# Sailors as Entrepreneurs in a Great Lakes Maritime Village

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Those with an interest in the maritime history of the Great Lakes may well agree that while stories abound, historical writings are more scarce. Shipwrecks have been documented extensively, but the question of what sailors were doing when not caught up in catastrophes remains largely unanswered. Studying the development of maritime dependent communities, however, offers the promise of seeing the context in which sailors lived and thus being able to understand more about their place within the local society. Algoma, Wisconsin, is one community which provides insight into the lives of the owners, masters and crew of the small and independently-owned schooners which were ubiquitous on the lakes but were rarely commented upon except when they met disaster. What can be seen in Algoma's history takes us far beyond the confining stereotype of sailors as bawdy, hard-drinking, waterbourne nomads. There, and presumably in other small maritime towns, common sailors occupied an impo rtant, respectable and responsible niche within the community. Their entrepreneurial spirit shaped both the local economy and local politics. Through small scale commercial sailing enterprises first- and second-generation immigrants found a way to escape rural poverty and become more fully integrated into the socio-economic mainstream. But perhaps most fascinating, the sailors and their vessels became a vital pa rt of local mythology, providing heroes whose names are still remembered 125 years later.

Algoma was chosen as the subject of this study chiefly because it was almost solely dependent upon maritime trade for its commerce for the first forty years of settlement, and because documentation of the town's development is available in several forms. Government records tell the story of the harbour's development; the archival remains of the region's most influential politician and capitalist provide invaluable insight into the behind the scenes struggle for economic dominance in the community; the prolific writings of a local historian record some of the first stories to come from the oral tradition; and a newspaper published consistently since 1871 give many contemporaneous reports of significant local events. The fact that Algoma was also home po rt for several Great Lakes sailors who would have been lost in obscurity had they not become legends through their daring deeds and deaths, is an added bonus.

The purpose of this a rticle, then, is to increase the understanding of the lives of common sailors on the Great Lakes by revealing the context in which they lived and some

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of the contributions they made to the community. First we will attend to an overview of the history of Algoma as a representative small maritime community on Lake Michigan; and, then, we will examine the sailors' entrepreneurial role in the life of the town.

Although northeastern Wisconsin has a rich early history of interaction between the French and their Amerindian friends and foes, the area remained sparsely populated until the mid-nineteenth century. Immediately upon the subjugation of the tribes west of Lake Michigan, robust settlements were established at the southern end of the lake at Chicago, Kenosha, Racine and Milwaukee. From there the frontier of settlement moved gradually north and west into territory known previously only to trappers and fishermen.' It was not until 1851 that the first permanent settlers of European descent arrived at Algoma. Initially, the settlement was named Wolf River, but soon after it was renamed Ahnapee. It is to Ahnapee that I will refer for the remainder of the paper because that was the name in use during the period under discussion.

The first Euro-Americans arriving at the site were English-speaking. Most were Yankees, born in the northeastern US, but several families came from other English-speaking lands, such as Canada, England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland. The initial small cadre of three families arrived in their fishing boats from the bustling, but still primitive, town of Manitowoc, about forty miles to the south. Soon thereafter, a larger group of families, all inter-related by marriage or business ties, arrived from Racine, a well-established port where harbour improvements and a small shipbuilding industry had already begun.

Virtually all the men were sailors of one sort or another, although only one is known for sure to have sailed on the ocean. Several, as already mentioned, were fishermen. A half dozen others either sailed and/or owned and/or were masters of the small sailing vessels that were vital to provide supplies to the community in its infancy.' All these men, except for one, abandoned sailing within several seasons after arriving at Ahnapee. They were aspiring entrepreneurs who had come to this wilderness outpost not to sail but to develop businesses which would form the economic backbone of a prosperous community. One began a sawmill; another opened a store and built the first commercial pier; while others founded brickyards, built hotels, or became farmers.'

In truth, the town did not need an indigenous group of sailors, nor did it need locally-owned vessels in its earliest years. Until more people arrived to settle the land and clear the forests, and until local enterprises began to do a business which exceeded local demand, visiting vessels from better-established ports were able to supply all of Ahnapee's transport needs. Although there were efforts as early as 1860 to develop the town's commerce by clearing the sand bar at the mouth of the river, it was not until after the Civil War ended in 1865 that local residents began to act in concert on their ambitions to develop Ahnapee as a port serving a hinterland where forests were quickly becoming farmland.

By 1867 work had started on the hulls of the first two Lake boats known to have been built at Ahnapee. In the spring of that year the race was on to see which of the two would be ready for launching on Independence Day, the Fourth of July, the one celebration which brought people together from all over the surrounding countryside. As it turned out, the local favourite, the small sloop-rigged scow *Irene,* slipped into the water with much hoopla on the "Glorious Fourth." But Chicago investors had pushed the

building of a larger scow, *Ahnapee*, to completion a few days earlier, giving it the honour of being the first Lake vessel launched in the town. The next season a schooner, *Bessie Boalt*, the largest ever built in Ahnapee at 103 feet long, 26.5 feet wide, and 8.6 feet deep, was launched from the beach directly into Lake Michigan.

To keep these and visiting vessels filled with cargoes of shingles, posts, cedar ties and telegraph poles from the surrounding forests, in 1867 two local carpenters, William Nelson and Abisha Perry, built a shallow-draft steam tug to operate on the river. This unnamed vessel was no more than a small scow with a paddle wheel on the back and a crude housing, but it was able to tow several empty scows upstream about nine miles to pick up loads at the sawmill in Forestville and along the embankment where farmers stacked wood for shipment. Four years later, a more sophisticated steam tug, *William I. Henry*, was built, but its V-shaped hull and screw propeller proved impractical for the shallow waters and it went to the nearby town of Sturgeon Bay to work at the end of the season.

The *William I. Henry* was replaced by the vessel most closely identified with life in Ahnapee and on the river, the little steamer *Betsey*. Another flat-bottomed, blunt-nosed scow, *Betsey* sported sidewheels for manoeuvrability. Over the next seven years this craft hauled countless loads of forest and agricultural products to town for shipment on Lake vessels. Its first trip every year was the townspeople's long-awaited validation that spring had finally arrived, and any day the vessel made its customary run was an occasion for local boys to grab their fishing poles for a carefree excursion on the river courtesy of *Betsey's* captain. The scow even served as a party boat on occasion. It is no wonder, then, that townsfolk thought of *Betsey* with affection and described the craft, with kind-hearted humour, as racing around the bends in the meandering river in a "reckless manner," saved only by the pilot's great skill from being driven up on the bank where it would be "dashed to pieces" by the muskie and pickerel which inhabited the stream.4

Let us not be misled, however. One could never say that Ahnapee developed a shipbuilding industry *per se*. Only eleven commercial vessels are known to have been built there in a half century. This excludes fishing craft, because their construction usually went unheralded. But the town did develop as a small commercial port where virtually all freight arrived and departed by boat for over forty years. Maritime dominance only began to wane when a railroad, the Ahnapee and Western, arrived in 1893.

