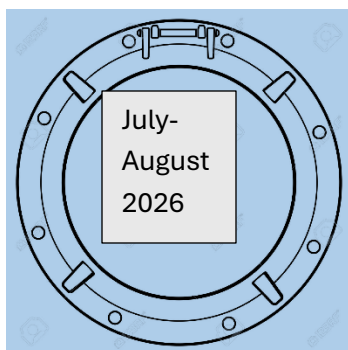




Ports and Port Holes

On the Waterfronts



Enjoying the sunset at Woodland Beach Park with industrial Ashtabula docks in the background.



These cars are aboard the auto carrier Mataafa, Captain Henry Mossman, are bound from Detroit's Chene Street dock to the Nicholson Transit Company's East 54th Street Dock in Cleveland.

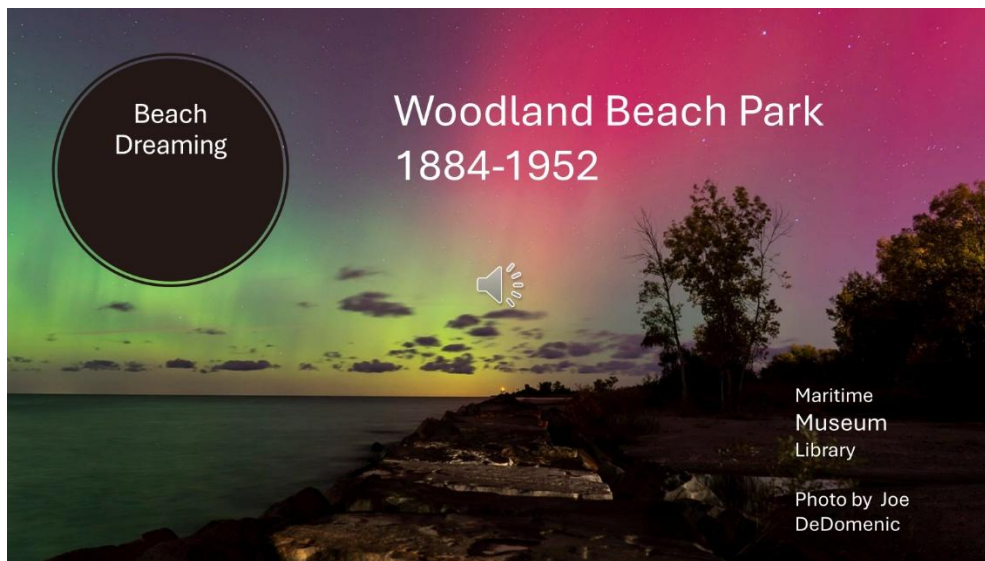
In this issue

Woodland Beach Park, 1884-1952

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Avast! Hold Fast Ye Dogs and Cats



People arrived in steady waves at Woodland Beach Park, just east of Ashtabula from about 1884 until 1952, where they could rent a log cabin, or relax on the beach, watch the iron ore shipping operations while munching popcorn, cotton candy, or enjoying a fish dinner. The more active folks could try out the dance hall floor, or ride the roller coaster, the Cupid boat, or the miniature train.

Trains and Trolleys

The [Ashtabula and Lake Shore Railway](#) owned Woodland Beach Park at the beginning of its lifespan. In the 1900–1906-time frame, the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad oversaw the park, in 1901 investing \$60,000 for improvements, and conducting weekend and holiday trips from Pittsburgh to Woodland Beach Park for the round-trip fare of \$1.75.

In September 1906, the Pennsylvania and Ohio Railroad purchased the Ashtabula and Lake Shore Railroad, including Woodland Beach Park.

"A.B. Phillips, City Clerk of Ashtabula Ohio, writes that the council recently granted a franchise to the East Side Street Railway Co. to build a street railway from the foot of Bridge Street to Woodland Beach Park, a prominent summer resort recently purchased by the Lake Shore Railway officials. The storage battery system will be experimented with on this line."

Woodland Beach Park experienced its glory years between the 1910s and 1920s with trolley cars bursting with people bustling back and forth to and from the park on a strict schedule. People from surrounding counties, cities like Pittsburgh and

Youngstown, and even other states would often plan excursions to Woodland Beach Park.

