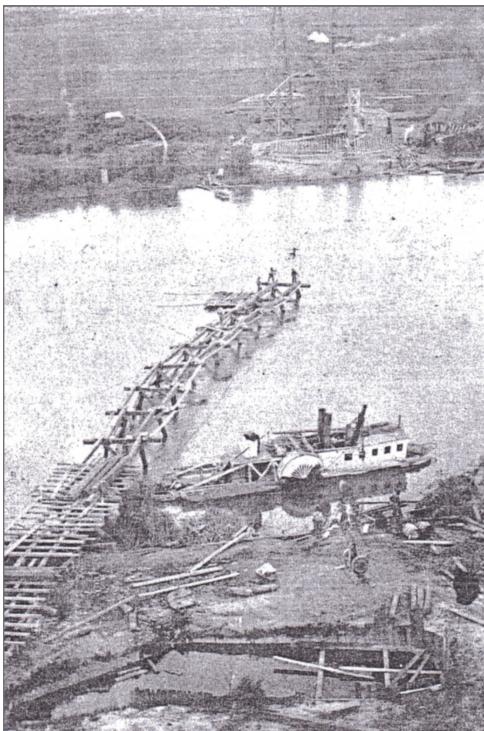


# *Captain Large*

*and the*

## *Empress of Ireland*



*Working at the Grand Trunk Bridge, 1912*

By Roy Brown  
Brandon Chamber of Commerce  
Brandon, Manitoba, Canada

### PREFACE

All too often, local or regional histories never get written. There is not too much doubt but that there are people who remember what happened and when, but it is seldom that anyone takes the time to research the rumors and then put the facts down on paper,

Roy Brown was appointed by the Brandon Chamber of Commerce to a special portfolio this fall, charged with coming up with the type of history that could help in the celebration of Grand Valley Days as part of the Centennial year program.

Captain Large and his paddlewheel boat sailed across Mr. Brown's horizon quite early in the research project, and the story was traced back to the little shop at Coulter, where

the boat was first built.

Portions of the boat were rescued from more than half a century of silt on the bank of the Assiniboine, just before freeze-up last fall. Much more of the boat remains to be found when spring returns.

But until then, and regardless of any future success in once more restoring the Empress of Ireland - Assiniboine Queen to a life on the rolling waves, the story of Captain Large and his boat is now in your hands.

We would like to extend appreciation here to Christie's School Supplies, a pioneer Brandon and western Manitoba firm, who underwrote the initial costs of publishing this story.

History isn't just something that happened hundreds of years ago, miles away. Manitoba is filled with interesting tales of yesterday. We hope you enjoy this one.

Garth Stouffer,  
Associate Editor,  
THE BRANDON SUN

Second Edition  
Printed in Canada

## CAPTAIN LARGE AND THE EMPRESS OF IRELAND

Hunt Johnston Rolston Large was born in Shelburne, Ontario, on June 17, 1876, and died April 10, 1947. According to information received from his son William in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, he came west at the turn of the century. He probably came with the C.P.R. as it moved west along the southern route through Waskada, Coulter and Lyleton, between 1900 and 1903. In any case he did start a business in the village of Coulter under the name South Antler Steel Works. His business cards and announcements indicate that he ran a general repair and machine works, making many different types of farm implements and small items such as wiffle trees, double trees and cement mixers.

According to people like Mr. Wesley Mallo, 82 year old pioneer of the Coulter district, Rolston was very well liked. He apparently had a winning personality, and even people with whom he had dealings, and may never have paid, all had a good word for him. One thing for certain is that H.J.R. Large was extremely clever. He was a first class steam engineer, a blacksmith and a master mechanic of no mean ability.

When automobiles started making their appearance on the main roads, Rolston, according to articles in the Melita newspaper accounts of that era, was given credit for repairing cars left on the side of the roads because the driver knew very little about the new means of transportation. One article of 1909 states that an American visitor to Coulter could have been left stranded had not Rolston come to his aid and made repairs and adjustments to his car.

Although Rolston Large may not have been blessed with many worldly possessions, he did have a big Irish heart. There are many stories of how he tramped through the snow drifts in cold weather, to take some of the pioneers their weekly mail, receiving in return a sincere thanks and a hot meal.

