

AUGUSTUS B. WOLVIN

Around the turn of the 20th Century, a major shipping entrepreneur operating in the area of Duluth, Minnesota, was Captain Augustus B. Wolvin. One of the early Duluth shipping "dynasties" had been the vessel brokerage house of La Salle and Company. In 1888, Augustus Wolvin became a member of the firm and its name was changed to LaSalle and Wolvin. In the early 1900s, the firm became known as Augustus and Roy Wolvin, Roy Mitchell Wolvin (born at St. Clair, Michigan, in 1880) having joined the company in 1897, after serving the Western Transit Company at Duluth. The Wolvin organization managed several prominent fleets between 1895 and 1914, and Roy Wolvin personally was very deeply involved in the operation of the Canadian Interlake Line as well as the 1913 formation and subsequent operation of Canada Steamship Lines and what was, for a number of years, an associated fleet, that of the venerable Montreal Transportation Company, in which Roy Wolvin had acquired a controlling interest.

Augustus B. Wolvin had been born at Cleveland in 1857, and received his master's papers at the tender age of 21. He sailed the lakes until 1883, and in 1895 he entered the lake vessel management field when he formed the Zenith Transit Company and ordered the construction of five large bulk carriers (ZENITH CITY, QUEEN CITY, EMPIRE CITY, CRESCENT CITY and SUPERIOR CITY) for this fleet. In 1899, he formed the American Steamship Company on behalf of the American Steel and Wire Company, of Chicago, at which time the Zenith Transit Company became a subsidiary of American Steel and Wire.

When the Pittsburgh Steamship Company was created in 1901 as the lake shipping arm of the United States Steel Corporation (which had been formed by J. Pierpont Morgan with the assistance of Judge Elbert H. Gary), the American Steel and Wire Company and its lake vessel operations were assimilated into the immense venture. Augustus Wolvin became the vice-president and general manager of the Pittsburgh Steamship Company, as well as managing certain other shipping operations concurrently. He held his position with Pittsburgh Steamship until 1904, when he resigned and became president of the Zenith Furnace Company. He would hold the latter position until his retirement, and he died at Duluth on March 31, 1932.

It should be noted that Augustus Wolvin managed the Peavey Steamship Company for the Peavey Grain Company from 1901 until 1903, formed the Provident Steamship Company in 1902, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Transportation Company in 1902, the Acme Steamship Company in 1904 and the Standard Steamship Company (Roy Wolvin was manager) in 1907. He also was involved in the International Steamship Company of 1900, which was interested in trading on the east coast.

What was to become the Acme Steamship Company in 1904 ordered one 532-foot steamer (JAMES C. WALLACE, which lasted until 1962) from the American Ship Building Company's yard at Lorain, Ohio (Hull 334) and, slightly earlier, another steamer, of 560 feet in overall length, from the same shipbuilding company. She was to be the AUGUSTUS B. WOLVIN (Lorain's 1903-1904 Yard No. 330) and a near-sistership, WARD AMES, would be built for Acme as the West Superior's 1907 Yard No. 518. A third close sister, H. P. BOPE, was built in 1907 by AmShip as the West Superior yard's Hull 519 for Wolvin's Standard Steamship Company.

The construction of the AmShip Lorain Hull 330 began on December 1, 1903. Work on the ship progressed steadily, although "The Plain Dealer", of Cleveland, reported that some twenty days of work had been lost to unusually inclement winter weather. The launch of the remarkable Hull 330 took place at Lorain on Saturday, April 9, 1904. Five thousand invitations to the event had been sent out, and handbills advertising the launch had been posted far and wide.