

# THE LIGHTSHIP



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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our fourth and final Dinner / Entertainment Meeting of 2004, a joint meeting with our friends of the Marine Historical Society of Detroit, was held at the Port Huron Museum on Saturday, December 4th. The evening, attended by 62 guests, began with a nice dinner served by the Museum Guild, followed by one of our customary raffles. A hat with the Sperry Marine logo, donated by John Philbin & Fred Miller, was won by David Lee. An American Steamship Co. hat and an Algoma Central Marine hat, also donated by John & Fred, were won by David Bury and Barb Ziegler. A *Lake Boats 1995* calendar, donated by Frank Frisk, was won by John Meyland. A copy of *Greenwood's 93*, also donated by Frank Frisk, was won by Bob Jardine. Four Detroit River Mail Boat Service "Opening Day" envelopes, donated by John Meyland, were awarded to John Hurley, Scott Page, Alan Mann and Angie Williams. A copy of *Historic Lakes Vessels*, donated for the raffle by the Marine Historical Society of Detroit, was won by T.J. Gaffney. A set of Welland Canal historical prints, donated by Jim Gallant, was won by Ginger McNabb. A DVD about the story of the Mackinaw Bridge, donated by Dick Wicklund, was awarded to Bob Lowe. Mary Ignatowski, Frank Tabor, Alan Mann and Jim Gallant each won a copy of the magazine *Seaway*

# BLUEWATER AREA SHIPWRECKS

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By Skip Gillham

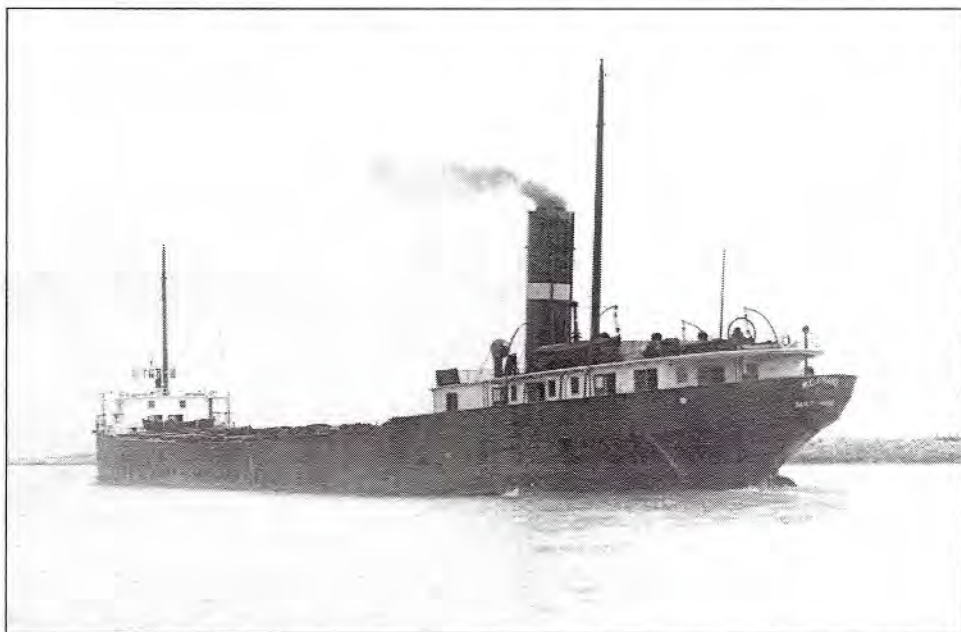
## \* W. C. FRANZ \*

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After a sale to Algoma Central Railway in 1913, the ship was renamed *W. C. FRANZ*. It apparently spotted the struggling fleetmate *LEAFIELD* just before it was lost on Lake Superior in November, 1913. Six years later, the crew picked up the sole survivor from the *MYRON* off Whitefish Point, Lake Superior on November 23, 1919.