In prosperous years there was a veritable glut of business in the harbour in the spring and early summer and then a slow decline until the season ended with a flurry of activity just after the harvest but before the bitter cold of winter denied access to the Lake. In 1879 (one of the few years for which regular lists of arrivals and departures were published) the number of vessels reported to have cleared went from twenty in March to fifty-nine in April and sixty-four in May, before dramatically falling off and bottoming out at only ten in August (see figure 1). In September the increase began with sixteen clearances, before another peak in October when thirty-eight vessels were reported in the harbour. Many of the vessels listed made regular visits to Ahnapee, usually arriving from and departing to either Milwaukee or Chicago. Railroad ties, fence posts, cordwood and bark were still the most common exports, but fish was also shipped and the fall wheat harvest accounted for the spike of activity in October. Meanwhile, finished lumber, merchandise, coal, iron and fruit were typical imports.

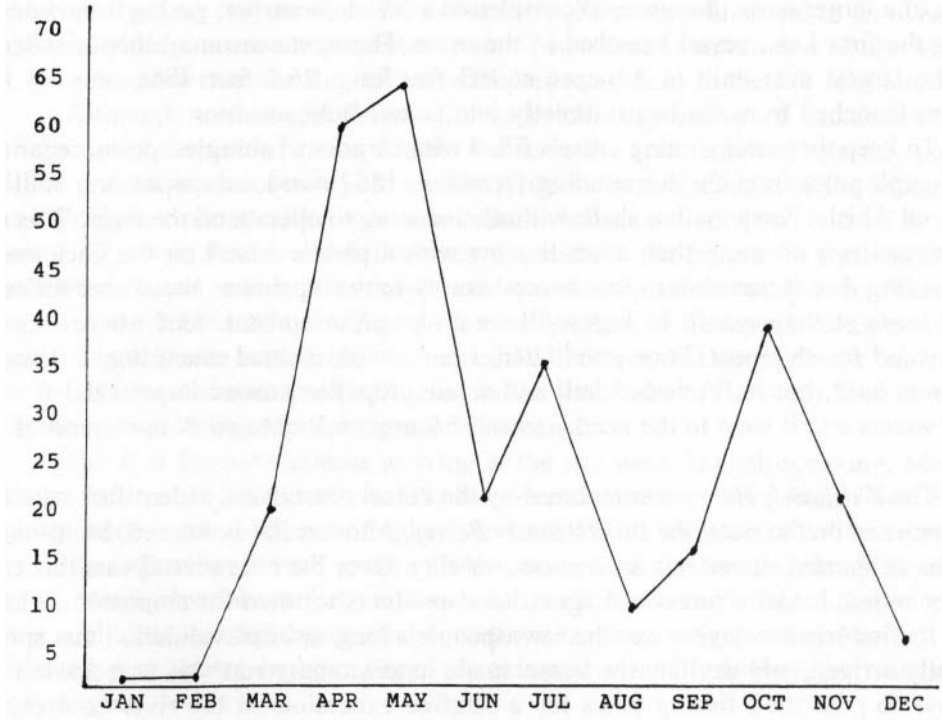


*Figure 1:* Number of Clearances in Ahnapee, 1879.

*Source:* *Ahnapee Record*, various dates.

Boat building and life on the river paralleled the overall development of the region. More new families were arriving. Census records show the population of the township doubled from 1152 in 1860 to 2380 in 1880. Moreover, Ahnapee was a community of immigrants. In 1870, for instance, eighty-five percent of the heads of households were foreign-born, and the largest segment by far, sixty percent, came from the Germanic states (see table 1). Meanwhile, only two percent of all heads of households were born in the state of Wisconsin.

**Table 1**
**Population Statistics for Ahnapee, 1870**

| Birthplace of Heads of Household | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Germanic States | 183 | 60% |
| Other Non-English Speaking Countries | 42 | 14% |
| English Speaking Countires | 35 | 11% |
| Total Foreign Born | 260 | 85% |
| Total Native Born | 47 | 15% |

*Source:* United States, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Population Census, 1870."

Another helpful indicator of how the area was developing was the dramatic increase in the quantity and diversity of occupations (see table 2). The number of professionals (teachers, lawyers, doctors, government officials, and the like) almost quadrupled between 1860 (when there were eight) and 1880 (when there were twenty-nine). During the same period, the number of businessmen almost tripled (from fifteen to forty), with specialists such as milliner, druggist, baker, grocer, restaurant keeper, insurance agent and even fruit tree agent appearing. Finally, the number of skilled workmen multiplied four-fold, from twenty-six to 102, with the same kind of diversification of skills.

**Table 2**
**Occupational Diversity in Ahnapee, 1860-1880**

| | 1860 | 1870 | 1880 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Professionals | 8 | 12 | 29 |
| Businessmen | 15 | 25 | 40 |
| Skilled Craftsmen | 26 | 58 | 102 |

*Source:* United States, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Population Census, 1860, 1870, 1880."

At the same time the nature of work for families in the surrounding countryside was also changing in dramatic ways. By the mid-1870s, the commercially-valuable timber had been all but eliminated from the immediate region and sawmills, which had provided the first local industry and principle export, began to close. Where the timber industry left off, however, agriculture picked up. Cleared land and drained swamps yielded rich farmland. What oxen used to do could now be done faster with horses, and farmers gradually embraced the new technology of harvesting machines. A county fair was begun with the explicit mission of increasing agricultural expertise and production.

In 1875, just one year before the largest sawmill in the county closed, the first recorded cargo of wheat was shipped aboard a schooner from the pier at Ahnapee. That fall grain came in so fast that a building formerly used as a school was filled to the rafters with wheat before new warehouses could be built. At the peak of the harvest a steady stream of wagons full of wheat, rye or barley arrived in town each morning, and a bidding war was waged on street corners, where local dealers stood calling out prices they would pay for grain in an effort to keep farmers from doing business with competitors.'

Unfortunately, local statistics were kept only casually. Nonetheless, a partial list of exports over an eleven-year period demonstrates the change in production (and, therefore, the change in work and lifestyle) which occurred (see table 3). It will be noted that while the amounts of cordwood, railroad ties and posts held steady, shingles and lumber shipped declined overall. At the same time, the amount of grain shipped increased consistently and new agricultural products, such as peas, beef, livestock, wool and cheese, were added to Ahnapee's export list.

