

THE A. McVITTIE REVISITED

One of our most popular recent features was our January Ship of the Month No. 217, being the history of the wooden-hulled Rutland package freighter A. McVITTIE. It has prompted much comment from the members, and one of those who wrote was Rene Beauchamp, of Montreal. He recalled that he had in his collection a photo of the McVITTIE, and he set about searching for it and then sent us a copy. We reproduce it herewith, for the enjoyment of all.

Rene's photo is interesting in that it shows the McVITTIE upbound in one of the old Lachine Canal locks, the gates just opening in anticipation of the steamer's departure. We have not often showed a Lachine Canal photo, and this one, arc lamps and all, fills an inadvertent void in "Scanner".

Of particular interest is that this view shows the McVITTIE with the legend 'O.C.&T.Co.' in black on her white forward rail, which indicates that it was taken in the period 1910-1917, when she was owned by the Ogdensburg Coal and Towing Company. We can narrow down the date even further, however, because in 1912, the McVITTIE was cut down to a single-deck freighter at the Ogdensburg yard of the St. Lawrence Marine Railway Company. Rene's photo shows the ship with her pilothouse moved forward onto the then-flush forecastle, but it can be seen that the midships section of the steamer has not yet been cut down. Hence, the photo must have been taken in 1910 or 1911.

In our feature, we had puzzled over the colours worn by the McVITTIE and her sisterships in their early years of service for the Ogdensburg Transit Company. Much of the mystery now has been solved by longtime T.M.H.S. member David T. Glick, who has written to tell us that, hanging over the fireplace in his winter home at Matlacha, Florida, is an 1889 painting of the GOV. SMITH (one of the McVITTIE's sisterships), painted by that highly respected marine artist, Seth Arca Whipple. Dave has shared with us the colours of the SMITH, as Whipple recorded them, and we shall never come any closer to knowing how the McVITTIE really looked in her early years.

The SMITH's hull was painted by Whipple as being a very dark grey, almost but not quite black, and no light grey boot-top shows, although we see it in later photos. The cabins were, indeed, white, and all of the lower cabin windows had green shutters. The big shuttered ports in the boilerhouse were painted by Whipple in the open position, and they were brick red on the inside. The steering pole, main (and only) mast, sidepoles and jackstaff all were cream or light buff, and the ball on the steering pole was the same colour, with "swiggles" of orange on it, no doubt for visibility. (Dave wonders, and we now do too, whether the ball might have had a small oil lamp in it so that it could be seen at night.)

In the Whipple painting, there is no big nameboard across the front of the pilothouse, nor boards on its sides. Dave tells us, however, that the ship's name is painted directly on the pilothouse sides in blue-green letters, as large as could fit, running from forward of the first side window to aft of the rear side window, above the windows and door. The painting shows the steamer flying her owner's houseflag, a swallow-tail pennant flown from the gaff. It is white, with the letters 'O.T.Co.' in sky-blue, with 18 stars of the same colour, nine each along the top and bottom. The large capstan on the fantail is painted a bright red.

Dave notes from the Whipple, and we agree on taking a closer look at the Larmour drawing of the McVITTIE, that what we described as a "centred cat-walk" between the bridge deck and the roof of the crew's cabin, was in reality an enclosed passageway with a rail on top. We had missed the tell-tale shading on the drawing and a door that is visible on closer study.

We sincerely thank Dave Glick for sharing these very important details with us, and we take pleasure in sharing them, in turn, with the members.