

BRITAMETTE

Our Ship of the Month No. 142, which appeared in the issue of December 1985, featured the four handsome canal-sized tankers BRITAMOIL, BRITAMOLENE, BRITAMOCO and BRITAMLUBE, which were built for the British American Oil Company Limited, Toronto, by the Furness Ship Building Company Ltd. at Haverton Hill-on-Tees, England. The first two, built as the yard's Hulls 199 and 200, were launched in May of 1931, while the latter pair, Hulls 209 and 212, were launched, in reverse order of their hull numbers, in May and March of 1932.

However, in 1932, British American Oil acquired another vessel for its lake fleet, and this was a tanker of a very different sort. It is her story that we tell now. But first, we should say a little bit about the company that would purchase her.

The British American Oil Company was one of several Canadian fleets that operated canal-sized petroleum tankers in the pre-Seaway years. Commonly known as "B-A", this firm had been founded back in 1906 by A. L. Ellsworth, the new company trading as a jobber of lubricating oils and kerosene. B-A, however, was greatly concerned about the quality of products marketed under its name, and so in 1908 it constructed its first refinery, which was located on the "old" Toronto waterfront. In subsequent years, the company expanded its operations, first throughout Ontario and into the province of Quebec, and then later into Western Canada. In 1931, B-A opened a refinery at Montreal East, and chartered ocean tankers brought crude oil to it from the wells of Texas. The company made the decision to build a fleet of canal-sized tankers to carry some of the cargoes from the salt-water tankers up to the Toronto refinery, and also to distribute the products of the refinery to various lake ports.

The new Furness-built canal tankers operated very successfully, and each of them was registered to a separate company bearing the ship's name, such as Britamoil Limited, Britamolene Limited, etc. Each of these firms was incorporated under the Dominion Companies Act as a private company with authorized capital of \$50,000 in \$100 shares, and with offices at 35 Bedford Row, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Marine Superintendent of the fleet was W. Gordon Smith. The ships' hulls were painted black, while the trunk, forecastle rail and cabins were white. Their very tall stacks were black, with a wide white band between two slightly narrower bands, the upper one green and the lower one red. The letters 'BAO' appeared in red on the white band, although in later years a red and white circular yin-yan design with the letters 'B' and 'A' in white replaced the red letters.

Shortly after commencing to operate its own lake fleet, British American Oil decided that there was a need for it to run a tanker service up the Ottawa River from Montreal to the nation's capitol. B-A's major competitor, Imperial Oil Limited, had two 175-foot steam tankers, OTTAWALITE and RIDEAULITE, built by Furness at Haverton Hill in 1930 for the Ottawa River trade, and B-A felt the need to compete. However, rather than taking the time to build a tanker specifically for the trade, B-A chose instead to acquire a tanker that was small enough to operate on the Ottawa River.

The vessel that B-A purchased early in 1932 was JOHN GEORGE (Br.162235) and, unlike the two small Imperial Oil steamers, this ship was diesel powered. She had been completed in April of 1931 as Hull 39 of the John Harker Ltd. shipyard at Knottingley, West Yorkshire, England. Knottingley is located on the River Aire, a tributary of the Humber River, and we suspect that JOHN GEORGE was built by the shipyard on speculation, hoping that it would find a buyer to operate her on those size-restricted waters. For whom was she named? John George Harker, perhaps?

According to notations on a midship hull plan in your Editor's possession, JOHN GEORGE was 130'0" in length between perpendiculars, 20'0" in molded beam, and 8'6" in molded depth. She was built to Lloyd's class 100A1+ for carrying petroleum in bulk. The 1932-1933 Lloyd's Register reported JOHN