Launching the Government Ships

The Government's pre-war survey of the possibility of ship-building in the Jacksonville vicinity resulted favorably and within a few weeks after war was declared several firms had received ship-building orders. Some time was required to prepare the plants for the work, but when this was accomplished the local shipyards went to work with a vim that broke several world's records for speed. By the summer of 1918 the work had reached a stage where it was not considered an unusual occurrence for a new ship to slide from the ways into the St. Johns River. Four steamer types were built here—"composite", part steel and part wood; "Ferris type", wooden cargo carrier; all-steel type; and concrete, hull of reinforced concrete. Their launchings as reported in the newspapers occurred as follows:

May 30, 1918—While the band played "Star Spangled Banner" and while hundreds of people waved their hats or handkerchiefs and cheered, the 3,500-ton "composite" steamer "Red Cloud", the first Government ship to be launched at Jacksonville and the first of the type in the South for the Emergency Fleet Corporation, was launched by the Merrill-Stevens Shipbuilding Corporation at 1 o'clock in the afternoon. As soon as the ship left the ways the keel for another was laid in the same place in exactly nine minutes, breaking the American shipbuilding record.

June 24, 1918—Steamer "Dancey", 3,500 tons, Ferris type, built entirely of pine cut in Florida, was launched by J. M. Murdock Co.

July 4, 1918—As a part of the national patriotic program three steamers were launched at Jacksonville. All were of 3,500 tons, namely: "Apalachee", composite type, launched by Merrill-Stevens Corporation; "Baxley", Ferris type, launched by U. S. Shipping Board; "Bedminster", Ferris type, launched by Morey & Thomas.

August 3, 1918—Steamer "Botsford", 3,500 tons, "composite" type, launched by Merrill-Stevens Corporation.

August 24, 1918—Steamer "Kanabec", 3,500 tons, "composite" type, launched by Merrill-Stevens Corporation.