

# THE LIGHTSHIP

LAKE



HURON

LORE

MARINE SOCIETY

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lakehuronlore@advnet.net

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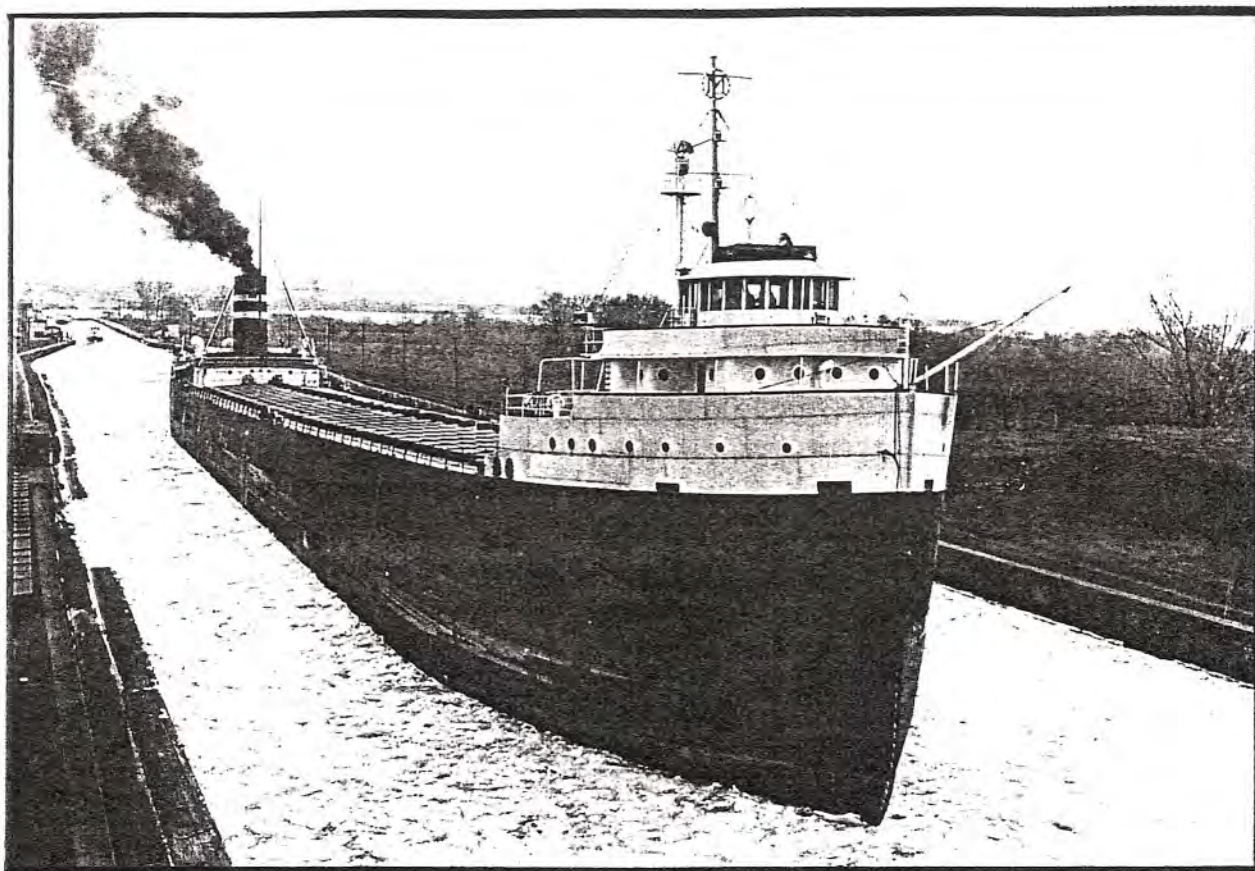
### ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Mark Your Calendar** - Our next entertainment meeting will be held on Saturday, Oct. 2nd at the Port Huron Museum. This is a joint meeting with our friends of the Marine Historical Society of Detroit and will begin at 6:00 pm with the usual social hour, followed by dinner provided by the Museum Guild. The evening's guest speaker is Skip Gillham of Vineland, Ontario, a well-known author and co-author of many books relating to Great Lakes Shipping Companies and Ship Builders. Skip also writes regular columns and features for several newspapers and Marine Historical Societies and shipping company newsletters. Of local Bluewater interest, he writes a weekly feature for the Port Huron Times Herald entitled *On The Lakes* as well as *On The Waterfront* for the Sarnia Observer. Of course, L.H.L. has the good fortune of having Skip as one of our regular, generous contributors to *The Lightship* with his *Bluewater Area Shipwrecks* articles. Skip's program, at the October meeting, will be entitled *Canadian Tankers*. The cost of the dinner meeting is \$10.00 (US funds) and please send your check or money order, payable to MUSEUM GUILD, to the Port Huron Museum. For your convenience, we've enclosed a yellow colored reservation slip with this issue of *The Lightship*. Kindly mark your envelope DINNER MEETING. The closing date for reservations is Wed. Sept. 29th. This will be a perfect opportunity to meet and hear this noted personality.

