

MONTREAL

From a shipping observer's point of view, the port of Toronto has fallen on sad times in recent years. From the heady years following the opening of the new St. Lawrence canals in 1959, when Toronto was a major destination for lakers and salties alike, the commercial port has declined to barely a shadow of its former self. The coal docks, petroleum terminals and grain elevators all are long gone, and only one salt-water line service still calls here. Were it not for the Redpath sugar plant, the two cement elevators, the piles of road salt brought in to rust out our automobiles, and the current boom in imported steel, there would be no major marine traffic here at all and the harbour would be empty except for yachts and party boats.

But even though Toronto once had a vibrant and renowned port, it would not come to the minds of most people as a major shipbuilding centre. Nevertheless, a substantial number of shipbuilders once did business here, although one would never know it to look at the waterfront today. Not only did Toronto contribute greatly to the building of tonnage for salt water during World War One, but a number of famous ships were constructed here. In fact, one particular Toronto shipyard produced three of the most beautiful and highly-acclaimed overnight passenger boats ever to operate in lake and river waters, and they all were built for the same firm, the oldest and largest operator of passenger steamers in Canada. These three ships may well have been overshadowed in size by the American night boats of Lake Erie, but they never were outdone in the grace of their exterior design or the elegance (albeit somewhat eclectic) of their interiors.

The Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company Ltd., commonly known as the "R & O", was a major force on the Canadian shipping scene for many years, and it was the principal operating entity involved in the series of mergers that led to the formation of Canada Steamship Lines Ltd. during 1913. From its formation as the Richelieu Company as far back as 1845, the company had carried passengers amongst the towns along the St. Lawrence River, primarily those situated between Montreal and Quebec City, and had brought the produce of the riverside farms to the markets of the major centres. One of its vessels, in fact, was built in 1845 (the year of the company's founding), remained in active service until 1954, and was still in existence in the early 1960s. She was RICHELIEU (I)(86), (b) BELMONT (93), (c) RICHELIEU (06), (d) BEAUHARNOIS, an iron-hulled sidewheeler which latterly served as a ferry at Valleyfield, Quebec.

Over the years, the R & O extended its operations to the upper St. Lawrence and then into Lake Ontario, and eventually it would acquire all the major passenger services up-system to and including the Niagara Navigation Company's routes from Toronto to Hamilton and the Niagara River. It would bill itself as "The All Water Route Niagara to the Sea". and boasted that, with only a short overland hop from Queenston to Buffalo, full water connections could be made as far as Chicago and the American and Canadian Lakeheads. Even before it acquired control of the Toronto-Niagara route, the R & O had connections that allowed it to advertise its route as "Niagara to the Sea" for many years.

We turn now to the Toronto harbour scene, for Toronto was the major port on Lake Ontario for many years, despite the major shipbuilding efforts in the Kingston area and the steel-manufacturing interests located at Hamilton. The Bertram Engine Works had a shipyard on the Toronto waterfront east of the old Western Gap, near the foot of Bathurst Street, which had been established by George Bertram and Sons as early as 1890. One of the yard's first new-buildings was the Royal Canadian Yacht Club's ferry HIAWATHA, which was launched in 1895 and is still in regular service. The yard later was known as the Canadian Shipbuilding Company, and still later as the Toronto Shipyards, and the site of the yard was filled in during the major southerly extension of the Toronto waterfront during the early 1920s.