

Ports and Port Holes

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Pinney Dock and Its People: Dreams, Determination, and Darned Hard Work!

Chapter One



Left to right: Nelson Pinney; Margarite Pinney; Mabel Rehm; Esther and Harold Wagner.

Nelson J. Pinney and his employees built Pinney Dock with dreams, determination and laboring days, with generations of lawn grazing dock geese also contributing. Brad Biro, current Pinney Dock Terminal Manager; Judy Sims, 36 year employee performing a variety of jobs including all things limestone; Paul Shellhammer, maintenance manager; Nikki Casagrande, Administrative Assistant; Tammie Turner, maintenance coordinator; and Gantry Cranes Rosie and Jake are just a few of the people and things that make Pinney Dock the thriving and progressive

business that it is, despite a sometimes uncertain future outlook for the docking and shipping business in general.

Since the over six decades when Nelson J. Pinney constructed his dock at 1149 East 5th Street, Pinney Dock & Transport Company has remained firmly in place and docked, unloaded, loaded, and stored a smorgasbord of bulk commodities for Ashtabula County and the world. Through years of skillful and imaginative terminal managing and dedicated reliable workers, Pinney Dock has earned and maintained a reputation for service and efficiency. The company handles iron ore, titanium ore, magnetite and other aggregates. It has six docks with 15,000 feet of berthing space for ships; 300 acres of outside storage space; 350,000 feet of warehouse space; and two 45-ton gantry cranes for discharging and loading salt water and lake bulk vessels. The Gantry cranes, Rosie and Jake, have individual personalities and stories.

Pinney Dock has been a part of Houston, Texas based Kinder Morgan Company since 2002. One of the largest energy infrastructure companies in North America, Kinder Morgan owns or operates approximately 83,000 miles of pipelines and 141 terminals. These pipelines and terminals transport substances including natural gas, gasoline, crude oil, and carbon dioxide. The terminals store and handle such commodities as renewable fuels, chemicals, petroleum products and vegetable oils.

Nelson Pinney dreamed big, but even he could not have imagined that his “junk” acquisitions and dock building would reach such financial, industrial, and historical heights.

Ashtabula’s Visionary Junkman

In the 1950s, Nelson Pinney was the man who dreamed the possibilities of the site of the former Woodland Beach Park into reality. Instead of seeing a swampy stretch of land east of the Ashtabula River as devoid of dreams after the demise of Woodland Beach Park, he envisioned a thriving dock that could revitalize the Ashtabula Harbor District and the Ashtabula economy as well.

Nelson Pinny’s background helped him develop the backbone to make his dock dreams come true. He dropped out of high school in the 1920s, worked in a steel mill and later worked for his uncle in a quarry in Portage County. Later, his uncle got a job building a seawall at Geneva on the Lake and recruited Nelson to supervise the construction. Next, James Arthur, a vice president of Ward Baking

Company, asked Nelson to design a seawall for his summer home and when Nelson had finished the design, Arthur asked Nelson to contract to build the seawall.

Nelson resisted. "I haven't got any money so that I can take the contract or even hire any men."

James Arthur had enough faith in Nelson Pinney to advance him the money to buy equipment and pay his workmen wages. Suddenly, 24-year-old Nelson found himself with cash, equipment, and six employees. He began building bridges, culverts, and seawalls. He took jobs other contractors did not want to do and made money on them, even during these Depression years of the early 1930s.

With his accumulating profits, Nelson purchased the equipment of a bankrupt construction company from the Commercial Bank of Ashtabula, and he eventually became a director of the bank. With his new equipment, Nelson graded the site for the new Elector-Metallurgical Corporation calcium carbide and ferro-alloy plant in Ashtabula. He also graded the site for the Electro-Met titanium sponge plant. The Electro-Met's electric furnaces produced massive amounts of hard glassy slag that had to be discarded and Nelson got the contract to haul it away. He also hauled away about 500 tons of fly ash every day and industrial waste from the Hooker-Detrex Inc. Chemical plant.

Nelson Pinney's climbing the industry ladder jobs included doing some grading work for the New York Central Railroad System. He soon discovered that many of the big mills and factories were paying the railroad to haul away their waste products, and the railroad was losing money dumping the waste and cleaning the cars. The railroad was happy to turn the contract over to Nelson, to immediately began to mine the trash for treasure. He used electromagnets to exact about 8,000 tons of salable scrap metal per year from the waste and sell it for between \$250,00 to \$300,000. These sales paid his costs and earned him a profit as well.

With industry still growing in Ashtabula County and the region, there was a need for more docks at the harbor to handle the increased tonnage. Nelson quickly point out this fact to the Ashtabula Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Commerce immediately appointed him to build the docks himself.

His gift for seeing possibilities in places of no discernable possibilities continued to serve Nelson Pinney well. He owned ten acres of land that the New York Central Railroad wanted for a new spur line, so he swapped the ten acres for ten acres of "worthless" marsh and bog on the Lake Erie waterfront. The entire

transaction came together for Nelson's benefit. He had his trucks haul away the slag and wastes from the chemical companies, dumped into his bog, and moved into place by his own grading machines. He bought the old Woodland Beach Park next to the bog and graded it into a slope down into the waterfront where his docks were taking shape.

While he built his docks with the material he was being paid to get rid of, Nelson Pinney decided to drill a well on his ten acres, hoping to find either gas or salt. Instead, the well contained calcium brine. Undiscouraged, Nelson immediately investigated its possibilities. He discovered a use. During the winter, he shipped large quantities of ore from storage piles at Ashtabula Harbor to Youngstown and Pittsburgh. When the moisture in the ore froze, it was difficult to handle it enough to empty the cars. Nelson Pinney proved that brine mixed into the ore solved the problems and he marketed the calcium brine as an ore antifreeze.

Pinney Dock Opening Energizes Ashtabula

An Ashtabula Star Beacon story dated April 16, 1956, highlighted Pinney Dock's first day at work after a five year construction period. The steamer G.C. Post shipped package freight from Pinney Dock No. 4 to Saginaw, Michigan. The loading of Ferro alloys by the G.C. Post marked the inaugural of the Pinney Docks. The self unloading carne boat left Sunday for Saginaw, Michigan, where the cargo will be turned over to the General Motors Corporation there.

