May 2023 Volume 2 Issue 5

PORTS AND PORTHOLES

Tangled Tales of Three Car Ferries and Their Fates:

Pere Marquette No. 16

The Ashtabula Car Ferry

Marquette & Bessemer No. 2

Captain George L. Thompson and the Pere Marquette 16

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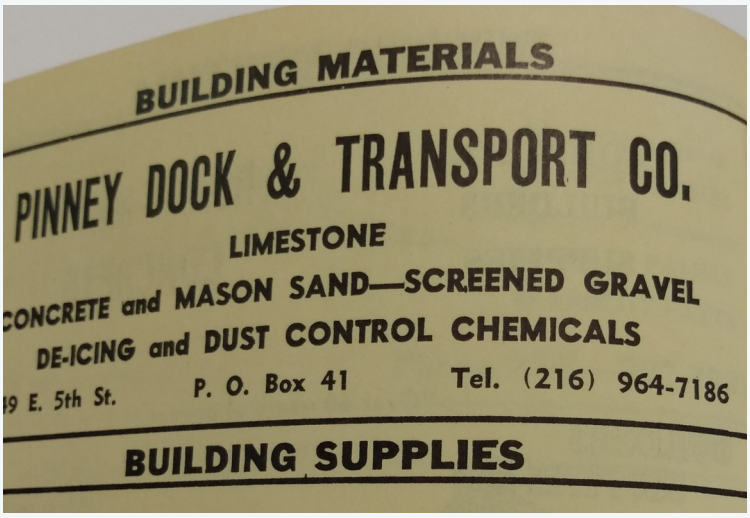
The Pere Marquette No. 16, The Ashtabula Car Ferry, and the Marquette Bessemer No. 2



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Captain George L. Thompson and the Pere Marquette 16

Pere Marquette 16 State of Michigan Historical Society

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The Pere Marquette 16's Many Lives

At this point in her nautical life, the *Pere Marquette 16* had passed through as many stages and transitions as a Lake Michigan storm. Built in 1895 by the Craig Ship-building Company of Toledo, Ohio, she was a wooden ship, 282 feet long and carried 26 cars. She was known as the *Shenango 2* and the *Muskegon when s*he sailed under the registration number of US 116695. In 1897, the Detroit, Grand Rapids and West-ern Railroad bought her to operate as a car ferry between Muskegon and Milwaukee.

After the Michigan railroad consolidation of 1899, the *Muskegon* was moved to Lud-ington and her name changed to *Pere Marquette 16.* The *Pere Marquette 16* had made numerous trips across the Lake to Ludington, Michigan before that fateful Saturday in December, and successfully cleared the Ludington North Breakwater Light.

Light Keeper Weckler's Trained Crew, Breeches Buoy and Lyle Gun

In December 1901, light keeper Adam N. Weckler had been at his post about 16 months, since August 14, 1900. The Pere Marquette Harbor Lifesaving Station had been established in 1871, and Keeper Weckler had efficiently trained his crew and other volunteers, training that was soon to make the difference between life and death for the 33 crewmembers on *Pere Marquette 16*.

The government equipped each lifesaving station with a breeches buoy and cart, and standard beach rescue drills of the time featured men or horses pulling a cart down the beach. The cart held a Lyle gun, line, powder for the gun, and a breeches buoy.

Captain David A. Lyle, a graduate of West Point and Massachusetts Institute of Technology invented the life-saving Lyle gun that could throw a line to a stranded ship, an invention that saved the lives of countless sailors. Once the line reached the ship, shore crews sent out breeches buoy equipment to the stranded people on the ship. The drill ended with bringing back "victims" in the breeches buoy.

The Ludington, Michigan, Lifesaving Crew is Ready

In actual rescues, line-throwing guns like the Lyle and breeches buoys were used for ships wrecked within 600 yards of shore while lifeboats performed long distance rescues. Lifesaving crews held beach rescue drills once every week to maintain their peak of readiness.

The lifesaving crew at Ludington had been discharged for the winter in December of 1901, but they and volunteer lifesavers were instrumental in the rescue. The men were Berndt Carlson, William De Young, George Robinson, Peter Carlson, Levi Schroder, Oscar Wilkinson and John Nelson.

Captain Thompson is Ready to Land His Crew and Cargo

Captain George L. Thompson had once again skillfully guided his vessel across Lake Michigan from Milwaukee, with the assistance of his officers and crew. A.T. Dority served as his mate; S. Brownell, second mate; Ernest Heald, purser; Samuel Sylvester, chief engineer; and George Van Brunt, assistant engineer.

The *Pere Marquette* carried a full cargo of twenty-six loaded cars, ten of them filled with perishable goods valued at $12,000 and the ship itself was valued at $165,000. As Captain Thompson steamed closer to Ludington, the wind velocity increased until it reached about forty miles an hour and towering seas from the south buffeted the *Pere Marquette*.

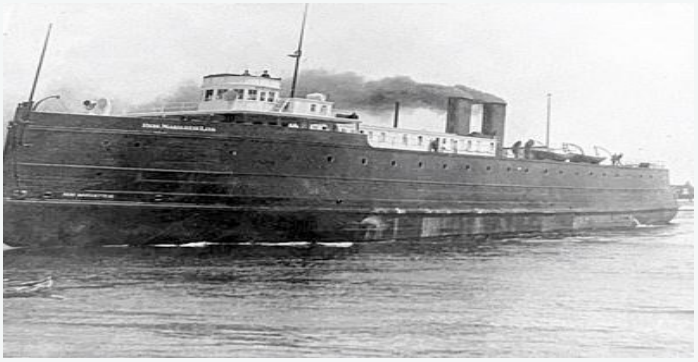


Photo of the Pere Marquette No. 16 a courtesy photo of the Mason County Historical Society.

Captain Thompson is an Experienced Captain, but He Miscalculates

Captain Thompson enjoyed a long-term relationship with the Great Lakes. He had moved from his birthplace in Ogdensburg, New York to Detroit when he was a young boy and received his education in the public schools of Detroit, Saginaw and Port Huron.

