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STEAM NAVIGATION ON THE OTTAWA RIVER

by

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Chairman, Marine Committee

Almost twenty years after the first steamboat had appeared on the Ottawa River, a young man, barely nineteen, made application for a position on one of the steamers belonging to the fleet of tow-boats, owned by the Ottawa and Rideau Forwarding Company. This was in the year 1838, the youth was Robert Ward Shepherd, who was later to become the founder of the only truly passenger steamer line on the Ottawa river between Montreal and Ottawa. In the very early days of steamboating on the Ottawa the steamers for the most part, were merely small side-wheel tow-boats. These small steamers towed barges in which were carried the passengers and freight, or towed the large rafts of lumber, which were brought down to Quebec, where the lumber was transhipped to Europe by sailing vessel.

The first steamboat on the Ottawa of which we have any record was the Union, which was built in 1819 by Philemon Wright, of Hull, and commenced operating the following year between Hull and Grenville. It was not until 1826 or '27 that the next steamer appeared. This was the William King, which plied the lower Ottawa between Lachine and Carillon. This boat was soon followed by the St. Andrews in 1828. Both these steamers were owned by merchants in Montreal and St. Andrews.

About 1828 or '29 a company was formed, called the Ottawa and Rideau Forwarding Company, MacPherson and Crane being agents for this line in Montreal and Kingston. This company built the steamers Ottawa and Shannon as well as a number of other boats and barges and, knowing the difficulties of the Ste. Anne's channel at low water, obtained permission to build a private lock at Vaudreuil, near where the present railway bridges now stand.

Both the Carillon and Grenville and the Rideau Canals were opened for traffic in the year 1833, thus enabling the barges of this and other companies to transport freight and passengers up the Ottawa without portage at Carillon and through the Rideau to Kingston.

Young Robert Ward Shepherd joined the steamer Ottawa, under Captain R.S. Robins, in 1838 and made it a point to acquire as much knowledge of the business as possible. After serving three years on this steamer, he engaged with the firm of Messrs. H. & S. Jones, of Brockville, Hooker and Henderson being the agents in Montreal. He was appointed to command their new steamer St. David, then building at Brockville. The St. David was a very small, high pressure side-wheel tow-boat and the living quarters were cramped, hot and uncomfortable. Captain Shepherd was sent up to Brockville

in May, 1841, to superintend the finishing of the boat and when she was ready brought her down to Lachine, shooting all the rapids safely, and commenced towing barges between Lachine and Carillon.

In the fall of 1841 the water being so low that the channel at Ste. Anne's was not safe to use, the first Government lock had not then been completed at this place. Captain Shepherd decided to try to find a safe channel in the rapids outside of the private lock at Vaudreuil, as the company owning the Lock would not permit any but their own steamers and barges to pass through. After a hard day's work of sounding and laying buoys, he found that he had marked out a good channel, which had as much water as the opposition company had in their lock, this being a little over three feet. By dropping an anchor at the head of the rapids with a long rope attached and the rope at the lower end fastened to a buoy, each barge was enabled to haul itself up by attaching the rope to its own windlass.

The finding of this channel at Vaudreuil naturally put an end to the monopoly of the private lock and Captain Shepherd was rewarded for his efforts on his employers' behalf, by being promoted that fall to the larger, low pressure steamer called the Oldfield. This he considered the greatest promotion he ever had, from the small steamer St. David, hot and uncomfortable at all times to the trim low pressure steamer Oldfield, where, although only 104 feet in length, the living quarters were more spacious and comfortable, making life more livable. When the Ottawa and Rideau Forwarding Company lost the monopoly of their private lock, a working arrangement was made between the two companies as to the towing business and the lock was to be used by the boats of both concerns.

During the winter of 1841-42 the

Oldfield was fitted with cabins to carry passengers, as the owners had decided to start a line of passenger steamers between Lachine and Bytown, without having cumbersome barges to tow. This was the start of a

regular passenger line. The steamer was fitted with a gentlemen's cabin below decks having twenty-four berths and a ladies' cabin on deck having twelve berths. Record has it that no expense was spared in the furnishing of this steamer. The Oldfield was to ply, as formerly, between Lachine and Carillon and another steamer called the Albion, owned by the Ottawa and Rideau Forwarding Company, which had also been fitted with passenger accommodation was to ply between Grenville and Bytown. Passengers being conveyed by stage between Montreal and Lachine and between Carillon and Grenville.

