

ment allowed my Dad to be in a ship without full responsibilities and it enabled him to heal. (Horace Beaton was on HURONIC for the rest of the 1945 season and on the canal package freighter LETHBRIDGE in 1946. In 1947, he was back on HURONIC until in July he was called up as master of NORONIC, substituting for Capt. Taylor, who was ill. He was back on HURONIC for 1948 and 1949. With NORONIC having burned at Toronto on September 17, 1949, Capt. Beaton got to sail HURONIC to the scrapyard at Hamilton in 1950, thus bringing to a final conclusion the long history of the Northern Navigation operations -Ed.)

"At the hearings which followed some months later, it was determined that the fire started in the C.N.R. freight shed as a result of a forklift engine which started a small fire in the shop, which spread to the shed filled with flour dust. The shed simply blew up, showering HAMONIC with flaming debris. In the end, all of the almost 400 passengers and crew survived. The only life lost was a shed worker who drowned attempting a rescue.

"There were several factors which contributed to the successful evacuation of the ship. When Chief Engineer Jimmy Neilon heard that there was trouble in the shed, he hurried below to the engine room. There he got the engine ready to go, so that if the wheelhouse rang for power, the ship could respond. Another factor was the action of her master, Horace Beaton, who took the HAMONIC away from the dock at full (astern) power, tearing out the gangways and breaking the lines, (backing out into the river in the path of an oncoming upbound "Steel Trust" steamer -Ed.) and then ramming her (bow-first) into the shore at exactly the right spot (the coal dock). In fact, it was a providential place, because Elmer Kleinsmith was there with his coal bucket and Purdy Fisheries were there with their boats and barges. These things together served many lives.

"It was most fortunate that the fire, once it reached HAMONIC, burned from the top of the ship down. This enabled the crew to wake up the sleeping passengers (some already were breakfasting in the dining saloon -Ed.) and send them below where they were protected from the flames, and from where they could step off in safety.

"During the winter lay-up in the early months of 1946, special gatherings were held at Sarnia and Port Huron to honour the rescue efforts the day that HAMONIC was lost. The captain, engineer, crew, the fishery people, the Coast Guard, fire departments, police, Red Cross and the medical staff of Sarnia General Hospital all were suitably recognized for their work and heroism.

"A few years after Dad retired from C.S.L. (his last ship was FORT CHAMBLY), we worked together on a small book about his experiences on Great Lakes ships. From the Wheelhouse was published by Boston Mills Press in 1979. When we were talking about the HAMONIC fire, I was reading many old press clippings. I said to him: 'Pop, it looks like you were regarded as a genuine hero for what you did with the "HAM" that day'. He replied: 'I was in the middle of the St. Clair River with my ship on fire from fore to aft. I didn't know what to do, and I had only a few seconds to decide. I made a right decision and they called me a hero. But I know that I could have made a wrong decision and then they would have called me a bum.' Dad never believed that he had done anything special that day and he claimed that 'any skipper worth his salt would have done the same damn thing'.

"Dad finished his career with C.S.L. bringing out two new ships, the FORT YORK and FORT CHAMBLY. As lovely as these new ships were, his favourite always was the HAMONIC. He had sailed in her as a young man and eventually became her master, and he was with her at her traumatic end. It was HAMONIC, with her graceful lines, her interior elegance and her beautiful spirit that captured my father's heart."

When the burned-out wreck of HAMONIC was cool enough to permit access, she was taken in tow and moved to a berth in Sarnia's North Slip. She lay there