

Readers will recall that our Ship of the Month No. 233, featured in the January issue, was the steamer SEVONA, (a) EMILY P. WEED (97). That feature was written for us by Robert J. MacDonald, of Erie, Pennsylvania, whose grandfather, Capt. Donald Sutherland McDonald, commanded SEVONA and was lost when she was wrecked on the Sand Island Shoals, in the Apostle Islands of Lake Superior, on September 2nd, 1905.

Bob has followed up on the article with some additional comments that should be shared with our readers. We mentioned that James McBrier, of Erie, who was principal owner of SEVONA, also owned the wooden steamers FEDORA and NYANZA, and the schooner-barge GALATEA. We questioned his reported involvement with the big UGANDA, but thought that he may have had an interest in ELFIN-MERE. Bob has not been able to find any documentation of McBrier owning ELFIN-MERE, but he confirms that UGANDA was built for McBrier in 1892 and did not pass to Edward Mehl, also of Erie, until 1902. As well, Bob indicates that, at various times, McBrier also had the wooden schooner-barge JOHN SHERMAN (U.S.75408), built in 1865 at Cleveland, and the wooden steamer FRED MCBRIER (U.S.120452), built in 1881 at Bay City, Michigan.

As verification of the fact that McBrier owned UGANDA, Bob Macdonald has sent us a copy of a letter, written in James McBrier's own hand on a piece of his personal stationery, dated December 8, 1897. The letter requests a local supplier of lubricating oil to send to McBrier a statement for oil purchased for the steamers NYANZA, UGANDA and SEVONA.

Bob has also copied us with several letters written to him by Charles E. Scouller, the deckhand from Erie who took charge of the smaller of the SEVONA's two lifeboats when the crew was leaving the wreck. Amongst other items, Scouller noted the colours worn by SEVONA. "The SEVONA's decks were red. The forecastle deck was lead colour, 3" planks fore & aft. The after ends of the planks extended a few inches over the bulkhead. The sides or edges of the forecastle deck were rounded and I think of steel painted black.

"The top of the forward cabin, pilot house and after cabin were lead (coloured) canvas. The insides of the bulwarks were yellow and the boiler house also. The fuel box was yellow when she had one. The foremast was yellow and I think the mainmast was black or dark green."

In a letter sent from his home in Fort Lauderdale in 1971, Scouller commented on his lifeboat crew and working conditions on SEVONA. "The one-armed oiler on the SEVONA was Harry Van Vlack. Both oilers were in our boat. The porter, one fireman, one deckhand and one oiler were at the oars. Harry Van Vlack and myself made up a total of six in our boat as near as I can remember.

"The SEVONA carried 3 firemen standing 3 hr. watches with a coal passer standing watch with him (each fireman). She carried 4 deckhands. Three worked as coal passers at sea and worked on deck in port and entering and leaving port. The 4th deckhand worked from 7 to 12 and 1 to 6 (o'clock) on deck. The chief (engineer) and assistant each had an oiler. They stood 6 hr. on and 6 hr. off."

About the wooden-hulled UGANDA, Scouller wrote that she "carried 2 firemen, 3 deckhands and 1 oiler. The firemen and coal passers stood 6 (hours) on, 6 off. The one oiler was on the chief's watch. The assistant did his own oiling... She had high bulwarks. They increased her tonnage and capacity by raising her spar deck to the top of the bulwarks. She had a very bad twist, usually caused by loading the stern to give a list toward the dock and loading the bow (afterward) to straighten her up. Otherwise they would not have been able to lower the spouts enough at the forward end."

Our sincere thanks go to Bob MacDonald for sharing these delightful tidbits with us and providing a glimpse of turn-of-the-century steamboating.