



Figure 1. The *U.S.S. Michigan* before the wind.

The Iron Lady of Erie

Steven Selenfriend and Ted Myers

This article is dedicated to the memory of my beloved friend and co-author, Ted Myers. Teddy died peacefully in his sleep on December 6, 1998 after suffering a heart attack. Teddy was a fighter. He survived the Battle of Pork Chop Hill in the Korean Conflict, the frustration and angst of the changing corporate scene in America, and most recently, his successful defeat of Lymphoma. Ted was a loving and devoted husband of forty-one years and an "All-American" father and grandfather. He was the ultimate in arms collecting. A protégé of Sam Smith, Ted's warmth and noncompetitive nature entwined with his love of sharing his research and knowledge, endeared him to all who came in contact with him. He was the ideal of what our organization was designed to be and what our hobby once was. We shall all be diminished by his untimely passing. I can only say—so long, my friend, I shall never know your like again.

SJS

This is the story of the *U.S.S. Michigan*. It is fitting the tale be told here in Pittsburgh, where she was born, and only 100 miles from where she died.

When people think of the maritime history of the American Great Lakes, some may recall the Battle of Lake Erie and Commodore Perry's defeat of the British fleet in the War of 1812. Others may think of the sinking of the famed ore carrier *Edmund Fitzgerald* on the often treacherous waters of these inland seas. Few know the story of the *U.S.S. Michigan*, a ship that for 68 years served as the guardian of the United States' 3,000-mile border with Canada, and her adventures during a tumultuous period of national growth, expansion, and strife.

The *U.S.S. Michigan* was as unique as her times and the precursor of the modern Navy. Built two decades before the more famed *Monitor*, she was, in reality, the first iron-hulled warship constructed by the United States and only the second such vessel to be built in the world. She was also America's first warship to be prefabricated and powered by steam-driven engines. The *U.S.S. Michigan* was this country's initial venture into a class of vessel that would spell the end of centuries of naval history, the end of the wooden sailing warship, and the predecessor of the modern fully armored steel battleship.

THE RUSH-BAGOT AGREEMENT

The story of the *U.S.S. Michigan* began 30 years before her construction. The ending of the War of 1812 left a large



number of British and America warships on the Northern Lakes. Great Britain determined to increase the number of vessels on the Lakes to replace those lost to Perry, and to maintain military supremacy over the United States. The American government learned of the British plan with alarm and realized some agreement for arms limitation had to be reached. James Monroe, then Secretary of State, advised John Quincy Adams, American Minister in London, to seek some kind of treaty, stating, "the smaller the number of ships the better."¹ Lord Castlereagh, the British Foreign Secretary, realized his country would be at a disadvantage in an arms race with the United States, and advised Charles Bagot, the British Minister in Washington, to move forward with negotiations. These negotiations were conducted between he and Richard Rush, Acting Secretary of State. An agreement was reached on April 28, 1817. There was never a formal treaty signing or ratification on either side of the Atlantic Ocean. On April 28, 1818, James Monroe, now President of the United States, issued a proclamation making this "gentlemen's agreement" the rule.

The terms of the Rush-Bagot agreement that limited naval forces on the Great Lakes read as follows:

On Lake Ontario, one vessel of 100 tons burden, armed with one eighteen-pounder cannon;

On the Upper Lakes, two vessels of 100 tons burden each, armed with one eighteen-pounder cannon each;

On the waters of Lake Champlain, one vessel of 100 tons burden, armed with one eighteen-pounder cannon;

All other armed vessels shall be dismantled forthwith and no other vessels of war built²

The agreement was cancelable by either party on 6 months' notice. To adhere to the agreement, the British transferred their



The Great Lakes of North America

Figure 2. The Great Lakes of North America.

vessels to their Atlantic Fleet and the Americans either sold their vessels to commercial interests or scuttled them. The famed brigs *Niagara* and *Lawrence*, the victors of the Battle of Lake Erie, were sunk in Misery Bay near Erie, Pennsylvania.

The agreement was mostly forgotten throughout the 1820s and into the 1830s. In 1837, unrest and the threat of rebellion arose in Canada. The taxation policies of England had not changed in its North American colonies, the lessons of the American Revolution seemingly unlearned. Revolution was again in the air. The French Canadians were motivated by the rhetoric of Jacques Papineau and among the Scotch Irish of Ontario, William Lyon MacKenzie became the leader of the Canadian separatist movement. In December of that year, MacKenzie led a mob against the government buildings in Toronto. British troops were sent to quell the trouble, and MacKenzie and some of his band fled to the United States. Again in January of 1838, MacKenzie raised another group of men, armed them, and set off to foment a rebellion. This group was formed in and around Buffalo, New York, and included many Americans who were sympathetic to the ideas of independence and freedom. They crossed the Niagara River and captured "Naval Island," a British territorial possession, where arms and powder were stored. As before, they were beaten back by British troops and fled to United States

soil. To guard against further attacks, the British began a buildup, sending to Canada 15,000 additional troops, refurbishing their forts, and arming merchant ships to protect their borders. The British, on several occasions, "invaded" American territorial waters. During one such incursion, an American commercial vessel, the *Caroline*, was burned. The ship had been suspected of supplying Canadian rebels with arms.

The "Caroline Affair" led then Secretary of the Navy Daniel Webster to communicate with Great Britain that the border was becoming a spark that could ignite new hostilities. Fear mounted along the Northern frontier of a British invasion. The British commenced building two large steam warships, one on Lake Ontario and one on Lake Erie, and acquired two more vessels from Americans in Buffalo, New York. The British were also fearful that the United States might attempt to annex or invade Canada and blamed us for failing to deal with those Canadian separatists who sought shelter, men, and arms on our side of the border. English steamers continued to encroach on American waters, checking U.S. ports, adding to the heightened tensions.

THE FIRST IRON WARSHIP

It was in this period of growing friction that, on August 3, 1841, Senator William Allen of Ohio proposed an amend-

ment to a pending Fortifications Act to appropriate "\$100,000 for the construction or armament of such armed steamers or other vessels for defense on the northwestern Lakes."³ The amendment was passed on September 9, 1841, and preparations for the building of the first iron warship were begun on November 27, 1841, for defense of Lake Erie. President William Henry Harrison named her the *U.S.S. Michigan*.

Tensions were eased, and much of the alarm subsided as many of the disputes between Britain and the United States were resolved in the Webster-Ashburton treaty of 1842. But the planning for the *Michigan* continued.

American military ship building in the 1840s reflected, as stated by Don Canney, "an ambiguous stasis and reaction."⁴ Between 1841 and 1844, 14 sailing vessels were constructed, including three frigates. During the same period, the British added more than 20 steam side-wheeled vessels. The farsighted Secretary of the Navy, Abel P. Upshur, organized the planning and construction of both the *U.S.S. Michigan*, our first iron-hulled warship, and the *U.S.S. Princeton*, the first screw-propelled steam warship. These vessels put the United States in the forefront of naval steam technology at this time.⁵

In 1842, the Navy Department asked for the development of plans for a barkentine-rigged, iron-hulled, shallow draft side-wheeled steamer to be used for defense on Lake Erie. The decision to build of iron was Secretary Upshur's. Iron was selected because of his idea of "giving as much aid as practical in developing a new use for our immense national resources of the metal and to ascertain the practicability and utility of building vessels of so cheap and indestructible a material."⁶ The *Michigan's* specifications called for her to be constructed of American Juniata iron of the best quality. This was also known as wrought iron, or charcoal iron, but, unlike today's wrought iron, it was noted for its durability, toughness, and resistance to fracture.

U.S. Naval Constructor Samuel L. Hartt was given the task of designing and building the vessel. This was no mean feat in that nothing like this had been attempted before. There were no plans, no guidelines, and no rules. Hartt had previously designed wooden sailing vessels but fortunately had had the opportunity to examine and study the British iron warship *Nemesis* and the iron freight steamer *Troubadour*. He completed his plans and models by March 25, 1842, 4 months after being assigned the job.

The firm of Stackhouse and Tomlinson of Pittsburgh was the only firm bidding to propose the fabrication of the entire vessel—hull, engines, and boilers. Their bid was 13¾ cents per pound for fabrication of the hull and 24 cents per pound for the building of the engines, "complete and erected in place."⁷

Hartt went to Pittsburgh with his son in the early summer of 1842. He hired men and set about the task of making the full-sized molds for the iron hull plates. The molds were made of wood, and each plate was hand forged by mallet in the mold. By the fall, the hull was complete and was preassembled, to confirm the construction and fit. The hull plates were then disassembled and numbered for shipment and assembly at a small shipyard at the foot of French Street in Erie, Pennsylvania. The combined mass of the vessel, 584 tons, was shipped by boat along the canal systems of the northwest. In Erie, reassembly took place during the late summer and fall of 1843, all the time under the watchful eyes of Samuel Hartt, who made tools, plans, and construction decisions as required on the spot.

The launching of the *U.S.S. Michigan* was set for Monday, December 4, 1843. This was to be a major event for the small frontier town and, on a given signal, church bells rang, calling the citizens to the docks for the launch. With the entire populace in attendance, the *Michigan* started down the ways at 4 PM. One third of her way to the water, she froze solid. The efforts of the shipwrights to free her with the use of sledges, blocks, and wedges were to no avail. The citizens went home leaving an embarrassed, frustrated, and nervous Samuel Hartt to a sleepless night.

