

C.C.G.S. GRENVILLE

- by Ronald F. Beaupre -

Ed. Note: When, for want of space, we left the story of the buoy and lighthouse tender GRENVILLE in the December issue, the steamer had been freed from the rocks of Burton Bank, where she spent the winter of 1924-1925, and was being repaired in the drydock at Collingwood. It is with great pleasure that we now return to the story.

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The "Amherstburg Echo" of September 2, 1927, reported: "The Canadian lighthouse tender steamer GRENVILLE, Capt. Smith, called at this port on Friday on her way down the lakes and picked up a big gas buoy at the Marine Depot which she is taking to Port Maitland on Lake Erie, where it will be converted into a gas and bell buoy at the entrance to the newly improved harbour there. The GRENVILLE also took on board coal to supply the lightships and lighthouses on the way down. She stopped at the Middle Ground to get the assistant keeper there and take him to the new lighthouse on the South-East shoal, of which he has been appointed light keeper."

And now we return to Appleton's article. "Returning to service at Parry Sound for the remainder of the (1925) season (after her drydocking), the GRENVILLE stayed in the upper lakes until 1931, when the C.G.S. ST. HELIERS, a Saint class tug which had been purchased by the department and lengthened by 60 feet, was converted to a lighthouse and buoy vessel for the Parry Sound Agency. Back at Prescott again, the GRENVILLE resumed her original role and the SCOUT, by then showing signs of age, was phased out of service.

"In those lean years, the thirties, life in the Marine Service reflected the general malaise which lay heavily on Canada and the world. Correspondence of the period is revealing. A request for four dozen lamp bulbs for the GRENVILLE, complete with full explanation why they were needed, formed the subject of a letter from the agency to the deputy minister. In March 1935, the main engine overhaul cost only \$257.25 and deck repairs were \$656.25. To those familiar with the GRENVILLE, there is a knowing ring about reports that the wooden decks were leaking above the accommodation and required to be painted and canvassed.

"Jobs were hard to get during the Depression and were largely dependent on political patronage. Crews were quite openly engaged from a roster drawn up in local constituencies; those in control of opposition members of Parliament were allocated a proportion agreed on mutually with colleagues on the Government benches in Ottawa. So rigid was the system that at one time special agreement had to be reached when two men were required for boiler cleaning. The boilers of the GRENVILLE being small, combustion chambers were very cramped and only the smallest of men could work there safely. Of several boiler scaling labourers available on that occasion, it was two with political preferment who got the job.

"It was something at that time to be a small Liberal or a small Conservative; better still to be a tiny Liberal or a tiny Conservative! Over the years, both must have crawled impartially up the back ends of the GRENVILLE's boilers.

"The first Master of the GRENVILLE, whose name appears on the original certificate of registry, dated July 9, 1915, was Captain Henry Esford. From then until 1930 the ship was commanded by Captain Dick Smith and possibly others. Thereafter the list runs: Captain M. Barry, 1930-42; J. Patchell, 1942-46; E. Parrish, 1947; O. Morphet, 1948-62; J. Gallant, 1962-64; A. Moreau, 1964-65; A. Croft, 1965-66; R. Blagdon, 1966; B. Dube, 1966; J. Young, 1967-68; D. Creaser, 1968."

Here we have some random notes from the 1930s time period. From the "Kingston Whig Standard" issues: September 8, 1934: "BLUENOSE cleared east at 7:30 a.m. Saturday in tow of the tug GRENVILLE." October 29, 1936: "Freighter STARMOUNT Grounds on Shoal - Brockville - The freighter STARMOUNT of the Canada Steamship Lines, upbound, grounded early today on a shoal at the east end of Refugee Island in the Brockville Narrows of the St. Lawrence, one mile west of here. The vessel is reported to be hard on at the bow and leaking slightly. The Canadian Government steamer GRENVILLE, in port here, steamed west to inspect the grounded freighter and wrecking equipment intended to release her is expected shortly."

Thursday, June 3, 1938: An extensive article describing the duties of GRENVILLE from an interview with her master, Captain M. Barry. "About five years ago the GRENVILLE went on a shoal near Griswold Island down the river. Quite often shoals are discovered where they were not known to exist before."