On Saturday, Oct. 23rd, a Member's Slide Evening (a joint meeting with the M.H.S.D.) will be held at the Museum beginning at 7:00 pm. Bring along 25 to 30 of your favorite ship slides, or if you would like to just be part of the audience and enjoy the photographic efforts of others, please feel free to attend and bring along a friend.

*New Members* - L.H.L. wishes to welcome aboard Wallace and Laura McGhee of Canton, MI.

\*\*\* NAME THIS SHIP \*\*\*



\* Al Sykes Collection \*

Answer is on Pg. 7

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The History of the Original Whistle  
From the *Frank Rockefeller*

By Gareth L. McNabb

Around the Great Lakes Region, the closing years of the Nineteenth Century were marked by radical changes in ship construction as conventional wooden ships were becoming older and less profitable. The increase in the dimensions of the Soo Locks coupled with advances in the manufacturing of quality steel resulted in a rapid expansion in the size and number of steel lake freighters.

It was the belief of Capt. Alexander McDougall that conventional ship construction could be improved upon. The result was a carrier with a flat bottom, which could carry maximum cargoes at minimum depths. The sides were rounded from the waterline to the decks so that, when fully loaded, the craft would shed water and offer minimal resistance to the wind. With spoon-shaped bow and stern the ship had contours which resembled a great steel cigar. In the eleven year period between 1888 and 1897, a total of forty-four of these whaleback

vessels were constructed. Twenty-six were barges without power, and eighteen were steamers which frequently towed one of two barges.

After being launched on April 25th, 1896, the whaleback steamer *Frank Rockefeller* began her 73-year career on the lakes by hauling iron ore from the Mesabi Range.

During the 1925 shipping season, Capt. Ezra Davis Purdy of Port Huron, Michigan, was justly proud of the *Rockefeller* which was his first command as master for the Pittsburgh Steamship Company. Capt. Purdy was particularly embarrassed if his boat was not "Shipshape in Bristol Fashion" at all times. He was known to have required his crew to scrub the cabins to gleaming white, even on the last trip, to have the boat looking sharp as she pulled into the winter lay-up dock.

In that era a ship's whistle was a most important object in establishing the individuality of each ship. In passing, whistle blasts were exchanged, and the vibration of the upper cylinder produced its own distinctive, roar-like tone. In fact, whistle tones were so distinctive, sailors could frequently identify the boat by the sound of its whistle. So, naturally, when that sound suddenly changed and became a discordant hiss, something like a grand case of laryngitis, there were bound to be some shocked and embarrassed sailors.

