



THE STEAMER ST. IGNACE STUCK IN ICEBERGS IN FEBRUARY, 1902. THE STEAMER ST. MARIE HAS COME TO THE RESCUE

The Perils of Late Navigation on the Great Lakes

By J. Olivier Curwood

A Striking Article Which Shows How, with Unrelenting Fierceness and Persistence, the "Little Ice Devils" That Dwell in the Depths of Lake Superior Grapple with and Sometimes Vanquish the Big Lake-Steamers, Dragging Them Down in Spite of the Efforts of Gallant Crews with Ax and Pick

WITH the first November storms along the Great Lakes, when insurance companies are beginning to refuse protection, and freight rates are high, come those days when daring crews and captains hazard their lives and the property

under them in a last long race over the inland seas, literally forced on to the venture by fool-hardy owners, who wish to swell their season's receipts by one more trip.

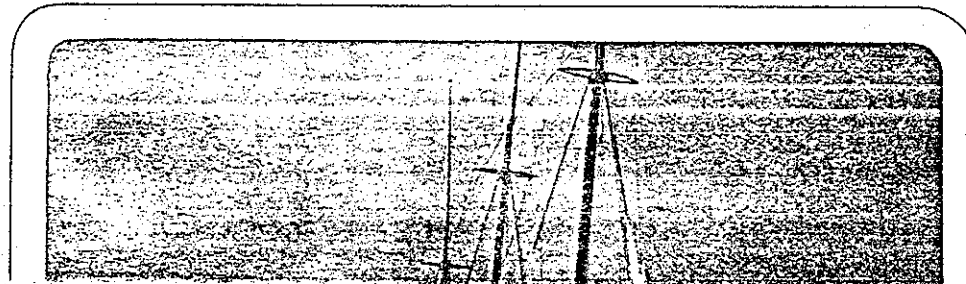
From this season on through December any hour is expected to bring the news of a great tragedy from off the lakes. It is during these days that lake casualties multiply with alarming rapidity; and it is then that occur those mysterious disappearances which make up such a large page in the history of lake navigation. Ships

water in the whole world. Here winter falls in the autumn, and from then until late spring it is a region of blizzards and blinding snow-storms. Even in summer the normal temperature of its water in many places is only four and five degrees above freezing—so cold that men have been chilled to death in its em-

and once a ship is carried down by the "little ice devils" it remains in its icy shroud for untold centuries; and bodies that sink in its cold depths seldom rise to float ashore.

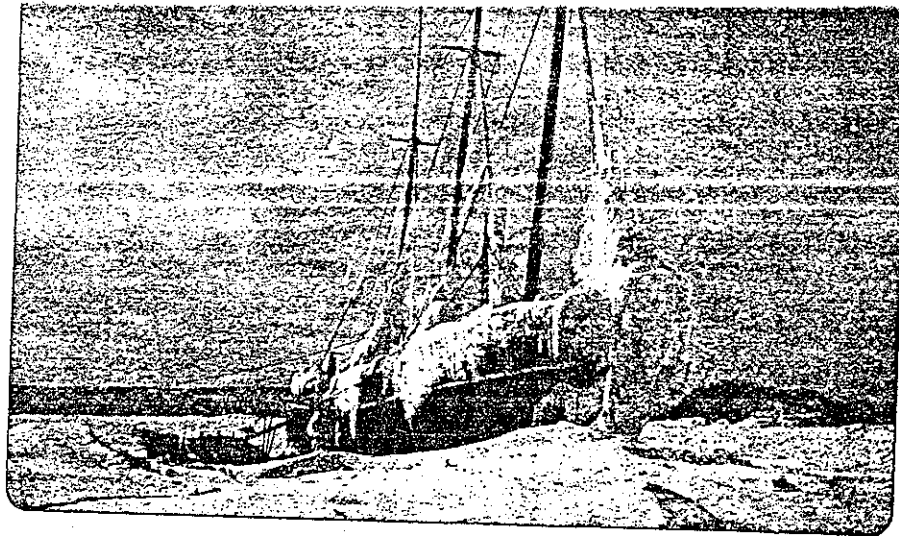
It is on Lake Superior that the "little ice devils" get in their deadly work. The history of one of these

