



Let's Put Harsens Island on the Great Lakes Map

In November the Society sent out a packet of information to all members about the fundraiser for our steam whistle project. Here's an update. As most of you know by now, thanks to members John and Ann Cameron, we are the lucky recipients of the steam whistle from the retired freighter J.B. Ford. We plan to install it on the front of the museum in operating condition, to use in saluting passing freighters on occasion. If we can do this, we may be the only historical museum on the Great Lakes with such an installation.

In order to install the whistle and other items required for its operation, we need a small addition on our building that will house a compressor and air storage tank large enough to operate the whistle. We have prepared plans, applied to the Township for permits, and obtained bids from contractors.

With materials the complete installation project will cost approximately \$11,000.

The Board of Directors has initiated a fund raising campaign to pay for the project which is to run through December. We have already raised about \$3000 in donations for the project, including matching funds from a challenge grant. The challenge is a pledge that will match, dollar for dollar, up to \$5,000 in donations received for the project through December 31.

Cont.

This means every dollar we raise in December will double in value, and if we raise the full \$5,000 challenge amount, we should have all the funds needed to complete the Steam Whistle Project.

To help us meet our goal, please consider making a generous donation before the end of 2017. If you have been considering a donation to the building fund, purchasing a "Building Brick", or upgrading to a lifetime membership, this is the perfect time. We need your help now, and every dollar will double in value to the Historical Society.

If you have not already done so, please fill out the enclosed donation form and return it before the end of the year with your tax deductible donation. If you've sent it, we thank you. The Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Feel free to call me at 248-388-0465 or any other member of our Board of Directors if you have any questions.

Thank you and we hope in 2018 to all be celebrating the completion of our Steam Whistle Project.

Robert Williams, President, on behalf of the Board of Directors.

*Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society
Freighter Salute Whistles*



The Society Pages

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Dec. 2017

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Message from the President:

The Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society has an initiative underway to record the history of the people of Harsens Island and the Flats. Our museum's special exhibit for 2018 is titled "The people of Harsens Island." The exhibit will actually be four separate exhibits "The 1700's - First Nations", "The 1800's - Early pioneers", "The 1900's - Resorts and long time families", and "The 2000's - Today's islanders." We are in the process of recording oral histories from those who have stories to tell. This was initiated with our lectures called "Island Stories," which began in 2016 and are available on DVD at the museum. (a good stocking stuffer, by the way) We have audio and video equipment available at the museum for recording island stories and would love to work with any volunteers who are interested. If you are interested in helping in this effort please contact our Curator Chuck Miller at 810-748-7209. He currently has a committee working on this project.

Thank you.

Bob Williams, President

Museum Hours for 2018

**May 25th (Memorial Day Weekend) Through
October:**

**Thursday, Friday - 12-3 PM; Saturday – 10 AM–3
PM, Sunday- Noon to 4 PM.**

Special Happy Hour- 2nd Friday 6-8 PM

Join us on Facebook!



J. B. Ford: The Man Behind the Vessel

Bob Williams

J.B. Ford – Who was he?

The steam whistle we are installing at the Harsens Island St. Clair Flats Historical Society Museum is from the retired freighter, J.B. Ford. With the Ford name being so prominent in the history of Michigan you might assume that J.B. was part of the Henry Ford family, but he was not.

J.B. Ford was Captain John Baptiste Ford (November 17, 1811 – May 1, 1903), an American industrialist and founder of the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, now known as PPG Industries, based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was born in a log cabin in Danville, Kentucky to Jonathan, a member of the Kentucky Volunteer Homespun regiment that fought the British forces at New Orleans in the War of 1812 and Margaret, the daughter of a French immigrant who fought in the American Revolutionary War. After his father did not return from the war, his mother apprenticed young John at the age of 12 to a Danville saddle maker. He ran away from the saddle maker at 14 and found his freedom in Greenville, Indiana, where he remained for the next 30 years.

Ford moved to New Albany in 1854 and opened a factory to manufacture feed-cutting boxes constructed of wood and iron. Needing a reliable source of iron for his box manufacturing business, Ford built his own rolling mill and foundry and eventually produced railroad and commercial iron products. By the late 1850's Ford realized he could not compete with the industrial iron giants located in the iron regions around Pittsburgh, and he converted his factory into a shipyard to produce steamboats, eventually producing his own steamboat line and was addressed as "Captain Ford" by many of New Albany's residents. During the Civil War, many of Ford's boats were utilized by the Union forces.

