

OCEAN

- by Capt. Gerry Ouderkirk -
with the Editor

The village of Port Dalhousie was agitated from centre to circumference on Saturday, April 13, 1872, the cause of the excitement being the launching of two vessels, a propellor and a schooner. The propellor was built for Capt. Sylvester Neelon, of St. Catharines, at the yard of Andrews & Son. She was of canal size and was built to join the Merchants Line. The Misses Neelon, daughters of the owner, christened the new craft OCEAN. The second launch was at Muir & Bro.'s yard; her name, ALBACORE, as was usual with vessels built by this firm, commenced with the first letter of the alphabet. Said the "St. Catharines Evening Journal": "We trust that both vessels will prove for their owners good investments, and that the owners may long live to produce similar or better craft".

The Merchants Line fleet was a consortium of which some of the principals were Aeneas D. MacKay, Sr., and Capt. J. B. Fairgrieve, both of Hamilton; Geo. E. Jaques & Co., Montreal; and James Norris, Sylvester Neelon and Capt. P. Larkin, of St. Catharines. In the 1870s, it ran from Montreal to Chicago and Duluth, stopping at intermediate ports, with as many as 25 vessels, all individually owned and chartered to the Merchants Line. In 1872, the masters of the line's ships were: AMERICA - Hiram Vaughan; DOMINION - J. Clifford; SCOTIA - J. H. Scott; EUROPE - J. McMaugh; OCEAN - A. McMaugh; CITY OF LONDON - J. McBride; GEORGIAN - T. Collins; L. SHICKLUNA - Wm. Hanna; CITY OF MONTREAL - J. Trowell; MARY WARD - J. Kennedy; OSPREY - Taylor; DALHOUSIE - M. McGrath; ENTERPRISE - P. McGrath. Unposted at the beginning of the season were ST. LAWRENCE and four new ships. LAKE MICHIGAN was to be commanded by Capt. W. Rolle, ARGYLE by H. McLachlin and LAKE ONTARIO by J. B. Fairgrieve. Also added to the fleet in 1872 were CANADA and COLUMBIA, built at Hamilton by A. M. Robertson; CHINA, built at Kingston by W. Powers (and burned the same year); LAKE ERIE and LINCOLN, built at St. Catharines by Melancthon Simpson, and YORK, built at Montreal.

OCEAN was a handsome steamer, typical of the combination passenger and package freight boats of her period. She had a straight stem and counter stern, and her hull had a great deal of sheer. Heavy fender strakes ran along the sides of the hull at and below main deck level, and another at the main deck bulwarks. The entire main deck was enclosed, and there were large cargo ports in the sides of this cabin to permit the handling of freight as well as the boarding of passengers.

On the upper deck was the passenger cabin which was pointed at its forward end in the fashion of the day, and which had an open promenade all around. The cabin windows had hinged shutters which could be swung closed in the event of heavy weather. The upper cabin did not originally extend aft of where the tall smokestack rose up out of the deck, but after a very few years, the cabin was extended further aft. An ornate, octagonal pilothouse was placed right forward on the hurricane deck, and by the 1890s an observation deck, equipped with awnings, had been built atop the cabin skylight, immediately abaft the pilothouse.

The St. Catharines registry showed that OCEAN had two masts, but photographs prove that such was not the case. She had but one tall, well-raked and sail-equipped mast abaft the pilothouse, and a tall jackstaff aft. As originally built, she carried four lifeboats, with one on either side of the hurricane deck, and another on each side of the open promenade deck aft, athwart the funnel. When the cabin was extended aft, these latter two boats were relocated on either side of the after section of the hurricane deck.

OCEAN was an interesting steamer. She had a very long, hinged spearpole to aid in steering the ship, and her pilothouse windows and many in the cabin