

KEARSARGE

In the early years of Great Lakes Shipping, most of the freight that was carried by ship was general cargo, or "package freight", consisting of small consignments of packaged goods as well as the personal belongings of immigrants and other persons who were moving to the newly developed areas of the continent. Despite the rapid development of the movement of raw materials in bulk during the latter years of the nineteenth century, there still was a considerable movement of general cargo on the lakes, much of it being finished manufactured goods, and this trade remained strong during the first half of the twentieth century. It really was only in relatively recent years that the package freight trade has virtually died out on the lakes, with such cargo now being transported more economically by rail and road carriers.

The early lake package freighters generally were wooden combination boats which also carried passengers but, by the late nineteenth century, there were many steel-hulled steamers which were designed and built solely for the carriage of general cargo, or for a combination of packaged as well as bulk cargoes. In most cases, they were beautiful ships, with graceful lines and powerful engines that could ensure their operation on a tight schedule, for the lines that carried package freight profitably were those that could promise delivery at a specified port on a designated day. Most such lines were operated by or, at very least, in conjunction with the major railroad companies and thus there were not only the guaranteed delivery connections but also the dollars needed to finance the expensive steamboat operations.

In 1883, there entered into the lake shipping business as a carrier the Cleveland firm of Pickands Mather & Company. Its main business was the transportation down the lakes of bulk cargoes of iron ore, and that is the trade in which all of its early vessels were engaged, whether they were fully or partially owned by Pickands Mather, or whether they were operated by them for other owners. Accordingly, it is somewhat surprising that, in 1894, Pickands Mather took delivery from the Chicago Shipbuilding Company, of South Chicago, of that yard's Hull 10, a combination bulk and package freight steamer named KEARSARGE. We believe that she was launched on May 31, 1894.

Her name appears to have been chosen to honour the U.S. cruiser KEARSARGE, which sank the Confederate cruiser ALABAMA on June 19, 1864, and which herself was lost near Roncador Reef in the Caribbean on February 2, 1894, not long before the new lake ship was completed. There also is a mountain in New Hampshire named Kearsarge.

The new ship (U.S.161061) was registered at Cleveland and, according to the United States List of Merchant Vessels, she was 328.0 feet in length, 44.2 feet in the beam and 23.0 feet in length, 3092.70 Gross Tons and 2721.37 Net Tons. The 1899 Great Lakes Register (Bureau Veritas) agreed, except that it showed her beam as 44.0 feet and her depth as 27.0 feet. She was powered by a triple expansion engine which had cylinders of 23, 38 and 62 inches diameter and a stroke of 40 inches, and which generated 1,100 Indicated Horsepower at 80 revolutions per minute. Steam at a working pressure of 160 pounds per square inch was generated by two single-ended, coal-fired, Scotch boilers, each of which had three furnaces and was 14'0" in diameter and 13'0" in length. There were 138 square feet of grate surface in the boilers, and 5,038 square feet of heating surface. The engine and boilers all were built for the ship in 1894 by the Cleveland Shipbuilding Company, Cleveland, Ohio.

The new ship was of classic design, with a beautiful sheer to her decks, a straight stem and a graceful counter stern. She had a flush forecastle and poop, with a closed steel bulwark around both and an open post-and-wire rail down the sides of her spar deck midships. She had two heavy wooden strakes along each side to protect her plating when canalizing or docking and wooden fenders suspended from the deck also provided protection. There were six sets of cargo ports provided on each side to give access to the 'tween deck. The bow anchors originally were carried on the forecastle head, the chains rising outboard from hawseholes, and the anchors worked by small davits at the stem.

The bridge structure was located abaft the first spar deck cargo hatch, and consisted of a rectangular texas cabin and, on the bridge deck above, a turret-style pilothouse with five large windows in its face, and an open navigation bridge on the monkey's island, complete with flying bridgewings. A "doghouse", providing additional accommodations, was located about half-way down the spar deck. The tall pole foremast was stepped immediately abaft the pilothouse, while the mainmast was positioned about half-way between the doghouse and the boilerhouse, both masts raked rather stylishly.