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\* *W. C. FRANZ* - Great Lakes Graphics Photo - Skip Gillham Collection \*

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### Answer to Name This Ship (Pg. 2)

**HARRY R. JONES** (US 157696) Built in 1903 by Superior Shipbuilding Co. at Superior, WI as hull # 509. Overall Dimensions: 468'-0" x 52'-0" x 28'-0". 5,265 GRT. Built for the Provident S/S Co. as a) *D.G. KERR* (1). Sold to Interlake S/S Co. in 1913. Renamed b) *HARRY R. JONES* in 1916. Sold to Cargo Carriers Inc. of Cleveland in 1955. Sold to Ferritar Corp. of Wilmington, DE in 1960. Sold for scrap to Marine Salvage of Port Colborne, ON. Towed out of the Seaway in the fall of 1960, by tugs *JAMES BATTLE* and *HELEN McALLISTER*. The tow line parted and the vessel grounded off the southwest coast of Scotland, on January 6, 1961. Released on February 15 and arrived at Troon, Scotland, on the same day. Scrapped there by West of Scotland Shipbreaking Co., Ltd.

# Lakers: The Ships That Bought Time

By David H. Grover

*Taken from the October, 2004 issue (Number 10, Vol. 22) of The Anchor Light, the monthly newspaper printed for U.S. Merchant Marine Veterans World War II by permission of Frances Thronson, the newspaper's editor, and David Grover, the article's author.*

One of the most distinctive classes of merchant ships that operated during World War II was made up of the small well-decked freighters known as Lakers. Built originally at Great Lakes shipyards through a construction program of the U.S. Shipping Board toward the end of World War I, they were, along with another group of freighters of that era known as Hog Islanders, perhaps the most numerous type of mass-produced American merchant ships prior to the advent of the Liberty ship. More than 300 of the small (canaller-sized) ships were built, and they left their mark on the American shipping scene.

At the start of World War II many of the Lakers were still operating under the flags of the United States and various foreign nations, and were called upon to assume a prominent role early in the war before American shipyards could turn out hundreds of Liberty and Victory ships. In fact, the first American merchant ship sunk at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack was a Laker, the *CYNTHIA OLSON*.

Although the designation "Laker" was often used loosely to describe virtually any ship built on the Great Lakes, the more specific and widespread use of that term for seagoing ships was reserved for those small, three-island freighters with two holds, each served by two hatches and separated by the midship house and engine spaces. Perhaps by today's standards of nomenclature, they should be called "Classic" Lakers.

Even among these standardized ships there were variations in specifications, depending on which basic design was used. The ships built under this program had four different deadweight tonnages, ranging from 2,875 to 4,200, depending upon the allocation of space and weight of their fuel. Otherwise, they were all alike; 261 feet in overall length, 43.5 feet in width and 28 feet in depth, with a maximum draft of 25 feet. They measured out at about 2,200 gross tons.

Lakers generally had triple expansion reciprocating steam engines which, depending upon which shipyard built the ship, produced 1,200 to 1,500 horsepower driving a single screw. A few, however, were built with diesel engines. Originally, among the steam powered Lakers, some burned coal while others burned oil, but through the years, most had been converted to the latter fuel.

The original names of most of these ships began with the word "Lake", with the names of both well-known and obscure lakes being utilized. As a ploy to boost the sale of Liberty Bonds, the federal government allowed communities with outstanding participation in the purchase of bonds during World War I to choose other names for the ships, so a number of the Lakers were renamed even before they were completed. Also, belying their original names, they became popular as oceangoing tramp steamers which is what they were designed to be, and were widely utilized on the trade routes of the world, particularly when their nine-knot speed was no limitation.

However, a few of the ships continued to operate in the waters into which they had been launched. The most famous group of Lakers on the Great Lakes was the "Poker Fleet" of



\* One of the Lakers, The Poker Fleet's *JACK*, served as a Merchant ship and was torpedoed and sunk between Puerto Rico & New Orleans on May 27, 1942 with a cargo of sugar. The vessel sank in four minutes with only a few survivors.