Dedication ceremonies on Sunday April 15 honored Nelson J. Pinney president of the Pinney Dock Transport Company; his associates; and opening of a new phase in the package shipping industry. Accepting congratulation, Nelson Pinney said he was "extremely pleased and excited," when the G.C. Post arrived. Noting that the docks are ideal for delivering and shipping package freight, Nelson remarked that a lot of work and a lot of money has gone into the docks in the past five years." I don't expect to see a personal financial profit in my lifetime, but the city needed additional docking facilities," he said.

Ports of Call

Ashtabula

Since Reverend Joseph Badger's 19th century digging out of the Ashtabula river sandbar, the Ashtabula Harbor has developed into one of the busiest ports in the world, providing work and livelihoods for immigrants from all over the world In the early 20th century, George Hulett's ore unloading machines became an essential part of the port. In the early 21st Century, Ashtabula Harbor handles

taconite, stone, and bulk materials employing self-unloading vessels, as well as serving as a recreational port with marinas and fishing charters.



G.C. Post Captain George Waskelin of Painesville, told Nelson that the new dock is “the easiest one in the Great Lakes in which to operate.”

David Haskell, president of the Ashtabula Chamber of Commerce, said Mr. Pinney changed a dream into a plan and a plan into a reality.”

Nelson Pinney continued to dream into planning and reality for the next twenty years.

Ports of Call

By the 19th Century, Port Burwell had become a shipbuilding and fishery harbor and the export center for the lumber and farm produce from Oxford County, supported by emerging roads and railway lines. The Tillsonburg, Lake Erie & Pacific Railway pushed for a railway car ferry service across Lake Erie. In 1903, the Railway improved Port Burwell’s harbor, eventually the Canadian Pacific Railway pushed for a railway car ferry service across Lake Erie. In 1903, the Railway improved Port Burwell’s harbor and eventually the Canadian Pacific Railway leased the Railway, and the Ashtabula Railcar Ferry began operating

between Port Burwell, Ontario, and Ashtabula, Ohio. The Ashtabula Railcar Ferry carried coal across Lake Erie between the two ports for half a century.

President Grover Cleveland's Secret Surgery on the Steam Yacht Oneida



President
Grover
Cleveland



Commodore Elias Benedict



Dr. William Williams
Keene

The President stood at the rail of his friend's yacht, the Oneida, watching the waves from Long Island Sound roll and tumble over each other. His fingers itched for his fishing rod. He had fished from this yacht many times in the past, but this time was different. This time, he faced something more serious than how many fish he caught. His tongue explored the contours of the tumor growing on the roof of his mouth. The economic panic threatened the country like his tumor threatened his mouth. He didn't want to call it cancer. Cancer, the forbidden word that translated into a person just as forbidden. The operation to remove the growth from his mouth had to remain secret for the good of the country and for the good of his family.

Stephen Grover Cleveland, the 22nd and 24th president of the United States, often pushed his favorite relaxing activities- fishing and sailing- to the back of his mind and life as he conducted his presidential duties. His second term that began in March 1893 proved to be especially trying, both nationally and personally.

President Cleveland won his second term in 1892 on a platform calling for the Repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890. The Democratic Party had split into two factions – the conservative pro business gold standard faction that President Cleveland led and the free silver faction that William Jennings Bryan headed. Campaigning on a sound money platform, President Cleveland carried his party only by choosing free-silver advocate Adlai Stevenson as his running mate. President Cleveland led his party in the drive to repeal the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890, and he had scheduled a special session of Congress to meet

on August 7, 1893.

Bank failures, a railroad bubble, and a run on the gold supply, ushered in a serious economic depression called the Panic of 1893 that swept the country. Besides dealing with the deep depression, President Cleveland also coped with persistent office seekers and anxious Americans wondering how to get their next meal and keep a roof over their heads. On a personal level, he and his wife Frances had a two year old daughter named Ruth and Frances was pregnant with their daughter Esther who was born on September 9, 1893.

In May of 1893, President Cleveland discovered a growth on the roof of his mouth near his molars on the left side – the side where he chewed his cigars and smoked his pipes. The tumor continued to grow and on June 18, 1893, Dr. R.M. O'Reilly, the official medical attendant for Government officers in Washington, examined the growth. He pronounced it an ulcer as large as a quarter, encroaching on the soft palate and some diseased bone. Dr. O'Reilly removed a small piece of the tumor and sent it to the pathologist at the Army Medical Museum without telling him the name of the patient. The pathologist reported that the tumor was malignant.

The tumor in the President's mouth had grown so large by the middle of June when his personal physician, Dr. Joseph Bryant, examined it, that it "often caused him to walk the floor at night," his wife Frances recalled years later. When she examined the tumor she saw what she described it as a "peculiar lesion."

Dr. Bryant advised President Cleveland that the tumor was malignant and to have it removed immediately. The President agreed with certain conditions. He felt that any sign of ill health would signify weakness and favor the pro-silver side. He decided to keep his operation secret and that the *Oneida* would be the best place for the secret operation to take place. President Cleveland's close friend banker and Commodore Elias Benedict owned the *Oneida*, a luxury yacht, and the President had already logged at least 50,000 miles on the *Oneida* fishing in Long Island Sound and off Cape Cod. When he disappeared on the *Oneida* for four days, people would think he had simply gone on another fishing trip.

Another Fishing Trip on the *Oneida*?

Even one fishing trip on the *Oneida* was a voyage into luxury. In 1883, John Roach, a self-educated Irish immigrant who created iron shipbuilding in the United States, built the *Utowana*, later renamed the *Oneida* at the Delaware River Iron Ship Building and Engineering Works at Chester, Pennsylvania. He built yachts for

rich and well-known people and he also built the United States Navy's first fleet of modern warships. He died in 1887, ironically enough of cancer of the mouth.

