

BELMONT YACHT CLUB LIBRARY OF ARTICLES

INTRODUCTION: We plan to have an article by a member in each month's newsletter with practical useful and/or interesting boating information or experiences.

Anyone who wants to submit an article can send it to Tanya at tanya.d.whitehead@gmail.com.

THE WHOLE CLUB IS EAGER TO STUDY AT YOUR KNEE AS YOU IMPART YOUR POWER BOATING OR SAILING WISDOM!



FEMALE MASTERS

By Wiley Edmondson

“Captain on the Helm” is a beautiful sculpture just south of Navy Pier. It depicts a man of perhaps late middle years, clad in a warm seaman's coat and captain's hat at the wheel of a ship. The deck is heeled, and the expression on the captain's face is grimly serious. The dedication reads:

To those courageous mariners who guided their ships through
perilous waters, carrying cargo and people. Their contributions
have been so much a part of our history. May they never be
forgotten.

Did all the captains who sailed the lakes look like this handsome, distinguished man?

Certainly not.

Not all of the captains were men!

Women were an important part of the crews of the sailing ships that carried the bulk of the cargos on the Great Lakes during the 19th Century. The Great Lakes schooners were often a family concern, owned by the captain and his wife. He would serve as the ship's master, responsible for navigating and sailing. She would be along as the ship's cook. When the ship was in port, she would "keep the books", pay the crew, arrange for cargoes, and pay the bills. Some of them were such good cooks that the ship attained a reputation for culinary excellence, so that sailors in every port were eager to sign on, and there was never a problem recruiting crew. Countless women served in this traditional capacity.

There were a few women who went beyond this traditional role. Some studied for, and passed, the arduous Master's Examination, and became captains. A woman was captain of the steam yacht *Emma G.* of Cleveland. Lillian McGowan became a sailor at age sixteen, and rose to become master of a 600-ton lumber schooner. Celia E. Parsons was captain of the steam yacht *Florence C.*, with her husband as ship's engineer. She went on to serve as captain of the steamer *Marcia*.

Some women functioned as captains of ships without ever having the license or title. One ship – a brig (i.e., a tall ship) – was owned by a father, mother, and son. The father was captain, the son the first mate, and the mother was the business manager, hiring the crew, paying the wages and collecting the freight money. Alas, there was a flaw in this organization chart. "Paw" liked to drink. Often. And in mass quantities. He would show up "lit" just before the ship was to sail. "Maw" would order him tossed onto the dock. She would then bark commands to her son:

"Single up your lines, mister, and get sail on her!"

"What course, Maw? "

"For Cleveland! Lay out the course yourself."

If "Paw" managed to make his way to the next port, and if he showed up at the ship sober, "Maw" would yield command of the vessel back to him. However, she would deduct the missed voyage from his share of the profits.

If either "Paw" or the son ran the ship aground, or otherwise caused damage, she would deduct the repair cost from their share of the profits.

Women more often became captains in order to continue the family business after their husbands died or became disabled. One such woman was Maud Buckley, born in 1864. At age 17, she married Captain Thomas Giles.

Tragically, Captain Gilles was killed – he was standing on the cabin top when the schooner jibbed, and the boom hit him and knocked him into the lake (always make sure you are clear of the boom when you are on a sailboat and the wind is coming from aft of the beam!)

Maud was left a widow with two children to support, so she signed on as a cook on the 404-ton schooner *Fanny Campbell*. She and the ship's captain, James Buckley, fell in love and married. They sailed together for years on the *Fanny Campbell*, and Maud became very adept and experienced at handling the ship. Their happy time together came to an end on one voyage, when James became ill, and Maud had to bring the *Fanny Campbell* into port without his assistance. His illness caused him to become permanently disabled. As always, Maud did what she had to do to support her family. She studied for, and passed the examination to become a captain.

As captain, Maud bore little physical resemblance to the "Captain on the Helm", but she was as fine a captain as anyone who ever served on the Great Lakes. When she was at the helm, or on duty as skipper of her ship, she almost always wore pantaloons and a long skirt with a ladies' bonnet, and only wore trousers when required for a particular task. She was "as quick as a cat", and went aloft to the topsail yards (110 feet up) when needed. Unlike most of the masters of tall ships on the Great Lakes, she neither drank, smoke, or swore.

The *Fanny Campbell* and her lady captain made many a profitable voyage over the years, until one terrible late fall day on Lake Huron in 1899. The ship was caught in a fierce gale which ripped all the sails to shreds, and forced the *Fanny Campbell* into the breaking waves two miles south of Harbor Beach, Michigan. Her sailors climbed up into the rigging to avoid certain death from being swept overboard. Fortunately, a crew from the local station of the United States Lifesaving Service responded in a surfboat. They yelled at Maud to jump into the surf boat. She yelled back,

"I am captain of this vessel and I'll be the last to leave! Come
down from aloft boys and jump as you all see your chance."

