

# THE LIGHTSHIP



Incorporated in the State of Michigan October 21, 1963

Vol. XXVII, No. 4

[www.lakehuronlore.com](http://www.lakehuronlore.com)

July / August, 2006

Terry Doyon (Editor)  
272 Elgin St.  
Sarnia, ON, N7T 5B6

Membership (annual) - \$12.00 (U.S.) \$18.00 (Can. funds)  
Send to: L.H.L. Port Huron Museum, 1115 6th St.,  
Port Huron, MI 48060 - 5346. Phone (810) 982-0891

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our second entertainment meeting of 2006, a joint meeting with the M.H.S.D., was held at the Port Huron Museum on Saturday, May 20. The audience was provided with an excellent dinner served by the Museum Guild. The evening's entertainment, a program entitled *Cutter Rescues*, presented by Ric Mixter, offered a look at rescues performed on the Great Lakes by several U.S. Coast Guard cutters in past years. The evening also included a raffle, awarding interesting items to the lucky winners.

Our next dinner / entertainment meeting will be held at the Museum on Saturday, September 23. A flyer will be sent to LHL members with the details.

**Historian of The Year** – At the Marine Historical Society of Detroit's 62nd annual dinner meeting, held at the Port Huron / Acheson Seaway Terminal on May 6, Roger LeLievre of Ann Arbor, MI was named as the 2006 *Marine Historian of The Year*. Roger is president of the MHSD, and a member of LHL. Excellent photography as well as publishing, writing, and editing of the popular soft-covered annual *Know Your Ships* and magazine *The Great*

Laker are among his many contributions to Great Lakes history. Congratulations to Roger, it is certainly an honor well deserved.

**New Members** – L.H.L. wishes to welcome aboard William Amman of Clarkson, MI, Anna Gingrich of St. Clair, MI, Mark DeConinck of Algonac, MI, and J. Albin Jackman of Redford, MI.

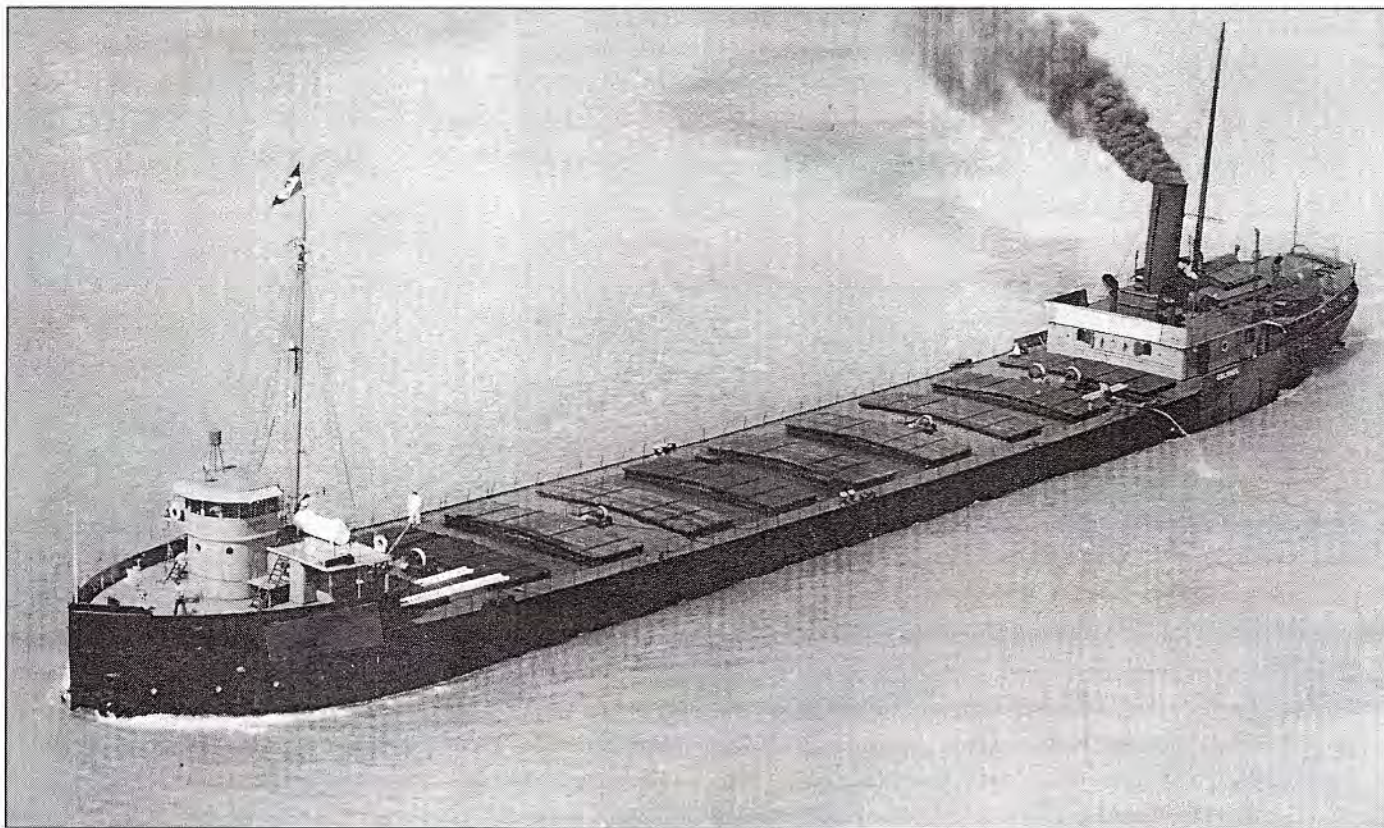
**Down by the Depot ... Hobo Fest** – Enjoy the numerous railroad-oriented festivities scheduled to take place in Port Huron from Friday, September 22 to Sunday, September 24. These include the *Hobo Hoe Down* on the Friday evening; *Ride the Rails* on the Saturday & Sunday, and *Coronation of the Hobo Queen & King* on the Sunday. There will also be an *Acoustic Music Fest* on the Saturday and Sunday, as well as a *Spam Cook-Off* and *Spam Carving Contest* on the Saturday. For times and further details of the events, you can contact T.J. Gaffney at the Port Huron Museum, 1115 6th St. in Port Huron, (810) 982-0891.

