

ROUILLE

On a number of occasions in recent years, we have commented upon the sorry state of shipping activity on the Toronto waterfront. Indeed, on many days during the normal navigation season, the only vessels visible on the Bay are the Island ferries and the numerous excursion boats that have come to infest the waters. Toronto Harbour has not always been so devoid of commercial shipping, however, and many of us have no trouble in recalling those heady days, just after the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959, when the port was full of active lakers and a wide variety of saltwater ships, with still others lying at anchor awaiting space at the wharves.

Less remembered today is the fact that Toronto Harbour was quite a busy place some thirty years earlier, when not only were there many canallers trading here with coal and petroleum products, but also unloading grain at the mills, and bringing in as well as loading out all sorts of general cargo. There also were a number of canal-sized salties trading regularly into the port in those years, many of them on line services.

As the imminent advent of the new Seaway brought high hopes for the port during the 1950s, so in the late 1920s and early 1930s did the impending opening of the new Welland Ship Canal inspire much hope for the future of Toronto Harbour. It was thought that the larger upper lake steamers would flock here, not only bringing in many loads of coal and other cargoes, but most importantly, unloading grain which would be trans-shipped into canallers for the trip down through the old St. Lawrence canals.

The Toronto Harbour Commission, awaiting the opening of the new Welland Canal, anticipated that a large tug would be required to assist in berthing the many upper lake ships that would be attracted to the port of Toronto, and to provide icebreaking services during the winter months so that ships loaded with winter storage cargoes could be shifted back and forth between their lay-up berths and the grain elevators. It also was thought that such a tug could provide fire-fighting service around the port.

Accordingly, the Toronto Harbour Commissioners awarded to Collingwood Shipyards Ltd. a contract for the construction of a large, steel-hulled, steam-powered tugboat. She was built at Collingwood as the yard's Hull 83, and her keel was laid on Thursday, July 25th, 1929. With appropriate ceremony, she was launched on Saturday, October 26th, and she was delivered to the Toronto Harbour Commissioners early in November, 1929, clearing the shipyard on November 8th.

The big tug was christened ROUILLE, and she was enrolled at Toronto on November 7, 1929, under Official Number C.156648. She was named for Fort Rouille, which was a fortified French trading post built in 1749 on the site of the present City of Toronto. It was actually located on a spot some 2½ miles east of the mouth of the Humber River, which would place it inside what today is known as Exhibition Park.

The fort was named for Antoine Louis Rouille, Comte de Jouey (1689 - 1761), who was the French Colonial Minister at the time the fort was conceived and constructed. Rather than being a garrison base, the purpose of Fort Rouille was to intercept the Indians who arrived on Lake Ontario via their trade route down the Humber River, and to "undersell" the English trading posts, thus monopolizing trade with the Native Canadians.

Fort Rouille had a very short life. During the summer of 1759, a British force under Sir William Johnson and General Prideaux was marching westward toward Fort Niagara. Pouchot, the French commandant at Fort Niagara, acting on the orders of de Vaudreuil (the French Governor of Canada at the time), burned Fort Rouille and then returned his garrison to Fort Niagara, which itself was later attacked and taken by the British after a lengthy siege.

ROUILLE was 100.0 feet in length, 25.1 feet in the beam and 13.0 feet in depth, and her tonnage was calculated as 214 Gross, 198 Under Deck, and 85