



Legends of the Lakes

November 10, 1975

SS Edmund Fitzgerald was an American Great Lakes freighter that sank in Lake Superior during a massive and violent winter storm on November 10, 1975, resulting in the deaths of all 29 crew members. The cause remains subject of debate, with theories including the flooding of the cargo hold due to loose hatches and rogue waves, or a possible grounding on an uncharted shoal that damaged the hull. Nearly 50 years have passed since the sinking of the one time 'Queen of the Lakes' or the 'Mighty Fitz'. Roughly 10,000 lives have been lost and over 6000 shipwrecks have been recorded on the five inland seas. Yet this tragedy still resonates as one of the most haunting maritime disasters in Canadian and American history. The Fairport Harbor Historical Society will continue its local remembrance ceremony, one held every five years. A 'Call to Last Watch' will see USCG-Station Fairport ring the bell for each member lost including Fairport's own Edward Binden. Another Fairporter and crew member Bill Simko will share his experiences on the Fitzgerald and various artifacts will be on display at the Fairport VFW Hall that evening. Gordon Lightfoot's song notwithstanding - Let's take this month's post to explore this fateful moment in Great Lakes history.



For 17 years, Edmund Fitzgerald carried taconite from mines near Duluth, Minnesota to Great Lakes ports such as Detroit, Toledo and others. Built in 1957 at a cost of \$7 million, launched in 1958, it was named after Edmund Fitzgerald for his 27 years of company service, as the president, vice-president and chairman of Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance. At 729 feet and weighing 13,632 tons it was the largest carrier on the lakes thru 1971 and its workhorse. In 1964 it became the first ship to carry one million gross tons thru the Soo Locks.

It broke that record in 1968 and set six seasonal haul records including a single haul of 27,402 tons. 'DJ' Captain Peter Pulcer elevated his vessel to rock star status of the times by piping music via intercoms as he passed thru the St. Clair and Detroit Rivers. Additionally he entertained spectators with running vessel commentaries when passing thru the Soo Locks.



That fateful night in 1975 actually began one day earlier on the afternoon of November 9 for current Captain Ernest M. McSorley. Departing with a full load of taconite ore pellets, a massive storm was



building. Joined at sea by the Arthur M. Anderson, both vessels were caught in a severe storm with near hurricane winds and 35 foot plus waves. Despite some claims of worn watertight hatches, improper safety protocols and communication systems at less than ideal working conditions Captain McSorley and the Fitzgerald left port in good condition with all equipment serviceable. By the next day, it was reported at 7:10pm-the last known transmission that McSorley's vessel had a bad list, lost two radars and was taking on heavy seas. The 'Mighty Fitz' went

down in Canadian (Ontario) waters, sunk to a depth a 88 fathoms (530 ft.) approximately 15 nautical miles from Whitefish Point. The SS Arthur M. Anderson was asked by USCG to circle back and look for the vessel and any survivors. Other vessels soon aided in the search. Theories about the founder soon spread. One theory espoused the flooding of the cargo hold due to loose hatches and rogue waves. Another theory speculated about a possible grounding on an uncharted shoal that damaged the hull. Located in deep water on November 14, 1975 by US Naval aircraft detecting magnetic anomalies, fact finding missions continued for decades. May 20 to 28, 1974 saw submersibles and side scanners employed in fact finding missions. In 1980, Jean-Michel Cousteau, son of famed sea explorer Jacques Cousteau sent two divers in the submersible RV Calypso to examine the wreckage. 1989 and 1994 saw two additional wreckage salvages occur.



What is known and generally thought to be the dominate theory is this. The Fitzgerald left Burlington Railroad Docks bound for Zug Island, Detroit on November 9 at 2:15pm. Winter storms were gathering with gale warnings and waves of 10 feet and higher forming. 16 hours of increasing bad weather followed. Mentions of 'The Three Sisters' were offered as swells of 30-58 feet hit, steady 55 knots of wind followed, gusts hit 71 mph and a lake temperature hovering at 41 degrees forced the

ship not to snap as previously thought but to rent. Thus, it grounded before or after taking on water. The bow section stuck upright mired in the mud, the stern section lies upside down 50 degrees from the bow. July 4, 1995 saw the ship's bell recovered and a replica bell returned to the wreckage. This bell now resides at the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum in Michigan.





In conclusion, join the members of the Fairport Harbor Historical Society as they share the story of the Edmund Fitzgerald-its construction-final voyage theories and crew memories. See below for the program agenda. Check the FH lighthouse website or Facebook page for more details.

Life boat and oars recovered from the wreckage

Submitted by. Dan Maxson - Local Lore by Max, 2010-2016 - The News-Herald, Community Media Lab
- Volunteer Docent , Curator - FHHS / Fairport Harbor Lighthouse & Marine Museum - Volunteer
Curator / Docent - Old Stone School, Concord Township