They all obeyed her. After the last of her crew were in the rescue boat, she grabbed the fall of the mizzen-boom topping-lift, swung out and dropped neatly into the surfboat. The *Fanny Campbell* broke up shortly thereafter.

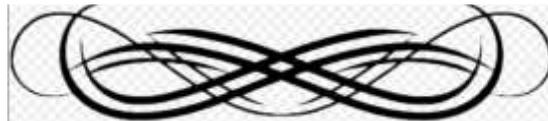
Maud never commanded a ship again. Her husband had died, so she took a job as a cook on a steam ship, and held that position for twelve years. It was said that she was "generous to a fault", and spent most of her money helping destitute sailors.

Wouldn't it be great if our lakefront were graced with a statue of Maud Buckley wearing skirt and bonnet, at the helm of her beloved *Fanny Campbell*? Wouldn't it also have been great, if back then, everyone knew of her and others like her and asked themselves: if a woman can captain a commercial sailing vessel on the Great Lakes, is there *anything* that a woman can't do?

Today, there is only one true tall ship based on Lake Michigan – the *Dennis Sullivan*, out of Milwaukee. She is a replica three-masted, wooden, gaff-rigged schooner. The ship has a displacement of 150 tons, and serves as an environmental research vessel, a school ship, and a living history museum.

Her captain is Tiffany Krikwan. Women now command 10% of all tall ships.

(The source for this article is *Women and the Great Lakes: Untold Great Lakes Maritime Tales*, by Frederick Stonehouse (2001), Avery Color Studios Inc., Gwinn, Michigan.)



Anchoring

Part 1

By Wiley and Merry Edmondson

This month's article is on the prosaic topic of anchoring. The purpose of this article is to convince all of us that being able to anchor successfully is important. This is not something we pay a lot of attention to in Chicago, or for that matter, on southern Lake Michigan, for the simple reason that there are very few good places to anchor. For most boaters at Belmont Harbor their anchoring is limited to weekend days at the "Playpen" off the Ohio street beach, or to go for a swim on a warm summer day, or watch the air

show. And don't we all miss that about now! The fact is that we devote a great deal of thought and expense to the things that make our boats go-engines, motors and sails- and very little to what makes our boat stay in one place-the ground tackle and anchors.

The owner of a seventeen-foot power boat with nine people on board-five of them small children- has run out of gas, and a strong easterly wind is blowing the boat rapidly toward a nuclear powerplant. He "freaks"! He calls, MAYDAY! MAYDAY! MAYDAY! on his marine radio, and the Coast Guard responds. After getting the boater's name, a description of the boat and its position, and directing the owner to have everyone put on a life jacket, the Coast guard instructs him to anchor until help can arrive. He responds on channel 16, with all the world listening, "I can't! I don't have an anchor!"

A powerboater has agreed to take two friends who SCUBA dive out to the recently discovered site of a 19th century shipwreck, marked by a floating beach bottle tied to a line to the wreck. Upon arrival at the site, he drops the anchor without checking the shackle as the divers get into their equipment. The lake is a little rough, the waves are three feet and building, but the divers enter the water without difficulty. They are three miles offshore, not far from Four Mile Crib. The boater settles down to read a book, but after a while it gets too rough to read. He looks up, and the boat seems to be much further from the crib than it was. He goes forward to check the anchor. He pulls on the anchor rode (the line and/or chain attaching the boat to the anchor), and it feels like it is attached to nothing. He pulls it in and-no anchor! The shackle has come out. He tries to start the outboard motor to get back to where he thinks the divers are, but it won't start. He does not have a marine radio and this is before cellphones. The divers, cold and tired, surface in what are now five-foot waves, and the boat is nowhere to be seen.

