



FREIGHTERS

THE GREAT LAKES SHIPPING INDUSTRY PERIODICAL | EDITION #78—SPRING 2025

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF SHIPWATCHER NEWS | EDITED BY BRENDAN FALKOWSKI | WWW.SHIPWATCHER-NEWS.COM



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LAKER REPORTS

UPDATES FROM THE LAKES



Great Lakes debut for two ships | April 24

Two newcomers to the Canadian fleet made their debut on the Great Lakes on April 24, 2025. McKeil Marine's *Kathy McKeil* arrived after her journey halfway around the world from Chengxi Shipyard in China. *Kathy McKeil* is the former Algoma tanker *Algosea*, which was acquired by McKeil in late 2023 and sent to China for conversion to a geared bulk carrier. Algoma Central's *Algoma Endurance* arrived in Montreal from the shipyard in Croatia. She is the final of eleven Equinox class vessels built for Algoma since 2014, and was the largest ship built by the 3 Maj Shipyard in Rijeka, Croatia. She is built to full Seaway dimensions and is equipped with a forward self-unloading system. ***KATHY MCKEIL* arriving at Windsor, ON, June 7, 2025.**
Photo: Scott Bjorklund □

Hon. James L. Oberstar grounds in St. Marys River | June 15

The Hon. James L. Oberstar ran aground on the St. Marys River at Johnsons Point while upbound in transit with a cargo of stone for Marquette, MI, on June 8, 2025. She went to anchor in Hay Lake in the St. Marys River following the grounding for inspection. Over the course of several days over the following week a portion of her cargo was lightered into fleetmate Kaye E. Barker and prepared to sail. The Oberstar escorted by the USCGC *Spar* to Duluth, MN, to unload her cargo of stone before proceeding to Fraser Shipyards in Superior, WI, for repairs. She arrived in Superior on June 16. Refloating efforts were coordinated between the U.S. Coast Guard, OSRO, and the Interlake teams. The incident and recovery resulted in no injuries or pollution. ***HON. JAMES L. OBERSTAR* arriving at Duluth, MN, for repairs under escort of USCGC SPAR, June 16, 2025.** Photo: David Schauer □



Partnerships and spinoffs | June 23

Federal approval of a U.S. Steel-Nippon partnership was announced on May 23, 2025. The deal will not be a traditional takeover according to recent announcements. Nippon will still take ownership of U.S. Steel, but U.S. Steel will remain U.S.-based with American leadership. The U.S. government will hold a golden share in U.S. Steel, granting them veto power in certain company decisions and maintaining U.S. power over critical manufacturing infrastructure. Additionally, Nippon has pledged to invest over \$14 billion into U.S. Steel operations across America. The deal was closed June 18, 2025. On the cement side, LafargeHolcim spun off their North American operations as new company Amrize on June 23, 2025. The spinoff includes several cement production plants and distribution terminals in the Great Lakes region. ***Holcim* logos such as those on the INNOVATION will soon be changing to Amrize.** Photo: Brendan Falkowski. □

THEY DELIVER

SOO MARINE KEEPS THE BOATS SUPPLIED

Written by Brendan Falkowski and Ryan Miller



(Main): OJIBWAY supplies the LEE A. TREGURTHA, August 14, 2024. Photo: Gus Schauer.

The authors visited the Soo Marine Supply warehouse and were able to observe a supply run to the Stewart J. Cort in June 2024. Special thanks to Brent Belanger for making this possible.

Nestled down off Portage Avenue along the St. Marys River in Sault Ste. Marie, MI, Soo Marine Supply (SMS) has been serving Great Lakes freighters for over 124 years. While it may not appear like much from the road, down that driveway lies a vital supply line necessary for provisioning the ships, but more importantly the crews. The ships run from March to January with little time to stop while in port. Soo Marine Supply provides a solution, delivering groceries, supplies, and people to the ships as they pass by Sault Ste. Marie, MI.

