

CRETE and VERONA

It has been quite a while since we featured in these pages a U.S.-flag upper lake bulk carrier, and so this time around we correct the situation by giving you two for the price of one. These were two particularly handsome steamers and they both enjoyed good, full lives, although one had more than her fair share of collisions. One of them even survived to operate under the Canadian flag for the last few years of her career.

As the art of the major upper lakes shipbuilding yards developed rapidly during the first three decades of the Twentieth Century, and as the large U.S. flagged fleets expanded their operations and replaced older carriers with more modern and efficient, steel-hulled steamers, so there came into being large groups of relatively similar bulk freighters, built to so-called "standard" designs. The two largest U.S. fleets on the lakes during those years were those of the Pittsburgh Steamship Company and the various companies managed by Pickands Mather & Company (consolidated into the Interlake Steamship Company in 1913). The former was the lake shipping arm of the United States Steel Corporation, known to many as the "Steel Trust", which was formed just as the new century began by J. Pierpont Morgan, Elbert H. Gary, and their associates.

However, back in 1883, Pickands Mather & Company, of Cleveland, Ohio, was formed by Colonel James Pickands, Jay C. Morse and Samuel Mather as an iron ore commission agency. That same year, the firm became involved in Great Lakes shipping when it acquired a partial interest in the wooden-hulled steamer V. H. KETCHAM, which it retained until she was sold in 1892. In 1886, the firm acquired an interest in the newly-built wooden steamer JAMES PICKANDS, which it managed until she was lost by stranding in 1894. The year 1887 saw Pickands Mather & Company assume management of another new wooden steamer, ROBERT R. RHODES, in which it also held a small ownership interest until 1902. The company's fourth ship was another wooden bulk carrier, the first SAMUEL MATHER, which was commissioned in 1887 as a virtual sistership of the RHODES in dimensions, and in which Pickands Mather held a 5/48 ownership interest. Unfortunately, this steamer was lost by collision in 1891.

In 1889, the Minnesota Iron Mining Company formed a shipping affiliate, the Minnesota Steamship Company, of which Jay C. Morse and Colonel Pickands were two of the founding officers, and Pickands Mather & Company operated both the iron mining and shipping companies. In subsequent years, Pickands Mather entered into management agreements with other fleets, notable among them being the American Steel Barge Company, owner and builder of a large fleet of whaleback steamers and consort barges.

In 1906, Pickands Mather (by then controlled by Harry Coulby and Henry G. Dalton) formed a new shipping corporation, which was known as the Lackawanna Steamship Company, to carry ore cargoes to the Bethlehem Steel plant at Lackawanna, New York. It almost immediately placed orders for the construction of eight modern bulk freighters, six of them to be 420 feet in length and two more being 60 feet longer, although otherwise almost exact sisterships. (Today, we cannot say for sure why all of the eight steamers were not built to the larger size.) The contracts for all of the ships were let to the American Ship Building Company, which designed the ships and built five steamers at Lorain, Ohio, and one at Cleveland, while one ship each was built by the Detroit Ship Building Company and the West Bay City Ship Building Company, which were subsidiaries of American Ship. The total cost of the eight vessels was \$2,225,000.

All of the eight steamers were named for mines on the Michigan and Minnesota iron ranges and, in turn, a number of those mines had been named for "exotic" places in the Mediterranean and Adriatic Sea areas. The two 480-footers were named CRETE (U.S.204587) and VERONA (U.S.204684) and they were built as Hulls 352 and 355, respectively, of the Lorain yard of American Ship Building. CRETE was launched on September 7, 1907 (sponsored by Miss Bessie