**Lake Huron Lore Summer 2006 Maritime Speaker Series** – The following guest speakers are scheduled to present maritime entertainment evenings at the Great Lakes Maritime Center (Vantage Point), located at Desmond Landing on the St. Clair River at the mouth of the Black River:

- 1) Friday, July 21 at 7:00 pm – Mike Dixon presents *St. Clair River Excursions*.
- 2) Friday, August 25 at 8 pm – Ric Mixter presents *Cutter Rescues*.
- 3) Saturday, September 16 at 7:00 pm – Skip Kadar presents *Great Lakes Passenger Ships*.

Admission is free. Further details can be obtained by e-mailing Dick Wicklund at [hmrwicklund@comcast.net](mailto:hmrwicklund@comcast.net) or calling Acheson Ventures at (810) 966-0900.

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\*\*\* NAME THIS SHIP \*\*\*



\* See Answer on Page 7 \*

## RECOLLECTIONS OF A JADED LADY

By Paul J. Schmitt

Most readers of *The Lightship* are well aware of the numerous, exciting tales of shipwrecks in the waters of the Great Lakes. Nineteenth century sailing ships that went missing out on one of the big lakes, the tragedy of vessels caught in Lake Huron's "Pocket" during the big blow of 1913, or the violent collisions that frequently occur on the connecting rivers, all make for exciting reading.

But what of the thousands of vessels that spend their career hauling the products of man's industry, serving their masters well, then meeting their final end under inglorious and frequently obscure circumstances. No mournful ballads written about them, no headlines, no tall tales of wreck and rescue, only a cold silent tomb in the inland seas. Many of these long forgotten work horses lie beneath the surface of the St. Clair River. The following is the tale of one of them.

The steamer *A.R. COLBORN* was built at Saugatuck, Michigan in 1882 for Mr. Austin Rose Colborn, who maintained a lumbering operation at Michigan City, Indiana, and Capt. Charles Brittain of Saugatuck, who was her first master. The 129 foot wooden-hulled vessel boasted a 240 h.p. steam engine and a 223 ton capacity (272 tons overall).