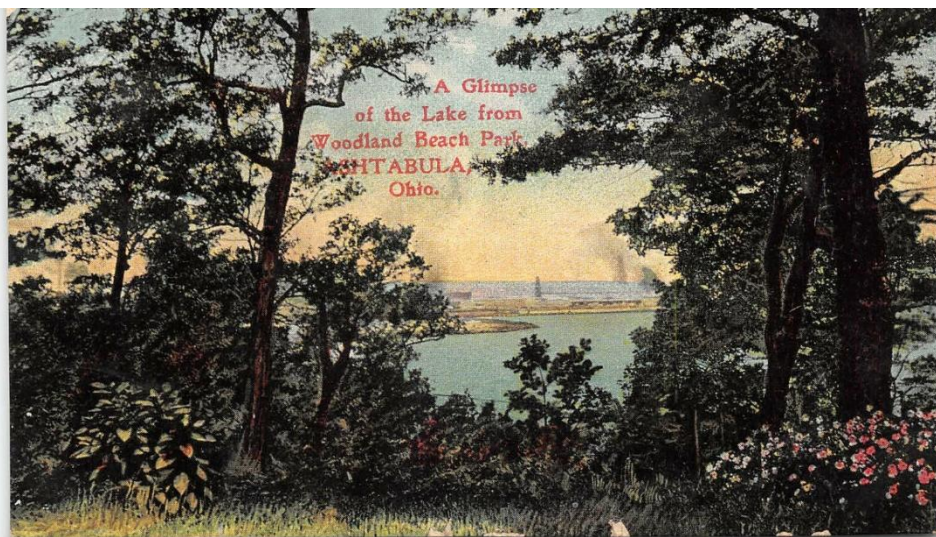
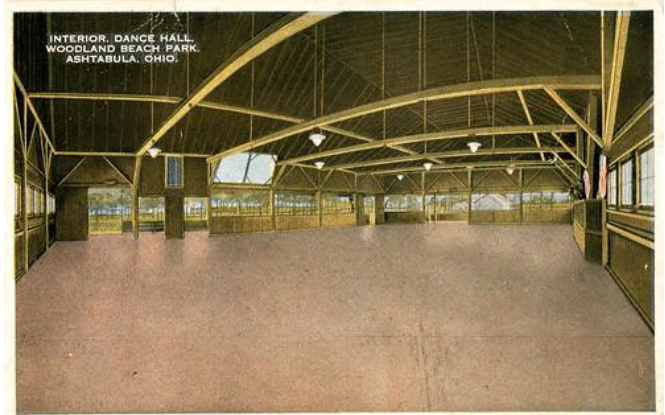
Entertainment opportunities at Woodland Beach Park were as plentiful as Lake Erie waves.



The roller-skating rink enjoyed a reputation as a stellar attraction, along with dance halls, bowling alleys, pool halls, and the midway.

At the Waterfront Pavilion, teenagers could twist and bogie

down on the dance floor during the Summer Sock Hops on warm summer evenings while older folks could swing and sway to live bands. The bottom level of the Pavilion featured changing rooms which were later transformed into storerooms for rental boats. Dancers at the open-air pavilion remembered the combination of humid lake air, wool bathing suits, and the wooden dance floor creating storms of static electricity during the summer dances.



Children with their adults could ride the merry round, and the coal powered train. For more thrilling rides both children and their parents and friends rode the

“Big Eli” model Ferris Wheel. The Big Eli Ferris Wheel and the Figure Eight Roller Coaster, built in 1906, motivated many people to visit the park and return to meet the challenge of more roller coaster and Ferris Wheel rides. Roller Coaster riders remembered that the sounds of its operations mingled with the screams of its riders echoing across the water to Ashtabula Harbor.

For maritime transport, park visitors rode the *Cupid*, a 45-foot gasoline-powered tour boat. Built in Ashtabula in 1911, the Cupid carried passengers on excursions around Ashtabula Harbor, docking directly at the pier.



Visitors seeking more sedate activities could also choose Woodland Beach Park for its scenery, picnic pavilions, relaxation, and front row benches to witness the activity at industrial

Ashtabula Harbor. Clubs like the Rotary Club, civic organizations, church groups, and family reunions kept the facilities at Woodland Beach humming with activity.

Some visitors chose to sit on the benches scattered around the park and experience Lake Erie, people watch, and observe the happenings of Ashtabula Harbor, so close that the clanking of Hulett's and the sounds of the docks carried clearly across the water. Beachgoers vividly remembered sunbathing on the sand while watching massive iron ore shipping and unloading operations at the neighboring harbor.

Many visitors remember the park's unique scent, a mix of sweet cotton candy, lake breeze, and a whiff of coal smoke drifting from the steamships operating in Lake Erie.

