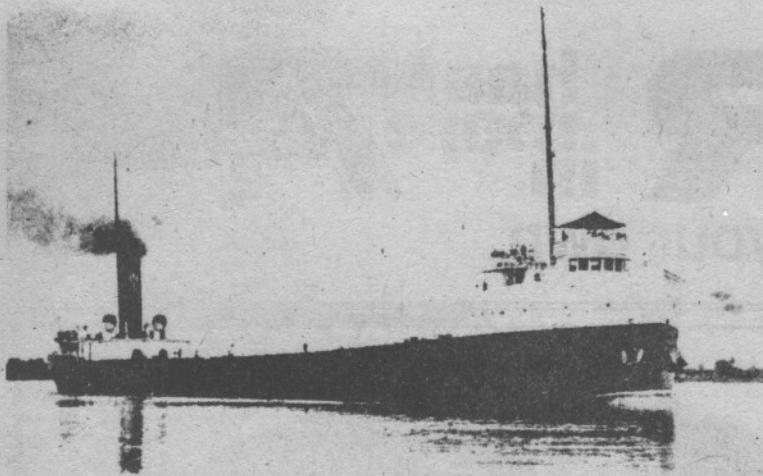


THE WRECK OF THE CHICAGO



By D. E. Pugh

Harbour residents are acquainted with the tremendous ferocity, and violence, frequently displayed by Superior's mountainous green waves, driven by a hard blowing gale. Local scuba divers, twisting their ways through the rusted torn skeleton of the steamer Chicago, still visible through the clear Superior waters of Michipicoten Island's west coast, shudder at the thought of the lake's vast destructive powers. The wreck itself, 325 feet by 44 feet, was only 28 years old at the time of the accident.

On Tuesday, October 22, 1929, the Chicago of the Great Lakes Transportation Company of Buffalo was on route from Duluth with a cargo of flour, bound for Portage Entrance to pick up a shipment of copper. Passage became more and more hazardous as a strong frigid northeast gale piled mountainous wave upon wave, preventing the ship from safely entering Portage Entrance. Believing that the only chance of safety for the ship was in the shelter of the North Shore, the Chicago under Captain Farrell, fought its way slowly across Superior's foaming whitecaps. With limited visibility from a bad snow storm, no record could be kept of distance or speed since freezing conditions had also destroyed the log. Static conditions made it impossible to receive signals from the Michipicoten Island radio beacon, so that Captain Farrell became unsure of his position.

Suddenly out of the blinding snow storm emerged the terrifying sight of a sullen line of roaring white breakers within 50 feet of the bow. "Hard astarboard" shouted the captain. The Chicago

shuddered and shook itself like a pig in a trough, then plunged itself upon the rocky shore, ripping a great gash into the port side. Hard aground, the Chicago quickly submerged until only the bow remained above the water, listing at 45 degrees. One crew member reported: "That moment was the most terrible experience in my life. I had no idea how to make it to shore! I can only wish to God that I may never have another accident like it."

Once on land, with some food and supplies, the sailors were marooned for four days on Michipicoten's bleak rocky coastline with four inches of snow. While Captain T. C. Farrell and the 32 seamen built shelters and lit a fire, C. Burns, a coal passer, struggled for five hours to find his way nine miles to Quebec Harbour. The following day more men attempted to reach Quebec Harbour but found themselves lost in a barren land of glaciated rocks and stunted spruce.

Attempts to reach Quebec Harbour were given up since the men had no idea of where they were heading for. By Friday afternoon, October 25th, the tug boat Seminole from Quebec Harbour reached the scene of the wreck but found that high seas made it impossible to reach the shore. Finally on Saturday morning the tugs Whalen and Strathboide as well as a coastguard cutter returned and brought the crew to safety.

Such was the extent of the damage to the Chicago that it was not worth salvaging. Its hull remains today as a testimony to Superior's dangers and the high cost of Great Lake sailing.

Questions -

- (1) How does the Chicago appear today?
- (2) Where was the Chicago headed?
- (3) Why did it have an accident?
- (4) What became of the crew?
- (5) What does this article reveal about Lake Superior?