Legend has it that the next morning, before dawn, December 5, 1843, a sleepless Sam Hartt, lantern in hand, walked to the shipyard to study the depth of his problems and potential humiliation. When he got to the launching site, the *Michigan* was nowhere to be seen. He lifted his lamp and, in the faint reflections of the light on the water, saw the silhouette of the ship gracefully afloat, seemingly having launched herself the previous night. It is more likely that the workmen labored fervently, applied more tallow or grease to the strongback, and managed to strongarm the *Michigan* safely into Lake Erie.⁸ Two days later, President John Tyler came to Erie and christened the ship.

Throughout the winter of 1843 and spring and summer of 1844, construction went on, the engines and boilers being installed, decking completed, rigging hung, ordnance installed, and crew recruited. August 19, 1844, her first captain, Commander William Inman, reported that the ship was officially transferred to the government by her constructors and was ready for service.

The *U.S.S. Michigan* was 167' 6" long, with a 27' beam and 7' 7" draft. Though Barkentine rigged, she would rarely proceed under sail, because her mass of 604 tons' displacement would not handle well and required her two large paddles to be partially dismantled for her to be able to sail. She was designed to carry twelve 32-pounder carronades in broadside and two 68-pounder Paixhan shell guns fore and aft

on pivots. At the time of her launching, she carried only four 32-pounders and the two Paixhan guns. She was the first vessel to be launched with her primary ordnance facing forward and aft as a centerline-mounted main battery, much like modern battleship turrets. The cost to construct the *U.S.S. Michigan* was \$152,478.71. The sloop of war *Cumberland*, built at the same time, made famous by her sinking by *C.S.S. Virginia*, cost slightly more than \$320,000.00, and the frigate *Congress*, also sunk by the *Virginia*, cost more than \$355,000.00, thus proving Upshur's beliefs in the economic advantages of iron versus wooden construction.⁹

THE CAREER OF THE U.S.S. *MICHIGAN*

As soon as the *Michigan* was launched, the journals of the day marveled at her construction and armament. The publicity made the British aware of the powerful new vessel with almost immediate negative response. The British Minister to Washington, Mr. Packenham, who knew of the Rush-Bagot agreement, wrote the American Secretary of State, John C. Calhoun, of this apparent violation of the treaty, and a new crisis ensued. The *Michigan* was forbidden to leave port until her ordnance was reduced. When she finally sailed, she mounted one 64-pounder gun on her forward pivot mount. Another crisis was averted.

In the years preceding the Civil War, the standing orders for the *U.S.S. Michigan* were to patrol the lakes and assist vessels in trouble. Her average cruising season would be from early spring to late into December, when the ice on the lakes would force her to remain at her home port at Erie, Pennsylvania. During her 9-month cruising season, the *U.S.S. Michigan* would generally make at least two voyages to the upper lakes, Michigan and Huron, and travel back and forth between Detroit and Buffalo, with stops also at Chicago, Cleveland, and other ports along the Great Lakes.¹⁰

The "Timber War"

In the early 1850s, the *U.S.S. Michigan* was involved in the interdiction of the so-called Timber Pirates and gang warfare that had erupted between lumbering factions in Milwaukee and Chicago. The federal government had established laws giving the Navy jurisdiction over federal lands as timber preserves to protect stands of live oak and red cedar for naval shipbuilding. Previously, in 1831, a federal law had been passed making the cutting of timber on government lands a felony.¹¹ This did not sit well with timber interests and the frontier spirit of the growing Northwest. It was believed Washington was involved in restraint of commerce. A market

developed in bootleg timber just like bootleg whiskey in our times. The "timber pirates" actually planned armed resistance to the federal agents. On her first cruise, the *Michigan* was rammed by a vessel in an attempt to sink her. After repairs, the *Michigan* returned to her duties, working in conjunction with federal marshals. The marshals, with the aid of the *Michigan's* Marine contingent, captured and delivered for trial many of the men responsible for the theft of timber from these preserves. The so-called "Timber War" ended, and the powerful vessel's presence and the federal government's willingness to allow the use of her in civil matters set the tone for her future involvements.

The Beaver Mackinac War

In 1856, *U.S.S. Michigan* became involved in one of the more bizarre events in American history. In what would become known as the Beaver Mackinac War, the *U.S.S. Michigan* played a role in the assassination of Mormon leader James Jesse Strang and the destruction of his sect on Beaver Island. Much of the history of the Northern territories, today's midwestern states, involved the religious persecution of the Mormon sects.

James Strang, a young lawyer from New York state, went to Nauvoo, Illinois, to meet the founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith. He became a member of the faith on February 25, 1844. When Smith and his brother were lynched by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, on June 27, 1844, Strang claimed to be Smith's heir and stated he was charged to lead the religious group. A power struggle ensued between Strang and Brigham Young, who was supported by the Church's hierarchy, the Council of Twelve. No conciliation could be obtained, and Strang was excommunicated. By April 1846, Strang had named himself a Prophet and formed his own sect.

Strang moved his followers from their homes in Wisconsin to Beaver Island, in northern Lake Michigan. The island was situated 40 miles from the vital Mackinac Straits, which channeled vessels on the trade routes to this emerging area right to the island and its deep water port of Paradise Bay.

The development of Beaver Island greatly threatened the financial markets of the older established trading and fishing community on Mackinac Island. A virtual cold war ensued, fueled by the added element of religious bigotry toward the Mormons and their practice of polygamy. In May 1851, the cold war ended and a shooting war commenced because of Strang's lack of understanding of how his community was impacting economically on Mackinac Island. The bloodshed led to the *U.S.S. Michigan* being ordered to the scene. The vessel and crew were released to work with the

civil authorities in putting down the unrest. The federal government decided to proceed with litigation to evict the sect from Beaver Island, because they were only squatters. The government authorized the district attorney of Michigan to proceed against Strang and assured the civil authorities of the aid of the U.S. Navy and the *U.S.S. Michigan*. Charges were brought against Strang, who by this time had declared himself King and the community of Beaver Island semiautonomous of the United States. This all ended in the assassination of Strang, which occurred within view of the *Michigan's* deck watch while in port at Beaver Island. The perpetrators took refuge aboard the ship and were transported to Mackinac Island. After Strang's death and the *Michigan's* departure, a band of men from Mackinac swooped down on the remaining Mormons on Beaver Island and forcibly drove them from their homes. Rumors circulated that Commander Charles H. McBlair, the new captain of the *Michigan*, had been involved in the assassination plot. Many of the facts in the attack did point to the possibility that there was truth to the claim. A Navy inquiry merely accepted McBlair's account of the incident and let it drop. It is important to understand the strong prejudice that existed nationally toward Mormons, especially since Utah's Mormon War of 1847.

Regardless of the *Michigan's* involvement in civilian problems in the Northwest, the primary function of the vessel in the years before the Civil War was, first and foremost, that of aiding and rescuing ships and seamen in distress. From 1854 to 1860, the vessel assisted at least 35 ships in harm's way, some more than once. The *Michigan* was almost wrecked herself in an attempt to rescue the 1,700-ton paddle steamer *Mayflower* on December 4, 1854, the third rescue of the vessel in 4 years. The *Michigan's* power and the invulnerability of her iron hull made her an ideal rescue vessel, even in ice-clogged waters of the early winter season. She was so good at her job, she became known around naval circles as a tug, and in fact, drew ire from civilian tug owners on the lakes, who claimed she was infringing on their ability to earn a living.

In 1857, under continuing protest from the British of *U.S.S. Michigan's* violations of the Rush-Bagot agreement, the Navy began an inquiry into removing the *Michigan* from the Great Lakes. To everyone's surprise, letters of protest to this action were received, and notes of commendation of the *U.S.S. Michigan's* deeds came from both sides of the border. She was not thought of as a warship but as an auxiliary in the peace process. Her services were available to ships of the United States and Canada. It was finally determined that to remove her from the lakes would be a detriment to harmonious commerce.¹²

The Civil War: 1861-1863

The spring of 1861 broke across the Great Lakes and the nation with great tension. The *U.S.S. Michigan* had just completed a major refit after 15 years of service. As she was preparing for the spring cruising season, the Civil War erupted at Charleston, South Carolina. Few Americans would comprehend, at the time, the cost to the nation in life, wealth, and resources the conflict would bring. Fewer still would realize how seriously the noncombatant regions of the nation would be affected by the turmoil of war.¹³ The Great Lakes region would become one of the most impacted areas.

In March 1861, Commander John C. Carter was given command of the *Michigan*. On May 9, 1861, he was ordered to take the *Michigan* to the principal cities along the lakes and to assist in the recruiting of men for service in the Navy. Although a seemingly nebulous function, it became as crucial a role as any. As Lincoln's plan of blockading the ports of the South was implemented, the sudden lack of ships and men to sail them became quickly apparent. The *Michigan* was responsible for recruiting over 4,000 men during the course of the Civil War. Most of the men served in the Mississippi Squadrons of captains S. H. Foote and David Dixon Porter, although many were placed on the blockaders in the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. The *U.S.S. Michigan* was almost recruited for the Atlantic Blockading Squadron herself, but she was too large to negotiate the Welland Canal, joining Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, so she could not navigate to the sea.¹⁴ The five smaller revenue cutters serving on the Great Lakes were taken for the blockade fleet.¹⁵ This left the *U.S.S. Michigan* as the sole Union naval presence on the Great Lakes.

