

# Launching a Ship was a Family Affair in 1871

Written by [Brian Johnson](#) posted on September 13, 2017 12:42

*Day by day the vessel grew,*

*With timbers fashioned strong and true.*

*Mr. Kinghorn's new composite steamer will be launched at two o'clock tomorrow afternoon.*

*"Daily News," Sept. 1, 1871*

*The keel for the new boat was laid in Power's shipyard on the first of June.*

*All summer, the hammers were kept busy at the shipyard on actually two composite steamers shipped over from Scotland. One belonged to Kinghorn and Hinckley. The other, well ahead of her 'rival' was a small enclosed passenger steamer that was christened and launched on August 16, 1871. She belonged to Charles F. Gildersleeve.*



Pierrepont (II): Kinghorn & Hinckley Steamer,  
Kingston/Wolfe Island/ Cape Vincent Ferry

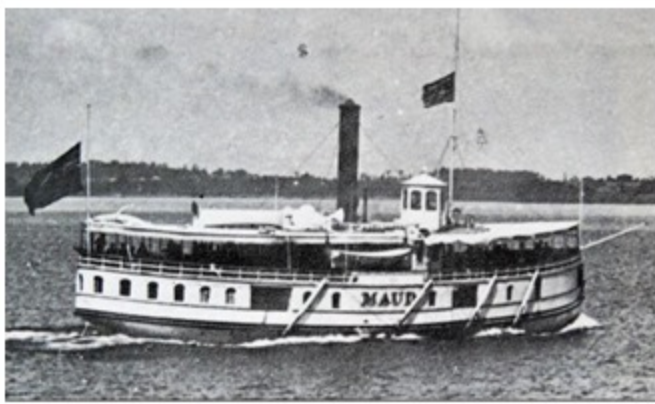
*For the launch occasion, ordinary work stopped in the shipyard, except for the building of the launching platform and seats moved in for the elite. A hot summer day, a light breeze blowing in from the southwest relieved the humidity. Gathered at the foot of Union Street, a throng of onlookers climbed aboard different ships for a better view. Some were on nearby rooftops. Stores and shops closed. Whole families turned out for a ship launching. Time went on as the hot morning changed to an even hotter afternoon. Without knowing the reason for the delay, several people left. "Maybe they couldn't afford the champagne," one passerby declared to his neighbour.*

*"Maybe ol' Gildersleeve din 'a wan 'a waste it, Ha ha..."*

*The christening and launch was actually delayed by a series of passing barges coming into Kingston harbour. Nearer the platform, those who stayed saw the christening party climb aboard to ride the new vessel down the ways. One was a little girl with sunny, blond hair dressed in a white dress trimmed around the edges in blue.*

*Speeches read, all was made ready for the hammers to remove the blocks. Swinging the champagne bottle high up on the bow and held by her parents was eight year old Maud Gildersleeve. At a signal from her father Charles, young Maud swung the bottle, turning her head quickly as she felt the drops splash alongside the bows of her father's new vessel, named for his daughter. The crowd cheered, the band struck up 'Rule Britannia' and the blocks were knocked out.*

As the brightly painted little ship rolled down the ways, her name 'Maud' could be seen painted in block letters over her paddle box. Maud was 293 tons and 114 feet long by 20 feet wide. The name was also prominent at the masthead as the burgee unfolded. At once, all of the nearby ships blew their whistles in the traditional salute. Just beside the launching railway was another partially finished ship awaiting her primer coat of paint.



Maud: Gildersleeve steamer, passengers and freight  
Wolfe Island Canal to Cape Vincent NY

Her turn came just two weeks later. Again, the same platform was moved toward the launching rail at Power's shipyard where the dignitaries could sit and watch the proceedings. By now, there was no guessing the new Kinghorn and Hinckley ship's name. Painted in large, black, symbolic letters on her two white, decorated paddle boxes was the familiar name 'Pierrepont'. Again, the name appeared on both bows and along her stern as well. The similarities to her predecessor stopped there. While the former ferry Pierrepont was strengthened by twin arches that ran fore and aft, both vessels had spoon-like bows but the brand new 252 ton 123 foot by 19 foot Pierrepont did not have the arches.

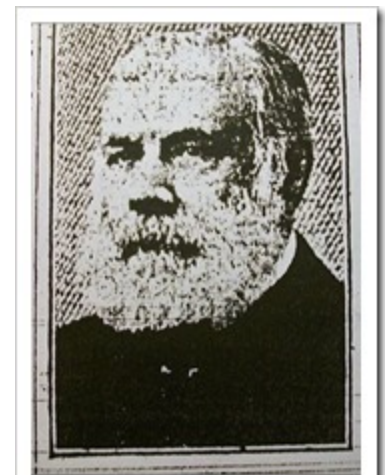
Sitting high on the ways and decked out from stem to stern with flags and streamers, the new, brightly painted white steamship looked huge; bigger than almost anything launched in the yard in some time. Her lines were sleek. Her foredeck, larger than her sister ferry the Watertown, would be capable of carrying the ever growing cargoes of freight and livestock. On the second deck, behind her pilot house, her main salon boasted brightly painted benches around the perimeter with individual table and chair ensemble complimenting the centre area. The whole cabin was spotless, complete with highly polished gimballed brass lanterns fixed to the bulkheads reflecting the sunlight through her large panoramic windows.

