

R. BRUCE ANGUS

Our feature articles in "Scanner" almost always have dealt with ships that no longer are active on the lakes, but in most cases they are vessels that have been gone for many years. This time around, like last issue, we have chosen a ship that, although gone from our waters, departed few enough years ago that most of our readers will have memories of her. She was a bit unusual, so we are happy to feature her now.

The history of the straight-deck bulk carrier R. BRUCE ANGUS really can be traced back to February 13, 1947, when an oil-drilling crew brought in the famous Imperial Oil Leduc No. 1 well near the little town of Leduc, Alberta, located some 20 miles southwest of the provincial capital, Edmonton. The discovery of crude oil near Leduc was, without doubt, one of the most significant events ever to occur in Canada's petrochemical industry, for it meant that Canadian crude oil now was available in great quantities to satisfy the growing demand, especially at refineries in Ontario and Quebec. Other big new wells were brought in over a short period of time in Alberta.

But how was the crude oil to reach its eastern markets? The Interprovincial Pipeline Ltd. pipeline, in which Imperial Oil was a major partner, soon was under construction, but getting the crude around the Great Lakes to Imperial's refinery at Sarnia was a major problem. At first, the pipeline was constructed only through to Superior, Wisconsin, from which it was intended that the crude would be shipped down the lakes by tanker until such time as the pipeline could reach all the way to Sarnia and eventually to Toronto and points eastward.

As a result, Imperial Oil Limited had plans drawn up by marine architect Peter M. Duncan for the construction of a fleet of sistership tankers, the largest ever to operate in lake trade to that point in time. The first of these to be completed was the appropriately named IMPERIAL LEDUC, built in 1950-1951 as Hull 146 of Collingwood Shipyards Ltd. She was 619'8" in overall length and was designed to carry 115,000 varrels of crude per trip on a 24-foot draught, or an estimated 5,000,000 barrels per lake navigation season. She ran her trials on Friday, April 13, 1951, averaging 14.24 knots per hour, and that evening she was accepted by Imperial Oil. Her owner wanted her drydocked for final inspection at Port Arthur, but ice still was blocking that harbour and so she was sent instead to the American Ship Building Company yard at Lorain, Ohio. She was refloated on April 18 and set out for the Lakehead. During the morning of April 19, whilst upbound on the Detroit River, she took on 500 barrels of bunker fuel from fleetmate IMPERIAL LONDON, the transfer being made "on the fly".

In due course, she arrived off the American Lakehead and, with the Superior entrance blocked by ice, she was escorted in through the Duluth entry by the Mackinac carferry SAINTE MARIE (ii), pressed into her usual spring service as an icebreaker. She loaded uneventfully, set out downbound and, on the morning of April 24th, amid much ceremony attended by Ontario Premier Leslie Frost, the LEDUC arrived at Sarnia with her first cargo of crude from Superior. G. L. Stewart, president of Imperial Oil, also attended, and the star of the show was Imperial's fleet commodore, Captain T. K. Russell Knight, who commanded the LEDUC and brought her under the Blue Water Bridge and in to Sarnia at exactly the much-advertised time (9:30 a.m. under the bridge and 10:30 a.m. at the wharf). Capt. Knight had been in the employ of Imperial since 1916 and, prior to the commissioning of the LEDUC, he had commanded IMPERIAL SARNIA (ii) since she came out new in 1948. Factory whistles all over the Sarnia area greeted the LEDUC on her arrival.

As IMPERIAL LEDUC was being finished at Collingwood in April of 1951, the keel was laid for what was to be the third sister, IMPERIAL WOODBEND, which was completed in 1952 as Collingwood's Hull 147. But entering service soon after the LEDUC was the second of the trio, IMPERIAL REDWATER, which was built as Hull 106 of the Port Arthur Shipbuilding Company Limited, at Port Arthur, Ontario. Her keel was laid on March 13, 1950, and she was launched on Saturday, November 18, 1950. The "Collingwood Bulletin" somewhat belatedly reported on the launch in its November 30 issue (quoting from the "Port Arthur News Chronicle"). The ship's sponsor in her christening was Mrs. C. D. Howe, and shipyard manager G. F. McDougall presided over the ceremonies. The entry of the big hull into the water sent a wave half-way up the wall of the yard's carpentry shop some 75 yards from the edge of the slip. One of the heavy safety chains, which restrained the hull in the launch, snapped under the strain, but the other chains held and the launch was concluded safely. The tanker was the largest ship built at the Port Arthur shipyard up until that time. 270 guests of the shipyard were