Relations between Britain and the United States began to deteriorate soon after the beginning of the Civil War. The blockade of Southern ports was starting to impact the flow of cotton to the textile mills of England, a cornerstone of the British economy. This crisis was further heightened by the political crisis brought about by the Trent Affair. On November 8, 1861, Commander John Wilkes of the *U.S.S. San Jacinto* stopped the *H.M.S. Trent* at sea and took into custody James M. Mason and John Slidell, Confederate ministers to London and Paris. Slidell had been a former Senator from Louisiana; and James M. Mason, the former Senator from Virginia and framer of the Fugitive Slave Law. Never before or since had relations between Britain and the United States been so strained without war resulting. Almost immediately, 10,000 British regulars and their supporting artillery were dispatched to Canada. The bands supposedly played "Dixie" as they set sail.¹⁶ The U.S.-Canadian border would again become a potential flash point for war. In the end, cooler

heads prevailed, and conflict was averted between the United States and Britain. This is not what had been hoped for by the leadership of the Confederacy, because a war with England might change the focus of the Union and cause the Southern states to be left to live in peace. Secretary of State Seward of the United States believed a war with England would help to reunite North and South to repel a common enemy.

The Civil War dragged on, and 1862 saw the *U.S.S. Michigan* continuing her standard patrols, rescue missions, and recruiting duties on the Lakes. New problems and new roles evolved for the *Michigan* as the war stretched on. The longer the war proceeded, the less popular it became in the North. On March 3, 1863, Congress was forced to pass mandatory conscription laws. This was held in great disdain by free and independent men across the nation. It was further infuriating to the masses that those of means could buy their way out of the draft. Cities across the North braced themselves for civil unrest, and calls went out for federal assistance. Thus, the *U.S.S. Michigan* entered the second phase of her Civil War career.

On July 28, 1863, Commander Carter reported to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles that, on his routine visit to Detroit, Michigan

I found the people suffering under serious apprehensions of a riot in consequence of excitement in reference to the draft, probably brought about by unscrupulous sensational newspapers predicting such riots. The presence of the ship perhaps did something toward overawing the refractory, and certainly did much to allay the apprehensions of an excited and doubting people. All fears in reference to the riot had subsided before I left.¹⁷

By the end of August, the *U.S.S. Michigan* had been ordered to assist in the suppression of draft riots in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Buffalo, New York. On September 3, 1863, Commander Carter again reported

I was called to Buffalo, New York, by urgent information that great danger was apprehended when the draft was to take place, that there was an organization of some 7,000 ruffians determined to fire and destroy all the elevators, containing millions of bushels of grain, in the vicinity of the creek. I proceeded immediate[ly] to that place and put my ship in the best possible position to act in case of emergency.¹⁸

Although war had been averted between England and the remaining United States in 1861, it goes without question that Great Britain certainly favored the Confederacy and became her primary source of arms, supplies, and even recruits. The *Alabama*, a British-built ship, alone sank 58 ships. It becomes obvious that the Rebel plan to bring the war to the Northern heartland did not end at Gettysburg; it simply became more covert, and agents would and could

operate at will out of Canada. It is probable that the draft riots along the Canadian border were fueled if not directly fomented by Confederate agents and infiltrators.

In response to the actions of the *U.S.S. Michigan* at Buffalo, the Navy immediately took action to increase the armament of the vessel. She received two 12-pound Dahlgren howitzers with boat carriages, along with shrapnel and grape shot ammunition, which were meant as antipersonnel rounds. The guns were mounted on the forecastle and promenade decks so they would be highly visible.¹⁹

The most crucial role of the *U.S.S. Michigan* in the Civil War began on October 22, 1863.²⁰ Commander Carter received orders to take his vessel to Sandusky, Ohio, a city on Lake Erie, situated between Toledo and Cleveland, to assist in the guarding of Confederate prisoners at the Prisoner of War camp on Johnson's Island in Sandusky Bay. The ranks of the prisoners in the compound had swelled to above 2,000 officers and men, many having been sent there after the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg the previous July. The *Michigan* was to assist in guarding the camp with her guns trained on the prison while her Marine contingent assisted the Army forces on land.

On October 28, 1863, Carter advised the Navy that "the necessity of the ship's stay here seems already to have ceased."²¹ Navy Secretary Gideon Welles ordered him to remain on station, "for the better protection against outbreak or escape of prisoners on Johnson's Island, during the approaching winter."²²

The situation took on a more ominous appearance. A telegram was sent to Carter November 12, 1863 by Secretary Welles that stated

Reliable information is furnished this Department that a project is afoot in Canada to fit out steamers and attempt a rescue of the prisoners confined on Johnson's Island. Use the utmost vigilance on board your vessel, and take every precaution against a surprise to yourself, as well as the garrison. Rifled guns will be sent to you. Report any information you may obtain or any wants necessary to meet the contingency anticipated.²³

The plot that the Government had been made aware of did not originally start as a plan to only free prisoners. The plan had been the brainchild of Confederate Navy Lieutenant William H. Murdaugh. Before secession, he had been an officer in the Federal Navy and was well aware that the *U.S.S. Michigan* was the only Naval vessel on the Lakes. He conceived a plan to capture the *Michigan* by using a raiding party out of Canada. The plan involved the taking of a Lake steamer that would then force a collision with the warship and take her by boarding. The plan then would be to create

havoc in the North by shelling key cities along the lakes, disrupting commerce, and freeing Confederate prisoners.²⁴

The plan was devised in February 1863 and reached the desk of the aggressive Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory. The plan was approved, and \$25,000 was allocated for the project. A ragtag crew of officers and men from the scuttled *C.S.S. Virginia* was put together. The Murdaugh plan might well have succeeded, but it was not implemented because the Confederate Cabinet became fearful of offending Great Britain by starting the raid in Canada and perhaps impacting on the completion and delivery of warships then under construction in England.

Autumn 1863 brought a new level of despair to the South. The growing number of defeats on the field at Vicksburg, Port Hudson, and Gettysburg had not only helped demoralize the Confederacy, but seriously hindered strategic planning because of the shortage of military supplies and personnel. The 6,000 prisoners of war at Camp Douglas near Chicago and Johnson's Island became a critical object of concern and interest. It was stated that there were sufficient officers imprisoned at Johnson's Island to lead an 80,000-man army in the field.²⁵ Confederate Secretary of War James A. Seddon and Naval Secretary Mallory called in CSN Lieutenant Robert D. Minor to review Murdaugh's plan.

This time desperation caused the plan to be approved, with final authorization being given by President Jefferson Davis, who stated, "It was better to fail than not make the attempt."²⁶ One hundred thousand dollars in gold and cotton was authorized by the Confederate Government for the plot. The raiding party of 22 men was placed under the command of Lieutenant John Wilkinson, who had been a successful blockade runner. The group left Smithville, North Carolina, on October 7, 1863 aboard the blockade runner *Robert E. Lee*, bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia. On arrival, they split up and agreed to meet in Montreal on October 21. There they would enlist additional men from the many escaped former Confederate prisoners and sympathetic Canadians.

The plan proceeded, with Wilkinson's group now 54 in number. Passage was booked aboard a Lake Steamer bound from St. Catherines, Canada, to Chicago. The group had been able to obtain a small 9-pound cannon and "Colt's furnished us with 100 Navy revolvers, of course through several indirect channels." To prevent detection, "dumb bells were substituted for cannonballs and butcher knives in lieu of cutlasses."²⁷ Once the steamer had been commandeered, course would be set for Johnson's Island. There, as stated in the original plan, the vessel would fake an accidental collision with the *Michigan* and take her by force of arms. Once the *Michigan* was under Confederate control, the prisoners would be freed. The only defenses the Union had in place to

guard the prisoners were the guns of the *Michigan* and 400 troops supported by two small howitzers.

The raid may very well have succeeded had it not been that, at the last minute, Canadian Governor General Lord Monck learned of the raid and notified the United States government of the potential threat. Lord Monck feared that this attack, coming from his country, might breach Canadian neutrality and bring retaliatory action from the United States. With the plan revealed and the federal forces at Johnson's Island and aboard the *Michigan* alerted, the raid had to be called off.

As had been promised by the Navy Department in the telegram of November 12, additional ordnance was received by the *Michigan* on November 23, 1863.²⁸ She was finally to become the heavily armed warship she was designed to be and that the new threat required her to be. She was suddenly bristling with firepower, as one 30-pounder parrot rifle, five 20-pounder parrot rifles, and six 24-pounder Dahlgren howitzers were placed aboard, complementing her 8-inch 64-pounder pivot gun and two Dahlgren 12-pound boat guns.

As autumn passed into winter, the greatest threat to the *U.S.S. Michigan* now became that of the storms and ice of a Great Lakes December. The rebel plot had been broken up, and on December 1, 1863, Commander Carter was given orders to proceed to her home port at Erie, Pennsylvania, to put up for the season.

The Civil War: 1864

The spring of 1864 brought planning for another tour of routine duty for the *U.S.S. Michigan*, but in the South the plans for the *Michigan* were all but routine. The Confederacy's lot had continued to spiral downward. Losses on the battlefields and at sea continued to sap at Confederate strength and hope. More Confederates were in northern prisons than General Lee had in the field.²⁹ These desperate times created desperate men, and desperate men developed desperate plans.

Early in 1863, President Jefferson Davis, his Secretary of War James A. Seddon, and Secretary of State Judah Benjamin had entertained a plan proposed by Captain Thomas Henry Hines to create an armed revolt in the northern states of Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. Hines' plan centered on the involvement of the antiwar factions in these states. The plan was shelved, after the unsuccessful raid by General John Hunt Morgan into Indiana and General Robert E. Lee's devastating defeat at Gettysburg.

In February 1864, the Union, in response to growing pressure from the citizenry, launched an abortive raid on Richmond, the primary purpose of which was to free the

thousands of federal prisoners of war held at Libby Prison and Belle Isle Prison. General Judson Kilpatrick bungled many opportunities for success, and during his retreat one of his units, commanded by Colonel Ulrick Dahlgren, son of Admiral John Dahlgren, was ambushed and the Colonel slain. Papers found on his body called for the burning and destruction of the city of Richmond and the summary execution of Davis and his entire cabinet. The papers were published across the South.

