

PILLSBURY, THE WHALEBACK

We have been pleased indeed with the response to our February issue feature concerning the whaleback steamer PILLSBURY, which later sailed under the name HENRY CORT. We wish to thank those readers who took the time to let us know that they liked the article.

In particular, member Kenneth E. Thro, formerly of the Duluth/Superior area and now a resident of Panama City Beach, Florida, has written to share with our readers an item which appeared on October 1st, 1893, in "The Inland Ocean", the Superior newspaper. The article indicated that PILLSBURY and her sistership, WASHBURN, had been designed to be able to carry 3,100 tons of cargo each per trip. Unfortunately, as completed, they were unable to come within 200 tons of their designed capacity, and this failure to conform with the specifications of the contract became the subject of litigation.

The Minneapolis, St. Paul and Buffalo Steamship Company (lake shipping affiliate of the Soo Line Railroad) won the legal action, and the court ordered that another whaleback steamer, the E. B. BARTLETT, be attached until the fine specified for the shipyard's failure to conform with the terms of its contract was satisfied. The BARTLETT had been Hull 113 of the American Steel Barge Company; completed during the summer of 1891, she was a near-sister of CHARLES W. WETMORE (Hull 112) and A. D. THOMSON (Hull 114). We have heard nothing more about this incident, and must assume that the shipyard promptly paid the penalty in order to secure the release of the BARTLETT which was at that time operating in the American Steel Barge Company's own fleet.

Ken also has confirmed to us that his extensive records provide no confirmation that PILLSBURY and WASHBURN were ever officially registered at Gladstone, Michigan, the registry port which originally was painted on the stern of each steamer. During this stage of their careers, Marquette was their official port of registry. They did, however, run out of Gladstone, a small port near Escanaba, because that was the port to which the Soo Line rails ran from Minnesota.

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ADDITIONAL MARINE NEWS

It would appear that efforts are underway to get the 1989 lake shipping season off to an early start, particularly on the U.S. side of the border. At the time of this writing, it was said that approaches had been made to the U.S. Corps of Engineers to have the U.S. locks at Sault Ste. Marie opened to vessel traffic on Tuesday, March 21st, but there was no indication whether the authorities would agree. Whether the Soo Locks open that early or not, however, several U.S. fleets have plans to fit out their boats early. One such company is Inland Steel, which plans to have all three of its vessels (EDWARD L. RYERSON, WILFRED SYKES and JOSEPH L. BLOCK) in commission by March 19th and running from Escanaba to Indiana Harbor. There is less enthusiasm on the Canadian side, where grain prospects are not encouraging. There may be some demand for early operation amongst self-unloader operators who were unable to fulfill cargo commitments last autumn.

Indications are that the end of the line has come for the fleet which for many years was operated by the Ford Motor Company, and which in recent years has been owned by the Rouge Steel Company, which took over the manufacturing of steel for Ford. In 1988, the Rouge Steel fleet was down to three vessels, all self-unloaders, these being the 1924-built HENRY FORD II, the 1952-built BENSON FORD (III), (a) EDWARD B. GREENE (85), and the WILLIAM CLAY FORD (II), (a) WALTER A. STERLING (85), which was put together in 1961 using a new mid-body and parts of a 1942-built salt-water tanker. It would seem that Rouge Steel has decided to contract out its lake shipping requirements, and that the company is considering bids from several operators. Accordingly, all three Rouge Steel vessels will likely appear in new colours during 1989,

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