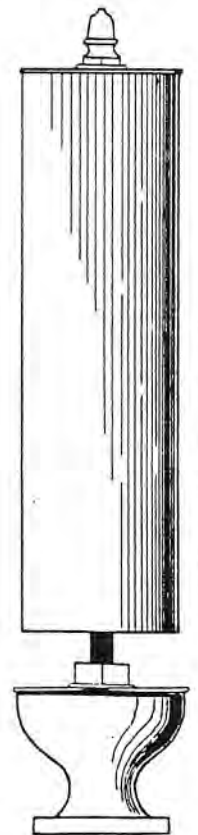
While descending the St. Mary's River, the whistle tore along the lower rim and as each ship passed, the embarrassment to Capt. Purdy and the crew increased. Once out into northern Lake Huron, Chief Engineer Walter Henry Smith of Marine City began repairs by fabricating a brass strip which was drilled and tapped for the insertion of short bolts. The task was more time consuming than Chief Smith had expected. Because the sound was unsatisfactory, a second, and yet finally a third brass strip was attached in the vain hope of restoring a satisfactory resonance.

The whistle, which is larger than generally realized, measures about 48 inches high by 10-1/2 inches in diameter and weighs 148 pounds. To Capt. Purdy's son, T. Boice Purdy, who was a passenger at age five, the whistle is vividly recalled. He states: "I can remember looking up, with a feeling of extreme fear, at the whistle at the top of the stack with black smoke billowing up behind it. It seemed a creature of supreme authority. I recall that before leaving the captain's cabin for dinner, I would look out forward to make sure we were not about to meet another vessel. If all was clear, I would open the door, and dash across the bridge and around to the dining room at the stern.

Because the whistle would not pass inspection, a new one was ordered and installed at Lorain, Ohio. The original whistle was lowered over the side of the *Rockefeller* into the Wescott Company boat, which was used to deliver mail, papers, and packages to steamers passing Port Huron's Pine Grove Park. It was then taken to Capt. Purdy's home on Gratiot Avenue and cemented into the beach patio as a conversation piece, where guests and casual strollers could marvel at its size. To those ashore, whistles look rather insignificant on the forward side of a steamboat's smoke stack. Sadly, there are few steam whistles in operation today on the Great Lakes, their distinctive character having been replaced by sound-alike horns.

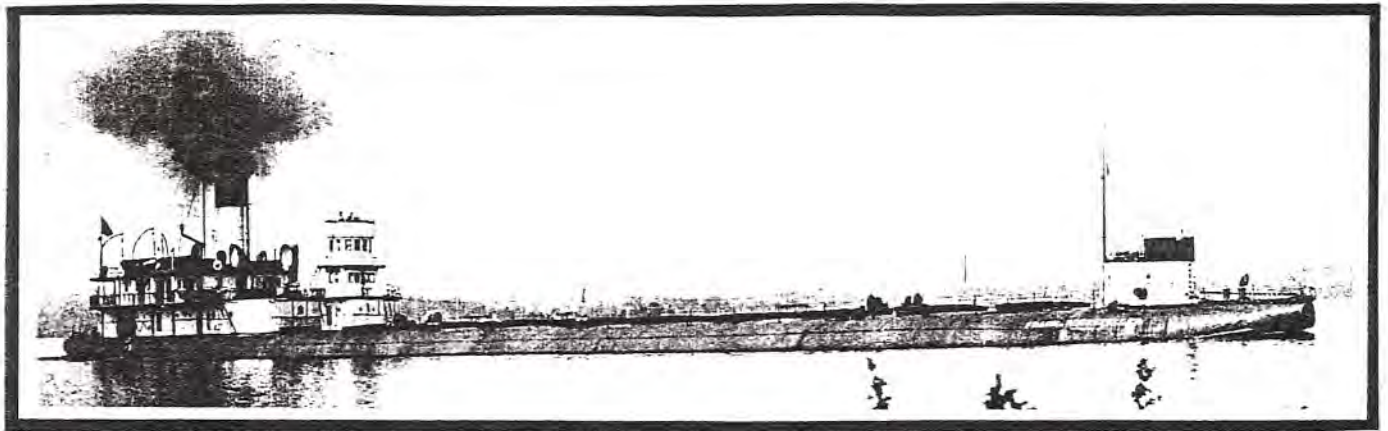
The family home, along with the whistle, was sold after Capt. Purdy passed away at seventy-five years of age in 1965. The new owner had little appreciation for the whistle and cared little when the lake level rose to undercut the cement platform and allowed the whistle to slide into the lake. For three and a half years, Lake Huron's water and sand hid the whistle. Then it reappeared after the storm of November, 1972. It was about fifty feet from shore and badly bent.

