

Toronto Bay is home to a great assortment of passenger ferries and excursion boats, and amongst them are some truly historic vessels. The Royal Canadian Yacht Club operates two ferries between its mainland Parliament Street wharf and its club premises on the Island, the HIAWATHA of 1895 (the oldest commercial passenger boat operating anywhere on the Great Lakes) and the slightly larger KWASIND of 1912. The Metropolitan Toronto Parks & Property Department operates the 79-year-old steam sidewheel ferry TRILLIUM and also the 54-year-old diesel-powered ferry WILLIAM INGLIS.

But if one should ask "the man in the street" in Toronto to name just one of the Island ferryboats, chances are that "he" would name the SAM McBRIDE, for she has put in more time on the heavily-travelled Centre Island run than has any other existing ferry, including TRILLIUM. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the building of SAM McBRIDE, and we would be remiss in the extreme if we did not commemorate that event in these pages.

SAM McBRIDE (C.171709) was the second of the diesel ferries to be built for the Island ferry fleet, and was considerably larger than SHAMROCK (II), later (b) WILLIAM INGLIS, which appeared in 1935. The McBRIDE, 115.7 x 33.0 x 8.9, 412 Gross and 266 Net, was built by the Toronto Dry Dock Company Ltd. at its Villiers Street premises, and she was launched from the company's drydock into the Keating Channel at 3:00 p.m. on Saturday, July 15, 1939. There was little fanfare at the time, but the press did cover the event and thus a record of the launch still exists.

Strangely, a part of the McBRIDE was in service before the ship herself was completed. The 1938 season was the last in ferry service for the popular, 1890-built, double-ended sidewheelers MAYFLOWER and PRIMROSE, both of which were in a fairly advanced state of deterioration of the superstructure. PRIMROSE had to undergo some rather extensive refurbishing of her wooden cabins in order for her to operate at all in 1938 and, as part of this work, her old benches were removed from her upper deck and new seats were substituted. This gave PRIMROSE a rather unusual appearance, in that ever since they were built, she and MAYFLOWER had carried bench seats which ran around the promenade deck rail, facing inward rather than outward. When PRIMROSE was cut down to a barge over the winter of 1938-39, the new benches were saved and it was they that were placed on the upper deck of SAM McBRIDE.

The McBRIDE was being completed by the Toronto Dry Dock Company in the late summer of 1939 but she would see no regular service that year. The builders were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the steering engines for the McBRIDE, which were ordered from the U.K. The steering gear was being carried across the Atlantic in the holds of the Donaldson liner ATHENIA when, on September 3rd, 1939, she became the first Allied vessel to fall victim to the German offensive. ATHENIA was sunk by U-30, 200 nautical miles west of the Hebrides, with the loss of 112 lives.

New steering engines had to be ordered and it was not until one sunny day in November, 1939, that the new double-ender ran her acceptance trials on Toronto Bay and in Lake Ontario off the Canadian National Exhibition grounds. SAM McBRIDE apparently performed very well, but the season was far too advanced for her to be commissioned that year.

SAM McBRIDE was built for the Corporation of the City of Toronto, to be operated by the Toronto Transportation Commission. She was named for one of Toronto's most famous city council members and mayors, an irrepressibly outspoken individual who never failed to arouse the ire of all present and keep the pot stirred at council meetings. He also was the only Toronto Island resident who ever served as mayor while living on the Island. He died in office during 1936.

Our records suggest that the official commissioning of SAM McBRIDE took place on Wednesday, May 22, 1940, and that christening ceremonies were held that day, the vessel's sponsor being Mrs. Reg. Shaw. Her husband was the Shaw of the Shaw Business College, and her father was the late Sam McBride, himself. It was only fitting that the boat be named for McBride, as he rode the fer-