Coming back to their home port of Great Lakes Naval Training Center under power, the crew of a 34-foot sailboat are cold and wet because the wind out of the northeast has increased to thirty knots, and the seas to seven and eight feet and it is raining hard. They all want to pick up the mooring, secure the boat, and get the hell off her and into their warm dry cars and go home. The mainsail is down with the sail cover on. The jib is bagged and in a big cockpit locker with a lot of other stuff. The boat's only anchor, a Danforth of modest size, is somewhere at the bottom of the locker along with a short length of chain and 100 feet of three-strand nylon line. This boat is raced, and not cruised, after all! They are off the breakwater- almost in, thank God- when the engine dies. Efforts to restart are unsuccessful. Someone thinks to look for the anchor. The boat is now being carried rapidly sideways toward the harbor breakwater by the waves. Just as a crewman finally gets the anchor and rode out of the locker, the boat hits the breakwater for the first time. The third time it hits, the boat is picked up and thrown into the breakwater, the hull cracks like an egg shell, and the boat begins to rapidly sink. The crew are thrown off into the waves. They try swimming toward the breakwater. This is difficult in their heavy foul weather gear, but at least they are wearing life jackets. The water is very cold. The boat's keel breaks off and sinks to the bottom. The rest of the boat is turned into surprisingly small scraps of wood and fiberglass.

AND FINALLY:

We (Wiley and Merry) are in our 30-foot Hunter sailboat on the ICW which at this point is some damn river in North Carolina. We are under power. It is the end of October, we are cold, it is overcast, there is current in the river and a stiff breeze out of the north. There is nothing but swamp and marshland as far as our eyes can see. We are in the middle of nowhere. The river is shallow, and suddenly the depth-finder reads only 4.8 feet-we draw 4.3 feet; we must have gotten out of the navigation channel somehow, -so Wiley spins the wheel around to “do a 180”, and then the boat turns, and then suddenly the wheel doesn’t work anymore, it won’t turn the rudder! The wind begins blowing the boat toward the shoals to starboard, and Wiley remembers that we never looked to see if the emergency tiller that came with the boat was still aboard; we had never tried it- and meanwhile within five seconds Merry has run to the bow and released the line that keeps the 37 lb. Bruce anchor secured on the anchor roller. Then she lowers the anchor to the bottom and plays out 63 feet of heavy chain, and lets out 20 feet of line for good measure. The boat swings until we are stern to the shoal, the anchor sets, and we are secure and safe. Oh, and the emergency tiller is aboard!

These are all real events, and are presented in lieu of arguments as to why anchoring is important. An anchor is safety equipment. We rest our case.

Next issue, we will present our thoughts and methods for anchoring. We do not purport to be experts. For example, Wiley failed to secure or check the anchor shackles years ago, and we took the boat out a half mile and anchored to scrub and wash her. The shackle came out, the boat had been drifting for a while before we noticed, and we lost a beautiful \$450. Fortress Anchor. But we have anchored a whole lot over the years, probably more than almost anyone else in the club. We now know, for example, three ways to keep your anchor shackle secure, and will tell you about them next issue, along with how we decide where to anchor, anchor scope, how to anchor, how we raise our anchor. We will also mention some anchorages on Lake Michigan that we like. We hope to start a discussion going so that we can all gain from the thoughts, knowledge and experiences of our fellow members, so that, in the end, our grip on sanity may not in some cases be well-anchored, (you know who you are!), but our boats will be. Send your anchoring thoughts to

wileyedmondson@gmail.com or merryedmondson8@gmail.com

ANCHORING PART 2

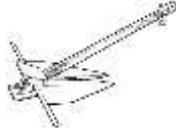
Anchoring – Part Two – Ground Tackle

By Wiley and Merry Edmondson

Anchoring can be a lot of fun. When our boys were little, one of our favorite boating activities was to anchor off the beach, and spend the day. When cruising, we have spent many a memorable night at anchor in some beautiful spot, far from any crowded marina or mooring field. This article is about “ground tackle” – the anchor rode (line and chain) and shackles.

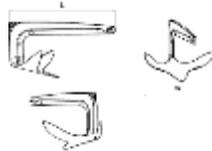
The Anchor

There is no “best anchor”. There is no anchor that is good at everything. Most of the boats in



Belmont Harbor use a Danforth.

We used them for years. This anchor has the important virtues of being lightweight, easy to stow, and relatively inexpensive. It works well on a sand or mud bottom, but the light weight limits its ability to penetrate grass.



We use a big Bruce anchor.

It is heavy, good at penetrating a grass, sand or mud bottom, and does well at “re-setting” if the wind or current changes direction. It is more expensive than a Danforth. Our Bruce fits on our boat’s anchor roller: if it didn’t, it would be very awkward to stow.

Whatever type of anchor you decide on, get one that is “oversized” for your boat.



Chain

Anchor chain is just as important as the anchor itself. If it is long enough and heavy enough, its weight settles on the bottom and delivers a horizontal pull to the anchor, causing it to dig in. Chain also helps to moderate the shock loads that could pull your anchor out as the boat bounces in response to waves or boat wakes. Boats in the 20 to 30 -foot range should have at least 20 feet of 5/16th inch chain. We have 62 feet of 3/8th inch. In general, the heavier and longer the chain is, the better – but it can’t be heavier than what you or your anchor windlass can haul back up into your boat!



