

NEEBING (II)

If there is one thing that troubles Great Lakes marine historians more than anything else, it probably is the confusion that has resulted when more than one vessel has carried the same name (especially if they were operating at the same time). This situation has been aggravated by the propensity of lake ship operators to "recycle" well-known names. Almost every historian has been misled by such name confusion at one time or another, and many publications have made themselves look foolish by failing to ensure that a reference to a particular ship did, indeed, identify the correct vessel.

The steamer which we feature this month is one surrounding which there could be considerable "name confusion". Not only was her last name a repetition of the name carried many years earlier by another vessel, but the steamer's first name actually was spelled in three different ways in the official registry records over the years. As if these two problems were not enough to baffle researchers, the steamer also is believed to have operated for a time under a name that seems never to have been registered officially at all!

It is high time that the story of her interesting life and tragic loss was told. In doing so, we will try to resolve some of the confusion over her various names, while still leaving a few questions for which answers are not readily available.

One of the Great Lakes' well known shipbuilding yards in the years around the turn of the century was that of the Craig Shipbuilding Company at Toledo, Ohio. The Craig family had been active in shipbuilding at Gibraltar, Michigan, and also at Trenton, Michigan, but moved to a new site on the east shore of the Maumee River at Toledo in 1888. The Craig yard turned out its first steel hull in 1890, and the company soon became famous for its specialty-type vessels, and most notably for the passenger steamers that it built. It is interesting to note that the Craig Shipbuilding Company was the only major U.S. builder of steel hulls on the lakes that did not become part of the American Ship Building Company when that giant amalgamation of existing shipyards was formed in 1899.

In fact, although the Craigs left the yard in 1905 and it was then taken over by other owners, it did not become part of American Ship Building until 1945. The Toledo shipyard lasted into the twilight of AmShip's activities on the lakes in the 1970s, and then was closed, but it still exists today, reactivated under new ownership.

In any event, during 1892, the Craig yard built, as its Hull 52, a steel-hulled steamer which was intended to operate as a lumber carrier. In the past, most lumber had been carried by small, wooden-hulled vessels which were suitable for trading into the small ports and other places where lumber was loaded. Craig felt that a steel ship, still built to relatively small dimensions, could engage in this trade quite successfully, and built this steamer on speculation in the hope that she could be sold after completion.

Some sources have suggested that Hull 52 out of the Craig yard was the first steel-hulled lumber carrier ever built on the Great Lakes, but that is not so. In fact, she was the second! As far as we can determine, the first was VIKING (18), (b) CYLATON (20), (c) CLINTON (II)(25), (d) VIKING, (U.S.161612 and C.141661), which was built in 1889 at Buffalo as Hull 49 of the Union Dry Dock Company, 217.4 x 37.1 x 15.0, 117.23 Gross and 943.82 Net. Her first operator was F. W. Gilchrist, of Alpena, Michigan. She served various owners including, from 1918 to 1925, the Mathews Steamship Company of Toronto, and finally was scrapped in 1936.

Somewhat smaller was Craig's Hull 52. She was only 193.4 feet in length between perpendiculars (approximately 210 feet overall), 40.5 feet in the beam and 13.0 feet in depth of hull. Her tonnage was calculated as 908.88 Gross and 779.82 Net. Typical of lumber carriers, she was a "well-decker", with