Built for the then booming lumber trade, the saucy little vessel was somewhat irreverently referred to, along with many of her contemporaries, as a *lumber hooker*. She, like some of her more jaded human sisters, would follow the



lumberjacks as they moved their camps further and further onto the wilderness. Lumber hookers, like the *COLBORN*, were usually small, shallow draft vessels built specially for hauling lumber. Since there was little attention paid to their appearance, they were lowly regarded during the Victorian age of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. While larger, faster, streamlined passenger and freight steamers called at then glamorous ports such as Chicago, Buffalo or Detroit, the little lumber hookers were relegated to such places as Rapid River, Naubinway or Ontonagon.

The *A.R. COLBORN* continued in the profitable, but humble lumber

trade selling out of the Lake Michigan ports of Saugatuck, St. Joseph and Michigan City until 1909, when she was laid up for lack of work. The once inexhaustible forests of Michigan and Wisconsin were a thing of the past. The lumber camps had moved to the far west and with them, the purpose for the lumber hooker. Hundreds of the now graying little ladies were laid up, awaiting the shipbreakers or abandoned at obscure backwater ports.

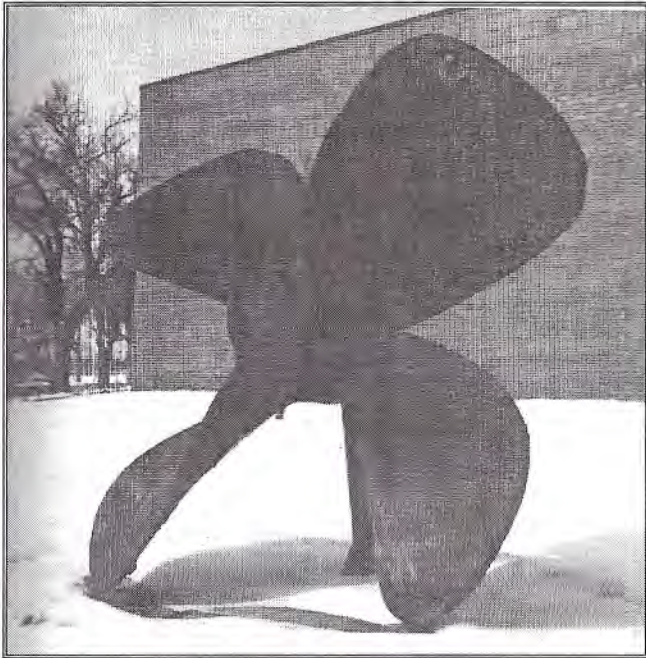
But such was not the fate of the *COLBORN*, for in 1910, she was purchased by Franklin Moore, Jr. of St. Clair, Michigan for the Douglas Transportation Line. She was to begin a new career as a salt ferry for the Diamond Crystal Salt Company.

Like any great lady embarking on a new career, the *COLBORN* received a facelift, some major structural changes, as well as a complete paint job. Her forecandle was removed along with her remaining mast, and a second deck was installed over her gunwale to keep her salt cargo dry. Thus gussied up, the *COLBORN* embarked on her second career, hauling salt from the Diamond Crystal plant at St. Clair to the rail head at Courtright, Ontario with an occasional trip to Detroit or a Lake Erie port to spice up her routine.

She continued in this service through the world war until the building of the Port Huron and Detroit Railroad,

which provided Diamond with a direct link to Detroit and other markets. Thus, the *COLBORN* again found herself without a job. Chances of selling the old vessel seemed remote, as the post war glut of unneeded Great Lakes ships had even relegated many newer and larger vessels to the ship-breaker's yard.

