

D. R. VAN ALLEN

- by Capt. Gerry Ouderkirk -
with the Editor

The steamer D. R. VAN ALLEN (C.71104) was a wooden propellor built at Chatham, Ontario, by the partnership of Capt. John Simpson and Duncan Chisholm, and she was named for Mr. Daniel Ross Van Allen, whose sawmill produced all of the ship planks and timbers that went into the partnership's Chatham-built vessels. Van Allen's machinery for planing was reported to have been imported from Glasgow. It was on Saturday, June 13, 1874, at 3:00 p.m., that the vessel honouring his name was launched at the foot of Van Allen Ave. for Van Allen & Co., of Chatham.

D. R. VAN ALLEN was 136 feet in length, 26 feet in breadth and 10 feet in depth, and 318 Gross Tons. She was driven by a new 87 h.p. steeple compound engine with cylinders of 16 and 28 inches bore, and a 24 inch stroke, built by the firm of Hyslop & Ronald, of Chatham. She did not make her trial trip down the Thames River until Tuesday, July 28th, and invitations to be on board for that trip were given only to stockholders and their friends.

D. R. Van Allen was a grandson of Capt. Henry Van Allen, of Port Dover, Ontario, who was said to have built, in 1831 at Chatham, the first steamboat carrying the British flag on the Upper Lakes. D. R. Van Allen's father, William, was a miller and merchant, and Daniel followed in his footsteps as a general merchant in 1842. In 1845, he bought property and established the town of Dresden, Ontario, where he built a hotel, a grain warehouse and a merchant's shop. He started his sawmill business at Chatham in 1858 and retired from it in 1897. In 1882, he founded the Chatham Manufacturing Co., of which he was president and manager. The firm supplied hardwood to shipbuilders, wagon manufacturers and other area firms. In the late 1880s, the company changed its name to Chatham Wagon Works, which eventually became part of the International Harvester Co. Politically a Conservative, D. R. Van Allen served as a trustee on the local school board and in council as a councillor, deputy reeve and reeve. He served one term, from 1874 to 1878, as mayor. He had the good fortune to meet His Majesty King Edward VII, then Prince of Wales, in 1860, and the Governor-General of Canada, Lord Dufferin, in 1878.

A popular tradition, perpetuated by the Illustrated Historical Atlas of Essex and Kent Counties, published by H. Belden & Co., Toronto, in 1881, credited the D. R. VAN ALLEN with being the last ship built at Chatham. That romantic volume stated: "There once flourished here an extensive and lucrative trade in shipbuilding. Several of the finest Canadian steamers on the upper lakes having been built here, among the list being the TECUMSEH, ONTARIO and QUEBEC, the latter two of the Beatty Lake Superior Line. This interest languished in 1874, however, that being the date of the launching of the last craft built on the Chatham stocks - the D. R. VAN ALLEN, so called out of compliment to the gentleman who was so largely instrumental in securing and retaining this trade." In fact, however, it was QUEBEC, launched on August 12th, 1874, that ended Chatham's shipbuilding industry.

The VAN ALLEN was a fairly typical "steambarge" of the period. She had a fully topgallant forecastle and poop, with a closed wooden bulwark on her shelter deck, and closed bulwarks also around the forecastle head and the quarterdeck. A small pilothouse sat directly atop the forecastle head, with three four-sectioned windows in its front and a window and door in each side. A squarish cabin was placed atop the poop, from which the tall and rather thin smokestack rose. The lifeboat was carried on the shelter deck. D. R. VAN ALLEN had only one mast, a tall fidded spar stepped immediately abaft the pilothouse; it sported a gaff and was rigged with auxiliary sail.

On D. R. VAN ALLEN's first trip to Montreal in early September 1874, she departed Chatham with 50,000 feet of hardwood destined for Oshawa and 12,000 bushels of wheat, which she picked up at Toledo, bound for Montreal. She al-