

The after cabin was a large structure set on the flush quarterdeck. The large boilerhouse was located at its forward end and contained a large hatch for coal bunkers. There was an overhang of the boat deck on either side, upon which were set the lifeboats, worked with radial steel davits. The tall but not very thick smokestack was set amongst a number of ventilator cowls, and its top originally was cut parallel to the water rather than at right angles to the rise of the sides of the stack. There was a tall jackstaff right aft, as well as a radial davit provided to lift the kedge anchor which was carried out on the fantail.

KEARSARGE, although registered to the Interlake Transportation Company, was not operated by Pickands Mather. Instead, she was long-term chartered to the Western Transit Company, which was the wholly-owned lake shipping subsidiary of the New York Central Railroad, and she was operated in its regular package freight trade. Accordingly, she was painted in Western Transit colours, with a light-brown hull, white cabins and a buff stack with a red band and then a black smokeband at the top. Latterly, the stack became black with a broad red band. The intertwined letters W.T.Co. appeared on her bows.

The "Fifty Years Ago" article in the Collingwood paper of July 18, 1946, noted an event from the summer of 1896. "The freighter KEARSARGE arrived here this week with a record cargo for the harbour and this elevator. She carried 135,000 bushels of corn from Chicago. The ship is a fine steel craft, coming out but a few years ago."

KEARSARGE seems to have operated successfully for Western Transit, and apparently without serious accident. An item in the "Buffalo Enquirer" of May 11, 1897, noted: "Marine Wear and Tear. There came off the steamer KEARSARGE a lot of junk that made several wagon loads. It consisted of worn-out tow lines that the whaleback fleet has exchanged at the Sault from time to time for new ones. The history of these lines, if it could be unraveled as thoroughly as the lines have been wound, would often make interesting reading, but it will not be told, for there is no one to collect it. Selling the waste at so much a pound is the best that can be done with the lot."

During the late 1890s and the early years of the twentieth century, however, Western Transit added to its fleet a number of newly-built package freighters that were far more suitable to its needs, steamers such as the TROY of 1898, BUFFALO of 1899, CHICAGO of 1901, MILWAUKEE of 1902, DULUTH of 1903, UTICA of 1904, SUPERIOR of 1905, ROCHESTER of 1907 and finally the BOSTON of 1913. By 1907, KEARSARGE no longer was needed by Western Transit and, as Pickands Mather was concentrating totally on the carriage of bulk cargoes, she wasn't needed there, either. And so KEARSARGE was put up for sale.

She was acquired by C. W. Elphicke and Company, of Chicago, which was acting on behalf of the Canada Atlantic Transit Company of the United States. Canada Atlantic Transit had been formed in the late 1890s and was a subsidiary of John Rudolphus Booth's Canada Atlantic Railway, of Ottawa, Ontario. This company operated a rail line between Depot Harbour, Ontario (located on Parry Island in Georgian Bay, off the town of Parry Sound) and Ottawa (the nation's capital), with connections to Montreal and also to the Central of Vermont Railroad. This through line had been completed in 1898 (via Booth's Ottawa, Arnprior and Parry Sound Railway), but had its origins as far back as 1879. Not only was Booth in control of the Canada Atlantic, which was the largest privately owned railway in Canada, but he also was heavily involved in the lumber trade in Northern Ontario. He remained closely associated with his various business interests until he passed away at the age of 98 on December 8, 1925.

The route of the new railway across Northern Ontario was a difficult one and there was substantial opposition to it from a number of sources. In fact, one complaint against the location of the line stated that one of the areas through which the rails passed was a "complete wilderness, wholly uninhabited and of considerable distance from any settled district but in the midst of Mr. J. R. Booth's timber limits"! Regardless, Booth pressed on with the construction of his line and chose Depot Harbour as its western terminus as, amongst other attributes, it possessed a fine natural harbour where docking facilities for lake vessels could easily be constructed.

By 1899, a large grain elevator, with a capacity of 1,000,000 bushels, was ready for operation at Depot Harbour. A 1,000,000 bushel addition to the elevator was constructed in 1906-1907, as the route from the lakes to the east coast, via Depot Harbour and the Canada Atlantic line, was by far the shortest route for export grain and this attracted considerable traffic. Much coal was brought by boat to Depot Harbour and, as well, large quantities of package freight and lumber were shipped out of the port on lake vessels. Spacious freight