

PADDLE-WHEELERS AND SCHOONERS

The first boat to use steam power in its propulsion on Lake Ontario was the FRONTENAC. It was a paddle wheeler which was built in Kingston, circa 1816 and serviced the north shore of the lake. The driving mechanism consisted of a wheel made up with large steel blades or paddles, rotating on a large drive shaft, the blades set partly submerged in a large squirrel-cage type of enclosure, with one assembly on each side of the vessel, mounted towards the stern.

Mrs. Wells, daughter of Samuel Ash, born at what is today the eastern boundary of Cobourg, in 1803, tells us in her pioneering recitations, "When the steamer FRONTENAC passed up the lake, which it did shortly after it was built, after the war of 1812, its machinery made such a fearful noise that the people left their houses and ran for their lives to the lake shore to see what was the matter, one man losing his hat in the hurry and consternation. The settlers gave it the name of 'OLD PUFFER', and it afterwards became such a terror to the children in its trips up and down the lake that the mothers were in the habit of frightening them into good behaviour by threatening to call 'old puffer'. Down through the years various

paddlewheelers served this area, making Cobourg a port of call after the harbour was started in 1828. During the 1830's the WILLIAM IV was an important means of water transportation along the north shore. Of course, we must not forget the good ship COBOURG, built on our shores at the east side of Division Street and launched at the end of May in the year 1833.

During the early part of this century, several "side-wheelers" were in seasonal service here. It was during the W.W.I. era that they were terminated locally. I recall the North King operating summer routes. The Capsian had a regular summer schedule between Cobourg and Charlotte, across the lake. The Argyle was another, operating along the north shore. I can barely remember a local excursion to Twelve O'Clock Point, located at the western end of the Bay of Quinte, on the steamer Argyle. Before W.W.I., boat excursions from Cobourg were a very popular event, using these paddle-wheelers. There is a possibility that in the future, summer excursion boats may return to Lake Ontario, and the new Cobourg waterfront will provide a great play-picnic area for incoming excursionists.

Schooners have been around for

quite some time. From the era of pioneer days up to W.W.I, this type of boat was the bulk carrier, the "Work-horses" of the Great Lakes. According to my dictionary, the word originated from a New England word, schoon, meaning to skim or skip upon the water. It was a fore-and-aft type of rigged vessel, first with two masts, later with three or more. The schooner boats brought in supplies to the Cobourg Harbour, such as coal. Over the years they took away from here farm and forest products and for a few years, in the 1860's and 1870, it handled the iron ore that came down the Harwood track from Marmora.

Three generations of the Cobourg Rooney family had master mariners who sailed the schooners, the last being Captain Dan Rooney, Madelines father. He was linked up with Cobourg's George Plunkett in the coal handling business, with Rooney as the sailor and Plunkett the business man. Rooney would leave the Cobourg harbour in his boat bound for Oswego for coal. It would require a whole week to make the trip, bringing back 500 tons of anthracite coal for local consumption. The following are some of the names of schooners that operated out of the Cobourg Harbour: "The Caledonia", Capt. Hugh


Rooney, - 1879; "The Annie Falconer"; "The Mary Taylor", - rechristened "The Loretta Rooney"; "The Anandale"; "The Jessie Drummond", wrecked off the Cobourg East Pier 1902, there was no Rooney on board at that time; "The Hannah Butler"; "Sofia J. Luff"; "The Charlie Marshall"; "The Wilfred Plunkett"; "The Katie Eccles" etc.

Recently, Madeline Rooney donated copies of some very interesting stories of Cobourg Boats, stories taken from "Schooner Days", to the Cobourg and District Public Library.

Car Ferries Loading - In the GOLDEN MEMORIES story of "The Shunter" - published March 25, the writer attempted to explain the loading and unloading of railway cars and the former car ferries. In that story the writer was in error. My boyhood, Factory Hill chum, Captain H.A. Nicoll, on request, has kindly enlightened me about

this special movement of railway cars. It was a very complicated procedure and not the simple movement, generally observed by one casually looking on. It was the responsibility of the boat mate on duty to arrange with the shunter crew, and work out together, just how the cars with various total weights would be moved and placed on the boat. Care had to be taken not to tip the boat too far sideways and also lengthwise.

The cars remaining on deck had to be clamped down so as not to move with the tilting of the ship. Hamish Nicoll was the first mate at the time the car ferries were terminated. He then moved on to the Canada Steamship Lines and for a number of years served as

captain on some of the largest bulk carriers plying the waters of the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River. 

A Cobourg Harbour (105-03)