The author, Gareth McNabb, contacted the owner and made arrangements to salvage the whistle, but the weather became severe and covered the shore with about two feet of ice. New Year's Day, 1973, was unseasonably warm and the ice soon melted, exposing the whistle. Gareth McNabb, in the company of friends Dale Larson, Paul Michalsen, Louis Ropposch, Jr. and Louis Ropposch, Sr., completed the salvage in about three hours under ideal weather conditions. With careful attention to detail, about one hundred hours were required to straighten and polish the whistle to its present condition. The whistle, which is in the collection of



the author, will be on display at various marine exhibits in the coming years, thus insuring an opportunity for people to become acquainted with its history, size and beauty.

Although the *Frank Rockefeller* changed its whistle only once, its name was changed three times. In 1928, the *Rockefeller* was renamed *South Park*, and in 1943 she received her present name, *Meteor*. Today, the S.S. Meteor Maritime Museum is located on Barker's Island at Superior, Wisconsin, less than two miles from her launch site. Each year, thousands of people visit what is now the world's only whaleback ship and tour the museum displays in the holds which, at various times, held iron ore, automobiles or petroleum.



\* *Frank Rockefeller* in 1914 \*

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## NAUTICAL NEWS

### L.H.L. "HISTORIAN OF THE YEAR" MEMBERS

Our last issue called your attention to the fact that we have several past *Historian of the Year* honorees, chosen by the Marine Historical Society of Detroit, as members of our Society. We would be remiss if we failed to acknowledge that our late former Secretary-Treasurer Bill Luke was named the M.H.S.D. *Historian of the Year* in 1990. Bill was a tireless worker for our group, a man overflowing with his love and knowledge of the Great Lakes and its ships, never failing to show or share with others, all he knew. The waters of the Great Lakes surely flowed through his veins.

Your Editor must also apologize for the error made in the last issue when L.H.L. member, Ralph K. Roberts of Saginaw, MI, the 1992 *Historian of the Year*, was listed as Ralph K. Rogers.

### TOLEDO MARITIME MARKET

The annual S/S *Willis B. Boyer* Museum Ship Maritime Market will be held on Saturday, Sept. 18th, 1999 from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm, alongside of the Str. *Willis B. Boyer*, located in the International Park, Toledo, Ohio. It will be held in a large tent set up adjacent to the ship. In addition to this year's event, a Ship Model Builders Show will be held on the *Boyer* in conjunction with the Maritime Market. General admission will be \$3.00 for adults, \$1.00 for children under 12. Preschoolers will be free of charge. Combination tickets for both the Boyer-Maritime Market, at both locations, can also be purchased. Items for sale will include new & used books, photos, art work, paintings, antiques, collectables and numerous "goodies", too many to mention.

### FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

Member Roger LeLievre advises the availability of the 40th edition of the annual *Know Your Ships*. It contains over 140 pages, listing more than 2,000 Great Lakes and Salty vessels with all their pertinent details, also 10 pages of ship's flag and stack markings. Numerous excellent photos are included. *Know Your Ships 1999* is

available at most area bookstores or may be ordered for \$14.95 (U.S. funds) plus \$3.00 S & H (Michigan orders must add 6% sales tax) from Marine Publishing Co., P.O. Box 68, Sault Ste. Marie, MI. 49783.

Also, L.H.L. member Skip Gillham has put together an interesting 22 page booklet entitled *Niagara's Shipbuilding Heritage: From 1828 To Port Weller Dry Docks*. As the name suggests, the booklet provides information on the shipbuilders, from the start to present, with points of interest on some of the schooners, passenger / freight steamers, tugs and modern-day self-unloading vessels that were built and launched at these yards, located throughout the Canadian Niagara Region. The booklet, which also contains 26 photos, can be obtained by sending a check or money order for \$8.00 (US funds for delivery in the U.S.) to E.B. Gillham, Box 443, Vineland, Ontario. L0R 2C0.