After he left school in 1877, he took a job with the Northwest Transportation Company and served as a watchman of the passenger steamer *Quebec*. He honed his seamanship on various Lake vessels, including the *Colorado* and *Roanoke* on which he served as master. In 1897 he became Master of the ferry steamer *Shenango 2,* later the *Musekgon*, later the *Pere Marquette 16.*

Captain Thompson's experience told him that he would have to run his ship directly in the troughs of the waves to enter the Ludington piers, but he believed he could bring her safely into the harbor as he had done so many times before. This time, despite his experience and intimate knowledge of the lakes, Captain Thompson miscalculated.

The Pere Marquette 16 had safely reached Ludington Harbor, but before she could safely tie up to the pier, the waves snatched her from Captain George L. Thompson's control.

The *Pere Marquette 16* Crashes to the Bottom and the Steam Pipes Snap

The waves tossed the *Pere Marquette* around like a cork and as she drew abreast of the south pier, she slammed into the bottom of the lake with terrific force. The shock of the crash threw the sleeping men from their bunks and brought every crewman on deck to investigate.
The steam-pipes were snapped and the ship immediately lost light, power and heat and drifted against the north pier. Clouds of escaping steam from the hold froze over the ship and the officers counted frantically to see if anyone was missing.

Michael Taft is Steamed to Death and Two Other Coal Passers are Badly Burnt

The *Pere Marquette's* officers discovered that everyone was accounted for except Michael Taft of Chicago, a coal passer. Steam had overcome him and scalded him to death, leaving a widow and two children to mourn him. Later when his body was recovered from the *Pere Marquette's* hold, the rescuers discovered that it was literally cooked. Taft belonged to the Buffalo branch of the Firemen's union and had shipped on the *Pere Marquette* only three days before.

Two other coal passers, who were severely burnt were unconscious and could not give their names. They had managed to escape from the hold and were taken to the marine hospital in Ludington where they were given slim prospects of recovery. Several other crewmembers were scalded less severely.

The Pere Marquette is Surrounded by Ice

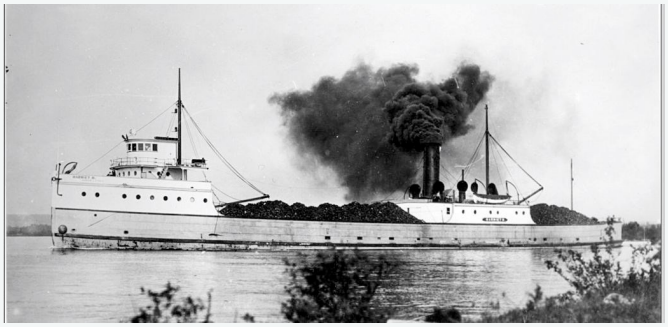
At daybreak on Sunday morning the stranded *Pere Marquette* lay about seventy feet north of the north pier and waves her pounded heavily, opening several huge holes in her forward quarter. She developed a heavy list to starboard and a big lump about amidships, giving the appearance of a sea serpent with a broken back.

Moving ice completely surrounded her and since she had no steam it was bitterly cold on board. The men who had been scalded suffered agonizing pain during the eight hours that elapsed between the accident and the rescue.

Rescuers and hundreds of interested spectators lined the shore and the rescuers had to decide how to get the men from the capsized ship. No small boat could survive on the mountainous seas that hurled tons of floating ice against the weather side of the ship, but quickly the training of the Ludington Lifesaving crew snapped into place.
The Ludington Lifesaving Crew Rescues the Pere Marquette Crew

The rescue crew promptly brought out their Lyle gun and breeches **buoy** and successfully fired a shot line from their cannon on shore across the deck of the stranded steamer while securing one end of the cable firmly to the pier. Those on board made the line fast and hauled out the cable, and the lifesavers on shore made sure their end was secure.

They sent the breeches buoy across and over the next three hours. One by one the lifesavers hauled 33 men and one corpse from the *Pere Marquette* and landed them safely on the pier. Captain Thompson was the last man to leave the *Pere Marquette*. As he took one last look around his crippled ship, he broke down, crying like a child.



The Harriet B

Will the Unlucky Pere Marquette 16 be Rescued?

That evening after the rescue Railroad Superintendent Mercereau told a *Detroit Free Press* reporter that he had ordered pumps and tugs from Milwaukee, Manistee, and Bay City and they would attempt to raise the *Pere Marquette* as soon as soon as the weather improved. Marine men speculated that the *Pere Marquette* couldn't be taken off the bar before the winter storms pounded her to pieces.

Superintendent Mercereau shrugged. After all, the "unlucky" *Pere Marquette* had figured in numerous accidents. One involved the wreck of a load of cars that cost her owners about $30,000. The railroad company never highly prized the *Pere Marquette 16* and did not seem to mourn her loss since both ship and cargo were fully insured, mostly with the Inland Lloyds. The company's two steel car ferries made regular trips and had never had an accident.

The Pere Marquette 16 is Finally Freed

The day after the accident, the rescue vessels- pumps and tugs-tried to begin the rescue of the *Pere Marquette*, but the waves thundering from the southwest and the bitter cold prevented any work from being done that day. The *Pere Marquette* rested on the sand bottom in a bank of ice on the shore side, with the seas washing over her decks on the west side. The entire ship was encased in ice and with no smoke blowing from her stacks and no crew to bring her to life; she resembled a desolate ice mountain.

But like all but one of her crew, the *Pere Marquette* lived to be rescued. The tugs and pumpers that the railroad had hired successfully freed her from the bar and she resumed her voyages on Lake Michigan. In 1907, the Hammermill Paper Company bought her, cut her down to a barge, named her the *Harriet B*, and used her to haul pulpwood. She was converted to a bulk freight steamer in 1918 and a barge in 1921, after beaching with heavy damage near Ludington. She foundered after being struck by the steamer *Quincy A. Shaw* near Two Harbors, Minnesota, in 1922.

The Ludington Lifesaving Crew Continues its Rescuing Ways

The Ludington Lifesaving crew moved on to other rescues with their Lyle Gun and breeches buoy. The breeches buoy was used for near shore rescues from about 1874 until 1939, when the Lighthouse Service transferred to the United States Coast Guard.

