

We find two other things interesting about the exchange of correspondence between Polson's and the Harbour Commission. One is that if the ROLLER BOAT was indeed under the charge of the Admiralty Court in 1915, this might tend to indicate that the litigation over the 1907 accident with TURBINIA was still not settled. The other point is that this is the only mention we ever have heard of a firm called the Roller Boat Company. This must have been the corporate name used by A. A. Laurier (or Laurie?), Polson's opponent in the litigation.

Photographs taken of ROLLER BOAT in the 1920s show a vessel that was seriously dilapidated. Both of her ends had disappeared, along with a substantial amount of her steel hull plating, and many of her circular ribs were showing. We had always wondered how this might have come to be, as steel ships' hulls do not normally fall apart when abandoned. The answer comes in the form of a letter sent by Polson Iron Works to Mr. J. M. Allen, deputy harbour master of Toronto, on September 24, 1918. It indicated that a Mr. Nicholson was going to be "cutting the boat in two", but that he intended to take away only the top half of the boat. Just like everything else that went on with ROLLER BOAT over the years, it seems that even this half-hearted scrapping attempt was abandoned with only part of the work done.

The Polson shpyard was one of the most easterly businesses on the old Toronto waterfront, and the eastern end of the harbour was little more than a swamp with numerous sandbars. At some point in time, the old ROLLER BOAT was dug up from her Frederick Street resting place, and was allowed to settle into the mud approximately off the foot of Parliament Street. She lay there for quite a while and, as such, survived on Toronto Bay longer than did her builder. Polson Iron Works had been founded back in 1883, but with the end of war shipping cnstruction after the close of World War One, the company found itself in dire financial straits. The Polson firm declared bankruptcy on March 11, 1919, and ceased doing business. The shipyard lay abandoned for the better part of a decade.

By the 1920s, the old Toronto waterfront, with its "Windmill Line" face south of The Esplanade, was sorely in need of a major facelifting. There was a plethora of dilapidated and ill-designed wooden wharves, and public access to the passenger ship docks was frequently obstructed by trains running down the middle of The Esplanade. The Harbour Commission laid out plans for a new harbour face considerably to the south of the old wharves, and incorporating a grade separation which would relocate the railroad tracks on an elevated right-of-way, carried by bridges over the major roads running down to the harbour.

The work on this project was begun at the far west end of the harbour and progressed eastward. By the spring of 1927, the new waterfront had been built as far east as the Yonge Street area, and a Harbour Commission photo dated May 28, 1927, shows the new portion of the harbour, with the old waterfront still in evidence to the east. And there, in the foreground of the westerly-looking picture, still resting on her sandbar, is the much deteriorated ROLLER BOAT.

There were many old derelict hulls lying along the old Toronto waterfront when the construction of the new harbour was begun. Most of these were wooden and simply were buried in the landfill. One of these, the old COMMODORE JARVIS, saw the light of day again briefly during the summer of 1997 when the construction of the Air Canada Centre for the Toronto Raptors basketball arena, on the site of the old postal terminal north of Lakeshore Boulevard and between Bay and York Streets, unearthed her remains.

But two steel hulls were buried as well. One was ROLLER BOAT, as there seemed to be no point in hauling her remains from her muddy resting place, so she simply was covered over. Her exact location today is not known, and this is as much a harbour mystery today as is the final resting place of the Dal-