

LADY HAMILTON

Late on the evening of Friday, August 29, 1952, Captain Goodwin Joshua ("Win") Corson, of Toronto, brought his vessel, the excursion steamer HAMILTONIAN, to her dock at the foot of James Street in Hamilton at the conclusion of a charter by 85 members of a building trade union. The HAMILTONIAN (C.103975) was an iron-hulled sidewheeler built in 1897 at Levis, Quebec, as (a) CHAMPION. She was 143.5 x 25.6 x 7.8, 482 Gross Tons and 304 Net. She served for many years as a ferry in the Quebec City area and then ran between Gananoque, Ontario, and Clayton, New York, for the Thousand Islands Navigation Company Ltd., of Kingston. Retired from that run in 1939, she was acquired in 1944 by the Hamilton Harbour Commissioners for the excursion service from downtown Hamilton to Burlington Beach and La Salle Park.

Captain Corson was a veteran of passenger ship service in the area, having been the last master of the Canada Steamship Lines passenger steamer MACASSA on the Toronto - Hamilton route before she was sold in 1928 to the Owen Sound Transportation Company Ltd. for conversion into the ill-fated overnight passenger and freight carrier (b) MANASOO, lost later the same year.

The last passenger went ashore from HAMILTONIAN at about 11:45 p.m. on that fateful evening and most of the crew, having finished their duties and believing that all was well aboard their ship, followed suit. The last three persons aboard, Capt. Corson, James Newell and the night watchman, Albert Cole, were in the captain's cabin at about 12:45 a.m., August 30th, when peculiar noises were heard. They discovered that the steamer was afire, but managed to escape to shore and turn in the alarm. The flames were fought through the ensuing hours and eventually were extinguished, primarily as a result of the efforts of Hamilton's then new fireboat JUDGE McCOMBS.

HAMILTONIAN's wooden superstructure remained standing, although charring was extensive and the damage was estimated at \$300,000. The cause of the fire was believed to have been a cigarette carelessly discarded in the women's washroom. Before the fire, the Harbour Commissioners had been considering a major refit for HAMILTONIAN, but the damage was so extensive and the vessel herself was 55 years of age, and so the decision was made to scrap her and to seek a replacement.

The ship which the Hamilton Harbour Commissioners eventually decided to acquire was a rather unusual vessel, particularly as far as her appearance was concerned. She was the former Detroit River passenger and auto ferry CADILLAC, which was owned by T. J. McCarthy, Sr., and was lying idle at Detroit. Her future appeared to be very bleak until the eyes of the Hamilton Harbour Commissioners came to rest on her.

CADILLAC had been built in 1928 for the Detroit and Windsor Ferry Company. That firm, the successor to the Detroit, Belle Isle and Windsor Ferry Company, carried on a tradition of ferry service across the Detroit River which dated back to 1798. It operated not only the passenger and auto ferry route between the foot of Woodward Avenue, Detroit, and the foot of Ouellette Avenue in Windsor, but also ran excursion service to Belle Isle (until 1923) and a very popular service from downtown Detroit to the Bois Blanc (Bob-Lo) Island amusement park downriver. CADILLAC was the very last ferry built for the cross-river service.

The contract for the construction of CADILLAC was signed on November 5th, 1927, and she was built as Hull 260 of the Great Lakes Engineering Works at River Rouge, Michigan. The keel of the new steamer was laid on December 29, 1927, and she was launched on Saturday, March 10, 1928. CADILLAC was christened with a bottle of water from a spring on Bob-Lo Island, and her sponsor was Mrs. William Green, daughter of Capt. Fred J. Simpson, vice-president and general manager of the Detroit and Windsor Ferry Company. One of the firm's other ferries was used to take employees downriver to the shipyard so that they could attend the launch and the christening ceremonies.