There was a time too, when Rolston saved the life of a man who had become tangled in the wheel of a threshing machine. Rolston coolly took a heavy hammer and broke enough of the large wheel, which was endangering the man's life, to free him. The victim,

although badly injured and somewhat marred by the accident, was forever grateful to Rolston, who thought nothing at all of the incident, even though he himself could have been injured. It was incidents like this that made people like him, and it is little wonder that he was able to get financial backing for his boat building enterprises

Many people have asked "Why would a man build a big boat in a small village like Coulter"? The answer would probably be much the same as the one given by the man when he was asked why he wanted to climb a high mountain - it was the challenge.

After spending several weeks in the research of the boat building activities of Captain Large, I have come to the conclusion that, while the boat built in Coulter, with the help of Andy and William McKague, was not a masterpiece, it was seaworthy. Large, having little money but plenty of courage, wrecked an old C.P.E. box car. The heavy plank flooring was used in the boat, and some lumber taken from the inside of an old house, along with some new lumber, gave him sufficient material to build the hull and the superstructure. The boat was propelled by a large one-cylinder gasoline threshing engine attached to the belt driven drive-shaft of the two large sidewheel paddles. The paddle wheels were about nine feet in diameter and were made of steel. It must be remembered that electric arc and acetylene welding had not been invented in 1908, when Large made his first boat, and all metal parts were made in the forge in his little workshop. The workmanship in the paddle wheels and other parts used in giving the boat structural strength, was the work of a man who was a master tradesman. While the superstructure lacked the professional touch of the boats built in boat building establishments, it was, nevertheless, a good looking craft. It was painted white and green and her name was an indication that Captain Large, being an Irishman, was not ashamed of his "Empress of Ireland".

The boat was built not too far from the old church in Coulter, and the story goes that on the lovely Sunday mornings in spring, when the minister was giving his sermon, Captain Large would start up his noisy machines and disrupt the church service. The elders of the church finally suggested to the minister that he have a little

Page 3

chat with Captain Large, and ask him to either come to church or not operate his noisemakers during the service. The minister did call on Captain Large, and when asked by some of the elders next day as to how the meeting had turned out, the minister replied, "It was the biggest mistake I have ever made. He knows more about the bible than I do". Large however, did not operate his machines during the service thereafter.

Then there is the story of how Captain Large kept one of his children warm in the old house in which they lived. They had an old fashioned cook stove with a high back. He fashioned a cradle out of wire, and hooked it over the back above the stove, to keep the baby warm on cold winter days.

The Large family lived in the village for some time, and they also lived on the high plateau overlooking the Souris and South Antler rivers. Rolston had a team of mules, and used to tether them out at night. He drove two iron pipes into the ground beside the house for the purpose of tying up the mules. The two pipes are still there beside the basement of his old home.

"The Empress of Ireland" was built in 1908 - 9, and was launched that year on the Souris River, just below the town. There was considerable difficulty in getting the big craft to the river, and according to reports, many people were present to see whether the "thing" would float or go to the bottom. One skeptic was alleged to have said, "You don't expect that thing to float, do you Rolston"? Captain Large painted a water line along the hull, and the skeptic was quite surprised when the boat drew just enough water to come up to the line. He never doubted for one minute that the "Empress" would be seaworthy, and he was right.

According to the passenger tickets for the year 1910, still in the possession of Miss Margaret Elliott of Melita, the "Empress" was built to ply the Souris between Napinka and Scotia, North Dakota. How many trips were made is not known. One thing however, still in the mind of Mr. Mallo, is that the boat was built narrow in order to pass between the piling of the C.P.R. bridge. He recalls too, that he often steered the boat while Captain Large would sing lively songs and accompany himself on the banjo, to the delight of the passengers, who had taken along their picnic baskets full of

Page 4

goodies, to make a day of it. Large's charming personality did indeed overshadow anything that may have been left to be desired, as far as the workmanship of the boat was concerned.

The Melita Progress reported on October 17, 1907 and September 23, 1909, that Captain Large was the proud father of another girl, and that his friends were looking for cigars.

"The Empress of Ireland" was beached in the fall of 1909. She was used in the spring of 1910 for a short time, then Rolston decided to move her to a more lucrative area.