Ford had a son Emory who graduated in July 1864 from Duff's Mercantile College upriver in Pittsburgh. Emory marveled at the many glass works in the city, and soon father and son set up a small glass factory in New Albany known as the New Albany Glass Work, producing bottles and jars. By 1867 the Fords had

greatly expanded the factory and began to study the technology to produce plate glass, which until now was imported from Europe. In 1870 they successfully mastered the technology and had the skilled workforce in place to produce the first plate glass in the United States.

In 1880 Ford left New Albany and opened a plant in Creighton, Pennsylvania called the New York City Plate Glass Company. In 1833 the business was reorganized as the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company ("PPG"), which became the leading plate glass manufacturing facility in the country. Tired of disagreements with their business partners, Ford sold his interest in the company in 1897. He formed a new venture near Toledo, Ohio, the Ford Glass Company. It later became Libbey Owens Ford Glass Company.

In 1893 Ford founded Michigan Alkali Company in Wyandotte, Michigan, a chemical company that supplied vital soda ash for glass production. Later, the company was renamed Wyandotte Chemical Company and became one of the nation's leading chemical firms, eventually becoming part of BASF and expanding into the BASF industrial complex. John Ford died at his home in Tarentum, Pennsylvania in 1903 and is buried in Allegheny Cemetery in Pittsburgh.

Next year when you hear the steam whistle blow and tell a friend that it is from the freighter J.B. Ford, you will know a little about J.B. to add to the story of our whistle.



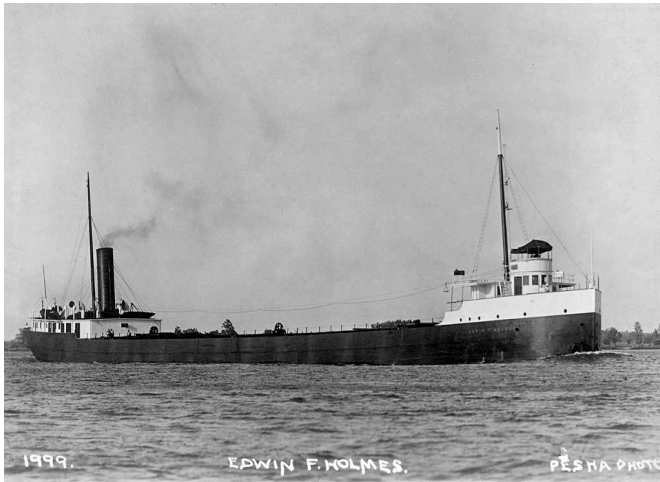
Capt. Ford in 1864



Mrs. Ford (Mary Bowen) in 1864

J.B. Ford: The Vessel

December, 2017



Lunched by American Ship Building Co. on December 12, 1903 as the bulk freight steamer EDWIN F. HOLMES (shown above) for the Commonwealth Steamship Fleet her dimensions: were 440' LOA x 50' beam x 28' depth; 4,787 gross tons



3,517 net tons. She was named in honor of Edwin Francis Holmes who was an investor and a corporate director in 1904. In 1916 when she was renamed E. C. COLLINS (shown below).

The E. C. COLLINS eventually became part of the US Steel fleet and sailed under their colors until 1944. Her lines are of the classic flat deck bulk freighter style, and although she underwent modernization from time to time, and three name changes, she still carried the distinctive profile throughout her sailing 111 year history.

Huron Cement Company acquired her in 1958 and converted her to a self unloader with the distinctive green hull. Her last year transiting the Great Lakes was 1985. Facing the expiration of her certificate of seaworthiness, engine problems and the spectre of a new breed of tug/barge vessels, she was benched and became a dockside cement storage vessel in 2001 in Chicago and then Superior, Wisconsin.

Working with owners LaFarge Cement North America, a nonprofit group attempted to preserve the old girl but the effort failed when it was realized that removing the asbestos from her would require \$500,000. Ultimately, the J. B. Ford was towed to the Azcon Metals scrapyard at Duluth on Friday, October 9, 2015, where this historic vessel will eventually be cut up. As of this writing, she is still intact.



Chuck Miller



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