puget Sound, the waterway for which she was once an international symbol. Most recently this effort has been organized by the Kalakala Foundation (632-0540).

PAUL DORPAT SPECIALIZES IN HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND HAS PUBLISHED SEVERAL BOOKS ON EARLY SEATTLE.