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The Ashtabula Car Ferry and Captain Ole Brude's Egg Shaped Lifeboat

The restored Urade or "Brude Egg" covered lifeboat displayed outside Alesund Museum. Mariner Captain Ole Brude created the concept of a covered lifeboat in 1904, and this facsimile of the Uraed was built around 1908. Captain Brude's covered lifeboat design is a maritime standard today.

The seas touching Norway's shores, and the role of lifeboats combined to shape the life of Ole Brude as surely as his footprints shaped the sand on Norwegian and American beaches. Born on February 12, 1880, in Alesund, a port on the Atlantic coast of southwest Norway, Ole experienced the worlds of Norway and America at a young age. His family immigrated to Minneapolis, Minnesota when Ole was still a child and they lived there for three years. His early childhood years in America were lengthy enough to allow Ole to absorb the promise and possibilities of America. The memory of these qualities in the American national character stayed vividly in his mind even when his family moved back to his native land.

Eventually, he would return to America as an adult to pursue American promise and possibilities himself. Back in Norway in 1896, Ole Brude experienced the sea firsthand at age 16. His adventures as a sailor led him to enroll in a naval college in Alesund and later join the Merchant Marine where he earned captain's papers. These early experiences and later, two maritime disasters drove the importance of lifeboats home to Ole Brude with the impact of a wooden lifeboat smashing against the hull of a ship.

As second mate of the steamer Athalie, Ole Brude observed firsthand how quickly, and easily stormy seas can destroy a wooden lifeboat. The Athalie encountered a severe storm on a voyage to Newfoundland and Labrador, and the captain ordered the launching of a lifeboat. An enormous wave seized the small wooden lifeboat, crushing it against the Athalie's hull. Twenty-two-year-old second mate Ole Brude vowed that he would build a better lifeboat. When he arrived safely in Alesund, he set to work designing a better lifeboat.

Another maritime disaster in 1904 deepened Ole Brude's determination to build an egg-shaped lifeboat that could not be crushed or would not sink. The Danish transatlantic ocean steamer SS Norge ran aground on June 28, 1904. After collecting passengers in Denmark and Norway, many of them emigrants, the Norge set a course across the Atlantic Ocean to New York City.

Caught in foggy weather, the Norge ran aground near Rockall in the North Atlantic and although she quickly reversed off the rock, the impact had torn several holes in her hull and water poured into the hold. Although the crew lowered eight lifeboats only five successfully reached the water, and many passengers jumped overboard and drowned.

The Norge sank twelve minutes after it collided with the Hasselwood Rock on Helen's Reef. According to author Per Kristian Sebak, more than 635 people died, including 225 Norwegians. Many of them died of exposure in the lifeboats. The sinking of the Norge ranked as the largest civilian maritime disaster in the Atlantic Ocean until the Titanic disaster eight years later.

The death of so many of his countrymen and the fact that he passionately believed that his fully covered steel lifeboat that sheltered survivors from the air and sea and used a sail for propulsion could save many lives encouraged Captain Brude to translate his belief into action. He expressed his feelings this way in his account of the creation and voyage of the Uraed.

"I have been a sailor for ten years and already at a very early stage of my sea faring life I have strongly felt the need of this and taken an interest in finding out the best possible construction for it as I found the lifesaving boats of the present time very defective on account of their open construction. Storms, rough sea, and cold weather very often make it difficult to realize the chief object of the lifesaving boat to come to the aid of the shipwrecked. I came to the conclusion that lifeboats must have an over covering and be constructed in the shape of an egg with rigging, sail, and rudder so that they could be maneuvered and navigated in a fully satisfactory manner. In order to make a trial with this, I sailed from my native town Alesund across the North Sea and Atlantic to America. During this voyage it proved that my life saving boat completely fulfilled her purpose and surpassed all expectations."

After some successful fundraising, Ole arranged for Alesund Mechanical Works to build the first model of his innovative lifeboat, which the local press dubbed "The Brude Egg," because of its oval shape.

Now fully convinced that his new lifeboat which he christened the Uraed, Norwegian for fearless, could save many lives, Ole Brude searched for more funding sources. He got word that France offered a one-million-franc prize for an improved lifeboat, with the judging to take place at the World's Fair in St. Louis. Ole made what he considered an obvious decision. He decided to sail his new lifeboat across the Atlantic Ocean to New York to prove it could conquer the ocean, and then load it on a train to St. Louis. Estimating the trans-Atlantic voyage would take three months, he calculated he and his lifeboat and crew would arrive in St. Louis before the fair closed in December 1904.

Persuading three friends Iver Thorsen, 46, Lars Madsen, 28, and Johan Johannesen, 24, to join him on his epic lifeboat voyage, Captain Brude and his crew readied the Uraed for its trans-Atlantic voyage. They stowed provisions of tinned goods, salt meat, and ships biscuits stowed in the benches. They loaded petroleum to be used for lighting and fuel and five hundred gallons of water. The captain had invented a rain accumulator made of thin sale cloth and shaped like an umbrella that could be hung upside down on the mast. The rain accumulator would prove to be a useful tool on the voyage.

Captain Ole Brude and his crew left Alesund harbor in August 1904. The first month of their voyage featured smooth sailing with comfortable conditions and good weather. Leaving Scotlanon the far horizon, the Uraed plowed ahead and reached the halfway point in its journey across the Atlantic.

The crew inside the Uraed enjoyed a snug ride. Their egg-shaped nest measured about eighteen feet long and eight feet wide, and effectively shut out the wind and water. In September, their luck turned. They lost their mast which significantly slowed down their progress even though they rode the waves westward with the help of a replacement sail they fashioned.

The voyagers spent their time chatting, reading, and smoking. Captain Brude described the movements of the Uraed as “those of a sea gull as she kept her horizontal position and lifted herself cautiously and quietly with the seas. The movements were so smooth and comfortable that swinging trays at the tables were superfluous. A glass of water could stand on the table in very rough weather without falling down.”

