

LEECLIFFE HALL (ii)

In searching our minds for an idea for the Ship of the Month feature for each issue, we try to find something very famous, or something unusual that will catch the interest of the members. (We do not write simply for our own benefit!) Trying to find it, however, can be quite frustrating and sometimes it seems as though all the best stories have been told. But when we recently received one particular suggestion, we realized that we never have featured the history of one of the Seaway-sized lakers built in the years following the opening of the new St. Lawrence canals. Now would be a good time to do so, because many of those ships already have been dispatched to the breakers and more will surely follow. As well, a number of the fleets for which those ships were built themselves have disappeared from the lake scene.

However, back in 1960, there was enthusiasm everywhere in the lake shipping community, and the Canadian fleets were making all sorts of plans to replace the smaller and older ships on which they had relied for so very many years. One of the companies that had relied heavily on canal-sized vessels, and even had built a whole new generation of them during the 1950s, was the Hall Corporation of Canada, and on June 23, 1960, it let a contract for the construction of its very first Seaway-size bulk carrier. The yard to which the contract was given was, however, not on the Great Lakes, but rather was that of the Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company Limited, of Govan (Glasgow), Scotland. If that name sounds familiar, it is because this was an old and honoured shipbuilder, and in 1907 it had turned out the famous passenger steamers KEEWATIN and ASSINIBOIA for the Canadian Pacific Railway. Fairfield built very good ships!

The keel of the new vessel was laid on August 2nd, 1960, and the ship was built as Fairfield's hull number 811. Her construction cost in excess of \$5,000,000 but that is but a drop in the bucket compared to what it would cost to build her today. She was launched on Thursday, May 18, 1961, her sponsor being Miss Susan A. Sterne, aunt of Hall Corporation president Frank A. Augsbury, Jr. She was christened LEECLIFFE HALL by Mrs. Augsbury (the former Lavinia Lee Andrews) for whom she was named, and she was the second Hall steamer to carry this name. She was completed in August of 1961 and, at the time of her delivery (within the specified contract period), it was stated that she was the largest dry cargo vessel ever built in the United Kingdom, and probably in all of Western Europe.

LEECLIFFE HALL was registered at Montreal and she was given Canadian official number 314366. She was 714.4 feet in length (729'9" overall), 75.3 feet in the beam and 35.3 feet in depth, her maximum loaded draft being 24.5 feet. Her tonnage was calculated as 18071 Gross, 12888 Net, and 25500 Deadweight. The ship was powered by two Fairfield-built two-cylinder steam turbines, which developed 8,200 Shaft Horsepower, and which had direct-reduction articulated gearing. The engines were built by the shipyard. Steam was provided by two oil-fired Foster Wheeler watertube boilers of the "D" type.

The new steamer was sailed across the North Atlantic under her own power and she arrived safely at Lauzon, Quebec, on August 23, 1961. There she was taken in hand by the Davie shipyard for completion, which included the opening of her hatches, which had been left sealed for the delivery trip across the ocean for safety reasons. Her formal commissioning took place at Montreal on September 22, 1961, and on the 25th she sailed light ship for Port Arthur, where she was loaded with a record cargo of 1,030,979 bushels of mixed grain. She arrived with that cargo at the Bunge elevator at Quebec City on October 6, 1961.

LEECLIFFE HALL was a handsome ship but one that was rather different in appearance from the Canadian-built Seaway-size bulkers that followed her into Hall Corporation service over the next few years. She actually had a bit of sheer to her decks and had a slightly raked bow and a cruiser stern. Both her forecastle and poop were fully topgallant, there being a closed bulwark for most of the length of the forecastle head and an open pipe rail around the poop except for a closed rail across its forward face. There was a large texas house atop the forecastle head and it contained rather lavish guest quarters, as befitted Halco's flagship. Above the texas was the large pilothouse, which basically was rectangular but which had a curved face sporting eleven windows and a prominent visor. There were four windows and a door in each side. A short foremast rose up out of the small cabin abaft the pilothouse which contained the master's quarters and office. The ship's name was displayed in large black letters across the face of the closed bridge deck rail.