The ship was built by the American Shipbuilding Co. at Lorain, OH in 1919 as the *LAKE FRESCO* \*

the Minnesota-Atlantic Transit Company. This steamship company named the five ships of its fleet for the cards of a royal flush; *TEN*, *JACK*, *QUEEN*, *KING* and *ACE*. During World War II, the U.S. Army acquired three of these ships, lacking only the *TEN* and *QUEEN*, and chose not to rename them.

Like their World War I counterparts, many of the Lakers were forced to spend much of their time in the reserve fleets which were established to accommodate the surplus ship tonnage during the 1920's and 1930's. Occasionally, ships were taken out of these fleets for special purposes, such as for Hollywood film-making. The classic "B" adventure movie, *King Kong*, features a Laker as the expedition ship that took the enterprising captors to the island where the great beast lived.

Lakers were modified through the years for a number of purposes. One spent her later career as a training ship; the California Maritime Academy utilized the *CALIFORNIA STATE*, the ex-*HENRY COUNTY*, on loan from the Navy and later the Maritime Commission during the 1930's and early 40's to train deck and engine cadets. She had been laid down as the *LAKE FRIENDSHIP*, but was renamed by the people of Henry County, Ohio as their reward for buying bonds. During World War II, the *CALIFORNIA STATE* was forced to take her training cruises in inland waters, utilizing the safe reaches of San Francisco and San Pablo Bays, and the Stockton ship channel. She was not replaced until a World War II transport was available in 1946, after which she was sold Panamanian and later Brazilian, finally being scrapped in 1962 at age 43, an unusually long lifetime for this type of ship.

The Army had one tanker, the *GEORGE F. DOWNEY*, that was converted from a Laker. The Navy had a pair of Laker-conversions that were perhaps even stranger; the *LAKE GREENWOOD* and the *COPERAS* which, by lengthening the deckhouse and adding turbines in lieu of reciprocating engines, first became small passenger ships and ultimately the small transports *USS STRATFORD* and *USS GEMINI*.

During the competition to obtain ships early in the re-armament program of 1940 and 1941, a number of Lakers were acquired by the armed forces. The U.S. Navy, not accustomed to making do with leftovers, reluctantly picked up only three on a permanent basis, two of which had served in the Navy toward the end of World War I along with about 65 other Lakers. The Navy also temporarily acquired three Lakers at the start of World War II that were immediately farmed out to the Coast Guard which used them in the North Atlantic as weather ships.

The Army, which was forced to depend on older vessels to a much greater degree than did the Navy, acquired more than two dozen Lakers, keeping their then-current names. Most of the Army's acquisitions, manned by civilian mariners, were sent to the Southwest Pacific Area where General Douglas MacArthur's forces were chronically short of shipping.

Many Lakers continued to be operated by steamship companies during the war. Their slow speed made them easy targets, and more than a dozen of the ships were lost in submarine attacks, particularly in the Caribbean and along the east coast of the United States in the early days of the war. For example, two were sunk by German submarines within a 24-hour period during January of 1942; the *NORVANA*, ex-*LAKE GATUN*, off Cape Hatteras and the *FRANCES SALMON*, ex-*LAKE FLAMBEAU*, off Newfoundland. In both cases there were no survivors.

Since there is no readily available total count of the Lakers that were in service at the start of the war, it is difficult to determine what kind of overall survival rate they experienced during the war. However, with the glut of ships available after the war, it is safe to say that only a few of the surviving ships of this class went on to further postwar careers.

In spite of their wide use, admittedly in rather mundane roles for the most part, the Lakers as a group achieved no great measure of fame during the war. Thus, it is not easy to understand why the Maritime Commission, almost as an afterthought, decided to create a World War II version of a Laker. These ships, about 260 feet in length and designated as the N-3S type or Baltic Coaster, were built both as coal-burners for the British and oil-burners for the Americans. Ninety-five of them were built in six shipyards, largely on the Gulf Coast, about one third of them for the British and two-thirds for American use. By the end of the war, these ships had never achieved the popularity that their look-a-like cousins, the Lakers, had known. After the war, they were absorbed by nations rebuilding their war-ravaged merchant fleets, particularly China.

