

THE FIRST CEDARBRANCH

Although we always enjoy writing about the passenger ships which once frequented our lakes, we get the most pleasure when we research and write the histories of the canallers which once were so familiar in our waters. The true canallers, built specifically to fit the small locks of the third Welland Canal and the old St. Lawrence canals (as opposed to earlier small ships which simply were built to such a size because technology had not advanced beyond that stage), were hybrids and they were real workhorses of lake transportation in the first half of the Twentieth Century.

It was the canallers that linked the Great Lakes with the deep seas, not only for the upbound movement of cargoes brought by ocean ships to St. Lawrence River ports, but most importantly for the outbound shipment of grain. Some of the grain was bound for the mills at Montreal, but most of it was for export overseas. The canallers served the tortuous lower portion of journey of this grain, which often was trans-shipped to them from the big upper lakers at Buffalo and Port Colborne. Even after the opening of the new Welland Ship Canal (official ceremonies took place on August 5, 1932, and featured the largest Canadian lake ship, the C.S.L. steamer LEMOYNE [I]), the canallers still were required for the St. Lawrence passage, and much of the grain was trans-shipped at Toronto, Kingston and Prescott.

The canallers were so familiar for so many years that even those of us who knew them well tend now to take them for granted and to forget the invaluable service which they provided in the years before the 1959 opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway. Comparatively little was written about the canallers in years past, and we consider it the responsibility of "Scanner" to correct this situation. Our efforts in this respect now continue!

When today's historians think about canallers, they tend to remember the Canadian fleets which operated large numbers of canal-sized steamers and motorships in the latter years of the "canaller era". But even more interesting were the earlier fleets which existed in the opening years of this century but which were long gone even by the time shipyards in Great Britain began churning out dozens of more modern canallers in the 1920s. And although most of the canallers were run by Canadian fleets, there were a few U.S.-flag canaller operations in business during the early years.

One such, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Transportation Company, of Duluth, Minnesota, was established in 1902 by Augustus B. Wolvin, together with a group of United States shipping men and financiers, the purpose of the company being to transport U.S. export grain from Duluth to Quebec City, and to carry coal, loaded at Oswego, as well as package freight, on the return upbound trip.

The founder of the fleet, Captain Augustus Benjamin Wolvin, was a native of Cleveland, who sailed the lakes from the age of ten in 1867 until he left the water in 1883. By 1888, he was in Duluth, working in the shipping industry from ashore, and by 1895 he was managing vessels on his own account. He served as general manager of the huge Pittsburgh Steamship Company fleet (the lake shipping affiliate of the United States Steel Corporation) from its formation in 1901 until 1904. Augustus Wolvin was highly respected as an operator of steamships and, together with Roy Mitchell Wolvin, managed several fleets for other owners. One of his most famous ships was his namesake steamer, AUGUSTUS B. WOLVIN, which was the largest ship on the lakes when she was completed at Lorain in 1904 for the Acme Steamship Company, of Duluth, which was managed by the Wolvins.

Soon after its formation, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Transportation Company ordered ten almost identical canal-sized steamers from the American Ship Building Company. Two of the steamers (named J. S. KEEFE and ROBERT WALLACE) were built at Buffalo, New York, while three (JOHN LAMBERT, GEO. C. HOWE and JOHN CRERAR) were constructed at South Chicago, Illinois. Three more (S. N. PARENT, ALBERT M. MARSHALL and A. D. DAVIDSON) were built at