

As is evident, each of the Zenith Transit ships was given the "nickname" of a United States city, and most of them referred to Great Lakes cities. But we know of no lake city ever called "The Crescent City". Some sources have concluded that she took her name from a lumber-shipping port in California's Del Norte County, but we fail to see any connection between that place (really so named, not just nicknamed) and the Zenith Transit Company or any of its principals. Accordingly, we cannot but think that CRESCENT CITY was named for the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, one of North America's greatest ports and one through which large volumes of American steel products have been shipped for many years. New Orleans is called "The Crescent City" because of its shape; it curves along the shore of the left bank of the Mississippi River, and it is squeezed between the big river and Lake Pontchartrain.

CRESCENT CITY was built at South Chicago as Hull 25 of the Chicago Shipbuilding Company, and she was launched on Tuesday, February 2nd, 1897. The fact that she was launched on a Tuesday rather than on a Saturday (which was the more common choice of launch days), would tend to indicate that no major festivities accompanied her launch. The new steamer was enrolled at Duluth, Minnesota, and was given U.S. official number 127176.

According to the 1897 issue of "Merchant Vessels of the United States", CRESCENT CITY (which was 413'6" in overall length) measured 406.0 feet in length between perpendiculars, 48.2 feet in breadth, and 23.9 feet in depth. Her tonnage was shown as 4213.00 Gross and 3675.64 Net. She was listed as having 1,800 Indicated Horsepower, but there is reason to question that.

More details on CRESCENT CITY as she originally was built, can be gleaned from various other sources, including the 1908 Great Lakes Register (Bureau Veritas). Her hull contained four cargo compartments, and four of her bulkheads were watertight. She had eleven hatches which were spaced on 24-foot centres.

CRESCENT CITY was typical of many of the big, new steamers of her era in that she was equipped with very powerful machinery, not only to give her a good turn of speed but also the enable her to tow consort barges, which was the custom of the day. She was fitted with a quadruple expansion engine built for her in 1897 by the Chicago Shipbuilding Company. It had cylinders of 18½, 28, 41 and 60 inches diameter, and a 42-inch stroke. The Great Lakes Register gave her Indicated Horsepower as 1,600 at 85 revolutions per minute. Steam at 250 pounds per square inch was produced by two coal-fired watertube boilers manufactured in 1897 by the Babcock & Wilcox Company at Elizabethport. Each boiler was 12'6" in diameter and 8'0" in length. There were four furnaces, 126 square feet of grate surface, and 6,400 square feet of heating surface.

The CRESCENT CITY was a handsome vessel indeed. She had a straight stem, a graceful counter stern, and a gentle sheer to her decks. She had a half-topgallant forecastle and a flush quarterdeck. Steel rubrails ran along her sides to protect her rivetted steel plating, and her two big stockless anchors were suspended from hawsepipes set near the stem just above the loaded waterline.

There was a closed steel bulwark around the forward section of the fore-castle head, and an open pipe rail ran around the rest of it. A hinged steering pole was set right at the stem. The small, turret-style pilothouse sat directly atop the fore-castle head and abaft it was placed a small texas house which contained the master's office and quarters. An open navigation bridge was positioned on the monkey's island atop the pilothouse, with protection, such as it was, provided by a closed wooden rail, an awning and a canvas weathercloth. The tall pole foremast rose out of the texas and was pleasingly raked. A small, open-railed crow's nest was carried part-way up the mast. The second of the steamer's three masts, the main, was stepped about midships.