### **HURON LADY II**

The Bluewater area gained a new tour boat in late May when the *Huron Lady II* arrived in Port Huron. She is the ex Lady Lumina, built of fibreglass in 1994, now owned by L.H.L. member Capt. John Rigney of Port Huron. His new 73 foot tour boat is heated and air-conditioned for the comfort of it's more than 100 passenger seating capacity. Details of the *Huron Lady II* cruise times and costs can be obtained by calling (810) 984-1500 or toll free (888) 873-6726.

### **FOREIGN VISITORS**

Sarnia's Cargill Elevators are enjoying an unusually busy summer. Since August 1st, four salt-water ships have graced the elevator dock. The *Tecam Sea*, *Strange Attractor*, *Spar Opal* and *Millenium Hawk* all loaded various grain cargos for Asian ports. Hopefully, this trend will continue into the fall.

### **FRENCH CRUISE SHIP**

Another cruise ship which is new to our area this year is perhaps a little more expensive than the tour boats we normally see sailing under the Bluewater Bridge. She is the 327 foot "megayacht" design *Le Levant*, built at the Alstom Leroux Naval Shipyard in Saint Malo, France in 1998 and owned by Compagnie des Iles du Ponant of France. Her 97 passengers have cabins which are all outward facing and come complete with a mini-bar, TV, VCR, stereo and telephone. The five-deck vessel also features a large lounge, two bars, library, swimming pool, Turkish bath, a gourmet restaurant and a boutique. With a crew of 47, it is most likely her passengers would receive ultimate first class service. The *Le Levant* will return to the Seaway on Sept. 15th for another two cruise trips; Toronto to Chicago and back.

### **SHIPBREAKING IN ALANG, INDIA**

In our last issue we featured an article about shipbreaking in Alang, India. The July issue of the World Ship Society's Marine News carried the following news item: Alang - (Ship) Breaking came to a standstill as 40,000 workers fled to the hills in early April after a guru predicted natural disaster would end all life on May 8th, 1999. Due to harvest, work is unlikely to resume before the end of May. This has caused large scale industrial disruption as Alang supplies 10,000 tons of steel daily to the steel mills and dismantles 95 % of Indian scrapping. *Note - A guru is a Hindu or Sikh religious teacher or leader.*

### **SYDNEY SMITH DOCK IN NEED OF REPAIR**

Located at the west end of Sarnia's Government Dock is a second commercial dock constructed from the hull of the *Sydney E. Smith Jr.* whose long career came to an end on June 5th, 1972 when she collided, under the Bluewater Bridge, with the steamer *Parker Evans*. The *Smith* rolled over on her side and sank, just off the Peerless Cement Co. plant in Port Huron. Her entire crew was transported to safety aboard the Point Edward Pilot Boat *Sally M.W.* thanks to the heroic efforts of her captain, Robert Campbell of Sarnia. After several weeks, the wreck was raised in two sections by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and obtained by Reid Aggregates of Sarnia for use as a dock facing at their gravel yard in the area west of the Government Dock. The sections, stripped of their superstructure, were taken to the riverfront site, fitted together and filled with ballast to create a dock. Reid Aggregates has since moved their gravel operation downriver near the Sunoco Refinery

but the *Smith* dock remains to be used as a ship repair facility and winter berth. After 27 years of use as a dock, the hull has once again began to separate. The City of Sarnia, who owns the property, hired a contractor with a backhoe in late July, to excavate, expose the problem and investigate the repairs required to allow the continued use of the dock for commercial ship repairs as well as public use such as fishing and boat watching.