lake tragedies is simple. With freight rates exceedingly high, one more trip means thousands of dollars to the owners of a vessel, and the ship is sent out from Duluth. If the season is very late, the word is passed from port to port, large and small, and to the lights along the coast. Each time the boat appears, word is sent back to the owners. But at last there comes a time when the messages cease—usually after the passage of the Big Sable light, the powerful beacon that stands as a warning on top of the Big



of the lakes. It is during the days that lake casualties multiply with alarming rapidity; and it is then that occur those mysterious disappearances which make up such a large page in the history of lake navigation. Ships go out, and are never heard from again. The lives of whole crews are snuffed out, and no one knows how or when they met their fate. Perhaps the next summer a piece of wreckage floats ashore somewhere, or it may be that not until twenty years later does a sign of the missing ship appear, for it is an old saying among lake seamen that "what the little ice devils pull down in Superior never comes up again." During this rough season the "watch-dogs of the lakes" are working night and day all the way from Duluth to the end of Lake Ontario, guarding the paths of those who are shaking hands with a fate as fickle as the winds. With most of the shipping off the lakes, the hardest time of the year has come for those men whose duty it is to attend to the lights in the barren wildernesses of northern Michigan. For days and nights at a time heavy fogs make one gray-white confusion of sea and sky and land. The most powerful lights twinkle like little stars from the rock-hemmed coasts, and the lamps at ship mast are like fireflies glimmering through gauze. Snow falls thick and heavy, shutting out all vision; or it may be that the nights and days are intensely cold, and then it is that the "little ice devils" creep up out of Lake Superior and drag the ships back down with them. Compared with these perils, those encountered in tropical seas during the hurricane season are small. There a whole ocean runs out before the tossing ship, but the narrow pathways of Lake Superior and Lake Huron are hemmed in by barren coasts like the Pictured Rocks, harborless wildernesses with only now and then a light to warn passing captains, and reefs and rocky headlands that jut out like knives to cut ships in two.

From the day that the British met defeat at the hands of Perry, Lake Erie has been considered the graveyard of the Great Lakes. But this has now changed. Trade between Duluth and East-ern ports has grown to gigantic proportions, and the only water-way to and fro is Lake Superior, the most dangerous piece of



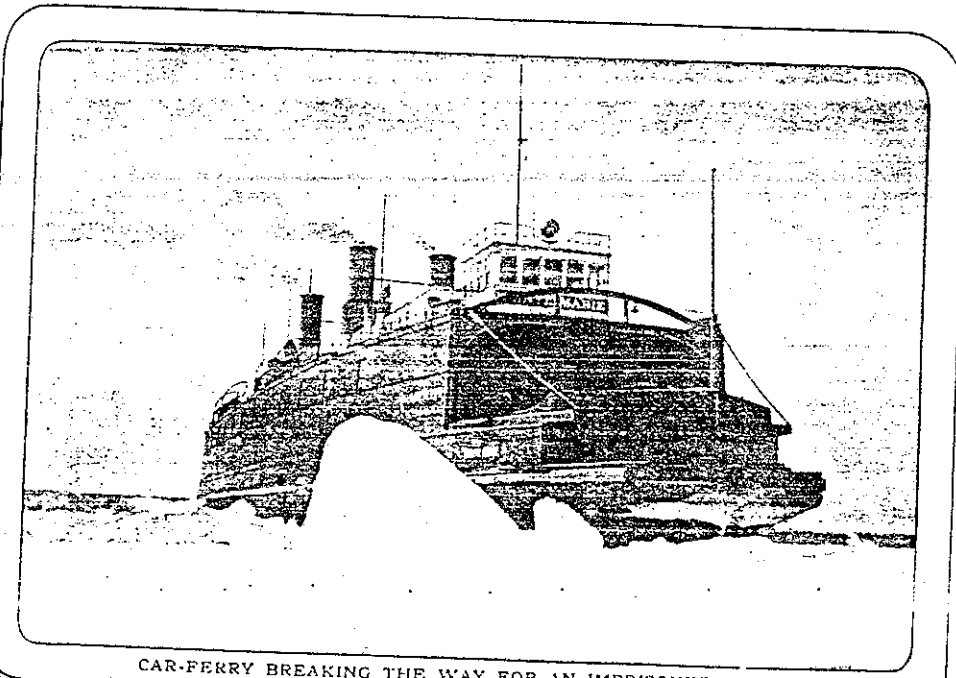
A TRAGEDY OF THE LAKE SUPERIOR WILDERNESS