Outrage spread throughout the Confederate states, and the government decided to move ahead with the original plan of Northwest Conspiracy as Hines had proposed. Confederate prisoners in the northwestern states would be freed with the aid of armed antiwar groups. These armies would then spread terror and destruction on the civilians, robbing and looting valuables to help refill the nearly depleted Confederate coffers, and slaying political leaders. The uprising would force Lincoln and his generals to pull their troops from the South to deal with the problems and fear at home. It was further expected that this crisis would cost Lincoln the 1864 election and lead to a negotiated peace.

Jacob Thompson, former Secretary of the Interior in the Buchanan administration and six-term Congressman from Mississippi, and Clement Clairborne Clay were sent to Canada as government agents to coordinate the Northwestern Conspiracy. Thompson and Clay arrived in Canada in April 1864. Thompson became involved with an organization in the northern states known as the Sons of Liberty. The Sons of Liberty was one of a number of militaristic groups sympathetic to the South and adamantly opposed to the continuation of the Civil War. History records these groups as the Copperhead political faction of the Democratic Party. Thompson got along well with the local leaders of the Sons of Liberty and together developed a plan to organize these bands into a fighting force whose objective would be to split Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio out of the Union by armed insurrection and, once taken, to hold them. As antiwar sentiment grew across the North, the group became less militaristic and more political. Most of the Democrats opted to stop Lincoln at the ballot box, not with violence. The party nominated General George McClellan as a candidate to oppose Lincoln. These groups would no longer be of use to the Confederate plot, and other ideas had to be developed to forward the rebel scheme.

Thompson's vision channeled back to the previously ill-fated Murdaugh plan. The hope of freeing prisoners to rebuild a fighting force was widespread in the South and applied to not just those men held captive in the far North. Robert E. Lee was involved in the planning of a plot to free

the prisoners held at Point Lookout in Chesapeake Bay.³⁰ He was probably involved in authorizing Thompson's plan.

In July, 1864, Thompson's plan began to take shape with the assistance of Captain Charles H. Cole, a recently escaped prisoner of war who had been an officer on the staff of General Nathan Bedford Forrest. Cole was sent to take passage on lake steamers to learn the channels and approaches to several harbors, the strengths of each place, and to learn as much as he could about the *U.S.S. Michigan*.³¹ As always, the plotters realized the ship was the key to any successful incursion into the Union from Canada. On his return, he put forth his version of how to take the *Michigan*, which, unlike the Murdaugh plan, would require an insider to make the capture of the vessel easier. To aid Captain Cole with the raid, CSN Acting Master John Yates Beall was sent. Beall was a southern hero who had served in General Jackson's Stonewall Brigade and with Colonel Turner Ashby at Falling Waters. He also had organized and carried out previous raids on Maryland's Eastern Shore and Chesapeake Bay.

The plot was designed for Cole to go to Sandusky, Ohio, and become a part of the community. While involved in this deception, he would befriend the officers and crew of the *Michigan*. As in the prior plan, Beall would capture a steamer and be ready to board the *Michigan* on a predetermined date when given a signal that the crew had been drugged and incapacitated, which was Cole's responsibility. They would then signal the prisoners to attack their guards and take the prison. That signal would be a shot fired into the officer's quarters on the island. The plan went on that, from Johnson's Island, they would take Sandusky and, if successful, go on to Cleveland by stolen horses and captured boats. They would attack and sack Cleveland, then force their way south through Wheeling and to freedom in Virginia. The *U.S.S. Michigan* would then be free to strike havoc and destruction on the cities along the Great Lakes, the locks of the canals, and the civilian population.

Cole moved to Sandusky on August 11, 1864. Posing as a wealthy businessman from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, he opened substantial bank accounts as President of the Mount Hope Oil Company. He took up residence in the best hotel in town. The charming and entertaining Cole quickly ingratiated himself to the residents, especially those of power, including Colonel Charles Hill, Commander of the Johnson's Island facility, and Commander Carter of the *Michigan*. Cole hosted a number of lavish dinners, and after one of these functions Carter invited Cole to come aboard and inspect the *Michigan*. At a second dinner hosted by Cole, he suggested to Carter that he would like to host a champagne dinner aboard the *Michigan* to honor the officers and crew for their

patriotic service. Carter graciously accepted the offer. The first part of the plot was in place, and the rest of it was now set in motion.

The date for the dinner party was set for September 19. In Canada, Beall now set about procuring arms and making travel arrangements for himself and his 25 raiders. It was decided they would board the steamer at various stops so as not to raise suspicions by boarding en masse. In Detroit, Beall and his second in command, Bennet Burley, booked passage aboard the *Philo Parsons*, a steamer making regular trips between Detroit and Sandusky with stops in between where the others could less conspicuously come aboard. The prisoners on Johnson's Island were furtively advised of the plan by messages placed in newspapers and notes secreted into cigars delivered to the rebel officers.

On September 18, Beall and Burley boarded the vessel. They had made arrangements with the ship's captain to make a stop at Sandwich, on the Canadian side of the river, to pick up some "other" passengers.

On the morning of the 19th, the *Philo Parsons* set sail. At Sandwich, four men boarded and then at Malden, Ontario, a regular stop, 20 men boarded with a large trunk. The vessel continued on her voyage. Later in the afternoon, the vessel made her usual stop at Middle Bass Island, where her Captain, Sylvester Atwood, lived. He usually spent the evening at home while the *Philo Parsons* continued on to Sandusky. His routine was to reboard the following morning on the return run.

The *Philo Parsons* continued on the 12 miles to Sandusky. Suddenly the large heavy trunk was opened, and its contents were passed out to the conspirators. Four armed men went to the wheelhouse and, with pistols drawn, advised the first mate that they were Confederates and that the ship was under Beall's command. Resistance was futile, and the crew advised they would follow the orders of their captors, which was to position the vessel near the entrance to the harbor at Sandusky. Here, with the U.S.S. *Michigan* in view, they would await Cole's signal that the crew had been plied with the drugged champagne and incapacitated. It would then be safe to proceed and board the warship unopposed.

As they waited, Beall was advised that fuel aboard the steamer was low, and he decided to return to Middle Bass Island and replenish their supply of firewood. While there, at about 4:00 PM, the steamer *Island Queen* pulled alongside the *Philo Parsons* on her routine passage. The rebels aboard the *Parsons* were surprised to see about 30 blue-uniformed soldiers on the *Island Queen's* deck. These were men of the 130th Ohio Volunteer Infantry returning from furlough. The Confederates quickly attacked the *Island Queen*. About a

dozen shots were fired, and one man, a member of the *Island Queen's* crew, was injured. These men of the 130th became the northernmost captives of the South during the Civil War.³²

Beall now had two vessels and too many prisoners to deal with. The soldiers were paroled and, along with the passengers, were left on the island, promising to do nothing for 24 hours. They scuttled the *Island Queen* and returned to Sandusky to await Cole's signal.

The signal never came. Cole's plan had fallen apart. Thompson would later report that the failure was due to a lack of secrecy in Canada.³³ Not only did the Confederates have spies and operatives working in Canada, but so did the Union. Word was passed on September 17 from a Union secret agent in Canada to the provost Marshall in Detroit that an attack on the U.S.S. *Michigan* was imminent. The appropriate officers were alerted at Sandusky. Lieutenant Colonel Hill notified Commander Carter, who initially passed off the news as just another scare story. A second telegram was sent on September 18 that basically laid out the details of the scheme, including identifying the *Philo Parsons* as the ship that would be taken, and naming Cole as the leader of the raid.³⁴ It was decided to let the raid take place so that all the Confederates could be captured. Carter sent for Mr. Cole, and once he came aboard the ship, he was arrested and placed in irons. A group of sailors were sent to search Cole's rooms, and they found damning evidence of his involvement in the plot. When confronted with this information, he divulged the entire plan and gave Carter and Colonel Hill, who had by this time joined him, the names of other conspirators in the Sandusky area. Colonel Hill returned to Johnson's Island to prepare his garrison for the expected uprising, and Carter readied the *Michigan* for the trap they had set.

Beall, flushed with his success at Middle Bass Island, brought the *Philo Parsons* back to a position outside Sandusky Harbor to await Cole's sign. As time went on without the signal flare, Beall's crew became more and more agitated. Fearing a mutiny, and perhaps realizing an attack on an unimpaired warship was senseless, Beall decided to democratically let the band determine what action to take. Only two men voted to continue the attack, and the *Philo Parsons* steamed back to Canada and safety.³⁵ Back in Canadian waters, the *Philo Parsons* was scuttled and the men escaped to return South or continue on in Canada. The following morning the *Michigan* sailed out to find the raiders, but it was too late.

