

ALTADOC (I)

In earlier issues, we have remarked upon the fact that one of the most famous U.S.-flag "independent" fleets on the lakes in years gone by was that operated by Joseph C. Gilchrist. This highly-respected shipowner had been born at Port Huron, Michigan, back in 1850, and he was raised in Marine City, where his father had shipping and shipbuilding interests. J.C. Gilchrist later went into the lumber business in Alpena and then in Vermilion, Ohio, and it was a natural step for him to move into the area of transporting lumber by ship. By the 1880s, Gilchrist was actively engaged in accumulating and operating a large fleet of steamers and schooner-barges.

Over the years, Joseph Gilchrist had numerous partners, including his cousin, Frank W. Gilchrist, of Alpena, and also John W. Moore and J.H. Bartow, of Cleveland. It was, however, J.C. Gilchrist who was the power behind the Gilchrist Transportation Company, the firm which eventually was formed to consolidate his various shipping concerns. When the company added new ships to its rapidly-expanding fleet, the cost of their construction usually was financed by syndicates organized by Joseph C. Gilchrist.

At the turn of the century, Gilchrist began a very rapid expansion of his fleet through the construction of numerous steel-hulled bulk carriers. Most of these were built in "classes", each of which comprised several sister-ships. The first of these classes consisted of six 346-foot, 5,500-ton capacity "Planets", steamers named JUPITER, MARS, NEPTUNE, SATURN, URANUS and VENUS.

The second of the Gilchrist classes contained but two steamers. Gilchrist ordered them from the West Bay City Shipbuilding Company (the successor to the F.W. Wheeler Company) late in 1900 or early in 1901. They were launched at the West Bay City, Michigan, shipyard exactly two weeks apart, and the first of them, Hull 602, hit the water on Wednesday, May 1st, 1901. That in itself was somewhat unusual, in that most lake shipyards in those years made it a practice to launch new vessels on Saturdays in order to accommodate the large crowds which invariably would turn out to watch such events.

Hull 602 was christened LAKE SHORE, while her almost exact sistership, built as Hull 603, was named GILCHRIST. The LAKE SHORE was 356.0 feet in length, with a beam of 50.0 feet and depth of 28.0 feet, and her tonnage was calculated as 3871 Gross and 2997 Net. She was powered by a triple expansion engine with cylinders of 22, 35 and 55 inches diameter and a stroke of 42 inches. The engine was built for the ship in 1901 by the Detroit Shipbuilding Company. Steam was provided by two coal-fired, single-ended, Scotch boilers which measured 13'2" by 11'6", and were manufactured by the American Ship Building Company, Cleveland.

LAKE SHORE was typical of lake bulk carriers of her period. She had a hull that sported a sweeping sheer, with a straight stem and a graceful counter stern. Atop her half-forecastle, there was a closed steel rail which gave way to an open rail about two-thirds of the way back, and there was a raised section atop the closed rail near the bow for added protection from the elements. On the forecastle head sat the small "turret-style" pilothouse, with five windows in its curved front, and abaft the pilothouse was the texas cabin, containing the master's office and quarters. The deck officers and crew were accommodated in spartan quarters in the forecastle. An open navigation bridge was located on the monkey's island atop the pilothouse. The tall and rather heavy foremast rose out of the texas.

An open wire rail ran down the sides of the spar deck, and the steamer was fitted with wooden covers for her numerous hatches. These had to be handled into place, dogged down, and then covered with canvas battens each time the vessel sailed.

The after cabin was placed on the flush quarterdeck, with a closed steel taffrail providing shelter from boarding seas. The cabin was fitted with large windows and a skylight to admit daylight. The two lifeboats were carried atop the cabin and were worked from radial davits. The stack was tall, heavy, and only slightly raked, and the heavy mainmast rose very close be-