The author had a chance to sail as a mate on one of these pseudo-Lakers going out to China after the war.

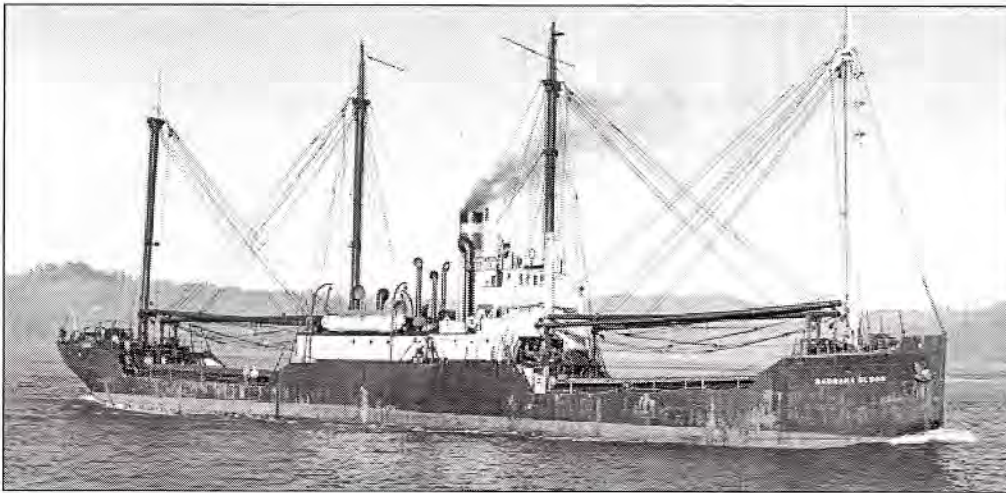
After giving some thought to the romantic adventure that the decrepit badly-listing ship could provide, he decided not to sign on, and to return to college instead. Although he often wondered what he missed out on, it was a decision he never regretted.

Very few of the “classic” Lakers still retained their original Laker names in World War II. Only two of the Army ships, and none of the Navy ships, served under their original names. Many of the ships remaining in private ownership also had been renamed from time to time. One group of Lakers had acquired names of Texas cities; others acquired prefixes characteristic of the company’s name, such as “Nor”, which adorned *NORINDIES*, *NORLAGO*, *NORLINDO* and *NORLANTIC*, or *CARIB*, which figured in *CARIBSEA*, *CARIBSTAR* and *CARIBQUEEN*.

One of the most exotic fleet-name prefixes, as well as historical outcomes, was associated with a pair of Lakers acquired by China Merchant Steam Navigation Company, a firm which operated ships on the China coast and was owned by an American expatriate in Shanghai. These ships were given the prefix “Hai”, meaning sea; their full names being *HAI HSIANG* (ex-*LAKE TULARE*) and *HAI JUI* (ex-*LAKE LILLIAN*). Under their original names, they had been in the U.S. Navy in World War I. Now, their unique claim to fame was that in 1940, they were winched up into the Yangtze River gorges above Ichang, far beyond the highest point on the river ever reached by oceangoing ships, and deliberately sunk as block-ships to prevent the Japanese from bringing gunboats upriver to attack Chinese Nationalist forces.

It is not clear how widespread the sale of Lakers to foreign countries was, but inasmuch as they were built by the federal government which retained ownership of many of them through the U.S. Shipping Board for many years, it seems unlikely that this was a common practice.