But it seemed as if fate would once more intervene as the old girl was again saved from scrapping. In 1920 the *COLBORN* was purchased by Capt. Bob Thompson of Port Huron, a well seasoned mariner, who maintained a tug and marine contractor service on the St. Clair River less than a mile north of the Black River. Capt. Thompson



apparently intended to convert the *COLBORN* to a tug boat as he brought her to his dock on the St. Clair River and was preparing to make the necessary conversion. But old age was taking its toll on both the captain and his vessel. Capt. Thompson took ill, and within a year, had passed away. Meanwhile, the old lumber hooker had sprung a leak and had sunk at her mooring. With her owner's death and the ensuing litigation over the estate occupying the time of the heirs and employees alike, the *COLBORN* was allowed to remain on the river bottom over the winter. The spring ice floes finished the job that time and nature had begun; the *A.R. COLBORN* was formally abandoned on April 28, 1922.

Today, the old girl lies in forty feet of water just north of the YMCA in Port Huron. While the engine and boiler remain intact, the river's current is slowly breaking up her once stout, white oak hull. Her propeller was salvaged and is on display on the campus of St. Clair County Community College; a tribute to a gallant, but jaded lady.

\* The propeller from the *A.R. COLBORN*,  
on display at St. Clair County Community College,  
Paul Schmitt Collection \*

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## NAUTICAL NEWS

### **From The Files** By Cy Hudson

**10 Years Ago ...** (1996)

**July 4** – The veteran Buffalo fireboat *EDWARD M. COTTER* built in 1900 was designated a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. National Parks Service. She was decommissioned as a fireboat in 1992.

**July 30** – C.S.L.'s self-unloader *H.M. GRIFFITH*, which was off Whitefish Bay in Lake Superior, and bound for Nanticoke, ON with a 22,775 ton cargo of western coal, had a spontaneous combustion fire in her number 2 cargo hold. Water was used to cool the fire, and the *GRIFFITH* used her unloading boom to dump 3,000 tons of coal into Lake Superior. After an inspection by the U.S.C.G., at the Soo the following day, revealed only minor damage, the vessel was cleared to proceed on her journey.

**August 10** – The Detroit Edison Company performed a controlled implosion to demolish the seven smoke stacks at the Conners Creek power plant situated on the Detroit River. These stacks, affectionately referred to as *The Seven Sisters*, were a familiar site to vessels entering the Detroit River from the lower end of Lake St. Clair.

**August 21** – The former U.S. Corps of Engineers tug *MARQUETTE* was downbound past Detroit on her delivery voyage to her new owners, based in Key West, Florida.

**August 29** – The *NICOLET*, which had been sold for scrap, left Toledo under tow of the McKeil tug *OTIS WACK*, arriving at Port Maitland, ON during the early hours of the 30<sup>th</sup>. Last operated in 1990, the *NICOLET* was built in 1905 by the Great Lakes Engineering Works at Ecorse, MI, as the a) *WILLIAM G. MATHER* (1) (25), b) *J.H.*

*SHEADLE* (55), c) *H.L. GOBELLE* (65). The vessel spent the first 60 years of her life in service for the Cleveland-Cliffs Steamship Company. After 1965, her ownership was transferred to the Gartland Steamship Company and eventually the American Steamship Company.

### ***15 Years Ago ...*** (1991)

July 1 – The automobile / passenger ferry *DALDEAN* celebrated it's 40<sup>th</sup> year in operation between Sombra, ON and Marine City, MI. She was built in 1951 by Erieau Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Company, Erieau, ON, for Bluewater Ferry Ltd. Service was started between the two communities on July 1, 1951.

July 3 – C.S.L.'s bulk carrier vessel *RICHELIEU*, loaded her first cargo of the season at Sarnia.

July 15 – The Spanish, 1975-built, 7311 grt, ocean motor bulk carrier *MILANOS*, anchored in the Detroit River since July 2, began the slow trip home. Auxiliar de Transportes Maritimos, the ship's owners, decided it would be cheaper to tow the crippled ship home for repairs rather than have the repairs performed locally. The ship's engine seized after the crankshaft broke. She departed Detroit, bound for Montreal, under tow of Malcolm Marine's TUG *MALCOLM* and McKeil's tug *ARGUE MARTIN*. The tow passed down the Seaway on July 19.

July 19 – P & H's *BEECHGLEN* returned to service clearing Port Weller Dry Dock. Her hull had buckled on April 30 while unloading a cargo of corn at Cardinal, ON. She arrived in Thunder Bay on July 23 to load her first cargo.

