

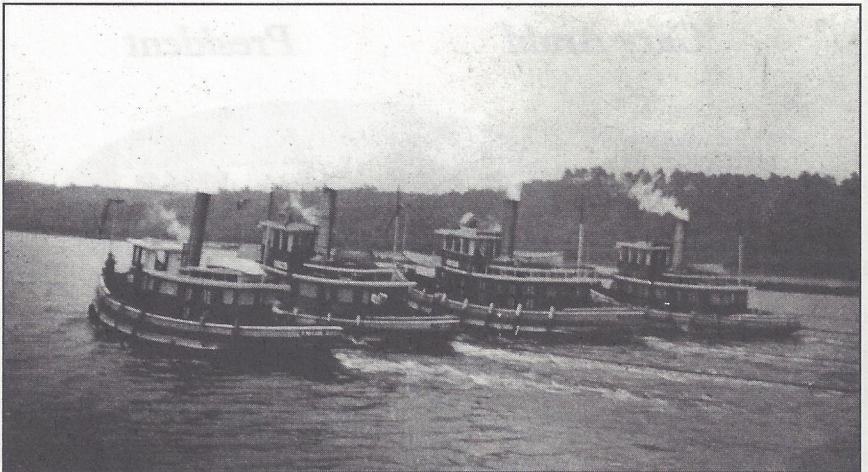
PILOT LOG 2006

A SALUTE TO ATHENS AND NEW BALTIMORE-BUILT TUGBOATS

The shipbuilding industry that flourished in Athens and New Baltimore from the mid-19th century until the time of World War I has been overlooked for too long by historians. The small shipyards of these villages turned out many steamboats, steam lighters and barges, but arguably their lasting contribution to the maritime world was in the sizeable fleets of tugs that came from local yards, which included Morton & Edmonds, Van Loon & Magee, Peter Magee, William D. Ford and R. Lenahan & Co. in Athens; and, in New Baltimore, J. R. and H. S. Baldwin, William H. Baldwin and that grandly-named-but-short-lived late-comer, the New Baltimore Shipbuilding and Repair Co.

The vessels were built for the area's two principal markets—Albany and New York City. In Albany, the eastern terminus of the Erie Canal, an impressive fleet of small harbor tugs performed two functions: They shepherded the multitude of canal boats that traversed the Erie Canal after they had reached Albany, and many of these tugs towed barges and canal boats on the canal itself. In New York—then, as now, one of the nation's major ports—these tugs joined the workforce of commerce of that place, docking and undocking seagoing vessels, shifting barges among the multitude of piers, and performing many other tasks.

The tugs built at Athens number over eighty, including the well-known side-wheel towboat *Silas O. Pierce*, launched by Morton & Edmonds in 1863. She



An unusual photograph of four Athens / New Baltimore tugs pulling a common tow c.1904 on the Hudson River near Albany.

L-R P.McCabe Jr. (Athens - 1899), Jas. A. Morris (New Baltimore 1894), Chas. J. Reno (New Baltimore - 1900), Thomas Chubb (Athens - 1888).



The *Gen. J.B. Carr* being worked on at a New Baltimore shipyard with a tugboat hull next to it on the left. The *J.B. Carr* served as a passenger ferry between Albany and Troy. She had been built at Rondout as the *Priam* in 1892. Photo, collection of the New Baltimore historian.

eventually came under the ownership of Rondout-based Cornell Steamboat Company, as did a number of other Athens-built vessels, such as *Thomas Chubb* of 1888, *H. D. Mould* of 1896, *P. McCabe, Jr.* (renamed *W. B. McCulloch*) of 1899, and *Primrose* of 1902.

New Baltimore's output of tugboats was around fifty vessels. This fleet was composed of some interesting vessels, such as the side-wheel towboats *Jacob Leonard* and *George A. Hoyt* in 1872 and 1873. Both were in the Cornell fleet. *George A. Hoyt* was the last side-wheel towboat constructed as such—most vessels of the type having been converted from elderly passenger steamboats.

Over the years, Cornell also acquired a number of New Baltimore propeller tugs, such as *Jas. A. Morris* of 1894, *Wm. H. Baldwin* of 1901, *R. J. Foster* of 1903, *Robert A. Scott* of 1904, and *Walter B. Pollack* (later renamed *W. A. Kirk*) of 1905. *R. J. Foster* and *Robert A. Scott* had originally towed ice barges for the Foster-Scott Ice Company.

The last tug built at Athens was the diesel-propelled *Thomas Minnock*, built in 1923 by R. Lenahan for Ulster Davis. She lasted until the early 1960s, although many of her last years were in lay up at the Island Dock at Rondout while owned by the Callanan Road Improvement Company. New Baltimore's last tug was *Gowanus*, built for the legendary Gowanus Towing Company by the Baldwin yard in 1921.

In recognition of the shipbuilding prowess of the shipbuilders of Athens and New Baltimore, we of the Hudson River Maritime Museum tip our collective hats to the accomplishments of these accomplished artisans and mechanics.

— by William duBarry Thomas