

# **Downriver Back in the Days**

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## Chapter 21 – The Native American Downriver



### Council Fires along the Ecorse River

Before the ancient Egyptians built their pyramids, before the ancient Britons built Stonehenge, native American tribes had established villages and towns Downriver from Detroit. Evidence indicates that the Native American people who came to be known as the Wyandot migrated from what is now the southern United States. Language provides one clue. The Wyandot spoke the same language as the Cherokee and anthropologists believe that they were one people. Burial grounds in Gibraltar show that the Wyandot tribe is 1,500 years old and arrowheads and other small artifacts from the Wyandot can be found Downriver.

At one stage of their history, the Wyandot extended south into Ohio, as far west as Wisconsin and north to Hudson Bay. They had settled throughout Ontario at one time, until a war with

eastern tribes and a malaria epidemic in the mid-1600s forced them west. The Native American tribes along the Detroit River and its tributaries, including Ecorse Creek, lived in the area 7,000 years compared to the mere 300 of Detroit and the white man. Kay McGowan, chairwoman of Native American studies at Marygrove College in Detroit confirms that artifacts found at sites throughout the Downriver area show signs of habitations going back to over 7,000 years. These early Native Americans considered Springwells, located near historic Fort Wayne, a sacred place of pilgrimage. Indians from all over the eastern half of the United States came there because of the underground springs. Eventually, they founded a village called Tonguish at the site of present day River Rouge and Ecorse. The modern city of Wyandotte actually was a major Wyandot village called Monguaga which later came to be called Monguagon Village.

For centuries Gibraltar, one of Downriver's smaller communities, was one of the most important and sacred sites to the Wyandot and Native Americans for hundreds of miles. Tribes came from every point of the compass through the Great Lakes to meet at Gibraltar or Tohroontoh, which means "the big rock" in Iroquois. Some of the greatest councils of native peoples in the history of this part of North America occurred in Gibraltar. The Cherokee came, the Cree, the Micmac from Canada, and the Erie. The Susquehanna arrived from the east. The Chickasaws and Choctaws journeyed from way up the Mississippi River.

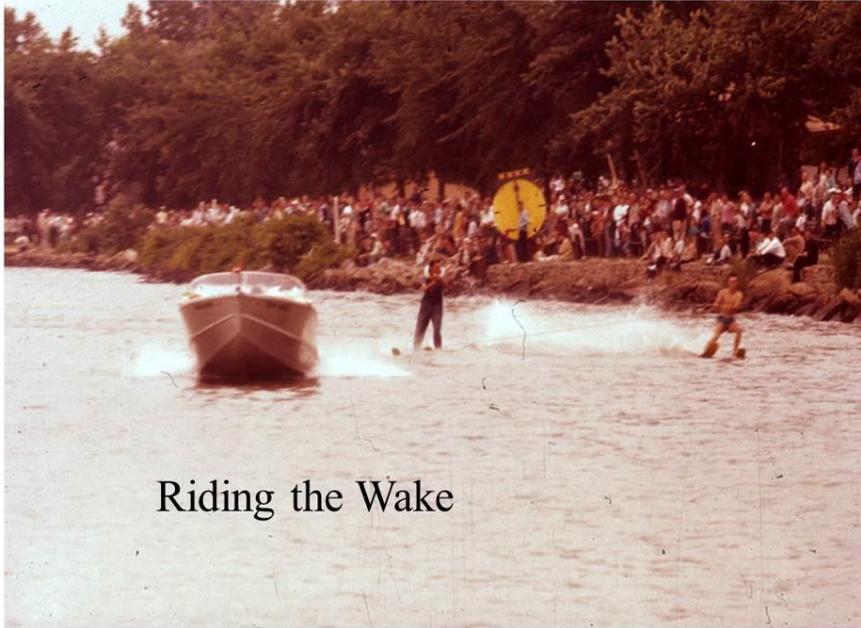
The council was by invitation only and the price of admission was a string of wampum. This wampum wasn't Indian money, but sacred beads made from seashells from the East Coast. "What the native people would do is take the shell and soak it in fermented peach juice for two or three weeks until it got real soft," according to Professor Kay McGowan. "They would come up the Mississippi River, carry their canoes across land, put them back in the water whenever they could, and head north. And they knew when they saw that huge boulder in the river that's where they pulled in for council."

There were many other tribes in the area, according to Professor McGowan. She said that there were Sauk and Fox, Miami, Weas, Mascoutens, Erie, Menominee, the Chippewa and the Ottawa along with the Wyandot. The closest neighbors and friends so the Wyandot were the Potawatami who had a village right next to the Monguaga called Robiche. The Wyandot grew corn and the Potawatami built canoes. In Wyandot society only members of the sea snake clan could build canoes and they built the huge ocean going and Great Lakes canoes. When they Wyandot wanted smaller canoes they would trade corn to the Potawatami for them. According to Professor McGowan, the Wyandot and Potawatami intermarried frequently. Their villages were very close together along the Detroit and Ecorse Rivers. The Native Americans loved the Detroit and Ecorse Rivers. They lived on the rivers, fished the rivers and raised their families in villages on the rivers. Fishing was more important to the Wyandot than hunting. Along with the giant sturgeon they fished for lake trout, walleye, and freshwater cod or "burbot" as they called it.

The children drank the cod liver oil every day because they knew it made them healthy, Professor McGowan said. The Rouge River, the Ecorse River, the Huron River and the River Raisin all had villages. Even the smaller creeks were used. The Indians would put fish fences across the creeks to gather fish.

Professor McGowan said that there were hunting blinds near the river that have been there for 400-500 years and the same families have used them for generations. She said that when the United States government tried to relocate the Wyandot to Kansas in 1843, some hid out on islands in the Detroit River and in hunting blinds along the river banks. They managed to remain in their ancestral homes while other tribes were moved West.





## Fur trading on the Detroit River

French voyageurs paddled down the river that they called “De Troit,” meaning the strait or the narrows. The French voyageurs who dipped their paddles smoothly in and out of its blue sunlit waters were the first non-natives to navigate the Detroit River and land on Detroit shores.

### **The Iroquois and the Dutch are Allies**

The French came to trade furs and explore, but others had more sinister reasons to explore the Detroit River. The river and its adjacent lands crossed the warpath of the Iroquois, fierce warriors from the east. By the 1600s, the Iroquois had allied with the Dutch who had founded New Amsterdam. The Dutch bought furs from the Iroquois and shipped the furs on sailing ships to Europe to be used for hats, cloaks, and ornaments. The beaver in what is now New York had been nearly all trapped by the middle of the Seventeenth Century, and the Iroquois ranged westward. They wiped out most of the Huron who shared their land with the Algonquin tribes called the Ottawa and Chippewa.

The English arrived in New York, supplanting the Dutch, but maintaining the Dutch friendships with the Iroquois and giving them access to Lake Erie and the other Great Lakes. The French had established themselves in Montreal and the French voyageurs explored the vast forests to the west of the newly founded cities in Quebec.

## **Father de Casson Lands on the Detroit River**

Traveling in Indian fashion, the voyageurs proclaimed their joy of life and the wilderness in exuberant songs as they paddled their way to the trading posts and towns. They could only transport furs and trading goods by water because there were no roads for horses and wagons. Father Dollier de Casson, the first priest to stand on the Michigan shore of the Detroit River, was a French nobleman who after a notable military career became a priest and explorer. In 1670, he landed on the left bank of the River in what is now Detroit, somewhere between the mouth of the Rouge River and Fort Wayne. Father de Casson planted a large wooden cross covered with the French coat of arms on the site, prophetically demolishing a stone figure that the Indians worshipped. Then he continued on to Sault Ste. Marie, to serve a mission there.

## **The French and English Vie for Control of the Fur Trade**

The French and the fur trade produced the first sailing ship on the Upper Great Lakes as well. The *Griffon* left Niagara in 1679, with Robert Cavelier LaSalle and a French and Native American contingent on board, including Father Louis Hennepin. La Salle hoped to use his advantage of being the first ship to travel the Detroit River to win a fur trade monopoly. The French and English along with a few soldiers and land seekers from the Thirteen Seaboard colonies began to congregate in Detroit. By the end of the Seventeenth Century the French and English were jostling each other for control of the fur trade and the allegiance of the Indians. The Iroquois, still aligned with the English, had invaded French territory and the commander of the French fort at Michilimackinac vowed to protect French interests in Michigan. In Albany, the English offered better prices for pelts and enjoyed a shipping advantage because of their access to New York harbor through the Hudson River.

The French had only the St. Lawrence River to gain their shipping ports and the St. Lawrence season was so short that the French ships could make only a yearly voyage from Montreal up the Ottawa River across Lake Nipissing and the Georgian Bay and into the Great Lakes. The Ottawa River route to Detroit began in Montreal, passed over about thirty portages, and came down through Georgian Bay through Lake Huron to Detroit. The Niagara route over Lakes Ontario and Erie was shorter and contained one portage at Niagara Falls.

## **Clarence Burton Collects Fur Trading Contracts**

Capitalistic fur traders in Montreal fitted out canoe loads of merchandise and sent them to the upper country under the care of a trustworthy voyageur, or if the load warranted, an expedition of voyageurs. After the canoe or canoes were loaded, agreements or contracts were negotiated with the required number of men to make the voyage. All of these agreements and contracts were written and notarized in Montreal. The men who could write signed their names to the agreements, and if they were illiterate, that fact was noted in the contract. The notaries kept these contracts which provide valuable primary sources of early fur trading transactions.

Detroit historian Clarence Burton collected what he estimated to be thousands of contracts and agreements, dating from 1680-1760, containing the names of the early voyageurs, where they lived, their occupations, dates of their visits to the western country, and times and terms of

employment. Frequently these contracts show the values of services and commodities and the volume of the trade.

### **The North West Company and the Ottawa Route**

In 1798, the North West or Canada Company controlled most of the fur trade between Montreal and Lake Superior. The North West Company had been organized in the winter of 1783-1784, but had never become an incorporated company like its chief rivals, the Hudson's Bay Company and the American Fur Company. The North West resembled a modern holding company, consisting chiefly of Montreal firms and partnerships in the fur trade. The North West Company began during the American Revolution and in 1811 it temporarily merged with the American Fur Company. In 1816, it established its posts over much of Canada and the northern United States. Its main line of communication was the difficult canoe route from Montreal up the Ottawa River, and through Lake Huron and Lake Superior to its chief inland depot, Grand Portage before 1804 and Fort William after 1804.

In 1821, the North West Company merged with the Hudson's Bay Company. All too soon, the day of the free trader depending on his own resources had virtually passed into history. Only a few fur traders filed applications at Mackinaw to be free traders. The North West Company included all Indian trappers and traders and was practically free from serious competition at this time.

Dr. Charles L. Cording described a trip with the voyageurs in about the year 1800, using the Ottawa Route. The journey began about nine miles outside of Montreal on the St. Lawrence at La Chine. A guide responsible for all pillage and loss and having sole control of the fleet directed a birch bark brigade of three or more canoes. All of the men and their wages were answerable to him and he decided the times and places of the arrivals and departures of the fleet. When fur trader Antoine de Mothe Cadillac journeyed from Canada to establish the French Fort at Detroit, he followed the Ottawa Route.

### **Great Lakes Fur Trader Pierre Leblanc and His Conflicting Worlds**

For two centuries, British and French fur traders vie for territory and influence with Great Lakes Native Americans, clashing and combining cultures. When the first French fur trading voyageurs exchanged greetings and goods with welcoming Native Americans they changed history, as did the first English trader who stood in the door of his rough, wooden cabin and held out trinkets to the Indians. As historian Richard White phrased it: "...When they (the Algonquian Indians) accepted European goods and gave furs in return, a still emerging market system in Europe impinged on their lives..."

### **British and French Fur Traders Compete for Indian Allies**

White argued that the Algonquian Indians in the Detroit and Great Lakes region obtained religious, political, and social benefits from European goods even though they as individuals did not accumulate wealth. He pointed out that the nature of the French fur trade also differed from that of the British. According to White, the French fur trade was a combination of entrepreneurial traders, merchant financiers, licensed monopolists, and government regulators,

and the French instituted the custom of relying on the Huron or Wyandot and Ottawa Indians to act as middlemen and expeditors of the trade.

The British, playing a commercial hand, shaped the fur trade as a weapon of war in the fierce struggle for dominance of the North American Continent. They cleverly played their commercial cards in the Detroit and continental fur trade by portraying themselves not as conquerors but as friends bringing gifts and trade goods. They usually offered better terms than the French and high quality goods at low prices, and basically won the commercial war before the advent of the military war.

In the meantime, the Native Americans were the middlemen and in a good negotiating position with most of their cultures still intact. In 1755, many Frenchmen felt that the fur trade of the Great Lakes did not earn even one percent of the price it had cost the King, and they would have allowed the entire trade to go to the English if the English had agreed to acknowledge French boundaries along the Ohio River. Both sides were courting the Indians with goods and promises and the Algonquians reaped the benefits of both while their preexisting native technologies survived for a long time alongside the new technologies that trade goods introduced.

### **Pierre LeBlanc, Fur Trader**

Individual fur traders like Pierre LeBlanc were as instrumental as Native Americans in establishing fur trading regions and without premeditation, transforming the cultures of both French and Indian worlds. Leblanc, who would later settle in Ecorse, a small settlement about eight miles from Detroit, was one of the first French men to travel to the area, arriving in 1790 for the Hudson Bay Company. Fur trading comprised most of the business in this western country at this time and created Native American, French, and British capitalists. Hunting fur bearing animals like beaver and muskrat, preparing their furs for market and transporting them to Montreal provided much of the impetus for exploration and settlement along the Detroit and Ecorse Rivers. Trade was carried on between Montreal and the upper country by canoes and bateaux. Canoes loaded at Montreal were brought to Detroit either over the Ottawa River coming down through Georgian Bay or through the Niagara route over Lakes Ontario and Erie. The Niagara Route was easier because it had one portage at Niagara Falls while the Ottawa route had at least 30 portages.

### **Pierre LeBlanc Blends Cultures**

Since French and other white women were scarce in this frontier settlement, Pierre married a Fox Indian woman and established a homestead farm on what is now West Jefferson Avenue near the Detroit River. When a French trapper took an Indian wife, his marriage helped him survive Native American attacks or other trouble with the warriors still numerous in the Downriver area.

The LeBlancs established themselves as sturdy farmers and trappers, trading with the Indians and maintaining a good relationship with them. Pierre and his Indian wife had a son whom they named Pierre, who was born in 1820 in a log house on the old family farm. This log house served as a place of worship for the early Catholics and for many years Mass was said within its rustic walls. Early in his life, the second Pierre revealed his sturdy French stock and Indian blood. He was a constable when he was only twenty years old and for many years he was a highway commissioner, laying out many of the first roads in the southeastern part of Michigan.

### **Pierre Le Blanc Pays his Taxes**

In 1850, the LeBlancs built a new house to replace the old log cabin and Pierre's son, Frank Xavier LeBlanc, was born in that house. Through his years of growing up on the LeBlanc farm near the Detroit River, Frank X. collected many souvenirs of his family's early days in Ecorse and Downriver.

Peter Godfroy, a merchant, survived the Indian massacre at Frenchtown in Monroe in which the entire garrison and all the settlers within the fort except him were tomahawked. He gave Frank X. LeBlanc's grandfather Pierre a receipt for goods that he had purchased and although yellowed and faded it was still legible. Another of his valuable possessions was a tax statement that the sheriff of Wayne County had sent Pierre LeBlanc in July 1824. The statement requested that LeBlanc pay the \$2.03 he owed in taxes!

Individual fur traders like Pierre LeBlanc brought about a blending or exchanging of Native American and white culture and the transformation of both.

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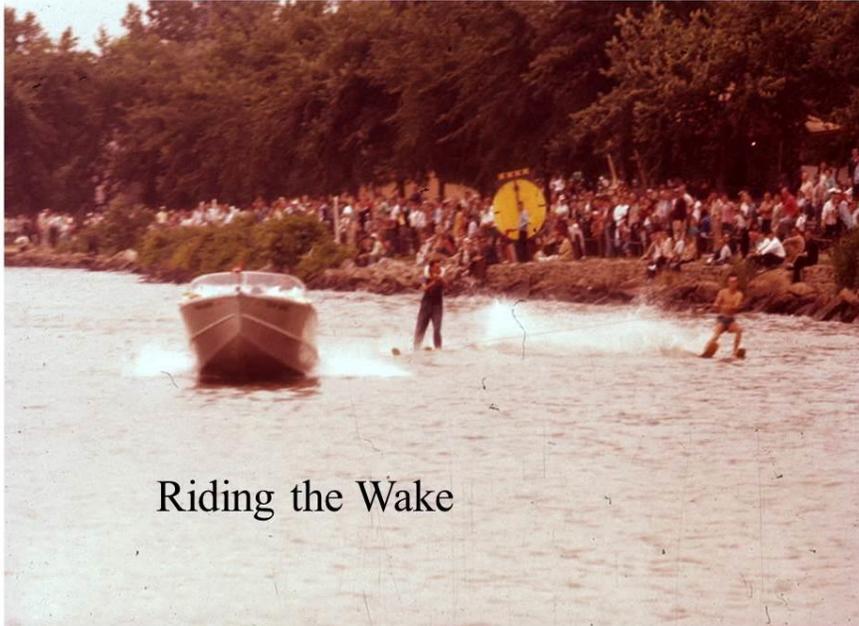
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"Oneida Sally" - Trader, Land Owner, Diplomat

Sally Ainese used her intelligence, talent, and wit to survive and prosper in both the Native American and white worlds of Michilimackinac, Detroit, and along the Huron River.

Sally Hance Montour Maxwell Ainese, an Oneida Indian woman from Pennsylvania, became a famous fur trader, store keeper, land owner and diplomat before the United States turned 50 years old. She was born on the Susquehanna River in 1728 before America was a country. She died in 1823 when she was 95 years old, well before the Constitution Act of 1867 transformed Canada into a Dominion

### **Oneida Tribe Was a Member of the Iroquois Confederacy**

Although she once claimed to be Shawnee, Sally is believed to be Oneida and the Oneidas regarded her as one of their own people. Sally's Oneida tribe was one of the original members of the Iroquois Confederacy. Like the other Confederacy tribes, the Oneidas had a political and social structure that Sally would use to her advantage and to the advantage of her people. Some sources claim that her surname was Hance, because this was a common name in the tribes in the Iroquois Confederacy. The Oneida people lived in villages composed of longhouses. Eventually, Sally lived in a house or "mansion", as she put it, on land that she had purchased herself. Oneida men dominated hunting, trading, and war and Oneida women were in charge of farming, property, and family.

Sally hunted, traded and negotiated between parties in war. Sally developed her leadership skills from within because women always ruled Oneida clans and they made all the land and resource decisions. Men negotiated the trade agreements and chiefs made the military decisions. Sally developed skills in trading and negotiating with military powers as well.

## **Sally Returns to Her Oneida People**

In 1745, when she was just 17, Sally married Andrew Montour, an Indian trader and interpreter for the British and they lived in what are now Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York. Andrew was the son of Roland Montour and an Iroquois woman born in a Seneca village in New York and he came from a family of interpreters

There is a conflict of sources about her personal life that unfortunately, only Sally can settle. Some sources say that she and Andrew Montour had several children. Others say that they had just one, a son named Nicholas, who was baptized in Albany, New York, on October 31, 1756. The same conflicting stories swirl around the breakup of their marriage, with some sources contending that she left him and others stating that he returned her and their son Nicholas to her Oneida people.

Whatever the circumstances of their breakup, Andrew Montour became mired in debt and nearly went to prison in the early 1750s. The family split up in 1755 or 1756, and most of the children went to live in Philadelphia. Nicholas must have been a baby when this happened, if he was born in 1756.

Sally and her son Nicholas went to live on the Mohawk River in New York State and by 1759, she was an active trader. Her contemporaries still called her Sally or Sarah Montour and her Oneida people gave her a deed to lands in the Fort Stanwix area, now known as Rome, New York.

## **A Consummate Trader**

Between 1759 and 1766, Sally expanded her activities westward to the north shore of Lake Erie. John Porteous records in his journal which is in manuscript form in the Burton Historical Collections in Detroit, that he met Sally Montour on Lake Erie. He noted that she was going "with one boat and some goods to winter at Grand Point."

By 1767, Sally was trading at Michilimackinac, Mackinaw City, Michigan. Another confusing and conflicting part of her story happens here. At this point people began to refer to her as Sally Ainse. Some sources say that she was married to or at least lived with Joseph Louis Ainse, a Michilimackinac interpreter.

There is also evidence that she lived with a trader by the name of William Maxwell. In the Dictionary of Canadian Biography, the biography of Joseph Louis Ainse mentions a mixed breed son, "Ance," who was known as a Chief at the Straits of Mackinac. It is possible that she was the "Mrs. Ainse" of John Askin's diary at Mackinaw in 1774-1775.

## **A Woman of Property**

The William Macomb ledger for 1775 records that Sally was also called Montour. In 1788, a group of Indian chiefs granted land to Jonathan Schieffelin and in the transaction she is referred to as "Sarah Ainse alias Wilson."

Between 1775 and 1785, Sally Ainese traded actively and extensively in the Western District. In 1780, according to a list made by Commandant Arent Schuyler DePeyster, two bateau loads of the merchandise ordered by the merchants of Detroit belonged to her.

Sally accumulated large debts with merchants William Macomb, John Askin, and Montague Tremblay. In 1781, her account with Tremblay was over 4,000 dollars. In 1783, she did business with Askin to the extent of almost 4,000 dollars, and in 1787, her account with Angus Mackintosh was for over 1,000 dollars. She had become a person of property, owning two houses at Detroit, and the 1779 census records that she owned flour, cattle, horses, and four slaves.

### **Trading Relationships**

Evidence indicates that in 1785, Sally Ainese had a trading relationship with David Zeisberger, a Moravian minister and missionary to the Native Americans. He recorded in his diary that in May 1787, Sally Ainese was trading with the Moravian Indians on the Huron River and offered to give them a “good strip of her land on the east side of St. Clair.” He established communities in Munsee, in the valley of the Muskingum River in Ohio, and a short lived one near modern day Amherstburg, Ontario.

As an Oneida Indian woman, Sally Ainese had developed skills in far and goods trading and diplomacy, but she couldn't change the Canadian Government's unjust decision.

After trading in Mackinaw and Detroit for ten years and accumulating assets in Detroit for several years, Sally Ainese decided to move to Chatham, Ontario. She was well respected by both whites and Native Americans and accumulated many friends and at least four husbands. She successfully negotiated with Chief Joseph Brant and Moravian Missionary David Zeisberger, and unsuccessfully with the Canadian government for land that was rightfully hers.

### **Sally Ainese Acquires More Land**

In the 1780s, Sally married John Wilson, a Detroit trader, and in 1783 he assumed responsibility for her account with John Askin. In May 1787, she bought some property and moved to the Thames River in Ontario. She built a house on part of her property in what later became Dover Township.

In 1788 the Ojibwa granted Sally a tract of land at the mouth of the Thames River in modern Kent County, Ontario. She continued to acquire land and received a deed from the Ojibwa for an area along the north shore of the Thames River in present day Chatham, Ontario.

After a few years she sold her home and land in Detroit and settled in her new home. She bought more land, three improved farms, an orchard, and a house that she called “the mansion.”

### **Alexander McKee Disputes Sally's Claim**

In 1789, Sally had petitioned Governor Guy Carleton for title to a portion of the land she had bought from the Indians. She claimed a 300-acre parcel that lay within the area that deputy Indian agent Alexander McKee had bought from the Indians for the British government. Sally's land claims and purchases conflicted with the claims of Alexander McKee and the argument boiled over in 1790.

Sally resolutely contended that her lands were exempt from this treaty, and a number of Indian chiefs and Jean Baptiste Pierre Testard, a member of the district land board present at the treaty negotiations, supported her claim. Alexander McKee, himself a major land owner in the area, denied that he ever intended to exempt Sally's land and several members of the land board supported him.

In June 1794, Sir John Johnson, the superintendent general of Indian affairs, exerted his influence and pressure on Sally's behalf and so did Mohawk chief Joseph Brant. Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe, outraged at what he felt was the injustice to Sally, ordered that she receive 1,673 acres of prime Thames River land. Sally had clear title to only about 1.7 percent of the land that she had originally petitioned for, but she accepted the offer. Then in 1798, the Executive Council denied her claim and she didn't receive the land or the compensation. Sally fought the decision for the next 23 years.

### **Chief Joseph Brant and Chief Agushawa**

Even though she was single minded and resolute in pursuing her land claim, Sally Aitse still carried on her trading. She successfully sued several people for small debts in 1792, and when Richard England, the commanding officer at Detroit, tried to prevent the sale of liquor to an Indian gathering at Defiance, Ohio, he complained that "Sally Aitse . . . availed herself of the general prohibition, and privately disposed of a sufficient quantity to keep an entire band drunk."

Sally left no doubt about where her sympathies lay in the struggle between the British and the Americans during and after the Revolution. After Fallen Timbers in 1794, she acted as a messenger between Chief Brant and Chief Agushawa and delivered Brant's pro-British speeches to Chief Agushawa on January 26, 1795. She remarked that she "was the first that ever settled on the aforesaid lands [Thames River at Chatham] before any white people ever thought to settle there, thinking to have it for herself and friends who were Loyalists, and has served his Majesty since and before the late unhappy rebellion."

### **Fallen Timbers and the Treaty of Greenville**

Chief Joseph Brant wanted to maintain Indian unity against the Americans and commissioned Sally to carry messages to Egushwa and other leaders of the western tribes. "I am much afraid that your wampum and Speeches will be too little effect with the Indians, as they are sneaking off to General Wayne every day," she advised Chief Brant in February 1795. Her judgment proved to be arrow point accurate. That month the western tribes signed a preliminary agreement with the Americans.

A coalition of Native Americans called the Western Confederacy and the United States signed the Treaty of Greenville after the Indians lost the Battle of Fallen Timbers. In exchange for goods valued at about \$20,000 the Native Americans ceded large portions of modern Ohio, the region of present day Chicago, and the Fort Detroit area. Mohawk chieftain Joseph Brant did not blame Sally for correctly predicting the outcome of the negotiations. He stated on June 28, 1795, that "she is one of ourselves and has been of service to us in Indian affairs at this place {Detroit}".

### **Sally Loses the Battle, but Continues to Fight**

Sally left her land in Chatham in the early 1800s, and moved to Amherstburg, Ontario. In September 1806, the record shows that when she bought a quart of whiskey from John Askin she still lived on her Thames River farm. Askin noted on her account that he didn't intend to ask for payment.

Still persisting in her claim against the government, in January 1809, Sally petitioned Lieutenant Governor Francis Gore for compensation for her land claim and again the government denied it. In 1813, she finally relinquished her Chatham holdings and continued to live in Amherstburg until she died in 1823.

On May 10, 1824, George Jacob and James Gordon as executors of the estate of Richard Pattinson were granted letters of administration for Sally's estate, since she owed Pattinson money and had left no heirs or relatives in Ontario.

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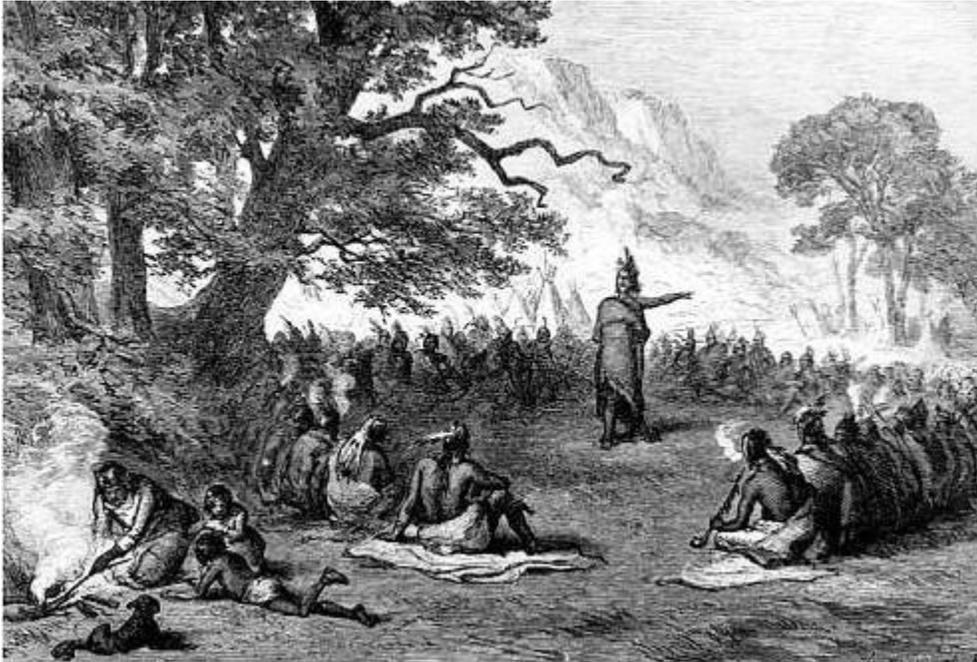
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## Chapter 22 – Fighting the British and Indians for Detroit and Downriver



Pontiac's Council- Wikimedia Commons

Britain and France fought for supremacy of the fur trade and for the rich lands and commerce of the Ohio Valley. The French and Indian War ended with a British victory and domination of the Ohio Valley until long after the American Revolution. The Indians had divided loyalties. The Iroquois sided with the English, but the Ottawa, especially Chief Pontiac, whose village was located on the Ecorse River, had become disillusioned with British designs on Indian land.

Beginning in 1762, Pontiac traveled long distances, visiting Native American villages and urging his allies to attack the British. He decided that he would call a council of Indian Nations to formulate a plan to drive the English intruders off of Indian land. Representatives from the various Native American groups in the area and from the East attended the Council on the Rivere Ecorces in the spring of 1763, including Chippewa, Ottawa, Shawnee, Delaware, Miami, Potawatomi and Huron tribes. There were probably others too. Chief Pontiac addressed the assembled tribes on the bank of the Rivere de Ecorces.

“God said, I am the maker of heaven and Earth, the trees, lakes, rivers, men and all that Thou seest or hast seen on the Earth or in the heavens and because I love you, you must do my will and you must also avoid that which I hate; I hate you to drink as you do until you lose your reason; I implore you not to fight one another; you take two wives or run after other people's wives; you do know I hate such conduct; you should have but one wife, and keep her until death. You sing the medicine song, thinking you speak to me; you deceive yourselves; it is to the Manito that you

speak; he is a wicked spirit who induces you to evil and for want of knowing Me, you listen to him...”

In the remainder of his speech, Pontiac exhorted the Native tribes to return to the ways of the Great Spirit and advised them that the Great Spirit wanted them to “drive from your lands those dogs in red clothing; they are only an injury to you. When you want anything, apply to me, as your brothers do, and I will do both.”

Inspired by Pontiac’s words spoken against the midnight murmuring of the River Ecorse, the Native Americans devised an ingenious plan. Each group was to concentrate on simultaneously capturing one fort from Detroit to Niagara, making it impossible for the British troops to help each other. Under Pontiac’s leadership, the Ottawa were assigned to capture Detroit. On May 7, 1763, sixty tribal leaders met at the east gate of the Fort (Griswold and Jefferson) with Major Gladwin in the Council House. The signal was a belt of wampum which green side up meant attack and white side up meant don’t attack. Ecorse .

Major Gladwin heard of the attack from an Indian squaw and the British left with the wampum white side up. Two days later, Major Gladwin denied Pontiac admission to the fort and successfully defended Detroit during the long siege. The Native Americans captured every fort west of Niagara one by one except Detroit. On October 13, 1763, the official peace treaty was signed in St. Louis between France and Britain giving all French possessions in North America to the British. Pontiac offered peace and retreated to his ancestral home on the Maumee River. Six years later, he was murdered in East St. Louis and buried under the street.

When Major Thompson Maxwell told the story of the Pontiac War and the attempt to massacre the garrison at Detroit in 1763 to C.C.Trowbridge of Detroit, he elaborated on the story of the Indian squaw who told Major Gladwin of Pontiac’s plot for taking the fort. He said that Major Gladwin had noticed this particularly attractive squaw and he discovered that she could make moccasins from elk skin. He asked her to make him a pair.

On the day that Pontiac and his men were to capture the Detroit garrison, the squaw lingered at the fort, seemingly reluctant to leave. When the officer of the day questioned her, she offered him the elk skin. He refused to take it, knowing that it belonged to Major Gladwin. He escorted the squaw to Major Gladwin and after much persuasion and Major Gladwin’s promise not to reveal the source of his information, she told him about Pontiac’s plot to take the Fort at Detroit.

### **Battle of Brownstown**

On July 5, 1812, General William Hull and his American army arrived in Detroit and by July 12, 1812, General Hull and his forces had crossed the Detroit River between Detroit and Sandwich above Fort Amherstburg in an invasion of Upper Canada. General Hull issued a proclamation assuring Canadians that “I come to protect and not to injure you.”<sup>1</sup>

The American Army was twice the size of the British detachment so when the Essex Militia stationed in Sandwich met them at a bridge over the River Canard on July 16, 1812, the Americans pushed back the British. The British withdrew to Amherstburg, but General Hull

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<sup>1</sup> James J. Talman, *Basic Documents in Canadian History* (Toronto: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1959)p. 78.

worried about his supply lines and lack of heavy artillery to batter Fort Amherstburg, so he did not follow up his victory. The Americans set up camp at Francois Baby's farm on the Detroit River and General Hull issued a proclamation that convinced about 500 Canadian Militiamen to desert. The Americans followed the British towards Amherstburg, but Canadian ships anchored near the mouth of the River Canard and British troops and Indians stopped the Americans from advancing to Amherstburg. General Hull wanted to use his large guns against Fort Malden at Amherstburg, so he delayed the attack for two weeks while the guns were being readied.

The British were not yet strong enough to push the Americans off Canadian soil, so they focused their military efforts against Hull's supply lines. Groups of British regulars, Canadian Militia and Indians fanned out from Fort Amherstburg, jeopardizing American communication and supply lines on the west bank of the Detroit River. They attacked two key American supply lines and in early August 1812, Captain Henry Brush led an American relief column from the River Raisin in Monroe to Detroit, bringing in cattle and other supplies to General Hull's Army. Captain Brush sent a messenger to General Hull who was encamped at the Canadian town of Sandwich, near present day Windsor, Ontario. The message advised him that Shawnee Chief Tecumseh and some of his warriors had crossed the Detroit River and advanced to the vicinity of Brownstown, and that British regulars were probably escorting and advising him.<sup>2</sup>

Captain Brush asked General Hull to send him troops from Detroit to protect his supply column. General Hull sent a detachment of troops consisting of 280 regulars and more than 330 Ohio Volunteer troops under Lieutenant-Colonel James Miller to escort the supply train back to Detroit. On August 4, 1812, Major Thomas Van Horne, commander, and 200 Ohio militia marched south down the road they had just cut through the Black Swamp to bring supplies to Detroit. As Major Van Horne and his men crossed Brownstown Creek, three miles north of the village, Adam Muir with 205 British regulars, Canadian militia and Native Americans ambushed the supply train. Tecumseh and 24 of his Indian warriors ambushed one of the supply columns. Amidst the confusion of crackling rifles, flitting shadows and revolving battle lines the Americans and Canadian retreated, regrouped, and finally Adam Muir and his troops retired to their boats and sailed back to Fort Malden, Amherstburg and Miller and his troops returned to Detroit. Some of the Indians chased Americans as far as the Ecorse River before they melted into the woods and the Americans marched on to Detroit.<sup>3</sup>

The American casualties in the Battle of Brownstown included 18 men killed, 12 wounded and 70 men missing. Adam Muir's casualties included three killed, 13 wounded, and two missing from the 41<sup>st</sup> Regiment, one killed and two wounded from the Canadian Militia and two killed and six wounded from the Native American contingent.

Silas Farmer wrote in his *History of Detroit and Wayne County and Early Michigan, Volume 2*, that the Americans and the Canadians fought a running battle from near Ecorse to Slocum's Island below Trenton. At Trenton he said the "routed Army took to their boats," meaning Adam Muir and his Canadian forces. According to Silas Farmer who is writing in 1890, the remains of a causeway over Monguagon Creek on the Payne farm where the fleeing army crossed still

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<sup>2</sup> The Battle at Brownstown: American and British accounts, *Columbian Centinel*, September 12, 1812. Parks Canada Teacher Resources Centre.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

existed. He wrote that the dead bodies of Indians and white men were buried where they fell and that bones of the fallen were found all the way along the slope from Ecorse to Trenton.

Silas Farmer also wrote that about 1860 when John Copeland built a saw mill at Ecorse on the site of the Salliotte and Raupp Mill, the bones of more than 100 people were dug up, and Daniel Goodell reburied them under a pear tree in his orchard. He said that the only remaining relic of the battle besides flint heads and old muskets was a stone on the farm of Charles Conrad, about five miles west of Trenton. The words “John Brown taken prisoner by the Indians, 1814,” were rudely scratched on the stone.

The skirmish outside of Brownstown did not turn the tide of the war Of 1812, but it did reveal that the American supply line to Ohio was not secure and convinced General Hull that the British and Indian forces outnumbered him, a conviction that would ultimately lead to the surrender of Detroit to the British.<sup>4</sup>

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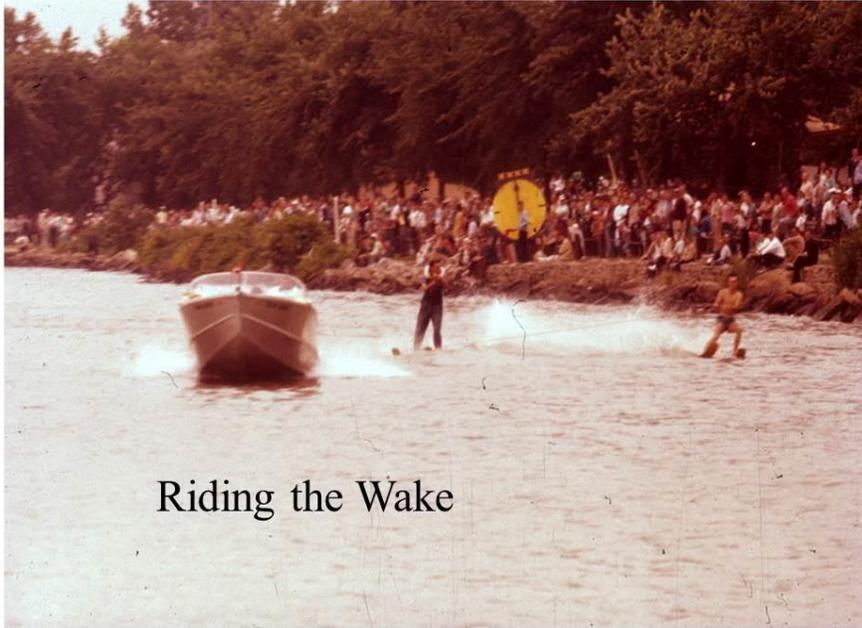
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<sup>4</sup> The Battle at Brownstown: American and British accounts, Columbian Centinel, September 12, 1812. Parks Canada Teacher Resources Centre.



## **Jefferson Avenue – the Connecting Road**



Marching down Jefferson Avenue-Photo by John Duguay

Jefferson Avenue 's family tree goes back to 1811, when President James Madison authorized a party to survey and mark a road following the Detroit River and setting aside six thousand

dollars to cover the cost of the road. It is fitting that Jefferson Avenue's roots extend to President Madison, because he was a close friend of Thomas Jefferson, the road's namesake.

The War of 1812 prevented the Indian road provision in the Treaty of Brownstown from being implemented. At the beginning of the War of 1812, General William Hull built a military road across the Black Swamp near Toledo, Ohio and on to Detroit, but the road was poorly built and could not carry even light traffic. It cost the United States Government over twenty million dollars to move a few companies of soldiers from Ohio to Detroit during the War. Consequently, flour brought fifty dollars a barrel at Detroit and after the army and the War of 1812 had passed, brush and trees soon reclaimed the military road.

### **The River Road is Resurrected**

A few years after the War of 1812 ended, the River Road began a second life. In 1817 the approximately 200 troops stationed at Detroit were put to work opening a road from Fort Meigs on the Maumee River through Frenchtown, now Monroe, Michigan. President James Madison and Congress established the road as a military road 66 feet wide and set parameters to lay it out. Congress passed a resolution on April 4, 1818, requesting the Secretary of War to communicate programs and prospects for the completion of the military road.

Congress requested Major General Alexander Macomb for a report on the military road. On November 27, 1818, General Macomb wrote to the new president James Monroe:

“Completed seven miles, Detroit to the Rapids. The road is a magnificent one, cleared of all logs and underbrush. Bridges were built of strong oak framework. One of the bridges on which men are working is 450 feet long. Will complete the bridges first before continuing with the road.”

The specifications called for the military road to be 66 feet wide, but the axmen cut an 80-foot-wide strip. About thirty miles of the road were completed and General Macomb sketched it, labeling it “The Great Military Highway.” He sent his sketch along with his report, but almost before President Monroe and Congress had received and read the report, brush and trees had converted the road back to an Indian trail.

Settlers living in the area and using the road were not content to let it remain an Indian trail and neither were soldiers from the War of 1812. They urged Congress to continue to build the road eastward and appealed to the civil and military officials in the Northwest to continue the road to bring the region into contact with the rest of the United States. They also believed that extensions of the Military Road would open up the Territory to increased land sales and give the farmers and merchants better access to markets for their products. Governor Cass demonstrated that an extension of the Military Road could be made a branch of the Cumberland National Road and bring Detroit into direct contact with the capitol at Washington.

## **Congress Acts to Extend the River Road**

Acting on the many appeals for the extension of the Military Road. Congress in 1823 granted land for the construction of a road from the Connecticut Reserve to the Maumee River, finally honoring the fifteen-year-old agreement with the Indians. Congress appropriated \$20,000 to improve the road that the soldiers built from Detroit to Maumee and this appropriation was the first grant that the Federal Government had ever awarded for road building.

The Niles Register of October 11, 1823, reported that Father Gabriel Richard, a Roman Catholic Priest, had been elected a delegate from Michigan Territory. Father Richard was well known around Detroit for his efforts at improving roads. At that time his district extended from Detroit to Mississippi.

## **The Five Great Military Highways**

Around 1825 Governor Lewis Cass planned and directed the building of five military highways, called the Five Great Military Highways, in Michigan. These roads radiated in all directions. They were the River Road from Detroit to Perrysburg, Ohio; Michigan Avenue from Detroit to Fort Dearborn in Chicago; the Grand River Road from Detroit to the mouth of the Grand River; Woodward Avenue from Detroit to Fort Saginaw; and Gratiot Avenue from Detroit to Fort Gratiot north of Port Huron. A map of the Michigan Territory in 1825 shows these roads and they are marked as United States Roads.

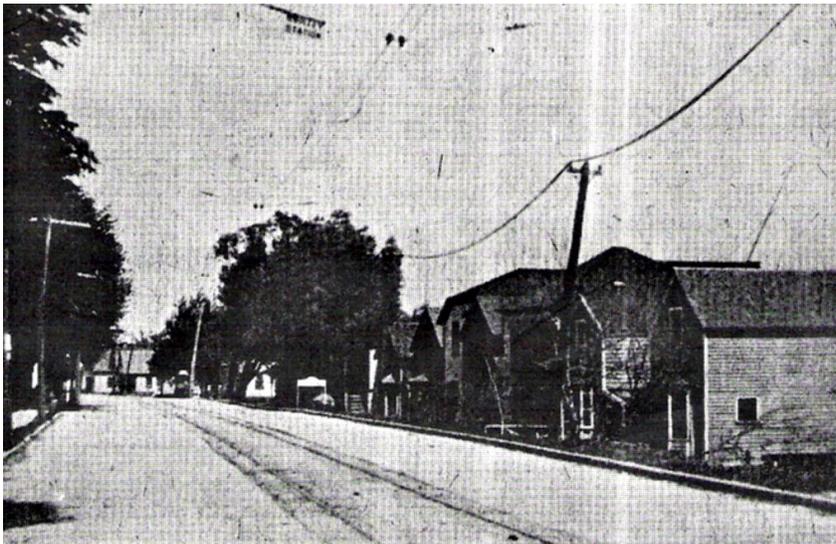
Although they were laid out as military roads at 100 feet widths, they were used primarily for peace and commerce. The River Road was the only one of the five military roads that served as an actual military road and that didn't happen until the United States entered World War I in 1917. Then the River Road was covered with huge motor trucks carrying war materials from Detroit to the sea. On October 29, 1829, the Legislative Council of the Territory of Michigan authorized a lottery to raise funds to build a road between Detroit and Miami in an attempt to help Congress. This was one of the first examples of local officials working with Congress to bring about improved roads.

In the following decades, roads including 122 plank roads in Michigan in 1851 were being built across the United States. Plank or corduroy roads (so called because the adjacent logs were as rough and ridged as a piece of corduroy cloth) were built in Michigan although mud could and did cover plank roads. There are still some traces of corduroy on the River Road buried deep in the ground in the vicinity of Silver Creek. Wagons often had to wallow through the mud to make it to market and stage coaches often got stuck up to their rims on the muddy spring roads.

In the days before railroads, stage coaches were often the only way people could travel from one town to another. One of the first stage coach lines to be established was along the River Road to Ohio. Ecorse pioneer Alexander Campau enjoyed the boyhood adventure of riding from Detroit to Monroe and back on the stagecoach which one of his distant cousins drove. He loved the experience of pulling into Monroe at night, hot, dusty and weary and listening to the traveler's spinning tall tales as he ate supper. The next day arising at dawn to match the stage home, he felt

a renewed sense of adventure as he headed to Ecorse along the River Road.

### **Miserable Macadam and Doubtful Concrete**



Jefferson Avenue, Ecorse in the 1920s

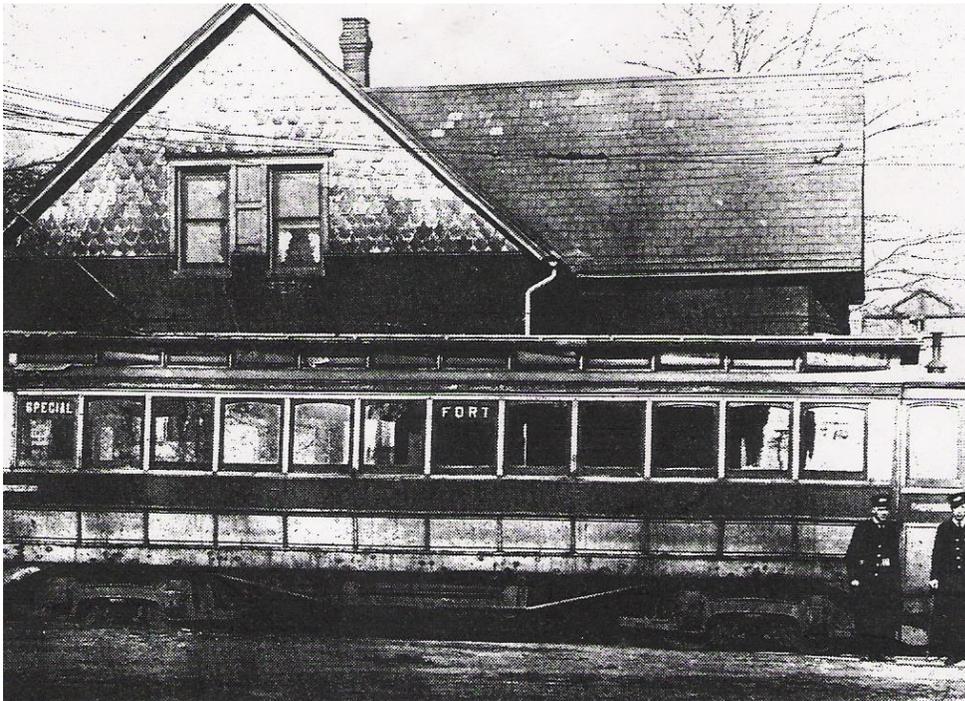
The late 18th and early 20th centuries were developing years for macadam, concrete and the automobile. People insisted that macadam and asphalt was bad for horses because they kept falling on macadam and asphalt roads or wearing out their shoes on them. The roads, especially in rural parts of Wayne County, were still impassible during the winter and wet seasons of the year.

The Wayne County Road Commissioners submitted their first annual report to the Board of Supervisors in 1907 and requested an appropriation of \$5,000 for the maintenance and repair of the River Road. This was the first step toward developing the rural sections of the River Road and during the following year the Board directed the improvement of the first mile of road. The specifications called for a 15-foot-wide road made of tar macadam to extend north of the north limits of the Village of Trenton in the vicinity of Monguagon Creek. In 1909, a section of the River Road built of macadam, limestone and crushed cobble was begun at the south limits of the City of Wyandotte and joined to the section built the year before.

As the rural sections of the River Road were being constructed, parallel pavement building was also taking place along its length. Workers constructed a brick pavement at River Rouge to join the section of brick pavement already built in Ecorse. Ford City constructed a brick pavement and when this was completed there was a continuous stretch of about 28 miles that extended from the Wayne-Macomb County line to Sibley. There was just one short break in the pavement in the southern end of Wyandotte. Workers built the first section of concrete pavement on the River Road in 1910. In 1911, another three-and-a-half-mile section extending south from the south limits of Trenton was built. The city of Wyandotte also built a section of brick pavement

one half mile long to close the existing gap. The concrete construction was carried on to the Monroe County Line and by the end of 1912 the total mileage of hard surface road amounted to less than twenty miles. Approximately eleven miles were concrete, two miles were tar macadam and seven miles were brick. This provided a continuous stretch of good road from the Macomb County line to the Monroe County line.

In the early Twentieth Century road commissioners began to conduct traffic counts on particular roads or a major intersection to pinpoint traffic conditions. The earlier traffic counts showed a definite trend towards motor vehicles. The first traffic count on the River Road was taken in 1912, just outside the city limits of Detroit. The day long count showed that there were 125 horse drawn vehicles, 370 autos, and 13 trucks. A 14-hour count at the same location in 1920 showed 33 horse drawn vehicles, 1,619 autos and 329 trucks. On July 31, 1927, after the River Road had been widened to 72 feet, the count for 14 hours in the Village of Trenton showed 10,450 automobiles, 73 buses and 31 trucks.



In the early 1900s, West Jefferson through Trenton, Wyandotte, Ecorse, and River Rouge was a mud road and the streetcar was the transportation of choice for the citizens of these Downriver communities. The Detroit Urban Railroad(DUR) ran these streetcars between 1892 and 1932. They were used for business, social and shopping trips to Detroit and even for funeral trips to Woodmere and Woodlawn Cemeteries in Detroit. Rental arrangements were made for a special car and the casket was carried along with the mourners. On other, happier trips people rented a special car called the Yolapoa to take them to parties. The conductor is not identified, but the motorman in this photo was Sampson Lake of Ecorse. Many people remembered riding this streetcar into Downriver towns and stepping off into muddy Jefferson Avenue.

When Burton E. Loveland arrived in Ecorse in 1919, he opened the first drugstore in the village on faith. At the time there was only one building on the west side of West Jefferson between Salliotte and Josephine and he occupied one of the three store rooms in that building. The rest of the street was vacant and West Jefferson wasn't even paved. He remembers that stones from the horse's hooves and from the few cars passing going through his front window.

Mabel Plourde remembered the River Road when the spring rains had drawn the frost out of the ground. She saw a big load of lumber come up from the Ecorse lumber yard, drawn by four horses on the River Road, with mud up to the hubs of the wheels and the driver standing on top of the load with the reins in one hand and a long whip in the other, lashing the horses that he could reach.

### **The Widening of Jefferson Avenue – 1937**

“Tippy” Dickey of High Street remembered when Jefferson Avenue was widened in 1937, checking her information with a 1937 story in the Ecorse Advertiser. The new River Road or Jefferson Avenue, was 90 feet wide with ten-inch-thick concrete to support the steel laden trucks that rumbled over its surface day and night and the whizzing automobiles whose tires kept the concrete hot.

Some Ecorse citizens thought that opening Jefferson Avenue would push sleepy Ecorse village into an industrial and modern age. In the past the road had been an Indian trail through swamp and swale, a military highway, a typical French village squatting on either side of it. On this highway which was shown on the maps of the Northwest Territory as a military highway from Fort Ponchartrain, Detroit to Fort Miami, Toledo there traveled Indians on the warpath, settlers coming into Michigan and soldiers coming to battle with the British. On its middle reaches were fought the massacre of Frenchtown (Monroe) and the Battle of Brownstown. It grew into a narrow tortuous pavement and then a new highway that cost nearly \$1,500,000.

Several people were responsible for the widening of River Road. The Wider West Jefferson Association organized in 1925 and elected Thomas J. Bresnahan, then mayor of River Rouge as its president. Ecorse Village President Fred C. Bouchard, Hubert S. Amiot of Wyandotte and former president F.C. Affholter of Trenton were on the board of directors and Don Goniea of River Rouge was secretary. Other Ecorse members were F.X. Montie, Earl Montie, I.J. Salliotte, and Christopher A. Raupp. When he became Ecorse supervisor, Frank X. Lafferty worked hard on the project.

The Wider West Jefferson Association backed the plan for a 120-foot highway from West Grand Boulevard to Trenton, cost free to the Downriver communities. After a bitter battle against the North Woodward interests, the Wider West Jefferson Association presented its plan to the Wayne County Board of Supervisors. The Board of Supervisors directed the Board of Road Commissioners to prepare plans for the widening.



Sandy Blakeman took this photograph of Jefferson Avenue as it looked in late 1947 in Ecorse.

The Wider West Jefferson Association sponsored a community party in Ecorse, called the Greater Ecorse-Wider Jefferson Celebration to commemorate the widening of West Jefferson. They sponsored a parade, selected a queen and there was dancing in the streets. Old Glory flew from every light post. The queen was Miss Eileen Raupp, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Christopher A. Raupp and 15-year-old ninth grade student at Ecorse High School. She was chosen from 13 other school girls to represent the Village of Ecorse and her ladies in waiting were Helen Pudvan, Irene Cochrane, Betty Navarre and Margaret Spaight. Miss Eileen Raupp, Miss Ecorse, cut the official ribbon opening the River Road, West Jefferson, at the corner of Cherrygrove and West Jefferson.

Generations of the Ecorse High School Bands and paraders marched down Jefferson Avenue as did other bands, community and veteran's organizations and celebrating citizens. The River Road, Jefferson Avenue, rolls on over the horizon and Downriver history marches right alongside.

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## Chapter 23: Backwater River and British Bluster: America wins the Arms Race on the Detroit River



Photograph by John Duguay

### Prelude: The British Fleet Cruises Cleveland

In a preview of the pivotal battle of Lake Erie in September of 1813, the British fleet from Fort Malden consisting of the *Queen Charlotte* and *Lady Prevost* with various smaller vessels appeared off Cleveland on June 19, 1813, and approached the mouth of the Cuyahoga River making ready to land. Terrified Clevelanders rushed to rally the militia, and soon scores of men with muskets on their shoulders, were hurrying toward the mouth of the Cuyahoga.

When the British fleet had sailed within a mile and a half of the harbor, the wind died down and the ships had to lie becalmed until afternoon. In the meantime, the militia gathered nearby and debated how to wheel the small, unmounted cannon from Cleveland village to the Cuyahoga River. Judge James Kingsbury, a paymaster in the army, took the back wheels of a heavy wagon, mounted the little cannon on them, and set it into position to shoot into the British ranks if they

did land. The small ships moored in the Cuyahoga River were moved two miles up the river out of harm's way.

Suddenly, a powerful thunder storm shattered the calm of the afternoon and swept down Lake Erie, driving the British fleet far to the east of Cleveland. When the storm subsided, the British lay opposite Euclid Creek in the town of Euclid and a detachment of British sailors went ashore. They killed an ox, cut it up, including the hide, and took it on shipboard. This particular British crew turned out to be exceptionally polite, because they left a golden guinea in a cleft stick at the place where they had killed the ox and a note. In the note the British sailors apologized because they had been in such a hurry that they spoiled the hide, and assured the Americans that if the thunder shower had not come they would have eaten their beef in Cleveland. The British sailed off down the lake, and the next time their vessels appeared in Lake Erie they were searching for the newly assembled American fleet, a prelude to the Battle of Lake Erie.<sup>5</sup>

The War of 1812 ensured the survival of the United States as a sovereign nation and was fought in as many diverse ways as Americans were diverse. Soldiers fought the war with tomahawks and bayonets in the middle of swarms of black flies in forest clearings and in mosquito infested swamps. Armies lined up sixty feet apart on grassy fields, shooting to kill each other at point blank range. War canoes travelled 1,000 miles in ten days along ribbon waterways that flowed into the Great Lakes. Newly launched frigates fired cannon balls at each other and empires rose and fell on the strength of one battle. The French and the British fought the global parts of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, but crucial encounters in the struggle between the British and the Americans for domination of North America took place on the Detroit River with historic precedents from the French and vital contributions from the Native Americans. In fact, Native Americans and their maritime and woodsmen skills played an important part in the French and Indian War and the in the War of 1812.

In many respects the outcome of the struggle for the North American continent boiled down to the shipbuilding on the Detroit River and Lake Erie on both the American and British fronts and one decisive battle on Lake Erie. The British established a Navy Yard at Amherstburg at the mouth of the Detroit River where it flows into Lake Erie and built ships for Commander Barclay's British fleet, and Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry assembled his fleet at the little hamlet of Erie, Pennsylvania on Lake Erie. The two naval forces would meet at Put-in-Bay in Lake Erie and change the course of the world war raging in Europe.

Even though many British officers considered the war with the United States a minor annex to the European conflict, they had to divert troops to fight in the American theater and if they had diverted but a few more, they probably would have won the War of 1812. As it played out, when the British had defeated Napoleon and dispatched more troops to America in 1814, they raided the Chesapeake region and burned Washington D.C. before the Americans finally stopped them.

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<sup>5</sup> J. B. Mansfield, ed., *History of the Great Lakes*. Volume I( Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1899) p. 211-236.

## **The Arms Race: Kings Navy Yard**

The British had a head start in preparing for the epic battle with the Americans that culminated in the Battle of Lake Erie in September 1813. After the Americans won their War of Independence from Britain, the British kept a tight grip on several major posts on the Great Lakes that they were bound by treaty to evacuate. The British considered the Detroit region, in Michigan Territory, an essential post and they maintained substantial military installations there, including a fort at Detroit, one called Fort Malden in Amherstburg and a navy dockyard for over a decade after the Treaty of Paris ended the Revolutionary War.

The American Revolutionary War also influenced Canadian nationhood. British North America issued a Declaration of Independence and Constitution of its own with the Constitutional Act of 1791. In fact, Loyalists from the American colonies were partially responsible for the act. American Colonists who remained loyal to Great Britain during and after the American Revolution immigrated to Canada and introduced a new English speaking segment into the country, one accustomed to representative government and ownership of land by free men. The Quebec Act of 1774 did not adequately assimilate or govern these new settlers and the new Loyalist settlers quickly recognized and exploited this fact. In 1791, the British Parliament passed the Canada Act, now called the Constitutional Act of 1791, providing for the division of Quebec into Lower and Upper Canada and setting up assemblies in both parts and freehold land tenure in Upper Canada. Ironically, the citizens of both French and English Canada would play important roles in the War of 1812.<sup>6</sup>

After they surrendered Detroit in 1796, the British began to build the Amherstburg Navy Yard in earnest and by May 1796, Lt. Colonel Richard England of the 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment reported, "I have the satisfaction of reporting that not a foot of timber that could be converted into any use is left here."<sup>7</sup> The British began constructing Fort Malden in 1799, and completed the earthworks and palisades of the fort in 1801. By 1804, troops had built at least ten buildings, including a guard house, powder magazine and blockhouse/barracks. Fort Malden served as the military garrison for the British along the Detroit River, a navy yard operated within it, and it also housed the headquarters for the British Indian Department.<sup>8</sup>

The navy yard, called the King's Navy Yard operated from 1796-1813, was located south of the fort near the growing town of Amherstburg, and its facilities included blockhouses, a timber yard and a wharf. The Provincial Marine built the ships it used on the Great Lakes at the Navy Yard and Master Builder William Bell directed the building of ships ranging from small, open bateaux to three-masted schooners.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ernest J. Lajeunesse, ed. *The Windsor Region: Canada's Southernmost Frontier: A Collection of Documents*. (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1960) p. 213

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 215.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>9</sup> *Navigation a Century Ago*, *Detroit Free Press*, August 30, 1863; The Provincial Marine functioned as a small Canadian hybrid Navy, performing naval work but run by the military. The governor and commander of forces in

Since the British desperately needed vessels to resupply the garrisons on the upper Great Lakes, the ships that were first built in the Navy Yard were small with a draft shallow enough to clear the bar at the entrance of Lake St. Clair. The engineers at the Navy Yard directed the troops in constructing blockhouses, store houses, a magazine, a wood yard and a wharf. Later they built lime and mortar houses and wooden defensive picketing around the Navy Yard. By 1805, private contractors had built a rope walk near the Navy Yard, consisting of narrow, roofed sheds about 350 yards long with open sides. The contractors used locally grown hemp fiber to manufacture the yards of rope and cable that the sailing vessels of the day required.

The Deputy Quarter Master Department of the Provincial Marine recruited the sailors to man the ships that were built at the Kings Navy Yard. An 1802 report illustrated that the sailors who signed on the Provincial Marine were for the most part civilian mariners. Between April 1794 and October 1801, the Provincial Marine signed on 189 seamen. They were made up of 71 Englishmen, 36 Irish, 19 Scots, 29 foreigners and 34 Canadians. At this historical point, "Canadians" usually meant the French Canadians who accounted for about 20 percent of the enlistments as did the Irish. The English made up 40 percent.<sup>10</sup>

The Provincial Marine also provided a dockyard at the Navy Yard and the Store Keeper's General Department hired the dockyard workers who consisted of highly skilled tradesmen. Sixteen people were listed in a quarterly pay report for Amherstburg, broken down into two foremen, seven carpenters, a blacksmith and his assistant, five sawyers and one laborer. Unlike the sailors, the dockyard workers had "British" names, with only one Canadian in their midst.<sup>11</sup>

Many skilled shipbuilders were lured to the Navy Yard at Amherstburg, including William Bell from England who signed on with the Provincial Marine as a shipwright in the Navy Yard. His skill earned him the position of Master-Shipwright and he drew the plans and constructed all of the major vessels that the Navy Yard produced until the British burned it in 1813.

Bell and the other Provincial Marine shipwrights faced the chronic problem of the rapid decay of the wood used to build ships. Shipwrights believed they had to use green timber because of the difficulty of curing wood without first letting it rot, and as a result ships built with green wood wore out rapidly. The *Camden*, probably built between 1799 and 1804, was noted as unfit to go to sea and the six year old *General Hunter* as "falling fast into decay."<sup>12</sup>

The schooner *Camden* was the first major vessel that Bell built at Amherstburg and in 1803 he drew up plans for the *General Hunter*. Initially, he rigged the *General Hunter* as a schooner, but

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British North America administered the Provincial marine and the Quarter-master General's department of the army over saw it; Lajeunesse, *Canada's Southern most Frontier: a Collection of Documents*, p.3

<sup>10</sup> W.A.B. Douglas "The Anatomy of Naval Incompetence: The Provincial Marine in Defence of Upper Canada before 1813," *Ontario History*, 71, no. 1(March 1979): 3-25. Fort Malden National Historic Site Resource Centre Files.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> William Wood, ed. *Select Documents of the Canadian War of 1812*. 3 volumes.(New York : Greenwood Press, 1968.)Vol. 1, p. 241.

later changed it to a brig. Construction began on the *General Hunter* in 1804 and her launching took place in 1805. She could carry eight 18 pounder carronades and four 4 pounder long guns.  
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Both the *Camden* and the *General Hunter* illustrated the dual role of the Provincial Marine. The ships were constructed so that the holds could accommodate troops, but with partitions that held cargos that made stealing them a difficult task. The railings were strong enough to hold ringbolts for gun breechings. The Amherstburg yard also manufactured smaller craft. The workmen built ship's boats for the marinas in Detroit and a long boat for the *Camden* in 1804. Bell's workers also built many bateaux, which were large, open multi-oared boats with a single sail that were useful for carrying supplies and troops.<sup>14</sup>

The Provincial Marine authorized the building of a larger ship in 1809, the *Queen Charlotte*, which Bell envisioned to be a three-masted, square rigged ship. She was 101 feet along the keel with a beam of about 28 feet and had full bulwarks instead of the open railings of the *General Hunter*. She was pierced for sixteen cannon and in many respects was built as a warship and not a transport vessel although she could carry troops and supplies.

When she was launched in 1810, the *Queen Charlotte* was the largest in the Upper lakes fleet and provided the Provincial Marine with serious combat potential. She remained the largest ship in the fleet until the *Detroit* was completed in 1813. Also in 1810, the Navy Yard workers turned out the *Lady Prevost*, which was rigged as a schooner, displaced 96 tons, and measured 68 feet long along the deck and 18.5 feet in breadth. She could carry ten 12 pound carronades and three 9 pounder long guns.<sup>15</sup>

Ship master Bell supervised the construction of the *Detroit*, his largest and last ship built at the Kings Navy Yard in the spring and summer of 1813, under very trying circumstances. King George III commissioned the *Detroit* to be built in honor of the brief capture of Fort Detroit, but shortages of everything from skilled labor, timber, cordage, ironwork and armament made building the *Detroit* difficult. Despite the difficulties, the workers completed her and she became the new flag ship of the Lake Erie Squadron. The *Detroit* was 400 tons burthen, about 120 feet long and 28 feet wide, and carried a variety of arms because of the shortages of armament, including eight 9 pounders, a 24 pounder and 18 pounder carronades.<sup>16</sup>

Besides building his major ships, in the spring of 1813 Bell built two gunboats, probably at Amherstburg. He and his builders quickly put them together to support General Procter's assault

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<sup>13</sup> General Hunter File. Ft. Malden Historical Site

<sup>14</sup> William Wood, ed. *Select Documents of the Canadian War of 1812*. 3 volumes( New York Greenwood Press, 1968.)Vol. 1 p.242.

<sup>15</sup> William Wood, ed. *Select Documents of the Canadian War of 1812*. 3 volumes( New York Greenwood Press, 1968.)Vol. 1 p.242.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

on Fort Meigs in April and the British burnt both of them to prevent the Americans from capturing them during the retreat along the Thames in October 1813.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the 1790s the Provincial Marine supported the British military on the lakes by furnishing them with reliable ships to transport cargo and troops from garrison to garrison, but then like black wisps of cannon smoke, rumors about Amherstburg's commander Alexander Grant began to drift to the ears of government officials in York and Quebec City. By the 1810s, the governments at York and Quebec City were scrutinizing the Provincial Marine service and Commodore Alexander Grant was fixed firmly in their binocular sights.<sup>18</sup>

Along with William Bell, Alexander Grant had steadily advanced the cause of the Provincial Marine at Amherstburg. Born in 1734 in Scotland, he came to North America during the French and Indian War, probably as an ensign in the 77<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot. After the war, he continued his service with the Provincial Marine by taking charge of the dockyard at Navy Island and then at Detroit in 1771. By the end of the American Revolutionary War Grant commanded 77 personnel and eleven civilians and had expanded his private shipping interests. He built his home, Castle Grant, in Grosse Point, Michigan Territory, and continued to live there even after the British surrendered the Michigan Territory to the Americans in 1796. He may have been the only commodore of a military force on active duty to live in the land of his eventual opponent.<sup>19</sup>

Despite all of his other interests, Grant felt that his first duty was commander of the Provincial Marine at Amherstburg. Even though he had competently served his country through the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars, Grant's contemporaries began to change their attitude toward him as the War of 1812 approached. They criticized him for what they termed lack of professional initiative as commodore of the upper lakes squadron and they disputed his administrative style. In February 1812, Captain Andrew Gray of the Quartermaster-General's Department noted in a report on the Provincial Marine that the seventy-eight year old Commodore should be removed because he was no longer effective and, indeed, might become a detriment to the Marine. After fifty-four years with the Provincial Marine, Grant retired in March of 1812 and his second in command, Captain George B. Hall, replaced him.<sup>20</sup>

After Grant retired, the British assessed their position at Amherstburg. In the same report that recommended that Commodore Grant retire, Captain Gray listed the vessels that were ready or could be readied for service in 1812. He listed the *Queen Charlotte*, with ten 24 pounder carronades, and six long guns; the *Lady Prevost*, with ten 12 pounder carronades; and the

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<sup>17</sup> Shipbuilding at Fort Amherstburg 1796-1813. Parks Canada. 1978.