**Table 3**
**Selected Exports from Ahnapee, 1874-1884**
**(Part A)**

| Year | Cordwood cords | RR ties no. | Posts no. | Shingles no. | Lumber Bd. ft. | Fish packs | Ice tons |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1874 | 9,684 | 134,860 | 292,650 | 9,947,000 | 618,000 | 0 | 0 |
| 1875 | 12,200 | 54,000 | 94,000 | 4,500,000 | 5,000,000 | 850 | 2,070 |
| 1876 | ? | ? | ? | 2,000.000 | 1,600,000 | 1,100 | ? |
| 1877 | 2,217 | 264,116 | 119,425 | 575,000 | 200,000 | 2,500 | 2,200 |
| 1878 | 5,000 | 375,000 | 125,000 | 150,000 | 200,000 | 800 | 3,000 |
| 1879 | 5,000 | 470,000 | 123,000 | 1,000,000 | 318,000 | 0 | 0 |
| 1880 | 6,500 | 928,000 | 167,000 | 1,000,000 | 408,500 | 0 | 0 |
| 1881 | 5,000 | 835,000 | 200,000 | 500,000 | 200,000 | 0 | 0 |
| 1882 | 4,500 | 840,000 | 200,000 | 400,000 | 500,000 | 300 | 0 |
| 1883 | 4,000 | 830,000 | 200,500 | 500,000 | 2,000,000 | 160,000 lbs. | 0 |
| 1884 | 4,300 | 850,000 | 250,000 | 500,000 | 1,500,000 | 180,000 lbs. | 0 |

Table 3 (Part B)

| Year | Barley | Oats | Rye | Wheat | Peas | Beef | Live Stock | Wool | Cheese |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | bu. | bu. | bu. | bu. | bu. | lbs. | no. | lbs. | lbs. |
| 1874 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,300 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1875 | | 0 | 0 | 73,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1876 | ? | 8.00 | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | 34 | 0 |
| 1877 | 20,000 | 0 | 500 | 175,000 | 2,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1878 | 15,000 | 0 | 500 | 125,000 | 5,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1879 | 20,000 | 0 | 1,000 | 150,000 | 450 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1880 | 19,785 | 0 | 8,050 | 216,000 | 700 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1881 | | 2,000 | 2,000 | 250,000 | 7,000 | 100,000 | 500 | 0 | 0 |
| 1882 | | 3,000 | 6,000 | 225,000 | 25,000 | 90,000 | 450 | 2,500 | 0 |
| 1883 | | 7,000 | 7,500 | 240,000 | 25,000 | 85,000 | 500 | 4,600 | 25,000 |
| 1884 | | 10,000 | 8,000 | 350,000 | 28,000 | 95,000 | 650 | 5,000 | 30,000 |

*Notes:* Barley is combined with wheat, 1881-1884; wool is expressed in sacks for 1876 and in pounds for 1882-1884

*Source:* US, Army Corps of Engineers, "Annual Reports to the Secretary of War," various years.

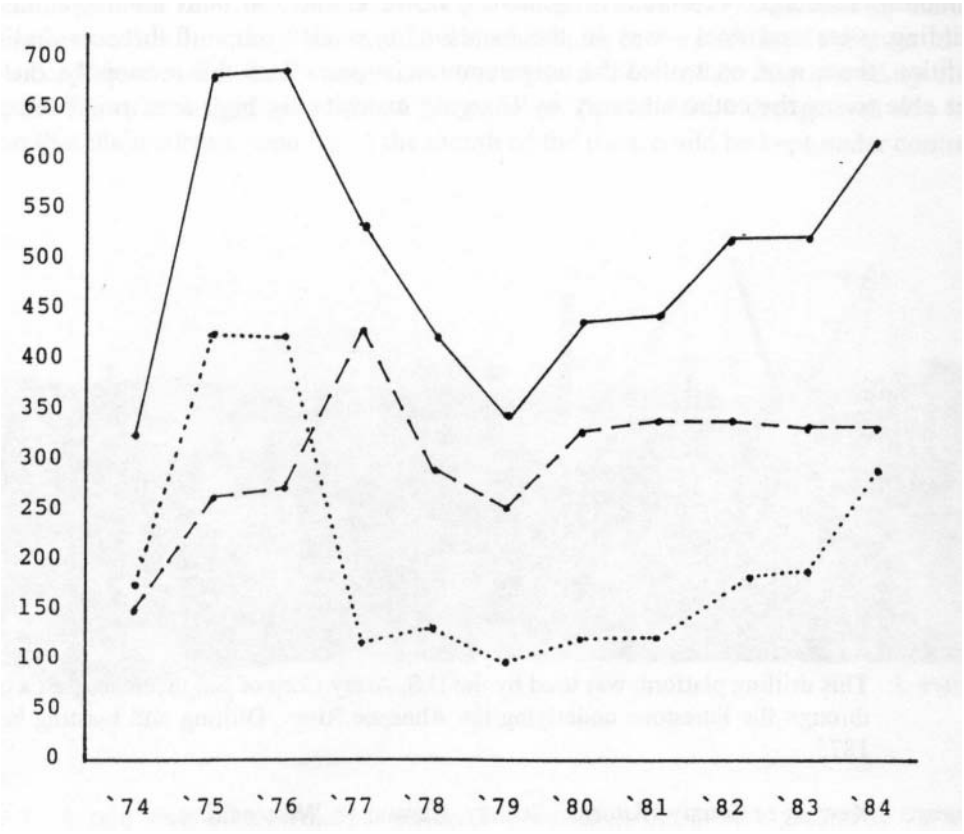


***Figure** 2:* Arrivals of Sail and Steam, 1874-1884.

*Source:* See table 3.

When we recall that virtually all this material was exported by Lake vessels, and that imports (including such vital items as farm machinery, flour, fresh fruit, and all sorts of general merchandise) also came by boat, the significance of the harbour is obvious. Arrivals of both sail and steam vessels during the same eleven-year period ranged from a low of 322 in 1874 to a high of 678 the next year (see figure 2). It should be noted that vessel activity not only reflected the volume of imports and exports but also the intensity of work being done on harbour improvements.6

Settlement upstream, along with the growing population and diversity of commerce *in* the town, contributed to the movement to develop the harbour. With mounting pressure, however, came serious social and political conflict. Of course, disputes over waterfront development were not unique to Ahnapee. In Milwaukee, for instance, tensions between various landowners with competing interests escalated until acts of

economic sabotage occurred.' ln Ahnapee, however, all the land readily suitable for building piers and docks was in the hands of a small group of three capitalists. ln addition, these men controlled the only commercial pier. With this monopoly, the clique was able to tax the entire citizenry by charging exorbitantly high fees to use the pier.

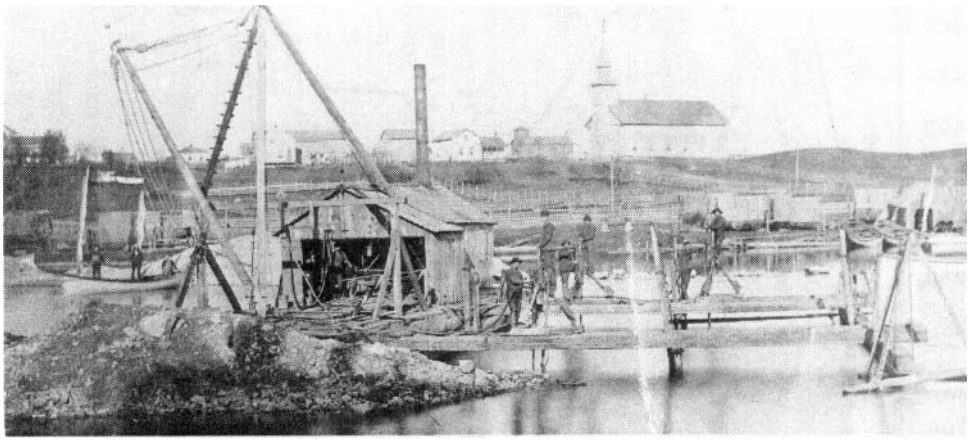

*Figure 3:* This drilling platform was used by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers to blast a channel through the limestone underlying the Ahnapee River. Drilling and blasting began in 1875.