### MARINE SCENE

#### **30 years ago ... (1969)**

- a) Steamers *Harry W. Croft* (US 204987) and *Philip Minch* (US 201928) departed Quebec City Sept. 5th in tow of the Polish tug *Jantar*, arriving in Santander, Spain, to be scrapped, on Sept. 27th.
- b) *Howard Hindman* (C 302710) and *Humberdoc* (C 179585) in tandem tow of the tug *Mississippi*, arrived in Bilbao, Spain on Sept. 6th to be scrapped.
- c) Scott Misener Steamships Ltd. announced they would manage the Mohawk Navigation Co., Ltd. in 1970.
- d) Former railcar ferry *Grand Haven* (Honduran registry) sank at a lay-up dock in Old River Bed, Cleveland, Ohio on Sept. 19th.
- e) Steamer *J.E. Upson* (US 205033) arrived in Santander, Spain, towed by the German tug *Fairplay XII*, on Sept. 25th, to be scrapped.
- f) In September, Bethlehem's bulk carrier *Lehigh* (US 244505) brought the first cargo into Burns Harbor, Ind., 15,700 tons of iron ore pellets from Taconite Harbor.
- g) The tanker *Maplebranch* (C 310914) received severe bow damage when she collided with the Danish ship *Atlantic Skou*, in the St. Lawrence River off Sorel, Quebec on Oct. 10th.
- h) The Great Lakes Towing Co. tug *Maryland* (US 225029) which had sunk on Aug. 26th, 1969, while under tow six miles east of Sturgeon Point, Lake Huron, was raised on Oct. 23rd. She was taken to Alpena, MI, then to Cleveland for repairs.

#### **35 years ago ... (1964)**

Steamer *Leecliffe Hall* (2) (C 314366) 730' x 75' x 39' 9", built by the Fairfield Shipbuilding & Engineering Co. Ltd. at Port Glasgow (Govan), Scotland as Hull 811, was launched on May 18th, 1961. The new Hall Corporation (Halco) vessel arrived at Quebec City on Aug. 23rd and was formally commissioned in Montreal on Sept. 22nd. The vessel set sail on her first trip on the Great Lakes on Sept. 25th, 1961. On Sept. 5th, 1964, while underway on the St. Lawrence River, 65 miles below Quebec City, the *Leecliffe Hall* collided with the Greek freighter *Apollina* and sank before it could be beached. Three crew members were lost in the sinking. The hull was later declared a total loss and was dynamited to remove it as a hazard to navigation.

#### **70 years ago ... (1929)**

The Str. *Myron C. Taylor* cleared Great Lakes Engineering Works at Detroit, August 27, 1929 on her maiden trip, and sailed light to Duluth, Minnesota to load her first cargo.

### F.Y.I.

As of midnight, August 31st, 217 salt water vessels (requiring pilots) have passed upbound through the Port Huron / Sarnia area since the opening of the 1999 shipping season. *This number includes salt water vessels, passenger ships as well as some Canadian registered tankers, eg. Algonova, Emerald Star, etc. Many of the vessels are repeat visitors.*

As of midnight, August 31st, 11,335 people have visited the Lake Huron Lightship so far this year.

The Editor would like to thank L.H.L. members Doug Schilz and Cy Hudson as well as Port Huron Pilot Boat Dispatcher Bill Wager and Lightship Volunteer Len Kuhn.

The Editor always welcomes member's comments, suggestions & contributions.

# BLUEWATER AREA SHIPWRECKS

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## STR. GLADSTONE

*By Skip Gillham*

The wooden freighter *Gladstone* (US 85996) was built by Wm. Radcliffe at Cleveland in 1885. The 303 foot long by 40 foot wide carrier was powered by a triple expansion engine and registered at 2,112 gross tons.

The ship originally served in the Bradley fleet and often towed a barge. *Pasadena* had been on the line near Keweenaw Waterway October 8, 1906, but had to be cut loose when the anchors failed. The latter smashed against the east pier and became a total loss.

*Gladstone* was rebuilt on several occasions over the years and was noted at 2,453 gross in 1909 and 2,348 gross at a later date.

The ship joined the Joan Steamship Co. in 1918 and sank that winter at St. Clair, Michigan, due to ice. The hull was pumped out and refloated but was found to be twisted and broken. As a result it was stripped out abandoned only to be sold for use on the Canadian side.