The schooner was driven ashore by storm, and the picture was taken after a part of her crew had abandoned her and the rest had frozen. This is a particularly valuable photograph, the only one of its kind extant. It has never before been published.

brace in July and August. And outside of this, Lake Superior is what might be called uncanny. Soundings have shown that in places it is almost fathomless, and that its bed is filled with huge caverns and fissures a fifth of a mile deep. On this bottom ice never thaws,

and with the thermometer down below zero, the sailors are almost helpless. Inch by inch the vessel is weighted down, and with each inch she settles the sea has a greater play over her. Like millions of little fiends the "ice devils" pull down, until she grows "loggy," foundered, and sinks like a piece of lead.

Each year affords new material for most wildly picturesque stories of adventure along the northern lakes. Deeds of heroism are performed, which live forever in marine history, yet story-writers leave them singularly alone. Few acts stand out more heroic than that of Capt. James Jackson, who two years ago won everlasting fame in the wintry seas of Lake Superior. The owners of the freighter *W. F. Sauber* sent her out from Duluth with one last load of iron ore, with Capt. W. E. Morris in command. It was late in November, and winter was setting in with a number of fierce gales from the north. Off Whitefish Point the *Sauber* was caught in one of these storms. All one night she weathered the gale, but with morning there came a blinding sleet with the fierce wind and intense cold, that froze the spray as soon as it touched the ship. All that forenoon one might have supposed it was night, with the sun a pale moon above. During those hours the "little ice devils" began to weight the *Sauber*