The service was first initiated in 1901, served by the wood-hulled ferry *Superior*. She operated in the supply boat capacity from 1901 to 1917 when she was replaced by another reconstructed ferry, the *Frontier*. *Frontier* served as the Soo supply boat from 1917 until June 1, 1947, when the current supply boat, *Ojibway*, entered service. The supply service was originally started to stock U.S. Steel's newly-created Pittsburgh Steamship fleet with ice, food and groceries, parts, and other supplies, but also later served the fleets of Bradley Transportation, Great Lakes Steamship, and Hutchinson & Co. U.S. Steel spun off the supply boat service with their marine division in the late 1980s. The warehouse and supply boat *Ojibway* were sold to MCM Marine in 2003, who renamed the business Soo Marine Supply and continues to supply the ships today.

Soo Marine primarily serves the American fleets of Interlake Steamship Co., Great Lakes Fleet, and VanEnkevort Tug & Barge, as well as other vessels by request. SMS doesn't operate on contracts with the shippers, but rather on an on-demand basis, making deliveries and fulfilling services when they are needed.

SMS General Manager Brent Belanger explained to us the

different supplies they can and have delivered. He produced from his desk a stapled packet of paper and passed it to us to look through. On the pages were roughly 500 lines of everything you'd expect to find at your local grocery store, apple sauce, pudding, soap, and paper towels. While flipping through the many pages, Belanger continued to explain the various other supplies like gear oil, steel cables, argon tanks, and deployable life rafts that were on the order form. In addition to the listed items there is a final page that's blank with lines where freighter crews could request specific items that Soo Marine Supplies would then source. In addition, they can perform crew transfers with rental cars arranged and personal storage lockers for their gear.

Orders are put in by the ships about 36 hours prior to passing through the Soo Locks, giving the crew at SMS enough time to pull together everything in preparation for delivery. For some special orders that may not be stocked in the warehouse, SMS crew will make runs to local stores to attempt to find requested products.

Typically, a big order would be placed at the beginning of the season during fit-out. The crew needs to eat. Supplies need to be stocked. Soo Marine's tasks during fit out can include requisitioning necessary spare parts for preventative maintenance, extra engineering supplies, replacement safety gear, and stocking the kitchen by ordering nonperishable bulk baking or cooking ingredients. The SMS crew loads supplies into their trucks for destinations ranging from Sturgeon Bay and Superior, WI, to Toledo, OH, and even Erie, PA, to get the ships ready to go. Throughout the shipping season, crews place additional orders to restock perishable and consumable goods. While resupplies can occur at ports, receiving them while underway is most convenient for the crew. As so many boats pass through the Soo Locks, it's a natural place to have a transfer location.



(Main): OJIBWAY pulls away from STEWART J. CORT after a supply run, June 28, 2024. (Inset): A crewmember in the pilothouse during the supply run. Photo: Brendan Falkowski

The facility includes two main warehouses: a stock room and a staging room. Walking through the staging room, shelving units were labeled with bright red tags punched with the names like *Hon. James L Oberstar*, *Mesabi Miner*, and other iconic freighters. The traces of heritage were evident even in the warehouse where a hard-to-reach shelving unit still bore a *Henry Ford II* name tag. On these shelves were custom metal skids that could be moved with a high-low or picked up by crane. Workers assembled orders by picking supplies from the stock room and moving them to the awaiting skids in the staging room. After being shown around the warehouses, it was time to get aboard the supply boat *Ojibway*.

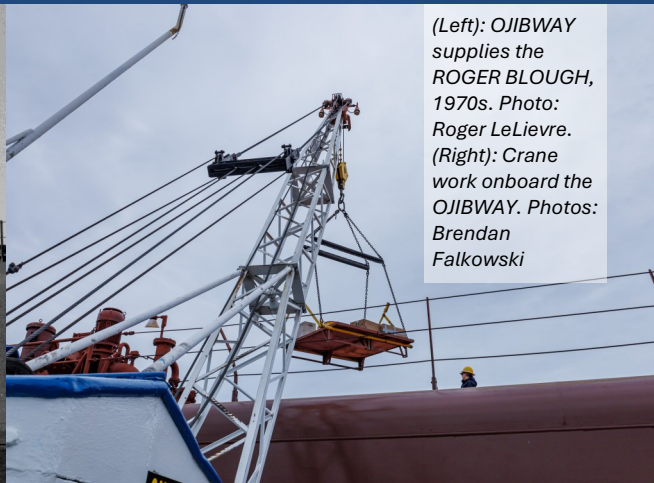
The *Ojibway* is a short and stout looking resupply boat that was designed and built in 1946 following World War II. It's clearly designed for working. In the center of the boat sits a superstructure with a spartan interior that mainly serves to elevate the pilot house and a crane. The crane, on a turntable, is able to rotate off the sides to transfer supplies onto the deck of passing freighters. Aft of the superstructure is an open deck to load cargo. Sectioned into four quadrants, skids are loaded nicely with enough room between them to let crew walk around them. Below deck is the engine room with a rather healthy amount of space - definitely enough room to get a wrench in. While old, the *Ojibway* is not poorly maintained. She starts with no hesitation and the crane runs smoothly.

