

Autos Across Mackinac: Cars Jammed With Sportsmen Poured Into U.P.

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Association. To get a raise, at 10:30 p.m. Monday, August 9, the men, members of the Seafarer's International Union, AFL, struck the car ferry as she arrived in Mackinaw City. Their wildcat action instantly tied up railroad freight and passenger traffic across the Straits. Mail to and from the south was delayed, but ultimately was switched to trucks belonging to Robinson Trucking, which moved across on the state ferries. Rail passengers also switched to the state boats, providing a land-office business for taxicabs and for enterprising local youths who earned tip money carrying baggage from the depots to the state docks. A day after the strike began, one lad received a whole dollar for carrying a small handbag the short distance.

There was discussion of using the Sainte Marie (II), then laid up in St. Ignace, in an attempt to break the strike on the Chief. But her crewmembers were sympathetic and the Chief occupied the only rail slip in Mackinaw City, anyway, and couldn't be moved without her crew. As a result of the strike, about 20 men were also laid off from the local rail yards.

The union eventually authorized the strike, which lasted three days, and only ended when Herman F. Schmidt, chairman of the board of the Mackinac Transportation Company, came to Mackinaw City to confer with the strikers. They voted to accept his wage increase proposals and return to work, although their union representative refused to sign the contract, saying he thought the company would probably have paid more if the men had remained off the job. While the men went back to work, they were still not completely happy.

Local defense units coordinated another area-wide air raid drill and blackout Tuesday, August 17, and for the most part, all went well, despite a load of passengers just disembarked from a D&C cruise ship at Mackinac Island. There were only two problems reported. One island hotel refused to douse its lights, a major violation, and aboard the darkened City of Cheboygan, someone stole a passenger's purse containing \$14. To apprehend the culprit, police held the boat in St. Ignace for more than an hour past her scheduled midnight departure. Several suspects were ultimately arrested.

To get folks to buy more War Bonds, the two surviving crewmembers of the torpedoed Escanaba appeared at events staged around the Straits region in early September, including an appearance September 1 at State Dock No. 1. Promoters also displayed a captured German mini-submarine as part of the bond drive.

But it was another war development that excited Michigan tourism promoters. Broadcaster Lowell Thomas reported live on the radio from a helicopter at the Connecticut workshop of Igor Sikorski, and predicted the new invention would change the living habits of Americans. Governor Harry Kelly predicted a billion-dollar income for Michigan tourist businesses after the war, largely because, "air transportation for the masses will eliminate the time gap between North Michigan and the industrial centers of the Midwest." He was particularly impressed that helicopters needed no large runways, and helicopter ports could be built economically all over the state. Officials of Great Lakes Greyhound even told newspaper editors that their firm had applied to the federal government for a national system of helicopter transportation, and that flight service would be available in more than 40 Michigan cities after the war, or just as soon as the equipment could be obtained. Their plans were a bit premature.

The UP Development Bureau's George Bishop was also planning ahead. He asked for an appropriation of \$130,000 to promote travel by any means to Upper Michigan in 1944, roughly the same amount that had been spent in 1943, although travel restrictions had cut tourism by more than 70% that year. Bishop noted that post-war planning was of crit-

ical importance to ensure people would think to visit Michigan once things returned to normal. By comparison, Minnesota appropriated \$ 75,000, Maine spent \$170,000, North Dakota had a budget of \$50,000, Pennsylvania had \$300,000, Illinois, spent \$150,000, and Kansas spent \$120,000 on tourism promotion in 1943.

While Bishop was looking ahead to post-war tourism promotion, Highway Commissioner Ziegler was looking toward post-war construction. With so few men available to work, and even fewer dollars available to pay them, highway construction and maintenance had just about ground to a halt. Instead, Ziegler marshaled his resources toward planning Michigan's transportation and highway system for the future. Highway department engineers were given free reign to plan and design roadways, safety improvements, bridges, freeways, interchanges, and all sorts of futuristic possibilities that might bring the state into the forefront once the war ended. It was this period of planning that ultimately would position Michigan ahead of many other states for federal highway funding, and direct road building and renovations well into the second half of the 20th Century.

There was also a little construction done in September. Luedtke Construction pulled wood pilings and replaced them with stronger steel "H" beams at the Mackinaw City dock. Superintendent Bentgen also asked for permission to designate as surplus some older equipment which had been lying around for years and was of no further use on the ferries. Commissioner Ziegler quickly gave his okay.