July 25 – The sixteen-man crew of the ocean-going tug *PACIFIC TIDE No. 3* were arrested at Montreal on charges of smuggling drugs. The tug had arrived from the Philippines to tow the damaged Spanish vessel *MILANOS* to Spain.

August 2 – Paterson's 1961-built Lake Bulk freighter *CANADOC* (2), which had been in lay-up at Montreal since April 6, 1990, and sold for scrapping, cleared the port in tow of the Netherlands Antilles tug *DALMAR SPIRIT*, bound for Mamonal, Columbia, arriving there on August 26, 1991.

August 8 – The excursion ferry *AMERICANA* has been sold, and passed down the Welland Canal bound for the Caribbean with registry in Panama. She was the former East Coast ferry *BLOCK ISLAND* that arrived in Buffalo just three years ago.

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### ***F.Y.I.***

On June 30, the motor vessel *WOODY*, bound for Duluth, passed upbound through the Port Huron / Sarnia area. She was the 41<sup>st</sup> upbound vessel requiring a pilot for the month of June. As of midnight, June 30, 120 vessels, requiring a pilot, have passed upbound through the Bluewater area since the opening of the 2006 shipping season. *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 contributors Cy Hudson and Lakes Pilots Association Manager, Bill Wager

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# Bluewater Passages

By Dick Wicklund

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## \* MR. FORD & THE FARRELL \*

On a warm sunny morning in July, 1913, the new steamer *JAMES A. FARRELL* was upbound in the Detroit River. This 600 foot Pittsburgh Steamship Company vessel had only been in service four months. She was the new flagship of the fleet, sporting luxurious guest quarters in her bow cabins, including an extra observation deck below the pilot house.

On this morning, in the river off Detroit, the *FARRELL* met a tugboat bringing guests who would board for a pleasant journey on the Lakes. The guests were Mr. William Livingston, president of the Lakes Carriers

Association, and Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford. They were greeted by Captain Fred A. Bailey and his crew. The trip would take them upbound through the St. Clair River, passing Port Huron and Sarnia, years before there was a Blue Water Bridge.

Hours after passing Fort Gratiot Lighthouse, and sailing into Lake Huron, the *FARRELL* and her guests would enjoy the beauty of the St. Mary's River. After transiting the Soo Locks, it was on to the deep blue waters of Lake Superior. The next day, the *FARRELL* would dock and load rich, red iron ore on the Western Minnesota shore.

In 1913, Henry Ford's Ford Motor Company was only ten years old, but unlike other car companies, was very prosperous and an innovative maker of the *horseless carriage*. The classic

Model T, introduced in 1908, was only in its fifth year and would become the company's most successful product. The moving assembly line was being developed and installed in factories during 1913. Soon, in 1914, a standard wage for production workers was established at \$5.00 per day, so they could buy what they built. With about 40% of the automobile market, Ford Motor Company was a huge success.

It is in this backdrop that Henry Ford sailed as a guest aboard the steamer *JAMES A. FARRELL*. Mr. Ford enjoyed this trip in many ways, strolling the decks, often starting at sunrise in a bathrobe, walking in bare feet. He would freely chat with the deckhands while sitting on the hatch covers. Being interested in the mechanics of the ship, the engine room was a favorite place for him to watch and ask questions.

In the pilot house, a congenial relationship developed between Mr. Ford and Captain Bailey. The favorite topic of conversation became the future of the automobile. The captain took the position that it would never replace the horse. This friendly debate would highlight their conversations during the entire voyage.

However, on the downbound trip, the *FARRELL* had a steering gear failure, and had to go to anchor for inspection and repair. Henry Ford took a keen interest in the problem and was down in the engine room. He reportedly was the first to spot the sheared gear. Repairs were put in hand, and a rather dirty, greasy, but pleased, Henry Ford immersed, happy to have been part of solving the problem. But then, of course, this was Henry Ford, a man who built an empire as a byproduct of his creative mechanical interest.

