

ALGOPASSENGERS!

OSSIFRAGE - The Rest of the Story...!

In the December issue, as the final chapter in our salute to the Algoma Central Corporation in its centennial year, we featured one of only three passenger steamers that the Algoma Central fleet ever owned and operated. We chose the OSSIFRAGE because she had a relatively long life and a most intriguing history, much of which we did not know and had no immediate means of discovering.

During the thirty-one years in which Your Editor has been piloting this humble publication, one of the greatest pleasures he has found in his work has come not from composing himself the most complete history of any one particular ship, but rather from serving as a catalyst, prompting others to ferret out missing information so that we could put the pieces together. This sometimes is a lengthy procedure, and some readers might wonder whether it is worth the effort. We can assure you that it most certainly is.

When we penned the original feature, we imagined that we might learn some more about OSSIFRAGE, or at least we hoped that we might. As it turned out, we did, and so we put together a two-page follow-up in the January issue. It raised, however, even more questions than it resolved and, in hindsight, we should have labelled that item "Ship of the Month No. 252A", for the flood-gates opened and now we have so much additional information that yet another full-sized feature can be produced; we will call this "Ship of the Month No. 252B". The information it contains has been located and relayed to us by some of the foremost marine historical researchers active around the lakes today, and we shall be eternally grateful for their efforts.

And so, dear readers, put your feet up and get ready for yet another thirty-year trip aboard OSSIFRAGE, the little passenger steamer that really COULD!

* * *

Much of the following takes the form of newspaper articles located by member Jack Messmer, of Lancaster, New York, and they tie together much of what was contained in our first feature and the enrollment details presented in the follow-up last month. They also give the lie to much of what we had supposed to be the time frame of the steamer's many and varied trades.

The very first item concerns the building of OSSIFRAGE, and gives us some details (but not the manufacturer's name) for the ship's first engine. It comes from the "Marine Record" of March 25, 1886: "West Bay City - F. W. Wheeler, shipbuilder, is building (Hull) No. 26, an excursion steamer, at the same yard, to be named the OSSIFRAGE, 130 ft. over all, 28 ft. 6 inches beam, 10 ft. depth of hold. She will have a high pressure engine 22 (inches cylinder diameter) by 24 (inches stroke) and a steel boiler 7 x 15 (feet). She is a very fine model and is designed to make great speed. She will run this season in connection with the Detroit, Bay City & Alpena railroad between Black River, Mich., and Alpena, and will be owned by F. W. Wheeler, her builder." The additions in parentheses are Your Editor's.

The Detroit, Bay City & Alpena Railroad was formed in the early 1880s and was the successor to the Tawas & Bay County Railroad. It ran up the eastern side of Michigan, and later was absorbed by the Detroit and Mackinaw Railroad, which was in existence until just a few years ago.

Another item appeared in the "Buffalo Daily Courier", May 13, 1886: "The new passenger propeller OSSIFRAGE, built by F. W. Wheeler at (West) Bay City was launched on Tuesday (May 11th). She is 120 ft. in the keel, 28 ft. beam and 10 ft. depth of hold. She will go on the Black River and Alpena route next week in connection with the Detroit, Bay City & Alpena railroad."

Aha! So now we know what the D.B.C.&A.R.R. service was and we know (see what is to come) that the photo of OSSIFRAGE with the five-whistle chime was taken in 1886, her very first year of life. She was to run that route for only