The Government lock at Ste. Anne de Bellevue was opened for traffic in 1843, and in 1847 the St. Lawrence Canals were opened, which resulted in the diversion of a large portion of the traffic from the Ottawa and Rideau to the St. Lawrence route.

The owners of the steamer Oldfield at this time, decided to give up their interests on the Ottawa and use the more direct St. Lawrence route for their forwarding business. Captain Shepherd then took advantage of the chance of buying out the steamer Oldfield and the goodwill of the company. He, together with Mr. J. Gibb, Notary, Mr. Wm. Parker, of Caldonia Springs, and Mr. A.E. Montmarquette, a merchant of Carillon, bought out the interests of H. & S. Jones on the Ottawa River and formed a company called the Ottawa Steamers Company. The Oldfield operated as formerly on the Lachine-Carillon route, connecting at Grenville with the Albion, which was still operated by MacPherson and Crane.

In 1848 the Ottawa Steamer's Co. was ordered a steamer to be built, to replace the Oldfield, by a Mr. Merritt, shipbuilder of Hochelaga.

The new steamer, which was called Ottawa Chief was 150 feet in length and 26 foot beam, and was specified to draw not more than 3 feet 3 inch. of water. When she was built, however, she was found to draw 4 feet 4 inch. and, although a splendid boat in every other way, she was unsuitable for the Ottawa trade on account of her draft. This steamer was therefore chartered by the Hon. John Hamilton, of Kingston, a large steamboat owner on the St. Lawrence, and the Oldfield was forced to continue for another season in the passenger trade.

The steamer Lady Simpson was built the following year by A. Cantin, ship-builder at Montreal, whose business is still in existence today. She was called after the wife of Sir George Simpson, Sir George having become a partner in the firm during the year 1849.

The Lady Simpson drew less than three feet of water, and, under the command of Captain R.W. Shepherd, was a great success in every way. Her beam engines were supplied by Mr. George Brush, of the Eagle Foundry, Montreal. The Oldfield was then used to tow rafts on the Lake of Two Mountains.

At this time the Shepherd interests bought out the steamer Phoenix, then operating on the upper route, from MacPherson and Crane. The passenger steamers of the Ottawa Steamers Company commenced carrying the Royal Mail between Lachine and Bytown in the spring of 1850. Sir George Simpson, Governor of the Hudson Bay Co., became the first president of the Ottawa Steamers Co. and the meetings of the partners took place in the old Hudson Bay House at Lachine.

In 1853 a new tow boat was ordered to be built at Cantin's yards to replace the Oldfield. This boat, the Atlas, was 150 feet in length with 25 foot beam and proved to be a splendid boat for the towing trade. She was commanded by Captain Joseph Blandin who had been on the Oldfield.

Captain Robert Ward Shepherd retired from active steamboating in

the fall of 1853 in order to visit his old home in Norfolk, England, and his brother Henry William Shepherd succeeded him in command of the steamer Lady Simpson.

Captain William Shepherd was Captain of steamers on the Ottawa for over fifty years and was an exceedingly fortunate one, for there never was a loss of life on any of the steamers under his command.

Captain R.W. Shepherd, on his return from England took over the management of the line, and on the death of Sir George Simpson in 1860 he became president.