Another Laker, the Army-chartered *BARBARA OLSON* of the Oliver J. Olson Company lumber fleet, played an important role in the opening days of World War II when she was pressed into service to rescue a group of



young Hawaiian men stranded on several islands in the eastern Pacific. These men had been serving as colonists as part of a long-term program to provide a justification for the eventual annexation of the islands by the United States. Escorted by the Coast Guard cutter *TANEY*, the *BARBARA OLSON* visited Enderbury and Jarvis Islands in January of 1942 to bring out the group of over-looked settlers. This ship had been built as the

*CORRALES* at Manitowoc, WI in 1918 and had strong ties to another ship of the Olson fleet which was soon to be famous, the *CYNTHIA OLSON*. The *BARBARA OLSON* had already been through a brief moment of fame herself when at Christmas time of 1941, off the coast of California, she survived a torpedo fired by the Japanese submarine I-19; the torpedo passed under her before exploding in a giant plume of water on her far side. That submarine was probably the last vessel to have seen any trace of the *CYNTHIA OLSON* two weeks earlier when the Laker became the first American vessel to be lost at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack.

In contrast to the *BARBARA OLSON*, and the Lakers on the Yangtze River, the bulk of the ships of this type served in more prosaic roles, the most critical of which seemed to be buying time for their owners, including the United States government, until newer and larger ships could be built. For this accomplishment, we all owe these grubby little ships our eternal gratitude.

From The Files By Cy Hudson

*10 Years Ago ... (1995)*

Jan. 7 – The 1984-built *TECUMSEH*, one of the now defunct Bob-Lo Island amusement park ferries, which ran to the island from Gibraltar, MI, started a “new life”. After a voyage via the Hudson River and Intracoastal Waterway, she was rebuilt at Fort Lauderdale, FL as the “tiki” boat *RUMRUNNER KEY* and began excursion service at Key West, FL. Now owned by Captain Pinney, she made regular two-hour trips around Key West and nearby islands. Her open deck was rimmed by a “palm thatch skirt and partially shaded by a tiki-hut roof”. More outstanding, according to a local press report, “there is a great hot tub, a real sand beach and palm trees”. The total effect was quite overwhelming.

Jan. 14 – The 1994/95 navigation season at the Soo was closed when the last ship of the season, the *JOHN G. MUNSON*, cleared the Poe Lock downbound with a cargo of iron ore for Gary, Indiana.

Feb. 10 – Chicago & North Western Railroad marked one of its longer iron ore shipping seasons at its Escanaba ore terminal on Lake Michigan when Great Lakes Fleet’s *CASON J. CALLAWAY* departed with 23,655 gross tons of iron ore, bound for U.S. Steel’s works in Gary, Indiana.

Feb. 21 – The 1995 navigation season at the Canadian Soo opened at approximately 1:15 pm when the Soconav tanker *A.G. FARQUHARSON*, after battling heavy ice in the St. Mary’s River, arrived from Sarnia with a cargo of fuel oil from Imperial Oil. Ironically, it was only two days after the tanker’s namesake, Andrew Gray Farquharson, passed away at Lancaster, ON at the age of 87. Mr. Farquharson had retired as President and C.E.O. of Texaco Canada Inc. in 1972, following 41 years service with the company.

*15 Years Ago ... (1990)*

Jan. 2 – The damaged 428-foot Finnish tanker *KIISLA* departed Buffalo, escorted by the CCGS *GRIFFON*, bound for Sarnia. On December 29, the tanker struck a rock shoal while inbound for the Black Rock Canal in Buffalo. She was refloated the same day without losing any of her hazardous cargo of xylene and toluene. Inspection by divers revealed a 4 foot by 1 foot gash in the tanker’s outer hull. This caused her draft to increase resulting in her not being able to off-load her cargo at the Noco refinery in New York. The U.S. Coast Guard allowed the tanker to return to Sarnia, though orders were given that she had to be escorted by an ice breaker, owing to heavy winter ice conditions on Lake Erie. The two vessels arrived safely on January 3 at the Suncor dock in Sarnia.

