

NORONIC was a relatively frequent visitor to Toronto in the years following the opening of the new Welland Canal, trading down to Lake Ontario on late-summer and autumn cruises. She arrived in Toronto on Friday, September 16, 1949, with 699 passengers and crew aboard, many of them being excursionists from Detroit and Cleveland. She was due to sail at 7:00 a.m. on Saturday for Prescott, but she never again would move under her own steam.

Many of the passengers and crew went ashore for the evening. Most passengers but far from all of the crew were back aboard when, about 2:30 a.m., a fire was discovered in a linen closet on C Deck aft. A bellboy and a passenger tried to fight the blaze themselves, but it soon got out of hand and, before long, the entire ship was ablaze. The Toronto Fire Department was summoned but nothing could prevent the ship from being completely gutted.

The passengers were mostly on their own in trying to find egress from the vessel. Spectacular photographs showed people struggling down fire brigade ladders with flames looming in the background. At least 119 passengers (the count seems always to have been in question) were lost and their remains were taken to the beautiful old Horticultural Building (still extant today) on the Canadian National Exhibition grounds, which was pressed into service as a makeshift morgue. Twelve unidentified and unclaimed bodies were laid to rest in a special grave at Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

So much water was poured into NORONIC that she sank at her pier. During the autumn, she was raised and stripped of her superstructure, the wreck having been abandoned to the underwriters and then sold to Marine Salvage Ltd., of Port Colborne. The hull was towed on October 29, 1949, to Hamilton, where it was dismantled by the Steel Company of Canada Ltd.

The NORONIC's night of infamy led to many repercussions. There was criticism of the steamer's officers and crew (all of whom survived) and, since fires do not begin all by themselves in linen closets, arson was suspected but never proven. Strict new safety rules were instituted and they led to the retirement of a number of ships which could not economically be altered to meet the safety requirements.

The city has done its best to forget the disaster which brought to such a sudden end the lives of so many visitors to Toronto. Even the slip in which NORONIC burned is gone, for eventually it was filled in and today is the site of the Harbour Castle Hotel and the "new" city ferry docks. Nothing new or meaningful can be said about NORONIC after all these years. All we can do, if we are so disposed, is to look back with sadness on a tragedy which should never have happened at all and which chanced to occur on our own waterfront...

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TEN MORE TALES OF THE GREAT LAKES

Back in 1983, T.M.H.S. member Skip Gillham's book Ten Tales of the Great Lakes appeared in print. Six years later, an additional selection of stories has been put together by Skip as Ten More Tales of the Great Lakes. This 72-page softcover, featuring 96 photographs, including a colour photo of H. C. HEIMBECKER on the cover, contains items such as the story of the Soo River Company fleet, the multiple conversions of CANADIAN EXPLORER and CANADIAN RINGER, the development of early lake self-unloaders, and the stories of salt water vessels which have come to grief on the lakes.

The book sells for \$12.95 and may be obtained from Stonehouse Publications, 17 Queen Street, St. Catharines, Ontario L2R 5G5. It will also be available from retail outlets, including the souvenir shop at Lock Three on the Welland Canal.

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And to close out this issue, a reminder that our Chief Purser wants to hear from you about your renewal for the 1989-1990 season. Fees are now \$18.00 per annum, but that is still a bargain in that it will give you eight great meetings and nine issues of "Scanner". We hope you'll agree.

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