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It happens fairly frequently that we feature a canaller in this section of "Scanner", and that most certainly is no accident. Today's shipwatcher may take for granted the St. Lawrence Seaway, which for more than thirty years has permitted the passage of large vessels between Lake Ontario and the ports of the St. Lawrence River from Montreal down and, if desired, all the way to salt water. Taken even more for granted is the Welland Ship Canal, which was completed almost another thirty years before the Seaway.

However, for many years in the history of shipping, the Welland and St. Lawrence canals were not large and efficient waterways. Instead, they were bottlenecks to the movement of shipping, made up of groupings of essential but small locks built of hand-hewn stone and equipped with wooden gates and low-level bridges that were, for many years, opened and closed by hand. Not only did the small locks dictate that only relatively small ships could pass through these canals, but they also caused the formation of long waiting lines of vessels in periods of peak traffic movement or when low water levels made the lower canals inoperable.

We have commented often in these pages upon the special type of vessel that was developed to carry cargo through these old locks, an interesting blend of lake and deep-sea design that produced ships known as the "canallers". With but very few exceptions, they are now long gone from the scene, and this is one of the factors that prompts us to write about them often in "Scanner". Another is that, on the whole, not much had been written previously about these little workhorses. The canallers for many decades were a vital link in the North American transportation system and thus important to the economy, not only of the lower lakes area but rather of the whole of Canada and much of the northern and central sections of the United States. They truly deserve more recognition than they have received in print to date.

The canaller, as we came to know it, was a direct descendant of the small, wooden-hulled, passenger and freight propellers which for so many years were the backbone of transportation on the upper lakes as well as on the lower lakes and in the canals. Nevertheless, the canallers developed much differently than did their big, upper lake cousins. Whether built to carry dry bulk cargoes, package freight or petroleum products, they were severely limited in length, breadth and operating draft, while still requiring almost the same size crew per ship as the big upper lakers. Accordingly, ways had to be found to give these ships the absolute maximum cargo capacity possible in such a limited hull size.

In the latter years of canaller construction, this led to the mass-production of ships ("built by the mile, cut off by the foot") in British shipyards. In the earlier years of the Twentieth Century, however, canallers were much more handsome ships, often designed individually and built for small operators rather than large fleets. Some of these canallers were built on the lakes and some in foreign yards, while some actually were salt-water steamers which were brought into the lakes because their dimensions made them suitable for service through the old locks.

It was a bit unusual back then for there to be a series of almost exact sisterships within any particular group of canallers, but one of the notable exceptions to this was the trio of three virtually identical combination bulk and package freighters ordered for delivery from British shipyards in 1903. The company which ordered the construction of these steamers was the Canadian Lake and Ocean Navigation Company Ltd., of Toronto, which was controlled by Mackenzie, Mann and Company Ltd., Toronto, and its Canadian Northern Railway.

The Mackenzie and Mann group, headed by Sir William Mackenzie and Sir Donald Mann, was much involved in transportation ventures of various types. In addition to the big railroad, it controlled the Toronto Railway Company (which ran Toronto's city streetcar system), the Toronto Suburban Railway, Toronto & York Radial Railways, and the Niagara, St. Catharines & Toronto