Shackles

Most boats on Lake Michigan have an anchor rode which is a length of chain attached to a much longer length of three-strand nylon line, with a shackle attaching the chain to the anchor and a second attaching the chain to the line. Each shackle is a potential failure point. Do not tempt fate by using a \$2.95 Ace Hardware shackle. If you can find them, get marine-grade stainless steel shackles, which should be of at least the same diameter as the chain. If you use galvanized shackles, they should be at least 30% larger than the chain.

No matter how much you spend on shackles, the pin can work its way out. It can do it even if you used pliers at the start of the season to screw the pin in so tight that it can't possibly come out. It can still work its way out. We found that out the hard way. If it does, the *best-case* scenario is you lose your anchor (we lost a \$450. Fortress anchor), and in the *worst-case*, you lose your boat. Of course, you should always check the shackles before you lower your anchor. But people forget...

So, here are three things you can do to keep the shackle pin from coming out:

1. Use Loctite. Loctite glues the pin in position, but not so tightly that you can't break it loose with a pair of pliers.
2. Use a small electrical cable tie. Push it through the hole at the end of the pin after you have tightened it, then through the bow of the shackle, and back through the cable tie. Pull it tight as you can, and trim off the excess cable tie
3. Do the same thing, only use Monel seizing wire. Put lots of twists in it, so it cannot come loose.

Note that cable ties are subject to UV degradation, so if you use this method you need to change the cable ties at least once a year.

In the previous BYC newsletter, we made a case for why the ability to anchor is important. In this article, we have covered what you need in order to anchor reliably. Next newsletter, we will discuss **how** to anchor. We will also discuss some Lake Michigan anchorages we have liked. As always, we welcome your thoughts, experiences, and suggestions on anchoring.



ANCHORING PART 3

ANCHORING – PART THREE

HOW TO ANCHOR

By Wiley and Merry Edmondson



This article will discuss picking a suitable spot to anchor, and then anchoring correctly, and then mention a few anchorages we have enjoyed cruising Lake Michigan.

Where to Anchor

When selecting an anchorage there are a couple of preliminary considerations. Will you be some distance from boat traffic? If you anchor near a navigation channel, boat wakes can make your time at anchor miserable. If you plan to go ashore, is there a safe place to leave your dinghy? A place to lock it up? In the Chicago anchorages of south Monroe Harbor and the “Playpen, the answer is “No!”,

unless you can afford to leave several armed guards to watch it. Is the anchorage bottom sand, rock, weed, gravel, or mud? Will your type of anchor set in this type of bottom?

The next consideration is protection. You want a breakwater, or land, between your boat and the seas, which is why good anchorages are in a harbor or bay, or up a river. We once anchored our boat on the Bahama bank, by Memory Rock, in twenty feet of crystal-clear water. The sea was calm. We put on our masks, fins and snorkels and scrubbed the bottom of our boat. After a nice dinner, we enjoyed glasses of wine and a beautiful sunset. We turned in, expecting a blissful sleep but forgetting that half-a-mile to the west of us the sea was thousands of feet deep. We woke up at about 3 am, because we were suddenly in 3-foot seas from the west, with waves growing to five feet.



(Memory Rock, Bahamas)

Your boat is in this same situation when you anchor off a beach. We all know how the weather on Lake Michigan can “turn on a dime,” so you need to keep one eye on the boat and the other the weather. We anchored off Sleeping Bear Dune in calm seas one time and rowed ashore in “Dimples”, our 8’ Fatty Knees dinghy. We took the stairs and trail to the top of the dune, where we could see our boat in the distance below us. The lake now had whitecaps, and our boat was bouncing around like crazy. By the time we got back to “Dimples”, the waves were 4’ and the wind was blowing like crazy. The first two attempts to push “Dimples” out into the waves and row off the beach resulted in the dingy getting swamped. With a heroic shove by Merry, followed by a dive into the dinghy, and a hard pull on the oars by Wiley, we made it off the beach on our third try. Our Bruce anchor had not dragged, and the boat was fine.

Depth and room are important considerations in selecting an anchorage. You obviously need enough water under your keel at anchor so that your boat will not go aground, or be bouncing off the bottom if the anchorage gets choppy. This includes the entire circumference around the point where you lower your anchor, because the boat will change position if the wind changes direction, or just “wander around” her anchor if there is no wind.

