

ALGOPASSENGERS!

In the November issue, we recognized the centenary celebrations of the Algoma Central Corporation by featuring the histories of the first four self-propelled freighters ever owned by the Algoma Central organization, the steamers MONKSHAVEN, THEANO, LEAFIELD and PALIKI. They were salt-water vessels of canal dimensions, whose purchase was authorized at a meeting of the corporation's directors held on February 16, 1900, at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The four well-decked freighters made their appearance on the lakes during the spring of 1900, and what began as the Algoma Central Steamship Line was off to an auspicious start, despite the fact that three of those four ships eventually met violent ends on Lake Superior.

In fact, as we mentioned, Francis Hector Clergue's shipping operations actually began back in 1896, when he acquired the wooden tug JESSIE and had her rebuilt at Sault Ste. Marie and renamed (b) PHILADELPHIA. At about the same time, a barge was acquired for her to tow, the wooden-hulled schooner-barge J. S. AUSTIN (C.96820), which had been built in 1863 by Miller at Port Ryerse, Ontario, for Ronald Ryerse and J. S. Austin. The AUSTIN was 136.0 x 26.0 x 10.0, 391 Net Tons, and she operated until abandoned (for age and condition) east of the Government Wharf at the Soo in 1911. PHILADELPHIA had been lost when wrecked at Gros Cap on October 3rd, 1907, although she had been sold during 1906 to Thomas Ganley, of Sault Ste. Marie.

Most observers today would not connect the Algoma Central name with the carriage of passengers on lake waters, although they might think of the company's railroad operations, and particularly the Agawa Canyon tour train which the company ran for many years until the railway portion of the corporation was sold in 1995.

However, in 1901, the Algoma Central Railway acquired three ships, two of which were passenger steamers, and another passenger vessel was purchased in 1902. These three open-lake passenger steamers were the only three passenger boats that Algoma Central ever would operate, apart from the two ferries ALGOMA and FORTUNE (BAWATING) which were operated across the St. Mary's River at the Soo by the International Transit Company, which was a division of Algoma Central until 1910.

The two passenger steamers acquired in 1901 were the MINNIE M. and the OSSIFRAGE, both propellers, while the 1902 acquisition was the sidewheeler KING EDWARD. These boats were placed on a route from Toledo and Detroit to Sault Ste. Marie, with ongoing service to Lake Superior, mainly to Michipicoten, the latter portion of the route being mainly a supply service. The story of MINNIE M. is a long and involved one, and her exploits have been described on previous occasions in assorted publications. We featured the long-lived KING EDWARD as a Ship of the Month a number of years ago. Accordingly, in order to close out the 1999 season and still recognize the Algoma Central centenary, your Editor thought that we should feature one of the corporation's least known ships, and one that has been written about very little in the past, the little steamer OSSIFRAGE.

OSSIFRAGE (originally U.S.155124) was an oak-hulled, passenger and freight propeller, which was built in 1886 at West Bay City, Michigan, as Hull 26 of the famed shipyard of F. W. Wheeler & Company. Wheeler was one of the foremost builders of large wooden hulls, and one of the few such yards that successfully converted later to the building of steel-hulled steamers. As originally built, OSSIFRAGE was 123.1 feet in length, 24.6 feet in the beam and 10.2 feet in depth, with tonnage of 383.58 Gross and 247.63 Net. We have been unable to ascertain any details of her original engine or boiler(s), which served her for the first six years of her life.

OSSIFRAGE was launched on Tuesday, May 11th, 1886, and she soon was ready for service. Small as she was, she did have some overnight accommodation on board. Her first owner was her builder, F. W. Wheeler, who operated her to