As the approaching ship exits the Soo Locks – when supplying while downbound – or rounding Mission Point when upbound, the boat crew heads out to *Ojibway* for their sprint out to the passing freighter. On June 28, 2024, *Ojibway* was supplying the downbound *Stewart J. Cort*. Typically, ships are supplied while transiting downbound, though some are supplied on the upbound. In an interesting situation of policy, a vessel is considered soil of the country it most recently made port, so a vessel that most recently called on a US port is considered “American soil” and one that called on a Canadian port is considered “Canadian soil”. In order to avoid some extra paperwork, vessels are almost always supplied when considered “American soil”.

Once on board now operating as captain, Belanger provided the safety brief: respect the crane and stay clear of the deck crew. He went belowdecks to fire up the single diesel engine, then he climbed the three ladders up to the wheelhouse at the top deck. Three more crew got onboard – two deckhands and a crane operator – before lines were cast off and *Ojibway* got underway. The supply boat makes way towards the Soo Locks to rendezvous with the *Cort*. As *Ojibway* comes to meet the *Cort*, she turns in a big, swooping turn and pulls up alongside. Over the VHF, Belanger established communication with the bridge of the *Cort* to synchronize speed and establish a rafting location. A single line is cast down to the bow of the *Ojibway* to hold her in place; the momentum of the *Cort*’s forward motion helps keep *Ojibway* tight alongside.

Nearly as soon as the line is tied off, the crane operator gets right to work. The first skip is already loaded in the bridle and ready to go. Like clockwork, the crane operator makes the whole operation look easy, quickly and smoothly moving the skips full of supplies from the fantail of the *Ojibway* up to the spar deck on the freighter. The two deckhands help load and unload skips on *Ojibway*, while the crew of the *Cort* take care of the operation up on deck. Next went the odd shaped items, a coil of wire rope and bundle of steel tubes were picked and hoisted aboard. After all of the supplies are unloaded from the skips on the *Cort*, the crew then loads up any trash and recycling to send back to shore. The reverse process ensues, loading everything back onto *Ojibway*. After the transaction is complete, the line is cast off and *Ojibway* heads back to home base. A traditional Great Lakes greeting, one long and two short blasts on the horn, were exchanged as the vessels part ways. Meanwhile *Stewart J. Cort* continues her trip to Burns Harbor, IN, to unload her belly of taconite pellets.

As the *Ojibway* comes back to the dock, she swoops up from the east and gracefully brushes up against the dock. The lines that were cast only half an hour earlier were retied again. The diesel downstairs is shut down and the crew immediately begins unloading the boat, swiftly slinging skips back up to the dock and unloading the trash and recycling from the *Cort*. Trash is sent to



(Left): OJIBWAY supplies the ROGER BLOUGH, 1970s. Photo: Roger LeLievre. (Right): Crane work onboard the OJIBWAY. Photos: Brendan Falkowski

the dumpster, while the recycling is all sorted and stowed in a customized recycling trailer. When full, the trailer is taken to the recycling center to be emptied. Interlake Steamship Company and other companies have specific agreements with Soo Marine Supply to handle refuse. Soo Marine Supply keeps a cardboard recycling trailer at the dock. Working with Northern Transitions (NTI), Soo Marine Supply is able to responsibly dispose of waste. The crew all return to their respective places, awaiting the call for the next supply run.

We were left with a new appreciation and respect for the Soo Marine Supply group and their employees. This glimpse into Soo Marine Supply shows the critical role that smaller companies contribute to making the Great Lakes shipping ecosystem healthy and efficient. It was clear the Soo Marine Supply crew knew their responsibilities, all the way from perfect docking alongside the



Cort and back at the dock to effortless equipment operation and solid communication leading to a safe work space. □

Special thank you to Brent Belanger, General Manager of Soo Marine Supply, for making this story possible.