Getting the Hook Down

Having selected the spot, it is time to get the anchor down and set. We always start our engine and get the sails down before we go into an anchorage. After we have selected the spot where we are going to lower our anchor, we maneuver to approach it from down-wind, with one of us at the helm (the “skipper”) and the other up at the bow. It is recommended that the crew at the bow, who will release the anchor, wear sturdy gloves.

Our anchor is on a bow roller, secured to a cleat by a line. When the skipper yells, “prepare to anchor,” the line on the cleat is removed so the anchor can run free, but the chain is held so that this can’t happen prematurely. The skipper puts the engine in neutral and the boat slows to a stop. The skipper then yells, “Lower the anchor!”.

You have all heard the phrase, “drop anchor.” DON’T! Lower the anchor by playing out chain or line until you feel that it is on the bottom. If you literally drop the anchor you can end up with a pile of chain on top of it tangled up with the flukes and or shank of the anchor keeping the anchor from setting.

As the wind moves the boat astern, slowly play out the chain or line, not allowing slack. If there is no wind or current, it will be necessary to power slow astern. If the engine is in gear it is very important that no slack be allowed on the anchor rode to keep it from fouling the prop.

Setting the Anchor

You should let enough anchor rode out so that the ratio of the (water) depth to the length is at least 5:1; 7:1 is preferred. If we have enough “swing room”, we will sometimes use a 10:1 ratio. To the maximum extent possible, you want the “pull” [load] on your anchor to be horizontal along the bottom. If you do not have enough room [or anchor rode] for a 5:1 ratio, anchor somewhere else.

It should be understood when figuring the “depth”, for purposes of the anchoring ratio, you add the distance between the deck and the waterline, to the depth of the water. (We measured this at the dock and then wrote it in our log.)

You also need some system for knowing how much anchor rode you are letting out. We use small colored cable ties, attached to the chain and line at ten-foot intervals.

After the right amount of line is let out, the crewperson at the bow cleats the line and yells “anchor snubbed”. The skipper lines up landmarks on shore, and the runs the engine astern. We run it all the way up to 2500 rpm for five minutes or so, but this is probably overkill. By noting the boat’s relative position to the landmarks, and watching the chart plotter, the skipper can determine if the boat is dragging anchor. If she is, get the anchor up and try a different spot.

Diving the Anchor

We always have mask, fins, and a snorkel aboard, mostly for fun, but very useful if you drop something important (like \$80. Sunglasses!) overboard at your dock or at anchor. When the water is clear enough and warm enough, one of us will dive down and check the anchor to make sure it is set. You may discover that it is a weedy bottom, and that your anchor is mostly being held by a tangle of

weed (if so, re-anchor!). One time, our Bruce anchor was resting on its side, with only one fluke dug in. The diver righted it and jammed both flukes into the bottom.

After you anchor, don't forget to turn on your anchor light if the boat will be there for the night.

Getting the Anchor Up

Ah! You have had a wonderful night's sleep on your boat in a quiet anchorage, and you wake up to a glorious sunrise. Or, you and your kids have spent the day at the beach, and everyone enjoyed the dinghy ride back to your boat. Time to go!

We have not usually had a great deal of trouble getting the anchor up. We start the engine. We like to leave it at idle, one of us at the helm and the other at the bow. We can usually pull the anchor rode in by hand (once again gloves are helpful!) and thus pull the boat up to the anchor. Since we are now elderly, the foredeck crewperson may need to take "breaks" from time-to-time by giving the rode a couple of turns around a cleat; this allows the foredeck crewperson to rest, and also feed the rode on deck into the anchor locker.

There have been times when the wind or current was too strong to bring the boat up to the anchor by hand, in which case we do it the way the more intelligent boaters do it all the time. Put the engine in forward, at idle speed, and move toward the anchor as the crewperson at the bow pulls the rode in. The risk here is that the skipper will move the boat forward faster than the crew at the bow can bring in the rode, causing slack, and the rode then gets wrapped around the turning prop, stopping the engine, bending the propeller shaft, and wrecking the coupler and maybe even the stuffing box, all while the crewperson was shouting, "STOP! STOP!", and the skipper yelling, "WHAT? I can't hear you!". Thus, you need hand signals for when engine noise and the wind prevents voice communication. Even better, there are sets of (battery operated) earphones and microphones sold for use when anchoring, bringing the anchor up, or docking. They are called, very appropriately, "marriage savers".

Once the chain is vertical – the anchoring ratio is 1:1 – we have almost always been able to break the anchor out and lift it by hand. When this didn't work, the skipper has put the engine "slow ahead," and this breaks the anchor out.

Some Overnight Anchorages on Lake Michigan

Chicago has the "Playpen", and South Monroe Harbor.

