

## BRITON

Over the years, we have featured a number of ships that joined the Pittsburgh Steamship Company when it was formed in 1901 as the Great Lakes shipping arm of the United States Steel Corporation. Those ships came from many different fleets on whose histories we have touched. But never before have we featured a steamer that came to the "Steel Trust" from the Menominee Transit Company. It is high time that we rectified that situation.

The Menominee Transit Company was formed in 1889 by Ferdinand Schlesinger, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He was known as Milwaukee's "Iron King" and he had arranged for the vessels of his new fleet to be operated by C. W. Elphicke & Company, of Chicago. They were to carry iron ore cargoes originating with the Chapin Mining Company for ten years, and Chapin was to purchase each year a 1/10 interest in the fleet, thus acquiring a full interest by the time the freight contract expired. However, those were giddy times of rapidly changing economic conditions and things did not always work out as planned.

In any event, Menominee Transit let a contract to the Globe Iron Works Company, of Cleveland, Ohio, for the construction of six steel-hulled sistership steamers, and they were built as the yard's Hulls 36 through 41, the first of them launched on August 30, 1890, and the last hull hitting the water on June 9, 1891. The ships were, in order of their hull numbers and launch dates, christened NORMAN, SAXON, GERMAN, BRITON, GRECIAN and ROMAN. We are particularly concerned here with Hull 39, the BRITON, which was launched on Tuesday, December 30, 1890.

BRITON (U.S.3493) was 296.0 feet in length between perpendiculars (312.5 feet overall), 40.4 feet in the beam and 24.6 feet in depth, and her tonnage was calculated as 2348 Gross and 1875 Net. All of the Menominee steamers shared these exact dimensions - even the tonnage! BRITON had seven hatches and three watertight bulkheads in her hull and, as did all lake bulk carriers of the time, her holds were cluttered with beams and stanchions which gave the hull its strength. The ship was powered by a triple expansion engine which had cylinders of 24, 38 and 61 inches bore and a stroke of 42 inches, which produced 1,200 Indicated Horsepower at 78 revolutions per minute. Steam at 160 p.s.i. was generated by two coal-fired Scotch boilers, each of which had two furnaces and measured 14'0" x 12'6". There was a total of 135 square feet of grate surface and 4,710 square feet of heating surface. Globe Iron Works built the engine and the boilers.

It would seem that BRITON and her sisters were not originally fitted with electric light, but that situation soon was changed. "The Marine Review" of January 21, 1892, reported that a contract had been let by Menominee Transit to the Fisher Electric Company for putting incandescent lighting plants in the Menominee steamers, the plants being exact duplicates of ones fitted by Fisher the previous year aboard the steamers CORONA, CAMBRIA and CORSICA of the Mutual Transportation Company, these ships also having been built by Globe, but in 1887-1888. Each ship was to get entirely new lighting fixtures, with five circuits on each boat.

BRITON was a handsome ship with a straight stem, a finely-cut counter stern, and a spectacular sheer to her deck. She had a fully topgallant forecastle and a flush quarterdeck, with an open pipe rail around the forecastle head, but a fully closed bulwark running down both sides of the spar deck and around the fantail. The stocked anchors were carried on the forecastle head, worked by a radial steel davit set just abaft the vertical steering pole, while the anchor chains rose out of hawseholes set very close to the stem just below the level of the spar deck.

The deck crew was housed in the forecastle, while the deck officers had accommodations in a deckhouse set back off the forecastle and abaft the first hatch. On the bridge deck above was the texas house containing the master's office and quarters. Forward of this, and elevated half a deck in height, was the pilothouse which had a door in each side and seven large windows in its curved but somewhat flattened face. Navigation normally was done from the open bridge on the monkey's island atop the pilothouse, where a large canvas dodger could be raised to provide shelter from the elements. The very tall and heavily raked foremast rose out of the bridge structure abaft the pilothouse.

Aft, there was a large deckhouse with the boilerhouse at its forward end. Several skylights admitted light to the interior parts of the cabin, notably to the crew and officers' mess-rooms. Two large ventilator cowls drew fresh air down to the boiler room. The tall and fairly thick smokestack rose out of the boilerhouse and it was heavily raked to match the