There was also another part of Michigan's highway infrastructure that Ziegler planned to abandon. Soon after taking office, he'd prevailed upon a friend, University of Michigan Marine Engineering Professor Louis A. Baier, to take a look at the causeway jutting out into the Straits from St. Ignace. Baier, who had been conscripted as a Lt. Commander in the Navy, was busy training naval architects in the use of the University's hull model testing tank in Ann Arbor as part of the war effort. But by the end of the summer, he'd taken time to visit the causeway, and his report back to Ziegler was not at all good.

According to Baier, the end of the causeway, where the ferry dock was projected, was totally unprotected in bad weather, and to make it at all useable, an expensive breakwater would need to be constructed. Even that would not allow boats to land in certain weather conditions, and so the present docking facilities would still have to be maintained. Baier reported that the surface of the causeway was also too low above the water level, and that wind whipped waves would wash over the structure, making driving across it on windy days dangerous, if not impossible.

Speaking at a tourism conference at Higgins Lake, Ziegler publicly withdrew his department's support of the project and observed that "upwards of half a million dollars has already been spent on construction and right of way acquisition. To spend any more would be throwing good money after bad." When asked what would become of the structure, he said it would forever stick out in the Straits as "a sore thumb, standing unused as a monument to bad planning." His remarks did not sit well with pro-bridge forces, but his words were proved true, less than a week later, when a huge windstorm washed waves high over the causeway surface.

Other than a drenching, the causeway suffered little physical damage, but other areas of Michigan weren't so lucky. A stretch of Scenic Highway 2 near Brevort was undermined and nearly washed out by waves. Another stretch was nearly buried by shifting sand dunes 40 feet high. Trees were toppled and private docks and pleasure boats were smashed. In the Straits, heavy wind-whipped swells caused The Straits of Mackinac to roll so much that a semi-truck carrying 10 tons of general merchan-



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dise was overturned on her deck. As the ferry turned for the buoy on her 6 a.m. crossing, she was caught in a trough, and in a particularly heavy lurch, the B&L trailer turned on its side.

Workers unloaded the merchandise when the ferry made St. Ignace, and she then was moored to the utility pier where a crane righted the nearly undamaged trailer. The cargo was reloaded and the truck continued on its way to the Soo. The ferry suffered only superficial damage.

A different kind of storm arose in late September when the Marquette Mining Journal gave credence to the rumor that Prentiss Brown planned to step down as head of the Office of Price Administration for an appointment to the Federal Reserve Board. Skeptics scoffed at the idea, but an Associated Press story from Washington a week later confirmed that Brown had been toying with the idea. Instead it suggested he might accept a Michigan federal judgeship. Neither turned out to be the case. Brown remained with the OPA until the end of the year, when he resigned to return to private practice in St. Ignace. He also accepted a position on the Detroit Edison Company board of directors.

September auto traffic continued to fall on the ferries. Only 10,292 vehicles were carried for the entire month, a 68.8% drop from the previous year. The year-to-date total was also down by nearly two thirds. Where in the same period in 1942 the boats had carried nearly 216,000 vehicles, in 1943 only 71,600 had been served. The upland game season saw little increase, as motorists found no gasoline to make the journey, and resort operators feared the rationing would have a dramatic effect on the 1943 deer season. To stave off disaster, leaders petitioned the OPA to let hunters pool their rationing coupons so they could share rides to the hunting grounds.

One man who did make it north in September was Ben Houle, captain of the former state ferry City of Munising, who shared a ride from Detroit to visit his ailing brother, John. The trip was brief, lasting only a weekend.

But for two officers of the City of Petoskey, the trip was a little longer. Both Captain Andrew Coleman and Chief Engineer Leo Foglesonger had been ordered to take leaves of absence from the State Ferries to stay with their ship and "protect the State's interest" while under lease to the Truckers Steamship Company of Detroit. But things had not been going well at Truckers, which had leased both the Petoskey and Munising. The Teamster's Union had not lessened its objections to ferrying truck trailers from Detroit to Cleveland, and convinced more shippers to end their contracts. Revenues fell far short of projections, and all of the ships' officers were given instructions to cut costs and overhead. Maintenance on the boats was slashed,

and Truckers Marine superintendent, Captain Duncanson, issued orders to both ships, which Coleman and Foglesonger felt were a direct conflict to their own responsibilities as ship's officers and representatives of the state. By early July, the men had had enough, and they submitted their resignations from Truckers, asking the state for their old jobs back at the Straits.

