

PELEE

- The Adventure Continues -

Ed. Note: Before we begin the second instalment of this feature, we must apologize for an egregious error which found its way into last month's issue. At the bottom of the front side of the photopage appeared the late Ken Smith's excellent view of PELEE which was taken on Sandusky Bay in 1943. Despite very careful proof-reading, the caption beneath the photo read that the steamer illustrated was WAUBIC. Ye Ed. has nobody but himself to blame for this one, so let the punishment begin. We urge readers to correct their copies, lest the error be perpetuated.

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As we broke off the story of the Pelee Island ferry steamer PELEE last month, the year 1937 had come and brought with it a major change in the ferry service. The federal government reduced the operating subsidy from \$8,250 which it had been every year since 1932, to only \$7,000 (it had been as high as \$11,000 per year from 1923 through 1930), and the Harris interests, who owned PELEE, refused to operate under these conditions. There also was some difficulty with officials over allegations of cross-border smuggling involving PELEE. The feds put the service out for tender, apparently at the urging of Captain J. E. McQueen, of Amherstburg, who wanted his steamer WAUBIC, which he recently had acquired, to be used on the ferry service. So PELEE and her master since 1914, Capt. John Nelson Sheats (who remained with her until 1947 and passed away in 1948), were unemployed for the 1937 season and, as it turned out, PELEE was out of work for three more years as well.

We touched in last month's issue on what happened during 1938, but we need to elaborate, because much more detail has become available. We noted that WAUBIC was severely damaged in a fire which broke out aboard while she was in winter quarters at Kingsville on the night of January 18, 1938. We have no information as to whether the cause of the fire ever was determined, but the damage was very extensive, the steamer being totally gutted and the entire superstructure destroyed with the exception of the steel sides enclosing the main deck.

We indicated that WAUBIC was rebuilt by Muir Bros. at Port Dalhousie, but that is only partially correct. In fact, WAUBIC was towed to Amherstburg in February of 1938, and her reconstruction was commenced at the government dock there. The steel work was done by Romeo Roy, of Windsor. She was fitted with two new diesel engines built by Fairbanks-Morse & Company, Beloit, Wisconsin. There were 12 cylinders, each of 10 inches bore, and a stroke of 12½ inches, the engines developing 210 N.H.P. A small boiler taken from the derelict tug CISCO also was installed, and local carpenters built the new superstructure, consisting of a small cabin on the upper deck, and a squarish pilothouse and texas on the boat deck. Strangely, the deckhouses were varnished rather than painted, giving them a dark appearance in photographs.

Renamed (b) ERIE ISLE, the vessel then was towed down to the Muir Bros. dry-dock at Port Dalhousie, where she was fitted with a false keel 10 inches deep, 1¼ inches wide and 85 feet long, its purpose being "to prevent the boat from side slipping or making lee-way when making the docks at Pelee Island when exposed to weather in a strong wind".

As the accompanying picture will show, ERIE ISLE was a most peculiar looking ship. She had a raised deck over her enlarged forward gangways, just like PELEE, to accommodate trucks, but her appearance suffered badly in comparison with the rakish PELEE.

When ERIE ISLE went back into service in July of 1938, McQueen relinquished the little ISLET PRINCE, which he had obtained as a temporary replacement to keep the islanders happy and to forestall any efforts by the Harris interests to get PELEE back on the route. Contrary to what we said in the first instalment, however, McQueen had not purchased ISLET PRINCE, but rather had