Although Captain Brude and his crew rode safely inside the Uraed, the weather outside their snug ship produced one of the worst winters in the North Atlantic, with stormy, cold days and rough seas. The voyage of the Uraed lasted five storm-tossed months, and after five months at sea, they landed in St. John’s Newfoundland. Since New York, not Newfoundland and Labrador, was their destination, they sailed back into the winter storms. On January 6, 1905, the waves swept them onto Pavilion Beach in Gloucester, Massachusetts, forty miles from Boston. They were a month too late for the St. Louis Fair.

Gloucester Daily Times Gloucester Jan 9, 1905, reported their arrived in Gloucester after

a winter storm. At Gloucester, the mariners of the Uraed received a hero’s welcome and created a frenzy of newspaper coverage. Even though they had missed the St. Louis Fair, ole realized that newspaper coverage, publicity, and connections would be essential in his quest to promote and finance the Uraed. According to the Gloucester Daily Times account of the 2005 commemoration of the Uraed’s arrival, one of Captain Brude’s crew, Iver Thoresen, remained in Gloucester and became an American citizen.

On January 16, 1905, the Uraed arrived in Boston. Captain Brude paid off his crew and headed back to Norway to file his letters of patent for the Uraed. The Marine Review, a Great Lakes maritime publication, recorded under marine patents that in 1906, Ole Brude of Alesund, Norway filed for lifeboat patent number 835,498.

A story in the Minneapolis Journal datelined Two Harbors, Minnesota, sums up Captain Brude's voyage by praising his seamanship and noting that the Uraed resembled "a small torpedo boat with a fin." The story said that one of the crew members was the son of the American counsel in Alesund and the crew encountered contrary winds and severe storms that carried away some of the Uraed's rigging but that it proved seaworthy. The trip was made in 112 days, and the story claimed that the Uraed was the first ship" that has ever crossed the Atlantic on its own bottom."

Optimistic about the future of his unusual egg-shaped lifeboat, Captain Brude established his own company in Alesund and began building lifeboats, but economics and timing were riptide detrimental to his progress. In the early twentieth century, producing one of his lifeboats would cost about 2,000 crowns while a classic open wooden lifeboat could be manufactured for about one hundred crowns. Captain Brude's ideas were far ahead of his time and pocketbook.

Captain Brude and his Uraed also battled the heads – at times he probably thought lunkheads- of the maritime establishments. After the Titanic sank in April 1912, he unsuccessfully approached the White Star Line with the plans of his lifeboat. Even though the sinking of the Titanic underscored the vital role of the quality and quantity of lifeboats, the loss of life did not change the minds or practices of the White Star or other shipping lines. It seemed like shipyards and ship owners could glimpse the possibilities of his Uraed, but they were not willing to expend the energy and economic investments it took to overcome the resistance of established maritime traditions and make his innovative lifeboat a reality. The captain could sell only about twenty-three of his lifeboats, and he finally went out of the lifeboat manufacturing business.

But Captain Brude still believed in his lifeboat and its life-saving potential, and he was not about to give up on his idea.

The Egg-Shaped Lifeboat and the Ashtabula Car Ferry

The Ashtabula Car Ferry is Born

The Ashtabula Car Ferry was built in 1906 at the Great Lakes Engineering Works in St. Clair, Michigan. On May 12, 1906, the Ashtabula Car Ferry was launched at Detroit, Michigan. The J.W. Ellsworth Company of Cleveland owned the ferry which could transport thirty railroad cars of coal. After the Ashtabula Car Ferry was launched, it received the finishing touches and then was sent to Ashtabula. The Ashtabula Ferry then was put in service and made her maiden voyage to the Canadian port of Port Burwell. The ferry transported coal for the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

The Ashtabula Car Ferry arrived in Ashtabula at 7:00 a.m. on Saturday, June 30, 1906.

Captain Ole Brude and the Ashtabula Car Ferry with the help of Captain Benjamin T. Haagensen would soon find their destinies intermingled. In 1909, Captain Ole Brude emigrated to America, for a time settling in Hibbing, Minnesota where his parents, Lars and Amelie lived. He worked various jobs to support himself, including farming and running a sawmill, and sailing the lakes, but he vowed to continue to promote and produce his lifeboat.

Once again, Captain Ole Brude's persistence and salesmanship produced results. A story in the Marine Review of January 1913 reported that a new type of lifeboat had been tested on the Car Ferry Ashtabula in Ashtabula Harbor on Monday, January 6, 1913.

The test results were so favorable that the lifeboat had been adopted as part of the car ferry lifesaving equipment.

The story stated that Captain Ole Brude had invented the lifeboat which was the same type as the Uraed that he had sailed across the Atlantic Ocean in 1904. It emphasized that the lifeboat, shaped like an egg and entirely covered over, featured a sliding keel to prevent drifting and rolling. A railing on top provided safe passage to the lookout tower for the helmsman to secure a complete panoramic view through four glazed portholes. The bow of the ship had a double bottom divided into four watertight compartments which could be accessed through manholes. The compartments were used for storing provisions, water, and other necessities. If a sudden disaster occurred with no time to get the boat overboard, it could be released from its tackles and would float on the water as the ship sank.

Encouraged by his success with the Car Ferry Ashtabula, Captain Brude stopped in Lake Erie port cities promoting the advantages of his lifeboat. The Marine Review of January 1914 noted that Captain Ole Brude was in Cleveland trying to interest the lake men in installing his lifeboat. Captain Brude and Captain Haagensen, both Norwegians, and both friends, combined forces to introduce his lifeboat to mariners who resisted the introduction.

Captain Brude had served with Captain B.T. Haagensen on the Car Ferry Maitland and the two formed a partnership that produced lasting results.

. A letter from the Marine National Bank of Ashtabula, located on Bridge Street in Ashtabula Harbor, dated March 2,1914, and signed by William B. Hubbard, assistant cashier, attested to the character and accomplishments of Captain Haagensen.

The Marine Review story, the letter of recommendation for Captain Haagensen from the Marine National Bank of Ashtabula Harbor, and an application for a Seaman's Protection Certificate of Citizenship from Captain Ole Brude, support the newspaper reports that Captain Haagensen served as the representative for Captain Ole Brude's lifeboat.