The trade on the Ottawa, both freight and passenger, increased perceptibly and more steamers were added to the fleet. In 1860 the steamer Prince of Wales was built at Cantin's yards to replace the Lady Simpson, and had a long and successful career, running for twenty-nine seasons on the Montreal and Carillon route. This steamer was named for H.R.H. Edward, Prince of Wales, afterwards King Edward VII, who was out here at the time, and who travelled on this boat on his trip up the Ottawa in 1860. The same year the steamer Queen Victoria was built for this company by A. Cantin at Hull, to replace the old steamer Phoenix on the upper route between Grenville and Ottawa. This steamer was 169 feet in length and was considered a very speedy boat. The steamer Alexandra, 162 feet in length, was built in 1866 in Cantin's yards, and was used as a tow-boat. She was later sold to the Hapburns, of Picton, Ontario, and rebuilt at Cantin's, being lengthened to 174 feet in 1883, and her name slightly altered to Alexandria. This steamer ran for many years between the Bay of Quinte ports and Quebec with passengers and freight and became the property of the Canada Steamship Lines through the merger in 1914. The old Alex, as she was called, was wrecked in 1915 off Scarborough Bluffs, near Toronto, in a heavy gale.

In the year 1864 the name of the Ottawa Steamers Company was changed by Act of Parliament to the Ottawa River Navigation Company. In the same year the Carillon and Grenville Railway was purchased from the late Sir John Abbott and others, and was used to convey passengers from the lower boat at Carillon to the upper boat at Grenville, and vice versa, as the passenger steamers did not go through the small Carillon and Grenville Canal. In 1865 the small steamer Dagmar was built at Montreal by A. Cantin, for the market trade, being 126 feet in length. This steamer was burnt to the water's edge, while in winter quarters at Como wharf in March 1890. The steamer Meude was built in 1871 as a tow-boat and was but 112 feet in length. She was later used in the freight service between Montreal and Ottawa. The Queen Victoria was operated as a day boat until 1873, when a night service was inaugurated, using this steamer on the upper route and the steamer Princess, 142 feet in length, built by P. Girard at Carillon in 1872 on the lower route. The first steamer having an iron hull built for the company was the Peerless in 1873, and was operated in the day service between Ottawa and Grenville. The Peerless was not only the largest steamer ever to ply the Ottawa, but was considered one of the finest river steamers in Canada at that time. Her joiner work and fittings were of the best workmanship. She was 210 feet in length with 28 foot beam, and was licensed to carry 1100 passengers. Her hull was of wrought iron, brought out from England in sections, as was the case with many of the iron steamers of the day, and was put together at Ottawa, just about where the Ottawa Rowing Club now stands. This steamer was unfortunately burnt at Montebello in 1885 and was rebuilt into the Empress in 1886, the hull being shortened to 185 feet in length.

When the night service was discontinued, some time in the late seventies, the steamer Princess was

put into the freight service and the Queen Victoria was sold to Toronto interests and was brought down the Long Sault Rapids of the Ottawa, between Grenville and Carillon, in the high water of the spring, piloted by a rafting pilot. This was an unusual feat and she was the only large steamer ever recorded to have descended these rapids.

In 1889 the steel steamer Sovereign was built at Montreal by W.C. White, and was placed on the Montreal-Carillon route to replace the veteran Prince of Wales. She was 170 feet in length, having accommodation for 700 passengers, and proved to be a very popular boat, being most comfortable and very fast. She was furnished with the feathering type of paddle wheels, probably one of the first steamers, either on the St. Lawrence or Ottawa Rivers, to be so fitted. This vessel came to an untimely end, being destroyed by fire on the night of March 17th, 1906, while being made ready for her season's work. Her hull and engines sank below the ice, but were later raised, sold, and rebuilt into the steamer Imperial, which ran for many years between Montreal and King Edward Park.

The Sovereign was replaced on the mail line by the steel steamer Duchess of York, which had been especially built, in 1895 for the picnic and moonlight excursion trade. This steamer had the engines out of the old Prince of Wales and large wooden paddlewheels, and was found to be too slow for the lower route.

In 1907 the Empress, a much faster boat, was brought down from the upper route and placed on the Montreal-Carillon run and was replaced on the upper by the Duchess of York. The latter boat, in 1938, was the only one still afloat of all the old Ottawa River Navigation Co's steamers and now bore the name of Beloeil. She changed ownership a number of times and also bore the names of Sorel and Polerin. In 1933

this steamer, under the name of Felerin, was running between Hamilton Ont., and Montreal, but latterly has been used solely in the excursion trade out of Montreal. In June, 1933, she was sold to interests at Trois Rivières and converted into a pulp-wood barge.