We have anchored in the playpen on weekdays a couple of times, and spent a surprisingly quiet night. Always turn your anchor light on if the boat is spending the night, even in a designated special anchorage area!

Saugatuck has an anchorage to starboard after you enter the channel. It is small and shallow – but perfect for a shallow draft power boat or a swing-keel pocket cruiser. We have anchored our fixed-keel boat overnight up the Kalamazoo River, on Kalamazoo Lake, just past the downtown. If you anchor here, be sure your anchor and boat are well-clear of the chain ferry.

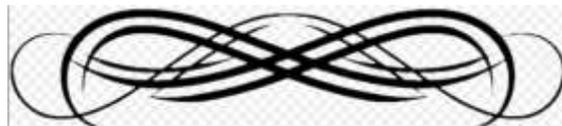
Pine Creek Bay, on the north shore of Lake Macatowa at Holland, is more than three miles up the channel from the break-wall, but it is worth the trip. It is quiet with forest on all sides and stars above, and good holding on a mud bottom.

South Manitou Island has a natural harbor that offers protection from north, west and south winds; it is entirely exposed to the east however. The beach is nice, and you can take a tour of the lighthouse and explore the old abandoned farms. The anchorage is a shelf of shallower water with a sand bottom, so holding is good. The bottom drops off very steeply to deep water (150 ') so make sure your anchor is well set. One cruising couple anchored on the shelf, went to bed and woke up the next morning drifting in the Manitou Passage!

Finally, Charelevoix (Round Lake) is our favorite anchorage off Lake Michigan. You'll have to wait for a bridge opening (named, appropriately the "Bridge Street Bridge"). It opens on the half-hour. Try to time it so that you are not drifting around in the narrow channel waiting for it to open. Right after the bridge, you enter Round Lake, which offers good protection from all directions and good holding on a mud/sand bottom. You can find a spot within an easy dinghy ride of the town, which has lots of neat restaurants and shops. It is only a short walk to a nice beach.

Anchors Away

Hopefully, many of you may know of additional places to anchor, and different techniques, and will be willing to share them. There are many day spots where you can anchor to go for a swim and no doubt many anchorages were not mentioned. Let's continue to grow a list of great anchorages for all to share.





DON'T GO OUT WHEN YOU SHOULDN'T GO OUT

The Disappearance of the Car Ferry Milwaukee – October 22, 1929

Captain Robert McKay was a “Type A” personality. He was known to be “rough, tough and gruff.” He lost his temper easily. Although a number of the officers on his ship held master’s licenses and were qualified to command a ship themselves, Captain McKay never asked for their opinions or advice, and they understood that any counsel they could offer would be highly unwelcome. When it was announced that Captain McKay was being promoted and given command of the mighty Milwaukee, his ship’s officers all chipped in to buy McKay a gold watch to be presented to him at a surprise party in his honor. When the surprise was sprung, McKay became furious and stormed out of the cabin. A female reporter from the local newspaper had been invited to the occasion, and McKay rudely shoved her aside as he left.

Another way that Captain McKay’s personality manifested itself resulted in the nickname – “Heavy Weather McKay”. He always kept the schedule. He sailed on time, very time, even if Lake Michigan was in the midst of a roaring gale.

Of course, captain would have confidence in the Milwaukee. She was a “car ferry” owned by the Grand Trunk and Western Railroad. Car ferries were huge ships designed to carry loads of railroad freight cars across Lake Michigan. The Milwaukee was 338 feet long – longer than a football field – and displaced 2,933 tons – more than a navy destroyer. She was broad-beamed, with powerful engines and twin screws. Unlike other vessels on the Great Lakes, car ferries were designed to operate year-round, and had strong hulls to deal with ice fields. She also had staterooms and accommodations for passengers on her upper decks.

However, along with their immense strength, car ferries had two unique vulnerabilities. Strings of railroad cars were moved from railroad sidings, across railroad tracks on the dock, and then onto rows of tracks on the ship. If the loaded railroad cars broke loose during a storm, the result would be a disaster. The Milwaukee had a system of blocks, chains and clamps to prevent this. The second

vulnerable aspect of the car ferries was the huge “sea gate” at the stern, which opened to allow railroad cars to be loaded and unloaded. If the sea gate were smashed in, waves would rush aboard and flood the lower decks, which contained the engine and boiler rooms and the crew’s quarters (known as the “flicker”.)