Jan. 7 – Once the tanker *KIISLA* had discharged her cargo of aromatics (xylene & toluene) at the Suncor dock in Sarnia, she departed, under the escort of Malcolm Marine’s *TUG MALCOLM*, for the dry dock at Bay Shipbuilding in Sturgeon Bay for repairs to her damaged hull.

*20 Years Ago ... (1985)*

Feb. 4 – Malcolm Marine’s Port Huron-based *TUG MALCOLM*, along with railroad and marine salvage crews, worked through a snow storm to lift a 50-foot rail tank-car, full of toxic chemicals, from the bottom of the St. Clair River at Sarnia. The tank-car, loaded with 160,000 pounds of propylene oxide, had slid off the C & O carferry 452 rail barge, and sank in 23 feet of water.

*F.Y.I.*

On Thursday, Dec. 23, 2004, the foreign vessel *BBC CALIFORNIA* passed down through the Port Huron / Sarnia area as the last saltwater vessel to leave the upper Lakes for the 2004 sailing season. According to Bill Wager of the Lakes Pilots Association in Port Huron, 357 vessels, requiring pilots, visited the upper Lakes during the 2004 sailing season. In comparison, 311 vessels visited the upper Lakes in 2003, 382 vessels in 2002, 403 vessels in 2001, and 465 vessels in 2000. *This number includes salt water vessels and passenger ships, as well as some Canadian-registered tankers. Many of the ships are repeat visitors.*

**The Editor would like to thank Cy Hudson and Lakes Pilots Association Manager, Bill Wager**

# BLUEWATER AREA SHIPWRECKS

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\* W. C. FRANZ \*

By Skip Gillham

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# SALTY SPOTLIGHT



By D.R. (Doug) Schilz  
([saltydug@yahoo.com](mailto:saltydug@yahoo.com))

## \* GOLDEN STAR \*

Built in 1975 by Astilleros Espanoles S.A. (Factoria de Sevilla), at Sevilla, Spain as Hull # 179.  
Length: 625'6" Breadth: 75'0" Depth: 47' 11"  
17,355 GRT M. Bulk Carrier  
Main Engine – 11,550 bhp Sulzer

Prior to all the security precautions being put into place that now affect all of us, there was a time when you could stroll to the top of the Bluewater Bridge and photograph the passing ships. It was a cool sunny day on Oct. 4, 1992 when I photographed an upbound saltwater ship called the *GOLDEN STAR* as she rode high in the river navigating toward the open waters of Lake Huron.

This ship was referred to as Sevilla-30, and was one of many that made their way into the St. Lawrence Seaway. Originally launched as *PONTE PASAJE*, she made her Seaway appearance as *DRY SACK* in 1976, owned by Naviera del Noroeste S.A., and registered in Spain. The vessel became the *GOLDEN STAR* in 1987 and, under the ownership of Hurricane Marine Co. Ltd., her registry was changed to Cyprus and she sailed the Seaway that same year. The *GOLDEN STAR* visited the Seaway every year from 1987 to 1992, with the exception of 1990. On the day I photographed her, she was making her only trip of 1992, bound for Duluth. Later that year, she was renamed *GOLDEN SKY* but her owners and registry remained unchanged. In 1994 she was sold and her new owners were Rose Garden Shipping Co. Ltd.

It was by chance that I caught her in Toronto unloading raw sugar in July of 1994. She was again sold in 1996 to Habeta Maritime Corp., and re-flagged in St. Vincent. The *GOLDEN SKY* was the last foreign ship to clear the Seaway on Dec. 24, 1996. She came back to the Seaway in 1997 and had again been re-flagged to the Bahamas. Her final year on the Lakes was 1998, and sometime after that she was sold to Aigaion Maritime Ltd., and registered in Malta. After a long career, by ocean standards, the vessel was finally sold to ship breakers in Pakistan, and arrived at her final destination in late 2001.



\* Photo of *GOLDEN STAR* taken by Doug Schilz from the Bluewater Bridge on October 4th, 1992 \*