In 1885, the *Utowana* won the Lunberg Cup, an international race. In 1887, Elias Benedict, a banker and a fanatical yachtsman, bought the *Utowana*, refitted it for comfort and speed and renamed it the *Oneida*. The *Oneida* measured 138 feet and featured an iron hull, two masts, and a steam engine. She could make 13 knots and accommodate a dozen passengers in her plush below deck quarters. She combined a schooner's elegance, a steamer's speed, and a luxury liner's comfort. Commodore Elias Benedict hosted famous guests on the *Oneida* including Edwin Booth, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Lawrence Barrett, and his close friend President Grover Cleveland.

President Cleveland announced that he would take a four-day fishing trip on the *Oneida* from New York to Gray Gables, his summer home in Cape Cod. The President's personal physician Dr. Joseph Bryant of New York assembled a team of doctors to perform the operation. He first recruited Dr. William Williams Keen of Philadelphia, who six years before performed the first successful operation in the United States to remove a brain tumor. Dr. Bryant also enlisted three other doctors and a dentist to complete the team that would operate on the President.

Next, Dr. Bryant turned his attention to transforming the small dark saloon of the *Oneida*, anchored in the East River, into an operating room. The crew removed all of the furniture except the organ- it was bolted to the floor- and cleared and disinfected the room. They lashed a large chair to the mast in the center of the saloon to use for an operating table. A single electric bulb connected to a portable battery provided the only supplement to natural daylight. Dr. Bryant arranged to have other pieces of necessary equipment including tanks of oxygen and nitrous oxide secretly delivered to the *Oneida*. He told the *Oneida*'s crew that the President had to have two teeth removed when they wondered at the accumulation of medical equipment.

All of the doctors involved knew the risks of operating in the small, semi-dark, and poorly ventilated *Oneida* saloon. In Commodore Benedict's vernacular, if disaster struck, the President's doctors would find themselves "up to the hub in mud."

An Operation on the *Oneida*

In a September 1917 article published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, Dr. Keen wrote that he arrived in New York City on the evening of June 30, 1893, made his

way to Pier A, and traveled to the *Oneida* lying at anchor quite a distance of the battery. Dr. E.G. Janeway of New York; Doctor O'Reilly. Dr. John E. Erdmann, Dr. Bryant's assistant and Dr. Ferdinand Hasbrouck, the dentist, had already arrived and were ferried to the *Oneida* from different piers.

President Grover Cleveland left Washington on June 30, 1893, after he issued a call for a special session of Congress on August 7, 1893 to repeal the silver clause of the Sherman Act. President Cleveland, Doctor Bryant, and Secretary of War Daniel S. Lamont arrived from Washington at a later hour, drove openly to Pier A, and were ferried out to the *Oneida*.

When President Cleveland arrived aboard the *Oneida*, he lighted a cigar and he sat on deck with the doctors and smoking and talking until nearly midnight. He spent a restful night without any sleeping medicine.

The next morning President Cleveland thoroughly cleansed and disinfected his mouth, but he did not shave off his mustache. The *Oneida* weighed anchor and started up the East River. Doctor Bryant and the other doctors hurried from the deck to the cabin when they reached the Bellevue Hospital at Twenty Sixth Street, fearing that some of the staff might recognize them.

In the salon, the doctors boiled their instruments and pulled white aprons over their dark suits. Shortly after noon, President Cleveland came into the room and sat in the chair. The doctors anesthetized him with nitrous oxide and ether. As the *Oneida* crossed Long Island Sound, the doctors operated on the President of the United States.

According to Dr. Keen, the doctors worried more about the dangers of the anesthetic than the dangers of the operation itself. After all, at age 56 and very heavy with a short, thick neck, the President was a candidate for apoplexy- a stroke. In an operation lasting approximately 90 minutes, the doctors removed the tumor, five teeth and much of the President's upper left palate and jawbone. They performed the surgery entirely within the President's mouth using the cheek retractor that Dr. Keen had brought back from Paris in 1866 to make sure that the President wouldn't have external scars. They even left his bushy mustache intact.

Four days later on July 5, 1893, the *Oneida* deposited President Cleveland at Gray Gables, his summer home on Buzzard's Bay. Two weeks later, again on the *Oneida*, the doctors performed a second operation to remove more suspicious tissue. By the middle of July, Dr. Kasson C. Gibson, a New York prosthodontist

arrived at Gray Gables to fit the President with a vulcanized rubber prosthesis to fill the hollow in his palate and restore normal speech.

Just a few weeks after his operation, President Grover Cleveland talked and fished in Buzzard's Bay like he had never endured an operation.

The Real Story Appears in the Philadelphia Press

Frances Cleveland and several of the other people around the President played a pivotal role in keeping her husband's operation a secret, and some of the newspaper stories helped her. The *New York Times* of July 9, 1893, published a story datelined Buzzard's Bay, Massachusetts and headlined "The President is All Right." Based on a dispatch from Secretary of War Daniel S. Lamont, the story said that the President had suffered from a toothache, but doctors had extracted the tooth. Dr. Bryant supplied medical attendance, and the story said that "undoubtedly there is a vacancy along his jaw where a tooth once grew- probably there is a mildly sore spot there, but surely nothing more will be heard of its "cancerous growth." The story concluded that "those who look for ominous news from Gray Gables just now will not get it."

A July 9th story in the *Brooklyn Eagle* sounded a slightly more ominous note by reporting that President Cleveland was ill with an attack of rheumatism confining him to his room. The story quoted Secretary of War Lamont as saying that the President couldn't have visitors until he felt better, but his condition was improving.

The real story with surprisingly accurate particulars broke in the *Philadelphia Press* on August 29, 1893. Elisha Jay Edwards, the 46 year old New York correspondent, had heard about the operation from a doctor friend who had heard the story through the medical grapevine. Elisha Edwards confirmed the story with Ferdinand Hasbrouck, the dentist who had anesthetized the President on the *Oneida*.