*Source:* Kewaunee County Historical Society, Kewaunee, Wisconsin.

Exacerbating the conflict over the waterfront was the fact that the members of the clique were Yankees, Episcopalians, politically connected, and wealthy. ln contrast, the vast majority of Ahnapee's citizens were foreign-born, Catholic or Lutheran, politically disenfranchised and lacking in capital. This is significant when we recall that midwestern society was very stratified and tensions often ran high between native-born citizens and immigrants. Thus, while on the surface the battle over the harbour was an economic conflict, it was also a struggle of class, privilege and ideology. I do not think it would be too much to say that it was, indeed, a test of democracy.'

Arrayed against the small clique of three Yankee landowners was a much larger group of farmers and merchants, almost all of whom were immigrants, mainly from Germany, Bohemia, Belgium and Switzerland. The one thing this group had in its favour was the ability to sway public opinion and, thus, to instigate governmental action designed to win public access to the privately-owned harbour. In 1866, for instance, sixty farmers and merchants formed the Ahnapee Farmers' Pier Company with the goal of building a second commercial pier on the lakefront to reduce shipping costs by competing with the pier controlled by the clique.' ln 1870 another popular movement began at the instigation of local farmers and merchants. This time the plan was to sell municipal bonds to pay for deepening the harbour so that vessels could reach new dock space not owned by the

clique.[10] Again in 1874, a citizens' movement began to raise a local tax for harbour improvements; this time the plan was to build a new pier in the middle of the river so that vessels could load and unload without ever having to dock at the facility owned by clique members. This pier was known as the Citizens' Pier. In addition, a dredge was also to be built so that the recurring sand bar at the mouth of the river could be kept under control»

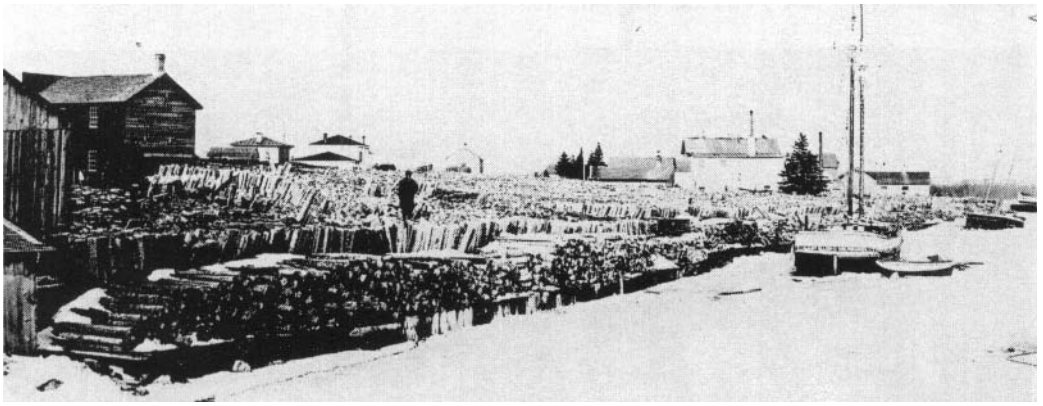

*Figure 4:* A rare view of the Ahnapee River. The vessel in the middle ground is the scow schooner *Lady Ellen,* most likely built in Ahnapee in 1875 by William I. Henry Sr. and captained for many years by his son, William Jr.

*Source:* See figure 3.

At every turn, the clique worked vigorously to block these populist movements. ln the case of the Ahnapee Farmers' Pier Company, for instance, the clique hired an agent who surreptitiously bought up the majority of company stock. At the next stockholders' meeting, the clique simply voted in their own candidates as company directors. Thereafter, the Farmers' Pier was no competition to the clique's facility; eventually the former fell into disrepair and was abandoned.[12] ln the case of the Citizens' Pier, the clique appealed to the law to prevent its building on the grounds that if they owned the riverbanks, they also owned the river between the banks. ln the end, this argument did not "hold water" and the pier was built.[13] But if the clique was unable to frustrate the citizens' movement, nature did the job very effectively. Not only did a persistent sand bar obstruct vessel movement in the river, but a limestone ledge under the water limited the depth of the channel to as little as five feet in places.

For a while boosters entertained high hopes that the federal government would come to the rescue of the town by designating Ahnapee as a "harbour of refuge" for Lake vessels in need of shelter. lndeed, the US Corps of Engineers did have plans to construct

an outer harbour — a walled-in basin in the Lake where vessels would be protected from prevailing wind and waves. Later, after the government selected another site for the harbour of refuge, Congress appropriated large sums both for building piers at the mouth, and for drilling and blasting a deeper channel through the limestone river bottom. But ultimately the government, too, frustrated the desires of local merchants and farmers for an improved harbour. Funds were never sufficient, and in the end a channel only 200-feet long and seven-feet deep was excavated. While this allowed fishing boats and shallow-draft scow-schooners to enter the river, any commercial vessel of significant size was still forced to dock at the lakeshore adjacent to land owned by the clique and to pay the required fees (or "tax") to load and unload.i4

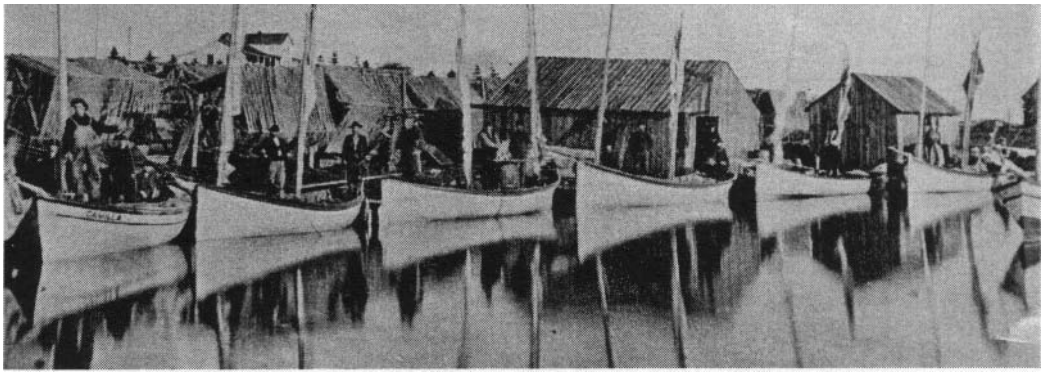

*Figure 5:* For years the fishing fleet moored on the north bank of the Ahnapee River. Milwaukee and Chicago provided the markets for their catch.