<sup>18</sup> The Provincial Marine and Royal Navy on the Upper Great Lakes 1796-1815." In Navy - Provincial Marine File. Fort Malden National Historic Site Resource Centre.

<sup>19</sup>Carol Whitfield, "Alexander Grant", in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Volume 5. ed: Frances G. Halpenny. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), pp 363-367.

<sup>20</sup> Wood, Vol 1, p. 254. Whitfield, "Alexander Grant." Grant and his Theresa is wife of 36 years had a family of 11 daughters and one son. Grant died on May 8, 1813 at his beloved home Castle Grant and was buried in Sandwich. (Now Windsor)

General *Hunter*, with six 6 pounder carronades. Captain Gray's allegation that the British did not have enough personnel to adequately operate their ships as warships seemed to be validated by the 1812 Provincial Marine numbers. There were five officers, two petty officers, forty seamen and two naval yard personnel, clearly not enough to man three vessels as warships. Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada General Isaac Brock proposed that an additional 100 seamen be added to the roster and that two companies of troops from the Royal Newfoundland Regiment be used as Marines and seamen. <sup>21</sup>

### **Arms Race: Native American Mariners**

When the first Europeans arrived in North America, they brought advanced maritime technology, firearms, and advanced metals technologies into the contest to seize the New World. Their first miscalculation occurred when hardy Native American tribesmen greeted them instead of representatives of the Chinese Empire. Their second miscalculation was underestimating Native American sophistication. Native Americans brought superior sanitation, agricultural innovation and the technology of the birch bark canoe, an invention that ultimately led to the destruction of their culture.

For decades, Europeans depended on boats built with the basic technological elements as their sea going ships to navigate inland waters in the New World and stayed behind the technological curve as a result. When the first French explorers penetrated the St. Lawrence River system in the late 1500s, they were astonished to find Native Americans using boats made of birch bark to travel the smallest streams to the greatest of the Great Lakes.

There is no record of the first Native American inventor who came up with the idea of using birch bark as the hull covering for a canoe. The design may have come from the kayaks of the Inuits of the far north who fearlessly sailed their hide covered boats across hundreds of miles of open ocean. Around 1500 A.D., an inventive Native American or a group of tribesmen built a frame of split cedar or spruce and covered it with large sheets of bark carefully peeled from birch trees. Gradually, the Chippewa who called themselves the Ojibwa standardized the classic birch bark canoe. They built their canoes in a variety of sizes and traded some of them to the Ottawa who established a great inland North American trade empire well before the Europeans "discovered" the New World.

When the French arrived, the Native Americans had already developed an extensive system of inland trade routes and the technology to exploit them. Depending on perspective, Samuel de Champlain's actions in helping an Algonquian tribes fight their Iroquois neighbors was either a disaster because he initiated 200 years of Iroquois hatred for the French or a coup because he made instant friends of the Ottawa and the rest of the Algonquian tribes who had spent

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<sup>21</sup> Wood, Volume 1, p. 289.

generations under the domination of the hated and feared Iroquois. At one point in his journeys, Champlain abandoned his sailboats and used 24 war canoes that his Indian allies had on hand.<sup>22</sup>

The French quickly adapted the Ojibwa canoe technology. Eventually, French fur traders standardized canoes into three sizes, the canot-any canoe up to about twenty or so feet long; the canot du nord (north canoe)-canoes of about 25 feet long; and the canot de maitre-master canoe-also called the Montreal canoes- canoes of 35-40 feet long. The smaller canoes were used on small and shallow inland rivers and creeks. North canoes – cargo capacity of about three tons- were primary freight haulers on medium rivers. Giant Montreal canoes-cargo capacity of about six tons- were used to transport freight on the largest rivers and the Great Lakes. The Native Americans also developed war canoes which were painted in symbolic designs, and were once a familiar sight on the Great Lakes. They held at least 15 warriors, some who paddled and some who fired weapons at their enemies.<sup>23</sup>

Birch bark canoes had some drawbacks. Although they were relatively tough, their hulls could be torn in rocky rapids and were not practical to use where birch bark for repairs was not readily available. Basically, Native Americans handed Europeans the seeds of their own destruction when they taught them birch bark canoe technology. Without canoes, the exploration and exploitation of the interior of North America would have taken a very different course and the French and later the British would not have been able to establish the fur trade in North America. War canoes and the Native Americans and voyageurs who manned them were also important weapons in the War of 1812.<sup>24</sup>

After the American Revolution, the British had maintained their old Indian alliances through the activities of military garrisons and Indian agents and regularly distributed presents as part of these efforts. The British Indian Department in Amherstburg played a vital role on the Detroit River. Experienced and resourceful people such as Simon Girty, Matthew Elliott, and Alexander McKee, veterans of the Revolutionary War led the Amherstburg Indian Department which sought the allegiance of the tribes in the Northwestern Territories and their loyalty in case of a war with America. The efforts of Girty, Elliott, and McKee and other Indian Agents made Fort Amherstburg a supply center for the Indian tribes and their main source of food, cloth, tools, weapons and ammunition. The success of these Indian Agents just across the river irritated Americans who felt that the Amherstburg Indian Department was interfering with internal American affairs. The parade of war canoes paddling down the Detroit River inflamed many

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<sup>22</sup> Raymonde Litalien and Denis Vaugeois. *Champlain: the birth of French America* (McGill: Queen's University Press, 2004) p 45.

<sup>23</sup> The Canadian Canoe Museum; Reflections, "Those Marvelous Ojibwa built birch bark canoes," Roger Matile, *Ledger-Sentinel*, Oswego, Illinois. November 9, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> *Historical collections. Collections and researches made by the Michigan pioneer and historical society ...* Reprinted by authority of the Board of state auditors. Volume 16 FROM MR. ASKIN-Indians, p. 76. Clark Historical Library. Central Michigan University.

Americans and the policies of the Amherstburg Indian Department pushed the United States and Great Britain closer to a confrontation.<sup>25</sup>

As the year 1811 drew to a close, the Indians of the Great lakes region were increasingly armed and restless, due in large part to the influence of the Amherstburg Indian Department. M. Lothier, agent for the Michilimackinac Company, wrote on January 13, 1812, that the Indians in the territory where his company traded were all unhappy with the American government and that if a war between the British and Americans happened “every Indian that can bear arms would gladly commence hostilities against the Americans.”<sup>26</sup>

Shawnee Chief Tecumseh emerged as the most prominent British ally. Like the Amherstburg Navy Yard and the British and Americans, the Indian involvement in the War of 1812 was rooted deeply in previous wars and Indian alliances. Both the French and British had divided and exploited Native American alliances during the French and Indian War and the American Revolution had proven disastrous to Native American alliances and lands. The Western Confederation of the Revolutionary War which had begun as a purely Indian political organization had gradually become absorbed into a European alliance despite the efforts of its earlier leaders like Joseph Brant to keep it separate.

After the Americans won the Revolutionary War, they continued to appropriate Indian lands and destroy Indian villages and the Confederation had been forced to move to the Huron/Wyandot village of Brownstown or Sindathon’s Village at the mouth of the Detroit River, a move that confronted the issue of the Confederation’s relationship with the British. The move also came with a price for the Indians. Joseph Brant and the Iroquois demanded that the Huron or Wyandot make a clean break with the British before they would agree to light a council fire at Brownstown. After the Sandusky villages of the Wyandot were destroyed by their enemies, they moved the council fire to Brownstown. Walk-in-the-Water and seven other of the Wyandot chiefs petitioned the United States on February 5, 1812, and won a fifty-year possession of Brownstown and Monguagon. He lived at Brownstown and commanded the Wyandot warriors.<sup>27</sup>

Tecumseh led a force made up of several Indian tribes including Ottawa, Shawnee, and Pottawatomie in their role in the War of 1812. Although he was born just outside the present day town of Xenia, Ohio, he eventually settled in what is now Greenville, Ohio where his younger brother Tenskwatawa or “The Prophet” lived. In 1805, Tenskwatawa led a religious revival urging Native Americans to reject the ways of the white man and warning them not to cede any more land to the United States. Following the self-destructive thread in their history, the Indians did not agree among themselves and a Shawnee leader Black Hoof opposed Tenskwatawa and worked to maintain a peaceful relationship with the United States.

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<sup>25</sup> “Navigation a Century Ago,” Detroit Free Press, August 30, 1863.

<sup>26</sup> Gregory Evans Dowd. *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815*(Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993 pp.)xiii, 135-137.

<sup>27</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) p.433.

Eventually Tenskwatawa and his brother Tecumseh established a series of multi-tribal villages under their leadership, first at Greenville and later at Tippecanoe, that remained largely but not entirely outside the network of American alliance chiefs. Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa were involved in the Shawnee movement to resurrect the confederation council fire at Brownstown. Tecumseh revived an old idea of Blue Jacket and Mohawk leader Joseph Brant which stated that all tribes commonly owned Indian lands and that no land could be sold without them all agreeing to the sale. The movement also involved an effort to restore an alliance between the Brownstown allies, the Cherokee, the Sauks and the Fox to resist the Americans.

By the early nineteenth century the primary source of resistance to the Americans and the one that Tecumseh would ultimately rely on did not come from Brownstown, but from the villages in Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin made up of Kickapoos, Sauks and Fox, Chippewas, Winnebagos, Menominees, and western Potawatomis. For a short time in 1812 and 1813 in the closing days of the peace before the Americans declared war, the British and the Algonquians resurrected an alliance on the middle ground. Tecumseh's rebuilt confederacy merged into a British alliance in the War of 1812.<sup>28</sup>

After the Americans declared war on the British in June 1812, "Tecumseh's War" became part of that struggle. Because of American-Native American events like the Treaty of Greenville and the Battle of Tippecanoe, the American effort to neutralize British-Native American cooperation backfired and Tecumseh and his followers became more firmly committed to an alliance with Britain. For a time, the British strategy for the defense of western Canada was a joint British-Algonquian strategy,

In August 1812, Tecumseh joined British Major-General Sir Isaac Brock in forcing the Americans to surrender Fort Detroit. Tecumseh demonstrated his military prowess in this endeavor. Brock advanced to a point just out of range of Detroit's guns and Tecumseh ordered his warriors to parade from a nearby wood and circle around to make their numbers seem larger. Brigadier General William Hull, the commander of Ft. Detroit, surrendered because he feared a massacre from the large Indian force.

The British had devoted much time and effort to consolidating their Indian allies. John Askin wrote from Michilimackinac in June 1813 that he was actively recruiting Indians from the Michigan side of Lake Huron including the Chippewa from the Genesee Valley and the Detroit area Indians. He and other British agents and traders persuaded many of the Indians that "the lives of their children" depended on British success in the War.<sup>29</sup>

Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry's victory in the Battle of Lake Erie in the fall of 1813 cut British supply lines and forced them to withdraw from Detroit. They burned all public buildings and retreated into Upper Canada along the Thames Valley. Tecumseh followed, fighting rearguard actions to slow the United States advance, but the British were defeated and Tecumseh was killed at the Battle of the Thames

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<sup>28</sup> White, *The Middle Ground*, p. 516

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*

The British and Canadian accounts of the War of 1812 feature numerous mentions of Indian allies and the important part their canoes and maritime back up played in the battles and daily skirmishes. One of the few of the American mentions of Native Americans taking part in battle occurs in the account of Dr. Usher Parsons aboard the *Lawrence*. He said that when the battle of Lake Erie was raging most severely, “Midshipman Lamb came down with his arm badly fractured. I applied a splint and requested him to go forward and lie down; as he was leaving me, and while my hand was on him, a cannon ball struck him in the side, and dashed him against the other side of the room, which instantly terminated his sufferings. Charles Pohig, a Narragansett Indian, who was badly wounded, suffered in like manner.”<sup>30</sup>

As was always tragically true in European-Algonquian relations, British imperial goals superseded Native American interests. After Tecumseh died at the Battle of the Thames, his alliance died with him. The imperial contest ended with the War of 1812 and the pivotal role of the Indian did as well. Native Americans were no longer a major threat or asset to an empire or republic. Fortunately for Tecumseh, death released him from long years of exile and a legacy of American defeat and domination.

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<sup>30</sup> J. B. Mansfield, ed., *History of the Great Lakes*. Volume I ( Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1899) p. 211-236.

## Chapter 24: The War of 1812

### Lt. Rolette Captures the *Cuyahoga*



Photograph by John Duguay

When the United States declared war on Great Britain on June 19, 1812, the British immediately seized control of Lake Erie. They already enjoyed the benefit of the Provincial Marine's small core of war ships and generations of occupation and influence in the Great Lakes. It took several days for word of the war to reach Fort Amherstburg. When Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas St. George of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Regiment received the news, he acted promptly. On July 2, 1812, the American schooner *Cuyahoga* sailed up the Detroit River loaded with supplies and a military band. A contingent of sick soldiers belonging to Brigadier-General William Hull's North Western Army followed in a smaller boat. Even though St. George knew that Great Britain and America were at war, the Americans did not.

As the *Cuyahoga* passed Fort Amherstburg, Lieutenant Frederick Rolette of the Provincial Marine rowed out to the ship backed by a polyglot force of soldiers, sailors and Native Americans. The surprised Americans put up only token resistance and after he fired his pistol in the air to get the *Cuyahoga* to heave-to, Lt. Rolette captured the *Cuyahoga*, although the smaller boat carrying the sick soldiers passed on unmolested to Detroit. Lt. Rolette rejoiced to discover

that the *Cuyahoga* carried Hull's papers outlining various plans for a campaign against Fort Amherstburg.<sup>31</sup>

Thomas Vercheres de Boucherville described the capture of the *Cuyahoga* on July 2, 1812:

*At two o'clock in the afternoon a small vessel appeared sailing lightly from the open lake into the mouth of the river but the wind was unfavorable and her speed lessened somewhat. With the aid of a glass it was easily discovered that she carried the American flag and it seemed probable that her captain was unaware of the knowledge we had, that war had been declared. Finding myself by chance in the ship yard where the Queen Charlotte was under construction, I came upon Lieutenant Frederic Rolette in the act of launching a boat manned by a dozen sailors, all well-armed with sabers and pickaxes, and I hastened to ask him where he was going with that array. "To make a capture," he replied, as he ordered his men to row in all haste in the direction of the vessel which was slowly but steadily making her way up the river, all unconscious of the fate awaiting her. I asked some Indians who were standing around if they would follow that boat. They expressed their readiness for the venture and we hurriedly entered one of their canoes, our sole weapons being three guns loaded with duck shot and two tomahawks. Rolette's boat reached the vessel's side a few minutes ahead of us and the men boarded her without meeting any resistance. Either the crew was unaware that war had been declared or they were uncertain of the relations between the two countries. The next instant I came up with my Indians and to leap aboard required only a moment. My friend then ran up the British flag and ordered the American Band to play "God Save the King." I should have stated that this vessel carried all the musical instruments of Hull's army besides much of the personal baggage of his men. This was the first prize of the war and it was taken by a young French Canadian.*<sup>32</sup>

The capture of the *Cuyahoga* was not the last time that the Americans would encounter Provincial Marine Lieutenant Frederic Rolette. Lieutenant Rolette entered the Royal Navy as a young boy, was wounded at the Battle of the Nile in 1799, and also fought at Trafalgar in 1805. He took a commission as a second lieutenant in the Provincial Marine in October 1807, and commanded the Brig *General Hunter* until the Royal Navy arrived at Fort Malden in 1813.

Lieutenant Rolette performed daring exploits during the War of 1812 that often drove him onto dangerous shoals, and his pistol shot at the taking of the *Cuyahoga* may have been the starting shot of the war. Besides the *Cuyahoga*, Lt. Rolette also captured over a dozen other ships during the war, including boats and bateaux. He also had an important role in the defense of the River Canard in July 1812 and at the capture of Detroit in August 1812. He commanded a Marine contingent during the Battle of Frenchtown in January 1813, where he once again was badly wounded. He recovered sufficiently enough to take part in the Battle of Lake Erie and took over command of the *Lady Prevost* when the Royal Navy Commander Lieutenant Edward Buchan

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<sup>31</sup> Milo Milton Quaipe, editor. *War on the Detroit: The Chronicles of Thomas Vercheres de Boucherville and the Capitulation by an Ohio Volunteer* (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, R.R. Donnelley & Sons, Co., Christmas 1940) p. 77-78.

<sup>32</sup> Milo Milton Quaipe, editor. *War on the Detroit: The Chronicles of Thomas Vercheres de Boucherville and the Capitulation by an Ohio Volunteer* (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, R.R. Donnelley & Sons, Co., Christmas 1940) p. 77-78.

was incapacitated. He was also severely wounded in the Battle of Lake Erie and spent the rest of the war in an American prisoner of war camp. The citizens of Quebec presented him a 50 guinea sword after the war in recognition of his services. He died in 1831 at the age of 48, never completely recovering from his many wounds.<sup>33</sup>

Determined to give the Americans a good fight, British General Isaac Brock sent 600 Ojibwa, 180 French-Canadian voyageurs and 60 redcoats to take Fort Mackinac. General Brock signed an agreement with Tecumseh, forging an alliance between British troops and northern Indians.<sup>34</sup>

### **Lt. Hanks Had a Premonition**

For over a week, Lieutenant Porter Hanks, in charge of America's most remote outpost at Fort Mackinac, had felt a premonition of disaster. The small island garrison of Michilimackinac rests in the narrow waterway where the northern tips of Lake Huron and Lake Michigan meet, so although small in size, its strategic value is immense. Lt. Hanks had noticed a cooling in the attitudes of the Native Americans in the area and with each passing day, he observed an increasing number paddle past the Fort heading north. He assumed that the Indians were rendezvousing at the British fort on St. Joseph's Island, but he could not think of a reason for them to gather there.

The Indians had a good reason to paddle the forty-five miles to the northeast. They journeyed to join a group of voyageurs, traders, and British regulars who had spent several days preparing to capture Fort Mackinac. After he heard that America had declared war, General Brock immediately sent a team of voyageurs to canoe 1,200 miles up to Ft. St. Joseph to officially confirm that America had indeed declared war. Shortly after that, General Brock issued an order to attack Michilimackinac. Lt. Hanks had not heard anything about these developments; in fact, he had not heard anything from American Secretary of War Henry Dearborn in nine months.<sup>35</sup>

Shortly before dawn on the morning of July 17, 1812, Lt. Hanks and his garrison were still asleep when seventy war canoes and ten overloaded bateaux deposited the British force two miles away at the north end of Michilimackinac. By daybreak, two British cannon had been set up on a hill overlooking the fort and trained Americans in their sights. The British herded all of the inhabitants of the village from their homes and guarded them in the distillery at the south end of town. Everyone but Lt. Hanks and his battalion of sixty ill and ill-prepared soldiers realized that the British had indeed landed.

As the soldiers awakened, the British and their Indian allies revealed their presence and Lt. Hanks, being an experienced officer, carried out textbook defensive measures. He watched his men scramble for arms, and accurately read the handwriting on the wall. The British, who had

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<sup>33</sup> Wood, Vol. 1, p. 558

<sup>34</sup> Milo Milton Quaipe, editor. *War on the Detroit: The Chronicles of Thomas Vercheres de Boucherville and the Capitulation by an Ohio Volunteer* (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, R.R. Donnelley & Sons, Co., Christmas 1940) p. 77-78.

<sup>35</sup> Alec Gilpin, *The Territory of Michigan: 1805-1837* (Michigan State University Press, 1970) p. 149.

positioned themselves well, heavily outnumbered the American soldiers and the Indian presence made Lt. Hanks uneasy, because he sensed a real potential for a massacre.

The British accurately interpreted the apprehension of Lt. Hanks and approached under a flag of truce to give him the chance to surrender. Civilian hostages in the truce party and his friends urged him to save his men and give up the Fort, and Lt. Hanks surrendered. By sheer cunning and audacity, the British force captured strategic Fort Mackinac, and the traders, Indians, and British soldiers seized the supplies of whiskey, pork and furs in the Fort. Lt. Hanks and his men were among the first official prisoners in the War of 1812, a war that they were not aware had started.

The British shipped Lt. Hanks and his men off to be paroled in America and compelled the remaining inhabitants of the Fort to swear allegiance to the British King. They did not mind swearing allegiance to the King, because many of them had been British subjects before the Americans landed on Mackinac Island less than twenty years before.

### **Lieutenant Rolette Helps Capture Detroit**

Lieutenant Rolette, in the meantime, was present at the capture of Detroit in August 1812. On July 5, 1812, General Hull and his army arrived in Detroit and by July 12, 1812, General Hull and his forces had crossed the Detroit River between Detroit and Sandwich above Fort Amherstburg in an invasion of Upper Canada. General Hull issued a proclamation assuring Canadians that “I come to protect and not to injure you.”<sup>36</sup>

The American Army was twice the size of the British detachment so when the Essex Militia stationed in Sandwich met them at a bridge over the River Canard on July 16, 1812, the Americans pushed back the British. The British withdrew to Amherstburg, but General Hull worried about his supply lines and lack of heavy artillery to batter Fort Amherstburg, so he did not follow up his victory. The Americans set up camp at Francois Baby’s farm on the Detroit River and General Hull issued a proclamation that convinced about 500 Canadian Militiamen to desert. The Americans followed the British towards Amherstburg, but Canadian ships anchored near the mouth of the River Canard and British troops and Indians stopped the Americans from advancing to Amherstburg. General Hull wanted to use his large guns against Fort Malden at Amherstburg, so he delayed the attack for two weeks while the guns were being readied.

The British were not yet strong enough to push the Americans off Canadian soil, so they focused their military efforts against Hull’s supply lines. Groups of British regulars, Canadian Militia and Indians fanned out from Fort Amherstburg, jeopardizing American communication and supply lines on the west bank of the Detroit River. They attacked two key American supply lines and in early August 1812, Captain Henry Brush led an American relief column from the River Raisin in Monroe to Detroit, bringing in cattle and other supplies to General Hull’s Army. Captain Brush sent a messenger to General Hull who was encamped at the Canadian town of Sandwich, near present day Windsor, Ontario. The message advised him that Shawnee Chief Tecumseh and

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<sup>36</sup> James J. Talman, *Basic Documents in Canadian History* (Toronto: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1959)p. 78.

some of his warriors had crossed the Detroit River and advanced to the vicinity of Brownstown, and that British regulars were probably escorting and advising him.<sup>37</sup>

Captain Brush asked General Hull to send him troops from Detroit to protect his supply column and on August 4, 1812, Major Thomas Van Horne, commander, and 200 Ohio militia marched south down the road they had just cut through the Black Swamp to bring supplies to Detroit. As Major Van Horne and his men crossed Brownstown Creek, three miles north of the village, Tecumseh and 24 of his Indian combatants ambushed one of the supply columns. Amidst the confusion of crackling rifles, flitting shadows and revolving battle lines the Americans began to retreat. The Indians chased the Americans as far as the Ecorse River before they melted into the woods and the Americans returned to Detroit.<sup>38</sup>

The American casualties in the Battle of Brownstown included 18 men killed, 12 wounded and 70 men missing. The Indians lost one chief. The skirmish outside of Brownstown did not turn the tide of the war, but it did reveal that the American supply line to Ohio was not secure and convinced General Hull that the British and Indian forces outnumbered him, a conviction that would ultimately lead to the surrender of Detroit to the British.<sup>39</sup>

For days after the Battle of Brownstown, the British forces stayed in place, anticipating another American force that had not materialized. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas St. George had sent in reinforcements so that now the British numbered nearly four hundred, but days of inactivity and depleted rations had caused Adam Muir to order his force back into their boats and return to Fort Malden. Suddenly, Tecumseh galloped up and told Muir about another detachment of Americans coming. Tecumseh planned another ambush, this time close to the Indian village of Monguagon. The odds seemed to be in favor of the 600 American soldiers, including an artillery unit which would be pitted against Muir's 400 British militiamen and Tecumseh's Indian soldiers.<sup>40</sup>

On August 8, another American force marched toward Monroe on a mission to reach Hull's supply train at River Raisin and escort it to Detroit. Near Monguagon, American Scouts ran into the British and Indian force of about 400 men, led by Captain Adam Muir and Tecumseh. The British and Indians blocked the road south and Lieutenant Colonel James Miller quickly mustered his Americans. In a running battle, the Americans drove the British and Indians back through Monguagon until the British retreated across the Detroit River in canoes and rowboats.

During the following week, Major General Isaac Brock, acting Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada docked at Amherstburg with reinforcements. The deserting militiamen returned and Tecumseh and Brock designed a plan to attack Detroit. The British reoccupied Sandwich and started to shell Detroit. On August 16, they crossed the Detroit River and the British and Militia fanned out to the southwest of Detroit and Tecumseh's native warriors scattered into the woods west and north of Detroit. Their combined strength- approximately 2,000 strong-almost matched

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<sup>37</sup> The Battle at Brownstown: American and British accounts, *Columbian Centinel*, September 12, 1812. Parks Canada Teacher Resources Centre: [file:///A:/americanindians\\_1812\\_htm](file:///A:/americanindians_1812_htm)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> The Battle at Brownstown: American and British accounts, *Columbian Centinel*, September 12, 1812. Parks Canada Teacher Resources Centre: [file:///A:/americanindians\\_1812\\_htm](file:///A:/americanindians_1812_htm)

<sup>40</sup> Alec R. Gilpin, *The Territory of Michigan, 1805-1837* (Michigan State University Press, 1970)p. 13-32.

the strength of Hull's remaining forces. A thoroughly demoralized Hull surrendered Detroit on August 16, 1812.<sup>41</sup>

Hull's surrender gave the British several unanticipated advantages. The British confiscated cannons, muskets and supplies stored at Detroit to equip and feed the Canadian Militia and their Indian Allies. The lack of an American Army reduced the threat to Fort Amherstburg and southwest Upper Canada and paved the way for the British and Canadians to occupy Michigan territory. Now that Brock had secured his flank, he could shift his forces away from the Detroit River region to the Niagara Frontier. Colonel Henry Procter of the 41<sup>st</sup> Regiment inherited Brock's command and a military conundrum: how to hold Detroit and Michigan territory with very limited forces – the very same question that Hull had pondered.

In October 1812, Governor General Sir George Prevost asked Lord Bathurst, Colonial Secretary, for drafts of Royal Navy officers and men to provide a core of naval professionals to man the vessels on the lakes. This call proved to be timely because by December 1812, Captain Andrew Gray, now Acting Deputy Quarter Master General, sent a memo to Prevost, evaluating the American project of constructing a fleet at Presque Isle, Pennsylvania. Captain Gray saw the America fleet as such a threat to British control of the Great Lakes that he felt "nothing can save our navy from destruction."<sup>42</sup>

### **The War: Year Two, 1813**

The Americans did not allow Hull's surrender to demoralize them. They built a second North Western Army with William Henry Harrison, Governor of Indiana Territory, in command. Governor Harrison planned a winter campaign to regain lost territory and to attack the British at Amherstburg, hoping that ice on the Detroit River would encase the British vessels and serve as a bridge for his 4,000- man army. General Harrison and the British commander, General Procter, and their forces clashed at the Battle of Frenchtown on January 22, 1813. Although the battle was hard fought with heavy losses on both sides, Procter and his troops prevailed. The next day the Indians massacred wounded American prisoners, creating enough American outrage to ensure their inevitable defeat. A detachment of the Provincial Marine, numbering 28 men of all ranks and acting as artillerymen actively participated in the Battle of Frenchtown. They suffered over 50 percent casualties with one man killed and sixteen wounded.<sup>43</sup>

The British had to control Lake Erie to win the War of 1812, and they faced a severe supply problem in maintaining this control. The region around Lake Erie and the Detroit River did not produce enough crops and livestock to feed General Procter's troops, the British sailors on Lake Erie or the multitude of Tecumseh's warriors and their families gathered at Amherstburg. The British maintained their control of Lake Erie from June 1812 until July 1813, when the American fleet that Commodore Perry was building at Presque Isle became a deciding factor in the War.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Wood, Volume 2, p. 298

<sup>43</sup> Wood, Volume 2, Page 10

In the spring of 1813, the Provincial Marine proved itself once again as an effective transport service when it carried General Henry Procter's force of Regulars and Militia across Lake Erie to besiege the American base of Fort Meigs in Perrysburg, Ohio. Over 500 Regulars embarked on the *Queen Charlotte*, *General Hunter*, *Chippewa*, *Mary*, *Nancy* and *Miamis*, and 462 Essex Militia were loaded onto numerous bateaux. The Marine also shipped large stores and large caliber cannons to bombard the fort. The operation and one later in July did not defeat the Americans, but the officers and men of the Provincial Marine were an important part of the campaign.

Responding to the American threat on the Great Lakes, the British sent two Royal Naval contingents to the Great Lakes in the spring of 1813 to supersede the Provincial Marine. Captain James Lucas Yeo commanded the largest group of about 446 officers and men that arrived directly from England. Robert Heriot Barclay, a Royal Navy veteran of the Battle of Trafalgar, led a smaller group of nine officers and gunners who came from the Atlantic command of Sir John Warden.

Robert Heriot Barclay had a similar seafaring biography to Oliver Hazard Perry. Barclay served aboard the *HMS Diana* in the English Channel and in November 1809, lost his left arm leading a boarding attack on a French convoy. He recovered and continued to serve as a Lieutenant aboard several ships on the North American station. After the United States declared war in June 1812, Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren, Commander in Chief of the North American station, detached Barclay and two other Lieutenants, Robert Finnis and Daniel Pring, to act as captains of corvettes on the Great Lakes. On May 5, 1813, Barclay arrived at Kingston on Lake Ontario and took charge of the squadron there as acting commander. Ten days later Captain James Lucas Yeo took charge and when his friend William Mulcaster declined his offer to be commander of the detached squadron on Lake Erie because he felt the squadron was undermanned and unprepared, Captain Yeo extended the offer to Barclay. Barclay immediately accepted.<sup>44</sup>

By 1813, the Americans dominated Lake Ontario and held the Niagara Peninsula, and Commander Barclay had to travel overland to Amherstburg to his command with just a handful of officers and seamen. Arriving there on June 5, 1813, he immediately set sail in two of his armed vessels to assess the American fleet. At this point the Americans did not have any armed vessels on the lakes, but they were constructing ships at Presque Isle and transferring several from Black Rock. Commander Barclay reconnoitered Presque Isle and noted that the Americans had a force of 2000 militia and the two American brigs already had their lower masts fitted.

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<sup>44</sup> Barclay was not actually a captain in rank. He was a commander, a rank midway between lieutenant and captain. Since he commanded a ship on Lake Erie he was in fact a captain and was so addressed. Actually he should have been called by courtesy a commodore, like Perry, who was only a lieutenant in rank, because he commanded a squadron. But Barclay's superior, Sir James Yeo, was only a commodore. Howard H. Peckham, "Commodore Perry's Captive. *Ohio History: The Scholarly Journal of the Ohio Historical Society*, Volume 72., p.222

Next, he attempted to intercept the American ships from Black Rock, but the foggy weather caused the two fleets to miss each other. Later Commander Barclay learned that he and the Americans had been only about fourteen miles apart off Cattaraugus Creek.

Only a small portion of the Royal Navy officers and seamen were sent to the Navy Yard at Amherstburg. Captain Yeo ordered Barclay there to assume the command of Commodore Hall and Barclay arrived with three officers, a surgeon, a purser, a master's mate and nineteen men. He had only the smallest core of naval professionals and the majority of the seamen and many of the officers that he commanded were not Royal Navy sailors. A roster for July 1813 listed 108 Canadians, 54 sailors, and 106 of the 41<sup>st</sup> regiment soldiers as serving aboard the vessels at Amherstburg.<sup>45</sup>

Commander Barclay pleaded for an additional 250-300 professional seamen, but had received fewer than fifty reinforcements before the battle of Lake Erie. During the summer of 1813, Barclay, Bell and General Procter frantically tried to prepare the *Detroit* and the Amherstburg fleets for action. The lack of trained seamen and supplies were to be critical factors in the autumn encounter with Oliver Hazard Perry and his fleet.

### **The Arms Race: Perry and Dobbins Build a Fleet**

The most significant American threat to Fort Amherstburg materialized in late 1812 and into the summer of 1813. On July 16, 1812, Captain Daniel Dobbins was at Mackinac with his schooner *Salina* that he had just purchased. Captain Dobbins had navigated the lakes for many years and intimately knew their shores, harbors, and citizens on both sides of the border. Word came that the United States and Great Britain were at war. The American force at Fort Mackinac, 56 in all, was captured and Captain Dobbins and his crew were ordered to take the oath of allegiance or give their word of honor not to take up arms against Great Britain during the war. Captain Dobbins refused to do this and because of the intercession of Mr. Wilmoth of the British Northwest Fur Company, he was allowed to leave with the *Salina* as cartel, to take his fellow prisoners to Fort Malden. His fellow prisoners included Rufus Seth Reed and William W. Reed of Erie and 29 others.

At Detroit, Captain Dobbins and the *Salina* found General Hull and his troops camped on the Canadian shore and Captain Dobbins joined two different expeditions against the British. He came back to Detroit with General Hull's army and was in Colonel Mack's Company which volunteered to take some mounted guns and drive the British ship *Queen Charlotte* and brig *Hunter* from their moorings off Spring Wells where they were landing soldiers to march into Detroit. Hull refused to allow them to try to stop the *Queen Charlotte* and the *Hunter*. After Hull surrendered Detroit, Captain Dobbins and the other prisoners were taken to Fort Malden at Amherstburg. Word reached the British commanding officer, General Brock, that Captain Dobbins had broken his parole by taking up arms to defend Detroit.

In August 1812, Captain Dobbins fled to the woods around Fort Malden, hiding part of the time under the upside down hulk of a wreck partly buried in the sand, and part time in the woods. The

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<sup>45</sup> Wood, Vol 2, p. 252; Wood, Vo. 2, p. 298.

British offered a reward for his capture, dead or alive, and Indians were delegated to track him down. He made his way on foot along the bank of the Detroit River, until he reached its mouth where he found a dugout. He paddled across Lake Erie to Sandusky, making his camp overnight on the shore of Put-in-Bay, which just a year later would become the scene of Perry's victory.<sup>46</sup>

Soon after Captain Dobbins reached the American forces in Ohio, General William Meade immediately sent him to Washington with the first official account of the surrender of Mackinac and Detroit. Captain Dobbins testified before the Cabinet at Washington and the government granted him a sailing master's warrant. After President James Madison had heard from several other sources, he exclaimed, "There is one thing to be done. We must gain control of the lakes. Therein lies our only safety."<sup>47</sup>

The government issued Captain Dobbins a sailing master's warrant, and ordered him to go to Erie and began building gunboats, and to contact Commodore Isaac Chauncey commander of the American fleet on Lake Ontario, for further instructions. On September 26, 1812, Captain Dobbins began his ship building on Cascade Creek, about a mile above Erie, where the lake was deeper. He had only the carpenters that he obtained locally and could only find one ship's carpenter for master builder, Ebenezer Crosby of Black Rock. He had to transport his ship building materials from Pittsburgh, over bad roads and there were no local mills for sawing lumber, only the standing trees as raw material.

In December, 1812, Commodore Chauncey and Henry Eckford, a naval architect, arrived at Erie, from Lake Ontario, and finished the drawings of the two twenty gun brigs, leaving instructions for getting out the timbers for them and for more gunboats. Noah Brown, chief master builder, arrived at Erie in February 1813 from New York with 25 carpenters, and Commodore Isaac Chauncey appointed Commander Oliver Hazard Perry as commodore of the fleet in March 1813.

Oliver Hazard Perry had succumbed to the siren song of the sea shortly after his thirteenth birthday. Early in 1799, the U.S. Frigate *General Greene* was fitting out for service against France, and her captain, Christopher Perry, recommended his son Oliver for one of the midshipman appointments. Oliver was warranted a midshipman in the U.S. Navy on April 7, 1799, and over the next six years he participated in the undeclared war against France and the Tripolitan War against the Barbary pirates. During that time Perry served on such well-known ships as the *Constellation* and *Constitution*, and after an extended leave in 1806-1807 he directed the building of a flotilla of small gunboats in Connecticut and Rhode Island. In April 1809, he received his first seagoing command, the 14-gun schooner *Revenge*. He did not enjoy

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<sup>46</sup>Frank H. Severance., Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society Volume VIII, Buffalo Historical Society, Buffalo, New York, 1905. Frank H. Severance, Career of Daniel Dobbins, page 257 of volume VIII.

<sup>47</sup>Frank H. Severance., Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society Volume VIII, Buffalo Historical Society, Buffalo, New York, 1905. Frank H. Severance, Career of Daniel Dobbins, page 257 of volume VIII.

commanding the *Revenge* and when the Navy offered him the chance to build and command the Lake Erie fleet, he eagerly accepted the task.<sup>48</sup>

In March, 1813, Captain Oliver Hazard Perry arrived at Presque Isle, and he noted that much work had already been done. Workers had laid the keels of two twenty gun brigs and a clipper schooner had been constructed at the mouth of Cascade Creek. Two gunboats were nearly finished at the mouth of Lee's run, and a third had been started. In May 1813, three smaller vessels were afloat and on May 24, the two brigs were launched. With boundless energy Perry purchased three schooners and a sloop and employed skilled workers to build three other schooners and two twenty-gun brigs which later accompanied the captured British brig *Caledonia*. The six ships built at Erie were the two twenty gun brigs *Lawrence* and *Niagara* and the schooners *Scorpion*, *Tigris*, *Porcupine* and *Ariel*. Noah Brown launched *Scorpion* in the spring of 1813 at Presque Isle, and Sailing Master Stephen Champlin, Oliver Hazard Perry's first cousin, commanded the *Scorpion*.

After Commodore Perry had satisfied himself that the Presque Isle project was operating smoothly, he traveled to Lake Ontario to acquire seamen from Commodore Isaac Chauncey, and to command the American schooners and gunboats at the Battle of Fort George. Then he went to Black Rock to inspect the American vessels that the British had released when they abandoned Fort Erie at the end of May. On June 6, 1813, he had the ships towed up the rapids at the head of the Niagara River, a difficult task that took six days to complete. These vessels were the *Caledonia*, the schooner *Somers*, the schooner *Amelia* that carried one long 18 pound gun; the schooner *Ohio*, carrying one long 24 pounder; and the sloop *Trippe*, carrying one long 18 pounder. The flotilla sailed from Buffalo and reached Erie, on June 18, moving "at the rate of twenty five miles in twenty four hours," on account of headwinds. They reached Erie barely ahead of a British cruising squadron under Captain Robert Finnis of the Royal Navy which had been searching for them.<sup>49</sup>

Like British Commander Barclay, one of Commodore Perry's biggest problems was manpower. He had only 120 men and he needed over 700 to operate his ships. He wrote to Commodore Chauncey several times requesting reinforcements, but received no reply. Desperate, Perry went over Commodore Chauncey's head and wrote directly to the Secretary of the Navy. Commodore Perry's audacity paid off, because pressure from Washington D.C. and other naval places motivated Chauncey to send about 150 men from Sackets Harbor to Lake Erie. Perry's rash action provoked several irate letters between Perry and Chauncey. Perry wrote to Chauncey complaining about the quality of the men that arrived, noting that the men who came were a rag tag set of "blacks, soldiers, and boys."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Theodore Roosevelt. *The Naval War of 1812*. Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1987. P. 56.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> "African Americans and the Battle of Lake Erie." U.S. Brig Niagara, Erie, Pennsylvania. Gerry Altoff, Erie Maritime Museum.

Again Perry bypassed Chauncey and complained to the Navy Department and again Chauncey wrote Perry a biting letter. Chauncey commented that he was sorry that Perry was not pleased with the men that he had sent but he noted:

“For my knowledge a part of them are not surpassed by any seamen we have on the fleet, and I have yet to learn that the Colour of the skin, or cut and trimmings of the coat, can effect a man’s qualifications or usefulness. I have nearly 50 blacks on board this Ship (the General Pike) and many of them are amongst my best men...”<sup>51</sup>

Commodore Perry’s best men included Thomas Holdup Stevens who Chauncey made an acting lieutenant in July 1813. Born in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1795, Stevens was warranted a midshipman on the *U.S.S. Hornet* at Charleston in February 1809, and served in the *John Adams* at New York at the beginning of the War of 1812. He volunteered for lake service and after serving on the Niagara frontier eventually joined Oliver Hazard Perry at Erie in April 1813. In the battle of Lake Erie, Stevens commanded the sloop *Trippe*-one long 32-pounder- last in the line. The *Trippe* passed the *Tigress* and *Porcupine* to engage the *Queen Charlotte* and after the action assisted the *Scorpion* in pursuing and capturing two escaping enemy ships. Stevens said that he was not specifically mentioned in Perry’s dispatches because he had differences with Jesse Duncan Elliott, second in command, under whom he had served previously in the *Niagara*. Congress awarded him the silver medal for officers in the Battle of Lake Erie and his home town of Charleston awarded him a sword. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.<sup>52</sup>

### **Preparing For Battle**

In July 1813, Commander Barclay effectively blockaded Perry’s American squadron at Presque Isle Bay. Then he and his fleet disappeared on August 2, 1813, lifting the blockade for three days and allowing Perry to get his ships across the sandbar at the harbor entrance. From this point until September 10, Perry cruised the western end of Lake Erie, trying to find the British and bring them to battle. In the meantime at King’s Navy Yard, Commodore Barclay stalled for time, waiting for the *Detroit* to be completed.

Barclay blockaded Presque Isle for the next few weeks, preventing Perry’s fleet from crossing the sandbar at the mouth of the harbor. Several times he requested Yeo to send him more sailors and arms. He also petitioned Major General Francis de Rottenburg, Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada to send him reinforcements for Major General Henry Procter’s troops at Amherstburg. He did not get his reinforcements.

Perry’s superior squadron instituted a counter blockade of Amherstburg and food supplies there rapidly dwindled. Finally, with supplies almost exhausted, Barclay ventured onto the Detroit River into Lake Erie to battle Perry. By August of 1813, Commander Oliver Hazard Perry had taken his squadron out into Lake Erie. Part of his strategy involved cutting the British supply route across Lake Erie and by September the Commissariat at Amherstburg showed only bare

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<sup>51</sup> African Americans and the Battle of Lake Erie.” U.S. Brig Niagara, Erie, Pennsylvania. Gerry Altoff, Erie Maritime Museum.

<sup>52</sup> Biography. Thomas Holdup Stevens. Arlington National Cemetery Website.

shelves. The garrison and the Indian forces camped outside of Amherstburg faced starvation. General Procter and Captain Yeo ordered Commander Barclay to try to break the blockade.<sup>53</sup>

On the eve of the Battle of Lake Erie the Commander Robert Barclay had 150 men from the Royal Navy, 80 Canadian sailors and 240 soldiers, mostly regulars, and some Indians. Adding their officers, this force amounted to a little over 500 men. About one-quarter of Commodore Perry's American crews were from Rhode Island and one quarter regular seamen, American or cosmopolitan, about one quarter raw volunteers from Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Kentucky, and one quarter blacks, numbering about 490 men on the muster roll. Of Perry's 490 men, all but 116 were sick with bilious or "lake fever," and were too weak to come on deck, which made the able-bodied force of the squadron a little less than 400.<sup>54</sup>

### **Battle of Lake Erie**

Commander Barclay led six British ships out of Amherstburg to meet Perry's nine vessel fleet on September 10, 1813. The six British ships were *Chippewa*, *Detroit*, which was the flagship of the fleet and the only British man of war on the Great Lakes, the *Hunter*, the *Queen Charlotte*, the *Lady Prevost*, and the *Little Belt*. Perry's fleet nine-ship fleet consisted of the *Scorpion*, the *Ariel*, the *Lawrence*, Perry's flagship, the *Caledonia*, the *Niagara*, commanded by Jesse Elliott, the *Somers*, the *Porcupine*, the *Tigress*, and the *Trippe*.<sup>55</sup>

At daybreak on the morning of September 10, 1813, the lookout on the *Lawrence* spotted sails on the horizon and sang out, "Sail ho!" Then the *Lawrence* signaled the fleet, "Enemy in sight," and "Get under way!" At sunrise the Americans spotted British vessels on the northwest horizon.

Dr. Usher Parsons, surgeon's mate on the *Lawrence*, gave one of the most definitive eye witness accounts of the Battle of Lake Erie. He described Perry's fighting flag as being inscribed with large, white letters on a blue ground, the letters saying, "Don't Give Up the Ship." As the crew assembled on the quarter deck, they gave three hearty cheers that the crews of the vessels of the entire American line joined and the flag went to the top of the fore-royal.<sup>56</sup>

Aboard his flag ship the *Lawrence*, Commodore Perry stood on the quarterdeck with two young officers, Thomas Breeze and his brother Alexander Perry. Their duty was to run with his orders to all parts of the ship because no officer could be heard ten feet away in the din and uproar of battle. Dr. Parsons reported that Commodore Perry's dog hid in the bottom of the closet holding all of the crockery. A cannon ball passed through the closet, and smashed both crockery and

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<sup>53</sup> Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812*, VI (Originally published New York, 1869. Sumersworth: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1979)p 509-515.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

<sup>55</sup> Theodore Roosevelt. *The Naval War of 1812*. (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1987)98.

<sup>56</sup> Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812* VI (Originally published New York, 1869, Reprinted by Benchmark Publishing Corporation, Glendale, New York) p. 526-533.

Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812*, VI (Originally published New York, 1869. Sumersworth: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1979)p 509-515.

door, covering the floor with fragments. The dog set up a barking protest against the right of such an invasion of his chosen retirement.<sup>57</sup>

As the morning and the battle wore on, the *Lawrence* became crippled, making it necessary for Commodore Perry to move to the *Niagara*. At about 2:30 that afternoon, Commodore Perry left the *Lawrence* with just his little brother Alexander and fourteen other men alive and unhurt and boarded a small boat with eight stout seamen at the oars. He stood tall in the stern of the boat and the British aimed a shower of grape, canister, and bullets at the boat and at Commodore Perry. He ignored them until his crew tearfully pleaded with him to sit down. The boat quickly reached the *Niagara*.

By 2:45 p.m. Perry had taken command of the *Niagara* and closed in on the British line which stood about half a mile away. The *Niagara* poured broadsides into the *Queen Charlotte* and the *Detroit* and when he saw the *Niagara* coming, Commander Barclay of the *Detroit* attempted to veer around to give the *Niagara* a broadside, but in his maneuvering he crashed into the *Lady Charlotte* and sustained a serious wound himself. The *Somers*, in command of Lt. Elliott, with the *Tigris* and *Porcupine* pressed down upon the *Queen Charlotte* who finding herself exposed ahead and astern, struck her colors. The *Detroit*, now unmanageable, also gave up and the *Lady Prevost* and *Hunter*, both disabled, pulled down their colors. The *Little Belt* at the head, and the *Chippewa*, at the rear of the line, made sail and ran, but the *Scorpion* and *Trippe* pursued them and after a close chase, took and brought them back. Not a sail of the enemy escaped and the victory was complete.

**Perry: “We have met the enemy and they are ours..”**

Immediately after the battle Perry sent this message to General William Henry Harrison: “Dear General: We have met the enemy and they are ours; two ships, two brigs, one schooner and one sloop.” He added in a postscript, “Send us some soldiers to help take care of the prisoners, who are more numerous than ourselves.”<sup>58</sup>

Commodore Perry helped nurse Commander Barclay’s wounds at Put-in-Bay and they became friends. The Americans paroled Commander Barclay and when he had recovered enough to travel he went to Quebec. In early 1814 the citizens of Quebec presented the Commander with a commemorative piece of silver and he received the same honor in London from the Canadian merchants there. Since all captains who lost their ships had to be court-martialed, Commander Barclay was tried in Portsmouth Harbor in September 1814 and was “most fully and most honorably acquitted.”<sup>59</sup>

On September 12, 1813, British Commander Barclay wrote a letter from Put-in-Bay to William Jones, British Secretary of the Navy in which he reminded the Secretary that he had last written

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Howard H. Peckham, “Commodore Perry’s Captive. *Ohio History: The Scholarly Journal of the Ohio Historical Society*, Volume 72., p.222

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

on September 6 that he desperately needed more seamen at Amherstburg or he would have to sail with what he called the “deplorably manned” squadron that he had. He reminded Secretary Jones that supplies had been so scarce at Amherstburg that there was not a day’s flour in store. He also reminded Secretary Jones that he had been following Major General Procter and Commodore Yeo’s orders when he risked a battle with the Americans. He described the battle to Secretary Jones and concluded by saying, “Captain Perry has behaved in a most humane and attentive manner, not only to myself and officers, but to all the wounded. I trust that, although unsuccessful, you will approve of the motives that induced me to sail under so many disadvantages, and that it may be hereafter proved that under such circumstances the honor of His Majesty’s flag has not been tarnished.”<sup>60</sup>

All ships were anchored after the Battle of Lake Erie and the survivors cleared away the wreckage, tended the wounded and buried the dead. They buried the enlisted men at sea at twilight and officers from both sides were buried together on South Bass Island the next day when all of the ships returned to Put-In-Bay. The entire American squadron suffered greatly, but more than two-thirds of the loss was on the *Lawrence*. She had 22 men killed and 61 wounded. The *Niagara* had two killed and 2 wounded. The *Caledonia* had three wounded, the *Somers* two, and the *Trippe* three. The *Ariel* had one killed and three wounded and the *Scorpion* had two killed. The total loss was 27 killed and 96 wounded of whom three died. The British losses, which fell most heavily on the *Detroit* and the *Queen Charlotte*, amounted to 41 killed and 94 wounded.<sup>61</sup>

Most historians state that the Americans won the Battle of Lake Erie because of what Theodore Roosevelt described as “Superior heavy metal.” Commodore Perry bought his cannon from the foundries on Chesapeake Bay and moved them to Presque Isle with great difficulty. Perry could get the materials and fittings from Pittsburgh which was becoming a major manufacturing center. On the other hand, British Commander Barclay had to transport his guns and supplies up the Saint Lawrence River to Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. In 1813, the Americans controlled Lake Ontario and occupied the Niagara Peninsula so Barclay’s supplies had to be carried overland from York (Toronto). The American victory at the Battle of York meant that the guns intended for the *HMS Detroit* fell into American hands and the *Detroit* had to be outfitted with miscellaneous guns available at Amherstburg. These guns were supposedly defective, but performed very well during the Battle of Lake Erie.<sup>62</sup>

The battle could have gone either way, especially if the outcome depended on the ship builders and crews. On the British side, William Bell supervised building the fleet at Amherstburg, including the *Detroit*, which was the best built ship on Lake Erie and the only British warship built on the Lake during the War of 1812. The building went slowly because Bell was such a perfectionist. In the meantime, the Americans had built six ships and this was an important

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<sup>60</sup> Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812*, VI (Originally published New York, 1869. Sumersworth: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1979)p 509-515.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Theodore Roosevelt. *The Naval War of 1812*.( Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1987) 147.

ingredient in the American victory. Some historians argue that even if Barclay had possessed more ships he would not have been able to get crews and armament for them.

On the American side, Daniel Dobbins, the experienced and skilled lake mariner, oversaw the initial construction efforts of the American fleet at Presque Isle and the movement of supplies to Erie. Noah Brown constructed most of the ships at Erie and designed the two largest brigs. These two men were the driving forces in the building of Perry's fleet.

Both the British and American crews were a mixture of professional and inexperienced seamen, lake sailors and boatmen or voyageurs. At least fifty or more of Perry's seamen were experienced sailors drafted from the *USS Constitution* which at the time was being refitted in Boston. Volunteers from General William Henry Harrison's army made up the American crews, while Commodore Barclay drafted several soldiers from Procter's 41<sup>st</sup> Regiment. He may have had some Native Americans in his crew, as he routinely used them.<sup>63</sup>

The Battle of Lake Erie was the first decisive fleet action of the United States Navy, and its tactical inexperience explains some of the difficulty in getting all of the ships engaged. This was also the first time a British fleet, even though a small one had been forced to surrender every ship. Circumstances had forced the British to go to battle unprepared and outgunned, and their defeat was a serious blow to their pride. National morale greatly improved in the United States whose tiny fleet had defeated part of the best Navy in the world.

The Battle of Lake Erie left the United States in complete control of Lake Erie and eliminated any chance that the British could resupply their garrison at Detroit. The defeated British fleet slipped away to Detroit and General Procter, realizing that safety lay in flight, had four of the vessels hastily loaded with arms, ammunition, stores, government papers and other plunder from Detroit. With all speed, the four ships sailed to Lake St. Clair and then took refuge on the Thames. Even before Procter learned of Barclay's defeat, he prepared to fall back on the British position at Burlington at the western end of Lake Ontario. Tecumseh knew that this would remove all protection from the tribes in the confederation whose lands lay to the west of Detroit and he unsuccessfully attempted to dissuade Procter from leaving.

General Harrison anticipated Procter's retreat and ordered his 1,000 mounted troops to begin advancing along the lake shore to Detroit. Commodore Perry used his combined fleet to transport Major General Harrison's army of about 2,500 soldiers to the north shore of Lake Erie where he intercepted the retreating British army and defeated it at the Battle of the Thames River on October 5, 1813. It was during this battle that Tecumseh was killed. His death and disillusionment with the British led to the collapse of the Indian confederacy's alliance with the British. The British were never able to reestablish their power in the West and the United States was able to secure its northern frontier.

After they lost the Battle of Lake Erie, the British knew that they had to evacuate Amherstburg. The Americans blocked the supply line across Lake Erie to the east and the British had no fleet to prevent William Henry Harrison's Northwestern Army from invading Amherstburg. Procter

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<sup>63</sup> David Skaggs, and Gerard Atloff, *A Signal Victory: The Lake Erie Campaign, 1812-1813*(Naval Institute Press. 1997) 12-15

ordered the destruction of Fort Amherstburg, the Navy Yard and all of the government buildings in Amherstburg, and by late September the British and the Indians began their retreat from Amherstburg.

On September 23, 1813, Procter ordered all of the government buildings in Amherstburg to be burned. The Navy Yard ceased to exist. After the war the Royal Navy built a new navy yard at Penetanguishene on Georgian Bay, far away from the United States border. Amherstburg retained a small military presence, but it was no longer a British naval base on the Upper Great Lakes.

At the end of September 1813, the Americans entered Amherstburg and started building a new fort on the ruins of the British fort, facing the same problems of manpower shortages and lack of materials and tools that the British had encountered when they built it. After the War of 1812 ended, the Americans returned control of the partially rebuilt fort to the British on July 1, 1815.

### **Encore: The Schooner Nancy of the Northern Theater**

The schooner *Nancy* was not built at the Amherstburg Navy Yard, but practically speaking Amherstburg served as her home supply base when she was the sole surviving British ship on the Upper Great Lakes. The *Nancy* was built for the fur trade in 1789 at Detroit which Britain still occupied. John Richardson of Forsayth, Richardson and Company of Montreal supervised her construction and designed her to be approximately 80 feet long with a 22 foot beam or width, and the depth of her hold was eight feet.

Under the command of Captain Mills, she performed her fur trade duties by carrying goods that included food, clothing, rum, meat, powder, blankets, tools, trinkets, weapons and ammunition up the lakes and then returning with furs. In 1793, Forsayth sold the *Nancy* to George Leith and Company, merchants and fur traders who in turn sold her to the North West Fur Company. In 1805 Captain Alexander Mackintosh succeeded Captain Mills as her commander and she continued to transport fur and merchandise on Lakes Erie, Huron and Michigan.

When the United States declared war on Great Britain in June of 1812, the *Nancy* lay moored at Macintosh's wharf at Moy (Windsor) across from Detroit. Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas St. George, commander of the garrison at Amherstburg quickly requisitioned her as a British transport and rechristened her *HM Schooner Nancy*. On July 30, 1812, *HMS Nancy* joined her first convoy with the Provincial Marine schooner *Lady Prevost*, moving military stores and sixty men of the 41<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Foot from Fort Erie to Amherstburg. During the summer and early fall of 1812, *HMS Nancy* constantly traveled Lake Erie between Detroit and Fort Erie, hauling stores and provisions. In his inventory to General Isaac Brock, Colonel Matthew Willot described her as being capable of mounting six four-pounder carriage guns and six swivel guns.<sup>64</sup>

On April 23, 1813, *HMS Nancy* joined a squadron transporting General Henry Procter's force from Amherstburg to Miami Bay outside of Toledo, Ohio, where he planned to attack Fort

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<sup>64</sup>Barry Gough, *Through Water, Ice and Fire: Schooner Nancy And The War Of 1812*, (Dundurn Press, 2006)22-26

Meigs. General Procter commanded a division of 423 men of the British 41<sup>st</sup> Regiment, 63 men of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, 31 men of the Royal Artillery, 16 men from other units, and 462 Canadian militia. Shawnee Chief Tecumseh and his force of about 1,250 American Indian warriors also supported General Procter. On May 1, 1813, General Procter and his forces lay siege of Fort Meigs in Perrysburg, Ohio and the American defenders suffered heavy losses, but the Fort withstood Procter and Tecumseh's siege and they finally withdrew. The Americans counted this an important psychological as well as tactical victory after their recent defeats at the battles of Detroit and Frenchtown and the British lifting of the siege marked the turning of the war on the Northwest frontier in favor of the Americans.

On September 10, 1813, Oliver Hazard Perry defeated Robert Heriot Barclay at the Battle of Lake Erie, leaving *HMS Nancy* the only British warship on the Upper Great Lakes. In October of that year, the Americans nearly captured *HMS Nancy* near the St. Clair River as she made her way to Detroit which the Americans had recaptured after they won the Battle of Lake Erie. Later in the month, *HMS Nancy* traveled to Sault Ste. Marie, where she was refitted and spent the winter.

After the Americans won the Battle of Lake Erie in September 1813, they controlled the British supply route to the Upper Great Lakes. The British acted quickly. They chose the Nottawasaga River near Georgian Bay as their new supply route, a route running partially overland from York (Toronto) north to the Holland River. Indians had used the route from Lake Simcoe to Lake Huron for decades and now the *HMS Nancy* used the Nottawasaga River to receive and transport supplies to the British garrison at Fort Mackinac between Lakes Huron and Michigan.

In February 1814, Colonel Robert McDougall commanding a British relief party made of up ten officers, 220 infantry and artillerymen and twenty seamen left Kingston for Fort Mackinac. They traveled the Lake Simcoe and Nottawasaga River route and arrived at Mackinac on May 18, 1814. The British had planned to cut down the *HMS Nancy* to a gunboat to add to their defenses, but they decided not to cut her down and she continued to serve as a transport. During the spring of 1814, she made three round trips from Fort Mackinac to the mouth of the Nottawasaga River for supplies.

Quickly detecting this new British supply route, and failing in their August 1814, bid to recapture Fort Mackinac, the Americans decided to capture the *HMS Nancy* which they believed to be in Georgian Bay. The American forces wanted to destroy the *HMS Nancy* because they hoped to starve the northern garrison at Fort Mackinac into surrender and gain control of the Upper Great Lakes.

A British scout, Lieutenant Ramsay Livingston, made a 360-mile canoe trip from Fort Mackinac to the Nottawasaga River with a message warning Lieutenant Commander Miller Worsley of the Royal Navy who had recently taken command of the *HMS Nancy* to hide her up river from the searching eyes of the approaching Americans. Worsley ordered her to be taken two miles up the Nottawasaga River and also arranged for a blockhouse to be built.

On August 13, 1814, American commander Captain Arthur Sinclair and his three ships the *Niagara*, *Tigress* and *Scorpion* arrived off the mouth of the Nottawasaga River in pursuit of the *HMS Nancy*. Soldiers in several wood gathering parties were astonished when they stumbled

upon the *HMS Nancy* in her hiding place because the officers still thought her to be in Georgian Bay. The next day, August 14, the *Niagara*, *Tigress* and *Scorpion* moved in to bombard the *HMS Nancy*, but the sand dunes effectively blocked the shells. The Americans had to land a detachment with a mortar before the shots inflicted any damage on the *HMS Nancy*.

Lieutenant Worsley and his force of 22 seamen, 23 Indians and nine French Canadian voyageurs and Lieutenant Livingston, valiantly defended the *HMS Nancy*, but they were overwhelmed by the American force of about 500 men. As soon as Lieutenant Worsley realized his forces were losing the battle to the Americans, he made two difficult decisions. He hid the *HMS Nancy*'s boats upstream on the Nottawasaga and he decided to scuttle the *HMS Nancy* instead of surrendering her. Before his men could finish the preparations to scuttle her, a shell hit the blockhouse and started a fire that swiftly spread to the *HMS Nancy*. She burned to the waterline and sank and Worsley and his men escaped up the river.

General Sinclair returned to Detroit after the battle, but the *Scorpion* and *Tigress* stayed behind to patrol the river and prevent canoes and bateaux from getting supplies to Fort Mackinac. The Americans blocked the river mouth with felled trees and left, hoping to intercept canoes carrying furs on Lake Huron. Lieutenant Worsley and his men rowed two bateaux and a canoe up Lake Huron toward Fort Mackinac, 360 miles away. During their trip they slid past the *Tigress* and *Scorpion* near St. Joseph Island, but they continued on their journey, arriving at Fort Mackinac on August 31, 1814.

At Fort Mackinac, Lt. Worsley convinced Colonel McDougall to allow him to attack both the American vessels and he hastily left Fort Mackinac on September 1, 1814, with a party of 92 men. One boat carried sailors and three others a detachment of Lieutenant Andrew Bulger's Royal Newfoundland Regiment of Fencible Infantry. Two of the boats carried small artillery pieces and some Native American escorts. Native American scouts had reported sighting the *Tigress* and *Scorpion* in Georgian Bay, in an area known as the Detour and Worsley moved as quickly as a Lake Huron storm to catch and capture them. On September 3, Worsley went ashore to look for the American ships and after he had traveled six miles he found the *Tigress* anchored alone. Sailors and soldiers paddled off under the cover of night to take the *Tigress* by surprise and they had reached ten yards of her before the Americans sounded the alarm. After a brief skirmish, Worsley and his men captured the *Tigress* with only two men killed and two wounded.

The British soldiers sent their American captives to Mackinac, after interrogating them and discovering that the *Scorpion* was just fifteen miles away. On September 5, 1814, Robert Livingston, of the Native Department, went to search for her and in two hours returned to report that the *Scorpion* was moving toward the British position. She soon came into view and anchored nearby. Worsley kept the American flag flying on the *Tigress* to avoid raising the alarm, and Bulger's men concealed their red jackets with greatcoats.

At dawn on September 6, 1814, Lt. Worsley and his men sprang into action. They bore down on the *Scorpion* and its unsuspecting crew. When they were twelve yards away, Worsley opened fire and the Newfoundlanders cast off their great coats, fired a volley and stormed onto the *Scorpion*'s deck. Within minutes, the *Scorpion* was a British ship.

The British took the *Scorpion* and *Tigress* to Fort Mackinac. They renamed the *Scorpion Conflance* to honor a ship that Commodore Sir James Lucas Yeo had captured from the French and they renamed the *Tigress Surprise*, to commemorate how they had captured her. Their bold actions allowed the British to regain control of Lake Huron and their vital supply lines to the Northwest, hastening the end of the war and the signing of the Treaty of Ghent in 1814.

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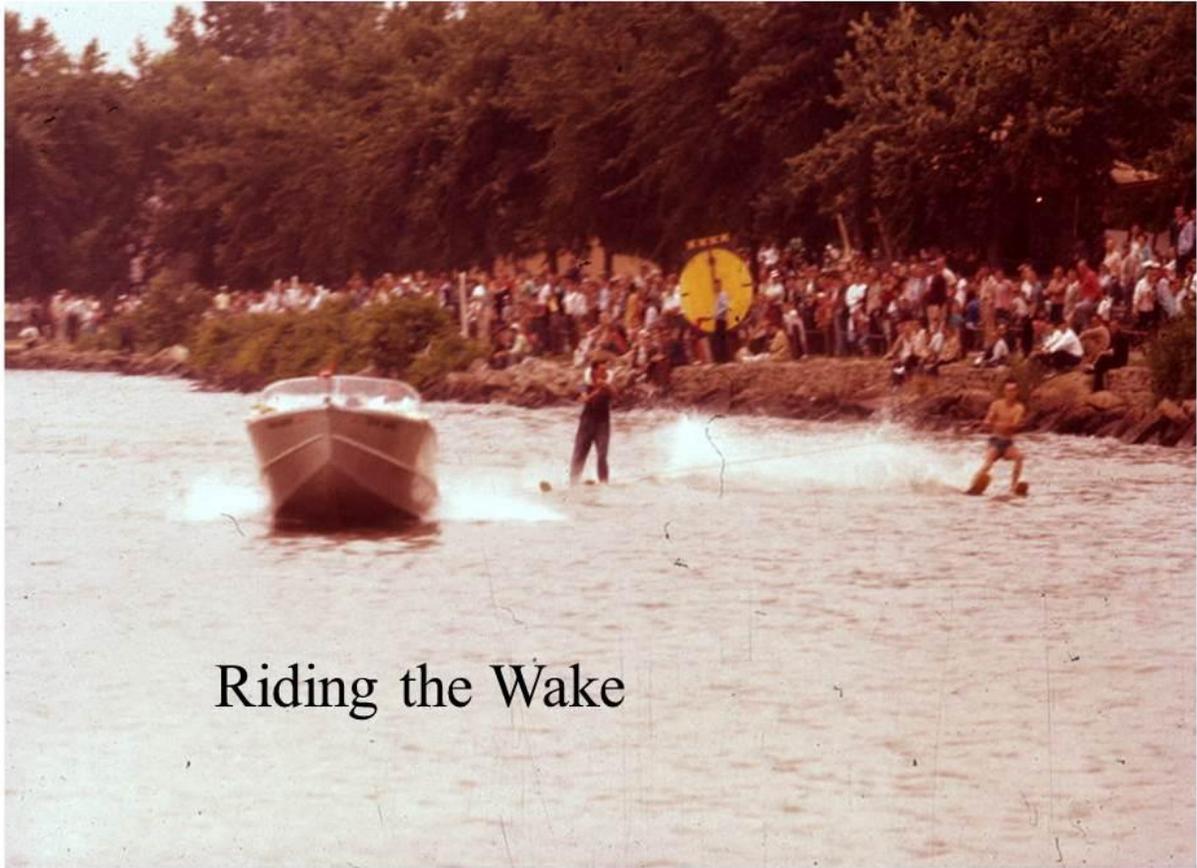
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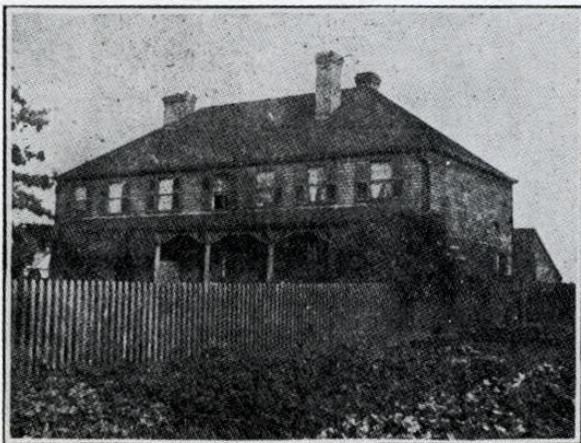
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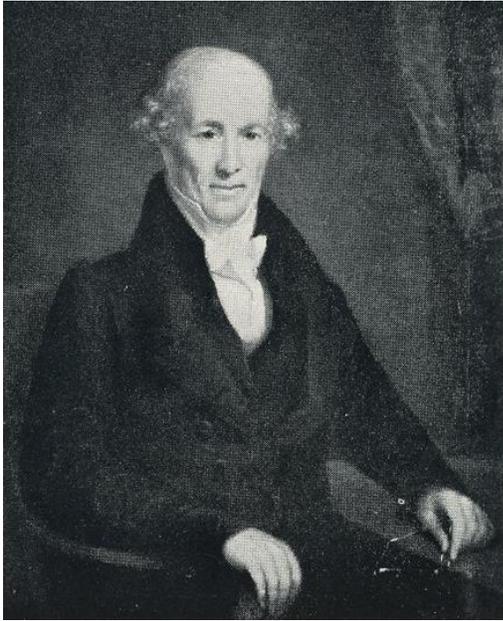


Riding the Wake

### Marie's Ghostly Lover of Monguagon



THE MOY HOUSE.



