

MAPLECOURT

When we seek a vessel to feature in these pages, we try to find a ship which had an interesting career. Some boats served for many years on the lakes without ever doing anything of note, and about some of them we would be lucky to be able to compose a feature of even a half-page in length. But other ships were notable for bizarre adventures, close escapes, tragic accidents, a wide variety of owners or names, or other unusual aspects of their careers. The vessel we have chosen to feature this issue was notable not only for the variety of trades she served, and for great changes in appearance over the years, but also for some particularly peculiar passages which she made through the small locks of the old canals.

The Canadian freight steamer and one-time wrecker MAPLECOURT began her life in 1892, when she was designed by John H. Smith at the request of the Northern Steamship Company, Buffalo, the lake shipping affiliate of the Great Northern Railway. The ship was designed to carry five hundred passengers, and to make the trip from Buffalo to Duluth in sixty hours. The contract for the building of the vessel was let to the Globe Iron Works Company of Cleveland, which constructed her as Hull 50 of its yard on Old River Street, at the foot of Taylor Street, in Cleveland, Ohio.

The keel of the big new passenger steamer was laid on October 7th, 1892. It is interesting to note that the keel laying took place on a Friday, a day which many lake sailors have considered inauspicious for the start of a ship's career or even a voyage. Perhaps the Friday jinx was more than just a myth, because the ship was to encounter a great deal of misfortune during her almost fifty years of life.

The steamer's hull was launched on Saturday, January 6th, 1894. This was a Saturday, it being accepted practice in those years to launch new ships on Saturdays so that crowds of admiring spectators could turn out to view a shipyard's latest product. Miss M. Gertrude Hanna, daughter of Howard M. Hanna (president of Globe Iron Works), pushed an electric button that started the guillotines cutting the myriad manila ropes and releasing the shoring under the hull, sending the ship broadside down the ways to drop five feet into the old riverbed of the Cuyahoga River. Co-sponsor of the ship was Mrs. John F. Gordon, wife of the general manager, Buffalo, of the Northern Steamship Company. She christened the ship with a bottle of sparkling wine, and gave her the name NORTH WEST.

Registered at Buffalo, New York, and enrolled under official number U.S.130661, NORTH WEST came by her name proudly. Not only did she carry on the Northern Steamship Company's tradition of giving its vessels names beginning with the word "North" or "Northern", but in addition the entire name honoured the area of the lakes which she was designed to serve.

NORTH WEST was 358.5 feet in length, 44.0 feet in the beam, and 23.2 feet in depth, with tonnage of 4244 Gross and 2339 Net. Her hull was built with some 1,500 tons of steel and 145 tons of iron. The plates were joined together by 81½ tons of steel rivets. In the construction of the cabins, some 50,679 cubic feet of timber and several tons of nails were used. Fifteen tons of paint were required to finish the hull, together with thirty barrels of oil.

NORTH WEST had twin screws driven by two quadruple expansion steam engines built by the shipyard. They had cylinders of 25½, 36½, 51½ and 74 inches, with a stroke of 42 inches, and they developed 7,000 horsepower. Turning at 120 revolutions per minute, the engines gave the steamer a regular speed of 20 miles per hour on a draft of 16 feet. The steamer had a complete water ballast system and, by altering her trim and pushing her machinery harder, she could do 27 miles per hour and did so on her trials on Lake Erie.

Steam at 275 p.s.i. was produced by a massive array of 28 Belleville patent water-tube boilers built by Globe Iron Works, each measuring 7'9" by 6'4½". The boilers, in three groups each of which had its own smokestack, were