The Aftermath of President Cleveland's Operation

After his operation, President Cleveland had recovered enough to return to Washington for the special August 7, 1893 session of Congress and by August 28 he had convinced Congress to repeal the Sherman Act. On September 5, 1893 he officiated at the First Pan-American Medical Congress in Washington, speaking with a clear and resonant voice and two weeks later he spoke at the Centenary of

the Founding of the City of Washington. He displayed no scars from an operation, and his voice and general health appeared normal.

On August 29, 1893, the Philadelphia Press story spread across the country and immediately caused an uproar. President Cleveland and his friends and family flatly denied the Elisha Jay Edwards story, still citing the Presidential bad tooth extraction story. Many other newspapers denied the story of the operation, while others minimized it by saying that it consisted of removing two teeth and a little rough bone. They cited the lack of physical evidence and the statements of Doctor Bryant, and President Cleveland's Cabinet officers and Private Secretary. Dr. Bryant, the spokesman for the doctors involved in the operation, would not discuss the President's case for professional reasons. He also minimized the operation because he feared that the truth of it would seriously impact the country's serious financial crisis

Many newspapers endorsed the story of the President's secret operation, pointing out the recent false denials of doctors in the case of General Ulysses Grant and other public figures. They pointed to Secretary of War Lamont's statement that the President was "a sick man – how sick we cannot tell—" paralleled the actual facts. Just as many newspapers branded E.J. Edwards a "disgrace to journalism." Despite the blow to his journalistic integrity, E.J. Edwards continued working into the Twentieth Century. In 1909, he became a columnist for the young *Wall Street Journal*, but accusations that he had faked his story about President Grover Cleveland's secret operation followed him throughout his career.

Dr. Keene Tells the Real Story Twenty-Four Years Later

President Grover Cleveland served the rest of his second term and lived the rest of his life with no reappearance of the cancer and no official admission of his secret operation. Even after he died in 1908, the secret operation remained a secret. Finally, in 1917, Dr. William Williams Keen decided to tell the entire truth about President Cleveland's operation. He always regretted that the newspapers had branded E.J. Edwards a liar and he said that by publishing his story of the operation he hoped "to vindicate Mr. Edward's character as a truthful correspondent."

In 1917, only three witnesses to the operation on the Oneida were still alive- Dr. Keen, Elias Benedict, the Oneida's owner, and Dr. John Erdmann who had been Joseph Bryant's assistant during the operation and had become a prominent

surgeon. Newspaper man E.J. Edwards had also survived to finally hear his *Philadelphia Press* story corroborated. After Dr. Keen published his account of the President's operation on the *Oneida*, E.J. Edwards received hundreds of congratulatory letters and telegrams.

A few questions about the nature of the tumor still lingered after Dr. Keen's *Saturday Evening Post* story. In 1975, modern doctors reexamined the tissue from President Cleveland's tumor and concluded it was a verrucous carcinoma of the hard palate and gingival, a diagnosis that matched the opinions of Dr. O'Reilly, Dr. Keen and others who had identified it. Tobacco and alcohol use can sometimes produce a verrucous carcinoma, and surgically removing it is usually the cure for the tumor.

The Oneida Endures Longer Than President Cleveland

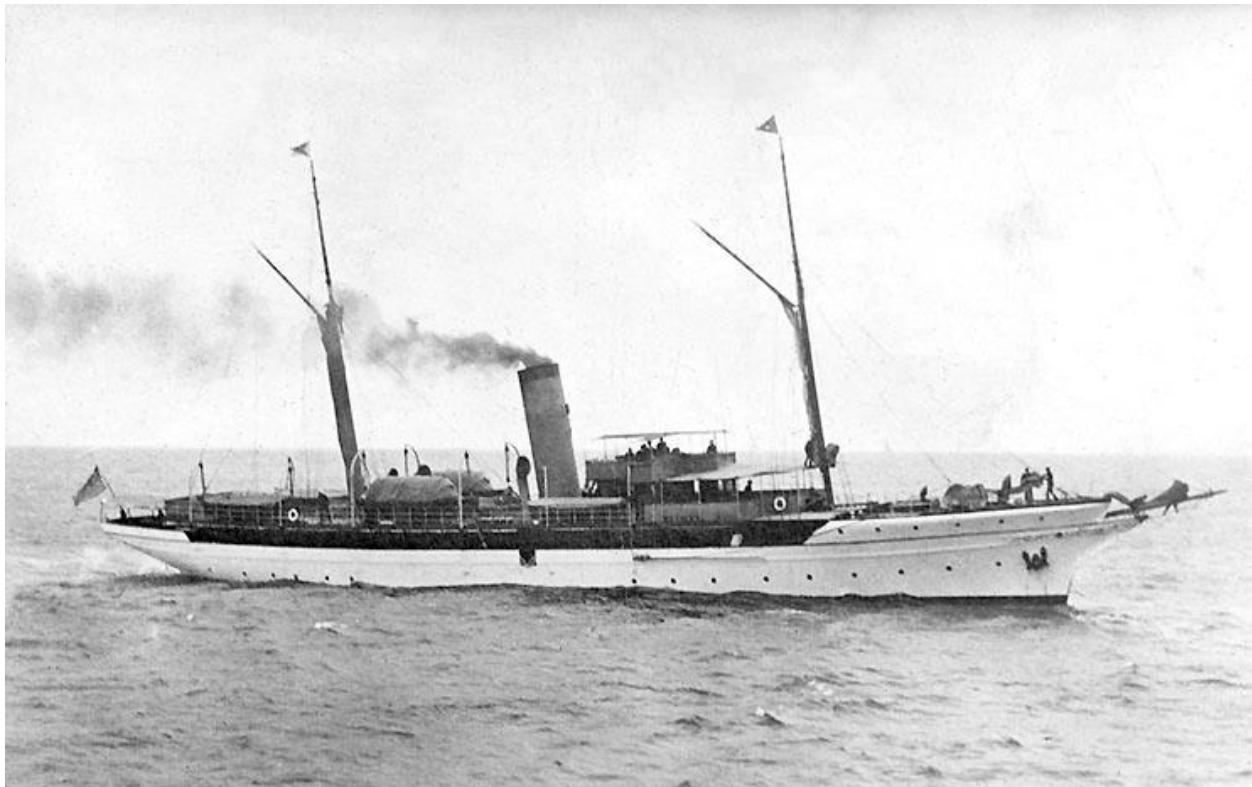
When ex-president Stephen Grover Cleveland died on June 25, 1908, his friend Commodore Elias Benedict and the *Oneida* still survived. In March 1913, Commodore Benedict bought a larger yacht that he also named the *Oneida*. He renamed the previous *Oneida* the *Adelante* and converted her to a tow vessel. The United States Navy commissioned the *Adelante* as the *USS Adelante* (SP-765) on December 17, 1918 at Lawley's Shipyard in Neponset, Massachusetts, with Lt. Edwin W. Keith, USNRF in command. On February 24, 1919, the *Adelante* dressed ship to commemorate the Boston arrival of President Woodrow Wilson on board the transport *George Washington* as part of the armada of ships that greeted him as his ship arrived in President Roads.

