

AGAWA (i)

Away back in the Mid-Summer issue of 1973 (Vol. V, No. 9), we featured the story of the steamer AGAWA (i), as told by this Society's first treasurer, James M. Kidd. Although Jim recounted the history of this famous ship well, the entire feature was barely two pages in length, and no photographs accompanied it. We can do much better now. We thank member Don Boone, of Collingwood, for inspiring us to revisit the history of the first AGAWA.

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At the time of the recent centenary of the Algoma Central Corporation, we told a bit about the early history of the parent railway (the Algoma Central Railway Company, which became the Algoma Central & Hudson Bay Railway Company in 1901) and its shipping arm, which started operations as the Algoma Central Steamship Line. The latter operated several passenger steamers, but its first freighters were the LEAFIELD, MONKSHAVEN, THEANO and PALIKI, which were acquired overseas and brought to the lakes in 1900. They were successful to a point, but three of them were lost on the lakes and the fourth, PALIKI, was sold and then went off-lakes during World War One.

The Algoma Central fleet, over the years, has had a number of vessels built expressly for its service, but many other ships either have been chartered or else have been acquired from other operators. The very first vessel built for Algoma Central was constructed as Hull No. 2 of the Collingwood Shipbuilding Company Ltd., under the direction of Hugh Calderwood, who drew up her plans. Interestingly, she was not a self-propelled ship but rather was a towbarge, designed in the fashion of many such vessels built for the larger United States fleets during the 1890s. They were built on the theory that much more cargo could be carried if each large steamer towed a non-powered barge also loaded deep with cargo. Tugs back then were plentiful and available to assist barges in port or the canal at Sault Ste. Marie or in other constricted waters.

The August 1901 issue of "The Railway and Shipping World" reported: "Press despatches recently stated that F. H. Clergue had contracted with the Collingwood Shipbuilding Co. for building a barge 390 ft. long [overall], 46 ft. beam, 26 ft. depth of hold, with a cargo capacity of 6,500 tons of iron ore, and that it would be ready for next year's trade between Michipicoten and Lake Erie. On July 27, we were informed that the contract had not been closed."

The September 1901 issue of the same publication noted: "Work has been begun at Collingwood on a steel tow barge for the Algoma Central Railway Co.'s steamship line. This vessel will be 390 ft. long, 46 ft. beam and 26 ft. deep with a carrying capacity of 7,000 tons. She will rank among the largest steel tow barges of the lakes and will have all modern appliances for the quick and economical handling of both ship and cargo. Provision will be made for the carrying of steel rails on the upper deck. She will come out in April next."

The new barge, christened AGAWA for the scenic Agawa Canyon, to which the railway operated excursion trains from the Soo, was launched on Saturday, July 19, 1902. She was enrolled at Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, under Canadian official number 111807. She was 379.0 feet in length between perpendiculars, 46.0 feet in the beam and 26.0 feet in depth, and her tonnage was 3517 Gross and 3308 Net.

Her cargo capacity was reported to be 210,000 bushels of wheat. There were three cargo compartments and two watertight bulkheads. She was fitted with three heavy steel masts, each of which was equipped to carry fore-and-aft sail on a boom and, in addition, a jib was rigged on the foremast stay. The fitting of sail not only was a precaution against emergency situations (the barge could sail herself if her towing steamer was forced to cut her adrift) but also was designed to help lessen the drag of the barge on the towing steamer. AGAWA usually was towed by MONKSHAVEN.