Commissioner Ziegler was apparently miffed that the men had abandoned their posts, and he refused, saying that the leave of absence was for the duration of the Truckers lease. He also said there was no work available, anyway, as other officers had more seniority. The men appealed the decision, first to a committee of the Civil Service Commission and later to the full commission. In both cases, Ziegler was ordered to put the men back to work. He refused, ordering Captain Bentgen, "Do not put either one of these men to work on our ferries or our docks without expressed approval from me!" He also asked Bentgen to prepare a complete review of the mens' records, including their performance evaluations, how they performed their duties, and maintained their boats, in case the information should be needed in any further appeals. So Coleman and Foglesonger remained out of work well into 1944, when their case was taken all the way to the Michigan Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, Coleman's replacement on the Petoskey made a navigational error and the ferry struck a reef near Amherstburg, causing minor damage. The repairs were covered by insurance, but the ship had to go to River Rouge for repairs and Truckers let it be known that they might return both boats early, before their leases officially ran out. The concept of ferrying truck trailers turned out to be a short-lived project, and an expensive one. Truckers soon defaulted on the \$400-a-day lease payment, ending up owning the Highway Department nearly \$30,000 on the deal.

Straits ferry traffic was also far below expectations, so Capt. Bentgen asked for permission to discontinue night boat service effective October 1. So few cars were traveling at night that loss of the sailings would hardly be noticed, and the department could save the cost of coal, oil, and especially wear and tear on expensive stern bearings. The approval was received, and on the weekend of October 4, the cuts took effect. Crewmen, which were becoming harder and harder to find because of wartime call-ups, were kept on the payroll, however, as they would hopefully be needed again for the fall hunting rush. Bentgen noted there was plenty of work to do on the boats, especially since they'd been rushed into service without complete reconditioning the previous spring.

Another, although unrelated, operation was also planned to

start in early October when Capt. John Roen won the rights to salvage the sunken steamer Humphrey that still blocked the ferry lanes. He asked Capt. Bentgen for permission to moor some of his salvage equipment at the Mackinaw City ferry dock, but poor weather delayed the actual start of work. By the end of the month, weather delays had allowed only a preliminary survey of the Humphrey, and it became apparent that salvage work might be delayed until the following year.

The weather did not delay the visit of Bob Bentgen, Superintendent Bentgen's son, who passed through en route to Milwaukee, where he planned to enter a diesel engine factory after training in the maritime service in New London, Connecticut.

The weather also did not delay the start of the November deer season. To entice more hunters, the Straits Inn near the Mackinaw City ferry dock hosted a "Hunter's Welcoming Party" with dancing to a live orchestra. But many of those intent on stalking deer, were being stalked themselves. The OPA sent a team of inspectors into the area to check hunters' gas rationing cards. They also banned the use of trucks for deer hunting, saying the trucks and their tires were more critically needed elsewhere. Violators faced loss of their operating permits, all their gasoline, and even possible forfeiture of their vehicles.

But despite the OPA, the surge of deer hunters caught nearly everyone off guard. Thousands took advantage of the opportunity to pool their rationing coupons, and cars jammed with as many as six sportsmen per vehicle poured into the region. With only two boats in service, the ferry backup at one point extended nearly seven miles. Fortunately, it was just then that Truckers Steamship returned the ferries they'd leased, and while the Petoskey went to the shipyard for repairs following her grounding, the Munising appeared at the Straits just as things became critical. Both Captains Houle and Coleman, still fighting to get their jobs back with the ferries, didn't come with them. They took alternate employment at the Soo for the rest of the shipping season.

Captain Bentgen quickly ordered the City of Munising into service and appointed former First Mate Peter Everson as her master. (Captain Duncanson would later be named master of the Petoskey.) Bentgen also requested the Chief Wawatam be brought online. But while her officers agreed to do the run, the Chief's crew refused to move the boat.

