

JOSEPH MEDILL INQUIRY

Ice as Probable Cause of Vessel's Loss

VIEW OF B.O.T. EXPERTS

From Our Own Correspondent

NEWCASTLE, Tuesday. The Board of Trade Inquiry into the loss of the all-welded motorship *Joseph Medill*, presumably in the Atlantic on or after Aug. 17 last, while the vessel was on her maiden voyage from the Tyne to Toronto, was opened in Newcastle to-day. The Inquiry is being held before Judge Richardson, Wreck Commissioner, with Commander H. Stockwell, Captain Peirs De Legh and Mr. J. L. Scott as assessors.

Mr. Owen L. Bateson appeared for the Board of Trade; Mr. G. St. Clair Pilcher for the builders, Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson, Ltd., of Wallsend; Mr. E. W. Brightman for the owners of the vessel, the Quebec & Ontario Transportation Company, Ltd.; and Mr. Alexander Ross for the Navigators and Engineer Officers Union and the National Union of Seamen.

Opening the case for the Board of Trade, Mr. BATESON said the *Joseph Medill* was an all-welded vessel of 2087 tons gross, fitted with two Diesel engines and built for carrying grain, newsprint and coal on the Great Lakes. Her length over all was 251 ft. and her breadth 43 ft. There were three holds and four hatches, with 3-in. woodwork covers, and fitted with permanent locking bars, three on either side, and for the purpose of the voyage she was fitted with additional lashings. She had four watertight bulkheads and two lifeboats, which could carry 21 persons. There were 16 people on board when she sailed. The contract price was £36,780, for about which sum she was insured. Her freight of coal was insured for £6500, and stores and bunkers for £3000, and there was a war risk insurance of 210,000 Canadian dollars. The vessel was classed Lloyd's certificate "A1," for service on the Great Lakes from April to October. She had a service speed of nine and a half knots, and the welding was guaranteed for service for twelve months, and there was a six months' guarantee in respect of other parts of the construction.

WIRELESS EXEMPTION

The vessel did not carry a wireless installation, an exemption having been obtained from the Board of Trade by the builders on the instructions of the owners. The exemption was granted under the Board's powers applicable to a vessel making a single long voyage and not meant for international service. A small wireless receiving set was installed.

Before the vessel left the Tyne she loaded 2784 tons, trimming was done in all holds, and there was no reason to suppose that the coal was not properly loaded. On her trials the steering had not been satisfactory, although the gear was in order. The vessel was drydocked and alterations made to the skegg between the propellers and the rudder, and a further trial proved that the steering was perfectly satisfactory. Mr. Vipond, the owner's superintending engineer, who sailed with the vessel, had been satisfied that the *Joseph Medill* was a fit and proper vessel to make the voyage. The vessel left on Aug. 10, and was reported at Dunnet Head on Aug. 12. She was last seen and reported by the master of the Norwegian steamer *Stavangerfjord* at 11.40 a.m. on Aug. 17 in 57 19 N. and 26 12 W. The master of the Norwegian vessel said there was nothing unusual in her course or condition.

POSSIBLE OR PROBABLE CAUSES

Mr. Bateson said it must be presumed that the *Joseph Medill* was lost with all hands. When last reported her average speed must have been about six knots. The Board of Trade was anxious that the Court should express some opinion as to the possible probable causes of the loss of the vessel. There were six causes which might be considered, however, improbable. Counsel proceeded to speak of what he called the least probable cause, namely, collision. He said it was highly improbable that two ships might have sunk and nothing have been heard, or one sunk without a report from the other vessel. The possibility of fire was remote, as a ship afire would almost certainly have been sighted in that part of the Atlantic. There had been cases of spontaneous combustion in cargoes of coal. Ventilation precautions had been made before the vessel sailed. There was a possibility that the vessel might have been wrecked on a remote part of the Newfoundland or Labrador coasts where there was little shipping. As to faulty construction resulting in a leak such as the pumps could not cope with, there was no reason to suppose that, or faulty construction. The welded form of construction was one which had proved satisfactory and the construction had been carefully supervised.

