

*From Cattle Boat to
Passenger Steamer*

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From Cattle Boat to Passenger Steamer

By FRED LANDON

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From cattle carrier to Canadian lake passenger steamer was the curious transformation that came in the year 1881 for the British ship *Campana*.

There are probably few people about Lake Huron or Georgian Bay or Sarnia who today can recall ever seeing this salt water vessel which for 15 years was on these waters.

GLASGOW BUILT

Originally called the *North*, she was built at Glasgow for the cattle trade between England and South America, though at the time she was purchased by Canadian interests she was running between England and South Africa in the same trade. A twin screw steamer, she was the first of that type in the Canadian lake shipping. She crossed the Atlantic in the early summer of 1881 and on arrival at the Port of Montreal was cut in two in order that she might be taken through the canals. It was the first time that this had been attempted, though the same procedure was followed four years later when the three new CPR steamers, the *Algoma*, *Alberta* and *Athabaska*, came from the Clyde to engage in the Upper lakes trade.

The *Campana* arrived at Collingwood on November 14, 1881, bearing in every way the appearance of an ordinary British tramp steamer. She was dirty and had no accommodation of any kind for passengers, but all this was changed during the winter months. Cabins were added, the ship was painted and it was an entirely new vessel in appearance which in the spring of 1882 began its regular trips between the Georgian Bay and the head of the Lakes, Fort William, Prince Arthur and Duluth. On this route she ran in company with the paddle wheel steamer *Frances Smith* and the propeller driven *City of Owen Sound*.

The *Campana* was widely known as the "Iron Boat" as she was the first iron steamer in the Canadian trade. It is true that the *Chicora* which came to the Lakes in the fall of 1868 has an iron hull but the *Campana* has been described as iron right up to the promenade deck, and indeed above that as

she was built out to the rails amidships, so that when passengers set out to walk around the ship outside the cabins they ran up against an iron wall as they neared the centre of the ship.

WELL REGARDED

The *Campana* brought hundreds of families from old Ontario to settle in the west and was a favorite for travelers as she was regarded as most seaworthy. In the eighties her arrival at Port Arthur was an event. From her decks would come great quantities of household goods belonging to those who were entering the Canadian west. She also brought in livestock, cattle, sheep and pigs which must have recalled to members of her crew, if they had been with her in pre-Canadian days, the cattle trade for which she had been built. Added to this was endless amounts of railroad building supplies for the construction of the CPR which was then under way.

After four years the *Campana* came under new management, being taken over by the CPR to replace the *Algoma*, one of the three new Clyde-built steamers, which was lost on Isle Royale on November 7, 1885, in her first year on the Lakes. This was one of the great tragedies of Lake Superior for there was heavy loss of life as well as the disappearance of as fine a boat as was then upon the Upper Lakes. Curiously the *Algoma* went on the rocks of Isle Royale on the very day that Donald Smith (later Lord Strathcona) drove the final spike marking the completion of the CPR.

It is of interest to note that the engines of the *Algoma* were later removed from the waters of Lake Superior and brought to Owen Sound where they were placed in the new steamer *Manitoba*, built there in 1889. The *Manitoba* was scrapped only recently so that those engines had been in use for more than 60 years. The *Manitoba* was scrapped at the Steel Company plant in Hamilton.

When the *Campana* was released by the CPR interests after the *Manitoba* came in service she was acquired by the Beatty interests at Sarnia and ran from that port in conjunction with the *United Empire* and *Monarch* for several years, going to the Lakehead and to Duluth. Here she was a popular vessel with the traveling public and made money for her owners. In 1895 she was sold to the Quebec Steamship Company to run on the St. Lawrence route between Montreal and Pictou, N.S. To enter this trade she had once more to be cut in two and the separate portions reunited at Montreal. Apparently this operation was not without fault, or two successive divisions may have created weakness, for on June 17, 1909, the *Campana*

went ashore a few miles below Quebec and broke in two at the place where she had been joined together for the second time.

So ended the record of this Glasgow-built ship which had sailed both fresh and salt waters, carried cattle to England for food and carried cattle for the settlers in the Canadian west and had been the means by which thousands of people had traveled to this new land.

During her operations on the Lakes she was first commanded by Captain F. B. Anderson. When he brought out the *Alberta* in 1884 the command was turned over to Captain John McNabb who stayed with her until she went to the St. Lawrence route. He then went to the *United Empire*, built at Sarnia in 1883, and remained with her until his retirement many years later. In all his long sailing career on the Lakes he is said to have never had an accident. He was Scottish born, quiet in speech and calm in an emergency. There are many stories told of him, all of which reflect a colorful personality. One such has to do with a morning on Lake Superior when the “old man” had been on the bridge all night. After breakfast one of the passengers climbed the iron ladder to the hurricane deck and entered into conversation. He realized that the captain had been on watch all night and in an effort to cheer him up he pointed to a clear spot in the sky above the heavy fog bank and remarked: “It seems to be clear up there, captain.” The skipper’s reply was, “Yes, but we don’t happen to be going that way.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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