*Source:* See figure 3.

With this background in mind, we can now address directly the sailor's role in Ahnapee. What we will discover is that even though Ahnapee as a port never achieved the importance to which it aspired, the role of sailors played in its life was nevertheless very important.

The earliest role played by sailors has already been described. The first businessmen to arrive in Ahnapee were vessel owners and masters, fishermen and commercial traders before they gave up the sea to establish farms, stores, mills, hotels, etc. But later in the town's life, after the clique of capitalists bought up the waterfront property, pier and forwarding business, sailors still played an entrepreneurial role as small business men allied with local farmers and independent merchants against the wealthy clique. An understanding of this role may begin with a look at an episode in the life of a local shipowner and lake captain named Johnny Doak.

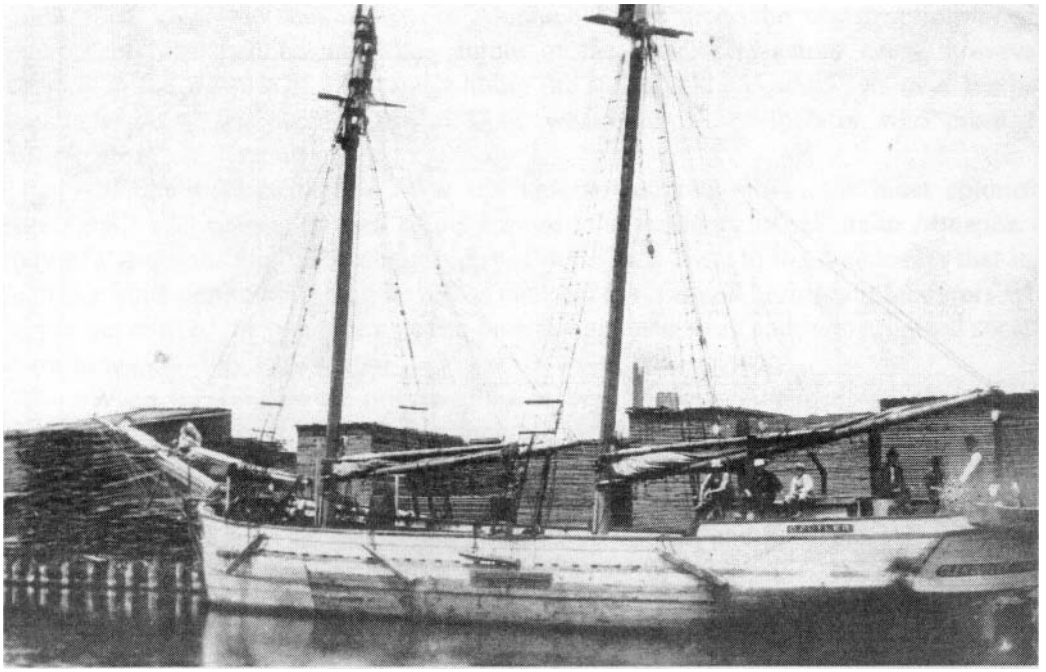

*Figure 6:* The *Glen Cuyler* was typical of many of the schooners which visited Ahnapee. She had the distinction of carrying the first cargo of wheat from that port.

*Source:* Great Lakes Marine Collection of the Milwaukee Public Library/Wisconsin Marine Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

In 1873, in the midst of the conflict between the clique and the citizens who wished to break its monopoly, Captain Doak sailed his little scow-schooner *Ella Doak* over the sand bar and into the Ahnapee River. While at a distance of 125 years this may not seem like much of an accomplishment, to the people of Ahnapee it represented a *coup* in the battle for free access to dock space. It was such a significant event in fact that it was passed on in the form of a local legend written down only a generation later.

According to the legend, Doak's triumph happened on Christmas Day 1873. A storm was blowing, but Captain Doak and his crew sailed on undaunted by the winds and waves in a valiant effort to reach home. They were spotted by an observer on shore who alerted other townspeople when it appeared that the captain was determined to enter the river's mouth. Soon a large crowd gathered in suspense, knowing that the sand bar between the piers threatened to dash *Ella Doak* to pieces. The only hope was for the captain to arrive at the bar just as a wave crested, allowing his vessel in effect to ride the surf into the harbour. As the story was told, the captain's timing was perfect; the crowd cheered and the captain danced a jig on deck as the vessel was safely moored by the river bank. Finally, his faithful wife, Jennie, appeared amidst the crowd to welcome the captain and his crew to the table where she had a Christmas feast ready for them.15

