



Framed by lifeboat on the Thomas Rennie, the Sam McBride helps maintain the shuttle service that provides passengers to Centre Island with a ferry every 15 minutes. —Globe and Mail, Graham Bezzant

## No-profit ferries go for a million

By ALDEN BAKER

The operation of the Toronto Island ferry service was once described as a scandalous waste of money.

In 40 years it has never turned in one cent of profit, but to many citizens, even to those who wait in the hot sun like cattle in a pen outside the mainland dock, a trip to Toronto Island is nothing without a ride on a ferry.

Metropolitan Toronto has given up hope that the federal Government will help build a \$10,000,000 tunnel for cars to Toronto Island and there is no longer interest in a bridge over the Eastern Gap.

"The ferry service is here to stay," Metro Chairman William Allen said in an interview. He believes that with some modifications the ferry service can handle traffic to the islands for years to come.

These modifications include two-level loading of the ferries to reduce the time at stops, and additional slips at the islands. A 1,000-passenger ferry may be added to the fleet.

The fleet has at present two 1,000-passenger vessels, one 500-passenger vessel and two 125-passenger boats, one of them an ice-breaker for year-round service. The ferries run daily from 6 a.m. to midnight.

The service has achieved an unchallenged record of annual deficits ranging from \$647 in 1926 to \$354,000 in 1954.

If the deficits over the years could have been converted to cash they would have been enough to build pedestrian tunnels under the Western and Eastern Gaps or to pay half the cost of a vehicular tunnel.

Metro is spending \$14,000,000 to redevelop Toronto Island as a 600-acre recreational area and considers the ferry service an essential factor in the attraction. However, a monorail from the mainland may be considered later on to supplement the ferries.

The fleet has a peak capacity today of 5,000 persons an hour. It could be expanded to 9,000 an hour with two more 1,000-passenger vessels.

From 1935 to 1938 the ferries carried more than 2,000,000 persons a year to the islands. During and after the Second World War the number of passengers dropped until 1961, when the first results of the redevelopment began to reawaken public interest. The lowest year was 1960, when 510,000 passengers were carried. This year Metro expects to transport 1,000,000 passengers to the islands.

# No-profit ferries go for a million

There was a ferry service on Toronto Bay before Toronto Island existed. In 1833 the ferry Sir John of The Peninsula, powered by two horses working a treadmill, gave a private company the monopoly on a harbor ferry service.

By 1851 Toronto Bay was crowded with 47 different ferrvboats of different sizes and shapes, plowing back and forth. The private companies did almost everything but sink each other's ferries. Fares were pushed so low by the competition that several companies lost money. High-pressure sales tactics were used to get people off the street and onto the ferries.

In 1925 grumbling about the quality of the ferry service started. Complaints about schedules, waiting periods and assorted minor irritations mounted and finally reached City Hall.

This led to one of the most fantastic bits of bureaucratic bumbling ever recorded in Toronto's civic administration, accusations of attempted corruption and bribery, demands for a judicial investigation and a strange game of musical chairs between the city's public transit authority and City Hall.

There was doubt that the Toronto Ferry Co. would put its ferry fleet in service in 1926. The company owed the city \$6,500 in rent for leased land. The lease had expired four years earlier but the company still used the land. Island residents prodded the city fathers about an adequate ferry service and the company agreed to provide a service in 1926 if the city would buy the fleet at the end of the summer season.

City Hall knew nothing about operating a ferry fleet, but jumped in with both feet.

The city paid \$337,000 for the ferry fleet

plus assorted buildings on Hanlan's Point, including a merry-go-round, a swimming club, a stadium and a bandstand.

With much reluctance the TTC found itself in charge of the fleet. An inspection prior to the 1927 summer season disclosed what the city had acquired.

The John Hanlan was to be the first boat in service for the season. It was put into drydock. The TTC report stated: "The conditions upon removal of the planking not capable of description by mere words."

The TTC informed the city that the ferry assets were in extremely bad condition and the Hanlan's Point dock close to ruin. About this time a Department of Transport inspector ordered a long list of repairs to the fleet.

The John Hanlan, the Jasmine and the Clark Brothers were put to a fiery death in a spectacular show in Lake Ontario for the benefits of thousands of citizens who crowded the shoreline at Sunnyside one summer evening.

The TTC had to go to court to fend off scheduled competition from private water taxis, suffered verbal abuse over refusing to provide winter ferry service, and generally considered the ferry service a source of extreme embarrassment until it was taken off its hands and given to the Metropolitan Parks Department in 1962.

The height of indignity was for Metro to offer \$1 for the ferry fleet.

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