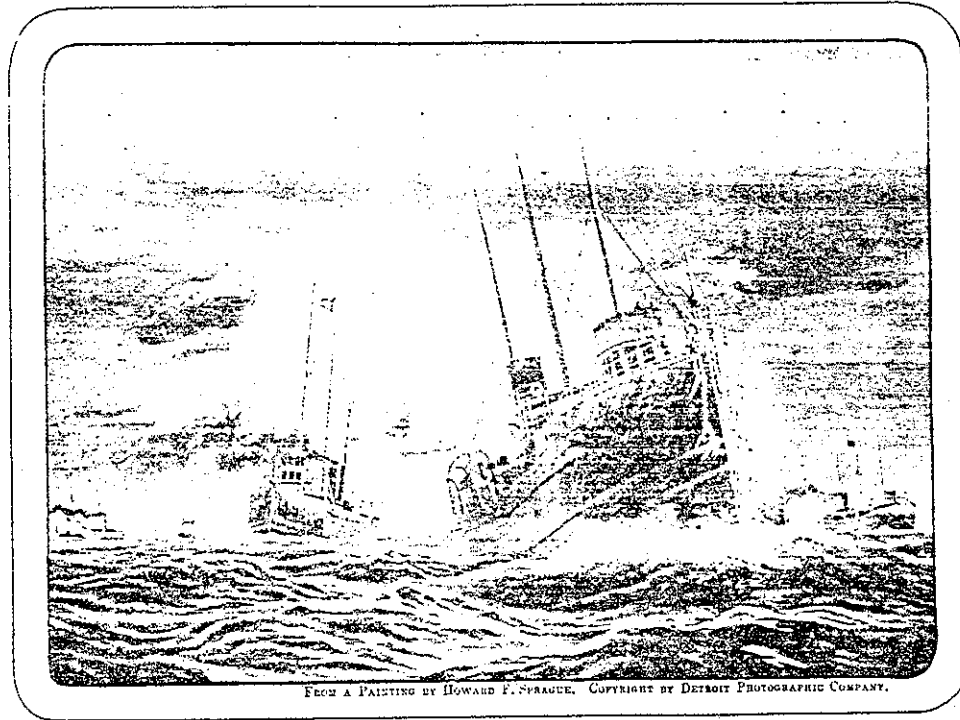
CAR-FERRY BREAKING THE WAY FOR AN IMPRISONED VESSEL

The crew attempted to clear away the ice as it froze, and lighten the ship, but no human being could live in the storm. Upon the sea, there are many things that happen. On that day there were just two vessels on Lake Superior, and fate decreed that they should meet off Whitefish Point. While the men on the *Sauber* were preparing for death, the steamer *Yale* was tearing her way through the gale toward the Soo; and passing within an eighth of a mile of the *Sauber*, Captain Jackson sighted the sinking ship. Then occurred that act which won for him a gold medal, and a heavy purse contributed to by half of the seamen of the lakes. Although at the time Captain Jackson was having a hard time in keeping his own vessel above the water, he immediately brought his vessel to. For hours the boat continued to toss in the trough of the sea, which was too heavy for small boats to attempt a rescue in. Night came, and the vessels drifted within a stone's throw of one another. The *Yale* was still comparatively free from ice, but the heavily laden ore-boat was sinking inch by inch. With the coming of morning, when the *Yale* might have been safely in port, it was found that she, too, was gradually settling, and that the *Sauber* would not live an hour longer. Captain Jackson at once called for those men who were willing to risk their lives in an attempt at rescue, and went out himself in the first boat. If bravery was ever rewarded, it was then. Every member of the *Sauber's* crew with the exception of the captain was carried to the *Yale*. At the last moment Captain Morris went to lower himself into one of the boats, hesitated, then leaped back to the deck of the sinking ship.

"Go on, boys!" he shouted through the gale. "Good luck to you—but I'm going to stay with the old boat!"

Thirty minutes later the *Sauber* went under, and immediately after the explosion of her deck, caused by the pressure of air and water, the last cries of Captain Morris could be heard above the gale. A few hours later the *Yale* came into port a monument of ice, and not an hour too soon.

Lake Superior has been the scene of as weird happenings as any tropic sea, and of all her stories, that of the "Frozen Ship" stands out the most romantic, a tragedy in which a three-masted schooner was lost in a wilderness of ice and snow as completely as if she had been in the polar regions. Her owner was her captain, and he started out with the foolhardy idea of sailing her down to a more southern port than Duluth. Just what happened after the storms of Lake Superior broke upon him there is no living man



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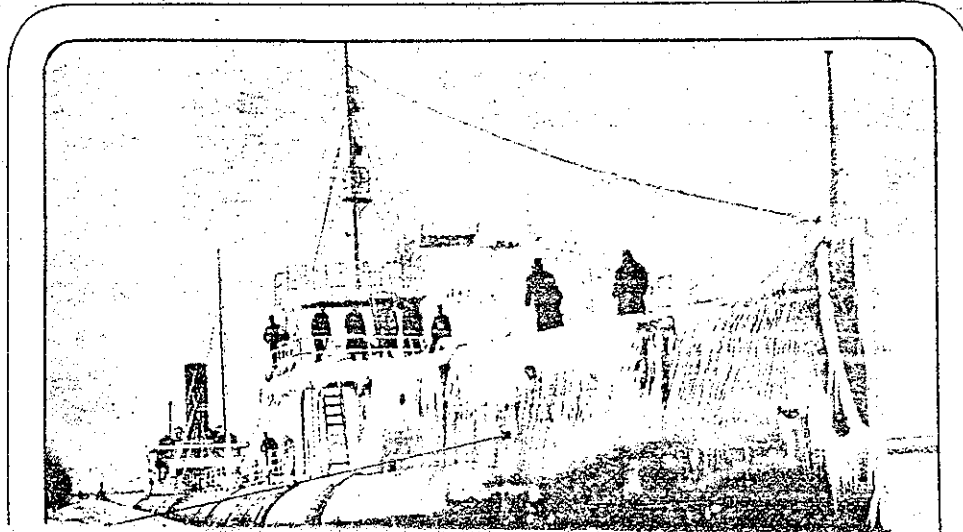
THE LAST TRIP FROM DULUTH

These vessels and their daring crews are making the last fall trip across Lake Superior after underwriters have refused to insure them

To lake seamen the "little ice devils" seem almost human in many ways. "If they can't get you in one way," says an old captain, "they'll most generally try to get you in another." And the queer story of the *Queen of the West* seems to corroborate this. Late in 1903 Captain McKenzie, of the freighter *Codorus*, was

There are other and darker tales to relate. The mysterious disappearances which have so long been supposed to belong exclusively to the big oceans and tropical seas have become more and more common among lake shipping, and vessels have disappeared on the lakes as completely as on the ocean, leaving no trace of the tragedy behind them.

