

Captain Herman Nelson, of the KING, gave entirely conflicting evidence, that being that SUPERIOR CITY, which he claimed was slightly on his starboard bow, called by whistle signal for a two-whistle (starboard-to-starboard) pass, and that the KING answered in the affirmative. Nelson stated that after two repetitions of the two-whistle signal, answered in kind by the KING, the SUPERIOR CITY began to swing across the path of the KING and then gave a one-whistle passing signal, which was returned with a danger signal. Nelson stated that his helm then was swung hard to port (into the collision instead of away from it?) and that her engine was put full astern.

Regardless of what version was the real truth, the fact remained that with both steamers proceeding at almost full speed, the port side of SUPERIOR CITY was exposed to the bow of the KING, which bit deep into SUPERIOR CITY aft of amidships on the port side. Captain Sawyer sounded the alarm and the crew of SUPERIOR CITY raced for the lifeboats on the boat deck aft. Unfortunately, the after end of the steamer flooded quickly, and the cold lake waters caused the boilers to explode beneath them just as the men were trying to lower and board the lifeboats. The entire after end was blown off SUPERIOR CITY, which sank in just minutes, and 29 of her crew of 33 were lost. Four men were rescued by boats from the TURNER, being Captain Sawyer, second mate G. H. Lehnt, wheelsman Peter Jacobson and boatswain Walter Richter, all of whom had been forward at the time of the collision.

Captain Sawyer was found hanging on to a life jacket he never had been able to put on. Lehnt was clinging to the bottom of a capsized lifeboat. Jacobson had been dragged down as SUPERIOR CITY sank but made his way back to the surface and swam for almost twenty minutes before he was located. Richter had been in his bunk when the warning signal was given and emerged only lightly clad. What clothes he was wearing were blown away in the explosion. Sucked down when the ship sank, he resurfaced and managed to climb onto a hatch cover from which one of the TURNER's boats rescued him. We will never know what agonies the lost crew members suffered. The loss of life sustained in this accident was the worst ever suffered by the Pittsburgh Steamship Company (although other U.S. Steel affiliates sustained similar if not worse losses in later years).

United States Steamboat Inspectors Gooding and Hanson, of Marquette, Michigan, investigated the accident but, strangely, never were able to determine what actually had occurred. The matter was litigated in the civil courts, which had no greater success trying to find out who was telling the truth, and after a judgment and subsequent appeal, liability finally was split equally between the two ships. The damage to the bow of WILLIS L. KING amounted to about \$30,000, while the total loss of SUPERIOR CITY came to \$650,000. SUPERIOR CITY, probably because of the extent of her damage as a result of the boiler explosion, never was recovered, and her wreck lies to this day on the floor of Whitefish Bay.

WILLIS L. KING, however, lived a long life. Built as Hull 79 of the Great Lakes Engineering Works at Ecorse, Michigan, she had been launched on December 17, 1910. She was 588.6 x 58.3 x 32.0, 7802 Gross and 6497 Net, and thus was much larger than SUPERIOR CITY, although with somewhat less power. She was managed for Jones and Laughlin by W. H. Becker, Cleveland, until his death in 1920, following which the Interstate Steamship Company managed its own vessels until 1949, at which time the parent Jones and Laughlin Steel Company absorbed Interstate. The KING was sold on November 15, 1952, to the Wilson Transit Company, Cleveland, and was renamed (b) C. L. AUSTIN. She was acquired in 1972 by the Kinsman Marine Transit Company, which operated her until she was sold in 1984 to Triad Salvage, of Ashtabula, Ohio, for scrapping.

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**Editor's Notes:** We acknowledge the account of the collision contained in Lake Superior Shipwrecks by Dr. Julius F. Wolff, Jr., and also an account of the legal proceedings by Robert I. Schellig, Jr., contained in the March-April, 1972, issue of "Telescope", published by the Great Lakes Maritime Institute, Detroit.

If any of our members should happen to have additional information concerning SUPERIOR CITY, we would be pleased to hear from them.

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Please do not forget to send us your membership renewal. Your support is vital to the continued operation of the Toronto Marine Historical Society.

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