

THISTLE and SHAMROCK

- The Story Continues -

Ed. Note: In the February issue, we presented the first instalment of our history of the Toronto Ferry Company's double-ended steamers THISTLE and SHAMROCK, which served the Toronto Island ferry routes for many years. We were very pleased that we were able to develop so much information concerning these ships that we had to split the feature into two segments. We had to leave the SHAMROCK at the point where she was emerging from the Andrews Shipyard at Oakville after her 1895 conversion from the single-ender SADIE, and so we will now resume our narrative as SHAMROCK enters service.

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SHAMROCK was an impressive steamer indeed, surpassed on the ferry service only by the 1890-built double-ended twins MAYFLOWER and PRIMROSE. Like THISTLE, she was sharp-ended, and she was mostly open on the main deck, but she was much more substantial in build than was THISTLE. Her paddleboxes were elegantly decorated and extended high above the upper deck. She had gangways both fore and aft of the paddlebox on each side of the ship because, like THISTLE, she was a side-loader. (MAYFLOWER and PRIMROSE, on the other hand, were built with rounded ends on the main deck in obvious anticipation of eventual end-loading, but this method of handling passengers did not become a reality for a number of years.)

Unlike THISTLE, and even her own former self as SADIE, SHAMROCK did not have only a narrow shade deck over the open promenade deck. SHAMROCK's hurricane deck was the full width of the vessel, and provided substantial shelter from the sun and rain. Twin "birdcage" pilothouses were set at either end of the hurricane deck, and a large brass bell was carried on the forward slope of the domed pilothouse roof. There was also a small pole rising from the dome, just forward of the decorative finial, on which the running light could be hoisted when in use. The funnel, rather more heavy than that carried by THISTLE, rose between the pilothouses. The lifeboats, in the custom of the day, were located on the promenade deck, to one side of the paddlebox on either side of the ship. SHAMROCK carried no masts, but she did sport very tall steering poles at either stem.

SHAMROCK was a successful and popular boat, running normally on the route between Yonge Street and Island Park (Centre Island). She did, however, display a rather alarming tendency to list sharply and suddenly to one side if her passengers moved to the rails to observe some interesting activity taking place on the Bay. As she was licensed to carry 370 passengers (but probably had many more than that aboard on frequent occasions), this could produce some rather frightening situations. Your Editor's grandfather happened to be aboard SHAMROCK on one such occasion, and experienced the reaction of the crowd to the sudden heeling of the steamer. (It is interesting to note that SHAMROCK's namesake, the 1935-built diesel ferry now known as [b] WILLIAM INGLIS, also has had stability concerns at times during her career, and this is one reason why the placement of the benches on her upper deck was changed a few years ago to prevent the congregation of crowds by the side rails.)

As far as we are aware, however, SHAMROCK never ran into any serious difficulties, and she enjoyed a little more than a decade of service under her new name. It was THISTLE that was retired from commission when the big, new BLUE BELL made her debut in 1906, and it is entirely probable that SHAMROCK would have survived until the inevitable eventual building of another new boat to run opposite BLUEBELL (as the name commonly was spelled - i.e. as one word), had not the fates intervened.

In July of 1906, the Toronto Ferry Company moved its city-side terminal from the foot of Yonge Street to a site at the foot of Bay Street, where the city