

AUSTRALIA

Today, when the word "barge" is mentioned, most people think of the large integrated tug / barge units that are becoming ever more common on the Great Lakes, or else of the scow-type barges such as the ones that are used to carry all sorts of commodities on the river systems and that assist in dredging and construction projects. However, not so many years have passed since the time in which, to most people around the lakes, the word barge was used mainly for the large consort-type barges that were towed not by tugs but by cargo-carrying steam freighters. At first, such consort barges were mostly cut-down wooden-hulled sailing schooners serving as barges in the latter stages of their careers.

But commencing during the mid-1890s, and continuing into the early 1900s, there were built quite a number of much larger steel-hulled bulk cargo barges which were meant to be towed by some very powerful steamers that were specially designed for the purpose. Some of these barges were even larger than their towing steamers, and together these tows could carry huge amounts of iron ore, their principal loads in the early years. The barges needed somewhat smaller crews than did the towing steamers, but they did require deck crews to handle their lines and their hatch covers. As well, they needed officers and wheelmen, because the barges did their own steering, and they needed boilers to produce steam for the winches, the steering engine and to heat the cabins.

When we remember these consort barges, we tend to think mainly of the ones built in large numbers for such fleets as the American Steel Barge Company (the whalebacks), the Minnesota Steamship Company and the Bessemer Steamship Company. However, amongst the other operators of big consort barges, and one we seldom have mentioned in these pages, was the Corrigan fleet of Cleveland. This fleet, long gone from the lakes, had its beginnings back in 1872 when Captains James and John Corrigan acquired their first schooner. That same year, the Corrigan brothers also became involved in the oil business, and they would operate a number of oil refineries which they eventually sold to the Standard Oil Company. Then from 1881 to 1883 they were in Austria and Hungary running oil refineries.

The Corrigans returned to Cleveland in 1883 and became interested in Lake Superior area iron mines, as well as expanding their vessel operations. They also invested in the River Furnace and Dock Company, of Cleveland, and in two more furnace companies in Pennsylvania. They acquired a number of schooners and/or schooner-barges and quite a few large wooden-hulled steam powered bulk carriers also were built for the fleet or were acquired from other operators. These steamers often could be seen towing consort barges.

Then in the mid-1890s, the Corrigan fleet moved forward into the age of steel ships. The odd thing was, however, that the fleet never had built for it nor ever purchased any vessels that were built as powered freighters, but it did commission the building of four large steel consort barges, which it used some of its larger wooden steamers to tow.

The first of these big barges was the 352-foot AURANIA which was built in 1895 at South Chicago as Hull 12 of the Chicago Ship Building Company. She was followed in 1897 by three more slightly larger steel barges, one of these being POLYNESIA which was Hull 70 of the Globe Iron Works, Cleveland, launched on June 12, 1897. Two more of about the same size as POLYNESIA were AMAZON and AUSTRALIA, built as Hulls 29 and 31, respectively, of the Chicago Ship Building Company. AMAZON was launched on June 5, 1897, while AUSTRALIA went into the water on Saturday, November 27. The latter two were virtual sisterships, although AUSTRALIA was two feet wider than either POLYNESIA or AMAZON and thus had a slightly greater cargo capacity.

AUSTRALIA was enrolled at Cleveland, Ohio, under U.S. official number 30094, although like many Cleveland-registered vessels, her home port was shown on the ship's stern and also in various shipping directories (except for the U.S. government shipping register) as Fairport, Ohio. Most directories showed the owner of AUSTRALIA as James Corrigan, although probably due to financing arrangements, all four of the barges actually were owned by the Chicago Ship Building Company until 1903, when ownership finally was transferred to James Corrigan. We suppose that the construction costs of the barges had been fully paid by that time, thus permitting the ownership transfer.

AUSTRALIA was 376.0 feet in length between perpendiculars (388 feet overall), 48.0 feet in the beam, and 26.0 feet in depth. Her tonnage was calculated as 3745 Gross and 3467 Net. She could carry about 6,500 net tons of cargo on a draft of 17 feet. Her steel hull had two watertight bulkheads and there were twelve hatches. Of course, she had no propelling machi-