

WHERE WAS ROSAMOND BILLET?

In April, we featured as our Ship of the Month No. 182, the sandsucker ROSAMOND BILLET, which was built in 1910 for service on Lake Winnipeg and the Red River, and which was disassembled over the winter of 1917-1918 and reconstructed at Trois-Rivieres as the C.S.L. canaller T. P. PHELAN. She foundered on August 21, 1926, on Lake Erie whilst operating on Lake Erie as the sand boat HOWARD S. GERKEN.

In October, we presented several more photos of the BILLET/PHELAN. The top photo on the back of the photopage showed the BILLET moored alongside a wooden pier, at the end of which was a small but prominent lighthouse. We did not know the location of the view, but suspected that it was somewhere on Lake Winnipeg, perhaps at the entrance to the Red River. We had no idea why so many people would be out on the pier, apparently admiring a lowly (although large for that area) sandsucker.

Loyal T.M.H.S. member Miss Margaret Evans, of Winnipeg, thought that she recognized the site of the BILLET photo. She searched through some old family photos and found one that her mother took in 1926 when Margaret, her parents, and the family's Airedale spent a vacation at Gimli, Manitoba, a large town located on the shore of Lake Winnipeg, about sixty miles from Winnipeg via the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Miss Evans recalls that they walked out on the Gimli wharf to watch people fishing there, and it was then that her mother took the photo which still is in Miss Evans' collection. The dock in that view is not exactly like the one in the photo of ROSAMOND BILLET, but it is close enough that there is little doubt in our mind that both shots were taken at Gimli. We must remember that more than a decade had passed between the taking of the two photos, and much can happen to a wooden wharf in that many years.

Why would so many people have been out on the wharf when the BILLET was moored there? Miss Evans surmises (and we agree) that the presence of the steamer was much like the arrival of trains in a period town; everybody would turn out to watch...

Regarding the question of ROSAMOND BILLET having boilers fuelled with cordwood, we now have a second opinion that such would appear likely. We earlier proposed the suggestion, advanced by Winnipeg T.M.H.S. member Bob Clarke, that coal was not a normal fuel for Winnipeg area steamers at the time in question. Miss Evans recalls a trip on the Lake Winnipeg passenger steamer KEENORA as late as 1933, at which time she still burned wood, and KEENORA would load up with cordwood at each of the stops along her route.

We thank Miss Evans for sending along to us her comments, and also for providing us with a print of her mother's 1926 photo. Her assistance has added a bit more detail to the story of ROSAMOND BILLET. We hope that our readers will continue to pass along to us any additional data which they might discover concerning this fascinating little steamer and, of course, our ultimate goal would be to locate a good-quality photo of the ship in her last incarnation, bearing the name HOWARD S. GERKEN.

* * * * *

CONDOLENCES

With sadness, we inform members of the passing of Mrs. Fran Morris after a brief illness. A lifelong resident of Goderich, Fran was the beloved wife of Ralph Morris, former chief engineer of the steamer OAKGLEN and longtime member of the Toronto Marine Historical Society. We express our sincere condolences to the Morris family.

* * * * *