Edmund Fitzgerald

The 50th Anniversary Remembrance Ceremony

6:00 PM Pledge of Allegiance Opening Prayer - Tina Green Mayor's Proclamation - Tim Manross 6:15 PM Edmund Fitzgerald Video 6:45 PM Introduction of Bill Simko by John Ollila Remarks Questions and Answers about his time sailing on the Edmund Fitzgerald 7:10 PM Community Church Bells Ringing 7:15 PM Remembrance Ceremony USCG Station-Fairport Harbor 7:30 PM Concluding Remarks - Dan Maxson/John Ollila 7:40 PM Benediction - Tina Green 7:45 PM Amazing Grace - Bruce Gregg Bagpipes Refreshments		THE CREW OF THE EDMUND FITZGERALD <table border="0"> <tr> <td>McSorley, Ernest Michael</td> <td>Master, Toledo, Ohio</td> </tr> <tr> <td>McCarthy, John Henkle</td> <td>First Mate, Bay Village, Ohio</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pratt, James A.</td> <td>Second Mate, Lakewood, Ohio</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Armagost, Michael Eugene</td> <td>Third Mate, Iron River, Wisconsin</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Holl, George John</td> <td>Chief Engineer, Cabot, Pennsylvania</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bindon, Edward Francis</td> <td>First Assistant Engineer, Fairport Harbor, Ohio</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Edwards, Thomas Edgar</td> <td>Second Assistant Engineer, Oregon, Ohio</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Haskell, Russell George</td> <td>Second Assistant Engineer, Millbury, Ohio</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Champeau, Oliver Joseph</td> <td>Third Assistant Engineer, Milwaukee, Wisc</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Beecher, Frederick J.</td> <td>Porter, Superior, Wisconsin</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bentsen, Thomas</td> <td>Oiler, St. Joseph, Michigan</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Borgeson, Thomas Dale</td> <td>Able-Bodied Maintenance Man, Duluth, Minn</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Church, Nolan Frank</td> <td>Porter, Silver Bay, Minnesota</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cundy, Ransom Edward</td> <td>Watchman, Superior, Wisconsin</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hudson, Bruce Lee</td> <td>Deckhand, North Olmsted, Ohio</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kalmon, Allen George</td> <td>Second Cook, Washburn, Wisconsin</td> </tr> <tr> <td>MacLellan, Gordon F.</td> <td>Wiper, Clearwater, Florida</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mazes, Joseph William</td> <td>Special Maintenance Man, Ashland, Wisc</td> </tr> <tr> <td>O'Brien, Eugene</td> <td>Wheelsman, Perrysburg Township, Ohio</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Peckol, Karl Anthony</td> <td>Watchman, Ashabula, Ohio</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Povisch, John Joseph</td> <td>Wheelsman, Bradenton, Florida</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Rafferty, Robert Charles</td> <td>Temporary Steward (First Cook), Toledo, Ohio</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Rippa, Paul M.</td> <td>Deckhand, Ashabula, Ohio</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Simmons, John David</td> <td>Wheelsman, Ashland, Wisconsin</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Spengler, William J.</td> <td>Watchman, Toledo, Ohio</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Thomas, Mark Andrew</td> <td>Deckhand, Richmond Heights, Ohio</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Walton, Ralph Grant</td> <td>Oiler, Fremont, Ohio</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Weiss, David Elliot</td> <td>Cadet (deck), Canogha Park, California</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Wilhelm, Blaine Howard</td> <td>Oiler, Moquah, Wisconsin</td> </tr> </table>	McSorley, Ernest Michael	Master, Toledo, Ohio	McCarthy, John Henkle	First Mate, Bay Village, Ohio	Pratt, James A.	Second Mate, Lakewood, Ohio	Armagost, Michael Eugene	Third Mate, Iron River, Wisconsin	Holl, George John	Chief Engineer, Cabot, Pennsylvania	Bindon, Edward Francis	First Assistant Engineer, Fairport Harbor, Ohio	Edwards, Thomas Edgar	Second Assistant Engineer, Oregon, Ohio	Haskell, Russell George	Second Assistant Engineer, Millbury, Ohio	Champeau, Oliver Joseph	Third Assistant Engineer, Milwaukee, Wisc	Beecher, Frederick J.	Porter, Superior, Wisconsin	Bentsen, Thomas	Oiler, St. Joseph, Michigan	Borgeson, Thomas Dale	Able-Bodied Maintenance Man, Duluth, Minn	Church, Nolan Frank	Porter, Silver Bay, Minnesota	Cundy, Ransom Edward	Watchman, Superior, Wisconsin	Hudson, Bruce Lee	Deckhand, North Olmsted, Ohio	Kalmon, Allen George	Second Cook, Washburn, Wisconsin	MacLellan, Gordon F.	Wiper, Clearwater, Florida	Mazes, Joseph William	Special Maintenance Man, Ashland, Wisc	O'Brien, Eugene	Wheelsman, Perrysburg Township, Ohio	Peckol, Karl Anthony	Watchman, Ashabula, Ohio	Povisch, John Joseph	Wheelsman, Bradenton, Florida	Rafferty, Robert Charles	Temporary Steward (First Cook), Toledo, Ohio	Rippa, Paul M.	Deckhand, Ashabula, Ohio	Simmons, John David	Wheelsman, Ashland, Wisconsin	Spengler, William J.	Watchman, Toledo, Ohio	Thomas, Mark Andrew	Deckhand, Richmond Heights, Ohio	Walton, Ralph Grant	Oiler, Fremont, Ohio	Weiss, David Elliot	Cadet (deck), Canogha Park, California	Wilhelm, Blaine Howard	Oiler, Moquah, Wisconsin
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THE EDMUND FITZGERALD

A 729-foot freighter, was thought to be the largest on the Great Lakes when it went down November 10, 1975. All 29 crewmembers, including LAKE, CUYAHOGA and ASHTABULA county residents, were lost.

VESSEL SPECIFICATIONS

Name: Edmund Fitzgerald Hull Number: 301	Length (overall): 729 feet
Beam (width): 75 feet Propulsion:	Depth: 39 feet
Steam Turbine Propeller Diameter: 19'6"	Horsepower: 7500
Owner: Northwest Mutual Life Ins. Co.	Home Port: Milwaukee, Wisc
Date of Loss: November 10, 1975	Operator: Oglebay Norton Co., (Columbia Trans. Div.)
Official Number: 277437	

