

Queen of the Lakes

In early March 1906, the keel blocks were nearly all laid for the construction of a giant new ship. The Superior Shipbuilding Company was looking to put an additional 400 to 500 men on the payroll to meet the demands of its eager customer. So many men were coming in for jobs that janitors at the shipyard barely stayed ahead of the trails of dirty footprints tracking across the floor of the hiring office that spring.



The Port's Past
By Patrick Lapinski

Cambria Iron and Steel Company, the owners of hull No. 515, wanted the new ship in a hurry. Before its keel was completely laid there was already talk in the yard that the ship would be the largest ever built in the Twin Ports. Weighing 7,438 gross tons, it would in fact become the largest ship on the Great Lakes by the time it was completed later that year. Building a new "Queen of the Lakes" was something to be very proud of.

While the pace of the construction at the Superior shipyard could never outstrip that of its predecessor, the American Steel Barge Company, the gross tonnage of the new "lakers" being built at Superior far exceeded the size of any of the whalebacks built there at the end of the 19th century. Work on the new

ship progressed without serious mishap throughout the spring and summer at a steady pace to meet the launching date.

Following a tradition of naming ships in honor of peers and colleagues associated with its business, Cambria Iron and Steel bestowed the name of one of its founders upon the new steamship. Edward Y. Townsend spent 18 years as president of Cambria Iron, and along with Charles S. Wood and Daniel J. Morrell, built Cambria Iron into one of the nation's largest suppliers of steel rails.

The *Edward Y. Townsend*, at an official overall length of 602 feet, helped usher in the new era of 600-foot ships on the Great Lakes

Mr. Townsend was a stout and genial man, known for a conservative management style. He is also credited with seeing the company through the ordeal of the Johnstown, Pa., flood in 1889 that killed many of the mill's workmen and their families.

The launching of the *Townsend* was set for just past the noon hour on Sunday, August 18, 1907. A large crowd gathered behind Howard's Pocket for a view of the celebration. On hand were the vessel's master, Captain Edward Sullivan, and its chief engineer, Frank Warner. Both

men had served together on the *L.C. Hanna* before their reassignment.

Emily Phelps of Marquette, Mich., granddaughter of President Fitch of the Duluth, South Shore & Atlantic Railroad, was chosen to christen the vessel. At 12:15 Miss Phelps cracked the ceremonial bottle of champagne against the bow as 8,488,000 pounds of steel slid down the launching ways into Howard's Pocket. A large wave deluged onlookers along Connor's Point as all variety of whistles roared and screamed in approval. The *Edward Y. Townsend*, at an official overall length of 602 feet, helped usher in the new era of 600-foot ships on the Great Lakes.

For the next 60 years, the *Townsend*, with its carrying capacity of 12,000 tons, sailed steadily on the Great Lakes. Along with its fleetmate, the slightly smaller *Daniel J. Morrell*, also built in 1906, the *Townsend* sailed its entire career for Cambria Iron, later known as Bethlehem Steel, before fate would end the careers of both ships during a November storm on Lake Huron.

On November 26, 1966, both the *Townsend* and the *Morrell* departed Buffalo, N.Y., in ballast for Taconite Harbor on Minnesota's north shore for their final trips of the season. Over the next several days the ships would leapfrog each other as

they fueled or anchored for weather. On the afternoon of November 28, with gale warnings posted, both ships entered Lake Huron, the *Morrell* leading the *Townsend* by 20 some miles into building seas.

Captain Thomas Connelly and the crew of the *Townsend* were caught in a rapidly building fall storm. Winds in excess of 50 miles per hour and waves of 12 feet were reported by the *Townsend* around 11 o'clock that night. By 2 a.m. on the 29th, the waves had grown to 25 feet, driven by winds of 65 miles per hour. The *Townsend* and the *Morrell* kept limited radio contact during the height of the storm as each ship struggled to stay afloat.

Some time in those early morning hours of the 29th of November, a night that would come to haunt many members of the *Townsend's* crew, they sailed over and past the wreck of the *Daniel J. Morrell*, unaware of the disaster while fighting for their own lives. In the days following the loss of the *Morrell* with all but one of its crew, the *Townsend* — severely damaged in the storm — was declared unfit to sail and its certification pulled.

The former Queen of the Lakes never sailed again. While being towed overseas for scrap in 1968, the *Townsend* broke in two and sank in the Atlantic Ocean.



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