

THE STRAWS THAT BROKE THE CAMEL'S BACK**- LIVINGSTON and WATERTON -**

On a number of occasions, we have mentioned in these pages the Mathews Steamship Company Ltd., of Toronto, the final and most impressive stage of the lake shipping business operated by various members of the famous Mathews family of Toronto. Unfortunately, any mention of this fleet has to deal not only with the superb collection of canal-sized and upper-lake steamers which it operated during the 1920s, but also with the foundering of the fleet in a sea of financial despair in the early 1930s. The demise of the fleet latterly operated by Alfred Ernest Mathews was not so much the product of the Great Depression as it was the result of the unwise over-extension of the company's resources as a consequence of the aggressive shipbuilding programme in which it indulged during the heady years of financial success.

The two ships which we have chosen to feature this issue were amongst the most handsome canallers ever built. Nevertheless, it generally was acknowledged, at the time of the Mathews fleet's demise, that it was the cost of their construction that put the company over the edge and led to its eventual failure when the economy took a dramatic downturn in October of 1929. Add to this the fact that they both were lost to enemy action in World War Two, and thus never were seen by most of today's shipping observers, and the steamers would seem to be appropriate subjects for a feature in these pages. On top of that, we have some excellent photographs of them to share with all of our many readers.

We have told the story of the formation of the Mathews fleet before, but not for a number of years, so it should be retold for the benefit of our newer members. The fleet was founded back in 1856 by James Mathews, of Toronto, and it later became the partnership of J. and J. T. Mathews. This partnership continued until 1902, when James Mathews retired; he died in 1912. J. T. Mathews continued his interest in lake shipping and, on October 14, 1905, the Mathews Steamship Company Ltd. was incorporated at Toronto with capital of \$250,000. The principals of this new firm were J. T. Mathews, Alfred Ernest Mathews, George H. Gooderham and R. L. Dennison-Taylor. The new company took over management of the steamer HADDINGTON (19), (b) MAPLEHILL (II)(38), (c) OAKBRANCH (I)(42), (d) EMPIRE LIZARD (46), (e) BASINGBROOK, which had been built on speculation in 1904 by the Bertram Engine Works Company Ltd. at Toronto as its Hull 43. The first steamer actually built for the Mathews Steamship Company Ltd. was the canaller EDMONTON, constructed in 1906 as Hull 10 of the R. G. Stevenson Company Ltd. at Hebburn-on-Tyne, England.

The Mathews Steamship Company Ltd. went through a number of reorganizations and changes of directors over the years, and J. T. Mathews did not long stay with the firm, for he died at Toronto on May 21, 1919, at the age of 69. During the 1920s, A. E. Mathews and James Playfair, of Midland, Ontario, were jointly involved in several shipping ventures, including the sugar trade out of Havana, Cuba, but the Mathews/Playfair "connection" ended in 1925.

A. E. Mathews added ten new freight steamers to the fleet during the 1920s, but when grain exports declined in the summer of 1929, reflecting the on-coming Great Depression, Ernie Mathews found himself in very serious trouble. For a number of years, he had lived the grand life, enjoying the pleasures of several luxurious private yachts, including the 94.3-foot SEMIRAMIS, the 117.3-foot ANONA, and the grandest of all, the 151.1-foot, 1913-built CONDOR, which Ernie Mathews bought in 1926. Some Ward's Islanders, known to Ye Ed. in his youth, recalled evenings of decadence aboard CONDOR when she would anchor in Toronto Bay on summer evenings in the late 1920s and would send a tender ashore to pick them up. A. E. Mathews