When the Livingston party departed the *FARRELL* in the Detroit River, the friendly banter between Captain Bailey and Henry Ford continued. After all the talk, the captain took Mr. Ford's arm and said, "That's a marvelous machine you have there Mr. Ford, but I'm still not sure it'll ever replace the horse and buggy." Ford answered with a big smile and "We'll see, Captain, we'll see!"

After surviving the Big Blow at the latter end of the 1913 season, the *FARRELL* laid-up for the winter and Captain Bailey returned to his home in Vermillion, Ohio. Shortly before Christmas, the captain found a new Model T parked in front of his house – compliments of Henry Ford! From that point on, Captain Bailey was an avid automobile enthusiast, happily driving his Model T.



\* An example of a 1914 Model T Ford \*



\* An Early View of the FARRELL – Pesha Photo \*

A little over ten years following this memorable event, Captain Bailey joined other investors in the Forrest City Steamship Company, and one of the ships was briefly named after him, the *F.A. BAILEY*. Also at this time, Henry Ford contracted the building of two new vessels to carry iron ore for his new River Rouge manufacturing complex. Both of these ships, *BENSON FORD* (1) and *HENRY FORD II*, sailed in 1924, and were well appointed with guest quarters – reminiscent of the *FARRELL*'s. When Mr. Ford sailed on his namesake, *HENRY FORD II*, I wonder if he remembered his trip on the *JAMES A. FARRELL*, and the interesting conversations he had with Captain Bailey? I think he did!

# BLUEWATER AREA SHIPWRECKS

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By Skip Gillham

## \* PITTSBURG \*

The oak hulled passenger and freight steamer *PITTSBURG* was built at the Welland Canal community of Port Robinson. She was constructed by the M. Simpson shipyard and completed in 1871 as *MANITOBA*.

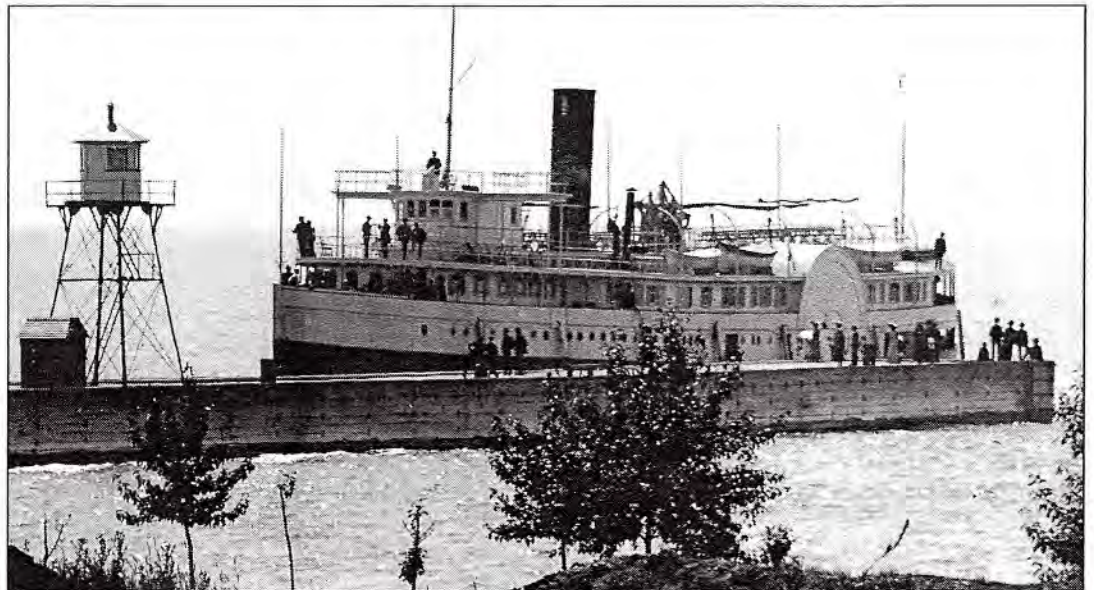
The 173 foot long by 45 foot wide sidewheeler made four trips between Collingwood and Fort William the first year, and the next season *MANITOBA* operated between Sarnia and the Canadian Lakehead. *MANITOBA* stranded on a reef off Michipicoten Island, on July 11, 1872, and was released two days later.

