

Operations continued successfully and generally uneventfully for the five Zenith Transit steamers through the years until, at the beginning of the 1900 navigation season, the Wolvins merged the Zenith operation into another fleet that they managed, namely the American Steamship Company, which also operated for the American Steel and Wire Company, Chicago. This American Steamship Company (totally unrelated to the firm of the same name which still operates today), had been formed in 1899, and its seven steamers and two consort barges had red hulls, white cabins and all-black stacks. It is unknown whether there was time for the Zenith Transit ships to be repainted in American Steamship colours before the next major development occurred.

In 1901, J Pierpont Morgan, with the assistance of Judge Elbert H. Gary and a number of very influential associates, engineered a series of mergers in the steel industry which led to the formation of the United States Steel Corporation. At the same time, Morgan created the Pittsburgh Steamship Company to assume ownership of the many vessels which were owned by the lake shipping arms of the various steel companies which were swallowed up in the merger. This included the ships of the American Steamship Company, including SUPERIOR CITY. At first, all of the ships of the new firm were given dark green hulls, straw-yellow cabins and all-silver stacks, which resulted in the ships of the "Steel Trust" being called "tin-stackers". They must have looked quite stunning in these colours. It proved, however, virtually impossible to keep the ships scrubbed clean of iron ore dust and coal smoke soot when they were painted this way, and by 1905 the ships were being given ore-red hulls, white cabins with dark green trim, and silver stacks with a broad black smokeband at the top. SUPERIOR CITY soon acquired this new livery.

The Pittsburgh Steamship Company and its successors were to remain in operation for many years, and one of its successors (albeit now owned by the Canadian National Railway interests) still operates lake ships today. Augustus Wolvin was manager of the big fleet (the largest the lakes ever would see) for its first few years, his place later being taken by Harry Coulby.

SUPERIOR CITY was a valued member of the Pittsburgh Steamship Company fleet for almost two decades, despite the fact that the fleet had built for it a number of ships which far exceeded her in size and cargo capacity. The ship herself was altered only in minor ways, perhaps the most obvious being the addition of a "doghouse" on the spar deck, several hatches forward of the break of the poop, to provide additional crew accommodations. As well, to provide a more sheltered space for the navigation officers, a turret-style upper pilothouse was constructed on the former monkey's island. It had nine windows in its face. We suspect that, when first built, this new cabin had no sunvisor, but a rather prominent one later was added. Because of its rather odd shape, we have reason to believe that the visor was "home made" and not shipyard-built.

We suspect that SUPERIOR CITY would have had her holds rebuilt during the 1920s, had she lasted that long, and that later she would have been sold off to other operators as were many of her contemporaries. However, fate was to intervene with a particularly tragic hand.

At a few minutes after 9:00 p.m. on the warm and generally clear summer evening of Friday, August 20th, 1920, SUPERIOR CITY was downbound from Lake Superior, in Whitefish Bay some five miles southeast of Whitefish Point, heading for the Soo. She was loaded with 7,060 tons of iron ore which she had taken on at Two Harbors, Minnesota. As the twilight settled in, two vessels were observed ahead. They both were upbound light and slightly on the port bow of SUPERIOR CITY, the closest being the Jones & Laughlin (Interstate Steamship Company) steamer WILLIS L. KING, and the other being the MIDVALE. The J. J. TURNER was following SUPERIOR CITY downbound. There was no reason for anyone aboard SUPERIOR CITY to suspect that anything was amiss, nor that the vessels would not pass in a normal one-whistle (port to port) fashion. But there, reason ceases to be a part of the situation, and today we have no way of knowing what was the truth concerning the almost unbelievable events that followed.

Captain Edward Sawyer of SUPERIOR CITY, who survived the incident that claimed his steamer and most of her crew, later gave evidence to the effect that on three occasions, he blew a one-whistle signal to the KING, and was answered in like fashion, indicating that the ships would pass in a normal port-to-port manner. He stated, however, that the repetition of the whistle signals, and the eventual sounding of the danger signal, were necessitated because WILLIS L. KING appeared to be veering to her port into his path. He claimed that at the last moment, the KING appeared to swing to her starboard, but too late to avoid a collision.