

where his father had shipping and shipbuilding interests. Joseph later went into the lumber business, first at Alpena, Michigan, and later at Vermilion, Ohio, and by the 1880s he was operating a rapidly-growing fleet of steamers and schooner-barges, which at first moved his lumber but later worked mainly in the bulk trades.

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. But it was the efforts of J. C. Gilchrist that made the fleet successful and it was he who brought the fleet into the new century with a major expansion of operations in the form of large, steel-hulled bulk carriers like the R. L. IRELAND, which were built especially for the iron ore and coal trades.

In fact, the fleet had built to its order seven major classes of similar but ever-larger steel bulk freighters, relying on the financing which Joseph Gilchrist was able to arrange quite easily in those boom times. This extensive construction programme made the Gilchrist Transportation Company into the number two U.S.-flag fleet on the Great Lakes, second in size only to the Pittsburgh Steamship Company. The rapid fleet expansion, however, was also one of the major causes of the eventual failure of the company.

R. L. IRELAND was a member of the fourth of the "classes" of steel ships built especially for the Gilchrist Transportation Company. The largest of these groups of steamers, it comprised eight ships, all of which were almost-exact sisterships and had a carrying capacity of 7,000 tons each. The PERRY G. WALKER followed the IRELAND out of the South Chicago shipyard as its Hull 63, while HENRY S. SILL was built by the Superior Shipbuilding Company at West Superior. The West Bay City Shipbuilding Company built FRANK W. GILCHRIST and the J. L. WEEKS, while the American Ship Building Company constructed JOSEPH C. GILCHRIST (II), R. E. SCHUCK (II) and LEWIS WOODRUFF at Lorain, Ohio.

The IRELAND appears to have operated very successfully for Gilchrist, although she did have her share of scrapes, as all freighters did. In the severe ice jam which occurred above the Soo in May of 1905, R. L. IRELAND managed to run down the tinstacker EMPIRE CITY, which sustained considerable damage. There is no report of any appreciable damage to the IRELAND.

A much more serious accident occurred during very cold weather, late in the autumn of the following year. On Friday, December 7th, 1906, the IRELAND stranded on Gull Island Reef in the Apostle Islands of Lake Superior, off Bayfield, Wisconsin. Due to the heavy weather and the ship's exposed position, the crew were taken off in the boats, the temperature being in the range of Minus 20° F. at the time. Some of the men reached Bayfield and summoned help, which arrived in the form of the IRELAND's sistership, JOSEPH C. GILCHRIST and the Reid wrecking steamer MANISTIQUE. They began salvage operations, and the steamer was refloated on December 11th, after which the crew went back aboard their ship.

At the time of the accident, the IRELAND was bound for Superior with a cargo of coal, and so after she was refloated, she resumed her way to her intended destination under tow of the 89-foot, 1892-built, wooden-hulled tug E. G. CROSBY of the Great Lakes Towing Company. A fresh bout of heavy weather caused the towline to part, however, and during the course of transferring the IRELAND's crew to the tug for safety, one man lost his life when he fell into the frigid water. Eventually, when the weather improved, the CROSBY succeeded in taking the IRELAND in tow again, and the pair finally reached Superior safely. The cost of the salvage operation and repairs to the IRELAND were reported to total \$90,000.

As far as we know, the IRELAND did not get into any other major incidents, and the only change made to the steamer during her Gilchrist years was the addition of an enclosed upper pilothouse. This first appears in a 1909 photo