The *Adelante* next went to Portland, Maine, and then moved to Damariscove Island where she helped convert and construct a network of wartime radio compass stations along the Maine coast for peacetime use. She also served as a boarding boat for ships including the *Battleship New Jersey* until the Navy eventually decommissioned her in Boston on August 18, 1919.

On March 25, 1920, J. Daniel Gully of Brooklyn bought the *Adelante* and renamed her *John Gully*. By 1924, the H.J. Wheeler Salvage Company, Inc., of New York bought the *John Gully* and renamed her *Salvager*, operating her until 1927. In 1927, the Salvage Process Corporation of New York bought the *Salvager* and operated her until 1940. By January 1, 1941, the company had abandoned the *Salvager* because it was old and deteriorated.

The Oneida's owner, E.C. Benedict, served as a pallbearer at his friend Grover

Cleveland's funeral in 1908, and Dr. Joseph Bryant rode in one of the funeral carriages. After Commodore Benedict sold the Oneida and her name and purpose changed, she made more years of history. When she ended her life as the Salvager, old and deteriorated, the ghosts of pleasurable fishing trips and important voyages remained, and the Oneida still rides sunlit waters and moon washed waves.



The Steam Yacht Oneida

The MV Roger Blough: The Men and the Ship



The Roger Blough is Born

The American Shipbuilding Company of Lorain, Ohio built the MV Roger Blough, a self-unloader, for the United States Steel Great Lakes Fleet in Duluth, Minnesota. The Blough cost approximately twenty million dollars to build, its construction, launching, and christening covered at least a three-year span and cost four lives before she was officially launched on June 5, 1972. She enjoyed a full and varied career until she suffered another fire in layup on February 1, 2021. In 2022 she awaits an uncertain future in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin.

Workers at the American Shipbuilding Company in Lorain laid the keel of the Blough's 437-foot-long bow section on September 3, 1968. She was float launched on December 21, 1968, minus her ballast tanks because of the restricted width size of the drydock. Workers built a new 125-foot wide drydock to accommodate the keel of the 421-foot stern section laid on December 29, 1969, and on July 25, 1970, they floated the bow section into the new drydock and joined it to the stern section.

American Shipbuilding Company had scheduled the launch of the Roger Blough for July 1971, but on June 24, 1971, fire broke out in the engine room of the ship. The fire claimed four workers lives, destroyed the engines and aft deck house, and cost approximately thirteen million dollars in repairs, as well as delaying the launching of the Roger Blough for almost a year. Named for the former chairman of U.S. Steel, she was christened and launched on June 5, 1972.

Roger Blough, the Man



Roger Miles Blough, born January 19, 1904, was the fifth of the seven children of Christian Emanuel Blough, a truck farmer and greenhouse operator and Viola Nancy Hoffman Blough, a nurse. People described Riverside, Pennsylvania, his hometown, as either a section of Johnstown of the 1889 killer flood fame or a small village outside of Johnstown. Building a life on his modest beginnings, Roger Blough became a teacher, a lawyer, and later the president and board chairman of United States Steel.

The modest circumstances of his family motivated Roger to plan his schooling just to the eighth grade, a commonplace practice for that

time. His teachers recognized his academic abilities and encouraged him to stay in school. He worked his way through Susquehanna Academy which was affiliated with Susquehanna University. He enrolled in Susquehanna University in 1920 but found it necessary to drop out for the 1923-1924 academic year to earn money for his school expenses.

Even though finances forced him to be a more focused student, Roger took advantage of his five-foot, eleven-inch, 175-pound frame to earn letters in football, basketball, and tennis. The Lanthorn, Susquehanna yearbook, noted that Roger's friends and acquaintances discovered that his kind smile and laughing eyes covered "a character containing those elements of greatness before which the world will someday bow in awe."

After he earned his B.A. and graduated in 1925, Roger Blough accepted a teaching position in Hawley in northeastern Pennsylvania, teaching mathematics and science and coaching basketball. As well as a teaching position, Roger gained a

wife and a new career direction in Hawley. On June 13, 1928, he married fellow teacher Helen Martha Decker, and they had twin daughters. His father-in-law was Hawley's leading attorney and he influenced Roger to enroll in Yale Law School. At Yale, Roger continued his pattern of excelling academically, and edited the Yale Law Journal.

Roger Blough graduated in 1931, the depths of the Great Depression and applied at White and Chase, a leading law firm on Wall Street in New York. George Case noted on Roger's application: "First class chap, clean, good looking I like him." George Case liked Roger well enough to offer him a \$200 a month position in his firm.

In a noteworthy and pivotal lawsuit for Roger Blough, he led a twenty-lawyer team defending U.S. Steel on monopoly charges during a 1939 and 1940 Congressional hearing. U.S. Steel President Benjamin F. Fairless saw Roger's potential and by 1942, Roger was U.S. Steel's general solicitor. He continued to climb the corporate ladder and succeeded Benjamin Fairless as president in 1955. The early 1960s proved to be controversial for U.S. Steel President Blough. In 1962, he clashed with President John F. Kennedy over steel price increases, but eventually U.S. Steel reversed its price increases. Roger Blough served out the decade of the 1960s as U.S. Steel president, retiring in 1969. For a time, he again worked for White and Case and he remained a U.S. Steel board member until 1976,

The 1960s also brought Roger Blough honors. In 1963 he received the National Football Foundation's highest award – the old Medal. Previous awarded winters included Dwight D Eisenhower, Herbert Hoover, Douglas MacArthur, and ironically, John F. Kennedy. He also was named Industrialist of the Year in 1967.

