Frank W. Spencer

The temptation, whenever someone of prominence who has made an impact on his community dies, is to haul out the old "end of an era" cliche. We can't do that in the case of Capt. Frank W. Spencer, the riverboat pilot and civic leader who died on Thursday near his age 97.

We can't do that because the "Spencer era" simply does not end. It didn't end with his retirement from active piloting some years ago, and it shall continue as long as the Savannah River does not dry up.

IT WAS CAPTAIN Spencer who in 1915 made it possible for the Savannah Harbor to be extended upriver to Port Wentworth. At the request of sugar interests, he made a survey of the river to determine whether ships of deep draft could find the stream navigable that far.

Yes, indeed, they could. The Spencer charts showed the way, and after the Savannah Sugar Refinery was established at Port Wentworth he, in 1917, boldly piloted the first sugar-laden steamer up there to prove his theory. The development on that end of the harbor followed; it stands today and shall stand always as a tribute to Frank Spencer's contribution to our shipping industry. No end of an era at all with the man's death!

CAPTAIN SPENCER'S many other contributions to shipping are legend, and they have been enumerated in his obituary. His contributions to his native Savannah in many other areas are just as legend.

As general manager of Atlantic Towing Co. he found time to serve such worthwhile endeavors as the Boy Scouts, the YMCA, as a charter board member of Armstrong College, in public welfare, public health and public education.

HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT was his pioneer work in the area of human rights. He was an advocate of integration years before the 1954 Supreme Court decision, indeed before the Brown case was ever filed. As a member of the Board of Education he shared a leading role in equalizing pay of Negro and white teachers. He lent his talents and leadership many ways in behalf of minorities.

One of his pet projects the many years he served on the Board of Education was port education — making students aware of the seaport's role in this section of Georgia.

THE SCHOOL BOARD named a Negro elementary school for Captain Spencer, a signal honor for one who loved and worked for his community. A bronze plaque there sums well the character of the man. It reads: "Anchor the fine things of life in the heart and in the mind, then set a course over the sea of life with a consecrated, resolute purpose to strive for the common good of all mankind."