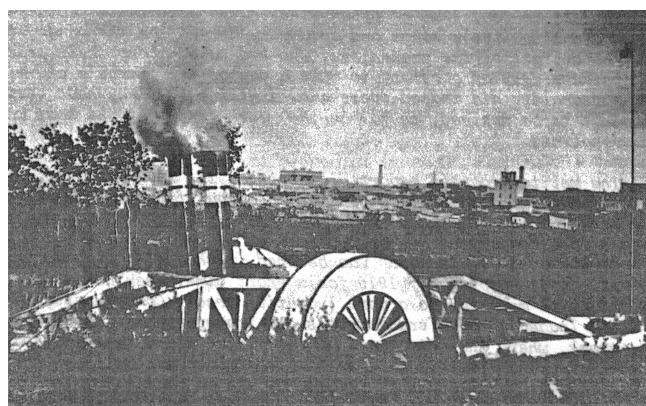
Consequently she was loaded on huge truck wheels and transported to the C.P.R. track, where she was placed on two flatcars and taken to Brandon in July. She was used as an excursion boat on the Assiniboine River during the Brandon Fair. How she was taken from the train to the river is not known, but Large's ingenuity would soon overcome any problems he may have encountered.

"The Empress" plied the Assiniboine for the balance of 1910, between Currie's Landing, east of Brandon, and Curran Park, west of the city. In the fall of that year she was taken up the Snye River to where Large had opened a machine shop behind 347-18th Street North. There he removed her one cylinder engine, and after adding about ten feet to her mid section, he installed two large steam boilers, parallel to each other, which were connected to two single Sawyer Massey steam cylinder engines. The engines were set on quarters to prevent sticking on centre, and she was operated the same as a railway locomotive. She was a powerful craft, with two telescopic exhaust stacks to enable her to pass under the bridges on the route. She had two cabins, and according to the passenger tickets, she had a piano on board for entertainment. When Captain Large could get a trusted person to steer the boat, he would play the piano and sing his favorite songs.

Whether the "Empress" made much money is doubtful, but this was not too important to her owner. He loved the good life, and getting his boat full of people on a Sunday afternoon, and telling them that the scenery on the Assiniboine was unsurpassed, made him just as happy, in all likelihood, as Onassis' seven million dollar yacht makes him happy.

Page 5

#### **Remains after fire in 1911**



### **Rebuilding begins – Spring 1912**

The "Empress" was tied down for the winter in the fall of 1911, at the mouth of the Snye River. She burned to the ice that winter, and all that was left in the spring was her big boilers, the paddle wheels and a portion of the hull. Like a lot of fires that happen when no one is around, Large was blamed for setting his ship on fire. Recent research into the story of the boat's history however, clears his name. It appears that two boys broke into the boat and were probably trying out their first cigarettes. Large was probably blamed because he did owe some money to people who had financed his dream.

Page 6

Captain Large however, was not a man to throw in the sponge, just because a fire had burned his ship. He found a group of men in Brandon who listened to his story about how money could be made by hauling coal down the river to where the Grand Trunk Railway were building the new line into Brandon from Harte. One of the group was a Coal and Wood dealer named Robert Lane. Wouldn't it be a wonderful tie-up for a coal dealer to be a part owner of a coal barge, deliver the coal to the boat, and take it down the river and sell it to the Grand Trunk to run their machines? Lane agreed, and two and possibly three more businessmen also thought the idea was a good one, and a young man of twenty, by the name of Art Mansoff, decided he wanted to join the group as the engineer, having had some steam engineering experience on threshing machines. The charred hull of the "Empress" was taken up the Snye behind a gasoline powerboat to Large's shop, where she was rebuilt and converted to carry coal and other cargo. Because she was a low narrow craft, she had a tendency to rock, so that two pontoon out-riggers were attached in front of the paddle wheels. This made her more stable and easier to handle.

Captain Large could not bear the thought of painting "Empress of Ireland" on a coal barge, so she was renamed "Assiniboine Queen". She was used for the summer and fall of 1912 to haul coal and materials downstream to where the bridge was being built over the Assiniboine. She was caught in the late fall in the ice, and was tied up with two logging chains on the north shore, about two hundred feet downstream from the north abutment of the bridge. The spring of 1913 brought a very severe flood and torrential rains. "The Queen" finally went to the bottom, and there she remained until the Jaycees of Brandon moved about six feet of silt and took out her big paddlewheels, the engines and two logging chains which were still as good as new. The two boilers had been removed during the first Great War, to make war machines.

