

ROSAMOND BILLET and T. P. PHELAN

by Ronald F. Beaupre

Each of the ship histories which we have explored within the pages of "Scanner" has had its own particularly interesting aspects which have caused it to be chosen for a Ship of the Month feature. In the case of the steamer T. P. PHELAN, the author's interest was piqued when he read that the vessel had stranded to a total loss on August 17, 1920, at his former home town of Iroquois, Ontario.

Some readers might be tempted to think that ROSAMOND BILLET and T. P. PHELAN were simply different names applied to the same vessel, and this would lead them to wonder why we have included both names in the title of this feature. In fact, however, ROSAMOND BILLET was not just renamed to become the PHELAN, but rather the former ship was completely dismantled in order to provide the materials required to build the latter. Both were very peculiar vessels, and their story is equally as unusual.

To begin our narrative, we must take a step back in history, to the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba, in the year 1910. (Winnipeg, of course, is located on the Red River, some forty miles from the southern end of Lake Winnipeg.) Hugh Sutherland, executive agent for the Canadian Northern Railway, had contracted to have a sand dredge built at Winnipeg for local service. This new steel-hulled, self-propelled dredge was designed by W. E. Redway, naval architect, of Toronto.

The Doty Engine Works, Toronto, provided much of the material required for the construction of the steamer, the parts being prefabricated and then shipped westward. The Doty firm, which operated plants at both Toronto and Goderich over the years, provided twin condensing, compound engines of 366 Indicated Horsepower and 56.32 Nominal Horsepower, each engine having cylinders of 13 and 26 inches diameter and a stroke of 18 inches. Two boilers, built of Clyde steel and capable of producing steam at a working pressure of 150 p.s.i., were shipped out to Winnipeg in 1910 by the Jencks Machine Company Ltd., of St. Catharines. The boilers were of the Scotch marine type and measured 9.0 feet by 11.3 feet.

The dredge, which was christened ROSAMOND BILLET, was launched at Winnipeg, into the waters of the Red River, on Monday, October 10, 1910. The vessel was propelled by twin screws and her hull measured 163.5 feet in length, 40.7 feet in the beam, and 9.6 feet in depth. Her tonnage was registered as 679.46 Gross and 462.04 Net. ROSAMOND BILLET was enrolled on the Canadian register at Winnipeg on February 27, 1911, and she was assigned official number C.130-272. Her registered owner was Hugh Sutherland, of Winnipeg.

Sutherland's intentions were that ROSAMOND BILLET would load her cargoes of sand or gravel on Lake Winnipeg and then would deliver the building materials to various locations along the shore of the lake and the banks of the Red River. There had been other sand boats operating in the area before, but the BILLET appears to have been the largest ship designed for the service.

Fully loaded, ROSAMOND BILLET could carry 1,000 tons of sand and gravel at a draft of 8.5 feet. She was designed specifically to be able to transit the St. Andrew's Lock, which was located on the Red River between Winnipeg and the outlet of the river into Lake Winnipeg. The lock had a clearance of ten feet of water over the sills and was built to facilitate navigation past the St. Andrew's Rapids. With its construction, the water level at Winnipeg was raised two feet, thus providing a navigable channel nine feet deep, and for the first time, the larger vessels operating on the lake could run upstream (southward) to Winnipeg.

The lock had a lift of 21 feet, with a chamber that was 215 feet long between the gates and 45 feet wide. The lock was first opened to traffic on May 2nd, 1910, and the formal opening ceremonies took place on July 14th. The pool