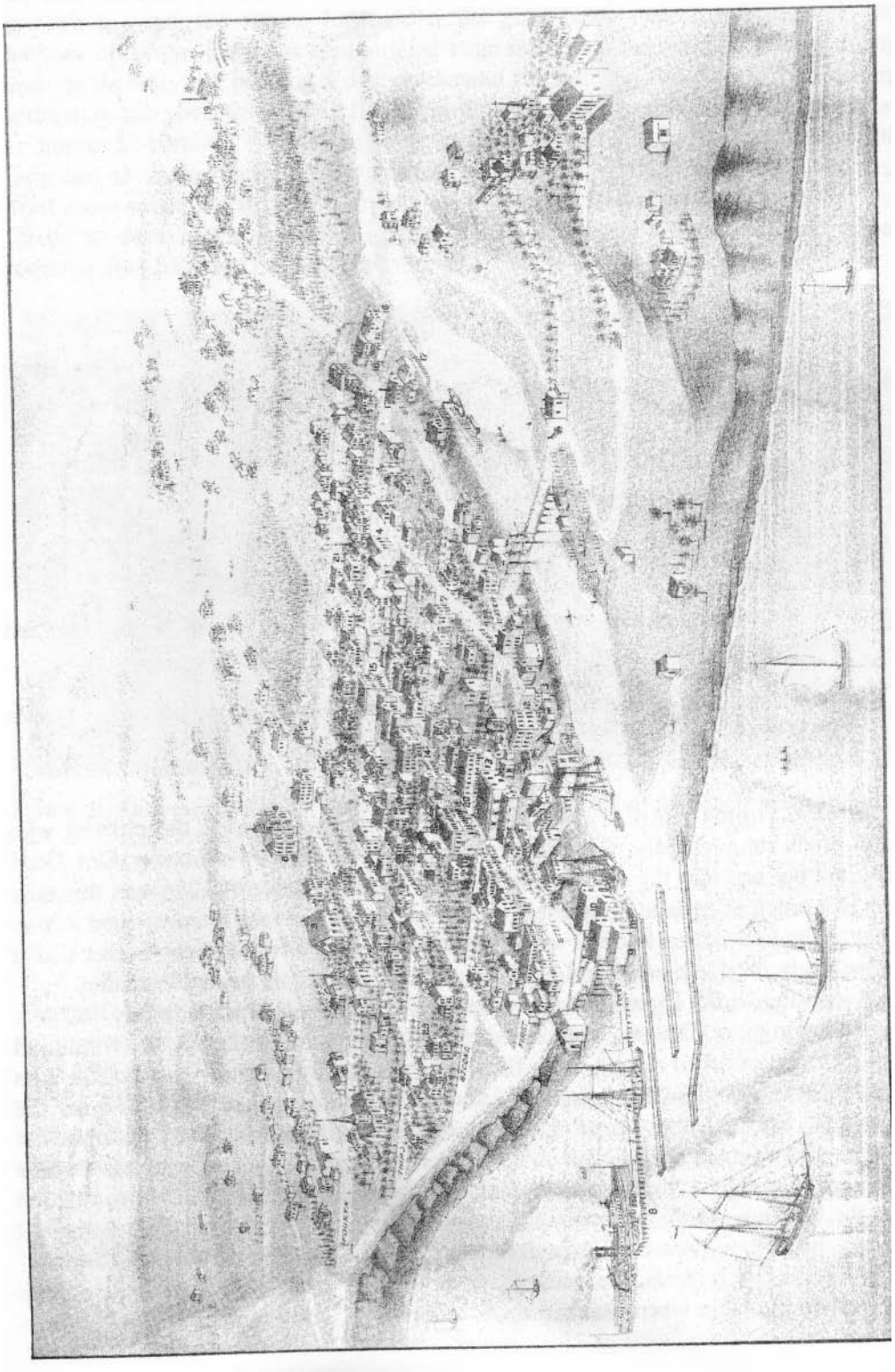

*Figure 7:* This 1880 view of Ahnapee shows the pier owned by two members of the clique: Charles G. Boalt and De Wayne Stebbins. Between the two piers at the mouth of the river lies the Citizen's Pier which could be used by lake vessels to load cargo brought down the river by scow and tug.

Of course, this is not exactly how it happened. The scow was indeed the first commercial vessel to anchor in the Ahnapee River after the construction of the government piers had begun at the mouth of the river. The actual event, however, occurred in the *summer* of 1873 and without the storm or the need to surf over the bar. Nonetheless, to local people Captain Doak was a hero — a liberator who promised freedom from the tyranny of the monopoly.16

Of course, Johnny Doak was not unique, but rather was the most colourful representative of a group of men who comprised the fraternity of sailors in Ahnapee. A study of the origins and inter-relationships of these men leads to the conclusion that in a small maritime community they served as mentors to rural and immigrant labourers who had not yet entered the mainstream of an increasingly urbanized and industrialized society where new opportunities awaited.

When we compare the origins of the earliest sailors in Ahnapee with those living there twenty years later, we can see tangible evidence that sailing was becoming an increasingly viable vocation for immigrant men for whom ethnicity and language were barriers. Of the eight men who were commercial sailors and residents of Ahnapee prior to 1860, four were born in the US and two each in Canada and Scotland. All were born into English-speaking families (see table 4).

**Table 4**
**National Origins of Sailors Resident in Ahnapee before 1860**

| Name | Place of Birth |
|---|---|
| Charles L. Fellows | Vermont |
| Abraham Hall | New York |
| Henry Harkins | Pennsylvania |
| John McDonald | New York |
| William McDonald | Canada |
| Zabina Shaw | Canada |
| William I. Henry, Sr. | Scotland |
| David Youngs | Scotland |

*Source:* US, "Population Census," 1860.

Twenty years later, seventeen men in Ahnapee identified themselves as professional sailors; of these, six were born in Europe, and nine were raised in homes where English was not the primary language (see table 5). Thus, the sailors of Ahnapee were becoming an increasingly diverse group ethnically over time. Moreover, we know that Ahnapee was not unique. A study of ethnic origins in a community which provides a statistically more convincing sample shows the same trend. ln Manitowoc, for example, forty-six men identified themselves as sailors, navigators or lake captains in 1860. Of these, twenty-four (fifty-two percent) were foreign-born. In 1880, however, there were 112 mariners of whom seventy (sixty-three percent) were foreign-born.

A perfect example of the way in which mentoring by older sailors allowed social mobility for an immigrant family may be seen in the case of the Schuenemann brothers, August and Hermann. The family had arrived from Germany in 1851 and settled on a

farm in Ahnapee in 1856 after living in New York state and Manitowoc. Eight years later, the boys' father, Frederick, was drafted into the Union Army and during his service contracted a chronic infectious disease, which led to partial blindness. After the war, he was unable to work consistently and the family slipped from a secure place within the German enclave towards poverty. Eventually, Frederick sold his farm and there was no future for his children other than to look outside the family for their life's work.

**Table 5**
**National Origins of Sailors**
**Residing in Ahnapee in 1880**

| Name | Birthplace | Father's Birthplace |
|---|---|---|
| [English-speaking parentage] | | |
| Aimer McDonald | U.S. | U.S. |
| Henry Harkins | U.S. | U.S. |
| Charles Bacon | U.S. | England |
| William Dingham | U.S. | Canada |
| John McDonald | U.S. | Ireland |
| Alva McDonald | U.S. | Canada |
| William McDonald | U.S. | Canada |
| William McDonald, Sr. | Canada | Ireland |
| [non-English-speaking parentage] | | |
| George Knipfer | U.S. | Germany |
| Aug. Schuenemann | U.S. | Germany |
| Albert Sibilsky | Germany | Germany |
| Michael Wenniger | Bohemia | Bohemia |
| William Bie | U.S. | Norway |
| Joseph Bie | Norway | Norway |
| Ed Anderson | Norway | Norway |
| Henry Johnson | Denmark | Denmark |
| Charles Nelson | Denmark | Denmark |

*Source:* US, "Population Census," 1860.

As a young adult the oldest Schuenemann son, August, worked for a while as a labourer, but then left home to find employment among Johnny Doak's crew. Later, his younger brother Hermann followed suit. Tradition has it that August was on board the *Ella Doak* when she "jumped the bar" in 1873. Two years later, he became part-owner and master of another Doak vessel, the schooner *W.H. Hinsdale.* And in 1879, he was given command of the scow-schooner *Sea Star,* owned locally by Capt. Charles L. Fellows. Altogether August Schuenemann is known to have been the master of nine Lake vessels. Brother Hermann also became a captain and was successively master and/or owner of at least seven vessels.