Angus Mackintosh



Marie Mackintosh hugged the Detroit River as close to her heart as she did her parents [Angus and Mary Archange Baudry, dit Desbutes, dit Saint-Martin Mackintosh](#), and her 13 brothers and sisters. The clear, calm river flowed a few feet away from her home and her father's store and storehouse on its banks on the Canadian side near present day Windsor, Ontario. Marie's father, [Agnus Mackintosh](#), had purchased the land on the south bank of the Detroit River in 1796, shortly after the British had finally evacuated Detroit as they had agreed to do at the end of the Revolutionary War. He built a complex containing a store, a wharf, a storehouse and a rambling frame house on Sandwich Street, a few miles east of the home of John Davis to shelter his family and his business. He named their home Moy House and Marie often heard him telling his friends that even though his home stood east of Sandwich, it was the meaty center of the sandwich, not the outside crust.

[Sandwich Town](#) and Detroit City shared an interwoven history. Around 1796, Detroit celebrated its independence from British rule and British government moved across the Detroit River to Sandwich Town, which had been chosen as an administrative center and capital of Upper Canada (Ontario) to replace the original offices at Fort Ponchartrain in Detroit. When the British government officials left Detroit for Sandwich, they took hundreds of British loyalists with them, including lawyers, constables, and merchants like Angus McIntosh and his family.

The War of 1812 brought famous military leaders from both sides to Sandwich, including British General Isaac Brock, American Generals William Hull and William Henry Harrison, and Native American warriors like Tecumseh and Walk-in-the-Water. The War of 1812 also set the stage for the tragedy of Marie and her Canadian soldier.

Every night Marie walked along the riverbank and down her father's wharf to watch the sunset dying the Detroit River into drops of many colors. She walked between the fruit trees that bloomed on both the Canadian and American sides of the water. Apple, mission pear, cherry and plum trees blossomed in spring, filling the air with their fragrance and offering fruit in the summer and fall. Sometimes in winter, Angus burned apple wood in the fireplace and its fragrance filled the house. On her Detroit River walks, Marie made her way through wild flowers and often saw deer in the surrounding woods and otter and muskrat along the River banks.

Every night while Marie watched the sunset over the Detroit River she thought about her sweetheart, a Canadian soldier with the British and Canadian forces stationed in Windsor. <sup>65</sup> The narrator of Maria's story in *Legends of Detroit* identifies Maria's sweetheart as Captain Muir, but Captain Muir doesn't fit into the narrative of the [Battle of Manguagon](#) and Marie's part in its

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<sup>65</sup> The account of this legend [in Legends of Le Detroit](#) says that Maria MacIntosh's sweetheart is a man by the name of Captain Muir, but that is mixing legend with fact, which is a characteristic of most legends. Captain Adam Muir was involved in the Battle of Manguagon, but he was wounded, not killed. A Lt. Charles Sutherland also fought, but he, too, was wounded and later died. Since this is a legend not completely verifiable by fact, perhaps Maria's sweetheart was an officer in the Canadian Militia which also participated in the battle. In fact, the British forces at Amherstburg which would later be involved in the [Battle of Manguagon consisted of 200 of the 41<sup>st</sup> \(The Welch\) Regiment, 50 of the Newfoundland Fencibles, 300 of the Canadian militia](#) and a few gunners.

aftermath, because he survived. A Lieutenant Charles Sutherland also fought in the battle, and he was wounded and he later died. Could her lover have been Lieutenant Sutherland?<sup>66</sup>

Whether his name was Muir or [Sutherland](#), or Brown, Marie loved the young Canadian officer who so far had been too timid to declare his love and ask for her hand in marriage. She thought about him constantly as she gazed over the calm waters of the Detroit River, turning over ways of making him brave enough to declare his love in her mind like she turned over stones on the sandy shores of the Detroit River. She waited through the spring and early summer for the Canadian officer to summon enough courage to speak his mind and heart to her.

While Marie waited for her Canadian officer to speak his mind, soldiers manning war canoes and larger vessels gathered on the banks of her Detroit River, determined to speak their minds and resolve the war between Great Britain and the United States and their Native American allies on each side. American General William Hull encountered the task of opening and defending a road between Detroit, Monroe, and Ohio to keep his Army supplied. The 200 men of the 41<sup>st</sup> Regiment, 300 men of the Canadian Militia and the 50 soldiers of the Newfoundland Fencibles based at [Amherstburg](#) were equally determined to prevent his Army from receiving supplies and reinforcements. The Americans had lost their first attempt to move supplies down Hull's trace at the Battle of Brownstown on August 5, 1812, even though they outnumbered the British and Canadians 8 to 1.

The Canadian Captain knew that the British and Canadian Army were planning a return engagement to keep the Americans in Detroit from receiving supplies and he knew that he would be a part of it. His knowledge gave him the courage to make a decision. He would declare his love to Marie and ask for her hand in marriage. After all, he could fight more effectively and courageously if Marie gave him her word and waited impatiently for him back in Sandwich. Her yes would propel him to certain victory in battle.

Anticipating her smile and her joyous acceptance of his proposal, the Captain journey to Moy and to his delight, found his lady love walking alone in the garden, an achievement in itself considering the size of her family and household. The Canadian Captain fired a fusillade of impassioned words at Marie's heart, and held out his arms, expecting her to fall limply into them in surrender. Marie didn't surrender. Instead, she looked at him cool as the ice on the winter River. "You took so long to speak that I no longer choose to hear what you are saying," her glance told him. Her eyes glinted like chips of Detroit River ice when he asked for her hand in marriage. Then she laughed at him.

The Canadian officer hadn't known how to melt the ice in Marie's eyes and heart, but her laughter slashed his pride. He turned abruptly and ran from Marie and Moy House, possibly reasoning that battle would be a much safer choice than laughter from his sweetheart Marie. For

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<sup>66</sup> [Lieutenant Charles Sutherland](#) joined the 41st as lieutenant from the Newfoundland Fencibles on August 25, 1810. Sergeant-Major Adam Muir was appointed adjutant of the 41st Regiment on September 30, 1793 and embarked in that capacity with the battalion companies.

her part, Marie couldn't believe that he given up so easily. "He's only piqued," she thought. "He certainly must know that I love him. Why must men be so stupid and matter of fact, taking months to make up their minds to woo a girl? Then if she doesn't immediately say yes, they let their wounded pride get in the way of a satisfactory answer. He'll be back, she thought. He will certainly return.

The Canadian Captain did not return. Marie waited with all of her senses straining to hear his footsteps, but all she heard was silence. She felt a heart throb of alarm and hurried to the door. She called her Canadian Captain, but she heard only the mocking echo of his horses' hooves as he galloped away. She called louder, she screamed, but he disappeared down the street in a flurry dust.

For the remainder of that day, thick clouds of impending doom choked Marie's heart and mind. The clouds thickened when her father told her that a battle had taken place across the Detroit River in Monguagon. She sat late in front of the fireplace, hoping, praying that her lover's anger would cool and he would return. She sat lonely by the fire until its dying embers prodded her into going to her room and bed. She got into her curtained four poster bed and pulled the comforter up over her chin, but she couldn't escape into sleep. Through the long ominous night hours, she despaired and often pounded her pillow. How could I have not told him of my feelings? She reproached herself, but then immediately reproached her lover. How could he not sense my feelings and understand how I wanted him to express his feelings?

Finally, toward morning, exhausted by her aching heart and her tears and questions with no satisfactory answers, Marie fell asleep. Muffled footsteps interrupted her uneasy slumber and sitting bolt upright, she pulled the curtains aside. Bright moonlight shone through her window and outlined the shape of her Canadian officer lover standing beside her bed. Inching closer to the edge of the bed to see him better, Marie saw with a heart stopping alarm that his face gleamed white as a corpse in the moonlight and blood oozed from a gaping wound in his forehead.

Before Marie could do more than tremble with fear and will herself to wake from the nightmare, her lover spoke to her. "Don't be afraid, Marie. I came to tell you, I fell tonight in battle, shot through the head, and my body lies in a thicket on the battlefield. If you love me at all, I beg you to rescue my body from the hands of hostile Indians and from the wolves and beasts of the forest. I assure you that the Americans will not long exult. Traitors sit around their camp fires and listen to their councils. Our blood has not been shed in vain. The standard of old England will float again over Detroit. Farewell, may you be happy."

As her Canadian officer spoke, he picked up her right hand and held it. A chilling sensation, colder than Detroit River ice and winter winds, cold as the grave, raced through her body. Marie fainted.

Marie awoke to the warmth of sunlight fingers touching her face and flooding her room as brightly as the moonlight had flooded it the night before. She jumped out of bed and quickly pulled on her corset and petticoats and dress. *The night before!* The night before had to have

been a terrible nightmare. This very morning she would go to Colonel Isaac Brock's camp and find her Canadian captain and tell him how she felt about him. She raised her right hand to fasten her top button and she stiffened with disbelief and fear. Her lover's touch the night before had left his deep, dark, fingerprints on her hand. She stared at her right hand in horrified fascination. Her lover's visit had not been a dream after all, and he had trusted her with an important mission.

Patting her hair into place with her left hand, Marie called for her horse, ordered a servant to follow her, and galloped to Sir Isaac Brock's camp at Fort Malden. Formerly known as Fort Amherstburg, the British had built the fort in 1795 to provide a defense against any American invasion of Canada and Sir Isaac Brock and Tecumseh used it as a command post. Marie found the fort occupied by a jumble of soldiers and Indians. She soon discovered that her Canadian lover had been killed in what was called the Battle of Manguagon

American Lieutenant James Miller had assembled a 600 man strong contingent of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry, some militia and two pieces of artillery, a six pounder and a howitzer, to try again to reach the supply convoy waiting at Frenchtown. For their part, the British sent 150 men of the 41<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Foot, fifty militia, and about 200 of Tecumseh's Indians to prevent the Americans from being resupplied. On August 8, 1812, the British crossed the Detroit River and established a blockade near the village of Manguagon, now Trenton. In the late afternoon of August 9, 1812, the British under Captain Adam Muir and Tecumseh fired the opening shots of their ambush and Lt. Miller quickly formed his men into a line, fired a volley, and advanced on the British with bayonets.

Second Lieutenant of Artillery James Dalliba who would later be surrendered as a prisoner of war in Canada, wrote that "The incessant firing in the centre ran diverging to the flanks. From the crackling of individual pieces it changed to alternate volleys and at length to one continued sound. And while everything seemed hushed amidst the wavering roll, the discharge of the six-pounder burst upon the ear. The Americans stood!"

The Battle of Manguagon lasted for more than two hours, with the British casualties numbering six killed and 21 wounded, and the Americans suffering 18 killed and 63 wounded. The Americans beat the British back through present day Trenton and across the Detroit River. The Indians under Tecumseh's command retreated into the woods. Despite the American victory, Lt. Miller believed he couldn't advance any further since he had lost 13 percent of his force, and he requested aid from General Hull to bring his injured men back to Detroit. By August 12, 1812, Lt. Miller's soldiers returned to Detroit, their mission of hooking up with the supply train unsuccessful.

At the beginning of the War of 1812, the Michigan Wyandot fighting at Manguagon had been neutral, with both the British and American forces vying for their allegiance. Walk-in-the-Water offered his services to the Americans, but General Hull followed government policy and rejected their offer, telling the Wyandot to stay out of the fight or pay the consequences. Walk-in-the-Water and his people also did not join Shawnee brothers Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh in their efforts to halt American expansion onto Indian lands, but eventually Tecumseh and the British forced Walk-in-the-Water and the Wyandot to move to Amherstburg.

In early August 1812, Tecumseh and his leading Wyandot supporter Roundhead, convinced the Wyandot and their head chief, Walk-in-the-Water to join the coalition of the Indians and the British. The alliance didn't successfully drive the Americans away, but the Wyandot villages continued to block Hull's Trace. Walk-in-the-Water fought at Monguagon, Detroit, and the River Raisin, but when General Procter evacuated the area in the fall of 1813, Walk-in-the-Water sued for a separate peace with the Americans. In 1815, Walk-in-the-Water signed the Treaty of Springwells, two years before his death in 1817.

On August 13, 1812, Major General Isaac Brock took command of Fort Malden and on August 16, 1812, he led the British troops and Chief Tecumseh and his Indian warriors across the Detroit River to march on Fort Detroit. The British and Indian force encouraged rumors that the Indian warriors were at least 5,000 strong and would swoop down on the civilian population of Detroit. General Hull surrendered Fort Detroit without firing a shot, sealing the fate of soldiers like Lt. James Miller and Lt. James Dalliba to become prisoners of war of the British. The successful siege of Detroit was pivotal in acquiring Indian support for the British at Fort Malden during the War of 1812.

Marie didn't explain why she was at Ft. Malden in the aftermath of a battle. She didn't stop to talk to anyone. She pushed through the crowd of soldiers and Indians, searching until she found Walk-in-the-Water, who was her father's friend and her friend too, and she astonished him speechless by telling him the story of the Battle of Monguagon. Threatening to paddle a canoe across the Detroit River to the battlefield herself if necessary, she convinced him and a few of his warriors to take her to the battlefield. As soon as she felt the bow of the canoe hit the beach, Marie jumped out and began to search the battlefield, Walk-in-the-Water hurrying behind her. Finally, she found her Canadian Captain in a thicket, with a bullet hole in his head. She begged the warriors to help her lift his body into her canoe and they formed a solemn procession down the Detroit River to Sandwich where her lover was buried.

From the day that she found her Canadian Captain at Monguagon, Marie wore a black glove on her right hand, and every August 9, dressed as a beggar and wearing sandals, she went from house to house from Sandwich to Windsor, asking alms for the poor. Even after she married a kind man of means, she continued to honor her Canadian Captain.

The Canadian Captain also keeps an eternal vigil. Every August 9, the anniversary of his death, the ghostly Canadian Captain glides through the shady woods of Monguagon, now Trenton, headed toward the Detroit River on a perpetual journey to Sandwhich and his sweetheart Marie.

## Chapter 25- Growing Farming and Shipping Centers



Photograph by John Duguay

The documentary record shows that the earliest settler in the territory that was to become Ecorse Township was Pierre Michael Campau in 1795. The early private records of the Labadie family show that Labadies settled near the mouth of the Ecorse River in 1764. In the later years of the 18th Century and in the early 1800s, many other French settlers established themselves on or near the Ecorse River, including families like Campau, Salliotte, Cicotte, Champaign, LeBlanc, LeDuc, Baby, Bourassa, Riopelle and Rousseau. An 1876 map of Ecorse reveals the names of settlers along the branches of the Ecorse River including Riopelle, Montie, Bondie, Campau, Cicotte, Champaign, LeBlanc, and Labadie.

Joseph Loranger was born on Woodbridge Street between Eighteenth and a half and Nineteenth Streets in Detroit on May 27, 1811. When he was a year old a renegade Indian kidnapped him from his cradle and carried him off into the wilderness near Ecorse. The Indian appeared in the house while the men folks were absent and though the women heroically resisted his efforts to gain possession of the child, he beat them own and ran off with Joseph. Two days afterward a friendly squaw sent word to his mother that she had recovered her papoose and would restore him for a consideration – a certain amount of whiskey demanded for ransom.

William Darby was one of the surveyors who ran the boundary line between the United States and Canada after the War of 1812 and one of the leading geographers of his day. He described the Detroit River and its tributaries including Riviere aux Ecorces or Bark River in an 1818 report. He wrote in part that the “settlements on the United States side continue up the rivers Ecorse and Rouge, which together with those along the shore of the strait, present a country in a high state of culture. The Canada shore is not less improved than that of the United States; farm follows farm upon both banks which, with the houses, wind mills and vessels on the strait, afford a fine picture of agricultural and commercial prosperity.”

The French settlers built piroques and bateaux to use on the Detroit River and its tributaries, including the Ecorse River. The piroque was a large wooden canoe made from hollowing a tree and splitting it lengthwise, using the halves for the sides of a boat made from planking in the bottom and ends. These piroques could carry three tons of freight and crews of six who paddled and poled the craft close to shore and beached it easily. A bateaux was a flat bottomed open boat built of cut timber that could be as big as a barge, at least sixty feet long, carrying 15 tons and a crew of 12. In deep water the crew moved the bateaux with oars. In shallow water they poled it or towed it from the shore. Settlers along the Ecorse River also used birch bark canoes and later in the century, rowboats.

An early Detroit Free Press advertisement attests to the commercial value of both land and bateaux.

#### Bateaux For Sale

The subscriber offers for sale a new land and well-made Bateau. She has a deck in her stern and will carry between sixty and seventy barrels. She will be sold at a reasonable price for cash down, or, a credit will be given on good security. For further particulars apply to

GEORGE CAMPBELL

River aux Ecorse, June 16, 1820

Alexander Lewis, an ex-mayor of Detroit, who lived in Sandwich, Ontario at the time, recalled the early voyageurs paddling up the Detroit River and its tributary Ecorse River in their birch bark canoes on their way to Green Bay to buy furs. He wrote: “Four or five men paddled in one canoe with their captain in the stern to steer. Their parties usually consisted of about forty men and I have seen them come up through the Streets of Sandwich, singing their French boat songs or smoking their pipes. The men wore brown coats and red sashes as part of their apparel and had capes on their coats to pull over their heads when there was a severe storm...”

Alexander Lewis also remembered the Land Panic of 1836. He said that in 1836 there was an event called “the land panic.” Real estate had been on the boom and some people were going almost wild over it. People came from other cities and bought the auction land that they had never seen and could not see, for some of it was swamp in Gibraltar.”

Another early Detroit resident, Dr. George B. Russel, learned about the Ecorse River on horseback. Born in 1815, Dr. George B. Russel was a circuit riding doctor. For 27 years, from about 1842 to 1868, he rode his circuit covering both sides of the Detroit River from Trenton to

the bay fifteen miles above Detroit and on the Canadian side from Malden to Belle River, 18 miles above Windsor. He also covered Gratiot Road to Mt. Clemens and Romeo, Woodward Avenue to Pontiac, Grand River Road to Farmington and Michigan Avenue to Dearborn and Wayne.

Dr. Russel heard that a camp of Indians at Connors Creek had contracted smallpox and after he arrived at the camp and examined the Indians, he discovered the disease in six or eight lodges. Richard Connor and his sister Therese helped Dr. Russel vaccinate 700 Indians in twenty hours. Not one of the exposed Indians died.

Another early settler, William Nowlin, writes about everyday life on the north branch of the River Ecorse in his account of pioneer life in the Michigan wilderness that he called The Bark Covered House. The oldest of five Nowlin children, William journeyed to Michigan with his parents John and Melinda Nowlin from what he considered civilized life in New York and he left a graphic, detailed account of his life in the Michigan wilderness near present day Taylor.

William was born in New York State on September 25, 1821, and he recalled that family talk about migrating to Michigan began around 1832, with the family making the move to Michigan in 1833-1834. They boarded the steamer Michigan and arrived in Detroit in the spring of 1834. From Detroit, William and his father John walked with guns on their shoulders to their new farm one mile south of Dearborn. The next day his mother Melinda and the rest of the family reached the homestead and in one week, John Nowlin had built a "bark covered house" for his family.

John Nowlin bought an additional eighty acres of land and the north branch of the River Ecorse, flowing east, ran through his land. Beech, hard maple, basswood, oak and hickory trees grew on the land on both sides of the creek and further back from the creek, ash and elm trees flourished. The Nowlin family, especially William, immediately began to make maple sugar. Over the next few years, the Nowlin's slowly acquired new neighbors up and down the creek.

Joseph Pardee was one of the Nowlin's neighbors. He came to Michigan in the fall of 1833, claimed his land and built the first log house on the Ecorse River west of the French settlement at its mouth on the Detroit River. According to William Nowlin, Pardee possessed a strong mind, an iron will, and a determination to leave his mark on the new land. Pardee cleared his land and carved out an extensive farm. When he died in 1859 at the age of 81, he left his family in excellent circumstances.

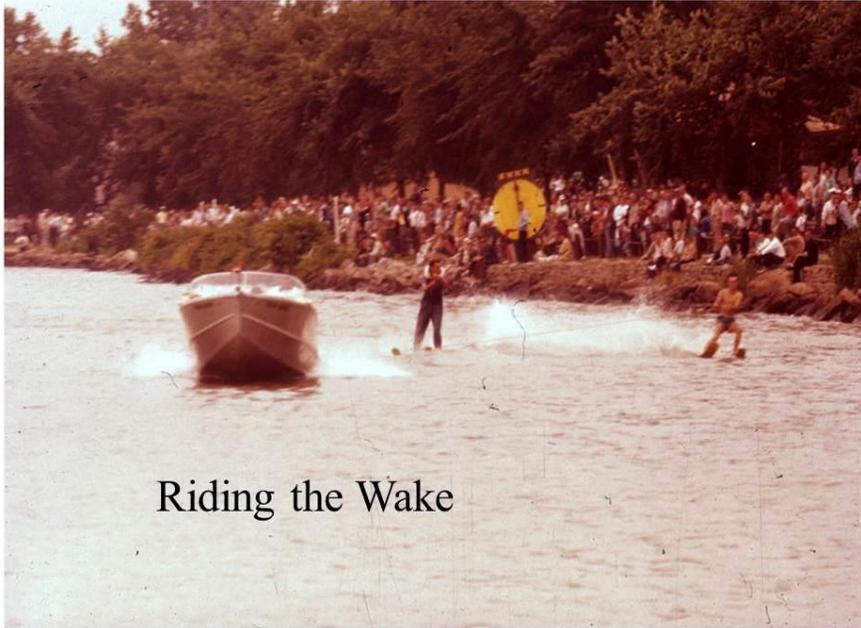
Other Nowlin neighbors besides Joseph Pardee who came to settle along and near the Ecorse River in the fall of 1833 were Asa Blare who came in the fall of 1834 and Henry Travis who came in the summer of 1835. George Purdy came in the fall of 1835 and Elijah Lord about 1837 or 1838. In 1875, when William Nowlin wrote his boss, George Purdy still lived on the Ecorse River and owned a good farm. William marveled at how quickly the land along the river became settled. He could stand by the Nowlin house, look to the west and see Joseph Pardee's house and the smoke from the chimney. He could even see Pardee and his sons when they came out of the house to do their morning chores. He could look to the east and see the house of Asa Blare that adjoined the Nowlin land. As William put it, "The light of civilization was beginning to dawn upon us."

Squire Goodell was another Nowlin family friend. William wrote about traveling through the woods to Squire Goodell's who lived near the Detroit River. William asked Squire Goodell to fill out papers that would enable him to collect the state bounty on wolves. William received the bounty, but didn't mention catching any wolves. He reported seeing many of them in the woods and hearing them so often nights "that we became familiar with them."

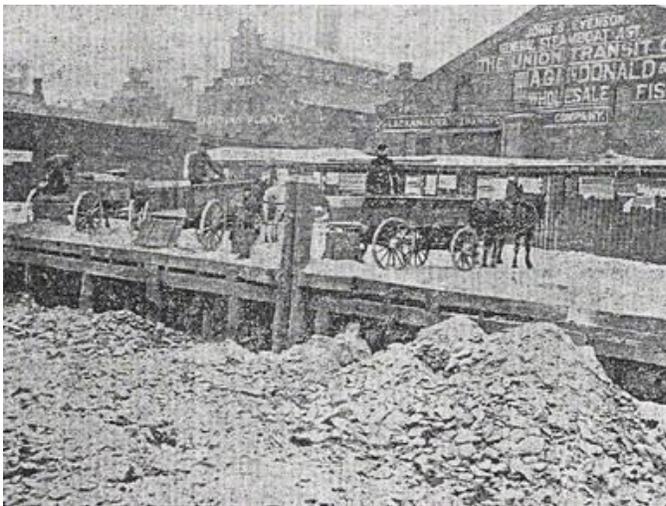
In the spring after the ice broke up on the Ecorse River, pike or pickerel came up from the Detroit River in large numbers and William and his neighbors went fishing. The water ran high in the creek, often overflowing its banks. In William Nowlin's words, "the Ecorse appeared like quite a river."

To navigate the Ecorse and Detroit Rivers, William and his friends made a canoe of a white wood log and launched it on the river. Sometimes they went fishing in the canoe, but when they fished from the canoe, William had to always take a friend along because the pickerel lay in the shallow water where old grass grew. By scrutinizing the surface of the water, William saw the small ripples that the fish made with their fins while they were swimming. The person in the back end of the canoe poled carefully toward the place where William saw the ripples and when they reached the fish they speared or shot them.

The fish ran up the Ecorse River two or three weeks every spring and the fish that didn't get caught swam back into the Detroit River. William's father John made a pike net with two sections. By the time the fish were running back into the Detroit River, the water had settled into the bed of the creek. John Nowlin set his net in the Ecorse River bed, stretched the sections across the Ecorse River, and staked them snugly. The fish ran up the Ecorse River at night and in the evening John would set his net and the next morning have a splendid catch of fish. William helped his father salt some of the fish they couldn't eat to preserve them for summer meals.



### A Few Downriver Swashbucklers and Steamers



The old passenger steamer *Dove* plied up and down the Detroit River during the 1860s, including the Civil War years, providing a stable sight in years of constant change. Detroiters and Downriver citizens loved the old passenger steamer which was built in Trenton in 1863 and for about eleven years it ran between Detroit and Amherstburg with stops in Ecorse, Wyandotte and Grosse Isle. Her first master was Captain Johan A. Sloan and later Captain Duncan Nicholson who became superintendent of the Detroit, Belle Isle & Windsor Ferry Company sailed her.

Later after being sold to parties in Bay City, the *Dove* ran between Bay City and Alpena for many years, and then her owners sold her back to Detroit people. Again, she piled the Detroit River between Detroit and Toledo until she burned at her dock in Toledo on November 24, 1897.

After the Civil War, Ecorse and most of Downriver remained a farming, shipping and resort area with muskrat hunters poling the marshes in wooden boats and watching the parade of ships in the River. This parade included the *Island Queen* of Johnson's Island fame. An advertisement in the *Detroit Evening News* of August 23, 1873 advised the public that the *Island Queen*, D. Nicholson, Master, leaves daily from Ward's Dock at the foot of Wayne Street at 3 o'clock p.m. for Wyandotte, Ecorse, Grosse Isle, Trenton and Gibraltar.

In the summer of 1868 the propeller *B.F. Wade* raced successfully up and down the Detroit River and elsewhere, much to the delight of the shore side gamblers. In July, some of the citizens of Detroit presented the officers and the crew of the propeller *B.F. Wade* with a flag manufactured by Messrs. Hoffner & Mayes of Detroit. The flag had a white background on which were placed a circle of red and blue stars. In the center in large red letters were the words, "Put Up Or Shut Up!"

It seems that piracy was a problem on the Detroit and other rivers including the Rouge, Ecorse, and St. Clair decades before the Prohibition Days of the 1920s and 1930s. It isn't difficult to imagine competing French and British traders hijacking of canoes loaded with furs and supplies for the Indians during the 17th and 18th centuries and there are well documented instances of British, American, and Canadian acts of piracy later in history.

By the mid-nineteenth century the pirates seemed to have evolved from patriots or partisans to mere ruffians. The *Detroit Post and Tribune* in 1877 reported that a gang of pirates had been plundering the entire length of the Detroit and St. Clair rivers for a time. River watchers had seen a new black sloop scow about 40 feet long by 12 feet wide, with a covered cabin about 16 feet long and five feet high lying along the shores at different times.

On the night of October 3, 1877, the scow's crew carried away 100 bushels of barley from Henry Rankin and about November 4th stolen 150 bushels of barley from another Henry, Henry Caswell. Between October 3 and November 4th, the crew of the black scow had stolen 60 bushels of oats from Harsen's Island on Lake St. Clair. The boat, which carried no name, reportedly had a good supply of bags for storing and selling the contraband. Six of the bags were marked "R" in black paint, two with a blue cross, and one with "W.I.L."

Eventually the Downriver authorities monitored the ship and one night they raided her and captured the ship and one seaman. *The Post* noted rather snippily "had there been less haste, the balance of the gang, together with their boats might have been captured." The authorities secured the captured pirate in jail, but when an officer delivered a warm breakfast to him he discovered the jail doors and the pirate missing.

Eight years later the pirate problem had still not abated. On August 2, 1885, an officer at Wyandotte tied up the scow schooner *Trader*, hailing from Alpena, on a charge of piracy.

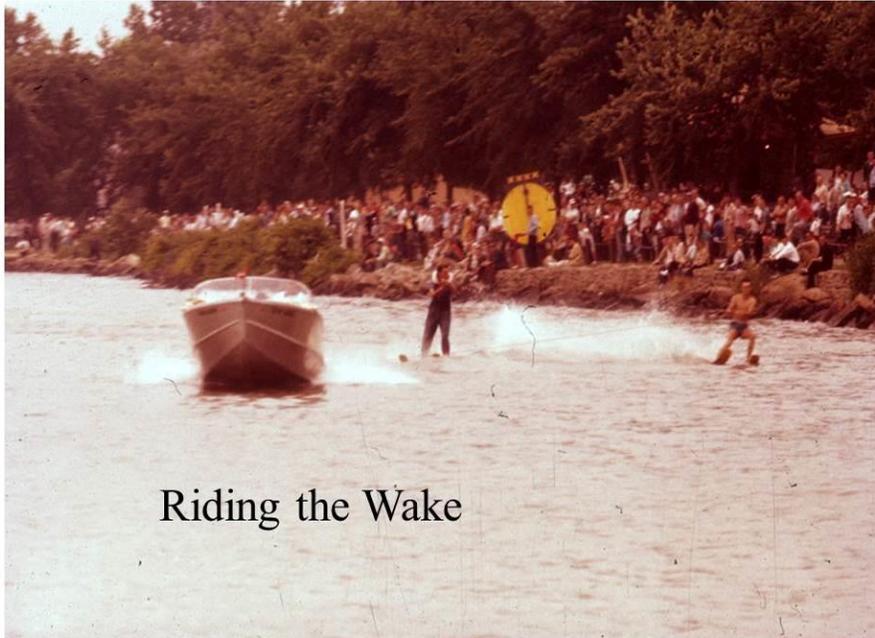
Downriver authorities began to suspect the *Trader's* crew of appropriating the loose property of vessels lying in harbor at Detroit and neighboring ports. A few nights before a topsail disappeared from a yacht at Amherstburg and the next morning the owner spotted his sail on the *Trader*, being used as an awning. He immediately filed a complaint, and authorities arrested Captain Williams of the *Trader*, brought him to Detroit and lodged him in jail.

A search of the *Trader* uncovered a treasure trove of pirate plunder from ships, a number of fishing nets, and several cans of paint identified as belonging to the steam yacht Sigma. Officials also found a complete camping outfit stolen from a party of anglers camped at the mouth of the River Rouge.

Evidently the *Trader* wasn't the only ship engaged in the pirate trade, because just five weeks later on September 15, the *Detroit Post* reported that river pirates continued to victimize the craft lying along the docks. The schooner *M.P. Barkalow*, the latest victim, had been tied to the wharf at the foot of Eighteen Street three days ago when someone emptied her supply box of its contents, valued at \$18.

The piracy problem continued into the 1890s and with the case of the *Emma*, assumed international proportions. Charles Gilman was sailing his bumboat in the St. Clair River near Stag Island in Canadian waters when he spotted the trading schooner *Emma* and hailed her. Once engaged in the opium smuggling business, the *Emma* was also cruising near Stag Island with a crew of six men and an equal number of women aboard. The crew composed of William Johnson, William Murphy, William Cooper, Thomas Willis, Patrick McLaughlin and Grant Gray entered into negotiations with Charles Gilman for several dozen eggs. Gilman charged that while part of the crew negotiated the egg deal, the others busied themselves stealing his towline, and pocket book containing \$23.00 which the crew purportedly divided equally between them.

Authorities arrested the *Emma's* crew and took them to jail in Port Huron where they were all charged with piracy. Assistant United States Attorney Wilkins received a letter from Deputy United States Marshal Petit at Port Huron informing him that the men were to be tried under the state law on the charge of robbery. Wilkins said that under the interpretation of the law that the Supreme Court decided in the famous Alaska case, the lakes were declared to be high seas and he could charge the *Emma* and her crew with piracy. The penalty under the United States statutes for piracy was hanging. The Canadian authorities applied for the extradition of the crew of the *Emma*, but extradition was refused, although the offense was committed in Canadian waters. The *Emma* sank in a storm on Lake Huron in 1896.



## Sea Serpents Ahoy!!

Sea serpents also lurked in the Great Lakes and in the Detroit River. The *Detroit Democratic Free Press* started its May 1835, sea serpent story by asking “who has not heard of the enormous serpent or snake of Lake Superior?” Different writers and travelers had mentioned the Lake Superior sea serpent, and then the story posed another question, “why would the sea serpent leave Lake Superior?”

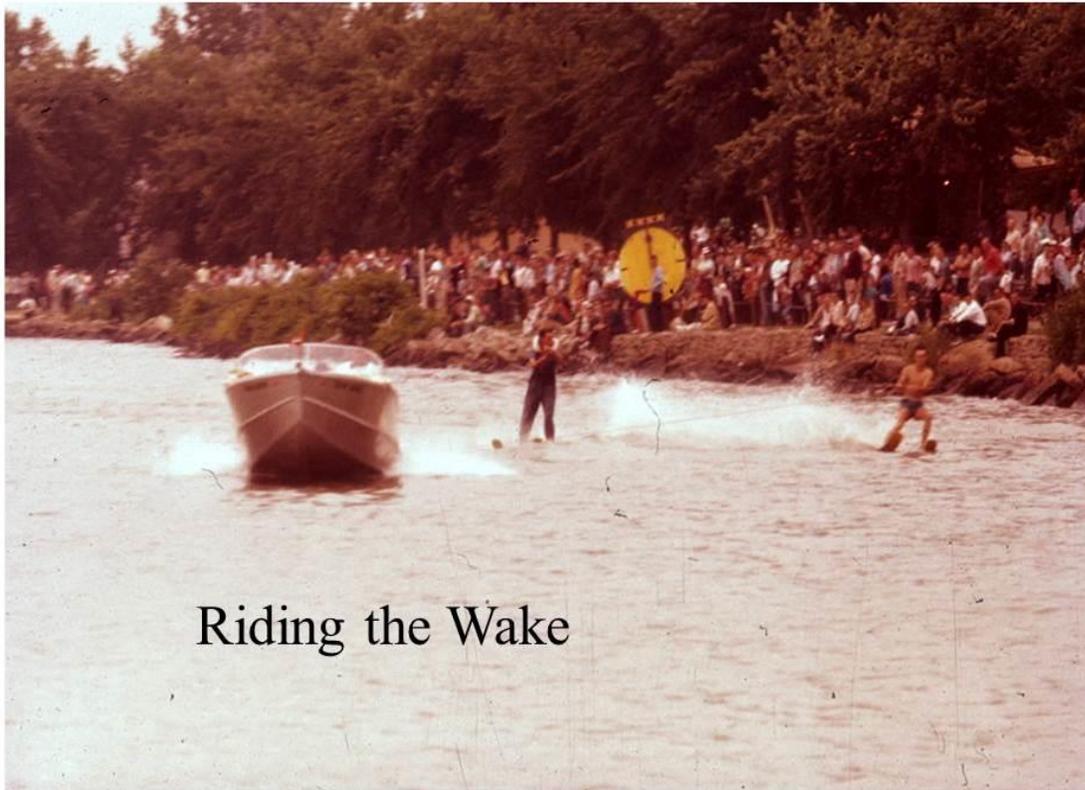
Whatever the sea serpent’s reasoning, it did leave Lake Superior that fateful May. On May 12, 1835 between the hours of 5 and 6 p.m., a serpent without a mane or phrenological bumps or bunches, slim in body and apparently not less than 75 feet long and five feet circumference and about 20 inches in diameter, floated down the Detroit River. As it passed the city of Detroit it held up its head five to eight feet and moved its head back and forth presumably giving equal time to surveying the American and Canadian scenery.

Sometimes the sea serpent seemed to let the current carry it and other times coiled as if prepared to spring on its prey. Other times it stretched forward full length, displaying its back of a dark brown color, its deep green sides and its dingy white belly. It did not have any fins, but did have small green, glistening eyes, circled with red. Finally, after it passed Detroit and was headed Downriver toward Ecorse when it disappeared into the depths of the majestic Detroit River.

Captain Goldsmith first sighted a sea serpent near Fighting Island in June 1860 when master of the schooner *Nevermore*. His description on the Fighting Island Sea Serpent closely matched the one that he reportedly saw twenty-three years later on Wednesday November 22, 1883, off Long Point. Now the master of the Wabash steamer *Morley*, Captain Goldsmith reported that while his

ship lay under Long Point during some heavy weather, he spied something about 1,000 feet from the *Morley*.

Examining the object with a strong glass, he discovered that it was not a piece of a wreck as he had first thought, but had a body of a terra cotta color with enough life in it to move up the lake at five miles per hour. The captain said that the creature kept its head, about the size of a barrel, well out of the water. About where the head joined the body were two arms or wings, which measured about five feet across. The tails – it appeared to have two tails-churned the water vigorously. As a precaution, Captain Goldsmith had Steward Brown examine the creature with a glass and he corroborated the Captain's statement.



## Riding the Wake

### **The Patriot War**

Michigan became a state on January 26, 1837 and a year later the Michigan militia which was still being organized, was called up to serve in the "Patriot" War which like the War of 1812, turned out to be as much of a maritime as land war. Several trends and events came together in 1838 in Canada and across the border in the United States to cause the Patriot War to erupt. Residents of Upper Canada and the United States were discontented with their governments for different reasons.

When Upper and Lower Canada were organized under the Constitution Act after the American Revolution, the British minister theorized that Britain had lost its American Colonies because it had allowed the colonies too much political liberty. These ministers did not intend to repeat the same mistake in their remaining province of British North America, so they structured the legislative assemblies in the Canadian provinces to favor the privileged classes and allowed elected assemblies representing the people no control over the governing officials and policies.

The people in the provinces were not content to live under such autocratic rule, and their discontent erupted in the 1830s. Like their colonial counterparts in America, the reformers initially did not want to be disloyal to Britain or separate from England. They just wanted responsible, truly representative government.

## **The “Patriots” Plan to Invade Canada**

Many Americans for their part, despite disastrous attempts in the War of 1812, still cast covetous eyes on the vast richness of Canada and dreamed of annexation. When in 1838, rebel leaders from Canada escaped to the United States, they found some Americans eager to listen and to fight to free Canadian colonies from the yoke of Great Britain. The plan was to form Upper Canada into an independent republic- one that would join the United States and make its liberators rich in the process.

These “Patriots” as they called themselves planned to annex the peninsula laying between the Michigan and the Niagara frontiers to the United States. In Michigan the Patriots organized secret groups known as “Hunter’s Lodges” which met at Fort Gratiot (Port Huron), Mt. Clemens, Detroit and Gibraltar. The patriots fanned out and called meetings, formed secret military organizations and prepared to act. Dr. E.A. Theller, an Irishman who opposed anything British, acted injudiciously and the Canadian authorities arrested, tried and convinced him. He was sentenced to the citadel of Quebec, but later escaped and made his way to Detroit.

At the beginning of the Patriot war, Colonel John Prince, a gentleman farmer, soldier, and a member of the Legislature, lived in the Sandwich District. The Canadian government gave him command of the Sandwich garrison that consisted of two companies of his own volunteer battalion. The entire border stood at attention and almost every citizen along the expected points of attack acted as night patrols. Captain Prince considered the invaders “pirates” and decided that he and his men would treat them as such.

## **The Patriots Land on Fighting Island**

The first attempt the Patriots made to invade Canada was in January 1838. A group of Patriots or “Pirates,” met on January 1, 1838, and they raised \$135.00 and ten rifles to aid their cause. Before dawn broke on January 5, about 20-25 Patriots crept to the Detroit jail where they seized jailor Thompson and his arms and ammunition. The next day they seized the schooner *Ann* and fortified with the arms from the Detroit jail and reinforcements of over 100 men, they set sail for Fighting Island across from Ecorse. An English steamer chased the *Ann* and when the *Ann* reached Ecorse a United States marshal and a posse of citizens hailed her. The Patriots aboard the *Ann* ignored the hail and as a stiff breeze filled her canvas, the *Ann* passed on down the river. A number of smaller boats joined the *Ann* and she landed at Gibraltar with at least 300 people aboard. Later that same evening a party of sixty men from Cleveland led by J.T. Sutherland arrived on the steamer *Erie*. The group of Patriots hatched a plot to capture Malden – Amherstburg.

Their plot didn’t play out the way they had planned. At Amherstburg, “loyal” Canadians waited for them and cut the halyards of the leading schooner *Ann* with their first volley. The schooner drifted aground at Elliott’s Point and all on board were captured or killed. Colonel Prince and his men took part in this route.

The schooner *Ann* episode alarmed the more neutral Detroit citizens and they called a meeting at the Detroit city hall to discuss ways of maintaining neutrality.

### **Michigan Governor Mason Gets Involved**

On February 12, 1838, Michigan Governor Stephens T. Mason and 220 volunteer militiamen started out on the steamers *Erie* and *Brady* to seize the schooner *Ann* for violating neutrality laws. The expedition turned out to be unpleasant because of the intensely cold weather and the attempts of two men to desert. They broke through the ice while crossing the Detroit River and drowned. When Governor Mason and the militia arrived at Gibraltar, he forced the Patriots to disperse, but the *Ann* escaped to Elliot's Point near Amherstburg. Governor Mason and his troops returned to Detroit without capturing the *Ann*, but demonstrating their determination to abide by the neutrality laws.

The disbanding of Patriot ranks at Gibraltar halted them temporarily, but they remained extremely active. On February 14, 1838, Captain Johnson and a company of regulars arrived from Buffalo and the Brady Guards left Detroit for Gibraltar to escort provisions to troops at Monroe.

J.T. Sutherland and his group of Patriots tried to capture Bois Blanc (Bob-Lo Island), but a small group of English regulars and Canadian militia drove them back. Sutherland and his Patriot group retreated to Fighting Island, and the Canadians who feared that the Patriots were planning to attack Amherstburg quickly marched there to defend it. Sutherland had ordered Dr. Theller who commanded the *Ann* to join him. When the *Ann* attempted to join Sutherland's forces, the Canadians on shore fired at her and shot so badly tore her rigging and sails that she drifted helplessly ashore where the Canadians captured her. When Sutherland heard about the capture of the *Ann* and Dr. Theller, he dropped back to Sugar Island and then to Gibraltar. The Canadians sent Dr. Theller to Quebec as a prisoner.

In the meantime, Colonel Prince and about 150 volunteers left Sandwich in the steamer *United* for Bois Blanc Island where as the *Sandwich Western Herald* put it, "the rebels, it seems, purposed to establish a post, and elevate a standard of liberty, forsooth!"

On the night of February 23 and 24, 1838, a small group of Patriots rowed from Detroit to Fighting Island, in the middle of the Detroit River between Ecorse and LaSalle, Ontario. The Patriots planned an attack against Sandwich and the following day General Donald McLeod, a British Army veteran and former resident of Prescott, and several hundred supporters came to join the Patriots.

The American General Hugh Brady notified the British regulars and Canadian militia of the proposed attack and on February 25, the Canadians and British and the Patriots sharply skirmished. Colonel Prince and his men were again in the thick of the fight. The poorly armed Patriots retreated to the Michigan shore and American troops broke up their ranks.

The United States government entered the fray by sending the steamer *Robert Fulton* from Buffalo to Detroit with three companies of United States regulars commanded by Colonel Worth. The government frequently sent troops to patrol both up and down the Detroit River to stem the Patriot movement, but the Patriots survived.

### **Return to Fighting Island**

On February 23, 1838, a force of 200 men gathered at an inn kept by a man named Thomas five miles below Gibraltar. Under the cover of a heavy snowstorm, they marched up the river in three divisions to Ecorse. At Ecorse people driving sleighs met them and transported their arms, ammunition, and supplies across the ice to Fighting Island.

Observing the Patriot activity from the Canadian shore opposite Fighting Island, the Canadians gathered their troops. In the meantime, the Brady Guards had left Detroit for Ecorse to arrest the Patriots. On the frosty Sunday morning of February 25, the Canadians shelled the Patriot stronghold, killing 13 Patriots and wounding 40 of them. The Patriots once again retreated to Gibraltar and along the American shore at points below Gibraltar. American troops met them, captured their arms and took two leaders prisoner, charging them with violating the neutrality laws.

The Canadians vowed to attack Detroit and Detroiters held public meetings in the city hall on March 7 and March 10 and decided that they would stand firmly against American violation of neutrality laws. Detroiters protested vigorously against the speeches in the Canadian parliament charging them with sympathizing with and aiding the Patriots. They clearly demonstrated that Colonel Prince who accidentally met T.J. Sutherland, the Patriot leader on the ice, had captured him in Canadian territory.

People on both sides of the Detroit River fired at each other in early summer the United States government sent ten thousand muskets to the arsenal at Dearborn. That summer, more than 200 Patriots camped at Bloody Run in Detroit waiting for the time and reinforcements for another foray against the Canadians.

### **The Battle of Windsor**

In November, United States authorities captured a schooner carrying several hundred arms for the Patriots near Gibraltar. General Brady chartered the steamer *Illinois* and stationed troops along the Detroit River. On November 23, the Patriots seized the arms of the Brady Guards, but the Guards recaptured them a few days later. The Patriots didn't have an organized military strategy, and for a time it seemed that they had abandoned their plans to attack Canada.

The Battle of Windsor, the next and final assault took place on December 3 and 4, 1838. American Lucius Versus Bierce of Akron, Ohio, commanded the American assault. He and his troops captured the steamboat *Champlain* at the foot of Rivard Street in Detroit and he and about 140 men landed near the present site of Walkerville after midnight on December 4, 1838. The

American force marched on Windsor, setting fire to the military barracks. The men who were not burned to death were shot as they escaped from the burning building. The Americans also set fire to the steamer Thames which was at the dock.

News of the marauding expedition from the American side soon reached Sandwich, but before Colonel Prince and his militia could reach Windsor, surgeon John J. Hume rode out to see what aid he could provide to the wounded. The Patriots immediately shot him to death. The militia met the patriots in Francois Baby's orchard near what is now the foot of Douglass Avenue, attacking from two sides. One volley scattered the Patriots who fled to what is now Walkerville, the militia is hot pursuit. Colonel Prince ordered all of the captured Patriots bearing arms to be shot, an action that caused much controversy.

Twenty-one Patriots were killed and many of them froze to death. They were fired on by Canadians and by Colonel Payne of the United States Army and his men as they escaped to Belle Isle. During the fighting Detroit blazed with excitement and city officials appointed a night watch of 50 men to patrol the city. The next day they swore in approximately 100 prominent citizens as peace officers.

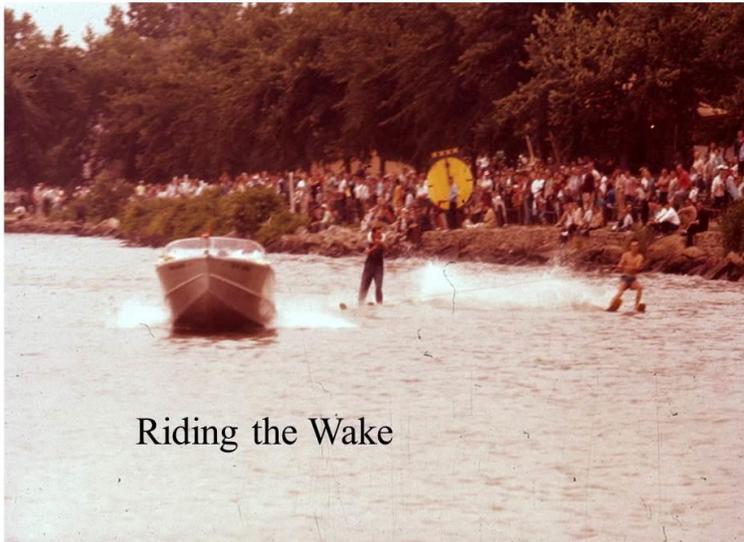
By January 1839, the Patriot or Pirate War, depending upon perspective, had ended and by the next month the British government appointed the Earl of Durham Commander-in-Chief of all the British North American provinces except Newfoundland, High Commissioner for special purposes in Upper and Lower Canada and Governor General of all British North America. He investigated the situation in the provinces and presented a report to the House of Commons on February 11, 1839, after the Times of London had revealed some of its contents without his knowledge. Perhaps American history would have been much different if Britain had applied his words to its American Colonies:

*I believe that no permanent or efficient remedy can be devised for the disorders of Lower Canada, except a fusion of the government in that of one or more of the surrounding provinces; and as I am of the opinion that the full establishment of responsible government can only be permanently secured by giving these colonies an increased importance in the politics of the empire, I find in union the only means of remedying at once and completely the two prominent causes of their present unsatisfactory condition.*

After the Patriot War, ferry and tugboat companies resumed operating on the Detroit River without international incident.

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### **Skedaddling to Canada and Back**

Americans and Canadians have been hurrying or skedaddling across each other's borders for centuries. In fact, the word [skedaddle](#) has roots in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Linguists and ordinary people are still discussing where skedaddle first saw the light of speech and the dictionary. Some people think the word originated in Sweden or Denmark and immigrants brought the word to England. Others think it came from a Scottish dialect and still others say skedaddle comes from the Irish words *gedadol* which means scattered.

The London Times weighed in on the argument in November 1862 when a correspondent flatly stated that the word "skedaddle" was not a Yankee invention. The correspondent said that the word "skedaddle" was commonly used in Dumfriesseire where it means to spill any liquids in small quantities. Skedaddle also applied to coals, potatoes or apples, and other items falling from carts traveling from one place to another. "But skedaddle does not apply to bodies of men scattered," the Times correspondent concluded.

Despite the controversy surrounding its origins, Skedaddle moved into solid print during the American Civil War. The New York Tribune of August 10, 1861, recorded a Secessionist retreat by observing that "No sooner did the traitors discover their approach than they skidaddled, a phrase the Union boys up here apply to the good use the Seceshers make of their legs in time of danger."

The word skedaddle quickly crossed over into civilian use and expanded to mean "leaving in a hurry." It just as swiftly crossed the Atlantic and appeared in the Illustrated London News in 1862, and in 1867 surfaced in Anthony Trollope's novel, *The Last Chronicle of Barset*.

Canadians and Americans officially began their version of skedaddling during the American Revolutionary War, although people had crossed the borders for the more benign reasons like fur trading and commerce and for less peaceful reasons during the French and Indian War. During and after the American Revolutionary War, about 50,000 [Loyalists](#) or colonists wanting to stay loyal to Britain fled north to the territory that would later become the Dominion of Canada.

During the [War of 1812](#), the United States invaded what were then [the British Colonies](#) in North America, (Canada) several times, and many Americans believed that Canadians would regard them as liberators. Although American armies did penetrate to [York](#), then the capital of the Upper Canada, and burn it, they weren't successful in capturing Canada and skedaddled back across the border. After the Treaty of Ghent in 1814, Americans and Canadians began the task of establishing a more solid and peaceful common border.

### **The American Civil War Brings a Golden Age of Skedaddle**

The American Civil War energized the word skedaddle on both sides of the American and Canadian border. Ironically enough, while the union of the United States was disintegrating, Canada was still in the process of forming its federated union. In 1861, Canada consisted of the United Province of Canada – parts of what are now southern Ontario and Quebec- and the separate colonies of Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia and Rupert's Land.

The American Civil War divided the Canadians as well as the Americans. The Canadian military, Tories, and people from Nova Scotia favored the South while people from New Brunswick and most English speaking people west of Quebec favored the North. French speaking people were mostly neutral. After four years of witnessing and fighting in the bitter American conflict, Canadians recognized the power of a united country. Two years after the Union had won the American Civil War, Canada passed its [Constitution Act in 1867](#) and became the Dominion of Canada.

In the meantime, during the Civil War, Americans and Canadians skedaddled back and forth across the border. In a desperate effort to enlist soldiers to fight for the North, American President Abraham Lincoln offered men money to sign up to fight and in 1862, Congress passed a draft to obtain soldiers for the Union Army and the draft law also said that a prospective soldier could hire a substitute to go to war in his place.

Some [Canadians](#) decided to go to war to earn the generous bounty. Many Canadian males who lived in rural areas where they had scant hope of scratching out a bare living by farming. Others lived in urban centers where they could find only low paying jobs, if they could find one at all. The bounty and the \$25.00 to \$30.00 a month for fighting in the Civil War attracted them more than the 25 to 50 cents a day they could earn at home. Border cities like Buffalo and Detroit featured a brisk human trafficking in soldiers. Other Canadians fought because they thrilled to the adventure of war and others fought as a private crusade against slavery.

Twenty first century historians estimate that between 33,000 and 55,000 men and women from Canada served in the Union Army and around 12,000 in the Confederate Army. Some Canadian soldiers already lived in the United States and others signed up when Union Army recruiters visited Canada

### **A Few Canadian Soldiers in Michigan Regiments**

[The Fifth Michigan Volunteer Infantry](#) was organized at Fort Wayne, Detroit and it mustered into service on August 28, 1861 with a total of 900 officers and men. Canadians enlisting in the Fifth Michigan included Thomas Birchall, 32, in Company B, Jeremiah Patchaud, 23, and Theodore Sharp 23, both of Company F. William Graham 25, and John Morgan, both of London, Canada West, were unassigned. The Fifth Infantry saw much action, including Chancellorsville and Fredericksburg and after the war ended, it arrived back at Detroit and disbanded on June 17, 1865.

Born in Canada in 1844, Robert F. Dodd enlisted as a Private at Hamtramck, Michigan, in Company E, 27th Michigan Infantry. At Petersburg, he acted as an orderly and volunteered to help carry the wounded from the ground in front of the Crater under heavy fire He died at Petersburg on July 30, 1864, and he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor on July 27, 1896. At least 29 soldiers who had been born in Canada won the Medal of Honor.

### **American Soldiers Skedaddle to Canada**

Americans skedaddled across the Canadian border just as avidly. On August 11, 1862, the Toronto Globe reported that “an extraordinary number of Americans are here to escape being drafted.” The same day the Milwaukee Sentinel noted that from fifteen to twenty refugees were taken from propellers on the way to Canada to escape the draft.

On November 4, 1862, the Burlington, Vermont Press reported that the United States Marshal at Rouse Point was stopped from twenty to thirty men a day who were attempting to escape over the border to Canada to avoid military service. The Press noted that “yesterday an able bodied young man by the name of Horace Edgerton from Pawlet in Vermont, was detected in an attempt to slip across the line in women’s clothes.”

The flow of American skedaddlers continued into 1863. The Detroit Advertiser of March 15, 1863, said that the number of skedaddlers climbed daily in Windsor, “though for the honor of Michigan, we are happy to say that they are by no means all from this State.” The Advertiser said that Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Iowa contributed their fair share of skedaddlers to Canada. According to the Advertiser, there were over 400 of the skedaddlers in Windsor and some of the Windsor citizens estimated the number to be as high as a thousand. There were also a large number in Amherstburg, Sandwich, Chatham, and scattered through settlements along the Canadian frontier.

The Advertiser reported that the public houses in Windsor were filled to capacity and all of the public houses were occupied by what it termed “a class of people who live on cold meals and

sleep on the floor.” Many of them were seeking employment, offering to work for fifty cents a day and board. The Advertiser noted that an intelligent Canadian had told them that not less than 4,000 or 5,000 of the runaways had crossed over the Detroit River to Canada during the past two months. The Canadian said, “As a general thing they are orderly, and the Windsor people have no cause to complain, so long as their guests are in funds and pay their board bills promptly. “The story concluded that the skedaddlers were cowards and that the Canadians heartily despised them as well as their fellow Americans.

Historian Marcus Lee Hansen presented the story a little more gently when he wrote that many of the deserters were experienced farm hands and were welcomed at first because of a labor shortage in many parts of Canada. Canadians appreciated their skill and willingness to work for lower than average pay. By 1864, the number of skedaddlers had increased enough – some estimate as high as 15,000-to upset Canadians who felt they were competing for Canadian jobs.

The Hartford Post of July 27, 1863, reinforced Marcus Lee Hansen’s point when it said in a July 27, 1863 story that the number of Canadians arriving in Hartford had increased and the increase happened in other cities, including Boston where over two hundred had arrived the day before. According to the Post, “there has been so much skedaddling from the States into Canada that it has greatly reduced the demand for and price of labor, so that the Canadians themselves find it to their advantage to come here and offer themselves for substitutes, realizing the large premiums offered.

After the [Civil War](#) ended, the American government offered an amnesty proclamation in May 1865, assuring draft dodgers that they wouldn’t be punished if they returned home. Marcus Hansen wrote that people who had moved to Canada before the Civil War moved back to the United States. Many Canadian skedaddlers followed the pattern by moving back to Canada.

### **Skedaddling into the Twentieth Century**

During World War I, many Canadian soldiers who didn’t want to enlist to fight overseas skedaddled into the United States for refuge- at least until 1917 when America entered the conflict. World War II featured a close cooperation of Canadian and America forces and government sanctioned skedaddling.

Americans who resisted the Vietnam War during the 1960s and early 1970s skedaddled to [Canada](#) in large numbers. The liberal governments at the time focused on maintaining Canada’s sovereignty and autonomy from the United States, so they granted the refugees asylum and most Canadians welcomed them.

In his book Northern Passage: American Vietnam War Resisters in Canada, sociologist John Hagan estimates that about 50,000 Americans skedaddled north to avoid fighting in a war they considered unjust. John Hagan himself protested the war and escaped to Canada to avoid fighting in it.

Americans and Canadians have a long tradition and trail of border skedaddling, and descendants

on both sides of the border!

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## Chapter 26 – The Downriver Underground Railroad



Underground Railroad Memorial, Windsor, Ontario

Canada is a smudge on the horizon from the Downriver Detroit River shoreline. Islands punctuate the clear water with green exclamation points and Captain John Edwards chugs his steamer *Arrow* across the river carrying runaway slaves to freedom. A black man skillfully manipulates the oars of a skiff and a woman and a child huddle on the seat across from him. They stare at Canada, leaning eagerly toward the Canadian shore.

A man stands on the Ecorse shore of the Detroit River, cursing and firing his pistol. He shouts something about the damned ‘Old Man’ making off with his property. Dark hands ease a rowboat into the River while white hands push it. Behind them, lamplight glows in the windows of a log farmhouse. The Detroit and Downriver Underground railroad was one of the busiest sectors of the American Underground Railroad and an unrecognized, but tangible extension of the Railroad wound deeply into Canada after it had crossed the Detroit River. The travelers on the Underground Railroad also made more return journeys on the Downriver Underground Railroad than the history books record.

In operation roughly between 1840 and 1860, the Underground Railroad ran most effectively after the Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850. This act empowered slave hunters to pursue fugitive slaves onto free soil and compelled law enforcement officials and bystanders to aid in the capture of fugitive slaves. It imposed fines and prison sentences on people helping fugitive slaves escape and resulted in countless efforts to kidnap fugitives who were living in the Northern United States or Canada and return them to the South

### **Slaves in Detroit and Downriver**

In Detroit, slavery dates to the time of its 1701 founding, and generations before that, Native American peoples enslaved each other for various reasons. Burton's list of the first settlers in *Detroit's First Directory* includes several slaves, although the first mention of Negro slaves occurs when two of Louis Campau's slaves are mentioned in 1736. Pierre Roy, possessed a Panis or Indian slave called Jacques who was 7 or 8 years old. Jean Richard, voyageur, owned Marie Jeanne, a Panis, slave who was about 15 years old. Mr. Moynier owned an Indian panis aged 12 to 14 years old who died on November 18, 1710. Joseph Paret owned an Indian Panis Joseph, called Escabia, who was about 22 years old. He died in January 1710.

Census documents of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries record varying numbers of slaves in Detroit and up and down the Detroit River, but firmly establish their existence. A 1762 census for Detroit reveals that 65 of the approximately 900 people living near the fort were African American slaves. Governor Henry Hamilton listed 78 female slaves and 79 male slaves in a later census.

By July 1832, approximately three hundred Negroes lived in and outside of Detroit, many of them runaway slaves. Most of them had found work, so they remained in Detroit instead of crossing into Canada and assured freedom. Many of them moved back and forth across the border as laws and slave catchers waxed and waned and opportunities for a better living and greater safety for themselves and their families fluctuated between Canada and the United States.

### **The Underground Railroad Travels Through Downriver**

It is as difficult to document the journeys of the Underground Railroad in Downriver Detroit as it is its journeys across the country because of the necessary secrecy surrounding its operations, but since Detroit was a major Underground Railroad station, Downriver communities were involved because of proximity as well as Abolitionism.

The fact that the Detroit River flowing through the Downriver communities and the Detroit River is studded with islands like Bois Blanc, Grassy, and Fighting Island serving as rest stops for fugitive slaves and their pursuers made it a magnet for fugitive slaves. Before and during the Civil War, escaping slaves used Bois Blanc or Bo-Lo Island as station stop on the Underground Railroad route to Canada. They landed on the beach and rested for a few hours or a few days before continuing on to Amherstburg and new lives in Canada. Local tradition has it that fugitive slaves also used Fighting Island and Grassy Island as stepping stones to Canada.

Captains of Great Lakes vessels used a sextant, compass, The Big Dipper and the North Star as navigational guides and their moral compasses to determine whether or not to transport fugitive slaves. With the help of Great Lakes captains or in small skiffs, canoes, rowboats or anything that floated, fugitive slaves crossed the River to freedom. "Old Man" is a slang term for a captain and many of the "old men" of the Great Lakes vessels were Abolitionists and carried fugitive slaves to freedom. A smaller number worked to keep or return the fugitives to captivity.

Free African Canadians and fugitive slaves from America quarried stone near the town of Amherstburg, Ontario. Then black owned vessels shipped the stone blocks up the Detroit River to the Port of Detroit where they were put on another ship and carried to the site of the first Sault Ste. Marie Canal that opened in 1855. This canal allowed ships to move freely from one lake to another and began the transporting of Lake Superior iron ore to the Midwest.

### **Ships on the Underground Railroad**

Black and white crewmen helped escaping slaves cross the lakes to freedom in Canada. George DeBaptiste of Detroit was one of the active conductors in the nautical Underground Railroad. Purchasing the steamboat *T. Whitney* in 1860, he ran between various Canadian ports and Detroit and later forged a direct link across Lake Erie between the ports of Sandusky, Ohio and Detroit. He made wood stops at the port of Amherstburg, Ontario. After the *T. Whitney* renewed its wood supply, it steamed out into the Detroit River and any fugitive slaves that happened to be on board were left at the dock to begin their lives in Canada.

The *Pearl*, a steamer plying between Amherstburg, Ontario and Detroit played an important part in the lives of many fugitive slaves, including John Freeman Walls and his white wife and her white children. Captain Christopher C. Allen, a native of Amherstburg sailed the *Pearl* as a wheelsman and a porter between 1859 and 1863 and piloted many runaway slaves on the Amherstburg docks to freedom.

"The Ward Line," a ballad from the traditional Great Lakes music collection at the Bentley Historical Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan addresses the reality of black sailors. Copper and iron ore were shipped from Michigan's Upper Peninsula and other Lake Superior ports on wooden hulled ships that were loaded by wheelbarrow. This was a backbreaking job and freed slaves were used as laborers in Samuel Ward's shipping company. They enjoyed a "free ride" while the ship sailed, but in port, they worked non-stop until the cargo was unloaded.

The Ward line of ships and their crews generally sympathized with fugitive slaves and carried them to Canada. Fittingly enough, Captain Eber B. Ward's story begins in Canada where he was born in 1811. His parents had fled to Canada from Vermont in 1811 to avoid the consequences of the War of 1812, so Eber was born an American citizen. After moving around for several years, the Ward family finally settled in Marine City, Michigan.

From the time he could dog paddle, Eber Ward longed to sail on the lakes and luckily for him, his Uncle Samuel, the leading shipbuilder of Marine City, noticed and tapped his enthusiasm for

Great Lakes shipping. Eber and Samuel Ward built and operated many vessels that traversed the Great Lakes and deposited fugitive slaves in Canada. Their vessels included the *General Harrison*, *Huron*, *Detroit*, *Samuel Ward*, *Atlantic*, *Ocean*, *Arctic*, *Pearl*, *B.F. Wade*, *Planet* and *Montgomery*.

Free black sailors and escaped slaves worked on Great Lakes ships and helped many fugitive slaves gain their freedom, and white vessel captains risked losing their ships to help runaway slaves, especially after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. General Reed's boats stopping at Racine, Wisconsin, took fugitives without charging them a fare. The General owned five boats: the *Sultana*, the *James Madison*, the *Missouri*, the *Niagara* and the *Keystone State*. The *Sultana* was an 800-ton steamer built at Trenton, Michigan in 1847. Before it wrecked in 1858, the *Sultana* transported many fugitive slaves under the command of Captain Gil Appleby who died in Buffalo in 1867.

Fugitive slave James C. Brown and his family left Sandusky in 1829 aboard the *Governor Cass* and took her all the way to Toronto. A shipping notice in the *Detroit Gazette* dated March 16, 1828, advertised the *Governor Cass*'s journey to Buffalo. The notice advised prospective passengers that the schooner *Governor Cass*—wind and weather permitting—would be at the wharf of Brooks & Hartshorn on the 23<sup>rd</sup> inst. And will sail for Buffalo in one or two days thereafter. For freight or passage apply to Brooks & Hartshorn.

The *Forest Queen*, the *Morning Star* and the *May Queen* running between Cleveland and Detroit carried many slaves to freedom. The *Phoebus* out of Toledo carried runaway slaves. These ships would stop at Malden on their way up the Detroit River and set the slaves free. William Wells Brown, a former fugitive, was employed on one of these ships. He would take the runaways aboard and deliver them from Cleveland to Canada without charging them a fare. His ship seldom sailed without first taking on a group of these fugitives who huddled together on a wharf on the Cuyahoga River. In 1842, he gave passage to 69 of them. Hubbard & Company, forwarding and commission merchants of Ashtabula, would hide runaways in their warehouses and send them across to Port Burwell at night.

Lake Erie and its many port cities provided one of the quickest and most friendly routes to Canada, particularly Buffalo and Detroit, because only the narrow Niagara and Detroit Rivers separated fugitives from freedom in Canada. Newspapers miles and states away often reported on fugitive slave traffic in Detroit. In 1859, a small town Wisconsin newspaper, the *Oconomowoc Free Press*, reported that the week of December 8, 1859, the Underground Railroad had brought 26 Negroes to Detroit.

### **A Riot in Detroit over Fugitive Slaves**

Fugitive slaves departed from the Detroit waterfront to Canada every day, crossing the Detroit River on steamboats and small craft. There were many violent and heart-rending scenes on the Detroit side of the River. One of them took place on June 14, 1833, when a riot erupted in Detroit. An escaped slave, Thornton Blackburn, and his wife had lived in Detroit for two years

when in 1833, a slave catcher came to town and arrested them as fugitive slaves from Kentucky. They were brought before the justice of the peace in Detroit who ordered them jailed.

