

members. Incidents in 1909 would challenge those claims.

A month into the strike the Soo Locks experienced one of the most serious accidents in its history. On 9 June, the passenger ship *Assiniboia* and the PSC freighter *Crescent City* were downbound through the Canadian lock. The Gilchrist freighter *Perry G. Walker*, upbound, approached the lower gates in preparation to lock through. Confused signals between the pilothouse and the engine room resulted in the *Walker* ramming the lower gates at full speed. The collision caused the sudden emptying of the lock, with the still open upper gates being torn away. The two vessels inside were swept out with the full weight of Lake Superior driving them. Both vessels struck the *Walker*, but the *Crescent City* received the most damage, sinking later at a dock. The Canadian lock was closed for twelve days later. The Lake Seamen drew attention to the competence of the strike-breakers in the handling of the Lake Carriers' vessel. The LCA dismissed the incident as an accident and deflected the discussion to the need for an additional lock to handle traffic.<sup>44</sup> November brought a second collision with lock gates, this time on the US side's Poe Lock by the freighter *Isaac M. Ellwood*. Fortunately, the closed lower gates prevented a repeat of June's outcome. Once again miscommunication was blamed, and the accident snarled traffic for days.<sup>45</sup>

On Monday, 12 July 1909 near Whitefish Point on Lake Superior the 420-foot steel freighter *John B. Cowle*, downbound with ore from Two Harbors collided the brand-new, 504-foot *Isaac M. Scott*. Catastrophic flooding trapped some of the *Cowle* crew within the hull while others jumped into the lake without even the time to grab life preservers.<sup>46</sup> The *Cowle*'s sinking ten weeks into the strike opens a window to crew composition and experience during the strike. It carried a large number of crew from the same community as the captain, Watertown, New York. A similarly large percentage of the crew had recently become sailors or were foreign born but without experience. Both the captain and the chief engineer had their teenage sons working with them. Experience also played a role in the *Cowle*'s loss as the wheelsman on duty was new to sailing and had only a few weeks experience. The vessel association's leadership had pushed companies to end the practice of hiring family members in 1904 yet the *Cowle* had multiple members on board. This coupled with the high percentage of new sailors with critical roles and little experience indicates possible issues manning the vessels, the non-enforcement of association policies, or a command to crew the ships at any cost. Despite their

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44 "Escape of Boats was Miraculous," and "The Accident to the Canal," *SSMEN*, 10 June 1909; "Gates Swept Away," *Buffalo Evening News*, 10 June 1909; "Accident at Sault Ste. Marie," *MR*, 39 (July 1909), 186-189.

45 "Steamer *Ellwood* Wrecks Soo Gate," *CL*, 11 November 1909; "Wrecked Gate of Lock at Zoo [*sic*]," *CPD*, 11 November 1909; "Gate of Poe Lock at Soo Wrecked," *SSMEN*, 10 November 1909.

46 "Cost Lives of Fourteen Men," *Bay City Times (BCT)*, 13 July 1909; "14 Perish with Cleveland Boat," *CPD*, 13 July 1909; "Captain Rogers Reaches Duluth," *DNT*, 14 July 1909; Frederick Stonehouse, *Lake Superior's Shipwreck Coast: Maritime Accidents from Whitefish Bay to Grand Marais, Michigan* (Au Train, Michigan, 1985), 142-45.