

REDCLOUD

- by Capt. John J. Lawrence -
together with your Editor

A whole generation of shipwatchers has grown up in the Great Lakes area, and a second is well along the way, since the demise of the canallers that were so common, not only in the St. Lawrence canals but all around the lakes, in the years before the 1959 opening of the "new" St. Lawrence Seaway. Many of our current members never will have seen canallers in operation, and many won't even remember the distinctive colours worn by the vessels of the Beaconsfield Steamships Limited fleet, which operated a number of canallers in the latter years of the old canals.

Another facet of lake vessel operations that many of our members never had the privilege of seeing was the use of large tow barges in the general and bulk freight trades. Some of these barges were used as consorts to large freighters, while others were towed by tugs. There was nothing quite so impressive as seeing a big upper-lake steamer, of classic turn-of-the-century design and with a quadruple expansion engine in her belly, pulling a consort barge at least as large, out on the open lake at the end of a "string", or alongside in a river or canal.

A new breed of tug/barge combinations is appearing on the lakes in the 1990s, but the barges of the past were a very different sort of beast. The last of them seen on our lakes were barges such as Upper Lakes Shipping's BRYN BARGE (1900), JOHN A. ROEBLING (1898), JOHN FRITZ (1898), GLENBOGIE (1902), and the 1896-built whalebacks 137 and ALEXANDER HOLLEY; Mohawk Navigation's ALFRED KRUPP of 1896 (often towed by SIR THOMAS SHAUGHNESSY, a recent "Scanner" Ship of the Month); Paterson's OWENDOC (1896), COLLINGDOC (II)(1897), and KENORDOC (II)(1898) and KENORDOC (III)(1896), and Hutchinson's big JOHN SMEATON of 1899 (at 461 feet, the longest of the consort barges), MAGNA (1896), MAIA (1898), MANILA (1899) and MARSALA (1900). There were also the barges CONSTITUTION (1897) and MAIDA (1898), latterly operated as self-unloaders in the coal trade by the Pringle Barge Line. The 1950s and early 1960s saw the end of consort barge operations, while the two Pringle coal barges ran into the mid-1960s before being retired.

A few of the lake consort barges were converted into powered freighters. This did not automatically extend their lifetimes. However, two such vessels, Quebec & Ontario Transportation's 1896-built barges PIC RIVER and BLACK RIVER, survived in active operation into the late 1970s as a consequence of their conversion into self-propelled motorships by Port Weller Dry Docks over the winter of 1952-1953.

What possible connection could there be between our mention of canallers and upper lake consort barges? Little, as it were, except for the fact that one lake operator built a fleet of six tow barges, all of which were completed as late as 1930, and which were of canal size and meant to operate through the locks of the old St. Lawrence and Welland Canals.

Consort barges were economical to operate, having very few crew members and low fuel and supply costs. Coal generally was used to fuel a small "donkey" boiler which supplied heat for the accommodations as well as steam to operate the capstans, deck winches, steering gear, pumps, etc.

Robert A. Campbell, of Montreal, was owner of the steamer BELVOIR (I)(33), (b) NEW YORK NEWS (II)(62), (c) BUCKPORT, which had been built in 1925 in England, and which was operated by International Waterways Navigation Company Ltd., Montreal. Co-owner of that firm was Toronto entrepreneur, John E. Russell. As the decade of the 1930s opened under the tremendous shadow of the then-just-beginning Great Depression, R. A. Campbell also was manager of Sin Mac Lines Ltd., which operated a large fleet of tugs, primarily in the Montreal area. John E. Russell was involved in that enterprise, as well.