The next day, Sunday, June 15, 1833, the agent of the owner asked to have the slaves delivered. Fearing a riot, the sheriff refused. During the day many black people were permitted access to the prisoners, and one woman was allowed to remain in the cell with Mrs. Blackburn until after dark. Mrs. Blackburn exchanged clothing with the visitor and escaped.

In the meantime, a crowd of both black and white people armed with clubs, stones and pistols assembled around the jail and on the wharf where a southbound steamboat was anchored. A little before 4 p.m., the sheriff went to the jail where a carriage was waiting to convey Blackburn to the boat. He was hardly seated before the Negroes attacked. The sheriff tried to bring Blackburn back to the jail, but the Negroes rushed him, apprehended Blackburn, put him in a cart, and then on a boat to Windsor.

The Canadian authorities arrested Thornton Blackburn and put him in a Sandwich jail. The United States authorities requested that the Canadians return Mr. Blackburn to the United States, but they refused, eventually freeing him.

### **Reverend William Troy's Memoirs**

Windsor, Ontario across the Detroit River from Detroit and the town of Sandwich which adjoins Windsor, were the Promised Land for many fugitive slaves. In his memoirs Reverend William Troy estimated that about 800 fugitive slaves had settled in Windsor and about 500 had moved on to Sandwich.

One of Reverend Troy's escaped slave stories narrates the journey of the Monroe family. The Monroe family, lived in Boone County in the state of Kentucky about forty miles from the Ohio River, and the family consisted of a mother, ten daughters and one grown son. The mother, an energetic and determined woman, discovered that she and her children were to be sold to the Deep South. She consulted her son about escaping to the state of Ohio and in October 1856, the family began the journey to the Ohio River. Reaching the River and crossing it safely in a small boat, they walked up the bank into the neighborhood of New Richmond, Ohio. While the son sought help to advance them in their journey, the master in Kentucky gathered a posse and posted a two-thousand-dollar reward.

The fugitive party traveled over the Underground Railroad to Ann Arbor, Michigan, but their master had arrived there before them. He had surmised that the slaves would try to reach Detroit. Discovering that they were being closely pursued, the fugitives immediately took the railway train directly to Detroit. In two and a half hours, conducted by their friends, they arrived on the bank of the Detroit River.

Discovering that his slaves had left Ann Arbor, the master followed the next train. At Detroit the slaves hurried to the ferry and stepped on board the steamer *Argo*, which transported them to the

Canadian shore in fifteen minutes' time. Reverend Troy described the master's reaction: "The master was that very moment coming in full speed down Jefferson Avenue, Detroit, calling to the captain, "Stop! Stop! But the call only excited laughter among the few who knew the master's errand."

Mrs. Monroe and her eleven children landed safely in Canada.

### **William Nowlin's Fugitive Slave Story**

Sometimes fugitive slaves used the Downriver Detroit route as an open ended highway to suit their social and economic needs. In an account of everyday life on the north branch of the River Ecorse near the Detroit River, Michigan pioneer William Nowlin discussed his source of farm hands. The oldest of five Nowlin children, William journeyed to Michigan with his parents, John and Melinda Nowlin, from what he considered civilized life in New York . William was born September 25, 1821, and family talk about migrating to Michigan began around 1832, with the family making the journey to Michigan in 1833-1843. They boarded the steam Michigan and arrived in Detroit in the spring of 1834.

From Detroit, William and his father John walked with guns on their shoulders to their new farm, one mile south of Dearborn. The next day his mother Melinda and the rest of the family reached the homestead and in one week, John Nowlin had built a "bark covered house" for his family.

One of William Nowlin's most telling Ecorse River experiences happened when he married and was establishing his own claim along the Ecorse River. He hired three or four colored men from Canada to help him through his haying and harvesting and with other odd jobs around the Nowlin homestead. Two of the colored men kept their names to themselves and the names of the other two were Campbell and Obadiah. According to William Nowlin, Campbell was the older of the two men and trusty and dependable in all respects. Obadiah was a young man whose parents had died when he was a child. He had a younger sister and brother and he wanted to keep them together and provide a home for them.

The 1850 Fugitive Slave Law required northern men to help hunt down and capture runaway slaves, so William did not inquire too closely into the histories of the men who worked for him. Campbell later told William Nowlin the details of his escape from slavery, and William realized that the colored men were afraid that they would be arrested and taken back into slavery. They didn't feel safe in working so far from Canada, but Nowlin's attitude should have reassured them. He said, "I am sure if I had heard of his master's approach or his agent's, I should have conducted him, for the three, six miles through the woods to the Detroit River, procured a boat and sent them across to Canada, regretting the existence of the Fugitive Slave Law and obeying a higher law."

After William Nowlin had finished his haying and harvesting, the colored workers moved back to Canada, near Windsor.

## Escaping to Canada

As Canadian citizens, former slaves forged new lives for themselves and often returned south to liberate relatives and friends. Militiamen returning from the Ontario raids of the War of 1812 advertised freedom in Canada. Dr. Alexander M. Ross of Canada toured the South, informing slaves about Canada and how to get there and encouraging them to escape. The slave grapevine in the South telegraphed the message "Escape to Canada."

Between 1793 and 1833, there was a considerable amount of Abolitionist sympathy in Upper Canada. On August 28, 1833, the British Parliament passed an act that absolutely abolished slavery in British North America. Once slavery had been abolished in Upper Canada and the United States had passed the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, Canada became the Promised Land for countless slaves in the United States and the Underground Railroad flourished. Canada's first major Abolitionist Society, the Upper Canada Anti-Slavery Society was created in 1837 and it drew members from Upper and Lower Canada. It also developed networks with other Abolitionists in the United States and Britain.

Henry Bibb, an ex-slave lectured on antislavery in Michigan and established a newspaper for fugitive slaves. He worked at menial jobs until 1844 and 1845 when he began lecturing in Michigan under the auspices of the Liberty Association, a political organization that promoted the election of anti-slavery candidates. A complete chain of persons who were organized for the relief and transportation of fugitive slaves stretched as far as the slave states and to America's boundary oceans.

Henry Bibb began a newspaper for runaways that he called *Voice of the Fugitive*, first published at Sandwich and then at Windsor, Ontario. In the December 3, 1851, issue, Bibb wrote:

"In enumerating the arrivals of this week we can count only seventeen, ten of whom came together on the Express train of the Underground Railroad...a mother with six children and three men. The next day there came four men, the next day two men arrived, and then one came alone. The latter tells of having had a warm combat by the way with two slave catchers, in which he found it necessary to throw a handful of sand in the eyes of one of them; and while he was trying to wash it out he broke away from the other and effected his escape."

In order to aid the fugitives, the Liberty Association of Detroit organized a Refugee Home Society which bought a large tract of land near Sandwich, Ontario and helped settle nearly fifty families between 1854 and 1872. The passage of the American Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 inspired the Canadians to create their own legislation and in 1851 they established the Canadian Anti-Slavery Society. Its strength lay in the inter-racial collaboration between members of the Underground Railroad Refugee community, and establishment white supporters such as newspaper publisher George Brown, leaders of the Presbyterian Free Church and the Congregational Church and many members of Toronto's growing business and professional community.

The first major wave of fugitive slaves to Canada crested in Essex County in 1817, because it

was the easiest and fastest location to reach from the United States. Underground Railroad terminals in Ontario included almost any ports on Lake Erie and the Niagara and Detroit Rivers as well as Amherstburg, Sandwich, Windsor, Owen Sound, Hamilton, St. Catharines, Toronto, Kingston, Brantford, Collingwood and Prescott. About twenty Underground Railroad terminals were located along the Lake Erie shore, the Niagara River and the Detroit frontier, particularly at Amherstburg, Sandwich and Windsor.

Fugitives also traveled by land and water to Toronto, Hamilton, St. Catharines, Brantford, Kingston and Prescott. Kingsville, Point Pelee, Port Stanley, Port Burwell and Long Point all received a goodly share of fugitive slaves. Many went up the Thames and filtered into the unsettled lands of Ontario West., but settlers in the 1830s tended to locate primarily along the Detroit River and Lake Erie shores. Hamilton and particularly Toronto drew fugitives looking for employment.

There were a score of refugee ports on the Ontario shore of Lake Erie from Windsor to Port Colbourne and Fort Erie. Sandwich and Amherstburg, being ports of call for all vessels going up the Detroit River became favored gateways to Canada. Anthony Bingley of Amherstburg said that when he went there to live in 1845, fugitives were arriving in companies of fifteen or more and that these numbers rose in the following years until it was not uncommon to see thirty of them getting off the lake vessels and ferries at this point.

An 1850 poem best captures the fugitive slave spirit of 1850:

I'm on my way to Canada that cold and distant land,  
The dire effects of slavery I can no longer stand,  
Farewell old master, don't come after me,  
I'm on my way to Canada where coloured men are free.

By the 1850s Ontario had six firmly rooted black communities: Central Ontario, (London, Queen's Bush, Brantford, Wilberforce); Chatham (Dawn, Elgin); Detroit Frontier – (Amherstburg, Sandwich, Windsor); Niagara Peninsula (St. Catharine's, Niagara Falls, Newark, Fort Erie); Northern Simcoe & Gray Counties (Oro, Collingwood, Owen Sound); and the urban centers on Lake Ontario (Hamilton and Toronto).

### **Building New Lives in Canada**

The 1861 Upper Canada census recorded people of color in 312 townships and city wards, which made them one of the most widely dispersed groups in Ontario at the time. The largest number of black people concentrated in Kent and Essex counties and more than 1,000 were listed in the city of Toronto. Most of these people arrived in the mid Nineteenth Century waves of Underground Railroad immigration.

Historian Malcolm Wallace in his *Pioneers of the Scotch Settlement* stated that Negroes formed a substantial part of the early population of Essex. His figures are eye opening. He said that in 1846 there were about 174 blacks among the 985 inhabitants of Amherstburg and by 1860 the

town contained 800 blacks and 1,200 whites according to the Report of the American Missionary Society.

Many of the refugees became farmers and small business owners. Wallace specifically mentioned the Walls family. He noted: "Perhaps the most picturesque Negro family on the Puce were the Walls. Mr. Walls had been a slave and when he fled to Canada he was accompanied by his master's wife and three daughters. They had three sons, all of whom became successful farmers. Mrs. Wall's white daughters grew up to marry Negro husbands."

Dr. Bryan E. Walls, an Ontario dentist, wrote a book about his family's escape to Canada called *The Road that Led to Somewhere*. He was also instrumental in establishing the John Freeman Walls Historical Site and Underground Railroad Museum in Windsor, Ontario.

After the fugitive slaves settled in Canada they could not sink into comfortable obscurity and the anonymity of a pioneer society. Much the same as in United States history, some parts of the larger Canadian society regarded them with suspicion and hostility. Despite the freeing of the slaves in Canada and the efforts of Abolitionists, pro-slavery supporters and politicians anxious to avoid a backlash from fearful white voters gave the refugees a tenuous hold on freedom and prosperity.

Dr. Bryan Walls wrote that Canadians enthusiastically provided refugee for the black man but the black man still lived in a segregated society. He said that white prejudice prevented societal equality and concluded: "In the abounding democracy of the farm community the Negro hired help occasionally ate their meals with their white employers, though not always. Moreover, there was no objection to admitting an occasional Negro child into the white school. Beyond this the colour bar was fixed."

Many Canadians and Americans watched the former slaves closely to prove or disprove theories and prejudices about their ability to live and prosper outside of the bounds of slavery. The former slaves struggled to establish themselves, trying to quietly integrate into the growing urban centers of southwestern Ontario. By the 1860s attitudes of some Canadians toward blacks reverberated through Midwestern papers. The February 9, 1860 *Chicago Times* said:

"The Underground Railroad will soon have quite an acquisition to its business in return freight. The recent disturbances in Canada indicate pretty clearly that the Negro does not assimilate with John Bull. Won't some of our representatives propose some feasible plan to dispose of the Negro? Canada is not a safe place any longer."

But despite the cultural, physical and spiritual obstacles, most of the former slaves successfully built new lives. Estimates of how many refugees took the Underground Railroad to Canada during the mid-19th century have varied considerably. Recent Canadian research says that of the more than 20,000 refugees that immigrated to Upper Canada, only about 20 percent returned to the United States during or after the Civil War.

In March 1860, enterprising Southerner C.L. Brown decided to encourage a reverse

Underground Railroad from Detroit back to the South. According to the *Detroit Free Press*, Mr. Brown opened an office in Detroit offering assistance to Negroes who wished to return to their masters. The *Free Press* reported Mr. Brown as saying: "I have made such investigations in Canada especially at Chatham and other places where Africans most congregate, to satisfy me that large numbers of them are anxious and ready to return to their masters in the South if they only had the means. "

Mr. Brown proposed to furnish them with transportation tickets and to send an agent with them to approach slave owners for remuneration for his benevolence. He did not report any takers of his offer.

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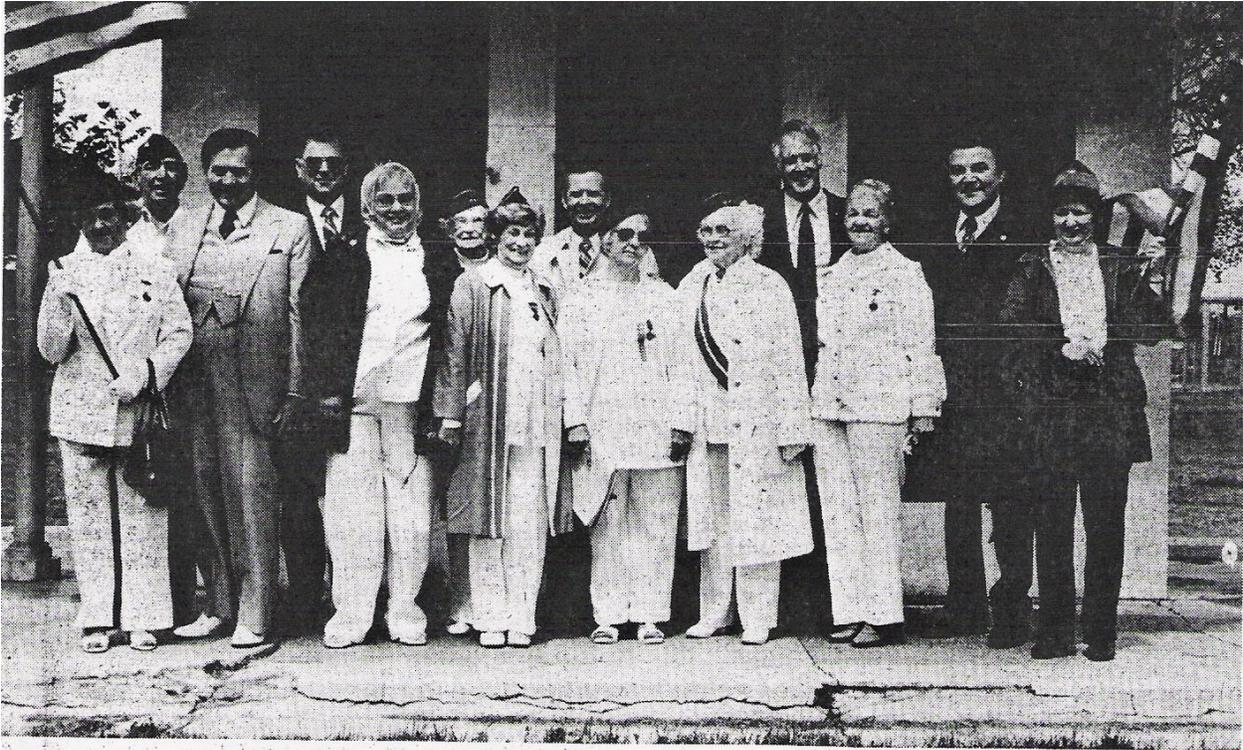
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## Chapter 27 – Downriver in the Civil War



**REPRESENTATIVES OF ECORSE veterans groups and auxiliaries remembered the nation's war dead during special ceremonies last week at John D. Dingell Park, conducted by Peter Reves Woman's Relief Corps 270 Auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic. Mayor Harry White, Councilman J.O. Smith, State Representative Robert Demars and former state Senator George Hart were among those participating.**

Frank Rathbun, a reporter for the *Mellus Newspapers* and Lincoln Park historian wrote an article about Downriver in the Civil War. The full article is on the Lincoln Park Historical Society Website. [Civil War: Frank Rathbun.](#)

Published in the *Mellus Newspapers* on May 11, 1961, in his article Frank Rathbun described the Downriver area in 1861, talking of farmlands dotted with the small clusters of settlements at Ecorse, River Rouge, and Wyandotte. Cities including Lincoln Park, Allen Park, Southgate, and Melvindale were still dreams in the imaginations of the descendants of the young Downriver men going to war.

In his story, Frank Rathbun detailed the outpouring of Downriver young men who volunteered to fight to save the Union, many were farmers and sons of farmers who labored on homesteads in Ecorse and Taylor Townships. Others came from old French families who had worked the ribbons farms along the banks of the Detroit River in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – Bondies, Bourassas, Cicottes, LeBlancs, and Salliottes. English families including the Goodells

and fathers and sons of German immigrant families including the Albrecht family volunteered. They enlisted in the infantry, cavalry, and artillery, serving as pirates, corporals, sergeants, lieutenants and at least one colonel. A few fought in the First Michigan Colored Infantry.

### **The Iron Brigade – 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan**

Many Downriver men fought their part of the Civil War in the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry, which was part of the “Iron Brigade.” In the beginning the Iron Brigade was made up of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiments, the 19<sup>th</sup> Indiana, and Battery B of the 4<sup>th</sup> U.S. Light Artillery. Later the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry joined them, and the entire brigade was called The Iron Brigade of the West. The Brigade earned the nickname of the Black Hats because of the black model Hardee hats that the Army issued to the soldiers. More than its appearance, the Iron Brigade gained fame for its ferocious fighting spirit, suffering the highest percentage of casualties of any brigade in the Civil War. The Iron Brigade lost 298 men and 27 officers during the Civil War, with 152 killed in action and 39 dying of wounds. The rest of them died of disease, which killed more soldiers during the Civil War than bullets or shrapnel.

Two Ecorse Iron Brigade members who died were Daniel Bourassa and Antoine LeBlanc. Daniel Bourassa who worked as a laborer enlisted on August 15, 1862, at age 29. The Confederates captured him and sent him to the prison at Salisbury, North Carolina. Located in an abandoned cotton mill, the Salisbury Prison at first adequately accommodated the prisoners, but by October 1864, the prison population had grown to 5,000 men and soon after that 10,000, and the death rate had escalated from 2 percent to 28 percent. Daniel Bourassa was part of the death rate escalation when he died on November 15, 1864. Antoine LeBlanc, 34, an Ecorse farmer, enlisted on August 13, 1862, and died in a Confederate prison at Richmond, Virginia on January 6, 1864.

### Just a Few Other Downriver Soldiers Who Died in the Civil War

Name and Company	Home	Died
James Adams- 8 <sup>th</sup> Infantry-Co. I	Brownstown	September 17, 1862
Elisha B. Anson – 1 <sup>st</sup> Cavalry, Co. K	Trenton	May 28, 1864
Lewis A. Baldwin, 24 <sup>th</sup> Inf. Co. B.	Wyandotte	October 22, 1864.
Edward S. Banker, 1 <sup>st</sup> Cavalry. Co.C.	Huron	June 11, 1864
John B. Beyetta, 24 <sup>th</sup> Infan. Co. F	Ecorse	June 18, 1864
Marshall Bills, 24 <sup>th</sup> Infan. Co. H.	Romulus	1864
Lewis Blow, 15 <sup>th</sup> Infan. Co. E	Trenton	November 3, 1863
Ferdinand Brest, 14 <sup>th</sup> Infan. Co. H	Taylor	August 13, 1864
William Brevort, 1 <sup>st</sup> Cavalry Co. H	Grosse Isle	June 1, 1864
Asa W. Brindle, 24 <sup>th</sup> Inf. Co. B	Wyandotte	April 30, 1863
Thornton F. Brodhead, 1 <sup>st</sup> Cavalry Colonel	Grosse Isle	September 2, 1862
William H. Bronson, 4 <sup>th</sup> Inf. Co. I	Brownstown	July 1, 1862
Charles Bush, 14 <sup>th</sup> Infan. Co. B	Belleville	September 11, 1864
John B. Cicott, 24 <sup>th</sup> Infan. Co. F	Ecorse	June 18, 1864
David Cicott, Jr. 1 <sup>st</sup> Cavalry, Co. C	Ecorse	February 23, 1865
James E. Clago, 4 <sup>th</sup> Infan. Co. I	Grosse Isle	June 27, 1862
Vincent Clark, 1 <sup>st</sup> Cavalry, Co. I	Romulus	August 20, 1864
James M. Collard, 24 <sup>th</sup> Infant. Co. D	Romulus	April 12, 1864

Name and Co.	Home	Died
Charles Dezalia, 9 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry Co. B	Trenton	March 6, 1864
Julius B. Doty, 4 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Co. D.	Brownstown	December 20, 1864
Thomas Driscoll, 1 <sup>st</sup> Cavalry, Co. B	Romulus	July 4, 1864
Antoine LaBlanc, 24 <sup>th</sup> Infantry, Co. F.	Ecorse	January 6, 1864
Phillip Leighton, 4 <sup>th</sup> Inf. Co. I	Trenton	December 13, 1862
William Leighton, 16 <sup>th</sup> Infan. Co. I	Trenton	December 26, 1862
John Lorin, 27 <sup>th</sup> Inf. Co.D	Ecorse	May 8, 1864
Noah Lorin, 27 <sup>th</sup> Inf. Co. D	Ecorse	August 2, 1863
Charles Losee, 24 <sup>th</sup> Infan. Co. K	Brownstown	December 3, 1862
Charles Saulsbury, 1 <sup>st</sup> Cavalry, Co. K	Grosse Isle	August 30, 1862
Charles J. Schultz, 5 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry, Co. B	Monguagon	July 18, 1864
Andrew Smith, 24 <sup>th</sup> Infan. Co K.	Brownstown	July 7, 1863
Christian Smith, 9 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry, Co. C.	Ecorse	November 3, 1863
John Smith, 16 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry, Co. C	Huron	February 2, 1864
John Stewart, 14 <sup>th</sup> Infan. Co. C.	Taylor	March 16, 1865
George Stinman, 24 <sup>th</sup> Inf. Co.H	Taylor	May 2, 1864

Michigan Regimental Rosters and Michigan Fatalities in the Civil War.

<http://www.migenweb.org/michiganinthewar/>

### **A Few 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry, Iron Brigade, Soldiers**

Name	Age	Home
Company A		
Roderick Broughton	26	Brownstown
Garrett Close	27	Brownstown
Jonathan D. Chase	20	Brownstown
Mark T. Chase	26	Brownstown
George Dingman	26	Flatrock
John Parrish,	19	Brownstown
Francis Wright,	18	Brownstown
Henry Wright	21	Brownstown
Company B		
Alexander S. Duncan	23	Wyandotte
John C. Alvord	20	Trenton
Lewis A. Baldwin	31	Wyandotte
Leander Bawvere	24	Trenton
Francis Baysley	21	Ecorse

Michigan Regimental Rosters and Michigan Fatalities in the Civil War.

<http://www.migenweb.org/michiganinthewar/>

These names are just a small fraction of Civil War soldiers from Downriver in other regiments.

## **Brownstown**

### **Infantry**

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Colored Infantry**

Unassigned

George Neve, 19

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> Michigan Infantry**

Company F – Walter H. Wallace, 20

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry**

Company D

Solomon Baker, 34

William A. Brown, 40

John Chamberlain, 28

Watson Clark, 21

Julius B. Doty, 16

John J. Edwards, 28

James Franham, 21

Abner R. Galpin, 20

Company I

William H. Bronson, 20

Albert Hale, 17

Samuel Hart, 21

Thomas Hill, 25

Thomas Hooper, 20

Oliver O. Jones, 19

George W. King, 31

Samuel J. Lawrence, 16

Henry Malley, 22

Dennis McLachlan, 22

Thomas Parrish, 18

James E. Purdy, 18

Daniel Reaum, 18

William H. Smith, 19  
Michael J. Vreeland, 22

#### **8<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry**

Co. I

James Adams, 22

#### **11<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry**

Co. D

Ira Abbott, 19

Robert Abbott, 18

Thomas Adams, 20

Richard J. Bronson, 18

George R. Brown, 28

Frederick Clossen, 23  
William A. Knight, 21  
Charles O. Peters, 18  
Henry A. Van Riper, 19  
William H. Warfield  
Company I  
John Blinn, 27

Company C  
Norton W. Curtis, 23

## **Ecorse**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Colored Infantry**

Co. C  
Thomas Seymore, 23  
Unassigned  
Samuel Pearce, 19

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Michigan Infantry, Company E**

Thomas Catwell, 30                      John  
Smith, 22

Company B  
Lewis Gardner, 36  
John P. Van Horn, 32  
James Vreeland, 41  
Company D  
John McVay, 33

Unassigned  
Franklin Rhodes, 18  
**4<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry, Co. K**  
Unassigned  
Harry Thomas, 24  
**7<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry, Co. E**  
Silas Fenton, 36  
Co. H  
Lewis Labrick, 18

## **8<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry**

Co C

Ira Amsbury, 39  
John Gorsuch, 27  
Alexander Wiley, 33

Unassigned  
George Kittle, 18  
Peter May, 18

## **9<sup>th</sup> Infantry**

Co. G  
Patrick Campbell, 18

## **14<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry Co. H**

Co. H

Richard Barrow, 26  
Henry Beaubien, 23  
Alexander Bondy, 27  
Joseph Bragensen, 31  
Emanuel Brest, 34  
John Brest, 41  
Gregory Drouillard, 18  
Solomon Drouillard, 23  
Joseph Fountain, 18  
Francis Labot, 43  
Joseph Laduke, 20  
Pascoh Odette, 24  
Peter Rabideau or Peter Rabitory, 35

Antoine Salliotte, 18

John Short, 41

Samuel Smith, 32

Unassigned

James Streeter, 19

## **24 Michigan Infantry**

Co. B

Francis Baysley, 21

## **Ecorse**

### **First Michigan Cavalry**

Company C

David Cicotte, Jr., 18

Company G

Augustus C. Bordino, 40

### **5<sup>th</sup> Michigan Cavalry**

Co. A

Elijah Goodell, 27

Co. B

John Harris, 29,

Co.C

Charles Brock, 28

Richard C. Collins, 21

William R. Frasier, 20

Martin Goodell, 23

August Misch, 35

John Wolcott, 38

## **Flat Rock**

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Michigan Infantry**

Co. D

Peter Delong, 44

Henry L. Stoflet, 22

J. Vreeland, 18

Albert W. Wager, 19

### **4<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry**

Co. I

Abiathar Jones, 30

## **Gibraltar**

### **4<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry,**

Company I

Horace A. Clarke, 20

### **11<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry**

Co. C

Charles Bryant, 18

### **1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Cavalry**

Co. C

Frank Clark, 18

John M. Miller, 23

Sylvanus Mott, Jr., 19

William H. Stoddard, 22

## **Grosse Isle**

### **4<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry**

Company I

James E. Clago, 23

### **First Michigan Cavalry**

First Michigan Cavalry

Colonel Thornton F. Brodhead

Company H

2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. William M. Brevoort, 20

Company I

Edwin F. Norvill

Company K

William A. Bury, 29

Charles Saulsbury, 40

## **Monguagon**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Colored Infantry**

Co. H

Jefferson Gibson, 28

Frank Johnson, 25

### **11<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry**

Co. F

Orson W. Smith, 17

Co. K

Jacob Kaiser, 21

### **First Michigan Cavalry**

Company C

Oliver Delisle, 36

Jason Nowland, 19

## **Romulus**

1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Light Artillery

Battery B

Alten Wheeler, 23

## **Taylor**

11<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry 11<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry

Co. I

John H. Wells, 21

## **Trenton**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Infantry, Co. I**

Arthur Edwards, Jr. Chaplain, 26

Albert J. Hartwell, 33

### **4<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry, Co. I**

Captain David A. Granger, 33

Phillip Leighton, 23

James McCann, 23

William W. Haven, 19

Nolton F. Stoddard, 27

Charles Kendall, 44

### **8<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry**

Co. H

Truman Hinman, 27

Co. I

Henry McVey, 20

Albert Taylor, 19

### **11<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry**

Co. D

Victor B. Eastman, 27

Zopher Gerard or Theophis Gerard, 34

George W. Shippee, 28

Eugene Terrell, 17

### **24<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry**

John C. Alvord, 20

Leander Bawvers, 24

E.R. Cady, 21

Nathaniel A. Halstead, 20

James R. Harens, 35

Henry B. Hudson, 20

John McCrudden, 19

James McIlhenny, 21

William W. Macard, 41

John H. Pardington, 23

William Smith, 22

Lafayette Veo, 23

### **First Michigan Cavalry**

Alfred K. Nash, Asst. Surgeon, 36

Jonathan Hudson, Chaplain

First Michigan Cavalry, Company K

1<sup>st</sup> Lt. James I. David, 39  
William A. Irwin, 23      Archibald L.  
Rankin, 22

2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Peter Staff, 25  
John P. Johnson, 25

William Sanborn, 30

George R. Alvord, 21  
Peter Karpp, 37

Gustav Schwartz, 20

Elisha B. Anson, 32  
Nicholas Kettle, 41

John King, 32

Garrett H. VanVorhies, 20

Eli Campeau, 28  
James Lawrence, 22

John Vashaw, 27

Milo Cory, 19  
Cyrus McBride, 21

Peter Veo, 22

Eli Solo, 24

## Wyandotte

2<sup>nd</sup> Michigan Infantry, Co. F

Benjamin Haight, 32      William W.  
Murphy, 19

**4<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry, Co. K**

Robert Moodie, 22

**First Michigan Cavalry, Company K**

Edwin H. Babcock, 38  
Francis King

Ira M. Swartz, 21

Alonzo Bachman, 28  
Henry King, 44

George Vance, 26

Albert Brockway, 20

Henry Ducant, 25  
John J. McNaughton, 27

Charles Wait, 18

Thomas C. Gould, 21  
Oliver Marcott, 41

George Wilcox, 22

## **5<sup>th</sup> Michigan Cavalry**

Quartermaster Arthur Edwards, 50

Commissary Dwight A. Aiken, 28

Co. B

George Kenzel, 26

William Jackson, 20

## **14<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry**

Co. H

Stephen Pemberton, 18

**24<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry**

Co. B

James McKnight, 19

James T. Newington, 27

James Pendes, 19

George H. Pinney, 29

Andrew Simmons, 23

Morris Trout, 19

Jeston R. Warer, 26

**5<sup>th</sup> Michigan Cavalry**

Co. D

Leander W. Ferguson, 32

John D. Gudith, 40

John Wolcott, 38

**1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Light Artillery,**

Battery B

Clint Williams, 22

## Three Ecorse Farm Boys Join the Michigan Cavalry



Elijah, Gabriel, and Martin Goodell, were all farm boys from Ecorse, Michigan, so they appreciated the farms, green fields, and orchards they encountered around Trevilian Station in Louisa County, Virginia, in June 1864, even though they were there to save the Union instead of enjoying Southern scenery. Ironically, they would soon participate in a battle that would take place in part on three farms- Brackett's farm, Ogg's farm, and the Gentry farm.

### Three Farm Boys from Michigan and the Green, Green, Grass of Home

The three Goodells came from a tradition of French ribbon farms fronting on the Detroit River all of the way from Lake St. Clair to Monroe, Michigan. Cadillac had given each farmer land on the riverfront, which followed the shoreline for two hundred to one thousand feet and extended from the Detroit River back two to three miles. The plots were so long and narrow that they were called French ribbon farms.

Because water transportation was essential in these early times of dirt trails and dense forests, every farmer wanted to own land rights on the Detroit River and yet remain near to Fort Pontchartrain (Detroit). The proximity of the farms to the fort provided protection and allowed the farmers crucial access to the rivers which provided them with transportation and a communication highway. The farmers used their canoes and bateaux to visit other farmers and friends in Fort Pontchartrain and to take their farm produce and furs to market. The descendants of the men who helped Cadillac settled Detroit inherited the French ribbon farms, men with names like J.B. Rousson, Joseph Bondy, and Louis Bourassa.

Elijah Goodell, a forerunner of the Goodell family in Ecorse, added an English name to the list of farmers. He was born in England in 1759, and came to Michigan in 1799. In 1818, he purchased a farm in Ecorse Township on the Detroit River from Louis Leduc and moved to Ecorse. Jonas Goodell, one of his sons, inherited his father's farm in 1820. In 1822 he married Angelique Salliotte, a granddaughter of original settler J.B. Saliot. The first Township meeting

of Ecorse Township which took its name from the Ecorse River, was held at the home of Daniel Goodell in 1827.

The plot of the village was first recorded in 1836 after having been laid out by Simon Rousseau, A. Labadie, L. Bourassa, and P. Leblanc. At this time it was named Grandport, but it was not incorporated as a village until 1920 when the name was changed to Ecorse. A.M. Salliotte was its first president.

The next generation of farmers had to stop their plowing and planting of corn and wheat and gardens and delay tending their orchards to fight to preserve the Union. Elijah and Martin Goodell both enlisted in August 1862, while Gabriel had already enlisted in September 1861.

Martin Goodell was one of Daniel Goodell's children listed in the 1860 Census along with Thomas, Lilus, and Polly. He was 23 when he enlisted in Company C, Michigan 5th Cavalry Regiment on August 27, 1862.

Elijah Goodell appears in the 1860 Census as age 25 and is listed with his father Jonas 62, his mother Angelique, 60, his brothers Richard age 21 and Alex age 17 and his sister Louisa, 23. He enlisted on August 14, 1862 in Company A of the 5th Michigan Cavalry at age 27 with the rank of sergeant.

Gabriel Goodell was born in 1837 in Ecorse and the Michigan Census lists him as the son of Jones (Jonas) Goodell and Angilique Salliotte. He enlisted in Company K, Michigan 1st Cavalry Regiment on September 26, 1861 when he was 23 years old.

All three Goodells were farm boys and as they marched through the Virginia countryside in June of 1864, they thought about the apple and pear orchards in Ecorse fragrant with blossoms and buzzing with the sounds of bees pollinating them under the warm summer sun. They thought longingly of Ecorse vegetable gardens and their mothers roasting corn and boiling potatoes for supper.

In a letter written from Strasburg, Virginia on May 19, 1862, Gabriel told his mother that there would be "an abundance of fruit this year, apples, pears, peaches and cherries and many other varieties. You have not stated anything about the fruit at home whether they be any or not. I wish you would tell me all about it in your next..."

In June 1864, the Goodell soldiers looked around them at the pastures and farms of Louisa County, Virginia, and for a moment they could forget the realities of war.

### **Louisa County Virginia Farm Country**

The agricultural practices in newly settled Louisa County were the same as those of Eastern Virginia. At first the settlers grew tobacco as their Eastern Virginia counterparts had done, but

after years of growing tobacco had depleted the soil, the Colonial Legislature restricted the tobacco acreage and required the farmers and plantation owners to grow alternative crops like wheat, corn, oats, and flax. Between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, each small farm and plantation grew to be self-sustaining, producing everything needed for their owners to survive including materials like wool and cotton to produce cloth. They employed blacksmiths to forge iron products including plows. Owners of small plantations usually entrusted the operation of their farms to overseers.

The Virginia Central Railroad reached Louisa Courthouse in 1838, and by 1840 the railroad made travel easy throughout the county. People could travel to visit each other and transport goods and services. During the Civil War, the Virginia Central Railroad served as a vital supply line to the Confederate troops, so Louisa County was the crossroads for both Union and Confederate Cavalry actions and it was also the underlying reason for the clash of cavalries at Trevillian Station in 1864. Despite repeated efforts, Union troops were never able to sweep through Louisa County to stop the railroad activity in Gordonsville.

### **Martin Goodell -Near Hartwood Church, Virginia**

The woods and fields of Louisa County, Virginia, reminded the three Goodell soldiers of all they had left behind them in Ecorse.

Martin Goodell of the 5th Michigan Cavalry wrote a letter home to his cousin back in Ecorse dated near Hartwood Church, September 8, 1863. He told her how much he missed her and asked her to tell him the local romantic gossip. He reminded her of the ride they had taken together and he implied that he had courted a girl on that ride, telling his cousin that he wanted to take that ride again when he returned from the war.

He concluded his letter by saying, "Cousin I suppose you have heard enough about the boys of Ecorse in the regiment we have been very lucky so far and I hope to return home this fall and I bid you good bye but not forever." He signed his letter "Your dear cousin Martin Goodell. Amen."

The scenery that Martin Goodell saw around Hartwood Church consisted of cleared land that had been farmed out and abandoned. A thick crop of scrubby pines had grown up so densely that in some places they were impenetrable, even on foot. Built in 1858, the present Hartwood Church rests on high ground near the junction of several roads, all providing access to popular fords of the Rappahannock River.

On February 25, 1863, the largest Civil War battle fought in Stafford County occurred when detachments of the 1st, 2d, and 3d Virginia Cavalry Regiments under Confederate Fitzhugh Lee attacked the Union cavalry outpost stationed at the church. They defeated the Union Cavalry and captured 150 men.

After the Gettysburg Campaign the Union and Confederate Armies returned to Virginia, and the Hartwood Church became the headquarters of General Judson Kilpatrick, Third Cavalry Division of the Army of the Potomac. The Union soldiers considerably damaged the interior of the

church, but it survived and its Presbyterian congregation is still active.

### **Elijah Goodell – The Battle of Trevilian Station**

Hartwood Church survived the Civil War, but Martin Goodell didn't fare as well a little over a year later at the Battle of Trevilian Station on June 11-12, 1864. While the Battle of Cold Harbor, Virginia, still raged, General Ulysses S. Grant sent General Philip Sheridan, his cavalry commander, and his men on a ride toward Charlottesville. General Grant ordered General Sheridan to cut the Virginia Central Railroad that supplied Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia which was locked in mortal combat with General Grant's Army of the Potomac around Richmond and Petersburg. General Grant told General Sheridan to destroy the tracks and Trevilian station and then join forces with General David Hunter who was coming east from Lynchburg.

General Sheridan and his cavalry – 8,000-9,000 men strong- galloped north around Richmond toward Charlottesville, 60 miles northwest of Richmond. General Wade Hampton, Confederate cavalry commander with 5,000 Confederate cavalrymen hurried to meet the Yankees. The two opposing cavalry forces clashed on June 11-12, 1864, near Trevilian Station on the Virginia Central Railroad near Louisa Court House. Union General George A. Custer and his cavalry attacked General Hampton's supply train near Trevilian Station. The first day of the battle belonged to the Union when General Custer's men initially drove the Confederates back, but then the Confederate cavalry nearly surrounded the Union forces. General Custer ordered his men into triangle formation and counterattacked several times before General Sheridan swooped in to rescue him late in the afternoon, capturing 500 Southern prisoners in the operation.

The battle continued the next day, June 12, 1864, and General Sheridan found himself in a precarious position with his ammunition low and his cavalry dangerously distant from its supply line.

After several attacks failed, the Union troops withdrew and General Sheridan and his men returned to the Army of the Potomac. The Yankees destroyed about five miles of the railroad line and burned Trevilian station, but inflicted light damage in proportion to the number of casualties. General Sheridan lost 735 men and General Hampton about 1,000. The Confederates drove the Union Cavalry away and quickly repaired the railroad. The Confederate victory kept General Sheridan from reaching Charlottesville and joining the Union troops from the Valley of Virginia, but the Battle of Trevilian Station drew crucial cavalry away from General Lee's Army at Cold Harbor and allowed General Grant's army to cross the James River to Petersburg.

In a letter home to Ecorse dated White House, June 21, 1864, Elijah Goodell told his sister that he had just returned from his last adventure at Louisa Courthouse where his 5th Cavalry had clashed with the rebels. He told her that his regiment had lost six men killed, seven wounded and 38 prisoners and that he was the only sergeant that hadn't been killed, wounded, or taken prisoner. He wrote, "William & Martin are both prisoners taken at the Battle of Tivillian Station."

## **M. Hicks, Confederate Prisoner of War**

On the Confederate side, Stuart Horse Artilleryman M. Hicks, from Martinsburg, West Virginia, recalled the story of his adventure with the 5th Michigan Cavalry many years later. He was a member of the Stuart Horse Artillery and he and a fellow soldier got lost in the woods surrounding the Virginia Central Railroad and men from the 5th Michigan Cavalry took them prisoner during the Battle of Trevilian Station. M. Hicks soon discovered that his Yankee captors were lost and the entire group of soldiers concentrated on traveling together and finding their way through the dense woods to their own lines. M. Hicks noted that he and his Confederate comrades had been prisoners of the Yankee cavalrymen for about thirty-six hours and everyone was very tired. He said, "I was sick and hardly able to keep up, and freedom did not come too soon for me."

M. Hicks noted that many of the Yankee soldiers came up to say good-bye to the Confederates and he described the last one to say goodbye to him as a man thirty or thirty-five years old with sandy hair and mustache and nearly six feet tall. The night before M. Hicks had noticed that when the man had settled near him to sleep that he did not set his canteen aside, but kept it on all night. This made M. Hicks certain that the Confederate had something stronger than water in his canteen. He discovered his suspicions were correct when the Confederate offered him a drink from the canteen and told him that it would do him good.

M. Hicks wrote that the drink did make him feel better, because it was peach brandy. He said that Yankees released the Confederates to go back to their own lines and he saw them no more. He concluded, "I went to the reunion at Gettysburg, hoping to see this man and others of Company B, 5th Michigan Cavalry, but learned that the command was not on the ground."

## **Gabriel Goodell, First Michigan Cavalry**

Company K-First Michigan Cavalry

Gabriel Goodell of the First Michigan Cavalry wrote a letter home from camp near City Point, Virginia, dated June 29/64. Along with comments about the weather and reporting that his company had helped construct a railroad near Petersburg, Gabriel told his family that..."Elige is in Com'd of his Co his Capt being badly wounded Martin Goodell is a Prisoner in Richmond also Wm Frasier he was taken three times got away twice martin was taken twice got away once..."

## **Martin Goodell in Andersonville**

Martin Goodell didn't escape the second time, and after spending some time in prison in Richmond, probably at Belle Isle because only officers were sent to Libby Prison, he was transferred to Andersonville.

At this point in the war, prisoner exchange agreements between the North and the South had broken down, which increased the number of Union soldiers held near Richmond. So many

prisoners nearby posed a threat to the security of Richmond and taxed Virginia's already limited resources, so prisoners were transferred from Belle Isle and Libby Prisons to Andersonville in Georgia.

Andersonville had been built to hold up to 10,000 soldiers, but soon became jammed with over 32,000 Union prisoners, mostly enlisted men.

An open air stockade enclosed by twenty-foot-high log walls was expanded to over 26, acres, but remained over crowded as prisoners continued to be packed inside. A stagnant, foul stream called Sweet Water Branch ran through the middle of the stockade and it served as a sewer as well as for drinking and bathing. Prisoners were supposed to be fed the same rations as Confederate soldiers which meant they received rancid grain and a few tablespoons a day of mealy beans or peas.

Poor food, no sanitation, shelter or health care, and the hot Georgia sun combined to create favorable conditions for dysentery, scurvy, and malaria. Operating until the end of the war, Andersonville held nearly 45,000 captured Union soldiers with nearly 13,500 or 30 percent of them dying in captivity.

Martin Goodell didn't return home to Michigan with his cousins. He died in Andersonville Prison on February 2, 1865, of diarrhea and his military record lists him as being mustered out on February 2, 1865. He is buried in grave 12573.

### **Elijah and Gabriel Goodell Came Home to Ecorse**

Gabriel Goodell wrote on his parents on May 8, 1865, from Camp 1st Mich. Cav. near Petersburg, Virginia that he was well and the weather was fine and warm. He said that "everything looks nice there will be plenty of fruits in this part of the country. Peaches are as large has a large cherry and the trees are over loaded with them... He predicted that "I think we will be home by the 4th of July that is all I care for..."

The 1880 census showed Gabriel employed as postmaster of Ecorse. He was married to Elizabeth and they had two children, Elmer and Ellen. Gabriel died on August 19, 1902, in Ecorse and is buried in St. Francis Cemetery.

Elijah Goodell was mustered out on June 19, 1865, at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The 1880 census listed Elijah as working as a surveyor. He married Josephine and they had three sons, John, Frederick and Charles. Elijah died in 1909 and he too is buried in St. Francis Cemetery.

When spring greens the trees growing near the graves of Elijah and Gabriel Goodell in St. Francis Cemetery and at Martin Goodell's grave in Andersonville, it is not difficult to imagine the faint sound of bugles, stirrups jangling, and the shouts of three Ecorse farm boys riding away to new battles.

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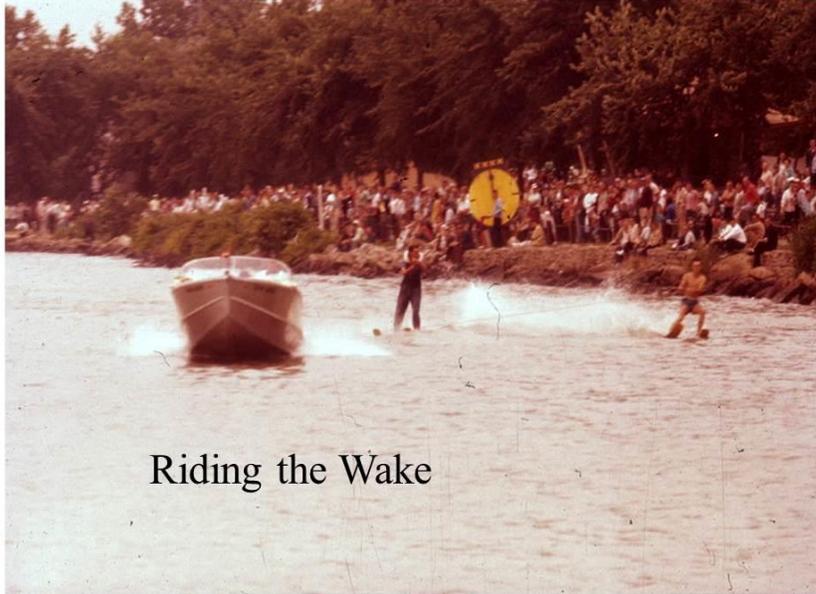
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Escape from Andersonville. Conditions in Andersonville. John L. Ransom, 9th Michigan Cavalry.

Martin Goodell



### **Six Confederate Officers Stage a Nautical Escape Through Downriver**



Confederate Cemetery-Johnson's Island Wikimedia Commons

The United States and Canada spent much of the Civil War mistrusting each other and arguing about several nautical incidents. According to the *London Times* if Canada and the United States went to war, the United States would attack Canada by sea instead of land. *The Times* said that

England's policy would be to conduct naval warfare on the Great Lakes, devastating the towns on their shores.

*The Detroit Free Press* said: "There can be no doubt what the duty of Congress is in this matter, even with the present improved aspect of affairs. Our lakes should be at once put in a situation of strong defense as a preparation of what may come in the events of the future."

### **Six Confederate Officers Escape from Johnson's Island**

No Civil War battles were fought on Michigan soil, but many Great Lakes mariners and ships fought for the Union Cause. It took the Union prison at Johnson's Island in Lake Erie near Sandusky to bring the Civil War directly to the front doorstep of Ecorse, Michigan, a small village on the Detroit River. Confederates had tried numerous times to escape from the prison at Johnson's Island, but the record shows only a few successful escapes before 1864. The year 1864 proved to be a successful year for escapes.

The *Sandusky Register* reported the escape of six rebel prisoners on January 4, 1864. *The Register* said that six Confederates – Major Stokes, Captain Stokes, Captain Robinson, and Captain Davis, all Virginians, Captain McConnell of Kentucky and Major Winston of North Carolina made a crude ladder by tying the legs of a bench with a clotheslines across a board at spaces of about three feet, about four feet short of the desired length. They gathered as much civilian clothes as they could from friends in the prison.

With Major Winston leading them, they crept on their stomachs past the stakes or "dead line" to the bottoms of the fence. The changing of the guard made this move even more dangerous. First Major Winston got over the fence, and next came Davis, Robinson, Major Stokes and McConnell. Captain Stokes went last and a sentinel spotted him, but thought he was a Federal officer.

At about 10:30, the men ran, slipped, slid and tumbled across the ice to the shore of the Peninsula. They could hear the sentries cry "all's well" as they made their way through fields and woods and over fences. A few hours before daybreak they found shelter in a frozen straw stack. They discovered two horses and bridles in a barn, mounted two men to each horse, and galloped toward freedom. The cold affected Captain McConnell so severely that he finally decided that he could not continue. Captain Stokes had not been able to get enough warm clothing and he too, decided not to go on with the others. He stayed outside the prison for a few days, but then returned. He refused to tell the names of the others.

### **Monroe, Michigan, a Forgotten Wallet and Reaching Trenton, Michigan**

The remaining fugitives crossed the Maumee River at Toledo about daylight, joining workmen on their way to work. At noon they bought and devoured cheese and crackers at a country store, the first food they had eaten in thirty hours. The night of January 4, 1864, they passed through Monroe, Michigan during a snowstorm, and about ten o'clock they found a French Canadian who gave them shelter. They resumed their journey the next morning and after traveling about a

mile, Captain Robinson discovered that he had left his wallet behind. The wallet contained papers revealing him to be an officer in the Confederate army. Major Winston went back to the house and retrieved the wallet without incident.

The fugitives arrived safely at Trenton, Michigan, and inquired of an old man about crossing the Detroit River. In the course of the conversation, the old man remarked that in eighty winters he had never seen such a cold snap.

### **Crossing the Detroit River Ice**

After dark the men ventured out onto the river ice. At first the going was smooth, but briars and marsh reeds made for slow progress. After about a mile, the ice turned dangerous. A storm a few days earlier had broken up the ice and the men had to scramble over piled up blocks of it. Major Winston felt the ice giving away and one of his feet broke through. He saved himself by leaning on firmer ice and his friends Davis and Winston knelt and pulled him out. His trouser legs immediately froze stiff.

The men did not know what to do. The sweeping north wind would eventually freeze them to death if they stayed out on the ice, but a return to the United States would be equally fatal. Davis moved ahead about ten feet and took a bearing from the North Star. The men could see a light burning on the Canadian shore and moved toward it. Near the shore they ran into another air hole in the ice. They slid up and down looking for firm ice, but found none. Desperate, they ran across the section one at a time. The ice creaked, but it held.

### **Traveling Through Canada, Sailing from Bermuda to North Carolina**

Finally, the fugitives stepped safely on Canadian soil. Davis bent over and kissed the ground as he had vowed to do if they ever reached Canada. They found a French Indian woman who gave them food and a warm place to stay. Then they were taken to Windsor where an innkeeper gave them room and board in exchange for their work as laborers. During their stay in Windsor and Montreal, they encountered C.L. Vallandigham, the copperhead leader who President Lincoln had ordered deported to the Confederacy and several of John Hunt Morgan's men who had escaped to freedom.

Major Winston wrote to a New York merchant and received a \$200 check to defray expenses and pay the passage of the fugitives to Montreal where they had other Southern friends to help them. They traveled up the St. Lawrence River to the ocean and Bermuda. Then they sailed on the blockade runner *Advance* to North Carolina and home.

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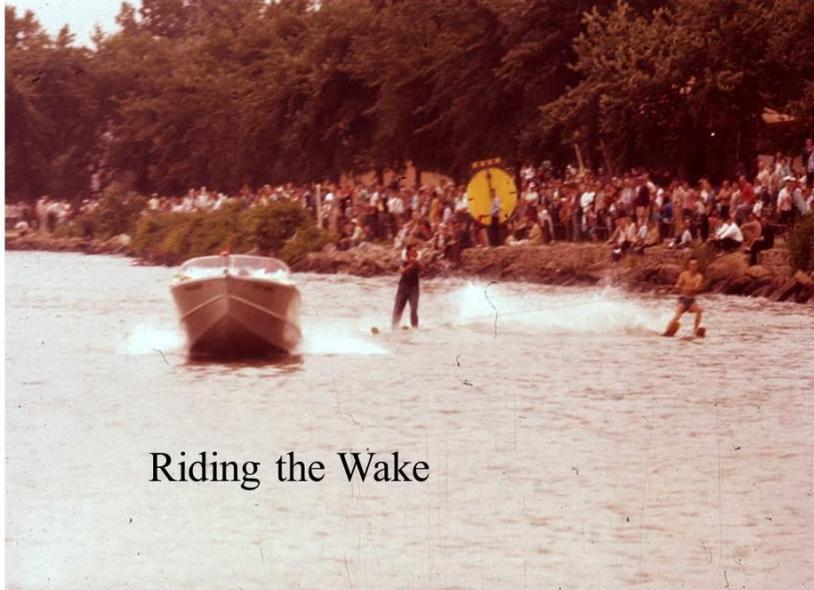
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## Confederate Spies and Pirates on the Detroit River



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Johnson's Island Confederate Cemetery Wikimedia Commons

No Civil War battles were fought on Michigan soil, but many Great Lakes mariners and ships fought for the Union Cause. It took the Union prison at Johnson's Island in Lake Erie near

Sandusky to bring the Civil War directly Downriver.

Captain Charles H. Cole of Brigadier General Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalry had been brought to Johnson's Island in September 1863. Days after he arrived the Yankees sent him and some companions into a steamer hold to get straw for bunks. The other men collected the straw and left the ship, but Captain Cole hid in the straw and stayed there as the guard lost count of the prisoners. He huddled under the straw as the ship stopped in Sandusky for the night. Eventually, Captain Cole crept off the ship and posing as a civilian worker, escaped to Canada. The next year Coe came back to Johnson's Island as a Confederate agent.

The Johnson's Island Conspiracy is one of the names for the Confederate plan to capture the United States gunboat *Michigan* and lake transports like the *Island Queen* and the *Philo Parsons* of the Detroit, Island, and Sandusky Line. Various accounts of the conspiracy give various reasons the Confederates wanted to capture the *Michigan* and free the 4,000 Confederate prisoners on Johnson's Island. These reasons included burning the buildings on Johnson's Island, invading, terrorizing and burning Great Lakes cities like Detroit, Cleveland and Buffalo and striking terror into the heart of the North.

With the blessing of Confederate President Jefferson Davis and the active, on-site participation of Lt. Colonel Jacob Thompson, former U.S. Congressman, Secretary of the Interior, later Confederate legislator and presently trusted advisor to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, the plan took shape. Lt. Colonel Thompson arrived in Canada in May 1864, and quickly marshaled his forces. Their primary objective, said Commander Thompson, was to send out peace feelers through contacts with influential Northern businessmen and politicians. If the peace efforts were unsuccessful, the alternate plan calling for subverting the Union forces using several methods, including capturing the Union warship *Michigan* guarding Johnson's Island, freeing the Confederate POWS from Johnson's Island and terrorizing port cities around the Great Lakes.

Other Confederates and Confederate sympathizers involved in the plot included Charles Cole, formerly of Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalry, John Wilkinson, CSA, who commanded the Johnson's Island expedition, John Yates Beall, of the Confederate Navy, Bennett G. Burleigh, a comrade of Beall, and Charles H. Cole, formerly of Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalry. Captain Thomas Hines was recruited to be military leader of the conspirators. The remainder of the conspirators was "Confederate prison escapees, refugees, soldiers of fortune, Kentucky cavalymen, rapsallions and a few Union detectives and spies."

Altogether, about twenty men had the responsibility of carrying out the plot which had been simmering for at least three years before it finally came to a boil. A letter to James Gordon Bennett of New York City from Canadian, dated Sandwich June 6, 1862, described the plot a full two years before Lt. Colonel Thompson arrived in Canada. Canadian requested Bennett to forward the letter to the Secretary of War if he saw fit.

### **The Conspiracy Downriver**

Canadian described a scheme hatched in Sandwich and on the American side of the river by some Southern sympathizers and Marylanders to liberate the rebel prisoners on Johnson's Island

who had been there since April 1862.

They first planned to charter a steam boat which had to be fitted up specifically for running, since she had not been in commission for some years. Then the conspirators had to abandon that plan because it would have been necessary to let the crew in on the secret, the expenses and danger to the owner would be too great, and a steamer entering the bay would draw more attention than a sailing vessel.

Instead, the conspirators decided to purchase an old sailing vessel and place it at some point in or near the Detroit River. One of the conspirators would be disguised and sent to engage a powerful tug to go for this vessel and arrive alongside it after dark. Next, parties from the vessel were: to board the tug, make prisoners of the crew, take charge, tow the vessel to Sandusky Bay, surprise the guard, liberate the prisoners, who are to be informed beforehand if possible, place them on the vessel, and tow her to Canada where they will be landed. This vessel will then be set adrift, the tugs crew liberated and the tug given up to them again. This plan will be carried out as soon as things can be gotten in readiness.

Canadian added in a postscript that for prudent reasons he had to use the nickname Canadian. He assured Bennett that he would call at the *New York Herald* office in the fall when he came to New York on business. He said that he would mail the letter at Detroit or Niagara Falls.

John Yates Beall and Charles Cole planned to capture two ships, the *Philo Parsons* and the *Island Queen* which he would use to overpower the *USS Michigan*. Then he would free the prisoners on Johnson's Island and they could commandeer trains and begin an overland escape to Columbus, Ohio. In preparation for his plan, Cole endeared himself to some of the Union officers on the *Michigan* and became their onboard guest. From this vantage point, he intended to send vital signals to guide Beall's attack. According to local historian Theresa Thorndale, Colonel Cole was supposed to have possessed wonderful coolness and courage and ample resourcefulness, although she wrote "to outward appearances he was a coarse, uncultured man."

### **Charles Cole Moved the Johnson's Island Conspiracy Along**

One version of the story said that "coarse, uncultured" Cole arrived in Sandusky Ohio in August 1864, dashingy dressed and smoking expensive cigars, with an equally stylish wife on his arm. He claimed to be a Pennsylvania oilman and sweet talked a meeting with Jack Carter, the *Michigan's* captain. Charming Captain Carter into a detailed tour of the *Michigan*, the expansive Cole said that he would treat the crew to a champagne dinner to repay the Captain's kindness when he really intended to put knockout drops in the champagne and commandeer the *Michigan*.

Cole had someone on his trail. John Wilson Murray, a Union Detective who supposedly uncovered the plot, published his version of the story in a memoir after the Civil War ended. Murray wrote that Commander J.C. Carter of the United States Navy sent for him and detailed him to special duty. He had heard talk of a plot to blow up Johnson's Island, liberate all Confederate prisoners and take them across Lake Erie to safety in Canada. Commander Carter gave Murray an unlimited commission to get to the bottom of the plot.

Murray first went to Detroit to confer with Colonel Hill who gave him what meager information he had. The information included the fact that Clement Vallandigham, a member of Congress from Ohio who sympathized with the South, lived in exile across the Detroit River in Windsor, Ontario. Dressed like a civilian, Detective Murray crossed the River to Windsor and found a place to live near Vallandigham's headquarters. He settled down to learn all he could about Vallandigham and the plot, closely observing everyone who called on Vallandigham.

A dapper, energetic little man who frequently visited Vallandigham's headquarters soon captured his attention. Murray learned that the little man's name was C. Cole and that he was supposedly a Confederate agent. Murray described Cole as about 38 years old, five feet seven inches tall, and weighing about 135 pounds. He had red hair, long mustachios and grey eyes so small and sharp and bright that the first thing Murray noticed about Cole was his eyes.

Murray managed to overhear part of a conversation between Cole and Vallandigham that firmly convinced him that Cole stood in the center of the plot. Murray advised Commander Carter and prepared to follow Cole wherever he led. Cole left Windsor, with Murray close behind. First Cole went to Toronto, stopping at the Queen's Hotel where a number of other Confederate sympathizers joined him. After long conferences Cole continued on to Montreal and Murray followed him on the same train.

The cat and mouse game began. Murray wrote that he felt somewhat like the underdog or the mouse, being only 24 years old, inexperienced as a detective, and untrained in shadowing, running down clues or solving mysteries. On the other hand, Cole made a good cat, being an experienced and trained agent who knew all of the spy tricks. Murray followed him, learning and accommodating as he went along. The chase took place in Canadian and American cities.

When Cole alighted from the train in Montreal, Murray hovered a car length behind him. Murray followed Cole to the St. Lawrence Hall Hotel and watched a woman join him. Murray described the woman:

*She was an elegant looking lady, big and stately, a magnificent blonde with clothes that were a marvel to me. I did not know her then, but later she turned out to be the celebrated Irish Lize. The contrast between her and Cole was striking. She was big, stout and fine looking; he was a little, sandy, red-haired fellow, but smart as lightning.*

From Montreal, Cole and Irish Lize as Murray heard him call her, traveled together to Albany. Murray wrote that he fiercely debated with himself whether or not he had enough evidence to seize them as Confederate sympathizers, but he knew that he did not yet have any evidence of a plot. He decided to follow them, expecting to be led South.

Instead, after stopping overnight in Albany, they traveled on to New York City, and Washington D.C., Murray trailing them from city to city, hotel to hotel. Cole and Irish Lize met several strangers in each city, evidently by previous appointment because they were always there waiting for the couple. In Cleveland, Charles Robinson, son of a former judge, joined them and they stayed there for two days before traveling to Sandusky. They arrived at Sandusky about June 20,

1864, and Murray arrived with them on the same train.

At Sandusky Cole posed as an oil prince and Irish Lize as his wife. They registered at the West House and appeared to plan on staying for a time. Soon after their arrival, they began to get company. A young man known as G.C. Bear and another called John U. Wilson of New Orleans joined Cole. The young men and Cole drank together and seemed to be well acquainted with each other. Cole bought fast horses and chartered a yacht. He cultivated the acquaintance of the officers of the *U.S.S. Michigan* which lay off Sandusky and of the United States Army officers in charge of Johnson's Island.

Murray reported that Cole appeared to be a free spending fellow who loved to have a good time. He became a favorite with both the naval officers aboard the *Michigan* and the army officers on the island. He sent baskets of wine and boxes of cigars aboard the *Michigan* and over to Johnson's Island.

Murray reported the events of the past weeks to Commander Carter and Carter advised him to continue his surveillance. In late summer 1864 Cole arranged for a party at the Seven Mile House, seven miles out of Sandusky and invited all the officers of Johnson's Island and all of the officers of the Michigan. John U. Wilson of New Orleans helped Cole prepare for the party. Early on the morning of the party, Cole received a telegram from Detroit that said, "I send you sixteen shares per two messengers."

### **The First Part of the Conspiracy Ran Smoothly**

The first part of the plot ran smoothly. On September 19 1864, Beall and Burleigh boarded as regular passengers on the *Philo Parsons*, a ferry making its regular run from Detroit to Sandusky, making stops of Windsor, Ontario. This particular morning, sixteen men got aboard at Amherstburg, in Canada at the mouth of the Detroit River, carrying their luggage with them. They were the "sixteen shares" that the two messengers were to deliver to Cole at Sandusky.

About ten miles north of Sandusky off Ohio's Marblehead Point, the 18 Confederates- 16 shares and 2 messengers – opened their luggage boxes and took out braces of revolvers. They took over the *Philo Parsons* and captured the captain and crew. Immediately the hijackers discovered that the *Philo Parsons* needed wood, so they headed back to Middle Bass Island. While they were there wooding, a second ferry, the *Island Queen*, appeared. Since the *Parsons* occupied its dock space, the *Island Queen* tied up to the *Parsons*.

The Confederates sent some of their men aboard the *Island Queen*, and caught the few of her crew aboard unaware. They ordered Engineer Richardson to get the Queen underway and when he refused to obey, they shot him dead. As soon as Captain George W. Orr, master of the *Island Queen* realized that he was being hijacked, he resisted forcefully, but finally yielded at revolver point. *The Island Queen* captives also included 25 Union soldiers on leave.

At gunpoint, their Confederate captors forced the soldiers and the Middle Bass Island locals to load wood onto the *Philo Parsons*. Then, since they had captured one more ship than they

needed, the Confederates made the soldiers and their other prisoners promise not to fight against the South and put them ashore. They towed the *Island Queen* out into Lake Erie, ran her aground on Gull Island and abandoned her. Then they steamed off in the *Philo Parsons* to capture the *U.S.S. Michigan*. Beall, Burleigh and the other conspirators pulled the *Philo Parsons* within sight of the *Michigan* and waited for Charles Cole to signal.

### **Charles Cole Captured and Exposed**

Captain Cole hadn't been as successful as Yates and Burleigh. Cole watched and waited in Sandusky with his party that would take practically all of the officers on the *Michigan* and on Johnsons Island to the Seven Mile house, well away from the center of the action. Cole and his deputy Wilson waited for the officers who were supposed to start from Sandusky early in the afternoon, to appear. They waited and waited. Finally, growing impatient, Cole told his deputy Wilson to see what was keeping the officers.

The two men discussed how to proceed and then walked down to the dock together. They spotted the *Philo Parsons* and Coe handed a ten-dollar bill to the coxswain of the boat's crew and told him to take the boys up for a drink. Everyone went except the boat keeper who waited with Cole and Wilson and James Hunter, an officer of the *Michigan* who was ashore. When the crew returned they willingly pulled off to the *U.S.S. Michigan* which lay three miles off Sandusky.

About half way out, Cole, who seemed to have a premonition of trouble, decided to turn back. Wilson remarked to the coxswain that the pennant of the *Michigan* was flying. The coxswain said that he would have to continue the trip but that he would bring them back as soon as he had reported to the *Michigan*. They went on to the *Michigan* and the officers aboard greeted Cole cordially and invited him to have a glass of wine, apologizing for disarranging his plans or delaying his party.

According to Murray's account, his friend Wilson turned to the orderly. "Tell Mr. Cole Captain Carter wishes to see him," he said.

Coe appeared, smiling and merry. Young Wilson met him on deck. "The Captain wants to see you," said young Wilson.

At the tone of his voice, Cole stopped short and looked at him, his eyes wary. Then he laughed and entered Carter's cabin with Wilson.

"Captain Carter, this is Mr. Cole, a rebel spy," said Wilson.

"Murray, arrest him," said Carter to young Wilson.

Cole straightened and saluted. "I am not a spy. I am a Confederate officer."

He thrust his hand inside his grey coat and pulled out his commission signed by Jefferson Davis, identifying him as a major in the Confederate Army.

“Take him and search him, Murray,” Captain Carter ordered.

Cole, accompanied by his former friend Wilson of New Orleans, now Murray of the *U.S.S. Michigan*, went to a cabin and a sentry was placed at the door. Murray searched him and found \$600 in currency, some letters and papers, and ten certified checks for \$5,000 each on the Bank of Montreal, Canada, payable to the bearer.

Murray laid them all out in front of Coe. Coe laughed.

“You served me well Murray Wilson or Wilson Murray or whatever the deuce your name may be,” Coe said.

“I served you the best I could,” said Murray.

“Sit down,” said Coe.

Murray and Coe sat down.

Coe told Murray that he was a pretty smart young fellow and concluded his remarks by asking, “You wouldn’t like to see me hung, would you?”

Murray said that he wouldn’t and that he hoped he had not been responsible in bringing about Coe’s hanging. Murray wrote that Coe had the best nerve of any man he ever saw, not making a fuss or even changing his tone of voice. According to Murray, Cole offered him \$50,000 if he would not reveal enough information to put a rope around his neck. All Murray had to do was give him \$500 or enough money to get to the South. For a moment, Murray considered the possibilities that amount of money could open up in his life, but then reconsidered. He told Cole that all Cole had to do was send for Captain Jack Carter and suggest that Murray or Wilson be searched and that would reveal who had sold out his country. “Mr. Cole, would you sell out the Confederacy?” Murray asked him.

