MARY H. BOYCE

In looking over the list of vessels which we have featured in these pages over the years, we recently noted that very few of them have been the small, wooden-hulled freighters which were the backbone of the lake shipping industry for so many years. There has never been any conscious attempt to avoid writing about them, but in many cases their comings and goings around the lakes in a workaday world were not recorded, and tracing their history can be a difficult task. As well, their activities were greatly overshadowed by those of the famous "line" package freighters and the high-profile passenger ships. Indeed, the latter vessels are those which most frequently are remembered today, and few observers of the shipping scene one hundred years later ever give more than a passing thought to the little steamers which carried every kind of bulk cargo imaginable. In fact, we wonder whether some of the younger shipping enthusiasts are even aware of the existence of such ships in those times so long ago.

The steamer which we feature this month was built in the latter years of the nineteenth century, operated successfully for a number of owners, and lasted longer than many other wooden-hulled freighters, serving through the first three decades of the new century. It seems fitting that we should present her story in this, our very first issue of the last decade of the twentieth century.

The small, propeller-driven freighter MARY H. BOYCE was designed specifically for the lumber trade, and she was built of oak in 1888 at Grand Haven, Michigan, by shipbuilder Duncan Robertson. She was constructed for Sherman Hoyt Boyce, who was a member of the lumber firm of Monroe, Boyce and Howlett, and she was named for his wife, Mary Hoyt Boyce, who in later years worked as secretary of her husband's firm. The steamer named for her was enrolled at Grand Haven and was given official number U.S.92033.

MARY H. BOYCE was 181.4 feet in length, 34.2 feet in the beam, and 14.0 feet in depth, with tonnage of 700.83 Gross and 607.60 Net. She was powered by a fore-and-aft compound engine, which had cylinders of 22 and 40 inches and a stroke of 36 inches. The engine produced Indicated Horsepower of 375, and could turn 87 revolutions per minute. Steam was produced by one firebox-type boiler, which measured 10 feet by 15 feet, and which probably was fuelled (at least originally) by wood. Harvey C. Beeson's shipping directory stated that her engine was built by H. G. Trout, of Buffalo. The 1899 Great Lakes Register recorded that all of the BOYCE's machinery was constructed in 1888, the engine by the King Iron Works, of Buffalo, and the boiler by Johnston Bros., of Ferrysburg, Michigan.

The BOYCE was a typical lumber carrier of her day, with but a single deck. Her small pilothouse was carried on the forecastle forward, and there was only a small texas cabin behind it. Aft, there was a fairly large deckhouse and the stack rose out of a small boilerhouse with a curved roof, which was located just forward of the aft cabin. The stack was tall and thin, and was heavily raked, as also were the two tall and heavy masts, the fore stepped just abaft the texas and the main very close to the forward bulkhead of the boilerhouse.

MARY H. BOYCE received a major rebuild in 1892 at Saginaw, Michigan, at which time she was enlarged with the addition of a second deck, and her tonnage was increased to 932.33 Gross and 839.10 Net. She received a further rebuild in 1902, when her tonnage was reduced to 700 Gross and 476 Net, and it seems evident that her second deck was removed at this time.

As well, it was in 1902 that MARY H. BOYCE was sold by Sherman H. Boyce, who in that year had seen his firm reorganized as Monroe, Boyce & Company. Her purchaser was Frank W. Smith, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who was one of the former owners of the Milwaukee Drydock Company, and who held considerable interest in vessel owning and management concerns. He was one of the principals of the Lake Shore Stone Company, of Milwaukee, and it was this firm which, in 1902, ordered the conversion by the Leatham Smith Dry Dock Company,