

STONEFAX

The decade of the 1960s was a particularly interesting one on the Great Lakes. True, those years saw the retirement of many of the more venerable lake steamers, especially on the U.S. side of the border, and the exodus of old lakers to overseas scrapyards began. Much to the delight of shipwatchers, however, a significant number of retired U.S. vessels were acquired by Canadian fleets and given a new lease on life in the various Canadian lake trades.

Most of these ships that crossed into Canadian registry (some of them via foreign enrollment in Bermuda or the Bahamas to avoid Canadian government import regulations) had been used hard over the years and were very nearly at the end of any possible usefulness. However, the Canadian fleets needed more additional tonnage than could be produced in the form of new construction from the shipyards, and for a few years, these older ships served their new owners well, even though they were far from economical to operate.

As well, in those years of the 1960s, there were considerably more Canadian fleets in existence than there are today. Some of them were small "shoestring" operations, with only one or two boats, while others were larger concerns, some of which had been in business for many years, but which, for one reason or another, did not survive the leaner years that were to come. Back in the mid-Sixties, how many of us would have said with any certainty that we would see the demise of such longtime and respected fleets as those operated by Hindman, Reoch, Quebec & Ontario Transportation, and even the venerable Hall Corporation?

The steamer which we have chosen to feature in this issue was a handsome old ship, and one that fell into both of the groups we have mentioned above. She crossed the border at the outset of the 1960s (in fact, she was one of the first to do so in that period), and her new owner was one of the fleets that since has gone out of operation. As well, all but one of her previous owners are no longer in existence. So now seems to be an appropriate time to feature her in these pages, particularly as she has been gone from the lakes for just over twenty years.

Our steamer began her life as Hull 609 of the West Bay City Ship Building Company, which constructed her at its yard on the Saginaw River at West Bay City, Michigan. This shipbuilding firm was formed in June of 1899 as the successor to F. W. Wheeler & Company, and was an affiliate of the American Ship Building Company. Hull 609 was launched into the Saginaw River on Saturday, April 18, 1903, and she was christened SINALOA. First enrolled at West Bay City, she was given U.S. Official Number 117248. An almost exact sistership, named SONOMA, was the yard's Hull 610, launched on May 23, 1903.

SINALOA was a steel-hulled bulk carrier, 416.0 feet in length, 50.0 feet in the beam, and 24.0 feet in depth, with tonnage of 4539 Gross and 3503 Net. She had four cargo holds, with 23 eight-foot hatches on twelve-foot centres. She was powered by a triple-expansion engine with cylinders of 20 1/4, 33 3/4 and 55 1/8 inches diameter and a stroke of 42 inches, which was rated at 1,310 Indicated Horsepower or 196 Nominal Horsepower. Steam at 170 pounds per square inch was produced by two coal-fired, single-ended Scotch boilers which measured 13'2" by 11'6". The engine and boilers were all made for the ship in 1903 by the Detroit Shipbuilding Company.

(Incidentally, we should note that although Lloyd's Register and most other sources always showed the stroke of the engine as 42 inches, the American Bureau of Shipping consistently recorded it as 40 inches. In the same vein, the A.B.S. always showed the steamer's length as 423.0 feet, while Lloyd's, the U.S. Merchant Vessels listing, and all other sources showed it as 416.0 feet. For various reasons, we choose to believe the data given by Lloyd's and the other sources, over those reported by the American Bureau.)

The first owner of SINALOA was the Superior Steamship Company, of Duluth, Minnesota, one of the many small affiliated companies managed by George