As an almost amusing postscript to the attempted raid, on the night of September 22, a fierce storm swept over the Sandusky area. Severe damage was done to a number of buildings on Johnson's Island by the fierce winds and

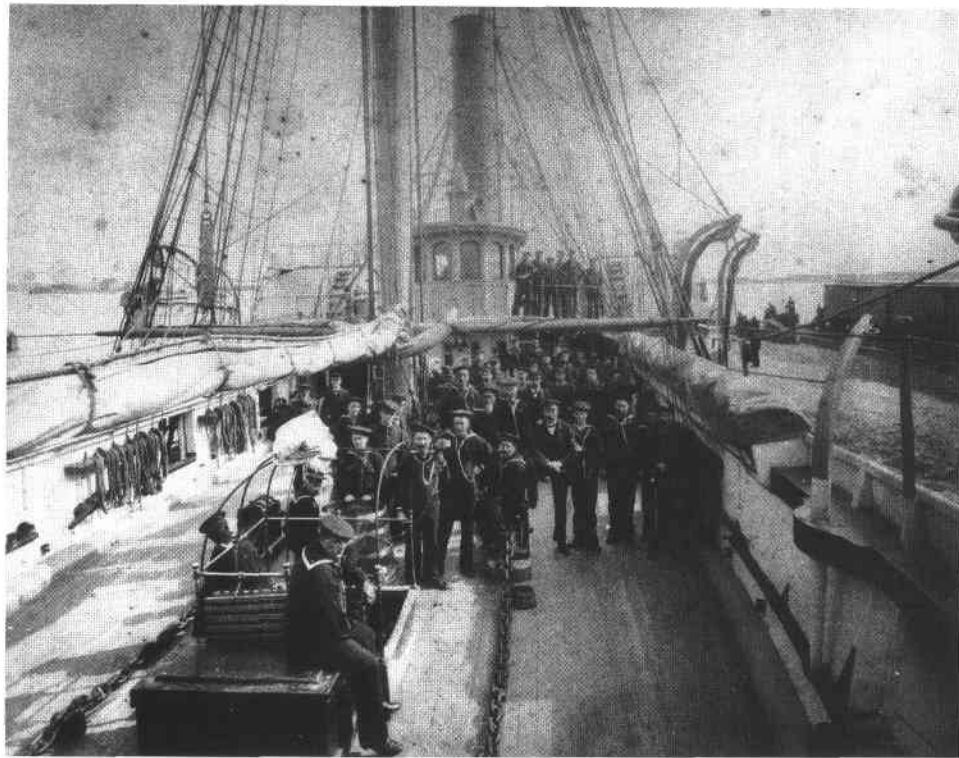


Figure 3. Crew of the *U.S.S. Michigan* ca. 1868.

lightning, and the crashes of thunder were thought to be cannonfire. The prisoners, thinking this was caused by shelling from the *Michigan*, now in their comrades' hands, attempted an escape. The troops were able to contain them, and the prisoner insurrection was ended.³⁶

Charles Cole remained a prisoner at Johnson's Island until the war's end. John Yates Beall was captured near Niagara Falls in December 1864 while involved in an aborted attempt to free a number of Confederate generals being transferred from Johnson's Island to the East. He was tried as a pirate and convicted. He was imprisoned at Governor's Island in New York Harbor, where he was hanged on February 24, 1865.

Tension along the Northern frontier did not end with this second failed attempt to capture the *U.S.S. Michigan*. In November 1864, Confederate Secretary of the Navy Mallory was again insisting on a third raid to free the prisoners on Johnson's Island. The attacks of the Northwest Conspiracy would not end in other areas, either. The successful raid of 22 Confederates into St. Albans, Vt., on October 19, 1864, left the citizenry in shock, bloodied, and almost a quarter of a million dollars poorer. The more the noose closed around the necks of the Confederate army in the field, the more desperate the acts of the rebels across the border in Canada would become.

In light of these growing threats, the Navy Department finally determined to upgrade the small arms aboard the

U.S.S. Michigan. An inventory of arms aboard the *Michigan* had been done in March 1864, and it showed the following:

- 30 Muskets smoothbore and rifled, locks marked *Harpers Ferry 1853*
- 35 Flint pistols—unserviceable
- 25 Jenks Merrill carbines
- 22 Colt revolvers
- 58 Cutlasses
- 37 Boarding pikes³⁷

November 30, 1864, saw the *Michigan* receiving 40 Sharps and Hankins carbines. She returned her 25 Jenks Merrills along with 23 cartridge boxes and 2,250 cartridges to the Portsmouth Navy Yard. On December 12, 1864, she sent the 35 flintlock pistols to Portsmouth. These were replaced the following day by 30 Whitney Navy revolvers and 12 battle axes.³⁸ Now, armed to the teeth with modern equipment, the *U.S.S. Michigan* and her crew could hold their own on land or sea. The need would never come for this firepower. The Civil War came to an end the following spring, and the iron warship had never fired her guns in battle.

The Post-Civil War Michigan

Now began the *U.S.S. Michigan's* post-Civil War career, one that would span an additional 80 years. Lieutenant Commander Francis A. Roe took command late in 1864. In 1865, she was ordered to use Detroit, Michigan, as her summer

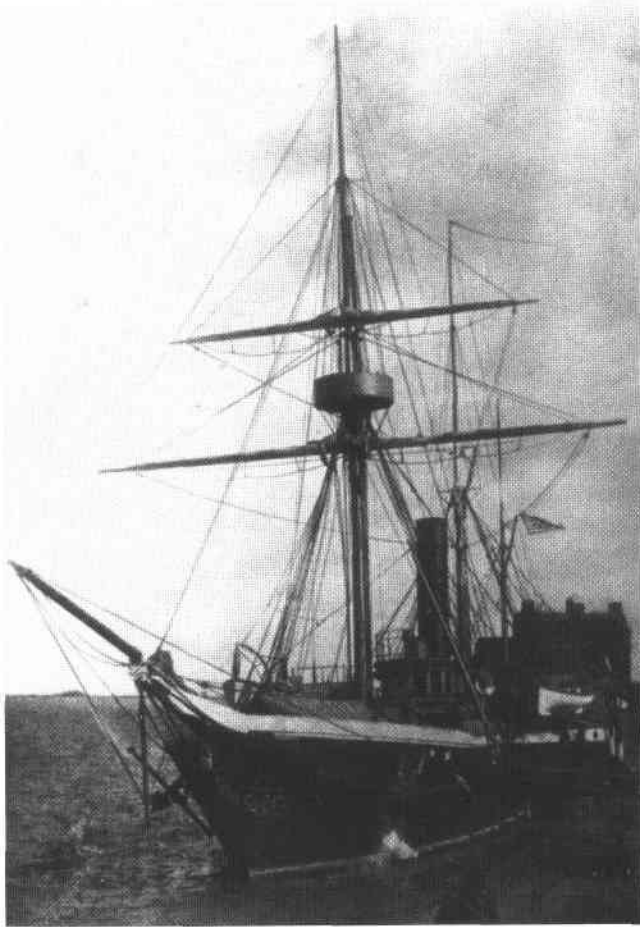


Figure 4. U.S.S. *Michigan* in 1892.

home port. Her orders were to be vigilant to rumored plots of revenge by former Confederates still in Canada. She also became involved in helping to suppress a miners' insurrection during the so-called Peninsula War in northern Michigan. In 1866, she assisted in another crisis that threatened, again, to put Britain and the United States on the brink of a serious confrontation. A group of Irish Americans, calling themselves Fenians, planned and attempted to carry out an invasion of Canada, with the goal being to free Canada from England's rule, form a new Ireland, and in time free Ireland from British rule. After a couple of invasions and battles on Canadian soil, the Fenian threat was defeated and came to an end.

Beginning in the 1870s, the U.S.S. *Michigan* began her slide into history. From the 1870s until 1905, the *Michigan* remained on station in the Great Lakes, performing her routine patrols and rescue operations. No major political crises erupted in the region as had marked her first 30 years of operations. Except for occasional winters spent in Buffalo being rebuilt or refitted, she remained berthed in Erie, Pennsylvania. In the 1890s, she took on new and added roles working with surveyors to study the Calumet River in preparation for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. She remained in Chicago for the entire duration of the Fair, with the crew

assisting by staffing various maritime exhibits. It was while on station here that she was painted white to match the other vessels of the New Navy's Great White Fleet, a color scheme that would remain throughout her remaining years in service.

By this time, the *Michigan* had been in service for 50 years. More modern vessels had come along, but the old side-wheeler was maintained in top-notch shape. She began participating in maneuvers with the newly formed Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Illinois state Naval Militias, the precursors of the Naval reserves.

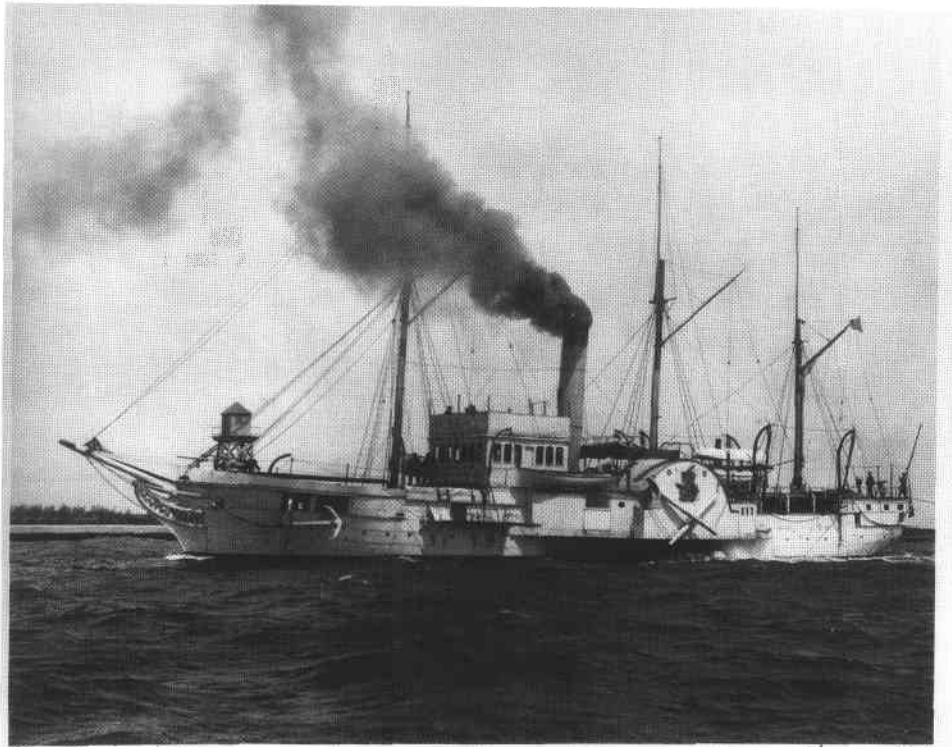
In 1897, the *Michigan* underwent a complete internal rebuild and was rearmed with the latest quick-firing breech-loading six-pound rifles. The frigate was redesignated from a fourth-class steamer to unarmored, unprotected cruiser. A new large square chart house replaced the sleek wheel house to facilitate her growing role in topographical and hydrographical surveys.

