

Boats on the Bay - 1

The growing trend toward large, steel-hull bulk carriers (referred to as steam barges) was reflected in the ships that came to Washburn to receive or discharge cargoes. Among the largest of these was the Henry W. Oliver at 444 feet, which loaded 341,000 bushels of grain in early December 1899, the largest number of bushels taken from the elevator up to that time. This record was broken in September 1904 by the Mary C. Elphicke at 430 feet, which took on 420,738 bushels and again in November 1905 by the William L. Brown, also 430 feet, which loaded 422,100 bushels, equivalent to 280 rail cars. Other somewhat smaller vessels in this category that loaded grain or discharged coal were the Saturn, Jupiter, and A.G. Brower, all about 350 feet. The wooden hull steam barges included the Alex Nimick, City of Naples, and Samuel Marshall, all about 300 feet.

Schooners (fore and aft sails) continued to call at the port, bringing in coal and taking way lumber. Two of the largest of this type were the three-masted Magnetic at 264 feet, and the four-masted Mable Wilson at 243 feet. The large, wood-hull steam barges and schooners probably represented the limit of wood construction. A quite different type of vessel, which visited Washburn during July 1897, while doing lake survey work, was the



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U.S.S. Michigan. Built in 1844 as the Navy's first ship with an iron hull, it was powered by side paddle wheels but also carried three masts for sails. The Times insisted on calling it a "warship" although it could not have been anything more than a gunboat, as warships had been banned on the Great Lakes by treaty since 1817. The ship naturally attracted a great deal of attention, but admiring crowds had to be content with viewing it from the outside as no visitors were allowed on board.

The Livingstone and Thomas W. Palmer, small wooden hull steam barges, departed with cargos of grain and flour. The Livingstone hull was of composite construction—an iron frame covered by wooden planking. Built in 1889, it continued in service until 1953. Also bringing cargoes of coal to the

port was the all-steel whaleback towed barge. Whalebacks were a unique class of vessels with an almost cylindrical steel hull and a conical or "snout-like" bow and stern. When loaded these vessels lay low in the water and with waves washing cleanly off their rounded sides, they somewhat resembled large, surfaced whales, hence the name. Other older traditional vessels that loaded cargoes of lumber, grain, or merchandise included the Colorado, Osceola, and Italia. These were wooden-hull propellers that carried only the foremast of a schooner-rig.

One vessel that caused a flurry of excitement in the bay communities was the passenger vessel North West. With its gleaming white steel hull, three smoke stacks set at a rakish angle, and a length of 358 feet, the North West was "the largest and most beautiful steamboat on the Great Lakes," according to the Times. Originally scheduled to call only at Ashland, on September 19 1895, the town chairman arranged for a one hour stop in Washburn, where it was greeted by an enthusiastic crowd and the city band. Washburn was a port of call for the Lake Superior Transit Company, whose east and west-bound passenger and freight vessels arrived at the merchandise dock 22 days out of the month. Its passenger vessels included the China, Japan,

and Empire State, and freight vessels Gordon Campbell and Vanderbilt.

A 1896 "bird's eye view" of Washburn shows a number of vessels as the freight terminal, coal dock, grain elevator, and dock. All of the vessels depicted are "steamers" or "propellers," and all are schooner-rigged (fore and aft sails), even the steam barges at the coal dock. Schooners continued in use, particularly for hauling lumber, and were frequent callers at Washburn, including the A.W. Wright and the Goshawk. A photograph of the A. W. Wright reveals the fate of many schooners—their main masts were removed for conversion to lumber barges, two or more of which were towed behind a steamer. The bowed structure shown over the mid-ships of many of the vessels strengthened their wooden hulls and prevented "hogging," or the drooping of the fore and aft sections of the vessel with respect to the mid-section. In contrast to the old wooden hull schooners were the new, steel-hull E.C. Pope and Alva, which were among the largest vessels in their class on the lakes. The E.C. Pope delivered 2,800 tons of coal in October 1845, the largest cargo of coal up to that time. Except in length, these ships were identical to modern coal and ore lake carriers with a large cargo space between fore and aft super-structures.