Lake Erie Speaks and Acts Again and Again

The fate of the Figure Eight Roller Coaster foretold the fate of Woodland Beach Park. Woodland Beach and its Park spoke with many voices and Lake Erie answered with waves and sand powerful enough to swallow buildings and beaches. Lake Erie eroded the beaches and buildings of Woodland Beach Park and sent powerful storms to claim some of the park's artifacts. Workmen built the wooden Figure Eight Roller Coaster to hug the shifting Lake Erie shoreline, constantly exposing it to high humidity, moisture, and high winds. In the late 1930s, high winds caused the aging wooden Figure Eight Roller Coaster to buckle, and the

roller coasters primary support framework partially collapsed. Large sections of the wooden tracks and scaffolding buckled and splintered, making the ride unsafe and impossible to operate.

The park boat Cupid was eventually sold, left the park, and sank while operating on Lake Erie near Sandusky. Lake Erie continued her perpetual eroding of the shoreline, nibbling away at the park's area. She also continued to produce her perpetual humidity and winds, which caused the wooden buildings and other wooden items to deteriorate over time.

Changing Times also accelerated the demise of Woodland Beach Park and the era of the railroad destination amusement park. Time passed more swiftly than the Woodland Beach Park roller coaster could navigate, and soon the Park entered another era which foretold its eventual demise. Beginning in the 1920s and continuing to the 1950s, railroad ownership and transportation evolved into automobile and modern highways and people enjoying greater flexibility in choosing the time and places of their entertainment. Woodland Beach Park became a cottage and commuter destination, and Ashtabula Harbor's ore, coal, and steel industry continued to grow and would eventually expand to demolish the Woodland Beach Park site.

The Cottage and Commuter Era

As Lake Erie, the park's owners, and changing social times and transportation gradually destroyed Woodland Beach Park, cottages and commuter life enabled its location to survive for at least two more decades until its neighboring Ashtabula Harbor and technology completely transformed it. From the time of the origin of Woodland Beach Park in the mid-1880s, cottages had skirted the park's boundaries, and sometimes even came nearer. During the Depression of the 1930s and the war years of the 1940s, mothers and children lived at Woodland cottages all summer, and fathers commuted daily to cities like Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Erie, or Youngstown. Sometimes economic conditions transformed the cottage into a permanent home.

These early cottage owners remember a central artesian well at the park that served as a community gathering place for people to pump fresh water and share neighborhood gossip. Young people from this era before the break wall built in the 1950s eliminated the natural beach remembered sneaking down to the beach to swim late at night, bathing in the glow of the nearby harbor lights.

(Click this link to the Maritime Museum Library Facebook page to see more Woodland Beach photos).

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61590583619947>

The Coming of Pinney Dock

During the late 1950s, industrial leaders in Ashtabula scrambled to prepare for the looming St. Lawrence Seaway, since the bulk shippers of iron ore, coal and limestone were already using the workable river frontage and mooring space. The obvious solution to the frontage and mooring space issue – building new docks, warehouses, and cargo transfer facilities- would take time and money accomplish. In the meantime, industrialists spend many sleepless nights and desk pounding days. Not Nelson Pinney. According to a story in the Pictorial Magazine of the Cleveland Plain Dealer, titled “Ashtabula’s Visionary “Junkman” by Dwight Boyer dated Sunday May 8, 1955, Ashtabula city fathers came up with a logical solution. They acted on Nelson Pinney’s reputation for getting things done and drafted him to do them, but Nelson Pinney stood on one of his docks waiting for them to arrive!

Nelson Pinney and Pinney Dock



This Dwight Boyer photograph shows Nelson Pinney and his pioneer Pinney Docks

Nelson Pinney and his two docks, just east of the Ashtabula River, May 1955

For years, Nelson Pinney had shaped the personal circumstances and resources at hand into community assets for Ashtabula. He had followed the rise and fall of Woodland Beach Park, and in 1955, industrialist Nelson Pinney and his crew acquired the core amusement park grounds east of the New York Central Railroad

docks. They leveled the remaining park structures to construct Pinney Dock, building a massive industrial complex with two 2,000-foot-long finger piers to handle commercial shipping. Nelson Pinney transformed the former grounds of Woodland Beach Park into one of the largest privately owned deepwater marine terminals on the Great Lakes, with a couple of hundred waterfront acres for future roads, railroad lines, storage, and transfer equipment.

Without tools on steroids or gangs of men, Nelson Pinney has done most of his work with his own men and his own machinery and used materials other people discarded, and best of all at no cost to the taxpayer.

Only two footnotes appeared in the tally of Nelson's positive accomplishments. He was not finished yet, and he had not acted because of the St Lawrence Seaway. He had anticipated the needs that the Seaway created by decades and worked to meet them locally. Nelson Pinney had foreseen that that increased new tonnages of limestone and salt shipped through the Great Lakes, especially Ashtabula, and the Port of Ashtabula, the geographical center of new chemical and other developments.