Why should they carry cars for \$143 wages when the state crews are paid \$168 for the same job? they asked. So the three state boats handled the 1943 hunting rush alone, and by Sunday afternoon, it was mostly gone. For the record, there were about 1,000 fewer cars and 500 fewer passengers than in 1942, but it was an amazing amount, considering the scarcity of gasoline and tires.

The OPA thought so, too, and while they initially backed off on the threat to inspect every hunter's rationing coupons, they did concentrate on out-of-state motorists and drivers' whose registrations showed they were more than 240 miles from home, meaning they'd driven further than their "pleasure driving" rations allowed. Offending motorists were given a choice of waiving the normal three-day wait for a hearing and going directly before the board in either Cheboygan or Mackinaw City, or having the records sent to their home districts for a hearing later. More than 1,500 drivers were cited in the northbound rush, and 11 motorists lost their rations on the first day of hearings alone. Some were forced to leave their cars at the Straits and seek alternate transport, as they could get no fuel to get their autos home.

There might have been more, but there were rumors that someone, perhaps even some ferry employees, were advising southbound drivers to ignore the tickets they were issued, and just drive straight home instead of stopping for the court in Mackinaw City. There was even a report that ticket sales were moved from the St. Ignace tollbooths so that returning

motorists could drive straight onto the boats to avoid the inspectors by paying fares onboard. The OPA court finally closed down a week later, when new rationing coupons, that drivers could use to travel that distance, became available.

The hunting season itself wound down with a smaller buck kill than in 1942. Hunters bagged nearly 2000 fewer deer than the year before, and by early December, despite several days of heavy southbound traffic, the rush was over. In a move that would show his media savvy, despite there being game and tourism officials to do it, the hunt's results were announced by Highway Commissioner Ziegler, based on counts taken aboard his department's ferries.

Capt. Bentgen also made an announcement. He revealed that the Munising and Petoskey would be sent to winter quarters at the Olds Dock in Cheboygan, where no ferries had wintered for several years. Cheboygan businessmen hoped it would mean additional employment for area workers when the boats fitted out the following spring.

But elation about possible jobs was tempered when word was received that 84-year-old Captain John Stufflebeam, former master of the Chief Wawatam, had died of a heart attack in South Haven. He'd only recently returned to Michigan from his retirement home in California.

There was also a death at the State Dock in early December. The Roen Company didn't wait until spring to begin work on salvaging the steamer Humphrey. Work began to remove 12,000 tons of ore from the ship with clamshell buckets so she could be refloated before winter storms set in. While the project went well on the freighter, one serious accident befell a crewmember while off duty. After falling asleep at a table aboard one of the salvage ships, in the early morning hours the man apparently sleepwalked off the boat, fell overboard, and drowned. His body was not immediately recovered.

Captain Ben Houle also found himself recovering from an accident. Since his ship was not being used at the Straits, he'd taken work sailing the tug Feeley, which was laid up at Thanksgiving. Since the steam was off, Houle spent his last night aboard in an upper bunk, and when climbing down in the morning, he slipped on a step stool, breaking his leg above the ankle. Doctors said he'd be hospitalized for several weeks.

With only several weeks to go in 1943, ferry traffic dwindled. To save money, Commissioner Ziegler decided to reduce service to only one boat, sailing from each side every three hours. The Straits was laid up, and the City of Cheboygan operated from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., making six round trips each day. Meanwhile, the Petoskey finally arrived from her repairs at Great Lakes Engineering Works and was sent to join the Munising in Cheboygan for layup.

The 6-trip ferry schedule lasted only a week or two, however, as by mid-month, Commissioner Ziegler announced that the Sainte Marie (II) would take over ferry runs on December 20 and make only five trips a day. The Cheboygan was held in reserve, to fill in during the holidays as traffic demands and ice conditions dictated. Surprisingly, more than 30 cars were left on the dock after the first Friday morning sailing before the holiday, so the Cheboygan was called into use. The only down side of the holiday rush was when dockman Rene Paquin slipped on the ice-covered dock and broke his arm, requiring a trip to the hospital at Sault Ste. Marie.

As the year wound down, President Roosevelt cited 72-year-old Wilbur Wright for his contributions to aviation 40 years before. The Wright Brother's flyer was returned to America from England, and there was talk that, in the shadow of a strike by rail workers, the government would take over the nation's railroads.

As 1943 ended, the winter of 1944 set in.

Next week: 1944.

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