

ST. HELIERS

When seeking a vessel to feature in these pages, it is all too easy to think of the many freight and passenger ships, as well as tugs, that have captured our interest over the years. Too often forgotten are the vessels that have operated faithfully for the lighthouse service or (later) the coast guard, on either side of the long international border that runs through our Great Lakes, in order to make these inland seas more safe for all. The fact is, however, that these ships generally enjoyed long and uneventful lives and seldom attracted public attention.

We feature one such vessel in this issue, and it is not really surprising to note that the majority of the interesting events in which she was involved took place after her career in the public service was finished. Another good reason for featuring her is that she was one of the prettiest ships ever used in government service on the lakes. Yet another is the fact that much erroneous information has appeared in the press concerning the early years of the steamer, and we would like to set the record straight as best we can.

ST. HELIERS was one of a large number of deep-sea tugs of the same ("Saint") class that were ordered from various shipyards in the United Kingdom for the British Admiralty during World War One. Just as in North America, however, many of the ships designed and ordered for wartime service were not completed until after the cessation of the hostilities. Such was the case of ST. HELIERS, which was turned out in October of 1919 at Port Glasgow, Scotland, as Hull 245 of Ferguson Bros. (Port Glasgow) Ltd. Classed by the British Corporation (until October 1929), she was 135.4 feet in length, 29.0 feet in the beam and 13.6 feet in depth, and her tonnage was calculated as 458 Gross and 9 Net. (The small net tonnage was the result of the fact that a tug of this type was made up almost entirely of machinery and crew accommodation space.) She had a fully topgallant forecastle and closed bulwarks on the main deck. She had an open bridge, two masts, and a fairly squat and heavy smokestack. A 12-pounder gun was mounted forward.

ST. HELIERS was powered by a triple expansion steam engine with cylinders of 18½, 28½ and 48½ inches diameter, and a stroke of 28 inches. Built for the tug by Ferguson Bros. (Port Glasgow) Ltd., this engine developed 123 nominal horsepower or 1,200 indicated horsepower. There were two single-ended, coal-fired, Scotch boilers which produced steam at a working pressure of 180 p.s.i. These boilers were each 12'6" by 11'0", with a total of 3,384 square feet of heating surface and 87 square feet of grate surface. There was bunker capacity for 250 tons of coal. The Ferguson Bros. shipyard did not have its own boiler shop, and so the boilers for ST. HELIERS were manufactured by the Clyde Shipbuilding & Engineering Co. Ltd., also of Port Glasgow.

We are not sure from whence The Admiralty got the particular name of ST. HELIERS for this tug. It might have come from St. Helier, located on the Channel Island of Jersey. It must be remembered that there were a very great many of these "Saint" tugs, and The Admiralty must have had quite a time finding "Saint" names for all of them.

In any event, The Admiralty put ST. HELIERS in service and it has been suggested that, for a short while, she may have served as tender to the battleship H.M.S. NELSON. We somehow doubt that such was the case but, if so, that situation did not last for long because, with the war over, these tugs were sold off as the opportunity arose. ST. HELIERS was one of the early ones sold, and in 1920 she was acquired by the Huasteca Petroleum Company, a Louisiana firm. Although she retained her original name, she was brought under the flag of the United States, being registered at Los Angeles, California, and given U.S. official number 220957.

Why the steamer was registered in California when she was owned in Louisiana we do not know, although it may have had something to do with tax concerns. Some have suggested that she operated on the California coast, but it seems to us much more likely that her Louisiana owner operated her in the Gulf of