On the late evening of October 21st a gale struck Lake Michigan with winds and waves building all night. The Milwaukee was scheduled to depart from Grand Haven early that morning for her usual passage to the Grand Trunk and Western Railroad dock in Milwaukee. Predictably, with “Heavy Weather McKay” in command, the ship departed on time in spite of the certain prospect of a very rough passage. And a rough passage it was! Huge seas built and the winds increased as the powerful Milwaukee bashed her way across the lake. On shore, docks and piers were swept away. Beach cottages were destroyed. In Chicago, waves flooded Lake Shore Drive. On the Milwaukee, passengers and even some of the crew muttered silent prayers for their survival.

We can well imagine their relief when the ship arrived in her namesake city, and Captain McKay skillfully maneuvered the ship against the dock. The gale was growing worse, the wind screaming, but this did not prevent switch engines from pulling the railroad cars off the Milwaukee and pushing twenty-five loaded east-bound freight cars onto the ship. A handful of passengers, with nowhere else to go to wait out the storm, also went aboard. Since it was obvious that the ship would not be going anywhere until the storm was over, three crewmen caught a streetcar downtown to go see a movie and visit a few taverns.

Meanwhile, out on the lake ships and their crews were fighting for their lives. The freighter Delos W. Cook had been unlucky enough to sail from Chicago before the storm warnings were posted. The storm caught her half way up the lake. Her crew did battle with the gale for twenty-seven hours before ending up back at her port of departure in Chicago. The Robert Hobson, a 600- foot long freighter – just two years old- was flung around violently by gigantic waves and began to take in large amounts of water. Her captain was finally able to turn her around off Ludington, to put her stern to the seas, and “ran before the wind” for two hundred miles until she reached safe harbor in South Chicago. She was later discovered to have broken more than 25,500 rivets.

Meanwhile although windswept rain rattled the windows of the Grand Trunk and Western Railroad offices, the employees carried on with their routine work. Suddenly, an impossible sound was heard over the roar of the storm. The Milwaukee’s steam whistle was giving the departure signal! Her crew cast off lines and the ship backed away from the dock. It was three o’clock, the exact time the ship was scheduled to depart. Office workers rushed to the windows in disbelief to watch the car ferry depart down the river toward the lake. Old lake sailors on ships moored along the river, who had just finished telling shipmates that they had only seen one or two storms this bad *in their entire lives*, dropped their jaws in amazement as they watched the Milwaukee steam across the harbor. A dock worker gave the sign of the cross.

The storm was nearing its height, and the car ferry was already rolling in the heavy swells running in the harbor. Half an hour later, the captain of the U.S. Lightship 95 , moored three miles due east of the Milwaukee harbor entrance, sighted the car ferry and noted in the log said she was “pitching and rolling heavily”. Her heading was due east, instead of holding a little to the north, where the ship would have met the waves at a more favorable angle – a typical uncompromising “heavy Weather McKay” course.

It would be forty years before anyone would see the Milwaukee again. The ship was not equipped with a radio. The law did not require one. None of the forty-six souls on board would ever be seen alive again. Bodies, furniture and other flotsam from the ship were found on the surface of the lake off Racine after the storm.

If this was the end of the tale, then the disappearance of the Milwaukee would have been a mystery. However, many Great Lakes ships used to carry a waterproof, floating canister called a "message case." It served the same purpose as the "black box" on a modern jet airliner. If a ship were about to sink, a designated-officers would place a message describing the vessel's circumstances in the message case and throw it into the lake. On October 27, 1929, the Milwaukee's message case was found on the beach at South Haven. Inside was a message written on the stationery of the Grand Trunk car ferries:

S.S Milwaukee October 22, '29 8:30 P.M. The Ship is making water fast. We have turned around and headed for Milwaukee. Pumps are working but sea gate is bent in and can't keep the water out. Flicker is flooded. Seas are tremendous Things look bad. Crew roll is about the same as on the last payday.

[signed] A.R. Sadon, Purser.

One of the bodies found floating in the lake with a life preserver marked "S.S. Milwaukee" wore a watch, which was stopped at 9:45.

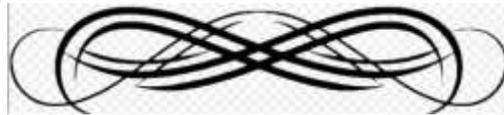
SCUBA divers discovered the wreck of the Milwaukee in the late 1960's. Her bow points toward Milwaukee. Her sea gate is smashed in. She is in 125 feet of water on the bottom of Whitefish Bay, just north of the city she was named for. Scores of divers visit this silent dark tomb every year.

So- the regatta has been planned and scheduled for months. Or, it is the start of your vacation, and you plan to sail across the lake to South Haven. Or, it is the end of the season, and you and two friends have all taken off work to move the boat to winter storage. You get down to the harbor, and the lake is rough and getting rougher. Winds are increasing. The weather report is not good. But you have a fine, stout, seaworthy boat.

