

TWO PRETTY CYCLO-SISTERS

It has been quite a while since we have featured a tanker in these pages. With the decrease over the years in the number of Canadian and American powered tankers trading on the Great Lakes, it is easy to forget that large fleets of them once were common in our ports. We now bring you the story of not one but two of those vessels.

One of the first companies to distribute petroleum products in the Toronto area was McColl Bros. Ltd., a small firm which dated well back into the nineteenth century, which operated a refinery of sorts in the east end of the city near the Don River. During the early 1920s, the company decided to transport its oil by ship and chartered from marine contractor John E. Russell, of Toronto, the bulk barges NADINE and HILDA. The plan was to carry the crude oil in the holds of the barges, but no special equipment, apart from some pumps, was added. As might have been expected, the experiment was highly unsatisfactory and very few trips were made.

The firm then decided to use Erie Canal type barges and, to this end, obtained the services of the THOMAS TOMLINSON and PASSAIC, both steel-hulled, as well as the wooden JAMES F. CAHILL. The former two were fitted out as tankers, but the latter was nothing more than a typical Erie Canal barge with the usual distinct peaked hatches. The barges were used in the Buffalo-Toronto crude oil trade and usually were towed by the Welland Canal tugs J. R. BINNING and METEOR. None of them remained in the McColl fleet for very long.

Very little is known about any of the three but, from details of a suit commenced by the mate of the CAHILL after her loss, it is learned that the action was brought against McColl Bros. Ltd., the Russell Towing Company, and C. D. Secord, the owner of record who, incidentally, was the owner, under the name Ohio Tankers Corp., of the B. B. McCOLL when she operated as A. J. PATMORE (and blew up at Toronto) a few years later. It is, therefore, to be assumed that Russell, who had connections with many operators, was running the barges in McColl's service.

In 1926, McColl bought its first steamer, the PULOE BRANI, formerly the Royal Fleet auxiliary tanker SERVITOR, and brought her to the lakes. She entered service in 1927 and soon was renamed B. B. McCOLL, but she was not to serve for long. On September 12, 1928, the aforementioned JAMES F. CAHILL was loading oil in Buffalo harbour when she caught fire. The blaze, apparently started by an oil lamp in the tanker barge (!), destroyed the CAHILL and spread to the nearby McCOLL as well as to the firetug W. S. GRAT-TAN. The McCOLL was seriously damaged and was abandoned to the underwriters, although she subsequently was rebuilt and, despite a later explosion and fire, served other owners for many years.

In 1929, the firm began a building programme to develop a more respectable fleet but, by this time, McColl Bros. Ltd. had amalgamated with John Irwin's Frontenac Oil Company Ltd., Montreal, to form the McColl-Frontenac Oil Company Ltd., Montreal. That same year, the fleet took delivery from the Furness Shipbuilding Company Ltd., of Haverton Hill-on-Tees, England, of its first modern canal tanker, which was christened JOHN IRWIN (i). For a canal-ler, she was to enjoy a long life, and served McColl-Frontenac and its successors longer than any other tanker, despite the fact that she was of shallower draft than tankers built later for the fleet.

The issue of "Canadian Railway and Marine World" for February 1930 reported: "McColl-Frontenac Oil Co. has, we are advised officially, ordered two oil tankers to be built by Furness Shipbuilding Co., Haverton Hill-on-Tees, England. Their general dimensions, etc., will be: - length, 250 ft.; beam, 34 ft.; moulded depth, 24½ ft.; d.w. tonnage, 1830 on 14 ft. draft, or 3670 on full loaded draft of 21 ft. They will be equipped with two 14½ x 11½ ft. boilers operating on 200 lbs. pressure. The engines will have cylinders 19, 31 [sic] and 54 in. by 42-in stroke, and 1,500 i.h.p. The speed will be 10