Roger Blough died of heart failure on October 8, 1985, and he is buried in Green Gale Cemetery in Hawley, Pennsylvania.

Roger Blough outlined his vision for his namesake ship at her christening ceremonies on June 5, 1971, in Lorain, when he said, "One look at this ship makes me believe that it's a real masterpiece in the art of shipbuilding." Over 1,000 people listened to his words and watched his wife Helen take six ineffective swings at the bow of the ship with a bottle of champagne before American Shipbuilding President Gordon Stafford helped her crack the glass.

In an accompanying editorial, the Lorain Journal stressed the pride in the American Shipbuilding Company and in Lorain, as the mammoth ship would carry the label, "Made in Lorain."¹

¹ Lorain Journal, June 5, 1971

Fatal Fire in the Engine Room!



The Roger Blough on fire, June 1971

Ray Kister, George Ux, and Lee Anderson were three of the more than one hundred men who escaped the flames racing through the giant Great Lakes Steel Ore Carrier Roger Blough anchored at drydock in Loraine, Ohio, on June 25, 1971.



SHIPYARD WORKERS Ray Kister, left, and George Ux. (Journal Photo by Dick Hendrickson)

Ray Kistler of New London, Ohio, shook his head in disbelief. In fact, the scene moved beyond disbelief to surreal. Fire was consuming the entire back wall of the engine room of the Roger Blough, fire producing thick black smoke, but the newly painted walls still gleamed a sparkling white. He had been working near the heart of the lower engine room – a huge room crammed with machinery. He looked at the whole after bulkhead – backwall. Although there had been no explosion, the fire advanced rapidly like a forest fire.

Lee Anderson, the tin shop boss, and Ray hurried to the ladder and climbed it and the stairs leading to the deck, while other men ran down the long tunnel toward the front of the ship.

Ray Kister got lost. He had not been working on the ship that long, He got confused, and for a few minutes he ran around in high-speed circles. Then he abruptly stopped his frantic running. He suddenly remembered he had to get to the starboard or right side of the ship. He reached the starboard side and crossed to go up to the main deck. The thick black smoke piled up like thunderclouds and he could scarcely see or breathe, but he did catch glimpse of men's feet all around. On the main deck he spotted men huddled on the starboard side waiting to get out the door. He went over and out and the other men who had been near him in the engine room also escaped.

That morning, George Ux, another New London Ohio, resident, who had worked on the Roger Blough about six months, happened to be in an office outside in the yard when the fire started. He immediately noted the time. The yard workers had told him that at 10:00 a.m. they planned to start the engines of the Roger Blough, which had not run since they had left the factory in England, Somebody said they saw smoke coming out of the stack, and George hurried outside to investigate, He noted the smoke and then looked at his watch, which registered 9:55 a.m. The fire could only have started a few minutes ago, he thought to himself.

Many of the men who escaped the burning ship returned to fight the flames, knowing that four of their fellow workers were trapped onboard. As the fire and the day wore on, George Ux and many of the other men helped the firemen move hoses. An explosion rocked the Roger Blough late in the afternoon. George did not know whether the explosion or the hose knocked him off his feet, but he managed to regain his footing uninjured.



More than ninety firefights from Lorain, Sheffield, Cleveland, and Shaker Heights responded to a fire in the engine room of the Roger Blough freighter on June 24, 1971, at the American Shipbuilding Company in Lorain.

Ray Kister and George Ux would not venture a guess about the cause of the fire, although Ray did remember that about a half an hour before the fire, he saw a burner and a welder working above him. The welder was burning something off and big chunks rained down dropping randomly. Some pieces landed near the gleaming white bulkhead that had been painted just the day before.

Four Men Did Not Get Out

George Adams, Clyde Burdue, John Alexander, and Leonard Moore did not escape the flames. Newspaper accounts of the fire state that two welders and two air tool department workers were checking a tank filled with air for leaks. The tank was located immediately below the engine room, even though a fuel tank holding

thousands of gallons of diesel fuel stood just a few decks below. The trapped workers died of asphyxiation.²

George Adams

His friends called George Adams, 44, of Lorain, "Juicer." They called him Juicer because he had his own truck service and delivered orange juice or nay kind of juice his customers wanted.

George lived in an apartment above the Iris Beauty Salon. A beautician at the Salon saw him leave for work and return every day, but she said that he never talked. He just regularly went "back and forth to work," on the Roger Blough.

His friends in Lorain said that George did not seem to have a family in Lorain, but he went to Cleveland every weekend where they thought his mother and father lived.

His friends Mary and Joe were grateful to George. Someone had broken into their home and George went to their house with Joe for backup and to check things out. "He was that type of person, real friendly," she said

They all agreed that George was a friendly fellow and frequented the ARS Club where he liked to dance. Another friend, Rene, a cashier at National Pharmacy, remarked that George looked like Buddy Hackett. "He would come in here all of the time and buy ice cream and pinochle cards. At Christmas time he would treat everyone," she said.

Clyde Burdue

Clyde Burdue, 60, lived in Vermilion, Ohio, Married with grandchildren, according to his neighbor Stanley Krzykwa he had a reputation for paying as much attention to children as he did adults. Stanley said he bought his grandchildren bikes, and he loved children. "He was the kind of guy that if he saw you digging, he would go get his shovel and boots and come and help you dig."

George Ux of New London said that Clyde was a chipper and leader man whose job was chipping welds and testing tanks. "You wouldn't find a better guy," he said

Another neighbor, Jesse Tetric, had known Clyde for eight to ten years. "He is a nice guy to get along with. Everybody liked him. He is a good-hearted guy."