Now that the history of the old ship has come to light, many people have said, "Heck, I knew where that old boat was all the time. Why I used to fish off it when I was a kid". The strange part is, that no one had ever thought of saving the old ship and placing it in a museum - no one that is, until I was asked by the Chamber

Page 7

of Commerce to enlist help to bring the salvageable parts in to Brandon.

Salvaging the old boat has caused a great deal of excitement in Brandon, and for that matter, all over Manitoba. It has motivated enthusiastic people into making application to the Centennial Corporation to start a much-needed museum, and sparked the formation of the Assiniboine Historical Society in this city.

Captain H.J.R. Large's dream of over sixty-two years ago in the small village of Coulter, may have seemed a crazy dream to a lot of people who knew him well, but he should be remembered for having had the courage to satisfy his ambitions and for having left us something that children of the future can read about and wonder how a man could build such a big boat in a small prairie village.

Only one man is living who worked on the ill fated "Assiniboine Queen". Art Mansoff, the engineer, lives in Dauphin, where he is still active as a welder and operator of his own business there.

He has had a radio show relating to sports for over eighteen years. He made the tape recording that directed me to the grave of the old boat, and was also very helpful in supplying information.

He was at the scene in the spring of 1913, when the boat capsized during a torrential rain storm.

After losing the "Assiniboine Queen", Captain Large and Art Mansoff opened a garage and repair shop in the village of Waskada, where they remained until the winter of 1914. When war broke out that fall, Large went back east, where he worked in a munitions factory. Mansoff joined the army on February 11, 1915 in Toronto, at the age of twenty-two.

The pictures of the old Steam Boat were loaned to me by Mr. William Large, one of the Captain's sons, who lives in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

A formal invitation to the Large family to visit Brandon in 1970, has been extended by the Centennial Committee.

Page 8

Thanks for help in salvaging the old boat must be given to the Brandon Chamber of Commerce, the Jaycees, the works department of the City of Brandon, and the Arena Service Centre.

The public relations department of both the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Canadian National Railway, were also very helpful in supplying documented information.

The paddle wheels and engines are in the C.P.R. Roundhouse, where they will be refurbished this winter by Albert Bobyk, 611-26th Street, and Atom-Jet Industries Ltd., of Brandon, and will be put on display for Centennial Celebrations.

## THE SOUTH ANTLER STEEL WORKS

H. J. R. LARGE, Proprietor, Coulter, Manitoba, Canada

Manufacturers of steel clevises, rings, hooks of all shapes and sizes, steel whiffletrees and doubletrees all sizes and different styles, combination steel and wood whiffletrees and doubletrees to match, neckyokes and all kinds of plow hitches, cold chisels, hoof chisels, punches, screwdrivers, belt awls, crowbars, tool handles different styles, file and screwdriver handles a specialty, steel fence posts, special hard rope any length or size up to 6 in. in diameter and any number of strands, manilla tow lines for threshing outfits any length with or without hooks, hard-twist lariets made to order, traction engine tenders, water tanks, decks for separators, harrow carts, etc., cement mixers (horse-power, steam or gasoline). Can furnish any tool that is made. Second-hand machinery bought and sold.

We make a specialty of building models for inventors, and are also in a position to perfect their ideas on a working scale. We overhaul engines, separators.

Crushing done during winter months. Telephone or mail orders promptly attended to.

Page 9

JUNE 1970

Since publishing the first edition of the Captain Large story, several pioneers have brought me many interesting yarns about the ill-fated Empress of Ireland. One story, unfolded by Mr. Walter Mummery of Brandon, revealed that Captain Large would run out of fuel for his boat quite often, when he would reach the vicinity of the C.P.R. coal dump. He would "borrow" a sufficient quantity of coal from the dump to get his boat back to the sixth street wharf, where he had picked up his passengers.

I also learned from Mr. Mummery, that a favorite riverside spot for the young fry of those times, was GOOSE EYE LANDING. It appears that the wharf on the south shore of the Assiniboine at Second Street North, was made from logs taken from the Hanbury Mill log boom. Several small pleasure craft used the wharf, and the owners were friends of Captain Large. There was an old wooden shack on the wharf, and a fellow nick named Hobo Kelly, slept in it. The boys who used the wharf brought him food, so he became another Huckleberry Finn.

