

CAN IT REALLY BE 100 YEARS?

It was back on Saturday, July 6, 1907, that the Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company Limited, of Govan, Glasgow, Scotland, launched its Hull 453 from building berth number 6 into the River Clyde. She was christened KEEWATIN by the daughter of Arthur Piers, manager of Canadian Pacific's deep-sea steamers, and she and her sistership ASSINIBOIA were built specifically for the Canadian Pacific Railway's Great Lakes Steamship Service. KEEWATIN (C.125985), 350 feet in overall length, ran her trials on September 12, 1907, and under the command of Capt. James Gillies, she arrived at Montreal under her own power on September 23, 1907. Cut in two for the tow up through the old small St. Lawrence and Welland Canal locks, she was completed and finished out, and she made her first revenue trip in October of 1908.

From that point, we fast-forward to the 1950s and 1960s, when many of us spent some of the most delightful days of our lives aboard these two steamers, enjoying the total atmosphere aboard, including the delights of "the swamp" (the flower-packed well between the promenade and awning decks) and the beautiful dining room. In the late afternoon, Ye Young Future Ed. relished standing on the hurricane deck aft, enjoying the wonderful smells of dinner-to-come wafting up through the galley skylights. And then there was the travelogue shown in the observation room aft in the evening, and the joys of hearing that wonderful deep steam whistle blowing passing signalsto other ships. And the sing-songs in the well deck before bedtime.

As a young boy, Ye Future Ed. was always welcomed into the pilothouse at any hour by our late friend and TMHS member Capt. Ernie Ridd, and even the often shy Capt. Alec Campbell, last master of KEEWATIN, made me welcome.

Your Future Editor and his family were aboard KEEWATIN on that infamous day in the summer of 1965 when it was announced that the passenger service would be ended at the close of that season. We were as grief-stricken as were the crew. My father and I even went back aboard in October and were among the five passngers who enjoyed the last Thanksgiving Dinner ever served aboard KEEWATIN. She was done at the end of November that year, although ASSINIBOIA kept running for two further years in freight-only service to obtain a freight rate differential for the C.P.R. In 1966 and 1967, ASSINIBOIA looked forlorn in her stripped-down service, although Ernie Ridd still blew us a salute whenever he saw us at the Soo.

KEEWATIN is 100 years old in 2007. She lives on, as a historical display at Douglas/Saugatuck, Michigan, where she has been since June 27, 1967. Owned by River Queen Boat Works/Peterson Steamship Co., she is open for public visitation and tours, seven days a week, from Memorial Day to Labour Day. She is kept exactly as she was in regular service, although historical displays are provided on the cargo deck, complete with gift shop.

There will be special events held during the summer of 2007 to celebrate the centenary of KEEWATIN, and all, especially former crew members and passengers, are welcomed.

KEEWATIN is docked just south of the Saugatuck-Douglas Bridge, Blue Star Highway and Union Street, P.O. Box 638, Douglas, Michigan 49406. Contact the office at 269-857-2464, or check out www.keewatinmaritime museum.com

Please check out and support KEEWATIN in her centennial year. She is the last of her kind on the lakes, and we dare not lose her.

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Have you reserved your tickets for the May Dinner Meeting aboard JADRAN on May 12? Please join the happy throng and send your remittance to the Chief Purser as soon as possible. Please see details on the front cover.

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