

## M. SICKEN

We always look for different kinds of ships to feature here to maintain the interest of our readers. And to keep the Editor interested in his work, too! It has been quite a while since we featured a wooden-hulled ship, and a long time since we wrote about a "rabbit", so here's one that not only lasted longer than most, but also had strong connections with eastern Lake Ontario.

So by now some of you may be asking yourselves what a "rabbit" might be. Well, in lake shipping parlance, a rabbit was a small, wooden-hulled steamer which generally had a raised forecastle and poop, and which had all her machinery and cabins aft. Boats of this nature generally were built for the lumber trade and had at least one mast with a cargo boom on it. Because of the amount of weight carried aft, particularly when running light, such a steamer often rode low in the water aft, and with her bow up much higher. Steamers of this type seldom ran for the larger vessel fleets but instead were run by small private operators, often with the owner as master and local hometown men and boys serving as crew. In many ways, they were very much like the goellettes of the St. Lawrence River.

Unfortunately, while rabbits operated fairly successfully on sheltered waters, they did not always fare well against heavy weather on the open lakes. A number of them were lost along with many of their crew members, with the result that some sailors called these little steamers "coffins" and would refuse to ship out in them.

The steamer with which we are concerned here was built of oak in 1884 by George King at Marine City, Michigan. She was named M. SICKEN in honour of her principal owner, Matthew Sicken, who had been born on June 4, 1830, at Bodenbach, Germany. He came to New York City in 1846 and worked there, and later at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, and at Detroit before building a sawmill at Marine City in 1870, and later another mill across the St. Clair River at Sombra, Ontario. He came to own several steamers and barges, which he used to haul logs to his mills and sawn lumber to his customers.

The steamer which Matthew Sicken had King build for him in 1884 was enrolled as M. SICKEN (not "Matthew Sicken" as reported in the press even half a century later) at Port Huron, Michigan, under U.S. official number 91672, on May 17, 1884. (That having been said, the U.S. government shipping register, beginning with its 1884 issue, always showed the SICKEN as having a port of registry of Marine City.) Actually launched during April, she was 128.0 feet in length, 26.0 feet in the beam and 10.0 feet in depth. She had Gross Tonnage of 212, Net of 168, and she could carry some 350 tons of cargo. The registered owner of the little steamer was shown as "M. Sicken & others". It is said that one of the "others" was a George Koenig - Koenig being German for King, as in the ship's builder!

The steamer's single propeller was powered by a steeple compound engine which had cylinders of 16 and 28 inches diameter and a stroke of 24 inches. It could develop a rather modest Indicated Horsepower of 285 at 115 revolutions per minute. The engine was built in 1884 by Christie & DeGraff, of Detroit. Steam at 104 pounds per square inch was produced by one wood-fired, firebox-type boiler. Manufactured in 1884 by T. McGregor, Detroit, it measured 7'6" by 14'0", had one furnace, 34 square feet of grate surface and 1,025 square feet of heating surface.

We cannot say exactly how M. SICKEN looked as originally built, but the earliest photo we do have of her, taken at the Soo Locks does, we believe, show her pretty much as she would have been in her earliest years. She had a rather impressive sheer to her hull (as many wooden freighters did until they began to get "tired" and flatten out). There was a high wooden bulwark down either side of the spar deck. Forward, there was a fully topgallant forecastle, with a closed wooden rail around its head. Her straight stem seemed to pull back slightly as it rose. One big stocked anchor was carried on the forecastle head, its chain rising outboard from a hawsehole below. The anchor was worked with a radial steel davit. (Later, when stocked anchors went out of style, the SICKEN received two mushroom anchors instead.) Wooden fenders, hung from the bulwarks, helped protect her oak hull from impacts when docking or canalling.

Aft, the quarterdeck was fully topgallant and there was a closed wooden taffrail around the fantail. The accommodations were contained in a cabin carried atop the poop and inside it must have been warm indeed with the engine and boiler located just below. On the hurricane deck was a pilothouse which was squarish and had three windows in its face. Some of the early rabbits originally had birdcage-type pilothouses, and M. SICKEN may also have had one of those at the start but, if so, it was gone by the time of our first photo. Behind the