For a long time, Nelson Pinney had taken jobs that no one else wanted and used materials that people threw away. His record of transforming dirty jobs into results and income stretched back into the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1920s, Nelson helped his uncle build two seawalls at Geneva-on-the-Lake. When he finished the seawalls, he still had equipment and a small workforce, and he decided to make Ashtabula his base of operations.

During the Depression years of the 1930s, he accepted every job that kept his men and machines working and using his skill, experience, and work ethic, he made them profitable. He used his profits to buy a bankrupt construction company in Ashtabula from the Commercial Bank of Ashtabula and eventually became director of the bank.

Working with improved equipment, Nelson Pinney successfully won a bid for grading a site for Electro Metallurgical Company's new plant to produce calcium carbide and various ferro alloys. The newly operating plant awarded Nelson a contract for hauling away and disposing of the plant's hard slag-like waste and about five hundred tons of fly ash each day. He signed a similar contract with Hooker-Detrex, Inc. to remove and dispose of lime residue. He dumped these waste materials into a low marshy area to fill it.

In this Dwight Boyer photograph, Nelson Pinney stands beside a pile of bulk salt, used in great quantities by National Distillery Corporation. which is loaded and trucked from small riverfront docks to the company's plant. New docks will boost tonnage and bring better handling facilities.



Along with his contracts with industry, Nelson Pinney performed a great deal of grading work for the New York Central Railroad System, and when he discovered that many big mills and factories paid for the railroad to haul waste materials away. This hauling proved to be unprofitable for the railroad which could not reconcile the pay with the cost of dumping the waste and cleaning the cars. Astute Nelson Pinney saw possibilities and solved the disposal problem, using electromagnets, he salvaged between 7,000 and 10,000 tons of salable each year from material that had been unthinkingly dumped.

The Ashtabula city fathers and businessmen drafted Nelson to provide port facilities. He knew that Ashtabula lost thousands of tons of freight every year because the city had no dock space, so he forged ahead to provide that space. After consulting with the city fathers and looking around, Nelson discovered that the New York Central Railroad owned the only land suitable for expansion, a ten-acre marsh and bog track close to Lake Erie. Nelson happened to own ten acres of more valuable land that the railroad needed for a new spur line. They made an equitable trade, and Nelson quickly developed his traded tract.

This Dwight Boyer photo shows the waterfront fill area that will be laced with a network of access roads and rail lines, Riverfront iron ore and coal docks are in the background.



Nelson Pinney's heavy trucks hauled the heavy slag and residues of the chemical companies, dumping it into the bog land and using his own grading machinery to push it into place. The fill job progressed

perfectly, adding to his original ten acres. Nelson purchased the adjacent acreage of the old Woodland Beach Park, where earth moving machines toiled away at a protruding knoll. Soon the machines leveled the entire area into a gentle rise, sloping to the waterfront, and two docks began to appear.

Absorbing thousands of tons of the slag waste, the docks quickly grew as a convoy of Pinney trucks made their rounds from plants to the waterfront. One of the docks measured 2,000 feet long and the other expanded daily. Nelson fortified them with steel sheet piling or large concrete blocks which he manufactured to use in his seawall and jetty work.

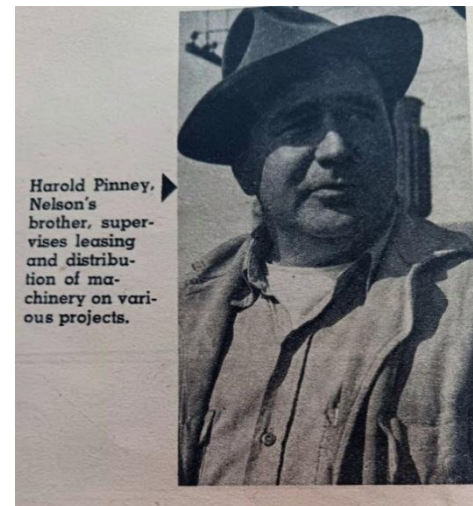
Extending his outreach, Nelson became the president of the Pinney Dock & Transport Company, Inc., the N.J. Pinney Company, and the Pinney Construction Company. Diversifying even more, Nelson drilled a well on the ten acres that he bought from the New York Central Railroad, hoping to find either gas or salt. Instead, he found the well contains a calcium brine, which he marketed as an iron ore antifreeze, dust control product, or weed killer.

Refusing to accept credit for Ashtabula's port development, Nelson insisted that the numerous new chemical companies building near Ashtabula in recent years deserve the credit for creating the demand for the products his dock facilities will handle. He noted that "without the cooperation of these industrial firms and that of many city, county and railroad people, the job would have been impossible. And do not forget my wife, Marguerite, my star bookkeeper from the very beginning.

