

JOHN J. BOLAND JR.

Two months ago, when we told the story of the Paterson steamer SASKADOC, we related the events of September 27, 1934, when the vessel was caught in a storm on Lake Erie. SASKADOC almost foundered when she suffered a steering gear failure and fell off into the trough of the seas. This caused such a problem for the otherwise staunch steamer because she was carrying coal and, in the fashion of the day, her hatches had been left open and the coal piled high above the level of the spar deck. This custom might have been considered dangerous on any of the other lakes, but shippers tended to take little Lake Erie for granted, thinking that little harm could possibly come to a ship on the short run across the lake to Port Colborne.

In that respect, they were guilty of an extraordinary lack of appreciation for events of the past. Lake Erie, long and shallow, has always been capable of being whipped into a frenzy in a very short period of time, and over the years has been the graveyard for many lakers. It appears to have taken the SASKADOC misadventure for the lesson to be learned, but an even worse accident of almost the same type had occurred two years earlier, and had resulted in the loss of a steamer with four of her crew. Perhaps the loss of JOHN J. BOLAND JR. in 1932 had been discounted because the ship was "just" a canaller, and not supposed to be able to withstand the stress of heavy weather which an upper laker could survive.

Regardless of the repercussions (or lack of same) arising from the sinking of JOHN J. BOLAND JR., her story is an interesting one and now would seem to be an appropriate time to tell it. The account of the loss of the BOLAND is all the more notable in that, of all of the many canal-sized lakers that were built for lake fleets, she was one of only a handful that were lost as a result of accident occurring within the confines of the Great Lakes.

Much has been said over the years concerning the longtime association of Capt. R. Scott Misener and John O. McKellar in the shipping business. Their partnership dated back to 1917, when the captain and the engineer acquired the wooden steamer OVERLAND. They sold her in 1919 and bought the SIMON LANGELL, which they operated until 1923. Misener and McKellar then bought the steel canaller CLAREMONT, which they ran in conjunction with the Dominion Sugar Company Ltd., of Wallaceburg, Ontario, until 1929.

Meanwhile, Misener and McKellar had seen the need for more canal-sized vessels in the grain trade. The new Welland Canal was under construction, but it would not be opened for several years and, in any event, small steamers would still be needed to operate through the small locks of the old St. Lawrence canals. In most cases, grain was brought down to Buffalo and Port Colborne by upper lakers, unloaded into elevators there, and then was transferred to canallers for the trip down through the canals to Montreal. As well, canallers engaged in various other trades, chief amongst these being pulpwood and coal, which took them through the old canals.

Accordingly, it was in 1928 that Capt. Misener and John McKellar, with the financial backing of the Boland family of Buffalo, took the step of formally incorporating their operation. They formed Sarnia Steamships Ltd. under the Dominion Companies Act, with authorized capital of \$800,000 and offices at Sarnia, Ontario. Captain Misener, of Sarnia, was installed as president and general manager of the firm; John O. McKellar was secretary; John J. Boland, Jr., of Buffalo, was vice-president and treasurer, while the remaining director was Ross Grey, of Sarnia.

Misener and McKellar, with Boland's backing, began to create a fleet for the new company by acquiring six canallers built in Britain. In 1932, the same group formed another company, Huron Steamships Ltd., Port Colborne, to purchase eight more canallers which had been built for other fleets but which had been repossessed by their British builders as a result of economic difficulties related to the Great Depression. The following year, 1933, saw Misener and McKellar form Colonial Steamships Ltd., Port Colborne, in order to acquire twelve ships formerly owned by the bankrupt Mathews Steamship Com-