The small screw steamer Victoria was built in 1899 at Toronto for the Ottawa River Navigation Company to run between Ottawa and Thurso. After 1919 her ownership changed a couple of times and she ended her days in Montreal Harbour, when her hull was squeezed by the ice in the winter of 1927-28. This was the only screw driven steamer ever built for the old O.R.N. Company, all the others being side-wheel boats.

The Carillon and Grenville Railway was unique, having the old broad gauge of 5 feet 6 inches, and two old wood-burning locomotives the Ottawa and the Grenville. The former had been used on the Grand Trunk Railway and was built at Birkenhead, England in 1857. The Grand Trunk had fifty engines built at this place and the old Ottawa was number 29 of the Birkenhead type. The locomotive Grenville was built at Hamilton, Ont., some time in the late fifties, and was a lighter type with inside cylinders. This railway was used by the Ottawa River Navigation Co., until that company ceased to operate the through line to Ottawa after 1910 and the rolling stock of the railway was finally sold for scrap during the years of the First Great War.

In 1882 Robert Ward Shepherd, Junior, son of the founder, became general manager of the O.R.N. Company, having started his steamboat career on leaving school as purser of the steamer Dogmar and later on the Prince of Wales. He continued as manager for two years after the line was sold out in 1907 to the Central Railway of Canada, a company in which the late Senator Owens and the late C.N. Armstrong were the chief promoters.

Captain Robert Ward Shephard, senior, president of the O.R.N. Co., died

at his country seat at Como, P.Q., in the summer of 1895. His brother William, who succeeded him in command of the steamer Lady Simpson in 1853, also commanded the steamer Prince of Wales from 1860 until the Sovereign came out in 1899, when he took command of the latter steamer. He retired from active steamboating in 1906, when the Sovereign was destroyed by fire. He died at the age of eighty-five in 1910.

Captain Peter McGowan of Lachine commanded the old steamer Princess for a number of years, and was succeeded on that boat by Captain W.F. Halcro of Hudson, P.Q.

Captain Alexander Bowie was for years the popular commander of the steamers Phoenix, Queen Victoria, Fearless and Empress on the upper route between Ottawa and Grenville. Captain Bowie had started as purser on the Steamer Lady Simpson and married a sister of Captains R.W. and H.W. Shephard, and made his home in Ottawa.

Captain Evangelist Gauthier was in command of the freight steamer Maude when that steamer was sunk in collision with the steamer Ottawa of the Ottawa Transportation Co. in September, 1906, opposite Hudson. This collision took place in the middle of the night and three persons on the Maude were drowned, the stewardess, chief engineer and a passenger. This was the first time in the history of the Ottawa River Navigation Co. that any lives had been lost in any of their steamers.

After the Company was sold in 1907 the new owners continued the through line only until the fall of 1910. After that the mail steamers ran merely as excursion boats between Montreal and Carillon and between Ottawa and Montebello, the upper boat making no connection with the lower. The Princess was laid up at Carillon in the fall of 1913 as being too old for further service. A few years later the Duchess of York was sold and ran below Montreal and was also oper-

ated as the ferry to St. Helen's Island for a couple of seasons. The Express and Victoria were taken over by an Ottawa syndicate in 1920 and the former, after years of running excursions and shooting the Lachine Rapids, was tied up at Ottawa in the spring of 1932 and sold for scrap and broken up in 1935.

After the coming of the railways on both sides of the river, busi-

ness for the boats gradually dwindled, and with the coming of the automobiles and trucks the death knell seems to have been sounded for the steamboat business not only on the Ottawa but on other waters. Today, a passenger steamer on the Ottawa would be an unusual sight. The only boats one sees on the Ottawa now are the small diesel boats carrying paper, some oil tankers and a few tugs and scows.