² <https://boatnerd.com/roger-blough/>

His friends said that Clyde had less than two years left until retirement.

His brother Woodrow Burdue of Huron, Ohio, said that Clyde worked for American Shipbuilding Company for 31 years. "A couple of weeks ago he told me that it will be a miracle if somebody isn't killed down there," he said.

John Alexander

A rigger at American Shipbuilding Company, John Alexander, 28, of Lorain, had worked there for about five years. His brother, Tom, also worked there as a pipefitter. John and his wife, Angie had three daughters, Christine, 7, Lisa 6, and Diane, 5. John always planned family weekends and had scheduled their first trip of the season to Cedar Point for the coming weekend.

John's mother, Mrs. Ruth Alexander of Lorain, said that her son was a skilled carpenter who had just finished crafting a "lovely table" and upholstering a chair. He had planned to help her remodel her house during the layoff season at American Shipbuilding. She added that her son also liked to fish and work on his car.

John's wife Angie spent the morning at the shipyards waiting for word about her husband.

Leonard Moore

Don Brunger sat outside his friend Leonard Moore's empty house in Elyria thinking about his close friend Lennie and his life. Don told a newspaper reporter that he had stopped by the Moore House in Elyria to see if he could help his wife Mary Ann, but no one was home. Mary Ann had gone to Lorain with her children to wait for word about her husband.

A high-pressure line welder at the American Shipbuilding Company, Leonard Moore, 34, had been laid off from his job at the shipyard and had just been called back around Christmas. He worked parttime at Majoris Ambulance Service in Elyria during his downtime at the shipyard. According to his friend Don, Lennie

Moore was “quite proud of the Roger Blough and took his whole family to see it launched.”

A sports enthusiast and a family man, Lennie attended nearly all of the Little League games that his sons Tim 12, and Greg, 6, played. The Moore’s had two other children, Chris 11, and Michelle, 9. Lennie and his wife Mary Ann were expecting another child in a few months.

Don’s thoughts drifted to a conversation he and Lenny had just a few weeks ago Lenny had told him that his working quarters were so close that he had to crawl around on his belly.”

Don knew that Lenny’s next comment would haunt him for the rest of his life. “It is close down there. If something happened, I do not know how I would get out of there,” he said.³

In an article in the Lorain Journal, Captain Bill Craig credited George Steinbrenner, Board Chairman and Chief Executive of the American Shipbuilding Company, with putting the lives of men over machinery. The American Shipbuilding Company officials and the firemen wanted to pour foam on the fire hoping to save the engine and the engine room machinery. George rejected the idea and refused to allow any of the foam to be discharged as long as there was hope that the four men were alive.”

He also explained that the company did not use a carbon dioxide fire extinguisher system because that method would have cut off oxygen to the flames and to workers, risking killing a number of people.⁴

According to news reports of the time, the fire burned for 19 hours, and temperatures inside the hull reached 2,500 degrees. Firemen finally extinguished the blaze a day later.

There is no consensus about the origin of the engine room fire, and the Lorain Fire Department could not pinpoint the actual cause. News of the tragic fire spread as well as theories about its origin. One theory focused on a high intensity light bulb. Another considered a diesel fuel leak from a faulty bonnet gasket on a fuel line in the engine room and yet others considered the welder’s torch as the culprit.

³ The Journal, Lorain, Ohio Friday, June 25, 1971, page 1.

⁴ Lorain Journal, January 15, 2017. “Roger Blough Turns 45”

The Great Lakes Adventures of the Roger Blough

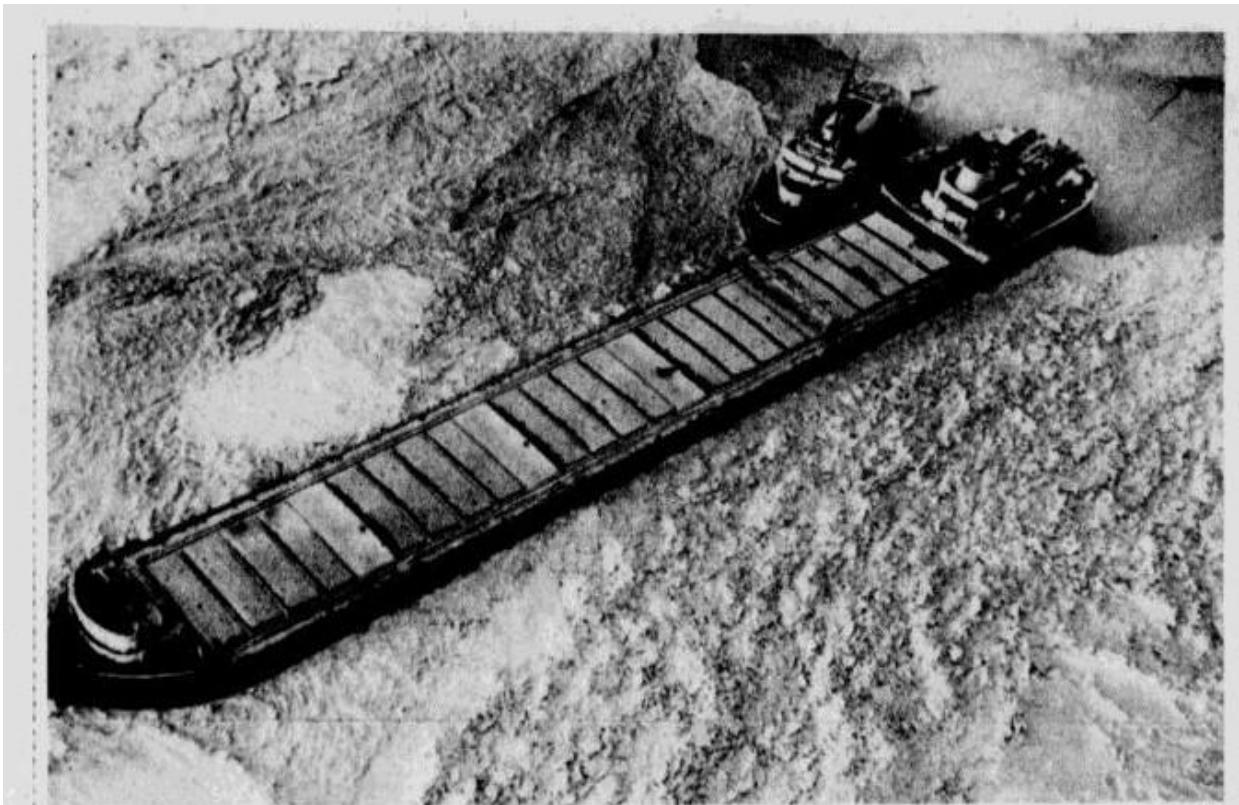
Like her U.S. Steel namesake, the MV Roger Blough led an adventurous life. On June 15, 1972, the Roger Blough began her maiden voyage, leaving Lorain in ballast. Bound for Two Harbors, Minnesota, she picked her upbound way past the sunken Sidney E Smith Jr. in Port Huron, Michigan and on through Lake Huron. She navigated the St. Mary's River, the Soo Locks, and the turbulent waters of Lake Superior, arriving safely in Two Harbors. Marine engineers custom designed the Roger Blough's self-unloading system to unload taconite ore pellets into compatible shore hopper systems located at U.S. Steel docks at Gary, Indiana; South Chicago, Illinois; and Conneaut, Ohio. Dock workers and machines loaded her with 41,608 tons of taconite ore pellets, and she began her taconite hauling career.