In his application, Captain Brude listed one of the ships he served on as the Maitland and Captain Haagensen had served as master of the Maitland in the time frame of Captain Brude's campaign for the Lake masters to adopt his lifeboat. The Great Lakes Engineering Yard at Ecorse, Michigan, laid the keel of the Maitland on March 13, 1913, and it was built as a steel, twin screw, cross lake railroad car ferry.

Launched on November 8, 1913, the Maitland was enrolled at Cleveland, Ohio on October 20, 1916, to the Toronto, Hamilton & Buffalo Navigation Company at Ashtabula, Ohio with its home port of Fairport, Ohio. After a brief stint on Lake Michigan, the Maitland began carrying railroad cars between Ashtabula, Ohio and Port Maitland, Ontario. Captain Haagensen and Captain Brude served on the Matiland together and also developed a friendship.

Captain Brude's Citizenship Application also noted that the District Court at Duluth, Minnesota issued him his naturalization documents on January 28, 1915. Although Captain Brude stated that he lived in Bear Lake Minnesota at the time he filed the application, he made many trips throughout the Great Lakes Region promoting his lifeboat. Reading his application reveals that the captain measured five feet six inches tall, he had a medium complexion and brown hair and blue eyes. Like a true sailor, he had an anchor tattoo on his left arm.

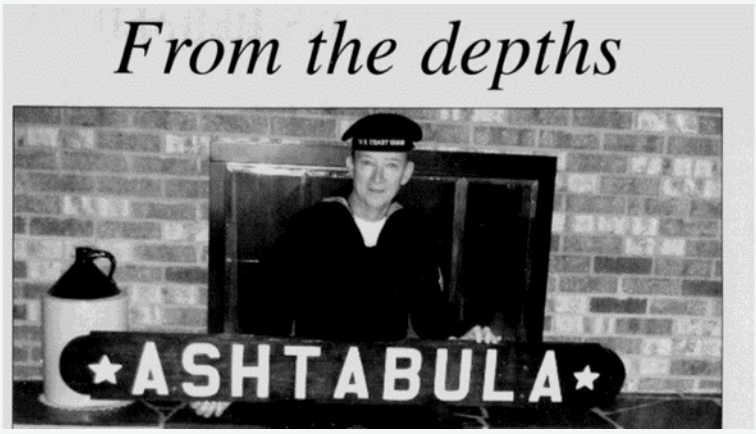
Thanks to the efforts of Captain Ole Brude, and Captain B.T. Haagensen, the Phoenix Foundry & Machine Company in Ashtabula had built the American prototype of the Uraed in 1912. In a letter to the Brude Company in Norway which he wrote in Swedish, Captain Haagensen talked about the building of the lifeboat at Phoenix Foundry & Machine Company in 1913. Authorities in Washington later approved the lifeboat.

The Car Ferry Ashtabula plied Lake Erie between Ashtabula, Ohio, and Port Burwell, Ontario, Canada from 1906 to 1958. After the Maitland and the Marquette & Bessemer No. 2 ceased operations in the 1930s, the Ashtabula was the only car ferry on Lake Erie. Ironically, she sank at her own dock when she collided with the steamer Ben Moreell.

Too badly damaged to be salvaged, she was scrapped in 1959.

The sinking of the Car Ferry Ashtabula marked the end of an era for the city and its people who flocked to the harbor to witness its coming and goings and watch it settle safely at its dock. The 51-mile trip across Lake Erie took about three hours and 45 minutes and Ashtabula citizens were on hand to watch it depart and return to its home port. Its whistle punctuated daily Ashtabula activities.

Ashtabula maritime museum member Neil Barton found the name board from the Ashtabula Car Ferry. He is also a former U.S. Coast Guard member and was the Ashtabula Lighthouse keeper from 1957-1959. He was the one on duty from September 18,1958, when the Ashtabula Car Ferry sank in Ashtabula Harbor.



Historian Carl Feather's You Tube video brings home the impact of the Car Ferry Ashtabula's sinking to the city of Ashtabula and its people.

Car Ferry Ashtabula https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqkXJoLmMnQ.

No one is sure what happened to the Brude lifeboat after the Car ferry Ashtabula was scrapped. Brian Hubbard, Executive Director of the Ashtabula Maritime and Surface Transportation Museum, remembers playing in the lifeboat with his friends as a young boy and believes that remained in the harbor for several years. But he is not sure about its ultimate fate. It is unfortunately likely that the Brude lifeboat suffered the same fate as the Car ferry it served.

The Tangled Tragedy of the Marquette & Bessemer No. 2

Marquette & Bessemer No. 2

Conneaut Area Historical Society

Call it coincidence, the roll of the dice, or divine intervention, whatever the reason, two Conneaut men, John Cook and John Olson, both firemen on the Marquette Bessemer No. 2, thanked their good fortune and their lucky stars that they had quit the ship in the winter of 1909. John Cook had sailed with the ship for two seasons and “Old John” Olson had performed his firemen’s duties on the Bessemer No. 2 for almost six years. Both men felt under the weather and declined to reboard the Bessemer for the last trip of the season.

Diminutive Scotchman John Cook told a newspaper reporter that he was “mighty glad “ he got off the Bessemer when he did. “Never had a narrower escape in my life,” he said. “When I went down to the boat Tuesday to get my pay, Chief Engineer Wood asked me if I wouldn’t make one more trip, saying that they were short of men. Came mighty near doing it but decided that I wasn't feeling well enough.

"I've sailed on that boat now ever since coming here from Scotland and it seems pretty tough to have nearly all the friends I've got wiped out like this. "No, this won't make me give up sailing and I'll probably go back on the lakes again next spring. Don't believe I'm one of the fellows who get scared very easily. When we were having an awful time coming over a short time ago, they woke me up and told me they were pumping water from the boat, but I was tired and turned over and went to sleep again.

"I wasn't the only one who was lucky. "Old John" had been on the boat longer that I had and he got off in time, too.”

. There's Tom Steele. We were raised together and came to America together.

"No, this won't make me give up sailing and I'll probably go back on the lakes again next spring. Don't believe I'm one of the fellows who get scared very easily.