In the pioneering years of his enterprises, Nelson realized that he could not be a one-man dock creator either physically or financially, so he incorporated. Incorporation gave him complete control of his operations, including his favorite, the port development project, although he did not plan to operate as a dictator. "Our docks although privately owned, will be open to all comers. There will be no preferred customs or monopoly of space by particular industries," he said.

Incorporating also enabled Nelson to add specialists to his work force. The Dwight Boyer photos below show some of his key men. Pictured left to right are engineer Eldon Cronquist, as general manager; Howard Bower with years of experience in the building materials field as superintendent; Olin Smith in sales; and Harold Pinney and Maynard Walker, Nelson's long time supervisory men, running the truck and mechanical operations.

Endless days are standard in Nelson's life. He starts visiting the dock area early and finishes with evening conferences at home, making him a hard pin to locate between 7 a.m. and midnight. He shuttles back and forth between his main office and two part-time offices, checking progress on grading contracts, making equipment usage decisions, holding conferences with his supervisors, and studying reports from his top engineer and superintendent. He answers multiple long-distance calls, and signs piles of business papers while maintaining contact with his trucking customers and patrolling his railroad salvage operations. Bank director's meetings and committee work on the Ashtabula chamber of commerce sometimes affect his lunch hour, but he considers lunch a "minor detail."



Hard manual work occasionally creeps into Nelson's Day as well. Since he began his career with hard manual work, he still will

jump into a balky truck or a bogged-down bulldozer. One truck driver observed that, "the nice thing about working for Nelson is that he knows your job as well as you do."

Nelson estimated that one of his docks would be ready by July 25, and the other sometime in September. He had already signed a contract to dredge the slips to a depth of twenty-seven feet and encouraged the government to appropriate funds to dredge a turning basin and channel to the harbor entrance.

Nelson Pinney reached these goals and more. He thought and acted ahead of and beyond the St. Lawrence Seaway to his twenty-first successor Kinder-Morgan and he would have welcomed the succeeding company with a handshake and a promise of new and better business opportunities.

From Shipwrecked to Shuttling Cars



Larry Hawkins and Edward J. Solotko took the photos for this Cleveland Plain Dealer Pictorial Magazine story dated July 24, 1949. The caption reads “The sun is a red ball of fire behind the stack of the auto carrier, Mataafa, bound from Detroit to Cleveland. This photo was taken about thirty miles west of Cleveland

and it is no accident that the sun is behind the stack- Captain Emory Mossman maneuvered his ship to place it there.



In this month July, day July 24, and year, 1949, the Mataafa spent her evening moored alongside one of Detroit's automobile lading docks to load her daily cargo of approximately 400 cars. Every morning she unloaded them at the Nicholson Transit Company's E.54th Street pier in Cleveland. The load coming down just about compensates for bucking the swift current in the Detroit River going up, and

the trip takes exactly nine hours going and coming. At this point in her life, the Mataafa ran down days and returned nights, and she wasn't loaded until noon.

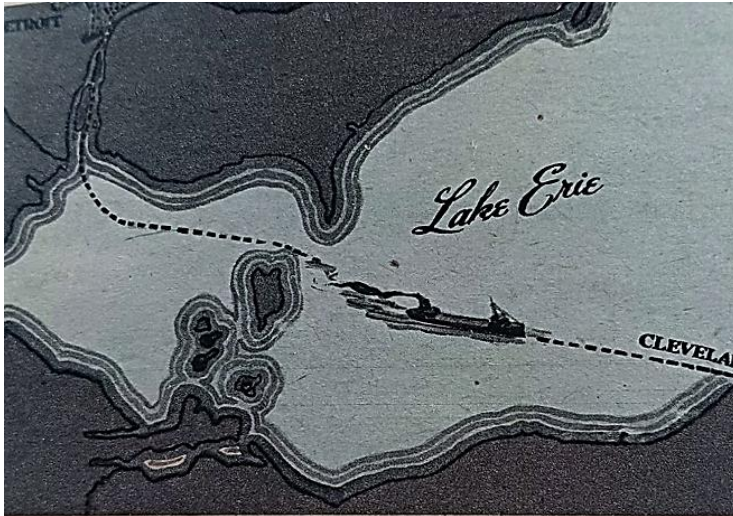
The Mataafa taking on cargo at Chene Street dock in Detroit.



Looking aft as the Mataafa steams down the Detroit River with 407 new automobiles aboard, worth about three quarters of a million dollars. The Ambassador Bridge and the Detroit skyline is in the background.

