

Ohio, in 1925, and that her tonnage became 3040 Gross and 2958 Net. By this time, and at least as early as 1919, their original masts were gone (they would have interfered with ore-handling equipment) and each barge had only a short pipe mast forward and another abaft the after cabin. However, before long came the onset of the Great Depression which had major effects on the lake shipping industry. Beginning in 1929, many of the smaller steamers and barges of the Pittsburgh Steamship Company's fleet were relegated to lay-up status, and the BELL and NASMYTH were no exceptions.

In 1932, the dynamic "lumber baron" E. E. Johnson, of Fort William, Ontario, had been one of the founders of the Pigeon River Timber Company, of Port Arthur, which was formed to cut timber on the north shore of Lake Superior and ship it to the pulpwood mills of Wisconsin. Early in 1937 (or, perhaps, late in 1936), this firm acquired both the BELL and the NASMYTH. Some reports indicate that both were purchased direct from the Pittsburgh Steamship Company, but we believe that the NASMYTH, and probably also the BELL, were acquired via John P. Geistman's Marine Iron & Ship Building Company, of Duluth. (Several other Geistman-owned ships also found their way into E. E. Johnson's fleet.)

The BELL was renamed (b) BLANCHE H. in 1937 and was enrolled at Port Arthur as C.158269, 366.0 x 45.1 x 21.5, 3395 Gross and 3003 Net, while the NASMYTH likewise was registered in 1937 as (b) MERLE H. [C.158268], Port Arthur, 366.0 x 44.1 x 22.0, 3419 Gross and 2979 Net. Chartered tugs may have been used to tow them, because the only large tug that we know Pigeon River actually owned at this time was the 1908-built MARGUERITE W. (53) [C.153120], (a) WILLIAM A. MCGONAGLE (i) (37) [U.S.205880], (c) RUTH HINDMAN (i) (65), (d) LYNDA HINDMAN, which Pigeon River also acquired in 1937, but from the Duluth, Missabe & Iron Range Railway Company.

In 1938, both barges were acquired by the Lakehead Transportation Company Limited, Fort William, which was formed by E. E. Johnson in partnership with Capt. George Hindman, of Owen Sound, to ship pulpwood from the Canadian Lakehead to Green Bay, Wisconsin. (Johnson bought out Hindman's interest in this firm in 1940.) As mentioned in our feature on the tug SATINLEAF / ROCKY RIVER, Lakehead Transportation soon came to own a large number of tugs and barges. An unsourced clipping from Ivan Brookes' 1942 scrapbook noted: "Grain Barges Moving. Three barges of the Lakehead Transportation Co., Fort William, which have stored grain at Fort William during the winter, sailed Sunday for the Bay Port(s). They were the BLANCHE H. towed by the tug OSCAR LEHTINEN ([c.173181], built in 1903 and formerly the U.S. lighthouse tender SUMAC); the MERLE H. towed by the MARGUERITE W., and the ALFRED J. towed by the GOTHAM." (This is the first we have heard of GOTHAM towing Canadian pulp barges.) The article went on to note that QUEDOC (i) would go down the lakes for the first time since 1936.

This company's life was short, however, for in 1942 the vessels and other assets of Lakehead Transportation were transferred to a new company incorporated by Johnson, namely Great Lakes Lumber and Shipping Limited, of Fort William. BLANCHE H. and MERLE H. made this transition and were towed by various tugs owned by the company. We don't know for sure what colours were worn by the barges when they were in Pigeon River Timber or Lakehead Transportation ownership, but when Great Lakes Lumber and Shipping owned them, they had green hulls, white cabins, and black stacks with a green band over a white band. As E. E. Johnson controlled them for the whole time, they may well have worn the same colours throughout.

Great Lakes Lumber and Shipping used them mainly to haul pulpwood from the Lakehead to Green Bay, Wisconsin, and the wood went mainly to the mills for newsprint. But in 1949, E. E. Johnson passed away and the Great Lakes Lumber and Shipping fleet operations were discontinued, except that some of the smaller tugs were used for Lakehead harbour towing service. The big lake tugs were the last to be sold, remaining inactive well into the 1950s, but