RESUME OF THE MINUTES

Parent Society

Meeting of February 21st:

This adjourned annual meeting was held in the Queen's Hotel, Montreal, under the chairmanship of Mr. Loye. There were 16 members and 7 guests present. The establishment of new headquarters in the Queen's Hotel was confirmed. The lecture of the evening was "The Quebec Bridges", presented by Mr. James J. McMahon. The constitution as drawn up by the Constitutional Committee was tabled and read by the Committee's chairman. It was submitted with the approval of Messrs. Nicholls (Chairman), Loye, and Smith; Mr. Terroux dissented. After a thorough discussion, it was obvious that it was not satisfactory to several of the members, to wit Messrs. Cole, McClure, and Terroux in particular, and the time being limited, the meeting was adjourned.

Meeting of March 13th:

An adjourned annual meeting in the headquarters of the Society; Mr. Loye, chairman; 13 members and 1 guest present. There were exhibited the new annual membership cards, and the February issue of the Bulletin. Mr. Nicholls reported upon the kindness with which he was received at the special meeting of the Toronto Chapter on the 24th. The meeting now constituted itself into a Committee of the Whole to discuss the Constitution and By-laws of the Association, and the By-laws of the Parent Chapter. Each article was discussed separately and any desir-

able changes incorporated. When the revised text was submitted to the meeting an equal number of votes was cast for and against; the Chairman (Mr. Nicholls) cast the deciding vote for.

Meeting of April 9th:

A regular monthly meeting; Mr. Loye, chairman; 15 members present. After some preliminary business the Chairman, having been previously warned that a group of members still felt dissatisfied with the constitution and by-laws, received a request from Mr. Terroux that the matter again be reopened. Mr. Nicholls protested, the document had been legally adopted and could not be set aside, save by a process established by it. He was overruled by the President. After much discussion, it was moved by Mr. McClure that the idea of a federal constitution and by-laws be dropped, and only a constitution and by-laws for the local chapter be drawn up. Votes: 11 for, 1 against.

Meeting of April 25th:

A special meeting; Mr. Loye, chairman; 14 members, 12 guests present. The meeting was addressed by Mr. H. S. Spry, assistant to the Chief of the Investigation Department, Canadian Pacific Railway, Montreal, on "Policing of a Great Railway".

Toronto Chapter

Meeting of January 5th:

John Griffin read the petition to be sent to the Association in Montreal. Petition moved accepted by F.H.Howard and signed by the thirteen Charter (or Founding) Members. Arnold Browne was elected Treasurer by acclamation. It was determined to hold meetings every third Friday and a schedule was drawn up.

Meeting of January 26th:

The Secretary proposed that a Chapter Bulletin be issued in March. The President proposed the possibility of an exhibition of railroad material to be sponsored by the Chapter. Discussion was postponed.

Meeting of February 16th:

Twenty new By-Laws were read by the Secretary. They were moved accepted by F.H.Howard and seconded by M.A.Fletcher. The President reported on the exhibition mentioned at the last meeting but it was determined that nothing should be done about it until the autumn.

Special Meeting of February 24th:

A special meeting held to hear an address by R.V.V.Nicholls, entitled "Streamlining applied to railroads". F.H.Howard extended the Chapter's thanks to Mr. Nicholls.

Meeting of March 8th:

The President outlined a project suggested by R.V.V.Nicholls with reference to a card-index catalogue of photographs of all Canadian locomotives and the possible adoption of the plan as a Chapter project. A motion by the Treasurer that the Directors be empowered to disburse the funds of the Chapter was adopted.

Meeting of March 29th:

The Treasurer read a financial report. The Secretary announced the election of six new members. The Secretary read a communication from the Toronto Model Trainmen's Club suggesting possible collaboration with the Chapter in some spheres. Several new By-Laws were adopted.

Meeting of April 19th:

The President suggested that the season's activities be closed with a dinner meeting; this proposal was unanimously approved. The President suggested the possibility of a Chapter sponsored excursion to be held during the summer months. Mr. Andrew Merrilees was asked to survey the possibilities. Mr. W.E. Matthews, Publicity Director of the Toronto Model Trainmen's Club, at the President's request, spoke briefly on the activities of that organization. The President extended the Chapter's best wishes to Pte. Harry Wales, 48th Highlanders, C.A.S.F., who was attending his last meeting.

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