By 1905, the *Michigan* had become one of the longest continuously operating warships in United States history, third only to the venerated *Constitution* and *Independence*. June 17, 1905 saw the first major change in the *Michigan's* long career. Her name was taken for the pre-dreadnought battleship number 27 then being built. The vessel was renamed the U.S.S. *Wolverine*, after the fierce little carnivore that was Michigan's state mascot.

The U.S.S. *Wolverine's* career in the U.S. Navy would last just another 7 years. In 1910, the vessel was hauled, and her iron hull was found to be in "incredibly good condition."³⁹ After 67 years of service, the faith Uphur had had in iron continued to be proven true. The time of the steamer's usefulness was growing to an end. She was, by 1912, a virtual museum piece. On May 6, 1912, the U.S.S. *Wolverine* "was placed out of commission"⁴⁰ and loaned to the Naval Force of Pennsylvania. Though the *Wolverine* was decommissioned, she technically remained the property of the U.S. Navy, a fact that would eventually lead to her demise.

Several years before her decommissioning, the citizens of Pennsylvania had begun to plan a celebration to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Oliver Hazard Perry's defeat of the British on Lake Erie in the War of 1812. In 1912, the Naval Militia used the *Wolverine* as a platform to locate and aid in the recovery of the wreckage of the scuttled brig *Niagara* in Misery Bay across from Erie. On March 6, 1913, the *Niagara's* hull section was raised to the surface, and by July she had been reconstructed and sent on a cruise of all the principal port cities of the Great Lakes, being towed by the *Wolverine*. The tour ended September 10, 1913, at Put-in-Bay, site of Perry's victory 100 years before.⁴¹

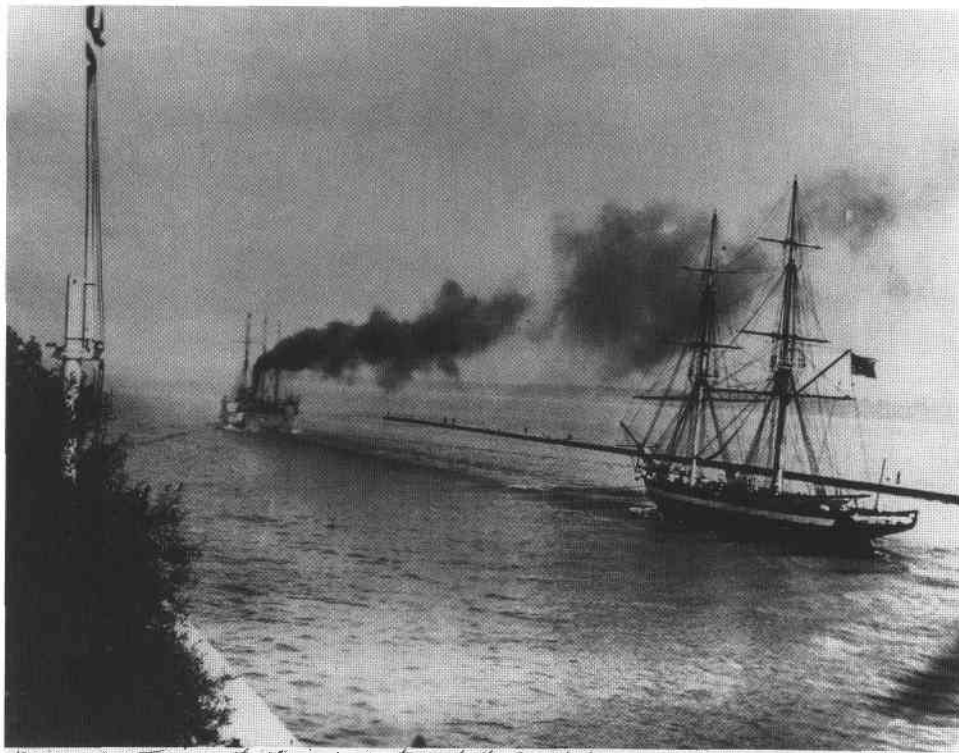
The U.S.S. *Wolverine* continued in service as the



*USS Wolverine
1st Steel Battleship*

*Head of the Great Lakes
Pictured about 1913*

Figure 5. U.S.S. Michigan post-1897.



Wolverine towing the Niagara on tour of the Great Lakes

Figure 6. The Michigan and the Niagara, 1913.

training vessel of the Pennsylvania Naval Militia, doing duty every summer for the usual 2-week cruise. When the United States entered World War I on April 8, 1917, not only were her sailors one of the first units activated for duty, the

Wolverine herself was called back to active naval service as a training ship at Great Lakes Naval Training Station near Chicago.

When the war ended, the *Wolverine* was again decom-

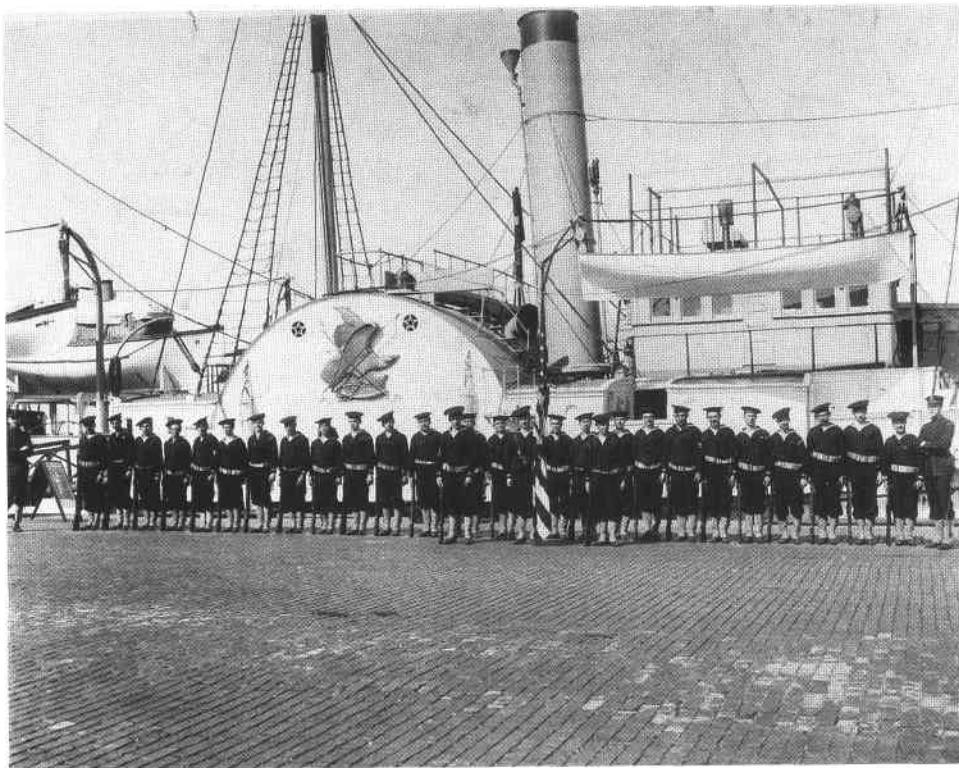


Figure 7. The Naval Militia ca. 1915.

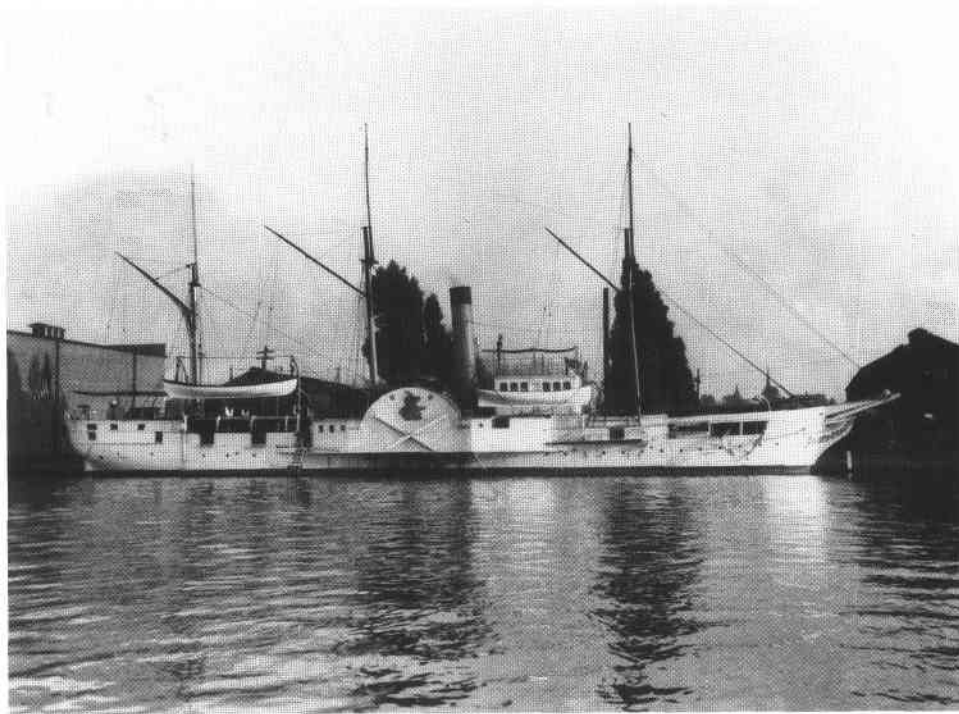


Figure 8. U.S.S. Michigan ca. 1920.

missioned and loaned once more to the State of Pennsylvania for use by the Naval Militia. The Erie City Council authorized her to berth at the city dock without charge. The Naval Militia again used her as a training vessel. Age and poor maintenance began catching up with the vessel. The Summer Cruise of 1923 proved to be her last. While out on the lake, the

Wolverine suffered her first and last major breakdown. The 8-foot connecting rod of the port engine snapped. The *Wolverine* limped back to Erie on her sole remaining engine.

