

JOHN H. PRICE

- by Robert D. Graham -

with the Editor

The Andy Warhol Axiom applies to ships as well as to people; even the most obscure seem to have their fleeting moments of fame, though often of the undesirable kind. So it was with the Hall Corporation's steamer JOHN H. PRICE.

Having gained the financial means to carve his own path in the shipping industry, Ogdensburg industrialist Frank Addison Augsbury wasted no time in starting up a fleet of his own. Within weeks of the sale, late in 1926, of the fleet of the George Hall Coal & Shipping Corporation to Canada Steamship Lines Ltd., British workers at a Teesside shipyard were laying the keel for the first of a new trio of canallers for Augsbury. These ships would be the nucleus of the new incarnation of the Hall fleet.

Frank Augsbury wanted undisputed control of the ships needed to complement his trans-border pulpwood, paper and coal interests. In merging the George Hall Coal & Shipping Corporation during 1925 with portions of the heavily-mortgaged fleet of James Playfair (including the boats owned by Glen Steamships Ltd. and Glen Line Ltd., and three of the ships of the Great Lakes Transportation Company Ltd.), which was backed by certain U.S. coal interests, Augsbury had gained much-needed vessel tonnage but had surrendered autonomy in their operation. With the sale of the "old" Hall fleet to C.S.L. in 1926, however, that complicated and contentious relationship was now behind him.

The new ships' owning company, Hall Corporation of Canada, did not even exist yet when they were laid down, for it was not chartered until April of 1927. For expert advice in his new venture, Augsbury turned to veteran shipping men Frank Ross and Albert ("Hutch") Hutchinson, as well as to Montreal admiralty lawyer K. Arthur Mathieson. The Hall Corporation's officers were: F. A. Augsbury, president; John C. Howard, vice-president; H. P. Strong, treasurer; Albert Hutchinson, secretary; W. S. Augsbury, L. W. Robinson, Jr., and Lewis Iselin, directors.

The order for the three new boats was awarded to the Smith's Dock Company Limited, of South Bank-on-Tees (Middlesbrough), England. This shipbuilder was famed for its "whalecatcher" design that later would evolve into the World War Two "Flower-class" Corvette, and the shipyard was located not far from the Aycliffe birthplace of Albert Hutchinson. The yard's mandate was simple: to build the biggest possible carriers for 14-foot canal draft at the lowest possible cost, which in this case was about U.S. \$110,000 per ship.

British yards cranked out canallers for the lakes in the 1920s like so much sausage, and Smith's Dock was no exception. Yard Number 831 was laid down on Thursday, 13th January, 1927, and on Thursday, March 31st, she was launched without fanfare. She was named JOHN H. PRICE, and was registered from the outset at Montreal under Canadian official number 147788. Her name honoured John Herbert Price, son of Sir William Price, and president of Price Brothers, the legendary Quebec pulp and paper firm.

On Wednesday, May 25, 1927, the completed PRICE, having passed her trials, sailed from the shipyard, paused to load a cargo of coal to take with her to Canada, and then embarked upon the voyage across the North Atlantic, shored up for the crossing with temporary wooden bulkheads in her holds. Her sistership WALTER B. REYNOLDS (II), the builder's Hull 832, had already departed, while the third vessel, MONT LOUIS (Hull 833), left several days later. All made it safely across the ocean to Canada.

The dimensions of the trio were generally typical of their breed. The PRICE measured 252.6 feet between perpendiculars, 259 feet overall; beam was 43.4