Ship builder John Power, decked out in his finest bowler hat and Sunday best, pulled his watch from his breast pocket. Snapping it open he checked the time. About two minutes to two o'clock. He then stood up and waved a signal to George M. Kinghorn that all was ready. Even for a hot, late summer day, G.M. himself was dressed in his finest attire, vest included. A fine, silk top hat completed his outfit. Again, gathered all around the upper platform, men and women, some with parasols, some with flasks of whiskey, hushed for the proceedings. Holding his hands up for silence, Power then welcomed Kingston Mayor Archibald Livingston to the podium.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the mayor began. "It behoves me to welcome all of you..."

At the same time, George Kinghorn, followed by his wife Elizabeth and oldest daughter Dinah, made their way aboard their newest ship on a rickety set of stairs specially built for the purpose. By now, although it took some time, the stalwart Scot was on speaking terms with the mayor of Kingston, having lost the mayoral race to him just recently. But that's over and done with he had said. Bygones be bygones and no hard feelin's. The party then walked forward toward the bow of the new ship. With them was Chief Engineer Alexander Milne, who had supervised her construction, especially the iron work. He would be in charge of setting up her machinery, when fitted.

G.M. Kinghorn stepped forward at the bow of his new vessel. Clearing his throat he gripped the lapels of his jacket with both hands. "Mayor Livingston..." he began. "My fellow Kingstonians, Reeve Dawson and people of Wolfe Island." His loud voice echoed off the nearby freight sheds. "It gives me great pleasure..." When he finished, the yard boss gave his signal to the men below: "Now! Look sharp and wait for it!!"



George Mathieson Kinghorn,  
Kingston councillor and  
shipowner



Captain Coleman Hinckley Sr.

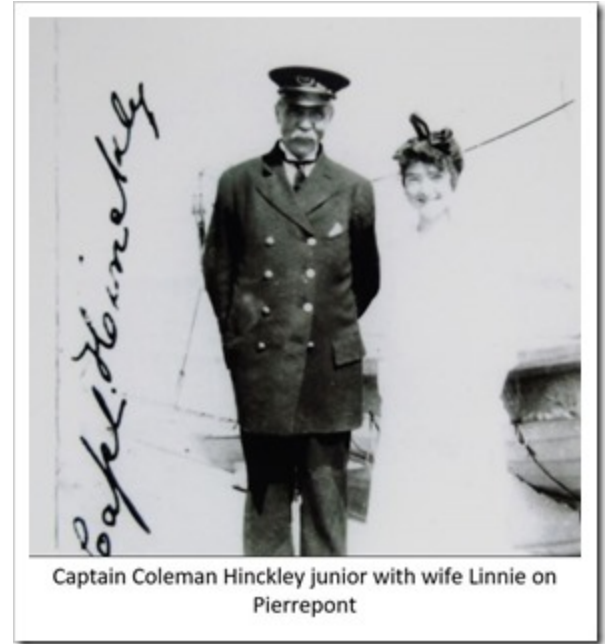
*Topside on the platform, eighteen year old Dinah Kinghorn held up her lengthy skirt and stepped smartly around her father. Looking back over her shoulder, she waited for GM to nod his head. Getting the required signal she drew her bonnet back from her eyes and put both gloved hands on the champagne bottle. Taking a deep breath she raised the bottle over her head and shouted, "I hereby christen thee... 'Pierrepont'!"*

*She swung the bottle down hard, and clamped her eyes shut. Crash! Expensive champagne foamed down the bow. The band broke out with 'Rule Britannia' as Dinah yelled, "May God bless thee and all..."*

*"NOW!!" the foreman yelled to the men under the hull. "Knock them blocks OUT!!"*

*A dozen hammers hit at once.*

*Above and beside the men the boat gave a sudden lurch, like a freed horse. Then, wheels squealing, she started down the greased track. Her passengers hung on to the bulwark of the bow as the new Pierrepont, resplendent with her flags, pennants and burgee flying in the late summer wind, gathered speed down the rail then hit the water stern first with a loud splash. All throughout the harbour again, much like two weeks previous for the launching of the Maud, the ships whistled their salutes, white steam spouting forward from their smokestacks followed immediately by the shrill scream. Among them, the Watertown, with Captain Coleman Hinckley Sr. at the wheel; the Gazelle, Captain David Pyke and the older, original Pierrepont, piloted by Captain Coleman Hinckley Jr. All blew their whistles together for their newest sister ship.*



Captain Coleman Hinckley junior with wife Linnie on Pierrepont

*As the new Pierrepont 'wet her bottom', she continued to roll and shake in her new element as the shore lines connected to her forward bits came taut. Slowly, Coleman Sr. brought the Watertown alongside. Carefully making the new ship fast along her own port side, the Watertown took her sister in tow over to Davidson and Doran's wharf where she would receive her boiler and machinery.*

*At the shipyard, lunch and beer was served to all on hand amid cheers from the greased workers climbing up from the rails, collecting the wooden wedges as they went. "I hopes they do this every Saturday, I do," one worker said to his buddy. "You could really get used to this, I could!"*

*"What, the work? Or the free beer afterwards?" his companion replied.*

*The old, former Pierrepont chugged her way back to her wharf at Brock Street. Coleman jr. called the chief to blow her boiler down when she was secure. By the end of the week her name board was removed. As the year 1871 drew to a close the company of Kinghorn and Hinckley made a decision. Unable to find a buyer, George Kinghorn ordered her stripped and dismantled.*