A collision on August 26, 1875, sank the *COMET* in the St. Mary's River above Whitefish Point and 11 sailors were lost. Then, on November 14, 1883, the ship was wrecked off Chantry Island, near Southampton, Ontario, and was not salvaged until May, 1884.

*MANITOBA* was rebuilt as *CARMONA* in 1888 and elegantly fitted for the Windsor – Detroit – Sault Ste. Marie run on behalf of the Lake Superior Transit Company. She later operated on Lake Ontario and then Georgian Bay. The ship was damaged in a collision with the *GRANDA* in 1899.

Following reconstruction and lengthening, the vessel returned to work in 1900 as *PITTSBURG*. A 40 foot section was added behind the paddlewheels and, while increasing capacity, the change reduced speed to 6 m.p.h. The vessel ran between Detroit and Sault Ste. Marie with off-season sailings out of Owen Sound.

A fire at the dock in Sandwich, Ontario, near Windsor, destroyed the ship on August 30, 1903. The remains were towed to Port Dalhousie in 1904 and broken up.



*PITTSBURG* at Kincardine,  
Ontario, Ron Beaupre  
Collection

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

**COLONEL** (US 127553) Length: 356'-0", Breadth: 50'-0", Depth: 28'-0", GRT: 3,879. Built for the Michigan Steamboat Co. as Hull # 142, at Wyandotte, MI by the Detroit Ship Building Company. Sold to the Bristol Transit Co. (W.C. Richardson, Mgrs) in 1915. Sold to the Columbia Steamship Co. in 1921. Sold to the Fontana Steamship Co. (Cleveland-Cliffs, Mgrs) in 1923. Sold to the U.S. Maritime Administration in 1943 (Cleveland-Cliffs, Mgrs). Sold to the Boston Metal Co. and scrapped at Buffalo, NY in 1954.

# SALTY SPOTLIGHT



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

## \* CAPETAN MICHALIS \*

Built in 1981 by Hakodate Dock Co. Ltd., Muroran, Japan as Hull # 707  
Length – 593' 3"    Breadth – 75' 11"    Depth – 47' 7"  
15,819 GRT    M. Bulk Carrier  
Main Engine – 11,400 bhp Sulzer

One of my favorite ship-designs is that of vessels built by the Hakodate Dock Company in Japan. Built between 1968 and 1984, these handy sized ships went through design upgrades throughout the years with many of them coming to the Great Lakes. Many of these ships found their way through the Port Huron/Sarnia area.

Originally built as the *VASILIKI*, she first ventured to the Lakes in 1982. Her owners at the time were White



Tower Trading Corp. and her registry was Greece. In 1985, she was sold and renamed *CAPETAN MICHALIS*, a name she was still carrying up to the end of the 2005 shipping season. Her listed owners were Varma Marine Enterprises. S.A. and still registered in Greece. She first visited the Lakes in 1985, and became a regular visitor there after. In 1994, she made only one transit on the Lakes. Her inbound voyage, in August, took her to Burns Harbor

\* *CAPETAN MICHALIS* at Sarnia Elevator –  
Doug Schilz Photo \*

with a downbound stop in

Sarnia where she loaded 17,950 metric tonnes of wheat bound for Pakistan. The ship departed Sarnia on August 26. In August of 2005, the *CAPETAN MICHALIS* was detained in River Tees, England for corrosion issues but was later released. She was back on the Lakes in November, 2005 venturing to Thunder Bay to load a split cargo of 12,798.330 metric tonnes of flax seed and 5,563.370 metric tonnes of mustard seed.

Her voyages have taken her to many ports around the Lakes, including Ashtabula, Detroit, Oswego, Duluth and Thunder Bay. Her cargoes have varied as well, with different grains, potash, coke and steel in her holds.

After 23 years of service, *CAPETAN MICHALIS* still appears to be in remarkably good condition. Unfortunately, ocean salt takes its toll on these ships, so it will remain to be seen if she ventures back to the Lakes once again, or if she will make that final voyage to the scrap yard.