

TWO STEAMERS NAMED W. C. RICHARDSON

In the February issue, we brought to our readers the story of two lake steamers named W. C. RICHARDSON, one of which lived a long and successful life, while the other ended her days tragically after less than a decade of service for the fleet operated by Capt. Wesley Cunningham Richardson, for whom both ships were named. Little did we know, as we prepared that feature, that so much additional information would become available that we could make a whole second instalment of the story available to our readers only three months later.

Several of our stalwart T.M.H.S. members have contributed the information and photos which appear in this follow-up to the W. C. RICHARDSON feature. We thank them for their efforts and, in order not to break the continuity of the story, they will be identified at the conclusion of this piece.

It will be recalled that W. C. RICHARDSON (I) was built in 1902 and finished her days when she stranded to a total loss on Waverly Shoal, just outside the entrance to the harbour at Buffalo, New York, in December of 1909. We have, however, found reference to two additional accidents involving this steamer, and the following details are taken from contemporary press reports.

The "Cleveland Plain Dealer" of April 16, 1905, reported this item, dated April 15, from Ashtabula, Ohio: "The stm. W. C. RICHARDSON, coal laden from Duluth, left her dock at 7:00 this morning and after clearing the piers went aground on the bar outside. Tugs pulled on her till 2:00 P.M. before she was released and got away. She was not damaged. The RICHARDSON was drawing 17'8" forward and 17'11" aft."

It seems that 1905 was not such a good year for the RICHARDSON, because on June 30th, the "Buffalo Morning Express" ran the following report, originating on June 29th at Duluth: "The stm. W. C. RICHARDSON is unloading coal and receiving repairs to 6 broken plates at the same time. The break was caused by the stm. (LEWIS) WOODRUFF of the Gilchrist fleet, which struck the RICHARDSON on the starboard side while running through the Soo. The WOODRUFF's stem is out of plumb, but she is not seriously damaged."

The "Buffalo Evening News" carried a follow-up news item on July 7, 1905, concerning this same accident: "The Gilchrist stm. (LEWIS) WOODRUFF passed Port Huron yesterday with a badly damaged bow, caused by a collision with the stm. RICHARDSON. The WOODRUFF will continue to Cleveland where, after unloading, she will be examined and repaired."

It might, perhaps, be timely for us to digress a moment and note that LEWIS WOODRUFF was to suffer an even more tragic fate than that which befell the W. C. RICHARDSON. Built in 1903 at Lorain by the American Ship Building Company, and 416 x 50 x 28, 4707 Gross and 3380 Net, she was owned and operated by the Gilchrist Transportation Company until that fleet was dissolved in 1913, at which time she was acquired by the Interlake Steamship Company and was renamed (b) ARGUS (I). Along with her virtually identical sistership HYDRUS (I), (a) R. E. SCHUCK (II)(13), she was caught out on Lake Huron during the the Great Storm of November, 1913. Neither steamer survived, each foundering with the loss of all hands.

The loss of W. C. RICHARDSON in 1909 was reported in great detail by the Buffalo newspapers, due to the tragic nature of the accident which occurred so close to the harbour entrance. Hyperbole and speculation marred many of the reports, but perhaps the best coverage appeared in the "Buffalo Evening News" of Friday, December 10th. It was headlined: "14 Survivors of RICHARDSON Brought Ashore; Herded Together by Steamer Owner, Who Took Extraordinary Precautions Against Newspaper Men - But Seaman Tells 'News' How Disaster Was Brought About".

"All the members except five of the crew of the wrecked propeller W. C. RICHARDSON stepped upon the dock at the Commercial Slip at 9:45 this morning. The five who are missing are: E. J. Cleary, second mate, of Detroit; Samuel