

GLENFINNAN

In these days when the number of fleets operating on the Canadian side of the Great Lakes has dwindled to a very few, observers of the shipping scene are looking back with increased interest at some of the vessel operators of the past. Of all of the Canadian steamship operators of days gone by, few were as remarkable as the entrepreneur James Playfair, of Midland. Not only did he manage a great number of different shipping concerns over his many years in the lumber and shipping businesses, but a great many other fleets, including some of those still active today, were connected in some manner during their early years with the operations of James Playfair.

The vessel which we feature in this issue is one of the more famous steamers which James Playfair operated. That was not her only claim to fame, however, for the ship not only was a pioneer in several ways, but she also was operated by several other very well known lake shipping companies. We probably should have featured her story long before now, but perhaps readers will find that it has been worth the wait.

The steamer that most people knew best as Playfair's GLENFINNAN, began her life when she was built back in 1893 for the famous Bradley fleet, of Cleveland, Ohio. This renowned fleet was formed back in the 1850s by Captain Alva Bradley, and in its latter years was carried on by his son, Morris A. Bradley. Over the years, the fleet owned or operated more than forty vessels; several of these were tugs, but the majority of the boats were wooden-hulled steamers and schooner-barges. Captain Bradley was highly respected as a vessel operator, and the quality of his fleet operation may be illustrated by the fact that it was his practice not to carry insurance on any of his ships. Alva Bradley was reported to have stated that he ran only the finest ships and chose only the very best men to sail them, and that these two principles were the best insurance against vessel loss.

Unfortunately, as the boats got older, losses became more frequent, and a number of serious accidents occurred. It is said that the tragic sinking of the schooner-barge JOHN MARTIN in the St. Clair River on September 22, 1900, after a collision with the straight-back steamer YUMA, was one of the events which caused Morris Bradley to begin the winding-down of the fleet. The MARTIN was under tow of the Bradley steamer MAURICE B. GROVER when she was run down, and four men died in the sinking, including the MARTIN's master.

Although the Bradley fleet did survive into the new century, it only ever owned two steel-hulled vessels. One was the steamer ALVA, built in 1893 as a combination bulk carrier and package freighter, while the second was the big M. A. BRADLEY, a bulk carrier which was built in 1908 and spent sixty years on the lakes. She latterly was known as Capt. R. Scott Misener's EVERETTON, which finally was scrapped in Spain in 1968.

The ALVA was built in 1893 as Hull 19 of the Cleveland Shipbuilding Company, and she was launched on Tuesday, June 6th, of that year. The Bradley fleet had her christened in honour of the fleet's founder, and she was enrolled at Cleveland under U.S. official number 107034. The ALVA was 342.2 feet in length between perpendiculars, 42.0 feet in the beam, and 19.6 feet in depth. Her original tonnage was 2419.98 Gross and 2000.92 Net. She was built with a double bottom fitted for the carriage of water ballast, and her hull had three watertight bulkheads. She was given a 'tween deck for the carriage of package freight, and she had eight hatches on 24-foot centres.

ALVA was powered by a triple expansion steam engine with cylinders of 24, 38 and 62 inches diameter and a stroke of 42 inches, which produced 1,500 Indicated Horsepower on 78 revolutions per minute. Steam, at a working pressure of 160 pounds per square inch, was produced by two single-ended Scotch boilers, which were fired with coal. Each boiler was 13'6" in diameter and 12'6" in length. There were six furnaces, with 138 square feet of grate surface and 5,148 square feet of heating surface. The engine and the boilers