

During the 1982 season, the KOCH made 60 trips between Clarkson and Buffalo. Also during this year, the St. Lawrence Cement Company changed its corporate logo and the vessel had her stack markings changed. The old, complicated and difficult to paint logo was replaced by a stylized 'L' in blue and red, still on a white disc on the black stack. It is not known exactly when it happened, but at some point fairly late in her lake career as a self-propelled ship, the KOCH had a yellow rubber ducky mounted on her steering pole!

ROBERT KOCH continued on her trolley run to Buffalo under her own power until eventually her owner decided that it could cut operating costs by running her as a barge. Accordingly, in the spring of 1984, at Hamilton, a towing notch was built onto the existing stern of the KOCH and motive power thereafter was supplied by the tug R. & L. NO. 1, owned by Wakeham & Sons Ltd., of Hamilton. (Wakeham, at the time, also owned the tugs PRINCESS NO. 1 and JENNY T. II.)

The KOCH had been kept up pretty well while she was self-propelled, despite the cement dust to which she was exposed, but after she became a barge, there was little or no aesthetic maintenance done and her appearance deteriorated considerably. Trips to Buffalo became intermittent, with the KOCH now running instead more frequently to Oswego. This arrangement worked for two years but, on Sunday, December 15, 1985, disaster struck during the vessel's last trip of the season.

The KOCH was carrying 2,000 tons of cement consigned to the Independent Cement Company at Oswego. It was normal practice for the R. & L. NO. 1 to push the KOCH using the stern notch but, on this occasion, the barge was out on the "string" because of the heavy seas that were running on Lake Ontario. At about 4:00 p.m., as the tow was approaching the Oswego harbour entrance, the towing cable parted. The tug put a crew aboard the barge and they dropped the nooks, leaving the KOCH to ride out the storm at anchor in the lake. The tug proceeded in to the shelter of Oswego harbour, waiting for the weather to moderate.

By Monday morning, the KOCH had drifted eastward about a mile down the lake from where her anchor failed to hold, coming to rest about 300 yards offshore on a mud-covered rocky shelf known as Sheldon's Point. The heavy seas pounding the hull on the rocks had done enough damage to allow water into her holds. Soon the engineroom began to flood as well, and the ship settled on the bottom, all the while taking a heavy coating of ice as the waves breaking over her froze to the decks and superstructure.

R. & L. NO. 1, with U.S. Coast Guard and pollution control officials aboard, made several trips to the barge, and they pumped off some 4,000 gallons of bunker fuel from the barge, reducing the threat of an oil spill. The Independent Cement Company, a subsidiary of St. Lawrence Cement, declared the KOCH's cargo a total loss, considering the extent of the hull flooding, and eventually the vessel itself, resting in 16 feet of water, also was declared a constructive total loss and was abandoned to the underwriters.

It had been more than half a century since an accident of this magnitude had occurred at Oswego. It was not uncommon in "the old days" for ships to drift off to the east of the harbour entrance in heavy weather, there to become casualties. At least 50 schooners met their fate on the rocky shore near Oswego. The last major casualty had been the small steamer ISABELLA H., a 106-foot long vessel, originally launched as McCORMICK in 1887 at Grand Haven, Michigan. She had been abandoned as unfit in June of 1911 at Chaumont, N.Y., but in 1915 she was rebuilt for Capt. Augustus R. Hinckley. On September 28, 1925, ISABELLA H. sank off the Oswego entrance, with the loss of one crew member. Like the KOCH, the ISABELLA H. came to rest squarely on a flat rock and her wooden hull was pounded until it broke apart.

Another major grounding in the area was that of the wooden steamer DAVID W. MILLS, which had been launched as SPARTA (i) in 1874. Capt. Frank J. Peter-