Autonomous Innovations | By Sam Hankinson

Last month, I found myself in a self-driving boat in the middle of Thunder Bay in Lake Huron. The City of Alpena was to my back as the boat, named *Archie*, pounded through the waves. *Archie* is an autonomous survey vessel operated by Mythos AI. Mythos was competing in the inaugural Uncrewed Triple Challenge sponsored by the State of Michigan, and I got to tag along for the voyage. The morning of the event felt like race day. Just like a triathlon, the water section would be first, *Archie* representing the beginning of a journey that would end at Camp Grayling. Our goal was to monitor the boat as it drove 4 nm out into Thunder Bay, turn around, and come back. Once we arrived in the transfer zone, an autonomous drone, developed by US-based drone company SiFly, launched from the stern of *Archie*. The drone would then transport a payload to a ground vehicle which covered the last leg to Camp Grayling. I did not accompany the entourage to the finish line, but I was told there was a great fireworks show to end the night. Mythos won best maritime.

The Mythos team has become a very important partner to the work we are doing at the Port of Monroe. Through our partnership with Newlab and Michigan Central, Mythos conducted a pilot project at Monroe in the fall of 2023. The best way to explain what Mythos did and why it matters is to compare it to the lovely weather we have here in the Great Lakes region. When it snows, you can look outside and easily make a judgement on the road conditions and decide if it's safe to drive. It is much harder to get information on the underwater roads that ships rely on. With their autonomous solution, Mythos was able to gather data on the navigable waterway at the Port of Monroe, and help us understand how the conditions evolved with vessel activity. We shared that critical information with ships crews that arguably need the data the most. Our pilot with Mythos was recognized by the American Association of Port Authorities at their annual conference in October 2024.

At the Port of Monroe, our role in innovation is to take what we learn and share it with our maritime community. In this case, I learned how autonomy can be developed as a tool for ships crews- not a replacement for people. *Archie* is performing a valuable service, collecting data about harbors that has been difficult to generate due to the cost of mobilizing an asset and processing the data itself. *Archie* is described as the "Roomba for ports," but the goal of Mythos is to vacuum up opportunities with larger vessels.



But what exactly brings about the need for automation? I think it's identifying a route. There's two happening now in Norway that are relevant: Fertilizer company Yara has developed the semi autonomous ship Yara Birkeland to sail short distances between their facilities in Porsgrunn, Norway. Second, grocery