The name GOOSE EYE LANDING was derived from the nick name given to a soldier who used to frequent the landing. He had unusual eyes, and the boys called him Captain

Goose Eye. In time the wharf became well known to Brandonites as GOOSE EYE LANDING.

From Mr. Hugh Munroe and Mr. Albert Zink, I have learned that the Assiniboine Park area was well patronized in the early days. It boasted the first cement swimming pool, which was heated by a large steam engine. A windmill on the north west corner of the property pumped water from the river into the pool. Steam was injected into the pool, and for the price of ten cents, one could spend the entire day swimming in warm water. One of the main attractions in those days was when young Jack Van Brunt, who lived on 6th Street north, climbed to the top of the high windmill tower, and dived into the Assiniboine. Captain Large would anchor his boat close by, so that the passengers could get a view of the breath taking plung. The next day, everyone would be talking about that young daredevil risking his life again, just for kicks.

Page 10

By Garth Stouffer, April 10, 1970.  
Sun Associate Editor

Frigid Manitoba weather blew Michael Kaiser of Wheeling, West Virginia, back to the southland on Wednesday of last week. But before he left, it was discovered that there are two Grand Valleys on the continent.

The story started a couple of weeks ago, when Mr. Kaiser, who is group manager for Great West Life Assurance Company in Wheeling, spotted a story in a magazine called the S and D Reflector.

The magazine is the publication of the Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen, and the story was a brief reference to the finding of the buried remains of the old Empress of Ireland (Assiniboine Queen) in the banks of the Assiniboine River just east of Brandon last fall.

Roy Brown, Grand Valley coordinator for the Brandon Chamber of Commerce, was the man who located the hulk of the Queen and who harnessed the energies of a group of Brandon Jaycees in retrieving the paddlewheel assembly and a few other odds and ends. Mr. Brown wrote a book which traced the story of the boat and of her buildermaster Capt. H.J.R. Large.

It was a reference to that story that appeared in The Reflector and attracted the attention of Mr. Kaiser.

The man from Wheeling advised that he would be visiting the Winnipeg head office of his company this month, and a telephone invitation was extended to him to visit Brandon as well and to pay a visit to the regular monthly meeting of the Assiniboine Historical Society.

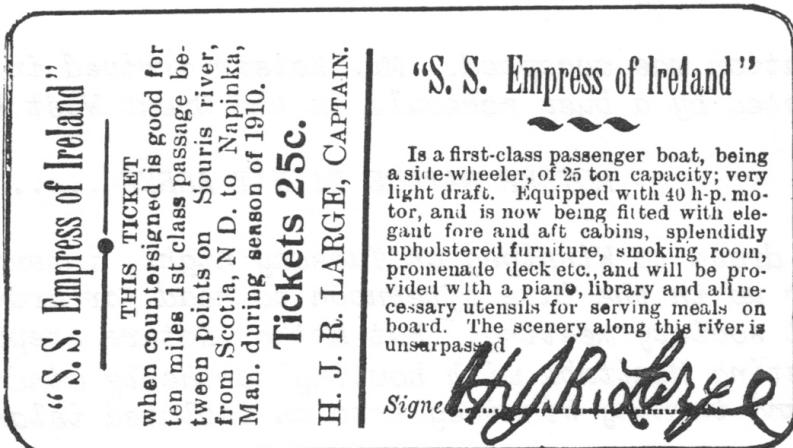
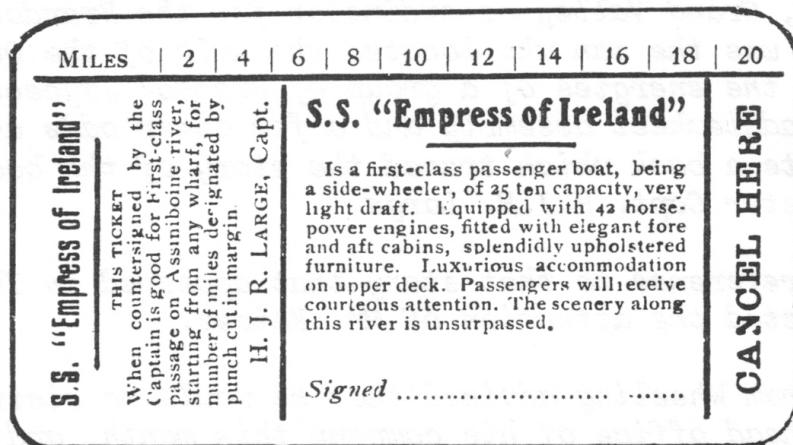
The invitation was accepted. Mr. Kaiser arrived in Winnipeg to be greeted by a busy schedule in the Great West headquarters.