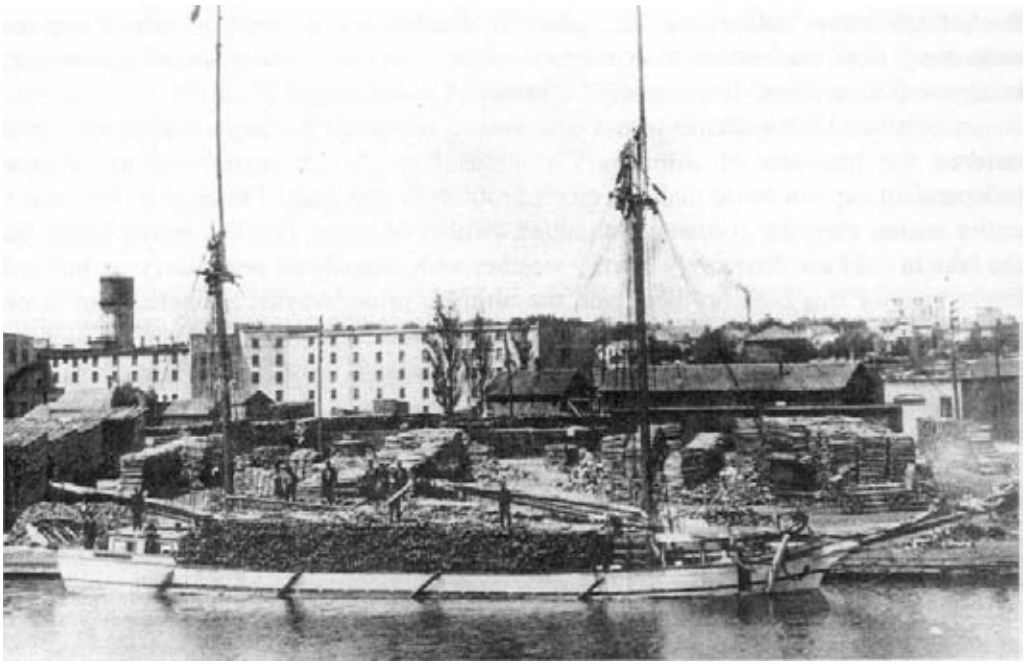

*Figure 8:* The schooner *Josephine Dresden,* shown here heavily laden at Sheboygan, Wisconsin, was later owned by Ahnapee natives and lake captains August and Herman Schuenemann.

*Source:* See figure 6.

The Schuenemanns not only became small businessmen but also joined the tide of emigration from the country to the city. Both August and Hermann eventually married and moved to Chicago. While August may have had some small business experience before he died, it is clear that Hermann had engaged in several serious business ventures in the city with mixed success. Before his untimely death, Hermann had moved his family into a comfortable three-story stone townhouse on North Clark Street in Chicago, been a grocery store owner, tavern owner and creator of his own enterprise, the Northern Michigan Evergreen Nursery, which owned cut-over land in upper Michigan from which new-growth evergreens were harvested for Christmas trees."

These were adventuresome, hard-working men who lacked the capital to compete successfully with the large commercial carriers. They also lacked the training and opportunity to become captain of a corporately-owned vessel. The fact that there were numerous aging and technologically obsolete sailing vessels in varying states of disrepair on the Lakes created opportunities. All it took was a small amount of money and a large amount of bravado to become the master of one of these craft.

All the schooners the Schuenemanns owned were already well-spent before they acquired them. The poor condition of the vessels and the willingness of their captains to accept risks explain more than any other factors why both August and Hermann died in

shipwrecks. The following chart shows that the median age of the sailing vessels used by the Schuenemann brothers was 33.5 years. lt also makes apparent that most of the vessels were very near the end of their careers when they were first acquired by one of the brothers. (On average, they survived a mere 5.5 years longer)"

Driven by the chance to end each sailing season with a large bonus, both brothers entered the business of shipping Christmas trees to Chicago. In a good year an independent captain could make as much profit with one load of trees as he had made the entire season carrying cordwood, shingles, lumber or stone. But this meant being out on the lake in cold and frequently stormy weather with dilapidated boats carrying bulky deck loads, and for this both brothers paid the ultimate price. August Schuenemann drowned in November 1898 aboard the two-masted schooner *S. Thal.* Hermann Schuenemann drowned in November 1912 in one of Lake Michigan's most famous tragedies, the loss of the three-masted schooner *Rouse Simmons,* which ever since has been known in Lake Michigan lore as "the Christmas Tree Ship."'9

**Table** 6
**Age of Sailing Vessels When Used by the Schuenemanns**

| Schooner Name | Official # | Status | When Built | First Used | When Lost | Age When in Use |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| W.H. Hinsdale | | part-owner | unk. | 1875 | 1877 | unk. |
| Sea Star | 22356 | master | 1855 | 1879 | 1886 | 24 |
| Ole Oleson | 155060 | master | 1865 | 1886 | 1887 | 21 |
| Supply | 23497 | owner | 1861 | ca.1888 | 1890 | 25 |
| Josephine Dresden | 12756 | owner | 1852 | 1889 | 1907 | 34 |
| Thomas C. Wilson | 24579 | owner | 1868 | 1893 | 1902 | 25 |
| Seaman | 23466 | master | 1848 | 1895 | 1908 | 47 |
| Mystic | | charterer | 1866 | 1895 | 1895 | 29 |
| M. Capron | | charterer | 1875 | 1895 | 1898 | 20 |
| Mary L. Collins | 16614 | owner | 1854 | 1897 | unk. | 43 |
| Experiment | 7523 | charterer | 1854 | 1897 | 1902 | 43 |
| S. Thal | 115781 | owner | 1867 | 1898 | 1898 | 31 |
| Truman Moss | 24454 | unk. | 1867 | 1902 | unk. | 35 |
| George L. Wrenn | 10816 | owner | 1868 | 1903 | 1911 | 35 |
| Rouse Simmons | 110024 | leaser | 1868 | 1910 | 1912 | 42 |

*Source:* The information in this chart came from several sources: (1) *The Herman G. Runge Collection,* Wisconsin Marine Historical Society, Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; (2) Record Group 41, records of the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation; Records of the Chicago District Office; Records Relating to Vessel Documentation; Certificates of Enrollment, 1865-1912; and (3) various newspapers.

Today Ahnapee (now Algoma) is a mecca for recreational fishing and boating. Highways have replaced both the lake and the railroad as the avenue of commerce. The early dreams of town boosters of building a Lake port to rival the cities to the south seems naive at best from the perspective of the twentieth century. But while many Lake settlements of one hundred and fifty years ago are now gone and all but forgotten.

Algoma remains vital because of nature's gift of the river and Lake, and because of the entrepreneurship of early sailors who bought the first real estate, established the first businesses, took the products of the forest and farm to market, helped fight the battle for access to the harbour, brought in the machinery for the town's mills and factories, and provided a means of passage from the limited opportunities of the farm to the expanding enterprise of the cities.

## NOTES

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I. The early history of the region is described in Leonard A. Coombs, Jr., *Early Travels in Manitowoc County, 1634-1835* (Manitowoc, WI, 1990); Louise Phelps Kellogg (ed.), *Early Narratives of the Northwest* (New York, 1917); Kellogg, *The French Regime in Wisconsin and the Northwest*(Madison, 1925); Jim Linak, "Early History of Kewaunee County (Unpublished Mss., 1989); Fred Neuschel, "Passing through the Kewaunee Wilderness: A Pre-Settlement History," *Voyageur,* XI, No. 2 (Winter/Spring 1995), 12-19; and Alice Smith, *The History of Wisconsin: From Exploration to Statehood* (Madison, 1985), 1-235.