In 1923 *Gladstone* was towed to Point Edward and sunk as a foundation for a dock off Canatara Park. It served for a number of years until apparently destroyed by fire in 1936.

The engine, steel frames and propeller remain on the bottom and have been of interest to divers.

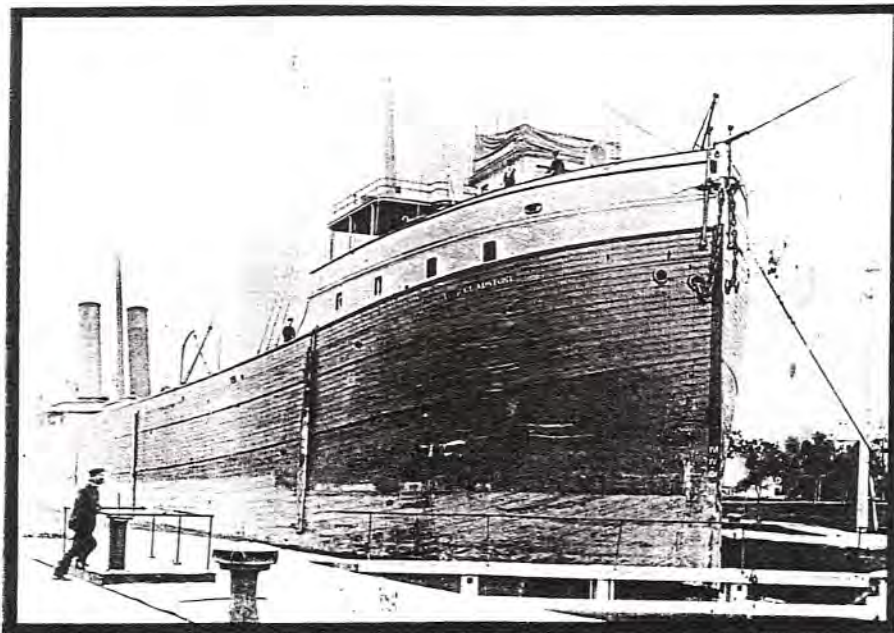


Photo:  
McCannell Collection

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### Answer to Name This Ship (Pg.2)

The Stmr. *Royalton* (1) (C 151108) was built in 1924 as Hull # 73 by Collingwood Shipbuilding Co. at Collingwood, Ontario. Dimensions were 550' x 58' x 31'. Launched as the *Royalton* for Mathews Steamship Co. Ltd. Sold to the newly formed Colonial S/S Co. in 1933. Vessel was acquired by Scott Misener S/S Co. in 1959. On June 25th of that year, the *Royalton*, while downbound on Lake Huron, collided with the Liberian registered freighter *Monrovia*. The foreign vessel, loaded with steel coils, sank in 150' of water with no loss of life. The *Royalton* received the required repairs and continued sailing until September 1979 when she layed up in Hamilton for the last time. The following year, the vessel was sold to Marine Salvage of Port Colborne and subsequently sold to foreign shipbreakers. On May 31st, 1980 the *Royalton*, in tandem with the *Marinsal* (ex-*Peter Robinson*) in tow of the West German tug *Hanseat*, departed Quebec City, bound for a scrapyard in La Spezia, Italy.

# SALTY SPOTLIGHT

By D. R. (Doug) Schilz  
(saltydug@yahoo.com)