The Captain and His Crew

Captain Robert Rowan McLeod, who died in the MARQUETTE & BESSEMER No. 2 sinking in 1909, with his daughter, Charlotte Roberta McLeod

Captain Robert McLeod, originally from Kincardine, Ontario, was one of the six McLeod brothers who sailed the Great Lakes. His brother, John, was Robert's first mate, and for a while lived in Conneaut, as well. Other crew members from Conneaut included Frank Stone, R.C. Smith, Chief Engineer Eugene Wood, E. Buckler, T. Kennedy, W. Wigglesworth, W. Wilson, F. Annis, P. Keith and P. Hughes. Charles Allen, who for a while had a barbershop in Conneaut Harbor, also sailed on the M&B No. 2 as a coal passer. Assisting was William Ray, who was making his first trip on a boat. Tom Steele, fireman, had immigrated to the United States from Scotland three years earlier. He planned to make the Dec. 7 trip his last because he'd found work on shore. John "Paddy" Hart, a stereotypical sailor from Ireland, was an oiler whose tales of serving in the Second Boer War fascinated his shipmates.

Because they were under the weather, John Cook and "Old John" Olson had escaped the weather-related sinking of the Marquette Bessemer No. 2 in December 1909. On the morning of December 7, 1909, the Marquette & Bessemer No. 2 departed Conneaut on its daily five hour run to Port Stanley, Ontario. The Bessemer departed late at 10:43 a.m. because it had taken the harbor tugs three hours to push an ore carrier back against the dock when strong winds had parted its lines. When the Bessemer finally left the dock, she carried a cargo of thirty loaded railway cars carrying coal, steel beams, and iron castings. The wind blew out of the southwest at fifty miles an hour and snow curtains surrounded the ship.

Another newspaper account of the Bessemer's departure has Edward Pfister, the Conneaut lighthouse keeper, repairing a fog signal bell on the lighthouse tower when the Bessemer No. 2 steamed out of the harbor late on that morning of December 7, 1909. Edward Pfister grabbed his hammer and banged on the bell as a farewell to the Bessemer. Captain Robert McLeod heard the bell and waved to Lightkeeper Pfister. "Get that thing fixed! I may need it on my trip back!" the Captain shouted to the lightkeeper. The Marquette & Bessemer No. 2 slowly chugged past the lighthouse and melted into the first major winter storm of the region, destination Port Stanley, Ontario.

The storm progressed with the day. The temperate dropped from 40 degrees F. to 10 degrees F. and by the evening December 7, 1909, the wind velocity had increased to a sustained 75 miles an hour. One version of the fate of the Bessemer No. 2 estimated the wind speed as 70 knots which translates into about eighty miles an hour. Whatever the variation, the wind speed combined with the drop in temperature and the snow created a regional blizzard that made the record books and proved fatal to the Marquette & Bessemer No. 2.

The original Marquette & Bessemer No. 2 being helped from the ice near Erie, Pennsylvania.

Over a century of controversy about what happened to the Besser swirls like the snow in the 1909 blizzard. People in Port Stanley testified that they saw the Bessemer offshore about six o'clock in the evening, but it could not enter the harbor because of the storm. Captain McLeod turned the ship west, possibly attempting to shelter at Rondeau, Ontario. Canadian Customs Officer Wheeler and other residents of Port Stanley said that they heard the Marquette & Bessemer No. 2's whistle around three o'clock in the morning near the Port Stanley harbor. Around five a.m., a citzen of Port Bruce, Ontario claimed that he had heard a steamer whistle so close to shore that he thought it had gone aground. The sound of the steamer whistle soon faded away.

On the opposite side of Lake Erie, Conneaut residents east of the city reported that they too had seen and heard the Marquette & Bessemer No. 2 on the late evening of December 7, 1909. One person reported that the Bessemer was headed directly for shore and the turned sharply to port before it faded back into the storm.

On December 8, 1909, shortly after midnight the captain and chief engineer of the steamer Black anchored outside Conneaut claimed that they saw the profile of the Marquette & Bessemer No. 2 heading east. Several Conneaut residents said that they heard the ship's whistle sounding distress signals around 1:30 in the morning.

Two days later, on December 10, 1909, the William B. Davock, who would later founder in Lake Michigan during the Armistice Day stormy of November 1940, passed through but did not stop through a wreckage field west of the tip of Long Point, Ontario. The green woodwork in the wreckage was the same color as the Bessemer's superstructure.

Two days later on December 12, the Commodore Perry, the tug of the Pennsylvania State Fish Commission, discovered lifeboat number four of the Marquette & Bessemer No. 2, fifteen miles off Erie, Pennsylvania. The lifeboat held nine bodies with evidence that a tenth person had sheltered in it, but he had jumped overboard for reasons lost to history. None of the men were dressed warmly, indicating that they had to evacuate the Bessemer in a hurry. Steward George H. Smith had carried two large knives and a meat cleaver from the ship's galley aboard the lifeboat, an action which caused speculation into the twenty-first century.

Searchers found a large amount of wreckage washed ashore near Port Burwell, Ontario, wreckage which included one intact unused lifeboat, and the buoyancy tanks from the second lifeboat. In the spring of 1910, the last lifeboat broken in two was found on the rocks of the Buffalo Harbor breakwater. Besides the nine bodies in the lifeboat number four, only five other bodies were ever found from the Marquette & Bessemer No. 2. Captain Robert McLeod's body contained severe slash wounds which supposedly matched Steward Smith's knives. This discovery caused maritime historian Dwight Boyer to believe that the Bessemer No. 2 suffered a severe list as she sank, making it impossible to use two of the lifeboat. Dwight Boyer believed that Steward Smith blamed the ship's of-ficers for their dire straits and brought two knives to attack the ship's officers.

The steward's knives and the captain's wounds have continued to be discussed and speculated about since the foundering of the Bessemer No. 2.

The Marquette & Bessemer Dock and Navigation Company Acts

Even before some of the bodies from the Bessemer No. 2 had been recovered, The Marquette & Bessemer Dock and Navigation Company replaced the car ferry, using the same plans. They slightly modified the plans by including a stern gate and an enclosed upper bridge but gave their new ship the same name as the foundered Marquette & Bessemer No. 2.