Cole considered his question thoughtfully then put out his hand and shook Murray’s hand. Murray left Cole a prisoner on the *U.S.S. Michigan*, “smiling in the little cabin with the sentry at the door.”

### **Confederates Aboard the Philo Parsons Downriver**

Meanwhile aboard the *Philo Parsons*, the Confederates anxiously awaited Cole’s signal. As the minutes on the ships clock tickled by, they grew more and more nervous. Finally, the crew voted on whether or not to attack the *Michigan* without a signal. Beall and Burleigh voted yes, but the other 17 conspirators voted no. The *Parsons* turned around and steamed for Detroit. The Confederates dropped most of the crew and passengers on Fighting Island and docked at Sandwich, Ontario. They scuttled the *Parsons* and began walking toward Windsor.

In a letter to Captain C.D. Horton, Colonel Charles W. Hill, Commandant of Johnson’s Island

Prison, reported the aftermath of the conspiracy. Along with a United States attorney, marshal and commissioner and Captain Horton of the *Michigan*, Colonel Hill evaluated the conspirators. They agreed that evidence was pretty strong against Merrick, Rosenthal, Cole and Robinson, and issued a warrant for their arrest.

Cole and Robinson were arrested and Captain Horton of the *Michigan* held them while Colonel Hill arrested and held Merrick and Rosenthal. Beall traveled as far as Niagara Falls where he was arrested, brought back to Port Clinton, Ohio and jailed. Eventually he escaped and returned to Scotland. The *Philo Parsons* was refloated, but burned to the waterline in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. The *Island Queen* was raised, put back into service and finished her career as a cargo carrier. Cole went to prison once again on Johnson's Island, and his "wife," Annie, returned to her profession on the Buffalo water front.

### **Professor Gil Stelter Has the Last Word**

Charles Cole managed to have the last word- at least an etched one. More than a century later, as Sid Jordan, a songwriter and volunteer guide at the abandoned North Quarry, clambered around a rocky ledge on the north shore of Kelley's Island, Ohio he found an inscription scratched into the stone. The inscription read: "CC 1864."

A Canadian history professor emeritus Gil Stelter of the University of Guelph in Ontario feels that there are deeper dimensions and ramifications to the conspiracy than have been realized. Through three years of extensive research, Stelter discovered that a Scottish immigrant, Adam Robertson, established two iron foundries and a factory in Guelph. Bennett Burley, a cousin of Robertson's and a Confederate officer and several of his friends, including John Yeats Beall, persuaded Robertson to make several cannon, cannonballs and grenades in his foundry. Robertson's son, speaking in 1917, said that the conspirators planned to ship the weapons to Lake Erie to help free the prisoners at Johnson's Island and capture the *USS Michigan*.

Dr. Stelter found copies of the conspirator's correspondence in the Robertson home and asserts that everyone knew that the foundry was making more than plows. The Union Army discovered the Johnson's Island plot and a parallel scheme to burn New York. It failed, but after an intensive reading of the correspondence and other documents, Dr. Stelter theorizes that the plot had a second dimension. He believes that the conspirators purchased a boat in Toronto and hoped to outfit it with cannon cast in Robertson's foundry.

Robertson's clandestine activities did not seem to affect his fortunes. His foundry continued to prosper and eventually he became mayor of Guelph. The only surviving cannon from his factory now overlooks Vancouver's Horseshoe Bay.

The unfolding of the Confederate conspiracy threw the United States War Department into a frenzy. Shortly after Beal and Cole and their fellow conspirators were arrested, Major General E.A. Hitchcock wrote Secretary of War Stanton a letter from Sandusky dated September 23, 1864. In his letter he strongly advised Stanton that the U.S. Government should have several armed vessels fully manned on the Great Lakes, so the Confederates could not seize commercial steamers and convert them into war vessels.

Major General Hitchcock reminded Secretary Stanton that Ex-Secretary Thompson was employed in Canada creating dangerous expeditions. He cited as his proof:

*The recent seizure of two steamers in this vicinity has indeed terminated disastrously for the projectors of the horrible scheme, but the demonstration actually made is a sufficient warning to induce our government to take immediate measures to guard against a repetition of it. It will be but an act of self defense, and from the disclosures made by Cole, now in arrest at Johnson's Island, I earnestly recommend that not time be lost in putting afloat armed vessels upon Lake Ontario, and speedily upon the upper lakes also. We are engaged in war, rendering this step justifiable under the treaty of 1815, but it is my duty to speak only the justifying necessity of this case.*

Seven months later in April 1865, the Civil War ended, sparing Secretary of War Stanton the necessity of putting armed vessels on the Great Lakes.

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The Sandusky Register

## Chapter 28---Downriver Business and Industry Cards



Photograph by John Duguay

It would take many sets of encyclopedias to document the businesses that transformed the Downriver communities from forests and farmlands to an industrial hub that contributed vital equipment towards winning both World War I and World War II as well as man and woman power. Henry Ford and his companies and other businesses including steel manufacturing and ship yards built Downriver into an industrial powerhouse. Blacks and Southern whites migrated to Detroit and Downriver to take advantage of the plentiful jobs and Henry Ford's \$5.00 a day wages. Automobile, steel and other industrial workers bought and enjoyed tidy homes in Allen Park subdivisions, wooden Ecorse houses with comfortable front porches and river front homes on tree lined Wyandotte streets.

**Allen Park 1950**

Allen Park Medical  
Laboratory

6586 Allen Road

Allen Park

**Ecorse, 1950**

Evans Motor Sales,  
Inc.

4688 West Jefferson

Ecorse 18, Michigan

Tel: Dunkirk 1-  
4900

Ecorse Heating and  
Appliance 4881  
West Jefferson

**A. B. C.**  
AFFHOLTER BROTHERS' CREAMERY  
**Quality Dairy Products**  
MILK, CREAM, BUTTER, BUTTERMILK, CREAMED COTTAGE CHEESE  
AND ICE CREAM  
Creamery 438 Grove St.—3042 Biddle Ave.—Tel. 2092—Wyandotte  
4094 W. Jefferson, Ecorse

**Gibraltar, 1950**

Houseman-Spitzley Corporation

All Real Estate Offerings

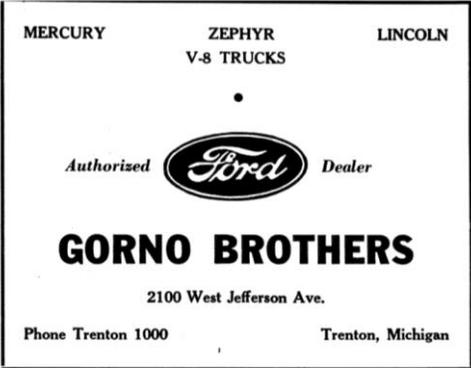
29881 Adams Drive

Gibraltar

<p><b>Lincoln Park – 1950</b></p> <p>River-Oaks Realty</p> <p>Specializing in Downriver Homes</p> <p>3769 Fort Street</p> <p>Lincoln Park</p>	<p>Stanford Bros. For a Better Deal</p> <p>870 Fort Street at Outer Drive</p> <p>Lincoln Park</p>	<p><b>Lincoln Park - 1957</b></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td> <p>Petri &amp; Sons</p> <p>2176 Fort</p> <p>Lincoln Park</p> <p>Tel: Dunkirk 1-28833</p> </td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		<p>Petri &amp; Sons</p> <p>2176 Fort</p> <p>Lincoln Park</p> <p>Tel: Dunkirk 1-28833</p>		
<p>Petri &amp; Sons</p> <p>2176 Fort</p> <p>Lincoln Park</p> <p>Tel: Dunkirk 1-28833</p>						

<p><b>River Rouge, 1950</b></p> <p>Babcock Bros. Sales, Inc.</p> <p>10268 Jefferson Avenue</p> <p>River Rouge</p> <p>Tel. VI-1-1377</p>	<p>Cheff's Studio</p> <p>Commercial and Portrait Photographers</p> <p>18 Haltiner Street</p> <p>River Rouge</p>	<div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Amiot</i></p> <p><b>H. S. AMIOT CO.</b></p> <p>Down River's Largest and Finest Cleaners</p> <p>139 MAPLE ST. TELEPHONES: WYANDOTTE 0255-0256</p> <p>BRANCHES</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;"> <p>WYANDOTTE 1010 Oak St. Tel. 0122</p> <p>TRENTON 2816 W. Jefferson Tel. 0480</p> </td> <td style="width: 50%; border-left: 1px solid black; border-right: 1px solid black;"> <p>RIVER ROUGE 10692 W. Jefferson Tel. Vinewood 1-1333</p> <p>ECORSE 4096 W. Jefferson Tel. Atlantic 0760</p> </td> </tr> </table> </div>	<p>WYANDOTTE 1010 Oak St. Tel. 0122</p> <p>TRENTON 2816 W. Jefferson Tel. 0480</p>	<p>RIVER ROUGE 10692 W. Jefferson Tel. Vinewood 1-1333</p> <p>ECORSE 4096 W. Jefferson Tel. Atlantic 0760</p>
<p>WYANDOTTE 1010 Oak St. Tel. 0122</p> <p>TRENTON 2816 W. Jefferson Tel. 0480</p>	<p>RIVER ROUGE 10692 W. Jefferson Tel. Vinewood 1-1333</p> <p>ECORSE 4096 W. Jefferson Tel. Atlantic 0760</p>			

<p><b>Trenton- 1930</b></p> <p>Valade Roofing Company, Inc.</p> <p>Roofing and General Sheet Metal Work</p> <p>Furnaces Cleaned and Repaired</p> <p>37 Cora Avenue</p> <p>River Rouge</p>	<p>Michigan Foundation Company</p> <p>Builders' Supplies and Coal</p> <p>110 West Jefferson Avenue</p> <p>Trenton</p> <p>Phone: Trenton 500</p>	<p><b>Trenton-1950</b></p> <p>J.A. Liss Sheet Metal Co. All Types Sheet Metal Work – Industrial and Residential</p> <p>1240 West Jefferson Avenue</p> <p>Trenton</p> <p>Phone: Trenton 4300</p>	
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<p><b>Trenton, 1958</b></p> <p>Ridge Funeral Home</p> <p>Ambulance Service</p> <p>R.V. Ridge, Funeral Director</p> <p>2272 West Jefferson</p> <p>Trenton</p> <p>Tel: Trenton 6240 and 6999</p> <p>(1958)</p>	 <p>MERCURY      ZEPHYR      LINCOLN V-8 TRUCKS</p> <p>Authorized  Dealer</p> <p><b>GORNO BROTHERS</b></p> <p>2100 West Jefferson Ave.</p> <p>Phone Trenton 1000      Trenton, Michigan</p>	<p>Jerry Feifer Signs</p> <p>Commercial, Industrial, Truck</p> <p>Phone: Orleans</p> <p>6-1066</p> <p>2826 5<sup>th</sup> Street</p> <p>Trenton, Michigan</p> <p>(1958)</p>

**Wyandotte, 1950**

Downriver Chevrolet, Inc. 3411 Biddle Avenue Wyandotte Phone: Wyandotte 1234	Home Furniture Company – Complete Home Furnishings  The Store of Friendly Service  3230-34 Biddle Avenue -	Affholter Brothers Creamery  Quality Dairy Products  Creamery – 438 Grove Street  Tel: 2092
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Nixon Funeral Home

Ambulance Service

2544 Biddle

Wyandotte Phone – 6480

1958

<p>John E. Youd Agency</p> <p>Established 1909</p> <p>General Insurance</p> <p>144 Walnut Wyandotte</p> <p>Tel; 1723</p>	<p><b>WYANDOTTE</b> <i>Coca-Cola</i> <small>TRADE-MARK REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.</small> <b>BOTTLING CO.</b></p> <p><i>"The Pause that Refreshes" Should Be in Your Refrigerator</i></p> <p>Telephone Wyandotte <b>0081 or 0092</b></p> <p>467 Eureka Ave. <span style="float: right;">Wyandotte</span></p>	<p><b>WYANDOTTE NEWS-HERALD</b> <i>The Home Newspaper of Southern Wayne County</i> <b>Published Every Monday and Thursday</b></p> <p>3042 First St., Wyandotte <span style="float: right;">Tel. 1166</span></p>
	<p><b>WYANDOTTE TRIBUNE</b></p> <p><i>Politically Independent Economically Sound</i></p> <p>98 Elm Street at First <span style="float: right;">Phones 1960-1961-4570</span></p>	

### **A Few Downriver Hospitals – 1958**

Wyandotte General Hospital 2331 Van Alstyne Boulevard Wyandotte	Sidney A. Sumbly Memorial Hospital 600 Palmerston River Rouge	Riverside Osteopathic Hospital 165 George Trenton
--	--	--

Trenton Hospital

406 Elm

### **A Few Downriver Churches, 1945**

St. Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Church

Very Rev. T.G. Morin Pastor

4496 High

Ecorse

Atlantic 8936

St. Patrick's Catholic Church

Rev. Clarence A. Doherty, Pastor

107-09

Superior Blvd.

Wyandotte

Tel: 0448

## A few 1958 Downriver Physicians and Surgeons

### Ecorse Physicians and Surgeons, 1958

Robert A. Brown 9 Salliotte Ecorse	Edmond J. Durocher 4158 West Jefferson Avenue Ecorse	Lee Hileman 4045 West Jefferson Avenue Ecorse	Walter J. Kemler 4045 Jefferson Avenue Ecorse
--	---	--	--

Arthur J. Roberts 9 Salliotte Ecorse	Thomas A. Tenaglia 9 Salliotte Ecorse	Lawrence H. Van Beclaere 10 Bourassa Ecorse	Ross M. Knox 9 Salliotte Ecorse	
--	--	--	---------------------------------------	--

### River Rouge Physicians and Surgeons, 1958

Ernest E. Belanger 10591 West Jefferson Avenue R 311 River Rouge	Harvey S. Broderson 10720 West Jefferson Avenue River Rouge	Clarence W. Lemmon 10591 West Jefferson Avenue R 211-12 River Rouge	Byron S. Milton 600 Palmerston River Rouge	Rene J. St. Louis 10909 West Jefferson Avenue River Rouge
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### Trenton Physicians and Surgeons

John H. Boyd 2615 West Jefferson	Lawrence A. Comstock	Howard B. Kinyon 240 St. Josenh	Maurice P. Miller 2057 West Jefferson
-------------------------------------	-------------------------	------------------------------------	--

### Downriver Lawyers, 1945

Samuel W. Braverman 2019 Fort Street Lincoln Park	John A. Aloiai 2829 Fort Street Lincoln Park	Arthur W. Buczowski 9330 Ruth Allen Park	Burger & Park 5524 Allen Road Allen Park
--	--	---	--

Robert E. Butcher

Ben Fisher Jr.

Clarence N. March

### Downriver Drug Stores, 1945

<b>Wyandotte</b>  Cunningham Drug Co., Inc. 3208 Biddle Avenue	Kinsel Drug Co. 3010 Biddle Avenue Tel: Wyandotte 2320	Oak Pharmacy 902 Oak Wyandotte	<b>Ecorse</b>  Liggett Drug Co. 4416 Jefferson Avenue	Loveland Pharmacy 4030 Jefferson Avenue	
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<b>Grosse Isle</b>  Brown's Pharmacy 7599 Macomb	<b>River Rouge</b>  Cunningham Drug Co. 10507 W. Jefferson Avenue	Labadie Drug Store 11292 W. Jefferson Avenue Tel: Vinewood 2-4320	<b>Trenton</b>  Owen Pharmacy 2704 West Jefferson Avenue	Picard's Pharmacy 2044 West Jefferson Avenue
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## Downriver Manufacturing- 1945

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Bowen</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>LUBRICATING DEVICES</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">GREASE CUPS—OIL CUPS PRESSURE LUBRICATING SYSTEMS</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>COLDFLO</b> BOWEN PROCESS</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>METAL STAMPINGS</b></p> <p>To customers' specifications by a process developed by Bowen Engineers stimulated by extensive research along lines of cold pressure machining, representing culmination of over forty (40) years' experience manufacturing Lubricating Devices.</p> <p>Many parts can be produced economically by this process, where conventional methods would entail prohibitive costs.</p> <p>Significant advantages include low cost, high strength, hardness, less finishing and less scrap.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Bowen Products Corporation</b></p>		<p style="text-align: center;"><b>GREAT LAKES STEEL CORP.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Division of National Steel Corp.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>PRODUCTS</b></p> <table><tr><td>Open Hearth Steel</td><td>Slabs</td><td>Billets</td></tr><tr><td>Merchant Bars and Shapes</td><td></td><td>Plates</td></tr><tr><td>Forging Billets and Bars</td><td></td><td>Reinforcing Bars</td></tr></table> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Hot and Cold Rolled Strip Steel Hot Rolled Sheets Cold Rolled Sheets Up to 91" Wide Michigan Metal for Vitreous Enameling</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">N.A.X 9100 Series Steels N.A.X High Tensile Steels (Bars, Shapes and Flat Rolled) Automobile Spring and Bumper Steel Special Rolled Sections</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Stran Steel Metal Framing for Residential and Commercial Construction Arch-Rib Housing and Utility Buildings</p> <hr/>	Open Hearth Steel	Slabs	Billets	Merchant Bars and Shapes		Plates	Forging Billets and Bars		Reinforcing Bars
Open Hearth Steel	Slabs	Billets									
Merchant Bars and Shapes		Plates									
Forging Billets and Bars		Reinforcing Bars									

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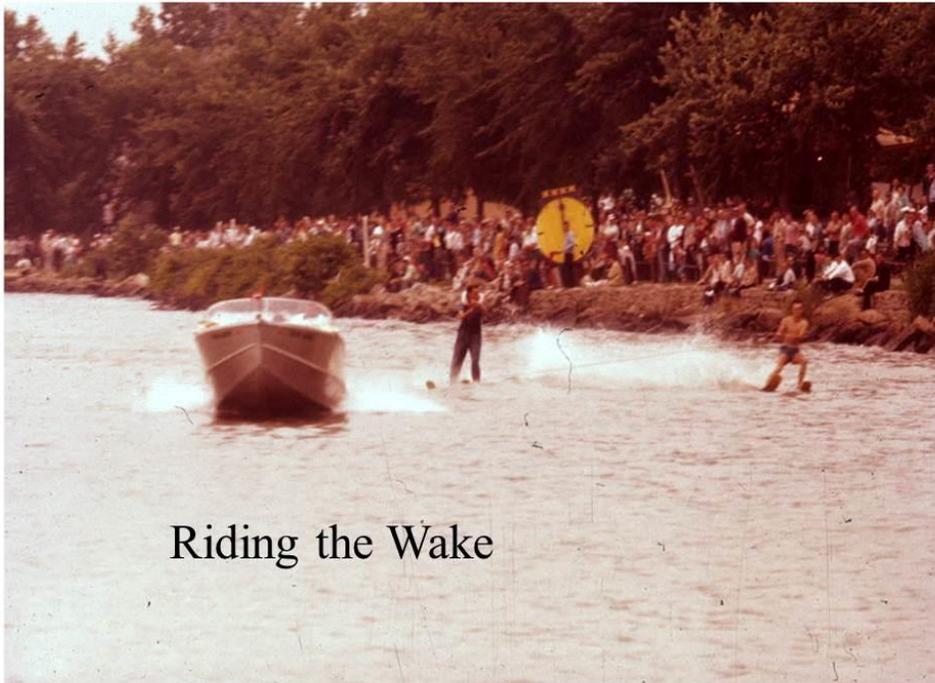
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Riding the Wake

## **E.B. and Samuel Ward, Captains of Great Lakes Shipping**



Captain E.B. Ward

Captain Samuel Ward and his nephew Captain Eber Ward built several Great Lakes ships and contributed much to the growth and development of the Great Lakes.

The story of Captain Eber Ward ended in January, 1875. At about 10:45 o'clock in the morning of January 3, 1875, he suffered an attack of apoplexy while walking on the west side of Griswold Street, between Larned and Jefferson Avenues in Detroit. He collapsed in front of the banking office of E.K. Roberts. He was at once carried into Mr. Roberts' office and several excellent physicians attended him, but their efforts were all in vain. One of the doctors said that he probably was already dead within three minutes from the time he was lifted up in the street. Later, they discovered that Captain Ward had suffered a similar attack a few months earlier. The doctors immediately notified his family, friends, and many business colleagues in different sections of the country of his death.

From his thirteenth birthday when he became a cabin boy on the Great Lakes, until his death, Captain Ward sailed on Great Lakes ships, built Great Lakes ships, and expanded Great Lakes interests. He added his life to those of many others who contributed to the growth and development of the Great Lakes.

### **The Ward Family Moves to Michigan**

Captain Ward's story begins in Canada, where he was born in 1811. His parents had fled to Canada from Vermont in 1811, to avoid the consequences of the War of 1812. After the war of 1812 ended, Eber's parents returned with their family to the old homestead in the Green Mountain State, where they remained until he was six years old. His home was located in the town of Wells, Vermont.

Not long after the "second Revolutionary war" had ended the tide of emigration resumed its westward march. In 1818, Eber's parents with their family and many others traveled to the more lucrative fields of the south and West. They set out for Kentucky, but were delayed at Waterford, Pennsylvania, for some time, and here Eber's mother died. They changed their course and went to Ohio. After a short stay in that state, they gradually pushed westward until they permanently located in Michigan.

### **Eber B. Ward Becomes a Cabin Boy on a Schooner**

Eber's father, had first visited Detroit in 1821. This was sixteen years after fire had destroyed the old town. At this time there was only one frame house in the town. The average buildings were made of logs with cedar bark roofs. At this time, the largest vessel that floated on the lakes was only of thirty tons burden, and when a ship arrived at Detroit's solitary wharf, a curious scene took place. Men, women and children thronged the river's bank to get a glimpse of the strange visitor. At this period, and for several years afterwards, the whole fleet of the lakes could not carry as much as one of the present large grain vessels. Not one of the ships navigating the lakes was owned in Detroit. There were but three or four then on Lake Erie, and most of them

belonged to the English. A public vessel known as the brig Hunter was the only means of water communication between Detroit and Buffalo.

E.B. Ward accompanied his father to Marine City in 1822, and in 1824 to Mackinac. Here he began his marine career by taking the position of cabin boy in a small schooner. At this time he was only about thirteen years old, but had wanted to sail on the lakes for a long time. He diligently worked his way from cabin boy to one of the first places in wealth and importance in Detroit and in Michigan.

### **Eber B. Ward Clerks for His Uncle and Sails the Great Lakes**

Samuel Ward, Eber's uncle, was the leading shipbuilder of Marine City and Eber observed his energy and admired his enthusiasm. He called the youthful Eber from his sailor's life, and gave him a clerkship in his extensive warehouse. This marked the beginning of Eber's shipbuilding life. Being constantly in connection with interesting marine interests, he rapidly improved his business talents.

*The History of the Great Lakes* sketches a picture of Marine City in Eber's time. It was located on the St. Clair River near Lake St. Clair and was formerly known as Newport. Captain Samuel Ward settled there about 1819 and in around 1824 built a schooner of 30 tons, called the *St. Clair*. She was shaped like a canal boat, full ends, with rudder "outdoors," and was tiny and schooner rigged. Captain Ward used the *St. Clair* to hold his stock and traded in general merchandise. He loaded her with skins, furs, potash and black walnut lumber for gun stocks in June 1826 and started for New York City.

### **Samuel Ward Sails the St. Clair Through the Erie Canal**

Samuel Ward arrived at Buffalo, took out the *St. Clair's spars*, and towed her through the canal to Albany with his own horses. She was then towed by steam down the Hudson River to New York, and returned the same way to his home, making the voyage in eight weeks. This was the first vessel passing from the lakes to the ocean via the Erie Canal. He made several extensive voyages in his little *St. Clair*. Captain Ward also sailed her from Detroit to Buffalo. She sailed into the new harbor in Buffalo that had been cleared of the sand bar. He didn't transship his cargo to a canal boat. Instead, he lowered the *St. Clair's* masts so they would clear the bridges and was towed across New York to Albany.

From Albany Captain Ward sailed the *St. Clair* down the Hudson. It was the first through voyage from the lakes to the sea and had a profound effect on Great Lakes commerce. The cost of moving freight from Lake Erie to New York Harbor dropped from \$120 a ton to \$4.00 a ton.

About 1831, Captain Samuel Ward built the schooner *Marshal Ney* of 75 tons, the first boat built in the Ward shipyard proper. In 1832, according to a Gratiot Paper, Captain Samuel Ward built a steamer called the *Huron* and it was very successful. It netted him thousands of dollars and "lay the foundation of his large fortune."

The schooner *General Harrison* of 100 tons came out in 1835. She was “somewhat long and narrow, and somewhat cranky, but a good sailor.” E.B. Ward sailed her as mate and he owned a quarter interest in her. Later, he became master. He took command of the *General Harrison* in 1835, and managed her successfully until his increasing interests demanded his presence at Marine City.

### **Henry Schoolcraft Praises Captain Ward**

Both Captain Eber and Captain Samuel Ward were excellent seamen. Henry Schoolcraft wrote about the terrific storm of November 1835. He embarked November 2, 1835 at Mackinac for Detroit aboard a schooner commanded by Captain Samuel Ward. That same evening, a great storm blew up on the Great Lakes. Schoolcraft wrote that they had scarcely cleared the lighthouse when the wind increased to a gale. The crew reefed the sails and made every effort to keep under way, but the wind prevented it.

Captain Ward attempted to hug the shore, and finally anchored in great danger under the high lands of Sauble. “Here we pitched terribly and were momentarily in peril of being cast on shore,” Schoolcraft said. One of the men fell from the bowsprit, passed under the ship and was lost. Everyone thought the ship would soon follow the sailor to the bottom, “but owing to the skill of the old lake mariner we eventually triumphed,” said Schoolcraft. “He never faltered in the darkest exigency. For a day and night, he struggled against the elements, and finally entered the strait at Fort Gratiot, and he brought us safely into the port of our destination.”

In 1839, Captain Samuel Ward built the hull for the steamboat *Huron No. 1*, but didn't have the money to finish it. His nephew Eber finished building the *Huron* and the *Huron* was placed on Lake Erie and run in opposition to a line of steamers at great profit. Eber later became a partner with his uncle at Marine City, where he continued a most successful business.

### **Samuel and E.B. Ward Operate Lake Steamers**

### **Samuel and E.B. Ward Operate Lake Steamers**

In 1841 the Wards brought out the steamer *Champion* and two years later the steamer *Detroit*. They operated independently as the *Detroit Observer* testified. In May 1844, the notice of the first steamboat combination formed on the lakes appeared in the *Detroit Observer* published by George L. Whitney. It said: “The owners of the steamboats on our lakes have completed an association for the ensuing season; the cabin fare from Buffalo to Cleveland is \$5; to Detroit, \$7; and to Chicago, \$14. The steerage to Detroit, \$3; to Chicago, \$7. We learn that the Julia Palmer and St. Clair do not come into the combination, but run on the “opposition line.”

In 1848, the Captains Ward built the steamers *Franklin Moore* and *Samuel Ward*. In 1851 four side-wheel steamers were built at the Ward Ship yard: The *Arctic*, *Ruby*, *Pearl* and *Caspian*. By this time Marine City contained several ship yards and had a population of 3,500 people. Many of the village residents owned lake vessels.

## **Captain Eber B. Ward Comes to Detroit**

In 1850 Captain Eber B. Ward withdrew his interest from the *General Harrison* and came to Detroit. Here a larger and less occupied field expanded his opportunities for success. From that day until the year of his death, he pushed his marine interests of Detroit forward with a steady, powerful hand. 1855, Ward built the Eureka Iron and Steel Co. along the Detroit River, which used the innovative Bessemer steel making process. In 1860, he took over the presidency of the Flint and Pere Marquette Railroad and served until he died. Through his timely efforts Detroit commerce grew and prospered. Detroit's floating property nearly doubled and Captain Ward and John Hutchins maintained a warehouse on the Detroit River for many years.

Captain Eber Ward entered another long term endeavor in Detroit. He became acquainted with a family named McQueen who lived in Hamtramck. The McQueens had sons and daughters, and Captain Ward married one of the McQueen daughters, Mary Margaret and they had five children. Years later, Captain Ward divorced his first wife and married Catherine Lyons. They had a son and a daughter. Their daughter, Clara, was born in June 17, 1873, in Detroit, Michigan and grew up to marry a Belgian Prince.

In 1872, Captain E.B. Ward built an iron tug boat, the first tug built of iron and the largest on the lakes. She was constructed by the Detroit Dry Dock Company, but was found to be not adapted for the work and was taken to New Orleans and sold. She went into the fruit trade in the vicinity of New Orleans

## **Some of Captain Eber B. Ward's Steamers and Sailing Vessels**

The names of the steamers and sailing vessels Captain Eber Ward built make up a long list. A few of his ships include the *Marshal Ney*, *General Harrison*, *Huron*, *Ruby*, *Pearl*, *B.F. Wade*, *Champion*, *Pacific*, *Samuel Ward*, *Franklin Moore*, *Atlantic*, *Ocean*, *Arctic*, *Planet*, *Northwest*, and *the Montgomery*. The Ward captains also built a number of smaller vessels.

## **Captain E.B. Ward Meets Dr. Increase Lapham**

Captain Ward had other interests besides shipbuilding. With Dr. Increase A. Lapham, Captain Ward played a behind the scenes role in agitating for a United States Weather Bureau. The records don't clearly state how the two men first came to know each other. It is possible they met onboard one of Captain Ward's ships. Dr. Lapham often sailed on Great Lakes ships on his scientific expeditions. The Great Lakes history record definitely places him on the *Sultana*. Dr. Lapham could have initiated a correspondence with Captain Ward, because they were both intimately involved with the Great Lakes, especially Lake Michigan.

It is more likely that they met when Captain Ward came to Milwaukee to pursue his business interests there. Increase Lapham had made countless observations of the rise and fall of water in Lake Michigan and determined the average level of water in the Lake. Engineers in Chicago and

Milwaukee established the foundation of the sewerage works and water supply using these observations. Captain, later General, George G. Meade, used the observations for fixing the zero for soundings of the Great Lakes.

In 1849, Dr. Lapham made a series of painstaking readings which enabled him to find a slight lunar tide in Lake Michigan, almost like an ocean tide. Also in 1849, Dr. Lapham put a self-registering tide gauge at Milwaukee for the Lake Survey.

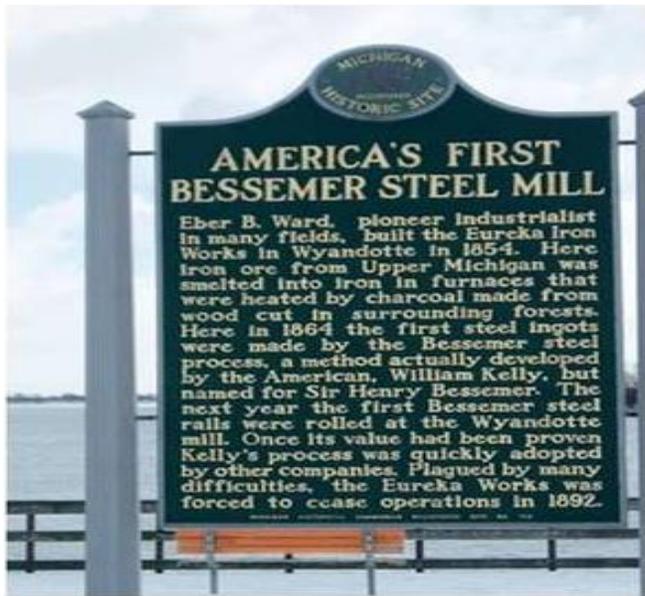
### **Captain Ward and Dr. Lapham Agitate for a Weather Bureau**

During these years, Captain Ward and Dr. Lapham preached to anyone who would listen about the necessity for a weather bureau. For fifteen years, Dr. Lapham persevered in collecting weather data and documenting the effects of weather on Great Lakes shipping.

In 1869, Dr. Lapham Congressman Halbert E. Paine, a report establishing the necessity for a weather bureau to prevent the loss of life and property on the Great Lakes. He proved it was practical to predict the frequency and intensity of great storms. He sent a long list of disasters that had occurred on the Great Lakes in 1869. It wasn't until his own weather predictions, based on his long assembled data were verified by the forewarned loss of property on the Great Lakes that Congress became convinced of the value of weather forecasting.

Finally, in 1870, Congress approved the weather bureau and employed Dr. Lapham as special aide in the War Department at a yearly salary of \$2,000 to inaugurate the weather service. The Signal Service office at Chicago sent out its first prediction on November 8, 1870, and the weather it predicted happened. Rejoicing, Dr. Lapham sent his first month's salary home. He and Captain Ward had won the Weather Bureau battle. In fact, they had won the battle too handily. Their efforts elevated the weather bureau to national and international status and resulted in other men taking over their positions in the Weather Bureau.

### **The Captains Ward Help Commercially Link the Great Lakes and the Ocean**

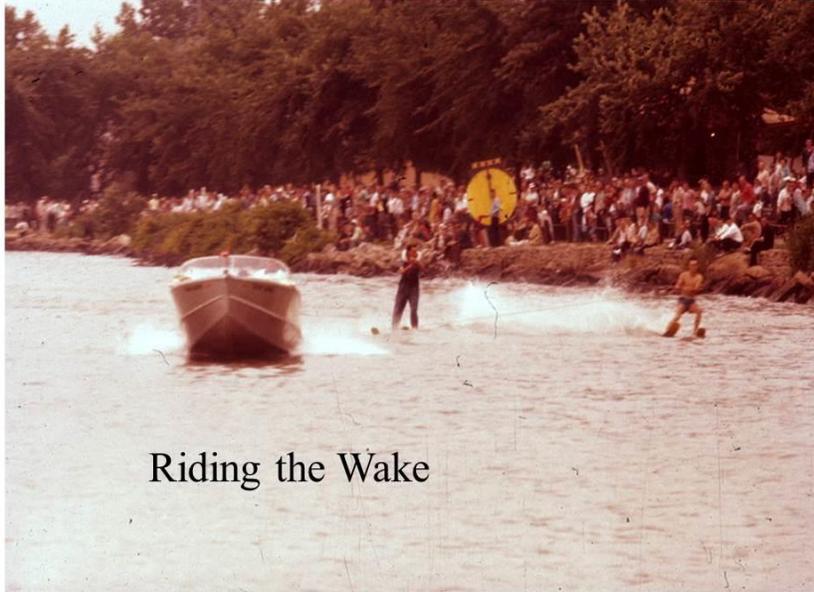


In the last few years before his death, Captain Ward had been gradually withdrawing from the vessel business and investing his extensive capital in another direction. He was invested to the extent of about one million dollars in the Chicago Rolling Mills, and half the amount in a similar corporation at Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His stock in the Wyandotte Rolling Mills in Wyandotte, Michigan, exceeded half a million dollars and his floating property was valued at about half a million dollars. He owned real estate to the amount of over two million dollars and had in the neighborhood of three million invested in different speculations.

The efforts of Captain Eber B. Ward and Captain Samuel Ward linked the commercial interests of the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean and thus to the rest of the world, Their ships and their enterprising spirits changed the history of Great Lakes commerce.

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## **Little Ecorse and River Rouge Built and Launched Big Ships: The Story of the Great Lakes Engineering Works**

For nearly two centuries, the Riviere de Ecorces, the marsh and farm lands surrounding it and the villages that its water rippled through presented a rural face to the world. Apple, pear and peach trees that the early French settlers had planted showered blossoms on its water. The marshlands that filled its mouth as it flowed into the Detroit River produced aromatic grasses that people used to feed their horses and cattle and as stuffing for their mattresses.

Settlers along the banks of the Ecorse River fished and caught frogs and gathered wild berries beside it. Several saw and gristmills and coal and brick yards dotted its banks, but then there was not enough industry located along it to affect the flow or purity of its water.

Then in 1901, Great Lakes Engineering works opened the way for the industrialization of the banks of the Ecorse River. Located on the site of the old Hall Brick Yard property, the plant grew to occupy an 85-acre tract with 1,400 feet frontage on the Detroit River, where the east branch of the Ecorse River joined the Detroit River. There were two launching slips, one 800 feet long, 125 feet wide and 14 feet deep and the other 800 feet long, 150 feet wide and 30 feet deep. A large steel floating dry dock, the only one of its kind on the Great Lakes in 1905, measured 430 feet long and 105 feet wide and could dock the largest boats afloat. The Michigan Central and Detroit southern Railroads both had trackage into the shipyards.

In 1905, the Great Lakes Engineering Works had eight large steel freighters under construction. Over the next six decades, it built many of the tugs, lake freighters and ore carriers responsible for commerce on the Great Lakes, including the Edmund Fitzgerald.



Great Lakes Engineering

### **The Dream Begins**

Anthony Pessano came to Ecorse with a far-sighted dream of building a shipyard on the Detroit River across marshes where muskrat enjoyed full reign. An equally farsighted in the capitalistic sense - old Ecorse Frenchman sold him some of the marsh acres with one condition.

You maike one reservation in de lease, mister Dee, Mai faithair an hees faithair before him shoot de muskrat in dais marsh, an' hiff I sell will you maike de reservation I be allow come on de lan' an shoot de muskrat? I tank you, sair.

Officially, Anthony Pessano didn't record his answer, but the marshes continued to yield muskrat for the famous muskrat dinners that Downriver restaurants served for so many decades. It is probable that Pessano granted the Frenchman's request and that the Frenchman and his heirs kept part of the family property bordering the Detroit River for themselves and the muskrats.

Anthony Pessano's dream of a shipyard on the marshes also came true. In the 59 years between 1902 and 1961, The Great Lakes Engineering works ship yard built most of the large freighters in the Great Lakes fleet. Altogether it turned 303- some sources estimate 338- vessels, and at

times employed as many as two thousand local workers when a multi-million-dollar vessel needed to be built. The Engineering Works constructed ships for the United States Government in World I and World War II and also built the cruise ships *North American* and *South American*, the state ferry *Vacationland* later called the *Jack Dalton* and eleven sections of the New York Central tunnel under the Detroit River. The *Edmund Fitzgerald* is probably the most famous ore carrier that the Engineering Works built but the names of many of their other vessels such as *Carson J. Calloway*, *Ann Arbor No. 6*, and *Arthur B. Homer* earned niches in Great Lakes maritime history.

In 1961, The Great Lakes Steel Company in a move that some would call irony and others progress, bought the Great Lakes Engineering works for a sale price of \$3,500,000 as part of its expansion program. In an April 30, 1961 article in its pictorial magazine, the *Detroit News* lamented that “It’s the End of an Era”. Detroit had ceased to be a shipbuilding center with the sale of the Great Lakes Engineering Works and there was only one major Michigan shipyard left – the Defoe Shipbuilding Company in Bay City. Ships from other companies now handled most of the ore that Antonio Pessano and the American Shipbuilding Company had founded shipping empires to build vessels to transport up and down the lakes. American steamship companies now bought parts or whole ships in cheaper yards abroad. The time honored tradition of shipbuilding along the Great Lakes was passing into history on ways figuratively greased by the very men who spent fortunes and careers building them. Part of the reasons for the demise of the shipyards was their very success- they priced themselves out of the market so to speak- and the stifling effects of the iron and steel and shipbuilding monopolies on competition and diversification.

### **The Iron and Steel Men**

George Fink, a steel man from the East who founded Michigan Steel Corporation in Ecorse, Michigan in 1928 and expanded it to Great Lakes Steel in 1929, had a great deal in common with Antonio Pessano who founded Great Lakes Engineering Works, the company that Great Lakes Steel later would buy. For both men, the bottom line was controlling the production of iron and steel.

Like George Fink, Antonio C. Pessano was born in the East. The son of Antonio D. and Elizabeth Pessano, he greeted the world in Philadelphia on July 3, 1857. His parents provided Antonio with a broad education at Philadelphia High School, Franklin Institute of Technology and later with private tutors in mechanical drawing, chemistry, and mathematics. Shortly after his 33rd birthday in 1880, Antonio married Elizabeth A. Walker in Philadelphia on September 22 and was well on the way to establishing his business career.

Pessano first put his education to work. For seven years he worked at the foundry trades and among the machines and carried his tin dinner pail. Eventually he successfully managed the iron and steel shops at Cresson. Pessano’s success at Cresson gained him industrial acclaim and he ultimately came to Detroit. He saw the Ecorse-River Rouge District as “a little Pittsburgh growing up.” He worked to attract railroads to the area, to buy land cheaply so he could build

them, and to develop enough coal storage facilities to tempt freighters to stop. John Hubert Greusel wrote admiringly of Antonio Pessano in the *Detroit Free Press* of November 1905 that he headed a co-operative movement composed of owners of 500 shops throughout the country called the National Foundry Association. The goal of the National Foundry Association was business protection. The iron and steel trade could oftentimes be tumultuous because its workers were very independent, earned high wages and insisted on collective bargaining. They were devoted to their craft, but quick to protest against poor working conditions. As Greusel put it:

“Working in front of roaring furnaces, breathing fumes and handling burdens of iron or steel is a life that kills. It takes a strong man to meet these fellows in a controversy. Pessano is the man.”

The owners of the 500 companies of the National Foundry Association depended on Pessano to keep the iron and steelworkers happy and productive. On several occasions Pessano’s grasp of the issues, his common sense and firmness helped prevent serious labor troubles.

By 1902, Pessano had learned mechanical drawing, technical engineering, and mathematics. He had mastered building engines, ships, and took out a score of patents for his improvements in power transmission. In 1901-1902 he moved to Michigan to take over the former Samuel F. Hodge & Company. Samuel F. Hodge, founder of Samuel F. Hodge & Company, marine engine works, immigrated to America in 1849 from Cornwall, England after working as a blacksmith for several years. After a brief stay in Toledo, he came to Detroit to work on the construction of the fortifications at Fort Wayne. After Fort Wayne was completed he worked in a blacksmith shop at De Graff & Kendrick’s Iron Works, at a locomotive works and sold mining machinery for Lake Superior mines. In 1863 with some partners, he organized a firm of his own to manufacture engines and machinery. Hodge served as president of his company until his death in April 1884 when his son Harry S. Hodge assumed the presidency.

The company was located at the corner of Atwater and Rivard Streets in Detroit and boasted several progressive innovations for its time. The main buildings included a foundry and blacksmith shop, a machine shop and equipment included an electric crane, and a surface railroad. A library containing texts books, statistics and reports, drawings and blueprints pertaining to the marine engineering trade was located in the private office of the president.

In the approximately thirty years the company had been in business it produced over 125 marine engines nearly all of which were in service on the lakes, as well as repair work and stationary engines. The company made the first triple expansion engine on the lakes for the *Roumania* and installed it in October 1886 as well as the engine for the *Colgate Hoyt*, the first of Captain Alexander McDougall’s whaleback steamers built at West Superior. The company built other whaleback engines, including the one in the steamer *Wetmore* that crossed the Atlantic to Liverpool and the engine for the excursion steamer *Christopher Columbus* of Chicago World’s Fair fame.

## **Great Lakes Engineering Works Expands**

Antonio Pessano won the confidence of such iron, steel, and shipping tycoons as George H. Russel, Colonel F.J. Hecker, W.G. Mather, and Joseph Boyer and they purchased the old Hodge plant, which Pessano helped to capitalize at \$1,500,000. In the three years from 1902-1905, Pessano turned the old Hodge plant into the largest steel shipbuilding plant on the Great Lakes and expanded into River Rouge-Ecorse.

*A Detroit Free Press* article in June 1903 described the new shipbuilding plant, scheduled to be completed for the most part before August 1. Located in Ecorse-River Rouge, the plant covered an 85-acre tract with 1,400 feet frontage on the Detroit River, and was built around the nucleus of the old Hall Brick Yard. The Michigan Central and Detroit Southern railroads had trackage into the yard. There were four shipbuilding berths, 600 feet long, so that four of the largest vessels ever planned for the Great Lakes could be built at the same time. Two slips for the side launching of ships were located between the berths. One of the slips was 600 feet long by 125 feet wide and 14 feet deep and the other measured 600 feet long by 150 feet wide and 30 feet deep. An electric traveling crane ran beside each building berth to carry the components of the ship from the shops to the ship. There were also two ten-ton steam locomotive cranes that ran on tracks to all parts of the yard to lift, haul and carry supplies and material.

Eventually the Engineering Works added a floating dry dock, the largest on the Great Lakes, and a subsidiary plant in Ashtabula, Ohio.

The 1903 Great Lakes Engineering Works was a reorganization of the Great Lakes Engineering Company with a starting capital stock of \$1,500,000. Antonio Pessano again was president and general manager of the now Great Lakes Engineering Works; George H. Russel, vice-president and John R. Russel secretary and treasurer.

By 1903-1904, the Great Lakes Engineering Works employed about 1,600 men, many highly skilled, who earned \$5-\$8 per day. Pessano's shipyard turned out 500-foot cargo and ore ships and had orders booked a year ahead, largely because of Pessano's foresight and business acumen. Besides building on the foundation that Samuel F. Hodge had laid and he reorganized, Pessano went out and sold his ships. He traveled to Pittsburgh to discuss shipping with a company leasing tonnage. Within twelve hours he had closed a contract for two new steel boats, costing \$750,000, without allowing the ship trust builders to make a competitive bid. He described his sales technique:

"A man isn't much good as the head of a ship company unless he can go out and get orders. I learned that the company had been contracting for tonnage. I showed the managers that they could make more by owning than by leasing. After that it was a simple matter to close the contract for \$750,000. Depend on it, there is no money lost in the shipping business these days. "

By successfully establishing his company, Pessano bested the conglomerate of dry dock and shipbuilding companies that organized in May 1899 under the name of the American Ship Building Company. Because he built and sold his ships competitively Pessano made some avid

enemies in the American Ship Building Company; some of the men would have gladly smelted him for his audacity in successfully pitting his company, capitalized at \$1,500,000 against American Ship Building's \$30,000,000. When asked how he managed to compete with his tiny capital, Pessano said:

“By having the best plant, the best men and the best backing. The company speaks for itself.”

In the tradition of creating his own shipbuilding monopoly and perpetuating the paternalistic company, Andrew Carnegie style, Pessano provided houses for the ship employees around the River Rouge-Ecorse division of Great Lakes Engineering Works.

He remarked to John Hubert Greusel in an interview:

“Don't they look bright? I always recommended that our company paint the houses in cheerful colors. To my mind, nothing is more depressing than to see row after row of lead-colored houses. There are too many like that in Detroit. The district near our works is dotted with cottages painted in warm blues, rich yellows, soft greens. It rests the mind and leases the eyes. It is a relief from the many ugly colors common in Detroit. You may not think so, but the color of the house in which a man lives has a little influence in the up building of the city. I am proud of the bright-colored village down at the Rouge.”

### **The Ships that Great Lakes Engineering Works Built**

In 1905, *Beeson's Marine Directory of the Northwestern Lakes* reported that Great Lakes Engineering Works was busy building eight large lake freighters, six of them at Detroit and two at St. Clair, Michigan. They were also building a drill scow equipped with special machinery for the Dunbar & Sullivan Co. of Buffalo, New York.

And for their own use they are building a large steel floating dry dock, 600 feet long by 105 in width and 30-inch depth with a capacity of 4,000 tons, gross weight.

Great Lakes Engineering Works advertised its maritime services in *Beeson's* as well:

#### **GREAT LAKES ENGINEERING WORKS**

Designers and BUILDERS of Steel Ships

For Passenger and Freight Service

Marine Boilers a Specialty

Semi-Steel Propeller wheels

Made Either Sectional or solid

Hydraulic Dredging Machine

Write for Catalogue

Detroit, Michigan

The Great Lakes Engineering Works also did custom refitting makeovers on already existing boats. In June 1906, Mont. Tennes and his backers paid the Great Lakes Engineering Works

\$20,000 for the steamer *John R. Stirling* that they planned to use as a floating pool room to compete with the *City of Traverse*. The *Stirling* was formerly the freight steamer *Vanderbilt* that had traded in the package freight business between Chicago and Buffalo. Tennes and his backers estimated that they would have to pay out another ten thousand dollars before the *Sterling* was ready for service. They planned to add a cabin on the upper deck and make other changes so that the ship could accommodate 1,500 people. The owners had secured a landing place for the *Stirling* in the Chicago River east of the Rush Street Bridge and Captain George Tebo, lately in the vessel fueling business on the Chicago River, was to be master of the *J.R. Stirling*.

The 356-foot *R. W. England* was the first ship that Great Lakes Engineering Works launched in 1904. Later the *England* became the *Frank Seither* and still later the *Fontana*. The *Fontana* stayed in service until 1960 when she was sold to Marine Salvage of Port Colborne and scrapped at Hamilton, Ontario. Great Lakes Engineering Works launched its the last ship on November 7, 1959 when the *Arthur B. Homer*, at 730-feet the largest ship on the Great Lakes, rumbled sideways down the ways while an estimated 10,000 spectators cheered. The *Arthur B. Homer* was the heaviest ship side-launched since the ill-fated *Great Eastern*, a 693-foot iron vessel was launched in the Thames River at London, England on January 31, 1858 and was the largest ship permissible under Corps of Engineers regulations for the Soo Locks and St. Lawrence Seaway.

The *Homer* cost more than \$7 million dollars and was the last of a three year-three freighter construction project at Great Lakes Engineering. The *Homer's* sister ships were the 729-foot *Edmund Fitzgerald*, launched on July 7, 1958 and the other the 689-foot *Herbert C. Jackson* which was completed on February 19, 1959. The Great Lakes Engineering works developed the system of prefabrication and final assembly that enabled shipwrights to build the three vessels in three years.

The ships that Great Lakes Engineering Works built and launched in between the *England* and the *Homer* were just as distinctive as the *William G. Mather's* longevity- it was delivered in 1906 and scrapped in 1996- and the *Homer's* length. In November 1904, the Great Lakes Engineering Works yard in Ecorse launched its second vessel, the large car ferry *Detroit*, build for the Michigan Central Railroad to maintain uninterrupted service between Detroit and Windsor. The *Detroit Free Press* account of the launching said that the *Detroit* took to the water in style, "sending a giant wave across the marsh to the accompaniment of two thousand cheers and a shrill salute from every steam whistle within hearing distance."

Vice- President of Great Lakes Engineering Works, George H. Russel, escorted the car ferry's sponsor, Miss Elizabeth Walker Pessano, the daughter of Antonio C. Pessano, president and general manager of Great Lakes Engineering to the launching stand. Accompanying her were Miss Helen Pessano, Miss Helen Russel, Miss Catherine Russel, Miss Florence Russel, Miss Grace Pessano, Miss Alexandrine Sibley, Miss Dorothea Sibley, Miss Fredericka Sibley, Miss Mildred Plum and Miss Catherine Moore. On the launching stand were A. C. Pessano and George H. Russel, representing the builders; Capt. F.D. Harriman, Joseph Boyer, H.C. Potter, Robert E. Plum, Walter S. Russel, Senator Alger, William Livingston, president of the Lake Carrier's association; J.C. Hutchins; Captain J.R. Innes of the Michigan Central Car Ferry

System; Captain Harry Innes and J.A. Westley, chief engineer of the Michigan Central Car Ferry Fleet.

Miss Elizabeth Pessano broke the bottle of sparkling champagne against the bow of the ferry and said, "I christen thee Detroit." The big ship plunged into the water and another Great Lakes Engineering ship joined the Great Lakes fleet.

The *Jacob T. Kopp*, launched on December 7, 1907, was named for a prominent banker and businessman of York, Pennsylvania and constructed to the specifications of the Pennsylvania Steamship Company. Its double water bottom foreshadowed the idea of the "unsinkable" Titanic, just five years in the future. The *Kopp* was a bulk freight carrier, 500 feet long over all, 480 feet length of keel, 54 feet beam and 30 feet deep. She was built on the improved arch construction principles, having double water bottom and vertical side tanks that extended upward from the water bottom. This permitted a large amount of ballast water when the steamer ran light and provided a decided advantage in case of storms. One week from her launch, the steamer's engines and boilers and all auxiliary machine had been completely installed and the boilers were under steam. This was a record pace for the time.

During World War I, the United States Shipping Board ordered at least 60 cargo ships from Great Lakes Engineering Works to transport ore from Lake Superior to the voracious Midwestern blast furnaces that produced steel needed for the war effort. The cargo ships also transported grain and other products between the lakes and some were sold to other countries to become part of their merchant marine fleets. The *Crawl Keys*, built in Ecorse in 29 days in 1918, was a cargo ship that traveled the lakes.

Bert Belky, a shipbuilder for fifty years, lived in River Rouge. He worked as a riveter and when he was 65 he retired and went to work for Fleetwood, a local company. During World War I, Belky was the world champion riveter. In those days welding was used and there was a drive on to see who could rivet the fastest all over the world. Belky won by driving 1,675 rivets a day. From the Rouge-Ecorse Great Lakes Engineering shipyard, he traveled all over the country building ships and he even helped build the Detroit-Windsor tunnel.

Belky kept copies of "The Great Lakes Record", a small magazine published by and for the employees of the Great Lakes Engineering Works. The February 1920 issue recorded these events as happening at the yard.

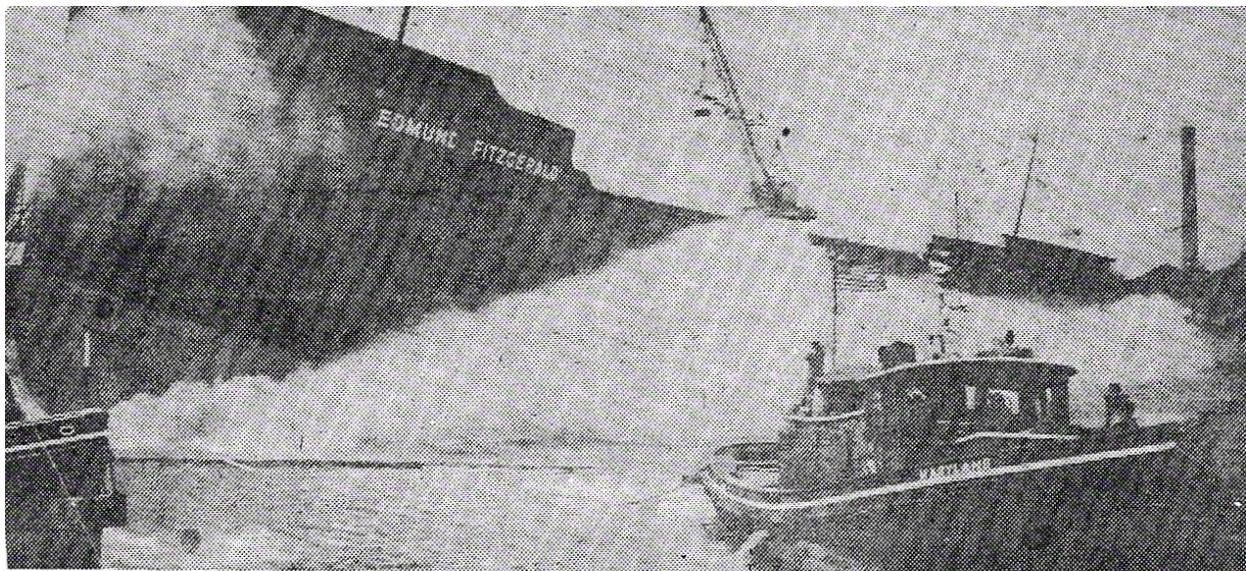
A succession of jobs has been keeping the repair department at the Ecorse yard going at top speed. As soon as one ship was repaired and removed from dry dock another ship took its place...for the opening of navigation is not far off and the work must be finished in quick time.

In World War II, the government commissioned the Great Lakes Engineering Works to build an entire fleet of ore carriers – the largest in the world at the time- to rush ore from the Lake Superior ranges to the lower lakes steel mills to meet wartime steel needs. The shipyard built at least ten ore carriers and three lakers to help in the war effort. Many of the cargo ships that

Great Lakes Engineering had built before and after World War I turned up in World War II merchant marine fleets. The *Lake Ellithorpe* was sold to Britain and eventually torpedoed, as was the *Craycroft* under her new name, *Fred W. Green*.

### **The *Edmund Fitzgerald*-Heading Home**

The tragic fate of the *Edmund Fitzgerald* has captured the hearts and imaginations of thousands of people, including the balladeer Gordon Lightfoot, who immortalized her in his 1976 song “The Wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*.”



*THE EDMUND FITZGERALD ON LAUNCH DAY*

Photograph by John Duguay

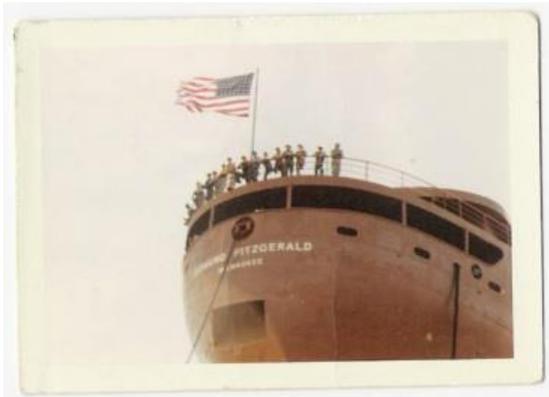
When the *Fitzgerald* was launched on June 7, 1958 at the River Rouge Yard of the Great Lakes Engineering works everyone thought that the launching would make a big splash. From its very beginnings, *The Fitzgerald* seemed to generate superlatives. The construction of the *Fitzgerald* created 1,000 jobs at the Great Lakes Engineering Works. The Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin paid eight million dollars to buy the privilege of calling the naming the *Fitzgerald* after its chairman.

At one point, the *Fitzgerald* was called the Queen of the Lakes because of her size. and because of her size- 8,500 tons – the shipbuilders thought that the *Fitzgerald* would throw a wave that would flood part of the Great Lakes Engineering Works and soak many of the thousands of spectators who had come to watch the launching. Instead, the *Fitzgerald* slid naturally into the

water with only a nominal displacement of water. Mrs. Edmund Fitzgerald, wife of the chairman of Northwestern Mutual Life, cracked the traditional bottle of champagne over the bow.

A family from River Rouge, Mayor and Mrs. John F. McEwan vividly recalled the launching of the *Fitzgerald* as a very special day for them. Several days before the launching their three-year-old son John had been hit by a speeding truck and had to spend several days in the hospital. He was discharged from the hospital just as the *Fitzgerald* was due to begin its career. Mayor and Mrs. McEwan wanted to do something for John to celebrate his homecoming so the entire family went down to the foot of Great Lakes Avenue and watched the *Fitzgerald* being launched.

As the *Edmund Fitzgerald* slid into the Detroit River at 12:40 p.m. on June 7, 1958, whistles blew loudly from yachts, sailboats, outboard boats, fishing boats, scows, tugs and freighters lining the waterfront to salute the launching. Airliners, military planes and two helicopters hovered overhead. When the launching was completed, the tug *Maryland* moved full speed ahead to keep the *Fitzgerald* from swinging against the banks of the launching basin. The *Maryland* quickly snubbed the *Fitzgerald* to shore where she remained until August when her cabins would be completed and her smokestack installed.



Her service years proved that the Great Lakes Engineering Company had built the *Fitzgerald* well. The only major work ever done on her was the installation of a bow thruster in 1969 and converting her to oil fuel and fitting automated boiler controls during the winter of 1971-1972. The *Fitzgerald* set a number of cargo records over the years and was a favorite of ship watches because of her attractive appearance and the antics of her longtime master, Captain Peter Pulcer, who consistently entertained anyone he thought was watching the him and his ship.

On November 6, 1975, the *Fitzgerald* passed the Ecorse and River Rouge shores headed toward Minnesota. She left Silver Bay, Minnesota about 1:30 p.m. Sunday carrying a cargo of 30,000 tons of taconite She cleared Superior, Wisconsin on November 9, 1975, bound for Great Lakes

Steel Corporation in Ecorse, just a few yards away from where she had been launched. On the night of November 10, approximately 17 miles from the entrance to Whitefish Bay, she encountered heavy Lake Superior weather and sank with all 29 of her crew, including Captain Ernest McSorley of Toledo, Ohio, who had commanded her since 1972. Later, the broken hull of the *Fitzgerald* was located in 530 feet of water, the bow and stern sections lying close together.

Back at her birthplace on the Detroit River, Mayor McEwan and his son John stared at the River, and watching the *Fitzgerald* gliding into her home port in wistful imagination's eye. Gordon Lightfoot etched the *Fitzgerald's* epitaph on the minds and hearts of many when he sang:

In a musty old hall in Detroit they prayed  
In the Maritime Sailor's Cathedral,  
The church bell chimed 'til it rang 29 times  
For each man on the *Edmund Fitzgerald*.

The literal and figurative bells rang in Ecorse and River Rouge as well.

### **The Dream Continues**

Many of the 303 or 338 vessels, depending on sources and how you tabulate total shipbuilding from the Detroit and Ashtabula works, that the Great Lakes Engineering Works had built, did not cease plying the Great Lakes when Great Lakes Steel bought the company in 1961. The *Detroit News* mourned the end of a shipbuilding era, but the era continued in a different form. The story of the *Sparkman D. Foster*, formerly known as the *Hoover & Mason*, is illustrative.

Two years after Great Lakes Engineering closed its shop doors, the steamer *Sparkman D. Foster* was towed from her winter berth in Detroit at the foot of Mt. Elliot. The Browning Line owned the *Sparkman D. Foster* and sold the steamer to Marine Salvage Ltd. of Port Colborne, Ontario, broker and scrap dealer. The sale of the *Foster* was subject to Maritime Commission approval because the transfer was to a foreign flag. Before she was scrapped the 524 feet long and 9,800-ton capacity *Foster* contributed and received parts of other ships. Her hull and engine were original Ecorse products and her conveyor boom and A-frame were removed and installed in the barge *Marquis Roan* that was seen frequently in Detroit. In 1956 the pilothouse of the scrapped freighter *B.F. Jones* was installed on the *Foster*.

The *Foster* also contributed to Great Lakes history for over fifty years. She came out in the Tomlinson fleet with the unusual double name of *Hoover & Mason*. For 23 years she was a bulk ore and grain carrier, but in 1928 she was sold to Boland & Cornelius, converted to a self-unloader and renamed *E.M. Young*. The following year she was renamed *Col. E.M. Young*. Browning Lines bought her in 1953, reconverted her to a straight-deck bulk carrier and brought her out again in 1954 as the *Foster*- named for Detroit's best-known admiralty lawyer. The *Foster's* life history paralleled that of many Great Lakes Engineering vessels and illustrated the longevity and durability of their product.

The saga of the last ship that the Great Lakes Engineering Works built, the *Arthur B. Homer*, also attested to the durability of Great Lakes Engineering construction. The *Homer* slid down the ways of the Great Lakes Engineering Works in Ecorse on November 7, 1959. At the time of its launching the carrier was the biggest ship on the Great Lakes and its launching the largest side launching in maritime history. The *Homer* was the largest ship ever to be launched sideways and out measured the *Edmund Fitzgerald*, then the Queen of the Lakes, by one foot.

An estimated 8,000 people gathered at the Great Lakes Engineering Works to watch the *Homer* kiss the Detroit River and cheered “there she goes” as she rumbled sideways down the ways at 12:22 p.m. When the *Homer* splashed into the Detroit River many people who had crowded too close to the launching slip were soaked from the spray which splashed almost as high as the ship. Several workers who had helped construct the ship stood on the afterdeck and waved their metal hats as she smacked into the water, her colorful pennants fluttering madly. Mrs. Arthur B. Homer, wife of the president of Bethlehem Steel, owner of the *Homer*, smashed the traditional bottle of champagne on the prow and said, “I christen thee Arthur B. Homer. Good Sailing.”

The ship started to move and whistles blared from long idle ore steamer quartered in the Great Lakes yard and from freighters that had anchored in the Detroit River to watch the launching. Several tugs and smaller boats hovered around the *Arthur B. Homer*.

The *Homer*'s reign as the largest ship on the Great Lakes proved to be brief. In 1960, another 730-footer, the *Edward Ryerson* was launched in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. Paradoxically, more than a decade later, another Wisconsin shipyard, Fraser Shipyards, Inc. of Superior, Wisconsin, lengthened the *Homer*. The *Homer* entered the shipyards in late September 1975 and in October 1975, Fraser drew up plans to expand her.

First a new midbody was fabricated, and then on October 26, after the *Homer* had been cut in two near midships, the work began. The stern half of the ore freighter was floated out of the dry dock and the new midbody floated in. The forward half of the ship was firmly ballasted on the keel blocks in the floor of the dry dock. Once the 75-foot wide and 39-foot deep midbody was positioned, the stern was winched back into the dry dock and aligned properly with the new midbody. Then the dock was pumped dry and the stern and midbody sections lowered into a position level with the bow.

In the next few weeks, the workers welded the midbody to the bow, and later the stern to the midbody. Special steel straps were welded the full length of the ship's bottom and to the spar deck outboard of the hatches to provide added longitudinal strength.

The installation of the 960-foot midbody section in the 730-foot *Homer*, made it the largest American Flag vessel ever to be lengthened and workers finished the job in a little more than two months. Fraser also increased the *Homer*'s cargo capacity from 27,000 gross tons of iron ore to 31,200 and installed a bow thruster to improve her maneuverability.

For three decades, the *Homer* carried iron ore from upper lake ports to Taconite Harbor,

Minnesota to Bethlehem's Burns Harbor plant on the southern shore of Lake Michigan and to the company's Lackawanna, New York plant on Lake Erie. She labored until the early 1980s when she laid up in Erie, Pennsylvania. In December 1986 her owner towed her to Port Colborne for dismantling. This last ship that Great Lakes Engineering built symbolized Antonio Pessano's vision of iron and steel and ships transporting the ore to make that iron and steel. Antonio Pessano was a nineteenth century industrial baron building his shipping company on Andrew Carnegie's idea of controlling the sources of supply, thus controlling its manufacture and pricing. Pessano also advocated pride in workmanship and in his workers.

The story of the Great Lakes Engineering vessels can be used as a metaphor for the adaptability and ingenuity of America's maritime tradition and a practical application of the qualities that Great Lakes founder Antonio Pessano used to found his business. A list of the stockholders attests to the power and influence that Antonio C. Pessano enjoyed.

Stockholders:

Antonio C. Pessano; H. W. Hoyt, vice-president, Allis-Chalmers Co., Chicago; H.C. Potter, Jr., Detroit, vice-president State Savings Bank; C.L. Freer, Detroit, capitalist; H.B. Ledyard, Detroit, president Michigan Central Railroad; George H. Russel, Detroit, president State Savings Bank; H.M. Campbell, Detroit, of Russell & Campbell; W.G. Mather, Cleveland, president, Cleveland Cliffs Co.; Henry Russel, Detroit, general attorney, Michigan Central Railroad; John A. Penton, Detroit; John H. Avery, Detroit, Belle Isle & Windsor Ferry Co.; Henry Ledyard, Detroit, attorney; W.S. Russel, Detroit, vice president, Russel Wheel & Foundry Co.; J.A. Ubell, Jr., Detroit, naval architect; Henry Penton, Detroit, marine engineer; W.J. Wickes of Wickes Bros., Saginaw, Michigan; I.W. Frank, Pittsburgh, president, United Engineering & Foundry Co.; O.P. Letchworth, Buffalo, President, Pratt, Letchworth & Co.; W.D. Sargent, New York, president American Brake Shoe & Foundry Co.; J.R. Russel, Detroit, secretary and treasurer, Russel Wheel & Foundry Co., and Great Lakes Engineering Works.