Think of Captain Robert McKay, and his mighty ship. Leave your boat where she is. Walk your crew to the club ship. Have a beer or glass of wine.... and tell them the story of Heavy Weather McKay, who never allowed Lake Michigan to change his schedule.



Source: [Ghost Ships of the Great Lakes](#), by Dwight Boyer



Lifelong Love of Boating

By Jennifer Budden

Drive down the Lincoln Highway headed east, take a turn at the Pepsi bottling plant, down a one lane road past the grocery store/bait shop, cross the railroad tracks and you'll find my grandma's lake house. There on the shore of Big Tippie is where my love affair with water began, surrounded by my loving family and friends. Uncle Dick throwing me off the pier to sink or swim, Aunt Dot and Grandma driving the wooden Chris Craft into that very same dock, Grandpa shaking his head stoically as it sank.

The lake house was the result of an ill-fated boat trip down the Kentucky River. My mom was 16 at the time, a little difficult, difficult enough that her mom and dad wanted to abandon ship. So my grandparents decided that a house on the lake might be just what was needed. A few years later, a good looking boy from Chicago was persuaded to come visit by the dual lure of a comely blonde and a wooden sailboat. A few more years, and that only son from Chicago, my dad, was teaching me to sail across the waters of Tippecanoe on a Sunfish.

My other half, notice I didn't mention better, cut his teeth on the Rock. The result of a mom deathly afraid of water and a dad who couldn't keep out of the drink, a compromise was reached and they became river rats. He learned to ski on the back of a Mark Twain, taught by a scuba diving Ski Bronc. He also learned not to speak when boat ramp bickering occurred. A little later he found himself canoeing across Batchewaung Bay in five foot waves, his childhood friends heaving over the sides. Years passed and fortunately the Coast Guard was vigilant in the lower Niagara, until I found him and helped him remember his love of the water. Yes, I am a better swimmer and a better sailor, but he is a better listener and his smile gets so big once we leave the harbor mouth.

We all have these beginnings, our love affair with water. In the coming months, I want to listen to your stories, to learn what brought your soul to the great lake.

We were born before the wind
Also, younger than the sun
'Ere the bonnie boat was won
As we sailed into the mystic

Hark now, hear the sailors cry
Smell the sea and feel the sky
Let your soul and spirit fly
Into the mystic

A little poetry from Van Morrison to rock your gypsy soul

Jennifer



Ted Gidd- BYC Member and Sage

This month's article is to be about how to buy a new boat, which segues well into this feature on Ted Gidd. Ted is well known in the Chicago Harbors community, always there to offer a ride on his dinghy, fix your fouled engine, put you in touch with the right guy if for some reason he can't get it to turn, and to smoke a cigar and shoot the breeze with.

Take a ride on his Sundancer, Summer Settlement III and any sailor would feel the itch for smooth planing through Lake Michigan chop with horsepower! Ted's boat is an extension of the man himself...comfortable, well through out, well maintained, fastidiously clean and...FUN!

The stardock community is DIY. No one embodies that more than Ted. Ted has always made sure the dinghy dock is put out each spring, put a hose out so the goose crap is washed off, given rides to stranded boating partners in 90 degree heat and invited us all to R Dock for one of his famous dj'd parties. His parties put the main dock parties to shame, just saying...

So it's no wonder that Ted is so integral in the refitting of the John B. Mack. Plumbing, electrical, woodworking, Ted has a wealth of technical knowledge and a passion for getting things done right. Most of all, Ted is fun and he has a good time doing what he loves, and he loves being on the water.

He began boating on the forks of the Black River in Elyria Ohio at his aunts as a boy. So why Lake Michigan? "Lake Michigan is a much better boating option than the Chain of Lakes....did you hear the one about..."

Getting back to the topic of how to buy a new boat, in Ted's wise view, unless you hit the lottery you don't buy a new boat. Get a boat that is 2-4 years old, buy it from someone who didn't enjoy boating as much as they thought they would. This way the bugs should be worked out and the boat will still be under warranty.

As I sit here writing and listening to Brain Damage by Pink Floyd (yes Florida members, this is what a winter in Chicago does to us). By the way, Ted never wears socks. I'm thinking of the last question I asked Ted. What is your favorite music for boating? "Anything that moves with the waves"

I dig my toes into the sand
The ocean looks like a thousand diamonds strewn across a blue blanket
I lean against the wind, pretend that I am weightless
And in this moment, I am happy
Happy

Courtesy of Incubus



Ted Gidd, Remodeling JB Mack

