

A. McVITTIE

In recent issues, we have featured a number of different types of lake vessels. One major class of ship has been notably absent from these pages for a considerable period of time, however, and that is the traditional type of package freighter which at one time was operated by many United States railroads to connect with their rail lines. There has been no specific desire on our part to ignore the railroad package freighters, but only a more pressing interest in other matters.

Having recognized our inadvertent oversight, we then set about trying to select a package freighter whose history our readers might find interesting. We wound up picking not one of the more famous steel-hulled package freight boats that were built in such numbers for the big rail lines in the early years of the Twentieth Century, but rather one of the big wooden-hulled ships that served so faithfully in the years before the new steel-hulled steamers came into being. We also have chosen one which operated for one of the lesser-known package freight lines.

In 1882, the Northern Transportation Company, which was controlled by the Central Vermont Railroad, began to give up its package freight service between Ogdensburg, New York, and Lake Michigan ports, and to liquidate its fleet of aging and uneconomical steamers. In 1883, in order to take over the trade of the old line, the Ogdensburg and Lake Champlain Railroad began a through package freight service from Ogdensburg to Chicago by water, with calls at way ports. The new service was operated by the affiliated Ogdensburg Transit Company. The line immediately began to build a modern fleet of new package freight steamers which were large and efficient, but whose size necessarily was limited by the dimensions of the locks of the old Welland Canal, through which their trips took them.

All eight of the wooden-hulled package freighters built for the Ogdensburg Transit Company came from the Detroit Dry Dock Company, and they were very handsome steamers indeed. The first group of boats ordered by the line comprised the WALTER J. FROST, completed in 1883, and WM. A. HASKELL and WM J. AVERELL (frequently spelled AVERILL, but never on the ship herself), which were the builder's Hulls 62, 67 and 68, respectively.

Only half a decade later, the O.T.Co. was doing such a thriving business that five more steamers were ordered from the same shipyard. They were much like the earlier trio, except that their tonnage was considerably higher, and each of the ships had only one big funnel instead of two thin stacks set athwartship. Detroit Dry Dock's Hulls 97 and 98 were GOV. SMITH and JAMES R. LANGDON, built in 1889, while Hulls 99, 102 and 104 were completed in 1890 as A. McVITTIE, F. H. PRINCE and HENRY R. JAMES, respectively.

The vessel operations of the Ogdensburg Transit Company thrived, and many chartered bottoms were used as well as the line's own ships. By the late 1890s, however, the parent railroad, the Central of Vermont, was mired in debt, and this state of affairs eventually led to the railroad being taken over by the Rutland Transportation Company, a subsidiary of the New York Central System. As a consequence, the lake package freighters came under the operation of the Rutland Transit Company. The new owners immediately began to modernize the fleet and the wooden vessels were disposed of as the new canal-sized, steel steamers were built.

The FROST was lost by stranding in 1903 and the GOV. SMITH by collision in 1906. The LANGDON and the JAMES were sold in 1910, as was the McVITTIE. The F. H. PRINCE was sold after a serious fire in 1911, and the last two ships, the AVERELL and HASKELL, were sold in 1916. In fact, these two original vessels lasted right through until the end of the line's operations, which ceased after the enactment by the United States of the Panama Canal Act in 1915. One of the provisions of this Act was to prohibit U.S. railroads from operating parallel water routes, and so the railroads had no alternative but