

JOHN MITCHELL appears to have operated without untoward incident until Monday, July 10, 1911. Early that day, the MITCHELL was upbound out of the St. Mary's River, heavily laden with a cargo of coal consigned to Superior, Wisconsin. With Capt. John H. Massey in command, the MITCHELL made her way carefully out of Whitefish Bay and onto Lake Superior in the early morning darkness, the visibility severely impeded by a heavy fog which formed in the warm air over the cold lake waters. On board JOHN MITCHELL, in addition to her crew, were a number of guests, including a small boy and six women.

When she was off Vermilion Point, Michigan, some ten miles west of Whitefish Point, the MITCHELL was, without warning, rammed on the port bow by the Jenkins Steamship Company's 354-foot, 1903-built, bulk freight steamer WILLIAM HENRY MACK (14), (b) VALCARTIER. The MACK was running light and her bow cut deeply into the hull of the MITCHELL. There had been no time for either ship to avoid the collision, and Capt. Massey had only just managed to sound the MITCHELL's whistle before the impact.

JOHN MITCHELL immediately heeled sharply to port, taking water very fast. Her foremast fell over onto the deck of the MACK, briefly locking the two ships together. The crews of both vessels, realizing that the MITCHELL could not long remain afloat, placed a ladder between the decks of the steamers, and twenty-five persons scrambled to safety via the ladder. Meanwhile, six persons from the MITCHELL, three men and three women, took to a small boat that they had managed to launch.

In less than seven minutes from the moment of impact, the JOHN MITCHELL sank to the bottom of Lake Superior, coming to rest upside down in some 150 feet of water. As she slid beneath the surface, the MITCHELL created sufficient disturbance of the water to capsize the small boat, and its six occupants were tossed into the water. One of them, sixteen-year-old Fay Clemens, the daughter of the MITCHELL's steward, was a strong swimmer, and she was able to keep the other five persons with the overturned boat and direct the crew of the MACK in their successful efforts to pull all six from the water.

Fortunately, the WILLIAM HENRY MACK was able to remain afloat, although she had sustained extremely severe damage. The entire lower portion of her bow was pushed back some twenty feet and was completely open to the water. Only three lives were lost in the accident, all from the MITCHELL; they were second officer Archie Causely, watchman George Austin and, unfortunately, steward Al Clemens, the father of heroine Fay Clemens.

As a result of the fact that the MITCHELL lay in deep water, and off one of the most exposed areas of Lake Superior's shoreline, no effort ever was made to salvage the steamer or her cargo. The MITCHELL still lies today in the spot where she sank seventy-nine years ago.

Meanwhile, the MITCHELL's sistership, WILLIAM B. DAVOCK, had enjoyed a rather successful early part of her career. She had been built to the order of the Vulcan Steamship Company, of Cleveland, which was managed by William B. Davock. This gentleman, a native of Buffalo, New York, had long been involved in the iron ore and shipping business, for many years being associated with the firm of H. H. Brown & Company.

Davock was closely associated with the shipping interests (which began on the lakes in 1906) of the Snyder family, of Sewickley, Pennsylvania, and their Shenango Furnace Company. Davock remained as manager of the Shenango lake fleet until the company opened its own shipping office at Cleveland in 1912. It was only natural, therefore, that the operation of WILLIAM B. DAVOCK was associated with the Shenango fleet. In fact, she carried the same dark green hull paint that the Shenango boats sported for so many years. The steamer's cabins were painted white, and her stack appears to have been black with a small design of some nature (we have been unable to identify what it was) carried rather high up on the stack.

It would appear that the Vulcan Steamship Company owned the DAVOCK all the way through until 1915, although there is considerable confusion as to who actually managed the company at any given time. Some sources indicate that