

The ship was the subject of many rumours. She was to be converted for overnight cruises to the Indian Ocean Islands; she was to be restored for cruises out of Durban Harbour, and later for trips out of the restored Cape Town Waterfront. Finally, there was serious talk of her being refitted by a diving company as a dive support ship. None of these rumours ever came to fruition, however, and sadly, apart from work on the engines, no other maintenance was carried out on the ship. Consequently, ROYAL ZULU's exterior became a sorry sight. Reports stated that there were holes in her decks, and that she was a complete shambles.

The final and inevitable indignity came in 1992, when Durban's Port Captain issued a statement to the effect that ROYAL ZULU's overall condition had deteriorated to such an extent that there was little chance she ever could be returned to commercial service, and that therefore her owners had decided to scrap her. The final contract was signed on August 15th, 1992, and shortly thereafter, the little ship made her final voyage, under tow, to a sandy beach in the backwaters of Durban Harbour, where she promptly was cut up for scrap. It was a sad end for a ship which never really was given an opportunity to prove herself in the excursion trade.

* * * * *

THIRTY YEARS GONE

It is difficult to believe that it has been so long, but this month brings the 30th anniversary of the cessation of regular overnight passenger service on the Canadian side of the Great Lakes. It was on the morning of Monday, November 29, 1965, that the Canadian Pacific Railway's passenger and freight steamer KEEWATIN tied up at Port McNicoll for the last time, her service between the Port, the Soo, and the Canadian Lakehead having ended in consequence of the introduction of much more severe Canadian safety at sea regulations. Thus concluded more than 80 years of C.P.R. lake service.

More than the loss of the historic service, however, shipping fans mourned the retirement of the beautiful, 1907-built sisterships KEEWATIN and ASSINIBOIA. The latter continued to run in the package freight and flour trade for the 1966 and 1967 seasons but only so that the C.P.R. could enjoy a rail freight rate advantage. ASSINIBOIA went to the east coast in 1968 and eventually burned near Philadelphia after an ill-starred attempt at a restaurant operation. Fortunately, KEEWATIN remains visible today as a museum ship at Douglas, Michigan, although her future appears to be in some doubt.

The same Canadian safety regulations, requiring extensive cabin modifications, spelled the end in 1965 of the Canada Steamship Lines cruise service on the St. Lawrence and Saguenay Rivers, operated latterly by the big RICHELIEU, ST. LAWRENCE and TADOUSSAC, and also doomed the Lake Winnipeg service of the venerable little motorship (built as a steamer) KEENORA.

This purge left only two overnight passenger boats running on the inland waters of North America. The Chicago, Duluth & Georgian Bay Transit Company's 1914-built SOUTH AMERICAN remained active on the Great Lakes through the 1967 season, at the end of which she was sold in anticipation of new United States safety regulations in 1968. The 1926-built sternwheeler DELTA QUEEN remained in service on the Mississippi River and its various tributaries.

Fortunately, DELTA QUEEN survived officialdom's onslaught, and still runs today thanks to the hard work of her various owners and the pleas of common people who still wanted to be able to spend the night aboard an operating steamboat. A few new vessels have since been introduced to our inland waters, but there still are no Canadian nightboats on the Great Lakes, and so it is with a great sadness that we recall that fateful day in November of 1965 when KEEWATIN finished her last trip. And we wonder how it is possible that thirty years have passed since that day...

* * * * *