



June 22, 2020.

Mayor Ted Walker
Tay Township
450 Park Street,
Victoria Harbour, ON L0K 2A0

Dear Mayor Walker:

You know me not only as a resident of Port McNicoll, but also as a member of Friends of Keewatin, the volunteer organization which has laboured for the last 8 years in the interests of sharing and preserving S.S. Keewatin, this remarkable one-of-a-kind treasure, by operating her as an historical attraction while simultaneously working on her restoration. I am writing to you on a matter of great urgency.

Volunteers have learned that the ship is at imminent risk of being removed from Port McNicoll by her owners, Skyline Investments, to a museum in Kingston, Ontario. This even though Gil Blutrich, the past President of SKYLINE promoted widely on TV and newspapers upon her arrival in June 2012 that SKYLINE would give the ship to Tay Township and Port McNicoll. Such an outcome would be a devastating betrayal not only to the approximately 300 volunteers who have contributed tens of thousands of hours collectively in the operation and restoration of the ship, and the thousands in the community who thronged to greet her on arrival, but also to the historical legacy of the County and the tourism industry here.

We, as volunteers and residents, request that the Township of Tay propose to the County of Simcoe that it offer to acquire S.S. Keewatin from Skyline Investments, to be operated as a marine museum by the Simcoe County Museum, in return for a tax receipt through the Cultural Property acquisition program offered by the Canadian Government. The certification of cultural property is a process administered by the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board (CCPERB), through which cultural property of outstanding significance is certified for tax purposes. The certification process encourages the transfer of outstanding examples of Canada's artistic, historic, and scientific heritage from private hands to public collections held by municipalities. (Please see the attached letter with the opinion of Royal Ontario Museum Curator Emeritus, Corey Keeble.)

Compared to any alternative Skyline Investments may be considering, this offer would involve no further investment (for example, in moving the ship to Kingston, Ontario) on their part and could be consummated quickly. Time is of the essence in this request, as the museum in Kingston is considering applying for permission.

There is nothing like S.S. Keewatin: she is the last of her kind in the world, as well as the embodiment of the unique laker history of the region. The people of Simcoe County deserve to have her here. Save Our Ship!

Regards

Wayne Coombes
Marketing and Communications

Cc: Eric Conroy, President & CEO
S.S. Keewatin Volunteers

With regard to a Canadian Heritage application for the S.S. Keewatin, I submit the following –

As a former curator in the European Department (Later “World Cultures”) of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto I had the honour and pleasure of preparing and submitting documentation for numerous cultural property applications concerning a wide variety of works of applied and fine art in various media during a 43 year career as an art historian. I have noted this in previous correspondence as well as testifying to my credentials and experience in the field of maritime history.

Those charged with adjudicating the case of the S.S. Keewatin would benefit by consulting the following: Norman J. Brouwer. *International Register of Historic Ships* (3rd Edition), London, and Peekskill, NY: Chatham Publishing, and Sea History Press, 1999.

I have a 1993 second edition of Brouwer’s register. The Keewatin, now at Port McNicoll, Ontario, is cited on page 303 of the second edition when the ship was still at Douglas, Michigan. In terms of age and importance, the Keewatin has no parallel in the Brouwer registry. It is by any standards a unique cultural property.

It is interesting to note that the second Brouwer edition contains references to some 51 Canadian boats and ships of various types and sizes, including the former CPR steamship Princess Marguerite built in 1948. While efforts were made to retain and preserve the Princess Marguerite in British Columbia, the ship was sold, towed to Singapore in 1992 and designated for use as a floating hotel. Sadly, this is an all too typical case of the loss of significant Canadian cultural property.

In contrast to the 51 Canadian entries in the second Brouwer edition, there are at least 91 recorded for Australia which in 1993 had a population of 17.67 million while in the same year our population in Canada was 28.68 million. We should and could do better!

It is important to realize that an historic ship such as the Keewatin is of unique cultural importance not only in terms of the ship itself but in terms of all of its interior fittings. In the case of the Keewatin, this includes engine and boiler rooms in the context of technology and engineering and all of the fittings of the public and private passenger spaces. With the Keewatin, the Dining Saloon is an excellent example of the preservation of a galaxy of table items and interior decoration which comprise a veritable encyclopedic presentation of what is generally referred to as applied or decorative art! The details of the public spaces and of the passenger cabins are a showcase of Canadian achievements in metalwork, wood, glass, textiles and other materials.

While it is easy to find examples of warships preserved virtually in toto with their interior fittings, it is much more difficult to find examples of historic passenger ships with their interiors preserved intact. The Queen Mary of 1936, preserved at Long Beach, California serves only partially as a museum and also functions as a floating hotel and, shopping mall. The Swedish built Stella Polaris of 1927 ended up as a floating hotel in Tokyo Bay. The former passenger vessel MV Hikawa Maru of 1930 survives at Yokohama as a museum ship but is considerably younger than the Keewatin! By virtue of its age and contents the Keewatin remains a virtually unique cultural artifact!

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It is important to realize that with the Keewatin, the ship is the equivalent of a museum building! Classic examples include HMS Victory of 1765 at Portsmouth and HMS Warrior of 1860, also preserved at Portsmouth. In the United States, the same could be said of the Protected Cruiser, the USS Olympia of 1892 where the “museum building” is the entire hull and superstructure of the ship itself and the same may be said of the USS Constitution of 1797 at the Boston Navy Yard. In Russia, one could refer to the cruiser Aurora of 1900 preserved in St Petersburg.

I have had the opportunity to visit many historical ships of different periods, including surviving warships of WWII in the United States and Great Britain. As for passenger ships, the single example by virtue of age, cultural and historical importance remains the S.S. Keewatin!

The Keewatin is properly regarded as a time capsule documenting the decades from 1907, the year of its construction, to the mid 1960s, the period of its withdrawal from active passenger service. Its collections include, in addition to the features of public rooms, cabins, engine and boiler space, areas reserved for rotating displays of model ships documenting both the history of Great Lakes shipbuilding and international maritime history.

Simply stated there is no comparable museum ship in all the world! I have visited and studied historic ships in Canada, the United States and Europe and can attest to this fact on the basis of personal experience!

Again, it is a pleasure, a privilege, a duty to affirm both the national and global importance of the S.S. Keewatin as a cultural treasure of the greatest possible importance to this nation and to the nations of the world!

Sincerely,

K. Corey Keeble
Curator Emeritus ROM