The second Bessemer car ferry entered service on October 6, 1910, ironically the same day that Captain Robert McLeod's body was discovered. The second Bessemer No.2 followed the same route as her predecessor, serving until 1946 when she was sold and converted into a barge and renamed Lillian. She was scrapped in 1997.

The Why and Where of the Foundering of the Marquette Bessemer No. 2

The lack of witnesses to the sinking, survivors, or a wreck for evidence, the cause of the foundering and precise location of the Marquette & Bessemer No. 2 have been mysteries since its sinking. Sightings of the Bessemer and soundings of its whistle were seen and heard on the Canadian and American sides of Lake Erie. Some of the theories about why it sank include the lack of a stern gate on the Bessemer which allowed monster waves to breech the ship from the rear. When that happened the ship would sink either because the battering wave action would eventually cause water to flood the engine compartments extinguishing the boiler fires, thus robbing the ship of all power.

Another scenario involved a single large wave coming aboard the ship containing enough water causing it to capsize and there without a stern gate to stop it. This event had nearly happened to the Marquette & Bessemer No. 2 the month before she finally sank, during a bad November storm. After this near catastrophe, Captain McLeod demanded that a stern gate be installed and the company promised to install it during the winter layup. Other possibilities include the theory that the heavily loaded cards pitched and rolled so violently with the action of the wind and waves that they broke loose from their fastenings and caused the ship to sink below the waves.

Added to the mystery of the why of the foundering of the Bessemer No. 2, is where it rests under the Lake Erie waves. Many different theories about her location have been debated through the years since she sank.

One theory based on the final sightings and the location of the wreckage say that the Besser headed east, trying to reach shelter behind Long Point. They say that the wreck should be either southwest or west of Long Point.
The rumor that the Besseer has been discovered, but its location is being kept secret for security or other reasons has been circulated in diving communities through the years.

Another theory has it that after crossing and recrossing the lake unable to find a safe, accessible harbor, Captain McLeod turned the Marquette & Bessemer away from Port Stanley to the West, headed toward Rondeau Point and Erieau, Ontario. When he reached the lee of Rondeau Point, Captain McCleod turned the ship southward, intending to aim for Cleveland.

Some advocates say that the Bessemer capsized off Rondeau while others counter with the idea that the Captain hugged the lee of Rondeau Point as long as he could, but once beyond the end of the point he headed south where the mounting seas continued to breach the ship. The seas added additional coating and weight of ice, causing the ship to roll, becoming more and more unwieldly and allowing water to invade the open car deck. Somewhere between Rondeau Point and Cleveland, the seas flooded the engine room and put of the fires. The ship lay dead in the water and in the trough of the waves and finally sank.

Other people speculate that the wreck of the Marquette Bessemer No. 2 sank into the muck at the bottom of Lake Erie, the fate of the wreck of the C.B. Lockwood. In the second printing of her book, The Story of Captain Hugh Donald McLeod and His Family, his daughter Donna McLeod Rodebaugh and the niece of Captain Robert McLeod writes about the fate of the Bessemer. She pictures a scenario of the car ferry crossing the lake in good order against the seventy mile and hour winds, but when he neared Port Stanley, the weather conditions prevented the captain from steering his ship into the narrow harbor mouth. Some sources say he made the run back across the lake and encountered the same conditions at Conneaut Harbor.

Conneaut dock workers reported they heard repeated distress signals they thought were the car ferry at 1:30 a.m. the following morning and the master of the steamer Black, lying outside the Conneaut Harbor was quoted as saying he saw the ship pass by in the darkness bound east. If these sources are correct, Captain McLeod did bring his ship back to homeport and even there the fury of the storm prohibited him from gaining entrance.

“Presumably he had tried to anchor and the severity of the storm pressing hard against the high wall-like sides of the car ferry snapped the anchor chains and it was then that the master of the Black saw the No. 2 driving east before the wind- the captain either setting course for Long Point or Erie, Pennsylvania to save his four year old ship.

“It was probably at this point that following waves poured over the stern and broke loose the loaded coal cars. If so, each surge of the vessel would roll the heavy cars forward, then back on their tracks and press the stern lower in the water. The boilers would be flooded and the ship lose headway and the huge ferry would be at the mercy of the waves. Water would sweep into the stern with every wave finally causing the awkward ferry to founder.”

In a 1989 Conneaut News Herald story, Managing Editor Robert Lebzelter.
quotes Donna Rodebaugh sharing her own theory about what happened to her uncle's car ferry. Based on her years of research, she said "My theory is that there is a fault in Springfield Township or at the state line east of Conneaut, not far out. I got a letter last month from a lady who says she listened to that whistle of the car ferry until it went under water. Her father worked at the docks. He knew the whistle and he knew it was in trouble. The lady said she still hears that whistle.:
Donna Rodebaugh further supports her theory that the ship is in a fault by pointing out that after 80 years somebody would have otherwise discovered it.

She was upset by a recent story in an Ohio newspaper that suggested that the steward had murdered Captain McLeod with knives and a meat cleaver. "I found out from the wife of a chef that a chef or a steward never leaves without his own knves and nobody better touch those knives. When they came home in the winter they would take their knives with them. Their wives wouldn't touch them"

On April 26, 2023 Thomas Adams, doctor from Cleveland, presented the story of the Marquette & Bessemer No.2, and his theory about the fate of the ship at his book signing at the Conneaut Public Library. In his book titled Where is the No. 2? The Mystery of the Marquette & Bessemer No. 2, Dr. Adams used a detailed power point consisting of maps, charts, and graphs as well as citing expert opinions to advance his theory about what happened to the Bessemer No. 2.

Based on his extensive research, Dr. Adams believes that on Captain McLeod's final effort to find a safe harbor for the Bessemer No. 2, he may have been close enough to Port Bruce and Port Stanley for the ship's whistle to be heard. The Bessemer may have been trying to find her way in the blinding snowstorm. Captain McLeod did not leave the bridge of his vessel and he did not get into an argument with crew members involving knives. Dr. Adams believes part of the crew had just enough time to launch lifeboat No. 4, with half capacity, no officers, and no warm clothing or supplies.