On January 11, 1973, as she navigated ice in the Straits of Mackinac, the Roger Blough struck the stern of the Philip R. Clarke and underwent repairs at Lorain during the 1972-1973 winter layup.

In 1975, the Roger Blough joined in the search for SS Edmund Fitzgerald. On November 11, 1975, the morning after the Fitzgerald sank, the Blough recovered a 25-person life raft belonging to the Fitzgerald.⁵

Ice covered waterways presented problems to ships winter navigating the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway.

⁵ <https://boatnerd.com/roger-blough/>



(United Press International)

Roger Blough Still Stuck In OffShore Ice

The Coast Guard cutter the Westwind Tuesday brings supplies to the ore freighter Roger Blough, stranded in the ice off Conneaut, Ohio, for the past week.

The Blough spent eight days in February 1979 stuck in the ice in Lake Erie about two miles off of Conneaut, Ohio. The efforts of the Coast Guard cutter Westwind, tugs, and her crew finally freed the Roger Blough from Lake Erie ice, and results from a study assessing the effect of “Vibrations Caused by Ship Traffic on an Ice-Covered Waterway” reveal the presence of the Roger Blough in the St. Mary’s River on February 24 and March 18, 1979. During the rest of 1979 and 1980 she continued to carry her loads of taconite pellets.⁶

Eventually, her specific design and economic conditions on the Great Lakes caused the Roger Blough to be laid up at Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin between September 12, 1981, to September 25, 1987. She spent the remainder of the 1987 season making twenty-one trips to haul 900,000 tons of taconite pellets to the Gary, Indiana plant. As other boats on the Great Lakes were built larger and larger, the Blough underwent sporadic mid-season lay ups because of her smaller size and unique self-unloading system design.

⁶ <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=YDD3yX7nJIMC&pg=GBS.PR6&hl=en>

Colliding and Grounding

The MV Roger Blough had her share of collisions. She connected with a foreign freighter in Chicago on April 23, 1994 but sustained only minor damage to the port lifeboat davits. In August 2,000 she hit a pier at Soo Ste. Marie, sustaining damage to several plates and a crack forward on the port side. Repairs were completed during her 2000/2001 winter layup at Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin.

In 2015, the Roger Blough was docked at Donjon Ship Building & Repair, a 44-acre shipyard located at East Bayfront Parkway in Erie, Pennsylvania. Secure in her east slip, the Blough underwent steel work.⁷

On May 27, 2016, while the Roger Blough hauled a taconite cargo for the Keystone Shipping Company, she ran aground on Gros Cap Reef in Whitefish Bay, Lake Superior. The United States Coast Guard Vessel Mobile Bay monitored the situation and enforced a 500-yard safety zone around the Blough. On June 3, the Blough began offloading some of her taconite cargo to the SS Philip R. Clarke. She was refloated off the reef on June fourth and anchored at Waiska Bay for evaluation and repairs. On June 7, 2016, the SS Philip R. Clarke and SS Arthur M. Anderson received the rest of her cargo. Four days later on June 11, 2016, the tug Candace Elise escorted the Roger Blough to Bay Shipbuilding, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin for repairs.

Another Engine Room Fire

Fire once again invaded the engine room of the Roger Blough on February 1, 2021, while she lay docked in winter layup at the Bay Shipbuilding Dock in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. This time, the Blough stood empty and there were no casualties.

In its August 17, 2022, incident report, the National Transportation Safety Board ruled that the “probable cause of the engine room fire aboard the bulk carrier Roger Blough was likely attributed to “repeated removal and reinstallation of the furnace’s burner that led to the failure of its mounting coupling.” This failure caused the operating burner to drop to the bottom of its enclosure and fracture its fuel supply line. This event allowed the diesel fuel to ignite.

The NTSB stated that the absence of a fire activated automatic fuel oil shut off valve on the fuel oil inlet piping before the burner contributed to the fire. The shut off valve would have stopped the fuel feeding the fire shortly after it started and limited the spread of the fire.”⁸

⁷ <https://www.goerie.com/story/news/local/2015/02/17/erie-shipbuilder-buoyed-by-lots/24770590007/>

⁸ <https://www.ntsb.gov/investigations/Pages/DCA21FM015.aspx>

The report estimated the damages at more than one hundred million dollars.⁹

The future of the M.V. Roger Blough is uncertain. She waits at her dock in Sturgeon Bay, while men decide her fate and waves slapping at sides beckon her to further adventures on the Great Lakes.



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⁹ <https://www.ntsb.gov/investigations/Pages/DCA21FM015.aspx>