MOTHER NATURE DIDN'T AGREE ..... Mr. Brown drove to Winnipeg on Tuesday night, intending to pick Mr. Kaiser up in the late afternoon to head for Brandon and the

historical society

Page 11

meeting. But Mother Nature stepped into the game, blasting Manitoba with howling northerly winds, slush, rain and snow and turning Winnipeg into an isolated island of storm.



Page 12



**Summer Scenes**

**Goose Eye landing, 1909**



Page 13

RIVERBOAT STORY STIRS INTEREST IN U.S.

MARCH 26, 1970

By Garth Stouffer, Sun Associate Editor.

The Empress of Ireland (Assiniboine Queen if you prefer) is making an even bigger wake in the waters of history that she made while chugging through the waters of the

Souris and Assiniboine rivers.

The boat, built at Coulter in the early days of the 20th century, enjoyed a few years of life on the Souris before her builder-master Captain H.J.R. Large moved her to Brandon, where he later converted her to a coal-carrying self-propelled barge that helped build the concrete bastions for a bridge on a railway line that never developed.

The Queen died just before the First World War enflamed the world and lay buried in silt and Assiniboine River willows until late last fall when her location was determined by Roy Brown, Grand Valley Council co-ordinator, and she was partially exhumed.

The story of the Queen was told by Mr. Brown in a small volume published late in the fall, thousands of copies of which have gone to Manitoba schools, and the tale of the story was published in The Sun and other papers.

Away down south in Wheeling, West Virginia, a man by the name of Michael J. Kaiser, group manager of Great, West Life Assurance Co., in that area, read about the finding of the skeleton of the Queen in the Assiniboine. He saw the story in the S & D Reflector, a publication of the Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen, a group of people dedicated to the preservation not only of the history of rivers, but also the rivers themselves.

Mr. Kaiser wrote to Mr. Brown, advising that he would be in Winnipeg April 6-11, and suggesting that he would like to take time off from his visit with the head office of his company, to come to Brandon for a closer look at the history of the Queen.

Page 14

In a subsequent telephone conversation, Mr. Brown extended an invitation to Mr. Kaiser from the Assiniboine Historical Society, to attend the April 8 meeting of the society and talk to the group about the Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen and the efforts being made by that organization to focus attention on the significance of the rivers of North America.

"The Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen", said Mr. Kaiser in his letter, "is an organization dedicated to preserving the rivers of North America and a finding such as that of the Assiniboine Queen is indeed of great interest to our organization."

Mr. Kaiser accepted the Historical Society invitation and will speak at the regular monthly meeting to be held at 8 p.m., April 8, in the lecture theatre at Neelin High School.

Highways were not passable, vehicles were ordered off the roads ... and Mr. Brown and Mr. Kaiser headed for the security of a warm hotel room rather than take a chance on the Trans-Canada.

They telephoned, however, during the historical society meeting, and that's where we learned about something even more interesting.

Mr. Kaiser told me during the telephone chat, that when Roy Brown mentioned Grand Valley, Mr. Kaiser heard a familiar tune.

His home town, he said, the 200-year-old city of Wheeling is located in what is known as the Grand Valley, a stretch of the Ohio River valley that separates the panhandle of West Virginia from the state of Ohio.

About five years ago, picking up the Grand Valley name as an attractive label, the people of the area began to promote interest. It has really paid off, with increased tourist attention and an annual "Whistle Blow Day" on June 6 the featured item of the year.

Grand Valley is probably an older name in the Brandon area than in the American southeast. The community grew up a few miles east of the present location of the city in the late 1870s when the Assiniboine was an important highway for transport through the

Page 15

pioneer Prairies.