Two years ago late last autumn the big freighter *Bannockburn* left Duluth with a crew of twenty-two men. What happened to her will never be known. She went out one morning, was sighted the next evening—and that was the last. Not a sign of her floated ashore, and not one of her crew of twenty-two was found. For eighteen months the ice-cold waters of Lake Superior guarded their secret. Then one day a wandering trapper discovered an oar among the driftwood at the edge of the Michigan wilderness. Around the oar was wrapped a piece of tarpaulin, and when this was taken off a number of rude letters were revealed scraped into the wood—letters which spelled the word B-a-n-n-o-c-k-b-u-r-n. For fear that the letters would not be noticed, the one who made them had filled the cuts with human blood, and after this had frozen stiff had wrapped the tarpaulin about the oar to preserve the lettering. This blood-lettered oar is all that remains to-day to tell the story of the missing *Bannockburn*. And now, by many superstitious sailors, the *Bannockburn* is supposed to be the "Flying Dutchman" of the



"You're sinking, you idiot! Why don't you heave to?"

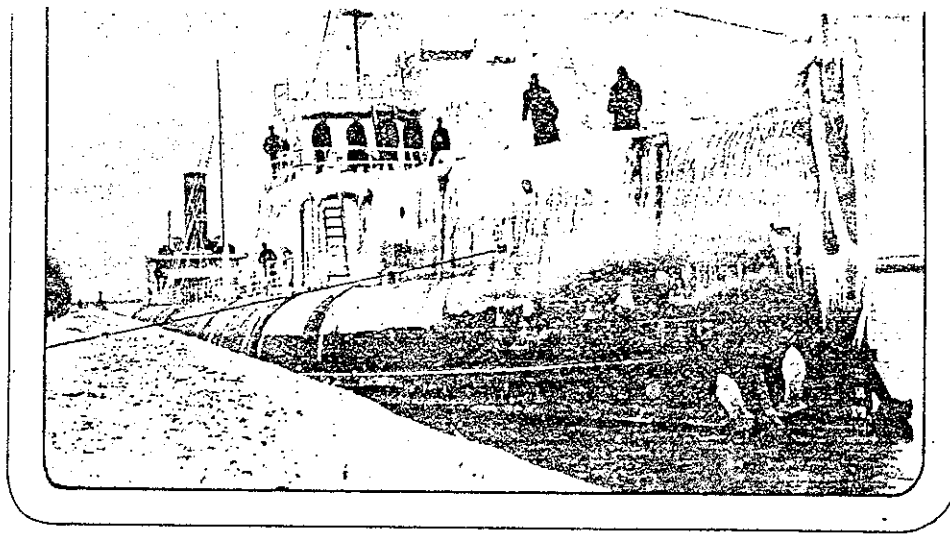
"I know it—but I can't come back the voice of the *Queen of the West's* captain. "The ice has got us, and if we stop for an instant we'll go down like a chunk of lead!"

The *Codorus* ran alongside, and for a few instants the *Queen of the West* stopped, while her crew clambered to the other vessel. Hardly had the *Codorus* got under way again, when, coming into a trough of the sea, the ice-laden vessel foundered and sank.

These are only a few of the stories which each year add to the history of late navigation on the Great Lakes.

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...or four deserted in
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...the trip was begun.

Then the captain went on. There came storms and the fiercest gales, and the "little ice devils" fought to pull the wooden vessel down; but what the captain and his three or four men did is a part of the story that will never be known. But one day, many weeks afterward, the ice corpse of a ship was discovered at the edge of the pine wilderness on the Michigan side. From stem to stern she was a mass of ice, and when she was entered, two men were found in her, frozen stiff, just as the "Frozen Pirate" was discovered in a story not so true.