The Mataafa's schedule allows only three hours for loading and three for unloading, and if there is any delay like another boat being in the dock ahead of her, the Mataafa gets off schedule. Today, July 24, 1949, the Mataafa got off schedule, enabling photographer

Ed Solotka to take pictures of people, places, and happenings on the trip as he and Larry Hawkins sat in the wheelhouse passing time about the time the ship passed Long Point.



Chief Mate John Galton who was on watch paced the narrow confines of the wheelhouse like a caged cat. "I'll bet I can draw a picture of every damned rock along the Livingston Channel," he complained. But he diligently consulted the chart, sighting every landmark and buoy along the route, writing

the exact time in the log.

Captain Emory Mossman, who had been a shipmaster for 26 years, remarked that any job can get to be routine and one run on the lake is as good as another.



++
Captain Emory Mossman (left) presents a crews gilt bag to cook Carl Berg, now back in Norway on leave. Carl's cooking made Mataafa a "happy ship". Seated are Chief Mate John Galton and Second Mate Rudolph Noga.

This is expected to be the biggest season ever for water shipment of automobiles. Don Galvin of the Nicholson Lines, estimates that 80,000 cars will be delivered here during the season.

The McCarthy Steamship Company also operates an auto carrier into Cleveland. Cars arriving here by boat are trucked all over eastern Ohio and adjoining states in the East.



Not Always a “Happy Ship”



The Mataafa began her career as the steam-powered bulk carrier SS Pennsylvania, built by the American Shipbuilding Company in Cleveland in 1899. The Minnesota Steamship Company purchased her that same year and renamed her Mataafa in honor of Mata'afa Iosefo, a prominent Samoan leader and high chief who fought in the First Samoan Civil War. Mataafa occupied a prominent place in international news

at the turn of the Twentieth Century.

The Mataafa carried iron ore across the Great Lakes without serious incidents until November 27-28, 1905, when a massive storm with eighty mile an hour winds and heavy snow swept across the Great Lakes. On November 27, the 430-foot Mataafa, with a full load of iron ore and towing the James Nasmyth, a barge, departed Duluth, Minnesota headed toward Lake Erie ports. Records show that the Mataafa frequently stopped at both Ashtabula and Conneaut harbors, so it is likely that it was bound for one of those ports. Captain Richard F. Humble guided his crew and performed his routine duties. Then, about twelve hours into the voyage, a massive

blizzard shook the Mataafa, packing seventy or eighty mile an hour winds, (depending on the citation) and mountainous high waves. Since the storm raged so fiercely, Captain Humbled decided to turn the Mataafa back toward the Duluth Ship Canal.



The force of the hurricane winds and blinding snow tossed the Mataafa like a cork, and Captain Humble and his crew lost control of the ship, which slammed into the harbor piers and gradually split apart just outside of the channel. Many of the

crew were saved but nine men trapped in the freezing aft section either froze to death or drowned before they could be rescued.

Mariners and ship owners across the Great Lakes tallied the storm numbers. Its winds and snow had damaged or destroyed at least twenty-eight vessels, claimed the lives of 36 sailors, and caused over \$3.5 million dollars in shipping losses based on 1905 dollars. The Mataafa earned the tragic honor of being one of the major storm casualties, so mariners named the storm “the Mataafa Storm.”

Despite breaking in two by the force of the “Mataafa Storm,” in the spring of 1906, Captain n James Reid of Sarnia, Ontario, and his salvage company salvaged the broken Mataafa by plugging the hull breaches, patching the ruptured amidships section and pumping out thousands of gallons of icy Lake Superior water.

For the next forty years, the Mataafa carried ore across the Great Lakes until in 1946, The Nicholson Terminal & Dock Company in River Rouge, Michigan converted her into an automobile carrier. For the next 19 years she transported automobiles on the Detroit to Buffalo route.

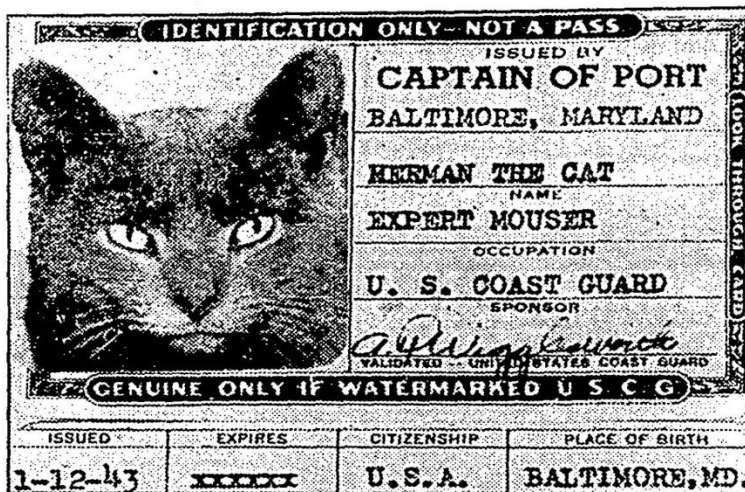
Marine Salvage, Ltd. Purchased the Mataafa in 1965, and she marked her final voyage by successfully navigating the Welland Canal under her own power. She then sailed across the Atlantic to Hamburg, Germany, where she arrived on July 19, 1965. Shipbreakers successfully dismantled her, something the Mataafa storm could not accomplish.