Mr. Bateson put in two samples of welded steel as used in the vessel. He said that if the welding was not done properly a crack in the plate might occur, but there was no reason to suppose that had happened. He said that emphatically in defence of the builders.

BAD WEATHER REPORTS

As to bad weather, there was no reason to presume that the cargo was not properly stowed. It had been done under the direction of Messrs. Arthur Stott & Co. Bad weather reports had been secured from different vessels in that part of the Atlantic and apparently there had been heavy weather about Aug. 21 to 22, but further south than where the *Joseph Medill* should have been, so far as could be ascertained, there was nothing exceptional in the reports over her course which might have caused a disaster.

Ice, in the opinion of the Board of Trade experts, was probably the most likely cause of the loss of the vessel. Ice and "growlers" had been reported at Belle Isle during August and September. The owners, too, had not ignored the possibility of ice in their instructions to the master, Captain J. Macintosh—a seaman of long and wide experience. The owners had told him to avoid ice and weather damage to the vessel, as speed was not so important as the arrival of the vessel in good condition.

Mr. Bateson added that 80 similar type vessels, although not all of them all-welded, for service on the Great Lakes, had crossed the Atlantic without mishap, and the all-welded motorship *Franquelin*, built by Messrs. Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson to the same designs as the *Joseph Medill*, had crossed without incident. The master of the *Franquelin* would be called.

Mr. JOHN WILSON ELLIOTT, secretary of Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson, Ltd., gave evidence as to the contract for the *Joseph Medill*, and said plans and specifications were prepared by Messrs. Lambert & Germain, of Montreal, and Mr. W. Lambert had supervised the work.

Mr. HARRY BOCLER, a naval architect with Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson, Ltd., said that the keel of the *Joseph Medill* was laid on Feb. 16 and the vessel was launched on July 14, 1935.

In answer to Mr. BATESON, WITNESS said he thought that the building time was "quick." The skegg in the *Joseph Medill* had not been carried sufficiently far back resulting in a difficulty in steering. It was difficult to get the rudder back once it had been put hard over. Some difficulty had been found in keeping the ship on her course over the measured mile speed trial. The skegg was lengthened and the rudder slightly altered, after which the steering was thoroughly satisfactory.

EXAMINATION OF WELDERS

Mr. NORMAN HUNTER, shipyard general manager of Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson, Ltd., in answer to Mr. Bateson, said that all new welders were examined to see that they were efficient. All the welders engaged on the *Joseph Medill* were thoroughly competent. The ship was not built in unusually quick time, and there had been no pressure to expedite the building operations. The doors on either side of the ship's side used in the Lakes' service for ventilation had been prevented from opening during the voyage by welded bars. His firm had built several Lake vessels for the same firm, and one all-welded vessel, the *Peter G. Campbell*, had been towed across the Atlantic. She was intended for towing and had no propelling machinery. The *Moira* was an all-welded tanker which had crossed the Atlantic several times in ordinary service.

In answer to Mr. Ross, Mr. HUNTER said that the *Joseph Medill* was the first all-welded Lake steamer to cross the Atlantic under her own power built by his firm. After the welding was finished and sights were taken the keel was straight, although there was some slight distortion and waviness.

In answer to Captain PEIRS DE LEGH, witness admitted that a stronger ship than the *Joseph Medill* would have been necessary had she been in constant Atlantic service. There had never been any complaints of leaking. He admitted that with a speed of about seven knots the vessel might have had difficulty in maintaining steeerage

way in an Atlantic gale. The vessel had been docked for rudder alterations when she was loaded.

Mr. BOCLER, recalled, said the vessel had a block co-efficient of .884, giving the vessel a high deadweight capacity in relation to her size.

Captain JOSEPH S. DEE, the master of the *Franquelin*, a sister ship to the *Joseph Medill*, said that his vessel behaved on her recent Atlantic maiden voyage as an ordinary ship except that she could not be headed into a heavy seaway. She ran 150 miles out of her course in a gale which reached force 9 and lasted two days. She took heavy seas and was a wet ship amidships, due to blunt bows, but she made no water and sustained no damage. The workmanship for the welding seemed above that of riveted ships which he had many times taken across the Atlantic.

The hearing was adjourned until to-morrow.

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