

Great Lakes sailor was hockey goaltender



Great Lakes Captain Walter Bowen, taken in 1961, hangs in his home.

BY PEGGY LEAVEY

Capt. Walter Bowen, Ontario St., is the third generation of the Bowen family to choose sailing as a career. His father, Capt. Benjamin Bowen, spent 63 years as a sailor on the Great Lakes, and for much of that time he was a Master Mariner.

Walter Melsop Bowen was born in St. Ola in 1898, and the family moved to Trenton when he was about three months old. The family home was on Marmora St. and Capt. Bowen's sister Margaret lives there today.

Walter went to the old school near where College St. School is today and to Dufferin Public School. After half a year of high school he decided he'd had enough.

His absence may not have been mourned by one teacher. As Capt. Bowen tells it, he always ended sitting in the front seat, and one rather large woman Latin teacher had the habit of planting herself on his desk. One day the irrepressible Walter held a long pin close to her derriere. Says Walter, his chum, Ray Robertson, hit his hand, the pin hit home, and the teacher hit Walter with the Latin book.

LANDING BOOM

At age 14 Walter served with his father as deck hand on F.E. Hall's old wooden steamer, Compton. His father, Capt. Ben Bowen, was the inventor of the landing boom, an ingenious device used to land a sailor on shore. In 1913, young Walter demonstrated his father's invention on the ice of the frozen harbor at Trenton.

Capt. Ben Bowen had a long spar rigged low on the foremost of the Compton. This boom could be swung to either side as the

ship approached the shore. It extended beyond the ship and by means of a knotted line, young Walter showed how it could be used as he lowered himself to the ice in the harbor.

Before this invention, in the absence of people on the shore to secure the ship's lines, the men risked injury, and even death as they leaped ashore. Capt. Ben Bowen never had the device patented, claiming that if it saved one sailor's life, it was reward enough. Capt. Ben Bowen earned the nickname Boomer for his invention. He died in 1954 at the age of 87. His son is often called Ben himself.

WORLD WAR ONE

During World War I, Walter was one of 4,000 Canadians attached to the British navy. He served two and one-half years in minesweeping duty.

In 1919 Walter's father bought a boat with Robert Weddell and after the war Walter went to Toronto and earned his mate's ticket. He then joined his father as First Mate on the ship, the M. Sicken, which carried coal between Belleville, Deseronto, and Trenton. They delivered coal to Powers' Coal Dock and to Squires, where the Trenton Cycle Centre is today. The boat was about 100 feet in length.

"We'd go in and back right down so we were just inches from the bridge," says Walter.

Following this Walter signed on a ship owned by the George Hall Coal and Shipping firm. Then he became Second Mate on the Belvoir, owned by Mohawk Navigation.

During the winter he was familiar sight with area hockey fans. He tended goal with teams in Frankford and Belleville and in Trenton for Trenton Quinte Orchard Hockey Club, which

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