

JUDGE HART

It has always been a pleasure for us to research and write the histories of the vessels which were designed and built to operate through the small locks of the old St. Lawrence and Welland Canals. Not only were these ships particularly interesting in many ways, but they now have been gone from the scene for the better part of three decades, and many of our current T.M.H.S. members never knew them.

The "canallers", as we knew them for so many years, were built primarily to move grain downward from Port Colborne and Buffalo (and sometimes all the way from the upper lakes) to the St. Lawrence River trans-shipment ports. As such, they operated for most of their lives in the protected waters of the lower lakes and the canals. Many of them went to salt water in the two World Wars, and there they fell victim to the actions of the enemy or to the vagaries of the elements on the deep seas, for which they never had been designed. Only a small number of the canallers were lost as a result of accidents occurring within the confines of the lakes.

One of the canallers which was lost on the lakes was JUDGE HART (C.146247), which met her demise fifty years ago this autumn. This steamer had been built two decades earlier for the Eastern Steamship Company Ltd., of Port Colborne and St. Catharines. This company was formed on December 22nd, 1922, by various Buffalo and area grain and investment interests, who were headed in the enterprise by Nisbet Grammer and Judge Louis Bret Hart. Grammer was president of the Eastern Grain, Milling and Elevator Company, of Buffalo, but it was reported that the Armour Grain Company also was interested in the new shipping venture.

Louis B. Hart was a native of Medina, New York, born there on March 30th, 1869. He studied law in the Buffalo area, and later worked for a number of law firms. From 1899 until 1905, he was clerk to the Surrogate's Court of Erie County, New York, and the state governor appointed Hart to the position of Surrogate in 1905. He continued to serve on the Bench until his death in 1939.

The owners of the Eastern Steamship Company Ltd. were not experienced in the running of steamships, and accordingly the fleet was managed for them by Boland and Cornelius, of Buffalo, the firm which also managed the operation of American-registered upper lake steamers owned by Nisbet Grammer. The Eastern Steamship fleet was to own 21 canallers during its relatively short period of operation. The ships spent almost all of their time taking down to the St. Lawrence ports the grain that had been brought to Buffalo and Port Colborne by upper lake carriers. They frequently returned into the lakes with cargoes of pulpwood.

The first ships owned by the new company comprised a group of ten canallers which were ordered from various United Kingdom shipyards on the same day that the Eastern Steamship Company was incorporated. The contract price for each vessel was \$330,000 and all of the construction took place under the supervision of A. B. Mackay. This gentleman was an entrepreneur who for many years had been involved in the shipping business at Hamilton, Ontario, but at the time of his involvement with the Eastern Steamship boats, he was a resident of Great Britain. Mackay reportedly dealt on behalf of Eastern with Messrs H. E. Moss and Company, of Liverpool, who were represented by one Mr. A. G. Jones, and the contracts were let to five British yards, each of which was to construct two steamers.

JUDGE HART was one of the members of this first group of Eastern canallers, and she was built in 1923 as Hull 1599 of the shipyard of J. Samuel White & Company Ltd. at East Cowes, on the Isle of Wight. The very first of the series of ships to be launched, the HART took to the water on Saturday, April 21st, 1923. She was 252.2 feet in length, 43.2 feet in the beam, and 17.8 feet in depth, with a tonnage of 1729 Gross and 1112 Net. Her overall length was 261 feet, which was just about the maximum that could be accommodated through all of the locks of the old canals at that time.