Ship of the Month No. 229

DALHOUSIE ROVER

-With Material Compiled by Capt. Gerry Ouderkirk and Collated by the Editor-

The recent scrapping at Port Maitland, Ontario, of the McKeil Marine Ltd. tug TRAVELLER has brought to a close the career of a tug which operated for more than half a century. True, many tugs have served for much longer, a good example being McKeil's ARGUE MARTIN, which celebrated her centenary in 1995. However, TRAVELLER was a tug particularly well known in the Toronto and Hamilton areas and she is worthy of having her history noted in these pages. Many of our readers, however, will not be familiar with the early and rather unfortunate history of this tug, which is all the more reason that her story should be told. Her most tragic accident occurred forty years ago this summer.

An unsourced newspaper clipping, dated October 4, 1941, from the scrapbooks of the late Ivan Brookes, of Hamilton, carried the headline "New Tug Departs", and read as follows: "Last night a brand new tug which will carry the name DALHOUSIE ROVER, arrived in Toronto, and today she cleared for the coast. She is on her way to New Brunswick, where she will be operated by the National Harbour Board's contract work there. Muir Brothers Dry Dock was the builder, and although the shipyard started to build the tug for itself, before she was nearly completed she was sold to the shipping interests at the coast (sic). Everything that the tug can have to make her modern and fast moving has been built in the little vessel. She has a length of 90 feet (overall -Ed.), beam of 20 feet, and is 11 feet deep. She is equipped as an icebreaker, and is powered with 200 (sic) horsepower engines and is an oil-burning steam vessel. The only reason for her call into Toronto last night was for fuel. She has a Canadian government home trade certificate."

In fact, DALHOUSIE ROVER, so named because she was built at the Muir Brothers shipyard in what is known as Muir's Pond, above old Lock One of the Third Welland Canal at Port Dalhousie, was 78.0 feet in length between perpendiculars, with a beam of 20.0 feet and molded depth of 9.6 feet. Her tonnage was 104 Gross and 47 Net, and she was enrolled at St. Catharines under Canadian official number 170519. The List of Shipping (Dominion register) showed her engine to be of 450 horsepower (not 200 as reported by the newspaper). DALHOUSIE ROVER was not given a new engine, perhaps because of the shortage of such equipment during World War Two. The engine that was installed had been built back in 1919 by Sorel Mechanical Shops. It was a fore-and-aft compound engine with cylinders of 17 and 34 inches, and a stroke of 24 inches. We do not know where it had served before DALHOUSIE ROVER received it, nor do we have any boiler data available.

Whether it is true that the Muir yard originally intended to use DALHOUSIE ROVER itself, we do not know. What is certain, however, is that she was owned by the C. S. Boone Dredging & Construction Co. Ltd., of Toronto, when she entered service, and it was Boone that chartered her out immediately for operation on the east coast.

DALHOUSIE ROVER was a handsome tug with two masts and with a pleasing sheer to her steel hull. She had a large cabin on the main deck, containing crew quarters, and a large, round-fronted pilothouse on the upper deck. She sported a well-proportioned smokestack, not too tall but quite thick and with a prominent cowl at its top. Her hull was painted black, while her closed deck rail and cabins were grey or buff. The stack was black with a large white letter 'B' on it.

It would appear that DALHOUSIE ROVER spent three and a half years doing towing on the east coast of Canada, apparently with success. Not much is known about her operations during these years, but the mark of a successful tug often is just that; she goes about her often inglorious business without attracting any special attention. It is known that on October 24, 1941, DALHOUSIE ROVER, under the command of Capt. Tufts, arrived at Halifax from Pictou, Nova Scotia, en route to Saint John, New Brunswick. This may well have