

A RETURN TO CRESCENT CITY

Ed. Note: The steamer CRESCENT CITY was our Ship of the Month No. 258 in the October issue. Responding to our request for a photo of the ship in Zenith Transit Company colours was Ralph Roberts, of Saginaw, who supplied the view we present herewith, taken when she was fitting out at the shipyard in 1897.

Sterling P. Berry, of Grosse Pointe, Michigan, wrote to clarify part of the history of Zenith Transit. He notes that just before the beginning of the 1900 navigation season, Augustus B. Wolvin merged his Zenith Transit Company into his American Steamship Company, and the ships of both companies sailed under the American Steamship flag that year. Of course, in 1901, they joined the newly-created Pittsburgh Steamship Company. He also notes that the 1922 rebuild, which was done at Cleveland, included the conversion of her holds to arch construction, removing the beams and stanchions that previously had obstructed unloading operations.

Then we received the most wonderful letter from Emory A. Massman, Jr., of Palmetto, Florida, telling us of his personal experiences in CRESCENT CITY. It follows intact, and we are most grateful to Emory for sending it to us.

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"The write up on CRESCENT CITY was of much interest to me. I have a few things to add to her history. I was a wheelsman in her for the entire season of 1943. Her skipper was Captain Harold McCool, of Detroit. The chief engineer was Charles Sampson, of Sodus Point, N.Y. The first mate was Frank Schieble, who was replaced mid-year by Michael Kostl. I wheeled for both these men.

"When CRESCENT CITY came to Nicholson-Universal with the SONOMA from Tomlinson, they had their choice between CRESCENT CITY and EMPIRE CITY. They picked CRESCENT CITY, which startled some of the marine people as EMPIRE CITY was considered a far superior vessel. CRESCENT CITY proved to be a cranky handling vessel. Sometimes she would back to port (normal) and sometimes she would back to starboard. You were never sure how she would react to a stern bell. She did not steer well when loaded and would take sudden sheers in either direction. Much of this had to do with over-loading to 21'6". She was really built to operate on about an 18' draft. However, during the war every extra pound was important. Some said her problem was due to the way they put her back together in 1906. She did have a very slight hump in her deck where she had broken in two (In November 1905). In the ship's favor was the fact that it was difficult to get her to pound in even the heaviest of head seas. This was due to her rounded forefoot.

"Both SONOMA and CRESCENT CITY had new pilothouses put on at Great Lakes Engineering Works in 1928 after their purchase. If you look at photos, you will see they are the same houses. One failing here was they placed the rear windows too low and the wheelsmen had to bend over to see out when steering over the stern (a common practice on the lakes). The houses were nicely paneled in oak and had heavy dark green battleship linoleum flooring. On arrival at Nicholson's CRESCENT CITY's captain's quarters were located in the small cabin on the Texas deck (21' x 12') plus a stateroom and bath in the fo'csle on the after port side. A short time later this arrangement was changed. The lower turret cabin under the pilothouse was fitted out as a passenger room with bunk beds. This didn't last long and the room became the captain's office. A full bath was placed in the starboard rear corner of the 21' x 12' cabin. The stairway down to the stateroom was eliminated. The former captain's bedroom in the fo'csle became the mate's quarters. The fo'csle layout was pretty much standard with three rooms and a bath on the starboard side, two rooms on the aft side of the windlass room bulkhead, the mate's room on the port side aft, and a single room in the centre aft section for the bo'sun.

"Back aft in the boilerhouse, put on in 1922, were two rooms. The chief engineer occupied the room on the starboard side. The one on the port side