Dr. Adams writes, "We will never know for sure what transpired those last hours on the lake, but I think the Marquette & Bessemer sank sometime after 5 a.m. Wednesday. She may have sunk as late as Thursday after being trapped in pack ice or disabled, but I think she went down Wednesday. I also think the wreck will be found south of Port Stanley coming up from the southeast somewhere in the arc 10 or 15 miles or so south of the harbor."

Dr. Adams went on to explain his reasoning, supported by maps, charts, weather reports, and relief maps of the currents and weather of 1909 and 2023. His interesting presentation sparked many questions and interactions with the audience of about fifty people who attended the book signing.

Three Car Ferries: Tangled Destinies

The Pere Marquette No. 16, the first steel hulled car ferry on Lake Michigan made her maiden voyage from Ludington, Michigan to Manitowoc, Wisconsin on February 17, 1897. She was transferred to the Marquette Bessemer route from Conneaut, Ohio to Port Dover, Ontario during the 1910 season to replace the sunken Marquette & Bessemer No. 2. Again in 1915, she served out of Conneaut. Laid up at Ludington, Michigan in 1930, she never went back into service. As the Pere Marquette, she struck and sunk a fish tug T.M. Ferry at Pere Marquette Lumber Company dock in Ludington on February 21, 1897. Collided with and sank the scow Silver Lake in the fog, May 28, 1900, about twelve miles off Manitowoc, Wisconsin, with one life lost on the scow. She was scrapped at Manitowoc in the winter of 1935-1936.

The Pennsylvania-Ontario Transportation Company of Cleveland, Ohio first enrolled the Ashtabula Car Ferry at at Detroit, Michigan on June 28,1906. The car ferry ran from Ashtabula, Ohio to Port Burwell, Ontario. She was sunk in a collision with the propeller Ben Moreell on September 18, 1958, about 350 feet off the Ashtabula Harbor entrance without a loss of life.
The McQueen Marine, Ltd., of Amherstburg, Ontario raised her and towed her to her car ferry slip where she was scrapped in the summer of 1959.
An underwriter was killed inspecting her wreck on November 10, 1958, and her Captain Louis Sabo committed suicide before the Coast Guard hearing took place on December 10, 1958.

The Fates of the Marquette & Bessemer No. 2 Crew

Sources about the number and fate of the crewmembers of the Marquette Bessemer No. 2 differ, with number estimates ranging from 30 to 38 men. Fireman Max Sparuh had been badly injured in a fall at Port Stanley before the last car ferry trip and was recuperating in a St. Thomas, Ontario hospital. Porter George L. Lawrence had missed the boat at Port Stanley when the car ferry returned to Conneaut. If the newspaper reports of John Cook and John Olson also not being aboard the final voyage of the Bessemer are correct, they also were not aboard.

Captain: Robert McLeod. Body found October 6, 1910 on Long Point.
He has a tombstone in City Cemetery, Conneaut

First Mate: John McLeod. Brother of Captain McLeod. Body found April 6, 1910 in Niagara River at Niagara.
Second Mate: Frank Stone
Purser: R.C. Smith
Wheelman: William Wilson. Body found October 1910 on Long Point.
Wheelman: John Clancy.
Watchman: F. Annis
Watchman: Fred Walker
Chief Engineer: Eugene Wood. Body found May 2, 1910 near Port Colburn, Ontario
Assistant Engineer: Edward Buchler
Second Assistant Engineer: Thomas Kennedy
Seaman: F. Barrett
Seaman: Ed Harvey
Seaman: P. Hughes
Seaman: D. Ball
Fireman/Seaman: Max Spanruh. In hospital. Did not sail with ship.
Fireman: Tom Steele. Last trip on ship. Found dead in lifeboat #4.
Fireman: Joe Shank. Found dead in lifeboat #4.
Fireman: J. Olson. Did not make trip.
Fireman: W. Wiggleworth.
Fireman: J. Cook. Did not make trip.
Oiler: John “Paddy” Hart. Found dead in lifeboat #4
Oiler: Patrick Kelly. Body recovered.
Oiler: A. Snyder
Oiler/Coal Passer: Charles Allen. Found dead in lifeboat #4
Oiler/seaman: John Wirtz. Making last trip on ship
Coal Passer: William Ray. Found dead in lifeboat #4
Coal Passer; Ray Hines. Found dead in lifeboat #4
Coal Passer: J. Hing
Coal Passer: C. Court
Steward: George R. Smith. Found dead in lifeboat #4. Armed with kitchen knives and meat cleaver.
Second Cook: Harry Thomas. Found dead in lifeboat #4
Waiter: J. Schwartz
Porter: Mauel Souars. Found dead in lifeboat #4
Porter: George L. Lawrence. Missed boat on previous trip

Some sources say there was a single passenger on board, a gentleman named Albert J. Weiss, the treasurer of the Keystone Fish Company of Erie, Pennsylvania who was carrying approximately $50,000 to buy a Canadian company.

FUNERAL SERVICES HELD OVER FIRST VICTIMS FOUND
Conneaut News Herald, December 14, 1909

Day Resembled The Day The Lost Crew Last Saw Their Home City\

Although it is probably a week ago today since the 32 sailors, mostly from Conneaut, met death when the car ferry No. 2 foundered, the first funeral services to be held over the remains of any of the members took place today. The last rites were performed over the body of Emanuel Soares this morning at St. Mary's church and the funeral services over Thomas Steele were held this afternoon at the Methodist church.

The funeral arrangements for the burial of Geo. Smith, Harbor street, the third and last of the nine men found, to be buried here, have not been decided upon. They are awaiting the arrival of a brother from Westminster, Can.

Some maritime sources claim they know the location of the Marquette& Bessemer No. 2 and others assert that its outline is easily spotted when flying over Lake Erie. Still others say that the wreck has long since been discovered, but its finders do not want to disclose its location for various reasons.

In his Conneaut News Herald story of 1989 Bob Lebzelter sums up the status of the Marquette & Bessemer No. 2 in 2023 when he writes: “Eighty years after the tragedy little more light has been shed on its fate then was known that cold Sunday morning when those bodies were found in the lifeboat off Erie.”