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## Chapter 29 – Downriver Prohibition



Photograph by John Duguay

### **River of Rum, River of Renaissance: the American/Canadian Prohibition and Preservation Partnership**

The nearness of Canada, the willingness of many Downriver residents to participate in rum running, the influence of Detroit's Purple Gang, and the Detroit River itself, made Downriver a major bootlegging area during Prohibition. In his book, *Intemperance: The Lost War Against Liquor*, author Larry Englemann wrote: "Soon after the passage of prohibition thousands of residents of the downriver communities began participating in rum-running and consequently reaped nearly unbelievable riches from their activities. During the prohibition years, in Ecorse and the other downriver towns, crime paid. Lavishly."

Eli "Peck" LeBlanc, scion of one of the old Detroit and Downriver French families which originated in Quebec watched the Detroit River from the porch of his home on Jefferson Avenue in Ecorse during the seven plus decades of his life. On a clear day he could see across the River to Canada from the vantage point of his front porch.

La Salle, Ontario is directly across the Detroit River from Ecorse and in the 1920s Peck saw the River dotted with small boats plying back and forth across the River. Boat traffic between Ecorse and Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Walkerville, La Salle, and Amherstburg, Ontario increased considerably during the 1920s because of legislation on both sides of the River. In a perfect river of rum match, Detroit served as the portal to the throats of thirsty Americans and its sister city Windsor, legally produced and exported beer and whiskey in unlimited amounts. The social and geographical partnership of the Canadians and Americans on the Detroit River produced a river of rum and other alcoholic beverages in the 1920s and the early 1930s and a more modern partnership in the Twenty First century created a renaissance of the River itself.

In the early years of the Twentieth Century, both Canada and the United States celebrated the first years of the Twentieth Century with sweeping political and social changes and a far reaching social experiment- Prohibition. Detroit was the first major United States city to ban the sale of alcohol in public establishments and by 1918, Detroit was completely dry. It had enjoyed a one-year head start when Prohibition became the law of the land in 1919. This year gave gangsters and bootleggers time to build a network to transfer liquor from Windsor to Detroit, a river of alcohol which led to a huge increase in alcohol consumption and an era of ingenuity, crime and gangster rule. Across the Detroit River in Canada, individual provinces including Ontario had outlawed the retail sale of liquor but the Canadian federal government had approved and licensed distilleries and breweries to manufacture and distribute alcohol ‘for export only.’

The Detroit River was a smuggler’s paradise, 28 miles long and less than a mile across in some places, it contained thousands of coves and hiding places along its shore and islands. Along with Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair and the St. Clair River these waterways carried about 75 percent of the liquor supplied to the United States during prohibition.

By 1929, illegal liquor was the second biggest business in Detroit at \$215 million a year, just behind automobiles. Public opinion stood firmly against the liquor ban and no mayor was elected in Detroit who favored Prohibition. As many as 25,000 blind pigs operated in the Detroit area and people drank everywhere from speakeasies to private clubs to established restaurants to storefronts and at home. Cocktail parties were popular in society circles and workmen drank beer with their lunch or dinner. Commercial breweries that were allowed to produce ‘near beer’ had to first produce real beer, and then remove the alcohol. This practice begged for exploitation. Illegal commercial enterprises often run by the various gangs poured out millions of gallons and home stills were everywhere.

The river of rum partnership began on August 11, 1921 when the shipments of beer and liquor from Canada to the United States became legal. This opened up a glittering world of rum running, roustabouts and riches for the ordinary people of Ecorse and allowed gangs like the Purple Gang from Detroit to provide a foundation for the Mafia and entrench themselves in American society. In the early 1920s immigrants flocked to Detroit seeking jobs in its booming automobile industry. Many of them settled in lower east side neighborhoods near the Eastern Market and came of age amidst poverty, crime and violence.

Many of the children growing up in these neighborhoods were children of Russian Jewish immigrants who toiled for a precarious living for their families. Some of their children joined a gang that two shopkeepers dubbed the “Purple Gang,” because they were “rotten, purple, like the

color of bad meat.” The young Purples worked in concert with the old sugar house gangs that provided corn sugar for home brewers who were allowed to brew a set amount of liquor for their personal use. Gangs like the Purples soon moved in on sugar houses and used them as a resource for illegal stills and breweries. When the opportunity came to “import” liquor from Windsor, the Purple Gang was organized and ready. By the early 1920s they had earned a reputation as hijackers, stealing liquor loads from older and more established gangs of rumrunners. Soon the Purple Gang dominated the business and connected with Al Capone’s Chicago syndicate.

Most Canadian provinces went dry at the same time the Eighteenth Amendment passed. The Liquor Control Act in Ontario prohibited public or hotel drinking but did not forbid manufacturing and exporting liquor. This loophole in the Act ushered in a wild decade. Thirsty Detroit languished across the Detroit River from Windsor and beyond it the entire American continent. Enterprising Windsor businessmen immediately set up export docks which were really simple frame sheds.

These docks soon dotted every inlet and every bank that would support a dock along the Detroit River from Lake St. Clair to Lake Erie. Trucks protected by the B-13 customs form for liquor in transit carried the liquor to the docks. Consigned to someone in Mexico, Cuba, Bermuda or St. Pierre de Miquelon, men loaded the liquor into speedboats or rowboats which then supposedly headed for Cuba or Mexico. Instead of voyaging to Cuba, these boats made the short run across the Detroit River and landed at docks in the United States.

Rumrunners tapped deep reservoirs of ingenuity within themselves and their equipment and they all had one goal: to use evasive tactics, camouflage and surprise to bring their wares safely across the Detroit River and to dodge United States Revenue cutters and police boats waiting on the far shore. Ninety percent of all liquor illegally imported into Michigan came by boat and the boats ranged in size, type, shape, and appearance. Steamers, tugs, fast motorboats, sailboats, rowboats, and canoes were used.

Customs agents found liquor hidden inside watermelons, hearses, and other unusual places. With some puzzlement, United States Customs officers noted an increase in the export of eggs from Windsor to Detroit. One day in May 1920, a man carrying a large market basket got off the Windsor ferry and walked about his business. Near the foot of Woodward in Detroit, a taxicab hit him and a crowd gathered. Some people sniffed the air, savoring the unmistakable aroma of whiskey. Several dozen eggs were scattered all over the pavement. The man, not seriously hurt, looked around him uneasily. As soon as a policeman approached, he struggled to his feet and fled the scene abandoning his basket with some of the eggs still intact. The policeman examined the basket and discovered that the eggs had been emptied of their yolks, filled with liquor and carefully resealed. From that day, customs officials looked closely at all baskets of eggs.

Another liquor concealing ruse involved a system of belts. One rumrunner described his lady’s system of belts where she would conceal bottles. She’d strap the bottles to her body beneath her dress. One time they reached the border, but then the customs agents asked them to get out of their car. She got out on her side and he got out on his side. They were looking at each other over the roof of the car while the customs agents searched when he noticed a frightened look on her face. “Smash, smash, smash...one of the belts had let go.”

Rum runners applied the same ingenuity to their boats. Muskrat La Framboise, a rumrunner, had a boat with a plug in it like a bathtub. When the police spotted him, he'd pull the plug and the boat would sink. Later when no one was around he'd go back to the boat and dive for the liquor. The whiskey was stored in jute bags tied together at the tops like ears. When the bottles were dumped overboard, you could dive down and pick them up by the ears and haul them to the surface. Muskrat was very good at this.

Photographers from the Prohibition era were used sheer nerve to get the pictures they wanted and Horace Wild, a photographer for the *Border Cities Star* followed the lure of the photograph. On June 29, 1929, he set out to photograph rumrunners in action, taking his sixteen year old son Noel with him. Horace, two reporters and his son Noel set out in a speedboat for Amherstburg to the scene of rum running activity on the dock. The day was calm and they cruised back and forth along the river. They saw cases of liquor piled up on the docks and about forty men loading boats to transport it across the border.

When the men saw Horace and the other reporters taking photographs, they got upset, so Horace and the reporters and Noel turned around and tried to run away. Some of the men crowded into four cars and others got into boats to chase the photographers. The photographers got away because their boat was faster than that of the rumrunners.

The cars followed the road along from Amherstburg and finally the photographers decided to let the cars catch their boat. They pulled over, put in at a point of land, and jumped off the boat. Horace and his son Noel grabbed their cameras and ducked into the woods. The rumrunners came along the road and spied Horace and his son Ned. They wheeled the car around and came back and gave chase. Horace and Ned tried running but the rumrunners grabbed them and smashed the cameras. They didn't find the film that Horace had hidden, but they smashed everything else. The rumrunners took Horace back to Amherstburg, leaving Ned because he was just sixteen years old. Ned immediately informed the Provincial police when they came along the highway a little later.

In the meantime, the rum runners took Horace, bound him in chains and were going to throw him in the river. The Provincials got to Horace just in time to keep the rum runners from throwing him in the river. The rumrunners were from the United States and according to Noel, "you could see every one of them in our pictures. If those had appeared in the paper, every cop in the States would have been after them...that's why they came after us."

In 1953, Windsor Police Chief Carl Farrow reminisced in the *Windsor Daily Star* about some of his experiences as a Provincial Constable in the late 1920s. He talked about the man rowing in a small rowboat across the river to Windsor from Detroit. He bought a few cases of liquor and then rowed back. A few hours later he'd row back to the Canadian side and buy three or four cases. He made the trip the next day in a boat powered with a shiny new outboard motor and bought larger quantities of liquor. A few weeks later he made the trip in a large speedboat. After several more trips, he'd suddenly disappear, and then months later he'd reappear with his rowboat and start the cycle all over again.

Chief Farrow also recalled winter trips across the River from Amherstburg. He said that "they'd take an old sedan, put chains on it, cut the top off it and load it up with whisky. They crossed the

ice of Lake Erie and carried planks to help them across cracks in the ice...it would be black with cars...heading for the States. The highways all along the riverfront were just black with trucks carting liquor to the export docks.”

### **Some Made Millions, Everybody Made Money**

Rum running on the Detroit River made many millionaires although more Canadian beer and whiskey was involved than rum. In 1924 alone, Canadian entrepreneurs shipped around \$30 million dollars' worth of Canadian liquor to the United States where its value escalated to \$100 million dollars. A large percentage of this money flowed through Detroit and Windsor and other border cities like Walkerville. Harry Low of Walkerville worked as a toolmaker when Prohibition struck the United States and Canada with beer bottle force. Low borrowed \$300 from a friend and set up a bootlegging business shipping liquor from a Windsor export dock on the Detroit River. He used speedboats to transport liquor supposedly headed for Cuba and West Indian ports across the Detroit River. In reality, his speedboats tied up at Michigan piers where his shipments connected to a network of markets in Detroit, St. Louis, Chicago and points beyond.

Harry Low quickly created some tricks to facilitate transporting his shipments from Windsor to Detroit and beyond. Workers at a Ford plant did a double take when they saw a Model T speed off the end of a dock into the Detroit River. Low's plan involved diverting attention and sending the police into action to drag for bodies. While the police searched, Low and his rumrunners rushed three truckloads of liquor into boats and across the river. By all accounts, the ruse worked.

Quickly outgrowing speedboats, Low invested his profits in two large cargo ships the *Geronimo* and the *Vedas*. Fully aware of his cargo, United States government border patrol agents seized the *Geronimo* and moored it to a Michigan dock. A storm cast the *Geronimo* adrift and it wandered back to the Canadian side of the River into the waiting hands of its former owners. Soon the *Geronimo* had resumed its rum running route.

Low refurbished the *Vedas*, a former World War I minesweeper, and soon it was transporting liquor from Montreal to Windsor. It also crossed Lake Erie to the United States for deliveries, but mostly it transported shipments from Quebec and rest offshore just outside of the territorial limits of the United States. During the night swift cruisers darted out, loaded up the contraband and ferried it to shore.

Weighted down with cash, Low spent money like beer flowing from a tap. He built a stately home in Walkerville that cost him more than \$130,000 and Walkerville considered it a premier showplace. It featured leaded windows, tiled floors, and a cloister for reflection and meditation. He also invested in the multi-million dollar Dominion Square in Montreal, the tallest office building in the city in its day.

Low was also vice president of the old Carling Brewery and police suspected him of being involved in the gangland murder of John Allen Kennedy, the bookkeeper of the company. The government also sued the Carling Brewery in 1928 and during the hearings many of Low's illicit activities surfaced. He continued to have on and off brushes with the law and by the end of

Prohibition his finances had dwindled. In 1934, Low and his associates launched Trenton Valley Promotions in Michigan. In 1936 he resigned its presidency and in 1939 faced with a United States indictment charging him and his vice president with stock swindling, Low moved to Sorel, Quebec. He returned to the shipyards where he found work as a toolmaker, the profession he practiced before he started his rum running career.

In 1949 he returned to Detroit and attempted to set up his own machinist shop, but people discovered his identity and he returned to Windsor and quietly lived out his days in a home on McKay Avenue until he died in 1955.

Canadian Journalist Al Roach interviewed another Low, Jim Low, a former Canadian entrepreneur in his waterfront home in LaSalle, Ontario. Then a reporter on the *Windsor Star's* suburban beat, Roach recalled a photograph hanging on Jim's wall. The photograph revealed several men in spats and bowler hats with Goodfellow bags and newspapers on the steps of the Detroit City Hall. "Obviously taken during the 1920s, they were a well-dressed important-looking bunch. Several could be identified as influential local politicians. And in the front row, holding the Goodfellow paper on high, was Jim," Roach concluded.

One of the hundreds of good men involved in what people generally thought of as a perfectly legitimate business, Jim Low made and lost a fortune in these rum running days. "Businessmen purchased the liquor legally in Canada and according to the export permits transported it to Cuba. The boats slipped across the Detroit River to Wyandotte or Ecorse on the Michigan side and returned from "Cuba" in a few hours.

Jim and his Canadian allies weren't the only ones involved. Many ordinary people made money from the rum running. They rented cars, trucks, or docks to the bootleggers. High school boys would skip classes and earn a dollar an hour, an astronomical wage for the time, loading liquor on little docks in the old Town of Sandwich.

Finally, journalist Roach asked the right questions and convinced Jim Low to tell the story of his rum running fortune. Jim had started his business with just a few cases at a time that grew into shipments of a few dozen cases at a time. After operating for a year, Jim had acquired a truck, contacts, and a reputation and by 1933 he had to choose between operating part time or full time. He decided to invest in rails. He had enough money in the bank and people were willing to loan him more. He owned a little field alongside his house in LaSalle, so he decided to build a railway spur line and bring in liquor by the box car load. He thought shipping by rail would be safer and a lot more profitable than by highway.

Jim funneled money into building his spur line that he estimated would pay for itself within months and make him huge profits as well. He didn't count on racing United States policy and losing. On February 20, 1933, Congress had passed the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment of the Constitution repealing Prohibition and state legislatures across America were slowly ratifying it. On December 5, 1933, Utah ratified the amendment and it became law, ending thirteen years of Prohibition. On December 5, 1933 workers finished Jim's spur line and rum running became obsolete.

Jim spoke his own requiem to reporter Al Roach. "I sold the rails for scrap and paid off what I could of my debts. It was all over. Some great days had come to an end. And some of us with them. Come on outside and I'll show you some of the railway ties in the weeds."

Another Jim, James Scott Cooper also hailed from Walkerville, had ties to railroads, and unlike Jim Low, got rich from Prohibition. Never forgetting his modest roots, Cooper shared his riches by sending great amounts of money into orphanages, schools, recreational schemes and farming ventures.

Technically, James Cooper could not be called a bootlegger or a rumrunner. He never rowed boats loaded with crates of whiskey across the Detroit River to thirsty Detroit. Ontario had voted for Prohibition in October 1919, but residents of the Province could still buy liquor for "home use." Saloons, bars and other liquor outlets were boarded up, but liquor for private consumption could still be imported, but Ontario's distilleries and breweries were not allowed to sell stock to Ontario residents on a direct basis. As a result, Quebec's distilleries became the main suppliers of alcohol until James Cooper arrived on the scene with a plan.

He discovered that the law did not prevent Ontario distilleries from filling orders not originating within the province. He set up shop across the river in Detroit and took orders by phone from customers in Windsor. He worked both on a commission basis for Hiram Walker and Sons and as a director for Dominion Distillery products.

In February 1931, a business associate of Cooper's told the *Border Cities Star* that "He simply walked into his Detroit office in the morning, picked up the Ontario orders and cheques on his desk, and came back across the river to leave them at Walker's distillery. The firm would then make deliveries in Ontario or elsewhere, on the strength of those orders. This was quite legal. And it was an arrangement that lasted for two years. It was Cooper's brand of importation, since the distillery in Windsor merely acted as a warehouse while the liquor was really being sold from Detroit. When Ontario laws changed to prohibit importation, Cooper engaged in the lucrative 'export' business. Appointed by the Walker distillery as its agent, in a very real sense, Cooper became 'the businessman bootlegger.'" He sought and found loopholes in the law where he could sell and deliver liquor to Ontario residents on a completely legal basis.

Although Cooper made arrangements on paper and conducted his business behind a desk, he still funneled liquor into blind pigs and bootlegging places in Detroit. But his refined manners, crooked bowtie, bright eyes and congenial nature masked the corrupt nature of his business. Cooper managed to escape shady dealings of others who openly bribed provincial officers in isolated railways sidings at night. He cleverly created a community aura for himself of a charming financier with an altruistic nature. He was a tireless entrepreneur who read a stack of newspapers and financial reports in his chauffeur driven car on the way to his office.

Cooper instituted farming reforms in his community as well as building two munificent Cooper Courts, one in Walkerville and the other in Belle River. His Belle River Cooper Court, the first one he built, was a two story structure that he constructed in 1920 at a cost of \$40,000. Four years later as his whiskey trade profits rolled in, Jim Cooper began work on his second Cooper Court at Walkerville. He completed this forty room mansion in 1925 at a cost of \$200,000 and it occupied an entire city block. It featured an organ that piped music to every room in the

mansion, a conservatory and a swimming pool. The top floor featured a large ballroom and a billiard room. The billiard room also served as a schoolroom for Cooper's son and three daughters. At the other end of the ballroom, Cooper installed a cedar lined room to store winter clothes and furs and next to that he equipped an exercise room with massage tables.

Cooper's financial empire was diverse and built on ingenuity, clever insights into the existing laws and loopholes of government regulations and he had resisted the temptation to invest in the stock market. As a result, he was one of the few investors to remain untouched by the October 1929 stock market crash. His business manager claimed that Cooper "never lost a dime."

Then the Canadian government decided to investigate the ventures of James Cooper, the distilleries and major shipping and export companies to see if it could discover wrongdoing and unpaid duties.

The Stevens Customs Committee held hearings in 1926 and interrogated Cooper about his operation of liquor exports. He explained that Dominion Distillery Products which he directed purchased liquor from Hiram Walker and Sons and sold it to their customers. He said that he also acted as a go between for both companies and as a result would tack on his own profits which amounted to one dollar per Dominion Distillery Products and one dollar for Cooper.

Under intense scrutiny, Cooper calmly admitted that he sold liquor to a whiskey jobber named Scherer in Detroit. Although he didn't have an address or company for Scherer, he acknowledged that he could find Scherer at the Statler Hotel in Detroit if he needed to make a deal. Cooper emphasized that duty on the shipments to Scherer and others like him had already been paid to the Canadian Government. He also noted that liquor he bought from Hiram Walker and Sons had never been diverted to Windsor locations therefore failing to clear Customs.

In 1929, Cooper left Walkerville to live in Switzerland. His health deteriorated and a series of illnesses including high blood pressure and hardening of the arteries left him incapacitated. Two weeks before his death in 1931, Cooper took the train to southwestern Ontario on a business trip, but illness forced him to leave the train at London, Ontario. He hurried back to New York and bought passage aboard the *S.S. Deutschland* to Europe. On this journey, he fell overboard and drowned. Or so the official story goes.

News of the mishap reached Windsor on February 10, 1931, when his wife Helen Cooper sent a cablegram from Vevey, Switzerland that said, "Daddy fell overboard yesterday. Body not recovered."

Some people dispute the official version of Cooper's death. They say that despite his illness, Cooper actually fled Windsor because federal authorities were chasing him and Michigan bootlegging gangs had put a hit on him, a death warrant. They say that he faked his own death to avoid further pursuit by his prohibition rivals and vengeful Detroit gangs. The fact that his body was never found added credence to this theory.

When Cooper died he left an estate of \$490,000 in cash to his wife and their three children. This sum did not include his Walkerville mansion which he had transferred into his wife's name years before that. As the years wore on the mansion became too expensive to maintain, the mansion

was dismantled and the land sold. The only remainder of the forty room Walkerville mansion is a smaller house on Devonshire Road that Cooper's wife built. The builders utilized salvageable materials including bricks, windows, paneling and the staircase from the Cooper mansion.

### **Facing Each Other Across the River-La Salle and Ecorse-**

At the turn of the Twentieth Century, Petit Cote, six miles west of Windsor was a quiet village where people spoke French, went to church on Sunday and cultivated their radish patches on weekends. They soon learned that if they rowed to Detroit or Ecorse with a bottle of whiskey they could double their profits. Soon they sold cases instead of bottles and owned launches instead of rowboats. They soon built big docks and spacious houses and changed the name of one section of Petit Cote to LaSalle, which sounded more upscale. Soon people were saying that more liquor moved across a couple of miles of waterfront at LaSalle than anywhere else on earth.

Across from LaSalle, Ecorse, a small, peaceful resort area on the American side of the River, became a notorious "rum row" and the center of an industry that was as vicious as it was profitable for those who participated in it. Millions of dollars changed hands at one time. Three banks did a thriving business in Ecorse, a town of less than 10,000 inhabitants. People made fortunes overnight and lost them just as quickly. For a number of years following the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, 90 percent of the beer and strong liquor reaching Michigan from Canada came by way of Ecorse.

The Detroit papers published graphic and stories detailing bootlegging operations in "wild west" Ecorse. Journalist F.L. Smith wrote in the Detroit News that "to have seen Ecorse in its palmy days is an unforgettable experience, for no gold camp of the old west presented a more glamorous spectacle. It was a perpetual carnival of drinking, gambling and assorted vices by night and a frenzied business like community by day. Silk shirted bootleggers walked its streets and it was the Mecca for the greedy, the unscrupulous and the criminal of both sexes. When the police desired to pay their hands on a particularly hard customer, they immediately look in Ecorse and there they generally found him."

The "perpetual carnival" began on August 11, 1921, when shipments of beer and liquor from Canada to the United States became lawful. This opened up a glittering world of rum running, roustabouts, and riches for the ordinary people of Ecorse. Immediately, three Ecorse workers took their savings and traveled to Montreal where the sale of liquor was legal. They bought 25 cases of whiskey and drove back to Windsor. Over and over they rowed a small boat back and forth across the river until all of their treasure was ferried to the American side. They posted a lookout for Canadian and American customs officials just in case, but all went well. They sold their liquor in Ecorse and used their profits to finance a second and third trip. Multiply these enterprises by thousands and you have some idea of the volume of rum running across the river. Both Canadians and Americans with their secret caches of beer and liquor waited "like Indians" among the trees and tall grasses on the Canadian side of the river. Boatloads of smugglers would glide across the river, signaling with pocket torches. A blue light flashed once and then twice – "all was clear." A large sheet hung on a clothesline meant – "turn back immediately, police arrived."

Rum running boats by the dozen were moored each day at the Ecorse municipal dock at the foot of State Street – now Southfield- which ran through the village’s central business district. Rum runners transferred their cargoes to waiting cars and trucks, while residents, police and officials watched. Officials erected a board fence to protect the waterfront, but rumrunners went around or beneath it. Some Canadian breweries set up export docks on the shore just outside of LaSalle, Ontario, which is directly across the Detroit River from Ecorse. Fighting Island, situated in the middle of the river between Ecorse and LaSalle conveniently hid rumrunners from police patrols

Orval L. Girard of the Detroit Times reminisced with one foot propped on a weather beaten pier on Southfield Dock:

*There was nothing but a swamp where the steel works stand, all along the river front customs picket boats cruised day and night in hope of discovering the rum running operations in Canada.*

Bootleggers let Ecorse citizens go in peace as long as they didn’t interfere with their operations. In 1918, boat houses once sheltering pleasure craft were converted to storage for liquor and luggers, which were high speed boats that transported good across the river. Summer cottages were turned into gambling houses with a variety of entertainment. Most of these changes were made along a one half mile stretch of land not more than a city block wide.

Mud Island had been created from logs from a nearby sawmill and it acted as a screen for an important tunnel that the smugglers constructed. Eli “Peck” LeBlanc, from another Ecorse family, said that the tunnel “extended about two blocks inland and was made in such a manner as to allow the boat to travel on the water and still remain below the ground.”

### **Hogans Alley and Ecorse Nightlife**

During the 1920s and 1930s the Ecorse waterfront especially near Jefferson and Southfield and a strip of river front called Hogan’s Alley became notorious for its night clubs. These rows of dimly lighted shacks were sometimes used as private bars known as “blind pigs.” This section was the heart of the majority of liquor runs and was off limits to everyone except the smugglers and chosen guests possessing an entrance coin. Young men wearing fancy clothes and diamond rings were a common sight. Imitating Al Capone, they appeared to be the tough gangsters of the 1920s. This was where the money switched hands, the cocktails were the best, and where every traitor received his reward. Such was Hogan’s Alley, sometimes referred to as the toughest territory in the country during the Prohibition Era.

Gambling, bootlegging and other nefarious activities took place on the Ecorse waterfront and bandits and gamblers from Detroit routinely traveled to Ecorse to ply their trades and hide out from the police. Another Wild West style battle between law and order and the rumrunners and their defenders took place in 1928 in Hogan’s Alley. Several cars and three boats holding about 30 Customs Border Patrol inspectors gathered at the end of Hogan’s Alley at the foot of State Street (Southfield) to wait in ambush for the rumrunners. Rum running boats pulled up to a nearby pier and the agents rushed them and arrested the seven crew members.

As soon as they were arrested, the crew of the boat yelled for help. Rescuers rushed from all around. Over 200 people arrived to stop the agents from leaving with the prisoners. The people

attacked the custom agent's cars. They slashed tires and broke windshields. They pushed other cars across the alley entrance and threw rocks and bottles at the agents. Before the situation became too desperate, the agents banded together, rushed the barricade and escaped.

By night, Ecorse was a changed world. One of the main reasons for this was that a Canadian regulation required that the rum boats had to be clear of the piers before nightfall. These boats could come to Canada as they liked, load when they pleased and depart as they chose as long as it was before sundown, for Canadian officials insisted on early farewells. As a result, the fleet would drop down the foreign side of the Detroit River and wait its chance to escape. The coming of night stirred the fleet from its daytime torpor. Trained eyes watched for signals which varied occasionally. A red and green lantern indicated "departure an hour from now", while two red ones meant "start at once."

The operation was quite complicated. Sometimes fifty or more boats ranging from fifty-footers to flat bus, small power boats, and even row boats waited to escape to the shores of Ecorse. Skill and experience were of the essence since the boats were not equipped with lights. Yet, it went on nightly. Some prohibition boats disguised themselves as run runners and run runners often turned prohibition agents for an evening. To know a friend or foe on the river after dark required attuned senses.

Once the boats reached the docks hired men began loading trucks and cars. It required accurate timing and capable organization. A method of concealing cargo was to convert houses into storage rooms for the contraband. Several residents, found both within and beyond the zone of suspicion built underground tunnels leading to the Detroit River.

Usually these bootleggers were well organized in loading both the boats and trucks during the transportation of the beer and liquor. Cases of beer were tied under the flat tubs or floor boards and some bottles were wrapped in burlap and hung from the bottoms of boats. Trucks and cars alike were equipped with trays under dashboards and hoods. Their padded interior prevented breakage even in the closest get away. The better liquor sold at a higher price due to the extra precautions given the shipment on its cannonball ride over the highways to Detroit, Ohio, and Chicago.

No matter how the liquor was delivered, there was no exchange of goods without cash. This was a crude business and the stakes were high. As long as the Ecorse runners got their price, it was of little avail to them whether a load got hijacked five times within the mile between Ecorse and Fort Street or not. Failure to present cash on delivery usually resulted in cold blooded murder. Bullet-riddled bodies were unconcernedly cast into the Detroit River. Other motives for killing arose when false labels were discovered on merchandise. On many occasions cheaper liquor was smuggled and forged labels were meticulously placed over the original ones. Such were the tactics those rough and ready smugglers used in the twenties and not all their actions are recorded as yet.

Transferring liquor was not the only part of night life during prohibition. Ecorse was wide open. Anyone could go down Jefferson Avenue day or night and the roadhouses were wide open: The White Tree, Marty Kennedy's, the Riverview, and Tom R\_\_\_\_\_, run by a former policeman.

Many people knew Patsy Lowrey's on Eighth Street. The backroom was decorated in the western style with sawdust on the floor and a tin voiced piano echoing through the room. Patsy's place had a good deal of atmosphere, all the vices of a Dodge City saloon and some extra ones that the Old West missed. The price across the bar was fifty cents for whiskey and twenty-five cents for beer. Prices were higher sometimes due to transportation and blood. Anyone of these numerous spots was fair game for a raid, but no one ever worried about it. The raiders could go in, destroy the interior, seize all the whiskey and discover that the same place was back in business within two hours. The raids were a nuisance, but they did not upset anything of importance.

Ecorse was safe for her customers. Ladies in evening dress kicked up their respectable heels on Jefferson Avenue or did the Varsity Drag in buildings that were high class enough for dancing. During these enjoyable evenings no one looked up from his drink when a shot was fired, for shooting was common among" the professionals."

A third side of the night life in Ecorse included certain citizens as well as the bootleggers who wanted to get rich quick. If someone had the right connections, packaged ingredients for making beer could be obtained for nominal fees. Thus stills and other needed apparatus could be found in basements of houses concentrated on Goodell Street. Some home breweries specialized in watering liquor by inserting a syringe through the cork of the bottle extracting the liquor, and replacing it with water.

The Mussent L\_\_\_\_\_ incident proved the transportation of these kits could be risky. During the winter months a smuggler was driving to Canada on the frozen Detroit River when the tire of his car was shot by a state trooper. He lost control of the car. It skidded onto a soft spot on the ice and fell through. Now it is only to be remembered by the witnesses. This was one of many methods of retaliation.

As the years progressed, so did the tactics. Opposition groups would kidnap workers to ransom a valuable shipment of goods. Bar room shootings became prominent as did bank robberies. Many felt that rum running in the Downriver area indirectly was responsible for a rise in other crimes.

### **The Realities of Rum Running**

In the early rum running days, the atmosphere on the Detroit River resembled a 24-hour party. Women participated with men in the bootlegging and the person in the next boat could be a local councilman or the high school drama teacher. Boat owners could transport as many as 2,500 cases of liquor each month at a net profit of \$25,000 with the owner earning about \$10,000. Some rumrunners made 800 percent profit on a load of liquor. The only real perils of the sea that the rumrunners encountered during those first years were getting lost in the middle of the river at night and collisions with other boats.

In the winter the river often froze solid and the rumrunners took advantage of the ice road. They used iceboats, sleds and cars to transport liquor from the Canadian side to Ecorse. Convoys of cars from Canada crossed the ice daily. Cars on the American shore lined up at night and turned

on their headlights to provide an illuminated expressway across the ice. A prolonged cold spell in January and February of 1930 produced thick and inviting ice on Upper Lake Erie and the Detroit River. Hundreds of tire tracks marked the ice trail from the Canadian docks to the American shore.

On a February morning in 1930, a Detroit News reporter counted 75 cars leaving the Amherstburg beer docks. He wrote that ten carried Ohio license plates and headed down river for south and east points on the Ohio shore. Others drove to the Canadian side of Grosse Isle. When they arrived on Grosse Isle, the liquor was loaded into camouflaged trucks and driven across the toll bridge to the American mainland. But most of the cars drove from the Amherstburg docks to Bob-Lo Park around the north end of Bob-Lo Island. From there the trail headed west to the Livingston Channel. When the Channel was safely reached the cars drove south for a mile where the trail forked. One trail led to a slip on the lower end of Grosse Isle. The other fork led about two miles further north. As the car drove, the road was about two miles from the upper end of Bob-Lo Park to the Grosse Isle slip. Translated time wise, it was about a six minute ride over the ice.

The most dangerous part of the journey consisted of the route along the Bob-Lo Park side where the ice turned tricky. The rumrunners drove as far as they could with two wheels on the shore. The road from the upper end of Bob Lo Island to Grosse Isle was safe and the ice solid. The rumrunners didn't try to hide their goods from the law. One of them told the Detroit News that "the law isn't the thing we fear most. What we are really afraid of is the ice. Anytime it may give way beneath and let one of us through."

The iceboats were the bane of the Coast Guard cutters because they were fast enough to be mere phantoms to the pursuers. Iceboats had obvious advantages over cars on frozen Lake St. Clair, the Detroit River and Lake Erie. Sail equipped iceboats could speed across the river in twelve minutes or less. Law officers did not have much hope of catching them. The Detroit News summed up the situation: "A gust of flying snow and perhaps now and then a trace of silver canvas in the wind and the boats were gone."

Both police and rumrunners used their ice imaginations. Rumrunners nailed ski runners to boats and pushed them across Lake St. Clair or towed several behind a car. When the police got too close, the rumrunners cut their boats loose. The federal agents fit a spiked attachment called ice creepers over their shoes, but running with creepers was slow. Some rumrunners knowing this, donned ice skates and gracefully skated away.

Then in 1921, the river pirates, including a famous one called the Gray Ghost, moved in. Go-betweens called pullers would carry cash across the river to the Canadian export docks for large purchases. Many of the pullers were robbed and killed and their bodies tossed into the river. In 1922, people found bodies floating in the river nearly every night. The Gray Ghost was responsible for a few of these bodies, but generally he remained a gentleman pirate and let his victims escape with their lives. The Gray Ghost was the most famous pirate on the river. His official titles included pirate, extortionist, counterfeiter and friend of the Purple Gang from Detroit. People called him the Gray Ghost because he piloted a gray boat and dressed entirely in gray, including a gray hat and a gray mask. He carried two gray pistols and a gray machine gun.

One of his favorite tricks was plundering pullers on the way to Canada. He would intercept them in mid river using his powerful speedboat to relieve them of their cash.

Once the rumrunners got their liquor across the river from Canada, they would dispose of it in several ways. Some syndicates paid farmers \$20,000 or more to store liquor in their barns around Detroit. Others moved in, uninvited, to the docks and storage areas of the wealthy homeowners across the Detroit River and Lake St. Clair. In 1922 alone, at least \$35,000 worth of liquor came to Detroit through the 70 miles of river and lake front stretching from Lake St. Clair to South Rockwood. When the Gray Ghost traveled to Canada for his buying trips, he shopped from a large selection. On the Canadian side of the Detroit River, the exporters had rows and rows of liquor docks. Shoppers could replenish their stock from 83 breweries and 23 distilleries.

The Gray Ghost continued pirating without too much interference and disposed of his booty among the bootlegging syndicates of Detroit. Then one day he made a fatal error. He purchased a large load of liquor in Canada with a bad check and irritated some prosperous wholesalers. Five of the wholesalers kicked in \$1,000 each and hired someone to eliminate the bad check problem. Rumor had it that the gunman worked for the Purple Gang, but the murder of the Gray Ghost was never solved nor was his true identity ever discovered.

### **You Passed It, Now Enforce It**

For several years there was practically no government effort to stem the tide of illegal liquor that flowed from Canada. When sufficient men were provided to conduct a reasonably efficient surveillance, the bootleggers resorted to bribing the federal police. Sometimes state troopers would question citizens about Ecorse's night activities. In fact State Trooper G\_\_\_\_\_, who was always out to get Ecorse once paid a visit to Ecorse dentist Dr. Arthur Payette to have his teeth cleaned. He mentioned the interesting view since the office over looked Hogan's Alley, but he received no cooperation from the dentist. Minding one's own business was the best policy.

No matter how hard the law enforcement tried, Prohibition was like trying to bail the Detroit River dry with a bucket. The rum runners would pay any price for a speedboat if it was fast enough to out run the law. Some of the customers used to complain bitterly about the prices when protection had to be split five ways: local, federal, state, county, and customs.

With these events and one other incident of significance, state authorities finally made an effort to clean up Ecorse. It was the shooting of Chief of Police Albert Jaeger of Ecorse in a Lincoln Park Café on July 7, 1922 that brought the events to a climax. Investigations resulting from this episode substantiated the fact that approximately fifteen hundred barrels of beer a night were unloaded in Ecorse. It was now time for the authorities to declare war.

The first invasion of Ecorse's waterfront by the Prohibition agents was well organized and surprisingly quiet. Taking every precaution known these agents met in the Federal Building in Detroit and proceeded to Ecorse in the back of three moving vans. Each was armed and had specific instructions. As the vans approached various bars, night clubs, and boat launches men

sought their enemy. About an hour later all those suspected of any foul play were picked up and brought downtown along with thirty thousand dollars' worth of liquor.

The next day police officers stated that "thus far more illicit liquor had been imported into the United States from Canada though Ecorse than any other American port. For the first time since the Volstead Law was enacted, these bootleggers were showing signs of fear.

The rum runners began to retaliate. To prevent agents from removing beer from storage rooms, these professional smugglers, in three successive efforts, attempted to dynamite, burn, and then destroy a bridge spanning a creek which gave access to the boat well. At one time a handful of federal agents held the bridge against a group of two thousand. It was the most turbulent day the Downriver rum havens had experienced since Prohibition began.

Ecorse acquired a bad reputation throughout all of this rum running activity. Delos G. Smith, U.S. District Attorney, characterized Ecorse as "one of two black eyes for Detroit." To back up his contention, he warned Ecorse Mayor Alfred Bouchard that if he did not enforce some law and order within thirty days he would send in the state police. The state police conducted a continuous waterfront vigil, powerful enough to cause most of the smugglers and bootleggers to move their business to Lake St. Clair in the north and Lake Erie in the south. The liquor smugglers had one point of power over the police. They had once used the patrol boat, the Alladin as a rum ship without the police ever knowing it. It took more than four years of hard work and strategy for the police to capture and convict the bootleggers. When Jefferson Avenue was widened in 1929, the shacks along Hogan's Alley were destroyed and the city bought the thin strip of land by the waterfront for a park.

Before the waning years of Prohibition, Federal and state officials had a difficult time making rum running arrests stick in Ecorse because the local police were in sympathy if not in cahoots with the rumrunners. Rumrunners served on juries and the only cases from Ecorse tried successfully were the ones tried in federal courts. In 1920, Albert M. Jaeger had become the first salaried fire chief in Ecorse and with a force of three men, took up office in the wooden city hall across from his house. At age 57 in 1945, he went to his office at the fire department in the new municipal building to receive the hearty congratulations of the 28-member fire department.

About 1922, two years after he was installed as Ecorse's first fire chief, Village President Fred Bouchard made Jaeger acting chief of police. He held the two offices jointly until 1926 and his joint chiefship provided material for local jokesters. The story had it that Jaeger always worked bareheaded in his office until a call came demanding his services as one department head or another. Then he would grab the correct hat, jam it on his head, and run out of his office to whatever challenge lay ahead.

Holding the joint office was difficult in the turbulent days of bootlegging and rum running in Ecorse. Several underworld hideouts had sprung up along the riverfront huddled beside the river below Southfield Road. One of them was known as "Robbers Roost," and often sheltered notorious lawbreakers. One March day in 1924, Jaeger and one of his men, Benjamin Montie, a fire truck driver and auxiliary policeman went down to Robber's Roost to investigate a case of petty larceny. Inside the Robber's Roost, two bandits who had just raided the Commonwealth Bank in Detroit and escaped with \$17,000 were counting their money. Chief Jaeger and

Benjamin Montie took the men to police headquarters for questioning and then Jaeger, Montie and two deputy sheriffs returned to Robber's Roost where they found two more of the bandit ring in hiding.

The two men jumped out of a window into the river. They swam back to shore and were captured just as two others drove up in a car. They were Bernard Malley, Leo Corbett, Eliza Meade and Tim Murray, Meade and Corbett were in the car and Corbett drew a gun and killed Ecorse Patrolman-fireman Benjamin Montie. Then Chief of Police Jaeger drew his gun and killed Corbett.

During the scuffle, Meade drove away in the car and a statewide hunt failed to find him. Later he was arrested in Arizona and sentenced to 20 to 40 years in Marquette Prison. As the bank robbers attempted to get away, they threw the \$17,000 over the streets and waterfront. Spectators did not return their spoils.

### **Rum Running Entrepreneurs and Raconteurs**

Rum running was ageless in Ecorse. Ecorse rumrunners employed as many as 25 schoolboys as spies, lookouts and messengers. In 1922, police arrested a 15-year-old boy delivering a truckload of liquor to a Downriver roadhouse. The boys said that he was only one of several local boys working for the rumrunners. He insisted that he worked only on weekends and nights so he would not miss school. These 13 to 16-year-old boys made such good lookouts that the police could not make unannounced raids on blind pigs and boathouse storage centers in Ecorse. The lookout boys usually spotted the police long before they arrived. One state police officer complained that "they spread out along the waterfront and are very awake and diligent."

Several former Ecorse citizens of a certain age recalled those days when they were young and enterprising and needed to make money for their family. One said that he used to dive for bottles off Southfield Dock and his take was usually good because of smugglers with slippery fingers. Another said that he used to do lookout duty for bootleggers in the evenings but wouldn't stay out past ten o'clock because he had to do his homework and get up to go to school in the morning.

John Wozniak of Ecorse is remembered as one of the more honest rumrunners. Wozniak's early twenties coincided with the early rum running years in Ecorse. He was enterprising enough to form his own navy of twenty-five "sailors" to carry Canadian liquor into America across the Detroit River. Wozniak gave his sailors standing orders to avoid violence. Wozniak's men did not carry arms and neither did he. When one of his men got caught, Wozniak backed him and his defense and paid the fine if the rumrunner was convicted.

His love of sports ended John Wozniak's empire. He sponsored a football team and his team became well known in Ecorse, Lincoln Park, Wyandotte and River Rouge. Law enforcement people would come to the games, frequently to identify the rumrunners on Wozniak's team. In 1928, federal law enforcement officials broke up a large bribery ring and with his protection gone, Wozniak was arrested. At his trial, Wozniak told the judge, "When I was indicted I was through for good. The law was getting too strong. I sold my boats and scuttled the others. I went into the automobile business and have done pretty well."

One morning over coffee, a charming elderly couple told a reporter from the Fort Street Journal about their notorious past as bootleggers. They were involved in the transporting of the whiskey from Canada to the United States. Several of the towns along the Canadian waterfront including Amherstburg and La Salle had export docks and there were buildings right by the water where you could buy whiskey and beer. There was a Canadian customs officer on duty right on the dock so they could check into customs and buy their booze all in one stop. After the buy, they would move their load up river and wait for night to transport it across to the United States. Beer was two dollars a case and the whiskey price depended on the brand.

In a large open skiff, they could bring as many as 600 cases of beer in one load and make \$1.00 profit per case. It was good money in those days and it lured many people into the business. The elderly couple said that during the first five weeks of Prohibition, five of the government agents of the newly created Prohibition unit were arrested for either taking bribes or going into business for themselves.

During the winter the bootleggers drove Model T Fords across the ice to the export docks. They removed the tops of the cars and all of the insides, leaving only a place for the driver to sit. Their route was from Amherstburg down around the southern tip of Bob-Lo and Grosse Ile to Calf Island, where they transferred it from the cars into a boat to cross the Trenton Channel which never froze to Gibraltar. The couple had a boat well right inside their house and could drive in and transfer the cases right from the boat to their "plant" or secret storing room.

The trucks belonging to many notorious men of that era picked up whiskey at their Gibraltar home. They "freighted" whiskey for Detroit's Purple Gang when the gang couldn't move it across themselves because of close surveillance by the law. Al Capone's trucks also loaded up at their house and hauled whiskey to Chicago. The elderly gentleman recalled that "Capone's boys had their way paid to Chicago; nobody ever bothered them."

Al Capone's estimated income from bootlegging is said to have been \$60,000,000 annually. Other people made good money freighting whiskey as well. When they bought the whiskey in Canada they could charge \$2 or \$3 per case for bringing it in.

Many cars were lost through the ice as they maneuvered around the southern tip of Bob-Lo Island and drove too far out onto Lake Erie. With an investment of as much as \$1,000 per car every effort was made to recover the cases before the car sank completely. Each driver carried a pike pole which he would use to hook the cases and pull them to safety. During one winter haul a car went through, but its front wheels got hung up on a chunk of ice and it could be seen drifting in Lake Erie for almost a week before it sank out of sight.

The risk of capture by the police was always present. The police would give chase in the cars and boats they had confiscated from unlucky bootleggers. Most of the customs officers bootleggers dealt with were crooked. The elderly gentleman recalled, "They either took your booze or for \$50 or \$100 they'd turn their backs and let you run. If you were arrested you needed about \$300 to get bail and sentences were small, two or three months and a fine. It all depended on who you know and how much pull you had."

Hijacking was widespread during prohibition. The bootlegger had to guard his whiskey from the moment he bought it in Canada until he sold it in the United States. The elderly woman said that she never knew when her husband would be home. It all depended on when it was safe to cross the river.

Not all Ecorse residents ran rum across the River. In fact, some of them disapproved of the rum running activity. Dorothy Cummings Dunlop, the granddaughter of Joseph Salliotte, recalled the rum running days in Ecorse with dismay. She said, "The greatest stigma of Ecorse for me was the illegal trafficking of liquor from Canada. This process was called "Bootlegging" and the "Bootleggers" were the men that stole across the river in the middle of the night with their illegal product. Although I was young, I could not accept in my rather prejudiced mind that this "under world" flourished so close to my grandfather's residence."

The Salliotte family were one of the founding families of Ecorse and Joseph still lived there on the corner of Jefferson and State Street now Southfield. The front porch of her grandfather's house overlooked the Detroit River and from the porch she could also see what she described as an ugly commercial looking dock bordered on each side by two buildings. One of the buildings was a saloon called the Polar Bear Café and on the south side of the dock stood a fish market with large glass tanks. Dorothy recalled one Sunday morning during the years that she visited her grandfather with her mother. On this morning she accompanied her mother and grandfather across Jefferson and viewed the disheveled interior of the Polar Bear Café. Tables and chairs were broken and scattered. A walk across the dock to the fish market disclosed smashed tanks and water and fish everywhere. "It seemed that the market was a "front" for the more prosperous business of distributing liquor that went on in the rear of the store. On the Saturday night before, the government agents had arrived. It was some solace to me to learn that the stores were rented out and the family had no real confirmation that anything untoward was going on".

Another French family, the Le Blancs witnessed Prohibition. In a 1966 interview with Ecorse native Jo Ann Coman, Eli "Peck" LeBlanc recalled Prohibition days. According to Peck, Mud Island, which was formed by logs from a nearby sawmill, acted as a screen for an important tunnel constructed by smugglers. This tunnel extended about two blocks inland and was made in such a manner as to allow the boat to travel on the water and still remain below ground. The rum runners then unloaded the liquor in a combination garage-gambling house on Monroe Street.

Peck LeBlanc vividly recalled Hogan's Alley in Ecorse, a small side street comprised of a row of dimly lighted shacks sometimes used as private bars that were called "blind pigs." The majority liquor runs ended at Hogan's Alley, but only smugglers and select guests who knew the pass word were admitted to Hogan's Alley. Once inside Hogan's Alley sights to be enjoyed included young men wearing fancy clothes and diamond rings in imitation of Al Capone, piles of money changing hands and countless cocktails disappearing down thirsty throats. Some people called Hogan's Alley the toughest territory in the country during Prohibition times.

In continuous stories, Detroit newspapers investigated the Prohibition years in Ecorse. Charles Creinn of the Detroit Times said that Ecorse, formerly a small, peaceful resort area, became a notorious "rum row" and the center of a dangerous, risky, but profitable industry after National Prohibition was passed in 1920. According to Creinn, millions of dollars changed hands at one

time in Ecorse and the three banks in the village of less than 10,000 inhabitants did a thriving business. People made fortunes overnight and lost them just as quickly.

.Another Detroit News reporter, Martha Torplitz, wrote that Ecorse changed its personality at night because a Canadian regulation required rum boats to be clear of the piers before nightfall. These boats could travel to Canada at random and load and leave when they pleased as long as they were finished before sundown. The fleet would drop down the foreign side of the Detroit River and wait a chance to escape. Sunset shook the fleet from its daytime drowsiness. Trained eyes watched for signals. A red and green lantern indicated "departure an hour from now" while two red ones meant "start at once."

Often more than fifty boats, from fifty footers to flat busses, smaller power boats and row boats and skiffs waited to escape to Ecorse shores. The escape required skillful navigating because the boats did not have lights and the skippers did not always know who was friend or foe. Sometimes prohibition boats disguised themselves as rum runners and rum runners often turned prohibition agents for an evening. A skipper had to have keenly attuned senses to be able to tell friend from foe on the river after dark.

As soon as a boat touched the dock, hired men began loading the liquor into trucks and cars, a job that required timing, organization and craftiness. Some bootleggers tied cases of beer under the floor boards of trucks and cars and installed liquor holding trays under dashboards and hoods. Their padded interior prevented the bottles from breaking even during the roughest chases and during the washboard ride over highways to Detroit, Toledo, and Chicago. Some wrapped bottles in burlap and hung them from the bottoms of boats for the ride to market and a few enterprising others installed trays below box cars on trains, then wired the numbers of their cars to the buyers waiting at the train's destination.

Eli "Peck" LeBlanc underscored an important point when he said that cash was the only exchange in this crude bootlegging business with extraordinarily high stakes. AS long as the Ecorse rum runners were paid, they did not worry about a load being high jacked or lost or misdirected. But if a customer did not pay cash on delivery the consequences could be cold blooded murder. Or if someone put false labels on the merchandise to get a higher price for cheap liquor and their customers discovered the trick, the deal could end in a rain of bullets. Police and civilians alike routinely fished bullet riddled bodies out of the Detroit River.

According to LeBlanc, policemen were not always on the right side of the law. Sometimes official eyes were encouraged not to see the bootlegging activities and sometimes the law ignored the bootleggers out of fear for their lives. "It was common knowledge that police officers were bribed and paid off in other ways to keep quiet.

Ecorse stood wide open for liquor activities besides transferring it. Ecorse was safe for a night on the town. Ladies in evening dresses kicked up their respectable heels on Jefferson Avenue or did the Varsity Drag in buildings that witnessed more decorous activities during the day. If shots punctuated the hours of an evening out, no one looked up from their drinks for shots were ordinary sounds in Ecorse. Anyone could go down Jefferson Avenue day or night to visit roadhouses like the White Tree, the Polar Bear Café, Marty Kennedys, The Riverview and Tom R\_\_\_\_\_, run by a former policeman. Many people knew Patsy Lowrey's on Eighth Street with

the backroom decorated in western style with sawdust on the floor and a tin-voiced piano echoing through the room. The price across the bar was fifty cents for whiskey and twenty five cents for beer.

Dr. Arthur Payette, another Ecorse pioneer who practiced dentistry in Ecorse for 35 years in his office overlooking Hogan's Alley, pointed out a different side of bootlegging in Ecorse. Some ordinary citizens as well as professional bootleggers wanted to get rich quick and with the right connections, packaged ingredients for making beer could be acquired for nominal fees. Stills and other needed apparatus could be found in basements of houses concentrated on Goodell Street and some "home breweries" specialized in watering liquor by inserting a syringe through the cork of the bottle, extracting the liquor and replacing it with water.

Dr. Payette said that for several years the government did not make much of an effort to stop Canadian liquor from coming into the United States and when they did try to enforce the law, the rum runners usually won out. The rum runner would pay any price for a speedboat if it was fast enough to outrun the law. Some of the customers complained bitterly about the prices when protection had to be split five ways: local, federal, state, county, and customs. The doctor vividly recalled a state trooper who came to his office for a teeth cleaning. According to Dr. Payette, state trooper G \_\_\_\_\_ was already out to get Ecorse and during the teeth cleaning he managed to work in some comments about the interesting view of Hogan's Alley and the bootlegging activity in Ecorse. Dr. Payette silently continued cleaning the street trooper's teeth. "Minding one's own business was the best policy," the Doctor said.

In 1936 the Ecorse Advertiser summarized Prohibition and the changing waterfront in Ecorse when it published a lengthy obituary called Requiem for Walter Locke and Rum Row. Walter Locke, a waterfront colleague of Eli "Peck" LeBlanc and his partner Ned Magee owned a boathouse restaurant at the State Street (now Southfield) dock and from this vantage point they witnessed the scores of men, boys, women and girls creating the Prohibition drama. Locke saw the scattered boathouses on the banks of the river that had been built at the turn of the century for pleasure boating taken over by a generation of people who worked at night and got rich quickly. Rents for the waterfront shack escalated from ten dollars a month to one hundred or more. He saw smuggling grow in volume and intensity and a class of men rise who glorified in their own skill, strength and acumen or outwitting the people who sought to enforce the Prohibition law.

Time passed and Locke heard the voices of thirsty Americans demanding whisky and beer grow louder and he saw the profits for handling them climb higher. The price of cheap whiskey arose to one hundred dollars a case –whiskey which would eventually fall back to its norm of \$24 or \$30 a case.

Bootlegging demographics changed as adventurous youngsters and their outboard motor boats displaced the strong men rowing their sturdy boats across the Detroit River. It took the youngsters and their motorboats ten minutes to cover the distance it took a man an hour and forty minutes to row. Then, as cargoes grew bigger, the luggers, with their huge flat bottom hulls that could hold hundreds of cases of beer and sleek, swift speedboats with more costly cargoes of whisky displaced the motorboats.

Walter watched rum row blossoming at night into a sea of color lights and music. He watched the half mile south from State Street (Southfield) to Ecorse Creek become a glittering cabaret center that became known as the "Half Mile of Hell." The narrow streets were crowded with automobiles from dusk until dawn and people surged on foot from one spot to another in a frenzied search for entertainment. They paid fifty cents a bottle for beer and fifty or seventy-five cents for a glass of whisky. A meal cost them two dollars and they tipped entertainers one dollar and thought they were getting their money's worth. Walter watched the gambling spots open and thrive in the encouraging atmosphere and witnessed fortunes made and lost on the turn of a wheel or the flip of a card. He saw one poor Ecorse man make \$100,000 in a single night and lose \$80,000 of it back again within a few days. Everyone but "the Law" thrived. The uphill battle of "the law" did not change. Walter Locke saw "the law," always in clumsier boats than the bootleggers. The outnumbered "Lawmen hung with the tenacity of bulldogs on their quarry," but better equipment and the sheer force of numbers thwarted their best efforts.

Then Walter Locke watched the fall of rum row on the Detroit River in Ecorse. It did not fall as gradually as it had risen; instead rum row shattered like a bottle smashed against a brick wall. He watched the river front shacks where millions and millions of dollars' worth of illicit liquor had been stored and passed on become disused and abandoned and then razed to their concrete foundations. He watched the narrow, dirty River Road turn into a broad ribbon of concrete called Jefferson Avenue and widen yet again almost to his doors. He watched a growing stream of traffic whiz by and drivers not glancing at famous local history spots.

Walter and Ned sat on the little veranda of their house boat restaurant discussing a Requiem for Rum Row. Goodbye to the fortunes lost when "the law" raided Rum Row and found the "plant" where the liquor was concealed. Goodbye to the whisky cars that whipped into and out of the secret boat well garages. Goodbye to the shots ringing out in the night and the lifeless bodies on the river shores of the boys who had "taken the night boat to Buffalo."

Suddenly Ecorse was "dead" and so was Walter Locke. If he had lived until the next summer, Walter would have watched trees spreading leafy branches over the county park along the former Detroit River rum row where so much whisky had been landed. Flowers swayed in the breeze where once dancers had swayed to cabaret music and fishermen instead of rumrunners boated on the river. Perhaps after all, Walter Locke knew and approved.

After the repeal of Prohibition, many former rumrunners in Ecorse turned to more respectable pursuits. Some were proud of their rum running activities while others, some successfully, managed to keep them a well-kept secret in their small town. The rum running roots of Clarence DeWallot, who operated the Silver Rail Hotel, a bar and bowling alley in Ecorse and the Pinehurst Inn at Indian River, Michigan, resurfaced in an Ecorse Advertiser story. The story, dated Thursday, July 9, 1953, identifies De Wallot as a "downriver rum runner of prohibition days."

DeWallot's sister-in-law, Mrs. Essie Haury had lived in her home on Sixth Street for 28 years and brought up her children there with the aid of a widow's pension. In July 1953, sixty-one-year-old Mrs. Haury appeared in Circuit Court to fight for her home. Her brother-in-law Clarence DeWallot had filed suit to take away her home. Mrs. Haury testified that her husband was injured in 1924 while helping DeWallot in his business. She said that he was hurt driving

from a boat house during a police raid and died six months later. Mrs. Haury testified that after her husband died her brother in law Clarence DeWalloot gave her the home and told her that he would take care of her family.

According to Mrs. Haury, she did not get a deed for the house from her brother in law, but she said that she had paid taxes for three years and then the city had declared her exempt as a widow for the remainder of the years she had spent in the house. She testified that De Wallot had told “everybody in Ecorse” that the house was hers.

Earlier, Clarence DeWalloot and a process server had given Mrs. Haury notice to vacate from her home, saying that he needed the home for himself. Mrs. Haury said that he lived with his unmarried daughter Lorraine.

Probate records showed that DeWalloot changed his name from Haury thirty years ago. He said at the time that Haury was the name he used “on the stage.”

### **The end of Prohibition, the beginning of a new partnership**

Pressure from the United States Government closed the Canadian export docks in 1929, so from then on the bootleggers had to go up the Detroit River to a brewery at Riverside to buy their wares. The Great Depression of 1930-1933 had great significance in the eventual repeal of Prohibition. The return of the liquor and beer industry was needed both for its tax revenue and for the jobs it would create. In February of 1933 Congress adopted a joint resolution proposing the 21<sup>st</sup> amendment which would repeal the 18<sup>th</sup>.

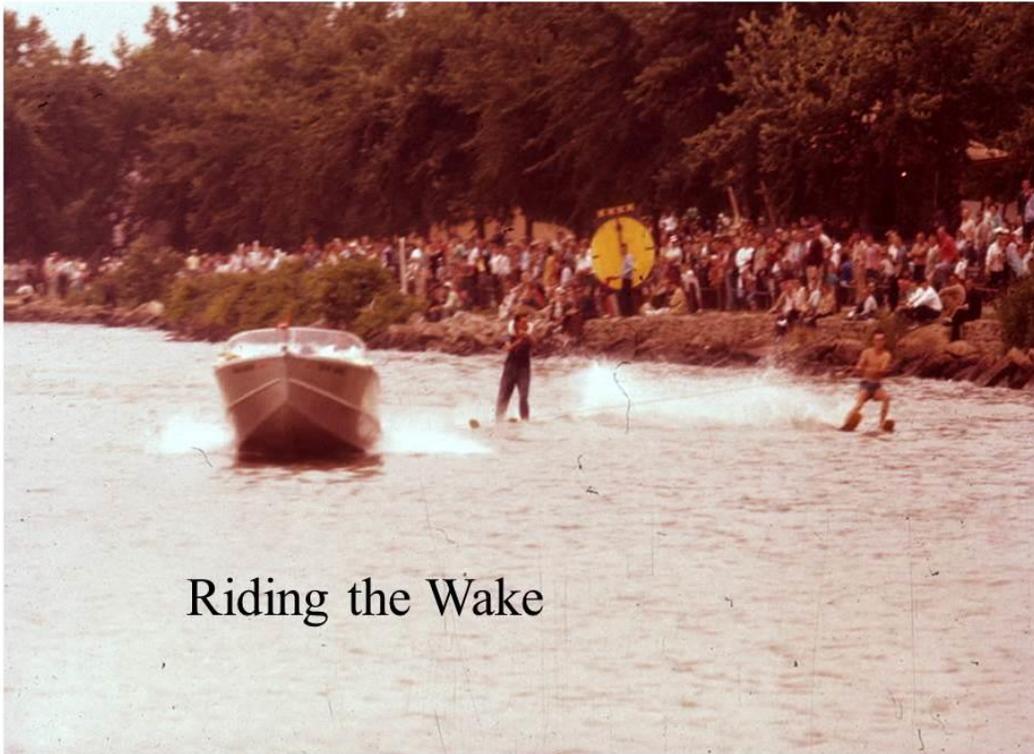
When Franklin Delano Roosevelt took office in 1933, he backed the repeal of Prohibition. In December 1933, a stroke of the pen demolished an entire flourishing industry. The rumrunners were legalized out of business and Ecorse city officials tore down the fence by the waterfront and created a park.

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Riding the Wake

## The Detroit River, the Poster Highway for Prohibition

The Detroit River is a presence in the lives of people who live along its banks. It is a commercial highway and a liquid agent of social change. During the Prohibition Era of American History, historians calculated that at least 75 percent of the illegal liquor smuggled and transported in the United States came through the Detroit River highway.

The life of Gus Pappas has flowed with the Detroit River through seasons of conflict and change. The son of Greek immigrant Sam Pappas, as a young boy, he fished and boated on its surface and hunted for muskrat along its shores for his father to cook and serve in his riverside restaurant.

As he grew older he joined the crews of the Ecorse Boat Club as they stroked their way across the surface of the Detroit River to countless championships. The shouts of encouragement from the shore still hang in the air above the River and shadow shells from the Detroit, Wyandotte, and countless other rowing clubs glide through its waves.

### **The Home Town Boys Dive for Contraband Liquor**

It is possible that Gus occasionally joined some of his contemporaries in diving into the Detroit River for bottles of contraband whiskey at the foot of Southfield dock, a popular pastime for young waterfront entrepreneurs during the Prohibition Era. He doesn't comment out loud, but the twinkle in his eyes hints at unspoken adventures.

### **Peck LeBlanc Watches Rumrunners from His Front Porch**

Eli "Peck" LeBlanc, the son of one of the old Detroit and Downriver French families which originated in Quebec watched the river from the porch of his home on Jefferson Avenue in Ecorse during the seven plus decades of his life. On a clear day he could see across the River to Canada from the vantage point of his front porch.

Peck was born August 10, 1888, and grew up in the family homestead on the Detroit River. In 1904 when he was sixteen, he worked in an ice house on the Detroit River, cutting huge blocks of ice which were stored in sawdust to use during the summer months. When he turned seventeen, Peck decided it was time he owned a "regular" suit and he took a job at the Great Lakes Engineering Works ship yard in Ecorse as a fitter's helper. He worked for five months until he had earned enough money to buy his suit.

When he was in his early thirties in the 1920s, Peck noted that boat traffic on the Detroit River had increased considerably. In the evenings he sat on his front porch watching and listening to the rum running noises. There is no documentary proof that Peck actively participated in the rum running activities on the Detroit River first hand, but however he acquired them, he possessed a repertoire of rum running stories. Peck shared his stories with posterity so well that he made them feel that they and perhaps they were first hand participants in the events of the 1920s and 1930s on the River.

### **Americans and Canadians Cooperate Across the Detroit River**

La Salle, Ontario is directly across the Detroit River from Ecorse and in the 1920s Peck saw the River dotted with small boats plying back and forth across the River. Boat traffic between Ecorse and Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, [Walkerville](#), La Salle, and Amherstburg, Ontario increased considerably during the 1920s because of legislation on both sides of the River.

In a perfect river of rum match, Detroit served as the portal to the throats of thirsty Americans and its sister city Windsor, legally produced and exported beer and whiskey in unlimited amounts. The social and geographical partnership of the Canadians and Americans on the Detroit River produced a river of rum and other alcoholic beverages in the 1920s and the early 1930s and a more modern partnership in the Twenty First century created a renaissance of the Detroit River itself.

### **Americans and Canadians Experiment with Prohibition**

Both Canada and the United States celebrated the first years of the Twentieth Century with sweeping political and social changes and a far reaching social experiment- Prohibition. Detroit was the first major United States city to ban the sale of alcohol in public establishments and by 1918, Detroit was completely dry. It had enjoyed a one year head start when Prohibition became the law of the land in 1919.

This year gave [gangsters](#) and bootleggers time to build a network to transfer liquor from Windsor to Detroit, a river of alcohol which led to a huge increase in alcohol consumption and an era of ingenuity, crime and gangster rule. Across the Detroit River in Canada, individual provinces including Ontario had outlawed the retail sale of liquor but the Canadian federal government had approved and licensed distilleries and breweries to manufacture and distribute alcohol 'for export only.'

### **The Detroit River a Smuggler's Paradise**

The Detroit River was a smuggler's paradise. It is 28 miles long and less than a mile across in some places, and it contains thousands of coves and hiding places along its shore and islands. Along with Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair and the St. Clair River these waterways carried about 75 percent of the liquor supplied to the United States during Prohibition.

By 1929, illegal liquor was the second biggest business in Detroit at \$215 million a year, just behind automobiles. Public opinion stood firmly against the liquor ban and no mayor was elected in Detroit who favored Prohibition. As many as 25,000 blind pigs operated in the Detroit area and people drank everywhere from speakeasies to private clubs to established restaurants to storefronts and at home.

Cocktail parties were popular in society circles and workmen drank beer with their lunch or dinner. Commercial breweries that were allowed to produce 'near beer' had to first produce real beer, and then remove the alcohol. This practice begged for exploitation. Illegal commercial enterprises often run by the various gangs poured out millions of gallons and home stills were everywhere and the Detroit River Road connecting Canada and the United States sparkled inviting in the sunshine and carried liquid cargo in the concealing darkness.

Detroit gangs, and ordinary people participated in the free flow of liquor back and forth across the Detroit River when Canada legalized liquor shipment. The partnership between bootleggers along the Detroit River and Canadian brewers began on August 11, 1921 when the shipments of beer and liquor from Canada to the United States became legal. This opened up a glittering world of [rumrunning](#), roustabouts and riches for the ordinary people of Ecorse and allowed gangs like the Purple Gang from Detroit to provide a foundation for the Mafia and entrench themselves in American society.

### **The Detroit Color of Purple - the Purple Gang**

In the early 1920s immigrants flocked to Detroit seeking jobs in its booming automobile

industry. Many of them settled in lower east side neighborhoods near the Eastern Market and came of age amidst poverty, crime and violence. Many of the children growing up in these neighborhoods were children of Russian Jewish immigrants who toiled for a precarious living for their families. Some of their children joined a gang that two shopkeepers dubbed the “Purple Gang,” because they were “rotten, purple, like the color of bad meat.”

The young Purples worked in concert with the old sugar house gangs that provided corn sugar for home brewers who were allowed to brew a set amount of liquor for their personal use. Gangs like the Purples soon moved in on sugar houses and used them as a resource for illegal stills and breweries. When the opportunity came to “import” liquor from Windsor, the Purple Gang was organized and ready.

### **The Purple Gang Connects with Al Capone**

By the early 1920s the Purple Gang had earned a reputation as hijackers, stealing liquor loads from older and more established gangs of rumrunners. Soon the Purple Gang dominated the business and connected with Al Capone’s Chicago syndicate.

### **The Ontario Liquor Control Act Loophole**

Most Canadian provinces went dry at the same time the Eighteenth Amendment passed. The Liquor Control Act in Ontario prohibited public or hotel drinking but did not forbid manufacturing and exporting liquor. This loophole in the Act ushered in a wild decade. Thirsty Detroit languished across the Detroit River from Windsor and beyond it panted the entire American continent. Enterprising Windsor businessmen immediately set up export docks which were really simple frame sheds. These docks soon dotted every inlet and every bank that would support a dock along the Detroit River from Lake St. Clair to Lake Erie.

Trucks protected by the B-13 customs form for liquor in transit carried the liquor to the docks. Whether it was consigned to someone in Mexico, Cuba, Bermuda or St. Pierre de Miquelon, men loaded the liquor into speedboats or rowboats which then supposedly headed for Cuba or Mexico. Instead of voyaging to Cuba, these boats made the short run across the Detroit River and landed at docks in the United States.

