

ONE PICKANDS, A HOBSON and TWO MATHERS

On more than one occasion, we have featured in these pages the stories of the various members of a notable group of sisterships. For example, in our January issue, we presented the history of three early sistership canallers, although we focussed our attention on one of the vessels. On certain occasions, we have featured all of the members of a particular group because, although the group as a whole was worthy of interest, none of the individual ships involved ever did anything which was of special importance.

As the art of the major upper lakes shipbuilding yards developed rapidly during the first three decades of the Twentieth Century, and as the large U.S.-flag fleets expanded their operations and replaced older carriers with more modern and efficient, steel-hulled steamers, so there came into being large groups of relatively similar bulk freighters, built to so-called "standard" designs. The two largest U.S. fleets on the lakes during those years were those of the Pittsburgh Steamship Company and the Interlake Steamship Company. The former was the lake shipping arm of the United States Steel Corporation, known to many as the "Steel Trust", which was formed early in the century by J. Pierpont Morgan and associates.

However, back in 1883, Pickands Mather & Company, of Cleveland, Ohio, was formed by Colonel James Pickands, Jay C. Morse and Samuel Mather as an iron ore commission agency. That same year, the firm became involved in Great Lakes shipping when it acquired a part interest in the wooden-hulled steamer V. H. KETCHAM, which it retained until she was sold in 1892. In 1886, the firm acquired an interest in the newly-built wooden steamer JAMES PICKANDS, which it managed until she was lost by stranding in 1894. The year 1887 saw Pickands Mather & Company assume management of another new wooden steamer, ROBERT R. RHODES, in which it also held a small ownership interest until 1902. The company's fourth ship was another wooden bulk carrier, the first SAMUEL MATHER, which was commissioned in 1887 as a virtual sistership of the RHODES in dimensions, and in which Pickands Mather held a 5/48 ownership interest. Unfortunately, this steamer was lost by collision in 1891.

About 1890, Pickands Mather & Company became operating managers for the Minnesota Iron Mining Company's shipping affiliate, the Minnesota Steamship Company and, in subsequent years, Pickands Mather entered into management agreements with other fleets, notable among them being the American Steel Barge Company, owner and builder of a large fleet of whaleback steamers and consort barges.

In 1913, all of the various shipping interests which then were under Pickands Mather management were consolidated under one operating entity, namely the Interlake Steamship Company. Its first president was Henry G. Dalton, who had been an associate of Pickands, Mather and Morse when they first combined their interests back in 1883. He was succeeded as Interlake's president in 1924 by Harry Coulby, another Pickands Mather partner, who held the post until his death in 1929. (Interestingly, Coulby had also served as manager of the Pittsburgh Steamship Company from 1904 until 1929.) After Coulby's death, Henry G. Dalton again became president of Interlake, a position he held until 1939. Dalton was succeeded by Elton Hoyt II who, in turn was succeeded by John Sherwin.

It was during Coulby's term as president of Interlake that two very important events occurred. The first was that twelve older ships were sold out of the fleet. One was sold in 1924 but was repossessed in 1928. Eleven steamers, however, were sold to Paterson Steamships Ltd., of Fort William, seven of these in 1925 and a further four in 1926. As a consequence, there occurred the other big event of this period, the construction for the Interlake fleet of a group of large and modern bulk carriers to take the place of the smaller vessels that had been sold out of the fleet.

In fact, five new steamers would be built during this period, four of which were almost identical sisterships, while the fifth was substantially larger and finished in much more elaborate fashion as would befit the fleet's new