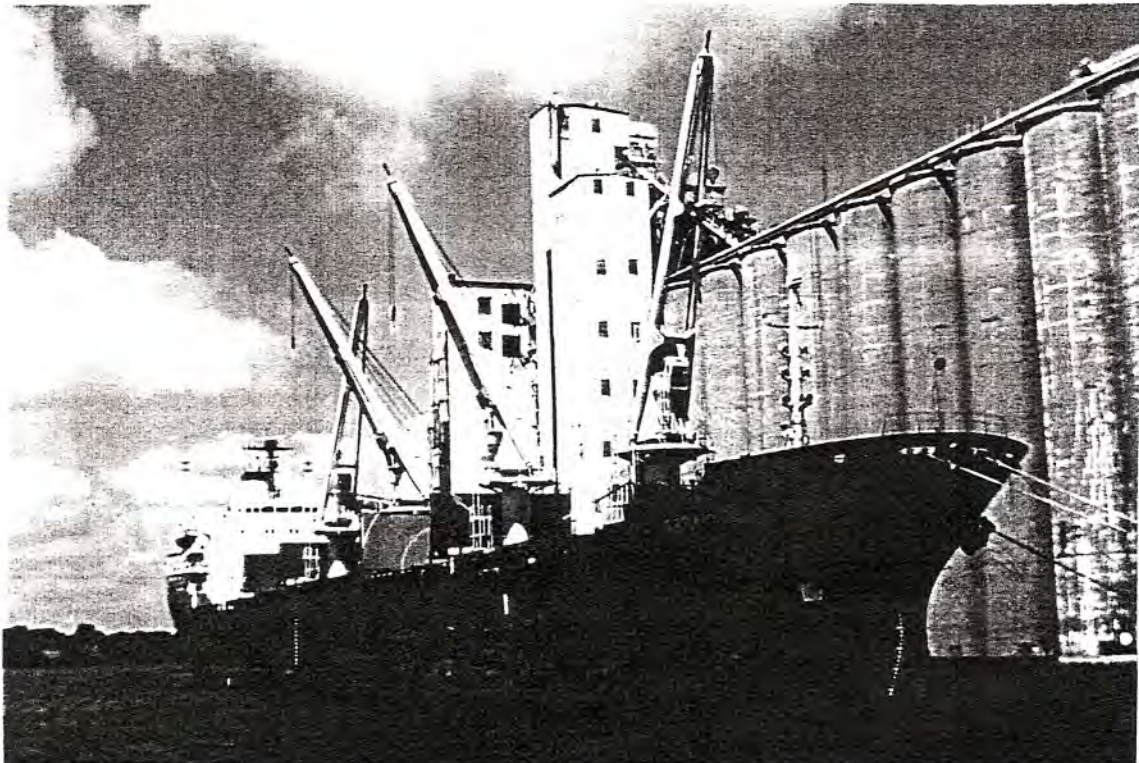
## TECAM SEA

Built in 1984 by Hitachi Zosen, Hiroshima Works, Innoshima, Japan as Hull # 4775.  
Length - 584'-8"    Breadth - 75'-11"    Depth - 48'-5"  
17,056 GRT    M. Bulk Carrier.  
Main Engine - 11,520 BHP Sulzer

The *Tecam Sea* is the first salt-water vessel to visit the Cargill Elevators in Sarnia this year. This well maintained ship has visited the Great Lakes previously under other names. She is referred to as the Lake Bulker type of vessel. There are many of these that visit the Great Lakes.

This ship was built originally as the *Rich Alliance* for Nereida Naveria S.A. and registered in Panama. She traded on the Lakes under this name. In 1989 she was sold and renamed *Monte Bonita*. She was owned by Sun Carriers Corp. and registered in the Philippines. She also traded on the Lakes under this name until 1993. In 1993 she was again renamed *University*. Her owners became Ebworth Pte. Ltd. and her registry was in Singapore. She did not trade on the Lakes under that name. In 1995 she was sold and renamed *Alam University* and her owners were listed as Senomam Niaga Sendirian Berhad and registered in Malaysia. She didn't trade on the Lakes under that name either. Finally, in 1998, she returned to the Great Lakes as the *Tecam Sea*, a name she was given earlier that year, and is currently owned by Sea Quality SA and is registered in the Bahamas.

The *Tecam Sea* arrived in Sarnia on Aug. 1st and loaded 17,275.968 metric tonnes of #1 white wheat for Pakistan. She departed Sarnia on Aug. 5th. The vessel is currently on a long term charter to Fednav, so I'm sure you can expect to see her return to the Bluewater area later this year.



\* August / 99 - Doug Schilz photo \*

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