### **Boats of Every Kind, Kin, and Color**

Rumrunners tapped deep reservoirs of ingenuity within themselves and their equipment and they all had one goal: to use evasive tactics, camouflage and surprise to bring their wares safely across the Detroit River and to dodge United States Revenue cutters and police boats waiting on the far shore. Ninety percent of all liquor illegally imported into Michigan came by boat and the boats ranged in size, type, shape, and appearance. Steamers, tugs, fast motorboats, sailboats, rowboats, and canoes were used.

### **Exported Eggs and Burdened Belts**

Customs agents found liquor hidden inside watermelons, hearses, and other unusual places. With some puzzlement, United States Customs officers noted an increase in the export of eggs from Windsor to Detroit. One day in May 1920, a man carrying a large market basket got off the Windsor ferry and walked about his business. Near the foot of Woodward in Detroit, a taxicab hit him and a crowd gathered. Some people sniffed the air, savoring the unmistakable aroma of whiskey. Several dozen eggs were scattered all over the pavement. The man, not seriously hurt, looked around him uneasily. As soon as a policeman approached, he struggled to his feet and fled the scene abandoning his basket with some of the eggs still intact.

The policeman examined the basket and discovered that the eggs had been emptied of their yolks, filled with liquor and carefully resealed. From that day forward, customs officials looked closely at all baskets of eggs.

Another liquor concealing ruse involved a system of belts. One rumrunner described his lady's system of belts where she would conceal bottles. She'd strap the bottles to her body beneath her dress. One time they reached the border, but then the customs agents asked them to get out of their car. She got out on her side and he got out on his side. They were looking at each other over the roof of the car while the customs agents searched when he noticed a frightened look on her face. "Smash, smash, smash...one of the belts had let go."

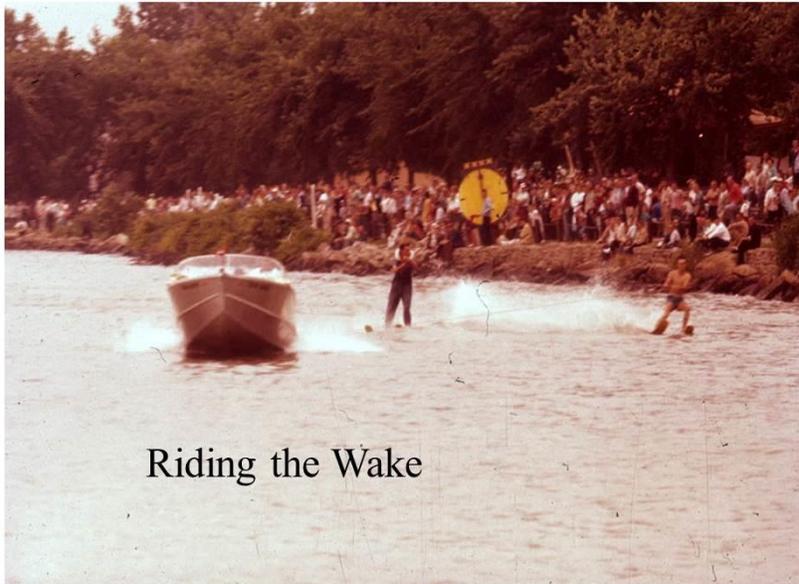
### **The Boat of Muskrat La Framboise**

Rum runners applied the same ingenuity to their boats. Muskrat La Framboise, a rumrunner, had a boat with a plug in it like a bathtub. When the police spotted him, he'd pull the plug and the boat would sink. Later when no one was around he'd go back to the boat and dive for the liquor. The whiskey was stored in jute bags tied together at the tops like ears. When the bottles were dumped overboard, a diver could dive down and pick them up by the ears and haul them to the surface. Muskrat became quite expert at this method of recycling.

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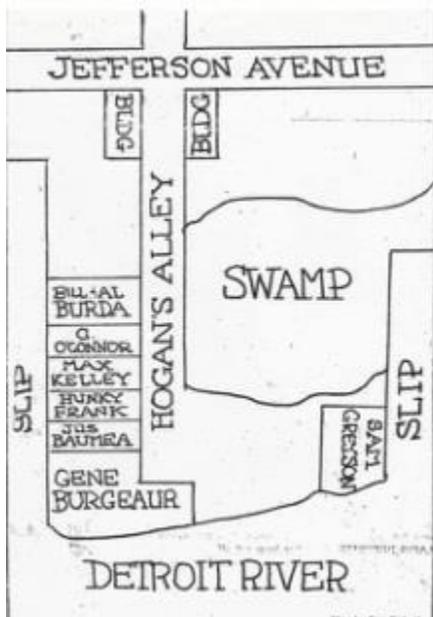
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Riding the Wake

Eli LeBlanc Witnesses Rum Running in Ecorse



*The Detroit Evening News* recorded an instance where the Detroit River helped sober someone up, the exact opposite of what happened on the River in the rum running days of the 1920s and 1930s. *The Evening News* reported that Albert Latour was soused in the River yesterday off Belle

Island, and it sobered him right off. When nearby boaters picked him up, he told that he had ‘shadows flitting around him.’ The only shadow his rescuers found was a whiskey bottle nearly emptied. They picked up him and his skiff and took them to Belle Island. <sup>67</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s the Ecorse waterfront especially near Jefferson and Southfield and a strip of river front called Hogan’s Alley became notorious for its nightclubs. Gambling, bootlegging and other nefarious activities took place on the Ecorse Waterfront and bandits and gamblers from Detroit routinely traveled to Ecorse to ply their trades and hide out from the police.

In 1920, Albert M. Jaeger had become the first salaried fire chief in Ecorse and with a force of three men, took up office in the wooden city hall across from his house. At age 57 in 1945, he went to his office at the fire department in the new municipal building to receive the hearty congratulations of the 28-member fire department.

About 1922, two years after he was installed as Ecorse’s first fire chief, Village President Fred Bouchard made Jaeger acting chief of police. He held the two offices jointly until 1926 and his joint chiefship provided material for local jokesters. The story had it that Jaeger always worked bareheaded in his office until a call came demanding his services as one department head or another. Then he would grab the correct hat, jam it on his head, and run out of his office to whatever challenge lay ahead.

Holding the joint office was difficult in the turbulent days of bootlegging and rum running in Ecorse. Several underworld hideouts had sprung up along the riverfront, huddled beside the river below Southfield Road. One of them was known as “Robbers Roost”, and often sheltered notorious lawbreakers. One March day in 1924, Jaeger and one of his men, Benjamin Montie, a fire truck driver and auxiliary policeman, went down to Robber’s Roost to investigate a case of petty larceny. Inside the Robber’s Roost, two bandits who had just raided the Commonwealth Bank in Detroit and escaped with \$17,000 were counting their money. Chief Jaeger and Benjamin Montie took the men to police headquarters for questioning and then Jaeger, Montie and two deputy sheriffs returned to Robber’s Roost where they found two more of the bandit ring in hiding.

The two men jumped out of a window into the river. They swam back to shore and were captured just as two others drove up in a car. They were Bernard Malley, Leo Corbett, Eliza Meade and Tim Murray. Meade and Corbett were in the car and Corbett drew a gun and killed Ecorse Patrolman-fireman Benjamin Montie. Then Chief of Police Jaeger drew his gun and killed Corbett.

During the scuffle, Meade drove away in the car and a statewide hunt failed to find him. Later he was arrested in Arizona and sentenced to 20 to 40 years in Marquette Prison. As the bank robbers attempted to get away, they threw the \$17,000 over the streets and waterfront. Spectators did not

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<sup>67</sup> The Evening News, 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Souvenir Reproduction of the First Issue of the Detroit News, Republished Sunday, August 18, 1963.

return their spoils.<sup>68</sup>

Following the family tradition, Eli “Peck” LeBlanc’s generation played an important part in Ecorse history. In a 1966 interview with Ecorse native Jo Ann Coman he recalled Prohibition days. According to Eli, Mud Island, which was formed by logs from a nearby sawmill, acted as a screen for an important tunnel constructed by smugglers. This tunnel extended about two blocks inland and was made in such a manner as to allow the boat to travel on the water and still remain below ground. The rum runners then unloaded the liquor in a combination garage-gambling house on Monroe Street.<sup>69</sup>

LeBlanc vividly recalled Hogan’s Alley in Ecorse, a small side street comprised of a row of dimly lighted shacks sometimes used as private bars that were called “blind pigs.” The majority liquor runs ended at Hogan’s Alley, but only smugglers and select guests who knew the pass word were admitted to Hogan’s Alley. Once inside Hogan’s Alley sights to be enjoyed included young men wearing fancy clothes and diamond rings in imitation of Al Capone, piles of money changing hands and countless cocktails disappearing down thirsty throats. Some people called Hogan’s Alley the toughest territory in the country during Prohibition times.<sup>70</sup>

In continuous stories, Detroit newspapers investigated the Prohibition years in Ecorse. Charles Creinn of the *Detroit Times* said that Ecorse, formerly a small, peaceful resort area, became a notorious “rum row” and the center of a dangerous, risky, but profitable industry after National Prohibition was passed in 1920. According to Creinn, millions of dollars changed hands at one time in Ecorse and the three banks in the village of less than 10,000 inhabitants did a thriving business. People made fortunes overnight and lost them just as quickly.<sup>71</sup>

Orval L. Girard of the *Detroit Times* reminisced with one foot propped on a weather-beaten pier on Southfield Dock. There was nothing but a swamp where the steel works stand. all along the river front customs picket boats cruised day and night in hopes of discovering the rum running operations in Canada.

The *Wyandotte Herald* joined the story parade, but said that bootleggers let Ecorse citizens go in peace unless they interfered with smuggling operations. “For a number of years following the advent of Volsteadism, 90 percent of the beer and strong liquor reaching Michigan from Canada came by way of Ecorse,” said the *Herald*. Before Prohibition, a few boat houses and cottages along the river front were used for legitimate purposes, it concluded.<sup>72</sup>

Then during 1918, boat houses once sheltering pleasure craft were converted to storage for liquor and luggers, which were high speed boats that transported good across the river. Summer cottages were turned into gambling houses with a variety of entertainment. Most of these changes were made along a one-half mile stretch of land not more than a city block wide.

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<sup>68</sup> Ecorse Advertiser, September 25, 1950

<sup>69</sup> Eli LeBlanc, in an interview with Jo Ann Coman in Ecorse, Michigan, January 15, 1966.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

<sup>71</sup> Charles Creinn, “Legend of Roaring Days of Ecorse Recalled.” *The Detroit Times*, August 3, 1956.

<sup>72</sup> “Rum Row Up Ecorse Way Is Passing Out,” *The Wyandotte Herald*, April 24, 1933.

Another *Detroit News* reporter, Martha Torplitz, wrote that Ecorse changed its personality at night because a Canadian regulation required rum boats to be clear of the piers before nightfall. These boats could travel to Canada at random and load and leave when they pleased as long as they were finished before sundown. The fleet would drop down the foreign side of the Detroit River and wait a chance to escape. Sunset shook the fleet from its daytime drowsiness. Trained eyes watched for signals. A red and green lantern indicated “departure an hour from now” while two red ones meant “start at once.”<sup>73</sup>

Often more than fifty boats, from fifty footers to flat buses, smaller power boats and row boats and skiffs waited to escape to Ecorse shores. The escape required skillful navigating because the boats did not have lights and the skippers did not always know who was friend or foe. Sometimes prohibition boats disguised themselves as rum runner and rum runners often turned prohibition agents for an evening. A skipper had to have keenly attuned senses to be able to tell friend from foe on the river after dark.

As soon as a boat touched the dock, hired men began loading the liquor into trucks and cars, a job that required timing, organization and craftiness. Some bootleggers tied cases of beer under the floor boards of trucks and cars and installed liquor holding trays under dashboards and hoods. Their padded interior prevented the bottles from breaking even during the roughest chases and during the washboard ride over highways to Detroit, Toledo, and Chicago. Some wrapped bottles in burlap and hung them from the bottoms of boats for the ride to market and a few enterprising others installed trays below box cars on trains, then wired the numbers of their cars to the buyers waiting at the train’s destination.

Eli “Peck” LeBlanc picked up the narrative again when he said that cash was the only exchange in this crude bootlegging business with extraordinarily high stakes. As long as the Ecorse rum runners were paid, they did not worry about a load being high jacked or lost or misdirected. But if a customer did not pay cash on delivery the consequences could be cold-blooded murder. Or if someone put false labels on the merchandise to get a higher price for cheap liquor and their customers discovered the trick, the deal could end in a rain of bullets. Police and civilians alike routinely fished bullet-riddled bodies out of the Detroit River.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Martha Torplitz, “German Writer Gives a Close-Up of Ecorse,” *The Detroit News* (Feb. 2, 1930).

<sup>74</sup> Eli LeBlanc, in an interview with Jo Ann Coman in *Ecorse, Michigan*, January 15, 1966.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

ordinary sounds in Ecorse. Anyone could go down Jefferson Avenue day or night to visit roadhouses like The White Tree, Marty Kennedys, The Riverview and Tom R. \_\_\_\_, run by a former policemen. Many people knew Patsy Lowrey's on Eighth Street with the backroom decorated in western style with sawdust on the floor and a tin-voiced piano echoing through the room. The price across the bar was fifty cents for whiskey and twenty-five cents for beer.

Dr. Arthur Payette, another Ecorse pioneer who practiced dentistry in Ecorse for 35 years in his office overlooking Hogan's Alley, pointed out a different side of bootlegging in Ecorse. Some ordinary citizens as well as professional bootleggers wanted to get rich quick and with the right connections, packaged ingredients for making beer could be acquired for nominal fees. Stills and other needed apparatus could be found in basements of houses concentrated on Goodell Street and some "home breweries" specialized in watering liquor by inserting a syringe through the cork of the bottle, extracting the liquor, and replacing it with water.<sup>76</sup>

Dr. Payette said that for several years the government did not make much of an effort to stop Canadian liquor from coming into the United States and when they did try to enforce the law, the rum runners usually won out. The rum runners would pay any price for a speedboat if it was fast enough to outrun the law. Some of the customers used to complain bitterly about the prices when protection had to be split five ways: local, federal, state, county, and customs. The doctor vividly recalled a state trooper who came to his office for a teeth cleaning. According to Dr. Payette, state trooper G\_\_\_\_ was already out to get Ecorse and during the teeth cleaning he managed to work in some comments about the interesting view of Hogan's Alley and the bootlegging activity in Ecorse. Dr. Payette silently continued cleaning the state trooper's teeth. "Minding one's own business was the best policy," the Doctor said.<sup>77</sup>

The *Detroit News* continued to publish stories detailed bootlegging operations in "wild west" Ecorse. Journalist F.L. Smith wrote in the *Detroit News* that "to have seen Ecorse in its palmy days is an unforgettable experience, for no gold camp of the old west presented a more glamorous spectacle. It was a perpetual carnival of drinking, gambling, and assorted vices by night and a frenzied business-like community by day. Silk-shirted bootleggers walked its streets and it was the Mecca for the greedy, the unscrupulous, and the criminal of both sexes. When the police desired to lay their hands on a particularly hard customer, they immediately looked in Ecorse and there they generally found him."<sup>78</sup>

The "perpetual carnival" began on August 11, 1921, when shipments of beer and liquor from Canada to the United States became lawful. This opened up a glittering world of rum running, roustabouts, and riches for the ordinary people of Ecorse. Immediately, three Ecorse workers took their savings and traveled to Montreal where the sale of liquor was legal. They bought 25 cases of whiskey and drove back to Windsor. Over and over they rowed a small boat back and forth across the river until all of their treasure was ferried to the American side. They posted a lookout for Canadian and American customs officials just in case, but all went well. They sold their liquor in Ecorse and used their profits to finance a second and third trip. Multiply these

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<sup>76</sup> Dr. Arthur Payette, interviewed by Jo Ann Coman in Ecorse, January 15, 1966.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> "Ecorse Feels Sting of Law," *The Detroit News*, July 31, 1922, p. 26

enterprises by thousands and you have some idea of the volume of rum running across the river. Both Canadians and Americans with their secret caches of beer and liquor waited “like Indians” among the trees and tall grasses on the Canadian side of the river. Boatloads of smugglers would glide across the river, signaling with pocket torches. A blue light flashed once and then twice – “all was clear.” A large sheet hung on a clothesline meant – “turn back immediately, police arrived.”

Rum running boats by the dozen were moored each day at the Ecorse municipal dock at the foot of State Street (now Southfield), which ran through the village’s central business district. Rum runners transferred their cargoes to waiting cars and trucks, while residents, police and officials watched. Officials erected a board fence to protect the waterfront but rum runners went around or beneath it. Some Canadian breweries set up export docks on the shore just outside of LaSalle, Ontario, which is directly across the Detroit River from Ecorse. Fighting Island, situated in the middle of the river between Ecorse and LaSalle conveniently hid rum runners from police patrols.

Rum running was ageless in Ecorse. Ecorse rum runners employed as many as 25 schoolboys as spies, lookouts and messengers. In 1922, police arrested a 15-year-old boy delivering a truckload of liquor to a Downriver roadhouse. The boy said that he was only one of several local boys working for the rum runners. He insisted that he worked only on weekends and nights so he would not miss school. These 13 to 16-year-old boys made such good lookouts that the police could not make unannounced raids on blind pigs and boathouse storage centers in Ecorse. The lookout boys usually spotted the police long before they arrived. One state police officer complained that “they spread out along the waterfront and are very awake and diligent.”

Federal and state officials also had a difficult time making rum running arrests stick in Ecorse because the local police were in sympathy if not cahoots with the rum runners. Rum runners served on juries and the only cases from Ecorse tried successfully were the ones tried in federal courts.

Another Wild West style battle between law and order and the rum runners and their defenders took place in 1928 in Hogan’s Alley in Ecorse. Several cars and three boats holding about 30 Customs Border Patrol inspectors gathered at the end of Hogan’s Alley at the foot of State Street (Southfield) to wait in ambush for the rum runners. Rum running boats pulled up to a nearby pier and the agents rushed them and arrested the seven crew members.

As soon as they were arrested, the crew of the boat yelled for help. Rescuers rushed from all around. Over 200 people arrived to stop the agents from leaving with the prisoners. The people attacked the customs agents’ cars. They slashed tires and broke windshields. They pushed other cars across the alley entrance and threw rocks and bottles at the agents. Before the situation became too desperate, the agents banded together, rushed the barricade, and escaped.

John Wozniak of Ecorse is remembered as one of the more honest rum runners. Wozniak’s early twenties coincided with the early rum running years in Ecorse. He was enterprising enough to form his own navy of twenty-five “sailors” to carry Canadian liquor into America across the

Detroit River. Wozniak gave his sailors standing orders to avoid violence. Wozniak's men did not carry arms and neither did he. When one of his men got caught, Wozniak backed him and his defense and paid the fine if the rum runner was convicted.

His love of sports ended John Wozniak's empire. He sponsored a football team and his team became well known in Ecorse, Lincoln Park, Wyandotte and River Rouge. Law enforcement people would come to the games, frequently to identify the rum runners on Wozniak's team. In 1928, federal law enforcement officials broke up a large bribery ring and with his protection gone, Wozniak was arrested. At his trial, Wozniak told the judge, "When I was indicted I was through for good. The law was getting too strong. I sold my boats and scuttled the others. I went into the automobile business and have done pretty well."<sup>79</sup>

In the early rum running days, the atmosphere on the river resembled a 24-hour party. Women participated with men in the bootlegging and the person in the next boat could be a local councilman or the school drama teacher. Boat owners could transport as many as 2,500 cases of liquor each month at a net profit of \$25,000 with the owner earning about \$10,000. Some rum runners made 800 percent profit on a load of liquor. The only real perils of the sea that the rum runners encountered during those first years were losing directions in the middle of the river at night and collisions with other boats.

In the winter the river often froze solid and the rum runners took advantage of the ice road. They used iceboats, sleds and cars to transport liquor from the Canadian side to Ecorse. Convoys of cars from Canada crossed the ice daily. Cars on the American shore lined up at night and turned on the headlights to provide an illuminated expressway across the ice. A prolonged cold spell in January and February of 1930 produced thick and inviting ice on Upper Lake Erie and the Detroit River. Hundreds of tire tracks marked the ice trail from the Canadian docks to the American shore. On a February morning in 1930, a *Detroit News* reporter counted 75 cars leaving the Amherstburg beer docks. He wrote that ten carried Ohio license plates and headed down river for south and east points on the Ohio shore. Others drove to the Canadian side of Grosse Ile. When they arrived on Grosse Ile, the liquor was loaded into camouflaged trucks and driven across the toll bridge to the American mainland.

But most of the cars drove from the Amherstburg docks to Bob-lo Park around the north end of Bob-lo Island. From there the trail headed west to the Livingston Channel. When the Channel was safely reached, the cars drove south for a mile where the trail forked. One trail led to a slip on the lower end of Grosse Ile. The other fork led about two miles further north. As the car drove, the road was about two miles from the upper end of Bob-lo Park to the Grosse Ile slip. Translated time wise, it was about a six-minute ride over the ice.

The dangerous part of the ride was along the Bob-lo Park side, where the ice was tricky. The rum runners drove as far as they could with two wheels on the shore. The road from the upper end of Bob-lo Island to Grosse Ile was safe and the ice solid. The rum runners did not try to hide their goods from the law. One of them told the *Detroit News* that "the law isn't the thing we fear most.

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<sup>79</sup> Henry Lee, *How Dry We Were: Prohibition Revisited* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963) p 76-78.

What we are really afraid of is the ice. Anytime it may give way beneath and let one of us through.”

The iceboats were the bane of the Coast Guard cutters because they were fast enough to be phantoms for the pursuers. Iceboats had obvious advantages over cars on frozen Lake St. Clair and the Detroit River. Sail equipped iceboats could speed across the river in 12 minutes or less. Law officers did not have much hope of catching them. The Detroit News summed up the situation: “A gust of flying snow and perhaps now and then a trace of silver canvas in the wind and the boats were gone.”

Both police and rum runners used their ice imaginations. Rum runners nailed ski runners to boats and pushed them across Lake St. Clair or towed several behind a car. When the police got too close, the rum runners cut their boats loose. The federal agents fit a spiked attachment called ice creepers over their shoes. But running with creepers was slow. Some rum runners knowing this, wore ice skates and gracefully skated away.

Then in 1921, the pirates, including a famous one called the Gray Ghost, moved in. Go-betweens called pullers would carry cash across the river to the Canadian export docks for large purchases. Many of the pullers were robbed and killed and their bodies tossed into the river. In 1922, it was a nightly occurrence to find bodies floating in the river near Ecorse. The Gray Ghost was responsible for a few of these bodies, but generally he remained a gentleman pirate and let his victims escape with their lives.

The Gray Ghost was the most famous pirate on the river. His official titles included pirate, extortionist, counterfeiter, and friend of the Purple Gang from Detroit. People called him the Gray Ghost because he piloted a gray boat and dressed entirely in gray, including a gray hat and a gray mask. He carried two gray pistols and a gray machine gun. One of his favorite tricks was plundering pullers on the way to Canada. He would intercept them in midstream, using his powerful speedboat to relieve them of their cash.

Once the rum runners got their liquor across the river from Canada, they could dispose of it in several ways. Some syndicates paid farmers \$20,000 or more to store liquor in their barns around Detroit. Others moved in, uninvited, to the docks and storage areas of the wealthy homeowners across the Detroit River and Lake St. Clair. In 1922 alone, at least \$35,000 worth of liquor came to Detroit through the 70 miles of river and lakefront stretching from Lake St. Clair to South Rockwood. When the Gray Ghost traveled to Canada for his buying trips, he had a large selection of liquor from which to choose. On the Canadian side of the river, the exporters had rows and rows of liquor docks. They could replenish their stock from 83 breweries and 23 distilleries.

The Gray Ghost continued pirating without too much interference and disposed of his booty among the bootlegging syndicates of Detroit. Then one day he made a fatal error. He purchased a large load of liquor in Canada with a bad check and irritated some prosperous wholesalers. Five of the wholesalers kicked in \$1,000 each and hired someone to eliminate the bad check problem. Rumor had it that the gunman worked for the Purple Gang, but the murder of the Gray Ghost

was never solved nor was his true identity ever discovered.

Ecorse continued to suffer a bad reputation throughout all of this rum running activity. Delos G. Smith, U.S. District Attorney, characterized Ecorse as one of two black eyes for Detroit.” To prove his point, he warned Mayor Bouchard that if he did not enforce some law and order within thirty days he would send in the State Police. The state police conducted a continuous waterfront vigil, powerful enough to cause most of the smugglers and bootleggers to move their business to Lake St. Clair in the north and Lake Erie in the south. But the liquor smugglers had one power point over the police. They had once used the patrol boat, the *Alladin* as a rum ship without the police ever knowing it.

It took more than four years of hard work and strategy for the police to capture and convict the bootleggers. When Jefferson Avenue was widened in 1929, the shacks along Hogan’s Alley were destroyed and the city bought the thin strip of land by the waterfront for a park.

Then Prohibition was repealed. A stroke of the pen demolished an entire flourishing industry in December 1933. The rum runners were legalized out of business and Ecorse city officials tore down the fence by the waterfront and created a park.

In 1936, the *Ecorse Advertiser*, summarized Prohibition and the changing waterfront in Ecorse when it published a lengthy obituary called Requiem for Walter Locke and Rum Row for Walter Locke, a waterfront colleague of Eli “Peck” LeBlanc. Walter Locke and his partner Ned Magee owned a boathouse restaurant at the State Street (now Southfield) dock and from this vantage point they witnessed the scores of men, boys, women and girls creating the Prohibition drama.

Locke saw the scattered boathouses on the banks of the river that had been built at the turn of the century for pleasure boating, but had been taken over by a generation of people who worked at night and got rich quickly. Rents for the waterfront shacks escalated from 10 dollars a month to one hundred. He saw smuggling grow in volume and intensity and a class of men rise who gloried in their own skill, strength, and acumen at outwitting the people who sought to enforce the Prohibition law.

Time passed and Locke heard the voices of thirsty Americans demanding whiskey and beer grow louder and he saw the profits for handling them climb higher. The price of cheap whiskey arose to one hundred dollars a case- whiskey which would eventually fall back to its norm of \$24 or \$30 a case.

Bootlegging demographics changed as adventurous youngsters and their outboard motor boats displaced the strong men rowing their sturdy boats across the Detroit River. It took the youngsters and their motorboats ten minutes to cover the distance it took a man an hour and forty minutes to row. Then, as cargoes grew bigger, the luggers, with their huge flat bottomed hulls that could hold hundreds of cases of beer and sleek, swift speedboats with more costly cargoes of whiskey displaced the motorboats.

Walter watched rum row blossoming at night into a sea of colored lights and music. He watched

the half mile south from State Street – now Southfield – to Ecorse Creek become a glittering cabaret center that became known as the “Half Mile of Hell.” The narrow streets were crowded with automobiles from dusk until dawn and people surged on foot from one spot to another in a frenzied search for entertainment. They paid fifty cents a bottle for beer and fifty or seventy-five cents for a glass of whiskey. A meal cost them two dollars and they tipped poor entertainers one dollar and thought they were getting their money’s worth.

Walter watched the gambling spots open and thrive in the encouraging atmosphere and witnessed fortunes made and lost on the turn of a wheel or the flip of a card. He saw one poor Ecorse man make \$100,000 in a single night and lose \$80,000 of it back again within a few days.

Everyone but “the Law” thrived. The uphill battle of “the law” did not change. Walter Locke saw the “Law”, always in clumsier boats than the bootleggers. The out-numbered “Lawmen hung with the tenacity of bulldogs on their quarry”, but better equipment and the sheer force of numbers thwarted their best efforts.

Then Walter Locke watched the fall of rum row on the Detroit River in Ecorse. It did not fall as gradually as it had risen, instead rum roll shattered like a bottle smashed against a brick wall. He watched the river front shacks where millions and millions of dollars’ worth of illicit liquor had been stored and passed on become disused and abandoned and then razed to their concrete foundations. He watched the narrow, dirt, River Road turn into a broad ribbon of concrete called Jefferson Avenue, and widen yet again almost to his doors. He watched a growing stream of traffic whiz by and drivers not even glancing at famous local history spots.

Walter and Ned sat on the little veranda of their house boat restaurant discussing a Requiem for Rum Row. Goodbye to the fortunes lost when “the Law” raided Rum Row and found the “plant” where the liquor was concealed. Goodbye to the whiskey cars that whipped into and out of the secret boat well garages. Goodbye to the shots ringing out in the night and the lifeless bodies on the river shores of the boys who had “taken the night boat to Buffalo.”

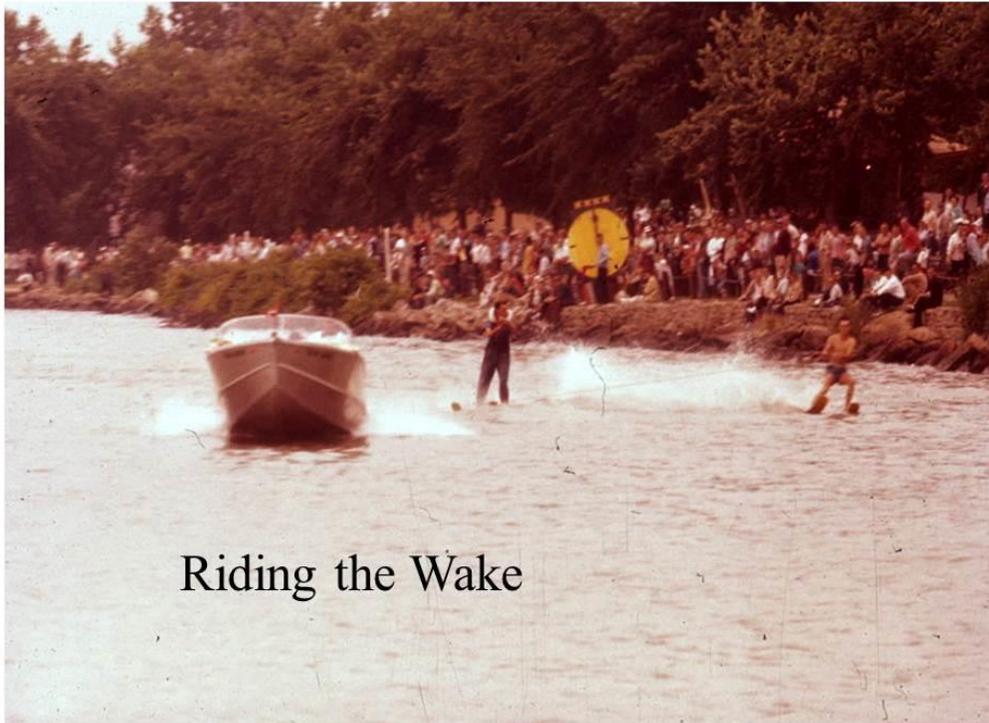
Goodbye to the fortunes won in overnight operation and to the desperate chances that were taken with life and liberty to make a “stake. Goodbye to the private operations of the “boys” and hello to the gangsters who muscled in to take the wealthier of the boys on a one-way ride. The jolly fellows who freely spent their money disappeared and tight-lipped gangsters took their places. The uproariousness of the water front turned into a furtive, stealthy fog. Once or twice a “muscler” offered to cut himself into Walter and Ned’s business. Ned would appear the next day with skinned knuckles or maybe his arm in a sling. Nothing else was said or done.<sup>80</sup>

Large scale bribery ruled the day and rum runners and prohibition agents went to jail. Legal exports from Canada stopped and it became more profitable to make beer on the side. Whiskey was cut and alky was brewed in alleys by “the Dagoes.” Suddenly Ecorse was “dead” and so was Walter Locke. If he had lived until the next summer, Walter would have watched trees spreading

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<sup>80</sup> William L.Lutz, “An Ecorse Boatman Recalls rum Running Tracks on the River,” The Detroit News, September 15, 1953, p. 34

leafy branches over the county park along the former Detroit River rum row where so much whiskey had been landed at midnight. Flowers swayed in the breeze where once dancers had swayed to cabaret music and fishermen instead of rum runners boated on the river. Perhaps, after all, Walter Locke watched and approved.



## Riding the Wake

Evening Chronicle

Marshall, Michigan

December 27, 1922

Lansing, Michigan, Dec.27—A single state trooper armed with two 44 caliber revolvers, kept more than \$5,000 worth of liquor intended for the Christmas trade in Michigan from being brought across the Detroit River, according to information reaching the state Department of Public Safety.

The trooper stationed on the Detroit River in River Rouge, kept guard 24 hours a day when the rum runners were expecting to bring their cargoes over from the Canadian side and prevented them from making a landing.

Ironwood Daily Globe

Ironwood, Michigan

July 14, 1923

Dry Agents Take 200 Motor Boats

Federal Men Face Large Mobs at Ecorse, Wyandotte,  
Trenton

Detroit, July 14- Federal prohibition agents assisted by co-representatives of the Treasury Department last night and early today seized 200 motor boats off Ecorse, Wyandotte, and Trenton in the Downriver Detroit. They conducted their operations in the face of an angry mob who the officers said attempted to dynamite a small bridge going across a boat well.

Traverse City Record Eagle

February 8, 1924

Pastor Spends Rough Evening, Practices What He Preaches and Gets Some Liquor Arrests

Detroit, Feb. 8----Rev. Marshall E. Hoyt, Methodist pastor at River Rouge, disguised himself as a laborer and walked onto Gold Tooth Bill's place to get a drink. But when he was told he would have to treat the girls, and Frances LaDuke, 25, coyly approached calling him "sweetie", so Rev. Hoyt alleged, he left without anything of a higher voltage than coffee. He came back however, with a squad of River Rouge police.

"Blah to you," said Frances as she was led away with Matt Dorez, the alleged proprietor.

Evening Chronicle

Marshall, Michigan

June 26, 1925

### Big Haul Made by Prohibition Agents

Detroit---June 26---Six men, a high powered launch, a total of 10,000 bottles of Canadian beer were captured by Prohibition agents at Wyandotte, small river town south of here, early today when the river and town was combed for booze and bootleggers.

The seizure was effected through cooperation of each forces with a federal speed boat. The federal craft sighted a suspected craft which slid up to the wharf and docked. Closing in simultaneously, prohibition agents found six men in the act of transporting liquor from the launch to the truck. The men surrendered without resistance.

The Wyandotte episode was "pulled" in pitch darkness and followed a similar seizure late yesterday of a speed launch by the prohibition navy off Belle Isle. Fifty cases and five half-barrels of beer were confiscated.

Prohibition activities of the last few days have netted at least five launches, federal sleuths said.



“Four hundred extra agents. Say, it would take 4,000 of them just to keep tab on the rum runner guards,” remarked one figure in the rum running game.

### Agents Outnumbered

Rum runners and bootleggers are thicker here than bees in a hive. They outnumber the dry agents 100 to 1. Their equipment is of the best. The geography of the Detroit District was made to order for them. The most efficient prohibition unit ever dreamed of, armed with limitless resources and whole legions of angels, could hardly hope to stop them.

The field of operations here extends from Toledo to Port Huron. For more than half of this distance the United States is separated from Canada only by a river. It would take a fair-sized army to patrol the river adequately. It would take an army to patrol the banks.

Bases of operation on the Canadian shore are innumerable. All of the way from Windsor to Amherstburg are docks and ships from which the swift speed boats of the rum runners set out for the United States. Most of the liquor is landed Ecorse and River Rouge. Grosse Isle, haven of the wealthy, also receives a lot of it; and there are scores and scores of concealed delivery points on the shores of Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair.

### 10,000 Cases a Day

Ten thousand cases of whiskey cross the river daily. This is a conservative estimate. The amount of beer that comes over is stupendous. The rum runner working day is 24 hours long. Armed convoys meet the boats. The liquor is unloaded and transferred to trucks in the twinkling of an eye.

There are nearly 50,000 private homes in Detroit in which liquor is made. The federal men are practically powerless to cope with these outfits, as it is almost impossible for them to make purchases, and without evidence obtained from an out and out purchase, they can not swear out search and seizure warrants.

Cheap whiskey retails here at \$40-\$50 a case. Good liquor from across the border sells at \$75-\$100 a case. Moonshine can be had for \$5-\$7 a gallon.

Bootleggers will make deliveries anywhere, any time. Beer is sold at around \$7 a case.

February 22, 1929

News Palladium

Benton Harbor, Michigan

17 Caught in Detroit Raids by U.S. Agents

Detroit, Feb. 22----Seventeen men were arrested on charges of violating the federal prohibition law last night by federal agents who raided 14 Downriver blind pigs, cabarets, and cafes.

Hundreds of patrons of the raided resorts were turned into the streets by the raiding party, which was led by Thomas H. Brennan, assistant prohibition director of Michigan.

The White Tree Inn, at Ecorse, which agents said was one of the oldest resorts in the vicinity, was entered and liquors valued at \$12,000 were seized and destroyed. Fixtures valued at several thousand dollars were sent to the government warehouse.

News-Palladium

Benton Harbor, Michigan

February 24, 1930

Police Stage Sudden Raids on Rum Joints

11 Held as Result of Liquor Drives in Eastern Michigan

Detroit, Feb. 24----Eleven men were today awaiting arraignment on charges of violating the state prohibition law as a result of 13 week-end raids by the state police in western Wayne County and Downriver communities.

The raids started suddenly yesterday afternoon under the direction of Captain Alonzo Gillette and Sergt. Carol W. Robertson. Bars and fixtures found in the establishments visited were destroyed and all liquor supplies were seized.

The places visited included the Silver Creek Club at Silver Creek where Adam Richards, the proprietor, was arrested; and a farm on the Dixie Highway in Gibraltar, where Julius Iwinski, was arrested; the Robber's Roost, at Territorial and Ecorse Roads, where Dominisk Tureco was arrested; a saloon at 2544 Oakman Boulevard, Melvindale, where Frank Cassidy was arrested.

Ed Coucher was arrested in a cabaret at 4579 West Jefferson Avenue in Ecorse; the proprietor of a cabaret at 4591 West Jefferson Avenue escaped the raiders by leaping through a second floor window, one H.E. Evans alleged to have been in charge was ordered to appear in court.

Milan Kojeck was arrested in a place at 224 Cherry Street, Wyandotte; Mike Gajic and Harold Kaylor were arrested in raids on two other Wyandotte establishments; one of them the White Elephant Café.

News Palladium

Benton Harbor, Michigan

December 30, 1932

Rum Raid at Border Nets 13 Prisoners

400 Cases of Beer and 29 of whiskey Are Also Seized

Detroit, Dec. 30---Thirteen men were held in jail here today following a foray by Coast Guardsmen and customs inspectors who combined forces yesterday to seize 400 cases of beer and 28 cases of whisky in the vicinity of Grosse Isle, near the north of the Detroit River. The liquor was being transported by two luggers and four row boats operated by four men. The quartet was arrested and later nine more men were taken into custody and charged with violating the United States Tariff Act.

The men taken with the liquor shipment were: Clyde Campbell, 40 years old, of Flat Rock; Henry Renuad, 43, of Horse Island; Richard Love, 48, of Wyandotte, and Frank Bailey, 27, of Trenton.

The nine arrested later were: Harry Millman, 36, of Ecorse; Leo Boucher, 30, of Detroit; Homer Beaubien, 33, of Newport; Alfred Holz, 33, and his brothers William, 35, and Howard, 23, of Monroe; George, 21, and his brother, Earl 17, of Monroe and Morton Weikert, also of Monroe.

Presence of Coast Guard forces indicated a well laid plan in anticipation of the large shipment those familiar with the patrol of the border said. Officials said they believe the nine men arrested following seizure of the liquor were members of the landing crew made necessary by the presence of the floes along the shore line.

## Chapter 30 – Downriver Voices



Photograph courtesy of the Ecorse Rowing Club

## Downriver Dancing Under the Trees



Rough and tumble pioneer dances called Bowery Dances grew up along with tiny Downriver villages like Ecorse, River Rouge and Trenton during the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. The Bowery Dances were held in four or five places along the Detroit River front at Rouge village, Emmon's Grove and at Quantz's Road house on the Pepper Road. People came from all along the river as far away as Toledo to attend these dances under the trees.

Torches flamed high, rude dances grew wilder, and old fashioned fiddle music joined the shouts

and laughter of the hunters and farmers who had gathered when news spread about a dance at one or the other of the various groves along the river front. Hard drinking and hard fighting usually punctuated the dance before the evening ended, because those were the days when a man's skill at fighting made him a man and excited words usually led to blows.

White people and Indians danced together in the pioneer version of the Bowery Dances. Elijah J. Goodell of Ecorse, born and bred in the old village, remembered when the white people and Indians used to dance together in the grove beside his father's house. According to Elijah, when he was a boy people who lived in the neighborhood for the most part were hunters and trappers and the first farmers were still busy clearing the heavily timbered land.

In those early days of Bowery dancing there were no advertisements or invitations. Someone would just look at the fine morning and decide to go up to Goodells or Rosseaus or Labadies and gathered together a dance. They would mount their ponies or get into a boat and paddle up the river to the next farm house, dragging the family along. From one farm house to another they would travel until a huge crowd had gathered. In those days everyone wore moccasins like the Indians and the women wore calico dresses and the men homespun hunting shirts and individualized hats.

Everyone danced on the level grass with boughs cut and thatched above them for shade in the afternoon and protection from the damp and dews at night. Eventually in the more popular groves, men collected huge rails and made a floor of them and everyone danced on the rough wood floor. Still later, when saw mills dotted the creek banks, men built board platforms for dancing and later yet, they built outdoor pavilions for dancing.

Elijah Goodell recalled that everyone joined the dancing, old fashioned square dancing, Virginia reels and country dances, and the Indians used to come over from Amherstburg and from their camps all up and down the Detroit River. When they had money to help pay the fiddler they joined in the dances and when they did not have money they stood aside and looked on, too proud to take part in the dance if they could not contribute something to the expenses. White men danced with the Indian women the same as with white women and Elijah remembered his mother teasing his father about 'that tall and handsome squaw' he danced with at one of the Bowery Dances.

According to Elijah, he saw the belle of the Bowery Dances, Kitty Coque, the daughter of a Native American chief who lived at Amherstburg, ride past his house on horseback. Kitty Coque was the prettiest, wealthiest, and most skillful dancer along the Detroit River. He saw her riding along with her beautifully beaded leggings and blue broadcloth blouse, fringed and beaded. "Yes, indeed, when she rode through Ecorse, every man along the river road would come out and speak with her and she was a bright talker too, and could give them as good banter as they sent," said Elijah. He said that Kitty married a chief in Amherstburg and sent her daughters to St. Louis to school, afterwards moving to St. Louis to live with them.

After the pioneer period of clearing land and settling farms, and the village period when Ecorse served as a trading place for farmers, industry moved in along the Detroit River. Villages

along the river were rapidly transformed from farm villages to manufacturing suburbs and the street railway was extended to Wyandotte and Trenton. As the villages grew more sophisticated, so did the transportation to the dances. The farmer boys brought in their rosy cheeked country girls from ten miles around in little two wheeled carts or gigs or sulkies to dance all night. After a night of dancing and drinking they rode home in the early morning.

People flocked to Emmon's Grove, a beautiful strip of pine woods just outside of Ecorse, in the early days of the Bowery Dance. As the country became more settled people converted groves into picnic grounds. Eventually every road house had its orchard and dancing pavilion connected with the grounds that encouraged the Bowery Dancing and the sale of beer. When sawmills and other manufacturers settled along the river, the farmer boys went to work in factories, laborers came in from the city, and the population grew. Many people came down from the city to the dances and transformed them from rustic to road houses and dance halls out-of-doors.

Following the old River Road, now Jefferson Avenue, across the River Rouge, the first roadhouse that appeared belonged to John Halfner. A large orchard adjoined a saloon building and in the orchard stood many green latticed arbors and a large dancing pavilion. The entrance was to the left of the building and a flickering torch lit the way across the path in the direction of the pavilion. Sometimes the head of the road house himself gave the balls and other times social organizations or church societies sponsored the balls.

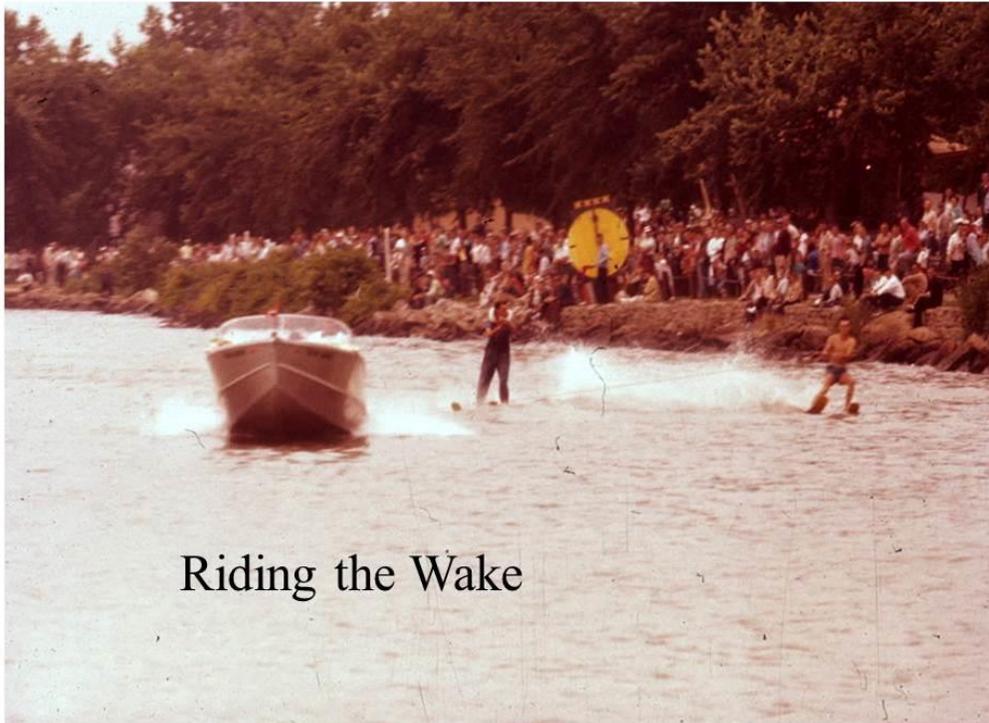
One night in August 1898 the Maccabees gave an open air ball on a ball night for a ball. It had rained heavily that afternoon, and little pools of water covered the ground and the trees dripped rain when breezes shook them. But the dancers came and huddled in a group around the edge of the pavilion, gossiping and chatting. Lines of dancers advanced, curtsied and swung to the music that the village shoemaker and his sons played on a pair of violins, a flute and a cornet. Under the dripping trees in the flickering shadows, young men and women flushed with dancing wandered arm and arm, while others sat on the benches under arching tree branches.

On the same Saturday night another dance took place at Charles Labadie's at Sand Hill, run by Felix Cicotte, and held for the benefit of the Sand Hill Baseball Club. The ball took place in the little pavilion of Labadie's orchard and the native French of Ecorse village, people from neighboring farms, and factory men and women from Wyandotte came to dance. Occasionally groups of young men ride their bicycles to the dances at Labadies and those at nearby Emmon's Grove. Sometimes the young men on bicycles discover that the night is too dark to ride home along the narrow bicycle paths so they seek shelter in neighboring barns. More than once an early rising farmer has found his backyard filled with an assortment of bicycles. As soon as they are discovered, the bicyclists hastily mounted their vehicles and rode toward the city in the sunrise glow.

The girls at the Sand Hill Base Ball Club benefit wrote white summer gowns and some of the men wore little tight caps and loose woolen shirts. The musicians wore shirts with rolled up sleeves. Most men wore their hats cocked on the back of their heads, and accented the effect by clamping a cigar stub tightly in the corner of their mouth. Other dancers smoked their pipes as they danced.

The beer stand stood in one corner of the grove and a line of thirsty men usually surrounded it. A shadowed pavilion stood down in the orchard and there young men and women sat in view of the rest of the grounds, hugging each other. A large crowd of children romped on the grounds. One little woman in black with a plain gold band on her hand brought five little children to the ball. The older children took turns rocking the baby in the carriage, and the little widow distributed her smiles and recaptured her youth among the young men standing around the edge of the pavilion.

She is the spirit of the Bowery Dances.



Riding the Wake

### **“Muskrat Love” Those Downriver Muskrat Dinners!**

Trapping and eating muskrat or the “marsh hare” has been a Downriver tradition since the French settlers who came with Cadillac trapped them for fur and meat. The muskrat, considered an epicurean delicacy when correctly prepared, is one of the cleanest of all animals, living on roots, herbs and marsh grasses. Muskrat dinners were and are popular in the entire Downriver area. The Cincinnati Times Star once quoted an invitation that a Frenchman named Pete extended to people to visit his Grosse Pointe home. He told them that his “ole womans” would cook mushrat for them and it would be so good that they would say dat de mushrat is



**MUSKRAT  
DINNERS**

**FRIDAY, FEB. 4th**  
6 p.m to 10 p.m.

**\$1.50**

**ALL YOU  
CAN EAT**

If you have never tasted Muskrat this is your chance  
... Bring the family they'll enjoy it.

**River Rouge Hotel**  
Anchor at Jefferson      River Rouge

“fish w'at swim de lac.”

Many a young man growing up in Ecorse and all of the other Downriver communities remembers trapping muskrat and taking them to the restaurant of Sam Pappas to be expertly cooked and served. Gus Pappas, Sam's son, has a colorful cache of muskrat stories from the days that he trapped them in Ecorse Creek and the Detroit River. Many Downriver French chefs have transformed preparing the plain muskrat roast into a gourmet exercise. In the Downriver tradition, the Ecorse Boat Club sponsored many muskrat dinners as fund raisers.

In February 1957, good news appeared on the gourmet front with the announcement of an Aquaba (muskrat) supper to be held beginning at 4 p.m. on Friday, March 8 at the St. Francis Xavier school auditorium, Outer Drive at West Jefferson, Ecorse.

Sponsored by the St. Anne Rosary Altar Society, the supper provided an “eat treat” for muskrat supper fans who had little opportunity to enjoy the delicacy as prepared by Gene Maurice. A renowned French style chef, Maurice prepared the muskrat from a jealously guarded French-Indian recipe handed down through his family for several generations. Anyone who preferred fish instead of muskrat could order it when purchasing tickets a few days in advance of the supper.

Mrs. Maria Lambrix, president of the altar society, named Mrs. Russell Goodell and Mrs. Leo McCourt co-chairmen of the supper. Tickets were purchased from members and at the door. Reservations could be made by calling Mrs. Lambrix, DU-1-3118.

Seven years later St. Francis Xavier was still sponsoring muskrat dinners. Again the St. Anne Rosary Altar Society and the Moms and Dads Club of St. Francis Xavier parish sponsored an annual Muskrat and Fish Dinner Friday, February 28, 1964 in the school auditorium beginning at

4:30 p.m. Mrs. Ella LaJoie was in charge of the kitchen and Mrs. Mary Layos of the dining room. They were assisted by men and women of both groups. On hand again this year as in the past in preparing this rare delicacy were Edwin Montry, James Clemens, Edward Lacross and Edward Stewart.

Mr. Stewart, president of the Moms and Dads club and Mrs. John Chrapko, president of the Altar Society, extended an invitation to all to attend the dinner. For those who were a little "leery" of trying the muskrat, there were plenty of fish and side dishes on hand.

Many Downriver residents, especially Catholics, are not aware of the reason they may eat muskrat on Fridays, since it obviously is not fish. In fact, this is the only region where muskrat is permitted to be served on Friday by the Catholic Church. A papal decree made this permissible back in the early 1700s, when during a famine, the early French settlers were hard pressed to obtain food. They appealed to the Pope, who granted a special dispensation for the people from Port Huron to Toledo along the waterway, and in certain parts of Canada. This right has never been revoked.

A tradition in the Monroe branch of the Reau family has it that the dispensation dates from the winter of 1813, when their family members were fleeing their homes after the battle of the River Raisin. They fled across the ice to Guard Island in Maumee Bay. Father Gabriel Richard of St. Anne's in Detroit found them huddled together in a starving heap in some Native American huts. They begged Father Richard for a dispensation to eat muskrat on Friday. Father Richard granted them their dispensation and since then settlers in the Maumee Bay area have claimed the dispensation to eat muskrat only for themselves and not for the rest of the French of Monroe or Newport.

The Monroe Democrat of January 5, 1906, reported a gala muskrat banquet in Monroe on Thursday December 28th and Friday, December 29th. Over a thousand people attended, including muskrat gourmets from New York, Chicago and Seattle, Bismarck, North Dakota; Saginaw, Bay City, Detroit, Ypsilanti, Mt. Clemens, Adrian, Blissfield, Monroe County, Toledo, Cleveland, Put-in-Bay and other Ohio points. There were 2,000 muskrats prepared and Commander Charles E. Greening, chairman of the committee reported receipts of \$1,500 and expenses of \$1,200.

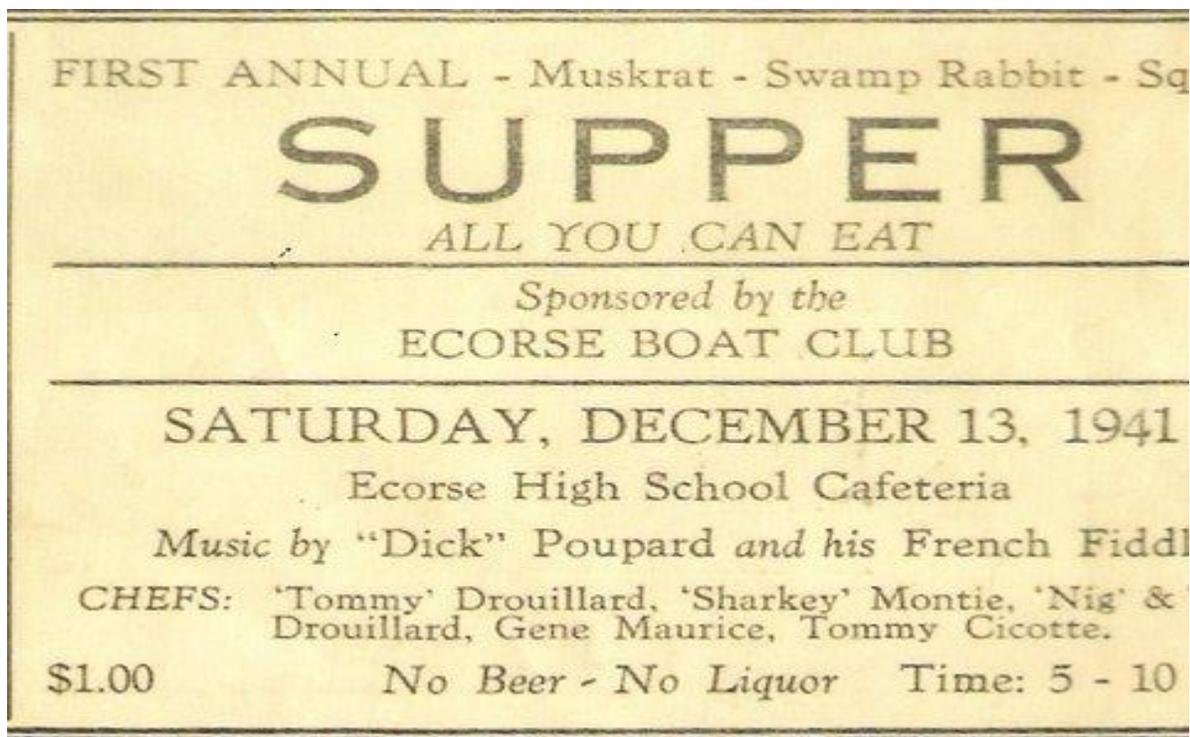
Another Monroe version of the Muskrat legend says that Catholics petitioned the Pope in Rome to declare the muskrat to be a fish since it lives in and around water. They argued that eating muskrat on Friday would be an inexpensive way to fulfill the requirement of not eating meat. Local legend has it that several French trappers in Monroe asked their priest whether or not muskrat could be a fish. Puzzled, the priest called a town meeting and the citizens debated the biological classification of the muskrat long and loud.

Finally, an old Frenchman stood up and declared, "The rat, he live in water- he no animal. The rat, he walk on land – he no fish. He mus" be vegetable."

Before the Second World War, countless Downriver housewives called on local trappers to provide muskrats throughout the season for regular Friday meals. Bishop Kenneth Povish in Lansing declared the muskrat question resolved in 1956 when the church ruled that eating

muskrat dated so far back that it had become an “immemorial custom,” as dictated by canon law. The bishop added that “anyone who could eat muskrat was doing penance worthy of the greatest saints.”

In 1987, the Archbishop of Detroit declared that muskrat could no longer be eaten as fish, a ruling that dismayed many local Catholics but did not deter them from eating muskrat dinners on Friday. Eating muskrat dinners is no longer tied in with fasting on Fridays, but Downriver Catholic Churches still hold muskrat dinners for parishioners and other muskrat gourmets. Protestant churches and secular enthusiasts also hold muskrat dinners.



In the mid 1980s after the United States Department of Agriculture closed down all Michigan muskrat farms, John came up with the idea of importing muskrats from Canada. His muskrat dishes are popular during Lent and all year around with many customers

Muskrat Dinner Downriver

The Kola Food Factory in Riverview is one of the Downriver Restaurants that serve muskrat. Owner John Kolakowski is an avid hunter.

## St. Francis Muskrat Dinner for Four People

Muskrat can be roasted in tomato sauce, accompanied by cabbage and potatoes or apples and onions.

3-4 muskrats (all fat and glands removed)

1/2 lb bacon

1/2 bunch celery, chopped

4 onions, chopped

1/2 lb oleo

1/2 tsp cayenne pepper

salt

pepper

21 oz canned tomato soup with no water added.

Sauté<sup>ed</sup> bacon, celery, onions, oleo, and cayenne pepper together for 10 minutes.

Put rats in bottom of a roaster. Pour sautéed mixture over the rats, and then cover with tomato soup. Bake, covered, for 2 1/2 hours at 350 deg. F or until done.

## Barbeque Muskrat

Yield: 1 batch

1 medium muskrat

Salt and water for soaking

1/4 cup chili powder

1/4 cup paprika

1 cup tomato puree

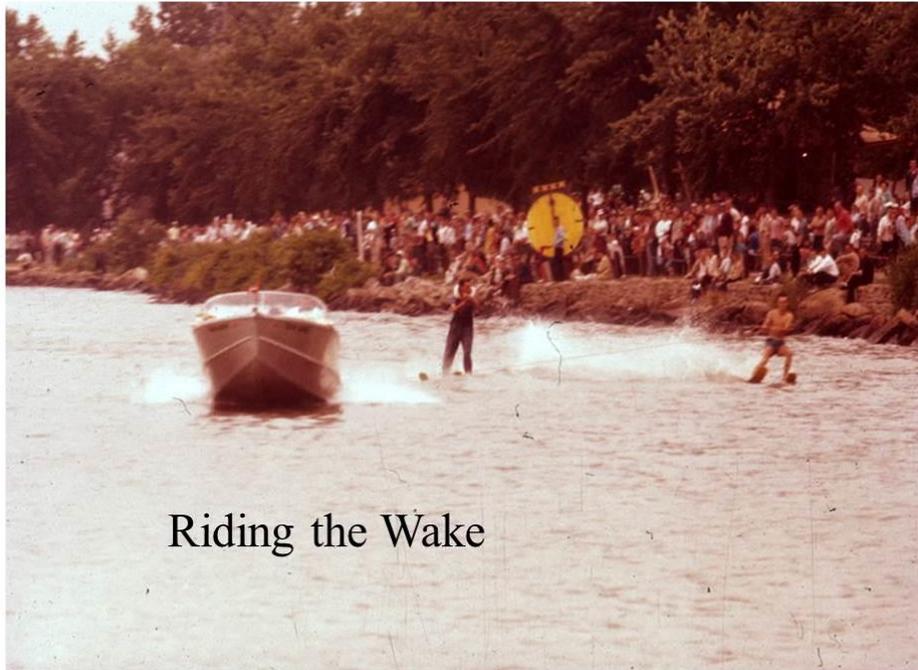
1/2 cup molasses

1/2 cup onion, grated

Salt and pepper

Cut muskrat into serving pieces and soak overnight in salt water to cover. Drain and dry. Dredge with mixture of paprika and chili powder. Place on grill over coals with a drip pan underneath.

Mix remaining ingredients and correct seasoning. Baste meat frequently and turn often until tender.



Judge Halmor Emmons Built a Country Home in  
"Swampy Ecorse"



## Camping on Emmons Boulevard - 1918

“I determined to seek a standing at the bar first, to do my whole duty to my clients, and never seek without the profession the slightest advancement. If collateral success of reputation came, I determined it should be accidental or when I had faithfully tried my utmost efforts at the bar.”<sup>81</sup>

Emmons Boulevard lies in Wyandotte, across the Jefferson Avenue Bridge that divides Ecorse and Wyandotte, a bridge that spans the meeting of the Detroit and Ecorse Rivers. The life of Judge bridges the pioneer days of legal and social history in Detroit and Ecorse. He gave his name to the farm stretching back from the banks of the Ecorse River (Creek) that he bought despite the puzzled questions of his Detroit contemporaries in the 1840s wondering why he wanted to locate at Ecorse and spend so much money on “that swamp of a place.”

His name on part of the land he bought is just part of the considerable legacy Halmor Emmons left to Michigan. He practiced law in Detroit from 1838 to 1870, carving a niche for himself in maritime and railroad cases. In 1870, President Ulysses S. Grant appointed him a Justice of the Sixth District Court in Michigan, and he served until his death on May 14, 1877. During the Civil War, he acted as an agent for the Union government. Despite all of his accomplishments, Halmor Emmons remained true to himself and his family and a likeable Nineteenth century human being.

### **Halmor Emmons Prepared for a Career in Law**

Friend Palmer, in his *Early Days in Detroit*, observed that his friend Judge Halmor Emmons planted many evergreens and other trees and flowering shrubs on his newly acquired farm. He noted that Judge Emmons made a striking picture riding the River Road when he held court, “with his saddlebags behind him going to and from his farm in Ecorse.”

Halmor Emmons had an excellent reason to buy a 622-acre farm on the banks of the Ecorse River where “the bullfrogs sang.” His poor health had been a nagging background accompaniment to his ambition since his younger days as a lawyer in Cleveland. Years later in Detroit, one of his doctors had advised him, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, to move to a place where he could catch malaria instead of consumption! Another doctor told him to move to Northern Michigan and “live among the pines.” Halmor Emmons listened to his doctors and then he consulted a Wyandotte medicine man who took him to view the land at the point where the Ecorse River meets the Detroit River. Mineral deposits abounded and the Wyandotte Native Americans considered it a healing ground.

The rural charm and quiet of the village of Ecorse at the junction of the Detroit and Ecorse Rivers eight miles away from the clatter and bustle of nineteenth century Detroit soothed

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<sup>81</sup> -Halmor Emmons from Portraits of eminent Americans now living with biographical and historic memoirs of their lives and actions – John Livingston New York, 1853, vol. 2 –

Halmor's city and law practice jangled nerves. Halmor Emmons built a house on the banks of Ecorse River and his biographers said that he traveled there every summer to live "amongst the reeds and the bull frogs."

Biographies like The Early Bench and Bar in Detroit from 1805 to the end of 1850 by Robert Bud Ross, described Halmor as standing about 5'8" tall with a spare frame. He had a dark complexion, piercing eyes, straight black hair and he wore a full beard and no mustache, the style of his day. The biographies noted that Halmor had a "feeble constitution."

The years before Halmor had moved to Detroit had been as busy as the growing city itself. When he arrived in Detroit in 1838, Halmor Emmons was still an attorney who had reluctantly left Cleveland to join his father in his Detroit law practice. Born in the small town of Sandy Hill in upstate New York on November 22, 1814, Halmor was the son of newspaperman Adonijah Emmons. As a boy Halmor Emmons developed a love of books that would stay with him for the rest of his life, and when the family moved further west to Keesville, New York, he made an educational arrangement with his father. Halmor attended school three days a week and the other three days he worked for his father's newspaper. He set type for the paper, worked to advertise it and build up its circulation and delivered it to subscribers.

Although Halmor only attended school three days, he earned good grades and his biography noted that Halmor learned most of his Latin grammar while riding his horse back and forth to school or on newspaper business.

As a young man working as a store clerk, Halmor Emmons gave his employer complete satisfaction and also kept up with his studies. Rising at five o'clock every morning, he would fulfill his clerking duties and after that he would study his books every evening until bedtime. Two of his friends from that period of his life, James Cronkhite, who studied literature and John H. Martindale, a talented young lawyer, influenced Halmor so profoundly with their ambition and professional aspirations that he decided to become a lawyer instead of a clerk or an accountant.

In 1837, soon after Halmor Emmons passed the bar, Nicholas Hill, Esq. of Saratoga Springs, New York, offered him a partnership. Halmor was dazzled that the author of Cowan and Hill's notes wanted him as a partner, but with the backing of his family, Halmor Emmons read law and worked at the firm of Stowe & Stetson in Keesville, in northern New York. Lawyers Stowe and Stetson were not inclined to be hands-on mentors; instead, they gave Halmor the requisite four volumes of *Blackstone* to study.

Dutifully, Halmor read Blackstone and made notes, but then he rebelled, arguing that Blackstone was dry and uninteresting. Instead, against all precedent and advice, he read lawyers that he considered relevant and interesting, including *Chitty's Contracts*, *Cowan's Justice Court Treatise*, and *Phelp's Evidences*. Halmor thoroughly studied and understood the law books and made notes about the points of law he learned from them. In his two years with Stowe & Stetson, he rapidly mastered the elementary principles of the law, and quickly gained recognition for his ability to prepare briefs.

After his two year stay in Keesville, Halmor moved to Essex, New York, where he spent two years in the law office of Honorable Henry H. Ross. After two years with Judge Ross, Halmor considered the effect on his fragile health of long strenuous hours of study and research it would take to keep up with the lawyers in Albany and other populous New York cities and decided that he would make a move West.

### **Halmor Emmons Practiced Law in Detroit**

Like many others before him, Halmor Emmons thought that the legal work in the West – as Ohio and Michigan were then considered – would be less strenuous, so he decided to move to Cleveland, Ohio and set up practice there. Halmor had also established a connection with one of the prominent lawyers in Cleveland and began to build a promising legal practice when his father asked him to come to Detroit to join the family law firm, A. Emmons & Sons.

It seems that lawyering dominated the Emmons family. Jed Philo Clark Emmons, Halmor's younger brother, completed his law studies and moved to Detroit in 1836. After Jed established himself as a lawyer, his father Adonijah Emmons who had passed the New York Bar exam years earlier, abandoned his newspaper and moved to Detroit to join his son's law practice. In 1838, Adonijah and Jed invited Halmor to join them in their Detroit law practice, and in 1838, Halmor moved to Detroit and the father and two sons practiced law as the firm of A. Emmons & Sons.

### **Halmor Emmons – Marine Lawyer**

Detroit's location on the Detroit River which linked the upper and lower Great Lakes made it an important shipping artery and soon Halmor Emmons turned his attention to marine law. In November 1841, A. Emmons & Sons tried the Fitch & Newberry & Goodell case., deciding the rights to a consignment of goods shipped to Detroit on the schooner *Lafayette*. Another of Halmor Emmons' early marine law cases, Hale and Hale vs. the ship *Milwaukie* in 1844, involved a cargo of wheat that the Hales shipped on the *Milwaukie* that didn't arrive in port.

Over three decades later in 1873, Halmor Emmons still tried marine cases, including the famous *Dove* and *Mayflower* collision in the St. Clair River. The *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser* reported on March 26, 1873, that Judge Emmons of the U.S. Circuit at Detroit had upheld the decision of Judge Longyear of the District Court that the *Mayflower* was at fault. Judge Emmons found a judgment against the *Mayflower* for several thousand dollars in damages.

A few days later The *Cleveland Herald* of March 28, 1873, reported that Judge Emmons had reversed Judge Longyear's decision in the case of John Demass vs. the brig *C.P. Williams*. Judge Longyear had ruled in the District Court that a case brought by John Demass, owner of the tug *General Grant* against the *Williams* couldn't be sustained because there was no lien against her.