*2. Ibid.,* 56-60; George W. Wing, "Early History of Kewaunee County" (Unpublished Mss.), 21, 38 and 40; *Ahnapee Record,* 31 July 1873; and *Algoma Record-Herald, 30* March and 20 April 1923.

3. The only local history of Algoma is Liz Howell, *Land of the Great Gray Wolf* (Sister Bay, WI, 1988).

4. License and enrolment documents for *some* of these early vessels are available at the National Archives, Great Lakes Regional Branch. A fuller treatment of this period at Ahnapee will be found in Fred Neuschel, "Life on the Ahnapee River," *Anchor News,* XXIII, No. 5 (October-December 1992), 92-100. The best early recollections are found in *Door County Advocate,* 11 July 1867 and 13 August 1868; *Kewuanee Enterprise,* 27 February and 5 June 1867, and 8 April 1868; *Milwaukee Sentinel,* 12 July and 31 August 1867; *Ahnapee Record,* 2 October 1873 and 8 February 1877. Other histories of harbour development provide interesting parallels. Cf., for example, Randall Rohe, "The Short, Intense Life of Peshtigo Harbor," *Voyageur,* VII, No. 2 (Winter/Spring 1991), 28-43; and Grace Swensen, "Manitowoc Harbor," *Anchor News,* X, No. 2 (March/April 1979), 4-9.

5. The boom in wheat production is well documented in *Ahnapee Record,* especially 29 July, 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30 September, 14 and 21 October, 4 and 11 November, and 2 and 9 December 1875. For the demise of the lumber industry, see *ibid.,* 8 April and 4 November 1875, and 19 October and 2 November 1876. While prime timber for building was exhausted, products like railroad ties continued to be shipped in quantity for some years; see *ibid.,* 10 April and 15 May 1979.

6. Data on imports and exports, as well as vessel arrivals and departures at Ahnapee, are found in US, Army Corps of Engineers, "Annual Reports to the Secretary of War." These documents are published in the House of Representatives records.

7. James S. Buck, *Pioneer History of Milwaukee, Vol. I* (Milwaukee, 1876), 189-190; William Edward Derby, "A History of the Port of Milwaukee, 1835-1910" (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1963), 1-37; Lee Lawrence, *The Wisconsin Ice Trade* (Madison, 1980), 7-8.

8. Fred Neuschel, "The Clique vs. the Croakers: Conflict in Small-Town Wisconsin," (Unpublished Mss., 1995).

9. The Pier Company used the original spelling of Ahnepee. See Wing, "Early History," 104.

*10. Kewaunee Enterprise,* 23 February 1870; State of Wisconsin, "Chapter 430: An Act to Authorize the Town of Ahnepee in the County of

Kewaunee to Issue the Bonds in Said Town to Aid in the Construction of a Harbor at the Mouth of the Ahnepee River," *Private and Local Laws Passed by the Legislature of Wisconsin in the Year 1870* (Madison, 1870), 1050-1054. This act was repealed in 1873; see *Laws of Wisconsin Passed by the Legislature in the Year 1873, Together With Joint Resolutions and Memorials* (Madison, 1873), 461.

*11. Ahnapee Record, 5,* 12 and 19 March, 23 April 1874, 21 May, 18 June, 23 and 30 July, 6 August, and 24 September 1874.

12. Before this more surreptitious effort, the clique had tried to block the building of the Farmers' Pier in the courts. See Kewaunee County Circuit Court, "Case No. 62, Charles G. Boalt, Plaintiff, vs. Ahnapee Farmers' Pier Company, Defendant," 31 January 1867; and *Kewaunee Enterprise,* 6 February 1867. The documentation demonstrating the clique's efforts to block popular access to the harbour is found in the papers of clique member Edward Decker. For their efforts to take over the Farmers' Pier, see University of Wisconsin at Green Bay (UWGB), Area Research Center (ARC), Edward Decker Manuscript Collection (EDMC), C.G. Boalt to E. Decker, 30 October and 9 November 1868, and "Decker's Personal Note to Himself, c. 1 December 1868."

13. UWGB, ARC, EDMC, D.W. McLeod to Edward Decker, 10 June 1876; and D.W. Stebbins to Edward Decker, 28 August 1876. While the law governing navigable streams was established, the confusion regarding the rights of landowners may be explained by the fact that such rights had not been tested extensively in the courts until after 1874. The relevant laws are found in *Revised Statutes of the State of Wisconsin* (St. Louis, 1871), 115, 510-511, 749-750 and 1698; and *Revised Statutes of the State of Wisconsin* (Madison, 1878), 477-481, where the Ahnapee River is referred to by its original name, Wolf River, and declared a navigable river. A number of cases brought to the state Supreme Court established that ownership of both banks of a navigable stream does not preclude public access and no intrusion into the water beyond the natural shore can be made "without express and competent grant from the public." Only the first of these cases had been decided prior to 1874, however; see *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of the State of Wisconsin,* XXII, 572-577; and XLII, 203-233 and 248-274. When Ahnapee was incorporated as a city in 1879, Section 91 of "An Act to Incorporate the City of Ahnapee" gave the city the power "to establish dock and wharf lines upon the Ahnapee river," and "to restrain and prevent encroachment upon said river, and obstructions thereto." This act is found in *Laws of Wisconsin Passed at the Annual Session of the Legislature of 1879* (Madison, 1879), 125-154. For a discussion of the history of riparian rights, see Ralph G. Plumb, "Harbor Administration: Harbors of Wisconsin" (Unpublished BLit thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1901), 17-22 and 41-43.

14. The history of the various harbour development projects can be traced through newspaper reports, but it is also well summarized in George A. Zinn (Captain of the Corps of Engineers), "Survey of Ahnapee Harbor, Wisconsin," in *House Documents,* XLVIII (Washington, 1897), 1-7.

*15. Algoma Record-Herald, 5* January 1934.

*16. Ahnapee Record,* 17 July 1873.

17. Fred Neuschel, *August and Herman Schuenemann: Tree Captains of Lake Michigan* (Algoma, WI, 1993).

18. Three sources were used for the dates of build and closure: Milwaukee Public Library, Herman G. Runge Collection; Chicago Historical Society, J. Norman Jensen Collection of Lake and River Disasters, 1679-1947; and *Inland Lloyd's Registry.* In a few instances certificates of enrollment, licenses or certificates of conveyance were found for the vessels at the National Archives, Great Lakes Regional Branch, in Chicago. Dates for the use of vessels by the Schuenemanns were derived almost exclusively from contemporary newspaper reports.

19. Fred Neuschel, "Bringing Christmas to the City," *Chicago History,* XXI, No. 3 (December 1992), 44-55. For a more detailed treatment of the wreck of the schooner *Rouse Simmons,* see Neuschel, "November 23, 1912: The Rest of the Story," *Anchor News,* XXI, Nos. 1 and 3 (January/February and May/June 1990), 4-11 and 44-53.