

On August 15, 1925, THOMAS F. COLE was secured in Lock 4, the Sabin Lock of the St. Mary's Falls Canal at the Soo, and very close to the steamer ahead of her in the lock, the R. L. AGASSIZ. There was only about three to four feet of clearance between the bow of the COLE and the stern of the AGASSIZ. The lockmaster was attempting to move the AGASSIZ ahead when the valves were opened to dump the water out of the lock. The COLE surged ahead and hit the AGASSIZ, pushing in her taffrail and breaking the after chock. The responsibility for the accident was placed on the Sault Canal by an arbitrator.

In the fall of 2003, we had the Paterson steamer NOVADOC (ii) as our Ship of the Month. We described in detail, mostly thanks to our member Lloyd Belcher, the conditions that existed out on Lake Michigan during the terrific Armistice Day Storm of November 1940. Now we have THOMAS F. COLE going through it and just barely surviving. Capt. R. W. Parsons described the ordeal at length and it came to light in the Fall 1961 edition of "Inland Seas", quarterly of the Great Lakes Historical Society, Volume 17, No. 3.

"I was sailing the THOMAS F. COLE at this time and we happened to be in Gary with a load of ore, arriving there shortly before midnight on the 10th (November). When I reported in to the dock office for our orders, the office clerk called my attention to a storm warning issued by the Weather Bureau at Chicago at midnight. The forecast said we would have strong NE winds, possibly increasing to gale proportions during the afternoon of the 11th.

"When we departed Gary, about 4 o'clock in the morning, the weather was clear and the wind in the SE about twenty-five miles per hour. I wasn't too much concerned about the storm warning we had received, as the east shore of Lake Michigan affords some shelter from NE winds, and our course was to take us up the east shore for a distance of 218 miles.

"After clearing Gary, I retired and slept until 10 in the morning. I noticed the wind had increased considerably and had shifted more to the southward; also that the barometer had dropped to below 29 inches. By noon I realized the winds were not going to get around to a NE direction and that we were in for a heavy blow, so decided to turn around and run for the west shore.

"The wind and the sea steadily increased, making it necessary to reduce speed. We were making fairly good weather of it until along came several big seas which raised the bow out of the water and with all the extra surface for the wind to hit, we blew around so, in a matter of a few seconds, that we were heading NE instead of SW. I made several attempts to turn around but we just didn't have enough power to bring her back into the wind.

"By this time the wind had settled into the WSW. To add to our troubles it was getting cold causing steam on the water and making it possible to see only a few hundred feet. I realized that I had to make a decision as to what would be the best for all concerned. I could continue on a course of around NE, which would have been fairly easy on the ship, but in a few hours we would be up on the east shore. Or I could allow for the leeway we were making, which would cause us to do a lot of heavy rolling and strain the ship, but would keep us in deep water and perhaps enable us to ride it out. I decided on the second choice and believe me, fellows, for the next 24 hours we rolled!

"Around midnight, we shipped a sea over our stern that caved in steel plating on the after and port side of our after cabin! Just how much damage had been done back there I did not know until we found some smooth water on the morning of the 13th. When this wall of water climbed aboard it knocked out all our telephones. All of our deck lights were flattened to the deck and encased in a foot or more of ice, but all kept right on burning, making a rather weird looking sight. Our lifeline had been carried away so no one ventured on deck, consequently none of the forward crew had food or coffee for about 36 hours. But most of them weren't thinking much about food at this particular time and we didn't have a union, so there were no complaints!

"We were not equipped with a radiotelephone or a radar set in 1940, nor did we have an anemometer to tell us how hard the wind was blowing, but we did have a short wave receiver in the pilothouse. Over this receiver we heard the Coast Guard station at Ludington talking to the Coast Guard at Manistee, both saying the velocity of the wind at their stations was over 100 miles per hour!

"Everyone welcomed the coming of daylight after a most miserable night, but with daylight came the realization we were not too far off the east shore of the lake. We were rolling as hard as ever but the seas were shorter and were being broken up by a smaller sea coming