

MORE ABOUT THE A. McVITTIE

A very popular Ship of the Month from the past was No. 217, which appeared back in our issue of January, 1995, with considerable subsequent follow-up. The ship featured was the wooden-hulled Rutland package freighter A. McVITTIE, which was built in 1890, and which finished out her days under the Canadian flag in the fleet of the Montreal Transportation Company Ltd., by then cut down to a bulk carrier.

Member George Ayoub, of Ottawa, has managed to ferret out some additional information to round out our story of the McVITTIE, and it is presented here for the benefit of all those who try to keep complete records.

We mentioned in our feature that, on August 17, 1915, the A. McVITTIE was involved in a collision on Lake St. Louis, in the St. Lawrence, with the 74.4-foot, 1881-built tug DOLPHIN (C.80680). The report of the Dominion Wreck Commissioner indicated that the McVITTIE was damaged, but described the DOLPHIN as being a total loss. In fact, according to George's information, the DOLPHIN was restored to service and enjoyed many more years of service. She was acquired on June 20, 1938, by Foundation Maritime Ltd., the famous east coast contracting firm and operator of tugs. The registry of DOLPHIN was closed on December 31st, 1942, with the notation "Sank off Halifax, N.S.", but no date was given for the venerable tug's demise.

Getting back to the A. McVITTIE herself, we noted that she was on the Buffalo Dry Dock Company's drydock in September of 1919, and we printed photos of her on the dock, these being dated Friday, September 12th. Vessel passages for the Welland Canal (taken from the Merrilees Collection at the National Archives of Canada), confirm that the McVITTIE passed up the Canal, apparently en route to the shipyard at Buffalo, on September 9th, and she was downbound in the Canal again on September 16th, most probably with a cargo of coal from a Lake Erie port.

Our feature indicated that A. McVITTIE suffered storm damage on Lake Ontario "during October of 1919, and only about a month after her Buffalo drydocking..." and that "as a result, she was considered to be inoperable, and was laid up at Kingston. There, on Friday, November 21st, 1919, she began to take on water, and she soon settled to the bottom."

The McVITTIE may well have sustained storm damage in October, but we have no confirmation of the date, and it may well actually have happened in November. George Ayoub has discovered that the Merrilees Collection vessel passages in the Archives show that A. McVITTIE made regular trips through the Welland Canal well into November of 1919. Her last reported upbound trip was on November 10th, and her final passage was downbound on Wednesday, November 12th, 1919, presumably with another cargo of coal.

We also mentioned in our feature that the McVITTIE was abandoned in 1920, that the "Mills List" shows her as being scuttled in 1920, and that she remained in the Canadian register until 1924. In fact, her registry was not closed officially until November 5th, 1925, with the notation "Dismantled and hull sunk in Lake Ontario out of the way of navigation". No date for the scuttling was given, and the report most certainly appears to have been out-dated.

This information confirms what we suspected, however, that the sunken McVITTIE languished in the Kingston or Portsmouth harbour area as did so many old hulls, and eventually was raised and taken out into the lake for sinking in a more appropriate place. We have no reason to doubt the 1920 date reported by Mills.

We extend sincere thanks to George Ayoub for supplying this interesting information for the use of our readers. We would like to learn more, however, about the storm that allegedly damaged the McVITTIE in November of 1919.