John Demass appealed the case to the Circuit Court, and Judge Emmons reversed the decision and ordered a decree to be entered in favor of Demass for the entire amount claimed. Judge

Emmons said that the time charged for was consumed whether the tug actually hauled the vessel off or not, and the lien existed irrespective of the question whether the tug was actually attached to the vessel or not. Halmor Emmons argued maritime cases during the January 1849 Michigan Supreme Court, including Robinson vs. the Steam Boat Red Jacket and Lawson et al. vs. Higgins et al concerning the building, fitting, and furnishing of a vessel,

### **Halmor Emmons, Railroad Lawyer**

The Western railroads developed at pace with the career of Halmor Emmons, and he quickly saw the opportunity to establish a new and profitable branch of his law practice. Eventually, most of the railroad lines going through Detroit hired Halmor Emmons to be their counsel-in-chief, including the Grand Trunk, Great Western, Detroit & Milwaukee and Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railroads. He became known as one of the leading railroad lawyers of his day.

Often, Halmor Emmons allowed his benevolent disposition to overcome his courtroom manner. One Detroit winter, rains had made the roads into the city impassable and the price of wood escalated from \$1.75 to \$6.00 a cord. One morning Halmor realized that if the poor people of Detroit didn't acquire some wood, they would freeze. Walking along the street, Halmor asked the first man he came to, "Are you around notifying?"

"Notifying what?" the man asked.

"The meeting in the United States court room to immediately procure fuel for the poor. It takes place at nine o'clock."

"I had not heard of it, but will do what I can," the man said.

"Very well, tell everybody you see to come," said lawyer Emmons.

He stopped other people on the street to tell them the same news, and in ninety minutes the court room overflowed with people. People subscribed thousands of dollars and in an hour or two the immense wood piles of the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railroad were distributed to the poor people who needed wood. The daily papers published the story with great fanfare, but at his request, they didn't publish the name of Halmor Emmons.

In his role as leading counsel for the Great Western Railroad in its case against the Commercial Bank of Canada, Halmor Emmons traveled to London to meet the president, directors, and leading lawyers of the Great Western Railroad to plan their legal strategy. During the meeting he revealed an encyclopedic knowledge of English railroad law that astonished his colleagues.

After one of the meetings, the railroad president asked Halmor to repeat his presentation so that a stenographer could record it. The railroad president noted that the group had been discussing common law, equity and railroad law, and asked Halmor what he considered to be his specialty. Halmor replied that he knew something about common law, equity, and railroad law, but he considered admiralty law to be his specialty.

## **Halmor Emmons, Temperance Advocate**

Halmor Emmons worked to keep his law practice and his personal life separate, but one case pushed that resolve to the breaking point. Halmor Emmons believed firmly and wholeheartedly in temperance, and he started a small temperance group in Detroit that soon grew into a larger organization.

One of the 1840s cases that Halmor Emmons tried involved the Reverend Dr. Duffield, a learned and widely known Presbyterian minister lecturing in Detroit. In his lectures Dr. Duffield harshly criticized the Catholic Church and the Irish for what he perceived to be their zealous love of spirits and lack of enthusiasm for the Temperance cause. The lectures created much excitement in Detroit, because at the time many Irish Catholic immigrants had settled there.

Alarmed at Dr. Duffield's inflammatory words against the Irish, the Reverend Catholic Bishop of the Diocese, perhaps Bishop Peter Paul Lefevere, and several learned priests called a counter meeting to denounce who they considered the Presbyterian rabble rouser and bigot. Heated rhetoric abounded and the atmosphere between the two factions grew tense as the evening progressed. Then Halmor Emmons decided to intervene. Calmly he stood up and he defended Reverend Duffield's right to preach against Catholicism, the Irish, repeal, temperance, and the welfare, temporal or eternal, of his fellow citizens.

Halmor Emmons argued persuasively enough to convince both sides of the controversy to adopt a resolution affirming the respect everyone felt for Dr. Duffield and acknowledging his human right to be mistaken in some of his facts. The young lawyer's argument resonated even more powerfully when people learned that he was not a particularly religious person. The case earned Halmor Emmons local and statewide recognition.

Halmor Emmons was a consistent and dedicated temperance advocate and worked tirelessly for the cause for most of his life.

## **Halmor Emmons, Abolitionist**

In 1843, Adam and Sarah Crosswhite and their four children, of Carroll County, Kentucky, discovered that their owner, Francis Giltner, intended to break up their family by offering some of them for sale. Traveling the Underground Railroad, the Crosswhites fled north and settled in the Calhoun County, Michigan village of Marshall. Marshall, Michigan, boasted a population of about 700 people, including at least 50 escaped slaves and free black families. Soon the Crosswhites had settled in and were comfortable to the extent that they sent their children to the racially integrated school and eventually had another child.

The Crosswhites enjoyed four years of freedom and then in January 1847, four slave catchers from Kentucky arrived in Marshall. Francis Troutman, a nephew of Francis Giltner, the Crosswhite's owner, verified the identities of the Crosswhites by hiring a deputy sheriff to visit them disguised as a census taker.

In late January 1847, a slave catching posse came to the Crosswhites' house. Francis Troutman, David Giltner, son of Francis Giltner, and two other Kentuckians tried to arrest the Crosswhites. Accounts vary as to how the neighbors were alerted, but they were alerted and soon a crowd of about 200-300 black and white Marshall residents surrounded the Crosswhite house.

Eventually, banker Charles Gorham and several other prominent Marshall citizens arrived, and after some consultation, banker Gorham introduced a resolution declaring that the Crosswhites wouldn't be captured and sent back into slavery. The townspeople backed them up and Francis Troutman and the other slave catchers were arrested for assault, battery, and housebreaking. They stood trial as the Crosswhites escaped to Canada over the Underground Railroad. The slave catchers returned to Kentucky, where their case galvanized the pro slavery forces and increased the animosity between the North and South.

The slave catchers returned to Michigan in December 1847 to bring a civil suit in the United States Circuit Court for the District of Michigan for \$2,752, the supposed slavery value of the Crosswhite family. Abner Pratt, a future judge of the Michigan Supreme Court and John Norvell, a United States Attorney for Michigan, represented Giltner who sued twelve Marshall residents. The number sued eventually shrank to seven Marshall residents, three white men who led the meeting outside the Crosswhite home – Charles T. Gorham, Dr. Oliver Cromwell Comstock, Jr. and Jarvis Hurd, and four black men who stopped the raiders from leaving before reinforcements arrived, Charles Bergen, Planter Morse, James Smith, and William Parker.

The defendants retained Halmor H. Emmons, a future U.S. Circuit Judge, as lead attorney, Calhoun County Prosecutor Hovey K. Clarke and prominent Detroit attorneys Theodore Romeyn, James F. Joy, and Henry H. Wells. On June 1, 1848, the trial began at the U.S. Courthouse in Detroit, on the corner of Jefferson Avenue and Griswold Street. United States Supreme Court Justice John McLean, sitting as a judge of the Circuit Court, presided. The jury didn't reach a unanimous verdict and the case was discharged.

At the second trial held in November 1848, the jury awarded Frank Giltner \$1,926 in damages plus costs, relying on the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 as a rationale for the judgment. The verdict paved the way for more slave catchers to attempt to recapture fugitive slaves living in Michigan as well as the entire United States. Halmor Emmons continued to act individually and as an attorney to aid the cause of fugitive slaves in Detroit.

### **Halmor Emmons and the Portraits of Eminent Americans Biography**

In 1853, John Livingston published a book called *Portraits of Eminent Americans Now Living with biographical and Historic Memoirs of Their Lives and Actions*, New York, 1853, and it included a sketch of Halmor Emmons, among those of many other prominent Americans of the time. Reading the sketch of Emmons and comparing it with other sketches is an exercise in wading through overblown, flowery Nineteenth Century writing to find meaning. Although the work is supposed to be autobiographies that all of the people involved paid to have included in the book, it is difficult to see how Judge Emmons could have written the meandering, ambiguous

synopsis of court cases that make up most of his so called biography. There are small nuggets of biographical information included, but they are few and far in between. The Halmor Emmons biography extends 34 pages, the longest in the collection, but most of it concerns what author John Livingston considers his notable court cases.

Portraits of Eminent Americans provoked much unfavorable comment among elder members of the Detroit Bar, and when the criticism reached the ears of Halmor Emmons, he decided to act. He made it his business to either personally or by proxy visit everyone he knew who owned the book and he bought it at any price the owner asked. There is no record of how many books he bought back, out of honest embarrassment at the fawning tone of the biography, but he probably paid a hefty figure for his embarrassment.

### **Halmor Emmons - Excitable, Emotional, Impulsive Outside of Court**

An anecdote about Halmor Emmons illustrates his out of the courtroom personality. For years, Halmor Emmons occupied an office in the old Rotunda Building in Detroit on Griswold Street. The Rotunda featured a large open space in the center with offices and galleries on each floor, arranged so closely together that people could talk to each other from their doorways. Many of Detroit's leading lawyers including William Grey, Theodore Romeyn, Ashley Pond, and John S. Newberry, occupied offices in the Rotunda along with Halmor Emmons. One day while he sat in his office, Halmor read an article in an agricultural paper stating that gas tar was a certain remedy for bugs and insects on fruit trees.

The article engaged his full attention and set his heart racing, because these same bugs infested his vast orchard in Ecorse. He decided to try the gas tar at once! He jumped into a buggy and went to the Detroit gas works where he bought several barrels of tar and sent them immediately to his home and orchards in Ecorse. By the next day, he had hired a dozen French workers to apply the coal tar to his trees.

The next week Halmor sat in his office reading the next issue of the same paper, and he noticed a paragraph that made him sit up straight and swear. He read an apology for an earlier misprint that said that by mistake the writer had recommended gas tar instead of pine tree tar to use on the insects. Gas tar was poisonous to vegetable life and would certainly kill young fruit trees.

The lawyers with offices near Halmor Emmons rushed to their doors to listen to him curse the agricultural paper "with a fiery vehemence that resounded through the building, at the same time tearing the paper to shreds, gesticulating like maniac, howling like a lion and swearing at intervals that he would sue the condemned paper."

William Grey asked, "What on earth is the matter?"

Theodore Romeyn said reassuringly, "Oh, it's only Hal Emmons giving somebody a piece of his mind."

This week, Halmor Emmons moved just as quickly as he had last week. By night time, the same

group of French workers was seen scraping the gas tar from his trees.

### **Halmor and Sarah Emmons**

Outside of his law office, Halmor Emmons is said to have preferred simple manners and tastes, been most affectionate toward his family, and never allowing professional opposition or rivalry to interfere with his social life.

Reverend Dr. Boues married Halmor Emmons and Miss Sarah Williams in Batavia, New York and according to the *Portraits of Eminent Americans* biography that embarrassed Halmor so much, she was one of the most beautiful and intelligent women in both New York and Michigan. The 1850 census revealed that the Emmons family lived in Hamtramck. By 1860, the Emmons family was living in Ecorse, at least part of the time and they had four children, Clara, Elizabeth, Sarah and Halmor, Jr.

Although Halmor wasn't a professing Christian, Sarah Emmons was a devout Christian. She believed in the effectiveness of family prayer and conducted family worship with her children in her own bedroom every day. She felt strongly that grace should be said at the table and setting aside her shyness, she decided to ask the blessing at each meal and created a time table when she would begin. The first evening of her grace timetable, Halmor Emmons brought Chief Justice Field and Governor Alpheus Felch to dinner. Later recalling the occasion, Sarah Emmons said, "I felt as if my heart would fly out of my mouth, but I asked the blessing, and I never again felt the least timid. God's grace was all sufficient."

### **Halmor Emmons, Law and Politics**

Clients and colleagues alike recognized Halmor Emmons as a young man of great legal ability and predicted that he would be an extremely successful lawyer. When Adonijah Emmons died in 1843, the family legal practice dissolved and Halmor Emmons formed a partnership with fellow Detroitter James Van Dyke.

According to The Early Bench and Bar of Detroit, fellow attorney Levi Bishop remembered Halmor Emmons as a man of legal ability and compassionate action.

If Halmor saw a poor, friendless boy struggling to survive, he would mentor him and lead him toward achieving his potential. He had many apprentices in his law office and he taught each of them the law with the method he had learned himself, instructing them to thoroughly read and understand each book, make notes about the books, and study them and think about the principles of law. Halmor Emmons followed this method for all of his legal cases, even after he became a judge.

Halmor Emmons displayed this same generosity of spirit in handling his law library, one of the largest in the west. He loaned his books to students and young lawyers without charge. He filled his extensive case of briefs with slips, marking their loan to various professional friends and he handed out arguments that had required elaborate, time consuming preparation to other lawyers

as readily as he shook their hand.

For more than ten years, John A. Van Dyke and Halmor H. Emmons were law partners, and both being able men, their firm enjoyed a large volume of business. Halmor's health continued to decline and in 1853, he tried reduce his hours and spend more time at his Ecorse farm. After John Van Dyke died in 1855, Halmor continued the practice and found himself busier than ever.

Although he was supposedly semi-retired from the law and just on the edge of politics, Halmor Emmons found himself centrally involved in both. At first Halmor was a Whig with free soil leanings, but he helped found the Republican Party in Michigan in 1854. He remained a champion of Republican faith and principles, with the exception of a brief exploratory excursion into the ranks of the Constitutional Union party in 1864.

The Republican Party was first organized in the state of Michigan in 1854, with Charles T. Forhain, Asa B. Cook, George Ingersoll, Erastus Hussey, Hovey K. Clarke, Austin Blair, Zachariah Chandler, and Halmor H. Emmons the most influential organizers. Each of them had been involved in the Crosswhite case as an interest party or counsel. With the help of these persuasive and influential men, the Republican Party eventually destroyed the institution of slavery.

### **Halmor Emmons, Civil War Secret Agent**

With the coming of the Civil War in America, Halmor Emmons skillfully used his geographical location in Detroit, his connections in Detroit, in Michigan, and in Washington, D.C., and his skills in oratory and diplomacy to become an effective Union secret agent in Canada. He commanded a corps of detectives and carried out dangerous assignments, including an early mission to obtain evidence of the Rebel plot to introduce yellow fever infected rags into the ports of Northern states.

Halmor Emmons traveled throughout Canada with his fellow Detroitier George Jerome, who also served as counsel for the Detroit and Milwaukee Railroad. One night the two men stopped at a Quebec hotel and heard news of a Union Army defeat. Several Southerners boarding at the hotel celebrated the Union setback with loud enthusiasm. George Jerome possessing a calm and cool temperament, ignored the noisy celebration, but Halmor Emmons who was known to be emotional and excitable except in court, took exception to the celebration. He stood on a stairway overlooking the crowd and shouted that they were cowards hiding in a foreign country instead of staying home and fighting for their beliefs. When the landlord tried to calm him down, Halmor Emmons included him in his harangue. Then he saw that his words were inflaming the situation to into a riot and he used his oratorical skills to calm everyone into civility.

At a hotel during another trip, this time in the company of one of his daughters and George Jerome, Halmor Emmons denounced several southern men for discussing secession sentiments in front of his daughter. Afterwards, George Jerome declared that he wasn't going to travel with Halmor Emmons again.

## **A Meeting with Jefferson Davis**

In 1866, Jefferson Davis, former president of the Confederate States of America, rented a house in Montreal. Jacob Thompson, Secretary of the Interior under President James Buchanan and Mississippi Governor during the Civil War, also lived in Montreal.

One day when Halmor Emmons and a fellow attorney from Detroit, E.W. Meddaugh, were in Montreal on business, they met Jacob Thompson who invited them to call on Jefferson Davis. The three men visited Jefferson Davis and were so well wined and dined that they didn't leave until long after midnight. According to E.W. Meddaugh, Jefferson Davis and Halmor Emmons monopolized the conversation which mostly refought the recent Civil War. Both men were magnificent debaters and they exhaustively argued topics from the cause of the war, the relationship between ex-slaves and white people, the treatment of Rebel and Union prisoners, and the possibilities of reconstruction. At times the debate became loud and fiery, but it didn't become unruly or rude. E.W. Meddaugh later said that he would have paid a pretty penny for a stenographic recording of the debate.

## **Attorney Halmor Emmons Becomes Judge Emmons**

On January 10, 1870, as the first appointment under a recent law, President Ulysses Grant nominated Halmor Emmons to be a United States Circuit Judge covering the states of Michigan, Tennessee, Ohio, and Kentucky. The United States Senate quickly confirmed him and he received his commission on January 17, 1870.

His new judgeship didn't bring Judge Emmons instant riches. By 1870, his earnings were estimated at from \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year, and when he accepted his appointment as a United States Circuit Judge, he accepted a salary of \$6,000 a year. The new Judge Emmons made decisions marked with an exhaustiveness of comment and authority, which while voluminous were always consistent and clear in their statements and conclusions.

The newly appointed Judge Emmons spent much time traveling his circuit in other states, but he stayed on his Ecorse farm with his family between trips. He still ruled on some of his favorite maritime cases, including the July 1875 Lake Superior Ship Canal Railroad and Ship Company bankruptcy litigation, which was reported in the New York Times.

Declining health, including the hint of tuberculosis, had plagued Halmor Emmons for years, but cancer of the stomach finally claimed his life. For six months he was confined to his room, but he still gave a few decisions in chambers. Then in March 1877, he abandoned all of his judicial labors because his disease had claimed all of his physical powers. Judge Halmor Emmons retained his mental powers and he affectionately said goodbye to his wife Sarah and his family and friends before his death at age 62, on May 14, 1877. Reverend Dr. Boues of Batavia, New York, who had married Halmor and Sarah Emmons, had been passing through Detroit, and had called on him when he heard of his critical condition. Ironically, he attended Halmor's death as well as his marriage.

On May 15, 1877, a large crowd of lawyers from the Detroit Bar Association and many friends attended a meeting in Judge Emmons' courtroom to remember him. A committee of five, Judge Henry B. Brown, Ashley Pond, Theodore Romeyn, Judge Charles I. Walker, and Samuel T. Douglass, was appointed to prepare a suitable eulogy. The next day the Detroit Bar members again assembled in Halmor Emmons' courtroom and marched to his residence at 133 Henry Street in Detroit to escort his body to St. John's Episcopal Church on Woodward Avenue and then to Elmwood Cemetery. Emmons Boulevard and Emmons Court still bear his name and some of the trees that Halmor Emmons and his farm laborers planted still grow in both Ecorse and Wyandotte.

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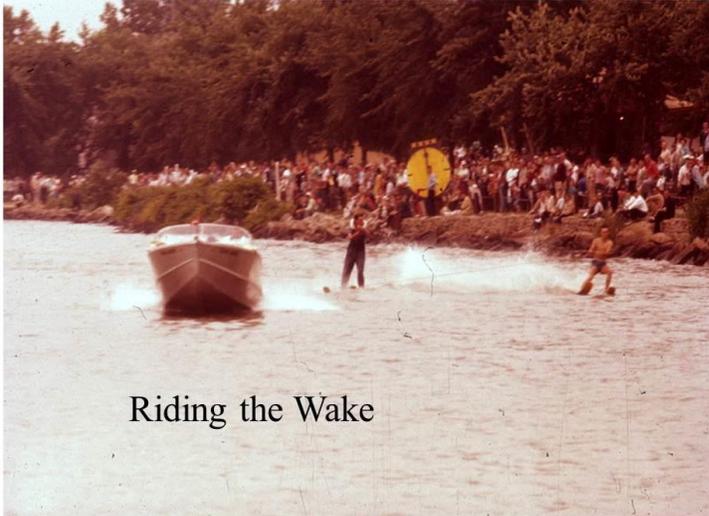
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## **Rafting the Waters and Pulling an Oar for Ecorse**



### **Rowing on the Detroit River**

Rowing is An Art!

Rowing a race is an art and not a frantic scramble. It must be rowed with head power as well as muscular power. From the first stroke, all thought of the other crew must be blocked out. Your

thoughts must be directed to you and your own boat, always positively and never negatively. Row your optimum power every stroke, all the while trying to increase your optimum.

Men as firm as you, when your everyday strength is gone, can draw on a mysterious reservoir of power far greater. Then it is you who can reach for the stars. That is the only way championships are made. That is the legacy rowing can leave you.

George Pocock

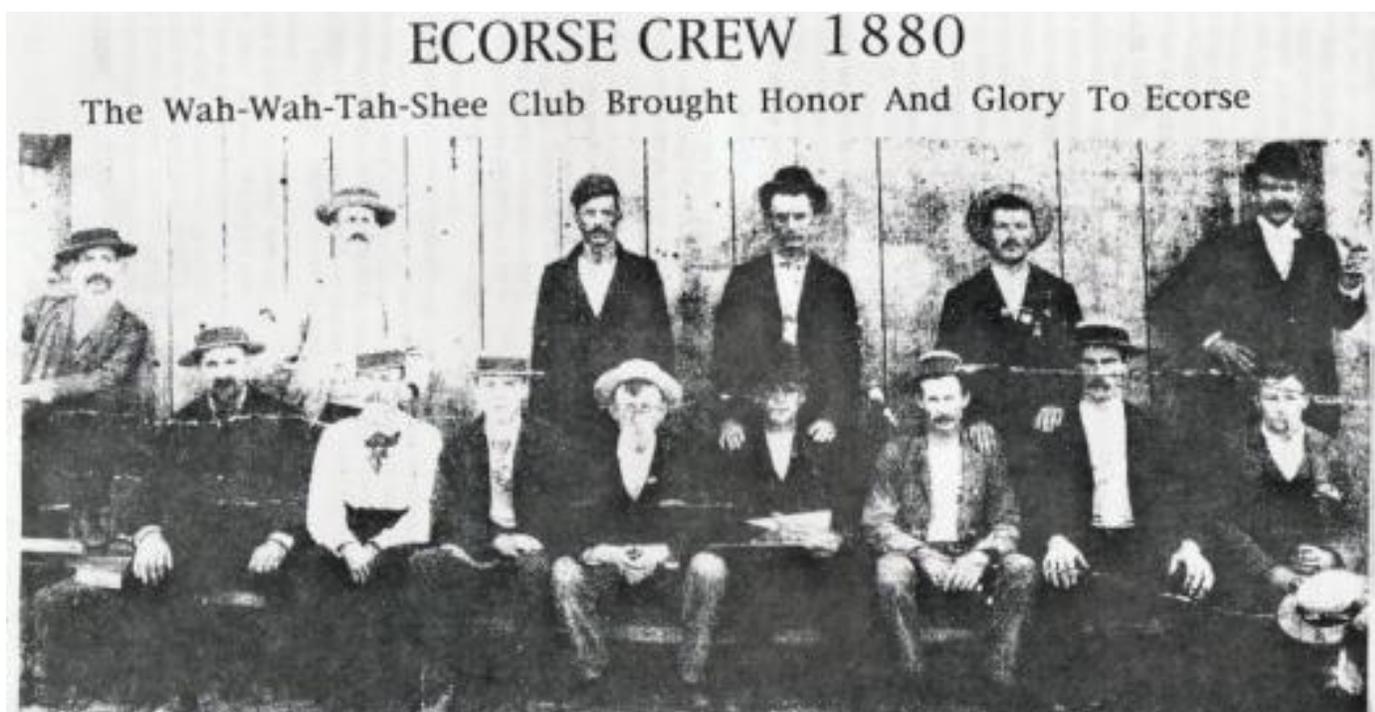
### **The Beginnings of Ecorse Rowing**

In 1901, G.A. Raupp of Ecorse, lumber dealer, guided a raft containing 2,500,000 feet of pine, hemlock, spruce and tamarack logs coming down the St. Clair River for use in his mill. One of G.A. Raupp's other endeavors, the Ecorse Rowing Club, proved to be even more lasting than his mill which went out of business in midcentury. He was one of its founding fathers and helped organize its first crew in 1873.

### **The Wah-Wah-Tah-Shee Club and the Montie Brothers**

Less than a decade after the close of the Civil War, Ecorse became rowing conscious. Shells were unheard of in those early days, but huge crowds lined the river front to watch the competition of the first ten oar barge and later the eight and even six oar barge races that eventually turned the eyes of the world to Ecorse. Contemporary observers said that the interest in training created in this sport that eventually led to the world championships won by the famous Montie brothers "is what fanned the interest in rowing, not the large crews and cumbersome barges."

The names of some of the first rowers and generations of championship rowers also appear on the 1876 map as owners of farms and land near Ecorse Creek. They include Beaubien, LeBlanc, Champagne, and Montie. Richard LeBlanc was one of the first to visualize the possibilities of a rowing club in Ecorse. He promoted the idea among his friends and in 1873, they organized a rowing club of less than twenty members. They called their organization the Wah-Wah-Tah-Shee Club, an Indian name for Indian names were the general custom in those days.



The original membership of the Wah-Wah-Tah Shee Boat Club, the forerunner of the Ecorse Boat Club, that was organized in the early 1880s. The Montie brothers, who brought fame and glory to Ecorse through their championship performances in both barges and shells, are included in the picture. These men represented Ecorse in the old Northwestern regattas held in the central states and regularly won championships. Front row left to right are William Montie, Joe Sauch, T. Bondie, D. Osbourne, Charles Tank, Charles Montry, Alf Beaubien, Elmer Labadie, Alex Beaubien.

Back row: Frank Montie, George Clark, William Champagne, Frank Salliotte, and Ted Ferguson.

For a number of years the Wah-Wah-Tah-Shees rowed on the Detroit River in an eight oar barge. The Montie brothers-Will, John, Lige and Frank- practiced with and apart from the rest of the Wah-Wah-Tah Shees. They were sawmill workers at the mill of Salliotte and Raupp and they worked twelve hour shifts rafting logs on Ecorse Creek and the Rouge and Detroit Rivers. When their work day finished, they went out on the Detroit River and rowed until dark in a barge with ordinary oars. For ten years they rowed and saved their money as well and after that decade of training and saving, they purchased a four oar racing shell, the best of its day.

In the 1870s, Southern and Eastern capitalists had introduced the business of rafting lumber and timber through the lakes. This business involved rafting sawmill logs for tugs and steamers to pick up or continue moving to their final destinations. The steam tug *Vulcan*, was a striking symbol of the growth of this business. During the year 1871, the *Vulcan* transferred twenty-four rafts of timber from Au Sable East. As a whole, the rafts contained about 20,000 feet of timber and not one of them was lost. Many of these rafts floated down the Detroit River on their way to Lake Erie and Lake Ontario ports.

This maritime tradition in Detroit and the communities up and downriver from Detroit, including Ecorse produced badly needed revenue for business and people, and made the transition from rowing barges for business to rowing for sport and pleasure as smooth as a skilled oar stroke through Detroit River waters. These skillful rowers competed against each other in races and produced rowing clubs that produced community unity, pride, and tradition. The Detroit Boat Club began racing in 1839 and the Ecorse Boat Club in 1873,

The Montie brothers of Ecorse worked as raftsmen, riding the Rouge River outside of Detroit. Every day, dressed in their working clothes – red shirts, blue jean overalls and heavy boots-they wrestled logs into the Rouge River, created timber rafts, and shoved and guided them to their destinations up and downstream. The brothers earned an area-wide reputation for their strength, endurance and love of French songs and French partying. They were so widely respected for their skill that the members of the Ecorse Rowing Club implored the Montie brothers to come and row with them permanently.

Such founding members of the Wah-Wah-Ta Shees as Charles Tank, the Beaubien brothers and Frank Salliotte convinced the Montie brothers that their strength and skill would make the club a winner. The Montie brothers didn't know anything about strokes or the science of rowing, but their hands-on rafting experience had helped them develop great stamina. They could row all afternoon without getting out of breath and still sing their French songs, tell stories and celebrate their victories. When General Russel A. Alger presented the Wah-Wah-Ta-Shees with the best shell obtainable, the Montie brothers and other members spent many long afternoons rowing on the river.

The first real race that the Montie Brothers rowed took place at the Aragon Club in New York. They competed in a four oar shell that was extremely popular at the time and they won. Later they acquired a ten oar barge and this is the barge that the Ecorse men used to enter and win the Northwestern Amateur Rowing Association race at Bay City in 1880. The winning crew consisted of Will Montie, bow; John Montie; G. Beaubien; G. Sanch; Bob Montie; H. Seavitt; W. McLeod; M. Bourassa; H. Labadie. E.J. Montie pulled oars in the race and W.A. Ferguson served as coxswain.

From this crew the Montie brothers organized the legendary four oar crew that went on in later years to defeat all competition. In 1882 the Wah-Wah-Tah-Shee Club entered the six oar barge race held in connection with the Northwestern Regatta and they won this race also. The winning crew included Phillip LeBlanc; G. Reach; Louis Seavitt; M. Bourassa with Ted Ferguson as coxswain. They covered the two-mile course in the extraordinary time of 13 minutes, 57 ½ seconds.

Also in 1882, the Montie's Wah-Wah-Tah-Shees teammate Charles Tank, Frank Seavitt, Lou Champagne and Elmer Labadie organized a crew and from 1882 until 1887 they rowed and won several races. Other Ecorse men who rowed during these years and established records for the Ecorse Club included Theodore Bondie, Alfred Beaubien, Charles Sesyer, Bill McGullen, Bill Clement, George Clark, Alex Beaubien, Henry Lange, Gus Gramer, at times keeper of the Mamajuda and Grassy Island lights and Mark Bourassa. These men rowed in fours barges and entered both junior and senior races.

In 1884, the Montie brothers rowed in the Regatta against such experts as the Excelsiors and the Minnesotas. After being beaten the first day of the Regatta when a broken rudder made their boat unmanageable, they came back on the second day to win the Regatta with a time of six minutes and  $5/7$   $5/8$  seconds for a one and one-half mile straightway course, nearly one minute faster than the record.

The next year on July 29, 1885, the Monies pitted their rowing skills against the Hillsdales in the Belle Isle Regatta. The Hillsdales had just won the Canadian Henley Regatta held at St. Catharines, Ontario, and crowds cheered them all along the Detroit River. The Wah-Wha-Ta-Shees nominated the Montie brothers to row against the retuning champions. The three contenders lined up at the starting line-the Montie brothers, the Hillsdales and the Centennials. The starting gun retorted and the Monties shot their Alger shell ahead of the Hillsdales, leaving them trailing ten feet.

At the turn in the course, the Montie brothers were two lengths ahead and rowing at the unprecedented stroke of sixty to the minute. The endurance of the Frenchmen enabled them to hold that phenomenal stroke to the end of the race. They finished four lengths ahead of the Hillsdales and nearly a half mile ahead of the Centennials. Lige Montie summarized the race in his own words when he exclaimed that he and his brothers had "beat de Hillsdales dat was just back from Hingland."

One person on shore was certain as fog on the Ecorse, Rouge and Detroit Rivers about the outcome of the race. Old Alec Cicotte, John's father-in-law (John married Eliza Cicotte and raised a family of three sons and two daughters) who had almost reared the boys from babyhood knew how strong and skillful they were. The story, probably embellished from telling and retelling but containing a kernel of truth, has it that when the Montie brothers won, old Alec sang and danced on the shore of the Ecorse River until he dropped from exhaustion.

On the day after the race, the four Monties were back on the Rouge River, wearing their blue-jean overalls and attending to their logging. On Sundays they would sit around old Alec Cicotte's place near the Rouge River, wearing their Sunday clothes, their coats covered with medals. They won many other races, but they enjoyed talking about the one where they beat the Henley champions who had just returned from "Hingland" the most.

## **Ecorse Grows in Rowing Strength and Competition**

The Royal Henley was introduced to Canada from England and took its name from the Royal Henley Regatta in England. It was held in Toronto in 1880, after the governing Canadian Association of Amateur Oarsmen was created, and during later years it was held at various times in Hamilton, Lachine, Ottawa, Toronto, Barrie, and Brockville.

By 1903, the Canadian Association of Amateur Oarsmen was searching for a permanent home for the Henley. The Association listed its requirements as a straight mile and one half stretch of water, protected to ensure rowing on the windiest days, a course making it possible for each competing crew to win, and a course convenient to spectators. They found exactly what they were looking for at the St. Catharine's Course on the original Welland Canal. The Royal Canadian Henley has been held at St. Catharines since 1903, with the exception of a break during the First World War.

After beating the Hillsdales, the Montie brothers toured the country, rowing 33 races and winning 31 of them. One defeat happened when John's foot brace broke and the other came about when the choppy water on the Hudson River broke their shell in half. Their shell demolished, the Montie's quit the race but recovered the parts and mended the shell well enough for their children to use it.

George Clark built the first boat for the Ecorse Club and the Club used it in practically all of the races that it entered. In 1893, the Ecorse crew consisted of Frank Salliotte; Elmer Labadie; Charles Tank and Theodore Beaubien. This crew remained intact through the 1894, season but in 1895 Charles Tank was the only member of the crew left to welcome Bill Clement, George Clark and Alex Beaubien.

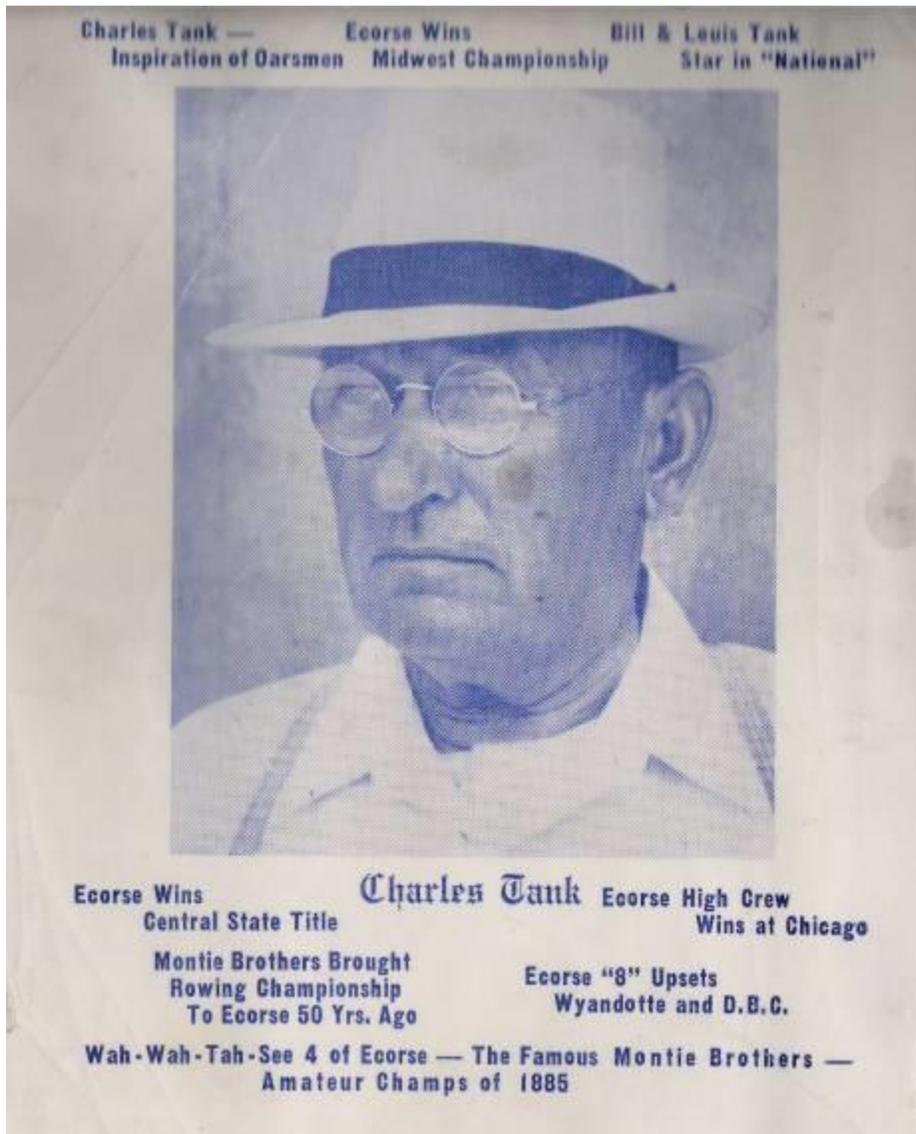
In 1896, another Ecorse crew composed of Alex and Alfred Beaubien, Charles Tank, Charles Sesyer and Louis Champagne set a world's record for the one and a half mile race around one buoy. In 1897 the crew was made up of Charles Tank, Louis Champagne, Alfred and Alex Beaubien and in 1898, Bill McGullin and Henry Lange joined the crew.

Just before the turn of the century rowing regattas were popular and the Wah-Wah-Tah-Shee Club entered every race it could. During these years the Ecorse men consistently won in the Northwestern on the Detroit River, Bay City, Orchard Lake, Lake St. Clair and at Monroe. Alvia Grant was among the famous Ecorse oarsmen just before the turn of the century. He was born in Ecorse on March 31, 1879, on the old Grant farm on Jefferson Avenue and lived there in a home listed as 3851 Jefferson Avenue all of his life. Besides rowing, Grant took an active part in the Macabees and worked as warehouse superintendent at the Worcester Salt Company. When he died on July 9, 1942, he was buried in St. Francis Cemetery.

In 1901 at Orchard Lake, the Wah-Wah-Tah-Sees won easily with an entirely new crew consisting of Fred Vellmure, Frank Grant and I. Salliotte pulling oars in this race. Fred Vellmure was also the sculler for the Ecorse Boat Club. During these years Ecorse defeated the Detroit Boat Club, Excelsior, Zypher and Centennial, all of Detroit. In a wider circle of victory, they conquered Bay City, Port Huron, Battle Creek, Monroe, Chicago, Wyandotte, Saginaw and Windsor, Ontario.

## The Rowing Club Reincarnated

The Ecorse Boat Club disbanded in 1906 and oarsmen from Ecorse raced under the Wyandotte Boat Club Banner. But the colorful memories of the Montie brothers kept alive the Ecorse tradition and inevitably the grandsons of William Montie, the Tank brothers, served as the backbone of the reorganized Ecorse Club. After rowing with the title crews in the 1890s, Charles Tank watched the Ecorse Rowing Club disband for lack of competition. For seven years he coached the boys in these clubs, including his own sons, to win competitions and helped make the Ecorse Club one of the best in the country.



After the Ecorse Boat Club disbanded Tank continued rowing alone and in the middle thirties, his sons Louis and Red began to row for the Wyandotte Boat Club where their father coached them. In late 1938 and early 1939, Charles Tank and several friends reorganized the Ecorse Boat Club, starting out with a \$350 deficit for a note to purchase a second hand eight oar shell from

the Detroit Boat Club. Charles Tank started out with the vintage shell – built in 1910- and large amounts of faith and courage.

The building that the rowing club used was the old brick building at the South end of Riverside Park that Mellon and Moran had once occupied as an auto, marine parts and machine shop. The east or river side had been adapted to boat repairing and withdrawal of motors and featured an I beam extending over the water to hoist motors by a chain pull. Wayne County bought M & M out, and the building was leased to the Ecorse Boat Club. Club members purchased two eight-oared shells and named them for Genevieve Tank and George R. Fink. These achievements were nearly eradicated by a tornado that whipped through the Downriver area one spring night in 1939, but the Ecorse Boat Club persevered and won the Intermediate “4” in the 1939 National Regatta at Detroit

Overcoming mishap and mayhem, the Ecorse Club struggled to glory by winning race after race. Ecorse won Schoolboy Championships and its lightweight crews won Royal Canadian Henley titles. Tank’s two rowing sons, Red and Louis, won sculling event after event. His other sons, Vernon and Pete, also were involved in the Club, Vernon as president and Pete as a topflight boatman.

### **The Tanks and Jim Rice Produce Championship Teams**

In 1940, the first Ecorse High School crew appeared on the Detroit River and reigned as undefeated champions of the Metropolitan area at the end of their first season. In 1941 Larry Smith and Pat Messler helped Charles Tank polish the crews that he had guided to championship status by teaching them rowing fundamentals. Even though some of his students did not become members of championship crews, they were the foundation of the Ecorse Rowing Club and passed on what they knew to the next generation of rowers.

### **The Era of Jim Rice**

Charles Tank died in 1940, and Jim Rice, his close friend and internationally known rowing coach became the director of the rowing program in 1942. Coach Rice brought fifty years of experience coaching championship crews with him to Ecorse. His first coaching job was with the Toronto Rowing Club in 1893, and after that he coached the Detroit Boat Club and the Wyandotte Boat Club in the Downriver area. Moving East, he coached at Harvard University, Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania and Havana University. In 1933 he coached the Hamilton Leanders and in 1936, returned to the Detroit Boat Club. When he agreed to coach the Ecorse Boat Club at the request of his friend Charles Tank, Ecorse and almost every other rowing club in the country recognized him as one of the top ranking rowing coaches in America.

After he took over as coach in 1942, the Ecorse Boat Club with Rice at its helm was the crew to beat in any race it entered. The Tank brothers, Louis and Red were still active as scullers and coaches but the younger men were fast replacing the men who started the club in 1938. The club won many races and its trophy room was crowded with medals and trophies, won in Chicago, Philadelphia and all towns where rowing was recognized.

The Ecorse High School crew won its third straight race in the third annual Downriver regatta in August 1941. The winning crew consisted of: George Pappas, stroke; Virgil Cuingan, Harvey Kromrei, Bob White, Reggie LeBlanc, Bob Blair, Earl Newland, Bob Vollmar, bow and front and Bill Hughes, coxswain. The Tank brothers won the 140 pound doubles and placed second in the heavyweight doubles at the Canadian Henley that year and William Tank won second place in the quarter mile dash for singles and Louis Tank won second place in the heavyweight singles. The Ecorse High School crew cinched the North American championship at the Henley and the 140-pound eight also won its race.

### **The Boat Club Enjoys Constant Winning in the Early 1940s**

The Ecorse “Golden Boys” of 1942 showed their stern to the best boats in the U.S. and Canada. In July 1942, Ecorse oarsmen exceeded hometown expectations when they performed like champions in front of a crowd of 25,000 people lining the Detroit Riverfront in the July 4 and 5<sup>th</sup> races. Even veteran coach Jim Rice who trained the Ecorse crews and usually accepted praise matter-of-factly, glowed with pride at the performance of his oarsmen. Ecorse won practically everything in the regatta, successfully defending their numerous titles and adding more championships to the Ecorse Rowing Club’s long list of achievements. Crew members added the Junior Point Trophy, the Senior Point Trophy, and the Senior Eight Championship Trophy to the trophy case at the Ecorse Boat Club as well as various plaques commemorating their Saturday and Sunday victories.

At the end of the Saturday events, Ecorse boasted a score of 61 points, 25 points ahead of the Central Rowing Club of St. Louis, its nearest opponent. On Sunday Ecorse continued to pile up points and records. In the first race Sunday afternoon the Ecorse club entered the high school and the 145 pound crews in the senior eight oar race.



The high school crew won the race and the Ecorse 145-pound crew came in third place to give Ecorse a 36-point lead. Manning the High school shell were Bob Vollmar, Harold Covert, R. Blair, V. Mitea, H. Marcott, C. Crunga, H. Kromrei, R. White and Whitefield as coxswain. An hour later this same high school crew came back to win the Schoolboy Championship

As two of the three remaining members of the original Wah-Wah-Tah-Shee Club, Alex Beaubien and Elmer Labadie, were two of the most interested spectators at the regatta. Alex Beaubien rowed his last singles race in 1889, when he defeated Knight Wright at the Belle Isle races and he also served as coxswain in the ten oar barge.

From 1940-1942, the Ecorse High School eight lost only one race, rowed at Minneapolis in a borrowed shell set up directly opposite to the one they were familiar with. In 1942, they won both the Junior and Senior Central titles at the Central States Schoolboy Regatta in Chicago and both Junior and Senior races at the invitational meet at Culver Military Academy. The 1942 Senior Schoolboy crew also won all major events at the Canadian Henley held at St. Catharines, Ontario, and two eight oar events within an hour to set a new endurance record. There is no record of any crew ever before winning the Henley heavyweight eight and the high school eight events in a single day.

Old timers who saw the 1942 crew in action voted it one of the best crews in the history of rowing.



Jack Kernan, 13, getting rowing advice from Alex S. Beaubien, 74, of Birmingham, who has won many medals for his skill and in 1899 was senior singles champion.

By 1943, most of the “golden boys” of 1942 were serving in the armed forces, but Coach Jim Rice felt optimistic about the 1943 crew’s performance. The 1943 crew won the Central States Interscholastic championship and went on to win the Canadian Henley. They won six races, were second in one race and third in another to capture all of the major events and finish second in point totals. It was the second year in a row that Ecorse boys, under Jim Rice, veteran coach, swept the race in the Henley.

The 1943 crew also won the High School Eight Championship and the senior heavyweight as well. John Whitefield was cox, Harold Marcott, stroke, John Gregan, Harvey Kromrei, Corky Poppa, Erwin Kromrei, Paul Scott, John Ghindia and Gus Pappas, bow.

### **The Ecorse Boat Crews Go To War, But The Boat Club Survives**

The 1942, 1943 and 1944 crews won all events very regatta they entered, but World War II attrition continued to affect the Ecorse Club. In the spring of 1943 the Ecorse Club regrettably declined the University of Wisconsin invitation to participate in a special spring race including both college and high school crews to be held at the university.



The Ecorse Boat Club participated in only two regattas during the 1944 season, because the World War had halted most of the regattas. In the two regattas that Ecorse oarsmen competed in, the Royal Canadian Henley and the Detroit River, they established records that brought fame and glory to the club and to Ecorse. Ecorse won three first and five seconds in the Henley and the Ecorse High School eight captured the interscholastic championship for the fourth consecutive time. In winning the race, Ecorse defeated the favored Grosse Pointe crew, St. Catharine's and Buffalo, crossing the finish line nearly two lengths head and defeating the Gross Pointe crew.

The Ecorse victory was more remarkable because of its courageous race for the senior eight championship which carried with it the internationally famous Hanlon Memorial Trophy, less than an hour before the high school race. Jud Ross. Coach of the Detroit Club, scratched his crew

for the senior race to have his boys in perfect condition. Ecorse became the first club in 59 years to win the Hanlon Trophy two years in succession and speculation had it that the Canadians picked an all-star crew this year to prevent the Ecorse boys from winning permanent possession of the Hanlon trophy.

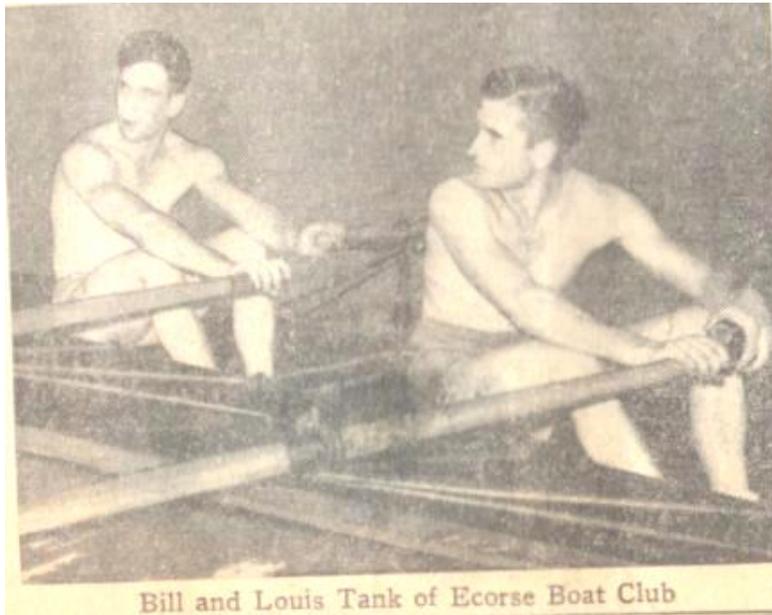
The 1945 senior crews were. Dallas Lett, Bob Pfeiffer, stroke; Lawrence Pulkownik, John Pulaski, Paul Hanusack, bow; Richard Emling, Joe Rawson, coxswain; James LeBlanc and Norman Mihatsch went on to win more rowing events.

### **Rowing Resumes Full Force After the War**

In 1946, the first year of peace with the return of many men from the armed forces saw a revival of rowing all over the country and Ecorse Boat Club with Jim Rice coaching came into its biggest season. 1946 Officials were: Vernon Tank, president; Edward Kromrei, vice-president; Albert Warner, treasurer; Arthur Sims, secretary; and Jim Rice coach. Coach Jim Rice had two teams competing that year. He selected Mike Stanovich, Bill Smith, Bob Hanusack, Dick Emling, Wayne Dupuis, Norman Mihatsch, Dallas Lett, Larry Pulkownik and Jimmy Osborn as the Ecorse High Varsity Eight to compete. The Ecorse Heavyweight Eight had already won the heavy weight event at the Shriner's Regatta two weeks ago and were practicing for the Central States Rowing Association Regatta on July 4<sup>th</sup> to compete for honors in their class. On this team were Bob Vollmar, Harold Covert, Walt Pooley, John Hill, Gus Pappas, Cam Wery, Bob White, George Pappas and John Whitefield.

Mike Tank was re-elected to head Ecorse Boat Club for the 1947 season at the annual election of the oarsmen in the main club room at West Jefferson and Mill Street. Tank had been president of the local rowing club for several years and guided the club into the favorable position of one of the best contenders in the country. Edward Kromrei was re-elected vice-president, an office he too held for several years. The club members re-elected Art Sims, Ecorse businessman as secretary and William Jones, affiliated with the Ecorse-Lincoln Park Bank, as treasurer, a first term for him. The club officials considered their most important task to be completing plans for the 9<sup>th</sup> annual Oarsmen's Ball, slated for Saturday February 15, 1947 in the St. Francis High School auditorium.

Louis Tank, United States and international sculling champion since 1936, was appointed head coach for Ecorse Boat Club crews for the 1947 season. Club officials searched for a suitable coach to replace Jim Rice who retired from coaching that year and the name of Louis Tank shone above any other candidates. Tank had been an active oarsman since the Ecorse Boat Club reorganized and his achievements had been numerous and consistent in both national and international regattas. With this appointment he followed in the footsteps of his father, the late Charles Tank, who was first coach of the present club.



Bill and Louis Tank of Ecorse Boat Club

In 1947 the Ecorse crews brought honors to Ecorse by winning the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Central States Rowing Regatta held on July 3 and 4 in Ecorse, beating their closest rival, the Detroit Boat Club, by more than 200 points. The only crew to win both a Junior and Senior event was the Ecorse Boat Club's 145 lbs four with coxswain. In the junior event the winning oarsmen were Wayne Dupuis, Robert Short, Ed Lett and Bill Wilson who pulled away from the Chicago, Wyandotte and St. Louis clubs to win in seven minutes, sixteen seconds, just nosing out Wyandotte by a very small margin.

Charles Piros, Ecorse High School sculler, pulled to an easy ten length victory in the high school singles event. The next day he came back in the senior events with a second place finish in the 145 lbs. singles.

Bob Volmar, Harold Covert, Bob White and George Pappas captured the junior heavy fours without coxswain with a time of six minutes and 51 seconds. However, these boys lost out in the senior event the next day when they were beaten by Detroit in seven minutes and 54 seconds. A strong headwind slowed the time up on the second day.

Lou Tank, champion Ecorse sculler, led all oarsmen in total points with victories in the quarter mile 145-lb singles race, in the senior 145 lb singles, a first in the heavy quarter mile singles race, and second to Reynolds in the senior heavy singles event. Russ Reynolds, champion of three years ago, won this even in eight minutes ten seconds.

## Building Boats and Shells

In the 1940s and beyond the Ecorse Boat Club members vied for championship titles in shells that they made. A score more or less of Boat Club members could be found any weekday evening busily building new boats and repairing others.

In January 1940 brothers William and Lewis Tank repaired boats and helped build others. They were helping to build seven singles and a double and did repair work on two eights and another double. A single shell cost approximately \$350 in 1940, and it cost about \$125 for the club members to build their own shell complete with oars. It took about 100 hours of labor to complete a single shell composed of four kinds of wood – spruce, mahogany, three-ply ash for ribs and cedar. Most of the club members were factory workers and built and repaired shells and rowed as a hobby.



But Thomas Gannon and Carl Peterson did not consider their boat building a hobby. Carl Peterson, proud of his Swedish birth and Thomas Gannon, equally proud of his Irish ancestry, gloried in the boats that built for the Detroit and Ecorse boat clubs.

Carl Peterson learned his trade as a cabinet worker in a piano factory in Goteborg, Sweden. He had been working at his trade for a long time before he came to the United States and began working at the Detroit boat Club in 1928.

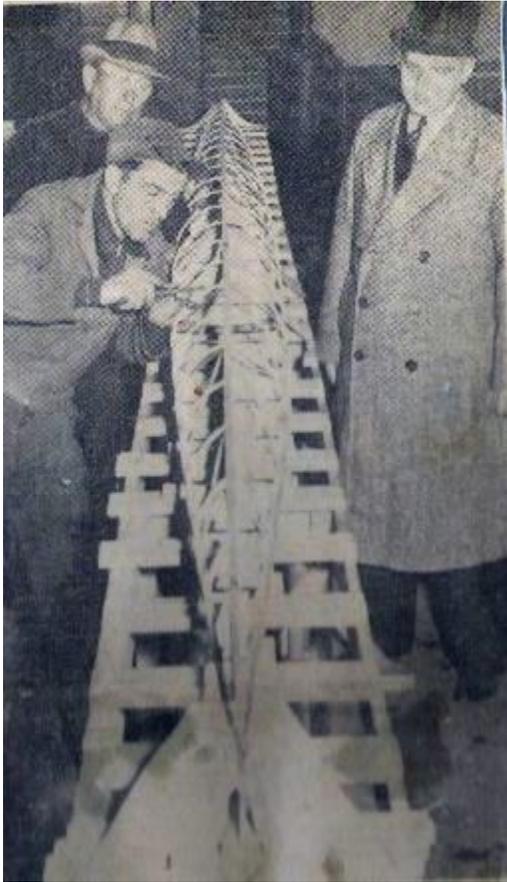
Thomas Gannon came to the Detroit Boat Club in 1914, and spent the next 38 years there building boats and shells. He immigrated to the United States from Paris, Ontario, with his parents when he was a teenager and had been in sailing since he was a young boy. He developed his skills on jobs in boat works on the Detroit River front and he became an expert boat builder.

Detroit Boat Club's head rowing coach, Divie Duffield, hired Gannon in 1914, and the first shell he ever built was an eight-oar boat 61 feet long. After that first shell, Gannon went on to build

more than \$100,000 worth of shells and his work was so highly regarded that top rowing people of the United States and Canada sought his advice, which he gave freely..



Gannon was the head rigger for the U.S. Olympic rowing team of 1928, and also created the slender, streamlined shells that comprised modern rowing equipment. He ranked with George Pocock and Frank Davy as the shell builder and Detroit Boat Club and Detroit Rowing Club crews pulled oars on his eights, fours, singles and doubles. He also invented a gateless oarlock and an adjustable rigger. He never built a shell from a blue print or a drawing. Everyone was an "original Gannon" and their qualities were so highly regarded that the top rowing people of the United States and Canada sought his advice which he gave freely. Rowing shells were not the only items he invented. He also designed and built sailboats and cruisers.



Together Peterson and Gannon constructed six eights, two fours, three doubles and several singles, all of which were in use. "We been workin' together 11 years and we ain't had much lip. Too busy," Gannon said.

In 1940, the Washington crew that had recently swept the collegiate rowing field at the Poughkeepsie Regatta, stopped in Detroit on the way to the big race and examined a shell that Peterson and Gannon had built. Gannon who did the talking for the two of them commented, "They said they liked the boat."

The Peterson-Gannon duo fashioned boats for 31 years. According to coach Jim Rice, no one was better at the boat building craft than Gannon and Peterson. They did more than build boats, they "hovered" over them he said. They made the keels from spruce and from Spanish cedar and from British Columbia white cedar they constructed the hulls. They build any style of crew craft, whether it was an eight oared job like the one which fascinated the Washington eight or the tiny single shell for the sculler. The duo also did other jobs around the Detroit and Ecorse Boat Clubs, including hanging wall paper, blacksmithing, painting, piloting a

boat, sharpening saws, repairing watches and even a turn in the kitchen. But they were happiest with a boat to be made.

In 1945 Detroit and Ecorse rowers gave a great testimonial banquet for Gannon and read some of the names of people who admired Gannon and whom he had helped. They included Jim Rice, Fred Standish, Roy Pingree, Jud Ross and Bill McBreeley.

Another memorable day in Gannon's life occurred when his wife Minnie died in 1944, and he told Jud Ross that he was through and that he would neither build, repair, nor letter another shell. Ross said, "Tom, if Minnie were alive she would say you are talking through your hat and that you know the Detroit Rowing Club needs you."

The grieving Gannon answered, "All right Jud, as long as you are the coach we'll stay together and work on."

And the two did until Gannon suffered a stroke and died in August 1954.

### **The Ecorse Boat Club's Next Fifty Years**

The Ecorse Boat Club continued its winning ways into the 1950s. In 1955, coach Bob Short gloried in the showing that his boys were winners during the weekend of the Mellus Newspapers' Schoolboy Rowing Regatta championship that was held on the Detroit River in

mid-May 1955. The underdog Ecorse rowers piled up 80 points to win the team trophy, defeating second place Allen Park by 13 points. Chicago's Weber High placed third with 30 points, with Roosevelt and Mt. Carmel next with twelve points each.

The Ecorse Boat Club's senior heavyweight eight scored the big victory of the regatta featuring the top notch prep rollers and scullers of the Midwest, upsetting highly rated Allen Park by two lengths in the feature race. Allen Park's crew had been favored because of a win over the Ecorse rowers a week before in Chicago.

In the spring of 1956, Camille Wery, 31-year-old former rower and Ecorse Rowing Club vice-president was elected president, succeeding Joe Rawson of Allen Park. Wery had been a Boat Club member since 1942 and an army veteran. He worked at Great Lakes Steel Corporation and lived with his wife Jean and four children in Ecorse Township. Other officers named in the recent election were Fergus Judge, vice-president; Wayne Dupuis, treasurer and Art Sims, secretary.

Bob Short, club spokesman, said that Ecorse would be the host of the 1956 Central States Rowing Association's annual regatta scheduled for July 4 on the Detroit River. The Ecorse Club also was making an all-out effort to qualify crews for the Olympic rowing trials set for June 28 at Syracuse, New York. Ecorse crews were planning to compete against Detroit Boat Club members for the right to represent the Greater Detroit area at the trials, Short said. He added that several Ecorse Boat Club members currently in the service had applied for transfers to the Detroit area so they could begin training for the Olympic trials.

Community support helped finance the numerous boat club crews and their equipment, and every year the young men in the Ecorse Boat Club would take part in fund raising activities to finance their seasons. On a Tuesday night in early July 1962 the young men of the Ecorse Boat Club canvassed the city between the hours of 6 and 9 p.m. They offered a decal with the Ecorse Boat Club emblem of crossed oars called "Blades" for sale.

Spokesman Dave Loveland explained that it was expensive to transport crews and equipment to regattas where the crews competed against national and international crews. The Crews did well in 1962. On July 4 the Ecorse Boat Club crews won their own Water Festival Regatta, rowing against crews from the Detroit Boat Club, Wyandotte, Roosevelt and Chicago. Ecorse emerged victorious in both heavyweight and 135 pound eights and fours and tied with the Detroit Boat Club in the quarter mile dash.

The Detroiters, Ecorse Boat Club's arch rivals, won their sculling specialties- light and heavy singles, open doubles and quarter mile single dash.

The weekend before the Ecorse Boat Club sent its junior crews to London, Ontario, for the Central Ontario Rowing Association Regatta. There they won two races in good competition and placed second in two others by close margins. They were pitted against crews from Wyandotte, Hamilton Leanders, Toronto Dons Rowing Club, St. Catharine's and London Rowing Club. Ecorse Boat Club emerged victorious in the 135 lb fours. Ecorse rowers were Jim Montie, Dick Thorburn, Sam Pappas and Bob Burkhardt. Jim Judge, Wayne Berger, Bill Nantau and Karl Schwartz won the heavy fours without coxswain, even though they had never before rowed

together as a unit. Ecorse took seconds in the 135 pound eight and junior heavy eights, the latter by half a boat length. Robert Walker coached the team.

Later that year, the Ecorse Boat Club's Intermediate eight crew beat the Detroit Boat Club in a preliminary heat at the National Rowing Regatta in Buffalo and then went on to place second in the finals of the event. Both the Ecorse oarsmen and the winning St. Catharine's eight broke records in the race, over a 2,000-meter Olympic course. St. Catharine's Club clocked 5:58.8 for the distance while Ecorse was timed at 6:02. The old record for the course set in 1909 was 6:03.

Ecorse also scored second in the Senior Heavyweight Four without coxswain, coming in behind a sharp Lake Washington crew. Still further back was the highly touted four of the Vespers Club of Philadelphia.

According to the club spokesman and later president, Dave Loveland, Ecorse racked up a total of 28 points to place seventh overall in the regatta, a creditable showing in the Nationals which attracted the finest crews from the United States and Canada. The Detroit Boat Club was the overall winner. The Ecorse Club had nine entries in the Canadian Royal Henley Regatta and Coach Walker felt that his oarsman would be "contenders in every race."

The 1964 Ecorse Boat Club brought home the winning trophy for the Senior 145 pound Four-without-Cox at the Canadian Henley races, which were held July 25, 1964, and televised on August 1. The winning crew was stroke Richard Thorburn; Three-man, Sam Pappas; Two-Man, Robert Burkhardt; and Bow Man, James Montie. Nick Pappas was the coach and David Loveland Club president. In 1965, the coaching staff was Louis Hawkings, assistant, Nick Pappas, head coach and Harry Miller, assistant.

Women continued to come into their own in the Ecorse Rowing Club and in the larger world in the 1970s and helped their male counterparts continue Ecorse's' winning tradition. In May 1975, the Girl's Crew of the Ecorse Rowing Club rowed to a solid victory over a girl's crew from London, Ontario. The Ecorse girls traveled to London where they rowed the four-oared race on the meandering Thames River course. Members of the victorious girl's crew were Janine Morguet, Karen Hawkins, Mary Jane Hric, Debbie Comerzan, and Rose Sanflippo, cox. This was the only woman's race held.

There were also exhibition races in which the Ecorse Boys' Crew was victorious in four out of seven races. The Girls' Crew and the Ecorse High Rowing Team planned to complete the weekend at the Canadian Schoolboy Championships in St. Catharine's, Ontario. In a scrimmage race the day before, the girls defeated the Detroit Boat Club girl's crew in the two events that were rowed, the eight-oared shell and four oared shell. The girls in the eight were Denise Comerzan, Patty Lindel, Debbie Garze, Sherri Judge, Jayne Eberts, Mary Ellen Sizek, Marsha Hawkins, Kim Miller, Shevawn Enright, cox. Victorious Ecorse Four were Janet Scesney, Cindy Bair, Debbie Garza, Mary Ellen Sitek, Kathy Schrock, cox.

Councilman Kenneth Slifka, Al Ruthven, Pete Vukovich, Councilman Nike Pappas, Cam Wery and Jack LeBlanc presided over a ceremony in September 1976, to dedicate a four-man skull to the name of Jim Rice. The dedication was part of the Ecorse Rowing Club's Old Timer's Regatta held at the Riverfront in September 1976.

The Ecorse Rowing Club also held its annual election of officers and board of directors on September 17, 1976. Al Sliwinski who rowed for Ecorse was elected president, Randy Swartzbaugh, vice president, Joseph E. Rawson treasurer and Paul Hanuscak, secretary. Members elected to the board of directors were Charles Lange Sr., Robert Short, Paul Messineo, Harry Miller, Ron Lammers, Robert Kunitz and Jane Eberts. Ms. Eberts was the first woman to be elected to office in the history of the Ecorse Rowing Club.

In June 1987, the Ecorse Rowing Club appointed a new head coach, Ricky Pollack, from Philadelphia, who had an extensive rowing background and coaching experience. Having first rowed at Undine Barge Club and Vesper for eight years, he went on to various coaching positions at Philadelphia Barge Club, Clark and Worcester Barge Club and Mt. Holyoke Rowing Club. He led the Women's Junior National Team in 1980 and Senior B Crew in 1982. Pollack said that he saw a lot of promising potential in the high school boys crew currently rowing at the club from Carlson. "In another year or two, many will be ready for national competition. They are the future of the club and we should do our part to make sure that they are successful.

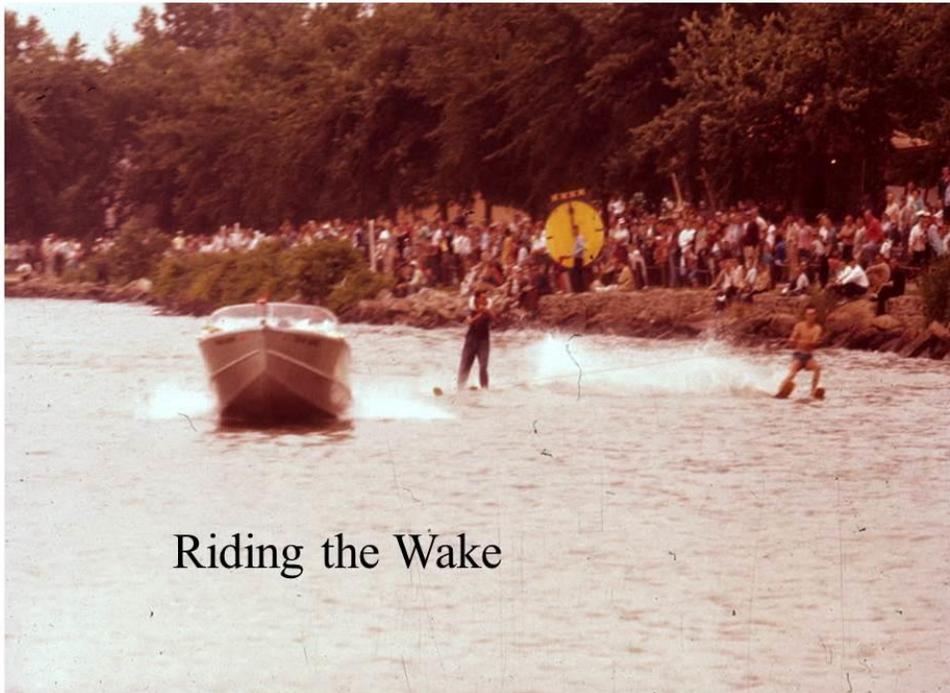
Pollack also planned to try to gain support from the community because community support through the years helped to make Ecorse a national rowing stronghold.

The 1987 season was the second that Carlson High School team had been based at Ecorse Rowing Club and although the school had just recently added rowing to the sports that it offered, the average turnout was close to ninety boys and girls. Head coach Ron Lammers worked to prepare the squad for competing in high school regattas across the United States and Canada.

Most of the boys and girls also rowed for the Ecorse Rowing Club. Girl's novice and varsity lightweight coaches Mary Ann Van Boxell and Beth Ann Gretka expected most of their girls to return to row in the summer as well. It had been many years since women rowed at Ecorse and this added new dimension to the Ecorse Boat Club.

In 1990 a women's crew, the Argonaut crew, convincingly won the Ecorse Rowing Club Arthur Sims Memorial Trophy and the Argonaut crew won the Intermediate Women's 125 lb eight event at the 1990 Royal Canadian Henley Regatta. This was the first year that the Arthur Sims Memorial Trophy was presented and Robert Sims, Arthur's son and Ecorse Rowing Club board member Joe Rawson presented the trophy.

During the last two decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty first century the Ecorse Rowing Club continued its 135-year tradition of winning crews. Ecorse Rowing Club has provided a source of community pride and recreation for 135 years and will continue to do so as long as the Riviere aux Ecorces and the Detroit River continue flow around the city of Ecorse.



Riding the Wake

# Downriver historians

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