

LAKE ONTARIO / CHAS. C. RYAN

- by Capt. Gerry Ouderkirk -
with The Editor

In the year 1872, a small, wooden-hulled, passenger and package freight steamer was launched for the firm of Capt. P. Larkin & Co., of St. Catharines, Ontario. Capt. Larkin, in conjunction with G. E. Jaques & Co., Aeneas D. Mackay and Capt. J. B. Fairgrieve, of Hamilton, and James Norris and Sylvester Neelon, of St. Catharines, formed the Merchants Lake and River Steamship Line. In the 1872 and 1873 seasons, there were approximately 25 steamships in the fleet, most of them chartered. One of these was the propellor OCEAN (Ship of the Month No. 234), which had been launched on April 13th, 1872, by Stephen Andrews & Son at Port Dalhousie.

The next launch at the Andrews shipyard was a gala affair. On Tuesday, June 18th, 1872, a special train carried Adam Hope, president of the Lake and River Navigation Company; Aeneas D. Mackay, manager; John Harvey, secretary and treasurer; John Crier, solicitor, and other prominent citizens and a number of ladies from Toronto and Hamilton to St. Catharines. The newly completed propellor LAKE MICHIGAN, the first of three sisterships built for the line, met the train at St. Catharines and conveyed the party to the shipyard at Port Dalhousie, arriving there at 5 o'clock p.m.

Shortly thereafter, the new propellor LAKE ONTARIO slid off the ways, christened by Miss Eugenia Owen Mackay, daughter of the manager, Aeneas D. Mackay. LAKE ONTARIO was intended for the route between Montreal and Hamilton, whilst LAKE MICHIGAN had been built for the service between Montreal and Chicago. After the launch, the party departed for Hamilton on the LAKE MICHIGAN, with Capt. Rolls (Rolle) at the helm. It being that ship's trial trip, no attempt was made at speed, and the party arrived at Mackay's Wharf, Hamilton, at 1 o'clock in the morning of June 19th.

The "St. Catharines Evening Journal" of the following day reported that as soon as LAKE ONTARIO had been launched, the keel of a new steamer for the Dominion Transportation Co. was laid in the same "box". This next vessel was scheduled for completion in time for the fall trade, and she likely was the steamer ISAAC MAY.

According to the "Annual Report of the Department of Marine and Fisheries for 1874, being a List of Vessels on the Registry Books of the Dominion of Canada on the 31st Day of December, 1874", LAKE ONTARIO was 136.8 feet long, 23.8 feet in the beam, and 7.6 feet in depth of hold, with tonnage of 375 Gross and 346 Net. She had a single deck and carried one mast. Her machinery was built by Thomas Wilson & Son, of Dundas, Ontario, a firm which operated the Gartshore Foundry, on Hatt Street, from 1869 to 1889. It had cylinders of 20 and 34 inches diameter, and a stroke of 34 inches, and developed 300 horsepower. This firm also built similar engines for the sisterships LAKE ERIE and LAKE MICHIGAN, both of which were built by Melancthon Simpson at St. Catharines.

We do not have much with which to work to give readers a description of LAKE ONTARIO. We know of only one photograph of the steamer, and it is reproduced in this issue. It only shows part of the ship, and is taken from dead astern so it really does not give us much with which to work. We can tell, however, that she was typical of many of the general cargo carriers of her day, with the main deck all enclosed. A deckhouse containing the passenger accommodations was located on the spar deck, with the usual "birdcage" pilothouse at its forward end. The single mast, equipped to carry sail, was stepped just abaft the pilothouse. Out of the large open area, aft on the spar deck, sprouted the very tall and fairly thin smokestack, the apron around its base rising almost as high as the roof of the deckhouse. A large ventilator cowl was positioned at either side of the smokestack. The lifeboats were carried on the hurricane deck atop the cabin. There would have been a closed bulwark