Avast, (Hold Fast) Ye Dogs and Cats!



Cats and ships and their crews have sailed together since the mists of antiquity and through centuries of maritime seasons have forged unbreakable relationships. Ashtabula and other Great Lakes ports enjoyed a “Ship’s Cat” Tradition during the late 19th and early 20th centuries when great lakes shipping shaped the landscape and social customs. Almost every freighter, lake carrier, and Coast Guard ship that rode the waves and dropped an anchor carried an unofficial or official ship’s cat.

Practically speaking, the huge iron ore and coal vessels were floating restaurants for rats, who destroyed food supplies and chewed lines. Cats served as inexpensive, independent rat traps, and were cuddly and affectionate as well. Even more important, people in ancient and modern times believed that cats possess magical powers, especially superstitious sailors who swore that cats controlled the weather and brought good luck to their ships. Sometimes fishermen’s wives would keep black cats at home hoping that the cats would use their influence to protect their husbands at sea. The good luck cat superstitions also carried over to dockside culture when ships from major lines like the Cleveland-Cliffs or the Pittsburgh



Steamship Company docks and ore and coal transport systems moored with cats.

At some points in feline-human relationships, the humans issued the felines passports to ensure their safety during international travels and recognize the contributions they made both on ships and dockside.

Until about the mid-Twentieth Century, cats were valued members of ship crews, but as the maritime industry changed, the role of cats on ships diminished from guides and guardians to mostly mascots.

Prophetic feline and feline war stories abound on the Internet, and two of them in particular, have interesting overtones of myth and legend more lasting than provable facts. One is a cat war story and the other a cat survival story.

The USS Ashtabula, a Navy fleet oiler named after the Ashtabula River, operated in the Pacific Theater during World War II. According to Naval tradition, fleet oilers routinely kept cats who served as official mascots and boosted morale during long, hard, tiresome, and often dangerous deployments. In August 1945, the USS Bristol collided with the USS Ashtabula and during the repairs sailors from both ships fiercely guarded their cats to prevent them from jumping ship, which they believed was a sign of extremely bad luck.

The second story has survived in legend, articles, and Facebook posts since April 10, 1912, in several different versions. It is backed up by eyewitness accounts from a Titanic survivor and by newsreels, pictures, and a segment from the television History Channel program. Jenny the Titanic cat did exist, but the details of her story vary.

One version is that on April 10, 1912, a tortoiseshell cat named Jenny tended her four kittens in the forward provisions hold in a nest of worn sailcloth. She had come aboard during the ship's fitting out and galley personnel fed her scraps in return for keeping the lower decks rat free. According to the unwritten law of the sea, Jenny was a crewmember. The ship, the Titanic, was docked in Southampton, preparing for a trip across the Atlantic Ocean to New York.

This morning when the Titanic was scheduled to begin her maiden voyage, one by one, Jenny picked up kittens, carried them down the gangway, past dozens of crew members heading in the opposite direction, and set each one of them down behind a stack of cargo crates on the dock. A senior steward bent to pick her up and carry her back aboard. She looked at him calmly. He walked back aboard alone.

Another man, a stoker, stood on the gangway for a long time, watching Jenny settle by the crates and lick her kittens clean. The stoker, one of the crew whose job it was to shovel coal into the ship's boilers in twelve-hour shifts, had signed his crew articles just four days earlier. He had his advance pay in his pocket and a bunkmate waiting for him below. He put down his duffel bag and walked onto the dock, sitting on a wooden bollard six feet from Jenny. He stayed there. His bunkmate found him twenty minutes later and advised him that he would lose his berth, his pay, his reputation on the White Star Lines. The stoker looked at the cats and then

he looked at his friend. The stoker did not move from his seat. His friend went back aboard without looking back.

The Titanic cast off at noon and steamed for Cherbourg, Queenstown, and then the open Atlantic. She glided at 22 knots through a clear, starless night when on April 14, at 11:40 p.m. she struck an iceberg. Two hours and forty minutes later, she plunged to the bottom of the ocean, with only 20 percent of the men operating the engines, boilers, and pumps surviving. This means that out of the approximately 325 men in "The Black Gang," over 250 perished.