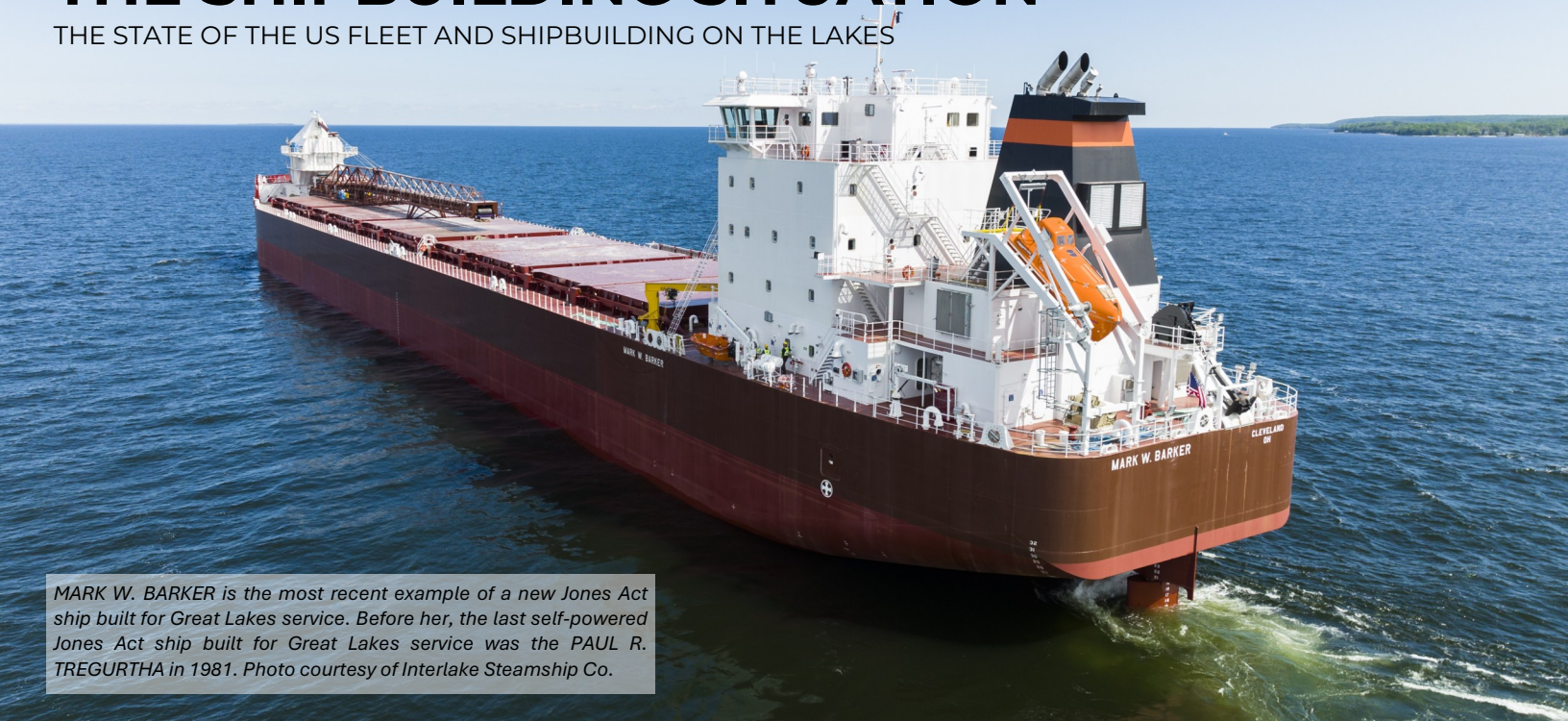
retailer ASKO developed two autonomous barges to create new efficiencies in their own supply chain, deploying them on a route that saves trucking miles in the Norwegian fjords. These are private companies making a decision to lead in autonomy to improve their transportation network.

There is a Great Lakes application to bring up, too. In 2020 the *American Courage* was fitted with new technology that allows it to sail up the Cuyahoga River semi autonomously. Interlake Steamship Co. recently completed a proof-of-concept drone pilot with Skyports Drone services, in which drones flew small devices and items from Interlake's shoreside facility in DeTour Village, Michigan to passing ships in the fleet. The results of the pilot will help inform the requirements necessary for adoption of drone-based logistics in the region, supplementing regular ship deliveries from supply boats. I am eager to continue learning how automation can complement the work that is being done by the Great Lakes shipping industry. For any company interested in marine innovation, the Great Lakes is a perfect place to test. From my perspective, I think the next step would be to identify routes on the Great Lakes that could be isolated as an automation test course. Monroe can be one of those ports. More pilots will help too. By testing we can figure out how to equip our mariners with better tools, and may end up finding new markets or use cases for vessels along the way. **INSET PICTURE: Interlake, Skyports, and Newlab team with the Skyports at DeTour, MI, May 14, 2025. Photo courtesy of Skyports Drone Services.** □



THE SHIPBUILDING SITUATION

THE STATE OF THE US FLEET AND SHIPBUILDING ON THE LAKES



MARK W. BARKER is the most recent example of a new Jones Act ship built for Great Lakes service. Before her, the last self-powered Jones Act ship built for Great Lakes service was the PAUL R. TREGURTHA in 1981. Photo courtesy of Interlake Steamship Co.

This article is the first in a series focusing on the current state of the Great Lakes shipping industry as we look to a future that is sustainable for both commerce and the environment.

Just over the last few months shipbuilding has gone from a forgotten industry in America to routinely making front page headlines. The current world climate has raised alarms across the globe for renewed investments in navies and merchant fleets as world powers compete for dominance of the seas. Even with this renewed interest in maritime, the Great Lakes still go largely under the radar, something this corner of the industry knows far too well. The spotlight only seems to find the Great Lakes maritime industry when things go wrong, and almost never highlight the industry's large role in the US economy and defense supply chain. Congressional reports cite that over 90% of the iron ore consumed by America's steelmaking industry is mined in the Great Lakes region and shipped through the holds of Great Lakes ships. The majority of American manufacturing is tied to the ability of raw materials to flow through the Great Lakes-Seaway system. Iron ore is just one of many other cargoes that support power generation, construction, food supply chains, and more throughout the region and even the world. As the national spotlight looks to the rest of US maritime when it comes to shipbuilding, let's take a closer look at the current situation on the Great Lakes.