Back in port, the Naval Militia sent a report of the damage to the U.S. Navy Bureau of Construction and Repair, requesting instructions on where to send the *Wolverine* for

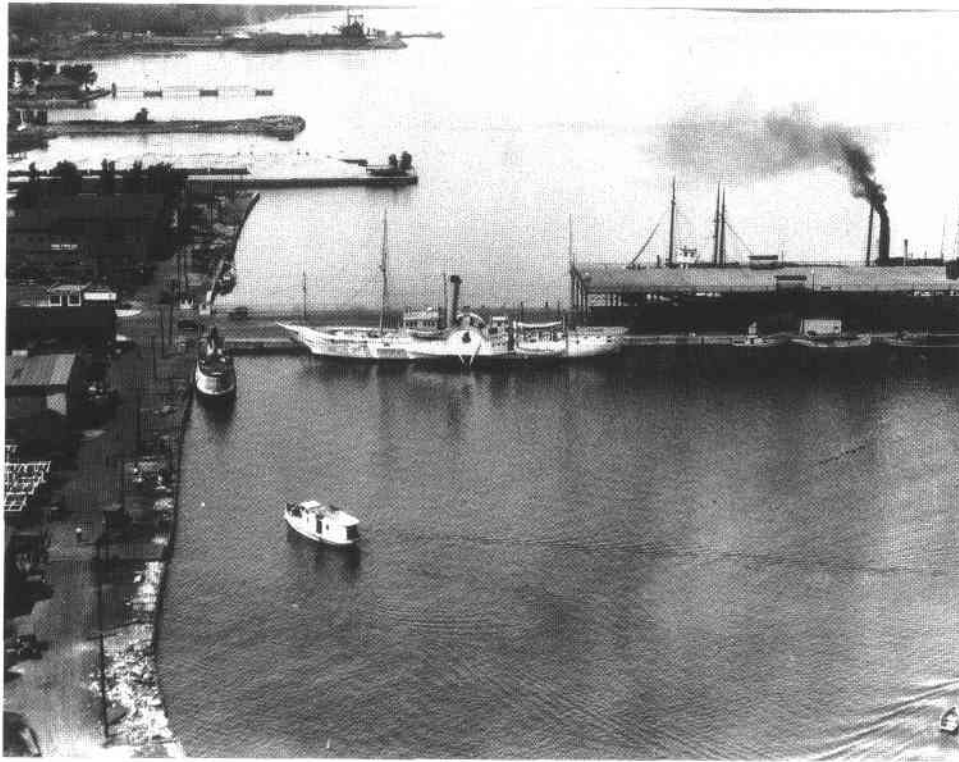


Figure 9. U.S.S. Michigan at Erie city dock, early 1920s.

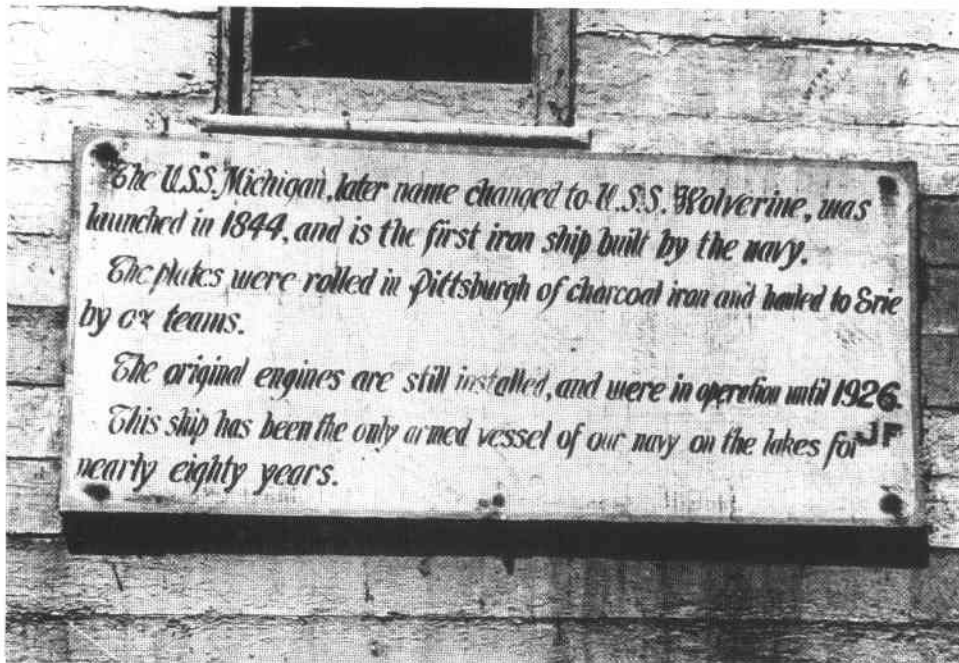


Figure 10. Erie city dock sign before Michigan's destruction.

repair. The Navy refused to act, because in their minds the vessel now belonged to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Both Pennsylvania and the city of Erie continued to state that the old warhorse was the property of the United States Navy and only on loan to the state's Naval Militia. This typical bureaucratic equivocation continued for years, and the *Wolverine* fell further and further into disrepair and disintegration.

In January 1926, the federal government offered the U.S.S. *Wolverine* to the city of Erie on temporary loan as a historical artifact. Again, the Erie City Council refused, fearing the Navy was trying to dump the financial responsibility of maintaining the ship on to Erie. How quickly this vessel, which had been so integral a part of the city's social and financial fabric, was betrayed and forgotten. The Navy, left with no alternative, decided to put the *Wolverine* up for sale

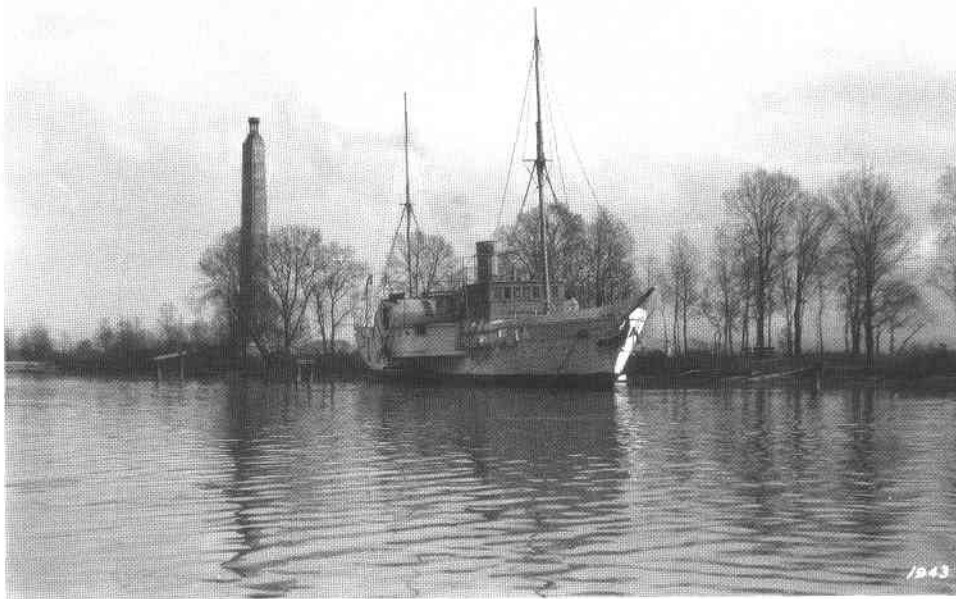


Figure 11. *U.S.S. Michigan* on the mud flats in Misery Bay.

on June 10, 1926. The Naval Reserve unit applied pressure through contacts in Congress to thwart the proposed sale, and on January 6, 1927, the Navy made a final attempt to give full ownership of the *U.S.S. Wolverine* to the city of Erie. The gift would be based on the one condition that there be no cost to the Navy. A federal law, Public Law 532-HR12853, was drafted and passed to accomplish this, and the *Wolverine* was struck from the Navy Register.⁴² Again, the gift was refused, for fear of the financial obligation.

The Erie City Council, probably under pressure from the Naval Reserve, reversed their position in July, and in a carefully worded reply, advised Congress they would gratefully “accept the LOAN of the *Wolverine*.”⁴³ The wording of the law passed by Congress stated the *Wolverine* would be “turned over to” the city of Erie and left the Navy believing they were no longer responsible for the *Wolverine*.⁴⁴ Erie continued to believe the ship was on loan from the Navy. The ship was thus doomed.

