

However, as has been well documented earlier in these pages, and particularly in our recent feature on ROYALTON, the Mathews Steamship Company ran into problems when the Great Depression struck and the company owed more money for the many new ships it had built in the 1920s than it ever could hope to pay. Ernie Mathews was caught between a rock and a very hard place, and he had nowhere to turn. The company was adjudged bankrupt on February 10, 1931, and thereafter was operated by (or for) the receivers, E.R.C. Clarkson & Sons, through the 1931, 1932 and 1933 seasons during which some of the steamers ran sporadically and some hardly at all. On November 28, 1933, the bondholders accepted a purchase offer from Sarnia Steamships Ltd., and this firm, operated by Capt. Robert Scott Misener and John O. McKellar, with the financial backing of the Bolands of Buffalo, in turn formed Colonial Steamships Ltd. to take over the ownership of the remaining thirteen Mathews vessels.

WIARTON was one of the Mathews ships that made the transfer to Colonial Steamships, but she never operated for that firm. She was sold on April 27, 1934, to the Nicholson Transit Company, a firm that had been formed c. 1918 by Capt. William Nicholson and others, of Detroit. Her Canadian registry had been closed on April 25, and on the 28th, bound from Toronto under her own power, she passed up the Welland Canal. The sale of WIARTON had been handled by solicitors Rowell, Reid, Wright & McMillan, of Toronto, and the sale price was only \$6,000.

She soon was repainted in the usual Nicholson Transit colours with a black hull, white forecastle and cabins, and a black stack on which was a large white letter 'N'. The name 'Nicholson Transit Company' was painted in large white letters, billboard-style, down either side of the hull. The foremast was buff while the main was black. With her re-entry to U.S. registry (again as U.S.77587) and with her deck rebuilt with large hatches to handle, amongst other commodities, scrap metal, the ship was shown as 246.58 x 41.16 x 15.58, 1593 Gross and 1124 Net Tons.

Nicholson renamed the steamer (e) FLEETWOOD (ii), recalling a name that Nicholson had given to a wooden steamer acquired in 1918 and dismantled in 1926. John Greenwood stated that the two ships were named for the city of Fleetwood, England, but we have no idea how that would have been relevant to Nicholson's lake vessel operations, unless William Nicholson had roots there. We suspect some other derivation. It is interesting to note that FLEETWOOD was the second of the Wolvin canallers to wind up in the Nicholson Transit fleet. In 1929, Nicholson had acquired BRIGNOGAN, (a) ALBERT M. MARSHALL (16), from Canada Steamship Lines, and she became (c) FELLOWCRAFT (ii), likewise named for a previous Nicholson wooden steamer. It is truly amazing how the Wolvin canallers managed to stick together over the years!

FLEETWOOD carried a variety of cargoes over the years for Nicholson Transit, but eventually along came World War Two. It greatly changed the look of Canadian and American lake shipping. The United States War Shipping Administration purchased FLEETWOOD from Nicholson Transit and took delivery of her at 12:01 p.m. Eastern War Time on August 17, 1942, at Ecorse, Michigan. She may well have needed considerable work to put her in good shape, as it was not until 9:00 a.m. E.W.T. on October 26, 1942, that FLEETWOOD (still at Ecorse) was handed over to Boland & Cornelius, Buffalo, as operators for the War Shipping Administration under a General Agency Agreement. She was still on the lakes when, at 10:15 a.m. E.W.T. on August 26, 1943, Nicholson Transit got her back as operator for the W.S.A. under another General Agency Agreement.

So now we know for sure that, contrary to reports appearing elsewhere, FLEETWOOD did not go to the coast in 1941 and return to the lakes in 1943. She never left the lakes at all during that period.

Nicholson Transit continued to operate FLEETWOOD under its agreement until 10:30 a.m. E.W.T. on June 14, 1944, when she was handed over to the British Ministry of War Transport, which had requisitioned her. It would appear that, following the hand-over, she did actually leave the lakes for the very first time in her life. British records show that she was "time chartered on a net basis" without saying to whom she was chartered. Some have said that it was for operation by Montreal Shipping Co. Ltd. (which also managed two other former Nicholson canal-sized steamers, FELLOWCRAFT and TAMPICO), probably on the St. Lawrence River, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and on the east coast. If so, she did not serve in that capacity for long, for at 12 noon E.W.T. on April 10, 1945, at Norfolk, Virginia, she was transferred to the U.S. Navy on bare-boat charter. The final entry for her in the U.S. Maritime Administration records showed that title to FLEETWOOD was transferred permanently to the U.S. Navy on January 14, 1947, with the note "Now a hulk". As well, the December