Besides the *Mark W. Barker* and a handful of barges, new construction for the US-flagged Great Lakes fleet has not happened in any major capacity since the late 1970s, aided by Title XI benefits from the Merchant Marine Act of 1970. Title XI offered operators guaranteed financing through the government for newbuilds and modernizing existing vessels, with additional tax benefits for investing in their fleets. This legislation is what built the current fleet of Lakers we know today. The existing fleet of Lakers has been able to handle tonnage demands since the last major newbuild program, partially aided by the steady decline of coal cargoes and the cyclical nature of the North

American steel industry allowing for older, obsolete vessels to be retired. The carrying capacity (sum of all US-flagged dry bulk ships) has remained steady at about 1.5 million tons over the last decade and a half, while the Canadian fleet's capacity has remained around the 600,000-ton mark. But the American-flag fleet here on the Lakes is aging – the average age of the American Laker fleet is 52 years old. That is over one and a half times the average life expectancy of 35 years of the ships built during the last fleet renewal program in the 1970s. To further put this into perspective, the average age of the Canadian Laker fleet is only 24 years, and the average age of the international visitors to the Lakes is 12. These ships have been modified, repaired, and modernized over the course of their lives to remain efficient traders, but even though they sail in freshwater, the age of the fleet is starting to rapidly catch up.

Operators seem to find themselves in a Catch-22 situation. The decline in coal transport demand in the region has significantly reduced the amount of cargo movement necessary in the region in the current market, leaving more vessels available to take on other cargoes. The demand does not exist in the sense of increased tonnage, but at the same time there is demand for new ships in the sense that the fleet will need replacement.

As for the operators, the combination of old age of the fleet and increased regulatory scrutiny have brought more unexpected repairs and work to attention. Just like when you hit the 100,000-mile point in your car, there are major repairs and maintenance items that have to be completed, with surprise issues that come up as well. With shipbuilding costs so high that newbuilds are out of reach, operators are forced to keep pushing their older ships longer and longer. This brings with it more work and maintenance to keep them going, as well as the added challenge of trying to repair old equipment. Lead times for parts that have to be specially manufactured or imported from overseas keep ships at the wall for several months at a time now. This kept the 1942-vintage cement carrier *Alpena* at the wall for



MICHIGAN TRADER is one of two more recent investments in new Jones Act hulls, this case being an articulated tug barge. She is pictured on the Detroit River, March 21, 2025. Photo: Sam Hankinson

the first three months of the 2025 season, and the 1973-built Integrated Tug-Barge *Presque Isle* during the summer of 2022 for three and a half months, just to name examples. These events have transpired when there is available cargo to move, forcing industry and operators to get creative in order to not fall behind. Every stakeholder on the Great Lakes should be aware of the increased potential of ships breaking down at critical infrastructure points, such as the Soo Locks or a loading dock. This would not only delay that vessel but accumulate delay time for other ships as well. The odds of this situation are only increasing at this point

Uncertainties in regulatory direction have not positively added to the equation either. Environmental regulations for emissions and directions on future fuels present a moving target for operators and engineers alike. Further regulatory discrepancies between US and Canadian agencies leads to further uncertainty on the subject of ballast water treatment systems (BWTS). While existing US Lakers that do not leave the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway system are not required to have BWTS, Canada put rules in place mandating systems onboard any vessels taking on or discharging ballast in Canadian waters by the year 2030.

Building new ships is the result of an equation that combines both demand for the new tonnage, whether that be for new cargo, replacing existing tonnage, or other initiatives, in combination with the economic factors that allow for the capital investment in new hulls. It's a chicken and the egg situation. The Great Lakes shipping industry, and American maritime as a whole, has been caught in a tricky spot where there is demand for the new hulls in terms of fleet renewal, but the economics do not play out.

