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Queen of the Lakes

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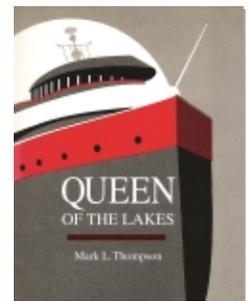
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A Canadian Successor

Canada Steamship Lines was already the largest of the Canadian fleets when it launched the *W. Grant Morden* on a chilly spring day in 1914. The historic firm's growth was far from over, however. In 1925, CSL acquired a shipyard, the Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing facility at Lauzon, Quebec. Then, in 1926, CSL further expanded its holdings by acquiring Midland Ship Building and the Great Lakes Navigation Company from Georgian Bay shipbuilder and shipowner James Playfair.

After amassing a personal fortune in the booming lumber business, the Scottish-born Playfair razed his mill at Midland, Ontario, in 1916 and built a shipyard on the site. World War I was still raging in Europe, and the first ships built at the yard were saltwater freighters contracted for by the Imperial Munitions Board. At the end of the war, Playfair made the shift to building bulk carriers for service on the lakes, several of which were assigned to his own shipping companies.

During the summer of 1926, Playfair invited a number of his friends to join him for the initial trial run of the newest ship built for his Great Lakes Navigation fleet. Launched at his shipyard at Midland on June 23, 1926, the *Glenmohr*¹ was the largest ship ever built there. At 633 feet in length, the pride of the Playfair fleet was also the longest ship on the Great Lakes. To it passed the title of Queen of the Lakes that had been held by CSL's *Morden* since 1914.

STR. GLENMOHR

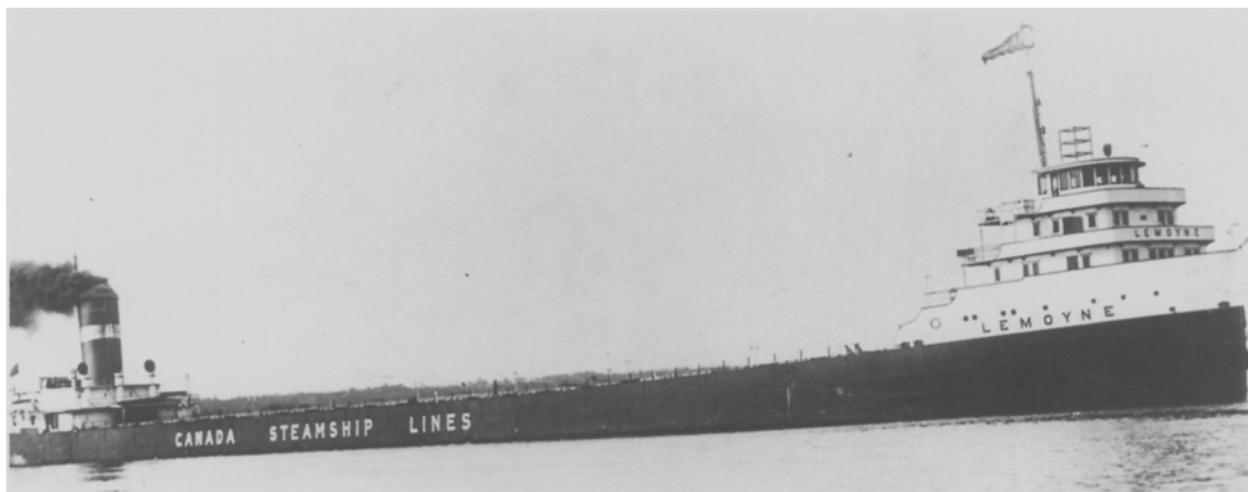
633'x70'x29'

Queen of the Lakes

June 23, 1926 to April 9, 1927

Playfair walked the decks of the beautiful new ship with his guests as crewmembers put her through the required series of turns and stops that had to be conducted before it could receive a Coast Guard certificate and go into service. This must have been a bittersweet moment for Playfair. In the weeks that had passed since the *Glenmohr* first went into the water, the aging Scotsman had sold his shipyard and fleet to Canada Steamship Lines. As the big freighter was put through its paces on the calm, azure waters of Georgian Bay, the host of the sea trial party was himself but a guest on a ship he no longer owned. In fact, the ship no longer even bore the name he had selected for it. Even before the sea trials began, the *Glenmohr* had been renamed the *Lemoyne* in honor of the summer residence of William H. Coverdale, president of Canada Steamship Lines. It was a ship whose name would soon be etched boldly in the record books of the Great Lakes fleet, but few would remember that it began its career as James Playfair's *Glenmohr*.²

Unlike the *Morden*, the *Lemoyne* was not just the longest



The *Str. Lemoyne* became the second Canadian Queen of the Lakes when it went into service for Canada Steamship Lines in 1926. Built by James Playfair at his shipyard in Midland, Ontario, as the *Glennohr*, the ship was sold to CSL even before it set sail for its sea trials. It is seen here at Sault Ste. Marie. (State Archives of Michigan)

ship on the lakes; it was also the biggest. While only eight feet longer than the *Morden*, the *Lemoyne* was one of the first vessels built with a seventy-foot beam. The giant CSL ship was more than ten feet wider than the former Queen and more than six feet wider than the *Schoonmaker*, *Snyder, Jr.*, and *Hartwell*, vessels that had amassed most of the Great Lakes cargo records during the 1911–26 period. The *Lemoyne*'s awe-inspiring dimensions translated into a gross tonnage of 10,480, over 1,000 gross tons more than any other ship on the lakes.³