On the morning of April 15, the stoker sat in his landlady's kitchen, holding a cold cup of tea, with a tortoiseshell cat curled on his lap and four kittens piled against his leg. For the rest of the day, he heard news of the casualties over the telegraph and radio from Southampton, a city who had sent over seven hundred of its sons sailing on the Titanic.

The stoker did not trust the sea again. He took shore work. He married and had two children; a daughter named Jenny and a son named after his bunkmate who had reboarded the Titanic and not returned home. He told his story every year, once on April 10th, the sailing day, and again on April 15th, the sinking day.

Jenny the cat lived nine years after she had not reboarded the Titanic. The landlady buried her in the back garden under a patch of nasturtiums in Southampton, the city she had chosen to live in instead of sailing on the Titanic.

J



(This story was submitted by Ray Burlingham, and is a clipping from A.

Lindgren's scrap book. It is datelined Conneaut Harbor, Ohio, April 16, 1940.

This story should nudge the memories of some of our old-timers. Here it is. (A little detective work 83

years later uncovered a picture of “Jack” and her story in the Painesville Telegraph, dated April 17, 1940.)

This is the story of a lonely dog. This story, a life drama of hope and courage, takes place at Conneaut Harbor on one of the world’s busiest ore docks. It begins last Independence Day when the Steamer Norway was alongside the harbor dock.

Aboard the ship was a sleek female police dog with a sharp muzzle and pointed ears. Her proud master was the second cook, a man named Berger Thorsen, of Ashtabula. The way to a dog’s heart is its stomach, and a ship’s galley can be a canine paradise. Berger, therefore, was tops! On July 4, Berger left the boat leaving his dog behind in the cabin.

The sailor never returned. That night during a heavy storm, he accidentally plunged into the harbor channel and drowned. Without her master, the dog made one more trip up the lakes. She protested Berger’s absence so vigorously that the crew put her off on the next arrival at Conneaut Harbor. The dolorous animal remained on Dock Four as the weeks passed. Almost daily she would ascend the ore piles, hunch down, and peer steadfastly at the water, her head between her forefeet.

She attracted the attention of Dockmen and Bessemer and Lake Erie Switchmen. Justus Hankson was one of the first to “adopt” her and for the sake of a name, called her “Jack.” But Jack was reluctant to make new friends. She was extremely timid and would flee behind the ore piles if anyone moved in her direction. Dockworkers at mealtime came to place scraps of food near the piles and after they had gone, Jack would come to eat.

The days grew bleak, the wind howled, the storms came, but Jack stayed. She found a sheltered spot in one of the piles and maintained her constant surveillance. Her hair grew long and shaggy and her feet and body turned the color of ore.

One day an accident befell Jack. She lost her footing and became pinned between an ore pile and the tie wall. Her plight was discovered and she was lassoed with a rope and hauled out. The rescuers were George M. Hill, and electrician, Harold Starkey, bridge oiler, and William Kitinoja, watchman.

To this day the dog has refused companionship, keeping a daily vigil of the water.

Always agile and alert, she will come within a few feet of some of the men, especially if she is offered food. Jaime Rankinen, operator of the haulage house, and Alex Kantola, night foreman, managed to have her come within range of a camera the other day. The entreat, however, was a big chunk of bread.

“She’s a friend of everyone on the docks,” Mr. Rankinen explained. “And we all think she will become reconciled to the fact her master is gone and let us be her friends.” But the dog lives in fervent hope her master will return.

(Dock Talk, February 1969)

A little more detective work indicates that Berger Thorsen arrived in New York Harbor on the ship Cymric from Norway on May 4, 1903. He was naturalized in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in April 1921. His naturalization record shows that he was born on February 5, 1880, in Norway.

The records show that Berger Torsen (Thorsen) worked on several ships after he arrived in the United States. Berger’s 1917 World War I draft registration describes his physical characteristics as a medium build, short, with light brown hair and brown eyes. He lived with his brother Jens on Ninth Avenue in Milwaukee at the time that he registered for the draft and he worked as a steward for the Interlake Steamship Company. The 1930 census reveals that Berger still lived in Wisconsin, this time in West Allis, and he listed his occupation as a steward on a retail freighter.

Berger Thorsen is buried in East Conneaut Cemetery, and compassion hopes that his faithful dog “Jack” was eventually buried with him.

Editor’s Note: I hope you have enjoyed these stories and look forward to reading more in the next issue which will be September/October 2026. If you would like to subscribe to Ports and Port Holes, email the editor at: kathywarnes@gmail.com.



Titanic “Black Gang”