

WINDSOLITE, SIMCOLITE and ACADIALITE

In our last issue, we featured vessels which were designed for service on the upper lakes, but which made the difficult passage down through the St. Lawrence River rapids to get to salt water. Two of the three returned to the lakes, somewhat disfigured in order to permit their upbound transit of the small locks of the old St. Lawrence Canals, and both of them later made the canal trip back to salt water. One of the whalebacks we featured made a fifth river passage, returning to the lakes once again to enjoy her latter years in her native fresh water.

Unlike the far-wandering whalebacks led by JOSEPH L. COLBY, however, several generations of lake ships were constructed especially for service in the old Welland and St. Lawrence Canals. To many of us, these "canallers" were common sights all around the Great Lakes for so many years that we took them for granted and did not really appreciate them until they were gone. And gone they have been for many years, some of them since the World Wars, and the last large group of them for more than a quarter of a century.

How time flies! A few of them survive, but most of the canallers are but a distant memory to those of us who can recall their comings and goings.

And the comings and goings of the canallers were commonplace to a boy who grew up on the Toronto Islands, for whereas the upper lakers then normally used the deeper Western Gap to enter Toronto Harbour, the little canallers usually took the Eastern Gap, from the west-side pier of which Ye-Young-Future-Ed.-To-Be could watch these workhorses going about their daily duties and photograph them in action. In fact, he sometimes boarded his trusty bicycle, picnic lunch in hand, and went to spend the day sitting on a bollard on the gap pier, camera at the ready, waiting to catch the canallers on film. (Today, one might wait days on end to see even one single ship enter or leave Toronto Harbour.)

All sorts of canal-sized ships visited Toronto during the salad days of shipping before the opening of the new St. Lawrence Seaway, but perhaps the most interesting and photogenic of all of them were the tankers which so regularly served petroleum terminals which then were located along both the Keating Channel and the Ship Channel, east of the Cherry Street bridges.

And although the canal-sized tankers came in various sizes and designs, amongst the most handsome of the lot was a series of ten tall-stacked, teak-pilothoused steamers turned out in the late 1920s and early 1930s by one particular British shipyard. The prototype of the series, and two others, were built for Imperial Oil, while three more were commissioned for the McColl-Frontenac (later Texaco) fleet, and the final four were built to run for the British American Oil interests. All ten of these ships were frequent visitors to Toronto, not only in their early years when Toronto saw much traffic in petroleum products, but also in the latter seasons of their illustrious but all-too-short careers.

The prototype of this group of canal tankers was WINDSOLITE (C.138580), built in 1927 as Hull 115 of the Furness Shipbuilding Company Ltd., at Haverton Hill-on-Tees, Great Britain, for Imperial Oil Limited, of Toronto. This company began as the Canadian subsidiary of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, but soon took its own place amongst petroleum refiners and shippers, and was the first Canadian firm to ship crude oil and its products in bulk on the Great Lakes. WINDSOLITE, named after her port of registry, Windsor, Ontario, had a typical Imperial Oil product suffix in her name. She was generally modelled after the earlier Imperial tankers IOCOLITE, ROYALITE and SARNOLITE, built at Collingwood in 1916, but incorporated many modern innovations which her extremely handsome fleetmates lacked.

The June, 1927, issue of "Canadian Railway and Marine World" reported that "Imperial Oil Limited, Toronto, had a single-screw oil tank steamship launched by Furness Shipbuilding Co., Haverton Hill-on-Tees, England, on (Tues-