AFTER A FIERCE NIGHT'S BATTLE

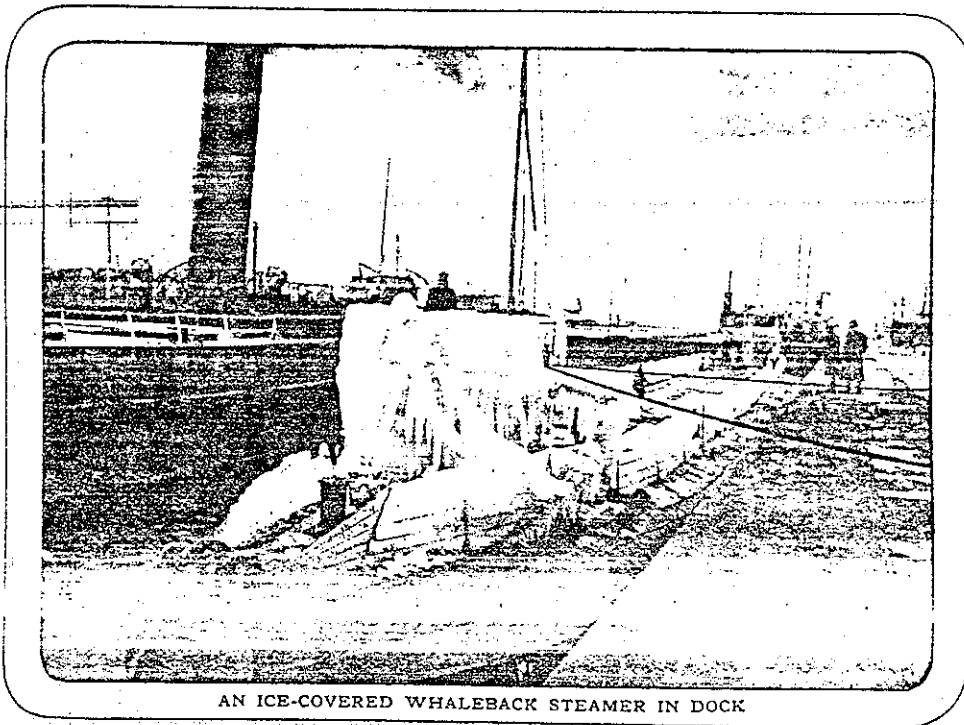
The "little ice devils" form on the vessels during stormy nights faster than the crews can chop them off

making his last trip across Lake Superior, when he made out the *Queen of the West* a couple of miles out of her course. Captain McKenzie could clearly make out the signal of distress flying from the *Queen of the West*, and could also see that she was in a sinking condition. Immediately he changed his course and gave chase. But the *Queen of the West* continued on her way

as if unconscious of the fact that rescuers were near. Mile after mile the chase continued and the crew of the *Codorus* could plainly see that the fleeing steamer was settling steadily. Also, instead of setting her course toward the Soo, she was taking the wind in the teeth directly toward the barren Canadian coast. There was a mystery about it all, and Captain McKenzie got up all speed. At last the *Codorus* came within hailing distance of the woods of Captain McKenzie have already passed down into lake history.

Lake Superior is not the only one of the five Great Lakes where late navigation is attended by great peril, but it is there that occur most of the strange disappearances of the inland seas. It has practically no harbors of refuge. After leaving the Soo a vessel has to make the Portage Canal unless it finds protection at Grand Island, and the chief point of danger lies between Whitefish Bay along the Pictured Rocks, guarded by the Big Sable light, to Marquette. In number alone the wrecks of Lake Superior hardly compare with those of either Lake Michigan or Lake Huron, but her mortality is greater than either.

Lake Huron has another story to tell—a story in which late navigation plays the same big part, but in another way. This lake is the "grave of the lumber-barge and lost treasure." Its bottom is covered with innumerable wrecks—wrecks of small wooden vessels which come down from Lake Superior heavily laden with ice, and which sink in the choppy swells, or run aground during the dense autumn logs so common to Lake Huron. Many years ago the whole of the Saginaw Valley was a great lumbering region, and in those days hundreds of thousands of dollars were brought up to the camps in the barges. It was in those days that a late-autumn storm sank the propeller *City of Detroit*, which had nearly one hundred thousand dollars aboard. Years of search has not revealed the location of the lost treasure. Other barges went down, in the course of a quarter of a century, carrying fortunes with them. To this day no one has found the remains of the *Water Witch*, which went down with almost half a million dollars' worth of copper which she was bringing from the Michigan mines. Again and again expeditions have been fitted out to search for these vessels, all lost in wintry seas, but nothing but disappointment has come to them. The great advance of recent years in shipbuilding does not seem to decrease the loss of property and life, and the mysterious disappearances of ships are even more numerous than in the old days of wooden vessels. Then a derelict might drift for weeks without sinking, but now the big steel freighters go down "wi' jest a gurgle 'n' a swish—'n' that's all." And each year will continue to add to the mysterious tragedies of the lakes.



AN ICE-COVERED WHALEBACK STEAMER IN DOCK