It didn't take the *Lemoyne* long to flex her steel-hard muscles. She established her first cargo record in August of 1926, loading 15,415 net tons of soft coal at Sandusky, Ohio, on her maiden voyage. A second record was set on September 21, when her cavernous hold was filled with 518,000 bushels of wheat at Fort William.⁴ During the 1928 season, her name also went into the record books alongside the world's record grain cargo of 555,000 bushels.⁵

The *Lemoyne* operated primarily in the coal and grain trades until World War II. When the wartime demand for raw materials led the American government to allow eight Canadian shipping companies to place thirty-five ships in the domestic U.S. iron ore trade, the *Lemoyne* promptly smashed the records previously set by the biggest American freighters. She carried three record cargoes during a single nine-day period in 1942,⁶ shattering the previous iron ore record by loading 17,253 gross tons at Superior, Wisconsin, for delivery to a steel

mill at Hamilton, Ontario.⁷ While her iron ore record fell later that season to one of the "supers" of Pittsburgh Steamship's *Fraser*-class that came out in 1942, the *Lemoyne* still held seven Great Lakes cargo records at the end of 1943.⁸

Vying for tonnage records along with the *Lemoyne* and the supers of the tin-stacker fleet were two other U.S. freighters launched in 1927. Inland's 621-foot *L. E. Block* and Interlake's 631-foot *Harry Coulby* were strong contenders for the iron ore cargo record from 1927 until the launching of Inland's 678-foot *Wilfred Sykes* in 1949. Like the *Lemoyne* and the *Fraser*-class boats, both the *Block* and *Coulby* were prodigious carriers.

In case there was anyone around who didn't know who owned the record-breaking *Lemoyne*, the owners of CSL solved that in 1927 when they boldly painted CANADA STEAMSHIP LINES on the side of her hull in large block letters, as they did on all 115 vessels in their fleet. CSL wasn't the first fleet on the lakes to use the sides of ships as immense billboards. The practice actually dated back to 1917, when the *Belgium* had BUY WAR SAVINGS BONDS emblazoned on the sides of her hull. James Playfair adapted the practice in 1921 or 1922, when he had the names of his ships painted in large letters along the sides of their blue-gray hulls. In 1926, the Chicago-based Construction Materials Corporation had its corporate name painted on the sides of the hulls of its two sandsuckers, but the lettering was not very large.

After Canada Steamship Lines painted the fleet name on

the sides of the hulls of its ships, many other fleets followed suit. Eventually, most of the large fleets on the lakes adopted the practice, including Pittsburgh Steamship Company, Columbia Transportation, and Cleveland-Cliffs. Boland and Cornelius took a slightly different tack. In 1932, the Buffalo, New York, shipping company adopted the practice of naming ships for important clients, such as Consumers Power, Detroit Edison, Dow Chemical, and United States Gypsum. Lest its customers somehow overlook the honor that Boland and Cornelius had bestowed on them, fleet officials ordered that the names of the ships be painted on the sides of their black hulls in huge white letters. Most of the fleets discontinued the practice during the 1950s and 1960s, but Canada Steamship Lines continues the practice yet today.⁹

The *Lemoyne* operated in CSL colors throughout her career. During the winter of 1968–69, she was laid up at Kingston, Ontario, and her owners announced that the ship which had once been the pride of their fleet was being retired from service. After being stripped of much of her equipment, she was sold to shipbreakers. The *Lemoyne* departed the lakes in early June of 1969 in a tandem tow with the *Str. Goudreau*. The two freighters arrived in Santander, Spain, on June 27 and were soon dismantled.¹⁰ Even as she went to the scrap pile, the *Lemoyne* set yet another record. She was the newest and largest Great Lakes freighter to be scrapped, a dubious distinction that would remain on the record books until the scrapping of the *William Clay Ford* two decades later.¹¹



The CSL stack markings on the *Lemoyne* featured a black stack with an orange cap and a white band. (Author's collection)

Notes

1. Most of the ships in the Playfair fleet had names that began with the prefix "Glen."
2. James P. Barry, *Ships of the Great Lakes* (Berkeley: Howell-North Books, 1973), 199–200.
3. Ship Biography, Institute for Great Lakes Research, Bowling Green State University.
4. Fred Landon, *Lake Huron* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1944), 316.
5. Arthur Pound, *Lake Ontario* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1945), 324–25.
6. Milo M. Quaipe, *Lake Michigan* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1944), 168.
7. John O. Greenwood, *Namesakes II* (Cleveland: Freshwater Press, 1973), 123.
8. Landon, 316.
9. Gary S. Dewar, "Billboard Lettering on the Great Lakes," *Inland Seas* 44, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 21–25.
10. Ship Biography.
11. Barry, 200.