The shipping business on the Lakes is a competitive trade, where margins are tight and don't allow for large amounts of capital to be saved for investment in new hulls, especially when the old hulls are so maintenance-intensive. To top this, current market conditions make it difficult to reinvest. Competition between operators continues to evolve, where in more recent times some have been more willing to slash operating budgets in efforts to undercut rates in a 'race-to-the-bottom' business style. This slims margins even more, making it

more difficult for everybody to look to reinvesting in new vessels. Industries that rely on cargo movement via Lakers are attracted to the low tonnage prices, and are reluctant to look past the lowest shipping rate and invest in the long-term viability of their shipping platform through commitment to long-term partnerships. There are some exceptions, however. Interlake Steamship constructed the Mark W. Barker as the result of a long-term agreement to transport salt for Cargill. US operators are often hesitant to handle salt cargoes in order to protect their aging Lakers from the corrosive nature of the cargo. Cargill realized they needed the security of having a reliable Jones Act vessel to handle their cargo, and partnered with Interlake for a long-term solution that was realized through a newbuild Laker.

Domestic US shipping is regulated by the Jones Act, which mandates that ships moving cargo between US ports be US built, owned, and crewed. The US maintains very high standards in labor regulations and construction quality, but it comes at a cost so high that domestic operators are not able to justify investment in new hulls. US shipyards come nowhere close to competing with rates on the world market. Steel and labor costs are multiples of those seen around the globe. The methods of trying to surgically maintain existing vessels only adds to those costs. Laws like the Jones Act are necessary to maintain a domestic industrial base capable of producing vessels for coastwise trading and national defense, otherwise the art of shipbuilding would be lost in America as a whole. Canada is a perfect example of this, as the repeal of the Canadian-built stipulation in the Canadian Coastwise Trading Act dealt a final death blow to the Canadian commercial shipbuilding industry, with their defense shipbuilding industry even feeling the ripple effects. Canadian operators are able to build vessels overseas at a much lower cost, which has allowed them to renew their fleets at a massive scale in recent years. The prohibitively high costs at US yards further snowball into issues relating to maintaining a skilled labor workforce capable of building high quality ships when steady work is not always coming in.

This story will be continued in the next issue. ▣

Special thanks to Travis Martin and Fred Koller from Bay Engineering, Eric Helder from Interlake Maritime Services, Nick Hunter from NETSCO., and Chuck Canestraight from Port City Marine Services for contributing their professional insight for this story.

HERBERT C. JACKSON



HERBERT C. JACKSON departing Charlevoix, MI, April 30, 2025. Photo: Logan Vasicek

Interlake Steamship Co. continued the modernization of their fleet in the late 1950s with the additions of two gearless bulk carriers, the first being the *John Sherwin* in 1958, delivered by American Shipbuilding Co. of Toledo, OH, followed by the *Herbert C. Jackson* in 1959, delivered by Great Lakes Engineering Works of River Rouge, MI. The *Jackson* was designed by H.C. Downer & Associates of Cleveland, OH, and laid down at Great Lakes Engineering Works as Hull #302 on June 25, 1958. She was officially christened *Herbert C. Jackson*, after the executive vice president of Interlake parent company Pickands-Mather, and launched on February 20, 1959. After final fit-out she sailed on her maiden voyage on May 15, 1959. Her original dimensions were 690' long, 75' wide, and 37'06" deep with a capacity of 24,400 tons at her mid-summer draft. She was built with traditional lines of the classic laker, and her forward deckhouse incorporated into the bulwark of the Texas deck for streamlining. She was powered by a single General Electric cross-compound steam turbine rated at 6600 SHP, with a pair of Combustion Engineering coal-fired water tube boilers. She was the first vessel on the Great Lakes to have her steam turbines located forward of her boilers, with the coal bunker located aft of the poop deckhouse.

During her first season, the *Jackson* primarily operated in the St. Lawrence Seaway iron ore trade due to miners strikes in the Minnesota range. A bow thruster was installed for enhanced maneuverability in 1966. Interlake Steamship's parent company, regional mining and resources giant Pickands-Mather & Co., was acquired by Diamond Shamrock in 1966. Operations of the fleet

remained focused in the transportation of ore, coal, stone, and grain.

In December 1970, the *Jackson* transported over 50 Christmas trees from a Lake Superior port to Cleveland, OH, where they were sent on to the White House in Washington D.C. for a special holiday display.