When the C.P.R. decided to make Brandon the headquarters, however, Grand Valley quietly disappeared into the mists of memory with only a school and an annual picnic keeping the name alive over the years.

That began to change in the fall of 1969 when the Brandon Chamber of Commerce decided to follow suggestions to make Grand Valley the theme of centennial celebrations in Brandon and district.

Gents in ruffled shirtfronts and piped jackets, ladies in long gowns of yesterday began at the start of the year to get into the Grand Valley spirit.



## Engines and paddle wheels on display. Jaycee Santa Clause Parade, 1969

Page 16

Another idea was born, however, when the two men from two Grand Valleys got together in Winnipeg. Why not a "twinning" of the two areas as well as twinning of Brandon and Wheeling, the urban centres of the respective valleys of the Assiniboine and the Ohio?

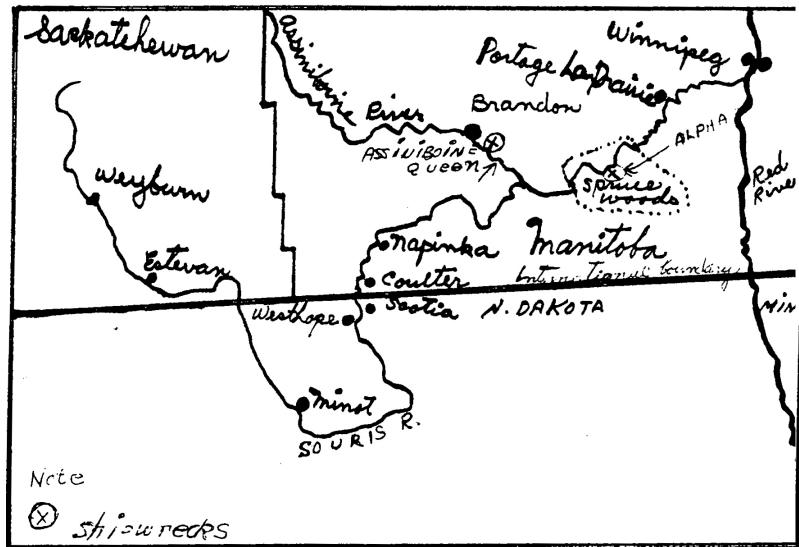
Mr. Kaiser is enthusiastic about the fact that there are skeleton fragments of boats to be found in Manitoba rivers.

"They've all been removed, buried or covered by waters backed up by dams in our country," he told me one evening, "It's just fabulous to think that they are be found here."

He's coming back in July...

Michael Kaiser is going to return to our Grand Valley in early July, after the snow has gone, hopefully. He has already laid plans for the visit, when he wants to take a look at the site of the Assiniboine Queen as well as some of the other sites of suspected paddlewheeler graves along the river.

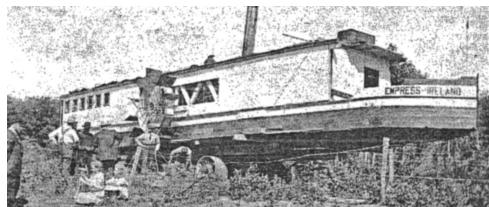
The S and D Reflector is carrying several pages in the July edition about the Empress of Ireland (Assiniboine Queen) and her history.



Page 17



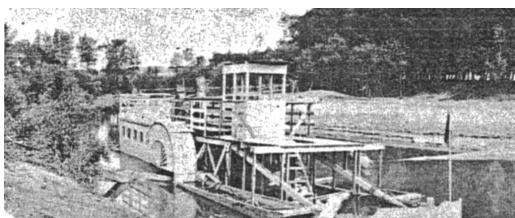
This re-printing of "Captain Large and the Empress of Ireland" was prepared by Ken Storie as part of a Local History Materials for Schools Project commissioned by the Town of Melita and the Antler River Historical Society. The project was funded by the Heritage Grants Program, Culture Heritage



1



2



3



4

1. On truck wheels to Souris River, Maiden Voyage, 1909
2. On Assiniboine, 1910
3. As "The Assibiboine Queen", 1912
4. Captain H.J.R. Large and Art Mansoff, engineer, Toronto, 1915
6. Charles and Margaret Elliott, Melita, Manitoba
7. Mr. Wesley Mallo; Coulter, Manitoba



5



6



7