The *Wolverine* remained at the Erie city docks, but she continued to suffer from depredations caused by the elements and vandals. No one would take responsibility for her maintenance. In November 1928, in an effort to save her, her final commander, William Morrison, had her towed to Crystal Point in Misery Bay, where the vessel would come under the jurisdiction of the Presque Isle State Park Police and save her from destruction by vandals. Here she lay, stranded and abandoned on a mud flat.

EFFORTS AT SALVATION

1929 found the Erie County Historical Society doing a study of how much it would cost to save and restore the *Wolverine*. At its completion, the panel advised it would cost between \$100,000 and \$200,000 to save the ship. An additional \$5,000 to \$10,000 would be required annually to maintain her. No thought was given to what revenue might be generated by the restored ship as a museum and tourist attraction. The price was deemed too high for the community to bear, and the federal government, by this time immersed in red ink brought about by the Great Depression, had more on its mind than saving a rusting hulk in Misery Bay.

Other efforts were made to save *U.S.S. Wolverine*. These included an offer by Henry Ford to bring the *Wolverine* to his newly created Historic Greenfield Village in Michigan. In the 1930s, the State of Michigan and the city of Detroit offered to fund the restoration of the ship, citing their historical link to the aging warrior. All of the efforts were of no avail, as Erie continued to claim she had no rights to make decisions regarding a vessel that was only on loan to the city. In the late 1930s WPA funds were made available for the *Wolverine* to be restored, but again the Navy stated they had no responsibility to the vessel that had been given to Erie. Erie again refused to take responsibility for her, claiming that because the *Wolverine* was only on loan Erie could make no decisions regarding the ship.

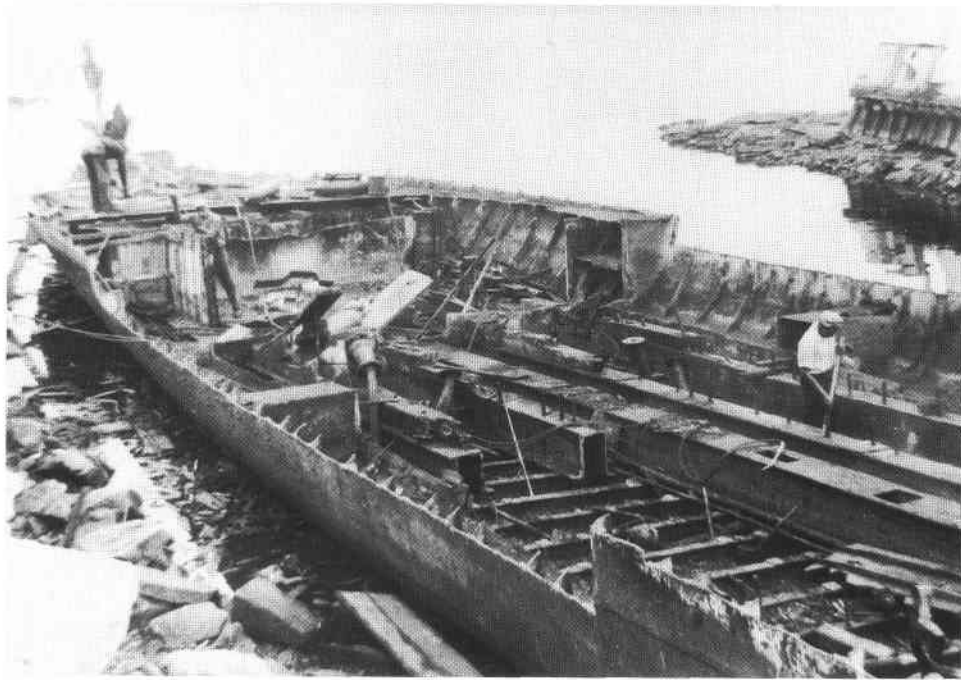


Figure 12. U.S.S. *Michigan* being scrapped, 1949.

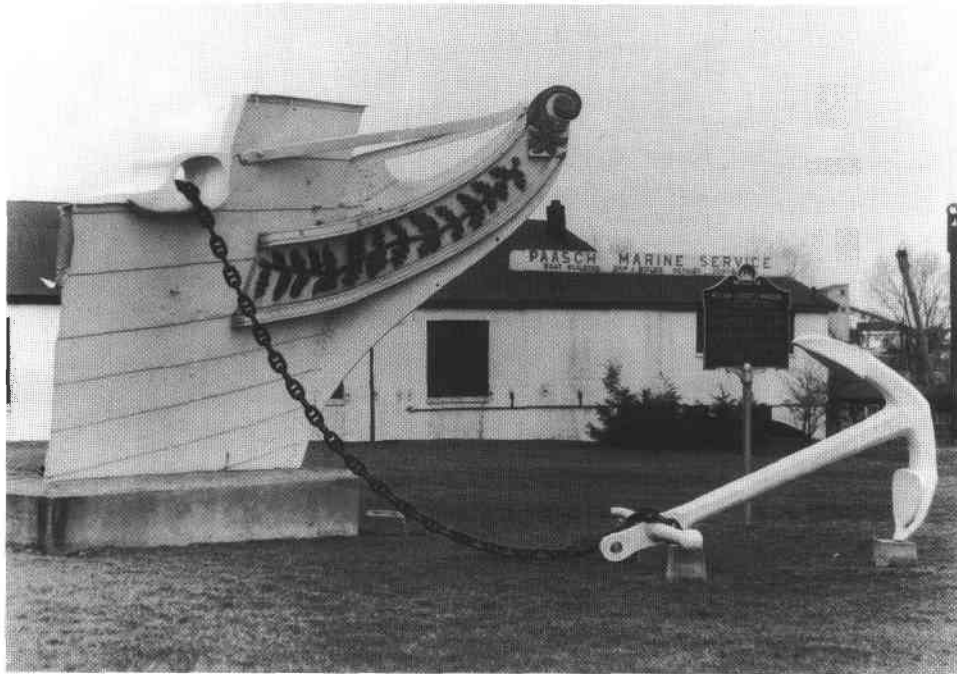


Figure 13. The *Michigan* today.

Again and again, as if fighting an enemy, the *Wolverine* refused to die. In 1939, a Navy Board of Inspection recommended the *Wolverine* be sold for scrap, but the recommendation was never acted on. The delay may have been due to the proposal by President Franklin D. Roosevelt for the creation of a maritime museum to be called "The Port of Missing Ships" at Washington, D.C., to include remaining historical naval vessels. The ships were to have been the *Constitution*, *Constellation*, *Hartford*, *Michigan* [*Wolverine*], and *Boxer*.⁴⁵ Congress did not appropriate money for

the project, and in 1941 World War brought other things to the forefront of the importance to the nation.

The *Michigan* again fought for survival when, in 1942, the mayor of Erie was approached to donate the hulk to the scrap metal drives to turn her iron hull into shells, tanks, and modern men of war. President Roosevelt once again interceded on the *Wolverine*'s behalf, stating that the aging relic could do more as a "morale factor"⁴⁶ than she could as cannon shells or armor plate. Although she was saved, she again suffered the ignominy of having her name taken from

her. This time the name was given to a side paddle wheel training aircraft carrier used on the Great Lakes for training Navy aviators. The now nameless hulk remained unrepaired and ignored in Misery Bay.

In 1944, the Senate agreed to consider a proposal by a newly formed group named the Foundation for the Preservation of the Original United States Ship *Michigan*, Inc., wherein title to the ship would be vested in this group, and responsibility for her salvation would be theirs. This would sidestep the indifference or interference of the city of Erie or the Navy. They would restore, salvage, sink, or scrap the vessel. An alternate group came into being with the sole intent of restoring the vessel. The Niagara Association's attempts came too late. In 1948, the transfer of the vessel to the Foundation was approved, and they decided to scrap the ship. The forward 10 feet of her bow was to be saved and made into a monument. Her fate was now sealed, but she would not die without a fight. While being towed to the scrap yard, the nameless hulk swung about, striking a tug and sinking it. One hundred six years, and she finally had a victory of sorts.

END OF A CAREER

The *Michigan* was scrapped in 1949. The Foundation received approximately \$2,300 from her scrapping and the souvenirs made from her brass and iron works. This amount barely paid for the base of the monument that had been proposed by the Foundation whose original project had been to save her.

So ended the career of a valiant fighting ship. A study performed on her iron hull by the Republic Steel Corporation in 1944 showed that after 100 years of being in the water, her iron hull showed virtually no deterioration due to oxidation. The iron measured to the thousandth of an inch at the keel was .625" in thickness or, as was specified in 1843, $\frac{5}{8}$ " thickness.⁴⁷

The *U.S.S. Michigan* had been a wonderful experiment in nautical engineering. She was in her day a great innovation in naval warfare, representing the link between the old sailing navy and the modern steel navy. The innovations of her center-mounted pivot guns fore and aft foretold the coming of steel battleships with centerline mounted batteries. All aspects of the ship were direct descendents of the navy vessels that had come before her, and still she contained elements of what was to come. The shame was, had she survived just a few more years, it is likely she would still be here to serve as a monument to the foresightedness of her builders, designers, and the men who sailed her and as a reminder of an almost unremembered history of conflict and

intrigue on our northern borders, and the virtually untold story of the Civil War theater of action that might have dramatically changed the war's outcome and our nation's history. This is the story of the *U.S.S. Michigan*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors wish to gratefully acknowledge the assistance given us by the following persons, without whose guidance this article would not have been possible: Anita Andrick, librarian and archivist, and Scott Miller, Library Assistant, Erie County Historical Society, Erie, Pennsylvania; and Mary M. Blahnik, Educational Coordinator of the Wisconsin Maritime Museum, Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

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