Pickands-Mather was purchased from Diamond Shamrock by Moore-McCormack in 1973, then headed by James R. Barker. After a series of transactions Pickands-Mather was sold to Cleveland-Cliffs, though the Interlake fleet remained with Moore-McCormack.

Moore-McCormack helped provide capital for the fleet to take advantage of Title XI of the Merchant Marine Act of 1970 to embark on a modernization program. Title XI established government-guaranteed financing and tax benefits for companies that invested in new ships and improving existing vessels.

The decision was made to convert the *Herbert C. Jackson* into a self-unloader to increase her competitiveness, with the contract awarded to DeFoe Shipbuilding of Bay City, MI. The work commenced after the conclusion of the 1974 season according to designs from Marine Consultants & Designers. A section was cut down in the existing cargo hold tank top running along the centerline of the ship for a new unloading belt tunnel. New sloped hopper sections were installed running lengthwise to direct cargo to the centerline cargo hold unloading belt. A loop belt elevator was installed in a trunk located just forward of her after deckhouse. Finishing off the upgrade was a 250' unloading boom at her after end to direct cargo to the dock or shoreside hopper.



(Main): HERBERT C. JACKSON, upbound on the St. Marys River, July 3, 1973. Photo: Roger LeLievre. (Bottom, Left): Herbert C. JACKSON arriving at Duluth, MN, July 5, 2021. Photo: Gus Schauer. (Bottom, right): HERBERT C. JACKSON in the MacArthur Lock, late 1960s. Photo: MHSD Collection



Her cargo capacity was adjusted to 24,800 tons at her current mid-summer draft of 27'08". While in the yard, the *Jackson's* boilers were also automated and converted to oil-firing, and she returned to service for the 1975 season.

Her cargo holds were lined with polymer in 1986 to better allow for cargoes to flow down her unloading slopes. The *Jackson* came to the rescue of two stranded boaters on Lake Michigan on October 1, 1986. The boaters had been adrift in the lake for nearly 80 hours.

Interlake Steamship was purchased outright from Moore-McCormack by James R. Barker in 1987, marking the beginning of the current era of Interlake Steamship Co. under private ownership of the Barker and Tregurtha families.

Herbert C. Jackson's bow thruster engine was exchanged with the one from the *John Sherwin* in October 1988. In 1998, she became the longest vessel to sail up the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland when she delivered to the LTV mill. The *Jackson* became the largest vessel to transit the Buffalo River when she delivered grain on April 28, 2001. Both records have since been

surpassed by other vessels. She delivered the final cargo of coal to the power plant in Port Washington, WI, on June 30, 2004, opening for public tours to commemorate the event. When the *Jackson* was transiting the Rouge River on August 1, 2006, the Dix Street Bridge was unable to open due to extreme heat, forcing the ship to stop partway through the river. The crew got creative and rigged up a hose to spray water to cool the bridge, which was able to open and allowed her to pass through.

By 2015, *Herbert C. Jackson* was the last steamer in the Interlake fleet. She was repowered by Fraser Shipyards in early 2016. A pair of MaK 6M32E diesel engines were installed, with a combined 6250 BHP. A controllable pitch propeller was installed as well. She returned to service in the Fall of 2016 as a motor vessel.

Herbert C. Jackson remains one of the busiest vessels in the Interlake fleet, serving iron ore trades between Marquette and Dearborn, and the stone trades throughout the lower Great Lakes. Her small size allows her to be versatile and efficient in many trades. ■



Scott Bjorklund Photo

BRENDAN FALKOWSKI is a Naval Architect/ Marine Engineer student at University of Michigan who shares his passion for the Great Lakes shipping industry through his newsletter, work, and photography. He hails from Bath, MI. He is an avid musician and is a member of the Michigan Marching Band. Brendan is also a competitive sailor, and is an assistant coach and photographer for the Bath High School Sailing Team. He enjoys sailing, photography, chasing boats, and spending time with his friends and family.

SHIPWATCHER NEWS CREW: Content: Brendan Falkowski, Sam Hankinson, Jack Hurt, Scott Bjorklund; Photo: Daniel Lindner, Roger LeLievre, Isaac Pennock, David Schauer, Gus Schauer, Ethan Severson, Logan Vasicek

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COVER: Supply boat OJIBWAY returns to the dock after supplying the ARTHUR M. ANDERSON, June 29, 2024. Photo: Gus Schauer

